

Blaenau Gwent  
**REACH**



*“Celebrating Blaenau Gwent”*

## THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION



The Industrial Revolution started around 1800, it changed how people worked for ever. New steam powered machines were being invented that could produce things cheaply and huge quantities. Large factories started to appear, and people move from the country into the towns to get work.



Before the Industrial Revolution people worked from home, in what were called cottage industries



A large factory during the Industrial revolution

## THE SOUTH WALES COALFIELD



The new machinery could not work without coal, it helped to fuel industries such as iron and copper smelting. Large factories produced items that were sent all over the world, the new steam engines on the railways ran on coal, people used it to keep warm and to cook their food. As more and more factories started to appear more coal was needed.

Barry Dock was the largest coal exporter in the world, sending the Welsh coal all over the globe, Cardiff was the second largest coal exporting port.

The South Wales coal fields grew quickly and people from all over Wales, England, Ireland, and Scotland came to South Wales to work. Tiny little villages with just a few farms very quickly grew into towns. Schools, shops, and churches were built and lots of terraced houses started to appear as more and more people came to work in the mines. The miners did not have to pay to live in their homes as it was part of their wages.

It was said that between 1851 to 1911 366,000 people moved to the South Wales coalfields.



## DID CHILDREN WORK DOWN THE MINES?



*children as young as 5 went down the mine to work, they didn't go to school and many children and adults couldn't read or write.*

*The Coal Mines Regulation Act passed from 1st March 1843 made it illegal for women or any child under the age of 10 to work underground in Britain*



## WHAT JOBS DID CHILDREN DO?

### THE TRAPPER



A trapper would open and close the wooden doors to allow fresh air to flow through the mine, this job was always done by the youngest children some only 5 or 6 years old.

Trappers were paid 2 pence a day, their light cost 2½ pence a week. Very often the light would not last the 12-hour shift and the children would be left in darkness.

### THE HURRIER AND THRUSTER



These jobs were mostly done by the older children who would push and pull tubs of coal along the roadways from the coal face to the pit bottom.

### THE DRAMMER



A drammer was paid 5 pence a day, they pulled the coal trucks by a chain around their waists

The thrusters, who were at the back of the coal trucks, often pushed with their heads, their hair was worn away and the top of their heads were bald.

## SAFETY IN THE MINES - THE DAVY LAMP



A long time ago the only light that miners had to work by were candles, in mines there are different types of gasses and there were many explosions caused by the naked flames from the candles. Many lives were lost.



In 1815 Sir Humphrey Davy invented a special lamp, this was called the Davy lamp after him. The flame was shielded by a mesh, so that it didn't set fire to the dangerous gases and cause an explosion.



If there was any carbon monoxide or methane gas in the air the flame burned with a blue colour. Both of these gases were extremely flammable and could cause explosions, the change in the flame colour warned the miners to get out quickly.

The Davy lamp helped to save thousands of lives, and still today a modern version of the lamp is still used to test for gases in mines.

## SAFETY IN THE MINES - CANARIES

On 27th January 1896 there was a terrible explosion at Tylorstown in the Rhondda, and many miners lost their lives due to a gas explosion.

Professor John Scott Haldane, a well-known Victorian doctor had studied the effects of gas on the miners. He realised that Canaries breath much faster than humans, he told the miners to take a canary down the mine, and when the miners saw the canary getting distressed, they knew there was gas and they had time to get out.



From 1911, each mine kept two canaries to help detect gases such as carbon monoxide which is colourless, odourless and tasteless.

Any sign of distress from the canary was a clear signal the conditions underground were unsafe and miners should be evacuated from the pit and the mineshafts made safer.

To keep the canaries safe, inventors came up with a special cage.

Once the canary showed signs of carbon monoxide poisoning the door would be closed and a valve opened, allowing oxygen from the tank on top to be released and revive the canary!



On 30th December 1986 it was decided that no more canaries would go down the mine and that gas would be detected in a more modern way; the miners were really sad that the little birds were not with them down the mines anymore.

## MINING FACTS



People wore their own clothing down the mine, it wasn't until much later that miners had overalls and safety gear



The men had a lunch box called a "snap tin", this had their lunch in it, the box was made from metal so that the rats couldn't steal their food!



BRASS CHECK



DAVY LAMP

As they entered the mine, each miner has a brass check that they would give to the lamp man who would give them a Davy lamp, when they had finished their shift they would hand the lamp back and their brass check was given back to them. This system made sure that all the miners were safely out of the mine at the end of their shift.



## MINING FACTS



*Until the 1950s many South Wales collieries didn't have pithead baths, so miners had to walk home covered in coal dust. Most of the miner's houses didn't have a bathroom, they used a tin bath in front of the fire to get clean.*

*The first Welsh pithead baths were built at Deep Navigation Colliery, Treharris, in 1916.*



*The Colliery cats had an important job to do, they made sure they caught the rats and mice that lived in the hay for the pit ponies. The cats never went down the mines but patrolled the stables.*

## MINERS' INSTITUTES



Oakdale Miners' Institute built in 1917.

The building is now housed in the Museum at St Fagans

*In the early 1900s, Miners' Institutes were built all over the country. These were often large buildings that the miners had paid towards, the money was taken from their pay packet every week.*

*Inside the institute you would find meeting rooms, reading rooms with all the daily newspapers set out, libraries so that the miners and their families could educate themselves. Later billiard/snooker rooms and dance halls were added to them.*

Oakdale Miners' Institute Library



## MINERS' FORTNIGHT



A few years after the 2nd World War it was announced that the mines would shut down for two weeks every year. The last week in July, and the first week in August, this became known as the "Miners Fortnight". The miners and their families who worked in the South Wales mines would rush to the seaside, to places like Porthcawl and Barry Island.



Plenty of fun at Butlins 1975

## PIT PONIES



*Pit ponies were used underground for more than 200 years. In 1842, when the Coal Mining Act was passed to say that children and women were no longer allowed to work underground. It was decided that ponies would be taken underground to do the work instead.*

*The ponies slept in stables underground and were fed hay with lots of fresh water to drink.*

*The ponies worked for 8 hours a day.*



*The Ponies had special headgear to protect their heads and eyes*

*It was said that the Pit ponies could move up to 121 tons of coal in a day*

## PIT PONIES



When the miners went on holiday the pit ponies did too! The ponies were allowed a rest and were taken to fields where they could run and rest.

In 1947 new hospital was built near Bridgend, this was a very special hospital, it looked after sick or injured pit ponies



*Duke, the "last surviving pit pony" in the UK is enjoying his retirement in Suffolk more than 20 years after he last helped to pull coal from mines.*

*Duke worked down a small mine in Pantygasseg near Pontypool and retired in 1999*

## THE SIX BELLS DISASTER

*Over the years there have been many coal mining disasters throughout the country, taking the lives of lots of men who worked hard in terrible conditions to keep the country going.*



*On 28th June 1960 at 10.45am a large explosion took place at the Six Bells colliery. The Pit hooter started to go off continuously and everyone knew this meant there had been a terrible accident. Lots of families waited for many hours to hear what had happened.*

*Just as the sun was setting over Six Bells the terrible truth of the disaster became clear, 45 men had lost their lives.*

*The disaster had killed friends, fathers, sons and brothers who had all who had been working together, it plunged the whole valley into sadness.*

*Around the country other mining communities understood the tragedy and started to raise funds for the families who had lost their loved ones.*

## REMEMBERING THE SIX BELLS DISASTER



It was decided to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Six Bells disaster with a new memorial.

Sebastien Boyesen, the artist was asked to create a fitting memorial. He spoke to lots of people in the area about the disaster and understood the devastating effect it had had on the families and community to this day.

Sebastien wanted to make sure that he created something very special.

## REMEMBERING THE SIX BELLS DISASTER



### **THE GUARDIAN'S OUTSTRETCHED ARMS PROTECTING THE PAST AND FUTURE OF SIX BELLS**

It is important that we remembered the past and remember the people whose names appear on the Guardian, honouring their bravery.

Britain was built on Welsh coal, the South Wales miners and their families played such a big part in the history of coal mining, helping the country to grow.

Always be proud of your mining heritage, it should never be forgotten.