

History of the Crumlin Navigation

The Navigation Colliery was built between 1907 and 1911 by the firm of Partridge Jones and Company. Two shafts were sunk into the Black Vein coal seam which runs under Crumlin and forms part of the geological sequence known as the South Wales coalfield. By 1935 the Colliery was employing 86 men on the surface and 358 men underground.

Early collieries were usually made of local stone which was easy and cheap to quarry locally. More expensive brick was used only around window and door openings. However, the Navigation Colliery was one of the first to be made completely out of brick. This was used creatively, with the red brick of the buildings being set-off with eye-catching yellow brick pilasters.

Inside, the buildings were also fitted-out to a high standard, with wood panelled offices and up-to-date machinery. The Navigation Colliery was built with the aim of creating an outstanding set of buildings and it is now considered to be one of the best examples of Edwardian industrial architecture in the country.

At the time of construction the coal industry in South Wales was booming, drawing in people from all over the world. The mines also supported local communities that had developed their own unique way of life, which was closely connected to the mines. By the early twentieth century, South Wales was the largest coal-exporting area in the world, with high quality anthracite and steam coal powering the globe's rapidly developing merchant and naval fleets. This is reflected in the name "Navigation", a name given to other collieries that were supplying the maritime industry with coal. The name was a badge of distinction, denoting that the coal produced in these collieries was of a sufficiently high quality to be used in the world's new steam-driven vessels.

However, in 1937 production suffered when miners digging into the Black Vein breached an underground lake. Water entered half-way up the mine shafts and led to emergency pumping operations being put in place. As a result, the bottom of the pit had to be raised by 39 metres. Despite this setback, the Colliery still employed 79 men on the surface and 336 underground in 1947, when the industry was nationalised and it continued to be highly productive during the 1950s. Peak production was reached in 1954, when 145,129 tons of coal was produced. However, by the 1960s the coal industry was generally in decline and in 1967 Navigation Colliery closed.

After closure some of the Colliery buildings were used for light industrial use, including car and furniture workshops. However, as the buildings were expensive to maintain, they slowly fell into disrepair and suffered fire damage and vandalism. Despite this, the quality of the buildings means that they have survived relatively well and they remain one of the best preserved sets of colliery buildings in Wales, and probably in the UK.

For this reason the buildings at the Navigation Colliery have been listed Grade II and II* by Cadw, in recognition of their outstanding architecture.

The site is now being slowly transformed into a community project through the hard work of volunteers and with the help of experts. Regeneration projects take time to develop and can take many years to come to fruition. In the case of the Navigation Project, the aim is to repair the buildings gradually, through the use of own labour and community involvement, with the aim of finding end uses for the buildings that will serve the local community and help create employment again on the site.

Nigel Bowen-Morris

South Wales Building Preservation Trust

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