



Hanes:

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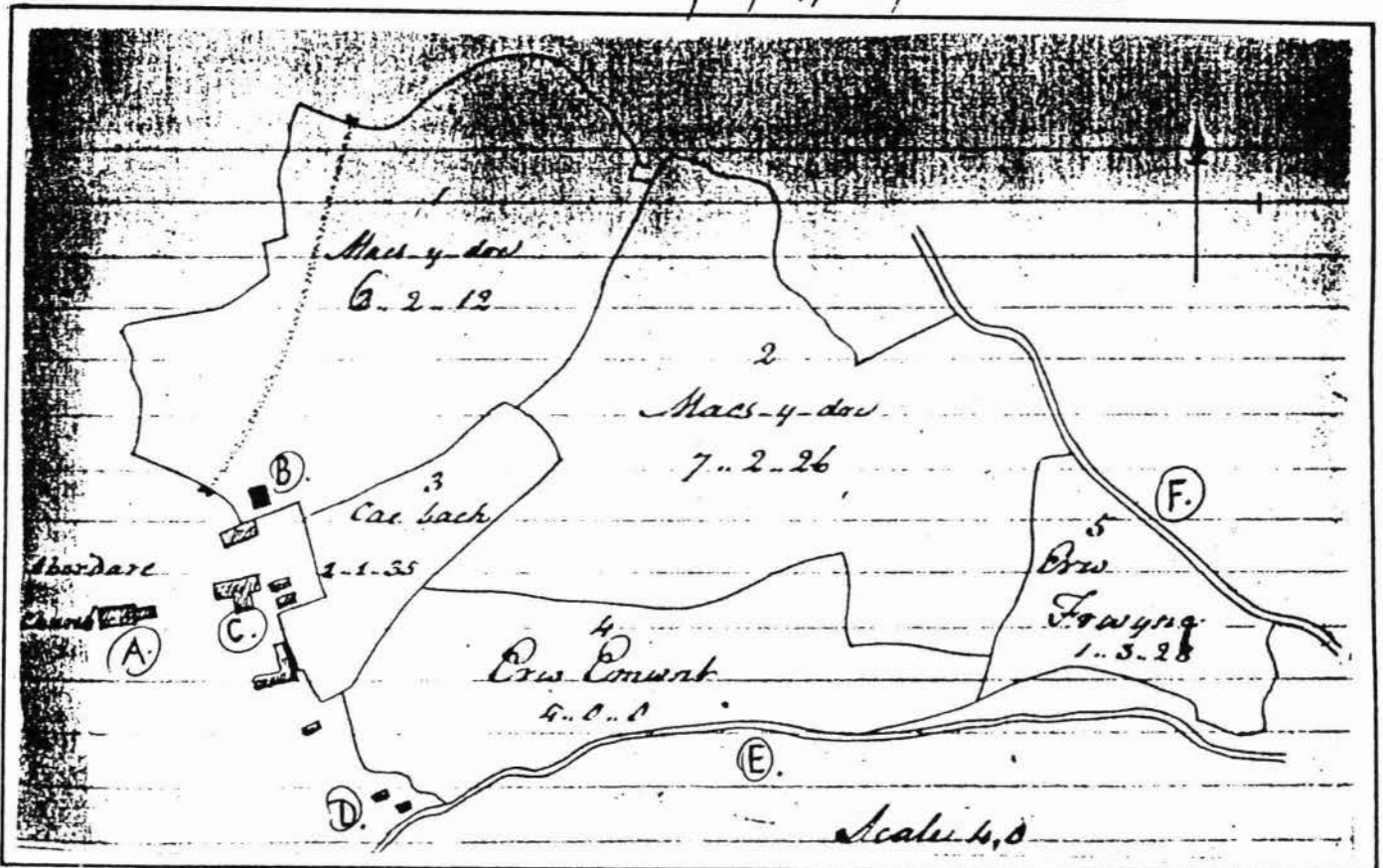
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To the public: 15p

Newsletter of the Cynon Valley History Society/Cylchlythyr Cymdeithas Hanes
Cwm Cynon.

A View of Aberdare in 1800...

-by Geoffrey Evans.



OLD PHOTOGRAPHS NO.5: Church lands at the centre of Aberdare Village, c.1800. (Source: by kind permission of Gloucestershire Record Office, Records of the Dean & Chapter of Gloucester Cathedral, D936.Y/57/1 and D936.Y/57/2).

Ever since 1541, when king Henry VIII gave the endowments of Tewkesbury Abbey to the new cathedral church of Gloucester, the Dean & Chapter of Gloucester owned the tithes of the parish of Aberdare, and with them the glebelands intended to support the local clergyman. Among the cathedral records at Gloucester Record Office are two "Surveys of Tithes" which assess the value of tithes due to the cathedral chapter from this district. Neither survey is dated, but are listed as c.1800 and c.1803.

The above map is taken from the first of these. It shows the extent of church lands in that part of Aberdare still known as Maes-y-Dre. The numbers shown on the map

are original & relate to field-names listed in the Survey. 'Erw Emwnt' signifies 'Edmund's Acre'; 'Erw Frwyn(o)g' means 'Rushes Acre'. The most remarkable thing is the survival of the old field-name Maes-y-Dre despite the fact that it has never been officially adopted.

Letters on the map have been added by me to help identify sites of interest. These include (A) St John's Parish Church; (B) the local tithe barn; (C) Ty Mawr; (D) probable site of the local corn mill; (E) the river Dare; and (F) the river Cynon.

In the second of these Surveys (1803) there is an interesting general note about

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A History of the Werfa Families:

PART ONE:

- BY EDWARD G. WILLIAMS.

THIS IS THE FIRST OF THREE ARTICLES BY MR. EDWARD WILLIAMS OF CHEPSTOW, A DESCENDANT OF THE VARIOUS 'WERFA FAMILIES' WHOSE HISTORY HE HERE DESCRIBES. MR. WILLIAMS IS ALSO A MEMBER OF THE C.V.H.S DESPITE THE DISTANCE AT WHICH HE LIVES. HIS THREE ARTICLES ARE ALL BASED ON ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS STILL IN THE POSSESSION OF THE WILLIAMS FAMILY. PART 1 DEALS WITH THE REESES OF WERFA; PART 2 WILL FOCUS ON THE SUBSEQUENT WILLIAMS FAMILY OF WERFA; & PART 3 WILL BE CONCERNED WITH THE VARIOUS PROPERTIES OWNED AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER BY THESE TWO CONNECTIONS. ED.

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The original Werfa homestead, whose ruins lie on the hillside above present-day Cwmbach, was for much of its history the home of the Rees family.

The first of the Reeses to settle at 'Tir y Werfa' are said to have come to Aberdare from Cilymaenllwyd, Carms., during the 1660's. Initially they and their successors held the farm as tenants of a series of landlords, the last of whom was Edward Mathew (IV) of Aberaman.

The first Rees occupant of the Werfa seems to have died c.1708, for in that year a new tenancy was granted to a Thomas Rees who was presumably his son. The property was a modest one at this time, consisting of a dwellinghouse, a cowhouse & barn, together with "100 acrs (sic) of Welsh measure". From this small start Thomas Rees & his successors were to build up assets which made them one of the more well-to-do families of the locality. Thomas Rees himself started the process when, it is said, he bought the Gamlyn Isaf farm in about 1727. Some time later he also bought The Court estate at Merthyr Tydfil which had long belonged to the Lewises of Y Fan, Caerphilly¹. Before his death in c.1752, Thomas & his son had acquired other leasehold farms in the Merthyr & Aberdare districts. The Court proved a sound investment many years later when its land was sought for building during the expansion of Merthyr.

For clarity, it may be best to list the Rees generations & their abodes. The several Thomas Reeses are numbered:-

The Rees Family:

1	- ? - Rees	Werfa	founder at Aberdare
2	Thomas Rees I	Werfa & Court	son (?) of no.1
3	Rees Thos. Rees	Werfa & Court	son of no.2
4	Thomas Rees II	Court	son of no.3)
5	Samuel Rees	Werfa & Court	son of no.3) brothers
6	Thomas Rees III	Gamlyn Isaf	son of no.5
7	Thomas Rees IV	Gamlyn Isaf	son of no.6
8	Dr Wm Thomas	Court	bro-in-law of no.6
9	Richard Thomas	Court	son of no.8

The first Thomas Rees above had at least one son - Rees Thos. Rees; but it is not certain whether it was R.T.R. or perhaps another son who later lived at The Court & is said to have given permission to the revivalist Howel Harris to address the village folk in the open space in front of the old Court House. The owner of The Court & the local rector weré the leading personages, & during the 1760's are said to have had things much their own way.

Whether he lived at the The Court or not, R.T.R. certainly owned it, for at his death it descended to the eldest of his 6 sons, Thomas Rees II. The youngest son, Samuel, remained at Werfa; and in 1787 bought the freehold from the landlord, Edward Mathew of Aberaman, for £250. In 1803, he also became owner of The Court & its estate which his brother, Thomas II, left to him when he died that year without an heir. Thus, Samuel Rees became one of the main landowners of the area at that time. He seems to have preferred the Werfa as a residence to The Court, in Merthyr. He was perhaps more interested in domestic than in public affairs, though he is said to have been one of the representatives of Aberdare farmers when they took legal action against the Marquess of Bute in 1790, in defence of common-rights at Hirwaun²; and he may have been the Samuel Rees named as one of the two high constables of Miskin Hundred in 1799.

Of his later years, it is said that when he had cause to journey from Werfa to Merthyr he would travel along the mountain-top track esconced "in a gambo cart, in which he sat in a straw beehive chair firmly secured to the vehicle...a curious spectacle...". In the eve of his life he was remembered by some as "an

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.../from p.2: THE REES FAMILY (contd):

eccentric but worthy man...a quaint old gentleman".

Samuel Rees' wife, whom he married in 1781, was Margaret Thomas, & she is said to have come from the Dyffryn, nr. Aberdare. Before her death in 1804, she had borne him three children - Thomas, Jane & Mary. His only son, Thomas Rees III (who at the age of 20 was a captain in the local Volunteers), inherited the Gamlyn Isa farm under the terms of his grandfather's Will made in 1787. According to the parish history published in Gardd Aberdar in 1854, Thomas III went on to buy the neighbouring Gamlyn Uchaf farm for £1,100 in 1820³. Interestingly, an Indenture of 1807 records the sale by him of a strip of land to the Tappendens of Abernant Ironworks, for the tramroad they had constructed to link their works with the head of the Neath Canal.

In 1819 Thomas III, at the age of 37, married Margaret Davies of Llwydcoed. She was still a minor; and his father, Samuel (by now a widower) strongly disapproved. Thomas & his wife settled at Gamlyn Isaf. Fortunately, father & son healed their differences & a Deed of Settlement was drawn up between them to ensure that after Samuel's days his lands would pass to his son & to the latter's heirs. In the event, however, Thomas III predeceased his father, and died in 1824 aged 42. He left a young son, Thomas IV. The small child should have been the next heir under the previous Deed of Settlement, but fate decreed otherwise.

A few years earlier, Jane, daughter of Samuel Rees & sister of Thomas III, married for the second time. Her new husband was William Thomas, a Merthyr surgeon & a keenly ambitious man.

By 1827, Samuel was sick & 83 years old; & Wm Thomas had managed to persuade him to make over the Werfa & Court estates to himself - allegedly for £11,000. The transfer documents were signed in April, 1827. It was later claimed by some that the Merthyr attorney Wm Meyrick (who had long been the Rees family's own legal adviser) was a party to the transaction;

NOTICE REGARDING MEMBERSHIP OF C.V.H.S:

New members are always welcome. Please contact J.F. Near, Secretary, 7, Tudor Tce, ABERDARE (878349) or any member. Publications (as available) from Doug Williams, 29, Tudor Tce, ABERDARE (877398). Items for Hanes to D.L. Davies, 5, Milton St, Cwmaman, ABERDARE (873226).

and the relevant indenture documents do indeed reveal that the doctor raised some of the purchase money from Meyrick, to whom he mortgaged the two estates as security.

Samuel Rees died soon after this transference, in January, 1828; but before this it is said he was further inveigled to make a new Will in favour of Wm Thomas & his wife, Jane, the latter being made his executrix. Claims were also put about that the earlier Deed of Settlement between old Samuel & his son Thomas III had not been properly witnessed, & was therefore invalid. The effect of these new provisions was to disinherit Samuel's young grandson, Thomas IV.

Thus ended the Rees family's 160-year old occupation of Werfa (c.1660 - 1828). The widow of Thomas III & her disinherited son remained at their Gamlyn Isaf home which her husband had inherited & owned in his own right and which she therefore retained. Their son, Thomas IV, survived only to the age of 33; and with his death in 1854 ended the male line of descent from the 17th century Reeses of Werfa.

Dr Wm Thomas eventually became a local magistrate⁴ & a person of some consequence in the Merthyr district. He continued to live at The Court until his death in 1858, when he was succeeded there by his son, Richard. Neither of them seems ever to have lived at the Werfa: the farm was leased to a succession of tenants while the mineral rights were leased to the Marquess of Bute. The marquess in turn sub-let them to John Nixon who subsequently founded the first 'Werfa Colliery' nr. Cwmbach.

EDITOR'S NOTES:

(1) It is generally held that Edward Lewis of Y Fan first sold The Court estate sometime after 1715 in order to pay the fine of £10,000 imposed on him for speaking in favour of James Stuart, the Jacobite 'Old Pretender' (see The Story Of Merthyr Tydfil, Cardiff, 1932, p.136).

(2) For details see A Descriptive & Historical Sketch of Aberdare (1885), reprinted in Old Aberdare, vol. 1, p.62; also observations in OA, vol. 2, pp.65/66.

(3) This is translated & reprinted in OA, vol. p.52. Elsewhere in his notes, Edward Williams states the actual date of purchase was the 8th July, 1822 (for £1,100; at an auction in the Castle Hotel, Merthyr); thus confirming well the 'traditional testimony' of Gardd Aberdar.

(4) Wm Thomas & Wm Meyrick advanced - but only with difficulty. The Bute agent, E.P. Richards wrote of W.T. '(he) was not of the class of individuals whom I think your lordship would introduce into the Commission of Peace'; & of W. he wrote 'there is something unsavoury about Mr Meyrick's household'. (See John Davies, Cardiff & the Marquesses of Bute, 1981, p.103).

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.../from p.1: ABERDARE IN 1800 (contd):

the transition of the Aberdare district from being a rural backwater to being a centre of industry and manufacture. There is also a short note about the 5 fields shown on this map as comprising the glebeland of the church. As these are likely to be of interest & value to many local historians they are given in full below:-

(a) GENERAL NOTE:

"This Parish is very extensive, but chiefly Mountainous (sic). When the last Survey was taken by Mr* there appear'd to be about 520 Acres of Land annually sown with Corn; whereas at present the quantity this Year is only 179½. the reason of this very great decrease is that the Iron Works are greatly extended, and the Proprietors consider Agriculture too trifling for their attention, and do not encourage it in a Country where the Labourers can earn so much more in the Mines or Manufactories than they could by following Plough (sic). they are therefore enabled to buy Corn cheaper than they could raise it, whose Labour is so high, and the Soil in general so unproductive. and as they keep a great number of Horses for the use of the Works, it is of more consequence to them to lay their Land down to grass than to keep it in tillage."

(b) SHORT NOTE REGARDING GLEBELAND FIELDS:

"Tith Barn & Glebe Land consisting of ...Meadows (which) lie very wet & so low that they cannot be drain'd, but as so many Horses are kept here they are more valuable than they would be otherwise." (D936.Y/57/2)

N.B: 'Mr': the name as written is not at all clear; it might be 'Mr Stone' or possibly 'Mr Hoare' or a name similar to either of these.



The ambitious publishing programme undertaken by the committee of the Cynon Valley History Society on behalf of all members takes an exciting leap forward **later this year** with the planned appearance of a new volume entitled ABERDARE: PICTURES FROM THE PAST.

This book will contain over 200 photographs touching upon all aspects of life in the locality since about 1870; & most of these will never have been published before. When coupled with the detailed captions that will accompany each photograph, this book is likely to become the most comprehensive volume of its kind ever produced by a **voluntary** history society in the south Wales valleys.

The printing is being done by Brown & Sons of Cowbridge - a firm noted for the exceptional quality of their work. The book is **certain** to be a rapid seller and considerable interest in it has been expressed locally & beyond. The price will be £7.50. One advance-order has already reached Doug Williams, our diligent publications secretary - from Nebraska, U.S.A. Anyone else keen to secure their copy before the rush starts can contact Doug by 'phone (877398) or at any forthcoming meeting of the society.

IT HARDLY NEEDS SAYING THAT A BOOK OF THIS SORT WILL NOT ONLY 'FILL A GAP' IN OUR RANGE OF PUBLICATIONS, BUT WILL BE THE PERFECT CHRISTMAS PRESENT FOR RELATIVES NEAR OR FAR. THIS IS ESPECIALLY SO AS THE BOOK IS DUE TO APPEAR IN THE SHOPS DURING EARLY DECEMBER, 1986.

NEWS...NEWS...NEWS...NEWS

- * THE ANNUAL AUTUMN TRIP of the Society took place on Saturday, 20th Sept., to Cirencester & its famous Corinium Museum, & also to the city of Gloucester where attention was divided between the superb cathedral & the Museum of Packaging in the dockland development. An extremely rewarding day was had by all & our sincere thanks to Doug Williams for organising everything - even down to the 2 blown-tyres on one of our coaches! Some said it was a plot to get us to march into Gloucester like a phalanx of Auxiliaries!
- * A WARM WELCOME TO MR. STEVEN GRAHAM, the new Reference Librarian at Aberdare Library, to the committee of the society w.e.f September. We wish him well among us & in his wider responsibilities.

- * THE SOCIETY MEETS regularly on the 3rd Thursday of each month (bar August). The chairman & vice-chairman for 1986/87 are Edwin Greening & Rhodri Humphreys. We welcome 2 other new committee members: Phil Davies, of Mt. Ash, & Victor Evans, Cardiff (ex-Aberdare).
- * THE OLD MARKET HALL, ABERDARE, (a Listed Building) should soon have the inscription 'ABERDARE·1853·MARKET' restored to it. A planning application Notice was published in the Aberdare Leader 18/9/86.
- * CONGRATULATIONS TO PONTYPRIDD Town Council on their most impressive feat in adapting the old Tabernacl Baptist Chapel into a heritage centre for the area. It's a first-rate job!