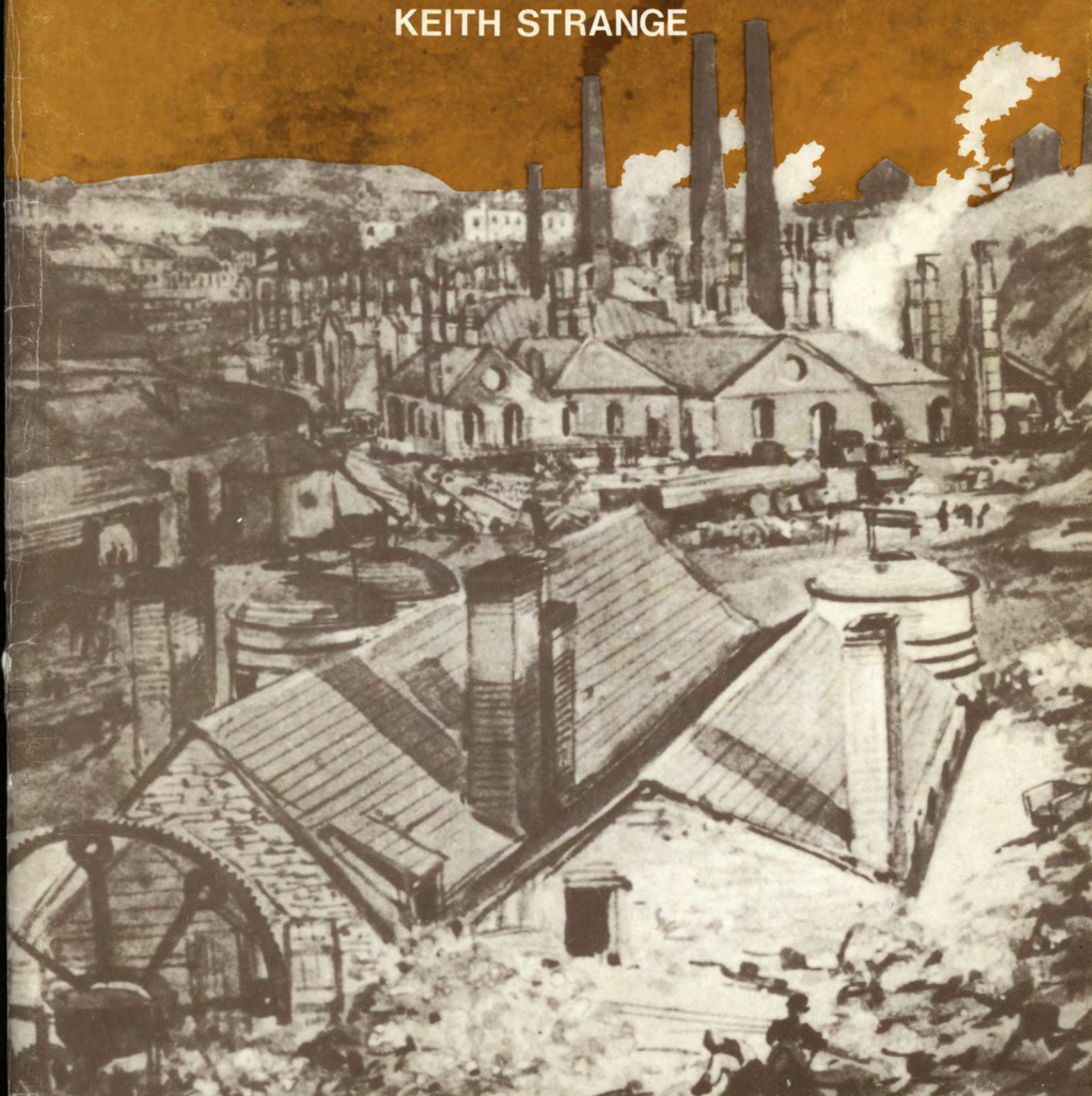


MERTHYR
TYDFIL
IN THE 1840'S

KEITH STRANGE



MID GLAMORGAN COUNTY COUNCIL
EDUCATION DEPARTMENT



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

COVER: DOWLAIS IRONWORKS IN 1840
from a watercolour by G.C. Childs,
by permission of the Welsh Industrial and Maritime Museum.

This booklet has resulted from a County In-Service lecture on 'Merthyr in the Nineteenth Century' given by Dr. Keith Strange. The following teachers were members of the History Research Group which was subsequently formed to produce 'Merthyr Tydfil in the 1840's'.

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Grateful thanks are given to the Warden, Merthyr Teachers' Centre for the use of facilities; Mrs Joan Hammett and Mrs Pat Clayton for typing services, and to Mr William Hopkins and staff of the Print Unit for design work.

Printed by: Mid Glamorgan County Supplies Department, Bridgend.

Cover designed by: W. Mostyn Davies, Dip.Ad., National Language Unit of Wales (W.J.E.C.)

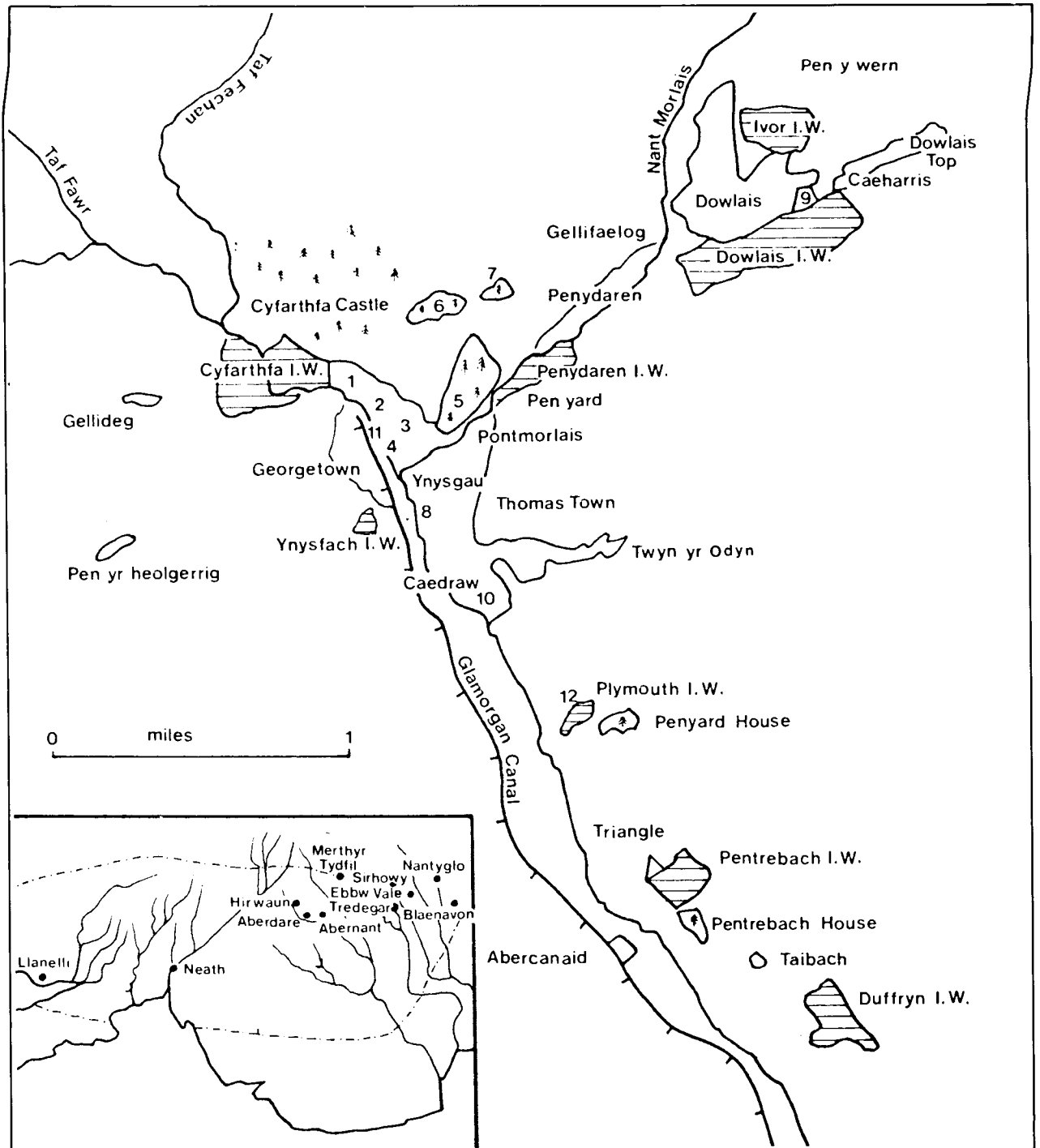
With appreciation
for your friendship
since 1981
-Eva M. Smith

MERTHYR TYDFIL IN THE 1840's

by
KEITH STRANGE
(History Research Group)

MID GLAMORGAN COUNTY COUNCIL
EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

MERTHYR TYDFIL IN 1851



KEY:

- | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| 1 Caepantwyll | 5 Penydaren House | 9 Dowlais House |
| 2 Tydfil's Well | 6 Gwaelodygarth House | 10 Plymouth Street |
| 3 Morgan Town | 7 Gwaenfarren House | 11 Pontstorehouse |
| 4 China | 8 Ironbridge | 12 Plymouth Lodge |

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CHAPTER 1

THE SOUTH WALES IRON INDUSTRY



Dowlais Ironworks 1840

Before the middle of the eighteenth century there was little sign that South Wales was to become one of the major iron making areas of Britain, and Merthyr — the town which was to become the largest iron producing centre in the world — had no better use for its iron-ore than using it to repair its roads.

This does not mean that there were no furnaces in South Wales, for in 1720 there were 16 of them spread throughout the area, all using charcoal as their basic fuel. However, the region was considered far too remote to justify increased investment and expansion.



THE SEVEN YEARS WAR (1756 - 63)

This proved to be the turning point. The war interrupted supplies of iron from abroad at a time when the same conflict saw the demand for iron for munitions grow. Suddenly English industrialists began to look again at the possibilities South Wales had to offer.

NATURAL RESOURCES

1. COAL

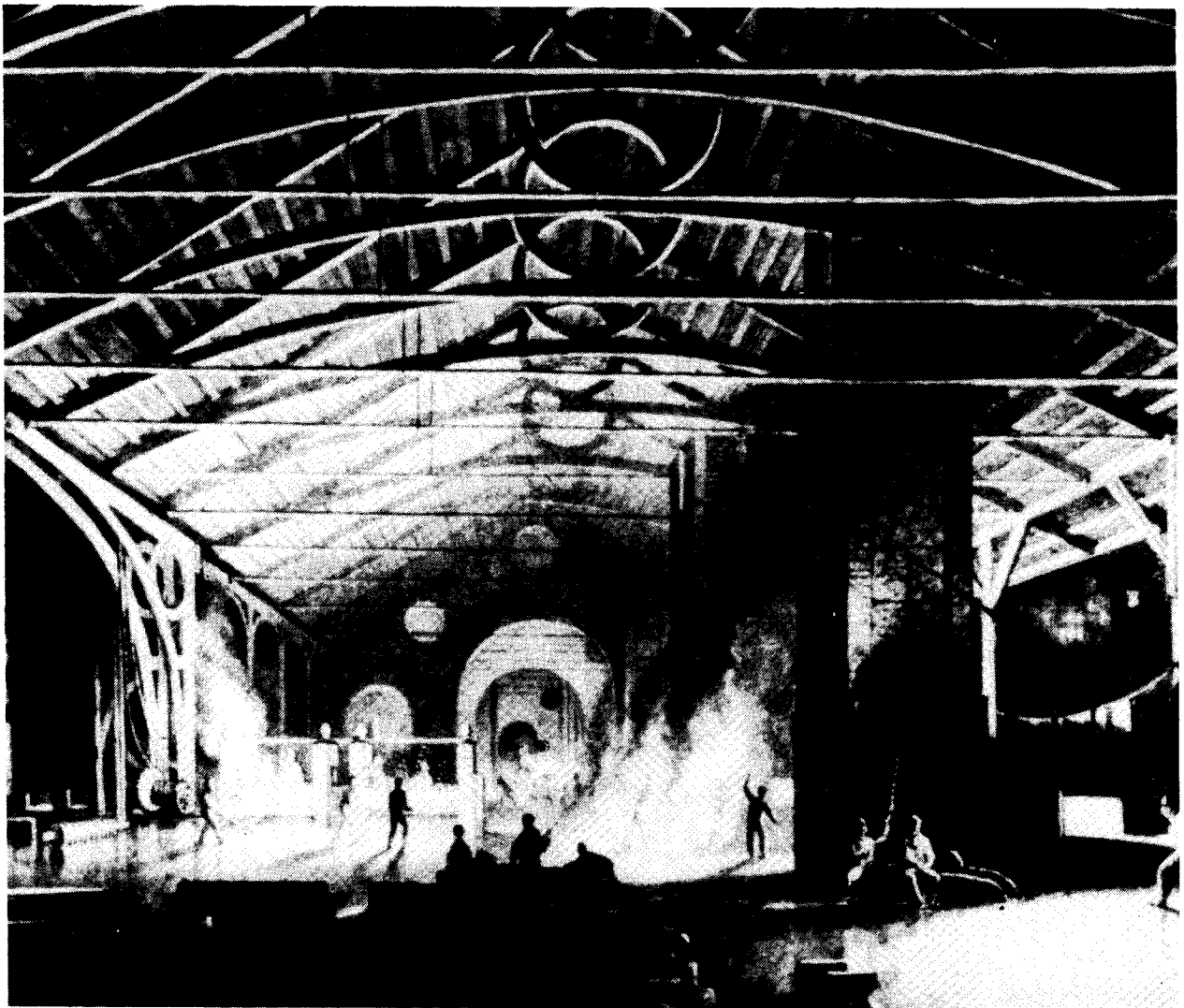
The South Wales coalfield is oval in shape, stretching from Monmouthshire in the east to Pembrokeshire in the west. The coal measures come nearest to the surface along the rim of the oval, and those of the northern rim proved easier to work.

2. IRON ORE AND LIMESTONE

As well as coal strata, the coalfield contains deposits of iron and limestone. The iron ore, or 'mine' as it was called, was most abundant along the northern rim. The limestone was needed to remove impurities.

3. WATER

The many streams and rivers of South Wales, fed by a rainfall which can exceed 100 inches a year in some parts, provided an almost constant source of power to drive water wheels for industrial purposes.



Merthyr rolling mills at night

In 1757, John Mayberry of Worcestershire rented land at Hirwaun and built a blast-furnace there. Two years later, a partnership of 9 industrialists, including Isaac Wilkinson opened the Dowlais works near Merthyr and this was followed soon afterwards by the Cyfarthfa, Plymouth and Penydarren works in Merthyr itself.

Just as the Seven Years War proved a turning point, so the industry was given a further boost by the increased demand brought by the American War of Independence. Demand and raw materials were not enough to ensure success, however, and the expansion of the industry was made possible only with the expertise of the Midland Iron-Masters and the finance of wealthy merchants based in London and Bristol.

New inventions and processes also aided expansion. Not only did Darby's discovery and development of coke enable the Welsh ironworks to prosper, but in the 1780's Watt's improved steam engine provided a new and more reliable power source and simultaneously boosted the demand for iron.

Of much greater significance was the invention of puddling. This enabled pig iron to be converted into wrought iron without hours of hammering. The process relied on coal and so the Welsh ironworks were well suited to exploit this development. Although the invention of puddling is usually credited to Henry Cort in 1784, in fact it was independently discovered by Peter Onions, a foreman at Cyfarthfa, and it was so widely adopted in South Wales that it became known throughout Britain as the 'Welsh method'.

Cardiff, Feb. 13. The canal in this neighbourhood is completed; and last Friday a fleet of canal boats, from Merthyr-Tydfil, laden with produce of the iron-works there, arrived at this place, to the great exultation, as you may imagine, of the town. With the iron treasures of the hills, we hope to grow daily more truly rich than the Spaniards are with their mines in Mexico and Peru; as ours occasion industry and population, whilst theirs purchase slothful dependence, and are destructive of both. The rude tracks, through which the canal in some places passes, are constantly improving, from the happy and healthful toil of the husbandman and in a few years will be forgotten in a garden of verdure and fertility. The canal from Merthyr to Cardiff is 25 miles in extent. It passes along the sides of stupendous mountains. Nothing can be more extraordinary than, from a boat navigating this canal, to look down on the river Taff, darting among the rocks 100 yards below. The fall from Merthyr to Cardiff is little less than 600 feet. The first barge that arrived at Cardiff was finely decorated with colours and was navigated from Melingriffidd works by Mr Bird, sen. Waterbailiff of the port.

Despite these developments, the very poor roads within South Wales made further expansion unlikely as neither pack-horses nor improved turnpike roads could solve the transport problems posed by increased demand. Thus, in the 1790's, led by the owner of the Cyfarthfa ironworks, the industrialists turned to canals. In 1790 an Act of Parliament gave permission for the Glamorganshire canal to be built between Merthyr and Cardiff and other schemes soon followed. Between 1794 and 1799 all four of South Wales' great canals were opened —

The Glamorganishire Canal
(Cardiff to Merthyr)

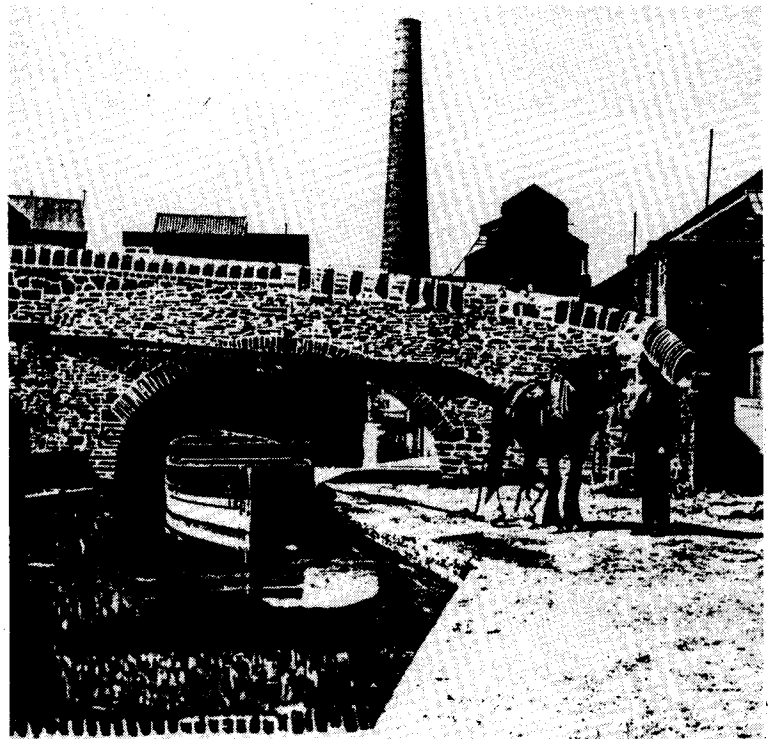
The Monmouthshire Canal
(Newport to Abergavenny)

The Swansea Canal
(Swansea to Abercrave)

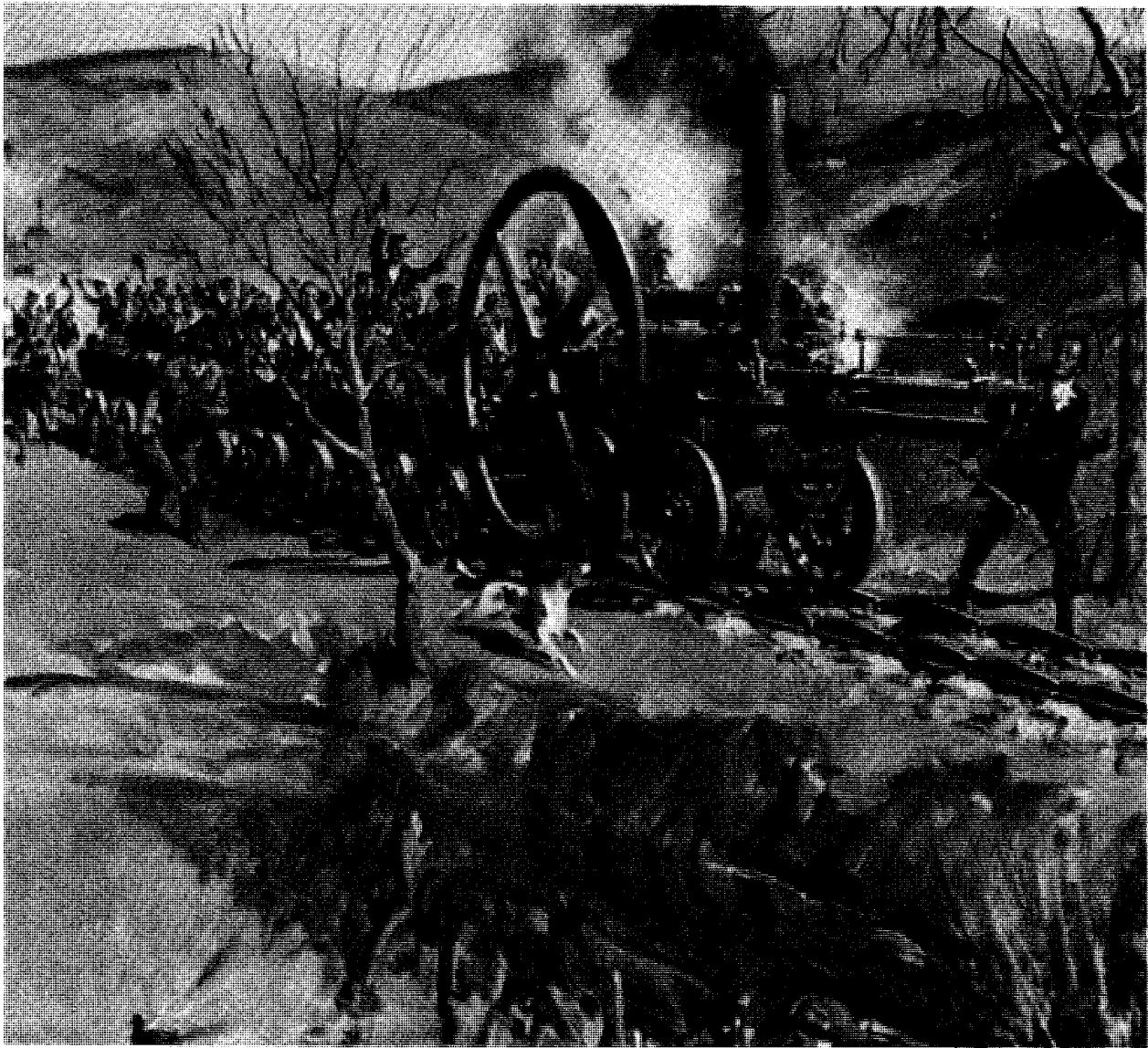
The Neath Canal
(Neath to Hirwaun)

The 77 miles of canal with 180 locks and rising at one point to over 500 feet above sea level represented a major engineering achievement, and, at a cost of £420,000, a very considerable gamble. Events were to prove this money well spent however.

Linked by an elaborate tramroad system with the ironworks, the canals gave the iron masters direct access to the ports of South Wales and so enabled them to expand their concerns to meet the growing wartime demand for iron. At the time of Waterloo there was a line of 8 large ironworks and a number of smaller ones stretching from Hirwaun to Blaenavon across the Heads of the Valleys, and between them they were producing around one-third of the total British output of iron.



The Glamorganshire Canal



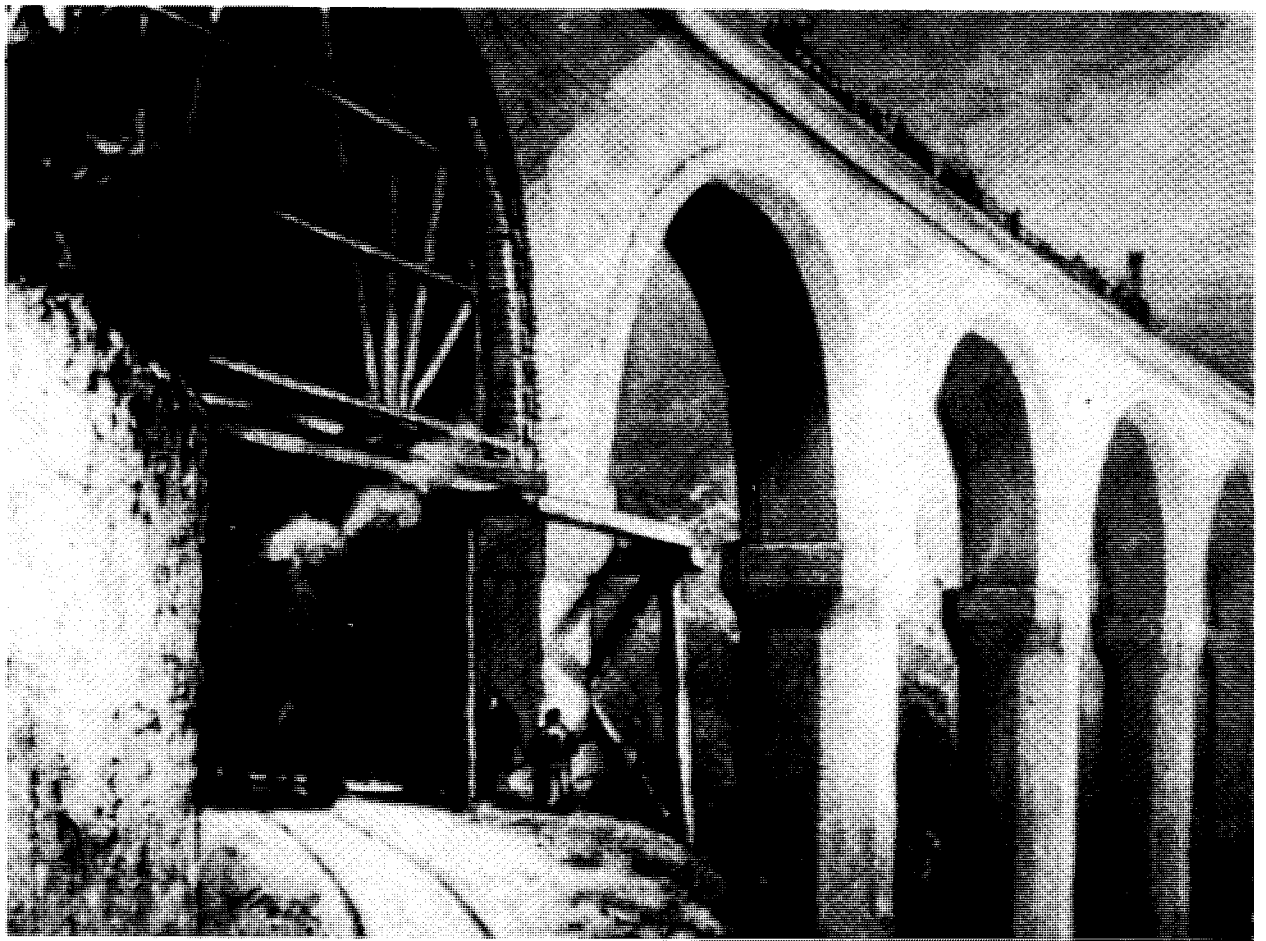
Trevithick's Tramroad Locomotive

Following 1815 and a severe post-war slump, the ironworks turned to the production of iron for a rapidly multiplying peacetime market. Ballast iron for shipping, plating for high pressure boilers, cables and pipes were all made to satisfy the demand from home and abroad. At Merthyr, for example, the Cyfarthfa Works made the iron used to build London Bridge, the Penydarren Works made the cables for the Menai Straits Bridge, and the Plymouth Works made the cables for the 'Great Eastern' steamship.

By far the greatest boost was provided by the development of railways. The first Welsh rail was rolled at the Penydarren Works for Stephenson's Liverpool to Manchester line, and before long there was scarcely an English railway which did not obtain at least some of its iron from South Wales.

Once the home market had stabilized after the initial period of 'railway mania', South Wales began to meet the demands posed by the North American, Austro-Hungarian and Russian markets. In 1844, for example, the Dowlais Works produced 50,000 tons of rails as a result of a single order from Russia.

As a result of this demand the period between Waterloo and the Great Exhibition witnessed the climax of the South Wales Iron Industry. The Dowlais Works quadrupled its production and became the largest ironworks in the world, Cyfarthfa increased production by 2 1/2 times, and both Plymouth and Penydarren more than doubled theirs.




Early scene, Taff Vale Railway

Before Merthyr could fully benefit from the growing 'railway mania' still better transport links were necessary. For a variety of reasons the canals of South Wales had never enjoyed complete success — the mountains prevented any real network of waterways from developing, maintenance costs were high, drought and frost played havoc with delivery dates, whilst the booming demand for iron and coal led to severe congestion. Although Trevithick's steam locomotive — the first in the world — had made its historic run from Penydarren to Quakers Yard as early as 1804, it was not until 1841 that Brunel's Taff Vale Railway connected Merthyr with Cardiff and the newly opened Bute dock.

Thus, at a time when Merthyr was producing the iron for the railways of the world, so it was that the railways ensured her continued expansion by providing cheap and reliable access to the sea.

This expansion was by no means restricted to Merthyr. New ironworks had opened to the east at Tredegar, Ebbw Vale and Nantyglo, and the industry also spread to the west of the coalfield when, in 1838, an adaptation of the Hot Blast process at the Ynyscedwyn Works at the top of the Swansea Valley enabled anthracite to be used in blast furnaces. Consequently other ironworks were established at this end of the coalfield and the industrialization of West Wales, and particularly of the Amman and Gwendraeth valleys, ensued.



TAFF VALE RAILWAY.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the TAFF VALE RAILWAY is now open from Cardiff to MERTHYR, for the conveyance of Passengers and Goods. The time of departure and arrival of the Trains will be as follows until further notice:—

H.	M.	U.P.—From Cardiff.	H.	M.
8	morning,	arrives at Merthyr.....	9	25
<i>Mixed Train.</i>				
11	morning,	arrives at Merthyr.....	12	45
3	afternoon,	arrives at Merthyr.....	4	25
H.	M.	Down.—From Merthyr.	H.	M.
8	20	morning, arrives at Cardiff.....	9	45
<i>Mixed Train.</i>				
11	35	morning arrives at Cardiff.....	1	20
3	20	afternoon arrives at Cardiff.....	4	45

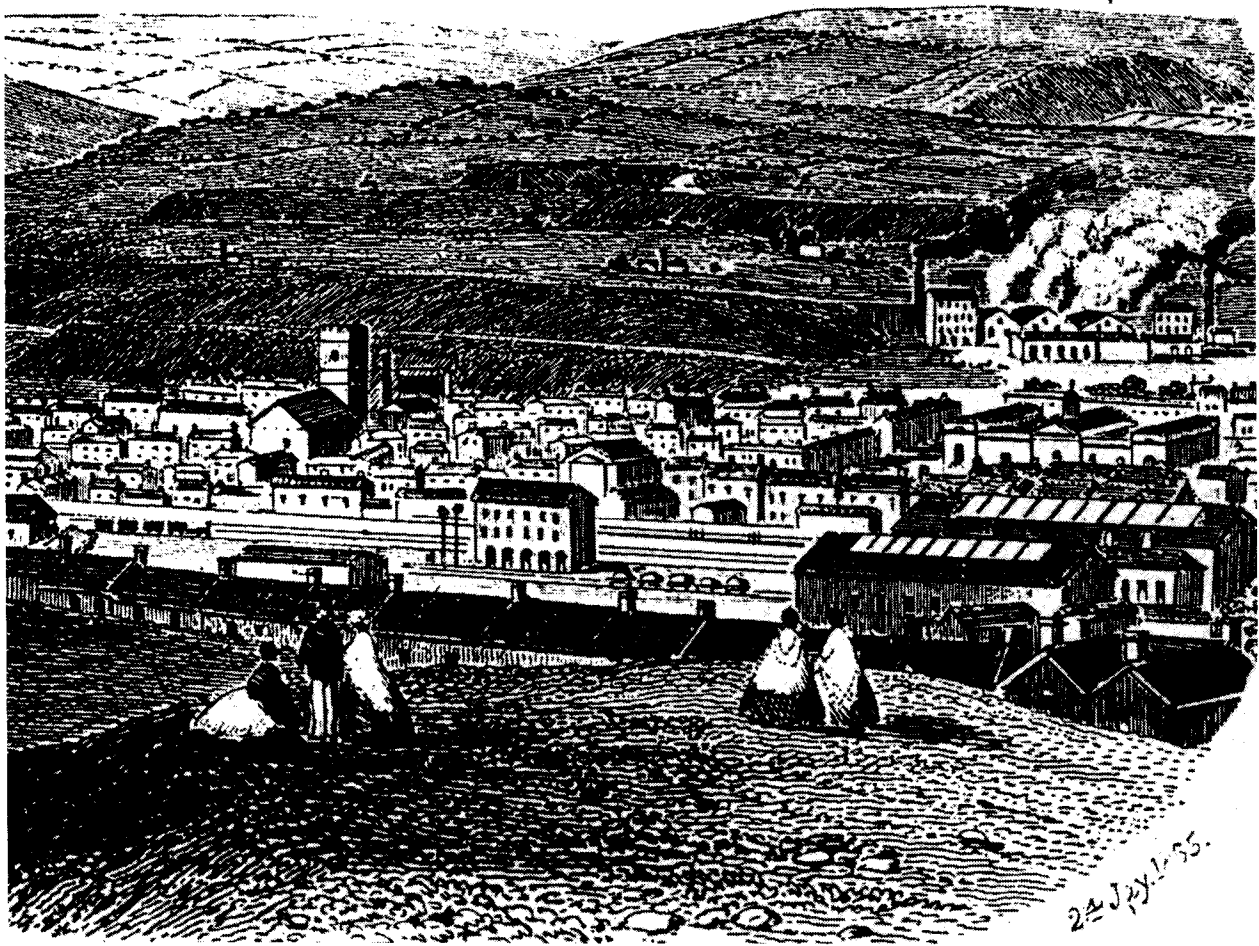
On Saturdays an additional Train leaves Cardiff at 3H 30a afternoon, and Merthyr 6 afternoon.

The Mixed Train for Goods and second and third class Passengers at 11 o'clock from Cardiff, and 25 minutes past 11 o'clock from Merthyr, does not run on Sundays.

Goods may be sent from the several Stations by the Mixed Train, provided they are delivered two hours previous to the departure of the Train.

PARCELS

May be Booked at the Railway Stations, the charge for which will be—1s for Parcels not exceeding 25 pounds weight; 1s 6d not exceeding 56 pounds weight, and so on, 6d for every additional quarter of a cwt., including all expense for Carriage, Portage, and Delivery.



Merthyr Tydfil

URBANIZATION

Within a century South Wales had risen from an agricultural backwater to become one of Britain's leading industrial centres. In human terms this great surge of industrialization brought massive immigration and urbanization in its wake. The great majority of these migrants came from rural areas of Glamorgan, then west, mid and north Wales, but there was also a limited movement of skilled ironworkers from England as well as of unskilled labour from the Welsh border counties, the West Country, and Ireland.

Of the towns, Merthyr showed the most spectacular growth. Still a small and insignificant hamlet in 1750, it had become a boom-town of 7,705 in 1801 and by far the largest town in Wales by 1851.

MERTHYR'S POPULATION		GLAMORGAN'S POPULATION	
1801	7,705	1801	71,525
1811	11,101	1851	231,849
1821	17,404		
1831	22,083	MONMOUTHSHIRE'S POPULATION	
1841	34,977	1801	45,582
1851	46,382	1851	157,418

EXERCISES

1. It is 1750, you have been sent to South Wales by an English ironmaster to discover if the area is suitable for investment. Write a letter to him giving your report.
2. What role did War play in the development of the South Wales Iron Industry?
3. Why did the iron industry grow on the northern rim of the South Wales coalfield?
4. How were the immense transport difficulties overcome in South Wales?
5. What enabled the ironworks to continue to expand after the defeat of Napoleon?
6. Explain why Merthyr grew from a small village into the largest town in Wales by the mid nineteenth century.

CHAPTER 2

EMPLOYMENT



Any attempt to discover just how many children were employed in the Ironworks and pits of Merthyr during this period is hampered by a lack of statistical evidence. However, in 1842 Parliamentary Commissioners inquiring into the employment of young children gave the statistics for the Plymouth Works.

PLYMOUTH WORKS 1842		
Total Workforce		2,225
Number of workers under 18 years:		
Aged between 13 - 18 years	470	
Aged under 13 years	265	
Total Aged Under 18 years		735

AGE	MALES	FEMALES
13 - 18 years	350	140
Under 13 years	190	75

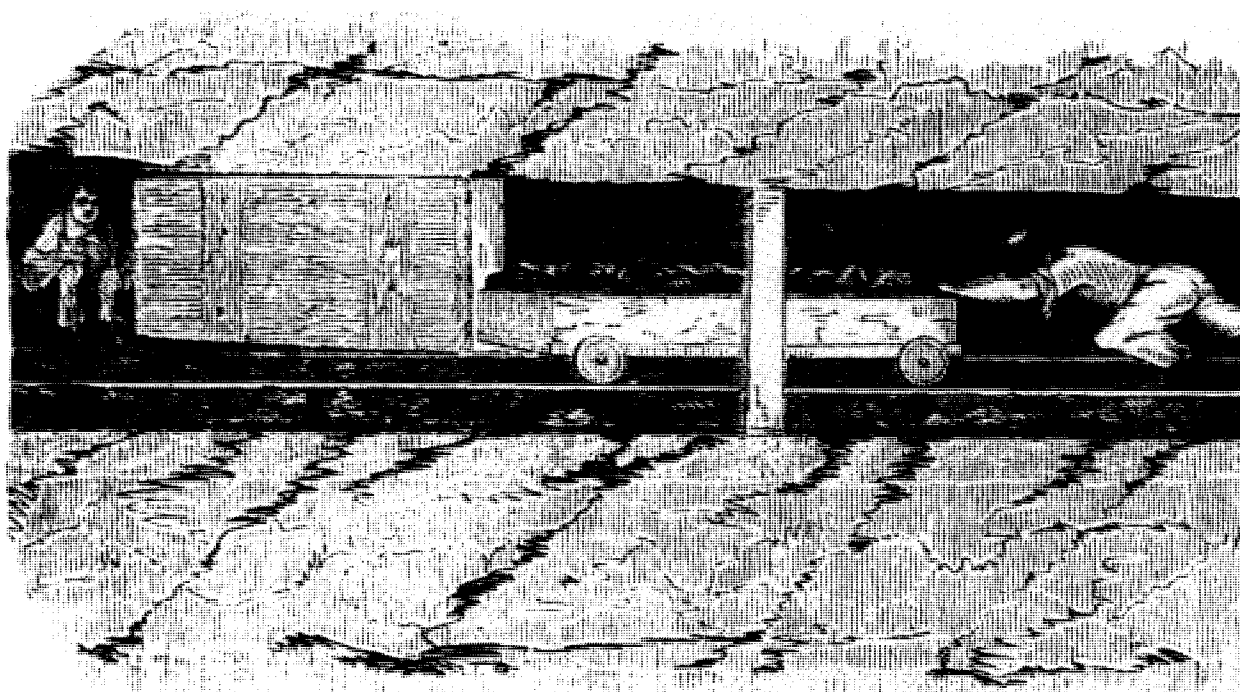
IRONWORKS		MINES	
(workforce of 1,550)		(workforce of 675)	
AGE	NUMBER	AGE	NUMBER
13 - 18 years	300	13 - 18 years	170
Under 13 years	150	Under 13 years	115

JOB DESCRIPTIONS

UNDERGROUND

"In the coalfield of South Wales... more cases are recorded of the employment of children in the pits at very early ages than in any other district."

(1842 Commission)



'STALL BOYS'

"I have known instances of a Father carrying his child of 4 years old on his back to work, and keeping him with him in the stall all day for the purpose of obtaining an additional tram allowed him."

(Fredrick Evans, Manager, Dowlais Mines 1842)

'AIR DOOR KEEPERS'

Varied from 5 years old to 11. Their, "post is in the mine at the side of the air-door, and their business is to open it for the hauliers to pass, and then to close the door after them. In some pits the situation of these poor things is distressing. With his solitary candle, cramped with cold, wet, and not half fed, the poor child, deprived of light and air, passes his silent day."

(1842 Commission)

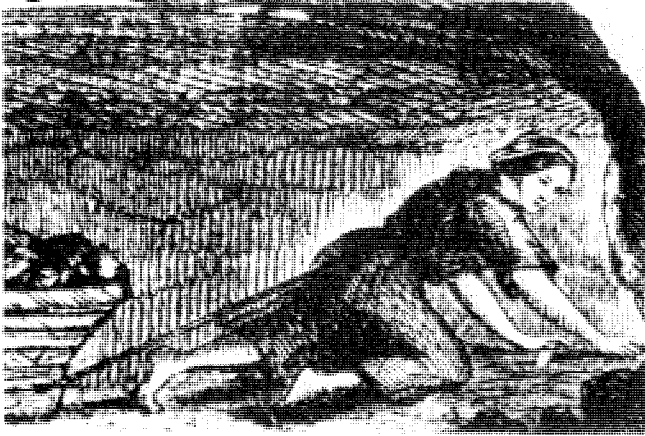
"Mary Davies, a very pretty little girl... [was] fast asleep under a piece of rock near the air door. Her lamp had gone out for want of oil, and, upon waking her, she said the rats or someone had run away with her bread and cheese, so she went to sleep."

(1842 Commission)

"Drawn boldly on the smooth shale, in chalk, I saw the outline of a prancing horse. The accuracy, fidelity and spirit of the drawing were such that I stopped to examine this really striking performance. I may state that the boys in the pits have in general a taste for drawing. The poor boy who has to attend all day one of the doors, takes in his pocket — for the purpose of whiling away the tedium, a farthing's worth of happiness in the form of a piece of chalk."

(Newspaper 1850)

'DRAMMER GIRLS'



Their job, "is the filling and drawing of the drams [trams], of coal or iron-stone; it requires great strength." One 13 year old girl stated, "the work is very hard, the mine is wet where we work, and the workings are only 30 to 33 inches high." Her 11 year old sister said, "When we draw the drams, which contain 4 to 5 hundredweight of coal from the [coal face] to the main road, I make 48 to 50 journeys."

(Newspaper 1850)

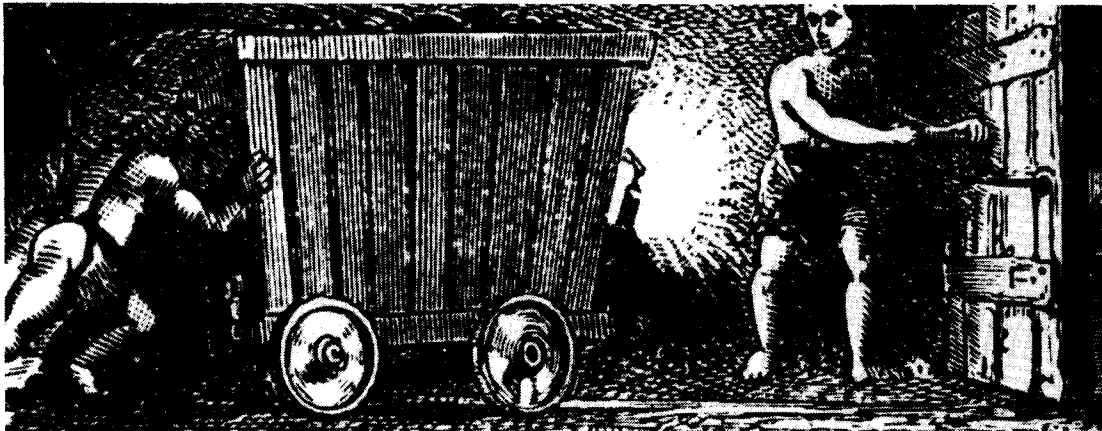
"They draw the trams by means of chains around their waists."

(1842 Commission)

'WIND WAY CUTTERS'

"The wind ways [i.e. ventilation shafts] are entirely cut by [boys]. They are 3 feet wide by 2 feet 6 inches high; within these narrow limits, without the means of working the coal (or iron-ore) in masses, these boys work, doubled up of necessity into the most painful and inconvenient postures."

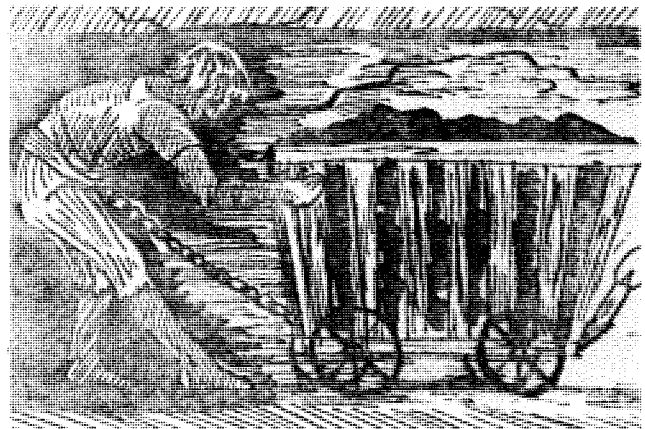
(Newspaper 1850)



'HAULIERS'

Their, "occupation requires great agility in the narrow and low roofed roads; sometimes he is required to stop his tram suddenly — in an instant he is between the rail and [the wall], and in almost total darkness slips a sprig between the spokes of his tram-wheel. It must be confessed, with all his activity he frequently gets crushed. The haulier is generally from 14 to 17 years of age, and his size is a matter of some importance, according to the present height and width of the main roads".

(Newspaper 1850)



IN AND AROUND THE IRONWORKS



Children were employed to help the unskilled labourers and also to assist the skilled iron makers in the furnaces, foundries and mills.

'BRICK GIRLS'

"A more humiliating and ungenial occupation is hardly to be found. At Dowlais I found the girls in a low shed having no windows or opening for the admission of light, except the doorway through which I entered. Underneath the floors are flues for the passage of heated air, to dry and prepare the bricks [used to build and repair the furnaces] for the kilns, which are built adjacent. The clay is ground in mills by steam power; and the [girls] then saturate it with cold water. They next temper it with their bare feet, moving rapidly about, with the clay and water reaching up to the calf of the leg. This operation completed, they grasp with both arms a lump of clay weighing about 35 lbs., and supporting it upon their bosoms, they carry this load to the moulding table, where other girls mould it into bricks."

(Newspaper 1850)

'PULLERS UP'

Puddlers employed a boy or girl, "who's business it is to open the furnace door which is raised by a lever and chain, when necessary for the puddler to put in his charge of metal. Boys and girls so employed are called **pull-up boys** or **pullers up**, averaging from 7 to 10 years of age. This labour is by no means severe but it is monotonous, and the atmosphere breathed is of a very high temperature."

(Newspaper 1850)

'CATCHERS AND HOOKERS ON'

At the rollers, where iron rails were produced, "The compressed bar, as it passes through each groove, is received by a youth on the other side, sometimes with a lever and sometimes with tongs, and handed over the rolls to the Roller. Now the youth who catches the bar is called a **Catcher** [and] there is another younger lad also employed as **hooker on**, whose station is before the rolls with a suspended lever to support the bar of iron before it enters the groove".

(Newspaper 1850)

'PILERS'

These were teenage girls who stacked iron bars ready for further smelting. According to one girl, "when the works are working [Railway] 'Rails', 2 other girls and myself pile, on an average, 35 tons a day between us. We have to lift up the pieces from the ground as far as my middle. Sometimes the iron is very hot... I have burnt my hands shockingly, and so have the other girls".

(Newspaper 1850)

According to the manager of the Dowlais Works, as far as piling was concerned:

"Men are not suited to the work. The frequent stooping and rising wearies them, whereas the girls being shorter and more active, get through with comparative ease."

HOURS OF WORK

In the mines, the 1842 Commission found that, "whilst the owners argued that workers worked only 8 or 10 hours a day, their [foremen] stated that an 11 to 12 hour day was probably more realistic, whilst the workers themselves maintained that they never laboured for less than 12 hours, and frequently they worked for 13, 14, 15, 16 and even 18 hours." In the mines a six day week was worked, Sunday being a holiday.

In the Ironworks, the normal shift was 12 hours long, and production lasted right through the night. Unlike underground workers, many of those employed in the ironworks laboured 7 days a week. At Dowlais the Sunday shift lasted 14 hours at the 'Old' works and 16 hours at the new 'Ivor' works. This was nothing when compared to 'the long turn' at Penydarren, however, where workers who started at 6 o'clock on Sunday morning did not finish until 6 o'clock on **Monday** morning.

WAGES

The exact level is very hard to determine because of a lack of statistics, and because they varied from works to works. In 1850, one newspaper gave the following:

Air Door Keepers	=	2/6 a week (12 ¹ / ₂ p)	Catchers	=	7/- a week (35p)
Wind-Way Boys	=	1/2 per yd (6p)	Hookers-on	=	4/- a week (20)p
Hauliers	=	12/- a week (60p)	Girls	=	4/- to 6/- (20 - 30p) a week

It should be remembered, however, that the children themselves would have been considered lucky to receive 6 pence a week, as until they reached 17 years of age, or married, their parents received all their wages. (6 old pence = 2¹/₂ new pence)

WHY DID CHILDREN WORK?

The boys who worked were usually, "the sons of very poor parents to whom their earnings are of importance."

(Dowlais Management)

"In most cases it is the extreme poverty of the parents that compels them to send their young female children to work."

(1842 Commission)

EXERCISES

1. Draw a series of pictures illustrating the employment of children in the mines and about the works.
2. Of the jobs undertaken by children in the mines, which do you think was the worst and why?
3. How much coal did the 11 year old drammer girl drag per shift?
4. Do you agree with the Dowlais manager about girls being better suited for piling than men?
5. Examine the statistics for the Plymouth workforce carefully.
 - (a) What percentage of the workforce was under 18?
 - (b) What percentage of the workforce was aged 13 - 18?
 - (c) What percentage of the workforce was aged under 13?
 - (d) What proportion of the 13 - 18 age group were female?
 - (e) What proportion of the under 13 age group were female?
 - (f) Where were children, in percentage terms, more important, in the Works or in the Mines?
6. Find out if, during the 1840's, there were any laws about child employment.

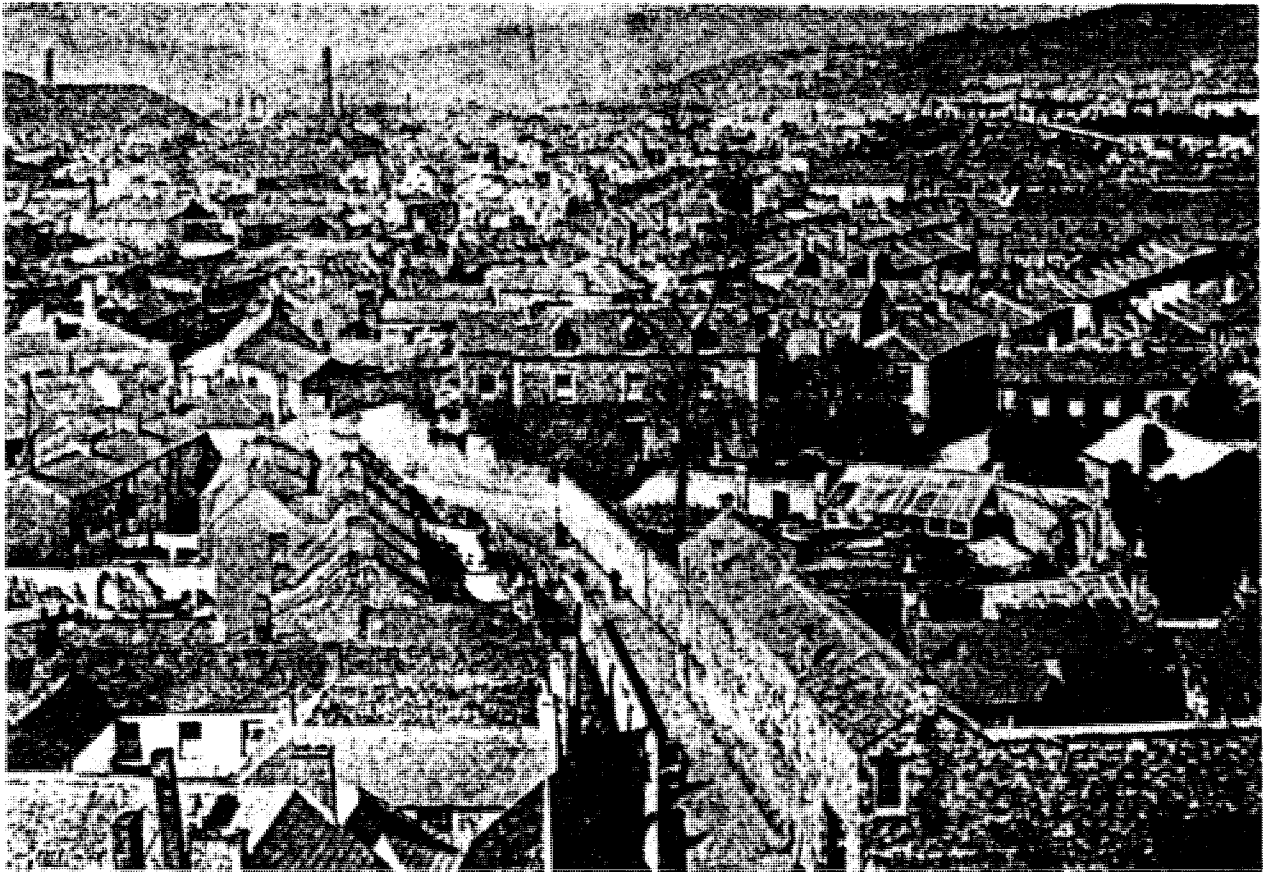
FOR DISCUSSION

Some people in the 1840's expressed concern over the effect employment at such an early age had on the physical development of children. What do you think they were worried about?

What kind of jobs do children do today? What are the present laws concerning the employment of young people? Do you think they should be altered?

CHAPTER 3

HOUSING



"They were not so much towns as barracks, not the refuge of a civilization, but the barracks of industry."

(Modern Historians)

OWNERSHIP

Whilst ironmasters owned about one-third of Merthyr's houses, the bulk of workers housing was built by speculators as, "Cottage property in this locality is one of the most profitable forms in which money can be invested."

(Government Health Inspector, 1849)

The sole concern of these speculators was to maximize their profits by building houses as cheaply as possible and then charging the highest rent which could be demanded. Such an attitude led to the, "erection of dwellings which were deficient of most of the basic amenities, and houses were built which contained the bare minimum necessary to command a rental. Houses [were] built in a 'monotony of disorder'. Merthyr became characterized by its housing congestion."

(Modern Historian)

DEMAND

Throughout the 1840's people flocked to Merthyr in the hope of earning good wages in the ironworks and mines. Thus, though of a very poor standard, housing was in constant demand.



"The rage for building in Merthyr is... far from having exhausted itself... sly little bits of ground concealed from public view by a sombre wall, and accessible from the public streets only by narrow alleys, are introduced to notice, and forthwith become the sites of cottages, so that every inch of available space is likely to be speedily occupied."

(Newspaper 1846)

"Upon one of these cinder heaps [i.e. The Penydarren Tip], a long row of workmen's cottages has been erected, and the locality has been not inaptly named 'Newfoundland'."

(Newspaper 1850)

RENTS

Visitors to Merthyr in the 1840's found that there were three categories of working class housing. The best houses were rented by the skilled craftsmen and ironworkers who could afford to pay between 10 and 13 shillings (50p - 65p) a month. The second category, costing in the region of 4 to 10 shillings (20p - 50p), was occupied by the semi-skilled, whilst the unskilled labourers and their families lived in the worst accommodation. Observers noted that, "the poor pay most dearly for their houses," and it would seem to have been the case for despite the appalling conditions, the unskilled section of the workforce — which was also the largest section — paid rents varying from 1/6 to 10 shillings a month, and in some cases more. (7 1/2p - 50p).

FIRST CLASS HOUSES

"Are of two stories, have four small sash windows, two above and one each side of the door. On the ground floor there is a kitchen with a stone floor; adjoining is a small room, just large enough to contain a bed, a chest of drawers, a small corner-cupboard, two chairs and a window table. The ceiling is not plastered, and the rafters are used for hanging up the crockery and household utensils. Above the stairs are two bed-rooms, one large and the other small; the ceiling here is of lath and plaster. This is all — there is no strip of garden, no backdoor or outlet, no [toilet], no drain to carry away house refuse, or any pump or pipe for the supply of water."



'Over and Under' houses, Merthyr

SECOND CLASS HOUSES

"Differ only in terms of size. Most have only two rooms measuring 8 feet by 10 or 12."

(Both quotes from Newspaper, 1850)

THIRD CLASS HOUSES

Generalizations are of little value because of the great variety of accommodation provided. Cellars, one roomed hovels, converted stables, back-to-back and over-and-under houses (where one house is divided into two by means of a vertical or horizontal inside wall) and lodging houses were all used.

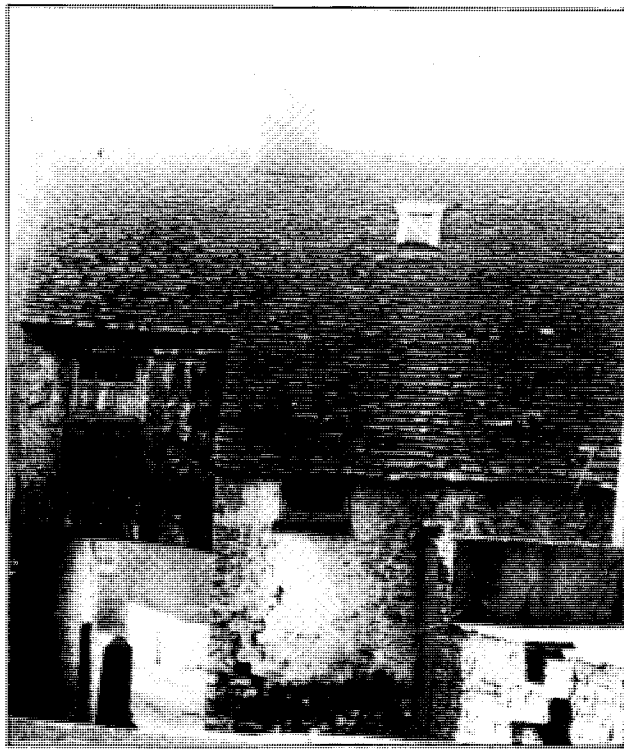
"In Caepantywyll the houses adjoining Isaac Williams' has been filled upon in the back with ashes up to the roof, and the occupiers of the houses above, for the want of necessary accommodation, actually throw all the filth from their house on the roof itself."

(Health Inspector, 1853)

"Some of the worst description of dwellings are those called "the cellars" [or "China"] at Pontystorehouse. These are small two-roomed houses, situated in a dip or hollow between a line of road and a vast cinder heap [the Penydarren Tip]. In these miserable tenements, which are closely packed together, and with nothing in front or between them but stagnant pools of liquid and house refuse, it is said that nearly 1,500 living beings are congregated. The rents of these pest-holes are high, ranging from 3/- to 5/- [15p - 25p] a month."

(Government Health Inspector, 1849)

In 1845 the same houses were described by another Inspector as being, "mere huts of stone". They were considerably below the level of the road, and were entered by descending ladders. According to the same observer, the whole area was nothing more than "a labyrinth of tenements and filth".



"The second house we visited was in Pontystorehouse. Originally it was a one-roomed house; but the boards overhead had been cut away to convert the slope of the roof into a second room. On entering we found three bare-legged women, a man, and some children, squatting around the fire. The dimensions of this room were 12ft by 8ft, and the only furniture it contained was one rickety three-legged table, a low bench, and a log of wood. One of the women ran out, and soon returned with a candle, which she lit and carried before us up a ladder, into the loft above. It was not without difficulty we squeezed ourselves through the narrow opening cut through the boards. The room was formed simply of the shape of the roof; there was no window. The cobwebs hung in black films from the roof. On the right and left of the entrance were two beds. The woman informed me that two families slept in that room (a labourer), his wife, and two children in one bed; her mother, her sister (grown up), her brother (aged 12), and herself in the other. In the room below there lodged two single women and one child,

aged 7 years. On what these slept I did not hear, certainly they had no proper bed."

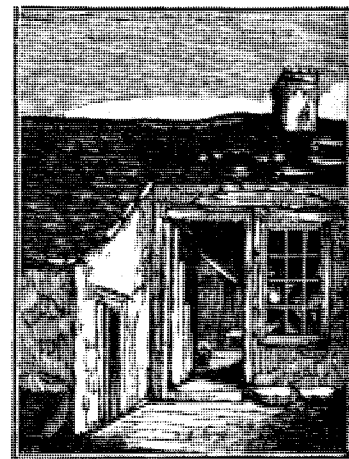
(Newspaper 1850)

"At half past nine last evening I saw Margaret Davies (living in a cellar, under a house) and found her in the collapsed stage of cholera. The cellar was until lately used as a cow house."

(from a doctor's report, 1854)

"Some huts in Pwlllybaw are in a filthy state. In one, in addition to the inmates and filthy bones and rags was a donkey."

(Inspector of Health 1853)



LODGING HOUSES

According to almost every observer the very worst accommodation was to be found in the town's lodging houses. In 1853 when the town had 130 of these, Merthyr's Inspector of Lodging Houses declared that the great majority were totally unfit for human habitation.

"The over-crowding is excessive. In one small room there are five beds. It is not uncommon to find three in a bed. The roof of the ceiling is so low, that in one case there is not room to sit up in bed. The charge is 3d [1¹/₂p] a night for a single lodger, and 6d [2¹/₂p] for a bed for a family, who then crowd in as many as possible."

(Government Health Inspector, 1849)

"Michael Harrington's is a lodging house. On visiting today I found 45 inmates, but many more come into sleep at nights, there are no beds, but all the lodgers lie on the ground or floor. The children were sleeping in old orange boxes, that is the younger ones, or they would be liable to be crushed in the night by persons rolling over them. Each party had with them all their stock, consisting of heaps of rags, bones, salt-fish, rotton potatoes, and other things. The stench was sickening."

(Police evidence to Government Inspector, 1849)

"It is the common practice for these rooms to be occupied by relays of sleepers, some of them being engaged on work during the night, and some during the day."

(Government Health Inspectors, 1849)

EXERCISES

1. Draw a series of pictures illustrating working class housing in Merthyr during this period.
2. Why do you think that many observers referred to workers houses as being 'cottages'?
3. Just why was building and renting out houses so profitable?
4. Is there any evidence to suggest that working people themselves encouraged overcrowding? If so, then **why** did they?
5. All the evidence in this section concerns working class housing. Find out what the Ironmasters houses were like.
6. What do the differences in housing standards and conditions tell us about working class life in the 1840's?

FOR DISCUSSION

Do you agree that Merthyr during the 1840's was not so much a town as a 'barracks of industry'? What do you think the writers meant?

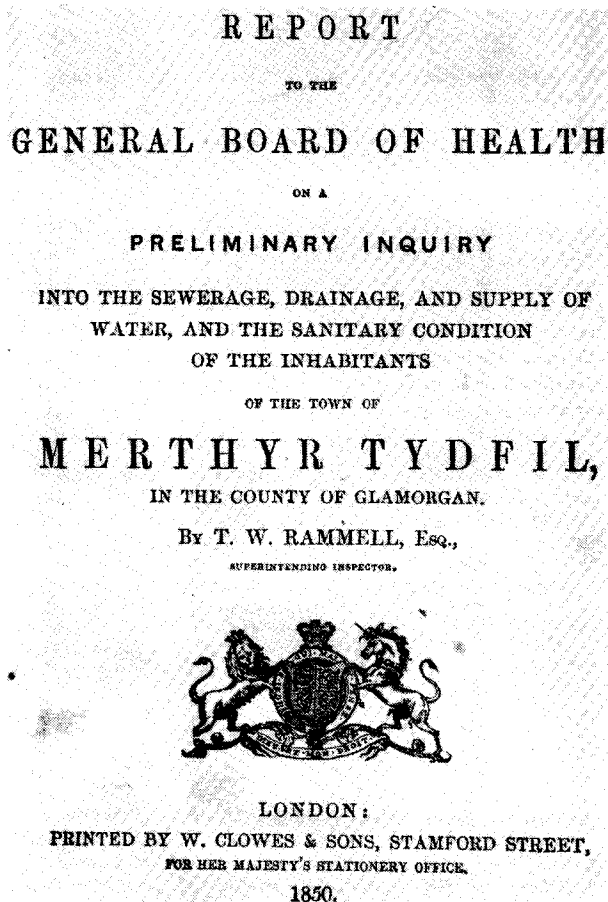
Housing shortages, overcrowding, slums — all were problems in the 1840's. Is the situation different today, and if so, then why?

CHAPTER 4

PUBLIC HEALTH

"For all intents and purposes of civic government, Merthyr Tydfil is as destitute as the smallest rural village in the Empire."

(Government Health Inspector 1849)



CLEANSING

"The courts, and often the middle of the streets are obstructed with heaps of ashes, ordure, the refuse of vegetables, and the clotted hay of which the Irish and some of the Welsh make their beds. Upon this is thrown all the slops of the houses. The roadways of the streets are in rainy weather absolutely impassible; they are a mass of festering black mud into which wheels of carts sink deeply. Crossings are here and there made — not by the parish, not by the Ironmasters but by the inhabitants themselves, who, for their own convenience in crossing these stinking and poisonous sloughs, have here and there, in an irregular manner placed stones in the mud."

(Newspaper 1850)

Apart from some limited rubbish collections in Dowlais, all waste was thrown into the streets to rot. "The heaps of putrefying and fermenting refuse are as astonishing as they are pernicious. There is not a wall, a heap of slag or cinder from the Works or a vacant spot of ground, that is not covered with abominations. The banks of the Taff form one vast and continuous mass of rubbish."

(Newspaper 1850)



DRAINAGE

Because of the hills and the slope of the land, Merthyr enjoyed excellent natural drainage. However, industrial development destroyed this.

"I have inspected the locality of Pontstorehouse called Bethesda Gardens. The place is in a filthy state and will never be otherwise unless it is properly drained. This will involve some expense as it lies in a hole formed by the Penydarren cinder heap."

Cellar dwellings, and those built below the level of the road suffered from filth which, "oozes up through the floor". One house, visited in 1853, "has a gutter coming under the floor from a back-court, the outlet of which is stopped up so that the filth breaks through the flagstones and makes the house dangerous to live in."

(Health Inspector 1853)

The practice of building houses in parallel rows up the sides of mountain slopes also produced problems. "In consequence of the conformation of the ground which is here extremely steep, the liquid refuse of one row of houses often drains down the back of another row of houses below it, and it frequently overflows the floor of the lower houses, and creates an ill-feeling between neighbours."

(Dowlais Grocer, 1849)

The town was littered with stinking ponds and ditches. The Taff and the canal acted as open sewers.



SANITATION

"The inhabitants make use of chamber utensils which they empty into the streets before the doors, sometimes into the river or, in the case of males, relieving themselves upon any of the numerous cinder heaps, or by the sides of walls or backs of houses. Children are placed out in open chairs in the street to perform their necessary operation."

(Government Inspector 1849)

"The Reverend Sidney Smith, in speaking of a barbarous African tribe says, 'that with all their barbarism they were peculiarly attentive to cleanliness, the poorest parts of their villages were furnished with toilets'. Let the inhabitants of Merthyr, especially the proprietors of cottages mark that."

(Newspaper 1847)

Even when toilets did exist, the lack of any sewer system meant they became nuisances in their own right, "worse than anything", according to one observer.

"In one court there is a privvy filled and unfit for use. Human excrement is consequently thrown about in all directions and urine streams down the steps leading up to the court."

(Health Inspector 1853)

Because of the lack of cleansing, drainage and sanitation, it is not surprising that reports such as the following could appear in the local newspaper in 1839,

'Early on Friday morning, the infant child of Mr James Evans, tailor, was attacked by an enormous rat. The child was in its mother's arms in bed and becoming very restless, she awoke and found to her inconceivable alarm that the bed-clothes were covered with blood.'

WATER SUPPLY



'At the water spout'

"The crowning evil under which the inhabitants of Merthyr Tydfil labour as regards their social and sanitary conditions is the utter want of provision for the supply of water."

(Government Health Inspector 1849)

This Inspector found that the Ironmasters and their Managers had their own private wells. The middle classes paid for their supplies from other private wells, but the working classes, which formed well over 95% of the town's population obtained their water from artificial springs which drew water from the Taff and its tributaries and the canal. In Upper Merthyr there were between 6 and 8 of these in winter, but in summer all but 3 dried up.

"At these water spouts I have seen 50, 80 and as many as 100 people waiting for their turn. The women have told me they have waited 6, 8 and 10 hours at a time for their turn. They have been known to wait up the whole of the night."

(Local Magistrate 1849)

In Lower Merthyr, "A woman in a wretched court informed me that they had to fetch water from the other side of the Taff which was done by wading the river but when there was flood they had to go round for it by the iron bridge, a distance of a mile."

(Newspaper 1850)

"The Bethesda Chapel graveyard is situated above the level of Bethesda Square and is itself overtopped, especially at the south and east sides, by an immense heap of refuse and other putrescent matters [The Penydarren Cinder Heap]. There is a well in the Square, or rather a hole, containing filthy water which must necessarily have percolated in part from the churchyard. This water the poor people were only too glad to use when they could obtain it."

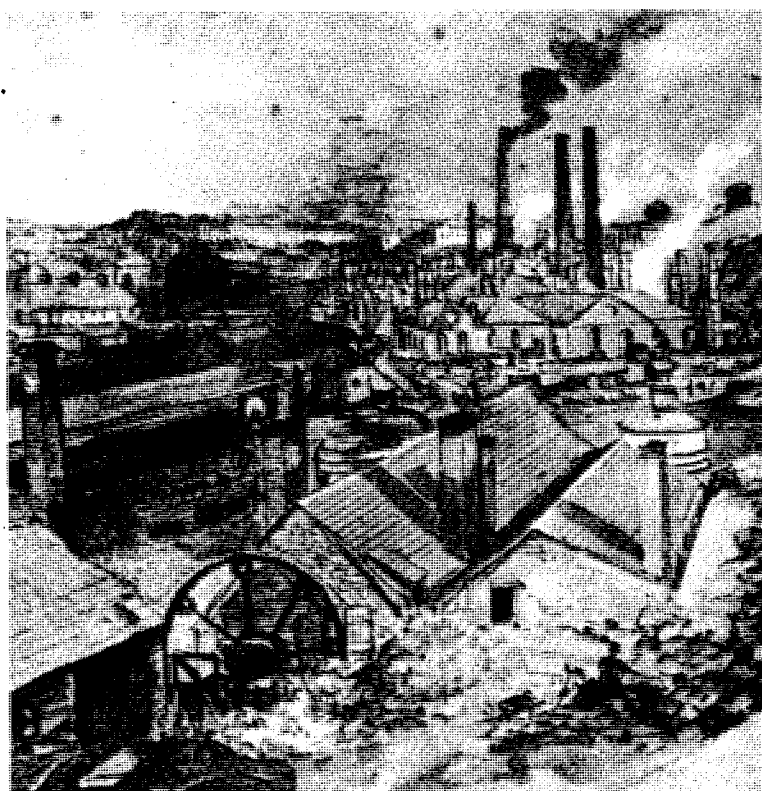
(Cholera Inspector 1849)

The problems involving obtaining water were made even worse, " because the occupation of the colliers and miners is of so filthy a nature that they are compelled to wash themselves all over at their return from work for which purpose a large quantity of water is daily required."
(Newspaper 1850)

Such was the demand that people frequently resorted to obtaining water straight from the Taff and the canal, despite the all too obvious pollution. H.A. Bruce, a local magistrate, told how he frequently travelled along a road which forded the Taff, and, "I scarcely ever pass without seeing people close to me easing themselves, whilst only a few yards off women and girls are filling their pitchers with water."

All this should be seen against a background whereby, "The Traveller who, on his way to the town, passes fine reservoirs kept up apparently regardless of expense and with extreme care, might suppose that at least the streets, if not the houses, would be well supplied. But the water in these reservoirs and the copious streams of the Taff are absorbed entirely in the Works. The Ironmasters have a long vested and absolute right in them and the only question is whether, knowing the condition of the town, they ought not to have assisted the inhabitants in procuring a supply."

(Newspaper 1850)



WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE?

"The habits of the women in respect of their houses, are those of cleanliness, decency, and order. They are always scrubbing the rooms, polishing and regulating the furniture or with long brushes laying white or yellow washes upon the front of their houses. In short, the people themselves do their duty."

(Newspaper 1850)

With regard to the lack of toilet provision which produced the scenes which so horrified observers, a Doctor Carte told the Government Health Inspector in 1849. "I do not blame the people: they have no other place to go to. I think they are naturally the cleanest people I ever saw."

EXERCISES

1. What aspect of life would you have disliked most if you had lived in a Merthyr slum in the mid nineteenth century and why?
2. What, in your opinion, was the most likely result of such a lack of Public Health?
3. Make a list of all the services in modern towns and cities which serve to keep them clean and healthy.
4. Find out what laws, if any, existed in the 1840's concerning Public Health matters.
5. Both the newspaper and the local doctor argued that working people could not be blamed for the state of the town. If this was the case — and you may not agree — then who was?
6. Visitors to Merthyr in the 1840's were appalled by its poor standards of Public Health and also by the widespread drunkenness amongst large sections of the workforce. Do you think there was any connection between the two?

FOR DISCUSSION

Why do you think Merthyr grew without any real cleansing facilities, without drains or sewers, and without any proper water supply?

What could be done today to make our towns and countryside healthier places to live in? For example, would you ban smoking? And what about smog? Lead in petrol? Acid rain?

CHAPTER 5

DISEASE



“In the eleven years between 1846 and 1857 the annual death rate averaged 33 per 1,000 at a time when 20 per 1,000 was considered to be the norm, earning Merthyr the unenviable distinction of being surpassed only by Liverpool and Manchester — the two worst towns in the Kingdom — in terms of percentage mortality.”

(Modern historian)

BIRTHS AND DEATHS IN MERTHYR, 1841 - 1853

	BIRTHS	DEATHS UNDER 1 YEAR	DEATHS UNDER 5 YEARS	TOTAL DEATHS
1841	1,482	247	554	974
1842	1,531	228	424	781
1843	1,574	226	403	810
1844	1,600	360	877	1,517
1845	1,694	309	590	1,082
1846	1,813	335	640	1,181
1847	1,759	385	788	1,434
1848	1,785	288	561	1,086
1849	1,791	428	998	2,925
1850	1,857	323	653	1,238
1851	2,056	374	761	1,481
1852	1,904	391	810	1,45
1853	2,006	400	772	1,483

INFANT MORTALITY

"In the seven years, from 1841 to 1847, 11,454 children were born, and 4,276 children, under 5 years of age, died — 37.3%; or more than 7 in 20. And in the six following years, from 1848 to 1853, 11,399 children were born, and 4,555 children, under 5 years of age, died — 39.9% — 8 in 20 — 2 in 5! The naked figures tell their own appalling tale."

(William Kay, Temporary Officer of Health, 1854)

"Largely because of such high rates of infant mortality the average age at death in Upper Merthyr (Penydarren and Dowlais) was only 15.9 years. In Lower Merthyr it was somewhat better, standing at 19.3."

(Modern historian)

In 1848 the local newspaper published a report comparing Tregaron, which it argued was the healthiest place in South Wales, with Merthyr, the least healthy according to the paper.

	TREGARON	MERTHYR
1. Average life expectancy —	41 years 9 months	18 years 2 months
2. Average age at which people who survived beyond 20 subsequently died —	60 years 6 months	47 years 10 months
3. Percentage of the population which reached their 80's and 90's	12%	2.6%



Cholera Graveyard, Merthyr Tydfil

"Although death directly produced by hunger is rare, there can be no doubt that a very large proportion of the mortality amongst the labouring classes is attributable to deficiency of food as a main cause, aided by too long continued toil and exertion without adequate repose, insufficient clothing, exposure to cold and other privations to which the poor are subjected."

(Richard Howard, Surgeon, 1840's)

CHOLERA AT MERTHYR-TYDFIL.		
RETURN OF CASES.		
Saturday, September 22, 1849.		
MERTHYR.	ATTACKED.	DEAD.
Total from commencement (May 25th), as per last Report, corrected by Registration Returns up to 10 A. M., Yesterday	1779	745
New Cases, up to 10 A. M., To-day	1	1
PENYDARRAN.		
Total from commencement (June 5th), up to 10 A. M., Yesterday	272	170
New Cases, up to 10 A. M., To-day	0	0
DOWLAIS.		
Total from commencement (June 10th), up to 10 A. M., Yesterday	1196	499
New Cases, up to 10 A. M., To-day	0	1
ABERDARE.		
Total from commencement (June 24th), up to 10 A. M., Yesterday	364	104
New Cases, up to 10 A. M., To-day	0	0
TOTAL	3612	1520
FRANK JAMES,		
<i>Clerk to the Guardians.</i>		
<small>J. W. WHITE, PRINTER, MERTHYR.</small>		

WHAT KINDS OF DISEASE?

Merthyr suffered numerous epidemics in the mid 19th century and was never free of contagious infections. The following are a few of the more deadly ones, as to list them all would take too much space:

ASIATIC CHOLERA

A highly infectious disease which attacked the intestines, it was carried in polluted water and by flies contaminating food. Four major epidemics swept through Britain in just 34 years. In each case it was carried along the trade routes from Northern India, and though given prior warning, such as the appalling state of Britain's towns, and the ignorance of the medical profession, that little was done to prevent its arrival. Doctors did not know it was carried by germs which flourished in polluted water, but thought it was some form of invisible gas which mysteriously attacked its victims. Many thought it had been sent by God to punish his sinful subjects. Church and chapel attendances rose three-fold in Merthyr during the four-month 1849 epidemic, prompting one Independent Minister, Thomas Rees, to exclaim, "Who will venture to deny that the Lord has mercifully ordained this awful scourge as the means of accomplishing his gracious purpose of saving thousands?"

YEAR	CHOLERA DEATHS IN MERTHYR
1832	160
1849	1,467
1854	455
1866	229

TYPHUS

Causing 1 in 9 deaths in Merthyr, Typhus was, "The most persistent and devitalizing fever of the first half of the 19th century. Greatly encouraged by hunger, dirt, and overcrowding, it is carried in the faeces of lice which dry to a light dust thus enabling a person to become infected by breathing in the dust, or by a scratch on the hand." (*Medical Historian*)

Because of the gross overcrowding, the totally inadequate washing and cleansing facilities, and the lack of spare clothing, Merthyr's poor were most in danger.

MR MORGANS 'CAMBRIAN SPECIFIC'

John Cole, Haulier, Pwll-y-Duffryn, had a severe attack of cholera: the Agent gave him his medicine, in spite of which he grew worse and worse, and was leaving the work: as he was growing weaker every minute, I offered him a dose of Morgan's Specific, which relieved him in 10 minutes. He continued in the work, and is quite well.

June 26th 1849

Signed John Humphreys

TUBERCULOSIS ('T.B.')

In Merthyr, during 1852, this was responsible for 1 out of every 5 deaths. It selected its victims from among those whose resistance to disease was diminished.

"Whilst no single factor may be said to cause it, poverty, which led to over-crowding and under-nourishment, and Tuberculosis were linked in an ugly alliance. The most important factor, in a primary sense, was close contact with an infected person, and whilst this may only have been brief, close and regular contact for weeks or months was of far greater significance. Whole families became infected in this way."

(Medical Historian)

"The lack of previous exposure to T.B. is very important. In the 19th century it was almost exclusively restricted to the towns at a time when thousands were migrating from rural areas to urban areas. It has been argued that the experience of these migrants was comparable to that of Africans, Amerindians and Maoris when they first came into contact with tuberculosis."

(Medical Historian)

WHY WERE THERE SO MANY CHILD DEATHS?

It would seem that infants, and especially the newly-born were particularly susceptible. There were four main reasons:

1. LACK OF RESISTANCE

Young children had not built up the resistance necessary to ward off infection.

2. INFECTED PARENTS

Children whose parents suffered from disease were highly at risk.

3. IMPROPER FEEDING

Babies and infants ate the same food as their parents and drank the same water. If the parents ate nutritional food and drank decent water, then there was very little problem, but



if, out of poverty, they lived on potatoes only, or on stale bread and rotten vegetables, and drank polluted water regularly, then the deficiencies are obvious. It should be noted that malnutrition has already been mentioned as a major factor behind disease.

4. DRUGS

Though more usually associated with the towns of the North of England, research indicates that many Merthyr children were frequently drugged.

"The mother goes out to her work in the morning leaving her child in the charge of either a woman who cannot be troubled with it, or with another child of perhaps 10 years old. A dose of 'quietness' is given to the child to prevent it being troublesome. The child thus drugged sleeps and may waken at dinner time; so, when the mother goes out again, the child receives another dose. When the mother and father come home at night quite fatigued, and as they must rise early (for work), they must have sleep undisturbed by the child, so it is again drugged, and in this manner young children are often drugged three times in each day."

(Manchester Chemist, 1840's)

"Half a teaspoon of 'Syrup of Poppies' is a sufficient dose for a child. It is an article very frequently called for by a great many people."

(Merthyr Chemist, 1844)

Both 'Quietness' and 'Syrup of Poppies' contained 100 drops of laudanum per ounce. Laudanum is a form of opium.

EXERCISES

1. Make a list of all the reasons why Merthyr was such a disease-ridden town.
2. Why do you think giving babies and very young children opium was harmful?
3. Tuberculosis caused 1 in every 5 deaths. Find out what kind of disease it is.
4. What would you have done if you heard Cholera was in your neighbourhood?
5. Why would a lack of spare clothing cause the poor to be more susceptible to Typhus?
6. Examine the statistics for births and deaths carefully.
 - (a) Draw up a table showing the deaths of children under 1 as a percentage of deaths under 5 years for each year.
 - (b) Do the same thing showing deaths under 5 as a percentage of total deaths.
 - (c) Do your findings lead you to agree with Dr Kay's statement concerning the rise in the birth rate, that it was, "an unproductive increase; an increase of children for the most part born to die"?

FOR DISCUSSION

Given the long hours of very hard work, the poor housing, the lack of public health and the horrific death rates, why did so many people flock to Merthyr?

Influenza, Scarlet Fever, Whooping Cough and Measles were major child killers in the 1840's. Why is this not the case today?

CHAPTER 6

POVERTY



Unfortunately, most of the official lists for the 1840's have either been destroyed or cannot be found. Consequently, we are not able to discover how many people actually received Poor Law relief and for what reasons. This information has survived for the 1850's, however, in the form of the 'Abstracts of Paupers, Merthyr Tydfil Poor Law Board'. Most of the statistical information in this section comes from a survey of these Abstracts for the years 1850 to 1854.

MAJOR FACTORS CAUSING POVERTY 1850 - 1854

Illness	accounted for	32% of paupers
Widowhood	"	24% "
Infirmity (accidents, disabled, maimed, aged)	"	19% "
Unemployment	"	10% "
Desertion	"	5% "
Being orphaned	"	3% "
All other causes	"	7%

ILLNESS

Having examined the previous sections on HOUSING, PUBLIC HEALTH and DISEASE there should be no need to explain why illness was the major factor.



WIDOWHOOD

Bearing in mind the high disease rates, and the frequent accidents in the mines and works it should not surprise us that widows should represent almost a quarter of Merthyr's paupers. With regard to disease, then observers noted that more often than not, it was a combination of exhausting working conditions and infections which resulted in death, and as only a small percentage of the workforce was female, fewer died.

The following is a letter written to the Manager of the Dowlais works in January 1844:

"Sir it is with the utmost trouble i now send you these few lines to you. My husband have been sick 8 months though severe illness, but now is dead this near 2 months by which cause i am plunged in the deepest distress and no means whatever for support having parted with many things out of the house. Sir should my misfortune and poverty move you to let me remain in the house and if i could have 2 lodgers to me; i have no living body in the house night nor day but myself. I do have 3/6 [17¹/₂p] from the parish a week and that is all i have to live on and i am helpless, i can't go out of the house for a drop of water nor anything else... i shan't be long in this owld world and i am in Dowlais this 40 years and have got my living by slaving hard. Sir, please to take me under your consideration. God bless you and all your Family.

i am duly and humbly oblige to you
i am Sir your humble servant
Mary Bowen widow and poor."

INFIRMITY

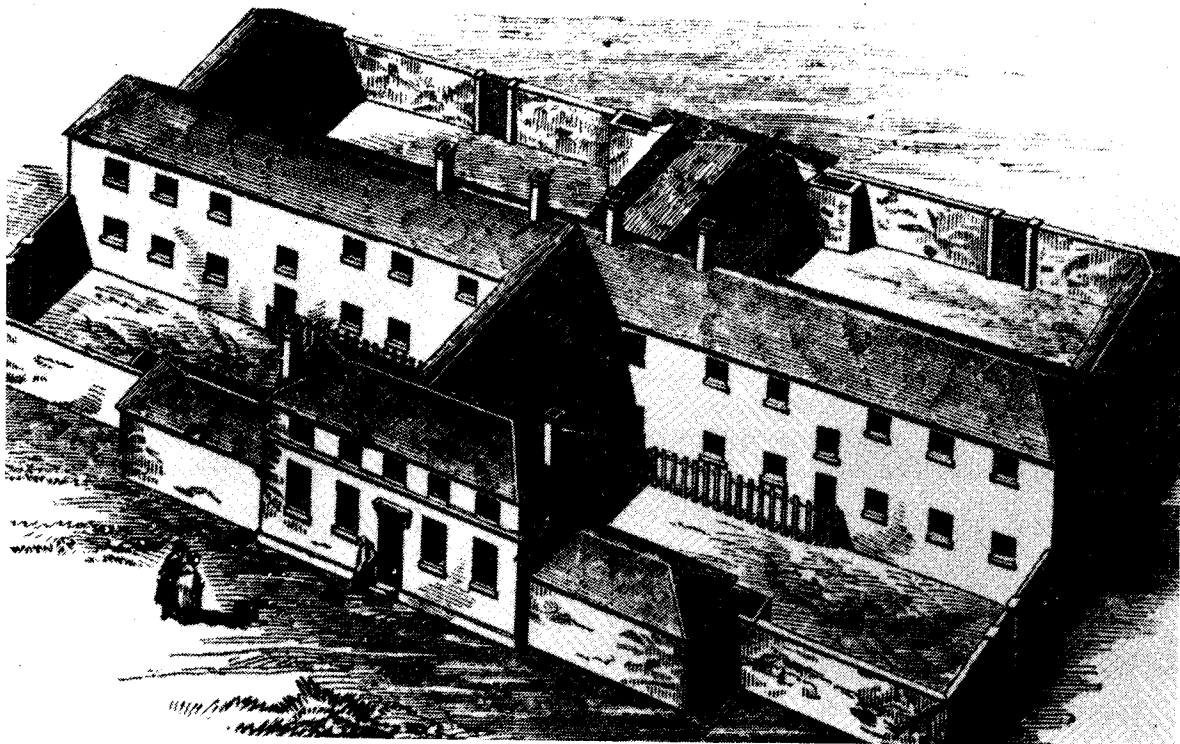
In 19th century Merthyr, apart from a few accident cases, the great majority of people relived under this heading were old people who were too weak to work. These were either allowed to stay in their houses, or, if they needed support and had no family were sent to live with anyone who was willing to take them.

"My name is Richard _____ I live in this house by myself, and work hard making skewers, or anything else I can do to earn a penny. My wife died of cholera in this house. Five years ago I had a paralytic stroke, but I got over it in part. The parish allows me 2/6 a week; out of that I pay 1/6 for rent, so I have 1/- to live on [5p], besides a penny or two I can earn. I am now 62 years of age. Many days I am without victuals. I paid rates and taxes for 30 years, but I don't get much return now. I am starved of cold, if I had a bed (cover) for my straw, and a rug to cover me, I should do."

(Newspaper, 1850)

The reporter then continued by writing, "I went upstairs; the only furniture of his bedroom was a brush, a small tub, and a candlestick. A heap of straw in a corner formed his bed and his only covering was some dirty bagging."

The same reporter also visited a lodging house in Penydarren where he found an old woman, "bedridden and supported by the parish, living in a small cupboard off the main room. She lay on a mass of woollen rags, spread on the floor and she completely filled the closet. If it were not for the open door, she must have died from suffocation. Her allowance was two shillings a week [10p], out of which she paid six pence for lodging [2 1/2p]."



A workhouse

UNEMPLOYMENT

During 1842-3 and 1849-52, the Iron Industry suffered major depressions. Wages fell and many were made redundant. These jobless people either moved elsewhere, or tramped round the countryside in search of employment. As long as they proved themselves genuinely seeking jobs then Poor Board guardians would support them for a few days before moving them on.

THE DESERTED AND ORPHANED

"There are about 40 children maintained by the Parish varying from three months to twelve years, who are placed with people in Caedraw, Pontstorehouse, Dowlais and other parts of the parish."

(Newspaper 1847)

Until a workhouse was built in 1853, all the Poor Law Guardians did was to board children out with anyone willing to take them. According to H.A. Bruce, the children, "are farmed out, at about 2/6 a head [12 $\frac{1}{2}$ p], to such people as are willing to receive and feed them at that price [and] it cannot be doubted that some of them are harshly treated, are stinted in food, poorly clothed and made victims to the desire of their keepers to realise some profit out of their miserable pittance."

In 1850 a newspaper reporter visited the 'hovel' of an Irishwoman in the cellars.

"The house consisted of two rooms. The first thing we saw on entering was the corpse of a child [which] had been dead 2 days, it was unprovided with a coffin. The odour of the house was almost insupportable. Before the fire were 3 or 4 children, amongst them was a boy named Martin, 11 years of age, who had been placed there by the Parish, the allowance being 2/- a week [10p]. This boy had no shirt; he was barefooted, in rags, his hair bristled up, and he was literally black with filth. He saw with the others on a low bench near the fire, and seemed more to vegetate like a plant than to live. I made him stand up, and questioned him, but could get no answer. He stared with an air of stupefaction at the fire, and appeared to take not the slightest interest at the entrance of strangers, or in the questions I put to him. Yet the woman told me he was not idiotic, his father had run away, and his mother was an 'unfortunate woman'."

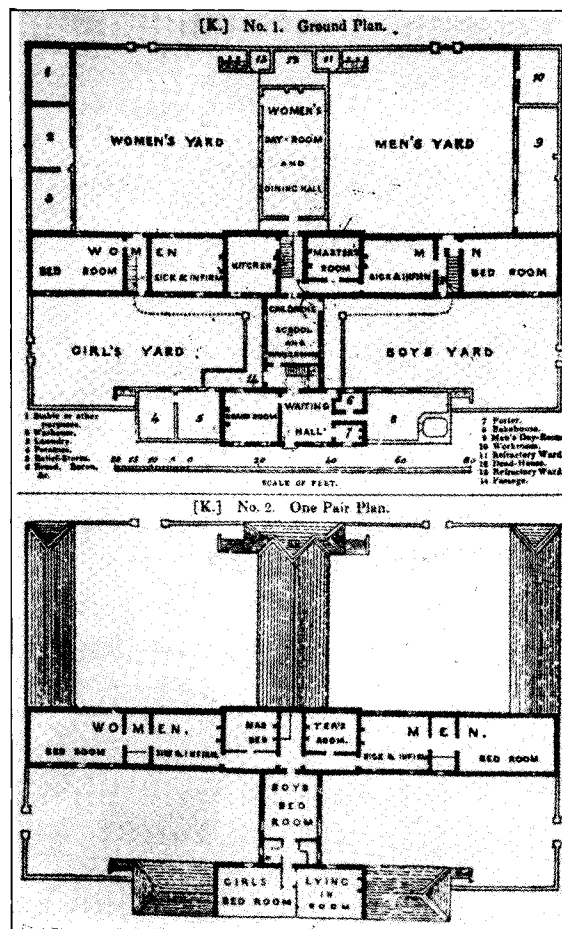
H.A. Bruce, told the reporter that during one of the coldest spells in the winter of 1849/50 his sister, who was married to a local Vicar, "met a child on the steps of the school-room in Merthyr, who was half-naked, bare-footed and black with cold. She took it into the school-room and restored it, so as to enable it to speak. It turned out to be the son of a woman to whom the Parish authorities had confided the charge of two pauper children. Mrs Campbell provided the child with a complete suit of warm clothing and sent it home. A few days later, she met the child in the same state — the clothes had been taken away."

Mr Bruce posed the question that if the mother of that child treated it in that manner, how did the Parish Authorities expect her to treat other people's children?

Pauper children in Merthyr, "are condemned to the greatest misery in the world".

(H.A. Bruce 1852)

They formed, in the words of one observer in 1852, "the sad and deplorable residuum of Merthyr's society".



Plan of workhouse

BREAKFAST:	Men	6oz. of bread and 1 1/2 pints of gruel or porridge.
	Women	5oz. of bread and 1 1/2 pints of gruel or porridge.
	Children (2-5)	4oz. of bread and 1/2 pint of milk.
	Children (5-9)	5oz. of bread and 1/2 pint of milk.
DINNER:	Adults	Cooked meat (5oz.) three times a week — Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. Broth or pea soup (1 pint) on other days. Potatoes: 1lb. each for men and women on Sundays and Thursdays. 1 1/4lbs. for men and 1lb. for women on Tuesdays. 3/4lb. for men and 1/2lb. for women on other days. Bread: 6oz. for men and 5oz. for women on the days of smaller potato ration.
	Children (2-5)	Cooked meat (2 1/2oz.) twice a week: Broth or pea soup (1 pint) on other days. Potatoes: 8oz. per day.
	Children (5-9)	As for 2-5 children, except for 3oz. of meat
	SUPPER	Adults
	Children (2-5)	Bread (4oz.), butter (1/4oz.) and milk and water (1/2 pint).
	Children (5-9)	Bread (5oz.) butter (1/2oz.) and milk and water (1/2 pint).

Infirm persons resident in the workhouse entitled to 1oz. tea, 5oz. of butter and 7oz. of sugar per week in lieu of the gruel or porridge.

A Workhouse Diet

OTHER CAUSES

The survey of recorded poverty during the period 1850-1854 revealed that as well as the ill, widowed, the old, and orphaned and abandoned, there were other classes of paupers, who were regularly being relieved. Amongst the women and children, for example, there were usually a few cases where the husband or parents had been gaoled or transported.

Merthyr, as did most towns, also had a small number of the mentally ill. Because keeping such people in institutions was considered too expensive at 10 shillings a week [50p], they too were lodged out with anyone willing to take them in for, "two shillings or less per week" [10p]. Though some were well looked after, others were locked up for most of their lives in the most appalling conditions.

One further group to receive regular attention were the dead. The high levels of illness and infirmity ensured that pauper graves were always in demand, and for a great many of those relieved by the Merthyr Union, a parish grave was ultimately their only possession.



A pawnshop

"... ordered that the following description be sent to the Poor Law Unions' Gazette, namely Thomas Evans has absconded leaving his wife and children chargeable to the Parish of Merthyr Tydfil; he is about 51 years of age, 5 feet 6 inches high, slight made with sandy hair and whiskers and is pitted with the smallpox. He worked at Dowlais for many years as a miner and is supposed to be in Nantyglo or that neighbourhood now. One sovereign reward will be paid on his apprehension."

(*"Merthyr Tydfil Union Minute Books; January 1843*)



Punch cartoon on gap between rich and poor

EXERCISES

1. Draw a series of pictures showing how poor people lived in Merthyr.
2. Draw a bar-graph illustrating the major causes of poverty during the period 1850-1854.
3. Find out what a **pauper burial** was. How did it differ from a more normal funeral?
4. Why were some people so willing to take in paupers?
5. Read Widow Bowen's letter slowly and carefully.
 - (a) How had she managed during her husband's illness and for the two months since his death?
 - (b) Why would she ask permission to stay in the house?
 - (c) Do you think her wanting to take in lodgers was solely to earn her some money?
6. Mary Bowen, the 62 year old man who made skewers, the old woman who lived in a cupboard, 11 year old Martin from the Cellars — all these were appalling cases. Who did you feel most sympathy for and why?

FOR DISCUSSION

H.A. Bruce argued in 1852, "It must not be forgotten, that of those who receive relief, the enormous majority owe their degradation to moral causes — to the faults of themselves or their parents. They owe it to their own improvidence, intemperance and recklessness." Do you agree with him, and if not, why not?

How do we deal with poverty today? Are the same groups of people being relieved now as in 1850? Do we still call it 'relief'?

CHAPTER 7

CRIME



When examining nineteenth century crime records one aspect immediately stands out — the number of young people who were convicted. Though tried and sentenced for a wide variety of offences, with all young criminals there was a common temptation — food, especially bread, and there can be little doubt that many were driven by hunger.

Juvenile thieves tended either to live rough or to come from very poor backgrounds.

COAL STEALING

This offence closely mirrored the state of trade, i.e. when wages were high and there was full employment very few cases came to court, but when the Iron Industry was depressed, wages were low, many were redundant and cases of coal stealing rose, especially in Dowlais where it reached epidemic proportions during the 'bad' years of 1842-3 and 1849-52. No less than 72% of convicted coal thieves were women and children, with parents teaching their youngsters how, where and when to steal.

"Colliers wives put stones on the rails of railroads, to cause the trains to shake so that the coal falls down, and children are always ready with their baskets to pick it up. It was the commonest trick possible."

(Magistrate 1850)

THE 'RODNIES' AND OTHERS

Causing the most concern to Merthyr's Authorities were young children who lived by theft. According to Police Superintendent Wrenn there were at least 150 homeless children in Merthyr who slept rough wherever some shelter could be gained. H.A. Bruce, a local magistrate, argued that at least 100 of these existed solely by theft.

"**John Groom and Jacob Morgan**, two miserable looking vagrant boys, were charged with having wilfully broken a square of plate glass at the Royal Exchange beer-house. It appeared that the prisoners wilfully threw stones through the glass, but did not attempt to escape. In their defence they said they had nothing to eat nor any place to go. In default of paying the value of the glass they were sentenced to fourteen days hard labour each."

(Newspaper, 1849)

"Some have no jacket, cap or shoes, and wander about with their ragged trousers hung by one brace; some have an old tattered coat, much too large for them, without shoes or stockings, others have on an old greasy grey or black cap, with an old jacket rent at the elbows, and strips of the lining hanging down behind. They are generally in a squalid and unwashed condition, with their hair clustered in wild disorder like a mop, or hanging down in dishevelled locks — in some cases cropped close to the head."

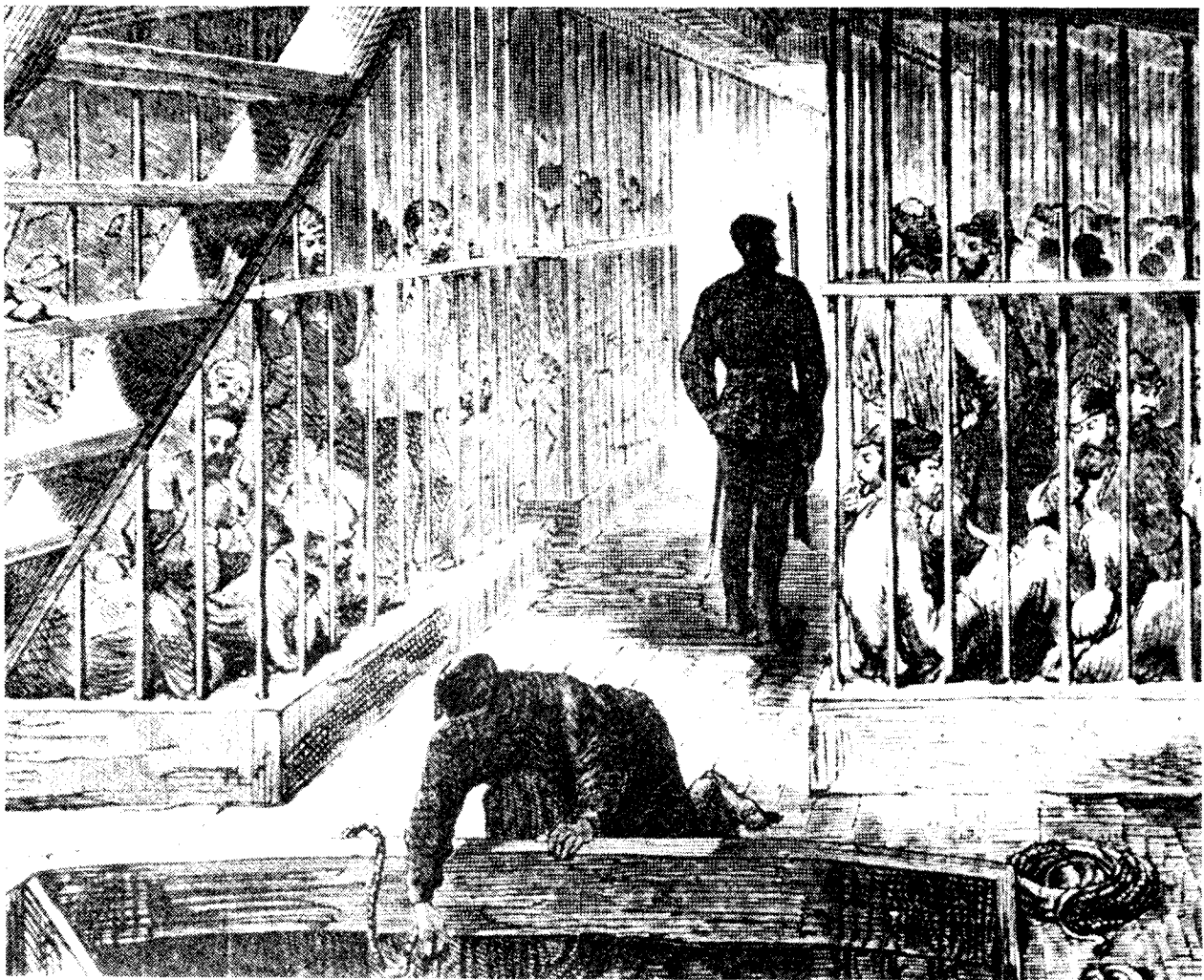
(From the notes of a campaigning journalist of the 1840's).



By far the majority of Merthyr's young thieves operated from the district known as 'China'. One of the very worst areas in the town as far as housing, public health and poverty were concerned, many children grew up in what may be called 'a culture of poverty'.

"It is very easy to blame these poor children, but I must question whether any human being, circumstanced as many of them are, can reasonably be expected to act otherwise; numbers are brought up to thieve as a trade, others are orphans, or completely abandoned by their parents; they subsist by begging or pilfering, when in prison no one visits them, nor do they seem to possess one friend in the world, much may be done by kindness but they are so accustomed to be considered as destitute of all moral feeling, that when they receive assurance of kindness, they can hardly believe them to be sincere."

(From a Parliamentary Inquiry into Juvenile Crime)



Inside a prison hulk

"I wish those who have the management of [children] of the description here spoken of, would reflect that, in the majority of cases, there has either been no parent, or those of such habits and temper as would have rendered orphanship a blessing; and that, in all probability, most of them never had a kind or affectionate sentiment imparted to or drawn out of them, by any human being they could look to as a friend; and that they have (in many ways) been driven to take up arms against society, meeting from their earliest recollections, with nothing but an enemy in man."

"They require humanizing rather than deterring from crime."

(Parliamentary Inquiry into Juvenile Crime)

CHILDREN EMPLOYED BY ADULT CRIMINALS

"Young children are often employed by more experienced thieves, to bring them information as to where and how property is situated; and they are also employed by house-breakers, to enter through windows and small apertures, and at the proper time to open the doors for the admission of their older accomplices."

(Chief Constable of Glamorgan, 1840)

FAGIN ?

"John Sweeny and John Williams, two notorious thieves, living at 'China' were charged on suspicion of stealing a till containing £3 from the shop of Mr Jones. Superintendent Wrenn stated the prisoners were seen lurking about the premises at the time the till was stolen; they were notorious thieves; Williams had been in custody 20 times; they lived in 'China' at the house of Jenkin Rees, alias 'Shenkin Bach', who employed them and took them about the country to steal."

(Newspaper 1847)

GIRLS

Whereas boys tended to operate in gangs, working well-defined districts and localities, girls tended to operate on their own.

February 1849 Eight year old Mary Davies steals a bundle of clothes from one pawnshop and then pledges them at another pawnshop. The police say that she is, "a notorious thief". The magistrates send her to prison for three days and warn her that if she continued to steal she would end up being transported.

March 1851 "Mary Davies was charged with having stolen a quantity of sugar, tobacco and bacon. The magistrates regretted that a child of such tender years should be brought before them. The Superintendent stated that though so young the prisoner had been convicted of theft... She is the illegitimate child of an abandoned woman, and whom he feared took no care of her."

(local newspaper).

BOYS

July 1846 Evan Peters and James Thomas are accused of theft. In evidence the police stated that they had known the boys for two or three years, "they sleep at the furnaces, or in the open air, and are reputed thieves. Thomas has been convicted of felony, and the other has often been apprehended on suspicion."

May 1847 "William Peters and Evan Peters, two vagrants and notorious convicted thieves, were charged with stealing some pork."

October 1847 William Peters has another conviction for theft.

April 1849 Evan Peters, William Richards and Thomas Thomas, "three notorious young thieves belonging to China", were charged with stealing a shop's till. "The prisoners, who behaved in the most impudent and hardened manner, were all committed to trial."

February 1850 Thirteen year old Samuel Tucker is accused of stealing clogs, but is discharged due to lack of evidence.

May 1850 Samuel Tucker sentenced to 14 days hard labour for stealing potatoes.

February 1852 Samuel Tucker receives 4 months hard labour for coal stealing.

February 1857 Samuel Tucker disappears from the records after being given a 12 month sentence for the theft of 12 bottles of large pickles, 6 bottles of small pickles, and 1lb. of mixed spice.

CONCLUSION

"If they were often cold and often wet, and always uncared for and unloved, at any rate they had the compensation of times of plenty when they could eat and drink their fill and enjoy the luxury of squandering their temporary riches in cheerful company."

(Modern Historian)

EXERCISES

1. Why would homeless children sleep near furnaces?
2. Mary Davies received her first conviction for stealing from a **pawnshop**. What was a pawnshop, and what was pledging?
3. Find out what happened when someone was **transported**. Where were they sent? What happened when they got there?
4. Who and what was **Fagin**?
5. What does the case of John Groom and Jacob Morgan suggest to you?
6. "They require humanizing rather than deterring from crime." What do you think the writer meant?

FOR DISCUSSION

Bearing in mind the information contained in this and other sections, especially **EMPLOYMENT**, do you agree with the quotation at the end of this section?

The Victorians were very concerned about the level of juvenile crime. Is this the case in modern Britain?

CHAPTER 8

EDUCATION



THE NEED

“There are few if any towns, where the necessity of providing for the instruction of the very young is more glaring than at Merthyr Tydfil.”

“Very few of the miners or colliers, or men engaged in the Iron Works are able to read or write.”
(Local newspaper 1840)

THE ‘DAME’ SCHOOLS

In 1840 a Government Inspector who visited Merthyr calculated that at least 70% of working class children received no regular education whatsoever. Those children who did attend school went for the most part to one of the 47 private or ‘dame’ schools, all but three of which were condemned by the Inspector.

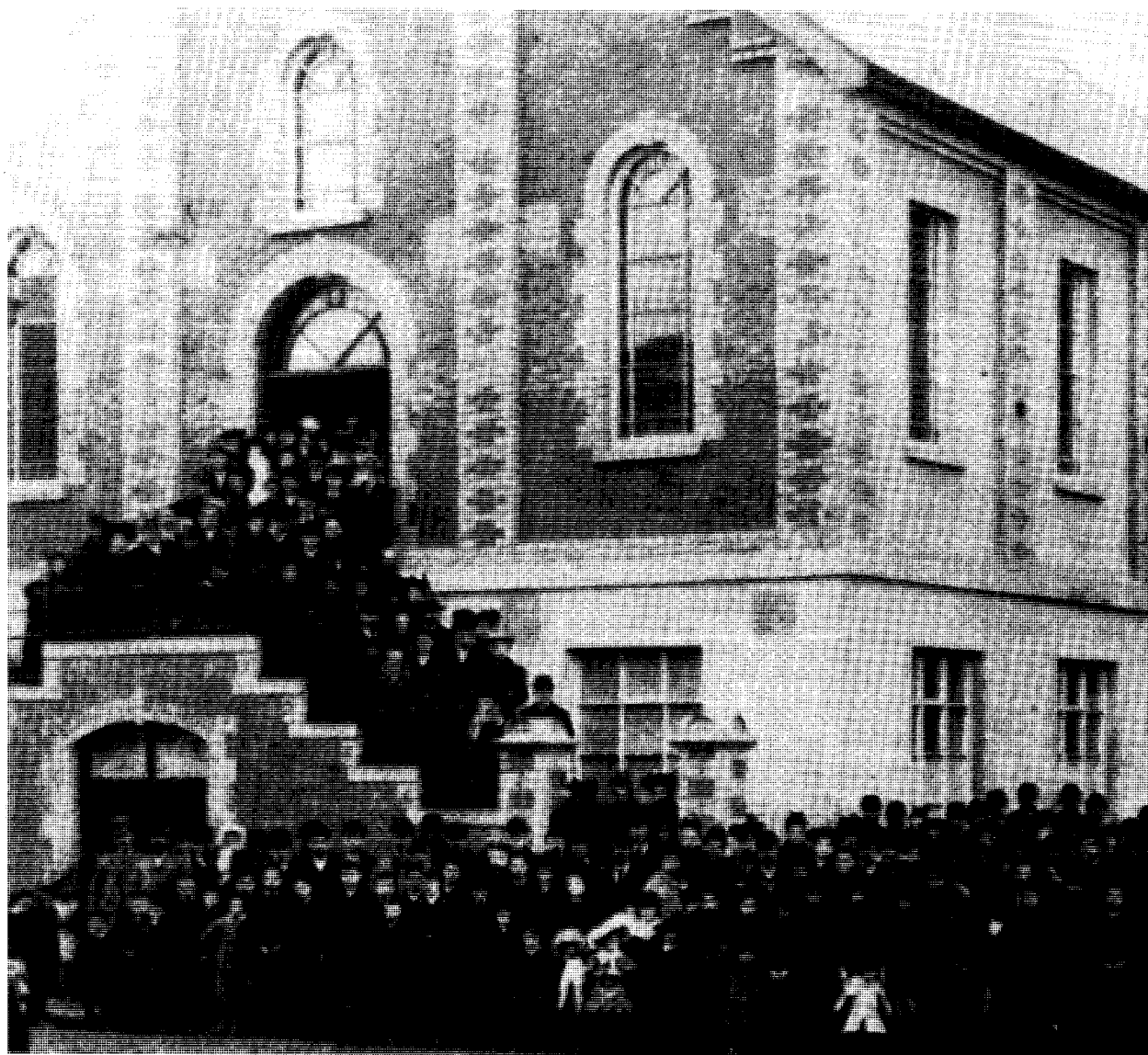
“The notion that there is any necessity that a schoolmaster should learn his business is quite in its infancy in Wales. The established belief has been that it requires no training at all.”

The school-rooms were, "for the most part dirty and close. A rudely constructed desk for the master often occupied one corner, and desks for the children were ranged along the walls from side to side. The books being provided by the parents, mere fragments consisting of a few soiled leaves, appeared to be generally deemed sufficient to answer the purpose for which the children were sent to school."

"In many, silence was only maintained for a few moments at a time, by loud exclamations and threats."

"In one, a deserted chapel, half the room was occupied with hay piled up to the roof."

"They seem in general to be not so much places of instruction, as of periodical confinement for children whose parents were at work during the day."



THE SUNDAY SCHOOLS

For the vast majority of Merthyr's children the only formal instruction was offered by the town's numerous Sunday Schools. Established by chapels and churches in an attempt to bring at least some education to the town, some idea of the numbers involved may be gathered from a newspaper report of 1839 concerning 2000 Sunday School scholars marching in procession. In 1841 Royal Commissioners said there were 1,777 Sunday scholars in Dowlais alone, and six years later the full Merthyr figure was given as 6,902.



THE DOWLAI SCHOOLS

As early as 1814 the Dowlais Company had opened a school for the children of its workers. In the 1840's the Guests, convinced that education in Dowlais was, "very meagre and unsatisfactory", decided to build new schools. Opened in 1844 and 1846, they were the largest of their kind in Britain and achieved great fame.

The following evidence comes from the 1847 Royal Commission on Education in Wales — more usually known simply as 'the Blue Books'.

The Infants School had one trained master and two assistants, the average daily attendance was 200. Though its one classroom was described as, "a small room of a very inconvenient description", it was "well supplied with apparatus", and boasted an enclosed playground newly laid with broken slag.

The Girls' School was, "well lighted and ventilated. It has three adult teachers, two of whom have been trained. Each afternoon the girls sew from half past three to quarter past four. On Fridays they bring work from their own homes. There were maps of the World and Palestine on the walls. Arithmetic is taught from the board and slates. The children were neat and clean, and the school quiet and orderly." The Commissioners did criticise the poor standards achieved, however.

The Boys' School was divided into Upper and Lower sections which had 40 and 130 pupils respectively. Most left school at 9 or 10 years of age to work before entering the Upper section and even the few who carried on left at 14. The two sections, "occupy two unequal parts of a big room — the larger part, or lower school is fitted up with a gallery and divided into sections, by curtains. Each class has a section, the teacher occupies the floor in front of the gallery. The Upper school-room contains a piano, drawings done by the boys upon the walls; maps and every kind of needful apparatus. It is by far the best provided school-room which I have seen in Wales."

ROUTINE OF THE DOWLAIS UPPER SCHOOL

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
9 till 1/4 past 9.	Hymn and Prayer.				
1/4 past 9 till 1/2 past 10.	Slate and Mental Arithmetic.	Algebra.	Mensuration.	Slate and Mental Arithmetic.	Algebra.
1/2 past 10 till 1/4 to 11.	Recreation.	Drill	Recreation.	Drill.	Recreation.
1/4 to 11 till 1/2 past 11.	English History.	Geography.	Dictation.	English History.	Geography.
1/2 past 11 till 12.	Grammar.	Etymology.	Tables, etc.	Grammar.	Etymology.
AFTERNOON:-					
2 till 1/4 to 3.	Writing.	Writing.	Writing.	Writing.	Writing.
1/4 to 3 till 1/4 to 4.	Vocal Music.	Linear Drawing.	Experiments on Chemistry.	Linear Drawing.	Vocal Music.
1/4 to 4 till 1/2 past 4.	Scripture.	Scripture.	Vocal Music.	Scripture.	Scripture.
1/2 past 4 till 5.	Hymn and Prayer.	Changing Library Books.			

Whilst the Guests received some government money to run their schools, most of the finance was raised by charging the pupils $1\frac{1}{2}$ - $1\frac{1}{2}$ p a week and by deducting a weekly sum from the wages of those who worked for the Dowlais Company. The Guests also ran evening classes for their workers, setting them exams like this one.

You are recommended to answer at least one question from each section.

HOLY SCRIPTURES

1. Write out the commandment which teaches you your duty to your parents.
2. How, and within what time, was the world created? Describe the creation of man.
3. Write out either The Parable of the Good Samaritan, or that of the Ten Virgins, and state what lesson is to be learnt from it.

ARITHMETIC

1. From 100,023 take 3,507.
2. Find the number of men in an army of 17 regiments — each regiment containing 1,012 men.
3. If a person who receives a legacy of £1,000 spent £457.6s.9d. in the first year, and half that sum in the second, how much will he have left at the beginning of the third year?
4. What would £2.13s.10 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. per week amount to in a year?
Prove the correctness of your result by division.
5. If the diameter of a $\frac{1}{2}$ d. piece is $1\frac{1}{8}$ th inches, how many $\frac{1}{2}$ d's. will reach $8\frac{3}{4}$ miles? Work this sum if you can, both by vulgar fractions and by decimals.
6. What would be the cost of a door 7 feet 6 inches high, and 3 feet 4 inches wide — $\frac{2}{3}$. per square foot?

LANGUAGE

Even though the overwhelming majority of people spoke Welsh, in all but the Sunday Schools instruction was only given in English. In 1840 a Government Inspector explained why,

“Good schools will aid materially in spreading the English language; the ignorance of which is one of the great causes of the backward state of the Welsh...”

ABSENTEEISM

Among those who did attend school, absenteeism was rife. In 1840 the Inspector was told, “the complaint of irregularity was universal.” In 1850 one of the teachers in a newly-established Merthyr school told a newspaper reporter, “The only difficulty I have is to get them to attend regularly — Mondays and Fridays are the worst days for attendance.”



PROGRESS ?

During the 1840's 'National Schools' were opened in Merthyr and the other ironmasters made plans to copy the Dowlais example. In 1850, however, formal education remained the privilege of the minority, and at the end of 1851 the local newspaper argued that of Merthyr's 9,000 children of school age, two-thirds received no proper education whatsoever.

“Many of these, though under age, are working underground; but by far the larger number are rambling about the streets, and taking early lessons in swearing, impiety and theft. Society refuses to educate them properly, and as a natural consequence they readily accept the education which is afforded in the public streets, in the works and in the neighbourhood of low taverns.”

EXERCISES

1. In Merthyr during the 1840's children were considered lucky if they went to school at all. How many years do we attend school for?
2. In the Dowlais schools Arithmetic was taught from, "the board and slates". What exactly were these slates?
3. Find out what the following subjects actually were — Church catechism, Etymology, Mensuration, Linear Drawing.
4. What do you think was taught in the Sunday Schools?
5. Having looked at some of the evidence, make a list of all the differences you can think of between schools in the 1840's and schools now.
6. What do you think the Inspector meant when he described the Dame Schools as, "places of periodic confinement for children", rather than places of learning?

FOR DISCUSSION

Read the last quotation slowly and carefully. What, as far as the local newspaper was concerned, was the result of the lack of education in Merthyr?

In the mid nineteenth century truancy was said to be a major problem, whilst in many of Merthyr's schools, "silence was only maintained for a few moments at a time, by loud exclamations and threats." What is the position in schools today?

CHAPTER 9

AMUSEMENTS



A dog fight in Merthyr

Merthyr's workers, and especially the children, were eager for amusement.

"SKATING — All our ponds are frozen, and some hundreds of persons of all ages, great and small, male and female, have been amusing themselves on the ice. In Penydarren Park, some surface water flowing down being frozen, formed a species of glacier, down which lots of boys, sitting on flat stones, and assisted by the law of gravity, descended with considerable rapidity."

(Newspaper, 1850)

"The common object of social intercourse among large numbers of the working men is **revelry**. In the summer months they meet for the purpose of gambling; — the games being generally 'pitch and toss', foot racing, and target shooting. Gambling is very common on the Sabbath. We have frequently surprised parties of this kind in one of the lanes skirting the Cyfarthfa grounds, on the cinder tips at Penydarren and on the banks of the Taff. Boxing matches (of unlimited rounds) are also common."

"David Watkins, alias 'Dius Bonman', aged 74, whose fame as a trainer of cocks for fighting has extended to all the surrounding districts, died last week at Dowlais."

"David Davies and Benjamin Isaac, were charged with assaulting Sergeant Burnett. Davies and others were setting two ferocious dogs to fight in the High Street when the policeman told them to stop."

(Newspaper, 1840, 1844, 1847)



TAFF VALE RAILWAY.

WHITSUNTIDE HOLIDAYS.

ON WHIT-MONDAY NEXT, the TIMES of DEPARTURE of the PASSENGER TRAINS will be as follows:—

FROM MERTHYR TO ABERDARE AND CARDIFF.

At 6h. 0m. and 9h. 0m. Morning; 1h. 10m. & 5h. 10m. Afternoon.

FROM ABERDARE TO CARDIFF AND MERTHYR.

At 6h. 0m. and 9h. 0m. Morning; 1h. 5m. and 5h. 10m. Afternoon.

FROM CARDIFF TO MERTHYR AND ABERDARE.

At 9h. 30m. Morning; 1h. 0m. and 5h. 0m. Afternoon; 8h. 0m. Evening.

Two and Fro Tickets, for Whit-Monday only, will be issued at all the Stations, at the rate of FARE AND HALF-FARE, for the Two and Fro Journey to Llandaff only.

Single Tickets to all Stations, at the usual Fares.— Passengers having To and Fro Tickets will deliver them to the Guards upon demand, who will give them a Return Ticket in lieu of it.

Further particulars may be obtained by applying at any of the Stations.

GEORGE FISHER,

Cardiff, May 17th, 1849.

General Superintendent.

Apart from gambling, the people also enjoyed travelling, and with the coming of the railways the opportunities and destinations increased.

"On Whit-Monday, many hundreds of people — 26 coaches from Merthyr alone — took advantage of the Taff Vale Railway's 'to and fro' tickets and went to Llandaff Fair."

"Some hundreds — we are informed upwards of 500 — of the inhabitants of this town and district took advantage of the cheap fares of the railway, to visit Cardiff and spend the day there."

"Great numbers of people still flock to the Great Exhibition."

Even when railways did not exist, certain places and events consistently attracted Merthyr people.

"It is not true that several large foreign ships cannot come into Swansea, owing to the tides being lessened by the quantity of sea water drunk by the Merthyr people. A moderate quantity for one man per day being about fifteen half-pints."

"Many hundreds went to see Thomas Thomas being hung for murder at Brecon... all available vehicles were in requisition and greedily hired."

(Newspaper, 1846, 1844, 1857, 1839, 1845)

GRAND BALLOON ASCENT!

THE Inhabitants of Cardiff, Llandaff, Merthyr, Newport, &c., &c., are respectfully informed that the Celebrated Aeronaut, Mr. GREEN, from Vauxhall Gardens, will make a GRAND ASCENT, in his new and splendid Balloon, "THE RAINBOW," from CARDIFF, on MONDAY, the 9th day of JULY, 1849; after which will be given a Grand Display of FIREWORKS.

Full particulars in next week's GUARDIAN Newspaper, and by Hand-bills.

Admission to the Ascent and Fireworks, 1s.

VISITING ATTRACTIONS

"Sand's American Circus performed at the [Cyfarthfa] Castle Field at 2.30 p.m. to around 1,300 people, and again at 7.30 p.m. to around 2,500 - 3,000 people."

"The Circus Royal — Mr Cooke and his troop of equestrians drove into town on Monday morning." (They stayed for over a month)

"The arrival of Madame Macarte's troop of equestrians was the great fact of Monday; the streets were thronged with expectant thousands."

"Monsieur Chylinski, 'THE FIRE KING' beat red hot iron with his bare hands, bit a piece of red hot iron from another piece — put melted lead into his mouth and swallowed boiling butter by the spoonful. Then he danced a waltz carrying three men at the same time. He is Polish and is accompanied by a blind and very talented musician."

"Tom Thumb appears daily at the Temperance Hall".

Travelling Shows were also popular.

"The juvenile portion of the public of Merthyr have been amused by an exhibition of wax works in the western portion of the market-house."

(Newspaper, 1844, 1846, 1857, 1840, 1857, 1844)

LAUGHING GAS!

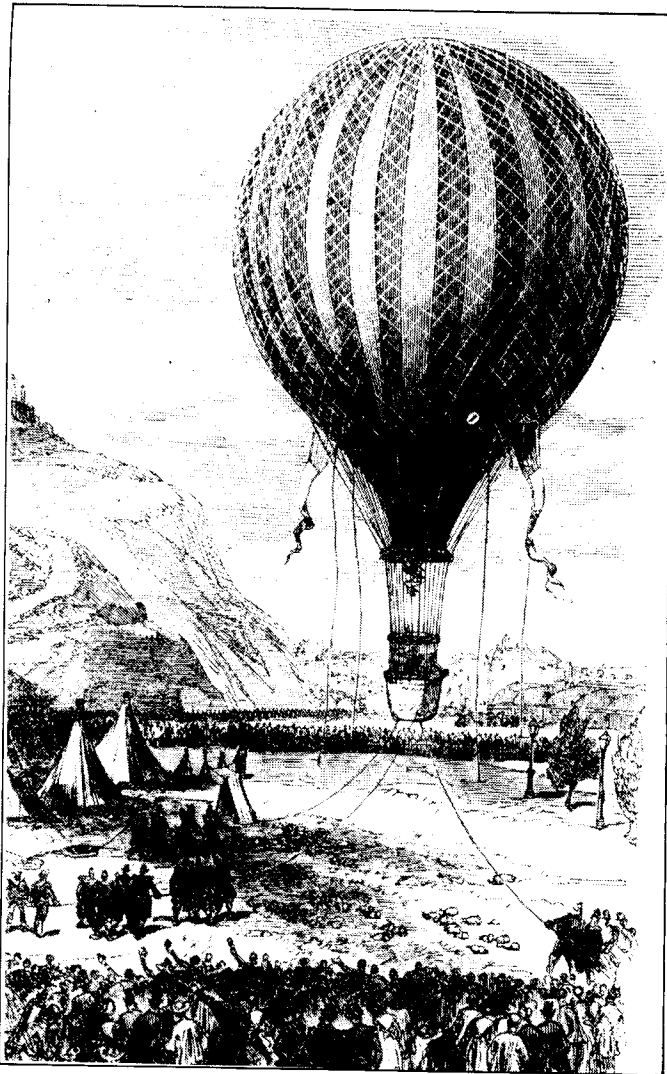
MR PARTRIDGE

BEGS to announce that he will publicly exhibit, **NEXT WEEK ONLY**, at a Room opposite the Bush Inn, High Street, Merthyr, the astonishing and laughable effects of the NITROUS OXIDE, or, as it is expressively called, LAUGHING GAS, when breathed into the lungs.

Admission—Ladies and Gentlemen, 1s; Mechanics, 6d.
Hours of administering the Gas, Seven, Eight and Nine o'clock, each evening.

“WIGGLESWORTH’S DIORAMA — An exhibition of mechanical figures has been enjoying great success. Views of Ispahan, Paris and other places arouse the interest — the one of Damascus is very good. On the occasion of our visit, the exhibition consisted of scenes in the life of John Wesley, the view of Damascus and a storm at sea. A grand juvenile performance was given on Wednesday, to the Sunday and Day Scholars. The boys and girls of the High Street National Schools went down the street in procession, and we have reason to believe that other schools also went to see the famous City of Imperial Rome, Prince Albert, the City of Amsterdam, the vision of Shakespeare, the City of Nankin, and the Storm at Sea.”

(Newspaper, 1851)



“During the past week we have been induced to form one of the numerous groups of gapers in the market-square. It contains lots of attractions. Let us stand facing the market-house. Right in front is what is called a flying dragon... On the right, are a couple of apple stalls — among the group stand our friend Pulman [the town crier], singing, ‘Rock, Rock, Rock again!’ and a little in the background is a gentleman who offers to show the Merthyr people how they look, in black, upon a bit of cardboard. On the left is a peep-show, wherein are shown views of the Crystal Palace, the Holy Land, and the [Kaffir] wars. Above may be seen in great daubs of paint, fighting ranks of soldiers and barbarians; in the foreground is a Kaffir murdering an English Officer, and immediately below it is a burly fellow of a Saxon [i.e. a German] boor, who makes a nightly practice of kicking and maltreating an Englishwoman of the Sally Brass order, whom he calls ‘My Ooman’. Close to this is a model of the Exhibition, in the interior, and a model of a cotton factory, with two pretty locomotives. In the centre stands the model gallery, to us the most interesting of the whole. We must pay a compliment to the brass band belonging to the ‘gallery’. They play every evening to crowds of delighted auditors and play remarkably well.”

(Newspaper, 1851)

ORGANISED AMUSEMENTS

Most of the town’s churches and chapels held picnics at various times, as did the Sunday schools. They also organised choral activities and eisteddfodau on a regular basis in an attempt to persuade people away from the ‘vulgar’ and ‘debasement’ amusements outlined so far in this section.

The Guests also provided leisure activities for their young employees, and for the children in their schools. On Whitsunday in 1850, for example, they gave a party for their school children. Milk and buns were distributed at Dowlais House, and the children were given a conducted tour of the gardens and greenhouses. After this the children played games like ‘prisoner’s base’, ‘leap frog’ and ‘Sally Walters’.



Pub Scene

PUBS AND BEERHOUSES

Throughout the mid 19th century Merthyr was notorious for its drunkenness which was by no means restricted to adults.

“It is quite painful to enter one of the more popular beer-shops, and see grown up men with their children — little old men of twelve and thirteen, drinking beer in plenteous draughts, and smoking their pipes with as much importance as men of larger growth. For much of this evil the wealthier inhabitants of the town and neighbourhood are to be blamed, for hundreds go to the tavern, from no other motive, than the want of something to do.”

(Newspaper 1848)

“There are taverns without end, and there are few libraries, lecture-rooms, or sources of amusement, to distract their attention in the tedium of their leisure hours, few as those are.”

(Merthyr Visitor 1852)

EXERCISES

1. What were 'pitch and toss' and 'cock fighting'?
2. From the evidence provided, what kind of visiting attraction proved to be the most popular?
3. Find out all you can about the **Great Exhibition**. Where was it and what was exhibited?
4. Why do you think gambling was so popular on Sundays?
5. Children still play 'leap frog' today. Have you any ideas concerning what 'prisoner's base' and 'Sally Walters' may have been?
6. Can you identify any common themes among the travelling shows?

FOR DISCUSSION

Why do you think Merthyr people were so eager for amusement?

In the mid 19th century people expressed concern about juvenile drinking and argued that the only way to prevent it was to provide alternative leisure facilities. Is there any similarity between then and now?

MERTHYR IN THE 1840's

BOOKS AND ARTICLES FOR FURTHER READING

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	COMMENTS
ADDIS John P.	The Crawshay Dynasty	Univ. of Wales 1958	Detailed technical account of the Crawshay Ironworks.
AFON TAF HISTORY RESEARCH GROUP	Recollections of: Merthyr's Past	Afon Taf History Research Group 1979	Merthyr in 1848 and 1854, various customs P5 - 9. Living conditions P20 - 22. Population and Death Figures. Dame schools in Merthyr area and Life of Working Class Women P30 - 34. (Suitable reading for years 3, 4 and 5 in Secondary Schools).
de la BECHE Sir H.T.	Report on the Sanatory (sic) Condition of Merthyr Tydfil, Glamorganshire.	1844	Very small print. Available Merthyr Tydfil Library Archives. Very detailed. Deals with drainage, cleansing, water supply, houses of lower classes, deaths from consumption and epidemics. Good source.
CLARKE	A Guide to Merthyr Tydfil and the Travellers Companion	Merthyr Tydfil 1884	Excellent material. Written in 1848. P15 Merthyr at Night. P35 Pop ulation in 1841 and 1845. Ch. VII fairs, market, street scenes, dress of women, number of houses 1845. Ch. IX Schools, Robert Thompson Crawshay's Wedding 1846. Available Merthyr Tydfil Library Archives.
CORDELL Alexander	The Fire People	Hodder & Stoughton	The story of Dic Penderyn and the Merthyr Riots 1831. (Historical Fiction)
CORDELL Alexander	Song of the Earth	London, Victor Gollancz Ltd. 1969	A picture of Merthyr in the mid 19th Century. (Historical Fiction)
DAVIES Evan	Merthyr - Iron and Merthyr — Riots 1750-1860	Longmans	Recommended Then & There series book.
DAVIES Penelope	Children of the Industrial Revolution (Panorama of History Series)	Pan Books 1976	Suitable for upper Juniors. Excellent illustrations on every page.
EGAN David	People, Protest and Politics: Case Studies of Popular Move- ments in C19th Wales.	Gomer Press	Designed for pupils studying G.C.S.E. History particularly useful for a Case Study on Merthyr Tydfil 1831 & Chartism.

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	COMMENTS
ELSAS Madeline (ed)	Iron in the Making: Dowlais Iron Company Letters 1782 - 1860	County records Committee of the Glamorgan County Council, and Guest Iron and Steel Col. 1960	Illuminating because the contents are actual letters written by both employers and employees. Very interesting chapter entitled 'Masters and Men', dealing with enticement, transfer, blacklisting, welfare, acci- dents, works shop, letters from employees petitioning for higher wages. Original letters at Glamorgan Records Office.
EVANS David	Wales in Modern Times	Edward Arnold 1979	Well illustrated. Textbook for O level and C.S.E. candidates but also suitable for able pupils in years 3 and 4 in the Secondary School. Ch. 13 'The Iron Industry in Wales Before 1900' — Many references to Merthyr — Cholera, housing etc.
EVANS J.O. & HARRIS T.J.	School & Play in the Parish of Vaynor from 1650 to the Present	Merthyr Tydfil District Naturalists Society 1983	Excerpts from School Log Books.
EVANS Leslie Wynne	Education in Industrial Wales 1700 - 1900	Avalon Books 1971	Maps showing distribution of various works' schools. Tables naming schools, counties and dates of estab- lishment. Ch. IV — Sir John Guest's Education Scheme — much more information in- cluding aims, examination paper, timetable, numbers on roll, teachers' salaries. P56 - 59 on Merthyr Ironworks' Schools and mention of Merthyr on numerous other pages.
EVANS R. Meurig	Children in the Iron Industry 1840 - 1842	National Museum of Wales 1972	Very well illustrated with many ref- erences to Merthyr Tydfil. Ideal for children's use.
EVANS R. Meurig	Children in the Mines 1840 - 1842	National Museum of Wales 1972	Describes conditions under which children lived and worked more than 100 years ago. The children tell of their experiences in their own words.
EVANS R. Meurig	Children Working Underground	National Museum of Wales 1979	Section on South Wales coalfield with reference to Merthyr Tydfil. Very clear, concise account of the coal industry. Good illustrations and contemporary accounts.

GINSWICK Ed Jules	Labour and the Poor in England and Wales 1849- 1851 Volume III South Wales & North Wales		Pages 10-94. Very good section on the iron industry and its social consequ- ences in Merthyr and Dowlais.
GROSS Joseph	A Brief History of Merthyr Tydfil	Starling Press Gwent 1980	Ch. 9 'The Nineteenth Century' industrial and economic history, politics, public administration.
HARRIS T.J.	An article on Education in the Parish of Vaynor prior to 1870.	Cefn Coed and Vaynor Local History Society	P.5 - 6 Ironworks' schools 1828 - 1870. P.7 Later Charity Schools 1808 - - 1870. P.7 - 8 The Treachery of the Blue Books 1846 - 1847. P.8 - 9 Day Schools in 1847. P.10 - 12 Sunday Schools in 1847. Very factual account.
JAMIESON Alan	The Industrial Revolution		Series — Exploring History. General Picture of Britain. Excellent photographs. Work cards.
JENKINS Gwyn	Past-into Present Series Wales	Batsford 1975	Chapter 3 — The Industrial Revol- ution in Wales. Special reference to Merthyr — illustrations. Chapter 4 in- cludes housing conditions, some reference to Merthyr. Clothes of various workers. Leisure activities. Suitable for O level and C.S.E. pupils.
JONES G. Penryn	Cholera in Wales	National Library of Wales Journal, Vol. X, 1957/58	Good Survey. More suitable for VI form and teachers.
JONES Jack	Bidden to the Feast	Remploy Ltd. London 1938	A picture of Nineteenth Century Merthyr Tydfil (Historical Fiction)
JONES Jack	Off to Philadelphia in the morning	Corgi Books	The Story of Joseph Parry. (Historical Fiction)
JONES Tydfil Davies	Poor Law Administration in Merthyr Tydfil Union 1834 - 94	Merthyr Library Archives	P46 - 50 Pauper Children, Health, Small-pox, Cholera.

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	COMMENT
	Merthyr Historian Vol. 1	Merthyr Tydfil Historical Society 1976	Illustrated. Chapter 1 Chronological date sequence of events for the Dowlais Ironworks. Chapter 2 Details of Merthyr Ironworks. Chapter 5 History of Transport – good detail. Chapter 11 Poor Relief in Merthyr in the Nineteenth Century – good picture of life, prices etc. Also Chapter on Notable Women of Merthyr – Lucy Thomas, Lady Charlotte Guest, Rose Mary Crawshay.
	Merthyr Historian Vol. II	Merthyr Tydfil Historical Society 1978	Illustrated. Chapter 4 Brief Mention of early Nineteenth century housing in Merthyr. Chapter 6 Hospitals in Merthyr since 1850 and brief details of Public Health before 1850.
	Merthyr Historian Vol. III	Merthyr Tydfil Historic and Civic Society 1980	Many good photographs. Chapter 6 'Accidents at Work in Merthyr Tydfil 1840 - 1850' Good insight into appalling working conditions. Chapter 9 'Some Aspects of Life in Merthyr Tydfil in the Nineteenth Century'. Very interesting account of living conditions – homes, clothes, shops, leisure, education.
	The Story of Merthyr Tydfil	Merthyr Tydfil Teachers' Association N.U.T. 1932	Very general – all topics rather brief. Chapter XIX Excerpt from George Borrow's visit to Merthyr in 1854. Available – Merthyr Tydfil Library Archives.
MERTHYR TEACHERS CENTRE GROUP	Merthyr Tydfil: A Valley Community	Merthyr Teachers' Centre Group in Association with D. Brown & Sons Ltd, Cambridge	The following sections might be of use: II History: Chapters 6 & 7 Political History in the C19th and C20th and the Development of Local Government. III Earning a Living: Chapter 2 Industrial Development to 1918. IV Social, Culture History: Chapters 1 to 5 dealing with Population, Health, Education, Eminent People & Religion.
MERTHYR TYDFIL NATURALIST SOCIETY	The Historic Taf Valleys, Volumes 2 & 3 1982 & 1986	Merthyr Tydfil District Naturalists Society	Volume 2: Chapter 2 Social History. Deals with the social history (mainly C19th) of both Taf Fawr and Taf Fechan Valleys between their sources and influence at Cefn Coed. Volume 3: Chapter 3. Social and Industrial History. Deals with aspects of C19th development of the town.

OWEN John A.	The History of the Dowlais Ironworks 1759 - 1936	Merthyr Tydfil Borough Council 1972	P7 - 80 Chronological date sequence of events for the Dowlais Ironworks. P70 - 72 Dowlais Ironworks 'Girls' Jobs, wages, clothes. P32 - Dowlais Central Schools. P27 - 28 Cholera. P22 Schools in Dowlais 1844 - fees, curriculum.
RAMMELL T.W.	Report to the General Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry of the Town of Merthyr Tydfil	1850	Available from Merthyr Tydfil Library Archives. This is a detailed and fascinating report, and one of the main resources for this period.
SPEED P.F.	Social Problems of the Industrial Revolution	Pergamon Press	General information which could be applied to any industrial town — pictures, photo-copies of posters. Includes song of the Temperance Movement — 'How best to use the Week's Wages'. Contents include state of towns, work- ing conditions, poverty, domestic habits. Very good.
TAYLOR Margaret Stewart	The Crawshays of Cyfarthfa Castle	Robert Hale London	Fair insight into private lives of iron- masters of Merthyr.
VAUGHAN Fred	Poor Relief in the Nineteenth Century		This is photo-copied article in the archives of Merthyr Tydfil Library. Much detail.
LOWE J.B.	Welsh Industrial Workers' Housing 1775 - 1875	National Museum of Wales	Very little text but excellent illus- trations.
WILKINS Charles	The History of the Iron, Steel, Tinplate and other trades of Wales	Joseph Williams Merthyr Tydfil 1903	Much information on the title material. P305 - 310 Chapter on 'The Streets and Workmen's Cottages: A Pen Picture' — circa Mid Nineteenth Century. Available archives Merthyr Tydfil Library.

WILKINS Charles	The History of Merthyr Tydfil	1908	Much information about the iron- masters and family life, the iron- works, the will of Anthony Bacon. Chapter XXVII — 'duties' of the Con- stable — fights between 'clans'. P370 List of criminal offences, number of ar- rests according to nationality 1851. P432 List of population, births, deaths inhabited homes 1801 - 1906. Chapter XXXI The 1850 meeting of the Board of Health — description of sanitary conditions of towns, state of roads, wages and price of commodities. Available archives Merthyr Tydfil Library.
WILLIAMS David	A History of Modern Wales	John Murray 1977	General background information with some references to Merthyr.
WILLIAMS Glanmor (Ed)	Merthyr Politics The Making of a Working Class Tradition	University of Wales 1966	Illustrated. Chapters include the Merthyr of Dic Penderyn 1831; Details of Merthyr's Population in Mid Nineteenth Century, housing, life expectancy — good description of Merthyr.
WILLIAMS Gwyn	The Merthyr Rising		An excellent account of Merthyr in the 1830's. Very highly recommen- ded.
WILLIAMS Huw (Ed)	Merthyr Tydfil 1500 years	Merthyr Tydfil Local History Group 1980	Illustrated. Chapter 4 'Women in Industry' in the Nineteenth Century' — very good ac- count of various occupations in which Women were employed. P41 Average wages 1847 P41 - 42 Cholera (Suitable for more able pupils from Year 3 in Secondary Schools).
WILLIAMS Huw (Ed)	Merthyr Tydfil Then and Now	Department of Extra Mural Studies University College Cardiff 1979	Chapter 'A Dowlais Diary' gives statistics on Dowlais workers and production. Brief picture of Dowlais 1800 - 1889.
WILLIAMS Moelwyn	The Making of the South Wales Landscape	Hodder and Stoughton 1975	Illustrated. P191 - 192 Merthyr landscape prior to Ironworks. P216 - 226 Industrial Towns with reference to Merthyr.
WILLIAMS Rhydwen	The Angry Vineyards	Christopher Davies Limited Swansea 1975	Historical fiction.

WILLIAMS
W.J.

Article on
Life in
Nineteenth
Century
Cefn Coed.

Cefn Coed and
Vaynor Local
Historical Society

P2 - 4 Housing — very readable and
interesting.
P4 - 5 Food.
P5 - 6 Home remedies.
P10 Chapels.
P14 Clothes.
P18 - 21 Transport
More relevant to second half of Nine-
teenth Century.
(Available Merthyr Library Archives).

Also the following articles, work-packs, journals etc.

Slide Packs/Booklets and Radio Cassettes

Each title in the modern Wales, Slide Series consists of 24 slides, some in colour. An ample booklet is provided, containing full notes maps and diagrams.

AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	COMMENTS
STRANGE Keith	Merthyr Tydfil Iron Community	Welsh History Resources Unit c/o National Language Unit of Wales	The set examines the effect Industrialisation had on Merthyr Tydfil, the first Industrial Town in Wales. Also available a radio-vision cassette.
DAVIES Brian	The Iron Industry in Wales 1750 - 1850	Welsh History Resources Unit c/o National Language Unit of Wales	The set outlines the development of the Iron Industry in Wales 1750-1850. By 1830 South Wales produced 40% of Britain's output of Iron. The emphasis is on economic history. Also available — a radio-vision cassette.
DAVIES Brian	People, Protest and Politics in Nineteenth Century Wales	Mid Glamorgan County Supplies Waterton Bridgend	This set explores in some detail the background, causes and events which lay behind the social and political developments of 19th century Wales.
DAVIES Conway	Coal Industry	Welsh History Resources Unit	Examines the development of Coal mining in Wales from early nineteenth century to the First World War

'Cholera in 19th Century Merthyr. This is a photo-copied article in the Merthyr Tydfil Library Archives. It is fairly good for quick reference on the 1849 outbreak.

Llafur Vol. 2 No. 1 Spring 1976. Article on 'Merthyr Tydfil: The Politics of Survival' concerning Public Health in Merthyr in the mid 19th century. This journal is published by the Society for the Study of Welsh Labour History. All enquiries about the Society should be addressed to Dot Jones, Economics Department, University of Wales, Aberystwyth. There is also a 'Llafur Teachers' Group' especially for teachers. Its secretary is Dr Keith Strange, Treorchy Comprehensive School, Treorchy, Rhondda.

Llafur Vol. 2 No. 4 Spring 1979. Excellent article on 'The Conquering of China' — Crime in this notorious area of old Merthyr — gives jobs, population, religion, wages, life in general, police force, gangs and well-known criminal types.

Llafur Vol. 3 No. 1 Spring 1980. Excellent article entitled, 'In Search of the Celestial Empire' — deals with Crime in Merthyr 1830 — 1860 with particular reference to 'China'.

Notes on the Sanitary Condition of Merthyr Tydfil 1847 - 1855 Article taken from the Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian — cholera, meetings of the new Board of Health, details of cases and numbers dead from June 13th, 1849 to September 22nd, 1849. Available Merthyr Tydfil Library Archives.

Resources Pack on Industry Schools Council Publication 1969. Available at the Teachers' Centre, Merthyr Tydfil. Apart from written information, the Pack contains photographs, paintings and drawings. Photo-copies of the material can be made but the pack cannot be taken out of the Teachers' Centre.

Royal Commission for Inquiry into the Employment and Condition of Children in Mines and Manufacturers 1842. Available archives, Merthyr Tydfil Library.

Royal Commission of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales 1846. Available archives Merthyr Tydfil Library.

On the State of Elementary Education in the Mining Districts of South Wales 1839. Many references to Merthyr Tydfil. Available archives Merthyr Tydfil Library.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The History Research Group wishes to acknowledge with thanks the help given by the following:

Mansel Richards and **Robert Evans** of Afon Tâf High; the staff of the **Merthyr Tydfil Reference Library**; **Nic Mansfield** Curator, Cyfarthfa Castle Museum; **Brian Davies** Curator, Big Pit Museum; **Bill Jones** Welsh Industrial and Maritime Museum. The staff of the **Central Library Cardiff**.

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Map of Merthyr in 1851 — Clive Thomas

- P. 1 Dowlais Iron Works, 1840 — G. Childs, by permission of B.S.C.
2 Battle Scene — L.F. Lejeune
3 Merthyr Rolling Mills at Night — Thomas Hornor, C.1817, National Museum of Wales.
4 The Gentleman's Magazine 1794
4 Glamorganshire Canal Pontypridd
5 'Trevithick's Tramroad Locomotive'. T. Cuneo, National Museum of Wales
6 Taff Vale Railway, Quaker's Yard; The Elton Collection, Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust.
7 View Merthyr Tydfil — Merthyr Tydfil Borough Library
9 Tip Girls — Welsh Industrial and Maritime Museum
10 Drawing from 1842 Commission (Air door)
10 Collier Girl photograph from Meurig Williams
11 Drammer girls 1842 Commission Report
12 Brick Girls — The Mansell Collection
15 Merthyr Tydfil Borough Library
16 Cyfarthfa Castle Museum
17 Low's Industrial Housing
18 Cyfarthfa Castle Museum
20 Rammell Report 1850
21 Manchester Public Libraries
22 L.H. Bolwell, 'The Urban Geography of the North Eastern Rim of the Glamorganshire Coalfield', M.A., Aberystwyth, 1961.
23 Mary Evans Picture Library.
27 Graveyard — Merthyr Tydfil Borough Library
28 Cholera, 'Return of Cases' Poster, 22 Sept. 1849 — Merthyr Tydfil Borough Council
29 C.M.G. 21 July, 1849, Cardiff Central Library
30 Gravestone — D. Maddox
32 Street Scene
33 Lady on Doorstep by courtesy of the Guildhall Library
34 Workhouse — B.B.C. Schools Publications
35 Workhouse plan — B.B.C. Schools Publications
37 The Mary Evans Picture Library (p.39 in 'One Day in Victorian England', Alastair Scott, Tyndall).
37 Punch Magazine
38 Hanging — B.B.C. Schools Publications
41 On board a convict ship, courtesy of Hulton Picture Library
44 B.B.C. Schools Publications
45 Troedyrhiw Chapel, Merthyr Tydfil Borough Library
46 Dowlais School — Merthyr Tydfil Borough Library
47 L.W. Evans, 'Sir John & Lady Charlotte Guest's Educational Scheme at Dowlais in the mid 19th century, National Library of Wales Journal, Vol. 9, 1956
50 Dog Fighting — Illustrated London News
51 C.M.G. Cardiff Central Library
52 C.M.G. Cardiff Central Library
52 C.M.G. Cardiff Central Library
53 Balloon, Illustrated London News 1871
54 'Collier Stepping' I.L. News.

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The research and development for this publication was partly funded by a Welsh Office grant.