

RHONDDA CYNON TAF POINTS OF INTEREST

TREFOREST WALKING TRAIL



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Pontypridd



Pontypridd
Museum



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TREForest – A BRIEF HISTORY

The development of Treforest pre-dates the growth of Pontypridd and the community there has a distinctive and intriguing history of its own. This short trail around the compact streets of the village traces the remaining evidence of Treforest's industrial past and highlights places of historical, social and cultural interest. The trail has no set route - points of interest are numbered in the text and can be located on the map at the centre of the booklet.

Much of Treforest's early growth is connected to the Crawshays, the Merthyr iron-master family, and the development of metalworking in the district. In the 1820s William Crawshay 2nd set up a tin mill on the western bank of the river Taff just south of the village, taking advantage of coal brought from the lower Rhondda by Dr. Richard Griffiths' horse-drawn tramroad (1809) and good transport links to Cardiff provided by the Glamorganshire Canal (1794). In the 1830s the works came under the control of William's son, Francis Crawshay (1811-1878), and, by 1836, it was one of the largest in Britain. Francis settled in Treforest, near his works, making his home at 'Forest House', where he lived with his wife and eight children. A large part of the village was built by him during the 1830s and 1840s to house tinplate workers. By all accounts, he was an eccentric character who never managed to turn a decent profit at the works but he was reputedly popular with his workforce and the only member of his family to learn to speak Welsh fluently. Francis Crawshay retired in 1867 and died in 1878. The tinplate works continued in operation until 1939 but during the second-half of the 19th century, Treforest was gradually overshadowed by Pontypridd, which prospered as the market town for the surrounding coal-mining valleys. In an effort to diversify employment, away from coal and iron, central government established Treforest Trading Estate in 1937, just half a mile south of the tinplate works. It's still home to over 100 companies. Today Treforest is perhaps best-known as the location for one campus of the University of South Wales, the largest University in Wales, home to 30,000 students from over 120 different countries. This student population supports a wide variety of shops, cafes, restaurants and pubs offering refreshment and entertainment. Of course, the other claims to fame Treforest has on the international stage is as the birthplace of the legendary Welsh singer, Sir Tom Jones, who lived in Laura Street and as the home of the World of Groggs.



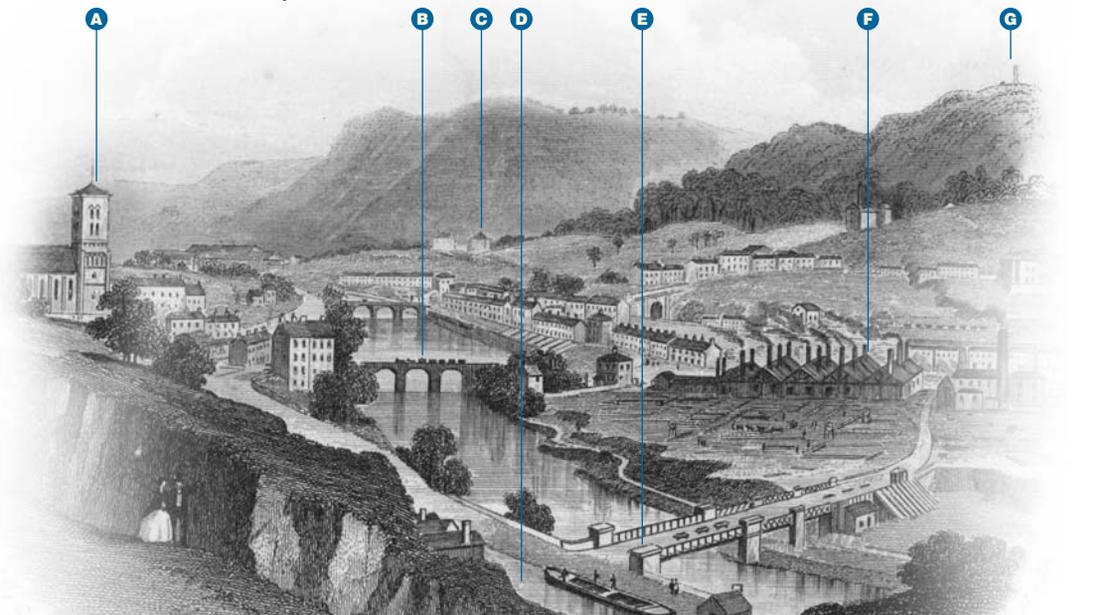
River Taff at Treforest 1830s with Machine Bridge in the background, painted by Henry Gastineau



TREForest 1850s

This engraving of Treforest as it appeared in the middle of the 19th century shows the developing community.

- A. St. Mary's Church, Glyntaff, opened in 1839. When a religious census was taken on a Sunday in 1851 the total attendance during 3 services on that day was 712 out of a total population for the district of 3,147.
- B. Machine Bridge with a 'journey' of horse-drawn coal drams crossing it. The tramroad and the bridge date from 1809, making it one of the oldest railway viaducts in the world. Dr. Richard Griffiths' Tramroad brought coal from levels in the lower Rhondda to join the canal system at Treforest for movement to Cardiff.
- C. Forest House with Treforest Tinplate Works in the distance.
- D. Glamorganshire Canal, the main method of transport until the opening of the Taff Vale Railway in 1840.
- E. Bridge over the Taff constructed by the Aberdare Iron Company in 1851 linking the Taff Vale Ironworks with the Glamorganshire Canal. The bridge's abutments survive at the end of the modern footbridge over the Taff.
- F. Taff Vale Ironworks opened by Rowland Fothergill. It produced rails for the expanding railway network. As late as the 1990s Treforest foundry cast iron by traditional methods on this site.
- G. The 'Glass Tower', a folly erected by Francis Crawshay from where he could survey his tinworks and the Taff Valley.



FOREST HOUSE - 'TY CRAWSHAY'

Francis Crawshay's home in Treforest was Forest House **1**. The building is now Grade II listed. Francis befriended another eccentric local character, Dr. William Price, with whom he shared a deep interest in druidism and antiquarianism. It may be Price's influence we see in some of the features Francis added to Forest House.

He gathered a collection of around 20 large standing stones which he willed to be arranged in a circle there after his death.

Renovation work carried out at the property during the 1940s revealed a circular and domed chamber in the basement which had a stone seat running around its edge and a stepped stone pillar at its centre. It could only be entered from a trapdoor above. Local folklore has it that this was the site of secret druidic ceremonies and the place where Dr. William Price hid from the authorities before fleeing to France after his involvement in the Chartist rising of 1839.

When Forest House passed from Crawshay ownership it was purchased by a local solicitor, Walter Morgan, and it was from his widow that the house was bought for the purpose of forming the South Wales and Monmouthshire School of Mines in 1913 to train surveyors and engineers employed in what was by then the predominant industry in the area. It was funded by the major Welsh coal owners who gave one tenth of a penny for each ton of coal their companies produced. Since then the site has seen a succession of ever-expanding

educational establishments culminating in the present University of South Wales campus. A reminder of the university's roots in the town's industrial past stands next to 'Ty Crawshay' in the form of an 1845 beam engine originally used at the nearby Newbridge/Gelliwion Colliery. Francis Crawshay's stone circle was buried in the foundations of the growing college during the 1950s.



TREForest TINWORKS AND THE TINWORKS FEEDER

The weir across the river Taff at Treforest **2** was constructed in the 1830s to provide a head of water at a point 500 yards upstream from the Treforest tinplate works. The production of tinplate requires pieces of hot iron to be passed repeatedly through rollers, making the sheets of metal slightly thinner each time before a coating of rust-proof tin is applied. The remains of a sluice are still visible on the western side of the weir. This carried water into a mill race connected to 8 waterwheels which powered the machinery associated with the process. Some of the tinworks buildings (now listed) still exist and can be seen via a short walk beyond the end of Meadow Street.



TREForest IRON AND STEEL MAKING



Francis Crawshay also constructed 3 blast-furnaces in Treforest **3** but never used them himself. In 1873 they were sold to Sir William T. Lewis of Aberdare who formed the 'Forest Iron and Steel Company' which produced iron and steel there until 1900 when the works were dismantled and the company wound up. The site, behind Kingsland Terrace, was landscaped and turned into playing fields. The area is known locally as the 'White Tips', recalling the slag waste material deposited there after the smelting process.

RAILWAYS

Treforest railway station **4** opened in 1847 on the Taff Vale Railway line linking Merthyr with Cardiff. Today, because of the university, it is one of the busiest stations on the route.

In the grounds of the university is the southern entrance to the Barry Railway tunnel (1888), which allowed coast-bound coal trains from the Rhondda Valley avoid the bottleneck of Pontypridd railway junction.



PARK STREET

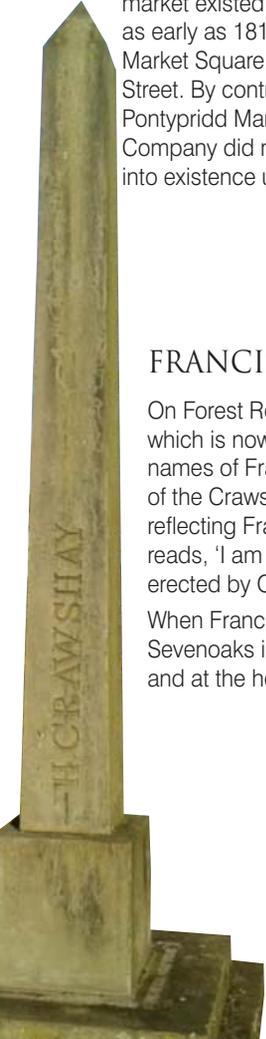
Industrial development brought people, trade and commerce **5**. Park Street is still the commercial centre of Treforest. A market existed in Treforest as early as 1814 based at Market Square, now Castle Street. By contrast, Pontypridd Market Company did not come into existence until 1877.



FRANCIS CRAWSHAY'S OBELISK

On Forest Rd., overlooking the river Taff, Francis Crawshay erected a stone obelisk **6** which is now surrounded by a small garden. It is dated 1844 and inscribed with the names of Francis and his brother, Henry Crawshay. It may have been a boundary marker of the Crawshay lands but it is fashioned along the lines of an Egyptian prototype reflecting Francis Crawshay's fascination with ancient history. An inscription on the plinth reads, 'I am a model of the only obelisk now standing at Heliopolis On of the scriptures erected by Osortseen 1st'.

When Francis Crawshay died in 1878 he was buried in the churchyard at Brasted near Sevenoaks in Kent. His grave is surrounded by a chain fence lined with druidical symbols and at the head of his grave stands a 20 foot high granite obelisk of similar design.



TREForest HOUSING

One of the most striking reminders of Francis Crawshay's involvement with Treforest is the village itself. Most of the oldest housing was constructed by Francis Crawshay for his tinworks employees - the houses at Long Row being especially distinctive. Other streets such as Forest Road, Park Street and Park Terrace are of similar age. Along the Broadway **7** a row of cottages with rough hewn stone frontages date from the early 1800s. They line the former route of Dr. Richard Griffith's horse-drawn tramroad. Here too you'll find the former Danygraig pub – now the famous World of Groggs.



PLACES OF WORSHIP

As well as the established church of St. Mary's, Glyntaff **8** (1839), a variety of religious denominations built early places of worship in Treforest to cater to the spiritual needs of the growing population. Libanus Welsh Baptist Chapel **9** on Fothergill Street dates from 1841 while Saron Methodist Chapel **10**, at the end of Saron St, opened in 1843 - its graveyard contains some striking tombstones which echo Francis Crawshay's Egyptian-style obelisk.



During the Irish potato famine of the 1840s many Irish immigrants arrived in Treforest and their original Catholic Church **11** (c1868) dedicated to St. Dubricius is in Bridge St. In 1927 a much larger Catholic Church was opened at the southern end of the Broadway, built of brick in the Byzantine style with a high nave. In the 1930s the church was renamed after the Welsh styling of St. Dubricius – St. Dyfrig **12**. Today a large part of its congregation comes from students attending the local university.

An interesting building on the corner of Old Park St. is the Oddfellows Hall **13** 1848. The Oddfellows are one of the oldest friendly societies set up to care for members and their families before the existence of the welfare state or the National Health Service.

TAFF VALE PARK

Just behind Parc Lewis School on the Broadway lies Taff Vale Park **14** an unassuming local playing field which gives few indications that for 30 years at the beginning of the 20th century it was one of the most important sports venues in Wales. At its peak it boasted a banked cycle track, a cinder running area, playing fields and the only substantial grandstand in the Valleys. It hosted professional athletics, football, rugby (union and league), boxing, cycle-racing, speedway, greyhound racing and even horse-trotting. The local soccer team, Pontypridd Dragons, even played friendlies against Tottenham Hotspurs and Queen's Park Rangers there.



SIR TOM JONES

Sir Tom Jones is a Treforest boy, born and bred. His remarkable 50 year career in singing and show business has taken him from performing in the pubs and clubs of Pontypridd to the cabaret venues of Las Vegas; from television specials and Royal Variety Shows to judging the up-and-coming singers of today on 'The Voice'. A short extension of your walk to No. 44 Laura Street **15** brings you to the house where he was brought up.

TREForest AND PONTYPRIDD

Treforest and Pontypridd have distinct but connected histories. During the second-half of the 19th century the growth of Pontypridd began to outpace Treforest. This engraving of Pontypridd, c1850, helps explain why. Pontypridd, located at a gap in the hills where the rivers Taff and Rhondda meet, was ideally placed to be the market town for these valleys when their coal production boomed. The artist's viewpoint is near the end of Rickards Street/Mitchells Terrace **16**.



For the energetic, the Treforest Trail can be combined with the Pontypridd Town Trail revealing how the two settlements interrelated during the 19th century. To do this, cross the river footbridge at the end of Windsor Road **17 and follow the signed path to Ynysangharad War Memorial Park – about half a mile away.**

