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HANES

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

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GETTING AROUND - HIGHWAYS AND BY WAYS IN 1852

Travelling around the parish during Aberdare's formative years would have been very difficult as most journeys had to be made on foot. An 1806 description of a 'roadway' in Aberdare is probably fairly typical of the majority of such thoroughfares: *The common and ancient pack and prime way leading from Penhe*[o]*wlyfelin* [? Heol y Felin] *in the parish of Aberdare to the parish church of Ystradvoduck* [Ystradyfodwg, the ancient parish that included both Rhondda valleys] *length 2,000 yards and in breadth 3 yards (which) was ruinous, miry, deep broken and in decay for want of reparation and amendment.*

The state of the roads to Merthyr Tydfil were of particular interest to T. F. Ellis and W. Wylde when they surveyed the parish in 1831 for Parliamentary boundary purposes, they reported that *there is one tolerably good route between Merthyr Tydfil and Aberdare which is rather circuitous; the direct passage over the mountain is barely passable for wheel-carriages.* [The former via Llwydcoed, the route of the latter was by way of Abernant.]

Bad State of Glamorganshire Roads – *From Aberdare to Newbridge* [Pontypridd], *and particularly nr Aberammon* (sic) *and the Bruce Arms, the holes are so deep that it is dangerous for a carriage to pass after dark. Two commercial gentlemen from Bristol had their phaetons much injured near the above spot; one had his axletree broken, and the other the principal spring. The latter was thrown out, and was much bruised.*

Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian, January, 31st. 1846.

Roads had certainly improved between ca. 1848 and 1852 when they were the subject of enquiry by Thomas Webster Rammell:–

Highways*:–The highways of the parish are now managed by a Board of Highways, which was established about four years ago. The extent of highways is about 35 miles. The annual cost of repairing them is about £500, which sum is raised by a 5d rate upon the present valuation.*

The Highway Board employ a surveyor at a salary of £45 a year, and also a clerk at a salary of £20.

In the repair of the roads, a good deal of limestone is used, in addition to the common pebbles of the country. Cinders are also extensively used. These materials seem to answer the purpose very well; and it

was stated that ***there has been a considerable improvement in the state of the roads since the Highway Board was established****, whilst at the same time, the expense has been reduced. Previously to the establishment of this Board, the highways were managed by overseers appointed by the four divisions of the parish,* [The ancient Hamlets of Cwmdare, Llwydcoed, Fforchaman and Cefnpennar. Ed.], *who were changed annually, and were unpaid.*
There are still many roads in the town which have not yet been dedicated to the public, and these are nearly all in a very bad state, and some almost, if not quite, impassable.
The footpaths in the town are made and maintained by the owners of the houses facing them.

Turnpike Roads. – *There are about 8½ miles of turnpike road in the parish, which are all under the management of the County Roads Board. There is much complaint of the state of that portion of the turnpike road below Aberdare. Many complaints were made of the state of the roads.*
Mr David Davies, surgeon, stated: – ***"The roads are so bad that they are not fit for a horse to travel upon. My horse is so accustomed to go upon the pavements that he will walk up steps as well as I can."***

The Local Board of Health became the highway authority after its establishment in 1854.

GETTING AROUND – HANSOMES FOR HIRE

Cabs and brakes first appeared on the streets of Aberdare in 1866. The prior lack of such an essential facility was the subject of an editorial in the ***Aberdare Times*** on the 18th November 1865 which commented:
We are not often behind our Merthyr Tydfil friends in the introduction of useful novelties, or in providing for the convenience of the public, but they are certainly taking the lead of us in several important matters just now. In the matter of cabs, for instance, they have shot ahead of us, and left us to wade through the mud whilst they are lounging in Hansomes with clean boots and economised time. Is there no chance of having a cab or two here? Don't be ashamed, young Aberdare, of playing to your Aunt Merthyr's lead, but launch into experiment at once.

This challenge was taken up and cabs were in operation on the streets of Aberdare by the beginning of 1866.

Keeping its eye on the ball the *Aberdare Times* further commented in the following March:–
We learn that our Merthyr Tydfil friends have had several new vehicles added to their stock of cabs. We have the pleasure of knowing that they are supplying a want long felt in this town, and we have no doubt if an additional number be required our spirited townsman Mr. Nicholas, will promptly put on the needful stream.

Aberdare Times, 3rd March 1866.

On the 23rd December 1865, the Chairman of the Local Board of Health (R.H. Rhys) gave notice that he would introduce a motion for the regulation of cabs at the Board's next Meeting. Appropriate By-laws were made on the 1st February 1866, under the Local Government Act of 1858, for the regulation of Hackney Carriages plying within the District of the Aberdare Board.

Aberdare Times, 24th February 1866.

These By-laws dealt with the licensing of cabs, the number of passengers carried, the regulation of fares, safety and condition of vehicles, designation of cab stands etc. The Regulations were initially enforced by the police and then by the Board of Health's Inspector of Nuisances.

Many of the pioneer operators were local publicans; one of the largest operators and the first to introduce cabs was David Nicholas of the *Queen's Hotel* [Burton's, Canon Street/Weatheral Street]. Another operator was Hosgood of the Iron Bridge Inn.

PUBLIC CONVEYANCES
Mr. D. NICHOLAS, QUEEN'S HOTEL, ABERDARE.

In thanking the public for their past patronage, begs to inform them he has Hansom and four-wheel cabs to let on hire (Subject to the Regulations of the Aberdare Board of Health) at any hour of the day.

He has just added to his establishment a handsome new brake which will carry 30 persons, and he has much pleasure in recommending this splendid vehicle to the attention of pleasure parties etc., as one of the most commodious and best built conveyances in the Kingdom, and which presents the advantage of being let at most moderate prices. Mr. Nicholas has made it his unceasing study to keep good horses and careful drivers, and relying on a continuous of public patronage, he is determined that he will not relax in his efforts to please, oblige, and accommodate.

Advertisement, ***Aberdare Times***, *1st September 1866.*

SHELTER

Whilst waiting for fares cabmen had either to sit on their cabs in the open in all weather, or wait in the nearest pub, even though it was an offence to leave cabs unattended. In 1885 a cabmen's shelter was placed in the town, much to the approval of the local newspaper which commented: *We have no doubt that the cabmen's shelter which as will be seen in our report of the Local Board's Meeting, is to be erected in Commercial Place will prove a great boon to the gentlemen of the badge. Hitherto, as everyone knows, they have been forced to stand out in all weathers, and that is decidedly unpleasant. We trust they will fully appreciate the consideration which is being paid to their wants.*

The shelter which could accommodate 16 persons was set up around the lamp pillar in front of the *Boot Hotel.* In 1892 the Board's Inspector of Nuisances reported that the shelter was in a very dirty condition, the cupboards under the seats were full of horse feed, it was much neglected and the inside of the shelter looked as if it had never been cleaned; what might be with a little attention an ornament to the town is a disgrace and an eye sore. (*Old Aberdare,* Vol.10 p132–133.)

CAB CRAZE

Aberdare did nothing by halves and by 1891 the *Aberdare Times* was complaining that there were now over 100 cabs in the district, compared with only 30 to 40 in Merthyr, making the roads perfectly dangerous owing to the number plying for hire. Consequently the Board of Health decided that the time had come to stop the granting of any further licenses, and the Cab Committee were instructed not to licence any more cabs or brakes until further notice be given. (Report of the meeting of the Local Board of Health held on the 25th September 1891, ***Aberdare Times***, 3rd October 1891)

CAB STANDS

Designated cab stands were moved from time to time. They were located at Victoria Square, Welsh Harp Square, Cardiff Street, Duke Street and at Whitcombe Street.

MODERN PILGRIMAGES.
CWMAMAN PEOPLE'S MECCA.

Ever since the establishment of the passenger motor service on the G.W.R between Aberdare and Cwmaman, the people of Aberdare have been favoured with weekly visits by the pleasure-seeking public of the village amongst the hills. The halting station being [near] the top of Monk Street, and I being resident not very far away, their customs are particularly noticeable.

From what I have seen at the Aberdare end, and also on one or two occasions at Cwmaman, the children have come to regard a trip to Aberdare as a pleasure excursion particularly on the pay

Saturday. They laugh gleefully and romp with delight as the time of departure approaches, for the older children remember the drudgery of walking or waiting for a brake under the old regime. And the beauty of these trips now is that John and Mary and all the children come together as a family, and their happy chatter is heard all the way down Monk Street, as far as the *Black Lion.* Then the young couples come together, and also the old bachelors and the old maids, all with their beaming faces towards Aberdare. Saturdays and Mondays are, of course, the favourite days for these trips, whilst every holiday time reminds us of the old-fashioned Mabon's Day. [An unofficial coalfield holiday, named after William Abraham (Mabon), (1842–1922), miners' agent and later M.P. for the Rhondda. In the 1890s miners refused to work on the first Monday of the month in order to limit coal production and maintain wages.]

Coming to the return journey, to watch the stream of passengers going up Monk Street on a Saturday night is very interesting, and the dialogues which are overheard at times are very amusing. For instance, two pals will continue the discussion they had at a public house, perhaps, and will keep on until they are comfortably seated in the motor. The lovers will talk of the pretty cinematograph pictures they have seen at the bioscope, and if a love scene has been shown upon the films that night, how artfully they adapt the circumstances to their own case of courtship. I remember a young man being moved to such an extent by the production of *Romeo and Juliet* (and Juliet's mother wasn't willing in this case) that he forthwith decided to elope with his lady love. While going up Monk Street he besieged her with entreaties to come. By the repetition of such performances rather often, her mother got to know, and the parental consent was obtained at last.

Another lot who attract attention on Saturday nights are the football enthusiasts. You will hear them recounting the incidents of the day's play. I never read the details of an Aberdare match because I can get to know the prominent players, and also the noteworthy bits of play, from the Cwmaman footballers. If a local match has also been played, in which they have participated, the excitement is doubly intense, and their voices are to be heard all the louder.

Then a train of little boys and girls come along with their parents, each one carrying a basket, handbag, frail, or parcel, as the case may be, making the scene look like the departure of a continental train from London. The luggage causes a little annoyance at times, but rests are taken here and there, to facilitate the reaching of the journey's end.

The most amusing sight of all is the rush that is made up the street by the late comers. To see them hurrying breathlessly to catch the last motor on Saturday night cannot fail to attract attention. Many a time have they been saved a walk home through the considerate action of the railway officials, but they have also been obliged to trudge it on occasions when they were hopelessly behind time. Imagine the chagrin of a man who has striven hard up a big hill, only to find that his last conveyance home has gone! Perhaps in the future the G.W.R. will provide a special late motor for the laggers.

The Aberdare Leader, 30th January 1909

Note: Passenger trains ran from the Black Lion Halt (just below Graig Place) to Cwmaman from 1906 to 1924 along the Dare-Aman branch of the Vale of Neath Railway (laid down 1854-1857).

CWMDARE'S TIME CAPSULE.

On the 24th July 2012, Society Member Ms. Hazel Hartland transferred ownership of her former family home at 3 David Street, Cwmdare to Cadw which has designated the property *Heritage Cottage.* In a statement to the Cynon Valley History Society, Cadw say:

Heritage Cottage is Cadw's 129th property and youngest asset. It is a small 19th century terraced house in Cwmdare, in the heart of the South Wales valleys. It is typical of many traditional buildings in Wales and elsewhere, but unique in that it has remained almost completely unaltered inside and outside since it was built in 1854.

With one in three buildings traditionally built in Wales, *Heritage Cottage* is important as a representative of such a significant proportion of our built heritage.
The project, led by Cadw – the Welsh Government Historic Environment Service – will ensure that *Heritage Cottage* is not only preserved for future generations to enjoy, but is also used as a learning resource to highlight how a traditional building, whether a castle or terraced house, can retain its character while being energy efficient and sustainable.
However the property is not only interesting because of its construction and on-going restoration, but also because of its local history. The mid nineteenth-century saw a huge growth in demand for Welsh steam coal. It was the fuel of industry, powering factories, ships and trains. By the 1850s, Cwmdare boasted four collieries and the village grew as terraced housing was built to accommodate the influx of workers. *Heritage Cottage* is a relatively unaltered example of the type of housing built by mine owners to attract their workforce. It housed family after family of working miners, usually accompanied by their wives, children, extended families; and often lodgers too. The renovation of *Heritage Cottage* will go back to basics and study cost-effective energy saving measures that build on the inherent sustainability of traditional buildings. The work will be a blend of modern and traditional measures ranging from insulation and draught proofing to good repair work that will help the original building fabric to provide optimum performance.
The work will be carried out in stages. The starting point is a detailed analysis of the building to really understand it. This will focus on condition and energy performance and includes different types of tests, before repair work is undertaken, and then energy efficient retrofit measures introduced. This will help to identify the incremental energy efficiency improvements that we can make, firstly through putting the building in good repair and then by retrofitting with energy efficiency measures.
The process, the information generated and conclusions reached, with the support of other research, will help us to develop an informed and realistic approach to the refurbishment of buildings like this without the need for extensive research and analysis on every traditional building.
John Edwards, Cadw's Assistant Director for properties in care said of the project "*Heritage Cottage* provides Cadw with a unique opportunity to explore, develop and promote a much better understanding of traditional homes in Wales, and beyond, about effective energy saving measures they can introduce at home to improve their energy efficiency, which will ultimately result in cost savings for them." [Submitted by Alun Watts, CVHS.]
You can find out more about *Heritage Cottage* – and watch a video about the project to preserve it - on the Cadw Website at www.Cadw.Wales.gov.uk. (Search also Heritage Cottage)
Note: David Street was built on the Gwyn Holford Estate. Number 3 has retained its stone corner stairs, a cast iron fireplace dated 1854, and a larder complete with slate slab.

FORTHCOMING LECTURES

April 17th	*London Oddities and Curiosities*	David Harrison.
May 15th	*The Mary Rose*	Phil Bowen
June 19th	*The Statue of Liberty*	Mrs. Polly Davies.

IN MEMORIAM

It is with great regret that we record the deaths of the under-mentioned society members:
Philip Davies, Mountain Ash, Society Chairman 1990-1991.
Robert Ferrari, Trecynon.

ST DAVID'S DAY 1914.

By the time you receive this edition of *Hanes*, St. David's Day 2014 will have passed; this fact should not however prevent us from looking at how the event was celebrated in local schools one hundred years ago.

The ***Aberdare Leader*** of 7th March 1914 filled a whole page with reports of St. David's Day school festivities. A considerable amount of preparation had obviously been carried out as the paper's editor commented *everywhere proceedings were marked with great enthusiasm, and seemed to surpass all previous efforts*.

School headmasters had made their own arrangements for the day, and a number of schools, Cwmbach, Cwmaman, the Town National and Park Girls' used public halls for their celebrations. A special feature of the 1914 festivities was the presentation of many dramatic sketches, these the *Leader* thought a splendid method of impressing on the minds of the children the work and character of Welsh National leaders.

At the **Park Girls' School** a talented young student teacher, Miss Amy Minty, was given special prominence in the paper for writing and producing sketches which, it was said, should be placed on the programme of schools for future use. One of these dealt with the epoch makers of Welsh history, from Dewi Sant to Llewelyn y Llyw Olaf.

Pupils of the **Aberdare Town National Schools** marched to the Memorial Hall, a large number of the girls arrayed in full Welsh costume, and nearly every child wore a daffodil. There they held a concert that included, Welsh folk songs, Welsh recitations, choruses, action songs and dances.

At **Abernant (Mixed) School,** the children were addressed in Welsh on the subject of the life of Dewi Sant.

Blaengwawr Infants' School celebrated with tableaux and put on two scenes from Welsh History.

Thomas Davies, of the Globe Hotel, played excellent selections of Welsh airs with variations on the harp at **Aman Infants' School,** and Gladys Evans, a young beginner, played *Ash Grove* on a mandolin. Three 'babies' sang *Dewi Sant.*

At **St. Fagan's Boys' School,** the concert was preceded by the National flag being paraded around the school yard and then hoisted on the school flag pole. Trees were planted in the playground. When the **St Fagan's Girls' School** ended its concert, pupils paraded the principal streets with flags and emblems. Most pupils wore Welsh costume and wore leeks.

The programme at **Cwmdare Schools** consisted of Welsh nursery rhymes and airs, and hymns were sung; the children took part in Welsh dances and games. Dramas were enacted including *Owain Glyndwr* written by Mr. D. O. Roberts. [Local teacher, including head at Gadlys Central School (1940–1949), writer of textbooks in Welsh. Hon. M.A. (Wales 1952), broadcaster, and chair of the 1956 Aberdare Eisteddfod Committee. Father of former local councillor and dentist, Dafydd Roberts.

At **Park Boys' School** the main room was decorated with Welsh banners and mottoes, and pictures of eminent Welshmen and famous old Ysgol Comin boys. Two loaned carved eisteddfod chairs were exhibited.

In **Glynhafod Mixed School,** pupils took part in a dramatisation of *The Throwing away of Excalibur.* There was a small loans exhibition which included a shawl relic of the Fishguard invasion shown by Miss S. B. Thomas. [Fishguard was invaded by a small French force in February 1797]

The various school concerts and events were attended by the local gentry.

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