



SOUTH WEST WALES INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

CYCHLYTHYR

CYMDEITHAS ARCHAEOLEG DIWYDIANNOL DE ORLLEWIN CYMRU

No. 10: July 1975

Editorial Committee: F.G.Cowley, P.R.Reynolds, W.I.Roberts

Price to non-members: 10p.

#### FUTURE EVENTS

Saturday August 23. Visit to Penwyllt, led by Paul Reynolds.

There are numerous features all within a small area of attractive countryside. They include quarries, limekilns, industrial cottages, the Brecon Forest Tramroad and Craig-y-Nos station, formerly patronised by Madame Patti and still well maintained, although now disused. Limestone has been quarried here for centuries and the quarries are still flourishing. A train-load of limestone is sent every day to BSC Llanwern.

Meet at 2.30 p.m. on the platform of Craig-y-Nos station. This may be reached by following the A 4067 Swansea Valley road and turning right beyond the village of Penycae, shortly before Craig-y-Nos Castle. There is ample parking space on the far side of the level crossing.

Please bring your own cars. Anyone who wants a lift can be fixed up if he or she gets in touch with the Secretary (W.Idris Roberts, Grove Cottage, Gloucester Place, Mumbles. Telephone 60330.)

Saturday October 25. Lecture on the South Wales tinsplate industry by D.Morgan Rees. 2.30 p.m. in the University College.

D.Morgan Rees is Keeper of Industry at the National Museum of Wales. He is the author of Mines, mills and furnaces, The industrial archaeology of Wales and various other shorter works.

It is also hoped to arrange a visit to Llanelli under the leadership of Mr Harold Prescott, the Borough Librarian. This will take place in late September or early October and full details will be sent out in due course if it proves possible to make the necessary arrangements.

#### LOWER SWANSEA VALLEY IA TRAIL

We are delighted to send members a copy of this pamphlet gratis. As you will see it has been published by the City Planning Department and the text and illustrations have been compiled by members of the Society. Dr Fred Cowley co-ordinated the whole project and acted as editor, Hayden Holloway took the photographs, and contributions were made by Paul Reynolds, Bob Roberts and Idris Roberts.

Something that will strike everyone who looks at the pamphlet is the very high quality of the drawings and design. For this the credit must go to Mr Peter Morgan, a draughtsman in the Planning Department. He has also designed a number of other similar booklets, and they must all be in the top bracket of town trails, a number of which have recently been published up and down the country.

Further copies may be obtained at 10p plus postage from P.R.Reynolds, 12 Beaconsfield Way, Sketty, Swansea. SA2 9JR.

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The AGM was held at the Royal Institution on 20th March 1975 and achieved a good attendance. It turned out to be a lively and interesting meeting.

In his Presidential address Professor O'Neill commented on the conclusion of another successful year in the Society's activities despite a slow start, due, perhaps to other conflicting events in the area. The continued high quality of the programme of lectures arranged by the Extra-Mural Department of the University College of Swansea and the site visits held during the summer months had been well patronised and were both interesting and enjoyable. He mentioned the photographic collection, growing rapidly (but still in need of photos of historical interest) in Haydn Holloway's care, as an important asset to future historians; and remarked on the Newsletter, now distributed to local public libraries and to several IA societies, as being of value as a means of disseminating information.

A programme of site visits for the summer was discussed, and from several suggestions made it was decided to choose Hirwaun & Blaehafon (which has already taken place), Penyllt (August) and Llanelli (to be arranged for September if possible.)

The officers and committee were re-elected with the addition of Messrs Alun Richards and Barry Fagg who were elected to fill two vacancies.

Several items were brought up under 'Any other business':

1. The Victorian stations at Neath and Bridgend which British Rail propose to demolish and rebuild. Urgent appeals for support for their protest against the proposal had been received from the Victorian Society and other interested bodies. After discussion the meeting decided, on a majority vote, that a good case had been made out for supporting the protest. (See separate item below.)
2. The now derelict Siemens Laboratory building at Landore, it was suggested, could be made to serve a further period of useful life, perhaps as an Information Centre serving a large recreation area under consideration for this part of the lower Swansea Valley. A use such as this would justify the preservation of this historic building. The meeting agreed that application should be made to the Welsh Office for formal listing. (See separate item below.)
3. A letter from the newly-formed Gwili Railway Company was read out seeking assistance towards the re-opening of the line from Carmarthen to Brinwydd. It was agreed to publicise their plans in the Newsletter (see below).

After refreshments we were privileged to see some of Mr Alun Richards' outstanding collection of colour slides of tramroads, and to hear him speak about them. The meeting unfortunately ran out of time, but Mr Richards kindly agreed to devote a full evening to his slides during the coming season. We will look forward to this with pleasure; the quality of the slides and their interest should appeal to everyone

W.I.R.

## NEATH GENERAL STATION

In our last issue we reported the plans of BR to demolish and rebuild Neath station. Since then a lot has happened. Opposition to the scheme has been led by the South Wales branch of the Victorian Society who have enlisted the support of the SWVIAS. At our AGM on 20th March last a resolution was passed deploring the proposed demolition and as a result of this Idris Roberts, as Secretary, wrote to the Welsh Office, the Chief Inspector of Historic Buildings at the Department of the Environment, and to BR's Chief Engineer at Paddington urging that the scheme be reconsidered.

Despite these appeals - including the ultimate protest of a letter in the correspondence columns of The Times by Doulgas Hague on 29th March - demolition started on April 10th. However the following day the Welsh Office placed a preservation order on the station and work came to a halt. BR submitted their request to Neath Borough Council for permission to demolish a listed building and mounted an exhibition at the station to enlist public sympathy for their plans. A brisk controversy developed in the town and district. Most people, especially railwaymen, seem to have favoured rebuilding. Once again our Secretary sent a letter of protest, this time to Neath Borough Council urging them to reject BR's application for planning approval for the new station.

However, despite this and other protests, the Planning Committee at Neath met on June 24th and granted BR permission to continue with their proposals. Since the station is now a listed building the Welsh Office have to confirm or reject this decision; and the Secretary of State may order a public inquiry if he thinks the issue merits it. The latest news from Cardiff is that a decision from the Welsh Office is likely to be delayed, though the reason for this is not stated.

P.R.R.

#### SIEMENS' LABORATORY

William Siemens founded the Landore Siemens Steel Company and set up the plant in 1868. In the following year steel production began, using for the first time in Britain the open hearth process of converting pig-iron into fine quality steel. The laboratory is all that remains of the original works and was also used as offices and possibly living accommodation. Of particular interest are the eight chimneys on the north wall which were presumably needed for the laboratory. (See: H.O'Neill: "Siemens steelmaking at Swansea 1869-88" in Metals and materials, August 1969.)

A Cambrian Daily Leader supplement in 1923 declared that "no ruin in the world can boast a past history of greater value to this generation than the disused buildings below Landore Viaduct where Dr. Siemens, with the help of local men, brought to completion the conversion of pig-iron into the finest qualities of steel."

The building is in a state of considerable disrepair but the basic structure is apparently sound, and although there are no approved proposals for the development of the Glandwr works, the site could be cleared or incorporated in the recreation area proposed for the Lower Swansea Valley. The building is almost the last surviving example in this area of a 19th century works and its historical associations give it added importance. If a use such as an information centre to serve the recreation area, with perhaps audio-visual facilities and catering for educational visits from schools, could be found for it, preservation of the building would be justified.

In reply to the request of the SWWIAS for formal listing of the building the Department of the Environment's Inspector of Ancient Monuments stated that consideration to this will be given at the Board's next meeting in December.

A copy of the Society's letter was also sent to Swansea Corporation suggesting that future deterioration of the building would be prevented, pending the decision of the Ancient Monuments Board, by bricking up doors and windows to discourage vandals.

W. I. Roberts

B. C. Fagg

#### GWILI RAILWAY COMPANY

This company aims to run a steam-operated tourist train on the southern two miles of the Carmarthen to Aberystwyth railway between Abergwili and Bronwydd. Later they hope to make connections with BR at Carmarthen and to extend six miles north to Llanpumpsaint. The intention is to re-instate the original wooden station buildings at Bronwydd and to incorporate parts from Neath General station, if the demolition of that building takes place, into their southern terminus at either Abergwili or Carmarthen. Trains will be operated by a 1939 Peckett 0-6-0T, at present the property of the Teifi Valley Railway Preservation Society.

The prospectus has recently been issued and the Company seek to raise £13,000 in the first instance in £5 and £10 shares. The directors look for support to those who really want South Wales to have a standard-gauge steam railway. Copies of the prospectus and application forms are available from the Secretary of the Gwili Railway Co., Mr R. M. E. Thomas, 9 Linden Close, Bryncoch, Neath.

Supporters of the scheme and others may be interested to know that a small book has recently been published. Entitled The Teifi Valley Railway, it comprises a collection of photographs of varying interest and quality of the lines between Carmarthen and Aberystwyth. The accompanying text is very largely second-hand. The authors are Roger Padfield and Barrie Burgess, and the book is published by Laidlaw-Burgess Publishers, Haverfordwest at 90p.

## SUBSCRIPTIONS

A number of subscriptions for 1975 are still outstanding. The rates are £1-00 p.a. (or 50p for full-time students and OAPs). If a cross appears in the margin beside this paragraph, that means that according to our records your subs. are owing. Please remit as soon as possible to the Treasurer (P.R.Reynolds, address on p.1), or we shall have to delete your name, with regret, from our list of members.

## NEATH ABBEY IRONWORKS

A group of the Friends of Ironbridge Gorge Museum are visiting South Wales on Saturday September 27. They are visiting the sites of various ironworks in the region including Neath Abbey. The leaders of the party are W.K.V.Gale, Barrie Trinder and Lawrence Ince (a member of SWWIAS). They hope to arrive at the site at about 11 a.m. It is good to hear of parties from outside the Swansea area visiting Neath Abbey: it deserves to be far more widely appreciated than it is at present.

## KIDWELLY TINPLATE WORKS MUSEUM

Llanelli Borough Council are trying to create a consortium of local authorities to develop and maintain the Kidwelly Tinplate Works as a major tourist attraction. The scheme is expected to cost £49,000, and will ensure the preservation of the last of the tinplate works to have survived in reasonable shape. One council so far has declined to be involved, Llanelli Rural Community Council - "nothing but a load of scrap" said one of their councillors.

## BLAENAFON TRIP

The theme of the Society's main summer trip this year, held on July 12, was the iron industry which flourished along the northern rim of the coalfield between 1760 and 1860. The first stop was made at Hirwaun where we were met by our guide for the day, Mr Raymond Bowen, President of the Oxford House IA Society at Risca. The well-worn blocks of the tramroads along a street named Tramway and along the causeway over the River Cynon were inspected before visiting the site of Hirwaun Ironworks. The original furnace established here in 1757 by John Maybery was the first blast furnace in South Wales to use coke as fuel. After we had viewed the ruined furnaces and the overgrown foundations of adjoining buildings it was instructive to be shown by our guide a rare photograph of the works taken at the turn of the century when the buildings were intact.

We moved on to Merthyr Tydfil, seeing the remains of the great Cyfarthfa works (begun 1766) as we entered the town. After a stop for lunch a visit was made to the remains of two of the furnaces at the site of the Plymouth works (begun 1763) and the tunnel through which ran the Penydarren Tramroad and Trevithick's historic engine in 1804. As we left Merthyr we were able to view from the roadside the industrial housing at the Triangle, Pentrebach, a typical example of houses built by the ironmasters in the early 19th century, and the site and remains of the famous Dowlais works (begun 1759).

On our descent into Blaenafon we could see the remains of the dammed ponds or reservoirs which provided the water power for the Blaenafon works. The works were opened in 1759 and form a compact site with the remains of massive 19th century furnaces overlooked by an even more massive colliery water-balance tower or balance lift of later date. The houses of the ironworkers, Stack Square and Engine Row (now derelict) were built before 1819 and adjoin the site. The whole complex is now in the care of the Department of the Environment.

The weather throughout the greater part of the trip was appalling and prevented us from visiting Garnddyrys on the western slopes of the Brecon. The trip, which might well have been a dismal failure, was made profitable and enjoyable by the sheer interest of the sites visited and by the knowledge, energy and humour of our guide.

Some works for those who wish to read more about the iron industry:

- D.Morgan Rees. Mines, mills and furnaces. (London, 1969), pp.74-76 (for Hirwaun)
- I.G.Jones. Merthyr Tydfil in 1850. Glamorgan Historian, IV (1967), pp.31-45.
- M.S.Taylor. The Penydarren Ironworks, 1784-1859. Glamorgan Historian, III (1966), p.
- M.S.Taylor. The Plymouth Ironworks. Glamorgan Historian, V (1968), pp.186-192.
- J.B.Hilling. The buildings of Merthyr Tydfil. Glamorgan Historian, VIII (1972), 167
- T.B.Parry. The Brecon. Jnl.Industrial Archaeology, I (1964), pp.76-93.

-5-

## INDUSTRIAL HOUSING IN SWANSEA

On Friday May 16 and Saturday May 17 two lectures on this subject were given by Mr Bernard Morris to members of the Society and others. On the Saturday afternoon, following his second lecture, Mr Morris led a party to look at several sites in and around the city, and to point out some of the more interesting features.

Clarence Street/James Street/Princess Street. Terrace houses built between 1830 and 1845. Two features of particular interest are the "catslide" roofs with the slope at the back considerably longer than at the front; and a secondary door, beside the front door of some of the houses, that formerly led to houses in the crowded courts at the rear. The houses were built as two-roomed units, with an additional ground-floor room added on at the back - hence the catslide roof. They represent the next stage in development from the one-up, one-down type of house. Also of note were the fine chimney pots on the Clarence Inn which were almost certainly made at Ynismudwy Pottery, a distinctive feature on an otherwise undistinguished terrace. These houses are likely to be demolished fairly soon since the whole area is due for redevelopment.

Vivianstown, Neath Road. Houses built for his copper workers by J.H. Vivian. The 1842 Tithe Map shows them as newly built. They also have the catslide form of roof and are remarkable for the use of moulded blocks of copper slag in the structure and especially as coping stones on the garden walls. The terraces are substantially as built, although slight modifications have been made to details, such as doors and windows.

Morris Castle. Built by the industrialist John Morris to house colliers working in his pits. Although the remains are only fragmentary it is possible to reconstruct the layout of the "castle" by using what remains intact in conjunction with plans and drawings of the 19th century. It has been stated by early writers that the castle provided accommodation for 40 families, but Bernard Morris suggested that 20 would be a more realistic figure judging by the amount of space available and the accommodation normally provided in cottages of the period. Parts of the interior walls still retain traces of plastering, and where this is so it is possible to make out the outlines of staircases which help to establish the position of each flat. The fireplaces are also still to be seen, and the fact that they have been repaired at a later date suggests that the "castle" remained inhabited for a number of years. Mr J.M. Davies, a member of the party, put forward information which would indicate that it was still inhabited in about 1850. To the north of the building it is still possible to see the earth banks that divided a number of small plots of land; these are shown on the Tithe Map and Mr Morris suggested that they represent potato patches provided for the inhabitants of the "castle".

Morris Castle is of considerable interest as a very early (the earliest?) block of workmen's flats and forms one of Swansea's oldest surviving buildings. It is also a striking feature on the sky-line, and it was widely felt that a strong case could be made for its preservation.

35 Morfydd Street, Murrleston. Almost certainly the sole surviving house from the original foundation of Murrleston. Unlike later industrial housing schemes Murrleston was not built by the land-owner, John Morris. He merely allocated the land, laid out the street plan and leased plots of land to his workers. It was then their responsibility to build a house on their piece of land. No. 35 was probably built in about 1790 and is a standard double-fronted cottage such as might have been found anywhere in the surrounding countryside. It is also interesting to note the long back gardens in the original core of Murrleston: probably they reflect Morris' intention of providing land for his workers to grow their own produce like the potato patches at the "castle".

Lliw Forge, Pontlliw. Industrial housing in a rural setting. Three cottages, again with catslide roofs, and an iron forge were in existence by 1813. The water-powered forge remained intact, if not in use, until the last war when it was stripped for scrap. It is now derelict and inhabited by hens, but enough remains to establish its original layout.

The SWWIAS are most grateful to Bernard Morris for his informative talks and for leading the excursion; also to the Extra-Mural Department of Swansea University College for making the necessary arrangements for the lectures.

BISHOPSTON VALLEY LEAD MINES

In a recently published article\* Mary and Gordon Tucker of Birmingham have described among others, the lead mines of the Bishopston Valley. There were two mines in the valley, Long Ash (SS 574887) on the eastern side, and All-Slade (SS 584876) between Hareslade and Brandy Cove. The first operated in the period 1852-54, and the second at three different times, the later 18th century, 1810-13, and 1852-54. A profit of £12,000 was made when this mine was first operated in the 18th century, but otherwise the undertaking does not seem to have been particularly remunerative. Whether this was because the ores were exhausted, or for lack of capital is left an open question by the authors. No trace of All-Slade mine survives, but there is an adit still to be seen at the site of Long Ash mine, and also the remains of a stone building below and to one side of the adit. In addition the authors recount the history of lead mine Penllyn, Llangam, Rudry and Machen, and provide a number of useful maps.

\* The lead mines of southeast Wales. Bulletin of the Peak District Mines Historical Society, VI, 1, (May 1975), pp.15-27

RECENT LITERATURE

From Castle to Civic Centre: a history of local government in Neath, 1100-1972;  
by George Eaton (7 Cimla Road, Neath). £1-75

Although this book deals with the long history of Neath as a corporate borough, much of it provides an interesting insight into industrial development and changes in public transport. Neath was once an important copper-smelting centre, and a quite vivid account is given of Sir Humphrey Mackworth, industrialist and entrepreneur, who found it advantageous to exert a dominating sway over the town council. It is interesting to note that some of the Mackworth papers are in the possession of Neath Antiquarian Society.

Until 1920 the town had street cars powered by gas which were bought by the borough council from Lytham St Annes. They ran from Briton Ferry to Skewen, both places then being beyond the borough boundaries. Although they became something of a curiosity and gave rise to a satirical ditty

"When they are in motion  
You'd think you're on the ocean"

they were a boon in their day, and a great improvement on the horse-drawn trams which preceded them.

Gas lighting in the town was first mooted by the Parish Vestry, and in 1833 there were fifty lamps for lighting public places. These details and much else make Mr Eaton's account well worth reading, even by those whose interests do not lie in political history of the civic variety. There are several photographic plates and a comprehensive bibliography. The dust jacket has a reproduction of a portrait of the lawyer, James Coke, four times Portreeve of Neath, printed by permission of his great-grand-daughter Mrs J. Bevan, Swansea.

G. I. L.

Steam on the Penydarren: by M. J. T. Lewis. (Industrial Railway Society, 44 Hicks Avenue, Greenford, Middx.) 40p.

This little book is a well-written and well-produced account of the Penydarren Tramroad at Merthyr and the steam locomotives belonging to the Bowlais and Penydarren ironworks that operated the traffic. The earliest of these was Trevithick's locomotive, the first railway engine in the world. Of the later ones, a number were built at Neath Abbey. Definitely recommended, especially to those who took part in the excursion on July 12 and saw the tramroad tunnel.

(Further notes on recent literature have been held over to our next issue for lack of space in this number. P.R.R.)