



Hanes :

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Free to members &
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NEWSLETTER OF THE CYNON VALLEY HISTORY SOCIETY /
CYLCHLYTHYR CYMDEITHAS HANES CWM CYNON.

Curator — YES!

— by the editor.

Museum — eh, not yet.

In January this year it was announced that Cynon Valley Borough Council had appointed Miss Fiona Davison as museum curator for this district, to be based initially (and as there is no museum) at the Dare Valley Country Park Centre. The post is partly funded by the Council for Museums in Wales.

All those concerned with securing a permanent centre for the display & interpretation of the Cynon Valley's interesting & significant history will no doubt welcome this step. To call it a 'bold decision' (as the Western Mail of 02/04/91 did) is to flatter the local council by implying it has a vision & sense of purpose in this matter when, for the better part of 20 years, its approach has been blinkered & reluctant. So much so that its comparative inactivity in this direction has been highlighted by the achievements of the local authorities & their partners in the Rhondda, Merthyr & Pontypridd districts.

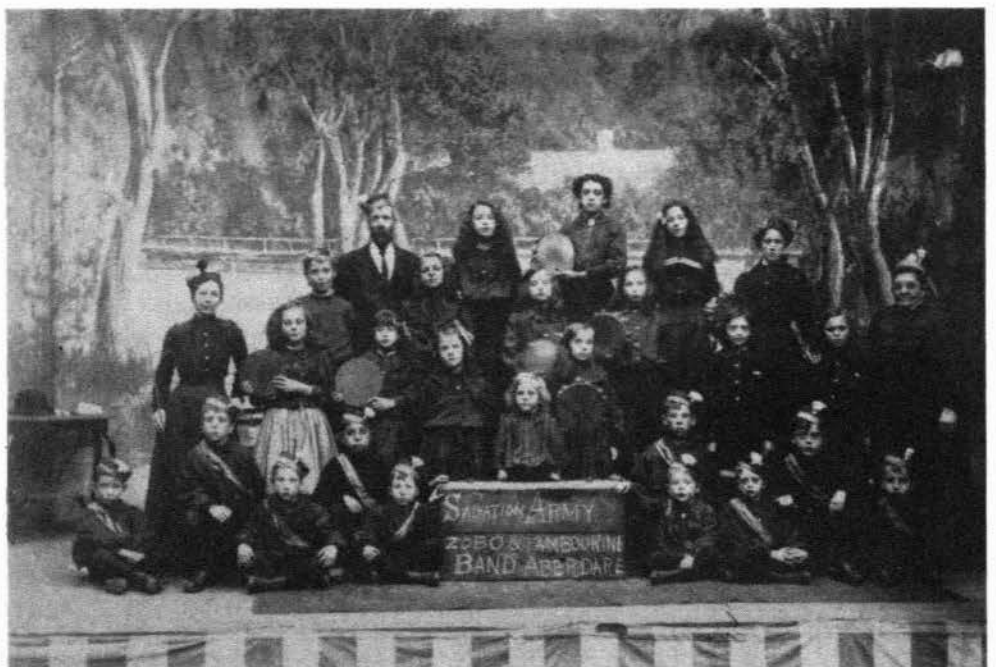
Never mind - let us be positive & face the future: for history (especially the history of the people) is a living & vigorous force in the minds of those who have the chance to be enlightened by its insights. Being positive in this context means that those who wish to secure a worthy interpretive centre in the Cynon Valley must not now sit back, thinking their battle is over. It is not. Miss Davison's charge is to identify a suitable location for such a centre; develop a local history collection & establish helpful contacts. It must be the concern of us all to see that matters do not simply rest there until the Council for Museums in Wales part-funding of the post runs out. We must ensure the prospect becomes a reality. There is certainly in this situation an important vigil for the C.V.H.S to observe.

Having urged support for Miss Davison in her post, I must say I found her reported comments concerning "odds & sods", "a stuffed dog" & "wooden horses heads" strangely off-key.

OLD PHOTOGRAPHS NO.8: ABERDARE SALVATION ARMY ZOBO & TAMBOURINE BAND:

The Salvation Army has a proud & colourful history in this district: the best-known figure being 'Mother' Kate Shepherd. Here, in a photo dating from c.1910, we see some of her flock - both sheep & lambs! It would be good to learn whether any of the sitters can be named. At the risk of displaying a considerable musical ignorance, it would also be good to discover what a 'zobo' is. Any ideas?

SOURCE: via the editor.



The divi's end: a summary by Doug Williams of the rise and fall of the Co-operative Movement in Cwmbach & Aberdare:

... and the editor's:

No social or economic history of the south Wales valleys would be complete without reference to the growth & central importance of the Co-operative movement in the everyday lives of the people there.

Of nowhere would this be more true than the Cynon Valley - or, more specifically still, of the Cwmbach & Aberdare districts. For it was here, in 1859/60, that the first Co-operative store & society in Wales was established. It was also here, in the Aberdare & District Co-operative Society, that the movement had its longest-lived independent concern in Wales. The independence of the Aberdare company lasted (along with Rhondda's) until 1988, when it was taken over by the national Co-operative Retail Society. The story of the movement during the years 1859 - 1988 (some 129 years in all) makes fascinating reading, & the following outline is drawn from two main sources:

- (a) the Souvenir history of the Cwmbach Industrial Co-operative Society, written by its General Secretary, Evan Jones, in 1900; &
- (b) retrospective articles taken from the Aberdare Leader between May & July, 1988 focusing on the winding-up of the Society as it then stood.

The first Co-operative store in Britain had been opened in Rochdale, Lancashire, in 1844. In 1859 a number of letters giving the history of the Rochdale pioneers were published in Reynolds Newspaper. These were read at Cwmbach by a David Thomas who was employed as a mechanic at the Llety Siencyn colliery nearby. In fact, these letters inspired him to consider forming a similar co-operative venture in his own home-district. To this end he consulted a friend, John Rees, who was a collier in an adjoining colliery. Together, they agreed to press the matter further.

Several factors beyond their control actually favoured their endeavours at this time. The first of these was the crushing defeat of the colliers after they struck in 1857. They had originally opposed a 15% reduction in their wages, but were finally made to return on a 20% loss. Many faced great hardship - particularly from being entirely at the mercy of the commercial classes. Another factor was the continued existence at Aberdare (until 1868 in fact) of the illegal Company (or 'Truck') Shop. Here, workmen were induced (by payment in company tokens, by easy credit, or by the availability of alcohol) to trade. The consequence was that the men remained fettered to their employers in every conceivable way.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE THREE OPPOSITE .../...):

When a newsletter entitled HANES (History) was proposed and first produced in July, 1984 it was said that the aim was to publish a new issue every six months. Somewhat ambitiously, it was hoped that publication might even become more frequent than that. How idealism can return to haunt you!

Well, the present issue is the eighth in the series to date (which, over the seven or so years between 1984-91, averages at about one every 10½ months). It will also prove to be the final number prepared by the then-and-current editor.

Again in July, 1984, the remark was made that members of the C.V.H.S. were themselves involved in researching their own historical interests; and that this was likely to have a bearing on how regularly HANES could be produced. Well, it has! The pressure of other, unending commitments makes it necessary for me to put aside the typewriter & tippex with this present number and hand over to another (as yet unknown) member of the Society.

I have enjoyed producing each issue and tried to make each one something of a 'taster' for the many different aspects of our local history. I must apologize not only for the very 'occasional' pattern of the newsletter's appearance but also for a dearth of those things which others might have wished to see appear in its columns.

It only remains for me to thank all those who have given me articles for inclusion from time to time, & to thank the Committee of the Cynon Valley History Society for their help & forbearance. It would also be fitting to wish my successor, whoever he (or she) may be, the best of fortune.

Yn ddiffuant,

D.L. DAVIES.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE CYNON VALLEY HISTORY SOCIETY: New members are always welcome. Please contact the Secretary, Mr Geoffrey Evans, 5, Plasdraw Place, ABERDARE. (871840).



...Divi's end'.../continued^{3.}

In exploring the prospects of a co-op society at Cwmbach, messrs. Thomas & Rees decided to call a public meeting. This was held at the Mt. Pleasant Inn, on 19th October, 1859, situated nr. Bethania Baptist chapel, (though it was no longer in existence by the time Evan Jones wrote his history of 1900). David Thomas was unable to attend & John Rees conducted the meeting himself. The response was enthusiastic, and the names of the first members & officers of the Cwmbach Society are listed on pp.8 & 11 of the Souvenir of 1900. Yet, lest anyone think these Cwmbach pioneers were well in advance of their time, let it be recalled that by the same year (1859) some 200 co-operative societies had been formed in England.

After appointing officers the next step was to find the new Society a home. After about 5 or 6 months, the officers ventured to take a lease on the site of cottages then known as Capel Bricks, & the necessary alterations were made to allow for trading.

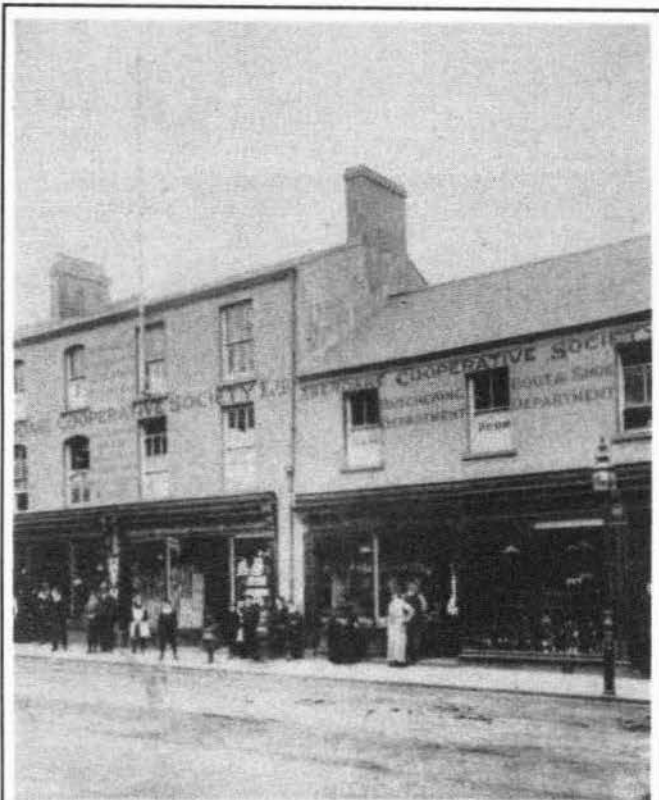
Having come so far, other factors of the period began to help the fledgling society. One such was the custom prevalent at the time of having to enter public houses in order to shop, for trading & drinking then went hand-in-hand. There were 6 or 7 such outlets in Cwmbach. The more prominent were the shops attached to the Scales Arms, the Lifeboat Inn, the Crown Inn, the Dyffryn Arms & the White Horse. Such a situation was deeply resented by the increasingly powerful temperance lobby & nonconformist churches of the day as led by the Revd. William Edwards, minister of Ebeneser Welsh Independents chapel, Trecynon. In fact, this body of organized opinion received a further massive boost from the great Diwygiad (Revival) of 1859.

Alterations to the cottages, made in order to fit them out as shops, were soon completed. The site for the venture had been well chosen in that it stood close to a quay on the old Aberdare Canal - which was a branch of the Glamorganshire Canal running from Merthyr to Cardiff. Thus, the first consignment of goods for the Society came from Merthyr Tydfil in canal boats and this was long to remain the case. The goods were then carried from the boats by members of the Society, and very soon what they called 'ein siop ni' (our own shop) was ready to trade.

It first opened on the evening of Thursday, 8th March, 1860; but since the first day's trading had amounted to only 7/5½d. they thought it unwise to open on Friday night. On Saturday, things picked up and £40/6s/8d. was taken. Stock ran short and a hand-truck had to be borrowed & volunteers sent to Aberdare for further supplies. There were many tales from these earliest of days about wheeling flour & other heavy goods along the canal bank from Aberdare to Cwmbach - sometimes knee-deep in mud or otherwise winding their way through stacked pitwood along the canal side. On one occasion, both man & load actually fell into the canal. It's said the load had to be 'written-off'. No mention is made of the man.

When the first quarter ended with a turnover of £635/1s/0d and the Society paying a divided of 1/- shilling in the pound, many who had hesitated took the plunge (though not into the canal it is hoped!) and joined up. In July, 1860, the Society's co-founder & first treasurer, John Rees, was appointed its only full-time employee - becoming store manager. He continued in this capacity until 1888 and in 1900 he was still active, being a member of the Merthyr (including Aberdare) Board of Guardians (or supervisors of the Poor Law) at that time. At first, the Society was known as Messrs. D. Thomas & Co. Ltd. Later, it became known as Messrs. John Rees & Co. Ltd; while later still it changed its name to the more appropriate Cwmbach Industrial Co-operative Society Ltd.

The venture went through a series of ups-and-downs during the period until 1920-21 though these were its golden years of expansion on the whole. Highlights included opening new branches at Aberaman (1874), Cwmaman (1883), & Mountain Ash (1892). In 1899/1900, the original Cwmbach store was itself completely rebuilt, and these new premises were those



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Aberdare Co-operative Society, Ltd. No. 440.

Source: D.L. Davies.

*From the Annals of
St. John's, Aberdare?
— by JOM EVANS.*

Mr. Mostyn Hughes, formerly of Aberdare, died at Shrewsbury in 1990 whilst in his 101st year. Mr. Hughes was born in Maes-y-Dre and lived there until 1977 when, on the death of his wife, he moved to Shrewsbury to live with his daughter.

His ashes were buried on the 7th June, 1990 in the churchyard of the parish church of St John the Baptist, in which church he was baptised in 1889 - over a hundred years before.

Given the timespan, such an occurrence must be rare indeed, if not unique, in the history of the parish. T.E.

KALMAN JONES —————

Since Hanes last appeared, the C.V.H.S. has lost a stalwart member in Mr Kalman Jones, who died at Trecynon on 24th March, 1990, aged 84.

Originally of Aberaman (he was a deacon at Saron chapel), Mr Jones was well-known throughout the district as an active member & leader of many worthy endeavours.

He had spend most of his working life as an employee, & subsequently director, of the local Co-operative Society (see this issue). In fact, he was an unrivalled source for the movement's history during the 20th C.

He was an entertaining public speaker and a rich source of oral & social history. He was also a member of the Dare Singers, of Aberaman Operatic Society; a producer, actor & playwright at the Little Theatre; and, in later years, a leader of the O.A.P. movement in Wales. Coffa da amdano.

' DIVI'S END ': .../continued from p.3:

that remained until the site was cleared for housing in about 1975.

It was the period of industrial unrest after World War I that began the Society's demise. It was hard-pressed as a result of strikes in 1920/21 & 1926, and in 1927 it was rescued by merger with the previously separate Aberdare Society. In 1900 there had been five independent societies in the valley: at Cwmbach, Aberdare, Dyffryn, Penrhiwceiber & the Trecynon/Cwmdare company. They all came together in 1927 to form the Aberdare & District Co-operative Society Ltd., which was to last until May, 1988.

A period of consolidation lay ahead which began with the purchase of Plasdraw House in 1929. This was to serve as the Society's headquarters until management was transferred to the Aberdare towncentre store in about 1984. Plasdraw House itself was demolished in about 1987. While used by the Society, however, it was more than a company office. It became the centre of activities at that site which ranged from baking to tennis (& other such employee recreations). The Plasdraw Dining Hall was also established there, and long remained a noted feature in the social life of the district.

In 1964 the Society's turnover was approx. £2.8m & it had 700 employees and 18,000 members. In 1965 its towncentre premises were completely overhauled and restructured as an up-to-date department store known as Co-operative House, Cardiff St. Further steps were taken to adapt to rapidly-changing retail patterns by creating two out-of-town supermarkets at Plasdraw & Penywaun during the early 1980s. Both stores were known by the name 'ADCO'.

Events continued to overtake the Aberdare Society, however; and in May, 1988 the decision was reluctantly taken to sell out to the national Co-operative Retail Society. The reason given was that the Society could not trade competitively as a result of wider market changes. In July, 1988, Co-operative House, Aberdare finally closed with a loss of 46 jobs. /