

The distinctive's of Blaenavon

What is Blaenavon?

Blaenavon is a town situated in the South Eastern Wales. It is well known for it's Coal, Iron and Steel production back in the 18th and 19th century. (1) 'Blaenavon' means "front of the river". (2)

The history behind Blaenavon

Blaenavon opened up an ironworks in 1788. The people that opened it up and invested £40,000 into ironworks were three business men from industrialist West Midlands, Thomas Hill, Thomas Hopkins and Benjamin Pratt. (4)

The big pit

The Blaenavon company had deepened the pit from 200ft to 300ft and that's where the name "Big pit" came from as it was very very large, it was made up of several mines combined together, these include Coity Pits, Dodd's slope, Coity Level Blaenavon new mine, Elled Drift, Forge pit, Forge level and Forge slope. Big pit was a huge supplier for coal and shipped coal world wide to hundreds of countries and used for fuel trains and engines by the Great Western Railways. Many children, men and women were also killed by the mines in Blaenavon although none of these were in the Big Pit. Today there is a museum for the Big Pit which remains popular and the closure of the Big pit had a impact on the communities with them giving high demand for coal. (3)

Coal, Iron and Copper

In 1913 Wales miners produced a tons and tons of coal, in fact it was a standing 57,000,000 tons of coal. Coal production has a very positive impact on Blaenavon as it provided many people jobs, coal and great economic success. Although it had good impacts it also had a few negative impacts, one of them being bad air pollution causing asthma, cancer, heart and lung ailments, global warming and a lot more environmental and public impacts. Another negative impact is that it damages the wildlife environment such as trees, plants and topsoil, it also destroys wildlife habitats. Not only does it damage the above but it also has an impact on the water environment

from the acid mine drainage, acid rain and the contamination of ground water and streams. In Blaenavon ironworks report back in 1842 it states that parents would take their children as young as 6 years old to go work in the mines but they would not employ children until they were 8 or 9 years old. The total amount of young children working in the mines was roughly 230 children and then in the coal mines there was roughly 136 children. The children also drove horses, this included children as young as 9 to 15 years old. They used to work crazy hours from 6 am to about 6pm with an hour dinner break meanwhile earning very little shillings, about 10 to 12 per shift this is a good amount compared to the drivers who only earn that amount in a week! Working in the mines can be dangerous for example there have been a few explosions one of which a man had died by burning to death. The miners health would be affected by working in the mines by the time they were 50 years old with asthma. (5) The mines in south wales area produced 30% of the worlds coal and a huge percentage of that was from Blaenavon, there is a duplicate of the mine that gives you a really good insight of what the Blaenavon mines used to be like many many years ago! The mines were very cold and claustrophobic. (6) On 11th of December 1908 three men had lost their lives due to a explosion these men were aged between 21, 34 and 54 years old, John Jones, Nathaniel Brankely and George Williams, sadly another three men had also lost their lives due to a fire these were aged 26, 30 and 43, The manager of Kay's slope, William Bond (firefighter) and Joseph Jenkins who was under manager of the Big Pit. (7) Altogether it was recorded that there was about 60 deaths in total from 1857 to 1880, this does not mean all those were in the Big pit it's self but through mines. There was a boy who had died due to being crushed to death because of a roof fall in 1891. When the mine had closed there was discussions about it being reopened for a museum so in 1983 it had reopened for visitors which help create 71 jobs in total. In the mines miners could only eat bread and jam or bread and dripping because other foods could not cope with the heat under ground and would go off extremely quick. They used to carry their food attached to their belt, this was a metal

tin that was rounded and waterproof and they used to call it a "snap", when they were working it was kept where they were working. The main purpose of a metal tin was to keep rats away from their food whilst they worked. (8) The men used to wear either a black or dark shirt with black or dark trousers, leather boots and a belt around their waste while the women wore a long sleeve dress that would go down to their ankles and had puffed shoulders with a white apron that would also reach their ankles with a bonnet. (9) Miners used to live in a cabin made out of logs, this was a one room cabin and they were cheap to build so made it affordable to live. Many people would move to villages such as Blaenavon for work hoping to become rich and then return home. Majority of the miners claim they loved working in the mines and made great lifelong friendships and they also say the positive's outweighed the negatives and it was worth it. Working in the mine meant you had to go for the toilet where ever you could go, find a quiet place, they used to tip there poop in the conveyor. (10)

References

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