

The Welsh  
Industrial  
Landscape Before  
Photography

*Mae'r adnodd hwn ar  
gael yn Gymraeg.  
This resource is  
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# The Welsh Industrial Landscape Before Photography

## Introduction |

*'Picture Bank' resources provide a set of images  
focused on a particular theme or subject.*

*This 'Picture Bank' resource focuses on the Welsh  
industrial landscape, between 1790 and 1860. The  
images have been selected from Amgueddfa Cymru's  
collection. They are high resolution enough for use as a  
whiteboard resource.*

*Within these guidance notes you will find background  
information on the theme, interpretation of the images,  
and details on further reading and web resources.*

*The resource is downloadable and does not have a  
specific age or progression step in mind. We would  
encourage users to read through the notes and edit the  
resource to best suit their needs.*

## Background Information |

*Wales can lay claim to being the world's first industrial  
nation. This was because in the mid-1800s there were  
more people employed in industry than in agriculture.  
Instead of toiling in the fields, families were now making  
their way to industrial centres across Wales in hope of  
earning more money. What those families found were  
occupations that placed them in front of white hot  
furnaces melting ores, cutting vast quarries, digging  
deep shafts to get coal, and moving and stacking the  
enormous amounts of the waste this industry created.*

*The industrialisation of Wales gathered pace around  
1750 and continued to expand into the 1800s. In a period  
where photography did not exist or at the very least was  
in its infancy, art was the only way of visually capturing  
the changing landscape of Wales.*

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## Background Information |

*The images chosen visually captures the history of industrialised Wales. Scenes of towns being engulfed by flame and smoke, with the shadowy, ever-present workers toiling ceaselessly. The artists were eyewitnesses, with pencils, paints, brushes and easels in hand and their work helps to define our understanding of the past.*

## Images used and interpretation |

*Some eyewitness accounts have been included to help bring the location to life.*

*Slides 1-4 | These images all relate to copper mining on Anglesey. The paintings show the scale of the industry and the workers breaking the copper ore into small lumps by hand, pulling it up from below in buckets, all before it gets shipped to Lancashire or to the Lower Swansea valley in South Wales for smelting. There is also an image of the first major suspension bridge in the world, the Menai Suspension Bridge, a symbol of how industrial in scale the routes to and from Anglesey were becoming.*

*The account below is from a tour of the copper mines in 1785.*

### **Eyewitness:**

*"Great pieces of rock which contain the ore, are blasted by gunpowder. These pieces are wound up in buckets from the bottom of the pit, and here are broken in to still smaller pieces, the mere stone being thrown aside and the ore sorted according to its value. In this operation of breaking ore many hundred people are constantly employed...The best pieces are sent immediately to the smelting houses near Liverpool."  
(Richard Twinning, Tour of north Wales, 1785)*

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## Images used and interpretation |

*Junction of Mona and Parys Mountain Copper Mines, J Smith, (watercolour), 1790*

*Miners at Menai, J C Ibbetson, (watercolour), 1792*

*Mines at Menai, J C Ibbetson, (watercolour), 1792*

*The Menai Bridge, Bangor, W H Bartlett, J Rogers, G Virtue, (print), 1841*

*Slides 5-10 | Neath and Swansea industrially developed earlier than many areas in Wales. Copper smelting and the search for coal needed for the smelting created many coal mines and copper works. There would be seven large copper smelting companies in the area by 1784, and between them they were buying over 72% of the copper ore available to buy in Britain. These images show early coal workings and the copper works. They also show waterwheels that powered the works.*

*The account below is by the artist who created the Neath Abbey engraving.*

### **Eyewitness:**

*The figures in the foreground, represent the manner in which the coal is conveyed, from the pits to the smelting houses. The vehicles in which this fuel is carried, are called dram waggons. Four or five of these heavy machines, linked together, and filled with coal, are drawn with the greatest ease by means of a single horse upon the rail roads...(Edward Donovan, 1805)*

*Neath Abbey with colliery in foreground and Neath Abbey smelting works in distance, by E Donovan, (engraving), 1805*

*Aberdulais Mill, T Hornor, (watercolour), 1817*

*Coal Works, a view near Neath in Glamorganshire, south Wales, J Hassell, (engraving), 1798*

*Town of Neath, T Hornor, (watercolour), 1819*

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*The Forest Works near Swansea, J Smith,  
(watercolour), 1792*

*Swansea copper works, J S Cotman, (watercolour),  
1820*

*Slide 11-17 | The first slide shows how much the coal,  
iron and more was transported across Wales. In the  
background can be seen the ships that would load up  
with all the materials and transport it across Britain  
and the world.*

*The rest of the slides showcase the iron and tin works  
that spread across south Wales. The scale of these  
industries was enormous. For example, by the mid-  
19th century, 40% of the iron exported from Britain  
was made in south Wales.*

*The following account comes from Thomas Hornor  
and is describing his visit to Merthyr Tydfil.*

### **Eyewitness|**

*"The walk through the place is replete with interest,  
every part presenting instance of ingenious  
contrivance and wonderful mechanism, which  
contrasting with the wide and sterile mountains  
realize the apparent contrarities of luxury and  
leafless desolation. At night, the view of the town is  
shockingly singular. Numbers of furnaces and truly  
volcanic accumulations of blazing cinders illuminate  
the vale which combining with the incessant roar of  
the blasts, the clangor of ponderous hammers, the  
whirl of wheels and the scarcely human aspect of the  
tall gaunt workmen seem to realize without much aid  
from fancy many of our early fears." (Tour through the  
Vales of Glamorgan, Thomas Hornor, 1819)*

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## Images used and interpretation |

*A plain representation of the teams and trams of coal  
bought down to Pillgwenlly by Samuel Homfray,  
Thomas John, (oil), 1821*

*Rolling Mills, T Hornor, (oil) 1817 (Penydarren  
Ironworks, Merthyr Tydfil*

*Trefforest Tin Works, Glamorganshire, J Appleby,  
(lithograph), 1840*

*Crawshay's Cyfarthfa Ironworks, P Williams, (oil),  
1817*

*Dowlais Ironworks, George Childs (watercolour), 1840*

*Dowlais Ironworks, George Childs (watercolour), 1840*

*Nant-y-glo Ironworks , by H. Gastineau and G  
Robertson, (watercolour), 1830*

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## Artist Bio's for some of the featured artists |

*Wales became a very fashionable destination for artists during the second part of the 18th century. Due to the Napoleonic Wars people could no longer travel to Europe and so artists turned their attention to Britain. (LLGC)*

### **John 'Warwick' Smith**

*Born in Cumberland in 1749. After some time painting in Italy Smith returned to Britain and between 1784 and 1806 he frequently visited Wales and became increasingly enchanted by the country. (LLGC)*

### **Thomas Hornor**

*Born in Hull, in 1785. In 1814, he came to South Wales and there he began to use his skills to create works of art that captured the landscapes around the area.*

### **George Childs**

*Born in 1798. He created three watercolours of Dowlais in 1840, which are some of the most used and iconic images of industrialised South Wales.*

### **Julius Caesar Ibbetson**

*Born in Leeds, 1759. In 1789, he was a guest at Cardiff Castle, which started a decade long association with Wales. He captured the ironworks, copper mines, collieries and the industry of Wales, as well as historic buildings and beautiful rural landscapes.*

### **Penry Williams**

*Born in Georgetown, Merthyr Tydfil, in 1802. Williams had no formal training. At the age of 12 he painted handmade Valentines Day cards featuring local flowers and painted landscapes around Merthyr Tydfil. After seeing his paintings, the Crawshay family commissioned him to paint various views of the Cyfarthfa Ironworks in 1817 when he was 15.*

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## Discussion |

*When you look at these paintings think about the following:*

- *Think about the environment, the buildings, how life was different, etc.*
- *What do these images tell us about the industrial history of Wales?*
- *Are the scenes depicted reality or a romantic, dramatised version of industrial Wales?*
- *Most of the artists are not Welsh. What can this reveal about artists in Wales?*
- *Why are the artists all males?*
- *What could that tell us about female artists during the 1800s?*

*When posing these questions it may help to know the following:*

- *Some of the art did distort and make more palatable the natural environment around industry. They were trying to sell their work, and they came from a tradition of painting natural landscapes.*
- *There was only a little over 100 working artists in Wales in the mid-19th century. This meant few Welsh people were becoming artists and even fewer women were.*
- *The type of medium used by the artist can drastically change how we view the past. When looking at the paintings note the medium in the title and you will see how different mediums can alter the images.*

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## Websites |

*Portraits of Industrial Workers in Wales | The Francis Crawshay Worker Portraits -*

<https://museum.wales/learning/activity/721/Portraits-of-Industrial-Workers-in-Wales--The-Francis-Crawshay-Worker-Portraits/>

*Coal and Wales | An introduction -*

<https://museum.wales/learning/activity/486/Coal-and-Wales--An-introduction/>

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