

BRYNMAWR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWS UPDATE

March 2021. Chartist Edition.

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In the last issue of the News Update I said that I would put together an article about the life of Crawshay Bailey. Well, I've done it and at the moment it stretches to 17 pages so sadly too much for the News Update. I will make it available on the website as soon as possible. So this issue is about the Chartist and a little about the anti Chartist group. I hope you enjoy it.

13th July 1839, Monmouthshire Merlin.
Some excitement had been for a few days raised amongst the Iron Works bordering upon the counties of Monmouth and Brecon, by a report that a large Chartist meeting would be held at Nantyglo or Coalbrook Vale, on the 1st of July, at which Mr. Frost, and one of the other great guns of the day, were to preside. Early in the day great crowds of strangers began to crowd in from Merthyr, Sirhowy, Pontypool, and Blackwood, and were observed to hang about Brynmawr, Nantyglo, and Coalbrook Vale.

At about 12 o'clock, a party were seen; with a cart in front, containing two harpers, flags and banners accompanying them the people, men and women, walking five abreast, on their way from Coalbrook Vale to Brynmawr; and amidst, or almost immediately preceding them, a curious looking object, seemingly unnoticed, or uncared for, but by a party of masons and carpenters, who walked with it, on a board covered with shavings, raised on their shoulders. On a nearer approach it proved to be in unfortunat man who had just fallen off an engine-house, at Blaina, and was being carried home by his companions as they thought, dying.

The procession had, as nearly as could be observed, about ten or twelve flags and banners, three-fourths of which were calico: the banners, all the flags, chiefly so.:

Small white flag-" The People's Charter."

Great calico banner, about two feet square; on a deal frame "The Queen and Charter. Peace, Law, Order."

Tri-coloured silk flags.

Great white calico banner, with letters of red paper, or calico, stuck or sewed on. We have forgotten the inscription, but this really was a most ludicrous thing. It was, perhaps, to show that the Chartists were not over proud.

Plain white silk flag, with red calico borders.

Great white calico banner, as above, but rather better in appearance, "Long live the People." Motto, "Order."

Flag, three or four colours, Peace, Law, Order Union is Strength."

Green calico banner, about two feet square, Pontypool Workingmen's Association, established 3rd July, 1837."

Large green calico banner, "Universal suffrage, Annual Parliaments, Vote by Ballot, no Property Qualification, Payment of Members."

Banner, Peace, Truth, Justice."

About half-past three o'clock in the afternoon; they returned in the same manner as they went up though greatly augmented in their numbers from Brynmawr, to hold their meeting at Coalbrook Vale.

Coalbrook Vale was where George Brewer lived, the iron master of Coalbrook Iron Works. He had established the works in 1820 and was possibly related to the Darby's of Coalbrook Dale which is why he named the works Coalbrook Vale though as we all know Coalbrook is a translation of Nant y Glo. He died in 1845 and his son Tom Llewellyn Brewer took charge until the works were sold in 1855. George Brewer was a very active member of the anti-Chartist group which was formed at Coalbrook House; in fact it was he who proposed the idea. On Monday, the 29th April, 1839, the inaugural meeting of the Anti-Chartist meeting was held, Crawshay Bailey was the Chairman but it was George Brewer who addressed the 5,000

(allegedly) gathered. He addressed the meeting in both English and Welsh. His proposal was: *"That we, her Majesty's loyal subjects, viewing the efforts that are now being made by disaffected men, in this and other parts of the kingdom, to subvert the peace and good order of society, consider it our duty to come forward and publicly declare our firm attachment to our beloved Sovereign and our unshaken confidence in our glorious constitution and are determined to do all in our power to support her crown and dignity."* Following the disastrous march to Newport on the 4th of November, active Chartists were being arrested and Zephaniah Williams (from Nant y Glo) had made his escape. It was the Anti Chartist movement that offered the reward of £100 for his capture. It was claimed not by the person who caught him but by the policeman who arrested him.

Following up an email asking about a plaque to the Chartists in Nant y Glo made me wonder about the other plaques as there were four originally planned for Blaenau Gwent. So with the sun shining, a glorious day on a Friday in 2020 to be precise off I went with hope in my heart, The first to be photographed is the one in Brynmawr on the wall on the corner of Boundary Street and Bailey Street, locals would say on the tump where the Slaughter House used to be. It is fitting that the plaque was placed here as the pub named The King Crispin stood on Boundary Street and the landlord was David Lewis, known as King Crispin who was the leader of the Brynmawr Chartists though he did not take part in the march on Newport. He was eventually arrested and sent to Millbank Prison in London. It doesn't look too bad, needs some cleaning but easy to read the inscription.



Back in the car and quickly down to Nant y Glo, (keeping within the speed limit of course). I knew the plaque was on the wall of what used to be the Medical Centre which was built on the site of Garn chapel. Could I find it? Simple answer is No. A frantic search and there it was though I couldn't get near to take a decent photo, this was the best I could get. The lettering was clear and the plaque in good condition. Above it is another plaque commemorating the chapel that was there. I think

maybe a bit of undergrowth clearing is called for so both plaques can be clearly seen. Again, a good place for the plaque as further down the road is the site of the Royal Oak Inn, The Chartist meeting place in Nant y Glo. Back in the car and heading to Cwmtillery where the plaque is placed on an old pit wheel where



Cwmtillery colliery once stood. Of course there are no signs but thankfully some helpful locals directed me to the correct spot. It's a shame there were so much rubbish around the pit wheel and the plaque is on the base holding the two wheels. Another plaque that needs some

cleaning, it's badly rusted and the words are not really clear but readable. One more to go and that's in Tredegar or to be precise Dukestown. This was placed outside what would have been The Star Inn and the Star Field was where Chartists met.



I have to report that this was in a far worse state than the other three. I could not make out one word on the plaque but do have a go. Sadly, the plinth is also crumbling away.

That was the end of my journey and I hope the start to one you will do to track the plaques down. I could give you a GPS but that surely would take the fun out of looking for them, like a treasure hunt really but no prize at the end.

Keep safe and carry on.