

“BRYNMAWR’S MARKET HALL”

by Eifion Lloyd Davies.

(Much of the following article has been taken verbatim from newspapers of the day).

With the recent success of the Cinema in the Market Hall at Brynmawr it is fitting that we look back at the creation of the hall.



In April 1862 the Monmouthshire Merlin reported on the town:

OUR PROSPECTS. This town was some time ago a sort of capital of the iron district, both in a commercial and intellectual point of view. The many large and handsome places of workmanship which adorn the town, with its town-hall, reading room, magistrates room, and Board of Health, made it one of the most important places on the hills but here, as in other towns in the district, the bad times have shown their pernicious effect upon the place and people. We are happy to state, however, that the prospects of the town are getting brighter, and a change for the better will probably soon take place, if the new railway from Abergavenny will be opened next month, and then, it is more than probable, the extension of the Western Valleys Railway from Nantyglo will be made, so that the junction will be at Brynmawr, thus securing to the place the advantage of two important (railway) lines. This must prove a great boon to the inhabitants, and must have a tendency to improve the trade”.

It all sounds very good but as the town and businesses grew there was another problem, i.e. the need for a new market. In 1883 The Weekly News carried the report that the subject of a new Market Hall for Brynmawr had long been a topic at the meetings of the town's Chamber of Trade and there was some opposition to this. The opponents had laid down the law that no land could be granted by the Duke of Beaufort owing to a clause in the present market lease to that effect. That idea was dispelled and on Thursday a deputation from the Chamber, Mr. W. Roberts, Mr. H. Connop, Mr. L. James and Mr. T. Hope met with the Duke's agents. Having explained the action of the Chamber Mr. J. Thompson on behalf of the agents said he was happy to do what he could on behalf of the Duke for the welfare and improvement of the town. He also explained that there was no clause in the present market's lease but it would be his duty to protect existing tenants and the application must be a unanimous one for the town.

Move forward ten years and the new Market Hall had again been proposed during 1893 and the Cardiff Times reported on the 25th February of that year that a meeting of owners and ratepayers was held in the Town Hall (which stood on Beaufort Street behind the present day Greengrocer before being demolished in 1974) to receive the report of the deputation appointed a few weeks previously. A proposal had been made to erect a wholesale market at a cost of £700. The deputation urged the meeting to support an amendment which they felt would serve a dual purpose being a market and a hall at a cost of £3,000. Failing this they suggested handing over the Board's market right to a private company to carry out the same.

The chair was taken by Councillor W. J. Long in the absence of Cllr T. G. Powell. Mr. James Bloor gave a report of the deputation's proceedings and this was followed by the same report given in Welsh by Mr. John Jones. The Board adopted the scheme for a market and a hall to accommodate 1,500 people. The cost would be £2,500.

Mr. William Davies and Mr. A. J. Markall, members of the deputation also addressed the meeting and Mr. C. Virgin moved:

"That this meeting of ratepayers totally approves of the action of the Local Board in complying with the wishes of the people and further that this meeting does not bind them to £2,500 if by spending £3,000 they can secure better accommodation"

Mr. James Holly seconded, and the resolution was carried unanimously.

On the 3rd March 1894 the Cardiff Times reported that on Wednesday afternoon, (February 28th) the New Market Hall erected by the Brynmawr Local

Board at a cost of £2,500 was opened by Mr. Charles Morley who was the Liberal Candidate for Brecknockshire in front of a large crowd. Mr. Morley was accompanied by Colonel Wood (who was the Conservative candidate for Brecknockshire and members of the Local Board followed by a large procession. When they arrived at the main entrance to the building, Mr. Charles Morley was presented with a handsome key by Mr. William Roberts the Chairman of the Local Board (with which he opened the building). Mr. Morley on declaring the building open congratulated the town of Brynmawr and the inhabitants of the surrounding districts and especially those gentlemen by whose energy and determination the hall had been built. He went on to say he believed it would prove to be of great utility to the town in many ways. It would be useful as a place for every sort of social gathering and as a meeting place to discuss the great questions of the day, on which all were agreed it was essential for the welfare of the County at large they should arrive at a sound conclusion.

Although, as the name implied, the building was to be a centre of buying and selling, the hall had been designed to serve the double purpose of a wholesale market and a public hall for concerts, theatricals and other entertainments. Mr Morley wished the hall every success. A luncheon was served in the hall immediately after the opening ceremony. The interior of the hall was tastefully decorated with flowers, festoons, and mottoes. Mr. William Roberts, J.P. presided, and was supported by Colonel T. Wood, the Conservative candidate for Breconshire and Mr. Charles Morley, the Liberal candidate, besides a large number of visitors. The usual toasts were given, and a concert took place in the evening under the auspices of the Local Board

But what did the Hall look like when it was first opened? A contemporary account stated: *“The building is 105 feet internally, having a gallery at one end over the main entrance, vestibule and collector's office and at the other end a platform the full width of the hall, 22 feet from back to front. This platform is intended, in connection with the market, for wholesale goods to be received from wagons through two doors placed, as is the platform, on a level with the body of conveyances. The platform will serve the purpose of a very commodious stage. It has two private entrances, and in the basement there are retiring rooms with lavatory accommodation for both sexes, together with refreshment-rooms and storage room for chairs, benches etc. The hall, with the gallery and platform, will accommodate about 1,200 persons. The building externally, although of model architectural proportions, has a substantial appearance. The walls are built of local stone, lined internally with brick, and having terra-cotta and Forest of Dean stone dressings.”*

Eifion Lloyd Davies.