

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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MEA CULPA

The editor occasionally receives letters from readers, and these are always welcome as they tend to raise interesting points, act as a catalyst and stimulate debate, or result in the discovery of forgotten or new facts. A recent item of correspondence, received from an Associate Member living in Somerset, mildly, but with humour, rebukes the compiler of this Newsletter for giving undue emphasis to events and personalities connected with the Aberdare area.

24th April 2014

“Dear Mr. Evans,

I have been an associate member – a ‘drone’, really for several years and the receipt of *Hanes* really does lift the spirit so I hope you will not find my observations impertinent, BUT I find that Aberdare and its environs (with the occasional foray to Mountain Ash), is given undue prominence and whilst I can sense the reason for this it does leave virtually two-thirds of the valley below the salt on the editorial table.

Anyway, to temper this mild criticism I enclose a poem I’ve written about the valley in the hope that it might cause some latent poets in the Society to put pen to paper, (poetry or prose), about what the valley means to them. Perhaps a slice of *Hanes* could be devoted to these reflections — present and from the past?

I hope that the poem and the suggestions prove that I am not completely idle.

I left Perthcelyn when I was thirteen but I find, at 76, that what I ‘ingest’ in those few years have conditioned my thoughts. I’d be fascinated to know what other people think.”

Your editor readily admits his guilt with regard to the imbalance in recording the history of the valley, and in mitigation devotes the larger part of this edition to those regions ‘below the salt’, and appeals to our readership to take up the correspondent’s challenge and submit their observations, thoughts, poems or prose for publication.

Other topics relating to the lower end of the valley now spring to mind and it is hoped to include these in future issues.

AFON CYNON

Over the Cynon Valley a blackbird sings -
the morning sun gilds the guardian hills,
His dark tribe have witnessed so many things.

Stern Pen-rhiw-C'radog from night's folded wings,
Brought back to warmth, from the dank thought that chills,
For over the valley a blackbird sings.

Princes and miners, farmers and kings,
A tapestry woven by time's gaunt mills.
Yes, his tribe have witnessed so many things.

Gouged from seams in the bedrock memory springs
Of brave men exploited by greed that kills,
Now over the valley a blackbird sings.

From the robes of Druids the mobile phone rings,
And progress produces a thousand ills.
His tribe have witnessed the sadness of things.

Like a melody from the harp's soul strings,
The Cynon flows gently, the past's cup fills,
While over the valley a blackbird sings -
His dark tribe have witnessed so many things.

Dave Peters

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The name Abercynon is relatively modern and was only officially adopted in 1896. In 1790 the spot was known as **Ty Planca** [after some sort of building made of planks or wood], a place then described by Henry Austin Bruce as the *né plus ultra of rotatory conveyance* - the end of the line for wheeled vehicles. Here, at that time, the difficult journey through the wooded Cynon Valley commenced; with the opening of the Aberdare Canal in 1812 communication became easier, as it was then possible to ride or walk along one side of the valley at least by means of the canal tow path. Ty Planca was now the junction of two busy canals (the Merthyr and Aberdare canals), as a canal settlement it increased in importance and population, and became known as **Navigation**. In 1846 the opening of the Aberdare Railway which connected Aberdare with the Taff Vale Railway at Navigation prompted another change to **Aberdare Junction** a name which prevailed until 1896 when it was again changed to **Abercynon**. (Merthyr Tydfil and Dowlais Times, 10th September 1896). To confuse matters the township was also, at one period, called by the quaint hybrid name, **Abertaffacynon**. Yet another name which once had currency was **Ynys Meyrick**, this designation appears in the Aberdare Railway Act of 1845 which permitted the construction of a railway from *Ynys Meyrick* to Aberdare. In the early 1900s an official attempt was made to rename Abercynon, **Carnetown**. (See below)

HOW TOWNS ARE MADE IN SOUTH WALES

A striking example of how rapidly new towns spring up and grow to large proportions in South Wales is given in the case of Navigation, near Quaker's Yard. This is by no means the only example of the kind in the district, but we refer to Navigation because it is the latest of those colliery speculations which have such a marvellous effect in changing the character of the place. It was only about six years since that the first sod was cut of the new colliery belonging to Messrs. Harris & Co., previous to which the particular tract of land may be said to have no inhabitants upon it. But what is the case now? After spending the enormous sum of half a million of money, and piercing the bowels of the earth to a depth of 700 yards, the much coveted seam of coal has been proved, and a town of considerable importance is rapidly springing up on the hitherto extensive waste of mountain land. No sooner had sinking operations been commenced than workmen's huts were built, then followed numerous cottages; and substantial shops of various kinds, public houses, and a large hotel has been set on foot, together with the various other ramifications of a civil community, until now, after an exceedingly short period of time, the population has increased so greatly that the School Board are bound to step in and provide for the education of the children. Their educational requirements at Navigation has thrown a further burden of responsibility upon the Merthyr School Board, whose hands, it must be confessed, were previously well filled, but within whose area the greater portion of the population resides. Already they have taken measures for providing school accommodation which must soon be required. ...The people themselves generally look after their religious requirements, according to their own way of thinking, but it is left to the School Board to provide for the secular education of their children.

The rapid growth of towns in this manner is perhaps, more striking in South Wales than in other parts of the kingdom, and is of course due to the valuable mineral resources which lay beneath the soil. Merthyr Vale and the various places in the Rhondda valley are similar illustrations of how towns rapidly spring up around us, but the latest, and perhaps the most extensive, will be in a short time that at Navigation.

Merthyr Telegraph, March, 21st. 1879.

THE PRICE OF COAL

The opening of the Cardiff-Dowlais colliery in the 1890s created the village of Abercynon. (Rowson & Wright: *The Glamorganshire and Aberdare Canals*). In 1895 during the course of sinking one of its two shafts, the North Pit, which had then been sunk to the depth of 740 yards and was approaching the 9-foot seam it was necessary to raise the sinkers from the shaft bottom to the surface in order to carry out shot firing. The first batch of eight men were hauled up in a bucket, which for the second ride was changed to a bowk — a large circular bucket suspended by four bridles with a steel rope which is drawn over the sheaves on the surface. The bowk contained 6 men and their tools, it was hauled up and when it was about 500 feet off the bottom of the shaft it tilted on its side, and *its living freight was hurled headlong into the yawning abyss*. When the bowk reached the surface it was found to be suspended on its side and secured by two bridles only. The other two had snapped. It was evident that the bowk had collided with something during its ascent. As for the six men, five had fallen into the sump which had to be drained to recover the remains, and the body of the sixth was recovered from a stage half way down. The bodies of all those killed were very badly damaged. The North Pit was 21 feet in diameter and the bowk measured 5 feet.

At an inquest held a few days later, evidence was heard that when the bowk left the foot of

the shaft it was securely attached to the rope by four bridles, chains and hooks. It commenced its ascent without problem, and then the winder heard it strike something. He shouted 'stop' and called to those below to stand clear. It was concluded that the bowk had collided with a byat [the bracing in the shaft] during its ascent. The verdict of the inquest was that the six men were killed by the upsetting of the bowk after it had hit a byat; the cause of which was not known.

The Aberdare newspaper reported that seven men had been killed in an earlier sinking accident.

Sources: *The Aberdare Times*, 14th September, 1895 and *The Evening Express*, 18th September 1895.

THE ABERCYNON SUSPENSION BRIDGE



The Abercynon suspension bridge, designed by Louis Harper of Aberdare and opened in November 1899, was of a *very neat and picturesque appearance*. It was built by James Howells, contractor, Abercynon under the supervision of the Council's surveyor. It had a span of 160 feet and was 5 foot wide. Its bearing load = 160 lbs per square foot, or about twice the weight of all the people who could stand on it at any one time. Its construction cost £500 of which the Carne Park Estate through William Thomas of Brynawel, Aberdare contributed £100. The bridge became unsafe as a result of flooding in 1942, it was then closed as a thoroughfare and subsequently removed. When built it was the only bridge of its kind in the country.

Cardiff Times, November 29th, 1899.

ABERCYNON OR CARNETOWN?

The residents of Abercynon are of one accord against the proposals of the Post Master General to substitute the name Carnetown for Abercynon. 'We have had', said an old resident, 'enough changes already, Heaven knows, and I don't think a better name than Abercynon need be sought for.' The action of the Mountain Ash District Council in protesting against any alteration has the entire support of the Abercynon people.

The Aberdare Leader, 14th January, 1905.

Carnetown built on the Carne Park Estate, still exists as an area of Abercynon. The land was owned by the Carne family of Nash, Nr. Llantwit Major. Carnetown has streets named Nash Street and Tressillian Place. Tressillian Bay lies between Llantwit Major and St. Donats. [Ed.]

ABERDARE JUNCTION TO PENRHIWCEIBER MARVELLOUS PROGRESS

Walking from Aberdare Junction to Penrhiwceiber (writes our Treharris correspondent) over the new public highway made a few years ago, and to the left of the Taff Vale Railway, anyone cannot but wonder at the rapid increase in the erection of hotels and dwelling houses in this direction. Coming to the old *White Thorne*, the licence of which was transferred to the *New Thorne Hotel*, Aberdare Junction, we find twenty five houses inhabited, and preparations for a number of others busily going on. A little higher up the Booth Hotel and forty houses are nearing completion, and it is said the building at this particular spot is only in its infancy. Still a little higher up we come to the *Tynte Hotel*, surrounded by fifty houses, all inhabited and thirty more in course of erection. There are also a number of quarries turning out some of the best of paving and building stone close to the buildings, the quality of which cannot be surpassed in the whole of Wales. Applications for licences for the hotels were made last year, but were refused, as they were considerably premature. Less than two years ago this district was all pasture land, and now it is one busy hive of industry; indeed it looks as if the three small farms will soon be replaced by a fairly sized colliery town.

Merthyr Times, June 6th, 1895.

The name Tyntetown (colloquially ‘the Tynte’), after the Kemeys-Tynte family of Somerset and Cefn Mably who owned the land, seems to have been synonymous with Mathewstown “*Mathewstown and Tyntetown are one and the same place. An effort is now being made to have the place called by one name only*”

Weekly Mail, May 23rd, 1903

Others disagreed “The Magistrates’ Clerk (Col. Lewis) [a Merthyr man] is evidently on the side of the Mountain Ash Chamber of Trade with respect to retaining the name of Tyntetown on the district below Penrhiwceiber. At the Abercynon Police Court yesterday (Wednesday) a witness stated that he lived at Mathewstown, when the Clerk interposed, saying ‘Call it Tyntetown; it is not Mathewstown’ ”

The Aberdare Leader, May 23rd, 1903

A SUMMER STORY — HIRWAUN’S RENOWNED OUTING.

The Picnic — On Tuesday, June 18th, a picnic on a large scale was held at Ystradfellte caves. The party was got up by Hirwaun gentlemen, and was therefore called the ‘Hirwaun Picnic.’ On a circular shown to us by a friend we noticed the names of Messrs. William Davies, Herbert Kirkhouse, and Leyshon Rhys, as stewards. The number invited, I was told, reached near the respectable figures 150.

On the Thursday previous to the great day — the 18th June, there was however, a shrill rumour that the picnic was to be abandoned, and that the parties invited were to be written to, to that effect. By the shivers, we felt our blood run cold! There was nothing, however, to be done; two of the stewards had withdrawn, and Mr. Leyshon Rhys was left to himself, it seems. It was however contrived between him and Mr. D E Williams, that the affair should not drop — the picnic was to take place, and no sham, humbug to be about it. Glorious news to a hungry stomach forsooth! By the hour of starting it was expected that a great many absentees would be discovered, for some very ARISTOCRATIC reasons were put forth by some of the most educated — the most elegant — the most refined — the most accomplished — the most beautiful — the most lovely — the most divine, for not attending. The reason brought forward by one of the little women was that the company was much too

‘mixed.’ True, such ladies require an extra amount of refinement to turn in, and we wonder at the taste of the stewards in the invitations sent by them. But, when the memorable day, 18th June arrived, lo! Trucks, voluntaries and all were seen bundled together, in carts and wagons for the purpose of feasting at the Porth. The lost stewards were found, and joined the party, and when the Vote of Thanks to the stewards for their attention &c., to the comforts and stomachs of the party was carried, it was replied to by one of the lost sheep. This day of Hirwaun renown will be ever remembered. It was a day remarkable for its consumption of inoffensive pigs, and innocent fowls, of porter well up, and champagne not sober making. All the expenses of the picnic, I am told, had to be borne by Mr. D E Williams, barring out the intoxicating drinks, which we are sorry to say have not yet been paid for. We trust a one [old] penny subscription will be raised in the parish of Aberdare towards wiping off the ‘scot’ — Yours truly, Guy

[Our correspondent will see that we have drawn our pen over some of the allusions made to young ladies &c., which we think highly improper. We only give the same reason for other corrections, Ed. A.T.]

The Aberdare Times, July 6th, 1861.

NEWS

Following the recent resignation of the Society Chair, Mr David Walters, the vice Chair, Mr Alun Watts is to take over as caretaker Chairman until the AGM in September when hopefully a new chair can be elected.

THE TEMPERANCE HALL 1858-2014.

By the time you receive this edition of *Hanes* the Temperance Hall, (known to later generations as *The Palladium*), Canon Street, will have been demolished. As a souvenir of the many hundreds of interesting events which took place there we reproduce below a Notice of an 1885 performance. For its detailed history see *Old Aberdare*, Vol.7, pp. 55-64.

TEMPERANCE HALL, ABERDARE, JANUARY 5th, 1885 WEEK
HYBERT, MIDDLE & WALLACE’S
GRAND AMERICAN PRODUCTION OF
UNCLE TOM’S CABIN.
(FROM THE THEATRE ROYAL, CHELTENHAM)
REAL NEGROES, FREED SLAVES AND JUBILLEE SINGERS.
30 ARTISTES
AND THE CELEBRATED BLOODHOUND ‘LEAP.’
HAS BEEN PROCURED AT GREAT EXPENSES AND WILL APPEAR AT EACH
PERFORMANCE IN THE GREAT SLAVE HUNT.
GRAND PARADE EACH DAY (WEATHER PERMITTING) OF BRASS BAND,
COMPANY AND FREED SLAVES WITH THE PROPRIETOR’S OWN OMNIBUS AND
FOUR IN HAND.
SEEN BY 30,000 IN SOUTH WALES.
4 TONS OF SCENERY: NEW DRESSES, NEW COSTUMES.

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