

RHONDDA CYNON TAF POINTS OF INTEREST

PONTYPRIDD COMMON WALK



CYNGOR TREF
PONTYPRIDD
TOWN COUNCIL



STRONG HERITAGE | STRONG FUTURE
RHONDDA CYNON TAF
TREDEGAR - GARTHEN | DYPFOCK - NER

INTRODUCTION

Coedpenmaen Common, better known as Pontypridd Common is a microcosm of the countryside that surrounds the town, each habitat with its own distinctive mix of plants and animals.

The acid grassland includes a wide range of native grass species and flowers such as tormentil, bedstraw, bird's foot trefoil, black knapweed and colourful waxcap fungi in autumn. There is also marshy grassland with cuckoo flower, meadow sweet and ragged robbin and in wet flushes marsh violets grow. In 1885 the renowned botanist John Storrie (*Flora of Glamorgan*, Wade et al, 1994) found the tiny and rare flower Cornish moneywort growing on the Common. In recent years it has been re-found on Llantrisant Common and Y Graig, Llantrisant, so this diminutive species may well still occur here.

There is gorse and areas of heather and whinberry, often on the craggy slopes. Well established woodland and younger trees of oak, ash, alder, birch, holly, hazel, rowan, willow and hawthorn include areas of bluebell and celandine as well as heather, bramble and bracken. The woods provide nest sites and food for insects and birds. Listen out for willow warbler, chiffchaff, wren, robin, blackcap, blackbird, mistle and song thrush. Among the insects you may see speckled wood, brimstone and purple hairstreak butterflies. On warm summer evenings the woodland edges are good for foraging bats, eating up millions of midges

1 Start adjacent to the large map/sign opposite the former Cottage Hospital. Pontypridd is essentially a Victorian town. Its most rapid period of growth occurred during the second half of the 19th century. At this time there was little provision for health care and no dedicated hospital for the town. Serious cases of illness were treated at the Workhouse on the Graig. In 1907 fund-raising began to build a new hospital but it did not open on this site until 16th February 1911 at a cost of almost £4,000, paid for by the people of the town especially the miners at the nearby collieries.



2 Continue along the footpath to the Rocking Stone, a 'glacial erratic' carried down the valley by the ice flow during the last Ice Age around 10,000 years ago. It will still rock if several people jump up and down on it. For over 100 years this was an important meeting-place in the history of the town.

Edward Williams, better known by his bardic name Iolo Morganwg (pictured), was an influential Welsh antiquarian, poet and inventor of the ceremonial that we see every year at the National Eisteddfod. In 1814 he held a meeting of local bards, i.e. poets, to celebrate peace with France at the end of the Napoleonic Wars. His local organiser was Thomas Williams 'Gwilym Morganwg', landlord of the Mason's Arms (now the HSBC) and later the New Inn (near Alfred's), and the event began with a procession up from the pub.



This began a tradition of such gatherings, sometimes as many as four a year (at or close to the summer and winter solstices, and the spring and autumn equinoxes) which continued irregularly for over a hundred years. Their common elements were - a colourful procession up from town, banners, poems on topical subjects read from the Rocking Stone (not just big subjects like War and Peace, but 'Is William Edwards' bridge the longest stone arch in the world?', or the benefits of the opening of the Taff Vale Railway, or the achievements/virtues of some local celebrity e.g. Dr. William Price), and music played on the harp.



In 1838 Dr. William Price (1800-1893), began to collect subscriptions to build a 100 foot high stone tower here, which was to house “a museum, a scientific institution, and a school for the children of the poor.” It was to be funded by the income from a camera obscura which would be a tourist attraction. This was the first proposal to establish a museum anywhere in Wales. Shortly afterwards Price became a leading figure in the Chartist movement, campaigning for the extension of the franchise. Following the suppression of the Chartist march on Newport in 1839 (at least 24 killed, leaders transported) Price fled to France, and his ambitious project came to nothing. However, he built the Round Houses nearby twenty years later (see [7](#)).

There are several accounts of Price performing at the Rocking Stone, becoming increasingly eccentric in old age – walking up from Treforest in full Druidic costume, carrying a large red silk flag, and climbing onto the Rocking Stone to address the sun at midday. Behind these performances Dr. Price had serious intentions. He founded the first co-op in Wales in 1840. Long before that he had established his own miniature NHS – workers at the chainworks paid him weekly contributions in return for free medical care, and he kept this up for over fifty years.

But perhaps he is best known as the pioneer of cremation in Britain. In 1884 he cremated the body of his infant son which was not yet legal. He was taken to court but successfully defended this test case establishing the legal basis of cremation in this country. The first crematorium in Wales was opened in 1924 just south of the Common in Glyntaff. Dr. Price’s daughter Penelopen later unveiled a stained glass window there dedicated to his memory.

Evan Davies (right), a local clock-maker got himself recognised as Archdruid of Glamorgan, and built the stone circle and serpent for his inauguration in 1850. He had studied the works of the eighteenth century archaeologist William Stukeley who had written much about Stonehenge and Avebury, and he also knew the work of William Blake. Both of these influenced what he built on the Common. The right eye of the serpent is ringed with the first ten letters of the bardic alphabet – an invention of Iolo’s according to British historians, recognizable as Celtic Etruscan according to Europeans.



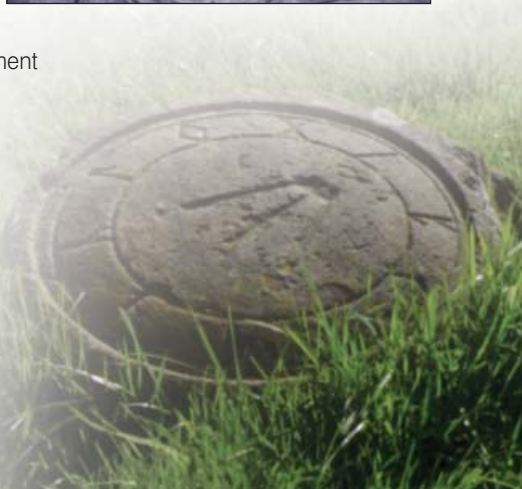
Evan Davies' only known surviving grandfather clock is in Pontypridd Museum

Evan Davies brought pageantry and drama to the gorsedd at the Rocking Stone. On one occasion he distributed leaflets announcing that a prophecy of Isaiah would come to pass. A large crowd gathered. Evan reminded his audience that Isaiah had prophesied that 'A time will come when nation will speak peace unto nation, spears will be converted into ploughshares and swords into pruning hooks.' At just the right moment his assistants displayed the appropriate agricultural implements, and the crowd cheered. This was Evan's protest at Britain going to war with Russia in the Crimea.

A few years later, in 1860, the mid-summer gathering took a surprisingly modern turn. The crowd heard three lectures, one on the discoveries of geology, another apparently explaining the work of Darwin, and the third arguing that the eisteddfod should be about the dissemination of modern knowledge, not just music and poetry. In case this was a bit heavy James James (composer of the tune of Hen Wlad fy Nhadau) enlivened the intervals with popular tunes on the harp. James' father Evan, author of the words of 'Hen Wlad fy Nhadau', was a regular participant in the gorsedd meetings. He read his poems from the Rocking Stone, and protested against the narrow-mindedness of the town's ministers.

In the 1870s and 1880s Pontypridd grew and changed rapidly. In 1820 it had been a Welsh-speaking village. By 1900 it was a large and mainly English-speaking town. No Welsh-language chapel was built after 1890. In this changed world the druidic gatherings at the Rocking Stone became increasingly irrelevant, though they continued until 1921. Nevertheless, the Rocking Stone became the focal point of public gatherings on issues which concerned the mixed population of the growing town.

In the 1860s when wages were low and unemployment high, emigration agents spoke to crowds from the Rocking Stone and urged workers to seek a better life in the USA or Australia. Indeed it was in response to such an invitation from a brother who had emigrated to the USA that Evan James wrote the words of Hen Wlad fy Nhadau, explaining why he had decided to stay in the 'Old Country' rather than take his family to the 'New World'.



At Tynewydd colliery near Porth in 1877 five miners were rescued in circumstances somewhat similar to the Chilean miners' rescue in 2010. Because it was a disaster with a happy ending it achieved huge publicity, and a great crowd assembled at the Rocking Stone for the presentation of Albert medals to the men of the rescue brigade. When miners went on strike against wage reductions in 1893 and again in 1898 they crowded around the Rocking Stone to hear Keir Hardie, who became MP for Merthyr and Aberdare and was the most outspoken advocate for the miners in Parliament. For a hundred years the Rocking Stone was the focal point for public meetings on any subject that concerned the people of Pontypridd and the surrounding valleys. Since 1923 Ynysangharad Park has become the town's great public open space.



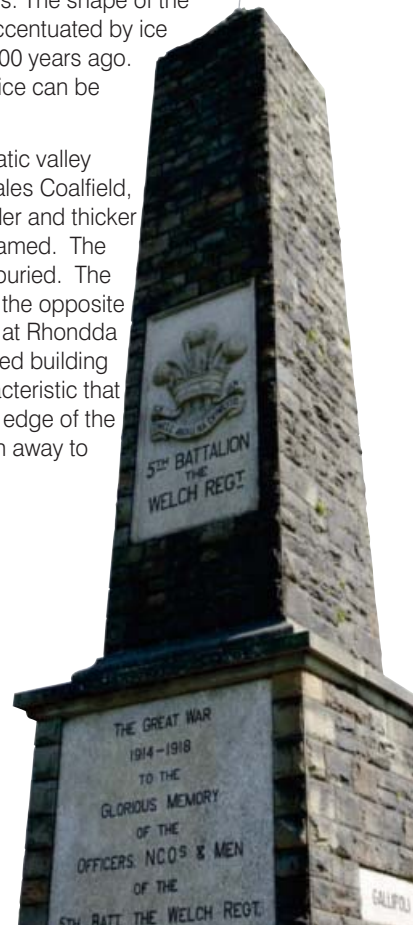
3 Follow the footpath and after 130m you will come to the remains of a pre-historic burial chamber just to the left of the path. This cairn dates from around 1500BC and although the mound has been flattened, some interesting features are still visible. Near the centre is the cist or chamber where the body would have lain although it has now been filled in. It is lined with large stones and originally would have had a capstone. This is now lying a few yards away. Eight of the ten small stones which formed a circle around the burial mound are still in place. They are quite widely spaced, and some are so small that they are hidden in the grass. If it is a clear day look south through the trees down the Taff Valley. On the right hand skyline is the Garth mountain on top of which you may be able to see the outline of a number of burial mounds of similar age to the chamber on the Common.



4 Continue along the path towards the war memorial, unveiled by Viscount Allenby on the 6th August, 1923 and dedicated to the 5th Battalion, the Welch Regiment many of whom were recruited in this area. Below you, beyond the A470, is Ynysangharad War Memorial Park which was opened on the same day after a public appeal to buy the land. At the foot of the escarpment was the route of the Glamorganshire canal. Opened in 1794 it connected the iron-producing town of Merthyr with the sea at Cardiff. Little trace of the canal remains, although an enthusiastic group of volunteers are restoring a double-lock basin, which can be seen behind the Bunch of Grapes public house in Ynysangharad Road. Where the retail park now stands was the site of the first large-scale industry to be attracted to Pontypridd – the Brown Lenox chain cable and anchor works which opened in 1818.

Pontypridd lies at the confluence of the Taff and Rhondda rivers. The shape of the land is made by eons of erosion by weather and water, here accentuated by ice in a succession of glaciations. The last one ended about 10,000 years ago. The classic 'U' shaped valley, widened and deepened by the ice can be seen as you look across the Park towards the Graig.

From this vantage point you can survey the town and its dramatic valley setting. The underlying rock, across the whole of the south Wales Coalfield, is pennant sandstone. Here you can see the crags of the harder and thicker rock bands, laid down in ancient seas before the dinosaurs roamed. The coal seams that helped to fuel the town's fortunes are deeply buried. The only signs now are the forested slopes of the Gelliwion tips on the opposite side of the town. The headgear of the Bertie and Trefor shafts at Rhondda Heritage Park are hidden from view. The hard rock also provided building stone for most of the houses and prominent buildings, a characteristic that fits the town to its surroundings. There are old quarries on the edge of the Common and their modern equivalent, Craig yr Hesk is hidden away to the north of the town.



5 Continue along the tarmac path for 50m and at the concrete bollards take the grass path to your right. Walk for 100m (with the houses on your left) until you reach a short stretch of tarmac path. At the top of this path follow the grass track around to the left until you reach a pre-historic standing stone which is deliberately aligned on an east-west axis - another indication of the significance of this area to pre-historic people. Nearby too you will find a number of large boulders which, like the Rocking Stone itself, were left here by a retreating ice -sheet.



6 20m further on your right stands a memorial stone with the inscription 'Stranger Halt' with the name of the person commemorated scratched out. This stone was originally dedicated to the memory of Philip Thomas, the first manager of Brown Lenox Chainworks. He died in 1840 after 21 years in the post. Although well intentioned, the unfortunate composition of the phrase 'much to the benefit of mankind died' caused his family such annoyance that it is believed they had the name of Philip Thomas erased. Continue along this track until you rejoin the tarmac footpath which will lead back to the starting point.



7 As an optional excursion turn right at Hospital Rd. and carry on into Rockingstone Terrace. The road narrows to become a lane. Continue downhill for 180m until you reach the whitewashed Round Houses built by the aforementioned Dr. William Price in 1861 and intended to be the imposing entrance way to an even more impressive mansion which he never built.

To return to the town, continue downhill to St Mary's Church in Glyntaff. Turn right into Pentrebach Rd. which follows the foot of the Common escarpment and continue on to Ynysangharad Rd. Here you will pass the Bunch of Grapes pub, an ideal refreshment stop, which lies adjacent to the Pontypridd Canal restoration project.

GETTING HERE

From the South - Leave the A470 at the exit signed A4058 Pontypridd. At the roundabout take the 2nd exit and take the right lane. At the next roundabout take the 3rd exit onto Coedpenmaen Rd, signed Cilfynydd, then follow this map to point **1**.

From the North - Leave the A470 at the exit signed Pontypridd A4233, Rhondda valleys, and at the roundabout take first exit onto Coedpenmaen Rd, signed Cilfynydd, then follow this map to point **1**.

On foot - from Pontypridd Museum cross the River Taff and proceed along the left hand pavement until reaching the large roundabout under the A470 trunk road, then follow this map to point **1**.



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Amgueddfa Pontypridd
a Hen Bont
Pontypridd Museum
and Old Bridge



Mae hon yn un o gyfres o deithiau cerdded yn Rhondda Cynon Taf. Ar gyfer y rhain a gwybodaeth am dreftadaeth, llefydd i fwyta, yfed, ac aros ynddyn nhw, ac am ymweld â Rhondda Cynon Taf, ewch i: www.visitrct.co.uk neu alw heibio i'r Ganolfan Groeso yn Amgueddfa Pontypridd.



This is one of a series of walks in Rhondda Cynon Taf. For these along with information on heritage, places to eat and drink, staying and visiting Rhondda Cynon Taf visit: www.visitrct.co.uk or call in to the Tourist Information centre at Pontypridd Museum.

MANNAU O DDIDDORDEB RHONDDA CYNON TAF TAITH GERDDED COMIN PONTYPRIDD



Dyma safle gwreiddiol gweithfa gadwyni
Llyn Lenox, erbyn hyn nawr yn barc adwerthu.
Yn y safle hon ydych chi weld safle'r gweithfa
Lenox, sy'n hysbysu'r safle o'r gwreiddiau
mae'n sefyll yma heddiw. Yn y safle hon
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