



ABERDARE'S ACCURSED HUNTSMEN !

Prior to the coming of industry the farming community of this area had a rich tradition of folk stories and legends. These would have been told and re-told around the hearth during the noson lawen (merry night) when small groups of people met to relieve the monotony of long depressing winter evenings. Other popular venues for story telling were knitting nights (noson weu), the smithy, stable loft and on occasions of mutual help such as sheep-shearing and harvest time.

The repeated telling of such stories ensured that they would be remembered and passed down to the next generation. The religious revivals of the 18th. & 19th. centuries and the industrial revolution destroyed many of these legends and the narratives either died out or acquired moral and didactic overtones.

Fortunately, numbers of folk-stories were collected and recorded by a few antiquarians before they disappeared completely. Those set out below relate to the Aberdare district. If readers are aware of further tales we would be pleased to receive them for publication in our next issue of HANES.

Accursed Huntsmen

There are many stories connected with witches near Craig-y-Llyn; and also concerning the 'Cwn Annwn'. These were the hounds of the Underworld, malicious spirit hounds, whose howling was regarded as an omen of death. A pack of 'Cwn Annwn' led by Arawn the Huntsman, were supposed to have their kennels in the recesses of Plinlimon in Montgomeryshire (Powys). Long years ago, people said that they heard Arawn cheering his dogs on the Aberdare Mountain; and in their wild hunting flight they trampled people to death.

An old legend of the Aberdare district describes a bad man who would hunt even on a Sunday, and for this deed of desecration he was banished into the air, where he was doomed to hunt for ever without rest

The late Sir John Rhys, one of the greatest authorities on Celtic Folklore, was of the opinion that the chase of the "Twrch Trwyth" (a ferocious wild boar), which is one of the most fascinating stories of the Welsh Mabinogion (Culhwch and Olwen), ended at Cwmaman, Aberdare!

Fairy Battle near Aberdare.

Wirt Sikes, United States Consul in Cardiff, and author of 'Rambles and Studies in Old South Wales', has recorded, without exact source, a fairy battle on the mountain between Merthyr and Aberdare, one army having white and the other black steeds. (Wirt Sikes - British Goblins, 1880).

The Devil Seeks Aberdare

(Satan appearing to a collier)
"John Roberts of Colliers Row Cyfarthfa, Merthyr Tydfil, was once going to Aberdare over the mountain. On top of the hill he was met by a handsome gentleman, who wore a three-cocked hat, a red waistcoat and a blue coat. The appearance of this well dressed man took John Roberts fancy;

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but he could not understand why he should be alone on Aberdare mountain and, furthermore why he did not know the way to Aberdare, for he had asked Roberts to direct him to the town. John stared at the gentleman, and saw clearly a cloven hoof and a long tail protruding from underneath the blue coat, and there and then the gentleman changed himself into a pig, which stood before John, gave a big grunt, and then ran away."

I received the story from a lady to whom Roberts related it.

(The Revd. Elias Owen M.A., F.S.A., Welsh Folklore, 1888)

Could the Devil still be in the vicinity? Readers are advised to avoid the Aberdare-Merthyr mountain!

G.D.E.

CAN YOU TELL ME?

QUESTION. "Each year, around the time of Remembrance Sunday, I hear it said that the Cenotaph on Victoria Square is a copy of the one in London and is the only such copy. Is this true?"

ANSWER. It is false. To start with, our cenotaph does not look like the London one in the least. Secondly, the word "cenotaph" simply means "an empty tomb", that is, a tomb commemorating persons who are not buried under it, but somewhere else. It follows that it has not got to be any particular shape or size and that the majority of war memorials in this country whether they look like one in Whitehall or not, can be described as cenotaphs, as they have no one buried underneath. Having said that, the nation's familiarity with the London cenotaph means that the word cenotaph is now strongly associated with this particular shape of war memorial.

QUESTION. "Why is the word "Perseverance" written on the wall of a house near the top of the Gadlys hill?"

ANSWER. The word is carved on a tablet let into the wall together with the date 1866 and the initials "R.M.". RM was Rees Morgan, a builder who built two or three houses here and there about the valley as speculative ventures. It is said that years ago several of his houses bore the same inscription, which seems to have been Morgans motto, copied in fact from the Crawshay family. An advertisement for sale of several of his houses on Gadlys hill can be seen in the "Aberdare Times" for 1st. July 1876..

THE EDITOR WILL BE PLEASED TO RECEIVE QUESTIONS ON LOCAL HISTORY, AND WILL ATTEMPT TO ANSWER THEM WITH THE AID OF LOCAL EXPERTS.

EDITORIAL.

As previously stated, the speakers arranged by the Society for this session are of high quality and good audiences turned out for Professor Sir Glanmor Williams and Dr. John Davies, author of the highly acclaimed "History of Wales".

Work continues, albeit slowly on the history of coal mining in the Cynon Valley which the Society is going to publish. One of the first tasks, which is nearing completion, is the compiling of a list of all known local collieries, arranged in date order where possible. Though the publication date is not yet settled, the appearance of the book is eagerly awaited because all the Society's publications are now sold out apart from "Pictures from the Past", vol.2, and a few copies of "Old Aberdare" in stock in local shops.

We apologise for the mis-spelling of "cylchlythyr" on the mast-head of the last issue and for its wrong numbering. The last HANES should have been no.9, not no.8.

The Editor.

THE LADY VANISHES.

Some time ago an elderly lady, long familiar to generations of Aberdarians, vanished. Afterwards many expressed concern at her disappearance and wondered as to her whereabouts. Eventually the lady in question was returned to her rightful place, to the great joy of those who have been worried as to her fate. Aberdarians need not squirm and fret over the hardships of kidnap victims. No harm has come to her during her lengthy absence. The lady is still in one piece and should look none the worse for her experience.

Readers may be concerned as to the identity of the lady. In the conventional sense the lady had no name. Her address could be cited as 'Aberdare Park'. She stood there from 1905 to 1991, some eighty six years. She was known simply as the "Spirit of Industry".

The 'Aberdare Leader' of April 22nd. 1905 recorded the Unveiling Ceremony of the 'Spirit of Industry' Fountain in Aberdare Park. Mr. Isaac George of The Grove, Mountain Ash, had been High Constable of Miskin Higher for 1904-1905. The fountain was his gift to the people of Aberdare to mark his year of office.

"The Fountain", recorded the 'Aberdare Leader', "is of massive granite, surmounted by a statue of industry, standing twelve feet high, on a pedestal five feet, five inches square."

Appropriately, Mr. George was presented with the first cupful of water from the fountain, water which was said to be "better even than Cardiff water."

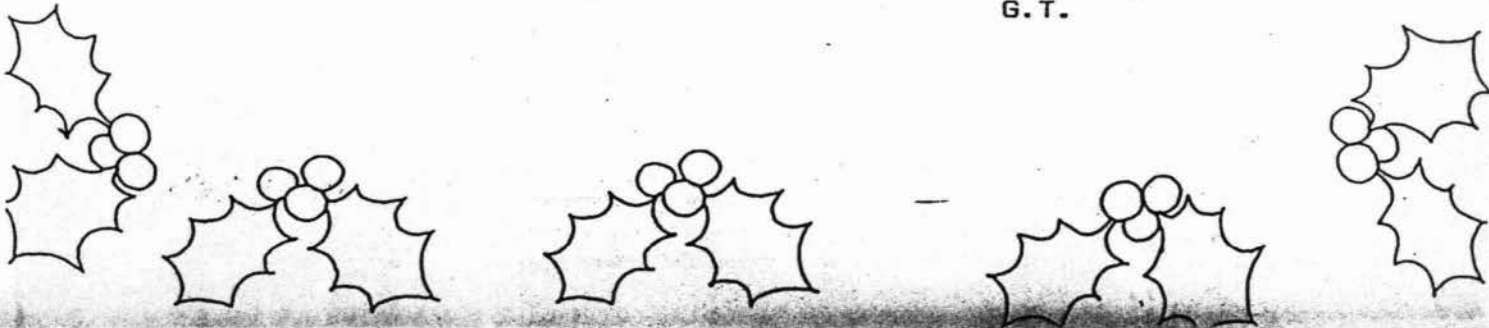
With the passing of time the fountain ceased to function, but it stood, topped by the 'Spirit of Industry' Statue as a fine example of civic statuary. Though weathered, the fountain and the spirit remained undamaged, until modern times, although Mr. Les Venn recalls an example of juvenile high-jinks in which stone-throwing boys managed to knock off the tip of the spirit's nose. (Mr. Venn assured the writer of the accidental nature of the incident).

Far from accidental was the damage done to the fountain and the spirit in the summer of 1990. At the time of the Aberdare Park Motor Cycle Races an act of blatant and malicious vandalism occurred when a gang of youths, wielding scaffolding poles, damaged the Spirit of Industry memorial drinking fountain, sited at the top of the parks main drive after which straw bales were stacked around the memorial and ignited. A monumental mason examined the memorial, and its red marble base, and reported that the statue itself was undamaged but the base was damaged beyond repair. The 'Spirit of Industry' statue was removed to a place of safety while the ruins of the fountain were dismantled and disposed of entirely.

However, the story had a happy ending when in early 1992 the council decided to purchase a new plinth on which the 'Spirit of Industry' statue would be resited. Contracts for the materials and work were agreed with a local monumental mason, and the work was completed by 31st. July 1992.

Hopefully the lady will never again suffer the double indignity of being vandalised then to be consigned to a council store for eighteen months.

G.T.



A glance at the "Aberdare Times" of 100 years ago this month shows a picture which is far removed from the present-day observance of Christmas as a mainly secular season of expenditure on presents and over-indulgence in the comforts of life.

The papers columns contain few if any advertisements for Christmas presents and food and drink, and for many people the season must have been very much like any other. It seems that Christmas day itself and Christmas Eve and Boxing Day were not as busy as they are today, for eisteddfods and religious festivals were commonly held on those days.

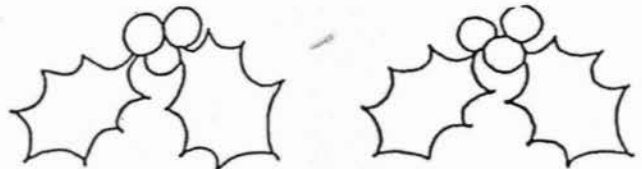
December started badly for Phillip Lake, an elderly man charged with "sleeping out", the serious offence of having no home to go to, for which he was awarded seven days hard labour. When three men with dogs (and a dead hare) were caught trespassing in search of game on Lord Aberdare's land, one of them explained that he had only gone for a walk and the hare "turned up unawares to him". Despite this ingenious explanation, all three were fined one pound and costs, or three weeks in jail.

In those days the harshest penalties often fell upon the young. Three boys in Hirwaun would also have faced jail for three days if they had not been able to pay a fine of 3/6d for throwing snowballs in the street. One man who missed Christmas altogether was quarrelling with his brother in Cefnpennar on Christmas Eve when he was recognized as a deserter from the army by P.S.King, he was remanded for a military escort.

If one relies on this newspaper, it would seem that the seasonal religious and cultural activity referred to above was centred at Aberaman. An eisteddfod took place in Siloh on Christmas Eve and another in Saron Hall on Christmas Day in the evening, the hall being overcrowded. No doubt there were unreported eisteddfods in other parts of the district.

EMIGRATION AND SPOILIATION - These two are largely connected by the redundant population that weekly leaves this valley. On Monday another large batch left the Great Western Station on their way to Liverpool and thence to America. And again the outcry causes that some neighbour has been despoiled of his goods. In some cases the spoliation is serious. Debts seem to have been contracted with the express intention of carrying off the goods dishonestly obtained. Having secured their booty, the dishonest people leave the town secretly, after having as secretly disposed of their own household goods.

FROM.- the Cardiff and Merthyr
Guardian of 27.3.1869.



Ebenezer (Cwmbach) was also crowded on Christmas Day to see a performance of "the popular book" (presumably a cantata) "Ein Gwardwr" (Our Saviour)

As Christmas approached many looked forward to a brief appearance at the Empire Hall of the famous D'Oyly Carte opera company, followed by Mr. Maurice E Bandmann's touring company in the five-act play "The Manxman". The "Aberdare Times" said that the scenery in the first act (the farmyard of the Manx fairy) was particularly realistic with the living animals, etc. But the people of Cwmaman, whose expectations for Christmas were more austere, resolutely turned their backs on the gaudy delights and temptations of the stage, and filled the Public Hall to hear an illustrated lecture by the Council Surveyor on the various appliances for the sanitary arrangements of dwelling houses.