

Recollections of Gareth Jones

By Nigel Linsan Colley

February 2007.

On occasion, I have been asked questions about the character behind Gareth, the man, along with 'what was in his unique make-up to stand up alone and be counted in his exposure of the Ukrainian famine genocide'.

In the past couple of years, as a result of international publicity for Gareth, our family has received two separate pieces of correspondence, which to my mind helps towards answering the above questions. There is no doubt that Gareth's address book, read like a 'Who's Who' of the international world of politics and business, but these following two pieces of correspondence perhaps shed light upon his humility, but also show that he never forgot his Welsh roots.

The first piece of correspondence refers to his time in the 'wilderness'; the following 12-months after exposing the famine, when Gareth was seemingly restricted to writing on solely the rural affairs of Wales rather than international politics, which was his forte... Nevertheless, in a delightful series of articles, he chronicles the dying days of many Welsh traditional art and crafts. In one article in particular (printed in full below), he is prophetically kidnapped by a gang of young mining children, then after negotiating his escape with a ransom of chocolate, he tramped on into the hills in search of Dorwen, the highest farmstead in the Black Mountains. There, he knocked on the farmer's door in order to secure permission to sleep in their barn, but instead was offered true Welsh hospitality with a bed in the farm for the night; and there began a warm friendship with farmer Moses and his family, ending with an affectionate postcard from far-off Siam; just a few months before his murder by alleged 'bandits' in Northern China; all of which recently we became aware of through Elaine Edwards, a descendant of this hilltop farming family.

The second piece of correspondence followed a radio interview I made on Canadian radio station CBC in late November 2006, when a listener of Welsh origin, Janet Wright remembered that her aunt, Mrs. Morfydd Davies (nee Williams) knew Gareth as a young girl and subsequently contacted her back in Wales. Mrs. Davies then wrote two letters to my mother Siriol (Gareth's niece), relating some of her vivid memories of Gareth, as well as sharing with us an amusing postcard, which evinced Gareth's playfully wicked sense of humour.

After having read both sets of correspondence, I sincerely hope that you, the reader, will have a better understanding of Gareth, a young man who dared stand up to Stalin, Hitler and also the Japanese, not simply because of his devout Welch Non-Conformist upbringing, but beyond all, I believe he saw and stood up for the goodness in the 'everyday' man; and no matter from whence they came...

Nigel Linsan Colley

Newark-on-Trent

17 February 2007.

The Western Mail 13th September, 1933

TRAMPING IN THREE WELSH COUNTIES

MINING TOWN BRIMMING OVER WITH MUSIC

Carrying On a Century-old Tradition in a Hill-side Farm

By GARETH JONES

What is the national dish of Wales? It would be difficult to find a rival to the ham and eggs served in the countryside, and of all the dishes of ham and eggs offered me the tastiest was at Cwmgorse, Gwaun-cae-Gurwen.

It had a richness of flavour which is all the more appreciated when it is eaten in the open-air after tramping. Perhaps the air of optimism and of work reigning in the anthracite areas, which contrasts strikingly with the pessimism prevailing more towards the east of Wales, adds zest and appetite.

I certainly found Gwaun-cae-Gurwen and the surroundings a bright patch. There was a spirit of friendliness about the district, although the winters there must be bleak and sullen, and the mountains to the north are bare and lonely. Everyone gave a greeting which was warm and spontaneous.

As I was passing the East Gwaun-cae-Gurwen Colliery several men waved, and we talked in Welsh for long [sic].

A Welsh Matador

On a farm near that colliery I came upon a character whom I shall call the "Welsh Matador." He was a short, wiry Cardi, with flushed cheeks, who had come to the farm, Bryn Awel, for his health.

He told me calmly of his fight with a bull upon the mountain. The animal had come rushing full speed upon him, and instead of fleeing for his life the little man had stood his ground until the beast was almost upon him. Then with his stick he struck the bull a crashing blow over the eyes, blinding the savage enemy. He was quite unconcerned at the struggle.

"Were you not terrified?" I asked. The Cardi was surprised at my question. "Oh, I'm quite used to it in Cardiganshire," he answered.

Leaving the matador to his work in the fields, I went on to a little town which delighted me - Cwmllynfell. It was so thoroughly Welsh and so thoroughly alive. The children played on the heath in Welsh and shouted greetings to strangers.

It was here that I was for the first time in my life taken prisoner by bandits and ransomed. They were Welsh bandits, varying in age from seven to thirteen years, who seized me and took me to their tent. I have no complaints to make about my treatment by these outlaws and they speedily released me from my captivity when a supply of chocolate was forthcoming as ransom.

Overflowing With Music

Cwmllynfell seemed to me to be brimming over with music-lovers. The first person I met was a proud member of the Ystalyfera Choir, which has won so often at the National Eisteddfod. In shop-windows there were printed notices about rehearsals.

No sooner had I begun to sup at the Mountain Hare than a torrent of brass instruments flooded the inn and I listened to cornets and trombones vying with each other in a Niagara of melody.

The tuning in was like an attack on the Western Front, but once they began to play order resolved itself out of chaos.

Nor was that an end to the flow of music at Cwmllynfell, for as I passed the school a stream of song issued from the windows and I stood listening to the "Ash Grove." So attractive was the music that I had to drag myself away, passing the memorial to Watcyn Wyn and the fine new building which is being erected in the middle of the town.

A Cockfighting Story

I saw nothing of the cockfighting for which Cwmllynfell was once famous, but I heard a story of those wild days. A cock which had battled often and well and was renowned throughout the neighbourhood for its savage vigour met at last its equal and had an eye scratched out. His owner, a miner, took it to a town some distance away to sell it. A prospective buyer came and was going to purchase the bird, when he noticed the blind eye. "But it's blind in that eye, man. I can't buy that."

"Blind in that eye, indeed," replied the owner. "It's winking at me, he is not to let him go too cheap."

Night was falling, but I was determined to find shelter in the barn of a farm up in the mountains and leave the industrial district for the countryside. Moreover, next day a stiff climb up to the top of the Black Mountains, to Llyn y Fan, and down to the Usk Valley awaited me. I, therefore, tramped along a beautiful gorge, through which flows the tempestuous River Twrch (twrch is the Welsh for boar).

Good-bye to the Mines

I seemed to be saying good-bye to the Wales of the coal-mines and the steelworks and suddenly alighting upon the Wales which has hardly changed.

The last trace of industrialism was the gaunt relic of Henllys Vale Colliery. How out of place it looked with the rocks and the river and the trees all around. Below blazed a huge fire of bracken, throwing up great flames. A derelict locomotive stood near the crumbling chimney of the colliery. Two elderly colliers emerged from the semi-darkness and greeted me.

"I want to go to the furthest farm up the valley," I told them in Welsh. "Is this the way?"

"It is," they replied, and one of them said dramatically, "But beware of Craig y Fran (the Raven's Rock) on the way. The path is narrow there and many have slipped to their death."

I went on, rather regretting that I had not stayed the night in Cwmllynfell, stepped warily as I went past Craig y Fran, descended to the stream, crossed over to Breconshire - the Twrch is here the boundary between Breconshire and Carmarthenshire - and rejoiced when I saw a light on the hill. It was Dorwen, the highest farmhouse in the valley.

Farmwife's Welcome

Would Welsh hospitality be as warm it is vaunted in literature and song? I wondered as I tapped at the door. The farmwife, came.

"May I sleep in your barn?" I asked. She grinned. "Sleep in the barn indeed! You can have a bedroom and you must have a good supper and a nice cup of tea and make yourself quite at home. 'Dewch I fewn! Dewch I fewn!' My heart leapt up; a thin mist was beginning to fail; I could hear children laughing inside and the sound of butter being churned; I could see a blazing fire; but the greatest joy was to realise that hospitality in Wales was as spontaneous and as warm as ever.

My host and hostess, Mr. and Mrs. Moses, farmers up in the hills, were carrying on a century-old tradition of doing honour to an unknown guest.

Correspondence relating to Dorwen from the Moses' Family

In February 2004, Elaine Edwards, grand-daughter of Mr and Mrs Moses of Dorwen Farm (above) wrote an email to Gareth's Archives:

"I first heard of your uncle when I was a young child (I am now 40) as my father had in his possession a few short pieces of correspondence - namely a letter, a postcard, a gift card and also a newspaper cutting confirming his death and a printed thank you card from your family. My great-grandparents had kept these after a brief acquaintance with your remarkable uncle. They met in 1933 (September, I think) as they took him and Dr. Wyn Davies in for the night at Dorwen Farm. I remember hearing of how they had lost their bearings as the fog descended suddenly on the mountain and that they somehow found their way to Dorwen Farm in dangerous conditions (I don't know how accurate that account is).

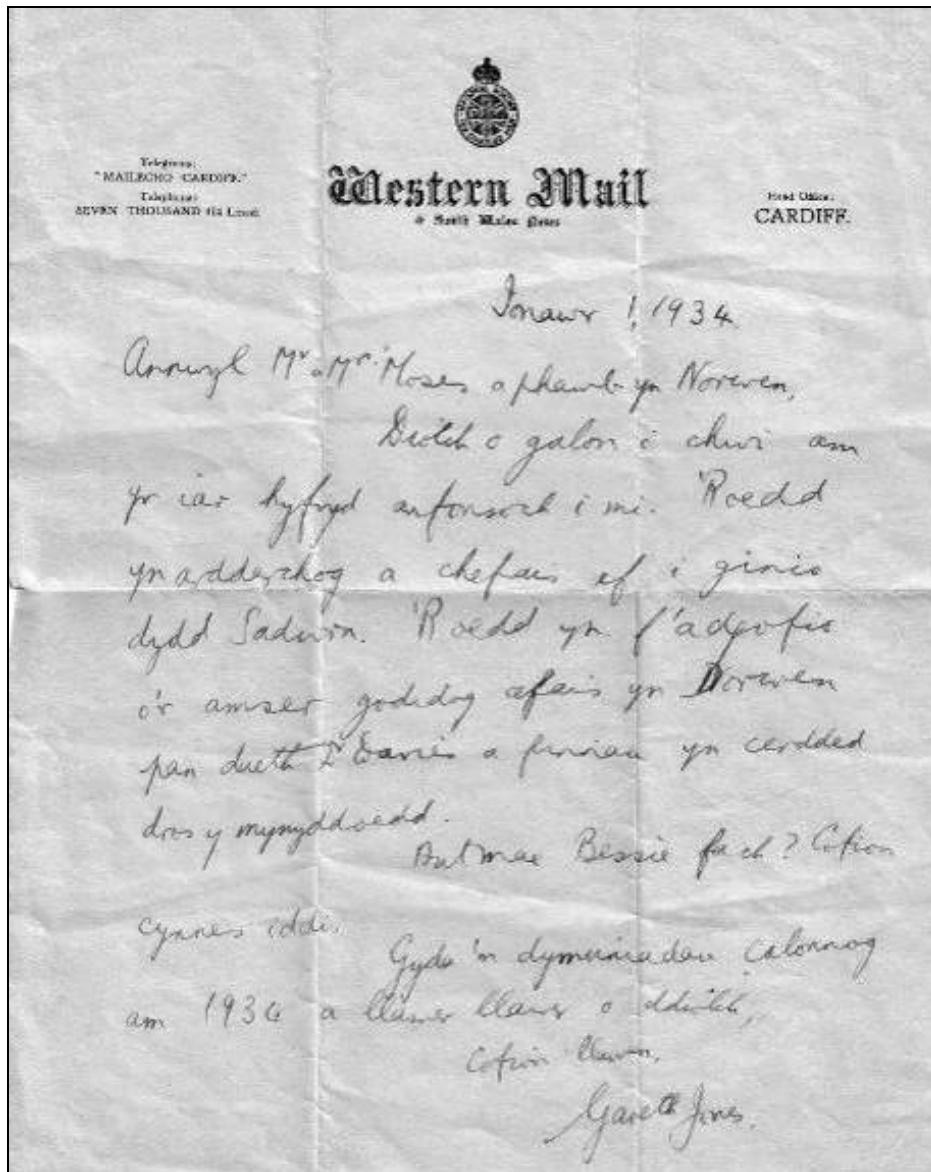
It is probable that they never met again but as a child I was intrigued by him - and struck by the fact that he kept in touch with this working-class, hill farming couple whose lives were so very different from his own. In the postcard from Siam - dated 30th April 1935 - he wrote about going on to China, Japan and America. Although there are only three brief pieces of writing in all, he comes across as a truly kind and decent man.

I can remember being aware of his story, wondering at his tragedy and feeling frustrated that there were no answers about why he had to die. Years later I read two articles in the *Western Mail* and his articles in "In Search of News" and realised how remarkable his short life had been. I thought a great deal about the way two very different families experienced the loss of a grown up child (Maggie, my father's mother died of TB at 28, in 1934) and when your family heard of your great loss my great grandparents were grieving for their daughter.

I started to write about my family a few years ago and found that I couldn't write about Maggie's death. My great-grandparents and Dorwen Farm without also thinking about Gareth Jones. It was strange."

Below are the postcards and correspondence Gareth sent in Welsh (and kindly translated by Elaine Edwards) to Farmer Moses and his family:

Letter to Mr & Mrs Moses from the Cardiff Western Mail Offices from Gareth, dated 1st January 1934.



January 1st 1934

Dear Mr and Mrs Moses and everybody at Dorwen,

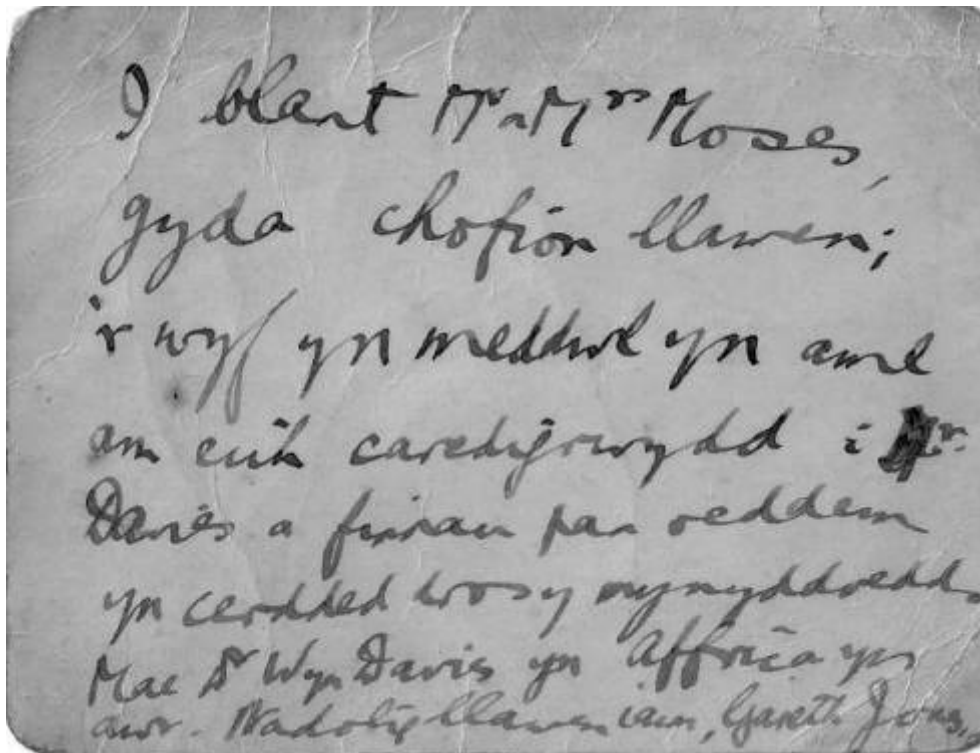
Thank you very much for the beautiful chicken you sent me. It was excellent and I had it for lunch on Saturday. It reminded me of the splendid time I had at Dorwen when Dr Davies and I came walking across the mountains.

How is little Bessie? Best wishes to her.

With hearty wishes for 1934 and many many thanks,

Best wishes, Gareth Jones.

Gift Card to the Moses' from Gareth.



To the children of Mr. and Mrs. Moses,

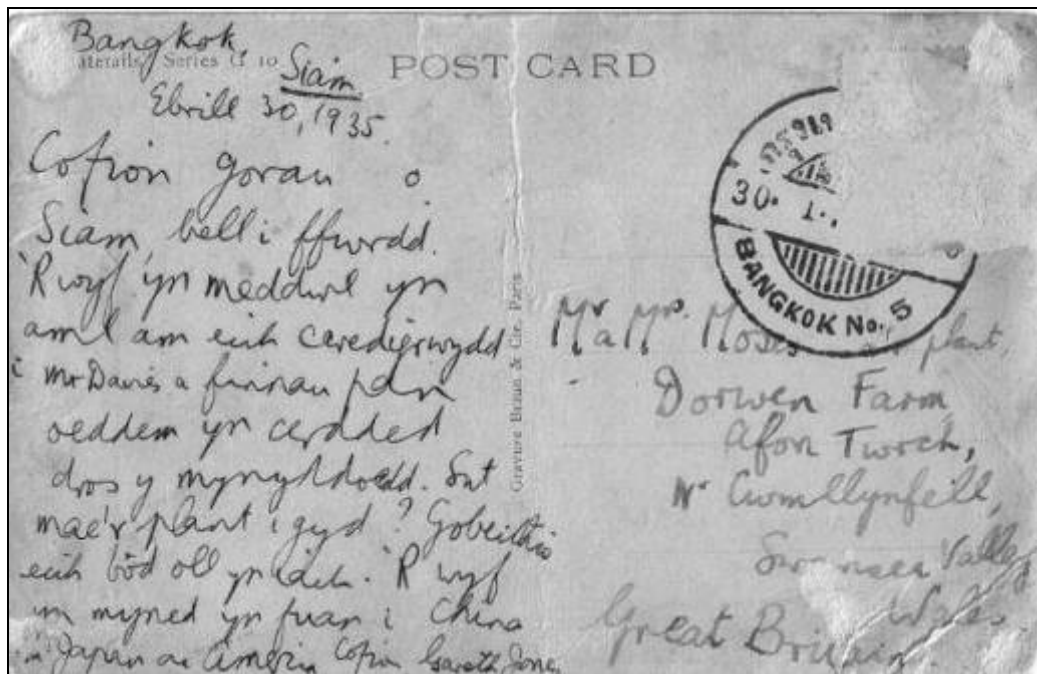
With best wishes; I often think of your kindness to Dr. Davies and myself when we were walking across the mountains. Dr. Wyn Davies is in Africa now.

A very happy Christmas,

Gareth Jones.

[The children referred to are Elaine Edward's father , about 1-year old, and his sister Bessie - about 5-years old; their mother was suffering from TB at the time and expecting her third child, so they were at Dorwen with their grandparents; she died in June 1934 at 28-years old. All that Elaine Edwards has of Maggie Edwards nee Moses are two photographs and one letter to her brother.]

Postcard to Mr & Mrs Moses from Siam, April 30th 1935



April 30 1935

Best wishes from far away Siam. I often think of your kindness to Mr. Davies and myself when we were walking across the mountains. How are all the children? I hope you are all in good health. I am soon to go on to China, Japan and America, Best wishes, Gareth Jones.

Second Series of Correspondence from Mrs Morfydd Davies in 2007 – 1st Letter

10. 1. 2007

Dear Dr. Colley,

I was delighted to receive your book - "More Than A Grain of Truth" - which you sent me when my niece, Janet, contacted you and I feel I must write and say how very much I have enjoyed reading it. I found it absolutely fascinating and somehow felt Gareth's presence all the way through - the Gareth who filled such a large part of my early life. Admittedly, there were times when, emotionally, I found it hard to accept.

I do not really know how Gareth and my family became such very good friends : my mother had known Gareth's parents when they lived in Llandeilo and many years later my brother Lewis met Gareth when they attended the Grammar School for Boys, ~~in~~ in Barry. I believe Gareth visited us in Llantwit Major from about 1925 until the time of his death. To me he was a wonderful, extra Big Brother.

I have so many memories of him and I still feel it was so amazing, that someone with Gareth's tremendous brain-power, who could meet on equal - or higher- terms with the highest in the land, could throw himself into a game of "Hopscotch" with a small girl and really enjoy himself.

Amongst my memories of Gareth are the friends he brought to Llantwit Major to spend an afternoon with us. The first one I remember was an Austrian by the name of Eric Bondman. He was completely blind and a wonderful pianist who would play any piece of music mentioned. I also remember Winkler (I'm not sure what nationality) and a Canadian by the name of Frank Scott. The friend of Gareth I remember best of all was Dr. Haferkorn, who became a great favourite with our family. On one occasion - on April 17th. 1928- they came to Llantwit major in the

afternoon and decided I needed some sweets so they carried me - in great state - to the sweet shop and told me to choose the ones I liked best. I chose Buttered Brazils. We then went inside to have tea and afterwards walked about in the garden. Dr. Haferkorn admired my mother's carnations so I picked one and put it in his buttonhole. He then wrote in my Autograph Album:

"The deep red carnation you gave me will scent my life with memories of you".

also (written in German and translated for me by Gareth)

"Memory is lovely; it is a Paradise; it is the only thing that cannot be forgotten".

I am so pleased you have produced your book: I admire you greatly for all the hours you have spent, all the research, all the physical energy and, perhaps more than anything, the emotional stress which must have been faced.

Your book has brought back so many memories. On several occasions Gareth walked from Barry to Llantwit Major accompanied by Ianto. Sometimes Ianto became tired and had to be carried. One of the most poignant passages in the book where you expressed Gareth's utter longing to be walking "with Dada and Ianto on the beach

Gareth was a truly great man and those of us who knew him are privileged to have such memories of a wonderful person.

I have about a dozen postcards which he sent to different members of our family. I also have a book of German folk songs which he had brought to Llantwit Major. After Gareth's death my brother Harold offered it to Miss Gwyneth Jones but she said to leave things as they were. However, I am the last member of my family who actually knew Gareth and if you would like to have these items I should be pleased to send them to you.

Yours very sincerely

Morfydd Davies

PTO

Williams

Notes relating to the above letter:

Ianto was Gareth's dog – pictured here below with my mother, Dr Siriol Colley aged about 13 and her brother John, circa 1937-38.



Dr Reinhard Haferkorn was a close friend of Gareth's and was the Chairman of League of Nations High Commission in the Polish Corridor (lecturing on the controversial League of Nations enclave at the prestigious RIIA [Royal Institute for International Affairs] in London in late 1932), as well as being a member of faculty of Technische Hochschule, Danzig teaching Classical literature.

N.B. Gareth stopped off in Danzig with Haferkorn (pictured below) directly after leaving Moscow in March 1933 en route to his famine-exposing press conference in Berlin on the 29th March (and met him there again in May 1933 in the company of the German Consul to Kharkiv, who personally expressed his concurrence that Gareth's graphical published picture of the city's destitution painted a true picture of the conditions therein).



Second Series of Correspondence from Mrs M. Davies in 2007 – 2nd Letter

24. 1. 2007

Dear Dr. Siriol,

Tel: 01885

Thank you so much for sending me your book Manchukuo Incident and I appreciate it very much. I am about halfway through it and am finding it gripping. Every so often I think "if only Gareth had lived, what stories he would have told.

Since my previous letter to you I have worked out that Gareth and Lewis (my brother) became friends between August 1921 and August 1922 when Lewis left home for Exeter University.

Thank you, too, for the photograph of Gareth with Dr. Hafercorn - it is such a good likeness of the two of them. I am very lucky that I have a fairly good memory and I have vivid memories of Gareth, Lewis and Dr. Hafercorn standing round the piano, "singing their heads off" and there was always fun when they were together. Little episodes come into my head: one afternoon Gareth went, with Lewis and Dorothy (my sister) to visit friends who lived on a farm. Mrs Thomas insisted they stayed for tea and asked Gareth if he would say Grace. He did that willingly and said "for what we are about to receive, God Bless Lottie" (Mrs Thomas' daughter)

On another occasion, when Harold, my younger brother, was in one of the lower forms in the Grammar School when a message was received for him to report to the Headmaster's Office immediately. He went in fear and trembling - to find the message had been sent by Gareth

One of the stories he told me - I'm sure he didn't expect me to believe it, but it was fun - one evening when he was in Russia he went to a dance and danced with a very beautiful lady. However, although he was enjoying himself greatly, he was puzzled: every time they twirled one way she grew taller while when they turned the other way she became shorter. The mystery was solved when it was explained she had a wooden leg which worked on a screw!

I have just been watching an item on television about the "Christmas shoeboxes" sent to the children of the Ukraine from schoolchildren in this country. Gareth would have been pleased to see the happiness these boxes brought, but very sad to know that more than ~~fiftyx~~ seventy years after he wrote his articles, this poverty still prevails.

Janet and I have spoken several times during the last few weeks and each time we have said what a great co-incidence that she ~~xxx~~ heard your son's programme and she has sent me a copy of all she has found out on the computer and I find it extremely interesting. I will shortly be able to look at the website myself. If Janet had not heard the programme I would not have heard anything about the unveiling of the plaque.

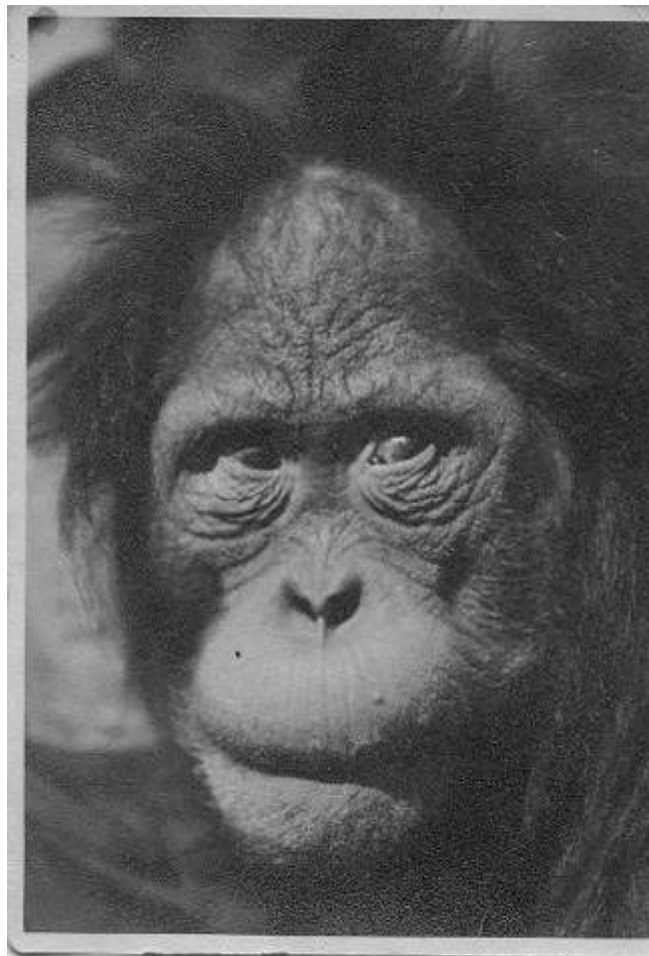
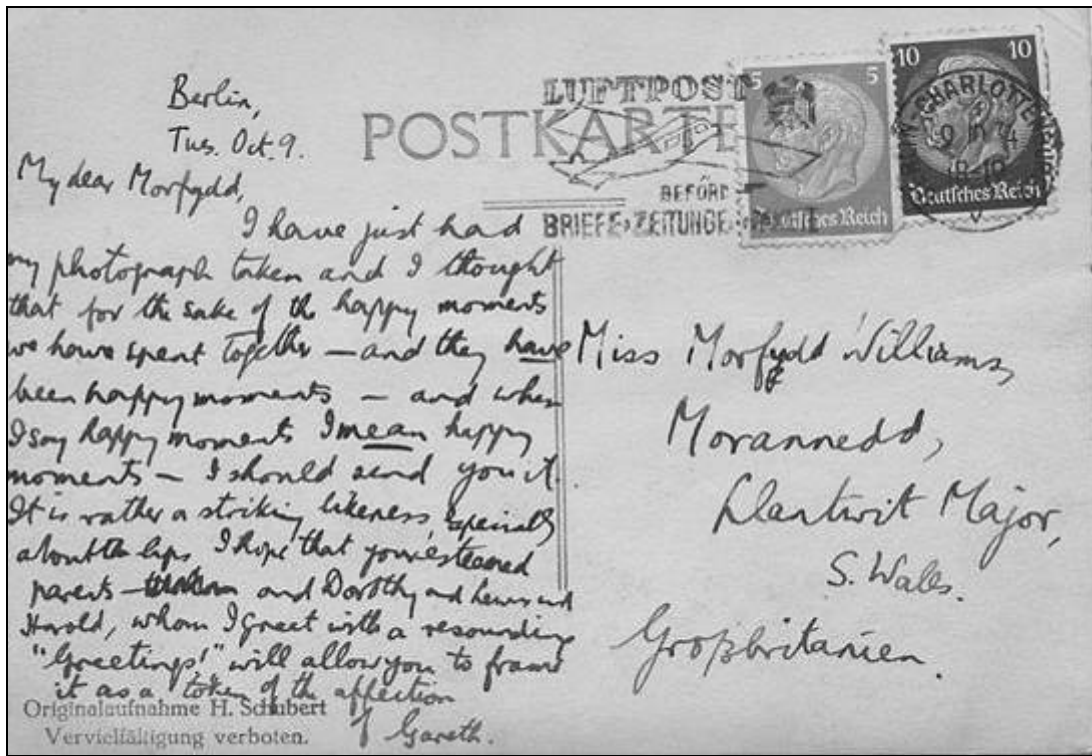
The fact that the Ukrainians had so much to do with it is proof that Gareth's articles reported the truth in spite of what lesser reporters tried to say. Gareth spoke for the people of the Ukraine, they only spoke for themselves.

Again, thank you so much for the book and, if you write another book about Gareth I shall be very happy for you to use anything I have said.

Yours sincerely,

Morfydd.

The following postcard was one of those mentioned in the first letter sent to the young Miss Williams in 1934 from Germany and shows Gareth's ability to mock himself!



Finally as an aside, I happened to have an enchanting telephone conversation with Mrs. Davies for over an hour on Saturday 17th February, during which she remembered coming home from Barry Grammar school for Girls to Llantwit Major; after alighting the train, the last leg of her journey was by bus, where she happened by chance to have met Gareth, who happily paid their fares, where the conductor mistakenly only charged them a penny... She recalls that Gareth was just on his way to interview Randolph Hearst at his Welsh castle retreat of St. Donats, outside Cardiff, which was an occasion that would subsequently transform his life...

I subsequently mentioned that Gareth was later to be offered a very lucrative job with a princely sum of £1500 per year by Hearst to run his Berlin press bureau, destined to start when he was to have returned from the Far East in 1935. Mrs. Davies then recalled a conversation he had with her mother, when Gareth stated he could never work for Hearst on a full-time basis, on account of his anti-British reporting of the Great War! At this revelation, I was simply aghast by her statement regarding yet another unknown instance of his moral fibre, but at the same time, not at all surprised! My primary reasoning being, that if the Soviets were incapable of finding his Achilles heel in terms of blackmailable vices and, in my opinion, ultimately resorted to having him liquidated, then there were probably no vices to be readily found!

One further account Mrs. Davies recalled during our conversation, relates to Gareth's remarkable ear for language. On one occasion at her home, she remembers Gareth purposely traipsing around her living room with a notebook in one hand and his other hand thrust in his pocket, whilst simultaneously mimicking perfectly the dulcet tones of his employer Lloyd George... In fact, Gareth had the ability to impersonate virtually every noteworthy person he met from Goebbels to Hearst; an after-dinner act he would regularly perform for the amusement of his fellow diners! Coincidentally, one of the other potential job offers he had prior his last fateful trip, was to set up an office for the BBC in Wales, one which he did not relish, but nonetheless, he would no doubt have been quite a performer!