



CENTRAL NEW BRUNSWICK WELSH SOCIETY

SEPTEMBER 2018



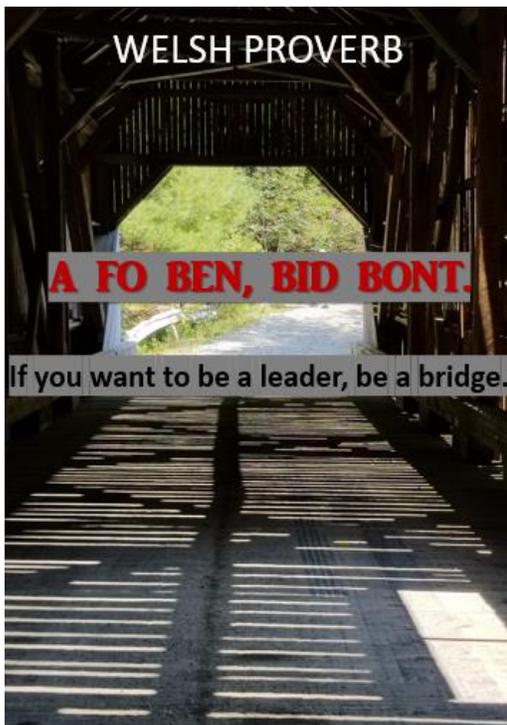
THANKSGIVING DAY SERVICE

When: 3:30 p.m.
Sunday, October 2, 2018

Please come to the church service and then join us for a potluck supper afterwards.

Where: Welsh Chapel
2900 Cardigan Road
Route 620

Bring your friends, neighbours and family!



PROJECTS UNDERWAY

We are currently working on a couple of major projects. The first is the replacement of the siding on the Welsh Chapel, planned for spring 2019. We have met with provincial officials to get some help in complying with regulations governing historic sites. An assessment of the necessary work has been done and we are currently in the process of seeking cost estimates. We will be seeking financial assistance from the province as well as donations in order to fund this work. The second project is the celebration of the 200th anniversary of the establishment of the Cardigan settlement. A group of volunteers has met and planning is underway. More details to follow on both these projects.

An alcoholic is someone you don't like who drinks as much as you do. Dylan Thomas



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THE STORY OF JOHN (JACK) HENRY THOMAS

In August 2016 skeletal remains of three soldiers were found in Lens, France along with general service buttons, ammunition, and a 26th Canadian Infantry Battalion (New Brunswick) collar badge. One set of remains was identified as John Henry Thomas, better known as Jack, a resident of Birch Ridge, Victoria County, New Brunswick. This is Jack's story.

Jack Thomas was the eldest son of Henry (Harry) Arthur Thomas and Jane Jones. Harry and Jane were born in South Wales, Harry in Newport and Jane in Bryn Mawr. They were married in 1888 and began their life together in the communities near Bryn Mawr, with Harry working as a butcher. In January 1890 their first child, John, was born in Ebbw Vale. John was joined by sisters Susan (1892) and Edith (1893).

In 1895 Harry and Jane decided to emigrate to Canada with their children and Harry's sister, Fanny. For some reason they all settled in Birch Ridge, Victoria County, located near Arthurette, where the family began farming. At the time Birch Ridge had one church and a population of about 100 souls. Two years later, Harry and Fanny's father, John, joined them.

The family grew with the addition of four girls and finally another son. Fanny married and lived nearby with her family. Their father John lived to the ripe old age of 83, dying in 1913. The children began marrying and having families of their own. It seemed the decision to emigrate was good for the Thomas family.



But their peaceful lives were disrupted when Canada entered WW1 in August 1914. Farmers and their sons were discouraged from enlisting as the government felt that they were essential for maintaining food production. However, Jack was not deterred by this. He had already served two years in the 67th Carleton Light Infantry. On April 20, 1916 the 27-year old enlisted in the 115th Canadian Infantry Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Forces in Saint John.

While Jack was in Saint John he met Blanche Somers Martin, a 39-year old grocer who had been born and raised in Hopewell, Albert County. Blanche was a well-established business woman with a home and store of her own. They were married on June 7th, 1916. They had only a few weeks together. On July 23rd Jack shipped out from Halifax on the S. S. Olympia, arriving in England a week later. In October he was transferred to the 112th Battalion at Camp Bramshott where he stayed until February 1917 when he joined to the 13th Reserve Battalion. In April Jack was assigned to the 26th Canadian Infantry Battalion (New Brunswick), part of the Canadian Corps in France.



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The Battle of Hill 70 was the first major action fought by the Canadian Corps under a Canadian commander in the First World War. This action began in mid-August. Jack was killed two days into the battle while his battalion was holding a forward position against German counter-attacks. More than 2,100 Canadians were lost during this battle. Jack was one of 1,300 whose bodies lie in unmarked graves.

Jack's wife Blanche never remarried. After Jack's death she returned to Hopewell to care for her aging parents where she lived until shortly before her death. In July 1958 Blanche Martin Thomas died from pneumonia and heart complications after being admitted to the Provincial Hospital (now Centracare) the previous January. She is buried with her parents in Hopewell. The inscription on her gravestone reads 'Blanche Martin 1877-1958 wife of John Thomas killed in action 1917'.

Some of Jack's family stayed to raise their families near the family farm while others spread across the country and into the United States. Jack's parents lived long lives – his mother Jane died in 1952 at age 86 and his father Harry died in 1955 at the age of 93. Descendants of Jack's sisters and brother live in New Brunswick today.

Jack was buried by his regiment at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's Loos British Cemetery outside Loos-en-Gohelle, France, during a public service on August 23, 2018. His great-niece and other family members attended the ceremony.



Change of Address

With a reduced membership we simply can no longer afford to rent a post office box at an annual cost of nearly \$200. Thus, all correspondence with the Central New Brunswick Welsh Society and the New Brunswick Welsh Heritage Trust should be sent c/o Janet

Thomas, 100 Epworth Circle, Fredericton, NB E3A 2M6. You can also contact me at bwheal@nb.sympatico.ca or at 506-474-0812 or via our Facebook page.



Our New Web-Page!!! Thanks to funding provided to the New Brunswick Celtic Affairs Committee from the Government of New Brunswick, the Central New Brunswick Welsh Society and the New Brunswick Welsh Heritage Trust have a beautifully designed web page. Share this address with your friends and family! <https://nbwelsh.ca/>



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THE VOYAGE

Most of what we know about the 1819 journey of the *Albion* can be found in the Ballad of the *Albion*, author unknown. According to the ballad, the voyage across the Atlantic was uncomfortable and frightening for the 180 passengers. Despite boarding on April 9th, the *Albion* did not clear the Welsh coast until April 14th due to unfavourable winds. But when they came, the winds came with a vengeance, making most of the passengers seasick. To give his passengers some relief, Captain Davies made for Kinsale, Ireland where the townspeople were fascinated by the Welsh language and the tall hats of the women. On April 24th, the weather improved so the ship headed across the Atlantic. But after only a couple of days of good weather a heavy storm hit. The sails were furled so the *Albion* could ride with the storm, but they were being pushed back towards the dangerous Irish coast. Everyone was confined below decks. The passengers were seasick and terrified, with many vowing to never step foot on a ship again if they survived to reach the new world.

After 6 days the storm abated, and passengers thankfully came up on deck where they were able to see passing ships and to send messages with a West Indies ship on route to Bristol, England. The first death of the voyage occurred on May 3rd when 2-year old Iona Morgan from the parish of Llangoedmore succumbed to whooping cough, an ailment that soon spread to all the children on board. Over the next two weeks the weather was poor, and many passengers once again suffered from seasickness. On May 15th William Jenkin from Trelech, was buried at sea. Jenkin had been ill before he left Wales but was convinced that the warmer climate of the new world would cure his ailments.

The weather improved enough that passengers began eating again and the children played on the deck. But on May 22nd this changed as the *Albion* entered the foggy and cold Ground Banks of Newfoundland. The passengers were amazed at the icebergs and large schools of fish. The death of the daughter of William Richard on May 30th added to the low spirits of the passengers.

Eventually the weather began to warm. On June 7th they were heartened to see the coast of Nova Scotia. Three days later they entered the Bay of Fundy where fishermen came alongside of the boat to sell them fish. Since food supplies were getting low, the fresh fish was welcome.

On June 11th, the passengers prepared for arrival in Saint John. A pilot ship met them a 2 p.m. to bring them into the harbour where the *Albion* finally dropped anchor, 64 days after boarding in Cardigan. The following day the doctor came aboard to check for diseases and once certified healthy the *Albion* docked at the quay. The passengers were so thankful that they held a service of Thanksgiving aboard ship! The next day they disembarked in Saint John. That night they held the first Welsh service in the province in the Presbyterian church. They had arrived! But what next?