



Hanes.

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Newsletter of the Cynon Valley History Society / Cylchlythyr Cymdeithas Hanes Cwm Cynon.

Alun Lewis, 1915-1944:



By
D. Davies,
Editor.

A PHOTOGRAPH OF ALUN LEWIS, HIS PARENTS, BROTHERS & SISTER TAKEN AT THE FAMILY HOME, 61, BRYNHYFRYD, CWMAMAN, IN ABOUT 1923/24: from L to R - Mair; Mrs Gwladys Lewis; Laurie Phelps (a cousin); Mr Thomas John Lewis; Alun; and, in the foreground, Huw and Glyn. (The photograph by John Hoskings, of Cwmaman; courtesy of Mr Huw Lewis.).

At the beginning of July, a series of events was organized to mark the 70th anniversary of the birth on the 1st July, 1915, at 16, Llanwynno Rd. Cwmaman, of Alun Lewis - undoubtedly Aberdare's most renowned writer. These were a great success; and this issue of *Hanes* will present in a somewhat more permanent form something of the life and family background of this gifted writer.

The leading event of the series was the unveiling by Mrs Gweno Lewis of a plaque at 16, Llanwynno Rd. on the 29th June. The proceedings were opened and concluded by John Mear, secretary of the C.V.H.S., and the Mayor of the Cynon Valley, Cllr. Miss Mia George, spoke on behalf of the borough. We

would like to put on record our genuine appreciation of the ready practical support given by the borough council in enabling this commemoration to take place. Thanks are due also to Mr Malcolm Phillips, Trecynon, for his skill in preparing such a fine plaque; and especially to Mr & Mrs Griffith Jones for agreeing to have the plaque placed on the wall of their home.

Our congratulations also to Lyndon Harris on presenting such a successful evening of Alun Lewis' works on July 2nd, & to Dr Alun John for his inspiring lecture the previous evening (both these events being held at Aberdare College of Further Education. We were particularly fortunate

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that the talented actor Philip Madoc was able to be present at the evening organized by Lyndon Harris. His contribution added greatly to an already impressive programme.).

The editor of this newsletter arranged a walk through the village of Cwmaman on Sat., 29th June, which took as its theme 'The Lewis Family at Cwmaman'. This too was very well supported - some having come from as far as Newport for the occasion. In preparing an exhibition on the family background & life of Alun Lewis, mounted at Aberdare Library, the editor would like to acknowledge the invaluable help of Mrs Gweno Lewis, the poet's widow; Mr Huw Lewis, his brother; and Mrs Gwyneth Williams, Cwmaman, cousin. Thanks are also due to Tudful Adams, deputy borough librarian; Betty Evans & Mary Morris (both of Aberdare Central Library); Margaret Hughes, Aberaman; to Glyn Davies, Gadlys, without whose photographic talents the exhibition would have been much poorer; & to the Chairman & Management Committee of Cwmaman Hall & Institute.

TEMPORARY LOCAL MUSEUM

The editor extends appreciation to the committee of our own History Society for granting him 'leave of absence' from the Society's main effort of the same period - the organization of a temporary museum of local life. The museum was a total success, and exceptionally busy from its first day to its last. An estimated 5,000 visitors called at what had previously been Wilson's Car Salesroom to view the exhibits. The district owes a debt of gratitude to Wilson's for the loan of their premises, and to Jeff Richards who organized the museum on behalf of the C.V.H.S.

OUR BEST WISHES

We extend our best wishes to Jeff Richards on being appointed headmaster of Penywaun Junior School. Llongyfarchion iti, Jeff, ar benodiad haeddiannol iawn! We also join in sending similar greetings for a full recovery from ill-health to a stalwart of the Society, Richard Arnold, borough librarian.

The Lewis Family Origins...

The Lewis family began its association with Aberdare in 1880, when Alun Lewis' grandfather, Job Lewis, moved from Efail Wen, in Cilymaenllwyd parish, Pembrokeshire, to take up work in Cwmaman (or Shepherd's) Colliery. Previously, he had worked in a slate-quarry at Llwyn'rebol, but moved to Glamorgan when the works there failed. As in so many other instances, his family did not at first move with him. They settled in Cwmaman in about 1887, and became members of Moreia Aman Welsh Congregationalist chapel. Job Lewis was Secretary of the chapel from 1887 to 1899; was elected a deacon in 1893, and remained a senior figure there until his death in 1938 at the age of 86. He was an erudite and religious man, known to people of his day as 'y sgolor' because of the depth of his Biblical knowledge. The family lived at 10, Railway Tce. As a boy, Alun spent hours there in the company of his grandfather and his aunt Jane, who ran the family home (and who was therefore known popularly as 'Jane Job'). Job Lewis and his wife, Mari (1844-1920) had four sons and two daughters: Timothy (1877-1958), who became Reader in Celtic & Palaeography at Aberystwyth university; Edward (1879-1941), a talented musician (see p.3); Daniel (1882-1916), who became a minister at Narberth; Thomas John (1885-1964), a schoolmaster who became director of education for Aberdare

from 1938 to 1946, and divisional education officer from 1946 to 1951; Elizabeth, who married the Revd. D. Peregrine of Trelech, Carms; and Jane, who remained all her life in Cwmaman, and who married in later years a local man, Tom Davies.

Alun Lewis' father, T.J. Lewis, met his mother, Gwladys, at an Aberdare suffragette meeting just before the First World War. She was the daughter of the Rev Melchizedec Evans, minister of Highland Place Unitarian Church from 1903-1913. T.J. & Gwladys Lewis married in 1914, and they settled at Llanwynno Rd, Cwmaman, where Alun, their first child, was born in July, 1915. Following T.J. Lewis' return from the forces in September, 1918, the family returned to Cwmaman after a brief sojourn in Yorkshire, and settled at no. 61, Brynhyfryd, where they remained until about 1931. Until 1934, the family lived at 62, Cwmaman Rd., Godreaman, but then removed to 7, Elm Grove, Aberdare.

Alun Lewis attended Glynhafod School, near Brynhyfryd, until the age of 10; and then went for a year to Cwmaman Boys' School. At 11, he won a scholarship to Cowbridge Grammar School (1926-32). From there, he went to Aberystwyth university (1932-35), & graduated with 1st Class honours in history. Then followed Manchester university (1935-37) and an

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M.A. degree; and subsequently a return to Aberystwyth (1937-38) to complete a teachers' training course there.

In November, 1938, Alun Lewis took up a teaching post at the Lewis School for Boys, Pengam. In 1939, he met his future wife, Gweno Ellis, who had also been a student at Aberystwyth. The occasion was a concert in the Three Valleys Festival of that year. The next year, Alun Lewis resigned his teaching post and enlisted in the Royal Engineers. He was later transferred to the 6th Battalion of the South Wales Borderers. At Gloucester, in July, 1941, he and Gweno Ellis were married; but army life, in the form of home-based training for overseas action, soon re-asserted its demands.

In November, 1942, his battalion set sail for India, and landed at Bombay at Christmas. Most of 1943 was spent in training for jungle warfare against the Japanese in Burma; and in February, 1944, the South Wales Borderers moved into the Arakan region of that country to stem further Japanese advance. Alun Lewis requested a posting with his company in a forward position where contact with enemy units had already been made. This was granted. On the 5th March, 1944, he was mortally wounded in an accident involving a loaded pistol. Thus ended the life and career of one of the most esteemed writers to have emerged from the era of the Second World War.

"Only the fleeting sunlight in the forest,
And dragonflies' blue flicker on quiet pools
Will perpetuate our vision

Who die young."

D.L.D.

O, TEMPORA :

- by D.L. DAVIES.

Have you noticed what a year this is for celebrating anniversaries? We are being treated to a rich feast of events in celebrating the tercentenary of Bach, Handel & Scarlatti. Royalists are busy marking the Queen Mother's birthday & the accession of the first Tudor, Henry VII, in 1485. On a more serious note we recall also the end of the Second World War & the use of nuclear weapons on Hiroshima & Nagasaki. At Aberdare too, we have a number of anniversaries to observe: the birth of Alun Lewis in 1915 being one, and the centenary of the National Eisteddfod at Aberdare in 1885 being another.

Yet, there is a third anniversary for us to recall locally: every bit as interesting but not nearly as widely known as these others. This concerns the election by Welsh settlers in Patagonia, on the 31st July, 1885, of the first democratically chosen local authority in Argentina - and possibly in the whole of South America. It had 5 members, & assembled as the municipal council of the Gaiman district. Of special interest to us is that the town of Gaiman (as it now is) was first settled in 1874 by the Rev J C Evans, formerly minister of Moreia Aman chapel, Cwmaman, & his family, who left Wales that year. In 1875, he was joined there by 36 members of his old Cwmaman congregation, & by a further 5 from Saron chapel, Aberaman, who sailed to Patagonia aboard the ship Masculine in September/October, 1875.

Thus, Gaiman today is populated (amongst others) by descendants of Cwmaman emigrants; and the amazing thing is that the town remains the centre of Welsh-language activity in Chubut province. In July, 1886, the Rev J C Evans was elected to be the first Justice (Ynad) of the district. He was a mainstay of the Colony (y Wladfa). His grandson, Ifano, still lives near Gaiman & writes to the editor in superb Welsh.

HOW TO JOIN THE CYNON VALLEY HISTORY SOC:
Please contact: John Mear, Secretary, 7, Tudor Tce., ABERDARE (878349), or Doug Williams, Publications Officer, 29, Tudor Tce., ABERDARE (877398). The Society meets on the third Thursday of each month at the Parish Hall, Monk St., ABERDARE. Any comments/correspondence re. this or any other issue of Hanes should be sent to: D.L. Davies, 5, Milton St., Cwmaman, ABERDARE. New members of the Society (whether living locally or not) are always welcome.

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- * Volume 4 of the Society's main publication, Old Aberdare, is soon to appear. It will have articles on the history of the Powell Duffryn Co; on the office of High Constable of Miskin; on art & artists in the district; & the memoir of a Hirwaun haulier. Copies will sell quickly: order yours with Doug Williams soon.
- * The annual autumn excursion will be on Sat., 21st. September, to Raglan & Ludlow. Members etc. £3; O.A.P., £2.50 through Doug Williams.
- * The A.G.M. of the History Society occurs on Thurs., 19th September, at the Parish Hall, Monk Street, Aberdare, commencing at 7 pm.
- * Heartiest congratulations to Prof. Brynley F. Roberts, University College, Swansea, but born & bred at Gadlys, Aberdare, on his appointment as Librarian and head of the National Library at Aberystwyth with effect from September. Dymunwn bob llwyddiant yn y swydd!

"...My Orphean Uncle..."

- by D.L. Davies. /.

This is how Alun Lewis referred to his uncle, Edward, in a letter of the 8th August, 1943. The allusion, of course, is to Orpheus, the mythical Greek master of music who received a lyre from Apollo & was taught to play by the Muses so that he could enchant beasts, trees, rocks and even Hades, god of the Greek underworld. Alun Lewis made a further reference to his uncle in the poem Bequest, where he wrote of, "My uncle trudging coal-black from the pit/With such transcendent music in his head..."

Edward Lewis was the second son of Job and Mari Lewis, and was the only one of the four to remain in Cwmaman for the greater part of his life. He worked mostly as a miner in Cwmaman Colliery (or Shepherd's Pit), and saw it as his duty to help his talented older brother, Timothy, proceed to university in an age without local authority awards, and in a family without great material affluence. (Timothy himself worked at Shepherd's Pit for some 9 years before proceeding to Cardiff, Liverpool, Manchester, Berlin, Freiburg & Aberystwyth universities as a student & lecturer in Celtic!).

Edward Lewis also helped the progress of his other brothers, Daniel (who became a minister) & T.J. (who went to Bangor university). He himself married Gwen, a midwife in Cwmaman, and had four daughters: Gwyneth, Heulwen, May & Rhiannon. Their family home was at 20, Byron St and the sound of music emanating from that home was a regular aspect of life in Cwmaman at the time, for Edward was a talented and devoted musician - the organizer of the greatest achievements in the active cultural life of the village. Indeed, it could justifiably be said that in the life of

Edward Lewis we have an example par excellence of the 'cultured collier'; the type of person who symbolizes the Welsh concept of the civilized gwerin.

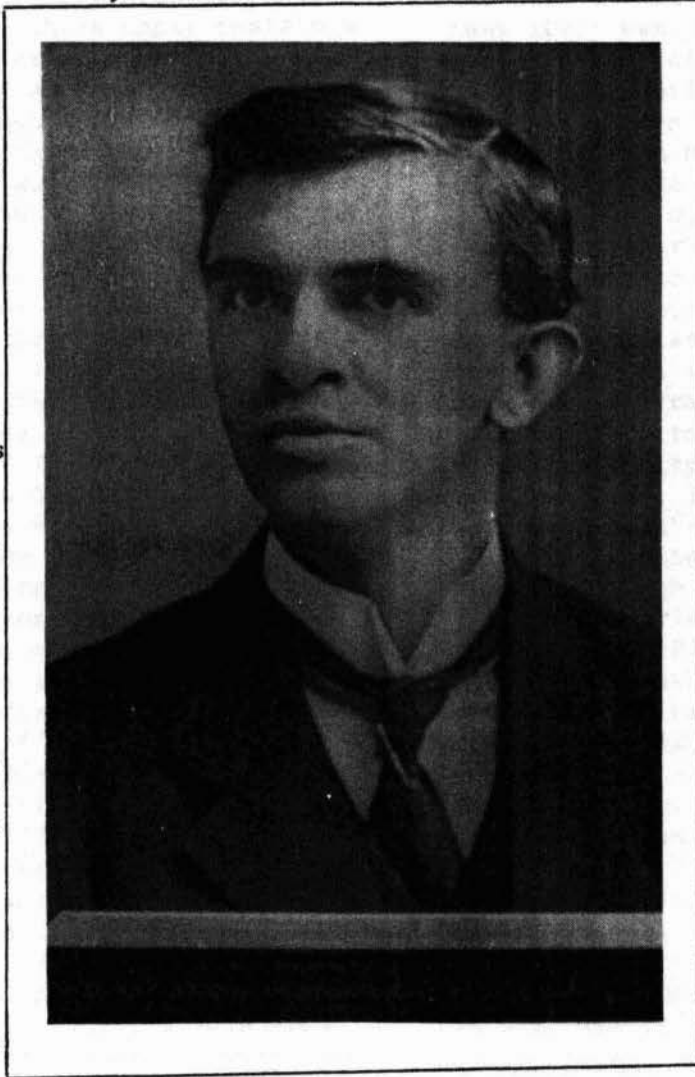
In 1908, Edward Lewis was chosen to become Conductor of the Cwmaman Choral Society, in succession to another famous & accomplished local musician, W.J. Evans, (1866-1947). He had been Conductor of the Aberdare Choral Society as well as Conductor at Cwmaman from 1900-08, and remained for many years a distinguished organist at Siloa Welsh Congregationalist Chapel, Aberdare. (W.J. Evans also composed the famous

hymntune Rhys ('Rho im yr hedd...') in memory of his father - who had been one of Caradog's sub-conductors of the Cor Mawr of 1871-73).

Edward Lewis took the Cwmaman Society to an amazing level of attainment. Under his baton, they performed at Cwmaman Hall & Institute (usually on Christmas or Boxing Day) a range of classical works that is in every sense breathtaking. These included The Dream of Gerontius (Elgar); The St Matthew Passion & Christmas Oratorio (J.S. Bach); Twelfth Mass (Mozart); Stabat Mater (Rossini); & an extensive repertory of choral Handel. "Transcendent music" indeed!

The apotheosis of this life's work probably occurred on Boxing Day, 1932, when the Society performed the German Requiem (Brahms) and Toward the Unknown Region (Vaughan Williams) The guest conductor at Cwmaman Hall that day was the great Ralph Vaughan Williams himself who, together with Sir Walford Davies, had become a friend of

Edward Lewis'. Under Walford Davies' guidance, Alun Lewis' 'Uncle Ned' later became a full-time tutor in music for the National Council for Social Service during the 1930's.



OLD PHOTOGRAPHS: NO.3: EDWARD LEWIS, 1879 - 1941; uncle of the poet Alun Lewis, and Conductor from 1908 of the Cwmaman Choral Society. (Source: Mrs Gwyneth Williams, grand-daughter.).

OUR DREAMING SIDE:

(OBSERVATIONS ON THE BIOGRAPHY ENTITLED 'ALUN LEWIS: A LIFE', BY JOHN PIKOULIS; POETRY WALES PRESS, 1984; 323pp., £12.95. BY D.L. DAVIES).

This view of Dr Pikoulis' book will not seek to analyse Alun Lewis' work, nor set out to 'interpret the interpretations' of this his most recent critic & biographer. These comments will focus upon aspects of the book of interest to the historical inclinations of our readers, while encouraging them to pursue the literary interest which Lewis' work richly rewards.

Those aspects of the book of most concern to us involve details of A.L.'s family background at Cwmaman & Aberdare. Dr Pikoulis presents these largely (but not exclusively) in chpts. I, II and VII of his work (Cwmaman/Early Schooldays/The Mountain Over Aberdare). These chpts contain a range of allusions & references which reveal the author's serious efforts at detailed background research. Admirable though these endeavours are, numerous errors exist within these 'background pages'. In kindness, it must be said that using a 1969 English rendition by Mr E R Morgan of the far fuller Hanes Cwmaman of 1913 by David Lloyd was not the best basis on which to proceed. Mr Morgan was an intelligent man, but not a demanding translator. His History is obviously but a summary of the original. It would not have been an irksome task had Dr Pikoulis asked one of his Welsh-speaking colleagues at U.C. Cardiff (or any competent Welsh-speaker) to have advised him on the content of the Welsh original.

Hence, Dr Pikoulis has lost a wealth of information regarding the origins of the village, including its overwhelmingly Welsh-speaking nature which so struck the poet's mother when she came to live at Cwmaman. He has missed allusions to members of A.L.'s family as "young prophets" of the chapel, and a reference to Edward Lewis' emergence as Conductor of the choral society in 1908 - all surely valuable background points. Dr Pikoulis has been led astray into claiming on p.25 that Cwmaman, in 1923/24, was "an area in which general primary education (sic) was recent".

This impression is based on E R Morgan's out-of-context statement that, "The boys' school (Morris St) was built in 1900.". Even so, Dr Pikoulis should have known that the Education Act of 1870 extended elementary education throughout the country, while that of 1876 made it compulsory nationally. Thus "general primary education" was no more "recent" in A.L.'s social background than it was elsewhere. Moreover, Lloyd adds that the first 'dame school' opened in 1860, & the first British School in 1864 (more than 20 years before the Lewises even arrived in Cwmaman).

More inaccuracies occur on p.19, where Dr Pikoulis says of A.L.'s father that, "Tom Lewis was born in Cwmaman in 1885 and...he managed to escape the (pits) that had drawn his father, Job,

from the farms of Pembrokeshire over 40 years before...". Much of this sentence is not true. Tom Lewis was born in Cilymaenllwyd parish, Pems., & some people close to the family recall him always speaking with a trace of a north Pembrokeshire accent. It has been said, on the basis of Timothy Lewis' papers, that the family did not remove to Cwmaman until the mid-1880's, not "over 40 years before". Job Lewis was not a farmer prior to his move to Glamorgan, but a labourer in the Llwyn'rebol slate quarry near Efail Wen.

The site of the first Lewis home in Cwmaman, at Railway Tce., is wrongly located on the map on p.14. What the author calls 'Cwmaman Mountain' on that map is, in fact, Mynydd Coedcae - as a casual glance at any O.S. map would show. The 'annalist' of the local literary tradition whom Pikoulis mentions on p.16 of his book is neither E R Morgan nor David Lloyd (as he later claims on p.297). Rather, it was the Rev Jacob Davies, & the work inferred is Cyfoeth Cwm (1965).

Captions to illustrations are also sometimes faulty. Plate 1 is said to show "Cwmaman, looking down-valley to the north east"; Plate 2 is said to be of "Cwmaman, looking up-valley to the south west", although both show the village running up-valley in the direction of its headland. Plate 5 is said to show A.L. & his brothers "At Brynhyfryd, April, 1922"; yet, being born, like A.L., at Llanwynno Rd, & having lived there for 32 years, & in knowing Brynhyfryd well, I'd wager the price of Dr Pikoulis' book that Plate 5 shows the 3 boys at Llanwynno Rd. Plate 7 reputedly shows the Lewis family "On holiday at Penbryn (Cards)". This is not so. The mountain in the background is as behind Brynhyfryd, Cwmaman; & had Dr Pikoulis checked with the illustration on p.32 of the Poetry Wales: Special Number of A.L. (vol.10, no.3), to which he contributed an article, he would have found the same seven figures in the same attire on the same mountain, but this time they are indeed said to be "A family group...on the mountainside above Cwmaman, about 1924."

Other errors are more the fault of proof-readers. The Lewis' chapel was Moriah Aman, not (as on p.22) Moriahaman,

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which makes it look like one of the places A.L. may have visited in India. The dreaded spelling error rears its head here & there: as on p.200 ('Portugese'); and neither is the index adequate when one has to scrutinize over 60 pages to re-trace a reference to A.L.'s uncle, Edward. The index lists him once (p.26) in a book of 323pp. The reference I sought was on p.229.

From what has been told me by local people & others about A.L.'s grandfather, Job, & father, T.J., I can only say that I consider Dr Pikoulis gives rather a misleading impression of both. The only image he gives us of Job Lewis is a pretty stern one provided by Alun's sister, Mair, who was 17 when her grandfather died. Older people who knew Job in village & chapel life refer to him as a devout, scholarly & cultured man. I am told A.L. spent hours at his home talking to him about religion, the Bible & the things he believed in. I know I am not alone in saying that Dr Pikoulis' view of Tom Lewis creates the entirely wrong impression of a character weaker & slighter than that of his wife. This is not considered at all true by those who knew them both well. Of Gwladys Lewis, Pikoulis writes with evident approval, & in a positive tone; but is in danger of making her seem willful & overbearing.

As parents, the Lewises had a duty to consider the value of religious observance in rearing their family. Mrs Lewis seems to have felt in conscience that it was not such a good thing. This is an opinion she had every right to adopt. Mr Lewis seems to have retained a greater regard for such observance, but without feeling sufficiently strongly on the matter to actively encourage an alternative view to that of his wife. Were things otherwise, it is widely agreed he would not have shrunk from acting according to his conviction.

In presenting Mrs Lewis as a forthright character, & Mr Lewis as less sure of himself, Pikoulis may have spurred on unintentionally an unpleasant attack upon Mrs Lewis' values & influence upon her son. This appeared in an anonymous & trivial 'review' of the Pikoulis book in Welsh-language magazine, Barn, of September, 1984. In this piece, Gwladys Lewis is berated for supposedly having reduced the stature of her son by not teaching him Welsh & by not sending him to Sunday School!

The present writer replied to these superficial comments about Mrs Lewis & about A.L.'s supposed lack of prowess in leadership. My reply was simply ignored. Nothing was heard until I contacted by phone the ed-

itor of Barn, the Rev Rhydwen Williams, of Trecynon, who was neither interested nor helpful in dealing with my enquiry. In fact, his reaction was to ask whether I had actually bothered to read Dr Pikoulis' book, & to say that he had been having a respite from editing Barn at the time I sent him my reply. Since January, 1985, Mr Williams has been editing Barn again. One would have thought that a cogent response to a contribution in his journal dealing with a figure of the stature of Alun Lewis would have been of some interest to him regardless of whether it arrived at his home during a respite or (to put it another way) shortly before he resumed his editorial function.

Here, in Hanes, I would invite Mr Williams to identify his anonymous reviewer & explain why he simply ignored a substantial reply to that reviewer on a subject of real literary importance. I believe Dr Pikoulis would probably wish to disassociate himself from many of the things stated in the Barn article.

Dr Pikoulis' book is a considered & informative addition to the bibliography of Alun Lewis. It contains new & enlightening material pertaining to his formative years at Aberdare, his time in the forces at home, and his experience of India. In terms of local background, much is good; but too many inaccuracies remain. One would encourage people to read the work (Aberdare Library has half-a-dozen copies). It will undoubtedly help the reader appreciate what a fine poet & author Alun Lewis was.

One has refrained from presenting a literary appreciation of this biography because that lies beyond the compass of Hanes. In considering those aspects of the work largely of local historical interest, one's main motive in relation to matters of fact has been to 'keep the record straight'; in matters of interpretation, it has been to present the other side. Yet, no-one should be left with the impression that Alun Lewis is a writer largely wrapped up in the local dimension. Nothing could be less true.

His voice, especially it seems to me in his poetry, speaks of great & worldwide themes. His work echoes a statement by one of his characters at the end of the story They Came (in The Last Inspection), who says "My life belongs to the world."

A WORD OF THANKS:

- or, rather, two! Firstly to D R Davies, Trecynon, for his observations on the career of Alun Lewis over the years; & secondly to Dewi Thomas, Aberdare, for ready consent to hold over till next time his fascinating article on Father Mathew.

TOPOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY OF WALES 1833.
SAMUEL LEWIS. Vol 1.

A B E

time. In the vicinity of the town are numerous and extensive encampments, but none within the limits of the parish, which comprises comparatively a small area. Archbishop Williams was a native of this place, and the apartment in which he was born is still shewn: when governor of the castle, he built a house here, in 1642, in one of the apartments of which his arms, impaling those of York, are yet preserved. The average annual expenditure for the support of the poor amounts to £351.

ABERDARE (ABER-DÂR) a parish in the upper division of the hundred of MISKIN, county of GLAMORGAN, SOUTH WALES, 5 miles (S.W. by W.) from Merthyr-Tydvil, and 21 (N.W. by N.) from Cardif (which is the post town), on the road from Cardif to Neath, over Hîrwaun common, containing 3961 inhabitants. This parish is celebrated as having been the scene of a sanguinary battle, in the reign of William Rufus, which is said to have taken place on Hîrwaun common, about two miles to the north of the village, between the forces of Rhys ab Tewdwr, Prince of South Wales, and those of Iestyn ab Gwrgan, aided by a body of Norman adventurers, under the command of Robert Fitz-Hamon, who, after having gained a signal victory over Rhys, who was slain in the contest, turned his arms against Iestyn, and dispossessed him of his territories, the most valuable of which he reserved to himself, and partitioned the remainder among the knights who had attended him in the expedition.

The village is pleasantly situated on the banks of the river Dâr, and near its confluence with the Cynon, in the delightful mountain vale of Cynon, which is remarkable for picturesque and romantic scenery, and is equally characterised by features of beauty and of grandeur. Its majestic groves of oak and fir, alternating with fruitful corn-fields and luxuriant meadows, are finely contrasted with precipitous and barren rocks, and enlivened by the bold sweep of the river, which in some of its windings appears to be hemmed in on every side by lofty and sterile mountains. The parish abounds with coal and iron-ore, the working of which, though it has materially defaced the beauty of the neighbourhood, which was previously distinguished as a place of enviable retirement, has added greatly to its wealth and the number of its inhabitants. Three iron-works are conducted upon a very extensive scale, of which those at Llwydcoed and Abernant are capable, when in full operation, of producing annually more than eleven thousand tons of iron; the works at Gadlys are at present discontinued. The Aberdare canal, which is seven miles in length, communicates with the Glamorganshire canal, and, by means of a tram-road, with the extensive works at Hîrwaun, in the county of Brecknock, affording a facility of conveyance by which the whole produce of this mineral district is sent to the port of Cardif, where it is shipped to various parts of the kingdom: this canal passes within half a mile of the village, from which a rail-road, two miles in length, extends to the works at Llwydcoed and Abernant. This parish is included within the borough of Merthyr-Tydvil; to which, by the act for amending the representation of the people in England and Wales, recently passed, the privilege of returning one member to parliament has been granted: the right of election is vested in every male person of full age occupying, as owner, or as tenant under the same landlord, a house or

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other premises of the clear yearly value of ten pounds, if duly registered as the act directs. It is within the jurisdiction of the court of requests held at Merthyr-Tydvil, on the second Thursday in every month, for the recovery of debts not exceeding £5. The living is a perpetual curacy, in the archdeaconry and diocese of Llandaf; endowed with £600 royal bounty, and £1800 parliamentary grant, and in the patronage of the Vicar of Llantrisant, who receives the vicarial tithes of this parish; but at present a negotiation is pending between the Marquis of Bute and the Dean and Chapter of Gloucester, in whose gift is the vicarage of Llantrisant, pursuant to which, should the latter accede to his lordship's proposal for further endowing the incumbency, the patronage of Aberdare will be transferred into his lordship's hands. The church, dedicated to St. John the Baptist, is a small ancient building without a tower or steeple, remarkable only for its rustic simplicity of character, which is in perfect harmony with the surrounding scenery. There are places of worship for Baptists, Independents, Calvinistic Methodists; English and Welsh Wesleyan Methodists, and Unitarians. A National school, capable of accommodating one hundred boys and fifty girls, has been built by subscription, on ground given for that purpose by the Marquis of Bute, and is partly supported by subscription; in addition to small weekly payments from the parents of the scholars. Four houses in the parish, belonging to the poor, were endowed in 1724, by Mrs. Elinor Matthews, with a rent-charge of £5 on the farm of Pen Caradoc, in the parish of Llanwonno, now the property of J. B. Bruce, Esq. There are remains of two ancient blomeris in this parish, by some writers attributed to the Romans, and by others, with greater probability, to the Britons, before the use of blast furnaces was known; and vestiges of a circular British encampment may be distinctly traced. Aberamman, the seat of the late Anthony Bacon, Esq., of Benham, in the county of Berks; was for centuries the residence of the family of Matthews; and Dyfryn is the birthplace, and was anciently the residence of Ieuan ddu ab Davydd ab Owain, an eminent poet, who flourished about the middle of the fifteenth century, and was a munificent patron of the bards: the estate came to his descendants, who, by the usual transition of names, were called Jones, from whom it was purchased by William Bruce, Esq., in 1748, and is now the property of his grandson, J. Bruce Bruce, Esq., who, under a recent act of parliament, has been appointed stipendiary police magistrate of Merthyr-Tydvil, Aberdare, and Gellygaer. Edward Evan, for many years minister of an Independent congregation in the neighbourhood, an eminent poet and philosopher, to whose efforts for the preservation of the bardic institutions the principality is greatly indebted, was also a native of this parish; he died in 1798, on the day appointed for a meeting of the bards of Glamorgan, which he was to have attended. The inhabitants of this parish complain, as a singular hardship, that, although the Hîrwaun furnaces of Mr. Crawshay contribute largely to the poor's rate of the parish of Penderrin, in the county of Brecknock, in which they are situated, the burden of the removals and accidents of a large portion of the workmen falls upon the parish of Aberdare, just within the limits of which their cottages are situated. The average annual expenditure for the support of the poor amounts to £605.2.

EXTRACT - DESCRIPTION OF ABERDARE

ABERDARE TIMES

NOV 3 1893

THE WELSH LAND COMMISSION.

HIRWAIN COMMON.

The Welsh Land Commissioners, at their first sitting at Swansea, on Tuesday last, sat until a late hour, when evidence of a valuable character was adduced. Amongst others Mr John Davies, checkweigher, Hirwain, a member of the Aberdare School Board, gave some interesting particulars relating to the losses sustained by the inhabitants of Hirwain through being deprived of their rights over the extensive common known as Hirwain Wrgaut. His evidence was as follows:—

In 1860 and 1863, 3,000 acres of the common land were allotted between the landowners in the neighbourhood, viz., Lord Bute, Lord Windsor, Colonel Kemys-Tynte, Mr Gwynne Holford, Mr Bruce Pryce, and others. Prior to this allotment there were hundreds of sheep on the common belonging to the workmen and small farmers and others in the neighbourhood, and the celebrated Hirwain flockowners were well-known throughout England and Wales. There were also Scotch cattle grazing there, but all had since disappeared. Workmen's wives and poor widows used to rear flocks of geese on the common, but now they had none. Small farmers used to send their cattle and sheep to graze on the common in summer months free of charge, but the users of the common were turned out, and some squatters who had held for less than 21 years were now charged rent, while cottages of others were pulled down. Some portion of the land, amounting to 30 acres, had been allotted for recreation ground, but the Hirwain people had not yet had possession of it, nor was it used for recreation purposes, except rifle shooting and gun practices. It was a very damp piece of ground—too damp for football or any other purposes. Another portion of the common, amounting to 20 acres, was allotted to the Aberdare Burial Board for the use of the Hirwain people. The Board, however, refused to use the ground for that purpose, and let it out to a private person for £12 a year, while the inhabitants of Hirwain, who numbered 4,500, had to bury their dead in places some miles distant, but the board made no allowance in fees notwithstanding that refusal. A piece of 10 acres was allotted to the churchwardens and overseers of the parish of Ystradfydwg in trust for the use of the labouring poor of the parish, but it was not so used. His object in giving evidence was to show how the great landowners of the county had taken possession of common land, and deprived the poor of rights which they had previously enjoyed.

Examined by Mr Brynmor Jones, witness said he did not complain of the allotments, but that the Hirwain people had not yet had possession of them.

Mr Brynmor Jones: Well, they are vested in trustees for you.

Witness pointed out that the £12 rent received by the burial board for the allotment was banked, and the Hirwain people, for whose benefit the allotment was made, received no benefit either from the land or the money. The allotments given the public were not nearly sufficient compensation to the Hirwain people in the loss sustained by them when the common was taken away from them.

ABERDARE LOCAL BOARD OF HEALTH.

The ordinary meeting of the above Board took place on Friday, the 27th ult., there being present Messrs R. H. Rhys (chairman), D. P. Davies, E. Morgan, W. Thomas, D. Davies (Canon-street), D. Davies (Canton House), and O. Harris.

The minutes of the last meeting were read and confirmed.

MEDICAL OFFICER'S QUARTERLY REPORT.

The following was read:—

To the Chairman and Members of the Aberdare Local Board of Health.

GENTLEMEN,—I beg to report that the number of deaths, registered during the quarter ending Sept. 30th, 1893, will show a decrease of 24 as compared with the corresponding quarter of the year 1892, and an increase of 39 as compared with the previous three months, the deaths in this quarter being 218—males 122, females 96. The 218 included—Typhoid fever 1; scarlet fever 1; measles 4; whooping cough 1; diarrhoea 22; marasmus 12; pneumonia 12; bronchitis 8; phthisis 10; influenza 2; convulsions 31; meningitis 1. Children under one year of age, 100; ditto from 1 to 5, 23; persons from 5 to 20, 16; 20 to 30, 12; 30 to 40, 8; 40 to 50, 11; 50 to 60, 12; aged persons of 60 and upwards, 36. Total, 218. Taking the population of the Aberdare Board of Health District to be 40,000, this mortality gives a death rate of 5.45 per 1000 for this quarter, and for the year 21.8 per 1000. Twelve deaths from various causes requiring inquest occurred in this quarter. I feel it incumbent upon me to draw your attention to the great mortality amongst children under one year of age. During the last quarter 100 such deaths occurred. I am strongly impressed that this high rate of mortality is in a great measure, as I have often said before, due to the present mode of artificial feeding of infants by the bottle and otherwise, and it is in this way I can account for the high mortality from convulsions, diarrhoea, &c. It is very gratifying to find that only one death from typhoid and one from scarlet fever has taken place during the last three months, which fact speaks well for the sanitary state of the district.

During the three months which have expired there were 380 births—181 males and 199 females, being an increase of 12 as compared with the corresponding quarter of last year, and an increase of 5 over the previous three months, and an increase of births over deaths in this quarter of 162. This gives a birth rate of 9.5 per 1000 in this quarter, and for the year 38 per 1000.—I remain, gentlemen, your obedient servant,

DD. DAVIES, F.R.C.S., &c., &c.
Medical Officer of Health.

Brynolwg, Oct. 24th, 1893.

Some interesting aspects of local life and its problems of 90 years ago.