

RHONDDA CYNON TAF HERITAGE TRAILS

ABERDARE WALKING TRAIL



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This series of Heritage Trails will take you on a journey through the area stopping off at historic places and Blue Plaques points that commemorate notable people, places and events in the County Borough. The map to the left shows the location of recently installed Blue Plaques and a series of driving trails link these and other historical sites.

This walking trail of Aberdare is one of a series of trails and further information and trails available can be found at www.heritagetrailsrct.co.uk or by phoning 01443 490238 or e-mail tourismenquiries@rctcbc.gov.uk for leaflets.

Details of where to stay in the area and other attractions can be found at www.destinationrct.co.uk



GETTING TO ABERDARE

BY ROAD

From the South – follow the A470 trunk road north from Cardiff. At the large roundabout junction at Abercynon, take the A4059 to Aberdare. Once in Aberdare park in Duke Street Car Park. (Sat Nav. CF44 7ED)

From the North – from A465 Heads of Valleys road at Hirwaun, follow A4059 to Aberdare. Park in Duke Street car park (sat nav CF44 7ED)

BY TRAIN

Amiva Trains run a regular service from Cardiff via Pontypridd to Aberdare.

Enquiries Tel. 08457 48 49 50 Web. www.amivatrainswales.co.uk

BY BUS

A number of bus operators serve Aberdare. For information enquire Traveline Cymru Tel. 0871 200 2233 Web. www.traveline.info

ABERDARE – A BRIEF HISTORY

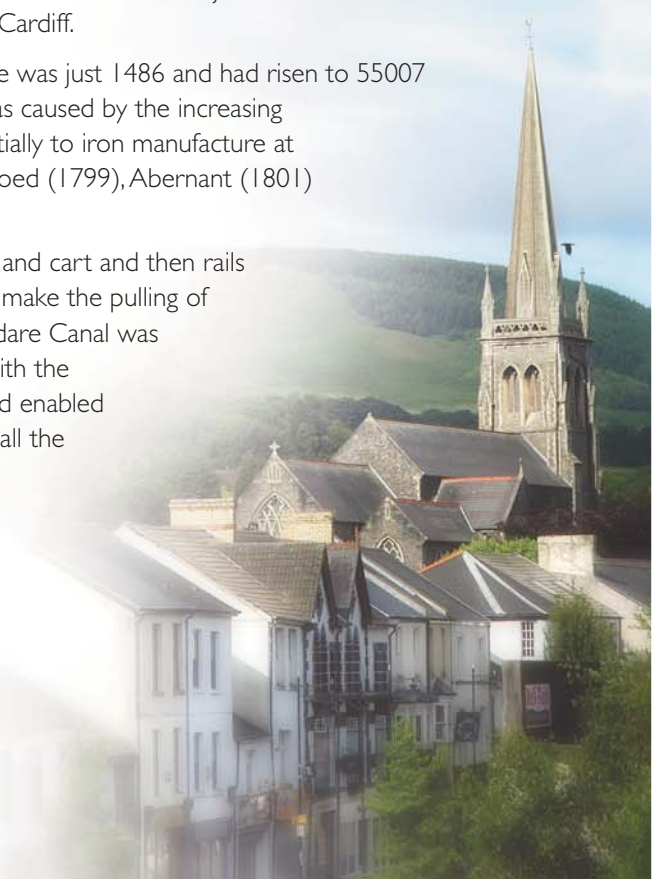
The origins of Aberdare date from Medieval times and there have been archaeological finds in the local area from Neolithic, Bronze Age and Roman times.

Situated in a broad part of the Cynon Valley, here the Dare River, which rises on Mynydd Bwllfa high above the town, joins the Cynon River on its journey from Llygad Cynon in the Brecon Beacons National Park to join with the River Taff at Abercynon and then to the sea at Cardiff.

In 1801 the population of Aberdare was just 1486 and had risen to 55007 by 1921. This rise in population was caused by the increasing industrialisation of the area, due initially to iron manufacture at places like Hirwaun (1757), Llwydcoed (1799), Abernant (1801) and Gadlys (1827).

The iron was transported by mule and cart and then rails were laid to create 'tram roads' to make the pulling of the heavy wagons easier. The Aberdare Canal was completed in 1811 which joined with the Glamorgan Canal at Abercynon and enabled goods to be transported by barge all the way to Cardiff and its docks.

In 1837 the first deep coal mine in the Valley was sunk at Abernant y Groes in Cwmbach and, in common with many valleys in south Wales, coal mining became the predominant industry for nearly 150 years.



In 1846 the Aberdare railway (TVR) was opened from Navigation junction (Abercynon) to Aberdare, enabling the extracted coal to speed to the coastal ports and then on to the rest of the world.

People poured in to the area and Aberdare became a thriving Victorian town with shops, pubs, 'coffee taverns' and places of worship being built to serve the physical and spiritual needs of the burgeoning population.

The town's fortunes ebbed and flowed through boom time in the late 1800's and early 1900's, the First World War and then the desperate poverty of the depression years of the late 1920's and the 1930's. World War II was followed by a period of increasing prosperity through the 1950's and 60's.

Following the closure of many of the mines in the region in the 1980's, Tower Colliery at nearby Hirwaun remained as the last deep coal mine in South Wales until 2008.

The town's focus has changed in recent years, but its Victorian buildings remain and there are a number of fine examples.



WALKING TRAIL



Our walk starts at Market Street next to the Market Hall.
**An alternative would be to start at the Library, if parking at the Gadlys car park – read the walk from Green Street at point (11). To follow the route please see the map in the centre of this brochure.*

The Market Hall 1 The building to the left as we look along this pedestrianised street is Aberdare Market Hall, which was built in 1853. As its name suggests it houses Aberdare's popular market and the buildings to our right hosted the town's slaughterhouse, - in days when the route from meat production to retail outlet was much shorter!

Two plaques on the Market Hall building recognise its historical significance.

In 1861 it was the site of the first National Eisteddfod in Wales (signified by the Blue Plaque at the entrance to the Market Tavern).

In 1910 pioneering film maker and cinema owner William Haggart (1851-1925) set up a cinematic show in the 'market yard' in Aberdare. The building slightly up from here on the right (next to the 'Old Court House') was then the site of the '**Kosy Cinema**' 2 which he opened in 1915.

Walk along Market Street until you reach its junction with Cardiff Street, where cross over the road at the pedestrian traffic lights. Having crossed the road, turn right and immediately left uphill.



On the right is the **Cenotaph 3**, which was designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens in a similar style to the famous Cenotaph in Whitehall in London and unveiled in 1923. The cenotaph remembers those of Aberdare who were killed in the First and Second World Wars.



Continue up the hill a few metres and on the left turn into Bute Street and after a few metres on the right note the plaque for **'Queen Mary's Cottage' 4**. On June 27 1912 King George V and Queen Mary visited Aberdare and the most famous element of the visit was their excursion to see this miner's cottage at 71 Bute Street which is still known as Queen Mary's Cottage.



Retrace your steps and turn left into Victoria Square and note the statue of 'Caradog'

Caradog (1834 –1897) 5

Griffith Rhys Jones, also known as 'Caradog', was a famous local character and musician in Aberdare. A blacksmith at nearby Llwydcoed Ironworks, he was the conductor of choirs from the age of 19 and famously led the 460 voice 'Cor Mawr' to victory in national choral competition at Crystal Palace in 1872 and 1873. For these feats he became a local hero and this statue, sculpted by Sir William Goscombe John, was unveiled by Lord Aberdare in 1920.



Also note **Black Lion Inn 6**

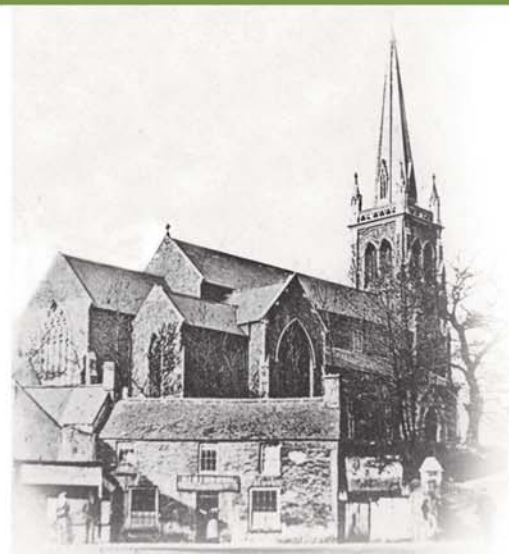
The Black Lion here in Victoria Square was the old coaching inn of the town, standing as it did where the old parish road (now Wind Street) ran into what became High Street (the main road of the old village). Dating from c.1800 it is one of the oldest buildings in the town centre and provided the town's first post office (a function related to its link with coaches coming and going in the pre-railway era). There was also a brewery located behind the hotel.



From here carefully cross Monk Street and proceed to the pedestrian lights to cross High Street. Double back a few metres to the memorial stone and plaque to James James.

James James (1833-1902) 7 At the corner of Monk Street and High Street, there is a memorial plaque to James James who, with his father Evan James, wrote the Welsh National Anthem. The Anthem has strong connections to Pontypridd, where it was written, although James in fact spent much of his life in the Cynon Valley and died at Hawthorne Terrace, Aberdare and is buried in Aberdare Cemetery.





At this point we can see quite clearly **St Elvan's Church 8** The large Victorian Gothic church in the centre of town which was completed in 1852 in response to the increasing demand for places for religious worship of all denominations at that time. Its steeple is 180 feet high and is a dominant feature in the town.

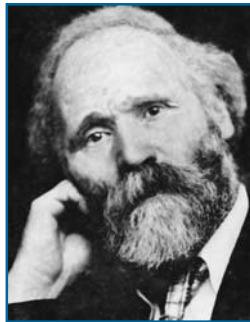
From here return to the pedestrian lights to re-cross High Street and turn right downhill. Proceed for about 50 metres and then take a short detour into the Council Office grounds in front of Rock Grounds (formerly the site of a brewery) to see a bust of:-

James Keir Hardie (1856-1915) 9 Keir Hardie rose from humble beginnings to become one of Britain's most notable politicians and the first leader of the Labour Party.

Born in Lanarkshire, Scotland, the illegitimate son of a servant, he became a coal miner at the age of 11 and taught himself to read and write.

He was instrumental with a group of other Trades Union activists in forming the Labour Party and eventually became one of the first of two MPs for the party in 1900, with Hardie representing the joint constituency of Merthyr Tydfil and Aberdare. He made his final speech in the Market Hall (at the start of our walk) before his death in 1915.

This bust of Keir Hardie in the Rock Grounds,- in front of the Council Offices was unveiled in 2006.



From this point retrace your steps to High Street and continue downhill towards the Library.

Note the old **Milepost 10** and the distances (along old roads) to other towns in South Wales. This milepost was originally located in Victoria Square and dates from 1860. There was originally a lamp on top of this structure.

Pass the library and turn left into Green Street (a broad square.)

In this area the old medieval village of Aberdare was situated near to the River Dare. Little remains of the old village.

At this point we can see two chapels:-

South Wales is famous for its many chapels which were built in response to demand by a number of non-conformist religious movements during the 19th century. Two notable chapels are located here:-

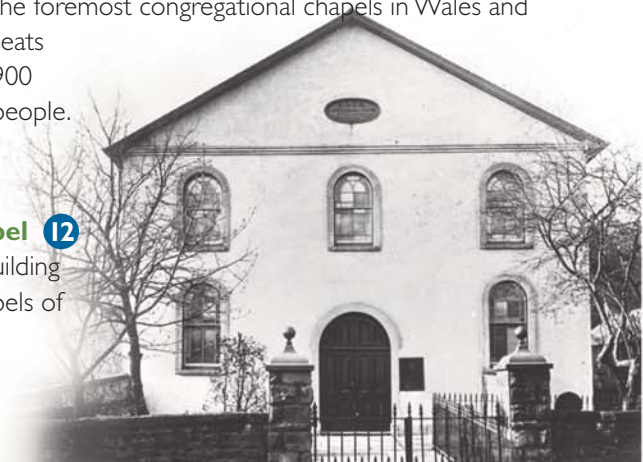


Siloa Congregational Church 11

(Built 1844 – Rebuilt 1855) is historically one of the foremost congregational chapels in Wales and seats 900 people.

Green Street Methodist Chapel 12

(1859) is another Grade II listed building and both are fine examples of chapels of the 19th century.





From here we can also see the old **Aberdare Town Hall 13** - home of the former Aberdare Urban District Council. Originally built in 1831 as the Market Hall for the town, it was replaced by the current Market Hall in 1853. There is a memorial plaque to World War I & II former employees of the Council at the entrance to the building.

The ornate blue **Aberdare Constitutional Club 14** can be seen across the road.

The Club was opened in 1894, and became an important place of entertainment for the population of Aberdare. The building has been a theatre, a ballroom and concert hall and later a nightclub.

From here continue to the left of Green Street Chapel and head towards the church in front of you.



St John the Baptist Church 15 The oldest building in Aberdare is St John the Baptist Church dating from c.1190. This medieval building would have been the focal point of the old pre-industrial village of Aberdare, of which there is now little evidence remaining. There are a number of interesting gravestones in the churchyard.

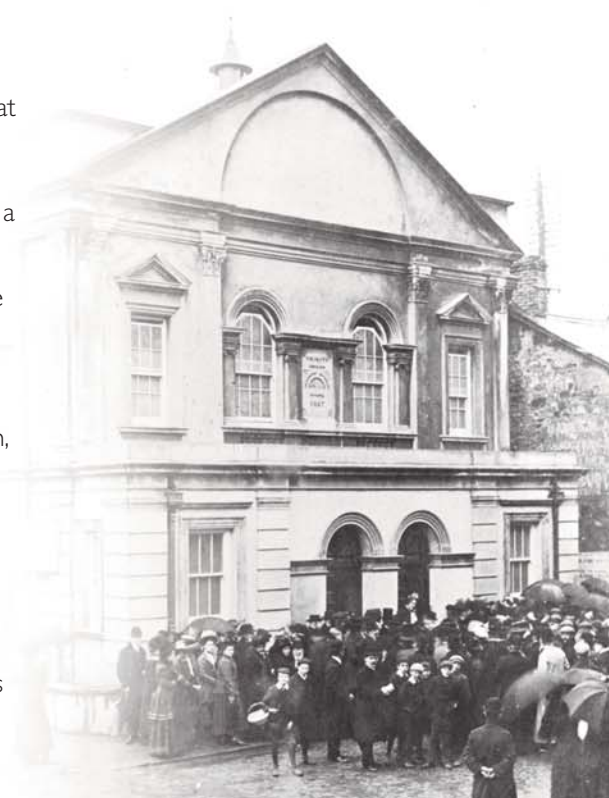


At this point you may wish to follow the map to **Cynon Valley Museum & Gallery 20** - a five minute walk.

Here you will find a fascinating museum on the history of the Cynon Valley until recent times. A shop, café and art gallery are also located at this historic former site of the Gadlys Ironworks.

Retrace your steps to the library and cross via the pedestrian traffic lights to Canon Street. Keeping to the left side, at the junction with Weatherall Street, notice the fine **Trinity Presbyterian Church of Wales 16** (built 1867) at a cost of £300!

Across Weatherall Street note the Blue Plaque to **Temperance Hall 17** an important public building in 19th Century Aberdare that was built in 1858. The Hall contained an auditorium, which could seat 1,500 people, a temperance hotel, a library and temperance coffee house. At the time of its construction the Hall was the largest space available in Aberdare to hold public gatherings and was used extensively for public meetings, lectures and entertainment.





The Hall was converted into the New Theatre and Hippodrome in 1895. In 1918 it was renamed the Palladium and from the 1920's onwards it was primarily used as a cinema until being converted into its present form as the Palladium Bingo Hall.

Continue along Canon Street and before bearing left into pedestrianised Commercial Street, note opposite on the corner next to the public seating area a white building, the site of the printing offices of **Gwlad Garw 18**.

Aberdare was once called the 'Athens of Wales' owing to the large number of printers in the town. There were two extraordinary phases between 1854 and 1865 and 1903 and 1911 when a new press was established on average every two years. The town produced much of the Welsh language press for a national audience as well as journals and religious publications.



Continue along Commercial Street, noting the old sign for the '**Bush Inn**' **19** high on what is now the 'Pickled Pepper' on our right. During the boom years of the mid 1800's Aberdare became notorious for the number of pubs in the town, an extract from the journal 'Old Aberdare' (Vol.2 1982) tells us:-

"Up to 1872 there were at least 273 ale houses or beer houses in the area from Hirwaun to Abercwmboi. There were over 40 in Cardiff Road. Commercial Street at one time or another rejoiced in having no fewer than 16 licensed premises."

The squalor, drinking and depravity in the town were much criticised and this led to the religious temperance movements that sought to discourage this behaviour.

We can end our walk either by cutting through the alley way to the right next to the old 'Bush Inn' referred to above which brings us out opposite the Market Hall; or else continue to the end of the Street and then turn right to the Bus Station (which was formerly the site of the Taff Vale (GWR) Railway Station) and car park where we started.

Note: For those who started at Gadlys car Park - follow the walk from point **1** - Market Hall to return to your start point.



LLWYBRAU TREFTADAETH

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ABERDARE / ABERDÂR

