

RHONDDA CYNON TAF POINTS OF INTEREST

PONTYPRIDD WALKING TRAIL



Amgueddfa
Pontypridd



Pontypridd
Museum



LOTTERY FUNDED
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STRONG HERITAGE | STRONG FUTURE
RHONDDA CYNON TAF
TREFTADAETH GADARN | DYFODOL SICR

PONTYPRIDD – A BRIEF HISTORY

Pontypridd lies at the point where the Taff and Rhondda valleys meet, and this connection, fashioned by nature, is echoed in a shared industrial, social and cultural history. It prospered from the mid 19th century onwards as the market town for the surrounding valleys, while these places were being exploited for their reserves of coal.

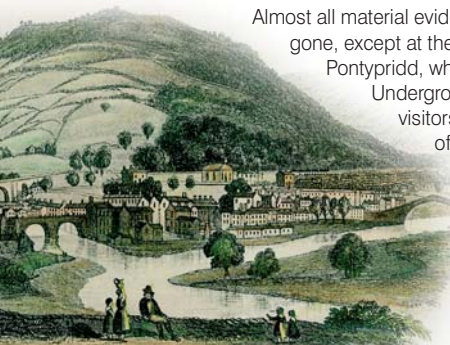
Before this the area was sparsely populated and relied on agriculture for its way of life. Pontypridd's most famous landmark and symbol 'the Old Bridge' dates from this time. Built in 1756 by William Edwards, it was for 80 years afterwards the longest single-span arched bridge in Europe.

The real development of the town began as a result of the opening of the Glamorganshire Canal from Merthyr Tydfil down to Cardiff in 1794. Merthyr made the best iron in the world, and Pontypridd offered easy access to good coal. These factors brought the first major industry, the Brown Lenox Chainworks, which opened in 1818, and Pontypridd became the unlikely centre of manufacture of chain cable and anchors for warships and merchant vessels. The last chain cable made here was for the QE2. A small section of the canal behind the former Chainworks site is being restored by a group of enthusiasts.

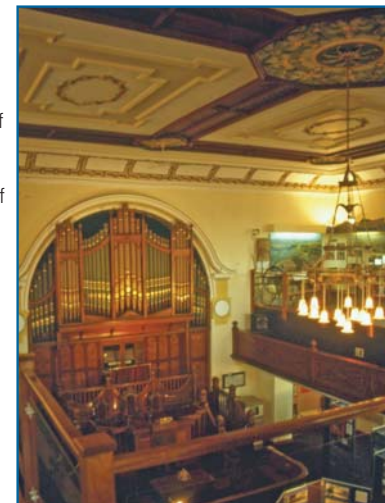
In the first half of the 19th century, the town's industry expanded to include a rail mill and one of the largest tinplate works in Britain, at nearby Treforest. But from about 1850, and for a century afterwards, the life of Pontypridd and the surrounding valleys was dominated by the growth of the local coal industry and the influx of people and trade it brought with it. In 1820 Pontypridd had been a Welsh-speaking village. By 1900 it was a large and mainly English-speaking town. The legacy of this short but eventful history is that Pontypridd occupies the interesting position of a market town serving its hinterland of industrial villages, and a community within which there is a shifting cultural balance. The rapid expansion of the town's population brought thousands from England, Ireland and even further afield. For a while it seemed that Pontypridd was not a Welsh town at all; but today a quarter of its primary school children go to Welsh language-medium schools.

Almost all material evidence of this important period of history has now gone, except at the former Lewis Merthyr Colliery, two miles from Pontypridd, which is now the Rhondda Heritage Park. Here the Underground Experience Tours guided by ex-miners give visitors an insight into the industry which was the lifeblood of the area. While the cafe and gift shop provide opportunities for refreshment and souvenir hunting.

Today the area offers a warm welcome to visitors and provides a wide range of shops, pubs, cafes, restaurants and entertainment.



1 **PONTYPRIDD MUSEUM** is at the northern end of the town near to the bus station and the Goods Yard Car Park. The museum building was the Tabernacl Chapel, built in 1861 to the design of its minister, Edward Roberts. Rebuilt in 1910 at the height of the town's prosperity, the interior has an exceptionally fine ceiling and art nouveau stained glass. The woodwork is pine from Russia and Poland, a reminder of the international trade created by the coal industry. The pipe organ is still used for concerts. There is a permanent exhibition on the history of the town and an ever-changing variety of temporary exhibitions.



2 **THE OLD BRIDGE** was completed in 1756, after three failed attempts. Its builder, William Edwards, first constructed a three-arched bridge, but this was swept away by a flood. He next attempted a single-span bridge, but the timber supports used during construction were also swept away by the river in flood. His third attempt collapsed under its own weight. His fourth, the present bridge, has three cylindrical holes each side to reduce the weight of the stonework. With a span of 140 feet Edwards' bridge was hailed as the first in Europe to exceed the span of the Rialto in Venice.



2A PONTYPRIDD CANAL

(short detour) Walk towards Pontypridd's main roundabout, crossing the road under the A470. Proceed forward, past the row of terraced houses and continue on to the Bunch of Grapes Public House. What remains of the canal lock, basin and bridge are situated at the rear of this establishment. Listed by Cadw in 2011 they offer an insight into the historic canal structure. There is a short 5 minute walk back the way you came to rejoin the trail at point 3



3 YNYSANGHARAD WAR MEMORIAL PARK

was established as a War Memorial Park after the First World War, and funded by public donations. The obelisk which can be seen from the Park, on the hillside to the east of the town, is a memorial to the 5th Welch Regiment, whose recruiting centre was Pontypridd.

The park is also home to the National Lido of Wales.



4 JAMES MEMORIAL The James Memorial commemorates Evan and James James, writers of the Welsh National Anthem 'Hen Wlad fy Nhadau'. The memorial dates from 1930, and is the work of William Goscombe John, arguably the finest Welsh sculptor to date. The statues represent Music and Poetry. Evan and James James appear on the plaque below. Evan, the father, is actually the younger-looking man, as the sculptor had to work from two photographs taken at different dates.

5 COAL DRAM In the sunken floral garden, a coal "dram" recognises the important financial contribution made by the miners to the creation of the park.



6 GORDON LENOX FOUNTAIN Near the children's play area is a small drinking fountain, dedicated to the memory of Lewis Gordon Lenox, grandson of Samuel Lenox, one of the founding partners of Brown Lenox

Chainworks. Established in 1818 it began the industrial development of Pontypridd, and became famous for the manufacture of the best iron chains for ships' anchor cables.



- 7 LIDO PONTY** Lido Ponty was originally built in 1927 in a style that was typical of its time, bringing a strong Mediterranean mood to the South Wales Valleys.

Long before he found fame and fortune, Pontypridd's very own Sir Tom Jones, was a regular visitor to the Lido. It was also the place where a young Jenny James first found her talent for swimming at the age of seven, going on to forge a career as a swimming coach and a lifeguard, saving more than 100 lives. While working as a lifeguard at the Lido, Jenny also used the venue for her physical training in her early years. She entered the Guinness Book of Records after becoming the first Welsh person to swim the English Channel in a time of 13 hours 55 minutes on August 16, 1951, at the age of 24. Jenny James sadly passed away in 2014, at the age of 87.

No visit to Lido Ponty will be complete without a trip to its Visitor Centre, where you will be able to find out so much more about its place in history. Take a magical journey through a timeline of the 20th Century and into the 21st Century, signalling a new chapter in the life of Lido Ponty. Visitors will be spellbound by this amazing insight into the local heritage, while at the same time exploring the full story of the regeneration of Lido Ponty.

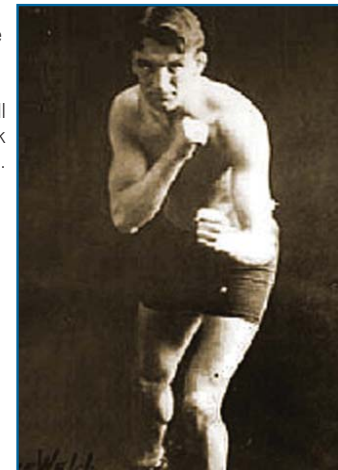
Take a look at some fantastic footage on our screens, as well as interviews with local people talking about their own personal memories of 'Ponty Baths.' Have fun at our interactive table; taking part in a quiz, attempting to complete a jigsaw puzzle and playing other games. Guaranteed fun for all the family!

The Lido Ponty Visitor Centre is situated above the Waterside Cafe and is open to the public all year round.

It also offers magnificent, panoramic views out across the whole of Lido Ponty, Lido Play and the surrounding Ynysangharad War Memorial Park. Lido Ponty is as proud of its heritage as it is the present day.



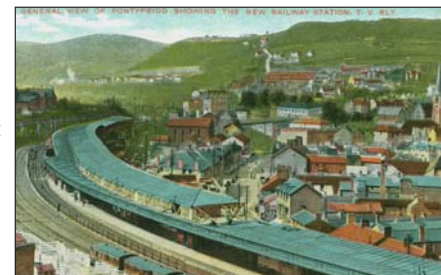
- 8 FREDDIE WELSH** On the wall at the start of Sardis Road is a blue plaque commemorating Freddie Welsh, who was world lightweight boxing champion from 1914 to 1917 and the only Pontypridd-born man to hold a world boxing title. He was born Frederick Hall Thomas in Morgan Street, Pontypridd in 1886 and took up boxing after emigrating to the USA at the age of 16. During his career he fought 168 times, losing only 5 bouts. He was awarded the first ever Lonsdale belt in 1909 after beating Johnny Summers to win the British lightweight title. He died in New York in 1927.



- 9 PONTYPRIDD RAILWAY STATION**

Rebuilt in 1907-09. In order to cope with the number of trains and passengers (11,000 per day) in a location where the narrow valley made it impossible to build several platforms side by side, a single island platform with several bays was built long enough to allow several trains to use it simultaneously. The platform was for many years the longest in Britain.

A detour along the Broadway from here will take you to the renowned World of Groggs where sporting, screen and stage stars including local operatic great Sir Geraint Evans and iconic Welsh performer Tom Jones, have been immortalised as hand-sculpted figurines which are available to view and purchase.



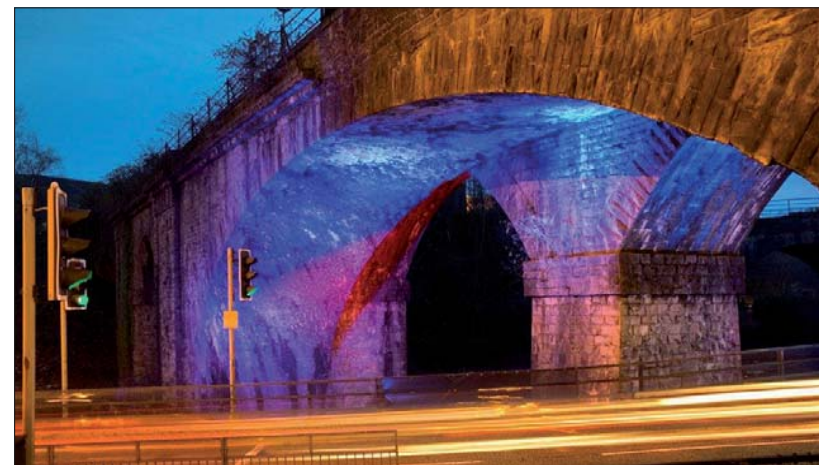
10 SARDIS INDEPENDENT CHAPEL was built in 1834 and rebuilt only 18 years later to meet the needs of a congregation which was growing with the town. It is built of the local Pennant sandstone, and is now the only chapel in Pontypridd to conduct its services in Welsh. One of its ministers, John Dyfnallt Owen, was a well known writer and one of its secretaries, Berwyn Lewis, had been prop forward for Huddersfield.

11 JAMES PLAQUE Continue along Sardis Road and cross the river Rhondda. High on the end wall of the first building across the river is a black marble plaque. This marks the site of the small woollen factory owned by Evan James and his house next door to it. He and his son James lived here when they composed the Welsh National Anthem 'Hen Wlad fy Nhadau' in 1856.



12 BRUNEL VIADUCT Turn around with the plaque behind you. The railway viaduct which crosses the river Rhondda and the main road carries the line to Merthyr Tydfil. The Taff Vale Railway from Cardiff to Merthyr was the first proper railway in Wales, engineered by Isambard Kingdom Brunel.

The pier which now stands behind the main arch is part of a second viaduct built alongside when the track was doubled. Originally the railway was carried across the river on a single arch of 110 feet, which was as striking in appearance as William Edwards' bridge at the other end of the town.

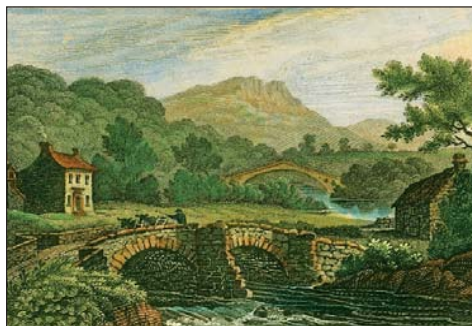


13 MUSICANS' MURAL Here a short detour is worthwhile. The steel steps at the side of the bus shelters just beyond the James plaque lead down to Mill Street, once the main road up the Rhondda valley. The road now narrows and becomes a pedestrian underpass, lined with murals depicting figures representing the rich and varied musical culture of Pontypridd.



14 ST. CATHERINE'S CHURCH Climb the steps back up to the main road and turn right. Across the road is St. Catherine's church, built 1866-70 by architect John Norton. Until then Pontypridd had been divided between five parishes, each with its church a few miles out of the town. The construction of this church therefore marks the establishment of the town itself. Built externally of local sandstone with Bath stone dressings, its interior by contrast is of red and black brick. It has fine stained glass, in particular a set of windows in the North aisle depicting the early history of Christianity in Wales. Cross at the pedestrian crossing.

15 GELLIWASTAD HOUSE Continue along Gelliwastad Road. Set back from the road on the left is the Gelliwastad Institute, formerly Gelliwastad House. Note the Blue Plaque on the wall marking its significance. This is the oldest building in the town centre, and was the home of the Griffiths family. Dr. Richard Griffiths (1756-1826) built a horse-drawn tramroad in 1809 which was the first means of transporting coal from the Rhondda valley and also brought miners' wives to shop at Pontypridd market. This began the development of the town.



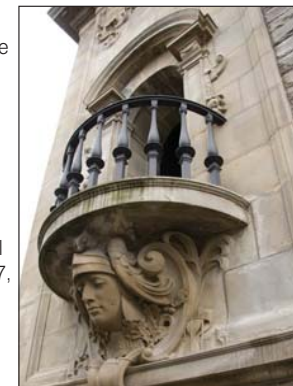
Continue along Gelliwastad Road to a former Wesleyan Chapel, built in 1895 to the design of the local architect Arthur O. Evans. Looking back along the road, the four churches and chapels within 200 yards testify to the prosperity of Pontypridd in its heyday.

This walking trail is one of a series available in the area. Details of these trails, places to stay and other attractions can be found at www.visitrct.wales Tel: 01443 424052

By public transport:
Visit: www.traveline.info or tel: 0871 200 2233

By road: Leave the A470 trunk road at the exit signed Pontypridd and Rhondda Valleys, then follow directions to the car parks in the town

16 MUNICIPAL OFFICES Next to this chapel is the former District Council building, which now houses the office of the Mayor of Rhondda Cynon Taf. This has been described as "far and away the most distinguished building in Pontypridd, a display of restrained Edwardian self-confidence which in its resourceful and original handling of the classical idiom can bear comparison with anything in Cathays Park, Cardiff" (John Newman- 'The Buildings of Wales - Glamorgan'). Either side of the entrance are memorial plaques to two distinguished figures of the Liberal nationalist era, Edward Thomas John (born Pontypridd 1857, d.1931), MP for East Denbigh and a prominent figure in the Celtic Congress and the Peace Society; and Sir Edward Anwyl, educationalist and first President of the Union of Welsh Societies (d. Pontypridd 1914). Cross the pedestrian crossing and walk down Crossbrook Street. * Please note this is a very steep route, use the alternative route which is flatter and highlighted on the map with the blue dotted line.



17 THE FOUNTAIN The Fountain, on an island in Penueel Square, was a gift to the town from Alfred Thomas M.P. in 1895. Designed by Charles Fowler of Cardiff it features Celtic knotwork derived from the ancient crosses of the Vale of Glamorgan. Look carefully at the four pillars and count the different designs. There are some fine Victorian and Edwardian buildings along Taff Street and Market Street. To appreciate them look above the shop fronts at the detailing.

18 THE MARKET Pontypridd market is synonymous with the town and the Pontypridd Market Company has existed since 1877. The market consists of a group of buildings, the earliest built in 1885-93 in the style then known as Mixed Renaissance, the latest in c.1910 in bold Baroque. The shop facades here have been restored to their original appearance. (open on Weds, Fri & Sat)



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