



## AN EARLY VISITOR TO ABERDARE

Aberdare seems rarely to have figured in the itineraries of early English visitors to south Wales, but one exception to this was the tour undertaken by the traveller and historian Robert Clutterbuck at the end of the eighteenth century. His manuscript describing the journey, now preserved in Cardiff Central Library, was edited thirty years ago by T.J.Hopkins and published in the "Glamorgan Historian" Vol.3. The following is a summary of the tourists impressions of Aberdare and its environs.

MAKING AN EARLY START from Cardiff on Monday September 9th.1799, Clutterbuck headed for Merthyr, presumably by coach, and after breakfasting on arrival, spent the day visiting the ironworks at Penydarran and Cyfarthfa, where he recorded details of the procedures used in iron manufacture. The following day, after first inspecting the ruins of Morlais Castle, he set off for Aberdare - on horseback, having been advised that the way was impracticable for carriages. Which route he took is not very clear. He states that he set off south west, crossing the canal west of Cyfarthfa, and ascended the hillside to the summit,

which suggests that he must have taken the more direct route to Aberdare, namely past Heolgerrig and up the hill track to Pleasant View then down through Blaennant and present-day Abernant.

Noting the barren and boggy nature of the countryside as he descended the southern side of the mountain, he at length "perceived at the distance of two miles the village of Aberdare, plentifully and rather beautifully intermixed with wood a luxuriant spot encroaching on the fruitless waste." The road "now became somewhat steeper and its winding course led through a copse and over the streams of Dare and Cynon...then running through some cultivated meadows it brought us to the village. He found Aberdare to consist of "near a hundred homes remarkable for their neat appearance; Not a cot (cottage) but it was as white as milk". St.John's church yard especially caught his eye, containing four very big yew trees and being "large, level and by nature preserved by weeds". The fine weather had brought some of the local women there to sit in the shade with their knitting, and their courteous manners pleased him as much as the surrounding scenery.

### UPDATE.

After reading the article on old Wells and Springs in issue No.9, Mr.D.J.Pugsley of Well Place has informed us that he remembers the disused building and medicinal well near Well Place, Cwmbach. It was situated just off Cwmbach Road opposite the car-wash of the Gulf garage. There are now two private garages there, the one next to the house (St.David's) being built on the site of the well.

## THE OLDEST FAMILIES OF ABERDARE

How far back can you trace your family in Aberdare and were they an important family in the Parish? The Hearth Tax, which was levied from 1662 to 1689 was based on the number of hearths in a house and this may be of some assistance to you.

Unfortunately, only 2 complete annual returns for Glamorgan have survived, but they are of great interest. One of these, the assessment for 1670, has been edited by Elizabeth Parkinson and forms the subject of a book published in 1994 by The South Wales Record Society. There is a copy in the Reference Library. Although the poor were exempt, they had to be listed, and so the return contains the names of all the householders in the parish. The ancient family of Mathew was taxed on six hearths but they took second place to one James Jones (who was he?) who had seven. Most of the remaining inhabitants had only one.

The following are the surnames of the Aberdarians of 1670. Many of the names occur several times so the number of dwellings is some 122, which many think surprisingly large, even for the whole Parish:-

Lewis, Jones, Evan, William, Morgan, Phillip, Thomas, Mathew, Owen, Herbert, David, Rees, Madock, John, Walter, Griffith, Howell, Meyrick, Bevan, Jenkin, Edwards, Treharne, Williams, Gibbon, Robert, Richard, LLen(Llewellyn?), Price, Meredith, Harrey and Rosser.

JFM

## EDITORIAL

During last summer a grass fire on a boggy area of Penwaun Iago (on the mountain above Cwmbach) was allowed to burn for some weeks with the result that over several acres the peat was consumed to the depth of nearly a foot in places. Mr Mark Evans of Cwmbach noticed that the lowering of the surface had exposed a causeway or series of stepping stones through the bog which appeared to lead to no obvious destination. Full marks to Mr Evans for bringing the matter to the attention of a member of the Society, which eventually resulted in the site being inspected by an archaeologist from the Glamorgan/Gwent Archaeological Trust, who is now looking into the matter, though difficulties dating such a feature are obvious. But it does show the necessity of reporting finds which might be of historical interest. There are known prehistoric sites along this mountain ridge, but no signs of Roman activity, though some experts "have a feeling" that there should be indications of their presence in the area. So keep looking!

The Editor

THE EDITOR WILL BE PLEASED TO RECEIVE QUESTIONS ON LOCAL HISTORY AND WILL ATTEMPT TO ANSWER THEM WITH THE AID OF LOCAL EXPERTS.

CAN YOU TELL ME? (No 2)

QUESTION Which is the oldest railway in the Aberdare area?

ANSWER If you mean a railway as it is understood today the answer is the Aberdare Railway which ran from Aberdare to Abercynon where it joined the Taff Vale Railway. This opened on 6 August 1846.

QUESTION I can remember the row of old houses which were round the corner of the top of Glan Road. Why were they called Pont Flash or Pont Y Flash?

ANSWER There was no bridge there but there certainly was a pond and so the correct name is "Pond Flash" or "Pond Y Flash". The meaning of "Flash" is unclear (can any reader help?). The pond was situated behind the topmost houses of Glan Road and was one of two storage ponds for the Gadlys Pit, the other being situated somewhere near the bottom end of Lambert Terrace.

A nuisance. - There is a saying extant that London bridge is never to be seen without a grey horse upon it, and we think it may with equal truth be said that the Welsh Harp bridge is never without a body of idlers sitting of its parapets. On fine days the little bridge appears to be a general rendezvous for the idle and impudent, and it is next to impossible for any respectable passer-by to escape an insulting remark being flung at him or her by one of them. We trust the police see to this matter, and thus rid the town of a nuisance.

From the Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian, 7 Sept. 1861. The Welsh Harp bridge was in front of Woolworth's. It carried the road through the town across the river Dare, which at that time had not been diverted.

The Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian for 5th June 1869 notices the first appearance of a velocipede (bicycle) in Aberdare. The following appeared in the issue of 19th June and shows that the first one was made by Evan Thomas, founder of the lamp works:-

THE VELOCIPEDE MANIA.- The rage for these new engines of transition is infecting every class of society. The desire to possess them has been fruitful in proceeding three kinds in this town and neighbourhood entirely of local and unprofessional manufacture. A bicycle has been expertly employed by one of our tradesmen for some time. A bicycle too was the manufactured among us, and is still on view at Nr Evans Thomas's. The second that appeared was a tricycle, and was the production of a working man's ingenuity. This is a rude structure, being partly made of wood. The third kind that appeared on the local highways was a polycycle. This seems to be a legitimate name for a four-wheeled velocipede. In it the driver sits between the two pairs of wheels in a small chair. Although lightly made, it seems too cumbersome and heavy to be used in general locomotion. A slight ascent almost successfully resists the propeller's strength. Nor, judging from a late experiment, is it more safe from accidents than a bicycle, when two different drivers were humiliatingly prostrated in the dust within five minutes of each other, on the cemetery road and by the same polycycle. Perhaps the ingenuity that made these machines may yet produce something better.

#### ANCIENT MONUMENTS IN THE CYNON VALLEY. (Part 2)

This is the second half of the list of ancient monuments in the area as published in the Mid Glamorgan edition of the "Cadw" schedule. Part 1, (spring 1995 edition of HANES), covered Aberaman and Aberdare.

- CWMBACH 1. Darren Fawr round cairn. (SO 033024) 2. Graig-y-Gilfach round cairn and earthwork. (SO 030034)  
 HIRWAUN 1. Cader Fawr round cairn. (SN 977122) 2. Cefn Sychbant round cairns. (SN 984107) 3. Craig-y-Dinas (SN 913080) 4. Ffos Ton-Cenglau. (SN 917030 & SN 919020) 5. Nant Maden round cairn. (SN 971106)  
 6. Onllwyn round cairns. (SO 004094) 7. Pant Sychbant round cairn and earthworks. (SN 996098 & SO 004102) 8. Penmaillard round cairns. (SO 010096 & SO 013096) 9. Site of Hirwaun Ironworks (SN 957058)  
 LLWYDCOED. Hut circles and enclosures on Buarth Maen. (SO 013053)  
 MOUNTAIN ASH. Ring cairn 350m. West of Penrhiw Caradog, Llanwonno. (ST 042980)

From page 1.

Leaving the village area, "this abundant garden" (had he heard the phrase "Gardd Aberdar"?) Clutterbuck now started off on the next stage of his journey and thought the upper part of the Aberdare valley a barren and uncultivated expanse, "varied but in dreariness". After nearly a mile and a half he crossed "a tramroad running north-west towards the ironworks known as Aberdare furnace". However, the only iron works in existence at the time was at Hirwaun, and the tramroad which Clutterbuck crossed must have been Glover's tramroad from Bryngwyn to the Hirwaun works. Following this incorrect reference to the Aberdare furnace Clutterbuck now makes the curious statement that "at this (ironworks) a canal commences and proceeding south east joins that of Merthyr about six miles above Newbridge" (i.e. Pontypridd) He is obviously referring to the Aberdare canal which, though sanctioned by an act of 1793, did not come into use until 1812. And of course its terminus was not near any ironworks.

After crossing the tramroad Clutterbuck evidently proceeded in the direction of Hirwaun and Rhigos, following a "long and straight road perfectly flat and open... newly made through swampy peat and composed of a white aggregate stone", material that was so angular and hard that he was obliged to dismount to relieve the horse's feet. This is the first eye-witness description of a part of the Abercynon to Glyn Neath turnpike which was authorised by an act of 1793. It was built piecemeal and probably never finished despite the passing of a further act in 1815.

On arriving at his next destination, Pontneathvaughan, he was so delighted with its surroundings and the streams and waterfalls of the area that he spent two days in the locality.

During the remainder of the week he passed through Neath ("a poor, dirty town"), Britton Ferry, and thence via Pyle and Cowbridge back to Cardiff. Clutterbuck's inaccuracies were probably largely due to a language problem. Then perhaps there may have been slips of memory as the original manuscript is a neatly written and well bound book, probably written up later from rough notes made each day. What a pity he could not have lingered a little longer in Aberdare and left us with more detailed information about the place and its inhabitants as they were nearly 200 years ago!

EGW.

-25th. ANNIVERSARY-

Please note that we are now taking orders for our limited edition anniversary plate, currently being designed and produced by Nantgarw pottery.

1971



1996

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