

# CYNON VALLEY HISTORY SOCIETY

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## HANES

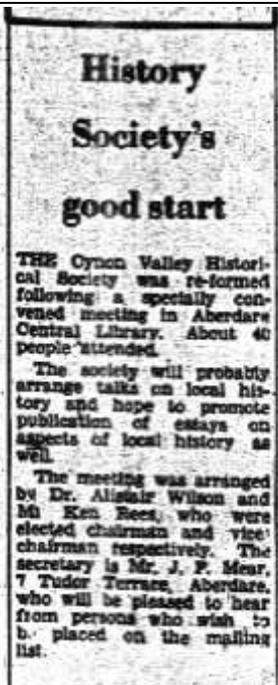
NEWSLETTER OF THE CYNON VALLEY HISTORY SOCIETY  
CYLCHLYTHYR CYMDEITHAS HANES CWM CYNON

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*How those curiosities would be quite forgot, did not such idle fellows as I am put them down*  
(John Aubrey 1626-1697)

## HAPPY FORTIETH BIRTHDAY CYNON VALLEY HISTORY SOCIETY



### TALL OAKS FROM LITTLE ACORNS GROW.

The first Meeting of the Cynon Valley History Society was briefly mentioned in the *Aberdare Leader* on 26 March 2011. The article records that the society will probably arrange talks on local history and hope to promote publication of essays on aspects of local history as well. No one present at that meeting could possibly have predicted the success that the society has merited over the last forty years. Over 400 lectures have been given and its publications, comprising ten volumes of *Old Aberdare*, a reproduction map, quality reprints of the famous Bacon sisters sketches of the valley in 1827 and 1828; two collections of well captioned old photographs of Aberdare and District, *Children of the Mines in the Cynon Valley*, *Cynon Coal* and *Chapels of the Cynon Valley* and an anniversary calendar will continue. All this has been due to the good stewardship and hard work of the dedicated and committed group of people, many sadly no longer with us, who have run the society since its formation. The late Professor Sir Glanmor Williams addressing the society at its first annual dinner in 1974 remarked that academics could only hope to

*touch a small corner of the local history scene – the real nitty-gritty on the ground had to be done by societies like CVHS or by local historians who, very sadly were ploughing a lone furrow. A lone furrow it may have been but one that has resulted in a large cultivated field which has yielded a good harvest. Sir Glanmor ended his talk by saying All Power to your elbow. Can there be any other valley with more vitality in it than this Cynon Valley of yours. Let these be our watchwords as we go forward toward the next forty years.*

*“Local History is not only about castles, the local gentry, manor houses and churches or buildings where Queen Elizabeth the first slept. It is about anything at all, it is about ordinary people, and about such things as miners’ lodges, friendly societies, chapels and workmen’s institutes. It is not about the aristocratic families but about local people.”*

**Professor Glanmor Williams JP, MA, D.Litt. (as he then was) in a speech given to the Cynon Valley History Society at its first annual dinner held at the Boot Hotel, Aberdare in December 1974.**

A topical note was introduced by Mr E J K Rees, a founder member and the immediate past chairman, who told those present that the venue of the dinner (*The Boot Hotel*) was at one time the site of a duck pond owned by the proprietor of the *Black Lion Hotel*. The original *Boot* was built in 1837 by Lewis Lewis, and the Post Office (now Weatherspoon’s) was built on the site. Incidentally the Lewis’s were engaged in the boot trade – hence the name *Boot Hotel*. [In 1846 the old *Boot Inn* became the *Boot and Railway* to commemorate the opening of the Aberdare Railway that year – Editor]

Mr. Rees also mentioned that *The Black Lion* derived its name from the Mathew Family of Aberaman House who had as their coat of arms a black lion and a heath cock. The latter gave its name to one of the original inns of the eighteenth century – the *Heath Cock* which was in High Street opposite the parish church. The original inn was rebuilt at a later date.

*(The Aberdare Leader 6 December 1974)*

## **WORLD EVENTS IN 1971 (history, politics and society)**

**(Here are some of the events which occurred during 1971)**

Ibrox disaster. Sixty six football spectators killed in a stairway crush.

Opening of the Aswan Dam.

Rolls Royce goes into liquidation and is nationalised.

The UK and Northern Island switch to decimal currency.

China is admitted to the UN.

The IRA bombs the Post Office Tower, London.

Greenpeace formally comes into existence.

Opening of Disney World, USA

Introduction of the microprocessor.

Creation of Bangladesh

The advertising of cigarettes on television banned.

The floppy disc is invented.

United Arab Emirates is formed.

Direct dialling between London and New York.

Introduction of CAT scanning.

Cell phone batteries invented.

First “quickie” granted in Great Britain.

Idi Amin seizes power in Uganda.

Launch of Salyut 1, first space station.

**Cynon Valley History Society founded.**

## **ABERDARE IN 1971**

We thought it might be of interest to look back at some of the events and the social life of Aberdare in 1971 at the time the history society was founded. The following pieces are taken from copies of the *Aberdare Leader* for the first three months of that year, the period during which the formation of the Society was being planned.

Aberdare's Member of Parliament was Arthur Probert and the local authority was the Aberdare Urban District Council. Its Clerk was D. Gordon James BA.

The trade of the town was in transition but still balanced between long established local firms and the new National multiples.

Victor Freed's furniture store in Market Street was flourishing and holding its January sale. Other familiar shops that advertised in *The Leader* were *Illtyd Williams, Leslie's Stores, Gregor Brothers, Theophilus and W.R. Bound & Son Ltd., Morris House, Victoria Square.* (Car Sales)

New housing estates were springing up and the 'housewife's dream' of a new freehold house on the first phase of the Pinecroft Estate, Cwmbach could be purchased for £3,250. Estate Agents promised property mortgages for a £50 deposit and £2.10.0d a week.

Local travel agents could whisk you away for 8 days to Majorca via *Sky Tours* for £29. For those that could not afford foreign travel the Western Welsh Bus Company offered coach tours to various British resorts. A 1600 XL Ford Cortina could be hired for £4.10.0d per day.

Both the Palladium and Rex Cinemas were thriving and showing films such as *Too Late the Hero* and *Carry On Up the Jungle*.

A Plaid Cymru Councillor, Glyn Owen, attempted to introduce a 'Green' element by proposing that members should not smoke during meetings of the Aberdare Urban District Council. The motion was defeated.

There was a great deal of vandalism in the town and the Council and other groups tried to oppose the use of the Panda Car and get 'Bobbies back on the beat'.

There was a Tesco supermarket in Cardiff Street (the present Wilkinson store) and a Mark Down store in Commercial Street.

W.H. Baker of Merthyr Tydfil was seeking a car salesman at a salary which 'should exceed £2,000 a year'. Other items relating to employment record the closing down of Purma Cameras with a loss of 98 jobs, and 19 redundancies at Cambrian Castings, Cwmbach.

Decimalisation was on the horizon and the Cooperative Society and other organisations were holding lectures on the new system which was to be introduced on the 15<sup>th</sup> February 1971.

Aberdare born professional singer Annette Merriman made her recording debut on *Hallmark Records*.

Local businessman Steve Smith laid on a seven course dinner at *The Glandover Arms* for a group of two dozen local old age pensioners. Participants also received seven free pints of beer each and were entertained with a concert and games.

In February the nine acre site of the former Aberaman Pipe Works was put up for sale, and it was announced that the 'showpiece' Council housing estate at Rose Row, Cwmbach was nearing completion but not expected to be largely occupied until 1972.

A favourite resort of teenagers *The Gogo Bar* situated in the old Empire Hall in the Constitutional Club was restricted by the police to members only as a result of incidents of violence that had occurred.

Sophistication arrived when Aberdare financier, Haydn Harries, was given the go ahead by the annual General Licensing Meeting to convert an old Cwmbach farm house into a public house and steak-bar to be called *The Golden Post*. The project was to cost £25,000 and involved the demolition of the main part of the old farm. It was pointed out that Aberdarians would no longer have to travel to Pontypridd or Cardiff to enjoy such facilities. [The farm was Ynyscynon which can be traced back to 1630. At various times it was in the ownership of John Jones Esq. (of Dyffryn?) and the Mathew family. In 1844 it was owned by Lady Glyn and occupied by David Williams (Alaw Goch) who sunk Ynyscynon colliery and built a gentry house on its land. See further D.L. Davies, *A Touch of Salt in The Land Your Fathers Possessed* (Cynon Valley History Society, 2011).]

The people of the Urban District of Aberdare faced higher bus fares and Council tenants a 10% rent increase. An increase in the Rates was also announced to a little under 5/- in the £. This was, it was noted, the highest increase in Wales.

The Council Librarian, Glyn John, presented the town with a 4mm to a foot scale model of Brunel's Dare viaduct. Made of balsa wood the scale model took Mr. John three months to construct.

The Library Committee provided a glass case and strip lights to illuminate the model at a cost of £17 and agreed to place it in the central library. [Notes: The model is now in the Dare Valley Country Park. Mr John was a founder member of the Society.]

Abercwmboi born actress Gaynor Morgan Rees, one of BBC Wales' most versatile actresses, appeared at the Coliseum, Aberdare on the 16<sup>th</sup> March in the Welsh Theatre Company's Welsh language production of Moliér's *Le Malade Imaginaire* (The Imaginary Invalid). The cast also included Meredith Edwards and Dafydd Iwan.

In late March *The Leader* published the registered number of unemployed people in Aberdare and Mountain Ash. The total was 1,019 (804 men, 117 women, 63 boys and 35 girls). The total had increased by 45 since January when the figure was 974.

A Government White Paper reforming local government announced the Aberdare and Mountain Ash Urban District Councils were to be merged to form one unitary authority. This was swiftly followed by a statement from the Mountain Ash U. D. Council that it was opposed to the tie up with Aberdare.

We end this review of events in the Aberdare valley during the first quarter of 1971 with an announcement in the *Leader* (March 5<sup>th</sup>) of the notice of the convening of a meeting to form a history society in the town.

## **ABERDARE IN 1871.**

One hundred years earlier there was a prolonged strike in the local coal industry which paralysed the trade of the district. The strike which started on 31 May 1871 affected the Aberdare and Rhondda valleys, resulted from the growing power of the Amalgamated

Association of Miners. In April 1871 it had more than 9,000 members in the two valleys and its strength caused the miners to seek an increase in wages. The owners promptly threatened a reduction and a strike followed involving 12,000 men. This resulted in an attempt by the owners to recruit labour from Staffordshire, Devon and Cornwall where there were unemployed tin workers. The attempt failed as miners' agents travelled around these areas discouraging recruitment by painting lurid pictures of the appalling and dangerous conditions in the mines of South Wales. The strike ended towards the end of August by the promise of arbitration which in February 1872 found in favour of the men awarding them a 2½% advance in wages backdated to May 1871.

The strike was seen as a great victory as it proved (1) that mine owners could no longer bring in black leg labour from other areas and (2) as a result of the arbitration process the owners had to recognise the union.

For a fuller account of the strike see Rev. R. I. Parry, *Early Industrial Relations in Aberdare* in *Old Aberdare* Vol.3 (1984).

## OTHER EVENTS

### New Rifles

In January the Aberdare battalion of the Glamorgan Volunteer Rifles handed in their Enfield rifles for a new issue of Snider breach loaders.

### Richard Fothergill MP.

That same month the Member of Parliament for Merthyr and Aberdare, Richard Fothergill, addressed his constituents at the Temperance Hall, Aberdare.

### The Telegraph.

New telegraph offices were opened at Mountain Ash and Cwmaman.

### Promotion.

M.G. Johnson, the manager of Werfa colliery, was appointed mining manager to the King of Burma.

### The Franco-Prussian War

The miners of Bwllfa colliery donated the sum of £33.12.1d to help alleviate the distress in Paris. A further sum of £8.12.10d was sent from the Hirwaun and Merthyr colliery, Hirwaun.

### Terrible Accident.

In February a 14 year girl was tragically killed at a local saw mill. She went to collect sawdust for a shop, and on climbing into the pit without permission was caught up in the shaft working the machinery.

### A Killjoy Minister.

March: A circus proprietor applied to the Board of Health for permission to set up his show for a month on ground near the public park.

A member of the Board, Dr. Thomas Price of Calfaria, urged members to discourage such applications on the grounds (1) The Circus would take hundreds of pounds away, (2) be a curse on the place and (3) be a great nuisance to the three chapels close by. The Board however granted the application at a rent of £15.15 and upon conditions. The Circus, Macollum's Royal Amphitheatre, opened on Easter Monday with a splendid stud of horses and ponies, male and

female riders, daring acrobats and fearless gymnasts. (Subsequent reports reveal that the circus was greatly enjoyed by all classes particularly the gentry and trade of Aberdare.)

[The three chapels were Gadlys, Bethel and Carmel. Ed.]

Richard Fothergill Jnr. has accepted the Commission of Ensign in the 14<sup>th</sup> Glamorgan Volunteer Rifles (*Western Mail*, 3 May 1871).

New High Constable.

Richard Pardoe, ironmonger of Cardiff Street, was appointed High Constable. He took over from Rees Williams of Cefn Pennar.

A Persistent Prostitute.

Martha Jenkins appeared before the Aberdare bench for the fifteenth time charged with being a common prostitute, wandering abroad and being drunk and disorderly in Commercial Place and Market Street. She was remanded to appear at Merthyr Police Court where she was sentenced to three months imprisonment at Swansea gaol upon which she remarked that she was determined she never wanted to see Aberdare again..

The Strike.

July 8: It was reported that the strike was beginning to bite and that men were leaving the area to seek work, the streets appeared empty and it was observed that there were long lines of empty coal trucks along the railway lines.

It is anticipated that some 200 Cornish miners will arrive in this town [Cardiff] by the steamer plying between here and Burnham tomorrow afternoon. The men will land at the new Low Water Pier. We are given to understand that they are being brought into the district to work the pits belonging to the Bwllfa Coal Company. (*Western Mail*, 9 August 1871)

Sudden Death

August 19: The paper reported the sudden death of Gomer Williams the youngest son of the late David Williams (Alaw Goch) of Ynyscynon. Gomer Williams had removed to Llanstephan to live and an inquest found that he had died from heart disease. He was buried in the family vault at Aberdare cemetery. The deceased was 30 years old. The 1861 Census gives his occupation as Surveyor. The burial record describes him as gentleman.

New Company,

The South Wales and Glandare Woollen Manufactory (Ltd) put its shares on the market. Its share capital was £20,000 divided into £10 shares. Its Managing Director was Dr. Thomas Price of Calfaria. The mill was situated on the river Dare in the town centre. [Between High and Canon Street] (September 23<sup>rd</sup>)

The Strike Again.

Following the settlement of the strike it was reported that blackleg workers, referred to by the paper as *the strangers*, hurriedly left the area. Their departure from Mountain Ash was overseen by a great crowd of men, women and children who followed them to the GWR station with shouts of "Hurrah" and the waving of flags of all colours. The "strangers" had a wait of an hour and three quarters on the platform during which time the crowd continually shouted, clapped hands, beat tin kettles, frying pans and waived handkerchiefs. A second batch of *strangers* was guarded by 6 to 8 police officers.

In Ivor Parry's essay (See above) he says that local shopkeepers, to a man, had refused to supply any 'dyn dod' (immigrant) with provisions. [Page 21].

At the police court the Stipendiary Magistrate, J. C. Fowler, commented on the exemplary conduct of both the police and the workmen generally during the strike. He observed that the peace of the Aberdare and Rhondda valleys, except for trifling exceptions, had been entirely undisturbed. (4 November 1871)

Testimonial to H A Bruce MP.

It was announced that a testimonial of an oil painting of Henry Austin Bruce would be presented to him at the Drill Hall, Merthyr Tydfil on the 2nd November 1871. The Notice stated that the celebrated Cyfarthfa band will attend and there would be a cold collation. After the presentation ceremony the painting was placed on public display at the Merthyr Temperance Hall.

A Chapel re-opens.

The edition of the 18<sup>th</sup> November records that Calfaria Chapel had reopened after being closed for a period of six months for extensive alterations and improvements. A large adjoining hall for Sunday school purposes had been added and the chapel was now "*one of the most handsome and commodious buildings in the district.*"

\* \* \* \* \*

The *Western Mail* reports that seven persons stand charged in Merthyr, with being concerned in the murder of Thomas Davies, a collier at Llwydcoed, near Aberdare, on the 16<sup>th</sup> April 1867. In April 1867 portions of a man's clothes were found near an old mine. They were recognised as those worn by Thomas Davies, who had not returned from the Aberdare fair, held on the preceding day. The boarding which protected the mouth of an un-worked mine was removed and the body of the missing man was discovered at the bottom of the shaft. The man had been murdered. Two years since [in 1869] an old 'fortune teller' was sent for by the friends of one of the prisoners, and as she alleges, they 'confessed', but until recently 'the old confessor' seems to have kept matters close. Lately however, she has been in no way reserved, but has spoken freely on the subject, as also has another woman, who now comes forward and solemnly swears to Price's participation in the murder. In consequence of their declarations steps were taken for the apprehension of all persons spoken to. The bench remarked that there was nothing to implicate five of the prisoners, who were thereupon discharged, but John Price and James Davies were remanded for a week, bail being refused.

**Birmingham Daily Post, 16, May 1871**

At the adjourned hearing witness after witness was called who could not testify to any thing like facts which connected the men in custody with the crime. The accused were consequently discharged.

The bench in disposing of the case, pointed to the only evidence given against the prisoners, that of two women, Jeanette Beales who confessed to believing in ghosts and Mrs. Greenslade the fortune teller. Beales told the court that she was troubled by ghosts and had seen one dressed in black that always grinned its teeth at her, and at one meeting, when she was on her way to see Mrs. Greenslade had caused her to fall down in a fit.

The court found that theirs (Beales and Greenslade) was the only evidence against the prisoners and that it was certain that no jury would ever convict upon such evidence, consequently the case must be dismissed.

*Western Mail, 29, May 1871.*

*This crime remained unsolved*



“Aberdare Times” Office,

31, COMMERCIAL-PLACE,

ABERDARE.

Valentines! Valentines!! Valentines!!  
The Attention of the Public generally is called  
to a very Large Assortment just received from  
London. Such Elegant emblems of love & affection  
certainly could Not possibly be obtained except  
at this establishment. The prices being low, they  
are within the reach of all. In design they have been  
pronounced to be charming. Now is the time for  
those wishing to give proof of their Endless affec-  
tion, to examine the extensive and rich STOCK.

### **BE MY VALENTINE!**

The nearest issue of our Newsletter *Hanes* to St. Valentine's Day, the 14<sup>th</sup> February, is the Spring number, so we thought we would include a local reference dating from 1881 to this romantic custom.

*The Aberdare Times* founded by Josiah Thomas Jones, an Independent minister, was one of the pioneers of the press in Aberdare. He came to Aberdare in 1854 from Carmarthen where in 1852 he had established *Y Gwron Cymreig* (The Welsh Hero). He continued to publish this paper at Aberdare. The journal consistently supported the workers rather than the ironmasters and coal owners. In 1858 he brought out *Y Gwladgarwr* (The Patriot) with the financial help of David Williams (Alaw Goch), that same year he published *Y Gweithiwr* (The Worker) which was to merge with *Y Gwron*. In 1861 he established the *Aberdare Times*, the town's first English language

newspaper which was to run until 1902, followed in 1885 by *Y Gweithiwr Cymreig* (The Welsh Worker). His most important contribution to publishing was probably *Tarian Y Gweithiwr* (The Workers Shield), a liberal-labour weekly directed at the miners and tin workers of South Wales. His printing works at Commercial Place (Victoria Square) produced a large variety of printed works in Welsh and English including books, almanacs, ballads and commercial material etc.

(Source of Advert: *The Aberdare Times*, January 1881)

See further: *Printing in Aberdare, Old Aberdare Vol.3 (1984) pp.57-83.*

Nowadays serious historians are expected to consult a mass of evidence, to analyse it critically and fairly, to test any preconceived ideas and never to indulge in wishful thinking or wild speculation or, heaven forbid, suppress facts or invent ingenious material to support their arguments.

.....Iolo Morgannwg the Historian. Geraint H. Jenkins, *Morgannwg* Vol. LII, 2008, pages 7-8.

***The Cambrian* was the first English language newspaper to be published in Wales (Swansea). It commenced in 1804. The Aberdare Library holds bound copies for 1805-1808. They will contain references to Aberdare. An index to entries can be accessed on line. Widen your search e.g. Aberdare, Llwydcoed, Gadlys etc.**

(Google Cambrian index online)

The Editor is indebted to Mr. Steven Graham for this information.

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[www.cynonvalleyhistorysociety.org](http://www.cynonvalleyhistorysociety.org)

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