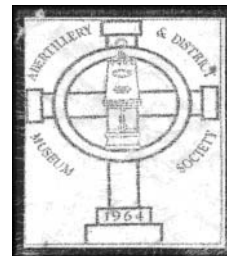


ABERTILLERY & DISTRICT MUSEUM SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

February 2008



Museum News – we may not have had a lecture in January but it was a busy month nonetheless. Our Annual Dinner was very enjoyable with Brian Davies (Curator of the Museum at Pontypridd) on good form as our after-dinner speaker, and Enid Dean providing an entertaining quiz. A big thank you to Roy Pickford for organising the event – no easy task! Thank you also to Nora Lewis who very generously donated a painting for the raffle.

The Coalhouse coffee morning was well attended and was a very enjoyable morning as well as a good fund raising event. There are photos on display at the Museum and a book setting out recipes and household hints from the 1920s. A big thank you to Sian Price and to all who gave, came and bought and made the event a success.

A coachload of our members were off again at the end of January on a visit to the National Museum to see, in particular, the Lowry painting of Six Bells (with a piece by Don on display below it) and the Red Lady skeleton. The museum provided guides to explain the items more fully and that was much appreciated.

On a more serious note if you call at the Museum Don or Peggy or one of the regulars can tell you more about the work going into preparing educational material for use with school parties, and the installation of new shelves in the archive room.

Annual subscriptions £5 membership fees now due. Please pay at or send your cheques to the Museum.

Contact Names

Mrs Peggy Bearcroft, Chairperson	01495 213806
Mr Don Bearcroft, Curator	01495 213806
Mr Ron Selway, Vice Chairman	01495 215775
Mr Trevor Cook Secretary- c/o Museum	01495 211140
Mrs Margaret Cook Assistant Secretary	
Mr Bernard Jones, Treasurer	01495 213185
Mrs Enid Dean, Fund raising Secretary	01495 212880
Mrs M Gilson, Schools Liaison	01495 212413
Mrs M Selway, Programme Sec	01495 211960
Mr Roy Pickford, Social Events Sec	01495 213377
Mr Bernard Hill, Asst Curator	01495 212864
Mrs Jen Price (Newsletter)	01633 482851

Fund-raising January - £517

The coffee morning raised a very welcome £160. Nora's painting raised £73.

Diary Dates

Wednesday 6th February 2008 – *A Visit to Italy* (films) by Harry Vagg

Wednesday 5th March 2008 – *Mons on the March* by Richie Rudd

Wednesday 2nd April 2008 – (to be announced) talk by Malcolm Johnson

Lectures start at 7.00pm in the Metropole Theatre, with teas and a chat downstairs in the Museum afterwards. Entry is £2 and the public are most welcome.

Museum opening times

The Museum is open to the public, **free of charge:**

Tuesday – Thursday 10am - 1pm 2pm - 4pm

Friday & Saturday 10am - 1pm

Museum phone number **01495 211140**. Visitors and volunteers are always welcome so please call in as often as you can.

Email address: abertillerymuseum@tiscali.co.uk

Web: www.abertilleryanddistrictmuseum.org.uk

Details of coffee mornings etc are posted on the notice board at the Museum or at the following websites where you can also read the Newsletters:

www.cwmtilery.com www.abertillery.net

Vice Presidents

Mr Keith Dykes	Mr Alan Hunt
Mrs Esme Heal	Mr Glyn Saunders
Mrs Kathleen Davies	Rev. R Watson
Mrs Margaret Herbert	Prof. Gerwyn Griffiths
Mrs Carole Brooks	Mr Edward Meredith (dec'd)
Mrs Jeanette Fulton	Mr Arthur Lewis OBE

(Annual Subscription £25)

Used specs and stamps – I am still collecting these to pass on to a charity working with blind and visually impaired people in less fortunate countries. **Jen Price**

2 ABERTILLERY & DISTRICT MUSEUM SOCIETY

Abertillery 1942

No. 338 (Abertillery & District) Squadron Air Training Corps organised a **Grand Dance** at the Drill hall in Abertillery on Wednesday 18th February. The Metro Syncopators were featured as the dance band and tickets were 3s.0d each. You also had the chance to 'challenge the Mystery Airman at the dance for a half-guinea voucher'.

Local Voices

Duffryn Road

My introduction to Duffryn Road was back in 1950 – early in January. A cloud laden morning with a hint of snow in the air. I was with Ray, my boyfriend of a few months and we were on our way to measure a piece of land previously earmarked for the bungalow he had designed.

We walked up Tillery Street and where it met Penybont Terrace turned into Duffryn Road, passing a corner shop which we later discovered was in the front room of the house, as were most small corner shops in those days.

Further up the road the surface became rough and stony, little more than a narrow dirt track. On our left we strolled beside a stream trickling gently on its way and on the open ground to our right chickens scratched around, next to which there were pig cots, some pigs even venturing onto the road. No fear of traffic then!

We were in no hurry and every few yards we stopped to look at all the space surrounding us. As the road curved and got steeper, we passed a large stone house – Duffryn House owned by the Coal Board and lived in by a mining engineer and his wife. We climbed on and as we approached the top of the hill to our left was a row of 13 cottages with long narrow gardens and to our right, set back from the road were three more cottages.

It was all very peaceful and we spent the next hour or so measuring the land in which Ray was interested. The measuring was interspersed by visits from some of the residents of the cottages, obviously curious as to what we were doing and why.

The land at the Duffryn which incidentally means 'valley', was Glebe land owned by the Church in Wales. Ray lost no time in putting together his plans for the piece of land he wanted and making an offer to the Representative Body of the Church in Wales. Within days he was invited to meet with a member and their solicitor. Everything moved very quickly. Ray's offer was

accepted, the legalities completed and on 28th February 1950 he became the proud owner of a long strip of land with a road frontage of 372 feet.

As I write this I am ruminating on the speed all this was accomplished; no fuss, no computers, no telephone, just the Royal Mail's letter post.

The next step was submitting the plans. The chief planning officer was a Mr Kegie who worked for Monmouthshire County Council of which county Abertillery was a part. He liked the plans and they were passed with only two stipulations – red roof tiles and a green front door, neither of which posed a problem. Then there was a development charge, which was later abolished but it was too late for us. It was something like the current stamp duty.

The big disappointment was having to wait for a licence to build. Five years after the end of the war there was still a shortage of materials, particularly timber. The issuing of licences was the only way of ensuring that the remaining forests were not depleted.

However, there were many things that could be done during the waiting period; like fencing, building a shed and lots of digging!

But that's another story.

Gwynneth Hutchings

Tin Works Typing

During the Second World War when I was a pupil at the County School (later to become the Grammar School) my friend Audrey Nunnerly and I were very keen to learn Commercial and Secretarial subjects. As these subjects weren't academic ones there was no facility at the school for this. However, Audrey's father was an official or manager at Abertillery Tin Works and he arranged that every Sunday morning we could go to the tin works where their typewriters were at our disposal to practice typing. What a very kind 'off the cuff' gesture. We had no tuition from anyone but were self taught with manuals. As we were full time students we could not avail ourselves of night school tuition at the local 'Tech' where these commercial subjects were taught. When I left school I attended evening classes and was able to take proficiency exams in shorthand and typing. Shorthand is largely obsolete now but typing is still a necessary skill in these days of computers.

Enid Dean

3 ABERTILLERY & DISTRICT MUSEUM SOCIETY

Continuing 'Fool Britannia' – Episode 3 Date unknown but, hopefully, far in the future.

Is there anything to report? Why ask me? I may be descended from old Cillim whatever but when you're reduced to living in a cave, you don't get much time for anything else except hunting. I did a little doodle on the cave wall the other day but to no avail, as I didn't catch anything except a nasty cold; so we're at a pretty low ebb. Wait a minute, there is something now passing the cave mouth. Oh, it's one of those blokes from the caves across the river – um? Um? – never mind, there's the family to feed and he'll do nicely. Pass me that sharp bit of flint over there, please.

To be continued. **Janet Preece**

Book Corner

'In the Footsteps of Alexander Cordell' by Chris Barber. Blorenge Books. 2007. £12.00

In this new work by Chris Barber he takes the reader on a journey through Cordell's historical novels. These six novels, from "Rape of the Fair Country" to "Requiem for a Patriot" bring to life the 19th Century industrial revolution that took place in the old County of Monmouthshire. It contains personal letters and conversations with Cordell who became a personal friend of the author. The book is well illustrated with colour and black and white photographs, as well as drawings by Michael Blackmore. This book makes interesting reading for anyone who has enjoyed Cordell's novels or those with an interest in the industrial history of our area. **Jean Colwell**

The Hafodyrynys Bevin Boy who became a Colliery Manager and World Consultant on Coal Outbursts

– In the mid 1950s the National Coal Board decided to mechanise coal mines and to this end interviews were conducted at No.6 Area Headquarters at Abercarn. Three persons were selected to form a team to introduce modern practices in local coal mines of Area 6 South Wales Division. When one member of the team dropped out it was left to Keith Jones and I to do the work. The Armoured Face Conveyor (a German invention due to rubber shortages in Germany in WW2) was installed in numerous pits – Marine, Cwm, Roseheyworth, Vivian, Six Bells, North and South Celyn and others – as a forerunner to Power Coal Getting and Loading. Later Keith and I separated to become Undermanagers, then Keith went to West Wales. Our next contact was by telephone on New Year's Day 1986 when he wanted to know if it was his ex mate receiving the OBE. It was 2006 when we contacted each other through Gwyn Davies, Oak Street Abertillery ex Industrial Relations Officer

NCB. Only then did Keith reveal to me he was an ex Bevin Boy, now a retired colliery manager. As a member of the Home Guard he had patrolled Crumlin Viaduct. **Arthur Lewis OBE**

The First Emperor: China's Terracotta Army

The discovery of the first examples of China's terracotta army in 1974 was one of the most spectacular finds of world archaeology. The exhibition currently on show at the British Museum gives the visitor a fascinating insight into the life of the First Emperor and the making of these figures.

The First Emperor, Qin Shihuangdi, was one of the world's greatest rulers. Over two thousand years ago he founded the nation that was to become modern China. He introduced reforms and enforced strict laws, built new roads and joined walls of conquered states to create a great wall. He wanted to govern forever in the afterlife. He filled the outer tombs of the complex with figures of the people who surrounded him in the real world. Over seven thousand terracotta soldiers and other figures have been found buried in pits outside the tomb, these mysterious life-size tomb figures, soldiers, scholars, acrobats, horses and other animals form a retinue for a megalomaniac monarch. The exhibition begins by depicting the beginning of the Emperor's work, the subduing of the warring states and the establishment of the Empire in words and graphics. The visitor then moves on to view an extensive model showing in great detail how the figures were made. All the figures are different; a small collection of body parts were produced then joined together in various ways with details worked by hand before the whole figure was painted.

We now come to the terracotta figures. There is an endless variety of facial features, hairstyles, arm and leg positions and costumes. The nine life-size figures include generals, some with body armour, heavy and light infantrymen and four marvellous horses drawing a chariot with charioteer. The First Emperor did not forget his civil administration. There are Civil Officials who wear padded robes and elaborate hats, acrobats and musicians.

The final section of the exhibition focuses on the tomb itself which has yet to be opened. It poses the question "should it be disturbed to further our knowledge or should the Emperor be left to rest in peace".

The exhibition is well worth a visit. It runs until 6th April 2008. Do pre-book your tickets if you intend to visit (tel. 020 7323 8181) and you will then avoid the long queues. **Jean Colwell**

4 ABERTILLERY & DISTRICT MUSEUM SOCIETY

MUSEUM MATTERS February 08

The museum has started off well this year with a Coffee Morning when Sian Price, one of the producers of the BBC Wales programme, the "Coal House Project" gave a talk on a look behind the scenes of the series.

The programme set in Blaenavon was about three families of our 21st century being transported back in time to live as mining families during 1927.

The series was so popular in Wales that it had higher ratings than soaps such as East Enders, (Peggy and I watched it avidly). One of the reasons I enjoyed it so much was that it brought back memories of an age that was still in being when we were children.

The miners bath time for instance; I have been told by my mother how when my father came home from the pit, would put an old shirt on, back to front with old stockings up his arms. Dressed like this he could nurse me while my mother was preparing his bath and I wouldn't get dirty.

I also remember when I was older the men coming home from the mine. Where more than one miner lived in a house they would have to wait their turn to bath. The houses at Panty Pwdyn were small with only one room downstairs. I remember men from two of the houses would bath in the open on their yard. To preserve their modesty the two wives would stand at the entrances of the gully that ran past the houses and prevent any women or children from passing by while the men were bathing.

The other men who were waiting their turn would lie on the banking in their dirty clothes, (I can see them now with a piece of grass between their teeth) sunning themselves. This also happened during the winter when it snowed.

The series was a great success and we are glad to here that another is being planned.

During last year I was interviewed by Dr. Eleri Wyn Evans on the Lowry painting of Six Bells. Eleri is the curator of the National Museum Art Gallery and also Art Education officer. Text from the interview and a touch screen with photographs of me and other interviewees are positioned near the painting.

Eleri invited us to visit the museum to see the finished project and to give us a guided tour of the art gallery and also arrange a guided tour by Dr. Ann Stevenson of "Origins" the newly finished archaeological gallery. This new gallery is magnificent and should be visited while they still have the "Red Lady of Paviland" (Who is a man).



.Jennifer and Sian Price

It is on loan for a year when it is due to be returned to Oxford.

After the guided tours we were at leisure to have lunch, browse around the museum, or as others did visit the castle and shops, Peggy and I chose to stay in the museum and taking a tip from Eleri sat,

watched and listened to visitors as they looked at the painting. One little girl looking at the picture on the touch screen spotted me afterwards I could see her walking around the gallery surreptitiously looking at me. Is it him or isn't it?

I was more than pleased to here two different people seeing my name and where I was from saying. **"Oh look there is a museum in Abertillery we must go and see that"**.

We have all visited the National Museum more than once but this visit combined with the knowledge and friendliness of our guides both of whom gave up their day off to come and show us around was clearly the best.

Obituary Cheryl Morris

Most of us were shocked to here the news that Cheryl Morris has died. Although not a member of our society Cheryl has supported us right from the very beginning .We featured prominently in her last column in the Gazette "Museum News". We are but one organisation among many that Cheryl supported; indeed she supported so many good causes it is hard to imagine where she found the time for all the good works that she was involved in. Cheryl was involved in her church and was also a County Borough Councillor again giving service to the community. At times like these we often say what a tragic loss but on this occasion it is not just a loss but a blow to the whole community!

Our sympathy goes to Malcolm and his Family.

Don Bearcroft Curator

