

HANES Bach June 2020 (issue 2)



Dear Members, we hope you are all well and are ‘managing’ to endure the current situation we are experiencing. HANES Bach will continue to be issued monthly for a limited period during this difficult (Coronavirus) period. All contributors are self-editors. Compilation is agreed with the CVHS committee.

The next issue of HANES 91 (Summer) will be issued July/August.

Aberdare’s Connection with the Alamo, San Antonio, Texas.

Celia G. Thomas

St John’s Church in Aberdare dates back to Norman times in the twelfth century A.D. and has a very interesting history. Behind the door is a plaque that links Aberdare to the Alamo in San Antonio, Texas, where the famous siege took place in 1836. Men from many different states of the USA fought for an independent Texas, freed from the rule of Mexico and its tyrannical president, General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna.

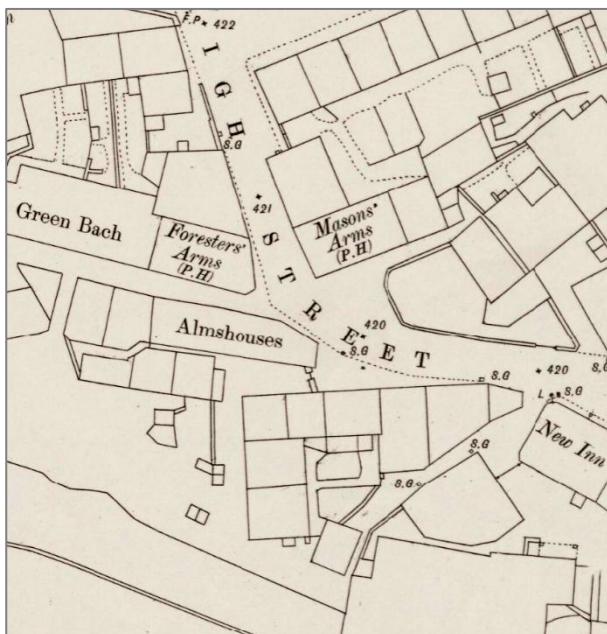
I have visited the Alamo three times. The first occasion was in March 1991. On entering I noticed a large glass case with flags of many different nations. One was the Welsh Red Dragon which surprised and intrigued me.

Inside the Alamo, fastened to the walls, are small brass plaques with the name and nationality of every man who fought and died there. After much searching, I found the one with the name Lewis Johnson from Wales. On returning home, I asked my cousin Denise, to find out all about him. She discovered that this man was from Virginia, son of James Johnson who had moved from Wales to America in 1829. So he was Welsh.

However, the name on the plaque in St John’s Church is Edward Edwards who had connections with Aberdare and worked for the British East India Company. It is said that he was commissioned to sell guns to the Mexicans, so although he died at the Alamo, he did not fight for the Texans. Therefore his name is not inside the Alamo on a brass plaque.

Revisiting The Almshouses

Geoffrey Evans



Section of the 1868 OS Map

The 18th century village of Aberdare, settled close to the parish church, was a diverse place with its market place, corn mill, smithy, several inns and a row of almshouses. The latter, built ca 1720 was provided by the charitable Eleanor Mathew of Aberaman to home poor persons of the parish. The tenements, four in number, consisted of one room only; they had no privies. Provision was made for the maintenance of the inmates by means of an annual rent charge of £5 on all the benefactor’s lands in the counties of Glamorgan and Monmouthshire.

By 1837 the administration of the almshouses had passed to the Aberdare parish officers who settled four pauper women in the dwellings, destitute widows, and divided the £5 between them. The houses had been repaired at parish expense but by 1836 were ‘in a dilapidated state’. At that time the rent charge was attached to Penrhiw Cradoc farm in the parish of Llanwonno then in the possession of John Bruce Bruce of Duffryn.

The almshouses were later given the addresses of 21 & 22 High Street and 1 & 2 Greenfach.

The properties were still occupied in 1883 when complaints were received by the Board of Health that large piles of ashes were being deposited at the rear. The Board issued notices that prosecutions would be brought if the practice continued.

Later the Health Board considered adding water closets, but there was insufficient space at the rear. It was remarked that at one time the dwellings were considered 'palaces' but were now very old fashioned and required a great deal of repair to make them habitable.

The notes of the meeting reveal that the pine end wall, facing towards the Black Lion Hotel, was covered in wooden boarding used for bill-poster sticking. This covered a stone tablet engraved with a Latin inscription stating that the houses were intended for four indigent virgins. The Board commented that as the boarding now covered up the only piece of antiquarianism in the town it should be removed.

The reports of the Board's February (1884) meeting indicate that because of the decline of the houses it was considering demolition, and it was noted that enquiries had ascertained that one of the trustees of the almshouses would offer no objection to such a proposal; the chairman, Rees Hopkin Rhys, referring to the original intention of the benefactor that the houses should be occupied by virgin spinsters, he remarked that he was sure that not one person who lived there now was a virgin spinster.

The four houses had become vacant by early April 1884 and the Board's Chairman considered that in view of their state it would be best if they were now taken down. The Board agreed to this course. One foresighted member, D. Davies (Canton House), requested that the tablet be preserved and the surveyor was instructed to see that the stone plaque was removed carefully.

In May 1884 the Board of Health's surveyor reported that the almshouses had been demolished and the materials removed, leaving the site clear.

The Rent Charge continued to be paid long after demolition, and in August, 1895 it was noted that the accumulated fund, then amounting to £67.10. 4d was held on deposit at a bank. There was a recommendation that the money be used for a scholarship, or scholarships, in the Aberdare Intermediate School.

In January 1896 there was a proposal that new almshouses should be built in the town to mark the honour of baronetcy conferred on Sir William Thomas Lewis of The Mardy, the properties to bear his name. The proposition did not however get off the ground.

Unfortunately, hardly anything is known about the inhabitants of these four small rooms; two pieces of information have however survived. The first, from the parish registers of 1735, records the burial of *Mary Ed. Meredith of ye alms house* in September of that year.

The second is an entry, dated 14th December 1882, in the unpublished diary of the Revd. David Griffiths, a curate at Aberdare from 1877 to 1883. It reads: *'through driving snow to the almshouses. Poor old Ann Rees in her lonely corner, widow. Found that our parish Dorcas, the benevolent lady of James Lewis Esq. of Plasdraw [House], and sister of the Dean of Bangor, had visited the literally lowly hut before us and left a warm shawl.*

Sadly the tablet, which would have been a most evocative link to the almshouses of 1720, has not survived.

Sources:

Geoffrey Evans, *A History of St John's Church, Aberdare*, Aberdare, 1982, p.73

Raymond K J Grant: *On the Parish*, Cardiff 1988, pp 6-7

Rev. David Griffiths, *Diaries, 1877-1883, Transcriptions*, ACL. R.Ch.1/6/1 & 2.

The Aberdare Times, 1887-1895 passim. *The Aberdare Leader*, 6th September, 1913.

The Cardiff Times, 10th August 1895.

Timber Viaducts

Colin Rees

Most of us with an interest in local nineteenth century industrial history will know that Aberdare had two railway viaducts of a type designed by I.K. Brunel. These viaducts had masonry piers but were characterised by their timber 'fans' which supported the bridge deck. These structures were not at all uncommon on the rail network in Britain, and were built with timber as an economy measure, compared to using masonry throughout. However, maintenance costs were higher than masonry bridges due to the rotting of the timber. What is less generally known is that there was a third viaduct of this type in Aberdare, situated between Abernant station and the entrance to the tunnel at the top of Cwmbach that took the railway to Merthyr Tydfil. But more of this viaduct later — a bit of background first.

Two major railway companies forged an entrance into Aberdare in order to convey the immense mineral wealth of the locality. Firstly, the Aberdare Railway reached Aberdare from present-day Abercynon in 1846. Its track followed the valley floor of the River Cynon and initially had its terminus at the bottom of Mill Street in Trecynon. The same year this railway was leased to the Taff Vale Railway Company.

Secondly, the Vale of Neath Railway, (VoN), arrived in Aberdare from Neath in 1851. There was an important junction at Gelli Tarw west of Llwydcoed, it was a three-way split: a branch straight on to Llwydcoed, Abernant then Merthyr, which was reached in 1853; a second branch, slightly to the right, down to the VoN station at Aberdare, later the High Level station; and a third branch sweeping more tightly to the right that took the railway over the 13-span timber Gamlyn Viaduct over the River Cynon, then on to the 11-span timber viaduct over the River Dare to Dare Junction, where, by a reversal of a train, entry into the Dare Valley and its pits was achieved in 1854. Then in 1856, the railway was extended from Dare Junction, via a crossing over Monk Street, to the Aman Valley and its collieries. Both the viaducts were about 70 feet high, and in length, Gamlyn was 600 feet, and the Dare 450 feet. They were truly impressive structures, and they were the last of the Brunel viaducts to survive, being demolished in 1947. The masonry piers are still extant.

But now back to the third bridge. It was called the Werfa Viaduct and was on the Merthyr branch. It spanned the ravine called Cwm y Felin Newydd through which runs Nant y Geugarn. It was of a similar construction* to the two other viaducts and was directly to the south west of the Werfa Colliery. However, the structure suffered from subsidence of the underlying ground and it eventually became unsafe and rickety. After unsuccessful measures were undertaken to strengthen the structure, a decision was made to demolish it and traverse the ravine with an embankment, which was in use by late 1867. This embankment can be inspected by taking a walk eastwards along the track bed from Abernant, starting near the Rhoswenallt Inn. The Werfa Viaduct was very rarely mentioned in local newspapers of the period. But here are a few of the accounts that do exist:

“ ... The line then embraces the well known coal pit of Messrs. Thomas and Joseph, passing within fifty yards of Nixon’s celebrated Werfa pit, near which it crosses a deep ravine by a gigantic viaduct, built at an elevation of one hundred feet.” (*The Welshman*, 4th November 1853.)

“ ... Then came the run over Werfa viaduct, at which point we invariably make it a rule to hold the breath and become nervous; ...” (*The Merthyr Telegraph and General Advertiser*, 16th January 1858.)

“...Then we have the Werfa Viaduct — a sinister bridge, that should be constantly examined.” (*The Merthyr Telegraph and General Advertiser*, 2nd December 1865.)

**Aberdare: The Railway and Tramroads*, John F. Mear, (1999), page 122.

Aberdare Cables/continuation.

Alan Abraham

Abstract Number 2.

Following the change of the company’s name to Aberdare Cables Ltd. and the acquisition of the former Ysguborwen Colliery site, building plans were prepared incorporating the old colliery railway sidings which previously had access to the Great Western Railway system. The building of a two-bay factory together with the acquisition of manufacturing plant commenced in 1937 and was completed in early 1938. On completion of the factory and installation of plant in early 1938, management and key workers from both Derby and Liverpool were employed. On the completion of commissioning the cable making plant, recruitment of local men, mainly redundant colliery workers, commenced. The successfully selected local employees were taught cable making by working alongside the key workers on the cable making machines.

For the success of any paper/lead cable manufacturing organisation, large tonnages of finished products together with the raw materials of manufacture had to be moved great distances within and beyond the United Kingdom. The daily movement of copper, lead, steel products and insulating paper in, and finish cable out, used the refurbished internal railway sidings that were reconnected to the existing Great Western Railway which ran alongside the factory boundary fence.

The first order to be received was for the supply of 520 yards of traction copper wire manufactured, in accordance with the British Standard Specification (BSS) Number 125.1930, overhead hard drawn copper wire. The customer for this order was Aberdare Urban District Council Electricity and Transport Department at a cost of £6 12s 11d, based on the then price of copper at £45 10s 0d per ton. The first order for paper/lead electrical cable manufactured in accordance with BSS Number 480.1933 was received from Felixstowe Urban District Council on 22nd March 1938, at a value of £139.

At the start of operations in 1938, fifty personnel, which included both the local and key workers, were employed under the guidance of Mr. T. Elder, General Manager. The number of employees increased to 200 by the summer of 1939 working in shifts to satisfy Aberdare Cables healthy order book.

In the early years, orders were received from within the UK and beyond; Welsh customers such as the city of Cardiff and Swansea local authorities were major clients as were English authorities that included Bournemouth, Chesterfield, Coventry, Derby, Manchester, Nottingham, Stockport, Poole, Woking and the

County of London. At this time, also, power cable was exported from Aberdare Cables to fourteen countries that included Iceland, Norway, Turkey and the Empire including South Africa and Hong Kong.

Aberdare's reputation became quickly noted in the market place, and with the local Member of Parliament blowing its trumpet, the Ministry of Supply became interested in their capability and became a customer. The first government order, to the value of £250,000, was received to supply all the cable requirements for the new Royal Ordnance Factory at Bridgend.

(Next abstract (the war years) in Hanes Bach No.3.)

Quiz/Puzzle Number 2.

This puzzle requires answers to the questions and then, taking the first letter of each answer, then use these five letters (anagram) and find an animal. *All six answers will be found in the next edition of Hanes Bach 3*

1. This nobleman was married to Elizabeth of York and his Uncle Jasper supported him in claiming the English throne. (5, 3 and 7)
2. A Welsh or Cornish short form poem written in a strict pattern known as cynghanedd. (6)
3. This team sport was originally a North American Indian tribal game. (8)
4. This female Welsh Hymn writer, with an Anglican upbringing and later became a Calvinistic Methodist (Presbyterian), lived in Montgomeryshire, born 1776. (3 and 9)
5. This river's source is near Plynlimon, it flows east and then south forming part of the English Welsh border on its route to the sea. (3).

Solution to Quiz/Puzzle Number 1.

Answers:- 1. Dwynwen. 2. Robert (Recorde). 3. Orme. 4. Neath. 5. Anglesey. 6. Gamlyn

Anagram:- DRAGON.

CADW Castell Coch: Community Engagement Project.

The Society has recently received a note from Cadw which may be of interest: - *we (Cadw) are inviting local groups, communities and individuals - anybody who is interested, in fact - to come together and participate in a project about Castell Coch. We are inviting everyone to conduct their own individual research projects on a topic that interests you most with the aim of combining everyone's findings into a detailed and interesting tapestry of the castle's considerable history. In addition to these, we are hoping to find accounts of life in Tongwynlais and the surrounding area from real people who have lived and worked in the area over the years.*

We have created a page where you can add any research you have done within each of the topics listed above, here is the link to the page: https://padlet.com/hollie_m_/6kgqkpd1wnc9

To add your research to the page you click the plus (+) icon below your topic area, which will allow you to upload your findings straight onto the page.

Further contact Tim Parry, Custodian, Castell Coch.CF15 7JS Tel (02920) 810101

Llywodraeth Cymru / Welsh Government E-mail: castellcoch@.gov.wales

Blue Plaque Scheme R.C.T.

We have been advised that the Blue Plaque Scheme is currently suspended. No contact is available at the Heritage Service for the scheme. Nominations will still be accepted at heritageservice@rctcbc.gov.uk who will collate all nominations. There are plans for the committee to meet prior to year-end, so it is a possibility that some plaques may be awarded.