

HANES



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Newsletter of the Cynon Valley History Society Cylchlythur Cymdeithas Hanes Cwm Cynon.

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CYNON VALLEY MUSEUM Official Opening.

The Mezzanine Gallery and Activities Room commemorate our local historians.

The 19th Of April 2001 saw the Cynon valley Museum officially opened by Jill Evans, MEP, in the presence of the Leader of the Council, Cllr. Pauline Jarman, Chief Executive Mr. Kim Ryley, and members of the Cynon Valley History Society.

The Society had put forward the suggestion that two local historians (John Davies [Pendar] and the Rev. R. I. Parry) should be honoured posthumously for their efforts in promoting an interest in local history, and in particular, for agitating albeit unsuccessfully in their lifetime, for a museum for the Cynon Valley. This suggestion found favour with the R.C.T. Council, with the result that the museum now has an "Oriol Pendar" and an "Ystafell Parry"

John Davies was probably the first person to broach the subject of a museum for the area in his column in the "Aberdare Leader" of the 31st December 1927, and he campaigned actively for the cause over many years. In conjunction with the late W. W. Price he set up a temporary museum in Aberdare in 1930 during Aberdare's "Big Week". Unfortunately, due to accommodation problems, it was not possible to make this museum a permanent amenity.

Finally, the Cynon Valley History Society organised another temporary museum in Aberdare between the 24th of June and the 6th of July 1985. This was extremely well attended and did much to encourage the history Society to intensify their efforts to bring a museum into being.

BRIEF HISTORY OF ABERDARE. THE CONCLUDING PART OF THE "BRIEF HISTORY" WHICH WAS PRINTED IN OUR PREVIOUS COPY OF 'HANES'.

EDUCATION

In 1885 we only had elementary schools with children leaving at between 12 and 13 years of age and some earlier after passing a labour exam, and a seminary at Trecynon preparing young men for the ministry. "Payment by results" forced the teacher to concentrate on the three R's, with little attention to such things as local history, and geography and nature study, physical instruction, swimming, etc. The great bug-bear then was the annual examination, with HM Inspectors arriving at 8 a.m. There was nothing in the form of cookery or housewifery centres for girls, and canteens for meals.

A WELSH REVIVAL ?

A brave effort was made to revive the Welsh language under the able guidance of Mr. Idwal Rees and his staff at the Welsh School at Cwmdare, opened in August 1949, and through Welsh lessons in the primary schools and to some extent in the secondary schools. Today the Welsh monthly periodicals of the various denominations are almost unknown.

The Welsh weekly papers are no longer published in Aberdare - the last to discontinue was "Y Darian" in 1934, and the Welsh bookstall in the Market is closed.

Again, what a transformation in the industrial life of Aberdare. The Tower Colliery is now the only deep mine left in Wales. At one time in the Aberdare area alone there were 10,000 men and boys employed in the mines. Unfortunately, the industries which have supplanted coal have not brought with them enough new jobs.

The several breweries of 1885 and the Halewood Clog Factory, the blacksmiths' shops, and the foundries, have disappeared, and so have numerous native tailoring, dressmaking and millinery establishments of Messrs. Hodges and Sons, Burton, Hicks, Masters and Co., Weaver to Wearer and others, whose factories are outside our district.

The Aberdare and District Co-operative Society has gone out of existence and the advent of supermarkets has had a severe effect on the small businesses in the town centre.

HOUSING

Rows of old houses at Green Fach and elsewhere have been demolished, while the local Urban District Council have erected some hundreds of houses almost forming new communities at Penywaun, Tre Ifor, Cwmbach, and elsewhere. Hundreds of new houses have also been built under private enterprise.

MUSICAL AND CHORAL

Instead of the keen competition of local choirs at eisteddfodau, as in 1885, and the Christmas Oratorios, we have a few active operatic parties. Today, instead of creating their own music, the masses are satisfied with looking at the television screens in their own homes.

The old opposition to dramatic performances has gone - no longer ostracised by the churches, which, when they were attended by large congregations, in many cases actively supported their own dramatic societies, and Trecynon, which formerly was so strongly antagonistic to all forms of drama, became famous as the home of the Trecynon Dramatic Society, which built the first "Little Theatre" in Wales out of an old engine shed. Under their producer, the Rev. F. R. Dennis, they carried all before them and defeated all comers from the British Isles in their performances of one-act plays like "The Poacher" and "Birds of a Feather" at the Scala Theatre, London. In June, 1948, Trecynon won the Lord Howard de Walden trophy with the presentation of "Birds of a Feather" by Mr. J. O. Francis, the Merthyr boy with Mr. Harold Davies, M.A., an Aberdare boy, as producer, at the Scala Theatre, London when the Scala resounded to "Cymru am Byth" and, of course, "Hen Wlad y Nhadau" by the London Welsh crowds that were present.

POLITICAL

Here again in representation on Local Government bodies and representation in the House of Commons. Aberdare in common with the rest of industrial South Wales has witnessed a great change. And it should be remembered that through Mrs. Pankhurst, women obtained the Parliamentary vote in 1918.

In 1885 the old local Board of Health members were composed of agents and colliery managers, with owners of prosperous businesses, but with the formation of the Aberdare Trades and Labour Council in 1900, and the active propaganda carried on by the Aberdare T.L.P. in every village in the area in the early nineteen-hundreds gradually strengthened the hold of James Kier Hardie as the first Independent Labour Member, 1900-1915. Complete transformation took place in public representation. In 1865 there was not a single Labour member on the Aberdare Board of Health, but until 1999, when control of the present local Authority, Rhondda Cynon Taff, passed to Plaid Cymru, Labour had dominated local government for many years.



THE WAY WE WERE THEN.

NO. 12.

Industrial relations in the mining industry in the second half of the 19th century were often bitter and sometimes clouded by violence. It is a pleasant surprise therefore to come across a document which testifies to the mutual respect which could arise between an official and the men. The following address was made in November 1872, to Mr. Roger Lloyd when he moved his home to New Zealand.

*An address to
Mr. Roger Lloyd*

By the

*Colliers and Miners of Ysguborwen Works
On the occasion of his
Leaving Aberdare for New Zealand*

"Dear Friend,

On the eve of your departure for a foreign land we have much pleasure in expressing our profound respect for you and our high approval of your general character. During the space of six years you have been engaged at Ysguborwen Works we always found you punctual, courteous, and most careful in your capacity as Overman. Considering the importance of that situation we cannot too highly express our appreciation of the manner you discharged your duties, which have been recognised and duly appreciated.

"Dear friend, our united and heartfelt prayer is that God may, in his mercy, succour you and your dear family during the long sea voyage to your new and distant home, where we trust you will enjoy many years of prosperity and happiness.

This address was accompanied by a purse containing 20 sovereigns, and was signed by Evan S Jones, William R Protheroe and David Gabriel. The address concluded with a testimonial signed by Samuel Thomas (Proprietor) and Edward Hayhurst (Manager). Mr. Lloyd had worked for Thomas for 12 years, so it was no wonder that Thomas regretted "the loss of so good, honest, sober and faithful a servant"

EDITORIAL.

This "HANES" contains details of improvements to our library and museum facilities which will be welcomed by all users of them. The occasional theft of photographs from the library has been a slow draining away of our resources for some years, but the digitalisation of the photographic collection will virtually put an end to this kind of selfish theft while making it easier for the genuine researcher to do his or her work. Like Oliver Twist, we are always looking for more, and we are wondering when the valuable 25"/mile and other useful maps in the library will be copied and the copies only made available for consultation, thus prolonging the lives of the originals, which would be difficult to replace.

A few years ago I was told that budgetary provision had been made for the purchase of a microfilm of the "Western Mail". Nothing seems to have happened about this and I wish to remind the powers that be that the Western Mail is a very valuable archive of information about South Wales.

Very early in the history of the drive for creating a museum for the Cynon Valley the History Society suggested two exhibits which would always draw a crowd. Firstly, a large map on which the site of the former collieries could be illuminated upon pressing a button, and secondly, a diorama representing the surface activities at Abernant Y Groes when the famous four foot seam was first proved in the Cynon Valley. Neither of these suggestions was adopted, but the History Society remains ready to give any help which may be needed.

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CHANGE IN THE OLD 'WELSH WAY' OF LIVING?

The modern brick houses at Penywaun call for a revolutionary change in the old South Wales way of 'living in the kitchen' while the "parlour" is reserved for special occasions.

While the public was inspecting the houses after the opening ceremony, some criticism was heard about the "smallness" of the "kitchen" (writes a "Leader" reporter)

Actually these modern houses do not provide kitchens to be lived in the old familiar South Wales way. The 'kitchens' which these people were criticising are "dining recesses" to be used for meals.

The large parlour room is intended to be used as the living room, and if the new tenants are going to live comfortably they cannot afford to keep it idle as a "best" room.

To make the best use of these modern houses the family must be prepared to use the scullery for washing up, etc., the dining recess for meals, and the "parlour" as the living room. For far too long the South Wales families have been content to live squeezed up in small back rooms, leaving other and more spacious rooms to become highly polished "parlours" to be used only on very rare occasions.

Some of the middle-aged visitors, when they had these facts pointed out to them by a "leader" reporter, seemed to resent such a revolutionary departure from their usual mode of living.

One argument which was advanced against the use of the parlour as a living room was that it would mean keeping two fires going, and that this, apart from giving the housewife more work in a house which was supposed to introduce labour-saving, would result in a big drain on supplies of coal.

At the moment, it was argued, working class families who have to keep a fire going from

the early hours already experience difficulty in eking out the coal supplies with just ONE fire! With two fires to provide for, the coal supplies would hardly be sufficient.

Our reporter replies that, of course the amount of coal used in the living room would not be nearly as much as that used in the average Welsh kitchen, for the living rooms are fitted with much smaller types of parlour grates. Another point is that small coal and cinders can be used to keep the kitchen range going simply for heating water.

NOTE: The sculleries and dining recesses are admirably equipped for domestic work, well lit and airy, and give the housewife much better facilities than are found in old fashioned houses.

[Aberdare Leader 18th Jan 1947]

EDITORIAL

Continued from page 3

Work on "Cynon Coal" has virtually finished, with the last section, the index, now in the hands of the printers. It will shortly be transferred to the binders, where some delay is bound to occur owing to the nature of the work. However the compilers are more confident than ever that the book will be a pleasure to look at and a pleasure to read.

The committee decided some months ago that the selling price of the book would not be decided until the book was in their hands. Since then the printers have informed us that there must be a substantial rise in the cost of the book. Nevertheless, every effort will be made to keep the cost of the book down.

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