

# HANES



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

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## THE RED BUS MYSTERY

### THE STORY OF WAR-TIME LOANS

When older people start reminiscing, the question of the red double-deckers that ran through the streets of the Aberdare district some time during the war often crops up. What were they and why did they come here are two of the questions often raised. They were red and had an open staircase at the back just like London buses. AND LONDON BUSES THEY WERE!



*Copyright the Omnibus Society, courtesy A.B. Cross.*

This is bus No ST986, one of the four which came to Aberdare. She arrived in February 1942, and made her way back to London in February 1944. However this photo was taken in 1934.

The story starts at the time of the London blitz when several of London's buses were destroyed by enemy action. Several of the transport concerns in unaffected parts of the country lent buses to the capital until new stock could be obtained. Afterwards some of London's reserve stock of buses were sent to help out in the provinces ostensibly to take the place of buses destroyed when the enemy took his aerial offensive to those places. However, in the case of the South Wales area the real reason was probably the need for extra transport to serve the Royal Ordnance Factories such as the one at Rhigos.

A total of 401 buses were involved in these loans of which 291 were rather elderly vehicles of the ST class which were in storage. Aberdare received four of them and their fleet numbers and registration numbers are given below together with their month of issue and month of return.

ST851	GJ2027	8/43	2/44
ST968	GK6244	2/42	2/44
ST989	GK6265	7/42	2/44
ST2002	GK6278	7/42	9/43

Other local bus companies which were lent

STs were the Bryn Motor Co Pontllanfraith.

Cardiff Corporation, Merthyr Corporation (9), Pontypridd UDC (8), Red and White services Chepstow (15), Rhondda Transport, Porth (17), and the West Monmouthshire Omnibus Board, Blackwood.

Though most of the buses had returned by the end of 1944, Hants and Dorset hung on to the last two of their borrowing until early 1948. Of the four "Aberdare" buses, 851 and 1002 were scrapped in 1945 after being damaged by the blast from a V2 rocket. 968 and 989 went back into service and were scrapped in 1948.

Due to wartime restrictions photographs of London buses during the war are few and far between and ST 968 is the only one of the "Aberdare four" of which a photograph is known to exist and that was taken before the war in circa 1934. Has anyone any photos of one of these buses when they were in Aberdare?

At least two STs have survived and are in preservation. One is at the London Bus Preservation Trust's Cobham Bus Museum and the other is in the reserve collection at London Transport's Acton Depot.



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2 Bus ST 868 was one of 12 buses loaned to Crosville services at Chester and so was never seen in South Wales. This photo was taken outside Gillingham Street Garage in Victoria in June 1949 and clearly shows the outside stair.

## EDITORIAL

In the library report in this issue we read that more space is to be made available for the local studies collection which is already probably the best of the south Wales libraries local collections. The progress in library services and in particular in the number of books, documents and photographs which comprise the local studies collection has been amazing. There was no local studies collection in the old library at the junction of Seymour St and High St apart from files of old newspapers, which were sent for salvage during the war. The only service provided apart from loans was the provision in the reading room of daily papers in which the racing news had been obliterated. The library was said to have been the last closed access library in the country, with a serving hatch through which books were requested and issued, thereby causing the maximum inconvenience to both staff and borrowers.

Open access was introduced and in 1949 a move to Siloa Hall took place. Then, on the 25<sup>th</sup> of September 1963 a new library was opened nearby, and only then was it possible for the librarian, the

late Mr G I John, to build a local history collection, which was based on a very substantial donation of manuscripts and books from the late Mr W W Price, whose eminence in the field of Aberdare's history has not been surpassed.

Mr John's interest in photography formed the basis of the photography collection, which though still extensive, has attracted the attention of thieves. Our library is an asset for which we ought to be profoundly grateful.

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The Secretary has received a letter from a Mr Terry Keegan who is seeking persons who are interested in milestones. Mr Keegan has enclosed a brief explaining the need to preserve and in some cases to recover old milestones, hundreds of which were lost, destroyed or put to other uses when roads were diverted or widened. The greatest loss occurred in the war when the Government ordered that they should be defaced or destroyed so as to be of no assistance to an invading enemy. If any member is interested, Mr. Keegan lives at The Oxleys, Tenbury Rd, Clows Top, Kidderminster, Worcs, DY14 9HE. Tel 01299 832358

## Death at Loos

Surname	Forename	Rank	Batt	Regt	Died	Age	Location	Mem Cemy	Address of next of kin	Service No
<u>Burt</u>	<u>Edward</u>	Pte	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Gordon Highlanders	25 09 1915	21 KIA*	Loos	Loos Memorial	126 Brynmair Rd Godreaman	11153
<u>Roberts</u>	<u>Archibald</u>	Pte	2 <sup>nd</sup>	ditto	ditto	21 KIA*	Loos	ditto	116 Brynmair Rd Godreaman	11152

\*KIA - Killed in Action

The above bare statistics tell the poignant story of two Godreaman friends in the First World War. They came from the same street, they joined up at the same time (consecutive service numbers), and they were killed on the same day attacking the French mining village of Loos. They have no known grave and their names are recorded on the Loos Memorial. Ten thousand British troops took part in the attack and eight thousand became casualties. The commander-in-Chief, Sir John French was subsequently relieved of his command.

The Aberdare Leader of the 15<sup>th</sup> of October 1915 states that the two young men enlisted in the Royal Scots Greys but were afterwards transferred to the Gordon Highlanders.

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## MUSEUM REPORT

The museum officially launched its contemporary art programme in February with the Sunseekers exhibition. Alongside this we have been running children's art workshops during school holidays as well as the occasional weekend. These have been well received and overbooked with children having the opportunity to try a range of activities, from making pewter jewellery, puppets, felt collages through to ceramics and print making. We hope to be able to continue these workshops throughout the year giving as many children as possible the opportunity to participate in arts activities.

We will be launching our programme of mezzanine gallery exhibitions this month with an exhibition which focuses on the changing role of women in the home and at work over the last two hundred years. The exhibition, called "A woman's work is never done" will be on show for six months with associated education activities linked to the national curriculum.

Last month Mr Doug Williams kindly gave the museum staff a talk on old Aberdare and the Gadlys Ironworks which the staff greatly enjoyed.

C.W.

Preparation for war

**DID YOU SEE THE FRENCH BOMBERS?**

*This was the heading of an article which appeared in the Aberdare Leader of the 26<sup>th</sup> of August 1939. The article read:-* Aberdare and district residents, wakened by a great roar of heavy aircraft over the town in the early hours of Thursday morning last, saw a large number of what looked like bombing planes pass over. Later in the day they found that they were bombers-part of the great French air-fleet that staged a "raid" on Britain, some passing from Liverpool on to Cardiff and Bristol-crossing over this valley.

At Hirwaun, Cwmdare, Llwydcoed, Trecynon, Town and Aberaman early wakers saw them pass.

Our Cwmaman correspondent writes:-

The village has always been looked upon as a "dead end" from a road transport standpoint. It seems however to be a No 1 aerial route judging by the week's sky traffic. Up to a few months ago the sight of a solitary plane flying overhead was a rare occurrence and evoked only passing interest, but recently and in particular during last week the locality has been well "on the map" aeronautically

On Thursday morning between the hours of 5.30 and 6.30 residents were woken by the roar of aircraft, which plainly indicated that something different from usual was passing overhead.

Windows soon became grandstands and workers who were getting ready to leave their homes rushed out to gaze skywards on seven huge bombers, which passed over twice in opposite directions at a low altitude. This occasioned much speculation, which changed to great excitement when it became known later in the day that squadrons of French

aircraft had "bombed" Cardiff that same morning

The animated discussion still continues amongst residents as to whether it was our allies craft that were seen. It is almost certain that it was.

On Friday a formation flight of nine other-planes passed on their way overhead and were watched by practically everyone. Then on the evening of the same day was witnessed another unique air scena when a large flock of seagulls came over and gave a two-hour flying display overhead from mountain to mountain the like of which has never been seen before not even by the oldest resident.

The visit of the bombers has done one important thing, made residents air-conscious. Several of the air-wardens have been approached with the query "Where are we to go to in the case of raids?" especially from those who live in close proximity to the local collieries.

*The events described above happened not long before the war started and so they have no connection with the great flypast which occurred over Aberdare one night in 1944. Wishing to get to the bottom of this I asked for help in the columns of the Leader in March 1991 as did another person writing in the Western Mail in May 1994, but all responses were contradictory. One person however was certain as to the date of the event and I am satisfied it was on the night of the 11<sup>th</sup> of May 1944. It is now virtually certain that an hour's work in the Public Record Office at Kew would uncover the explanation for this event, which was something, which will never be forgotten by all those who saw it. If any member is likely to visit that area and would like to help I will furnish him/her with the necessary briefing. Editor.*

### LIBRARY REPORT.

Work is now underway to expand the space available for housing the local studies collection in Aberdare. A number of volumes have already been moved to a room adjacent to that presently used, and we plan to develop this area to allow for future expansion of the collection. Recent acquisitions of note include a number of volumes received from the old Mid Glamorgan County Libraries. Many of these are literary works from local authors, but there are also a number of volumes produced by Aberdare publishers. In common with many of the locally published volumes in the collection these are Welsh language publications. A number of 2<sup>nd</sup>. (c1900) and 3<sup>rd</sup>. (c1920) edition Ordnance Survey maps of the area have been purchased to fill some gaps in our collection.

A.P.