

Rhymney Notes

Iron Works

The first foundry was fired in a snowstorm in 1801. It made iron for a few years before production was shifted downriver to just south of the station.

The Union Ironworks on the east of the river - formed between a partnership of Richard Crawshay, Richard Cunningham and Thomas Williams.

The Bute Ironworks on the opposite bank, opened in 1828, with the then futuristic looking Egyptian style furnaces.

They two ironworks merged in 1837 to become the Rhymney Ironworks, which at their peak employed more than 5000 workers.

The iron ore came from the clays surrounding the coal or from patch working in the surrounding hills.

The ironworks closed in 1891 and by the early 20th century the town's collieries employed nearly the entire local population.

Untruth: When the two iron works merged, a bridge over the river was constructed, made from iron manufactured at the iron works. The bridge turned out to be made from inferior iron and rusted away over time causing the demise of Rhymney iron works.

Rhymney Brewery

Started as part of the iron works to satisfy the thirst of the workers at the end of their shifts. They put their engineer Andrew Buchan in charge of it. Buchan was Scottish and came first as an engineer to deepen and straighten the river to facilitate the building of the ironworks.

At some stage it became the largest brewery in south Wales (1960s?). It took over Crosswells Brewery in Ely, Cardiff in 1938 and brewing ceased there in 1947.

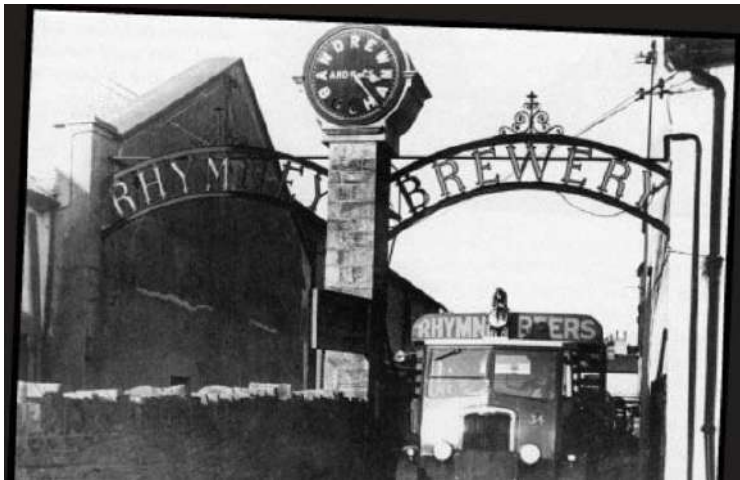
By then Whitbread had an interest in it and eventually took over in 1966. It ceased in 1978

<http://www.alangeorge.co.uk/historyofbrewing.htm>

For over 140 years there was a brewery at Rhymney, a little town at the end of one of the Valleys that run north-wards from Cardiff. Rhymney Breweries Ltd were the largest brewery business in South Wales in the 1960s when acquired by Whitbread. The Rhymney Brewery has its origins in the great days of the South Wales iron industry. Working in heavy industry and the hot blast furnaces certainly gave the men a terrible thirst! It should be noted that it was no joke but absolute fact that in mid nineteenth century industrial Wales it was far safer to drink the beer than to touch the water,

as many victims of cholera found to their cost. Many licensed houses at this time had their own brew house from which they obtained their own supply of ale.

The Rhymney Brewery began operating in 1839 with Andrew Buchan as its manager. In 1858 a directory for South Wales noted "brewing is carried on to a considerable extent by Andrew Buchan & Co at Rhymney, where the Brewery is considered the largest in South Wales". Andrew Buchan was noted for his love of children and he financed annual treats for schoolchildren. According to his obituary, "If he saw a small boy with a shabby cap he would toss it over a hedge and then take the boy to his Shop and give him a new one-with a bag of biscuits also". By 1878 the Brewery called Rhymney Brewery and Co. Ltd. delivered 12,500 barrels a year to its 29 tied houses and also other public houses. At the National Brewers' Exhibition in 1888 in London, the firm was awarded a silver medal for its Old Beer and a bronze medal for its Stout. Beers produced at the beginning of the twentieth century included King's Ale, "The Wine of the Valleys", which was introduced in 1902 to mark the coronation of Edward VII. The long list of beers include: - Empire, GHB, BB, IPA and Stingo in Draught, and Light Ale, Empire Special, Cream Stout and Family Stout in bottle. The famous Hobby Horse trademark of the little man on the barrel, designed by a keen sportsman became well known familiar sight throughout Wales and especially the Valleys. "Where the Hobby Horse Roams" became the phrase used to describe the extent of the Buchan estate. Other slogans over the years included, "The True Brew- always in Good Condition".



http://breweryhistory.com/wiki/index.php?title=Rhymney_Breweries_Ltd

<http://calmview.cardiff.gov.uk/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=DRB%2FA>

Untruth: The Rhymney Brewery hobby horse logo came about one day after a nasty accident when a horse-drawn delivery dray was being loaded with barrels and the horse bolted, running into the brewery and headlong into one of the barrels being filled with beer.

Bells of Rhymney Sculpture

The artwork was inspired by the poem Bells of Rhymney by Idris Davies. Created by Michael Disley, the sculpture depicts two workmen - a miner and a steel worker, back to back, resting on a bell. The workman on the right is a steelworker holding a welding mask. Behind him is a helmeted miner.

<https://www.michaeldisley.com/bio>

<https://sculpturelounge.com/portfolio/michael-disley/>

Michael has worked in stone, granite, and marble for more than thirty years. He has over a hundred commissioned works on public view in the UK, Ireland, and The Far East, and work in many public and private collections.

He has worked as a stonemason in Chester, lived and carved alongside the Shona carvers of Zimbabwe and carved marble in Japan. Recently he has worked in Jaipur carving sandstone, and in Xiamen in China, making large granite pieces for commissions.

His bas-relief trees are carved from marble sourced from around the world and celebrate the stunning beauty of the materials: each one is unique as no two pieces of marble are the same.

He exhibits widely across the UK, and his outdoor carving studio for the last twenty years has been at Appleton Quarry in The Peak District.

He has run 'School Of Rock' stone carving workshops for over twenty years teaching thousands of first time carvers the craft of stone carving.-----

It began with a wrong turning in a college in Chester as I walked in to an exhibition of life drawings from their art foundation course. I met a man called Jack Shore who gave me a chance to enrol and start to look at the world in a new way. From there I studied sculpture at Sunderland Polytechnic, and after three years as a self taught stone carver I went home to Chester.

I applied to a local stonemasonry firm and began carving 'properly' for the first time. I learned an enormous amount about the materials and techniques I should have been using all along, and spent three important years here making parts of churches and listed buildings.

In the mid 1980's public art had just really started to take off, and a few commissions came my way, followed by a few more. I was still a jobbing stonemason at this point and had moved to Yorkshire.

In the past 25 years I have made over a hundred public works all across the UK and Ireland. In 1993 I went to Africa to live and work with the Shona carvers in Zimbabwe. This gave me a taste for new horizons and since then I have travelled extensively to Japan, China, and India to discover new materials, techniques and cultures.

Carving beautiful natural stones, marbles and granite has been a real joy throughout my career and continues to be both a challenge and a pleasure.

Untruth: Sculptor Michael Disley works in Yorkshire and used two of the Tetley Tea Folk as models for this sculpture.

War Memorial

A wheel cross, with Celtic knotwork, on a tapering shaft, a tapering plinth and two-stepped square base.

Designed by Edward D Gilbert of Rhydney - probably relatively unusual to get a local person to design the memorial?

unveiled in 1929

Among those named on the memorial is Fred Trump, who left his job as manager of one of the world's biggest gold mines to serve in the First World War. As a mines inspector, he had earlier survived an underground explosion which buried him under fallen coal. He was killed in action in France in December 1917.

Benjamin and Mary Ann Rist, who lived in Carno Pit Row, suffered the loss of two sons in the same month in the First World War. Enoch and Joseph Rist served in different battalions of the Welsh Regiment and both died of wounds in August 1917.

Similar misfortune befell John and Louisa Maud Duggan in 1944. Their son Bertram died on 24 June, and his older brother John just three days later.

Oak Leaves Sculpture

Sculpture for Idris Davies of Rhymney

The artwork looks like a giant open book two pages with hawthorn leaves breaking through the spine allowing the viewer to peek through. Near the base of the pages the opening and closing lines of Idris Davies' poem 'Rhymney' are inscribed in raised lettering. Originally finished in an auburn metallic paint, now mostly worn away. From the back the book appears as if the spine has broken, and the hawthorn leaves are creeping through – the poem bursting into life to illustrate another line: 'And the hawthorn by the pithead / Would blossom in the rain'. The nearby library holds a collection of Davies' memorabilia. See the nearby seat which includes further lines from the poem.

This piece of artwork commemorates the Rhymney born miner-poet (no pun intended) Idris Davies, a poet of the early 20th century. The symbolism of the oak leaves I can't quite fathom. Nor why they clothe a barrier-like double door left ajar is lost on me. They quote a line from one of his poems; "When April came to Rhymney, with sun and shower and sun.." and leave it hanging.

Untruth:

One of Idris Davies's lesser known poems

There was an old lady from Rhymney

Who complained to all and sundry

She said she was skint

and needed a mint

And thats why she stole the money

Idris Davies (1905-1953)

Born in Rhymney

Wrote engaging socialist verse. Originally writing in Welsh, but later writing exclusively in English.

Pit strikes, pits, the General Strike, dereliction across the valleys, the great depression.

Wrote a collection entitled Gwalia Deserta - the Wasteland of Wales

Started his working life down the pits, then became a teacher.

Plaque on house marks his death in his mother's house.

He was the only poet to cover significant events of the early 20th century in the South Wales Valleys and the South Wales Coalfield, and from a perspective literally at the coalface.

After leaving the local school at the age of fourteen, for the next seven years Davies worked underground as a miner. After an accident in which he lost a finger at the coalface, and active participation in the General Strike of 1926, the pit closed and he became unemployed.

He qualified as a teacher through courses at Loughborough College and the University of Nottingham. During the Second World War he took teaching posts at various schools in London, where he became friends with Dylan Thomas.

In 1947 he returned to teach at a school in the Rhymney Valley. The poems for his second anthology, published by Faber and Faber in 1945, were chosen by T. S. Eliot. Eliot thought that Davies' poems had a claim to permanence, describing them as "the best poetic document I know about a particular epoch in a particular place".

Dylan Thomas had read "Bells of Rhymney" as part of a St. David's Day radio broadcast, but told Davies that he did not feel the poem was particularly representative of Davies' work, as it was "not angry enough".

Davies died too early to enjoy his international success.

Probable untruth (told to me by the librarian): Davies used to live next to the fire station but eventually had enough of being woken by the fire engines in the middle of the night so he moved, only to find that they built a new fire station next door to him.

Thomas Jones (1870-1955) called TJ

Tom Jones, lived at 100 High Street, Rhymney

Articles on Thomas Jones

<https://journals.library.wales/view/1386666/1424133/184#?xywh=-1016%2C347%2C4120%2C2717>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Jones_\(civil_servant\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Jones_(civil_servant))

Welsh-speaking but educated in English as Welsh had been banned in schools by then.

Father became manager of the Rhymney Iron Works Company Shop.

Left school at 14 on the insistence of his grandfather. He became a clerk in the iron works.

Read a lot and became a public speaker. Went to Aberystwyth University to study for the ministry. New interests intervened, however; and Jones eventually graduated with first-class honours in economics from the University of Glasgow in 1901.

Pursued an academic career between 1901 and 1910 - London School of Economics, Ireland and Glasgow.

In 1902 he married a student from his time at Aberystwyth, Eirene Theodora Lloyd (1875–1935),. There were three children from the marriage: Eirene White (1909–99), who became a Labour Minister under Harold Wilson, Tristan (1913–90), who became managing director of The Observer, and Elphin, who died in a motoring accident in 1928.

He became familiarly known as "T.J." He was Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet under four Prime Ministers: [David Lloyd George](#), [Bonar Law](#), [Stanley Baldwin](#) and [Ramsay MacDonald](#). His 3-volume Whitehall Diary (1969, 1971) threw much light on politics "behind the scenes", including the [Irish Treaty](#), the [1926 General Strike](#), the [Cliveden Set](#), and so on.

He was Chairman of [Gregynog Press](#) throughout its existence.

Towards the end of his life Jones became President of the University of Wales, Aberystwyth,

Also nicknamed 'Perpetual Motion' at university - hyperactive.

Tom Jones ended up managing the iron works store 'tuck shop'

St David's Church

St David's Church, Rhymney. It was established in 1843. Designed by architect Philip Hardwick.

It was built by the Rhymney Iron Company in 1840 to designs of architect Philip Hardwick of London, in a strong, severe and minimally classical style, with similarities of design and plan to non-conformist chapels. It is built of rock-faced Pennant sandstone in large, squared blocks with similar hammer-dressed quoins, slate roofs and wide bracketed eaves. The church was originally sited in the midst of scattered terraces of industrial housing, between tramways to east and west, with Rhymney River to the west, and a limestone tramroad to the north.

The building comprises a two-stage square entrance tower with round-headed belfry windows and a pyramidal cap, in axis with the pedimented nave, and a shallow pedimented chancel. A pair of low west (ritual east) vestries were added later. Inside, unfluted Greek Doric columns support the galleries.

The church was Grade II (star) listed in 1990 as one of the most interesting Neoclassical buildings in South Wales.

Philip Hardwick also designed the Doric Euston Arch (think Arc de Triumph) (controversially demolished in 1962) and Curzon Street Station (the oldest extant railway station in the world) - now being refurbished and will become part of the new HS2 Curzon Street station.

Hardwick was a close friend of the artist [J. M. W. Turner](#) (1775–1851), who had been a pupil of his father. In 1851 Turner chose Hardwick as an executor to his will.

Hardwick had been inspired by [Italian architecture](#), following a trip to Italy in 1818–1819.

Buchan is buried in the church vaults and is commemorated by a plaque in the nave.

A number of wall monuments including 4 to the Buchan family by Reeves of Bath and Wood of Bristol, another to Henry Valentine Trump JP (d 1895), manager of the Rhymney Ironworks, of Rhymney House

Untruth: Constable and Hardwick almost fell-out when Hardwick suggested he paint an arch with Doric columns over the river in the Hay Wain.

The Baptist Fair

Grade 2 listed building

The serpent of dissension was a frequent visitor in the garden of religious life. There were not a few 'split chapels' but the fissiparous tendencies of the congregations were at least proof of vitality and evidence that there were subjects deemed to be worth fighting about. Fighting there certainly was, the most famous local battle being on the subject of baptism.

This was in 1841 and lasted two days in the open air in front of two chapels. Challenges had been issued and accepted and two ministers had been chosen to put the case for the Sprinklers and the Dippers respectively : John Jones for the former and T. G. Jones for the latter. The Baptists were charged with spreading damaging rumours in advance about Mr. John Jones, calling him an ungodly man, an infidel, a monster from Llangollen. Scurrilous and anonymous leaflets were pushed by night under doors and malicious paraphrases of biblical passages were pasted on the door of the Congregational chapel. Feeling ran high as November 1st approached and on that morning the roads for many miles around were alive with men and women tramping to the scene of the debate.

Estimates of the number present varied from fourteen to twenty thousand, including sixty-four ministers. Rules of debate were settled. Only baptism was to be debated; each side was to speak alternately for seven minutes ; only the two champions were to speak and they were not to appeal to the audience for support ; no obstacle was to be put in the way of the speakers and the audience was to keep silent during the proceedings ; two chairmen were to preside, one for each party

All the rules were soon broken. At one point a part of the stage gave way. At another one leader called the other "Tom Paine, Deist". This led to great commotion and the crowd pressed forward towards the platform shouting for twenty minutes, and the insulted champion was carried away on a chair by his supporters. Throughout the debate biblical texts were bandied about in Welsh and in Greek. "But that is the genitive case?" shouted one. "No, it is the accusative case", retorted the other. "The two are debating so badly that we ought to choose two others", interjected the chairman. Another advised the audience to study their Testament quietly at home.

It was a sorry exhibition and it ended in complete confusion. Both sides claimed a victory and for months after the parties continued to libel each other in the press and in pamphlets. The experiment was never repeated and few today in Rhymney have even heard of the Baptist Fair.

Untruth: in the end the ministers decided to settle the argument by seeing how long the other could stay under water or have a hose turned on them.

Ty Carno

A former Ironworks tuck shop.

Andrew Buchan took over the running of the shop in 1836.

Buchan had employed Irish navies as labour to divert the course of the River Rhymney so that the Bute Iron Works could be constructed. The presence of the Irish caused problems and troops were drafted in to keep the peace.

The tuck shops were owned by the iron masters.

It allowed the workers to purchase items for tokens rather than money. The tokens formed part of the workers pay and enabled the owners to profit not only from the employees labour but from their consumption of everyday items too. They were outlawed in the Tuck Shop Act of 1831 but the Rhymney Iron Works continue to run them for decades.

They sold everything from candles to coffins and in 1864 were selling tickets to the first ever performance of Messiah in Wales.

Buchan paid the navvies in tokens that could be redeemed at the Carno shop.

Then became a general store - only closed 15 years ago.

Now renovated by Stephen Ryan with a keen eye for tradition and memorabilia.

Untruth: The shop was the inspiration for the Two Ronnies Four Candles sketch

Idris Davies Headstone

Coordinates (Idris) : SO 10712 08729

The Twisted Chimney - Simnai Dirdro

By New York artist Brian Tolle. Installed 2010.

The aim was to create a vision of hope and a nod to the post-industrial heritage of place rather than a being a literal depiction of the area's past. It is sited near the former Union Ironworks and on land that was once a railway line, and was created with input from the residents of Bute Town.

Carved in polystyrene, then coated in 6mm of Armour-Lyte for durability and strength, before being hand painted by theatre company Steel Monkey.

Video of the twisted chimney being made: <https://vimeo.com/30073975>

Reminiscent of Salvador Dali.

This is Tolle's only permanent work in UK (he has exhibited at the Tate Modern)

Other works include the Irish Hunger Memorial in Manhattan, New York (looks like a derelict cottage to us in Wales?)

Untruth: When it was first constructed it was a straight chimney but then somebody lit a fire at the bottom and because it is made from polystyrene it melted and hence the shape it is today.

Butetown

This is an example of the English and Welsh names evolving separately. Now famous for the museum housed in some of the original terraced houses, the English name comes from the Bute Iron Works and the Marquess of Bute, who owned the land in the area. The Welsh name comes from a time when local residents simply referred to it as "the new town" in the area and was described as Newtown in 1875.

The area was developed into a "model village" to house local ironworkers in the 1830s and consisted of three rows of 16 houses each, for a total of 48 residences. The village's population fluctuated, and in the 19th century between 195 and 430 people lived there.

Untruth

As well as a school and a pub there also ended up being a zoo in Butetown. It started with some retired pit ponies but then gradually grew as local Victorian aristocracy needed to dispose of animals they had bought home from expeditions to Africa, South America and the Far East. Eventually local authorities classed down the zoo fearing spread of unknown infections. Lord Bute was so disappointed he had the animals immortalised in stone carvings and set on a wall outside Cardiff Castle.