

CYNON VALLEY HISTORY SOCIETY

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HANES

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In this issue we look at Christmas 100 years ago but also look at family life in Aberaman at the turn of the century. Also we have a query about a local football team and how to find old maps of anywhere in the UK. I hope you enjoy this issue.

To all readers I wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Healthy 2018.

CHRISTMAS 1917

100 years ago Britain and its Allies were looking at defeat straight in the face. With the Russian Revolution over, the Bolshevik government concluded an armistice with Germany on 15th December 1917. The German troops on the Eastern front would now reinforce the troops on the Western front and could well drive the Allies into the sea. Yet the darkest hour is before the dawn. One silver lining in the ominous clouds was happening in Palestine.

General Allenby's army defeated the Turks thereby capturing Jerusalem on 11th December after it had been in the hands of the Turks for 400 years. Allenby entered Jerusalem on foot through the Jaffa Gate out of respect for the Holy City.



But there was a sad side to this victory. "John Harris of Lincoln Cottage, Cardiff Road, Mountain Ash was killed during this action. He had the good fortune to escape the Western front without a scratch but he then went to Palestine where under General Sir Archibald Murray he took part in the battle of Gaza. Previously he had worked at Messrs Nixons as a fitter."

Aberdare & Mountain Ash Express, 29 December 1917

There was another silver lining. America had entered the war in April 1917. "With such an ally the allies will hold the fort until the American army is alongside in sufficient strength for the resumption of the offensive. It takes time to train men from civil life into efficient soldiers, but it is being done at hundreds of camps in America, and at scores in England and France."

Aberdare & Mountain Ash Express, 29 December 1917

Russia

"The only intelligence we receive from Russia is such that it pleases the Bolshevik controllers to allow to be sent (they used censorship on all foreign correspondents).

The most crafty and unscrupulous of German politicians, Kauhman has gone to Brest-Litovsk to negotiate the terms of peace and he will take care that the ends of the Kaiser are served now. The innocent Bolshevik delegates imagined that they had made a good bargain for the Allies by stipulating that no German troops were to be transferred from the Russian Front while the armistice lasted." [Of course, the Germans would transfer all their troops from the Russian front to the Western front, which would make the war much more difficult to win. Ed.]

To the Allies it has been a disaster of the gravest character.

Russia (now) passes through the fiery furnace of a tremendous social and political regeneration with present forebodings of a reign of terror after the precedent of the French Revolution [far worse than that. Ed.] The laws have been abolished, the judges dismissed, property sequestered and all elements of stability destroyed. Indeed Trotsky, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, has threatened his rival parties that within a month there will be no more confinement to fortresses for opponents, but in the name of liberty (!), the guillotine will be erected and administer its swift punishment to all dissentients from Bolshevik methods! The immediate prospect for this unhappy country is nothing less than red ruin!"

Aberdare & Mountain Ash Express, 22 December, 1917

Mrs Pankhurst and the Russian Revolution



Mrs Emmeline Pankhurst gave a "practical, eloquent and patriotic address at Aberdare Drill Hall. She drew a picture of Kerensky; the man who we thought was the perfect exemplar of Russian freedom. [He was Prime Minister of Russia in late 1917]. She told her audience otherwise. When she saw the man herself, the nearest imitation of Napoleon, she looked into the face of the most materialistic man she had ever seen, and she had the shock of her life. He was the coarsest, grossest man and most absolute fraud she had known."

[She was totally wrong, he was a sugar daddy compared with the despotic Lenin. He instituted basic civil liberties: freedom of speech, press, religion and universal suffrage including equal rights for women! I am surprised that she disliked him as this was close to her heart. Ed.]

Later at Merthyr Drill Hall in her speech she said, "The poor Russian soldiers were insufficiently equipped with munitions, guns, clothing and food. Russia was

absolutely unprepared for the war just as we were unprepared. The only nation that was prepared was Germany. In Russia, Germany had men in the highest positions, and when revolution came, they were going to take over the highest offices with one inevitable result. [This was not true. I don't think she knew about Lenin, Stalin or Trotsky who were behind the revolution. Ed.]

Poor Russia! She had escaped from the rule of one autocrat, one tyrant, (Czar Nicholas II), but today after the Revolution it was in the hands of thousands of tyrants and it was more difficult to deal with the tyranny of many than of one.

Committees were established in connection with everything and the men belonging to them did nothing but talk. [Lenin and his Bolsheviks would have been hurt by that comment Ed.] In Russia there was a terrible system of committees. [! Ed. These were mostly Bolshevik "soviets" that instigated the Revolution. Ed.]



Aberdare & Mountain Ash Express, 8 December 1917

Abercynon Prisoners of War

Mrs Jones the wife of Mr Bruce Jones, M.E., J.P. of Plasnewydd, Abercynon sent letters and parcels to 15 prisoners of war who were from Abercynon.

She allowed the *Aberdare and Mountain Ash Express* to use extracts from their letters:

Lance Corporal R. Roberts wrote on 5th August 1917 saying, "Your most welcome and encouraging letters to hand. I have to thank you ever so much for all that you have done for me since I have been here, (13 months). I have to thank you very much for a parcel of 300 cigarettes. What are needed most here now are soap, sugar, milk and margarine. I was captured on 1st July 1916 and taken to Dulmen. From there I was taken to Minden on August 13th to work on a canal, but through an old wound on the foot I was found unfit for the work and was placed in the canteen as a waiter. (I am working elsewhere now). The work and hours are not bad. We start at 7 and knock off at 5pm."

Corporal D. Meredith of South Wales Borderers wrote on 30th August, "Our motto here is keep smiling. Some of us have developed a chronic smile during the three years of internment. It helps to cheer up the others. We have a form of exercise in the camp clearing a piece of ground of tree roots, but we have nothing else to while away the time. We have had a hot summer here."

Private James Tottle of the Welch Regiment wrote from Switzerland on 12th July, "The air in Switzerland has done me a lot of good and I am anxious to come back to the coal mine again." [The fresh air in Switzerland would be much better than the poisonous air in a coal mine! Ed.]

Aberdare & Mountain Ash Express 1 December 1917

Jeweller's son killed in Action

Mr Rungi, [Runge Ed], jeweller, Cardiff Street, has received information of the death of his son, Guardsman Eric Rungi. The deceased was about 19 years of age and was home on leave about a month ago. He proceeded to France and met with his death after having been only one day in the trenches. He had a splendid

physique, was very popular in the town and his heroic death will be regretted by a wide circle of friends.

Aberdare & Mountain Ash Express, 15 December 2017

Great Fire at Mountain Ash Coop Italian Allies to the rescue

At midnight on Saturday one of the greatest fires for many years at Mountain Ash occurred. The outbreak was first noticed by Mr Paul Bracchi and his assistants. At tremendous risk, they succeeded in getting the horses safely out of a burning stable. Mr Griffiths, the manager, also at great risk managed to secure the account books and a large amount of takings from the safe. Most of the foodstuff in the warehouse was burnt. The fire brigades from Mountain Ash and Aberdare quickly responded and succeeded in getting the flames under control.

Aberdare & Mountain Ash Express, 1 December 2017

Family Life in Aberaman and Canada

What are the chances of an Aberaman man emigrating to Canada, marrying a Rhondda girl then coming back to Aberaman to become a baker? About a million to one, but it actually happened!

Let us leave 1917 and the First World War and go to family life. The following is an excerpt from a privately published book by Betty Lloyd about her family entitled *Rainbow through the Rain*. Her daughter Sally Williams has kindly given me permission to print the following extracts:

Sarah Davies who had lived in the Rhondda valley decided to join her sister Catherine and her husband Lewis who had emigrated to Canada. Eventually she arrived at Nanaimo, a town on Victoria Island, British Columbia. Sometime later Catherine and Lewis took a lodger, Hector King, who had left Aberaman after working in a coalmine there and had emigrated to Canada where he worked for a firm of civil engineers, building roads. The two young women were eager to talk about "home" to this young man and soon Sarah fell in love with him. She described him as "a most handsome man with curly hair, blue eyes and was middling stout".

In a few months, Sarah and Hector were married and left British Columbia for Montana. Eventually two little girls were born- Beatrice in 1891, and Mabel in 1893. In summer evenings Hector loved to sit at the door of their log cabin reading. His favourite author was Dickens, and Sarah enjoyed listening to him chuckling over the novels, but gradually he found reading more difficult. With grief and anxiety they realised his sight was failing. Not only could he no longer read, but it was becoming increasingly difficult for him to do his work.



Catherine Mary, Beatrice, William, Mabel, Hector,
Sarah and Margaret

Sarah decided to take Hector to the best eye doctor in America who was 300 miles away in Boston. They embarked on this tremendous journey but by this time, Hector was completely blind. The eye specialist said that nothing could be done. He advised them to go back to Wales to live among their own people.

When they returned to Montana they received a letter from Hector's parents, (who did not yet know of his blindness), explaining that they had decided to retire, and offered to them their grocery and bakery business in Gladstone Street, Aberaman. They accepted and embarked on their long journey home: Sarah was expecting her third child, Catherine Mary, (Betty Lloyd's mother).



Old Granny Mary King, Sarah, Hector, Catherine Mary, Beatrix and William outside the bakehouse

When they arrived back in Aberaman in late 1893, Sarah wondered how she would cope with a newborn baby, a baby a year old, a toddler of two and a half, a blind husband and a shop and bake house to run. With a painful heart, Sarah gave Mabel to Ruth, Hector's sister to adopt and bring up.

Sarah and Hector adapted to shopkeeping very well. Sarah enjoyed serving customers, while Hector dealt with commercial travellers and orders, and he took great interest in the bake house.

Every evening he would say, "Beatrice, ovens", and she would take her father up to the bake house and read the thermometer. If the temperature was not high enough, Hector would stoke the boiler. He could do this quite dextrously despite his lack of vision.

Hector was kind but strict. A neighbour complained of one of the children stealing apples from their garden. The offender was William, the youngest of the family. Hector took the boy into a room and beat him. This was the first time that he had ever beaten any of his children but it marked a change in their father. The specialist in Boston had said that Hector's optic nerve was diseased and there was a strong possibility that in time the disease would attack the brain, and Hector's reason would be impaired. When they had been in Gladstone Street about ten years, Hector's character began to change. He became increasingly irritable and short tempered until Sarah and all the children lived in fear of his violent outbursts. These alternated with moods of deep depression when he would retire to his bedroom.

One day he locked himself into his bedroom and sometime later, they heard a dreadful noise of breaking glass and a heavy fall. Hector had either fallen out of or thrown himself from the bedroom window. He sadly died the next day.

Sarah was now a widow, just over forty with five children ranging from one year to thirteen years.

Catherine Mary loved handling beautiful materials and making hats, which in those days were works of art. Sarah apprenticed her to the main drapers in Aberaman — Powell's shop. She paid five pounds, a considerable sum then, for Catherine Mary to be taught the trade of a milliner. She went into the workroom and began the long five-year apprenticeship. For the first two years, apprentices had no wages, and then they had five shillings a week until they became "improvers."



Catherine Mary

The hours in all shops were very long. They worked from 9 am until 1pm, then from 2pm until their tea break. For both breaks, Catherine Mary was able to go home, but she hated leaving the family after tea to go back to the shop and work (Mondays to Thursdays) until 7.30pm, on Fridays until 9pm and 10pm on Saturdays. Often on a busy Saturday, by the time that everything had been cleared up she would not arrive home until eleven o'clock.

Catherine Mary had now grown into a beautiful girl. She was slim, ethereal looking with an exquisite complexion and long fair hair. Many Aberaman people thought she was the most beautiful girl in Aberaman. When she used to walk down Lewis Street, the apprentices would rush to the shop doors to see her pass; she was so beautiful. But Catherine Mary was unconscious of the effect she had on people as she was so modest, quiet and reserved. After she had been an apprentice for a year or two, hard times came to the valleys. There were many strikes and growing unemployment.

This economic depression soon affected Sarah's business. Her takings fell, and she found herself giving a great deal of credit. As she used to say: "How could I refuse, when women came crying to me for food for their children".

Many of the customers eventually paid their debts, but many others never paid what they owed Sarah. Sometimes she would stand at the door of her shop watching a funeral go down George Street and think, "Forty pounds owed to me in that coffin — I'll never have it now".

At last, Sarah decided the struggle against falling trade and bad debts was too great, so she gave up the business, rented a house in Clifton Crescent and hoped to make a living keeping boarders until the children would be old enough to earn.

Tramway Stars football team and Cae Pugh



I have received this letter from one of our members, Gareth Thomas, and I

wonder if anybody can help him. [If you can, please email me. Thanks, Ed.]

William Price of 8, Llewellyn Street, Trecynon, Aberdare was the secretary of Tramway Stars, a local football team. In March 1911, he received a postcard, sent to him by a 'G. Evans', who was the secretary of Gadlys Rovers, another local football team. Evans wrote, "Please announce a fixture with us on March 11th, 1911 at half past three prompt, at the Aberdare Park."

There is no report on this game in the *Aberdare Leader*. Probably the match, if it was ever played, was an informal arrangement and not a Cup or League fixture. "At the Aberdare Park," is a phrase often found in connection with local football matches, pre-1914. Where was the football pitch, I wonder? I doubt if ever there was a football pitch within the present boundaries of the park, but maybe I'm wrong.

I wonder though, if the area known as 'Cae Pugh,' which has space enough for several pitches, would have been where football matches were played, while being described as 'at the Aberdare Park'? Cae Pugh is on the Landare side of the park, and separates Aberdare Park Nursery, (for plants not children), from Park Lane School."

What has the National Library of Scotland done for Wales?

Given free maps!

This is a wonderful gift to local historians.

To find a map and print if off please follow the following instructions:

Go to <http://maps.nls.uk>

Click Georeferenced Maps

At Find a place-Gazetteer, type in placename, e.g. Abernant

(At choose a historic map overlay)

1. Great Britain is default
2. Select a map e.g. Six inch 1883-1913
(this shows the map)

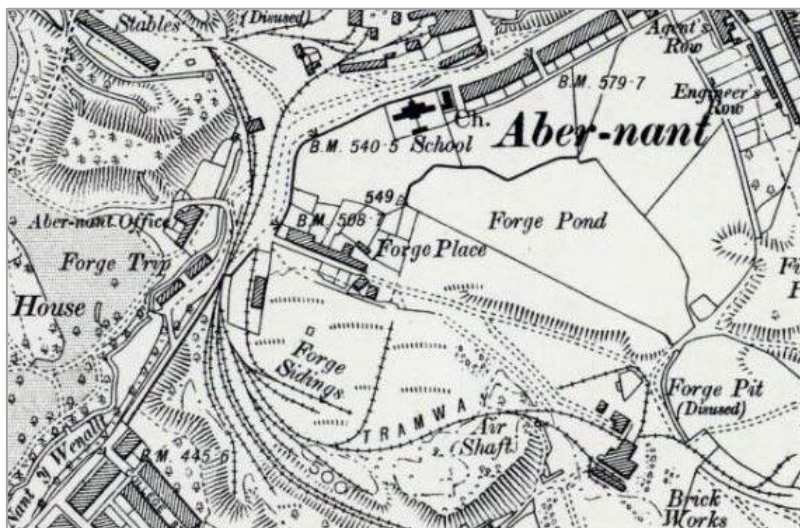
(At Change transparency of overlay)

Click blue dot (at opacity 100%)

Slide to left slowly to Opacity 0% to see modern aerial view

Click mouse on map and roll mouse wheel to enlarge or reduce

To print, Right click and print preview



Museum News

Christmas came early to the museum in October when they were presented with a cheque for £388,178 from Pen y Cymoedd Wind Farm Community Fund. This grant will, over the next four years, enable them to increase their staffing and to become self-sustainable. Also, the money is being used to renovate their first floor area. It will have a makeover, with bright new spacious rooms, which will be open from early 2018. A new hireable room will be opened including the museum's extensive library.

Recent Historical Television Programmes

Building the Ancient City: Athens and Rome. Professor Andrew Wallace-Hadrill explains, in a very engaging way, how they were built. BBC4, 2 parts.

The Other Pompeii: Life and Death in Herculaneum. This same professor examines the other lesser well-known Roman town destroyed by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79. This fascinating programme was on BBC4.

Eight days That Made Rome. This 8-part series on Channel 5 is presented by Bettany Hughes. It includes the battles of Cannae and Zama when the Romans fought Hannibal; Octavian's (Augustus's) rise to power, and the reign of Nero.

Recent Historical Books

We travel 2000 years forward to Gordon Brown: *My life, our times*. An autobiography by the politician who was Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1997 to 2007, and then Prime Minister until 2010.

The First Iron Lady by Matthew Dennison. This book is about George II's consort, Caroline of Ansbach, who was infinitely more intelligent than her boorish king.

Our Story of George Ewart Evans, by four pupils from Abercynon Community Primary School. Ewart was born in Abercynon and was a pioneer of oral history.

It is priced £6, and is available from that school.

Feedback

I would be grateful for feedback about any articles in this issue. Articles on any subject about our valley's history for possible publication are welcome. Due to a lack of space and time there is no article about the Little Theatre in this issue but there should be an article about it in the spring issue.

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