

Greening the valleys

The archaeology of industrial Wales

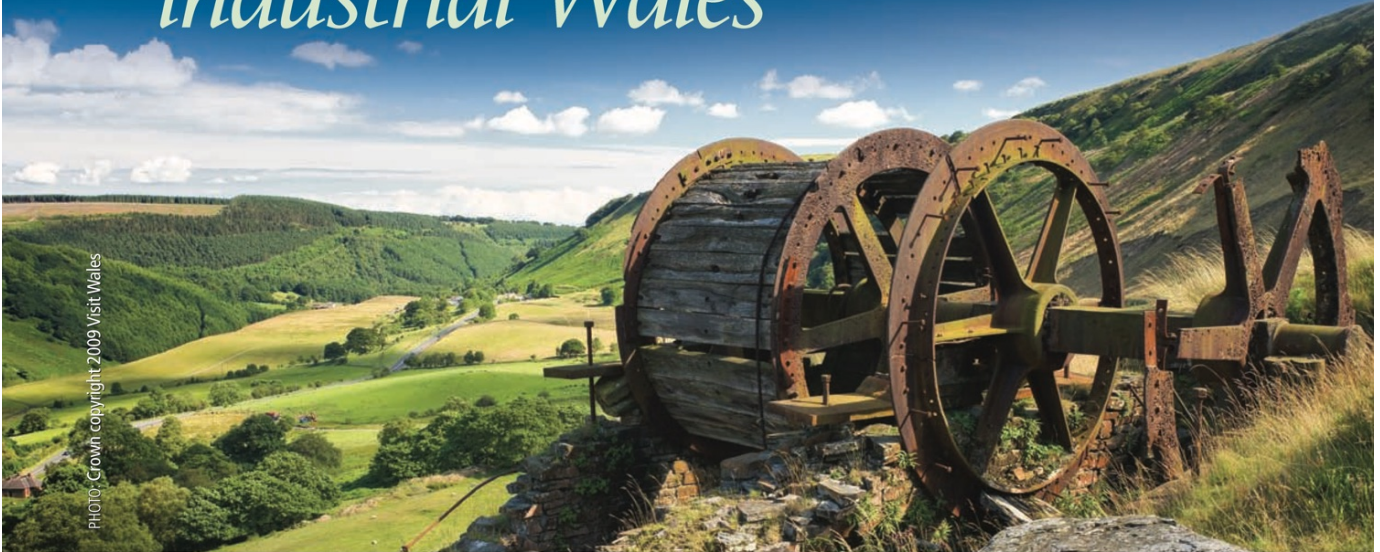


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Wales was central to the world's first industrial revolution; the abandoned remains of 200-year-old coal and iron industries litter the valleys. **Frank Olding** reports on the Green Mines Project, which is conserving and presenting the physical remains in Blaenau Gwent and regenerating this once-plundered landscape.

An 18th century ironworks; a wealthy ironmaster's mansion; poignant memorials to workers buried in the Cefn Golau Cholera Cemetery; a fortified residence at Nantyglo—the last private defence-work built in Britain. All are vivid reminders of the bitter class war that sometimes raged in these idyllic, Welsh valleys. So it is that in one corner of Britain the history of the industrial revolution is represented in physical remains—a history of technology and production, of wealth and power, and of poverty and resistance.

The modern county of Blaenau Gwent occupies the far north-western corner of the old historic county of Monmouthshire. Bounded by the Brecon Beacons National Park to the north and by the Blaenavon World Heritage Site to the east, the area is rich in archaeology of all periods; but it is, of course, its industrial archaeology that rightly attracts most attention. Pioneering industrialists were drawn to the area by the presence of ample supplies of the raw materials needed to make iron on an industrial scale—iron-ore, coal and limestone. Between 1778 and 1837, no less than ten ironworks were established in an

Above *The Sirhowy Valley. Originally, the valley was a thickly wooded area. However, coal, wood, limestone, and ironstone were found there in abundance, all essential materials needed in the process of iron making. This unique geology was the catalyst that dramatically changed this idyllic landscape for two centuries.*