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HANES

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

ISSUE NUMBER 86

SPRING 2019

To continue to take your minds off Brexit we look again at some of the brave men of this valley who fought against Fascism in the Spanish Civil War. Also, we remember a gruesome unsolved murder in Aberdare Park and in the present, we look at a double blue plaque event and a local boy made good.

Happy Reading!

The Spanish Civil War

Brave William Lloyd and Bob Condon at the battle of Jarama



Surviving members of the British Battalion following the
Battle of Jarama, February 1937

Welsh miners made up one of the largest contingents within the British Battalion during the Spanish Civil War of 1936–39. Thirty-three of them were killed in Spain, including the Aberdarian Tom Howell Jones. Two others, both from Aberaman, William D. Lloyd and Robert Condon survived and returned home.

During the battle of Jarama, which took place in February 1937, a 680-strong British battalion was surprised by a Fascist attack, which inflicted severe losses. Jock Cunningham, a Glaswegian, the one-time commander who had been hospitalised, discharged himself on hearing his battalion was lacking organisation and came back to take command. In a short space of time he did wonderful work in restoring morale. Lloyd was appointed as a runner to him.

One day Lloyd reported that, "200 men could be seen coming from the Fascist lines singing the International and holding their hands up. A cease fire took place but suddenly they threw bombs in to the trenches and captured 30 of our boys."

Lloyd greatly missed Bob Condon for two days after hearing that his company had been wiped out. Yet when he saw him returning, he said, "It was like a sight from heaven."

"Cunningham had a consultation with a Spanish general who told him that the position was extremely serious. If the enemy advanced farther up the Valencia road, which lay a little distance behind them, it would be cut, and Madrid would be prevented from having any more supplies. Then, possibly the war would end quickly with victory for Franco. We were told that it would be certain death to go back, and the General wanted to know whether we would do it.



Jock Cunningham

Cunningham turned to us boys, 150 of us now, and after telling us what it would mean, asked us if we would go back. Not one said no.

We advanced quickly. On the way we met Spaniards, Frenchmen and Americans who had dropped back. They were thrilled and inspired by the fact that we were going back and they fell in behind us, making us 2,000 strong. We regained the ridge but in another attack by the Fascists, our line was broken and there was a retreat. Everybody ran except 40 of the English speaking battalion under Cunningham, and with him were Bob Condon and myself. We held the position for some time.

Cunningham was told that Fascists had taken over some of our trenches so he led a bombing raid down a trench held at one end by the Fascists and at the other end by the Spanish government troops. They took this trench and with six men and a Lewis gun, (Lloyd and Condon may have been in that brave group but Lloyd does not say that in his letters), cut off a group of some 80 Fascists from their own lines. However, Cunningham was hit by four bullets: three rifle wounds through his left upper arm and another rifle bullet under his shoulder blade that had entered his left chest, passed through, and lodged there.

Spanish comrades immediately ran back with him to the dressing station, a distance of two kilometres, and this probably saved his life, for he was losing a tremendous amount of blood."

This almost impossible defence blocked Franco's attempt to seize the capital and helped the Republicans to fight for another two years

In May, Lloyd returned to Wales to raise funds for the dependents of the men of the British battalion who had been killed in Spain and to recruit new volunteers to fight the Fascists.

Postscript.

After World War II, there was a knock on Will Lloyd's door and who should be there but Jock Cunningham, tramping and destitute. In came the old commander to stay for a couple of months in Aberdare but wondering a bit in the mind. A sad end for a tremendously brave soldier who deserved the V.C.

Sources

Aberdare Leader 1st & 8th May 1937.

Gillian Malpas, (one of Lloyd's daughters).

For Lloyd's memoirs please look on this website:

<http://crazydruid.net/PoliticsandMedia.html>

Thanks are due to Mark Williams for sharing his website.

William Lloyd's later life

He married Catherine Mary Jones in 1939, and lived in Penywaun. He had four daughters: Carol, Lynda, Gill and Ina and a son Byron.

William D. Lloyd died in 1986.



William Lloyd

Other Men who went to fight

Glyn Thomas

Thomas lived in Cwmbach and was a member of the local Communist Party.

On the way to the Paris International Brigade HQ, he was in a party of 50 British Volunteers, English, Welsh and Scottish boys. They were all determined to fight Fascism. At Paris, he met German anti-Fascists who had escaped from concentration camps and crossed the frontier to join the Spanish Government forces, and also Italian soldiers who had deserted to fight Fascism, while there were many French recruits. He was never to fight, as he was not accepted for service on medical grounds.

Source: *Aberdare Leader*, 27th February 1938, p.8

William Durston

Durston was a die-caster from Aberaman who "arrived in Spain in November 1937 and was regarded as a useful and conscientious clerk in Tarazona, but was prevented by silicosis from doing physically demanding work. He sought repatriation on medical grounds before the Ebro battle", yet some sources state that he died in that battle on 25th August 1938.

The Moscow Archives accused him of being a dubious element who possibly deserted but this is very doubtful. (If any member has more information about Durston, I would be very grateful to receive it. Ed.)
Source: *'You are legend,'* by Graham Davies.

Unsolved Murder in Aberdare Park

Polish miner Jerzsy ("George") Strzadala's 33-year-old life was quiet and unspectacular. His death in the park was brutal and savage. His dead body with 44 stab wounds was found near the Glan Road side gate by three schoolboys on 20th April 1948.

Conscripted by the Germans to fight in the war, he had been captured by the British in 1944 and had been in a P.O.W camp. Later he came over to Britain, lived at a miners' hostel in Hirwaun, and worked at Tirherbert Colliery.



'George' Strzadala

He was a gentle character who loved his homeland and spoke with great feeling about his mother, and sent parcels and money home to her regularly. Fastidious as was his nature, he loved to buy the best clothes and did most of his shopping in Cardiff. His fellow workers said of him that he was "a really fine fellow and one of the best".

A severe thunderstorm the previous night had drenched the victim's body and had washed away many clues with it.

The murder weapon was deduced to be a sharp-pointed dagger with a razor edged six-inch blade.

The park lake was drained and dredged but no weapon was found in it. Strzadala had also been robbed, between £20 and £30 had been taken from his wallet, which had been found near his body, and his Swiss watch minus the strap was also missing.

Chief Inspector Robert Fabian of Scotland Yard was called in, but despite 600 statements taken by the police and the evidence of 15 witnesses, he left Aberdare a baffled man.



Robert Fabian in Aberdare Park

A Trecynon man on the night that Strzadala was murdered saw him talking to a man in his twenties, short, sturdy with dark hair dressed in a navy pin stripe suit. This man, the probable murderer, was never found.

Strzadala was buried at Bryn-y-Gaer cemetery, and sixty-five fellow Poles threw earth into his grave. Local

Lodge officials praised his work and said how much he was liked. He appeared to have no enemies.

But tragically, he had at least one. The mystery of who that enemy was is as deep now as it was 70 years ago!

Source: Liz Makin.

Aberdare Leader, 24th April and 1st May 1948

Aberdare Park Celebrations

The Friends of Aberdare Park have instigated many improvements in the park. On Easter Sunday, information boards showing the flora and fauna and a timeline of the park's history were unveiled by Roy Noble. John Davey, representing our society, and members of the Friends of Aberdare Park and representatives from the Cynon Valley Museum attended.

The garden around the statue of Lord Merthyr has been improved and a splash pad will be installed on the site of the paddling pool.

On 13th July, there will be special celebrations of the 150th anniversary of the opening of the park. There is a possibility of a royal visit!

A Double Blue Plaque Event: The Old Town Hall and the Cambrian Lamp Works

This special event was organised by the society and took place at the Cynon Valley Museum on 22nd February.

Charlotte Morgan, the manager of the museum welcomed everyone and gave a short talk about the Old Town Hall. It started its function as a market in 1830 but in the 1850s it was structurally altered and the local Board of Health met there. In 1894, that organisation became defunct but the new Aberdare Urban District Council chose to retain it as its principal offices and council chamber. In 1996, it ceased to be the main offices when Aberdare UDC was replaced by Cynon Valley Borough Council but it was still retained for administrative purposes.



Lord Aberdare unveiling the Old Market Hall Plaque

Lord Aberdare while making a speech about the Town Hall remarked that his ancestor, the first Lord Aberdare, was one of the first guardians who sat on the local Board of Health. Lord Aberdare then unveiled the plaque.

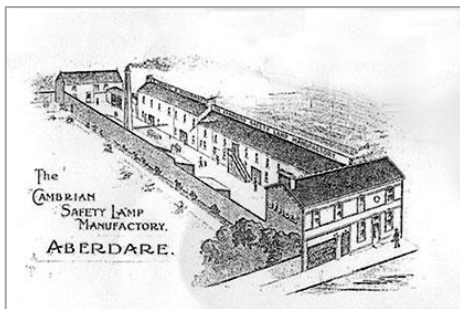
The Cambrian Lamp Works was founded in 1860 by Evan Thomas, originally based at Cardiff Street, Aberdare. In 1877 the premises of the works was moved to Graig Street in Foundry Town and Mr Lewis Noah Williams joined the company. It officially became known as E. Thomas & Williams Ltd. in 1907. The works grew extensively and became very successful, winning prizes at many exhibitions with the result that they exported lamps all over the world.

Sadly, in 1978, there was a fire at their factory and the premises moved to a unit in Robertstown. They are the only approved manufacturer of safety lamps in Wales. Vikki Howells our local AM unveiled the plaque.



Vikki Howells, A.M., unveiling the Lampworks Plaque

The event then came to a close but not before a first class buffet was provided.



The Cambrian Lamp Works in Graig Street, Foundry Town.



The Town Hall in its two-storey form. (Trinity Chapel is on the right).



The three-storey Town Hall

Nick Servini at the Daffodil Festival

The Daffodil Festival, organised by the Soroptimists, was held at Green Street Methodist Chapel, Aberdare over the weekend 28th April to 3rd March and during which many interesting events took place.

One of them was a very interesting talk given by Nick Servini.

He was born and brought up in Aberdare, and went to Bishop Hedley Roman Catholic High School in Merthyr Tydfil and Millfield School, Somerset, before studying philosophy at Southampton University. He then turned to journalism where he studied it professionally at Highbury College, Portsmouth.

His first job was as a trainee reporter at the Essex Chronicle.



Nick Servini at the Daffodil Festival

After stints on the South Wales Echo and the Welsh Mirror, he joined the BBC in 2000 where he was a reporter on BBC Radio Wales. In 2007 he was promoted to become the BBC Wales Business Correspondent and later he became the Political editor of BBC Wales. One highlight of his life was a 10-minute interview with the then Prime Minister David Cameron, who he said was a pleasure to

interview. He interviewed several successful people and often asked them, "What was the secret of their success? They often said: Persistence".

Currently he is a presenter of the BBC's *Wales Today* TV programme.

Cynon Valley Museum Exhibitions and Talks

- Photographic Exhibition featuring Ann Clwyd M.P., until 27th April
- Welsh Photographic Society Annual Salon, 3rd May to 1st June
- Coleg y Cymoedd Annual Art Exhibition, 7th June to 29th June
- Incomers: the story of people migrating to the valley from the earliest times to the present day 5th July–17th August

Talks programme

- The Religious Revival of 1904, by Martin Barclay on 1st May at 7pm. Entrance £3.00
- Women in the Miners' Strike in South Wales. Talks and discussion by historian Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite on Saturday 4th May, 2pm - 3.30pm. Free admission.

New Historical Books

On this day in History by Dan Snow, Price £14.99. Starting on 1st January, Snow tells us of historical events that happened on each day of a year. Some days were very busy, for example the 25th October: the Battle of Agincourt was fought on the same day as the Charge of the Light Brigade.

Bletchley Park and D-Day by David Kenyon, Price £18.99.
To be published on 28th May.

This tells the untold story of Bletchley Park's key role in the success of the Normandy campaign. The man who played the major part was Eric Jones, the son of a Macclesfield textile manufacturer who was the officer responsible for interpreting and prioritising all the covert intelligence that came into Britain from Nazi-occupied Europe. He helped to lay the groundwork for the success of D-Day.

Historical Television Programmes

Wales: England's Colony? presented by Martin Johnes, BBC, 2 parts.

Empire of the Seas by Dan Snow. This 4-part series on BBC 4 traces the development of the Royal Navy from Drake to date.

Historical Radio Programmes

In our Time, a Radio 4 programme chaired by Melvyn Bragg who discusses with three experts various subjects including many historical topics ranging from Marie Antoinette, Garibaldi, Battle of Salamis and the Great Irish Potato Famine, etc. These programmes are available on BBC Sounds.

Future National Eisteddfod

In 2022 the National Eisteddfod will be held in Rhondda Cynon Tâf.

Feedback

I would be grateful for feedback about any articles in this issue. Articles on any subject about our valley's history for possible publication are welcome.

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Registered Charity No. 510143

Printed by Dial-A-Print, Mountain Ash, 01443 474822