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HANES

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A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL OUR READERS

It has been our custom in the past to fill the Christmas edition of Hanes with reports of bygone festive events; we have recorded so many of these that they are probably now as unwelcome as Marley's ghost on Christmas Eve. We will however include one more as an introduction to the story of the military hospital which was set up in Trecynon during the Great War.

SMOKES, WHIST AND PRIZES.

The wounded soldiers at the Trecynon hospital were not forgotten during Christmas. In response to an appeal issued by the High Constable for gifts in money and kind, quite a number of useful things were received and there was an abundance of everything for the wounded soldiers' comfort. On Christmas day about the dinner hour, Mr. Kenshole, High Constable, visited the hospital. He was accompanied by the Lady High Constable, Dr Banks, Dr Ieuan Thomas, Hirwaun, Mr F W Mander JP, Mr Frank Hodges JP, Mr. John Prowle and others. The soldiers were addressed by the High Constable and some of the other gentlemen present. Mr H Seymour Berry, Merthyr, had sent a consignment of cigarettes, and a small bundle of same was placed in each soldier's stocking on Christmas morning. On Christmas evening the patients were entertained with musical items. - On Boxing Day evening a whist drive was organized at the hospital. Prizes were distributed to the winners by Mrs. Kenshole and Mrs. Mander.

Thanks are due to the Commandants for their efforts in making the lot of the wounded happy and contented.

(Aberdare Leader, 30th December 1915)

This was but one of many social events arranged for the wounded soldiers over the Christmas period, and throughout the year. The injured men were also afforded many other treats and privileges such as invitations to dinners arranged by churches, chapels and other organisations, complimentary seats at local cinemas, free travel on the tramway system, bathing at the park pool and price concessions on the hire of boats on the lake. But what was this local hospital for wounded soldiers?

THE MILITARY AUXILIARY HOSPITAL

The Aberdare and Merthyr Red Cross Hospital was one of hundreds of military hospitals established in the United Kingdom in the early years of the First World War to take the pressure off hospitals on the Western Front and other war zones. The institution at Aberdare was a satellite of the 3rd Western General Hospital, Albany Road, Cardiff; this hospital finding itself short of bed space contacted Aberdare's Dr Isaac Banks requesting the use of the Cottage Hospital. This small hospital, endowed by the Marquess of Bute, was located at the junction of Abernant and Cwmbach roads, at the rear of the old Trap Tavern (later surgery).

The Cottage Hospital was however required for local needs and was otherwise unsuitable, so Dr Banks immediately contacted the Chairman and Clerk of the Merthyr Board of Guardians, (John Prowle and Frank James), and through them obtained permission to adapt and use the Board's Industrial Training School at Llewellyn Street, Trecynon as a military hospital. This would be run, under the supervision of Dr. Banks, by the Aberdare and Merthyr branch of the Red Cross Society. Two Commandants were appointed to administer the hospital, Dr. Banks' wife, Mrs Florence Adelaide Banks and Mrs. Edith Williams, the wife of County Councillor T Walter Williams of Glenbrook, Harriet Street. The nursing staff would consist of members of the Merthyr and Aberdare detachment of the Red Cross.

Matron and Red Cross nurses of the period.



The facilities were gratefully accepted: -

'I am commanded by the Army Council to acknowledge the receipt, through the Local Government Board, of an offer from the Guardians of the Merthyr Tydfil Union of the Union Schools and one block of the infirmary, to provide hospital accommodation for sick and wounded soldiers. The Council desire me to convey their grateful thanks for the patriotic offer, and to say that the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Western Command, has been asked to depute an officer to inspect the buildings as to their suitability for the purpose, and I am to ask that this officer may be accorded the necessary facilities.'

B B Cutill, War Office, London.
(*Aberdare Leader*, 3rd April, 1915)

Alterations then being made to improve the Industrial School were abandoned, and essential modifications were immediately carried out to ensure the premises suitability as a hospital. Generous donations were made by the public, particularly Mrs. George Hann of Ysguborwen who made a gift of £300 to purchase X-Ray equipment; the Guardians authorised the adjacent Training School Farm to acquire 2 or 3 additional cows to ensure a fresh milk supply to the hospital. Essential fixtures and fittings were furnished by the War Office, and the hospital prepared to receive its first patients by late September or early October 1915. An official inspection was carried out by Major McClean of the Western General Hospital on Tuesday the 14th September 1915, his report was most favourable and he declared that everything reflected great credit upon those responsible for the arrangements [and that] the building was the best he had inspected so far.

(*Aberdare Leader*, 18th September 1915)

A few weeks later the hospital was opened by Lord Aberdare in a ceremony attended by the Mayor of Merthyr, the Guardians, Dr. Banks and other dignitaries; on opening day the road leading to the hospital was lined by a guard of honour of members of the Aberdare and Merthyr detachment of the Red Cross in uniform. After the opening ceremony a short religious service was conducted by the vicar of Aberdare. In the afternoon a large number of visitors were allowed to look around the hospital and great interest was shown in the X-ray room and equipment. The hospital had 60 beds and had been set up with the maximum of comfort and the minimum of expense. Everything had been carefully planned and nothing in the way of comfort for the patients had been overlooked.

(*Aberdare Leader*, 25 September 1915).

The first wounded soldiers arrived at Aberdare on Thursday 7th December 1915. They arrived by train at the TVR station and were warmly welcomed by a very large crowd. There were thirty-five patients most of whom were convalescent and able to walk, but some were still suffering badly from the effects of wounds and illnesses. The men were conveyed to the new hospital in cars lent by local people. Two more arrived the following day, and twenty on Monday. Amongst those arriving that day was Pte Rees Jenkins of Oxford Street; he had left Aberdare in December 1912 for Australia and joined the Australian Imperial Forces in Adelaide in August 1914. He was drafted to the Dardanelles and was reported missing last June, he succeeded in regaining British lines and was subsequently wounded.

At Christmas 1917 the hospital had the care of 200 patients.

Over 2,000 wounded soldiers had been treated at Trecynon at the date of the hospital's closure in May 1919. Of the forty-seven military hospitals established

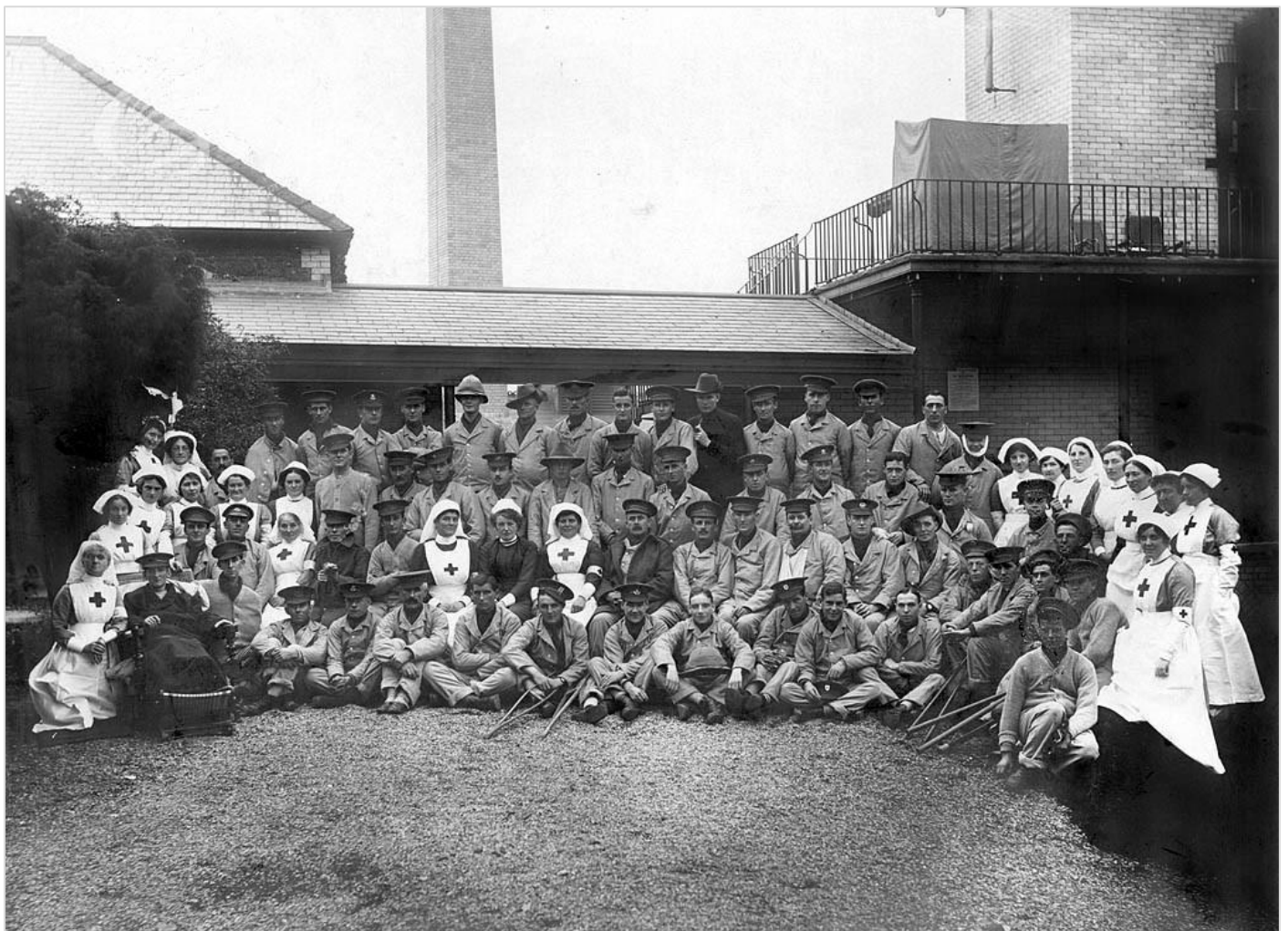
in Glamorgan, Aberdare had been one of the most successful and over 300 operations had been performed there. It had not wanted for money and still had a surplus of £1,000. A great part of its success was due to the local Voluntary Aid Detachment, and the excellent training given to the nurses. This was due to the dedication of Commandants Williams, Banks, the Misses Watkins and others in Aberdare. Dr Thomas of Hirwaun was also closely associated with the running of the hospital.

Unfortunately there were deaths too, such as that the Trecynon soldier, Trevor James, 13th Welsh, of Mount Pleasant Street, a clerk at the Bwlfa Offices in civilian life. He had served for three years, and a fortnight before the armistice was signed his leg was blown off by shrapnel at Gouzecourt. On becoming convalescent he was conveyed to Brighton hospital, later returning home on leave. He developed a cold at home and pneumonia set in. Dr Banks recommended his removal to the Red Cross Hospital where he died shortly afterwards. His brother-in-law Pte James T Morgan, Leicester Regiment, was killed in France in September 1916.

(*Leader*, 18th January, 1919)

Pte James' name, given as Trefor James, is recorded on the Bethel War Memorial (now at Ebenezer Newydd).

In February 1919, Dr Isaac Banks was created an Officer of the newly established (1917) Order of the British Empire for his services to the hospital.



Nursing staff and patients at the military hospital, Trecynon.
(Photo RCTCBC Libraries)

HAPPY 100th BIRTHDAY PONT SALEM

For some forty years Robertstown had in the words of *The Leader* been cut off from the mainland [of Aberdare], and was as isolated as any island in the Pacific. Stranded between two railway systems, (the Taff Vale and Vale of Neath) the river Cynon and a tramway, its only means of entry or exit was by means of a small bridge across the Cynon leading to the tramway. The Tresalamites had agitated and petitioned for a proper bridge for a considerable time, a need that was granted on the 17th December 1914 — one hundred years ago. The bridge was constructed across the railways from Tudor Terrace to Robertstown by D Tyssul Davies of Trecynon and the steel work was provided by A D Dawney and Sons of Cardiff. The bridge is some 120 yards long and about 8 foot wide and the contract price was £2,500. Originally the bridge was open to pedestrians and light vehicular transport. The opening ceremony was performed by Councillor W Thomas, chairman of the Aberdare UDC who cut a ribbon at the Gadlys end of the bridge, the assembly then walked across the bridge, the chairman then cut a second ribbon at the Robertstown end and declared the bridge open. A speech by Evan Jones, chair of the Council's Building Committee, reviewed the Council's recent works which included the bridge opened at Aberaman to avoid the Powell Duffryn crossing, and the recently opened Cwmbach bridge; besides building bridges he recorded that an excellent system of tramways had been opened and the Education Committee had, in the last few months, built an Open-air school for defective children, and a Domestic Centre at Aberdare. It was acknowledged that the lack of a bridge at Robertstown had probably retarded its growth to a considerable extent.

(The Aberdare Leader, 24th, December 1914)

DON'T HAVE ONE ON US! THE GUARDIANS' CHRISTMAS MEETING.

Mr P Mansfield, Dowlais, said he considered that once in every 365 days the inmates of the Workhouse should be given a glass of beer, that is if they wanted it, and he would move that half a pint be given to each one on Xmas day. Mr Harry Evans seconded, and added that some of the inmates would think it a great luxury to be given a glass of beer. Mr J Lloyd did not think that anything of this kind should be allowed. It had not been allowed for many years. The Board had unanimously declined a similar gift some years back, and it was a dangerous policy to grant the request now. He moved the gift be not accepted. Mrs Richards seconded. Mr Mansfield: Mr. Lloyd has not given a single reason against it. Mr Meth Davies: Have we not a resolution on our books disallowing beer on the premises? Members: No. A vote was taken for and against but the Chairman and Deputy Clerk could not say which side had carried. A member requested that names be taken and this was acceded to. The Aberdare members voted as follows: For Mr Rees Rees, against Mrs. Richards, Messrs Meth Davies, T D Williams, John Hughes, Morgan Williams and David Jones (Hirwaun). The voting was 11 for accepting a gift of beer for the inmates, and 16 against. The Rector voted for, and Mr Henry Owen, a wine and spirit merchant, voted against, an incident which caused some amusement. Mr Mansfield remarked that he hoped that those who voted against the motion would also deny themselves of beer on Xmas day (laughter). Mr A J Howfield (who had voted against) remarked that he hoped all those that voted against will sign the pledge.

(The Aberdare Leader, 24th December 1914)

SHORTAGE OF FOOD – ABERDARE SHOPS RUSHED BY CROWDS OF PEOPLE

As you stagger home from Tesco with your Christmas shopping spare a thought for the Aberdarians of 1917/1918 and conditions here resulting from the war and German U-boat activities.

'The police experienced some difficulty on Wednesday morning (yesterday) in controlling huge crowds who visited Aberdare grocers' shops in search for food. The crowd gathered first opposite Maypole's shop, and later hearing that there were supplies in Mr G W Fletcher's establishment in Commercial Street, about 500 men and women rushed there. The shop was soon filled by eager men and women who demanded to be supplied. PS Bevan was on the scene, and handled the crowd very diplomatically. He spoke in Welsh to them, and invited a deputation of four men to inspect the premises, so that they may be satisfied that Mr. Fletcher was not withholding the sale of butter, bacon, cheese and other articles. Four were appointed and they accompanied Sgt. Bevan around the premises and reported to the crowd that there were none of the articles mentioned. The shop of Mr T Lloyd in the same street was afterwards visited, but Mr Lloyd likewise had nothing to sell. Many women from Cwmaman, Aberaman and Abernant remained about town trudging in the snow for hours in search of various articles of food, but the majority had to return with their baskets empty. Butter, margarine, lard, bacon and jam are almost unprocurable this week, and fresh meat is again scarce. Some of the butcher's shops in town have been closed since Saturday. The miners, particularly, find it very difficult to accommodate themselves, because there is nothing they can take to work except dry bread. The position so far as they are concerned is becoming desperate. Luckily, bread and potatoes are plentiful, though the authorities urge economy in the use of the former.'

(The Aberdare Leader, January 19th, 1918)

JULIAN VISITS ABERDARE



Mark IV Tank No. 113, Julian on tour. (not taken at Aberdare)

Tanks were first used at the battle of Flers Courcellette (Somme) but on a small scale on the 15th September 1916 (50 tanks). They were then used en masse at the battle of Cambrai on the 20th November 1917 when 378 machines were deployed. Tanks were first seen by the British Public at the Lord Mayor's Show in London in November 1917. Such was their fascination that the National War Savings Committee capitalized on the craze and sent six tanks (tank banks) on a nationwide tour to raise money to aid the war effort by selling Government War Bonds and War Savings Certificates. Julian (pictured above) visited Aberdare on the 31st May and 1st June 1918, and was 'stationed' at Victoria Square. The tank was 'met' at the railway station and escorted with great ceremony by a parade to its billet. During its stay the top of the tank was used as a stage for speeches, recitals, instrumentalists and variety acts. Two lady 'hostesses' sat at tables inside the tank, and during its short stay here £270,000 was raised by the sale of Bonds and Certificates. (Swansea raised £2,180,939).

(*Aberdare Leader*, 8th June, 1918)

NEW PUBLICATION.

The Men Who Marched Away: A book commemorating Aberdare's war dead particularly those recorded on the 'Eden Memorial' at St Elvan's Church, Aberdare. Contains over 200 short biographies of the fallen and reproduces letters etc. written from the front, by many of these. The volume also lists all Cynon Valley war memorials and calls for the local recognition of a Penrhwi-ceiber VC, Robert Bye of the Welsh Guards. 148 pages, colour and b/w illustrations. Price £12 (post: £14.50 first class, £14.00 second class.) For further details see the Society's web site.

AN INTERESTING YULETIDE VISITOR

A number of past issues of Hanes have recorded important or interesting visitors to the town. There have been reports on Evan Roberts, the revivalist, Emmeline Pankhurst, King George V and Queen Mary. Others who have not appeared on our pages include Lloyd George, Souza, and Arthur Orton, the Tichborne Claimant.

In 1904, 110 years ago this month, seventy-five year old General William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, came here to preach. On arrival the General was given a hearty welcome at the Low Level (TVR) Station, a band played *Huddersfield*, and Booth spoke to the waiting crowd, after which he was taken to Danygraig House as the guest of Mr and Mrs J H Powell (Beehive). At 5.00 that evening he addressed the first of two Revival Meetings at Siloa chapel. Amongst those present were Rev D Silyn Evans and Thos Jones of Carmel. The hymns *Pour Thy Spirit, Blessed Jesus* and, *Draw me Nearer* were sung with much fervour. General Booth then told the congregation of his recent visit to Buckingham Palace and the 'jolly talk' he had had with the king. 'People', he said, thought that he would have to kneel and bow and kiss the king's hand, &c., but nothing of the sort took place.' He had related to King Edward what the Salvation Army had done and were doing — how they were saving poor sinners from the power of sin. The king then told him how deeply interested he was in the class for which the Salvation Army worked, and how delighted he was to hear of the good work the Salvation Army had done and were doing. The session closed with a prayer in Welsh given by a person in the gallery, and the singing of *Gad im Deimlo*.

At 8.00 a second meeting took place, the chapel was once again crowded and soldiers and lasses [thus] were busily engaged in seeking penitent sinners in the hall. Exhortations were given by several men and women in the congregation.

On Sunday, morning, afternoon and evening meetings were held at the spacious Market Hall [capable of holding 5,000 people]. At the first meeting, the General took as his text 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul.' In the evening he addressed the meeting on the theme 'Be sure your sins will find you out.' The huge gathering was visibly impressed by his earnest and pathetic appeal to sinners. The evening concluded with the customary appeal to erring sinners to kneel at the penitent-form. At first there was great reluctance, but finally about forty came forward to seek salvation.

Christmas Fare — This year — and indeed, for many previous years — our butchers, confectioners, and grocers have vied with each other in their exhibition of the good things in request at this gay season. Beef with prodigious layers of fat, gigantic geese, and little mountains of fruit — all have contributed to make this, like other Christmases, a festive one.

(*Aberdare Times*, 27th December 1862)

A festive plea one hundred and fifty years ago.

A holiday for Christmas — As Christmas day happens this year to fall on a Sunday, it has been determined by the tradesmen and merchants of many large towns that Monday the 26th inst., should be regarded as a holiday. We have no doubt that the tradesmen of our own town will see the propriety of adopting a similar course. The festive season of Christmas is the time of all others when friends and relations assemble in their wonted places. Scattered families gather round the paternal board, boys come home from school, and long-absent relations fill places in the family circle which are vacant, it may be, all the year round. For these and many other reasons, which the business men of our town need not be reminded of, we have no hesitation in requesting that our shops and offices be allowed to present a holiday appearance on the Monday following Christmas-day.

(*Aberdare Times*, 17th December 1864)

We are pleased to report that the liberal and benevolent business men of Aberdare did grant their employees, whose holidays throughout the year were few, the additional day advocated by the *Times*.

(*Aberdare Times*, 24th December 1864)

Note: A glance at the census shows that many local shop assistants came from Cardiganshire, Carmarthenshire and other distant counties.

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Edited by Geoffrey Evans, 5, Plasdraw Place, Aberdare, CF44 0NS (01685 871840)

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