



HISTORIAN WANTED!

Readers of HANES No 11 may remember that in 1799 Clutterbuck the traveller went along a newly made road west of Hirwaun, This was part of a turnpike (or toll road) authorised by an act of 1795. Before that road was built the road to Neath was a "Parish road" which went down the extremely steep and dangerous Pencaedrain road to Pontneathvaughan.

There is a tendency to believe that present-day roads follow the route of ancient pre-existing trackways but this is true only up to a point, For example, if someone wished to visit Aberdare from the east in the late eighteenth century, wheeled vehicles had to be left at Abercynon and if the occupants were disinclined to walk, the only means of transport further up the valley was a sledge-cart. Though the road was bad, it finished altogether at Duffryn, since no thoroughfare had been left between the enclosed lands of Duffryn and Aberaman. the traveller then had to make his way through Craig Isha and Abercwmboi woods, thence to "Aberaman hill" then through the bed of a brook by Abergwawr and Ynyslwyd, entering the village where the Black Lion now stands, i.e. through Wind St. Another track from Duffryn ran up to Cefnpennar and down into Cwmbach, and thence to Aberdare. Again, consider the Maerdy road. Although there was a pathway to the Rhondda Fach which had served for centuries, there was no passage for vehicles until the present road was built In 1892.

From the foregoing It is hard to believe that the first Highways Act was passed as long ago as 1555, This placed the responsibility for the maintenance of roads upon the Parish, which could call upon residents to supply four days labour a year to mend the roads, though eventually the custom arose whereby this could be commuted by a cash payment so that labour could be hired to do the work, Another Highways Act of 1835 abolished statutory labour and increased the amount that could be raised by highway rates. The 1844 Turnpike Act Then under the Public Health Act 1848 local highway boards were formed,

From the late eighteenth century another "layer" of road administration had come into being. These were the turnpike trusts set up to maintain and improve the more important "through roads" of the day. Acting under statutory powers, the trusts were empowered to charge tolls for the use of the portion of road within their custody. The money collected in this way was to be used to defray the expenses of the enabling Act, for the repayment of loans granted for the construction of the road and for repairs to it.

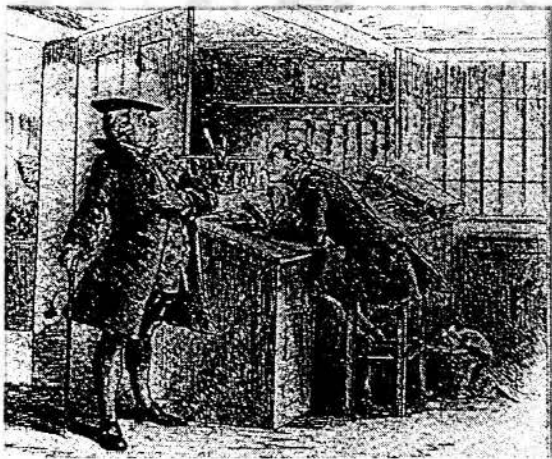
As we know, the tolls were very unpopular in country districts and in parts of south Wales (but not here) they gave rise to the "Rebecca

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CURATOR APPOINTED

HANES extends a warm welcome and best wishes for success in his new post to Mr Christopher Wilson, whom the Council has appointed to the post of curator of the Aberdare museum which is being established on part of the former Gadlys ironworks site. Mr Wilson, who is 38 years old and from Llanelly, has taken up his post and is now in the early stages of cooperation with the consultants who are designing the interior of the new museum.

The new curator took his degree of B.A. in history at Wolverhampton University and a post-graduate Diploma in Museum Studies in Leicester. He has 13 years museum experience with Dyfed, Clwyd and Powys county councils and has conducted research on the life of H.M. Stanley which led him to an interest in African exploration. His other main interests are in prehistoric archaeology and British military history.



Can you Tell Me? No 4

Question

Why was the Open Air School so called ?

Answer

Because it was a school which followed a regime based on as much exposure as possible to fresh air. Some activities took place out of doors when the weather permitted, and others under a verandah.

The open air system was based on an experimental school for delicate children opened in Germany in 1904, The first English version opened near Woolwich in 1907, and the Aberdare open air school, which was near the top of Park Lane where it opened on to Comin Hek, was the first in Wales,

Question

Is the railway bridge over Abernant road the original one?

Answer

It is probably the third bridge at that place. The story of the first bridge is typical of the off-hand attitude to safety in the early days of railways. The Aberdare branch of the Vale of Neath railway terminated in 1851 at what was eventually called the high level station. If an extension of the line eastwards had been part of the railway's original strategy the level of the line at the terminus would have been made lower so as to enable a level crossing to be made over the Abernant road. However, it was not until after the line had been completed that it was decided to extend the line as far as the head of the Aberdare canal in a bid to reach the collieries of the Cwmbach area. This extension opened in June 1853, a bridge (made mainly of wood) over the Abernant road and an embankment being necessary,

In September 1869 the driver of a heavy coal train was horrified to see the bridge yielding as his train passed over it. Putting on full steam, he managed to get his train across, but the bridge had then to be closed for repairs, during which the massive beams were found to be completely rotten. The Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian noted "There are other bridges in this locality not in much safer condition than the one above noticed".

Question

When did the Aberdare canal go out of use?

Answer

The decline of the Aberdare canal began in the mid 1870's due partly to the demise of their main customer, the Aberdare Iron company (with works at Llwydcoed and Abernant.) The other

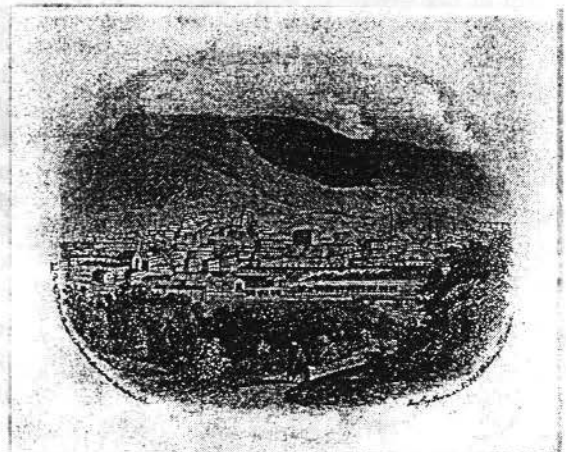
factor was the introduction of railways, though at first there was enough iron being made and coal being raised to keep both railways and the canal busy, Then in the late 1870's the canal was affected by serious subsidence for which they failed to get a legal remedy. This caused the canal to close in 1900 on the grounds of safety.

Question

I have an old newspaper dated the 21st of August 1869 which mentions a steam tramway at Abernant, though it gives no details. What could this have been?

Answer

This is a difficult question because of the shortage of information regarding the tramroads of the Abernant area (I use the word "Tramroad" as the word "tramway" is today usually reserved for rail-borne street passenger systems). In brief, by about 1806 Tappenden's tramroad from their Ironworks at Abernant to the Neath canal had been completed. It was so arranged to pass on its way through the precincts of the Aberdare iron works at Llwydcoed. By 1819 the AIC had acquired the Abernant works and both sites worked as one, with considerable traffic passing between them by means of that portion of Tappenden's tramroad which connected them. This tramroad was converted to steam haulage but no one knows the date of the conversion or of the second conversion when it was made into an ordinary railway. The newspaper reference may be to this line or to the tramroad from Abernant to the Aberdare canal which was made in 1819 and also converted to a railway later.



The Way We Were Then No 5

(i) "I noticed a group of men discussing on a recent Sunday night at the bottom of Cwmdare Hill the subject of boxing. Now surely this is not a fit subject to argue about on a Sunday night in a public place, just as people are coming from a place of worship"

(ii) "Many of the employees of the Bwllfa collieries are riding to and from work on bicycles. But one has eclipsed all the others by riding a motorcycle. What will it all end in? Soon we shall see men being conveyed to the pit head in aeroplanes",

(From "Cwmdare notes" from the Aberdare Leader, 14 May 1910)



Editorial

The leading story in this issue is an appeal for someone to take an interest in the old roads of the Aberdare area. The beginner's approach to local history usually adopts one of two extremes, The beginner either believes that somewhere there is a book or collection of documents which contains all that anyone might want to know, or he/she believes that no information could possibly exist after so many years. Though the truth is usually somewhere in the middle, the second approach is almost true in the case of the local coal industry. There were scores of collieries in the Cynon valley area, and up to about the 1950's when a pit shut the records were usually left in the offices. These were soon vandalised and the records scattered about the place. The sad result is that for most collieries there are no records at all except those found in other archives, eg estate records and the Mines Inspectors' reports. In addition some plans of workings have survived in official records.

Concerning research generally, it is often necessary to go far afield to hunt down sources. The records of the Aberdare Canal Company are in Glamorgan Record Office, Cardiff, while those of the Gadlys estate are in the Lucas papers in the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth. Most of the surviving records of the railway companies are in the Public Record Office, Kew.

However, the researcher into local roads can make a good start in our library at Aberdare, and there is more to find in Glamorgan Record Office.

The Pubs and Clubs of Aberdare

Those who are waiting for the impending reprint of "Old Aberdare" volume Two with its interesting list of the inns of Aberdare will like the following poem composed in 1879 by a Mr T H Perkins to commemorate Queen Victoria's 60th birthday. The poem cleverly brings in the names

Hail, "Salutation," from our little town!
Long may "Victoria" live to wear "The Crown",
Tho' some there are who gloat o'er false alarms,
The people still support "The Royal Arms."
"The Golden Lion" of our isle still stands
To keep the empire's honour in her hands,
And while "Britannia", mistress of the sea
Still reigns supreme, her subjects must be free.
"The Morning Star" of freedom still shines on
And points to past and glorious victories won.
The British workman loyal to the core,
Still loves our "Constitution" as of yore,
"The Queen's" own subjects of all castes and creeds,
In one grand anthem praise her noble deeds!
"The Eagle" with "The Globe" compete in vain
To send congratulations on her reign.
Could "The Three Generals" open now their eyes,
The nation's growth would fill them with surprise.
"Lord Nelson", "Picton" "Raglan" - could they see-
What praise would greet them on our victory.
Although "The Rising Sun" has ceased to sway,
"The Full Moon" shines upon our upward way,
So shall it be, that when her soul departs
"The Prince of Wales" shall reign o'er loyal Hearts.
And since "Reform" is foremost in our day,
The nation's heart is "Liberal" to its sway.
Now from our lovely vale "The Farmers" raise
To join "The Colliers" in our hymn of praise.
All peoples bless her both from near and far,
But none with greater zeal than Sweet 'Berdar.'

Weatherwise

A frequent subject for discussion (before the arrival of "global warming") was the question of historical changes in the weather-are the summers and winters hotter or cooler than they were years ago?. And what about the rain?. Do we get more of it than our ancestors did? Contemporary evidence relates that flood damage was more widespread than we would expect to get today.

An early reference is to the year 1785, when there were great floods throughout summer, with cattle having to be moved to hillsides for safety. In 1813 heavy floods put the whole village of Aberdare (such as it was) under water and the bridge at Llustwen (on the upper part of the Rhondda Fach river) swept away. It was probably only a wooden bridge and it has been suggested that many of the bridges in the valleys were so made because, in areas subjected to floods, they could be repaired easily. Whether the Llustwen bridge was then repaired is not known, but there was no bridge there in 1860 when some Aberdare workmen nearly drowned when crossing the river.

Bridges were again carried away by summer floods in 1823 and in 1829 it was reported that the whole valley was completely under water! The same thing happened in November 1833 when there was one uninterrupted lake from Gadlys to Duffryn.

Though thunderstorms, cold spells and gales were noted in ensuing years, heavy floods were less in evidence until November 1878 when torrential rain flooded the centre of the town, cutting off worshippers at the morning service at Nazareth Chapel. But, as related in HANES no 12, Mountain Ash with its fall of fishes in 1859 holds the record for odd weather in this area.

HISTORIAN WANTED!

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riots". In this area there were two "Turnpike trusts" the first of which was established in 1793 to build a new road (which may be called the Aberdare road) from a spot between Abercynon and Cilfynydd to Abernant, which in those days was the name given to Glyn Neath. In 1795 the Abernant and Rhyd y Blew trust was formed, the latter place being a public house near Beaufort. This road was to go through Hirwaun and Merthyr so the Aberdare road was connected to it at Hirwaun. It was part of the Abernant and Rhyd y Blew road west of Hirwaun that Clutterbuck travelled on. This was the road which ran past Rhigos and down the Glyn-neath bank.

Both these trusts were rather unsuccessful and it seems that neither road was fully made, The Aberdare road had an incomplete section in the village and at Abercynon a bridge which was to be built over the Taff had not been started as late as 1843. However, the Glamorgan Canal Co's aqueduct over the river Taff had a towpath on one side which was wide enough to take carts, and they permitted the public to use this on payment of a charge of 6d a cart and 2d a ridden horse (pedestrians were allowed to pass free of charge).

The main problem was, of course, shortage of money, notwithstanding that the Aberdare trust's tolls were 50% higher than any other. The industrialists who had lent money to start up the trust had lost hope of seeing their money again. They had no one to blame but themselves, for after the first meeting of the trustees on 8 May 1793 not one of them attended on the following *thirty eight* occasions when a meeting was convened. The next successful meeting was on the 21st of May 1803. In 1844 there was no clerk or surveyor to the Trust but Thomas Wayne stated that he was "virtually treasurer", having been appointed at a meeting at which he was not present. Someone said "Wayne will take it and let him pass through the gates free". When Wayne was informed what had happened he said "Very well, let it be so". The Act for the Aberdare road had expired in 1814, but Wayne was unaware that a new Act had been passed in that year.

There was a toll gate each side of Aberdare village, the locations of which were moved once or twice. The lower village gate was probably outside the Boot Inn and afterwards at Ynyslwyd, and the upper gate was at the White Lion and afterwards at the house now called Station House near the bottom of Cwmdare hill. Carts etc had to pay 9d and ridden horses 2d, but broadwheeled carts (which did less damage to the road surface) paid 6d.

Few people are aware of the old parish roads of this area or indeed of the turnpike roads which augmented them. There is plenty of evidence in archives which needs to be dug out and put into written form. And there are little mysteries to be solved. For example, was the lane to Fedw Hir which becomes the exit road from the crematorium one of the two parish roads which led to Merthyr? This article began with the words "Historian wanted!" The editor would like to hear from

some one who is willing to take this subject up and perhaps produce an article in due course. Advice on sources will be gladly given.

Charles Peace and Hirwaun

The Aberdare Leader for the 18th of February 1933 records that Charles Peace, the notorious Victorian burglar and murderer, was seen many years previously in Hirwaun!

The event was recalled by a Mrs Elizabeth Thomas who had the eerie experience of travelling alone with him when he was a fugitive from justice. Mrs Thomas (then aged 99) related that when she was about 26 years old she happened to be on a train that was passing through Hirwaun. As it did so a man vaulted a wall and jumped into her compartment, of which she was the sole occupant.

"He asked me if he had frightened me and I said he had, and that he had no business to jump into the trains in that fashion", she said.

Later he was arrested and she learned that her fellow passenger had been no other than Charles Peace.

The Power and the Privilege

"Mr Richard Fothergill asked for facilities to enable him to travel between Abernant and Merthyr early in the morning and late in the evening, for the purpose of occasionally visiting the Plymouth Iron works. Mr Williams [the superintendent of the line] arranged for him to have a special engine for the purpose whenever he wanted it,"

(From The minute book of the Vale of Neath Railway Co. 20 Oct 1863. Fothergill Hankey and Bateman were then the principal partners of the Aberdare Iron Company and in that year they had bought the Plymouth Iron works at Merthyr.)

Industrial News from 1865

Some improvement is manifested in the coal trade, and many of the works are being extended. At Hirwaun, the Hirwaun Iron and Coal Company (limited) are continuing their operations with a view of greatly extending their coal-get, and furnishing themselves with a good supply of iron-stone. Indeed this company appears to have given such an impetus to all kinds of trade in the immediate locality that all the houses (many of which a few months ago might have been had for keeping fire in them), are now filled, and new ones are being built. Moreover, the inhabitants have determined upon erecting gas-works in the place, and will deposit their plans for the same at the office appointed by Government for that purpose, in the coming November.

The editor will be pleased to receive questions on local history and will attempt to answer them with the aid of local experts.



With grateful thanks to NeighbourNet for assistance with design and layout of this newsletter