

# CYNON VALLEY HISTORY SOCIETY

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# HANES

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

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I wish you all a Happy and Healthy New Year.

In this issue we look at a mansion with a very interesting history.

We continue Morien Morgan's account of his experiences as a Prisoner of War during the Spanish Civil War.

As 2019 was the 80th Anniversary of the start of World War II we look at Life in Poland with the German invasion; a former German U-boat Commander's "Peace" speech in 1937, and how the *Aberdare Leader* reported the start of the war.

Happy Reading!

## Fairfield House



One of the Cynon valley's cultural and architectural secrets lies at the end of Brondeg Terrace, Foundry Town, in Aberdare. It is a very imposing mansion named Fairfield House and has a fascinating history.

Griffith Davies of Ynyslwyd House sold part of his farm estate on 26th October, 1877 to Richard Lewis a Trustee and assistant treasurer of Highland Place Unitarian Church.

One year later Fairfield House was completed on this land at a cost of £4,000, a sum resulting from the proceeds of Lewis's successful Dare Foundry business. It was gorgeously furnished, and had an acre of ground surrounding it, with a carriage drive leading to the front entrance.

Lewis was born in 1831 in Llwydcoed of poor parents. He with his sons worked hard and built up the Dare Foundry enterprise so that at his peak Lewis was worth £40,000. In addition, he owned a row of houses in Elizabeth Street. From one of these, No. 8, he moved to Fairfield House. His business was so successful that in around 1890 he started the Gadlys foundry. He later bought the Rock Brewery, but this last business did not prosper financially so he had to clear his debts of £30,000 to the Brecon Old Bank who had advanced him the money for the venture. Becoming bankrupt after having lived in Fairfield for 30 years, he found it a hard wrench to leave the house and to live in Broniestyn Terrace. He lived there for only 18 months before he died in 1909 aged 77.

**RICHARD LEWIS,**  
**ENGINEER,**  
**Iron and Brass Founder,**  
AND MANUFACTURER OF EVERY DESCRIPTION OF  
STEAM ENGINES AND GENERAL MACHINERY,  
**DARE FOUNDRY, ABERDARE.**  
CASTINGS MADE TO DRAWINGS OR PATTERNS.

Earlier in 1907 Lewis had sold his beloved house to three men one being Rees Llewellyn, of Bwlfa. He in turn sold it to his son D.R. Llewellyn.

In 1911 a very special son was born there who would become a great Olympian: he was Sir Harry Llewellyn who won an Olympic gold medal when he rode the show jumper Foxhunter in the 1952 Helsinki Olympic Games. Altogether they won 78 international competitions.

In 1922, D.R. Llewellyn sold the house to his brother Captain Morton Howell Llewellyn and his wife Hannah.

In 1935, the couple donated their house to the local Jubilee Fund Committee. It was hoped that this gift would be used to establish an Educational Settlement in the Cynon Valley. The valley had been in desperate need of this to support, educate and encourage the huge numbers of the unemployed to utilise their talents, hopefully in readiness for employment.

This came to fruition when Mr J. Victor Evans, who was born in Cwmdare and son of H.H. Evans, accepted the post of warden of the Settlement. Alterations to the house were undertaken and a new lecture hall costing £1000 was built in the grounds. Mr Evans with his wife as co-Warden managed a full-time staff of nine people. These men and women lived in Fairfield House and delivered a broad curriculum of academic courses and vocational courses including carpentry, painting and sculpture.



Ladies Keep Fit Class, 1960s

The Settlement officially opened on 28th September, 1938. During that year it was so successful that satellite venues of learning called social centres sprang up. These were located in nine places in the valley. The Settlement thrived and nearly 300 people

attended courses there. Opera was a popular course so that there were almost 100 members in their society, called the Cynon Amateur Operatic Society. In 1937, they gave a week of successful performances of *Rose Marie* and *Showboat*. The Society staged annual productions up until the 1960s.

During World War 2, Fairfield was used to billet American soldiers before they took part in the Normandy landings.

In the 1920s a large conservatory was added which had an intricate mechanism to open all the side windows simultaneously.

Part of it in the 1960s housed an indoor swimming pool. Later in 2001 the conservatory sadly fell into disrepair and so had to be demolished. The house has a roomy cellar, which is excellent to store wine. Four large reception rooms occupy the ground floor, which has large bay windows at the front, sprung floors and ornate coving. An impressive staircase with cast iron banisters leads to the upper floors where there are six bedrooms.

The Settlement went from strength to strength but in the 1960s it declined and sadly in 1967 it closed and reverted to residential status. The last warden of the Settlement was Mr Gwilym Treharne who lived at Fairfield with his wife Grace and son Gabe. [Gabe is now a Pro Chancellor at Cardiff University, Ed.]

From 1980 to 2000 it was owned by Anthony Hose, a conductor of the Welsh Chamber Orchestra, and his wife Moira.

Fairfield House has been a magnificent and much appreciated family home for Charles Archer (a member of our Society), now Emeritus Professor with Swansea University and his large family since November 2000.

I would like to thank the Archers for giving me information about their house and also Alun and Anne Watts, and Colin Rees, for giving me additional details.

Further information:

The WW Price Collection in Aberdare Library, and

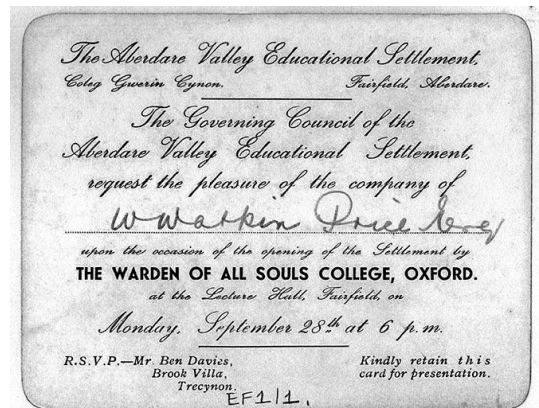
"An oasis of culture The Aberdare Valley Educational Settlement 1936-67" by Keith Davies, in Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion, 1999, (pp 135-148), also online at

<https://journals.library.wales/view/1386666/1425626/132>

## Morien Morgan: His Spanish Civil War experiences, Part 2

On 8th April, 1938, Morien Morgan with other Welsh prisoners were taken to a 200-year-old monastery called San Pedro de Cardenas, near Burgos, which had been converted into a concentration camp. Most of them would remain there until 23rd January, 1939. In all, there were 650 "International" prisoners from 32 countries. The largest group in the camp were 141 Britons.

On arrival, all their clothes and boots were taken from them. They were given a grey/blue smock and trousers. They slept on the floor. Their blankets and clothes were full of lice, Morgan said, "I got accustomed to them; they had transparent bodies, when they sucked blood I could see the blood going inside them. They had running water but no soap, and the toilets were just holes in the concrete floor.



W.W. Price's Invitation to the Opening Ceremony

The chief hardship apart from the confinement was the lack of cigarettes and scarcity of reading matter.

The Communist Party prisoners in the camp decided to organise "House Committees" which would arrange social activities. This decision was taken when they organised a concert to celebrate May Day. A Welsh quartet practised singing for an hour a day so they could enter a talent competition. Singing the Welsh National Anthem and Men of Harlech, they won the second prize of twenty cigarettes against keen competition from twelve national choirs.

Another House Committee organised educational classes, which were a marvellous way of passing time. Morgan taught English to Italians using French as a medium. He also made a set of chess pieces.

The South Wales Miners Federation sent five pounds twice to each person. That money was equal to fifty to a hundred pounds today. The twenty Welshmen clubbed together and bought exercise books, pencils chalk and tobacco which was shared out. Books were sent to the men but the camp priest retained many of them and they were not issued. Despite this, Morgan received Sunset Song, Cloud Howe and Grey Granite by Lewis Grassic Gibbon. With some wood they made bookshelves and formed a lending library, but few prisoners borrowed books

Some prisoners were allowed to bathe in a river. One of them used a reed to breathe under water and so escaped, consequently they were never taken to the river again. The Poles and Germans had a choir. Their voices covered the sounds of the sawing of bars of a window. They made a rope out of mattress straw and one man escaped. Despite bad food, the Germans and Poles did much physical exercise and became so fit that some were able to escape. One day Morgan recalls they got a postcard from Switzerland saying, "Wish you were here".

He recalled breakfast was garlic soup, water and crumbs; lunch was two rolls of bread, lentils and beans and later raw potatoes. Some of the men had diarrhoea, (dysentery), and some died as a result. The unbalanced nature of the diet led to some of the men's teeth breaking, some had sores from their waists to their ankles possibly due to scurvy.

Morgan was twenty at this time and he found being in prison with 150 people was an education. He said, "It was the first time I had contact with older people who had experienced strikes and hunger marches. At university, learning was head knowledge and arguing. In this camp, I integrated book learning with reality; here was humanity as a whole. I wanted to understand how life came into existence and how it produced modern man."

"We hated one sergeant who used a truncheon over helpless people. Ordinary Spanish soldiers who guarded us were unlettered, uneducated simple chaps who ate similar food to us."

"One day five or six of us were made to stand in front of a wall and the Spanish soldiers shot at us, deliberately missing us, and they had a good laugh."

Christmas would have been miserable for Morgan but thankfully, his sister Gwen sent him two pounds, which was sent in August through the Red Cross that helped him to buy food to celebrate Christmas. On Christmas Day and New Year's Day, they had big concerts. Morgan wrote, "The International choir reigns supreme. The room resounded to the cheering after each song.

At the end of our imprisonment we "International" prisoners were taken through the streets of San Sebastian, the crowds gave us a grand welcome giving us sugar, chocolate, tobacco and cigarettes. All of us were put into a prison: in underground cells, but with the doors left open. We were given fish heads, with the eyes still in them, to eat but we ate them in the dark. Loaves of bread were thrown down to us, our captors hoping to see us

scrambling for bread but we picked it up in a careful way. In prison we were given clothes, trousers, berets and boots. We swapped shoes for tobacco with the other prisoners so everybody was happy.

The Government forces had 40,000 prisoners but Franco only had 300–400 as he had most of them shot. We were exchanged with Franco's prisoners, so one of us was worth 100 of the others."



**Knight of the Order of Loyalty of the Spanish Republic in Exile**

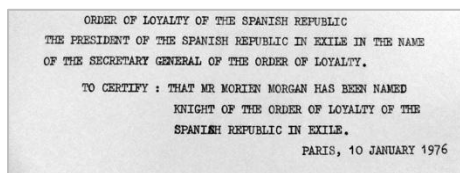
His release took place at the French border to British officials on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1939.

"We were not asked to sign anything to say that we would not come back but the British government charged us four pounds for repatriation. I paid but Edwin Greening did not pay.

There was a good reception in London for us. Our MP and Arthur Horner, the Miners Secretary welcomed us. We were taken for the night to somewhere in London."

On 18<sup>th</sup> February 1939, Morgan returned to his home in Ynysybwl

"The Ynysybwl Brass band was going to give me a hero's welcome so they waited for me to arrive, but a day too soon. So when I arrived on the following day, they were not there, so I just went straight home grateful to be a free man".



**Translation of the Certificate**

But a few days later he had a proper hero's welcome when he was greeted enthusiastically by a large crowd at Mountain Ash Workmen's Hall.

He was given a knighthood by the Spanish government in exile for his role in the prisoner of war camp.

## Life in Poland with the German Invasion and Occupation 80 years ago, by Elzbieta Maria Jenkins (née Pogorzelska).

I was born in Cieszyn, a town in the south of Poland, before the Second World War. My father, who was a Colonel in the Russian army of Czar Nicholas II and who served in St. Petersburg, fled to Poland at the end of the Russian Revolution. My mother left the Ukraine at about the same time, and they met in Eastern Poland.

My childhood was happy and pleasant; I made friends with other children in Cieszyn, and enjoyed school.

The last summer in free Poland, I spent in a mountain resort, which was not far from our town. In the second half of August 1939, I remember the feeling among people became tense. I heard my parents talking about impending war, and other people, on holiday, were suddenly leaving.

We also went back to our home in Cieszyn. After arriving home, we packed what we could in a great hurry and within days, left Cieszyn in railway trucks, travelling eastwards with many other refugees. During the journey, the Germans began bombing the track, and the train stopped many times. Each time it stopped, we had to quickly leave the train and hide in the woods.

After a few days, we reached Krakow, and the train halted there. In Krakow, I witnessed the Germans entering the city — soldiers in tanks and motorcycles in green and black uniforms. I felt terrified.

After about two weeks in Krakow, we decided to return home to Cieszyn in a horse-drawn cart with other families, because there were rumours that the Russian army were about to cross our eastern border. When we arrived home, we found many changes. The street names were changed from Polish to German names, and people were not allowed to speak Polish in public, only the German language.

Soon the Jews in Cieszyn were taken from their homes and placed in ghettos, then later, were sent by rail to camps. In the former Jewish quarter of our town, the synagogue was blown up. Jewish graves in their cemeteries were destroyed.

After a few months, my family had to move to a small apartment in the centre of Cieszyn, because our house was taken over and occupied by a German family. The same happened to other Polish families. All children in schools had to learn and speak only German, and the teachers were Germans, who mostly came from the 'Reich,' (German State).

I should mention that Cieszyn is in the south-west region of Poland, a part of Silesia, which, in 1939, was incorporated into the German State. This meant that conditions in Silesia were milder than in some other parts of Poland. The Germans were encouraging Poles to accept German citizenship. Those who refused to accept it had to work very hard in the nearby steelworks and coalmines, and many were sent to Germany to work on farms.

When the German army was retreating from the Russians in 1944–45, I saw many German soldiers passing through my town. I remember that many were injured and were without decent uniforms. When in May 1945, the Russian army entered Cieszyn, they appeared to be from different parts of Russia, including the Far East, and the first to enter the town were riding horses.

The street names in Cieszyn were again changed. They were given names, for example, of Russian leaders; e.g. the German 'Hitler Square' was renamed 'Stalin Square'.

Soon started 45 years of Russian presence in Poland.

Elzbieta now lives near Hirwaun.

## War is Madness said Former German U-Boat Commander

A Bombardment of Questions was thrown at Baron von Spiegel speaking on the subject "The Madness of War" at a meeting convened by the local branch of the British Legion at Trinity Chapel on 12th April, 1937.

The Baron said he was present as a bearer of goodwill on behalf of German ex-servicemen.

He said that he had received fine receptions at numerous British Legion meetings throughout Britain. He remembered a time when he was unwilling to enter this country, when he was taken as a prisoner of war to Milford Haven on the last day of April, 1917 by a British Q boat. He went on deck and there he hated the English and had wished them all the worst. Now for the first time in his life he was amongst them, and found that every man on that ship had been kind to him. He also mentioned how he saved the lives of 23 members of the British vessel "The Horse" for which he was thanked by the British Admiralty. This all went to prove that there was comradeship even in wartime he stressed.

Several questions were asked most of which were concerned with Hitler. He replied that Hitler is full of common sense. He has been in war and has seen service in the trenches and he perfectly hates war because he knows what it is. It is Hitler's aim and goal to bring Germany back to what it was before the war, without involving the country in another disaster. Although he does not know any diplomatic language, he knows his goal. The Rev. Colin Gibb, M.A., (St David's Presbyterian Church), closed the meeting with a fervent prayer for peace.

Source *Aberdare Leader* 17th April, 1937, page 5.

(This article is full of irony. The Anglo-German Naval Agreement allowed the German Navy to build ships to be no more than 35% of the size of the Royal Navy's ships. Unknown to the Baron (?) and to Britain, Germany did not keep this agreement. They started building the Bismarck in 1936 and the Tirpitz later that year as well as numerous U-boats. Ed.)

### The Start of World War Two in the Cynon Valley

On 3rd September, 1939 Britain declared war on Germany.

The following extracts are articles in the *Aberdare Leader* of 9th & 16th September:

#### Black Outs

Cwmdare was the model area in the valley's blackout system.

#### Valley's First War Victims

The present dreadful war was brought to our homes on Monday by the news of the death "in action" of Petty Officer John Herbert Martin aged 31 of 5 Salisbury Road, Abercynon. He was the first person in the valley to die in action during the war. When he was 18, he joined the Royal Navy and served continuously for 12 years, rising to be Petty Officer. He was attached to the Submarine Service. After serving his 12 years, he was employed as an engineer at the Powell Duffryn Power Station at Aberaman. On July 31st he was called up as a Reservist and three weeks ago bade his wife farewell at Portsmouth.

The news of his death was received with genuine regret and it cast quite a gloom over the locality.

The family have a remarkable record of service to their country: Mr J.H. Martin (senior) father of the deceased, who died a few years ago, saw active service in the Indian Frontier War 1897-98, in the South African War and he also served in the Great War 1914-18.

His grandfather Thomas Martin served in the Crimean War and was at Sebastopol.

#### Frederick James Tiley of Mountain Ash.

Tiley was a torpedo gunner in the Royal Naval Reserve. He was only 32 years old, and started life as a messenger boy in the Mountain Ash Post Office. Strangely enough, he was disqualified from that service on medical grounds and stranger still, was accepted in the Royal Navy, where he served for 13 years. He retired on pension and was transferred to the Reserve where he was called up a few weeks ago.

Mr Tiley left a widow and one baby boy 16 months old.

## Society News

With sadness, we record the death, on 31st December 2019 of Mrs Marian Williams. We extend our sincere sympathies to Marian's husband Mr Haydn Williams who is a Society member and who has served on the committee for many years.

## 2019 Local News

### Memorial Garden

A memorial garden for war heroes was unveiled on Sunday 3rd November, 2019. It is situated in Aberdare town centre near the library.

### Abernant Railway Tunnel.

There are plans to re-open this tunnel, which links Aberdare to Merthyr Tydfil. It was designed by Brunel and was initially part of the Vale of Neath Railway and for 110 years, the main role of the line was to export coal from the Merthyr valley to Swansea to negate the high demurrage costs payable to the Marquis of Bute's estate for shipment of coal out of Cardiff Docks.

## Cynon Valley Museum Exhibition

January 31st - February 21st - "Aberdare Park, A Year in the Life, a collaborative exhibition between Cynon Valley Museum, Friends of Aberdare Park & Aberdare Camera Club celebrating 2019, the 150th year of the Park.

## Amos Brown

In our summer issue of 2017, No. 79, the story was told of one of the valley's most picturesque characters who started life as a cotton-field slave in Alabama and ended up living in Abercynon. One of his relatives has sent me a video of him feeding his pigs. This can be seen online at the link below:

<https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-mr-amos-brown-pig-keeper-1943-online>

## Local Historical Books

*The last years of Coal mining in South Wales: a pictorial record*, by Steve Grudgings  
Volume 1: From the Eastern Valleys to Aberdare, published by Folly Books, 2018.

Includes Abercwmboi, Mountain Ash, Penrhiwceiber & Lady Windsor, Abercynon. Profusely illustrated many b&w & colour photographs, £24.99.

Volume 2: Aberdare to Pembrokeshire.

Includes Aberdare pits, Cwmdare & Hirwaun Tower. £25.00

*The South Wales Tornado of 27th October 1913 and its aftermath of devastation in the Taff Valley*, by Keith Jones. (This contains details of the destruction of some of the houses in Abercynon).

*Anthony Bacon (1717–1786)* by Wilf and Mary Owen. Available at £6.00 from the authors and from Aberdare & Merthyr Libraries. Bacon was the founder of Cyfarthfa Ironworks and one-time owner of Hirwaun ironworks.)

## An appeal for information about the Jewish Community in the Cynon Valley

The Jewish History Association of South Wales, (JHASW), was formed in 2017 with the aim of preserving the cultural heritage of the Jewish communities of south Wales, and to raise awareness and enhance public knowledge of the Jewish heritage of the area. Anyone who would like to share photographs, documents, reminiscences/ memories relevant to the project should please contact the local group at: Research Team, JHASW, c/o Cynon Valley Museum, Depot Road, Aberdare, CF44 8DL. There will be an open day and a small exhibition of the ongoing research, and its results so far, at the CVM on Saturday, 29th February 11 am to 3.00 pm.

## Feedback

I would be grateful for feedback about any articles in this issue.

Also, articles on any subject about our valley's history for possible publication are most welcome.

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