

HANES Bach May 2021 (Issue 9)



*Dear Members, Time flies! A year has gone by since issue 1.
Zoom meetings, zoom lectures, Old Aberdare Vol XI
in final preprint stage, digitisation project progress, HANES quarterly
and the penultimate edition of Hb — all part of our Societies YEAR.*

‘Bravo, Gwen Howells, bravo’

Gareth Thomas writes:

It’s Wednesday, 24th April 1907. A well-advertised and long-awaited orchestral concert is about to begin. The venue is the Constitutional Hall, Canon Street, Aberdare.



On stage is Aberdare-born Gwen Howells. Not sitting inconspicuously among the nine second-violins, Gwen is quite the opposite and is highly conspicuous, for she is the orchestra’s conductor. The orchestra is hers and that evening’s programme one of her devising. How many lady conductors were there at the time? Few, I would imagine.

A newspaper report of the concert may be found on Welsh Newspapers Online, more specifically at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3577341/3577344/30>

The programme was varied. Among the highlights were ‘Liberty Bell’ (Sousa); ‘Welsh Airs and Variations’ (Gilmer but in the style of Beethoven and Tchaikowski); a solo by popular local bass, Mr. Eben Powell, (‘My Dreams’); and ‘Angels Guard Thee’, a horn solo (Godard), performed by Mr. Richard Livsey, principal of Livsey’s Wind Quintette which enjoyed high-standing among London aficionados.

Miss Gwen Howells contributed two violin solos to the concert, one by Pablo de Sarasate and the other by Henryk Wieniawski.

The unidentified newspaper reporter for ‘*The Aberdare Leader*’ enthused throughout his (her?) piece: “rapturously encored”; “very highly appreciated, as the deafening applause and persistent encores indicated”; “a selection which elicited another outburst of well-merited applause.”

Of Gwen Howells, Mr. Emile Gilbert, (of London), clarinet-player in Livsey’s Quintette, remarked, that

he, “had never heard in England an amateur band playing with such precision as Madame Howells’ did”, and that she, “has worked assiduously to bring her orchestra to a high status.”

Musically-minded readers of ‘Hanes Bach’, might, with some effort, find online many of the pieces performed at the concert, with ‘YouTube’ being a particularly good source.

How grim to realise, though, that smoking was probably permitted during the concert. Truly foul must have been music halls, concert rooms, theatres and cinemas before smoking in such venues was made illegal, in 2007.

Colin Rees writes:

Gwen Howells was a music teacher and a violinist of some distinction; but she was also a woman who experienced considerable anguish in her early life. She was born in Aberdare circa 1880 and was brought up at 337 Cardiff Road, the younger daughter of Thomas Evans, who at that time was a coal miner.

Around the age of 20, Gwen Evans had caught the eye of ‘Professor’ Richard Howells¹ a very well known and respected musician of Dan-yr-Allt, Abernant Road. Richard Howells had been left with three children after his wife Mary, (née Thomas of Briton Ferry), died in May 1900. However, in the autumn of that same year, Gwen Evans and Richard Howells were married, and on April 9th 1901, their daughter Bessie Lillian Howells was born in Cardiff.

Not long after the birth, the marriage failed and a separation order was enacted in September 1901. There was much animosity between the two parties, leading to scuffles outside the Dan-yr-Allt house between Gwen, with her sister, and the two women who lived there, employed to look after the three children. These disturbances led to a court appearance in August 1902, when the Evans sisters were found guilty and fined.

In April 1902, Gwen entered the Guildhall School of Music in London, and remained there until March 1905, qualifying to be an L.G.S.M. Whilst Gwen was away, her daughter lived at 17 College Street, Abernant, with her parents, Margaret and Thomas Evans. Also present in the Abernant home was Gwen’s older sister Elizabeth, who later, in 1910, became Mrs Elizabeth Davies².

In the period 1906 to 1907 there were further court appearances when Gwen sued her husband for non-payment of maintenance due to her for raising her daughter. Prof. Howells was refusing to pay because he alleged that Gwen had broken a separation agreement whereby maintenance would only be paid provided Gwen did not reside in Aberdare. She had in fact taken up lodgings in Merthyr, and returned to Aberdare to see her daughter and to carry on her profession as a teacher of violin in the town for at least six days each week — using the Merthyr-Abernant railway line to commute. This time Gwen won the case, with costs.

In August 1913, Gwen’s orchestra was chosen to play in a magnificent fund-raising garden party held at Abernant Park, attended by a multitude of the valley’s notable citizens – a sign, no doubt, of her acceptability in the town. However, just a month later in September 1913, Gwen was preparing to emigrate to Canada. Indeed, there was a formal dinner to bid her farewell, where she was presented with a silver conductor’s baton, and, from J. Arkite Phillips³, a gold bangle. There is an account of this function in the *Aberdare Leader*, of September 6th, 1913⁴. On the same day as the newspaper report appeared, Gwen, her daughter, mother and sister set sail from Liverpool on the S.S. Teutonic of the White Star Dominion Line bound for Montreal.

We next hear of Gwen as she passed from Canada to the USA in January 1915 heading for Portland Oregon. In June of 1915, at the same border crossing point in Eastport, Idaho, Gwen’s sister, Mrs Elizabeth Davies and Gwen’s daughter, Lillian Howells, also crossed from Coleman, Alberta in Canada also heading to Portland.

Gwen continued her career as a teacher of violin, and reports of her concerts feature in local Oregon newspapers. She was appointed Head of Violin at Columbia College, in Milton-Freewater, and Head of Music at Philomath College, both in Oregon. In 1924, she successfully applied for the post of instructor in violin at the music department of Southwestern University, Texas; but was unable to take up the appointment due to illness. Meanwhile, Lillian, her daughter, qualified as a music teacher and organist;

she also gained a position on the staff at Philomath College. There are reports of the two playing in concerts together at a range of venues in the state. Lillian became a naturalised US citizen at the age of 41 during WW2.

By 1940, the US Census lists Gwen, her sister Elizabeth, and her daughter Lillian all living together in Portland, Multnomah, Oregon. However, also in the household was her father Thomas Evans, then aged 88, who had obviously joined his family having travelled the 6,000 miles from the Abernant family home. Gwen's mother and her brother, Thomas Rhys Evans, died in 1934 and 1978 respectively, both in Multnomah. Oregon Registers of Deaths suggest that Gwen Howells died in 1957 in Multnomah, and her daughter Bessie Lillian Howells in 1979. Gwen had no further children, and her daughter did not marry. Direct relatives, if any, of these women would be the descendants of Gwen's brother, Thomas.

1. Richard Howells, 1862–1941, was an extremely well established musician in south Wales and the wider Principality. He was a member of the family known locally as the 'Howells of Maesgwyn'. His musical achievements are too numerous to mention here, suffice to say that he was an accompanist at the National Eisteddfod in Aberdare in 1885, and at seven others in south Wales. He was the father of the violinist Mari Howells; of Harold Gwyn Howells, LRAM, ARCM, ARCO; and of Gweneth who died aged 12, the twin of Mari.
2. Elizabeth Davies's husband was the brother of Tom Davies, who became an Elementary School headmaster in Abernant.
3. James Arkite Phillips was a well-known musician in south Wales. He lived at 5, Canon Street, where he also ran a music store. He was the father of P.E. Phillips, Head of French and later Deputy Headmaster at Aberdare Boys' Grammar School.
4. Copies of most editions of the Aberdare Leader up to 1919 are available online at <https://newspapers.library.wales/>

FROM CAGE TO CORTEGE

by Geoff Evans

Over the years the Aberdare valley has witnessed many large and poignant funerals. To mention a few, there was Caradog's in 1897 with its massive attendance and the presence of sections of Y Côr Mawr, the sad 1896 Christmas Day burial, attended by Sir W T Lewis of six victims, (including a 13-year-old boy), of the Abernant River Level colliery flooding; Lord Aberdare's in 1895, his remains having being brought from London to Mountain Ash in private saloons attached to the scheduled train: one for the coffin, the other for the family. The funeral followed later, the committal, its procession escorted by thirty police officers, taking place in the presence of the great and the good.



A GENERAL VIEW OF THE FUNERAL.

Crowd at Lord Aberdare's funeral. (*Evening Express*, 2nd March, 1895)

Finally that of the cyclist Arthur Linton with an accompaniment of three brass bands, a phalanx of Friendly Societies, cycling clubs, and the dramatic sight of his black draped competition bicycle wheeled by his rival, the Frenchman M. Huret.

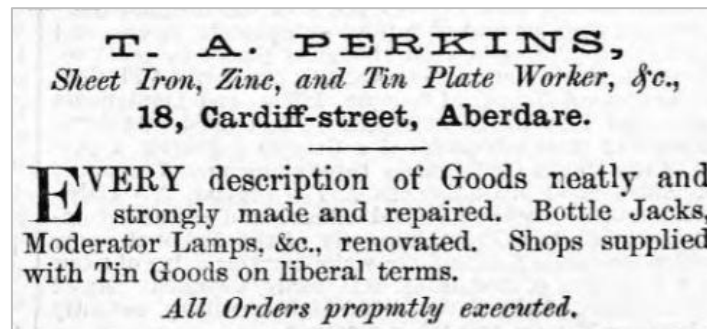
In contrast in 1905, Edward John Davies, a veteran miner at Llettyshenkin colliery died; his funeral was to be held on a Thursday. On the Wednesday afternoon the entire workforce of the colliery numbering 400 men and boys, through a deputation, asked the colliery manager, Mr. James, for time off at 1.00 pm to attend. The deputation undertook to make up the time by working an extra hour at the end of their shift on two consecutive nights. Permission was refused on the grounds that the request should have been made early on Wednesday morning. The decision could not be conveyed to all the men in time and on the Thursday, they resolved to stop at 1.00 pm anyway. This they did assembling from their working places at the bottom of the shaft. They were not however allowed to ascend the shaft until 3.00 pm, which was the appointed time of the funeral, so they went straight from the pit-top to the deceased's house at 12, Morgan's Row, Cwmbach. Still in their working clothes and carrying their box and jacks, they joined the procession and walked to Aberdare. When they reached the top of Canon Street the 400 colliers left the cortege and lined-out on the side of the street. As the hearse passed they all raised their caps out of respect to their late comrade. The remainder of the cortege then passed and proceeded to the cemetery. It was, reported the newspaper, a very impressive moment. (*Aberdare Leader*, 11th. November, 1905)

Notes

Llettyshenkin Colliery was sunk in 1843 by William Thomas. In August 1849, gas from adjoining workings seeped into the mine and exploded killing 52 men and boys.

At the date of the 1905 Cwmbach funeral the colliery was owned by Burnyeat Brown & Co. It was acquired by Powell Duffryn in 1908, and closed in 1922.

The 'box' refers to the collier's lunch box in which he carried his sandwiches, and the 'jack' to the container containing cold tea. These items, made of tin plate, were manufactured by local suppliers such as Perkins of Cardiff Street. Examples can be seen on display at Cynon Valley Museum (Mining case). Boxes were also known as snap tins, or Tommy boxes.



Aberdare Times advert

Quiz/Puzzle Number 9,

by Alan Abraham

This quiz requires answers to five "Castle questions" below. All answers will be found in the next edition of either Hanes Bach or Hanes.

1. The future English king, Henry V, was born in this castle. (8).
2. The future English king, Henry VII, was born in this castle. (8).
3. This castle built by Master James of Saint George for Edward I in North Wales is best known for its two barbicans (double gates) and posteum (water gate). (5).
4. The 150-foot clock tower of this castle was redesigned by William Burges in the 19th Century. (7).
5. This castle became a part of the Royal Mint of Charles I to recover silver from unrefined lead mined in the mid Wales metal zone. This silver was needed to overcome his financial problems. (11)

Solution to Quiz Number 8

Answers: 1.Owl. 2. Red Kite. 3. Turkey. 4. Goats. 5. Adder /Viper (re: *Saint Patrick*).

In Memoriam

We regret to record the death of Mrs Shirley Ferguson of Llanilar, Aberystwyth. Shirley was born in Aberdare and had been a supportive member of the Society for over 15 years.