

HANES Bach May 2020 (issue 1)



The first HANES was issued in 1984. (*No 1 July 1984, price 10 pence*) and headed ‘A Voice for Local History’

The editor of the first HANES produced by the Cynon Valley History Society was D. L. Davies who, in his introduction in the Newsletter stated that by producing it the Society ‘*hopes to give its members a means of exchanging news, views and information and also hopes to project the society outward in the direction of the local public and other local organisations in order to show that the history of the district is interesting and valuable and that the Society, as one of the main ‘custodians’ of that history is worthy of widespread local support.*’

HANES, 36 years on, continues to be issued on a quarterly basis, free of charge to all members and strives to meet the objectives of those earlier targets! The current editor is Steven Graham.

HANES Bach will be issued monthly for a limited period during this difficult (Coronavirus) period. All contributors are self-editors. Compilation is agreed with the CVHS committee.

HANES will still be issued quarterly

Extract from Hanes Number 1

John Davey

On the front page a photograph of old Trecynon is shown, (pre 1934, possibly 1914–1918), and on the back of the original photograph, designed as a postcard, it carries the wording “*We Have To Gain The Victory. That Is Our Task*”, a prophetic phrase that could be considered very relevant to the situation of today.

Industrial Archaeology Society

A letter to the Aberdare Leader in April 1967 comments on the Crane Pillar at the Basin, Abercynon. It states that this area was the terminal point of the epoch making first run in the world of a railway locomotive! There is also one at the Aberdare basin. The letter also refers to the newly-formed Industrial Archaeology Society at Aberdare. What happened to the Industrial Archaeology Society ???

The Barlow Rail

A report in the Western Mail (January 1981) refers to a railway track, once used on the Dare and Aman branch of the Neath Railway, being dug up and being re-laid in the Dare Country Park as a special exhibit! It was called the Barlow Rail after its designer, William Barlow, who was president of the Institute of Civil Engineers, a century ago. The Barlow Rail was unusual because it could be laid directly on ballast without the need for sleepers and was used on many South Wales routes in the Victorian era. Where is it now ?

The Iron Tram Bridge, Robertstown (financial concerns for tomorrow!)

The recent storms of early 2020 have resulted in the guide rails on the side of the bridge being badly damaged although the main platform of the bridge remains intact. The damage was caused by a tree falling on top of the bridge. Last year the base of one of the supporting abutments had been partially eroded by the river (action was taken by installing barriers to prevent pedestrian access to the bridge).

The cast iron bridge across the River Cynon between Trecynon and Robertstown is one of the oldest surviving ‘railway’ bridges in the world. It was built by the Aberdare Canal & Navigation Company in 1811 to carry the Llwydcoed Tramroad that ran from Hirwaun to the canal head at Cwmbach, south east of Aberdare.

Of interest to note is that at a CVBC Development Services meeting (19th November 1975) it was stated that the iron bridge was in need of repair but that the cost of such repair, re: Central Government advice (to limit local authority expenditure to essential projects), meant that no money was available on restoration apart from minor repairs. The pursuit of restoration continued (by John Mear and the Society), and in 1981 a letter was sent to CVBC enquiring about the possibility of them obtaining a grant from the National Heritage Memorial Fund, (Professor David Morris had stated that there was a lack of interest in Wales to apply for such grant aid). CVBC responded by stating their concern over the future of the bridge and the finance required to retain the bridge. Restoration of the bridge did eventually occur and in 1991, it became Grade II listed. The Robertstown Tramway Bridge was made a scheduled ancient monument in 2008, and was given a blue plaque as part of the Rhondda Cynon Tâf heritage trail.

On 22nd March 2010, an information panel was unveiled near the bridge, sponsored jointly by ICE Wales Cymru and Rhondda Cynon Tâf County Borough Council.



Aberdare Cables *Alan Abraham*

Some abstracts from an original and unpublished article on both Aberdare Cables Ltd. which operated from 1937 to July 31st 1971 and Pirelli General which operated from August 1st 1971 to December 31st 1985. I was employed on the site from August 1st 1955 until its closure and transfer of operations to Hampshire.

Abstract Number 1

When Macintosh Cables closed down at Derby and Liverpool in late 1934 the Engineer, Mr Tom Elder, was made redundant and when in dialogue with a close friend, Mr. Fred Penny, the Local Director of International Combustion, Derby they considered forming a new electric cable manufacturer in Derby. The pair came together and with the help of Sir George Usher and others discussed the possibility of financing a new company to manufacture paper lead cables of which there was, currently, a shortage of manufacture capability in Great Britain, especially, as indicated by the London Electric Supply Co. who were having difficulty to obtain sufficient cables for their ongoing installation programmes. Initially, an attempt to purchase the Macintosh site in Derby failed and land was then sought of in South Wales; the Member of Parliament for Aberdare, Mr. George Hall, (later Viscount Hall of Miskin), encouraged Aberdare Urban District Council to make available land on the redundant Ysguborwen Colliery site in Trecynon and that the council would, also, make available council houses at Tre-Ifor, Llwydcoed and Trefelin, Trecynon for key workers who were redundant employees from both the Liverpool and Derby Macintosh factories. Originally, the company was to be called “Trevethic Cables” but prior to the commencement of building the factory in 1937, the company name was changed to Aberdare Cables Limited and cable manufacture began in 1938.

Next abstract in Hanes Bach No.2.

Elaine Morgan, (1920–2013) *Celia G. Thomas*

This year of grace 2020 marks the centenary of the birth of Elaine Morgan. She was born Elaine Floyd on November 7th, 1920 in Hopkinstown near Pontypridd. She grew up in a mining community and won an exhibition scholarship to Oxford University where she became a star student. She graduated from Lady Margaret Hall with a degree in English. After graduation, Elaine taught for three years with the Workers Educational Association. She married Morien Morgan who had fought in the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War. They had two children, Dylan and Gareth, and later adopted a boy who they named Huw.

In the 1950s Elaine won a competition in the New Statesman which started her writing plays for the BBC. She wrote dramas, thrillers and many television series including adaptations of ‘How Green Was My Valley’ (1975), ‘Testament of Youth’ (1979), and ‘The Life and Times of David Lloyd George’ (1981). Her other work included episodes of, ‘Dr Finlay’s Casebook’ (1963–1970), and ‘Campion’ (1989).

In the 1970s Elaine started to focus her attention on science with a new theory on human evolution. In her treatise “The Descent of Woman”, she argued that women’s roles were as important as men’s. This book became an instant best-seller worldwide. She was feted in America and promoted her book on television in a coast-to-coast tour.

She published more books on evolution including ‘The Aquatic Ape’ (1982), ‘The Scars Of Evolution’ (1990), ‘The Descent Of The Child’, (1994), ‘The Aquatic Ape Hypothesis’ (1997), and ‘The Naked Darwinist’ (2008). Elaine was invited to discuss her ideas well into her old age. She gave one talk at eighty-nine which was viewed by more than a million people on the internet.

She won many awards. She won the Prize Italia in 1975 for a documentary about Joey Deacon, the disabled fundraiser, and her script for Vera Brittain's memoir, 'Testament of Youth' gained her the Royal Television Society's award for writer of the year in 1979. In her 90s she won golden opinions for her column in the Western Mail. She won two BAFTAs and two Writers Guild Awards.

Elaine was given an OBE in 2009 and was elected a Fellow of The Royal Society of Literature. She died at the age of 92 on July 12th 2013. Welsh author Trevor Fishlock described her in an obituary as a writer "who brought out the flavour of Wales".

She was a valley's girl who became internationally famous as a pioneering writer, a feminist icon and an evolutionary theorist.

The Other Side of the Common *Geoffrey Evans*

Leland crossed it in 1537, observing 'a great race and bredth of horsis', as did George Borrow in 1840, later recording: 'In about half-an-hour after leaving this place [Rhigos] I came to the beginning of a vast moor. It was now growing rather dusk, and I could see blazes here and there; occasionally I heard horrid sounds. Came to Irvan (Hirwaun)...'

Both travellers were writing about Hirwain Common which according to a 1666 survey extended over an area of four thousand acres. Most of us know of it through its Inclosure in 1857, and because parts were allotted to the parish of Aberdare for a public park and cemetery.

The breed noted by Leland was still thriving in 1840, and comprised one of the lots in the sale of livestock at Bwllfa Dare farm that year, namely..... 'Ten handsome ponies, of the celebrated Hirwain Common breed'. These ponies, known to local people as 'brocs' are represented today on the emblem of the Cynon Valley History Society.



The common also had a darker side, and was the home of many nefarious activities. It was vast, remote and criss-crossed by many roadways, tracks and paths most of which were stopped up under the Inclosure Award. From the early nineteenth-century it was venue of large-scale sheep stealing, 200-250 head at a time, bare knuckle prize fights, and foot and trotting races. In 1855 a correspondent to a newspaper reported that the common was becoming the resort of the drunkard and gambler on Sundays; pitch and toss was rife, and worse many of the illegally built cottages, (*ty un nos*), had set up as *cwrw-bachs* selling beer in contravention of Sunday licensing laws.

Here are some recorded examples of the sporting activities.

Foot Races and other races

Will O'Wain and the Welsh Bantam to run three miles, for 60 sovs [sovereigns] a-side, at Hirwain Common, Aberdare.

In 1837, two Aberdare men – Gething and Morgan Davies competed in a trotting match. Their horses, Jack and Cymro Bach, ran three miles for 50 sovereigns aside. Jack was the winner by 100 yards. The report says that although betting was on a small scale, some £500 changed hands. The day's sport ended with a foot race, drunkenness and fighting.

An interesting Notice dated, Aberdare village, 16th December 1839, given by Timothy Morgan announced, 'In answer to several applications to run FOOT RACES, I beg respectfully to acquaint my numerous supporters in my late successful contest on Hirwain Common, that I decline for the future, to engage in any

match that may be made for me.’ Yet another race took place in 1847 between John Jones, (alias Shoni Gastell-nedd), and Howell Davies, an Aberdare man, for £10 a sidebet. A large crowd witnessed the contest which was won by Davies. We are told that several smart sums of money changed hands; and that there were a number of running fights, full of sound and fury, but doing no damage.

Fighting

A notorious sheep-stealer, Richard Hackford, alias Hereford Dick, was re-captured on the Common in 1847 by Aberdare Police Constable Saddler after a desperate fight.

Two police officers were assaulted in 1856 during an attempt to break up a fight on the common. A crowd of four hundred spectators had turned up to see the match.

As late as 1904 police officers frustrated a fight there between three men one of whom said that he had been obliged to ‘fight the two, every other round’.

Meetings

The Common was a popular venue for many varied public meetings. As an early example: a large crowd met to agree petitioning the Queen and Parliament in support of a People’s Charter. Another large meeting supported an anti-truck movement, whilst another group met to protest against the high price for meat being charged by local butchers.

Many other significant events have taken place on the common, for example, the very first Eisteddfod of the modern era was proclaimed there in 1861. “...Precisely at ten o’clock according to bardic custom, a procession of bards, committee and friends, headed by the Aberdare Rifle [Volunteers] band, marched to Hirwain Common, where the chief bards entered the circle and opened the Gorsedd by delivering the following proclamation: The truth against the world. In the year one thousand eight hundred and sixty one, the sun approaching the Autumnal equinox, at the hour of noon, on the 20th day of August, after the proclamation of a year and a day, this Gorsedd is opened on Hirwain Wrgant Common, in Glamorgan with invitation to all who may assemble here, where no weapon is unsheathed against them, and judgment will be pronounced all work of genius submitted for adjudication, in the face of the sun—the eye of light— The Truth Against the World.”

The procession then re-formed and marched back to the Market House, Aberdare. **Note:** the Eisteddfod should have been held on the Common but a severe storm the previous night destroyed the pavilion.

Quiz/Puzzle Number 1. *Alan Abraham*

This puzzle requires answers to the questions and then, taking the first letter of each answer, use these six letters (anagram) to find a mythical beast. All seven answers will be found in the next edition of Hanes Bach.

1. This saint is the Welsh patron saint of lovers. (7)
2. What was the name of the Welsh Physician & Mathematician who invented the equal sign (=)? (6)
3. It is a famous “Great” in North Wales. (4)
4. In the Castle Hotel, ----, the inaugural meeting of the Welsh Rugby Union took place. (5)
5. Parys Mountain can be found in which of the old Welsh counties? (8)
6. In the Cynon valley there are two viaducts on the Dare and Aman branch line, one is the Dare and identify the other. (6)

Digital Skills Funding *Charlotte Morgan*

The Society has been encouraged to apply for some funding via the National Lottery Heritage Fund to support improving our Digital Skills as an organisation. We have submitted an application, and will find out shortly, if we have been successful. If we are successful, this will help us learn new skills, and hopefully encourage a new generation of members from younger age groups, as we will be able to advertise to them and offer online ways to be part of the Society. This will also have a benefit to our members who are not always able to attend lectures, or those who live outside of the Cynon Valley. We will update you when we find out if we have been successful!