

THE MAKING AND REMAKING OF A WELSH MINING LANDSCAPE AND VILLAGE: *Onllwyn, Cwm Dulais, 1876-Today*

Professor Juliet Davis and Dr Lui Tam
Welsh School of Architecture, Cardiff University
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Onllwyn, 1977 (Source: RAF aerial photo)

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0.0 Introduction

This document introduces the development and transformation of Onllwyn in the Upper Dulais Valley, linked to industrialisation from the nineteenth century and the subsequent de-industrialisation from the mid-twentieth century. The Dulais Valley lies within the western half of the South Wales coalfield and became a focus for mining high-quality anthracite coal from the end of the eighteenth century. A mere handful of scattered farms at the turn of the nineteenth century, Onllwyn belonged to Dylais (Dulais) Higher (including Crynant, Seven Sisters, and Onllwyn) in the parish of Cadoxton-juxta-Neath in the nineteenth century. It developed as a mining village from the 1840s onwards. A similar growth pattern can also be seen in neighbouring villages in the valley. Onllwyn, when referred to as a community area today, also covers Banwen and Dyffryn Cellwen.

Assembling this document began with archival searches from April-November 2022 to identify maps, photographs, and other records (including newspaper reports) in order to piece together an account of the landscape's changing topography and material fabric. The arising records tell a story of large-scale transformation at the landscape level, which dramatically shaped the character of Onllwyn through time – from rural to industrial to semi-rural again - but also of development followed by decline. Visual records of material remains, ranging from coal tips which now are overgrown, mine passages now lost from view to buildings long vanished, clearly testified to a place and a community that has been steadily dismantled from the 1960s onwards. While Onllwyn today gives relatively little away about its past – a cemetery with no chapel, a miner's welfare hall set within a now largely rural landscape, and some housing from the 1920s are some of the few vestiges that remain – the record of maps and photographs is rich and extensive, bringing a lively but vanished world back to visibility.

The research went on from December 2022 to involve interviews with older residents of the locality who had lived or worked in Onllwyn to understand better the places evidenced by archival records. Between January and March 2023, eight people (seven men and one woman) participated in this research. Semi-structured conversations focused on understanding the place's intertwined material and social fabrics and the experience of remaking from their perspectives. Through them, it became possible to understand how buildings were used and lived locally. We learned about various facets of Onllwyn, such as the proprietors of the pubs and their different characters, the working routines associated with the underground networks of pits and drift mines, and how the coal washery worked.

The document is structured in four parts. It begins by describing 'the making of Onllwyn as a mining village', followed in the second section by the 'remaking of Onllwyn from 1960 to the present'. In the third section, descriptions of various elements of the vanished landscape are provided, encompassing infrastructure, industrial buildings, housing, and social/ community infrastructure. Finally, a discussion of 'Onllwyn today' points to where the records of history lie or are kept within the valley. Hence, it describes local archives and repositories of books and photographs. These archives create a distinctive yet fragile record of their community's history which, as we suggest at the end of this document, are valuable and vital to preserve for future generations.

1.0 The Making of Onllwyn as a Mining Village

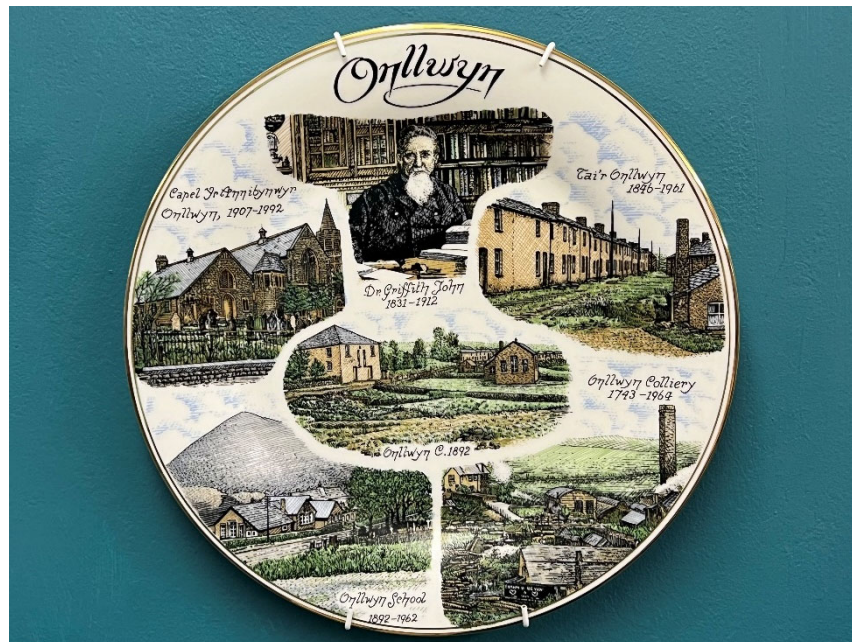


Figure 1 A commemorative plate of Onllwyn's industrial landscape (Source: Juliet Davis, 2023)

From the mid-nineteenth century until the 1980s, Onllwyn's development as a community was shaped strongly by its economic focus on coal extraction and industry. However, it appears to have originated as a small farming community in pre-industrial times (Evans, 1977, p. 42). Iron ore had undoubtedly begun to be extracted before the nineteenth century, but this was on a small scale. Before the advent of tramways and canal networks, it was carried by donkey on rough tracks and used at wrought iron works at Melincourt in the Neath Valley (Evans, 1977, p. 47). Coal only began to be extracted in earnest from the early nineteenth century. Until then, it was harvested on a very localised scale by farmers for their own purposes or sold locally. Bell pits from these early excavations can still be seen in the aerial photos from the 1940s.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, there was no significant route into the area apart from the Roman Road (Sarn Helen) built by the Romans, which ran from Neath to Chester. Sarn Helen (Helen's Causeway) is thought to have acquired its name from 'Sar-y-Lleng' or 'path of the Legion' (Evans, 1977). The road runs past the remains of the Coelbren Roman auxiliary fort and marching camp, then through the centre of the Banwen Industrial Housing (established in the early twentieth century). The Roman fort was likely constructed during the Roman conquest (from the Flavian period 74-84CE until the early-mid second century) (RCAHMW, 1907-2004).

Large-scale coal extraction in the Onllwyn and Mynydd y Drum began when, sometime around 1822, John Christie, an adventurous Scottish merchant, started his enterprise at the Great Forest (Fforest Fawr, between the Black Mountain and the Brecon Beacons). He built the first section of the Brecon Forest Tramroad from Sennybridge to Pwll Byfre quarries. He started coal exploration in Fforest Fawr, soon realising that there was no coal seam there. Christie began leasing Drum (Drim) Colliery from Sir Charles Morgan in c.1823 on the Drum Common in 'Yr Onllwyn', recorded on the Tithe Map from 1844 (Hughes, 1990; Sayce and Martin, 1844). Christie subsequently extended the forest

tramroads south of the Brecon Beacons to connect the Drum Colliery and the Swansea Port, a strategic move. However, the Drum Colliery did not provide the anthracite coal that Christie was after. It turned out to be a 'disastrous concern' by the mid-1830s due to the impossibility of draining water out of the mine. John Christie declared bankruptcy in 1827, passing his properties to his principal creditor Joseph Claypon. Aware of the Drum Colliery's drainage problems, Claypon turned his attention to the land of Onllwyn, owned by Capel Hanbury Leigh (linked to the Hanbury family, a prominent industrial family of iron and tinplate works in the Pontypool area). The opening of the colliery was costed on 23rd May 1835 (Reynolds 1979, cited in Hughes, 1990).

Claypon and his agent Charles Gabell built an extension of the tramroad from Drum Colliery to Gurnos Wharf on the Swansea Canal in 1832-34. The new line was built to a higher standard intended for locomotive haulage, transporting passengers and freight. Branch lines were built to connect the new collieries at Onllwyn. The initial attempts at extracting coal at the Onllwyn collieries proved challenging. A new level was opened in June of 1835 but was almost abandoned by September of the same year, as workable coal seams could not be located. For the first quarter of 1836, Claypon had to pay his colliers extra to work underwater in the water-logged Drum Colliery (Hughes, 1990).

By 1837-38, traffic on the tramroad had increased exponentially due to the technological advancement of iron smelting in the Dulais Valley, especially at the Ynysgedwyn ironworks. This, in turn, made using the local anthracite coal for smelting iron ore possible. The owner of the Ynysgedwyn ironworks, George Crane, wanted to use coal from the Onllwyn Collieries to power his ironworks. According to the Kirkhouse Journal, the Onllwyn Collieries were easily producing over 5000 tonnes of anthracite coal, which were probably all consumed by the ironworks locally, suggested by the absence of evidence of Claypon shipping any coal out (Hughes, 1990).

Industrial activities in Onllwyn grew exponentially in the 1840s. In 1840, the Onllwyn Collieries were taken over by John Williams from Monmouthshire and John Jones. By 1842-43, the production of coal at Onllwyn had quadrupled. Williams brought two blast furnaces to Onllwyn in February 1844, using locally produced anthracite and iron ores (The Cambrian, 1844). The blast furnaces were directed and managed by Rees Davies, the furnace manager of Ynyscedwyn Iron Works, who had successfully used anthracite coal under the direction of George Crane. After John William's bankruptcy, the ironworks were bought by William Parsons, who operated them from 1859-1863 (Swansea Canal Ledger, 1813-63, cited in Hughes, 1990). The anthracite production in the Dulais and Swansea valleys was so significant by 1847 that it was known as the 'anthracite district' (The Pembrokehire Herald and General Advertiser, 1847). Unfortunately, the ironworks at Onllwyn did not last long due to being ill-suited to being run using anthracite coal. The furnaces had to be modified to use bituminous coal instead. The ironworks eventually failed as trade was affected by the so-called 'Panic of 1866,' a sharp international financial downturn, never to reopen (Ince, 1993).

It should be noted that, besides coal mining and metalworking, various other supporting industrial activities also played a part in the making and transforming of the landscape. One such activity was related to limekilns. Limekilns were already part of John Christie's pursuits when he was managing his farms in the Great Forest. In addition, limekilns shown on nineteenth-century maps were

sometimes mine kilns or iron-calcining kilns (Hughes, 1990). These kilns were just as crucial to industrial development as mines and workings.

The old farming settlement in Onllwyn changed little despite growing industry and infrastructure until the 1840s. John Williams, among the many industrialists owning or managing the Onllwyn works, led its transformation from a rural settlement into an industrial village, organised to provide for the housing, spiritual and educational needs of a mining community. According to the census, two rows of workers' terrace housing were built between 1851-1861, though Williams was bankrupt by 1859. The 1851 census also recorded 105 Irish immigrants living in Onllwyn (Davies, 2004, p. 78). Besides housing, Williams commissioned the construction of an independent chapel in Onllwyn (See section 3.4.1 below). Before mechanisation in the mid-twentieth century, manual labour was required to mine coal. As Evans puts it, '[m]en, women and children worked there from dawn to dusk, 16 hours a day. Apart from Sundays, they never saw the light of day' (Evans, 1977).

In the coming sections, the ongoing transformations of the landscape and settlement are described, beginning with data from various editions of OS maps supported by a range of historical references and archival materials.

1.1 1876-1903

The first detailed map of Onllwyn's industrial landscape is the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey Map. The first version was surveyed in 1876 (1:2500), updated in 1896-97 (1:2500) and 1903 (1:10560) (Ordnance Survey, 1878-88, 1896-99, 1904). The Onllwyn Colliery, or Onllwyn Pit, is present on these three maps. The Neath and Brecon Railway connected it with the nearby Seven Sisters Pit, Coelbren junction, and Abercraf (Abercrave) Colliery. The railway was connected with the tramways that went to the Onllwyn Pit. A tramway branch line also connected Onllwyn Station with Maes-Marchog Colliery (later Onllwyn No.3 Colliery), southeast of Onllwyn. To the north of the Neath and Brecon Railway, the previous Brecon Forest Tramroad is marked on the map as 'Old Tramway', though it had been dismantled by this point. A branch towards Onllwyn from the main tramway would have still been visible. Other features prominently visible on the OS map are the Coelbren Roman Fort and the Roman road Sarn Helen. The branch line between Onllwyn and Maes-Marchog crossed Sarn Helen at the location which later became the village of Banwen. Though the drainage from the collieries was not clearly marked on this version of the OS map, based on later maps, it is reasonable to suggest that there were drainage and streams draining water from the Onllwyn Pit to the nearby Dulais River.

Besides the functioning coal pits, air shafts, and kilns, there are also large areas of old quarries, some scattered old coal pits, and drifts from previous mining activities visible on the map. The prominent feature marking Onllwyn village is the two rows of terrace housing (Front Row and Back Row) located next to the functioning colliery. The school is marked at the west end of Back Row. To the east of the housing are the Independent Chapel and the burial ground. Along the road leading to and from the Onllwyn railway bridge were a few places that formed the social fabric of the mining community. On the south side of the railway were the Post Office and the Onllwyn Inn, with the Halfway House Pub (P.H.) on the north side (see sections 3.3 and 3.4 below).

The updated OS map from 1896-97 clearly shows further development at the Onllwyn Colliery, indicated by the increased numbers of industrial buildings and new branches connecting the colliery with the main railway line to accommodate larger output and traffic. The Drym Colbren Colliery Co. Limited and Griffith Thomas (who owned a colliery at Onllwyn between 1890-1905) were recorded as owning anthracite collieries in Onllwyn. Most other features remained the same, except for the Infant School, now located north of the Independent Chapel. This is consistent with the establishment of the school in 1893, recorded in Kelly's Directory (see section 3.4.2 below for the school's history) (Kelly's directory of Monmouthshire and South Wales, 1891, 1895).

Tramways and branch lines were altered frequently to suit the changing needs of the collieries, as to their rise and fall. The 1903 map shows a Drym Colliery appearing for a short period to the north side of the railway, with some tramways around it. There was also a coal pit at Cwm Mawr further up north towards Mynydd y Drym, also known as Dulais Higher Colliery, according to the records in the Cwm Dulais Historical Society. The site of Drym Colliery would later become Dulais Colliery. Maes-Marchog Colliery appears as 'disused' in the 1896-97 and 1903 versions but was revived later. The 1896-97 map shows some significant developments of the collieries in Abercrave (Abercraf), on the other side of the Mynydd y Drum. An International Purification Works and International Anthracite Colliery appeared next to the Abercrave Colliery. They remained in place on the 1914-15 OS map.

Besides the physical development of the industrial landscape, newspaper records of the late nineteenth century provide insights into the social context of the mining community. Numerous accidents, some of which were fatal, happened in the collieries. For example, a collier named William Rees Davies was run over by a 'journey' of trams and killed in 1896 (Evening Express, 1896). Another collier, John Miles Edwards, was killed by gas and four air in 1898 (The South Wales Daily Post, 1898). Onllwyn was 'famous for its big meetings' of the Welsh Independent congregation (Tarian Y Gweithiwr, 1877). Onllwyn is also at the heart and birthplace of strong ideologies and comradery among the mining communities. A major collier strike sparked in 1898 from Onllwyn and Seven Sisters spread across all collieries in the Merthyr Vale, with the number of striking colliers rising from 2,000 to 60,000 over two months from February 1898 to April 1898. The dispute was finally settled for the six collieries in the anthracite district in May 1898.

1.2 1914-1953

The second edition of the OS map in this area was surveyed between 1914-15 (1:2500) and published in 1919. No other version was drawn until after the World War Two in 1953, but aerial photos were taken by the RAF in the 1940s, providing a record of the landscape in the period just after the War. The map from 1914-15 shows significant changes in the area since the previous OS was drawn. Besides the original Onllwyn Colliery site on the south side of the railway, a sizeable new colliery called Dulais Colliery appeared on the north side, owned by Dulais Colliery Co. Limited until at least 1926 (Kelly's directory of Monmouthshire and South Wales, 1914, 1926). The Cwm Mawr (also known as Dulais Higher) Colliery was labelled as disused on the 1914-15 OS map, but historic photos from around 1916 show that it might still be active then. According to Davies, the Cwm Mawr pit was closed around 1933 (Davies, 2004, p. 95). There were also more industrial buildings at the Onllwyn site. Maes-Marchog Colliery, also named Onllwyn No.3 Colliery (as titled on the

subterranean map), appeared to be back in operation. The subterranean maps from this period were drawn over the 1914-15 OS map, but the exact survey date is unknown. They show the extensive underground area of the collieries under the field between Onllwyn and Maes-Marchog. Two levels of coal seams (4ft and 18ft) were being extracted at this point. Another feature that appeared around this time was the Onllwyn Washery. According to the National Monument Records (NMR), the washery was built in 1932 and re-equipped in the 1950s. Aerial photos show an apparent change in the washery's configuration between 1954 to 1960 (see more on the washery below).

More remarkable changes happened in the village landscape that further illustrated the rapid development of the mining community. Besides the Front and Back Rows, a Dulais Garden housing compound appeared to the southwest of Dulais Colliery along the railway. More housing also appeared in the Onllwyn village, including Khartoum Terrace and Gordon Terrace (described in section 3.3.2 below). Both terraces are visible on the 1914-15 OS Map along the main road (later Wembley Avenue). The school building at Onllwyn was enlarged in 1904. The post office was moved to the south of the main road, giving way to colliery buildings. A reservoir was also built to the south of the Independent Chapel into which the drainage was led. The Independent Chapel in Onllwyn had been rebuilt by 1914 when the map was surveyed. The 1914-15 map was also the first map where the two villages, Dyffryn Cellwen and Banwen, appeared between Onllwyn No.1 and No.3 Collieries. Dyffryn Cellwen is along the road between Onllwyn and Maes-Marchog, whereas Banwen is along the Roman Road leading towards the Coelbren Fort. There were two chapels, a school in Dyffryn Cellwen and another chapel in Banwen (see further descriptions of these facilities below).

After the long interval of the two World Wars, the 1953 version of the post-War National Grid OS map (1:10000) shows significant changes to the area. The Dulais Colliery is recorded as disused, but its remnants were still visible. Aerial photos from 1944, 45, 47, and 54 show that large coal tips were still occupying the site of the Dulais Colliery. The brickworks and the Onllwyn Washery complex appear alongside massive coal tips to the east of the Onllwyn railway bridge, with aerial ropeways transporting coal between the coal tips and the washery and depositing the coal southwards from the washery (Ordnance Survey, 1953).

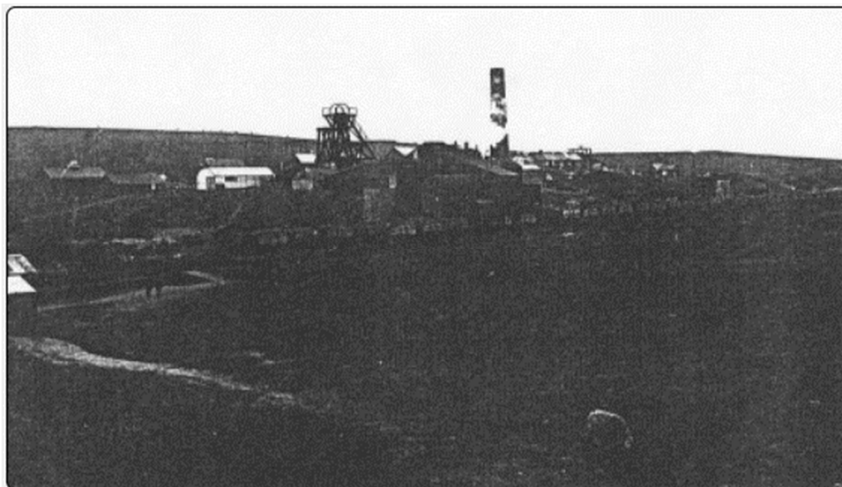


Figure 2 Dulais Higher Colliery (aka Cwm Mawr), Onllwyn. Postcard, 4th August 1916 (Source: [Cwm Dulais Historical Society](#))

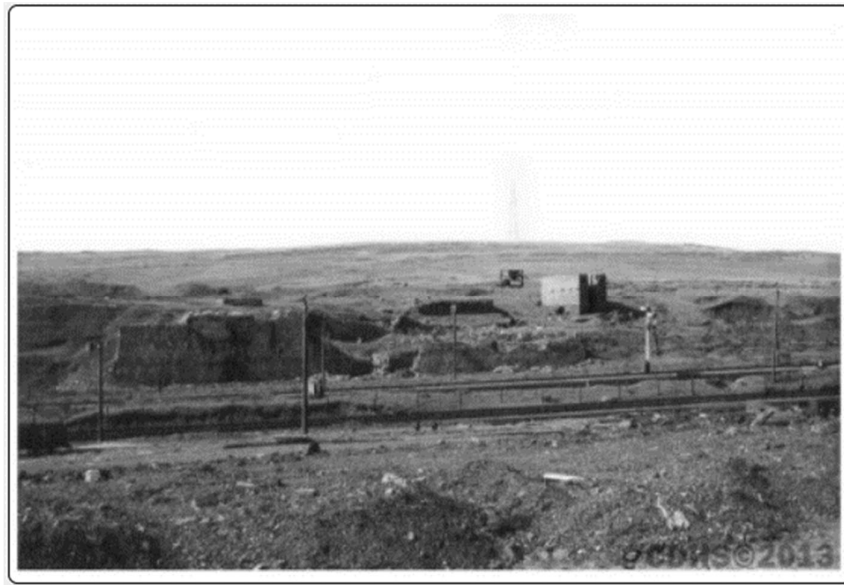


Figure 3 Remains of Cwmmawr Colliery, c. 1962, ref No. 345.046) (Source: [Cwm Dulais Historical Society](#))

2.0 The Remaking of Onllwyn from 1960 to the present

2.1 1960-1980s

The third edition of the OS Map (Post-war National Grid) (1:2500) was surveyed in 1962, with 1:10000 updates in the 1970s (published in 1979, survey date unknown) and 1980s (published in 1988, survey date unknown). The 1960s was a turning point for Onllwyn as the underground mines started to close, though the decline of the collieries and their communities is almost invisible on the 1962 OS map, which shows prominent industrial features. An area of allotment gardens even appeared next to Banwen around this time. On 3rd February 1962, the Onllwyn No.3 Colliery, which employed around 450 people and had more than 90 ponies, was closed. Its closure created a significant rupture in the Onllwyn community. A newspaper article from the *Herald of Wales* in January 1962 interviewed the local residents, who were very pessimistic about the change related to this imminent closure. Some were deeply worried as they had just bought a house in Onllwyn to be close to work, and with the colliery closed, they did not see the possibility of selling it or were worried about how to afford payments on the house. For those interviewed, the main concern was the lack of alternative employment or arrangements for people who might not have been at their prime time due to injuries or old age. A Will Pembridge, who was 49 years old then and had been a miner since he was 14, expressed discontent at having been barred from screening the spoil heaps for coal. Besides those directly employed by the colliery, the community members were worried that other employment and business opportunities would also disappear. A Mrs Kemeys predicted that Onllwyn might soon become a 'ghost town' (*Herald of Wales*, 1962).



Figure 4 Herald of Wales article framed in the Dove Workshops café (Source: Davis, 2023)

This worry was not unwarranted. Despite the numerous tramways, massive coal tips, conveyer belts, and aerial ropeways visible on the 1962 OS map and historic photos characterising the landscape of Onllwyn, the fabric of the village started to fall apart at exactly this time. Even before the closure of Onllwyn No.3 in 1962, Onllwyn's population was already shrinking, a process that actually began in the 1940s. Front Row, one of the two rows of terrace houses built in the 1850s-1860s, was demolished by 1962.¹ The aerial photos from 1977 show that the Back Row was also demolished by then, giving way to a large, new opencast working south of the railway.

According to the interviews with former miners, some people living in the Front and Back Rows were moved to Neath, and they might have found jobs in other traditional collieries, including the Cefn Coed Colliery (see more detail in section 3.3.1 below). Some of the miners from Onllwyn were also transferred to Crynant and Seven Sisters. The Onllwyn Primary School, dating back to the late nineteenth century, was closed in 1962 (or 1964). Aerial photos from 1977 and 1983 show that its footprint was still visible for a long time afterwards, disappearing during landscaping works between 1983-1989.

Considerable changes to infrastructure also occurred in the 1960s. Even though some of the tramways in Onllwyn remained in use for the washery, the brickworks, and the growing opencast mines, parts of the Neath and Brecon Railway were dismantled in the 1960s. As a result, the community lost its railway connections to surrounding areas in the Swansea Valley, which constituted a significant part of the local community's mobility. Despite losing a large part of the social and community fabric, the pubs and chapels still remained for some years beyond 1960s however.

¹ The two rows are still visible on the 1954 aerial photo, but the Front Row had disappeared in the 1962 OS map.

Profound as the changes were, they did not signify the actual end of mining in Onllwyn or elsewhere in the Dulais Valley and nor did they signify an end of coal, but rather a major change in the technology of mining and changing values and flows of coal internationally. This is reflected in the vast areas of opencast workings appearing to the north of Onllwyn and the west of Coelbren during the 1970s. The National Coal Board Executive (later British Coal), based near the old Coal Exchange in Cardiff, led the shift from drift mines and pits requiring manual labour to mechanised open cast mines in the area.

In the 1980s OS map, both areas are marked as 'disused working', and the aerial photos from 1983, 1985, and 1989 show that they were gradually relandscaped. Despite the rise and fall of collieries in the Onllwyn area however, the Washery stayed active. Reequipment and modifications can be seen by comparing aerial photos from 1960, 1977, 1983, 1985, and 1989 (and also see section 3.2.3 below).

2.2 1990s-PRESENT

Onllwyn remained active as a mining area as Celtic Energy took over the washery and the opencast mines in Mynydd y Drum from British Coal in 1995. However, by this time, the labour force in mining was much diminished. The village was hollowed out through demolition and population displacement. While underground, hand-worked mines certainly impacted the landscape below the surface of the valley and led to the formation of prominent slag heaps; it was the opencast mining from the early 1970s that transformed Onllwyn into what Francis (2018, p. 79) describes as '[a] lunar [...] landscape of giant cranes and giant lorries'.

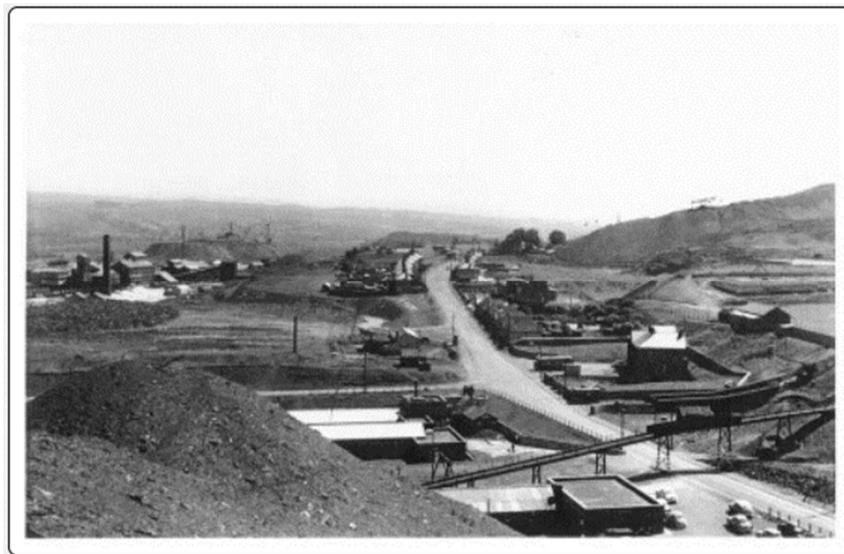


Figure 5 View east from Onllwyn No.1 Colliery tip, c.1960 (Source: [Cwm Dulais Historical Society Archive, ref No. 209.100](#))



Figure 6 View north from the opencast mine in the Drum opencast mine near Onllwyn Chapel, Coelbren in distance, date unknown (Source: [Cwm Dulais Historical Society Archive, ref No. 158.000](#))



Figure 7 Mynydd y Drum, Onllwyn Chapel at the centre with Drum Opencast Mine to the left (Source: [Cwm Dulais Historical Society Archive, ref No.159.100](#))

3.0 Lost Onllwyn

The remaking of Onllwyn from the 1960s to the present has involved major landscaping, ongoing opencast mining, and the steady dismantling of much of the former mining landscape and the village. Today, Onllwyn is little more than a collection of houses strung along a road; only the Welfare Hall testifies to a former social life linked to the mining community.

Following the previous section, this section details some key elements of the lost historic landscape and village. Whereas the history of Onllwyn was described chronologically in section 2, in this section, the focus is on the development, evolution, closure and demolition of each element.

3.1 TRAMROADS AND RAILWAYS

3.1.1 BRECON FOREST TRAMROAD AND THE NEATH AND BRECON RAILWAY

The transportation system was instrumental to the development of the industries in Onllwyn and its connection with the surrounding regions in the Neath and Swansea Valleys, the Brecon Forest, and the ports in Swansea and Port Talbot. Indeed, the development of the industries in the valleys could not have happened without the supporting infrastructure for transportation. All the industrialists invested in either developing the tramroad and railway or owning wharves along the canals and at the ports. The Brecon Forest Tramroad was instrumental in supporting the industries between the Brecon Forest and the docks and wharves on the Swansea Canals and River Tawe at Abercrave and Ystradgynlais. After John Christie's bankruptcy, the tramroad, along with Christie's other industrial enterprises, was passed onto Claypon. As mentioned, Claypon extended the south part from the Drum collieries to Gurnos Wharf.

In 1826, the Dulais Railway was incorporated, which was intended to transport products such as coal, iron, and lime between Ynys-y-Bont (northwest of Onllwyn) and Aberdulais, running parallel along the Dulais River valley. However, it was not built into the Brecon Forest Tramroad system until the Neath and Brecon Railway opened in 1864, forming the part from Aberdulais to Coelbren Junction (Jones, 1979). After Claypon's death in 1859, the Tramroad was passed onto the railway contractor John Dickson (P.R.O.: RAIL 876/11 and P.R.O.: B 3/1091-2, cited in Hugues, 1990, p. 35). Further fuel to the expansion of the industry was created in 1862 with the passing of an Act enabling industrialists in the area to form the Dulais Valley Mineral Railway company. The railway construction from Onllwyn to Brecon proceeded from 1864 to 1867.

A branch line to the collieries in Onllwyn was built in 1838. The branch line traffic increased as the collieries increased their productions, especially when the Onllwyn Ironworks was started in 1844. While the tramroad and railway lines were primarily for freights, passengers sometimes travelled along the railway lines on pedestrian lines or jumped onto the freight waggons to go to shops in Swansea Valley (Hughes, 1990, p. 57). The mineral railways between Onllwyn and Maes-Marchog were expanded substantially during the 1910s to accommodate the expansion of colliery activities in the area (Ordnance Survey, 1918).

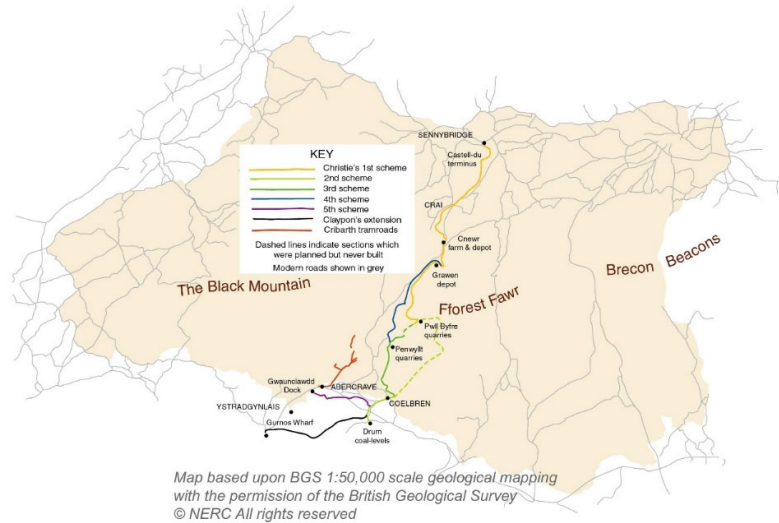


Figure 8 The different phases of the Brecon Forest Tramroad (NERC, 2011, Source: <https://www.fforestfawrgeopark.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/BFT.jpg>)

3.2 INDUSTRY

3.2.1 ONLLWYN NO. 1 (and NO. 2) COLLIERY

Onllwyn No.1 Colliery was located at the heart of the village. On maps from the late nineteenth century, it is marked as 'Onllwyn Pit', but it is the same complex.² As mentioned in the overview above, the Onllwyn Colliery started around 1835 following Claypon's attempt to find an alternative coal supply on Capel Hanbury Leigh's land at Onllwyn after he failed to sustain the Drum Colliery. The Onllwyn Colliery prospered around the 1840s after John Williams and John Jones took over the lease. It remained active until the 1960s, with some pauses during the Second World War. At least eight coal levels are recorded on the historic OS maps, and underground maps reveal a complex and extensive network of tunnels. The Onllwyn Colliery was initially connected to the Brecon Forest Tramroad and later to the Neath and Brecon Railway via several incline panes and branch lines (see the list and their NMR records in the table below).

In the 1876 OS Map, the colliery site appears to have various industrial features such as old coal pits, old coal drifts, old coal levels, and old quarries. A branch line connected the 'Onllwyn Pit' with the Neath and Brecon Railway, and another branch line connected from Onllwyn Station to Maes-Marchog Colliery. At this point, there were limited built features on the site, except for a smithy (likely to have been left from previous furnaces), a limekiln, and some air shafts. The OS Map updated in 1896-97 shows some significant changes in the arrangement of the tramways connected with the Neath and Brecon Railway. There was likely an engine house on site. The OS Maps from 1903 did not differ significantly from the previous version, but the 2nd edition from 1914-15 shows

² There is also a Onllwyn No.2 Colliery, of which some community members still have memory, but not a lot of information can be found about it. Its exact location is likely to be the area north of the Onllwyn Washery.

exponential development in the 1910s, when the colliery and its communities expanded. There was an engine house in the nearby Dulais Colliery and a reservoir south of the village. The extent of the colliery is demonstrated even more by the subterranean maps from around the 1920s. It shows the extensive underground drifts sprawling across the field south of Onllwyn Village and meeting the underground drifts of Onllwyn No.3 Colliery. Based on these subterranean maps, at least two coal seams (18 feet seam and 4 feet seam) were active at the time. Evans & Bevan was recorded as a colliery owner in Onllwyn in 1914 (Kelly's directory of Monmouthshire and South Wales 1914).

Aerial photos from the 1940s and the 1953 and 1962 OS map shows massive coal tips and some reconfiguration on the Onllwyn No.1 site above ground (see Aerial Photos and Historic Maps folders). They also show that the Washery and Brickworks were already in place by then (see more on them in section 3.2.3 and section 3.2.5 below). Architectural drawings of the Onllwyn No.1 pithead bath from 1954, designed by the divisional chief architect of the National Coal Board (NCB), W.M. Traylor, suggest that the pithead bath was added or reconstructed at this time (Traylor 1954). Its boiler was designed by Cochran & Co. Annan, Ltd (Cochran & Co. Annan, Ltd. 1954). There is nothing suggestive in the 1962 map that the underground colliery at Onllwyn No.1 would be closed just two years later in 1964.

NPRN	Name	Type Of Site	Description on NMR
80145	Onllwyn Colliery West Incline	Inclined Plane	Railway incline formation, upper third survives at a gradient of 1 in 8.
80159	Onllwyn Colliery Eastern Incline	Inclined Plane	Eastern inclined-plane from the Brecon Forest Tramroad mainline (Claypon's Extension) down to the eastern part of Onllwyn colliery. Probably built in the 1830s but now removed for opencast coal-mining and since relandscaped. In September 1840 Joseph Claypon, owner of the Brecon Forest Tramroad, had a locomotive designed at the Neath Abbey Ironworks with a liftable adhesion drum that seem likely to have been designed to enable the locomotive to traverse this incline and take coal up towards the Swansea Canal. Built after 1832-34 by the engineer William Kirkhouse as part of the Claypon's Extension Tramroad of the Brecon Forest Tramroad from the Swansea Canal at Gurnos and the Ynyscedwyn Ironworks over Mynydd y Drum to the Brecon Forest Tramroad near Onllwyn. The engine itself was made at the Neath Abbey Ironworks but has now gone although part of its cylinder base may lie buried. The incline went out of use in the 1860s and most of it survives as an earthwork. (Hughes, 1990)
80154; 80155; 80157; 80158	Onllwyn Colliery, Coal Level 2, 3, 4 & 5	Tunnel	Nineteenth-century coal mining tunnel shown on the first edition 1:2,500 Ordnance Survey map.
80166	Onllwyn Colliery Level 6	Level	Nineteenth-century coal-level whose opening now lies under the upper, hillside, bank of Onllwyn Football Club.

80167	Onllwyn Colliery Level 7	Tunnel	A nineteenth-century colliery tunnel entrance later overlain by a public road and houses.
80168	Onllwyn Colliery Level 8	Tunnel	Nineteenth-century colliery tunnel whose site has been obscured by later tipping.
80162	Onllwyn Colliery Shaft	Shaft	Nineteenth-century shaft site, now under part of the Onllwyn Washery apron.
80169	Onllwyn Colliery Shaft 2	Shaft	Nineteenth-century coal shaft later built over by gardens of an adjoining terrace.
80161	Onllwyn Colliery Drift	Tunnel	This started as an early nineteenth-century colliery tunnel but by the 1980s all that was visible on site was encased in twentieth-century mine ventilation apparatus. The condition of the tunnel is unknown.
80164	River Dulais Bridge, Onllwyn	Railway Bridge	Mid or early nineteenth-century bridge carrying the eastern Brecon Forest Tramroad branch to the Onllwyn Colliery. Under the line of the later road bridge, presumed largely destroyed as no surface remains are visible.
80160	River Dulais Bridge	Railway Bridge	Railway underbridge on the eastern Brecon Forest Tramroad branch to Onllwyn Colliery, carrying the line over the River Dulais. There are no visible remains.



Figure 9 Onllwyn No. 1 subterranean map, early twentieth century (Source: West Glamorgan Archive Service, ref D/D PRO/ HSE 82; photo source: Juliet Davis)

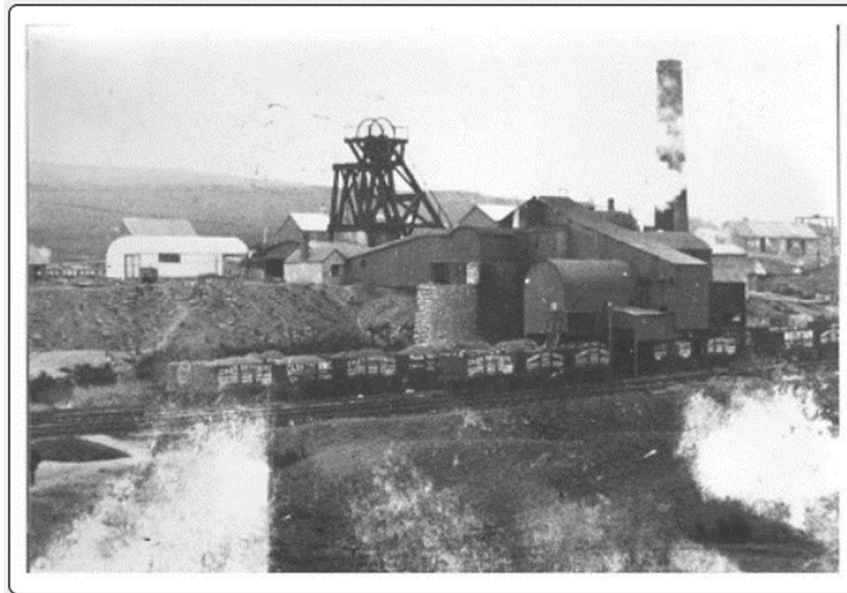


Figure 10 Onllwyn, Cwmmawr Colliery, Neath and Brecon railway and railway wagons labelled 'Dulais Anthracite', 'Glyncorrwg', and 'Mountain'. Date unknown (Source: [Cwm Dulais Historical Society Archive, ref No. 340.816](#))

3.2.2 ONLLWYN NO.3 COLLIERY (MAES-MARCHOG COLLIERY/BANWEN COLLIERY)

The Maes-Marchog Colliery, later known as Onllwyn No.3 Colliery, is present on the 1st edition of OS map, surveyed in 1876. A branch line (mineral railway) connected Onllwyn villages and Maes-Marchog. The Banwen village was not yet present, but the colliery was near the Banwen Pyrddin ('river' or 'waterfall'). The colliery did not have a lot of above-ground features at this stage. A few coal levels, airshafts, a chimney, and a smithy were marked on the OS map, as well as some quarries nearby. These features did not change much in the 1896-97 and 1903 OS maps, but Maes-Marchog Colliery was marked as 'disused' in these two versions. They also show that parts of the tramway (mineral railway) closer to the colliery had been dismantled.

As mentioned in previous sections, the 2nd Edition OS map surveyed in 1914-15 showed dramatic changes in the entire Onllwyn area, including the emergence of Dyffryn Cellwen and Banwen. The expansion of the mining settlement was certainly partly linked to the reactivation of Maes-Marchog Colliery, appearing as an established colliery complex with various built features (possibly including an engine house) and a complex network of tramways. The tramways were reconnected again to the mineral railway connecting Maes-Marchog and Onllwyn. The subterranean map from this period named the Maes-Marchog Colliery Onllwyn No.3 Colliery. It also showed that its underground drifts were adjacent to those of Onllwyn No.1. The 1953 and 1962 OS maps show continuous development and reconfiguration of the colliery, including the appearance of a massive coal tip to the east of the tramway. Architectural drawings from 1953 show that the Nottingham office of Young Austen & Young Limited designed the pithead bath of Onllwyn No.3. The No.3 Colliery was closed in 1962, but just as many other collieries in the area, the marks it left on the landscape, including the tramways, the colliery buildings, and the massive coal tips, remained characteristics of the place long after the colliery's closure, as can be seen from the aerial photos taken in 1983 and 1985. An opencast working can also be seen south of Banwen. According to local residents, after the colliery closure, the pithead bath was used by the Banwen Pony Club and later as an aluminium foundry (Focus

Group 1 – see below). Later still, it was used for offices by the National Coal Board and donated to the DOVE Workshop in 1986.

3.2.3 ONLLWYN COAL WASHERY

The washery is part of the fabric of ‘lost Onllwyn’ as it is an infrastructure that has been remade over time, and the last iteration of it will disappear during 2023. A coal washery is a plant that cleans mined coal of soil and rock, breaks and sorts it into pieces of similar size, stockpiles the material ready for transport, and loads it into vehicles for distribution. Archival records of the Onllwyn Coal Washery are primarily stored in Aberystwyth within the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales collection (Wright, 1993, Malaws, 2010). They include extensive aerial photographs from the 1930s to the 1990s, ground-level colour photographs and descriptive notes from the 1990s.

A washery, processing and distribution centre at Onllwyn was first built to service local drift mines in 1932 by Evans & Bevan Ltd. This family firm controlled large areas of coal reserves in the Dulais Valley from the 1870s. It was altered in 1950 during nationalisation by the National Coal Board, which took over the Onllwyn collieries in 1947. It again received an overhaul in 1998 by Celtic Energy which bought British Coal’s opencast operations in 1995. At the time, it was the last gravity-worked example of a coal washery in the country.

Photographs of the 1950s washery by Peter Wakelin from the early 1990s reveal a complex group of buildings (Wakelin, 1992). The complex was steel framed, its various facades formed of brick set between the structural elements, and its rooves a mix of corrugated metal and plastic. The whole was a hodgepodge of industrial spaces, manifesting in the aerial photographs as a collection of double-pitched rooves jammed together. Surrounding the main complex were a series of one-storey brick huts (remnants of which remained in 2022). Some of these, as marked on plans, were surveyor’s offices. The main complex bridged the railway tracks – 5 lines altogether – enabling the washed and graded coal to be loaded onto wagons and transported around the site. Many buildings were interconnected with chutes that sailed over the pitched rooves transporting coal to different plant sections and the mineral railway line. A massive hopper on the north side was presumably associated with coal washing.

Notes based on an interview with the site manager Frank Stagg in 1993 suggest that 30% of the coal produced then was for the domestic anthracite market while 70% was used in industry. The complex could produce 14,000 tons of coal a week. Coal exports were shipped from Swansea, Neath Abbey, and Briton Ferry to destinations across Europe.

The reconstruction of the washery in the 1990s was done to enable the facility to process the output of all of Celtic Energy’s sites, including the vast Nant Helen opencast mine north of Onllwyn. The new plant, which included a Heavy Media Drum Separator for coal greater than 22 mm and Heavy Media cyclones for small coal, could operate up to 24 hours per day, processing far more coal than previously - up to 26,000 tonnes of coal per week at its peak. The plant produced five different sizes of coal in each of three different coal qualities: Black Diamond, Premium and Economy. The Froth Flotation Plant at Onllwyn was constructed in 2005 to recover fine coal from washery slurry, which

had until then been treated as discard. The main customers for the coal produced here were the power station at Aberthaw and the Corus steelworks (later Tata) at Port Talbot (Malaws, 2010).

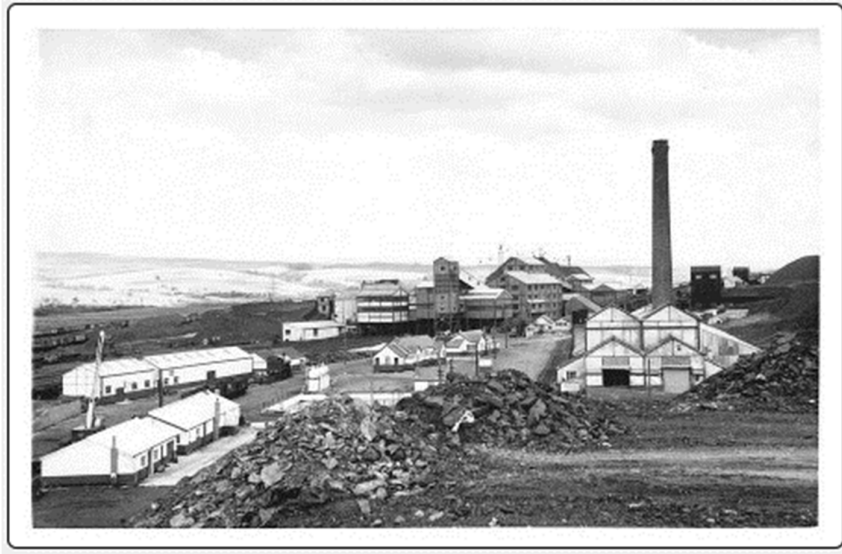


Figure 11 Onllwyn Washery and Brickworks c. 1960 (Source: [Cwm Dulais Historical Society](#))



Figure 12 Aerial photo of the washery (RCHMW, 1957)



Figure 13 Onllwyn Central Washery staff, 1936 (Source: [Cwm Dulais Historical Society](#))



Figure 14 Onllwyn Washery, c. 1992 (Source: [Cwm Dulais Historical Society](#))

3.2.4 ONLLWYN IRONWORKS

The Onllwyn Ironworks was first constructed around 1844 by the industrialist John Williams who leased land in the area from 1842 and also controlled the Onllwyn collieries at this time (Davies, 2002, p. 74). The venture was initially unsuccessful as described in section 1.1 above. When the works were taken over in 1859 by industrialist William Parsons, only one furnace was in blast. He modified the works and was able to run two furnaces concurrently between 1862-1864. Visible on maps, the ironworks site included a smithy, an ironworks shop, a post office, two furnaces and

calcinating lime kilns. In 1864, the venture was taken over by the Onllwyn Iron and Coal Company but closed in 1866.

Aerial photos suggest that most of what was left of the furnaces, ruined by the 1880s, was removed by opencast operations during the 1970s. The early nineteenth-century Brecon Forest Tramroad included a branch to the Onllwyn Ironwork. After the closure of the works and as the landscape was reshaped by mining activities, this was buried by the Khartoum Tip from the Onllwyn Colliery. This tip, once prominent in the landscape locally, has itself now disappeared.

3.2.5 ONLLWYN BRICKWORKS

Not a lot of information is available on the Brickworks. It was built after 1914 by Evans & Bevan Ltd. and became part of the National Coal Board's holdings, which included Onllwyn No. 1 and the Washery, in 1947. The clay used in the brickworks was locally quarried, and several types of bricks bearing the Onllwyn stamp were manufactured. It likely closed in the 1970s after the closure of the mine. Comparing the 1962 OS map and the 1977 aerial photo shows that the building for the Brickworks was demolished between these dates. The site was used as a parking lot after that.

3.2.6 COAL TIPS

By 1962, as shown on the OS maps, the scale of excavations below ground at Onllwyn no.1 and no.2 mines had transformed the landscape above ground, producing high mounds of slag and spoil. The scale and prominence of these tips within the localised landscape of the village are also apparent in historical photographs – the photograph of the Onllwyn No. 1 spoil/refuse tip from Wembley Avenue in Section 3.3 below, for example. This tip lay just to the north of the school, chillingly recalling that the Aberfan disaster in 1966 resulted from the collapse of an unstable coal tip into a primary school that lay beside it. A second large tip linked to Onllwyn no.1 rose between Khartoum and Gordon terrace, extending south into the hillside (with a tramway set along it to transport the waste). A little further along Wembley Avenue to the east was the 'Washery Spoil Tip' (Evans, 2006, p. 84). An overhead gantry which crossed the road above Wembley Avenue transported basket loads of refuse to the tip.

The aerial ropes and bundles of coal swinging over the tips would have been a distinctive and once noisy feature of the local landscape. This came across in several accounts of those interviewed in this research. Asked to describe the most significant features of the local landscape now lost, one of the three men involved in the focus group held on 10th February 2023 highlighted the tips, commenting that:

'[One] thing that was around here which has pretty much all gone now is tips. Just here [pointing at maps] there were two very large tips... I don't know, 300/ 400 feet high. And they were reclaimed and flattened out. And then, next to the cemetery in Dyffryn Cellwen there was another large tip there, and that's been all grassed over. So, it's hard now to tell where they were...' (Focus Group 1, 35 mins)

The tips often contained sizeable lumps of coal caught accidentally amid the refuse. Thus, they were a source of rich pickings for local families in the Interwar years. As the same man explained, local

people *'would, of a weekend, go and pick coal off the tips'* because the allowance given by Evans & Bevan Ltd *'wasn't enough to sustain a family.'*

Following the Aberfan disaster, tips across South Wales were flattened out to avoid anything similar happening elsewhere (Francis, 2008, p. 1). The reclamation of the tips, suggested by interviewees, was a positive thing, leading to a cleaner and more rural environment. As one interviewee put it, after a time the river, which had been black, *'started running clear, fresh water [though] it took a long, long time'* (Interview 2, 1 hr 31 mins) What was less appreciated was the lack of care sensed in how the topography was formed, paying insufficient attention to views, connections, and levels. In addition, there appear to have been issues with how the ground itself was restored in the wake of excavation, the combination of thin topsoil and impenetrable slag leading to the stunting of new trees.

3.3 HOUSING

3.3.1 Y TAI MELIN - FRONT ROW/ BACK ROW

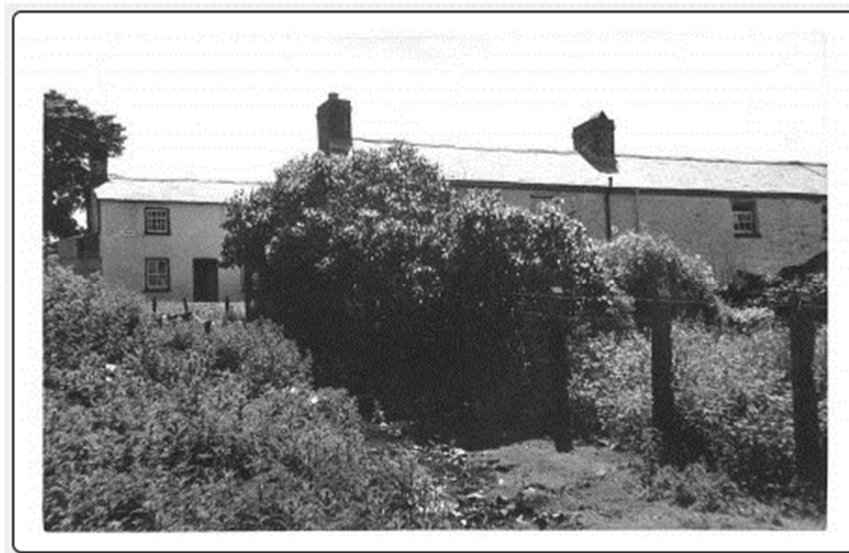


Figure 15 Front and Back Row, Onllwyn (Source: [Cwm Dulais Historical Society](#))

The Front and Back Rows of housing, known locally as Y Tai Melin (The Yellow Houses) in Welsh, was built between 1851-1861. They were commissioned by John Williams, who took over the Onllwyn Collieries in 1840 and was the driving force behind the Ironworks in Onllwyn from around 1844 (as described above) (Davies, 2002, p. 74). They reflected the need for housing for colliery and ironwork workers and their families. Each row was a terrace of small double-fronted, two-storey houses for iron workers. They did not have indoor toilets, bathrooms or running water but were equipped with ovens cast at the local ironworks. The Front Row was built into the hillside, so the houses on that side of the street did not have back doors but front gardens (commonly used for growing food). An airshaft was located in one of Front Row gardens, according to the 1876 OS map, marking the location of a drift mine passing underneath.

One of the houses in Front Row was a doctor's surgery in the early twentieth century (Davies, 2002, p. 74). Back Row's gardens extended in the other direction, from the rear of the houses. Historic maps reveal that the gardens were dotted with extensions or outhouses. The name 'Yellow Houses' refers to the colour of the sulphur-containing, waterproof clay from 'up the mountain' used to render the front facades (Davis/ Tam Interview 2, February 2023). Both rows are visible on the 1876 OS map through to the 1953 OS map.

The 1962 edition of the Post-War National Grid 1:2500 map shows that the Front Row had been demolished by then – a response to rising housing standards, the decline of the old houses, and the closing of the Onllwyn No. 1 Colliery. The Back Row still remained for another decade or so, though likely unoccupied based on historic photos from the early 1960s. RAF aerial photos from 1977 show that the Back Row had also been demolished, giving way to the opencast working south of the railway. As some colliery workers were moved down the valley to Cefn Coed, some residents were rehoused in council housing in Neath during the 1960s (Focus Group 1, 50 minutes).

3.3.2 KHARTOUM TERRACE AND GORDON TERRACE



Figure 16 Khartoum Terrace (Source: [Cwm Dulais Historical Society](#))

With the rise of collieries in the early twentieth century in the Onllwyn area (potentially around the start of the First World War in 1914), including the emergence of Dulais Colliery, the expansion of Onllwyn No.1 Colliery, and the revival of the Maes-Marchog Colliery (Onllwyn No.3), there was again a growing demand for housing. In Onllwyn village, this demand led to the erection of two rows of corrugated iron houses (manufactured by a London firm of unknown name) by the Evans & Bevan company that owned the Onllwyn No. 1 Colliery. They were named Gordon Terrace and Khartoum Terrace after Major-General Charles George Gordon (1833-1885)³. These names themselves speak to the interconnections between coal, the mining communities of South Wales, and the wealth generated to expand, power, and defend the boundaries of the British Empire.

³ General Gordon was sometimes referred to as 'Chinese Gordon' or 'of Khartoum', who led military campaigns across various fields of conflict for Britain including the Crimean War of 1853-1856, the so-called 'Taiping Rebellion' of 1850-1864, and the 1880s' Siege of Khartoum' during the Sudan Wars.

Each row comprised ten bungalow houses. Until nationalisation, these were ‘company houses’ owned by Evans & Bevan Ltd, as were ‘ninety-nine per cent of the houses at the top end of the Dulais Valley’ according to Evans (2012, loc 465). Many of the houses were both homes and cottage industries. For example, Gordon Terrace included a tuck shop or barber, a newsagent, and a post office that operated out of residents’ parlours or front rooms. The families that ran these businesses often did so on a part-time basis, combining them with shifts in the mine. Though the name of the firm that manufactured these early examples of prefabricated housing is unknown, it is thought that it exported them to rapidly growing industrial settlements, particularly mining areas, across the British Empire (Evans, 2012, loc 460).

As described by George Evans, each house was constructed using 3x4” hardwood frames, clad in corrugated iron sheeting and lined internally using tongue-and-groove pine boards. Unusually for housing of the period, the houses were insulated, apparently using horsehair. For Evans, who lived in one of the houses, it was ‘the most comfortable house I have ever lived in’ (2012, loc 460). They were heated using a ‘Dover’ stove that burnt anthracite coal day and night. Each mine worker employed by Evans & Bevan Ltd. and living in a company-owned house was entitled to a coal ration per year.

The tin houses were demolished in the early 1960s by contractors employed by the National Coal Board – about the same time as the Yellow Houses (Evans, 2012, loc 991)- and replaced by modern flats and houses that remain to the present day (Davies, 2002, p. 75). As with the Yellow Houses, some residents were rehoused in new council housing in Neath. ‘Tin Town’ housing in neighbouring villages, Dulais Gardens at the edge of Onllwyn village, for example, was replaced with modern housing at the same time. Semi-detached houses that also remain to this day on Wembley Avenue were built during the 1920s. As with ‘Gordon’ and ‘Khartoum’, the street’s name has imperial connotations, commemorating the British Empire Exhibition held at Wembley in 1924.

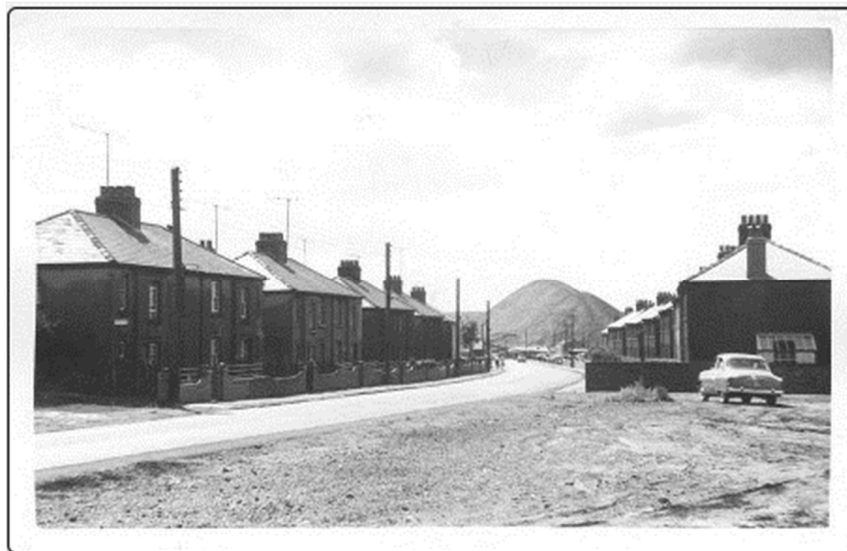


Figure 17 Wembley Avenue and the Onllwyn No. 1 Colliery Tip (Source: [Cwm Dulais Historical Society](#))

Many of those interviewed as part of this research remembered the tin houses. One man recalled the freestanding tin hut at the end of Gordon Terrace, just before the Welfare Hall, which was ‘green in colour. It was a little tuck shop where you could go in and buy sweets before the cinema. In the

back, through the curtain, was the barber's shop.' This shop indeed belonged to 'Thomas the Barber', skilled in the art of short back-and-side haircuts (Davies, 2004, p. 89).

The Cwm Dulais Historical Society collected photos of the houses as they were being demolished, providing a record of early prefabricated house construction methods. According to some of those interviewed, the houses were demolished because of the presence of asbestos sheeting, though it was unclear where this was. With the disappearance of the terraces, Onllwyn lost not only housing and residents but also the small-scale, independent enterprises that families often managed alongside mining work, which were part of the independence and economy of village life.

3.4 SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURES

'This village, well in fact I would say the Valley, had everything. It had swimming pools, it had sports grounds, it had tennis courts, cinemas, snooker halls. It had everything. But at one time, see, the miners used to pay 2 shillings a week out of their pay into a kitty that was to keep sports facilities going. Once the colliery went, the money dried up and everything went.' (Focus Group 1, 1.13 minutes)

Accompanying and tied to the loss of industry has been the disappearance of a wide range of facilities and services that were part of the fabric of Onllwyn and other villages in the South Wales Valleys until the 1960s.

3.4.1 CHAPELS IN ONLLWYN, DYFFRYN CELLWEN, AND BANWEN

Welsh nonconformist chapels were important elements of the industrial landscape across Wales (Rees, 1975). Across Onllwyn, Dyffryn Cellwen, and Banwen, numerous chapels and mission halls were developed from the mid-nineteenth century until the 1930s. Besides providing spaces for worship, they were vital to the organisation of social life.

Onllwyn Chapel/ Independent Chapel

The Independent Chapel in Onllwyn, Glamorgan (later West Glamorgan) began in 1842 when John Williams leased land for his ironworks and mining operations. He commissioned a builder, John Thomas of Liverpool, to construct a chapel in 1846, shortly before Front and Back Row (as described above). According to a chapel member at the time of its closure (1992), Sam Francis, the chapel enabled the 'religious life of the settlement to continue in a goodly fashion' at a time of rapid growth and change. The Old Chapel at Onllwyn appointed its first minister in 1848.

In 1907, the congregation decided to build a larger chapel building as the population had outgrown the old one. The new chapel would accommodate a congregation of 650 people. This was a time when attendance at chapel was part and parcel of everyday life. The chapel and accompanying vestry were designed by the architect George William Beddoe Rees. Rees was a prominent Welsh architect (and nonconformist) active around this time (RIBA, 2001). Born in 1876, Rees began his career in architecture as a builder, apprenticed to his father Isaac Rees from 1892-96. Following his

qualification as an architect in 1902, he specialised in church buildings and was particularly active in this area in Cardiff.

The Onllwyn chapel was designed in late Gothic style and was reported in a newspaper article from the time to mark 'a great advance in the design and arrangement of Welsh Nonconformist chapels.' The use of the late Gothic style reflected a wider transition in Welsh Congregational Chapel design across the industrial landscape in Wales from the Italianate style to the Neo-Gothic style in the later part of the nineteenth century.

The chapel was built by the Cardiff-based firm Turner & Sons Ltd. Turner & Sons was a successful construction firm active from 1885 and survived up until 1991. Under its founding directors Ephraim Turner, James Turner and WH Turner, it was responsible for the construction of a range of prominent buildings in Cardiff, including the City Hall, the Technical College (later the Bute Building, home to the Welsh School of Architecture), the Law Courts, the former Glamorgan County Hall, the Cardiff Royal Infirmary and the General Post Office.⁴ The chapel was built using local stone, with dressed bath stone for decorative features, edgings and details. The foundation stone for the new chapel was laid in July 1909 (The Cardiff Times, 1909), and the new Capel yr Onllwyn opened in March 1910. Along with the new chapel, a new school building with a suite of classrooms, minister's rooms, and a kitchen were provided. The chapel building was 'of local stone, faced with blue Pennant stone shoddy facing and Bath stone dressings', railings were 'of selected pitch pine' (The Cambrian, 1910).

According to local people, the chapel was '*a way of life*', and sometimes the chaplain of the chapel was also the leader of the local branch of NUM (Focus Group 1). However, due to the dwindling population, money was no longer available to maintain it. As a result, it began to fall into disrepair, which seems to have happened from the late 1950s onwards (Interview 3). The chapel's last permanent minister left in 1962, and the chapel was fully closed in 1992, the last service being held on Palm Sunday of that year (Davies, 2004). The decision to demolish it then was based on significant levels of disrepair due to theft, water ingress, dampness and rot. On the other hand, the demolition was also the outward and material sign of traditions falling apart, including the formation of the chapel choir and the many activities and events associated with the religious calendar – a marker of the end of a time '*when religion was part of your life*' (Focus Group 1, 52 mins).

⁴ Photographic records of these buildings exist and are held in a collection devoted to 'E Turner & Sons Limited, Builders and Contractors, Cardiff' at the Glamorgan Archives, reference D1079



Figure 18 Old Onllwyn Chapel – Capel Yr Onllwyn (Source: West Glamorgan Archive Service (Ref: GB 216 D/D Ind 10/6))

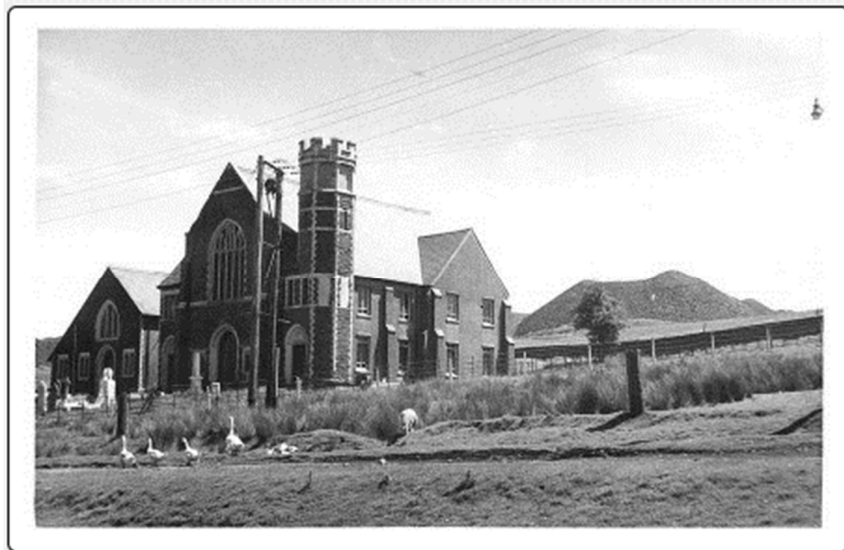


Figure 19 Geese in front of Onllwyn Chapel and the 1st Onllwyn tip behind, c. 1960 (Source: [Cwm Dulais Historical Society](#))

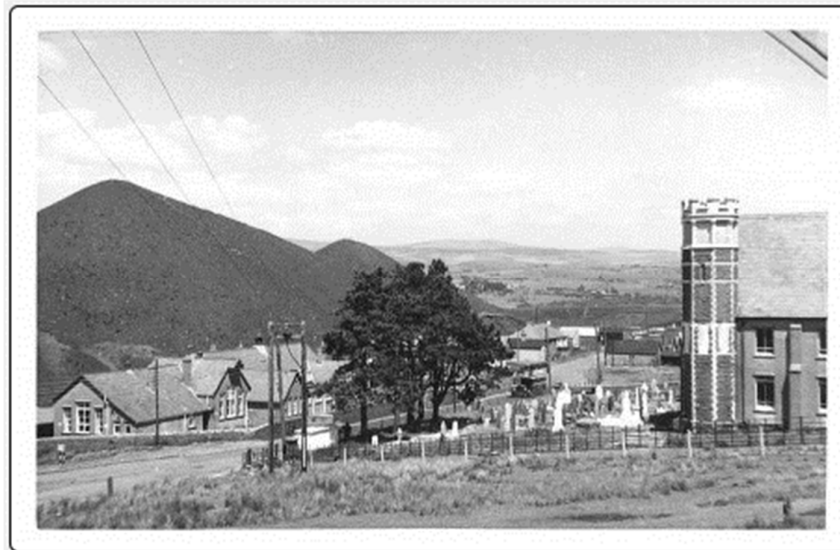


Figure 20 View of Onllwyn No. 1 colliery tip, Onllwyn Chapel and Khartoum Terrace (Source: [Cwm Dulais Historical Society](#))

Besides the Onllwyn Chapel, there were some other chapels nearby:

Calfaria Baptist Chapel, Main Road, Dyffryn Cellwen first appears on the 1918-1921 3rd edition Ordnance Survey County Series map. It last appears on the 1970s Post-War National Grid 1:10000 map.

Siloh Calvinistic Methodist Chapel, Onllwyn Road, Onllwyn first appears on the 1918-1921 3rd edition Ordnance Survey County Series map in Dulais Garden. It last appears on the 1953 OS map. It was demolished by 2000, according to the National Monuments Record (NMR).

Noddfa Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, Main Road, Dyffryn Cellwen first appears on the 1918-1921 3rd edition Ordnance Survey County Series map. The NMR states that the chapel was built during the early nineteenth century ‘in the Simple Round-Headed style with a gable entry plan’ that characterised chapels of the period. However, it seems unlikely that it was built then because Dyffryn Cellwen only started appearing from the 1910s onwards.

St David’s Church, Dyffryn Cellwen was built on the Main Road between Dyffryn Cellwen and Banwen in 1925 by Evans & Bevan and dedicated to Welsh patron saint St David (Kelly’s directory of Monmouthshire and South Wales, 1926). It is a tin church, a ‘rectangular corrugated iron structure with an asymmetrical pitched roof, a gable porch on the northwest gable and a lean-to extension on the southeast gable’ (Leighton, RCAHMW, 2015). Unlike many others, it still stands at the time of writing. This owes to the Washery which supported it through its ‘Liaison Funding.’

Capel Bryn Seion (Independent Chapel), Dyffryn Cellwen was a relatively late arrival to the chapel scene in the locality. Built in 1933, it absorbed the overspill congregation from the Onllwyn Chapel. However, it had closed by 1967, highlighting the speed at which religious practices and chapel life

declined in the mid-twentieth century.⁵ Its closure coincided with the rapid closure of many collieries in the Dulais Valley, helping to reveal the beginnings of de-industrialisation as a time of cultural as well as economic upheaval. The chapel was converted to housing in 1988.



Figure 21 Onllwyn Chapel before demolition. Note the tower to the side had already been demolished at this time (Source: [Cwm Dulais Historical Society](#))

3.4.2 ONLLWYN COUNTY PRIMARY SCHOOL

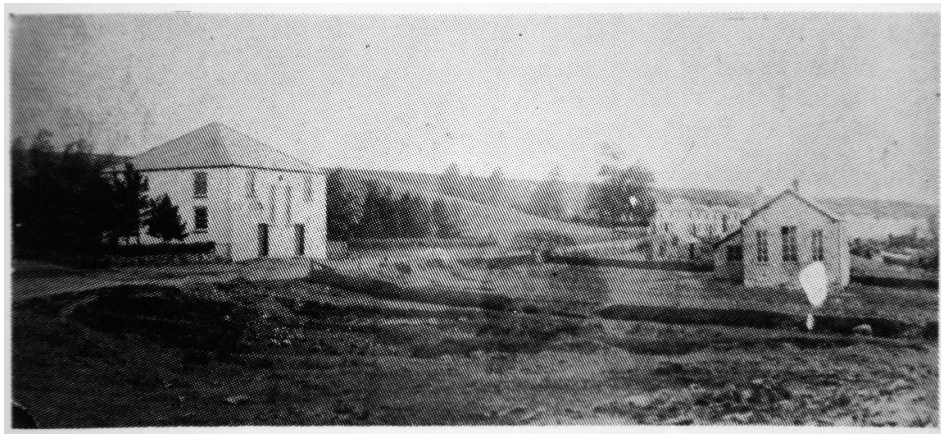


Figure 22 The Onllwyn Chapel c. 1900 (Source: Francis, 1994)

An infant school is marked at the west end of the housing on the 1876 OS map, though no buildings are recorded. It has been hypothesised that, prior to the construction of the school, a smaller school was nestled at the west end of the houses in Back Row (Hughes, 1990). The new infant school for 80 children (an average of 55 attendings) was established in 1893, opposite the Onllwyn Chapel, which can be seen on the 1896-97 OS map (Kelly's directory of Monmouthshire and South Wales,

⁵ Records of Capel Bryn Seion, Dyffryn Cellwen are available here:
<<https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/archives/4e27fc8e-b78d-373a-bb98-89fcc4e0ce2c>>

1895). The school had just two classrooms which provided for the education of infants in their first two years of primary school (Evans, 1977). Afterwards, the children went on to the primary school in Coelbren (across the common from Onllwyn) or Seven Sisters. Most children lived in Gordon Terrace, Khartoum Terrace, Front Row and Back Row at the turn of the century.

The Onllwyn School (mixed & infants) was enlarged in 1904 for 282 children (Kelly's directory of Monmouthshire and South Wales, 1914). However, numbers began to decline soon after the Second World War (Evans, 1977). According to interviewees of this research, the real demise of the school came with the dispersal of the population from Front Row and Back Row (Focus Group 1). It closed in 1962 and was finally demolished in 1964, the year that Onllwyn No. 1 closed.



Figure 23 Opening of a new wing at Onllwyn school (Source: [Cwm Dulais Historical Society](#))



Figure 24 Onllwyn School, Infants' class, 1957 (Source: [Cwm Dulais Historical Society](#))



Figure 25 Onllwyn School drawing (Source: Lui Tam)

3.4.3 PUBLIC HOUSES

All those interviewed in this research conveyed the sense that local pubs were places for the community, as much as the chapels and community halls were. There were two pubs in the village – ‘The Slope’ or Halfway Inn and the Onllwyn Inn – both were features of the local landscape through much of the twentieth century. Before the nationalisation of the Onllwyn collieries by the National Coal Board, both pubs were owned by mine-owning Evans & Bevan Ltd. (likely from 1910). They were lively places and a focus for music and entertainments as well as drinking, eating and socialising.

Halfway Inn (PH)

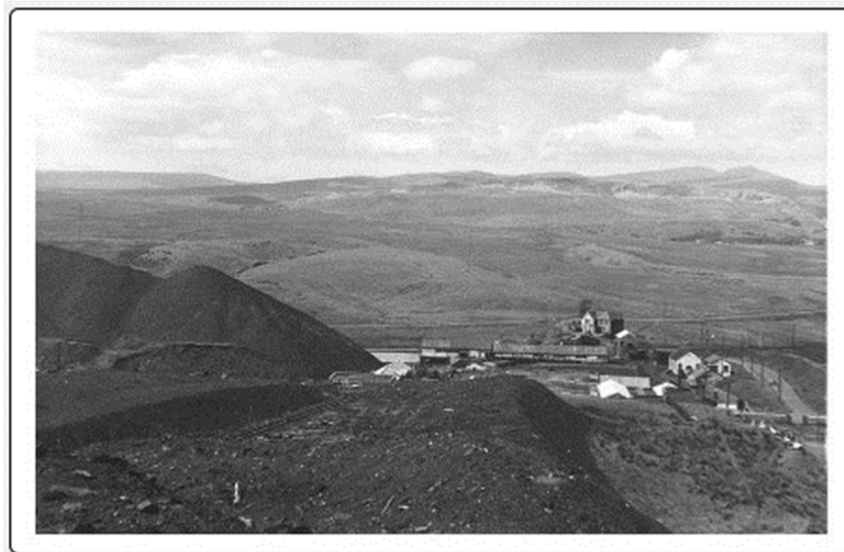


Figure 26 Onllwyn No. 1 Colliery and Halfway Inn ('The Slope') from Onllwyn No. 1 tip (Source: [Cwm Dulais Historical Society](#))

The Halfway Inn (pub), located just north of the Onllwyn railway station next to the railway bridge, was developed around 1911-1913 on the site of an earlier establishment called 'Halfway House'. The earlier building was an old farmhouse marked on the Welsh Tithe Map covering Onllwyn from 1841 when it lay close to the early Drum Colliery. Sometime in the 1860s, the owners applied for a licence to sell alcohol there, serving the miners as they left the colliery at the end of the working day.

It was referred to as 'The Slope' by local people because it was positioned on an upward rise from the village. According to Cwm Dulais Historical Society's records, the Halfway Inn was closed in April 1973 and converted into flats. It was run by the same family from 1863 until its closure. Aerial photos show that the building was demolished between 1985-89.

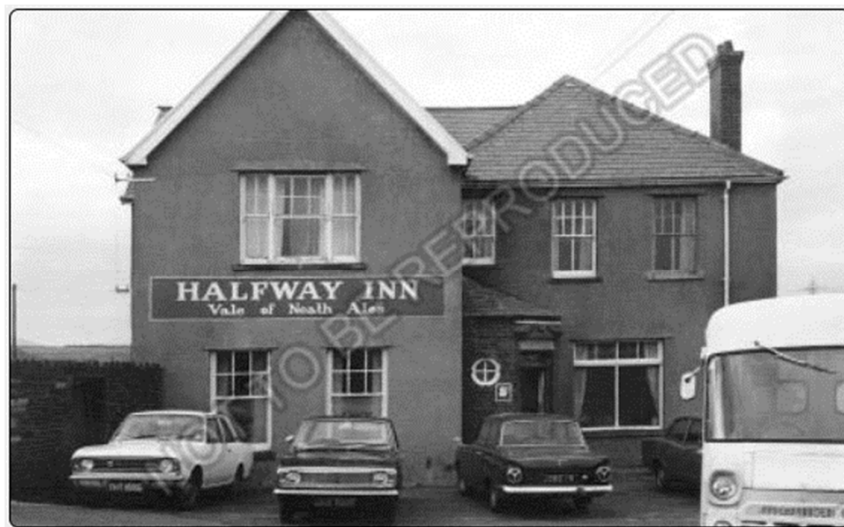


Figure 27 Halfway Inn ('The Slope') closed April 1973 (Source: [Cwm Dulais Historical Society](#))

Onllwyn Inn (PH)

The Onllwyn Inn, as seen in historic photos, was developed around the 1910s, a long, plain, austere two-storey Edwardian building with a central, slightly projecting, gabled section marking the entrance. The building replaced an earlier, smaller public house on the same site, the Onllwyn Arms, which is visible on the 1876 OS Map. John William built and converted the initial public house for his son-in-law John Lewis at the end of the nineteenth century. William David Morris owned the older inn until 1914 when Evan Evans Bevan bought the inn and built the new Onllwyn Inn. It was later owned by John Daymond (who was also the sub-postmaster or had the same name) in 1923 and James Jones in 1926 (Kelly's directory of Monmouthshire and South Wales, 1920, 1923, 1926). David Williams, also employed as an overman at Onllwyn No.1 Colliery, moved to the inn around the 1940s (Evans, 1977). Cyril Jones, an ex-miner from the Seven Sisters Colliery, held the license in the 1970s.

Wings to either side had banks of sash windows facing toward the street (Davies, 2002, p. 81; 2004, p. 101). The ground floor was red brick-faced, the upper floor rendered and the roof slate. According

to Brinley Evans (2012, loc 468), the inn was ‘one of the three splendid pubs built by the Evans & Bevan family at the top end of the Dulais valley. The interior was fitted out in first-class Edwardian style and was, architecturally, amongst the finest commercial buildings in Wales.’



Figure 28 Onllwyn Inn (Source: [Cwm Dulais Historical Society](#))

In ‘When I came Home’, Brinley Evans describes one of the early landlords of the new inn. Jim Jones, the landlord from 1923-1940, is said to have ‘looked like Wallace Beery, the large tough American film star’ and was known to ‘lock himself in the beer cellar and drink himself into oblivion.’ Jones’s niece Hanna, who grew up in the inn, married the older brother of Evans’s wife Peg in 1939. Soon after, they became the proprietors of the Price’s Arms in Coelbren, a point of notable pride as it was ‘the only non-Evans-Bevan pub at the top of the Dulais.’

Revealing a density of ties characteristic of a close-knit community, all those interviewed as part of this research either knew or knew of the family members of the pub’s twentieth-century proprietors. They also, in several cases, noted the significance of the fact that pubs were largely controlled by the mine owners (alongside many other elements of the local economy). As one of the three men involved in the focus group held on 10th February 2023 commented:

All of the mines, before they were nationalised, were owned by the family Evans Bevan who lived in Neath. And they owned the brewery, and they owned the houses, and they owned the shop and they owned the mine. So, you worked in the mine, they paid you on a Friday and then the following week they took all your money back...[laughs] I mean they owned all the pubs up here, they owned the brewery, they owned the shop, they had everything... They always seemed to take back more than they ever paid out, mind...’

(Dove_focus_DavisTam_10.02.2023, 0.15-0.16 minutes)

While the interviewees linked the loss of the traditional miner’s pub to the closure of the collieries, it was also clear that the pubs did not close at the same time as the mines – ‘they survived the pits by 20 years’ estimated one man (Focus Group 1, 30 mins). They dwindled from the mid-1960s, too

big for the size of community that was left and for a local workforce that no longer worked to the same rhythm or even in the locality.

Disappearing with them were the music and entertainments that people enjoyed as well as the opportunities for chat and comradery. As one man put it *'You won't find a piano in any pub or club in this valley now. It's gone! And believe me, there used to be beautiful singers, choirs would come who could all sing...'* (Interview 2, 57 mins).



Figure 29 Onllwyn Inn area looking towards Onllwyn no. 1 colliery tip, pithead baths, water tower and engine house, around 1955
(Source: [Cwm Dulais Historical Society](#))

3.4.4 SPORTS PAVILION/ FOOTBALL GROUND/ PLAYGROUND/ POOL/ BOWLING GREEN



Figure 30 Banwen Pony Club Gymkhana, Onllwyn Welfare playing field, Wembley Avenue tips & aerial ropeway, c.1960 (Source: [Cwm Dulais Historical Society](#))

In 1919, the Royal Commission for Coal led to the establishment of a Miners' Welfare Fund (created through a levy on the ton of the national output of coal) to provide resources and social institutions

for the miners, such as communal baths, scholarships, and welfare halls. This, in turn, led to the construction of welfare halls and other amenities across the region in mining communities such as Onllwyn.

In Onllwyn, the legislation catalysed the formation of the Onllwyn and District Miners' Welfare Association in 1922. This organisation quickly began to secure and allocate funds for the local resources the community wanted. The funds will likely have included a contribution through mining operations from the Welfare Fund and an element of local contribution from miners' wages. Miner's contributions and their fund-raising activities also kept the facilities going, highlighting the inextricable ties between industry and social life in mining communities.

The development of a sports pavilion and 'Rec' – otherwise referred to as the 'Onllwyn Welfare Ground' – including a football field, bowling green, tennis courts and children's playground followed, opening in the 1920s and 30s. The first wooden sports pavilion was opened in 1926, the year of the General Strike, by Evans & Bevan. However, this pavilion burnt down in 1953, and it was replaced by a brick pavilion built by J.R. Edwards to plans by Neath Rural District Council, who likely also completed the plans for the Welfare Hall (Davies, 2002, p. 81).⁶

The 'Rec' (recreational ground) was popular for sports events throughout the 1950s, including international football matches and a 'Grand Sports' day, including running contests and cycling. These came to an end following the closure of the mine in 1962-64. The activities of the sports facilities were captured by the proprietor of the local bakery in Dyffryn Cellwen, John Dillwyn William, captured on a cinefilm between the 1950s and 1970s.⁷

3.4.5 SOFT SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE/ COMMUNITY GROUPS AND EVENTS

Linked to the pubs, chapels, welfare hall and recreation grounds, and the sense of community forged through the shared mining experience was a wide range of social groups and activities intrinsic to village life. The importance of these for people's sense of place and belonging came through strongly in interviews with the former miners in January-March 2023.

In Onllwyn, various groups were formed around music, such as the 'Drum Gleemen' male voice choir (very few records exist). Other villages throughout the industrial heartlands of South Wales also had (and some still have) gleeman choirs which take part in national singing competitions and Eisteddfods. Faith groups included the Onllwyn Christian Fellowship, the local YMCA (which ran a youth group and other support services for children and young people) and the congregation of the Independent Chapel. In the aftermath of the Second World War, an Ex-Service and Working men's Club was formed to cultivate mutual support among former servicemen, given the hardships they experienced both during and after the War. Political groups of the mid-twentieth century included the Young Communists League (Evans, 2012, loc 186) and the Onllwyn Lodge of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). Several sports groups, such as the Bowls Club, the Clarion Cycle Club, the

⁶ Records of planning applications 1882-1974 for the Planning Department of Neath Rural District Council are held here: <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/archives/4df7e442-e5e3-399a-9910-c2a7eebad227?component=453b5033-ff1f-3659-8834-f87e245a8929>

⁷ The footage can be viewed on the British Film Institute's website here: <https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-dulais-valley-carnivals-wedding-playground-swimming-majorettes-1965-online>

Onllwyn Swans Soccer Team (Davies, 2002, pp. 83-87) and the YMCA Welfare Soccer Team made use of the welfare scheme sports facilities described in section 3.4.4 above. Neighbouring villages had the same sorts of groups – Banwen, for example, had a Pony Club, which made use of the old pithead bath of Onllwyn No.3 (where the Dove Workshops is today).

The YMCA was the focus of an annual carnival which the baker John Dillwyn William, captured in his cinefilms. According to George Brinley Evans (2012), the carnival, shared by Onllwyn and Dyffryn Cellwen, was used to raise money for the YMCA, but it was also an opportunity to showcase local creativity and humour in the form of elaborate costumes, floats and musical performances. William's footage reveals the vibrant life of streets and public spaces (including the pool and paddling pool at Onllwyn and Seven Sisters), the Welfare Hall and the chapel in a bygone age and how these everyday human activities were positioned between industrial workings and the stark mounds of the coal tips.



Figure 31 Banwen Pony Club event at the Onllwyn Welfare Hall (Source: [Cwm Dulais Historical Society](#))



Figure 32 Onllwyn YMCA soccer team (Source: [Cwm Dulais Historical Society](#))



Figure 33 Onllwyn and Banwen Ex-Servicemen's Club, 1953 (Source: [Cwm Dulais Historical Society](#))

4.0 Onllwyn Today – Legacies

As briefly described in section 2.2 above, Onllwyn today is a collection of homes strung along a road. The shops and facilities that provided a focus for the community have gone. Only the Welfare Hall remains, as described below.

All those interviewed as part of this research lamented that the village as they knew it when the collieries were still active had disappeared, despite undeniable improvements in the natural environment and living standards. The closures of the school, the chapels, and the pubs were devastating, they suggested, in terms of social and cultural capital, a sense of belonging in place, and community. These were all places where, as Hywel Francis identified (2018), a sense of solidarity between people, and the collective capacity to deal with adversity, was forged historically.

In 1967, Donald Coleman, an MP of Neath, spoke at the House of Commons about the concerns of his constituency in the Dulais Valley and Neath Valley upon the closure of many collieries in the 1960s. He reported how:

'The people living in the older industrial areas are not opposed to industrial and technological change, but what makes them bitter is the sight of their industries dying out and no other employment replacing them and the sight of their young people going elsewhere for work, when they know that, if work were available, they would stay to play their part in their own communities.' (Coleman, 25th July, 1967)

More than fifty years later, these reflections still resonated with the expressions of those interviewed in this research who were asked to describe their experience of change. Some compared today unfavourably with the past, harsh as mining work was.

They explained how they continued to live all this time with the unfolding consequences of industries dying – from the loss of a sense of being immersed in and contributing to a thriving industry, to the loss of intergenerational community as young people have left, to the loss of facilities and spaces in which community life unfolded to a legacy of ill-health (with lung diseases such as emphysema and pneumoconiosis from inhaling coal dust being prevalent even in the 1980s and '90s) to ongoing feelings of having been inadequately compensated for physical injuries. Feelings of loss and even grief appear to have continued, particularly among the older generation who remember the past.

As one man in his 80s, who'd begun work in Seven Sisters mine in the 1950s put it:

'The biggest change If I go back to my youth and the village and the valley... it was a happier time in my opinion. We had everything. We had a cinema in Onllwyn, cinema in this village and cinema in Crynant. We had rugby teams, we had the band, we had concerts going, carnival parties... We had a swimming pool here and, to go down there in the summer, well you could say there were five-six hundred people down there, and kids running all over the shop' (Interview 2, 53 mins) .

Today, by contrast to the late 1950s, this *'is the forgotten Valley'* he said (Interview 2, DavisTam 2023).

They also indicated that the days of intense mining activity in the Dulais Valley remained a source of pride for older people who still remember them. As the older generation who experienced the aftermath of the Second World War disappear, that memory – as contained in testimonies, stories, memorabilia, local art and photography - to future generations is vital for people with longstanding local ties are to understand their roots and recognise the opportunity for prominence in the context of Wales's decarbonised 21st-century economy again.

The final sections below describe three 'legacies' of the mining industry – the Welfare Hall and then, moving beyond Onllwyn, the Cwm Dulais Historical Society and the Dove Workshops.

4.1 ONLLWYN WELFARE HALL



Figure 34 Onllwyn Lodge NUM, committee and officials with the banner at Onllwyn Welfare Hall, 1963 (Source: [Cwm Dulais Historical Society](#))

Welfare organisations emerged across mining settlements in South Wales in the late nineteenth century. They were typically initiated and managed by local miner groups who contributed a portion of their wages into a communal collection to pay for them. When, later, legislation leading to the introduction of a Miner's Welfare Fund was created, a wider range of buildings housing these organisations was designed and developed, creating venues for education, political meetings, and socialising.

Along with the sports pavilion, football field, bowling green, tennis courts, and children's play area described above, Onllwyn Welfare Hall was a beneficiary of this legislation which catalysed the formation of the Onllwyn and District Miners' Welfare Association in 1922. Plans for a Welfare Hall were afoot from the mid-1940s, and it finally opened on 23rd July 1955, surviving to this day.⁸ Likely, the plans for the Welfare Hall and the new sports pavilion were drawn up by planners or architects in Neath Rural District Council.⁹ The Hall operated as a cinema from 1956 onwards. However, this use declined in the early 1960s, presumably because the closure of the collieries affected the level of contribution from a local workforce to the running costs (Davies, 2003, p. 97). Nevertheless, from the 1960s until the early 1980s, it was a popular venue for live performances and sports, such as wrestling matches and school plays. It also provided a club room where patrons could socialise and play games like pool, darts, and bingo.

During the Miners' Strikes of 1984-5, the Hall became a focus for activities of the local branch of the NUM, operating as a centre for food distribution and providing a venue for meetings and social evenings to bring together and offer support to striking miners and their families. As Francis (2018)

⁸ Records of the Onllwyn and District Miners' Welfare Association are held here: <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/archives/7590f654-67c3-3348-af1c-2ed07bbf5a27>

⁹ Records of planning applications 1882-1974 for the Planning Department of Neath Rural District Council are held here: <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/search/archives/4df7e442-e5e3-399a-9910-c2a7eebad227?component=453b5033-ff1f-3659-8834-f87e245a8929>

indicates, the fact that Onllwyn had lost its underground collieries twenty years earlier was the very reason it became the chosen place for these activities, as it was already emblematic of the loss of industry and the impacts on the community that ensued. As he describes it, ‘the Welfare Hall was the centre for three valleys in 1984-85: its support group, its women’s group, its weekly newspaper ‘The Valley’s Star,’ the strike committee, the food distribution for a thousand families and the South Wales striking miners’ choir (Francis, 2018, 93-94).

Interviewees forming part of this research remembered clearly the comradeship and sense of solidarity that led to and was also forged anew through these activities. This comradeship contributed to the strength of the local trade union in Onllwyn. According to one man:

‘Times were hard [during the 1984-5 Strike], but, I think, the rest of the community who weren’t working as miners, they set up a community fund, donated money, donated food also, all sorts of things to try to support the miners... I think the community spirit during the Strike was very strong...’ (Dove_focus_DavisTam_10.02.2023)

Symbolic of working-class solidarity, the Welfare Hall was the place where the London-based Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners Group (LGSM) travelled in 1984-85 to join in union activities and show support for families faced with the ongoing impacts of pit closures, as shown in the 2014 film ‘Pride’.¹⁰ In May 1985, prominent South Wales women spoke at a conference held at the Hall entitled ‘Welsh Women Make History’. Ties between members of the LGSM and the Neath, Dulais and Swansea Valley Miners’ Support Group survived. In 2015, they held a 30th-anniversary reunion at the Hall. A concert to mark the centenary of the Miners’ Welfare Movement was held at the Hall in January 2019.

The venue, it would seem, has been kept going through support from Celtic Energy and a local windfarm, though it is little used now.¹¹ There is a display of historical photographs inside. However, at least in name and material form, it remains to testify to the relationship between welfare and mining and mark important moments in not just local but also national political history.

¹⁰ <https://rcahmw.gov.uk/lgbt-history-month-lesbians-and-gays-support-the-miners-1984-85/?fbclid=IwAR3x3bbydVmQ7FpZYEndoyPBFdQfvMrWYF6XHLGYjqFeP0Qj9x0an5za4M0>

¹¹ http://www.dulaisvalley.org/heritage_sites_pubs_clubs.php

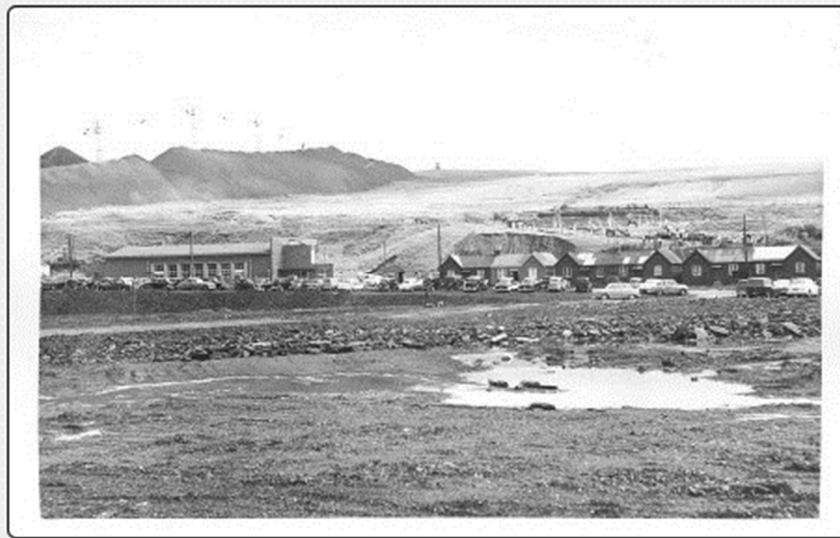


Figure 35 Onllwyn Welfare Hall, Gordon Terrace, Wembley Avenue and the Washery Tip (Source: [Cwm Dulais Historical Society](http://www.cwmdulais.org.uk/))

4.2 THE DOVE WORKSHOPS IN BANWEN

The DOVE Workshop (Canolfan Banwen Centre) is located in a building between the Banwen Industrial Settlement and the previous Onllwyn No.3 Colliery (Maes-Marchog) (see section 3.2.2 above). The building, which had been the opencast executive offices of the National Coal Board, was donated in 1986 to Onllwyn Community Council. The Council designated it as a centre for adult education and cultural development (Francis, 2008, 1-2). The driving force behind the DOVE was Mair Francis, an art teacher by trade who became involved in the Labour movement and the politics of the miner's strike in the 1980s. She was active in a range of social causes to support Dulais Valley residents throughout the period of pit closures (ibid., p. vii).¹²

Following the Miner's Strike, DOVE was established as a women's cooperative providing educational resources for local women. It enables them to gain new Further Education or Higher Education qualifications and, in turn, create new prospects upon the diminishing of the traditionally male-dominated industry. Before occupying the former coal board offices, the cooperative ran classes and other activities from Pantyfordd Hall just west of Onllwyn and, a little later, from an old billiard's hall in Onllwyn.

In Francis's own words, DOVE 'was influenced by three radical social movements, the green movement, the peace movement and of course the women's movement' (Francis, 2008, pp. 3-4). It was, of course, primarily from the second of these movements that DOVE got its name, with the dove being a symbol of peace. Dulais Valley women's engagement in the peace movement was exemplified during the 1981 'Women for Life on Earth' marches to Greenham Common and involvement in the wider campaign for nuclear disarmament. Interest in the green movement was inspired by the everyday experience of the impact of opencast mining on the local environment, which hollowed out places of memory and nature. In turn, as Mair puts it, the DOVE's commitment to women was driven by the recognition that '[w]omen in the valleys had little access to education

¹² Also see the recordings of the Welsh People's History Society < <https://www.llafur.org/speakers/mair-francis/> >

or training, childcare or transport' (ibid., p. 6). Finally, the word 'workshop' was inspired by Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop in Stratford, East London, which became known for its use of experimentation and its ethos of collaboration.

The Community Council gave DOVE use of the former coal board offices for a year for free. The Banwen Centre was opened in February 1987 by Glenys Kinnock, politician and wife to the then leader of the UK Labour Party, Neil Kinnock. Beginning in Pantyfordd with machine knitting and spinning classes, from its new beginnings in Banwen, the DOVE set out to establish a range of partnerships with education providers, enabling it to establish and support the necessary progression routes into formal education and training programmes for local women and men. This included the provision of childcare facilities as well as activities to support health, well-being, and the care of babies and children. The list of collaborations established since then has involved Swansea and Cardiff universities, the Port Talbot Skills Centre, Neath College and many others. One such collaboration with Swansea University led to the creation of Banwen Library as an offshoot of the South Wales Miners' Library, with which it shares a travelling librarian.

In 1993, the DOVE was expanded using European funding. In the same year, the first community-based degree scheme was launched, allowing adults to complete degrees from the 'Community University of the Valleys.' By this time, the DOVE Workshops was also involved in regeneration work to rehabilitate the landscape around Banwen, recognising the links between this and the transitioning economy of the area.

A single visit to the Dove Workshops is sufficient to see that it has been a focus for some extraordinary events over the years, including talks from prominent academics and politicians on themes of local interest, including industrialisation, capitalism and working-class life. Posters of these are proudly displayed all around the walls of the workshops. Also showcased are writing pieces, other creative projects that local people have produced over the decades, and important newspaper articles about the Dulais Valley. Among these is the famous 1941 article in 'Picture Post' by B.L Coombes titled 'This is the Problem'. It provides a glimpse into the challenges of working-class life in wartime Britain during the 1940s and, as such, is laden with insights into the roots of the 1980s political crisis. They also include exhibition posters and book launch flyers, including events related to the multi-talented former miner and Banwen resident George Brinley Evans who died on 14th October 2022.

4.3 CWM DULAIS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Cwm Dulais Historical Society (CDHS) was established in 1964 as the village of Onllwyn was undergoing its traumatic process of dismantling, described throughout this document. Its principle objective since then has been to encourage and support interest in the local history of the Dulais Valley, helping local people preserve a cognisance of the industrial past. Until late 2022, its president was George Brinley Evans (aged 96 at the time). Today, in 2023, the lead archivist is Norman Burns (aged 94), supported by Eifion Williams (in his 80s). Part of the physical archive of photographs and other records is held at the Dove Workshops, but a large part of it, only partially catalogued, is in Burn's own home. The gallery on the Society's website contains a wide range of images, several of which are included in this document. Based on the catalogue, the archive contains over 3000 items

of different types, such as photos, documents, and maps, all with relevant metadata painstakingly compiled by Norman over the years. However, the photos have been scanned at low resolution – a digital collection of high-resolution images does not yet exist. Furthermore, the catalogue has been produced using software that is no longer readily available. Therefore, despite the incredible care that has gone into forming it over the years, this rich archive is as fragile as the physical material, with much urgency for improved storage and accessibility.



Figure 36 Maps and memories (Source: Juliet Davis)

5.0 Some Concluding Reflections

As suggested above, the CDHS's archive, along with other archival materials scattered in different institutions, create a distinctive yet fragile record of their community's mining history. Those who run the CDHS archive are deeply passionate about what has been collected but worry that it may not outlive them, may even end up *'in the bin'* (Interview 3, 59 mins). As Burns put it in interview:

'I'm on the way out! But I don't want the archive to go out with me. I've invested a lot of effort into it [...] My prime concern is not just to keep it or save it, but to keep it where it is relevant [...] There are a number of items that we have in our archive that don't belong in an archive; they belong in a museum: framed photographs, quite large ones, silverware, commemorative cups and things like that' (Interview 3).

Many interviewees argued for the importance of preserving the archives and giving it a secure home for future generations, which includes offering the potential for local people to understand their landscape and the stories associated with its transformation. Today, given how substantially the landscape has transformed, the archives, the Banwen library, and what remains of the Welfare Hall are the best resources locally for understanding the industrial past, including the intertwining of the industry with politics, social life and the fabrics of the place.

Of course, for now, it is still possible to meet and talk to older people in the Onllwyn area about their memories of that past. However, as any former workers of the Onllwyn Collieries would now be at least in their late 70s, this possibility will not last for much longer. The memories of those we spoke to were acute despite the number of decades that have gone by since that pre-1960 Onllwyn, containing insights into changing technologies, politics, families, social infrastructures and mining life. As the quotes in this document have suggested, their stories, laden as they are with feeling as well as facts, allow the past to be pieced together and understood in a way that other archival materials on their own do not.

At the close of this journey, we argue that creating a sustainable record of the past for future generations will take investment and expertise to bring together fragile records which, as the CDHS acknowledge *'is a bit chaotic in places'* (Interview 3, 1 hour 3 minutes). This expertise will need to relate to digitisation, computer modelling, recording, filming, curating and displaying techniques. Without such efforts, there is a risk that an opportunity to showcase the history of Dulais Valley, which is, at a small scale, a history of the whole of Britain, to people locally and far more widely, may also be lost.

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Interview List

- Crynant_interview 1_DavisTam_20.01.2023*** - Interview 1 (x 1 man) at his home – former manager at the coal washery
- Banwen Dove_focus 1_DavisTam_10.02.2023*** - Focus Group 1 (x 3 men) at the Dove Workshops – two former miners and a chemist
- Seven Sisters_interview 2_DavisTam_03.03.2023*** - Interview 2 (x 2 men and 1 woman) at their home – two former miners and a miner’s wife
- Banwen Dove_interview 3_DavisTam_10.03.2023*** - Interview 3 (x 2 men) at the Dove Workshops – two archivists / former miners

7.0 Archival Sources

As well as the local resources described above, images, recording and maps can be found at a range of other locations as summarised here:

Getty Images

- <https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/news-photo/unemployed-welsh-coal-miner-b-l-coombes-out-walking-with-news-photo/97860432>

Aberystwyth:

- The National Library of Wales Archives and Manuscripts -- [Evans and Bevan Anthracite Collieries Records, Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales](#)

Cardiff:

- [Glamorgan Archives, Cardiff](#)
- National Museum of Wales: contains the [John Cornwell Collection](#) of photographs

Swansea:

- [South Wales Miners' Museum Collection](#)
- Richard Burton Archives at Swansea University – [South Wales Coalfield Collection](#)
- South Wales Miner's library - <https://www.swansea.ac.uk/library/south-wales-miners-library/collections-resources/>
- <https://lisweb.swan.ac.uk/swcc/video/vid7.htm>
- [West Glamorgan Archives Service](#) – contains a range of historical materials including OS maps, photographs, National Coal Board files relating to West Glamorgan collieries, books, drawings and memorabilia.

Dulais Valley:

- [Cefn Coed Colliery Museum](#)
- [Cwm Dulais Historical Society Archives](#)
- Banwen Library – [Dove Workshops](#)
- South Wales Miners' Museum - [photographs of collieries in South Wales](#)