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HANES

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THE WINTER OF 1947 AND THE HISTORY OF PENRHIWCEIBER PART TWO

In this issue we look at the terrible winter of 1947 and continue our look at the history of Penrhiwceiber. I have included only one notable person: the Member of Parliament, Mr George Hall. I will include other notable people in the next issue.



Winter 1947

For the last 40 years we have had relatively little snow, but 70 years ago in 1947 Britain experienced the worst winter for hundreds of years. What was it like living in this valley then?

Here are some articles from the *Aberdare Leader* that tell us of the terrible conditions and of the hardy people who overcame them:

- Miners trudged two miles to work when bus stuck
- Paint frozen in tins
- Broken, frozen milk bottles at Trecynon Creamery
- Frozen Aberdare Park Lake but no skating!

Western Welsh buses taking miners to the “Pandy” Colliery, (Rhigos Drift), had to stop two miles away from the colliery owing to the heavy snowfall. The miners trudged the remaining two miles through the snow to the colliery and traversed the same distance back to the bus at the end of the shift.

Wednesday week was the coldest day of the present wintry spell at Aberdare when 17 degrees of frost were recorded at the park. [I presume the temperature was 15 degrees F, or -9C. Ed.]

As a result, paint froze in tins as painters tried to work on the new Penywaun Council houses.

The C.W.S. Creamery at Trecynon experienced the wholesale of freezing of milk in bottles and as a result, a terrific amount of bottles was lost.

No skating was possible on Aberdare Park lake. [What a shame! Ed.]. Several people made enquiries and showed surprise, [Understandable Ed.], when told this, Mr F.P. Courtney, Parks Supt., told a Leader reporter that though the surface was frozen, flurries of snow which froze created bumps and ridges on the ice which would have made skating dangerous.

Aberdare Leader, 8th February 1947

Bride Walked Through Snow

An unusual happening at Cwmaman during the recent wintry spell was the spectacle of a bride and her attendants trudging through the snow and ice to a waiting car which had been unable to reach her home to take her to the church. Women in nearby houses watched her pass and were loud in their praise of her pluck in overcoming the hazards of the weather.

Aberdare Leader 15th February

Cefnpennar family isolated by twelve-foot snowdrifts

Cefnpennar Uchaf House where Mrs M. Juliff resides was cut off by massive snowdrifts. The men of the house tried to go to work on Monday but were met by impassable snowdrifts 9-12 feet in height which completely blocked the narrow lane leading down to Cefnpennar. Eventually after much hard work they managed to force a pathway through to some adjoining fields (to the civilisation of Cefnpennar).

Mrs Juliff, (aged 70 plus), walked through the fields and through snow waist high to report the position to the Aberdare Council’s Surveyor’s Dept and on Tuesday a squad of workmen cleared a two and a half feet wide lane through the frozen snow to her house.

Water pipes had frozen at the house and water had to be carried great distances (and with great difficulty) from streams and springs – some of which were completely hidden by ice and snow.

Despite all these problems, including having no coal, Mrs Juliff told the Leader reporter she “would not wish to change places with a town-dweller for anything.”

Mr Tommy Phillips of Ffynnon-y-Gog Farm, the local shepherd, has also had his share of hardship, having been kept busy digging sheep out of deep drifts and repairing fences and walls broken by the weight of the snow.

Aberdare Leader 22nd February

Plays and Concerts still went on!

Despite the snow and ice, the Abercwmbai Institute Society performed “The Arcadians” at The Coliseum and “The Messiah” was performed at Glynneath by the local Welfare Choral Society

Aberdare Leader 15th & 22nd February

Winter’s Worst Blizzard at Mountain Ash

Looking forward to the “thaw” today, (Thursday as optimistically forecast in the BBC bulletins). Mountain Ash residents found themselves battling with the most trying blizzard of the year on Tuesday night and yesterday (Wednesday).

A high wind played fantastic tricks with the snow, piling it up in three, four, five feet drifts in the streets. Bus services to Cefnpennar and Perthcelyn were discontinued, coal merchants were unable to deliver coal, and milk vendors had not received their bulk supplies.

About sixty unemployed men were put to work by the council in an effort to keep main roads open. They worked diligently throughout the day despite the swirling snow and are to be commended on their tireless efforts.

Aberdare Leader 8th March

Bus Stranded

As there were heavy snowdrifts between Llwydcoed and the top of the mountain the Merthyr route was often closed. The Graig Mountain had been closed to traffic for a longer period than had ever been known before.

One bus which tried to get through to Maerdy had been stranded on the mountain for a week. [I hope there was nobody on it! Ed.]

Train snowed up at Abernant. Part One

Mr A. Jenkins, Stationmaster of Abernant Railway Station, said that because of the severity of the conditions, the Hirwaun to Merthyr train arriving at 5.25pm on Wednesday afternoon failed to leave until 9.20 the next morning! Mr Jenkins who worked for 24 hours non-stop in the teeth of the blizzard said, "We tried to get the train away but the engine was blocked with snow and failed to move. We sent for an assistant engine from Merthyr but that too became blocked on the Cwmbach side of the station. There were about 100 people on the stranded train.

Part Two: The Good Samaritan

Here the experience of an onlooker, Councillor D.J. Morse, without mention of whose thoughtfulness and generosity this story would not be complete.

As he was proceeding to his work at 6.30 on the Thursday morning, he saw that train at Abernant Station and made enquiries. Finding that the passengers had not had anything to eat or drink all night, he rushed back to his home at Windsor Terrace, and with members of his family returned with as much food as he could find and jugs of tea.

As he left the station an hour later to continue his walk over to Werfa he met a group of men who had walked many miles through the snow in an effort to reach their homes after having been stranded all night. They were well nigh exhausted. He kindly sent them down to his home at Windsor Terrace where they were put to warm by the fire and given something to eat and drink.

Factory Girls Ordeal

Now through the eyes of the factory workers employed at the Rhigos Trading Estate who say they will not forget Wednesday March 5th as long as they live.

Some of them, mostly girls had to wait for anything up to two and a half hours on the bleak Rhigos Halt for a train to take them home. It was terribly cold with piercing high winds driving the snow across the open common with merciless ferocity. The girls were stiff with cold and one of them fainted. However they maintained their spirits remarkably well, many of them helping to while away the time in traditional Welsh fashion by singing. Eventually the train arrived and brought the workers to Aberdare just before 7.30pm. A Leader reporter met them at Aberdare Railway station. He was greatly impressed by their plucky bearing as they came off the train. Although quite aware that what they had gone through was only half the battle, the girls walked briskly down the gangway into the station yard with a smile. Several of them joked as they stepped out into the height of the blizzard facing a long walk along bus-less roads over ankle deep in snow to Aberaman, Cwmaman and Abercwmboi. [These were not the weaker sex! Ed.]

Odd Spot

Readers are reminded that summer time begins at 2pm on Sunday March 16th. [This was a rather ironic statement, it seemed that summer would never come but it did. Ed.]

Aberdare Leader 15th March

Penrhiwceiber Workmen's Institute



The colliers of Penrhiwceiber colliery decided that they needed an Institute and Public Hall. The colliery company agreed to provide the capital required, about £2,000, and the workmen paid it back in instalments of half penny in the pound out of their wages.

The building was erected by Messrs Batchelor and Snowdon and the architect was Mr Edward Bruton of Cardiff.

On 18th June 1888, a silver trowel was presented to Alderman Cory, with which he proceeded to lay the first memorial stone.

Mr Glasbrook (a director of the company) laid the second memorial stone.

Six months later on 3rd December the Institute was opened by Lord Aberdare.

A reading and billiard room were in the basement, and on the ground floor was a concert hall. A library would come later.

After the speeches a concert took place, the artistes included Eos Morlais and the Mountain Ash Glee Party.

In the early years of the twentieth century, the Institute saw many events: a lecture on Iolo Morganwg, a Young Liberals meeting, election meetings, and thousands of games of billiards.

The box for cinema projection (originally bioscope) was added some twenty years after construction in the early 1900s and is mainly unaltered. The first talking picture shown there was "The Love Parade" starring Jeanette Macdonald and Maurice Chevalier.

John Peregrine was the Secretary of the Institute from 1913 to 1958. He bought the hall for the miners. There was a branch hall at Matthewstown.

In the early 1980s I remember an "Any Questions" programme being recorded there. With the Tory MP and Labour MP arguing, the audience rose to the occasion and I could hear them cheering on the Labour MP.

The Institute was refurbished in 1993, alterations which retained most of the historic fabric.

The cinema closed in the 1980s but in 2011 it put on the Ceiber Film Festival: 15 iconic films with a Welsh flavour were shown. The Institute is still going strong today; long may it do so in this closely-knit community.

The Welfare Hall



This was linked with the Institute and was located near to the Lee Hotel. It was built around the early twentieth century.

In 1931 the Library moved from its old location in the Institute to the Welfare Hall. Then it only had 560 books on its shelves. Mr Evan J. Thomas was the Librarian.

In October 1952 a new library was opened on the top floor, the new librarian was Mr Eddie Williams. It then had 4,000 books.

It is now used as a boxing gym.

The Nixons Workmens Institute



This was built in July 1908 by Thomas Davies of Cardiff Road, Mountain Ash. It was opened by Alderman Enoch Morrell, and was located on the corner of Harcourt Terrace and George Terrace, but it has been demolished in the last few years.

Notable People

George Hall, M.P.

George Hall was born in Penrhiwceiber on 31st December 1881. He started work at Penrkyber Colliery at 12 years of age because he was compelled to leave school so that he could assist his widowed mother who had been left with a large family to support. In 1908 he won a seat on the Mountain Ash Urban District Council, as the first Labour member for the Penrhiwceiber ward. He remained a member of that body for 18 years during which time he became chairman of both the U.D.C. and of its Education Committee.

He continued to work as a collier until appointed checkweigher in 1911, and then acted as local agent of the South Wales Miners' Federation until elected to parliament in 1922.

He married Margaret Jones from Ynysybwl in 1910 and the couple had two sons, Leonard and Bruce.



George Hall M.P.

Hall was elected Member of Parliament for the Cynon Valley in 1922 when he won the seat for Labour, defeating Charles Stanton who had held the seat since a 1915 by-election. Hall represented Aberdare from 1922 to 1946 and served under Ramsay MacDonald as a Civil Lord of the Admiralty from 1929 to 1931; under Winston Churchill as Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies from 1940 to 1942; as Financial Secretary to the Admiralty from 1942 to 1943; as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs from 1943 to 1945, and under Clement Attlee, as Secretary of State for the Colonies from 1945 to 1946.

He was a first-class constituency M.P. — always courteous and approachable, he was ever ready to take up the grievances of his constituents.

The Cynon valley owed a great deal to him for his efforts to attract new industries into the town during the dark days of the depression. In 1937 he was able to persuade a new company, Aberdare Cables, to establish their factory in Aberdare. Thanks largely to his efforts Royal Ordnance factories were established in Robertstown and Rhigos in 1940, and in 1945 the Hirwaun Trading Estate was founded. These developments helped to establish the Cynon valley as a centre of light industry, which was an inestimable boon for a valley that had become too heavily dependent on coal.

In 1941 his beloved wife Margaret died after a long illness, during which he nursed her devotedly despite the enormous amount of travelling at home and abroad associated with his political responsibilities. He was appointed a Privy Counsellor in 1942. Sadly, in that year tragedy struck again for him when his son Bruce was killed in action when his ship, H.M.S. Bedfordshire, was torpedoed by a German U-boat.

In October 1946, he yielded to repeated requests by Prime Minister Atlee to accept a title in recognition of his wartime service to the nation — he had refused Churchill's offer of a knighthood and was made Viscount Hall of Cynon Valley. He was the first coalminer ever to be elevated to the peerage. He then served as First Lord of the Admiralty under Atlee from 1946 to 1951 and as Deputy Leader of the House of Lords from 1947 to 1951. Lord Hall died in November 1965 aged 83. He was survived by his second wife, Alice Martha Walker whom he married the previous year, and by his son Leonard who inherited his

title. His memorial service was held at St Winifred's Church, Penrhiwceiber with hundreds of people lining the streets in silence. The eulogy included a personal tribute from Clement Atlee who said that, "He rose from the pit-bottom, motivated by the highest humanitarian principles and upheld by a strong Christian faith".

Nye Bevan described him as "commanding the heights of power and influence, yet kept firm and untarnished links with the Cynon valley and its people".

Information for this article was kindly given by Jennifer George (his great great niece) who also gave us a fascinating lecture about him last year.

Edwin Greening in his autobiography "From Aberdare to Albacete" paints a less complementary picture of him.

Footnote

For those of you who are interested in Perthcelyn, Martin Price, its local historian, has written two books: *Perthcelyn Remembered* and *Perthcelyn Remembered in Pictures - Past and Present*.

The perfect companion volume of this issue of *Hanes* is *Penrhiwceiber: past and present*, which contains hundreds of photographs, and is published by Dial-A-Print, our printer, (details on the back page), priced £12.00.

The Bute Arms



This historic public house in Victoria Square re-opened in December last year under its original name. The building had been previously called the Beluga Bar, which was a wine bar from December 2009 to December 2015. The Bute, which of course is named after the second Marquess of Bute the great landowner in South Wales, dates back to at least 1840. Justice was dispensed there. On 10th September 1846 it was the setting for the Aberdare Petty Sessions. Some landlords of local public houses including David Jenkins of the Bute were charged with "allowing tippling in their houses during the hours of Divine Service". They all pleaded guilty and were fined 10s each and costs of 9s 6d each.

The Cambrian 18th September 1846

From the 1870s the pub became a centre for miners meetings, e.g. "At a meeting held at the Bute Arms, Aberdare on Monday evening, 1,000 men in the Aberdare valley were represented. David Morgan (Dai o'r Nant) was appointed chairman. It was resolved that a society be established for obtaining co-operation among the men to prevent reduction [of wages Ed.] in future and to assist any particular body of men. The subscription was fixed at a penny per month for every collier. It was also resolved to hold monthly meetings. The men are to appoint their own delegates."

Aberdare Times 19th July 1879

Mountain Ash's last bank to close



Lloyds Bank has announced that it will be closing its Mountain Ash branch on 29th March 2017. This will be a tragedy, as it became the sole surviving branch in the town when the Barclays branch closed in March 2015.

Andrew Morgan, the Leader of RCT council, Pauline Jarman and Ann Clwyd M.P. are doing their best to fight this closure.

Nos Galan founder dies

Bernard Baldwin, M.B.E., the founder of these races, died on 3rd January this year aged 91. Barry-born Bernard took up athletics and cross-country running at school, becoming Welsh A.A.A. Junior men's Mile Champion and winning his full international vest in 1947. He served as a trainee air gunner in World War II, then took up teaching when he taught at several schools in South Wales.

After marrying Pat Richards of Mountain Ash in 1949, he settled there.

He then entered the administration side of British athletics and was awarded the M.B.E. in 1971 for services to it. He organised road races all over South Wales, the most famous being the Nos Galan races which he started on 31st December 1958 in memory of the Welsh runner Guto Nyth Bran. This race has taken place every year since with a short interval in the 1970s.

He was awarded the Freedom of Rhondda Cynon Tâf in 2014.

He was also a local historian, he wrote "*Mountain Ash Remembered*" in 1984, the first book about the town's history written this century. He also wrote a companion volume "*Mountain Ash and Penrhiwceiber remembered in pictures.*"

I remember talking to him in his house in Caegarw when I lent him some photographs for his book. He was a charming man, and by his passing, the Cynon valley has lost a great character.

(The only other history book about Mountain Ash was written in Welsh by William Bevan in 1896. Alan Vernon Jones (one of our CVHS committee members) translated it into English in 1990 and added updated notes).



Bernard Baldwin

Centenaries

The Battle of Passchendaele, (Third Battle of Ypres), July to November.

The Russian Revolution: November.

Recent Historical Television Programmes

- *Six Wives*, with Lucy Worsley on BBC 1. In three episodes. Lucy Worsley retells the story of Henry VIII and his six wives. It is a documentary blended with drama. Lucy appears as herself and as a serving maid in Henry's court, which is somewhat confusing.
- Dan Snow on Lloyd George on BBC 1. The presenter traces the story of his great-great-grandfather.
- *Vienna: Empire, Dynasty and Dream*, presented by Simon Sebag Montefiore in three episodes on BBC4.
- *Time Commanders*, three episodes on BBC4 presented by Gregg Wallace. Two teams of contestants re-enact the battles of Zama (between Hannibal and the Roman Empire), Chalons (between the Huns and Rome) and Waterloo. It's an exciting way to teach military history.
- *British History's Biggest Fibs*, with Lucy Worsley, BBC4
- *Great Welsh Parks*, Iolo Williams will look at the Dare Valley Country Park, BBC1.

All available on the BBC iPlayer.

**In Memoriam
RONALD JOHN BEVAN**

Sadly, we report the death of CVHS member Ron Bevan on the 23rd December, aged 88. He had been a member the Cynon Valley History Society for about 20 years, being unable to attend lecture meetings through ill health.

Born in Cwmbach, Ron left school and entered the world of the cinema, becoming the projectionist at most of the theatres in the locality and served some years as manager of The Rex. Having a very good memory, he could name films, dates of release and principal actors without effort.

During the post-war period, Ron was a redcap with the International Patrol, an organisation comprising British, French, American and Russian forces personnel tasked with policing the city of Vienna. He was there from 1947-1949, and, being a lover of classical music, they were two wonderful years.

Ron also spent some years as a roofer, working on commercial and industrial sites. His wife Jean died some years ago. There were three children, Susan, Barbara and Roger. Barbara had three boys, Stephen, Mark and Sian.



Ron's International
Patrol Badge

Next Issue

The Spring issue will include more notable people of Penrhiwceiber and some of the history of its hotels and various aspects of sport in the valley including an article about William Dice Davies, the great Welsh international quoits player, "Georgie Pwnch," a bare knuckle boxer, and an historic football match played between the Liberal and Independent Labour Party "old crocks".

Feedback

I would be grateful for feedback about any articles in this issue. It is always good to know what you think of them or if you have any additional information about them. I also welcome articles on any subject about our valley's history for possible publication, Ed.

Acknowledgement

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