

CYNON VALLEY HISTORY SOCIETY

PRESIDENT: THE LORD ABERDARE



HANES

NEWSLETTER OF THE CYNON VALLEY HISTORY SOCIETY
CYLCHLYTHYR CYMDEITHAS HANES CWM CYNON

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TO EVERY THING THERE IS A SEASON IN MEMORIUM

It is the Editor's sad duty to record the deaths of two more well known members of the Society. That of Brynmor Evans our General Secretary from 19xx until his very recent retirement from office as a result of ill health.

Brynmor was well known in the community through his involvement with different aspects of the Arts; as a talented and published poet, prominent in the Cynon Valley Writers Circle and as a keen photographer. In the latter pursuit he had been both President and Secretary of the Aberdare Camera Club, and Steward and Past President (1983-1985) of the Welsh Photographic Federation. In 2002 he was awarded a Fellowship by the Federation. In addition he was also an Associate of the Photographic Association of Great Britain.

Our second loss is that of Mrs. Diana Phillips of Cefn Pennar. She and her husband, Mr. Douglas Phillips M.R.C.V.S., regularly attended our Meetings. Mrs. Diana Phillips provided us with a link with the past, as her father Col. W.M. Morgan was the last Land Agent to the Bruce family's Dyffryn Estate, and her grandfather Capt Morgan Morgan J.P. of Maesydderwen, Mountain Ash also acted in a similar capacity for previous Lord Aberdare's as did his father, David Morgan, before him. David Morgan was the family's Agent in the mid 1860's, an interesting association with Henry Austin Bruce and his descendents for more than a century.

CYNON VALLEY HISTORY SOCIETY AT A CROSS ROADS. "CHANGE AND DECAY IN ALL AROUND I SEE"

As your Editor is preparing this issue for the printer he has heard that the Town's Little Theatre, which opened in 1931, has closed, and that its Playhouse, previously an engine shed, is to be sold. No doubt we shall soon see yet another dwelling house claim its site. The "Little" was originally the home of the Trecynon Amateur Dramatic Society, which was founded in 1909. The present Theatre (The gift of Sir David Llewellyn of Bwllfa) was secured for the Society by, interestingly, the Revd. E.R. Dennis, then Minister of Hen de Cwrdd, who was to produce many of its plays (in Welsh and English) between 1931 and 1948. Here is a fine history that needs to be recorded.

We must therefore let this be a warning and a lesson to our group. Sadly we as a Society are a group of people of, dare I say, advanced years, and although young in heart and enthusiastic we urgently require new young recruits to come forward if we are to survive into the future. As most of you are aware we are without a Chairperson, General Secretary and a Treasurer, and we have recently lost many faithful and dedicated people. If any member or reader would like to volunteer for any of these posts, he or she would be welcomed with open arms.

Finally a plea. If any of your children, grandchildren or friends has an interest in local history please introduce them to the Society.

If the Little Theatre can perish, so too could our own group!

THE TEN GREATEST CYNONITES.

Although Hanes has received a number of suggestions from our Associate Members, the local response to this topic has been disappointing. We will therefore keep the "Competition" open until next spring in the hope that our Aberdare readership will become inspired in the months ahead. We should perhaps have given some guidelines as to selection of candidates. As a general guide, nominees need not have been born in Aberdare but must have contributed directly to the social economic political or industrial growth of our community, and have left some lasting legacy.

CHRISTMAS CRACKERS. BOX ONE.

The last three Christmas issues of Hanes have described aspects of how this festive season used to be celebrated in the valley. Readers will probably now have lost their appetite for more of the same along with the prospect of turkey sandwiches two days after Christmas.

We therefore give this Edition the title CHRISTMAS CRACKERS, as it is filled with items that we hope will amuse Readers over the holiday. These are similar to the mottoes and jokes that can be found inside the crackers which will grace your table on Christmas Day.

Our last page deals with the more serious subject of fires and fire fighting, a topical issue as a great number of accidental fires occur over the Christmas period as the result of unattended candles, carelessly placed decorations, and roaring yuletide fires.

On behalf of the Society's Chairman
And Committee I would like to take
This opportunity of wishing you
Joyful Christmas Greetings and Health and
Prosperity throughout 2008.

THOSE CHRISTMAS TRAFFIC JAMS.....

In August 1897 the Aberdare Times carried an Advert under the heading "Wait for the Big Show". It heralded the forthcoming visit of Fourpaw's Gigantic Circus and Hippodrome (Combined with Anderton and Haslam's Mammoth Menagerie) to the Ynys Field.

One of the shows novelties was the MOTOR CAR, or "Horseless Carriage". On view daily on the Circus Field.
(AT 16/8/1897.)

No one visiting the show to view this "Wonder" could have foreseen that in 100 years time the townspeople would be heartily sick of seeing a motor car on the Ynys or indeed anywhere else!

AND CHRISTMAS IS USUALLY THEIR BUSIEST TIME.....

Dear Sirs,

The Salvation Army continue to scream in the streets, no doubt to their own satisfaction. It is said they do a great deal of good. Possibly they do, but I know they do a great deal of harm in the musical sense to the local children, because they and their "cyrne" (trumpets) invariably sing out of tune. I have no objection to what they call "preaching" in the streets. But I do object to being compelled to listen three times a week to what they call singing, within a stones throw of the house where I dwell.

(Letter from Jenkin Howell to a local newspaper 1901)

Note: Jenkin Howell (1836-1902) was a respected (if in this instance intolerant) musician, printer and Welsh language newspaper and Journal proprietor. (Y Geninen). He dwelt, as he states in his letter, in Canon Street.

HAVE ANY OF THESE ITEMS BEEN USED ON YOUR CHRISTMAS TABLE?

1884. Mr. T. Whitty Evans the well-known auctioneer at 11 Canon Street conducted an interesting sale of 700 items of old and valuable china including Sevres, Dresden, Worcester and Nantgarw. There were items from the sale of Napoleon the Third's effects at the Tuileries (Paris) including a Sevres coffee set with the Royal Crown and Monogram of Charles X.

AN ABERDARIAN WHO FAILED TO CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS.

At an Inquest held on the 29th December 1847 at The Cardiff Arms, Hirwaun, before W. Davies Esq, on the body of Mary Jones, Widow aged 55 years who died on the 28th December; the Coroner's verdict was that the deceased died from the want of the common necessities of life. The Jury was of the opinion that she had sufficient pecuniary resources to procure the means to support life if she had resorted to them

PROVIDING CHRISTMAS CHEER

The Committee recommended the purchase of an organ for the dining hall of the workhouse from Messrs. Thompson and Shackell for £28. (The Aberdare Times 26th July 1899. Note of the proceedings of the Board of Guardians).

New Decimal Palm Candles – 2d. per lb. 10 to the lb.

These candles though ugly, burn well, and without guttering. They are admirably adapted for all who require a great light. For Artisans, Turners in metal, Sempstresses, Tailors, Shoemakers, for the windows of small shops, and for persons of weak sight, where the light is of primary and appearance of secondary importance. In short one Decimal Palm Candle gives the light of three ordinary Candles, and does not require snuffing. Sold by Grocers, Candle Dealers, and Oilmen (Newspaper advert 1850.)

CHRISTMAS CRACKERS BOX TWO.

Most of us enjoy a drink at Christmas time, and we are all looking forward to the Chairman's Christmas Reception with its now customary glass of wine and a mince pie or two. It is attributed to Dean Aldrich (1647-1710) of Christ Church, Oxford.

**IF ALL BE TRUE THAT I DO THINK,
THERE ARE FIVE REASONS WE SHOULD DRINK,
GOOD WINE, A FRIEND, OR BEING DRY,
OR LEST WE SHOULD BE BY AND BY —
OR ANY OTHER REASON WHY!**

Toasts are traditional especially at Christmas. The word is taken from the piece of toast which used at one time to be put into the tankard, and which still floats in the Loving- Cups at the ancient universities. Here is an Irish Toast that we particularly like, and commend to you.

**HEALTH AND LONG LIFE TO YOU,
A CHILD EVERY YEAR TO YOU,
LAND WITHOUT RENT TO YOU,
AND MAY YOU DIE IN IRELAND!**

Yachi Dda!

A CHRISTMAS BUZZ – 1888 STYLE...

ELECTRIC BELT FREE.

To introduce it and obtain Agents we will for the next Sixty Days give away, free of charge in each Town in Great Britain a limited number of our GERMAN ELECTRO GALVANIC SUSPENSORY BELTS, Price One Pound; a positive and unfailing cure for Nervous Debility, Varicocele, Night Troubles, Loss of Energy &c. £100 Reward paid if every Belt we manufacture does not generate a genuine electric current. Address at once ELECTRIC BELT AGENCY, P.O. Box 178, BROOKLYN, N.Y., U.S.A.

(ABERDARE TIMES ADVERTISEMENT March 10th.1888.)

ABERDARE ON E-BAY.

Looking for a Christmas present? The following interesting items have been spotted recently on the Internet's E-Bay Auction Site.

A real photograph postcard of Aberdare's bonfire set for the Coronation of George V. Starting Price £40. There were no bids.

A beautifully decorated small brass miner's plug box inscribed F.Hek, Cabinet Maker, Aberdare and dated 1905. The opening bid for this item was £0.99. There were 20 bids and the box sold for £108.78

Another piece of Aberdare History is to be found in D.M.Richards's useful little book "The High Constables of Aberdare" (Aberdare 1894) This has now been on offer for several months. The book was originally priced at £99. There were no buyers, so by strange market forces the logic of which escapes your Editor, the price has recently been increased to £119.99 This particular copy was presented to Edgar Jones M.P* on the 12.May 1910 by D.M.Richards. Don't rush to buy it; the Society may consider re-printing it!

*Edgar Rees Jones, A barrister, succeeded D.A.Thomas (Lord Rhondda) as the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Aberdare in 1910. He was a liberal and served in tandem with J.Keir Hardie.

Finally a vial of Aberdare air is available at price 99p. (Pre or Post closure of the Phurnacte Plant?)

A PRE-CHRISTMAS EXHIBITION OF MODERN DANCING.

The Aberaman Welfare Hall, or Palaise de Danse, was all agog on Thursday week when the Management had secured the special and exclusive engagement of Madam Marie Jose and her partner, of London (and the School of Dancing, Cardiff). They gave exhibitions of modern dancing, which included The Yale Blues, Black Bottom, Charleston and Fox-Trot waltzes. The spacious hall was nicely decorated for the occasion, and a very enjoyable afternoon and evening were spent. The dancers showed their appreciation by turning up in large numbers, select lady partners being present for practice dancing.

In the evening another novelty was introduced, viz., the new Gecophone Orchestrola, which is the latest device for reproducing music, and on it was rendered some of the latest and best music. The instrument was in charge of Mr.Buttram, of the General Electric Co.

Mr.Knowles acted as M.C., and Miss Hussey's Welfare Orchestra was also in attendance. Dancers agreed that it was one of the best programmes yet provided for them.

(The Aberdare Leader 13th.December 1927.)

BOOT BUYING EPIDEMIC

On Friday last, a great sensation was caused in Canon Street, on account of a sale of boots and shoes at the Public Benefit Boot Shop, lately in the occupation of Mr.Tremellen. For hours previous to the opening, which was advertised for six o'clock, the shop was besieged with intending purchasers. The crowd occupied the whole width of the road opposite the shop, and for some time, notwithstanding the efforts of the police to keep the anxious bargain-seekers within a reasonable limit of space, traffic was interfered with, and even pedestrians found a difficulty in passing. The siege lasted in its undiminished severity for days. Evidently "There is nothing like leather"

(The Aberdare Leader 4th.April 1903)

FIRE FIGHTING

(Pour mon ami, Ken Collins, ancien Pompier extraordinaire)

Until the late 19th Century if your premises caught fire they would have burnt down unless there was a source of water near by, and a crowd to assist. In 1847 the thatch on the roof of Abernant y Groes Isaf Farm caught fire and the building was destroyed through lack of help. The report of the conflagration says, "*The blaze could be seen for miles and attracted hundreds to the spot*".

Later, in 1876, one of Aberdare's grander houses, The Oaklands, Aberaman, was destroyed in a couple of hours after being struck by lightning. Most of the contents were rescued, but only because the Rifle Corps happened to be drilling on the adjacent Aberaman Park grounds.

The iron works and collieries probably had primitive fire fighting appliances and crews on hand, and local theatres would have had to employ a fireman back-stage. Initially community fire fighting was the responsibility of the police and they kept a hose and reel, in the station and received an honorarium for their trouble. A note in The Aberdare Almanack of 1893 shows that the Inspector of Police, Frederick James Jennings, was also Captain of the Fire Brigade. Such facilities would only have been effective if there was an available water supply. During the 1890's hydrants began to appear, and the new Local Authorities began to set up their own Fire Brigades in the early 20th Century. The decision to set up a local Brigade was prompted by a serious fire in 1902 that destroyed the old Aberdare Market Hall. This fire was fought by the local Police Force aided by civilian volunteers. Although unable to save the market, the police were able to prevent the fire spreading to other premises.

The Aberdare Brigade was formed in January 1903. It consisted of 3 Officers and 21 men. These were volunteers who were paid only for the time spent actually fighting fires. When the Aberdare Brigade were called out to assist with a fire in the Mountain Ash District they successfully claimed £14.16.6d for services rendered. A Fire House was erected by the Board of Health in Station Street. This was "Quite up to date and fully equipped with all the latest appliances", including (in the period 1914-1916) a motor fire engine which was the property of the District Council. The Brigade's First Captain was J.Lendon Berry (resigned 1909)

One of the greatest problems that the new Brigade had to deal with was that of the water supply. In 1903 the Council* were informed that during a fire at 10 George Street, Aberaman that year "The police were obliged to fetch a waterman before anything hardly could be done", and then it was discovered that the hoses were leaking badly, and that one burst while being used. Another problem occurred with the hydrants which were found to be covered by metal on the roads, and the fireman had great difficulty in obtaining water. (Aberdare Leader April 4th 1903)

The fire engine mentioned above was a "Merryweather" appliance. It was acquired in 1905. A 1920 photograph shows this and a second smaller "Keystone Cops" looking vehicle, a smart motor cycle and rider, with the Brigade's compliment of 21 men, and a dog!

In 1911 the Brigade was presented with Certificates and a cup for winning First and Second Prizes in the South Wales District Annual Fire Brigades Competition at Newport.

Brigade members wore an oval breast badges on their uniforms bearing the initials A.F.B., and a number (1 to 21). In 1916 the Brigade was led by Capt. John Davies and Lts James James and W.J.Williams. Its Honorary Secretary was Mr.D.Dando of Duke Street.

In 1935 the Aberdare Fire Brigade took delivery of a new Ford-based fire engine. Its Captain at that time was R.L.Berry (J.L's son).

Memorable fires that occurred in the 20th Century were the fire at the Co-operative Society's millinery department in Cardiff Street (1919) resulting in a loss of £20,000; the fire at the hospital in 1929 when two firemen lost their lives, and the Sunday night blaze at Haggars Cosy Cinema in Market Street. Although badly damaged (it did not re-open), firemen prevented flames spreading to adjacent shops, and the adjoining Police Court. In the aftermath of the fire at the Co-op complaint was made to the Fire Brigade Committee that the Brigade was ineffective, mainly due to a poor water supply. The Committee under its Chairman, Edmund Stonelake, exonerated the Brigade. Its Captain on the occasion had been Jack Davies.

*Report of a Meeting of the Aberdare U.D.C. At the same Meeting R.L.Berry, who was also a Councillor, asked if the estimate of expenditure for the ensuing year provided for the cost of equipping the Fire Brigade with necessary appliances, and the installation of electric bells at the homes of Brigade members. A vote was taken and it was agreed that extra money be found for fire fighting purposes even though this meant a rise in the Rate to 1/9 in the £

. Photographs of the Brigade and Fires see *Old Aberdare & Merthyr in Pictures Pl.70-72* and *Old Aberdare in Pictures Vol.1 Pl.36, 37 and 180d*, and *Vol.2 Pl.46* which shows a horse drawn appliance, see also plates 128 and 152.)

WHY DOES A FIREMAN ALWAYS WEAR STOCKINGS ? BECAUSE HE IS NOTHING WITHOUT HIS HOSE !

*

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