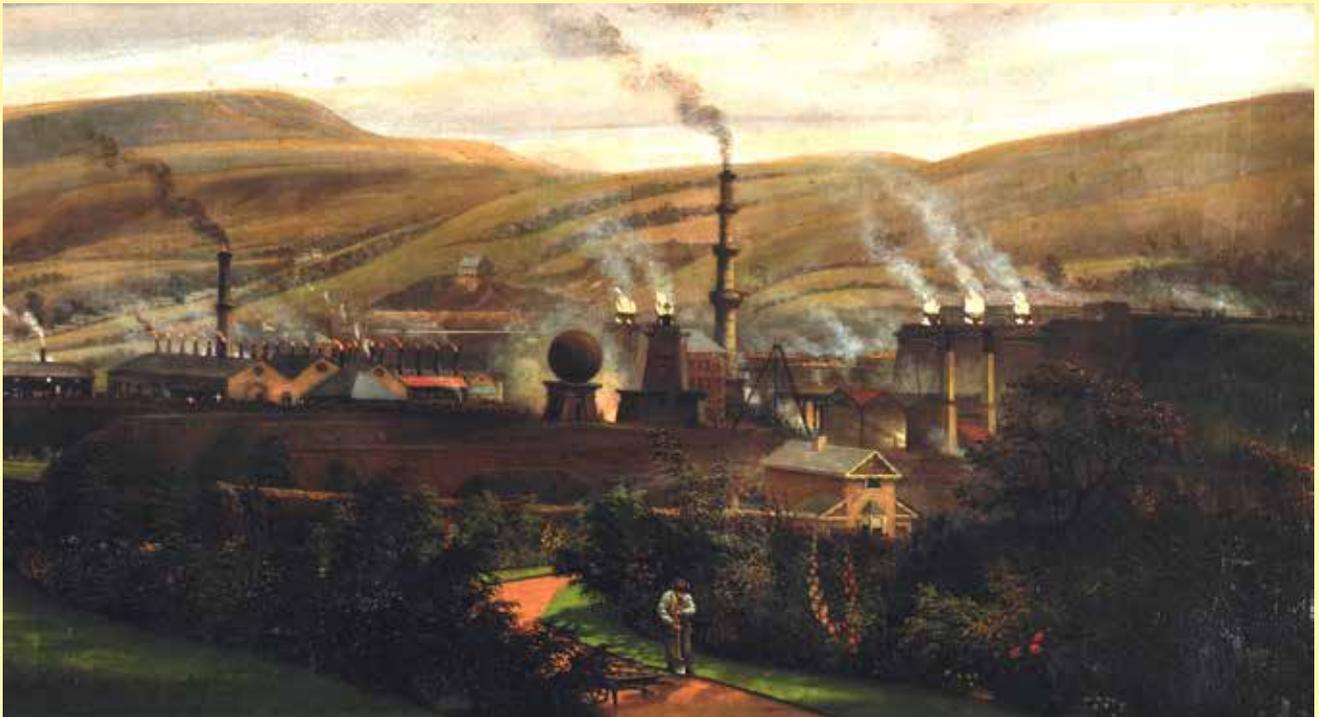


# How Green Is My Valley

## Gardens and Industry in South Wales

WHGT 30th Anniversary Weekend, Angel Hotel, Abergavenny, 10-12 May 2019



*Detail: South Wales Industrial landscape, Penry Williams c.1825, NLW*

A weekend exploring the ornamental landscapes developed in the midst of the industrial revolution of South-east Wales, which today can be enjoyed for recreation. From the late eighteenth century the area witnessed some of the greatest industrial activity in Europe, not only leading the world in iron production and coal extraction but also saw the world's first steam train.

**Dr Peter Wakelin:** Independent author, curator and former Director of Collections at National Museum Wales, opens the weekend with an introduction to the early development of the iron and coal industries and their impact on the landscape.

**Dianne Long:** Garden historian specialising in Georgian industrialists' landscapes will explore the ornamental landscapes developed by the industrial entrepreneurs whose names still resonate throughout the Valleys today - the Hanburys, Homfrays, Crawshays and others. We will discover how industrial elements were incorporated into gardens, which then in turn provided infrastructure for the ironworks.

Visits include the fine parks and green landscapes at Pontypool, Cyfarthfa Castle and Bedwelty House and a tour of the World Heritage Site of Blaenavon.

**Lord Dafydd Elis-Thomas AM:** Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism will be our guest speaker at the Angel Hotel on Saturday evening.

**Pontypool Park:** locally known as the People's Park, is a Grade II\* site of 64 hectares with the American Gardens, an ice house and a shell grotto. A footpath from the park leads to the Folly Tower.

**Cyfarthfa Park:** The Grade II\* park covers 65 hectares in a prominent position overlooking the town of Merthyr Tydfil and the Cyfarthfa Ironworks.

**Bedwelty Park:** The Grade II 26-acre Victorian garden and park was designed as a Dutch garden around which one could walk or ride without being confronted by gate, fence or outside features. There is an unusual listed icehouse, a rock grotto and the Long Shelter, a listed structure built for the Chartist movement.

**UNESCO World Heritage Site of Blaenavon:** the birthplace of the industrial revolution.

Early arrivals on Friday will be offered a guided tour of the Priory Church of St Mary, Abergavenny, noted for its outstanding mediaeval monuments including the glorious wooden fifteenth century figure of Jesse.

## How Green Is my Valley; Gardens and Industry in South Wales

From early modern times gardens were being created amidst the pioneering iron and tin industries of South Wales. These pleasure grounds were not spaces far from the industrial smoke and clamour, but contiguous with and often integral to the industrial operation. South-east Wales has probably more such gardens extant than anywhere else in the United Kingdom. WHGT's 30th Anniversary Conference will explore some of these industrialists' gardens.

The concentration of industrial activity occurred largely in the old counties of Brecknockshire, Monmouthshire, and Glamorganshire. The older iron furnaces and forges were mainly in the mountainous hinterland and the later burgeoning copper and tin smelting took place around the ports of Swansea and Briton Ferry. At the end of the eighteenth and early decades of the nineteenth centuries, while the industrialists around Swansea moved away from the noxious fumes of their works, the ironmasters in the valleys were constrained by topography and mostly remained living close by their works.

The integration of the industrial and the ornamental landscape can be seen in several different ways. For example, by-products of the ironworks were used to ornamental effect, like the blue-black lustrous scoria blocks in walls, or un-moulded 'rocks' as in the garden of the ironmaster's house at Blaenavon, or the slag encrustations decorating grottos like that at Pontypool. However, by far the most significant feature unifying the aesthetic with the industrial was the use of water. Not only was water one of the cardinal elements of a landscape garden, but it was also the vital power for industry, with and without the steam engine. The ornamental and the industrial roles of water worked together in many ironmasters' landscapes.

Pontypool Park is one of two designed landscapes in South Wales that stand out as having a long history of combining aesthetic and industrial interaction, the other being The Gnoll, at Neath. Begun in the seventeenth century, by 1752 its formal gardens occupied nearly eleven acres. These were largely to the south of the house: a terrace with a series of walled or fenced enclosures of planted beds, trees and espaliers sloped towards the river, whilst to the east a flat lawn, possibly a bowling green, was bordered by a long canal below which a pond in the Little Park connected to a much larger pool in the Park. This had a feeder to the Forge, clearly in view of the house. Elsewhere, in the park to the south east, the Nant y Gollen stream flowed down through a tear-drop shaped pool, probably by a hammer mill, merged with a stream from a long rectangular pool to join the outfall from the Forge before powering the Cutting Mill on the banks of the Afon Llwyd. All these interlinked water courses, some with cascades, were essential for the industrial processes while enhancing and animating the park landscape.

Archdeacon William Coxe who stayed at Pontypool for a week or more in 1799, considered that the gardens were

*.....in the style of the last age, not consonant with the genius of the place. But these specimens of false taste will soon be removed, a lawn of verdure will gradually slope from the house to the torrent and harmonize with the native beauties of the scenery.* Accordingly, the canal was soon drained and grassed over.

Anthony Bacon, from Whitehaven, and his partner William Brownrigg founded Cyfarthfa in 1765. Bacon's earliest house, built in 1765 with a pleasant lawn and shrubbery, was in the midst of the works on the banks of the River Taff. In 1786 Richard Crawshay took over from Bacon but continued living at Llwyncelyn, which overlooked a separate part of the ironworks known as Ynysfach. He had a large garden for which he employed a skilled London gardener, William Pamplin. On 2 September 1796, Pamplin wrote to a friend in Chelsea that his employer was *a very strange man and does not take that delight in his garden that I wish.* However, at last Pamplin was allowed to build the hothouses he had planned, *I proposed to him to have the stock of pines from you, he said he could have enough from his friends, a method I don't like. I represented to him the advantage of clean stock, so he told me he should like to know your price.*

Pineapples were to be a family favorite as thanks are often expressed in the letters from William Crawshay who was living at Stoke Newington on the outskirts of London to his son, William II, for sending one or more pineapples, melons and grapes.

The Crawshay family also built Gwaelod-y-Garth on the edge of the Cyfarthfa Estate with the ironworks of Penydarren and Cyfarthfa below. Set in ornamental gardens and parkland surrounded by farmland, it was the home of William Crawshay II until he built Cyfarthfa Castle on the hill above the works in 1824/5. An integral feature of the Cyfarthfa grounds and built at the same time as the Castle were the complex series of reservoirs. The Bryn Cae Owen Pond at the highest point fed a flight of four elliptical ponds, which were controlled with sluices to their south-west and linked into a leat. This fed the large puddled clay lake below the Castle, with another feeder leat which was formed by a ledge cut into the rock above the Taf Fechan (or Gurnos) tramway. Like Pontypool, the mansion looked down on the industrial source of the family wealth.

The investment and majority of the great entrepreneurs of the period originated from outside South Wales, but they founded dynasties that had a long and profound impact on the economy and culture of South Wales. Necessity may have driven their inventive integration of the industrial and the ornamental, but it has left a unique garden record.

Dianne Long