

INTERNATIONAL LINKS

Throughout its history Blaenavon has played a global role, this page explores some of the international links that the town has forged during the past two centuries.

Inward Migration

Following the establishment of the first Blaenavon Ironworks in 1789, the population of the area gradually increased. Throughout the nineteenth century Blaenavon became home to hundreds of families from all over Great Britain and the wider world. A number of the early migrants, who were skilled iron makers, came from counties such as Staffordshire to seek profitable work in Blaenavon but a greater number of the early migrants came from the agricultural areas of Wales and the west of England during the early years of industry. Many Irish migrants were employed at Blaenavon's mines and ironworks in the 1840s, 1850s and 1860s. Some people came from as far as Germany and northern Italy to seek work in Blaenavon during the nineteenth century.

Overseas Migration

At times of economic depression in the 1820s and 1840s many skilled workers from Blaenavon sought their fortunes in the United States, some of them taking valuable skills to American ironmasters. In one week in 1848 no fewer than fifty people left Blaenavon for the United States. Blaenavon people also tried to start new lives in the countries of the British Empire such as Canada and Australia. Some even travelled as far as Russia.

Case Studies

The Caddick & Taylor Families

Thomas Caddick, son of a blacksmith, was married at Odessa in 1886 to Mary Ann Taylor, whose father, Charles Taylor, was a puddler from Blaenavon. The family spent 28 years working in Russia, before returning to Blaenavon. Caddick and his wife's kinsmen worked for the New Russia Ironworks, established in the Donetsk basin in 1869 by the Welshman John Hughes of Merthyr Tydfil.



The town around his Russian works came to be known as Hughesovska, but its name was changed to Stalino in 1924, and subsequently to Donetsk.

The Baker Family

Iron-making skills were not the only talents that Blaenavon people took with them around the world. Samuel Baker (1860-1936), for example, the headmaster of Park Street Wesleyan Methodist School, migrated to London, Ontario, Canada with his wife, Mary, in 1886. Baker became a very influential citizen of London, Ontario, and served as principal of St. George's School. He was also a noted local

politician and became city-clerk for twenty-nine years. In 1924, he wrote a book entitled *The Rise and Progress of London*.

The Cowmeadow Family

George and Naomi Cowmeadow of Blaenavon migrated to the coal mining town of Minmi, New South Wales, in 1884. George Cowmeadow used his coalmining experience acquired in Blaenavon to good use and worked in the local mines. George Cowmeadow was a committed socialist and was an active member of the Ancient Order of Druids, a social and benevolent society. He participated in Lodge meetings for the purposes of improving industrial relations and when he died, in 1914, the 'clasped hands' symbol of the Miners' Association Union was inscribed on his tombstone. His wife, Naomi, ran a shop in Minmi and when she retired years later, she moved to Swansea, NSW, where she lived in a house which she named 'Blaenavon Cottage' in honour of the town of her birth.



Export & Import of Skills and Goods

From the 1860s rails from Blaenavon were being supplied to railway companies in Russia, Finland, India and Canada. Perhaps Blaenavon's most significant international connection came through the transfer of the steelmaking process developed at Blaenavon by Percy Gilchrist and Sidney Gilchrist Thomas, which was publicly announced in London in March 1878. Within four years it was being used at works in France, Belgium, Germany, the Habsburg Empire and Russia, and the American steel magnate Andrew Carnegie paid 250,000 American Dollars for the right to use the process in the United States.

Blaenavon also acquired skills and goods from other countries. In about 1860, for example, the Blaenavon Company negotiated with the French firm of Petin, Gudet et Cie to use their patent process in a mill to roll iron for weldless tyres. And, in the 1880s, as local supplies of iron ore were becoming exhausted, the Blaenavon Company began to import Spanish ore which was shipped from Bilbao, and then carried up the valley by rail from Newport docks.

Twentieth Century Global Links

International connections continued in the twentieth century. Belgian refugees worked in shell factories at Blaenavon during World War One, and the Canadian Army provided expertise for the development of open cast mining during World War Two, part of a programme which contributed significantly to the British war effort.



In 1985 Blaenavon was 'twinned' with the French town of Coutras, Aquitaine. An official twinning ceremony was held at Bethlehem Court, Blaenavon, on 18 May 1985. Since that date Blaenavon has hosted several official visits from Coutras and, similarly, delegations from Blaenavon have been sent to Coutras.

Twenty-first Century Global Links

In November 2000, the announcement that the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape had achieved World Heritage Status was made in Cairns, Queensland, Australia. Since World Heritage Status has been attained, many of Blaenavon's visitors have come from overseas and have played a part in reviving the town's economy through tourism.