

# HANES

Issue Number 28



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Autumn 2004

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

## WAITING UPON THE SPIRIT

The year 2004 represents the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1904 Religious Revival in which the Cynon Valley featured significantly. Its main protagonist, Evan John Roberts, of Loughor, near Llanelli, made Aberdare the venue of the first of a series of visits to a number of Welsh and English towns in the winter and spring of 1904/1905 when the Revival was at its height.

The term, "Waiting upon the Spirit" became Evan Roberts's watchword. Its significance lay in the fact that he replaced the authoritative, doctrinal Calvinism of his day with an emphasis upon the Third member of the Trinity, The Holy Spirit. This refocusing of religious influence was revolutionary for it threw the spotlight on spiritual experience and the emotions rather than on theological dogma. The impact was all the more resounding in that it was embodied in the person of a handsome twenty-six year old who made it his practice to be accompanied in the pulpit by young women converts.

Completely self-effacing, Evan Roberts claimed to be but a medium for the Holy Spirit. Consequently preaching played a subordinate role to impromptu hymn-singing and extempore prayer, mainly from the congregation, with Evan Roberts remaining silent as he "waited upon the Spirit"

His first service in Aberdare was held at Bryn Seion Methodist Chapel, Trecynon on Sunday, November 13<sup>th</sup> 1904. The event has been described as follows:

*"The sober, sedate Calvinistic congregation that gathered in Mount Seion that morning received a shock. They looked askance when they saw their Minister's place occupied by a young man, accompanied by such youthful maidens. Instead of announcing the customary hymn for the commencement of the service one of the young women burst forth in spiritual song expressing her new experience, tears streaming down her cheeks..."* Evan Roberts *"remained absolutely silent...his body shook perceptively as tears coursed down his pale cheeks. Then...strange stillness fell upon the people, like the quite presaging an electric storm. It soon broke when one of the proudest members of that assembly fell on her knees in agonising prayer and unrestrainedly confessing her sins...others followed rapidly..."* (D. Matthews pp.29-30)

This meeting, which "lasted all day without respite", was followed by many others at chapels throughout Aberdare and Mountain Ash in the days and months that followed. Services even spilled over into private houses, public houses, underground and even Mountain Ash and Abercynon railway stations!

The Western Mail, which extensively covered the progress of the revival and was later accused by The Aberdare Leader of being its "Booming Agent", recorded its moral repercussions as including a reduction in crime and disorderly conduct, whilst prayer meetings held underground even tended to subdue trade union activity.

This extraordinary religious phenomena can probably be attributed to such factors as crowd psychology, economic depression (the winter of 1904/5 was one of gruelling economic and physical suffering in South Wales), its entertainment value to people living drab and monotonous lives, and even Celtic gullibility and predilection for the emotional and the imaginative

By the end of 1905 the Revival had all but petered out, but it is an event which has been recorded permanently in the annals of Welsh Nonconformist history.

*Marian Morgan.*

### SOURCES

David Matthews, I Saw The Welsh Revival, Moody Press, Chicago, 1951, pp.29-30.  
The Western Mail, November 22<sup>nd</sup>.1904, January, February 1905.  
The Aberdare Leader, November 18<sup>th</sup>.1905.

## WHO WAS EVAN ROBERTS?

### FACT

Born in 1878, the evangelist, Evan Roberts was the leader of a religious revival which swept through Wales in 1904 and the year following. He worked in a coalmine and as a blacksmith's apprentice before training for the ministry with the Calvinistic Methodists. After undergoing an intense religious experience at Blaenannerch in 1904, he became the focus of a spiritual awakening at his home church, Moriah, in Loughor, near Llanelli. The revival spread rapidly in the valleys of Glamorgan, in Liverpool and in parts of north Wales but its enthusiasm died away in the winter of 1905-6, during which its leader suffered a mental breakdown. No intellectual and a poor orator, he has been criticized for an overemphasis on emotional conversions. Unlike many revivalists, however, he cared little for wealth or fame and his example is still revered in Evangelic circles in Wales. Evan Roberts died in 1951.

### FICTION.

The Rhondda novelist Rhys Davies (1903-1978) chose as the subject of his first book, *The Withered Root*, the story of Reuben Daniels, a handsome young Welsh-speaking collier who leaves the pit and joins a revivalist sect known as the Corinthians. Daniels goes on to preach throughout Wales at large and emotional meetings. Eventually, however, sick and disillusioned, he returns to his mother's home to die, the conflict between spirit, mind and flesh having brought about his destruction.

(With acknowledgement to *The Oxford Companion to the Literature of Wales*.)

### OTHER VISITORS TO THE TOWN

We have no doubt that the Aberdare of the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and early 20<sup>th</sup> was a vibrant and busy place, and originally must have been very like the frontier towns of the old wild west – you just would not know who would turn up next! Much anticipated travelling shows, circuses, menageries and strolling stage players apart, there was phenomena such as “Sequah” the Medicine Man, the ageless quack doctor and mountebank, a survival from the 16<sup>th</sup> century country fairs. He arrived here in August 1889 stocked with gallons of “Prairie Flower”, and “Sequah's Oil”. This is how his product was puffed in *The Aberdare Times*.

#### SEQUAH SPEAKS.

To the Inhabitants of Aberdare  
On Saturday Evening August 31<sup>st</sup>. at 8 o'clock.

#### FAREWELL ADDRESS

Sequah will deliver his  
Farewell Address at 8.00 o'clock  
This is your Last Chance

Don't Miss this Opportunity

#### SECURE THE MARVELLOUS REMEDIES

They will keep for twenty years  
They do not Sour or Ferment.

*Better than Bread in many of your Households.*

Sequah Speaks Daily on the Vacant Ground

Adjoining the Market Hall, Aberdare

Every afternoon at 3, and every evening at 8.

**ADMISSION FREE.**



**SEQUAH.** – Sequah is about to take his departure from our midst. During his stay thousands have flocked to hear him nightly and to witness some very marvellous instances of his skill in curing rheumatic afflictions. Perhaps one of the most noted was that of an old man seventy years of age, who had been for many months scarcely able to move his limbs and had to be carried to the platform; but after treatment he was able to walk about amongst those assembled and ascended the platform without any assistance. Another of Sequah's patients, Mr. Rees Williams, testified to the great benefit he had derived from Sequah's treatment, Mr. Williams being well known in the place, as having been for many years a great sufferer. (**Local Intelligence – The Aberdare Times 31/8/1889.**)

That same year, 1889, The British American Dental Association of London announced its intention of visiting Aberdare every Tuesday to supply artificial teeth of “*Exquisite beauty and true to nature in appearance, comfort, and mastication*” Prices place these benefits within reach of all.

Attendance at Mr. Abel Dance's (Grocer and Confectioner!) 2 Cardiff Street, Tuesday 10 to 5 o'clock.

## **ABERDARE'S IMPROVING DAILY.**

*"Both producers and shopkeepers adulterate all foodstuffs in a disgraceful manner, with a scandalous regard for health"* (The Conditions of the Working Class in England by Friedrich Engels.)

### **PRIME SAUSAGES**

*Are always obtainable at the Shop of*

**THOMAS A. LEWIS,**

**BUTCHER,**

**30, COMMERCIAL PLACE, ABERDARE,**

**WHO** has just received a new improved Meat Chopping **MACHINE**, of the well-known Rowland & Andrews' make, the arrangements of which prevent grease and dirt from coming into contact with the meat.

(The Aberdare Times 8th April 1865)

*"Bread is adulterated with mashed potatoes, alum and sometimes with sulphate of Copper (this is) injurious to health and even poisonous."* (The evidence of a doctor contained in the Report of the Select Committee Appointed to Inquire into the Adulteration of Food, Drinks and Drugs. First Report 1854-1855)

## **THE GADLYS MODEL BAKERY CO., GADLYS ROAD.**

Recent revelations by sanitary inspectors and others show a state of affairs in bakeries conducted upon old-fashioned principles nothing less than appalling, and sufficient to make one forswear the "staff of life" forever. In order to keep a bakery in proper sanitary condition, the utmost care is necessary, while all the appliances in use must be of those improved descriptions that are easily cleansed and disinfected. Aberdare can now boast an establishment which embodies all the most modern inventions and improvements devoted to the baking trade. It is known as the Gadlys Model Bakery Company, whose operations, commenced here two years ago, have been attended with the success the enterprise merited. The bakery is situated in the Gadlys Road and is very commodious and well-built. It is fitted with capacious patent "Decker" ovens, and all the most recent improvements, and is kept in a perfect state of cleanliness and sanitary condition. A very large number of thoroughly experienced bakers, confectioners and pastry-cooks are employed, and every facility exists for the prompt execution of the most extensive orders. Only the finest flour and purest ingredients are used in the manufacture of the firm's specialities, which are all of the most wholesome description. Beyond making vast quantities of plain and fancy bread, the Model Bakery manufactures cakes, buns, pastry, wedding cakes etc., of the choicest kinds. These, along with their plain and fancy breads, they supply to confectioners, grocers and private families throughout the district, extending from Penderyn to Penrhiwceiber, where they make daily deliveries, and all orders are executed with the least delay. The bakery has received the unqualified approval of the most eminent sanitary authorities, and has no doubt met a long-felt want in the neighbourhood. The business is under the personal management of Messrs. Evan Jones and E.G. Davies, whose enterprise called it into existence.

(Aberdare - Illustrated, 1892.)

## THE REST OF 1904-1905.

The words "Revival" and "Evan Roberts" would have been on most people's minds and lips throughout those dramatic months linking 1904 and 1905, and other events were invariably overshadowed by the many meetings and conversions that took place in the valley, however normal life for thousands continued, and our last page will be devoted to the other happenings of the period. A few of the more colourful and bizarre incidents of the Revival are also included.

- Statutory Notice was given of the Aberdare U.D.C.'s intention of applying to Parliament for a Bill to construct tramway routes in the town.
- A big fire at Gadlys Foundry caused £2,500 worth of damage.
- Public Dances were held at the Market Hall. Aberaman Silver Band was in attendance. Admission 6d. Couples 9d.
- Aberdare Valley "was ablaze with Revival" (26<sup>th</sup> November 1904)
- The death of Jimmy Michael the cyclist was reported (December 3<sup>rd</sup>.)
- The Revival caused discord at Llwydcoed, and there were distressing cases of Religious Mania at Cwmdare and Cwmaman.
- Tickets for the "Great Hamburg Lottery" were on sale in the town. The top prize was £30,000.
- A lecture on practical Bee keeping (illustrated by lantern slides) took place at the County Schools.
- A young male member of Ynyslwyd Baptist Church, Aberaman claimed to have perceived Christ in bodily presence and prayed with great fervour that others might see Him also.
- Elements of commercialism crept into the Revival. Haggard & Sons' Royal Electric Bioscope announced a Grand Sacred Pictorial Entertainment on Christmas day, and Lendon Berry, the photographer, offered life-like copyright portraits of Evan Roberts and The Lady Evangelists at 1/- each (wholesale terms on request!)
- Opening of the new Public Offices at Mountain Ash by Lord Aberdare.
- The Mountain Ash Fanciers held their Annual Exhibition of Dogs, Poultry, Pigeons, Cage birds, Rabbits, Cats and Cavies at the New Pavilion, Mountain Ash.
- A grateful pauper wrote to the Guardians thanking them for the extra Christmas relief that he had received.
- 141 people signed the pledge at Horeb, Llwydcoed. Nearly every member of the church were then abstainers.
- Midnight Revival services were held in the streets of Trecynon. Processions approached the main public houses and there was much praying and singing in front of them.
- An Aberdare fishmonger received a consignment of mackerel on a Sunday and was obliged to open his shop to sell it. This incident was followed by great excitement at Cwmbach when a 20-year-old male Revivalist said it made his heart bleed to see members buy mackerel on a Sunday. He proceeded to pray for the buyers and the vendor, when a member of the congregation said the House of God was not the place to discuss the selling of fish or anything else.
- Family mourners returning to the home of a deceased lady immediately after the funeral ransacked the house and discovered £1200 in gold coin hidden in a cupboard. The woman's sons were dumfounded, as they believed their mother was living on the verge of poverty.
- Drunken revellers held mock Revival Meetings. One took place in Canon Street. The group paraded the length of the street singing a parody of the Revivalist Anthem "Throw Out The Life Line", stopping outside public houses along the route. The police were sent for but no action was taken.
- Within 2 to 3 weeks of Roberts's arrival the district was in a state of intense religious fervour and excitement. Other evangelists were not slow to try to gain converts for their cause. In mid December Gen. Booth of the Salvation Army arrived in the town. He was afforded a tumultuous welcome; on stepping off the train at the TVR (Low Level) Station. He was met by crowds and a band, which struck up the tune "Huddersfield". Booth was to speak at a number of venues in the town principally The New Theatre (Palladium) His message was "I want to bring all the people to Salvation."
- Lloyd George M.P. contacted the town stating "All those who love Wales must wish the Revival God Speed"
- The established Church which would otherwise have probably ignored the phenomena of the Revival did hold a series of National Purity Crusades at the Memorial Hall (Silver Collection)
- Public houses at Robertstown (The Great Western, Britannia and Gadlys Arms) were stormed by Revivalists.
- In January a horse owned by Tom Dix (Cab proprietor) died on the spot near Abernant Station.
- A new Music Hall The Theatre of Varieties opened in the Constitutional Club. Earlier Trecynon Revivalists met at the top of Canon Street opposite the club, and sang, "Throw out the Lifeline" and prayers were offered for those frequenting the club.

*In our next (Christmas) edition of Hanes we will look at the events of the Great War, in the town and the trenches, in December 1914, and tell you some local ghost stories!!!*

**Published by Cynon Valley History Society.  
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Registered Charity No.51014.**