

# CYNON VALLEY HISTORY SOCIETY

CYMDEITHAS HANES CWM CYNON

PRESIDENT: THE LORD ABERDARE

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# HANES

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

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Welcome to Spring and I hope this issue will put a spring in your step!

Green Street Chapel was bedecked with hundreds of daffodils which, after the long cold winter, cheered up all those who attended the Daffodil Festival. Following an article about the festival, we again look at the Cynon Valley Italian families, this time the Carpaninis. We also continue the series about local men who fought in the Spanish Civil War, reading one of Will Lloyd's letters. This valley was "built" on coal and one of the worst disasters is described, looking at some Mormons who died in it. Mountain Ash had Harri Webb, the poet, as its librarian for a time and we explore his life and work. Enjoy your reading!

## DAFFODIL FESTIVAL AT GREEN STREET METHODIST CHURCH



It was a great pleasure to attend the Daffodil Festival organized by Green Street Methodist Church, Aberdare after an interval of three years because of Covid-19.

On Sunday evening, 26th March a Cymanfa Ganu took place in which the Mountain Ash & District Choral Society and Catrin Southall took part. Rev. Hywel Davies conducted the singing with great *hwyl*.

The programme continued on Monday and Tuesday and came to a climax on St David's Day. Roy Noble told us humorous stories of his old St David's Day school days. He also informed us that St Patrick was not, as is commonly believed, born in Ireland but in Banwen, not 15 miles from Aberdare!

Carys Crimmings played two pieces on her harp one being *Myfanwy*. Debra John told, with superb facial expressions, a story about the Risca Cuckoo and the legend of Dinas Emrys, which kept us glued to our seats.

Katie-May Davies delightfully sang two songs: *Gwahoddiad* and *Dyma Cariad*. The choir of Cwmdare Primary School sang some songs including the ever-popular *Sospan Fach*.

The morning ended with two Ukrainian refugees who are now living in Aberdare: Katerina and Anna Yanevych who sang musical items from their native land including their national anthem that was very emotional.

## The Carpanini Cafés

Some of you may know of Carpanini's café (Pino's café) which is situated in Miskin Road, Mountain Ash. Others may remember the Carpanini's café that was in Glancynon Terrace, Abercynon, also the one in Aberdare both of which have sadly closed down.

In this article we look at the founder of the Abercynon and Mountain Ash cafes: Andrea Carpanini (1895–1964).

Andrea came from Bardi, Italy, and he worked as a builder in his youth. During World War 1 he served in the Italian Artillery with the rank of Sergeant Major.

He came to Abercynon in 1919, and was employed in a café at the top end of Margaret Street. In 1923 he opened premises on the corner of Lower Margaret Street in partnership with the Rabaiotti Brothers and then in 1926 opened his own café: the Corner Café in Glancynon Terrace, Abercynon. His hard work and integrity resulted in his building it up into a very successful business.

In 1939, within hours of the announcement that Italy and Britain were at war, all Italians were rounded up and interned. Ernie (possibly a brother of Andrea) of the Corner café in Abercynon was roused from his sleep by a knocking on the door. He found that a police inspector and a sergeant had come to arrest him. He later described what happened: "I am very sorry", the inspector said, and he put his arms around me. He was crying as he picked me up". All over South Wales, similar scenes were taking place. Both the police and Italians were bemused.

Andrea was also interned in the Isle of Man.

Later in 1947 he brought his wife Maria, (née Viazzani), and his two sons Giuseppe (Pino) and Maurizio (Maurice) and three daughters, Luisa, Marinella and Ida over to work in the business.



The Carpanini Brothers Café, Abercynon  
The older man is Andrea, probably with his sons  
Giuseppe and Maurizio

While being interned in the Isle of Man he met Domenico Provini who came from Bettola in the Piacenza province. He had brought his family including Maria and his other two daughters over to Wales where they settled in Tredegar. The fathers kept in touch, and when the coffee machine in the Tredegar café broke down, Giuseppe came over to repair it. He fell in love with Maria and they married in 1959.

In the early 1950s, Andrea took out a mortgage to buy an Italian café at 4 Miskin Road, Mountain Ash from Mrs Bisagni whose husband Antonio had died a few years earlier. The Bisagnis had bought it in 1928 from Carlo Rabaiotti who had owned it for just two years. Andrea spent some time renovating it and re-opened it on St Patrick's Day, 1954. Giuseppe and Maria ran it while Andrea ran his Abercynon café.

A proud moment for Andrea was when he won the Silver Challenge Cup in the National Ice Cream National Competition in 1957 making his business the first from Wales to win this premier award.

Andrea sadly passed away in May 1964, and his dying wish was that his body should be interred in the family vault in Bardi. This was carried out by his eldest son Giuseppe (Pino).

*I would like to thank Andrew Carpanini (Andrea's grandson) who kindly gave me and Julia Ziomek, (the librarian at Mountain Ash Library), this information.*

*To be continued*

[If anyone has information and stories about the Aberdare café please let me know. Thank you, Ed.]

## Harri Webb (1920–1994): A great Welsh Poet. A Tribute.

These are the last two verses of Harri Webb's poem 'Let them eat coke' about the Phurnacite "smokeless" fuel plant in Abercwmbai that employed many people in the Cynon valley but which also polluted much of the surrounding area:

"When Moses led the Exodus  
He gave the Jews a sign  
Of cloud by day and flame by night,  
Before them it did shine.  
Now Ezra stands in Moses place,  
All life he would destroy,  
He's encouraging an exodus  
Away from Abercwmbai.

And when a voice of protest's heard  
In the corridors of power,  
The answer comes, Don't be absurd,  
You are a cheeky shower,  
You're only tedious Taffy trash,  
You're only hoi polloi,  
We must have clean air in Berkley  
Square  
And to hell with Abercwmbai!"

"Ezra" was Derek Ezra the Chairman of the National Coal Board, which owned the Phurnacite Plant at that time. The plant was demolished in 1991.

Harri Webb was born into a working-class home in Swansea docklands in 1920. He was educated at Magdalen College, Oxford where he studied medieval and modern languages, specializing in French and Spanish.

In 1941 he joined the Royal Navy and served as an interpreter with the Free French in the Mediterranean, seeing action during the Battle of Crete. His nerves were affected by the pounding of the ship's guns.

Demobilised at Largs, Ayrshire in 1946 he wandered aimlessly around Scotland for a while until he discovered the writing of Hugh MacDiarmid, the Scottish poet, Nationalist and Communist who was to become a major influence on him.

A year later, he began to learn Welsh and soon joined the Welsh Republicans.

After the movement's demise in 1959, Webb was for a while a member of the Labour Party, but then appalled by its negative attitude of self-government for Wales he joined Plaid Cymru, where he later edited its newspaper and stood as their candidate in Pontypool in the 1970 General Election.

Earlier he had started a career in librarianship. In 1954 he was appointed Librarian at Dowlais Library, where he took a prominent part in founding the Merthyr Tydfil Eisteddfod.

Later in 1964, he was appointed the Librarian at Mountain Ash. Two years later, he wrote a very short history about the town. There he made innovations such as lending LPs and buying books and periodicals, e.g. Vogue to appeal to a female readership, which brought him some criticism. Today there is a plaque in honour of him in the present Mountain Ash Library.



Harri Webb

Although he was a librarian, he was primarily a poet: he came to prominence during the 1960s and became a regular contributor to the magazine *Poetry Wales*. His reputation as a poet of the Nationalist cause rests on the poems in 'The Green Desert' and 'A crown for Branwen'.

On the reorganization of Welsh local government in 1974, he took early retirement from librarianship.

In 1985, he announced that he would write no more in English, adding with characteristic hyperbole that English was "a dying language" and that the only language for a true Welshman was Welsh!

A few months later, he suffered a stroke and was taken into Prince Charles Hospital in Merthyr where he remained for five months. After convalescence, he moved from Rose Row to Bryn Hir, Cwmbach. His health continued to deteriorate and he became virtually housebound. [I did visit him there and was saddened by his poor physical state. Ed.]

At his own request and insisting he was a 'Swansea Jack', he was moved to a nursing home in Swansea where he died on 31st December 1994.

Let Harri have the last words in his rumbustious Nationalistic style:

After the Severn Bridge was opened in 1966, he wrote:

"Two lands at last connected  
Across the waters wide,  
And all the tolls collected  
On the English side!"

This was stamped on thousands of T-shirts and, for a while, lorry drivers coming out of Wales, with the rhyme emblazoned on their chests, would shout it at the imperious attendants who took their money!

Sources: Meic Stephens' obituary in *The Independent* and *The Collected poems of Harri Webb*.

## Will Lloyd and the Spanish Civil War

Will Lloyd wrote many letters to the *Aberdare Leader* informing the readers what was happening. He was a member of the International Brigade who were fighting the Fascists under General Franco. Here is an excerpt of one of his letters from that newspaper of 14th August 1937.

### Called from Sports

On 3rd July, we were having a short rest behind our lines; our battalion was enjoying a grand sports fete back in a little village. There was a competition between the American battalion and ourselves, and incidentally we beat them hands down in almost everything, when suddenly the order came, "Everyone get packed ready to move into action". Everyone immediately got down to it and in one hour, the battalion was ready to move off. However we were kept waiting until the next morning because of transport difficulties.

July 4th The whole battalion moved off in lorries, singing and cheering villagers lining the streets as we went on our way. Two days were spent on the side of a road amongst the olive trees. There we were told that we were going into action in the first big offensive the Government had undertaken.

At night we saw troops in their thousands; what seemed like a never-ending line of men, battalion after battalion. Then came the cavalry; then came the tanks and big guns, all rumbling along the road for miles.

July 5th Two o'clock in the morning we moved again, marched until 5 o'clock to our attack position. We took our position right on a ridge overlooking a plain, where we saw two little villages that were our objective.



Government soldiers

*Photo credit: World History Edu*

### First Casualties

Everything looked so calm and peaceful as we started to move up towards the first village only to be suddenly shattered by the heavy drone of aeroplanes. Everyone looked up and thought, "Here it comes", but with a sigh of relief we found they were our planes. They dropped a few bombs on the trenches surrounding the village, and then went farther on into enemy territory.

Our first casualties came as we advanced. A shell landed right in a group of our boys. We advanced under a barrage of our artillery and all day the battle raged. The sun was scorching down on our backs; our mouths were parched for lack of water.

### Double Deceitful Fascist Villainy

About 8 o'clock in the night, it was reported that the village was surrounded, and we were to advance right into it. Suddenly there was a commotion in the village, and it was seen that a small band of villagers—women and children—were marching towards us. Everyone shouted, "Cease fire". The firing stopped for a few minutes, then, from behind the small band of women and children, a few Fascists threw bombs right amongst our boys on the road.

Pandemonium reigned, everyone started to fire, and to shout and scream. Sadly, two women civilians were killed and the rest were captured.

As things quietened down, one of our company commanders, Bill Meredith, a boy who was respected and almost loved by all of us, saw a man lying on the ground a few yards outside the village. Thinking he was wounded, Billy crawled over to him, and soon as he got near him the man, a Fascist, drew his revolver and shot him.

*To be continued*

## **Mormons and the Middle Dyffryn Colliery Disaster**

Sixty-seven lives were lost in this disaster on 10th May 1852 but it is a little-known fact that 19 of them were Mormons (members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints LDS). *The Cambrian* of 14<sup>th</sup> May 1852 stated this fact.

Eight more members of the LDS church who were working at the colliery, managed to get out alive. William Phillips, the local LDS church leader, (at Merthyr), stated in a letter that he had counselled the members to work elsewhere for safety's sake, but concluded that they were lured by the extra £2 per month that could be earned there. How tragic!

Among the victims were a number of fathers with their sons: Ebenezer Morris, aged 32, and his sons John (aged 10) and David (aged 8). [These are the ages on their gravestones but in a ballad and in the Welsh Mormon History of the explosion, John is 11 and David is 10 so there is some ambiguity there.]

Ebenezer was the president of the Cwmbach Branch of the LDS church. He had been sent to the area with his family to serve as a proselyting missionary, but like many missionaries he would have needed to work to support himself, and in this case also his family. He had converted to Mormonism in 1844, his wife Mary Margaret in 1843, and they were among the first congregation of the LDS church established in south Wales in Penydarren, Merthyr Tydfil. Family lore tells that the two boys weren't working in the pit, but had gone down to take food to their father, and indeed, they may have been younger than the ages given in the report of the accident. The bodies of Ebenezer and his sons were never recovered from the pit.

There is a very interesting detail on his gravestone that has the dates of his and his sons' deaths. It reads, "Also Mormon Morris (son) died 4th May, 1850, aged one year. It shows that Ebenezer and his wife Mary were such dedicated Mormons that they named their youngest son, "Mormon", who sadly died at such a young age.

Other LDS fathers and sons were Rees Hopkins (aged 50) and his son John (aged 15)

Edward Davis (aged 34) and his son David (aged 14)

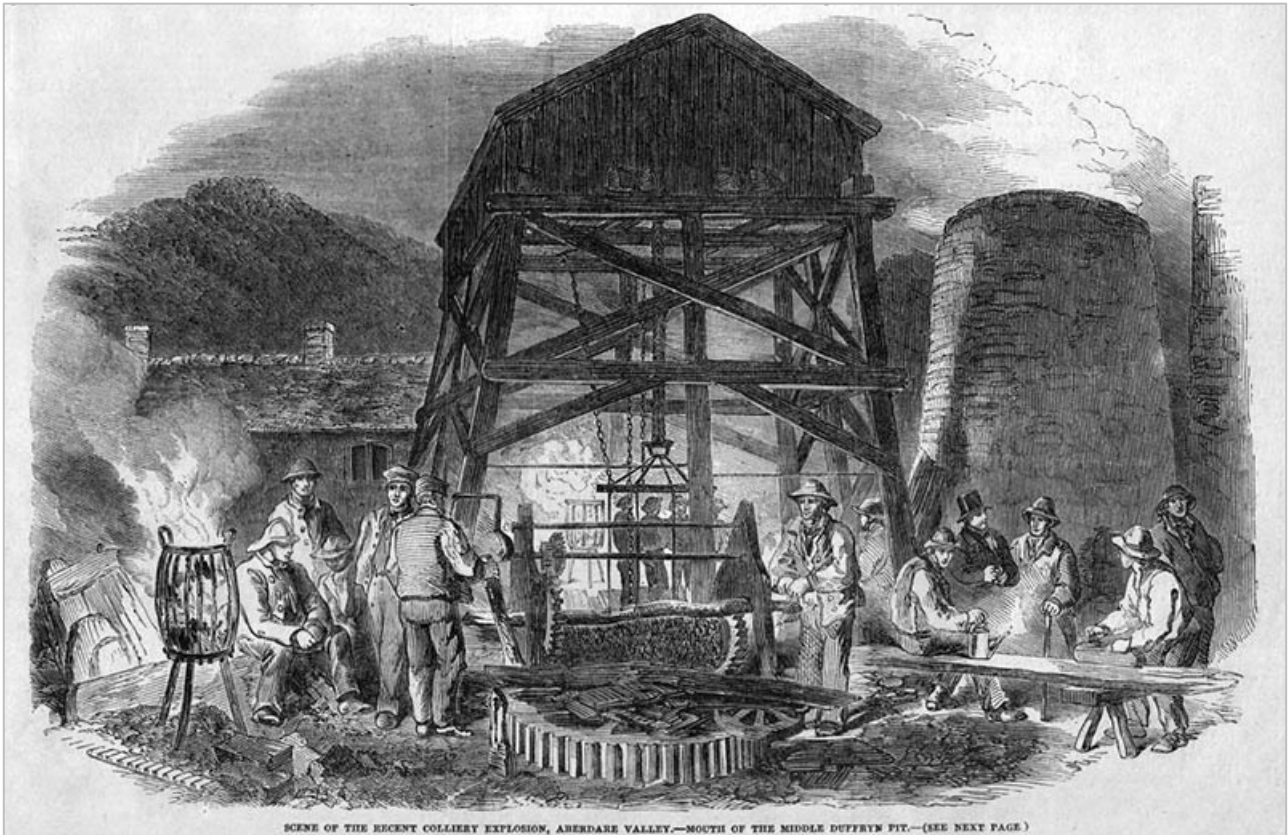
Lewis Jones (aged 42) and his sons William (aged 16) and John (aged 14)

Amongst the others were Thomas Pritchard and David Jenkins.

Four of the widows emigrated to Utah, the spiritual home of the Mormons. They were Ebenezer Morris's widow, Mary Margaret, living in Tir Founder, Cwmbach, who had given birth to their seventh child just days before the accident. In the Spring of 1853, she emigrated with her surviving four children, and settled in the Utah territory, where she married and had a further six children.

Rees Hopkins' wife Sarah would also emigrate that year with their youngest son William Thomas Hopkins, on board the 'Jersey'.

Thomas Pritchard's widow, Hannah emigrated in 1864 with the three youngest of their four children.



Scene of the recent colliery explosion, Aberdare Valley. Mouth of Middle Dyffryn Pit

David Jenkins' widow, Anna with her two sons left for America in 1868 and settled in Samaria, Idaho, along with many other Welsh converts to the LDS church.

These four women had an indomitable spirit and were totally dedicated Mormons, having the commitment to travel 3000 miles in a ship with the very poorest of living conditions to New Orleans. To take boats up the Mississippi River to St Louis, then on the Missouri River to Council Bluffs. Then to transfer to a wagon train and travel 1030 miles through blizzards in winter and the enervating summer heat to the promised land of Salt Lake City was an astonishing, incredible feat of endurance.

I would like to thank Terry Jones of the Merthyr Tydfil History Society for giving me information for this article.

For further reading about the disaster see Gareth Harris's book *The Aberdare Valley Colliery Disasters 1845-1861*, in which he devotes 100 pages to this disaster.

David Leslie Davies has written a fascinating chapter in *Mormons in Early Victorian Britain* about Rev. David Bevan Jones, *Dewi Elfed*, who converted to Mormonism and who had a dramatic confrontation with Rev. Thomas Price at Gwawr Welsh Baptist Chapel in Regent Street, Aberaman in 1851.

## Aberdare Cottage Homes: World War One Roll of Honour

The 83 men whose names are on this roll of honour attended the Industrial School at St Fagan's, Trecynon, Aberdare. It has much information about these soldiers. It is available at Glamorgan Archives, Ref Lib/61/44.

I am grateful to one of our committee members Rod Jenkins who has brought this to my attention.

## Aberdare Cenotaph

The centenary of the erection of the Cenotaph took place on 8th March, and a celebration to mark the occasion will take place later this year. An article about its unveiling is on the St Elvan's church heritage website.

## Society News

### Digital copies of Hanes

The Society intends to offer to all members who request it, a digitized copy of Hanes. This may well be helpful to members who have eyesight problems who can then enlarge the text accordingly on their screen. Any member who wishes to receive a digitized *Hanes* should contact the editor, Steven Graham. Members receiving an email copy would not normally also receive a posted copy and by doing so would help to reduce the society's costs.

### Doug Williams' records/archives

We would like to thank Mrs Meinir Morgan, a daughter of Doug Williams, for kindly donating her father's local history materials to the society.

### Death of Dr Trevor Howell Jones.

We are sad to record the passing at the age of 91 of Dr T.H. Jones, who was one of our longstanding members. He was brought up in Llewellyn Street, Trecynon.

## Patagonia with Huw Edwards

This fascinating television programme was recently shown on BBC 4. The newsreader followed in the footsteps of the Welsh settlers who travelled there more than 150 years ago. It is available on BBC iPlayer.

## FEEDBACK

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

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