

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 hope you are all enjoying the recent Mediterranean sunshine. In this issue we look at two great women who have the surname of "Davies" and a contemporary great local man and a brave man's letter from the Spanish Civil War.

Happy Reading!

THE UNVEILING OF A PLAQUE TO COMMEMORATE FLORENCE ROSE DAVIES



Purple plaques have been unveiled to commemorate remarkable Welsh women and this, the thirteenth, was unveiled on Friday, 12th May at the Cynon Valley Museum, Aberdare. The plaque was to commemorate Florence Rose Davies (1882–1958) of Aberdare who was an extremely distinguished Labour Councillor, feminist and campaigner.

Outside the museum, Sian Rhiannon Williams, the Chair of the Welsh Plaques committee, spoke about Rose. This was followed by Jane Hutt, the Welsh Government Minister for Social Justice, who gave a short, rousing speech.

Rosemary Davies, the granddaughter of Florence Rose Davies unveiled the plaque assisted by her relatives Rowland Davies, ex-editor of the Cynon Valley Leader, and Dr. Trystan Dafydd Davies, a Senedd political advisor.

After the unveiling Beth Winter, our local M.P. gave a short speech. Neil Evans, Senior

Lecturer at Coleg Harlech then gave a fascinating lecture about this woman who rose from nothing to become Chairman of Glamorgan County Council in the days where Women's Lib did not even exist! Some pupils from Aberdare Community School attended, who I am sure were inspired by this great women, as we all were.

Florence Rose Davies 1882–1958

A little, old lady collapsed as she was going into a Glamorgan County Council Committee meeting at Cardiff City Hall, but with gritty determination attended the meeting. Sadly, she died a month later on 13th December 1958. A year or two before she had a seizure, which almost ended her life, but she rose triumphantly from her sick bed and resumed an abundance of public duties. This lady was Florence Rose Davies, one of the greatest women that the Cynon valley has ever known. It was typical of her that she was a fighter to the last; this tiny but indomitable figure who in so small a frame had the heart of a lion.

Florence Rose Davies was born at 43 Cardiff Street, Aberdare on 16 September 1882, the daughter of William Henry Rees, a local tin worker, and his wife Fanny, who was the eldest daughter of J. Lendon Berry, Aberdare's famous photographer. She was one of seven children, six of whom became teachers.

In 1896, she became a monitor at the Aberdare Town National School, and was then apprenticed as a pupil teacher there, subsequently becoming an assistant mistress. She earned £40 per annum in the position. As a teacher she saw how badly female teachers were treated and this made her a feminist. In 1906, after attending one of Keir Hardie's election meetings at Merthyr Tydfil, Davies decided to join the ILP.

1908 was an important year for her for two reasons: She became Secretary of the Women's' Branch of Aberdare branch of the Independent Labour Party. In addition, she married Edward or Ted Davies, a fellow teacher and an activist within the local co-operative movement. She resigned her teaching post at the time of her marriage (as was the custom at the time), but she was soon co-opted on to the Education Committee of the Aberdare UDC. This was a paradox as she was legally unable to vote in local elections. Her brilliance soon shone through and by 1915, she was its chairman. Shortly afterwards she became a member of the board of governors of the town's two (the boys' and the girls') grammar schools.

She soon developed a special interest in the provision of school facilities for blind, deaf and mute pupils and subsequently for children with learning and physical disabilities. The first of her own five children was born in 1910.

Over these formative years, Rose Davies, together with her husband Ted, also developed a close political and personal friendship with Keir Hardie, MP, and both assisted his local campaigns in the two general elections, which took place in 1910.

By 1918, she was elected the chair of the Aberdare Trades and Labour Council, the first woman to occupy this position, and in 1920, she became a JP. In 1919, Davies stood unsuccessfully as the Labour candidate for the Aberdare town ward of the Aberdare UDC, but she was elected to represent the more working-class Gadlys ward in 1921.

The need for improved maternity services and birth control featured prominently in her



Florence Rose Rees

local election campaigns. In 1925, Davies was elected the Labour councillor for the Aberaman ward (Aberdare) of the Glamorgan County Council, thus becoming the first ever-female member of the county council. Soon she was elected an alderman of the council and later she would be chairing every council committee and would later become the first woman Chairman. They were incredible achievements in that age of strong male chauvinism, when men ruled everything and women were thought of as just drudges bearing children, cooking, and cleaning for their menfolk.

During the early 1920s, Davies played a major role in establishing Labour Party organisation in the newly created parliamentary constituency of Aberdare, and she was elected the first secretary of the East Glamorgan Labour Women's Advisory Council. She worked closely with Elizabeth Andrews, who was the first Labour Party's women's organiser (born in Hirwaun, an article about her will appear in a future Hanes). She became a passionate advocate of greater political education for women.

In addition, she was deeply involved in the array of peace movements in the 1920s and various women's movements throughout Wales. She played a major role in the preparation of the impressive peace memorial from the women of Wales to the women of the United States aiming to persuade the United States to join the League of Nations. Davies carried on the work of the former local M.P. Henry Richard, 'the Apostle of Peace'. In 1930 she was nominated to attend the League of Nations meeting at Geneva

In the General election of 30 May 1929, Rose Davies stood as the first ever Labour candidate for the Honiton division of Devon, singularly unpromising territory for the Socialist cause, and she won just 915 votes, 2.6 per cent of those cast there, and predictably lost her deposit. Logically she should never have stood but the Labour Party wanted to fight every seat in the UK and poor Florence was the "whipping woman". Also many Socialists in the constituency had cast tactical votes for the Liberal aspirant in the election J. G. H. Halse against the Conservative candidate Sir A.C. Morrison-Bell, who won by a small margin. Yet, with characteristic stoicism and optimism, she rejoiced in having 'sown the seed' in virgin territory for the Labour Party.

Davies remained a prominent public figure within Aberdare and the county of Glamorgan for the rest of her days. In 1925, she was chosen as a governor of the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, and of the University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire, Cardiff.

Her husband's death in 1951 saw her increase her efforts and involvement in public life. She became especially preoccupied with the setting up of a school for deaf and mute children at Penarth during the 1950s.

Despite not owning a car, she attended a positive array of public meetings by bus and train including far-flung venues like Birmingham and Manchester and would make her way hotfoot to gatherings to rise and speak imperturbably as if she had just come from the tea table at home. She would walk in smiling to meetings where no-one knowing her crowded diary, expected to see her.

She was awarded the MBE in 1934 and then the CBE in 1954.

Rose Davies died 13 December 1958 at the Royal Infirmary, Cardiff, at the age of 76 and was given a highly impressive, well-attended public funeral service at St Elvan's church, Aberdare.

As a socialist and a feminist, who cared deeply for people and their welfare, she was second to none; she had greatly improved the lives of thousands of women and adults with special needs throughout Wales and Britain.

Sources: Articles by Ursula Masson, also in DWB and the Aberdare Leader of 13th December 1958.

Will Lloyd's letter Part 2 From the Aberdare Leader 14th August 1937

He wrote, "Our battalion charged into the village. Then the cleaning up began. We saw Spaniards coming back with prisoners, and Englishmen with prisoners, and of all the captured men, only one was defiant. All the rest seemed submissive hanging their heads, eager to answer questions put to them. We went from house to house searching to make sure there were no Fascists hiding in the houses.

We came to a large farmhouse which seemed deserted, entered in and started looking around, when suddenly we heard voices right under our feet, very quiet whispering. We saw a big heavy grating from which the voices came. Two of us lifted the grating and ordered the people out. Slowly and nervously, out of the darkness came the first, a soldier who was terrified in case we were going to throw a bomb amongst them. We motioned to him to come up, and he gave the Red Front salute, and shouted "Salud". He embraced me, started shaking my hand and repeated this performance with everyone on the room. Behind him climbed another five soldiers, and a very old man with seven women and two little boys aged about 7 and 12.

They all gave the Red Front salute; shaking hands and embracing us. The little boy whom I helped out of the trap door had collapsed with fright. His eyes were almost popping out of his head and his whole body was limp when I picked him up and put him on a chair.

After our assuring them that we were not going to shoot them, they calmed down and started to give us water, which we badly needed.

After searching till late in the night, we selected a house to sleep in. We were lucky enough to find a place with mattresses and flopped out on these. In the middle of the night I was awakened by a terrible crash but was too tired to make enquiries and dropped back to sleep almost at once. The next morning I found that the crash was a bomb that somebody had accidentally let off right outside our door!

We started scrounging round for some food, and found some coffee and eggs and made a very good breakfast.

Later in the morning, I took a walk outside the town and looked over the battlefield. The dead lay sprawled out.

That day we took up another position and went on with our attack.

Marion Davies: A Grand Old Lady of 103!



Marion with Gill Escott

Marion celebrated her 103rd birthday on 28th March. Her father was J. L. Rowlands, the joint owner of the "Aberdare Leader". Her mother was Mary Lewis who had a heart for helping poor people. In the late 1920 & 1930s, some rich people in England sent parcels of food and clothes to the Memorial Hall where Mary and others would distribute to the poor people in the valleys. Her parents were John Lewis who owned a tailor's shop in Market Street (and was also a man of letters) and his wife was Gwendoline who were both fluent Welsh speakers. [There is an excellent article about him in Hanes No. 7, November 1989].

In her early years, Marion went to Abernant Junior School. She remembers one Christmas; the schoolchildren were so poor that her mother asked the owner of Café Mona to send up a tray of iced cakes to them, which she did. Another Christmas, the children would have had no Christmas presents so a kind person gave money for a pencil and notebook to be given to the boys and a handkerchief to the girls.

Aberdare hospital caught fire in 1929 and she remembered that two firemen died trying to save lives. On the day of the funeral Aberdare was packed with silent crowds, she said you could hear a pin drop out of their great respect for the firemen.

After leaving Abernant School, she went to a school in Towyn, Merionethshire in 1932, then to Aberdare Grammar School then to Malvern Girls School.

She returned to south Wales where she worked for the Rhondda Leader in the Accounts department, around 1938 at 15 Taff Street, Pontypridd.

During the Second World War, many servicemen were billeted in the valley's houses and at her parents' house, two GIs, one called Joe, stayed there.

She married in 1945 and moved to the Aberdare Leader office where she worked as a proofreader, working with Gwyn Prosser and Rhiannon Davies. Her father was excited when he bought the Cossar printing press, which cost £4,000, which greatly improved production.

When she was living in Oxford, she went to a party where she met Dylan Thomas and his wife Caitlin. They were the only people from Wales and Marion asked him "Where did you park your car?" Dylan replied that they did not have a car!

Highland Place Unitarian Chapel was a big part of her life where she worshipped every Sunday. She was a Sunday School teacher and has happy memories of Sunday school trips to Barry every year. If the organist did not turn up, she would play the piano. During her time there, Rev. Jacob Davies was the minister, she thought highly of him. Her father took some services when there was no preacher. Now she misses not attending church.

Marion had two sisters: Betty who went to Cardiff University and became a teacher, and her younger sister Gwyneth who followed in Marion's footsteps and became a proofreader at the Aberdare Leader. Gwyneth married Alan Davies the son of Alderman Rose Davies. Rose's husband, Ted Davies, was the headmaster of Gadlys Central School.

Marion's uncle David Emrys Jones owned Café Mona in Commercial Street where many organisations held meetings and special dinners in its long room. As well as being a baker, he owned many horses and raced horses drawing traps at shows, which won him a glass showcase full of cups, trophies and bowls. [His favourite horse was called "Golden Wonder"; another was "Cudham Sensation" which came second in the Welsh Grand National in 1910].

She says the reason why she has lived so long, she says is her Christian faith, her friends and taking one day at a



Gwyneth & Marion Rowlands

time.

Marion has one son Rowland who was the editor of the Aberdare Leader and later became the Press Officer for the Secretary of State for Wales. Her grandson Dr. Dafydd Trystan Davies has also achieved great things as he has recently been seconded to the Senedd as a political advisor to the Welsh Government. He once stood as the Plaid Cymru candidate for the Cynon Valley in the General Election of 2010.

The day after I interviewed Marion for the "Altered Images" project was her 103rd birthday. She was greatly looking forward to having a celebration at her house with her special family. We wish her many more happy, healthy years!

BLACK ON BLACK by Robert Smith

Black faces would hardly be a novelty in a mining town but the Temperance Hall in Aberdare, which stood in Canon Street from 1858- 2014, (but is sadly now demolished), featured different black faces. On January 5th 1885, The Temperance Hall, known to later generations as The Palladium, welcomed Hybert, Middle and Wallace's 'GRAND AMERICAN PRODUCTION OF UNCLE TOM'S CABIN'. (from the Theatre Royal, Cheltenham). Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel had been adapted for the stage.

The show, which could hardly be expected to suit modern sensibilities, promised 'real negroes', freed slaves and Jubilee singers, thirty artistes in all, and the celebrated bloodhound 'Leap', who had been procured 'at great expense', and would appear in each performance in the 'GREAT SLAVE HUNT'. There was to be a GRAND PARADE each day, (weather permitting) with a Brass Band, Freed Slaves and the proprietor's own omnibus and four-in-hand. (i.e. open carriage). It was claimed to have four tons of scenery, new dresses, new costumes and that 30,000 people had seen the show, in South Wales,

The 1852 novel Uncle Tom's Cabin sold thousands of copies and was translated into some 40 languages. As a play in London, it ran for over 100 performances, and it influenced popular theatrical presentations including minstrel shows and the music halls. [The book was greatly instrumental in aiding the abolition of slavery in the USA. Ed.]

Postscript to Mormons and the Middle Dyffryn Colliery Disaster

Mary Morris, a widow of Ebenezer Morris who died in the disaster were dedicated Mormons. They had other children: Joseph Smith Morris named after the founder of the Mormons and Hyrum named after one of his brothers.

In March 1853 Mary emigrated with her four surviving children, the youngest was not quite seven years old. She was fortunate to find a young man who was willing to drive her ox team as payment for the cost of his own travel, but she would have walked almost 1000 miles, or helped to drive the second of her two wagons, while managing her children.

A year after reaching the Salt Lake valley, Mary married Robert Wardrop, an LDS convert and stone mason from Scotland. Six years into her marriage and with three additional children, they moved to Cache valley in northern Utah. Winters are harsh in Utah but more so in the Cache valley which is over 4,500 feet above sea level. Mary and her family would have built a cabin near to other Mormon settlers for better protection against marauding groups of Native American Shoshoni, on whose hunting grounds they had settled. So here, Mary spent the second half of her life, giving birth to three more children, serving her family, and community.

When she died in 1888 , in a eulogy to her, it was suggested that she could rightly referred to as "Saint Mary" because of her life of dedication and faith to the LDS cause. She had come a long way from Cwmbach!

I would like to thank Terry Jones for this information.

Tyrone O'Sullivan: an appreciation

This Welsh national hero died recently aged 77. Born in Abercwmboi he rose to fame by helping to organize the buyout of Tower Colliery, Hirwaun keeping it going for another 13 years.

After the Miners' strike of 1984-85 when Margaret Thatcher's Tory government had defeated the miners, many mines were served with closure notices. The Tower workers agreed



to take redundancy terms and the pit closed in April 1994. They then had second thoughts and Tyrone and his comrades persuaded the miners to give £8,000 from their redundancy money towards a £1m down payment to buy the pit back. This was a terrible risk because if the miners failed they would lose all their money.

Tyrone said that he told his miners' management team who were going to the meetings to, "Wear suits and buy briefcases, and if you don't have anything to put in them, then put your sandwiches in them. You must look like proper business men!" With much negotiating, they organized their cooperative calling it Goitre Tower Anthracite and in eight months against all the odds, bought back their pit.

On 2nd January 1995, Tyrone and his wife Elaine helped to blow up 239 balloons, one for each Tower miner. After their triumphant march up the hill to Tower Colliery, Ann Clwyd, the Cynon valley MP (who had previously staged a sit-in in Tower-colliery, to protest against its closure) cut the ribbon to re-open the pit and released the 239 balloons.

In a lecture that he gave, Tyrone said the first thing that he did was to get rid of the horrible Izal abrasive toilet paper and buy quilted toilet paper instead! Far more importantly in the first year, the pit made a profit of four million pounds and in the second year made another four million pounds profit. Tyrone received an OBE in recognition of his, and his comrades' great achievement.

Despite British Coal saying there was no more coal easily obtainable, the miners mined coal there for another 13 years until there was finally no more left. The mine closed for the second time in January 2008.

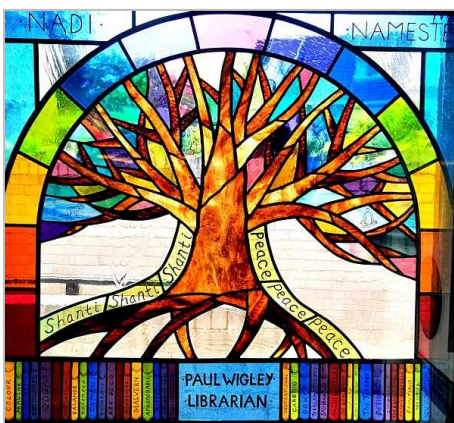
The buy-out was so famous that Alan Hoddinott composed an opera called 'Tower' about the miners' achievement.

O'Sullivan continued as chair of Goitre Tower Anthracite. Late in life, he moved to the Mumbles coast.

His wife Elaine, two daughters and five grandchildren survive him.

Sources: 'Tower of Strength' by Tyrone O'Sullivan, and his Guardian obituary.

Hirwaun news



A window has been installed at Hirwaun library to celebrate the life of Paul Wigley, the former Branch Librarian who sadly died last May.

Derek Brockway of Weatherman Walking fame has recently made a programme about the area. He visited the site of the old ironworks and the Penderyn Whisky Distillery. It is available on BBC iPlayer.

Photo credit: RCT Libraries

Blue Plaques

Members are welcome to nominate a person or place. The final decision will rest with the committee.

The Proclamation of the 2024 National Eisteddfod.

The Eisteddfod will take place in Rhondda Cynon Taf on 3-10 August 2024. The location has not yet been announced.

The Proclamation took place in Aberdare on Saturday 24th June. The procession started at 2pm at the Sobell Sports Centre and proceeded through the town. The actual

Proclamation took place at the Ron Jones Stadium at the Ynys at 3pm.

David Leslie Davies led a historical walk around Aberdare starting at St John's Church at 10.30am on that day. The walk commentary was conducted in Welsh.

There will be a report and photographs of the Proclamation in the next issue of Hanes.



The Proclamation of the 1956 Aberdare Eisteddfod in 1955
photo credit: RCT Libraries

Aberdare Cenotaph Centenary

This commemorative event took place on Sunday, 25th June at 10.30am, where Roy Noble was the guest speaker. Various local choirs also took part.

Both the Proclamation and the Cenotaph event took place in brilliant sunshine in hot weather.

Local Book

Peter Finch who has written a book, "Walking the Valleys," which contains fascinating information on 15 walks in the South Wales valleys including walks around Aberdare and Abercynon and is well worth reading. He recently gave a talk about his book at a recent Society lecture.

For members who have missed this lecture, he is giving a talk about his book on Saturday, 8th July at 1pm at the Cynon Valley Museum in Aberdare. Selected photographs, which his colleague John Briggs took, will be on display there between 8th and 29th July.

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