

CYNON VALLEY HISTORY SOCIETY

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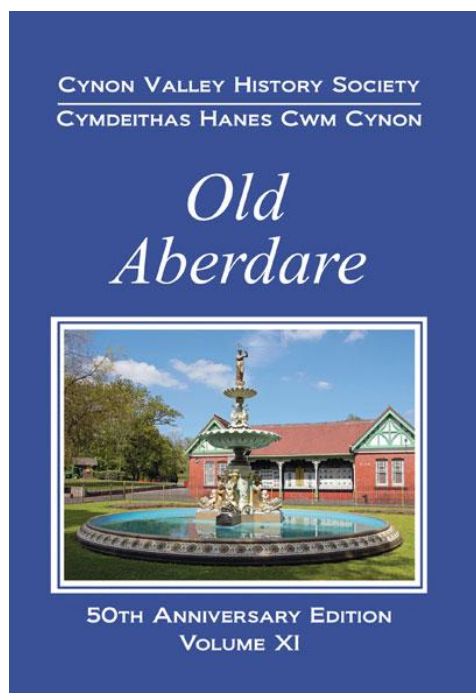
NEWSLETTER OF THE CYNON VALLEY HISTORY SOCIETY
CYLCHLYTHYR CYMDEITHAS HANES CWM CYNON

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It is with great sadness that I have to inform you all that one of our Vice-Presidents Elfed Bowen has sadly passed away. In this issue, David Leslie Davies has written a touching obituary about him. Also there is an article by D. L. Davies about the history of Siloa chapel, which has sadly closed now. It is the centenary of the Cwmbach Male Voice Choir (Côr Meibion Cwmbach) so Hywel Davies has written an article about this great achievement. What was life like here in 1921 at their beginning? An article informs us about it. But first, we have good news:

OLD ABERDARE VOLUME XI



We are pleased to announce that Volume XI of *Old Aberdare*, our 50th Anniversary Edition, was published last month. The volume includes many fascinating articles:

- The history of the Little Theatre by Steven Graham
- The family background of Alun Lewis by David Leslie Davies
- The cartoons of Reuben Silverman and commentaries about them by Steven Graham and D.L. Davies.
- A history of the medical provision in Aberdare by the late Dr Alistair Wilson
- Aberdare's Controversial Town Plan 1957–1963 by Steven Graham
- John Ewington and the Taff Vale Railway Strike of 1900 by Alun Williams

The book has 200 pages, has numerous black and white illustrations, and is a bargain at £7.00+ £2.50 p&p., (or £10.00 from the Cynon Valley Museum).

It can be obtained from our Book Sales Officer Mr Haydn Williams, 12 Little Wind Street, Aberdare, Mid-Glamorgan, CF44 7EU, Tel 01685 879793. Please make cheques payable to Cynon Valley History Society.

The History of Siloa Congregationalist Chapel by David Leslie Davies

This is an edited version of his article



It was sad to hear in November 2020 that *Siloa* Welsh Congregationalist chapel at Green-fach, Aberdare would not re-open when the easing of social restrictions caused by Covid-19 might otherwise have allowed that to happen.

Siloa was the last active Welsh-language chapel within Aberdare town-centre where once there had been a half a dozen such causes.

Its closure marks the end of an era in the religious, social, and linguistic character of the town – and because of the central role it has played in the history of Aberdare in good and bad times. The rest of this article will seek to outline a little of that distinctive role.

Very soon after 1800 a small group of Congregationalists (usually known in Welsh as *Annibynwyr* – i.e. *Independents*) founded their “cause” in a private house at a site then known as ‘Penpound’, opposite the present *Calfaria* chapel at the bottom of Monk St. By 1808, it is said this cause had 26 members scattered between ‘y *Pentre*’ (*‘the Village*’, as Aberdare was always known at the time), Heol-y-felin (i.e. Trecynon), Llwydcoed and Hirwaun.

By 1810, this house had become too small and a decision was made to erect a new, purpose-built chapel: not in Aberdare but at Heol-y-felin since that district was more central to a membership scattered between ‘y *Pentre*’ and Hirwaun. This chapel was opened in 1811 and named *Ebeneser*. This chapel also became the ‘mother-cause’ of all other Congregationalist chapels in the Aberdare area.

By the 1840s, the village of Aberdare was becoming a busy urban centre at the heart of a rapidly industrialising valley. Some members at *Ebeneser* felt it time to re-establish a presence within that centre and in 1842 began meeting at a house in the densely-packed area of industrial cottages that had grown up near what had been the village green of the old, pre-industrial village (hence the names ‘Green-fach’ & ‘Green St.’ still in use today).

In no time this house also became too small and in 1843 the upstairs ‘Long Room’ of the old Boot Hotel (pre-dating the current building) was hired. In March that year, the cause was formally incorporated and one of its members, David Price, inducted in August as its minister.

The cause swiftly outgrew the Boot Hotel and so shared the premises of *Carmel* Baptist chapel which by then had been built at Penpound, Monk St. This arrangement continued until the construction in 1844 of its own purpose-built chapel in Green-fach. The new chapel opened in January 1845 having cost £600 and was formally named *Siloa* after a spring mentioned in the New Testament where the sick sought healing and which Jesus visited.

In 1844–45 it is said *Siloa* had 60 members. By the start of 1849 there were 120; by the end of 1849, 270. By March 1851, it was reported to have 430 evening attenders. Such growth may be not entirely unconnected to the fact that 1849 was also a year *cholera* broke out at Aberdare. Prior to the opening of Aberdare cemetery in 1858, *Siloa* and other chapels had its own burial-ground which became a centre for the interment of those living in the squalid housing of Green-fach who fell victim to that disease. Indeed, the 1847 Report of the Education Commission and the 1853 Rammell Report on Public Health at Aberdare (for which see *Old Aberdare* vol.1) mention Green-fach as a centre of insanitary living conditions.

In 1899, it is reported *Siloa* had 661 members; in 1904-05 (the age of the 'Evan Roberts Revival') the total was 761. This was its highest recorded total. Since then, the process was one of gradual decline: in 1923 – 645 members; 1954 – 363; 1964 – 191; 2003 – 38; 2015 – about 20.

In 1855, the original chapel was enlarged at a cost of £1,300. This is essentially the building we see today. In 1890 a pipe-organ was installed; in 1897 a new *Ysgoldy* was built at Blaen-gwawr and in 1907 a large new *Neuadd (Hall)* was built opposite the chapel at Green-fach. This later became the temporary home of Aberdare Public Library. The chapel was further restored in 1920 and 1957.

Siloa has figured in many significant episodes in the history of the town and wider district. It was a centre of local reaction and resistance to the Education Commission *Report* of 1847 (*The Treachery of the Blue Books*) which in part impugned the wisdom and morality of the Welsh working class not because it had mostly lacked an opportunity to advance itself but because it was Welsh-speaking and Nonconformist. (See Hanes Autumn 2020 issue pp4-7 for more information about this meeting).

Also it was in *Siloa* vestry in 1868 that the meeting to adopt the peace pioneer Henry Richard as a radical Liberal parliamentary candidate for Aberdare & Merthyr occurred. This was a step that led to the rout of Henry Austin Bruce (later the 1st Lord Aberdare) and the election for the first time of a Welsh M.P. who was genuinely the people's choice. Richard, incidentally, is seen as the 19C precursor of the League of Nations and of today's United Nations for his effort to create an international peace-keeping forum.

It was at *Siloa* (and the Temperance Hall, Canon St.) in 1864–65 that Edwin Cynrig Roberts, one of the founders of the movement to create a Welsh settlement in Patagonia, delivered to local audiences the virtues of that enterprise on behalf of its Emigration Committee, being supported by one of the most crucial figures of the success of that precarious venture, Abraham Matthews, minister of *Horeb* chapel, Llwydcoed. That was why, in November 2015, a blue plaque funded by *Clochdar* and the CVHS was placed on the chapel front to mark the 150th anniversary of the founding of *Y Wladfa*.

In 1915, Aberdare's memorial service and meeting for Keir Hardie, pioneer Labour M.P. of the joint Aberdare & Merthyr constituency, took place here (although some leading members opposed his pacifist approach to what subsequently became known as WW1).

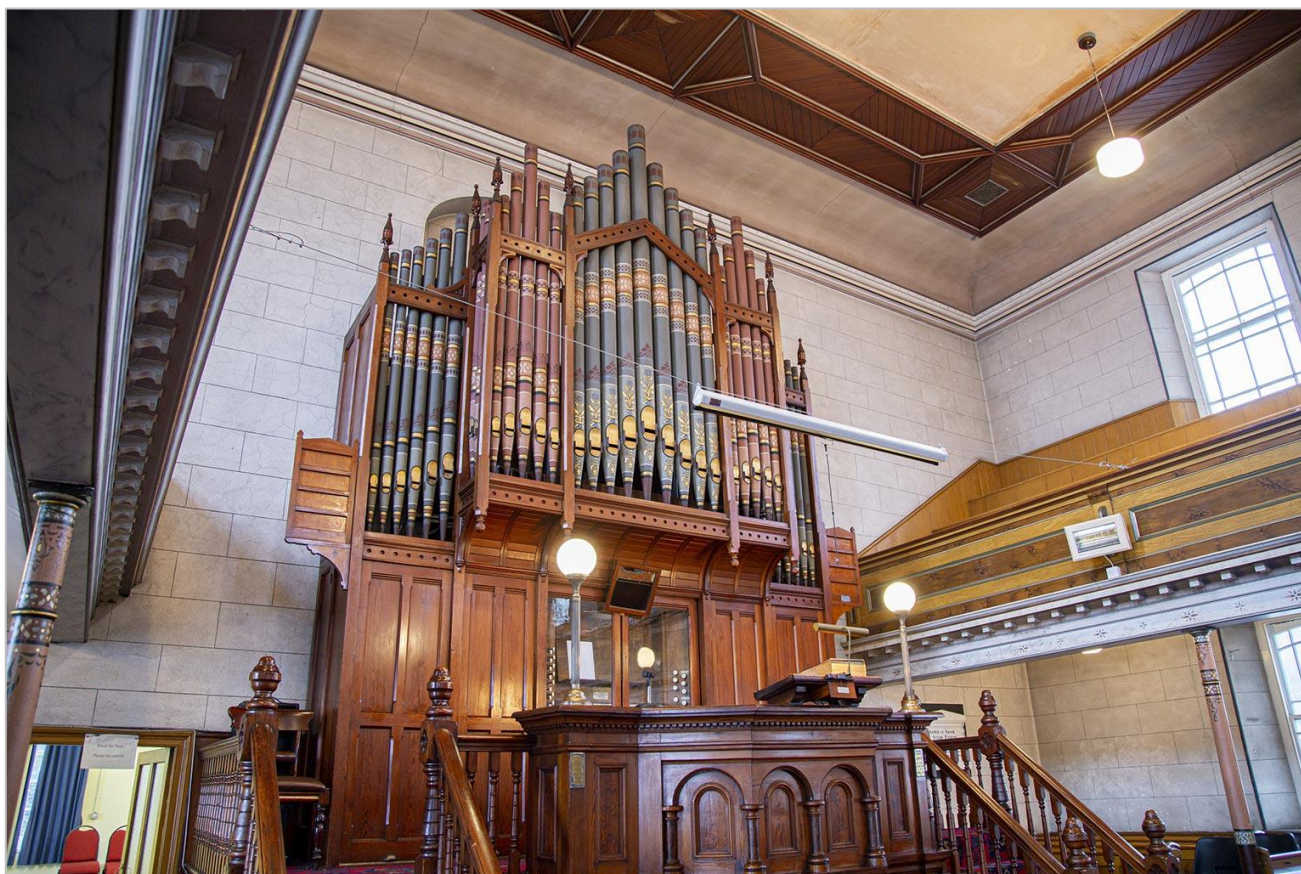
Several musicians of note have been linked to the chapel, including Griffith Rhys Jones (*Caradog*) whose *Côr Mawr* won fame in choral contests at the Crystal Palace at London in 1872 and 1873, thereby doing much (for better or worse) to create the idea that the Welsh are particularly musical! His choir was drawn from across the Glamorgan valleys and it was at *Siloa* that its Aberdare section (one of the largest) rehearsed under the

baton of his deputy, the much-admired (and overlooked!) Rhys Evans.

During the 143 years between 1843 and 1987, *Siloa* had only four ministers: David Price (1843–78); Silyn Evans (1880–1930) after whom Heol Silyn at Penywaun is named; R. Ivor Parry (1933–1965) who helped establish the C.V.H.S. in 1971; and Aneurin Roberts (1969–1987). There was also a visiting part-time minister (Allan Pickard of Cardiff) who served for a time in the first decade of the 21C. Ivor Parry will be a well-known name to the historically minded. As well as being minister at *Siloa* he was a learned teacher at Aberdare Boys' Grammar from 1964 to 1974; a leading historian of his denomination; a diligent tutor in adult-education and correspondent in local history for the *Aberdare Leader* under the pseudonym *Historicus*. He died in 1975.

Until 2015 or so, *Siloa* maintained a Welsh-medium Sunday School until it gradually declined. During its existence it was a ready venue for any Welsh or humanitarian cause that needed a home in Aberdare town-centre, including *Cymrodorion Aberdâr*, the local *Cymanfa Ganu* committee and *Clochdar* as well as numerous choirs and societies.

It need hardly be said that its presence at the centre of Aberdare will be missed - and will leave a significant gap as a community resource, especially as it was sold (one understands) early in 2021 to a purchaser based at Bath whose plans for the building, as yet, are not entirely clear. One thing is clear, however: that the reputation and role played by this chapel in the life of the town - and underlined by the plaque placed on the chapel in 2015 to mark the 150th anniversary of Welsh Patagonia - must not be lost to the area and its people.



The interior of Siloa (Photo: Mark Price)

The Cynon Valley 100 years ago

Life has been hard this summer of 2021, with many of you shielding, not being able to see your children, grandchildren, or friends, not being able to go to concerts, plays or even to go to public houses but spare a thought to those who lived here 100 years ago.

In 1921 there was a Miners' strike which started in April, the cause being that the employers wanted to cut wages by up to half. The miners rejected this, and a lock-out followed.

David Phillips (Ap Pennar) wrote in the *Aberdare Leader* of 11th June 1921, "*Week after week passes by and the suffering among miners' families is becoming almost intolerable yet the irresponsible conferences stand in the way of a settlement. The leaders say their hands are tied by the conferences and the miners are given no chance of expressing their opinion by means of a ballot*".

There were two Relief Funds: The *Aberdare Education Committee* collected a total of £987 18s 5d for the feeding of the poor school children.

The second was the *Aberdare Miners Relief Fund* which totalled at £3664 5s 2d. All the monies and cheques for the miners were sent to Mr Illtyd Hopkins, The Miners Office, 20 Commercial Street, *Aberdare*.

The people made their own entertainment to keep up their spirits:

On 1st June there was a 'Go-as-you-please' Competition (Concert) held at *Abercwmboi Workmen's Hall*, 25 competitors sang solos and did recitations. Two days later there was another concert where there were 900 present! The following Saturday a competitive concert took place which was held for the schoolchildren under 14 years old. Prizes were awarded at all these concerts.

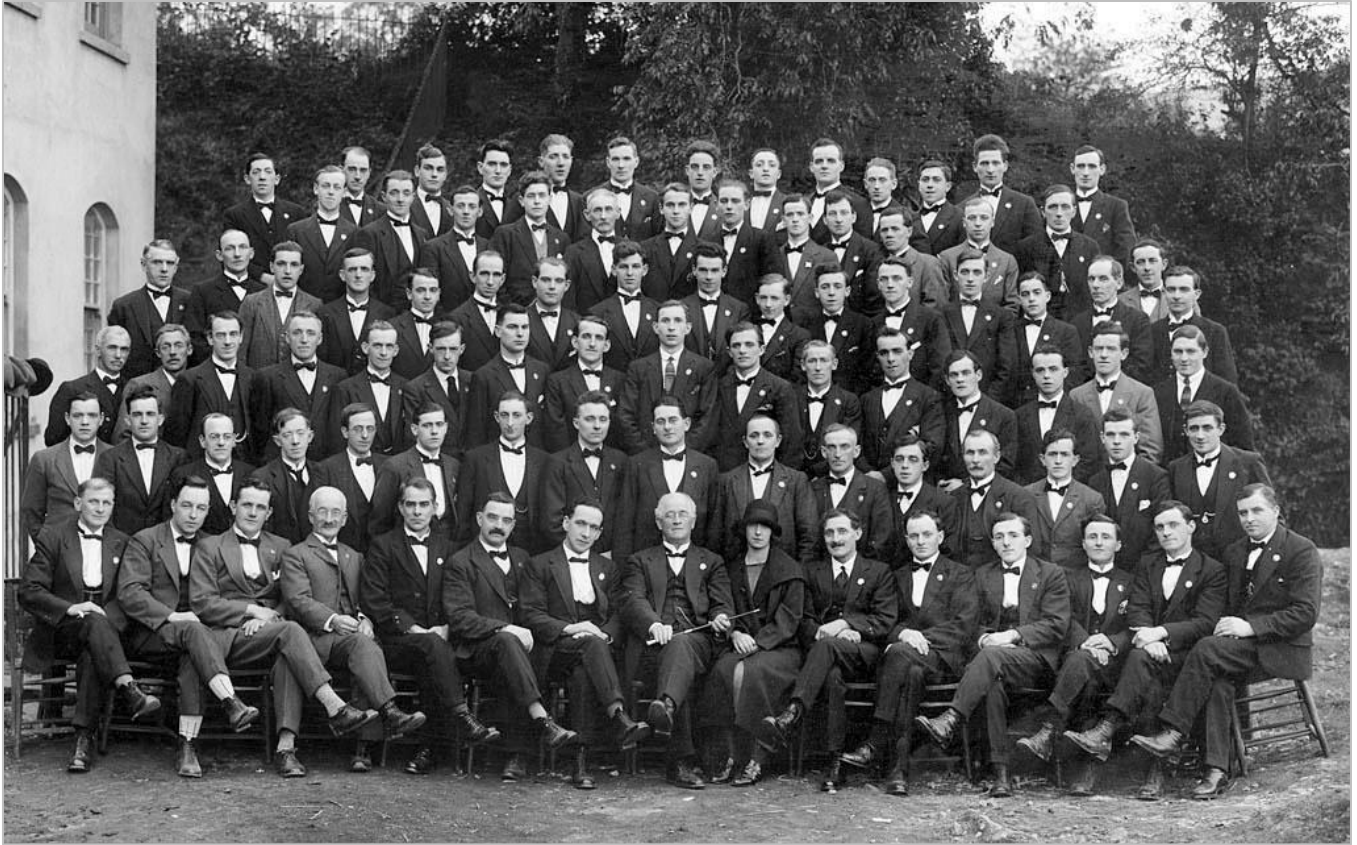
Later that month the second "Marathon race" organised by the *Penrhiwceiber Strikes Entertainment Committee* took place. Thousands of spectators watched the 24 runners. Willie Rees of *Monmouth Terrace* was first; he covered the distance of six and a half miles in 44 minutes.

The strike lasted 3 months until the miners were forced to capitulate at the end of June with greatly reduced wages.

When there had been a ballot and the miners had voted to return to work Ap Pennar said in an article in the *Leader* of 25 June that the miners had lost almost £10 million in wages! That implies a tremendous amount of suffering. He ended his article saying that, "*If the present is dark, the future is almost hopeless*". The General Strike was 5 years in the future and the miners would suffer far worse then.

Côr Meibion Cwmbach – An Outline History by Hywel Davies

One summer's day in 1926 a body of men dressed in their Sunday Best could be seen making their way over the Graig mountain from *Aberdare* to the *Rhondda*. At their head walked a patrician-looking figure, Herbert Davies - 4 years into his post as conductor of the *Cwmbach United Male Choir*, formed in 1921, and now collectively on its way to compete at the *Maerdy eisteddfod*. The trek over the mountain had been a challenge for some, but the General Strike of 1926 had limited the available options. In the event, it had been worth it, as nothing lifts the spirits better than winning first prize at an *eisteddfod*. Further success was to follow in that eventful year: not only did the choir win another first at a choral competition held in *Siloa, Greenfach*, but also a handsome bardic chair, now on display at the *Cynon Valley Museum*.



Cwmbach Male Choir with its conductor Herbert Davies

A hundred years later, and 19 conductors since its formation, such was the renown of the Cwmbach Male Choir (CMC: note the change of name in 1971) that its services were sought even by fashion houses, advertising agencies and TV variety shows. Not every male choir, after all, gets to model Gucci suits at the request of Vogue magazine, as was the experience of a few Cwmbach choristers in 2019. Similarly, the opportunity to provide the sound track for the Clogau Welsh Jewellery's Christmas Collection in 2020, is not one that is widely shared. Neither was CMC's appearance on the ITV show 'Britain's Got Talent' in 2007 something that every Welsh choir can add to its list of credits. When the grounds for such renown are sought, a number of factors present themselves. Firstly, the choir, from the outset, was the product of a community that was as vibrant and cohesive as it was populous and innovative. Secondly, since 1921, the choir by way of its many concerts, competitions and tours has won for itself a name for musical excellence, artistic adaptability and generous support for a range of charitable organisations.

In his critique of music and society in Wales 1840-1914, 'Valleys of Song', Gareth Williams notes that "*Aberdare was a musical hothouse*" at this time. Of few communities was this truer than Cwmbach. Since the opening of the Aberdare canal in 1812, the sinking of the first deep pit at Abernant-y Groes in 1837 and the sinking of Lletyshenkin colliery in 1843, the village had become increasingly distanced from its rural past. By mid century, life was, for many, in Thomas Hobbes' famous phrase, "*nasty brutal and short*" - as indicated by the tragic loss of life associated with such explosions as occurred at the Lletyshenkin colliery in 1849, 1853 and 1862. Such experiences encouraged a communal response, which gained expression in the opening in 1860 of the first co-operative store in Wales in Cwmbach, and in the proliferation of places of worship, as chapels, and a church, increasingly challenged the pitheads for dominance of the local skyline.

This is the context in which the vibrant musical life of the local community took form. In 1858 the huge Temperance Hall in Aberdare was opened as a venue for concerts, oratorios and eisteddfodau. The following year, it may have been where the first official Cymanfa Ganu in Wales was held – though elsewhere that distinction is also claimed for the near-by

Bethania chapel. In 1861 the town was the venue for the first modern National Eisteddfod, while in 1872 and 1873 the Aberdare-based 'Côr Mawr' won great acclaim at the choral festivals held at the Crystal Palace in London. Its conductor, Griffith Rhys Jones, better known as Caradog, though born in Trecynon and a Unitarian by confession, had cut his teeth as a conductor at Bryn Seion, Capel yr Annibynwyr, Cwmbach. Along with other miners at the Lletyshenkin colliery, such as Thomas Evans (Telynog) and Thomas Edwards, (Cynonfardd), Caradog typified this fusion of communal resilience, musical prodigy and denominational involvement. In 1904, another local miner, Johnnie Lloyd, formed the Cwmbach Excelsior Glee Choir, which, during the coal strike of 1921, morphed into the Cwmbach Male Voice Choir. Within a week it had given its first public concert in the village, with Johnnie Lloyd as its founder conductor. Top of the bill was a rendition of Laurent de Rillé's 'Martyrs of the Arena', which, fortunately, has remained part of the choir's repertoire.

The inter-war years were ones of economic and social disruption. Yet, ironically, industrial inactivity and musical activity seemed to be "*antiphonally joined*". By 1928 the choir had 110 members and was sufficiently confident to compete in the Treorci National Eisteddfod that year. By the 1930s, the choir had established itself as a feature of the musical life of the Cynon valley and beyond as a result of the many concerts and eisteddfodic competitions that represented the bulk of its activities. From 1936–1939 it was ably led by one of its more long-serving conductors, W J Davies, who was reappointed at the end of the war, and served until 1950. A particular instance of the choir's support for charitable causes followed the Llandow air disaster of 1950, when 80 Wales supporters were killed on their way home from a rugby international in Dublin. Similar fund-raising concerts were given by the choir following disasters at Six Bells Colliery, Abertillery, Aberfan and Gleision – as well as others further afield. Indeed, the very last public engagement for the choir before the 2020 lockdown was at a charity event at Harrow in support of the Lisa Crispin Cancer Trust - a charity set up by Lisa's father, the conductor Owain Arwel Hughes, with whom the choir has a long-standing relationship, affirmed annually with a guest appearance at the Welsh Proms.

W J Davies was succeeded by another towering figure of the choir's post-war period, T R James, who also served a split term, 1950–1958 and 1959–1981. During TR's tenure, Cwmbach became a well-respected presence not only on the stage of the National Eisteddfod, but also at the Miners' Eisteddfod in Porthcawl, the Pantyfedwen Eisteddfod, the Cardigan Semi-National and even, in 1950 and 1951, at the International Eisteddfod in Llangollen. Meanwhile, its concert performances associated the choir with some of the best-known names of grand opera, such as Sir Geraint Evans, Dame Gwyneth Jones and Stuart Burrows.

Another celebrity with whom the choir enjoyed a close relationship at this time was Paul Robeson. In 1960 the choir appeared with him at the Royal Festival Hall in London, and hoped to celebrate its 50th anniversary the following year with a similar engagement. Unfortunately, Paul Robeson was unable to be present, and at the last moment, his place was taken by George Lloyd, an established choir soloist and grandson of the founding conductor. Other celebrations followed in 1961, including a visit to Hungary, making it the first Welsh Male Choir to tour behind the so-called Iron Curtain. Further visits to Hungary were to follow in 1978 and 1986. In many ways TR's years as conductor mark the golden age of CMC. There was a steady intake of younger members, encouraged, perhaps by TR's contacts as a member of staff at the Aberdare Boys' Grammar School. Concerted efforts were made to expand the choir's repertoire, leading to the issue of its first LP in 1971. The previous year John Lloyd had been appointed choir accompanist. His talent and musicality became a hallmark of the choir's concerts for the next 20 years, as TR and his successors, Derek Barnes (1981–1983) and Colin Lawrence (1983–1991) were quick to testify.



Cwmbach Male Choir with Paul Robeson at the Royal Festival Hall, 1960

T R James retired in 1981, after 30 years in post, but not before perhaps the greatest threat to the choir's continued existence had left its mark. An invitation to take part in the Roodeport International Eisteddfod in Johannesburg was met with initial enthusiasm by many choir members. A tour to South Africa, where some had experienced military service during the War, was an attractive prospect. However, from 1948 until the early 1990s, government there was characterised by a system of apartheid, while the memory of the Sharpeville Massacre of 1960 was still an outrage to international sensibilities. The choir's intention to tour, thus, was subject to intense criticism. On occasion the police had to be called to deal with hostile demonstrations as choristers met for weekly rehearsals at Pant School, Cwmbach. Internally, too, the controversy caused rift and recrimination, followed by expulsions and resignations. Eventually it was decided not to tour in the name of the choir – though some members probably joined the so-called, and anonymous, 'Jones Choir' that made the journey to Johannesburg. As a postscript to these events, it is worth noting that in 1997 a further invitation was extended to the choir to visit the Roodeport Eisteddfod. This time, with apartheid no longer holding sway, the choir was able to accept - and with Michael Jones, standing in as conductor for Andrew Badham, and Mrs Darya Brill-Williams filling Michael's role as accompanist, the tour was a great success. A particular highlight was the close association with the Cenestra Choir of Johannesburg. Since then both choirs have shared platforms in the UK and Ireland, while the cancellation of a proposed centenary tour of South Africa in 2021 caused great disappointment.

A less existential, if more immediate, crisis rocked the choir in 1995 when Pant School, Cwmbach, where much the choir's music and memorabilia were stored, caught fire. As a result the choir was obliged to rehearse at a variety of venues up and down the Valley, until eventually, Maesgwyn Special School was made available as a settled home. Following the South Africa tour, Emyr Wyn Roberts was appointed to succeed Andrew Badham as Musical Director in 1998. Like others before him, Emyr was to serve a split term, 1998-2002, 2005-2011, with Michael Jones again standing in as conductor during the interregnum. It was a time of continuity, change and innovation. The annual St David's Day concerts in the Coliseum continued to strengthen the choir's local base; a second LP recording was released in 1999; the choir sang at the Millennium Stadium in 2004 as it had in 1992, when, at the then Arms Park, it became the first Welsh choir to

lead the pre-match celebrations; while overseas tours, including a further two to Canada, (in 2001 and 2006), served to enrich and diversify the choir's concert repertoire.

The death of the afore-mentioned George Lloyd, a chorister for 62 years, on the eve of the new century, marked a sad breach with the past - even as the appointment of a new accompanist, Jayne Thomas in 2005, opened another chapter in the choir's history. Meanwhile new ties with the community and the wider public were being forged. A charity fund-raising event held in the courtyard of the local Country Park in 2009 soon become an anticipated annual occasion. Moreover, much good will was generated during the choir's 2008 Italian tour when it took part in a special service in Bardi commemorating the victims of the Arandora Star disaster of 1940. Of the 800 or so Italian internees on board the ship, 50 of those who perished, following a U-boat attack, hailed from Bardi - and many were part of the south Wales Italian community. It was a valued gesture that also created a link with the Bardi café at the Welsh Folk Museum in Cardiff.

Emyr Wyn Roberts was briefly succeeded as conductor by Norman Harries and Andrew Quick during which time there were further overseas tours as well as a successful 90th anniversary concert in the Coliseum, featuring recordings of Paul Robeson and George Lloyd singing. In 2016 Mike Thomas of Abernant was appointed as the 19th conductor of the choir since 1921. His tenure of office has continued the pattern of local concerts, overseas tours and charitable ventures, while also engaging the choir in events that brought it unexpected celebrity. Remarkably, under Mike's leadership, the choir has survived all the difficulties of lockdown, not least by continuing to rehearse regularly on Zoom. In 2020 it even managed to release a Christmas charity single in aid of Age UK, while a Virtual St David's Day concert continued a series inaugurated in 1992. Celebrations in 2021 have inevitably been muted; yet the occasion has not gone unmarked. A Choir Centenary Bursary Fund (based on an earlier Young Musicians Award of 1992) generously makes funding available to Cynon Valley musicians, aged 16-25, for professional training.

Musical Directors are the public face of every choir; but they would be the first to acknowledge the debt they owed to talented resident accompanists. Cwmbach Male Choir has been singularly fortunate in the quality of those who have filled this role since 1921. There have been 20 accompanists to date, with Jayne Thomas in post since 2005 - nine of them women. By contrast, only one woman has filled the role of Choir Musical Director, namely Phyllis Morley Jones (1958-1959). On the other hand, five of the 20 accompanists went on to become Musical Directors of the choir, so perhaps there is something to be learnt from that.

Much, has changed since that trek over the Graig mountain in the summer of 1926; but the pride and gratitude thousands have felt for the cultural, communal and charitable work of Côr Meibion Cwmbach remains. Congratulations, Cwmbach, on your first 100 years.

(For further information about the choir, there is a book about its history from 1921-2001 entitled *80 years of song* Ed.)

A LIFE WELL SPENT : ELFED BOWEN, 1927-2021 ***An obituary by David Leslie Davies***

It was with genuine sadness that his many friends at Aberdare and in the Cynon Valley heard of the death of Elfed Bowen on Friday, 2 July at Llys Gwyn Care Home, Pontarddulais. He was born on the 9 August 1927, being just a month or so short of his 94th birthday at the time of his decease.

Elfed was a much-respected townsman who gave unstintingly of his talent, time and



Elfed Bowen
From the staff photograph of
Aberdare Boys' Grammar School, 1954

energy to public life in this, his home district.

His professional career was spent as an educator, having taught Chemistry and Maths at secondary and further education establishments in the old county of Glamorgan. Even at retirement, after a long and busy career, he chose not to sit back in a comfortable armchair and do little. Rather, he threw himself into making a creative contribution in other directions.

As members of the CVHS, we were blessed that he joined the Cynon Valley History Society at an early stage in its existence and subsequently gave the Society more and more energy and attention as time went by: as a long-serving committee member and in holding posts of leadership within it.

No-one who witnessed Elfed at work on behalf of the Society, whether in committee or in members' meetings, would have known that he had long since attained an age when most would have 'called it a day' and reached for the proverbial 'pipe and slippers'. That was not Elfed's way. If he joined an organisation, he was committed to it - which meant giving of time and effort unsparingly. This was so in relation to the Aberdare Tennis Club of yore - one of his great loves of which he was a past captain and secretary. It was true also of *Ebeneser* Welsh Congregationalist chapel, Trecynon, where he remained an active member until his and Cicely's departure from Aberdare a few years ago.

Elfed was brought up at Foundry Rd, Hirwaun - though he had strong family links in the Gadlys area (of which more later). He attended Aberdare Boys' County (later Grammar) School between 1938-45 and subsequently attended University College Cardiff between 1945 and 1948, graduating that year in Chemistry. He gained his Teaching Certificate there in 1949 and did his teaching practice at the then Mountain Ash Grammar School.

His first teaching appointment was at the Rhondda County/Grammar School, Porth; but after a year or two there, he briefly left teaching for an industrial research job at Fort Dunlop, Birmingham where he spent two or so years. On 1 January 1953, he was appointed to teach Chemistry and Maths at his old school, Aberdare Boys' Grammar, and remained there until July 1956, when he returned to Porth Grammar as Head of Chemistry. He later transferred to lecture at Pontypridd Technical College, Rhydyfelin, and his final post was as Head of Science & Chemistry at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School where he spent eleven years before retiring in 1992.

Elfed had joined the CVHS years before and had been an active committee-man for some time - succeeding Doug Williams as Sales and Publications Officer in keeping track of what went out as copy and came in as revenue in the Society's publishing programme. Needless to say, he was always diligent in this regard.

On retiring, Elfed's involvement with the CVHS grew and he served as chairman in 1992-93 and 2001-02. By 2010 he had been given life-membership, thereby joining a group that included early stalwarts such as Ken Collins, Tom Evans, Edwin Greening, John Mear and Doug Williams. In 2012 he was made an honorary vice-president - only the fifth to receive that accolade in the CVHS' fifty-year history (the others being Tom Evans, John Mear, Ken Collins and Tydfil Thomas). Elfed also contributed vigorously to marking the Society's 40th anniversary in 2011 and appears three times in the celebratory volume *The Land Your Fathers' Possessed*, published that year (pp. 220/225/227).

Elfed was a colourful character and an enthusiastic *raconteur* in English and Welsh. Welsh was the language he and I spoke together and I recall his mirth in 2015 when the Society joined in activity to mark the 150th anniversary of founding the Welsh Settlement in Patagonia (in which the Cynon Valley played a major role) as he spoke of a brother (or cousin, I forget which) of his grandmother who'd emigrated to *Y Wladfa* in Argentina from Glan Rd. "*ar y Gatlys*".

This relative, (whose name I should have noted at the time), had emigrated from Aberdare to Patagonia in the 1880s in search of a fuller life. During his time in Argentina - in what was essentially a frontier society - his relative had developed the habit of carrying on his person, at all times, a loaded pistol for personal protection. On visiting Aberdare in the early 20C to see his relatives, Elfed related how he refused ("*point blank*"!) to give up the habit and went about with a loaded gun ready to meet whatever befell him on Canon St. or Glan Rd. - much to Elfed's grandmother's alarm: the family fearing he might be arrested at any time! Elfed was beside himself in recalling what his gran (or other relative) had told him!

Elfed and his engaging wife, Cicely, lived most of their married life at Plas-draw and it was with reluctance they eventually decided to move to Pontarddulais to be nearer their daughter, Catherine (Griffiths), a GP in the area, their son-in-law and grandchildren. At first, they lived in their own home; but as Cicely's health declined, and subsequently Elfed's, both moved to live in care at Llys Gwyn where Elfed died peacefully on 2 July. The funeral (smaller than it would otherwise have been, because of Covid-19 restrictions) took place at Llwydcoed on 16 July.

The committee and members of the CVHS extend to Cecily, Catherine, Huw and to grandchildren Elin and Hywel sincere sympathy on the loss of such a genuine and warm-hearted *paterfamilias*. With his decease, Aberdare and the Cynon Valley have also lost an admirable townsman whose name will be long spoken of with respect among us.

Cofiw'n yn annwyl amdano. Fe'i cyfrifwn hi'n fraint ein bod wedi ei 'nabod a chael y cyfle i'w alw yn frodor a chyfaill. Gwened yr haul yn hir ar ei gofiant.

Solutions to Quiz Number 10 by Alan Abraham

- Q 1 (i). The Welsh supporters sang "HEN WLAD FY NHADAU" in response to the New Zealand Rugby Team performance of the Maori "HAKA".
(ii). The Aberdare rugby player was Dr. Teddy Morgan.
- Q 2. The Aberaman soccer player was Alfred (Alf) Sherwood.
- Q 3. The Cwmaman athlete was Ronald (Ron) Jones.
- Q 4. The Robertstown "cast iron tramway bridge" was built in 1811.
- Q 5. The donator of £1,500 to build Trecynon Free Library and Hall was ANDREW CARNEGIE of Skibo Castle, Dornoch, Sutherland.
- Q 6. The Boot manufacturer was P. HALEWOOD.

The Aberdare Italians

An eagle-eyed member spotted some mistakes in the last issue about the Servini family. In the photographs of Marcello Servini, Giacomo is actually first on the right on the top row and Frederick is actually on the second right on the bottom row.

In the article about Frederick Servini, he is actually one of Marcello's sons not Giacomo's. The current owner of Servini's café is Nick Servini's uncle Marino, not his cousin.

Owing to lack of space, articles about this subject will continue in the next issue.

CVHS SPEAKERS / LECTURES 2021-2022

Date	Venue	Speaker	Topic
09/09/21	Zoom	Sian Powell	Similarities between Wales and Cornwall
21/10/21	St. Elvan's	A.G.M. followed by Father Robert Davies	The New St Elvan's Heritage Project
18/11/21	Museum	Philip Sweet	Aberdare Athletic F.C.
16/12/21	Museum	Christmas & Rev. Eric Jones	Reminiscences of an Aberdare Ministry
20/01/22	Zoom	Dr Chris Turner	The Welsh Religious Revival 1904-05, A Social History

The lectures commence at 7pm

Membership Fees for the coming year September 2021 – August 2022 will remain at £12 for the year. A bilingual membership form (loose) is included in this edition of HANES. Membership forms can also be downloaded from the Society's web site.

Local History Book

Derek Williams, the Director of Colstars Theatrical Group, Aberdare has written a book about its history entitled *75 years of treading the Boards* which costs £12.50 and is available from him or any member of Colstars.

Children's Books

Following on from a recent article on Jerzy Prygodzicz from World War 2, his son, Richard Prygodzicz, who wrote the article for Hanes, has just published on Amazon his sixth children's picture book, under his pen name Jerzy Jones. If any of you would care to support him, his books are written for 3 - 7 year-olds and have a good following on Amazon. Please check out the excellent reviews there.

Zip World

This has opened on the Tower Colliery Site at Hirwaun. It costs £50 for two trips for those who want to be terrified as they fly over Llyn Fawr!!

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to RCT Libraries for the reproduction of the photographs of Côr Meibion Cwmbach.

Feedback

I would be grateful for feedback about any articles in this issue. Articles on any subject about our valley's history for possible publication are welcome.

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