

HANES Bach June / July 2021

(Issue 10)



Dear Members, As 'promised' this is the final edition of HANESBach. To celebrate there are 6 pages not the usual 4! It has been an interesting journey since May 2020 and hopefully provided some minor distraction for you from the upsets and worries of the past months. Thanks to all the contributors who made Hb happen and thanks to you for being there to read their work.

MOUNTAIN ASH MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT *by Jeremy Morgan*

In a previous issue of *Hanes Bach*, the question was posited as to the number of Members of Parliament that had a reasonably strong association with the town and district of Mountain Ash. Outlined below is a list, organised alphabetically, of those who meet the criteria. It would be interesting if anyone could add to this. While some of these are well known local figures, others may be new to some. Sadly, restricted space mean these are very potted biographies.

Henry Austin Bruce GCB PC JP DL FRS FRHistS (16 April 1815 – 25 February 1895)

M.P. Merthyr Tydfil, (14 December 1852 – 11 December 1868); Renfrewshire (25 January 1869 – 23 August 1873). Ennobled as The Right Honourable The Lord Aberdare, of Duffryn in the County of Glamorgan, 23 August 1873. Held numerous government posts including Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Home Affairs (14 November 1862 – 25 April 1864), Vice-President of the Committee of the Council on Education (16 April 1864 – 26 June 1866), Home Secretary (9 December 1868 – 9 August 1873), Lord President of the Council (9 August 1873 – 21 February 1874). The epitome of a Gladstonian Liberal, Bruce did much valuable work after he left office, primarily through chairing numerous committees, perhaps most significantly the Committee on Intermediate and Higher Education in Wales. Qualifies through his lifelong association with the Duffryn Estate and Mountain Ash, buried at Aberffwd Cemetery.

Sir James Lewis Knight Bruce PC FSA FRS (15 February 1791 – 7 November 1866)

M.P. Bishop's Castle (April 1831 – December 1832). A dyed-in-the-wool Tory, a brother of John Bruce Pryce and uncle to H. A. Bruce, he first attempted to gain a seat in Glamorgan and was later considered by the influential Bute faction as a county member, but his lack of a local estate was felt a hindrance. An accomplished barrister and judge, he was knighted in 1842 and in 1852 was one of the first two to be appointed Lord Justice of the Court of Appeal. He died at his home Roehampton Priory in 1866, now more familiar as the site of the (in)famous private clinic. He qualifies due to his part ownership of Gwernifor Farm, Mountain Ash.

Stephen Owen Davies (n.k., but probably before November 1886 – 25 February 1972)

M.P. Merthyr (5 June 1934 – 23 February 1950); Merthyr Tydfil (23 February 1950 – 25 February 1972). Born in Abercwmboi, his father was a radical trade unionist. As was the case with his near contemporary Hall, he left school at 12 to work in the collieries. He was employed at Cwmpennar and (like his other near contemporaries, the Keating brothers) at Nixon's Navigation. Despite his background and later political ideology, the colliery officials encouraged him to study and he earned a degree at Cardiff. A lifelong proponent of colliers' rights and Labour principles, he was nonetheless deselected by the Labour Party in 1970 due to his advanced, if uncertain, age. In defiance, he stood against the official Labour candidate and won. He is buried at Maes yr Arian cemetery, Mountain Ash.

Bruce Thomas George PC (1 June 1942 – 24 February 2020)

M.P. Walsall South (28 February 1974 – 6 May 2010). He joined the Labour Party while at university and before being elected to Parliament was a university and college lecturer. Most notable for his contribution to the Defence Select Committee (1979 – 2005), he chaired this influential body from 1998 to 2005 and was awarded the rare distinction for a backbencher of being sworn in as Privy Councillor. Qualifies as he was born in Mountain Ash and attended the town's grammar school.

George Henry Hall PC (31 December 1881 – 8 November 1965)

M.P. Aberdare (15 November 1922 – 4 October 1946). Ennobled as The Right Honourable The Viscount Hall, of Cynon Valley in the County of Glamorgan, 28 October 1946. Held a variety of government posts, including Civil Lord of the Admiralty (7 June 1929 – 24 August 1931), Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies (12 May 1940 – 4 February 1942), Financial Secretary to the Admiralty (4 February 1942 – 25 September 1943), Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (25 September 1943 – 26 May 1945), Secretary of State for the Colonies (3 August 1945 – 4 October 1946), First Lord of the Admiralty (4 October 1946 – 24 May 1951), also as Deputy Leader of the House of Lords, 1947 – 1951. He left school at 12 to work underground, but an accident allowed him time to continue his education. He became a checkweigher and won a seat on Mountain Ash Urban District Council, the first Labour representative for the Penrhiwceiber Ward. He was later elected MAUDC's Chairman. Hall beat Charles Stanton to win the Aberdare seat in 1922.

Kim Scott Howells PC (born 27 November 1946)

M.P. Pontypridd (23 February 1989 – 12 April 2010). Held a variety of government posts, including, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (28 July 1998 – 11 June 2001), Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (11 June 2001 – 13 June 2003), Minister of State for Transport (13 June 2003 – 10 September 2004), Minister of State for Higher Education (10 September 2004 – 11 May 2005), Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (11 May 2005 – 6 October 2008), Chairman of the Intelligence and Security Committee (3 October 2008 – 11 May 2010). Although born in Merthyr Tydfil and brought up in Penywaun, Howells qualifies for this list as he attended Mountain Ash Grammar School, where Bruce George would have been a few years above him. He was a National Union of Mineworkers official who co-ordinated the actions of the south Wales miners during the strike of 1984-5.

Matthew Keating (23 May 1869 – 25 May 1937)

M.P. South Kilkenny (10 August 1909 – 14 December 1918). Of Irish parents, Keating was born in Mountain Ash and worked at local collieries. Elected as an Irish Parliamentary Party member, in the wake of the Easter Rising of 1916 he was defeated by a Sinn Fein candidate. He later entered business and was a Director of Irish Shell. Although the family were poor by the standards of the time, their father seemed keen on buying books for his children, no doubt adding to their achievements. Three of these gained distinction during the first decades of the twentieth century. As well as Matthew, his sister Mary Keating Hill was a noted suffragette; his brother Joseph was an author, playwright and later a radical Labour councillor, who became Chairman of MAUDC. Matthew was made a Fellow of the Royal Statistical Society.

John Williams (17 February 1861 – 20 June 1922)

M.P. Gower (8 February 1906 – 20 June 1922). A supporter of Liberal-Labour politics, when the Miners' Federation of Great Britain affiliated to the Labour Party in 1909, along with the other south Wales M.P.s representing mining communities, he joined that party. Born in Aberaman, he left school at 12 to work in the collieries. At a relatively young age he became a checkweigher and later a miners' agent. He was elected to the Mountain Ash Urban District Council for the South Ward in December 1894. He died while still a sitting M.P.

Stephen Roy Williams (Born 11 October 1966)

M.P. Bristol West (5 May 2005 – 30 March 2015). Was Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (7 October 2013 – 8 May 2015). Born in Mountain Ash, although brought up in Abercynon, he was educated at Mountain Ash Comprehensive School and the University of Bristol. At first a member of the Social Democratic Party he later became a Liberal Democrat when the latter merged with the Liberal Party in 1988. He has been a councillor on Avon County Council and Bristol City Council, he has also unsuccessfully stood for the West of England mayoral elections in 2017 and 2021 and for the European Parliament in 2019.

QUIZ NUMBER 10.

by Alan Abraham.

This quiz is to find out what you know about the “valley”. Answers will be found in the next edition of *HANES*.

Q1. In the 1905/1906 season the All Blacks Rugby Union Team toured Great Britain and France and they played 33 games, winning 32 and losing only one. The All Blacks only loss was in the International at the Arms Park, Cardiff, and the Welsh team were victorious. The following two questions are based on that rugby match.

(i). Prior to the kick off the Welsh crowd sang in reply to a New Zealand action. What did they sing and what had happened prior to this Welsh retort?

(ii). Aberdare players were part of the Welsh team and one member was honoured, in March 2010, with a Blue Plaque which can be seen in Abernant, who was he?

Q2. Between 1947 and 1957, a son of Aberaman, represented Wales at soccer on 41 occasions. Who was he?

Q3. This Cwmaman athlete is best remembered as being part of a British relay quartet which included another Welsh man, (Berwyn Price), and two English men, (Peter Radford and David Jones), They succeeded in beating a USA team at the White City Stadium on 3rd August 1963 and equalling, the then current world record for the 4 x 100 yards relay. Who is he?

Q4. In what year was the Robertstown “cast iron tramway bridge” erected?

Q5. Who donated £1,500 towards the building of Trecynon Free Library and Hall in 1902?

Q6. In the 19th century a boot manufacturer was located in Canon Street, Aberdare, and in recent years the name was synonymous with two ladies shoe shops in the Morgan Arcade, Cardiff. What was the name of the boot manufacturer?

Solution to Quiz Number 9.

Answers: 1. Monmouth. 2. Pembroke. 3. Conwy. 4. Cardiff. 5. Aberystwyth.

A MELODY OF HARPISTS *by Geoffrey Evans*

Aberdare abounded with fine harpists during the late eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The Welsh National instrument was the triple stringed harp although Edward Evans (see below) played a single string instrument.

An article entitled Musical Aberdare published in the *Aberdare Leader* on the 24th August 1907 reminds us of a few former players, Edward Evans of Hen-Dŷ-Cwrdd, Sion Shams, John Williams (*Horse and Groom*), Tomos Dafydd Llewelyn, and *our present* harpist Thomas Lewis.

To this list we add:

Master Roger Thomas, Mount Pleasant Inn, Cwmaman (Fl 1908),

Master Taliesin Merfyn Morgan of Canal Head House, Harpist to the Aberdare Cymmrodorion Society. (Fl.1910),

Abraham Richards, Robertstown (d.1908),

D R Davies (*Telynfab Gwalia*) (d.1910). Official harpist at the National Eisteddfod, Mountain Ash.

He often accompanied Eos Dar. Kept the Central Hotel, Aberdare at the time of his death. Ebenezer Rees, 'Professor on the harp', Red Lion, Gadlys.

Harps were made locally and tuition was available from the best players as can be seen from the advert below.

Mr. Taliesin James, R.A.M.,
Hon. Local Examiner to the Royal College of Music, London,
would be very pleased to receive a **limited number**
of Harp Pupils.

—○—

Terms on application to
Hawthorne House, Gloucester Terrace, Aberdare.

Taliesin James son of James James composer of the melody of the Welsh National anthem.
Aberdare Leader, 9th June, 1906.

Most of the players were also publicans and a series of biographies of these colourful characters would be of interest. For Thomas Dafydd Llewelyn see *Old Aberdare*, Vol.2. pp 16-17 and passim.

As an example we record, briefly, the life of Thomas Lewis of The Welsh Harp Inn, Trecynon.
THOMAS LEWIS.

His divine harp soothed the ears of peasant and peer and shed rays of joy into many a hall and hovel. Lewis was born at Ty Fry, Cwmdare [*sic*] and moved to the Welsh Harp around 1852. When he was sixteen he went along to the Aberdare November fair with a friend who accidentally discharged a rifle blinding Lewis. He already had an exceptional natural musical ability and his disability led him to take up the harp as a source of consolation, and as a means of making a living. His fame as a player spread and demands for his services increased. He came to the notice of many of the leading families in south Wales and became guest player at many of the grand houses of the area. He was a favourite of Lady Llanover, a great patron of the Welsh arts, who appointed him the family harpist.



Augusta Hall, Baroness Llanover (*Gwenynen Gwent*)

One of the main promoters of the triple harp as the National instrument of Wales in the 19th C. She made the triple harp, or Welsh harp, the official instrument of the Abergavenny eisteddfods.

Lewis also played for three generations of the Kemeys-Tynte family, playing at their homes at Cefn Mably and Haswell Park, Bridgwater. He was officially appointed the family harpist in September 1883. He was popular at both estates where he 'charmed and cheered illustrious visitors'. The Kemeys-Tyntes presented him with a silver badge of office which Lewis first wore locally in March 1884 at a dinner held at The Royal Exchange, Trecynon at which he played a harp solo 'in good style' and accompanied various other vocalists. Locally he played at the mansions of David Davies, Maesyffynnon and the Waynes at Glandare.

He won many eisteddfod prizes during his lifetime including that of best performer of *Llwyn Onn* (The Ash Grove) with variations, on the pedal harp at the first National Eisteddfod of the modern era held at the Market Hall, Aberdare in 1861. The prize was £5. (*Monmouthshire Merlin*, 24th August, 1861)



**Thomas Lewis, the blind harpist of The Welsh Harp Inn.
Image Pl 137 *Aberdare Pictures from the Past*. (CVHS, 1986)**

In 1862 the *Aberdare Times* commenting on Lewis' win at a Carmarthen Eisteddfod (where he competed against Ebenezer Rees of Aberdare. See above). 'For a long time past this talented young man, although labouring under the great inconvenience occasioned by his blindness, has been steadily working his way upwards in the musical world; he has been successful in most of his competitive performances, and has certainly succeeded in winning a respectable position among Welsh lyrists....at the recent National, Lewis was highly complimented by Professor Thomas on the sweetness and correctness of his playing ...' (19th July, 1862)

The unfortunate Lewis was assaulted at the Welsh Harp in 1876 when a drunken customer struck him and damaged his harp. And in May 1908 he was knocked over by a cyclist in the park, where he enjoyed strolling. One of Lewis' ribs was broken and two other ribs injured. Lewis was awarded £15 compensation by Judge Gwilym Williams at the local County Court in November of that year. Lewis died at the age of 72 on the 5th June, 1902 and is buried at Aberdare Cemetery.

His obituary in *The Aberystwyth Observer* says he held a popular position in the musical world, having for many years been harpist to the late Lady Llanover. Although blind, he possessed a knowledge of the district which was so clear and definite that when seen walking through the streets and parks – skirting the various ponds – none but those who were aware of his affliction could have suspected it. (12th June, 1902).

The Society's *Aberdare: Pictures from the Past* (Vol.1, pl.137) displays a photograph of Thomas Lewis (1829–1902) whose mother kept the suitably named Welsh Harp Inn, Trecynon. Thomas Lewis later held the licence.

UPDATES.

- *Hanes Bach 2* (June 2020) carried an article by Geoffrey Evans on the old village alms houses endowed by the Mathew family in 1720. It reflected on the fact that it was a pity that little was known of the lives of the occupants, and happily, the following informative account has been found by Geoffrey since the publication of that piece. The Gazette giving the information is dated 26th June 1841

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ABERDARE.

On Saturday last, Gwenllian Williams, a pauper, died at Aberdare, aged 88. It is a remarkable circumstance that this woman left a daughter, a granddaughter, and a great granddaughter, and a great great grandson, the latter of whom was born about four hours before his venerable ancestress's decease. She was a pauper belonging to Aberdare, and lived in an almshouse, along with her daughter and granddaughter.

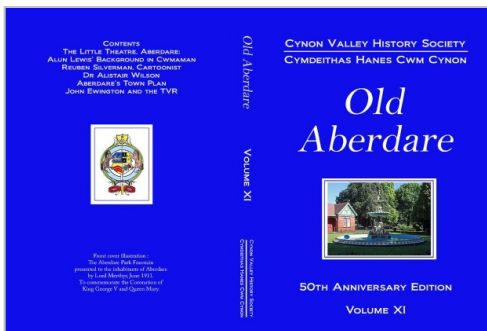
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• **The Barlow Rail**



Hanesbach 1 (May 2020) reported on the Barlow Rail and said a section had been re-laid in the Dare Country Park but, at the time, could not be found (?). It has been located and can be seen in a fenced off section in the main car park. *As you know the Barlow Rail was unusual in that it had wide flaring feet enabling it to be laid directly on the ballast without requiring sleepers. Ref. also John Mear's Aberdare. The Railways and Tramroads jhd*

• **Volume 11**



Planning to be printed in July 2021. Further details to be included in the next edition of HANES (95)

In Memoriam

We regret to record the passing of Mrs Olwen Roberts of Green Hedges, Bryncoch, aged 92 years. Mrs Roberts, formerly of Gadlys Gardens, was a member of the Society for many years and actively encouraged her friends to join. In Hanesbach 5 (May 2020), Olwen wrote a short article recalling her schoolgirl memories of meeting Dame Sybil Thorndike.

Sad News. At the time of going to print we have been advised that Mr Elfed Bowen, one of our Vice Presidents, has passed away. Elfed, born in Hirwaun, was a long serving teacher at MAGS and served our Society with exceptional diligence in several roles for many years. A full obituary will be given in the Summer edition (95) of HANES.