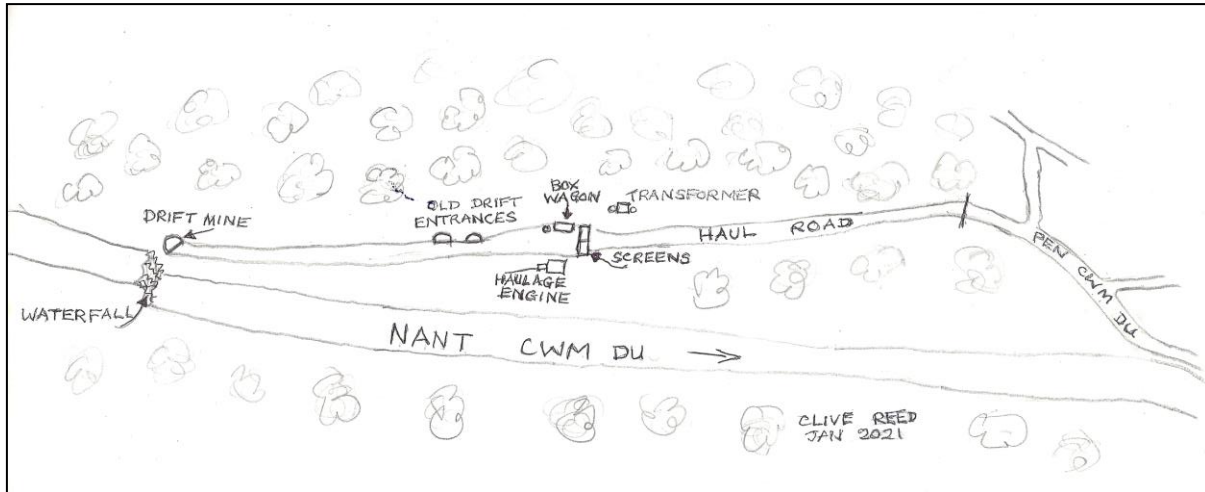
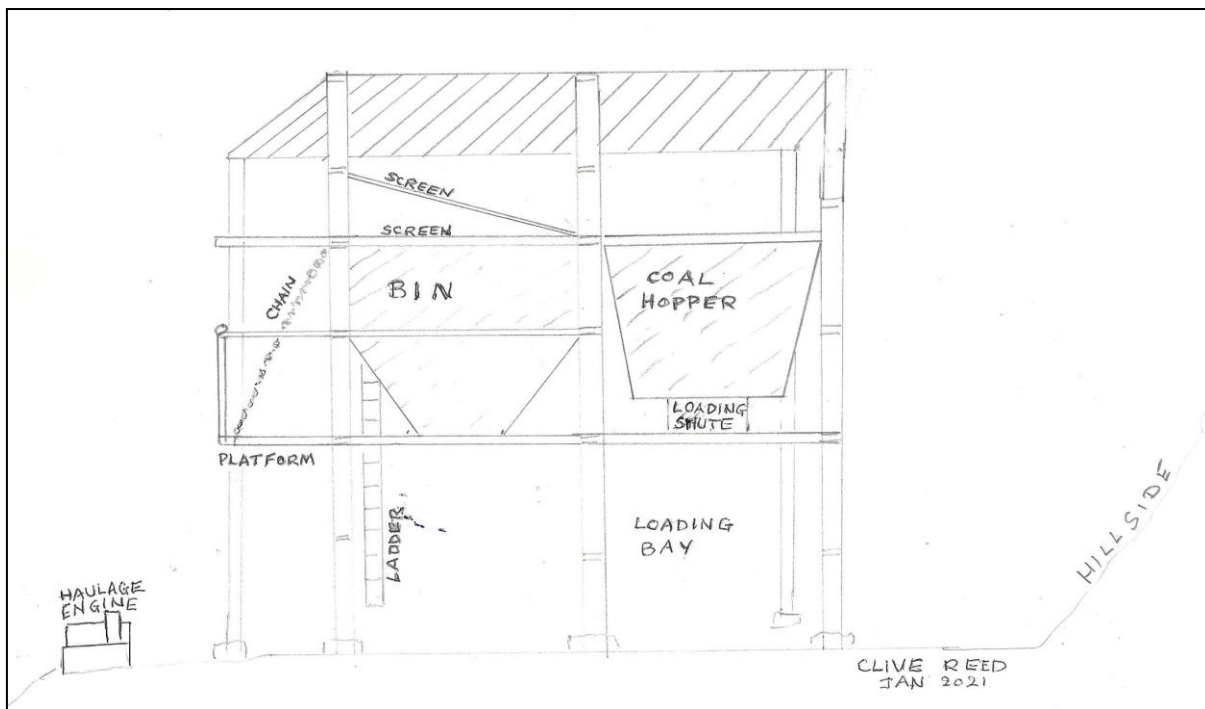


Pontardawe Colliery-Cilmaengwyn

I recently received a request for information on an abandoned colliery at Cilmaengwyn and a colliery winding engine at the site manufactured at Brierley Hill in Staffordshire from the South West Wales Industrial Archaeology Society. There were several coal mines working at the site over a period of over 140 years and my colleague Noel Watkins had historic documents of those and stories of the mine that he said was named Pontardawe Colliery about 1900. I remember the colliery in 1980 with abandoned surface equipment still en situ, partly covered in trees and with the colliery screens still intact at that time, but not in use. Access to the mine was along the haul road that had been constructed for motorized vehicles to take coal away from the mine, but this is mostly overgrown and deeply rutted at present.



Coal mine at Cwm Du in 1983. CR



Nant Cwm Du Coal Screens 2021 CR

The Brierley Hill engine was near the base of the coal screens, typical colliery coal grading structures, quite large and consisting of two hoppers enclosed within a steel framework of angle irons and RSJs all covered in rust, and topped with a sloping, corrugated steel sheet roof. A tall ladder gave access to the various stages of the screens for operating the coal loading and screening and for maintenance purposes. There was a walkway of sorts on the topmost level for the washery men to keep an eye on the process. A platform jutted out from the side nearest the river, giving access to a chain hanging down from the top platform,

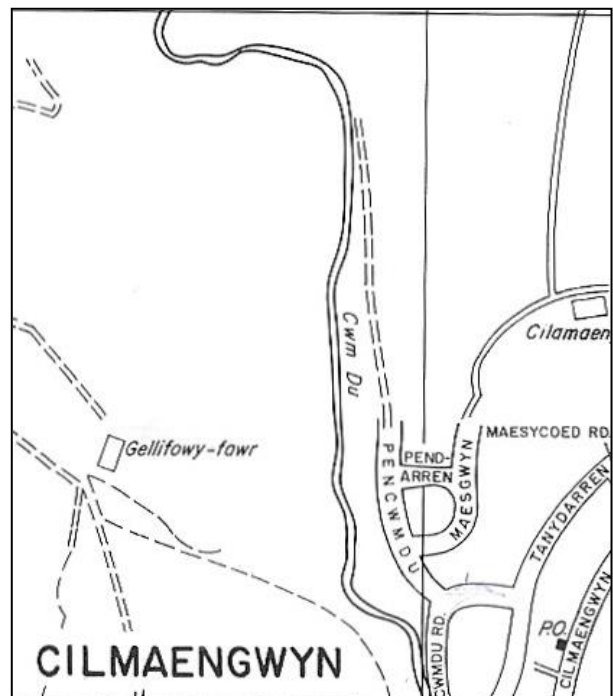
presumably attached to a device of sorts to assist in cleaning the screen. An electricity supply to the mine included a transformer near the top of a wooden framework which no doubt gave electrical power to the entire mine infrastructure, including the washery screens, haulage engine, generators, workshop equipment, etc. Lorries could park under the hopper nearest the hillside to load coal after it had been screened and cleaned. The site looked a mess with bits of metal, corrugated sheets, pipes, girders, strewn all around the screens. I donated my photographs of the mine, about 40 of them, to the Richard Burton Coalfield Archive at Swansea University two years ago and I only have a few negatives left at home.

There was no coal loading arrangement for the hoppers in situ at that time so I do not know how they were loaded. Normal practice with coal screens was that the coal would have been loaded by conveyor belt then vibrated downwards through at least two differing mesh screens that retained different sizes of coal and allowed rubbish and unwanted small coal to fall to the bottom of the arrangement. The screen nearest the river probably stored the waste that would have been taken away to a landfill site.

There was a considerable amount of conveyor belting around the screens and around a large steel drum that faced toward a drift entrance alongside the Cwm Du waterfall, this entrance partly blocked with stone and earth rubbish to prevent any access into the mine. The waterfall is about thirty-five feet high with the mine on a ledge about fifteen feet above river level. Three mine entrances were extant in 1983; the one alongside the waterfall and two walled up drift entrances near the screens that were the earlier coal mines. I have a copy of the Gilwen Colliery (Rhiwfawr) leased areas plan, undated, which shows the extent of the Red Vein under Mynydd Alltygrug and Mynydd Gwrhyd, extending southward to within about a quarter mile of the Cwm Du mines. The map also shows the nearer Great Down Fault running east to west, this being only about 140 yards from the mine entrances. Therefore, I presume that the Pontardawe and other collieries did not mine Red Vein coals to the north of the mines because of the fault. However, they possibly mined house coals from other seams because they are mentioned in the agreements with the miners at Pontardawe Colliery.

Near the coal screens was a wooden railway box wagon with a corrugated steel roof and a sliding door in one side. The wagon was used as a workshop and stores for the mine. Outside the wagon at one end was a cylindrical, steel air receiver about five feet high and approximately two feet in diameter. This was used as the air reservoir for the air compressor that would have been inside the wagon, and which was driven by an electrical generator, but by 1983, that and all the other workshop equipment had been removed except for the tram plates which I photographed, and a pair of colliery pony hames that I recovered and still have adorning a wall at home. A cast iron centrifugal pump that had colliery trucks (wheels) attached to move the pump around the mine remained near the air reservoir and this would have used compressed air to operate the pump and would no doubt have been used to help drain the mine.

In the 1970s coal was taken away for sale via a haul road approximately 300 yards long, running from the mine to a junction with the steep roads of Pencwmdu (road) and Cwmdu Road, then downwards to the junction of Ynysmeudwy Road and Cilmaengwyn (road). See attached map of Cilmaengwyn NPTCBC Guide Book.



NPTCBC Guide Book Map at Cilmaengwyn c2000

The map shows the Cwm Du with the above-named roads, and the haul road shown as a dotted line to a location near the waterfall. For anyone who might attempt to visit the mine, the name Cwm Du might give them slight difficulties if they are not local. There are *two* Cwm Dus in the area, one at Pontardawe heading up to Rhyd y Fro along the Upper Clydach River and the other at Cilmaengwyn. Cwm Du means black or

dark stream and has nothing to do with coal. Both small valleys are steep sided, narrow and quite dark, hence the names.

I mentioned the former Pontardawe Colliery and the documents that Noel Watkins loaned me about thirty years ago. I have my own typescript of those documents and might as well include them here as they are a part of the Cwm Du coalmines history.

Pontardawe Collieries Co. Ltd.

First registered 18 October 1900. Directors were John Morgan of Pontardawe as surveyor, John Griffiths of Ynysmeudw also a surveyor, W.R. Hughes of Swansea listed as a traveller, T.C. Gregory of Radstock listed as a wagon builder, Mr M.H. Greatrex was secretary at fifteen-shillings per week. John Morgan was appointed as the Chairman of Directors. The company purchased Cwm Du and Cwmnant Collieries. (Cwmnant Mine images are included in Tareni Colliery by C. Reed on pages 251 and 252 and show the working conditions at small mines in the 1950').

1st November 1900

Wagons supplied by Messrs Banfield.

Ynysmeudw Tinplate Company have loaded truck from the screens and put in empties for a penny halfpenny per ton until such time as Midland Railway agree to do the work.

Timber supplied by Messrs Glassbrook, free from sap, large loose knots and shakes. Samples of Cwmdu coal analyzed by Messrs Penrose and Co.

Boiler purchased from Newport.

Engines supplied by Mountain of Leeds.

Messrs Wheeler and Gregory supplied fifty new wagons at ten tons each on seven-year purchase lease at £12-18-6 per wagon per annum, also to maintain the wagons at three-shillings per wagon per year.

Wheeler and Gregory supplied a few wagons on sample hire at three-shillings per week until new wagons are ready for delivery.

29 November 1900

Rails, Upper Forest and Worcester Company supplied five tons of steel bridge rails at £5 per ton. Messrs C.E. and H.M. Peel. Two tons of bridge rails at eighteen-pounds to the yard at £8-7-6 delivered to Ynysmeudw.

Ynysmeudw Tinplate Company supplied twenty-nine S.W. gauge corrugated iron (sheets).

Messrs Wheeler and Gregory had order for eight long sleepers at half-crown each.

Colliers' arrived at work drunk and assaulted the manager, the man was summoned.

7 December 1900

All colliers sacked, manager given one month's notice to quit.

Evan Griffiths employed to build masonry foundations for the engines, boilers and drum and weighbridge machines at four-shillings and sixpence per cubic yard.

20 December 1900

Confirmed order to Glasbrooks for sleepers, 100 Red Riga nine-inches by nine-inches by four and a half inches at three-shillings and sixpence each delivered Ynysmeudw sidings.

2 January 1901

Ordered from Messrs Peel three-dozen steel rollers ten-inches diameter with turned spindles and pedestals complete price twenty-one shillings per cwt. Continued driving the airway and tramroads.

17 January 1901

Sidings not completed, the Ynysmeudw Bryn Company demanded sixpence per ton for shunting with locomotive instead of horses as here to fore at penny-halfpenny per ton. (ps. I have a photograph dated to c1930 which shows a cow pulling coal Wagon at the Bryn Works).

Ordered from Messrs Peel one dozen side rollers (steel) eighteen-inches long and four-inches diameter with one-inch bore providing price does not exceed twenty-one shillings per cwt.

Purchased new safe twenty-eight inches by twenty-inches at four-pounds fifteen-shillings from Messrs Birt.

7 February 1901

Ynysmeudw Company wound up (tinplate works).

Purchased anvil and bellows.

18 April 1901

Colliery ready to resume coal working.

Arrange with Ynysmeudw works for use of their sidings at penny-halfpenny per ton.

2 May 1901

Acknowledge receipt of fifty wagons.

8 May 1901

Mr Davies employed as engineman at five-shillings per day.

15 May 1901

Thomas Rogers appointed colliery manager at two-pounds per week for first month and afterwards two-pounds ten-shillings plus free house coal.

12 June 1901

Colliers demanded four-shillings and seven-pence per day but agreed to contract for twenty-one shillings per yard.

27 June 1901

Prepared ground for laying another pair of rails on the sidings.

11 July 1901

Engage Bennet to lift and straighten sidings at five-shillings per day for himself and four-shillings for one assistant, three-shillings for the other to fix points and crossings for new sidings at three-pounds ten-shillings per set.

In view of the difficulty of working coal at a profit at the present time it was resolved to proceed with the continuation of the tramway across the road and over the canal without delay.

Mr Morgan promised to prepare a plan of the bridge over the canal as soon as possible in order to apply to the G.W.R. (Owners of the Swansea Canal) for their permission to carry out this scheme.

8 August 1901

Resolved to instruct colliery manager to offer the men the Eaglesbush (Colliery) list in its entirety.

22 August 1901

Mr Rogers – manager gave three months notice.

12 September 1901

Men agreed to accept Eaglesbush list for one month.

26 September 1901

Order timber from Glasbrook for weighbridge shed.

5 October 1910

Colliery offered for sale to Mr Branfill for five-thousand pounds to include all plant and materials less five-percent commission.

28 November 1901

Accepted Mr A.B. White's offer to work Cwmddu Colliery on a royalty at one-shilling and five-pence per ton for period of three months. (Note, A.B.White was Alexander Bain White who's family were Swansea Canal engineers from 1858 to 1912 residing at Fountain Hall, Ystalyfera, and who afterwards lived at Ynysci House, Ystalyfera, and who worked the Godre'r Graig barge building yard and Ynysci Mine at Ystalyfera). CR.

8 February 1902

Confirmed decision to construct level crossing at Ynysmeudw.

9 April 1902

Colliery worked at a loss because of the tender nature of the coal.

11 November 1902

One hundred and fifty sleepers ordered from Glasbrook at two-shillings and seven-pence each delivered Pontardawe. Six tons of flange rails, equal to new sixty-five pounds from Probert at four-pounds ten-shillings per ton delivered to Pontardawe, fishplates, nuts and bolts and dogs included.

5 December 1902

Ordered set of points from Bute Works, supply to Company at sixteen-pounds delivered Pontardawe.

10 December 1902

Mr Lewis Morgan, Colliery Manager two-pounds five-shillings per week.

19 December 1902

Mr Morgan retired as Director, and re-elected.

9 January 1903

Cancelled order for points and crossing from Bute Woks.

5 May 1903

Push forward the sale of the colliery.

10 July 1903

Sell stones from the quarry but leave the clay alone.

2 May 1906

Received contract for sale of colliery from Mr Tournier for four-thousand pounds.

14 December 1906

Sale of colliery off.

13 December 1907

Offered colliery for sale at reduced price three-thousand five-hundred pounds.

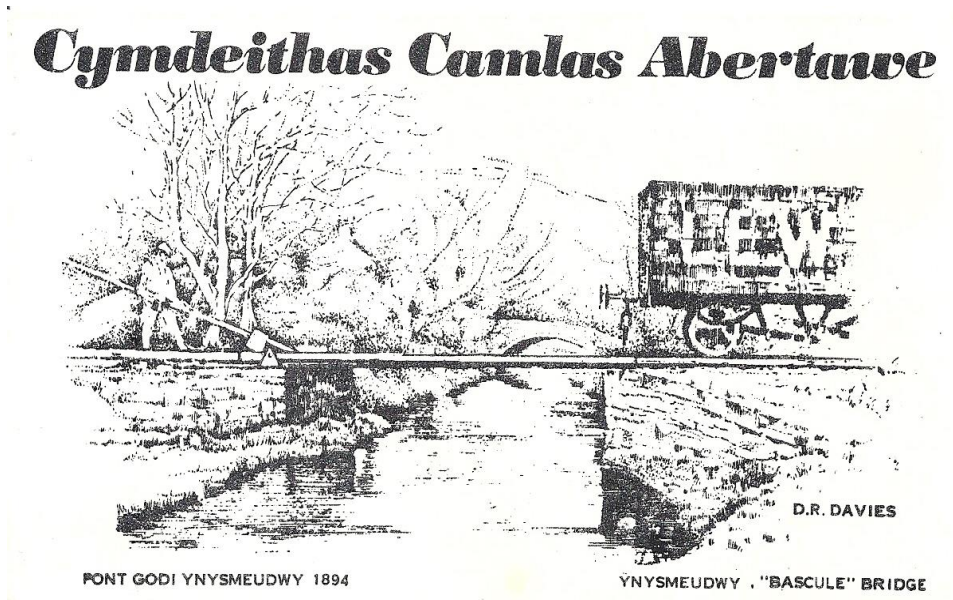
21 October 1908

Colliery wound up.

COMMENTS ON TRAMROAD/RAIL/BASCULE BRIDGE

Mr Noel Watkins' comment to me which was published in the 2010 Bwletin on information regarding a set of crossing gates being installed across the main road alongside the canal bascule bridge, are confirmed in

the 8 February 1902 colliery records whereby it states; “Confirmed decision to construct level crossing at Ynysmeudw”. The foundation bridge abutments of the bascule bridge are still extant. The canal being narrowed considerably at that point from 25 feet down to about ten feet to take the weight of a steam locomotive and coal wagons crossing a lightweight steel and timber bridge deck. Mr John Hutchins, the canal foreman from 1954 onwards informed me that he used to operate the bascule bridge by pushing a very heavy iron weight along a greased RSJ that acted as the counterweight to the bridge deck. This raised the bridge to allow canal barges to pass along the canal. The bascule bridge was removed in the 1960s and placed on the Mon and Brec’ Canal, leaving only the bridge abutments surviving at Ynysmeudw. Coal mining began in the valley before the Pontardawe Collieries of 1900, at sometime in the early 1870s. The Swansea Canal Ledger, Rail 876/3 (1838-73), records on page 531 just the following: Cwm-Nant-Du colliery wharf at Ynysmeudwy in 1872. Following that, the G.W.R Swansea Canal Book of Bridge Profiles dated 1888 has a drawing of a bascule bridge crossing the canal to the north of the Nant Du Aqueduct at Ynysmeudwy. This bridge allowed a colliery tramroad to cross the canal from a mine in the Cwm Du valley. A postcard was published by the Swansea Canal Society c1990 that depicts the bascule bridge with Cilmaengwyn overbridge in the background. The original colliery tramroad that crossed the canal used a more lightweight bascule bridge than that used by the Pontardawe Collieries. Their statement of July 1901 that the Company was in discussion with the G.W.R. for permission to construct a canal bridge supports this proposition.



Pont Godi – Bascule Bridge at Ynysmeudwy

A 1918 O/S Map of the area shows a tramroad running from the bascule bridge westwards into the Cwm Du alongside the northern bank of the brook for a distance of over a quarter mile to reach the coalmines. The construction of local authority housing at Cilmaengwyn in the 1940/50 period has changed the topography of the area considerably. Where once there had been a wooded hill side, there is now a steep roadway leading to several dozen homes, so attempting to visualize a tramroad leading to a mine is difficult. Also, with the construction of the Godre’r Graig bypass road 1960-62 and the A4067 Pontardawe to Ynysmeudwy bypass road 1994/96, the original road layouts at Cilmaengwyn and Ynysmeudwy have altered dramatically.

The colliery tramroads exited the Cwm Du eastwards, crossing the canal and connecting with the railway sidings of the Bryn/Ynysmeudwy Tinsplate works (1879-1941). This allowed access to the Swansea Vale main line railway for the sale and distribution of coal from the Cwm Du mines, via a timber trestle bridge constructed across the Tawe in (c1886) (Brookes, Chronology of the Tinsplate Works of Great Britain 1941) (Brookes included *circa* in the date used for the construction of the river timber bridge in 1886, as did John Henry Davies, who published A History of Pontardawe and District in 1967 and who no doubt obtained his date from the Chronology) CR. This date is open to conjecture. The Swansea Canal overflow culvert near the aqueduct and which the railway sidings had to cross has the date 1882 cut into the keystone at the top of

the arch. No railway sidings could be laid across the Cwm Du unless the canal overflow was also crossed. So, I assume this is the correct date for the river and stream crossings by rail and of the tramroad over the canal.

The River Tawe Bridge was severely damaged by flood waters in 1933 (I cannot find my reference to that date, but I do remember reading of it in a local newspaper account), and that suspended all rail links from the tinplate works and Cwm Du coal mines to the Midland Railway from that time onwards, but several support timbers still survived in the River Tawe in March 1991 when I photographed them. The bridges crossing Nant Du were not removed until the c1991 A4067 Swansea Valley bypass road construction. I walked over those many times when I lived at Ynysmeudwy.



Photograph 1991 of River Tawe railway trestle bridge.

The Nant Cwm Du and its valley have a long history of commercialization/industrialization, extending back to at least 1628, whereas the small villages of Cilmaengwyn and Godre'r Graig are relatively new, originally consisting of a few cottages for quarry workers, a few coal workers and agricultural families, and later a small number of dwellings for the nearby tinplate workers, only becoming established c1900 with Ynysmeudwy village established in 1848 by the Ynysmeudwy Pottery.

The first recorded industry on the Nant Cwm Du was Ynysmeudwy corn mill in 1628 near its junction with the Tawe and which worked to c1828 and where later the Ynysmeudwy Pottery was erected. The corn mill utilized water from the Nant Cwm Du, carried from a weir several hundred yards upstream from the mill and via a leat down to the mill. The lower sections of the leat to the corn mill/pottery still survive in 2021. (Information on Ynysmeudwy corn mill of 1628 was contained in the property deeds to Clive Reed's cottage at Ynysmeudwy).

The corn mill is shown on a [Briton Ferry Estate Map of Kilmain Gwyn Lands c1820](#) titled [Ynismudw Brook Watercourses D/B BF E/1](#) and housed at WGAS. A furze Mill, iron forge and two water leats are identified on the plan. A furze mill used a water wheel to operate crushing machinery inside the mill to bruise furze or gorse to make it edible for animals on the nearby farms. A working furze mill can be seen at St Fagans National Museum of Wales. The iron forge used pig iron transported by canal barge from Ynyscedwyn Ironworks to the canal wharf at Ynysmeudwy to manufacture shovels and other agricultural implements. The Nant Du had a fall of forty-five feet from the weir below the waterfall to the corn mill, so had little difficulty in providing a sufficient flow of water to the forge, furze mill and the corn mill. Ynysmeudwy Pottery utilized this water flow to power a flint mill at the pottery from 1845.

As an aside to the coal mining, I located further Brierley Hill foundry items, these being the railings around the Cimla (Neath) Methodist Chapel on Cimla Common which I attended from about 1950 until I began work in 1959. The chapel was built in c1875. The cast iron railing supports have cast into them the following "Hill and Smith Brierley Hill".

Clive Reed