

The Story of Britannia Foundry, Pontymister

by Malcolm Johnson

Part 2



Britannia Foundry, Pontymister

John Miles died on 1st April, 1867 in Pontymister, aged 47 years.

RISCA.

FUNERAL OF THE LATE MR. J. MILES.—The funeral of the late Mr J. Miles, of Pontymister House, whose death, as already recorded, occurred with affecting suddenness, took place on Thursday, at Llanhilleth church. The funeral procession, which was conveyed from Risca to Llanhilleth and back by special train, was very numerous, including besides many of the friends and workmen of the deceased, a large number of the members of the Pontymister Company and Risca corps of volunteers, of the former of which deceased was a member, and in which he had just received his commission as ensign. The deceased was highly esteemed by all who had known him, and his death awakened universal regret throughout the neighbourhood. The arrangements for the funeral were conducted by Mr. J. Palmer, of Newport.

Monmouthshire Merlin, 13th April, 1867.

The Merlin records that John Miles resided at Pontymister House, this may be an error on behalf of the reporter. Early maps show that Pontymister House was located in Pontymister Works and would have been occupied by the works manager.

Later documents refer to the occupation of Risca House Inn where he was landlord.



Monmouthshire Merlin, July, 1867.

John Edwards: - *Edwards and Challingsworth*

As part of Miles' estate the Britannia Foundry was advertised and sub-let to John Edwards, a Stroud man. He was to work in partnership with George Challingsworth trading as 'Edwards and Challingsworth, Iron Founder and Engineers'. However, this partnership did not last long and was dissolved by mutual consent on 8th June, 1869.

Edwards continued trading alone for a further six years.

Due to mounting ill-health, Edwards advertised the sale of the Foundry for a period of twenty one years beginning in January, 1874, for the Works as a going concern and 1st February, 1874 for Britannia House.

The business premises offered included the Foundry building some 149 feet long and 45 feet wide and the Blacksmiths Shop 35 feet long and 16 feet wide. The Pattern Shop stores were 90 feet x 16 feet wide. Particular reference was made to the tramway which offered access to the main railway line which ran parallel to the Foundry. Also offered was a dwelling house with nine rooms, offices, a cellar and gardens.

George Challingsworth - *Edwards and Challingsworth*

George Challingsworth was known to be working as a foreman at Britannia Foundry during the reported fire of March, 1859. '*Great praise is due to Mr Challingsworth, the foreman, for his intrepidity*' In time Challingsworth was to enter into a business relationship with Henry White of the Emlyn Works.

Challingsworth was born c1807 in Wordsley, Staffordshire, as was his wife Martha. He arrived in south Wales looking for work as a moulder in the burgeoning iron industry. At various times he worked at a number of ironworks throughout the eastern valleys including Blaenavon, Varteg, Cwmavon, British and Golynos.

TO be LET, by TENDER, for a term of 21 years, as a going concern (in consequence of the failing health of the proprietor), that eligible and well-situate Trade premises, known as:

**THE "BRITANNIA FOUNDRY,"
PONTYMISTER,**

In the Parish of Risca.

The Premises consist of FOUNDRY, 149ft. \times 45ft. containing 3 Cranes, 1 Drying Stove, with 2 Coke Ovens attached, Railway and Stone Floor, Gas Apparatus complete, 2 Cupolas, and other conveniences, all of which are in good working order.

YARD of convenient size, with two cranes, one of which used to load and discharge trucks upon the Railway Siding.

BLACKSMITH'S SHOP, 35ft. \times 16ft., with two fires, driven by a fan, with bellows also attached.

PATTERN STORES, 90ft. \times 16ft.

STORE ROOM, 27ft. \times 17ft.

ENGINE and BOILER HOUSE, 22ft. \times 17ft., containing a 12-horse Engine and Boiler complete, for driving fan, Machinery in fitting shop, and Loom Mill; boiler 18ft \times 4ft. 7in., fan 3ft. 6in. \times 1ft. 3in., with pulleys and necessary shafting.

FITTING SHOP 36ft \times 20ft., with a Tramway 140ft long, running into it.

PATTERN SHOP^{over}.

STABLING for 3 Horses, and a Cart Shed, with other conveniences.

A CONVENIENT DWELLING-HOUSE of 9 rooms, with Offices Cellarage, Gardens, Yard, Piggeries, &c.

There is a Railway Siding, 80 yards in length, between stop blocks, with points and crossings connecting it with both the up and down lines of the Monmouthshire Railway and Canal Company, which runs parallel, with the premises.

These valuable premises comprise an area of 1a 2r 10p., or thereabouts; are situate in the centre of several extensive Tin-plate Works and Collieries, thus commanding a large foundry trade and are well adapted for carrying on an increasing Foundry Business, to which might with advantage be added Mechanical Engineering, Railway Wagon Building, and Repairing &c., &c.

The Stock and Loose Plant, including the Lathes in fitting shop, to be taken at a valuation.

Possession of; the Works will be given on the 1st JANUARY and of the Dwelling-house on the 1st FEBRUARY next.

The whole Premises, Fixtures, and Plant may be viewed on and after the 8th NOVEMBER next, on application to the Proprietor, Mr. JOHN EDWARDS, and a Draft Lease, with Inventory of Plant and Stock, may be seen, and any further particulars required obtained at the offices of Messrs. WILLIAM GRAHAM and SON, Victoria Chambers, Newport, Mon., to whom Tenders are to be addressed on the 27th day of NOVEMBER next.

The Proprietor does not bind himself to accept the highest or any tender.

Dated 29th October, 1873.

19089

FLY-WHEEL RIM.—On Tuesday se'nnight, a rim for the fly-wheel of the new blast-engine, which is shortly to be erected here, was successfully cast, under the superintendence of Mr. George Challingsworth. This rim is about 23 feet in diameter, and somewhere about 16 inches square. Although exceeding the enormous weight of 25 tons, so perfect were the arrangements, that scarcely three minutes had elapsed before the prodigious mould was filled. This is but one of a large number of massive castings which have recently been made here.

Monmouthshire Merlin, 3rd March, 1860.

A rim for the fly-wheel of a new blast engine at Blaenavon was successfully cast in 1860 under the supervision of Challingsworth. The rim was about 23 feet in diameter and exceeded the weight of twenty-five tons. A newspaper reports the pouring of the molten metal was directly from the furnace taking about three minutes.

In November, 1864, George Challingsworth, master moulder, was presented with a gold watch on the occasion of his leaving Blaenavon to work at Britannia Foundry.

After his partnership at the Foundry with Edwards was terminated he and his wife left Pontymister. He was to record his profession as iron founder and inn keeper, keeping the Isca Inn in Commercial Street, Newport (now the Talisman.) from 1871.

Henry White: - *White and Challingsworth*

SALE OF ENGINES, MACHINERY, &c., &c.
EMLYN FOUNDRY, NEWPORT.

MR. JAMES GRAHAM begs to announce that he has been favoured with instructions from Messrs White and Challingsworth (consequent upon their removal to their new works at Pontymister) to offer for SALE BY PUBLIC AUCTION, on WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 20th, 1875, the undermentioned valuable
FOUNDRY PLANT,

and Effects: comprising 1 Cornish Boiler, with all mountings complete, 18ft. by 5ft. 6in., 2 stationery 8 H.P. vertical Engines, with heaters, Feed Pumps, Stop Valves, &c., complete, 1 8 H.P. Portable Engine, Steam Pump, Centrifugal ditto, Lathes, Drilling and Screwing Machines, Punching and Shearing Machine combined, a small steam Hammer, a quantity of Lath, and Smiths' Tools, 1 40in. Brackell's Patent Fan, 80ft. of 2in Shafting, Brackets and Riggers, 4 Iron Jib Foundry Cranes 20ft radius with Rack and Double Purchase Gearing complete, Wrought-iron Cupola 22ft. by 4ft. 6in. with Platform, Columns, and base-plates, Slings, Chains, &c., 6-Ton Crane Ladle; 1 ton Ditto Shank Ladles, 2 pairs Stove Doors, 2 pairs of Stove Carriages, Core Racks, Rails, &c., Loam and Blacking Mill combined, Shear Legs, Blocks and Crab Winches; wrought and cast Scrap Iron, Anvils, Swage Blocks, Smith's Bellows, Vice, Vice Bench, Tool Boxes, Grindstones, Water Boshes, 2in 3in. 4in., and 5in. faced Steam Pipes; good collection of Iron and Wood Patterns, a quantity of loose Bricks, and used Foundry Loam; 59 tons of general Moulding, Flasks, lot of Leather Belting; 1 new Land Roller, Water Casks, Core Bars, &c., Trolleys for heavy and light work, Carts, a large Lorry to carry 8 Tons, Harness &c., and 1 powerful draught Horse.

Approved Bills at Two Months will be taken from Purchasers for amounts exceeding £50.

Sale to commence punctually at Twelve o'clock.

Detailed Catalogues, giving full particulars, can be had one week prior to the Sale, on application to the Vendors; to the Auctioneer, 67, High-street; or the Office of the Machinery Register.

N.B.—Messrs. White and Challingsworth desire to take this opportunity of informing their friends and Customers, that their present Office will continue open as heretofore for the transaction of Business at which place they will be glad to receive all Town and other orders; and that in consequence of increased and improved facilities for Manufacture at their New Premises, at Pontymister, all work entrusted to them will be executed with the greatest possible promptitude and despatch.

[21,028

In 1874 Challingsworth had entered into a new business arrangement with Henry White formerly of the Emllyn Iron-foundry in Newport. The partners recognised that they required bigger premises and facilities so they made the decision to leave the Emllyn Foundry and purchase Britannia Foundry, Pontymister.

The newly formed company, now named Messrs White and Challingsworth advertised the sale of the Emllyn Foundry its Plant and Effects in October 1875. Their advert advises: 'and that in consequence of increased and improved facilities for manufacture at their New premises, at Pontymister, all work entrusted to them will be executed with the greatest possible promptitude and despatch.'

This advert clearly indicated a fresh move to Britannia Foundry.

In 1875 the partners were contracted to mould a bed-plate for the newly built Panteg Steel and Engineering Company weighing about twenty tons. On completion great care was necessary to transport the plate by special train from Pontymister to Panteg and this was done on a Sunday.

By 1881 Challingsworth was 75 years old and at the time was living at Foundry Cottages located directly opposite Britannia Foundry. He died in August 1883 aged 79 years

By 1887 the company's name was again changed, to *Henry White and Company*.

At the time, the nearby Pontymister tinplate works and the adjoining steel works were under the ownership of Captain P. S. Phillips. Phillips was a major south Wales tinplate producer owning plate works at Nant-y-Glo, Waterloo, Blaina and Abertillery.



Britannia Foundry workmen

During this period Captain Phillips continued to face 'cash-flow' problems and in 1896 the '*Pontymister Steel and Tinplate Works*' was purchased for the sum of £32,000 by Mr. Mc.

Connell and held in joint ownership with the former works manager, Mr Corfield.

A new company was registered in July 1897 under the name '*Monmouthshire Steel and Tinplate Company Limited*' for an authorised capital of £70,000. The plan was to take over the existing steel and tinplate business as well as Henry White's Britannia Foundry. '*Henry White and Company*' was incorporated on 3rd June 1903 with an authorised share capital of £40,000.

Lands acquired through the sale included the Foundry, Millbrook Villa, dwelling houses and Risca Mill and pond.

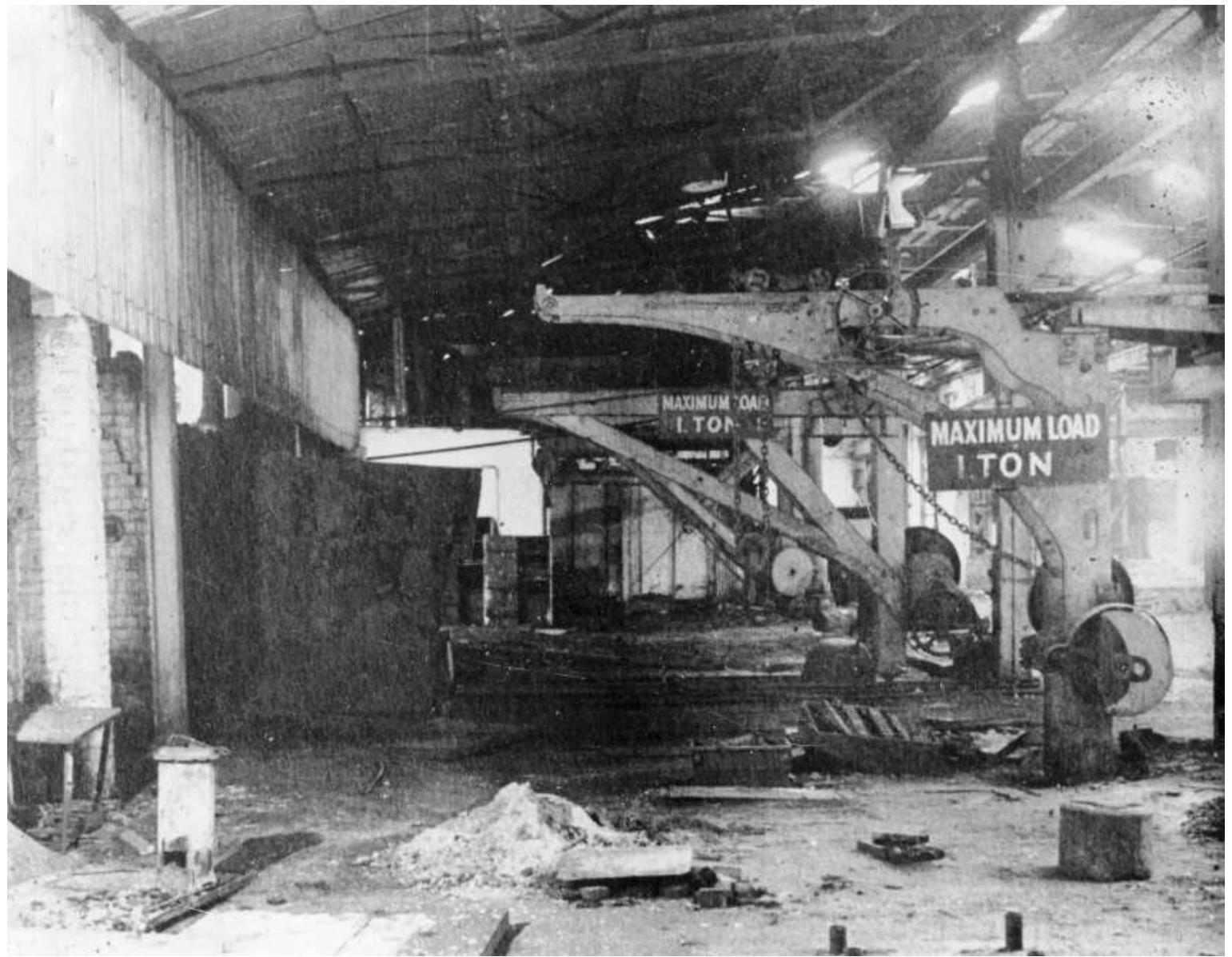
WHITE & CHALLINGSWORTH STEEL FOUNDERS,

Manufacturers of Steel Castings of all descriptions,

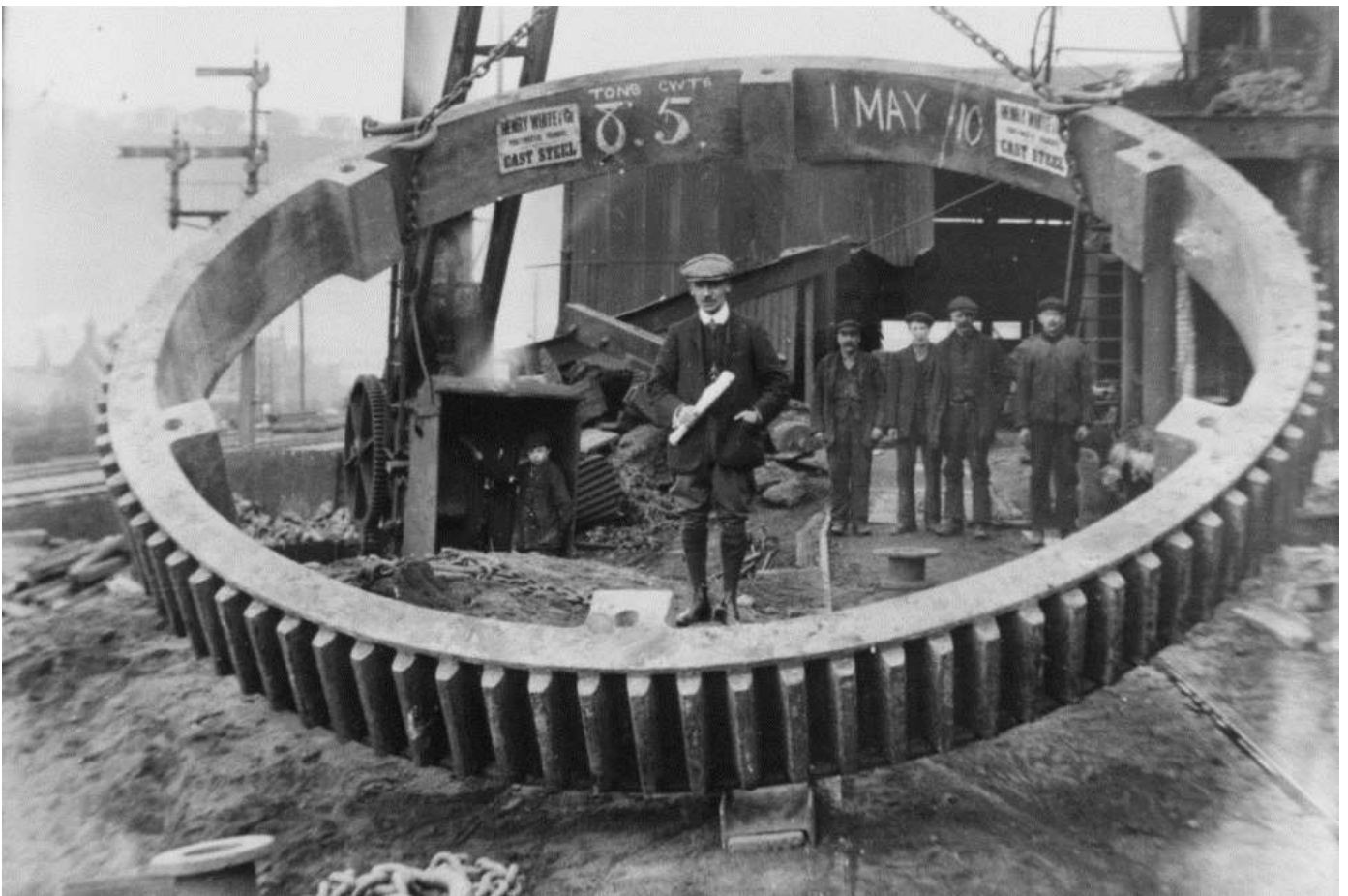
RAILWAY AND TRAMWAY POINTS AND CROSSINGS,

Mild Steel for Forgings, &c. Steel Castings for Ironworks, Ironstone Mines, Slate Quarries, Lead Mines, Collieries, and Engineering purposes, turned, bored, and planed. Mill and Forge Work of every description. Gas and Water Pipes of every size.

~~~~~  
**PONTYMISTER STEEL WORKS,  
PONTYMISTER, near NEWPORT, Mon.**



**Interior view showing wooden cranes: Photo Risca Museum.**



**Preparing to deliver a casting to Panteg Steel Works (?) Photo: Risca Museum**

White died in 1906 and Samuel Pope, well experienced in the Sheffield steel industries, was appointed Chairman and Managing director of the new group. Britannia Foundry operated separately from the new group and employed at its peak 250 workmen eighty of whom were moulders. Major customers now included the Royal Navy, producing castings for warships including H.M.S. Dreadnought, cast iron manhole covers and a significant order for castings from a northern based boilermaker. In addition, the Foundry produced lamp-posts for local authorities (One can still be seen at St. Michaels and All Saints Church at Lower Machen.)

In 1917 the industrialist John Paton joined the company's Board of Directors and in 1921 the group amalgamated with Messrs. Partridge, Jones and John Paton Limited. The foundry closed in the 1960's followed by final site clearance and the building of a major housing development.





**George Challengsworth outside the 'Isca Inn', Newport, now the 'Talisman'**

**Photo: courtesy Peter Brown**

---

## Malcolm's Merlin Musings

Malcolm has selected and had printed numerous interesting snippets from the Merlin, to help raise much needed funds. They are available at the Museum at £3.00 each

Here's a couple to whet your appetite; or better still reaching for your cash (*yes we will still take cash* 😊)



**THAMES TUNNEL.-** The works are still progressing with comparative rapidity. It is believed from the appearance of the strata and the care taken to protect the works, that all danger has been surmounted. A shaft is to be sunk on the Wapping side as soon as the tunnel passes the line of low water mark, at which time the workmen will then continue their labours at both ends of the tunnel until they meet. It is expected that foot passengers will be able to pass through the tunnel in the autumn of 1840.- *Railway Magazine*.

### **Summary of a paper on the state and prospects of the iron trade in South Wales in May, 1839.**

'Till 1740, the smelting of iron ore in England was executed entirely with wood charcoal, and the ores employed were principally brown and red hematite's. Earthy iron ores were also smelted; but it does not appear that the clay iron stones of the coal basins were then used, though they constitute almost the sole smelting material of the present day. At that era there were fifty-nine blast furnaces, whose annual product was 17,350 tons of cast iron - that is for each furnace, 294 tons per annum, and 5 1/2 tons per week. By the year 1788 several attempts had been made to reduce iron ore with coked coal; and there remained only twenty-four charcoal blast furnaces, which produced altogether 13,000 tons of cast iron in the year. The remarkable increase was due chiefly to the substitution of cylinder blowing machines, worked with pistons for the common wooden bellows.

In 1802, Great Britain possessed 168 blast furnaces, yielding a product of about 170,000 tons rising to 250,000 tons by 1806. In 1820 the make of iron had risen to 400,000 tons and in 1826 to almost 600,000 tons. By 1838, output reached upward of 1,000,000 tons.

**The Nantyglo Works** - here upwards of £50,000 was spent in an attempt to establish a profitable iron work. Not until Messrs. Joseph and Crawshay Bailey purchased the property was any remuneration realised. Messrs. Bailey within the last few years purchased **Beaufort Iron Works**. At the two establishments they have fourteen furnaces in blast, ten blown with cold and four with hot air. Their make of pig iron is from 1200 to 1300 tons

per week, from which they make about 750 tons of bars, rails and rods, and the remainder sold for foundry purposes.

Situated in the same valley is the **Coalbrook Vale Company's Works**, consisting of three furnaces, all blown with cold air. The make of the furnaces is 160 to 180 tons of cast iron per week.

Lower down the valley is the Blaina and **Cwm Celyn Iron Company Works**. The two properties have recently been purchased by a joint-stock company and Messrs. Brown and Russell are the joint managing directors. At Blaina they have two furnaces in blast and one to be erected. All blown with cold air. They yield about 120 tons of pig iron per week. At Cwm Celyn they are building four furnaces.

**Ebbw Vale Works**, the property of Messrs. Harford, Davies and Co., who are also owners of the Sirhowy Iron Works, have three furnaces in operation and are building a fourth. They blow one furnace with hot and two with cold air. At Sirhowy, they have four furnaces in blast and one undergoing repair. These furnaces make about 100 tons per week, each.

One mile lower down the Ebbw Vale is **Victoria Iron Works** recently established under the able Roger Hopkins,. These works belong to the **Monmouthshire Iron & Coal Co.**, Only one furnace is yet at work but another is ready to be blown in and they are erecting two others. Additional furnaces lower down the valley, near Abercarne, will be built.

**Tredegar Iron Works** have five furnaces in operation, all blown with cold air, they are building two others.

**Rhymney and Bute Iron Works**, belonging to a joint stock company now have six furnaces in blast, two blown with hot and four with cold air, and they are building four others. The establishment of Sir John Guest, Lewis and Co., of Dowlais, here you will find fifteen furnaces making an average of 1350 tons of pig iron per week. Four thousand hands are employed.

**Pen-y-Darran Iron Co.**, has six furnaces in blast all the furnaces are blown with cold air.

**Aberdare Iron Company** has six furnaces in blast producing 350 to 400 tons of cast iron per week.

**Pentyrch Iron Works** near Cardiff have two furnaces blown with cold air and produce 150 tons cast weekly. ~



# Last week's Quiz

1 What is on top of the clock that is on top of the lighthouse structure in Roath Park lake?

It's a replica of the ship Terra Nova to commemorate Captain Scott's ill-fated expedition to the South Pole. The ship's last call was at Cardiff to load with coal which had been donated by local colliery owners. *For detail of the lighthouse, or Scott's Memorial go to <http://www.cardiffparks.org.uk/roathpark/info/scottmemorial.shtml>* The site also includes great detail about the history and of Roath Park Lake itself along with many other Cardiff leisure



amenity sites

cc-by-sa/2.0 - Scott Memorial, Roath Park... by Robin Drayton - geograph.org.uk/p/3566728

*Answer. The photo is one of seven arches constructed by local industries on the occasion*



*of a visit by Lord Tredegar on 5th October 1896 to the 3<sup>rd</sup> annual Eisteddfod organised by Moriah Baptist Chapel.*

*This arch, the last travelling north, was built by the local coal miners and was situated near Risca church; the building on the extreme left is the Public Hall and the one in the centre (behind the vertical post) is the Albert Hotel.*

*For a detailed press report of the event see:*

<https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3426316/3426323/153/risca>

*Or this report which varies a little from the above:*

<https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3265465/3265468/73/risca>

*However neither agree on the number of, nor provide a complete list of, the arches and in a later edition an apology has to be made as ‘we omitted to notice the beautiful arch erected by Mrs. William Howells, sen., and Miss Thomas, Victoria-parade, at their own expense.’*

## *This week's Quiz*

- 1 David Spencer, born in Ynysddu on 10th April 1936, achieved what on 29th September 1960?
- 2 Front and side view of a building, where was it and what was it used for?





