

# 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, antiquary, 1626-1697)

## HANES AND RADICALISM

### CHARTISM IN ABERDARE

Little is known of the activities of the Chartist movement in Aberdare or indeed of early radical politics in general. There would certainly have been strong working class awareness and interest in democracy following the American Declaration of Independence in 1776, and the French Revolution of 1789.

An important local figure with sympathy for that momentous event in France was The Rev Thomas Evans (Tomos Glyn Cothi), a red-hot democrat and reformer, with the nickname 'little Priestley'. He was appointed minister of Hen Dy Cwrdd, Trecynon in 1811, and his memorial in the Old Meeting House makes reference to *his devotion to the cause of civil and religious liberty*.

D. L. Davies has drawn our attention to the existence of an 1814 organisation named *The Club* that met at the Blue Bell Inn, 58, Mill Street, and suggests that this might have been a political discussion society; there was too a short-lived *Aberdare Political Union*, an organisation linked to a similar society in Merthyr Tydfil. The *A.P.U* flourished in 1830 and 1831, and is thought to have been active in commandeering weapons at Aberdare during the 1831 Merthyr Rising. Later, in 1837 a Welsh Society called *Cymdeithas Rhyddymofynwyr Aberdâr*. Founded by William Williams, 'Y Carw Coch', met at his Stag Inn at Harriet Street and was by nature political reformist (with Chartist links) and cultural -it initiated the first of the *Carw Coch* eisteddfodau in 1841. The eisteddfod led to the formation of *Cymreigyddion y Carw Coch* in 1841, another cultural organisation with strong Chartist sympathies.

See further D.L.Davies, Introduction to Gardd Aberdar Essay in *Old Aberdare*, Vol. II, pp 10-16 and 56-57.

## The Spies in the Lodge!

Chartism, promoted by Hugh Williams a radical lawyer from St.Clears, came into Wales through the flannel manufacturing districts of Carmarthenshire and Montgomeryshire. (Kevin Littlewood: *From Reform to the Charter: Merthyr Tydfil 1832-1838*).

The Chartists sought universal male suffrage, annual elections to Parliament, a secret ballot, equal electoral districts, paid members of parliament and the removal of property qualifications for voters.

The movement believed that such reforms could be obtained by means of a Petition to Parliament which it called a Charter. Chartist aims were promulgated through Working Men's Associations for Obtaining the People's Charter (W.M.A.'s).

By 1838 the W.M.A. had many branches in industrial south Wales. These were known as Lodges; the Merthyr Tydfil Lodge was strong, and quite a lot of its activities are known. There is now evidence that there was also a lodge at Aberdare, but unfortunately little is known about it. This is hardly surprising, as when the majority of the associations disbanded in the aftermath of the Chartist Riots at Newport, they prudently destroyed their records.

The main support for the Aberdare Lodge would have come from the workers in the iron industry. Their numbers can be assessed from an 1841 document.

	Workers over 18		Aged 13-18		under 13	
	M	F	M	F	M	F*
Aberdare } Abernant }	780	80	174	31	89	6
Gadlys	?	?	?	?	?	?

(M= male F = female)  
Totals Aberdare and Abernant 1160. Gadlys 150 (estimate.)

All we presently know about the Aberdare branch is that the number of members in 1839 was possibly 400, and that in the early part of 1839 the Lodge donated £14 to the Chartist Prisoners' Defence Fund.

A Meeting of rebel delegates from the industrial valleys was held at Dukestown on the 10<sup>th</sup> October 1839\*. Six delegates from Merthyr attended, and a number from the Aberdare Lodge. The Merthyr lodge declared that they had some 2,000 men, armed and ready to move (4 brigades or about 180 sections in all.). Aberdare, however, refused to commit themselves to a rising on the grounds that they had not yet recruited sufficient numbers.\*\* These brief but interesting facts concerning radicalism at Aberdare are contained in communications passing between George Rowland Morgan of Gadlys, the Scales (the Llwydcoed ironmasters) and The Marquis of Bute in his capacity as Lord Lieutenant of Glamorgan. The secretary of the Aberdare Lodge was a weaver, named John Williams. Another of its Officers was Thos. Evans, a shoemaker.

Perhaps the most interesting part of this fragment of history is the fact that G. R. Morgan, and the Scales were in possession of important intelligence which they were able to pass on to Lord Bute. The only way they could have obtained this was either through informants, or spies who had infiltrated the Merthyr or Aberdare Lodges!

Source: Ivor Wilks: *South Wales and The Rising of 1839*. (Gomer Press 1989.)

\* The Chartists marched on Newport on 4 November 1839.

\*\* Perhaps this is why Aberdarians became to be known as 'snakes' (or? sneaks)

## GLORIOUS DEMONSTRATION IN WALES

- *ABERDARE, Glamorganshire.*

A very large meeting of the working people of this place and its neighbourhood took place on Monday last. The meeting was called for the purpose of taking into consideration the propriety of sending a petition to her Majesty, to call to her councils men who would do their best to get the People's Charter passed into a law. The working people of Aberdare like those of almost all places in the Kingdom, taking a lesson from the legality of Lord John Russell's proclamations (if they contained anything of what the lawyers call common or statute law), sent a requisition to the chief constable, who, imitating the conduct of his betters, did not make his appearance, whether by accident or design we know not.

The meeting was held adjoining a common called Hirwain, and took place at six o'clock in the evening. It was opened with a prayer. The Chairman having briefly stated its purport, called upon a Welsh speaker to address the assembled multitude. From the limited space which we can afford, it is impossible to give more than a mere outline of the proceedings. The drift of the speaker's argument went to prove that the condition of the working people of Great Britain had been getting worse and worse for a number of years; and after quoting from the works of Arthur Young, the Report of the Poor-law Committee, the prices given for the manufacture of goods at various times, concluded by endeavouring to show that there was no hope of redress for the working classes until they had a voice in the making of the laws. He then moved the adoption by the meeting of a petition for the purpose mentioned above.

The motion was seconded by another Welsh speaker and carried unanimously. The next speech delivered in English, was one of great excellence, combining a good deal of pointed humour with sound information and argument. It was listened to with profound attention throughout. This meeting will provide fruit in abundance; and, doubtless, we shall soon see the working people of this place as zealous and as active as their more numerous brethren of Merthyr Tydfil and Dowlais.

Go where we will - to the populous city or the lonely hamlet - on the mountain or in the plain, there is but one voice, "The People's Charter!" "Down with the base hypocritical, weak and mischievous Whigs, and up with the honest and wise men!" Amen.

It was computed that there were from 7,000 to 8,000 people present, including a great number of the bonnie lasses of Old Cambria.

**Source: *THE OPERATIVE*, June 23, 1839.**

The Chartists of this place [Aberdare] held a meeting on Tuesday, the 4<sup>th</sup> inst., at the New Inn, Mill Street. Mr. William Charles was appointed to the Chair; Mr. Bayleys, from Merthyr, expounded separately, the six points of the People's Charter, in English in a masterly style, which gave great satisfaction to a room full of attentive hearers. After him, Mr. John Harry rose, and in Welsh made a very appropriate speech on the same matter, and proved that no other means could remove the distress now existing among the working classes in this kingdom, without getting the People's Charter the law of the land. After enrolling fifteen new members, making a total of 93, the meeting separated.

**SOURCE: *NORTHERN STAR AND LEEDS ADVERTISER*, January 15, 1842.**

**Editor's Note: The chief constable = the High Constable.**

The Aberdare Chartists held their weekly meeting at the New Inn, Mill-street, on Tuesday evening January 25<sup>th</sup>. The three speakers, after showing the distressed state of the country, earnestly advised all present to unite for the People's Charter a memorial for Frost, Williams and Jones was agreed to.

***Ibid*, February 5, 1842.**

Mr. Morgan Williams, Merthyr, has been nominated delegate to represent the Aberdare Chartists in the ensuing Convention. ***Ibid*. March 5<sup>th</sup>, 1842.**

## **ATROCIOUS ACTS AT ABERDARE.**

*On Monday last Mr. Powell of the Gaer, brought about 150 colliers into Newport on their way from the Forest of Dean to his works at Aberdare. The Aberdare colliers, still on strike number about 700. They have now been 16 weeks unemployed – not, it appears on account of any reduction in wages, but because they will not agree to cut coal for 1s 4d per ton for the next twelve months, although the price has been, for a long time passed, 11d per ton at some of the Welsh iron-works. At a very large meeting of the men on strike held upon Hirwaun common on the 11<sup>th</sup> instant, the speakers, deprecated the atrocious acts recently committed (one of which resulted in the murder of the poor man Thomas), and denied that they were perpetrated by members of the union. In reply to this, a correspondent of this day's Merthyr Guardian affirms that before he was murdered his wife received 'three separate warnings of his probable fate by three different members of the union,' and reminds the miners of the 'almost universal joy with which the poor man's misfortune was hailed.' He further asks – 'Is it not notorious that the dead children of relatives of those who have not joined in the strike, are followed to the grave amidst the heartless laughter, the abominable hootings and exultations of hundreds, not only of men, but of women and children, who followed the melancholy procession beating frying pans, kettles, and tea trays?' If these things be truly described, they are really horrible.*

**Source: Bristol Mercury, March 23, 1850.**

Editor's Note: The circumstances of the murder of John Thomas was dealt with in detail in *Hanes*, Number 56 (Autumn 2011)

## **ANGRY WORKMEN AND SURPRISED BUTCHERS**

1861. July 12, a mass meeting was held on Hirwaun common protesting against the high price of meat, and to decide to buy none unless it was reduced.

*For the past fortnight or three weeks a large number of the working classes at Beaufort, Brynmawr, Nantyglo, Pontypool etc. have refused to be purchasers of meat at a higher price than 6d per 1lb. This movement is the result of resolutions passed at meetings held for the purpose of discussing the question of high priced provisions.*

*On Friday last a similar movement was inaugurated in this neighbourhood, a monster meeting of workmen and others having been held on the Hirwaun Common. A Chairman (Mr. Curtis) was duly appointed; and after hearing several addresses the meeting adopted a resolution pledging all those who agreed with it not to buy any meat on the following (market) day at a price above 6d per 1lb. One or two speakers more temperate than the rest proposed to give the butchers a week's notice of their intention but this idea was scouted by the majority of the meeting.*

*The butchers of the town have been taken by surprise by this unexpected combination and the consequences to some of them have been serious.*

**Aberdare Times July 20, 1861.**

## **POWER TO THE PEOPLE**

Nearly two thousand persons assembled at an open air meeting at Aberaman on Monday last. The meeting had been called through the instrumentality of the town crier. Mr Thomas Thomas, Cwmdare, was called upon to preside. A large number of working men addressed the audience. The principal object of the speakers was to impress upon their hearers the great power that was granted them by the last Parliament, and to exhort them not to use the power in Parliamentary elections only, but also at the election of local officers. The approaching election of members of the Board of Guardians was referred to as an appropriate time for using their votes with effect. The meeting was very orderly conducted, and the various speakers had an attentive hearing.

**Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian, March 27, 1869.**

Editor's Note: The 'great power' mentioned in the article was the extension of the franchise, under the Reform Act of 1867, to all householders. This effectively gave the vote to the working classes.

\* \* \* \* \*

Aberdare radicals regularly shout that the town is a hot-bed of Good Templarism, and yet at a Rechabite eisteddfod held in the Temperance Hall there yesterday there were not 45 persons present – including men, women, children, and reporters – an hour and a half after the proceedings had been announced to commence.

**Wales Day by Day, *The Western Mail*, December 6, 1893.**

## **ABERDARE I.L.P SUPPORTS VOTES FOR WOMEN.**

At an open-air meeting held in Victoria Square in September 1906, the speaker, the famous suffragette Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst, had to compete to be heard with a musical service being held a few yards below.

The famous suffragette, who was addressing members of the Aberdare Independent Labour Party on the subject of votes for women, first related the story of the struggle for the franchise. Mrs. Pankhurst (who the year before had been imprisoned for refusing to pay a fine imposed for allegedly kicking a police officer) then put her case for women's rights, emphasizing that if women were given the vote a labour government might be returned as had happened in Australia.

Towards the end of the meeting Mrs. Pankhurst handed the president (John Prowle) a resolution *that this meeting of the inhabitants of Aberdare protests against the exclusion of women from the exercise of the franchise, and demands that the Government in their Bill dealing with Plural Voting shall include a clause extending the franchise to women.*

The proposition was seconded by Mrs. Jones, who had been a resident in Australia, and had enjoyed the franchise there. It was then put to the meeting and endorsed unanimously.

The meeting was attended by a large group of men and women who listened attentively and warmly applauded the speaker several times. Mrs. Pankhurst answered a number of questions, and had to put up with a little good natured barracking by one or two persons thought to have been 'inspired by a liquid spirit.'

*Aberdare Leader*, September 8, 1906

Editor's Note. Despite the support of Aberdare ILP women did not get the vote until 1918, and this was restricted to women over the age of 30. They had to wait until 1928 to get voting equality with men.

## **ANOTHER SUFFRAGETTE IS SENT PACKING**

King George V and Queen Mary visited the town in June 1912 as part of their Coronation tour of South Wales. They were taken to Aberdare park and while a choir of 10,000 school children were singing before their Majesties a woman Suffragist who had fastened herself to a railing shouted at Mr. McKenna\* who was accompanying the Royal party as Minister in attendance. Constables pulled her away and packed her off by the next train.

*The Times*, June 28, 1912.

\*Home Secretary under H. H. Asquith.

## **ABERDARE 150 YEARS AGO**

In November 1862, Mr. Lewis presided over a meeting to devise means to alleviate the distress in Lancashire during the Cotton Famine caused by the American Civil War. In December, 1862, a strike of Gas Buyers took place and the price was reduced from 6s. to 5s. Per 1000 [units].

On March 10<sup>th</sup> 1863, the marriage of H.R.H. the Prince of Wales to Princess Alexandra, eldest daughter of the King of Denmark, took place; Mr. Lewis as High Constable convened a meeting of the inhabitants to take steps to present a loyal address to the Prince. An Illuminated Address was sent to H.R.H., and a Welsh and Danish Bible was sent to his bride. On the day of the wedding a procession of all the Sunday schools in Aberdare, Abernant, Cwmbach and Trecynon proceeded to Abernant Park, and presented Mr. Fothergill with a Bible. Mr. Fothergill presented tea, sugar and bread to some 800 aged persons in the district.

Editor's Note. That year's High Constable was Henry Lewis, a linen and woollen draper of 11, Commercial Place.

**Source: *The High Constables of Aberdare. (Aberdare1894)***

#### IN MEMORIAM

It is with sadness that we record the death of Society member Trevor Lewis Taylor of Bryn Eithin, Cwmdare. Trevor, who died in March 2012, was born in Dulwich in 1921 and came to live in Aberdare the following year when his father left to work in the Cynon Valley. Trevor was educated at local schools and at the Aberdare Boys Grammar School. On leaving school he became a student teacher at Park School (Ysgol y Commin), moving on to train at Borough Road Teacher Training College in London (1940-1942).

In 1942 he enlisted in the Royal Air Force and trained as a pilot in Canada. During the war, Trevor flew Mosquito FB 6 aircraft in low-level dawn attacks on German convoys off the coast of Norway. At the end of the war, and then a Flight Lieutenant, Trevor completed his teacher-training and took up a post at Ashford in Middlesex. He eventually became Head of a school in Spelthorne, and on retirement decided to settle in Aberdare in the late 1980s. Here he made new friends and became an active member of Probus, and took an interest in the history of the locality joining CVHS. Trevor attended meetings regularly and served on the Committee for a short period.

A keen sportsman, Trevor had a passion for expensive fast motor cars which he drove with great enthusiasm and a former pilot's skill.

A longer biography (with photographs) can be found on the Aberdare Boys Grammar School web site ([www.abgs.org.uk/FormerPupils/TrevorTaylor](http://www.abgs.org.uk/FormerPupils/TrevorTaylor)).

#### ERRATA.

Mr. Steven Graham's name was omitted from the list of Society Committee members for the year 2011-2012 listed in Hanes No. 57 (Winter 2011). Steven represents Rhondda Cynon Taff Borough Council on the Committee and is also a member of the Society in his own right. D.L. Davies is Vice-Chairman and the Society's Correspondence Secretary is Elaine Lewis. Our Webmaster is Dr. Colin Rees

#### LOGO

The heraldic device used in the heading of this edition of Hanes and the previous number (57) is that of the former County of Glamorgan. The arms, *or, three chevrons gules* (gold with three red chevrons), were those of the De Clare family who held the lordship of Glamorgan from 1217 to 1314.

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