

HANES



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Newsletter of the Cynon Valley History Society Cylchlythur Cymdeithas Hanes Cwm Cynon.

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THE COSY CORNER REFRESHMENT BAR

48 Gadlys Road (Opposite Park Cinema) Aberdare.

Let's go to the Bracchi's!

Much interest was shown in the Society's October meeting on the subject of the Italian Connection. This lively talk outlined the history of the families from Bardi in northern Italy, who in search of a better life, settled in the populous industrial towns of South Wales, setting up ice-cream parlours, sweet shops and restaurants. These soon became part of the social life and heritage of the South Wales valleys.

Perhaps one day someone will come up with an essay on the Italian restaurant trade in the Cynon Valley. Meanwhile it is worth recording the names of those who established businesses in the town of Aberdare and its districts. This list has been compiled from various trade directories and does not claim to be definitive.

1902. Bracchi Bros. Ice Cream Manufacturers, 26 Canon Street. (*Bennett's Directory of South Wales - Sub. Aberdare.*)

1912. Marcello Servini, Ice Cream manufacturers. 22b Lewis Street, Aberaman.

1930. Ferrari's Café (Late-Miles Restaurant) 2 Canon Street.

Mascherpa Bros. Confectioners and Tobacconists, 21-24 Canon Street.

A. Sidoli & Sons, Express Café, 3 High Street & The Cosy Corner Refreshment Bar, 48 Gadlys Road (opposite Park Cinema).

Carpanini's, "For good Fish and Chips", Duke Street. (*From - "Official Souvenir Programme, Aberdare's Big Week, Nov. 2nd. - 8th. 1930"*)

1933. Servini's Café - Restaurant, 2 Cardiff Street. (*The date of opening appears on the advertising fascia board.*)

It is interesting to note from just these short notes how the businesses grew and the enterprise of the owners in opening them near parks, cinemas and railway stations.

1903 – Bill's in town.

One hundred years ago, on the 4th. July 1903, Aberdare was visited by none other than **Buffalo Bill** (Col. W F Cody 1847-1917) and his spectacular and renowned '**Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World**'. Aberdare was one of only seven towns in Wales visited by this show, which was to have been its final ever tour of England and Wales (but was not).

Aberdare was included not only because of its population (43,365 in 1901) but for its rail communications and network of railway sidings. The existence of the latter was necessary as the show was transported on four show-trains pulling a total of 150 carriages, (consisting of Barnum & Bailey Circus cars). These trains travelled in all some 3,000 miles between 100 U.K. locations. The carriages contained the show's stock of 500 horses, 150 buffalo, kitchens with a catering staff of 80, properties, scenery and a huge arena and grandstand, plus 800 performers. All these were moved for one day only onto the Ynys Meadow, (now Sobell Centre & sports fields) where the show was seen by 10,000 people in the afternoon and 12,000 in the evening. Far more people than could be accommodated in the grandstand turned up from surrounding areas. The Aberdare Leader described the show as "*The social event of the year – if not the century*" – "*never before in the annals of Aberdare was such a crowd seen in the town as last Saturday - - - Col. Cody's striking personality was an object of general admiration and every appearance of the illustrious westernian was greeted with great applause. The whole affair came off without a hitch and the mobility and dispatch displayed was most wonderful. The spectators will not soon forget this grand study in equestrianism.*" - "*After the show a concert was held on the grounds at which the American band played an excellent part.*"

For years afterwards there was talk of the wonderful horsemanship, uncanny marksmanship and hair-raising attacks on a stagecoach by yelling Indians. The town experienced record congestion and, apart from the arrival of special trains from all areas there was an influx of conveyances from Merthyr, Neath, and the Rhondda Valleys. Sadly there was a fatality when a Mr. Thomas Jacobs of Alice Place, Cwmaman died as a result of a collision with a two-horse Brake in Market Street. The 'Leader' reporter records how he saw his boyhood hero in the flesh as he rode in his American buggy with his wife.

Those fortunate enough to see the show were spellbound by the Mexican Vanquero's, Sioux, Arapahoe, Brule and Cheyenne Indians, Russian Cossacks, Arab horsemen, Cowboy bands, artillery drill, bare-back riding, displays by the English Cavalry, the unequalled marksmanship of Johnnie Baker, the attacks on the 'Deadwood Stage' and the general evocation of the Wild West brought to Aberdare. The highlight of the performance was the re-enactment of the Spanish-American war – "Battle of San Juan Hill". Admission prices – 1/- (5P.) to 5/- & 7/6 (for a box). Each show lasted for 4 hours. The show visited Aberdare on American Independence day, which the entire cast celebrated with a National Birthday Dinner – menu as follows –

SOUP.

Tomato Puree

FISH.

Boiled Salmon

(Columbia River)

Sauce Hollandaise.

ENTRÉE'S

Ox Tongue and Spinach

Banana Fritters. Wine Sauce.

ROASTS.

Prime Ribs Beef, Brown Potatoes.

Turkey, Cranberry Sauce.

(New England Style)

Spring Lamb, Green Peas.

Chicken and Dressing

(Newburgh Style)

VEGETABLES

New Potatoes - Stewed Corn

Ice Cream – Pumpkin Pies

Bent's Crackers – Stilton Cheese

Assorted Fruits – Nuts

Coffee - Tea.

(Acknowledgements to *Buffalo Bill*
Historical Center, Cody,
Wyoming, U.S.A.)

Aberdare 1854 – 1856.

Previous issues of 'Hanes' have featured descriptions of the town at various periods of its development. The following account of Aberdare was written by D.T. Alexander, who came to Aberdare in 1854 to learn the drapery trade. Mr. Alexander later changed his profession to that of estate agent, and founded the well-known firm of Stephenson & Alexander.

These references to Aberdare are taken from a short series of articles printed in the 'South Wales Daily News' in 1913, subsequently published in 1915 as 'Glamorgan Reminiscences'. (Reprinted under the same title in 1973 by Stewart Williams).

Removal to Aberdare.

In the year 1853 I left the Vale of Glamorgan and went to reside at Aberdare. Both Aberdare and Merthyr were at that time largely dependent upon the iron industries. There were the Dowlais, Cyfarthfa, Plymouth, and Penydarren Ironworks at Merthyr; and the Abernant, Llwydcoed, Gadlys, and Aberaman Works at Aberdare; and the Hirwain Works at Hirwain. The collieries were then mostly working what was then considered to be house coal. These had been opened mostly by the late Mr. Thomas Powell; the late Mr. David Davies, of Blaengwawr; Mr. Samuel Thomas, Ysguborwen; The father of Mr. D.A. Thomas; Messrs. Thos. and Wm. Wayne; Thomas Joseph; the Rees's of Lletty Shenkin; John and Ebenezer Lewis; and the Werfa and Fforchneol Collieries, which were being worked by the Heath Evans Company, and others. The steam coal measures were at that time being sought for, and had actually been won at Mountain Ash in the pit sunk by the late Mr. David Williams, of Ynyscynon, father of the late Judge Williams, and grandfather of Mr. Rhys Williams, of Miskin. Mr. David Williams's winning at Mountain Ash had been just bought by the late Mr. John Nixon, whose firm afterwards developed into the great industrial undertaking known today as Nixon's Navigation Collieries.

The T.V.R. in the Late Fifties.

Let me tell you a little about the Taff Vale Railway in the late fifties. The main line then ran from Cardiff to Merthyr. The means of communication on the branches, as, for example, that which connected Aberdare with the main line was exceedingly primitive. For instance when you got into a third-class carriage on the Aberdare branch you entered at one end into an arrangement such as is now used for a horse box. There were long seats the length of the carriage. There were no windows, and the only ventilation was through a latticed aperture. You were locked in directly you left the station. At the next station the doors were opened by the guard to allow anyone to get out who required to do so, and then closed.

Another notable feature was that upon the main line there was an incline which ran up from Navigation to the top of the hill near Quakers Yard. Here the engine and carriages were attached to a winding gear, which pulled them to the top and let them down in the same fashion.

The First Steam Coal.

I have referred to the ironworks at Aberdare half a century ago. There was also a large ironworks at Merthyr and Dowlais, owned by the Guests, of Dowlais, the Crawshays, of Cyfarthfa, and Anthony Hill, of the Plymouth Works; and the Penydarren Works were also at Merthyr, but I do not recollect who the owners were. It may be well here to record the fact that Mrs. Rees, of Waunwyllt, Merthyr, who was grandmother of the late Lady Lewis, was the first person to send steam coal to the London markets.

The leading owners of the iron industry in the Aberdare Valley were the Crawshay Baileys, at Aberaman; the Waynes, at Gadlys; the Fothergills, at Abernant and Llwydcoed; and Francis Crawshay, at Hirwain. There was also in those days a gentleman connected with the Llwydcoed works, who afterwards took a very prominent position in connection with the iron trade, and who afterwards became one of the leading men in the North of England, namely the late Mr. David Evans of Barrow in- Furness.

(To be continued in the next edition of Hanes.)

"Ripping Yarns"

We are familiar with the ripping yarns – those enjoyable stories of 'Daring-Do' of our childhood, which used to appear in the "Boys' Own Paper" and other periodicals. Here then are some true and exciting tales of adventure from our own locality.

Ripping Yarn No. 1.

September 1804. Mr. Bruce Knight of Duffryn Aberdare wagered a considerable amount of money that he would walk from Cardiff to Brecon and then return to Cardiff via Merthyr Tydfil in under 40 hours! Result: He won the bet comfortably, completing the entire journey, a total distance of 86 miles in 33 hours!.

Ripping Yarn No.2.

Brigadier-General The Hon. C.G. Bruce, soldier, mountaineer, traveller (1866-1939), the younger son of H.A. Bruce, the first Lord Aberdare, served with the Gurkha Rifles and introduced shorts to the Indian Army. They were first worn by a crack force named the 'Frontier Scouts', which he personally formed and trained. A great explorer, he wandered the whole extent of the Himalayas, and organised and led expeditions to Mount Everest in 1922 & 1924 (although his age prevented him from attempting the final assaults). A man of reputed great strength and endurance, he often wrestled with two Indian wrestlers at a time and on one occasion threw three opponents simultaneously. In his early days he daily carried his orderly on his back up the hills of the Khyber in order to keep fit. After retirement he lived for a time in Llettyshenkin and Cefnpennar houses.

Christmas 150 years ago.

"Ordered that all the inmates of the workhouse have roast beef and plum pudding for dinner on Christmas Day next, and that the men and women have 1 pint of beer each and the boys half a pint" – *From the minutes of the Merthyr Tydfil Board of Guardians – 17th. December 1853* (From Tydfil Thomas' "Poor relief in Merthyr Tydfil Union in Victorian times – Page 82.)



CHRISTMAS 2003.

We wish all our members and readers a very happy Christmas and a prosperous new year.

Chairman's Message.

After several years as editor of 'Hanes', John Mear has reluctantly relinquished the position, and we have been fortunate to have a volunteer in the form of our past secretary, Geoffrey Evans to take over this position. We are delighted to welcome Geoffrey back to the committee, and to the position of editor.

The Society is making good progress with our forthcoming book 'Chapels of the Cynon Valley'. This book will run to about 400 pages, copiously illustrated with many colour and monochrome photographs and drawings. Publication is expected by November 2004.

Thank you for your support over the past year, and best wishes to all for Christmas and the New Year.

Alan Vernon Jones. Chairman.

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