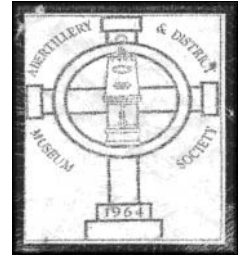


ABERTILLERY & DISTRICT MUSEUM SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

March 2009



Coffee Morning 7th March - this will be a multiple celebration. Firstly it's the official opening of the Express Café. The installation of the café shopfront has been a big success and we are very grateful to **Biffaward** for their generous financial contribution. The coffee morning will also be a belated St David's Day celebration and a 50th anniversary celebration of our national flag – officially authorised by the queen in 1959.

There will be a full account of the coffee morning, and photographs, in the April Newsletter.

Fund raising February £509

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:

Annual Subscriptions- £5

Your membership subscriptions are now due - £5. Please call at the Museum to pay, or send a cheque made payable to Abertillery & District Museum Society. As you know, the Museum is run entirely by volunteers and so we are reliant on a range of fund raising initiatives to meet the high costs of keeping the Museum running, (and warm!). Your membership subscriptions are important so please pay promptly.

100 Club – to be drawn at the March lecture. Please encourage friends and family to join.

Diary Dates

Wednesday 4th March 2009 – Italy by Harry Vagg

Saturday 7th March 2009 – *Coffee Morning* (Express Café opening, St David's Day, and National Flag celebration)

Wednesday 1st April 2009 – *Early Underground Flash Photography* by Chris Howes

Wednesday 6th May 2009 – *Unusual Memorials for the Fallen* by David Woodliffe (*Ralph Robinson Memorial Lecture*)

Friday 8th May 2009 – *Field trip to Avebury*. This is part of the archaeology course which Frank Olding, Blaenau Gwent Heritage Officer, has been running at the Museum. Places on this trip are available to members of the Museum Society.

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.

Contact Names

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Mr Keith Dykes	Mr Carl Jones
Mrs Esme Heal	Mr Glyn Saunders
Mrs Kathleen Davies	Rev. R Watson
Mrs Margaret Herbert	Prof. Gerwyn Griffiths
Mrs Carole Brooks	Mrs Jeanette Fulton
Mr Arthur Lewis OBE	Mrs Thelma Griffiths
(Annual Subscription £25)	

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The Welsh Flag

Although the dragon has been used in Wales for many years, it wasn't until the 20th century that it became an official symbol.

In 1284 Edward I incorporated Wales into England under the Statute of Rhuddlan. In 1301 Edward made his eldest son the Prince of Wales – a tradition that persists today. The Laws in Wales Acts of 1536 and 1543 in the reign of Henry VIII from the Welsh Tudor dynasty, created a single state and legal jurisdiction, effectively annexing Wales to England.

Henry did, however, use the red dragon on green and white as an emblem on many Royal Navy vessels and it was also used by Queen Elizabeth I. The Welsh influence waned under James I when the dragon was replaced by a unicorn in the royal arms and it did not return to the Royal Badge of Wales until 1807.

Largely because of the Laws in Wales Acts and the Statute of Rhuddlan, Wales is not represented on the Union Jack, other than through the cross of St George, Wales and England being one country according to the Acts.

In 1901 the dragon became the official symbol of Wales and in Caernarvon in 1911, at the investiture of Edward, Prince of Wales, the flag appeared in its current form, helping its rise to prominence.

In 1953 it was announced that there would be a new royal badge containing the motto “Y Ddraig Goch Ddyry Cychwyn” (roughly translated as “the red dragon inspires action”).

In 1959, after successful lobbying by the Gorsedd of Bards and others, Queen Elizabeth II made the red dragon on a green and white background the official flag for Wales. It was announced that the flag to be flown on government buildings would consist only of the red dragon on a green and white background, rather than the 1953 badge, which was still in occasional use.

The 1959 design can be seen across Wales – a symbol of pride in history and heritage for Welsh people across the world.

Source – bbc website

John Murphy, Cwmtillery

A gentleman in Oxford would like information about some medals he has which were awarded to a John Murphy in Cwmtillery; apparently Mr Murphy was also a special constable. If you have any information about or photos of Mr Murphy and/or the local police, please contact Don at the Museum.

Beware of ice!

Recent news about both bridges over the River Severn being closed because of ice falling from cables overhead, damaging cars, revives memories of icicles in pit shafts. Most coalmine shafts were round in shape whilst pit cages were rectangular. To protect personnel working at the shaft bottom from falling debris canopies were constructed over exposed segments.

These canopies were mainly of wooden planks some 8” thick.

During winter time huge icicles would form preventing winding operations in downcast air shafts. Coal fires at pit top were lit to warm the air, releasing spear formations of icicles to fall from great heights. These spears of ice would become embedded in the wooden planks below.

Arthur Lewis O.B.E

Organisations

Continuing our series of notes on local clubs and societies.

‘New Horizons’

The original name of this small ladies organisation was the Culture Club. It operated from Davey Evans Court in Castle Street and was originally for the benefit of the residents. After its instigation an invite was extended to any interested person to attend. The meetings were usually held once or twice monthly on Wednesdays at 11.00a.m. Some very interesting activities took place from monologues about historical persons to music sessions and flower arranging and card making.

Recently the Culture Club changed its name to New Horizons and it is run by the residents themselves. Their aim is to carry on in the same manner as before and invite members at a cost of £1 per session. Various activities are already lined up for the coming months and of course there is always the usual cup of tea before we leave. Lyn, the warden of Davey Evans Court is most hospitable and all who attend these interesting sessions are grateful to her. The venue is second to none. The meeting is in a light warm room with easy chairs in which to enjoy whatever event the committee has organised.

I just love the meetings. It is a nice enjoyable morning out, where like-minded people meet. I can thoroughly recommend New Horizons.

The Roving Reporter

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National Amateur Team Snooker Championship 1956

In 1956 the Buroughs-Watts Hall in London – scene of the World Amateur Snooker Championships – closed. The then national newspaper, The News Chronicle, purchased the historic table, on which the legendary Joe Davies made the first 147 break, from them and offered it as a prize for a National Team Championship.

This was to engender greater national interest in amateur snooker than ever before and a veritable host of club teams entered for the competition. Four zones were set up to cover the U.K., with the area winners scheduled to fight out the semi-finals and final at the Hammersmith Palais in London on March 28th 1956.

Winners of the Wales and S.W. England area were the Central Club of Abertillery – the ‘Lib’ as it was affectionately known in the town. The team of Len Luker, Jack Wellington, Des Meredith, ‘Dai’ Marks and Captain, John Ford, had made comparatively short work of its opponents on its route to the finals.

From the onset of the competition, The News Chronicle had made it obvious who they wanted to win the coveted table, namely, Finsbury Park Conservative Club of London. Indeed, the Club had made two players – the recently crowned English Billiards and Snooker Champions – honorary members for the finals. It was against this powerhouse unit that Abertillery unfortunately drew for the morning semi-finals. Perhaps unfortunate was not the appropriate word since the ‘Tillery’ boys took Finsbury Park to the cleaners in no uncertain fashion.

With Mann’s Billiards Halls of Staffordshire as their worthy opponents the scene was set for what was to be a nail-biting final. When BBC cameras brought the final game to the screen, Abertillery were losing the final deciding frame 31-0. This was particularly unfortunate as minutes before Des Meredith, some 40 points ahead, miscued, to leave his opponent the game.

Never was the saying “Cometh the hour, cometh the man” more appropriate than now. From day one of the competition it was always envisaged that the strong and nerveless safety player of the team was to be Dai Marks at number 5. What an inspired choice it was to turn out, as Dai ruthlessly reeled in his younger opponent to win 39-31 in a veritable cliffhanger of a game.

A surprised News Chronicle duly arranged for the magnificent table to be transported to the ‘Lib’, where for the next 50 or so years it was the object of envy of the whole Welsh snooker establishment. Fortunately, Len Luker and Des Meredith are still with us in the town – as

unassuming and gracious as they always were, in defeat as well as victory.

Trevor Cook

Trevor has found some newspaper cuttings relating to this famous tournament so please call at the Museum if you’d like to see them.

Local Voices

The Town Carnival

My friend and myself were guides for St Michaels Guides 1st Abertillery. The Guides had decided they would like to enter the town carnival. The theme was to be Fantasy Island, a popular television programme in the late 70s and early 80s. So, we bought crepe paper in every colour we could find and proceeded to make grass skirts and garlands of leis. A little time before the carnival we had a problem – we could not find a lorry to set the float upon.

One of the guides solved this. She said her Dad would lend us a lorry when he had finished his coal delivery on Friday afternoon. The lorry arrived and the big clean up began. We scrubbed and rubbed every area to make it clean. The great day arrived. It was the most miserable coldest grey August day. The guides had arrived in their bikinis all dressed for the occasion. All but one who said “my mother says I have to wear a cardigan”. So we had 20 shivering guides and one very cosy. But all was not lost. We had 2nd prize and celebrated with hot dogs and lemonade.

Sylvia Pickford

Poet’s Corner

‘Jobsworth’

*“You’re the Photographic Archivist” Don said
“and that’s your job”.*

I thought “with that there title I should be worth a bob”

So I asked him for a pay rise and he got a little fraught

He said “I’ll pay you twice as much”. Which as you know is naught.

*And then I had another thought “I’ll try for R.S.I”
My fingers are arthritic but they said annum domini*

So I’ll just go down each Tuesday and do my little bit

Because I like the company, and for the love of it.

We’re a band of volunteers and very few move fast.

But we think it’s worth preserving the memories of the past.

So each one there is worth their salt and each one would be missed

*So I’ll not get all big headed ‘cos I’m
Photographic Archivist.*

Rose Smith

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MUSEUM MATTERS

In our book "History 2000" there is a chapter that I wrote called "Core Sample". In it are a number of

accounts that people in the past have written about Abertillery. I find them interesting as they give you a glimpse of what it was like to live in those far off days. When we were implementing the museum design we tried as far as it was possible to incorporate stories such as these in the displays.

An account that Colonel A. T. A. Brown gave of Abertillery at the turn of the Century is as follows.

"When we lived at Abertillery the death occurred of Queen Victoria and I remember our family going into deep mourning for her, and then we saw the accession to the throne of King Edward VII. Poverty and squalor existed in abundance not far beneath the surface of Victorian and Edwardian prosperity, but there was comparatively little of this in Abertillery which was enjoying full employment and phenomenal developments. The wages of the working man were low compared with the post-1945 period, but families were able to enjoy a fair standard of living with careful spending. The system of payment in the mines for many years was on the "sliding scale" principle, and at the end of each month an increase was awarded based on profits of the previous month. These in many cases took the form of a lump sum, and the settlement day was known as "Mabon's Monday." This was generally a holiday for the collieries, and much of the bonus money was spent in the public houses and in the drapery and clothes shops. The tinworks too was working regularly with overtime. Tilney's joinery works was booming through the demands of the developing building trade in the area.

"The general picture was one of prosperity, and consequently the town attracted many travelling shows and circuses. Lord John Sangers Circus was a frequent visitor to the Tinworks Field, and Canter's traveling amusements and bioscope came to Tilney's Yard. This was the time when the dancing girls performed outside the tent and music was provided by the automatic organ. The films at this time were in their infancy and flickered considerably. The best seats, to conform with the traditions of the music hall, were at the front. There was a flourishing market-place with a large hall adjacent where the town balls and dances were held. The Metropole was just a few steps away where plays, operas, and music-hall turns were on the bill. The old travelling theatre that put on the Victorian blood-and-thunder thrillers like, "The Murder in the Red Barn" was also a visitor to the town. So there was plenty of entertainment and sporting activities to meet the tastes of the people of Abertillery."



Another account that was given to me was of the days when there was no street

lighting and most roads were rough tracks. The original road leading from

Pant y Pwdyn to Cwm-Nant y Groes was above the present Cwm Farm Road and followed the contours of the mountain to Bryngwyn School and Cwm Nanty. On the corner where the road turns up the valley there is a small house with small windows on the ground floor facing down to Six Bells. This was once an engine house for the Cwm-Nant y Groes Levels and was later turned into a dwelling house. This was a dark and lonely road with no lighting people, could very often lose their footing. The old lady who lived in the house used to put an oil lamp in the window during the dark winter nights to help travellers on their way.

The Miners Kitchen in our museum is built with this story in mind; the painting in the window of the kitchen was done by the artist Geriant Darbyshire using photographs of the Engine House and of the area today plus an old photograph of Six Bells Colliery. He has obviously done a good job as a friend of mine who lives close to it recognised it and said, "That's where I live".

The Tudor display is designed from a description of Tir-Nicholas Farm Cwmtillery wrote by the mine owner John Russell.

A typical Welsh valley farm with whitewashed walls and massive gables and stone-tiled roof, situated low in the valley for shelter. The front garden was surrounded by hedges of Holly and Beech and its stone-flagged pathways were lined with dwarf bunders of clipped box bushes. Near the house was its watermill. Inside the house sat two women working at a spinning wheel, making wool for knitting or weaving. Large sides of bacon hung from the rafters, and simple food, including milk, butter and cheese made from ewes' milk, and instead of wheaten bread, crisp fresh oatcakes was the diet.

Don Bearcroft Curator

