

# 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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## HIRWAUN REVISITED

The last page of *Hanes* 32 (Autumn 2005) carried a short article on aspects of Hirwaun (*Your Area? An Occasional Article: No. 1 Hirwaun*). In this issue we record further glimpses of the past of this historic village.

### NAME AND GROWTH OF COMMUNITY.

The village of Hirwaun takes its name from Hirwaun Wrgant the long moorland, reputedly given to *all who desired to keep cattle and sheep, and grow corn* by Gwrgant ab Ithel the father of Iestyn ab Gwrgant the last independent ruler Glamorgan.

There is evidence that a number of Cistercian monks resided in the area in the twelfth and thirteen centuries; their dwelling was in the vicinity of the confluence of the stream Nant-y-Bwlch and the river Cynon, where there was a mansion house and the wood of Bolchoyth [Bolgoed], apparently possessions of Llantarnam Abbey.

In 1536 the antiquary John Leland was impressed by the sight of *a great race and bredth of horsis* roaming on Hirwaun Common.

The community itself grew up around the valley's first ironworks set up there by John Mayberry in 1757. George Borrow approaching the industrial village in 1854 *saw blazes here and there and heard horrid sounds*. He described Hirwaun as *an enormous mining place with a spectral chapel and streets crowded with rough, savage looking men*.

### THE CHARTISTS OUT AT HIRWAUN

We heard today from undoubted authority, that the Chartist are in arms at Hirwaun, nr. Merthyr. The inhabitants of that district are in a state of great excitement and consternation. The latest news from Merthyr this evening confirms this intelligence.

Source: *The Standard*, 21, November 1839.

This event followed the Newport Rebellion of 4 November 1839

## HIRWAUN IN 1847

This extract from the Tithe map shows how the village of Hirwaun looked in 1847. The furnaces and works do not however appear on the map as they were built on land within the adjoining parish of Penderyn; consequently although most of the workforce lived in the parish of Aberdare, and its iron was transported to and shipped from the Aberdare canal, the parish of Aberdare received no benefit from the rates levied on the works.

In 1847 the ironworks was owned by William Crawshay II, and managed by Francis Crawshay. The Hirwaun of this date is as large, if not larger, than the village of Aberdare.

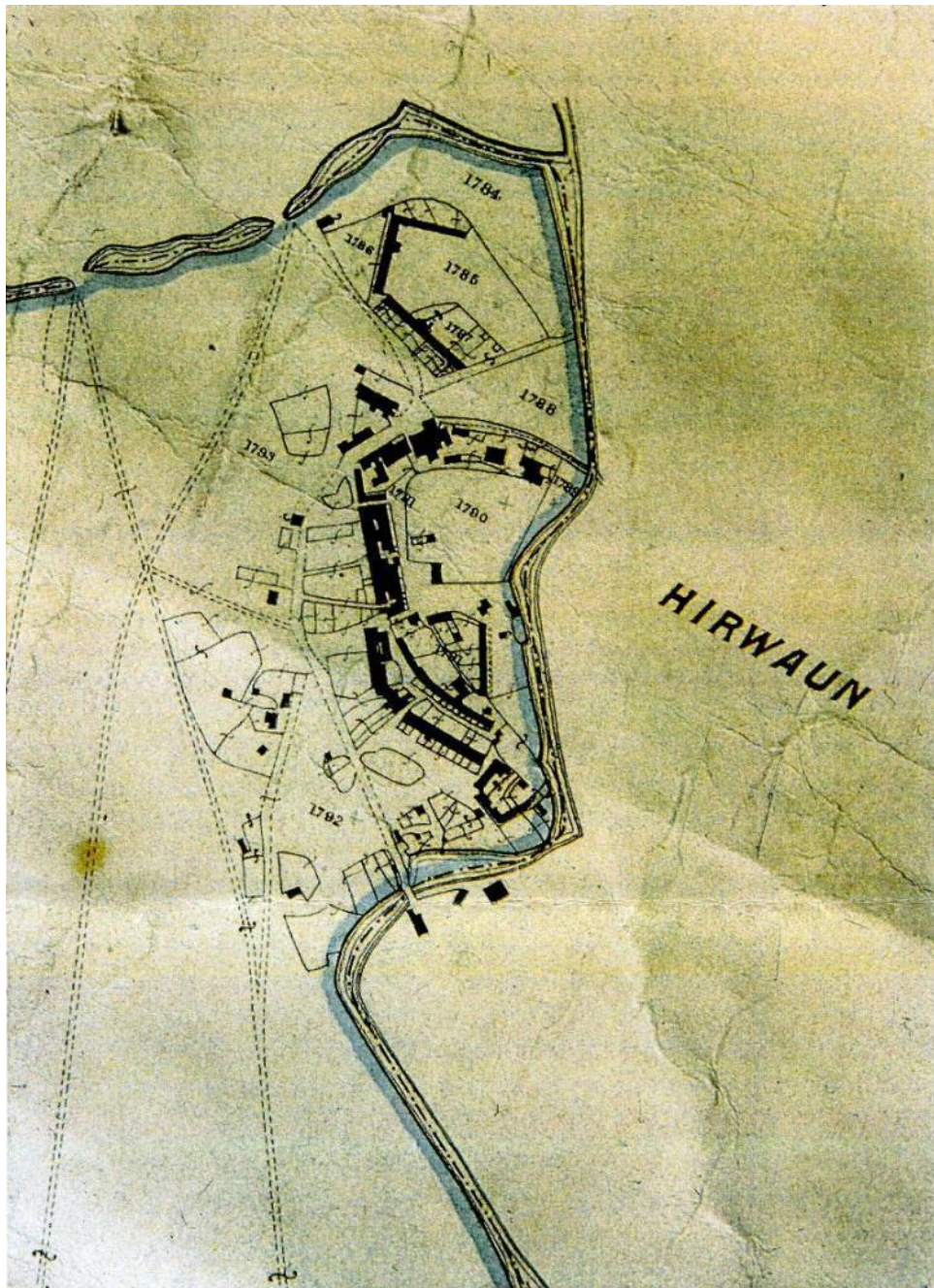
The street pattern is "a direct result of the converging tramways," and although no street names are given in the Tithe Schedule, they were known as High-street, Foundry-road, Ironworks-road, Tramway, &c. When the works were sold in 1813 it included 116 workmen's cottages, a public house, sundry farms, a water corn mill and wharfs.

The Tithe Schedule contains the following information relating to the parcel numbers shown on the map:

**Hirwaun Common and town**  
**Land Owner: Bute, Marquis of as Lord of the Manor.**

<b>Tithe Map number</b>		<b>Occupier</b>
1784.	Tips and pasture	Wm Joseph & ors.
1785	Cae Hirwaun (Meadow)	do
1787	Houses, yards etc.	do
1788	Coke Yard	William Crawshay
1786	Houses, yards etc.	Richard Morgan & ors.
1789	Pasture and field.	Trustees of Chapel.
1790	Pasture field	John Lewis.
1791	Houses, yards etc.	Peter Moore & ors.
1792 and 1793	Houses, yards etc.	Sundry.
1794	Hirwaun Common	

Note: The Common, which measured 950 acres 3 roods, and 15 perches in 1844 extended from Hirwaun to the Gadlys entrance of the Aberdare Park. (See further D.A. Harvard: **Hirwaun Common and its Inclosure**: *Old Aberdare* Vol. 8 1997.)



This plan shows that part of Hirwaun falling within the parish of Aberdare  
(From the 1844 Parish Tithe Map)

#### **PUBLIC HEALTH - T. W. RAMMELL'S OBSERVATIONS.**

*At the northern extremity of the parish is the village of Hirwain, containing about 1,800 inhabitants in that portion contained in Aberdare parish. Hirwain lies at the extreme north – west of the parish, and is only partly within it. Out of 3,000 inhabitants about 1,200 are dwelling in the parish of Pen-derrin, in the county of Brecon, which commences on the opposite side of the river. The condition of this part, both with respect to the want of drainage and proper privy accommodation, may be described as very similar to that of the village of Aberdare. The whole of this property belongs to Lord Bute, who has put in two large drains, but it is said they do not act well.*

**Source: Thomas Webster Rammell, Report to the General Board of Health ... into the sewerage, drainage ... and sanitary condition of ... Aberdare. (1853)**

The Rammell Report describes sanitary conditions at Hirwaun with broad-brush strokes, and without going into detail compared to the circumstances of that village with those of Aberdare.

Sanitary conditions at Hirwaun were still dire in 1874 and two letters published in the *Western Mail* that year reveal just how bad the situation was. These set out in horrific fact what living conditions were actually like. The first of these letters headed, *A Fever Factory at Hirwaun*, describes various filthy plague-spots in the village such as **Crescent Row**, near the railway station, which stood close to a ravine through which a stream ran. There was a pigsty on the side of the ravine from which filthy refuse trickled into the stream; alongside the row and considerably below road level there was a well, the resident's source of water. Within yards of this well cart loads of ashes and filth were deposited from which poisonous particles are washed, by rain, into the water source

The writer then mentions conditions in the vicinity of the **Maesyrrhidian Arms**. Alongside the pub there were further deposits of ashes and refuse which had resulted in the formation of a black pool of foul water which also flowed down in the direction of Crescent Row.

The letter also drew attention to the state of the banks of **the Glancynon river** (*sic*) along which more pigstyes and poultry pens stood from which animal odour dripped and tumbled into the stream in a rivulet of slimy ooze. Half a mile down stream from the pens children of cottagers waded into the water to fill pails, cans and kettles for drinking and domestic purposes.

Finally the letter refers to the state of a building, fit only for a stable, which was actually used as a place of worship, at one end of which was a heap of ashes tipped out of the way by the people living nearby which ran in a black stream into the river. Under the chapel, the writer observed a slimy cellar approached by a flight of steps covered by filth and human ordure. Close to stood a mellow flavoured pig sty. In this dirty building, continued the writer, with its grossly filthy surroundings and poison exhalations from the slimy cellar, human beings meet to worship their creator twice every Sunday and once every Monday.

In the second of his letters the correspondent drew attention to the state of a row of workmen's cottages standing close to the **Cardiff Arms Hotel**, the backs of which, consisting of dead walls, faced the main road. The escape of what is described as 'refuse' ran from the stables of the **Cardiff Arms** to the house forming a pestilential pool a foot deep, bounded on one side by the wall of the cottages through which it percolates into the inside of the dwellings, the stench being unbearable to all but the miserable occupants.

In front of the cottages is a dead wall 7 feet high and entrance the cottages is via a narrow passage not more than a yard wide which is blocked up at the top end. There was a gutter along the passage full of poisonous liquid which carries all the refuse from the **Cardiff Arms Hotel** through a hole in the wall that separates the hotel premises from the cottages. The stench is horrible and what it must be like when the deadly fluid is in agitation I must leave to you to guess.

Here six to eight families live, and men, women and children suffocate hourly with abundance of space nearby to build roomy cottages. This filth runs down the slopes into the river hard by, after nearly suffocating these cottagers nearly to death, and was carried away to be used for domestic purposes by cottagers lower down the stream. There is no system of drainage in the town at all; I was unable to ascertain the name of the owner of these places.

The writer ended his second letter by mentioning **Mill Street, Hirwaun** a community of some 30-40 cottages with no sanitary accommodation whatsoever. These houses, he recorded, stood near the gas works and just under the walls of the more stately and roomy dwelling of David Evan Williams JP, and were owned by an Ystradgynlais man.

## TRANSPORT

If you had lived in Aberdare in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, and assuming you had the inclination and means to travel, the coach from Merthyr Tydfil to Neath and Swansea staged at the *Cardiff Arms Hotel*, Hirwaun.

In 1816 a new Post Coach service named "*The Accommodation*" (Which could carry four inside) was inaugurated. This left the *Wheat Sheaf Inn*, Swansea three times a week (Wednesday, Friday and Sunday) for Hereford, via Neath, **Hirwaun**, Merthyr, Brecon and Hay. There were a number of good connections at Hereford. This coach made the return journey on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays. (*The Cambrian Newspaper*, July 1816)

A whole network of coaches enabled you to travel around South Wales and beyond. Various coaches regularly left the Castle Hotel, Merthyr to such places as Abergavenny ("*The Royal Mail Coach*") at 7.30 each morning, and "*The Tally Ho!*" ran from The Bee Hive on the Glebeland at 7.00 a.m., three times a week. "*The Imperial*" (From Swansea) left the Castle for Brecon three times a week (summer only).

Another Royal Mail coach, departing Merthyr, would take you to Cardiff each morning and the "Packet Coach" made the same journey via Newbridge (Pontypridd) four times a week.

Those wishing to travel to Swansea (via Neath) took "The Imperial" which started out at Brecon and could be boarded at Merthyr Tydfil or Hirwaun. This service ran four times a week during the summer months.

For goods, there were a number of Carriers operating out of Merthyr. Their destinations were Abergavenny, Brecon, Caerphilly, Newport, Cardiff and Swansea.

### THE MAIL COACH

A new Mail Coach will commence running the 6<sup>th</sup> of next month from Swansea to Merthyr, which will be a great accommodation to the inhabitants of the towns and those of Neath, Wellfield [Glyn Neath], Hirwaun and Aberdare.

*Bristol Mercury*, 27 JUNE 1835.

### INTERESTING REMINISCENCES OF THE OLD VILLAGE.

The following recollections appeared in the *Aberdare Leader* in 1923 in a report of the Golden Wedding of John Alexander Lewis and Ann Lewis of 11 Cross Street, Hirwaun. Mr. Lewis, a native of Hirwaun, who was born in 1853, had been a fireman at the Old Bute Pit, Hirwaun in 1880; he started work at the age of 7 as a door-boy at the Steam Coal Colliery. His wages were 2/6d a week.

His parents, who lived at 3 Penyard Houses, did not regard with favour the first train which passed through Hirwaun in 1851. They feared the safety of their children, and an appeal was made to Mr. Crawshay for a change of residence. Mr. Crawshay favoured this by building them a house near the ironworks, a residence now commonly known as *Ty Pystyll*. He remembers coal being taken from the Patches, and brought to the spot where the police station now stands. If the coal supply exceeded the ironworks' demand, it was placed in baskets carried by donkeys, and sold around the houses. The coal was also brought in carriages, two trams being placed on each carriage, to a place near the present wagon depot. Women superintended the unloading under the charge of Rees Rees, Penderyn, who resided at Hodges House, Station road. The carriages were taken thither by the engine *Vulcan*, whose first driver was a David Lewis. Mr. John Lewis states that a good horse could outwork the locomotive. A better locomotive named *Jupiter* was later used.



People lived in wooden huts at Buxton's Field, Tower Road, and the places where Perrott's and Watkin's, (Rhigos Road) houses now stand. There were three huts at Tower Road, occupied by Joseph Rowlands, John Lewis and William *y Llifwr*. Where the Watkins's house now stands, a Thomas Phillips had a hut. He was called *Thomas Wallop*, because he was continually walloping boys who stole his apples. Of the ponds, the Big Pond was made first. The Little Pond was made by the proprietor of the Patriot Inn. There was a sand pit where the Post Office is now erected, and this was worked by John Hart, assisted by his daughters, Louise and Sarah. A man of no fixed abode also helped the Harts; he was missed for a few days, and then discovered dead in the sand pit. It was presumed he had been covered by a fall of sand while sheltering, following a drinking bout. The first school was called *Ysgol Pentwyn*, and this is the Infants' School of today. It was here that all local meetings and concerts were held. There was no lighting scheme in vogue, the only light being that afforded by the Ironworks furnaces. Many public houses of that day have disappeared, some of which are the Joiners' Arms, Lle Mwlyd, Black Horse (Brecon Road), and the Pig and Whistle.

Source: *The Aberdare Leader*, June 30, 1923.

**Illustration:** 1867 ticket from the Editor's collection. In 1876, Hirwaun had a fine new public Hall, *The Victoria Hall*, Cross Street. This was replaced in 1916 by the *New Victoria Hall*, a drama and ciné-variety theatre. Later re-named *The Palace*. Demolished in 2000. [Ed.]

## TRANSPORT

The railway between Hirwaun and Neath was constructed in 1848–1851. Later it was extended to Merthyr. Before the advent of the steam engine, a coach drawn by two horses plied between Merthyr and Swansea. The fare from Hirwaun to Swansea was 4s. 6d. (It is nearly that by rail these days.) One of the most important stations on the route in those coach days was the *Cardiff Arms*, Hirwaun, where a change of horses used to take place on the journey from Merthyr to Swansea and vice versa. The mail was conveyed by this coach. The nearest market was Pontypridd, and many Hirwaun women used to cover the distance on foot and did not consider the journey very long. To-day however, they draw very long faces if they have to walk a distance of 3½ miles to Aberdare.

## OLD CUSTOMS.

At the beginning of the 19th century, coal was conveyed to people's houses in sacks or cradles on the backs of donkeys. The coal was sold by the pound, and as a rule, girls would be in charge of the donkeys. One of the last survivors was Miss Ann Roderick. In those days, too, and for many years afterwards, women and girls and boys 7-10 years of age worked underground.

Few people in Hirwaun paid any attention to the Enclosure Act. One Watkin Griffith Watkin succeeded in enclosing a piece of land near Bethel place for 21 years, and held it afterwards in perpetuity.

*Aberdare Leader*, September 17 1921.

## A SUSPECTED MURDER

### JEALOUSY AT THE CASTLE HOTEL HIRWAUN

William James, a publican and miner residing at Hirwaun, a village eight miles from Merthyr Tydfil, was brought up on Saturday morning at the Merthyr Police Court, charged with the wilful murder of William David, a hawker residing at Hirwaun, under the circumstances stated in the *Daily News* of Saturday. The prisoner is about 45 years of age; it appears that he has lately lived unhappily with his wife, of whom he was jealous. Several witnesses were examined, from whose evidence it appeared that about 11 o'clock on the night on which the deceased met his death, he and several other parties were at the *Hirwaun Castle*, the public house kept by the prisoner. They were talking about going to bed, when the prisoner's wife said, "We must sleep three in a bed." One of the party said in a joke he would sleep at the foot of the landlady's bed. The prisoner seemed not to have liked the words. The deceased shortly after went out, but did not return, the prisoner having gone out before him. Shortly afterwards the prisoner came back with a candle in his hand, and said, "There is a man who has come to his death — he has fallen through the stable loft; it is Will David." The wife replied, "Don't tell your lies." The prisoner then said, "Yes, yes; he is dying now; it is on account of thee that he is dying." One of the party then got up, and asked for a candle for the purpose of going out. The prisoner's wife brought a candle and lantern, and the prisoner then became extremely violent. Marks of blood were found upon some clothes alleged to have been worn by the prisoner on Monday night, but which were changed on Tuesday morning, which marks the prisoner accounts for by saying they were caused by the killing of a pig. At the conclusion of the evidence the prisoner was committed to take his trial for wilful murder at the next Summer Assizes at Cardiff.

*Daily News*, 16 MARCH 1859.

## THE CARDIFF ARMS HOTEL

Hirwaun's leading hotel, the *Cardiff Arms*, stands in a prominent position on the square in the centre of the village; it was the principal and only commercial inn at Hirwaun. It was once a coaching inn on the Swansea-Merthyr-Brecon route; fresh coach horses were stabled there and exchanged at this mid-way point of the journey. Mail was also dropped off and collected at the Inn.

The *Cardiff Arms* was standing in 1835, but is probably older. The name *Cardiff Arms* probably has a connection with Hirwaun's principal landowner, the Marquis of Bute, and mirrors the famous inn of that name in Cardiff. The Marquis often stayed there and it was Cardiff's principal coaching inn.

The accommodation at the inn consisted of a large ground-floor taproom, a commercial room, large kitchen and other offices. On the first floor were eight bedrooms, a sitting room and a club room. Attached to the premises was an eight stall stable and coach house.



THE Public are respectfully informed, that the safe and elegant STAGE CARRIAGE,

### THE IMPERIAL,

Starts from SWANSEA for MERTHYR and BRECON, and for LLANELLY, KIDWELLY, and CARMARTHEN, in the following order:—

From Swansea for Neath, Merthyr, and Brecon, at eight o'clock every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday Morning; and arrives at Neath at nine o'clock, Merthyr at half-past one, and Brecon at five.

From Brecon for Swansea, at eight o'clock every Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday Morning; and arrives, on its return, at Merthyr at half-past ten, Neath at half-past three, and Swansea at five.

From Swansea for Llanelly, Kidwelly, and Carmarthen, at ten o'clock every Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday Morning; and arrives at Llanelly at half-past twelve, Kidwelly at two, and Carmarthen at four.

From Carmarthen for Kidwelly, Llanelly, and Swansea, at ten o'clock every Tuesday, Friday, and Sunday Morning; and arrives, on its return, at Kidwelly at eleven o'clock, Llanelly at

Amongst those using the facilities of the *Cardiff Arms* were the Crawshay family; William Crawshay who purchased the Hirwaun Iron Works in 1819, often stayed there overnight when visiting the works, and his son Henry who managed it. William used to bring samples of iron for Henry to see and pile them on the mantelpiece of his regular room in the inn, until the landlord complained that it might break with the weight, so two special pillars to support it were made at Cyfarthfa and presented to him. (M S Taylor, *The Crawshays of Cyfarthfa Castle*, p70)

The club room would have accommodated meetings of the many Benefit Societies which existed in the village [Ed.]

### AT ST LLEURWG'S CHURCH

With a population of 4,000, Hirwaun had no church until the opening of St Lleurwg's Church in July 1858. The Rev John Griffith, the vicar of Aberdare, had described the district after years of neglect, a *spiritual wilderness*. The 1851 Religious Census records that, at that date, Anglicans had the use of a Licensed Room at Hirwaun (services there were originally held in a pub and then in an overcrowded large room), and that one service alternatively in English and Welsh was taken by the curate. The site of the church was given by Lady Bute and built by means of a generous donation from her and money donated by the Anglican community at Hirwaun and the locality in general.

### INDUSTRY

**Hirwaun Iron Works.** Established 1757 (Wilkins & Maybery), Wasse and King (1775), 1780 (Anthony Bacon), J & S. Glover (ca 1786-1799), A & T Bacon and then T. Bacon (1799), Jeremiah Homfray & Ors (1802-) William Crawshay (1819)

**A REMARKABLE CONFIRMATION.**—A remarkable confirmation was held at St. Lleurwg's Church, Hirwaun, on December 3rd, 1888, by the Bishop of Llandaff. The list of candidates included 'twenty men, of whom five were Wesleyans, aged respectively 27, 58, 21, 44, 30, one being a local preacher, and two others, "members;" two were Baptists, aged 28 and 12, the first being a "member;" two were Independents, aged 62 and 30, both "members;" two were Calvinistic Methodists, aged 32 and 21; of the remainder, one Oburohman was aged 69, another 52, and a third 50. Nineteen women were confirmed, and of these 3 were Wesleyans, aged 32, 57 and 25, all "members;" seven were Independents, aged 27, 27, 37, 26, 47 and 23 (the age of one is not given), five being "members;" one was a Methodist "member," aged 41; two, aged 50 and 27, were not going to any place of worship; of the Conchleians, so-called, one was 66, another 59, and another 44. Twenty-two boys and girls were confirmed, of whom two were Roman Catholics, two Wesleyans and one a Methodist.



Fragment of an iron company £5 bank note.

1865 **N. B. Allen & Co**, Dinas Fire Brick Manufacturers, Hirwaun (and at Neath)

**The Hirwaun Crucible Steel Co.** Its partners were Thomas Dickens and John Corbett Long (Retired March 1889), and then Thomas Dickens and John Snape. Dickens retired in December 1890 and the firm was continued by Snape (There in 1900). The company were steel-smelters and steel casting manufactures. They produced amongst other products, fire bars.

#### CLOSURE OF THE IRON COMPANY SHOP

An interesting insight into living conditions at Hirwaun in 1869 appears in an advertisement announcing the sale of the Company's Shop (on account of the proprietors giving up the business) at Hirwaun by **W H Williams & Co** on 21 September. The advert directed at Drapers, Grocers, General Shopkeepers and others offered for Sale by Auction on the premises, the whole of the stock-in-trade, trade fixtures, utensils, and other effects comprising cloths, doeskins, ready-mades and waterproof clothing; general drapery, including dress fabrics in variety, shawls and mantles, bedding, hosiery, gloves, haberdashery; about 500 pairs of boots and shoes, a general assortment of groceries, teas etc.; paper, brushes, iron, zinc, and tin goods; weighing machine, scales, mills, canisters etc., together with the shop fixtures, utensils etc., amounting per Inventory to about £1,000.

Sale to commence each day at half-past eleven. The goods to be on view the morning of the sale.

The Linen and Woollen Drapery to be sold the first day.

Secured Bills taken in payment for purchase above £50.

*Bristol Mercury*, 21 September 1869.

## ABERDARE CENTRAL LIBRARY RECENT ACCRETIONS

### WHAT'S NEW AND NOT SO NEW AT THE LOCAL HISTORY DEPARTMENT AT ABERDARE LIBRARY.

#### NEW

Llanwynno - *A Treasure of Memories* (an adaption of the writings of William Thomas by Alan J. Meats), published in 2012

#### NOT SO NEW

*Aberdare and Mountain Ash Express* 1908, 1912–13, 1917–22, 1924–41 and 1947-50; these copies also cover the Merthyr, Bargoed and Rhymney valleys. They are bound volumes and some are in a fragile state.

National Eisteddfod of Wales 1885 at Aberdare. Photocopies of the original manuscripts of *Englyn: Y Trydan ac Cyfeillgarwch*.

Merthyr Tydfil Union Minutes 1910-12

Calfaria Baptist Chapel, Aberdare: Balance Sheets for 1879 & 1889. Full list of all the members & officers of the church in 1887. The Library also holds other registers and balance sheets.

Appointments diary of David Morgan (*Dai o'r Nant*) from April 1899 to April 1900. (Some of the handwriting is difficult to read)

Steven Graham, Reference Librarian

#### IN MEMORIAM

We regret to record the death of Mrs. Margaret Rohan who died on the 4th December 2012. Margaret had been a member of the Society for some 12 years and was well known and respected in the community. A full tribute appears on the Society's Website, [www.cynonvalleyhistorysociety.org](http://www.cynonvalleyhistorysociety.org)

#### NEW LOCAL HISTORY PUBLICATION:

##### ***CHURCHES OF THE CYNON VALLEY*** by Alun Vernon Jones.

A comprehensive study of the Anglican and Catholic churches of the Cynon Valley.

This volume contains church and local history, art and the architectural details of some 32 churches.

It has over 300 illustrations mostly in colour.

Price £20 (by post £26) and can be purchased at Aberdare Central Library, Cynon Valley Museum or from the author, A.V. Jones at 3 Holly Drive, Aberdare, CF 44 PB.

For further details and sample illustrations, see [www.cynonvalleyhistorysociety.org](http://www.cynonvalleyhistorysociety.org)

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Edited by Geoffrey Evans, 5 Plasdraw Place, Aberdare CF44 0NS (01685 871840)

Epost / Email: [Gmorgannwg@aol.com](mailto:Gmorgannwg@aol.com)

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