

# HANES Bach September 2020

(issue 4)



*Dear Members, another edition as promised. In continuing uncertain times, Committee has decided not to hold the AGM this year. Plan is for early 2021. We shall continue to update you. Many thanks to members who have renewed their membership for the 2020/21 year. Most encouraging response despite the current situation. We wish you all well. NB, All contributors are self-editors. Compilation is agreed with the CVHS committee.*

## A Forgotten Villa by Colin Rees

Several of us will remember the many large houses or minor mansions that existed in the Cynon Valley. Dyffryn House, The Mardy, Glandare House, Maesyffynon, Blaengwawr, Abernant House and the many others that come to mind. However, there is one about which little is known; even its name is rarely mentioned, namely Neuadd-y-Wenallt, also known as Coedcae. It was built by John Crichton-Stuart the 3rd Marquess of Bute in 1896–97 as a *shooting box*, a small country house providing accommodation for a shooting party during the hunting season. However, it is not known whether it was ever used as such, or indeed visited by any member of the Bute family. Initially, it was managed by Sir W.T. Lewis, the Bute Agent for the Aberdare area. It was situated high up on the Merthyr Mountain and accessed by a track that led off behind the two chapels, Bethesda and Bethel, at the top of Abernant Road.

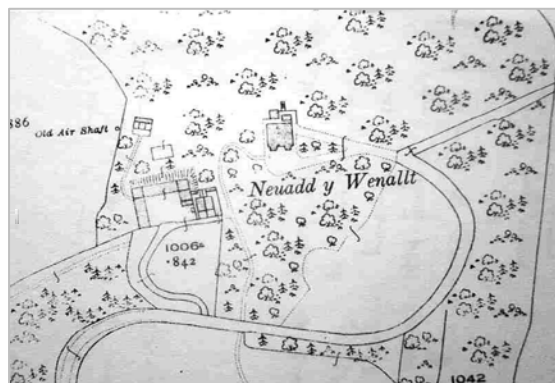
The Weekly Mail of November 20th 1897 reported as follows: “Lord Bute is building a mansion at Coedcae near Abernant, Aberdare, which will cost about £20,000. The foundations were cut nearly twelve months ago, and the building itself is now fast approaching completion. Workmen are busily engaged in laying out the grounds, and when this work is finished the residence and its surroundings will be exceedingly pleasant. An avenue of trees extending for three-quarters of a mile to a mile in length has already been planted. It is not known who will occupy the mansion, but it is thought that one of his lordship’s sons will make it his abode when in the district.”

The house had a basement, and three floors plus attic rooms. It was built to be staffed by servants; it had a large kitchen, scullery and larder with a cook’s sitting room and an enclosed back staircase up to the first floor. There were eight bedrooms spread across the 1st and 2nd floors, and there was accommodation for the cook, a gardener and two maids. Its cost today would be just short of £3m. By 1919 however, Neuadd-y-Wenallt was put up for auction together with a vast number of other Bute properties in the town centre, plus the Ynys Fields, the Aberdare Fair Ground, three large farms, as well as Plasdraw House and Abernant House. The auctions took place in December 1919 and January 1920.

Today nothing remains of this house apart from vague outlines of its foundations in the grass, visible in aerial photographs. In the years just preceding and following its sale, it was occupied by various private individuals, such as the fruiterer J.H. Ruther in the 1920s, Archibald Luther Davies, (son of the Cwmaman colliery manager, Thomas Luther Davies) in the 1930s, and during WW2, by the Powell Duffryn colliery manager, Tom Welbourn, his wife Olga and two daughters.



Neuadd-y-Wenallt, c1943.  
Between the first and second floors is the date 1897



Neuadd-y-Wenallt and its sinuous drive with  
Coedcae Farm to its west



The arrow shows the location of Neuadd-y-Wenallt above Abernant. The chimney of River Level Colliery is also visible near foreground, and Richmond Terrace is bottom right.

***Acknowledgement:** I am grateful to Tom Welbourn's daughters Susan and Harriet for the photograph of the house, and details of its interior.*

**Every Picture tells a Story** by Gareth Thomas



Here are three pictures which are dealt with in reverse chronological order.

**The first picture** shows two houses of the 'Tai Cap Coch' housing estate in Abercwmboi. The housing is unremarkable, architecturally uninteresting. However, the buildings occupy the site of an old public house, the 'Prince of Wales', once familiar to locals as simply 'The Prince', and a far more noteworthy building than any in the 'Tai Cap Coch' estate. 'Tai Cap Coch' extends up the hill towards Cromer Street and also occupies the site of St. Peter's Church, which was demolished in 1974. The name of the estate is derived from the 'Cap Coch Inn' once a public house nearby but no longer functioning as such, though the building is extant and was decorated recently.

**The second picture**, taken in 1992 and sourced from the Rhondda Cynon Taff Digital Archive, shows the public house, the 'Prince of Wales' in a dilapidated state. Shortly after the photograph was taken, it was demolished and the site later developed for housing.

**The third picture** is an Edwardian postcard which shows the 'Prince of Wales' public house. The postcard was posted on August 13th, 1907, addressed to Miss A Burt, Hermitages St., Crewkerne, Somerset. The sender identified himself/herself rather formally as 'G. Stodley'. The message reads, "Dear Alice, just a few lines to let you know I arrived safe and sound, Yours G.Stodley." Who 'G.Stodley' was we'll never know, I suppose, nor why he had come to Abercwmboi.

What is of interest though is this. A green Edward VII half-penny stamp is still affixed to the card. Very often, stamps were eased off the backs of postcards and kept, while the postcards themselves were disposed of, thrown on coal-fires, probably. But this postcard with its stamp still attached has survived for more than a hundred and ten years. Miss Alice Burt must have cherished the card and kept it safe. I have been collecting postcards for many years but I have never seen another copy of this card. Maybe it is unique in having survived and the picture on the postcard might be the only one still in existence of the 'Prince of Wales', Abercwmboi, in Edwardian times.

The photographer is not identified. Presumably a 'he', the photographer numbered the card with a '5'. How many other photographs he took, possibly including more of Abercwmboi, I don't know.

If it was not for the postal cancellation which bears 'Aberdare' on its upper rim, the postcard would be unidentifiable, for there is no text on the picture side of the card specifying that this was Abercwmboi.

*Notice the old trick of the photographer, though: line up as many people as you can (there are ten men and boys here) for each might well, in time, buy a couple of postcards to keep or to post to family or friends.*

Postcards, eh? Not as trivial as some people might think, indeed perfectly valid and useful historical evidence of times past.

*Next time you are driving through Abercwmboi from Aberaman, Sheppards the chemist and B.a.n.c. Stores will be on your left, and on your right, just before you come to those premises, will be the two houses of the 'Tai Cap Coch' estate that occupy the site of the 'Prince of Wales' public house.*

**Aberdare Cables cont.** by Alan Abraham

#### **Chapter 4. Changes to the operations at Aberdare Cables after the Second World War.**

With the end of WW2, Great Britain required electrical power cables to replace numerous electrical systems in both towns and the industrial infrastructure which had been damaged and / or destroyed through continual wartime bombing. At this time, shortages created difficulties to the principle material in cable manufacture, and the uneasiness in the military situation in Europe between the newly formed western alliance and the eastern Communist Bloc gave rise to an embargo on supplying many categories of plant and materials.

One such action resulted in the refusal of the French Government to export to Russia a 2,500-ton Hydraulic Press, resulting in its being available to potential customers in Western Europe. Aberdare Cables successfully acquired this heavy hydraulic press to replace its 1,000-ton hydraulic lead/lead alloy press and purchased this French plant in 1947. This plant gave excellent service for Aberdare Cables well into the early 1960s, and we'll talk about the future developments of lead extrusion in a later chapter.

In 1948 there were radical changes made to power cable supply, due to the nationalization of the electricity generation and distribution systems throughout the UK. The net result was the creation of the Central Electricity Generating Board, (CEGB), and the Electrical Supply Boards, (ESBs), such as the South Wales Electricity Supply Board, London Electricity Supply Board etc.

Previously, most customers were local authorities who purchased electric cable for their immediate needs. Typical customers were the like of Aberdare UDC who generated electricity at the Aberdare Power Company, (known locally as the "Destructor"), located at the disused Gadlys Iron Works, which was fuelled by household refuse from Aberdare AUDC refuse collections, (which in those days had a very high calorific value), and the electricity so produced was distributed to house owners by the local authority.

The ESBs changed their ideas as to having their electric cables supplied to their point of use rather than to regional stores/depots. Such a change in delivery practice resulted in the requirement to change the method of delivery, to accommodate the ESBs, so specialized low loader transport was required with specialized handling gear to facilitate roadside delivery of these heavily loaded cable drums.

To manage this roadside delivery, Aberdare Cables created a transport group, under the name 'Glyn S. John' that operated with the Aberdare Cables Ltd. logo. Aberdare Cables continued to use rail transportation for export, especially to the Docks at Newport, Gwent, for shipment through the Crown Agency to the colonies and further afield to New Zealand, Russia and the Gulf States.

The WW2 war emergency restricting the use of galvanised steel wire and steel tape armour was rescinded. Hence, an updated British Standard for electric cable (BSS 480) was produced and agreed with the CEGB, ESBs and the Electric Cable Makers Association (ECMA) and was issued in 1948.

In this new manufacturing era, it was necessary to be able to manufacture stronger cable drums that could be recycled. This came with an increased cost, and methods to create cable drums for multiuse was urgently needed. After due consideration, it was decided to treat the timber used in drum production with wood preservative/insect repellent. The treatment solution was patented and Aberdare used it under licence. The treatment increased drum life considerably, and since each cable drum had a unique reference number it was possible to determine every drum's life history.

During the fifties work commenced on cable design to increase voltage performance of power cables from 11 kV to 33 kV and due to the excessive fluctuating cost of copper an alternative, aluminium, was slowly introduced into low voltage power cables, also, the manufacture of plastic cables was being planned. An Anniversary Dinner was held at the City Hall, Cardiff on November 14th 1958 to commemorate 21 years of service to 27 original members of staff who were presented with a gold watch or Westminster clock.

*In the next edition, the sixties at Aberdare Cables to its sale to Pirelli General Cables in August 1971.*

#### **Quiz/Puzzle, Number 4.**

This puzzle requires answers to the questions and then, taking the first letter of each answer, these five letters can be used in an anagram to name a Welsh Prince who was “reputed” to have sailed to the Americas in 1170. *All six answers will be found in the next edition of Hanes Bach.*

1. This Lord who was a President of the Royal Geographical Society and had a Mountain Range in Africa named in his honour. What was his formal name? (8)
2. Where was a “Roman Gold Mine” located in Wales that used thousands of slaves to mine more gold than was mined in the rest of the Roman Empire? (10)
3. This 7<sup>th</sup> century Mercian King was best known for “creating a dyke” to defend his country. (4)
4. The bardic name of a Welsh musical conductor who sparkled at the Crystal Palace. (7)
5. The Celtic languages are divided into two sub groups, namely the Goidelic and Brythonic. The Goidelic consists of Irish and Scotch Gaelic and what other. (4)

#### ***Solution to the Quiz/Puzzle, Number 3.***

*Answers:- 1 Geraint (Evans). 2. Navigation House. 3 Alun Lewis. 4. Iron. 5. Market Hall. 6. Linton. 7. Breton.*

*Anagram:- LAMBING.*

#### **Memories from one of our members by K.C.Jones**

Having left Aberdare Girls Grammar School in 1935 and wanting to financially support her widowed mother, my mother Ruby May Whitty sought local employment. Her father Arthur had been killed in a mining accident at Cwmneol colliery Cwmaman some years previously. As like many others during the 1930s she found employment difficult to obtain. Eventually through an agency she was offered work as a housemaid in the service of Lady Lucy Agnes Gilbert at her home, Grimsdyke, in Harrow, Middlesex. Lady Gilbert was the widow of Sir William Gilbert who with Arthur Sullivan produced the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas.

My mother often spoke with me of her time there and there were some events she would recall time after time. It seems one of her first duties was to collect the mornings mail, place it on a silver salver, leave it on a desk at the bottom of the stairs and shout out “post”. Lady Gilbert’s secretary would then come down to collect it. After a few days she was discreetly taken aside by the butler, Mr Baylis, who said, “I have had instructions from upstairs to tell the little Welsh maid would, when shouting post up the stairs, please say “powst” as the way she says it sounds so bad”. It seems my mum’s valley accent did not go down very well ! However, she still looked forward to the daily delivery as she had a crush on the post boy who used to cycle across the common on his GPO pushbike. His name was Fred Jelly! Thank goodness it didn’t develop into anything serious, as I couldn’t imagine having the name Kelvin Jelly! Another task she disliked was scrubbing that part of the floor underneath the parrot’s cage. As soon as she finished cleaning it, Joey (the parrot) would flick the seeds out of his tray over her hard work.

***On returning home just prior to the death of Lady Gilbert, she was told, “Ruby, you can drop that English accent when you like, you are back in Wales now”. It seems she just couldn’t win.***

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