

1

Merthyr Tydfil War Memorial

Opened on Armistice Day November 1931, this fascinating war memorial

depicts Santes Tydfil overlooking three figures: a coal miner to her right and a collier's wife with a babe in arms to her left. Some think this is not so much a memorial to the dead of The Great War but to all those who have suffered in colliery disasters. One has in mind the catastrophic disaster at Senghenydd in 1913 where over 450 men



and boys perished in one explosion. Both versions would suffice here. It is sculpted in bronze by L.S Merrifield, a pupil of Sir Goscombe John, and is one of the finest memorials - unique as a remembrance to war and to colliery dead - to be found anywhere in Wales.

Near here, though not visible from the road, is Iscoed House where in February 1935 some 800 protestors, mainly women, stormed the building where the iniquitous means-tested benefits ("the dole") were being administered in the depression years of the 1930s. A full account appeared in the Merthyr Express under the headline "Offices Besieged."

2

Flooks (now Lunah Tearooms)

Our trail takes you down the town's High Street, starting at the northern end of Pontmorlais. Once a busy, bustling shopping area of two-way traffic and trams, the street is now quieter. At the very top, you will find Flooks, owned and run for several decades by the redoubtable Lillian Jenkins. This was a locally and nationally recognised jewellery emporium par excellence retailing all manner of fine ware, gold, silvers and porcelain. There was another branch elsewhere in the town and one in Bristol. All have now gone but the iconic grade 2 listed Victorian building remains. If you have time, take a look at the fine stucco and copper work, and the lion-masks above the first floor windows.

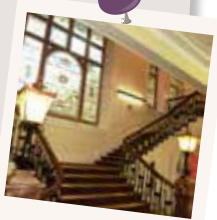


3

Redhouse

Now pop inside Redhouse (closed on Sundays). Immediately facing you, above the dual staircase, you can view the fine stained glass in commemoration of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, 1837-1897. The window was installed just as the building was being completed as Merthyr Tydfil's first town hall.

Also contained in this building are roundels depicting a few of the women of this town who have made an outstanding contribution. Especially noteworthy are Laura Ashley, born in Dowlais in 1925 and famous for her textile designs, and Charlotte Guest, known for her pioneering translation of mediaeval Welsh stories under the collective title of the Mabinogion. Also celebrated here are Rosemary Crawshay, Ursula Masson, Julie Williams and St Tydfil herself.



4

Rosie Royals (corner of Victoria Street)

On the corner of Victoria Street and High Street, where Merthyr's street market is held every Tuesday and Saturday, was Rosie Royals (now Pound Stop). Outside there hung game, poultry and meat of all sorts, whilst within were fruit and vegetables and a certain 'rich language'. The legendary Rosie was striking in appearance and renowned as a colourful character in her personal life. This street junction is sometimes referred to as Rosie Royals Corner, such was her and her shop's celebrity in the town.



8

St. Tydfil's Parish Church

Nearby is the ancient parish church of St. Tydfil's on which site or somewhere nearby she was believed to have died, killed by marauding Picts or were they Irish or simply non-Christian barbarians? No one is sure of the date either, possibly 420 or 480. The latter is usually taken as the preferred date for the founding of this town named after her. Located here, but no longer in existence, was a well-recognised shrine of the Tudor era of the 1500s; there are records of payments being made for gilding the image of Martyr Tydfil. The church's outward appearance has been altered over the centuries, major redesign taking place at the end of the 19th century to designs by J.L Pearson, an architect specialising in ecclesiastical buildings. Sir John Betjeman was highly enthusiastic about this building and its Romanesque, Norman style front archway is to be noted. Enter the grounds via the gate facing the memorial fountain - just turn the handle.



5

The Crown Inn

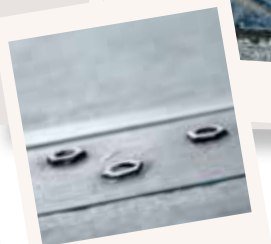
The Crown Inn, the oldest public house still on its original site in the town, hosted in the early 1840s in one of its back rooms a meeting of a women's Chartist group trying to pressurise the Government to grant voting rights to all women. These meetings were unique for two reasons: firstly women seeking the vote early in the 19th century and secondly meeting in, of all places, a public house from which ostensibly they were barred - for being females! But here, in the town's pubs, were the best and most suitable long and back rooms to host such gatherings.



6

Llys Janice Rowlands

High Street opens out into Llys Janice Rowlands, named in memory of the much-loved wife of the town's former Member of Parliament, Ted Rowlands, now Lord Rowlands. Notice the artwork embedded in the floor and designed by Chris Butler. He drew his inspiration from objects on show at Cyfarthfa Museum including the tools of various trades but also from the passing social habits of local inhabitants: thus, there are depicted here a tape cassette, a hammer, an early mobile phone, an ipod, tailor's scissors and many more interesting items.



7

Robert and Lucy Thomas Memorial Fountain

The focal point of the square is the Robert and Lucy Thomas Memorial Fountain, inaugurated in 1906 and paid for by one of her descendants, Sir. W.T. Lewis, later elevated to become the first Lord Merthyr. It commemorates Lucy Thomas's contribution as "the founder of the South Wales coal trade." As a widow she continued the working of coal levels on the local hillsides after her husband Robert passed away in the 1820s. This canopied drinking fountain was designed by W Macfarlane & Co, architectural iron founders of Glasgow, and manufactured at the Saracen Foundry in Possilpark, Glasgow. If you look at the memorial shields in the lunettes you will see references to mining including a man wielding a pick axe as well as a steam ship, a locomotive and the coat of arms of St Tydfil.

