CYNON VALLEY HISTORY SOCIETY

CYMDEITHAS HANES CWM CYNON

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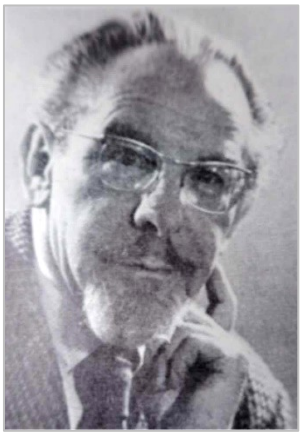
NEWSLETTER OF THE CYNON VALLEY HISTORY SOCIETY
CYLCHLYTHYR CYMDEITHAS HANES CWM CYNON

ISSUE NUMBER 108 AUTUMN 2024

This autumn there are four articles: the first is about an Austrian photographer who lived in this valley, the second about the closure of an Aberdare church, followed by memories of an Italian café in Aberdare, and finally an article about GIs in Abercynon during WW2.

I know it is some time until Christmas, but the committee would like to wish you a very happy Christmas and a Healthy New Year in 2025.

Hans Hoyer (1909–1993)



Hans Hoyer

This Austrian man's life reads like a terrible drama; he amazingly survived Nazi persecution, endured many trials and tribulations and much poverty, but finally settled peacefully in Aberdare.

Hans was born near Carlsbad just before World War 1 when the country was part of the Austrian Empire, but at the Treaty of Versailles it was incorporated into the state of Czechoslovakia and he grew up a citizen of this new country, keenly interested in political matters.

At 21 years of age he was a Town Councillor, the youngest in the country and already an implacable opponent of the Nazi Party, which was securing a sinister hold on large numbers of the Sudeten Germans. As the freedom of the Press and publishing disappeared in Germany, so Hans and his friends engaged in smuggling clandestine literature across the border, and he realised the imminent German invasion would mean the signing of his death warrant.

The menace of the Nazis grew ever larger and Hans sent his wife Anna and five year old baby son Walter out of Prague two hours before the Germans marched in.

On 1st October 1938 the Nazis crossed the border in Czechoslovakia. At four o'clock in the morning, he was awakened by the local police, who warned him that the Nazis were on the way. Taking a small case, he left his homeland, getting out on the last available train. Mr Hoyer had a narrow escape. He found that the train which was to have taken him to safety was in the hands of the Germans. Enduring a nerve-wracking six-hour detention by German troops on that train during which he and other people were made to stand against the wall, their hands above their heads. Just then a party of Czech troops attacked the Germans, so he and some others were able to slip away. Eventually he came to England where the family were re-united.

At Margate where there were 600 refugees, Hoyer, the accountant and statistician, who had been forced to forego a degree course in public administration because of Nazi persecution, found himself masterminding the catering.

Eventually his family moved to Llangollen where Hans took a job with the Forestry Commission. 'It was very hard at times', he said with masterly understatement, 'sometimes we found ourselves with only 2s 6d to spend for the week'.

Having learnt English quite well, Hans moved with his family to London in 1941 — at the height of the Blitz where he worked on a grinder in the machine shop of an ammunition factory near Chingford where he stayed for two and a half years.

Later he found a job at a felt factory, in the Pavilion, Mountain Ash, and for a while he lived happily in lodgings with Mr and Mrs Horseman in Hamilton Street there.

When the war finished, he became an interpreter with the U.S. Air Force in Germany, moving on from there to serve with the American Military Government on de-Nazification tribunals.

Back in England his plan to emigrate to New Zealand fell through. It was only then that he moved back to Wales. No longer stateless but a naturalised Briton he spent 10 years in the Accounts Department of the GEC in Aberdare before joining the Standard Telephones and Cables Company at Treforest in 1967.

For 34 years he lived in 24 Trevor Street in Aberdare before retiring from work in 1968. He said of Aberdare 'The people are so friendly, and my wife Anna is a proper Welsh woman now!'

A photographer of long experience and great talent, he joined the Aberdare Photographic Society in 1949, and at an exhibition he had 36 exhibits out of a total of just over 100.



Hans had a good sense of humour. Familiar scenes were given a new slant: a photograph of the Phurnacite Plant is entitled "No Smoking Please." This is a similar photo taken by Glyn Davies, Gadlys.

Hans also lectured on photography at local evening institutes and travelled around judging at exhibitions — a far cry from the days when he used to eke out his money taking passport photos in camps for those refugees lucky enough to be accepted as emigrants to other lands.

As Hans says, 'I was one of the lucky ones.' He remembers, though, those who weren't.

Sadly Hans' wife Anna died in 1986 and seven years later he died at St Tydfil's Hospital, Merthyr Tydfil on 23rd September, 1993. He was cremated at Llwydcoed Crematorium. Walter, his son, thanked Aberdare Camera Club for their support there.

Sources STC News 28th July, 1967.
Aberdare Leader 6th October, 1988, 12th January, 1989 and 23rd September, 1993.

The Closure of St. Mair's Church, Aberdare

by Rev. Evan Jenkin Kingsbury

Translated by James Stewart, grandson of the author.
From *Y Llan*, 28 February 1964.

It was sad for me, and no doubt many others, not least the present Vicar of the parish, to read in the *Western Mail* that St. Mair's Church in Aberdare had closed for lack of worshippers to keep it open. This is a common problem these days, despite the efforts being made to maintain interest in the Welsh language. This is a beautiful church which was built a hundred years ago, thanks to the effort and sacrifice of the town's church-goers, in order to minister in Welsh to the spiritual needs of an important and populous town which sent coal to every corner of the world in the last century and the beginning of the present one [the 20th].



St. Mair's Church

As far as I know this was the only [Anglican] church with a space to offer baptism by total immersion, and I saw this done there many times. I remember a vibrant period in its history fifty years ago, when it had a large congregation. This was a time when the churches and chapels of Wales were full of worshippers on Sundays, both in the morning and the evening — and so it was in Aberdare before there was talk of radio or television. I received a letter a month ago from a woman in Haverfordwest who was celebrating her golden wedding anniversary and who reminded me of the days when we were both members of the Band of Hope and took part in singing cantatas.

Dr. C.A.H. Green [later Archbishop of Wales] was Vicar of the parish at that time and always had six priests to assist him. The Vicar and his curates enjoyed the respect not only of church-goers but of the town's inhabitants in general.

The lay members of St Mair's, men and women, were zealous for their church, not only faithful in the services but ready to defend the Church during the battle against the Bill of Disestablishment and Disendowment. The church-goers of Aberdare, St Mair's among them, were strong supporters of the Church Defence League. A number of them went to the House of Commons to protest against the Act. Although this church was young compared to many others, it had an honourable tradition.

There were fifty singers in the choir until the start of the war of 1914, and all of them faithful members of the Sunday school, which had more than two hundred members. The choir was led by the organist and choirmaster W. R. Protheroe for more than a quarter of a century. He was a colliery official in Cwmdare and would walk from Parc Uchaf with his family twice each Sunday to carry out the work which was closest to his heart, which was to teach and perfect the singing of the Holy Office. Only the highest standard was good enough for him. He was always present at the choir practice on Tuesday evening and the weekly service on Thursday night. Under his leadership the choir, along with the choirs of other churches of the circuit, was at the forefront of the annual St David's Day festival, when the mixed choirs of the Rhondda and Aberdare valleys would meet in the cathedral at Llandaff.

The Sunday school was also a prominent participant in the eisteddfodau held by the Sunday schools of the Deanery. So we had no time to be idle; the programme was always full and the word 'boredom', which is heard so often these days, was unknown to us. This was a time before motor cars were common and people worked twelve hours a day — miners included. Despite this, there was an atmosphere of peace and sanctity on a Sunday. 'Those were the days!'

St Mair's was fortunate to have had the service of priests who were good shepherds and who had a great influence. Men like Rev. Joseph Morgan who was later a Canon and Vicar of Panteg in Monmouthshire; Rev. Dewi Williams, later Vicar of Rhymney, who died some years ago at his daughter's home in Australia; Rev. W. Herbert Jones, Vicar of Seven Sisters and later of Aberavon; and Rev. Thomas Jones, Vicar of Porth, Rhondda.

With the support, help and encouragement of these priests, six of us at the same period prepared for the Ministry in our free time. Four succeeded in entering St David's College, Lampeter in 1913 and were ordained in 1915, namely D. T. Jones, former Vicar of Tregaron; John Davies, Vicar of Penydarren; his brother David Davies, former Vicar of Nevern; and Fred May who went on to be curate in Henley on Thames. I and W. Stanley Pontin, Vicar of Radyr near Cardiff, joined the armed forces in the war of 1914–1918 and so our ordination was postponed until 1922.

It won't be long before St Mair's is demolished to make way for accommodation for the inhabitants of the town. In a short time its work and its history will have been forgotten, but I truly hope that a memorial will be placed in one of the other churches, or some other location, to commemorate this beautiful church which adorned the town centre for so many years.

Rev. Evan Jenkin Kingsbury was born in Cardiff Street, Aberdare in 1889 and attended the National School until the age of 12, when he left to work at Flooks Gents' Outfitters. He joined the Army in 1916 and after the war entered St David's College Lampeter. Leaving there, he became a curate in Llanelli, then Rector of Llangrannog and finally Vicar of Cydweli from 1934 to 1956. He died in Pembrey in 1981.

Y Llan was the Welsh language weekly newspaper of the Church in Wales.



St Anna and St Simeon



King David and St. Cecilia

There are good illustrations of St Mair's in *Churches of the Cynon Valley* by Alan Vernon Jones and the following information is taken from his book. The iron cross from the roof of the church is preserved in St Elvan's.

(The architect of the church was Arthur Blomfield and his assistant was the famous novelist and poet Thomas Hardy. The building contractor was Philip Rees who also built the Temperance Hall in Canon Street.)

During demolition two of the stained glass windows were saved and are now located in nearby St Elvan's Church. They are of King David and St Cecilia, the patron saint of music. The other is of St Simeon and St Anna. This window was dedicated to Martha Thomas, known as Martha 'Eglwys' who was the sexton at nearby St John's church for 47 years. The face of St Anna is her portrait.

Five years later the St. Mair's Social centre was built on the site. The Aberdare Leader said of this: "Hardy's creation is now a tasteless pyramid of dull bricks!". [Latterly it has been re-modelled to become the Cynon Linc. Ed.]

My thanks to Rod Jenkins for the information about the stained glass windows.

The Carpanini Cafes: Aberdare, further information



Angelo Carpanini

Mrs Kate Meyrick, Angelo and Maria's great-grand-daughter, has given me more information about the family. So the following are additions and amendments to the article about the family that were in *Hanes*, issue 104.

Angelo Carpanini was an Italian soldier who fought for the Allies during 1915–1918. He was awarded a medal for it. See image on page 6. As he was wounded during the war, he received compensation.

In 1918 he emigrated to Wales and opened a café in Maerdy. There he met Maria Sterlini who he married on 9th May, 1923. A year later Alma Giovanna was born. In 1926, Angelo and Maria bought premises at 5 Duke Street, Aberdare. Two daughters soon followed: Joan was born in 1930 and Rene a few years later.

In 1934 Angelo was granted British citizenship. He had the third finger of his left hand missing. (Had he lost his finger while cutting chips?)

He was a proud owner of a motorcycle and sidecar. Often, he would ride over to the Rhondda to meet some Italian friends — the Emanuelli's at Treorchy who owned an Italian café there. Angelo was inordinately proud of Alma. She had another admirer: Hector, one of the sons of the Emanuellis who was infatuated with Alma and thought she would be the perfect wife for him, but he almost broke his heart when he found out that she had married David Meyrick 1943.



Alma playing the accordion and Irene with the tambourine

The Duke Street shop proved to be very successful and was known among the miners and their families as "Carps".

Maria Carpanini kept a fleet of caravans in Porthcawl, which she rented out during the summer months. When she opened the letters of application for caravan bookings, she threw some in the bin. When asked why, she replied "Well, if they can't bother to enclose a stamped addressed envelope, they have no chance of renting one of my caravans!"

Alma had great musical talent: she was a gifted piano accordionist, had a beautiful contralto voice and belonged to several choirs. She loved opera and was a devout Roman Catholic.

One of the highlights of her life was to be elected as President of the Aberdare Inner Wheel in 1990.

She was a much-loved and respected figure in the community and sadly died in 2008 aged 84. Angelo died on 20th December, 1973 aged 77. Maria also died aged 77, on 18th August, 1976.

When they died Alma looked after the shop until it closed in 1984.


CONCESSIONE N. 248150

IL MINISTRO DELLA GVERRA

DECRETA

IL Soldato

Carpanini Angelo fu Giuseppe

È AVTORIZZATO A FREGIARSI DELLA

MEDAGLIA ISTITVITA A RICORDO
DELLA GVERRA MCMXV-MCMXVIII

AVTORIZZATO A FREGIARSI DELLA MEDAGLIA INTERALLEATA
DELLA VITTORIA (R.D.N.1637 DEL 6-7-1922) CONCESSIONE N.
Roma 3-1-1924
IL COMANDANTE

ROMA, ADDÌ 21 NOV 1925

IL MINISTRO

B. Mussolini

The certificate from the Italian Ministry of War awarding Angelo Carpanini a medal for his part in the 1915–1918 World War signed by Benito Mussolini!

Sources of information: I would like to thank Mrs Kate Meyrick, Alma's grand-daughter. Also, Emanuelli, Hector, *A sense of belonging: from the Rhondda to the Potteries*, S.A. Towns Books, 2010.

GIs in Abercynon by David Watkins

One night just after Christmas 1943, American GIs arrived. I was unable to sleep due to the noise of hundreds of U.S. Army lorries driving through Park View Council Estate and into the Abercynon Welfare Grounds.

In the morning, I opened our back door and in the yard was a crumpled pack of "Camel cigarettes".

After much pleading with mam to let me leave the house, I and the rest of the kids from the estate ran to the end of our street where we were able to look down onto the cricket pitch which was now completely covered by US army 2.5 ton lorries. They parked all along the road on every available space to Penrhiwceiber.

The black GIs and NCOs lived in wigwams on the soccer pitch and ate in the Rugby Club Pavilion. On the other side of the river the white officers ate in the bowls pavilion.

The white officers had to be billeted in private houses with bathrooms as it was thought that mere colliers' houses, on the Park View estate, had bathrooms that were totally unsuitable to entertain white American gentlemen!

A couple of days after the black Yanks were settled on the park, I was walking home with dad from Carnetown to Park View via the Thorn Hotel. As we neared the hotel, I heard a piano being played in a style I had not heard before. Dad stopped to listen and told me I was hearing syncopated jazz. Out of curiosity we went into the pub and we looked into a smoke filled room; where with the aid of an upright piano, two black Yanks were singing a duet, another was playing a mouth organ and another was beating out a tune on a biscuit tin. As they played another two were tap dancing to the music on the worn-out lino floor.

Years later Tom Jones used the Thorn Hotel as his practice rooms.

From our home hillside vantage point we were able to watch baseball games on the cricket pitch and on Sundays we were treated to a thing called Burger and peaches and Carnation milk (bring your own basin). Before leaving we were given a handful of C-ration one-cup coffee sachets for "mom and dad".

One day there was a dreadful smell of sewage coming from the Officers Mess as some drains were blocked. Some GIs were ineffectively trying to unblock them using some thin tree branches. Next to me was a boy who told a soldier, with a lot of stripes on his arms, that his uncle was the council's drain unblocker. This resulted in a jeep arriving, taking us to his uncle's house who returned with a set of drain rods and solved the problem. Uncle was given a multi-pack of cigarettes and some nylons for his wife!

Suddenly one day the soldiers were gone leaving the grass of the football pitch marked by circles of flattened grass where the wigwams had stood.

With the help of a piece of a tin, bent around the end of a stick, I scratched the surrounding earth there and found a dime which I treasured.

Sometime later I found a baseball on the riverbank that had been hit into the river Cynon and gave it to the nearby secondary school as a keepsake.

Where have all these years gone?
Cofion-cynnes

Source: This article is in the W.W. Price Collection at Aberdare Library, and online at

https://sites.google.com/site/usmilitaryinsouthwales/the-americans-arrive-in-abercynon-by-david-watkins

In the book *Carnetown Primary School Centenary, 1909*–2009 by Robert Jones are more memories of the GIs in Abercynon.
Reg Gair was a pupil at Carnetown School. In an interview, he spoke about the American GIs:

"When I was 15, my friends and I liked dancing and would often walk to dance halls in Mountain Ash, Nelson, Pontypridd and Cilfynydd. I remember on one occasion at a dance in Cilfynydd, a group of five or six black American soldiers walked in. They were polite and well dressed. Within under half an hour two American military police arrived and ordered them out. It appeared that they weren't allowed to mix with the local population.

I do remember that when the Americans arrived in Pontypridd to get money from the bank to pay the soldiers, they stood outside armed with rifles in case there was any trouble. I believe that many of the Americans were sent off to take part in the Italy campaign."

Society News

The Cwm Book: We have sold most of these books and have fewer than fifteen left. If anyone wants one as a Christmas present, please contact Haydn Williams, (Tel. 01685 879793), as there are no plans for a reprint.

Reminder — Membership fees for the year commencing Sept 1st 2024 – August 31st 2025 (£12 p.a.) are now due. Payment can be made by cash, cheque or bank transfer. Membership forms are available on our website or contact Society Treasurer John Davey (jh_davey@hotmail.com) for details.

Change of Speaker for our lecture on 21st November: Stephen Cooke is unable to give his talk then. Instead Alan Vernon Jones will give a lecture about his fascinating book *Bruce of the Himalaya* — which costs £15.00. There is an article about the book in the previous edition of *Hanes*.

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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