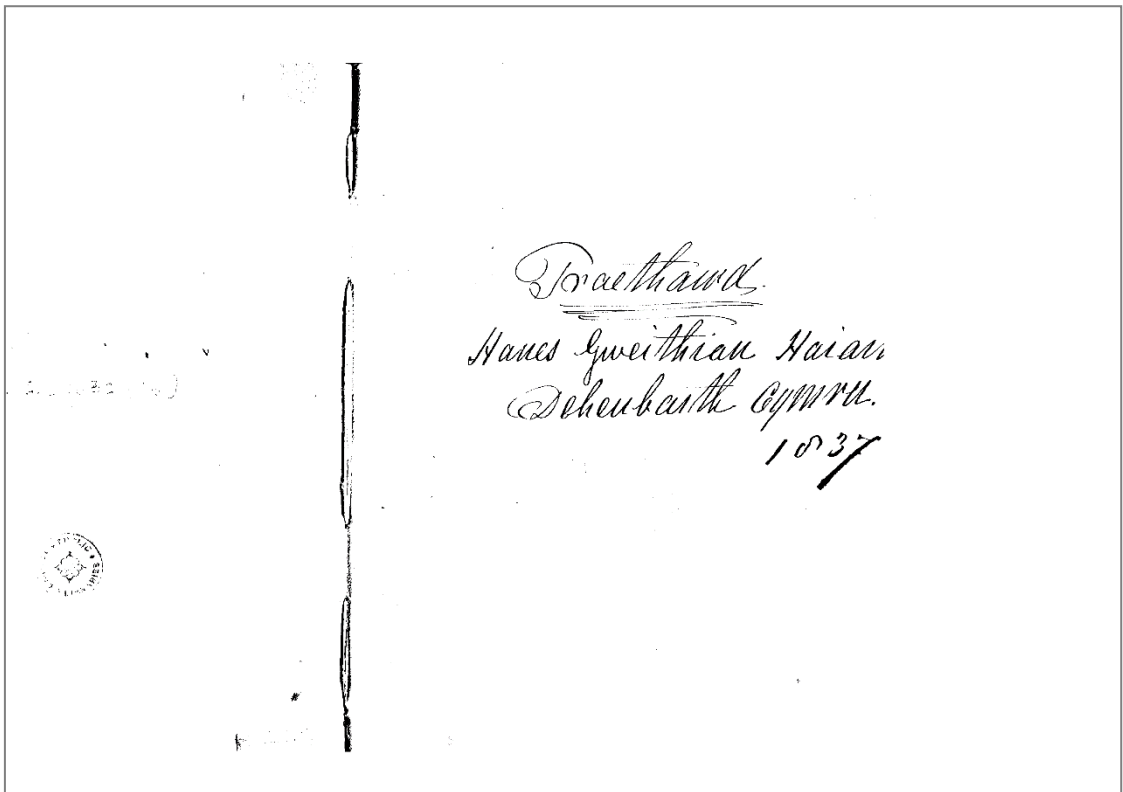


# SAMPLE

The History of The South Wales Iron Industry, 1837.

by Thomas Watkins, - Eddil Ifor, (1801 – 1889)



One of the winning essays from the Abergavenny Eisteddfod of 1837

Translated by Colin Morgan and edited by Colin Morgan & Peter Morgan

Jones 2009

© Cedwir pob hawl i'r cyfieithiad hwn; rhydd eu golygyddion ganiatâd i'w ddatblygu a dosbarthu i'r **Fforwm Treftadaeth Blaenau Gwent** yn unig.

### **About The Author Thomas E Watkins (Eiddil Ifor) (1801 – 1889):**

Thomas Watkins was born in Pwll-yr-Hyward, Llanfoist, Monmouthshire on May 1<sup>st</sup> 1801. His father had worked in Abertyleri [Abertillery] but returned to Llanfoist to work in the limestone quarries belonging to the Blaenafon iron works. The family were members of the Baptist chapel in Llanwenarth. Thomas Watkins kept the White Hart tavern in Blaenafon before going to work as a weigher in the iron works of Blaenau Gwent where in 1859 his wife died in Blaina, after which in 1860 Thomas Watkins returned to Blaenafon to keep the Three Cranes tavern for the remainder of his life . He was an original and leading member in its early years of the Abergavenny based group of people - Cymreigyddion y Fenni - who established the series of Eisteddfodau that created such a stir in Gwent between 1833 and 1854. Thomas Watkins was a regular competitor in the Abergavenny Eisteddfodau and won many prizes for his essays, of which this is one. He is best known for his history of Llanfoist parish - Hanes Llanffwyst – which won first prize in the first Abergavenny eisteddfod in November 1834. He was not as successful as a poet but he certainly was as an essayist in these eisteddfodau, winning competitions on a dozen occasions. Nine of his essays survive, five in the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, and four in Cardiff Central Library.

### **About the Editing of this History of The Iron Industry by Thomas Watkins:**

The headings in this edited translation are those of this author. Where additional headings have been made by the editors they are in square brackets.

**The History of The South Wales Iron Industry,  
by Thomas Watkins - 1837.**

**The Situation of the Earlier Welsh.**

In preface to looking at the history of the Iron Works it will not be without benefit to describe something of the practices and way of life of the old inhabitants of Gwent and Glamorgan and some of the neighbouring counties prior to the establishment of the iron works. Principally though it is these two counties who have most of these works in South Wales at the present time. The majority of the population of South Wales still follow many of the aims, practices and rituals of their forefathers to which they pay great respect. Their main trade at the time of the start of the Iron Industry was agriculture according to the methods of this and earlier times. There was a high degree of unity and brotherhood among them; they nurtured the maintenance of their country and its national identity, and many of the old practices in their purest form which had been in existence for a thousand years. They behaved affably and kindly towards each other in their various neighbourhoods.

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**The Beginning of The Works & Their Commerce – [life before industrialisation]**

The majority of local people had some sort of smallholding, particularly the heads of families, where they raised barley, wheat, rhug and oats for their own use and to meet the needs of their wider family. Every family kept bees for honey and the making of their ancient beer – Cwrw Metheglyn. They kept

large flocks of sheep and every family of eminence would keep a shepherd to look after them. The flocks would frequently contain between two and three thousand sheep in number and up to twenty and thirty thousand, and others emulating somewhat the Llwydiarth families and the Pibydd Moel works in numbers. They kept many goats which they reared along the edges of the crags and hillsides, and particularly by the medium sized smallholder and rarely would you see their cottage without these surrounding them. Every family kept a pig and geese. Every smallholder kept one or two hounds, and frequently these would be assembled to hunt and destroy foxes and other wild prey.

The main commerce of the mountain dwellers and small valleys of Gwent was in limestone and coal. Every smallholder in the mountains would keep between nine and a dozen horses the size of a pony, as well as mules to carry the limestone and coal to some English counties, those which border Gwent such as Herefordshire, Gloucestershire and Worcestershire. Their trackways can be seen on a clear day from the top of the Brecon Beacons along the mountain borders of Gwent, running a long way down the steep flanks of Llangatwg [Llangattock] to the fantastic natural cliffs of the Clydach valley, Gilwern, Blaencwm Llanwenarth, the Blawreang [Blorengel], Llanelen, Llanover, Mamhilad, Trefethyn, and to within a mile of Pontypool. They ploughed their fields by the power of oxen and it was not usual to keep large horses prior to the building of the works, when it became a general practice because the call for them grew greatly. Without them it was not easy to construct the works.

### **Their mode of dress**

Clothes were universally made of wool cloth made in their own homes. Men and boys wore short cloaks – *huganau* - and long grey breeches, shirts of wool in white, grey spotted or red which was the most general. The women and girls wore gowns of striped wool, mottled or spotted caps with wide brims, and a long shawl spread across their shoulders from the back to the front. They spoke their own language in the fair and market, and they severely loathed those of their neighbours who would use English or forms of dress from England, and anything else they considered a vain pose.



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