



HANES

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Newsletter of the Cynon Valley History Society

Cylchlythyr Cymdeithas Hanes Cwm Cynon

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MUSEUM TO HONOUR HISTORIANS

RCT Borough Council has decided that two rooms in the Aberdare Museum will be named after deceased local historians to celebrate their contribution to our knowledge of the past. A proposal adopted at a recent meeting of the Council will result in the Education Room being named the Ivor Parry Room and the Temporary Exhibition Room being designated the John Davies Room. This arises from a letter written by the History Society some years ago to the former Cynon Valley Borough Council.

The letter pointed out that Aberdare's most prominent historian, Mr W W Price had been commemorated by the naming of the "W W Price Research Room" in the central library, and it was fitting that the Reverend Ivor Parry and Mr John Davies (known as "Pendar") should also be remembered, as both had made valuable contributions to local history both in talks and by way of articles in the local press. John Davies, originally a miner then a School Attendance Officer, had begun writing articles in *The Leader* in 1924 which ceased only with his death in 1940. Appropriately, he had campaigned for the setting up of a museum for many years.

Robert Ivor Parry took a first class honours degree in history before undertaking theological studies which eventually led to his induction as pastor of Siloa Congregational Chapel Aberdare. In 1964 he resigned his pastorate and became Head of Religious Studies at the Aberdare Boys' Grammar School. Mr Parry's status among "serious" historians is guaranteed by his historical and theological writings in both English and Welsh, but he is best known locally for his courses of lectures on local history and for his "Historicus" column which ran for several years in the *Leader*.

History Society chairman Bryn Davies says "The Society has campaigned for a museum for many years, following in the steps of John Davies. Now we have the museum and it is very fitting that his name and that of Ivor Parry will be commemorated in this way".



The Rev R I Parry MA



Mr John Davies ("Pendar")

EDITORIAL



The Aberdare museum opened its doors to the public on the 5th of June when in an incomplete condition, but it is likely to be ready in time for the official opening which is to be held shortly. The museum is on the site of the former Gadlys ironworks which was the fourth to be built in this area (if one includes Hirwaun). The ironworks dates from 1827 and by 1854 had four blast furnaces which produced their last iron in 1876. By accident rather than by design the masonry of the furnaces remains intact though precarious, thus making them important industrial relics. A nearby blast engine house also survives and is used as offices. It used to be thought that the museum building was the casting house which was built in front of the furnaces but it is more likely that the building is a former wagon works built on the site of the casting house.

Whatever the origin of the building, we hope that the people of Aberdare will visit the museum and continue to bring along and donate objects of interest. The museum report on page 3 mentions aspects of our local history which are at present under-represented. The Editor would like to add to these a plea for the donation of artefacts related to the iron making industry.

The Editor apologises for the late arrival of this HANES due to the pressure of work.

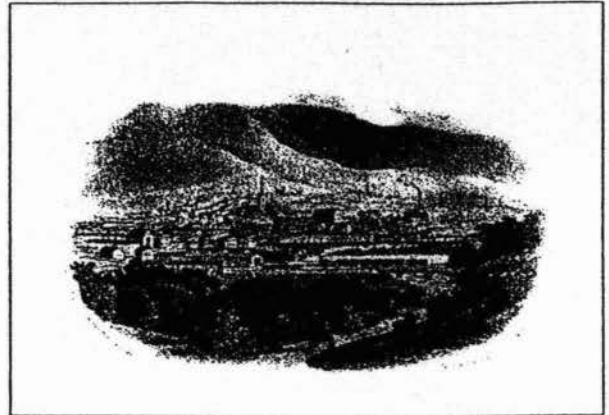
The Editor would be pleased to receive questions on local history and will attempt to answer them with the aid of local experts. Additions and corrections to articles which have appeared will also be welcomed. For example, when did Brookfield Villa cease to be used as a nursing home?

CADW STEPS FORWARD

CADW has intervened in the case of the Gelli Isaf tramroad bridge which, together with the Hirwaun causeway, are scheduled ancient monuments. Readers of HANES No 14 were told that part of the arch of the Gelli Isaf bridge had fallen into the river and that the stability of the bridge was at risk.

Now CADW has written to RCT pointing out the risk and asking them to take remedial measures. The bridge carries a right of way for pedestrians and RCT is therefore obliged to keep it in order. It is to be hoped that this will accelerate the repairs which are already in programme but subject to priority and available finance.

THE WAY WE WERE THEN No 8



An undated extract from the "Aberdare Times" is headed "Local Notes (from the local stage)" and runs as follows. *"One is apt to make allowances for discrepancies in plays for it is a most difficult thing to avoid impracticabilities. But when one is asked to believe that men would endure a killing thirst when the scenery in the rear shows plainly that there is a flourishing river wending its way close by, one is apt to be very chary indeed. This remark we tender gratis to those in Aberdare whom it may concern."*

Everyone knows that street names as well as place names generally often have links with local history. Sometimes streets can be dated by their association with historical events (Alma St, Waterloo St.) or with the family names of the landlord (Harriet St, John St, Bute St, Herbert St.). The ground upon which Maes y Dre is built belonged originally to the Dean and Chapter of Gloucester (i.e. the cathedral. (See HANES No 5). The Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian for 28 January 1854 tells us that they had obtained powers to grant building leases on the property and an immediate explanation for Gloucester St, Canon St and Dean St is apparent. But what about Whitcombe St, Hall St, Seymour St, Weatherall St, Pembroke St, and Bankes St? The first two were named after the solicitor and surveyor to the Dean and Chapter. Weatherall St (properly "Wetherell") and Seymour St are named after Canons of Gloucester Cathedral. The naming of one street after another Canon, Dr Jeune, the master of Pembroke College Oxford was intended but the street was named Pembroke instead. I do not know the origin of Bankes St.

Dean St was regarded as the principal street and this was on the course of the footpath leading to the church which formerly ran through the area, of which there now remains only the lane which divides the old rates office and the health centre, and the gap with a grave in it in the houses across the road.

Glancing again at the CMG it is a possibility that the anonymous author of an article in the Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian of 24 November 1854 was the disputatious vicar of Aberdare, the Reverend John Griffith. It stated; *"There have been some severe cases of cholera here this week. We hope, however it will not become epidemic. It broke out at that plague spot in the town known as Green Bach. This is*

a collection of houses near the old church. It is a literal fact that twenty two houses have been built on a spot of ground no larger than that which is usually occupied by four cottages. In these twenty two cottages are lodged about 140 human beings. They were built by a Mr Euston Richards in three or four rows. Whenever there is any epidemic or any illness in the parish this is sure to be the first scene of it. Here the smallpox raged most; here typhus each winter slaughters her numerous victims; here the cholera has now asserted its reign".

There now follows supporting evidence extracted from Rammell's report-see Old Aberdare Vol 1.

It was absurd to say that Green Fach (which many of us will remember) was built on a plot big enough for only four cottages. The well-known Baptist minister, the Reverend Thomas Price, replied to the accusations in the next issue of the CMG, stating that there were 19 houses, not 22, and they were of the usual size except that they had no gardens. They had privies "at a distance" and drains running into the river Dare. He denied that Green Fach (as it was afterwards known) had been the place where cholera struck first.

MUSEUM REPORT

Following the opening of the front-of-house areas of the museum on June the 5th, work has progressed apace on the completion of the final phase of the project, that of the main social history gallery.

As visitors to the museum can see for themselves, construction work on the gallery displays is virtually complete. Most areas just need the finishing touches prior to the installation of the cases, which are on site. All electrical work is complete, as are the floor finishes. This leaves only the audio-visual and multi-media computer units to be installed before the graphics can be placed in situ. Once this is complete the final dressing of the gallery and the installation of artefacts within the cases can be undertaken.

If work progresses without any hold-ups then it should be only a matter of weeks before all works on site are complete.

To coincide with the completion of the main gallery additional works will see the final detailing of the shop/reception area, the art gallery and mezzanine temporary exhibition gallery. The museum will be officially beginning its exhibition programme within these areas to coincide with the completion of the whole project. Visitor response to the museum has been very positive since our opening. The opportunity to follow the work of adaptation on the main gallery has been something many people have taken up through regular visits. There has been renewed interest both in the work of the museum and its future development, with an increase in the number of artefacts and items of information coming into the museum.

The museum is continuing to look for artefacts and photographs that reflect life in our valley over the last few centuries, though a temporary shortage of storage space means that the museum is not currently acquiring large or heavy artefacts. The museum is particularly interested in artefacts and photographs from the Abercynon area as well as material relating to the theme of crime and punishment. Anyone who has any material that they think may be of

interest to the museum should contact Gareth Gill on 886729. The museum is closed on Wednesdays but open from 10.00 - 4.30 on the other days of the week.

WAR MEMORIALS SURVEY

The Imperial War Museum is working on a survey of war memorials in the country as part of "The National Inventory of War Memorials" and has asked the Aberdare museum for help. Naturally, at this stage in the commissioning of the museum, resources cannot be devoted to projects not directly connected with the work in hand and Chris Wilson, the curator, has written to our secretary Eric Rose asking whether any members would be interested in taking on the project, which consists of documenting the war memorials in the area. Support such as copying, and photographic assistance can be provided by the museum.

If anyone wishes to help please get in touch with Chris at the museum (Tel 886729).



CAN YOU TELL ME? No 8

Question

There are Memorial Halls in various parts of the country, usually dedicated to the remembrance of the dead of the Great War. The Aberdare Memorial Hall was, I think, too old for this. What was its significance?

Answer

It is a pity that the past tense has to be used in respect of the Memorial Hall, for I think that it was suitable for a town centre museum. The hall was opened in 1895 and dedicated to the memory of the Rev Canon Richard Bowen Jenkins who in his time at Aberdare added 7 extra churches to the Anglican strength. He was vicar from 1883 to 1893 when he retired through ill-health. He must be distinguished from an earlier namesake, the Rev Canon John David Jenkins, vicar of Aberdare from 1870 - 1876. It was believed that he came to Aberdare worth about £50,000 but died a poor man, having been bled white by the "puddlers and other unprincipled people" who told him hard luck stories to get money for drink.

Question

Were the Llewellyns of Bwlfa associated with a nursing home?

Answer

In 1924 a public collection was made to suitably commemorate W M Llewellyn's services to the community. "WM" announced that he would use the money to establish a District Nursing Association in the upper part of the valley which came into being as the Elizabeth Llewellyn Nursing Association. This resulted in the setting up of a nursing home in the house called Brookfield Villa on Hirwaun Road, which was the first house on the left going towards Hirwaun after the turn-off for Cwmdare. The purpose of the new home was to render assistance in the form of nursing and the provision of garments and nourishment to necessitous cases, and particularly when the mother of a large family is handicapped by ill-health in attending to her domestic duties.

Question

Who was the Moss of Moss Row?

Answer

Edward Moss was from Cheltenham and was one of those who interested themselves in the South Wales iron industry with a view to making some money. In 1823 he owned "Moss's Row" and leased them to the proprietors of the nearby Abernant ironworks, namely William Thompson, Thomas Fothergill, George and John Scale, and William Forman, who also owned Aberdare ironworks. He probably owned Moss House as well. The 16 houses, built in 1804, were leased for £24 a year for 75 years. There is a reference somewhere to him making a survey of some sort. His daughter Maria, aged 6 months, is buried in St. John's churchyard. Space was left on the tombstone for further entries but none were made, indicating that perhaps Moss and the rest of his family returned to Cheltenham and ended their days there.

BOOKS

The Committee has authorised a reprinting of the "Children in the Mines" booklet. Though it has long since sold out, there is still a demand for the first impression which came out in 1987. The reprint will be on sale in November.

The Editor's "Aberdare - the Railways and Tramroads" has appeared since the last edition of HANES. The book is on sale in local shops priced at £14 and is available by post from the author at £16. The book contains 225 pages in which are 147 photographs and 12 maps. There is an extensive index and a gazetteer with many grid references.

CONGRATULATIONS

Members will wish to congratulate the History Society's Treasurer, Ken Collins, upon becoming a graduate of the University of Glamorgan at Treforest. When a Divisional Officer in the Fire Service, Ken retired early due to back injury. After taking A Levels at Aberdare College, he proceeded to the University and has just been awarded an Honours degree in Humanities.

ABERDARE AND THE CINEMA

The plaque commemorating William Hagggar which was unveiled on the wall of the Aberdare market building in 1997 epitomises his connection with Aberdare and the growing realisation of his important role in the early history of the moving picture industry. (See "William Hagggar, Pioneer of the Cinema in Wales" in "Old Aberdare" Vol VI). Hagggar made over 40 films, some of which would have been made locally, and these would have been a fascinating local archive, but unfortunately very few of the films survive. Though these were the first, they were not the only films made locally. Apart from a few documentaries at least two film dramas incorporated scenes shot in the Cynon Valley area. In August 1939 a small film unit arrived in the village of Llanwonno and filmed five actors dressed as "villagers" starting on a march (supposedly to London) where they were to make representations about an unspecified cause. The film featured the famous actor and singer Paul Robeson, who did not take part in the Llanwonno filming. The inhabitants of Llanwonno came from miles away to see the spectacle and over a hundred were enlisted as extras to cheer the deputation on its way. The film was to be released under the title "David and Goliath".

Crowds also turned up in Cwmaman and Cwmdare when scenes were shot in 1948 for "The Three Weird Sisters", the script for which was written by Dylan Thomas. The leading lady was an actress called Nova Pilbeam whose exertions did not succeed in averting what was afterwards described as a very bad film.

The Aberdare Leader for 18th January 1936 contains an article about a Trecynon boy who took the role of Captain George in a Hollywood film entitled "Clive of India" and was recognised on screen by friends when the film came to Aberdare. He was Lewis Jones (stage name Philip Dare) of 16 Bell St, son of Mr Harry Jones, billiard marker at the Hirwaun billiard hall. Lewis had had acting experience locally before he went to America and had a good singing voice. The article went on to say that he was soon to take part in "Folies Bergere" with Maurice Chevalier and Merle Oberon. Does anyone know details of his ensuing career?

Finally, the scene changes to a bus in Tottenham Court Road, London, at around the end of September 1934. Aberdare's MP George Hall is aboard and making his way to the House of Commons. He is spoken to by a lady who obviously knows who he is, but he does not recognise her, and is obliged to confess his quandary "I am Mrs Charles Stanton," she replied, much to Hall's surprise, for Charles Butt Stanton had been MP for Aberdare from 1915 to 1922 when George Hall had taken his seat from him. Afterwards he had become a publican in London. In the conversation that followed, Hall asked Mrs Stanton what her husband was doing, and was even more surprised when he was told that Stanton was "acting in the films", and had recently appeared as a bishop in a film called "Nell Gwynne".