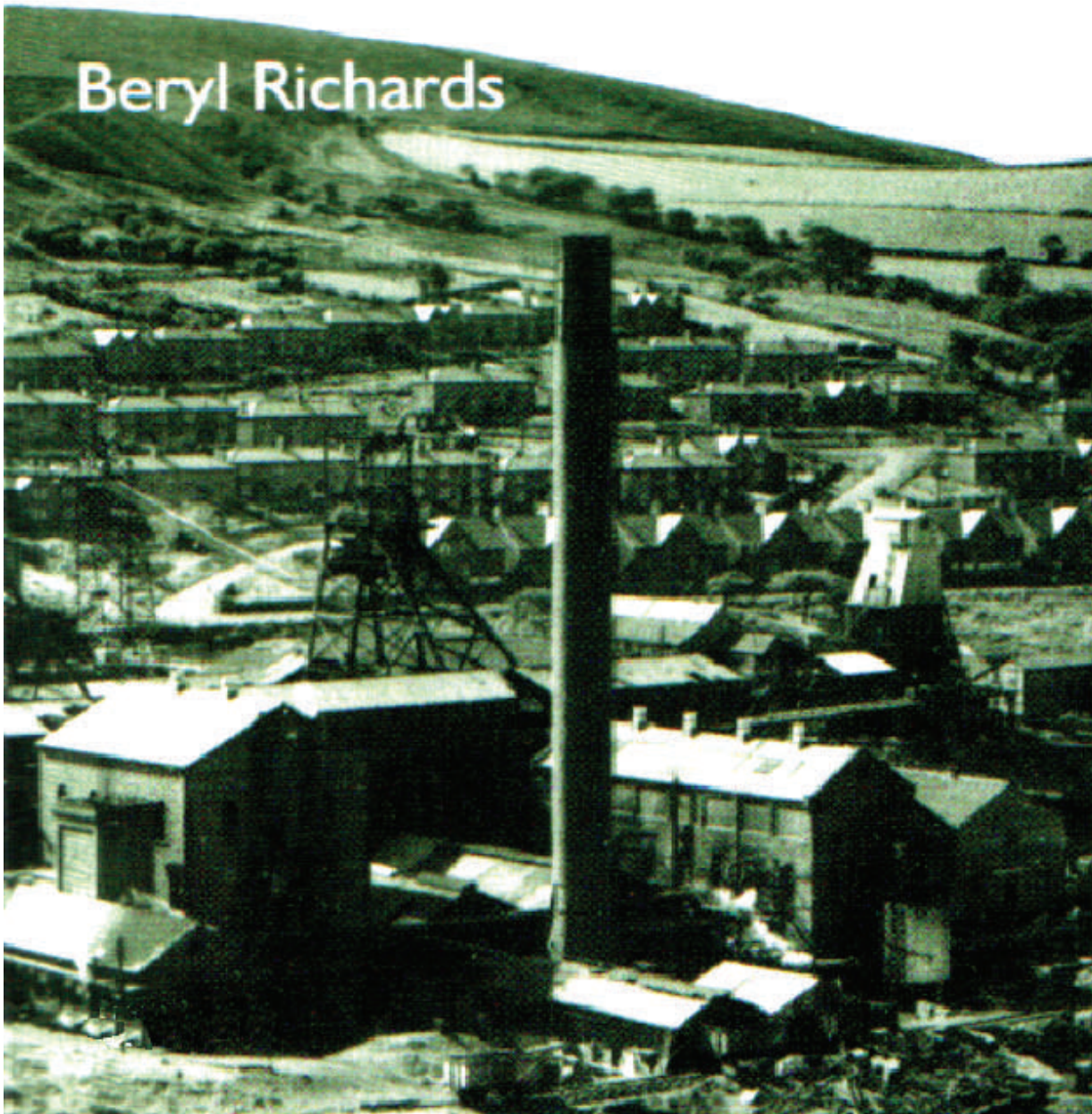


Nantybar

A vanished village in the Afan Valley

Beryl Richards



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Cover picture:

Dyffryn Rhondda Collieries before the Nant y Bar cottages were finally demolished.

CONTENTS

Introduction	5
Preface	8
The Early Days: Fforchdwm and Nantybar	11
The South Wales Mineral Railway	15
Living Conditions	18
Child and Female Labour	23
Health, Safety and Social Growth	27
The Truck System	32
Friendly Societies, Masonic Orders and Trades Unions	36
Maps	42

INTRODUCTION

All for one, one for all, that is our device, is it not?

– Alexandre Dumas

An old Chinese proverb, which states that the first step of the journey is the longest, expresses my feelings about writing this piece. My curiosity about the small hamlet of Nant y Bar, which was situated in the Upper Afan Valley, North of Port Talbot, was aroused when I attended a seminar, held at Swansea under the auspices of the Institute of Welsh Affairs, and devoted to the initial planning stages of the proposed Industrial and Maritime Museum to be opened there. A talk given by Mrs Anna Southall of the National Museums and Galleries of Wales presented us with a highly personalised and colourful overview of her ideas on the Industrial Revolution and the place that Wales had occupied in this process during the nineteenth century.



The valley as it is today.

Wales became the first industrialised nation in the world, a fact that we have undervalued, although it had a profound effect on both our culture and archaeology. During the 1840s, more of the Welsh population was engaged in industry than in agriculture. In much the same way as the OPEC countries control oil prices now, Wales dominated industry then, when the world price of coal was set at the Coal Exchange at Cardiff. World copper prices had been set at Swansea, and, similarly, the price of tin at Llanelli. The price for slate was set at North Wales, at the quarries at Bethesda.

In Wales, too, advances were made in the technology of coal mining and iron extraction. Welsh iron-turning was the foremost in the world; the manufacture of steel rails and other steel and iron products at Dowlais and Ebbw Vale placed them amongst the most prominent iron-making centres anywhere in the UK and beyond. John Hughes had established the first iron works in Russia. The first iron bridge was manufactured in Wales. Cardiff became the first coal-exporting seaport, and possessed the largest masonry (man-made) docks in the world. Sea captains and crews sailed out of Cardiff to all parts of the world.

It is with the thought that we in post-industrial Wales needed to develop a consciousness of and acknowledge the fact of our huge contribution to the industrial and cultural identity of the UK that inspired me to research at a local level our input into this huge and emotive historical drama.

“What,” we ask, “could a small row of houses situated in a remote Welsh valley during the 19th century have contributed to this wave of change?”

Nant y bar is representative of many similar rural communities in South Wales, who participated in the Industrial Revolution by taking a share in it and adapting to the migration of people from all over the UK and the scale of the social change that swept, during the mid 1800s, across the South Wales Valleys.

The human story of the Industrial Revolution is played out on a vast stage, taking into consideration the innovation, entrepreneurship, migration, emigration and social change that came in its wake.

These were turbulent times. Violence played its part in this change, as demonstrated by the Daughters of Rebecca, the Scotch Cattle Raids and civil unrest. With the formation of Friendly Societies and Unions by the working classes, the people began to organise themselves to improve the dire situation in which they scraped a living.

Religious upheaval and the rise of Nonconformity also influenced the working population, by bringing cohesion and purpose to communities that had been thrown together from the streams of outsiders coming to

the valleys to seek employment... The use of child and female labour in industry also played an important part in the social changes and the class structure of the period, and it took much lobbying by liberal-minded people before the law was changed, gradually, to get rid of this appalling business.

It is important to consider the contribution brought by the skills of the men employed in the iron and coal trades, and the degree of technological expertise that they achieved, in light of the fact that, in the early days of the industrial expansion, the population was largely illiterate. Coal and iron had a long association with this era, as did the seaports of the South Wales coast. The local seaports of Briton Ferry Dock and Swansea reflect the huge developments of the ports of Barry and Cardiff.

On a smaller scale, Nant y Bar reflects these huge social and technological changes. Initially the Afan Valley was a rural and remote community. The mainstay of the economy had been based on farming and sheep. Men worked the farms and tended the livestock; married females cared for their large families, and their daughters were employed in domestic or agricultural capacities on the local farms. The Tithe map of 1841 shows smallholdings and fields rented from local farmers who owned the land. During the early days of the 19th century, communications were poor.

Owing to the fact that the valley floor was thickly wooded, the old drove roads, which stretched over the mountain-tops, were used. The old Parish road from Glyncorrwg to Neath was utilised. There was also the old road from the Llynfi Valley, used by travellers on their way to what was then known as the Borough of Aberafan or Neath.

Coal had long been used locally as a domestic fuel, taken from small drift mines on farm land. With the developments in technology of the iron trade, the demand for coal in the early part of the century increased, and more labour was employed by the farmers to meet the growing demand for coal. The thickly-wooded valley floor had once provided enough timber to fuel the iron-making process, but as this source of fuel became exhausted, the demand for coal expanded. More manpower was needed to accommodate this expansion in demand for coal as a fuel source, and, gradually, the mining of coal became an undertaking in its own right.

PREFACE

The Upper Afan Valley runs in a northerly direction, from the steel town of Port Talbot, for some 22 miles. The 1850s saw an unprecedented era of growth and development in the locality due to the enormous deposits of coal to be found there. The demand for it caused by advances in industrial technology on a national level, which needed fuel to power the newly invented steam engines and steam-powered ships. Alongside these advances in technology, commerce and trade were rapidly expanding to what would become a globally significant level.

My interest in the early history of the area was aroused by chance, and became almost an obsession. Research into it has occupied most of my spare time for the past two years.

At the beginning of the 19th century, Afan Uchaf was remote, rural, idyllic, and dotted with farms and *hafodau*, or *hafods*, to use the colloquial term, which were holiday homes for the well-off. I heard a chance remark about a now-vanished village, which had once been situated in the valley; this awoke my curiosity about its ultimate fate. It was Nant y Bar, or Nantybar. For the main chapters in this book I have used the second spelling.

The initial stage of my research was into early maps and census returns. I learnt nothing from the early Ordnance Survey Maps, or the 1851 Census, on the subject of Nant y Bar and its inhabitants, which was extremely frustrating, particularly as the Ordnance Survey Maps for the 20th century showed the cottages to have existed.

The staff of the West Glamorgan Archives at Swansea were extremely helpful, and suggested that, if I was in possession of a family name, there may be a possibility of finding information about the place, if it ever existed.

A series of coincidences led me to one interesting clue: the fact that my sister-in-law's grandparents had migrated to that area from Devon during the 1830s. This gave me a name to look for at the West Glamorgan Archive Service at Swansea, but I still needed to fix the exact location of the vanished village. Evidence of the actual location came from the Tithe Maps of 1841, which were kept at the Archive Point, at Port Talbot Library. Another source of information came from the 1851 Census, to which I returned later.

Difficulties were encountered when I tried to define what had been the old Parish Boundaries, and, from them, to pinpoint the exact location of Nant y Bar. The Internet Genealogy site, Ordnance Survey Site, and dozens of other sites were consulted. Subsequently, I found that the Administrative County was Brecon, and the parish was known as Lower Llantwit, with Neath being the administrative centre. During 1874, the parish name was changed to Michaelston Super Avon, and its Parish Boundary was then changed to incorporate the Cwmafan area, which was subsequently 'relocated' to the borough of Bridgend.



One of the roads to Nantybar. The South Wales Mineral Railway Line commenced during 1853 designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel. The original cottages at Afon Vale could possibly have been built to support rail construction.

During my researches on the Census returns, I came across the family name of Whitelock, which was the maiden name of my sister-in-law. It emerged that, during the 1830s, her great, great ancestor had migrated from Devon to Fforchdwm, a farm adjoining the Nantybar estate. The Census revealed that Mr. Whitlock's son was employed as a collier when he was only seven years old.

The social and work conditions of child labour that emerged during the 19th century were reflected in the Census of 1851; and that, in turn, led me back to the Internet and the BBC history website, which

reflected the larger political and economic circumstances of that era.

The need for transport and communications in the 19th century played a huge part in opening up the remote, ore-rich valley. Initially, the Tennant Canal and an ingenious system of weight-related tram roads were used to transport the coal to the barges at the Aberdulais basin. This was before the development of the south Wales Mineral Railway, which was designed by the famous Isambard Kingdom Brunell!

In order to amplify my knowledge of this area, I have paid visits to the National Library of Wales at Aberystwyth, Cardiff Central Reference Library, and the West Glamorgan Archive Service, where the advice and guidance of the staff were superb. The Mines Inspection Reports of the era from 1851 to 1896 were consulted in detail, and gave a very dismal picture of accidents, and health and safety failures underground. The reported statistics reflected the way in which the ordinary working population was treated. Information was obtained from the Ordnance Survey Maps from 1851 to 1891, and also the Census from 1851 to 1891.

Help and encouragement came from Mr Glyn Thomas, unfortunately now deceased, who was the former Director of the Coal Mining Museum at Afan Argoed. I found his exceptional knowledge of the coal mining industry in the Afan Valley to be an inspiration, although the fact of the initial existence of the cottages, that had puzzled me, had also perplexed him. Subsequently, it became apparent the cottages had undergone a change of name some time during the late 1800s, from Avon Vale Cottages, to Nant y Bar Cottages, or Nant y Bar Street.

The journey into our past that I made when I collected material for this short history of Nantybar, and the people I have met, has been exciting and inspirational. The characters which have jumped at me from this stirring period in our past, the people who took the entrepreneurial risks and the labourers and artisans who showed so much grit and courage in working in the blackness of coal, were all, in their different ways, inspiring. Tribute has also to be paid the people of the 20th century, who have preserved the story of the valley, which has been dramatic and stimulating. They deserve to be recognized for their contribution to the life and culture of Afan Uchaf.

CHAPTER 1

THE EARLY DAYS: FFORCHDWM & NANTYBAR

Nature knows no equality; its sovereign law is subordination and dependence.

Marquis de Vauvenargues

The Industrial Revolution began in Great Britain during the latter half of the 1700s, and Wales had become a leader in the development of the iron industry by 1795. By the early nineteenth century, the improved technological changes that had taken place gave rise to the need for the extraction of coal commercially, to power the iron foundries and to support the advancements in steam technology.

The dawning of the Industrial Revolution rapidly brought huge social change to what had previously been an almost exclusively agrarian community, and altered the landscape for decades into the future. Tracts of land such as Afan Uchaf, which had, until the 19th Century, been remote and inaccessible, became targets for the entrepreneurs, industrialists and property developers of the era, who recognised the huge fortunes to be made from the new technology.

The invention of new and more powerful machinery caused an increased demand for fuel. During the initial stages in the development of the iron-making process, timber was used for charcoal to fire the furnaces, but as this source of fuel became exhausted, coal, available in proximity to the iron deposits, began to be used as an alternative. Amongst the most prominent of industrial entrepreneurs in the South Wales area at the end of the nineteenth century was the Marquis of Bute. He and other wealthy landowners like him quickly recognised the fact that their property had an abundance of coal, and they were adept at exploiting the wealth that lay under their estates, as demonstrated by the rapid expansion of the Rhondda valley. A process of phenomenal development took place in the mining of coal, all over the South Wales Coalfield.

With the burgeoning technology of the Industrial Revolution, another matter of prime importance was the means whereby to transport the

raw materials to the processors, and the manufacturers of the machinery and equipment needed by expanding industries. The growth of the canal system had spread to the South Wales area by the early part of the Nineteenth Century, thus making it possible to transport coal and other raw materials by inland waterways, from the South Wales area to the ports and elsewhere in Britain.

A newspaper dated 31 December 1842 included a small paragraph, stating ‘... the following Gentlemen were elected Trustees of the Neath Harbour:

Nash Edwards Vaughan Esq., of Rheola
 Townsend Wood Esq., of Blaengwrach
 Charles Strange Esq., of Fforchdwm
 Messrs William Llewellyn, H.S. Coke, William Weston
 Young and Robert Evans of Neath.’

It was apparent that forward planning for communications and transport to link the Neath, Afan and Llynfi Valleys with the South Wales railways and ports had taken place during the early part of the 19th century. The huge potential wealth to be acquired from mineral extraction, using the new technology of the Industrial Revolution, had made exploitation of the more inaccessible parts of the South Wales Coalfield essential.

The Upper Afan Valley, at this time, was very remote and had poor communications with elsewhere. However, circumstances changed with the formation of the Neath Canal Company, in 1791. Initially, the canal was to be built in sections; the first to be completed was to run from Brickfield to Abernant, Glynneath. During 1798, an extension of permission was granted, to allow the contractors to take the canal southwards to Giant’s Grave, at Briton Ferry. This made it possible to transport coal from the Upper Afan Valley.

FFORCHDWM

By 1816, John Houghton had acquired the land comprising Fforchdwm Draw, Fforchdwm Ganol and Blaenpellena. It seems that coal extraction was not particularly feasible because of the geographic position of Fforchdwm, which was situated on an inaccessible part of Mynydd Fforchdwm. The first level was opened at Fforchdwm during 1832, but it was difficult to transport the coal to the nearest sea port. A tram road had to be built across the top of the mountain, to carry coal to the Neath Canal. From here it was conveyed by barge to Briton Ferry Dock.

This tram road, known locally as Parson’s Folly, was officially called

the Glyncoirwg Mineral Railway. Parsons and Strange, two entrepreneurs of whom we shall hear much, at a later point in our story, engaged William Kirkhouse, a Civil Engineer, to construct a tramway from Aberdulais to the levels of Blaen Cregan, Tonmawr and Fforchdwm, a distance of some 12 kilometres.

John Houghton died in 1825, and his five sons inherited his 1500-acre estate. It was during this period that his son, Dugdale Houghton, began to take an interest in the expansion of coal extraction at Fforchdwm. The Houghton family started negotiations with William Tennant, who was the owner of the Neath Canal. These resulted in a wharf being built at the terminus of the Neath Canal, at Swansea. In order to finance this operation, the Houghtons obtained a mortgage of £5,000 from Josiah Guest of Dowlais, in March 1833.



Nantybar Cut just above the cottages. A fine example of Victorian engineering during the mid 1850's blasting through living rock to gain access to the huge bonanza of the Black Diamonds - Coal

Sections of the tramway were in service by 1840, but the scheme was not completed until 1842. A steam engine, which had been manufactured at the Neath Abbey Ironworks, transported coal from one of the sites in the Gwenffrwd Valley to the summit of Cefn Morfydd.

A viaduct composed of three arches was constructed at Nant Pelena, to cover the chasm between there and Cefn Morfydd. Also added to the construction was an ingenious gravity-based system incorporating six steep inclines, where the weight of the full coal trucks going down the incline was used to haul the empty trucks up the inclines, using a pulley system. During this period of expansion, the construction of Fforchdwm Row was undertaken, to house the workers needed to carry out construction work and the extraction of coal. This row of houses appears to have been one of the oldest industrialised housing developments in the Upper Afan Valley.

NANTYBAR

During the early part of the 19th century, the Nantybar property was divided in two and known as 'Nantybar Fach' and 'Nantybar Fawr', respectively. The latter was the property of one Rhys Thomas, the former the property of the Briton Ferry Estate. Nantybar Fawr was acquired by Rhys Thomas during 1821. Thomas Jones acquired the property for a period in 1827–28. In 1852 the property passed into the hands of a B M Davies.

Parsons and Strange played a significant role in the Afan Valley during the inauguration of the South Wales Mineral Railway. One of the initial supporters of the SMWR project was B M Davies of Nantybar, whose interest was stimulated by Robert Parsons' declaration that 50 tons of coal per day could be extracted from Nantybar. Mr Davies sank a level on the property, and, finding minerals on the site, he became at the outset of the project an enthusiastic supporter.

It is not immediately clear why B M Davies did not actually work the minerals, possibly it was through lack of finance. The costs pertaining to the South Wales Mineral Railway were high. Later in the 19th century, the Nantybar Estate appears to have made three attempts at commercial coal extraction. The level which was opened during 1885 was owned and operated by BM Davies and a Dr & Mrs Jones of Loughor; she was the only surviving daughter of Thomas Jones, and it is possible that B M Davies was a relative of hers. The level was connected to the SMWR by an incline that is still visible today.

There appears to have been a change in the management of the Nantybar level from 1885 to 1895, when the level was operated by the Nantybar Colliery Company and was managed by M Reynolds, and, later, operated by a Company called Pawley Thomas, who were based in Cardiff, and known as Mercantile No. 2.

It is supposed that there were two levels, one at Fforchdwm, which was known as Mercantile No.1, which could have been linked underground with Mercantile No. 2. Mercantile No. 1 appears to have been the main outlet for the coal that was mined at the Fforchdwm side, in the Pellena valley. The 1895 List of Mines states that work there ceased in May 1895.

The influx of men, who came to the Afan Valley in response to the need for a greater labour force, started during the early part of the century, and the local economy seems, for a time, to have been a mix of agriculture and mineral extraction. This infusion of new population to the area was to influence the shaping of the community throughout the century

The landowners and entrepreneurs provided accommodation for the labour force, and the 1851 census records that the population was a mix of agricultural, domestic and industrial labour, during the early years of the Afan Valley's development.

CHAPTER 2

THE SOUTH WALES MINERAL RAILWAY

Each needs the other: capital cannot do without labour nor labour without capital.

Pope Leo XIII

The great catalyst for the subsequent heavy industrialisation of the Upper Afan Valley occurred during the 1850s with the inauguration of the South Wales Mineral Railway, which opened up the Afan and Llynfi Valleys to coal extraction on a larger commercial scale than had previously been the case. It was also possible to escalate the iron-making process, with the improved communications system provided by a steam powered railroad.

On 16 July 1852, the Castle Hotel at Neath was the venue of a meeting of the SWMR board, attended by:

N. Edwards Vaughan (Chair)
 William Jones Maesteg
 Joseph Jenkins Jones St Brides
 Gilliam T. Jenkins
 Phillip Dunne Abercorn
 Rees Jenkins, Blaencorrgwg
 Dugdale Houghton, Fforchdwm
 Robert Parsons, Tonmawr
 Benjamin Morgan Davies

During the course of this meeting, it was decided that Dugdale Houghton should take the chair. It was further resolved that, "...a Public Line of Railway, on the Broad Gauge, is most desirable from Briton

Ferry to Maesteg and Glyncorrwg, with branches to the adjacent collieries and works.”

A further resolution was that, “This meeting is of the opinion that the demand for some new and effectual line of Railway shall connect the district of Maesteg and Glyncorrwg with a good Seaport has become most urgent.”

Many of the gentlemen present held land through which the proposed Railway would pass, and had agreed to “... approve of such a scheme, and consent to grant without compensation such portions of their respective lands ... provided that an application be made to Parliament in the Session 1853 or 54, for an Act empowering the same.”

The Prospectus issued by the South Wales Mineral Railway during January 1853 lists the Engineer for the project as one Isambard Kingdom Brunel Esq., one of the most famous civil engineers of the day, who worked on the Great Western Railway as well as helping to build railways in Australia, Italy and India. He also worked, with his father, Sir Marc Brunel, on the Thames Tunnel, and he designed and saw built three great steamships, *Great Eastern*, *Great Western* and *Great Britain*. Clearly, the board of directors wanted only the very best of assistance for their project.

Among the great and the good mentioned as Directors of the South Wales Mineral Railway it is significant that Dugdale Houghton of Fforchdwm and Rees Jenkins of Blaencorrwg appear.

The capital required for the Company was, for the era, a staggering £150,000. Shares of £10 each were offered, the deposit for each share being one guinea, or 21/-. Mentioned among the directors were representatives of the Great Northern Railway, and a certain Captain Bulkley of Windsor, who was a director of the Great Western Railway. The significance of the massive capital invested lies in the importance it places on the very valuable mineral deposits lying within, and in the surrounding areas of, the Afan and Llynfi Valleys. The Prospectus mentions inexhaustible ... beds of bituminous coal as well as... Aberdare Steam coal as used on foreign lines of Packets.” Great emphasis was also placed on “... extensive strata of black band and other rich iron ores,” which, it was hoped, would be more intensely and extensively used “... with the advantage of the (then) proposed Railway.”

Agreement had already been reached with Landowners along the route of the Railway to “... give gratuitously so much of their land,” as was required for the construction of the Railway.

It was planned to form a junction with the already existing South Wales Railway, which ran along the coastal strip and linked up with the (then) new Briton Ferry Docks and the Swansea Dock. The advance

plans for the Railroad stated that it would run for approximately 17 miles from the Briton Ferry junction, past Crythan, and, entering the Afan Valley, run for eleven miles, to a location referred to as the Glyn-corrwg Steam Coal District, with a 4-mile-long branch line to incorporate the so-called Maesteg Iron District.

Mr. Thomas, a mining agent representing a large 'coal shipper' in South Wales, published a geological report in 1850; it stated that a "... vein of steam coal of very superior quality ... being equal to the Aberdare Steam coal ... the vein is five feet in thickness, the top being primitive rock and the bottom fireclay."

The construction of a Railway to link the Llynfi and Afan Valleys would connect the South Wales Mineral Railway with the existing Llynfi Ironworks, and the Maesteg, Garth and Tondy Works. Communications with the copper-smelting and other metal manufacturing facilities at Neath and Swansea would also be made easier via this route. Another factor, which was considered of immediate significance, as well as the discovery of the Steam Coal in the area between Corrwg Fawr and the stream of the Corrwg Fechan, was that the area was already provided with small drift mines, and iron smelting was already in place.

Another proposal on the boardroom table was that the existing Llynfi Valley Railway convert their railroad to broad gauge, and that a junction be constructed at Blaen Llynfi, thus making it possible to have access to Bridgend, where the Llynfi Railroad joined the South Wales Railway, so giving the valley faster access to the large port of Cardiff, to which it was hoped to convey Glyn-corrwg steam coal, limestone for use in the iron smelting process, and also lime to burn for agricultural uses.

The potential financial rewards for the landowners and entrepreneurs were huge, and proportional to the risk in such a venture. However, the first hand of the game had been played with the establishment of the transportation system, provision of sufficient manpower to work the mines and transport links, and the provision of housing for the newly imported workers. Its outcome was yet to be realised, and the effect upon the indigenous population and the migrant population would be as enormous as it was unforeseen, as the records that have since come to light reveal.

CHAPTER 3

LIVING CONDITIONS

The health of the people is really the foundation upon which all their happiness and all their powers as a State depend.

Benjamin Disraeli

The Mines Inspection Report of 1854 details the bad social and working conditions, and makes an attempt to describe the circumstances and conditions affecting the mining communities, which had sprung up all over the South Wales Coalfield.

The health, well-being and safety of the population had been adversely affected by the industries that had sprung into being in its midst. Although some legislation concerning living and working conditions had been passed in Parliament, it was much later in the 19th Century that such legislation became effective.

The Mines Inspector cites the general disrepair of the largely stone-built cottages, in which the mining population was largely forced to live, as adversely affecting their general health. At the time, sanitation was minimal, clean water usually came from a communal well or standpipe, and the conditions in the mines, for men, women and children, were dirty, dangerous and, in time, lethal. The report compares the rates of pay of the labour force in Glamorgan, and found it to be 20 to 30 per cent higher than the wages paid to labourers in the County of Pembrokeshire.

The Inspector stated that the generally better standards of living in Glamorgan were due to the higher wages, and the comparative ease of coal extraction by the labour force was having a relatively beneficial influence on the health of the Glamorganshire labour force, although this was not a particularly healthy environment.

A large proportion of the workforce suffered from pulmonary complaints. The Inspector reports that candles were used in the mines, and that in the extremities of the workings there was hardly enough oxygen

for a flame to burn, and this in turn caused breathing problems. That candles also caused explosions was subject for later reports.

The more prosperous areas of the South Wales coalfield were situated near the major Ironworks, where the most abundant supplies of iron ore were to be found. In the case of the Afan Valley, abundance of iron was found in the Maesteg area, and on the other side of the valley, at Neath, a distance of about 25 miles from the coastal strip.

An influential factor in the better living conditions of the Afan Valley were the geological conditions and comparative ease with which mineral extraction could take place, resulting in a more prosperous and better equipped workforce.

The 1854 report describes the typical terraces of cottages, stretching along valley slopes. The Inspector mentions that the Masters, who provided this type of housing, varied hugely in their attitude toward the workforce, which ranged from the paternalistic to indifference to the people whom they employed. The huge influx into these communities of people from all over the country and their social classes are also mentioned as being a contributory factor to their hygiene and cleanliness.

The Inspector gives examples of the varying living conditions and describes some houses as being large and roomy. However, in general, the construction of these houses was rather basic. The houses were built back-to-back, so that no through ventilation was possible. Initially, bad air was thought to have been the cause of the cholera and other epidemics that swept the whole of the country. This combined with lack of drainage, absence of privies, or toilets, as we now know them, and the close proximity of animals, kept by the tenants, were also quoted as being bad for the workers' well-being and health.

Edwin Chadwick, a Victorian Civil Servant, published an influential report into the Public Health and living conditions of the working population of Britain, which cited similar causes for the huge epidemics of cholera and other serious illnesses that were sweeping the heavily industrialised parts of England, Scotland and Wales. The medical profession initially had no idea of what had caused these outbreaks, and miasma, or bad air, was often blamed. Statistics of mortality for the period state that, by the mid 1830s, 21,000 people had died of cholera. Other endemic illnesses were tuberculosis and smallpox, as well as diseases of childhood. Infant and childhood mortality figures were higher than any time since the last outbreak of plague.

In an attempt to illustrate how these momentous times affected families, one example is the Whitelock family, who moved to the pit at Fforchdwm. The Census of 1851 records this family, which consisted of Christopher Whitelock, head of the household, aged 38, whose occupa-

tion was that of a collier; Mary, his wife, who was then aged 44; and their six children. Mrs. Whitelock, Mary Jane, 17, and Anne, aged 15, are recorded on the census as labouring on the farm (Fforchdwm). The other three children of the family are Anne, 9; John, 7; and Betty, who was 5 at the time. Seven-year-old John was listed as a collier, who worked at the Fforchdwm level. The employment of children was a feature of the Industrial Revolution and was used as a source of cheap labour. This feature will be discussed at a later stage. Also occupying this crowded household were two lodgers, David Issot, who was 24, and Frances Charles, aged 28, who both worked on the farm as labourers. It is significant to note that the census reported that the Parish of birth of the children aged 9 years and under is Michaelston, which is the local parish, indicating that the family had been settled in the locality for some years when this census took place. Also reflected in the census is the large migration of the population from the rural areas. The centres of industrialisation acted as a magnet for people from all over the British Isles and Ireland, many of them moving to the developing areas of mineral extraction and manufacturing. The importance of the geographic and industrial location could be easily linked to the improvement in rail communications of the period, and this interconnection of railways greatly facilitated the movement of population from one district to another.

Also highlighted in the local statistics are the crowded living conditions of the labour force. As late as 1895, the living conditions in the Afan Valley were of poor quality. In certain parts of the valley, those with a higher population density, houses were seriously overcrowded. The local slaughter houses that served some of the hamlets were poorly maintained, and were without adequate means for the disposal of animal remains.

Water supplies to some parts of the valley came from springs or streams and piped to public taps, known locally in the Upper Afan Valley as sprouts. There were small reservoirs serving Glyncorrwg and Abergwynfi.

The powerful landowners, who had provided the terraces of houses, felt no compunction to provide adequate water and sewerage. It appears that the lack of proper drainage and sewerage gave rise to serious health problems for the population. Cellar houses in Maesteg were mentioned in particular; their inhabitants suffering from poor health and overcrowding. The lack of a pure water supply was another health hazard for the valley people. They drew water from standpipes in the streets, and the poor state of some earthenware water pipes, which suffered from cracks and leakage, also presented problems.

There was insufficient water for a proper drainage system, and human excrement was not efficiently disposed of. The contents of shared privies were often tipped into rivers and streams, which, in turn, were used as a supply for public water. Thus, the vicious circle of ill health and premature death persisted.

The 1871 Ordnance Survey map shows that the Nantybar houses, which were then known as the Afon Vale Cottages, were served by three wells, situated a few hundred yards from the houses, and reached by a footpath, which is still apparent today. These houses were not built on the back-to-back system, as in other parts of the valley, but were three-storied buildings. The 1871 Ordnance Survey map indicates outhouses, which could possibly have been shared privies. If that is what they were, it indicates a marginal improvement over the unhygienic conditions under which people in other parts of the valley were forced to live.



This picture of the rock face in Nantybar Cut shows clearly where the rock was drilled the hard way with hand drills at levels of two to four feet, packed with dynamite and then exploded.

It was not until 1893 that a significant improvement took place in the living conditions of the workforce. It was on the 13th June 1893 that the first meeting of the Glyncoirwg Local Board took place. The Glyncoirwg Local Board was composed of local business and professional people who had expressed an interest in improving the life of the, by now, highly populated and industrialised community, who occupied the mining villages and hamlets, and those who were still working on the farms. The Report into the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population in Great Britain', which Edwin Chadwick had compiled in 1842, had stated that there needed to be a process of sanitary reform. Chadwick, by no means a philanthropist, had believed that a healthier population would work harder, and that the costs for the State, of their support, when needed, would be lower.

It was almost 50 years later before any sort of municipal control of the public health appeared to take place in the Afan Valley. The Glyncoirwg Urban District Council was officially inaugurated in December 1894.

There were other areas of public life and communications which the Glyncoirwg UDC attempted to improve, amongst which were the state of communications and road maintenance. It seems that the state of the bridges and highways, which were owned by local landlords, were in poor state of repair, and attempts were made by the Authority to persuade the landlords to carry out the repairs of particularly bad stretches of road, in order to improve communication. The Railways, by this late in the 19th century, had long been established as the major means of transport and communication.

The Urban District Council was by now collecting household rubbish. It was scavenged by local contractors from communal rubbish bins, and was collected daily from Abergwynfi and Glyncoirwg. The Council used a land fill site for disposal of the rubbish. Attempts to improve living conditions developed at a faster rate in the 20th century. The landlords of the Nantybar houses were requested by the UDC to provide at the back of houses a pipe for slop water, during 1894.

The UDC gradually improved living conditions, by providing proper sanitation and drainage, and the conditions at the local abattoirs were also improved. Another innovation was the introduction of an early form of planning consent, to ensure that new buildings were provided with the correct sewage and drainage connections, and had water closets. On a national scale, a Consultative Board of Health had been established, and Glyncoirwg Urban District Council was only one out of 1,200 Local Boards to be established to investigate the living and nutritional conditions of the working population. This was the start of local control of public health and hygiene, albeit on a very minor scale.

CHAPTER 4

CHILD & FEMALE LABOUR

No business which depends for existence on paying less than living wages to its workers has any right to continue.

– Franklin D. Roosevelt

The early part of the nineteenth century saw a huge increase in demand for coal to feed the steam power for the ever more innovative technology that was being developed, and to provide fuel for manufacturing, steamships and the expanding railways. As we have seen, coal mining was labour-intensive and very dangerous. Most of the workforce was illiterate, received no training in safety practices, and had no concept of the very dangerous conditions underground to which it was exposed. Mines, in addition to the hazards of dust and gas explosions, were subject to flash floods; after heavy rainfall, often some distance away in the surrounding hills, the miners underground were often taken unawares and drowned where they stood.

Almost everyone engaged in heavy industry in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries would have come from a rural area. Some of the new centres of industry, like the Upper Afan Valley, had no infrastructure to support the huge increase in population. Previous to the influx of new families to the area, this had been a very remote area.

Such was the appetite of the early coalmining industry for cheap labour, that women and children were employed underground. It was a fact of daily life that, in order to survive in these newly industrialised areas, each member of the family unit had to work; this included infants under 10 years old, adolescent females and pregnant women. Male colliers continued to work until they were too old, were maimed, or could no longer work.

However, it seems from the census figures for the latter half of the nineteenth century, a married woman with an established family, who maybe took in lodgers who were employed in the pit, or who stayed at

home and worked, might have been looking after and catering for ten to twelve people in her household.

During the early part of the nineteenth century, the methods used for coal extraction were not only labour-intensive, they were primitive. Women were used to operate the windlass, which transported the coal and men from the pit to the surface. Older children, women and girls were used also in the process of extracting coal, by pulling trams or, at an earlier stage, baskets mounted on sledges. They would be harnessed like animals, and drag the loads through the blackness, progressing on hands and knees. They had a chain attached to the waist and connected to the tram or sledge. At a later stage, it was more efficient to utilise pit ponies for this work.

Younger children were kept in conditions of utter darkness, once the candle they used had burned out. Very often, their meagre rations of bread and cheese, and sometimes cold tea, were taken from them by adults or larger children.

Working conditions for these pathetic young children, who were mercilessly exploited, were appalling, and the accident rate was very high. Their main occupation seems to have been the opening and closing of the ventilation doors.

There was no means of compensation for any of them who were hurt at work, and many children, who had already been injured or maimed, were sent back underground by their parents, if they were remotely capable of earning any money.

Children aged between six and 11 years and sometimes even younger were given their tasks and left to work unsupervised for periods of up to 12 hours. Safety, and welfare/educational initiatives for these young workers were nonexistent. With many mouths to be fed, sometimes with the major breadwinner incapacitated through sickness or injury, each member of the family who was capable of performing any work, from the youngest to the oldest, irrespective of age or sex, was expected to contribute to the overall household budget.

In the early days of mining development, in certain parts of the Welsh coalfield, where there was no easy approach to the coal-face, ladders were used to access the deeper levels in the pits. Another early method of access was by a basket attached to a rope, lowered by a windlass. Manning this windlass was considered women's work. Sometimes, this function was performed by a horse. An alternative method of being lowered underground was still by basket but this was attached to a horse gin. This device had a rope attached to the horse at one end; the rope passed over one wheel and under another, and the attached basket lowered into the pit.

It was the practice for only the adult men to be allowed into the basket to be lowered underground. Young children and females had to cling to the rope or chain above the basket. Little or no regular inspection of the ropes or chains took place, and it was common for accidents to occur. Sometimes, any victims of such a break in chain or rope would be severely, perhaps fatally, injured. There was no means of ensuring that the breaking point on the rope or chain was not exceeded by the weight of humans or coal being borne by it.

Exploitation of children in industries such as coal mining had not gone entirely unobserved by outsiders, and for a time, there was an ever more strident outcry against the practice, which reached the ears of the Government of the day some time around 1842. This was an era of civil disturbance in more than one field. It was now when the Rebecca riots were taking place, in revulsion against the tolls charged on rural roads. The Chartists' revolt occurred in 1839, and Hugh Owen, a far-sighted philosopher and student of the human condition, called upon the Welsh people to lobby in the cause of education. He saw this as one of the main tools for use in the new Industrial Age; the way to equip workers with knowledge and skills, to add value to their own spheres of work and enhance national prosperity.

The result of the growing agitation concerning conditions in the coal mines resulted in Government Inspectors being despatched to visit those coal mining regions in Wales where women and children were employed regularly. They found appalling conditions of poverty, which, in many places, amounted to slave labour.

It was a common occurrence, where the weight of coal mined was the basis for the wage paid, for father and son to form a joint team to work underground. With such a large number of strangers working together in almost total darkness, it was a measure of security for a man to work with his son.

We mentioned earlier the 1851 census returns, from which it can be seen that most male children above the age of 6, who were living at Fforchdwm and Afan Vale Cottages, later to be renamed Nantybar, were listed as having the occupation of collier.

The *Cambrian* dated 4 March 1870 carried an article entitled, 'The Bill for Regulating and Inspecting Mines'. This article refers to the terms of the new bill and details the fact that children under 12 years old were to be excluded from employment, and 'that no boy under 16 years should be engaged underground for more than 12 hours a day.' The article continues:

'We are not concerned with this portion (child labour) of the measure. A sufficient amount of philanthropy exists to prevent the practice of op-

pression by avaricious and unscrupulous masters.'

From this, we can be sure that the welfare of children was not of prime concern to the Government. However, in an account published in the dated 9 November 1870 of a conference held by colliers to raise their awareness of the Bill for Regulating and Inspecting Mines, which was then passing through the legislative process, a different opinion was expressed upon the employment of children than that previously held by Parliament. The *Cambrian's* editorial of the same week discusses the issues of child labour raised at the Conference, and places directly upon the parents the blame for the abuse of children used as labour. The newspaper report states: 'This is a point more within the control parents rather than the Legislature.'

There must surely have been a certain amount of relief all round at this view of the situation, which removed all moral responsibility for the amount of cheap child labour used and the long hours worked, from the employers and onto the impoverished families themselves. Cheap labour for the employers and mine-owners resulted in a fast return on their considerable capital investments.

The conference attempted to intervene in the legislative processes of the day, and demanded that (the then) forthcoming full time education of children would be enforced by Mining inspectors to be recruited from the workforce, who, it was argued, would have more direct knowledge of possible hazards faced in the mines, and would understand the physical and educational needs of the very young workforce. It is interesting to note that the possibility was considered at this early date, and possibly for the first time, of the management of collieries from within, by an educated, literate and technically trained workforce.

CHAPTER 5

HEALTH & SAFETY AND SOCIAL GROWTH

Education during the early part of the nineteenth Century was, at best, sporadic and badly organised, with poor delivery. The old system of the Circulating and Sunday Schools, which taught literacy through the medium of reading the scriptures, was gradually becoming obsolete as newer educational initiatives came into being. During the early part of the 1800s, two new Societies with the purpose of promoting education emerged. These held different views about what should constitute education. The National Society was heavily influenced by Anglican Church. The British and Foreign Schools' Society was a non religious organisation, which believed in a more liberal curriculum.

However, one disadvantage of education in the 19th century was its emphasis on non technical education, which was quite unsuited to the needs of the masses of people, and failed to furnish them with the skills and knowledge they needed, if they were to keep pace with the huge increase in technology, which was happening very quickly. It resulted in a semi literate and very often unskilled workforce, with no understanding of the dangers inherent in their working environments, nor did they recognise the capitalists' motives for keeping them in such a position.

The single factor working for employees was the value of the machinery with which the masses worked. When it was damaged by unskilled workers and there were none who could effect on-the-spot repairs, production was brought to a halt, and the employers were hurt in the pocket. This inclined them to the view that some form of literacy, numeracy and technical skills would enhance the commercial value of the workforce.

Although there was much industrial unrest, it was not until later in the century that democracy as we know it today began to develop. The emergence from a largely pastoral society into the modernism of industry was cumbersome, and yet, it happened so fast that the working population was slow to understand what was taking place in the new social order of which they formed part. At the same time, the State showed lack of awareness for the need for education; neither did accept

that it needed to take social responsibility for an exploited and illiterate workforce.

The Truck system was also employed by some coal and iron 'Masters' to pay for inferior educational services. This was a system of vouchers being given in lieu of wages, which were only redeemable at the company store. It was a barrier to many aspects of life that we take for granted today. Firstly, it was impossible to save for the inevitable time when a person was unable to remain in employment. Secondly, it was a way for the employer to recoup everything paid in wages, by so structuring prices and availability of goods that all an employee earned was absorbed by the store. A third, and sometimes overlooked, consequence of the Truck system was that it inhibited the growth of new small businesses, and placed a virtual stranglehold on existing ones.

The 1851 Census for Fforchdwm and the Afan Vale Cottages list most of the children between 6 and 10 years old as scholars, a fact not reflected in the National statistics. Most of the female children in this age group, however, are listed working on farm, either Nantybar or Fforchdwm. It is significant to note that most of the other local children contained within the census findings were listed as being at home, although there one or two exceptions. There is no evidence to be taken from the census of female labour being employed underground at either Nantybar or Fforchdwm, but a large proportion of the young, unmarried females were listed as being employed on a farm, and while the exact duties they performed are not detailed, they probably worked in domestic or labouring capacities.

A Conference of Colliers was held at Pontypridd and reported in the *Cambrian* of 9 December, 1870. From the contents of the report, it had become apparent that the workforce now recognised the need for training and literacy. By today's standards, the skills training may have been elementary, but training in the practical measures of underground safety caused a deal of discussion among the delegates at the conference. The need for literate colliers, who were trained in the practical aspects of mining, was also discussed, as was the power of the local authorities to enforce school attendance. Children employed in the mines were given compulsory elementary education, as a result of new legislation.

The link between vocational education and health and safety at work was one topic increasingly highlighted by the working men represented at the conference. They felt compelled to pass the message about this aspect of their work to management and the Masters, with an urgency that was in proportion to the number of accidents occurring underground. The Conference also highlighted the need for sub inspectors,

who had power to stop a dangerous process²⁹, or eliminate apparent hazards, before accidents occurred. It had been customary for an Inspector of mines to arrive *after* an accident had occurred.

Prevention was considered as a better alternative to having an investigation of WHY something had happened, especially if a danger had been pinpointed earlier and nothing had been done about it.

The Mines Inspection Report of 1853, for the South Wales Region stated: "It is no longer a question whether humanity and society claim certain duties at the hands of an employer of labour. The only practicable means, in my opinion, of bringing collieries within the pale of existing laws would be the enacting of a code of regulations so general as to meet the more prevalent causes of accident in collieries, by defining the requirements for the safety of the mass on the part of the individual workman or managers.'



Detail of original plans showing the route of the South Wales Mineral Railway as drawn by Isambard Kingdom Brunel and presented to Parliament during 1853, which brought accessibility to the Afan Valley

The report stated that the increased demand for coal caused an increase in the amount of labour employed during the first six months of 1853. Corresponding with a downturn in health and safety measures, in order to keep up production. These took the form of neglected repairs to 'machinery and works' and 'new works opened with utmost rapidity'. It was during this same decade, the 1850s, when the South Wales coal-fields became the most important in the world, and the port of Cardiff was handling shipping on a previously undreamt of scale.

The author of the report goes on to say that the cause rather than the effect of pit explosions should be addressed by the correct use of ventilation, a matter to which, in a large number of mine sites, employers and employees paid insufficient attention. Another source of fatal accidents was the ignorance of the colliers who used unlocked safety lamps, which exposed a naked flame to combustible gasses and caused explosions and fatalities.

Mr Herbert Mackworth, author of the report, further felt strongly about the need for a written safety code, and had taken the initiative by consulting with the colliery overman at Aberdare on this subject. A series of meetings or lectures were held at Aberdare, bringing home to the audience the fact that mines were the most dangerous. It is significant from this Mines Inspection report of 1853 that the Inspector of Mines for South Wales recognised the need to educate the workers and ensure that they were literate and numerate before they could receive the technical training they needed in order to work in the mines. Further training was based on written rules and regulations. Unless they were able to read and do basic calculations, the written rules and regulations went unheeded.

An attitude that was prevalent during 19th century, with respect to uneducated workers, was that their ignorance derived from their social class, and this was only partly true. Those engaged in pastoral or agricultural employment had little need for the sort of skills that were vital to the new age of industrial expansion. A man might be a very successful farmer and have just enough education to enable him to buy and sell amongst his peers at the local mart. His year was ruled by the demands of his livestock and harvest; and schooling such he might have enjoyed would have been minimal and sporadic.

An extremely significant factor, which deserves recognition here, is that the Inspector proposed to the foremen amongst the workforce that the colliers needed to form themselves into an association, in order to disseminate the rules on safety hazards to the workforce at large. The need for a literate and safety-conscious workforce was also emphasised. It was the opening of a Pandora's Box, and showed certain prescience on the part of that Mines Inspector, although the end result of this association of workers could never have been envisaged so early.

The appalling treatment of the widows and orphans of men to whom accidents befell was also berated by the Mines Inspector, who highlighted their lack of legal and financial provision and compensation. The duties of the Coroners and the service which they performed in highlighting the causes of fatalities were also detailed in this very radical report by the Mines Inspector, who showed himself to be a very thought-

ful and kindly person. The main causes of many of these accidents were reiterated in his report. He listed: poor work organisation and management; the ignorance of the colliers of the dangers of working underground; and the infrequent or non-existent inspection of the ropes and chains that hauled the human and mineral cargo to the surface was also mentioned as a major hazard. There were cases of sheer negligence on the part of many of the owners and managers. Lastly and hugely significantly was the fact that, at this time, managers and mine-owners were not held legally responsible for the conditions prevailing in the mines.

When an accident was reviewed and the case was heard in Court, it was reported that, the jurymen were sometimes illiterate, and often they were in the employment of the colliery owners on whose premises such accidents took place. Thus, on two counts, they were seldom able to come to an impartial decision, upon which the court should have been empowered to dispense justice, increase safety, and pay adequate compensation to the surviving members of the family. Ignorance and illiteracy, and the threat of victimisation by the mine owners or managers, severely limited the legal rights of accident victims and their families. The Mines Inspector cites a list of the most common causes of explosions and fatalities underground, and he commented on the use of child labour. He stated his opinion, that ‘... every boy, under the age of 25 years of age should bring a certificate of his age from the registrar or guardian before being set to work at any mine.’ He further mentioned the fact that education of employees should be undertaken at the ‘joint expense of the proprietors and the workmen.’

The report catalogues a long list of legislative, compensatory and other ideas, both social and practical, to make the coal mine safer for its employees. The Inspector stipulated, too, that written rules should be adapted to *particular circumstances and individual pits*.

The whole ethic of safety, adequate compensation and mutual responsibility of owners and employees, which was a factor not taken into consideration during the early industrialisation process, is discussed. The use of Friendly Societies and Mutual Benefit Associations are also mentioned, during this early part of the expansion of the South Wales coal-field.

This inspector recommended that the legal power of juries be increased, and the decisions of the Coroner be implemented, in cases which do not appear to amount to manslaughter, to enable him to produce a finding that was somewhere between manslaughter and an accidental death. A further recommendation was that no inquest should be held concerning accidents in mines without an inspector or a qualified

mining engineer appointed by him as his deputy present to inspect the state of the mine and aid in the enquiry.”

A new concept was gaining ground, that of mutual responsibility for health and safety between employees and management.

CHAPTER 6

THE TRUCKING SYSTEM

‘Let them eat cake.’

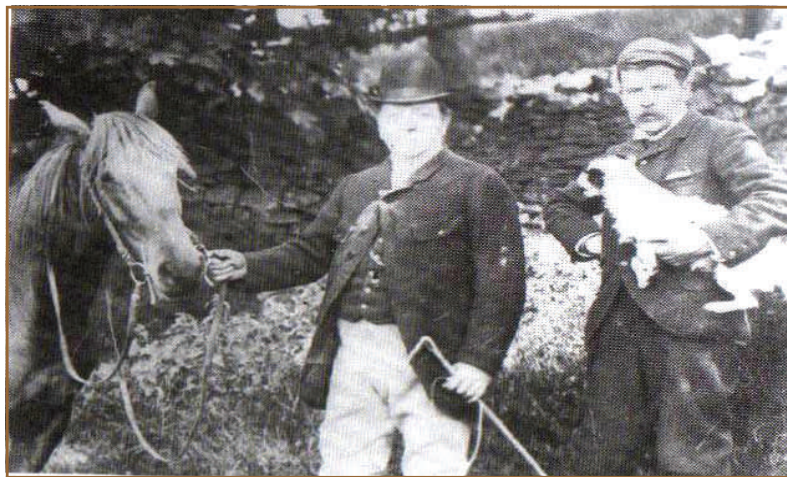
Attributed to Marie Antoinette

1. A hugely influential factor affecting the lives of the thousands of people who eked out a living in the South Wales valleys was the Company shop, mentioned briefly in a preceding chapter. The strategy of coal and iron Masters was to ensure that their employees were totally controlled by them, living, as they did, in housing that was owned by their employers. Also, with alarming frequency during the early part of the nineteenth century, the workforce received no cash payment for their labours, but were paid in checks that took the form of credit notes, or metal tokens, minted by some of the companies. These were exchanged for goods at the Company shop, where almost all of the needs of the family, including food, clothes and even furniture were purchased. Goods supplied were frequently of very poor quality and nearly always sold at grossly inflated prices, thus keeping the workforce debt-ridden and dependent upon their employers.
2. Much of the labour force was also compelled to undergo a process called the long pay, where periods of weeks elapsed before they were paid, which compounded the process of increasing poverty and debt, and forcing them to ask for credit in the company Truck Shops.
3. During 1830, Sir Charles Morgan made a speech to the Houses of Parliament, campaigning against the Truck System, which had originally operated in the newly industrialised areas in which no infrastructure existed to cater for the needs of those who comprised a part of the huge migration from the rural areas.

4. Many others spoke out against the Truck System. The *Cambrian* carried a report of the speech given by Mr Littleton to the House of Commons on 17 March 1830, seeking to bring a Bill before the House, to abolish payment of wages in goods. He produced for the House sworn statements from working people, citing instances where they were charged at between 100 to 200 per cent ABOVE the market price for the commodities they bought. Often the goods purchased were forced upon them in lieu of wages, and were of inferior quality.
5. As the 19th century progressed, some unscrupulous Masters actively encouraged the use of credit. Some goods were sold to their employees at higher prices than the market value. In order for the workforce to obtain essential goods for their survival, they became tied to and dependent upon the Company Shops for their sustenance, and the Company for their employment. Such was the miserable lot of the early colliers and their families in South Wales and in other industrialised districts in Britain...the early part of the nineteenth century, the expanding market for coal resulted in an increased labour market, with migration from all parts of Britain to remote and underdeveloped, coal-rich regions in the North of England and in South Wales.
6. The entrepreneurs of the Afan Valley had recognised this potential for mineral extraction at a very early stage of the Industrial Revolution. The *Cambrian* newspaper of 10 August 1833 carried an advertisement placed by a certain William Stewart of James Street, Neath, asking for fifty colliers desirous of regular employment and liberal wages, who were wanted to work at Fforchdwm Colliery, Nr. Neath. It was to this advertisement that Christopher John Whitelock replied, and which brought him from Devon, with his wife and six children; by what means they travelled is unknown. The 1851 Census for Fforchdwm mentions a certain Mr William Hughes, a Mineral Agent, indicating that the practice of actively recruiting labour from different parts of the country, and offering homes and jobs to miners and their families was an ongoing process, necessary in order to recruit and retain the workforce. The Company shop was also known as the Tommy shop and it started off by meeting a need, but, as we have seen, it quickly became a tool for the exploitation of the workforce.

During 1830, despite the repressive and harsh living conditions of the working population, a vociferous and often contentious series of letters was written to and published by the *Cambrian*. This correspondence highlighted both the prejudice that existed against the working man from those considered his social superior, and also gave voice to the concern felt by the more liberal section of the middle classes about the

miserable existence, bad housing, poor employment and pay, endured by the millions who were forced to eke out a living caused by submitting themselves to the whims of their employers. The *Cambrian's* correspondents of the 1830s state both sides of the argument. The professional and middle classes wrote the majority of the letters, but correspondents from each camp avidly took their respective stands, with colourful language and florid phrasing. The *Cambrian* appears to have tried to present both sides of the argument with impartiality. One aspect of this Truck system mentioned in the exchange of letters was the Truck Doctor, described by a correspondent in the *Cambrian* of 18 December 1830. It pertained to the medical services provided by the Masters, and the writer referred to it as monstrous. The fact also emerged that there was no system of medical teaching in hospitals, and would-be doctors were trained under the apprentice system, whereby they were bound to medical practitioners. There was no overall quality control, and standards of competence varied substantially from one area to another.



Squire Jenkins of Gelli c. 1890 and Dr. Hemming.

One correspondent who raised this issue, and the efficiency, quality and training of medical apprentices, mentioned that the men (employees and their families), because they are poor and only workmen, are exposed to the ignorance and inexperience of raw apprentices, who would not venture to offer themselves to dress a cut finger for those workmen's masters. The correspondent goes on to describe the area covered by one medical gentleman, who was in attendance for a total of 15,000 working men, employed at some four Iron Works, and who had a distance of some 15 miles to cover in order to practise his profession. The doctor travelled over this large distance on horseback.

The *Cambrian* covered one large issue to do with politics and of the Constitution, which affected the working classes of the nineteenth century in a manner that exposed their plight in quite a radical manner. A correspondent known as 'OPA' wrote in the *Cambrian* dated 4 December 1890:

"If your correspondents would use their pens in condemning that policy by which England is approaching to a state of anarchy, their time would be well employed, I mean that policy by which so many millions of currency were withdrawn from the circulation, in suppressing a paper currency under a few pounds, which have NEVER yet been replaced by gold.'

The measures which had been taken by Mr Littleton to repeal the Truck Act were criticised by the correspondent as not addressing the constitutional issues raised by the financial and political state of the country, which groaned under a debt of eight hundred millions.

The lack of currency circulating in the country seemed, from some viewpoints, to have exacerbated the abuse of the Truck system, which was considered by other factions to be a humanitarian and honourable gesture by the Masters for the benefit of their employees.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the newspaper published extreme opinions on this contentious issue, which contrasted starkly with one another. A correspondent, who signed himself "Hear both sides", wrote that the Truck system did a service by providing credit at the Company shop, until pay day, and that this was a service to a collier or iron foundry worker who was unfortunately married to an extravagant slut, who would run him into debt at more than one shop, the result being that the unfortunate individual could not pay his debt because of the "slut" to whom he was married.

THE CASE OF MR CARKEET. The *Cambrian* newspaper of 3 March 1871 records that Richard Carkeet sued a certain Griffith Williams for the sum of £4.16/6d. Mr Carkeet was a collier who worked at the Avon Vale Coal Company, some two miles from the Nantybar Houses, and whose wages were calculated on a tonnage basis. The defendant courageously alleged that he had not received the amount due to him, and had been paid in part with company "cheques" or credit notes, which could be drawn only at company shops. As no receipts or accounts had been kept by the employer to disprove the allegation, Mr Carkeet was awarded the sum of £4.16/5d.

This Truck practice and its abuse continued intermittently throughout the nineteenth century, in all parts of the country. In 1887, Parlia-

ment passed the Truck Amendment Act, and the whole system became illegal. The *Cambrian*, throughout this time, campaigned on a local level, although attempting to highlight both sides of the dilemma. It also highlighted the injustice and the cheating of the working man, who could not make independent choices of where he spent his money.

Discontent spread nationwide and manifested itself in part in the Merthyr riots of 1831 in which both workers and military men lost their lives in the defence of or suppression of democracy, according to viewpoint. The Debtors' Court was ransacked by debt-stricken workers, the town was raided for sequestered goods, and troops were called to suppress the rioters, leaving at least two dozen townspeople dead. This uprising resulted in the hanging of Richard Lewis (Dic Penderyn), who was buried in St. Mary's churchyard at Aberafan (now Port Talbot).

CHAPTER 7

FRIENDLY SOCIETIES, MASONIC ORDERS AND TRADES UNIONS

There are only two choices: A police state in which all dissent is suppressed or rigidly controlled; or a society where law is responsive to human needs.

William O. Douglas

The Borough of Afan and the Upper Afan Valley boasted a plethora of Friendly Societies and Lodges, of all descriptions and catering to all social classes. They varied in nature from drinking clubs, to Craft Guilds. A surprising development is referred to in the *Cambrian* of 30th October, 1840, which carried an advertisement for the convening of a branch of a Female Order of Ivorites, to meet at Aberafan. This in itself seems an unusual occurrence, so early in the century, as there seems to be very little evidence that there were any organised female lodges in the British Isles until well into the 1890s.

The growth of the Friendly Societies, which had been in existence for many years before the Industrial Revolution, proliferated during this pe-

riod. The upturn in their popularity was caused in part by the mass migration from the rural areas into the newly industrialised belts. These very small agricultural communities had survived under the local institutions of the Church, and the local gentry who provided such employment, accommodation and education as were contained within existing Parish boundaries. Suddenly, with the huge shift in the population, migrating to where there was work in the new industries, fragile local infrastructure was overburdened.

The Poor Laws, which had been passed during the reign of Elizabeth I, were totally inadequate to deal with the needs of a suddenly newly created social structure. Society, as it had been organised, could not sustain such a huge change. Thus, the sort of infrastructure that there was at Afan Uchaf, which initially operated as an agrarian system, and which had suddenly become a budding industrial economy, was thrown into confusion. In consequence, the grass roots elements of a vastly changing society took certain parts of their lives into their own hands and developed a philosophy of self-reliance in times when they were faced with utter destitution, largely ignored by the state, in order to provide themselves with some sort of social, health and other types of financial provision. There was also an element of loyalty to one's brothers or sisters employed in the same trade, profession or craft.

The *Cambrian* of 6 August contains a report of the Queen Victoria Lodge of the Oddfellows outing to Ilfracombe, which appears to pinpoint some of its social functions. The Friendly Societies began to compete for custom with the company shops. In the Cwmafan and Afan areas, the Friendly Societies provided funding for Widows and Orphans, as reported in the *Cambrian* of 26 April 1869. The meeting of the Neath and Aberafan Branch of the Ivorites cited details of sickness and accident benefit funds.

By 1867, the Friendly Societies had engaged their own doctor, and the *Cambrian* carried a testimonial for Doctors Richards and Phipps. This reflected the national trend: provision for the people by the people, at the basic levels of society, which counteracted the terrible deprivations inflicted by the prevailing economic conditions. They also helped to deal with some of the savage Acts of Parliament designed to curtail the advancement of equality and social improvement so desperately needed by the working population.

The Act of 1799, outlawing any secret oaths or bonds to be made by members of Friendly Societies, indicates that the State administration of the period wished to curtail the liberty of the artisan and his family. The law was a panic measure, in response to the fear that the French Revolution and the concept of liberty, equality and fraternity would manifest

themselves in this country. It is significant that legal currency up to the value of five pounds had been withdrawn from circulation. It was hoped by this to avert a similar revolution being brought about by the under-privileged population.

Members of organisations that had formed themselves into National fraternities and held closed meetings, and which were not registered with the Magistrates, were punished by transportation. The Freemasons, however, were able to compromise, and it was agreed by the House of Lords that the Freemasons might register their organisation with the Magistrates, and thus they were able to weather the legislation, which was altered at a later date.



There was no road into the valley until 1922. Communication before that date was either by horse-drawn vehicles or the railways. Getting to the nearby town of Neath or the then thriving village of Cwmafan, was by rail.

The Combination Act also facilitated legislation against Trades Unionism, in an attempt to defeat the artisan's position in seeking representation for equal and safe treatment in his employment.

The *Cambrian* is littered with reports and references to the delegations of Miners' meetings held during the 1880s. On 5 April 1872, the Miners' Conference of Amalgamated Associations is reported as accepting into the Association the Neath and Aberafan Branches.

During this period, there are reports of the owners of large estates and titles being accepted by an order of the Freemasons known as the

Knights Templar. the first reference appearing in the *Cambrian* was of one Charles Kemys being initiated into the brotherhood. During 1868, T M Talbot was accepted into the New Encampment of the Knights Templar at Swansea.

The Welsh Friendly society known as the Ivorites proliferated in the Afan area. The organisation was originally formed in Wrexham. One of the objectives was to preserve the Welsh language and culture in the midst of the huge social and industrial upheaval that took place during the 1800s. Many of the migrant population spoke no Welsh, and there was pressure upon the indigenous population to speak English.

By the end of the 19th Century, the Order had become almost part of the establishment, and had become accepted in many areas, where it was seen as providing some social, financial, moral and educational support to the population.

The Ivorite Society's Eisteddfod was held at Aberafan and was reported in the *Cambrian* of 1 June 1849. The *Cambrian* also reported that there was a female branch of the Ivorites, known as the Ellen Codebog Lodge, which met at the Bear Inn at Aberafan (reported 31 October 1840). The female branches of such Orders very rarely had female officers, as borne out by the signatures of the officers inserted in the notice of a forthcoming meeting that the *Cambrian* had advertised. The very early formation of a female Lodge emphasised the independent and self-reliant spirit which pervaded even the female population in such a hard period in the history of the locality.

The Ivorites, like many other Friendly Societies, had strict rules of conduct for their members. They issued a booklet of signs and passwords for members to recognise and contact each other. The *Cambrian* provides ample evidence of this, with examples of Friendly Societies such as the Oddfellows and the Ancient Order of Foresters and other philanthropic societies proliferating in the Aberafan, Cwmafan, and the Afan Valley areas during the mid 1800s.

The fall-out from the French Revolution caused a great deal of legislation to be passed from 1790 to 1799, with the ultimate object of stifling working class democracy and independence. The only alternative to being banned by the State as an illegal organisation was to register under the auspices of the Friendly Societies Act of 1790.

The *Cambrian* of this period is littered with snippets of gossip and scandal and reports of some fraudulent dealings, but it seems that the Order had become part of the civic fabric of society. Its members held initiation ceremonies similar to Freemasons, where the use of passwords and regalia was the normal practice.

Alongside the Friendly Societies, another branch of self help and pro-

gress appeared in the newly industrialised areas of the country. Organisations developed, which are known today as Trades Unions. The Combination Act of 1799 made it difficult for workmen to organise themselves in a democratic manner, in order to obtain better wages and working conditions. Enforcement of the Combination Act caused huge discontent, not only locally but also on a national level. The resultant chaos and anger which followed this legislation is reflected in the *Cambrian* throughout the 19th Century. The newspaper reports in detail the meetings and protests of the coal and iron industries, held at frequent intervals, at local inns and other premises.

There were many attempts to organise labour, both nationally and in Wales. Craft Unions exclusive to one occupation were formed during the 1850s. Owing to the heavily industrialised nature of Wales, and the prevailing social conditions, many of the earliest local branches to be formed were by Railwaymen and Dockers.

Progressive movements such as the Chartists did not achieve their objectives, and led to bloody scenes such as the Peterloo Massacre and the Westgate rising at Newport. Hanging and deportation were the punishments meted out for the most trivial offences.

It is debatable whether the great changes in government and the democratic system, which were brought about in the 19th century, were the result of the increases in technology, agriculture and population. The French Revolution served as an alarm call to the State, who passed legislation such as the Trucking Act. The contentious Acts of 1790 and 1799 limited the amount of bargaining power of the artisan. The country was kept poor, immobile and uneducated, owing to the fact that the industrial companies and manufacturers owned most of the local housing, which was tied to the jobs. The state of affairs happened as a result of the withdrawal by the State of currency under the value of five pounds. It might be worthwhile to stop for a moment and consider the human beings who now populated these new industrial areas. While the economy was still based on village and hamlet, farm and church or chapel, the language in daily use was Welsh. The people had been settled in their small localities for generations, had intermarried, and knew and understood everyone with whom they came into daily contact. They were often poor but not usually discontented with their lot, since they shared it with their neighbours.

The first wave of incomers would have seemed like invaders from another planet, with an incomprehensible language and unfamiliar manners and behaviour. To the incomers, the native Welsh would have seemed equally strange, probably unfriendly, suspicious, and possibly even resentful. None of us likes change. Small changes can loom large.

Changes such as faced the inhabitants of the once peaceful valleys would have been almost overwhelming. The destruction of familiar landscapes, the filth and pollution, the loss of pasture to railways and coal mining and iron ore extraction and smelting must have fulfilled their ideas of Hell on Earth.

Everything that had been taken for granted for centuries was wiped out in a generation, and one of the most precious treasures to face extinction was the Welsh language. In 1891, the number of Welsh speakers had dropped to 54.4%, and steps were under way to stem the intrusion of English and erosion of Welsh. It was not totally successful, and by 1931, the number of Welsh speakers had dropped to 36.8%. The seeds of Welsh Nationalism had been sown with the industrialisation of South Wales, and the plant continued to flourish. It is easy to forget just how relentlessly the culture of a proud and ancient people was placed in jeopardy by King Coal.

With pressure from the working classes, and a proportion of the middle classes, who were concerned with poor hygiene and living conditions of the poor, things gradually improved, and there was a reduction in the outbreaks of typhoid and other epidemics of that period. The Cambrian Index for the period reports repeated debates in Parliament over the bad social conditions endured by many.

The introduction of the railways opened up such locations as Nantybar, which was to become a reflection of the larger society. The Nantybar mine changed owners during the 50 or so years that it was worked. The Mines Inspection Report of 1896 listed it as being no longer in use.

The cottages built for the early miners were demolished during the mid 20th century; they were continuously inhabited until that period, and were probably some of the oldest industrialised housing at Afan Uchaf. The struggles endured by the gritty men and women of this small hamlet during the 19th century set the scene for the even greater social changes which were to take place during the 20th century.



*Afan Vale cottages later to be renamed Nantybar cottages circa 1861.
 Note: There is no evidence at this date of residual development surrounding them, which appeared in subsequent years.*

