



HISTORIC STRUCTURES AT RISK

Two monuments of the age of tramroads in the Cynon Valley are deteriorating to the extent that urgent remedial work is called for to stop them falling down. The tramroad bridges at Gelli Isaf and the former Hirwaun Iron Works, both scheduled ancient monuments which have had little or no maintenance in living memory, are being damaged by tree growth and by the dropping out of sections of masonry.

The bridge or "causeway" at Hirwaun, dating from about 1809, is thought to be the best survivor of its kind and has been adjudged to be of International importance. It carried the Aberdare Canal Company's tramroad over the Cynon at the eastern boundary of the ironworks and ran from there to Penderyn. Although a public right of way it has been closed for some years.

Gelli Isaf bridge is also a right of way. The present bridge is a replacement dated 1834 of the bridge originally built by the Abernant Iron Company to carry their tramroad to Pontwalby over the Cynon and was afterwards taken over by the Aberdare Canal Company. It is said to have particular importance to Wales. It is still used by walkers most of whom are unaware that part of the arch on the upstream side has fallen into the river.

Responsibility for repairs to these bridges lies with RCT Council who have decided to programme remedial works for the Gelli Isaf bridge "in accordance with appropriate priority and subject to available finance". A few years ago a consultation process took place at Hirwaun regarding the future of the ironworks site and the "Bont Fawr," as it is known, but no news of any decision regarding its conservation has emerged.

The remarkable thing about the causeway is its dimensions, being about 300 metres long and about 9.2 metres high, features which are not readily apparent because it is heavily overgrown with ivy. Because of its size the cost of consolidation of the causeway must be alarmingly high, but this will be small when compared with the cost of restoration should the causeway or part of it fall down. What this means is, that should it collapse, it will probably never be repaired, and might in fact be demolished on the grounds of safety.

In crude volume terms, about 99% of everything that has ever happened in our valley took place in the last 200 years. But for years we have been sweeping away the remaining vestiges of our contribution to the industrial revolution. In most cases this has been a good thing. But why are we apparently leaving such important monuments as these bridges to fall into decay?

One day, soon, it will be too late. The causeway is regarded with a great deal of affection and indeed pride by the inhabitants of Hirwaun. When are they going to band together to save the "Great Bridge"? While waiting to hear of developments I shall send a copy of this "HANES" to the relevant councillors as a Xmas box.

A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE TRAMROADS OF THE AREA

At the beginning of the 19th century ironworks were being built at Llwydcoed and Abernant (the Hirwaun ironworks were already in existence). The steam locomotive had not by then reached a stage of development which made its general adoption irresistible and the long-distance transport of heavy materials such as iron, coal, slate, etc. was by means of coastal shipping feeding (and fed by) canals and navigable rivers. An act had been obtained in 1793 to build a canal from Aberdare to the Glamorgan canal at Abercynon but in view of the slow development of the local iron industry the canal proprietors had deferred the cutting of the canal indefinitely. The local ironmasters urgently required access to the sea and turned their eyes to the head of the Neath canal at Glyn-neath. Thereafter the Tappendens, two of the four partners in the Abernant Iron Company, built a tramroad from Abernant to the canal, passing through the Llwydcoed works (the owners of which were the Aberdare Iron Company) and connecting with the Hirwaun works by using part of a pre-existing tramroad (Glover's tramroad) from Bryngwyn to the works. Tappenden's tramroad to Glyn-neath opened at the end of 1804 though the great Penrhiw incline at its western end and its steam winding engine gave endless trouble.

In 1812 the Aberdare canal was opened, forming a connection with the Glamorgan canal at Abercynon. The canal company built (probably in the same year) a tramroad from the head of the canal near Ynyscynon to the Aberdare Iron Company's works at Llwydcoed. This used the well-known Iron bridge at Robertstown to cross the Cynon and then ran up its west bank to Gelli Isaf where it joined Tappenden's tramroad.

A number of shorter tramroads were built of which the most important were the Gadlys Iron Works tramroad which joined the ACC's tramroad on the west side of the Robertstown bridge and the Abernant Iron Company's tramroad from the Abernant works to the head of the Aberdare canal. The former was probably opened in about 1827 and the latter in 1819 or shortly after. When the railways came the canals could no longer compete and they and their associated tramroads began to decline. The final death blow for the Aberdare system came with the abandonment of iron making by 1875.

Now on sale, "Old Aberdare" vol. 8 See page 2

Book News

The main news is that "Old Aberdare" Vol 8 is now ready and our Sales Officer Elfed Bowen will have copies for sale at the December meeting. It will also be on sale at the Library, the Country Park and local shops. Postal sales will be carried out as usual by Tom Evans. Stocks of the reprint of Vol 2 are dwindling rapidly.

Details of other books of local interest are as follows;

"Llwydcoed in old Photographs" by Jean and Russell John available from them for £11 inc. P & P. Write to 566 Filton Avenue, Bristol, BS7 0QG. (Their earlier book "Grey Trees" is sold out).

"A History of the Villages of Hirwaun and Rhigos" by Nansi Selwood costs £11.50 (inc. P & P) and is available from her. Write to Pen y-Cae farm, Pontpren, Penderyn, CF44 0SJ

"Poor Law Relief in Merthyr Tydfil Union in Victorian Times" By Tydfil Thomas. (The Merthyr Union included the Parish of Aberdare). This hard-back book is available from the County Record Office, County Hall, Cathays Park, Cardiff, price £17.50 (inc. P & P). Mrs Thomas's recent novel "A fierce Flame" which is set mainly in 19th century Merthyr is obtainable price £10 (inc. P & P) from the publishers, Minerva Press, 195 Knightsbridge, London, SW7 1RE

Less than a dozen copies of Alan Vernon Jones's translation of William Bevan's "History of Mountain Ash" (1896) are left. The price is £4.95. Write telephone or call Mr A V Jones, 3 Holly Drive, Cwmdare, Aberdare. Tel (01685) 879731.

Dr R K J Grant's "The Cynon Valley in the Age of Iron,' (price £8) is still available from the Central Library and the Country Park (as are some of the books listed above). It is also obtainable by post (price £8.50) from the author at 19 Granville Tce, Mountain Ash.

Also still available is the Editor's "The story of Cwmdare" available from him. (Address on back page) at £10.00 or £12.00 by post.

Diary Of A Victorian Country Girl

The small farm of Ty'n y waun was at one time the only building of any significance in the area afterwards occupied by the village of Cwmdare. The original thatched building was rebuilt in 1888 and much altered again a few years ago. When the farmer James Lacy died in 1856 his widow Mary continued to run the farm with the help of her five children. However four of them eventually moved away leaving only Joan at home to assist her mother. However there were apparently one or two servants there as well and Joan seems to

have had plenty of time for socialising and chapel-going, and a 19-day holiday at Tenby. This we know from a diary relating to the first seven months of 1879 which has survived. The diary for January and February is printed here by kind permission of a present-day member of the family, Mr David Welton. In the diary Joan's suitor Evan Davies, an Aberdare butcher, is referred to by means of a dash or is described as "my boy", or "someone."

Diary of Joan Lacy dated 1879

- 1 Jan. A very wet day, Went down to Carmel this evening to a concert. My Boy met me and walked home.
2. Went to chapel this evening. Called at John Jones' and found him not in a very good humour. He said that I had been the means of changing the night of the meeting.
3. Went to town today. Called to see May and had a long chat.
5. Today I have been to chapel and had two excellent sermons with Richard, and a capital singing school afterwards.
6. Been to a prayer meeting tonight, afterwards for a walk
7. Went to town this morning to see excise officer about keeping a dog without a licence. Told me I had better see the supervisor. Chapel in the evening.
8. Decided not to go to Brecon. Went to town to send a Post Office Order for rent. Ground covered with snow and very cold. Chapel in the evening.
9. Still very cold. Went to Merthyr to see the supervisor. Told me he didn't know whether we would be allowed to keep a dog but that we should hear from him again and until then would be safe without a licence. Returned by the 7 p.m train. Met my boy and walked home
10. Today I have been very busy preparing to go to Tenby, Went to chapel in the morning, not many there, so cold. A very good meeting. Heaven bless those that went out.
- 11, Here I am in Tenby, lost my luggage. Had a very cold Journey.
- 12, Today has been rather miserable. Only went out in time for evening service. Had a good sermon. Saw Mr Thomas and spoke to him.
13. My birthday. Another year of my life has Just flown away - yes gone! Oh how forgetful I have been of him who has kept me from all danger. If I am spared another year, Lord grant that I may live near to thy glory!
14. Today I had to do the housework. Eliza went home to bury her sister.

15. Very tired. No bed last night. Eliza did not come. Had a letter from home this morning, my dear mother quite well.
17. Prepared a grand dinner and no one came, Had to dress Miss Roberts
18. The Misses Lawrence came today content (also...) {contents of brackets crossed out}. Eliza came looking very ill, Wrote a letter to my boy. Dear me how the time flies, one week since I left home.
19. Another Sunday in Tenby, couldn't go out this evening. Saw Mr Lynette(?) looking so proud as well, had to hurry home to get supper for ten.
20. Very busy preparing for the dance, The Misses Lawrence came this evening.
21. Thank goodness the dance with all its vanity is over. "They" call it a proud success but I should say proud vanity
22. Today I am very tired. Had a letter from home, my dear mother still keeping very well.
25. Had a letter today from Maggie {her sister Margaret?}
26. Another dreary Sunday, not been out at all today. Sarah very ill. Had a letter from my boy.
27. Sarah still very ill. Cannot go home till she is better.
28. Sarah little better, hoping to go home tomorrow. Oh how I long to be there once more.
Yes I an going home Mrs R. said so now.
29. Here I am in Brecon and though tired cannot help talking with May. How many memories of the past comes to my mind yet I do not wish then over again.
30. Home once more, so glad to be with my dear mother again and find her so well.
31. Went to town this morning, called at Plas Draw and saw 'Mr Lewis. Called upon Mrs (Deer)? and Mrs Giles and had a long chat. Met --- quite accidental. Promised to go to the hall and went to hear Minister Booth, much how the time flies, one week since I left home.

1 Feb. The beginning of another month. Ah well, the time flies. A thickness of snow.

2. Today I have been to chapel and had two good prayer meetings. Couldn't go to school, had toothache.
3. Wrote four letters and went to town to see Mary and had heaps of news. Took my boots to V.Griffiths
4. Went to singing school tonight, not many there, Eliza Jones came here and left In time to meet the last train.
5. Very wet, went to chapel, had a very good meeting.
6. Went to Mr Richards to Mill Street and afterwards for a walk.
7. Still very wet, went to town.
8. A man from Penderyn came to offer a cow and a calf.
9. I have been to chapel today, had a good prayer meeting this morning and this evening. Morgan Evan, Hirwaun preached from 2. Tim. 5-14, Had a teachers meeting after school, I was re-elected teacher of the pupils.
10. I went to town this evening and called to see May, afterwards went to the rehearsal at Carmel, my boy met me and walked home, got awfully wet.
11. Had a letter from Maggie, Johnnie bach very ill, wrote to her and took the letter to Nant Melyn, saw Giles and asked me for Captain Roberts address.- Very Mild today, my dear mother's 61st birthday, May heaven bless and spare her for us many years again.
12. Very fine today, went to chapel this evening, afterwards for a walk. Promised my boy not to call him "wretch" again. bought some books - graphic etc, Promised to try and get D.P, to take a ticket for the lecture.
13. Very wet, went to chapel, Joseph Jones was christened. Letter from Maggie, Johnnie better.
14. Went to town today, left a ticket at D,P. and got my keys, wrote to Maggie and sent Johnnie a pair of stockings.
15. Had a letter from Tom (Lacy) asking me to meet him in town! David Lewis came for hay. Afterwards I went to town and met Tom and Margaret, went with them and bought a jacket and took it to Mrs Mills. I bought mother an apron and M --- ? sent her a turnover.
16. A very fine day, went to chapel. Mr Pugh did not come. disappointed. I had a committee this evening as to the best plan to clean the chapel, after many proposals it was decided that I should make a list of members and those that were willing to assist and meet again on Thursday evening.
17. Went to the tea meeting at Bryn Sion, then to Morgans to meet Mrs Mills but she didn't bring Margaret's jacket. Afterwards I went to the lecture, met my boy and walked home.
18. Went to town this evening to fit Margaret's Jacket,
19. Wrote to Tom today and went to post, met P. Morgan, he told me about Mrs Harris' death. Went to chapel in the evening, not many there but had a good meeting. Met my boy. He told me he would send two hams tomorrow.
20. Heavy downfall of snow today, Tulip calved. Went to chapel this evening.
21. More snow. Mother would go cut to clear the way to the road and well, and took a chill, had to apply mustard poultice to

- her face, very bad. Killed three fowls and sold them for 6/-. Had two hams from town.
22. Mother very ill. not been out. Went to W.Morgans to order B.Meal and I Corn. Had an interesting conversation with May. about teeth and matrimony. Had a letter from Maggie, not very well,
23. Mother in bed today though no worse. How lonesome it seems without her and how vacant the house is as well as the old chair. Coming from chapel this evening, how glad I was to see a light in the window which assured me there was someone expecting me to come, John Jones cane down and stayed an hour. Very cold night.
24. Mr Rowlands called to see mother and took tea. Went to chapel, met my boy, went for a walk, Mother better.
25. Evan Howell came for the calf this morning and paid 15/- for it. Went to town, called at Mr Mills wrote to Maggie.
26. Very fine day, went to John Jones and cut out a dress and made body. Wrote Margaret to tell her to come over on Friday. Went to chapel, afterwards for a walk.
27. Went to town this evening, Margaret's jacket not ready.
28. Went to town for my jacket, called to see May but didn't stay long.



Editorial

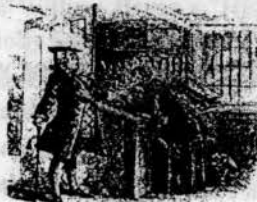
At the November meeting we heard the remarkable story of the Tower colliery "EBO" that is, "employees buy-out," presented by one of the prime movers in that remarkable event, Tyrone

O'Sullivan. The meeting started with the presentation to Mr O'Sullivan of a commemorative plate recording the 25th anniversary of the Society. This was a token of appreciation of a handsome grant from Tower towards the cost of the Society's history of coal mining in the Cynon Valley.

A good number turned out to hear what Mr O'Sullivan had to say, and formed an attentive and appreciative audience. However, it is noticeable that over the last four or five years the average number attending the meetings has declined, largely due to the fact that losses are not being made good by the recruitment of new members. The committee asks each local member to give this matter some thought and to try to enlist a new member if possible. The custom has always been that new members can come along to a few meetings to see if they like what goes on, without being asked to pay anything.

Again, it is a waste of effort if the committee is running the Society in a way which does not suit the majority of members. Members who have suggestions for improvement should mention this to the secretary or any committee member.

Finally, many members will be aware that a category of "Associate Membership" has been introduced for persons who wish to support the Society and be kept informed of its doings, but who are unable for any reason to attend meetings. The subscription will be half the rate of full membership.



Can you Tell Me? No 5

Question.

Where was the first post office in Aberdare?

Answer.

Writing in 1922 the Rev R J Jones stated that the first post office he could remember was at the Black Lion, the landlord carrying out the postmaster's duties, such as they were, at a window which opened onto Monk St. At the beginning of the nineteenth century letters for Aberdare were taken off the mail coach at the Cardiff Arms, Hirwaun, where the horses were changed. In 1828 letters for Aberdare averaged about three a day.

Question.

Were there truck shops in the Cynon Valley area?

Answer.

The Hirwaun, Aberdare, Gadlys and Abernant ironworks all had truck shops. Since these companies all had coal mines the truck system could be said to affect the coal mines as well. The houses called "Shop Houses" on Llwydcoed hill mark the location of the Aberdare Iron work's company shop and the Gadlys Iron Co's shop was at Dover house. When the truck system was made unlawful in 1833 the practice was discontinued, except at the Gadlys works, but in the 1850's the practice was resumed, notably by the Abernant company at their shop in the premises afterwards occupied by the Trap surgery. This led to Richard Fothergill of the Abernant works being fined £5 and costs. The surprising sequel to this was a large public demonstration in favour of Fothergill who kept his shop open until 1858.

A Merry Christmas and a happy New Year to all our readers

With grateful thanks to NeighbourNet for assistance with design and layout of this newsletter

Published by Cynon Valley History Society. Hon. Sec. Eric Rose, 46 London Street, Mountain Ash. (01443) 473533

Edited by John Mear, 7 Tudor Terrace, Aberdare. (01685) 878349

Registered Charity No 510143