

# CYNON VALLEY HISTORY SOCIETY

PRESIDENT: THE LORD ABERDARE  
VICE-PRESIDENTS: TOM EVANS, JOHN F. MEAR AND KEN COLLINS



## HANES: THE FIFTIETH EDITION

NEWSLETTER OF THE CYNON VALLEY HISTORY SOCIETY  
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### SOCIETY NEWS

#### HANES.

The first edition of the Society's Newsletter *Hanes* appeared in July 1984 and was the inspired creation of our Chairman, David Leslie Davies. Its coming of age (issue Number 21) passed without acknowledgement in the summer of 2001. The Newsletter has had four Editors,

David Leslie Davies, Numbers 1 to 8 (July 1984 – May 1991)

John Mear, Numbers 9 to 23 (Spring 1995 to Summer 2002)

Eric Rose, Number 24 (Summer 2003)

Geoffrey Evans, Numbers 25 to date (Winter 2003- )

Since 2004 the Newsletter has been published quarterly, and the number of its pages increased to (normally) 6 or 8. The larger editions contain some 5,000 plus words, and its content is often themed e.g. *Hanes on Agriculture*, *Woman's Hanes*, *Hanes on the Law*. etc. The Editor would welcome contributions, letters or comments, from our readers – any topic, any length.

#### FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY.

We look forward to an even more important celebration in March 2011 when the Society will then have been in existence for forty years. To mark the occasion a special anniversary volume will be published, hopefully in the autumn of 2010, and preparatory work is well in hand. The book will contain four interesting pieces, and be well illustrated with many colour prints. The four articles selected for publication are,

1. Accounts of the Cynon Valley as recorded by various tourists, topographical dictionaries, guide books, and other visitors and observers who visited the area between 1536 and 1938.
2. A re-print of a series of interesting and colourful "Notes Historical" written for the *Aberdare Leader* in 1921-1922 by the Rev. Rees Jenkin Jones (1835- 1924), minister of Hen Dy Cwrdd, Trecynon . There are 168 *Notes*, and these will be accompanied by a Biography of R. J. Jones and a Bibliography of his works and collected papers.
3. An appraisal of the evidence surrounding the story that David Williams Snr. of Ynyscynon farm witnessed the death of Admiral Lord Nelson at Trafalgar.
4. Cynon Valley History Society – The First Forty Years. (A brief history of our Society).

It is hoped that the publication of the book will be followed, in 2011, by other celebratory and social events such as a Day School with a panel of distinguished guest-speakers, an outing, or outings (e.g. to the new Glamorgan Record Office), an anniversary Dinner or Buffet, field trips etc. Further details of these will appear in the pages of *Hanes*, or be announced at future meetings.

### **CALENDAR.**

The Society intends to produce a colour illustrated calendar for the year 2011 which it is hoped will become a regular feature of our activities. The illustrated section of the calendar will be removable so that the owner can retain the illustrations and useful local history references. "Mr. Calendar" is Haydn Williams who would be glad to receive any colour photographs or old documents suitable for reproduction. We have not ruled out the possibility of asking members to pose for a future calendar following the example of the Women's Institute members in the film "Calendar Girls!"

### **SECRETARY.**

The Society is still without a correspondence secretary; would any one like to take on the post and help run our affairs? If so please contact any of the Officers.

### **IN MEMORIAM.**

#### **Emeritus Professor Hywel Teifi Edwards (1934-2010).**

Professor Edwards was born in Llanddewi Aber-arth, Ceredigion, and was formerly Professor of Welsh at the University of Wales, Swansea and the author of several books on Wales in the Victorian age, and the important two volume, *Yr Eisteddfod 1176-1976*, (1976), and was editor of *Cyfres y Cymoedd*, a ten volume series about the valleys of Wales. His last published work, *The National Pageant of Wales* was written in English.

Professor Edwards was a good friend to the Society, and will be sadly missed; he had a great affection for Aberdare, a place he grew to love after spending time here during the 1956 National Eisteddfod. He regarded Aberdare as a town which still retained a rich Victorian character; he generously supported the activities of the Cynon Valley History Society, once lecturing on the subject of the impact of the Welsh choirs appearing at the Chicago World Fair of 1893. He launched the Society's, *Chapels of the Cynon Valley* in 2004. He also took part in the History and Heritage Day held on 11 June 2009, unveiling the Blue Plaque at the Aberdare Market Hall, the venue of the first National Eisteddfod of the modern era in 1861, publicly stating that he was immensely honoured to have been asked to perform the ceremony. Possibly his last public appearance took place at Aberdare on 15 October 2009 when he gave a rousing lecture at the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations of Green Street Methodist Church, on the 1859 Religious Revival, and the first ever Gymanfa Ganu held here that same year.

An excellent obituary by Meic Stephens, *Hywel Teifi Edwards: Historian of Victorian Wales and The National Eisteddfod*, appeared in The Independent on Sunday on 7 January 2010 (it can be read on line).

\* \* \*

**Mr Hugh Hopkins**, 28 Stuart Street, Aberdare. Member 2004 – 2009.

### **FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE.**

The remainder of this fiftieth edition of *Hanes* is devoted to aspects of recreation in the town and beyond, and records some of the simple but colourful pleasures of Aberdarians, and how they enjoyed themselves in times past. The following pages look at an 1865 pleasure fair, roller-skating rinks and some club and works outings to the country and seaside.

## **GIN, SKY-BLUE HORSES AND PILL DOCTORS. ABERDARE FAIR IN 1865.**

.....so it was at the Aberdare fair on Monday – held on Monday because this year the 16<sup>th</sup> of April fell on a Sunday. In the morning there was the usual show of cattle; there was the usual talking to and pinching of animals, and just as it mostly happens at this April fair, high prices were asked for animals very low in condition, and higher prices for those that were high in condition. Towards the evening the scene changes, pleasure seekers pour in on every side; Cheap Jack grows noisy, and showmen, animated by the nips of gin imbibed during the day, increase in loquacity. There is a sensation of camphene, which, mingling with the savoury odour of the faggot-stand, and amalgamating with the odoriferous forces of oranges and gingery beverages, takes ones nose by storm. At this moment the excitement is intense. On one hand you are implored to try your strength for a penny; you turn round and you are asked to test the capacity of your lungs at the same low charge. You look behind you and lo! A picture of sleek benevolence in the shape of a herbal pill doctor. Compared with this man's learning as to herbs Linnaeus's knowledge was nowhere, and Cooper's mystic writing on the same subject vanished into nothingness when breathed upon by this great reader of nature. He doesn't want money, but his conscience will not allow him to look unmoved upon suffering humanity when he, and perhaps *he* alone, possesses the power to relieve. One of those pills, compounded solely of beautiful herbs, would cure chapped lips, or remove a cough of twenty years standing; two of them would remove freckles – mark this, young ladies- or cicatrize an ulcerated lung! But these wonders pale away before the “hextraordinary feats of legerdemain” in the course of performance in that show hard by; that “astounding exhibition, generally admitted to be the most magnificent travelling”, also claims attention, and that wonderful circle of pink, green and sky-blue horses in rotund motion is positively enough to take a juvenile's breath away. Then there are the men who so generously cram a purse with silver- and the more verdant portion of the public with lies, we are sorry to add – and sell all for a shilling; the Cheap Jacks who “lose two pence by every knife but by selling a good many manage to make a do.” (It is likely enough that this word *do* has two meanings) Such were the salient features in our fair on Monday, and if we add to the foregoing the facts that towards midnight there were a good many vehement assurances given in various parts of the town that nobody would go home till morning; that no end of people forgot to think of their *heads* in the morning, and that so determined were many virtuous young men – and old ones, too, we fear – to “have the spree out” that they “loitered upon the charmed scene” for at least another day – if we add these few delightful facts to the little sketch we have drawn above, we think we can flatter ourselves with the belief that we have given a correct picture of “last Aberdare fair.”\*

THE ABERDARE TIMES, 22 APRIL 1865.

\*One hundred and forty five years on. As I put this edition together I can see from my window the 2010 Spring pleasure fair being set up on the Ynys.

**ABERAMAN ANNUAL FLANNEL FAIR** will be held on Saturday and Monday next August 11 & 13 in Mr. Hopkins' **PICTON INN FIELD**. Great attractions, Lane's Circular Switchback, Galloping Horses, Shooting Galleries, Shows, Cocconut Shies, Swings etc.

**GREATEST FAIR EVER HELD.**

WESTERN MAIL, 10 August 1894.

## **RINKING**

**New Skating Rink** – A new skating rink to be built and arranged on the newest possible principles and with every accessory for the enjoyment of visitors is now in course of construction at Aberdare. Some time ago Mr. Leyson Rhys, an enterprising townsman, purchased the site of the old gas works and some land adjoining at the lower end of the town, and at once set about making an extensive skating rink. A piece of land was enclosed for the rinking platform, excavated, and laid with concrete before being covered with cement. An excellent flooring, as level as a billiard board, was thus obtained. The roof will be an open one, at any rate during the summer months, but may be covered when it is found necessary to introduce lighting in the winter; the rink which is furnished with an orchestra, is 215 feet long, with an average width of 50 feet, the area being 11,000 feet or 2,000 feet more than the Crystal Palace. As accessories to this splendid central attraction, a large portion of the ground surrounding, and which is hidden from the road, will be tastefully laid out for promenading, and besides the necessary offices attached to the main building, there will be a refreshment room, 30 feet long by 16 feet 6 inches wide – this and the skate room being on a level with the road – an advantage which is not always to be met with, even in the Metropolis. Mr. Rhys has let the ground and the buildings to Mr. J.H.Miles, of Southampton, proprietor of skating rinks at Highbury and Winchester, who has obtained a concession from Col. Plimpton. The rink will be opened on Thursday week.

**Western Mail, 1 July 1876.**

**The Skating Rink** – The new Skating Rink at Aberdare, which was described a short time ago in these columns, was formerly opened on Thursday. The Rink was open all day and attracted a good many visitors; a ball took place in the evening. [The Rink was at Tudor Place, Aberaman – Ed.]

**Western Mail, 21 July 1876**

Rinking, or indoor-roller skating, was a popular Victorian and Edwardian pastime which first became fashionable in the 1870's, remaining in vogue until the end of the nineteenth century. It then enjoyed a revival in 1907 becoming all the rage, until nearly every town in the country had at least one rink. By 1910 there were over 500 across the United Kingdom. In addition to the purpose built rink at Aberaman, a rink was set up in 1909 at the Lesser Market Hall managed by Mr. Thomas Botting who was also the instructor, and a larger one at the Pavilion, Mountain Ash, which by 1912 held regular Grand Skating Carnivals attended by "a great crowd of rollers". The Pavilion Rink could accommodate 200 people comfortably. (For The Pavilion Rink see The Aberdare Leader, 24 February 1912)

### **ICE SKATING**

It is some years since we published one of our *Ripping Yarns*. Here is another. "In the winter of 1881 a young boy, described as a handsome lad of 15, the son of an engine driver, fell through the ice on Hirwaun Pond, and was in imminent danger of drowning, when he was gallantly rescued by Mr. D.A. Thomas who was skating on the pond. For this deed Mr. Thomas was presented with the Parchment of the Humane Society. Mr. Thomas is a Queen's Prizeman and holds a medal won for superiority in the long dive." D.A.Thomas of Ysguborwen, who was educated at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge become Chairman of the great Cambrian Colliery combine, and the first Viscount Rhondda. (From a Sketch of Mr. D. A. Thomas's Career. *South Wales Daily News*, 7 March 1888.)

## **OUTINGS AND TREATS.**

### **ABERAMAN 1869**

Church Sunday School – On Monday last the annual treat was given to the children of the Aberaman Sunday School. Happily for the children and their friends the heavy morning rain abated about mid-day, and the afternoon showed a beautifully clear and bright sky. At about half past two o'clock the Revd. H. D. Jones, the teachers and scholars assembled at the small temporary church and after forming a procession proceeded, about 80 in number, through some of the principal streets on the way to Aberaman House. As they went, with banners flying, they sung Nos. 142, 156, 229, 203, "Hymns Ancient and Modern" the tunes in the book being in all but one instance changed for others of a more simple and hearty character. As they sang their cheerful hymns in front of Aberaman House they were listened to by Mr. Elliot, M.P., Mrs. Elliot, family and visitors, who expressed themselves pleased to see the children. After some encouraging words from Mr. Elliot they were invited to stroll through the beautiful grounds on their way back to the "Old Company Shop" – now untenanted – where a substantial tea awaited them. About 130 sat down to tea. After tea a most pleasant evening was passed in sports and games, in a field kindly lent by Mrs. David. The children before dispersing were again treated to cake, fruit, &c. Three hearty hurrahs were given first for Aberdare friends, and next for Aberaman friends, who on this occasion had subscribed towards the treat with even more than their usual liberality, so much so that the funds were sufficiently in excess of the expenses to provide suitable prizes for the most deserving of the children.

Western Mail, Thursday 19 August 1869.

### **WHITSUNTIDE FESTIVITIES 1871**

The shops were opened here the same as usual, but a great many "juniors" obtained a day's leave, and availed themselves of the opportunities afforded by the Railway Companies for a change of scene. A large party organised by Mr. Jones Jnr. of the *Aberdare Times*, passed the day at Raglan Castle, returning to Aberdare in the evening, when dancing commenced, and was kept up till an early hour this morning. The day passed off quietly here.

Western Mail, 30 May 1871

### **WHITSUN OUTINGS 1880**

#### **ABERDARE SOCIAL CLUB.**

The second annual picnic in connection with the above club took place on Monday last. (Whit Monday) the party, numbering about thirty, proceeding in brakes to the Dinas Hotel, Pontneathvaughan, where Mr. and Mrs. Tucker catered for them in a highly satisfactory manner. Mr. T. Lewis\*, harpist, accompanied the party, and dancing and other amusements were kept up with spirit during the afternoon in a field adjoining the hotel. A most enjoyable day was spent.

\*Thomas Lewis (1829-1902) can be seen in plate 137 *Pictures from the Past* Vol.1. See also note 66 on page 26 *Old Aberdare, Vol.2.*

#### **CARRIAGE ACCIDENT.**

On Monday a brake belonging to Mr. Dyke, Boot Hotel, Aberdare, took a pleasure party to the caves at Ystradfellte. When returning, near the Brecon Arms, the horses took fright and dashed away, upsetting the brake and smashing it in the process. Mr. Rees and the other occupants were slightly, but not seriously, injured. The horses escaped with little damage.

**Both reports are from The Aberdare Times, 22 May 1880.**



### **TAFF VALE WORKMEN'S OUTING AT ABERDARE 1884.**

On Monday the West Yard employees of the Taff Vale Railway Company held their annual picnic. The party, numbering over 700, composed of the workers, wives, children and sweethearts, accompanied by Mr. William Burn's Blue Ribbon Band, were conveyed by special train to Abercynon Junction. After viewing the scenery of the district, the party assembled in a field where refreshments were provided by Mr. William Jenkins, the host of the Junction Hotel. The weather proved exceptionally fine and a most enjoyable day was spent. The arrangements were carried out very efficiently by a committee of the workmen of which Mr. Wilkins was chairman and Mr. Owen, Secretary. One of the features of the day was the prelude to the competitive sports. This comprised a parade of 150 children. The competitive sports consisted of the following heats, 130 yards race, 100 yards race (for boys under 16), High Jump, High Pole Jump, 80 yards race for men over 45, 100 yards three legged race, 80 yards sack race, 80 yards egg and spoon race and a Consolation Race. There were also competitions for the best comic song and the best sentimental song. Valuable prizes consisting of trousers, a silk umbrella, a gold ring and a silver plated pepper box had been donated by Cardiff stores.

**Western Mail, 2 September 1884**

### **BREWERY OUTING 1890**

The Directors and employees of the Trecynon Brewery Company had an outing on Thursday to Barry. After spending the morning at Barry and visiting Barry Island the company returned to Cardiff and partook of dinner at the Black Lion Hotel. A few toasts were given, concluding with "Success to the Brewery" (What else! Ed.). Penarth was visited in the afternoon.

**Western Mail, 29 August 1890**

### **A TRECYNON OUTING 1902**

On Saturday last, the 26<sup>th</sup> inst., the Holiday Club so successfully held at the Cross Inn, had their trip to Brecon. Starting at 6.30 a.m., they reached Brecon at 8.30, after a truly pleasant drive in brakes, supplied by Mr. Samuel of the Welsh Harp, Trecynon successor to the late Mr. Thomas Lewis, the blind harpist (see above). After visiting the Priory Church and the Barracks, and indulging in boating on the Usk, where a salmon knocked the boat over, they were given a hearty appetite for a good meal, which was much enjoyed at the Fountain Inn, by the party of 40. They returned on the homeward trip, leaving Brecon at 6.30 and reaching the Cross Inn at 10.00 p.m., after a day of good weather, enjoyable company, and a sprinkling of rain to keep the dust down.

**The Aberdare Leader, 2 August 1902.**

### **BWLLFA OUTING 1923.**

The Bwllfa Office Staff held their annual outing last Saturday. They were accompanied by Mr. Isaac Davies, accountant, and Mr. T. Tudor, cashier. The place selected was Weston, and the party journeyed by charabanc to Cardiff Docks, thence by boat. The luncheon was held at Brown's Hotel. The toast of the managing director, Mr. W. M. Llewellyn, M.E. (who was unable to be present) was responded to by his secretary (Mr. Tom Parker). His speech was loudly applauded. The party spent a right royal time and "Sweet 'Berdar" was safely reached in the wee small hours of the following morning.

**The Aberdare Leader, 30 June 1923**

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[www.cynonvalleyhistorysociety.org](http://www.cynonvalleyhistorysociety.org)

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