HANES Bach March 2021 (Issue 8)

Dear Members, put the clocks forward, time moves on and we have our zoom licence! An initial monthly lecture programme has been prepared and issued by Alun (Watts), and we hope it is yet another step forward in providing further sources of interest to all.

Oyez, Oyez, Oyez
We Wish You All Well

THE TOWN CRIER (Trefhoeddwr) *by Geoff Evans*

Long before cell phones, text messages and social media, communities would have relied on its town crier to circulate information quickly.

The office of town crier is doubtless an ancient one, the figure of a crier, or bellman appears, in the Bayeux tapestry, and there are references to him in the plays of Shakespeare, particularly *Hamlet.*

Local newspapers and other records show that the post existed in Aberdare throughout the greater part of the nineteenth century and at least up to the period of the Great War. The earliest local reference found so far dates from 1834 when the town's dissenters failed to get a notice of their meeting announced by the crier. This was a malicious act it was suggested. It was obviously not the dissenter's day as alternative public notices posted around the village by them were torn down, and one was even burnt off! The crier at the time was the church sexton and under the orders of the curate at Aberdare. His standard fee was 1/-. (See further *The Cambrian*, 15th March, 1834)

In 1865 at a time of price increases, especially in the meat market, consumers paid the crier to go round the town telling people not to buy meat unless the butcher sold it at 6d per lb. The local butchers were not however responsible for the rise in price.

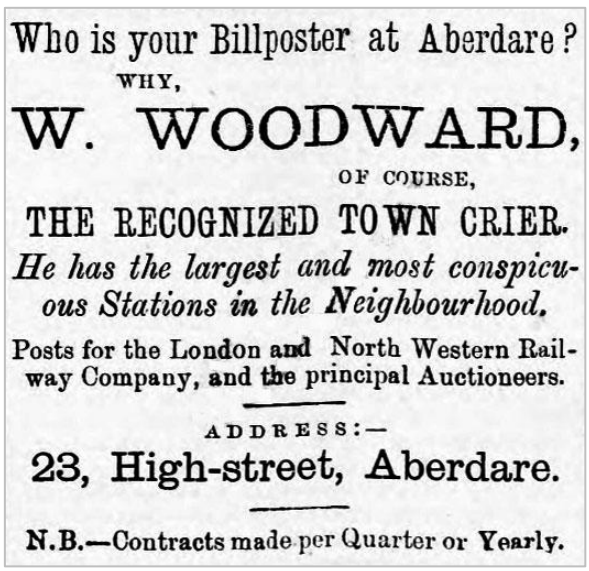
The crier gave notice of the cancellation of a wild beast show [menagerie] that was recalled from Aberdare to the Crystal Palace, London. (*Cardiff Times*, June 1867)

Henry Austin Bruce's election accounts show that he used the services of the Crier, James Bowden, during the 1868 Borough Election.

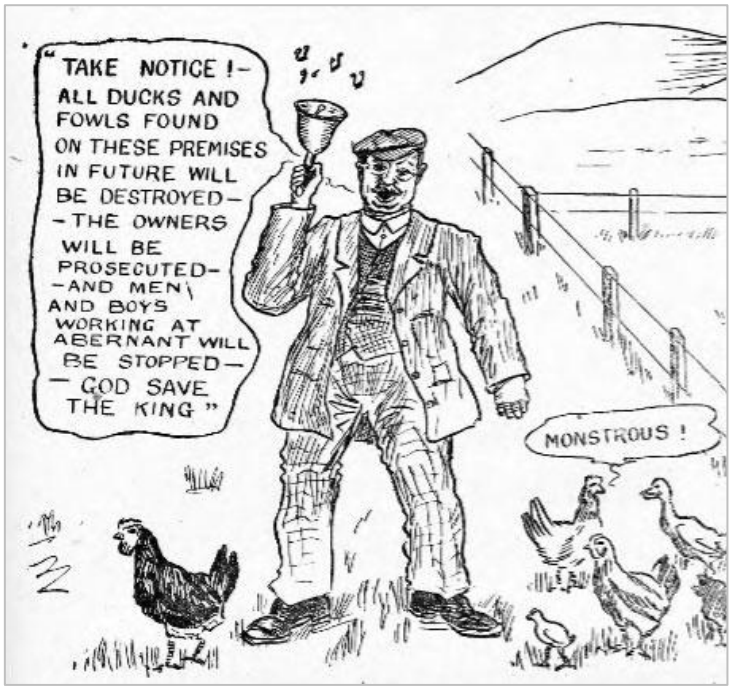
On Whit Monday, 1869 the town crier walked the streets of the town to announce that the *Aberdare United Choir* had 'winned' the first prize of £24 at the Swansea National Eisteddfod; the crier called for three cheers for the conductor, Mr G Jones, *Caradog* .

In 1871 the Mountain Ash Board of Health commissioned the crier to give notice to residents to observe specific Bye Laws (the clearing of snow from streets).

At a meeting of the Mountain Ash Local Board of Health held in January 1872 the Clerk reported that in accordance with instructions he had caused bills to be put out and the crier sent around with reference to the visitation of small pox.



The crier was a useful member of the community, and his services were available at short notice. The pages of the local newspapers reveal he executed a variety of 'cries', mostly of a political and social nature. Not able to make a living solely by crying, the incumbent often doubled as the local bill-poster.
It would seem that the crier of this period had rivals. *Aberdare Times*, 1887.
An unwitting crier could be used for mischievous purposes as is seen in 1893 during a strike at Bwllfa and Nantmelyn collieries. When the strike was settled militants sent the town crier out with a bogus announcement that no hauliers would resume work that day.
In a humorous article in *The Leader* by the Jewish sports writer Reuben Silverman, (*The Muddied Oaf*), drew readers' attention to an escalating Abernant controversy in which keepers of poultry and fowl allowed their birds to wander and feed on a local privately owned field. The landowner had posted notices requesting those responsible to desist, but to no avail. Consequently the town crier was called out. The officer diplomatically paraded the back lanes of Windsor Terrace as far as Agents' Row, declaring,
'Take Notice, all ducks and fowls found on these premises in future will be destroyed — the owners will be prosecuted — and men and boys working at Abernant will be stopped. *God Save The King!'*



Reuben Silverman's image of the town crier.

In November 1908, Aberdare was host to a group of hunger marchers. The expenditure relating to their hospitality in the town include, the hire of the Market Hall (£1.10), straw for bedding, £1, and the Town Crier, 5/-. The total of £2.15*s* was met by subscriptions.

Other miscellaneous cries heard about the town:
Appeals for lost children. The return of lost property. Sales of goods. Calling workingmen's meetings.

In 1898 the functionary at Hirwain was a William Lewis; his work during the coal strike of that year was acknowledged by the community in 1904 when he was presented with a bell. The event is recalled in verse in the *Aberdare Leader*. The lines (in translation) read:

No fitter person more deserves
our praise than William Lewis
whose pure, faultless work
brings all things to light
In such a prolonged lock-out
his task he filled so dearly.
A silver bell of golden charm
Is gifted now unto him
And a handle of ivory…

***Aberdare Leader*, 30*th April, 1904*.**

On the 14th August 1914 the *Cambria Daily Leader* announced that the winner of the national town crier's competition held at Marlborough was W Powell of Penrhiwceiber.

Other valley Town Criers included:
Morgan (and sexton) ca 1834
James Boden
W Woodward, 23 High Street
R C Leach, 63, Cardiff Street, (1872. Actual crier E T Trethowan)
William Argust, 1875
John Jefferies (Honest John). Mountain Ash. (Fl. 1908)
— Bourne (Mountain Ash)
William Lewis (Hirwaun)
Thomas J Jones

Generally a dignified office, we end this short account of town criers with the conduct of the last named, Thomas J Jones of Aberdare, who was fined 15/- (with 30/- costs) for breach of the Great Western Railway bye-laws. He was travelling between Swansea and Neath when he started ringing his bell refusing to stop; he made himself generally objectionable, and finished up by pulling the communication cord, rushing into the guard's van and smashing a carriage window. On sentencing Jones, the chairman of the bench remarked, '... next time you go away, you had better leave your crier's bell at home.' (*Pioneer*, 17th January, 1914) The charge was interfering with the comfort of passengers, he was fined 15/- and costs.
Note: The writer is grateful to Mr. Hywel Davies for the English translation of the verses quoted above.

Professor Hywel Francis: a tribute by Steven Graham

Born in Onllwyn in the Dulais Valley in 1946, the son of Dai Francis, General Secretary of the South Wales Miners Federation. In many ways he followed in his father's footsteps. After graduating from Swansea University with a BA in History in 1968, he threw himself into work as a historical researcher, trade union organizer, an adult educator and a political and social activist.
He was part of a notable group of radical scholars who established *Llafur,* the society and journal for Welsh Labour history in 1970. Latterly he was its president. Over the next three decades he helped to establish the South Wales Miners' Library and the Richard Burton Archives.
He published *The Fed: A history of the South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century*, and then his PhD, based on extensive oral history reviews with amongst others Edwin Greening and Morien Morgan as *Miners against Fascism: Wales and the Spanish Civil War*. A stream of further publications followed including *Do Miners read Dickens?: The history and progress of the South Wales Miners' Library; History on our side: Wales and the 1984-5 Miners' Strike* and *The Tower Story* (about Hirwaun Tower Colliery).
While not writing books, he was the M.P. for Aberavon from 2001 to 2015 and sat on committees such as ones on Welsh Affairs and Archives and History.

He died on 14th February this year, aged 74. He was a great Welshman, historian and politician and will be greatly missed.

Quiz/Puzzle, Number 8, by Alan Abraham

This puzzle requires answers to the five questions below and then taking the first letter of each answer, rearranging them as an anagram to find an old English coin. *All answers will be found in the next edition of either Hanes Bach or Hanes.*

1. The bird gwdihw (Welsh) has a call similar to its name in the Welsh language. What is the bird's name in English? (3).
2. The bird barcut (Welsh) has a call similar to its name in the Welsh language. What is the bird's name in English? (3 and 4).
3. This bird is associated with the 25th of November. Where? over the pond. (6).
4. These animals invaded a holiday resort in Wales recently. (5).
5. This viviparous animal is found on the British mainland but not on the island of Ireland and is excellent at maths. (5).

Solution to Quiz Number 7.

Answers:— 1. Glan Road, Trecynon. 2. Glanaman Road, Cwmaman. 3. Brynmair Road, Cwmaman. 4. Cardiff Road, Aberaman (later the "Blaengwawr Boys Club" and more recently the "Phoenix Theatre"). 5. Primrose Hill is located between Mill Street and Clive Street, Trecynon.

Memories of Old Aberaman by Gaynor Richards

It was with great interest that I saw the photograph of old Aberaman on the front cover of Hanes Bach Issue 7. *(Article by Gareth Thomas 'Back to Basics')*

The photograph shows the back of the Swan Hotel and the houses on Cardiff Road. At the bottom right is Lower Street, and as a young child I lived in the first house next to the wall. It was No. 5 Lower Street. The house was owned by an elderly gentleman called George, and my parents rented two rooms from him: the front room and a bedroom.

My memories of the front room are blue floral curtains, a settee with a drop down arm, and a guard round the open fire.

My father worked at Aberaman Colliery, he came home each day to bath in a tin bath in front of the fire. I remember washing his back!

I do not recall the bedroom, but my mother told me that I slept with her and my dad, and my brother slept in his cot. It all sounds very bleak now!

I remember Nici Naci Tip, Mike's Field and the Aberaman swimming baths, and of course the Aberaman Railway Station with the steam locomotives and the Guard's van at the back.

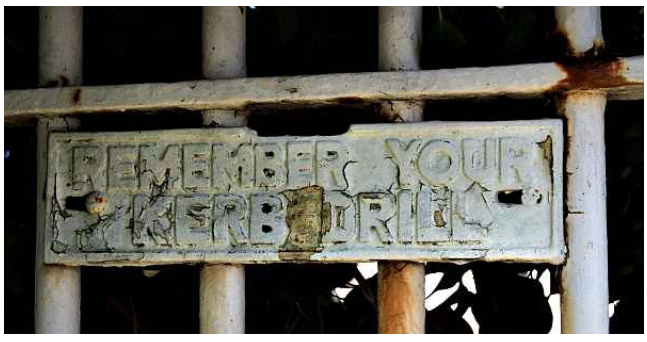
I attended Aberaman Nursery School, my memories of that are: having a nap on a little canvas bed, and lining up for a spoonful of cod liver oil (ugh!). Please note that the same spoon was used for each child.

Aberaman was a thriving village; you could buy most things in Lewis Street, Archie Andrews Chemist was on Cardiff Road. There was a cinema, library and a billiard hall.

In December 1952 we moved to the new Council estate at Penywaun. It was wonderful: hot and cold running water, bathroom and my own bedroom. My father was happy with the large garden where he grew flowers and vegetables for many years.

Looking back, I had a good happy childhood—Halcyon days – gone now—but I still have my *memories !!*

Finally, *as well as all the meaningful advice provided to minimise the spread of Covid-19, please don't forget your* ***kerb drill****. This reminder can be seen on one of the rusting gates on the, now regrettably, empty Gadlys Secondary Modern School. (jhd)*



Published by Cynon Valley History Society March 2021 Printed by Dial -A- Print