

CYNON VALLEY HISTORY SOCIETY

CYMDEITHAS HANES CWM CYNON

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CYLCHLYTHYR CYMDEITHAS HANES CWM CYNON

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GADLYS IRON WORKS IN 1870

It is indeed good news that the Cynon Valley Museum has been saved and will re-open in the Autumn. It should not be forgotten that the building and most of the surrounding area was once the site of the Gadlys ironworks. The furnaces stand, more or less intact, at the rear of the building and are, it is understood, to become part of the museum's attractions. The following description of the works in 1870 will therefore be of topical interest.

GADLYS ABERDARE.

4 miles west of Merthyr, reached by the Vale of Neath Railway. The number of furnaces in blast, 2; out of blast, 2; puddling and balling, 37; weekly make of rails 250 tons; and of tin-plate, 150 tons. In connection with the works are extensive collieries, employing 1,800 to 2,000 men, and capable of turning out 700 to 800 tons per day. It is a noticeable fact that Mr. Wayne, the founder, was the first, after the owner of Wernlaes [*sic*, ? Waun Wylt], to bring steam coal into repute, and make it an article of commerce. Wayne's Merthyr steam coal gained the *Diplome d'Honneur* at the French International Exhibition of 1867. Gadlys is also celebrated for its cold-blast foundry pig-iron. The Millwall shield, which withstood the most powerful gun in the world, and the Armstrong 12-inch, 600 pounder, was made from Gadlys iron.

(Extract from *The Iron Works in the Merthyr District*, The Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian, September, 17th 1870.)

SIDELIGHTS ON THE GREAT WAR.

ALFRED LEA

Jeweller, 18 Commercial Street, Aberdare.

THERE having been a rumour that the said Alfred Lea was of German nationality, I have upon his invitation, obtained particulars from the Registrar

of Burton, Cheshire, which proves him to be born in Cheshire and a son of Mr. John Silvester Lea, a farmer.

E Rees
Superintendent of Police,
Aberdare.

(*Aberdare Leader*, October 31st, 1914)

SUSPECTED GERMAN SPY

Arrest at Abercynon
Certain documents seized

Otto Kruger (48) was charged at Mountain Ash Police Court today (Thursday) with an offence under the Official Secrets Act.

Superintendent Rees stated that he had received information to arrest the prisoner for an offence under the above Act, and asked for a remand.

Inspector Toye stated that at 4.30 pm on Wednesday he, in company with Superintendent Rees, went to a house and shop in Ynysmeurig Road, Abercynon. They found the prisoner there. He is a man of German nationality, and follows the occupation of hairdresser at Abercynon. He was suspected of being a foreign agent. They searched the house and took possession of certain documents. They conveyed the prisoner to the Police Station. Asked if he had any questions to put, prisoner said 'Yes, your Worship' speaking with a broad German accent, he asked 'Can I go home to my wife and children? There is no one to look after them.'

Mr. T. Elias, the clerk, said, 'That is impossible. We cannot do it.' The prisoner was remanded for a week.

(*Aberdare Leader*, August 15th, 1914.)

The following week *The Leader* reported the remand proceedings under the heading 'Alleged Spy.' This short article stated that Otto Kruger, hairdresser of 36 Ynysmeurig Road, Abercynon was brought up in custody, and charged with committing a breach of the Official Secrets Act. The prisoner looked ill, and on the case being called, Supt. Rees said the authorities had decided to take action under the new Aliens Act, and the prisoner would be deported. The charge of spying was therefore withdrawn.

(*Aberdare Leader*, August, 22nd, 1914)

This story became something of a myth in Abercynon for many years and one version related that he had been imprisoned in the Tower of London; another went so far as saying he was executed there.

Spies were imagined throughout the valley and spy mania reigned during those early years of the war; 'the good people of Mountain Ash and Penrhiwceiber', it was reported, 'seem to be rather sensitive and suspicious just now. Every stranger seen in the streets is regarded as a possible German spy. Only the other day some women at Newtown were nearly scared out of their wits by a local wag, who wore a false beard and moustache, which gave him a foreign appearance.' (War Jottings, *The Aberdare Leader*, October, 24th, 1914)

'In October 1915 great excitement prevailed in Aberaman district on Thursday evening last. A rumour that a German spy was at large in the neighbourhood quickly gained currency. The supposed spy who was proceeding towards Tonllwyd Halt, G.W.R., is said to have enquired of a woman who resided near the halt the time that the colliers' train to Cwmaman was due. His query aroused the suspicion that he was a spy whose intentions were to derail the train. The man who was now followed by a large crowd of people, proceeded up the line towards the Black Lion Halt. P.C. Thomas Rowlands, Aberaman, approached the alleged spy, who was ultimately identified as a resident of Cwmaman, and who was slightly under the influence of drink. The constable directed the man home, and thus the scare terminated.'

(*Aberdare Leader*, October 2nd, 1915.)

Conscientious objectors at Penderyn

During the war, a number of conscientious objectors were sent to work at the waterworks then under construction at Penderyn. Through *Local Memos* by Memo we learn that in March 1917, 'The conscientious objectors have arrived at Penderyn. For a considerable time the contractors of the Mountain Ash Waterworks at Penderyn have been short of labour, and application was made to the Home Office for a contingent of C.O.'s. The request was granted and 20 arrived last week.' 'Penderyn,' commented Memo, 'is surely more attractive than Dartmoor.'

There were disturbances from the outset; the same issue reported that 'trouble has arisen concerning the employment of the 20 objectors by the contractors of the Mountain Ash Waterworks.' It is reported that 'several of them, variously estimated from 7 to 11, have refused to work, urging that they object to be employed by private contractors and that they are entitled to obtain work of national importance under the Government. Police escorts were wired for on Monday, and the men who so objected have been removed.'

(*Aberdare Leader*, March 10th, 1917)

Elsewhere in the same edition, the Clerk to the Mountain Ash Council informed the Council that of the 20 conscientious objectors who had been sent to Penderyn to be employed on the Council's waterworks, 11 had left. It appeared that eight returned to where they came from and three decamped. Another 11 C.O.'s had been sent down instead of them, and these were going on satisfactorily. Industrial relations at Penderyn were poor and the Clerk went on to say that he had been informed by the contractor (Mr Underwood) that the Black Gang had threatened to strike unless they had an immediate increase of wages. Asked who were the Black Gang, the clerk replied, — the engineering section, fitters, blacksmiths, stokers etc.

SOCIETY NEWS

Committee member and former reference librarian, Mr Steven Graham has asked your editor to bring the following facility to your notice. As the editor has a vested interest in the project, he cannot recommend it enough! Many of the books etc. listed in the bibliography are available at Aberdare's Central Library. Titles that are not will be obtained by the present Reference Librarian on request.

Bibliography of the History of the Cynon Valley

Geoffrey Evans started this mammoth task in 1993 but it proved too huge a project to complete. In 2012 Steven Graham the then Reference Librarian at Aberdare Library decided to complete it and put it on the internet. The list includes not only books and articles relating only to the Cynon Valley but also other texts of more general information that contain important references to the Cynon valley. Only some of the items from the W. W. Price Collection are included as they are too numerous to list in their entirety.

The bibliography has 20 chapters on various subjects, is 104 pages long, and is in PDF format. A second edition was produced just before Steven retired and should be on the internet soon.

There is a link to it on the Cynon Valley History Society web site, or it can be found if you 'Google' the words "bibliography Cynon".

It is hoped this bibliography will be of great help to researchers of our valley's fascinating history. (S.G.)

Hywel Wynn Vaughan.

Brief mention of the death, on 30th March 2015, of one of the Society's Vice Presidents, Hywel Vaughan of Raglan, was announced in our Spring edition. Hywel was born at Aberdare, attended junior school here, and was a pupil at the Aberdare Boys' Grammar School for a short while prior to the family's move to Newport, Gwent. Hywel's father, Trevor Vaughan, a railwayman, was a local councillor in Aberdare and later became Mayor of the County Borough of Newport. Hywel became a teacher but left the profession to become an official with the National Union of Teachers. When he retired, he sought his roots at Aberdare and joined the Cynon Valley History Society, commuting from Raglan each month to attend its meetings. He joined the committee and became its Chairman in 1994-5. His tenure on the committee and as chairman was noted for its many wise and diplomatic decisions. During his year of office, he was responsible for setting up a fine memorial to James James (*Iago ap Ieuan*) at the entrance to St Elvan's church, and the restoration of his grave at Aberdare Cemetery. In 2001 Hywel Vaughan was awarded the degree of Master of Arts (Honoris Causa) by the University of Aberystwyth for his services to the N.U.T. He leaves a widow and two daughters. A memorial service was held at St. Peter's Church, Bryngwyn, near Raglan on 8th May 2015. The service was attended by several members of the Society.

We also record the death, on the 22nd April, of Mr. Sid Jones of Ty Fry. Mr Jones and his wife, who passed away some years ago, used to attend meetings regularly, and Sid was one of the faithful band of volunteers who used to deliver *Hanes* to members by hand.

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