

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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PROCLAMATION ISSUE

In this issue we remember the Proclamation of the National Eisteddfod that took place in Aberdare on a sunny day in June. We also look at the lives of two very important valley's people who died recently. Again we look at an Italian family who lived in this valley and we celebrate big two anniversaries of this valley.

I apologise for the late publication of this issue but my wife Charlotte and I walked for 6 weeks in September and October, the Santiago de Compostela camino, a 500 miles walk through northern Spain.

Happy Reading and the CVHS Committee wish you a Happy Christmas and Healthy 2024!

The National Eisteddfod Proclamation Day



Trumpeters Dewi Corn and Gwyn Anwyl

The blazing sun shone down on 24th June in Aberdare, 67 years since the National Eisteddfod last came here welcoming crowds of people to this great event.

In the morning David Leslie Davies, historian and CVHS member, gave an excellent historical walking tour of Aberdare starting at St John's Church built around 1189, then passing Siloa chapel where some brave chapel members left to sail to Patagonia in 1865. He then spoke about the great centre of printing once located in Aberdâr, about Caradog, and the Market Hall.

During the morning all the Gorsedd members' robes were ironed under the supervision of Susan Jenkins, the editor of *Clochdar*, the district's local Welsh language monthly paper.

At 2pm all the Gorsedd members followed by members of local organisations marched from the Sobell Leisure Centre over the bridge to the Welsh flag be-decked Commercial Street, Cardiff Street around Market Street, back over the bridge to the Ron Jones Stadium.

The Archdruid Myrddin ap Dafydd opened the proceedings at 3pm. The hot sunshine was so powerful that an old man beside me fainted with the heat and had to be revived by ambulance men.

Aberdare's own Roy Noble, *Roy o'r Gwter Fawr*, recited Mountain Ash's Pennar Davies's poem 'Pan oeddwn Fachgen,' (When I was a boy).

The Horn of Plenty, (Corn Hirlas), was presented to the Archdruid.

The Welcome poem, written by Dr Aneirin Karadog, was read by Gavin Rhydfelen and Menna Tomos. One line was 'Aberdâr yw bro'r derwydd' (Aberdare is the home of the druids!). This referred to the first modern National Eisteddfod held at Aberdare in 1861.

Helen Prosser, Chair of the local Executive Committee, presented the Archdruid with the first copy of the RCT Rhestr Testunau of 2024.

The Archdruid in his speech singled out 94-year-old Elfed Davies, of Gadlys, (and of the CVHS), as he spoke from the centre of the Gorsedd circle. He explained that Elfed was the last remaining member of the local General Committee of the 1956 Aberdare National Eisteddfod, and it was his pleasure to acknowledge Elfed publicly for what he had done over the years for education, the Eisteddfod, the Welsh language and for the Macmillan Cancer Support Charity. Elfed, (in the care of his daughter Elisabeth), was given a prime seat in the front row of the Gorsedd guests, and had tea with the Archdruid after the ceremony.

Going from the past to the future, Myrddin stated that Dr Mererid Hopwood had been elected Archdruid from 2024 to 2027. She became the first woman in Eisteddfod history to be awarded the Chair at the National Eisteddfod in 2001, and in 2003, she won the Crown. She is the second woman to hold the post after Christine James who held it from 2013–16.

On a wider theme, the Archdruid defended the Eisteddfod's 'Welsh language rule', by which the event celebrates the language by using it to conduct the festival.

The Flower Girls' Dance followed which was a delight to behold.

The ceremony finished by the singing of 'Hen Wlad fy Nhadau', which was sung with such 'hwyl' that it echoed around the hills.

Six weeks later it was announced that the National Eisteddfod would be held in Ynysangharad Park, Pontypridd.



Seren Haf MacMillan, (Mam y Fro), with the Corn Hirlas and Ffion Haf Roberts, (Morwyn y Fro), with the Blodauged and Chynnyrch y Mesydd



A Oes Heddwch ?



Rev Hywel J. Davies and Elfed Davies.



Professor Mererid Hopwood, to be the next Archdruid.



Archdruid Myrddin ap Dafydd



Jeremy Turner formerly of Aberaman



Sandra de Pol, an Argentinian who learnt Welsh in Patagonia, now living in Wales, and D.L. Davies



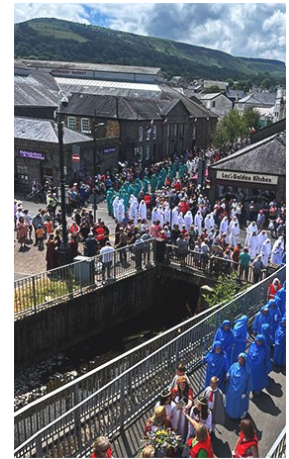
David E. Roberts formerly of Blaengwawr



Archdderwydd/Archdruid and Robin McBryde (Robin o Fôn), Ceidwad y Cledd



A group including Roy Noble (Roy o'r Gwter Fawr), right, at the beginning of the procession



The Procession returning to The Ynys

Ann Clwyd: an obituary

She was born Ann Clwyd Lewis in Denbigh in north Wales in 1937. Her parents were from the seaside village of Aberdyfi, in Gwynedd, an area to which Clwyd retained a lifelong attachment.

In her career she followed the lead of Florence Rose Davies as a fearless feminist, not in Glamorgan County Council but in the House of Commons where she was dedicated to advancing the rights of women.

She spoke only Welsh until the age of five and remained an advocate of the language, later securing European funding for its encouragement and taking the parliamentary oath in Welsh and English.

After dropping out of university at Bangor because she spent too much time socialising and on student politics, she found a job with BBC Wales and became a studio manager – she did the sound effects for the children’s programme Toytown – which led eventually to journalism as a freelance reporter and producer. Much later, she received an honorary degree from Bangor!



Ann Clwyd

Gradually she became more interested in politics. She had developed ambitions to be a Labour MP. She joined the party in 1968 and in 1970 stood in the safe Tory seat of Denbigh. In October 1974, she was selected for another unwinnable seat in Gloucester and thereafter failed to win selection for several constituencies.

During this period she also wrote for the Labour party newspaper Labour Weekly, as the Welsh correspondent and for The Observer. She was elected as the MEP for Mid and West Wales in 1979 despite being against the Common Market but she was swiftly won over.

Eventually she won a seat, becoming the M.P. for the Cynon Valley in 1984, which she held until her retirement in 2019. She was the first female MP to represent a seat in the valleys of the south Wales coalfield and at one point the only female MP in Wales.

The welfare of miners was close to her heart. In her journalist days she campaigned forcefully for compensation for their suffering of pneumoconiosis, and during the Miners Strike, she was a thorn in Margaret Thatcher’s side as she defended the miners during the bitter miners’ strike. At Tower Colliery, Hirwaun, she joined a successful sit-in for 27 hours to keep the mine open.

Her heart was for underdogs on an international scale. She deeply sympathised with the Kurdish people of Iraq. Her support for them meant that she missed a Commons vote in 1995 when pursuing her campaign on their rights, which led to Tony Blair sacking her from his shadow foreign affairs team.

In a remarkable speech in the House of Commons in 2003 criticising the brutal regime of Saddam Hussein, she supported the proposed war against Iraq. This, among other things, healed the rift between her and Blair, now Prime Minister, resulting in her appointed as his Special Envoy on Human Rights in Iraq, a post she held until 2010.

Being a strong woman with a mind of her own could get her into difficulties. Apart from Blair sacking her, Neil Kinnock dismissed her in 1998 from her post as spokeswoman on women and education and for defying the whips in a vote on nuclear weapons.

She married Owen Roberts in 1963. Sadly, he suffered from multiple sclerosis and died in the University Hospital of Wales, Cardiff in 2012. She told MPs, “he had died like a battery hen”, and had been treated with coldness, resentment, indifference and contempt on his

deathbed. This account opened the floodgates of similar grievances and led the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, to appoint her to lead a review into the NHS complaints procedure.

During the latter part of her parliamentary career she chaired the Parliamentary Labour party in 2005, and the all-party parliamentary group on human rights (1997–2019). She was a member of the select committees on international development (1997–2005) and on foreign affairs (2010–2019).

When she stood down at the last election, after 35 years representing the Cynon Valley, she was the oldest woman to have sat as an MP. Her autobiography "Rebel With A Cause" was published in 2017 and is dedicated to her late husband and to all who fight for human rights.

A memorial service was held for her at St Elvan's Church, Aberdare on 13th October where many tributes were given including ones by Mark Drakeford, First Minister of Wales, and Sir Tony Blair. A more detailed article about the service is in a recent edition of *Clochdar*.

This article is based on her obituary in 'The Guardian' by Julia Langdon for which due acknowledgment is given.

The Carpanini Cafés: Mountain Ash

After Andrea Carpanini died in 1964, his wife Maria took over the ownership of the shop at Mountain Ash and her son Giuseppe, (nicknamed Pino), ran the café and lived above the shop.

Every morning at 5am, they would go to the railway station to collect the ice, and then make the ice cream in a room at the back of the shop.

They worked hard in the 1960s, and never turned anyone away. Tramps were given a flask of tea and a pie to take away. The cafe was a welcoming place to meet for all ages. It was always busy on Sunday when they served a roast dinner between 1pm and 3pm.

There are many couples still married who would meet in the cafe whilst courting. Many youths came to the café, as there was a jukebox there.

The shop next door was bought and was merged with the café in October 1982.

It became a fish and chip shop that stayed open until 11pm.

During the Miners' Strike, the Carpanini's donated a box of food every week for the miners and their families.

Disasters

The café has overcome various disasters. Pino married Maria Provini and the first night back from their honeymoon, Maria and Pino woke up to find they had been burgled and sadly, everything was gone.

Several years later, they bought a new fridge for the stockroom. Fortunately, Pino was a very light sleeper and was awoken by the smell of smoke. He went down to the stockroom and found their brand new fridge was on fire. He put out the fire but the shop was a mess.

They have also been flooded twice, in the autumn of 1960 and in December 1979. On the latter date, the water level was five feet high. Windows were smashed with the force of the water, seats were floating down the river, and all of their stock was ruined. The council supplied heavy industrial machines to dry out the cafe, and the entire family and many neighbours all came to help clean and re-stock. Despite the immense damage, and due to the assistance from friends and family, the cafe was able to re-open within a week and customers came back in droves.

Pino sadly died in 1999, and the name of the café was changed to *Pino's Cafe* in memory of him.

Their worst disaster was the sudden death of their youngest son, Bruno, who collapsed after a bicycle ride on 12th November 2013 at the age of 47. Bruno is buried in Mountain Ash, but Pino and Morris are interred in a niche in a little chapel in Bardi. Maria plans to add a memorial stone for Bruno in that family chapel.

His brother Andrew (junior) then took over the running of the café. His wife, Marina, is also descended from Italian immigrants. They came from Rome in the early 1960s and worked in a café in Bristol, where Marina was born. Andrew and Marina met at Belmont Abbey, at one of the annual Italian outings, where a Mass was held in the Abbey, followed by a picnic on the grass. They have been married since 1989.

The café has won various awards, twice for their ice cream. A group of five men and women came to inspect the place and taste their ice cream, and out of 90 other shops, the prize was given to *Pino's Cafe*.

Recently Andrew sold the café thus ending almost 70 years of a rare survival of a great Welsh-Italian café tradition in the valleys, but the tradition of a welcoming atmosphere along with good food for reasonable prices, *Pino's Café* will, I am sure, continue.

[I would like to thank Andrew Carpanini, (Pino's son), who gave this information to Julia Ziomek, (the Mountain Ash librarian), who kindly passed it on to me. Ed.]

The Carpanini Cafés: Aberdare

Angelo Carpanini was born in Bardi, Italy on 20th August 1896. I believe he was no relation to the Abercynon and Mountain Ash Carpanini's!

He married Maria Sterlini there and they emigrated to Wales, coming to Maerdy a few years before 1924 where their eldest daughter Alma was born.

In 1926, (rather a bad year with the General Strike taking place), they bought premises in Duke Street, Aberdare, where they opened a café and fish and chip shop. The latter was beside the Low Level Railway Station, on its left was the café/restaurant, and behind it was a function room with the River Dare flowing behind it. The hours of business were very long: 9am to 11.30pm!

They were a jovial and friendly couple and lived at 25 College Street, Abernant. Sadly, Angelo sadly died in December 1973.

The restaurant and fish and chip shop was demolished when the Aberdare by-pass was built in 1984.

Alma was a character: she played the accordion and sang and also started a young people's club for all denominations of Aberdare's youth on Sunday nights at the schoolroom of the Roman Catholic Church where table tennis and draughts were played.

She married David Meyrick who died in the mid-1980s. They had two children: Anthony and Linda. She remarried Dewi Morgans who was the Director of Cynon Valley Borough Council Technical Services Department. She later was elected President of the Aberdare Inner Wheel.

Alma had two sisters: Joan who lived in Monk Street, Aberdare was a professional singer; the third sister was Renee.

My thanks to Celia Thomas, Rod Jenkins and Rob Jones for this information.

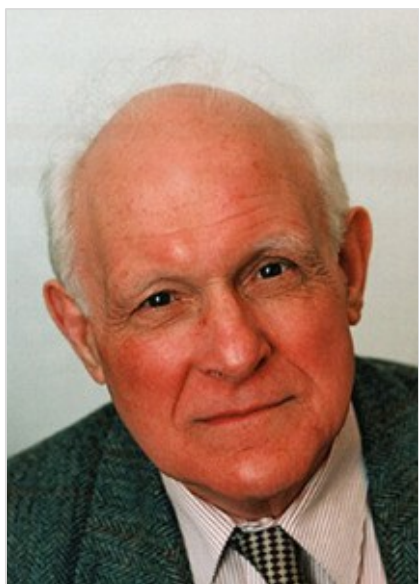
The Servini family, (continued)

There is a 6-minute video featuring Robert Servini. He discusses the Italian cafés of south Wales, and his family's involvement in them, see

<https://youtu.be/nHOKhJep45I>

Obituary

Professor Brynley Roberts, C.B.E., M.A., Ph.D.



Brynley Francis Roberts

Brynley Roberts was one of the valley's most distinguished academics who died on 17th August, aged 92.

Bryn was born in 16 Stuart Street, Foundry Town, Aberdare in 1931, the son of Robert and Laura Roberts (née Williams). Bryn's father, (a native of Caernarfon), was a printer with Wilcox and then with Stephens & George, (S&G), until his retirement. With his knowledge of the Aberdare printing industry, Bryn wrote, much later, an article about it in *Old Aberdare*, Volume 3.

Bryn received his primary education at the Town Council School, (now Caradog), before entering the County School in 1941. Whilst at school he was a keen rugby player and represented his school in its 1st XV in successive seasons.

Writing books was one of his specialties: he started early in life: In 1947, he wrote the songs of *Ysgol Ramadeg y Bechgyn*.

He went to Aberystwyth in 1948, graduated in 1951, then did some teacher training and research. Later he did his National Service where he took a Russian translator's course, which he said was rather like a relaxed, eccentric school.

Two important events took place in his life: in 1957 he married Rhiannon Campbell of Trecynon, and he gained promotion onto the staff of the Welsh Department at Aberystwyth University, having been appointed as Lecturer in Celtic Philology, Cornish and Medieval Welsh.

He left in 1978 to become Professor of Welsh Language and Literature at Swansea University.

The peak of his career came when he was appointed Librarian at the National Library of Wales, where he stayed from 1985 to 1994. During that period, in 1987, he was appointed as editor of the Dictionary of Welsh Biography.

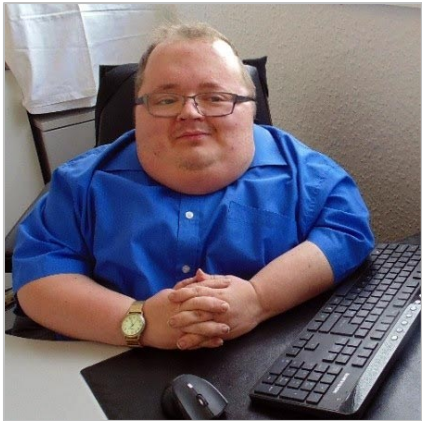
He kindly wrote for our society in 1993 an article on "Some Aberdare Place-Names," which was published in *Old Aberdare* Volume 7, in addition to the article mentioned above on "Printing in Aberdare".

In 1994 he retired and continued living in Aberystwyth. His retirement was not a slumbering one but a busy one. Later at the grand old age of 92, he wrote in 2022 a book in English about the antiquarian Edward Lhwyd.

As David Leslie Davies says in *Clochdar* No. 334, Hydref 2023, (which has a more detailed obituary about Bryn), "Cwm Cynon is much the poorer for the loss of one of its brightest sons."

Source: ABGS website.

Councillor Richard Jones



Richard Jones sadly passed away several weeks ago. Despite being born with brittle bones and being confined to a wheelchair, he amazingly overcame all these problems and worked wonderfully well for the welfare of people in this valley and throughout Wales. He was a Principal Consultant for Accessible Wales and was deeply concerned that disabled people should have equal rights.

Chairing organisations came easy to Richard: he was Chair of the Cynon Valley Museum Trust; Chairperson of the Cynon Valley Constituency Labour Party; Chairman of Accessible Caring Transport based in

Mountain Ash, and Chair of the local Citizens Advice Bureau.

In addition, he was a Community Councillor for Hirwaun and Penderyn Community Council, a school governor of Hirwaun Primary school, and in 2022, he became a governor of the local Welsh-medium comprehensive school, Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Rhydywaun at Penywaun.

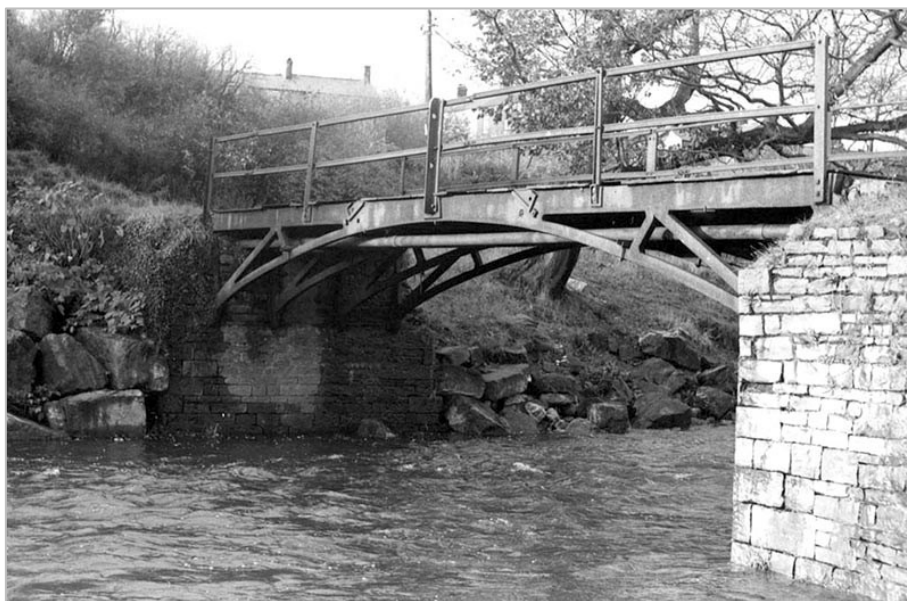
In his relatively short yet full life, he increased the well-being of so many people and will be greatly missed.

Glenys Kendall

Mrs Kendall, who was the Secretary of Christchurch Baptist Church, Gadlys for 62 years died, in October aged 100. Recently, Glenys gave her time to record her recollections of the Cwm in an interview with local historians. She lived in Maelgwyn Terrace, very near the Cwm, all her life. She was a dedicated Christian lady who will be greatly missed.

Robertstown Tramroad Bridge

This bridge was built in 1811 to carry the tramroad that linked the ironworks of Aberdare to Hirwaun and the canal basin at Glynneath. After having suffered extensive damage in the last few years, it has been restored after a lengthy closure, and has now been re-opened.



The Tramroad Bridge before the damage caused by Storm Dennis



When the bridge deck had been removed.



The bridge after the repairs had been completed. The handrails are a new feature.

The Geological history of the Cynon Valley



Dr David Roberts, now of Abergavenny, but originally from Blaengwawr and former Head of Geology at Staffordshire Polytechnic, has written an excellent account entitled 600 Million Years of Cynon Valley Geological History. It deals with the rocks below the valley, the rocks visible in the valley as well as the evolution of the River Cynon, and glacial events. The thoroughly researched account can be viewed on our web site in the Historical Notes Section at

<https://www.cvhs.org.uk/DERoberts/contents.html>

50th Anniversary of the Dare Valley Country Park

This December the Dare Valley Country Park celebrates its 50th year of its opening; it was opened on 5th December 1973.

It is unique in several ways: it was the first to be established by a District Council and the first to be created on largely reclaimed derelict land. Much of this land was given by the National Coal Board.

Reclamation work started in 1971 and included the levelling of tips, the river Dare was re-routed with the forming of two lakes and a cascade, together with the grassing of the reclaimed areas and 20,000 trees were planted in the park.

The Nantmelyn and Powell's collieries were demolished. This action, in my opinion, was very short-sighted as they could have been made into tourist attractions, but the Aberfan tragedy was still very strong in the minds of everyone and it was thought that all disused collieries should be demolished.

A Visitor Centre opened on 28th September 1985, but it was built on the site of the former Powell's Pit. This centre has been greatly used but to build it on the site of Powell's Pit, was this a good idea! Yet some things were saved from the past: The cast iron pillars, which support the balcony of the centre, were salvaged from Calfaria chapel, Abercynon,

while the clock was "plucked in the nick of time" from Noddfa chapel, Godreaman.

The management of the park was entrusted to a Warden Service, the first warden was Ossie Gates who looked after the day-to-day running of the park and most importantly, helped the public enjoy it. In 1986, the Warden Service was incorporated into the Countryside Ranger Service; the person in charge of it was David (Dai) Protheroe. He also acted as the "Dame" in Cwmaman Theatre Pantomimes.

The park has held numerous events: Fishing in the lakes, children pond dipping, raft racing and canoeing have taken place.

Within the park, the Green Meadow Riding School organizes riding lessons, and sheep dog demonstrations have taken place.

The buildings and facilities have greatly increased over the years:

An Interpretation Centre was opened in the early 1990s

Camping facilities and the Caravan Park have expanded.

A two-storey accommodation block has been built.

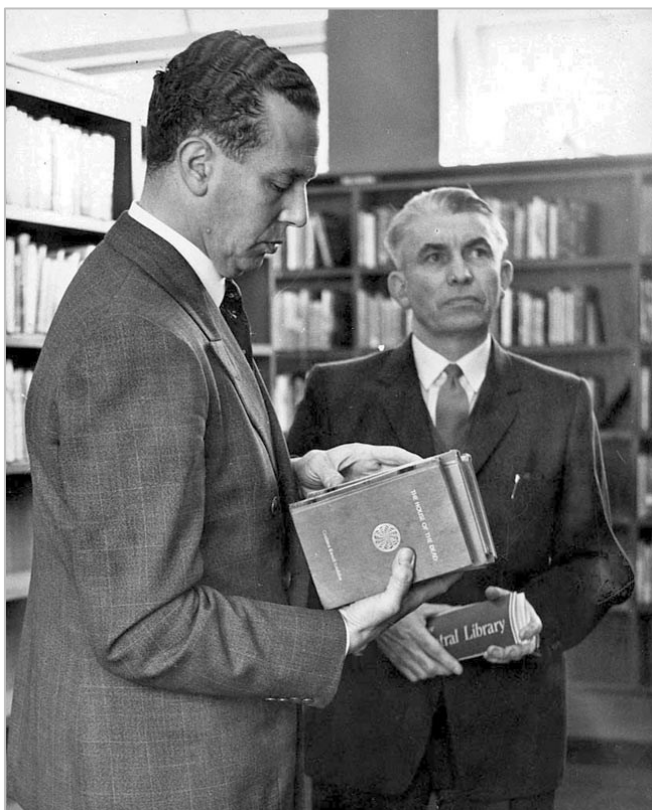
Recently a Mountain Bike circuit has opened which is very successful.

The café in the Visitor centre is always popular.

Shakespeare plays have taken place in the courtyard and an *'Allo 'Allo!* play was recently performed in the Visitor Centre.

During the Covid-19 epidemic, the Country Park was a huge asset to the local community, long may it continue!

Aberdare Library's 60th Birthday Celebrations



Sir Keith Joseph and Glyn John, Librarian

Aberdare Central Library was opened by Sir Keith Joseph on 25th September 1963.

Since then it has been the centre of many of Aberdare's events. From 23rd to 30th September this year, there were numerous celebratory proceedings:

It started with a bang on 23rd with a Fun Day outside the library from 10am to 3.30pm organized by 'Our Aberdare'.

Inside the library, a coffee morning was held and there were children's craft activities.

During the week, the Reference Library meeting room became a "Cinema" showing films of local history materials, the creation of the library staircase mural etc.

Also during the week local schools took part in a birthday card competition for the library's 60th birthday, "More than a Song Choir" performed, and a local writers' anthology was launched. A 1960s Fashion show, local history research, and "Books of the 60s" events took place.

Past Personalities of the Library

- Mr Glyn I. John, Borough Librarian, and a keen photographer
- Mr Gwynfryn Davies, Borough Librarian
- Miss Betty Evans, Lending Librarian
- Mr Richard Arnold, a keen local historian, Borough Librarian
- Ms Tydfil Adams, a Mobile Library Assistant who had a meteoric rise to Borough Librarian and eventually became Powys County Librarian
- Ms Helen Osborne, Children's Librarian who improved Children's libraries in the borough so much that she was commended several times by the Chief Executive.
- Mr Steven Graham, [myself Ed.], Reference Librarian during two periods between 1982 and 2014.
- Mrs Julie Jones, Borough Librarian and RCT Borough Librarian from 1996.



The formal opening of Aberdare Central Library in what is now called Library Square
25th September 1963

Library Photographs by kind permission of the RCT Photographic Archive

CVHS LECTURES 2024

Date	Speaker	Topic
18 January	Chris Parry	Francis Crawshay's Workers' Portraits
15 February	Robert Jones	Robertstown Tramroad Bridge
21 March	David Maddox	Pontypridd Under Siege: The trial of the Treorchy Rioters
18 April	Robert Jones	Proposed launch of the book, 'The Cwm: A Lost Community' TBC
16 May	Brian Davies	Restoration of the Great Western Colliery, Hopkinstown
20 June	Steven Graham	History of two Eisteddfodau held in the Cynon Valley

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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