

CYNON VALLEY HISTORY SOCIETY

PRESIDENT : THE LORD ABERDARE
VICE-PRESIDENTS: T. J. EVANS Esq., JOHN F. MEAR Esq.



HANES

NEWSLETTER OF THE CYNON VALLEY HISTORY SOCIETY
CYLCHLYTHYR CYMDEITHAS HANES CWM CYNON

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EDITOR'S NEWS BOARD

HANES

We apologise that publication of this issue of Hanes is late. The reasons for this are, firstly priority has been given to the preparation of the delayed Tenth Edition of *Old Aberdare* which we are happy to say should be available in June/July, and secondly the Society's main computer was invaded by Trojans, Worms and other annoying and undesirable elements. We are happy to report that these horrors have now been eradicated and that no work has been lost.

IN MEMORIAM

It is our sad and most unwelcome task to record the deaths of the following members: Mr. Bryn Cummings (January 2008), Mrs. Dilys Evans of Abernant the wife of Vice President Mr. Tom Evans, Mrs. Shirley Spiers (formerly Shirley West), Ivor Morgan, the author of *Saint Elvan: Parish History and Churches*, and Huw Davies. Huw was our Chairman in 1993.

VICE-PRESIDENTS

The Society is delighted to announce the appointment of two Vice-Presidents. They are Mr. Tom Evans and Mr. John Mear. Both were founder members and have been loyal members since 1971. Their devotion to the Society is well known, but for posterity it should be recorded that not only have they been actively involved in the running of our affairs, both have held the Office of Chairman. Tom had been a member of our Committee from 1971 until his retirement in 2007, and John Mear was the Society's first Secretary a post he held from 1971 until 1989.

FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY – 2011

Consideration is being given to a special publication to commemorate this milestone event. If any member has any documents or photographs relating to the Society's events the Editor would like to hear from them. A short questionnaire is being prepared which will ask you to record any special memories of personalities, lectures or other memorable events such as Field Trips or annual outings.

SPECIAL GENERAL MEETING

Notice is hereby given that a Special General Meeting will be held immediately prior to the June 2008 Lecture for the purpose of approving the Audited Accounts for 2006-2007.

FUTURE MEETINGS

Regrettably our present meeting place at the Parish Hall leaves much to be desired; it is not the most comfortable of places and the acoustics, as both speakers and listeners have discovered to their cost, leave much to be desired. As from September meetings will therefore be held at the Vestry of Green Street Church; those attending will be able to park close to the venue.

OLD ABERDARE

We are pleased to announce that the long awaited Tenth volume of our Journal, *OLD ABERDARE*, will soon be to hand. The book contains six (instead of the usual four) works. The titles are, Old Cwmbach; Private Adventure Schools (Dames' Schools) in Aberdare; The Aberdare Background to the South Wales Choral Union (Y Côr Mawr); Webster's Aberdare Directory of 1865; "After Rammell", Extracts from the copy report books of the town's Inspector of Nuisances and Cabs; and "Justice Denied?" This latter essay recalls serious rioting that occurred in the town centre and at Mountain Ash on the day of the 1880 General Election. The authors of the articles are Susan Dennis-Gabriel, Ivor Parry, Gwilym Ambrose, Colin Davies and Geoffrey Evans.

As we go to press we have noticed that a copy of the very first edition of *Old Aberdare* is being auctioned on eBay. There are two bidders and the current price is £15.15p.

BLUE PLAQUES

Rhondda Cynon Taff Borough Council has obtained Lottery Heritage Funding of £49,000 for the purpose of erecting London County Council style blue memorial plaques to commemorate sites or people of historic importance within the borough. The allotted money will provide, inter alia, thirty three plaques. (London has 300). These plaques have to be shared between, Pontypridd, Cynon Valley and the Rhondda. The Society identified twenty one subjects within our area for blue plaque recognition, and is pleased to report that it has been successful in obtaining eleven plaques for Cynon Valley. These will recognise the following sites and personalities.

CULTURE: The Temperance Hall (The Palladium), The Market Hall (acknowledging that in 1861 the very first National Eisteddfod was held there), Ynyscynon House (David Williams "Alaw Goch").

INDUSTRY: Gadlys and Hirwaun Ironworks, Robertstown Tramway Bridge of 1811. The site of the first sale-coal mine at Cwmbach (Abernant-y-groes colliery, 1837). The Navigation Hotel, Abercynon (as the offices of the Glamorganshire Canal Company).

RELIGION: Hen-Dŷ-Cwrdd Unitarian Chapel, Trecynon, founded in 1751.

SPORT: Arthur Linton (1894 World Champion Cyclist), Dr. E.T. (Teddy) Morgan (Abernant) the Welsh Rugby International who scored the winning try against New Zealand in 1905, arguably the most famous try in the history of the game.

The Society is grateful to Alan Vernon Jones for initially identifying and submitting sites and representing CVHS from the inception of the proposed scheme a few years ago. It is possible that there could be a further allocation of plaques at a future date, and the Society is of course at liberty to erect its own plaques subject to the necessary consents.

PUBLICITY

The Society has a presence on the Rhondda Cynon Taff Borough Council's "Our Community on Line" Web Site, Shape-it.org, and it is hoped that our own CYNON VALLEY HISTORY SOCIETY Web Site will be up and running shortly.

The following story was written by Mrs. Denise Jones of Abernant, and was one of two read out by her at our Christmas Meeting. We have since received requests to publish these and are delighted to include the first of her nostalgic accounts in our spring edition. The second story, Summer Journey, will appear in a future issue. Our thanks to Mrs Jones for allowing us to record these in HANES.

LOCAL HERO

Dandy Row. Strange name! Certainly no Beau Brummells in our street except, perhaps, for Mr. Eynon, who was always smartly dressed, and had "something to do with the greyhounds!" Anyway, that was the name given to twenty-one houses with the "Full Moon" at one end and the "Rose and Castle" at the other. Later, other houses were built, stringing their way in a long continuous line on both sides of the long road leading to Cardiff, which is how it got its later name.

Ours was the first row, built in 1854, at the foot of a long, low spoil-tip which had been excavated from the earth to sink Blaengwawr Colliery. The tip rose up behind our back gardens. Eighty years on and the tip had grown over, giving us our own private playground with grass and elderberry trees and secret blackberry cwtches yielding huge blackberries in September. It was our own exclusive park, though Mrs Williams "Salvation" had a hedged-off section for an allotment, keeping it well fed with the horse manure (always in plentiful supply) that she gathered from the Street with her little bucket and shovel. The rest of the tip was for the children in the row. There were dips and hollows providing us with ideal terrain for our horseless Cowboys and Indians. Old gnarled trees and bushes became houses, or dens, or cars — wherever our imagination took us. In our safe world we could play our own games on a children's planet. We could be anyone we chose...Hollywood stars or little Welsh housewives serving tea on broken bits of china with cut up dandelion leaves for cakes, carrying ourselves off into the land of make-believe.

Right then! A sunny day in the Summer holidays! A sudden change of plans! Down from the tip into the back garden. Rush down the back steps into the back kitchen Mam busy scrubbing the clothes at the tub...must have been a Monday...with the kitchen full of steam. "Where are you off to now?" "We're going up by the brook." "Righto! Come back for your dinner...and go and ask Gransha for a lend of tuppence before you go. The gas is running out!" "Oh Mam! You know what he's like. He won't be willing". But we came back with the two pennies. There was I, the big sister, all of seven years, with the little ones — five year old Geraldine and three year old Michael tagging along. To the end of the street then, round the corner, and up the lane to the Maes-y-ffynnon brook. No big boys on the rope swing today!

On we go further up the lane. Hope that fox-dog belonging to Mrs. Evans isn't out! A black terrier shaped like a fox; harmless except that he would bark and frighten us. All clear! We go through the iron gate to the ghost colliery. Everything just as it had been left; just like an old gold-mining town in the Old West. Two large buildings beautifully built of dressed stone. One, a power-house of some kind, with arched chapel windows, and mysterious locked double doors. The other, a two-storeyed structure with a cast-iron staircase outside leading up to a concrete verandah, supported by cast-iron pillars. The top storey had been the old lamp room, and the lower one, the blacksmith's shop. Peering through the grimy windows, you could still see the anvil and forge with the smith's tools strewn about. We loved playing on the verandah. If you were brave enough you could jump down onto the grass below but too far for a seven year old. That would come later. The pit-head was still there with its huge rusting wheels, its cage still attached to its cables. Iron ladders reached to the top, but no one ever dared to climb.

Running down from the side of the engine-house was a concrete slope, about 15ft. wide, and at a height of about 20ft. sloping to ground level. This was a great source of fun...and danger!! We might easily have fallen over the side, but no one ever did. We enjoyed ourselves having races up and down the slope, which we had named the White Slide. In between the two buildings was a patch of ground which must have been trampled on by generations of colliers, (our father, grandfather and great grandfather among them). Nature had, over the years, transformed it into a mini-meadow covered with clover, buttercups and daisies. It was there we must have had our first lessons in the art of Daisy Chain Making. This grassy slope rose up, and over the top you discovered an unbelievably beautiful sight. There stretched a lily pond with a green meadow beyond. It had originally been a feeder pond for the colliery. Every pit had one for its water supply, but who knows who it was who planted those lilies turning it unknowingly into a magical wonderland for us children. Across the pond and over the meadow, hidden by trees, lay the garden and mansion of the long departed colliery owner.

That day we found lots of the neighbourhood friends on the bank of the pond. What was going on? The big boys were there...12 or 13 year olds. This was an annual occurrence. Gathering lilies...or attempting to!! The opposite bank was inaccessible, and the pond itself had no bottom!! We had been warned by our parents! The lilies grew only on the far side, and so, it was considered exceedingly daring to try to reach them. Long sticks with hooped wires were made. There was a kind of iron girder sticking out of the water half-way across, so that, with help it was fascinating to watch the exertions of those brave boys doing something we could never do ourselves. There we were then, twiti-ing down along the bank and shouting our disappointment when a lily slipped from the wire noose. "Try and get a yellow one, John." John would be too busy and engrossed to hear...stretched out at full length.

Howard Rees bored with watching and waiting for something to happen, started his silly antics. Going behind each one of us, holding our shoulders saying, "I'll push you in...I'll push you in!" I wasn't taking much notice of him, but suddenly as he got nearer to us at the end of the line...horror struck!! Gerry and Michael were both in the water. NO BOTTOM TO IT!!! And I was supposed to be looking after them. Please God don't let them drown! They were right in the water. As quick as a flash John Williams dropped his stick, waded over and got the two of them out onto the bank. I must have been transfixed with shock and the horror of the situation. Someone must have run down the lane to get my mother. It certainly wasn't me! I couldn't move! The little ones were crying and soaked through. Then my mother appeared still in her pinny, carrying coats; she carried Michael and left me to usher my little sister back home.

My mother was very calm about it. It wasn't my fault. "It's a good thing I had the washing going", said Mam as she quickly wrung out the washing in the tub and stripped and dumped her shivering children into the warm water. "All's well that ends well", she said. "That boy deserves a Victoria Cross. Pity I can't give him one. I'll bet he'll have a row from his Granny for getting wet. I'll have to give him something, love him." It was a tuppenny bar of Cadbury's chocolate ... and the gas meter had to wait.

Denise Jones.

HANES ON RECREATION

REFRESHMENTS

(1) COFFEE HOUSES

Coffee-houses were popular in the larger cities and towns in the 17th and 18th Centuries. The first was opened in Oxford in 1650. They soon became centres for social and political gossip, and meeting places for the wits and literary men of the day. In 1808 The Cambrian Newspaper contained the following hints for Country Coffee-Room users.

(1) Gentlemen learning to spell are requested to use yesterday's papers. (2) Those who have already attained that art are desired not to put it into practice, by reading the paper aloud, to the annoyance of the whole room. (3) It is a bore to all present, and does not add one atom to the consequence of any Gentlemen, who may take the pleasure in disseminating the following important fact viz. - That he had dined yesterday, or that he had dined today. Or that he is to dine tomorrow with some Great Man! (4) The door of a coffee-room is just as easy to shut as the door of a drawing room, and the comfort of its being so, is justly appreciated by the inside passengers.

They were promoted again in the industrial towns in the 19th Century as part of the Temperance Movement. There were a number in Aberdare; one dating from 1852. Principally there was the Temperance Coffee House in the Temperance Hall (Palladium) itself (Opened 1858). There was another at No.2 Cardiff Street (Able Dance's Coffee Tavern opened in February 1881), and one at Mr. Oxenham's Queen's Hotel (now Burton's).

The following account of the opening of a fourth appeared in the **Aberdare Times** (12th November 1881.)

OPENING OF A COFFEE TAVERN —On Thursday evening Lord Aberdare opened a coffee tavern in Commercial Street. The house is styled "The Black Diamond" and is the property of Mr. Macrate of Cardiff, though an effort is being made to have it transferred to a company of local gentlemen. On the ground floor are a bar and refreshment room; on the first floor a billiard-room; and on the second floor, reading and bagatelle rooms. These latter rooms have been let to the Church of England Young Men's Club; and it is hoped that this connection will be beneficial to the character and prosperity of the establishment. His Lordship delivered an excellent speech on the occasion. At the inauguration there was a numerous attendance and amongst those present were, The Rev. J. Wynne Jones (vicar of Aberdare), the Rev. A.E. Campbell, the Rev. H.R. Johnson, Major Powell, Dr. E. Jones, Mr. J. Lewis, J.P., Mr. R. Pardoe, Mr. E. Thomas and others. Since the opening the tavern has been well patronised, and there is every prospect of it proving a success.

The "Black Diamond" was still functioning in 1893 as can be seen from the following advert, which appeared in the Aberdare Almanac for that year.

<p>* BLACK DIAMOND COFFEE TAVERN. Commercial Street, Aberdare. ***** TEA, COFFEE & COCOA. Hot Sausages, Chops, and Potatoes, Currant Cake & Pastry, Cold Roast Beef & Boiled Hams. BILLIARDS. PROPRIETOR . . . J.M. Jones. *</p>
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(2) SUPPER BARS

<p>* LONDON'S LATEST CRAZE! A HOT DINNER FOR 4d. AT GEO. UPTON'S SUPPER BAR, ABERDARE. FROM 12.30 to 2.30 p.m. ALSO FAGGOTS AND PEAS AND FISH AND CHIPS NIGHTLY.</p>
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(1903 Advert)

THE OPENING OF THE PUBLIC PARK

("THE PRIDE OF ABERDARE")

On the 27th July 1869 The Public Park was opened in the presence of Richard Fothergill and Henry Richard, the Members of Parliament for Merthyr Tydfil (that included Aberdare).

Consisting of nearly fifty acres this pleasure ground had formed part of the ancient Hirwaun Common. It was secured for the people of the town by the Inclosure Commissioners for England and Wales under their Seal dated 8 June 1865 in pursuance of the Acts for the Inclosure Exchange and Improvement of Land. Its purpose was to provide facilities for exercise and recreation, and in the hope it would become a "pleasant place for the dust-begrimed inhabitants"

The land had been formally enclosed in 1863 when a wall was built around its perimeter.

The cost of the drainage, laying out of the park and the erection of the lodges etc. amounted to a total of £7,000, and the Local Board of Health borrowed the sum of £5,000 from the Government to complete the works of walling, draining and planting. This sum was repaid by means of 1½ penny rate in the pound, over a period of 30 years.

William Baron, a Swansea landscape gardener and nurseryman, designed the park. He had been trained, and recommended by Sir Joseph Paxton the designer of the great Crystal Palace. It was claimed that the park had the finest collection of trees and shrubs outside Kew Gardens.

In 1887 three rowing boats were given to the town, for use on the lake, by Isaac Thomas, a well-known local undertaker and character. (**Hanes** will publish an article about him in due course.)

The boats were "launched" at a small ceremony before Lady Lewis of The Mardy, Miss Davies of Ynyscynon and the High Constable, David Davies, Grocer (Canon Street). These three public figures then embarked on one of the boats, which had been named, "Ruth", and were rowed around the pond, whilst a Mr. William Thomas, accompanied by the Aberdare Volunteers' Brass Band, sang "appropriate verses" to the stirring tune, "God Bless The Prince of Wales" (H. Brinley Richards). This is a ceremony your Editor would love to have witnessed!

In 1885 the park was described thus: - "*A charming feature of Aberdare is its public park, which is situated about half-a mile from the centre of the town. It is 49 acres in extent and contains two ornamental lakes, upon which there are swans and other waterfowl. Accommodation is made for cricket, football, and tennis playing - these sports being generally in full swing during their respective seasons. A stroll along the walks near the shrubberies is very enjoyable, whilst from the higher part of the ground an excellent view of the valley may be obtained. The park, both from its beauty and from the commendable neatness with which it is maintained, is an object of which the inhabitants are justly proud.*" (**Richards D.M., Aberdare - A Descriptive and Historical Sketch. [1885]**)

"We... put in ...a refreshment room which I had copied from Battersea Park London. This was not a success. I had visions of luring the miner and his wife out to the Park, dressed in whites, playing cricket, croquet or tennis with the professional classes. I wanted to see him and his wife sitting out in the Park enjoying a nice afternoon tea. It did not catch on that way. The tearooms deteriorated into a third-rate sweets and ice cream shop. I was disillusioned and disappointed; the miners did not rise to it." (**From The Autobiography of Edmund Stonelake'.**)

Aberdare's Pretty, Picturesque, Public Park: Ideal Place for Bathing, Boating and Sports.

Teas provided for large numbers such as Sunday Schools, and Picnic parties. For estimates apply to F.C. Smith, 43 Lewis Street, Aberaman, Lessee and Caterer at the Park. (**Advert. September, 5th 1914.**)

Notes. See further Elliot A.W., Trees and Shrubs in Aberdare Park. Aberdare 1913, (copy in the Reference Room at Aberdare Library)

Harvard D.A., Hirwaun Common and its Inclosure in Old Aberdare (Vol.8), Aberdare 1997.

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