

Gelligaer Historical Society

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LLANCAIACH COLLIERY

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Although, in general, the Llancaiach estate is well documented with deeds going back to the 16th century and farm leases to the 17th century, there seems to be a gap in the early 19th century. The information about the early history of the colliery on Llancaiach Fawr therefore comes primarily from the newspaper cuttings shown below.

Another colliery, on rather an extensive scale, is about to be opened on the Llancaiach Estate, (Gelligaer), the joint property of Lord Dynevor and J. M. Richards, Esq. Sir Christopher Smith, Bart. of Worcestershire, is said to be concerned in this new company. Considerable progress has been made in sinking.

Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian, Glamorgan, Monmouth and Brecon Gazette
20 September 1836

GLAMORGANSHIRE COAL-FIELD.—Within the last few days, two new veins of coal have been struck in the hilly district, likely to furnish the market with a very abundant supply of superior coals. The one is of a bituminous and very cheerful quality, on the Llancaiach estate, the joint property of Lord Dynevor and J. M. Richards, Esq., which is worked by the under lessees of Sir Christopher Smith, Bart.

Monmouthshire Merlin 16 December 1837

Messrs. Duncan and Co, the proprietors of Llancaiach Collieries, kindly distributed amongst the poor at Cardiff the first boat load of coals brought to that town which at this season of the year, proved a most welcome donation. We understand these excellent collieries will soon be in full work, and we wish the spirited proprietors every success.

The Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette and Merthyr Guardian
24 February 1838

Sir Christopher Smith was the son of Sir William Smith, of Eardiston, Worcestershire, who had built the Llanvabon Tramroad¹ around 1810. This tramroad was vital to any coal mining in the area around Llancaiach Fawr as it enabled the coal to be transported to the Glamorganshire Canal and thus to Cardiff for sale. Although Sir Christopher Smith is said to be the lessee, there is no evidence of this except in the newspapers. The colliery proprietor was listed as Messrs Duncan and Co. but early evidence on the partnership is lacking.

The first load of coal arrived in Cardiff in February 1838, and Duncan and Co. did what Thomas Powell had done seven years earlier in distributing a load of coal amongst the poor at Cardiff – whether this was something that had been started by Thomas Powell and become a tradition or was just coincidence is not known, but in both cases it was successful in getting publicity.

Newspaper reports show that in 1838 Duncan and Co. shipped 6,300 tons of coal on the Glamorganshire Canal and this is presumed to have

been their first year's production. In 1839 they shipped 13,386 tons, and in 1840 22,285 tons. In 1842 they started shipping coal by the Llancaiach Branch of the Taff Vale Railway Company. (Llancaiach station was actually at Nelson). Annual production figures are not available again until 1853 when Gelligaer parish rates show they raised 38,991 tons. For subsequent years tonnage see below.

The mine was visited by the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Children's Employment which reported in 1842. At the time of the visit, 56 males were employed, 40 of whom were adults, 10 were between 13 and 18 years of age, and 6 were under 13 years old. The mine was mentioned as having *steam power, 24 horses, winding engine raises coal 60 yards to a level 24 yards below the surface, coal brought from the workings to the pit bottom by horses.*² The level 24 yards below the surface would have allowed the coal to be transported out to the tramroad which took the coal to the Llanvabon tramway without having to be raised an extra 24 yards.

Mr. Richard Andrews, *overseer* at the mine, was reported as having said

Colliers take their children to work below ground at very early ages. There is one little fellow, by the name John Davis, helping his father, who is certainly not more than five years old. It is not infrequent for colliers here to take them down, even in petticoats, to claim a dram. The effect of taking children down so young has a very bad influence on their health. In the first place they are half starved below, as they never can get their meat like other people and they never grow like other children. As to education, it is quite out of the question. No lad can be thoroughly useful till he is 13 or 14 years of age and it is poverty or dissipation which causes men thus to deprive their children of light and air. At this work nearly half the men can read Welsh but very few of them can read English which keeps them all dark and the wives and daughters are excessively ignorant. The girls are sent to work in farm houses at 10 and 12 years of age. They get their food for their labour for two and three years and afterwards from 40s. to 60s. a year. I see no difference between the agriculturists and the colliers of this quarter, There may indeed, be a shade of difference in the intelligence of the two classes in favour of the colliers. There are very few cases of bastardy or desertion as it is customary amongst the men to

marry when the subject to asthmatic complaints and to rheumatism arising from the quantity of water in the pits most of them have large families.

In 1824 Richard Andrews had been Sir Christopher Smith's agent at Llanvabon Colliery, and in 1835 he had been working for Thomas Powell at the Gellygaer/Gelliargwellt Colliery. The *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette*, 5 November 1859, reported that Mr. Richard Andrews, aged 81, had died October 26, and *He was for upwards of twenty years coal agent to Messrs. Duncan & Co., Llancaiach Colliery, Gelligaer. His character was unimpeachable, and his loss will be deeply felt at the colliery for many years.*



Monmouthshire Merlin, 12 May 1849, mentions Jonathan Worthington as the proprietor of Llancaiach Colliery, However Duncan and Co. continue to be shown as the owners. Jonathan Worthington was born in Stourport, Worcestershire, in 1796 into what would appear to be a "gentry" family. In 1841 he was recorded as a carrier living in Stourport with his wife and 4 children. By 1851 he was a *Colliery Proprietor* living at 'Llancaiach Works' with his wife and 17-year-old daughter – this was probably Llancaiach House, shown left in a modern photograph. He was also a

director of Rhymney Railway.

On 26 July 1853, the *London Gazette* reported the dissolution of Duncan and Co as shown below. It is interesting to note that Duncan and Co. also had an interest in Gilfachmaen-isaf. This farm is adjacent to two Llancaiach estate-owned farms which are adjacent north-west to Llancaiach Fawr. It is not obvious how the coal would have been shipped to Cardiff unless it was mined from the Llancaiach Colliery.

Worcestershire newspapers show that, in the 1830s, John Garmston and Jonathan Worthington had a business association with an Archibald Duncan. The latter died in 1839 and in his will wrote: *I also give and bequeath unto the said John Garmston my five fifteenth shares in the Llancaiach Colliery and my remaining fifteenth share therein I give and bequeath unto my friend Jonathan Worthington of Stourport.* There is no indication as to who held the other nine fifteenth shares but Duncan & Co. was likely a partnership of Worcestershire investors.

NOTICE is hereby given, that the Partnership heretofore subsisting between us the undersigned, John Garmston and Jonathan Worthington, carrying on business in copartnership together at the Llancaiach and Gilfach Mainisha Collieries, and also at Cardiff, in South Wales and elsewhere, under the name or style of Duncan and Company, has been this day dissolved by mutual consent. All accounts due and owing to the said partnership will be received and paid by the said Jonathan Worthington, who will carry on the business henceforth on his own account.—Dated the 19th day of July, 1853.

John Garmston.

London Gazette 26 July 1853 *Jonn. Worthington.*

Another Worcestershire connection to Llancaiach Colliery is provided by Benjamin Wood and Co., who, in 1867, had 6 coke ovens at the colliery. This had increased to 17 by 1873, and they continued to be recorded until 1880. Benjamin Wood & Co. was also the proprietor of Deri Newydd colliery from 1872-75. When Benjamin Wood appeared before court, under the Bankruptcy Act, 1869, in March 1876, he was described as carrying on business as *Wood and Co., and lately at the Deri and Cefn Glaes Collieries, in the respective parishes of Gellygaer and Merthyr Tydfil, and the Yew Tree and Kedings Collieries, and The Haughton Colliery, all in the parish of Kingswinford, in the county of Stafford, Coke Maunfacturer and Coal Master,, and residing at Oldswinford in the county of Worcester.*

A lease of 1876 indicates that in 1859 a new lease was granted by Llancaiach estate. The reason for this is not known. The mine's ownership continued to be shown as Duncan and Co. in Gelligaer parish rates until 1861.

Jonathan Worthington died, aged 67, 12 April 1860. George Samuel Worthington, Jonathan's second son, became the proprietor of Llancaiach Colliery, and in 1861, aged 32, he lived at Llancaiach House. He continued living at Llancaiach House as proprietor of the mine until 1873. Although at the time of the 1871 census he was visiting Charles H. Williams at Roath Park.

In 1873 George Worthington agreed to sell the mine to a company of investors from the north-east of England who traded under the name of Powell's Gellygaer Colliery Company. They appear to have had no Welsh connection. At the same time the Company also agreed to buy the neighbouring Gellygaer/Gelliargwellt Colliery from Thomas Powell's heirs. In 1874 their partnership was incorporated under the name Powell's Gellygaer Colliery Company Limited, with the collieries valued at £90,000 and the original partners as shareholders. According to a Memorandum of Agreement of 4 June 1874 they, *in the year 1873, agreed to purchase the Leasehold Collieries known as the Gellygaer Colliery and the Llancaiach Colliery,, and they were let into possession respectively on the Thirtieth day of July, 1873, and carried on and worked the said Collieries* They were legally assigned the collieries on 30 November and 2 December 1873 respectively.³ In the case of the Llancaiach Colliery, the previous lease of 1859 was surrendered and Llancaiach estate granted a new lease of lands in Gelligaer and Llanfabon.⁴

Llancaiach Colliery

The enterprise was not a success, and operations ceased in 1880. In fact they surrendered their lease of the coal under Llancaiach estate lands 18 August 1879 and the lease was granted to Harris Navigation Coal Co. Ltd. The latter was sinking a deep mine at what was to become Treharris, and subsequent mining under the land would have been from that colliery. As was required by law, plans of the abandoned mines were filed with the Home Office 8 August 1881.

However, that was not the end of mining at Llancaiach Fawr, as, in 1891, W. C. Beddoe & Co. reopened a mine to exploit the Mynyddislwyn Rider vein of coal. The Beddoe family had been carrying on such mining endeavours for many years. On 5 October 1894 the company was incorporated as Llancaiach Collieries Company Limited⁵, a company that did not mine exclusively at Llancaiach. They continued to mine at Llancaiach until 1905. The plans of the abandoned mine were deposited for the final time 11 July 1905.

Table showing the coal raised at Llancaiach Colliery upon which Gelligaer parish rates were calculated⁶

Date	Tons	Source	Date	Tons	Source	Date	Tons	Source	Date	Tons	Source
1855	26,516	GA P2-13 ⁷	1864	51,403	as below	1872	37,597	BGS 1872	1880	48,241	BGS 1880
1856	25,537	GA P2-14	1865	45,706	DG-D-1-19	1873	35,500	BGS 1873			
1858	41,138	GA P2-99	1866	50,242	GA P2-38	1874	35,684	BGS 1874	1891	3,869	GA P2-89
1859	46,695	GA P2-101	1867	50,382	as below	1875	17,654	BGS 1875	1892	5,741	GA P2-91
1860	59,909	as below	1868	41,396	BGS 1868 ⁸	1876	24,906	BGS 1876	1893	9,511	GA P2-93
1861	54,215	DG-D-1-19 ⁹	1869	47,837	BGS 1869	1877	25,633	BGS 1877			
1862	41,823	GA P2-25	1870	46,654	BGS 1870	1878	22,135	BGS 1878			
1863	46,845	GA P2-26	1871	53,244	BGS 1871	1879	40,772	BGS 1879			

¹ See The Glamorganshire and Aberdare Canals, Stephen Rowson & Ian L. Wright, Black Dwarf Publications, 2001, pp 167-180.

² Copy of unpublished draft as transcribed by Ian Winstanley.

³ National Archives BT 31/1983/8483 – incorporation of Powell's Gellygaer Colliery Company Limited.

⁴ Glamorgan Archives DWP.

⁵ National Archives BT 31/5974/42128 – incorporation of Llancaiach Collieries Company Limited.

⁶ Other coal may have been mined from under the neighbouring parish of Llanfabon.

⁷ GA P2 – Glamorgan Archives – Gelligaer parish rate books

⁸ BGS – British Geological Society – Year books

⁹ DG - Glamorgan Archives – Dowlais Iron Company Archive