

Notes from Local Interest Group 30th November 2023

Present: Maureen Lloyd (ML), Joan Hughes, Celia Jones, Mollie Moore, Dawn Richards, Gina Goodge, Grace Davies, Stephen Lloyd, Julie Jones, Ken Lloyd, John Price, Mike Labbett, Janet Thomas, Vicky Gore, Iris Lloyd, Roy Lloyd, Malc Gonnella, Cherry Williams, Viv Lloyd, Michael Lloyd, Llewellyn Lloyd, Rose Lloyd.

On Zoom: Wendy & Dainis Ozols, Sylvia Illingsworth, Margaret Price, Gareth Jones, Llewellyn Breese, Jennifer Lewis, Sue Lawler, Angela Jones

Apologies: Avryl Lloyd, Joan Lloyd, Elsa Harflett, Victor Williams, Eva Morgan.

ML welcomed everyone to the Hall and on Zoom, with a special welcome to Llewellyn Breese who was joining us from Vancouver. She introduced the speaker for the evening, Cherry Williams saying that she is the Lloyd family historian and usually able to answer a question regarding the family.

“A Lloyd who became an Australian Showman (and meeting his Granddaughter, Tawera)”

Cherry began by saying that back in 2021 she had written two articles for The Gossip about her relatives from two generations who had gone to Australia in the 1800s “to look for gold”. The first members were John and David Lloyd who left Nantmel sometime between 1841 and 1851. They were later discovered on a return journey passenger list in 1856. Sadly, John did not make it home, having died aboard ship on that journey. David did arrive home and farmed locally for the rest of his life.

Then, in 1872, John and David’s nephew, James Lloyd also went to Australia, sailing on the John o’Gaunt from Liverpool, a journey which took four months. His parents were James and Ann (née Evans) originally of Nantmel, but later moving to Gwenddwr in 1860. James settled in Ballarat in the State of Victoria. He started off as a gold miner, but he did very well and worked his way up to shareholder and to be a member of the Ballarat Stock Exchange. James married three times and had children from all three marriages. He returned to Wales several times to see his family and on his last visit in 1905 he brought some of his children with him. Cherry showed us a photo taken on this visit to the family farm, Cwmgwenddwr.

After writing about these members of the family, Cherry decided to do some more research using “Ancestry”. She found a relative called Johanna Lloyd who knew very little about her Welsh relatives. Cherry was able to fill in Johanna’s back story and she was able to tell Cherry about her family in New Zealand. Johanna is James Lloyd’s great great granddaughter and is a teacher in New Zealand.

One of the characters that Johanna was able to tell Cherry about is Owen Rutherford Lloyd (her grandfather) and she has a book about him called “The Boy from Buninyong”. The author of this book had befriended Owen and found his life so fascinating that she decided to write his story.

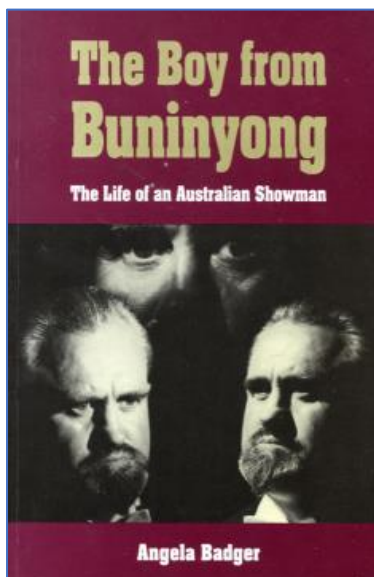


Owen was the grandson of James Lloyd (Cwmgwendwr); his father was called Peter Rutherford Lloyd, a son from James' second marriage. Owen was born in 1907 in Buninyong in Victoria; later in his life he moved to Ballarat. He did not want to be a miner (his father had been a miner and later a mine manager). So, he became an engineering apprentice until the Depression hit when he, like many others, were out of work. It was then that he met a chap who played a fiddle that he had made himself and decided to do likewise. He made himself a fiddle, learned a couple of songs and became a busker, moving to Geelong, a port city in Victoria, where he found lodgings. Always able to look after himself in dangerous situations, Owen learned that at some point he had been a wrestler and a boxer, defeating the light and welter-weight champion of Scotland! Quite a character!

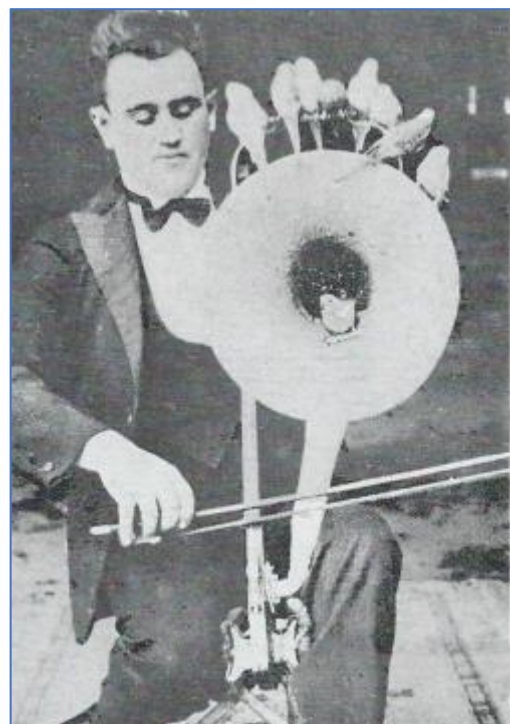
However, he did not really settle and soon moved on to the Sydney area working as an entertainer. In his new world of entertainment he met and teamed up with a doctor and his mystic wife working with charitable organisations. However, his mother strongly disapproved of them taking half of the takings and told him so. He then bought himself a Model T Ford and, with his fiddle, a new suit and a new pair of two-tone shoes he went north. Again, he met and teamed up with another entertainer, this time a sword swallower and fire eater, who taught Owen some new skills, increasing his repertoire! After a few months, he moved back to Sydney where he found a "street puppy" who kept following him around and so Owen kept him as a travelling companion. He then headed for Queensland but with car problems and lack of money he decided to head back home to Victoria State. On the journey he came across a small injured bird which would not leave him. This was the beginning of another novelty act. Over the years he trained hundreds of birds to "sing, stand to attention, turn round and even play dead." He was quite an attraction! Owen showed us a photo of Owen with his fiddle and the birds. He became known as The Birdman.

When he was 24, he met and married a Brisbane girl, Rose Elizabeth Henderson, and they had two children. They moved to Melbourne, but Owen soon became restless again and he went back on the road, without his family. Not only did he travel extensively in Australia but he also found his way to Africa and spent about a year with a circus in the east and south of the continent. His role was ringmaster where he was amongst trainers of wild animals.

On his return from Africa, and restless yet again, he travelled to New Zealand where the shows never stop, summer or winter and so he bought a van, acquired more birds and another dog. Near Gisborne, North Island, he met a pregnant Maori girl and delivered her baby in his van! He took the girl and her baby back to her village and, because he had been able to



predict the sex of the baby before it was born, as well as saving another child, the people in the village thought



that he had supernatural powers and so the community welcomed him. Owen became absorbed in Maori culture and learned as much as he could about their customs and traditions. His life became busy in New Zealand with his reputation as a healer going before him. People flocked to his shows, not to be entertained but to be healed. He “married” for a second time, a 19 year old Maori girl called Moetu Brown whose life he had also saved. Over the next years they had seven children together, presumably conceived on his visits back to the village because he continued to travel but she did not accompany him. Cherry showed us a photo of Owen’s offspring, Lloyds with Maori blood.

Eventually, Owen went back to Australia just before his parents died. Having then lost interest in his travelling lifestyle, he bought a junk shop in Botany Bay, Sydney, still busking in the evenings. In 1972, a local TV station, ABC TV, held a buskers’ competition which Owen entered. He did not win, but so popular was his act that ABC awarded him the Viewers’ Choice. Cherry has found a story in a Sydney newspaper about Owen with a cartoon of him and his performing birds. He had been performing, without permission from the city council in a Sydney Park and was very popular. Children would flock in their hundreds to see him perform and there is even a wooden sculpture of him in the park.

In the early 1980s, Owen retired and went back to New Zealand to be with his family. He died in 1984 and was buried in Gisborne. Rose Elizabeth Henderson was still recorded as his wife and so they had obviously never divorced and his “marriage” to Moetu Brown was in name only. What an amazing life he had lived!



The story did not end there as in June 2023, Johanna emailed Cherry to say that her sister, Tawera, was coming to the UK and that she wanted to meet Cherry. Tawera is an artist and sculptor of some renown in New Zealand with exhibitions worldwide; she is also a teacher and senior adviser for Indigenous Exchange Creative New Zealand. Her trip was related to her work as an artist and she would be visiting Edinburgh, Liverpool’s Tate Gallery and Cardiff. Cherry showed us some photos of Tawera’s artwork, heavily influenced by her Maori heritage.

Tawera could remember Grandfather Owen’s flying visits when she was a child and so she was extremely interested to see his Welsh home. She

greeted Cherry at Hereford station with a “kia ora”, welcome in Maori. (So that Tawera would recognise her, Cherry was holding a home-made flag with a Welsh dragon on it.)

Cherry took Tawera to Gwenddwr Church to see the graves of her ancestors. Tawera sang a Maori prayer at the graves – on all of the visits to the places where her ancestors had been she wore black out of respect to them. Tawera was especially interested in the things that she saw in the church. From there, they went on to Erwood Station and then to Cwmgwenddwr, the Lloyd’s old homestead. At the farm, they were welcomed



by the current owners, the Powells, and were given Welsh cakes. Whilst at the farm, Tawera wanted to replicate a photo she had seen of one of her ancestors. In the picture, and on the day of her visit, there was water in the spot where her ancestor had been standing. Water has great significance in Maori culture and so this was very important to Tawera. Cherry also took Tawera to Nantmel, which is where the Lloyds had lived prior to moving to Cwmgwenddwr. They visited the family farm Gelynen and Nantmel Church. In the churchyard are the graves of the parents of John Lloyd, who died on the ship returning from Australia in 1856. John is also commemorated on the grave although he would have been “buried” at sea. Although the church was locked, Cherry’s husband, Victor, found someone with a key and so they were able to go inside. Tawera noted that the acoustics in the church were very good and so she sang Pie Jesu here, and Cherry says that it sounded beautiful. One of the things that Tawera said whilst she was here on her visit was, “We are our ancestors’ wildest dreams”. Cherry told us that all of Owen’s children had Welsh names and all took the surname Lloyd, and so the link with his Welsh ancestry was very strong.

Before Tawera left, Cherry organised a Lloyd family gathering in Painscastle Village Hall. Cherry’s daughter, Caz, and Tawera entertained the gathering singing the Maori prayer “Te Aroha” which Caz had learnt some years earlier. At the end of her stay, Tawera went on to Cardiff for further meetings about art. She certainly had an amazing experience visiting sites of great significance to her family, thanks to Cherry, and it is no surprise that her sister, Johanna, would like to come to visit now!

What a fascinating talk. As with all of her talks to Local Interest Group, Cherry had kept us enthralled throughout. ML thanked her so much for giving us such an entertaining evening. Owen Rutherford Lloyd certainly had a most eventful and thoroughly unusual life and this made for a wonderful evening. What an amazing amount of research Cherry has done on the Australian and New Zealand side of her family and it is obvious that she thoroughly enjoyed the process.

Many thanks to Iris Lloyd for making the refreshments and to Avryl Lloyd for providing them, as well as all of those who helped in the hall on the evening. Once again, very special thanks go to John Price for overseeing all of the technology required for the smooth running of the event and for making it possible for the Zoom audience to join in.

