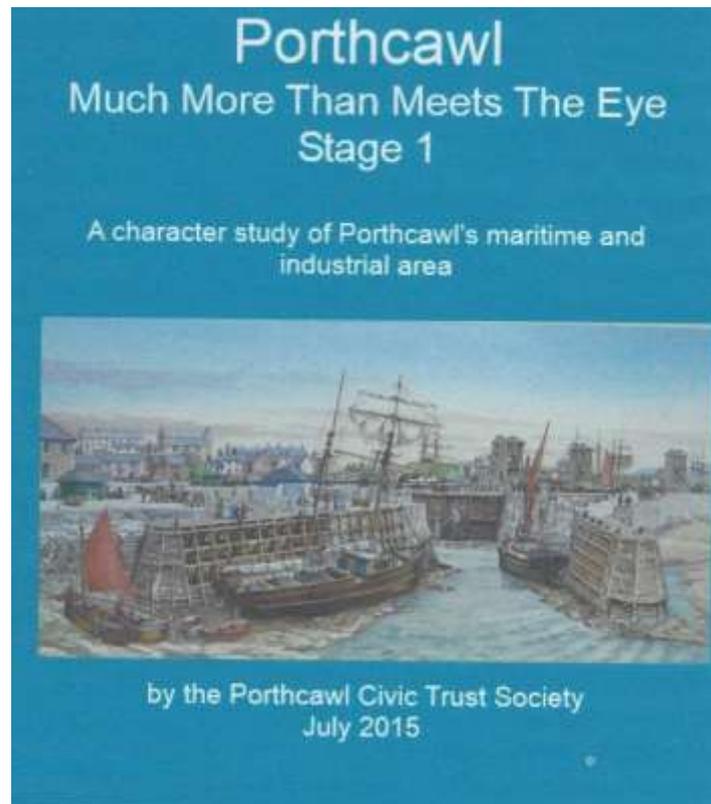


**Porthcawl: Much More Than Meets The Eye**  
**Stage II, Part B: 'Old Porthcawl', Trade and Commerce**



**The Story So Far...**

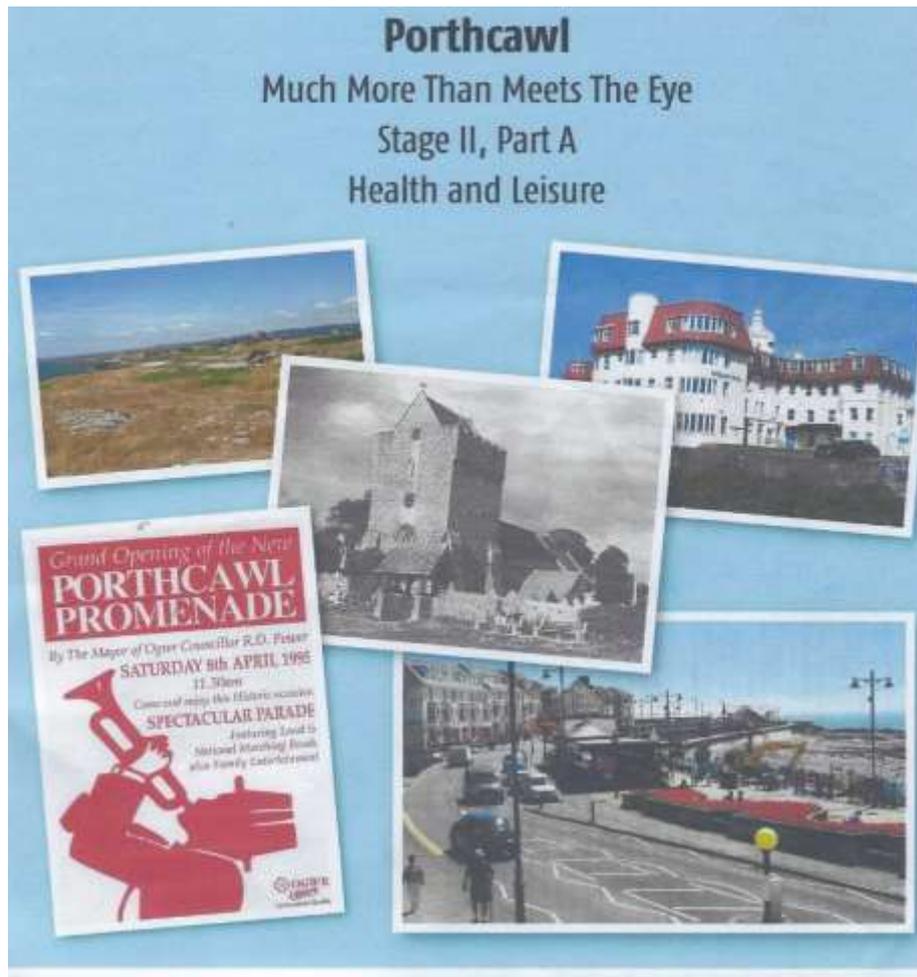
In Stage I and Stage II, Part A, of *Porthcawl: Much More Than Meets The Eye*, **Porthcawl Civic Trust Society** (the **Society**) relates how an early settlement in south Wales located on the Port Cawl promontory jutting into the Bristol Channel, grew and developed into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century coastal town of Porthcawl.

It was to be an eventful journey through time for that rural community. A journey that included pre-historic cultures, Viking attempts at marauding and colonisation, the Norman Settlement, the turbulence of the Reformation and the home-grown advance of the Nonconformist Cause in Wales. That was not all. With the 19<sup>th</sup> Century came industrialisation and urbanisation whilst, in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Porthcawl was a garrison town. Along with the rest of the UK, the community experienced the trauma and lasting effects of World War I (WWI), World War II (WWII) and the Spanish Civil War.

**Stage I – Porthcawl: Much More Than Meets The Eye (cover above)**

In Stage I of *Porthcawl: Much More Than Meets The Eye (2015) Amended Version*, the **Society** concentrates on how the modern 21<sup>st</sup> Century urban conurbation of Porthcawl grew from a small, original late Georgian harbour and the highs and lows of its short maritime trading career. The **Society** describes Porthcawl's 19<sup>th</sup> Century development, its experience of the Industrial Revolution, Railway Mania and the town's early residential beginnings.

The document also details how, at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Porthcawl inherited remnants of its industrial past and turned that legacy to its advantage. It concludes with the **Society's** ideas and suggestions on how the future townscape of Porthcawl can be improved.



**Stage II, Part A – Porthcawl: Much More Than Meets The Eye (cover above)**

Stage II, Part A, of *Porthcawl: Much More Than Meets The Eye (2020)* reaches further back in history. The **Society** briefly examines Porthcawl’s past and how the town gradually absorbed the neighbouring villages of Nottage and Newton as it became a 20<sup>th</sup> Century seaside destination of note. The **Society** touches on 19<sup>th</sup> Century divisions between work and leisure plus the Victorian obsession with health and seaside attractions, and reflects on how the topography of Porthcawl and its intrinsically rural landscape shifted and changed during the town’s transition into a seaside resort.

The document examines the part played in this growth by the villages of Nottage and Newton and the western environs of Porthcawl including Rest Bay, Locks Common, the Esplanade and the Waterfront. It gives a short history of each, examines Porthcawl’s development as a health resort, reflects on how those western environs played a role in some significant global events of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries and how those areas of Porthcawl are expected to develop in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

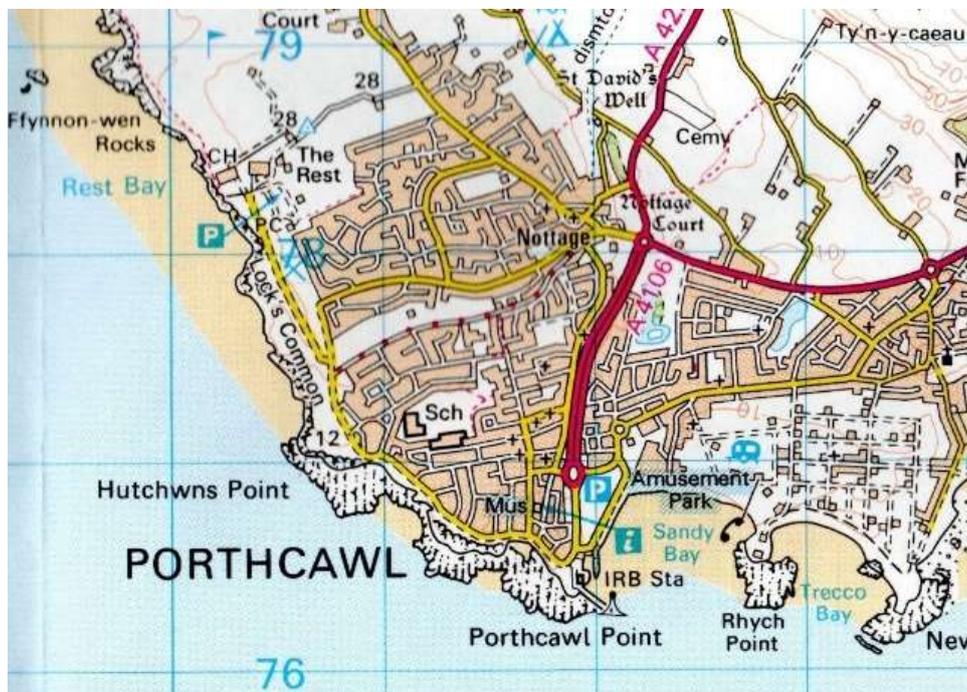
In Stage II Part A, of *Porthcawl: Much More Than Meets The Eye (2020)*, the **Society** highlights how, through the ages, people gravitated towards Porthcawl, wanting a share of the town’s health-giving vibes and its environment by making it their home or using its geological and geographical assets for their leisure and recreation. The



report also alludes to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century 'movers and shakers' of Porthcawl and how they shaped the embryonic town.

Map of Porthcawl in 1900 (BCBC, 2013)

General of the Ordnance Survey Office, Southampton, 2002



Porthcawl in 2002 from Ordnance Survey (OS) Landranger Map 170, Vale of Glamorgan, Porthcawl & Rhondda, published by the Director

## The Story Continues ...

Stage II, Part B, is the third volume of *Porthcawl: Much More Than Meets The Eye*. The report focuses on Porthcawl's journey from port town to coastal resort after Porthcawl Dock closed in 1906 and covers the central and eastern parts of Porthcawl that were not dealt with in Stage II, Part A, of the report.

## The Origins of 'Old Porthcawl'

The term 'Old Porthcawl' is infrequently heard in modern Porthcawl, though it is more familiar to older residents of the town. It is a hard term to define as it is more of an idea or perception of a house and/or place and its setting within Porthcawl. In this report, it will generally refer to houses and/or places that have their origins within the town before the outbreak of World War I (WWI) in 1914 and during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century interwar period.

## Urban Beginnings

Porthcawl became an urban district in 1893, the Porthcawl Urban District Council (PUDC) was formed in 1894 and the town's fully-fledged urban status was confirmed with the granting of the Royal Assent on 7<sup>th</sup> August 1914, 3 days after the outbreak of WWI. It is generally acknowledged that James and Mary Caroline Brogden played a major part in Porthcawl's early development and actively promoted the town as a modern seaside resort in tandem to its role as an industrial port and railway terminus.

Porthcawl certainly blossomed during the latter quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and much of the Brogden vision of the town as a fashionable coastal destination had been attained by the time Porthcawl Dock closed in 1906. For example, by 1880, Mary Caroline Brogden had granted building leases on land that she had earlier bought on Pickets Lease and the couple had:

- Built and opened the Marine Hotel and Marine Terrace by 1886.

- Unveiled both the Esplanade and Esplanade Hotel in 1887.
- Granted building leases for Mary Street and Caroline Street (now Esplanade Avenue).
- Started building Railway Terrace (later Hillsborough Place, now Hillsboro Place) in 1888.
- Developed housing in Victoria Road, Church Place, Philadelphia Road, South Road and New Road.
- Installed infrastructure to enable Porthcawl to function as an up-to-date urban conurbation.

James Brogden's death in 1907, almost immediately after the port's closure, effectively marked the end of the Brogden era and, coupled with the closure of maritime trading, signified a turning point for Porthcawl. Sadly for his widow, Mary, persistent financial problems necessitated the sale of most of the Brogden estate, including their home, Sea Bank House, which was bought by John Elias and other investors (Higgins, 1968; Morgan; 1987).

## Porthcawl After the Brogden Era

The closure of Porthcawl Dock represented the removal of Porthcawl's industrial role and the initial *rationale* for the town's existence. In 1907, therefore, much rested on the disposal of the considerable Brogden land holdings and what purpose their future owners intended them to have.

Unable to maintain and fund its upkeep, Mary Brogden had already handed over the Esplanade to PUDC in 1904. The main beneficiaries of the Brogden financial problems and James and Mary's personal tragedy, were local entrepreneurs such as the Lambert brothers - Harry Fenton and John Lewis. They acquired substantial portions of Brogden land holdings and another parcel of land to the north of Pickets Lease from Lord Wimborne. The remainder of Pickets Lease was bought by Richard Edwin Jones, a caterer and hotelier. In reality, it was that trio who became the architects and developers of Porthcawl as the town entered a new phase of development that lasted until the start of WWI in 1914 (Higgins, 1968)



**Fenton Place circa 1920 (Reproduced from *Old Photos of Porthcawl in Glamorgan*).**



**Fenton Place in August 2019 (minus most of its Chestnut trees) looking towards South Road.**

## Porthcawl After 1907

### The Lamberts

The Lambert brothers quickly implemented the plans that James and Mary Brogden had drawn up and created residential streets on their land acquisitions. They were responsible for building:

- Victoria Avenue up to Restways.
- Suffolk Place up to and including Westbourne Place.
- George Street.
- the early stages of Fenton Place.

(Higgins, 1968)

Suffolk Place was the main artery of the Lambert Development and it was built roughly parallel to South Road (the earlier South Lane). Turning off both sides of Suffolk Place in a grid formation was a network of terraced streets with houses which had slate roofs and were, architecturally, simply constructed. The houses had bay windows, some canted and/or full-height but many were single-storey and slate-roofed, together with small, polite front gardens. The exception was Westbourne Place which consisted of slate-roofed, flat-fronted, red-brick terraces with no bay windows and no front gardens. Westbourne Place was also different insofar as the houses had front doors that opened directly on to the pavement, although the front porches had inner doors and decorative tiles halfway up the wall, similar to other houses in the area.

Both sides of Lewis Place were added later, but all the streets - Westbourne Place, George Street, as well as Suffolk Place and Fenton Place were interconnected by a series of lanes and pathways running behind the rear gardens of the houses. Some lanes and pathways were no more than dirt tracks and, with rising car ownership in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, single-storey garages and/or outhouses were gradually erected in many of those rear gardens. As a result, most of the lanes are now, in practice, shared driveways.

Some of Porthcawl's existing housing was incorporated into the Lambert's new development. For example, house-building in Philadelphia Road had begun circa 1847 to accommodate incoming workers on the Dyffryn Llynfi Porthcawl Railway (DLPR), Porthcawl Dock and the town's increasing population.

By 1906, Philadelphia Road was still incomplete but there had been some sporadic infilling so it had an eclectic range of houses of varying sizes and designs. Even so, it remained (and still remains) a relatively narrow road turning off South Road, running parallel to Fenton Place and the east side of Lewis Place. The Lamberts linked Philadelphia Road at its western end to their development by a junction with Suffolk Place, now opposite the original part of Park Avenue which was completed by 1925 (Higgins, 1968).

The southern end of Suffolk Place merged with Church Place at a crossroads where the landmark first Anglican All Saints Church had been built in 1892 on land donated by Lord Wimborne. It was replaced by the present Grade II Listed All Saints Church, CADW ID: 11372, which was completed and consecrated in 1914 (Further details of the Anglican All Saints Church, can be found in Stage II, Part A, *Porthcawl: Much More Than Meets The Eye (2020)*, pages 8-9 of the Appendix). Victoria Avenue was already in the planning pipeline and was intended to be a continuation of Victoria Road, running westwards from Church Place towards West Drive, Locks Common and the sea (Higgins, 1968; Morgan, 1987).

At its northern termination, the focal point of Suffolk Place was the now decimated Bluebell Wood together with the fields and meadows which, before the opening of Nottage Primary School in 1952, and construction of the later Forty-Acre Estate in the 1970's, formed a natural, environmental boundary between Porthcawl and Nottage village.

When the first stage of the Lambert Development was built between 1909 and 1914, it was within a relatively short distance from Porthcawl's first railway station in South Road which had opened in 1876. Unfortunately, the outbreak of WWI in 1914 put the country, and Porthcawl along with it, on a war footing and interrupted the building process. The Lambert Development subsequently remained unfinished until 1922, when Suffolk Place was extended and Lewis Place was completed in 2 halves either side of Suffolk Place at its northerly end (Higgins, 1968).

The housing in Lewis Place was mixed. On the west side of the street, the dwellings were arranged in short terraces with single-storey, squared-bay windows and overhanging slate roofs. Dominating the west side of Lewis Place was a row of 3 terraced houses, larger in scale and set on a slight rise at right angles to each side of the road, thus creating a *cul-de-sac*. The eastwards side of Lewis Place differed in architectural design. On one side, there were 5 units of semi-detached houses whereas the opposite, east side had 4 pairs of semi-detached houses with the appearance of chalet bungalows as they had centrally-placed gabled porches and dormer windows set into the roof space.

All told, the Lambert Development amounted to more than 150 houses and they considerably expanded the parameters of the town's built environment by pushing the outer boundary of Porthcawl northwards towards Nottage village (Higgins, 1968).

### Later in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

**T**he array of terraced properties built by the Lambert brothers was seemingly aimed at the lower end of the urban housing market. Many houses were privately owned but it was common practice to rent one's home and a number of dwellings were subsequently rented out to second, even third, generations of the same family.

Many families originated from Porthcawl or nearby towns and were known to each other or had local ties. These aspects of

familial and/or local connections contributed to a sense of familiarity and permanence that persisted amongst those living in that particular area of Porthcawl far into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Nowadays, the housing market is more mixed and many of the houses on the Lambert Development have been divided into 2 or more residential units while others form part of buy-to-let portfolios.

The street design of the Lambert Development is socially significant as Suffolk Place, Westbourne Place, Lewis Place as well as George Street (before Fairfax Crescent was built at its western end in the 1930's) were all *cul-de-sacs*. These days, children and adults generally do not regard the street as a social space but, in this area of Porthcawl, before motor transport was in the ascendancy, the street was often claimed by children who used it to play in safety well into the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century. And not just their own street. By using the lanes and pathways that ran through the Lambert Development, children gravitated freely between each street depending who and what their friendship groupings were at that particular time. Adults were also known to sit outside their front doors on warm summer days and pass the time of day with neighbours and friends, although perhaps not to the same extent as in the more traditional societies of the nearby south Wales coalfield and industrial areas.

The Lambert Development's position at the, then, margins of Porthcawl also encouraged the growth of local community spirit amongst residents in this part of town. So much so that another of its features was the well-patronised 'corner shops' that quickly sprang up on the corners of Suffolk Place, Fenton Place and George Street. In fact, local anecdotes recall that it was quite a busy commercial shopping hub. Apart from a Gwalia store, 2 or 3 other general stores, a sweet shop, and a newsagent and tobacconist (smoking was very much the norm then) there was a dairy and even a hairdresser's situated at the crossroads until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century. Oh and a 'deli' opened in the 1950's!



**Suffolk Place circa 1920 (Reproduced from *Old Photos of Porthcawl in Glamorgan*).**



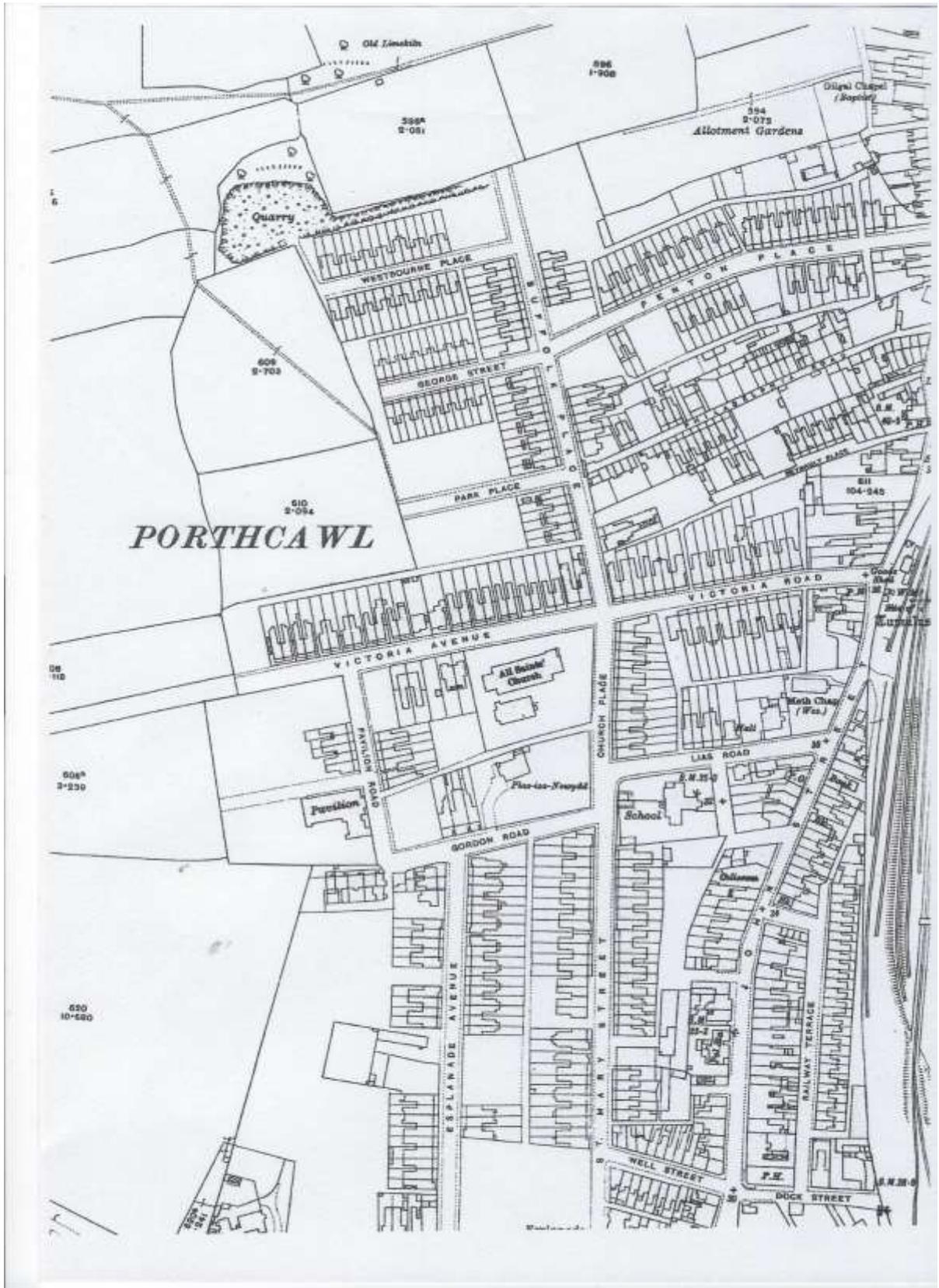
**Suffolk Place in August 2019 looking towards Church Place.**



**Victoria Avenue circa 1910 (Reproduced from *Old Photos in Porthcawl in Glamorgan*).**



**Victoria Avenue looking towards Church Place in August 2019.**



A section of an OS map published by the Director General at the Ordnance Survey Office, Southampton, 1919 (Courtesy of Glamorgan Records Office (Glamro)).

## The Lambert Development Today

The Lambert Development is relatively distant from current tourist haunts such as the beaches in Porthcawl, Harbourside and the Eastern Promenade. But such has been Porthcawl's expansion over the past 100 years that, today, the Lambert Development is a comparatively small enclave of the town. It no longer marks the boundary of Porthcawl as Nottage Primary School together with extensive housing on the Forty-Acre site, now sit on the meadows and pastures that once denoted the town's northerly edge. In contrast to its arrival on the Porthcawl townscape in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century when that area of Porthcawl was, reportedly, regarded as 'far out' of town, it has now been completely absorbed into Porthcawl's townscape and is generally regarded as being near to the town centre!

In the here and now, a small development has sprung up at the western end of Westbourne Place, and many houses have acquired new roofs, windows and front doors, although roof and building lines are mainly intact. Some houses, for example in Westbourne Place, still have red-brick exteriors while others have been personalised with rendering or pebble-dash and exterior paint in varying colours. Many of the front gardens have also been embellished with hard landscaping, flower pots, hanging baskets and window boxes.

Otherwise, this small corner of Porthcawl still has a series of terraced streets with housing that shares a particular unity of time, place and scale. With the great benefit of hindsight, this area could, debatably, reflect the moment when the town's residents gave Porthcawl a vote of confidence irrespective of the commercial failure of Porthcawl Dock. Of course, it is just as feasible that Porthcawl's prior status as a port town with all its associated dirt, noise and general hurly burly, had deterred some people who were seeking a more peaceful *milieu* to put down roots. Hence, once maritime trading and all its associations had been removed, they felt Porthcawl was a more inviting place to make their home.

## Richard Edwin Jones (R E Jones)

Faced with the *fait accompli* of port closure and the disappearance of Porthcawl's industrial role, another local entrepreneur, R E Jones, adopted a different approach to either James and Mary Brogden or the Lambert brothers. He had multiple investments throughout the United Kingdom (UK) and was founder of R E Jones Limited (Ltd) a well-known firm of caterers and hoteliers. Please see Stage II, Part A, of *Porthcawl: Much More Than Meets The Eye (2020)* pages 95-96 refer for more details of R E Jones' commercial links with Porthcawl.

R E Jones was familiar with Porthcawl and its surroundings. He had bought the Marine Hotel on Porthcawl's Esplanade from James and Mary Brogden in 1886 and both he and his wife, Elizabeth, already owned and resided in The Cottage in Caroline Street (now Esplanade Avenue). After James Brogden died in 1907, he capitalised on the Brogden monetary difficulties by buying land extending eastwards from the then Sea Bank House (now the Seabank Hotel) to the port area to the east of Porthcawl (Elwy Jones, 2014).

Like the Lambert brothers, R E Jones was quick off the development mark although, unlike the Lamberts, he appears less interested in the residential housing market in Porthcawl. He envisaged the town as a thriving coastal resort and, mindful of the town's increasing tourist appeal and growing number of visitors, he believed the way forward was to offer holidaymakers a wider choice in the type of holiday accommodation available to them (Elwy Jones, 2014).

The family records indicate that R E Jones was a Justice of the Peace (JP) and had earlier been a long-standing member of Cardiff City Council. He was an influential man with an expanding business empire and was unafraid to use his business contacts to further the interests of Porthcawl. He had helped found Porthcawl's Chamber of Trade and became an active member of PUDC as well as a Mayor of Porthcawl (Elwy Jones, 2014).



**Esplanade Avenue circa 1915 (Reproduced from *Old Photos in Porthcawl in Glamorgan*).**



**Esplanade Avenue in August 2019 looking northwards**

## FUTURE OF PORTHCAWL.

### IMPORTANCE OF DEVELOPMENT ON PROPER LINES.

### WIDTH OF STREETS; A LESSON FROM SWANSEA.

A well-attended meeting of Porthcawl rate-payers was held at the National Schools on Tuesday evening under the auspices of the newly-formed Chamber of Trade. The Lord Mayor of Cardiff, Dr. James Mullin, and Mr. W. Brace, M.P., who is was hoped would attend, wired that they were detained.

Mr. R. E. Jones, who presided, said he hoped the Chamber of Trade would be able to do a great deal in the development of the town on right lines. No one had more confidence as to the prospects of Porthcawl than the speaker. He knew of no resort which was richer in natural advantages—the bracing air which they enjoyed there was unequalled in any place he knew. If they fully realised what valuable assets they had and proceeded to make the best use of them, he ventured to think their fortunes would be made. (Laughter and applause.) After all, they were very fortunate in having such an enterprising company as the G.W.R. with an interest in the town, and if they approached the company in the right spirit, they would, as business men, see that it was in their interest that Porthcawl should be developed, and accordingly grant the better facilities which were so greatly needed. (Applause.)

Councillor David Davies, Swansea, delivered an interesting and racy address on the work which the Chamber of Trade might accomplish in the proper development of the town. At the outset he congratulated the people of Porthcawl in having a gentleman of such influence in business circles as Mr. R. E. Jones interesting himself in the town. (Applause.) But however striving Mr. Jones might be with the Great Western Railway Company, he could not have the same driving power as could be exercised by a Chamber of Trade if it represented the united opinion of the people. The G.W.R. Company were considering whether they would not divert their main line between Cardiff and Port Talbot, and revert to the straight and natural route originally selected, through Cowbridge, and this scheme would bring Porthcawl within pistol shot of the main line if the line would not actually pass through the town. Should this be brought about, the future prosperity of the place would be absolutely assured, for the greatest disadvantage from which it suffered at present was the difficulty of reaching

it. In the matter of railway diversions in South Wales, the Company were playing for a big stake—the great Trans-Atlantic traffic. Only a little push might be necessary to induce the company to go on with the scheme, which would mean so much to Porthcawl, and the Chamber of Trade would do well to bring all possible influence to bear on the Company. (Hear, hear.) The speaker went on to show what a Chamber of Trade could accomplish in preserving the natural beauties of the place from interference by private owners. For instance, the time might come, he pointed out, when private owners might

carry out something on the foreshore which would be injurious to the town, and an organised and virile body of residents having a large interest in the place would be a greater force in restraining such acts than a District Council, whose duties were limited. They had at Porthcawl the nucleus of a great town, but everything would depend upon the kind of buildings which were erected and the width of the streets. In Swansea they were spending scores of thousands of pounds to undo the mischief of their short-sighted predecessors. Let them see to it that wide roads were provided by keeping before the vision of the Council its duty to the present as well as future generations in this respect, and there ought to be no serious difficulty in securing this, because land was at present comparatively cheap. Those concerned in the development of the town would also do well to secure as much architectural beauty as possible.

(Hear, hear.) The Chamber of Trade could do much in producing an intelligent electorate and in getting good men returned to the Council. The speaker proceeded to deal with various questions of local government, and spoke strongly of the practice of dealing with public questions in secret, remarking that publicity was the one supreme and wholesome influence in public work. (Hear, hear.)

Mr. G. S. Jones, proposing a vote of thanks to Mr. Davies, said there were some people who thought the G.W.R. was a philanthropic institution. He believed that if they went before the officials of the Company with sound business proposals, the question of better facilities would receive immediate attention. (Hear, hear.)

Mr. T. G. Jones seconded the vote of thanks, which was carried with acclamation.

Other speakers included Councillors J. L. Lambert, T. E. Deere, J. Elias (Nottage), Messrs. H. B. Comley and Kappel. In the discussion it was suggested that steps should be taken to advertise Porthcawl. Mr. R. E. Jones was cordially thanked for presiding.

Excerpt reproduced from *The Glamorgan Gazette* newspaper dated 21<sup>st</sup> May 1909.

## Picton Avenue

James and Mary Brogden had already planned Mary Street and Caroline Street (later to be Esplanade Avenue) but it was R E Jones who brought them to life. Plans had also been drawn up for Picton Avenue although it was not completed until 1925, after the death of R E Jones in 1923 (Elwy Jones, 2014).

The **Society** has not been able to discover whether R E Jones was influenced by the Garden City ideals of Ebenezer Howard. That said, the R E Jones Development was based on a characteristically Edwardian design concept that resulted in the construction of houses set in broad, formal streets running northwards from the Esplanade that were geared towards meeting tourist needs.

Caroline Street was renamed Esplanade Avenue by R E Jones and, on vacant land surrounding his then home - The Cottage, high-end houses were built either side of the road leading down to the Esplanade. The standout feature of each street was the enticing vista of the Esplanade and its southerly views over the sinuous curve of Town Beach looking over the Bristol Channel towards north Devon (Higgins, 1968; Elwy Jones, 2014).

R E Jones was not just ambitious in the scope and scale of his street-planning. He also turned his attention to the house-building process itself. In anticipation of the units being used as boarding houses/guest houses or small hotels, R E Jones employed local craftsmen to build full-height, substantial 2-storey houses in distinctive bay-fronted terraces. The houses were in groups of 6 and nearly all had prominent gables and other distinctive design features that included wrought-iron balconies, iron-work canopies, decorative tiles and barge-boards on house frontages. As such, they are good examples of Edwardian craftsmanship and have similarities to other R E Jones hospitality outlets such as the Mackworth Hotel in Swansea which was designed and built in the 1890's (Elwy Jones, 2014).

## The R E Jones Development Today

Esplanade Avenue, Picton Avenue and Mary Street are well-situated and lead to tourist attractions like the Town Beach, the Esplanade and Waterfront. As R E Jones intended, many of the houses became boarding houses, guest houses or small hotels to complement Porthcawl's resort function and flourishing hotel trade. From the heritage viewpoint, the Edwardian housing development financed and built by R E Jones, is comparatively unchanged in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The houses are of generous proportions and some in Esplanade Avenue and Picton Avenue have since been converted into apartments and others are private family homes. But many of these spacious houses remain boarding houses, small guest house/ boutique hotels for example, the Lorelei Hotel in Esplanade Avenue and 19 Mary Street.

Unsurprisingly, some of the characteristic iron-work has not survived a century or more of Porthcawl's unforgiving salt sea-air and was removed during WWII, or is showing its age. Some houses have also been rendered, pebble-dashed and/or painted but, in the **Society's** view, many of these imposing dwellings have been well-looked after with genuine attempts made to preserve original features such as doors, decorative tile-work, stained glass windows and iron balconies (Elwy Jones, 2014).

As a result, Esplanade Avenue and most of Picton Avenue still consist of characterful local buildings that are representative of early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, terraced villa housing and, outwardly, both streets remain good examples of a formal, coherent design that typifies aspirational Edwardian dwellings. Consequently, they are part of Porthcawl's heritage assets and every effort needs to be made to preserve and protect the remaining details and features of the original build for future generations. The **Society** is therefore pleased that Esplanade Avenue and Picton Avenue were brought within Porthcawl Conservation Area with effect from 11<sup>th</sup> August 2016 (*The Glamorgan Gazette*, 2016).

## Mary Street Today

**M**ary Street was another part of the R E Jones' Development. It runs north from the Esplanade, parallel to both Esplanade and Picton Avenues, and intersects with Suffolk Place, Church Place and Victoria Avenue at a crossroads. Mary Street also shares many of the distinctive design features of both Esplanade and Picton Avenues such as tall, full-height houses with decorative features and prominent gables, ornate ironwork and tiled porches.

Having said that, its situation is more complicated. While Mary Street is similar in character to Esplanade and Picton Avenues, it is a more mixed scene. Its houses are less uniform in size and scale and, at its lower west side opposite Well Street, housing appears earlier and different in style. On its lower east side is a terraced block of 5 houses which are noticeably smaller in scale, have full-height square bays, porches and small front gardens. Although smaller, at least one of this group of houses has been sub-divided into flats. And, whilst houses on the west side of Mary Street also have a rear lane, this smaller group of houses on its east side have a lane with a stone boundary running along their rear gardens that backs on to a public car park.

Regrettably, the years have not been kind to Mary Street. Mary Street, together with Esplanade and Picton Avenues, was built with tourist and holiday accommodation in mind but Mary Street's close proximity to the commercial centre of Porthcawl, particularly John Street and Well Street, together with the spacious nature of its structures, has made its buildings liable to be taken over for business or commercial use, irrespective of their suitability.

Planning-wise, there appears to have been a *laissez-faire* attitude towards Mary Street as, over the years, many houses have been remodelled as shops or businesses, with differing degrees of success. The seeming absence of adequate monitoring of some conversions and building adaptations has also added to Mary

Street's inconsistent appearance. Many original features have been lost or altered beyond repair in the process and small hotels, guest houses and bed-sits exist cheek by jowl with businesses such as employment agencies, hairdressers, an off-licence cum newsagents, studio photographers and houses of multiple occupation. Instead of an Edwardian street with unified proportions and a sense of time and place, Mary Street now presents as a confusion of properties and lacks a recognisable, convincing identity.

The **Society** acknowledges that there must be a creative use of resources and that town centres need variety in order to thrive. Even so, given the unique provenance of the buildings in Mary Street and that it is literally in the midst of Porthcawl Conservation Area, the **Society** would like to see a greater emphasis on aesthetic values as well as the positive use and repurposing of the buildings in Mary Street. Whether or not that could be achieved by reconsidering its status within the parameters of Porthcawl Conservation Area is debatable. Nevertheless, it is a possibility worthy of consideration.

Otherwise, although some properties have been cared for and converted with flair, the **Society** suggests that there should be more vigilance and consistency where Mary Street is concerned. A more practical planning approach should also be adopted towards its mixed-use possibilities, maybe by highlighting the positive ways of repurposing these historic period properties and incentivising house-owners to restore and/or preserve any existing original features. At the very least, there should be increased levels of quality control plus more rigorous levels of monitoring towards any planning applications and adaptations related to Mary Street, especially as the speed of Porthcawl's Regeneration is expected to accelerate in the very near future.



**Mackworth Road circa 1915 (Reproduced from *Old Photos in Porthcawl in Glamorgan*).**



**Mackworth Road in August 2019 looking towards New Road.**



Queens Avenue circa 1915 (Reproduced from *Old Photos in Porthcawl in Glamorgan*).



Queens Avenue viewed from New Road in August 2019.

## More Pre-WWI Urban Beginnings

In New Road on the eastern side of Porthcawl, urban beginnings were just as prolific as on its western side.

Demonstrating the same confident belief that Porthcawl had a bright future despite the closure of Porthcawl Dock, Newton Primary School was built on the opposite side of the road to the existing Old Rest Cottages, and the Roman Catholic place of worship, Waddle Hall, which was built in 1904 and enlarged in 1908. In 1908, Newton Primary School opened its doors to an increasing number of children either being born in Porthcawl or coming to the town to live and the School was classed as a Grade II Listed building in 1998, CADW ID:19371 (British Listed Buildings, 1998).

That aside, urban development in New Road was more piecemeal than in western Porthcawl as exemplified by the Lambert or R E Jones Developments. By 1914, with the exception of land occupied by the gasworks and allotments, there was ribbon development along New Road that went as far as Queens Avenue to its north and Mackworth Road to its south. Most of Mackworth Road and Queens Avenue had already been built and essential utility services such as fresh water was provided by the service reservoir at Ty Coch. By 1914, the sewage system had also been modified whereupon Porthcawl's western area was drained by gravitation to an outfall at Iron-Gate Point (Higgins, 1968).

In total, it is estimated that over 750 houses were erected in Porthcawl between 1905 and 1915. However, the outbreak of WWI in August 1914 put a brake on Porthcawl's urban housing expansion and any related projects. Porthcawl played its part and fully participated in the war effort by, for instance, becoming a garrison town, but the requirements of the war effort called a halt to Porthcawl's rapid urban expansion (Higgins, 1968).

It was not until the ending of hostilities in 1918 that PUDC could implement the provisions of the PUDC Act (1914) and begin creating the civic amenities befitting a prominent coastal resort and make a start on, for example, the Eastern Promenade

Scheme. Stage I of *Porthcawl: Much More Than Meets The Eye* has more details of the Eastern Promenade Scheme and related developments, pages 57 to 60 refer.

For the purposes of this report, therefore, the **Society** will continue Porthcawl's story immediately after WWI ended when construction and house building resumed in the town. A fuller and more detailed account of the broader impact of WWI on Porthcawl and its residents can be found by Porthcawl Museum and Historical Society on [www.porthcawlmuseum.com](http://www.porthcawlmuseum.com).

## 'Old Porthcawl' Until WWII

In the aftermath of the Great War, there was infilling and continued shifts and changes in housing developments that were to have a lasting impact on Porthcawl's townscape. As a result, while the nucleus of 'Old Porthcawl' was created in the period up to 1914, the inter-war flurry of new developments and housing effectively reinforced and expanded the size and perception of 'Old Porthcawl'. For example, by 1925, in addition to Lewis Place and Suffolk Place, 200 more houses were built in Picton Avenue, Blundell Avenue, Park Avenue, South Road, Arlington Road, and South Place with another 140 houses added between 1925 and 1930 (Higgins, 1968).

House-building also continued over a wider area during the 1930's, so altering both the shape and topography of Porthcawl. Notably, too, while there were new housing developments in Wellfield Avenue, Northways and Nicholls Avenue, new builds were mostly to the west and north of the Esplanade such as in Green Avenue, Lougher Gardens, Severn Road, Fairfax Crescent, as well as Newton-Nottage Road and West Road (Higgins, 1968).

During the 20<sup>th</sup> Century inter-war period, new housing also appeared along the sea-front in Newton and the surrounding area. Moreover, New Road became a focus of development both along its length towards Newton Village and around the level crossing at Station Hill.



**Newton Primary School in New Road circa 1910  
(Reproduced from *Old Photos in Porthcawl in Glamorgan*).**



**Newton Primary School in New Road looking  
towards Newton village in August 2019.**

Many houses in the ribbon development on the south side of New Road and to the north from Queens Avenue towards Newton Village, were larger and of a more individual design so seemingly aimed at the upper end of the housing market. In sum, they effectively connected an expanding Porthcawl with Newton village (Higgins, 1968).

All-in-all, the inter-war years saw the number of houses within Newton Nottage parish grow by almost 1,000 at an average of 50 houses per year. Accompanying this growth was a corresponding increase in the rateable value of the parish from £36,252 in 1930 to £58,922 in 1939 (Higgins, 1968).

Such impressive statistics suggest that Porthcawl's explosion in house-building was due to an influx of newcomers to the town. Far from it. Within the context of the whole of the UK, increased construction was part of a nationwide phenomenon but the building boom was not matched by a similar increase in Porthcawl's resident population. On the contrary. Porthcawl's population was recorded as 6642 in 1921, whereas in 1931 it was recorded as being 6447 – a fall of 2.9% (Higgins, 1968).

Part of the reason for this fall in numbers was that the UK was in the throes of the Great Depression of the 1930's and, unfortunately, south Wales was one of the hardest hit areas in the UK. With a scarcity of jobs in the locality, Porthcawl, like elsewhere in the UK, experienced depopulation as people, and sometimes whole families, were drawn to employment hotspots like London and the Midlands in search of work and wider horizons (Higgins, 1968).

### Transport in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

Although Great Western Railways (GWR) had officially closed Porthcawl Dock in 1906, the railway station together with its tracks and freight yard were left intact. R E Jones had become President of Porthcawl's newly-formed Chamber of Trade by 1910 where he was supported by like-minded members such as H B Comley who shared his ambitions for Porthcawl to grow into an

outstanding seaside resort that offered visitors wider choice. In addition, they wanted the town to become a desirable place to live.

They, together with PUDC councillors, were fully aware of the importance of transport infrastructure and the pattern of its service delivery, most especially the maintenance of good railway links, as a means to realise their tourist and residential ambitions. Thus, the common aim of Porthcawl's Chamber of Trade and PUDC was to retain GWR's presence in Porthcawl at all cost. More than that, collectively, they wanted to increase railway services to the town (*The Porthcawl News*, 1910).

Coincidentally, GWR was examining the viability of its railway services to Cardiff, Port Talbot and the Vale of Glamorgan in 1909. Meanwhile, Porthcawl's original railway station was located in South Road, in a part of 'Old Porthcawl' that was some distance from the beaches, the Esplanade and the Waterfront. As things stood, the railway system was not fit for tourist purposes, as it was primarily geared to the needs of the coal and iron industries and facilitating the movement of coal and goods, rather than people (*The Porthcawl News*, 1910).

Given the removal of Porthcawl's maritime trading and industrial *raison d'être* in 1906, together with the fact that the town was still finding its feet in tourist terms and establishing itself as a worthy residential area, Porthcawl was in real danger of having its railway station demolished. Such an eventuality would seriously damage any meaningful accessibility to the town for both tourists and residents and be a hammer blow to Porthcawl's hopes of growth and development.

Sensing an opportunity to change GWR thinking, Porthcawl Chamber of Trade and PUDC acted in unison. Making strong representations to GWR, they actively sought to avert any disruption and/or dismantling of railway services into the town (*The Porthcawl News*, 1910).

The alliance was successful. In the teeth of staunch opposition from Temperance

and Sabbatarian movements from within Porthcawl and the surrounding district as well as the nearby south Wales coalfield, Porthcawl Chamber of Trade and PUDC put forward positive arguments favouring the maintenance of a railway station in Porthcawl. They also argued that GWR could increase its revenue by enhancing railway services to the town, especially at weekends (*The Porthcawl News*, 1910).

In the event, Porthcawl's first railway station in South Road was dismantled. At the behest of the Porthcawl Chamber of Trade and PUDC, it was replaced by a brand new railway station in Dock Street that was better-suited to tourist needs as it was nearer to the beaches, the Esplanade and the Waterfront. The relocated railway station opened in Dock Street in 1916, effectively sealing Porthcawl's transition to a fully-fledged seaside resort and serving the Porthcawl community well until its demise in the 1960's.



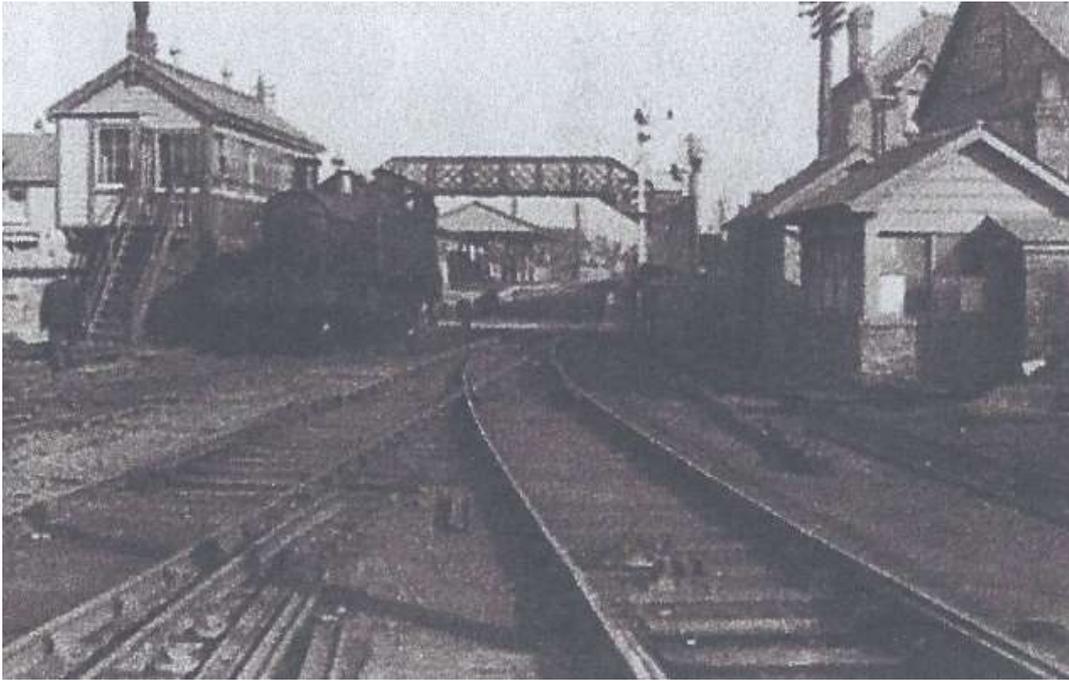
**The Porthcawl's first railway station in South Road circa 1900 (Reproduced from *The People's Collection Wales*).**

## PORTHCAWL DEVELOPMENTS.

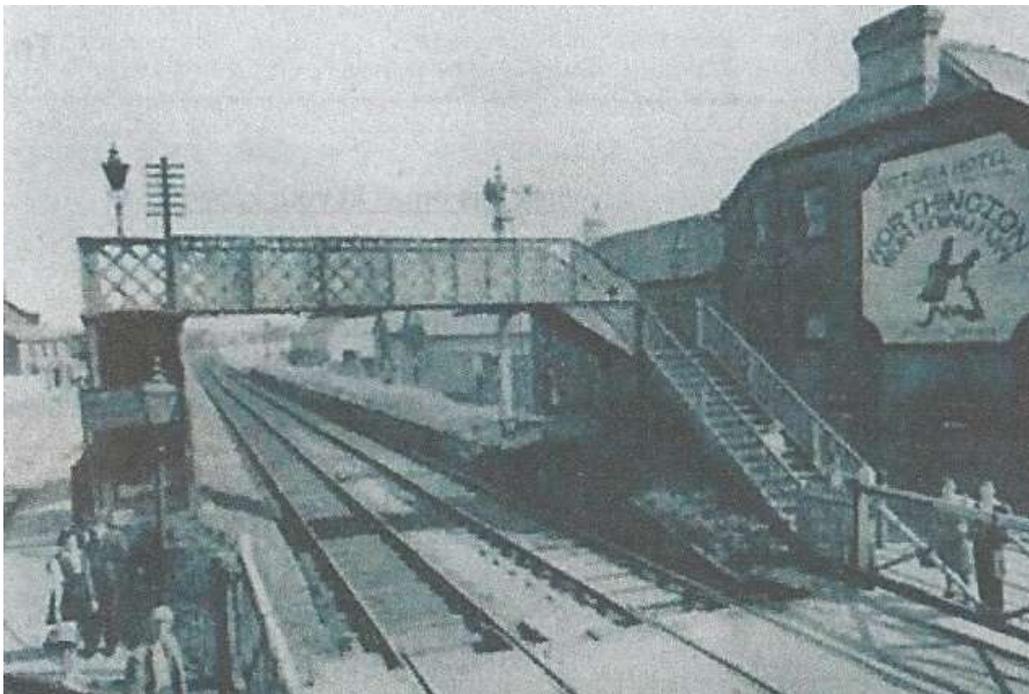
### G.W.R. CO. TO ASSIST: MANAGER'S LETTER.

It was stated some time ago that there was a likelihood of important railway developments at Porthcawl, which would add to the growing popularity of this seaside resort.

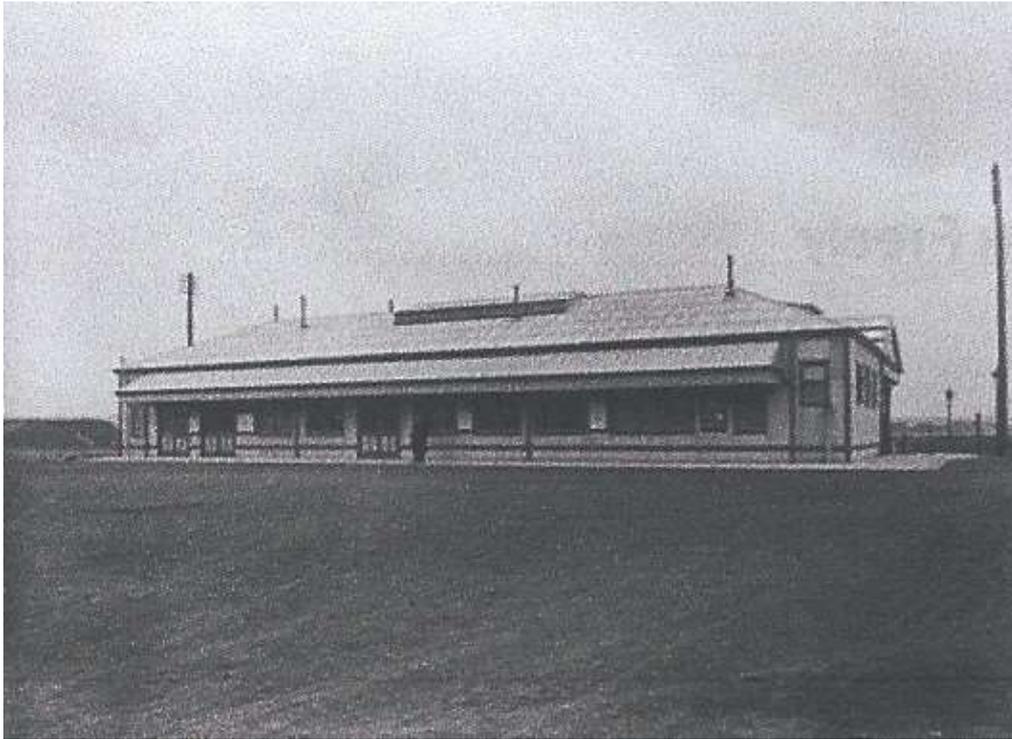
In connection with this matter the following letter has been received by Mr. R. E. Jones, Swansea, from Mr. J. C. Inglis, general manager of the G.W.R. Co.:—  
"I am in receipt of and am much obliged for to hear what you are able to say as to the developments which are taking place at Porthcawl, and which it is hoped will continue. There is no reason to doubt that the Company will assist in the encouragement of this development so far as they are able and reasonably can do. Your suggestions and proposals shall receive the careful consideration by the company's responsible officers before any decision can be arrived at. You may, however, be assured that the most sympathetic considerations shall be afforded to your proposals, and again thanking you for your letter, I am, faithfully, James C. Inglis."



The pedestrian bridge and signal box at 'The gates' circa 1916 (Reproduced from *Society & Science Picture Library Prints*).



The pedestrian bridge and the level crossing at 'The gates' circa 1950's (Reproduced from *Getty Images*).



**Porthcawl's new railway station in 1916  
(Reproduced from *Society & Science Picture  
Library Prints*).**



**The signal box and railway lines at 'The gates',  
looking towards the sea circa 1950's  
(Reproduced from *WalesOnline*).**

## ‘Taking Visitors’

Having convinced GWR to maintain and improve railway links to the town, Porthcawl Chamber of Trade and PUDC did not rest on their laurels.

Some resident householders in Porthcawl, such as those in Marine Terrace, were already offering accommodation to visitors by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Porthcawl Chamber of Trade and PUDC were fully aware of this and encouraged the practice as it was in line with what R E Jones and others envisioned when advocating increased choices for Porthcawl’s holidaymakers.

The upshot was the growth of a virtual tourist ‘cottage industry’ in the town which, in local parlance, was referred to euphemistically as ‘taking visitors’. The phrase was much-used and understood throughout Porthcawl to indicate that someone took in paying guests during the summer season. In fact, ‘taking visitors’ was a familiar term in Porthcawl until the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Such was its success, ‘taking visitors’ became ‘...the main industry of the parish...’ (Higgins, 1968:155).

Where Porthcawl is concerned, ‘taking visitors’ can either be interpreted as a reflection of the town’s characteristic entrepreneurial spirit or simply a means of staving off economic hardship. In reality, it was probably a bit of both. Certainly at a practical level, this informal, populist approach to holiday accommodation offered additional choice to holidaymakers on economically friendly terms. At the same time, it was a source of income for private householders before the Welfare State came into being in 1948, although the practice outlived the inception of the Welfare State. Municipally, too, ‘taking visitors’ added extra resilience to Porthcawl’s tourist market, reinforcing its ability to weather economic downturns until the latter quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century when there was a social revolution in holiday habits in the UK

Despite its benefits, ‘taking visitors’ was not without its drawbacks. Not all private householders were welcoming, nor were all

visitors respectful of other people’s property. Anecdotally, there were reports of, on the one hand, restrictive conditions and overcharging and, on the other, of bad debts and anti-social, disruptive behaviour.

‘Taking visitors’ was significant in other, mostly unrecorded, respects. In Wales at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, especially in south Wales, the working lives of Welsh women were dominated by the needs of coal production and heavy industry. There was little opportunity for them to engage in waged employment and, compared to other parts of the UK, the number of Welsh women in waged employment lagged behind the rest of the country, and actually fell in the inter-war years. Moreover, as well as specific regional economic circumstances, traditional Welsh cultural modes, norms and values determined the general belief that, ‘...women’s place was in the home...’ (Beddoe, 2001:182).

The Edwardian home was a feminine domain, albeit a physically demanding one. It was also a period when women were disenfranchised, largely invisible in public life and, often, the expectation was that they would be kept by spouses and/or male relatives. Married women seeking paid work were mostly unwelcome in the employment market and single women faced the marriage bar if they wanted to get married or promoted. Consequently, it was an uphill battle for women to earn their own income (Beddoe, 2001).

As most, though not all, domestic households were run by women, any official endorsement of ‘taking visitors’, tacit or otherwise, legitimised the practice, thereby empowering the woman of the house whilst offering her a route to independent means. Whatever their reasons, at a time of widespread economic hardship, many local women embraced the fresh opportunities presented by Porthcawl’s formative tourist and leisure market. Indeed, in later life, many of the older generation of women in Porthcawl spoke very proudly of how they ‘kept the wolf from the door’, added to the family income, possibly educated their children, bought ‘big ticket items’ or even paid off the mortgage by ‘taking visitors’.

## Hotels

Willing or not, private households could not cater for all Porthcawl's visitors and holidaymakers.

Fortunately, Porthcawl was well-endowed with hotels and/or boarding/guest houses to accommodate visitors and holidaymakers to the town on a more formal basis. As well as the Marine and Esplanade Hotels which opened on the Waterfront in 1886 and 1887 respectively, John Elias, along with others, ran Sea Bank House, later the Seabank Hydro Hotel, as an unlicensed private hotel and the Pier Hotel was operational by 1911. Today, it is rumoured that plans are afoot to renovate the Pier Hotel on the Esplanade but there is nothing tangible as yet.

In 'Old Porthcawl' there was the Porthcawl Hotel which was, and still is, situated on the corner of John Street and Dock Street. The Porthcawl Hotel opened in 1884, was extended in 1891 and had a central role in the formation of the Royal Porthcawl Golf Club (RPGC). Stage II, Part A of *Porthcawl: Much More Than Meets The Eye (2020): pages 48-52* provides further detail about the involvement of RPGC in the Porthcawl Hotel.

Those of a Temperance or Sabbatarian disposition had the additional option of staying in a Temperance Hotel/guest house. At that point in time, it is thought that Porthcawl had 3 Temperance Hotels/guest houses – Mrs White's Family Hotel on the corner of James Street and John Street which is now the site of Lloyd's Bank, together with Evans' Temperance Restaurant and boarding house which was next to the Pier Hotel on the Esplanade (Higgins, 1968; David, 2006).

Comley's Temperance Hotel in John Street made up the trio of Temperance options. Henry Beeche Comley originally had a background in Newport's grocery trade and became one of Porthcawl's prominent early developers. Like R E Jones, he came to Porthcawl when it was a functioning commercial port and, also like R E Jones, he was a member of both Porthcawl Chamber of Trade and PUDC. He later

took an active part in the launch of the Porthcawl branch of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) (Comley, 2013).

In 1883, H B Comley leased the land at the southern end of John Street from Mary Brogden and began developing a Coffee House on the site. He subsequently sold the lease to William Roberts who expanded the venture, naming it the Porthcawl Hotel, on its completion. As the Porthcawl Hotel was a licensed concern, H B Comley had turned his attention to creating a Temperance Hotel, next to the Porthcawl Hotel, which, until recently, was 'Streets Night Club' but is now closed. At the time of writing this report, the Porthcawl Hotel is in the process of being turned into a mixed retail and residential development (Higgins, 1968; Comley, 2013).

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, 'Old Porthcawl' also had several hotels on the eastern side of town. Aside from the many beer-houses, public houses and hostelrys, some of which offered rooms for paying guests, there were also several hotels in New Road. For example, in addition to the Victoria Hotel and the General Picton, there was, and still are, the Prince of Wales, the Queen's Hotel, the Mackworth Arms and the Brogden Hotel, now the New Brogden Hotel (Morgan, 1987).

There was also the Westward Ho, which was situated on the western corner where Esplanade Avenue meets the Esplanade. It is believed to have been built as a small hotel/guest house in the early 1900's during the Brogden era. In style, design and building materials, it resembles the now demolished Esplanade Hotel and the initial stage of John Street's development. Somewhat controversially, it was converted into apartments at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

The next section of the report will cover the Business, Retail and Commerce aspects of Porthcawl life up to and including WWII. It will, accordingly, deal with the development of South Road and John Street and the roads immediately surrounding it.

ADVERTISEMENTS.



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Restaurant, Temperance Hotel,  
*AND BOARDING HOUSE,*  
**PORTHCAWL.**

*Highly recommended as the Best and Cheapest House for the  
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INCLUSIVE TERMS FOR BOARD AND APARTMENTS.

DINING ROOM TO SEAT 250 PERSONS.

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BUNS, CAKES, PASTRY, &c., made on the Premises.

Meat and Fruit Pies made to Order.

Families supplied with BREAD, CAKES, PASTRY, &c., daily.

Advertisement for Comley's Restaurant,  
Temperance Hotel (Reproduced from *Porthcawl  
as a Health Resort*, Hunter 1892).

## **Business, Retail and Commerce**

### **South Road, John Street and Well Street**

#### **The Origins of South Road**

**B**efore the development of John Street, most 19<sup>th</sup> Century activities in Porthcawl centred around The Square, near Porthcawl Dock. Further information about The Square in Porthcawl can be found in Stage I of *Porthcawl: Much More Than Meets The Eye: pages 68-70 refer.*

Another important hub of activity revolved around the town's first railway station at the southern end of the pre-industrial South Lane (later to become South Road). As the name suggests, South Lane was initially a rough track or path that flowed in a southerly direction from its junction with Locks Lane on the outskirts of Nottage Village. It continued over the sandy open ground of Pickets Lease to the, then, more sparsely populated coastline of the Port Cawl promontory. In all probability, South Road followed the 'way' of South Lane and was more fully developed after the passage of the Newton Inclosure Award of 1864 (Higgins, 1967; Morgan, 1987).

#### **The Development of South Road**

**B**y 1833, Windmill House and Rock House at the northern end of South Lane had already been built and the arrival of the DLPR in 1828 also stimulated further development. For example, housing developed in Philadelphia Road from 1847 onwards and a beer-house where South Road meets John Street, morphed into the Royal Oak Public House after the Inner Dock Basin opened in 1867. The later opening of Porthcawl's first railway station at the southern end of South Road in 1876 was a cue for yet more intermittent development (Higgins, 1968; Morgan, 1987).

On the eastern side of South Road is a dressed stone wall, similar to those found in Dock Street and the Harbourside area, which, it is said, is the remains of the wall that originally divided the roadway from the

railway, now the A4106. It is understood that the boundary wall contains many examples of the characteristic 2-hole tramway sleeper stones that formed part of the old DLPR (Morgan, 1996)

Moving northwards towards Nottage village on South Road's western side, are Victorian cottages, one of which was once occupied by a locally well-known cobbler's shop but is presently available to let. Further on, next to the Sea Horse Public House (once the New Inn) is another row of Victorian cottages opposite a terrace of late Victorian, stone-clad villas with decorative brick dressing on the eastern side of the road.

There is some scattered modern infilling in South Road such as the block of flats built in 1977 on its western side to replace Porthcawl's old Council Offices. On the other side of the road is a sequence of Victorian/Edwardian detached and semi-detached, stone-clad houses, again with exterior decorative brick dressing. Midway along South Road's western side, is a run of imposing 3-storeyed villas, some with red-brick exteriors, dating from the Edwardian period. Nearby, on the corner of South Road and South Place is Southlands, a large, detached red-brick Edwardian house with decorative external features standing in its own walled grounds which is now a funeral parlour. Further along, is a row of 4 Victorian cottages that are believed to have been converted from an earlier building and, opposite these is a run of late Victorian/Edwardian stone-clad villas and Bethel Chapel which was built in 1865 (Higgins, 1968; Morgan, 1987).

Towards the northern end of South Road, is Fitzhamon Road, the *de facto* entrance to the Forty-Acre estate, which was built in the 1970's and leads indirectly to the coast. A gated housing development of 3-storeyed, semi-detached town-houses that was recently built on the vacant site of McConnell's building yard is next and, on the other side, between Windmill House and Fairview Tyres, there are 2 bungalows and 2 pairs of semi-detached houses, probably dating from the immediate post-WWII era or perhaps the 1950's.

## South Road in August 2019



South Road at its intersection with Fenton Place and South Road next to the Seahorse Public House.



Looking southwards towards John Street next to the old stone wall that once separated South Road from the railway line.

**South Road in August 2019 cont'd**



**The Royal Oak**



**The Seahorse**



**Southlands**



**Villas in South Road**



**Victorian/Edwardian  
villas in South Road**

## South Road Today

South Road and the surrounding area have undergone considerable change since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. These days, it is a busy thoroughfare with all the trappings of a modern urban environment such as lighting, drainage and road markings. Today, South Road's 21<sup>st</sup> Century streetscape is that of a diverse, characterful ribbon development that reflects the evolution and growth of Porthcawl from the coming of the DLPR in 1828 until the present day.

Like its predecessor, South Lane, South Road remains a main route southwards from Nottage and the northern edge of Porthcawl, to the coast and Porthcawl town centre. While South Road has an open, rather rural air at its northern end, when it reaches Fitzhamon Road, the road curves and narrows quite sharply and, from there, takes on a more enclosed quality.

Where there was once open farmland, the wedge of land, west of South Road bordered by Locks Lane, has been urbanised and is now occupied by Nottage Primary School, the individually designed houses and bungalows of the Forty-Acre Estate, Porthcawl's Squash Club, the town's rugby pitch and clubhouse and the Army and Air Cadet bases.

On its eastern side, South Road is bordered by housing and the A4106, which runs from Nottage roundabout to Porthcawl town centre and the Eastern Promenade, and follows the now defunct railway line. On its western side, near to where it meets John Street, 'Old Porthcawl' roads such as South Place, Fenton Place and Philadelphia Road feed in to South Road.

As a result, there has been a marked increase in the level of movement in this public space since the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Whereas South Lane was once used by horse-drawn vehicles such as pony-and-traps and farm vehicles, South Road is now a main road into the town centre as well part of a bus route. All this adds to the constant flow of traffic between Porthcawl town centre, 'Old Porthcawl', the

Forty-Acre site, Nottage Primary School and Nottage village. Unfortunately, the absence of a pavement at one point together with the narrowing of the road in several places, creates difficulties for pedestrians and vehicular traffic alike.

## Porthcawl Conservation Area

### John Street

Porthcawl Conservation Area was initially designated to be an area of special architectural or historic interest in August 1973. In addition to other areas of Porthcawl such as Harbourside and Dock Street, it consisted of the whole of Well Street and John Street up to and including the Porthcawl Hotel on its eastern elevation and up to the present Welsh Shop on its western elevation. When the boundaries of Porthcawl Conservation Area were extended northwards on 11<sup>th</sup> August 2016, it also embraced Hillsboro Place, James Street, and John Street up to its intersection with Lias Road.

### The Origins of John Street, Well Street and Lias Road

After the passing of the Newton Inclosure Award (1864) and before his marriage to Mary Caroline Beete in 1874, James Brogden bought 30 acres of Pickets Lease for and on behalf of the family firm of John Brogden and Sons. James had already joined up the dots for his imaginary new town of Porthcawl and a large part of his purchase of Pickets Lease was earmarked for its principle business, commercial and retail sector. In fact, as early as 1867, he named the planned main thoroughfare for the proposed new town, 'John Street' in honour of his father, John Brogden. Reportedly, the aim of John Street was to connect The Square, Porthcawl's earliest settlement, with its first railway station which opened in 1876 at the southern end of South Road (Higgins, 1968; Morgan, 1987).

Like South Road, the development of John Street and Lias Road is the built environment's visible response to

Porthcawl's changing role and function from 19<sup>th</sup> Century working port to 20<sup>th</sup> Century seaside resort. In common with much of 'Old Porthcawl', each street was conceived by James Brogden to accord with his masterplan for Porthcawl, the overall aim being to create a high-end seaside resort parallel to its function as an industrial and maritime port.

## Well Street

**W**ell Street is a short road running parallel to the Esplanade at the southern end of John Street. The road was integral to James Brogden's plan to link John Street and Mary Street which, along with the rest of his scheme, remained at the planning stage prior to his marriage to Mary. Indeed, Well Street was pivotal to James Brogden's scheme for his new town as '...it was proposed to expand in all directions...' (Morgan, 1987:48).

As the name implies, Well Street was so named as a water-well had been sunk behind the site of the planned Esplanade Hotel. James Brogden's fellow early developers, George Dement and Joe Lill, were responsible for Well Street's development which began in 1867 and continued throughout James' absence in New Zealand until his return in 1874 (Higgins, 1968; Morgan, 1987).

By then, houses and shops had been built in Well Street including on each corner of its intersection with John Street. The house and shop on the southern corner of Well Street, (better known as Sidoli's Café, but now Café Fresco) became Porthcawl's first post and telegraph office, while the building on the opposite northern corner of Well Street became James Pearce's Commerce House and, eventually, Hockings, which sold toys and ephemera. The building was destroyed by fire in 1984 and, when rebuilt, became an opticians shop (Higgins, 1968; Morgan, 1987).

In typical 'Old Porthcawl' fashion, not all the structures in Well Street were meant to be commercial outlets, though all have since been converted for retail, business or

commercial purposes. That apart, although they vary in height, the buildings in Well Street have a unity of time, scale and place and a similarity in architectural style and design to Railway Terrace, now Hillsboro Place. For example, they are built as terraces in a Victorian villa style, have steep gables, slate-roofs and no front gardens. More details of Hillsboro Place are in Stage I of *Porthcawl: Much More Than Meets The Eye*: pages 73-81 refer.

### **The Victorian View**

*Porthcawl now has that which adds to the comfort of visitors – a good number of first-class shops.....My own experience...and only surprise is that such a number of good establishments can keep going, especially so in wet weather...You have your choice of two or three first-class establishments, quite stores in themselves, while there is an excellent supply of poultry, eggs and butter whenever required....Not forgetting the very popular universal provider, Sampson, who sells everything, is most obliging, agreeable, and willing, and when not busy will oblige you with a musical selection, either on harmonium, violin, or euphonium*

Hunter, 1892: 2-3

## Lias Road

**L**ias Road is a comparatively short road linking Church Place with John Street at its northern end where the Wesleyan Methodist Church, now Trinity Church, was built. There are surprisingly few official records about Lias Road, although the Ordnance Survey (OS) map of 1876 does reveal the presence of a track or 'way' leading past the National School built in 1873 on land donated by James Brogden. It is also known that Lias Road was named after John Elias, another early Porthcawl developer and contemporary of James and Mary Brogden (OS, 1867; Higgins, 1968; Morgan, 1987).

In view of James Brogden's involvement in the creation of both the National School

and the Wesleyan Methodist Church, it is likely that Lias Road was part of James Brogden's original new town plan for Porthcawl from the start. At any rate, the later OS map of 1897 shows Lias Road to be at a more advanced stage and the 1911 Census records the presence of several residential buildings (OS, 1897; Office for National Statistics (ONS), 1911; Higgins, 1968; Morgan, 1987).

As a roadway, Lias Road performs an important practical role in Porthcawl as it is a convenient access point to the town centre from northern Porthcawl and places in western Porthcawl such as Westbourne Place and Suffolk Place. Since the outset of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, it has also become a busy part of the town's, commercial, business and shopping sector in its own right. It has, for example, a 2-storey car park and is the location of retail outlets such as the Co-operative Supermarket and Lloyds Chemist, as well as being a stopping point on several bus routes.

### John Street

**M**ost of the built environment of John Street was developed later than Well Street and, compared to the sometimes frenetic pace of building in the rest of 'Old Porthcawl', John Street evolved slowly. Maps of the period between 1875 until 1900 show John Street to be partially developed and it was not until 1914, on the eve of the Great War, that it neared completion. One effect of this staggered growth is that John Street has a more varied architectural streetscape than Well Street.

The nature of Porthcawl's trading environment was possibly part of the reason for John Street's cautious start. Although Porthcawl's tourist market was beginning to flourish at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, it was still nascent and, to a great extent, as at the mercy of the weather as it is today. Furthermore, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, although pay and working conditions were improving, disposable incomes remained low for many people. So too, was the downtime of most of the working population. A 6-day working week

was commonplace and people had fewer holidays than their modern counterparts

Inevitably, these factors affected Porthcawl's tourist trade and, in economic terms, were not easily compensated for by the size of the local population. For example, in 1881, the resident population of Newton Nottage parish was a mere 1397. In 1891, it had risen to 1758 and by 1911 it had reached 3444. It was not until 1921, 3 years after the end of WWI that the local population had almost doubled in size and increased to 6642 (Higgins, 1968).

Another reason for its hesitant progress is that although James Brogden had envisaged John Street as the focus of Porthcawl's business, retail, commercial activity as early as the 1860's, circumstances beyond the remit of this report prevented his plans coming to fruition. John Street's eventual realisation is down to his wife, Mary. In 1880, she seized the initiative and bought the land first purchased by James Brogden in 1865, made John Street's development a private venture and facilitated its construction (Higgins, 1968; Morgan, 1987).

Although James and Mary Brogden were already heavily involved in building the Marine Hotel, Marine Terrace, the Esplanade and Esplanade Hotel, Mary Brogden lost no time in making a start on John Street. Having acquired the necessary land, first to be developed was its western side and, in 1881, she reserved a prominent site in John Street for the construction of the rock-faced stone Police Station which now houses Porthcawl Museum and Historical Society and Porthcawl Arts Society (Higgins, 1968; Morgan, 1987).

The Old Police Station was designed and built by John Prichard who was also responsible for building the main part of the Grade II Listed Rest Convalescent Home in Rest Bay. Further details of the Rest Convalescent Home in Rest Bay can be found in Stage II, Part A, of *Porthcawl: Much More Than Meets The Eye (2020): pages 36-47 refer.*

The Old Police Station was first Listed as a Grade II structure, CADW ID: 11354 in 1989, and amended in 1998, and is now valued as a well-preserved civic building (British Listed Buildings, 1998).

Next on Mary Brogden's John Street agenda were 2 houses numbered 38 and 40 that were built next to the Police Station in 1882. They began their trading life as J M Walters and R Sampson Son & Co. Walters is still run by family descendants of the original owners and is trading today as Walters Shoe Shop. In May 1882, Mary Brogden further developed the western side of John Street by releasing a plot on which numbers 10 and 12 were built which eventually became a grocer and a draper (Higgins, 1968; Morgan, 1987).

In 1883, Mary Brogden turned her attention to the eastern side of John Street and released more parcels of land, including those mentioned earlier for the Porthcawl Hotel and Comley's Temperance Hotel. In 1888, midway along John Street, on the corner of where it meets James Street, she released additional land for the construction of Mrs White's Temperance Hotel and 2 adjoining shops. The site of Mrs White's Hotel is now occupied by Lloyds Bank. Still on the eastern side of John Street, Mary Brogden leased more land in 1894, for what became a sequence of shops, one of which became John Dare's first shop in John Street. That building is now the Porthcawl branch of the YMCA (Higgins, 1968).

The Brogden influence on John Street effectively ended in 1896 when Mary Brogden released plots of land on the western side of John Street on which 4 houses were built. They remained domestic dwellings until circa 1911, but have long since been converted into shops.

By 1900, the retail frontage in John Street extended from the junction of John Street and Dock Street, as far north as James Street linking it to the, then, Railway Terrace (now Hillsboro Place). Even so, John Street's western elevation appears to have retained significant gaps between the 4 houses sited on land released by Mary

Brogden in 1896, and the Wesleyan Methodist Church (now Trinity Church) on the corner of John Street and Lias Road that was built on land assigned to the Wesleyan Methodists by James Brogden in 1871 (Higgins, 1968; Morgan, 1987).



**Coney Beach stuntman with C Bragg, the Butcher in Porthcawl circa early 1950's (Courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon and Mrs Mary Daley).**



**John Street circa 1910 (Reproduced from *Old Photos in Porthcawl in Glamorgan*).**



**Barclays Bank when opened in 1935 (Reproduced from *Barclays Group Archive*, 2019).**

## John Street in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, John Street entered a further stage of development, one that was to mirror Porthcawl's growth as a seaside resort between 1911 and the outbreak of WWII in 1939. During that period, there was a spurt in local population numbers though, from 1921, Porthcawl's population plateaued and remained relatively static until the end of the 1930's. Figures are not available for 1938, but in 1931, Porthcawl's population was 6447 whereas in 1941, it was estimated to be 9314 (Higgins, 1968).

It was not only Porthcawl's population that had changed between 1900 and 1939. Transport links had improved, and the town's commercial, retail and business sector was boosted by a flourishing tourist trade which, together with a stable local population, supported a growing economy. The retail function of John Street grew stronger as a result and the local economy expanded sufficiently to sustain further investment and expansion. In such circumstances, owners of some buildings in John Street and Well Street were encouraged to convert their domestic residences into business, commercial or retail outlets (Higgins, 1968; Morgan, 1987).

These shifts were reflected in the streetscape of John Street. Its early architecture was Victorian in design with 3-storey, stone or stone-clad buildings with steep gables, decorative brickwork and barge boards. One outcome of the later commercial and retail expansion was the infilling and reappointment of shop-fronts of some of John Street's existing units. The next tranche of business, commercial and retail developments, north of James Street, was more aspirational. Those buildings had a clear identity and built form with smart, formal, active frontages and pseudo-classical facades with decorative external features that reflected a higher level of confidence in Porthcawl's future as a seaside resort

Time and space preclude itemising all the developments in John Street as the 20<sup>th</sup> Century turnover was high. For example, in each stage of growth, some larger shops were sub-divided, there was some infilling and mergers and relocations in Porthcawl's business, commerce and retail sector. Having said that, there are some changes and aspects of special interest and importance which highlight Porthcawl characteristics and the prevailing social and historical trends of the time. This report will, therefore, provide an overview of these developments and detail them by generally moving northwards in John Street to its intersection with South Road.

## The Public Conveniences

One such example of a major change and innovation of the period was the public conveniences in John Street. In 1924, in what signified a radical recognition of public health needs, the tourist-aware PUDC provided a purpose-built public toilet facility in the town centre next to the, then, Police Station. The public conveniences were configured with the ladies and disabled public conveniences front and centre and gentlemen to the rear. They were, and remain, a much-valued public amenity.

Moreover, the public conveniences introduced another architectural style and design into John Street. In contrast to the surrounding buildings, the building housing the public conveniences was built in an Art Deco style that chimes with the present Seabank and Grand Pavilion. The exterior of the building is painted rough-cast to the front and side with mullioned doors and windows while the structure's interior retains most of the original *accoutrements*. Please see *Part A, of Porthcawl: Much More Than Meets The Eye (2019) pages 84-86 and 93-110*, respectively for more information about the Seabank and the Grand Pavilion on the Waterfront.

The public conveniences are valued as a rare, mostly unaltered example of its type and Listed as a Grade II structure, CADW: ID 11355 in 1989 and amended in 1998 (British Listed Buildings, 1998).

For many years during the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the public conveniences in John Street were highly rated in the 'Loo of the Year Awards'. More recently, both the building and its interior fell into a serious state of neglect. However, at the start of 2019, Porthcawl Town Council (PTC) acquired responsibility for the building and the public conveniences in John Street and it is understood that plans are afoot to sympathetically restore the facility.

### **The Co-operative Society**

**W**hilst not a Listed building, another example that characterises shopping in pre-WWII Porthcawl, is the old Co-op building halfway up western John Street, almost opposite a branch of Costa Coffee.

The Co-operative movement is based on the central tenets of thrift and mutual assistance and was particularly strong in south Wales at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The Co-operative Society, or 'Co-op' as it was known, was founded in Porthcawl by Mr and Mrs William Rees who, on moving to the town in 1917, discovered it had no Co-op. Both were founder members of the Mid-Rhondda Society in addition to the Rhondda Society, so they decided to start a Co-operative Society in the town (Lazell, 2009).

The Co-op building was situated on the corner northwards from a run of shops that included Boots the Chemist and Peglar's Grocers, and helped fill a large gap on John Street's western side. Local sources recall that the building occupied the ground and first floors of the whole corner building and later encompassed what is now New Look and the RSPCA charity shop, next to the old Post Office, now Coral Racing Ltd.

The Porthcawl Co-op later merged with the very active Pontycymmer Co-operative Society in 1927 and was the nearest thing Porthcawl had to a department store in the pre-WWII era. Anecdotal accounts recall that the Co-op was always busy. Vegetables, meat and other foodstuffs were sold on the ground floor, while clothing and furniture was displayed on the

first floor, although at a later stage some clothing was also sold on the ground floor. A visit to the first floor was via a steep flight of wooden stairs that echoed loudly when trodden upon, and was a real occasion for excitement as it housed the more expensive goods.

In what was perhaps the first shopper's loyalty scheme, Co-op members were given a dividend or 'divi' in return for purchases. Dull, grey, metal discs represented the number of divi's earned by customers on what they had bought and were distributed from a kiosk under the stairs. Anecdotal accounts recall that there was always a long queue!

The arrival of different business models put paid to the divi and it is believed that the Co-op ceased trading from its corner building in the early 1970's. The exterior of the old Co-op building has been modernised and repurposed several times since and is unrecognisable from when it was first built. Local sources recount that, originally, the 3-storeyed building had a side entrance and gables plus canted bay windows on the first floor. Now it has a modern, flat-fronted shop frontage but it is still one of the largest structures in John Street. Since the Co-op left the premises, the building has had various identities as an indoor market, a cut-price clothes outlet, and is now a branch of Poundland.

### **Retail, Commerce and Business in 1938**

**S**hopping habits have undergone massive change since pre-WWII days. Then, refrigeration was a luxury only possessed by a privileged few and most households relied on larders for cold food storage. Shopping was more often than not, a time-consuming and necessary daily task. Shops were more differentiated in the goods they sold and the services they offered than today, and shopping required social interaction, orientation and a sense of place. And, as few people were car-owners, the cost and inconvenience of travel and getting purchases home, made shopping a mostly local affair.

In 1938, before the outbreak of WWII, Porthcawl town centre had a wide variety of shops, some of which were part of retail chains such as the Maypole, Peglar's Stores and Boots the Chemist, though the majority of shops were independently owned and run. A rough breakdown of the shops and the consumer goods they sold reveals that, in 1938, there were 16 clothing and footwear outlets in John Street and Lias Road, 7 butchers and fishmongers, 9 newsagents, confectioners and/or tobacconists, 6 bakeries and dairies and, including the Co-op, 10 grocers and/or fruiterers. A list of the shops in John Street and Lias Road, but not Well Street, in 1938 can be found in Appendix A.

### The Post Office

Porthcawl first had a Crown Post Office and Telegraph Office on the corner of John Street and Well Street in the 1860's. But such was the growth of retail, commerce and business in Porthcawl in the ensuing 52 years that, in 1912, a larger, purpose-built Crown Post Office was opened in John Street, filling another space further down its western side. The Post Office was situated a few doors down from the Co-op and opposite the soon to be opened National Provincial Bank of England on John Street's eastern elevation. When first constructed, the Post Office was a plain, but imposing, 3-storeyed building with a flat-fronted exterior consisting of a wide brick frontage, architrave over the doorway, a decorative brickwork archway over the side entrance, and stone mullions surrounding the windows (Awen Cultural Trust, 2019).

Its interior was as impressive as it had glass screens atop long, solid wooden counters. To the continuing detriment of Porthcawl town centre, the authorities deemed it necessary to close its Crown Post Office and relocate it within the Spar convenience store in the early 1990's. Since the Post Office vacated the John Street building, it has been converted into a bookmakers - Coral Racing Ltd, part of the Ladbrooke group. Apart from colourful signage over the windows, the exterior of the building is largely unaltered.

### Banking

Another indication of the growth of Porthcawl's local economy and how important Porthcawl's commerce, retail and business sector had become in the pre-WWII period, was the number of banking outlets that opened in the town.

A branch of the National Provincial Bank of England opened in John Street in July 1908, initially operating as an agency to its Bridgend branch. Finding trade brisk in Porthcawl, in 1913 the bank moved to new premises on the eastern side of John Street, next to the present Bon Marche, and became a fully independent branch in 1914. There it remained until the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, becoming part of the Union of London & Smiths Bank in 1918, thereafter the Westminster Bank to form National Westminster Bank (Nat West) in 1970 (Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) Heritage Hub, 2013).

Lloyds Bank arrived in Porthcawl in 1919 and positioned itself on the corner of John Street and James Street on the site previously occupied by Mrs White's Temperance Hotel where it remains today. In 1935, the National Provincial and Lloyds Banks were joined by Barclays Bank which opened a branch in John Street on its western elevation, next to Wesley Methodist Church, now Trinity Church. It was followed by Midland Bank, later to become part of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC) in 1992, on the eastern side of John Street at the corner with James Street, opposite Lloyds Bank.

The banking sector has been subject to many mergers, takeovers, name changes and closures since pre-WWI days. Regrettably, Porthcawl has had its share of closures as HSBC closed in 2014, Nat West in 2018, while Barclays Bank shut its doors in 2019. At the time of writing, the buildings that housed Nat West and Barclays remain up for sale.



**Mrs White's Temperance Hotel, circa 1900  
(Reproduced from *People's Collection Wales*).**



**John Street looking southwards. Lloyd's Bank  
on the corner of James Street in August 2019.**



John Street looking northwards circa 1950's with Woolworths on the right (Courtesy of Wayne Stainthorpe, Porthcawl Museum and Historical Society).



The Rock Hotel circa 1900 (Reproduced from the *People's Collection Wales*).

## The British Restaurant

In WWII, imports of food supplies were seriously imperilled and the UK's agricultural production alone was insufficient to feed the nation. As a result, a lot of official attention was paid to the national diet and how and what people ate on the Home Front whilst hostilities lasted.

Before the outbreak of WWII in 1939, there was extensive research into the requirements of a nutritious diet and its relationship to good health which was motivated by the poverty, hardship and ill-health experienced during the Great Depression and Hungry Thirties. During WWII, the wartime Ministry of Food implemented many of the research findings and, mindful of the need to maintain the nation's health, ensured that adequate levels of food were fairly distributed amongst the population. Accordingly, cookery and food education programmes disseminated dietary information, encouraging people to maximise the nutritional value of the food they ate. Rationing was also introduced in the UK in January 1940, and did not finally end until 1954, when cheese, fats and meat came off ration (Norman, 2007).

'British Restaurants' was a wartime dietary initiative intended to protect and sustain the UK's health and well-being. They were so-named by (later 'Sir') Winston Churchill and were created throughout the UK to supplement the frugal, often tedious, rationing allowance. The Restaurants were run by local committees as non-profit making concerns and based in spare premises, church halls and canteens. Whilst very Spartan, British Restaurants were universally popular and provided nutritious meals for about 1/6 in old money terms, equivalent to about 7p today.

In response to public demand, a British Restaurant opened in Porthcawl in July 1942 and was located in a large retail outlet, in what is now the Costa Coffee shop on the eastern side of John Street. Its ceremonial opening was performed by the Chief Divisional Food Officer, (later 'Sir') Thomas G Jones, KBE (Mansley, 1994).

The British Restaurant in Porthcawl was very successful to the extent that '...arrangements had to be made to control the queues waiting outside. Later in 1942, it was agreed that teas and suppers should also be served, partly to make up for the loss of visitors who had patronised the Restaurant during the summer...' (Mansley, 1994: 13)

When the British Restaurant closed in Porthcawl in the aftermath of WWII, the premises became a furniture shop during the 1940's, and later the Clock Shop sometime in the 1970's or early 1980's. The shop remained empty for a long period, before reopening as a Costa Coffee Shop circa 2012.

## The Rock Hotel

Moving northwards on the western side of John Street, a little further past Trinity Church is the Rock Hotel at number 98. The 'Rock', as it is called in Porthcawl, is situated on the corner of John Street and Victoria Road, now Victoria Avenue, and is the only public house in John Street.

Until Porthcawl Dock opened in 1828, there were no public houses in the town. Thereupon, several sprang up in the dockside area to cater for the thirst of men working in its dust-laden atmosphere. As Porthcawl grew, more public houses, taverns and beer-houses opened, especially after the Inner Dock Basin opened in 1867 (Morgan, 1987).

The arrival of Porthcawl's first railway station in South Road in 1876, sparked the unveiling of several inns in its vicinity such as the Royal Oak and the Seahorse, once the New Inn, in South Road. Another was the Rock Hotel, though it is believed that the Rock began existence as a beer-house and the building was initially called the Victoria Inn, then the Victoria Hotel. However, that concern later started trading from a site at the top of nearby Station Hill taking the name of Victoria Hotel with it. In order to avoid confusion, the original building in John Street was renamed the Rock Hotel (Morgan, 1987).

The Rock was built in the late Victorian era. Old photographs show a slate-roofed building with a flat-fronted façade, no external decorative features, a centrally placed doorway and 6 sash windows. The Rock has a 'cellar drop' or 'beer drop' embedded in the pavement outside which may be a throwback to its days as a beer-house. Local sources recall occasions in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century when brewer's drays were parked outside the Rock while beer was unloaded into the 'beer drop'.

External examination of the run of retail outlets of which the Rock is part suggests that the original building was larger than shown in early photographs and has been sub-divided. For instance, the roofline extends over 3 retail outlets with a seemingly shared chimney stack between 2 of the 3 shops in the row. The **Society** also understands that the rear of the 3 retail outlets share the same building line.

Although there have been some cosmetic and structural changes since it was first opened, the exterior of the Rock is recognisably the same as that photographed circa 1900. The building has survived 2 World Wars, the Great Depression and the Hungry Thirties and, while it has gone up-market from its supposed beer-house origins, the Rock retains a loyal following and is a popular venue in Porthcawl.

## The Cinemas

### The Coliseum

**H**ollywood and the Silver Screen came to Porthcawl in 1912 in the form of the Coliseum Cinema, known locally as the 'Col'. At the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, film-going was a new kind of leisure activity and it did not take long to arrive in Porthcawl. According to the *Kinematograph Year Book of 1931*, the Col had 1 screen, seated 450 people and was owned by George Beynon and Sons. It was situated at numbers 66 to 68 on the western side of John Street and Frank's General Provisions had a shop integrated into the Col's frontage. Next to the Col was Cloth Hall, run by J E Davies

as a Gents' Outfitters. On the other side, were Boots the Chemist and Peglar's Grocers (Morgan, 1996; Cinema Treasures, 2019)

The building housing the Col has had an interesting, varied existence. In 1916, it was, briefly, a place of worship for the English Independent cause. Originally, their Church stood in New Road on land donated by Mary Brogden. When this was conveyed to the Masonic Hall Co Ltd, worshippers had nowhere to hold their meetings and religious services. The Col, together with Stoneleigh College (please see below) provided temporary bases for the group until a disused skating rink was renovated and converted into Highfield Congregational Church in Highfield Close, which opened in 1918 (Morgan, 1987).

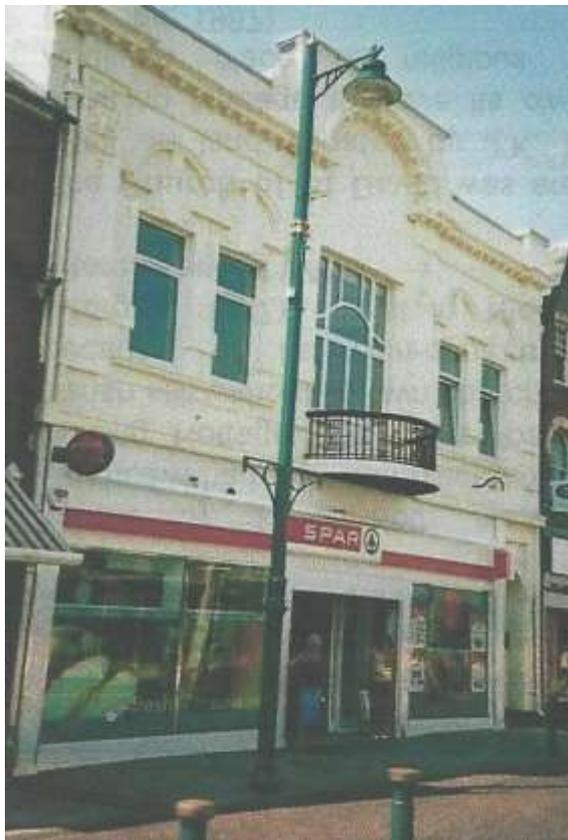
Showing films was almost a side-line for the Col as it was a venue for occasional variety shows and, it is said, also had a café and dance-hall, although that is disputed in some local quarters. PUDC had offices on the first floor and local election results were announced from a small balcony over the entrance to the building. It is believed that Ramsay McDonald addressed the crowds from the balcony in his capacity as Labour Member of Parliament (MP) for the Aberavon Constituency from 1922-1929, which, at that point, represented Porthcawl in the Houses of Parliament (Morgan, 1996).

Reliable anecdotal accounts also recall that after WWII, when post-war rationing was still in force, the first floor of the Col was used as a distribution centre for welfare orange juice and other rationed foodstuffs which were arranged on trestle tables and exchanged for ration coupons.

The Col stayed open as a cinema until May 1968. The building is now a much-used Spar convenience store and post office and its interior is that of a self-service shop. Even so, while the upstairs windows are modern replacements, the exterior has retained its original stucco flourishes and finishes, corbels and moulded façade as well as its famous balcony (Morgan, 1996; Cinema Treasures, 2019).



The 'Col' cinema in John Street circa 1912 (Reproduced from *Old Photos of Porthcawl in Glamorgan*).



The Spar Convenience Store (Reproduced from *Cinema Treasures*, 2019).



Cinema Poster, 1951 (Reproduced from *Around Porthcawl Newton and Nottage*, Morgan, 1996).

## The Casino

The 1930's was the great age of cinema in the UK when picture-going was at the height of its popularity and many people went to the 'pictures' once or, sometimes, twice a week. Early films were in black and white, but the 1930's saw the emergence of films in colour. In addition to being an escapist and leisure form, going to the pictures had a vital social role as, together with the 'wireless' and newspapers, public opinion was informed and shaped by the content of British Pathé News and/or British Movietone News which were, then, integral aspects of the cinema programme.

George Beynon was a pioneer of early cinema-going. As well as being the proprietor of the Col, he also owned the Cosy Corner cinema which opened in 1923 in a recycled WWI aeroplane hangar in, predictably, the Cosy Corner in Harbourside. More information about the Cosy Corner can be found in Stage I, *Porthcawl: Much More Than Meets The Eye: pages 43-45 refer.*

In the 1920's and 1930's, George Beynon and his family took advantage of the cinema-going trend and opened a third cinema, the Casino. The date is unknown but thought to be in the late 1920's. Several local sources state that the Casino had operated as a theatre before becoming a cinema but, to date, the **Society** has been unable to confirm that information.

The Casino was situated on the western side of John Street, at its far northern end, opposite the signal box and level-crossing in John Street and a bus stop located at the top of Station Hill. Soon after Porthcawl's first railway station was opened in 1876, a sequence of Victorian stone-faced buildings was built on the northern corner of what was Victoria Road (now Victoria Avenue) and John Street. From old photographs of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, it seems likely that the Casino was a later infill between those buildings and the, then, Stoneleigh College which will be dealt with below (Morgan, 1996).

The Casino's exterior frontage had a sloping, wide-angled balustrade which conveniently offered shelter to people waiting to get into the cinema. The balustrade above the ground floor of the Casino cinema had a dual purpose and was also used to display posters and publicity material such as giant cardboard effigies related to current films being shown or, advance publicity about future film showings (Morgan, 1996).

The Casino's external appearance was rather unprepossessing but, for its time, it had a state-of-the art interior. Local accounts confirm that the building was bigger than the Col but the **Society** has, as yet, been unable to discover its exact seating capacity. Otherwise, internally, it had a smart glass-fronted box office, a big screen, wide aisles and comfortable upholstered seats and, of course, rather swish velvet stage curtains. Ice-creams and confectionary were available to buy, though probably not during WWII.

The Casino hosted many events such as the Samtampa inquest, political and church gatherings and, it is said, some European film premiéres. Management kept up with new innovations, for example the Casino was one of the first cinemas in the area to show Cinemascope! Crucially, as Porthcawl was a holiday resort, the Casino had the added draw of screening the latest films soon after their release/premiéres (Morgan, 1996; *The Gem*, 2019).

Children's matinées were held each Saturday morning with age-appropriate films such as 'Lassie' and featuring popular cinema heroes like Roy Rogers and Trigger. Although exceptions were made if any film was popular, the Col and the Casino usually changed their programmes twice a week with a different film shown on Sundays (Morgan, 1996; *The Gem*, 2019).

## Stoneleigh College

Stoneleigh College was originally a private residential dwelling that was built towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Later in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, it became known as Victoria House, and

was usually referred to locally as 'Victoria's'. The building was situated at the far northern end of John Street, on its western side, a few doors up from the Rock and near to the Royal Oak Public House in South Road.

It is apparent from photographs of the period that Stoneleigh College was a large, full-height, double-fronted Victorian villa with a dormer window in the roof, steep gables, barge boards, canted bay windows and a hood mould over a centrally placed doorway. Old photographs also reveal that the building stood in its own extensive grounds and had a wide, well-manicured front garden (Morgan, 1996).

The **Society** has been unable to unearth the exact date when the building became Stoneleigh College, but it is believed that Mr and Mrs Brills had already acquired it by 1910 (Morgan, 1987). It is also believed that, prior to that, the Brills had taken over the well-regarded school called the '...Esplanade School for Young Ladies...' (Hunter, 1892: 56).

The Esplanade School for Young Ladies was based on the sea-front and had previously been run by the Misses Jones. The **Society** has been unable to discover whether the Brills transferred that particular school as a going concern, or, whether they created Stoneleigh College as a new enterprise with a different identity. Whatever the case, Stoneleigh College was run by the Brills as a girls' boarding school, at least until 1916.

For a standout building in the main street, there are many gaps in the existing history of the structure housing the Stoneleigh. Some sources maintain that the Stoneleigh was a theatre prior to becoming a cinema whilst others say that, in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the Stoneleigh, as it came to be known, was transformed into Victoria's Night-Club. On the other hand, equally reliable anecdotal accounts maintain that, although they remained separate buildings, the next door structure of the Casino cinema, was linked to Victoria's Night-Club.

## The Stoneleigh Night-Club

In the 1960's, cinema-going lost favour and fell from grace with the advent of TV and rapid advancement of home-based entertainment. The Casino became a casualty of this switch in public taste and closed its doors as a picture-palace in the early 1970's. After a re-vamp, it is said by some that the building became physically attached to Victoria's Night-Club, which was next-door, and became the Stoneleigh Night-Club. The 'Stoneleigh' as it was called locally, opened in 1974 and was run by George Beynon, the elder George's grandson.

Under the younger George Beynon's stewardship, the Stoneleigh was open 7 days a week and became Porthcawl's best known night-spot and cabaret. Events were hosted by a compère, it had a resident band and became the venue for many headline celebrity acts of the time featuring stars such as Tony Christie, Bob Monkhouse, Bruce Forsyth, The Drifters, Bay City Rollers, Tommy Cooper, Slade and Lulu (*The Gem*, 2019).

Changing leisure and recreational habits in the early 1980's again caused a shift in emphasis and, still operating within the leisure context, the Stoneleigh was converted into a disco night-spot complete with dance-floor, audio-visual system, video screens and laser lights. Unfortunately, that too was not enough to sustain audiences. Business declined and the Stoneleigh eventually closed its doors in the late 1980's (*The Gem*, 2019).

Regrettably, a major blaze irreparably damaged both Victoria's and the Stoneleigh in 1989 and the site lay derelict for many years surrounded by ugly hoarding. It was even the subject of a Parliamentary debate until public pressure forced the demolition of the eyesore in 1992. Eventually, the land was reclaimed and in 2006 the site became a block of sheltered accommodation for older people called, appropriately, Stoneleigh Court (*The Gem*, 2019).



Stoneleigh College circa 1910 (Reproduced from *Porthcawl Newton and Nottage*, Morgan, 1987).

ADVERTISEMENTS.

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**High School for Girls**  
(ESPLANADE.)

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Miss SMITH, with Junior Government and Italian.

Pianoforte and Sitar—  
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Good Home for Boarders, with sound Mental and  
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*Pupils Prepared for Examinations. Twenty-five Certificates  
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Air healthy and bracing, highly recommended for delicate Girls.

TERMS ON APPLICATION,  
With References from Parents of present and Ex-pupils.

An advert for Porthcawl High School for Girls, (Reproduced from *Porthcawl as a Health Resort*, Hunter, 1892).



**Stoneleigh Night Club fire 1989**  
(Reproduced from *Around Porthcawl Newton and Nottage*, Morgan, 1996).



**The Casino Cinema circa 1960's/1970's**  
(Reproduced from *Around Porthcawl Newton and Nottage*, Morgan, 1996).

## The Italian Influence

The Italians were a group of incomers that made a significant, long-lasting impact on Porthcawl. During the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, whilst Porthcawl was establishing itself as a seaside resort, waves of immigration from Europe and further afield brought people looking for work and opportunities into the profitable, mineral-rich industrial heartlands and coalfields of south Wales.

Many Italians were part of that socio/economic phenomenon. Despite the real differences in cultural traditions and religion, the Italians integrated themselves in what, to them, was an alien Welsh society. It did not take long for the famous 'Bracchi's' to appear in the towns and villages of the Welsh coalfield. In what amounted to a radical change from the norm, the Bracchi shops sold coffee, light drinks and tobacco and offered an alternative to beer-houses and public houses. As such, they were perceived as community assets and social spaces to just sit, 'take five' and enjoy a cup of coffee.

Realising that leisure and recreation were the coming thing and the seaside was the place to be, some Italian families made their way to the coastal belt of south Wales, including Porthcawl, where they quickly established themselves as very industrious members of the community.

Once settled in Porthcawl, the Italians soon had their coffee shops, ice-cream parlours, fish and chip shops/restaurants up and running. The close-knit Italian families made a considerable contribution to the mores and culture of Porthcawl's way of life to the extent that, before long, a visit to their coffee shops and ice-cream parlours became a regular occurrence for local residents. While for visitors and holidaymakers, a trip to the seaside was not complete without at least having a coffee, an ice-cream, a portion of fish and chips. Or, better still, all 3!

## The Origins of Italian Migration

The little Italian town of Bardi in northern Italy is central to the story of Italian migration. Since the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, it has had, and continues to have, a very close relationship with south Wales, in terms of work, livelihood and, in modern times, even blood ties:

### **An Alien Land**

*'...Since the arrival of the brothers Bracchi and the brothers Berni - names which played a notable part in the social development of the South Wales mining communities, through the cafés, coffee-houses and ice-cream parlours the brothers established independently - young men from the neighbourhood of Bardi had settled in the coalfield towns, bringing up families who were Italian by blood and Welsh by birth, and equally proud of both...'*

Parker, 1961:5

## The Bracchi Family

There are several families in Porthcawl who are of Italian descent and have family links with Bardi. Two Porthcawl families who are of Italian origin have generously agreed to share their stories for the purposes of this report.

Before moving on to relate their history, however, there is an intriguing aspect of the Italian settlement in south Wales that very noticeably differentiates Porthcawl from the traditional communities of the south Wales coalfield. In the nearby Valleys, Italian cafés, coffee houses, and ice-cream parlours are grouped together and universally referred to as 'Bracchi's'. This has not happened in Porthcawl. Here, the various Italian hospitality outlets are often referred to by the owner's surname such as Fulgoni's or Sidoli's and, as frequently, the Christian names of the person running the café such as 'Frank's', 'Jenny's' and 'Pietro's'.

## The Fulgoni Family in Porthcawl

That does not mean that Porthcawl has no connection with the Bracchi family from Bardi. Quite the opposite. According to Fulgoni family accounts, Giacomo Bracchi left Bardi and arrived in Wales in the late 1800's, via Chicago in the US. He originally settled in Aberdare before moving to Porthcawl circa 1918/1919 whereupon he purchased the Central Café in John Street.

After coming into the ownership of the Fulgoni family, the Central, as it was often referred to locally, underwent several name changes. For example, from being the 'Aurora' in 1978, it became 'Mitza's Café' before reverting back to its old name, the Central Café. After again reverting to Aurora, it is now a high end specialist home and gift retailer that is still being run by a member of the Fulgoni family.

Meanwhile, a second café came into the Fulgoni family circa 1938 which became an institution in Porthcawl. Situated at the top of Station Hill, next to the now defunct level crossing, signal box and the pedestrian bridge, it was just known as 'Fulgoni's' (the site is now part of the Royal Air Force Association's (RAFA) Club). When it was a café, it was a highly popular meeting place where local people sat and passed the time whilst waiting for friends or the many trains to pass! This particular café was also where the famous Fulgoni ice-cream was made but it was later closed as a result of the removal of the level crossing and its subsequent replacement with the Station Hill subway circa 1969/1970.

Ice-cream manufacture was, and still is, something that the Italians mastered generations ago and still excel at. The whole process has been greatly simplified in contemporary terms by the advent of widespread refrigeration and the introduction of new technology. As a result, ice-cream is taken for granted in modern day-to-day lifestyles.

This is in marked contrast to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, when ice-cream was certainly not common-place. When it was

first introduced in the UK and, even into the post-WWII years, having ice-cream was an enormous treat. Making it, on the other hand, entailed care and attention, time, and not least, back-breaking work:

### **An Alien Land**

*'The hardest part of making the ice-cream was the stirring, Angelo discovered. For an hour, sometimes more, he would have to stand at the round tub in the yard behind the shop stirring the thickening mixture of milk, sugar, cornflour and eggs with a long-handled wooden spade until the mixture developed the consistency of butter. As he stirred ice and salt were packed around the freezer in layers, and as the mixture froze large lumps of it would cling to the side of the churn and would have to be scraped away with the spade. The work was long and monotonous and until he became used to it the muscles of his arms and shoulders ached so much that the pain would keep him awake at night. The ice was kept under wet sacks in the coolest and dampest part of the cellar beneath the shop and Angelo's first job in the morning ritual of making the ice-cream was to carry the ice up from the cellar and break it into pieces with Signore Marti's stiletto.'*

Parker, 1961: 35

The Fulgoni family also purchased The Seaview Café (also known as 'The Bridge') in Harbourside. It, too, was demolished in the early 1970's, presumably to make way for the present Glamorgan Holiday Home (opposite Porthcawl Harbour) which is now closed and awaiting its fate.

Earlier, in 1938, the Fulgoni family opened another café in John Street which remained in the Fulgoni family until it closed its doors in the 1970's. In the 1950's, it underwent a revamp and was generally referred to as 'Jenny's' by Porthcawl residents who regarded it as a very smart *rendezvous*. The building subsequently became a dress shop, then a Red Cross charity shop. Later still, it was sub-divided and is now a bakery and health-food store.

In the late 1970's, the Fulgoni family acquired a further café/restaurant in John Street, next to the present police station, which was, and is still, known as Fulgoni's. That café remains in the Fulgoni family, providing all-day breakfasts and lunches for local residents and holidaymakers alike. It has an extensive customer base and loyal following and is a busy establishment that has been serving meals to local residents and visitors to Porthcawl for over 40 years.

### **The Sidoli Family in Porthcawl**

**A** little later than Giacomo Fulgoni, Celeste Sidoli left Bardi and arrived in Wales, via London and Ireland, soon after the end of WWI. According to the Sidoli family, Celeste originally settled in Caerau, Maesteg in the Llynfi Valley, where he worked in a shop selling sweets, ice cream, cigarettes and other light refreshments. His wife, and sons Francesco, (aged 10 years) Pietro and Louie together with his daughter, joined him some years later in the mid-1920s.

As a boy and young man, Francesco known as 'Frank', was taken under the wing of a senior member of the Fulgoni family and helped out at his café/ice-cream parlour in New Road (now trading under the name of 'Franco's Fish and Chip' shop). There he remained until the outbreak of WWII in 1939, whereupon he was interned on the Isle of Man with other Italians.

After his release from internment in the Isle of Man and return to Porthcawl, Frank had the opportunity to take over the New Road shop, then still owned by the Fulgoni family, which he did circa 1946. Shortly after, Major Sir Leslie Joseph offered him a concession on Coney Beach selling ice-cream. More information about the Sidoli family shop in New Road and Sir Leslie Joseph and the Coney Beach Amusement Park is detailed below in the report.

Ice-cream sales on Coney Beach did not last long due to the practical and logistical difficulties of transporting ice-cream from its manufacturing base to Coney Beach. However, Sidoli's ice-cream was manufactured 'in-house' in the shop in New

Road until as late as 2013, whereupon it was transferred to another Sidoli family business in Well Street. Since 2018, Sidoli ice-cream has been manufactured in a new factory at the rear of Well Street.

In the late 1950s, the shop on the corner of Well Street and John Street which had originally been Porthcawl's first Post Office, was purchased by the Sidoli family (it is now Café Frésco). Soon after, the Sidoli family took over a further café/ice-cream parlour on the Esplanade. Around 1967, another fish and chip café/restaurant was purchased in Well Street. That establishment remained in the Sidoli family until it very recently changed hands to become 'Finnegan's Fish Restaurant'.

During the above period, the Sidoli family was responsible for running the historic kiosk next to Porthcawl Harbour and, in the mid-1990s, the Sidoli family also took over a kiosk on the Esplanade opposite its intersection with John Street. It has since been expanded and developed into the scenic and very popular Piccolo Bar.

#### ***Frank's Narrow Escape***

*In company with many foreign nationals, Francesco 'Frank', Sidoli was interned in WWII and spent the war years on the Isle of Man.*

*The authorities had originally planned to include Frank in a mass expatriation of those destined for internment in Canada. However, a chain of circumstances led to Frank quite literally missing the boat! This turned out to be a blessing for both him and his family.*

*The ship, the S.S. Arandora Star (1929-1940), a passenger ship of the Blue Star Line, set sail from Liverpool on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1940 bound for Canada with 1673 people on board who included 1299 internees and German prisoners of war.*

*On 2nd July 1940 the ship was torpedoed 125 miles west by north of Malin Head, County Donegal. Of the 734 Italian internees on board, 470 were lost. A total of 868 survivors were rescued by HMSC St Lauriat and taken to Greenock.*

As told by Ronnie Sidoli, August 2018

## John Street After WWII

**H**ostilities ceased in 1945 but Porthcawl's attempts to return to normality in the aftermath of WWII were easier said than done. Many of the town's pre-war attractions had gone, such as the bandstand and iron railings on The Green, Salt Lake had been filled in and Cosy Corner had lost its amusements (Morgan, 1987).

That was not the end of it as the very harsh post-WWII Period of Austerity brought fresh challenges for Porthcawl. The efforts to repair the town's hotels, public houses, and boarding houses after 6 years of war-time wear and tear quartering troops had to grapple with shortages of basic building materials like bricks, timber, cement and paint. Consequently, there was little change in post-war John Street and it remained essentially the same as before WWII (Morgan, 1987).

The Beeching Plan was the game-changer for Porthcawl and it dealt a real body-blow by closing the town's railway station in 1964. Arguably, the impact of that closure was starkest at John Street's northern end and on Station Hill, as both were denuded of the keynote structures of the level crossing, pedestrian bridge and signal box.

### 'Above' and 'Below' the Gates

**I**n addition to being an early node of building and development in Porthcawl, the junction between John Street and Station Hill was a hive of activity throughout most of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Porthcawl's first railway station was located at the intersection of Station Hill and New Road until 1916 and, when a new railway station was opened in Dock Street, the original railway station was dismantled and replaced by a level crossing, a signal box and pedestrian bridge.

This was highly significant as, within living memory, the phrase 'above or below the gates' was a term frequently used in relation to a place in Porthcawl. 'Above' referred to a northerly or westerly area of the town and, thereby, by implication, the

colder, more bracing part of Porthcawl whereas 'below' was considered to be more sheltered with a milder climate, but was noisier during the summer months due to its proximity to the Coney Beach Amusement Park.

The level crossing or 'gates' as they were known, were the preferred meeting place in Porthcawl as they were convenient for both those who lived above them or below them. The nearby Casino cinema offered shelter under the balustrade if needed and there was a bus-stop that served the main bus routes. The aptly labelled 'gates' were also situated in the midst of Porthcawl's shopping area that, in most of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, extended beyond John Street, Well Street and Lias Road to include Station Hill and much of New Road.

Station Hill led into New Road and was a busy local distributor road for pedestrians, public transport and the ever-increasing number of cars. During the summer months, the level crossing was constantly in use due to the combination of normal railway services and sheer volume of excursion trains from as far away as the Midlands (Morgan, 1987).

Quite apart from its importance in terms of transport and public movement, the level crossing was a meaningful place for generations of Porthcawl children. Although the practice would be **VERY** frowned upon today for sound reasons of health and safety, many local children perceived the pedestrian bridge over the level crossing as part of their parallel universe, almost as a playground.

The attraction lay in the billows of steam emanating from the funnels of trains that slowed down as they passed the level crossing, enveloping anyone on the bridge and, often, totally obscuring them. This offered local children opportunities for play, make-believe and generally messing about. It is no exaggeration to say that the pedestrian bridge over the level crossing on Station Hill represented La La Land for local children in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century! Some even went as far as to drop stones down the funnels of passing trains:

'...As a result, the crossing gates seemed to be permanently in use, much to the enjoyment of local youngsters who, from vantage points on the footbridge, specialised in the art of dropping stones down the funnels of the slow-moving locomotives...'

(Morgan, 1987:53).

### Station Hill Level Crossing

While the coming of the Portway was regarded by many as a more attractive approach into Porthcawl and so cause for celebration, others mourned the resultant demolition of the signal box, level crossing and pedestrian bridge and their replacement by the Station Hill subway.

The removal of such gateway features certainly altered the skyline and streetscape at the northern end of John Street. But the act was symbolic of a more complex, underlying scenario affecting Porthcawl. Many agreed that the introduction of the tree-lined Portway (A4106) was a marked visual improvement, especially as it gave additional direct access to areas such as the town centre and Eastern Promenade. Many also regarded the removal of the boundary stone wall between the railway line and John Street as another reason to celebrate, particularly as it was replaced by a modern café, police station and a more accessible route to Coney Beach and the Eastern Promenade via a new intersection at Lias Road and the town roundabout.

On the minus side, however, the replacement subway between John Street and Station Hill caused unease amongst a large chunk of the town's population. It was badly-lit and, once in use, quickly became dirty and graffiti-strewn. It did not have, and even now has not got, any video surveillance system despite there being numerous requests to introduce one.

Like them or not, the level crossing, gates and pedestrian bridge were landmark features of John Street's northern area that allowed above ground, face-to-face

interaction, movement for both people and cars and gave the northern end of John Street and Station Hill a sense of place. On the other hand, the creation of Portway dual-carriageway and Nottage and Portway roundabouts, whilst easier on-the-eye and practical for car-users, effectively carved Porthcawl in half.

The Station Hill subway exposed a much bigger issue affecting Porthcawl insofar as the town's infrastructure was designed with the 19<sup>th</sup> Century priorities of horse-drawn vehicles, pedestrians and a steam railway in mind. The loss of the railway system not only undermined the town's connectivity, it further unbalanced its outdated infrastructure. Furthermore, the increasing car-ownership that typified the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century, exacerbated already limited car parking provision, especially as the demise of the railway ushered more coaches into Porthcawl without accompanying parking provision being made for their arrival or departure. Those same issues dog Porthcawl to this day.

To add insult to injury, the subway created a *cul-de-sac* out of Station Hill and, without the footfall and passing trade the area had previously enjoyed, businesses there tended to stagnate. Aesthetically, too, the northern end of John Street and Station Hill's quality of place was further marred by fire damage to the Stoneleigh in the late 1980's. The long delay in reclaiming the badly neglected site, added to the area's difficulties and were only partially resolved when McCarthy & Stone constructed Stoneleigh Court in 2006. Making matters worse, were the grimy, dilapidated bus shelters and nearby benches that were rather grandly termed the bus station. All told, the area had a rundown, dilapidated appearance.

### The SHOUT Forum

Porthcawl is blessed with a vibrant voluntary sector that offers a wide-range of interests, companionship and activities for all generations. A full list of Porthcawl's voluntary and not-for-profit organisations known to the **Society** can be found in Appendix B.

**The John Street entrance to Station Hill subway in August 2018.**



**Another view of the John Street entrance to the Station Hill subway in August 2018 with murals painted by Porthcawl Comp students.**



The Station Hill subway art Installation in August 2018.



A Station Hill subway mural in August 2018.



The Station Hill subway in August 2018 with murals painted by students at Porthcawl Comp.



The commemorative plaque now on the wall of the RAFA Club on Station Hill (Courtesy of Gary Victor SHOUT).

The SHOUT Forum is an organisation for the over-50's that is fully committed to the town's well-being. It deplores dog-fouling, the growing number of potholes in roads and pavements, and the steady decline of many aspects of Porthcawl life such as the lack of usable public seating, suitably placed litter bins and the absence of public amenities such as leisure facilities.

### Station Hill Subway

In 2011, SHOUT Forum spearheaded a self-help community enterprise designed to rejuvenate the northern area of John Street and integrate Porthcawl's important railway history into the here and now. Over the period from 2011 until 2015, SHOUT Forum, in partnership with Porthcawl Comprehensive School (the 'Comp') Groundwork Wales, Newton Primary School, PTC and BCBC, implemented a heritage project to refurbish the Station Hill subway and, as said by Carwyn Jones, Bridgend Assembly Member (AM):

'...to properly link this part of town with the rest of the town again...'

Bolter, 2015:2

As well as generally revamping the area, Comp students painted murals on the walls of both entrances to the Station Hill subway. Later stages of the project included the installation of a wooden sculpture at the entrance to the Station Hill subway representing a cluster of railway signals, and the newly laid paving stones depicting the many railway lines that converged on Porthcawl's railway system. In 2015, a Blue Plaque was also installed at the rear of the RAFA Club located on Station Hill which commemorates Porthcawl's 19<sup>th</sup> Century industrial origins (Bolter, 2015).

At the time of writing, the bus shelters remain a work in progress. Aside from that, the northern end of John Street has been greatly improved by the upgrading of the 6 benches by PTC together with the landscaping of the environs at both entrances to the Station Hill subway.

### John Street

Moving southwards from Station Hill subway, past the optimistically termed 'bus station', is Fulgoni's café which occupies a large site with an extensive frontage on John Street's eastern elevation and has its own car park. Next door is a 1970's, flat-roofed, brick-built Police Station that is believed to be the subject of a future amalgamation with the local Fire and Ambulance service, although details are so far unknown.

Stoneleigh Court is situated on the opposite western elevation of John Street. It is a large, modern, angular, simply constructed, 3-storeyed residential block of sheltered accommodation with honey-coloured rendering. Next door are 3 retail shops in a Victorian terrace of 3-storeyed, stone-faced, buildings on the northern corner of Victoria Avenue that bear marked similarities to buildings further down John Street built during the Brogden era.

Then comes the Rock, on the opposite southern corner of John Street and Victoria Avenue, together with buildings that include a butcher shop, 2 hairdressers, a travel agency, the now closed Barclays Bank which is currently up for sale, 2 flooring shops and Trinity Church. Car parking is allowed, albeit for a limited time, and this part of John Street is surprisingly busy, mostly due to customer loyalty to the retail and commercial outlets located there. Trinity Church is another draw as, apart from its normal religious services, it hosts various events and is a frequent and well-used meeting place for various groups and organisations in the town, including the **Society**.

### The Streetscape of John Street

In 21<sup>st</sup> Century Porthcawl, John Street, Well Street and Lias Road remain the focus of the town's retail, service and commercial activity. The section of John Street from Lias Road until it meets Well Street lies at the heart of Porthcawl's shopping sector and now forms part of Porthcawl Conservation Area in its entirety.

As to be expected, the passage of time since 1938 has wrought changes on this stretch of John Street. Multiple socio/economic factors feed into the task of shopping in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and the retail, commercial, and business sector has had to adapt to the needs of today's shoppers. On the plus side, there are, for example, higher disposable incomes, more women in the work-place, car ownership and increased longevity. On the downside, there is financial uncertainty, economic downturns and growth of online shopping. All have affected the retail scene in a way unimaginable in 1938.

The **Society** will not itemise every shop in John Street in this report as there have been manifold changes in the past 81 years. For example, Woolworths – that High Street giant that set the transatlantic tone for 20<sup>th</sup> Century retail practice, had a strong presence in Porthcawl both as a major employer and retailer.

From shortly after WWII until its collapse in the UK in 2008, Woolworths occupied a large Art Deco building at 1a John Street. Today, the building is a branch of B&M's cut-price chain store. There have been window modifications that are discernible to the naked eye and there is now no sign of Woolworth's ever having been there. Nor are there any vestiges of small independent retailers such as I M Waters, which is believed to have sold vinyl records in the 1960's. Before that, the building is thought to have been part of the Victoria Wine retail chain.

New research focusing on John Street's activities during WWII and its aftermath until the present day, would be a rich seam of information that would yield results that could throw light on the mores and socio/economic history of Porthcawl throughout that period. Suffice to say that these changes are not only reflected in the streetscape of John Street but in the sort of goods and/or services offered by commercial, business and retail outlets located there.

For instance, currently there are 3 bookmakers in John Street alone which

reflects a more liberal social outlook on betting. And, whereas in a pre-WWII world items were bought to last and a stigma was attached to anything second-hand, at the last count, John Street now has 5 charity shops with another in Lias Road.

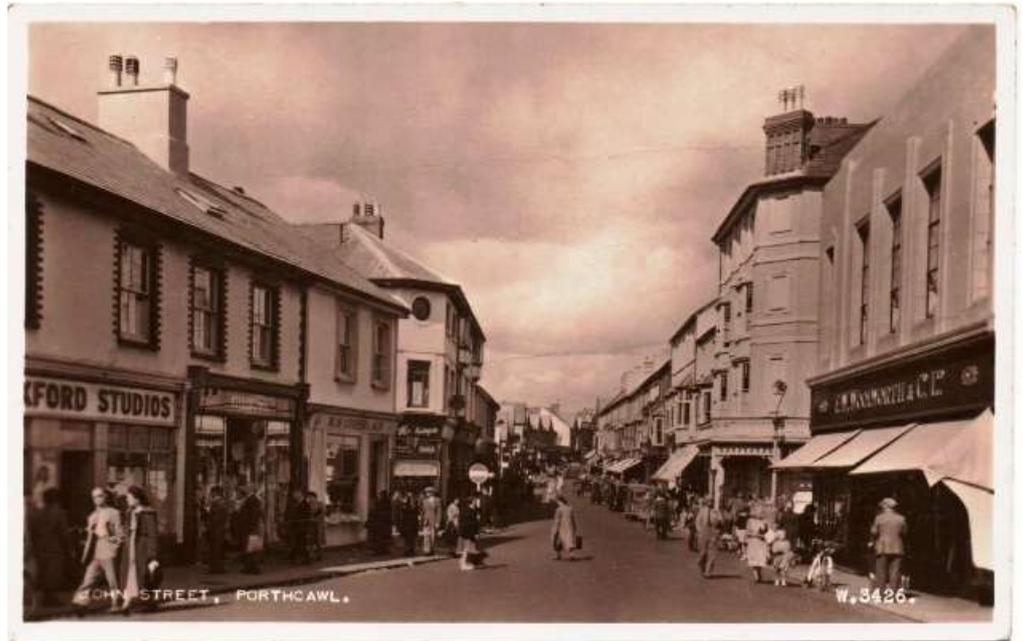
The changing nature and resultant turnover of various business, commercial and retail outlets has generally impacted on the buildings in John Street in which they have been housed. In the last 81 years, for instance, there has been an ongoing process of dividing and sub-dividing the original shops in John Street, Well Street and Lias Road.

Although some still remain, recessed central entrance shop frontages are not as plentiful in John Street as they once were. Interestingly, those that have survived such as Costa Coffee and Maples in John Street, are being added to with a recessed shop entrance for a new jeweller's shop being installed at the time of writing this report.

Continuing southwards down John Street, the decorative moulded upper storeys on each side of the section between Lias Road and James Street remain impressive even though alterations have been carried out over time. Similarly, further down John Street, the canted bay windows, steep gables and fine stonework of the upper storeys of the buildings constructed during the Brogden years, such as those at the Y Centre, remain comparatively intact, despite the many changes and the wear and tear of the passing years.

What is also interesting, is the difference that 81 years has made to the signage utilised in John Street. A separate study of this aspect of John Street's streetscape would be especially rewarding. This section of John Street was outside the scope of the Porthcawl Conservation Area for a considerable length of time in which standards of monitoring and enforcement over such changes has, to say the least, varied over the years and some signage and logos above shop entrances appear quite at odds with the buildings.

Woolworths circa 1940s (Courtesy of Wayne Stainthorpe, Porthcawl Museum and Historical Society).



Woolworth's building now B&M in August 2019.

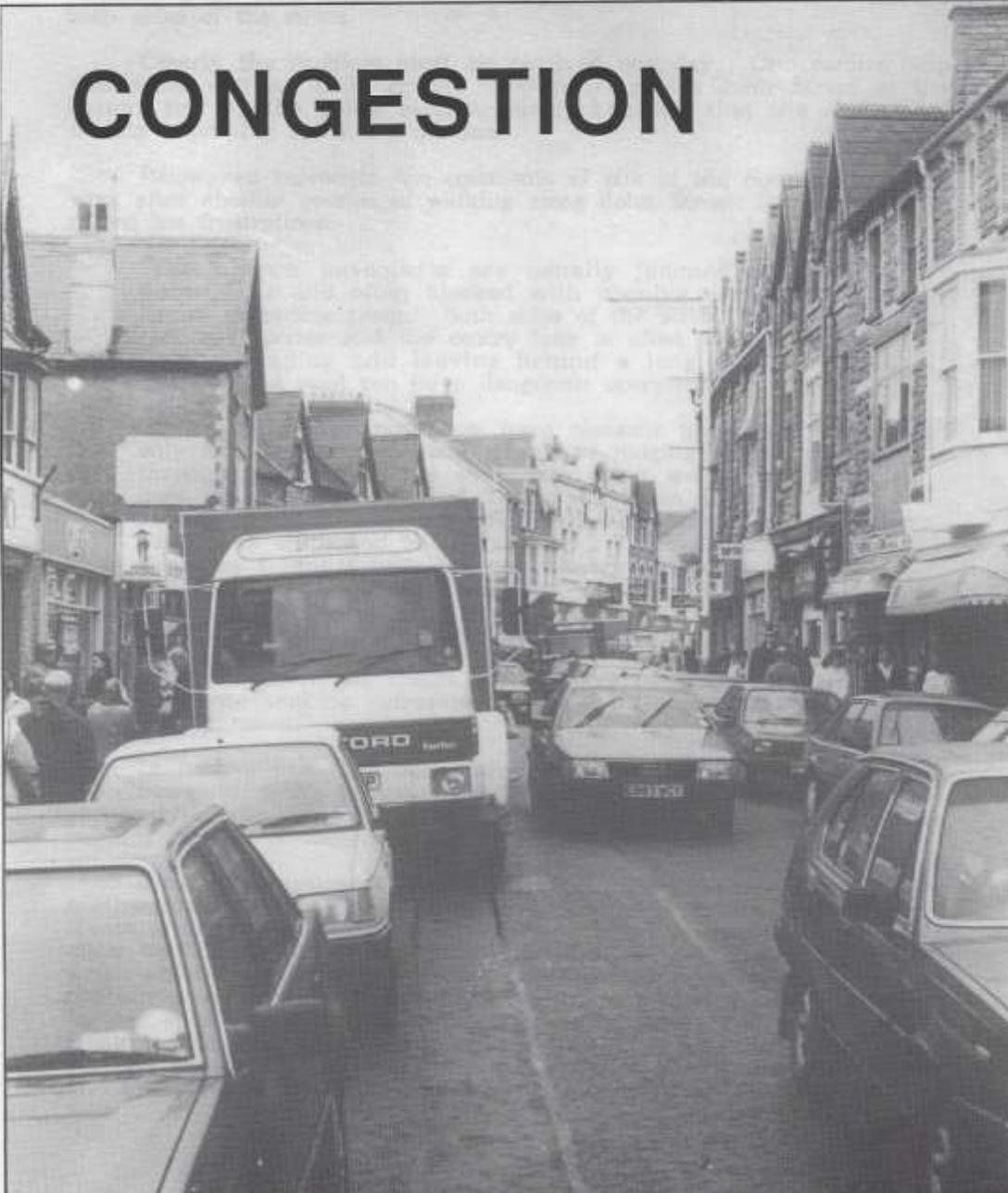
Shop-front signage for I M Waters uncovered in August 2019.





# Newsletter

OCTOBER 1989



## CONGESTION

Front cover of the Society's Newsletter for October 1989.

The **Society** believes that recording current commercial, retail and business outlets operating in John Street would be a social and demographic asset and vital tool in planning portfolios. Ideally, to provide such a picture of business, retail and commercial activity in Porthcawl, the record should include such outlets and premises elsewhere in the town.

## Pedestrianisation

**H**owever, the real standout change of John Street's 21<sup>st</sup> Century streetscape is pedestrianisation. Unlike the northern end of John Street which allows one-way traffic flowing southwards, the stretch of John Street beyond its junction with Lias Road until it arrives at Well Street is pedestrianised between the hours of 11am and 5pm.

In the post-WWII period up to the late 1970's, a great many local residents avoided John Street altogether at the height of the summer season, especially during 'Miners Fortnight', as it took forever to get from one end of John Street to the other. The narrow pavements, heaving crowds and slow-moving traffic were a nightmare for shoppers, hazardous for small children and anyone with a pram, and a no-go area for those with limited mobility.

Pedestrianising John Street was first mooted by Porthcawl Town Council (PTC) and Glamorgan County Council (GCC) in 1971 after the closure of the railway in Porthcawl. A public meeting was held to discuss the viability of proposals such as a new approach road into Porthcawl (now the A4106), a new police station, a new ambulance station, a new 'prestige' office building, the 'landscaping' of Salt Lake and the pedestrianisation of John Street. The **Society** was fully supportive of the latter suggestion from the outset but the measure was delayed, for a variety of reasons, and it was not until June 1992 that a 12 month trial period was undertaken (Porthcawl Civic Trust Society Newsletter, 1989).

Many shopkeepers took advantage of the scheme and stalls were soon positioned outside shops and tables and chairs

outside cafés. Even so, not everyone was in favour and there was some concern that a ban on cars in John Street had resulted in a drop in trade.

At the end of 1992, a halt was called to the pedestrianisation trial and John Street returned to being a car-friendly public space. Nevertheless, a Public Enquiry was held in January 1994 which found in favour of the pedestrianisation of John Street. The **Society** took an active role in the Public Enquiry from the start. As well as the **Society's** Executive Committee member, the late W B Harries Baker, giving evidence, the **Society** organised a petition and, despite 3 days of inclement January weather, collected 3769 signatures in support of John Street's pedestrianisation.

## John Street Today

**T**here are remaining problems to overcome. Deliveries to shops still occur between 5pm and 11am and 'blue badge' holders are permitted to use John Street during that interval of time. Other motorists also take advantage of when John Street is 'open' and cyclists sometimes use the road recklessly without consideration for pedestrians.

Nonetheless, the pedestrianisation of John Street has transformed its streetscape at ground level. Instead of the original narrow pavements, level paving now extends across the whole width of John Street. Parking bays, highlighted by different coloured paving stones and bollards, have been provided at regular intervals to allow vans to make deliveries to those shops without any rear access.

In addition, a new hexagonal bandstand was strategically situated where James Street intersects with John Street and Victorian style, conservation quality street furniture such as benches and litter bins, compatible with those on the Esplanade, was installed along the length of John Street. There were also 2 street art installations of fantastical marine creatures on plinths placed outside what are now, the Halifax Bank and a gift shop.

When pedestrianisation was first unveiled, the quality of the stonework on the concourse was first-class. Unfortunately, the inevitable wear and tear that comes with the very heavy use of a public space has necessitated repairs that have not been carried out to the same high standard.

For example, rather than replacing missing or damaged metal drain covers, the gaps have been cemented over, and paviers that have been subject to heave and subsidence have not been repaired. Disappointingly, the provision of promised trees and raised flower beds has failed to materialise. Thankfully, that has been partly compensated for by the outstanding hanging baskets and flower displays provided by PTC which appear each summer.

There is a view that John Street's streetscape has become 'cluttered' to the detriment of pedestrian safety. But, compared to when the crowds and grid-locked traffic brought John Street to a standstill and there were frequent bumper-to-bumper accidents, modern John Street now has a pedestrian-friendly ambience. People can move freely without risk of accidents to themselves or others. Just as important, there is no sign that pedestrianisation has undermined the local economy.

### **Porthcawl's Local Economy Today**

**U**nlike some town centres in the UK, John Street, Well Street and Lias Road, appear to be having a trading moment. Amidst gloomy reports of town centres dying and downturns in trade, Porthcawl town centre seems to be bucking the trend of rows of empty, boarded-up shops. Even when businesses fail and shops are vacated, the premises quickly reopen as start-ups and/or boutiques, sometimes selling items of an idiosyncratic nature or premium and luxury products.

True, it is a mixed picture and a number of factors contribute to a more seemingly upbeat John Street trading scene. For instance, in contrast to some town centres, Porthcawl does not have many retail chain

outlets. Its town centre is mainly comprised of independent retailers, many of them local entrepreneurs with a regular trading base, who know the area and keep abreast of their customers' needs.

Porthcawl also appears to have an inbuilt resilience, possibly stemming from its retail longevity and co-operation between the business, commercial and retailing sectors. In what could be a measured response borne of experience, the town has, for example, retained its Chamber of Trade which includes the hospitality sector, acts as a forum for concerns, and co-ordinates Sunday opening. In fact, Sunday appears to be a busy trading day in Porthcawl as many shops, cafés and restaurants are open for business and the town centre is often thronged with people (Grice, 2012).

### **Tourism**

**T**ourism is Porthcawl's main industry and, within the town, there is a widespread acceptance that holiday habits have changed since the days of the Miners Fortnight in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. That event was once the mainstay of the tourist trade in Porthcawl when, typically, the entire population of a mining community decamped to the seaside for a fortnight's holiday each July/August.

Then, the holiday season offered a very narrow window of trading opportunity. Nowadays, Porthcawl's 21<sup>st</sup> Century tourist economy is based on an extended holiday season in which many day-trippers visit the town throughout the year. Beyond the summer holiday season, even a glimmer of winter sunshine seems to tempt people out and about with a resultant upturn in trade. Similarly, on the other side of the weather spectrum, spectacular storms encourage crowds of people to come, watch and photograph mountainous waves crashing against Porthcawl's sea-defences.

An annual events calendar is now the bedrock of Porthcawl's tourist economy and, as well as sports events, there is the 'Celtic Festival' in March and 'Jazz on the Beach' in April. By far the biggest event is the Elvis (Presley) Festival reputed to be

## Up & Down John Street in August 2019



Costa Coffee (once the British Restaurant).



Original gables & stonework on upper storeys of Brogden era buildings in John Street.



The now divided Bon Marche.



The now closed NatWest Bank.



The old Post Office building now Coral's betting shop.



Fulgoni's café /restaurant.

the largest such festival in the world, which has been running since 2004 and has an estimated impact of £6.7 million on the local economy (BCBC, 2017).

There are other occasions. Some one-off, others annual events such as sporting events, a Vintage Car Rally, the 'Summer Carnival' and the 'Christmas Swim' on the morning of Christmas Day which is traditionally covered on national television (TV). Apart from boosting Porthcawl's local economy, it is also worth noting here that most of the major money-spinning events, such as the 'Christmas Swim' are the products of voluntary sector organisation, effort and goodwill within the town with probably the Porthcawl Carnival being the longest-running of all.

The wheel seems to have come full circle for Porthcawl as today's tourist scene is reminiscent of Porthcawl's emergence as a seaside resort at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. At that point in time, as now, more downtime and changing leisure and recreational habits, enabled Porthcawl to become a desirable day-out destination.

Continued improvements in the town's appearance and its facilities have played their part in this shifting scene. For example, surfing and water-sports in general, are a great draw, the All Wales Coast Walk brings many visitors to the town and Porthcawl's ongoing regeneration process involving recent Harbour improvements and the reinforcement of sea defences attracted many curious onlookers. The redeveloped amenities in Harbourside are another bonus (Grice, 2012).

All have enhanced Porthcawl's attractions. Visitors who may just want a coffee, an ice-cream or a bite to eat plus an invigorating walk by the sea, a stroll on the Esplanade to blow the cobwebs away or just to 'mooch' around, now find they have more choice. Both *Stage I* and *Stage II, Part A of Stage II, Part A Porthcawl: Much More Than Meets The Eye* have details of recent improvements to Harbourside and the All Wales Coast Walk as well as details of

Porthcawl's present and future water-sports facilities.

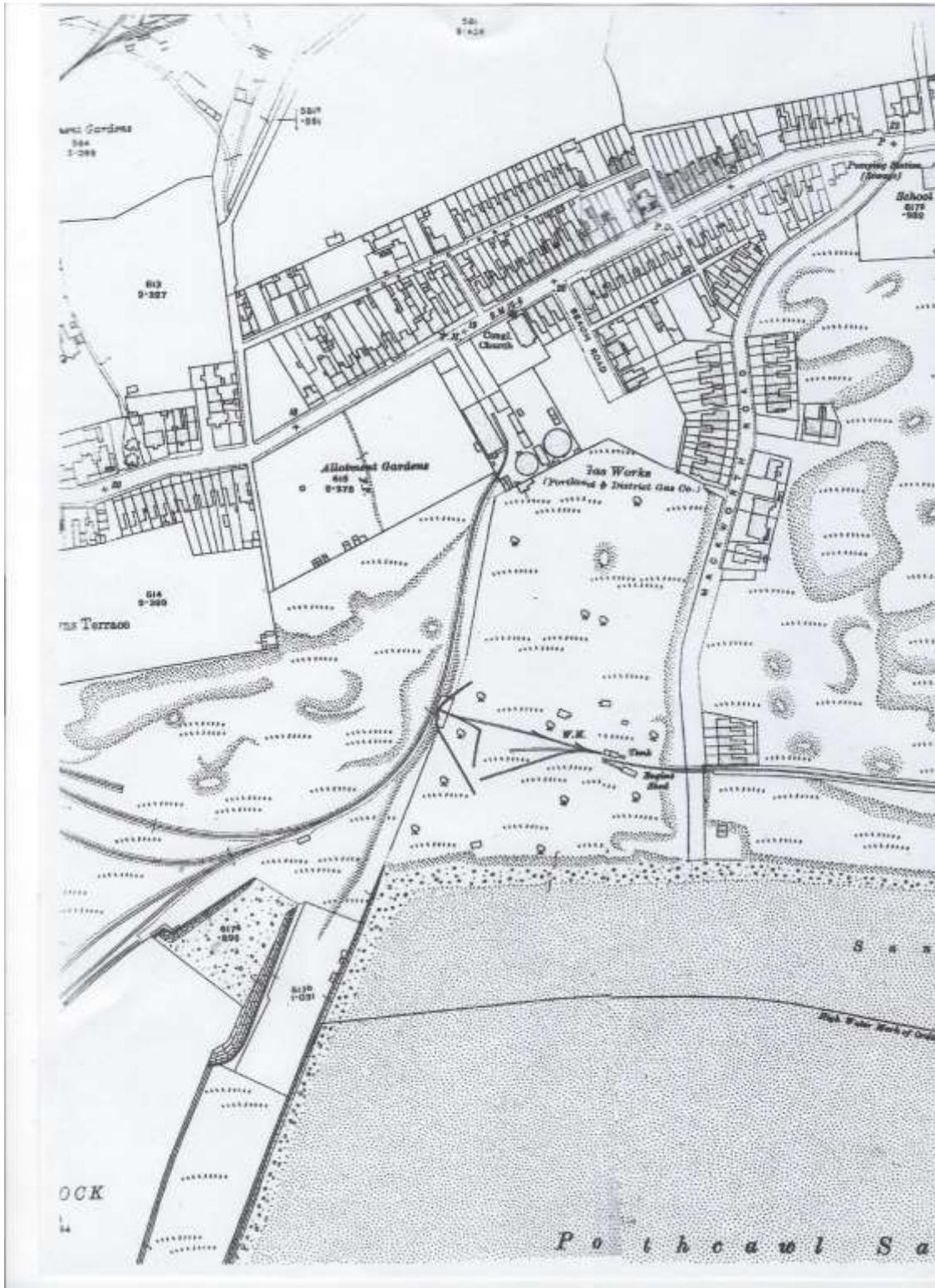
Porthcawl's long-staying visitors have also changed. When first created, Trecco Bay Caravan Park was self-contained and holidaymakers mostly remained on site. The present owners have improved and upgraded Trecco Bay Caravan Park (now called Trecco Bay Holiday Resort) and it now attracts more affluent holidaymakers more inclined to explore Porthcawl, shop in John Street and generally bring added trade to Porthcawl and the local economy. There are also the coach parties from the rest of the UK that regularly stay at the refurbished Seabank Hotel. They too, frequently patronise John Street shops (Grice, 2012).

### **Porthcawl's Local Population**

**P**orthcawl's population increase since the end of WWII has also had its own impact on the town's local economy. In the first post-WWII Census returns in 1951, Porthcawl's population stood at 9521 (Higgins, 1968). By 1971, the town's resident population had grown to 14,103 whereas in 2001, it was 15,869, and in 2011, it was 16,005 (ONS, 2019).

Consequently, apart from the revenue generated by tourism, there are now more residents to sustain Porthcawl's economy. But caution is needed here. The social make-up and behaviour of modern-day shoppers is of a very different order to that of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century. Today's retailers face new challenges, such as online retailing and competition from large supermarkets with car-parking facilities.

While the situation is variable, John Street, Well Street and Lias Road appear to be holding their own in this competitive market. Recent reports of a drop in footfall are thought to be attributable to local residents doing their main shop elsewhere and using Porthcawl's shops to top up on food and household goods in the meantime. The counter argument is that Porthcawl's retail sector is expanding and offering a broader selection of goods and services that is attracting more people.



A section of an OS map showing the area around Griffin Park & the old Gasworks published by the Director General of the Ordnance Survey Office, Southampton, 1919 (Courtesy of Glamro).

## Station Hill and New Road

**N**ew Road seems to have fared less well than John Street, Well Street and Lias Road in these changing trading conditions.

New Road is one of the longest roads in Porthcawl. Officially, it runs from Station Hill subway to Griffin Park roundabout before turning eastwards towards the Conservation Area of Newton Village. However, as the particular stretch of road from the subway to Griffin Park roundabout is usually called Station Hill by Porthcawl residents, this is the name that it will be referred to within this report.

## The Origins of New Road

### Retail History

**I**nitially, New Road arose organically following the introduction and development of the DLPR tramway and the later construction of the first railway station on South Road in 1876. Along with much of the area east of the Portway, New Road comes within the purview of 'Old Porthcawl' and, as it was south of the former level crossing on Station Hill, it was part of the area often referred to as 'below the gates'

When it was first built, New Road was a busy distributor road and it remained so until late into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It was a constituent part of a main bus route to Cardiff and other major locations and had a footfall that supported a well-patronised body of local commercial, retail and business activity. Across the retail spectrum, New Road had food stores, several butchers, a pharmacy, a garage, a builders' suppliers, a plumbers, an off-licence, tobacconists, newsagents and a photographer amongst others.

It was also well-endowed with 'watering holes' and, within the hospitality sector, there were the Queen's and Brogden Hotels, the General Picton Public House in New Road together with the Prince of Wales and Queen Victoria Public Houses on Station Hill.

## Station Hill and New Road Today

**A**s previously stated, the Queen Victoria Public House at the top of Station Hill was demolished when the Station Hill subway was constructed in the 1970's. Despite the subsequent problem of a decline in footfall, the Station Hill vicinity has retained a good mix of commercial, business and retail units, as well as some in the hospitality sector and a few early residential buildings.

The RAFA Club is at the top of Station Hill adjacent to the subway entrance and next door to the Prince of Wales Public House. One unit is empty but, moving downwards, the run of shops includes a stationers, a fish and chip shop, a shoe-shop, a decorating supplier, a surfing gear outlet, a tattoo removal parlour, a micro-brewery and wine shop, plus a Chinese takeaway. On the opposite side of the road are 2 gentlemen's hairdressers, a vintage clothing outlet, a pizza parlour, a restaurant/café, a travel agency, a computing outlet and empty premises that were once a betting shop. There is also a very busy garage in a turning just off that part of Station Hill.

Further down towards the Griffin Park roundabout, the next segment of Station Hill has Victorian/Edwardian buildings occupied by the Porthcawl United Services Club, adjacent to what is believed to be the earliest housing on New Road - numbers 39, 41, 43 and the Elms, as well as Elm and Morfa Cottages. On the opposite side of the road is a bakery, a boutique, a gift shop, a launderette and dry cleaners, a large charity outlet selling second-hand furniture plus a care and support agency.

Nearby, on the same side of Station Hill, is a sequence of gabled, full-height terraced Victorian villas, most of which have been converted into B&B's. At the Griffin Park roundabout itself, there is an intersection with Northways to the east and the Eastern Promenade to the west.

Local residents generally regard the Griffin Park roundabout as the beginning of New Road proper. The roundabout is

surrounded by a cluster of shops that include an Indian restaurant and takeaway, a bicycle shop, 2 fish and chip shops cum restaurants, a beauty salon and a hairdresser, plus a furniture and upholstery shop. All are frequented by both Porthcawl residents and its visitors.

The upshot is that, currently, Station Hill has a diverse range of shops offering an array of goods and services. Many are long-standing occupants of their premises and, notably, some, like the stationers, the decorating suppliers and launderette and dry cleaners, have a near monopoly of trade in Porthcawl. Others deliver personal services, or specialise in what they do and use their premises as a base for their activities as well as a retail outlet.

Local residents 'in the know' are regular customers in this area and, overall, this stretch of New Road appears to be a creative, resilient section of Porthcawl's business, commercial and retail sector. To all appearances, it seems to have successfully adapted, albeit with some reservations, to changed market conditions since the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

### **Griffin Park Roundabout to Newton Village**

Visually and practically, Griffin Park can be perceived as the beginning of a separate area in New Road, distinct from Station Hill. Generally, this section of New Road is signified by a pattern of ribbon development from Griffin Park roundabout until the outskirts of Newton Village and, in the main, housing predominates over shops. Along its entirety, there are private residential properties varying greatly in size and design from large individually designed houses to purpose-built blocks of flats. That said, there are some hospitality outlets scattered along the length of New Road such as The Queen's and New Brogden Hotels and a few retailers for example, Gutteridge, the florist and horticulturalist together with a car sales lot.

New Road starts with the General Picton Public House and a cluster of shops which

include a charity shop, training academy and aesthetic clinic, a further Chinese takeaway, a hobbies shop, and pet food and pet grooming parlour. There is also a funeral parlour, Indian takeaway, an army surplus outlet and small watch shop. But this group of shops either side of the road moving from Griffin Park roundabout towards Newton Village soon peters out.

New Road is a difficult route to evaluate as it consists of a series of discrete localities. For instance, as a distributor road, it has turnings leading into little-known, unexpected destinations. Just past the last group of shops is a turning off to the right leading into Glan Road which is a mix of residential dwellings, including a block of flats and some light industrial units situated on the site of an old gas works. And, on the opposite side of New Road, off any of the left-hand turnings is, what appears to be, a maze of roads and *cul-de-sacs*.

Thereafter, New Road still has a smattering of retail outlets but previously busy shops have closed and the buildings are gradually becoming private residential dwellings. This situation has been arrived at as New Road is bounded to the south by the coastline and tourist hotspots of Porthcawl Sands/Sandy Bay; Coney Beach Amusement Park; and Trecco Bay Caravan Park. In the past 30 years or so, a series of developments such as:

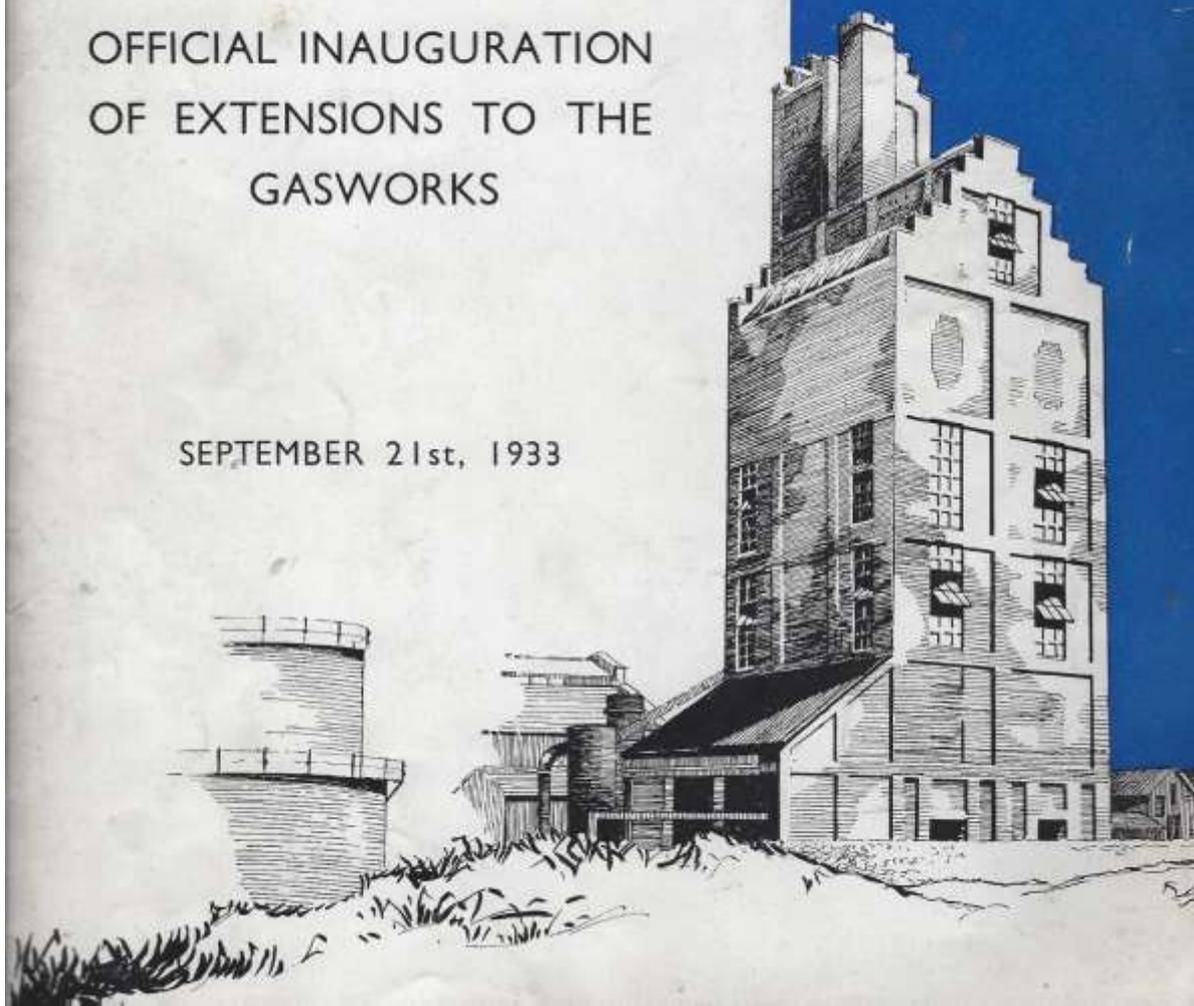
- Trecco Bay Holiday Park closed some entrances/exits leading into New Road;
- BCBC closed Sandy Bay Caravan Park to both residential and touring caravans in 2001;
- Traffic calming measures, specifically road bumps, were introduced to curb traffic speeds;
- As a result of the above, bus companies removed New Road from their routes.

The unintended consequences of these collective decisions has been a drop in footfall which, in turn, has caused a dramatic decline in New Road's once healthy trading position.

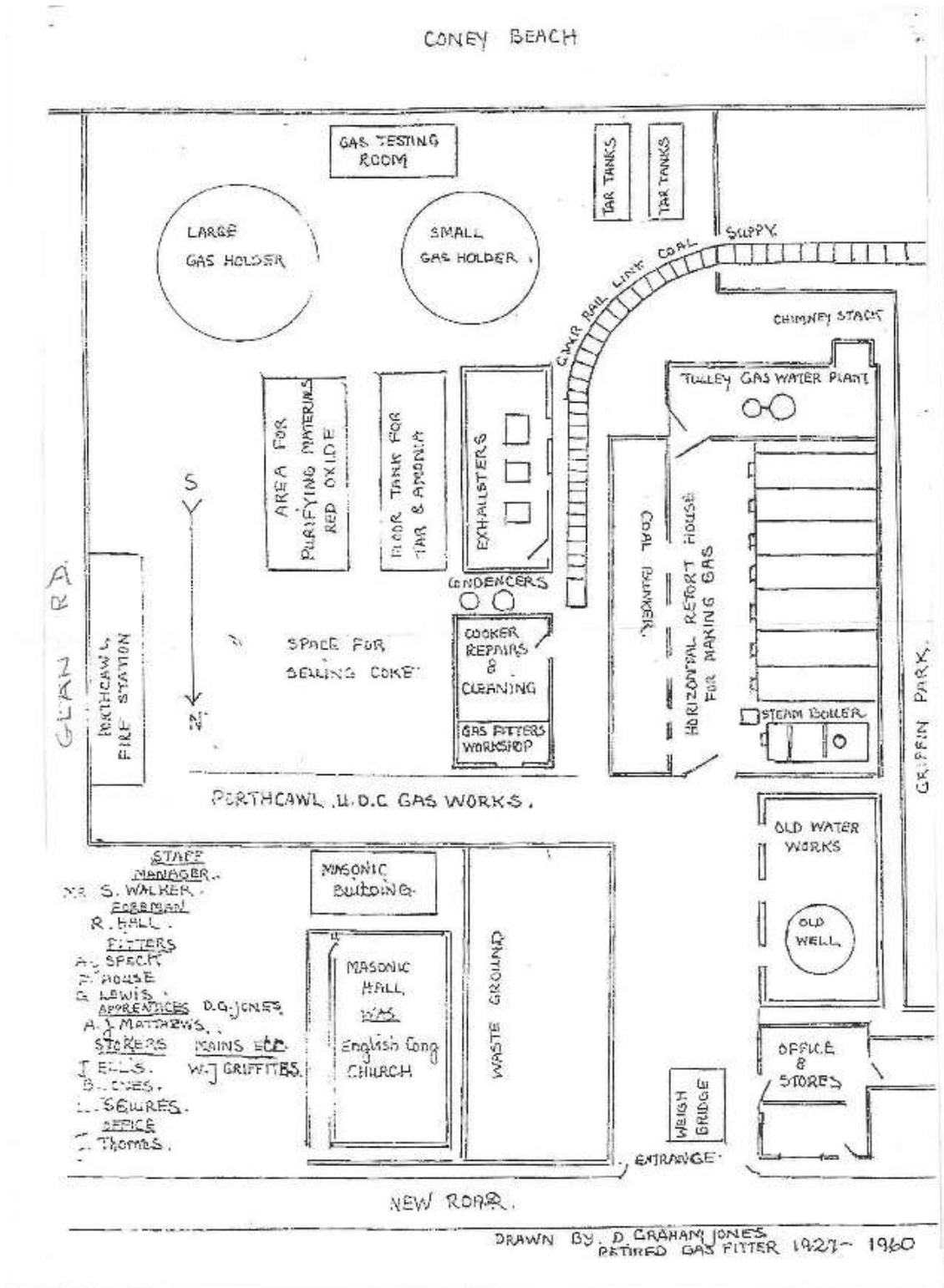
URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL OF  
**PORTHCAWL**

OFFICIAL INAUGURATION  
OF EXTENSIONS TO THE  
GASWORKS

SEPTEMBER 21<sup>st</sup>, 1933



Official programme cover to the inauguration of the extensions to the Porthcawl Urban District Council Gasworks on September 21<sup>st</sup> 1933 (Courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley).



A local artist's plan of Porthcawl Urban District Council's Gasworks believed to be as it was in the late 1930's (Courtesy of Mrs Rene King).

## Griffin Park

### The Origins of Griffin Park

**H**ospitality, business, commercial and retail outlets aside, Griffin Park is adjacent to the Griffin Park roundabout and is the real focal point of this particular corner of 'Old Porthcawl'.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> Century inter-war period, there was a desire for increased leisure and recreational facilities in Porthcawl. This led PUDC to build and complete many public works in the town as a way of improving its appearance, increasing its seaside appeal and strengthening its resort function (Higgins, 1968; Morgan, 1987).

The Eastern Promenade Scheme was such a scheme. Under the terms of the agreement with GWR and the PUDC Act (1914), a planned-for road from the seafront to the old ballast-tip (now occupied by the Coney Beach Amusement Park) was, in fact, extended to the site of the old charity allotments through to the present junction with New Road at Griffin Park roundabout. More details of the Eastern Promenade Scheme are in *Porthcawl: Much More Than Meets The Eye (2015) Amended Version, pages 57 to 60 refer:*

'...The road from the sea front, which under the agreement with the Great Western Railway Company was to be constructed to the entrance to the old ballast-tip, was, in fact, carried on through the site of the old charity allotments, to its present junction with New Road. What remained of the allotment site was laid out as Griffin Park, with its bowling greens, putting greens, and tennis courts, and as the open space provided with seats on the opposite side of the road...'

Higgins, 1968:152

They may appear to be poles apart but the origin and development of Griffin Park is inextricably tied to what was termed the 'Porthcawl Gas Undertaking'. This had its roots in 1867 or thereabouts when capital was raised by public subscription from the then residents of Porthcawl to facilitate the

supply of gas to parts of the town. Later, this publically subscribed utility appears to have been subsumed into the Porthcawl Gas Light and Coke Company Ltd, formed in 1891 with responsibility for the partial illumination of the parish of Newton Nottage (PUDC, 1933; Higgins, 1968).

The Porthcawl Gas Light and Coke Company was served by a rail link from the Porthcawl railway network and, in 1875, had 3 operational gas holders, although only 2 are shown on the OS map of 1919 (Coflein, 2019). In 1912, the utility company sought statutory powers to bolster its position, prompting PUDC intervention. The resultant bitter controversy concerning whether or not a gas undertaking should be municipally owned, was resolved by the passing of the PUDC Act of 1914 (Higgins, 1968).

The PUDC Act (1914) empowered PUDC to acquire the Porthcawl Gas Light and Coke Company and, in July 1915, PUDC duly purchased the firm for £29,436 18s 8d. At this point, it is important to note that the above OS map dated 1919, refers to the Porthcawl & District Gas Works. In later PUDC official literature, the utility is also referred to by the generic term of the Porthcawl Gas Undertaking. As such, the Porthcawl Gas Undertaking was nationalised in 1949 but, prior to that, extensions to the gasworks were formally inaugurated on 21<sup>st</sup> September 1933 (*The Glamorgan Gazette*, 1915; PUDC, 1933; Higgins, 1968; Morgan, 1987).

Some imagination is required at this point as the jigsaw is hard to piece together given that the land in question has since been overlain with further developments. However, before the Eastern Promenade Scheme was created, the Porthcawl Gas Light and Coke Company was based next to what is now Griffin Park and Glan Road (please see the above OS map of 1919. Beach Road is thought to have become Glan Road sometime after 1933).

Between 1933 and 1934, a road was built from the northern end of the Eastern Promenade Scheme cutting through the old charity allotments adjacent to the newly

extended gasworks. The remainder of the old charity allotments was converted into Griffin Park and, in accordance with the agreement with GWR, seating was put on the open space on the other side of the road, on what is now the grassy area next to the Sandpiper Bar (Higgins, 1968).

### **Griffin Park between WWI & WWII**

**G**riffin Park opened between 1934/1935 and was named after W J Griffin, a prominent local resident and previous Mayor of Porthcawl, as well as Chairman of both the PUDC and its Gas Committee on several occasions. As a new public amenity, Griffin Park more than fulfilled its aims. It transformed the old charity allotments, spruced up Porthcawl's appearance and the new road offered an alternative route to the seafront which avoided the, then, bottleneck of the Station Hill level crossing (Higgins, 1968).

Once fully landscaped, Griffin Park became one of Porthcawl's inter-war attractions and a jewel in PUDC'S crown. Replete with bowling and putting greens, tennis courts and a spacious children's playground, the Park was near to Coney Beach Amusement Park and the existing Trecco Bay camping facilities. Moreover, its facilities added to, supported and reinforced the town's other tourist stalwarts of the hotels, guest houses and B&B's, the Salt Lake 'Lido', paddle steamers and the GWR excursion trains.

The downside was that the grassy area opposite Griffin Park shared the fate of many similar spaces and lost its iron railings to the overarching demands of munitions production during WWII.

### **Post-WWII Griffin Park**

**F**ollowing WWII, Griffin Park itself remained a well-used social space, and retained its appeal decades on after its creation. Even so, as a successful example of municipal leisure and recreational provision, it only came into its own on the completion of the Eastern Promenade Scheme in 1950, connecting Griffin Park with Cosy Corner, the Harbour

and the Esplanade. If you wanted to chill out, relax and enjoy yourself that was the part of 'Old Porthcawl' that you headed for.

In a post-WWII world before health and safety issues came to the fore, the children's playground in Griffin Park with its row of wooden swings, the slide and the big rocking horse figured largely in the lives of many Porthcawl children. Where better, for instance, to mark those truly memorable occasions in the 1950's when sweets and confectionery came off ration, than on the swings in Griffin Park with your friends?

But Griffin Park was not only for children. The Sports Pavilion with its unique pagoda-style roof structure had changing rooms while sports equipment was for hire in a nearby hut. Porthcawl's very own weather station was set in the well-tended gardens of Griffin Park and its bowling greens were admired by visitors to the town. Indeed, Griffin Park hosted many touring groups of bowlers, particularly during the post-war Miners Fortnights when miners from south Wales held their annual bowling tournaments (Morgan, 1996; David, 2006).

If the weather and a game of bowls did not rock someone's boat then Griffin Park had games of putting or tennis they could resort to. Or, if neither of those found favour then a quiet moment sitting on a bench taking in the view of the Park might just do the trick.

### **Griffin Park Today**

**T**ime left its mark on Griffin Park in the years between the 1950's and the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The weather station was removed and, regrettably, the putting green fell into disuse this year and is, for now, merely a grassed area. The public conveniences suffered very serious neglect, although they have now been taken under the wing of PTC and are currently being rebuilt.

Regrettably, too, although the landscaping and greenery in Griffin Park has matured in some places, many of the original Park hedges have disappeared altogether. Those that have endured have lost their earlier pristine, cared-for appearance.



**An aerial view of Griffin Park circa 1950's with New Road in the background (Courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley).**



**A game of bowls in Griffin Park circa 1950's with the Pavilion in the background (Courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley).**



**The weather station in Griffin Park circa 1950's with New Road in the background (Courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley).**



**A game of putting in Griffin Park circa 1950's (Courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley).**

As for the children's playground, the old-fashioned swings, slide and rocking-horse have long-gone. So have the later helicopter and fireman's pole, replaced by more colourful versions of children's playground paraphernalia like the pirate ship, made of different materials and more attuned to modern trends, new thinking in the world of children's play and adventure, and modern standards of health and safety.

Be that as it may, Griffin Park has managed to hang on to its characterful, visual appeal together with its strong sense of place. In the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, it remains the much-loved centre-piece of this little patch of 'Old Porthcawl'. And, on a practical level, it is a well-used leisure and recreational facility for local residents and visitors alike.

Today, Griffin Park is a great family amenity and social space where children play in the open-air and teenagers can hang out in, what members of the **Society** are reliably informed is, 'a cool space'. As for adults, outdoor bowling is an important leisure activity in Porthcawl and the Griffin Park and Porthcawl Bowls Clubs permanently avail themselves of Griffin Park's facilities.

The **Society** understands that a Griffin Park Pavilion Association was created in 2012. The Association is now responsible for the upkeep of the Griffin Park Pavilion, which has been recently refurbished and now has, for example, new men's and women's changing rooms. It is also understood that there are occasions when the Pavilion hosts book club meetings and other community events, though no details are available. Even so, the upkeep and maintenance of Griffin Park is very vulnerable and, in the climate of ongoing local authority funding problems, prey to present and future BCBC cutbacks.

### The Future of Griffin Park

**G**eographically and strategically, Griffin Park is very well-placed in Porthcawl. It has a meaningful identity of its own and could remain unchanged, or, there are alternatives.

### The Alternatives for Griffin Park

**A**s it is, the area of 'Old Porthcawl' surrounding Griffin Park is relatively unscathed by unsympathetic conversions. In the context of Porthcawl's process of regeneration, there is a viable possibility that the green space opposite Griffin Park, which was originally part of the Griffin Park project, could be restored to its pre-WWII state.

It is feasible that, with minimal effort and expense, the grassy area next to the Sandpiper Bar could be upgraded to its former glory by means of a simple landscaping scheme and/or the introduction of public art. As a bus stop is already located in that particular spot which attracts many visitors and holidaymakers, an information board giving details of where and what to do in Porthcawl could, therefore, form part of the project. Such an addition would be especially helpful to visitors and holidaymakers if it were linked to other information boards that are being installed in town and the surrounding area.

Another proposition concerning Griffin Park would require a more creative approach. The Park is undeniably part of New Road but the Park also leads directly on to, and has a strong connection with, the Eastern Promenade. Immediately south of Griffin Park is Porthcawl Sands/Sandy Bay - a big stretch of family-friendly, sandy coastline that many believe to be the best beach in Porthcawl.

A more radical idea might be to explore the possibility of reinforcing and strengthening Griffin Park's relationship with the Eastern Promenade. This would enable its existing public amenities and social space to be incorporated into the development of the municipal Eastern Promenade and its projected future extension around the foreshore of Porthcawl Sands/Sandy Bay.

Unfortunately, as matters stand, BCBC seems to have other plans for the periphery of the area in question that, many argue, will have an adverse impact on Griffin Park. Towards the Eastern Promenade and slightly to the west of Griffin Park is an area

of grassland totalling 3.5 acres, known as 'The Green'. Early in 2019, the **Society** became aware that, according to a legal notice of 4<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> April 2019, BCBC proposed to dispose of its interest in what was described as a '...public open space...' Until then, the **Society** was unaware that 'The Green' was an officially designated 'Public Open Space' or that BCBC intended to sell it (Porthcawl Civic Trust Society Summer Newsletter, 2019).

There is obfuscation about BCBC's future plans but, if the authority proceeds with the disposal of The Green, it is understood that it will be to enable a food store to be sited there. In company with several other organisations in Porthcawl, the **Society** opposes this move and believes that:

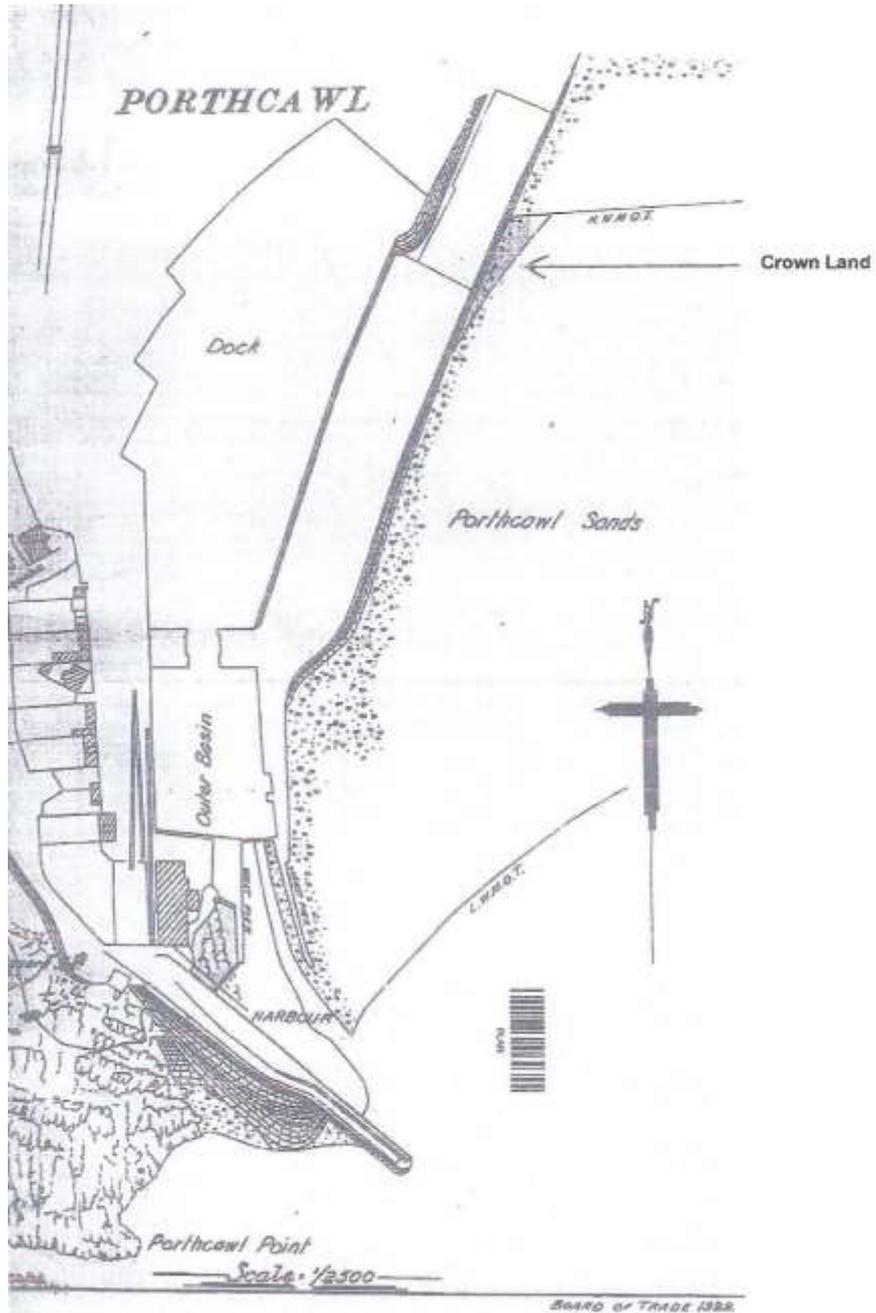
- Such a food store would be better-placed in Dock Street, where it is more likely to stimulate trade within the town centre.

- Siting a food store in this part of Porthcawl is fraught with difficulties. It will affect trade in the town centre as crossing the busy Portway will deter its customers from going into Porthcawl's town centre.
- The disposal of such a site for retail purposes on prime waterfront land will be a loss of a public and social space with developmental potential to become a high amenity asset.
- Such a disposal is at odds with the leisure and recreational vibe of its surroundings.
- Placing a food store at this location will greatly increase movement in the area and negatively affect Griffin Park and its environs which, by custom and tradition, have a logical, long-standing recreational relationship with the Porthcawl community.

In short, such a strategy will undermine, maybe even destroy, Griffin Park's special characteristics and its treasured leisure and recreational ambience.



The grassy area next to the Sandpiper Bar at Griffin Park Roundabout in August 2019 with seating and a bus stop.



Porthcawl Sands from the Board of Trade Map 1929 (Area denoted as Crown Land is also as shown on Land Registry Title Plan CYM256633 dated 14<sup>th</sup> February 2013).

## Porthcawl Sands or Sandy Bay?

A few hundred yards away from Griffin Park is a stretch of coastline with a large, near rock-free sandy beach and an outstanding vista. However, the mere act of naming this particular section of Porthcawl's coastline is far from straightforward as since it was first discovered it has had, and still has, several names. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, it was more usually referred to as 'Porthcawl' or 'Sandy Bay', while in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century it was commonly called 'Porthcawl Sands':

'...to the eastward of the Port are three Bays of considerable dimensions, extending as far as the estuary of the Ogmor River. The first is known as the "Sandy" or "Porthcawl" Bay, the next called "Trecco Bay" having equal advantages as a bathing ground; the third is named "Newton Bay" ...'

Hunter, 1892:4

Porthcawl Sands or Sandy Bay is part owned by BCBC. Patrick Evans, the present owner of Coney Beach Amusement Park, is the owner of the section of the beach extending from the Wimpy Burger Bar on the foreshore to the Eastern Promenade wall, excluding a small patch of beach next to the Eastern Promenade wall. This particular section is Crown Land and thus belongs to the monarch of the day, in this case, Elizabeth II – please see the shaded area in the above map. BCBC owns the remaining segment of the beach from the dunes down to Rhych Point (BCBC 2019; Board of Trade, 1929; Land Registry, 2013).

There is yet another complication. In more recent times, whilst that particular part of the coastline is sometimes still referred to as Sandy Bay, following the introduction of the Coney Beach Amusement Park, it became more widely known as Coney Beach and is often referred to as such by both local residents and visitors. To avoid further confusion, this report will, therefore, differentiate between each section of the beach when and if appropriate.

## The Characteristics of Porthcawl Sands or Sandy Bay

Of the 7 beaches making up Porthcawl's coastline, Porthcawl Sands/Sandy Bay is generally less bracing than Rest Bay and not as sheltered as the Town Beach. Like the adjoining Trecco Bay and Newton Bay, the beach has a shallow rake and, as the name suggests, is very sandy, making it ideal for young children and families and, access permitting, people with restricted mobility.

Within Porthcawl's parameters, the bay is bounded to the east by Trecco Bay and its caravan site, together with Newton Bay and Newton Burrows with their sand dunes. Weather permitting, distant views of Ogmor-by-Sea, Dunraven Cliffs and Nash Point are visible further eastwards. To the west, the beach has the clear demarcation line of the Eastern Promenade reinforcing its strong sense of place. The characterful stone sea wall that extends from Porthcawl Harbour to the foreshore of Coney Beach is a reminder of Porthcawl's half-forgotten 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century railway and maritime history which is further sharpened by the wasteland of the derelict Salt Lake in the background. Southwards is the panoramic view of north Devon, the Bristol Channel seascape and Tusker Rock at low tide. The inland backcloth to the north is one of the green high ground of Newton Down

## Coney Beach Amusement Park

Setting aside any personal preferences or otherwise for its Kiss-me-quick milieu, Coney Beach has a palpable character of its own. For many people, it is the place that defines Porthcawl and the generous dimensions of the bay, together with the backing of the Amusement Park, make Coney Beach easily identifiable. Notwithstanding that, many people who frequent the beach and/or the Amusement Park are unaware of its backstory, or that Coney Beach reflects the narrative of Porthcawl's growth and development into a major 20<sup>th</sup> Century coastal destination.

## The Origins of Coney Beach Amusement Park

That growth and development began when the DLPR opened a tramway into Porthcawl Harbour in 1828, long before the town became a seaside resort. Once the Harbour was operational, the DLPR obtained an amending Act of Parliament in May 1829 authorising, amongst other things, the purchase of land on which to tip the ballast that arrived on incoming ships. Part of this site became known as the old ballast tip. After the closure of Porthcawl Dock in 1906, GWR sold the old ballast tip in 1910 and it was eventually bought by Sir T G Jones, KBE, in 1917 (Higgins, 1968).

Reliable local sources state that, several years before the outbreak of WWI in 1914, some buildings had already been built on the foreshore of what was to become Coney Beach. It is believed that they consisted of a few tea-rooms and stalls and, while they were understood to have been of rudimentary construction, they were, in fact, the forerunners of Coney Beach Amusement Park.

After the end of WWI in 1918, 2 ex-WWI aircraft hangars were erected on the site of the old ballast tip, presumably to provide added facilities for catering and entertainment purposes. Subsequently, in 1920-21, Ernest Joseph, together with colleagues, made the old ballast tip into the 'home' of a Figure '8' that was initially located in west Glamorgan. Meanwhile, 2 members of the Evans family who were travelling showmen, visited Porthcawl, took up residence in the town and eventually began running the Figure '8' (Higgins, 1968; Morgan, 1996; *Vale Life*, 2016).

Ernest Joseph and his group purchased the old ballast tip from Sir T G Jones, KBE, in March 1922 and, in January 1924, they formed Porthcawl Recreations Ltd which went on to acquire the site. It was further developed into an Amusement Park and the Figure '8' was joined by items such as the Water Chute, Big Wheel, World Cruise, the Dodgems, the Ghost Train, the Helter Skelter, Boating Lake and Roundabouts.

In addition to the inevitable fairground clairvoyant and/or palmist, there was also a small zoo, together with indoor and outdoor skating rinks and assorted catering and sports buildings (Wikipedia, 2019).

By 1939 and the onset of WWII, the old ballast tip had evolved into the Coney Beach Amusement Park, named, it is said, after the famous New York amusement park on Coney Island that was built to entertain American troops returning from WWI (Higgins, 1968; Wikipedia, 2019).

## Coney Beach Amusement Park and WWII

Following its opening in 1920, Coney Beach Amusement Park operated from the Easter Bank Holiday until the end of October each year. The Amusement Park temporarily closed on the outbreak of WWII in September 1939 and resumed normal service in April 1946, after WWII had ended.

During WWII, Coney Beach Amusement Park became part of the UK's war effort and was used to quarter troops. It was the wartime base of the 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Welsh Regiment, and that Regiment was followed by the Belgian Brigade's Armoured Car Division which remained there until the unit left Porthcawl in 1942 (Mansley, 1994).

In addition to Coney Beach Amusement Park billeting service personnel, the beach itself was also used as a training ground for military exercises. For example, the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the West Yorkshire Regiment used the bay to practice beach landings (Mansley, 1994).

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in 1941, the USA entered WWII and various units of American troops were stationed in Porthcawl for differing lengths of time. One, the 351<sup>st</sup> Engineers, had a 15-piece dance band which performed at the Coney Beach Amusement Park as well as the now demolished Cosy Corner cinema/theatre, the Grand Pavilion, and the Esplanade and Seabank Hotels (Mansley, 1994).

Apart from these diversions, the core purpose of the Engineers was to:

'...construct bridges and many of Porthcawl's residents remember seeing these being built out from the end of Mackworth Road on to Coney Beach and from the Eastern Promenade...'

(Mansley, 1994: 100)

Local sources also recall witnessing American troops scaling the wall separating the beach from the Eastern Promenade. It is said that, if closely examined, traces of those exercises can be seen on the sea-defence wall of the Eastern Promenade.



A day's outing to Porthcawl circa 1950's  
(Courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley).



Coney Beach cycle-park circa 1935. Griffin Park is in the background. The cost of parking a bicycle is equivalent to about 2½p in today's money.  
(Courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley).

**Major Sir Leslie Joseph**



**(Sir) Herbert Leslie Joseph (1908-1992)**

*He was brought up in Swansea where he attended St Winifred's Convent School before moving on to King's School, Canterbury. He trained as a Civil Engineer and served as a Royal Engineer in WW2. He was Garrison Engineer, overseeing the building of Sennybridge Military Camp, Brecon, before his posting to Sudan. With his father he ran Coney Beach Amusement Park, Porthcawl, and in the Forties he was asked to help develop the Festival Gardens Fun Fair in Battersea Park, which was to accompany the 1950 Festival of Britain, for the Government. He took over when the project was very behind schedule... Having succeeded on getting it opened on time, he received a knighthood...and chose to be called Sir Leslie Joseph...*

*His many local business interests, most of which had been started by his father Ernest Joseph, included printing a chain of local newspapers in South Wales (...one known as The Porthcawl Advertiser), owning a building firm which was involved in rebuilding Swansea after the bombing of WW2, and developing a large caravan park at Trecco Bay, Porthcawl. At the Festival Gardens he became involved with Charles Forte and Sir Leslie joined its board of directors, rising to become Vice-Chairman to Charles (later Lord Forte), caterer and hotelier, and a few years later they did a deal which made Coney Beach part of the big Trust House Forte portfolio. For many years he spent most of the weeks in London developing and managing the many leisure activities of that large company. In addition to Coney Beach the funfairs owned by the group came to include Dreamgate in Margate and Belle Vue in Manchester. Belle Vue had a varied programme of events and activities including a yearly Christmas circus, so one of his more unusual duties was to travel abroad to sign up circus acts!. He developed for Trust House Forte a leisure complex called Summerland in Douglas on the Isle of Man...and when the Forte Village Resort complex that was being developed in Sardinia fell far behind schedule...he was sent in as trouble-shooter to facilitate its opening ...as he had done so successfully in the Festival Gardens.*

*Eventually Trust House Forte sought to reduce its leisure interests and Sir Leslie bought back Coney Beach for the family. Before his death it was sold again, this time to Pat Evans, a local Porthcawl showman, whose family had been involved at the funfair as concessionaires for many years, possibly since its inception.*

*In his later years, Sir Leslie became a keen and knowledgeable collector of Welsh Porcelain. With another collector, Jimmy James, he published a good reference book on the shapes and sizes of Swansea china that reflected their years of collaborative research. Much of his large collection of Swansea and Nantgarw porcelain and Swansea pottery, which he had built up over many years, was sold by Sothebys after his death. The auction, held at the Orangery, Margam Park near Porthcawl, attracted collectors from many parts of the world and recorded what were then, record prices for Welsh porcelain. Having helped to design a fine home for his family on Danygraig Hill, Porthcawl, he was able to pursue horticulture, another of his leisure interests, when he planned its beautiful garden.*

Mrs Mary Daley (Sir Leslie Joseph's daughter)  
August 2018

**THE  
FEATHERWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP  
OF  
GT. BRITAIN & EUROPE**

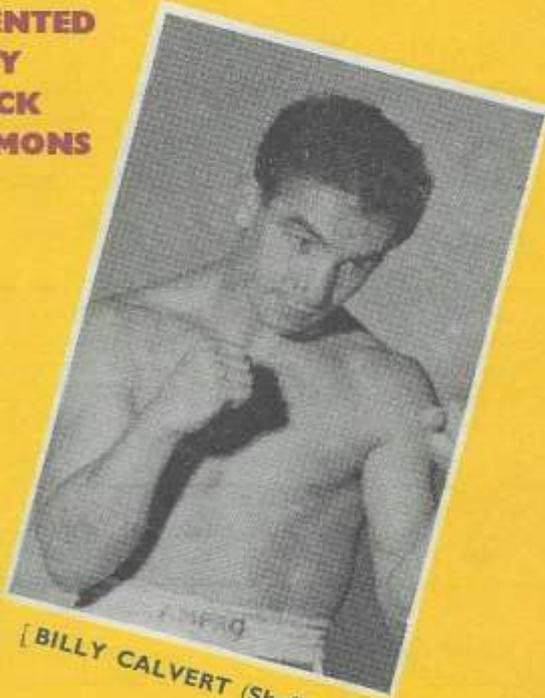
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**PRESENTED  
BY  
JACK  
SOLOMONS**



HOWARD WINSTONE (Merthyr)



BILLY CALVERT (Sheffield)

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**CONEY BEACH ARENA · PORTHCAWL**

**Tuesday · 20th August · 1963**

**DOORS OPEN 6 p.m.**

**COMMENCE 7.30 p.m.**

**Programme II-**

Front cover of a major Boxing event programme  
(Courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon and Mrs Mary Daley).

## Coney Beach Amusement Park in the Post-WWII Era

Although a go-to place before WWII, Coney Beach Amusement Park experienced a boom in popularity from the 1950's onwards due to a full programme of events such as the firework displays each September and acts like the aerial acrobatics performed by the Royal Air Force (RAF). Other crowd-pulling occasions included circuses, darts matches, snooker tournaments and exhibitions, beauty contests, sandcastle and jazz band competitions. All were organised and promoted by Major (later 'Sir') Leslie Joseph who undertook the management of the Amusement Park after his father, Ernest Joseph, moved on to pursue other interests.

These events made Coney Beach a main attraction in Porthcawl, drawing crowds of people to the town from throughout Wales and further afield. Post-WWII, road links had improved with the gradual extension of the M4 in the 1960's and 1970's making Porthcawl easy to reach. As a result, there was a rise in visitor numbers which, undoubtedly, helped to boost Porthcawl's economy and provide local people with jobs, albeit of a seasonal nature.

In fact, many of Porthcawl's teenagers were introduced to the world of work via holiday and/or weekend jobs at Coney Beach Amusement Park. The hours were acknowledged to be long, unsocial and the work often arduous. But the pay was regarded as good, especially for new entrants into the labour market with little or no life experience and time-limited in their availability for work. In post-WWII Porthcawl, where jobs were scarce, seasonal and mostly tied to the tourist industry, many teenagers regarded such holiday jobs as a bonus and they were greatly sought after.

### Boxing

Whilst a general programme of events was successfully implemented by Major Sir Leslie Joseph, he was perhaps best known for the

introduction of serious professional boxing to Porthcawl although professional boxing is no stranger to Welsh life. Even before the outbreak of WWI, boxing was a prestigious sport with a strong following in the Principality, particularly in the Valleys of the nearby Welsh coalfield. Prior to WWI, Wales had produced a clutch of world-class boxers such as Jimmy Wilde, World Flyweight Champion, Freddie Welsh, World Lightweight Champion, and Jim Driscoll (Cardiff), World Featherweight Champion 1906 -1913 (Ringsport, 1963).

The inauguration of serious professional boxing in Porthcawl took place in August 1949 when approximately 10,000 people attended a boxing tournament in the new open-air Coney Beach Arena. Major Sir Leslie Joseph was a member of the Welsh Area Council of the British Boxing Board of Control (BBBC) and he stated in the programme marking that occasion that:

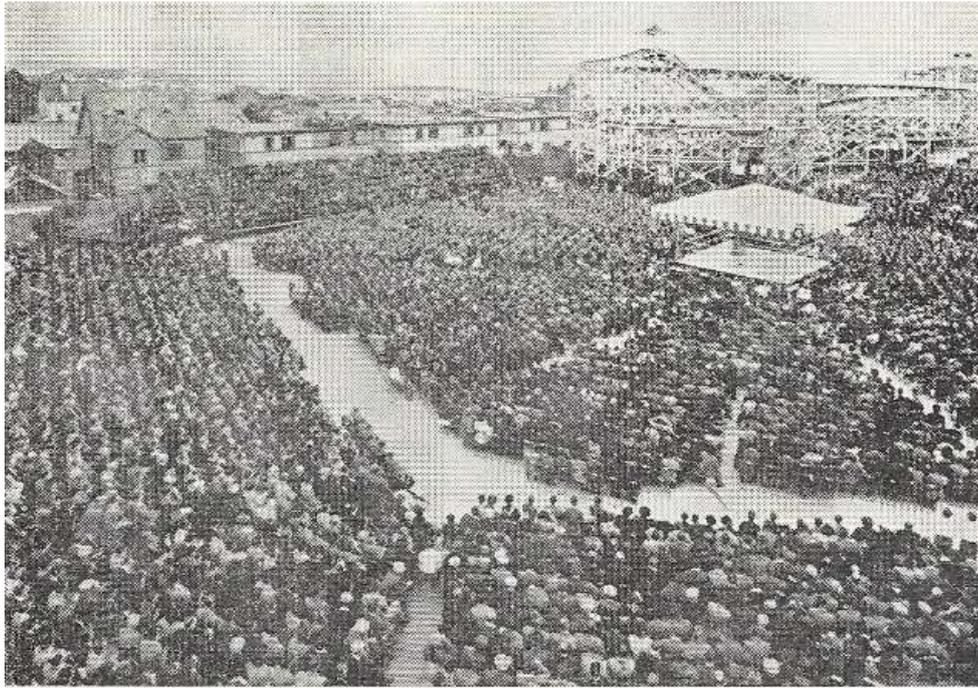
'...in promoting my first boxing tournament I was determined to do three things. Firstly, put on a good programme; secondly, set a reasonable price ceiling and thirdly see to it that, whether a ringsider or five-bobber you should enjoy the show in comfort...'

(Joseph, 1949: 5)

This suggests that the cheapest seats were 5/- in old money terms, that is, about 25p today. Writing later in the August 1963 programme, Alan Wood, Boxing Editor of *The Western Mail* newspaper and regular contributor to programmes for the boxing events, stated:

'...The Coney Beach Arena, Porthcawl, which remains the most comfortable outdoor arena with everyone seated, in Britain, has been the scene of many exciting and thrilling contests. The intimacy of the 12,000 seater the 'brainchild' of the late Ernest Joseph and his son Sir Leslie Joseph, has allowed even the most distant spectator to see the blow-by-blow proceedings as though at the ringside itself...'

Wood, 1963:8



A PORTION OF THE CONEY BEACH ARENA

**Coney Beach Arena with the Figure '8' in the background, in its heyday circa 1960 (Courtesy of Mrs Christina Eynon and Mrs Mary Daley).**



**Participants in a Jazz Band Competition in Coney Beach Arena circa 1950's (Courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley).**

The boxing matches included fights for the British, European and Empire titles in the Heavyweight, Flyweight and Featherweight Divisions. So successful were these boxing tournaments that leading British boxers of the day such as Dick Richardson, Henry Cooper, Joe Erskine, Brian London and Howard Winstone took part. Major Sir Leslie Joseph continued to promote boxing bouts in Coney Beach until the mid-1960's whereupon they were taken over by the famous boxing promoter, Jack Solomon.

Professional boxing has long since left Porthcawl but the town enjoys a good reputation on the amateur boxing circuit in the shape of the Pyle and Porthcawl Pumas Club. The Club has a base in New Road, Porthcawl and encourages both male and female boxers. It has been in existence for 60 years and has won a number of Welsh and British boxing titles during that period.

Meanwhile, the Coney Beach Arena, the scene of so many boxing matches, jazz band and marching competitions, beauty contests and other atmospheric, crowd-pulling events, is no more. Unfortunately, the site is currently a rather run-down, vacant space which is formally defined as a car park.

Fairgrounds and Amusement Parks can be dangerous places as they generally deal in spills and excitement and, while it may be an unpalatable truth, risks are involved in such pursuits. Coney Beach Amusement Park has had its share of incidents over the years. By far the most serious of these occurred in 1994, when a 9-year old boy very tragically died in an accident on the Water Chute Ride (Wikipedia, 2019).

This accident was the second in a number of high-profile incidents that resulted in negative publicity for Coney Beach Amusement Park and a downturn in visitor numbers. Whilst that may be the case, there have been no reports of incidents involving maintenance problems since 2009.

## Coney Beach Amusement Park Today

The initial creation of Coney Beach Amusement Park was controversial and, for a considerable length of time afterwards, a number of Porthcawl residents regarded its existence as an ongoing blight on the town. A century after its inception, however, it is recognised that Coney Beach Amusement Park has had a significant role in Porthcawl's social history. Quite apart from the pleasure it has given to thrill-seeking individuals, the leisure and recreational facilities at the Amusement Park have made a sizeable contribution to the town's local and tourist economy.

Nowadays, the Coney Beach Amusement Park is run as a family business by the descendants of Pat Evans, who first came to Porthcawl in 1918. According to a recent article in *Vale Life*:

'...All members of our family, and extended family, run their own rides and equipment here. We're proud to be a family business, run for families to enjoy...'

Evans, 2016:10-11

## The Future

The immediate future of Coney Beach Amusement Park looks secure, although there is some speculation about what the plans are for the site in the longer-term and what its eventual destiny may be. Under BCBC's present regeneration plans being scrutinised for Porthcawl, the intention appears to be that the Amusement Park will be demolished and space made available for a periodic travelling fair on the redeveloped foreshore of Coney Beach.

But that is all conjecture. To date, plans are characteristically vague and it is likely that an extended period of time will pass before further consideration will be given to this proposal, let alone its implementation. In the meantime, visitors are still able to enjoy all the fun of the fair.



**Coney Beach Amusement Park in 1929 before Griffin Park was created (Reproduced from the *People's Collection Wales*).**

**Wales' First Big Wheel circa 1938. 'A picture of the Big Wheel Ride recently introduced at Coney Beach Pleasure Park, Porthcawl. From the top of the ride can be seen the surrounding country for miles around.'** (Photo and information courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley).





The 5-piece band – the Coney Beach Five, was an early attraction at Coney Beach Amusement Park circa 1930. 'Hear us on the wireless - Book us to play at your own dances' (Photo and information courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley).



The Carousel circa 1930 – also an early addition to Coney Beach Amusement Park (Courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley).

'Hands Free' on The Wall of Death 1930 (Courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley).





**Crazy Golf in 1931 (Courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley).**



**The Dodgers being constructed circa 1930 (Courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley).**



**The Boating Lake in 1930 (Courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley).**



**The Ghost Train circa 1950 (Courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley).**



**The Coney Beach Café circa 1950 (Courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley).**



**The Helter Skelter & Boating Lake circa 1950. Porthcawl Railway Station & Salt Lake are in the background (Courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley).**



**The World Cruise circa 1950 (Courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley).**



**The Starmen of Sweden High-wire Act circa 1960 (Courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley).**



**A Terapin amphibious vehicle named 'Mary' on Coney Beach circa 1950 (Courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley).**

**A ride around the Bay on the Terapin called 'Mary' circa 1950 (Courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley).**



**The rescue of a yacht by one of the amphibious DUKS at Coney Beach circa 1950 (Photo and information Courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley).**



The Mumbles to Coney Beach Swim 1970  
(Courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley).



Flyer for Sandcastle Contest circa 1970  
(Courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley).



Oh Dear! The tide's coming in. Sandcastle  
competition at Coney Beach circa 1970  
(Courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley).

## **Cleanliness and Safety on Porthcawl Sands/Sandy Bay**

**A** more pressing imperative, especially in view of deepening contemporary concern about the state of the environment, is the safeguarding and cleanliness of this well-liked piece of Porthcawl's coastline. Here, it is not just the naming of Porthcawl Sands/Sandy Bay and Coney Beach that is confused. Beach cleaning is, rightly, a big issue in Porthcawl and it is widely assumed that BCBC is the authority responsible for the cleanliness of Porthcawl's coastline in its entirety.

Unlike Rest Bay, neither Coney Beach nor Sandy Bay have the coveted status of being Blue Flagged beaches and litter is problematic on Porthcawl Sands/Sandy Bay. Voluntary groups undertake beach cleans, dogs are banned in the summer months and BCBC regularly empties litter bins, but rubbish and detritus is constantly washed up on the Bristol Channel tides. It also appears overnight in holiday periods when, unlike other European countries, many people dispose of their rubbish in an irresponsible, antisocial manner or fail to take it home (BCBC, 2019)

As stated earlier, Porthcawl Sands/Sandy Bay is a beach of generous proportions but the Wimpy Burger Bar on the foreshore marks an imaginary line separating Coney Beach from the rest of the bay. Up to that point, the owner of Coney Beach Amusement Park who also owns the beach in front of the Amusement Park, is responsible for beach clearance and maintenance (Bolter, 2017).

BCBC recognises that the situation vis-à-vis beach cleanliness is confusing particularly as, again, once past the Wimpy Burger Bar, another imaginary line is drawn in the sand. The next section of Porthcawl Sands/Sandy Bay directly in front of the Hi-Tide cabaret bar and restaurant, smaller than that belonging to the Amusement Park, is maintained by the owners of the Hi Tide. The remainder of Porthcawl Sands/Sandy Bay up to and including Rhych Point, is municipally owned and cleaned by BCBC (BCBC, 2019).

## **Cleanliness and Safety on Trecco Bay**

**O**nce past Rhych Point and into Trecco Bay, the situation becomes even more confusing as the land and beach at Trecco Bay are privately owned by Parkdean Resorts. The cleanliness, maintenance and running of the beach at Trecco Bay is, therefore, their responsibility (BCBC, 2019).

Trecco Bay is the sandy beach and land to the east of Porthcawl Sands/Sandy Bay which, at the time of writing this report, has been classed as a Blue Flag beach for the 14<sup>th</sup> consecutive year. Sandy Bay and Trecco Bay are separated by the narrow, rocky outcrop of Rhych Point that is a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation and partially protected by concrete rubble. Lifeguard patrols are based on the strategically located Rhych Point and they patrol both Porthcawl Sands/Sandy Bay and Trecco Bay in the summer months from April until the end of September.

## **Sandy Bay and Trecco Bay Caravan Parks**

**T**here are a number of camping and caravan parks in Porthcawl but Trecco Bay, as well as Sandy Bay, before it closed in 2001, are probably the best known. Both are large caravan parks and both have direct access to the first-class sandy beaches from which they took their names. Indeed, the sites of the municipally owned Sandy Bay Caravan Park and the privately owned Trecco Bay Caravan Park were next-door to each other. Consequently, they were so irretrievably linked in most people's minds that many people, including local residents, did not differentiate between them. Yet, they fulfilled different functions and were different in kind.

## **Sandy Bay/Trecco Bay during WWII**

**S**andy Bay and Trecco Bay Caravan Parks have both dominated Porthcawl's public profile since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century. Like Coney Beach Amusement Park, to many in the general population, they are what really defines

Porthcawl although neither Caravan Park materialised until the post-WWII period. Having said that, the land on which they are sited played an important role during WWII in accommodating some of the American military units based in Porthcawl.

As mentioned earlier, Porthcawl was a garrison town throughout WWII. Quartering the thousands of British and international service personnel who were based in and/or passing through Porthcawl between 1939 and 1945 was problematic as, in 1940, it was a small town and there were only 2,400 houses within its environs. The problem was partially solved by utilising some of Porthcawl's, then, undeveloped spaces such as land on the perimeter of Trecco Bay, to the south of New Road (Mansley, 1994).

That land was known as Plovers Plain. As the name suggests, its terrain had the advantage of being flat although it was sheltered by tall sand-dunes, making it an ideal location for one of the American units - the US 342<sup>nd</sup> Engineers - to pitch its camp. There was already some housing in the surrounding area and it appears that the American troops were quickly accepted by the local community to the extent that school-children often went to and were made welcome at the camp:

'...The Americans soon made friends with the locals and school-children were regular visitors to the camp. Mr Dennis Purchase, who lives in New Road, still has "My Buddy Book" which he bought at Camp PX and filled in the details of the soldiers he had made friends with. "We used to rush home from school", he says, "and go over to the camp. The soldiers would give us money to get fish and chips for them"...'

Mansley, 1994:100

Local sources recall that the American troops regularly bought fish and chips from 'chippies' such as Beales Fish Restaurant at Griffin Park roundabout, and were in the habit of eating their fish supper out of their metal helmets!

## Sandy Bay and Trecco Bay Post-WWII

The end of WWII in 1945 ushered in a social revolution in holiday tastes that stemmed from the inter-war years, if not before. Prior to the outbreak of hostilities in 1939, camping, along with other outdoor pursuits like hiking and cycling, had enjoyed a wave of popularity in Europe and the UK.

Although the amenities and standards experienced by those pioneer under-canvas enthusiasts were rough and ready and more akin to the modern practice of 'wild camping', summer camping was a standout feature of the inter-war years in Porthcawl. Thus, by the outbreak of WWII in 1939, thousands of people had already visited Porthcawl and experienced a camping holiday (Higgins, 1968).

Initially, there was no organisation and tents were pitched at random amongst the unregulated, accommodating sand dunes straddling Trecco Bay and Newton Bay:

'...By the early 1930's, large numbers of under-canvas campers were dispersed about the district during August, and by 1939 their numbers during the Bank Holiday weekend had grown to 12,000, a temporary influx larger than the static population of the parish...'

Higgins, 1968: 153

What was to become an outstanding feature of the UK's changing holiday habits in the post-WWII period, was the gradual replacement of canvas tents with trailer-tents and makeshift caravans, no doubt for added comfort and, almost certainly, a concession to the capricious British weather. Slowly, too, safeguarding public health became a concern as increasing numbers of people took to the road for a fortnight 'away from it all' camping or caravanning holiday. Inevitably, regulation crept into what had been, until then, an economic as well as a spontaneous, leisure and recreational pursuit (Higgins, 1968).



**Coney Beach when the sun was shining circa 1950 (Courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley).**



**An old postcard of Sandy Bay circa 1920 (Courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley).**



**Trecco Bay circa 1950 (Courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley).**



A map of Coney Beach/Sandy Bay & Trecco Bay (BCBC, 2019).



Aerial view of Sandy Bay Caravan Park & Trecco Bay Caravan Park. Sandy Bay is the smaller of the two (With apologies for its poor quality (*The Western Mail* newspaper, 12<sup>th</sup> June 1999).

## **Sandy Bay and Trecco Bay Post-WWII cont'd**

In response to demand and as a measure to safeguard public health and hygiene, permanent holiday camps equipped with functional, if basic by modern standards, shower and toilet facilities began to emerge. It is believed that Porthcawl had 11 such permanent holiday sites by 1950, the largest of which would eventually become the Trecco Bay and Newton Burrows Holiday Camp (Higgins, 1968).

## **The Origins of Sandy Bay and Trecco Bay Caravan Parks**

**B**oth Sandy Bay and Trecco Bay Caravan Parks sprang from a convoluted series of transactions that began in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

In 1907, Sir T G Jones, KBE, acquired approximately 10 acres of land in the Mackworth Road area, as a result of Mary Brogden's financial problems following her husband's death (please see page 4 above). In February 1924, in an ostensibly unrelated purchase, he bought the Newton Burrows estate made up of approximately 250 acres of land from a point 100 yards east of Mackworth Road to the edge of Porthcawl's eastern boundary. In March 1934, that parcel of land was subsequently conveyed to Newton (Porthcawl) Estates Ltd, in which Sir T G Jones, KBE, held substantial interests (Higgins, 1968).

In May 1938, Newton (Porthcawl) Estates Ltd granted Ernest Joseph (father of Major Sir Leslie Joseph), a lease which was later transferred to Porthcawl Camping Sites Ltd, the Company which was ultimately responsible for the development of Trecco Bay and Newton Burrows Holiday Camp. That lease was extended in 1949. In the interim, in July 1944, Newton (Porthcawl) Estates Ltd offered to sell the land to PUDC. The PUDC then applied to the Welsh Board of Health to have that land classified as an area for compulsory purchase (Higgins, 1968).

An inquiry was held in May 1947 in which the Welsh Board of Health agreed to the partial designation of 56 acres west of Rhych Avenue, then known as Sandhills, for compulsory purchase. PUDC bought the land and levelled the sand-dunes that same year so as to maximise the number of caravans that could be parked there. That site became known as Sandy Bay Caravan Park (Higgins, 1968).

Sandy Bay Caravan Park accommodated both static and touring caravans and Recreational Vehicles (RV's) although, over time, it became more associated with touring caravans and RV's. Inevitably, the wear and tear accompanying the heavy usage of Sandy Bays' roadways and facilities such as the public shower and toilets blocks, took its toll. Unfortunately, BCBC was unwilling to invest in essential repairs/replacements and, as the area was earmarked for redevelopment under one of Porthcawl's now defunct Regeneration Schemes, Sandy Bay Caravan Park closed in October 2000 and was cleared of caravans in February 2001 (Rees, 2001 & 2002).

## **Sandy Bay Caravan Park Today**

**D**espite subsequent interest from prospective buyers, BCBC has allowed the 56 acres comprising Sandy Bay Caravan Park, to lapse into a state of dissolution and decay. Lighting and roadways still exist but, left untended, the site has been overtaken by nature and the resultant sand accretions have become habitats for flora and fauna native to the sand-dunes (BCBC, 2009).

BCBC has been heavily criticised for its ill-judged decision to close Sandy Bay Caravan Park. Apart from the loss of income to Porthcawl and the whole of BCBC, another damaging aspect of the closure was the number of RV's and touring caravans which, bereft of adequate touring and public health facilities in the town, habitually parked along the seafront in Porthcawl (Lewis, 2015).

Views of early camping in the sand-dunes (All photos on this page are courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley).





The Trecco Troubadours and their audience in a bell-tent circa 1940 (Courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley).



Advertising the evening's entertainment at Trecco Bay Caravan Park circa 1950 (Courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley).

**Trecco Bay. Early caravans of all shapes and sizes parked here, there & everywhere (Courtesy of Mrs Tina Eynon & Mrs Mary Daley).**



**Slightly later. An old postcard of serried ranks of caravans in Trecco Bay circa 1950 (Courtesy of John Richardson).**

## Trecco Bay Caravan Park and Mass Tourism

In January 1951, Newton (Porthcawl) Estates Limited and Porthcawl Seaside Camping Sites Limited entered into a new lease of 200 years for the stated 193 acres that remained of the Newton Burrows estate (Higgins, 1968).

In the period from 1951 to 1959, plans for the area were developed and, in 1959, Major Sir Leslie Joseph bought 300 acres of sand-dunes at Trecco Bay on a 200 year lease with the aim of converting the area into a caravan site for 3,500 caravans. Unfortunately, available records are unclear as to whether the 193 acres were included or additional to the original 300 acres mentioned above (Higgins, 1968).

Planning permission for the scheme was granted on 19<sup>th</sup> March 1959 and Trecco Bay Caravan Park was subsequently created in 1961. Thus, mass tourism had arrived in Porthcawl as, when Trecco Bay Caravan Park was combined with the adjoining Sandy Bay Caravan Park, they contained 4400 caravans and, famously, became the largest caravan camp in Europe (Higgins, 1968; Wightwick, 1999).

Shortly after, a proposal was submitted to extend Trecco Bay Caravan Park in order to accommodate another 1000 caravans in Newton Burrows. Local feeling was overwhelmingly against this proposal and it met with a storm of protest which was, in fact, instrumental to the formation of the **Porthcawl Civic Trust Society** in 1970 (Higgins, 1968; Porthcawl Civic Trust Society Press Release, 1974).

## Trecco Bay Caravan Park in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century

At that point in time, Porthcawl was a comparatively small urban conurbation of around 3,000 residential dwellings and the proposal to expand Trecco Bay Caravan Park involved the siting of over 4,000 caravans in a concentrated space on the eastern fringes of the town. Porthcawl was not alone in witnessing the creation of new camping

and caravan sites, however. Throughout Wales, such sites were springing up inland and along the coastline, provoking a groundswell of opposition to the point that Gwynedd, Clwyd and Dyfed halted permitted camping and caravan sites within their counties (Sharp, 1964; *The Western Mail*, 1975).

Whilst the expansion of Trecco Bay Caravan Park was controversial and most local residents were against siting more caravans in the sand-dunes of Newton Burrows, public opinion was nuanced. There was some ambivalence towards the issue amongst a faction of local residents and a significant minority in Porthcawl favoured the initiative. There were many Porthcawl residents who wanted a break from the austerity of the immediate post-war years and were hopeful of a return to the flourishing tourist trade that the town had enjoyed before WWII. It was their belief that the proposed extension of Trecco Bay Caravan Park would enhance the local economy, develop tourism in the area and bring much needed employment to the town (Morgan, 1987; Isaac, 1999).

Moreover, in the aftermath of WWII and up to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, environmental awareness was not as pronounced as today. What is apparent, too, is that the underlying attitude towards the wild area of sand-hills and burrows to the east of Porthcawl, mimicked that of the approach towards common land with the earlier Inclosure Award of 1864. That is, some held the view that the sand dunes were of no particular value, agricultural or otherwise. Please see details of the Newton Inclosure Award of 1864 in *Stage II, Part A, of Porthcawl: Much More Than Meets The Eye (2020)*, page 16 refers.

To its supporters, therefore, the existence of Trecco Bay Caravan Park and Sandy Bay Caravan Park and their continued development, offered the prospect of more local jobs and all the attendant benefits that would bring to Porthcawl's local economy. Given this, some considered that no harm would come if more sand-dunes were bulldozed and caravans sited on the land. Such was the price of progress.

There were detractors to the expansion of Trecco Bay Caravan Park in the higher echelons of public administration. When asked by the, then, Glamorgan County Council (GCC) to perform a planning exercise and create a statutory town map in 1964, a professional town planner of high standing, Dr Thomas Sharp, CBE, wrote a coruscating report stating:

‘...I regret that I do not feel able to undertake this work. In my opinion, the future of the town has been so prejudiced by developments within the last decade that no worthwhile plan for the future can be made until the situation resulting from those developments has been corrected....’

The injurious developments which I refer to are, of course, the caravan camps which have been established in the eastern part of the town beyond the harbour. Here the degradation of what had hitherto been a quiet and reticent seaside holiday resort, had already been begun before the war....the effect of that has been of nothing compared with the caravan area now immediately adjoining it. There, on what was a few years ago was a great expanse of natural burrows and sandhills, has been developed the most deplorable and civically cancerous growth that I have yet to encounter in my long experience in urban development....’

Sharp, 1964:1

The eventual outcome of such vehement opposition was that the idea of extending Trecco Bay Caravan Park into Newton Burrows was dropped. Meanwhile, the site had come within the ownership of Sir Charles Forte and, thereafter, the Trust-Houses-Forte Company.

### **The Impact of Trecco Bay Caravan Park on Porthcawl**

Once completed, Trecco Bay Caravan Park had its own shops, cafés, entertainment centres, cinema, non-denominational church, swimming pool and the sought-after social cycles! Trecco Bay Caravan Park even had its own mobile stage on which an unknown singer named Shirley Bassey made an appearance (Wightwick, 1999).

Unbeknownst to Porthcawl, Sandy Bay and Trecco Bay Caravan Parks were part of a bigger picture as far as the UK's holiday habits was concerned. Foreign holidays arrived a little later in the 1970's and 1980's but the mass tourism of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century involved the growth of trailer-tent and caravan holidays. They were clearly an idea whose time had come and their popularity grew very quickly, especially amongst traditional mining communities. It was not long before Trecco Bay Caravan Park became known as 'Rhondda-by-the-Sea' and 'Hiya Butt Bay' (Wightwick, 1999).

This was not surprising as, in contrast to hotels, B&B's and guest-houses, a seaside caravan holiday in Porthcawl represented unrestricted freedom. Indeed, their popularity was such that many people from Valley communities invested in their own static caravans in Trecco Bay Caravan Park to which they decamped for long periods in the summer months. Many still do (Wightwick, 1999; Isaac, 1999).

The ramifications were considerable for Porthcawl. As always, there were winners and losers. Contextually, the UK was getting itself back on its feet and, from the 1950's onwards, austerity and wartime experiences were consigned to the past. Those willing to put reservations aside and who were alive to new trading opportunities adapted, tailoring their business and/or working patterns to the needs of Porthcawl's holidaymakers. For instance, the hospitality sector did well and, in an era when few people possessed or could afford a camera, photographers such as 'Jacksons Faces' also prospered.

But, debatably, it was Porthcawl's visitors and holidaymakers who benefited the most. Where once a holiday, certainly one of a week or more, was out of logistical or financial reach, or at best, involved staying with family and/or friends, a stay at Sandy Bay or Trecco Bay Caravan Parks offered people the opportunity to have an affordable seaside holiday. And, whereas in the early days of camping/caravanning, people took pot-luck, the existence of both Caravan Parks gave people more choice and leverage over the standard of

accommodation they could have and, perhaps just as important to them, what they were able to do whilst on holiday (Isaac, 1999).

The most obvious loser was the environment. Before the development of the Sandy Bay and Trecco Bay Caravan Parks, the wild, unspoilt burrows and sand-hills formed part of an uninterrupted expanse of sand-dunes stretching eastwards from Porthcawl Sands/Sandy Bay to the mouth of the River Ogmore. It was an intrinsic part of Porthcawl's hinterland and had a natural beauty of its own. It was also adjacent to the Glamorgan Heritage Coast which, in 1973/1974, was deemed one of the first 3 Heritage Coast areas in the UK (Higgins, 1968; Morgan, 1987; Sharp, 1964; Porthcawl Civic Trust Society Press Release, 1974).

Other losers were those in Porthcawl's business, commerce and retail sector who were unable/unwilling to adjust to the changed conditions Porthcawl found itself in. Trecco Bay Caravan Park was a virtual township so there was little incentive for holidaymakers to go to Porthcawl town centre as the site catered for their needs. Porthcawl town centre suffered a downturn in tourist trade as a result. The take-up for B&B's, guest houses and hotels also declined and 'taking visitors' became a distant memory. The upshot was that Porthcawl's resort function dwindled away, and there was a consequent undermining of the local economy (Morgan, 1987).

By the early 1970s, the ownership of Trecco Bay Caravan Park had passed to Trust House Forte but that change of ownership did not still the ongoing controversy about the site. Local sources confirm that complaints continued about the Caravan Park's size, layout, the appearance and cleanliness of the site and the behaviour of the holidaymakers.

In time, Trust House Forte decreased its leisure interests and divested itself of the site which was bought by First Leisure Corporation in 1991. Between 1991 and 2015, Trecco Bay Caravan Park underwent

a series of sales and takeovers, changing hands several times and experiencing many improvements. As a result, the number of caravans had been reduced to 2,200 by 1996 and there was a major upgrading of the site in 1997. In 1999, there was a management buyout by Parkdean Holidays, followed by a merger between Parkdean Holidays and Park Resorts in 2015 when Parkdean Resorts became the site's current owner (Wikipedia, 2019).

### **Trecco Bay Caravan Park Today**

**T**recco Bay Caravan Park is much improved as a result of the input of new ideas and shifts in management. Security has been beefed-up and serious investment has upgraded the site to the high standards it enjoys today. That investment has paid off as Trecco Bay Caravan Park is now an award-winning destination for its parent firm.

Today, in contrast to the neighbouring Sandy Bay Caravan Park which was shut-down by BCBC in 2001 and remains a derelict site, Trecco Bay Caravan Park is thriving. It has been rebranded and is known as the Trecco Bay Holiday Resort. Whilst it remains one of the UK's largest holiday parks, it is the recipient of continuing investment and is becoming more integrated into the wider Porthcawl community. For instance, it regularly hosts musical events during the annual Elvis and Celtic Festivals in Porthcawl and the Welsh Pool Festival was held there in 2019.

As well as having its own Blue Flag beach (see above), holidaymakers have a choice of accommodation between lodges and caravans, either to rent or to own. The Resort has a very wide range of entertainment and sporting facilities from adventure golf, archery and badminton, a selection of restaurants and food outlets. In addition, Parkdean Resorts has won the David Bellamy Award for Conservation and Trecco Bay Holiday Resort has, rather appropriately in view of its past history, its own dedicated Conservation Area (Parkdean Resorts, 2019).

### **When the Valley went to the seaside**

*It was an annual exodus without rival. One fortnight every summer thousands of miners and their families would desert the South Wales valleys and head off to the seaside...Miners' Fortnight was an integral part of Welsh culture. The annual closure of the pits meant two weeks of communal partying usually besides the seaside complete with knitted handkerchiefs, beer and calamine.*

*Today, with only one deep pit still operating in Wales there is no summer shutdown and few miners. Those employed at the worker-owned Tower Colliery in Hirwaun are more likely to go to Benidorm than Barry and the seaside resorts in Wales no longer echo to the sound of thousands of visitors arriving together from the valleys...But memories of halcyon days paddling in chilly seas and singing songs with workmates and family are still quite strong. Margaret remembers clearly the entire village of Tonyrefail packing up and decamping to Trecco Bay in Porthcawl. She spent all her childhood holidays at Trecco Bay Caravan Park with her parents, seven brothers and sisters and most of Tonyrefail.*

*Her father, who worked as a miner from 1916 to 1936, help set up a precursor to the annual two-week trip to Porthcawl. As secretary of the Miners' lodge he persuaded the colliery works committee to set up funds for miners' entertainment. After four years, there was enough money to launch an annual day trip to Porthcawl.*

*'I remember the double-decker buses parked along Mill Street and right up to Trebanog waiting to take people to Trecco Bay'. We always went on a Sunday' Margaret recalls. The trips from Tonyrefail would involve 600 miners and their families making a party of at least 2000 people heading for the sea together.*

*It was through these day trips that her father became friendly with Ernest Joseph, the man who initiated tourism in Porthcawl by setting up a figure-of-eight ride up on the sand shortly after World War 1. Mr Joseph also owned Coney Beach restaurant and entertainment complex. On what was to be the last day trip, it was decided that snacks should be provided for 2000 day trippers and Mr Joseph was asked if sandwiches and cake could be cut up in the restaurant. Mr Joseph agreed and even provided staff to help with the preparations.*

*This association was to prove helpful. Soon afterwards, Mr Joseph bought the site where families were camping during Miners' Fortnight, traditionally the last week in July and the first week in August. The land, previously owned by the Porthcawl Sand and Gravel company, was now subject to strict new regulations on rubbish collection and lavatories and the budding tourism magnate raised the rent. Worried that many miners could no longer afford the fees, Mr Joseph agreed that prices would be lowered.*

*Sixty years later, Margaret remembers the excitement as the whole of Tonyrefail prepared to decamp to Trecco Bay for two weeks. Families would start to pack for the excursion weeks beforehand and some local businesses, including Evans the fish shop, would even open satellite stalls in Porthcawl. 'Our family arrived in a coal lorry with all our furniture, even the sideboard and pegs. We took everything but the kitchen sink. We were busy packing and the lorry would be cleaned down and piled high with furniture' Margaret says. Like the day trips, the two week break also involved as many as 2000.*

*Once in Porthcawl, most people slept in tents rather than caravans because it was cheaper. Canvas bell tents, with the whole family sleeping round the central pole were popular. Waking together, they would savour the smell of bacon frying as mothers up and down the site cooked up breakfast on primus stoves in the open air. Other meals, including fish and chips from Mr Evans temporary stall, dewberry tarts made from fresh dewberries collected on the dunes, or fresh mackerel bought from local fishermen.*

*'People would go to various places for Miners' Fortnight but Porthcawl was always the place of choice because of the dunes. We had happy days there. They were happy carefree days' says Margaret. 'Year after year you were with people who you knew and there was a community feeling. It was a lovely place too. I have been to Italy, Belgium and Holland. As an adult but you can't beat Welsh beaches'...'Originally, we had a bell tent. But later we got a caravan called a New York and thought we were very posh. It had oil lamps and pull down beds and you cooked inside'.*

*Margaret's father got a job as camp warden and this meant extended summer holidays at Trecco Bay. But it was not all relaxation especially for Margaret's mother. 'She had eight children quite young. She used to wrap the baby's nappies up and we had to take them down to the toilets to empty them. The toilets were a row of tin sheds with wooden seats and a big hole. There were no disposable nappies in those days so we emptied them and took them back for cleaning.'*

*With the outbreak of World War II, the landscape changed. The beach and dunes were used for army training, trenches were dug in the sand and poles placed on the beach to stop enemy landings. When the Americans joined the fighting, the campsite was even closed for a time so US soldiers could be based there.*

*From 'When the Valleys went to the seaside', Wightwick, The Western Mail, Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> June 1999: pp4-8.*

**A section of Trecco Bay Holiday Park facing the sea and looking eastwards in August/September 2018**



**Part of the Trecco Bay Holiday Park Conservation Area in August/September 2018.**



Photos of the Conservation Area in Trecco Bay Holiday Park in August 2018



### **What Comes Next?**

The **Society** intends to complete Porthcawl's story in the next episode of *Porthcawl: Much More Than Meets The Eye* which will deal with the parts of Porthcawl that the other reports did not reach! It will include, for example, housing to the north of New Road, the Lake and Wilderness area, further development of the Burrows and the Danygraig area of Porthcawl. It is also hoped to add an environmental dimension by including the ancient lanes and 'ways' in Porthcawl. But time, as ever, will be the ultimate arbiter of what is possible and whether the **Society** achieves these aims. It can but try.

