

But Porthcawl's emergence as a destination for health, recreation and leisure began many years before it terminated maritime trading. Indeed, Porthcawl's origins as a widely-known seaside resort can be traced back to the impact that industrialisation and its attendant socio/economic and political changes had on south Wales generally.

Topographical History of Porthcawl

Before the construction of Porthcawl Dock, pre-industrial Port Cawl Point came within the boundaries of the historic parish of Newton Nottage and was administered by the Deanery of Margam and the Diocese of Llandaff in the Anglican Church in Wales. During that time, the landscape of Newton Nottage parish could be characterised by several distinguishing features, namely:

- A large dune system running from Sandy Bay towards Tythegston in the north, and the Ogmore River and Merthyr Mawr to the east.
- Extensive common land on Newton Down, north of Porthcawl (often referred to as Stormy Down), and Backs Common and Locks Common to the south.
- Sandy, supposedly unproductive land named Pickets Lease to the west, sheltered by Port Cawl Point.
- A tidal inlet in Newton Pool and surrounding undrained 'wetlands' with a network of smaller pools, such as Pwll-y-dre and Pwll Llodir.
- Scattered individual farms for example Grove, New Park, Mŵr, Hutchwns, South and Shortlands (then called Hen Dŷ), Tŷr Mawr and Tŷ Talbot, together with other farmsteads in the adjoining villages of Nottage and Newton.

(Morgan, 1987).

It is thought that the landscape of Newton Nottage parish had remained relatively unchanged since medieval times,

although land ownership had been subject to complex social and familial relationships. Those relationships together with other historical factors, had resulted in a patchwork of land ownership circa 1800 (Higgins, 1968).

At the outset of the 19th Century, almost 50% of Newton Nottage parish land was regarded as either permanent pasture or common land which residents of the parish used for crop-growing, grazing and managing livestock. This is believed to have been an ages-old tradition as maps of the period indicate common land and predominantly sandy wasteland were *de facto* boundaries to agrarian land. This suggests that the landscape was based on strips in open fields organised according to medieval, or perhaps even earlier, ideas of land management (Higgins, 1968; Morgan, 1987).

Nottage Village

Further evidence shows that the parish of Newton Nottage has been the scene of human habitation for over 4,000 years. Artefacts found within the Nottage vicinity indicate that Beaker folk, Celts and Romans all settled in the area and that Nottage village pre-dates its village neighbour Newton (Higgins, 1968).

Nottage village has quaint old dwellings such as Apothecary and Elm Cottages and the Grade II Listed Farmer's Arms public house, CADW ID: 19372, as well as Grade II Veronica Cottage, CADW ID: 19373 (British Listed Buildings, 1998). The narrow lanes and byways like Moor Lane and Lougher Row, indicate that Nottage is a place of antiquity, probably of mixed Celtic, Saxon and Viking origin. Speculation surrounds the real nature of the original hamlet on which Nottage was founded and many are of the view that Nottage village was consciously built in a defensive position next to a creek or inlet leading to the sea, in order to protect its inhabitants from marauding Vikings (Higgins, 1968).

The likelihood is that the economy of Nottage and its surrounding area revolved around agrarian concerns and that Nottage village sprang from the monastic cell or settlement of Llanddewi that, in English, translates as 'the enclosure around the Church of St David'. Manorial records confirm the presence of a monastic cell or early Christian Church of St David in Nottage village but to what degree such a cell was active is not known. Even if it was prominent, it is likely that its role in the religious life of the area would have been eclipsed on the arrival of Norman invaders as they staunchly espoused the Church of Rome and perceived other forms of religious faith as heresy. Thus once built in the 12th Century, the Church of St John the Baptist in the adjoining Newton village would have become the centre of faith and religious practice in the parish of Newton Nottage (Higgins, 1965; Morgan, 1987).

Further confirmation of the existence of a Christian Church or cell in Nottage village followed excavations undertaken for the construction of the Dyffryn Llynfi Porthcawl Railroad (DLPR) railroad at the start of the 19th Century. Human remains were unearthed within land adjacent to the present Rose and Crown public house and it is thought that particular patch of land was originally the graveyard for either the old Celtic Church or a church used by the monks of Noge Court, otherwise called 'The Grange' or 'Noche Court Grange' (Higgins, 1968).

Nottage Court

Noge or Noche Court Grange (the Grange) is set in its own walled grounds in Nottage village and the discovery of fossilised remains within its boundaries suggests that it was an area that was settled in Roman and pre-Roman times. In subsequent centuries, the Grange is known to have come within the aegis of Margam Abbey and used as a base to administer the Abbey's land

holdings in the Nottage area. The Grange was rebuilt and renovated over successive centuries and, following the Dissolution, was acquired by Sir Rice Mansel in 1540, thereafter by the Lougher family in 1570, before passing to different owners until 1770, when the Grange was returned to the Lougher family. Later, during the 19th Century, ownership of the Grange was transferred to the Knights and Blundell families and it became the residence of the Knight family (British Listed Buildings, 1998).

The Reverend (Rev) Henry Knight restored the Grange between 1841 and 1846 and it became known as Ty Mawr. By 1877, Ty Mawr had been renamed Nottage Court and remains so today. The building is prominently situated above Nottage roundabout on Fulmar Road leading into Porthcawl, and is reached along a short drive through wooden gates in a high-walled garden. In 1951, CADW Listed Nottage Court as a Grade II* structure CADW ID: 11213 and the major historic building in the historic village of Nottage. The Listing was amended in 1998 (British Listed Buildings, 1998).

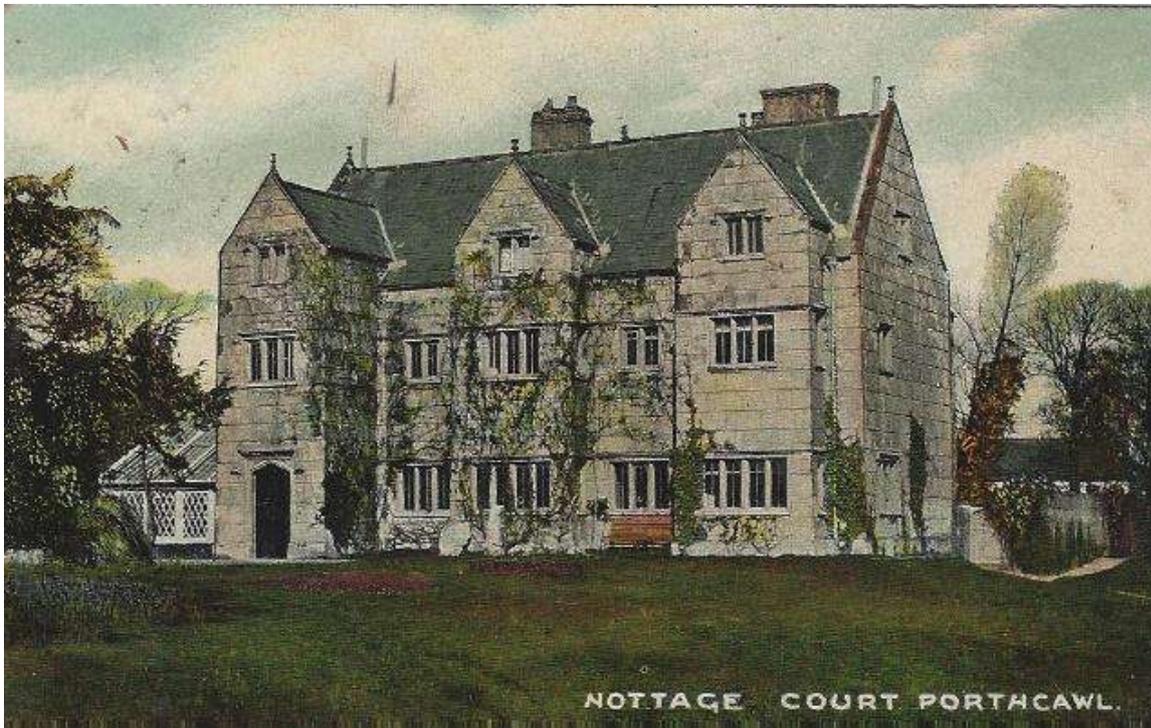
Nottage House

Nottage House is also on Fulmar Road, situated above a meadow opposite Nottage Court, a short distance from Nottage Roundabout. It was listed as a Grade II building CADW ID: 19368 in 1998 and is valued as a mostly unaltered, early mid-19th Century dwelling house with strong connections to the DLPR (British Listed Buildings, 1998; *Porthcawl: Much More Than Meets The Eye (Amended Version) 2015: pp 16-20* has a fuller account of the DLPR).

Nottage House is an imposing 3-storey building of large exterior proportions built before 1850 and remodelled later in the 19th Century. It is thought the house was owned by the Superintendent of the DLPR whilst the tram-road was in existence.



Nottage House in May 2018



Nottage Court (From an old postcard by Comley postmarked 1909)

Interestingly, a coach house exists at the rear of the House that reputedly housed the Superintendent's own horse-drawn railway carriage. Nottage House itself has Victorian window features, tall angled chimneys and a Welsh slate roof with terracotta ridge tiles and rustic stone finials. There are many additional interior details amongst which are retained fireplaces, 6 panelled doors, panelled bay windows, fireplace recesses and a later 19th Century open-well, wooden staircase (British Listed Building, 1998).

Nottage Forge

In medieval ages, blacksmiths were mostly occupied with the forging of household objects, weapons and armour. In doing so, they had diverse dealings with many sections of the community and, as highly valued members of medieval society, they often held leadership roles. Equipped with what amounted to the advanced technology of the time, the craft of medieval blacksmithing endured until the Industrial era when machinery and mass production precipitated the decline in the blacksmith's trade (Oldfield Forge, 2017).

As it was an agricultural area it is not surprising that the parish of Newton Nottage originally had several blacksmith artisans. According to church records, in the last half of the 18th Century there were 4 blacksmiths in the parish of Newton Nottage and, during the 19th Century, there were at least 3 blacksmith forges in existence within the parish. For example, a smithy was situated on the present Harbour View site where the demolished Dunraven flats once stood. Above the blacksmith's shop at the side of the old Porthcawl Dock was a private school started in 1820 which was believed to have been run by Thomas Thomas, known locally as 'Tom Tom' (Bennett, P late 1960's; Higgins, 1968).

Today, Nottage Forge is the only remaining smithy with a blacksmith *in situ* in the ancient parish of Newton Nottage and it is situated on the fringes of Nottage village at the junction of Locks Lane, South Road and Fulmar Road. The Forge has adapted to changing demands over time and remained a base for a blacksmith and farrier until 1975 but then became a wrought-ironwork business.

The present structure is clearly of some age and is said, by some, to be over 400 years old. Unfortunately, the **Society** has not found any confirmation to support that belief, although the Tithe map of 1846 shows 2 small buildings as part of Land Unit 532 near to the junction of Locks Lane and South Road (Awen Cultural Trust, 2018; Henry, 2018).

The Labourer's Wall, Nottage Green in May 2018



Nonconformity in Nottage

In medieval Nottage village, the Church of Rome was arbiter of the social norms and mores of everyday life. Religious observance of the Roman Catholic faith continued unabated until events and new ideas which surfaced in the 16th and 17th Centuries brought faith and religion to the fore. However, the Reformation required obeisance to Henry VIII and the monarchy and communities throughout the British Isles, including the residents of Newton Nottage parish, had to adopt the Anglican religion. Shortly after, the Elizabethan era brought enmity with Spain, a rejection of previous religious loyalties and a long-lasting intolerance of the Church of Rome and the Roman Catholic faith (Morgan, 1987).

Restoration of the monarchy in 1660 heralded a power struggle between the King and Parliament that was only resolved by the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the accession of the Protestant William III of Orange. The subsequent Toleration Act of 1689 effectively abandoned the idea of a comprehensive Church of England and embodied the principle of tolerance towards other religious groups. This landmark Act aimed to heal a religiously divided British Isles and, whilst it fell short of allowing Nonconformists, Roman Catholics and others access to public and political office and academia, it ushered in the notion of freedom of worship for Nonconformists, albeit with some restrictions. The Act also enabled Nonconformists to have their own teachers, preachers and places of worship, subject to certain caveats. In doing so, it paved the way for future Nonconformist advancement in Wales (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2018).

The residents of Nottage village and the surrounding area were mostly Welsh-speaking. And, although Newton village had become the locus of activities in Newton Nottage parish after the

construction of St John's in the 12th Century, Nottage remained the agricultural epicentre of the parish (Bennett, late 1960's; Morgan, 1987).

During the 17th Century, a moribund Anglican Church in Wales was often neglectful of its pastoral and clerical duties and demonstrably cavalier towards the use of the Welsh language. Welsh congregations were therefore unable to comprehend the language or meaning attributed to the teachings of the Anglican Church. It is known that from the mid-17th Century onwards, parishioners were unhappy with the Anglican Incumbents of Newton Nottage parish and the administration of its finances. Small though it was, Nottage was quick to take advantage of the inherent concessions of the Toleration Act (1689) towards the Nonconformist Cause. An overtly Nonconformist faction took hold in the village and, by the end of the 17th Century, Nottage was a hotbed of Nonconformity and a microcosm of the debate revolving around the Nonconformist Cause in Wales (Higgins, 1967; Morgan, 1987).

In fact, by the end of the 19th Century Nottage village and the surrounding area was in the vanguard of Nonconformity's advancement throughout Wales. The **Society** does not intend to outline the complexities nor detail the personalities involved or ways in which Nonconformist advancement was acquired either in Wales or the parish of Newton Nottage. For the purposes of this report, suffice to say that, by the start of the 19th Century, the Nonconformist movement was well-established in the parish of Newton Nottage. Baptists and Presbyterians had permanent meeting houses and there were 4 Nonconformist sects actively worshipping within Nottage village alone, that is: Methodists, Independents, Presbyterians and Baptists (Higgins, 1967; Morgan, 1987).



Nottage Forge in May 2018



Nottage Village Green in May 2018



Nottage Green in May 2018



The Swan in September 2017



The Farmers Arms in September 2017



The Rose and Crown in September 2017

Newton Village

It is known that Newton village originated in the 12th Century, much later than Nottage, and it is obviously a very different settlement in terms of character and layout. Newton village has a more open ambience which is greatly enhanced by the group of buildings clustered around Newton Village Green, such as the Jolly Sailor pub, the oldest remaining public house in Porthcawl. Grade II Listed Tudor Cottage, CADW ID: 11361 is a little further away and was Listed in 1989 and amended in 1998, while the Crown House, a Grade II Listed structure CADW ID: 19369, and The Old School CADW ID: 19357, were both Listed in 1998. All 3 were valued for their proximity to the Church of St John the Baptist, the Churchyard Cross and St John's Holy Well (British Listed Buildings, 1998). The Holy Well of St John's which is also situated on Newton Village Green, is dealt with separately on pages 32 to 34 of this document

The Church of St John the Baptist

The fortified Grade 1 Listed Church of St John the Baptist is adjacent to Newton Village Green and dominates the centre of Newton village. St John's, as it usually called locally, has a CADW ID: of 11214 and was Listed as a Grade I building in 1951 and amended in 1998. Its value rests in St John's importance as an example of a medieval church that has not been heavily restored, together with the surviving medieval fabric of its structure, especially the intriguing medieval stone pulpit within St John's interior (British Listed Buildings, 1998).

Doubt surrounds exactly when and by whom St John's was built but this rare Grade I Church is known to have been constructed during the 12th Century as a fortress with a flat roof and narrow windows to facilitate the defensive efforts of its archers in case of attack. Over

succeeding centuries, St John's was rebuilt and the present saddleback tower was added in the 15th Century by Jasper Tudor, Duke of Bedford and uncle of Henry VII (Morgan, 1987; British Listed Buildings, 1998).

The Churchyard of St John's

The Churchyard surrounding St John's is the site of the Churchyard Cross, a Grade II Listed restored medieval preaching cross. The Churchyard Cross was Listed in 1951 and amended in 1998, CADW ID: 11215, as it comprises an important element in the liturgical infrastructure of the late medieval Church of St John the Baptist (British Listed Buildings, 1998).

St John's Churchyard is now closed to burials but past residents of Newton Nottage parish buried there include some locally celebrated individuals such as James Brogden. James was a son of John Brogden and he, together with his second wife Mary, who is buried with him, is credited with envisioning Porthcawl as a seaside resort and being the prime architect of the town's infrastructure. James Brogden died in 1907, shortly after the closure of Porthcawl Dock, and his wife Mary Brogden, died in 1927. In spite of the many plaudits for their efforts on the town's behalf, their grave was neglected until Porthcawl Town Council and other local organisations, including the **Society**, were instrumental in its restoration in 1994 (Morgan, 1996).

The Pulpit in St John's Church

The interior of St John's is reached through an ornate doorway and has several outstanding features, for example a striking chancel roof, original wall paintings and unusual windows. Nevertheless, it is the semi-circular stone pulpit that arouses the most curiosity as its exterior is decorated with a depiction of the flagellation of a beardless Jesus

Christ. There is no evidence to confirm the possibility, but there is a local belief that this decoration indicates the existence of an even older early Christian Church on the same site as St John's (Higgins, 1968; Morgan, 1987; British Listed Buildings, 1998).

A lesser considered possibility stems from the past Viking presence in the Vale of Glamorgan. Although Wales was not heavily colonised by the Vikings, the Vale of Glamorgan and the Dunraven Heritage coastline were settled by Vikings circa 600 AD. It is said that Tusker Rock, off the coastline of Newton, was named after Tuska, a Danish Viking who inhabited the fertile Vale of Glamorgan during that period (BBC Cymru Wales, 2014).

Within the Porthcawl area, there is another commonly-held belief that, in the distant past, Tusker Rock was attached to the cliffs of the Dunraven Heritage Coast. Local rumours and stories recount how sheep once grazed on Tusker Rock and legends tell of the Phantom Lights of Tusker, the accompanying 'cyhiraeth' or screaming noise that warned of approaching storms and 'tolaeth', a ghostly sound of coffin-making, foretelling death (Morgan, 1974).

Deepening the mystery is the notion that St John's unusual pulpit originated in a church in the long-gone village of Tuskar on Tusker Rock. It is widely accepted locally that sometime after Viking colonisation, land connecting Tusker Rock with the mainland was submerged by the Bristol Channel's tidal phenomena, maybe even the tsunami said to have occurred in the Channel at the start of the 16th Century (Gibbins & Elwy Jones, 1944).

Nowadays, Tusker Rock is a small mass of land about 3 kilometres out to sea that measures less than 500 metres across. When tidal conditions permit, Tusker Rock can be seen at Newton Bay and along Porthcawl's coastline as '*...a black smudge on the seascape, just left of the Pier and Porthcawl Lighthouse...*' (*Porthcawl: Much More Than Meets The Eye (Amended Version) 2015:79*). The Rock is navigationally important to shipping and the East Cardinal buoy is sited within its waters. The seas around the Rock are also popular with divers and kayakers and are fertile fishing grounds for local fishermen. And, while crawling with marine life, the Rock itself is strewn with the wreckage and detritus from the ships claimed by the Rock's dangerous surrounds and treacherous waters.

An Extract from Country Life Magazine

A Pulpit from the Sea...

I note from the letter from Captain CG Gibbins, in the issue of February 18, about the strange pulpit at Newton Nottage, Glamorganshire.

In my childhood while living in Newton I was given to understand that this particular pulpit had some hundred years ago been found on the foreshore and that it had been lost when the church and village of Tuskar were destroyed by encroachment of the sea. Tuskar Rocks can now be seen only at low tide, about a mile out at sea.

The pulpit was re-erected in Newton Church which is of considerable antiquity, though later than that of Tuskar. The tower is – as often is the case -- the oldest part, but it is recorded in the porch that John Kenfig was the first known rector in the twelfth or early thirteenth century. I cannot recall the exact dates shown.

There is an extensive crack in the pulpit, which may be of evidence of the rough usage resulting from the tides which must have carried it along the sea-bed.

W N Elwy-Jones (Wing Commander, R.A.F.), and living at Weyhill Road Andover whilst based at RAF Andover (Reproduced as written in *Country Life Magazine* No1642, 1944).

**The Church and Churchyard of St John
the Baptist Newton in May 2018**



Newton Bay

The proximity of Newton village to Newton Bay further enhances the village and it is easy to see why. Newton Bay has a broad scenic vista and a shallow, gently sloping beach with a backdrop of sand dunes and commanding views inland. The sandy beach is approximately 3 miles long and stretches from Newton Point in the west, eastwards to the mouth of the River Ogmore. The Jurassic cliffs of the Dunraven Heritage Coast are visible to the east of the Bay while the seascape takes in the view of Tusker Rock at low tide.

Newton village has a noticeably milder climate than elsewhere in Porthcawl. But the downside of its nearby coast is that, over the centuries, the village has had to contend with the continuing encroachment of its sandy hinterland. To the north of Newton Bay lies, what is now, a discrete area of dunes - Newton Burrows and Merthyr Mawr Warren. Both are the remains of what was once the largest sand dune system in Europe and the present dunes now form an important wildlife habitat which are currently deemed a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). As important, it is also a Historic Landscape which has yielded archaeological material flagging up human activity from the Bronze and Iron Ages and even earlier (The Glamorgan–Gwent Archaeological Trust, 2018 & 2019).

It is thought that in the 16th Century, a creek or inlet called a 'weare' ran along the route of the present Beach Road in Newton as, for example, historical records reveal that Richard Tuberville left a small bequest to the '...weare...' at Newton (Higgins, 1968:20).

Having easy access to the sea in the form of an active port or creek, was an important commercial draw during the 15th and 16th Centuries and it undoubtedly contributed to Newton's gradual

ascendancy over Nottage village. In fact, at the beginning of the 16th Century, Newton was even mentioned in the '*Declaration of Havens, Roads, Creeks and Landing Places*' (1532). From all accounts, it appears that there was quite a thriving trade between Newton village and other ports along the Bristol Channel. Subsequent records confirm that, at the end of the 17th Century, exports from the port at Newton were mainly wheat, butter, sheep, raw wool and hosiery whereas imports were mostly apples, pears, salt and grain (Higgins, 1968; Morgan, 1987).

It is rumoured that, during this period, the Weare House mansion was built on the foreshore of Newton Beach and later leased to William Leyshon in 1664. He is thought to have been a resident of Newton village and a sea-going farmer and owner of a ship called the '*Five Brothers of Newton*' that traded with the ports of Minehead and Bristol along the Bristol Channel (David, 2006).

Weare House was later renamed the Old Red House which, it is said, had a colourful history involving notorious characters such as the Turpin gang from the 17th Century onwards (Higgins, 1968). Doubt has been cast on the accuracy of this assertion but there is certainly anecdotal evidence maintaining that, throughout the 18th Century and perhaps even earlier, Newton mariners, many of them farmers such as William Leyshon, were complicit in the illicit, but profitable, trade of smuggling (Morgan, 1987).

Later still in the 18th Century, Newton aspired to be a fashionable watering place. To further that ambition, the Old Red House is recorded as having been converted into private, up-market accommodation functioning as an annexe to Pyle Inn and offering facilities for sea-bathing. Having gone up in the 18th Century world, it is thought that the Old Red House was host to luminaries of the day such as Dr Richard Price and Josiah

Wedgwood. Anecdotally, it is also strongly rumoured that the latter was so taken by the colours and tones of the pebbles on the beach, that he recreated them in Wedgwood's famous pottery and china. Regrettably, the Old Red House appears to have fallen into disuse in the 19th Century and its ruins were finally destroyed by storms in the 1930's (Hunter, 1892; Morgan, 1987).

GLAMORGANSHIRE.
TO BE LET,
AND ENTERED UPON IMMEDIATELY;

ALL that DWELLING-HOUSE, with the Appurtenances, called The BATHING-HOUSE, situate at NEWTON-NOTTAGE, lately occupied by Mr James Marmont, innkeeper, and used for the accommodation of company resorting to that pleasant and much frequented bathing place.

Also, the RABBIT-WARREN adjoining, being an extensive and well stocked Warren, with other Lands there, also lately held by the said James Marmont.

Together with the MINES of LEAD and MANGANESE, in and under the said premises, which have already been opened, and a considerable quantity worked.—The Mines may be melted at Newton, as coal can be obtained in the neighbourhood, or may with great facility be sent by sea to Bristol, Swansea, or Neath.

The premises are situated on the South-East Coast, and in a fertile part of this county; and the Down, an open, dry tract of land near Newton, commands various beautiful and extensive prospects of the British Channel, the coasts of Somerset, Devon, and Glamorgan, and the interior of Glamorganshire.

Newton is about six miles from the plentiful market-town of Bridgend, and the harbour is the resort of vessels trading from Bristol with all kinds of West-India and other produce for the supply of the country.

The whole may be had together, and a term of years will be granted, if required.

For further particulars apply (if by letter, post paid) to Mr. Robert Jenkins, at Ewenny, near Bridgend.

Reproduced from The *Cambrian* newspaper dated 18th November 1809

A History of The Jolly Sailor at Newton Green

The Turpin brothers came from Lincolnshire. Frances Turpin was the landlord of The Jolly Sailor which was an inn, grocers, and blacksmith. John Turpin was a sea captain who commanded a sea sloop that ran their trade from the coast of South Wales to the coast of France, Portugal and Spain. Most of the inhabitants of the small hamlet of Newton were members of the Turpin gang.

They dug a tunnel from the Jolly Sailor under Newton Church to a pub on the beach by Newton Point called the Red House. I used to play in the ruins of the pub as a child.

Off Newton Point is a large flat rock (Tusker Rock) where John Turpins sloop would tie up. They would land their cargo on to the rock, then long boat it to the shore into the Red House, climb the wall of Newton Church where the yew tree is and look up into the window of the Jolly Sailor. If there was a red light in the window it indicated to them that there were boarders at the inn and it was dangerous to approach The Jolly Sailor. The window that they used to show the red light was in the house where Mrs Williams used to live. The same house that the present landlord John Davies found the entrance to the tunnel.

The noise of men and barrels being rolled along the tunnel alerted the Vicar of Newton Church, who when he first heard these noises coming from under his church, thought the church was haunted. The Vicar brought these noises to the attention of the Bishop, who in turn went to the authorities and the gang was smashed. John Turpin was hanged in Cardiff. In those days, if you were hanged, you ended up in a lime pit. Somehow the Turpin family managed to get hold of his body and he is buried under the yew tree. His name was added to his family tomb after his death.

In Newton, there is a new tomb stone on the grave and the layout of the writing on the stone is exactly the same as on the old one. It reads:

'Here lies the body of John Turpin, Mariner born in Lincolnshire (let no man move his body!')

It is said that he went to the gallows without betraying the rest of the gang.

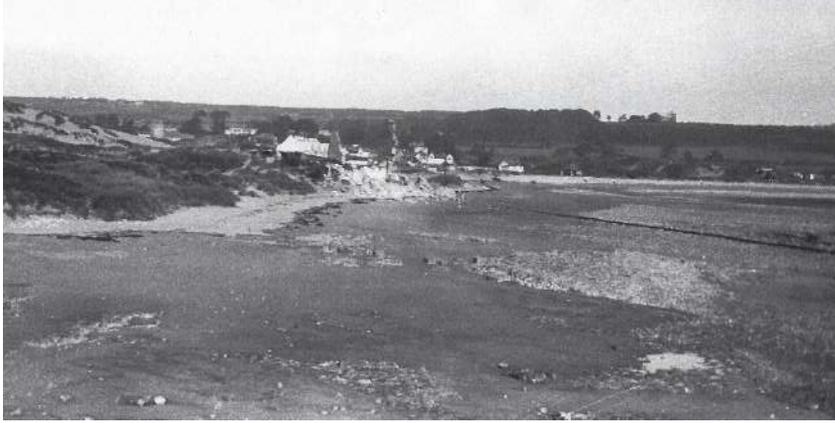
Note: The yew tree in Newton is not more than 200 years old so the planting of the yew tree is about the same time as the legend.

It was the Turpins themselves who planted the yew tree. The yew is a mystical tree, it is the wood that made the long bow (the Welsh invented the long bow). The spirit of the green man is supposed to live in the tree. The Turpins coming from Lincolnshire thought themselves to be the Robin Hoods of their day as they helped the poor of Newton, Robin Hood dressed in Lincoln green and the Turpin gang really were men in Lincoln green.

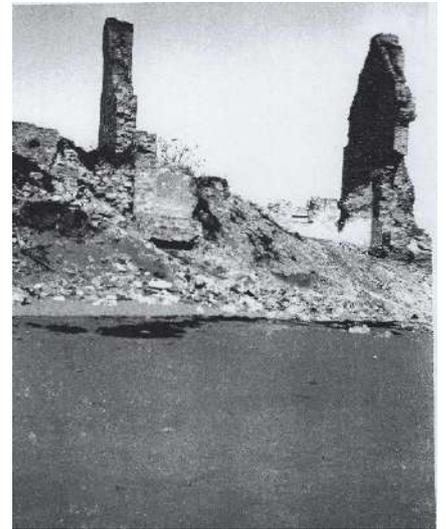
A small crown garrison was established on Newton green where Crown House now stands. The old building has long gone but the name Crown House has lived on.

(Anonymous - Reproduced as written in www.glamorgancoast.co.uk, 2017)

**Please Note – the above information
has not been authenticated**



**The Ruins of the Red House on Newton Bay
circa 1931 (Courtesy of Awen Cultural Trust)**



The Newton Inclosure Award of 1864

The opening of Porthcawl Dock in 1828 disturbed the bucolic, pre-industrial existence of Newton Nottage parish (for a fuller account of the creation of Porthcawl Dock and its growth and demise, please see *Porthcawl: Much More Than Meets The Eye (Amended Version) 2015: pp 16-21 refer*).

After the Dock opened in 1828, there was some small-scale reorganisation of farms and random developments along the railway and Harbour area but the real topographical game-changer for the parish of Newton Nottage was the passage of the Newton Inclosure Award of 1864 (Higgins, 1968; Morgan, 1987).

Newton Nottage parish was not alone in Wales, or in the UK, in being subject to an Inclosure Award. During the 19th Century and earlier, inclosure (also called 'enclosure') awards were legal documents drawn up by Inclosure Commissioners as a way of changing ancient farming methods of open fields, common meadows and pasture, into a modern system of landownership, tenure, and cultivation in severalty. The awards have endured over time as legal documents and, in the absence of a title-deed, an inclosure award can act as ultimate proof of title (National Archives, 2017).

In Porthcawl's case, the Newton Inclosure Award of 1864 (the Award) was based on the Newton Inclosure Map of 1862. The Award allowed land previously communally farmed under the open field system, to be either divided into small farms cultivated by individuals or converted from arable land to pasture with the land passing into the ownership of large landowners and excluding other land users. The Award's primary aim was to lay down a basic plan for the growth and development of Newton Nottage parish and set out a means of access to the land about to be partitioned and converted for other purposes (Higgins, 1968).

The prime objective of the Award of 1864 was the enclosure of just over 800 acres of land on Backs and Newton Commons (Higgins, 1968). Although some small parcels of land were bought by local people, the Lougher and Pembroke estates each acquired 100 acres of land with which they created new farms at Dan-y-lan and Mount Pleasant (Morgan, 1987).

Whatever justification was used for the Award and its implementation, in the short-term, it heaped hardship and social and economic dislocation on the poorer residents of Newton Nottage parish. Left without their traditional means of subsistence farming, they had to resort to alternative methods of grazing and tending their livestock and crop-growing, or abandon them altogether. Even more drastically, some had to seek parish relief or waged employment elsewhere.

Logistically, the Newton Inclosure Award (1864) was the most consequential factor in bringing widespread topographical change to Porthcawl's landscape. Although socially disruptive, releasing land that the Victorians thought had little agricultural or agrarian value for building purposes, did introduce '*...a modicum of town planning...*' and changed the shape as well as the size of the town (*Porthcawl: Much More Than Meets The Eye (Amended Version) 2015, page 13 refers*).

In the long-term, the Award triggered the development of Port Cawl promontory into the urban conurbation of Porthcawl and enabled the construction of its modern infrastructure (Higgins, 1968). In the short-term, nearly 850 acres of common land in Newton Nottage parish was disposed of by the Award's provisions and implementation. After the sale of land worth £2,770 to defray expenses, over 630 acres was given to landowners in the area. Moreover, the much-valued leisure amenity space of the Village Green on the west and south side of Newton cemetery covering just over 3 acres was:

'...entrusted to the care of the Churchwardens and Overseers of the Poor as a place of Recreation and Exercise for the Inhabitants of the Parish'

Hicks, 2002: 1



Newton Green in the summer of 2017

**Newton
Fayre in
2017**





Newton beach in 2017



The Ancient Briton in 2017



The Jolly Sailor in 2017



The Old School in 2017

The Townscape of Porthcawl Today

All told, the pre-industrial landscape of Newton Nottage parish remains the basis of Porthcawl's 21st Century modern urban infrastructure. Many pre-industrial lanes and paths that were originally developed for agrarian purposes are still embedded in the town's pattern of roads and streetscapes, for example:

- South Road overlays South Lane
- Locks Lane remains *in situ* although native hedges have been cut into and replaced by walls and fences in many places;
- Locks Lane is partly overlain by Fitzhamon Road;
- Marlpit Lane, Moor Lane, Newton Nottage Road and West Road remain intact;
- To the north of Porthcawl, Zig-Zag Lane (Heol-y-Brittons Way, once known as Burdon's Way) and Ty'n y Caeau Lane are still in place.

Just as important, the characterful, historic centres of Nottage and Newton villages have retained their distinctive aspects and can be easily discerned within Porthcawl's current, much expanded townscape. This is despite nearly 200 years of development and change in the parish (now known as Newton Nottage, Porthcawl) and after Porthcawl has incorporated Newton and Nottage villages within its boundaries.

Conservation Areas

The protection and preservation of the historic integrity of both Newton and Nottage villages is highly rated by their residents and Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC). The fact that both the village cores of Nottage and Newton are comparatively well-preserved is partly attributable to both villages being designated as Conservation Areas in August 1973 under Mid-Glamorgan County Council, a predecessor of BCBC.

Conservation Areas come in all shapes and sizes and are regarded as such for their particular architectural features, historic value and interest. Any existing special features such as individual buildings, certain road layouts and/or development patterns, trees, and open spaces, feed-in to the quality of a Conservation Area and they and their boundaries are subject to s70(5) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act (1990). Be that as it may, the designation of a Conservation Area is not an end in itself. Structures and buildings within their boundaries come under special scrutiny when any modifications and alterations are proposed and/or accepted (BCBC, 2016; CADW, 2017).

This is not necessarily a prohibitive state of affairs. Nottage village is a prime example of a Conservation Area that has been greatly improved since land, previously housing a barn, 2 milking sheds and allotments in the centre of the village, was given to the community by Nottage Court Estate in 1983 (VisitorUK, 2017).

Since its conversion into Nottage Village Green, the end wall of that particular piece of land has been highlighted. The wall is historically important as it was where working class men lined up for work, usually on Mayday each year, and it is known as the Labourer's Wall for that reason. That hitherto nondescript patch of land has become a focal point for 21st Century Nottage village, as it has morphed into a leisure and recreational amenity for the use and enjoyment of the whole community. During warm spring/summer weather, it is now a frequent scene of children playing whilst adults use the facilities of Nottage Village Green and its surroundings for socialising and relaxation on a summer's day or evening.

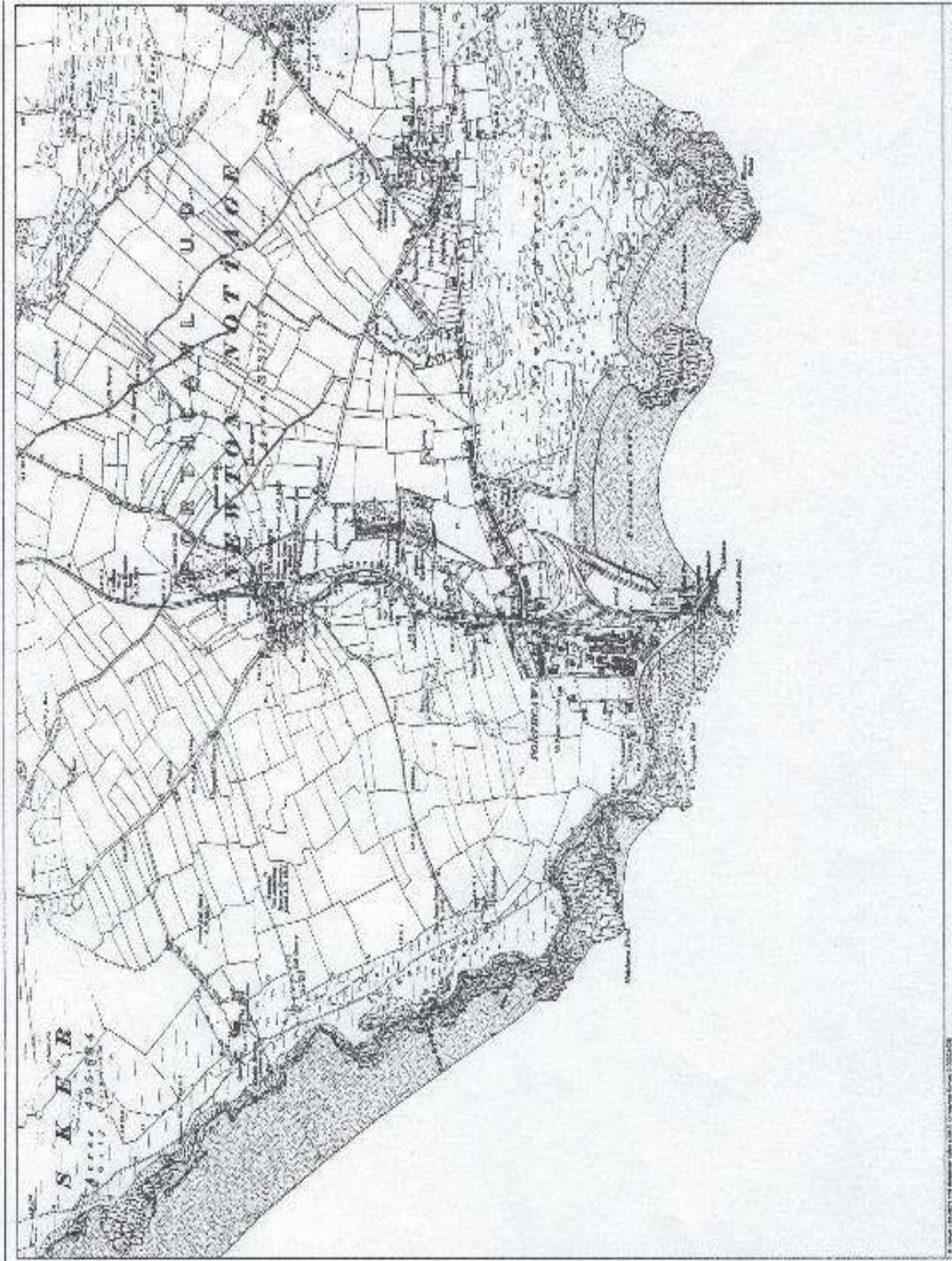
The next section of the report covers how Porthcawl changed and developed in the period between the opening of Porthcawl

Dock and its closing in 1906. It will deal with how the town found itself in a transitional state following the end of maritime trading in Porthcawl and speculate on why it chose to embrace a seaside resort identity. This section will also touch on the many overarching influences that Porthcawl had to contend with in the fast changing world at the beginning of the 20th Century, including differing patterns of work and leisure.

There is a brief overview of how faith and religion affected what was regarded as recreation and leisure before the report moves on to the age-old relationship between Porthcawl and its coastal location, the notions of healthy living and the significance of the Holy Wells in the parish of Newton Nottage.



Looking northwards over Porthcawl & the entrance to the closed Inner Dock in June 1917 (Courtesy of Tony Comley).



Porthcawl in 1900. Historic Data (BCBC 2013)

Porthcawl in Transition

In *Porthcawl: Much More Than Meets The Eye (Amended Version) 2015*, the **Society** outlines how, within a period of less than 80 years, Porthcawl had begun and ended its maritime trading career. With the closure of Porthcawl Dock in 1906, Porthcawl and its residents faced a daunting task as the Inner Dock Basin, unveiled with such fanfare in 1867, was an area of well over 7 acres. The defunct site was handed over to the district of Porthcawl by Great Western Railways (GWR) in the GWR Act (1913) and the PUDC was awarded decision-making powers in the PUDC Act (1914). But the land had no future defined purpose and was essentially derelict. At the very least, a huge clean-up operation was required if its reclamation was ever to become a reality. Such was the size and complexity of the task that, over 100 years later, it has yet to be completed and land known as Salt Lake, remains a work in progress.

The Urbanisation of Porthcawl

Fortunately, other matters moved at a brisker pace for the parish of Newton Nottage. At a civic level, the initial settlement around the Port Cawl promontory had matured into the town of Porthcawl and acquired the status of an urban district council in 1893.

Socially, too, the character of Newton Nottage parish had undergone its own metamorphosis since 1828. Whereas it was once a rural parish of 2 halves - Newton and Nottage villages, the passage of the Newton Inclosure Award (1864) had facilitated the development of 2 areas known as Pickets Lease and Backs Common. By 1906, Newton Nottage parish had evolved into the urban conurbation of Porthcawl and the agricultural labourers and farmers of the pre-industrial era had been joined by artisans, skilled craftsmen and workers with differing socio/economic skills.

So much so that, between the early 1840's and the second phase of industrialisation in Wales, Porthcawl's population had more than doubled from 792 in 1841 to 1872 in 1901 (Higgins, 1968).

By 1906, population churn and changed societal composition meant that Porthcawl was not only a bigger but a more divergent society than that of the pre-industrial parish of Newton Nottage. Furthermore, the human face of industrialisation and new societal make-up, in and of itself, acted as a further stimulus to the expansion of Porthcawl's townscape and the development of its residential and commercial environment.

Porthcawl's built environment had continued to evolve in response to the new demands being placed upon it in the 19th Century. By 1906, therefore, the area around Porthcawl Dock was no longer a cluster of buildings sustaining the workings of the maritime port. Porthcawl had become a settlement in its own right. Shops and houses, independent of the Dock and the adjoining villages of Newton and Nottage, had sprung up and the demand for homes and domestic products in the town had grown exponentially.

Work and Leisure

Porthcawl emerged into the much changed world of the 20th Century, bereft of a firm identity. Geographically larger and with a population made up of a disparate social mix, Porthcawl was effectively a bustling new town with many new town characteristics. Contextually, though, it was still part of the wider Welsh society. As such, the town and its inhabitants were susceptible to Welsh cultural influences and significant mores like Nonconformity, the Sabbatarian and Temperance movements and Revivalism. For example, according to the 1901 Census, 678 or 36% of Porthcawl's population over 3 years old spoke Welsh or were bilingual (National Archives, 1901).

Even that was not the full picture as it was not just Porthcawl that had undergone profound change since 1828. At a macro-level, the first and second phases of industrialisation had brought immense structural and societal change to south Wales. Added to which, important legislation, such as the Factory Act (1874) had replaced previous *laissez-faire* attitudes to employment practices, altering both the perception and nature of waged employment. By 1906, the idea of 'work' was being deconstructed and the notion of 'leisure' was acquiring new dimensions.

Leisure

In 21st Century Wales, the idea of leisure is firmly implanted in the national psyche and a normal part of life. Apart from an unfortunate few, individuals are often spoilt for choice about when to take leisure time and what, if any, leisure activity they want to pursue.

This was not always the case. Historically, leisure was an upper-class privilege and, prior to industrialisation at the end of the 18th Century, work and leisure were often hard to differentiate as they moved in conjunction with religion and the seasons. Tasks were performed as and when nature and the weather dictated and were usually associated with dates and festivals in the Christian calendar. In Wales, as in the rest of the pre-industrial British Isles, feast days were patronised by the area's social elite and marked by activities such as ploughing, drinking contests, cock-fighting, rugby or football, depending on the locality (International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, 2016; Wikipedia, 2016).

The Industrial Revolution undermined this traditional pattern of everyday life. Instead of tasks carried out as needed, depending on the weather and relevant seasonal and environmental conditions, industrial economies of scale determined that working patterns and practices followed the factory system of long

working hours often within a confined space and without any safeguards.

Today, work and leisure still have a complicated, multi-layered interaction that many find hard to define. For the purposes of this report, it is enough to state that when the 19th Century ended, industrialisation and factors such as shifts in patterns of social engagement and control and stricter employment legislation, had empowered those in waged employment, given them more rights and confined the working week to 56.5 hours. Added to which, real wages had grown and the 9-hour working day and routine annual holidays had become more commonplace in urban areas, firstly amongst white-collar office workers and later spreading to the working-classes (International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, 2016; Wikipedia, 2016).

At the start of the 20th Century, work and leisure had become more differentiated. Hours spent in the work-place had declined parallel to the increased time someone could spend at 'leisure'. Concepts of a limited working day and week had become the new norm, the role of 'work' had become less onerous while the notion of 'leisure' had become an accepted part of everyday life. New ideas and opportunities to pursue different interests during a person's leisure time were permeating UK society and more time and interest could be expended on leisure activities of all kinds at every social level (International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, 2016; Wikipedia, 2016).

Seaside Resorts in the UK

Multiple factors propelled Porthcawl towards the Victorian seaside tourist market at the end of the 19th Century. Uppermost for many, was the outstanding, practical question of what was Porthcawl's place in 20th Century society, how could it earn its keep and, in doing so, resolve the issue of determining the town's identity?

The Seaside Ideal

The UK's tradition of the seaside ideal and beach holidays with health and pleasure as the end product, is usually thought of as a Victorian invention and the Victorians certainly embraced the seaside *en masse*. But, in truth, it was in the 17th and 18th Centuries that spas, health regimes and advances in medical science first captured the imagination. The perennial notion of the seaside as a watering place and place to visit for health improvement, sea-bathing, exercise and fresh air was really a natural extension of that early Georgian ideal (Walton, 2005).

At the end of the 19th Century, that trend was further fuelled by the deeply-held belief that the miasma or foul, polluted air enveloping Georgian and Victorian cities and enclosed spaces, caused sickness and disease. This was the rationale that impelled many to escape to fresher environments. With its cleaner, purer air, where better to find such surroundings than at the seaside? This was the underlying thrust of the popularity of seaside resorts in the British Isles and a major reason they became the fastest growing types of urban development in the 19th Century (Walton, 2005 and 2011).

The Victorian View

'You have all these conditions at Porthcawl. ...You have here what you cannot get in the most sanitary of towns – pure unbreathed air...'

Hunter, 1892:7

Porthcawl as a Seaside Resort

Towards the end of the 19th Century, Porthcawl residents were not impervious to the growing popularity of the seaside ideal and belief in its health-giving properties, nor to its potential importance to the nearby heavily

populated south Wales coalfields and industrial areas.

Old records and photographs show that, even as trade at Porthcawl Dock was waning, Porthcawl had already experienced a steady, yet growing stream of visitors from centres of population in south Wales for day trips and longer holiday periods. For example, in 1880 there was mention of Porthcawl's '*...developmental potential as a holiday destination...*' in *Slater's Commercial Directory (1880)*. And in 1907, after the closure of Porthcawl Dock, comment was made in *The Glamorgan Gazette* that Porthcawl was '*...that pearl of holiday resorts, that gem of the wild South Wales coast...*' (*Porthcawl: Much More Than Meets The Eye (Amended Version) 2015 page 8 refers*)

Fortuitously, as maritime trading in Porthcawl was fading into obscurity, the tourist scenario appears to have gathered momentum. The White Funnel fleet of P&A Campbell Ltd belonging to 2 Scottish brothers, had arrived in the Bristol Channel in 1887 and, by 1906, the first Pleasure Steamers, belonging to the White Funnel Fleet, usually referred to as the 'People's Liners', had begun excursions to and from seaside resorts in the Bristol Channel. In the early 1900's, Porthcawl became a regular port of call for the Pleasure Steamers and was offering a novel mode of transport to places such as Ilfracombe, Minehead, Swansea and Lundy along the coastline of the Bristol Channel (Morgan, 1987).

By 1906 transport to and from Porthcawl had also ceased to be dependent on the poor road system of the 18th Century and before. While the British Isles had been beset by the upheavals of Railway Mania earlier in the 19th Century GWR had become responsible for Porthcawl's railway service before the start of the 20th Century. GWR had extensive railway connections throughout Wales and the south west of England and becoming part

of such a major railway network greatly enhanced Porthcawl's connectivity and enabled people to get to and from the town with greater ease. For an account of the growth of Porthcawl's railway network, please see *Porthcawl: Much More Than Meets The Eye (Amended Version) 2015*, pp 16-21 refer).

With numerous pointers towards a promising future in tourism, the way forward was well-signposted for the town, but Porthcawl and its residents did not wait on events. Photographs and records of the period reveal that many Porthcawl businessmen and women were conscious of the town's tourist potential. They did not hesitate to capitalise on its environmental assets and location and, in the last quarter of the 19th Century, there were notable commercial and business developments in the town such as the building of the Royal Oak, the Ship Aground and the Brogden Public Houses.

Porthcawl was much more than just somewhere to go, however, and it was not only business and commercial interests driving its urban expansion. During the 19th Century, there had been an influx of people attracted to Porthcawl as a result of seaside visits and its maritime trading. Some also chose to retire to Porthcawl or make it their home. Thus, by the end of the 19th Century, Porthcawl had ceased to rely on its port, and was becoming a residential town (Higgins, 1968).

Putting down roots often involves having a somewhere to worship in a denomination of choice and the number of churches and chapels in Porthcawl at the beginning of the 20th Century are a bellwether of what an increasingly settled, mature community the town had become. This proliferation of places of worship was largely down to the advance of Nonconformity and it becoming the dominant faith and religion in Victorian Wales. It is said, for example, that between 1800 and 1850, a new chapel opened in the Principality every 8 days (BBC, 2018).

The parish of Newton Nottage was an early stronghold of the Nonconformist Cause and, in the 19th Century, doctrinal differences and an influx of newcomers to Porthcawl led to the growth of more English-speaking denominations. Those factors together with the resurgence of the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches led to the construction of more chapels and churches to the extent that the town was well-endowed with places of worship for almost every faith and religion (Morgan, 1987).

As a result, faith and religion had palpably contributed to the development of Porthcawl's urban townscape by 1906. A list of places of worship and their location in Porthcawl can be found in the Appendix attached to this report.

More generally, land released by the implementation of the Inclosure Award (1864) had also led to a spate of building in Porthcawl towards the end of the 19th Century. For instance, New Road had been built between Newton village and Porthcawl and South Road had residential houses, shops and business. Porthcawl had a doctor, a chemist, an estate agent and a number of shops. In all, although:

'...the development of Porthcawl, as the town of a port, had been halted by the collapse of the dock; its development, as a holiday centre and seaside resort, had only just commenced...'

Higgins, 1968: 149.

The period towards the end of the 19th Century was evidently a critical transition period for Porthcawl. One in which the town and its inhabitants truly set their sights on becoming a seaside resort to reckon with. The next section of this report will outline how Porthcawl was defined by its landscape and geology and how its reputation as a place of health and well-being is more ancient and deep-seated than many realise.



The 'People's Liners' at Porthcawl Pier circa 1950 (Courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley)



Porthcawl as a Health Resort

Ultimately, Porthcawl climbed on the bandwagon of health tourism and started anew in the 20th Century. Yet its subsequent standing as a go-to place for health and well-being stems from a time even before industrialisation. The parish of Newton Nottage has ancient precedents as somewhere to visit for health and good fortune that can be traced far back to pre-history when Port Cawl promontory was a mere dot on the map.

Water and the Celts

Water held a mystique for the Celts and aquatic-based religions flourished amongst Celtic nations. To the Celts, as in many ancient cultures, water was believed to be an elemental power, a boundary between land and sky and the physical world from the Otherworld. To people who had a more limited understanding of the workings of Planet Earth than exists today, the constant ebb and flow of water and its force and capacity for both beneficence and destruction must have seemed magical and capricious in equal measure. Water was perceived to be a health-giver, vital to life and wellbeing, and rivers, oceans, springs, bogs and lakes were worshipped and mythologised by Celtic people (Green, 1986; Ross, 2001).

Springs and wells seem to have held the Celts especially spellbound. In antiquity, widespread illiteracy prevailed and the oral tradition was the norm. News would circulate by word-of-mouth that a well or body of water had supposed medicinal or other qualities and that well-visitations had ensured fertility, recovery from illness and longevity. Life expectancy was short and good health and long life were often delicately balanced, so our Celtic ancestors habitually visited certain wells, springs or bodies of water said to have miraculous curative powers for all kinds of illnesses or the granting of wishes (Jones, 1954; Green, 1986; Ross, 2001).

The Holy Wells of Wales

A sacred or Holy Well is an enduring and highly evocative Celtic symbol. Basically, a Holy Well is a well, small pond, spring or minor body of water that was revered by pagans or Christians, and often both. Many wells in Wales were regarded as sacred in pagan belief systems for centuries before they were Christianised. When Wales became Christian, many pagan wells came under the wing of the Church and were named after Christian saints, thereby making them sacred or Holy Wells. In fact, a survey of over 1000 wells in Wales conducted at the start of the 1950's found that nearly half are dedicated to saints (Jones, 1954).

It is debatable whether the Christian take-over of the wells prolonged the Celts' veneration of water. Regardless of that, the Holy Wells of Wales were a medieval focus of pious devotion, pilgrimage and superstition to those in the population wanting to avail themselves of fertility, health and good fortune (Jones, 1954; Davies et al, 2008).

That said, Holy Wells were also functional entities and, as part and parcel of daily life, they were used for the necessary provision of water. According to the then custom and practice, to 'activate' the power of sacred or holy water, virtually all the healing and/or Holy Wells required specific rituals, such as the making of offerings, leaving of rags, pins, or pebbles, the dressing the wells with flowers and garlands. To invoke the desired good fortune, curative powers, fertility, good health and long life, Christianised or sainted wells invariably had to be visited on the appropriate saint's day, or dates in the Christian calendar such as Epiphany, Easter or Whit Sunday (Jones, 1954).

The Holy Wells of Porthcawl

Geologically, the urban townscape of Porthcawl is founded on limestone rock so ensuring the associated benefits of dry ground, numerous wells and a plentiful supply of water (*Porthcawl: Much More Than Meets The Eye (Amended Version, 2015: pp 6-7 refer)*). Given this, it is not surprising that amongst Porthcawl's scattering of wells, 3 are Listed as Grade II structures, that is:

- St. David's Well aka Ffynnon Dewi
- The Great Well aka Y Ffynnon Fawr
- St John's Well aka Sanford's Well or de Sanford's Well

Equally important, 2 of the above are also regarded as sacred or Holy Wells, namely:

- St. David's Well
- St John's Well

St David's Well aka Y Ffynnon Dewi in Nottage village

St David's Well is near the Listed Grade II former Tramroad and Railway Bridge, known locally as Cuckoo Bridge, and the junction with Moor Lane, north of Nottage village, CADW ID 19361. St David's Well was Listed in 1998 as CADW Building ID: 19360 and is said to have strong historic associations with early medieval settlements in Nottage. In addition to the supposed curative power of its water, St David's Well is named after the patron saint of Wales and owes its standing as a Holy Well to the sanctity bestowed upon it by a visit of its patron saint sometime in the 6th Century (British Listed Buildings, 1998).

Centuries later, St David's Well gave its name to the ancient dell of Dewiscumbe mentioned in the 12th Century grant of Novam Villam in Margam by William, Earl of Gloucester, to his supporter, Richard of Cardiff. At that point in time, the boundary of Novam Villam extended from

the sea northwards through Dewiscumbe to Park Newydd Farm (Jones, 1954).

It is thought that St David's Well was connected to monks who farmed the Grange, then owned by Margam Abbey. As stated earlier, it is believed that there was once a church or chapel possibly of the Celtic faith, near to St David's Well as there are local anecdotes about the remnants of a road called Heol y Capel that can still be traced through the Croft from St David's Well to the chapel site (Jones, 1954; Higgins, 1968).

St David's Well is near a tidal stream that runs to and from the Bristol Channel. It is understood that encroaching sand and dunes led to Dewiscumbe becoming a lake, now called the Rhyll. Over time, the lake sank to become an underground stream flowing into the Wilderness and a remaining lake to the south that is believed to discharge into Porthcawl Harbour (*Porthcawl: Much More Than Meets The Eye (Amended Version 2015) page 50 refers*).

As noteworthy is the fact that, in more modern times, several farms in the area of surrounding Nottage village have taken advantage of this natural phenomenon to sink and tap into Artesian wells and pump up water stored underground (Morgan, 1996).

External Appearance of St David's Well

St David's Well underwent some restoration in 1962 and is now surrounded by a small stone enclosure approximately 2 metres high that has topmost stones forming a rough coping. The enclosure wall to the Well curves eastwards to accommodate its large stone slab roof (Morgan, 1996).

Near to the Well's enclosure is a stone inscribed with a history of St David's Well and its restoration. Access to the Well is through a small stone stile and a gated entrance leading down 4 stone steps into a curved chamber. St David's Well itself

has a stone floor together with a culvert with 2 curved stone ledges in the right wall and a niche in the left wall (Morgan, 1996; British Listed Buildings, 1998; Coflein, 2002).

St David's Well Today

St David's Well is a heritage asset set back from the minor road or lane in which it is situated. It is located below ground level so, circumstantially, it is not readily perceived as a landmark, particularly when it is covered with seasonal undergrowth and overhanging trees. Consequently, St David's Well is frequently missed or ignored by passers-by who are often unaware of its existence or its long, distinguished history.

Regrettably, too, St David's Well is somewhat scruffy in appearance and would definitely benefit from a further process of restoration and a greater level of regular maintenance. In addition to being overlooked, in its present state it is susceptible to misuse. Members of the **Society** are aware for example, that it became home to a 'King of the Road' for an extended period in the fairly recent past. As worrying, members of the Society have also spotted rough sleepers using it as a 'resting place'!



St David's Well May in May 2017



The Great Well aka Y Ffynnon Fawr in Nottage village

Information about The Great Well is confused but it is thought to be a restored medieval well (Coflein, 2003). It was Listed as such in 2003, CADW Building ID: 80911, at a later date than St John's Well in Newton and St David's Well in Nottage (British Listed Buildings, 2003).

Unlike St John's Well and St David's Well, the Great Well is not classed as a Holy Well. While that may be so, the stile leading into the structure is believed to be an altar stone from an old church or chapel, possibly from the defunct Nottage chapel, and the present well-house is thought to date from the beginning of the 19th Century (Coflein, 2002).

The Great Well is a landmark structure situated at the base of Nottage Hill in a hollow in the ground below road level near Nottage Roundabout at the junction of the A4106 and A4229. In contrast to St David's Well, the Great Well is visible to both pedestrians and vehicular traffic on Fulmer Road and the approach road to Nottage Roundabout from the M4.

It is believed that the Great Well is part of a network of wells following a fault line extending from Porthcawl Breakwater or Pier to St David's Well in Nottage and is one of the few surviving ancient wells in

the area. Hence, the Great Well is a heritage asset and structure of considerable historic and social interest.

Another feature, debatably the most important, is that the Great Well is claimed to have the clearest and best tasting water of all the wells in the Porthcawl area. Probably for this reason the Great Well was the initial source of water for the earliest houses in Porthcawl as well as the inhabitants of the ancient village of Nottage. Based on this evidence alone, the Great Well deserves more recognition than it receives as it has played a crucial role in Porthcawl's history (Morgan, 1987).

External Appearance of the Great Well

Externally, the Great Well is more imposing than the other 2 wells mentioned above. It stands above ground level and covers a wider surface area than either St John's Well in Newton village or St David's Well in Nottage.

The Great Well has an outer rectangular well-house of grey stone with a concrete roof and camber-headed doorway with a black iron gate. There are steps down to a vaulted cistern and, on entry to the left of that cistern, there is a stone ledge that can be used as a step or a seat. On the wall on the right side of The Great Well is a plaque with an inscription in both Welsh and English that reads:



The Great Well in May 2017

The Great Well Today

The Great Well is prominently situated in Porthcawl and constitutes a gateway feature to the town as people pass it on a daily basis whether on foot or in vehicles entering and leaving Porthcawl.

The presence of the Great Well at such a strategic point adds a characterful quality of place to the main entry point into Porthcawl. In view of the Great Well's significant role in the history and development of Nottage village as well as the town of Porthcawl, the **Society** thinks it is a pity that more attention is not paid to its maintenance and upkeep.

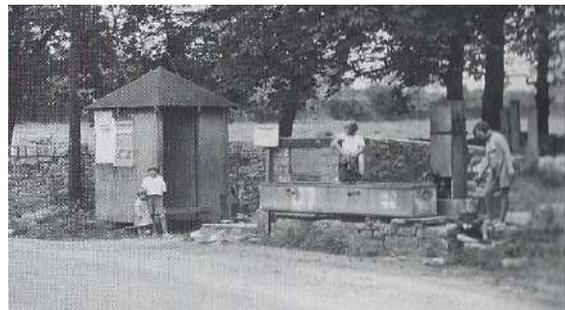
Like St John's and St David's Wells, the Great Well has an unkempt appearance and would certainly benefit from a stricter and more regular regime of maintenance and upkeep. At the very least, rubbish and litter could be removed from its surroundings more frequently than is the case at the moment.

There is also a strong case to be made for the provision of an information board adjacent to the Great Well, similar to that located next to the bandstand in John Street, Porthcawl. Such an information board could provide details of the important role that the Great Well played in the creation of Nottage village and Porthcawl, and possibly be linked to St David's Well on the outskirts of Nottage and St John's Well in Newton village. Details of the Well Walk could be also be a townscape feature and an added tourist attraction (please see page 35 below).

The Great Well in May 2017



Entrance to the Great Well in May 2017



A boy drawing water from the Great Well circa 1938 (Reproduced from *Porthcawl Photographic Memories* by David, J (2006).

St John's or de Sanford's Well in Newton Village

St John's Well is often referred to as Sanford's or de Sandford's Well but, in this report it will be referred to as St John's Well. St John's Well is situated in the Conservation area of Newton village on the south-east side of the public amenity space of the Village Green, just south of St John's churchyard at the juncture with Beach Road as it slopes down to the sea.

In common with St David's Well and the Great Well, St John's Well is a characterful landmark in the area and a heritage asset to Porthcawl. It was listed in February 1998 as a Grade II Listed building CADW Building ID: 19356 and is regarded as a surviving structure of long-held historic importance that is thought to be at least early medieval in origin. It is believed that de Sanford, one of the crusading Knights of the Order of St John of Jerusalem, was the possible founder of the nearby Church of St John the Baptist in the late 12th Century when he was granted land in Novam Villam (Newton) by William, then Earl of Gloucester (British Listed Buildings, 1998).

As already mentioned, some later 16th Century documents record Newton as having a 'creek' or port and St John's Well is said to be adjacent to a road to the sea and the '*...station or haven for shippes...*' (Higgins, 1968: 23).

Later still, St John's Well is referred to in a 17th Century poem by Sir John Stradling of St Donat's, when mention is made of the Well's distinctive characteristic of seeming empty when the tide is in and full when the tide is out. R D Blackmore, author of '*Lorna Doone*' (1869) and the '*Maid of Sker*' (1872) fame noted that St John's Well had '*...the sand coming out of its nostrils when it first begins to flow...*' (Morgan, 1987:28)

It is now known that, as St John's Well is subterranean and influenced by tidal

patterns in Newton Bay and this phenomenon is caused by fissures in the surrounding limestone rock acting as valves and reacting to air pressure as the tide ebbs and flows (Higgins, 1968; Morgan, 1987; British Listed Buildings, 1998; Coflein, 2008).

Beliefs & Customs of St John's Well

As with many other Holy Wells, there are beliefs and customs specifically attached to St John's Well. In the past, it was recorded that:

- people at St John's Well would flagellate themselves to atone for their misdeeds
- any running water taken from St John's Well would stay pure and wholesome for the next 12 months
- spilling water while carrying it away from the Well was regarded as a portent of bad luck
- when 2 or more people were standing at St John's Well together they were required to make a sign of the Cross before washing
- on Midsummer's Day in pre-industrial times, a bonfire was lit in a circular enclosure to the south-west of St John's Well. It is said that, as recently as 1820, it was customary for a small cheese or cake to be thrown across the bonfire and people would jump over the bonfire's dying embers in the belief that this ritual would protect the crops from blight.

(Hunter, 1892; Roderick, 1986; Morgan, 1987).

Spas and Sea Bathing in Newton

As the Georgian healthy living ideal gained ground in the 18th Century, it stimulated renewed interest in the medical and/or curative uses of spring or well water, sparking a trend for visiting watering places such as spas and sea-bathing. Newton village became part of this new vogue for sea-bathing and,

capitalising on the reputation of the alleged curative powers of St John's Well's and its proximity to Newton Beach, the village enjoyed a degree of popularity as a stylish, sought after health resort befitting the 18th Century. It even offered sea-bathing machines along with all the mod cons of the day! (Davies et al, 2008).

More recently in the 20th Century inter-war period, St John's Well again gained prominence when a further attempt was made to present Newton village as a fashionable watering place. Having discovered that some of the contents of St John's Well emptied directly onto Newton Beach, Dr Hartland, a well-known local physician, invoked the supposed curative powers of the Well as a remedy for such ailments as rheumatism and skin disorders. He subsequently created an open-air health spa on Newton Beach between 1920 and 1939, and encouraged people to bring containers to the beach to collect the spill-over water from the Well. Sadly for all concerned, later analysis of water from St John's Well found that it lacked any special qualities and disproved any ideas about its curative powers. Even so, the large stone slab that Dr Hartland originally set up for the purpose of dispensing water from St John's Well is still present on Newton Beach (Morgan, 1987; British Listed Buildings, 1998).

External Appearance of St John's Well

At ground level, St John's Well has a visible semi-circular stone basin, an iron pump set into a rear wall and a stone drainage channel nearby. The gated rubble stone doorway entrance to St John's Well is at ground level and is thought to have replaced a previous construction that was described as an earlier 'low circular tower' (Coflein, 2008).

Access to the Well is via gated entrance followed by a long, internal descending flight of stone steps to a cavity with side stone walls and lime-washed interior and a stone slab roof (Coflein, 2008).

St John's Well Today

St John's Well is an outstanding landmark feature on Newton's Village Green that ought to give the locality a sense of history and place. Sadly, the neglected, nondescript appearance of the Well and its worn painted doorway belies its historic importance and the amount of attention that St John's Well has attracted down the ages. Currently, its rather neglected and shabby exterior appearance is quite at odds with the Well's historic importance.

In common with St David's Well and the Great Well, St John's Well clearly needs an improved level of regular, ongoing maintenance by whatever authority or bodies that is/are responsible for its upkeep. At the very least, it could do with a coat of paint and a general tidy up. As it is, its general air of decline encourages, perhaps even promotes, disrespect for such an historic structure and, at worse, invites vandalism.



St John's Well in May 2017

St John's Well in May 2017

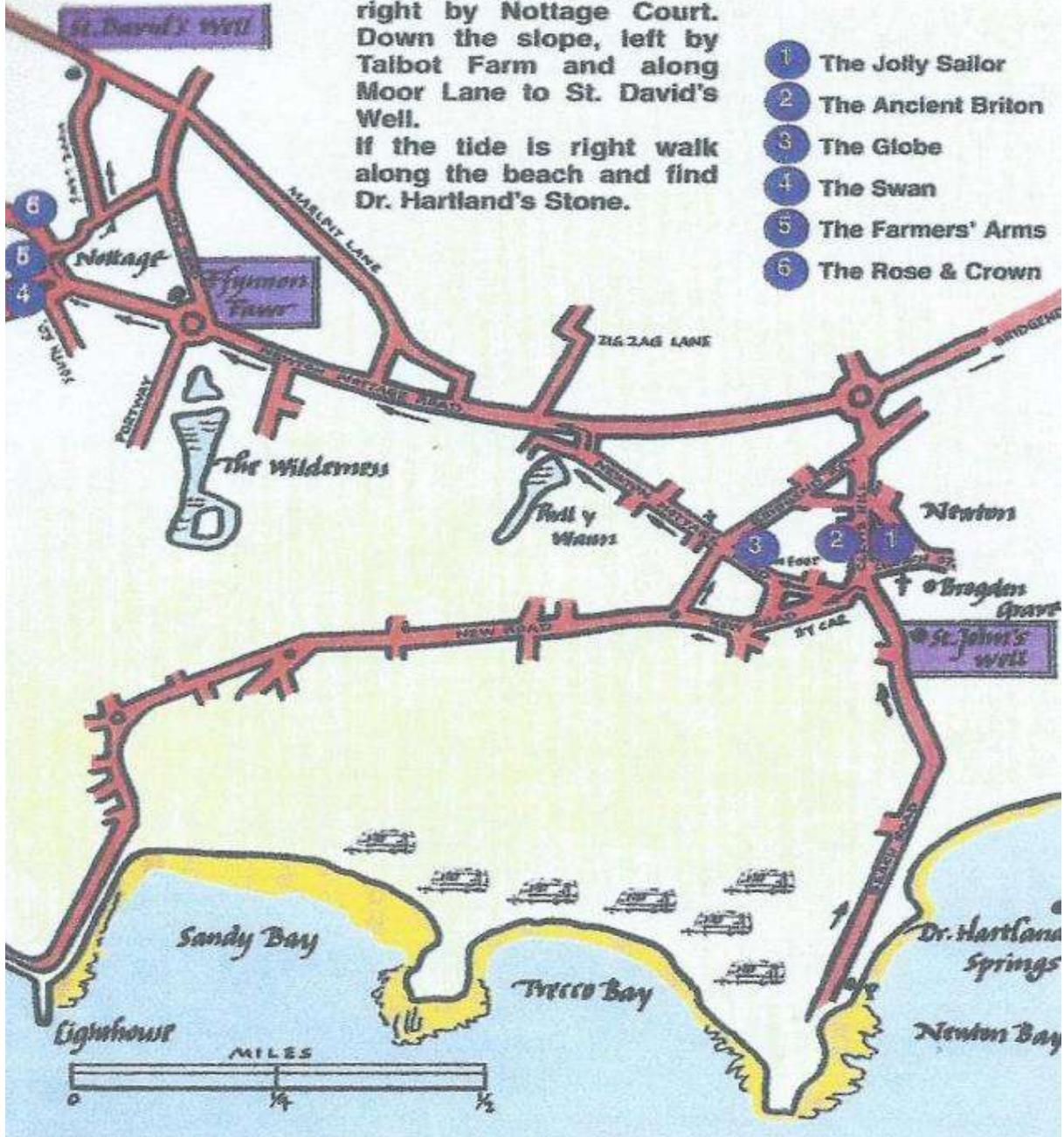


THE WELLS WALK

Park on Newton Bay - walk along Beach Road to St. John's Well on the Green and seek Brogden's grave on the east wall of the churchyard. Take the road to the left of the Ancient Briton, to the Globe and along Newton Cottage Road. Pause by the lakes - first Pwll-y-Waun and then The Wilderness. At the roundabout cross over and visit Ffynnon Fawr.

Walk up the hill and turn right by Nottage Court. Down the slope, left by Talbot Farm and along Moor Lane to St. David's Well. If the tide is right walk along the beach and find Dr. Hartland's Stone.

- 1 The Jolly Sailor
- 2 The Ancient Briton
- 3 The Globe
- 4 The Swan
- 5 The Farmers' Arms
- 6 The Rose & Crown



(Source & Date of Map Unknown)

Rest Bay circa 1950's

(Photographs of Rest Bay, courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley)



Rest Bay circa 1950's cont'd



The Rest Home

The Rest Home is an instantly recognisable local landmark and one of Porthcawl's most important heritage assets. The building lies within the Rest Bay area, approximately 1.3 miles from Porthcawl town centre and is located within Porthcawl's coastal zone, directly overlooking the Bristol Channel. It is situated next to the Royal Porthcawl Golf Club on the edge of a headland on the western side of Porthcawl, jutting out over what is universally recognised to be an excellent sandy Blue Flag beach. Indeed, the beach is so scenically outstanding that its original name before the present Rest Home was built was the 'Long Sand':

'...There is a magnificent sand bay just under the Rest called the Long Sand. This is a truly extensive and magnificent bathing beach...'

(Hunter, 1892:7)

The Rest, as it is referred to locally, was Listed in February 1998 as a Grade II building CADW ID: 19365. Apart from its distinctive Gothic appearance, much of its iconic status lies in its eventful history and the part it played in developing health and welfare ideals in the turbulent industrial history of south Wales. As significant, its origins, growth and subsequent decline offer insights into Porthcawl's long career as a health resort and seaside destination.

The Old Rest Cottages

According to official records, the role and function of the Rest building was preceded by 3 still existing small cottages at the eastern end of Porthcawl, in what is now New Road. The original notion of a convalescent home for working men, women and children was the brainchild of Dr James Lewis and his wife, Charlotte, and it is thought that their prior knowledge of the geography, scenery and climate of Newton Nottage parish was instrumental

in their choice of that particular location for the venture (Thomas, 1987).

When opened in 1862, the *Rest for Invalids, Convalescents and Scrofulous Patients* was a totally unique institution in Glamorgan that pre-dated hospitals in the county by 20 years. The Rest was launched without any appeal for public funds and had few, if any, parallels in the British Isles. In this context, it is interesting to note that the experimental idea of a convalescent home for members of the working population was both endorsed and funded by powerful local philanthropists, landowners and industrialists who fully supported the Rest's aims:

'...to supply without lowering the independence and self-respect of the individual, yet placing within his reach, the means of perfect and rapid restoration to health, at the very lowest cost, thus affording to the poor those facilities for recovery now only available to the wealthier classes...'

(Thomas, 1987:11)

Dr Lewis had a long, distinguished medical career and, for his time, radical and unorthodox views about the way to promote the health and welfare of the working population. In 1847, he became the Medical Officer for Bridgend and Cowbridge Union but prior to that he was physician and surgeon to the Llynfi Coal and Iron Company and medical officer of Brogden's Mines and Colliery Company (Thomas, 1987).

The enactment of the Public Health Act in 1848 and establishment of a General Board of Health enabled the creation of local Boards of Health and appointment of new local Medical Officers of Health (MoH). It also facilitated the development of infrastructure responsible for public health provision, albeit limited, which was to become influential to achieving the necessary improvements in drainage, sanitation and housing conditions.

The Public Health Act (1848) and other related measures were motivated by poverty and excesses of the first phase of the Industrial Revolution that were so keenly experienced in south Wales. By the mid-19th Century in the south Wales coalfield and industrial area, it was apparent that the preponderance of unregulated iron, coal, and other heavy industries, demographic changes and the rapid growth in population accompanying industrialisation, had caused very major problems in public health (Public Health in Wales, 1800–2000 (2005).

The situation was further exacerbated in the, then, county of Glamorgan by overcrowded, low quality housing and insanitary conditions in urbanised areas that had become a wholesale breeding ground for bad health and disease. As a result, there were frequent outbreaks of cholera and typhus and diseases such as smallpox and scarlet fever were endemic throughout the south Wales area (Public Health in Wales, 1800–2000 (2005).

In common with many MoH's and his socially committed medical colleagues, Dr Lewis devoted himself to bettering the lot of the working population. But even he did not anticipate how successful the Old Rest Cottages would be in achieving, and exceeding, the scheme's original aims. Between its launch in 1863 until the opening of the new Rest Home in 1878, the Old Rest Cottages proved demonstrably inadequate to meet the extensive health and welfare needs of workers within the Glamorgan catchment area (Thomas, 1987)

The dearth of provision to meet those needs was so obvious that, when mooted, the idea of a larger, purpose-built convalescent home again earned the backing of wealthy Victorian landowners, philanthropists and industrialists. The suggestion also famously gained the support of the health reformer, Florence Nightingale, who was reportedly honoured

to be included in the planning of such an innovative development in public health:

'...believing as I do that no greater benefit could be bestowed on the working people of this country than that every county and every hospital should have such a Rest as yours...'

(Thomas, 1987:14)

Planning the Rest

Planning the construction of the present Rest Home began in 1869, a mere 7 years after the Old Rest Cottages opened, whereupon the hunt was on for a site that could offer dedicated facilities for sick or injured people so that they could recover and benefit from fresh sea air, a healthy diet and exercise. Ultimately, the Talbot family of Margam donated the cliff top site of the present Rest in 1874, although several other locations were offered and considered before the site of the upgraded version of a convalescent home was decided upon (Thomas, 1987).

The existing Rest is totally different to the Old Rest Cottages that it replaced. Apart from the obvious variation in architecture, size and scale, the location of the current Rest is at the western end of Porthcawl, an area widely regarded as having a more 'bracing' climate than its easterly neighbour, Newton village. As far as the planners were concerned, the new site for the convalescent home had several advantages insofar as it was situated away from any urban centre and was adjacent to Locks Common and the nearby extensive stretch of sandy beach - the Long Sand (Thomas, 1987).

Temperance was a very powerful force in Victorian Wales and, although environmental factors played a role, it seems that the deciding factor in the final decision to locate the new convalescent home at the other end of Porthcawl, was that: *... as well as providing a healthy, recuperative seascape...*

it was '...sufficiently removed from public houses to avoid the temptations of intoxicating liquor!'

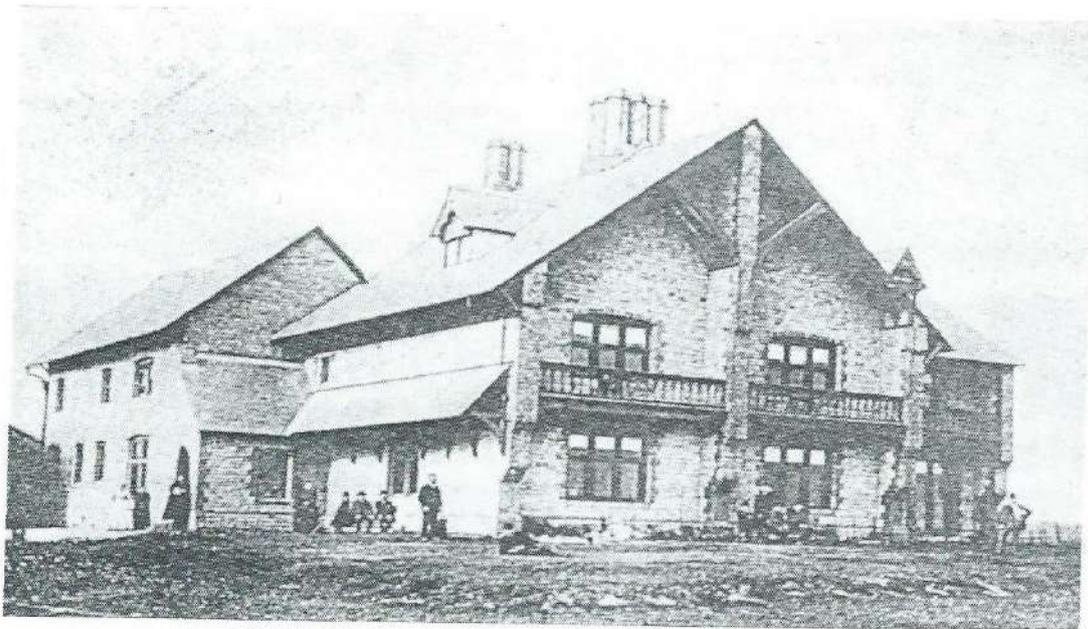
(Thomas 1987: 16)

In the event, economic downturns and late 19th Century fluctuations in the coal and iron trades caused a shortage of funds so interrupting the building timetable. A staged approach was adopted instead to ensure that the main building, designed by John Prichard, could be opened in 1874. Thereafter, between 1891 and 1893, an influx of funds enabled the left wing and water tower, designed by G F Lambert, to be added. The rear left wing and right wing designed by E M Bruce Vaughn, were added in 1900 and 1909 respectively. Eventually, by 1909, the Rest finally resembled the design it was intended to have when it was originally conceived in 1869 (Thomas, 1987).

The Rest in the 20th Century

The Rest was founded for the benefit of Glamorgan's working population in its entirety and, by the 1890's, its admissions registers, which are an example of social history in themselves, reveal that its users came from a wide variety of occupations. Even so, given the proximity of the Rest to the lucrative and productive south Wales coalfields, it is not surprising that most of its users came from the mining industry, a fact that earned the Rest the enduring epithet of being the '*Miners Home*' (Thomas, 1987).

Between 1862 and 1947, the Rest functioned and thrived as an interdenominational voluntary institution. It had a strict moral code and rules governing admission and residence that required abstinence from gambling and alcohol that were stringently enforced. Funding for the running and maintenance of the Rest emanated from many private sources varying from prominent landowners, industrialists, the trade union movement, friendly societies to private individuals (Thomas, 1987).



The first stages of the building of The Rest, c.1880
Reproduced from R.C. Hunter's Porthcawl as a Health Resort publ.1891

After 1947 and the introduction of the Welfare State, the Rest operated as an independent organisation offering a diversity of services to a broad variety of people alongside the provision of state welfare services. Over the decades, the pattern of social needs changed considerably from those of 1862, and the Rest adapted to those changing needs by becoming a charitable Trust in 1983 (Thomas, 1987).

Sadly, those changes were not enough to stave off financial difficulties and the Rest formally closed in 2013, to the regret of many, especially those in the Porthcawl community who were involved in its day-to-day management and running. Others perceived it as the passing of an era as the Rest had a rich and chequered history that reflected the major developments and historic events of its 139 years existence when it was variously:

- ❖ A convalescent home for the working population from 1874 until 1914 and the outbreak of World War 1 (WW1).
- ❖ A refuge for Belgian Refugees in WWI, 1914 to 1915.
- ❖ A Billet for Royal Army Medical Corps in 1915.
- ❖ An Auxiliary War Hospital in 1915.
- ❖ A Field Hospital in WWI between 1916 until 1918 returning to civilian use in 1919.
- ❖ An Auxiliary War Hospital in World War II (WWII), before it was again returned to civilian use.
- ❖ Billeting for troops in WWII.
- ❖ An independent charitable trust from the 1960's offering hotel-style services.
- ❖ A popular and well-patronised meeting place from the 1960's onwards for local groups and societies such as University of the Third Age (U3A) and the Porthcawl and Pyle Photographic Society.
- ❖ A well-regarded venue for private parties and celebrations.

The External Appearance of the Rest

Prior to the restoration and development of the Rest which started in 2017, the appearance of the building had remained unchanged for many years (please see page 47 for a current view of the Rest).

The frontage of the Rest building is orientated towards the sea and Rest Bay and, given its exposed position, the Rest was consciously designed and constructed to withstand the rigours of its location in a storm-prone Bristol Channel. Consequently, its architectural design was complex, utilising projecting buttresses, overhanging eaves and the lining of external walls with brick to reduce the possibility of water penetration, all of which combined to give the building an idiosyncratic, multi-layered appearance (British Listed Buildings, 1998).

The roof of the Rest was of Welsh slate, and the buff and red rock, sandstone exterior of the main building was interlaced with blue and red brick and ashlar dressings. There were groups of tall octagonal stacks on ridges and a central tall water tower with a crenulated roof. Good ventilation was given a high priority in the basic design of the Rest and, reportedly, as many as 50 fireplaces were incorporated into the construction of the building to ensure warmth and effective heating and to avoid damp seeping into its structure (British Listed Buildings, 1998).

The Rest is located within open countryside. Whilst some land was sold to the Royal Porthcawl Golf Course, the site of the Rest and its grounds still comprises 4.84 hectares. According to its Listing as a Grade II structure in 1998 and later planning application dated 2014, the Rest is recorded as having some 20th Century, single-storey buildings and hard-standings eastwards of the main building and several adjoining extensions added during the 20th Century (BCBC, Mayo Property Developments, 2014).

When inspected by CADW in 1998 and 2017, there was a balcony on the first floor, sheltered by a deep overhang accessed through large, cambered headed, full height windows with replacement glazing similar to that of the ground floor. Above the overhang were 2/2 pane square-headed casement windows and slit lights. The roof dormers had decorative bargeboards and casement windows on each side with end buttresses that were end-stepped. The central section had similar windows plus another balcony (British Listed Buildings, 1998).

Still on the first floor, the hipped side wing to the right of the 2 storeys had cross-frame windows on the ground floor together with a bay with a pitched slate roof and bracketed eaves. There was an

elaborate water tower at the rear and a steep hipped roof with metal finials behind a deep embattled parapet and heavy moulded coping above a bracketed string course (British Listed Buildings, 1998).

The winged chalet style design of the Rest is reflective of its Victorian origins. The 3-storey central section is made up of 2 double-bay gabled cross wings and a central 2-bay recessed section under very deep eaves. Side wings have similar deep overhanging eaves with supporting triple struts at 45° angles that spring from corbels each side of a central pier that extend to the full height of the building and increase in depths through offsets (British Listed Buildings, 1998).



The Old Rest Cottages in New Road in May 2018

The Rest Today

Today, the appearance of the Rest remains unmistakably that of a Victorian institution that some in the local community have likened to ‘*God’s waiting room!*’ Others certainly do not deny its Victorian origins, but nor do they perceive the building in such negative terms. They prefer to think of the Rest as a great survivor of its age and origins and its function representative of a kinder Victorian ethos that offered respite, peace and solace to those who would otherwise have had none.

After its closure in 2013, the Rest was sold on the open property market and Acorn Developments, its current developer, is still in the process of restoring the building and converting it into high-end, quality apartments and penthouses. This has involved the removal of some unsympathetic additions and extensions but, despite the demolitions and upheavals, the Rest remains definitely

Gothic in appearance. In fact, the process of removing the *ad hoc* extensions of the 20th Century has exposed the bare bones of the building, allowing its integrity to shine through.

The process of restoration and redevelopment of the Rest began in the autumn of 2017 and, at the time of writing this report, remains ongoing. Some of the restored units have already been sold for private residential use but, fortunately, some **Society** members were able to tour the Rest when it was stripped back before the restoration and redevelopment process began. Whilst the building obviously lacked the polish and grandeur of its heyday, that has to be set against the realisation it has also withstood very wild weather in an extremely exposed position in Porthcawl for an extended period of time. That alone is testament to the specialised, contextualised design of the structure and an enormous credit to the skill of the artisans and the workmanship they put into the Rest’s original construction.



The exterior of the Rest in August 2017



A doorway in the Rest August 2017



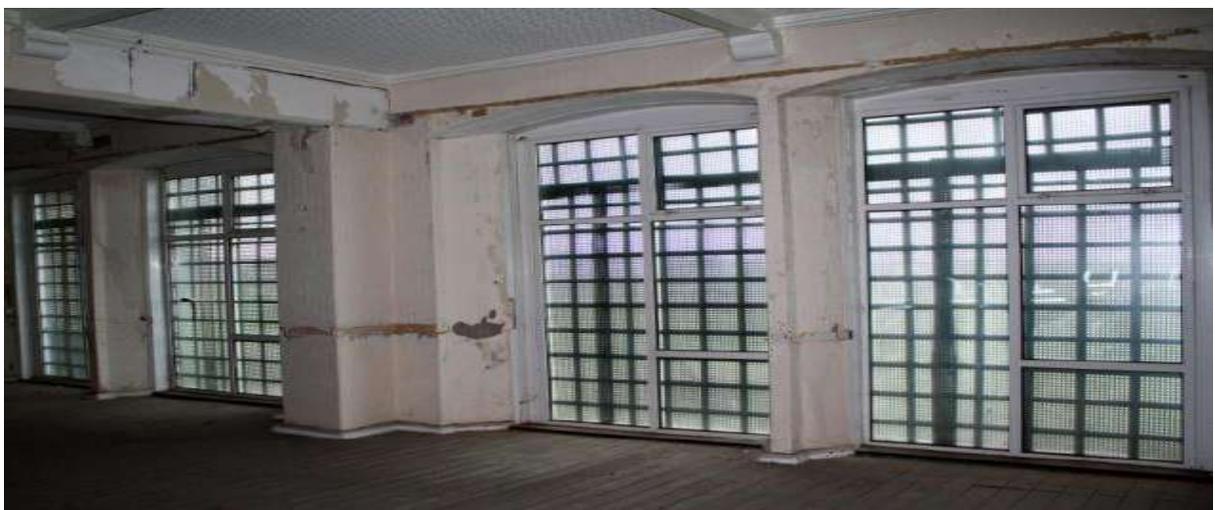
A staircase in the Rest in August 2017



A main room in the Rest August 2017↓



Another staircase in the Rest in August 2017





2 original boarded & ledged doors in the Rest in August 2017

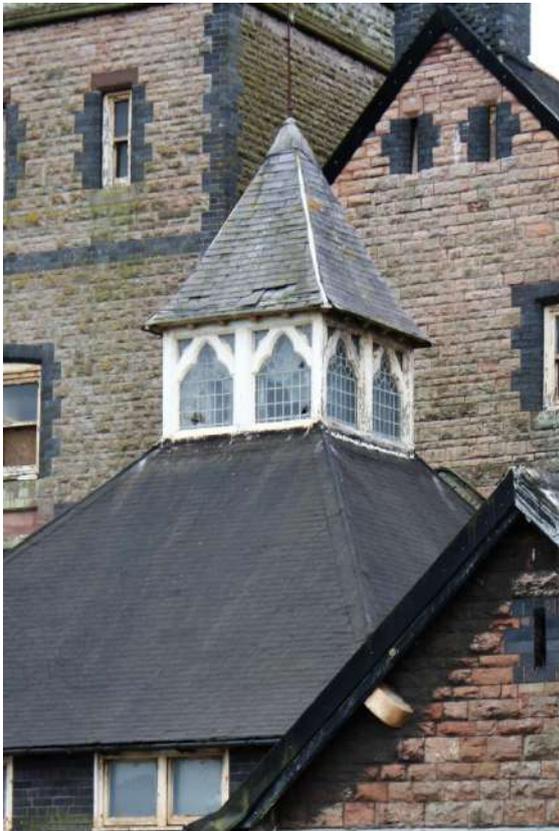


An interior corridor in the Rest in August 2017





An exposed interior ceiling in the Rest in May 2017



Exterior of the Rest in May 2017

The Rest in January 2019



Golf in Porthcawl

The Royal Porthcawl Golf Club (RPGC) golf course and clubhouse is situated next to and slightly to the west of the Rest Home, directly overlooking the beach at Rest Bay. The RPGC was the trailblazer for the game of golf in Porthcawl and the Club played, and still plays, a seminal role in developing and sustaining the sport in the town, in addition to facilitating the development of sports tourism in Porthcawl itself.

The Origins of Golf in Porthcawl

Golf is not a new sport and there are reports that a game similar to golf was played in Scotland during the 12th Century. Possibly so, but it was in the 18th Century that a more recognisably modern form of golf took hold in Scotland with the formation of The Gentlemen Golfers of Edinburgh in 1744 and The Royal and Ancient Club of St Andrew's in 1754. Since then, the game of golf has spread throughout the world (McMahon, 1991; Kailes, 2010).

Golf flourished in the UK during the 18th and 19th Centuries and, in the Principality, the sport can trace its origins back to the 1880's. Late 19th Century Wales had an economy founded on the booming coal, iron and mineral industries, and attendant socioeconomic factors offered favourable conditions in which to foster the formation of golf clubs and enable the game of golf to take root and thrive (Kailes, 2010).

Sport in general reflects the mores of its time and, whereas the Victorian working population could claim football and rugby as their sporting outlets, the captains of industry in Wales were seeking a sport of their own to identify with, patronise and play. Equally important was the fact that many of its enthusiasts considered golf to be a wholesome activity that was entirely compatible with the Victorian healthy living ideal (Hunter, 1892; Kailes, 2010).

By the mid-1880's, 9-hole golf courses were being built on coastal common land around Wales with the earliest golf course formed in Tenby in 1888. Unfortunately, as golf clubs were mainly created and run by the middle-classes, golf was largely perceived to be an elitist sport, solely for the rich (Hunter, 1892; Kailes, 2010).

The Royal Porthcawl Golf Club

The RPGC was one of a handful of golf clubs created in Wales soon after Tenby. It came into being in the summer of 1891 when a group of wealthy Cardiff businessmen involved in the highly profitable shipping and coal-mining industries in Wales, decided to build a golf course near the new and expanding town of Porthcawl. After making an approach to the Porthcawl Vestry, they were granted permission to build a 9-hole golf course on Locks Common (Hunter, 1892; Kailes, 2010).

The Victorian View

'...What can be more invigorating to a jaded business man than a few hours ramble of the breezy downs, with the additional zest of a keen game of golf? The course - some three miles - must be walked over in the course of play, but the nature of the game prevents excessive fatigue. The exercise of walking alone, over the Common towards the Rest, under favourable conditions as regards weather, and inhaling the health-giving Atlantic breeze, is a great boon, and if combined with a "foursome" at Golf, cannot but yield happy results to the visitor.'

Hunter, 1892:17

The, then, recently completed Porthcawl Hotel on the corner of John Street and Dock Street became the temporary headquarters for the aspiring golf club and H J Simpson, a professional golfer, was appointed Captain of the RPGC for the first 2 years of its existence (McMahon, 1991).

Locks Common was cleared of gorse and bracken to make way for the original 9-hole course designed by Charles Gibson, a professional golfer of Westward Ho fame. The RPGC quickly grew in popularity and in 1895, a lease was signed with the Margam estate for additional land on which to build a further 9 holes. Shortly after, the original 9-hole course was abandoned and a new, dedicated clubhouse was built on the recently acquired land together with another 18-hole golf course created by Ramsey Hunter (McMahon, 1991).

From the very start, the RPGC's 18-hole golf course established a name for itself as a classic links course. Rising midway to gorse-laden heathland, the RPGC golf course offers excellent views over Rest Bay and the Bristol Channel towards north Devon while the Channel acts as a funnel for the unpredictable Atlantic winds. The wind is a very significant characteristic of this golf course as it does not have a traditional out and back layout. There is also an absence of trees and dunes, so the course is fully exposed to the idiosyncrasies of whenever and whichever way the wind blows (McMahon, 1991).

Such was the RPGC's impact and importance that the *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* published views of its course in the issue of the journal for March 1892, very soon after the inception of the Club (Hunter, 1892). However, the RPGC was situated off the beaten track and, in the early years of the Club's existence, many of its members travelled to Porthcawl by train. It is known that the Club members were powerful and influential enough to negotiate cut-rate tickets from GWR for their journeys to and from Porthcawl and could, additionally, arrange for the Cardiff to Swansea train to stop at Pyle in order to have a more convenient journey to the golf course (McMahon, 1991).

As impressive was the RPGC members' ability to acquire yet another concession in 1898 by having a new station built at Nottage, named Golfers Halt, later known as Nottage Halt. Nor did it stop there. Not content with facilitating an expansion of the railway network to Porthcawl and building of a completely new railway station at Nottage, RPGC members also attained the right of way across the fields from Nottage to their clubhouse and golf course at Rest Bay (McMahon, 1991).

The RPGC in the 20th Century

Within the first decade of the 20th Century the reputation of the RPGC had grown to such a degree that it received its greatest honour in 1909, when it was granted the rare privilege of being able to use the prefix 'Royal' before its name. In doing so, the RPGC became only the second golf course in Wales and one of only 63 in the world to have such a distinction bestowed upon it. More accolades followed. In 1923 the, then, Prince of Wales, later to be Edward VIII and himself a keen single handicap golfer, agreed to become a patron of RPGC and subsequently visited Porthcawl twice in 1932 to play golf at its course (McMahon, 1991).

But royal patronage and prestige were not enough to shield the RPGC from the impact of WWI. During the Great War, the continuity of the RPGC was threatened as the authorities wanted to commandeer its golf course to meet UK home food production needs. Wanting to avoid such a drastic step and possible extinction, the RPGC handed over 2 parcels of land for potato growing in a compromise agreement. The RPGC was further affected as Porthcawl was a garrison town throughout WWI. As a gesture to serving forces in Porthcawl and the surrounding areas, the RPGC granted honorary membership to all Commanding Officers and Officers of Regiments stationed in the area (McMahon, 1991).

The RPGC golf course underwent a number of alterations throughout the 20th Century, mainly carried out by Harry Colt in 1912 and Tom Simpson in 1933 and 1934 and its current measurement is 7,065 yards from the back markers. Regrettably, Tom Simpson's modifications were followed by the outbreak of WWII in 1939 just as those changes were bedding down. Not until 1951, when it hosted the Amateur Championship, did the RPGC manage to re-establish itself. The upside of this process of reinvention was that it resulted in an improvement in the golf course under the vigilant eye of head green-keeper Marcus Geddes (McMahon, 1991).

The RPGC's renewal process also sparked an upsurge of enthusiasm for the game of golf in the Porthcawl area. This was reflected in a clutch of high calibre amateur and professional championships held at the RPGC during the 1960's that included international matches and the Curtis cup. Later, in 1995, the RPGC achieved the pinnacle of Amateur Championship golf when it hosted the Walker Cup, won by Great Britain and Northern Ireland, featuring the triumph of Gary Wolstenholme over golfing great Tiger Woods (McMahon, 1991).

The Pyle and Kenfig Golf Club

The Pyle and Kenfig Golf Club, called the P and K locally, lies next door to the RPGC and, strictly speaking is just outside the boundaries of Porthcawl. That aside, the RPGC played a crucial role in the P and K's formation and the P and K has very strong ties with the Porthcawl community. It seems that, before the outbreak of WWI, a number of Porthcawl residents and caddies began playing golf on the original, but abandoned, RPGC 9-hole golf course on Locks Common. In 1919, after the end of WWI, that group became the nucleus of the Newton Nottage Golf Club.

Initially, the Newton Nottage Golf Club used the sand dunes that subsequently became Sandy Bay Caravan Park as their golf course but, unsurprisingly, the greens on the Sandy Bay course were susceptible to sand blown in on incoming Bristol Channel winds. With golfing becoming ever more popular, and wanting an improved golfing outlet, Newton Nottage Golf Club asked the trustees of the Borough of Kenfig for permission to lay a golf course on Waun-y-Mer Common to the north of Rest Bay and Nottage.

The initial decision of the Kenfig trustees to refuse such a golf course was later reversed on condition that 6 of the P and K's committee members should come from the parishes of Pyle, Kenfig and Tythegstone Higher. As a result, the P and K golf club was formed in 1922 and created a 9-hole golf course with a par of 35 that, by 1925, had become a fully functioning 18-hole course. At the P and K's inaugural lunch on 29th July 1922 the, then, Captain of the RPGC, T C Graham, presented the P and K with the Graham Bowl as a trophy for the P and K golf course. Nowadays, the Graham Bowl is competed for annually at the P and K and remains its oldest trophy (Wood, 1997).

The P and K's golf course has been the subject of several alterations over time. Its pre-WWII golf course differed from the present version inasmuch as the track running midway between the P and K's golf course was widened by Glamorgan County Council (GCC) in 1939 to form a road. In WWII, the armed forces also commandeered the 16th fairway and land forming the dog-leg 15A fairway. In the aftermath of WWII, compensation was paid in respect of the latter and a new design incorporating the current back 9 holes was laid out by P Mackenzie Ross, the Golf Course Architect. The outcome is that the P and K golf course now offers a challenging game of golf as, like the RPGC golf course, the wind coming off the Bristol Channel presents a real test of skill for golfers of all abilities (Wood, 1997).

The Grove Golf Club

By the 1990's, the popularity of golf as a sport had increased in the Principality, broadening its appeal in doing so. Many factors were involved in this shift in support for the game, for instance golf had largely lost its elitist image, acquired a younger age profile and was appealing to a wider audience that, by now, included many more women. Demographic factors also came into the equation as people had longer lifespans, were physically active for a greater length of time and generally, enjoyed higher standards of living. As important, patterns of work and waged employment had undergone profound changes enabling individuals to have more leisure and free time at their disposal and many were choosing to spend their downtime playing and/or watching golf.

The **Society** believes that the Grove Golf Club was opened in 1997 to cater for the heightened demand for the game of golf in Porthcawl and its surrounding area. The Grove is presently set in 120 acres of undulating parkland, offering an interesting contrast to both the RPGC and the P and K classic Links golf courses.

The Grove lies within Porthcawl's catchment area, north of Rest Bay and can be found down an adjacent lane to the P and K clubhouse, leading to the A229 between the outskirts of Nottage village and South Cornelly. At the time of writing, the club has 550 members, a spacious, modern clubhouse that is open to the general public and a reputation for the warm welcome it gives to visiting golfing clubs, societies and charities.

The Grove came into being as a result of the collaboration of businessman Mike Thomas with farmer Timothy Jones who undertook a major project to diversify land from traditional farming and create a par 72 golf course. The **Society** understands that the scheme was brought to fruition by designer Mike Thomas and architect John

Williams. Green-keeper Henry Stead, supervised the building of the golf course, the planting of more than 20,000 trees and the creation of an artificial lake. There are unconfirmed reports that the course dries out during the summer months, but water comes into play on the signature 5th, 7th and 11th holes.

Local sources also describe how, when first opened, the Grove had a 9-hole golf course but soon expanded to become the 18-hole golf course that it is today. Inevitably in the Porthcawl area, the wind becomes a significant factor to play when it blows in from the Bristol Channel and, whilst not so crucial as on the RPGC or the P and K golf courses, the Grove can then offer a stimulating round of golf.

Golf in Porthcawl Today

Since it was first played in Porthcawl in 1891, the sport of golf has firmly embedded itself into the heart and character of the town. Indeed, in the mid-20th Century and aftermath of WWII, P Mackenzie Ross described Porthcawl as '*...a veritable golfer's paradise...*' (Wood, 1997:11).

That was before the creation of the Grove. These days, Porthcawl can boast 3 well-known golf clubs with a combined membership of over 2,000. Each of the 3 golf courses tests individual golfing skills and offers different degrees of golfing satisfaction.

At the RPGC, recent, extensive improvements to its clubhouse and pro-shop together with alterations to the course itself, have maintained the Club's longstanding reputation for excellence and a high-quality, challenging game of golf. As well as a number of high-level golf tournaments played at the RPGC since its inception, every Welsh Championship has been played on the Glamorgan Links and the Amateur Championship has been played at the RPGC no less than 7 times (McMahon, 1991).

The RPGC has famously hosted some of the most prestigious amateur and professional tournaments such as the Senior British Open Championship in 2014, the first time a Major Championship had been staged in Wales. In 2017, the Senior British Open Championship returned to the RPGC when, as in 2014, Bernard Langer was victorious. Happily for Porthcawl, the RPGC Championship golf course is rated the top golf course in Wales and, in 2018, ranked as 64th amongst the top 100 golf courses in the world, up 5 places on previous rankings (McMahon, 1997; Kailes, 2010; Top 100 Golf Courses of the World, 2018).

The P and K has also played a full part in Porthcawl's golfing success as, in both the 2014 and 2017 Senior British Open Championships, the P and K golf course fulfilled the role of 'prequalifier' and earned plaudits from golfing competitors (McMahon, 1991). To its continuing credit the P and K is now ranked 10th in the 100 Top Golf Courses in Wales (Top 50 Golf Courses in Wales, 2018).

The Future

As the sport enjoys substantial media coverage of a global kind, golf effectively showcases Porthcawl to the world. The town's 3 golf courses, especially the RPGC and P and K, have made Porthcawl synonymous with premier golfing destinations and ensured the town is visited by golfers from other countries, particularly the United States (US) and Europe.

Residents of Porthcawl and its surrounding area are fortunate in having a varied range of high standard golfing opportunities readily available to them. The game makes a substantial contribution to the tourist, leisure and commerce industries in Porthcawl and helps to fill the coffers of BCBC when, for example, local golf clubs host major tournaments such as the Seniors British Open Championships.

Given this, it is such a pity that, at the time of writing, there is a complete absence of high quality hotel accommodation within Porthcawl's boundaries in which tourists and golfers of national and international standing can stay. It is especially ironic as, within living memory, the town had venues such as the iconic 5* Seabank and 4* Esplanade Hotels, in which visiting world-class sporting/boxing figures such as Ingmar Johansson and the Cooper brothers together with celebrities of the day like John Mills and Michael Wilding, frequently stayed.

Even during the post-WWII period when the UK was virtually bankrupt and recovering from a crippling world war, Porthcawl could still boast gold standard, up-market hotel accommodation that provided much-needed employment opportunities in tourism and related industries for people throughout Bridgend County Borough. It was to the regret of the Porthcawl community that, from the 1970's onwards, short-termism and lack of vision prevailed towards the town. The result was that such venues were sold off or downgraded, contributing considerably to the decline of Porthcawl's reputation and tourist appeal, and its leisure and commercial sector, thereby eroding its employment base and seriously damaging the local economy.

Apart from Porthcawl's other sporting and environmental assets, such as water-sports which will be dealt with further on in the report, the RPGC, the P and K and the Grove have a global, telegenic status. In view of this, any realistic assessment must be that the game of golf will continue to grow in popularity. Golf is already a successful draw for visitors to Porthcawl and, by implication, the county of Bridgend. The **Society** is of the view that high-level decision-makers in the tourist and local planning sectors need to address this present, damaging gap in the provision of modern, high-end hotel accommodation with the utmost urgency.

Royal Porthcawl Golf Club (RPGC). Club-house & golf course in July 2018



Pyle and Kenfig (the P and K) Golf Club-house & golf course in July 2018



The Grove Club-house & golf course in July 2018



Speed Trials

For a comparatively remote spot, Rest Bay witnessed a significant amount of sporting activity at the beginning of the 20th Century. Golf was not the only sport to flourish there but, whereas the RPGC bedded down on the hinterland, the beach itself at Rest Bay became the venue for Speed Trials for motor-cars and motor-cycles.

The Automotive Age

The motor-car is an icon of modern living and symbol of personal freedom. Yet as recently as the end of the 19th Century it did not exist as a viable choice of personal transportation for most of the population. It was only in the short span of time between 1894 and the outbreak of WWI in 1914 that automobiles evolved to a point at which they began to revolutionise modern lifestyles.

At the end of the 19th Century, personal transportation had many limitations. At a time when urban living was speeding up, journeys carried out on foot, in the time-honoured way, were slow. Bicycles had already arrived on the scene and while often less than comfortable, they were affordable, lightweight, easily stored, faster than walking and, once purchased, cost next to nothing to maintain. Although less flexible, water transport was another option and, by the beginning of the 20th Century, river boats and steam-ships had developed sufficiently to offer long-haul transport to the more affluent traveller. Rail transport had also emerged in the 19th Century and, by the start of the 20th Century, the speed of trains had effectively cornered the long-distance luxury travel market (Hanlon, 2017).

Horse-drawn vehicles were another alternative for getting from one place to another and there was an ages-old, long-standing market in that form of personal transportation. By the start of the 20th Century, such vehicles had been finessed and refined to the point that horse-drawn

carriages offered privacy, comfort and greater autonomy (Hanlon, 2017).

The Origins of Speed Trials

Early automotive pioneers were motivated by a desire to harness the speed of trains to the flexibility and convenience of horse-drawn carriages. And they envisaged the motor-car as the means to do it once it had achieved its full potential (Hanlon, 2017).

At the start of the 20th Century, Europe held pole position in car manufacturing although the position was reversed by 1913 once Henry Ford's car production line swung into action. From then on, the mass manufacture of Model T Fords increasingly provided fast, comfortable and affordable personal transportation to ordinary people thus stimulating demand, especially in the US (Hanlon, 2017).

Up to 1914 when the US became the automotive market-leader, motor-cars were individually assembled and some fast cars were built but not in large numbers. In reality, most cars were slow, cumbersome and unreliable with top speeds of about 20 miles per hour (mph), rising to 40 mph as technology improved. From the early days of motoring, car owners, as well as car manufacturers, had sought ways of testing and improving their machines by eagerly pitting them against others in Speed Trials to prove their reliability and publicise their speed (Hanlon, 2017).

This was problematic in the UK. Dedicated car racing tracks such as Silverstone and Brooklands had not been constructed and closing public roads for circuits was difficult. Such as they were, existing highways and byways had been created for horse-drawn vehicles and were mainly unpaved, potholed and unsuitable for heavy usage. Speed Trials called for large areas of firm, flat, safe surfaces free of obstacles so, where better than the big, open sandy beaches around the UK coastline? (Hanlon, 2017).

Speed Trials at Rest Bay

Several Welsh beaches had the space, dimensions and surface that could lend themselves to the demands of car-racing, for example Pendine Sands, Aberavon and Rest Bay and Speed Trials were held across south Wales from the outset of the 20th Century. Motor-cycles were also undergoing their own parallel process of evolution and development and, for both automobiles and motor-cycles, speed was, quite literally, the essence. Hence, events often combined Speed Trials for motor-cars as well as motor-cycles.

According to reliable local sources, Speed Trials started at Rest Bay in 1913. Participants came from throughout the UK and it is believed that the occasions consisted of measured speed over a given distance such as, from Rest Bay to Pink Bay and *vice versa*. Whether every event included both motor-cars and motor-cycles is unclear, although there is a photographic record of a Speed Trial for motor-cycles at Rest Bay on 21st June 1913. However, the earliest record of a Speed Trial for motor-cars the **Society** has been able to trace was on 3rd July 1914 (The Glamorgan Gazette, 1914).

When WWI broke out in August 1914, the UK was put on a war footing. As mentioned previously, the Rest sheltered Belgian refugees between 1914 and 1915 before becoming an auxiliary military hospital and likely military hub from 1915 onwards. Whilst records are again unclear, it is believed that Speed Trials ceased to be held at Rest Bay throughout the duration of WWI. Thereafter, it is understood that they resumed at Rest Bay in 1920, although the earliest photographic record of Speed Trials being held there after the end of WWI, is in 1922.

The **Society** has also discovered that Speed Trials were known to have continued at Porthcawl at least until 1924 as Bonhams Auctioneers featured several

medals which were auctioned on 6th December 2017. Amongst this lot of automotive memorabilia was a bronze medal understood to have been awarded to Selwyn Francis Edge, a prominent early motor-car driver. Publicity material attached to the auction records that he attained the 'Fastest Time of Day' of 49.6 seconds from a standing start on wet sand over a 1 mile course at Speed Trials conducted by the South Wales Automobile Club on 18th/19th July 1924 at Porthcawl. Another group of medals, held by a local resident, includes a medal for a motor-cycle and side-car Speed Trial, inscribed with the name of E J Boshier-Jones in 1921 (Wilson, 2017; Stainthorpe, 2020).

Photographs of such occasions at Rest Bay reveal fascinating differences between the shape and mechanics of those vintage cars that took part in the Speed Trials. Apart from a great many being open-top and classed as racing cars, the car tyres appear solid and essential components like the car engine and brakes were mounted externally. Interestingly, in an era when many women were disenfranchised, the photographs also reveal the involvement of women car drivers in Speed Trials.

Whether Rest Bay remained the venue for Speed Trials later into the 'Roaring Twenties' is not known although there is some suggestion that they continued up to 1939 and the outbreak of WWII. In retrospect, this era marks the coming of age of the automobile as it had become more efficient, powerful, safer and reliable, making car ownership a viable option for families. Gradually, too, as society became more mobile, roads designed for horse-drawn vehicles were being replaced by those fit for motor-cars. While the automobile remained a status symbol and preserve of the middle and upper classes until the mid-20th Century, Speed Trials had achieved their purpose by enabling the development of motor-cars and their entry into mainstream society.

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ONE PENNY.

"SCORCHING" AT PORTHCAWL

SPEED TRIALS ON THE SANDS.

REMARKABLE TIMES.

This year's hill-climb and speed trials, held jointly by the South Wales Automobile Club and the Cardiff Motor Club, may well be described as the most successful joint meeting yet held by the two organisations. The weather on Saturday, when the speed trials on Porthcawl sands were decided, was again ideal, and the sport was witnessed by thousands of spectators, who crowded the rocks and other points of vantage above the course. Motor vehicles were there by the hundreds, but so well was the affair organised and so well did the county police control and direct the traffic that not a single accident was reported. The course was fairly good, the sand being firm, in spite of the fact that water lay on the track in places, especially in the first half. The chief officials were the same as at the hill-climb on Thursday at Caerphilly, but on this occasion the president of the joint committee, Lord Ninian Stuart, M.P., was present, and took great interest in the proceedings.

The chief performance of the day was that of L. Hands on a 25/50 Talbot belonging to the Earl of Shrewsbury. He had won one race, and when retiring for the rest broke a valve, and was not in time to start. However, he was permitted to try the course later against time, and did 50 4-5secs., a speed of 71.43 miles per hour, beating the previous record of 51 3-5 sec. for the course, a measured mile, which was made by E. Stokes on a 25 Talbot last year. This, however, has still to come before the committee for discussion as to whether it shall be considered a record for the meeting. Fine driving was shown by Miss L. B. Starkey, who was one of the winners, and F. C. Clement, on the 15/20 Straker Squire, which came to grief on the middle bend at Caerphilly, did remarkably well. In the cycle events A. B. Wades' record of 64-5sec., made last year on an 8 New Imperial, was beaten by S. B. Briggs on an 8 Champion Jap, who did 61 2-5 sec., or a speed of 58.63 miles per hour from a standing start. He also won the unlimited side-car event.

Reproduced from
*The Glamorgan
Gazette* dated
Friday, 3rd July
1914.



Medals presented to E J Boshier-Jones at Speed Trials of motor-bikes & sidecars at Rest Bay in 1921 (Courtesy of Wayne Stainthorpe).



**Raymond Mays in a Bugatti Brescia at Rest Bay
(Courtesy of Wayne Stainthorpe).**



**Speed Trials at Rest Bay, circa 1920 (Courtesy
of Porthcawl Museum and Historical Society).**



Racing cars at Rest Bay circa 1920 (Courtesy of Porthcawl Museum and Historical Society).



Racing car at Rest Bay circa 1920 (Courtesy of Porthcawl Museum and Historical Society).

Water-sports

Wales is a sports-loving nation and sport is a prominent aspect of Welsh culture and everyday life so it is hardly surprising that golf is not alone in starting as a recreational and leisure pursuit before becoming a tourist draw to Porthcawl. Unlike golf, however, water-sports had a much more convoluted journey before becoming part of the town's sporting scene.

The History of Water-Sports

Wales has numerous rivers and is bordered on 3 sides by the sea, all of which provide outstanding settings for the performance of traditionally accepted physical abilities such as swimming, rowing, canoeing, sailing and fishing. In the past though, rather than perceiving activities in these areas in terms of sporting prowess, they were more often regarded as necessary life-skills, especially for those living and working in or on the waterside or at the coast.

Attitudes changed during the 19th Century with the realisation that, in addition to being required life-skills, water-based activities could be participated in for competition and fun. This altered mind-set and urge to harness tidal power and the strength of the waves emanated from far-away places, particularly from the Pacific Islands (Mansfield, 2011).

From the 18th Century onwards, maritime explorers had seen Pacific islanders diving into deep water without creating so much as a ripple, how islanders used narrow boats to cut through and navigate strong Pacific Ocean currents and how, by standing on wooden boards on the crest of the waves, they would successfully steer themselves to the shore. Explorers saw, too, how Pacific islanders were as at ease in water as on land, how they communed with the water and surf, competing with each other by criss-crossing the waves on their boards and saw how these physical activities were engaged in on a spiritual

level as much as for pleasure and enjoyment (Mansfield, 2011).

Captain Cook's Journal, 1778

'Twenty or thirty natives taking each a long narrow board, rounded at the ends, set together from the shore. Their object is to place themselves on the summit of the largest surge, by which they are driven along with amazing rapidity towards the shore...the boldness with which we saw them perform these difficult and dangerous manoeuvres was astonishing.'

Mansfield, 2011: 12-13

Western explorers and colonists were enthralled by their discoveries and spread the word on return home. As a result, after the US annexed Hawaii in 1898, water-sports, including belly-boarding and surfing, took hold in America from the cusp of the 19th and 20th Centuries, before spreading to Australia and South Africa. Meanwhile, while still not mainstream activities, water-sports gained popularity, for instance swimming became an Olympic sport in 1896, in tandem with the development of swimming pools. Water-polo, which originated in England in 1870, became an Olympic sport in 1900 and swimming the English Channel in 1875 to prove endurance and skill subsequently became a well-publicised and much followed event (Kingston, 2005).

Thereafter, water-sports, especially surfing, acquired an exclusive aura and social cachet that permeated early 20th Century society. For example, there are reports and photographs of the author, Jack London, surfing in Hawaii in 1907 as did Prince Edward, later King Edward VIII, in 1920, followed by Agatha Christie in 1922 (Mansfield, 2011).

The emergence of water-sports as valid leisure and recreational activities together with the increasing popularity of belly-boarding and surfing in particular, continued apace during the 20th Century, making it a period of unprecedented

growth in water-sports recreational and leisure opportunities. Traditional, water-based sporting pursuits, such as fishing, swimming, rowing and sailing, also flourished but it was belly-boarding and surfing that were standout attractions. So much so that as the 20th Century wore on, surfing became a firmly established international tourist industry in the US, South Africa and Australia. There are differing accounts of which country was first in Europe, but it appears that the Channel Islands, primarily Jersey, was first off the mark in establishing the British surf scene in 1958 (Mansfield, 2011).

When it came to the UK mainland, the spread of surfing can be attributed to 4 Australian teenagers who arrived in the UK with their trademark Malibu fibreglass surf boards in 1962. Reportedly, it was they who led the way. When based as lifeguards in Cornwall, the 4 Australians exceeded life-saving expectations and, in their time off, amazed the communities where they worked with their skill and ability on their fibreglass surf boards. So impressed were local councils by the life-saving record of the 4 Australians that the usual wooden, standard issue boards for lifeguards were replaced by fibreglass boards (Booth, 2012).

The Australians' free-wheeling lifestyle also set the tone for the creation of a surfing culture in Cornwall. That culture together with fibreglass surf boards, was quickly emulated elsewhere in the UK, including Porthcawl. Moreover, surfing not only grew in popularity but became the basis of the tourist industry and mainstay of the local economy in Cornwall and the south-west of England, earning an estimated £70 million for the Cornish economy alone (Booth, 2012).

Water-Sports in Porthcawl

In the mid-20th Century, Porthcawl extended its sporting base to include an array of water-sports and water-based activities such as power-boat racing, canoeing, kayaking and wind-surfing, all of which had acquired a firm foothold in the town by the Millennium. For example, the town hosted a series of international jet-ski races at the start of July 2018. While that may be the case, it is belly-boarding and surfing with which Porthcawl is now most associated and, given the town's geographical advantages, it is easy to understand why.

Skер and Rest Bay Beaches

Coney beach and Trecco Bay to the east of Porthcawl have their fans, but it is Rest Bay and, to a lesser extent Sker beach, that is the epicentre of water-sports activities in the town.

Both Sker and Rest Bay are situated on the Bristol Channel facing south-west and are well-placed to receive Atlantic swells. Sker beach, or Sker as it is known locally, is the most westerly beach in the county of Bridgend. Officially, Sker is in Ton Kenfig, just outside Porthcawl's boundaries, and is accessible only on foot through Kenfig National Nature Reserve or from Rest Bay so is less visited by the general public. For some, this lonelier, wilder ambience, together with Sker's particular tidal patterns, have the edge when it comes to fishing, surfing and body boarding. Sker, it is argued, outshines all the others when it comes to beaches, dunes and as a setting for fishing and other water-sports, as well as surfing. Others believe that the inaccessibility of Sker and its lack of lifeguards and other facilities, rule it out as a serious contender *vis-à-vis* water-sports.

To the east of Sker, almost immediately around the coastal corner and on the very edge of Porthcawl, is Rest Bay. The county of Bridgend is literally spoilt for choice as far as big, bold, sandy beaches

go but, for many, Rest Bay is simply the best, not least because it is accessible both by car and on foot. Furthermore, it has a broad expanse of beach and shoreline that regularly gains one of Wales' 230 coveted Blue-flag Awards for cleanliness and water quality, both of which are essential health and safety factors for participating in water-sports (Anderson, 2011).

Looking northwards, the now closed Rest Home still dominates the horizon and the RPGC's clubhouse and golf course and low cliffs of Locks Common form a scenic backdrop to Rest Bay. Rest Bay retains a natural, unspoilt beauty of its own and rock-pools teeming with a variety of marine life are dotted about between the cliffs and pebbled foreshore making it a perfect spot to introduce families and young children to the seaside pleasures of paddling, fishing-nets, sandcastle-building and crabbing.

Rest Bay also has waves that frequently reach 6' or more, making it a consistently good setting for all kinds of water-sports. When incoming waves are not too big, bathing, canoeing, kayaking and wind surfing and other water-sports enthusiasts can all be found at Rest Bay, whatever the weather and whatever the season.

Water-sports participants need caution when it comes to rip-tides on incoming waves, and Rest Bay has the advantage of having a lifeguard station above the slipway that is fully manned during the summer months. Apart from that, locals will readily testify that, other than in exceptional weather conditions, waves at Rest Bay are mostly rideable. Providing there is enough swell running, it is not unusual to find as many as 100 people in the sea at Rest Bay on any given day. It is the preferred location for surfers whether they are novices or more experienced in the sport and it is primarily as a belly-boarding and surfing destination that Rest Bay is best known.

Surfing in Porthcawl in the 20th Century

Once the pleasures of surfing began to get known and circulate, the Porthcawl community was quick to adopt surfing and belly-boarding in the 1960's. Locally, it became part of the contemporary 'chilled out' scene although, initially, surfing was a novel activity for the town, viewed with suspicion by some while indulged in by a few:

'...One morning in 1966, Porthcawl police station received a call from a local woman who claimed to have seen "two men floating on aircraft wings in Rest Bay!" When the Porthcawl coppers rushed to the scene, they found local pioneers Ken and Ray Evans enjoying a mellow three-foot session...'

(Mansfield, 2011:111)

In fact, Porthcawl soon became one of the most high-profile pockets of activity in the Welsh surfing scene. Late in the 20th Century, outside influences such as in performance and the all-important surfboard shaping and design, had a positive impact on surfing in Porthcawl. For instance, Porthcawl Lifeguard Club was the first in Wales to utilise surfboards and Porthcawl residents and veteran surfers such as Brad Hockeridge, Mark Schofield, Simon Tucker and Greg Owen have surfed competitively, nationally and globally, winning both national and international surfing awards (Evans, 2006; Mansfield, 2011).

From the 1960's and until the end of the 20th Century, Porthcawl developed a rich surfing heritage that, as a matter of regret to the **Society**, is not well-documented and so is hard to access. Despite that, the town has emerged as a surf town and become home to the Welsh Coast Surf Club (WCSC), a diverse group of people united by a love of surfing (Davies, 2017).

The WCSC covers the south Wales coastline from Sker to Ogmores-by-sea and began its existence in 1969 as the Crest

Surf Club (Coney, Rest, Sker, and Trecco) before becoming the WCSC in 1971. The aim of the WCSC is to foster surfing talent and the Club underpins Porthcawl's vibrant surfing community by organising competitions and events as well as the legendary annual surfer's fancy dress ball (Anderson, 2011; Davies, 2017).

Water-Sports in Porthcawl Today

Surfing had shed its elitist image and acquired a cult status by the start of the 21st Century. Over time, Porthcawl has gained and maintained a mixed water-sports scene but whilst other water-sports, such as wind-surfing, have advanced considerably in popularity, it is still belly-boarding and surfing that retain the optics on Porthcawl's beaches.

Nowadays, Porthcawl ranks as one of the topmost 5 surfing spots in Wales and the town has one of the oldest surfing communities in the UK. Rest Bay remains a surfing hot-spot in south Wales, to the extent that it has become the place of choice for annual regional and national surfing competitions (Anderson, 2011). Furthermore, Porthcawl Surf School based at Rest Bay was named Best Surf School in Britain at the UK Pro Surf Awards in 2016 (BCBC, 2016).

Until fairly recently, Porthcawl reflected this top-ranking position in surfing culture in its retail sector with shops like Flow, Surf and PM Surf that catered for the niche market in water-sports goods in the town. Unfortunately for them, the rise of online retail outlets together with an unfavourable trading environment, has brought about a decline in high street footfall resulting in only 1 surviving surf retail outlet in Porthcawl at the time of writing this report.

The Future

Surfing is one of the world's oldest sports. From distant beginnings as an intrinsic part of religious and cultural traditions on the far side of the

world, it has become a global sport indulged in by many as a recreational and leisure pursuit. People today surf for many reasons such as a means of staying fit and healthy; learning about the oceanic and beach environment; escapism from school and work; pleasure-seeking and the camaraderie of the surfing community:

'...Surfing is an amazing sport which always challenges me physically and mentally. I have learnt about the weather, the environment, and my own physical ability which is always challenged when surfing. It has taken me all over the world in its pursuit. I have experienced places and people that I would never if I didn't surf...'

(Anderson, 2011:2)

In the 21st Century, water-sports, and surfing especially, are set to be growth areas and the indications are that it could even exceed those present expectations of growth. For instance, surfing is to be included in the Tokyo Olympics in 2020 and research has also found that:

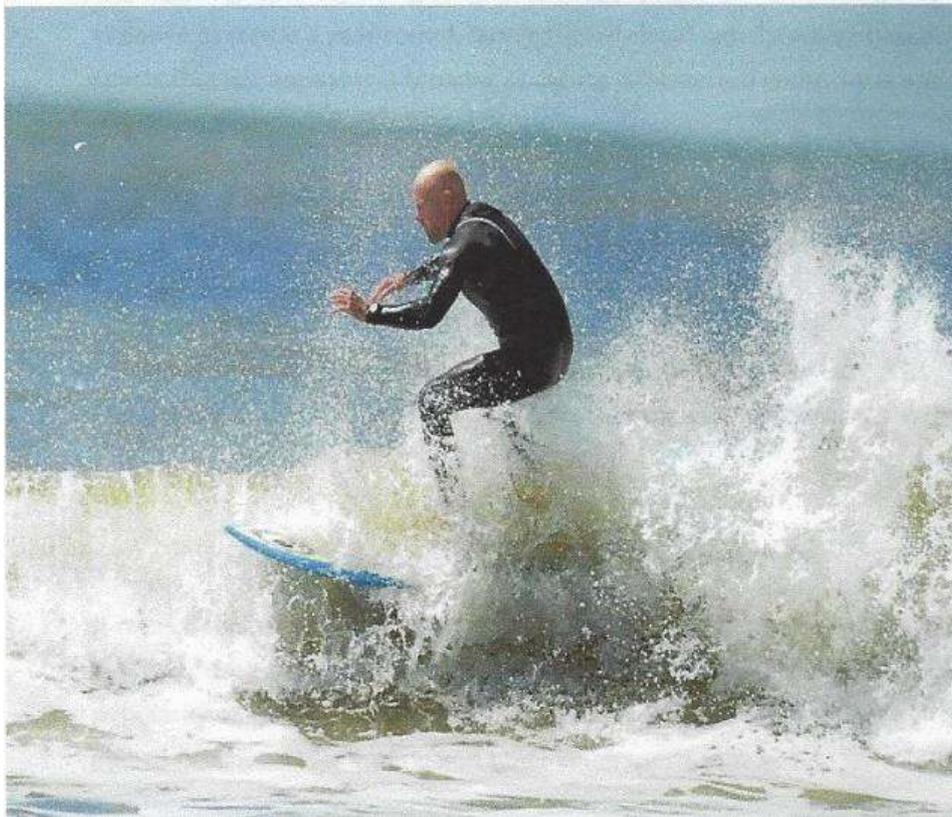
'...Surfing pulls people to the area, people come specifically for the surf, they spend money in the area, use our local B&B's and ...contribute to the local economy...'

(Anderson, 2011:2).

In contrast to golf, another of Porthcawl's global sporting assets, water-sports especially surfing, has a younger age profile. For example, a recent survey found that most surfers are aged between 20-29 years, although a good number were aged over 40. The average mean age was shown to be 30 years and, although surfing is currently a male-dominated sporting activity, research also indicates that the number of women involved in surfing is increasing rapidly (Anderson, 2011).



Rest Bay in September 2018



A surfer at Rest Bay (Reproduced from *WalesOnline*, dated 30th November 2016)

The Water-Sports Centre

Porthcawl is fortunate insofar as its geographical situation on the Bristol Channel ensures that it is uniquely well-positioned between industrial south Wales to the west and the Glamorgan Heritage Coastline to its east. The town and its hinterland have an extensive, winding coastline of its own and 7 good sandy bays. Crucially, it has nearby links to the M4 and it is estimated that more than 3.75 million people live within a 2 hour drive of the town (BCBC, 2016)

In view of these circumstances, it is not surprising that BCBC is making radical changes to Rest Bay and the surrounding area. Existing beachside facilities are considered inferior to those of European counterparts and water-sports facilities elsewhere in the UK, such as Swansea's 360 and Monmouthshire's Llandegfedd Centre. As water-sports in general are destined to grow for all the reasons cited above, BCBC wants to capitalise on Rest Bay's reputation for water-sports and maximise its tourist potential. Consequently, BCBC is in the process of creating an all-year-round, family friendly local hub for water-based sports that is designed to appeal to a wider audience of seasoned water-sports participants and beginners alike (BCBC, 2016)

Preparations for these changes are well-advanced and BCBC has granted approval for the conversion of a plateau on Locks Common, adjacent to the Rest building, into a future hub for water-sports activities. Work is already underway and the one-storey Malc's café next to Rest Bay car park has been demolished and is being replaced by a 7.3 metre, two-storey 'centre for water sports excellence' comprised of 480 square metres total surface area. At the time of preparing this report, the proposal is that the centre will

include an entrance lobby, 3 units, a covered area for dog walkers, retail units, storage unit, changing room, plant room and bin store as well as upgraded toilets on the ground floor. On the first floor, the intention is to have restaurant facilities, a function room, kitchen and front balcony terrace area (Houghton, 2017).

Local opinion in Porthcawl continues to be divided about this development. Many reservations about these plans were voiced by organisations such as the **Society**, nearby residents on the Rest Bay estate and the Rest Bay Surf Lifesaving Club. In addition to the possibility of noise and disturbance during the construction process, and the ever-present risk of congested parking, there were ongoing concerns about the proposed building focusing on the actual sustainability and compatibility of the materials being used in its construction, the height of the building and whether it accords with Rest Bay and its environs.

The **Society** accepts that there is a need to upgrade the café and other facilities to accord with modern standards and expectations. That said, plans for a 2-storey building of such proportions represents an intrusion into the skyline at Locks Common and a further erosion of the perimeter of Locks Common itself. For many, it is out of keeping with the area, marking yet another stage in the process of gentrifying Rest Bay and Locks Common. And in doing so, running the very real risk of jeopardising Rest Bay's essentially craggy vernacular.

Malc's café in May 2018



Design for the proposed water-sports Centre at Rest Bay (BBC, 2017)



Locks Common



Locks Common Road circa 1960s
(Courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley)

Locks Common Nature Reserve

The Grade II Listed Rest Home and the RPGC clubhouse directly overlook Locks Common and any study of Porthcawl would be incomplete without mention of this cherished amenity space defining the westerly fringe of the town which is highly valued by the town's inhabitants and its visitors alike. In fact, a major reason for locating the Rest Home on its present site was that it was adjacent to:

'...fine expansive Downs...that under foot they are exceedingly dry, from which a fine view of Swansea may be seen...'

(Hunter, 1892:6).

Locks Common was the 'Downs' referred to by the Victorian tourist R C. Hunter in his tourist guide *Porthcawl as a Health Resort* (1892). Nowadays, Locks Common is one of BCBC's official Conservation areas and is a designated Local Nature Reserve (LNR).

The award of official Conservation status to Locks Common is a modern continuation of the healthy, outdoor theme associated with Porthcawl, and is intended to preserve the Common's panoramic views, its landscape, nature and wildlife for the enjoyment and well-being of future generations (BCBC, 2014).

Geologically, Locks Common LNR is a large stretch of grassland, heath and limestone pavement that acts as a habitat for a varied number of indigenous plants and wildlife. Covering an area of over 30 hectares, the Common has the Rest, the RPGC and Rest Bay at its extreme western boundary while Iron-Gate Point forms the official entrance to Locks Common LNR to the east. With the backdrop of inland hills and mountains to the north, the Common stretches down to the Bristol Channel and, in favourable weather, Somerset and the distant coastline of north Devon are easily visible (BCBC, 2014).

Originally, Porthcawl had 4 Common areas - Locks Common, Backs Common, Newton Down and Pickets Lease. Backs Common, between Nottage village and the town centre, together with Pickets Lease, now form much of the built environment of modern Porthcawl. Newton Down on the other hand, was renamed Stormy Down for strategic reasons in 1940 during WWII. The name has stuck and, to this day, it remains known locally as Stormy Down, although Ordnance Survey (OS) maps still show the area in question as Newton Down with an area called Stormy Down located to the north of the A48.

The Locks Common Agreement

Locks Common's big, open space has a mixed history. Apart from being a place of recreation and movement for Porthcawl's residents and visitors, the Common has been used as a golf course, for army training and animal welfare.

In 1899, Porthcawl Urban District Council (PUDC) signed the Locks Common Agreement with the Lord of Pembroke Manor (Higgins, 1968). The aim of the Agreement was to formalise the management and regulation of Locks Common and, under the provisions of the Commons Act of 1899, powers were given to PUDC, subject to the rights of the commoners and those of the person entitled to the soil of the Common.



Cars parked on Locks Common circa 1950's/60's (Courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley).

The Locks Common Agreement (1899), specifically required PUDC to:

'...maintain the Common free from all encroachments as a place for exercise and recreation to which '...the inhabitants of the district and the public generally...' have a right of free access...'

(Higgins, 1968: 131).

The Agreement did not intend to prohibit any development of the Common as the PUDC was also empowered to:

- do whatever necessary to protect and improve Locks Common
- construct a car park
- make and enforce any bye-laws
- preserve order and prevent nuisances.

In the event, WWI interrupted proceedings and postponed the completion of any developments for Locks Common that PUDC had in mind. As stated earlier, prior to WWI the Common was temporarily leased to the RPGC for use as a golf course and occasionally utilised for military training by the army. Only in April 1923, well after the end of WWI, was the scheme for the development of Locks Common eventually finalised under the Commons Act of 1899 (Higgins, 1968).

That same year, the Rest Home and the RPGC jointly financed the construction of Locks Common Road across the Common to facilitate a more direct, scenic access to each institution as an alternative to the existing, less convenient, approach along the old Nottage Road (Thomas, 1987).

Later in 1923, PUDC formally adopted the maintenance of Locks Common Road and formalised its role in the management of Locks Common. PUDC thereby officially endorsed the undertaking it had made to prevent any building encroachment in the Locks Common Agreement of 1899 (Morgan, 1987).

Porthcawl Aerodrome

Porthcawl Aerodrome was not, in fact, on Locks Common but situated directly behind it on a field abutting the Common and Locks Lane. It appears that, shortly after WWI, possibly as early as 1919, Locks Lane field was periodically used as a civil airfield by the Berkshire Aviation Co. for Jubilee Air displays. Records are vague, but there is a suggestion that aircraft also landed on the beach, although no indication is given of which beach in Porthcawl was used! Trips around the locality were organised at 2/6 shillings a flight in old money terms and, whilst data is unconfirmed, are thought to have continued at intermittent intervals until 1935. It is also on record that the Avro 504 built by Morgan and Co, Coachbuilders, flew from Locks Lane airfield in 1920 (Morgan & Aircraft and Motor Vehicles Factory, 2014; UK Airfields & Airports, 2014).

Pine's Airways

Records are more specific about a later, more permanent aerodrome on Locks Lane that was operational between 1936 and 1939. The aerodrome was a private venture called Pine's Airways and was owned by George Pine, a local businessman who had served in the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) and Air Cadet Corps (ACC) and whose family had a background in the transport industry (Morgan, 1987; Mansley, 1994).

Before the outbreak of WWII, George Pine obtained a commercial flying licence and became the owner of 2 light aircraft that he subsequently used to operate a flying taxi service to Swansea and Cardiff and make flying excursions around Porthcawl and the Bristol Channel (Morgan, 1987; Morgan, 1996).



The Flying Flea replicated from a kit circa 1984
(Wikipedia, 2018)



The early days of aviation. An aeroplane thought to have landed on a field abutting Locks Common circa 1920's (Reproduced from *Old Photos of Porthcawl in Glamorgan*).

PINES AIRWAYS LTD.

OFFICE TEL 67

LANDING GROUND TEL. 247

JOY FLIGHTS FROM 2/6

EACH.

SPECIAL FLIGHTS OVER PORTHCRAWL 5/-

OGMORE-BY-SEA - 10/-	MARGAM CASTLE 10/-
NASH Lighthouse - £1	PORT TALBOT - 15/-
CARDIFF - - £2	NEATH - - £1
KENFIG POOL - 5/-	MUMBLES - - £2

SPECIAL MORNING FLIGHT TO CARDIFF

Via Ogmores, Southerndown, Nash Point, St. Donat's, Breaksea Point, Barry and Penarth. Return via Llandaff, Peterston, Pendoylan, Llan-sandor, Llangan, Ewenny, Merthyr-Mawr and Newton.

Fare £1 each. Leaving Porthcawl 9 a.m.

Flights of 100 miles or over by **SPECIAL CHARTER**, at 1/- per mile for 2 Persons.

(Reproduced from *Porthcawl, Newton & Nottage* by Morgan, 1987).

Older Porthcawl inhabitants happily recall their 'aerodrome'. Accounts vary but they remember how they used to enjoy aerial trips around the bay at 5/- a time in old money. There were occasions, too, when the aerodrome became a venue for travelling flying circuses, aerobatic displays and car exhibitions. Apparently, Sir Alan Cobham and his flying circus performed an aerial display at the aerodrome and an autogiro, an early type of helicopter, together with a Flying Flea, were exhibited there (Morgan, 1987; Mansley, 1994; David, 2006).

But referring to it as an 'aerodrome' is rather an overstatement. Even so, the airfield was most definitely a newsworthy development for Porthcawl and having its very own 'aerodrome' really did put the town on the flying map and way ahead in the seaside resort terms of the day (Morgan, 1987).

Sadly, the outbreak of WWII called a halt to the fun, thrills and sheer excitement of Pine's Airways Ltd, the aerodrome and all the events held there. During the post-WWII period, the field was returned to crop-growing and, at the end of the 20th Century, it became the site of a modern housing estate with large, executive style houses.

WWII and its Aftermath

Locks Common remained relatively undisturbed following WWII. The Common had 2 discrete shelters built into the contours of the landscape providing shelter should bad weather strike but, unlike today, the Common did not have toilet facilities, a restaurant, or a permanent car park. At that point in time, Locks Common remained an unspoilt, natural environment with a rhythm all of its own. It was host to a wide variety of coastal birds, butterflies, flora and fauna and changing seasons were marked by the coming and going of the wildlife and the state of the gorse on the Common!

A white painted lookout pole located in the dip of the Common opposite the entrance to Locks Lane was used and maintained by coastguards. And, for those who just wanted to take the weight off their feet and sit and watch the world go by or the tide come and go, there were benches along the perimeter of the Common, facing out to sea, allowing sight of the north Devon coast, weather permitting.

Like places elsewhere in Porthcawl, Locks Common always had dramatic appeal in stormy conditions. Nonetheless, many familiar with the town and its environs, believe that the Common was, and still is, at its best when the sun is shining. Whether walking the dog or 'taking the air', it was a place that someone could go to for a walk or solitary contemplation. Older residents of Porthcawl also remember that, as the Common could only be reached on foot or by car via Locks Lane or Locks Common Road, it was often deserted with perhaps one or two people to be seen in the distance.

Car Parking on Locks Common

During the early and mid-20th Century car ownership was more of a rarity and car parking was only officially allowed on Locks Common itself at peak holiday times of the year such as Bank Holidays or 'Miners' Fortnight'.

In the 1960's, PUDC acted within the terms of the Locks Common Agreement and constructed a large, official car park in a field adjacent to the Rest Home and Locks Common, together with a block of public toilets and a café selling light snacks, beverages and ice-cream. The café and public toilets were welcome measures as was the regularised car parking in the official car park. This measure undoubtedly helped to preserve the turfed surface of the Common which was showing signs of wear and tear as car ownership and random car parking on the Common were on the increase.

Locks Common, Inter-War & Post-War Housing

Between WWI and WWII, there was some ribbon development along the edge of Locks Common, east of the junction between Locks Lane and Locks Common Road in the direction of West Drive, the Esplanade and Porthcawl town centre. Old photographs of the inter-war period reveal that there were only a few houses adjacent to the Common built along a private road set well back from Locks Common Road. Seemingly aimed at the upper end of the housing market, these houses were large, individually designed and, with a few exceptions, detached. All faced the sea and were on relatively big plots of land.

In the immediate post-WWII period, several of these houses became the property of the Steel Company of Wales and the National Coal Board and were used for housing visiting dignitaries and hospitality purposes. With the demise of both public bodies in 1967 and 1987 respectively, most of these properties became privately-owned, family homes. Monkstone House on the corner of the private road, was an exception as it became a residential care home towards the end of the 20th Century.

Meanwhile, in the mid-20th Century, Porthcawl had continued to expand westwards. There were spasmodic new developments as, for example, Westfield Crescent and the later additions of Nottage Mead and Heol Groes Faen in Nottage. Severn Road was completed down to Locks Common and there were new builds in Crossfield and Springfield Avenues and Hutchwns Close, immediately behind Locks Common. A cluster of bungalows was also built on a small rise nearest to Locks Lane on a corner with Hutchwns Close but these were, controversially, demolished and replaced by 3 blocks of 3-storeyed flats at the start of the 21st Century.

The Rest Bay Estate

The **Society** is fully aware that the Rest Bay estate is not actually situated on Locks Common itself. Nevertheless, the creation of the Rest Bay estate had a serious impact on Locks Common that needs to be taken into account in characterising modern-day Porthcawl. Having said that, this report's examination of the estate and the 20th Century western expansion of Porthcawl, north of Locks Common, will not go into detail insofar as the construction of buildings and/or styles of architecture are concerned. The **Society** will, so far as it is able, comment on the housing in general terms, on the developments themselves, when they took place, their effect and how they altered the character and social make-up of Porthcawl.

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The Rest Bay Estate was developed in incremental stages between the 1960's and the 1970's and represents one of several major residential undertakings in Porthcawl during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Whilst begun as separate developments by different developers, they later merged to become one and are known as the Rest Bay estate. Taken together, they substantially increased the size, shape and character of Porthcawl, particularly at its western end. Basically, the development consisted of:

- 1965-67 - the first phase from West End Avenue which was bisected by Glynstell Road;
- a small development at the Whimbrels, adjacent to and to the south of Fulmar Road;
- Fulmar Road southwards to Locks Common, leading to Mallards Way and meeting Locks Lane at a T-junction just short of Locks Common Road;
- housing west of Fulmar Road, off-shoots to Sandpiper Road, West

Road, Anglesey Way, Long Acre Drive

- other developments adjacent to Locks Lane such as Adrian Close, Penylan Avenue and Warwick Crescent constructed from the 1960's onwards.

The Rest Bay Estate was developed with mixed housing designs typical of late 20<sup>th</sup> Century housing. Rooted in the 1970's idiom, housing on the Rest Bay estate was developed in blocks and came in an assortment of mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century styles and designs. For instance, there were a great many bungalows, big and small, detached and semi-detached, with and without dormer windows.

When it comes to the houses on the Rest Bay Estate, there was an incredible amount of choice. Some had sloping roofs, some had pitched and some had flat roofs. There were terraced and semi-detached houses and a large number of 3 and 4-bedroomed detached executive houses. There were *cul-de-sacs* with pedestrian lanes and byways, some leading to Locks Common, some to playing fields between Fitzhamon Road and Fulmar Road and some to 'Old Porthcawl'. As they were built at differing times with differing materials and requirements, parts of the Rest Bay Estate have a spacious feel, others less so and many of the houses and/or bungalows were built on quite generous plots of land.

Later still, as the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was closing, large-scale, individually styled waterside houses were erected at the edge of the Rest Bay estate, in Mallards Way and Rest Bay Close directly facing Locks Common and the Bristol Channel. They were designed to maximise views over Locks Common, Rest Bay and Swansea Bay and, in sum, succeeded in altering the northern skyline behind Locks Common.

The Rest Bay estate was built on farmland previously used to graze dairy herds of cattle. The massive new development

was completed in the late 1970's and extends as far as Nottage village, adjoining West Road in several places. It also encloses the present West Park Primary School which was built in 1971 to cater for the influx of families that accompanied new housing on the West Park Estate and to the west of Porthcawl.

### The Effects of New Housing

Overall, the increase in housing marked a step-change for Porthcawl and transformed it into a *de facto* dormitory town. Moreover, the housing developments effectively changed the socioeconomic mix of Porthcawl's population as, in addition to people who were already living in Porthcawl who were attracted to the new housing stock, there were returnees to the town. There was also an attendant increase in public sector employees, scientists, artisans and technicians who worked in the expanded industrial sectors on the outskirts of Bridgend, employees of the Steel Company of Wales in Port Talbot (known locally as Treasure Island!) and British Petroleum (BP) in Baglan to name but a few (Morgan, 1987).

It was, and still is, of enormous significance to the residents of Porthcawl that the Rest Bay estate, together with other new housing developments in the town, coincided with the closure of Porthcawl's railway station in Dock Street. The shutdown of the railway network brought a reliance on the car and curtailed transport connectivity in any meaningful sense for Porthcawl's residents – a state of affairs that, regrettably, persists into the present day.

At that time, environmental concerns were not uppermost. Dependency on the car and road transport did not deter many who were employed in Cardiff and Swansea or even further afield. From the 1960's onwards, car ownership was on the rise and new road links such as the M4 had fully opened between Bridgend and

Porthcawl in 1980. A daily commute to work was a price many were willing to pay in exchange for the opportunity to live at the seaside in Porthcawl.

More locally however, as far as Locks Common is concerned, the town's western expansion and advent of the Rest Bay Estate and its associated network of roads and pathways, introduced more movement and noise into what had previously been a quiet, open amenity environment. Added to which, the presence of newly built housing contributed to qualitative changes in the skyline north of the Common and the sense of place associated with Locks Common itself.

On a practical level, increasing volumes of traffic to and from the Rest Bay Estate along Fulmar Road, especially on the completion of Mallard Way and its junction with Locks Lane and Locks Common Road, became the norm. That effect was further exacerbated by the construction of 40-50 large dwellings in Sanderling Way on the cusp of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries. Following that, there was an escalation of movement and road noise that noticeably changed the quality of place on Locks Common. In all, western Porthcawl had become urbanised and for those with long memories, it meant that it was no longer possible to walk to the Common and Rest Bay through open fields!

### **Locks Common Today**

**A**side from new housing and road developments, Locks Common was subject to other changes in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. For instance, the actual surface of Locks Common became a no-go area for car parking and, in compliance with European Union (EU) legislation, a lifeguard station was built on the Common immediately behind Rest Bay.

Similarly, the wide old pebbled steps from the Common on to the beach were

irretrievably damaged in a fierce Bristol Channel storm sometime towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. They were replaced by a new set of steps together with a slope, intended to facilitate access from Locks Common to the beach at Rest Bay for those with limited mobility and/or families with prams and pushchairs.

When all is said and done, despite these many changes, Locks Common in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century has stubbornly retained its character. Today, although there have been developments around its western and northern perimeter, Locks Common remains an essentially open, natural feature at the western edge of town. The Common has retained a sense of place together with that all-important supportive environment for an array of coastal birds, butterflies, flora and fauna. There are still benches dotted here and there for those who want to rest awhile and its comparatively flat surface is still criss-crossed by footpaths. And the scenic walks between the Promenade, Locks Lane and Rest Bay still provide outstanding photographic opportunities and the bracing fresh air of Porthcawl.

### **Walking**

**W**alking is a highly recommended pastime and healthy form of exercise. Porthcawl is surrounded by open countryside, beaches and an interesting, meandering coastline, so is blessed with multiple walking opportunities both of the serious and not so serious kind.

For example, Porthcawl town and the villages of Newton and Nottage retain many of the age-old, well-worn lanes and pathways originally developed before the coming of combustible engines and cars. In more serious walking mode, there is the Nottage Circular Walk, the Nottage and Sker Point Circular Walk, the Newton to Candleston Circular Walk and the 3 Wells Walk (please see page 35 above). Those seeking even greater walking challenges

will find them further afield westwards to Margam, along Sker to Morfa and Aberavon, or eastwards to Merthyr Mawr, Candleston and the stepping stones at Ogmore-by-Sea.

### The Yellow Brick Road

**W**hile Porthcawl has spread inland and outwards along the Bristol Channel coastline since it came into being, the town remains a relatively flat, compact area. Those without mobility problems have many opportunities for daily walking whether out of necessity or for reasons of health and/or enjoyment.

That has not always been the case on Locks Common. People with limited or restricted mobility and those in wheelchairs or with pushchairs found the springy surface of the turf on Locks Common unnerving and difficult to negotiate, especially as underlying rocks protrude and potholes in the surface of the Common present a hidden danger.

At the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, an important change was made to the topography of Locks Common when a dual pedestrian and cycle footpath was built along the edge of the Common parallel to Locks Common Road. The footpath quickly earned the local nickname of the 'Yellow Brick Road' due to its pale yellow surface. But nicknames apart, the footpath has the strictly practical purpose of protecting the turf on Locks Common from excessive footfall, whilst at the same time enabling cyclists, pushchair and wheelchair users, as well as pedestrians, to get to and from Porthcawl town and Rest Bay unimpeded (BCBC, 2014)

### The All Wales Coast Path

**O**fficially, the Yellow Brick Road forms a constituent part of the 870 miles of the All Wales Coast Path. It is the first of its kind and, as the name suggests, the aim of the All Wales Coast Path is to enable people to walk around

the coastal perimeter of Wales in its entirety (Natural Resources Wales, 2018).

The Porthcawl stretch of the Coast Path is a comparatively new addition that can be accessed by following the Yellow Brick Road until it reaches Rest Bay where it joins the Coast Path as it curves around the Bay. Keeping a steep, broad bank of limestone rocks and pebbles between the beach and foreshore, the Coast Path subsequently skirts around the westerly edge of the Bay and the RPGC. In front of the RPGC clubhouse, the Coast Path connects with the recently built boardwalk and continues onwards until it reaches the smaller, lesser known, but very scenic Pink Bay. This Bay is less sandy than Rest Bay but more than compensates for that as there are multiple pebbles and rocks on its foreshore with a pink, marbled appearance. Further onwards is Golf Bay – a local secret! Even further onwards, the Coast Path continues westwards until it reaches Sker Point and Sker beach where it snakes around The Grade I Sker House CADW ID: 11217 and Kenfig Nature Reserve (British Listed Buildings, 1998; All Wales Coast Path, 2012)

### West Drive

**T**he **Society** has found it hard to uncover any specific information about West Drive - when it was built or whether its origins were related to the construction of Locks Common Road in 1923. Historically, it is known that West Drive was once farming land and that, tragically, it was the site of a mass grave for hundreds of soldiers who were shipwrecked on Scarweather Sands in 1798 on their way to put down a rebellion on the island of Ireland (Morgan, 1987).

The **Society** has discovered more recent references by past members of the RPGC, to a rough track running along the coastline between Iron-gate Point and Hutchwns Point in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Unfortunately, the **Society** has not, as yet, been possible to verify this information.

## West Drive in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

The general belief is that the likely origins of West Drive are related to the construction and development of the Victoria Estate early in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Reliable anecdotal evidence is that West Drive was *in situ* in 1945 and, more up-to-date information indicates that the section of West Drive from Seabank House to Iron-Gate Point was integrated into the Porthcawl Conservation area on 11<sup>th</sup> August 2016 following a public consultation exercise (BCBC, 2016).

In reality, many residents of Porthcawl and its visitors regard West Drive as an integral part of the Prom. For most, West Drive marks the beginning of the public space known as the Esplanade and there is no general awareness that it has a different name-tag to the Esplanade. Such lack of awareness is easily explained as West Drive runs seamlessly westwards from Iron-Gate Point before converting into Locks Common Road. Visually, there is no demarcation point where one road ends and another begins. Similarly, going east towards Porthcawl town centre, West Drive follows the curve of the coastline to The Green, bereft of its original bandstand, opposite The Green Avenue, and ends at Iron-Gate Point before it segues into the Esplanade.

The term 'Iron-Gate Point' is derived from the iron gates that were in place to keep people away from Locks Common when the Esplanade was first built. Here, integrated into a shelter set sideways to the sea opposite the Seabank, is a cast-iron fountain complete with an iron cup attached to a chain and the remains of a stone pillar. The stone pillar, on the other hand, once stood outside Stoneleigh House in John Street and is believed to have been a support for the

aforementioned iron gates that were at the entrance to Locks Common (Porthcawl Town Council, 1993).

Facing the shelter, running parallel to the Esplanade, is Seabank Gardens where the notorious 'selfie bench' is positioned, together with a bespoke piece of public art shaped as a mermaid, carved out of a 4-ton piece of Portland Stone. This public art, sponsored by First Leisure and sculpted by Peter Nicholas is meant to reflect Porthcawl's close involvement with the sea (Porthcawl Town Council, 1993).

Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, house-building resumed along the West Drive area, for instance Carlton Place was constructed at the rear of West Drive. There was also some infilling of the area around Victoria Avenue and Lougher Gardens running down to the Esplanade. There are older properties on West Drive itself, however. Enticed by uninterrupted views of the Bristol Channel, larger units and villas were built along West Drive in the inter-war period. Ocean View is one such example and was originally a hotel. It later quartered troops in WWII, but has since been converted into privately owned, residential flats (Mansley, 1994).

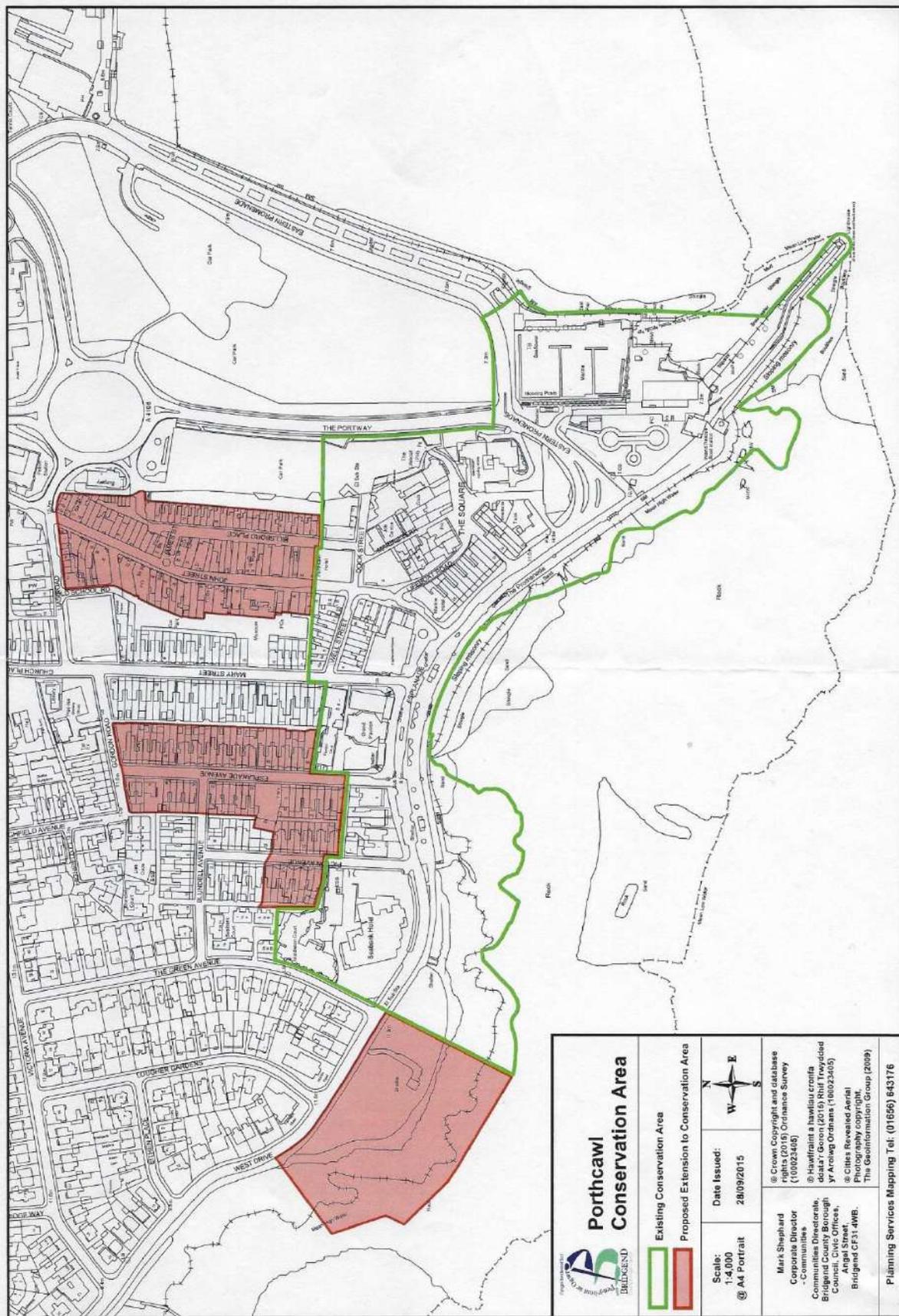
Most of these villas were built as a continuation of Locks Common Road and in ribbon development form to maximise sea views. A few such units, for example the Atlantic and Fairways Hotels, have had several incarnations but are now in commercial use as hotels whereas detached executive houses that were later added between the 1950's and 1970's remain in private residential hands.

The next section of the report deals with Porthcawl Conservation Area and will include the Esplanade, the Waterfront and buildings fronting the sea.

Seabank Gardens in July 2018



**Porthcawl Conservation Area (BCBC 2015)**



## Porthcawl Conservation Area

**P**orthcawl Conservation area was designated as such on 31<sup>st</sup> August 1973 and is comprised of those areas of Porthcawl that were largely completed during the town's industrial activity, before Porthcawl Dock terminated maritime trading in 1906. It includes those parts of Porthcawl that are of industrial archaeological significance, that is the:

- original tidal basin, aka Porthcawl Harbour
- Breakwater, aka the Pier
- Slip
- Old Customs House
- Pilot Look-out Tower
- Porthcawl Lighthouse
- Jennings Warehouse
- Cosy Corner

The Early Residential parts of Porthcawl were also included namely Dock Street, The Square, Lifeboat Row, Marine Terrace and Hillsboro Place (originally named Railway Terrace). All the above were comprehensively dealt with by the **Society** in Stage I of *Porthcawl: Much More Than Meets The Eye (Amended Version) 2015* together with the Inner Dock Basin (generally known as Salt Lake car park) and the Eastern Promenade.

On 11<sup>th</sup> August 2016, the boundary of Porthcawl Conservation area was extended to incorporate James Street, the whole of John Street, the Esplanade and Picton Avenues, Hillsboro Place and part of West Drive to just past the present Fairways Hotel (BCBC, 2016).

This section of the report will, therefore, be concerned with Porthcawl's Waterfront area, that is the coastal zone from Harbourside to the Esplanade, the Town Beach, the Lower Promenade, the original 3-storey lodging houses and hotels, the later addition of the Grand Pavilion, now a Grade II Listed Building, and the more recent Esplanade House.

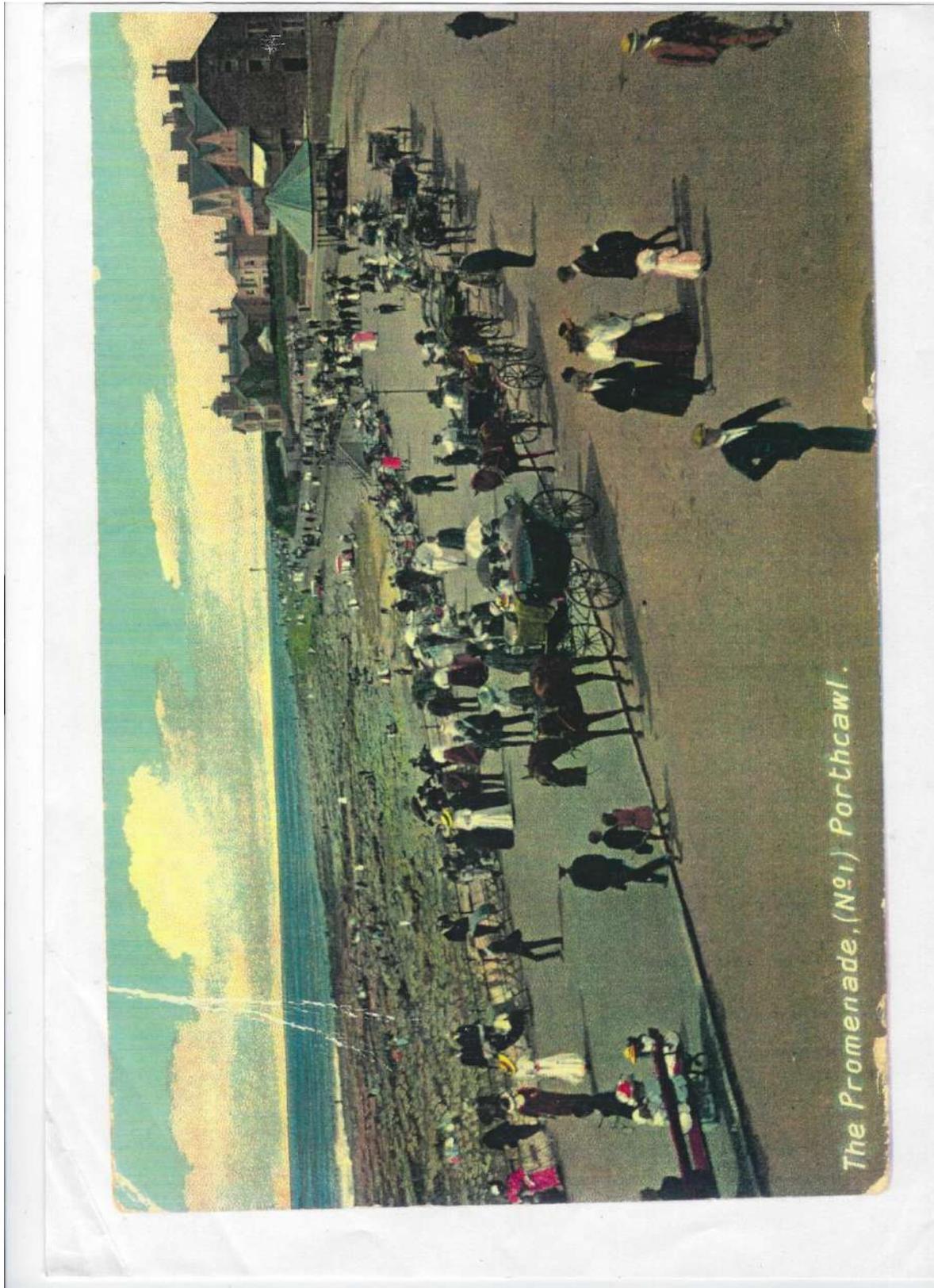
## Esplanades and/or Promenades

**W**ith coastal settings on the 'up' in Victorian society at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, any UK town wanting to be taken seriously as a sought-after coastal resort had the creation of an esplanade or promenade high on its agenda. In practice, the terms 'esplanade' and 'promenade' are used interchangeably but each can be defined as a long, open, level public area normally found next to a waterfront (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2017; UK Beach Guide, 2017).

When first introduced, an esplanade or promenade was somewhere a person could take a leisurely walk and enjoy the fresh air, whatever the state of the tide, beach or shoreline. The intention was that s/he could gain the maximum health benefits from 'taking the sea air' and be considered part of society. In more modern times, esplanades and promenades are frequently landscaped, adorned with public art, run parallel to leisure and recreational amenities and are places where individuals are sometimes permitted to use bicycles and other forms of non-motorised transport (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2017; UK Beach Guide, 2017).

### Porthcawl's Esplanade

**S**hortly after James Brogden married his second wife Mary Caroline Beete in 1874, the couple began a privately funded venture of urban expansion by purchasing land on Pickets Lease with the aim of transforming Porthcawl into a foremost coastal destination. Running true to Victorian form, James and Mary Brogden envisaged an esplanade or promenade as essential if this ambition was to be realised. Fittingly, the first project the couple tackled was the wholesale development of the Waterfront and the resultant Esplanade and carriageway was unveiled in 1887 in celebration of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee (Higgins, 1968; Morgan, 1987).



A postcard of the Promenade in the early 1900s  
(Source unknown).

The Esplanade represents the sweeping centrepiece of James and Mary Brogden's vision of Porthcawl. When first completed, it ran from Iron-Gate Point opposite the present Seabank Hotel and entrance to Locks Common LNR in the west, to the Slip sheltered by Porthcawl's Pier, in the east. The Esplanade was much praised when it was opened and with good reason. By following the natural arc of the shoreline, the Esplanade makes the most of the commanding view southwards towards the north Devon coast, eastwards towards Ogmores-by-sea and the Dunraven Heritage coastline and westwards looking over towards Swansea Bay and the Mumbles (Hunter, 1892).

### **The Victorian View**

*'...It extends from the Breakwater to the Iron Gate, in a westerly direction, is 633 yards in length, with an average width of 90 feet, and forms a grand promenade, with handsome seats well distributed throughout the walk. There is also an excellent carriage drive. It faces the south and south-west, and is sheltered from the east wind by a fine terrace of houses and the Esplanade Hotel...'*

Hunter, 1892: 3-4

That was not all. By including an adjoining carriageway with spaces for approximately a dozen horse-drawn carriages that follows the curvature of the shoreline, the Esplanade also showcased the Town Beach as a nearby attraction. The Esplanade was replete with Serpentine benches for seating and had an attractive Victorian shelter that, very regrettably, has since been demolished (Hunter, 1892)

### **The Town Beach in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

**E**ach of Porthcawl's 7 bays or beaches have their own particular characteristics. The Town Beach also known as the Seafront Beach, comes within the Porthcawl Conservation area

and is smaller than other Porthcawl beaches. Apart from having a wide vista offering outstanding views southwards from the centre of town, the Town Beach is thought of locally as a more sheltered beach than Porthcawl's other beaches. As it is conveniently situated for Porthcawl town centre, the Town Beach is often used by workers on their lunch break, families strolling along the Esplanade and/or anyone who wants to enjoy some sunshine, have a quick breather and take in the seascape.

The Town Beach is a rocky beach with occasional patches of coarse sand that, to the disappointment of many, does not lend itself to the building of good sandcastles! Despite that, generations of children have found the myriad rocks on the Town Beach perfect for climbing and exploring and, with its rock pools teeming with sea life, a haven for fishing nets and crabbing.

### **The Victorian View**

*In front of the Esplanade and reached in a few seconds from the Promenade by easy flights of steps is the Town Bay...from morn till night in fine weather, hundreds of youngsters may be seen ...amusing themselves, while their guardians, elder relatives and others sit within a few feet of the sea reading, knitting, or watching the merry gambles of the little ones'*

Hunter, 1892:7

Normally, there are no lifeguard patrols on the Town Beach and swimming is prohibited due to the prevalence of sharp rocks and dangerous tidal conditions. Nevertheless, experienced swimmers find the tidal swell inviting and the bay is mostly used by surfers. When the tide is right, the Town Beach is popular with fishermen who are said to catch gurnard, bass, rays, pollack, mullet, conger and mackerel (Fishing in Wales, 2011).

## **The Paddling and Billy Pools**

**E**ager to capitalise on its popularity with families, PUDC built a children's paddling pool on the Town Beach early in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The paddling pool was inset into the limestone rocks, had a smooth concrete base and sides and was washed twice daily by incoming tides. During its lifespan, the paddling pool introduced generations of children to simple seaside amusements and gave them enormous enjoyment, especially the more timid who were afraid of the sea. Unfortunately, although popular, the paddling pool had virtually no lifesaving safeguards and, as it deteriorated over time, was infilled towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

In addition to the paddling pool, there was also the Billy Pool on the Town Beach. The Billy as it was referred to locally, was located near to the children's paddling pool just a little further up in a quieter spot on the Town Beach and was a naturally deep rock pool set into the limestone rocks in front of the Esplanade. Its depth made it more suitable for older children but, for those in the know, the Billy Pool was the place to be and word soon got around if anyone had swum really well there. In reality, the Billy was used by more adventurous children who could swim and did not fear the water. The rest just looked on with envy (Morgan, 1987).

## **The Sea Defences on Town Beach**

**T**he Brogdens were the first in Porthcawl to engage in a constant battle with Bristol Channel tidal forces and, when the Esplanade was opened in 1887, it effectively became Porthcawl's first sea defences. Before that, the Town Beach was left to its own natural devices that varied according to prevailing weather conditions, although from all accounts, a stable beach slope was generally maintained.

Soon after the Esplanade's initial construction in 1887, James Brogden tried

to stabilise the top of the Town Beach fronting the early Esplanade by using a stone revetment laid on to the existing slope of the embankment. In what was to become an all too familiar state of affairs, storm conditions undermined that revetment and the Town Beach was scoured away by continual Bristol Channel waves that often overtopped the Esplanade and flooded the surrounding area (Morgan, 1987).

As a result, the Town Beach had its first sea wall built in 1906, becoming today's Upper Promenade or the 'Prom' as it is usually called in Porthcawl. The, then, new gravity concrete retaining wall was built several metres in front of James Brogden's original revetment giving the Prom a wider, more formal walkway with foundations well below the beach level of the time. It had, in addition, timber piles in front of the toe of the wall to provide added stability and resist the scouring of the sea (Morgan, 1987).

## **The Lower Promenade**

**B**ut the forces of nature were not so easily deterred. By the early 1930's, there had been a further scouring of the beach, reducing the beach level to such an extent that it exposed the front toe and timber piling of the 1906 wall. In 1934, therefore, a second sea wall was built approximately 5 metres in front of the 1906 wall, so forming the Lower Prom as it is today (Morgan, 1987).

The current Lower Prom was officially opened in 1935 and built, it is said, at what seems an incredibly low cost in current market terms of £15,000! Like the original Esplanade, this new layer of sea defences was very broad, had benches for seating and gave Porthcawl a remarkably large linear surface area of Promenade to enjoy (Morgan, 1987).

At the same time as the Upper Prom was both widened and lengthened, the Lower Prom was integrated with the Pier. The Upper Prom's level was also

simultaneously supported using graduated concrete stilts from a point opposite the exit from John Street on to the Esplanade until it reached Cosy Corner and the Pilot Look-out Tower in Harbourside. Those supporting stilts have since been infilled, though at the time, they considerably increased the public amenity space at the Waterfront edge whilst simultaneously strengthening the sea defences.

### The Tarmac Beach

**H**istory repeated itself however. Although the new sea wall had a substantial gravity concrete wall with foundations several metres below its contemporaneous sea-bed level, by the 1980's, it was eroded by the insistent pounding of the waves and scouring of the sea bed. The sea defences were again endangered as a result and there are many Porthcawl residents of a certain age who can recall stormy days when waves overtopped the sea walls, flooding the Esplanade and John Street.

By the end of the 1980's, beach levels were noticeably reduced on the Town Beach, exposing the base of the 1934 sea wall and necessitating the construction of the 'Tarmac Beach'. The Tarmac Beach had stone reinforcement, was designed to last for 30 years and was built with the use of rocks, stone and bitumen. The Tarmac Beach really put Porthcawl on the map for all the wrong reasons and was much derided both locally and nationally. More positively, when the Tarmac Beach was first constructed, it restored the level of the Town Beach and provided a gently sloping surface that was intended to dissipate the force of the waves, thereby, at least theoretically, offering some protection to the Lower Prom.

It is estimated the Tarmac Beach cost £1.65 million pounds. Together with a smart, revamped Esplanade or Upper Prom, the Tarmac Beach was officially unveiled in April 1995 by Richard Power, then Mayor of BCBC's preceding

authority, Ogwr Borough Council. At the time of its unveiling, the restored Prom represented the largest public investment in Porthcawl since the Eastern Promenade was started in the 1930's. The **Society** is pleased to say that it had a major role in designing the upgraded Prom and was sufficiently impressed by the end product with its circular raised flower beds, paved surfaces and kiosks to nominate Ogwr Borough Council for the Prince of Wales' Committee Award (Porthcawl Civic Trust Society, June 1995).

The **Society** acknowledges that, despite its rather inappropriate, odd appearance and notoriety, the infamous Tarmac Beach fulfilled expectations insofar as it protected the Town Beach and Upper and Lower Proms. In practice, its construction maintained the integrity of the Town Beach sea-defences, prevented the flooding of the seafront and safeguarded Porthcawl's town centre. As important, it protected businesses, people's jobs, homes and livelihoods.

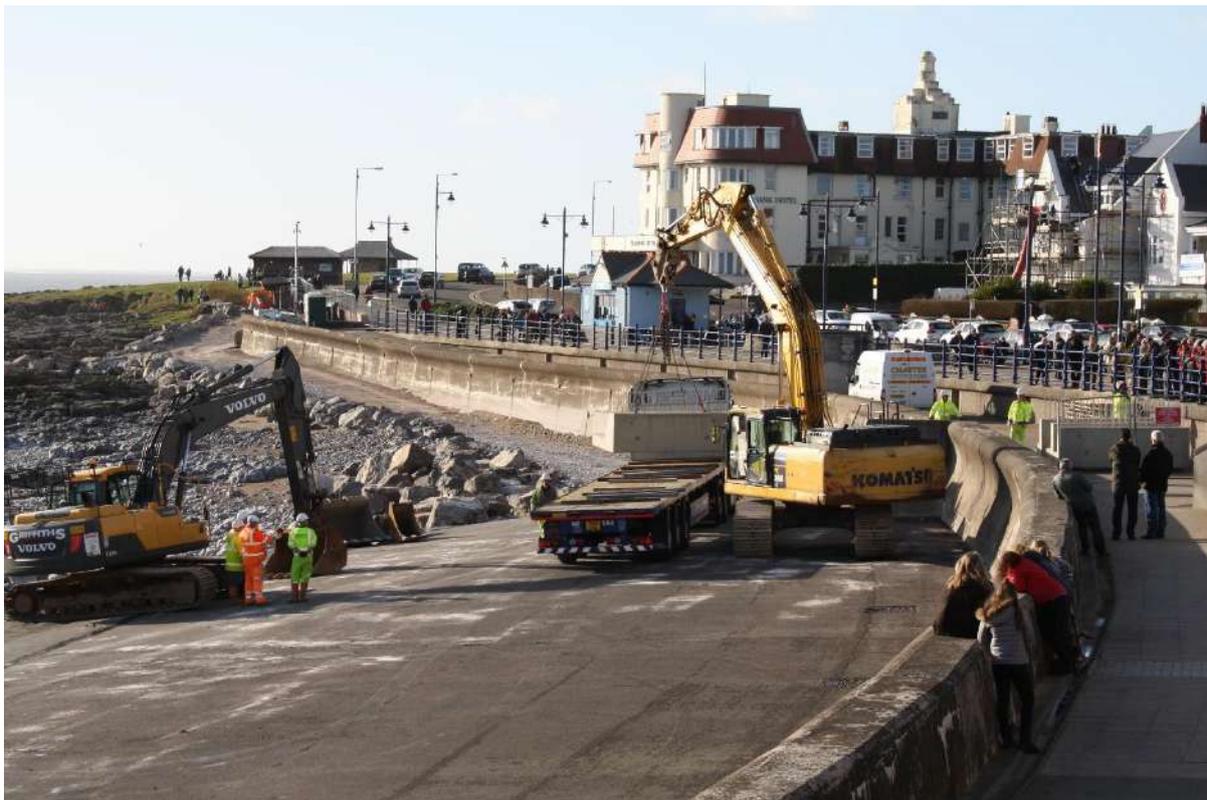
Inevitably, time and tide literally took their toll. By 2010, the sea-defences on the Town Beach had, once again, deteriorated and it was clear that the Tarmac Beach had reached the end of its natural life. There was concern, too, in some unpublicised quarters, that disintegrating asphalt was releasing toxic materials into the sea to the detriment of the once plentiful marine life in the rock pools of the Town Beach as, for example, limpets and sea anemones seemed to be disappearing.

### The Future

**I**n the context of ever-mounting global concern about climate change, the overt deterioration of the Tarmac Beach prompted a study of the sea defences on the Town Beach by engineering consultants and, following a public consultation exercise, it was decided that they should be replaced. Hence, at the time of writing this report, the Town Beach

once more became the scene of activity and construction worthy of Bob the Builder!

The complex work of upgrading the sea defences on the Town Beach was estimated to cost £3 million and take approximately 12 months to complete. Now finished, the Town Beach has a stepped, smart sand coloured surface leading gently down to the water's edge in a series of narrow terraces. As well as being aesthetically more pleasing than the Tarmac Beach, the new surface is intended to provide greater and more efficient protection against flooding and erosion from the unpredictable weather patterns and changing maritime conditions associated with climate change (Bolter, 2017).



**Excavation for Porthcawl Town Beach Sea Defences in August 2018**

**Excavations for Porthcawl Town Beach  
Sea Defences in August 2018**



The completed Town Beach Sea Defences in April 2019



## Porthcawl Waterfront

As the 19<sup>th</sup> Century drew to a close, a central aim of James and Mary Brogden and other local entrepreneurs, was to capitalise on the Railway Age and facilitate Porthcawl's growth as a tourist destination of consequence by creating notable, imposing public buildings.

Environmental factors may have necessitated changes to Porthcawl's Waterfront setting during the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries, but that 19<sup>th</sup> Century vision has endured. Much of Porthcawl's original Esplanade is still evident in today's Upper Prom and Waterfront, and the surrounding buildings are redolent of the late Victorian period when the first segment of the Esplanade was opened in 1887. Over 130 years later, despite many changes and upheavals, today's Upper Prom retains a sense of time and place that is reflective of Porthcawl's often dramatic seascape and really wild weather. And, with few exceptions, it remains an essentially Victorian promenade with keynote structures related to leisure, entertainment and tourism.

Architecturally, the linear space and surrounding structures of the Upper Prom possess a unity of scale and are mainly low-keyed in character. Most of the buildings are 3-storeyed and have ground floors that have been converted into commercial use. Otherwise, the buildings share lightly-coloured rendering and have similar eaves and ridge heights. Some buildings have active frontages with bay windows, overhanging eaves and recessed balconies, some roofs are pitched and a number have gabled roofs of slate. Aside from that, the Upper Prom is punctuated by several noteworthy buildings such as the Westward Ho and the Pier Hotel, while there are 5 other structures that are of particular social and historic importance:

## The Seabank Hotel

The Seabank Hotel is not a Listed structure. Nonetheless, it is an interesting building which has had a ringside seat to some of the major events in modern history. Currently, it is a large white structure with a red tiled roof positioned on an elevated, strategic headland at the western end of the Waterfront with superior views of the Bristol Channel coastline.

The present 4-storey hotel, locally referred to as the Seabank, is very different in appearance to its previous versions. Initially, the site was occupied by a smaller structure named 'New House', which was built by George Dement at the start of the 1860's. He was a prominent local builder and one of several of James and Mary Brogden's contemporaries who were stakeholders in the development of Porthcawl in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (Higgins, 1967; Morgan, 1987).

In the 1870's, a larger stonework structure named 'The Seaview Bank' was built on the same site. This was bought by John Brogden, James Brogden's father, who renamed the building 'Sea Bank House' and it became home to James and Mary Brogden after their marriage in 1874. At that point, Sea Bank House had a prominent Italianate tower at the front of the building and small garden at the side. In the 1890's, James and Mary Brogden encountered financial difficulties and Sea Bank House morphed into Porthcawl College, a prestigious boys boarding school established sometime in the 1890's, that had the Rev. E J Newell of Oxford University as its headmaster (Higgins, 1967; Morgan, 1987).

In 1907, after the death of James Brogden, Sea Bank House was bought by John Elias, who built Lias Cottages between Gordon Road and Highfield Avenue and who, in partnership with others, turned Sea Bank House into a private, unlicensed hotel (Morgan, 1987).

Many golfers from the RPGC frequented the Seabank early in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. During that period, Wales was a stronghold of the Sabbatarian and Temperance movements and there were strict laws governing alcohol, especially on Sundays. It is said that the Seabank was only granted a licence to sell alcohol in the inter-war period when its application to do so was supported and backed by the influential RPGC (Morgan, 1987).

According to the family records of R E Jones, the Seabank's freehold was bought by the hotel and catering firm of R E Jones Ltd in 1926. Unfortunately, as yet, the **Society** has been unable to uncover the exact date that firm undertook the management and day-to-day running of the Seabank (Elwy Jones, 2014).

That aside, the Seabank earned the reputation of being a well-patronised, comfortable and prestigious place to stay throughout the 1930's when, it is believed, the hotel was jointly managed by Mr Schmit and his French wife (Heaton, 1985; Morgan, 1996). It is known that, during the 1930's, the top floor of the Seabank was occupied by Alfred Pope, a Cardiff businessman. Records are unclear but it is understood that, although the freehold of the building remained with the firm of R E Jones, Alfred Pope owned the Seabank Hotel itself (Heaton, 1985).

Alfred Pope was, amongst other things, a coal exporter but he subsequently became a ship-owner in order to profit from the lucrative trading opportunities presented by the Spanish Civil War. In December 1936, he created the *Veronica Steamship Co Ltd* and became one of a number of Welsh blockade runners who maintained substantial trading links with Spain that were, then, crucial to the continuance of the Welsh coal industry (Heaton, 1985).

It appears that, during the Spanish Civil War between 1936 and 1939, Alfred Pope's 3 ships – the legendary *Seabank Spray*, *Seabank* and *Kenfig Pool*, ran the

gauntlet of General Franco's Nationalist forces and were instrumental in breaking the blockade of Bilbao in northern Spain by delivering much-needed supplies to the beleaguered Republicans (Heaton, 1985; David, 2006).

To date, the **Society** has been unable to discover whether Alfred Pope was responsible for the makeover of the Seabank which is understood to have been remodelled sometime from 1930 onwards. At that point, a new structure and modern concrete façade were added in an Art Deco design and it is also believed that it was then that the building was renamed the 'Seabank Hydro Hotel' (Morgan, 1987; Leisureplex, 2018).

### The Seabank in WWII

In WWII, Porthcawl was a garrison for multi-national military forces and the Seabank was commandeered for use as a military base with a resultant loss of jobs for the hotel staff. It is said that General de Gaulle stayed in the Seabank in 1940, as did Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands who came to inspect the Dutch troops who were billeted at Danygraig. Film-star David Niven is also believed to have stayed at the Seabank sometime in 1940 in his capacity as a colonel in the British Army (Morgan, 1996; Elwy Jones, 2014).

The 49<sup>th</sup> (West Riding) Reconnaissance Regiment was formed at the Seabank in 1942 and US troops of the 107<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion of the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division were stationed there in late 1943. Reportedly, General (later President) Dwight D Eisenhower inspected the Division at the Seabank in 1944. The 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was followed by US troops of the 75<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. The 75<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was subsequently involved in the Battle of the Bulge in the Ardennes at the end of 1944 where the Division incurred heavy losses and suffered many casualties (Mansley, 1994; Elwy Jones, 2014).

After the end of WWII in 1945, the Seabank returned to peacetime commercial trading. It was again refurbished and took on its more recognisably modern form in structure and appearance. Reliable anecdotal evidence suggests that it was in the aftermath of WWII that R E Jones Ltd undertook the day-to-day management and running of the Seabank. Certainly, it was in the post-WWII period until the 1960's, that the Seabank regained its reputation for gold-star catering and hotel service delivery to become the hotel of choice for celebrities such as Spencer Tracy, Michael Wilding and Richard Harris. Figures from the sporting world also made it their base as did the New Zealand Rugby Team - the All Blacks and South African Rugby Union Team - the Springboks.

In the 1960's, the façade and roof-line of the Seabank was altered and the tennis courts and rear garages fell into disuse. They were removed in the 1970's, and the Seabank Court and Middleton Court retirement complexes now occupy that land. The Seabank was again refurbished in the 1990's, although it did not regain the coveted 5\* status of its earlier heyday (Mansley, 1994; Wikipedia, 2016; Leisureplex, 2018).

#### **The Seabank Hotel circa 1920 (Source unknown)**



#### **The Seabank Today**

In 2010, Leisureplex acquired the Seabank and undertook a rolling programme of updating the building with amenities and standards more attuned to modern usage and expectations. Nowadays, the Seabank has 89 rooms and is a 3\* coaching hotel that is part of the Leisureplex Hotel group (Leisureplex, 2018).

The present Seabank retains its outstanding views over the Bristol Channel but, whereas the building once overlooked an unsullied Locks Common, the Hotel now marks a point where the inter-war villas begin on West Drive and continue on to Locks Common Road. As James and Mary Brogden realised, the site provides a gateway feature to the Esplanade and any building situated there will create an impact. In spite of its lower hotel ranking and the intrusions on its once uninterrupted views towards Swansea, the Seabank remains a proud, imposing structure and a well-known, easily recognisable landmark within Porthcawl's modern townscape (Morgan, 1987; Wikipedia, 2016).



The Seabank hotel in August 2018



The Westward Ho in August 2018



The Jennings Warehouse in August 2018



Marine Terrace in August 2018

## The Jennings Warehouse

**A**t the eastern end of the Upper Prom and on the lower lying land of Cosy Corner, just off the original Esplanade, is the Jennings Warehouse. The Jennings as it is called locally, dates from 1832 and, as it is a rare example of a very early railway warehouse with important connections to the south Wales iron industry, it was deemed a Grade II Listed Building, CADW ID: 11369 in 1991 (British Listed Buildings, 1998).

Since 2015, the Jennings has undergone a comprehensive process of restoration and has become a popular centrepiece of the regeneration of the wider Porthcawl Harbourside and Waterfront area. It is now the site of a creative mixed-use scheme that houses 3 separate café/restaurants as well as 14 work-life residential units. In June 2018, the newly restored Jennings won the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) Regeneration Award (Ellis Williams Architects, 2018).

In the same month, the Jennings was shortlisted for the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Regeneration Award. Details of the Jennings prior to restoration are provided by the **Society** in Stage I of the Characterisation report *Porthcawl: Much More Than Meets The Eye (Amended Version) 2015: pp 38-41 refer.*

## The Marine Hotel and Marine Terrace

**S**oon after their marriage in 1874, James and Mary Brogden began a flurry of construction in Porthcawl and opened the Marine Hotel and Marine Terrace in 1886. Shortly after it opened, the Marine Hotel, was bought by caterer, hotelier and property developer R E Jones, another local entrepreneur involved in the shaping and development of late 19<sup>th</sup> Century Porthcawl, and a contemporary of James and Mary Brogden. These days, the ground floors of the Marine Hotel and Marine Terrace variously house the popular commercial

outlets of the Cosy Corner café, Pietro's Ice Cream Parlour and the Waterfront bar and restaurant while the upper storeys offer self-catering holiday accommodation.

## The Esplanade Hotel

**W**hen planning the Esplanade, James and Mary Brogden reserved pride of place for the Esplanade Hotel which opened in 1887. The Esplanade Hotel, fondly called the Esp in Porthcawl, was built in a Victorian villa style and designed in such a way that, had it failed as a hotel, it could have been sub-divided into 6 houses (Morgan, 1987).

After it opened in 1887, the Esp became the focal point of the Esplanade and, following the death of James Brogden in 1907 and Mary Brogden's subsequent financial problems, the Esp traded as a hotel under several different owners. Records indicate that its freehold, along with that of the Seabank, was acquired by R E Jones Ltd in 1926 and, until the outbreak of WWII in 1939, R E Jones Ltd was responsible for the management and running of both the Esp and the Marine Hotel (Elwy Jones, 2014).

In WWII, the Esp, like the Seabank, was commandeered by military authorities and quartered Allied troops. At the end of WWII in 1945, the Esp returned to peacetime use under the management of R E Jones Ltd (Elwy Jones, 2014).

During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, R E Jones Ltd was a major employer in Porthcawl although R E Jones himself died in 1923 and is buried in Newton Cemetery. He was a businessman with many investments and interests. In the period between 1870 and the 1960's, both he, and later his heirs, built a portfolio of business interests founded on a wide-ranging, multi-million pound catering and hospitality business. So successful was the business that, in 1924, King George V awarded R E Jones Ltd a Royal Warrant for catering services which the firm retained until George V's death in 1936.

Local anecdotal accounts recall that the Royal Warrant was displayed on the front of the Esp throughout this period (Elwy Jones, 2014).

The Marine, Seabank and Esp Hotels were all valuable freeholds within the R E Jones Ltd business empire. Whilst the 5\* Seabank occupied the upper end of Porthcawl's highly profitable hotel trade, under the stewardship of R E Jones Ltd, the 4\* Esp became a bustling Waterfront hotel located in the heart of Porthcawl and a sought after venue for many prestigious events in the Porthcawl and south Wales social calendar. Nevertheless, in 1962, the hotel chain of R E Jones Ltd including the Marine, Esp and Seabank hotels, was advertised in the Times newspaper, sold by Joseph Maxwell and subsequently broken up (Elwy Jones, 2014).

Afterwards, there were some abortive attempts to revive the Esp's hotel trade in the latter quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Unfortunately, the Esp had fallen into a serious state of disrepair by the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and failed to attract the necessary funds for remedial work. Even more unfortunately, although it had historic connections to the Brogdens and that key group of local entrepreneurs responsible for the growth and architectural development of late 19<sup>th</sup> Century Porthcawl, the Esp was never classed as a Listed Building. Sadly, too, it appears that the possibility of preserving or replicating its Victorian frontage was not seriously considered nor was the building thought worthy of restoration. Hence, the building was demolished in 2004 to the great dismay of many in the Porthcawl community.

## Esplanade House

**E**splanade House is a 42-unit apartment block that was erected on the site previously occupied by the old Esp. The upper floors of Esplanade House consist of private, residential apartments and its ground floor houses a row of commercial outlets with active modern frontages that include a minimarket, a craft shop and café, a hairdresser and another café/bistro.

With its turquoise, patinated copper frontage, Esplanade House is far-removed in appearance and design from the Esp and, while nominally similar in size and scale to its predecessor, it presents as a much bulkier structure. Although the building has been *in situ* for approximately 12 years, Esplanade House still remains a controversial development in Porthcawl and is often disparagingly referred to as the *Bottle Bank* by the town's residents.

Even so, Esplanade House was one of 6 projects to win a Welsh Housing Award in 2006 and the **Society** understands that the building has a well-planned and well-appointed interior (Geograph, 2013). However, many though not all, in the local community consider the building and its embellishments to have such an assertive, modernist exterior that it jars with other buildings on the Esplanade and its relatively modest, low-keyed character.

## The Sundial Chairs Art Installation

**T**he Sundial is a unique 25' public art installation created by Andy Rowe in 2001. Set back from the roadway on the pavement in front of Esplanade House and the adjoining Brogden Building, the art installation takes the form of utilitarian seating with bilingual inscriptions in Welsh and English on the backs of its 15 metal chairs. Each chair is at the end point of radiating hour lines and, within the Sundial's semi-circular arrangement, are 2 plaques inset into the pavement, again inscribed in both Welsh and English, with the words:

*'Remember tomorrow' and 'Invest in yesterday'.* Within the art installation is a large, 10' high, cast bronze sculpture of a pointed gnomon, that is, a *'...rod or pin etc. on a sundial showing the time by the position of its shadow...'* (The Concise English Dictionary, 1991:503; Waymarks, 2018).

The Esplanade Sundial Chairs art installation is a well-crafted, bespoke item that deserves more attention than it presently receives. It is, however, positioned on a busy corner where traffic habitually pauses and people are distracted and generally in a hurry to reach John Street, the Esplanade or elsewhere on the Waterfront.

Ideally, Andy Rowe's art installation should be situated in a less hurried spot. People seated on its chairs could then have an uninterrupted view of the sea and shoreline and could mull over and fully absorb the underlying meaning of the art installation. As it is, this unusual seating is mostly ignored and the art installation's message that the perception of time can be altered if people just sit and reflect and watch the world goes by, tends to be lost and/or overlooked (Waymark, 2018).



**The Esplanade Sundial Art Installation in August 2018**



The Esplanade Hotel circa early 1970s (Courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon and Mrs Mary Daley)



Esplanade House and Brogden Building in August 2018

**The Grand Pavilion**



**The Grand Pavilion circa 1994**



**The Grand Pavilion in August 2018**

## The Grand Pavilion

The Grand Pavilion is situated on the corners of Esplanade Avenue and Mary Street. The Pavilion, as it is usually called in Porthcawl, and its adjoining Winter Gardens, was built between 1931 and 1932 at a reported total cost of £25,000 and opened by the, then, Mayor of PUDC, Russell Mabley in 1932 (Morgan, 2004).

The Pavilion is centrally placed on the Esplanade, and makes a strong architectural statement in the Art Deco style that complements the nearby Seabank Hotel. The Pavilion was Listed in 1998, CADW ID: 19364, firstly for its importance as a Waterfront building which has retained much of its original character and, secondly, as it reflects Porthcawl's development as a major coastal resort following the closure of Porthcawl Dock in 1906. The Pavilion is also listed for the trail-blazing use of ferrous concrete in its building process. In the 1930's, Ferrocete was the cutting edge technology of its day and the inclusion of a new, untried technology in the Pavilion's construction process drew much scrutiny from structural and official quarters (British Listed Buildings, 1998).

Externally, the Pavilion has a distinctive appearance and with its large octagonal silver dome atop a white rendered building and striking, wide Art Deco frontage, it is a well-recognised structure throughout south Wales. When first opened in 1932, the Pavilion was surrounded by Winter Gardens as the building was originally intended to be a Palm Court hosting tea dances, balls and civic functions. In practice, although the Winter Gardens were desirable features, they were under-utilised and were later resurfaced. The resulting hard-standing space is currently used for car parking for staff and visitors to the Pavilion (Morgan, 2004).

## The History of the Pavilion

When they implemented their grand design for Porthcawl in the 1880's, James and Mary Brogden demonstrated foresight and forward planning by reserving a large space on the Esplanade intended to be the site for an imposing municipal building. In the event, the combination of the couple's financial difficulties, James Brogden's death in 1907 and WWI between 1914 and 1918, delayed any development of the site. The PUDC secured an option on the plot in 1915 but it, too, was unable to make any progress. Thus, the site remained empty during the 1920's and became known as *Brogden's Field* (Morgan, 2004).

The Pavilion was eventually built between 1931 and 1932 by E J E Moore with L G Mouchel as consultant engineers for the concrete dome. Allegedly, plans for the Pavilion were based on a similarly designed building in Singapore. Whether that is true or not, at the time the Pavilion's Art Deco style of architecture drew critical comment from some quarters as it was perceived to be out of keeping with the Esplanade's Victorian surroundings (Morgan, 2004).

On a structural level, the innovative use of Ferrocete throughout meant that the building process was relatively speedy, enabling the Pavilion to be completed in record time. Remarkably, some 86 years later, the structure has withstood the test of time and tide in what is a very exposed, weather-beaten position in Porthcawl (Morgan, 2004).

The formal opening of the Pavilion on 8<sup>th</sup> August 1932, was a day of celebration in Porthcawl. To mark the occasion, an official banquet was held at the nearby Esp, the Pavilion's dome was floodlit and the building hosted its inaugural ball (Morgan, 2004).



The Queen Alexandra Memorial Clock circa 1994

### The External Appearance of the Pavilion

Prior to the official opening of the Pavilion, a double-faced clock on top of the front façade of the building was unveiled by Mrs J H Pearson, then Commandant of Porthcawl's detachment of the Red Cross. The clock, known as the Queen Alexandra Memorial Clock, was financed by public subscription and supplied by H Clare, a local jeweller (Morgan, 2004).

In addition to being an ornamental item and accurate timepiece, the clock is inset into a triangular tall tower finished with an orb finial. The clock tower rises from a square plinth which is embellished with relief lettering set within moulded panels and is an important external design feature that accentuates the symmetry of the Pavilion's frontage (Morgan, 2004; Coflein, 2005).

In what became a sorry tale, a weather-vane in the form of a galleon was also erected in a prominent position on the roof of the Pavilion:

*'...The sun shone out brilliantly all the while, and the quaint weather-vane set high above the pavilion – a galleon in bronze, with all sails set -- glinted and glittered as if alive to the importance of this, its first voyage...'*

Morgan, 2004:21

The weather-vane was removed in 1972 for unknown reasons and stored until 1996. Thereupon, it was remounted only to be removed again for safety reasons in 1997 following adverse weather. In 2003, a lighter replica of the weather vane was bought by the **Society** to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II in 2002. Regrettably, it met with the same fate as the original weather-vane as stormy weather again resulted in the replica weather-vane having to be

removed. At the time of writing this report, the weather vane has yet to be remounted (Morgan, 2004).

Externally, the upper floors of the Pavilion have octagonal, wide-partitioned, arched Diocletian windows with doubled windows at their sides. An attached rear service wing has blind panels together with a dated triglyph-type motif and added side wings. Directly in front of the clock and centrally-placed above the original main entrance is an external balcony with a balustrade on a parapet with a moulded cornice (British Listed Buildings, 1998; Coflein, 2005).

### The Shelters

The Pavilion's external façade has added interest in the form of single-storey loggia wings flanking either side of the main entrance that camber outwards in line with the natural curve of the Town Beach. Each of the loggia wings have 5 pairs of columns and steps to full-length windows surmounted by friezes and parapets. The full-size glazed windows are a later addition and were inserted in the 1990's when the Pavilion was redeveloped (please see below). Adjoining the loggia wings and columns are decorated archways and downward flights of steps leading to what were once the Winter Gardens but are now car parks (British Listed Buildings, 1998).

Until the late 1990's, the Pavilion's loggia wings contained deep, open public shelters with wooden benches for seating. These bespoke shelters were designed with Porthcawl's famously bracing, health-giving properties in mind, and were created to allow people to sit and enjoy the benefits of the sea air whatever the weather or the season. In practice, the shelters proved to be wind-traps, prone to attracting rubbish blown in from the sea and Waterfront in certain weather conditions. Latterly, they were also inhabited by rough sleepers.

Consequently, when the Pavilion was redeveloped in the 1990's, both shelters were enclosed and glazed and converted into offices with an alternative main entrance on one side, and a café bar/restaurant on the other (Morgan, 2004; Coflein, 2005).

### The Original Entrance to the Pavilion

The original main entrance to the Pavilion was approached from a wide forecourt flanked by pairs of tapering Tuscan pillars on square plinths and a 1930's style recessed doorway with Art Deco lettering in an over-light. There was a short, curved flight of 3 steps up into a wood-panelled foyer, complete with box office, leading to the Pavilion's main auditorium. The original main entrance had a mosaic floor embedded with an anchor centrally placed in the PUDC's Coat of Arms representing Porthcawl's symbiotic relationship with the sea. Entry into the main auditorium was either through 2 sets of glazed wooden double doors or matching wooden revolving doors (Morgan, 2004; Coflein, 2005).

### Today's Entrance to the Pavilion

Since it opened in 1932, the Pavilion has had several programmes of refurbishment. Nonetheless, the building retains most of its original interior layout but, understandably, for practical reasons, the original, impressive and characterful main entrance and its mosaic floor are no longer in everyday use.

On either side of the entrance are recessed round-headed arches leading to side entrances and concrete stairs to the Pavilion's lower levels. The arches and stairways to the lower ground floor are original but entry into the Pavilion's interior is now either through glazed double doors that have been affixed to the previous shelter frontage or through the café/restaurant. This rather makeshift entrance is via a short, narrow flight of stone steps leading up to the entrance that is not, in the **Society's** view, either

mobility or disability friendly, nor is it without its dangers for crowds spilling out of the Pavilion after an event.

Having negotiated the entrance and once into the Pavilion, there is a spacious modern foyer with a generously sized, accessible box office with adequate room for a flow of movement around the existing foyer and into the main auditorium. The foyer has sufficient wall space for advance publicity materials such as posters, flyers, billboards plus floor space for sculptures and works of public art.

### **The Interior of the Pavilion**

**W**hen first opened, the main auditorium of the Pavilion had a seating capacity of over 1000 people whereas, today, the auditorium has differing seating arrangements that accommodate 453 people. Up a steep flight of stairs, there is an upstairs balcony with a moulded Art Deco front that provides additional seating for 190 people.

In the centre of the balcony is an enclosed square room housing projection and lighting equipment that is accessed by single doors on either side. Adjacent to this facility is a set of fire doors leading from the inside balcony to an outside space and balcony with a wide vista and panoramic view of the Bristol Channel and north Devon coastline.

Thankfully, the Pavilion's octagonal dome has survived the sometimes extreme weather it has been subject to since it was erected. Internally, therefore, the dome still performs its intended function of providing a tent-like roof to the main auditorium and giving its internal dimensions a spacious, airy ambience (Morgan, 2004).

The Pavilion's internal walls have decorative plaster mouldings throughout. Within the main auditorium, there are an additional 8 decorative plaster mouldings regularly placed around the bottom of the inner base rim of the octagonal dome

depicting Tragedy and Comedy; Astronomy; Art; Science; Religion; Poetry; Literature and Music. A clock is fixed on the wall above the stage and last, but definitely not least, the Pavilion is blessed with a well-sprung wooden floor, regarded by both young and old, as the best dance floor in the area, if not further afield (British Listed Buildings, 1998; Morgan, 2004).

### **Lower Ground Floor**

**T**he Lower Ground Floor of the Pavilion was formerly called the Lesser Hall, subsequently became the Jubilee Rooms but is now a refurbished performance space known as the Stagedoor. When first built, it was reached by a steep internal downward flight of stairs that even now presents difficulties for the very young or less mobile. Fortunately, an internal lift has been installed enabling easier access to the Pavilion's lower ground floor and:

- access to the Pavilion's ground floor from the car park
- the Paul Robeson Room and memorabilia
- the Stagedoor which hosts regular comedy nights, lunchtime theatre, folk and jazz sessions, dance classes, theatre workshops, conferences and meetings and
- the dressing rooms, storage space and other backstage facilities

The Pavilion's backstage accommodation and dressing rooms, is accessed via a narrow corridor. The dressing rooms are equipped with basic facilities for make-up and costume changes although, from a visitor's perspective, they seem too cramped to allow adequate freedom of movement for actors to prepare for performances, especially when a large cast is involved in an event and a number of participants are trying to prepare for their stage appearances at any one time.

## The Early Years

Between the opening of the Pavilion in 1932 and the outbreak of WWII in 1939, Porthcawl blossomed as a seaside resort and attracted an increasing number of visitors to the town. Whether or not the Pavilion was intended to be a Palm Court, the fundamental purpose of the structure was to be a venue for leisure and entertainment and from the outset, the Pavilion fulfilled this aim by responding to public demand. Many events were held under its silver-domed roof during the pre-war period, some of regional importance to Wales. In Porthcawl itself the Pavilion soon became a meaningful icon and locus of the town's activities. Indeed, it is impossible for the **Society** to recount or do justice to the full range of pre-war events that were held there.

It is a matter of historical fact that south Wales in the 1930's was very hard-hit by the Great Depression and, generally, a scene of poverty and terrible hardship. In view of this, it is easy to overlook the fact that the 1930's was also an epic era for music and dance. The Pavilion reflected these musical trends by hosting regular dances featuring performances by dance bands such as Harry Danell with E Hughes Davies on the organ and Bill Watts on the trumpet (Morgan, 2004).

The Pavilion quickly became a Mecca for people from throughout south Wales who were attracted to its regular dances as a means of socialising, relaxation and enjoyment and, no doubt, escapism. As well as offering a measure of relief from the surrounding harsh, oppressive reality, the Pavilion and its dances earned quite a reputation for generating romance. Amongst the older generation in particular, there are many instances where couples met, 'courted' and went on to marry as a result of meeting each other at the Pavilion's dances before, during and after WWII (Morgan, 2004; David, 2006).

## The Wartime Years

Luckily, the Pavilion had consolidated its position as an effective focal point for the Porthcawl community before the outbreak of hostilities in 1939. In the turmoil of WWII, the Pavilion adopted a paramount role in Porthcawl life and really came into its own as a repository for the town's war-effort, hopes, fears and, ultimately, resilience. In fact, the phrase 'we never close' could have been coined for the Pavilion. By the end of 1940, it is estimated that at least 15,000 people had attended the various functions held there following the imposition of the blackout in 1939 (Mansley, 1994).

A vital aspect of the Pavilion's role in the war effort was to raise and maintain public spirits by devising morale-boosting events based on musical entertainment and dancing. The Pavilion rose to the occasion by stepping up its pre-war dance programme and holding regular dances every Monday, Wednesday and Saturday. Apparently, each dance would begin with the familiar playing of the La Fleur Theatre Organ by Glan Evans (Morgan, 2004).

The Pavilion catered for all tastes. It is believed that as many as 800 people attended the Pavilion's regular concerts and musical events held on Sunday evenings. A more highbrow occasion occurred in October 1940 when Dame Sybil Thorndike and The Old Vic Company received a Civic Reception having twice performed *Macbeth* to a full house (Mansley, 1994).

Yet another occasion was a Sunday in December 1940, when a performance of *Porthcawl Big Night* attracted an audience exceeding 1,000 people – a considerable number given there were then only 2,400 houses in Porthcawl. Later, in December 1942, a performance of *The Student Prince* at the Pavilion produced by the Porthcawl Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society (PAODS), provoked a storm of protest as it entailed the cancellation of a

regular Wednesday night dance to allow the show to be staged (Mansley, 1994; Morgan, 2004).

More poignant occasions were the spontaneous evening concerts in the Pavilion. By all accounts, the building's 2 deep shelters in the loggia wings were habitually appropriated by throngs of people, many of whom formed part of the war effort, or armed forces personnel stationed in or near Porthcawl. Together with Porthcawl residents, they would congregate to listen and join in the singing of Welsh hymns and the rendering of impromptu solos by members of the audience (Mansley, 1994).

Nor was it just in the early years of the war that the Pavilion took centre-stage. The building continued its role as the heart and soul of Porthcawl's community throughout WWII and its aftermath. For example, at the end of the war in 1945, a special Victory in Europe (VE) dance was held in the Pavilion that was packed with dancers and spectators. And, in September 1945, PUDC entertained over 1,000 of Porthcawl's children to tea in the Pavilion. There was a concert and in-house entertainment that included acrobats, comedians and ventriloquists provided by the West Yorkshire Regiment's 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Mansley, 1994).

Equally important, although on a more serious, practical note, the Pavilion's Lesser Hall was much utilised by the Air Raid Precaution (ARP) and women ambulance drivers of the Red Cross. A less well-known fact is that part of the lower ground floor below one of the loggia wings that now functions as a café/bar, was converted into a rifle range for target practice. Reliable anecdotal accounts confirm that it remained a functioning rifle range well into the post-war period when it was used for target practice by local contingents of the Army and Air Cadets. The Pavilion was also a multi-purpose centre during WWII as it served as:

- ✓ a reception centre for receiving visiting dignitaries such as Mrs Winston Churchill in 1943;
- ✓ a meeting place and/or assembly centre for the town;
- ✓ a centre for wartime campaigns and collections such as the War Savings Campaign in 1944 and 1945

(Mansley, 1994; Morgan, 2004).

Apart from being a garrison town, Porthcawl's own war effort included acting as a refuge and home from home, such as it could ever be, for child evacuees, exiles and troops from the UK and faraway places like the US, Canada and Europe who were stationed in the area between 1939 and 1945. Although a surprising number eventually stayed on after the war and made Porthcawl their home, others did not survive WWII or were injured and/or disabled. In common with others elsewhere in the UK, Porthcawl residents adapted to the fortunes of war and the multiple comings and goings of strange faces and lonely or displaced people.

Inevitably though, some individuals made more lasting impressions than others. To this day, when older residents reminisce about WWII and Porthcawl, it is often with mixed emotions and they liken the town to a place where 'ships passed in the night'. In this context, the Pavilion is often spoken of with enormous warmth and affection. For a great many people, the Pavilion was much more than a building, a dance-hall and/or a meeting place. It was a touchstone and crucible for the coming together of strangers from near and far, a place that gave them respite and a rare opportunity to enjoy themselves, forget the dangers they faced and their cares and sorrows, at least momentarily.

## **Dunkirk – May 1940**

*At the outbreak of war in September 1939, my father gave my mother 3 hours to pack for herself, my brother and me. He brought us to Porthcawl to be with my Grandmother for the duration of the war, he returning to London.*

*In those days, Porthcawl had a lovely railway station with a large station yard entrance in Dock Street and a Station Master's office, today known as The Harlequin - now unoccupied and going to rack and ruin.*

### **Settling down to a changed life and a very full town, more than was known before the war.**

*An influx of children known as evacuees all requiring a home and to be able to go to school. Then arrived the British Army known as the British Empire Force, they needed shelter like everyone else so many of the big houses and the two big hotels in Porthcawl (The Seabank and the Esplanade) were requisitioned for the troops. A lovely Private School in Lougher Gardens owned by the Miss Howells had to move out as well.*

*As a child of 7 years old it was very noticeable to me the activity of the soldiers and on most fine evenings I could be found playing in the front garden. More often than not there would be two soldiers coming up Victoria Avenue who would stop and say 'Hello' to me. Noticeably they were carrying some of their kit plus the tin mug and plate rattling and would always ask me if I would like to have their mugs. 'No thank you' was always my reply. The general hub of the town increased quite dramatically one day and by the next morning the town was very quiet and all the troops were gone not to be seen anywhere. They had all been moved to the trains during the night.*

### **An eerie silence in the town.**

*The general talk around was where had the troops gone and where were they going. No television in those days. The only outside link with the world was the radio and everyone would avidly listen to the news read by Alvar Lidell – a lovely deep voice which was very addictive to listen to, and hear that the British Empire Force had left England for Dunkirk. To this day, I wonder what happened to my 2 friendly soldiers. Both obviously married and with children of their own.*

*Days later hearing the news that the troops had been beaten back and all the armada of small ships and boats to the rescue to bring them back to England. In the meantime, Porthcawl was told to prepare itself for the return of the troops.*

### **Return of the troops all in one day**

*A crowd at the railway station to greet them. My friend and I also among the crowd and what a sorry sight to see. Uniforms in disarray, muddy boots, some jackets half on, mostly injured in some form or another, bandaged arms and legs, bandages around the head- some very blood-stained, others on crutches and some on stretchers. How long our British Army soldiers stayed with us I cannot remember but then of course arrived the American Army!*

Diana John  
August 2018



The Grand Pavilion Auditorium in August 2018



A Grand Pavilion Dressing room in August 2018

## The Post-WWII Years

The end of WWII in 1945 and the immediate post-war years, were extremely challenging for the UK. Globally, the country was in the throes of relinquishing its Empire as well as meeting the demands of the Cold War while, domestically, the country endured a period of real austerity, Porthcawl included. Scarcities and rationing dominated everyday life and, at a macro level, there was immense socio/economic dislocation and disruption of a structural kind as a result of ongoing De-mobilisation and Reconstruction. As if that were not enough, as the country attempted to return to a peacetime footing, it was simultaneously being transformed by the implementation of radical measures such as Beveridge, the Butler Act (1944), the introduction of the National Health Service (NHS) and the large-scale nationalisation of some utilities and heavy industry.

As a result of WWII, many people, together with their friends, relatives and significant others, had suffered trauma, deprivation and loss following injury, bereavement and/or displacement. People were trying to rebuild their lives in an atmosphere charged with deep and profound change, upheaval and hardship. Put simply, there was as urgent a need to maintain public spirits and morale as there ever had been in WWII. It is fair to say that the Pavilion's response to this truly wholesale social and economic need, was a case of 'business as usual' and its continued adherence to a mixed programme of culture, arts and entertainment remained a necessary and valued outlet for the Porthcawl community.

## The Miners' Annual Eisteddfod

The Pavilion's importance extended beyond Porthcawl, however. On the plus side, wartime camaraderie and unity did not dissipate overnight. On the contrary, it seeped into a post-war spirit of optimism and belief that a 'brave

new world' was at hand and the introduction of the Miners' Annual Eisteddfod exemplified that belief.

Wales has a strong, deep-seated literal and musical heritage that stems from its ancient culture based on the use of music as a form of primary communication. Moreover, its reputation as the 'Land of Song' is a modern stereotype that is founded on 19<sup>th</sup> Century conceptions of Nonconformist choral and religious music, hymn singing and brass bands together with 20<sup>th</sup> Century male-voice choirs, singer song-writers and opera, as well as arena singing in sporting events, especially rugby (BBC, 2018; Williams, 2016).

From the 19<sup>th</sup> Century onwards, Nonconformist churches and chapels had proliferated in Wales and become centres of fellowship, culture and recreation. As such, they were the mainstays of various communal activities such as Eisteddfodau (festivals of music and poetry) and Cymanfa Ganu (hymn singing festival) (BBC, 2018; Williams, 2016)

The coalfields and valleys of south Wales were the traditional heartlands of Cymanfa Canu, choirs, singing and Eisteddfodau and many in those mining communities had a soft spot for Porthcawl. They identified the town as a place of leisure and enjoyment and, directly after WWII, the Pavilion became their chosen setting to launch and develop a Miners' Annual Eisteddfod. The annual event had the aim of reviving the traditional cultural activities of the coalfield which had declined dramatically in WWII due to overwhelming wartime pressures in the demand for coal (Francis & Smith, 1980).

Throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the coal industry was at its height and the high quality coal hewn from the narrow, difficult coal seams of south Wales by its colliers was hugely sought after. South Wales was the largest, most important coalfield in the UK with coal miners perceived to be one of the most

important groups of workers in the country. It was during this period that the miners and their union, the South Wales Miners' Federation (SWMF or more commonly known as the 'Fed') acquired its socialist, radical reputation (Curtis, 2011).

In addition to representing its members, the Fed and its successor, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM South Wales Area) was much more than a trade union as it exercised a broader role within coalfield communities. For example, the Fed was responsible for the creation of workmen's institutes, it ran leisure and cultural events, established medical schemes, respite centres and built libraries and cinemas for its members (Curtis, 2011).

The Miners' Annual Eisteddfod was another such example of the Fed's overarching involvement in the traditional mining communities of Wales. The Eisteddfod began as a single-day event in the Pavilion in 1948, becoming a 3-day event in the 1970's before its eventual demise in 2002. In view of the decline and eventual obliteration of the coal industry in south Wales towards the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the ending of the Miners' Annual Eisteddfod was a virtual certainty. But before that, the Miners' Annual Eisteddfod was a popular event that often attracted capacity audiences to the Pavilion as well as deckchair listeners whiling away their time on both the Upper and Lower Proms, enjoying the broadcasted proceedings. At its apogee in 1980, the Miners' Annual Eisteddfod was described as:

*'... a unique cultural event and reportedly the only truly bi-lingual Eisteddfod in Wales, the only Eisteddfod which is visibly growing and the only festival of its kind to be sponsored by a British trade union. Most significant of all, the Miner's Annual Eisteddfod has been one of the most influential factors in stimulating a range of cultural activities, particularly choral music for adults and children alike, at a time*

*when the decline of the industry has threatened the existence of so many Welsh mining communities...'*

(Francis & Smith, 1980: 428)

### **Paul Leroy Robeson**

**T**here are many things that can be said about Paul Robeson. Amongst his many qualities and achievements are the facts that he was an African-American and son of a slave, had a law degree, possessed one of the most expressive, resonant voices of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and could sing in 20 different languages. He was an acclaimed actor and widely recognised as the greatest American footballer of his generation. More than that, in later life he became a political activist who, in the 1930's and 1940's, exerted an influence that, some assert, could be compared to Martin Luther King and Malcolm X (Sparrow, 2017; Wikipedia, 2019).

Given all this, it is recognised that Paul Robeson had a special relationship with Wales and its coal-miners. Paul Robeson first came across the miners of south Wales when his career was at its height in the 1920's, after he had come to the UK to escape racial segregation. While in the UK, he became interested in the Labour movement after meeting a group of Rhondda miners affected by the General Strike of 1926. Understanding their situation as a result of his father's slavery, Paul Robeson identified with them, joined the marchers, sang spirituals to them, paid for their return journey to Wales and donated food and clothing to their cause (Sparrow, 2017).

Amongst other examples of Paul Robeson's empathy and generosity to Welsh miners as they strived for recognition and better conditions, were his support and contributions to the Miners' Relief Fund, and to the victims of the Gresford mining disaster in 1934. In 1939, he also used his fame to highlight the miners' plight by appearing in *The*

*Proud Valley* in the role of black stoker, David Goliath, helping unemployed Welsh miners re-open their pit. The mining fraternity never forgot his generosity and meaningful appreciation of their struggles and a long-lasting bond was forged between them of which Paul Robeson said that he'd '*...learned more from the white working class in Wales than from anyone....*' (Sparrow, 2017:4).

Paul Robeson was later radicalised by his encounters with the UK Establishment and, having become disillusioned after his return to America in 1939, he espoused a left-wing agenda. In the midst of the Cold War in the 1950's, his articulation of a politically far left perspective made him a target of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and McCarthyism and he was consequently black-listed as a performer in the US. With his hard-won career ebbing away and prevented from travelling abroad, Paul Robeson was unable to accept the open invitation to appear at the Miners' Annual Eisteddfod in the Pavilion extended to him by the miners in the period between 1952 and 1957.

But the miners famously refused to accept the status quo in respect of their 'honorary Welshman'. Instead, they set up an historic transatlantic telephone link between a New York studio and the Pavilion. Paul Robeson was thereby able to participate in the 1957 Annual Miners' Eisteddfod on 5<sup>th</sup> October 1957 and thrill a packed Pavilion with his rendition of a selection of songs dedicated to '*...a world where we can live abundant and dignified lives...*' (Sparrow, 2017:8).

Following Paul Robeson's death in 1976, BCBC arranged for a room in the lower ground floor of the Pavilion to be dedicated to him. The Pavilion's Paul Robeson Room was opened by his son, Paul Robeson Junior, in 1998 and contains Paul Robeson memorabilia, displays and artefacts commemorating his strong links with Wales together with a coal bust of Paul Robeson himself.

## **The Brass Band Competition**

In 1998, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the inauguration of the Miners' Annual Eisteddfod was celebrated by the introduction of a Brass Bands Competition in the Pavilion. The intention was to inject an overtly musical dimension into the Eisteddfod as a means of revitalising the event but the move did little to salvage the Miners' Annual Eisteddfod. Fortunately, some 20 years later, the Brass Bands Competition endures as a stand-alone event and still continues to draw audiences to the Pavilion every February.

The Brass Band Competition attracts entries from across Wales and a secret ballot decides in which order bands perform. At the time of writing this report, the Brass Bands Competition is ongoing and is supported by the Porthcawl Town Council, BCBC as well as the Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation (CISWO) and Tower Colliery, Hirwaun in Rhondda Cynon Taff (RCT). Competition is fierce amongst participants and the quality of performances is high with 6 cups and trophies being awarded to the various competition winners by CISWO; Tower Colliery; Doug John; Eifion W. Rogers; Porthcawl Town Council and the Secretary's Rose Bowl (Morgan, 2004).

## **Conference Centre and Concerts**

It was not only the Miners' Annual Eisteddfod and Brass Bands Competition that used the Pavilion during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The building became a regular venue for meetings and conferences by various organisations such as the Townswomen's Guild (TG), the Women's Institute (WI), and the Welsh Conservative Party.

Musically-based groups and organisations like the now defunct South Wales Burma Star Choir, also used the Pavilion as a venue for their choral concerts, and the Porthcawl Male Voice Choir performed their first concert at the Pavilion in November 1980. It has continued to hold

annual events there, sometimes with guest singers and performers such as Iris Williams, Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 2003 and Max Boyce in 2002 (Morgan, 2004). At the time of writing this report, the event remains a permanent fixture in the Pavilion's programme.

### **Entertainment and Leisure**

In the period between the ending of WWII and the 1970's, the Pavilion remained at the core of Porthcawl's entertainment. Before the advent of television and the age of the small screen, entertainment was mainly acquired via the radio and/or the cinema or was of the home-grown variety.

Time and space preclude the number of examples this report can give of the sheer volume of organisations, shows and performers that appeared at the Pavilion or used it as a venue for their activities during this period but there are a few that deserve special mention:

#### **Porthcawl Steps Out**

Porthcawl Steps Out was a series of annual children's shows put on in the Pavilion between the 1950's and 1960's that were produced by Sheila Gammon, née Phillips, who ran a dance school in the town. The dance school and its popular shows were frequent items in the Pavilion's programme and they were responsible for fostering the pool of local dramatic and artistic talent in their productions. Individual performers often went on to further their professional stage careers and/or amateur interest and involvement in other local organisations such as PAODS or the Porthcawl Little Theatre.

#### **Royal Air Force Association (RAFA) Club**

Each September between the late 1940's until the mid-1970's, Porthcawl's branch of the Royal Air Force Association (RAFA) commemorated Battle of Britain week with a series of

theatrical and musical productions in the Pavilion, such as *Flying High* in 1954. With wartime loyalties and memories still fresh, many Porthcawl residents regarded the RAFA shows as the unmissable highlight of their year. The shows frequently combined headline acts from the London Palladium with local talent and, more often than not, the shows were performed in front of a full house.

The RAFA shows were certainly a spectacle to behold. Participants worked hard preparing for them and rehearsals were social affairs that began early in the year and were eagerly looked forward to. Much effort went into ensuring the shows had a professional gleam by, for example, sourcing stage costumes from London theatrical suppliers (Morgan, 2004).

#### **Porthcawl Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society**

Porthcawl Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society (PAODS) has been in existence for over 85 years. Soon after its formation, it acquired a reputation for high quality, successful dramatic productions. Since its introduction, PAODS has nurtured local talent in shows such as *Magyar Melody* (1959), *Geisha* (1960), *New Moon* (1962) and *Oklahoma* (1964). Along with RAFA shows, PAODS live dramatic productions were an absolute must for the majority of Porthcawl's mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century population and remains so today (Morgan 2004).

#### **Porthcawl Little Theatre**

This Porthcawl drama group came into being in 1948 and its debut production was *Night Must Fall* by Emyln Williams which was performed in the Pavilion in September 1948. It was followed by, in no particular order, the *Shop at Sly Corner*, *The Barber and the Cow*, *The Virgil*, *Castle in the Air* and *Dear Octopus* by Bernard Shaw, amongst others. Sadly it is no more but in common with Porthcawl Steps Out, the RAFA club and PAODS, the Little Theatre carefully

fostered local interest and enthusiasm in the arts and encouraged dramatic talent during its lifespan (Morgan, 2004).

### Stan Stennett's Summer Shows

**S**tan Stennett's Summer Stars was a timely addition to the Pavilion's programme range. As the 20<sup>th</sup> Century drew to a close, Porthcawl, like many UK seaside resorts at that point in time, experienced a drop in popularity as people chose to holiday abroad rather than stay in the UK. In an attempt to revive the fortunes of both the town and the Pavilion, Stan Stennett, Member of the British Empire (MBE), began his Summer Stars in June 1970, partly out of loyalty to Porthcawl but mostly out of a sentimental attachment to the Pavilion which he describes as a *'...lovely vibrant building...'* (Morgan, 2004: 6).

Stan Stennett's aim was to halt the trend away from traditional seaside resorts, at least as far as south Wales was concerned. He also wanted to stave off the threatened closure of the Pavilion by producing summer shows that outclassed other UK holiday destinations. The Summer Shows were a great success and Stan Stennett achieved his aim by producing traditional, old-fashioned family entertainment that was a mix of *'...comedy, singing, specialty acts and dancers and a change in programme twice a week...'* (Morgan, 2004: 6).

The Pavilion's rich history reflects Porthcawl's entertainment heritage and firm, longstanding engagement with popular culture. The building has hosted live entertainment from acclaimed celebrities and stars such as Eddie Izzard, the Supremes, Barbara Dickson and Rob Brydon. Of necessity, the examples given here are just a limited snapshot of the shows and productions mounted at the Pavilion during the post-war period up to the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Shows such as Stan Stennett's Summer Stars gave the Pavilion a much-needed shot in

the arm and, whilst it continued to suffer its ups and downs, the Pavilion successfully weathered the fall in audience numbers that occurred towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

### The Pavilion Today

**T**he Pavilion's survival into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century was down to 'nous' and hard work and by ensuring that it could offer something to appeal to a wide audience. Its eclectic range of entertainment included live theatre and music, stage appearances by famous orchestras and amateur and professional theatre performers making their way to the top of the theatrical ladder for example, Catherine Zeta Jones, Tom Jones, Cilla Black and Ken Dodd. Even, it is rumoured, the Beatles! The building also hosted beauty and talent contests, boxing and wrestling competitions, as well as tea dances, recitals and ballet.

The upshot is that the Pavilion entered the 21<sup>st</sup> Century going from strength to strength. In 2015, the Pavilion became part of the Awen Cultural Trust which, working in partnership with BCBC, manages and develops BCBC's cultural facilities and services such as theatres, libraries, community centres, Bryngarw Country House and Park together with work-based projects for adults with disabilities (Awen Cultural Trust, 2015).

Arguably, even more than in the past, the iconic Pavilion now operates as a very versatile, inclusive venue that offers participatory activities such as art classes, the ever-popular tea dances alongside cultural events and a broad choice of music and live theatre. Many in Porthcawl and the surrounding area assert that the range of the Pavilion's programme is better than ever. Again, time and space preclude against outlining the Pavilion's current programme but some of its civic highlights are:

## Christmas Pantomimes

Christmas and the New Year is always a busy season in Porthcawl but an outing to the panto at the Pavilion remains high on the wish-list of many Porthcawl children and families. The Pavilion has a long track record of putting on pantomimes throughout the festive season with *Aladdin* in the 1950's being one of the earliest. A series of seasonal pantos arose from Stan Stennett's Summer Stars shows and were produced by Stan Stennett's own theatre company and sometimes featured Stan Stennett himself in a major role. For example, *Billy and Bonzo meet Robin Hood* in the 1970-1971 panto season was followed by *Jack and the Beanstalk* in 1973 (Morgan, 2004).

All the classic panto tales have been performed at the Pavilion such as *Dick Whittington* (1990), another was *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* with 2 of the Nolan sisters in the 1996-1997 panto season.

## Christmas Carol Concerts

This is another must during Porthcawl's festive season. The Pavilion's Carol Concert is an occasion when the town's citizens and organisations assemble to celebrate Christmas together and hear the musical offerings of local schools, choral societies and individual performers. This annual, most traditional of festive occasions, usually plays to a packed house.

## Porthcawl Comprehensive School

The Pavilion also has an educative role in Porthcawl and the surrounding area. By using a collaborative approach and offering practically-based support, the staff and management of the Pavilion actively encourage the involvement of local choirs, musical societies and schools across a wide spectrum of the arts and culture.

One such example are the shows put on by Porthcawl Comprehensive School, mostly referred to as the 'Comp' in Porthcawl. The school stages choral and orchestral presentations which are possibly less well-known than its musical drama shows. Although both genres are always supported by the wider community, it is the Comp's annual musical drama shows that usually have their names up in lights. They began during the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and continue to this day, examples of which include *Oklahoma* (2003) and *Les Miserables* (2004). *Oliver* in February 2019, played to rave reviews. The consensus is that the Comp's standard of performance is so high that it is often hard to remember that the actors are still at school! As a result, the Comp productions are very popular and, invariably, tickets sell out quickly and are hard to get.

Drama is a very popular curriculum subject at the Comp and many of its drama students have gone on to make their careers in the theatre and/or the arts, for example Rob Brydon and Ruth Jones. Part of the reason lies in the Pavilion's collaboration with the Comp in work experience programmes. Student involvement across the artistic spectrum is central to the partnership and they learn all aspects of stagecraft, for instance by designing and building their own stage sets and /or making their own costumes.

## Bridgend Youth Theatre

In keeping with past practice and traditions, the Pavilion operates within a wide catchment area and the building has become home to the renowned Bridgend Youth Theatre (BYT) which is open to children between the ages of 7 to 14 years residing in the county of Bridgend. Since its inception in 2000, the BYT has established itself as a British Academy of Film and Television Awards (BAFTA) award-winning theatre company that is run in partnership with BCBC and

It's My Shout Production Ltd (Bridgend Youth Theatre, 2016).

Apart from nurturing confidence and self-belief in its students, the BYT aims to develop individual potential and a range of personal skills as well as stagecraft skills that include improvisation, mime, dance, singing, circus skills, costume and stage management. As a cutting edge youth theatre company, BYT offers its students many experiences in the arts and culture industry as it has close links with key organisations such as BBC Wales, Sianel Pedwar Cymru (S4C), the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama and the National Theatre of Wales. To accompany its large-scale stage productions, BYT holds professionally-led workshops throughout the year. Each summer, it produces 9 short films that are later shown on BBC Wales and S4C, and form part of mainstream film premieres and awards ceremonies (Bridgend Youth Theatre, 2016).

Views of the Pavilion 'tennis courts' in September 2018



Porthcawl Library in September 2018



## The Future of the Grand Pavilion

**T**he Grand Pavilion is Porthcawl's local treasure and the **Society** is conscious that this report has only provided a cursory look at the history of the building and its activities. So much of the Pavilion's past programmes of shows and events have been skirted over and there are major omissions in its current range of activities. For example, the frequent art exhibitions and talks; jazz and folk sessions; the comedy club; the lunchtime theatre; the annual Gilbert and Sullivan shows put on by the Savoyards and Porthcawl's annual mayor's ball have all been omitted. Not to mention the Pavilion's central role in Porthcawl's famous Elvis Festival held each year. Aside from being great fun, the event has a global reach that regularly attracts capacity crowds, world-wide press and media attention that really puts Porthcawl on the map.

The **Society** believes that the Pavilion has arrived at a watershed moment. Impressive though the Pavilion's past and present achievements certainly are, there is so much more that could be achieved with vision and imagination. As it is, the building's physical constraints limit the Pavilion's operational range and the exciting options that it could potentially offer the population of Porthcawl with differing needs and expectations to those of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. And that is before the population surge that is expected to accompany the regeneration and redevelopment of Porthcawl.

BCBC, the Pavilion and now Awen Cultural Trust, have a very creditable track record of supporting the performing and visual arts. Now would a good time to improve their involvement in the literary and wider arts scene in Porthcawl, especially bearing in mind the limitations of Porthcawl Library. Whilst the Library staff are unfailingly helpful and cannot in any way be faulted, the building in which the Library is housed is not fit for purpose

for a town of Porthcawl's size or population. For a start, as some of the **Society's** members have had the misfortune to discover, the building is difficult to access for disabled people, those with restricted mobility, and/or someone with a pram or pushchair.

The downside does not end there. The Library's study facilities are parlous and constrained. Debatably, they go as far as to undermine the concept of lifelong learning and put Porthcawl's youth and student population at a disadvantage in an increasingly competitive, sophisticated and demanding education system, particularly for those who only have access to below par study facilities in their home environment.

The upside is that the Pavilion is blessed with sufficient space for expansion on either side of the building. Those spaces offer an ideal opportunity to incorporate a state-of-the-art modern library and study facilities that could offer a solid basis for transforming the structure into a liberal arts centre.

Hopefully, it could also provide a local studies centre that more adequately befits a town of Porthcawl's size and its rich and varied history. A reader's lounge would also be a wonderful addition, particularly for those in Porthcawl who are seeking the peace and quiet of a studious milieu.

Such a transformation offers scope for more innovations and improved service provision. There is no shortage of ideas here. For instance, there is a small but growing number of people within the town and its surrounding area who already attend book launches and readings at the Green Room run by Sustainable Wales. Moreover, there is a very active branch of U3A in Porthcawl that makes a point of exploring the arts. That being the case, as Porthcawl has been without a bookshop for a considerable length of time, perhaps the Pavilion could plug that gap and include one in the development of

a liberal arts centre. It could be modelled on the bookshop located within the Dylan Thomas Centre in Swansea or the Museum of Welsh Life at St Fagan's in Cardiff.

The bookshop need not necessarily be run by Awen Cultural Trust. It could be franchised out and, ideally, provision could be made for book signings, lectures, talks and/or master-classes. Perhaps too, there could be scope for other developments such as the inclusion of a writer and/or musician-in-residence. That would be such an asset, not just to the Pavilion but to the development of creative writing, literature and drama in Porthcawl and the arts in general in the town and its hinterland.

A performance studio with raked seating that could double as cinema would be very desirable, as would a video link to book and poetry readings and studio performances held elsewhere in the UK. Some or all of these ideas have the advantage of offering additional streams of

revenue to Awen Cultural Trust. In addition to assisting the conversion of the Pavilion into a cutting edge liberal arts centre with broader horizons that could attract greater audiences to its facilities and events, any or all of these improvements and/or innovations would be welcome new amenities for Porthcawl's residents and draw in like-minded visitors. Just as important, they would be all-weather attractions in a town that can be very weather-beaten and windswept..

In the next part of the report, Part B of Stage II *Porthcawl: Much More Than Meets The Eye*, the **Society** will examine the central and eastern areas of the town, highlighting the growth and development of 'Old Porthcawl' and the ongoing changes in leisure and recreation in Porthcawl. It will, in particular, focus on how they were related to and were supported by the town's Commerce and Trade sectors.



## **Porthcawl: Much More Than Meets The Eye**

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