

Newsletter:

22nd Edition Thursday 20th August 2020

Weekly update

The Museum continues to open on Saturdays between 10am and 12.30pm. For those missing social contact with fellow members, feel free to call in on a Saturday and you're sure to find 4 or 5 familiar faces.

At the beginning of the year we starting holding Committee meetings after the Museum closed on a Saturday. This proved beneficial as half of the Committee members are usually there anyway. The first meeting since lockdown was held last Saturday and the decision was made to hold the postponed AGM, scheduled for September 4th, remotely. This will be a new experience for many of us but those who have used Zoom assure us that it is easy to use and a satisfactory meeting can be held.

Last weeks Walk was led by Phil and as John said last week it was both interesting and informative.

Despite the change in the weather, a good sized band of us wandered around a number of former 'Risca' brickworks sites and the early limestone quarry to the rear of the Level Crossing. As the Canal prevented further expansion another quarry was opened above it and linked by tunnel beneath it. Largely obscured by the overgrowth it was eventually seen on the evening: *(it is much better to view Phil's photos taken several years ago given their quality and also note the amount of ongoing decay ...and also find out what was found inside*



Upcoming walks

Malc's Walkabout; 21st August, 2020.

This is a relatively easy Walkabout.

He's wrong!



We meet at Risca Railway Station car-park, and from there we walk past the Masons Arms and the site of a Corn Mill. We walk along Water Lane, now renamed Manor Road, passing the site of a 'Blacking Factory' which was built in 1862 to serve the nearby Britannia Foundry. The factory buildings were purchased by Thomas Budding in 1870 and converted to a Flannel Factory powered by a waterwheel. The workers cottages remain.

We reach the site of Leaky Bridge, sometimes known as Giles' Aqueduct. Finally, we are at a point where once stood Ty-mawr. A Tudor built house, once home to the Waters, Phillips and the Giles family, the house was demolished to allow access to the Ty-Sign housing estate.

A short walk along the canal will take us to Hill Street: a row of houses built by Henry White, one-time owner of Britannia Foundry, to house his workforce.

We return to the car park through the housing estate, built on the site of Britannia Foundry.

On Aug 28th, John will lead a walk looking at the site of Blackvein Colliery and Colliery Row. Meet at the Blackvein Road car park at the bottom of Waunfawr Park, Crosskeys (ST226914)

Following John Hughes's excellent contribution on Markham Colliery, Mike Harris has a postscript to add

There has been so much growth of trees in the valley there that one can see virtually nothing of the remains of the site of the mine.

Even the position of the pit-head baths building on the west side of the valley is not visible from the road up to Hollybush.

There is no view across to the main mine on the east side of the valley. Most of the pit-head buildings were removed not long after closure. A lot of mature trees have been cut down in the last two years revealing bare hillsides above the mine.

Markham produced some of the finest steam coals for railway locomotives from any coalfield in Britain. In the 1930's, a large part of Markham's output went straight to the Great Western Railway, and was used throughout their network on express passenger trains hauled by the famous King, Castle and Hall classes of engines.

It's claimed the best of the firemen on the crack expresses like the Red Dragon (Cardiff to London, Paddington) or the Bristolian (Bristol, Temple Meads to Paddington) knew if their tender of coal came from Markham, Oakdale or North Celynen; these were the three favourites.

Much as the new 800 class diesel / electrics are efficient and fast, they don't rank with the sight of a Cardiff Canton shed Castle class steaming into Newport High Street platform 1 or a down Red Dragon express on a summer's afternoon. And the rather rare view of a King class from Old Oak Common shed in London was a treat for the camera and notebook.

A very kind fireman let me go up and stand on the footplate of King James 1 one afternoon!!! Very happy schoolboy memories - and no damned covid-19 to concern us all

Mike Harris

On a bicycle made for one *by Malcolm Johnson*



What a thrill it must have been for the one-time owner of the Penny Farthing bicycle, now on display at Risca Museum, as he once rode through the streets of Risca waving to excited children as they walked to school accompanied by their mothers.

When the going was good the ride was satisfying; but Risca's former Turnpike Roads would not meet modern road-building standards and our once contented rider would have cause for concern should the front wheel get caught in an unseen rut or possibly hit a large stone.

Perhaps now looking a pitiful and sorry sight, to re-mount the machine, the rider would place his foot on a 'step' located above the rear wheel while pushing the cycle forward to gain momentum before finally seating. This activity required a great deal of skill.

Riding along the old parish roads, hopefully safely seated, the rider would consider it even more gratifying to be able to look over high hedgerows and

take in the distant view of Ty-isaf Farm and maybe acknowledging folks with a wave as they queued outside Ty-Pwcha cottage, waiting to buy one-penny bottles of pop, without straining his neck.

And what of the Penny Farthing's tale? The bicycle was first introduced during late Victorian times and was so named from the Penny and Farthing coins then in circulation. This type of bicycle was one of the earliest machines made entirely of metal instead of part-wood.

The bicycle featured a large diameter front wheel on which was positioned a frame with handle bars, leather seat, pedals and a stabiliser wheel. Both front and back wheels were fitted with hard solid rubber tyres. Some comfort was afforded to the rider by a leather seat attached to the frame by springs. Brakes, springs, lamps or gears were items from a distant future.

The large diameter of the front wheel permitted faster travelling due to increased distance covered for each single rotation of the pedals. Instances have been recorded of riders exceeding up to ten miles per hour on well-maintained roads.

To stop the machine the use of a shoe's heel was usually found to be the most effective way of stopping: or jumping off by first placing a leg over the handle-bars.



A similar Penny Farthing bicycle can be seen on display at Risca Museum. The Museum is open every Saturday morning between 10.00a.m. & 12.30 p.m.

All welcome.

Free admission.

Penny Farthing

Photo: Risca Museum

Due to Lockdown a packet of seed potatoes I intended to have the grandchildren plant in their garden ended up giving me a good haul of spuds from my allotment (disease free too, so shame I didn't notice the variety!)

However my results pale into insignificance compared with John Martin's in September 1862...perhaps soil fertility has decreased in the valley in the last 150 years?...(easier to get horse manure then? ☺)

PONTYMISTER.

A few days ago, Mr. John Martin, mechanic, Pontymister Works, raised in his garden 265 potatoes, weighing 56 lbs. This extraordinary number and weight were produced from a single potato, cut into seedlings. The potatoes are the "French white."

BRECON

Our area has had a number of colliery disasters and, quite rightly, the focus is centred on the loss of life. David Brimble survived but that was as miraculous as the death of his workmates and relations was tragic.

David Brimble was born in High Littleton in the Somerset coalfield in 1819 and, with his younger brother, came to Gwent in his late teens eventually settling in Risca. Other family members appear to have followed them from Somerset. In 1844 he married local girl Hannah Price and in the following years they had seven children.

When pits were sunk to a greater depth to get to the rich seam of steam coal, known locally as the Black Vein, problems were encountered with gas deposits which, under certain conditions, resulted in underground explosions.

In 1846, one such explosion at the Black Vein colliery resulted in 35 deaths. In the newspaper reports, credit was made to David Brimble who had taken part in the rescue ⁽¹⁾. The report of another explosion in 1853 in which 9 men died again mentioned David Brimble as part of the rescue party.

The worst explosion happened in 1860 with 142 killed including five surnamed Brimble. David and his 16 year old son, Joseph, were rescued barely alive but Joseph died a few days later when David's condition was said to be precarious. A newspaper reported that 'Mrs Morris, a benevolent lady, paid for a woman to look after David Brimble who was badly burned in the explosion and had no-one to attend him' ⁽²⁾. David's wife was very close to childbirth and there were young children to look after which probably explains the need.

In addition to Joseph, the Brimble's who died were James aged 45, James aged 35, Thomas aged 12 and William aged 14. They were all related, I think one James was a brother and the other a cousin and the two youngsters were nephews.

Unusually, his name does not occur in relation to the 1880 explosion when 120 died at the new colliery (which became Risca Colliery) but in 1882 it was reported that four were killed in an explosion at the North Risca colliery ⁽³⁾ and evidence was given at the subsequent inquest by David Brimble ⁽⁴⁾.

David and Hannah lived in various locations around Risca but in 1881 they were in Colliery Row. David died in 1889 and is buried in the cemetery at Cromwell Road; his death was not the result of a colliery incident.

references

(1) Monmouthshire Merlin 17 Jan 1846.

(2) Star of Gwent 19 Jan 1861.

(3) Monmouthshire Merlin 20 Jan 1882

(4) Monmouthshire Merlin 10 Feb 1882

Census Returns

Malcolm's Merlin Musings

Malcolm has selected and had printed numerous interesting snippets from the Merlin, to help raise much needed funds. They are available at the Museum at £3.00 each

Here's a couple to whet your appetite; or better still reaching for your cash (*yes we will still take cash* 😊)



VICTORIA IRON WORKS, MONMOUTHSHIRE.

IMPORTANT TO IRON-MASTERS, COAL-PROPRIETORS, AND OTHERS.

W. GRAHAM & SON,

Beg to announce that they are peremptorily instructed

TO SELL BY AUCTION,

On the Premises, at Victoria Iron Works aforesaid, on MONDAY, the 1st of April, 1844, and following days until all is sold.

The whole of the VERY VALUABLE PLANT, Blast, Locomotive, and other Engines, Machinery, Stock, and Moveable Effects, the property of the Monmouthshire Iron and Coal Co., taken in Execution by the Sheriff of Monmouthshire, which have all been erected with the last few years at an immense expense, and are now in excellent condition. To be viewed until the day of sale, and catalogues obtained 14 days prior thereto, on application to MR SAUNDERS on the premises at Victoria; at the Castle Inn, Tredegar; Bush, Merthyr; Angel, Abergavenny; Crown, Pontypool; Newbridge Inn, Newbridge; Kings Head, Newport; and of the Auctioneers at their Residences at Usk.

The sale to commence each day precisely at 10 in the morning.

Usk, February 28, 1844.

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### THE MERLIN, 1846

**FATAL ACCIDENT**- a lamentable occurrence took place on Saturday night last. A man, in a house at Dowlais, had, on Saturday last, brought in a loaded gun, and had taken the precaution to take off the caps. About nine o'clock on Sunday night, a lad, named Anthony Howells, 18 years of age, took the gun - which lay against the clock - and began playing with it. He jocularly pointed it at Thomas Thomas, a boy of 14 years, not thinking it loaded. The gun, on his pulling the trigger, went off, and the load striking the boy Thomas in the middle of the forehead, blew his brains against an adjoining wall. An inquest was held on the body of the deceased, and the jury, by the direction of William Davies Esq., the coroner, returned a verdict of Misadventure.

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EMPLOYMENT OF COMPRESSED AIR IN COLLIERY WORKINGS.

- The coal mining company in Douchy, in France, is at present making some rather interesting experiments, to cause the water, or well, in coal pits, to rise to a level, by the assistance only of atmospheric pressure, already employed with such success, by M. Triger, in the coal basin of the Maine and Loire. This operation has been carried on with success, and everything announces that it will terminate in the same manner; it will be a most fortunate innovation, if introduced, in the workings of the mines generally, and worthy of the consideration of the most practical savings. Up to the present time, they have arrived at the bottom of the principle level of the water, and the miners are working in a pressure of two atmospheres and a half. Hitherto, no inconvenience whatever to them has been noticed in the works so operated, and they are nearly always accompanied by their director of the works. Perhaps, they have become a little thinner during the course of those works, where they inspire or inhale an exceedingly compressed oxygen air; but, on the whole, there is no doubt of their success, - and, what is more, no accident has happened in this arduous operation.

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**Explosion at Risca Colliery** The inquest on the bodies of the unfortunate men who lost their lives by this terrible explosion was commenced on Friday, the 16th inst, at the Albert Inn, Risca. William Brewer, Esq., the coroner, with the jury, had been engaged nearly the whole of Thursday, in viewing the bodies that had been taken out, seven still then remaining in the fatal pit. The following persons formed the jury, - John Rosser, Esq., Foreman. Jacob Jacobs, William Rees, John Duffield, William Matthews, John Phillips, William Hodges, Henry Moses, Daniel Jones, William Lovering Cock, William Howells, Samuel Bateman, William Jones.

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CAUTION - RISCA CATASTROPHE. - We have been informed that several idle fellows are already travelling in parts of this county and Glamorganshire stating that they are persons who had escaped from the colliery where the explosion had taken place, merely with their lives, but being sorely hurt. Now, whoever is attempting, or will attempt, such an imposition on the humane, may be safely considered as imposters, for, it is officially communicated to us that as long as any person is a sufferer from this calamity, and conducts him or herself well, so long will the proprietors provide for their wants.

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**On Sunday night last**, at the Primitive Methodist Chapel, Brynmawr, while Mr. John Ricks was preaching to a crowded congregation, his little girl, under two years of age, was observed to stagger and fall in the aisle. When taken up, she immediately expired.

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LOSS OF ANOTHER LIFE FOR WANT OF LIGHT AT THE CANAL SIDE!

On Tuesday week, an inquest was held before Wm. Brewer, Esq., coroner, and an intelligent jury, on the body of John Jenkins, a labouring man, aged 56, who lost his life on Sunday morning, in that part of the canal where three persons have been drowned within a few weeks! The following evidence was adduced on the occasion:- William Evans, smith, of Pill, stated that he knew the deceased, was shipping coal with him on Saturday night last at Mr Morrison's wharf. Left off work at about half-past one with the deceased and two other men, William Rees and John Evans, who had been working in the same yard. They had only one pint of beer each, and all four came out of the Union together. Witness, stopping for a moment, asked deceased to wait for him, but he said; 'I'll go on, you will soon overtake me.' I went after John and walked into the canal, fortunately a man named Green heard the fall, and came and assisted me out of the water. I returned back to the Union; they gave me a light, and I went on home. The bridge was shut when I went home, and I heard nothing of the deceased until last night when a person came to enquire about him, and I told him all I knew. Mr. Isaac Venn, marine storekeeper, of Pillgwenlly, deposed that the

deceased worked some time for him; that the person where the poor fellow had lodged came to enquire about him that they borrowed the grappling-irons from the dock, and searched for the body in the canal, which they found near the swing bridge.

Verdict, 'Found dead in the canal'. The deceased, who was a widower, has left three helpless orphans. We are happy to announce that the Canal and Dock Company have placed lights in the dangerous quarters above alluded i.e. for the protection of life, and the prevention of future accidents.

Last week's Quiz

- 1 Given the heat outside cool off and name the street and give the year.



This is Llanarth Square with the photographer having his back to the main road looking towards Ty Sign; the Branch club on the right and an outbuilding of the Rolling Mill on the left. It was 1978, mid-summer (only joking). Interestingly, there is no way that this street is a square, perhaps the name should be changed to Llanarth Rectangle.

- 2 It's not just colliers that work in a coal mine, only the men that cut the coal were entitled to that name. Other occupations were timbermen, firemen, engine drivers, hauliers, ostlers, blacksmiths and many more; but **what did the Billy-boy do?**

When Brian Davies last visited us he was asked a question on 'Billy Fair-play' which turns out to be a machine that separated the small coal from the large. The 'Billy-boy' was the person who manned this machine and recorded the weight of the rejected small coal.

This week's Quiz

- 1 Name the local farm and give its location.



- 2 What links the Albert Hotel, Danygraig House & Risca Town School.