

# CYNON VALLEY HISTORY SOCIETY

CYMDEITHAS HANES CWM CYNON

PRESIDENT: THE LORD ABERDARE

VICE PRESIDENTS

MRS TYDFIL THOMAS O.B.E., J.P., M.A., ELFED BOWEN B.Sc.

[www.cvhs.org.uk](http://www.cvhs.org.uk)



# HANES

NEWSLETTER OF THE CYNON VALLEY HISTORY SOCIETY  
CYLCHLYTHYR CYMDEITHAS HANES CWM CYNON

ISSUE NUMBER 84

AUTUMN 2018



PEACE



On 11th November this year we commemorate the centenary of the Armistice of World War One. In this issue we reflect on this by looking at the peace celebrations at Aberdare, Mountain Ash and Abercynon. Also, there are two reports of how two Cynon Valley Prisoners of War were treated, which does not make pleasant reading. Yet what makes fascinating reading is telling the story of Elfed Davies's, (one of our members), father's experiences: Isaac Davies in that war. We look at the life of Frank Vickery, one of Wales' greatest playwrights who sadly died this year. Finally we report on a blue plaque event to celebrate George Hall and the re-dedication of a gravestone of a local man who fought at Rorke's Drift.

Happy Reading!

## Armistice Celebrations in the valley

### Aberdare

Soon after the news of the signing of the armistice and cessation of hostilities became known in Aberdare on Monday morning, the place was en fete. Flags and bunting were in abundance, and the hooters and bells proclaimed the joyful news. A short service of thanksgiving was held at St. Elvan's Church early in the day.

In the evening thousands of people lined



Victoria Square, Aberdare, in response to a notice by the High Constable



Charles Kenshole. After he and other dignitaries had made speeches, the large crowd joined in singing the Doxology, the Welsh and English National Anthems to the strains of the Town Band.

Later the town councillors sent their congratulations to Major R.D. Williams who had won the D.S.O. (His father was Mr L.N. Williams, J.P.)

*Aberdare Leader* 16 Nov 1918, p2

### **Mountain Ash celebrations**

The great news of the signing of the armistice arrived a few minutes before eleven o' clock. Quickly the welcome news spread and soon there were animated scenes of joy and delight. Streets and business premises were soon gaily decorated and children with their trumpets and flags were marching through the streets singing patriotic songs and national airs. The committee and staff of the Y.M.C.A. soon got to work and with the assistance of Mr A. Pincombe, (clerk to the Council), it was arranged that a great mass meeting should be held outside the Town Hall offices.

The meeting was preceded by a procession headed by the Mountain Ash Volunteer Band. The proceedings opened and closed with the Welsh National Anthem. The crowd numbering several thousand took up the refrain magnificently. Various councillors addressed the gathering.

The Y.M.C.A. Rooms were occupied until past midnight, and terminated with a magnificent concert with local artistes providing the musical entertainment

*Aberdare & Mountain Ash Express* 16 Nov 1918, p7

### **Peace celebrations at Abercynon**

The news of the Armistice being signed quickly on Thursday evening, hooters were placed on the railway and in a short time there was great excitement but the following morning, when it was found to be only a rumour, the disappointment was intense. There was great anxiety throughout the following days, and on Monday morning when the news came through it was heralded by the blowing of the whistles and the hooters, as well as the firing of detonators. Bunting and flags were quickly brought out and in a very short time, the place had a very gay appearance.

Later in the day, a general holiday was proclaimed for Tuesday, and in the evening, a committee (meeting) was held to make arrangements to celebrate the event by having a monster procession.

On Tuesday the procession, which was headed by the Abercynon Brass Band, started from the Navigation School at 2pm and paraded most of the

streets. The rear was brought up by "Dan's Ragtime Band," which has become popular in the district.

The procession was one of the longest that has been seen in the district and there was a great variety of costumes.

In the evening a public meeting was held at the Workmen's Hall, when there were about 1,800 persons present.

Glees and part-songs were rendered by the Cynon Glee Party and solos were sung by Madame Alicia Cove Parry and several others. All the speakers including Councillor Charles Maddox spoke in the same strain — one of thankfulness to God for the glorious victory which we had achieved. The 11th hour on the 11th day of the 11th month will be the most historic time in the history of the world. Touching references were also made by the speakers to those who had lost dear ones.

The meeting was a most enthusiastic one.

*Aberdare & Mountain Ash Express 16 Nov 1918*

### Concert at the (Merthyr) Workhouse

The quarterly concert arranged by the Ladies' Visiting Committee happily synchronised with the peace celebrations and provided a bright evening's entertainment on Wednesday night. There were recitations, comic songs, and Welsh airs sung by singers in Welsh costume.

*Aberdare & Mountain Ash Express 16 Nov 1918, p8*

### Petty Crime: Costly Cakes

P.C. Morgan was recently in Cardiff Street, Aberaman and saw assistant Guiseppe Gambetta and Thomas John Morgan coming out of the shop of Marcello Sevigni, (Servini), in Cardiff Road at an hour, which was contrary to the law. P.C. Morgan found that he had been supplied with cakes, which, he confessed, were for his supper. Sevigni, (Servini), was summoned for selling the cakes after the proper hours and was fined 40s while his assistant Guiseppe Gambetta and Thomas Morgan were each ordered to pay 10s for aiding and abetting in the offence.

*Aberdare Leader 30 Nov 1918*

### How Local Prisoners of War fared in Germany

Last week two of our boys who have been prisoners in Germany found their way home at long last. All of them gave a short history of their incarceration. Here is the account of Pte. A. Morris, 2/Wiltshires, of 20 Mount Pleasant Terrace, Miskin:

He found himself in France in August 1914. On 31st October 1914, he was captured. He with the rest of the captives was marched from Zullebreck to Courtrai, where they were stripped of every shred (of clothing), only being allowed to retain their trousers, and this in November. From there they were packed, 69 of them, in a cattle truck to Gottingen. The journey was for four days, and without food or drink

during the whole of that time. On the fourth day a small portion of so-called bread was issued. Bad luck attended Morris, for a Frenchman stole his portion, and Morris knocked out his erstwhile ally. He was punished for this by being tied to "the post" for 4 hours a day for 7 days. The cowardly Germans would give him a real Boche kick or a (friendly) punch. On January 25th, they placed him in a cage in Zerbst camp and he stayed in that horrible condition without blankets, coats or boots for 28 days. This soldier of stolid demeanour and cast iron constitution arrived home last week.

Corporal H.A. Dally, 1/Somerset L.I. of 7a Rheola Street, Penrhiwceiber also gave his account to a reporter. He was injured and captured on 27th August 1914. He was stationed in many camps and in one camp, several of our men were shot. The food was abominable. Punishment followed punishment for the most trivial offences oftentimes quite imaginary. They had no change of clothing and no chance to wash themselves and, as a consequence, the lice flourished abundantly. Heavy horsewhips were in constant use, especially on the backs of the poor Russian soldiers. One favourite punishment for the Bosche to inflict was the requirement to stand throughout the whole day and with no movement allowed for any purpose whatever. Dally reached this country on November 17th and no doubt found Rheola Street overjoyed to receive him.

*Aberdare & Mountain Ash Express, 7th Dec 1918*

## Isaac Davies



Isaac before he joined the army in 1915

One of our members Elfed Davies of Gadlys has told me the story of his father Isaac Davies who fought in World War 1.

He joined the famous 38th Welsh Division on 21st October 1915 having given his date of birth as August 20th 1893 and not his real date of birth of August 20th 1895.

Some weeks after Isaac's enlisting, the secretary of the Trecynon Amateur Dramatic Society wrote him a letter on behalf of the society and sent him a gift.

Isaac was to have acted the character of Gwilym in the play called "Change," but was called up before the date of the performance. Fortunately the society obtained the services of a young man from Cefn Coed to take his place.

He trained with his unit until 10th February 1916 when it was sent to France — his specialist military qualification was a shoemaker but he would never make a shoe in the war!

Soon after arriving in France his unit was separated from the 38th Division, and spent all its time as sappers making roads. Holes created

by shells were filled in with picks and shovels at night. German heavy artillery aimed to destroy roads and transport lines so casualties in this unit were very high but thankfully, Isaac escaped injury.



91750 Sapper I. T. Davies,  
215 A.T. Coy Royal Engineers

His unit saw service at Mametz Wood and was responsible for the main supply route for the next stage of the offensive. They served throughout the rest of the Somme campaign and in 1917 were at Passchendaele where the division captured Pilkem Ridge. Again, supply routes were of major importance as the weather was very bad and the whole area was a sea of mud. Without the good work carried out by his company, the fighting units would not have been able to do their jobs.

Isaac frequently sent some embroidered cards home to the family especially at Christmas and Easter. He returned home on leave from France in August 1917 and what a welcome he received from his fellow members of the Trecynon Dramatic Society. A function was organised to celebrate his homecoming and during the evening celebrations, members of the society read out poems that they had composed. Here are four verses of one:



An embroidered greetings card

This here song's my own invention  
So please give me your attention  
I will sing of Isaac Davies  
Who tonight our honoured guest is

From amongst the great French nation  
Comes a sound of lamentation  
Pretty maidens sore bewailing  
All their sorrow unavailing

What's the cause of this commotion  
Coming o'er the briny ocean  
What on earth has so bereft them?  
Why: Ike Davies he has left them.

His pleasant ways and winning  
With his well known gift of "chinning"  
Won the hearts, by scores and dozens  
Of our volatile French cousins.

All with me  
must agree

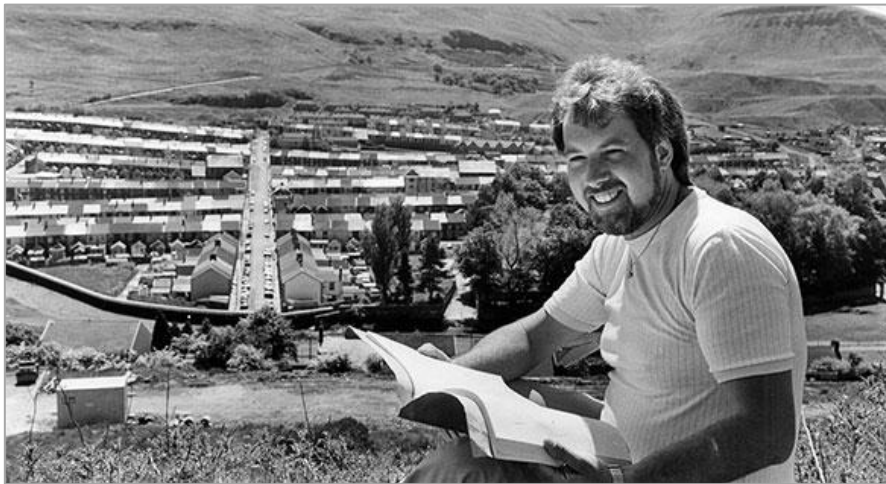
He's the Prince of all good fellows, so we'll give him three times  
three!

Leave over, he had to return to his unit in France. At Calais, he boarded a very long troop train, which was to take the troops back to the front. Isaac was travelling in one of the last carriages on the train.

He now tells the frightening story: "Suddenly as we journeyed I saw another troop train travelling in the same direction on the adjacent parallel line. As I watched the other train, the carriages were getting closer to each other and then suddenly a terrific explosion hit the middle of the train in which I was travelling. The coaches were lifted high in the air and nearly all of the coaches were derailed. The middle section of the train was devastated. The only coach saved on the train I was travelling in was the first coach and the few coaches at the extreme back. Many soldiers died, I was very lucky to be in the end coach."

By Christmas 1918, his unit had moved to Belgium and Isaac sent a Christmas greeting to his family.

## A Tribute to Frank Vickery



Wales' most successful playwright sadly passed away last June. His 30-plus plays were often performed at Aberdare's Coliseum and Little Theatre where they were tremendously popular.

Frank was born in Blaencwm, near Treherbert. His father sadly died in a coal mining accident and, as a result, he always sought approval from his mother.

At age of 10, he nagged his mother to buy him a typewriter, as he wanted to be a writer. She gave in and bought him one that enabled him to enter competitions in newspapers and magazines. At the tender age of fourteen, he began acting with local amateur groups. While working as a bus conductor and later in a furniture factory during the daytime, he wrote by night.

As a working class man, he wrote mainly about working class characters, but all classes loved his humour; he had an extraordinary ear for dialogue.

In 1977 his first one-act play, *After I'm Gone* performed by The Players Theatre starring Gareth Gibbs won the Howard de Walden Cup making them British Champions at the British Final Festival of One-Act plays.

He formed his own theatre company: The Park and Dare Theatre Company (of Treorchy) and wrote many of his plays for them.

Probably his most popular play is *One o'Clock from the House*, which is about a family trying to make arrangements for their father's funeral.

In the mid-1980s the company went to London, paying five annual visits to The Duke of York's Theatre for one-off performances; they walked the streets handing out leaflets resulting in full houses.

His plays were so hilarious that at the Parc & Dare Theatre, people were falling about laughing but he was also brilliant at writing pathos. He combined both to write a humorous but poignant play entitled *A Kiss on the Bottom* about three women in hospital for cancer treatment, a play that surely no playwright would dare to write about!

He wrote 11 plays for Cardiff's Sherman Theatre, from 1991 to 2000. Speedy writing was his forte, he could write a play in 14 days. *Sleeping with Mickey Mouse*, a two-hour monologue for Menna Trussler as an elderly woman bleakly reminiscing on New Year's Eve, was arguably Vickery's most accomplished play, and was seen at the Sherman in 1992. As it was so brilliant, it was performed on television starring Brenda Blethyn.

In 1994, Vickery formed his own company, Grassroots Productions, with whom he often acted, appearing most recently as the titular cowboy manqué Tonto Evans at the New Theatre, Cardiff in 2005. He was also a popular dame for the company.

In collaboration with Mal Pope, Vickery co-wrote the musical *Amazing Grace*, which was premièred in 2005 and dealt with the 1904–1905 Welsh revival.

His television credits included episodes from the popular Nerys Hughes period drama *The District Nurse* and *Eastenders*.

He died after a short illness a week short of his 67th birthday. Wales will be a sadder place without him but through his plays, he will live on and still make us laugh!

Sources: <https://www.thestage.co.uk/features/obituaries/2018/obituary-frank-vickery-ayckbourn-valleys/>

There is also a TV programme about him: *Frank Vickery: the People's Playwright*, which was shown on BBC2. It is well worth watching and is available on TVCatchup.

## Society News

### The Annual General Meeting

On the evening of Thursday 20th September, twenty-two members braved torrential rain to attend our AGM.

At the meeting it was agreed that the membership fees would remain the same for 2018/19 but from 2019/20 the fees would be raised to £12.00 and that the associate member rate would be abolished.

### Election of Officers and Committee Members 2018/19

The following Officers were re-elected:

Secretary:	Mr. Jeremy Morgan
Treasurer:	Mr John Davey
Speakers' Secretary:	Mrs Val Manning
Minute Secretary:	Mr Alun Watts
Webmaster:	Mr Colin Rees
Editors:	Mr David Leslie Davies, Mr Steven Graham and Mr Colin Rees.
Book Sales:	Mr Haydn Williams
Committee Members:	Mr Alan Abraham, Mrs C Thomas.

Ms Charlotte Morgan was elected on to the committee.

Following the meeting, there was a very informative illustrated lecture on the Iron Industry of the Aberdare Valley given by Steven Graham. A book on this subject is now on sale for £16.00.

### November 11th Cenotaph Ceremony

The Society has purchased an Armistice wreath. Alan Abraham will lay the wreath on behalf of the Society at the Remembrance-Armistice Day ceremony on 11 November at the cenotaph in Aberdare.



## Blue Plaque event

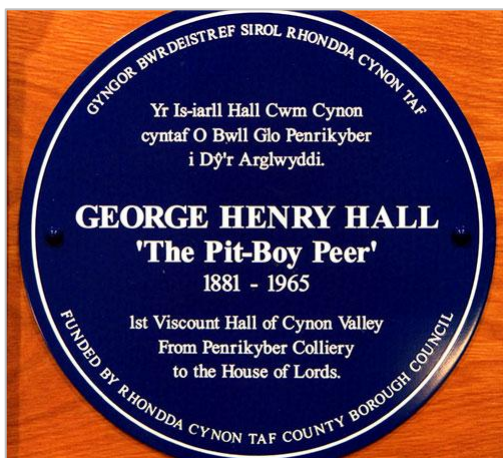


Lord George Hall

On Friday 28th September, a blue plaque in memory of Viscount George Hall was unveiled by Mrs Ann Clwyd M.P. at Penrhiwceiber Workingmen's Hall and Institute. He started work at Penrikyber Colliery when he was only nine and rose to the House of Lords. A talk on his life was given by Mrs Jennifer George a relative of his. Some musical items were given by the two Penrhiwceiber schools. Mrs Vikki Howells, our local Labour A.M., also gave a speech about him. Our president, Lord Aberdare, and some of our members attended the ceremony.



Ann Clwyd, M.P., unveiling the plaque



The new Plaque



Mrs Jennifer George speaking about George Hall

### Local Rorke's Drift Defender

The following day at Aberdare Cemetery the grave of Private David Lloyd was re-dedicated. He lived with his family in Mount Pleasant Street, Trecynon before joining the army. *Cwmdare Voices* sang some items and among those present were the Mayor: Councillor Steve Powderhill, the Leader of RCT Council: Andrew Morgan, Roy Noble and some of our society members.

### New Historical Books

In the last few months, three books have been written about various aspects of the history of Merthyr Tydfil: Pontmorlais – *The Gilded Years: a history of regeneration at Merthyr Tydfil* by Huw Williams. This is a brief illustrated history of this important Merthyr street. It is freely available at the Redhouse, (the Old Town Hall), in Merthyr Tydfil.

Another book is *Remarkable Women of Merthyr and Rhymney* by Dawn Bowden (Member of the Welsh Assembly for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney). This is available free at her office in Merthyr's High Street, or online from her own website.

*Once upon a time in Merthyr Tydfil ...The Birth and growth of an Industrial Town*, by Wilf and Mary Owen traces the history of its iron industry with particular reference to some ironmasters who came from the Midlands to Merthyr, e.g. John Guest, (1722-1785), the grandfather of Josiah John Guest, (1785-1852); Anthony Bacon, Richard Hill and Francis Homfray from the North of England. It is available from Cyfarthfa Castle Museum and other outlets in Merthyr Tydfil and costs £10.

*The Quest for Queen Mary* by James Pope-Hennessy edited by Hugo Vickers.

*Queen Victoria* by Lucy Worsley.

*Ar Drywydd Niclas y Glais* by Hefin Wyn. This 450-page volume traces the life of Thomas Evan Nicholas whose bardic name was Niclas y Glais. Niclas was defeated in the 1918 Aberdare General Election by Charles Stanton.

*Erebus* by Michael Palin who recounts the tale of the ill-fated HMS Erebus that disappeared on an Arctic expedition in 1848. It was broadcast by the BBC in *Book of the Week* Monday–Friday at 9.45am Radio 4 in early October.

*Vietnam* by Max Hastings: an epic history of a divisive war 1945–1975. This exhaustively researched and superbly written 752-page book is powerful and chilling.

*Churchill: walking with destiny* by Andrew Roberts. This masterwork of 1150 pages is a landmark reconsideration of the iconic war leader based on exclusive access to extensive new material from private diaries, to details from war cabinet meetings. (The author will be speaking about his book at the Hay Festival Winter Weekend on 23rd November).

## Historical Television Programmes

*Ancient Invisible Cities*. BBC2, 3 episodes: Cairo, Athens and Istanbul.

There are many television programmes to commemorate the end of World War One :

*100 Days to Victory*, 2 parts, BBC2 . This gripping programme focuses on General John Monash of Australia and General Arthur Currie of Canada, and tells how these two generals with their new tactics, helped the allies turn from the brink of defeat to victory in the last 100 days of the war.

*We Will Remember Them* with Huw Edwards BBC4. He reveals the untold story behind the British government not repatriating its war dead.

*WW1 : The Last Tommies*. BBC4. 3 episodes.

*WW1: The Final Hours*. BBC2.

*They Shall Not Grow Old*. BBC2. A documentary to mark the centenary of the end of the war.

These are all available on BBC iPlayer and TVCatchup.

## Cynon Valley Museum Exhibition

From 6th November to Christmas: World War 1 in the Cynon Valley: The impact of the end of the war.

## In Memoriam

<p>We regret to record the death of CVHS Member Julia Irene Prytherch, of 20, Seymour Street, Aberdare. Mrs Prytherch passed away on 11th September 2018, aged 77 years. She leaves one daughter, Sharron, and a grand daughter, Samarra.</p>
---

## Stop Press : Book Launch

Rev. Alan Meats will launch his book, "To a Valley Born" at Aberdare Library on Wednesday 28th November, 10.30-12.30.

In his book he takes a nostalgic trip through memories of childhood and schooldays in the 1940s and 50s, described with humour, honesty and perception.

He was formerly the vicar of St. Fagan's Church, Aberdare.

## 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.

© Published by The Cynon Valley History Society.

[www.cvhs.org.uk](http://www.cvhs.org.uk)

Edited by Steven Graham, 7 Hazel Drive, Aberdare, CF44 8DB

Tel: 07779 863611

**E-mail: [sgraham10@hotmail.com](mailto:sgraham10@hotmail.com)**

**Epost: [sgraham10@hotmail.com](mailto:sgraham10@hotmail.com)**

Registered Charity No. 510143

Printed by Dial-A-Print, Mountain Ash, 01443 474822

SG

October 2018