



SOUTH WEST WALES INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

CYLCHLYTHYR

CYMRDEITHAS ARCHAEOLEG DIWYDIANNOL DE ORLLEWIN CYMRU

No. 19: July 1978

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

Price to non-members: 10p

FORTHCOMING EVENT

5 August

Visit to Burry Port and the Gwendraeth Fawr valley

Leader: Mr Ray Bowen

Time of commencement: 10.00 a.m. (Please be punctual)

The meeting place is the Carbay Club in Burry Port, formerly the Neptune Hotel, which is on the seaward side of the railway station. After visiting sites in Burry Port itself, the party will head up the Gwendraeth valley to Pwll y Llygod near Carway to see part of Kymer's Canal and an associated tramroad bridge. After that we will continue to Cwmawr where some interesting discoveries have recently been made on the incline of the Kidwelly & Llanelli Canal.

We have been asked to emphasise that this is a serious day's outing involving a fair amount of walking. Stout footwear and protective clothing are needed, and it is not suitable for young children. Because a lot of the expedition is to be made on foot, and because there would be difficulties in getting a 'bus to some of the locations, the outing will be made in private cars. Please telephone Idris Roberts (60330) or Paul Reynolds (21525) if you need help with transport. It is suggested that you bring along your own provisions, and a stop will be made at a pub at lunch time. The outing is expected to finish at about 5.00 p.m.

As well as our own society, also taking part will be members of the Burry Port Local History Society, the Llanelli Search & Recovery Club, and the newly-formed Gwendraeth Valleys Historical Society.

Ray Bowen is well known to many members of the SWWIAS from previous occasions, and so there is no need to emphasise how knowledgeable and entertaining a leader he will prove to be. His particular interest is in the railway system of the Gwendraeth valley, the Burry Port & Gwendraeth Valley Railway, about which he published an excellent article in the Carmarthenshire Antiquary in 1976.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

A brief reminder to those of you who have not yet got around to paying your annual subscription for 1978. If a cross appears in the margin beside this paragraph, that indicates that, according to our records, you are in arrears. Please remit to the Hon. Treasurer, Paul Reynolds, as soon as possible. If we do not hear from you we shall, regretfully, have to take that as the equivalent of resignation. The rates are still £1-50 (standard rate) or 75p (OAPs and full-time students).

CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations to Gareth Evans, one of our members, who has just been awarded the degree of Ph.D. for his thesis 'The growth and development of organised religion in the Swansea Valley, 1830-1890'. A copy should soon be available in the library of the University College of Swansea.

QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

Earlier this year you may recall that we sent out a questionnaire inviting your views on the activities of the Society. The overall impression to emerge from an examination of those forms that have been returned is one of general agreement with the way in which things are being organised. However, it should be borne in mind that only 33 questionnaires were completed out of the 90 which were sent out, and a professional statistician would probably regard this return rate as too low for any conclusions based on it to be reliable. Nevertheless a good many interesting ideas have surfaced and the Committee will try to put some of them into effect over the next year or two.

It is hoped that the following analysis of the returned forms will be of interest to readers and that the "silent" members will find that in general they assent to the results.

1. Evening lecture meetings

Nearly all respondents found our programme of monthly meetings during the winter to be adequate (30/33), and nearly as many (29/33) were happy with the Royal Institution as a venue. There was much less unanimity over the best time for meetings to commence: 16 were happy with 7 p.m., 14 would prefer 7.30, and one chose 8 p.m. Among reasons given for non-attendance at meetings, the most frequent was other commitments (14/33). Only three replied that meetings were not of sufficient interest. In this connection it would have been useful to have known the reasons for non-attendance from those who did not fill in their forms. The only suggestion put forward for an alternative to lectures was the showing of films on IA activities overseas.

2. Field days and outings

Twenty respondents found that our summer programme of outings was sufficient: nine did not answer this question, while two voted "not enough" and a further two "too many". Most preferred 'bus transport (18/33) to private car (5/33), but three replied that this was a matter which depended on the distance and the nature of each expedition. Again, the most commonly given reason for non-participation was other commitments (4/33). Interestingly, one reply claimed that the excursions were not sufficiently active, that there was too much sitting and looking.

A great many suggestions were put forward for sites for future visits. The Committee will clearly have a good store of ideas to draw on when arranging future events.

There also appeared to be a measure of support for shorter afternoon outings during the winter (19/33), and this is perhaps something that we should try to arrange during next season.

3. Practical archaeology

Generally it would appear that the principal reason for not taking part in the excavation of Scott's Pit was personal (health, family commitments, etc.) (21/33). There seems to be quite a degree of support for further practical programmes such as other excavations (9/33), the compilation of guides (12/33) and filling in CBA record cards (12/33).

4. Newsletter

Most members are satisfied with the present frequency of publication (20/33), although nine replies found it not frequent enough. The material that commanded most interest was historical notes and articles (32/33), followed by literature reviews (18/33) and extracts from old publications (16/33).

5. General evaluation of the Society's activities

A points system was established in order to quantify the relative popularity of our different activities on the basis of 4 points for a first choice, 3 for a second, 2 for a third and one for a fourth. This resulted in the following scores:

Lecture meetings	82
Visits and excursions	71
Newsletter	67
Practical archaeology	35

HAFOD VIADUCT

Earlier this year the demolition took place of Hafod Viaduct which used to carry the low-level line from Swansea (High Street) to Morryston. The contract for this land clearance scheme and a similar one involving the removal of the railway arches beside Oystermouth Road was carried out by Morris Bros. (Civil Engineering) Ltd. and financed by the Welsh Development Agency to the extent of £28,000.

Morryston was surprisingly late to receive the benefits of railway communication. The original line of the Swansea Vale Railway passed through Llansamlet on the other side of the river, missing Morryston altogether, and it was not until 1871 that the first part of the loop line was opened from Upper Bank to Morryston. In 1875 it was extended through Clydach to rejoin the S.V.R. at Glais, by this time under the control of the Midland Railway. The rival route from Swansea to Morryston, the Great Western's low-level line, did not reach Morryston until ten years after the S.V.R. and this may be due in part to the fact that the G.W.R. had leased the Swansea Canal in 1872 and was therefore naturally unwilling to invest in a railway which would have had the effect of draining traffic off the canal. The G.W.R. preferred to work the canal as vigorously as possible in opposition to the M.R. However, under the terms of the lease of the Swansea Canal to the G.W.R. the latter was obliged to build a railway to Morryston, and the same Act of Parliament which confirmed the lease also empowered the construction of this railway. No action was taken by the G.W.R. and a further Act was needed in 1878 to prolong the powers. After that work soon started in earnest. The only engineering feature of any significance was the Hafod viaduct and the rest of the line was laid close to the canal where only a minimum of earthworks was needed. By August 1879 the line was well in hand and the masonry of the viaduct had nearly been completed. The deck was added the following year, and the new railway was finally opened with the minimum of ceremony on 9 May 1881.

The Morryston branch left the G.W.R. Swansea branch at Hafod Junction, 770 yards south of Landore station and 1560 yards north of High Street station. At the junction the Swansea branch crossed Neath Road on a high bridge and the Morryston line therefore had to start at this level straight onto the Hafod viaduct. The viaduct (SS 660 951) was built of masonry with 26 brick arches of descending size by which the railway was carried down beside Neath Road to pass under Landore viaduct at street level. The second arch from the south was on the skew to give access to the Morfa copperworks. Towards the centre there was a section of wrought-iron girder bridge supported by two pairs of columns of the same material where the viaduct crossed the Swansea Canal. On this section an oval plaque recorded the manufacturer's name: "E. Finch & Co Ltd., Engineers, Ironfounders. Chepstow. 1880". The walls were topped for much of their length with Joseph Hamblet's "Patent" vitreous bricks made in West Bromwich. It is reported that a plaque of uncertain origin and purpose was once to be seen on the eastern face of the second pier north of the girder section, bearing the date "1910".

P.R.R.

CASARA LEAD MINE

On 29th April a group of Society members under the guidance of Mr Alun Richards and Mr Mike Evans visited the site of the Casara lead mine near Llangadog (map reference 754 275). Lead had been mined in this area at least as early as the seventeenth century, but the present remains date from after 1851 when Henry Gibson started the Great Welsh Silver-Lead Mine. The remains consist of a ruinous Cornish engine house, a water-wheel pit and dressing floors. Mining seems to have ceased here in 1865. For further information, see G.W.Hall, Metal mines of southern Wales (Westbury-on-Severn, 1971), pp. 32-35.

To round off the afternoon the party visited Carn Goch, the largest prehistoric hill-fort in Wales (map reference 690 242). For further information on this site, see A.H.A.Hogg, 'Carn Goch, Carmarthenshire', Archaeologia Cambrensis, 1974, pp.43-53.

F.G.C.

Crynant

The National Museum of Wales, the N.C.B. and West Glamorgan County Council are co-operating in a scheme to establish a permanent exhibition of local industrial history and coal mining at Blaenant Colliery in the Dulais Valley. The centre-piece is to be the engine-house which contains one of the last steam winding engines in Wales. The intention is to restore the engine to working order and to open the building to the public. The N.C.B. has agreed to the preservation of the now redundant winding house and headgear and is planning to improve the surrounding area. West Glamorgan C.C. is to spend £5000 on the rehabilitation of the engine itself and the engine-house and will employ 21 workers under the Job Creation Scheme. It is hoped that the site will be open to the public in April 1979.

Landore Viaduct

British Rail started reconstruction work on the viaduct on 12 June. The work is likely to last until next May and, when complete, will allow trains to cross the viaduct at speeds of up to 40 m.p.h. instead of 20 m.p.h. which is the present limit. It will also mean that heavier goods trains, now routed by the Swansea District Line, will be able to cross the viaduct if required. The job consists of replacing the 21 existing approach spans, two on the Neath side of the river and 19 on the Swansea side. The present spans, dating from the 1880s, are of wrought iron plate girders with timber decking beneath the tracks and vary in length from 30 ft. to 74 ft. They were supplied by Finch of Chepstow. The iron weighs 640 tons and the timber 500 tons. The new spans will be of steel and will weigh over 1500 tons. The westbound track will be renewed first, with all trains working single line on the eastbound track. This will last until Christmas when the process will be reversed for the reconstruction of the eastbound line. As the girders of each westbound span are removed by a crane working at ground level, temporary supports will be needed to strengthen the eastbound track. These will be inserted at weekends when the railway will be completely closed to traffic. The project will cost over £1,500,000 and is the biggest bridge project on the Western Region for many years. It has nothing to do with the fire in the approach embankment which is still burning, although under control.

Ynisedwyn

Brecknock Borough Council have more or less completed a derelict land clearance scheme on the site of the ironworks. Unfortunately the furnace bank was too decayed to be worth preserving, but the chimney stack and cathedral-like arches of 1872 which were never completed have been kept as a central feature on the site. When you think about it, it's rather ironic that the ironworks should be immortalised by a still-born scheme dating from the years of decline and collapse.

Mumbles Railway

One of the last surviving reminders of the Mumbles Railway was lost recently when the old train shed on Oystermouth Road was demolished.

Kidwelly Tinplate Works

Although this site has been cleared considerably in recent years, it appears that there is still the possibility that an industrial museum can be established here. Llanelli Borough Council are trying to raise the necessary £40,000 and hopes are pinned chiefly on a grant from the E.E.C. If the money is forthcoming work on the project could start this year: otherwise it will have to be scrapped, at least as a local authority project. The impetus behind the scheme has come from Mr W.H. Morris and the Carmarthenshire Antiquarian Society who pointed out about ten years ago that Kidwelly was the last of the old pack-mills to survive in something like its original form, and would therefore lend itself well to the purposes of a museum. In 1974 concrete proposals were made and a detailed specification drawn up, but nothing came of the plan. Even if Llanelli B.C. drop the project now, the Carmarthenshire Antiquaries may still attempt to find alternative sources of support for it.

Sad end to a hopeful scheme in Pembrokeshire

It was in 1974 that "Margaret", the tank engine formerly in service at Kidwelly tinplate works was acquired by the then Pembrokeshire County Museum for exhibition at Scolton Park Country Museum near Haverfordwest (SWWIAS Newsletter 8, 1974, p.5). When an ex-G.W.R. coach of approximately the same age was found recently in use as a chalet at Broadhaven hopes were entertained of restoring the coach to its original condition and coupling it up to "Margaret". However, within a few days of the museum acquiring the rights to the coach vandals moved in and deliberately set fire to it. It was completely destroyed, thus putting paid to an exciting and imaginative restoration scheme.

"Margaret" was built in 1878, and the coach concerned probably belonged to the period 1870-1880. It was a four-wheeled, four-compartment ex-G.W.R. coach. In about 1923 it was converted into a plate-layer's cabin and soon afterwards was sold for use as a chalet. It was occupied at first by holiday-makers, and in its latter years by squatters.

VIVIAN'S TRAMWAY

Guide books have changed. In the library of the Royal Institution is a battered copy of an 1870 Guide to Swansea and Gower. It opens with a hair-raising description of the decrepitude of Landore viaduct (still wooden) over which the visitor has just arrived, and while waiting at Landore station for his connection into Swansea, he is treated to a thorough survey of the nearby works. One interesting passage runs thus:-

"The tramway, which, at a considerable elevation above the road and railway, crosses at this place, and the rattle of whose chain over iron rollers when it is at work must be disagreeable to human tympanums, is used to haul up slag from the (Vivian's) Copper and Zinc Works, and deposit it on that dark heap to the right, which is beginning to assume the appearance of a volcano, to whose scowling brow scoriae from the crater had adhered."

The Hafod tip has been levelled to build Pentre Hafod School, but the supporting pillars for this overhead tramway still exist. One can be seen on the eastern side of Neath Road, just short of the railway bridge and the Landore Diesel Depot. A second, shorter support is on the wall between the works and the canal.

G. F. Gabb

SWANSEA VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Following the success of an exhibition held at Pontardawe Cross last May, a new society has been formed in this district to study its history. The Hon. Secretary is Mr S.M. Williams, 11 Thomas Street, Pontardawe, Swansea, and I'm sure he would be very pleased to forward details of his society on receipt of an s.a.e.

LLAFUR

Llafur is a society for the study of Welsh labour history. It was formed in 1970 and now has a membership of over 700 trade-unionists, academics, students and institutions. It holds regular meetings, including weekend and day schools, study tours and lectures. Its annual journal, also entitled Llafur, appears every May, vol. II, no. 3 having just been published. The annual subscription is £1-50, with a reduced rate of 75p for students, OAPs and the unemployed. Further information may be had from Dr Hywel Francis, Llafur Secretary, South Wales Miners' Library, 50 Sketty Road, Swansea.

Also available from the South Wales Miners' Library are several publications on local history and labour relations, including reproductions of postcards and a reprint of the Merthyr Trades Council General Strike souvenir of 1926. A list is available, also from Hywel Francis.

RECENT LITERATURE

MERTHYR TYDFIL HISTORICAL SOCIETY. Merthyr Historian, volume 2.

The first volume of Merthyr Historian appeared in 1976 and following its favourable reception volume 2 has now been published. Like its predecessor, it consists of the texts of lectures given to the society and covers the following topics: industrial history, living conditions, aspects of social history, and sources for the history of Merthyr. As is to be expected, virtually every article has a bearing on the town's industrial history and remains, but two articles which I found to be of particular interest were Diane Green's 'Housing in Merthyr Tydfil' and Alun Morgan's 'Earning a living: industrial development 1918-1939' which vividly describes the effects of the great depression on Merthyr. There was 80% unemployment in Dowlais by 1935, and in 1939 it was recommended that the town be completely abandoned and the entire population moved to the coast or the Usk Valley. Also of IA interest is Leo Davies' 'The old iron bridge, Merthyr'. This is a better book than volume 1, but even so, it would have been further improved by more vigorous editing. An annoying feature, too, is the binding which has been done in such a way that the book will not lie flat for attentive reading.

(From: Dr J. Gross, Yr Hafod, Heol y Mynydd, Cefn Coed, Merthyr Tydfil, Mid Glam.
Price: £2-40 plus postage, 25p.)

Huw WILLIAMS. A history of the church in Dowlais.

A few years ago members of our Society included a visit to Saint John's church in a tour of Merthyr. Huw Williams' booklet forms a guide to and history of this church which was founded by Sir John Guest for his workers. Guest was a good churchman, founded several churches in the parish, and at one time was able to boast that he alone of the ironmasters stopped all but essential work in his furnaces on a Sunday.

(From: The Revd E. B. Thomas, The Rectory, Gwernllwyn Road, Dowlais, Merthyr Tydfil.
Price: 35p plus postage, 10p.)

Chris EVANS. Maencwmdulais: a short history of the social and industrial development of Onllwyn and Banwen-Pyrddin.

Following his earlier history of Seven Sisters, the author has turned his attention to the head of the Dulais Valley. Hardly surprisingly, his earlier chapters on the pre-industrial period are brief, and he really comes into his own in the later 19th and 20th centuries for which he can draw on living memory. His particular interest is in the coal industry and its political aspects. Unhappily, a few errors appear to have crept in, e.g. "Christy" for "Christie" and "Sunnybridge" for "Sennybridge" (p.53); and on p.27 there is a paragraph describing Sir Herbert Mackworth building a tramroad to the Neath Canal from Banwen Pyrddin in the 1740s and putting wind-powered waggons on it. Nevertheless, the author has accumulated a wealth of information, and at the price of £1-00 for a hard-backed book of over 150 pages his work represents exceptionally good value.

(From: South Wales Miners' Library, 50 Sketty Road, Swansea.
Price : £1-00 plus postage, 40p.)

(N.B. Chris Evans' History of Seven Sisters is also still available from the above address at the same price.)

P.R.REYNOLDS. 'Chauncy Townsend's waggonway', Morgannwg, XXI, 1977, pp. 42-68.

Townsend was a London capitalist and founder of a dynasty of coal-owners who worked the coal in the parish of Llansamlet. In 1750 he laid down a waggonway which was to function as the prime artery of the undertaking until its replacement by Smith's Canal in about 1785. In this article Townsend's operations are described; the history of the waggonway and its traffic is investigated; and by means of 18th century maps and fieldwork its course is established.