

# HANES

NEWSLETTER OF THE CYNON VALLEY  
HISTORY SOCIETY/  
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CYNON



# HANES

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## A MUSEUM AT LAST!

It was announced, just before last Christmas, that the project to convert the old Council Stores building into a museum, was to receive a grant of 350,000 pounds from the European Strategic Development Scheme. This building is next to the new Tesco store in Gadlys, Aberdare.

The curator, Linda Coode, has been busy working with a design team to determine how the inside of the building will look. The inside of the building has been designed using the principle of "zoning". This divides the building into four, and provides the best conditions possible for people and the museum objects. There will be a permanent exhibition, and a temporary display as well as a meeting room for societies and schools.

The theme of the permanent exhibition will be "The life and work of the people of the Cynon Valley - past and present." This covers many aspects of the rich history of the valley, from coal mining to chapels, from choirs to living conditions, and from archaeology to transport. It is envisaged that the displays will be lively and informative, and also of use for schools.

Linda has been collecting objects for the Museum since she started in 1992. The objects collected vary tremendously. The Museum collections include a medal presented to the members of Caradog's Cor Mawr, a shell found near the Darran, relating to the artillery experiments carried out there in 1891, and also two magic lanterns with slides. There are also two paintings by the artist G.F.Harris - the T.V. presenter Rolf Harris' grandfather.

If you have anything at all that you think might be of interest to the Museum, please contact Linda in Dare Valley Country Park 01685 874672. She will be delighted to hear from you.

### DORA

This is the not wholly-affectionate acronym of the Defence of the Realm Act 1914, all the stages of which were passed through in a few hours in view of the impending war. This act gave undefined and therefore exceptionally wide powers to the government "for securing the public safety and defence of the Realm". The building now known as "Tegfan" in Llewellyn Street Trecynon belonged to the Board of Guardians, and during the war which followed they were persuaded by the well-known local doctor Isaac Banks to make it available to the local Red Cross for use as a military auxiliary hospital. This was one of many set up for the convalescence of the thousands of surviving casualties of the war in the trenches. For this and for his work at the hospital Dr. Banks was awarded the OBE in 1919.

If the wounded soldiers thought that they were entitled to drink a few pints of beer now and then after the horrors that they had gone through they were soon made to realise that they had made a great mistake.

In view of the great losses at the front the authorities were anxious for wounded soldiers to get back in the lines as soon as possible (no doubt with the admonition "get killed properly next time!"). It seems that the officer Commanding Western Command believed that the recovery of the injured was being hindered by too much drinking, for in August 1915 he issued an order under DORA that no licensee in his area was to supply wounded men with intoxicating drink. The Aberdare police duly went round pubs and served a copy of the Order on all the licensees. Cont.....

On Whit Monday 1917 a policeman saw a wounded soldier enter the White Lion, Gadlys, through the back entrance and when he followed he found seven men there, three of whom were soldiers with drinks in front of them. When these matters came to court the Bench took a serious view of the offence and fined the landlord 25 pounds. The stipendiary added "We must ask Supt. Rees to communicate the facts to the War Office as well as the Liquor Control Board, and to say he is doing so at our direction". The Landlady said she could not pay and was imprisoned for 31 days, protesting as she was conducted from the court that the police had entered her house and stolen away her living. At the following licensing sessions the police said the pub was difficult to supervise as it had six entrances, and the back entrance (which opened on to a back lane was afterwards blocked up as a condition of renewal of the licence.

The licensee of the Bridgend Inn Trecynon was charged with the same offence in February 1918 after four soldiers were found in the back room with drinks on 22nd. January. When the policeman was taking their names one of them fainted. The Stipendiary said "this is in flagrant breach of an important order." 25 pounds or 31 days.

Hardest hit of all was the Railway Bar which after several offences was closed by the Liquor Control Board from 1st. October 1917 to April 1918.

#### IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN CALLED LLAN FAGAN TOWN!

The Aberdare Leader for 17th. September 1932 looks back at the Eisteddfod held in July 1857 in the field where Trefelin now stands. One of the competitions was to find another name for the area then known as Heolyfelin, or in English, Mill Street. The name was suitable when the place consisted of little more than Mill Street itself, but following the building of many more houses by then, perhaps people thought that the old name was misleading. Among the entries were Tref Clive, Milltown, Tre Scale, Llan Fagan Town, Tre Siarl, and Abercynon. From the Cardiff & Merthyr Guardian of the same time we find that the winning entry was Trecynon, suggested by two persons whose names were not given, who shared the ten shillings prize.

In view of the proximity of the river you may think "Cynon Town" very apt. In fact the report states that it was named in honour of the industrialist and eisteddfodwr David Williams ("Alaw Goch") who lived at Ynyscynon House. Trealam and Williamstown in the Rhondda are also named after him.

#### EDITORIAL

The lead story in this edition of "Hanes" is the fact that the last obstacle has been overcome, and Aberdare is to have its museum, after about 70 years of intermittent lobbying. The curator is Ms. Linda Coode BA. Dip IA. AMA., who is now building up the collection of exhibits and at the same time co-operating on the interior design. I asked her when was the museum going to open? "We are aiming to open in spring 1996. We expect the actual building work to start shortly."

Will the museum be a mining museum?

"The museum will obviously contain displays relating to coal because it is so important to the valleys history. However the valley has such a rich history that it would be a shame not to include displays about as many subjects as possible. Also there are already two very good mining museums not far away - Big Pit and the Rhondda Heritage Centre"

What is your view on the location of the museum?

"People supporting the development of the museum have always requested a town-centre site but parking problems have been associated with the possible High Street sites. I think the selected site is an ideal compromise. It is near the town centre, it has nearby parking facilities and a bus stop practically outside the door."

Aberdare was an iron town before it became famous for coal. will the museum be reflecting this?

"As you know, the museum is actually on the site of the Gadlys Ironworks and one of the blast engine houses remains and has been converted into offices. But more importantly the museum will be in front of a row of four blast furnaces, the masonry of which has survived intact. They are a Scheduled Ancient Monument and because of their condition must be ranked with the best in the country. There is great potential for interpreting these furnaces in the future."

Will you be consulting with local organisations?

"We are doing this already with certain local groups. In particular, the History Society has been very supportive in setting up the museum and I would like to thank them and everyone else who has provided so much advice, help and guidance. I have been asked to attend the meetings of the committee so that the exchange of views can continue."

The Editor.



## A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

I am pleased to have this opportunity to contribute to the first edition of "Hanes" to be published for some time. It is a useful vehicle for informing members of the work of the Society and for printing articles featuring aspects of local history by individual members. The Society can be proud of its record over the last 24 years since it was formed in March 1971 at the instigation of Mr. Ken Rees and the late Dr. Alistair Wilson.

The chief activity over the years has been the monthly lecture and the 1995/6 programme, which is close to completion, will equal the best programmes from the past, both in variety of subjects and the quality of lecturers.

As well as this "passive" aspect of the Society's work there is also an "active" side. Over the years the Society has been successful in protecting our local heritage such as one of the oldest iron railway bridges in the world (at Robertstown) and the Gadlys ironworks site. This side of the Society's work includes an initiative to restore the grave in Aberdare Cemetery of James James, composer of "Hen Wlad fy Nhadau". This move has attracted national attention and has resulted in the work being carried out free of charge by the old-established firm of Mossfords of Cardiff as a contribution to the community. Attention is now being directed to the provision of a separate monument to the composer.

An important aspect of the work of a local History Society is the recording of the past and making such records available to the public. This the Society has done superbly by the publication of the series "Old Aberdare" vols. 1 to 7, and "Aberdare, Pictures from the Past", vols. 1 & 2. Such work is continuing with the preparation of a book on the history of mining in the Cynon Valley.

The opening of the Cynon Valley Museum will mark the culmination of years of advocacy by the Society for such a facility, and we look forward to helping the Curator to establish it as a centre for the conservation of local historical artefacts and the development of the Society's work of informing the public of our local heritage.

Hywel W. Vaughan.

## THE OLD WELLS AND SPRINGS OF ABERDARE

The evidence given in the Rammell Inquiry into the health of the inhabitants of Aberdare (1853) is well known. In a district of over 15,000 inhabitants there was no public provision for water supply. The great bulk of the inhabitants were supplied from springs, sometimes called spouts and from wells. In Greenfach there was the Darran Spout near Lindsay's brewery, more familiarly known as Pistyll y Darran. Others were Maes y Dre Well, Blaengwawr Spout, a well at Hirwaun, and two spouts in Trecynon. The Reverend Thomas Price stated "There is much waiting at the spouts; three hours for a turn is no uncommon time..... they get up frequently at two or three o'clock in the morning to go for water. A hundred jugs in a row are at times seen at the spouts. There is much immorality at the spouts, from people waiting there and having nothing to do."

From time to time there were other springs and wells. Perhaps the most famous was the Chalybeate well opened at Ynyscynon in 1863, which was held to possess curative properties and was visited early in the morning by many people to drink the water. The landowner David Williams (the celebrated Alaw Goch) erected a building over it with a pump room. The water had a bad smell which was probably why people thought it was good for them. But it also had the power to turn a silver spoon yellow, and perhaps they wondered what colour it was turning their insides. For whatever reason, it fell out of favour and became disused in the middle 70's and the land around was built on. Is this the origin of Well Place, and are there any remains of the well there today? In 1921 it was stated that the building could still be seen "in the gardens just below Ynyscynon Bridge near Well Place".

Cont.....

Many shops and houses had their own wells, often in the cellar, if they had one, and one such can be seen today in the cellar of a house not far from the town centre. They even sank one (unsuccessfully) in Victoria Square in 1855 in a time of drought. A few years ago one was discovered in the front garden of a house in Hirwaun road. It was possible for inflammable gas to percolate from the uppermost coal seams into wells, and on at least one occasion death and serious injuries followed an explosion caused by a plumber working on a pump in a well.

The Aberdare Waterworks Co. was formed and the water supply was turned on on 12th. September 1859. But at first it could only supply the low-lying places and wells and springs continued to be used in areas without a service.

#### ANCIENT MONUMENTS IN THE CYNON VALLEY.

Under section 1 of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979, the secretary of State is required to compile a statutory schedule of monuments which appear to him to be of national importance. From time to time, a list of all the monuments included in the schedule must be published; this may be done as a single list, or as lists for particular areas.

#### THE WAY WE WERE THEN (1)

Part of a letter by Mr.D.Gray on vulgar and immoral language(Aberdare Leader, 18 June 1921)"Coming by [tram]car one day the car stopped at a certain place to pick up more passengers. Several persons came in and the conductor requested those that were in already to move up. A woman said "Damn!" and she had her little boy about 4-5 years of age sitting near her. What impression will that have on the little boy when he grows? Did that woman give any thought that she was rearing a citizen of the future? And what did she think of the dignity of her sex? Something must be done to prevent this canker."

The following is a list by community, of the scheduled monuments in the Cynon Valley.

- ABERAMAN 1. Bedd-Eiddil dyke (SS 972997). 2. Cairn cemetery on Rhos-Gwawr (SN 988010 & SN 996003)
- 3. Remains of Iron Furnace at Cwmaman (ST 004994) 4. Twyn y Bridallt Roman Camp (ST 002981)

- ABERDARE 1. Carn Pentyle-Hir & adjacent round cairn. (SO 020053 & SO 021053) 2. Gadlys Ironworks (SO 000030) 3. Garn Las earthworks (SO 029038) 4. Gelli-Isaf Tramroad bridge, Abernant tramroad. (SN 990044) 5. Gwersyll (SO 027040) 6. Iron Trambridge, Robertstown (SN 997036) 7. Ring cairn Sth of Twyn Blaenant (SO 025044)

To be continued in next issue.....

#### HISTORY IN A HONDA!

Car boot sales are a popular and growing means of obtaining a great variety of unwanted common, and occasionally uncommon items, but not one would imagine, important historical documents. Yet this is exactly what happened; Readers will be surprised (and glad) to learn that two original Poor Law Commission Rate Books for the Parish of Aberdare for the years 1840 and 1850 recently came to light in a boot sale in Glamorgan! Promptly acquired by an antique dealer, they have now been re-purchased by Society member Mr.Gareth Thomas, and are now safely back in Aberdare. These records would have been the property of the Board of Guardians; How they turned up in a car boot sale we cannot imagine. As far as we are aware they were not owned by some local person (although they could have come from some house clearance) nor were they known to the late Mr.W.W.Price, and not much passed his notice!

Note. Under the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, a rate was levied on all eligible property owners in the parish by the Board of Guardians of the Poor. The rate was assessed and collected by Officers called Overseers, and used for the relief of the poor residing within the Parish.