

HANES



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Newsletter of
Cynon Valley History Society

Cylchlythyr Cymdeithas
Hanes Cwm Cynon

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At last - "CYNON COAL" !

Well attended launch at the museum on 12th. November leads to Sales drive..

The first batch of "Cynon coal, the history of a mining valley", the Society's history of coal mining in the Cynon Valley, arrived over a week before the launch on Monday the 12th. November at which there was a good turnout of members and guests. They included the members of the working group which wrote the book. The launch was also attended by Roy Noble and Tyrone O'Sullivan, both of whom made brief but apt contributions commending the book following the opening of the launch ceremony by the Society's Chairman, Elfed Bowen. Associate members from as far away as Bristol also attended, and met old friends as they did justice to the splendid buffet set out by the museum staff, to whom our warmest thanks are due. The following day this year's Chairman, who is also the Local Sales Manager, was busy placing the book in local outlets. The book costs £15 and is very good value for money, consisting as it does of 282 pages containing 176 illustrations, 20 of which are in colour. All copies of the book have now been received from the printer, and the book is already selling well, and is the subject of many compliments directed at the working group.

The publication of books on local history is one of the intended objects of the history society when it was founded in 1971. However, it was not until 1976 that Volume 1 of "Old Aberdare" appeared. This contained reprints of historical essays about Aberdare, dating from 1837, 1853, and 1885, which were at that time not easy to get hold of. The book eventually sold out and was reprinted. Volume 2 appeared in 1982 and was reprinted in 1997. In the meantime volumes 3 - 8 were published, together with a book entitled "Children of the Mines" which was reprinted in 1999.

The Society also published two volumes of selections from the "Bacon Drawings" among other things, but perhaps the publications for which the greatest demand was experienced were the two volumes of pictures of the Aberdare Area. They were entitled "Aberdare Pictures from the Past". (Volumes one and two)

It is to be hoped that "Cynon coal" will maintain and augment the standard of the writings on our local history.

(a) The way we were then. No.13(a) (adapted from Pendar's contribution to the "Leader" in 1931.

The first strike (streic y glo mor as it was known at that time) came soon after the Crimean War in 1857-8, and affected only a small portion of the coalfield. The leaders were ordinary workmen, but generally intelligent. I think it is a fact worth mentioning that there are a goodly number of the sons and grandsons of old miners' leaders now engaged as officials of high standing in many of the South Wales collieries. I suppose it is Personality that counts for this every time. I was privileged to be acquainted with Mr Henry Coleman, a respected man, and an old colliery official. He once told me that he was instrumental in installing the Nottingham method of working coal in the Tunnel Pit, back in the early '70's. His father, who lived for many years at Penywaun, was the manager of iron ore mines for Mr Scales of Llwydcoed. The iron ore miners in the early days were more numerous and commanded a higher wage than the colliers. I am not aware of any strikes among the iron ore workers, and it would be interesting to ascertain if there had been any.

(b) Taken from the "History of Pontypridd and Rhondda Valleys" By "Morien," 1903.

KING COAL

It is a tradition in the Taav (sic) and Rhondda Valleys that "a headless horse would be seen running up the valley of the Taav, and, when in 1841, the first locomotive was seen coming up the new railway to Pontypridd, they said that the wizards prophesy was being fulfilled.

Old Tom Morgan, Dinas, and several rustic friends of Cwm yr Ystrad came down to Pontypridd to "try" the new machine, and they fearfully booked themselves by it for Cardiff. They were full of anxiety, and, finding themselves travelling very fast below Llandaff station, Old Tom could contain himself no longer, and with eyes distended he excitedly called out in Welsh "They'll never be able to sprag it, we shall tumble headlong into the sea".

(c) Old landmarks of Aberdare and district. (A.L.17 May 1924)

I may be challenging opposition by suggesting that in early days the main Gadlys Road did not go down straight from the Waynes Arms to the Glandover Inn as it is today. I have an idea that the old turnpike road turned to the right through East Avenue and then to the left at the back of the Waynes' Arms and down again passing the back of the Mackworth Arms, the bottom of Morgan Street, and going along the low roadway as it is today from Nos.19 to 1 Gadlys Road and Dover Place.

Of course there was no Taff Vale Railway to be crossed in those days. The road continued from Dover Place and came out just opposite Pembroke Street. The iron railing which separated the road from the churchyard, I believe, is the one seen today, inside the pathway leading from the Gadlys bridge on the right, downwards. There is also an old archway at the back of the Mackworth Arms, which, in my opinion, covered the old roadway when the small loco railway from the Gadlys Old Pit to the Ironworks yard.

(d) East Avenue used to be a very dignified old road in my boyhood days. Then, it was the main avenue to Glandare House, which was the abode of the Wayne family. A pretty carriage drive existed there, reaching from the house now known as Ty Gwyn, through Maelgwyn Tce, up to Glandare house. After the Pont Goch was constructed - where Badash's establishment is now - to carry the colliery rubbish over the road to the Patagonia Tip, the drive to Glandare house was made from the top of Oxford Street as it is seen today. A beautiful pathway, which was a right of way, then led up through the Glandare field from near the Pont Goch, and came out near the Pont-y-fflash houses. This pathway, in those days was an ideal retreat for young courting parties at the top of Glan Road. When the new drive was made, this ideal old winding pathway was closed and the present straight artificial lane, coming out at the top of Oxford St. was constructed in its place. The Glandare fields were then given to wheat growing.

(e) A very interesting landmark to the boys of fifty and sixty years ago was the spot known as Pwll-y-Gerwyn on the Dare river below the Cwm viaduct. The water of this river, dashing down from over the falls at this spot was clean and beautiful in its spraying whiteness, and here in the summer days, the Town and Gadlys boys were continually disporting themselves in naked ablutions. Many a truancy afternoon was spent here by some of the Ysgol y Comin boys, and many a time did I see a naked fugitive playmate scampering up the hedge-bank, across the field, his clothes in a bundle under his arm, generally minus a stocking, a boot, or a cap, fleeing from a pursuing parent who had got wind of the truancy. Pwll-y-Gerwyn is there today, but its water, in rushing over the fall, is steamy, black, and shiny, with a strong odour of something coming from the subterranean workings of the Bwllfa Collieries. Rarely now can be seen or heard happy groups of boys, plunging, playing, and diving in the water of this old noted spot. Many a fine, weighty trout was to be found in the river in those days, and the tributary rivulet running by Llwynhelig was a favourite haunt of the poaching angler. Bordering on Llwynhelig was the farm of Richard Tomos Richards. It was a tradition among the boys that a ferocious bull was kept on this farm. It was considered the height of valour for any boy to be able to say that he had been up the mountainside, past Richard Tomos Richards' farm, showing trophies in the shape of used bullets from the Volunteers shooting targets, or "gropwns" from the mountain trees.

Perhaps some of the older people will remember the awful attempt that was made by some evil disposed person to blow up the house of Richard Tomos Richards (Llwynhelig). This occurred on the 12th. December 1868.

(The culprit was a Thomas Morris from Aberaman, who received severe burns from the explosion and seven years imprisonment from the judge. Ed.)

EDITORIAL

Members of the Society will wish to join the Committee in congratulating **Hywel Vaughan** on achieving the honorary degree of Master of Arts, University of Wales. Hywel has been a member of the Society for 13 years. He was a native of Aberdare but his family moved to Newport when his father, a railwayman, was "posted" there.

Hywel spent his working life in Education, starting as a teacher in Primary and Comprehensive schools in the Newport area. Having taken an interest in Trade Union matters in 1971 he was appointed NUT Regional Secretary for Wales, a post he held until his retirement in 1989.

He has been a member of the University Court for 34 years and served on the Council of Cardiff University from 1977 until July 2001. He was also a member of the Vice-Chancellor's group responsible for a far-reaching review of the University's constitutional arrangements.

Hywel's experience in industrial relations stood him in good stead when he became a member of the Society's committee. His contributions were always well thought out, and to the point, and his attributes were never so well-demonstrated as when he was in the chair.

The conferment of the degree shows the respect with which his work in education was regarded, - a respect which is matched by the respect generated by his contributions to our committee meetings over the years.

Museum Report.

It has been a very busy time for the museum and gallery with increased donations to the collections. Even so, museum staff are beginning work on new displays within the "Footprints through Time" gallery for the new year. Other developments include increasing the level of information for the public, and developing further interactive displays for children.

The museum was singled out for the quality of its achievements over the last eighteen months when I was asked to give one of only two presentations to the National Conference of the Heritage Lottery Fund held in October this year.

In November the museum was host to the Society upon the launch of "Cynon Coal", and this resulted in valuable press comments. Other events in which the museum took part included the presentation of the prizes won at the RCT's Chairman's Christmas Card Competition and the Trefoil Guild's commemoration of guilding in the Cynon Valley.

Until the 12th. January there will be an exhibition of photographs of Tower Colliery miners by the American, Marian Kamish, and this will be followed by a second showing of work by St Fagan's 'After School Club.' (C.W.)

Library Report.

It is very pleasing to report that the first stage in the digitalisation of the Central Library's photographic collection has been completed and work has been started on the collection at Mountain Ash, Abercynon, and Ynysybwl. Over 6,000 images at the Aberdare Library are now available on the web site

www.rhondda-cynon-taff.gov.uk/photos.

If you do not have access to the internet at home, every library in RCT can now provide public access to it. The library would be pleased to receive additions to its photo collections or to be given any extra information about the photos it already has.

On another matter, the 1901 census will become available in January 2002. The Central Library will be purchasing microfilm copies of the returns for Aberdare and Llanwonno parishes and these will be available from January 2nd. Persons wishing them are strongly advised to book a microfilm reader. Contact for the above facilities is Alan Prescott (01685 880053).

(f) UNPARALLELED BLASPHEMY IF TRUE.

We translate the following letter from the "Haul" of this month. We can hardly believe it to be true. We give it publicity only in order that Dissenters may with one voice repudiate anything so shocking being enacted among them. Unfeeling savages only, believing nothing of the Christian religion could ever be guilty of such wickedness. Talk of Mormonism!! What has Mormonism ever been guilty of so atrocious as what is detailed here?

(Perhaps "Never" was intended for the first word in the preceding line. Ed)

Translated from the "Haul"

Ebenezer Independent Chapel at Aberdare. - An Eisteddfod was held in the above chapel on Christmas day, 1852.

"Things were enacted there such as is awful to think that any body of men calling themselves Christians, could allow for one moment to be performed in their chapels. There were three lads, acting Christ, Righteousness and Sin, on a platform! There was the loudest merriment ringing through the whole house, and clapping of hands and beating of feet. Also two young women were there acting the two Marys weeping over the grave! The wailings of these two young women were sufficiently terrible to make one's hair stand on end." - *AN EYE WITNESS.*

The "HAUL" wrote a long article on the subject, expressing the hope that the Minister of the chapel would be able to say what was really enacted there.

***(The reader will remember that Pendar is speaking of matters as they were in his youth.)**

Further reminiscences from the pen of "Pendar"

(The following is the continuation of an article by Pendar which appeared in the *Aberdare Leader* on the 20th. of September 1924.)

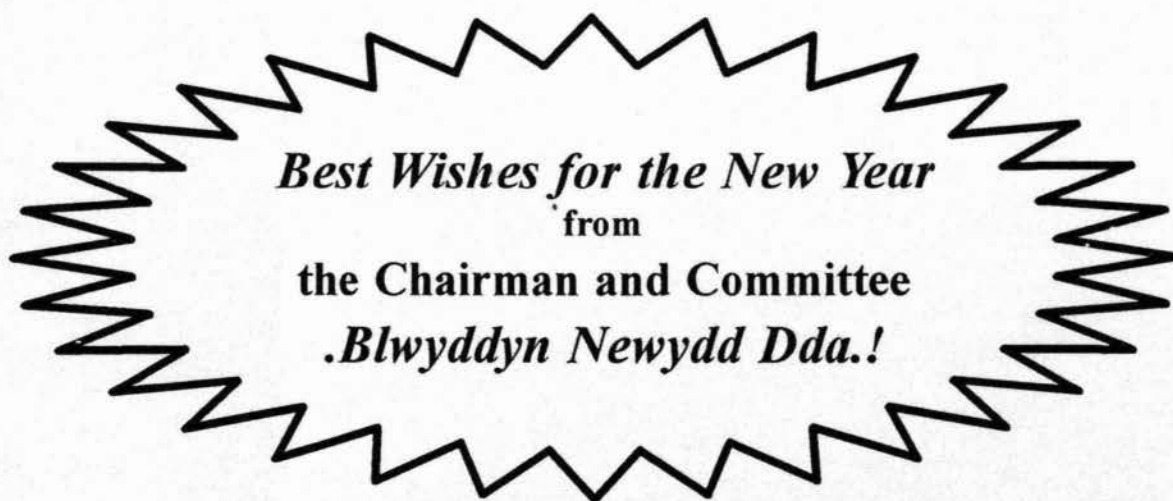
Llwydcoed and Sguborwen

In the old days the mountainside above Llwydcoed and Sguborwen used to ring with the sound and echo of the hauliers' voices taking their horses to and from the stables by the big house to the various working levels and slants.

The running sound of the trams and wire ropes up and down the numerous inclines made the whole area alive. The puffing sound of the various haulage engines came clear and distinct on the breeze, giving rhythm and measured time to the whole activities. Many a time a shackle or rope would break, and a number of trams, full or empty, would be rushing wildly down the inclines, causing damage and loss of coal and other material.

The two old houses situated at the bottom of the big incline were often battered and injured by these accidental breakages. The last man I can remember living in the top end cottage was Dafydd Edwards. He, in dress and appearance, looked almost as dilapidated and bruised as the old house he lived in.

Today, the whole countryside of Ysguborwen is lying quiet and serene. The old horseway from the stables to the drift is covered by grass and coarse plants. The old inclines, which used to be black streaks of small coal, reaching from the riverside up a long way towards the mountain top, overlaid by two parallel lines of glistening steel rails, which shone like silver under the glowing face of a shining sun, are now almost covered with green, and overhanging branches of the hedgerows on each side. The old shale tips also, upon which the silhouetted figures of the horses, hauliers and tippers were often seen to move about, are now beautifully garmented with luxurious green foliage.



Best Wishes for the New Year
from
the Chairman and Committee
.Blwyddyn Newydd Dda.!

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