

HERITAGE NEWS

BLAENAVON WORLD HERITAGE SITE NEWSLETTER ISSUE 7 - Winter 2008



Heritage Lottery Fund: Never let us forget Blaenavon's landscape

The Forgotten Landscapes Partnership has received a grant pledge of £1.6 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund, which will help promote one of the finest examples of heritage-led regeneration in Britain. The project will facilitate the restoration of the building, post-industrial features and ancient monuments that form the distinct historic character of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape, whilst conserving and interpreting the natural habitat and wildlife of the area.



Amongst the many natural heritage projects will be the restoration of wetlands, grasslands and heather moorlands to provide habitats for the area's wildlife; the conservation of red grouse and the return of Welsh mountain ponies and traditional breeds of cattle to the common-land for the first time in a generation.

The Partnership aspires to engage with the community through volunteer schemes, training programmes and educational initiatives which, linked to the National Curriculum, will see schoolchildren participate in photography and oral history activities to learn about the area's cultural and historical associations.

Dan Clayton Jones, Chair of the Committee for Wales, HLF, said "the project is seen as the next natural step in the regeneration of Blaenavon, bringing prosperity and significant long term benefits to the area by encouraging people to get involved in their local heritage landscape, to learn more about it and to appreciate it."

Steven Rogers, Planning Officer for the FLP, said: "This award means so much to everyone who has been involved in developing the project ideas over the last 18 months. The Partnership can now move forward with confidence and deliver the vitally important heritage projects that local people want to see."



FLP group photo

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Coal House at War Coal House at War

The award-winning BBC television series *Coal House* returned to our screens this autumn, transporting three Welsh families back to Stack Square in 1940s Blaenavon. *Coal House at War*, set in 1944, brought attention to the 'forgotten armies' of the Second World War such as the female munitions workers and the Bevin Boys, the men who were conscripted to serve in the British coal industry. 600 families applied to participate in the series and the successful applicants had to contend with rationing, air raid precautions, evacuees, hard physical labour and the difficulties of fighting a 'Total War' from the Home Front.

The first series, set in 1927, enjoyed considerable acclaim, being a major topic of conversation in Blaenavon and the rest of the country. The series, which strongly engaged with the community, transformed the *Coal House* families and the businessmen of Blaenavon, who participated in the programme, into local celebrities. The quality of *Coal House* was recognised by BAFTA Cymru who, in April 2008, presented Indus Films, the producers of the series, with the prestigious Gwyn Alf Williams award for the programme's contribution to the understanding and appreciation of Welsh history.



Stack Square © TCBC

Fe ddychwelodd *Coal House*, cyfres deledu boblogaidd y BBC i'r sgrin unwaith eto yn ystod yr hydref, gan gludo tri theulu Cymreig yn ôl i Stack Square, Blaenafon yn y 1940au. Fe wnaeth *Coal House at War*, a leolwyd ym 1944, ddwyn sylw at 'fyddinoedd anghofiedig' yr Ail Ryfel Byd, sef merched y ffatri arfau a'r Bois Bevin, y dynion a orfodwyd i wasanaethau yn y diwydiant glo Prydeinig. Fe wnaeth 600 o deuluoedd wneud cais i gymryd rhan yn y gyfres a bu rhaid i'r ymgeiswyr llwyddiannus gystadlu â dogni, cyrchoedd awyr, faciws a llafur corfforol caled ynghyd â'r anawsterau o ymladd 'Rhyfel Cyfan' o'r Ffrynt Cartref.

Cafodd y gyfres gyntaf a leolwyd ym 1927 cryn gymeradwyaeth, lle bu'n brif destun trafodaeth ym Mlaenafon a gweddill y wlad. Fe wnaeth y gyfres ymhél yn llwyr â'r gymuned, gan ddod ag enwogrwydd i'r teuluoedd a'r rheini o'r busnes Blaenafon a gymerodd rhan yn y rhaglen. Cydnabuwyd ansawdd y rhaglen *Coal House* gan BAFTA Cymru pan gyflwynwyd Gwobr Gwyn Alf Williams i Indus Films, cynhyrchwyr y rhaglen, ym mis Ebrill 2008, a hynny am yr hyn a wnaeth y rhaglen gyfrannu i ddealltwriaeth a gwerthfawrogiad o hanes Cymru.

Successful Year at Blaenavon Ironworks



The Truck Shop: (Photo: Cadw, Welsh Assembly Government. Crown Copyright).

Blaenavon Ironworks has enjoyed a successful year, as Jackie Arrowsmith, Regional Custodian for Cadw, the Welsh Assembly Government's Historic Environment Service, explains.

In spring 2008 Cadw assumed direct management of Blaenavon Ironworks, offering free admission to all. Throughout the year there has been an increased interest

in the site and between March and August alone it received some 15,463 visitors, a substantial increase on previous years.

The Ironworks, an integral part of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape World Heritage Site, has recently benefited from the development of greater historical interpretation. In 2006 five workers' cottages were dressed to reflect the fashions of several bygone

eras and a reconstruction of the company's Truck Shop was completed earlier this year and has been used as an educational tool to engage with schoolchildren.

Blaenavon Ironworks also has much to interest adults and enthusiasts of industrial history. Accurate models, providing a holistic view of the site, are displayed in one of the cottages and five audio information posts have been

installed, providing factual and dramatised interpretation for the visitor.

An extensive guidebook, detailing the history and science of the site, was published in 2006, and the staff members possess a vast knowledge to deal with questions from visitors, curious to learn more about the historic monument.

For more information: telephone 01495 792615.

Blwyddyn Lwyddiannus yng Ngwaith Haearn Blaenafon

Mae Gwaith Haearn Blaenafon wedi mwynhau blwyddyn lwyddiannus fel yr esbonia Jackie Arrowsmith, Ceidwad Rhanbarthol Cadw, gwasanaeth amgylchedd hanesyddol Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru.

Yng ngwanwyn 2008 fe wnaeth Cadw ymgymryd â rheolaeth uniongyrchol Gwaith Haearn Blaenafon, gan gynnig mynediad am ddim i bawb. Drwy gydol

flwyddyn gwelwyd cynnydd yn y diddordeb, a rhwng Mawrth ag Awst croesawyd rhyw 15,463 o ymwelwyr i'r safle; cynnydd sylweddol ar flynyddoedd blaenorol.

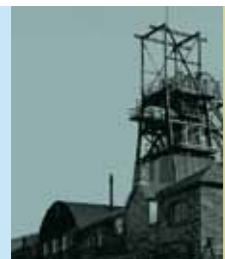
Mae'r Gwaith Haearn, sy'n rhan annatod o Dirwedd Ddiwydiannol Safle Treftadaeth y Byd Blaenafon, wedi elwa'n ddiweddar ar ddatblygiad dehongli hanesyddol sylweddol. Yn 2006 cafodd pump o fythynnod y gweithwyr eu

trefnu a'u haddurno er mwyn iddynt adlewyrchu ffasiwn nifer o'r oesau a fu ac yn gynharach eleni ail-grewyd Siop Dryc y cwmni a'i defnyddio fel offeryn i addysgu plant ysgol.

Mae gan Waith Haearn Blaenafon hefyd ddigon i ddiddori oedolion a selogion sydd â diddordeb mewn hanes diwydiannol. Mae modelau manwl gwir, sy'n darparu golygfa gyfannol o'r safle i'w gweld yn un o'r bythynnod,

a gosodwyd pum safle gwybodaeth clywedol sy'n darparu dehongliad ffeithiol a dramatig ar gyfer yr ymwelydd. Cyhoeddwyd arweinlyfr eang sy'n manylu ar hanes a gwyddor y safle yn 2006, ac mae gan y staff wybodaeth helaeth er mwyn delio â chwestiynau gan ymwelwyr sy'n awyddus i ddsygu mwy am yr heneb hanesyddol.

Am fwy o wybodaeth: 01495 792615



Mining Museum Celebrates 25th Anniversary

In April 2008 Big Pit National Coal Museum marked its 25th anniversary with a weekend of special events and activities. Few could have imagined in the late 1970s, when early proposals were made to convert the working colliery into a museum, that the venture would be such a success. Reopening as a museum in 1983, Big Pit was instantly popular, providing visitors with the unique experience of exploring underground passages with former miners but financial difficulties meant that the museum often faced an uncertain future.

The management of the site was assumed by the National Museums and Galleries of Wales in 1999 and since Blaenavon received World Heritage Status in 2000, the museum has gone from strength to strength and visitor numbers have soared. An extensive revamp of the site was completed in 2004 courtesy of grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Welsh Assembly Government and the Welsh Tourist Board. The new surface displays, exhibitions and interpretation features were instrumental in Big Pit receiving the prestigious Gulbenkian Prize for museum of the year in 2005.

Since 1983 over three million people have been welcomed to the site and, with its enduring popularity, Big Pit will continue to bring global attention to the coalmining heritage of Wales for many years to come.



Big Pit © TCBC

Amgueddfa Mwyngloddio yn Dathlu Pum Mlynedd ar Hugain

Ym mis Ebrill 2008 fe wnaeth Amgueddfa Lofaol Genedlaethol Cymru ddathlu ei phumed ar hugain pen-blwydd gyda phenwythnos o ddigwyddiadau a gweithgareddau arbennig. Ychydig iawn fyddai'n dychmygu ar ddiwedd y 70au, pan wnaethpwyd cynigion i drawsnewid y pwl glo i amgueddfa, y byddai'r fenter mor llwyddiannus. Pan agorwyd yr amgueddfa ym 1983, roedd Pwll Mawr yr un mor boblogaidd, yn darparu profiadau unigryw i ymwelwyr a oedd am archwilio'r twneli tanddaearol gyda chyn-lowyr, ond oherwydd anawsterau ariannol roedd yr amgueddfa'n wynebu dyfodol ansicr iawn.

Fe wnaeth Amgueddfeydd ac Oriolau Cenedlaethol Cymru ymgymryd â rheolaeth y safle ym 1999 ac ers hynny fe dderbyniodd Blaenafon Statws Treftadaeth y Byd yn 2000. Mae'r amgueddfa wedi mynd o nerth i nerth gyda nifer yr ymwelwyr yn ffynnu. Ailwampwyd y safle yn 2004 diolch i grantiau gan Gronfa Dreftadaeth y Loteri, lywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru a Bwrdd Croeso Cymru. Fe wnaeth yr arddangosfeydd newydd ar yr wyneb ar nodweddion dehongli chwarae rhan bwysig pan ddyfarnwyd Gwobr Gulbenkian am amgueddfa'r flwyddyn i Bwll Mawr yn 2005.

Ers 1983 croesawyd dros dair miliwn o bobl i'r safle, a, gyda'i phoblogrwydd syfrdanol, mi fydd Pwll Mawr yn parhau i ddenu sylw byd-eang i'r dreftadaeth mwyngloddio yng Nghymru am nifer o flynyddoedd i ddod.

Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway Silver Jubilee



Pontypool & Blaenavon Railway © TCBC

Also celebrating its Silver Jubilee in 2008 was the Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway, which opened in August 1983. The anniversary was successfully marked by a well-attended weekend gala on

the 13th and 14th of September, which received much attention from the Welsh media. The attraction has long proved popular with children, the general visitor and steam train enthusiasts and now the small

railway, which has already seen much improvement in recent years, is set to benefit from significant funding from the Heads of the Valleys Programme. The dedicated volunteers plan to use the

money to enhance the attraction by trebling the length of line by 2010 and by renovating the track and railway bridges.

For more information contact the Pontypool & Blaenavon Railway Society on 01495 792263.



World Heritage Centre Opens

After years of extensive renovation, research and planning, the Blaenavon World Heritage Centre was officially opened by the First Minister of Wales, Rhodri Morgan, on the 25th of March 2008. The centre, which is the first dedicated World Heritage Centre in Britain, provides an interpretative overview of the rich history of Blaenavon and utilises a range of media to explain why the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape was deemed worthy of UNESCO World Heritage Status in November 2000.

The centre is based within two of the three buildings that once constituted the Blaenavon Endowed Schools. The original school, which opened on the 15th of April 1816, was established by Sarah Hopkins of Rugeley (1768-1844) in memory of her late brother, the estimable ironmaster and philanthropist Samuel Hopkins, who died in June 1815. The school, which became the first purpose-built school in Wales to be founded by an industrial employer for the benefit of the workers' children, initially welcomed 120 'poor and needy' pupils but as Blaenavon developed in the nineteenth century the school rapidly expanded. An infants' school was opened in February 1849 and in 1860 a separate boys' school was created, by which time some 500 scholars were in attendance.



The Boys' Endowed School in 1910. Photograph courtesy of Mrs. M. Burnell

For over 160 years Sarah Hopkins' school educated generations of Blaenavon children and was an integral part of the community. The boys' and girls' schools merged in 1959 to form St. Peter's C.V. Junior Mixed and Infant School and in 1982, following the closure of Blaenavon Secondary Modern School, St. Peter's School moved to its present location in Park Street.

For almost a quarter of a century the Church Road buildings lay vacant and dilapidated but the investment of £2.7 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Cadw and Welsh Assembly Government has ensured that a high-quality, sympathetic restoration has been completed, incorporating an impressive glass link connecting the former girls' and boys' schools. The successful combination of the old and new buildings was recognised in May when the centre became the sole Welsh recipient of a prestigious award from the Royal Institute of British Architects. Paul Murphy, Secretary of State for Wales, formally presented the award to the architects,



World Heritage Centre © TCBC

Purcell, Miller, Tritton, in a ceremony held at the centre in June.

The World Heritage Centre, an invaluable resource for tourists and the local community alike, has received overwhelmingly positive feedback from the thousands of visitors who have been welcomed to the site since March.

A variety of services are offered at the site, including tourist information, a local history research facility, specialised education provision for schools, state-of-the-art conference facilities, an art gallery, a well-stocked gift-shop and an excellent cafe.

This outstanding facility, the centrepiece of the Blaenavon Project's regeneration programme, is looking forward to a happy future, 'building a future on the past'.

The centre is open Tuesday-Sunday (and Bank Holidays) from 9am - 4pm (5pm during summertime).

Telephone: 01495 742333.

Email: blaenavon.tic@torfaen.gov.uk



The dilapidated interior of the former boys' school © TCBC



The exhibition room of the World Heritage Centre © TCBC



Ranger News



Rangers and volunteers dry stone walling © TCBC

An exciting programme of junior ranger walks and interactive events took place over the summer and early autumn. Outdoor venues included the award-winning Coity Tip Trail and Garn Lakes Local Nature Reserve. The family-orientated programme was led by local Rangers, with input from Sharon Ford from Big Pit National Coal Museum.

Children aged seven and upwards took part in pond dipping, bat hunts, fossil hunts, orienteering and wild animal tracking. Junior ranger programmes are a great way to nurture 'young advocates' for local nature and heritage, and there are plans to expand the programme in the near future.

If you would like to find out more about the work of the World Heritage Site Volunteer Rangers, including the development of future junior ranger programmes, why not come along to one of our informal meetings? Meetings are held on the first Friday of every month at 7pm in the World Heritage Centre, Blaenavon.

Over the coming months volunteers will be developing the 2009 walks and events programme as well as undertaking practical countryside management work such as dry stone walling and maintenance of the flagship 16km (10 mile) long Iron Mountain Trail.

For further information please contact Alvin Nicholas, Tel: 01495 742334, email: alvin.nicholas@torfaen.gov.uk

Garn Lakes Country Fayre

The 2008 Garn Lakes Country Fayre was held on the last Sunday in June. Although the weather was against us with showers throughout the day, at least this year the ground was a lot drier under foot! Visitor attendance to the event was good with over 2,000 visitors recorded. Once again there were themed areas at the Fayre, with the craft marquee, a bio-diversity area, local and charitable groups and refreshments. The hog roast was popular as ever, visitors got through two pigs during the day! It was the second year for the dog show, which proved a success with a lot of entries in each class – this is something which will be further developed for next year, and sponsors have already been secured for prizes and rosettes.

In 2009 the Fayre will take place on Sunday 28th June, and we are already planning more activities for visitors to take part in as well as some roaming entertainment.

For further information on next year's event, please contact Katie Gates, Tel: 01495 742338, email: katie.gates@torfaen.gov.uk



© TCBC

Iconic historic monument is saved for future generations



The chimney interior following restoration © TCBC

The chimney at Hill's Pits, Garn Yr Erw, has been saved from collapse through the intervention of Torfaen Council in partnership with the Welsh Assembly Government and the Walters Group.

The structure is an iconic feature in the landscape, standing out as an

unusual structure in a landscape otherwise bereft of buildings. It is clearly visible from Big Pit and is a point of interest for walkers following the 'Iron Mountain Trail'.

Large cracks had appeared in the structure following years of neglect and it was feared that it might continue

to deteriorate and eventually collapse. As a key feature of the World Heritage Site, this would have major implications as well as becoming a danger to the public. Following a grant from the WAG, work was undertaken over the summer by Abbey Masonry Ltd who, despite inclement weather, managed to

complete the works to a high standard.

Works included:

- Installing stainless steel anchors to secure the structure
- Cleaning out the flue to reduce pressure on the chimney
- The removal of the Rowan Tree and the reinstallation of the curved stones on top of the structure
- Re-pointing the structure with an appropriate conservation mortar mix

There were also some important ecological considerations for the project. The Black Spearwort plant on the south facing wall is locally distinct and was protected during the works. Small crevices were maintained and now provide an ideal habitat for bats to roost.



Mystery Photograph



Photograph courtesy of Mrs. M Burnell

Can you help us identify the location or people shown in this interesting photograph, submitted to the Blaenavon World Heritage Centre digital archive by Haydn and Margaret Burnell? The photograph is believed to have been taken in Blaenavon and shows a diverse group of people but unfortunately we know very little about the picture or the purpose it was taken. If you have any information about this image, or if you wish to share your old photographs of Blaenavon, the staff members at the Blaenavon World Heritage Centre would love to hear from you. Tel: 01495 742333. Email: blaenavon.tic@torfaen.gov.uk

Torfaen Adult and Community Learning

If your Saturday evenings are spent enjoying the flamboyant movements of the stars of Strictly Come Dancing on TV, you may be interested to learn of the dance class organised by Torfaen Adult and Community Learning being enjoyed by local people at the Community Education Centre in Park Street.

This successful evening class is enjoyed by all age groups and you don't even need a partner. The variety of Latin American, Ballroom and other dance styles allows not only social interaction but also encourages exercise and a healthy lifestyle whilst ticking all of the boxes in the enjoyment stakes.

There are many other courses on offer at Park Street including Art, Flower Arranging, Nail Art, Relaxation and Alternative Therapies, so...., it really would be 'Nice to see you, to see youNICE!'.

For more information, contact Blaenavon CEC at Park Street on 01495 792013.

WEA Local History Group

wea

workers' educational association south wales | cymdeithas addysg y gweithwyr de cymru

Under the auspices of the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) we are a group of approximately twenty local history students who, for the last two years, have met to study the history of Blaenavon. Initially our period of research was that of the nineteenth century but we have since moved into the period 1900-1951 and have filmed the personal histories of our group members.

Each member has been designated a particular theme to research and consequently each has made

a contribution to our knowledge of the period. It has become a meaningful exercise combining a range of personal experiences relating to lifestyle, work, education, religion, leisure, sport and wartime exploits. And, by delving into the local archives, we, as a group, have been able to begin the compilation of a booklet covering the period. We are hopeful that our 'second Blaenavon story' will not only be leavened with humorous anecdotes, eyewitness accounts of events and pen-portraits of notable individuals,

but also with an excellent display of sketches, provided by our artist-in-residence, Mary Challenger.

It is fair to say that the conception, birth and growth of Blaenavon is well-documented but our desire above all else is to attempt to bring a greater awareness to local people and the wider public about how this community was able to come to terms with the difficulties confronted between 1900 and 1951.

For details of WEA courses, Tel: 01495 791128.

Govilon Heritage Group Goes Walkabout

It started as a leaflet to help visitors find their way around the historic village of Govilon. Now it has become a local institution. "We held our first guided walk over 3 years ago

to promote our walks leaflet", explains Frances Baines of the Govilon Heritage Group, "but due to unexpected demand we now have to run three guided walks each year.

We even time our first walk to support the Crickhowell Walking Festival held in early March".

But this is not all that is on offer in Govilon. The

website (www.govilon.com) has perhaps one of the best history sections of any village. It is a Pandora's Box for genealogists and those interested in local history. The Heritage Group has also erected information boards and a leaflet to coincide with the village walks. There is also a village book and historic prints specially commissioned from the well known artist Michael Blackmore.

So what's next? Frances and the group are not resting on their laurels. "We are balancing the three summer walks with some winter talks by well known local historians" adds Frances. And guess where you can find all the details – on the website of course.



Local artist Michael Blackmore producing work for the group (photograph courtesy of Mr. Rob Vaughan)



Coming Events

Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway: Steam Santa Specials

13 & 14 December 2008, 11am - 3.30pm

Travel by steam train to Santa's Grotto, where there will be presents for children and sherry and mince pies for adults. Book ahead to avoid disappointment and get a discount. Special fares apply. Telephone 01495 792263.

A Coalfield Christmas

Sunday 14 December 2008, 11am - 4pm

Big Pit: National Coal Museum

Festive celebrations and activities at Big Pit: National Coal Museum. Telephone 01495 790311.

Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway: Steam Santa Specials

20 & 23 December 2008, 11am - 3.30pm

Travel by steam train to Santa's Grotto, where there will be presents for children and sherry and mince pies for adults. Book ahead to avoid disappointment and get a discount. Special fares apply. Telephone 01495 792263.

Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway: New Year DMU Service

27 & 28 December 2008

Ticket Information: £2.50 adult/£1.50 child (3-16). Telephone 01495 792263.

Take a Stroll: Blaenavon 6 January 2009

2pm

Departs from Queen Victoria Public House

Moderate, healthy community walk. Telephone 07908 214499.

Blaenavon Local History Society:

'David Williams - History of Monmouthshire 1796'

8 January 2009, 7pm - 9pm

Blaenavon Workmen's Hall

By Brian Davies. £2 for non-members.

Blaenavon Local History Society:

**'The Roman Tetrapylon' Architectural Ethnic
Cleansing in the Middle Ages' by Dr. Ray Howell**

12 February 2009, 7pm - 9pm

Blaenavon Workmen's Hall

£2 for non-members.

Govilon Heritage Trail

28 February 2009, 2pm - 4pm

£2 for non-members. Led by a local historian, this walk, part of the Crickhowell Walking Festival, follows the railway track and country lanes to explore the west of the village of Govilon. The route keeps to steady gradients and all weather tracks. Start Forge Car Park Govilon. Distance 1.5 Miles.

Blaenavon World Heritage Day Committee

**presents the Morrison Orpheus Choir St. David's
Day Concert**

1 March, 2009

Blaenavon Workmen's Hall

For information about tickets and prices telephone 01633 648326.

Blaenavon Local History Society:

**'Monmouth and the Wye Tour: Late 18th and
19th Century Tourism' by Andrew Helme**

12 March, 2009, 7pm - 9pm

Blaenavon Workmen's Hall

£2 for non-members.

Blaenavon Local History Society:

'Debra from the Coal House' by Debra Griffiths

9 April, 2009, 7pm - 9pm

Blaenavon Workmen's Hall

£2 for non-members.

World Heritage Day

27 June 2009

Garn Lakes Country Fayre

28 June 2009

