



Hanes:

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Free to members.
To the public: 15p

Newsletter of the Cynon Valley History Society /
Cylchlythyr Cymdeithas Hanes Cwm Cynon.

'AND THE WALLS CAME TUMBLING DOWN.'

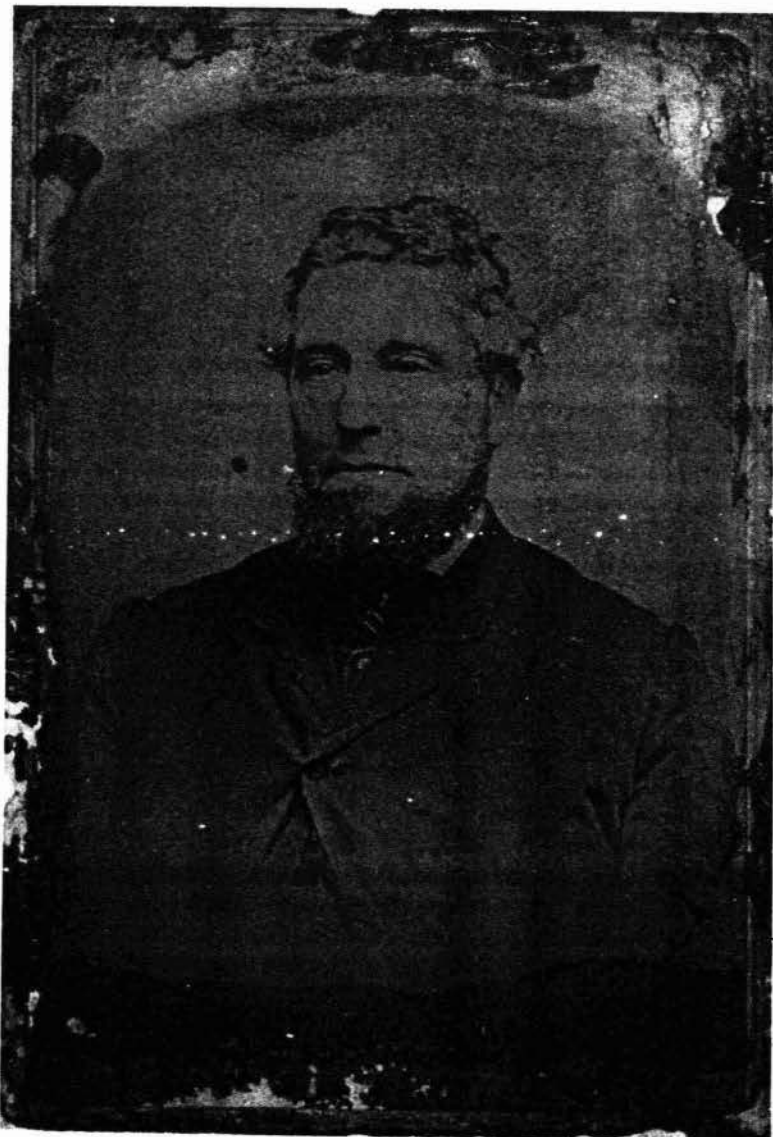
Have you noticed how much the local 'townscape' has changed lately? There have been undoubted improvements in certain quarters. Other changes, however, have caused real disquiet in the minds of many residents. A lot of good work has been done to restore the old Aberdare Market complex; the removal of the old Gadlys Bridge has produced an attractive landscaped northern approach to the town centre; and it is a relief to many to see the old National School building in Cardiff St being adapted to modern use rather than have to witness its demolish as was once feared.

All is not bad. All is not lost. Yet so much of interest & value has recently been

swept away that it must give rise to real concern on the part of those who wish to see Aberdare & its environs flourish as an attractive locality in tune with its background as well as with future needs. So-called 'progress' has ruined many town centres in the valleys & elsewhere by destroying adaptable buildings of unique character in order to replace them with squat & square Aztec-like structures that could be just about anywhere. No disrespect is meant, but next time you're there look critically at what 'the experts' have done to much of Merthyr, Ebbw Vale or Pontypridd. And before we feel smug compare the old National School building in Aberdare with the 'Poundstretcher' building a few doors down in Cardiff St. The point is well made.

Recently, we have lost Dyffryn (1987), Maerdy House, Plasdraw House and the Memorial Hall (1988). Every redeemable colliery building has been cleared with no effort having been made to secure one as a centre of our industrial history. It can only be disturbing to think of what losses may lie .../p.2...

OLD PHOTOGRAPHS NO.6: William Williams (1810-1878), founder of the Glancynon ironfoundry, Aberdare. See article on the Williams of Werfa family within. (Source: Edward Williams, Chepstow, a great-grandson.)



A HISTORY OF THE WERFA FAMILIES:

PART TWO:

-by Edward G. Williams.

The Williams Family:

THIS ARTICLE IS A CONTINUATION OF THAT IN HANES no.5 WHICH FEATURED THE REES FAMILY: OWNERS OF THE WERFA BETWEEN THE LATE 17C & 1828. EDWARD WILLIAMS IS A GREAT-GRANDSON OF WILLIAM WILLIAMS WHOSE PHOTOGRAPH APPEARS ON p.1 AND WHO FORMS THE MAIN OBJECT OF THIS ARTICLE. LIKE ITS PREDECESSOR, IT IS BASED ON ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS STILL IN THE POSSESSION OF THE FAMILY. THIS WILL BE THE FINAL ARTICLE ON THESE INTERESTING & IMPORTANT MEMBERS OF THE OLD FARMING COMMUNITY AT ABERDARE. ED.

As stated in Hanes no.5, the Merthyr surgeon William Thomas acquired The Court & Werfa estates in 1828 from the Rees family, & he lived at The Court, Merthyr, while letting the Werfa to tenants. Little is known of those who occupied Werfa during the next 30 or so years. William Morgan, a farmer, & his family lived there in 1841 & 1851, & may have lived there in the 1830s. Wm. Morgan died in 1861 & the tenancy changed a few years later. By then the landlord of the Werfa was Richard Thomas, son of Wm. Thomas of The Court, who had died in 1858 leaving his estate in the hands of trustees. In 1866 these granted a 60-year lease of the Werfa, at £60 p.a., to an Aberdare man named William Williams. This lease did not include the mineral rights, which had been let some years before to the Marquess of Bute.

Wm. Williams (1809-78) was an ironfounder who owned the Glancynon Foundry at Aberdare. Born at Ystradowen in the Vale, he had come to Aberdare when his parents moved to the town in the early 19C. He probably began his working life in one of the local ironworks; by his 30s he had set up as a blacksmith in the Trap area, at the bottom of today's Abernant Rd. His business succeeded, & by about 1858 he had established his own foundry. This Glancynon Foundry stood on a narrow strip of land bounded on one side by the Taff Vale (or Low Level) Railway, & on the other by the river Cynon. Its location became known as 'Ironbridge' because of the bridge over the Cynon near the end of Commercial St & which terminated the site at its southern end. Williams was an active businessman. During the 1860s he pursued interests in addition to his foundry. Local Board of Health records show he won contracts for supplying roadstone & for 'street scavenging' (cleansing) work. He also applied for the Board's consent to repair or extend properties in Dean St & elsewhere. This suggests he may have branched out into property ownership. This is plausible since his father (who had lived at Ynyslwyd Cottage, Aberaman, & had died in 1862) described himself as 'Proprietor of Houses'.

.../AND THE WALLS CAME TUMBLING DOWN (p.1):

ahead because of the growing difficulties facing the congregations of many local chapels & churches. It seems that only much greater official backing can secure the future of the Hen Dy Cwrdd (est.1751). Meanwhile, we still await (despite the promises) a local museum & heritage centre while comparable districts all around us forge ahead in that direction with schemes of their own.

An encouraging development lately has been the move to establish at Aberdare a civic society under the 'umbrella' of the Civic Trust for Wales. All praise to Mrs. Tydfil Thomas for having roused sufficient interest & support! For years, the History Society has been loudly & assiduously calling for the proper care & development (they CAN go together) of what is potentially one of the most attractive town environments in all south Wales. Now, we look forward to the prospect of co-operating closely with the new civic society & with all other bodies

which share our concern. In particular, the C.V.H.S. awaits with interest an opportunity to discuss with the civic society practical ways by which 'civic awareness' may be raised.

We are further encouraged by news that the Civic Trust for Wales has appointed a chief projects officer in the person of Dr Matthew Griffiths of Barry. Since 1982, Dr Griffiths has been an investigator on behalf of the Royal Commission on Ancient & Historic Monuments in Wales. He has also been most active in the study of the history of Glamorgan. He is a past secretary of the county history society; a member of the executive of the South Wales Record Society; a contributor to several learned journals and a frequent speaker & tutor in local history. We wish him well as one who is likely to bring much discernment to the exercise of his new responsibilities. D.L.D.

In 1834 Wm. Williams married Mary Thomas of Cefn Pennar Uchaf farm, by whom he had 8 children. The Thomases had hitherto lived by farming, but later began leasing to local coal companies the right to work minerals under their land. In 1849 this right went to the Wayne family, & later to the Llety Siencyn Coal Co. In time, Mary inherited a share of the royalties derived from such leases & in 1881 appointed a trust to distribute her share equally among her children after her lifetime.

In addition to the Glancynon Foundry and his properties at Aberdare, Wm. Williams farmed the Werfa's 200 acres by virtue of the 1866 lease. His 4 sons, William, Edward, John and Wyndham, helped him until each married & left home. Edward became an engineer & draughtsman; John & Wyndham described themselves at first as mechanics & later as 'iron & brass founders'. John was also to qualify as a colliery manager. William senior probably acquired a fair amount of capital during his business life; but it is unclear why, when aged 64, he began an enterprise in an area of which he had no experience - i.e., coal mining. By 1874 he owned the Coed Caedryrs colliery, Nantgarw, previously worked by the Llantwit Red Ash Colliery Co. From 1875 the firm registered as 'Wm. Williams & Co.', & from 1877 Wm.'s son John was its manager. This colliery worked a level yards from the Glamorganshire canal. Whether this had anything to do with water entering the workings is unclear, but the colliery suffered severe flooding in about 1878 & had to be closed. Whether old Wm. Williams knew of this end to his venture is uncertain for he died aged 68 in April, 1878. The enforced closure of the pit was a hard blow to the family.

Following the closure John returned to Aberdare & joined his brother Wyndham at the Glancynon Foundry. Wyndham ran the foundry & farmed at Werfa while their father was away. In 1881 Wyndham married Rachel, daughter of Thomas Jones, owner of the George Brewery. His father-in-law took a financial interest in the foundry, & when Wyndham died aged 42 in 1896 he took over the business. The foundry continued in operation until the early 20C.

John Williams did not remain long at the foundry after his return. He entered the tin industry & became manager of the Cynon Tinplate Works at Robertstown until his death. He & his wife, whom he married in 1873, settled at the Werfa - the lease of which his elderly widowed mother had been able to purchase in 1883. John's wife, Anne Margaret, was a daughter of Rhys & Margaret Howells. Her father was Superintendent of the Taff Vale (Low Level) station at Aberdare. Her mother was a daughter of Thomas Rees III of Gamlyn Isaf & a grand-daughter of Samuel Rees, last of that name to own the Werfa (see HANES no.5).

The marriage of Anne Margaret to John Williams therefore restored the Rees family's old connection with the Werfa.

Many changes had occurred at the Werfa since the late 17C. Home comforts were far greater; farm buildings had been enlarged & nearby grassland enclosed & improved; peacocks now paced the garden, and access had become much easier. Instead of a jolting journey over rough tracks by car-llusg & gambo, a visitor could ride to the house in gig or carriage along a gravelled drive which wound down the hill to the lane that lead to Abernant. The valley below was no longer a gentle rural scene; but the Werfa retained an atmosphere of quiet seclusion amid its lofty views. Sadly, this was not to endure. During the 1880s the house began to show effects of subsidence caused by mining operations during the previous 3 or 4 decades. Soon, the Williamses were forced to leave for a new home. This was built lower down the hillside at the foot of the drive that led up to the old home-stand, & became the new Werfa Farm - the present 'Werfa House', Abernant.

John & Annie Williams had 12 children, the youngest born at the new house. When John died in 1909 he was followed as manager of the tinplate works by his 4th son, another Wyndham. About this time the family again tried its hand at the coal trade, & with more success. The old Werfa colliery owned by Evens & Co. has been taken over by the Marquess of Bute at the turn of the century, & had finally been closed in 1905 or so. About that time, or a little later, the Williams family opened a small drift mine called Werfa Graig not far above the older colliery. This proved short-lived; but in 1914 a new company was formed - the Werfa Dare Colliery Co. Ltd. This operated a drift mine near the previous Werfa and Werfa Graig sites; was set up with a share capital of £5,000 and, having bought the workings of its predecessors for £3,500, commenced operations in 1915. Its directors were Wyndham & Rees, the sons of John and Annie Williams; Wm. Edwards, a bank manager & their brother-in-law; Benjamin Greenslade, export agent; & James Ruther, fruit merchant. Despite difficulties in working a...

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* NOTICE REGARDING MEMBERSHIP OF THE C.V.H.S: *
* New members are always welcome. Please *
* contact J.F. Mear, Secretary, 7, Tudor Tce, *
* ABERDARE (878349) or any member known to you. *
* Publications (as available) from D. Williams, *
* 29, Tudor Tce, ABERDARE (877398). Items for *
* HANES are always welcome & should be sent to *
* D.L. Davies, 5, Milton St, Cwmaman, ABERDARE *
* (873226). The Society meets at Aberdare Parish *
* Hall on the 3rd Thursday of each month. *

.../p.3 THE WILLIAMSES OF WERFA (contd):

previously exploited area, the Werfa Dare was one of the few small collieries which remained in business throughout the period between the two wars & in its day employed up to 280 men. It worked during the 1939-45 war and, following nationalization was closed by the N.C.B. in 1949.

Annie Williams, widow of John, lived at Werfa House until her death in 1940, aged 86. Three of her children also lived there, and 3 others in the neighbourhood. By the end of the 1960s, all of these had died or left the district. The sale of Werfa House at this time severed the Rees & Williams families' centuries-old link with the Werfa estate.

ANNUAL DINNER

* This year's annual dinner will be held at plasdraw Dining Hall on Thursday, 12th May, at 7 p.m. The guest speaker will be Mr. Richard Keen, the Historic Houses Officer of the National Trust in Wales.

* Mr Keen has recently presented his own series of historical interest on B.B.C. Wales. He was previously on the staff of the National Museum & will be well-known to many.

* Tickets, price £6, are available from Mr. Tom Evans, Ynyslas, Abernant Rd, ABERDARE (tel. 873587).

NEWS...NEWS...NEWS...NEWS...NEW

* THE CYNON VALLEY HISTORY SOCIETY HAS NOW formally donated to the Central Library at Aberdare the large collection of fragile glass negatives known as the 'Berry Collection'. J. Lyndon Berry was a commercial photographer at Aberdare during the late 19th & early 20th centuries. His own store of glass negatives remained in private hands until five or six years ago when they were brought to the attention of our publications secretary, Mr. Doug Williams. Doug was kindly allowed to examine them on behalf of the Society, and place them on deposit at the Central Library. Prints of most of the negatives have since been made, & much effort has gone into identifying as many of the views as possible. Some were straightforward; most were not. Together, the collection provides a wealth of unique views of the wider Aberdare district between (approximately) 1870-1910, & the negatives have now been 'translated' from a deposit into a gift for the benefit of the local public. A real debt of gratitude is owed both the original owners & to Doug Williams for his sterling work.

* A NEW CIVIC SOCIETY FOR THE DISTRICT WAS established at the end of 1987 with a view to enhancing both our urban environment & our appreciation of it. The History Society has already pledged its support & was pleased to be able to make a small donation towards the costs of starting this new body. Mrs. Tydfil Thomas, retired headmistress of the Girls' Comprehensive School, Aberdare, was a moving spirit in the venture, & she now has an able committee & group of supporters to pursue the task they have set themselves. Mr. Tom Evans of our own committee is among them.

* CONGRATULATIONS ARE DUE TO TWO ACTIVE historians of the area for having gained in the summer of 1987 the degree of B.A. from the University of Wales. Both Betty Evans of

Abernant and Geoffrey Evans of Plasdraw achieved this success after studying for three years at the Polytechnic of Wales, Pontypridd, in addition to meeting the demands of their everyday employment and life. Our sincere congratulations to both!

* IT HAS BEEN RECENTLY REPORTED THAT THE hitherto 'independent' Aberdare & District Co-operative Society will be wound-up later this year & its interests acquired by the national Co-operative Retail Society. Such a step has occurred long since in many other parts of south Wales (e.g. in the Rhymney Valley); but it is of a special significance here since it was at Cwmbach during the 1850s that the very first Co-operative Society in Wales was founded. A plaque marks the site of this first venture immediately opposite the Queen Victoria public house in Cwmbach.

* THE LADY WINDSOR COLLIERY, YNYSYBWL finally closed on the 26th March, 1988, & thereby struck another significant note in the history of this valley since there is now remaining only one working colliery - that at Tower, Hirwaun. How much has been done to conserve a knowledge of that 'coal society' which created the modern Cynon Valley? The answer can only be 'Far too little'. Surely it is more than ever a case of 'Do it now, for soon it will be too late'.

* OLD ABERDARE VOLUME 5 IS DUE TO APPEAR AT Whitsun. The price has not yet been fixed; but watch out for its appearance because each volume has sold remarkably quickly, & since this is the 5th in the series many will want to buy it to make sure they have a complete set. It is hoped to publish vol. 6 in time for Christmas, 1988.

* A WARM WELCOME ALSO TO 'CLOCHDAR', THE new Welsh-language local monthly started in December, 1987. It is 20p a copy & packed with news & views. Well worth buying!