

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

ISSUE NUMBER 106

SPRING 2024

After a very wet winter it has been wonderful to see daffodils flowering, the heralds of Spring. In this issue we have a report on the Daffodil Festival at Green Street Chapel, Aberdare, the unveiling of a Blue Plaque to a courageous woman. Also, we have a report of a frightful murder in Aberdare in 1866. And we cover the launch of our society's latest book.
Happy Reading.

Our Latest Publication. The Cwm: A Lost Community The launch meeting of the book.



Vikki Howells MS, Cllr. Wendy Lewis, Lord Aberdare, and Rob Jones

At the beginning of the month on Friday 3rd May, the Society launched its latest publication at St Elvan's Church, Aberdare. The book is about The Cwm, a community that existed along the banks of the River Dare, and which was reached by following Glan Road beyond Glandare House, (now the site of St John Baptist School). The people and buildings have long since disappeared from this area, and the book reminds us in some considerable detail of the activities, people, and the geography of that area. The lead author is Society member Robert E. Jones, who drew together earlier research on the topic by three other members.

The launch function was well attended, and copies of the book were available for purchase at the event.

Committee member Alun Watts opened the meeting and invited the Mayor, Cllr. Wendy Lewis, to give a short speech.

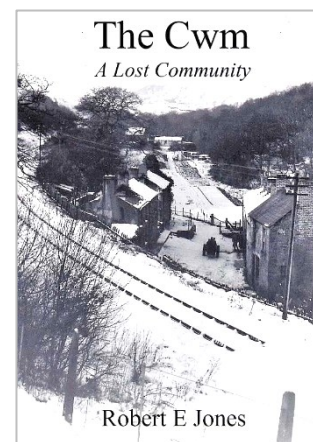
Vikki Howells, our local Welsh Senedd Member, who herself was an ex-history teacher gave a short address in which she thanked the Cynon Valley History Society for publishing the book. She gave a brief summary of Rob Jones' background. He was formerly a teacher of Religious Education before becoming headmaster of Carnetown Primary School in Abercynon. Whilst there, he authored a book about the school and the celebration of its centenary in 2009. Several years ago, Alan Abraham, John Davey and Haydn Williams started researching material for the book and, more recently, asked Rob Jones to do further research, and to complete the book which he has done culminating in the volume of some 170 pages.

Rob Jones then gave a fascinating, beautifully illustrated lecture about the history of the Cwm. This brought happy memories to many in the audience.

The book costs £14.00 and is available from Mr Haydn Williams, our Book Sales Officer.
Email: haydnwilliams3@hotmail.com
and Tel 01685 879793.

Lord Aberdare, the Society's President, who was also present, praised the Society, especially its publications including the quarterly newsletter *Hanes* and the volumes of *Old Aberdare* of which volumes 1 to 11 have been published. He said they do not refer to him!

This nostalgic meeting ended with light refreshments.



Front Cover of the book

Daffodil festival at Green Street Chapel, Aberdare 1st-3rd March



The celebration of St David's Day on Friday 1st March at the chapel got off to an impressive start with a massed children's choir drawn from Aberdare Town Church, Caradog, Cwmbach Community, Church in Wales, Cwmaman, and Oaklands Primary Schools.

On Saturday 2nd March there was a Festival Celebration.



Sabrina Lee at Green St Church

The Guest speaker was Sabrina Lee, a BBC Wales weather presenter. She is a local girl, who attended St. John Baptist High School, and is a member of Green Street Chapel. She went to Reading University where she studied meteorology, spending her third year of her course at the University of Oklahoma where she saw her first tornado. After gaining work experience at the weather forecasting company, Meteogroup in London, Sabrina joined BBC Wales in 2019 and is now presenting the weather to thousands of people each week.

She told us that sometimes she has to get up at 4am, but in spite of this she enjoys her work very much. When she gives the weather forecasts on the television, she does not use an autocue but speaks without notes — she writes her own scripts for TV and radio. She gets on very well with Derek Brockway, the principal BBC Wales weather presenter who has taught her much.

Musical items followed: The Dare to Sing Ladies Choir sang "I am going to the chapel to get married" and "Calon Lan". Carys Crimmings played some pieces on her harp; Katie May Davies sang "Myfanwy;" and Deborah Williams played her flute and sang.

This was followed with Bara Brith and Welsh cakes.

On Sunday 3rd March at 6pm, a bilingual Cymanfa Ganu was held. An offering was taken in support of the National Eisteddfod to be held in RCT this summer. Rev Hywel J. Davies, Arweinydd, conducted the service in his inimitable style. Mr Sheridan George was the organist, and his wife Teifwen was the festival organiser with the help of chapel members.

Mountain Ash and District Choral Society contributed items, and the "Highly Strung" ukulele group also took part.

The service ended with the rousing singing of national anthem, Hen Wlad fy Nhadau.

A Frightful Murder in Aberdare

On Friday 30th November 1866 there took place a shocking murder in Duke Street, Aberdare. Thomas Watkins, a powerfully built man, aged 31, was murdered by Benjamin Jones, a thickset and tough fellow, a puddler. It was the custom of Watkins to attend the public slaughterhouse every Friday. During the day, these two men had several disputes about slaughtering and strong threats were used by Jones. After the slaughterhouses had closed, around 9pm, they went to the Market Tavern public house. They appeared to be very friendly, and the deceased treated the prisoner to a glass of beer. But a scuffle broke out and Jones hit Watkins so severely in the mouth to draw blood, then followed it with a second blow. As things were getting so serious, the landlord ordered them both to leave. Before going out Jones looked at Watkins and said, in Welsh, "I will be into you before I go to sleep".

Frightful Murder

IN

Duke-Street, Aberdare

ON

Friday Evening, Nov. 30th, 1866.

When one

THOMAS WATKINS,

A Cattle Dealer, was murdered by

BENJAMIN JONES, Labourer,

Who has been committed upon the Coroner's warrant to take his trial at the next Swansea Assizes upon the charge of *wilful murder*.

Working men, come now, consider,
Awful, wretched is your case ;
Look around you, see the quarrels
And the *murders* which take place.
Drink—strong drink, has ruined thousands
And some noble working men ;
When will you look at its evils,
And avoid it, now say when ?

At Aberdare a little quarrel—
It could not be very great ;
But it did excite the parties
All to an alarming heat ;
Costs incurred by the complainant—
Great uneasiness to mind,
And the consequence was *murder*,
Then a prison close behind.

The first two verses about the murder from the extensive press coverage.

Somebody then went for Watkins' mother-in-law, Mrs Rosser, of the Old Bank. She soon came to the public house, to fetch him home. He left with her, but they had scarcely got outside the door when Jones, who was lying in wait for them, ran up to Watkins and, with a heavy stone in his hand, struck him a tremendous blow on the side of his head, just behind the right ear, so violent that he fell to the ground like a lump of lead. Mrs Rosser was so horror-stricken that she ran back into the house, screaming for help. Watkins was taken into her house where he died.

Tragically the wife of Watkins was taken into labour on Friday at about quarter of an hour after her husband had been brutally murdered, a child was born to her.

The murderer was caught and was sentenced to death.

This has caused great uneasiness at Aberdare; many people were quite surprised to hear of it. Something is said of memorializing the Secretary of State to commute the sentence.

Surprisingly, Jones was soon reprieved until her Majesty's pleasure was further declared.

The jury was not unanimous in believing Watkins had committed wilful murder, and, after the trial, communicated with the judge to petition for mercy.

Benjamin Jones was deported on October 10th, 1867, and arrived in Western Australia the following January. Researchers have unearthed evidence that Jones was granted a conditional release in Geraldton, WA, in 1885. It appears he stayed in Australia and died aged 69 in 1897 at Champion Bay, Geraldton.

This information was taken from the Brecon County Times, 8th December 1866, p4; the Brecon Reporter 16th March 1867, p8 and the Cardiff Times 30th March 1867, p5., and the Australian website *Convict Records*.

Unveiling of a Blue Plaque to commemorate Ceridwen Brown



Beth Winter, M.P., Ann Wilson, Professor Dai Smith and Dr Daryl Leeworthy at the Blue Plaque event

The unveiling of a Blue Plaque in memory of Ceridwen Brown took place at St Elvan's Church, Aberdare on Friday 8th March. This date was most appropriate as it was International Women's Day. Over 70 people attended.

Councillor Dan Owen-Jones, The Deputy Mayor of RCT, opened the proceedings, followed by Professor Dai Smith, CBE, who gave a talk about Ceridwen. Professor Smith holds the Raymond Williams Chair in the Cultural History of Wales at Swansea University. Beth Winter, the M.P for Cynon Valley, also addressed the gathering.

Following a break for refreshments., Dr Daryl Leeworthy gave the main lecture about Ceridwen.

The plaque is soon to be erected on Ceridwen's old home in Regent Street.

An article about Ceridwen Brown appeared in the previous edition of Hanes. But to recap briefly, she was a prominent campaigner for fairer rights and conditions for the working class of this area, especially during the Depression of the 1930s; she was involved in the Women's Co-operative Guild, the anti-war and pro-peace movements, anti-austerity and anti-poverty action. In 1935, she was one of the leaders of the large group that walked over the mountain from Aberdare to Merthyr to Iscoed House in Merthyr Tydfil in protest at the Means Test. She also stood in local elections on behalf of the Communist Party. She was born in Aberaman in 1896 and died aged 80 in 1976.



Beth Winter speaking at the event

Ann Wilson is to be thanked for organising this most successful event.

The 2024 RCT National Eisteddfod at Pontypridd

The 2024 National Eisteddfod in Pontypridd is fast approaching, taking place on 3–10 August. 'Earlybird' tickets are already on sale until June 14th when they will be sold at full price. Tickets for concerts, separate from the Maes tickets, go on sale from June 14th also.

The focus of the festival will be on the Maes at Ynysangharad Park. Maes B will be located at Pontypridd High School Fields, and the Caravan Park and Camping site will be on land between Pontypridd and Glyn-coch.

The Pavilion will be found on the Maes, with a number of smaller pavilions and tents dotted around the field, including Y Babell Lân (literature), Y Lle Celf (Crafts), Maes D (Learners), Ty Gwerin (folk music), Pentref Plant (Children's Tent), Llwyfan y Maes (theatre productions), and others offering various performances and sessions from morning till night. You will also find over 200 stalls, selling Welsh gifts and crafts, souvenirs, books, cards, jewellery, art, etc.

The organisers hope that travel to and from the event will be by public transport. But for those who must use their cars, there will be two park and ride sites: one at Abercynon and the other at Upper Boat. These will be open from Saturday 3 August to Saturday 10 August. There are indications that reservations may be necessary at the car parks, and intending users should enquire further about this.

A full report of the Eisteddfod will appear in the next edition of Hanes.

A story from the 1885 National Eisteddfod in Aberdare



The 1885 Eisteddfod Procession proceeding along Cardiff Street from Aberaman to The Maes in Plasdraw.
(Photo: The RCT Photographic Archive.)

In the 1885 Aberdare National Eisteddfod, the second choral competition was the principal event of Friday, and five choirs were taking part in this competition: The Rhondda Fach Choral Union; the Aberaman Philharmonic Society; The Penrhiwceiber & Mountain Ash Choral Union; The Mountain Ash Harmonic Society; and The Morlais Choral Society.

Handel Harries, (Chairman of the Aberdare Co-operative Board in 1956), recalled in the Aberdare Leader of 18th August 1956 a humorous event when he sang alto with the Penrhiwceiber & Mountain Ash Choral Union Choir in this competition.

“Penrhiwceiber were led by a local butcher named James James and the Mountain Ash Harmonic Society by their conductor known as “Coleman Bach”.

Choral rivalry was very keen in those days. The Mountain Ash Harmonic choir challenged the number of people singing in the Penrhiwceiber & Mountain Ash Choral Union choir with cries of "Count them".

A count was taken and Penrhiwceiber were found to have ten choristers too many. Captain Thomas Phillips of Aberdare was the chief stage steward and, in pruning the choir down to the stipulated number, he took out all ten of the alto section! This ruined, of course, any chance of success Penrhiwceiber might have had.

Penrhiwceiber’s furious supporters became incensed at this and when the Mountain Ash Harmonic Choir came to the stage, they showed their resentment in as vocal a fashion as they could.

But Mountain Ash did not let matters pass at that. When Penrhiwceiber’s butcher conductor walked forward, loud cries of ‘Faggots’ and ‘Sausage’ rent the air!’

Local History Society walk in Cwmaman

On a Saturday afternoon, 23 March, around 30 people gathered to go on a walk around the upper parts of Cwmaman led by CVHS member David Leslie Davies. The trip was organized by the village's Historical Society. Fortunately, they had fair weather, with only one heavy downpour in the early afternoon. Then, it was dry, and even sunny, for the rest of the trip.

They started at the ‘Top Club’, Glynhafod, talking about the early history of the area: the Roman Camp on Twyn-y-briddallt at the summit of a prominent ridge on the mountain; the old pilgrimage road that winds its way over the Graig from the direction of Aberdare towards Llanwynno and Pen-rhys; the farms of the pre-industrial era (some going back to the 1570s), and the remains of the early ironworks near ‘Castell Corryn’ which date back to the 16C.

They then walked around the village talking about its development during the industrial period: the houses, streets, pubs, chapels, railways, and the earliest collieries, together with some individuals and places that arose as a result of the coal industry. Next, they went along Glanaman, down Spencer St, (taking a look at the Dare-Aman railway built by Brunel in 1856), up Fforchaman Rd (noting the important connection between the Moreia-Aman chapel and the establishment of the Welsh colony in Patagonia), before heading for Llanwynno Rd.

Once there, they discussed the old mill of the village in Cwm Pandy; the birth nearby of the poet Alun Lewis in 1915, and the construction of the Crawshay Bailey bridge and tramway in 1849–50 coming up the valley from Aberaman towards ‘Shepherds Pit’ at the top of the valley.

They returned to the starting point along the tramway, past The Llechwann (the ‘Railway Inn’), the Old Vicarage and the site of Y Llaethdy farm, almost invisible now, (referred to in 1778 as Llaethdy or Cwmaman Farm).

Many thanks to D.L. Davies for permission to use this article adapted from ‘Clochdar’.

Professor Martin L. Williams

A recent addition to the Dictionary of National Biography was that of the late Martin Williams, (1947–2020), who had local connections. He was a leading chemist and environmental scientist who chaired many national and international committees.

He was born in Mountain Ash, to Muriel (née Tinkler) and Chester Williams, and was brought up in Abercynon. He attended Mountain Ash Grammar School, took a first-class degree in chemistry at University College, Cardiff in 1968, and his Ph.D. at Bristol. In 1975, after previously holding two research fellowships, he then joined the Warren Spring Laboratory, then one of the world's leading air quality research institutes.

Following the hot summer of 1976, he published a key paper in the journal *Nature* about ground-level ozone concentrations showing for the first time the harm this gas, (so critically important to life when present in the upper atmosphere), posed significant dangers to health when at ground level.

Martin went on to work at the Department of the Environment, later Defra, with responsibilities at the World Health Organisation, and co-chairing the EU working group on particulate air pollution. He also chaired a committee at the United Nations.

In 2010, he switched to a university career, as professor at the environmental research group at King's College London. In 2019, he was named one of the UK's three clean air champions.

His *Guardian* obituary can be read online at, www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/oct/27/martin-williams-obituary

Society News

Steven Graham has for the last 14 years been researching all the National Eisteddfodau that have taken place in what is now the County of Rhondda Cynon Taf. There have been eight "Nationals" in this area: the first modern one was in Aberdare in 1861, and there were two more here in 1885 and 1956. Mountain Ash had three: in 1905, 1946 and a radio-only one in 1940. Pontypridd hosted one in 1893 and Treorchy in 1928.

He hopes to put all the articles on to the society's website by 1st August in time for the National Eisteddfodau at Pontypridd.

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