

# CYNON VALLEY HISTORY SOCIETY

## CYMDEITHAS HANES CWM CYNON

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# HANES

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

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## DO YOU REMEMBER THESE?

Mr. Richard Coulthurst of Stockport has emailed the editor as follows: *CVHS members who can think back to the 1950s, or even earlier, may remember the 'Cash Railways' that operated in some shops and linked the sales counters to a central cash desk or office. The assistant would take your money which would be put in some sort of container and then whisked off to the cashier before being returned with your change and receipt. There were a number of variations including cash balls which ran on a sort of railway, pneumatic tubes and overhead wire systems. Few, if any, systems remain active in shops but they are to be seen in a number of museums, and similar equipment is still used in other locations. I clearly remember an overhead wire system in the Lipton's shop at the corner of Commercial Street and Canon Street in the early 1950s and I am pretty sure that Aberdare Cooperative Department Store in Cardiff Street had a pneumatic tube system. Can anyone confirm this, and were there any other shops in the Aberdare area which used these 'Cash Railways'? An interesting website [www.cashrailway.co.uk](http://www.cashrailway.co.uk) contains more information about the systems and is worth a look.*

The Editor would be glad to receive readers' memories or comments; there is a literary reference to Cash Railways in Dylan Thomas' *Under Milk Wood* (1954), there Mog Edwards of Manchester House, Llareggub (late of Twll), in a letter to his sweetheart Miss Price says: *I have come to take you away to my Emporium on the hill, where the change hums on wires.*



## NEW SEAL, TABLE AND DINNER AT THE BLACK LION.

The first meeting of the newly elected Aberdare Urban District Council was held on the 4<sup>th</sup> January 1895. All the members were present together with the Clerk, Deputy Clerk and Surveyor. The meeting was chaired by D. Price Davies (Ynyslwyd House) pro tem and its first duty was to elect a Chairman from their number. It was proposed and

unanimously agreed that Rees Hopkin Rhys who had for many years been Chairman of the Local Board of Health be appointed. D. P. Davies was then duly elected Vice Chairman.

The Clerk, (Thomas Phillips), informed the Council that he had received a letter from the Local Government Board setting out the duties of the new Council and the changes which had taken place. Relevant Committees were then appointed, viz.:

(1) Farms Management Committee, (2) Finance Committee, (3) Parks, Hospital and Scavenging, (4) Roads and Streets, (5) Hackney Carriages, (6) Lighting, (7) Water Works and Supply, and (7) Nuisance Removal.

It was noted that the Chairman and Vice Chairman were *Ex Officio* members of every committee, and it was suggested that the number of members sitting on each committee should not exceed seven, but there were certain committees that all members should sit on.

Two members were authorised to sign cheques for men's wages (Council employees). A cheque for £178.1.2d was then drawn to cover these. The Clerk was also instructed to obtain a new seal, similar to the old one, but to alter the name to *The Urban District Council of Aberdare*. The old seal, used by the Local Board of Health, bore the Royal Coat of Arms, the Local Board having copied this from the [National] Board of Health, which was a Government Department entitled to use the device. This is an interesting record as it explains how the Urban District Council, throughout its existence, used these Arms on its regalia, stationery and transport. In the 1940s a complaint was made to the Lord Chancellor by a Conservative Party candidate, who had had a rough time here during a Parliamentary election, but no action was taken. The story that Aberdare was once 'entitled' to use the Royal Arms can perhaps join the Aberdare myths that it was one of only two places in the country to have both a cenotaph, and a High Constable (when that office existed), the other being Westminster.

The final resolution of the Council at that first meeting was to authorise the Clerk to purchase a new cross-table, the present one being too small for the increased number of members. Members then adjourned to the *Black Lion Hotel* for dinner; although there is no note of who paid for the meals, it would seem that on that night a precedent was set for local self civic hospitality which endures to this day!

*The Aberdare Times, 12<sup>th</sup> January, 1895*

A photograph of the first Council appears in *Aberdare: Pictures from the Past*. Plate 81.

## **A CHALLENGE**

Arthur Linton [the champion cyclist of Aberaman] has accepted a challenge from *Buffalo Bill* (Col W. F. Cody) to ride him for six hours on the Winter Track, Brussels, against a team of six horses. The race is scheduled for the 13<sup>th</sup> June. Later in the month Arthur Linton will compete in a twenty-four hour race at Paris open to all comers. Linton is not in good form yet, but doubtless when the great trial comes off he will astonish the whole of his friends.

## **THE TOWN'S FIRST BRASS BAND?**

It is high time that a history of Aberdare's brass bands was compiled; there is plenty of material out there, and a record of these institutions would make interesting reading. Most of the bands, Aberaman (Crawshay Bailey's), Ysguborwen and Llwydcoed were formed during the industrial period and were associated with the district's ironworks and collieries. The Aberdare

Volunteers also had its own band, although this would appear to have been the Ysguborwen Band under another name.

It has come to light that a band, named the Aberdare Band, existed in 1840; it was engaged that year by George Overton, the local coroner, to play at a ball at Duffryn House, which he was then renting from Henry Austin Bruce. Thomas Wayne, the manager of the Canal Company and one of the guests at the ball, provided a canal boat to take the musicians from Aberdare to Duffryn drawbridge; it was a fine moonlit night, and the trip along the canal was a most enjoyable one, with the band playing selections as the horse tugged the boat along. The only lock they had to pass through was at the Duffryn Arms [Cwmbach], and the boat we are told glided through as if it was on the Suez Canal; when the boat reached the Duffryn drawbridge it was met by Mr Overton's butler who escorted the players through the grounds to the entrance hall, there they were given a meal before the dance commenced. This account was related by Dawkin Williams of Trecynon whose father was the leader of the band.

At the end of the ball the players had to walk back to Aberdare along the towpath reaching the town at 4.00 am 'dead tired'.

The names of the players were, Thomas Williams (clarinet); Daniel Lloyd; Richard Williams; Lewis Griffiths; John J. Jones (brother to *Caradog*), French horn; Morgan Morgan (the author's uncle); Shadrach Lewis (cashier at Nixon's); Thomas Morgan (uncle), Ophicleide\*; David R. Llewellyn, bugle; David Jones; William Jenkins, drummer; William J. Price. The first bandmaster of the Aberdare Band was Mr. Shaw from Cyfarthfa, who came over to Aberdare once a week.

*The Aberdare Leader, 19<sup>th</sup> April 1913*

\*Ophicleide = a keyed brass instrument of the bugle family similar to the tuba but shaped like saxophone.

## PHILLIPS' ORCHESTRAL SOCIETY

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[CONDUCTOR: MR. J. ARKITE PHILLIPS.]

Our portrait is of Mr. J. Arkite Phillips, Aberdare, whose career as a musician has been watched with great interest. As an oboist he is well known throughout the Principality, and has on many occasions played principal oboe under some of the finest conductors in the country. In 1899, in an open solo competition, Mr Phillips carried off first prize at the Cardiff National Eisteddfod. Phillips' Quadrille Band is well known throughout Wales. Like Mr. Barter Jones, now conductor at Daly's Theatre, London, and other musicians the Principality has produced, Mr. Phillips has studied the piano and organ under the instruction of the late able musician, Mr. Edward Lawrence. Mr. Phillips is also honorary organist at Trinity Church in Aberdare. For his early instruction as oboist Mr. Phillips is indebted to Mons Leban, principal oboe at the Italian Opera, Leeds Festival, etc. It is interesting here to note that Mr. Phillips' teacher was one of the instrumentalists the late Sir Arthur Sullivan (then Mr. Sullivan) brought over from the Continent to play in his Orchestra, which he conducted himself at the [London] Aquarium.

*The Aberdare Almanac and Local Advertiser for 1901 (Jones & Sons, Aberdare Times)*

Phillips' bands played at various events in the town, and other areas, at concerts, balls and dances. His orchestra consisted of 40 players (rising to 45). Initially it was made up of 7 first violins, 8 seconds, 2 violas, 2 cellos, 2 double basses, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 3 cornets, 3 trombones, euphonium, tympani and piano. Arkite Phillips ran a well known music shop at 5, Canon Street, Aberdare, selling a range of wind and brass musical instruments, pianos and scores. Many of the leading musicians of the day, such as Caradog, Rees Evans and Joseph Parry, frequented the shop. Phillips also taught the pianoforte and oboe.

He was the son of B. H. Phillips, the inventor of the chifffoniere organ; his sister was the headmistress of Abernant Girl's School. It is fitting to include this short account in *Hanes* as J. Arkite Phillips was the father of Mr Peter E. Phillips, M.A., fondly known as *Pep*, who carried on the family musical tradition with his concerts with the pupils of the Aberdare Boys' Grammar School. *Pep* was a founder member of *The Cynon Valley History Society*, and regularly attended its meetings until his death in 1985.

### **OLD ABERDARE**

Some of the facts recorded in the following account of the town of Aberdare will have been read before; it is included however, as much is new and adds to our knowledge of what the centre of Aberdare looked like at this time. It would be interesting if a relief table or computer drawing could be constructed from the information in the article; a project for the new comprehensive school perhaps?

#### **Chief Buildings and Roads in 1840-1850: Recollections of John Morgan of Cwmbach.**

Canon Street and Maesydre was one green field, a narrow pathway ran through it stretching from High Street to the Iron Bridge, at the bottom of Commercial Street, strange to relate a portion of that pathway is still preserved; it is that narrow footway running between the Education Offices and The Poplars. Pedestrians on their way from Heol-y-felin to Abernant or Merthyr or Cwmbach, would use this short cut, but horses and carts had to proceed through High Street as far as the entrance to St. Elvan's, thence down through Commercial Street. The river Dare was not then arched over as it is now. It was on the Welsh Harp Square that an arched bridge had been erected to enable all horses and carts cross over to the Abernant side of the river and vice versa...The *Welsh Harp* building [public house] was the only establishment existing in this part of the town on that side of the river. The *Heathcock* [Inn] stood then where it does now, close by was the shop of Evan Griffiths, father of the late David Griffiths, ironmonger.

Carmel (Capel Penpound) was very different from what it is now, the stairs leading to the gallery were in the gable end. There was only one house in this part of the town, and it stands to this day and is occupied. This is situated in the gardens at the rear of the bill posting stations opposite Calfaria... St. John's church and churchyard had been giving shelter to the quick and the dead for centuries.

Next door to the Town Hall was the *Angel Tavern*, and the site of the Town Hall was occupied by the market of the day. The *Green Dragon Inn* was also in existence and stands to this day, as it was then.

There were thatched cottages in various places round here, and the old *Wellington* public house stood where the Constitutional Club is now. This old fashioned house was pulled down, and the stones lay on the site for a considerable period. There were a few cottages on the opposite side, with long gardens in front called Tai y Berllan. Along High Street were a few small cottages and on the right hand side stood the *Boot*... The old *Boot Hotel* was one and the same building as the late Mr. Daniel Griffiths' ironmongers shop. The *Black Lion* had a long garden in front, stretching down as far as the present *Marquis of Bute Hotel*; there was a row of workmen's cottages on the field at the back of where now are situated Emrys Evans' Chemist shop, the Beehive and the London and Provincial Bank [Barclays].

A public house called the *Rising Sun* (with a courtyard) preceded the *Central Hotel*, on that very spot. Looking down Victoria Square (facing Merthyr Mountain) one's eyes rested on green pasture land where the *Boot Hotel* and Market Street were built. In the place of the *Castle Hotel* was a shop with a narrow pavement running up alongside the *Black Lion* garden as far as Wind Street. There was no Bute Street in those days. From the *Castle Hotel* downwards [towards Aberaman] there were stone-roofed cottages as far as the National School which was called in those days Ysgol Rydd; the master was Richard Edwards. From the Town National to Mountain Ash were only occasional houses and farms. *Aberdare Leader*, 26<sup>th</sup> July 1913

## THE WELSH HARP BRIDGE.

There is a saying extant that London Bridge is never to be seen without a grey horse upon it, and we think it may with equal truth be said that the Welsh Harp Bridge is never without a body of idlers sitting on its parapets. On fine days the little bridge appears to be a general rendezvous for the idle and impudent, and it is next to impossible for any respectable passer-by to escape an insulting remark being flung at him or her by one of them. We trust the police will see to this matter, and thus rid the town of a nuisance.

*The Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian, 7<sup>th</sup> September, 1861.*

## ROOKERY COTTAGE

The observant may have noticed an old cottage set back next to the stone tram-road embankment on the left hand side of the Gadlys Road; it bears the name *Rookery Cottage* and is certainly one of the oldest remaining houses in Aberdare.

It was once the home of Thomas Williams, a stone-cutter, and a member of the Philosophical Society of the 1830s who had paid special attention to electricity, and was the owner of the only electric machine in Aberdare at that time. His father built the old Market House, the site of which is now occupied by the Council Offices.

His son T. Dawkin Williams, who had been born in *Rookery Cottage*, started a pottery works on the Common not far from the lower park pond but the clay proved unsuitable. He built the *Star and Garter* [a public house opposite the Trap Surgery] for himself. In his younger days he was a zealous worker at Hen Dŷ Cwrdd, and had wonderful tact in managing children. He was also a member of the choir and had a good bass voice. He had a retentive memory and his knowledge of old Aberdare was extensive. It was interesting to hear him talk of the old natives and of past events in the history of the district. He was probably the last pupil of the old Minister of Hen Dŷ Cwrdd [the Rev John Jones] of whom he had a great admiration. Williams was fond of quoting some of the lessons of the old book.

Obituary of T D W, *The Aberdare Leader*, 19<sup>th</sup>, January, 1918

Thomas Dawkin Williams died on the 6<sup>th</sup> January 1918, aged 85. Note, there used to be a Dawkin's Place at the Hirwaun end of the cemetery. The present roundabout on the by-pass at this point is known as Dawkin's roundabout.

For the Philosophical Society see *Old Aberdare*, Vol. Two, p. 56.

## PUTTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

### **Pont Siencyn Arthur.**

We are informed by Mr T. Dawkin Williams, Trecynon, that the bridge at the bottom of Harriet Street known as Pont Siencyn Arthur was not built by Siencyn Arthur but by Thomas Dawkin and his son Thomas, grandfather and father respectively of Thomas Dawkin Williams, in the year 1829.

The masons employed were Edward Jenkins, Troedyrhiw, Cwmtaf, and Thomas Thomas Rhiwglyn, while the hod-bearer was named Edward Morgan. The site of the bridge was called Rhydygored. It was here that the water was diverted for the use of Llwydcoed Mill, which was right opposite [the end of] Mill Street, hence the name.

The bridge was then known as New Bridge; Harriet Street as New Street, and the Company [Truck] shop in the vicinity as the 'New Shop'. The shop was erected by Mr. George Scale... The first clerks employed at this establishment were Mr. Hitchman, Messrs John Jayne, father of the late Bishop Jayne; Jenkin Rhys, Gelli, Penderyn, grandfather of R. J. Rhys, coroner, and William Williams. Before the bridge was completed there was a great flood in the River Cynon. In order that the great onrush of water might have a free flow under the bridge, Thomas Dawkin had to release the 'centres', that is the wooden supports to the superstructure. These

were washed away by the flood, but the bridge was saved, and the builder thereby saved one hundred pounds, which was the contract price for erecting the bridge.

The narrator of this incident Mr. T Dawkin Williams is to-day hale and hearty at 85.

*The Aberdare Leader, 1st, September, 1917*

## SOCIETY NEWS

We regret to record the death, since our last issue, of Mr. Hywel Lloyd of Abernant. Mr. Lloyd, who was a former Headmaster of Ysgol y Comin (Park Schools), had been a member of the Society for a great number of years, and was rarely absent from meetings; his relevant comments, contributions to lecture topics and lively observations will be missed.

We congratulate our former Chairman, David Leslie Davies, on his admission to the Gorsedd of Bards on the 9<sup>th</sup> August last at the National Eisteddfod of Wales held at Denbigh. This well deserved honour acknowledges David's great contribution to Welsh culture in his local area, and reflects his commitment in teaching Welsh as a second language, and as an adult tutor in Merthyr Tydfil and Aberdare for some 30 years. The citation for the appointment also refers to his part in founding the local Welsh language Newspaper *Clochdar*.

### **Alaw Goch Commemorated.**

Another Blue Plaque was unveiled on Thursday the 21<sup>st</sup> August, 2013. Affixed to the Gorsedd Circle at Aberdare Park, it acknowledges the role of David Williams (1809–1863) in bringing the first National Eisteddfod of the modern era to Aberdare in 1861, and securing its future as a National cultural institution. The Blue Plaque was set up by the initiative of the Society, which also paid for its manufacture.

**\*THE WINTER ISSUE OF HANES WILL BE A GRAND CHRISTMAS EDITION\***

## LEGAL IRASCIBILITY

At a contested case at Aberdare Magistrates' Court one of the witnesses on taking the oath imprinted a kiss on the sacred volume in a rather unceremonious manner, when the Stipendiary Magistrate, (Sir) T. Marchant Williams, intervened with "Look what you are doing, that is not a baby."

Another witness addressed the Magistrates as 'My Lords.' The Stipendiary: We have not come to that yet.

*The Aberdare Leader, 7<sup>th</sup> June, 1902.*

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