

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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CHANGE AND DECAY IN ALL AROUND I SEE...

(H.F.Lyle: *Abide With Me*, 1847)

Aberdare has recently lost two more of its historic houses, Aberaman House in September 2012, and last month (February) our local hospital, the former Abernant House.

THE LOST HOUSES.

(1) Abernant House

The original Abernant House was built in 1804 by Thomas Birch one of the partners in the Abernant ironworks on the site of Cynon Farm; this first house was probably a fairly modest establishment. In 1862 it was enlarged by the then owner of the works Richard Fothergill III, becoming probably the finest of Aberdare's large houses. Built in Palladian style it had a grand interior and luxurious furnishing. Ornate gardens were created with splendid topiary, pathways, box hedges, lawns and flower beds. There were over a dozen large greenhouses alongside the house in which pineapples, grapes and other exotic fruits and flowers were grown; these were heated by conduits containing hot steam piped from the ironworks.

Fothergill left the house in 1880 to reside in Tenby and Abernant House then remained empty for many years. The mansion was left in the care of James Lewis of Plasdraw as Trustee who allowed it to be used on special occasions such as the Grand Ball held in January 1886 to celebrate the knighthood granted to William Thomas Lewis of the Mardy. Various local organisations were also allowed to use the house and grounds from 1887 onwards for public events such as church bazaars, annual flower shows (1889-1892) and poultry, pigeon and cage bird society competitions.

In 1892, Abernant House took on a new lease of life when it became, with the financial help of Miss Olive Talbot of Margam Abbey, *St Michael and the Angels* Clergy School for the Diocese of Llandaff. Opened by the Bishop of Llandaff on St David's Day 1892, it functioned until 1904 when the college removed to Llandaff. This connection is commemorated in the name of an adjacent street, College Street.

In 1914, following a public meeting of townspeople and other interested parties, a Management Committee resolved to lease the house and grounds for use as a hospital. Within three years, sufficient money for this purpose had been raised and after internal conversion and extension the building was opened on July 17th 1917 as the Aberdare and District General Hospital. The final cost of £10,300 was funded by the colliery companies of the district, local miners, benefactors, and the general public. This same group of people undertook to ensure the future maintenance and running costs of the hospital.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF ABERNANT HOUSE (1873).

On Tuesday the second of September 1873 the town was lavishly decorated with banners and flags, and the utmost enthusiasm prevailed amongst the thousands of people who assembled in honour of the day's event.

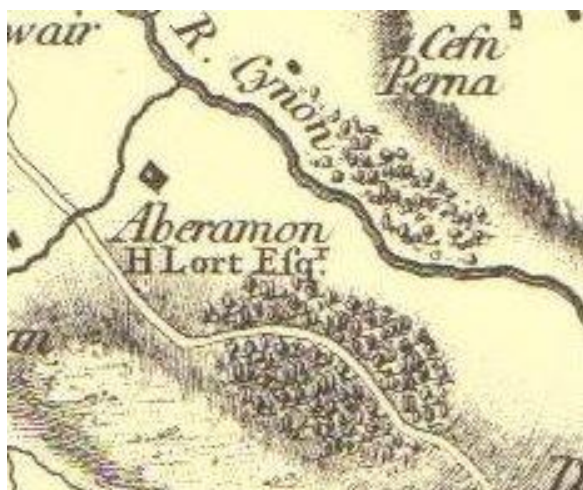
About 2 p.m., the gates of Abernant Park were thrown open to a limited number of visitors, 2,000 tickets having been issued for the occasion. Intended as a mode of honour to the South Wales Choral Union, and also celebrate on a more extended scale the majority of Mr. Richard Fothergill Jnr. After the recent victory at the Crystal Palace, Mr Fothergill Snr. determined to celebrate the event by presenting a medal to each member...The choir grouped in horse shoe formation on the fine lawn in front of Abernant House, and the public gathered around as conveniently as possible. Mr. Fothergill, his family and visitors were within the circle, and the Crystal Palace cup, and the beautiful cup presented to the Welsh in London were exhibited in the centre. A large number of flags were flying, and the scene was one of great interest. Proceedings commenced with the choir singing *The Many Rend the Skies*, this was followed by the *Hallelujah Chorus*, and *Let the Hills Resound with Song*. Richard Fothergill Snr. then addressed Caradog and the members of his choir [full text omitted] and concluded by saying that he wished to give a memorial of the day, and that each member of the choir would receive a silver medal. The choir then filed off to another portion of the grounds, and as they passed the house in single file (Caradog at their head) Mrs. Fothergill presented the conductor with a gold medal and each member with a silver one. Richard Fothergill Jnr. was then presented with a beautiful illuminated address [its content is set out in the article] in a gilt frame, and a diamond ring. The presentation was made by the leader of a deputation of a hundred Merthyr and Aberdare tradesmen each wearing white rosettes. Mr. Fothergill Jnr. then responded [speech omitted], and the celebrations concluded with the choir singing special stanzas written for the occasion. The Fothergill family then invited the large company to stroll through the grounds and to partake of refreshments set out in a large marquee.

Later that evening there were public rejoicings at the Ynys in the form of a Fete and Rustic Sports which well over 20,000 people attended. [An account of this event appeared in Hanes, No.27, Summer 2004. Ed.]

(*Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian*, September, 6th, 1873)

[NOTES: Cynon Farm is not mentioned in the parish Land Tax Assessments. Richard Fothergill Jnr. died of a form of Typhus in April 1877 just three years after this joyous event. The Crystal Palace cup is on display at the St. Fagans National History Museum. A photograph of the commemorative medal can be seen in *Aberdare: Pictures from the Past*, Vol. 2, plate 195. Ed.]

(2) ABERAMAN HOUSE.



Originally an ancient farmhouse it was the home of the Mathew family from at least 1524; the Mathews rose through the ranks of the County gentry and in 1618 William Mathew of Aberaman became High Sheriff. At some point in its history, the farmhouse was replaced by a large stone-built gentry-house, which in 1670 was the second largest house in the valley having six hearths. This in turn was demolished, and in 1747, the family built an elegant Georgian mansion in its place.

In the course of time (1788) the Aberaman Estate passed to Eleanor Mathew, and the mineral rights to her, and her sisters Rebecca and Maria Eleanor. In 1806 the house and land was purchased by Anthony Bacon II as a summer resort. Bacon died in 1827, and in 1837 the estate, consisting of some 1,538 acres

was bought by Crawshay Bailey. He did not take up residence there until 1844, and in 1845 sank the Aberaman colliery on the estate and started erecting an iron-works. Crawshay Bailey enlarged and re-fronted the house and built large stables.

In February 1867, Crawshay Bailey sold the Aberaman estate to the Powell Duffryn Steam Coal Company, and Aberaman House became the home of its Managing Directors, Sir George Elliot and later Graeme Ogilvie (ca 1893). It subsequently became the administrative centre of Powell Duffryn in this valley.

The coal interests of Powell Duffryn passed to the National Coal Board in 1947 on Nationalisation of the mining industry, and Aberaman House became the regional offices of Area Number 4, and subsequently the offices of the Opencast Executive.

Illustration: Aberaman House as shown on the Yates Map of Glamorgan, 1799. H.Lort = Hugh Lord who married Eleanor Mathew.

For a detailed account of the Aberaman Estate, see The History of Powell Duffryn in the Aberdare Valley in *Old Aberdare*, Vol 4, pp 3-22.

At the time of going to press, houses are being constructed on the grounds of Aberaman House, and there are proposals to convert the extant stable block (a listed building) into five dwellings.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF ABERAMAN HOUSE (1886).

Wednesday may be regarded as a red letter day in the annals of Aberaman the occasion being the marriage by special licence of Mr. St. George Garde-Brown with Miss Ethel Pyle, granddaughter of Sir George Elliot, Bart., MP.

The ceremony took place in St. Margaret's Church, which was recently built at the cost of Sir George in memory of his late wife and deceased daughter, this being the first marriage that has taken place in the sacred edifice. The liveliest interest was evinced in the proceedings and long before the hour fixed for the ceremony a large concourse had assembled within the building, admission being by ticket. The village of Aberaman was gay with flags, many of which bore mottoes expressive of good wishes to the bride and bridegroom.

[...]

The bridal party were conveyed to and from the church, which was filled to overflowing with privileged spectators, in carriages provided by Mr. Thomas Davies, of Merthyr, and others, and intense excitement prevailed among the onlookers in the street upon their arrival and departure, two of the carriages being drawn by four greys with postillions in scarlet and blue livery respectively.

Immediately the ceremony concluded the fact was proclaimed to the neighbourhood by the discharge of cannon, the firing of which was continued at intervals throughout the afternoon.

The breakfast, which was of a sumptuous character, was served in a specially erected pavilion adjoining Aberaman House.

[...]

On the wall at the back of the head table was the motto *Hir oes, Llwyddiant, a Llawenydd* [Long Life, Success and Happiness] ... The whole of the floral decorations in the pavilion were most tastefully carried out by Mr. Mitchell (head gardener at Aberaman House). The bride cake was supplied by the eminent firm of Buzzard & Co., London. It weighed 3 cwts [152.4 kilos], and was of such proportions that the doors of the mansion were scarcely large enough to allow its admittance. During the breakfast Hulley's County Band played a pleasing selection of music, and occasionally, throughout the day, the Aberaman Brass Band under the leadership of Mr. J Prestwood played selections in the grounds, viz. grand fantasia, *Pastorella*; polka, *Merry Lads*; Mendelssohn's *Wedding March*; selection, *Iolanthe*; Valse *Estudiantina*; selection of *Welsh Airs*; Valse, *Sweethearts* etc.

At night a Grand Ball was given in the pavilion, which together with the entrance hall were brilliantly illuminated by the electric light, there being eighty-six, twenty-candle incandescent lights, produced by a 120 light Gramme machine, the whole being supplied by our fellow-townsmen, Mr. G. Wilson, Dare Villas.

(*The Aberdare Times*, October, 30, 1886)

THE TEMPERANCE HALL

The Temperance Hall once so central to the town has undergone a number of changes since its opening in 1858. From public meeting-hall and place of entertainment, theatre, cinema to Bingo hall it is currently up for sale, and we now hear that it is to become a Mosque or Islamic centre.

The movement for such a building commenced at a public meeting held at Bethania Chapel on February 27th 1857 held for the purpose of advocating the importance of erecting a Temperance Hall at Aberdare. Such was the significance of the venture that the meeting was to be chaired by Henry Austin Bruce MP, who in the event was unable to attend because of illness. His place was taken by David Williams (Alaw Goch); the meeting was well attended, and there were many pledges of financial support. At the end of the proceedings it was proposed that *this meeting, considering the great increase in population, feels the necessity of a proper place to hold public meetings etc., for the instruction, edification and proper amusement of the people.*

(Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian, March, 14th, 1857)

'NOT ONLY AN ORNAMENT BUT AN HONOUR TO THE TOWN'.

Aberdare's Temperance Hall was opened with great ceremony by Henry Austin Bruce in July 1858. A contemporary report described the new hall as a remarkably fine building, well adapted as a public hall, with suitable rooms for lectures, a library, and a temperance coffee house. Its very spacious and lofty main auditorium could hold 2,000 people. The original cost of the building was over £3,000 and its funding was undertaken entirely by the members of the Total Abstinence Society.

(Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian, July, 17th, 1858)

THE PEEP OF SPRING

People are beginning to white wash and paint, and cottagers are commencing to make their little garden-plots look orderly, as if another crop was to be looked for. These are pleasing evidences of Spring – betokening the passing away of frowning winter, and the advent of a more smiling, sunny, and, let us hope, prosperous season.

(Merthyr Telegraph, March 31, 1866)

FRIENDLY SOCIETIES

The autumn 2009 edition of *Hanes* (No. 48) contained a number of general observations and facts relating to the Friendly Societies which sprang up in the town during the nineteenth century. The growth, functions and customs of such organisations would make a fascinating and important contribution to the history of the district, and would be an ideal topic for a dissertation. Until such an event happens readers will have to be content with a few more disparate facts.

Dr. Thomas Price of Calfaria Baptist chapel, who was a member and advocate of many of the local societies, referred to the growth of membership in the Aberdare area in a speech given at a Public Dinner at the Boot Hotel, Aberdare in April 1865. He stated that in 1813 there were 17 clubs [Friendly Societies] in the district with 360 members. By 1855 there were 59 lodges with a total membership of 5,162 members. Now [1865] the Foresters alone had 40 lodges with 2,862 members.

There were 30 Ivorite lodges with 1,820 members.

These benefit societies were productive of a vast amount of good in the place.

Dr. Price said he was a member of nearly all the societies: The Oddfellows, The Foresters, Ivorites, Alfreds and the Christian Union. In addition to the Friendly Societies, there were other societies with a total membership of 5,000, making the total membership of all societies 9,682. On average members paid 25/- a year; striking out 5/- for fees the cost of dinners and other contingencies, each member paid about £1 a year in solid money, contributing £9,682 as a provision for sickness and death. He did not think that such a sum would be obtained under the Poor Law Guardians, although they would be bound to get half.

(The Aberdare Times, April 15, 1865)

THE FORESTERS PROCESSION (1853).

The various lodges connected with the Ancient Order of Foresters joined in procession on Monday last in characteristic costume, forming a slightly interesting and amusing spectacle ... of their 'turn out' on Monday, we may observe that Aberdare has never before witnessed so thoroughly characteristic and picturesque a demonstration, the whole recalling vividly to mind the days when *Bold Robyn and his Merry Men* ruled triumphant in Sherwood Forest. We are pleased to find so much spirit among them, and heartily wish them every success.

(*Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian*, August, 13, 1853)

AND IN 1864

On Monday, the several Foresters' Courts of this district, held their anniversary at their respective headquarters. Some of the Courts turned out in Lincoln green, with bow and horn, and other implements of ancient woodcraft. After parading the streets, headed by a brass band, travelled by train to Hirwaun, where they were joined by other brethren. They then proceeded to the Court-rooms and regaled themselves. Court 'Forester's Home' had a supper at the Temperance Hall in the evening, and the members spent a few hours most pleasantly.

(*Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian*, August, 12, 1864.)

Illustration: Victorian Scrap showing members of the Ancient Order of Foresters.



THE ODDFELLOWS AND IVORITES

The greatest part of the Oddfellows of the district had their turn-out last week; although the weather in the morning was not favourable, yet the members mustered very strong. After perambulating the town, the members returned to the Temperance Hall to hear the adjudication of *Cynddelw* and his fellow-judge on the subject published six months ago by the Society for competition. The competitors were numerous in poetry, essays (historical and biographical), recitations, sacred and secular singing etc.

On Saturday the Order of True Ivorites held their feasts. Different Lodges joined in the general procession and after parading the streets, each dined at their respective lodges. The morning meetings were held at different chapels and the Temperance Hall. In the evening, meetings were held at Ebenezer, Trecynon and at Saron [Aberaman] and were crowded with hearers. [List of speakers mentioned]

(*The Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian*, July 28, 1860)

The past few days have seen a crop of club feasts and the town has been enlivened. On Saturday the Alfreds and Orangemen marched out headed by the Aberaman and Aberdare Rifle Corps bands and carrying their banners. Processions were amongst the neatest and most orderly we have noticed. The men were well dressed and well behaved, and after attending Divine Service returned to their respective lodges to partake of a substantial dinner. On Monday the Foresters made their annual demonstration. Having formed a procession of considerable length and gaiety at Mill Street they marched to Aberaman exciting a good deal of attention as they passed along. They kept in good order headed by a number of the members mounted and accompanied by the Aberdare Rifle Corps band. The procession was rendered more gay and picturesque by the presence of a number of very fine flags and banners, the chief of which was the emblematical banner of their Order.

On the same day Women's Benefit Societies held meetings at the Corner House, Llwydcoed, The Full Moon, and Carpenters' Arms, Harriet Street, and the Blue Bell, Mill Street held their anniversaries. Having marched to a place of worship, the members dined together and enjoyed a pleasant evening.

(*Merthyr Telegraph*, August 19, 1865)

The Friendly Societies were still flourishing at the end of the century and a number are listed in *The Aberdare Almanac* for 1896.

There was considerable amusement in the town last week when a local draper announcing yet another sale of goods, displayed a large notice in his window stating MR JONES' TROUSERS ARE DOWN AGAIN. (*Aberdare Jottings in The Aberdare Times*)

THEN AND NOW.

There has been of late a great influx of strangers in this place [Aberdare]. Three new surgeons have established themselves in the town, and we believe that they are not connected with any works, but merely have their private patients to attend to. Two solicitors also have been added to those who already practised here. Drapers, grocers, watchmakers, and shoe makers, have not been behind hand in making their appearance in our streets, and as new shops almost daily spring up in a most wonderful manner.

(*Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian*, March 14, 1857)

THE COST OF COAL

Our streets on Saturday last, were the scene of a melancholy procession, the result of the late disaster at Ferndale. First of all came three coffins, a little later fourteen passed, a tremendous concourse of people proceeded them, and we are told that some were left at the station, there being no bearers obtainable to carry them. This appeared to cast a gloomy aspect on all the proceedings of the after part of the day.

(*Merthyr Telegraph*, June 19, 1869)

[The disaster mentioned in the article occurred on the 10th June 1869 when fifty-three men and boys were killed as the result of an explosion at Ferndale colliery. Seventeen months previously, on November 8, 1867, one hundred and seventy eight men and boys were killed in two consecutive explosions at the same colliery. Ed.]

* * * * *

Our **Market House** will soon be a thing of the past, or at least a mere relic of its former greatness. Its name would lead one to surmise it be a thriving, busy place of sale and barter, but it is rapidly approaching to that of gossip mongery and play-house.

Only last Saturday rotten apple shying and even football, to say nothing of the minor games, were indulged in. Surely it is high time for reformation.

(*Aberdare Notes: Aberdare Times*, October, 30, 1886.)

SOCIETY NEWS

Membership fees for the new membership year (September 2013–August 2014) will be £10 (ten) for full membership and £6 (six) for associate members. Payment of membership fees as near to the September 1st date would be much appreciated. The increases are in line with the approval given by members at the September 2012 AGM to membership fee changes.

A LOCAL SUCCESS STORY

The Society has been presented with a copy of *The Story of Ready Roasted Chickens Ltd.: 1965-2003*; this privately published brief account describes how the well-known Servini family started selling roasted chickens on a small scale at its Cardiff Street restaurant in the mid nineteen-sixties. These were prepared on a small spit-roasting machine capable of cooking four chickens at a time. Such was the success of the venture that a separate business evolved. The Company moved its operations to a plant at Cwmbach, and later opened a second unit at Gadlys. In 1979 production was moved to Trecynon where seventy people were employed. By 1986, Ready Roasted Chickens achieved sales of £5m per annum. This interesting history of a local business was given to the CVHS by Mr Robert Servini, and has now been handed to the Reference Section of the Central Library where it can be seen on request.

ERRATA

(1) Hanes 60 erroneously stated that Aberdare Hospital was re-opened in 1925 by The Duchess of Kent. As many readers will have noticed, the ceremony was carried out by H.R.H. the Duchess of York (later H.M. Queen Elizabeth, the wife of King George VI). The editor apologies for this careless mistake.

(2) Page 8: Correction of typographical error. For accretions read accessions. The note as supplied by Mr. Steven Graham of ACL actually read 'Recent Additions.'

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