

LLAFUR

Welsh People's History Society
Cymdeithas Hanes Pobl Cymru



LLAFUR: THE WELSH PEOPLE'S HISTORY SOCIETY.
WINTER 2016 EDITION

¹DNCB/66/3: Penallta miner bathing at home before
the advent of pithead bathing facilities, c.1930

CHAIR'S REPORT

Since I last wrote a report for this newsletter, our political world seems to have moved on its axis. 2016 will certainly be remembered as one of the defining years in the political history of these islands. The Brexit vote seems sure to change ultimately not just our relationship with Europe, but our whole social and economic context, and, very likely, the relationship between the nations of the United Kingdom. Given the decision of the majority of Welsh voters to vote for Brexit, it remains unclear how this will influence Wales over coming years. The only thing that can be said for certain is it seems highly likely that we are in for a politically stormy period for some time.

One manifestation of this is the current crisis in the Labour Party. While not all Llafur members are Labour Party supporters, and the society does not hold a party political position, the relationship between what we do and labour politics is undeniable. My own view is that the current turbulence in the Labour Party has deep roots, which go well beyond the occasion of Brexit, and may well be part of a fundamental process of realignment within British radical and labour politics. Wales, of course, with its deep, vibrant and rich history of radicalism has a role to play in this, and will, in turn, influence it. This makes the work of our society – encouraging people to get in touch with the past of the common people of Wales – more vital than ever. Without knowing where our radical traditions have come from, it will be all the more difficult to play an active role in building upon them for the future.

To this end, the work of the society continues. Apart from the events reported and advertised in this newsletter, the committee has been busy overhauling our publicity materials and website during the course of this year. This has been a long, and sometimes difficult, process that has raised questions for us about the ideals and aims that are at the heart of what we do. We've been developing a new recruitment strategy, with a view to reaching out to new members and securing the future of Llafur. I'm pleased that this long task is now very near completion; the Society will soon be launching its new website and publicity materials, and we hope that we will be able to recruit a new generation of members.

Finally, I would like to encourage members to think about getting more involved in the work of the Society. Much of our work falls on the shoulders of a very small number of individuals, and we would welcome the involvement of members, at whatever level. This may mean joining the committee, standing for election to one of the Society's posts, or just distributing a few leaflets. One thing is for

certain, there is plenty of work for all! So, if you are interested in becoming more involved, please get in touch. We look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes,

Martin Wright,
Llafur Chair

Should the history of 'One' be our prime concern?

by Darren Macey

As a society, we seem to be enthralled with intangible statistics and data. The events that flash across our television screens or social media feeds are rarely put into a human context. Often the importance of each life, of the human component is secondary to the requirement for a sanitised view, one that is 'fit' for the delicate sensibilities of public consumption. The individual is absorbed into a collective number, numbers which deaden, numbers that reduce death, misery and suffering to an abstract. We hear almost daily reports concerning the horrific death toll in Syria, yet these numbers have far less impact than the footage of one dazed and bloodied Syrian boy rescued from the rubble of Aleppo? The image of five-year-old Omran Daqneesh, shocked and outraged the world, it should however also offer a warning of the dangers inherent in reducing history and indeed tragedy to abstract numbers.

The hundredth anniversary of the Battle of the Somme this summer was marked by a plethora of eminent historians, television presenters and even former sporting stars attempting to offer some perspective to its staggering casualty figures. They featured the usual mix of World War One clichés, obligatory sweeping shots of innumerable, gleaming white marble gravestones, anecdotal tales from the Pals battalions, and archaeological digs in Meretz Wood, were all deployed with varying success. In terms of providing some human context to the horrific suffering endured by the combatants, I would suggest that the poetry of Graves, Sassoon, Jones and Owen had the most enduring effect.

It seemed fitting therefore to open this newsletter with Wilfred Owen's poem 'Disabled'. The poem describes not the thousands but the 'one', it signifies all those left behind, maimed and broken on the fields of France. Owen's one is also a young 'footballer' once 'after the matches carried shoulder-high' a metaphor that resonates particularly strongly this summer, during which Wales celebrated her young footballing sons fighting on far different French fields.

Disabled

By Wilfred Owen

*He sat in a wheeled chair, waiting for dark,
And shivered in his ghastly suit of grey,
Legless, sewn short at elbow. Through the park
Voices of boys rang saddening like a hymn,
Voices of play and pleasure after day,
Till gathering sleep had mothered them from him.*

*About this time Town used to swing so gay
When glow-lamps budded in the light-blue trees,
And girls glanced lovelier as the air grew dim,—
In the old times, before he threw away his knees.
Now he will never feel again how slim
Girls' waists are, or how warm their subtle hands,
All of them touch him like some queer disease.*

*There was an artist silly for his face,
For it was younger than his youth, last year.
Now, he is old; his back will never brace;
He's lost his colour very far from here,
Poured it down shell-holes till the veins ran dry,
And half his lifetime lapsed in the hot race
And leap of purple spurted from his thigh.*

*One time he liked a blood-smear down his leg,
After the matches carried shoulder-high.
It was after football, when he'd drunk a peg,
He thought he'd better join. He wonders why.
Someone had said he'd look a god in kilts.
That's why; and maybe, too, to please his Meg,
Aye, that was it, to please the giddy jilts,
He asked to join. He didn't have to beg;*

*Smiling they wrote his lie: aged nineteen years.
Germans he scarcely thought of, all their guilt,
And Austria's, did not move him. And no fears
Of Fear came yet. He thought of jewelled hilts
For daggers in plaid socks; of smart salutes;
And care of arms; and leave; and pay arrears;
Esprit de corps; and hints for young recruits.
And soon, he was drafted out with drums and cheers.*

*Some cheered him home, but not as crowds cheer Goal.
Only a solemn man who brought him fruits
Thanked him; and then inquired about his soul*

*Now, he will spend a few sick years in institutes,
And do what things the rules consider wise,
And take whatever pity they may dole.*

*Tonight he noticed how the women's eyes
Passed from him to the strong men that were whole.
How cold and late it is! Why don't they come
And put him into bed? Why don't they come?*

Recent Llafur Events



Keir Hardie Day School

Merthyr Tydfil

Old Town Hall/Redhouse

Saturday 6th February 2016

Report by Chris Parry and Rhodri Hughes

On a day that could be described in Kier Hardie's homeland as 'dreek' and all too common for February in Merthyr Tydfil, over seventy hardy souls braved the weather to hear a series of lectures on aspects of Hardie's life and relationship with Wales. The day school fittingly held at Merthyr's historic Town Hall, a venue in which Hardie addressed his new constituents as Wales's first Labour MP following his election victory in 1900.

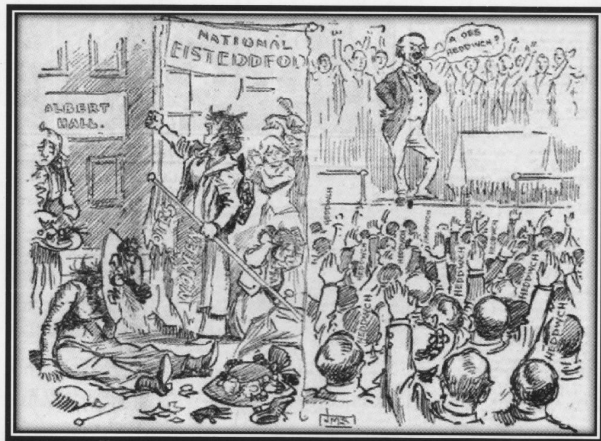
The proceedings opened with words of welcome and some introductory statements from Gerald Jones (Labour MP for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney), followed by the opening lecture from Huw Williams (Chair of Merthyr Tydfil WEA) entitled 'Keir Hardie at Home'. Both Jones and Williams emphasised Hardie's close association with Merthyr Tydfil and its citizens. Unsurprisingly the enduring relevance of Hardie proved to be a recurring theme throughout the day, particularly given the present tensions and tumult within the Left in Britain. Indeed, this was a point made frequently by Sir Deian Hopkin in his lecture, Keir Hardie: A Reconsideration, in which he called for a reconsideration of Hardie and reiterated his lasting influence upon the contemporary Labour Party. Joe England, 'Keir Hardie and the Dowlais Rising', delivered an excellent talk on Hardie's resolute yet often overlooked support for the iron moulders at the notoriously anti-union Dowlais Iron Company during the 1911-1912 strike, followed Hopkin.

After a delicious buffet lunch, the lectures resumed in the afternoon with Llafur Chairman Martin Wright presenting 'Keir Hardie and Wales', in which he discussed Hardie's relationship with the political culture of Merthyr. In particular, Wright detailed how Hardie was able to overcome accusations of being a 'stranger' in Merthyr to win successive elections and effectively translate wider concerns into a specifically South Walian context. Concluding proceedings, Daryl Leeworthy gave us 'Keir Hardie the Interna-

tionalist', a fascinating talk on Hardie's internationalism, paying particular attention to Hardie's visits to North America and their subsequent effect on his politics.

Days such as these are important as they remember Hardie's contribution not just as MP in Merthyr Tydfil, but in Wales and throughout his life. Each of the four lectures offered a differing insight into what made Hardie the man he was, the influences that shaped his thought and his beliefs as well as providing a clearer understanding to specific aspects of Hardie's political journey. The choice of Merthyr as the location for the day school held particular significance. Hardie and Merthyr are in inextricably linked, during Hardie's tenure as MP the town witnessed the last vestiges of its former position as an industrial powerhouse stripped away in the years following the end of World War 1 as it fell into a slow decline. After listening to the lectures given at Redhouse, the audience would have little doubt as to Hardie's reaction to this sad and slow process, he would surely have fought with his customary vitality, exuberance and clear steadfast belief.

'The Suffragettes, the Steddfod and More...'



Archif Menywod Cymru / Women's Archive of Wales Session at the National Eisteddfod Friday August 5th

Report by Sian Rhiannon Williams

Several Llafur members were involved in a very successful history session, 'The Suffragettes, the Steddfod and More.' hosted by Archif Menywod Cymru / Women's Archive of Wales at the National Eisteddfod at Abergavenny on Friday 5th of August. The Societies Tent was packed to capacity for this annual event, which was first organised in 2012.

Dr Ryland Wallace, the first speaker, gave a very informative, amusing and well-illustrated presentation which included a rather fierce looking terrier (!) who had guarded the Eisteddfod field from attacks from the Suffragettes (as-

sisted by a barbed wire fence) when the festival last visited Abergavenny in 1913. The organisers were keen to avoid the disruption and attacks which had previously taken place at the Wrexham and London eisteddfodau. He cleverly placed this in context, explaining how David Lloyd George, then the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Home Secretary, Reginald McKenna were targeted, and how the Suffragettes had been shouted down and roughly treated as they were expelled from the previous events. Given the tight security around the maes at Abergavenny in 1913, the Suffragettes struck elsewhere and attempted to destroy the town's cricket pavilion. Fortunately for Ryland, who is a cricketer of some note, they did not succeed. However, they made their presence felt in the area and several hayricks were set on fire.

Ryland was followed by Dr Elin Jones who gave a powerful talk on the exceptional Margaret Haig Thomas, later Lady Rhondda, born at Llanwern House. She focused in particular on her Suffrage activities in Newport and her later contribution to Equal Citizenship rights for women but also stressed her contribution to the world of business. Professor Angela John, the authority on Lady Rhondda, had advised on the contents and was in the audience. Elin spoke with great enthusiasm and passion, invoking the fighting spirit of the Suffragettes.

Catrin Stevens drew attention to the Archive's past and current projects, including the most recent on Women and the First World War, and encouraged further research on the topic.

AJ Cook, 'the raving tearing Communist'.

The unveiling of a Blue Plaque in honour of A J Cook
at Rhondda Heritage Park on
Saturday the 25th June 2016.
Report by Darren Macey



On a sun kissed Saturday in June 2016 the great and the good of Rhondda's society gathered to unveil a Blue Plaque honouring Arthur James Cook at his former workplace, now the site of The Rhondda Heritage Park, the

Lewis Merthyr Colliery. Although Cook led the miners for a relatively short period (1924-1931), in his role as General Secretary of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, his influence during a critical period that included the 1926 General Strike was manifold. The plaque, funded by the Association of Friends of The Rhondda Heritage Park, recognises this and the pivotal role played by Cook in labour relations during the first half of the twentieth century.

The son of a soldier he was born at Wookey in Somerset in 1885, beginning his working life on a farm and as a Baptist preacher before joining the mass exodus of agricultural workers pouring into the coalmines of South Wales. Cook moved to Porth in the Rhondda and at the age of 18 found work underground. His first shift on the coalface left an indelible impression on Cook. A rock fall killed the man working next to him and young Arthur had to drag his 'butties' body to the surface. Shaped by these events and the working conditions which confronted miners across the South Wales coalfield he resolved to campaign for a better life for the miners and their families above and below ground. In 1905 whilst working at the Lewis Merthyr, he joined the Independent Labour Party, and campaigned vigorously for Labour candidates in the 1906 election.

Cook who would come to prominence during the 1910 miners' strike which culminated in the 'Tonypanyd Riots' was awarded a scholarship to the Central Labour College in London in 1911. Unable to complete his studies due to financial difficulties however, he would return to the pits a year later. Elected a miners agent in 1919 he would become a member of the Executive Committee of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) in 1921 and its leader from June 1924 until his death in 1931. On reading of AJ Cook's election as secretary of the MFGB, Fred Bramley, the general secretary of the Trades Union Congress, wailed that Cook was 'a raving, tearing Communist' and that 'now the miners are in for a bad time.'

This raving, tearing Communist who had caused such consternation in the upper echelons of the TUC, the leader of one of the largest and most powerful trade unions on earth was however primarily a miner. Arthur Horner, who knew Cook from an early age, describes him in his autobiography;

'I never lost my admiration for him [Cook],' wrote Horner. 'In the months before the 1926 strike, and during the strike, we spoke together at meetings all over the country. We had audiences, mostly of miners, running into many thousands. Usually I was put on first. I would make a good logical speech, and the audience would listen quietly but without any wild enthusiasm.

'Then Cook would take the platform. Often he was tired, hoarse and sometimes almost inarticulate. But he would electrify the meetings. They would applaud and nod their

heads when he said the most obvious things. For a long time I was puzzled, and then one night I realised why it was. I was speaking to the meeting. Cook was speaking for the meeting. He was expressing the thoughts of his audience; I was trying to persuade them. He was the burning expression of their anger at the iniquities they were suffering.'

One can only guess what this firebrand would have made of this official commemoration but the reverence and respect shown to his ideals and memory almost eighty-five years after his passing would perhaps have made him proud. Cook would surely have raised a smile at the involvement of so many former miners in the ceremony. The first of those, retired miner and Chairman of The Association of Friends of The Rhondda Heritage Park, David Owen presented a welcome address eulogising Cook. In Owen's programme notes he described how Cook led by example, 'surrendering his union salary, living on only on lockout pay and living on trains as he shuttled from coalfield to coalfield'. Former Lewis Merthyr miner Ivor England followed Owen and in his own inimitable style gave a short talk entitled 'setting the scene'. Other keynote speakers included author Hawys Glyn James with 'The price of coal' and Wayne Thomas, Secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers (South Wales Area). A large crowd enjoyed the day, which also included rousing musical performances from Côr Meibion Cwm Rhondda, The Plough Singers, Hafod Primary School Choir and The Lewis-Merthyr Band.

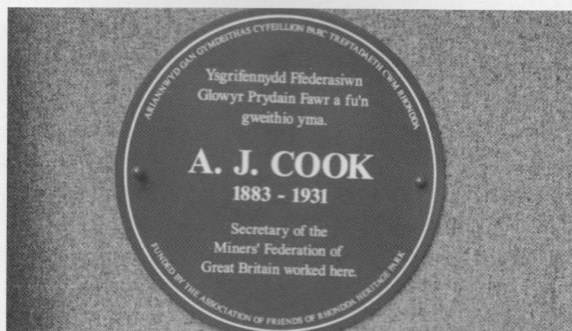
Cook, following a battle with cancer, died a relatively young man in 1931 aged just 47. His former workplace the Lewis Merthyr Colliery acrimoniously ceased production in 1983 during the prelude to the Miners' Strike of 1984-1985. The 'Lewis' had at its peak had employed almost twelve hundred souls carving around 1,250 tonnes of coal from the dark bowels of the valley every day. Its demise left Maerdy Colliery as the last bastion of the coal industry in the Rhondda until its closure in 1990.



The site is now the home of The Rhondda Heritage Park, visitors can follow in the footsteps of Cook and his fellow coal miners in an Underground Tour Experience, led by retired colliers. I would suggest that Cook would have felt immensely proud of both the reverence shown to his memory and the way the history of this industry is being

kept alive by the miner themselves. Cook was after all at his core a miner, perhaps the epitaph written by Robin Page Arnot catches the essence of the man behind the headlines.

There never had been a British miners' leader like Arthur James Cook; never one so hated by the government, so obnoxious to the mine-owners, so much a thorn in the flesh of other general secretaries of unions; never one who during his three years' mission from 1924 to 1926 had so much unfeigned reverence and enthusiastic support from his fellow-miners. Neither to Tommy Hepburn nor Tom Halliday, neither to Alexander McDonald or Ben Pickard, neither to the socialists Keir Hardie nor Robert Smillie did the miners of Britain accord the same unbounded trust and admiration as they reposed for those three years and more in A.J. Cook. That support was his strength, and it was his only strength. When he lost it, he lost the ground on which he lived and moved and had his being. Today his faults are forgotten or forgiven amongst the older miners who tell the younger men their recollections of past days; and still in every colliery village, there abides the memory of a great name.



News from the Archives

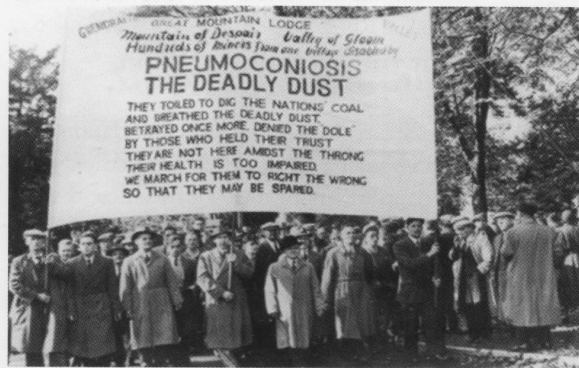


DNCB/64/7: Ynysfeio Colliery No.1 Rescue Team at Dinas Rescue Station

Amazing achievement at archives

In a huge boost for budding researchers of the South Wales coalfield The Glamorgan Archives have been

awarded a Wellcome Trust Research Resources Grant of over two hundred thousand pounds to catalogue and conserve the records of the National Coal Board (NCB) for the Glamorgan area. The NCB records offer a rich vein of primary source material for historians seeking a comprehensive understanding of the coal industry. They document not just the institutional history of mining, geological surveys, the impact of mining on the environment and information on individual pits, but also the social and cultural characteristics of the coalfield with details of coal miners and their work, their families and their health - and union or welfare association efforts to improve this.



DNCB/64/53: Great Mountain Lodge members with a banner protesting the treatment of miners with Pneumoconiosis, at Miners' Gala, Sophia Gardens, Cardiff,

The scope of the records is impressive and represents one of the largest collections held by the Glamorgan Archives, comprising 344 boxes, 575 rolls and 707 volumes, ranging in date from 1799 to 1989. It includes both paper records and photographic media, and despite the current inadequate finding aids is the fifth most frequently consulted at the Archives.

The award itself is the largest Research Resources Grant ever awarded in Wales and ranks as the second largest awarded throughout the UK. It will fund a three-year project entitled - Glamorgan's Blood: Dark Arteries, Old Veins - Cataloguing and Conserving the Records of the National Coal Board. The grant of £203,456 will enable a project archivist to work full-time on the production of a good quality catalogue to increase the accessibility of the records, along with the employment of a conservator to ensure the stabilisation of the collection and its long-term preservation for future generations. Work on the three-year project starts in the autumn and progress will be reported on the Glamorgan Archives blog,

About Glamorgan Archives

Glamorgan Archives serves the authorities of Bridgend, Caerphilly, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Rhondda Cynon Taff and the Vale of Glamorgan. It collects preserves and makes available to the public documents from the area dat-

ing from the 12th century to the present day. Over 12km of documents are held in the strong rooms of its purpose-built facility that opened in January 2010.

More information on Glamorgan Archives can be found at www.glamarchives.gov.uk

And for further details contact:

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About the Wellcome Trust

The Wellcome Trust is a global charitable foundation dedicated to improving health. We provide more than £700 million a year to support bright minds in science, the humanities and the social sciences, as well as education, public engagement and the application of research to medicine.

Further information on the Wellcome Trust is available at www.wellcome.ac.uk

Reviews

Two Nations, one border, a review of 'Firefighters Under Occupation' a Ciaran Gibbons film

By Darren Macey



Ciaran Gibbons (third from the left) pictured with Hebron firefighters.

'I can think of no more stirring symbol of man's humanity to man than a fire engine.'

Kurt Vonnegut

In our predominantly secular society, it would be difficult to challenge American author and commentator Vonnegut's assertion. Vonnegut, was once described by the Guardian as managing 'to combine an exceptional humanity with a remarkably blasé pessimism' and it is those very sentiments that are at the heart of 'Firefighters under Occupation'. The stoic, everyday nature of the courage and a gallows humor displayed by these individuals is truly exceptional. Firefighters under Occupation takes the viewer on a journey from the UK to Palestine, offering a firefighter's perspective on the Israeli occupation of the West Bank. It depicts their struggle, their fears and perhaps most

strikingly their hopes. An inherently dangerous job in any country, those tasked with firefighting in Palestine face not just those intrinsic dangers but also the threat posed the Israeli Occupation Forces. The military occupation of Palestine by the State of Israel has been the subject of myriad commentaries, films and artworks from numerous perspectives, they tend however to fall into two categories, either depicting the Palestinians as helpless, passive victims or belligerent terrorists. This film offers something different, it sensitively documents the courage displayed by the Palestinians in seeking normality in a perpetual warzone and the efforts of Palestinian firefighters seeking to save lives in the occupied West Bank.

Directed by Welsh filmmaker, firefighter and former soldier, Ciaran Gibbons, the film records the humanitarian support given to Palestinian firefighters by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) as well as the facilitation of training in the UK and the long-standing bond between Dundee and its twin town of Nablus. Gibbons a firefighter since 2000, offers a moving portrayal of life on the West Bank. The film shot on location in the West Bank during October and November of 2015 and produced in association with the FBU, an organisation that has links to Palestine since early 1970s. Often harrowing, Gibbons's documentary highlights the duality in Israel's self-image as a modern progressive Western style democracy and the actuality of its continuing apartheid towards its Arab inhabitants. Gibbons travels across the West Bank and into Jerusalem, working alongside both Palestinian and Israeli fire fighters, finds the antiquated Palestinian apparatus is in stark contrast to their Israeli counterparts.

He offers the viewer a short discussion on the Six Day War, resisting the temptation to belabour his point or pontificate, instead illustrates by example, with scenes displaying the horrific nature of settler aggression towards Palestinian families. Spearheading that settler movement Gush Emunim (Bloc of the Faithful), has provided the political and practical impetus for the West Bank settlement movement, as well as its religious and ideological justification in the philosophy of a Greater Israel. The Six Day War changed the dynamic of Israel politics, with further changes taking place following the election of the first right-wing Likud government in 1977. This widening of the power base in the Israeli political structure resulted in a delusion of power and a greater distribution of power amongst a more diverse set of groups, transforming the Gush Emunim ideology into a more influential social factor. Successive Israeli governments have been willing to accommodate Gush Emunim and the religious settlement movements while attempting to contain them with some civil limitations. They are in sections of Israeli secular society considered a mild irritant but remain within the wider remit of Zionism and pioneering.

In emphasising the glaring inequalities and bigotry on the West Bank, the film gives a damning indictment of the convenience and power of Zionist ideology. Zionism's nar-

rative has created in Israel an 'ethnic democracy' based on continuing Jewish supremacy, the legitimacy of their governance and a bloody-minded ability to ignore world opinion. As Gibbons's demonstrates in many senses, Arabs living within the borders of Israel are a non-people, written out of their own histories by Zionist attitudes and doctrine. Religion and ethnicity are presented as a justification for their actions. Arabs segregated from many facets of everyday life conversely, Jews have exclusive full citizenship based on ethnic affiliation, yet Arabs are limited to partial citizenship. Jewish Israelis denominate as a 'political community' with its own particular public good from which Arabs are excluded. Constitutionally they are considered as an 'aggregate of individuals' and entitled only to partial 'individual' civil-political rights, but denied any collective claims for self-definition. This compartmentalization between ethnic and national categories, between the rights of the collective Jewish community and the individual Arab, is as a construct produced by the Zionist movement and its state apparatuses.

The Israeli system mirrors apartheid in South Africa South and hypocrisy of the 'Jim Crow' concept of 'separate but equal' legislation and its practices in the Southern States of America. Yet where is the international outcry demanding equality and equity? A potent and disturbing film, Gibbons' documentary emphasises the need for the international community to address these atrocities but perhaps more importantly it asks the viewer some uncomfortable questions. Should we all be willing to accept the actions of our 'friend and ally'? If not, how should we register our opposition? Firefighter Gibbons has surely shown us the way, as he puts it;

*I wanted to make some small difference,
be a voice that said no more!
I resolved to do something
that I hoped would be meaningful
and decided to film
a documentary about Palestine.*



Gibbons though his membership of the Fire Brigades Union made contact with Jim Malone (pictured above) a Scottish FBU member & long time Palestinian supporter & together they planned the film.

Gibbons's documentary achieves his aims and more. As a testament to its power and influence, it screened for Members of Parliament in Westminster in September and later that month for Assembly Members at the Senedd. While laudable, it would be folly to expect this to have caused an

epiphany within the corridors of power. Rather I would suggest that lessons should be learned from the struggles of the anti-partied movement during the 1970s and 1980s. In challenging, the reluctance within government to support the oppressed at the expense of the expedient public opinion must be mobilised and sustained public pressure must be exerted. With a wider distribution, this documentary could begin this process.

An online trailer for the film is available at: <https://vimeo.com/173465574>

or for further screening details please contact Gibbons directly at ciaran250@yahoo.co.uk.

Members' Contributions

October the 21st 2016 provided another number 50, fifty years since the monstrous torrent of waste and slurry slithered from the tip above Aberfan. Roaring down towards the village the black tip would engulf a farm, several houses and a school. The pupils at that school, Pantglas Juniors, were just beginning their first lesson of the day when the tip consumed their classrooms. To an 'outsider' the numbers dominate, alongside the 50 years; we hear of the 25 were able to escape, 116 perished alongside 28 adults. Those numbers however cannot measure the devastation within a community shattered by the tragedy or quantify the grief of a country shocked and saddened at the news headlines and images. Growing up in the South Wales Coal field Aberfan was 'our' tragedy, for my parents' generation 21st October 1966 represents a moment frozen in time. Their collective memory fixed at the instant they heard the news; thousands would drop everything to race to Aberfan to claw at that mountain often with little more than their bare hands. Our member Mary MacGregor's account and poem offers us a perspective behind the numbers.

Aberfan

By Mary MacGregor

Aberfan is engraved on my heart, as it must be on the heart of anyone who comes from the Valleys. Aberfan was where my father had been born and brought up and where my grandmother lived at the foot of the tips in Aberfan Road and opposite The Mackintosh Arms. Merthyr Vale colliery was where both my grandfathers had worked, my maternal grandfather killed in an accident there in 1906. Pantglas was the school my father and his three brothers had attended. My father used to tell me how he and his 'butties' frequently tried without success to steal rides in the buckets that took the slag from pit to tip. The cemetery was where relatives on both sides of my family were buried. I knew the names of the streets, the houses and the families.

The horror of the disaster struck home as no other had done before. I wanted to write about it but felt I would never be able to. How could one make use of it for one's own ends? Then, forty-six years after the event, I came across the copy of The Times newspaper for 22 October 1966, the copy I had carefully kept all those years. It was this that unleashed the poem, 'Aberfan'.

ABERFAN

*Yesterday, today, tomorrow
I went, I saw, I am going
Words written on a schoolroom wall.*

*They'd heard a rumble. Because of the fog
They couldn't see the slag heap slide.
They did not see it uproot great trees
Or pour like water down the hillside.
They did not see it swallow the school.
One boy, helpless saw his friends run the wrong way
And too late, the slurry sucking them away.
But they had not seen the slag heap move.*

*Tomorrow, yesterday, today
Children cheerful waited for the register.
They heard a noise, saw stuff flying around,
Saw the room seeming to fly about,
Saw desks falling over, their teacher on the floor.
They saw him free himself
And felt his arms helping them out.*

*Today, tomorrow, yesterday
And the tip went on moving.
With spades, picks, bare hands, men and women dug.
Mothers clawed at mud to find their children.
And then the miners came.
Into the dark they went,
their headlamps lighting the way.
All day, all night, they dug to pass the children out
But the slag heap went on moving
And mothers clawed at mud.*

*Yesterday, tomorrow, today
Midnight : they found the body of Mr Beynon
He clutched five children, his arms protecting them.*

*Tomorrow, today, yesterday
Far off faint cries. Shouts of 'Quiet'.
Earthmovers stopped their engines.
Once more with pick and shovel
They went on digging, digging.
And the tip moved on
And mothers clawed at mud
And on the hanging schoolroom wall the words:*

*Yesterday, today, tomorrow
I went, I saw, I am going.*

Membership details

People's history is concerned with the history of ordinary people: their work, their politics, their culture and their everyday lives. It is concerned with the experiences and institutions of the working class, and the role of ordinary people in making history. It is the property of everyone, and Llafur, the Welsh People's History Society exists to promote the study of the People's History of Wales.

Please pass on this message to friends, relatives and colleagues, our membership is open to everyone with an interest in Welsh people's history. As a member of the Society, you will be part of a network of like-minded people with an interest in people's history. Members include professional and amateur historians, trade unionists, students, museum, library and archive staff, workers in the public and private sectors, members of all political parties and none. Just to remand you, members also receive the following;

- a copy of the annual journal, Llafur
- have the opportunity to attend the Annual General Meeting and influence the Society's policy
- get the chance to participate directly in the running and development of the Society

Annual membership costs just £20 (for waged member), £10 (for unwaged members) and £20 (for organisations and overseas members). Subscriptions are due on 1 October each year.

Newsletter - A parting shot.....

*History will have to record that the greatest tragedy
of this period of social transition was not the
strident clamour of the bad people,
but the appalling silence of the good people.*
Martin Luther King, Jr.

I'm sure there will be howls of consternation among the sections of our membership as to the content of this newsletter. I am aware that its focus is on the South Wales coalfield, I would however say in my defence this situation comes not from choice rather from a relative dearth submissions from outside these parameters. This is not my newsletter or indeed the newsletter of the committee, as members it is OUR newsletter. All submissions, reviews, ideas, notifications, plugs or indeed any other appropriate content are appreciated, so please get your thinking caps on and start typing! If you would like to contribute or have any ideas and suggestions concerning the direction and content of the newsletter, please contact me at darren.macey42@gmail.com.

In addition to the newsletter, this call extends to members who feel able to speak or help organise day schools and all upcoming Llafur events so please feel free to get in touch with any ideas or suggestions. You can contact either myself, our Events Secretary Owen Collins (owenroy-collins@gmail.com) or to be added to our email mailing list please contact Siân Williams (s.f.williams@swansea.ac.uk)

Darren Macey