

CYNON VALLEY HISTORY SOCIETY

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HANES

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A Happy and Healthy 2022 to you all

2021 has been a difficult year for many and I hope that the Covid-19 virus will be eradicated this year so that life can get back to normal.

Two distinguished men of our valley have died recently: Our own Geoffrey Evans who was a pillar of the Society, and Ron Jones, one of Wales' most famous athletes. We have obituaries for both of them.

Many, many, valley chapels have closed and recently some of our banks have closed or are closing. There are articles about one of each.

Our newsletter has a pen-picture of a valley street, an article about the Rossi family, and ends with an appreciation of one of our valley's greatest men.

Enjoy your reading!

Geoffrey Evans: an obituary

(an edited version of articles by Jeremy Morgan and Hywel Davies)



How can one pay tribute to a wonderful gentleman like Geoffrey Evans, who died on October 6th?

His interests were so many and varied including the worlds of music and theatre such that a starting point is difficult to identify. He will probably be remembered above all as a local historian

He was a hardworking member of the Cynon Valley History Society committee and its secretary from 1989–1993. The fruits of vast research into the history of the Cynon valley were printed in some of the *Old Aberdare* volumes and in *Hanes*, the quarterly newsletter of the society, to which he contributed much and edited from 2003–2015. In 2011, he co-edited the volume *The Land Your Fathers Possessed* and three years later he wrote *The Men Who Marched Away*.

In other historical spheres, he was Secretary of the Glamorgan History Society, 1993–95. His published work runs to at least seventeen books and articles, which he wrote, co-authored or edited, as well as innumerable other contributions. This sterling endeavour was recognised when he was made a member of the Royal Historical Society.

Geoff was born in Broniestyn Terrace, Trecynon. After completing his National Service in the army, he went to work at the Lederle Laboratories on the Rhigos Estate. There he met Olga who also worked at the laboratories, and in 1963, they married at Saron Chapel, Aberaman. They raised two children, Anneliese and Julian.

By the time he married, Geoff had begun training in the legal profession, but although he qualified, he soon realised that his heart was not in the Law. History was his primary interest, especially that of the Cynon valley.

He was a valued member of the Rotary Club in Aberdare, where he served terms as both President and Secretary, and being a local historian, wrote a book about its history.

Geoff was brought up in the Church in Wales and he was diligent in writing histories of both St. John the Baptist Church, and St. Elvan's, Aberdare. Also, as the work of adapting St. Elvan's to a community centre draws to a close, it is worth recalling Geoff's valuable contribution as historical adviser to the church steering committee.

The Cynon Valley Museum was another of his loves; he helped in the fight to retain it. While there was no saving the Museum as a publicly funded institution, Geoffrey was quick to step forward to actively contribute to its success under the auspices of the Cynon Valley Museum Trust. He was among the first to stand duty at the front desk when it reopened and progressed to being a Collection Volunteer. In the museum he continued his historical work by researching into history of the Jewish community of the valley, and by writing popular articles for the museum's own newsletter, Y Chwa/Blast.

Just in case you think he was slowing at this point, Geoffrey also set up a new group dedicated to taking action to protect and maintain the Gadlys Ironwork's blast furnaces. That the group was called the Gadlys Ironworks Trust — fondly known as the GITs — speaks much of his sense of fun.

Geoff enjoyed discussion and socialising in the lounge of the Whitcombe Inn in the centre of Aberdare, with a pint of *Butty Bach* in front of him. He always dressed smartly, and 'dapper' is the word by which he shall be remembered; also as a gentleman by all who knew him. Geoffrey never seemed to age, his vitality and energy belied his rather advanced years (88), which he kept secret.

As Jeremy Morgan, a friend and fellow museum worker wrote in his written tribute to Geoff: "The next time I am in the pub, I shall raise a glass of 'Butty Bach' in memory of the 'Butty Mawr.'

The Rossi family *by Susan Rossi*

Albino Rossi left Bertozzi near Bardi in February 1960 for Wales because he was looking for a better life. His farm was not large enough for all his family to work on, and there was no industry in the area.

He left behind his wife Gina and four young children: Celestino aged 13, Luigi aged 12, Lina aged 10 and Ugo aged 6 to run the farm and manage the animals.

On arrival in Wales, Albino went to work for Gina's cousin in Tonypany making ice cream in a café owned by the Servini family.

After 3 years of working long hours, Albino was able to send for the family to join him in Wales. The family arrived in Cardiff on the 9th May 1963 after travelling by train for two days. With no understanding of English, Gina hoped Albino had received the telegram she had sent him in Tonypany giving information of their arrival time!

The younger children attended the local Roman Catholic school and Celestino and Luigi went to work in Asti's near Cardiff General Railway Station, while Albino continued working at Servini's in Tonypany. At the time Albino came to work in UK people had to have a sponsor and a job to go to, and stay there for 4 years which meant that sadly Albino was 20 miles away from his wife and his children. Gina worked in the kitchen of Luigi's Restaurant in St Mary Street, Cardiff.



Gina and Albino Rossi



The Rossi Family in 1990
Ugo, Albino, Lina, Gina, Luigi, Celestino

At last in February 1969, the family were reunited when they moved to Mountain Ash where they took over the Ferrari's Café in Commercial Street.

In 1973, Lina married a local boy Dennis Evans and they took over what was Sidoli's Café, High Street, Aberdare renaming it The Pop-in Café.

Celestino worked in First Steel in Hirwaun until he retired through ill health, and sadly died in 2009 aged 62.

Ugo had a stall in Aberdare Market selling cold meats.

Luigi married Susan Coley, (who was born in Cilfynydd), in 1975 and they continued in the Café until 1977 when Albino & Gina retired to live in Plasdraw, Aberdare.

In 1990, Albino (then aged 75) and his family went to Italy on holiday where he sadly died. Gina died in Aberdare in 2002 aged 81. They were both buried in their local cemetery in Italy.

Luigi then with his wife Susan and brother Ugo took over the Regent Fish Bar in Canon Street, Aberdare, (previously owned by John Negrotti).

They worked there for 24 years until taking early retirement in November 2003.

[Most Italians left the Bardi area at the turn of the 19/20th centuries but the Rossi family left much later, in 1960. Ed.]

[I would like to thank Graham James, a society member who kindly introduced me to the Rossi family. Ed.]

Ron Jones, MBE: an obituary



Ron Jones, (right), practising with
Lynn Davies in 1964

Ron Jones was born and bred in Cwmaman. He attended Glynhafod Primary School and then went to Aberdare Boys' Grammar School.

His sporting career started in a strange way. In 1955 he knocked on the front door of Bernard Baldwin's house in Mountain Ash, who was the Welsh A.A.A. secretary, and asked for advice about running in athletics competitions. Bernard told the 21 year-old to run in the Glamorgan Championships in Swansea. To his astonishment, Ron won the 440 yards' race.

Aberdare had no running track so he had to travel to Cardiff to join Birchgrove Harriers. He went on to great successes winning

12 Welsh sprint titles from 1956–1970 and set 22 Welsh records.

He was one of the few Welsh athletes ever to hold a world record in athletics, this was when he, with Berwyn Jones, was part of the British 4x110 yards relay squad that beat the Americans and matched their world record of 40 seconds in 1963.

At the Olympic Games in Mexico in 1968, where he was the captain of the British team, he had the double distinction of clocking 10.43 seconds for the 100 metres, a British record which would last for 22 years.

In 1972 he retired, but continued in the sporting life becoming the Chief Executive of Queens Park Rangers, then in 1980 came back to his homeland to become Managing Director of Cardiff City Football Club. Later in 1997, he became Director of Sports Aid Cymru Wales.

In 2018, a new £3m athletics track in Aberdare was named in his honour.

He died on 30th December 2021, aged 87, one of Wales's greatest athletes!

Sources: Couzens, Terry, The Cwmaman Files.

Cole, Rob, Cynon Valley Leader, 6th January 2022.

ABGS website, (www.abgs.org.uk).

Bethesda Welsh Baptist Chapel, Abercwmboi

This chapel sadly closed on 3rd October when the last service was held there. It has an interesting history.

The cause was started in 1854 in Cap Coch (Abercwmboi) by a few members who came from "Gwawr" Welsh Baptist chapel, Aberaman. They met in the homes of Mr William Thomas "Bach" and John Rees in William Street.

As membership increased, in 1856 two houses in Jenkin Street were converted into a chapel. The trustees were Thomas Evans, grocer, Lewis Street, Aberaman and Howell Evans draper, Aberaman — and later the Cloth Hall, Mountain Ash. The chapel opened in September 1856, when the irrepressible Rev Dr. Thomas Price and two other ministers conducted the service.

Amongst the membership, the chapel had three lay preachers in their midst: James Bennett, John Bevan (overman) and William Walters. At that time, there were two services on a Sunday, a thriving school and 78 members.

On May 14th 1860, the church was officially formed and 39 members were released from Gwawr. The first pastor was Rev Robert Owen of Berthlwyd.



Two baptisms took place in 1860, when 11 persons were baptized in the river Cynon, somewhere between the Middle Duffryn Colliery and Peace Park.

Two years later Rev James Jones from Calfaria chapel took over the pastorate. He was the first manager of the Cooperative store in Abercwmboi. He wrote in conjunction with Rev William Harris of Heolyfelin, *Llyfr Tonau a Wasanaeth y Bedyddwyr*, (a book of hymns for use in Baptist chapels).

The numbers increased so much that the chapel in Jenkin Street became too small and in June 1864 the foundation stone of a new chapel in John Street was laid by Miss Mary Morgan and in August 1865, it opened at a cost of £864.

Rev Jones left the church in 1869 and the following year an elderly gentleman Jenkin Rees accepted the pastorate and was there for 18 months 1870–71. He was a good preacher

but W. W. Price records that he "suffered from bad feet!"

The chapel had several other pastors until, in 1900, Rev Matthias Jenkins who was born in Maenclochog, Pembrokeshire took over the pastorate. In his early years he became a lay preacher in 1892 while being a deacon at Ebenezer chapel, Aberavon. Despite not having had any college education he was much sought after as a preacher and his first pastorate was Philadelphia Chapel in Ogmores Vale where he laboured for 3½ years.

At Bethesda, he ministered for a long period - 30 years. By 1930 he was in poor health, he was compelled to retire on 23rd February, and died on 16th May, aged 72. There is a memorial to him in the church.

During his time there, a drama group was formed and penny readings and debating meetings were held.

By 1932, the members had cleared the debt of £1154 in purchasing the minister's house, extending the vestry and re-decorating the interior and exterior of the chapel.

There was a crowded congregation in the chapel on 11th January 1934 when Rev Arthur Llewellyn was inducted into the pastorate. There were 18 speakers at the afternoon session of the induction service. [It must have been a very long service! Ed.] He had been brought up in Hermon, Pontygwaith, and Rhondda leaving for Bangor Bible College 1926-29. At his induction he said that he had met Rev Mathias Jenkins several years previously and said to him that if an invitation came from Bethesda he would accept and spend his lifetime there. This promise he indeed fulfilled. His was a long and successful pastorate. During his time, there were extensive renovations in 1949, and the chapel re-opened on 9th February 1950.

He was secretary of the East Glamorgan Baptist Association. He had served on the committee of the Parliament for Wales Campaign and when the National Eisteddfod was held in Aberdare in 1956, he was the vice-chairman of the Youth Committee.

He was always active and cheerful, extremely well liked and highly respected, being at all times ready to help anyone in need.

Bethesda was preparing for its centenary celebrations, but they were darkened when Rev Llewellyn was taken seriously ill and could take no further part, and he sadly died after a long illness aged 56 on 3rd February 1960.

From 1916 to 1938 the membership stayed steady at around 150 with 18 (Sunday School teachers). The high point of the Sunday School occurred in 1928 when there were 195 pupils! The Second World War caused a decline, so in 1947 the membership dropped to 119 — there were 60 children and 8 teachers.

Many of the senior members have served the chapel for numerous years: Mr David Morgan was 87 in 1960 and was a senior deacon. He was elected treasurer in 1910 and after the death of William Daniel, he was elected secretary with the late Mr Evan Richard Evans as treasurer, and only relinquished his duties due to failing eyesight in 1948: 38 years of faithful service.

Mr D. M. Rees was appointed deputy precentor in 1926, then in 1930 he was appointed conductor and still held that position in 1960: 34 years of service, which continued thereafter.

Mr Rees's wife Bronwen, (née Thomas), was appointed organist in 1929 and was still playing the organ in 1960: 31 years of service.

[I hope to continue its history up to its closure. Ed.]

Barclays Bank, Aberdare: Its history and Proposed Closure



The closure of Barclays will leave only one of the "Big 4 Banks" remaining in Aberdare: Lloyds Bank in Canon Street, although there are still some building societies in the town.

The Barclays Bank branch at 12/13 Victoria Square has an interesting history. Here are some of its highlights up to 1936.

On its site originally was The Baileys Arms which stood there from 1861 to 1882. Among the landlords were Thomas Lewis, William Morgan, Henry Bragg, William Powell, and Theophilus Davies, a harpist and boxer. Dic Sion Siams (Shams) assisted him.

The building changed its character totally when it was converted into a branch of the London and Provincial Bank in 1882. Thomas Boswell was its first manager.

Around 1900 Charles Morgan Lewis became the manager of the branch and held the position until it was taken over by Barclays Bank around 1914–18. He was succeeded by C. J. Trump who became a local director of Barclays Bank in Cardiff.

In 1925, Mr G. R. Phillips took over his position in Aberdare. He had previously been the manager of the Aberystwyth branch where he had been a member of the Court of Governors of the University College there. In Aberdare, he became a member of Carmel Baptist Church and as an ardent freemason became a member of the St David's Lodge in Aberdare. He retired on 30th April 1936 after serving Barclays for 42 years with the good wishes of his customers whom he had proved a safe guide in financial affairs.

Mr James Herbert John took over his position on 1st May.

Sources:

W.W. Price List of Occupants and occupations in the Aberdare Streets. WWP Collection Ref LH3.

Aberdare Leader 2nd May 1936, p5.

The Jews of Clifton Street, Aberdare

A Society member Mrs Medi Jones, née Williams, who was born in 15 Clifton Street, has kindly sent me some information about the Jews who lived in Clifton Street and who were wonderful neighbours to her around the period 1939–45:

No.5

Mr Solly and Mrs Alena Schlachter lived here in 1939. Mr Solly used to go on his bike with a gun strapped to it. He would go to the slaughterhouse down by the river to kill animals for the Jewish people of Aberdare.

No 12

The Shimiloves lived here during 1938–39.

Sydney Shimilove began working at Morris Jacobs shop in Aberdare in 1929 when it was still primarily a pawnbroker. He was only twelve years of age when he began his work there and eventually became manager of the shop.

However, he remembered that shortly after he started, it switched to be a draper's shop. He was often seen on the bus from Cardiff to Aberdare wearing a brown bowler hat and a smart three-piece suit.

His brother David married and moved to the Rhondda. Their sister Nan always lived there and never married.

No 14

Mr Sam Kahn and his family lived here. Sam had fled from Germany and in Aberdare travelled every day to his work in Cardiff. They were a very Orthodox Jewish family. Medi tells us that her father and her mother attended the wedding of their daughter in the yard of the house under a canopy where saucers were smashed! The whole street was invited to the wedding in their garden.

There was another marriage in the family as The Jewish Chronicle of 2nd December 1945, page 11 informs us. Bernard, younger son of Mr Sam Kahn and Mrs Kahn, (née Ginsberger), of 14 Clifton Street married Cynthia, daughter of Mr & Mrs H. Goldberg of 11 Cardiff Street, Aberdare on 18th October in London. [Mr & Mrs Harry Goldberg were the proprietors of the 'Jane Cooper' shop selling women's clothes. Ed.]

Medi can remember the big funeral when their grandfather died. Many Jews from the Cardiff community attended and there were many cars in the street. There were candelabras in the windows and a lot of weeping and wailing. All the women wore wigs in those days.

Before the Kahns lived there it was a manse, as Rev Thomas Henry, the minister of the Primitive Methodist Chapel, Monk Street, and his daughter Doreen lived there. In 1962, Rev Eric Jones came to live there with his wife so it became a manse again.

There is an excellent article entitled *A Walking tour of Aberdare's Jewish History* which was produced by the Cynon Valley Museum and which can be seen on their website. Geoffrey Evans did much research on the Jews of the Cynon Valley.

CVHS SPEAKERS/LECTURES 2022

20/01/22	Zoom	Dr Chris Turner	The Welsh Religious Revival 1904-5: a social history
17/02/22	T.B.C.	Steven David	T.B.C.
17/03/22	Museum	Mike Jones	The Neath and Tennant Canals
21/04/22	Museum	Dean Powell	William Price
19/05/22	Museum	Pat Evans	Musical Memories
16/06/22	Museum	Anne Watts	David Lloyd George

'Old Aberdare' series for sale at Brecon

David Leslie Davies has informed me that on 13th November at the "Brecon Books", second hand bookshop at 10-12 Lion Yard, Brecon, he came across a *fairly* complete collection of the *Old Aberdare* series: nos. 1 & 2 (in reprint), 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 to be precise. Missing were nos. 3 & 4.

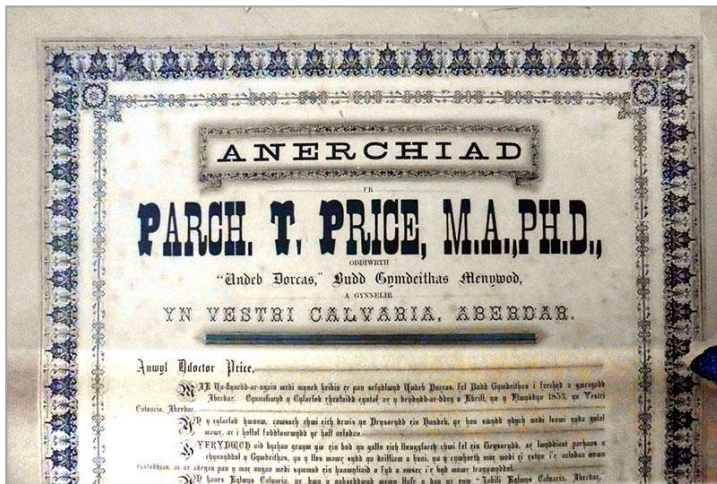
Some members of the Society might like to buy these as individual items, to complete a 'run', or as a whole. Also there was John Mear's excellent book on Cwmdare.

The books may be sold by now but if you are interested please contact Paul Hanson at breconbookshop@gmail.com

Rev Dr Thomas Price and the Dorcas Society

Aberdare Library has in its archives a beautiful address in Welsh given to Rev Price by the Dorcas (Friendly) Society in July 1874.

A summary of the address is as follows:



Dear Doctor Price, Twenty-one years have passed since the Dorcas Society was established as a Social Benefit for the ladies and wives of Aberdare. The first regular meeting was held on 13th April 1853 in the vestry of Calvary, Aberdare.

At that meeting you were chosen to be Treasurer of our Union, which position you have filled with great care and to the satisfaction of all members.

Since 1853 until the last annual meeting, the union received £509 19s and has paid towards illnesses, burials

and expenses, the sum of £320 13s 5d.

Dear Doctor Price, would you allow us at the end of 21 years of free service, to present you with a small gift as an expression of our feelings towards you as our Treasurer. The gift has taken the form of a beautiful gold ring which we would like you to wear as a sign of the loving bond which unites us as one family of all the members of Dorcas Society. On the outside of the ring we have had engraved your initials carved on a precious stone, while on the inside is the following sentence- "Presented to Rev. Dr. Price by the members of the Dorcas Society 1874".

I would like to thank Mrs Marilyn McAdam for translating the address into English.

Feedback

I would be grateful for feedback about any of the articles in this issue. Articles on any subject about our valley's history for possible publication are welcome.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Mrs S. Rossi for the photographs of her family, RCT Libraries for the photograph of Barclays Bank and Mr John Davey for the photograph of Bethesda Chapel.

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