

Section A

Coal in the Rhondda was, in its time was the best steam coal in the world. From its rise in the 1850's, till its fall in 1983, the Rhondda has been both a place of hope and a place of despair. But as well as this it has been a ray off hope for the working class, with the workers and there families of the this small south Wales vally standing up for there basic rights and pay, standing up for what they believe is right.

Over the years the Rhondda valley has changed dramatically. It has changed from a small solitude hamlet nestled in the beauty of the surrounding valley, to a bruised fallen king of industry tossed onto the dieing heap of Britain's long since over industrial revolution.

There were many reasons for the coal industry to 'boom' in the Rhondda valley, amount these are, the thousands of square acres of steam coal rivalled by non which, G.T. Clarke of Dowlais remarked as "in the highest degree of purpose of manufacture, of commence and of war." This comment was made during a time when every thing was run by steam engines and so was very true. But although this was true at the time it was not true later on. As the development of the diesel engine came in and things were slowly modernised, the demand for steam coal dropped. Also the resent 'boom' of Cardiff as a modern port, and the recent opening of the Taff Valley Railway linking Merthyr and Cardiff. Both of these put to together meant that south Wales coal was now more accessible then ever.

There is another reason for the 'boom' of the coal industry in the Rhondda Valley. To truly appreciate this reason we first have to look at who it is, that is saying it and why they are saying it. The reason I am talking about is that of the findings of Henry de la Beche and Doctor Lyon Playfair, who said after "scientific test", said that South Wales coal unequivocally was the best fitted the needs of the navy. The reason I feel this comment cannot be taken as a literal as it seems is because, scientist acting on the behalf of the British Admiralty made this comment. And so they were bound to say that coal from south Wales fitted the Navy's needs the best. There are several reasons for the scientists to say this; one of the reasons for the scientists to say this was because, at the time the test were carried out the British navy was the best in the world. And so when the British navy did something the rest of the world took note of this and also did it. This would have made South Wales steam coal very desirable and in high demand from many of the worlds greatest navy's. This in turn would have brought more money into the country and so the country would, in turn the country would grow stronger and prosper from its new wealth. The other reason for the scientists to say this is because indeed Welsh coal was the best suited for the purposes of the navy. Never the less, What ever the reasons for the scientists to say that Welsh Steam coal was the best, coal in the Rhondda prospered during the years of 1951 - 1983. And with it brought thousands of new jobs and hope for many of the rural community's migrating from the countryside to find better work. But as always along with the good times came the bad.

The Rapid rise of Coal in the Rhondda lead to a rapid rise in the population as in stated in source A2 the population rose by 151,000 inhabitants, between the years of 1851-1911. Houses were built to house the rapidly arriving workers, but these houses were little more then a roof over there head. They were small cramped and there was in the beginning an average of 8.8 people per house. But if you look at what the people had come from (mud-huts, small wooden houses ETC.) the houses that they moved into were a marked improvement. Other problems the coal industry

caused was the destruction of the once beautiful scenery that existed in the valley. The Trees that once covered the valley side were all cut down and used, the once rich rivers were polluted to the point nothing but bacteria could live in them. This not only ruined the view but it also created many sanitary problems for the people who now lived in the valley, as the river was there only source of water but it was black with the pollution from the coal mines. Despite all the sanitation problems and the cramped living conditions people continued to flock to the Rhondda Valley right up until the mines closed in 1983.

Section B

In the Rhondda Valley there were several collieries, the most well known of which is the Lewis Merthyr Colliery, Trehafod. This colliery had three working mines as shown in the picture in source B2. You can tell that they are working mines as you can still see the smoke billowing out of the tall chimneys. The Trehafod site was first opened in the 1850's with the sinking of the Hafod and Coedcae collieries working the upper bituminous seams. Then between the years of 1880 and 1881 three 'great' Steam coal pits were sunk the Bertie, Trefor and the Hafod pits. By 1900 the three 'great' steam coal pits were under the single control of William Thomas Lewis. Production boomed to nearly a million tons annually and Lewis Merthyr Collieries Company Ltd. Became one of the most important mining concerns in Britain. During his reign as the owner of the Trehafod pits, William Thomas Lewis became Lord Merthyr. This title I feel was only given to Lewis as a sweet to keep him happy and so he didn't leave and close the mines which not only would have created mass unemployment but (more importantly for the government) a great loss in revenue from the mines. In 1983 the government closed down the Lewis Merthyr colliery. 8 years after its closer the Lewis Merthyr colliery was re-opened as Rhondda Heritage Park. This I feel was just a pathetic attempt by the government to ease their guilty conscience. The reason I believe this is because in 1983 the government closed the Lewis Merthyr colliery and with it went hundreds of jobs. The government covered up the massive unemployment problems with a new scheme, which was to revitalize the Rhondda and "make sure that the memory's of the rich mining history of the Rhondda is never lost". The government then pumped 7 million pounds into the Rhondda Heritage Park, which promised to bring jobs to the Valley once again. The Rhondda Heritage Park did indeed bring jobs to the valley but not nearly as many as the mines once did.

The Rhondda Heritage Park was I fell in very accurate portrayal of a miners working life. But I fell it was censored to much, if you had simply looked at the Rhondda Heritage Park for what it was like to be a miner, then you would have only have half of what it was like to be a miner. The Rhondda Heritage Park portrays the better side of being a miner very well but it only really concentrates on the good side of mining and so leaves off the bad things such as the poor housing low pay appalling working conditions etc. These are some of the key issues of mining and I feel are too important to be left out.

I feel I must add something about the guide that showed us around the Rhondda Heritage Park. The reason I feel I should say something about are guide is because he him self was once a miner and is now a guide in a tourist attraction. Watching are guide as we walked around the park I noticed the look on his face (although happy) was a face that was annoyed, annoyed that he had seen men go down that pit and never come back up and know hundreds of tourist are wondering around going "awww its it said" not knowing just how bad things really were, annoyed that the government that he had put his trust in had betrayed him and his fellow workers, and then tried to pawn him off by giving him a job as a tour guide. Although I'm sure that this was not how the guide was meant to come across. I fell it gave me a better insight into how a miner feels now the mines are closed.

The Rhondda Heritage Park has a display about the Tynewydd disaster. The Tynewydd disaster is a disaster but one with a happy ending as in this disaster only 4 people died and the rest are rescued in heroic fashion. The disaster its self was caused

by a boundary separating a flooded mine from another one was too thin and simply just burst and the mine was flooded. The flood trapped two groups of men the first were rescued quickly although one man died (a rescuer) when he hit through the wall separating the trapped men from the rest of the mine, and the change in the pressures sucked him into the hole he had just dug through. However the second group trapped were a lot harder to get to. After a failed attempt to get to them through the flooded passages the engineers decide to drill a hole through to the men to get liquid food to them before they died of starvation. But by drilling this hole the engineers had relieved the pressure in the space where the men were trapped and the water level started to rise. As well as relieving the pressure the engineers had released a lot of gas, which made the mine unsafe. Despite this four men kept on digging to save their friends then four men finally broke through to the trapped miners (by this stage the trapped miners couldn't even stand). The trapped miners were rescued and were all ok.

This story does not, I feel represent the true danger of working down a mine as it has a happy ending, which never normally happened in mining disasters. The risk of a disaster happening underground was quite high. I feel this poem represents how the miners felt about working down the mines. It was hung for many years on the wall of the Llanhilleth Workmen's Institute:

Heaven or Hell?

*A Welshman stood at the Golden Gate his head bowed low,
He meekly asked the man of fate the way that he should go.*

*"What have you done" St. Peter said "To gain admission here"
"I merely mined for coal" he said, "for many a year"*

*St. Peter opened wide the gate and softly tolled the bell,
"Come and choose your harp" he said, you've had your share of hell.*

This poem I feel represents how the miners felt because it describes the mines as hell. This in a very religious time is quite a strong word to describe something.

Although I feel the Tynewydd disaster is not a fair representation of how dangerous it is to work down a mine I can see why they choose it instead of a more horrific disaster. One reason for them to choose this disaster instead of another is because it is suitable for a young audience so you can get the message across to all age groups. The other reason I feel the Rhondda Heritage Park shows this exhibit is because you are about to go down into a mine and they don't want to scare you about going underground, as you might not want to go.