

CYNON VALLEY HISTORY SOCIETY

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HANES



NEWSLETTER OF THE CYNON VALLEY HISTORY SOCIETY
CYLCHLYTHYR CYMDEITHAS HANES CWM CYNON

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The Chairman and Committee send all our readers Best Wishes for Christmas and the New Year.
Dymuniadau gorau ar gyfer y Nadolig a'r Flwyddyn Newydd.

How those curiosities would be quite forgot, did not such idle fellows as I am put them down (John Aubrey 1626-1697)

WOMAN'S HANES: NUMBER TWO.

Hanes No.44 (Autumn 2008) was devoted to aspects of women's history, and as this proved popular the editor has decided to devote a second number to the subject.



THE GENTLE SEX 1875.

At Aberdare thirteen women and a boy have been charged with riotous behaviour. They followed a repairer working in the Dyffryn Pits as he was being conducted from his work by two policemen. They pulled him about, struck him, and did all they could to get him from their protection. The bench fined the married women £1 each, and the single women and the boy 10/- each or one month's imprisonment in default, but all the fines were paid.
The Graphic, 13 March 1875.

and 1891

A woman at Aberdare police-court yesterday, in describing a fight which had taken place between two members of her own sex, described one of the fair combatants as the better 'man'.

A CHARITABLE BARONESS. 1878

Since Sir William Temple retired to Sheen to cultivate roses I do not suppose that English history presents so interesting a spectacle as that of ex-Home Secretary Bruce superintending the serving out of soup in an obscure part of South Wales. Lord Aberdare has given up to Mountain Ash what was meant for mankind, and those administrative talents which excited such admiration and envy when exercised in high places are now devoted to the organization of local charity. But Lord Aberdare plays only the second part in the good work. It is Lady Aberdare who is the heart and soul of the movement which has eased hunger-pangs in many homes.

Wales Day by Day, *Western Mail* 28 October 1891.

It might do some of our ladies of Mayfair good to see Lady Aberdare trudging along the muddy lanes of Mountain Ash engaged upon a work which an unassuming manner and a kind heart make to look as little as possible like charity.

"LONDON GOSSIP", *HAMPSHIRE TELEGRAPH AND SUSSEX CHRONICLE ETC.* 23 JANUARY 1878.

FASHION

Man alive, the young women of my time, when I was a youngster, were proud to show their arms and fine, brawny, beautifully shaped arms they were, too. And talk about pretty faces? Well for plump, rosy and kissable cheeks, give me the old girls. Not much powder and paint then, no it was the lean, sweet, pretty, soap-and-water-washed-face that one could kiss, without having to wash and rub the nasty paint away before and after the ordeal.

“No Pen Dar, I pity the boys of today. It is legs they’ve got to look at, white legs, red legs, yellow legs, blue legs, and black legs. Caton pawb i, the girls of my time wouldn’t show the leg above the boot, no, not for the whole world.

But now up to the knees, my boy. And they tell me that the girls are dancing so much these days that their legs develop, not into pretty, slim, and delicately shaped ankle and calf, but into stout, jumbo-like pillars, which are awkward to see, moving about the dancing rooms.

.....let me tell you something of how the women of long ago dressed. And I’m sure, many of the women of fifty, sixty and seventy years of age will remember the styles I mention.

CRINOLINES AND HOOPS.

About sixty-eight years ago the crinoline was in vogue. The common people called them hoops. They were skirts covering three or four petticoats, and were spread and held out by means of hoops. Every woman wearing a crinoline would require the space of two or three seats for room in any place of meeting. This fashion lent itself well to the caricaturist of those days.

CHINONS AND GRECIAN BENDS.

“The Chinon, Dolly Varden, Pompadours, and the Grecian Bend were vogues in hairdressing, cloaks and figure form garments. All of them covered the feet, and some even trailed the ground, sweeping and raising the dust as the wearers walked along.

SILLY GIRLS AND FASHION.

The girls to-day are not to be compared with the clean brickyard girls, the strong pit-head girls, and the finely-shaped mine and tin-works girls of long ago.

Source: Pen Dar, *Aberdare of Long Ago*, *Aberdare Leader*, 26 March 1927.

* * * * *

The greater number of the servant girls employed at Aberdare in the [eighteen] fifties were Carmarthenshire and Cardiganshire girls, and nearly every one of them wore the old Welsh tall hat. Those employed in the ironworks only did the lighter duties. They used to dress in fustian trousers with short skirts down to the knee, and these were made of a rough canvass material, with jackets something like a short coat put over their shoulders, and with large leather pads strapped on their backs for pushing backwards the trams along the tramways. On their heads they wore flat straw bonnets or hats which were very like those worn by cockle women. These they wore not only at the works, but about the streets also.

Source: D.T. Alexander: *Glamorgan Reminiscences*. (Carmarthen 1915, reprinted Cowbridge 1973)

A WEDDING AND A TRAGEDY.

On Wednesday 7 December 1864 Judge Gwilym Williams, the son of David Williams (Alaw Goch), of Ynyscynon House, Aberdare married Emma Eleanor, daughter of William Williams of Aberpergwm.

Although the wedding took place at Aberpergwm, Aberdare town had been decorated “with almost magic speed”, with triumphal arches, and devices. The train carrying the groom to Aberpergwm was met at The Vale of Neath Station [The High Level], by the town’s tradesmen and others, who handed the Judge an Address which commenced “*You Sir, have been reared amongst us, and have had opportunities of obtaining such a hold upon our affections...*”

The Rejoicings in compliment to [the couple] extended to several parts of the town. At Ynyscynon the booming of cannon was heard at intervals throughout the day, and until late in the evening. The firing was conducted without the slightest accident having occurred. About five o'clock, however just as the train in which Mr. & Mrs. Williams were travelling [on their way to their Honeymoon at Naples, Ed.] was passing the spot named, a dreadful accident occurred, a large quantity of powder in a cask accidentally ignited and a poor cripple was killed on the spot. Four other men were severely injured, and one of them died on Thursday morning. The remaining three are, we regret to learn, in a very critical condition", [The *Cardiff Times* 9 December, and 12 December 1864.] Extracted by Dr. T.F. Holley and quoted in his "*The Glog Squires*" Merthyr Tydfil 1996.

According to a letter in the *Aberdare Leader* [30 August 1930] the cause of the accident was as follows: - "*Some of the fellows on top of the Ynyscynon Pit put a number of tram wheels together so as to make a cannon of the axle-sockets. Dai Rees, the lamp man, was giving out the powder from a cask for the purpose. While at the job of handing out the gunpowder a spark from the pipe that he was smoking, fell on the loose powder. This exploded with an awful crash, and poor Dai Rees was killed*"

Gwilym Williams (1839-1906). Son of David Williams (Alaw Goch), Barrister-at-Law, Stipendiary Magistrate at Pontypridd and Rhondda 1872, ("*A terror to malefactors*"), County Court Judge 1884, Chairman of Glamorgan Quarter Sessions (1894). Like his father a great eisteddfodwr. Enlarged Miskin Manor.

A NEAR TRAGEDY AND A WEDDING.

On the 27th March 1866 a passenger train running on the Vale of Neath railway collided with a Great Western goods train near the Gadlys crossing and the Aberdare station. The passenger train was wrecked and the accident could have been a very serious one, fortunately there were few serious injuries to the passengers. Details of the lucky escape of several of those travelling are given in *The Aberdare Times*, including the story of a couple who were coming down from Hirwaun to get married at the Aberdare parish church. Happily they escaped with nothing more than a shaking, and managed with some difficulty to get up to the hymeneal altar where by aid of an indulgent clergyman they succeeded in getting through the interesting ceremony. We trust, recorded the *Times*, that the close of their wedded life may prove less chequered than the opening thereof. (For full details of the accident see *The Aberdare Times* of 31st March 1866, or contact the Editor of *Hanes*.)

LOCAL WEDDINGS

In June 1848 the Revd. John Griffith, Vicar, officiated at the Wedding of Richard Fothergill of Abernant House and Elizabeth, the youngest daughter of Edward Lewis, the Glamorgan Canal Company's Agent at Aberdare.

"At dawn the roar of cannon resounded through the valley. At 8.0 a.m. the bridal party entered the parish church. Immediately on the sacred Rights having been performed the Gadlys cannon poured forth their thunder. . . responded to by the Abernant (guns) and others peal after peal during nearly the whole of the day. The churchyard walks were properly decorated with tasteful and beautiful garlands and arches of evergreens and flowers, and the whole village testified its respect. . . by a brilliant exhibition of flags and banners of every hue and description. A splendid dejeuner was laid out at the Canal House, whilst the progress to and fro of the party was welcomed by the joyous shouts and congratulations of the crowds."

* * * * *

THE MARRIAGE OF MISS BRUCE. (1869)

Yesterday Mountain Ash was in a general state of excitement in consequence of the marriage of Miss Bruce, the eldest daughter of Mr. Henry Austin Bruce, Home Secretary, who is now residing at his seat, Dyffryn, near Mountain Ash. Early in the morning the village put on a gay appearance, the railway station was decorated with flags and evergreens, white flags and streamers of every description were hung from shop and house. Many of the flags bore appropriate mottoes as "Health and Happiness," "Long Live the Bride," &c. On the road leading to St. Margaret's Church were two triumphal arches of evergreens, bearing mottoes. The interior of St. Margaret's was very prettily decorated. Almost as soon as daybreak the "powder burning" commenced and throughout the day pistols, guns and cannons were to be heard. The time fixed for the wedding was half past eleven, but long before that hour the churchyard and the road adjoining were crowded with people eager to get into the church, which was, we need hardly saying, soon crowded to its capacity. The carriages began to arrive about eleven o'clock, the footmen and coachmen wearing of course the white favours. As soon as the bride arrived accompanied by Mr and Mrs Bruce, the guns boomed forth a salute and the greatest eagerness manifested itself to see her by the crowd of persons. The bridegroom, who is Mr. Douglas Richmond, of the Home Office, was in waiting and the ceremony was proceeded with. The bride was followed by ten bridesmaids, dressed in white and pink. The marriage was performed by the Revd. D. Jones MA, assisted by The Revd Mr. Bruce, Cowbridge. On leaving the church the happy pair were received with another salute from small arms and cannon, and the firing was continued as carriage after carriage drove away. In the evening the newly married pair departed for the continent, carrying with them the best wishes of the inhabitants of Mountain Ash, by whom the bride is well known and highly esteemed. A public concert was held in the evening at the Workmen's Hall, Mountain Ash, and the rejoicings closed with a grand ball. The day, until about four o'clock, was remarkably fine, but at that time the rain descended in torrents. Mountain Ash being very near Aberdare and Merthyr, a number of passengers was taken from those places to witness the wedding. The bells of Aberdare church sent forth merry peals during the day.

Western Mail, 17 September 1869

THE VICAR'S MARRIAGE

On the 18th. January 1899, the Vicar of Aberdare, Charles Alfred Howell Green D.D.* and Katherine Mary (Kitty), the eldest daughter of Sir William Thomas Lewis Bt. (later Lord Merthyr) were wed at St.Elvan's Church, Aberdare. The Rev. Richard Bowen Jenkins, his predecessor at Aberdare, performed the ceremony.

"Green proposed marriage in a letter, which he wrote at 4.00 in the morning of Tuesday 2nd. August 1898, after he had visited his parents at Halkyn in Flintshire for fourteen days "to think about it". His proposal was accepted by Kitty at 10.30 a.m. that same day. Green drew up the Order of Service himself and directed that "The choir should proceed from the vestry to the choir stalls at 2.30 p.m. punctually, and that immediately the bride's carriage reaches the outer door of the north porch, the choir and congregation shall stand, and (after one chord on the organ) will sing hymn No.271." Entries in Green's Journal for that day read, "Packed during the morning at the Vicarage. Married Kit at 2.30 p.m. Left Aberdare at 4.40 p.m., reached Bristol at 8.00 o'clock. Spent night at Clifton Down Hotel, said evensong in rooms about 10.00 p.m."

*Vicar of Aberdare 1893-1914. Afterwards first Bishop of Monmouth, translated to Bangor 1928, Archbishop of Wales, 1931.

IN MEMORIAM

John Frederick Mear

1934-2010

Vice-president and founder member of Cynon Valley History Society

Secretary 1971-1989

Chairman 1992



It is with very great regret that I have to chronicle the death of John Frederick Mear.

John was born at Cwmdare and although he lived the greater part of his life in Aberdare itself he never forgot his roots in that village, and enjoyed returning there and discussing the 'old days' with veterans of the Bwllfa and other local collieries.

John enjoyed early classical music particularly Bach and Purcell. The music played at his funeral, one of Bach's Brandenburg Concertos and Handel's aria, *O Ruddier than the Cherry* reflected two of his favourite composers.

It is ironic that John should pass away on the eve of the Society's fortieth anniversary as he was not only a founder member of this Society but its first secretary. He was secretary for nineteen years, at a time when the office was onerous and involved drafting constitutions, minute keeping, dealing with correspondence, finding speakers, as well as keeping a close eye on what was happening to the little that survived of our historic heritage.

Not only did he shape the Society as we now know it, but he found time to initiate nine volumes of the Society's Journal, *Old Aberdare*: finding writers and printing firms, selecting photographs, editing the essays and getting them through the press. In addition, with the assistance of a dedicated team, he produced two splendid collections of photographs of the district, two albums of reproductions of the sketches of Emma and Lucy Bacon, a facsimile of the map of the parish that accompanied the Rammell Report, and the monumental and well received Cynon Coal.

As if this was not enough he produced fifteen editions of the Society's newsletter *Hanes* (Numbers 9 to 23), and still found time to research and write two definitive books on the history of the area, one about his cherished village of Cwmdare, *The Story of Cwmdare* (1991), and *Aberdare the Railways and Tramroads* (1999).

John's interest in the history of Aberdare covered a wide spectrum, but he was particularly concerned with its industrial past especially the iron and coal industries. He also had a great regard for Aberdare's earlier local historians, W.W. Price and particularly John Davies (Pen Dâr). He knew the contents of the latter's newspaper articles, written for the *Aberdare Leader* in the 1920s and 30s, by heart and ensured that extracts from these were reprinted in *Old Aberdare*, (Vols. 5 and 8).

John was an authority on the Barlow Rail and wrote a small pamphlet on the subject. By searching the local countryside he was able to find surviving examples and was instrumental in setting up a short stretch of track at the Visitor Centre of the Dare Valley Country Park.

He persistently petitioned for an Aberdare museum, and engaged in frequent correspondence and meetings with the local authority in an attempt to secure such a facility.

In the context of John's hard work and the continuing success of this Society and its publications I can but record Sir Christopher Wren's obituary and say to members, *Reader, if you seek his memorial - look around you.*

It is true to say the Society was very much John and John was the Society. Unfortunately for the last six years of his life he was unable to participate in its affairs and his wise counsel and innovative ideas were sorely missed.

As well as being a man of letters, with a great command of the English language and knowledge of literature, he was also a practical man; capable of repairing a motor car and undertaking advanced building works.

John has made a significant contribution to the culture of Aberdare by bringing its history to a wide public and he will remain an inspiration to all who knew him.

The Society's thoughts have been with John's family since news of his passing was received and wishes to record its sincere sympathies at this sad time.

Geoffrey Evans.

Published by The Cynon Valley History Society.

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