



## SEVENTY MPH CYCLONE IN THE TRAIL OF THE STORM EXTENSIVE DAMAGE IN ABERDARE VALLEY

*No, this does not mean the extensive floods and gales in October. This so-called cyclone hit Aberdare and district on the 16th of November 1928. We give an abbreviated version of the Aberdare Leader's account of it:-*

Very serious damage was done by the terrific 70 miles per hour gale which swept over Aberdare and district on Friday. It is many years since a storm of such severity was experienced here, and the Floridian hurricane left disastrous marks on numerous dwelling houses. Many are the stories of damaged rooms due to the tearing away of slates. In one house a whole chimney piece fell through the roof, a huge stone therefrom crashing on the bed. A man was knocked down by a falling hoarding in Gadlys road and injured ....

A loud crash in Victoria Square was the signal for the assembling of a crowd of people, Mr Morgen Issacs window having been smashed in by a piece of lead blown from the roof of a neighbouring building. Some of the glass was carried by the wind to the other side of the road, striking Barclays Bank premises.... Much danger was caused to pedestrians in the neighbourhood of the Taff Vale Crossing in Commercial St by the stripping of slates from surrounding roofs. Twenty slates dropped in one minute from the Ironbridge Hotel, some of them narrowly missing pupils of the Girls' County School who were proceeding to school.... Slates and bricks from the Glancynon Foundry were flying in all directions. A distinct swaying motion was to be seen in the stack, but it did not crash....

The tornado brought down trees at Aberdare Park and the lake was churned up until it presented a rough sea aspect....thousands of slates were littered on the streets in Trecynon and numerous windows broken. A window was blown out in a vacant drapers shop in Gadlys Road.... The roof of a portion of the Aberdare Golf Club premises was ripped away and left the ladies' portion of the house exposed to the wind and the rain. Fowl cots in Abernant were torn asunder and some of them left upside down ....

In Cwmdare practically all the houses in the village showed some sign or other of the mighty force of the wind.... one side of King Street suffered very badly, five large chimney pots were blown down and several houses are minus troughing, weather boards and other outside fittings.... The velocity of the wind interfered with the Bwllfa pit and also extinguished the lights. The traffic shift here and at Nantmelin drift was suspended ...

Lower down the valley at Penrhiwceiber Colliery a 50-foot high wooden cooling tower was seen to be swaying precariously with each gust. As its collapse would have damaged nearby machinery Mr John Davies, an electrician, climbed the outside of the tower and attached ropes to it which were then secured at ground level. When the gale abated the tower was taken down.... A man was crossing Mount bridge when his hat was blown off. He quickly raised his hand, in which he had three £1 notes, to prevent it going over the bridge. By so doing, he released his grip of the notes which were blown away. He will carry his notes in his pocket in future.... One young man was reading a newspaper on Penrhiwceiber road when a flying slate carried it away from his hands. He was standing near a newsagents establishment at the time. Gazing at the flying news-sheet he hesitated then entered the shop presumably to purchase another paper.

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### NEWS FROM THE MUSEUM

Progress towards opening continues to be made. Work on the fitting out of the storage and workshop areas has been completed this year, ensuring that the museum meets the required standards for the safe storage and handling of its collections, thus safeguarding them for the future.

The final stages of building work, the installation of an education room on the mezzanine floor, will be complete by Christmas.

Following approval from the Heritage Lottery Fund for works on site to begin, the reception/shop and art gallery spaces will be the first area tackled to complete all works situated at the front of the building. It is intended that these areas will be open to the public early in the new year. Work on the main gallery, the final stage of the project, will begin in the new year with the completed museum due to open in May.

# THE CENOTAPH-HERE TO STAY

It is now about two months since work on the remodelling of Victoria Square came to an end. The result is a great improvement and the various features already look as though they had always been there, and add dignity to the cenotaph, the memorial to the dead of two world wars. However, probably few people realise that several alternative sites for the cenotaph were under consideration in 1920 and support for the town centre site was by no means unanimous.

A committee met on the 26th of January 1920 to discuss the provision of a cenotaph. This was chaired by the then High Constable, C B Stanton, MP, whose son had been among those killed in the war. The council had agreed to support such a measure and the committee decided to call a public meeting to discuss the matter fully. However, by December 1922 a final decision about where the cenotaph was to be erected had not been made. At a meeting of ex-servicemen held to discuss its positioning a Major David stated (perhaps facetiously) that if it were placed in Victoria Square it would not be possible to pause and reflect (because of the traffic) unless one went into the Boot Hotel. This remark was objected to by "Officer's widow," who stated in a letter to "The Leader" that it was a slur on war widows. She said the cenotaph should be sited where it could be seen every day. Although the majority of ex-servicemen wanted it placed in the park near the lower gates the eventual decision of the Council was to place it where it is today, and the completed monument was unveiled on the 15th of March 1923.

By 1939 when the Council should have concerning themselves with much more important matters the increase of traffic in the town centre made them consider whether the Cenotaph should be moved to a quieter place. They suggested to a deputation of ex-servicemen that it should be moved to a site between the fountain and the lower park gates, The ex-servicemen met and considered the options including a removal to the Rock Grounds. There seemed to be a feeling that the cenotaph was in an unsympathetic and disrespectful environment and when a vote was taken it was in favour of moving the Cenotaph. As we all know, nothing was done and the matter was left in abeyance.

In January 1948 the council met a deputation from the local branch of the British Legion, which claimed that the plinth of the cenotaph was being used to load milk churns and beer crates and asked the council to move it to a more suitable site. One councillor stated that the council was originally in favour of siting the cenotaph in the park, but gave way to the wishes of the ex-servicemen who had wanted it to be placed in Victoria Square. Though the councillors were in favour of acceding to the British Legion's request a letter to the Leader from the former Vicar of St Fagans, then in retirement in Middlesborough, seems to have had a telling effect. The Reverend E W Hughes wrote that to move the cenotaph would be a catastrophe. Situated where it was, the cenotaph was a constant reminder to all of the importance of that which it commemorated. The memorial must stay where it was "lest we forget, and to the greater glory of Aberdare and as an inspiration to all who follow us." His spirited letter seems to put a stop to the proposed move-but not permanently.

In January 1950 it seems that the question was raised again. But a circular from Whitehall at that time asked the local authorities to confine spending on highway schemes to essential matters and this caused the council to defer the question of moving the cenotaph, and it seems that the matter was not raised again. The recent alterations in Victoria Square make it unlikely now that the cenotaph will ever be moved. And a good thing too.

## EDITORIAL

The news that part of the museum is to open before the whole of it is finished is a pleasant surprise and serves to recall the lobbying which the History Society carried out in the 1980s to set up a museum in the area, and to site it in Aberdare rather than in the Country Park. However, there are still some important historical relics out there which are not "in captivity" and which never will be. Subject to the effects of wind and weather for not much less than 200 years (in one case) they cannot last for ever. The well known tramroad bridge at Robertstown was restored some 10 years ago and is not in danger, though the approach on the north side is in a filthy condition. We cannot say the same of the interesting and important Hirwaun causeway which carried the tramroad to Penderyn over the Cynon and the splendid stone bridge at Gelli Isaf which were referred to in HANES Nos 14 and 15. The History Society will continue to campaign for the preservation of the little that remains of the transport system of the age of iron in the Aberdare district.

## BOOKS

Copies of "Old Aberdare" Vol 8 are still available price £5.50 and would make a good Xmas present for someone who is "difficult" to buy for. The editor regrets that his book "Aberdare-The Railways and Tramroads" has met with production difficulties and will not now be ready until early in the new year.

Still available locally is "Cynon Valley Place Names" by Deric John, published by Gwasg Carreg Calch at £4.50, 118 pages. Mr John, a retired teacher, has lived in the Cynon Valley since 1971, and has developed a strong interest in local placenames. In his book the variations in the local place-names over many years are listed from their first known occurrence to the present and their meanings are given in all but a few cases. The earliest recorded place name is Ystradfellte ( written as "Melltoull" ) in c. 1150, followed by Aberdare and Hirwaun, the latter written as "Hyrweunworgan", both first recorded in the year 1203. These are closely followed by "Meyskin" (1233), "Bwllfa Dare" (1253), and "Pennyderyn" (1291).

This very useful and informative book gives references for all the variations given, and includes a page of sound advice for researchers. It is highly recommended.

# THE WAY WE WERE THEN No 7

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**THE BRECONSHIRE BEACONS.** Last Sunday was the day which is every year recognised as the proper day for climbing these hills and indulging in Champagne and bottled porter on their highest peaks. As usual a number of people from Aberdare and Merthyr, with a sprinkling from the neighbourhood of Brecon, made their annual visit, climbed the hill, and indulged themselves when on the top.  
C.M.G. 7th of July 1906.

**TOWN IMPROVEMENTS.** If one part of Aberdare more than another requires demolition and reconstruction it is that part of High Street which clusters around the Farmers' Arms. Between the bridge over the Dare and the top of Canon Street, that side of High Street is almost one dense nursery of crime and immorality. On most Sundays there are drunken brawls and disgraceful scenes, which are most offensive to decent persons having to pass that way. In clearing away some of those nests of infamy, and remodelling the street generally the Board of Health are doing a very requisite and good work. As at present constructed it is narrow and dangerous, full of abrupt angles, round which the drivers of vehicles dart at a furious rate not seeming to be concerned about the mischief they may do. There are hopes however that the danger will be to a great extent removed. Now that the work is under hand, it is to be hoped that the Board will do their part efficiently so as to render that thoroughfare as safe for pedestrians, and especially children, as any part of the town. The whole of High Street from No 1 to the bridge over the Dare railway requires widening. It would be greatly improved, and so in fact would Commercial Place, by a portion of the garden at that end being taken away and thrown into the thoroughfare. We know not how far the Board intends to proceed with immediate improvements, but we should be glad to see the street much widened from the point at which the work is begun to the premises of the late Mr Morgan Williams on the right hand side, and then the work of demolition and improvement begun on the other side, taking those dilapidated huts and that ugly and dangerous corner of the Parish Church Yard. Until this is done High Street will remain what it now is, dirty, ugly, and unsafe to travel through. Anyone who has noticed vehicles dashing down the bridge at the Gadlys end, or has seen them turn the angle into Canon Street, or round the Masons' Arms, must have felt astonished that so few accidents occur at these points.... We hope it will not be necessary to have a member of the Board of Health or any one belonging to the members' families killed or maimed in High Street before it will be possible to get its dangerous points improved.... and in their place no doubt we shall see structures raised that will be a credit rather than a disgrace to the town.  
A.L. 12th of July 1873.

[A map of the area concerned unfortunately it is not dated, as it should be, but it dates from not before 1866.



Continued from front page.

The effects do not appear to have been as bad as those of the 1913 tornado which assailed the Taff Valley on the 27th of October in that year. Its first effects were felt at Treforest at about 6 pm preceded by a tremendous rainstorm accompanied by thunder and lightning. The following is taken from Thomas Evans's "The Story of Abercynon".

The tornado struck Abercynon with tremendous violence. Several persons were seriously injured but nobody was killed. [but see below] The portion of Abercynon which received the full force of the storm was Fair View and Pen Locks. The whole street of twelve houses was wrecked. Nine houses were roofless, the debris being found in gardens and fields behind the houses. In the field lies what is left of the house of Mr Alfred Blake. This was known as old Station House because it was from there that a stationary engine hauled the train up the steep incline in the middle of the 19th century. It is sad to relate that Alfred Blake succumbed to injuries received during the storm two days later. The east side of Abercynon generally was stripped of trees, huge elms and oaks lying with their roots in the air. There they remained for many years and were later cut up for firewood during the 1921 strike.

Other effects of the storm were reported later. The roof of the Cooperative Stores in Cilfynydd was eventually found on the common half way to Abercynon. A man walking in the middle of the main street in Cilfynydd was swept up by the tornado and carried over the houses. His body was found in a field the next day.

## Can You Tell Me? No. 7



### Question.

Did Aberdare ever have a set of stocks, and if so where were they placed?

### Answer.

Stocks were used to expose wrong-doers to public derision and insult. They were often placed in churchyards and such was the case in Aberdare, the stocks being in that part of the churchyard which was behind the "Cross Keys" in Green St (closed 1880). Small children were often threatened by their parents with the stocks if they misbehaved.

### Question.

Where was the skating rink in Aberdare?

### Answer.

I have seen no record of a skating rink at Aberdare. However there was one at Aberaman, variously described as being in Old Gas House Lane and Belmont Gardens. This may have been the old building visible from the bypass which was demolished a few years ago. Can anyone help with more information? The skating rink floor was made of cement laid over a lot of blood from the slaughter house.

### Question.

I was shown recently a list of locomotives made by Fletcher Jennings which included some used in local ironworks. One engine built for a firm of contractors in Birmingham ended up at the Gadlys Iron Company where it used to work on "Knackers Knowle incline". Can you tell me where this was, please?

### Answer.

This is probably an instance of an English person trying to spell a Welsh place-name which he has heard spoken, which has given rise to scores of ludicrous examples, such as "Lady Jenkins' Colliery for Lletyshenkin Colliery. Knackers Knowle must refer to a local place, probably in the Gadlys or, more probably, the Llwydcoed area. This is another case in which the help of readers is sought.

*The editor will be pleased to receive questions on local history and will attempt to answer them with the aid of local experts. Contributions on local history subjects will also be welcomed from both full and associate members.*

## A Merry Christmas and a happy New Year to all our readers

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