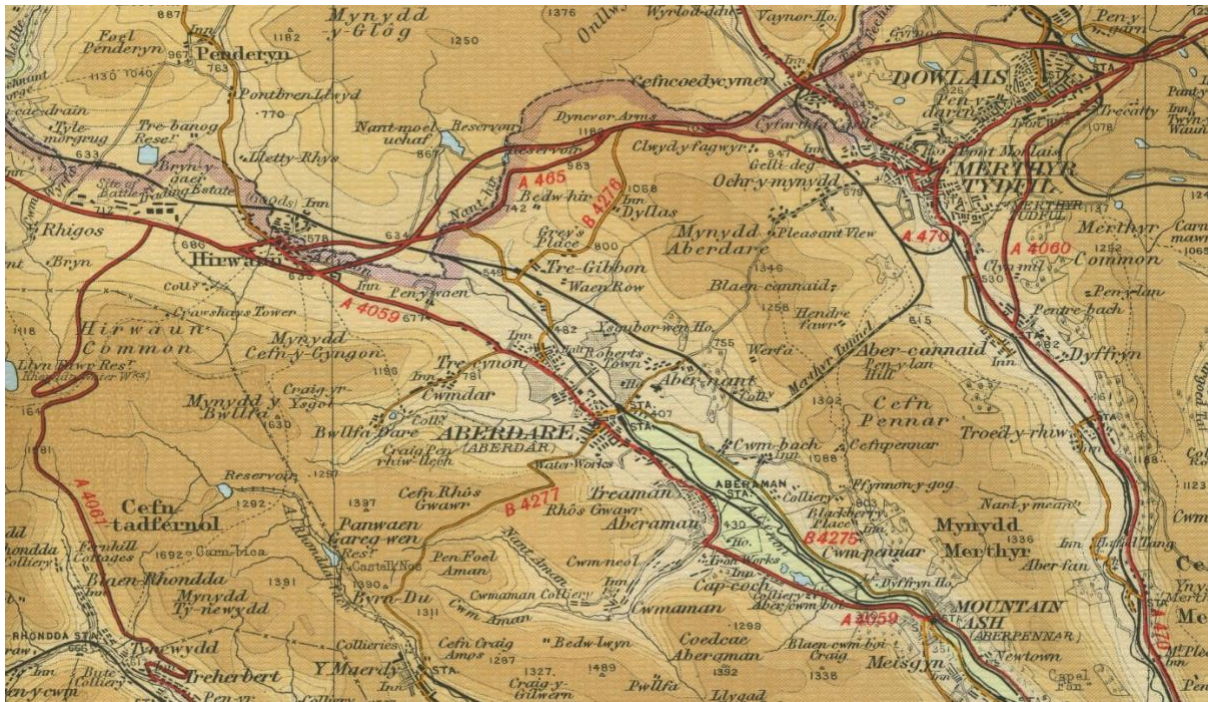Generational changes and perceptions of Aberdare town

Above is an old map, a piece of history. So what is the significance? Nestled amongst the mountains in the shadow of the coal pits and ironworks is a town now known as home. It has been said that over the years the Cynon valley has had the reputation for being "slightly dodgy!" Has even been labelled "rough and ready!" Is known for being impoverished and disadvantaged, where people live below the bread-line.

Despite this and ignoring the negative media coverage, scratch below the surface and it may be surprising to find a town steeped in history. Not only this but a rich and vibrant town, filled with people of all ages, race, colour and ethnicity living alongside one another in relative peace & harmony. It is difficult to imagine any other community that would offer a more heart-felt welcome. So if this town is to be labelled then it should be known as the "Diamond in the rough"

This project has been designed to investigate the generational changes to Aberdare. As only a recent member of this community, this investigation of the town, has proved to be very interesting. In order to complete the task; it was necessary to choose a subject to write about, namely a business, building or structure that has seen changes throughout the years.

Aberdare Temperance Hall

In the 1800's the population of Aberdare was a mere 1486 and as seen in the table below greatly increased in size:

POPULATION OF THE PARISH OF ABERDARE FROM 1801 TO 1971:

1801	1,486	1891	40,917
1811	2,782	1901	43,265

1821	2,062	1911	50,830
1831	3,961	1921	55,007
1841	6,471	1931	48,746
1851	14,999	1941	43,740
1861	32,299	1951	40,932
1871	37,774	1961	39,155
1881	35,514	1971	37,775

Courtesy of Cynon Valley Historical Society.

Previously the main employment of the Cynon Valley had been agricultural cottage based industries. With the discovery that the Cynon valley was rich in mineral and fossil fuel "Black Gold" and the building of the ironworks by the Crawshay family in Merthyr, industrialisation and urbanisation had increased the population to 55007 by 1921. Fortune favoured the town during the late 1800's and early 1900's and Aberdare became a thriving Victorian town, filled with shops, pubs, "coffee taverns" and places of worship.

Notorious Aberdare!

The consumption of alcohol has long since been part of the Welsh tradition. It has played a major part in the culture of Wales. During the "Boom Years" of the mid 1880's Aberdare became notorious for the amount of pubs in the area; there were at least 273! However, it became apparent that levels of consumption had reached an all-time high, dangerous level. Employers had also noticed how much affect this was also having upon the workforce and to the wives who witnessed money wasted on alcohol rather than being spent at home on the family, and the escalation in domestic violence.
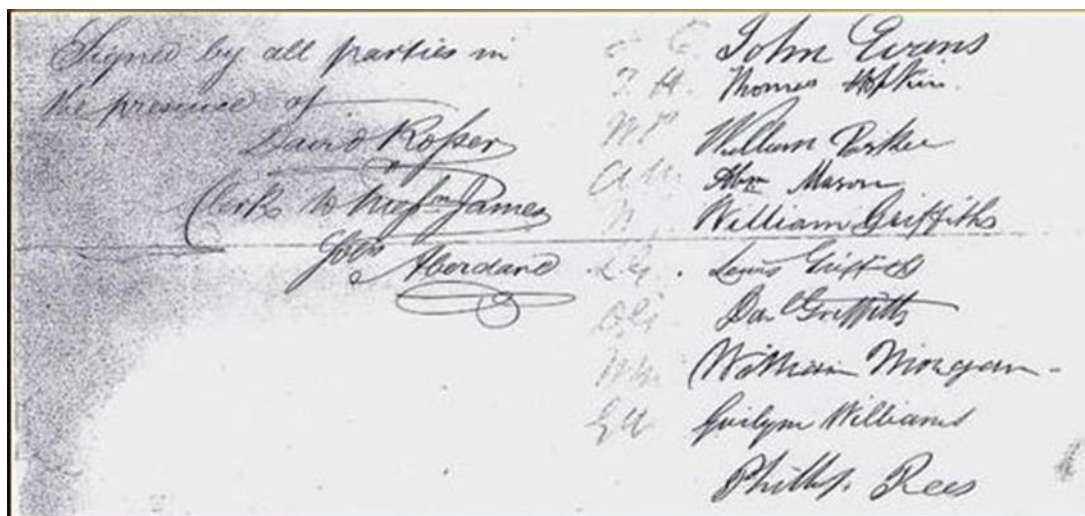
 Commercial Street alone hosted no fewer than 16 licensed premises. Inevitably the squalor, depravity and public drunkenness were a cause for concern in the town. Hence the need for the religious Temperance Movement that sought to discourage the deplorable behaviour! However, despite this the consumption of beer was recommended due to the inferior condition of the water.

The Temperance Society

The Total Abstinence Society were part of the Temperance Movement in Wales. 4th June 1857, an agreement was made with the "Total Abstinence Society" to build a Temperance Hall in Cannon street. The total cost of the build was £3,000; the crusade was headed by Mr J B Gough. The amount was paid to builder Phillip Rees.

The Temperance Hall occupied the largest space available in Aberdare town and it contained the following:

- An auditorium with seating for 1, 500 people

- A Temperance hotel with 11 rooms

- A library and a Temperance coffee house

- A committee room

However in the years following the war, the popularity of the Temperance Society declined. The depression years were remorseless, during that time nobody would refuse a working miner a pint of beer or two, so long as his family did not starve.

Over the years the Temperance hall has changed hands and been used for various types of business. The hall was converted into a theatre. The New Theatre and Hippodrome in 1895 and was renamed the Palladium in the 1918 where its primary use was as a cinema.

www.theatretrust.org.uk.

In more recent years the

Palladium was

transformed from a

theatre into a bingo hall.

Sadly, the building was left unoccupied and derelict for several months and had deteriorated and was badly in need of repair. 13th November 2013 Speaking at the development control committee hearing on Thursday, November 7, Councillor Mike Forey said: "I have affectionate memories of the building as a cinema and I am sorry to see its demise. But based on its interior condition, its use could not continue."

The building has since been demolished to make way for newly built apartments. Which it has been recommended be built in keeping with the character of the town.

An artist's impression

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