THE MILL ON THE DARE.

Those present at the Society's December 2003 meeting were able to study the sketches of local views made by the sisters Bacon in 1827-1828. These were presented on slides by Mr. Douglas Williams. Of special interest were drawings of two mills said to be on the river Dare. (See the reprint of Old Aberdare Vol. 1, Page 16b.) "Hanes" will attempt to relate these to existing documentary evidence.

The first known reference to a mill in Aberdare dates from 1491-1492. The relevant record mentions "The mill at Aberdare" which was then ruinous (Ministers' accounts of the officers of Jasper, Duke of Bedford and Earl of Pembroke). W. W. Price, writing in 1948 said "near the present post office (now Wetherspoon's – Ed.) was the bridge to cross the Dare, on the right was the ancient corn mill which had ground corn for centuries". (Park Schools Centenary – Its History: 1848 – 1948, page 9.) It is known that there was still a mill in the village of Aberdare in 1840. It is listed in the Poor Law Rate Book of 30/9/1840, It was then owned by John Richards, and occupied by Evan Evans at a gross estimated rental of £15.

The second reference, in 1664, to a mill in the village of Aberdare relates to a 'well-known' tucking (fulling) mill with all watercourse thereto belonging. This mill had been in the ownership of Morgan David Jenkin, William Morgan and David Morgan prior to that date when it was purchased by the Matthew family of Aberaman. This was later leased at a yearly rent of £15. (Glamorgan County History, Vol. IV, Page 339.)

A 'new' mill was erected at Aberaman in c.1630 Viz: "William Matthew Esq. holdeth 30 acres of the Lord's demesne lands in Aberdare, upon this is a mill lately erected and built paying therefore £10." (Survey of the manor of Miskin). In 1638 this is described as a "Gryndinge mill", and in 1789 when the Aberaman estate was advertised for sale we learn that the property had "a corn mill in good repair, with plenty of water in all seasons, and great custom". (Hereford Journal).

It is of course impossible to know exactly where either of the Dare mills stood. We can, however, pick up the story again some 24 years after the Miss Bacon sketched by looking at an 1852 trade directory, which lists –"The High Street business of one John Lindsey who was both a brewer (probably the Rock Brewery) and a miller; and a Woollen Cloth manufactory also in High Street."

The latter was owned by a Margaret David. This building is clearly shown on the 1868 large scale O.S. map as a woollen mill (Glandare Mills). It may have stood on or near the site of the mill drawn by Emma or Lucy Bacon. By 1875 ownership had passed to Edward Gilbert Price & Co., woollen manufacturers of 28 Canon Street, the river and mill being directly behind this (Worrall's Directory). A further change of use occurred in 1895 when the premises became 'Halewood's Boot, Shoe & Clog Factory'. Peter Halewood was the largest maker of footwear in the town with branches throughout South Wales, including Cardiff.

This old building remained until perhaps the 1950's, its last use being a training centre for the unemployed (see photo 100 in 'Pictures from the Past' Vol. 1.) Although we can only see the old Dare mill "through a glass darkly" we do have a unique record of the continual use of an industrial site in the centre of Aberdare from medieval times until the 1920/1930's.

In addition to the above there was an old mill brewery in High Street in 1893. Yet another ancient mill existed at Llwydcoed, Melin Llwydcoed, (owned in 1682 by Miles Mathew of Gadlys) hence Mill Street, and trade directories list the name 'Old Mill Factory' in Gloucester Street. Both these stood on the River Cynon. Other mills are briefly mentioned in Gardd Aberdare.

A DAY AT THE FAIR

ABERDARE'S FAIRS & MARKETS

Fairs and markets, in some form or another, have been held here since Aberdare first became a settlement. The earliest markets would have been held in the churchyard of St. John's or around the cross which is said to have stood on the site of the old Town hall in High Street, itself built on the site of an ancient inn called Bon-y-Groes (the base of the cross). There were also smaller district fairs at Aberaman, Heol-y-Felin and Tregibbon – (Whit Monday)

Traditionally market day was a Saturday and periodical fairs were held on April 1st. and 16th., and November 13th. for cattle. Other fairs such as flannel fairs came later. Markets and fairs were important events, not only for the buying and selling of goods but also for the hiring of agricultural workers (mop fairs)

The word 'fair' is derived from the Latin word Feria – a holiday, and so it was locally, officially or unofficially! – *"Hardly any children in school today owing to a fair held in the place"* (Llwydcoed school log book, June 5th. 1865), and *"Most of the pits were idle on fair day and only partially worked on the Tuesday, and the same may be said of the ironworks"* (C & M. Guardian, 1866).

These commercial fairs attracted roundabouts, entertainments and side-shows. We still speak of 'The Fair' when the town is visited twice a year by amusement caterers who still stick (approximately) to the traditional dates of the old fairs. The colourful report that follows is taken from the 'Aberdare Times' of April 1870.

THE FAIR – THE PRINCIPAL FAIR OF THE YEAR – A FAIR LOOKED FORWARD TO WITH INTEREST BY THE YOUTH OF THE DISTRICT FOR MILES AROUND – WAS HELD ON SATURDAY. CATTLE WERE SOLD IN THE MORNING, BUT THE CHIEF FEATURE OF THE FAIR IS "PLEASURE". THERE WAS A GOOD SHOW OF CATTLE, MANY OF WHICH CHANGED HANDS AT UNUSUALLY HIGH PRICES. THE PRINCIPAL STREETS OF THE TOWN AND ESPECIALLY THOSE IN THE VICINITY OF THE MARKET WERE CROWDED IN THE EVENING WITH THOUSANDS OF MEN AND WOMEN OF ALL AGES. EVERYBODY SEEMED TO HAVE TURNED OUT "TO SEE THE FAIR". THE CROWDS WERE THOROUGHLY GOOD-HUMOURED, AND WERE BENT ON ENJOYING THEMSELVES. THERE WERE THE USUAL ACCOMPANIMENTS OF ALL PLEASURE FAIRS, AND A GOOD DEAL OF MONEY WAS SPENT. THE BALLAD SINGER AND THE STREET HAWKER DROVE A GOOD TRADE, AND THE DEALERS IN ORANGES AND BUNS WERE FULLY OCCUPIED. "CHEAP JACK" (1.)WAS VERY WITTY, AND WAS WELL PATRONISED, AND WARREN'S THEATRE, (2.) WITH ITS TINSELLED ATTENDANTS, WERE CROWDED. THE LARGE AMOUNT OF YOUNG LADS WAS REMARKABLE, WHO WERE DETERMINED TO SEE AND TASTE EVERYTHING. MANY OF THESE ARE YOUNG COLLIERS, WHO ALREADY EARN AS MUCH AS MANY AN AGRICULTURAL LABOURER. HOT "FAGGOTS", AT A PENNY APIECE, WITH A HALFPENNY WORTH OF BREAD, WERE MUCH RELISHED BY THESE YOUNGSTERS. THE PUBLIC HOUSES WERE CROWDED IN THE LATTER PART OF THE EVENING, AND MUST HAVE DONE WELL BY THE FAIR. THERE WERE, AS USUAL WHERE LARGE CROWDS CONGREGATE, A NUMBER OF THE LIGHT-FINGERED GENTRY PLYING THEIR VOCATIONS. THEY WERE, HOWEVER, CLOSELY WATCHED BY THE POLICE, WHO DESERVE CREDIT FOR THE INTELLIGENCE AND VIGILANCE THEY DISPLAYED. AN INSTANCE OF THEIR SKILL WAS SHOWN LATE IN THE EVENING. A PENDERYN FARMER HAD SOLD HIS CATTLE IN THE MORNING, AND INSTEAD OF GOING HOME WITH THE PROCEEDS – BETWEEN £10 AND £50 - HE REMAINED TO SEE AND ENJOY THE FAIR. BY SOME MEANS OR OTHER HE WAS RELIEVED OF THIS MONEY, AND SPOKE OF IT TO A POLICEMAN HE MET. THE THIEVES WERE POINTED OUT, BUT NO MONEY WAS FOUND ON THEM; BUT THE POLICE TOOK THE LIBERTY OF SEARCHING A "GENTLEMAN" ON WHOM THEY HAD HAD THEIR EYE ALL DAY, AND THE IDENTICAL MONEY (CHIEFLY BANK NOTES) WAS FOUND ON HIS PERSON.

NOTES.

    (1.) Cheap Jack – A travelling vendor of small wares who is usually ready to 'cheapen' his goods, i.e. take less for them than the first-named price.

    (2.) Warren's Theatre – A fit-up or portable wooden and canvas booth theatre which presented melodrama and 'blood and thunder' plays. Warren was a well-known travelling showman. Local chapels would have abhorred the sight of the female 'tinselled attendants'.

(A future issue will look at the permanent market buildings of 1832 and 1853).

SEE THE CONQUERING HERO COMES.*

AN ACCOUNT OF THE OPENING OF THE ABERDARE RAILWAY IN 1846.

(1) THE CEREMONIES.

"On Wednesday the 5th. August this pretty village was the scene of considerable and pleasing excitement. From most of the principal homes and from all the prominent points of the place flags and banners floated in the breeze – many bearing the most elegant devices, mottoes etc. All the inhabitants turned out in their holiday attire. To Aberdare and its far-famed valley the advantages which this railway may be the means of procuring can scarcely be estimated properly.

At an early hour an empty train gaily decorated with various colours and evergreens left the village for Abercynon to pick up the directors and shareholders travelling from Cardiff and Merthyr Tydfil, its departure was marked by fanfares etc. played by the local band. The returning train was greeted along the route by the cheers of the crowds and the firing of canon. On arrival the party of directors etc. headed by the band walked in procession to the Boot Inn (then in High Street – ed.) where they held a business meeting.

A later train brought a 'brilliant party of ladies and gentlemen' to Aberdare to join the festivities. Throughout the day the place continued to throng with people – banners and flags were suspended from almost innumerable points and 'canons roared'.

At 4.00 pm. a very numerous party of gentlemen sat down to a most sumptuous champagne dinner at the Boot, the table was most liberally supplied and the wines of which an abundant quantity was provided – were of first rate excellence (all at the expense of the company!)

The following day at the Black Lion Hotel, those who had built the railway and company employee's (100 in all) dressed in their Sunday clothes and looking as smart as squires of high degree were treated to a meal of roast beef and plum pudding and a liberal supply of cwrw da." (Abridged account – ed.)

(2) THE ANATOMY OF THE RAILWAY.

The Aberdare Railway Company was incorporated by Act of Parliament on 31st. July 1845. Its promoters were Sir J.J. Guest and Crawshay Bailey, other directors included – Edward Morgan Williams (Gadlys) – Edward John Hutchins and David Evans. It had a capital of £166,600. The whole line, station houses, bridges etc. cost £50,000. Tenders included requirements for:- 500 tons of rail – 60,000 screw bolts and 10,000 sleepers of larch. The line was surveyed by David Jones and the builder was a Mr. Storm (Stormtown was an area and the name of a signal box in Abercynon, so perhaps the railway navvies set up camp there).

A description of the carriages appeared in the last edition of 'Hanes'. One of the locomotives (an addition to stock in September 1846) was named 'Aberaman'. This was a beautifully made and most powerful six-wheeled engine by Hawthorn of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Its cylinders were 16" with a two-foot stroke. The driving wheels were 4' 6" in diameter and it had a six-wheel tender. The engine and tender weighed 24 tons. It was the largest loco in the district and was capable of drawing a very heavy load. No accidents or disputes occurred during the construction of the line. Building had commenced on 17th. August 1845. The single track (with sidings and a branch line across the valley to Cwmbach) was just ten miles in length. The railway commenced at Navigation house (Abercynon) and terminated on Gadlys Uchaf Farm (near the bottom of Mill Street).

The first engine passed over the line from one terminus to the other on the 22nd. June 1846. The line was opened for mineral traffic in July 1846 and to passengers on 6th. August 1846, on that day all the shops closed and the tradesmen of the "village" took to and fro tickets for a trip on the railway. Prices were – first class, one and fourpence – second class, one shilling – third class, eightpence (all single fares). On the opening day Mr. Thomas Powell sent 100 tons of coal down the line to Cardiff. In 1848 Henry Austin Bruce was able to write to friends saying, *"We are no longer the inaccessible people we were, being within half a mile of a railroad station, a great convenience which does not at all interfere with the scenery."* Soon after the opening of the railway the 221 shares in the Aberdare Canal Company dropped from an original price of £120 per share to £70.

* This rousing chorus from Handel's 'Judas Maccabaeus' was traditionally played by brass bands throughout the Victorian era to herald the launching of ships and the opening of railways etc.

Sources –
The Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian – August & September 1846.
Regional History of the Railways of Great Britain, Vol. 12. South Wales. By D.S.M. Barrie, pp153-4.

MORE RIPPING YARNS.

(1.)

The history of the Matthew family of Aberaman House is yet to be written. For generations they were the principle 'Squires' of the district, owning extensive lands in the parish. Myles (or Miles) Matthew (1621-1682) was the sixth child of William Matthew 1 and Catherine, daughter of Edward Pritchard of Llancaiach. He married Elizabeth, the daughter of William Bassett of Miskin.

It is recorded that Miles Matthew in command of the Life Guards, played a heroic part at the opening engagement at Keynton (Kineton) at the foot of Edgehill on 23rd. October 1642, carrying the standard of Charles 1 and assisting him and the Duke of York to escape from the battlefield. He had his horse shot from under him and later was forced to take refuge in the interior of Wales. He was later (1648) captured at the battle of St. Fagan's. He was detained on a Parliamentary sloop ' The Admiral Crowther' lying off Cardiff, and sentenced to death. His sentence was commuted and he was instead transported to the Barbados. He eventually returned to Wales and became High Sheriff of Glamorgan in 1676. He died at Llancaiach in 1682 and is buried in the chancel of St. John's Church. In 1659 he resided at Blaengwawr farm, and later at Gadlys Isha.

(2.)

On 11th. August 1900 Bostock & Wombwell's famous Menagerie visited the town. It was announced that on the last day of the show Mr. Thomas, hairdresser, of 47 Pembroke Street, would enter the lions' den and shave a man for a wager of £10.

The outcome of this challenge is not recorded – we wonder if it was a close shave?!

ABERDARE 1854 – 1856. (Continued from last Hanes.)
The Great Strike of 1856.

I well remember the great strike in the iron trade in 1856. On that occasion the military had to be stationed at Aberdare. There was a great upset in the industrial community over this district at that time, but in the Aberdare Valley the trouble was with the iron workers and not the colliers.

It is an interesting coincidence that during my professional career, many years after I had lived in Aberdare, I have, in my professional capacity, been entrusted with the dismantling and realisation of the Hirwaun, Llwydcoed, Abernant and Aberaman Iron Works, this evidencing the wonderful alteration that has taken place in the local iron trade within the last half-century. Practically the whole of the ironworks situated in this valley, and which were the industries largely supporting the population between the fifties and sixties, have ceased to exist.

Aberdare Half a Century Ago.

I do not quite recollect what the population of the Aberdare Valley was in those days, but certainly not more than one-third of what it is today, if as large. The town of Aberdare consisted mainly of Cardiff Street, Commercial Street, Commercial Place, High Street, Bute Street, Market Street, and Station Street. Commercial Street terminated with the old Welsh Harp, directly opposite the bridge. There was a row of cottages on one side of Cardiff Street with gardens in front, at the side of which the old West of England Bank stood adjoining. The Queen's Hotel had been recently erected on a field known as Maes-y-Dre, and was the only house at that time existing on this open space between the Gadlys Works and the town.

Glamorgan Reminiscences, by D.T. Alexander – (to be continued.)

ADDITIONS.

The last edition of 'Hanes' listed some of the Italian café's that opened in the town in the 1900's. The following additional information is now recorded –

New establishments (by 1920).

Mrs. E. Cardinali – 34 Commercial Street.
Guiseppi Cardinali – 4A Ffochaman Road.
Cruci Bros. – 10 Cardiff Street

Louis Fulgoni – 43 Lewis Street, Aberaman
Rabaiotti Bros – 28 Commercial Street.

New branches of existing businesses (by 1920).

Bracchi Bros. – 6 Lewis Street, Aberaman – 34 Canon Street, Aberdare - & 71 Gadlys road.
G. Mascherpa & Sons – 38 Commercial Street.
Marcelli Servini – 22 Lewis Street, Aberaman. & 272 Cardiff Road, Aberaman.