



SOUTH WEST WALES INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

CYLCHLYTHYR

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No. 11: November 1975

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

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FUTURE EVENTS

Thursday 20th November
Royal Institution of South Wales
7.30 p.m.

Mr J.S.Bunt, Curator of the Glynn Vivian Gallery and of the Maritime and Industrial Museum will speak about progress made during the past twelve months in establishing the industrial museum on the South Dock site.

Saturday 6th December
Visit to the Neath and Tennant Canals
Meet at Aberdulais Aqueduct at 2 p.m.

Members of the Neath and Tennant Canals Preservation Society will show us some of the more interesting features of the canals in this area. This will be a good opportunity for members of SWWIAS to see the work that the N & T have done in the past year to clean up the canals and for members of the two societies to meet one another.

Please bring your own card. Parking space is available at the nearby Railway Inn, Tonma. As usual, please contact the Hon.Secretary, Mr W.I.Roberts (Telephone 60330) if you need a lift.

Please note also the following meetings being arranged by the Extra-Mural Department in association with the SWWIAS. Fuller information will be sent out in due course.

Saturday 20th March 1976. 11.15 a.m. J.Hugh Thomas, M.A., a lecturer at the Barry College of Technology (Polytechnic of Wales) will speak on settlement and early industry in the Swansea Valley. This will be followed by an afternoon excursion to sites mentioned in the lecture.

Saturday 15th May 1976. A study tour of industrial sites at Merthyr Tydfil will be led by Mr W.E.Jenkins, B.A. of the Extra-Mural Department.

VISIT TO PENWYLLT

On Saturday afternoon, 23rd August, Mr Paul Reynolds acted as our guide and commentator on a tour of sites in the Penwyllt area.

The tour began at Craig-y-Nos Station. This former Neath & Brecon Railway station, opened in 1867, was patronised by and specially furnished for Madame Patti. The line was closed to passengers in 1964 and the station was subsequently purchased by Hobbs (Quarries) Ltd. and refurnished in period style. It is now used as a Directors' and visitors' dining room. The table of dates recording the station's history which is displayed on the platform is not entirely accurate.

Before leaving the station our guide sketched the history of the Brecon Forest Tramroad. This was built between 1820 and 1825 by John Christie, A London indigo merchant and owner of the Crown Allotment of the Great Forest of Brecon. It extended from the Gwaun Clawdd wharf at Caerlan to Sennybridge and the traffic consisted mainly of coal, lime and limestone. The ownership passed to Joseph Claypon, a Boston banker, in 1829 and it was incorporated into the Neath & Brecon Railway in 1863. The stone blocks and course of the tramroad can be seen near the Mountain Rescue Centre.

The party moved on from the station to examine an interesting block of workers' cottages known as Kershaw Row. The seven double-fronted cottages are built back-to-back, a type unusual in South Wales, and were probably built in the 1820s. They were abandoned in 1970.

The limestone quarries were next visited, Christie's worked-out quarry, the quarry on the Commoners' Allotment with its derelict limekilns, and the Penwyllt Quarry which is still being worked by Hobbs Ltd.

The party next made its way south of the station and east of the railway line past the Mountain Rescue Centre (where traces of the Brecon Forest Tramroad were noted) to the Penwyllt Dinas Silica Brickworks. These were started at the end of the 19th century under the ownership of Kershaw and Pole. Brickmaking ceased in the late 1920s but silica sand was still extracted and sent out by rail until probably after World War II. The long railway incline running up the hill to the sand pits and the short lines to the quarries at a lower level can all be traced.

Across the railway line to the west is a block of remarkably well preserved limekilns. These were served by rail and date from the late nineteenth century. The heavy rain prevented our visiting these.

We are grateful to Mr Paul Reynolds for his expert guidance around a most interesting group of industrial sites. In spite of the driving rain this was a very successful and well attended meeting.

F.G.C.

TALYCLUN COLLIERY, HENDY

Work is currently being undertaken on the construction of the M4 Pontarddulais by-pass. Where the new road passes between Hendy and Llangennech the main contractors, Sir Robert MacAlpine & Sons, have cut into the abandoned Talyclun Colliery (SN 575035). They are employing Thyssens Ltd. as sub-contractors to dig out the old workings and thus consolidate the foundations of the road. This is cheaper and quicker than trying to fill in the extensive galleries and roadways. During the summer a small party were fortunate enough to be allowed to visit the workings before the sub-contractors began work in earnest.

The first site visited was a slant in use until the early 1950s. The condition of the tunnel was surprisingly good after 25 years, with only a few minor falls. The semi-circular steel supports for the roof were nearly all intact, as were the rails. The trams used to be hauled up by means of an endless rope, and many of the pulleys that supported the rope remained. The roadway sloped down gradually for about half a mile - we found it difficult to estimate distances underground - until it became too deep in water to carry on. It is understood that the roadway we explored connected with another that is used to drain and ventilate the privately-operated Wern-y-Cwm Colliery about a mile to the north-west (SN 562039).

We also visited another level leading into the same workings, but this had been blocked a short distance from its mouth by a roof-fall. It was last worked in about 1916, and an older form of support was used, consisting of vertical timber posts driven in at the side of the tunnel which supported a cross beam.

As well as coal, the colliery also yielded fireclay and a small brickworks was established. The remains of this had been destroyed before our visit, but a number of bricks were found underground inscribed 'Talyclyn'.

In conclusion we would like to put on record our gratitude to Messrs. MacAlpine and Thyssen for permitting this visit, to their local representatives for the co-operation, and to the mine rescue officials who led the group and contributed greatly to our understanding of what we saw.

P.R.R.

LOWER SWANSEA VALLEY IA TRAIL

One of our members, Mr R.S. Craig of University College London - who is Editor of the journal Maritime History - has drawn our attention to an error in section 6 of this trail. The hulk of the 'Lady Quirk' is described as that of "a two-masted barque". There is no such type of ship: having two masts she could have been a brig, brigantine or ketch. The reference ought to read "a two-masted vessel".

Another member, Mr R.V. Barnes, has also spotted two points that need correction. He writes as follows:

"Dear Sir. I was pleased to receive a copy of the Industrial Archaeology Trail of the Lower Swansea Valley with the last edition of the Newsletter. This is certainly a very worthwhile publication and one which is very badly needed. May I, however, draw attention to two inaccuracies of fact. The first, under paragraph 3, states "From New Cut Bridge a number of interesting features may be seen. Looking south towards the open sea, note the massive piers that once carried the Swansea and Neath Railway. The line was opened in 1863 to bring coal from the Merthyr and Aberdare region to Swansea docks for export. It was closed in 1965 and the bridge later removed. The bridge was designed to open to allow shipping to pass up-river. It was the scene of a spectacular accident in 1865 when it was inadvertently left open and a train ran over the edge into the river."

In fact, this was not the scene of the 1865 incident which occurred by the viaduct which crossed the entrance to the North Dock between the half tide basin (Weaver's basin) and the main dock which was filled in and is now a BRS depot. Spanning this channel was a draw bridge which opened and which was supposed to be protected by an infallible system of signalling. The infallibility was obviously suspect and a train plunged into the open gap in 1865 as the illustration in the trail shows.

The other minor inaccuracy of fact occurs in paragraph 7, where it is stated "Grenfell Town, built by the Grenfells for their workers still survives, but the early workmen's cottages below the church have been cleared away". Grenfell Town is of course in the village of Pentrechwyth and the area around All Saints Church, was, as far as I am aware, never known as anything but Kilvey or Foxhole."

Our correspondents are of course both quite correct. We are glad to take this opportunity of putting the record right by publishing their remarks.

THE MUMBLES' RAILWAY SUB-STATION AT BLACKPILL

Members of the society may have read with interest the controversy in the national and local newspapers relating to the claim by British Rail that the Stockton & Darlington Railway, celebrating its 150th anniversary this year, was the first passenger railway. In fact the Oystermouth Railway, constructed in 1804, operated a regular passenger service between Swansea and The Dunns, Oystermouth, from 1807; and, although originally horse-drawn, lays claim to being the first passenger railway in the world. It was later extended to Mumbles pier, and was known as the Mumbles Railway for most of its life. It was abandoned in 1960.

Professor J.D. Weston of the University College of Swansea has recently brought together some notes on the remaining major feature of the Mumbles Railway as it finally was - the electrical sub-station at Blackpill.

Charles E. Lee in his book The first passenger railway (London, Railway Publishing Co., 1942) records the details of the electrical supply when the line was electrified in 1928:

'Electricity for the line is supplied from the generating station of the Swansea Corporation. This supply is in the form of alternating current at 6,600 volts, and in order to convert it into direct current at 650 volts a sub-station was provided by the Swansea Corporation Electricity Department at Black Pill, which is about the mid-point of the line. The sub-station equipment was supplied by the Metropolitan-Vickers Electrical Co. Ltd. It consists of two 500-kW rotary converter sets with fully automatic control gear. Arrangement of the equipment is such that initial impulse of starting the station when required is given by operating a switch on the supply circuit at the generating station. The first rotary converter at the sub-station then automatically starts and connects its output to the line. The second machine comes into commission whenever the load on the line requires the operation of both machines. Directly the load falls to a value which can be carried by one machine alone, the machine last started is automatically disconnected and stopped.'

The South Wales Transport Co., who undertook the electrification and were responsible for operating the line, confirm these details in a booklet entitled Electrification of the Mumbles Railway, 1928, where it is pointed out that the equipment of the sub-station was a striking example of a modern engineering development. This booklet also has an illustration of the exterior of the sub-station from a drawing by the architect, Mr Ernest Morgan, A.R.I.B.A., as well as an illustration of the interior of the building.

There are one or two points which are worth noting. Apart from street tramways, the Mumbles Railway seems to have been the first and only electric railway to exist in Wales; and the building that housed the sub-station at Blackpill seems to be the only substantial relic of the Mumbles Railway still standing.

Despite its rather dilapidated appearance, this building is quite shapely and seems to be essentially sound. Its large windows with their semicircular arches, and the colonnade on the seaward side are features which could be decidedly attractive with some superficial renovation, and the interior could no doubt be adapted to house some civic amenity. Various bodies, including local authorities, the press, the broadcasting authorities, schools and colleges, the National Museum of Wales, the Royal Institution of South Wales, the Swansea Civic Society, the South West Wales Industrial Archaeology Society, the Institution of Electrical Engineers (South Wales Centre), might be interested in the conservation of this building. In particular, as 1975 has been designated European Architectural Heritage Year, and as the civic authorities in Swansea have been responding quite significantly to this, it might be appropriate that the preservation of this building should be included in the programme.

It is also of interest that the village of Blackpill was formerly served by two railway stations - that of the old Mumbles Railway and a station called Mumbles Road on the main line from Swansea (Victoria) to Shrewsbury. Part of the track-bed of this latter line between Blackpill and Sketty Lane is now a footpath, and scenically one of the finest urban footpaths in the world - a heritage from 1975 for which we are indebted to the old railway engineers as well as to contemporary planners. The ruins of Mumbles Road station can be seen from the top of the embankment at the point where the railway crossed the road by a bridge now demolished. They look very dangerous and it is surprising that no death by misadventure has occurred there. The track-bed of the railway through the Clyne Valley would make another superb footpath.

NEATH AND TENNANT CANALS PRESERVATION SOCIETY

In the one year since it was established the N & T has made good progress on its self-appointed task of clearing the Neath Canal and restoring it to a condition that allows boating and other amenity uses. Work has been undertaken so far at four sites.

Aberdulais Basin (SS 773993). This was the first project to be undertaken by the society and it has now reached a successful conclusion. In the past year members have shifted more than 2400 cubic yards of silt from the basin, the undergrowth has been cut back on every side and tree roots that threatened to destroy the edge of the basin have been removed. Access lanes of stone or ash have been laid out and work has been set in hand to consolidate the towpath. The basin was opened to the public on September 27th when a grand "boat-in" was held amid torrential showers. The site is of considerable interest as the junction between the Neath and Tennant Canals and the site of the superb Aberdulais Aqueduct.

Yscwrfa (Llynay) Bridge (SN 864056). Earlier this year work started on clearing the canal from south of the bridge down to Maesgwyn lock. The site is about a mile west of Glynneath. Trees growing in the canal bed have been chopped down and burnt, and the silted-up bed has been cleared using water power. Temporary stop boards have been placed at the top end of the lock which has resulted in the water level being raised to 4'. The lock chamber has been cleared at the southern end and the lockside has been stoned. A start has been made on clearing the towpath and laying an all-weather stone access track.

Unfortunately this section is to be isolated from the rest of the canal as a result of road improvements to alleviate the dangerous S-bend on the A465 which have recently been commenced. Under this scheme the canal is to be culverted at this point, thus preventing boats from passing between the two sections. The N & T urged the provision of an extra-large culvert to allow for future boating, but this was turned down by the Welsh Office. However the old bridge is to be preserved as a lay-by.

Resolven (SN 825032). To compensate for their lack of success at Yscwrfa, the N & T have successfully persuaded the Welsh Office to modify its plans for realignment of the A465 at Resolven. The original plan involved buttressing the road and culverting the canal. However in June the Welsh Office announced that the plans had been altered: the canal would not be culverted, but instead an embankment with retaining wall would carry the road alongside the canal at this point. A start has now been made on clearing the canal at Resolven.

Neath (Bridge Street) to Tonna Lock. Earlier this year a trial clearance at Bridge Street improved the appearance of the canalside considerably, and in the Spring the growth at Tonna lock was cleared, making the old Neath Canal workshops visible once again. It is hoped to clear the towpath, improve its surface and remove any obstructions all the way from Neath to Tonna when permission is granted by the Canal Company.

The N & T have also produced an attractive bilingual Christmas card showing the skew bridge at Aberdulais under a light covering of snow. Although sold to benefit N & T funds the cards are by no means an obtrusive form of advertising and may well appeal to a wider public. They cost 5p each and are available from Mr P. E. Corles at 102, Pen-y-Fro, Dunvant, Swansea or the Computer Centre, University College of Swansea.

LOWER SWANSEA VALLEY

The position regarding various monuments in the Valley is at present as follows:

Morris Castle. This is in the process of being scheduled as an ancient monument for its historical value as an early block of workers' flats. The City Council are to acquire the ruins and $4\frac{1}{2}$ acres of adjoining ground, and plan to spend £1000 on preservation during Heritage Year 1975/76. The surrounding open space is a natural park and signs will be erected and footpaths improved.

Morfa Bridge. Its scheduling is being considered by the City Council who own the bridge. It forms an essential link in an east-west footpath from Landore to Cwm and only minor repairs are needed.

Yorkshire Imperial Metals (ex-Hafod and Morfa Works). It is hoped that with the co-operation of the management it will prove possible to list the Musgrove uniflow engine and its engine-house, together with the canteen with its attractive wooden clock tower and the pantiled workshops immediately to the north. The whole forms a good example of an industrial complex.

Smith's Canal. Scheduling of parts of this canal which ran from Llansamlet to Foxhole is being considered by the Department of the Environment. It ante-dates Swansea Canal by a number of years, having been started in 1784.

Siemens' Laboratory. £1500 is to be spent during Heritage Year on selective demolition which is unfortunately necessary because of its derelict condition. However it is intended to preserve the northern bay with its distinctive range of eight chimney stacks. The other walls will be demolished to window level to leave an immediately recognisable layout.

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LOWER SWANSEA VALLEY EDUCATION CENTRE

This is a proposal for a building in the Lower Swansea Valley to be used as a centre to display and store historical records of the Valley and the metal industries for which it was so famous. The general objective would be to provide a centre where members of the public, students and scholars could expect to find the majority of available material on the subject attractively displayed.

The amount of interest from students and the public in general, both in Britain and overseas, in the Lower Swansea Valley is considerable. Its fame as the 19th century world centre of copper and zinc smelting, and as one of the largest concentrations of industry and derelict and polluted land in the country, has been spread by the L.S.V. Project Study of 1961-67. A large amount of technical work has been published on the Valley and its character and history are well known. There are numerous maps, diagrams, reports, documents, etc. held in public or private ownership on the various firms and buildings which existed in the Valley. The centre would aim to provide access to as much of this material as possible, and also, by means of audio-visual aids and models, to display the information in an effective and attractive manner.

Subjects which would be eligible for inclusion would range through the history of copper and zinc smelting, tinsplate manufacture, mining, and the industrial buildings to topics related to the Valley itself, such as topography, geography, history, flora and fauna, pollution and future development. It is because of the rich history of the Valley and the interest shown in it that it would be appropriate to locate the centre in the Valley rather than at Swansea's South Dock Industrial Museum, or even the Royal Institution, although the latter might be a second best choice.

A large house or shop, old church or hall might be suitable, but a new building in the area designated as a Forest Park, immediately south of the main Swansea to Paddington main line, would potentially be the best location. The association of the centre with the future recreational development of the Valley and other buildings and activities would obviously have advantages.

Finance for setting up and running such a centre would be a considerable problem in the current period of austerity, and it would be easier to run it in association with something else or in the Royal Institution. If sufficient support is forthcoming to support the idea, then there is no real financial constraint on taking the first steps in collecting together the material and displaying it in temporary surroundings until such time as the money for a purpose-designed centre is available.

This project would involve considerable work and planning, but does not seem to present insuperable difficulties, and could form a focus for the SWWIAS.

Your initial comments on this proposal would be welcomed by Barry Fagg at the Guildhall (Telephone 50821 extension 31).

THE VOICE OF OLD SWANSEA

Whilst books, manuscripts and photographs are being collected on Swansea's past, a great wealth of history lives in the memories of its people. Unfortunately, as most people do not write their life story, this aspect of a city's history dies with its citizens. As part of Swansea Heritage Year a project is being undertaken to record the voices of local people giving details of their past lives, which in turn is the history of the city. The Archives Recording Project, as it is known, was inaugurated by a passing remark by Councillor Susan Jones, Chairman of the Education Panel for Swansea Heritage Year and is now being co-ordinated by Barry Fagg for the Education Panel, and Hywel Francis, Tutor in Extra-Mural Studies at the University College of Swansea.

So far the project has attracted about twenty people from all walks of life, including a railway porter, a city planner, housewives, office workers, students and artists, all of whom are interested in this aspect of historical recording. Some groups have more definite aims, however, such as a group from Parkmill and Bishopston who are interested in recording village personalities as part of a wider history project. Other people were interested in recording with a bias towards industrial

or political personalities but whatever anyone has to say who has lived in Swansea for a number of years is very likely to be of interest in future years.

About thirty hours of recording has been carried out to date which is quite an achievement when it is considered that an interviewer has to borrow a tape-recorder, arrange to meet the interviewee and then complete a questionnaire followed by an hour or so of good quality recording. Finally a report is written summarising the interview which is then deposited with the City Archivist. Of course, it is not then intended to allow the tape to lie on the shelves gathering dust. In the near future it is hoped to produce a catalogue of both the personalities and the material recorded which will help to fulfill the objects of the project by encouraging teachers and historians to use the material for educational historical purposes.

Recordings made to date include one with Mr W.H.Grenfell, former Assistant Manager of Yorkshire Imperial Metals, who has recorded his version of life in a copper works in the period of industrial decline in the Lower Swansea Valley. This is supplemented by recordings from other people who also worked in similar surroundings. Ex-Superintendent Bill Francis of the Swansea City Police describes his experiences when the police were ambulance men and firefighters during the war, making specific mention of the visit of Winston Churchill just after the city was blitzed. Dr E.B. Meyrick, a local amateur historian, has recorded a very human account of modern local history which has been passed already to West Glamorgan Education Authority to test its usefulness in the classroom.

The project is fortunate in being sponsored by the 3M Company who have been extremely co-operative in supplying both the tapes and the necessary technical advice. However, there has been a considerable amount of difficulty in finding sufficient suitable tape-recorders, assistance being sought from many sources, including the Swansea Heritage Year Executive and a national electrical goods firm, but so far only the use of machines loaned by West Glamorgan Education Authority has eased the problem.

Even though the project was inaugurated under the auspices of Swansea Heritage Year it is intended to continue it well after 1975 and eventually such a fund of information will be available on the history of Swansea on tape that the Archives Recording Project could prove to be the start of a new era in the collection of historical data.

The project is very large in scope and has already created a good deal of interest. Anyone who wishes to join in would be very welcome, either by taking part in the actual tape-recording or by providing information suitable for recording. Please contact Barry Fagg if you are able to help at Swansea Guildhall (Telephone 50824, extension 31).

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

The problems of conservation in towns of historical and architectural significance has received a great deal of attention, but not so much interest has been shown in the problem as it affects ordinary towns. From January 16th to 18th next year a conference is to be held in Swansea to discuss the issues involved, and it is hoped that the speakers will include the Prime Minister among others. There is also to be a full programme of trips, film shows and slide shows. Full details will be made available later, but in the meantime please direct any enquiries to the Director of Planning at the Guildhall (Swansea 50824).

RECENT LITERATURE

Bryn THOMAS. Days of old.

Mr Thomas, a member of this society, has recently published another of his little books on the history of Llandybie. A sequel to The good old days, the 120 pages of the present work cover such subjects as collieries and quarries, road and railway transport, and social conditions in the village in the early part of this century. Attractively produced, the book includes 12 interesting photographs.

(The author, Jalna, 53 Blaenau Road, Llandybie, Ammanford, Dyfed. 95p + 16p postage.)

Neil COSSONS. The BP book of industrial archaeology.

A chapter-by-chapter survey of different industries and their relics. Of particular value are the simple diagrams explaining various engineering processes and so on, such as the construction of a blast furnace or the operation of a steam engine. A gazetteer pinpoints sites to visit. Compiling a selective list of this nature is always a hazardous enterprise, but is it unjust to complain that Hirwaun, Yniscedwyn and Neath Abbey have remains of the iron industry worth inspecting even if they may not be as spectacular as Blaenavon, the only iron industry site listed in Wales? Everyone, of course, will have their own grumbles about the gazetteer. There is also a list of IA societies in which we see with some dismay that our society has been confused with that of the Cardiff area to produce the Swansea-based South-East Wales IA Society!

(Newton Abbot, David & Charles. £4-95.)

Stewart WILLIAMS. Vintage buses and trams in South Wales.

A fascinating and nostalgic collection of photographs that should provide a good deal of pleasant browsing, although some readers might regard the accompanying text as too meagre. It is perhaps unfortunate that where Swansea is concerned the editor of the book has chosen to give so much space to well-known and frequently published pictures of the Mumbles Railway at the expense of illustrations of 'buses and trams on the same scale as for Cardiff or Newport. And beware of the caption to illustration 172: this horse-drawn tram is an interloper. It has nothing to do with Swansea but belongs to Oxford.

(Stewart Williams, Bryn Awel, Buttrills Road, Barry, South Glam. £3-75.)

Peter HUGHES and Richard KEEN. Industrial Wales in art.

Originally published in Amgueddfa, the journal of the National Museum of Wales, this 18-page pamphlet was intended to accompany an exhibition of industrial art held in the museum during July. With a good number of illustrations, the authors survey the treatment of the industrial theme in art by different artists from 1770 to the present day.

(Cardiff, National Museum of Wales. 25p.)

David E. BICK. The old metal mines of mid-Wales. Pt. I: Cardiganshire south of Devil's Bridge. Pt. II: Cardiganshire - the Rheidol to Ceginan.

A description of the mines and their history with a generous selection of illustrations, maps and diagrams. Sites where there are still substantial remains are listed in an appendix to each volume. In the introduction to pt. II the author makes a plea for the preservation of the more substantial remains. Several Cornish engine-houses have been demolished in North Wales in recent years and clearly an official policy needs to be formulated to prevent the wholesale destruction of all the remains of the industry.

(The Poundhouse, Newent, Glos. Pt. I, 75p. Pt. II, 85p.)