

CYNON VALLEY HISTORY SOCIETY

CYMDEITHAS HANES CWM CYNON

PRESIDENT: THE LORD ABERDARE

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HANES



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

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Welcome to this bumper summer edition of Hanes!

Life in the valley has been very busy this season with the RCT National Eisteddfod at nearby Pontypridd together with many other special events in the valley. There is some sad news about two local schools but on a happier note, a famous actor came to Mountain Ash recently. Amazingly, four books on various local history aspects including two on local fascinating characters have been published so you know what to buy for Christmas!

The RCT National Eisteddfod of Wales held at Ynysangharad Park Pontypridd, 3-10th August, 2024



It was in Aberdare where the first modern National Eisteddfod was held in August 1861. The prime mover for it was David Williams, Alaw Goch. In the August eisteddfod, Trecynon-born Ieuan Rhys of Welsh Ad/Lib Company acting as Alaw Goch, brought him back to life and discussed his life and career.

Here are some of the highlights of the Eisteddfod with particular relevance to the Cynon Valley.

Susan Dennis-Gabriel

Cwmbach-born Susan Dennis-Gabriel was honoured to be chosen to be this year's Wales and the World President of the Eisteddfod. She gave an address as the representative of the Welsh diaspora at the Gymanfa Ganu on the Sunday evening. This event was televised on S4C and can be seen outside Wales on Freesat Channel 120.

Susan was one of the earliest pupils at Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Aberdâr, and her passion for the Welsh language has continued even though she moved from Wales many years ago.

After graduating in English at Cardiff University, she taught for a while, before going to study music at the Royal College of Music in London. After winning a scholarship to the University

of Vienna, she moved there with the intention of becoming a professional opera singer.

She came back to Britain for a time and sang with Welsh National Opera, Covent Garden and Kent Opera before returning to Vienna to work. She married the Professor of Music at the University of Vienna, the late Wolfgang Gabriel, and together they raised a daughter, Angharad, who is a professional singer.

In Austria she worked as a professional soloist for years, performing at the famous Musikverein in Vienna, and in other cities across Europe, before working as a voice tutor for students at the start of their career. She also worked as a guest voice tutor in Finland, Spain and Japan.

She has kept in touch with family and friends in Wales over the years, especially with her nephew and his family in Aberdare.

Susan has written a scholarly article about old Cwmbach in *Old Aberdare*, Volume X, which is still available at the Cynon Valley Museum.

The Community-based Choir Competition

81-year-old Paul Carson, who lives in Cwmbach took part in the National Eisteddfod's community-based choir competition for the NINTH time. He went to a school in Shrewsbury and he had a wonderful music teacher who, at various times, formed choirs with more than 200 boys. The choir sang everything from Handel's Messiah to Tippett's Child of Time, with the composer himself in the audience.

He adds: "When the Eisteddfod visited Neath more than 30 years ago, I went along to the first rehearsals and stuck around". Paul's wife, Marie, is also a member of the RCT choir. "It's her sixth time this year" remarked Paul.

The couple moved to Wales 35 years ago after seeing a smallholding advertised.

"We saw it and said, 'Why not go for it?' We kept Highland cattle for more than 25 years. They're wonderful!"

Incidentally Paul and his wife are long-standing members of our history society and they live at Abernant-y-Groes Uchaf Farm, Cwmbach.

The Crown Competition



33 entrants competed in this prestigious competition. The aim was to write a 'prydddest', or series of poems, of up to 250 lines on the subject was 'Atgof', (memory or recollection). The winner was Gwynfor Dafydd of Tonyrefail. The adjudicators said that his work evoked a range of emotions from the sadness of the Senghenydd wives, to the comedy surrounding the attention given to Guto Nyth Bran. Youngsters and staff at Ysgol Garth Olwg donated the crown,

along with the £750 cash prize.

The crown's designer, Elan Rhys Rowlands worked with her employer Neil Rayment to make the crown. She based the design on the national anthem and the Pontypridd old bridge.

The Prose Medal Competition

Fourteen entries were received but the medal was awarded to Eurgain Haf who lives in Pontypridd. The theme was a volume of creative prose not exceeding 40,000 words on the subject of Newid (Change). Her novel is called Morfarch Arian (Silver Seahorse). It tells the story of a family of four who all have mental health problems.

The medal was given this year by '*Clochdar*', the Cynon Valley Welsh newspaper, in memory of Idwal Rees, the first head teacher at Ysgol Gynradd Gymraeg Aberdâr.

The Charing Competition

The theme of the competition was Cadwyn (Chain). The reason for this theme was that a very important chain works, (Gordon Lenox), was situated across the river Taff from the



Carwyn Eckley

maes. The prize was for a poem or collection of poems in strict metre, of no more than 250 lines. It was a photo-finish as one adjudicator favoured one poem and another favoured a different poem which gave the third adjudicator Aneirin Karadog sleepless nights.

This, he said was rather like the 1893 Pontypridd National Eisteddfod Chaiing of the Bard ceremony when two of the adjudicators Pedrog and Dyfed publicly disagreed with Cowlyd, and Judge Gwilym Williams had to forcibly intervene to stop him talking and made him leave the platform. This did not happen with the present day adjudicators!

In the end Karadog had to choose which was the most memorable poem. In the end he chose the collection written under the nom de plume of Brynmair who was

Carwyn Eckley aged 28. He is from Pen-y-goes, Dyffryn Nantlle, but he now lives in Cardiff.

One of the adjudicators Huw Meirion Edwards said that the poems were the poet's response to the harrowing experience of losing his father following an illness in 2002 while he was a young child. Two decades of grief and trying to cope with the loss have been distilled into these subtle and moving poems. The ceremony is available on the iPlayer until mid-September at this link:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p0jdnzsv/>

Gorsedd meetings

Aberdare-born Dafydd Trystan Davies, the great grandson of J.L. Rowlands, the co-founder of the Aberdare Leader, was invested into the Gorsedd. Dafydd also celebrated his birthday on that day. His friend Rhuanedd Richards, (Director, BBC Wales), whom he knew since they were three years old when they were in nursery school, was inducted at the same time, which Trystan said made the ceremony even better.



Local Winner

Congratulations to David Leslie Davies, one of our long-standing society members, who won a substantial prize in the competition Tri Thriban Morgannwg. A triban is a verse of four lines with certain technical constraints. Writing these verses was common in Glamorgan, and hence they are sometimes called Triban Morgannwg.

Mihangel Morgan

Trecynon-born Mihangel Morgan who has written many Welsh language novels discussed his work and relationship with the Cynon valley with Rhiannon Marks and held a Question and Answer session with Gaynor Morgan Rees.

There is an article about him in Cwm Cynon edited by Hywel Teifi Edwards, Gomer Press, 1997, pp342-381.

The Eisteddfod is not just for one week!

The Eisteddfod has given money for projects which will run for at least two years, one of which is the Bryncynon Strategy which has its HQ in Ynysboeth, near Abercynon. The members are determined to strengthen the use of the Welsh language in the area. The Strategy distributes meals and runs a lunch club. They have a community garden and café. A bilingual booklet of recipes was launched at the 'National'.

P.S.

A policeman saw that I had a map of the site and asked me where the Science and Technology Village was. I thought that it should have been the other way round with me asking him!

The Eisteddfodau of Rhondda Cynon Taf

The editor of Hanes, Steven Graham, has been for 14 years (off and on!) researching this subject. His articles about them are on our society's web site in the section Historical Notes. The link is:

<https://www.cvhs.org.uk/Eisteddfodau/contents.html>

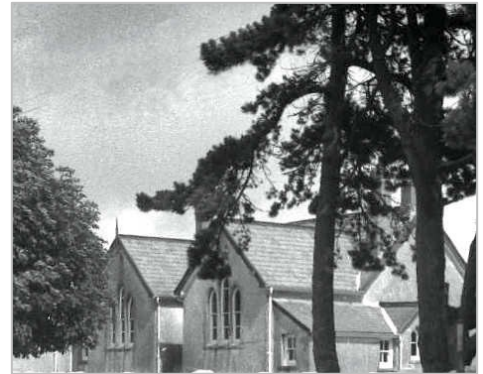
They cover all the 'Nationals' of Aberdare, Mountain Ash, Pontypridd and Treorchy from 1861 to 1956. Happy Reading!

The Closure of Rhigos Primary School

by Colin Rees

The end of the summer term 2024 saw the closure of Rhigos County Primary School. It was a school that had served its community since May 1876.

Its closure has been hotly contested by residents since the proposal to do so became known last year. Apparently, it was the smallest school in the county of Rhondda Cynon Taf. At the beginning of the 2023-24 school year it had 54 pupils and pupil numbers were projected to drop by more than a third in the following five years. At the time of its 125th anniversary in 2000-01 the school had 103 pupils. After closure, pupils are expected to transfer to Hirwaun or Penderyn primary schools, necessitating school transport arrangements.



Rhigos School, 1950

The Cardiff Times of May 20th 1876 commented briefly on its opening:

"RHIGOS SCHOOL BOARD. A school, erected by this board at a cost of £900, was formally opened by Mr. D.E. Williams, J.P., Hirwain, chairman of the board, on Monday. The architect was Mr Hugh D. Williams and the contractor Mr David Williams, Hirwain. Mr Williams having declared the school opened, speeches were delivered, and the children and parents partook of tea at his expense. Mr Thomas Phillips, Aberdare, clerk of the board, was present."

Almost all the schools of the Aberdare School Board were built between about 1860 and 1880. Schools that had opened before then in Aberdare were the schools of the non-denominational British and Foreign Schools Society, (Hirwaun, 1849, and Ysgol Y Comin/Park School, 1848). Also the National Society (for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church), had opened schools in Cardiff Street, St Fagan's and Cwmbach, c1829, c1850 and 1851 respectively.

Initially the Rhigos school had four classrooms, two of which were separated by a removable partition to create a bigger space for large group meetings. During the twentieth century the accommodation was enlarged and facilities improved.

The first headmaster was a Thomas Herbert, who was succeeded by fifteen more headmasters until its first headmistress was appointed, a Mrs Pauline Jones of Aberdare. Headmasters who may be recalled by more senior society members include William Jenkin Mears, David Thomas, W.J. Morgan, J. Hirwen Williams, Aubrey H. Morgan and Leslie G. Evans. Also remembered is one of the longest serving members of staff that school ever had, namely Miss Ettie Smith, of Tramway, Hirwaun, who presided over the Infants' Department.

The school will be sorely missed by Rhigos people, not only for its local educational role, but also as a focus for various community activities such as its Christmas pantomime, its summer fair and harvest festival activities.

Caradogfest 2024

To celebrate Caradog's Côr Mawr winning first prize at the Crystal Palace in London in 1872 and 1873, (which really meant they were the best choir in Britain), it had been decided to celebrate this historic achievement for the third year running in Aberdare. This took place at St Elvan's church during the weekend 5-7th July.

To appreciate Caradog, on Friday afternoon Anastazia Thomas gave a lecture about "Caradog and the Choral Tradition". [Gwilym Ambrose has written an article "The Aberdare background to the South Wales Choral Union", (Caradog's Côr Mawr), which is in Old Aberdare Volume X, copies are available from the Cynon Valley Museum].



This was followed in the evening by a Gala Concert where a new Côr Mawr composed of several choirs performed. The Dare to Sing Ladies choir sang some songs and Laura Evans was the soloist.

On Saturday afternoon the ukulele band "Highly Strung" entertained the audience. This was followed in the evening by a Twmpath.

Ending the celebrations on Sunday evening a Cymanfa Ganu took place conducted by Rev. Hywel Davies. The Lewis Merthyr Brass Band accompanied the singing.

Hen Dŷ Cwrdd Chapel, Trecynon and its interesting characters



Christine Moore, Rev J. Eric Jones and D.L. Davies

The history and background of this, the oldest chapel in the Cynon Valley, was celebrated by an exhibition and lectures at the Cynon Valley Museum on Saturday, 13th July. The event was organised by Christine Moore of Addoldai Cymru, the registered charity which now owns Hen Dŷ Cwrdd.

Rev. Eric Jones, the chapel's last minister, spoke about his ministry there and of some of its prominent characters. There was Rev. E.R. Dennis, who ministered at Hen Dŷ Cwrdd for 30 years and who produced many plays for The Little Theatre. There were also the Howells sisters of Maesgwyn Farm, Cwmdare and later of Broniestyn House, four of whom were unmarried; W.W. Price, the eminent local historian; Gwyneth Humphries who kept a chemist's shop and a blind, almost deaf lady named Sarah Jane Evans who lived in Broniestyn Terrace.

David Leslie Davies, a long standing member of the CVHS, gave a fascinating talk about the life and times of Thomas Dafydd Llewelyn (Llewelyn Alaw), 1828–1879, who was also a member of Hen Dŷ Cwrdd. He learned to play the harp from the age of eight and soon became an expert player of that instrument.

He composed and collected eleven volumes of manuscripts of Welsh airs and folk tunes including many dance tunes which were deposited in the National Library of Wales. Jeff Jones and Rob Bradshaw of Bridgend have now selected 57 of them and have published a bilingual book entitled, *A Tribute to Llewelyn Alaw/Teyrnged i Llewelyn Alaw* in which they describe musical aspects of the harpist's work. There is a chapter by D.L. Davies on the historical background of 'Llewelyn Alaw' and of Hen Dŷ Cwrdd.

He has also written a book of poetry entitled *Canu ar Lannau Cynon* which focuses on social change in the Cynon Valley. It was produced to raise funds for the Cwm Cynon Eisteddfod Appeal committee, and we understand it has already raised in excess of £1,000. The first book costs £15.00, the second £6.95. Both are, (or soon will be), available at the Cynon Valley Museum.

The Cefn Cribwr Tune Club interspersed D.L. Davies's lecture by playing some of Llewelyn Alaw's tunes, including the 'Heolyfelin Hornpipe': Heolyfelin being the old name for Trecynon.

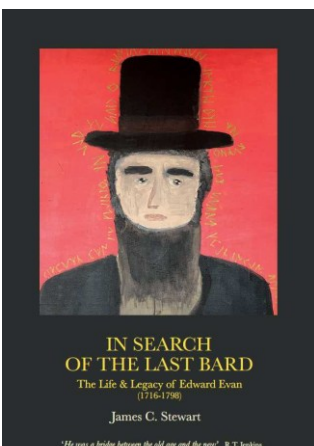
David has had a busy time as he spoke at St Elvan's Church on 26th July on the Eisteddfod tradition in Wales and the Cynon Valley. He also gave a lecture in Welsh about Llewelyn Alaw at the National Eisteddfod in Pontypridd.

The Blue Plaque Event for Edward Evan



An almost forgotten 18th century bard was celebrated with a Blue Plaque on 9th August very near his farm of Ton Coch which is now in the grounds of Mountain Ash Golf Club. Edward Evan, (1716–1798) and his descendants lived there from 1749 to around 1870 and were tenants of the Dyffryn Estate, which was owned by the Lords of Aberdare.

Evan was a poet, harpist, weaver, carpenter and a glazier who was married twice. Also he was a minister at Hen Dŷ Cwrdd chapel, Trecynon. According to Iolo Morgannwg, he was the last of the druidic bards of Wales, though this is held to be a figment of Iolo's imagination. Edward's poems *Afalau'r Awen* were printed four times after his death.



James Stewart's book about Edward Evan

The Vice-President of the Golf Club, Mr Tom Williams introduced the various speakers. David Leslie Davies gave a talk in Welsh about Edward Evan. This was followed by another talk, this time in English by James Stewart, (a distant ancestor of the bard), who has written a book about Evan entitled 'In search of the last bard' which has been published by the Cynon Valley History Society. (It costs £10). The front cover of the book was designed by a pupil from Rhydywaun Welsh School as part of a competition.

The President of the society, who is also the President of the golf club, Lord Aberdare in his speech said that when he played there when his father owned Cefnpennar House the golf balls would fly over from the adjacent fairways into the garden so he was never short of them. He also told the story about one day a putter came flying into his garden. Soon a shamefaced golfer came to the house and asked for his putter back!



Rev Eric Jones

The Mayor of RCT Coun. Dan Owen-Jones, gave a speech, this was followed by short speeches from Vikki Howells, M.S., and Gareth Evans, the captain of the golf club. Alun Watts from the society rounded off the speeches.

Outside the clubhouse, Rev. Eric Jones, the last minister of Hen Dŷ Cwrdd unveiled the plaque.

After a light buffet, James Stewart took some of the attendees to the site of Ton Coch Farm, which is near one of the greens, where he recited a poem written by Evan's son.

Fire at Gadlys Girls' Lower School

During the blaze



The aftermath



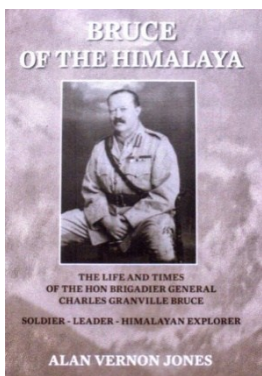
A fire occurred at this Grade II listed building on the night of 20th May. The cause was probably arson.

This beautiful building was opened as the Gadlys Higher Standard Schools on 7th October, 1907 by Rees Llewelyn of Bwllfa who declared it to be "the finest piece of architecture in Aberdare". It was designed in a free Jacobean style by Thomas Roderick and cost £4,000.

From 1978 to 2014 it was Aberdare Girls (Lower) Comprehensive School, where girls of 11-14 studied. Since 2014 it has been empty as all the pupils were transferred to Aberdare Community School. Planning permission has been given for the school to be converted into 31 residential units. It is hoped that this new use will be accomplished soon, as it would be a disaster if this building was to be set on fire again or just left to decay.

I would be pleased to hear of the happy memories that members have of this old school.

Local Himalayan Explorer



Alan Vernon Jones, one of our members has written a fascinating book entitled 'Bruce of the Himalaya'.

It is about Brigadier General Charles Granville Bruce, (1866–1939), who was the youngest son of the First Lord Aberdare, namely Henry Austin Bruce, and his second wife Norah Creina Blanche Napier. He was a soldier and commander of the 5th and 6th Gurkha Rifles Regiment, was severely wounded at Gallipoli and a noted mountaineer and Himalayan explorer. He was also the leader of the 1922 and the 1924 Mallory and Irvine attempt on Everest before illness forced him home. Bruce was a larger-than-life character and there's good film footage of him on that

trip. In the book he gives a nice vignette of life at Dyffryn House and at his father's house in London, which has amusing incidents including chasing poachers.

The foreword is written by Alastair Bruce, 5th Lord Aberdare, his great-great nephew. The book is 200 pages long, has 40 illustrations and costs £15.00 (plus £3.50 p&p). It is available from the author at 3, Holly Drive, Aberdare, CF44 8PB. Tel: 07506 753790, email: alanvjones44@icloud.com

Family Rug Search.

The great grandson of the late Mr Charles Frost is trying to find any information about the history of two large rugs which his great grandfather made whilst living at the Tegfan Home in 1967.

One of the rugs shows the entire Lord's Prayer and the other the Crucifixion.

Any knowledge of these rugs would be appreciated. Please contact the editor of Hanes.

Timothy Spall comes to Mountain Ash

Phillip Street, Mountain Ash was the location for a new BBC comedy drama/murder mystery, "Death Valley," starring Timothy Spall and Gwyneth Keyworth.

They play an oddball, hilarious detective duo: John Chapel and Janie Mallowan who solve gripping murders in various stunning Welsh locations.

There was a large encampment on the Mountain Ash RFC car park comprising technical and support elements for filming, catering, wardrobe and other large tourers and caravans. Apparently, it was quite impressive and several people noted the friendliness and openness of cast and crew members.

Society Membership Fees for 2024/2025

The Society's membership fee, per person, for the period September 1st 2024 to August 31st 2025 will remain at £12.

The membership form has been sent to all existing members. Details of payment methods are included on the form. It is requested that, irrespective of how the payment is made, a completed copy of the membership form is sent to the Treasurer via email, post or hand delivered. This will ensure that your current contact details are known.

The bilingual membership form is also available on our website: www.cvhs.org.uk

A copy of the Speakers Programme for 2024/2025 is also included and is on our website.

You will continue to receive the quarterly HANES magazine – the cost of which is included in the annual membership fee. More details of the Society are on the website.

The Society appreciates your continued membership and welcomes all new members.

Feedback

I would be grateful for feedback about any articles in this issue. Articles on any subject about our valley's history for possible publication are welcome.

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