

= Rhondda =

Rhondda / ʔrʔnðʔ / , or the Rhondda Valley ( Welsh : Cwm Rhondda [ kʔm ʔr ʔ nðʔa ] ) , is a former coal mining valley in Wales , formerly a local government district , consisting of 16 communities built around the River Rhondda . The area is , in fact , made up of two valleys : those of the larger Rhondda Fawr valley ( mawr large ) and the smaller Rhondda Fach valley ( bach small ) . The singular term ' Rhondda Valley ' and the plural ' Rhondda Valleys ' are both commonly used . In 2001 the Rhondda constituency of the National Assembly for Wales had a population of 72 @, @ 443 ; while the National Office of Statistics described the Rhondda urban area as having a population of 59 @, @ 602 . Rhondda is part of Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough and is part of the South Wales Valleys .

The Rhondda Valley is most notable for its historical link to the coal mining industry which was at its peak between 1840 @-@ 1925 . The Rhondda Valleys were home to a strong early Nonconformist Christian movement which manifested itself in the Baptist chapels which moulded Rhondda values in the 19th and early 20th century . Rhondda is also famous for strong masculine cultural ties within a social community which expressed itself outside industry in the form of male voice choirs , sport and politics .

= = Rhondda Fawr = =

The larger of the two valleys , the Rhondda Fawr , extends from Porth and rises through the valley until it reaches Blaenrhondda , near Treherbert . The settlements that make up the Rhondda Fawr are as follows :

Blaencwm a district of Treherbert .

Blaenrhondda a district of Treherbert .

Cwm Clydach a community .

Cwmparc a district of Treorchy .

Cymmer a district of Porth .

Dinas Rhondda a district of Penygraig .

Edmondstown a district of Penygraig .

Gelli a district of Ystrad

Glynfach a district of Cymmer

Llwynypia a community .

Pentre a community .

Penygraig a community

Porth a community that sees itself as the unofficial capital of the Rhondda , mainly due to its geographic location .

Ton Pentre a district of Pentre .

Tonypandy a community .

Trealaw a community .

Trebanog a district of Cymmer

Trehafod the most southernmost and smallest of the Rhondda Valley communities .

Treherbert a community .

Treorchy the largest community in either of the valleys .

Tynewydd a district of Treherbert

Williamstown a district of Penygraig .

Ynyswen a district of Treorchy .

Ystrad a community .

= = Rhondda Fach = =

The Rhondda Fach is celebrated in the 1971 David Alexander song ' If I could see the Rhondda ' ; the valley includes Wattstown , Ynyshir , Pontygwaith , Ferndale , Tylorstown and Maerdy . The

settlements that make up the Rhondda Fach are as follows :

Blaenllechau a district of Ferndale .

Ferndale a community .

Maerdy a community .

Penrhys a district of Tylorstown .

Pontygwaith a district of Tylorstown .

Tylorstown a community .

Stanleytown a district of Tylorstown .

Wattstown a district of Ynyshir .

Ynyshir a community .

= = Etymology = =

In the early Middle Ages , Glynrhondda was a commote of the cantref of Penychen in the kingdom of Morgannwg , a sparsely populated agricultural area . The spelling of the commote varied widely , and the Cardiff Records shows the various spellings :

Many sources state the meaning of Rhondda as ' noisy ' , though this is a simplified translation without research . Sir Ifor Williams , in his work Enwau Lleoedd , suggests that the first syllable rhwadd is a form of the Welsh adrawdd or adrodd , as in ' recite , relate , recount ' , similar to the Old Irish rád ; ' speech ' . The suggestion is that the river is speaking aloud , a comparison to the English expression ' a babbling brook ' .

With the increase in population from the mid @-@ 19th century the area was officially recognised as the Ystradyfodwg Local Government District , but was renamed in 1897 as the Rhondda Urban District after the River Rhondda .

Residents of either valley rarely use the terms ' Rhondda Fach ' or ' Rhondda Fawr ' , referring instead to ' The Rhondda ' , or their specific village when relevant . Locals tend to refer to " The Rhondda " with the definite article , despite its non @-@ usage on sign posts and maps .

= = Early history = =

= = = Prehistoric and Roman Rhondda : 8 @,@ 000 BC ? 410 AD = = =

The Rhondda Valley is located in the upland , or Blaenau , area of Glamorgan . The landscape of the Rhondda was formed by glacial action during the last ice age , as slow moving glaciers gouged out the deep valleys that exist today . With the retreat of the ice sheet , around 8000 BC , the valleys were further modified by stream and river action . This left the two river valleys of the Rhondda with narrow , steep sided slopes which would dictate the layout of settlements from early to modern times .

= = = Mesolithic period = = =

The earliest evidence of the presence of man in these upper areas of Glamorgan was discovered in 1963 at Craig y Llyn . A small chipped stone tool found at the site , recorded as possibly being of ' Creswellian ' type or at least from the early Mesolithic period , places human activity on the plateau above the valleys . Many other Mesolithic items have been discovered in the Rhondda , predominantly in the upper areas around Blaenrhondda , Blaencwm and Maerdy , mainly stone age items relating to hunting , fishing and foraging which suggests seasonal nomadic activity . Though no definite Mesolithic settlements have been located in the area , the concentration of finds at the Craig y Llyn escarpment suggests the presence of a temporary campsite in the vicinity .

= = = Neolithic period = = =

The first structural relic of prehistoric man was excavated in 1973 at Cefn Glas near the watershed of the Rhondda Fach river . The remains of a rectangular hut with traces of drystone wall foundations and postholes was discovered ; while carbon dating of charcoal found at the site dated the structure as late Neolithic .

===== Bronze Age =====

Although little evidence of settlements has been found in the Rhondda that date between the Neolithic and Bronze Age periods , several cairns and cists have been discovered throughout the length of both valleys . The best example of a round @-@ cairn was found at Crug yr Afan , near the summit of Graig Fawr , west of Cwmparc . The cairn consisted of an earthen mound with a surrounding ditch 28 metres in circumference and over 2 metres tall . Although most cairns discovered in the area are round , a ring cairn or cairn circle exists on Gelli Mountain . Known as the ' Rhondda Stonehenge ' the cairn consists of 10 upright stones no more than 60 cm in height encircling a central cist . All the cairns found within the Rhondda are located on high ground , many on ridgeways , and may have been used as waypoints .

In 1912 a hoard of 24 late Bronze Age weapons and tools was discovered during construction work at the Llyn Fawr reservoir , at the source of the Rhondda Fawr . The items did not originate from the Rhondda and are thought to have been left at the site as a votive offering . Of particular interest were fragments of an iron sword which is the earliest iron object to be found in Wales and the only ' C @-@ type ' Hallstatt sword recorded in Britain .

===== Iron Age =====

With the exception of the Neolithic settlement at Cefn Glas , there are three certain pre @-@ Medieval settlement sites in the valley ? Maendy Camp , Hen Dre 'r Gelli and Hen Dre 'r Mynydd . The earliest of these structures is Maendy Camp , a hillfort whose remains are situated between Ton Pentre and Cwmparc . Although its defences would have been slight , the camp made good use of the natural slopes and rock outcrops to its north @-@ east face . Maendy camp consisted of two earthworks , an inner and outer enclosure . When the site was excavated in 1901 several archaeological finds led to the camp being misidentified as Bronze Age . These finds , mainly pottery and flint knives , were excavated from a burial cairn discovered within the outer enclosure but the site has since been classified as from the Iron Age .

The settlement at Hen Dre 'r Mynydd in Blaenrhondda was dated around the Roman period when the discovery of fragments of wheel @-@ made Romano @-@ British pottery were discovered at the location . The site is made up of a group of ruinous drystone roundhouses and enclosures and is thought to have been a sheep farming community .

The most definite example of a Roman site in the area is found above Blaenllechau in Ferndale . The settlement is one of a group of earthworks and indicates the presence of the Roman army during the 1st century AD . It was thought to be a military site or marching camp .

===== Dark Age and Medieval Rhondda : 410 ? 1550 AD =====

The 5th century saw the withdrawal of Imperial Roman support from Britain , and the succeeding centuries , the Dark Ages , witnessed the emergence of a national identity and of kingdoms . The area which would become the Rhondda lay within Glywysing , an area that incorporated the modern area of Glamorgan , ruled by a dynasty founded by Glywys . This dynasty was later replaced by another founded by Meurig ap Tewdrig whose descendant Morgan ap Owain would give Glamorgan its Welsh name Morgannwg . With the coming of the Norman overlords after the 1066 Battle of Hastings , south @-@ east Wales was divided into five cantrefi . The Rhondda lay within Penychen , a narrow strip running between modern day Glyn Neath and the coast between Cardiff and Aberthaw . Each cantref was further divided into commotes , with Penychen made up of five such commotes , one being Glynrhondda .

Relics of the Dark Ages are uncommon within the Glamorgan area and secular monuments are still rarer . The few sites discovered from this period have been located in the Bro , or lowlands , leaving historians to believe that the Blaenau were sparsely inhabited , maybe only visited seasonally by pastoralists . A few earthwork dykes are the only structural relics in the Rhondda area from this period and no carved stones or crosses exist to indicate the presence of a Christian shrine . During the Early Middle Ages communities were split between bondmen and freemen . The bondmen lived in small villages centred on a court or llys of the local ruler to whom they paid dues ; while the freemen , who enjoyed a higher status , lived in scattered homesteads . The most important village was the ' mayor 's settlement ' or maerdref . Maerdy in the Rhondda Fach has been identified as a maerdref , mainly on the strength of the name , though the village did not survive past the Middle Ages . The largest concentration of dwellings from this time have been discovered around Gelli and Ystrad in the Rhondda Fawr , mainly platform houses .

During the late 11th century , the Norman lord , Robert Fitzhamon entered Morgannwg in an attempt to gain control of the area , building many earth and timber castles in the lowlands . In the early 12th century the Norman expansion continued with castles being founded around Neath , Kenfig and Coity , while within the same period Bishop Urban established the Diocese of Llandaff under which Glynrhondda belonged to the large parish of Llantrisant .

Upon the death of William , Lord of Glamorgan , his extensive holdings were eventually granted to Gilbert de Clare in 1217 . The subjugation of Glamorgan , begun by Fitzhamon , was finally completed by the powerful De Clare family , but although Gilbert de Clare had now become one of the great Marcher Lords the territory was far from settled . Hywel ap Maredudd , lord of Meisgyn captured his cousin Morgan ap Cadwallon and annexed Glynrhondda in an attempt to reunify the commotes under a single native ruler . This conflict was unresolved by the time of De Clare 's death and the area fell under Royal control .

#### == = Settlements of Medieval Rhondda = = =

Little evidence exists of settlements within the Rhondda during the Norman period . Unlike the communal dwellings of the Iron Age the remains of the Medieval buildings discovered in the area follow the pattern similar to modern farmsteads ; with separate holdings spaced out around the hillsides . The evidence of Medieval Welsh farmers comes from the remains of their buildings , with the foundations of platform houses having been discovered spaced out throughout both valleys . When the site of several platform houses at Gelligaer Common were excavated in the 1930s potsherds dating from the 13th @-@ 14th century were discovered .

The Rhondda also has the remains of two Medieval castles . The older is Castell Nos which is located at the head of the Rhondda Fach overlooking Maerdy . The only recorded evidence of Castle Nos is a mention by John Leland who stated that " Castelle Nose is but a high stony creg in the top of an hille " . The castle comprises a scarp and ditch forming a raised platform and on the north face is a ruined drystone building . Due to its location and form it does not appear to be of Norman design and is therefore thought to have been built by the Welsh as a border defence ; and must therefore date before 1247 when Richard de Clare seized Glynrhondda . The second castle is Ynysygrug , located close to what is now Tonypany town centre . Little remains of this motte @-@ and @-@ bailey earthwork defence as much was destroyed when Tonypany railway station was built in the 19th century . Ynysygrug is dated around the 12th century or early 13th century and has been misidentified by several historians , notably Owen Morgan in his book ' History of Pontypridd and Rhondda Valleys ' who recorded it as a druidic sacred mound and Iolo Morgannwg who erroneously believed it to be the burial mound of king Rhys ap Tewdwr .

This earliest Christian monument located in the Rhondda is the shrine of St. Mary at Penrhys whose holy well was mentioned by Rhisiart ap Rhys in the 15th century .

#### == = Post @-@ Medieval and pre @-@ industrial Rhondda : 1550 ? 1850 = = =

In the mid @-@ 16th century the Rhondda , at that time known as the Vale of Rotheney , belonged

to the large but sparsely inhabited parish of Ystradyfodwg , ' St. Tyfodwg 's Vale ' . For administrative purposes the parish was divided into three hamlets : the Upper or Rhigos Hamlet to the north , the Middle or Penrhys Hamlet and the lower or Clydach Hamlet . Throughout the post @-@ Medieval period the Rhondda was a heavily wooded area and its main economic staple was the rearing of sheep , horses and cattle . The historian Rice Merrick , in describing the upland area of the Vale of Glamorgan , stated that there " was always great breeding of cattle , horses and sheep ; but in elder time therein grew but small store of corn , for in most places there the ground was not thereunto apt ... " While English cartographer John Speed described that the rearing of cattle was the " best means unto wealth that the Shire doth afford " . As there was no fair held in the Rhondda the animals would be taken to neighbouring fairs and markets at Neath , Merthyr , Llantrisant , Ynysybwl and Llandaff . However , to be self @-@ supporting , the farmers of the area grew crops such as oats , corn and barley in small quantities . Crops were grown in the lower part of the Rhondda on narrow meadows adjoining the riversides , though during the Napoleonic Wars scarce supplies forced the cultivation of the upland areas such as Carn @-@ y @-@ wiwer and Penrhys . Merrick would describe the diet of the upland inhabitants as consisting of " bread made of wheat ... and ale and bear " and over two hundred years later Benjamin Malkin showed how little the diet had changed when he wrote that the people still ate " Oatmeal bread , with a relish of miserable cheese ; and the beer , where they have any , is worse than none " .

In the first half of the 17th century a rising cost of consumable goods and a series of bad harvests brought about economic changes in Glamorgan . Those with enough wealth were able to seize on opportunities created by these unsettled conditions and set about enlarging and enclosing farm lands . The enclosure of freehold lands that began in the later Middle Ages now gained momentum and farms that were once owned by individual farmers were now owned by small groups of wealthy landowners . By the 19th century most of the Rhondda farms and estates were owned by absentee landlords , such as the Marquis of Bute , Earl of Dunraven , Crawshay Bailey of Merthyr and the De Winton family of Brecon .

= = = = Settlements of post @-@ Medieval Rhondda = = = =

Between the Acts of Union in the mid @-@ 16th century and the English Civil War in the mid @-@ 17th century , a period of great rebuilding took place in the Kingdom of England , of which Wales was now annexed , and this is reflected in the structures that were built within the Rhondda Valley . The fluctuating economic state of the late Tudor period resulted in farmers taking in more land , creating higher levels of surplus goods and therefore producing higher profits . This profit was reflected in the new farm houses built in the Rhondda and for the first time an emphasis on domestic comfort became apparent in the design of the dwellings . Many of the new farm buildings were simple structures consisting of two or three small rooms , though of a much sturdier and permanent quality than the Medieval platform houses . A popular style of building was the long @-@ house , a building which combined the house and cowshed into a single building . By 1840 , at least 160 farms existed in the Rhondda , but most were destroyed with the growth of the mining industry . Of the few surviving buildings , those of note include Tynewydd ( ' New House ' ) in Blaenrhondda , a 17th @-@ century house thought to have given its name to the neighbouring village of Tynewydd and Tyntyle in Ystrad dated around 1600 .

There were few industrial buildings pre @-@ 1850 ; those of note include the 17th @-@ century blast furnace at Pontygwaith which gave the village its name and the fulling mill established by Harri David in 1738 , which in turn gave its name to Tonypany . Corn mills existed sparsely throughout the valleys as did early coal pits , with two early pits recorded as being opened in 1612 at Rhigos and Cwmparc ; though these would have mined from exposed rock in the hillside and not deep mined .

= = Industrial Rhondda 1850 ? 1945 = =

== Industrial growth ( 1850 ? 1914 ) ==

The southern coalfield of Wales is the largest continuous coalfield in Britain , extending some 113 kilometres ( 70 mi ) from Pontypool in the east to St Brides Bay in the West , covering almost 2 @, @ 600 square kilometres ( 1 @, @ 000 sq mi ) . This coalfield took in the majority of Glamorgan , and the entirety of the Rhondda was situated within it . Although neighbouring areas such as Merthyr and Aberdare had already sunk coal mines , it was not until Walter Coffin initiated the Dinas Lower Colliery in 1812 that coal was first exported from the Rhondda Valleys on any sort of commercial scale . This coal was originally taken by packhorse , before the extension of Dr. Griffiths ' private tramline , to Pontypridd and then by the Glamorganshire Canal to the port at Cardiff . The lack of any transportation links was one of the main problems that curtailed exploitation of the Rhondda Valley coal fields , along with the belief that the coalfields beneath the valley were thought to be too deep for economic working . It was therefore seen as an expensive risk and deterred anyone looking for a quick profit . The exploration of the Rhondda was undertaken by the Bute Trustees , agents of the third Marquess of Bute , who not only owned large tracts of valley farmland but also possessed a large financial interest in the Cardiff Docks which would export the coal . The trustees sank the Bute Merthyr Colliery in October 1851 , at the top of the Rhondda Fawr in what would become Treherbert . The Bute Merthyr began producing coal in 1855 , the first working steam coal colliery in the Rhondda .

In conjunction with the sinking of the first colliery at the head of the Rhondda , the second issue of transportation was being tackled at the same time with the extension of the Taff Vale Railway ( TVR ) line . After Royal Assent was given to construct the railway in 1836 , the original line was laid from Cardiff to Abercynon , and by 1841 a branch was opened to link Cardiff with Dinas via Pontypridd . This would allow easier and faster transportation for Walter Coffin 's Dinas mine , an unsurprising addition considering Coffin was a director of the TVR . In 1849 the TVR had extended into the Rhondda Fach and by 1856 the railway had reached the furthest areas of both the Fach and Fawr valleys at Maerdy and Treherbert . For the first time the Rhondda Valley was connected by a major transportation route to the rest of Wales and the exploitation of its coalfields could begin .

The TVR line would dominate the transportation of coal throughout the Rhondda 's industrial history , and its monopoly was a point of contention , as with no rivals the colliery owners could not negotiate for haulage rates . Several attempts were made to break the monopoly including the opening of the Rhondda and Swansea Bay Railway , between 1885 and 1895 , which linked Blaenrhondda at the head of the Rhondda Fawr to the Prince of Wales Dock . To achieve this rail link the Rhondda Tunnel was constructed through Mynydd Blaengwynfy to Blaengwynfi ; at the time the longest railway tunnel in Wales .

Initially the shallower pits at Aberdare proved a bigger attraction for prospective mine owners , but once Aberdare became fully worked by the 1860s the Rhondda saw a rapid growth in development . During the 1860s @-@ 1870s 20 collieries opened in the Rhondda Valleys with the leading coalowner in the Rhondda Fach being David Davis of Aberdare , and David Davies in the Rhondda Fawr . In 1865 the output of coal from the Rhondda Valley was roughly one quarter of that of Aberdare ; ten years later the Rhondda was producing over two million tons , more than the Aberdare Valleys . These figures would later be dwarfed by the massive excavation rates seen in the last quarter of the 19th century up to the beginning of the First World War . In 1913 it was recorded that the Rhondda Valley 's output was 9 @. @ 6 million tons .

By 1893 there were more than 75 collieries within the Rhondda Valleys and although most were initially owned by a small group of private individuals this trend changed towards the start of the 20th century as companies began buying up the existing collieries . The widespread adoption of limited liability status began a trend towards a concentration of ownership , reducing some of the economic risks involved in coalmining : unstable coal prices , inflated acquisitions , geological difficulties , and large scale accidents . The emerging companies were formed by the individuals and families who sank the original collieries ; but by the start of the 20th century , they were no more than principal shareholders . These companies included the Davies 's Ocean Coal Company , Archibald Hood 's Glamorgan Coal Company and David Davis & Son .

= = = Population growth in the Industrial period = = =

During the early to mid 19th century the Rhondda Valleys were inhabited by small farming settlements . In 1841 the parish of Ystradyfodwg , which would later constitute most of the Rhondda Borough , was recorded as having a population of less than a thousand inhabitants . With the discovery of massive deposits of high quality , accessible coal during the mid 19th century the Rhondda Valleys experienced a large influx of financial immigrants . The first immigrants came to the lower Rhondda villages of Dinas , Eirw and Cymmer . Special sinkers came from Llansamlet , while the first miners were from Penderyn , Cwmgwrach and the neighbouring areas of Llantrisant and Llanharan . The 1851 Census lists apprenticed paupers from Temple Cloud in Somerset , some of the earliest English immigrants . From a mere 951 in 1851 , the population of Ystradyfodwg parish grew to 16,914 in 1871 and by 1901 the Rhondda Urban District had a population of 113,735 . As more and more coal mines were sunk the population grew to fill the jobs needed to extract the coal . In the 1860s and 1870s the majority came from the neighbouring Welsh counties , but with the improving rail transportation and cheaper transport immigrants came from further afield . The 1890s recorded workers from the South West , places such as Gloucester and Devon , by the 1900s people came from North Wales , the lead mining area of Anglesey and the depressed slate quarrying villages of Bethesda , Ffestiniog and Dinorwig . Although there are records of Scottish workers , mainly centered on Archibald Hood 's Llwynypia mines , there were only small numbers of Irish , less than 1,000 by 1911 . The low immigration levels of Irish workers is often blamed on the forcible ejection of the Irish who lived in Treherbert during three days of rioting in 1857 . The population of the valleys peaked in 1924 at over 167,900 inhabitants .

The mass influx of immigrants during this period were almost totally English and Welsh ; the most notable exception being an immigrant nationality from outside the United Kingdom , the Italians . In the late 19th century a group of Italian immigrants , originally from the northern area of Italy , centred on the town of Bardi , were forced out of London by an over saturation of the market . These immigrants set up a network of cafés , ice cream parlours and fish & chip shops throughout South Wales and these businesses became iconic landmarks in the villages they served and they and subsequent generations became Welsh Italians . Particular to the Rhondda , the shops ran by the Italian immigrants , were known as ' Bracchis ' , believed to have been named after Angelo Bracchi who opened the first café in the Rhondda in the early 1890s . By the early 21st century several of the original Bracchis were still open for business in the Rhondda .

= = = The decline of coal and economic emigration ( 1914 - 1944 ) = = =

At the start of the First World War , the economic prospects in South Wales were good . Although production fell after the 1913 high , demand was still strong enough to push the coalfields to their limit . In February 1917 coal mining came under government control and demand increased as the war intensified , ensuring a market for sufficient supplies of coal . After the war the picture began to change . Initially the British coal industry was buoyed by a series of fortuitous economic events , such as the American coal miners ' strike , and by 1924 , unemployment for miners was below the national average . But the belief that the mining industry would experience a permanent demand for coal was shattered by the Depression , and the Rhondda experienced a massive upturn in unemployment . The situation worsened in 1926 when , in response to coalowners reducing pay and lengthening working hours of miners , the TUC called a general strike in defence of the miners who had been locked out following A.J. Cook 's call ' not a penny off the pay , not a minute on the day ' . The TUC called off the strike just nine days later , without resolving the miners ' cut in wages . The miners disagreed and stayed on strike for a further seven months until they were starved into surrendering . The Rhondda saw many schemes set up by miners to aid their plight , such as soup kitchens and fêtes and ' joy ' days to support them ; while in Maerdy the local miners set up a rationing system . By the time the miners returned to work there was little desire for further action through strikes , which saw a decline in the popularity of ' The Fed ' and greater emphasis on solving

problems through political and parliamentary means .

With the advent of the Great Depression , employment within the Rhondda Valleys continued to fall . This in turn led to a decline in public and social services , as people struggled to pay rates and rents . One of the outcomes of a lack of funds was a fall in health provisions , which in Rhondda lead to a lack of medical and nursing staff , a failure to provide adequate sewage works and a rise in deaths from tuberculosis . By 1932 the long @-@ term unemployment figure in the Rhondda was recorded at 63 % , and in Ferndale the unemployment figure for adult males rose as high as 72 @.@ 85 % .

With little other employment available in the Rhondda the only solution appeared to be emigration . Between 1924 and 1939 , 50 @,@ 000 people left the Rhondda . During this time life was difficult for communities built solely around a singular industry , especially as most families were on a single wage .

The start of the Second World War saw a complete turnaround in the employment figures , and by 1944 unemployment figures in the Rhondda ranged from 1 % in Treorchy to 3 @.@ 7 % at Tonypany .

= = = Mining disasters = = =

As with any heavy industry , the possibility of serious injury or death was an everyday risk for the mine workers of the Rhondda Valley . The most notorious form of colliery disaster was the gas explosion , caused by either a buildup of methane gas or coal dust . As the mines became deeper and ventilation become more difficult to control the risk increased . The worst single incident in the Rhondda was the 1867 Ferndale disaster in which an explosion saw the loss of 178 lives . However , the major disasters only accounted for roughly 20 % of overall fatalities , with individual accidents accounting for the bulk of deaths . The list below shows mining disasters which saw the loss of five or more lives during a single incident .

= = Modern Rhondda 1945 @-@ present = =

The coal mining industry of the Rhondda was artificially buoyed throughout the war years , though there were expectations of a return to the pre @-@ 1939 industrial collapse after the end of the Second World War . There was a sense of salvation when the government announced the nationalisation of the British Coalmines in 1947 ; but the following decades saw a continual reduction in the output from the Rhondda mines . From 15 @,@ 000 miners in 1947 , Rhondda had just a single pit within the valleys producing coal in 1984 , located at Maerdy . The decline in the mining of coal after World War II was a country wide issue , but South Wales and Rhondda were affected to a higher degree than other areas of Britain . Oil had superseded coal as the fuel of choice in many industries and there was political pressure influencing the supply of oil . Of the few industries that were still reliant on coal , the demand was for quality coals , especially coking coal which was required by the steel industry . Fifty percent of Glamorgan coal was now supplied to steelworks , with the second biggest market being domestic heating , which the ' smokeless ' coal of the Rhondda became once again fashionable after the publication of the Clean Air Act . These two markets now controlled the fate of the mines in the Rhondda , and as demand fell from both sectors the knock @-@ on effect on the mining industry was further contraction . In addition exports to other areas of Europe , traditionally France , Italy and the Low Countries , experienced a massive decline ; from 33 per cent around the start of the 20th century to roughly 5 per cent by 1980 .

The other major factors in the decline of coal were related to the massive under @-@ investment in Rhondda mines over the past decades . Most of the mines in the valleys were sunk between the 1850s and 1880s , which , as a consequence , meant they were far smaller than most modern mines . The Rhondda mines were in comparison antiquated , with methods of ventilation , coal @-@ preparation and power supply all of a poor standard . In 1945 the British coal industry cut 72 per cent of their output mechanically , whereas in South Wales the figure was just 22 per cent . The only way to ensure the financial survival of the mines in the valleys was massive investment from the



NCB , but the ' Plan for Coal ' paper drawn up in 1950 was overly optimistic in the future demand for coal , which was drastically reduced following an industrial recession in 1956 and an increased availability of oil .

The British government and Welsh employment bodies funded and subsidized external businesses to locate new ventures within the valleys to replace the vanishing heavy industries . The first attempt to bring in business not connected to the coal mining industry began in the 1920s when David Jones , Town Clerk to the Rhondda Urban Council , gained government support in attracting outside businesses to the area . Companies included Alfred Polikoff 's clothing factory , Messers Jacob Beatus , manufacturing cardboard boxes and Electrical and Musical Industries Ltd . Following the end of the Second World War , 23 companies were set up in the Rhondda Valleys , eighteen of them sponsored by the Board of Trade . Most companies had periods of growth and collapse , notably Thorn EMI in the 1970s and Burberry in the 2000s .

The Rhondda Heritage Park , a museum commemorating Rhondda 's industrial past , is situated just south of Porth in the former Lewis Merthyr Colliery in the small former mining village of Trehafod .

= = Religion = =

The commote of Glynrhondda was coterminous with the earlier parish of Ystradyfodwg , but little is known of the Celtic saint Tyfodwg , or Dyfodwg after whom the parish is named . Saint Tyfodwg is thought to have existed around 600 AD , and although the parish bears his name there are now no religious monuments or places of worship named after him within the Rhondda boundaries . There are two churches in South Wales outside the area named after the saint ; Y Tre Sant in Llantrisant and Saint Tyfodwg 's in Ogmore Vale .

The earliest known religious monument is the Catholic holy well in Penrhys first mentioned in the 15th century , though it may have been a place of pagan worship before this . This pilgrimage site was identified as a ' manor ' belonging to the Cistercian Abbey of Llantarnam and was seen as one of the most important religious sites in Wales , because of its Marian shrine . This holy site was the main reason people would pass through the commote ; it was even thought to be the main reason why the first bridges were built over the River Rhondda .

During the Middle Ages the Parish church of Ystradyfodwg near the bank of the River Rhondda served the parishioners of the Rhondda Fawr , while the families of the Rhondda Fach attended Llanwynno church . The inhabitants of the lower Rhondda , in the vicinity of Porth and Dinas , would need to trek to Llantrisant to hear a service .

Despite the importance of the Anglican Church in the lives of the parishioners the growing strength of Nonconformity would make itself felt in the 18th century . In 1738 the Reverend Henry Davies formed the Independent Cause in Cymmer and five years later a ' Ty Cwrdd ' or meeting house was opened there . Although attracting families from as far away as Merthyr and the parish of Eglwysilan , there were no other Nonconformist Causes until David Williams began preaching in the Rhondda in 1784 . In 1785 six people were baptised in the river near Melin @-@ yr @-@ Om and in 1786 ' Ynysfach ' was opened in Ystrad and was ' a new house for religious services ' . This was the first Baptist chapel in the Rhondda and later became known as Nebo , Ystrad Rhondda . Cymmer and Ynysfach chapel would be the forerunners in a new religious movement in the valley for the next 150 years . In the early 19th century there were only three places of worship in the Rhondda ; the parish church ( now dedicated to St. John the Baptist ) , Cymmer and Ynysfach chapels . This changed rapidly after 1855 as the coal mining industry brought in an influx of population and by 1905 there were 151 chapels in the valley .

Chapel life was central to valley life throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries , but as with many communities throughout Britain , the post wars saw a decline in regular membership . To some extent , as the population declined the number of places of worship also declined , but this was exacerbated in the Rhondda by a process of linguistic change which saw a severe decline in the number of Welsh speakers . As a result , it was the Welsh language chapels , in particular , that saw a severe drop in membership from the 1950s , and the next half @-@ century saw many

chapels close . By 1990 the Rhondda had less than 50 places of worship , and many of the buildings had been demolished .

= = Political activism = =

Political activism in the Rhondda has a deep link with trade unions and the socialist movement but was initially slow to develop . In the 1870s the Amalgamated Association of Miners won support , but was destroyed by employer hostility . The Cambrian Miners ' Association was more successful and the creation of the South Wales Miners ' Federation after the 1898 coal strike , gave the South Wales miners a reputation for militancy , in which the Rhondda Valley played its part . As part of the Redistribution Act of 1885 the Rhondda was granted its first seat in Parliament which was won by the moderate trade union leader William Abraham , who was notably the only working @-@ class member elected in Wales . Socialism and syndicalism ideals grew throughout the 20th century and industrial struggle reached a crescendo in the 1910 @-@ 11 Tonypandy Riots . A year later Tonypandy saw the publication of Noah Ablett ' s pamphlet The Miners ' Next Step . Tonypandy was at the centre of further public disorder when , on 11 June 1936 at Dewinton Field , a large group of people gathered to confront the open @-@ air address by Tommy Moran , propaganda officer of the British Union of Fascists . The crowd , recorded as between 2 @,@ 000 and 6 @,@ 000 strong , turned violent and police were forced to protect Moran ' s Blackshirt bodyguard . Seven local people were arrested .

The Rhondda also has a strong history of communist sympathy , with the Rhondda Socialist Society being a key element in the coalition that founded the Communist Party of Great Britain . By 1936 there were seven Communists on the Rhondda Urban District Council and was publishing its own Communist newspaper The Vanguard . In the 1930s Maerdy became such a hotspot of Communist support it was known as Little Moscow producing left wing activists such as Merthyr born Arthur Horner and Marxist writer Lewis Jones . The Rhondda miners were also active in socialist activities outside the valleys . In the 1920s and 1930s the Rhondda and the surrounding valleys provided the principal support of some of the largest hunger marches , while in 1936 more Rhondda Federation members were serving in Spain as part of the International Brigades than the total number of volunteers from all the English coalfields .

In 1979 , Rhondda councillor Annie Powell became Wales ' only communist mayor .

= = Culture and recreation = =

= = = Role of women = = =

With an economy fundamentally dependent upon a single industry , there was a scarcity of paid employment for women in Rhondda ' s coalmining heyday . The Encyclopaedia of Wales notes that the image of the Welsh Mam , a wife and mother constantly at home and exalted as the queen of the household , was essentially a Rhondda creation . However the Rhondda did produce the suffragette and social reformer Elizabeth Andrews , one of only nine women among a list of a hundred greatest Welsh heroes chosen by ballot in 2004 .

= = = Sport = = =

Social amenities were rudimentary even before the formation of the Rhondda Urban District Council in 1897 . Due to the geographic layout of the valleys , land was a scarce resource , and therefore leisure activities that took up little space , time and money were sought . This saw the popularity of activities such as greyhound races , cockfighting , open air handball courts ( often attached to a public house ) , boxing booths , foot racing and rugby union .

Rugby union

During the mid @-@ 19th century the influx of immigrants from the older mining towns , such as

Aberdare and Merthyr , brought with them the game of rugby . At Treherbert it took a five @-@ month lockout in 1875 to see the game establish itself at the various collieries where the Amalgamated Association of Miners held their meetings . In 1877 Penygraig Rugby Football Club was formed , followed by Treherbert in 1879 , Ferndale in 1882 , Treorchy in 1886 and Tylorstown in 1903 . In the late 19th and early 20th century , the ' Rhondda forward ' was a key player in many Wales teams . The heavy industrial worker was a prime aggressive attack figure in early Welsh packs , typified by the likes of Treherbert 's Dai ' Tarw ' ( bull ) Jones who at 6 @-@ foot 1 inch ( 185 @. @ 5 cm ) and 16 stone ( 100 kg ) in weight was seen as an animal of a man .

Due to the lack of playing fields in the valleys , many rugby teams would share grounds , travel every week to away grounds or even play on inappropriate ( e.g. sloping ) pitches . The valley clubs also had no clubhouses , with most teams meeting , and changing , in the closest local public house . Many more clubs , built around colliery and pub teams , appeared and disbanded but many of the clubs survive to this day .

#### Football

Due to the dominance of rugby union there have been few football teams of note in the history of the Rhondda Valleys . Several teams were formed around the end of the 19th century , but most folded during the depression , including Cwmparc F.C. in 1926 and Mid @-@ Rhondda in 1928 . The most successful club from the area is Ton Pentre F.C ..

#### = = = Music = = =

The temperance movement , which had been absorbed into the moralistic system of the Nonconformist chapels , caused a shift in social attitudes in the mid- to late @-@ 19th- and early @-@ 20th century Rhondda . Alcohol was looked down upon and so were the increasingly violent sports such as rugby , so young men looked for different and more acceptable pastimes . Voice choirs were a natural progression from chapel society , and brass bands would eventually gain acceptance by the movement .

#### Male voice choirs

A phenomenon of Welsh industrial communities was the appearance of male voice choirs , believed to have been formed from glee clubs . The Rhondda produced several choirs of note , including the Rhondda Glee Society , who represented Wales at the World Fair eisteddfod . The rival Treorchy Male Voice Choir also enjoyed considerable success at eisteddfodau and in 1895 sang before Queen Victoria . Many choirs still exist today including the Cambrian Male voice choir , situated in Tonypany .

#### Brass bands

In the mid @-@ 19th century brass bands had a poor relationship with the Nonconformist chapels , mainly due to the heavy social drinking that came hand in hand with being a member of a band . This changed towards the end of the 19th century , and as well as becoming more respectable , many bands had actually joined the temperance movement . Two of the more well known brass bands from the Rhondda both started as temperance bands . The more famous , Cory Band from Ton Pentre , started life as Ton Temperance in 1884 ; while local rivals The Parc and Dare Band were the Cwmparc Drum and Fife Temperance Band .

As the temperance movement faded the bands found new benefactors in the colliery owners , and many bands took on the names of specific collieries . A memorable image of the connection between the collieries and brass bands came in 1985 , when the Maerdy miners were filmed returning to work after the miners ' strike , marching behind the village band .

#### = = = Culture and nationality = = =

#### Language

For the majority of its history the area now recognised as the Rhondda Valley was an exclusively Welsh speaking area . It was only in the early 20th century that English began to supplant Welsh as the first language of social intercourse . In 1803 , English historian Benjamin Heath Malkin

mentioned while travelling through Ystradfydwg , that he had only met one person with whom he could talk , and then with the help of an interpreter . This situation was repeated with John George Wood , who on his visit to the area complained of the awkwardness of understanding the particular dialects and idioms used by the native speakers , which were on times difficult for other Welsh speakers to understand . This dialect was once called ' tafodiaith gw?r y Gloran ' ( ' the dialect of the men of Gloran ' ) .

As the industrialisation of the valleys began there was little shift in the use of Welsh as a first language . Initial immigrants were Welsh and it was not until the 1900s that English workers began settling in any great numbers , but it wasn 't these new workers who changed the language ; the erosion of Welsh had already begun in the 1860s in the school classrooms . The educational philosophy accepted by schoolmasters and governmental administrators was that English was the language of scholars , and that Welsh was a barrier to moral and commercial prosperity . In 1901 35 @. @ 4 % of Rhondda workers spoke only English but by 1911 this had risen to 43 @. @ 1 % , while Welsh speaking monoglots had dropped from 11 @. @ 4 % to 4 @. @ 4 % in the same period .

The true Anglicization of the Rhondda Valleys took place from 1900 to 1950 . Improved transport and communications facilitated the spread of new cultural influences , along with dealings with outside companies with no understanding of Welsh , trade union meetings held in English , the coming of radio , cinema and then television and cheap English newspapers and paperback books ; all were factors in the absorption of the English language .

#### Cadwgan Circle

Though the population of the Rhondda was embracing English as its first language , during the 1940s a literary and intellectual movement formed in the Rhondda that would produce an influential group of Welsh language writers . Formed during the Second World War by Egyptologist J. Gwyn Griffiths and his German wife Käte Bosse @-@ Griffiths , the group was known as the Cadwgan Circle ( Cylch Cadwgan ) , and met at the Griffiths ' house in Pentre . The Welsh writers who made up the movement included Pennar Davies , Rhydwen Williams , James Kitchener Davies and Gareth Alban Davies .

#### National Eisteddfod

The Rhondda has hosted the National Eisteddfod on only one occasion , in 1928 at Treorchy . The Gorsedd stones that were placed to commemorate the event still stand on the Maindy hillside overlooking Treorchy and Cwmparc . In 1947 Treorchy held the Urdd National Eisteddfod , the Eisteddfod for children and young adults .

#### Communal activity

Rhondda had a strong tradition of communal activity , exemplified by workmen 's halls , miners ' institutes and trade unions . Miners began to contribute to the building and running of institutes - such as the Parc and Dare Hall in Treorchy - from the 1890s onwards , and they were centres of both entertainment and self @-@ improvement with billiards halls , libraries and reading rooms .

= = = Media = = =

In 1884 the Rhondda Valley was served by local newspaper the Rhondda Chronicle which became the Rhondda Gazette and General Advertiser of the Rhondda Fach and Ogmore Valleys in 1891 . In 1899 , the Rhondda Valley was served by the Pontypridd and Rhondda Weekly Post while Rhondda Post was also in circulation in 1898 .

The Rhondda Leader one of the more familiar local papers of the region , was first published in 1899 and nine years later became the Rhondda Leader , Maesteg , Garw and Ogmore Telegraph . The Porth Gazette was published from 1900 to 1944 and during that period there was a newspaper called the Rhondda Socialist . Rhondda Gazette was in circulation from 1913 to 1919 while the Rhondda Clarion was available in the late 1930s .

The Porth Gazette and Rhondda Leader was published from 1944 to 1967 while also published in Pontypridd during those years was the Rhondda Fach Leader and Gazette . In more recent years the Rhondda Leader and Pontypridd & Llantrisant Observer combined before the Rhondda Leader became a separate edition once more .

In August 1952 the BBC transmitter at Wenvoe began broadcasting allowing the Rhondda to receive television pictures for the first time . This was followed in January 1958 with Commercial Television provided by Television Wales and the West ( TWW ) , giving the viewers of the Rhondda a choice of two television channels .

= = Transport = =

Due to the geological layout of the Rhondda Valley , transport links are fairly restrictive . The original road layout followed the valleys with few connections between them . In the 1920s , a major unemployment relief programme for out of work miners was created to build mountain roads connecting communities together . The mountain roads had a lasting effect and transformed the valleys from being dead @-@ end communities .

Two main roads service the area , the A4058 runs through the Rhondda Fawr and the A4233 services the Rhondda Fach . The A4058 starts at Pontypridd runs through Porth before ending at Treorchy , where it joins the A4061 to Hirwaun . The A4233 begins outside Rhondda at Tonyrefail , heading north through Porth and through the Rhondda Fach to Maerdy , where the road eventually links up with the A4059 at Aberdare . Two other A roads service the area ; the A4119 is a relief road , known as the Tonypandy Bypass and the other is the A4061 which links Treorchy to the Ogmere Vale before reaching Bridgend .

There is a single rail link to the Rhondda , the Rhondda Line , based around the old Taff Vale Railway which serviced both the Rhondda Fach and Rhondda Fawr . The Rhondda Line runs through the Rhondda Fawr , linking Rhondda to Cardiff Central . The railway stations that once populated the Rhondda Fach were all closed after the Beeching Axe . The railway line serves ten Rhondda stations with the villages not directly linked connected through bus services .

British Rail reopened some of the closed stations such as Ystrad Rhondda railway station in 1986 .

= = Residents of note = =

See also Category : People from Rhondda

Due to the scarcity of inhabitants in the Rhondda prior to industrialisation , there are few residents of note before the valleys became a coal mining area . The earliest individuals to come to the fore were linked with the coal industry and the people ; physical men who found a way out of the Rhondda through sport ; charismatic orators who led the miners through unions or political and religious leaders who tended to the deeply religious chapel going public .

= = = Sport = = =

The two main sports with which the Rhondda appeared to produce quality participants were rugby union and boxing . One of the first true rugby stars to come from the Rhondda was Willie Llewellyn , who not only gained 20 caps for Wales scoring 48 points , but was also the first Rhondda born member of the British Lions . Such was Llewellyn 's fame that during the Tonypandy Riots , his pharmacy was left unscathed by the crowds due to his past sporting duties . Many players came through the Rhondda to gain international duty , and after the split between amateur rugby union and the professional Northern League , many were also tempted to the North of England to earn a wage for their abilities . Amongst the new league players was Jack Rhapps , Aberaman born , but living in the Rhondda when he ' Went North ' , eventually becoming the world 's first dual @-@ code international rugby player .

The most famous rugby player from the Rhondda of the later half of the 20th century is Cliff Morgan . Morgan was born in Trebanog , and gained 29 caps for Wales , four for the British Lions and was one of the inaugural inductees of the International Rugby Hall of Fame . Another notable player is Billy Cleaver from Treorchy , a member of the 1950 Grand Slam winning team .

During the 20th century The Rhondda also supplied a steady stream of championship boxers . Percy Jones was not only the first World Champion from the Rhondda , but was the first Welshman

to hold a World Title when he won the Flyweight belt in 1914 . After Jones came the Rhondda 's most notable boxer , Jimmy Wilde also known as the " Mighty Atom " , who took the IBU world flyweight title in 1916 . British Champions from the valleys include Tommy Farr who held the British and Empire heavyweight belt and Llew Edwards who took the British featherweight title .

Although association football was not as popular as rugby in the Rhondda in the early 20th century , after the 1920s several notable players had emerged from the area . Two of the most important players both came from the village of Ton Pentre ; Jimmy Murphy was capped 15 times for Wales , and in 1958 managed both the Welsh national team and Manchester United . Roy Paul , also from Ton Pentre , led Manchester City to two successive FA Cup finals in 1955 and 1956 and gained 33 Welsh caps . Alan Curtis , who was best known for representing Swansea City and Cardiff City , came from the neighbouring village of Pentre , and in an 11 @-@ year international career won 35 caps for Wales scoring 6 goals .

The Rhondda Valleys have also produced two world class darts players . In 1975 Alan Evans from Ferndale won the Winmau World Masters , a feat repeated in 1994 by Richie Burnett from Cwmparc . Burnett surpassed Evans when he also became BDO World Darts Champion winning the tournament in 1995 .

#### = = = Politics = = =

Despite neither being born in the Rhondda , the two most notable political figures to emerge from the area are William Abraham , known as Mabon , and George Thomas , Viscount Tonypandy . Abraham , best known as a trade unionist was the first Member of Parliament of the Rhondda and the leader of the South Wales Miners ' Federation . A strong negotiator in the early years of valleys ' unionism , as a moderate he lost ground to more radical leaders in his later years . Thomas was born in Port Talbot but raised in Treallaw near Tonypandy . He was a Member of Parliament for Cardiff for 38 years and Speaker of the House of Commons ( 1976 ? 1983 ) . On his retirement from politics he was made Viscount Tonypandy .

Leanne Wood , current leader of Plaid Cymru is from the Rhondda .

#### = = = Film and television = = =

The most well known actors to have been born in the Rhondda are Sir Stanley Baker and brothers Donald and Glyn Houston . Baker was born in Ferndale and starred in films such as the The Cruel Sea ( 1953 ) and Richard III ( 1955 ) , though it was as actor / producer of the 1964 film Zulu that his legacy endures . The Houston brothers were both born in Tonypandy , with Donald gaining better success as a film actor , with memorable roles in The Blue Lagoon ( 1949 ) and Ealing 's Dance Hall ( 1950 ) . Glyn Houston acted primarily in British B @-@ Movies , and was better known as a television actor .

#### = = = Literature = = =

Of the Cadwgan Circle , the most notable of their number is Rhydwen Williams , the winner of the Eisteddfod Crown on two occasions who used the landscape of the industrial valleys as a basis for much of his work . Writing in the English language Peter George was born in Treorchy and is best known as the Oscar nominated screenwriter of Dr. Strangelove , based on his book Red Alert . Reflecting the lives of the residents of the Rhondda , both Gwyn Thomas and Ron Berry brought a realism to the industrial valleys which was missing in the more rose @-@ tinted writings of Richard Llewellyn .

#### = = = Visual arts = = =

The Rhondda Valleys has not produced as notable a group of visual artists as it has writers , though in the 1950s a small group of students , brought together through a daily commute by train to

the Cardiff College of Art , came to prominence and are known as the ' Rhondda Group ' . Although they did not set up a school or have a manifesto ; the group , which included Charles Burton , Ceri Barclay , Glyn Morgan , Thomas Hughes , Gwyn Evans , Nigel Flower , David Mainwaring , Ernest Zobole and Robert Thomas , were an important artistic movement in 20th @-@ century Welsh art . The most notable members of the group include Ernest Zobole , a painter from Ystrad , whose expressionist work was deeply rooted in the juxtaposition of the industrialised buildings of the valleys set against the green hills that surround them . Also from the Rhondda Fawr was sculptor Robert Thomas ; born in Cwmparc , his heavy cast statues have become icons of contemporary Wales , with five of his statues publicly displayed in the centre of Cardiff .

= = = Science and social science = = =

In sciences and social sciences the Rhondda has provided important academics within the aspects of Wales and on the World stage . Donald Davies , born in Treorchy in 1924 was the co @-@ inventor of packet switching , a process which enabled the exchange of information between computers , a feature which enabled the Internet .

In the social sciences , the Rhondda has produced Welsh historian John Davies , an important voice on Welsh affairs , who was one of the most recognised faces and voices of 21st century Welsh history , and was also one of the main authors of The Welsh Academy Encyclopaedia of Wales . The Rhondda has also produced J. Gwyn Griffiths , an eminent Egyptologist , who was also a member of the Cadwgan Circle . Griffiths and his wife Käte Bosse @-@ Griffiths were influential writers and curators in the history of Egyptian lore .