

Bear left and again cross over the river and take the path that goes sharp left up the embankment. This is following the line of Albert Street and if you stand ½ way up the path you will be standing in approximately the same spot as the photographer that took photo 3.



Photo 3: looking up Albert Street

At the end of the left hand side of the street you may just make out a gas street standard that was known as the Halleluiah Lamppost, so called because it once was the place where impromptu religious meetings took place!

Continue up the path and cross over the road then bear left; when you are opposite the **Queen Victoria Pub**, the Halleluiah Lamppost was approximately where the traffic island is today.



Photo 4: looking up Prince Street

From this spot look up **Prince Street** and then at photo 4; the **Workman's Hall** is top left and the Co-op is in the centre. Turn right into the bottom of **Broad Street**.

This is now the commercial centre of Blaenavon with a butcher, chemists, cafes, book shops, a pet store and a bank. It is hard to imagine it was once known as Heol y nant or Brook Street because it had a small stream, called the Nant Llechan, running down the middle of this once narrow lane

with little footbridges criss-crossing it.

As you walk up the right hand side of the street, stop opposite the **Co-operative Pharmacy** and look at photo 5. This was the original site of the post office prior to the new building in Prince Street.

Also at this spot, look up the street and then compare the



Photo 5: Old Post Office, Broad Street

view with that of photo 6. The building off-set in the middle of the left was the White Hart Inn, one of the many public houses in the town now gone.

Continue up the road and just



Photo 6: up Broad Street

beyond the fish & chip shop turn and look down the road, comparing it with photo 7 (I'll give you clue, the building behind the boy in the foreground is the 'chipper').



Photo 7: down Broad Street

As you continue up the street, look for the **HSBC bank** on your left. This was originally the Metropolitan Bank and had a much grander frontage onto the corner of Broad Street and Lion Street. On the other corner is the **Lion Hotel**, once the victim of riots following the 1868 general election.

The two Tory candidates were declared elected to the old county of Monmouthshire. This did not represent the feelings of the valley towns who had overwhelmingly voted for the Liberal Candidate. There were severe riots in Blaenavon and it was claimed that only the arrival of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers stopped the violence turning into murder. The mob turned on the Lion Hotel, smashing its windows and forcing their way in. The pub's alcohol was taken out into the street and casks were breached. The 'Free Press' reported that rioters 'went down on their hands and knees to drink like beasts until they reeled and fell senseless'. Furniture and possessions were taken out of the hotel and used to make a huge bonfire and there was even an attempt to torch the hotel itself. The Landlord, Mr J Morris later made a claim for damages to a total of £1,672.

Continue up the hill and when you are level with **Broad Street car park**, turn around and look down the street and compare the view with that of photo 8.

You can make out the **Moriah Chapel** down on the left of the street, though today it has lost its fancy finials! The picture (taken from a bedroom window



Photo 8: Whitson Parade on Broad Street (a house now demolished) is of the Whitson Parade. This was the holiday where the Benefits Clubs and the Sunday Schools paraded around the town. Benefit Clubs were formed by workers before state welfare covered sickness, unemployment or death and were usually centred around one of the many hostleries of the town; for example the New Inn had the Phoenix Club, the Old Crown hosted the Old Benefits Club and at the Bridgend could be found the Dic Sion Ffrynnyng club. Everyone would be decked out in their Sunday best and would sing as they processed behind banners or a 'silver' band. The end of the tour usually culminated in an annual feast for the Benefits Clubs or high tea for the Sunday Schools with tables loaded with dainties and huge pots of steaming tea.

(At this point you can extend your walk to visit the site of the original church for Blaenavon at **Capel Newydd**. This is a round trip of about 2 miles. Turn right into **Old Queen Street** and straight on along **Queen Street**, past **St. Paul's Church** then straight ahead onto and along **Llanover Road**. This comes out onto the mountain road and about 1 km further along the road after you cross the **cattle grid** you will see a large **Sycamore tree** with a bench beside it. When you come level with the bench, look to your right for the little iron cross that indicates the site of the old chapel of ease that was replaced by **St. Peter's Church** in the town. The Church had fallen into disrepair by the 1860's. Retrace your steps and rejoin the walk).



Photo 9: Church outing to Chapel Newydd



At the top of **Broad Street**, cross over the road onto **King Street** then turn to your left and look up the street, comparing the scene with the one in photo 10, not a lot on the right of the street has changed, apart from the loss of the shop frontages.



Photo 10: King Street

Continue up the right hand side of **King Street** and just before you turn right into **Ellick Street**, opposite the **Bethel Chapel**, compare the scene in photo 11.



Photo 11: King Street

King Street was once called Heol-ust-tewi which translated means Hush, Be Silent Street which then became the Street of Whispers, it was the old commercial centre for the town. The pub in the foreground was the Rising Sun and the house beyond that was Peglars grocery store.

Turn right and walk up to the end of **Ellick Street**. As the road opens out into a green space, look at photo 12 which



Photo 12: swimming in Elgam Reservoir shows the reservoir that was fed by the brook that once ran down Broad Street. It shows the 'new' council houses of Elgam Avenue in the background.

Walk up the path that continues to the right of number 42 Elgam Avenue, continuing up the steps until you come onto the top road. Turn left and walk along this stretch of **Elgam Avenue**. When you reach the green, try to imagine this as open farmland.

A small hill farm once occupied the area around where the green is today and was called Elgam Farm. The land was supposedly inhabited by the Tylwyth Teg, the fair folk or fairies. This was why most of the housing for the rapidly expanding town was on the west of the Abergavenny road; no-one wanted to upset the tylwyth teg as they could blight your crops, cause your animals to waste away or could steal your child leaving a changeling in its place. It was not all bad for if you kept in their good books, rewarded them or pleased them they could help make you prosperous or long lived; but as they were notoriously capricious, not many people wanted to run the risk of upsetting them.

Continue along **Elgam Avenue** and **Rifle Street** and as you pass the Rifleman's Pub, turn left onto the **Abergavenny Road**.

At this point there was once a tollgate that was smashed during the Rebecca Riots in 1839.

These were demonstrations against the hated gates that had been set up by Toll Gate Trusts, supposedly to raise money to maintain and improve the roads but quite often the extortionate tolls were diverted to other 'uses'. There was growing discontent amongst the rural and urban poor which flashed into violence when this additional burden came at a time when prices for live stock were low coupled with poor harvests. The rioters often dressed as women and blocked their faces to disguise their identity as capture could result in transportation.

Continue on down the Abergavenny Road and the old

church building on your left is **St. James' Church**.

St. James' Church once stood at the end of West View Terrace and was built out of corrugated tin plates so it was called the 'Iron' Church. (Photo 13).

When the slag and spoil heaps threatened its existence, the



Photo 13: original St. James' Church

congregation 'moved' the church to its present position, the beautiful stone being robbed from the blast furnaces at the iron works.

Once past the fire station, cross over the top of **King Street** and take the second fork (Upper Waun Street).

The first fork is the top of King Street and the first terraced house on the left side of the street was once a pub called the 'Pen Y Ceffyl' (Nags Head!). When it was converted into a private residence a 'Brown Bess' musket was found in a walled up fireplace. It is believed that this musket was stolen during the time of the Chartists riots from the barracks that once stood opposite.

Continue down **Upper Waun Street** and bear left as it turns into **High Street**.

This was once lined by shops, hotels and beer retailers but the only evidence today is in the frontage of the houses. A wider window usually indicates a shop and a double frontage could have been a tavern or hotel. A house with evidence of a corner doorway would also have originally been a commercial property.

When you come to the former Council or 'Municipal' Offices, look down **Lion Street** and compare the scene with that in photo 14; whilst the skyline has changed very little, many of the properties in the foreground



Photo 14: looking down Lion Street have been demolished. Continue down High Street until you come back onto **Church Road** alongside the **Workmen's Hall and Cenotaph**.

Once a common sight in the South Wales Valleys, not many Workmens' Halls or Institutes still stand and not many were as fine as Blaenavon's. The building is still very much a hub to the community today, with a cinema, snooker tables, concerts and a dedicated team of volunteers. It was funded by subscriptions from workers who had one half penny a week deducted from their wages, the building being opened in 1894. Photo 15 shows the Workmen's Hall with the



Photo 15: King Edward VIII visit to Blaenavon

Cenotaph and its Memorial clock, in the foreground. The event being recorded is King Edward VIII's visit to Blaenavon in November 1936. This was part of the great tour of the industrial valleys of South Wales, where he made his famous comment 'Something must be done to get these people work' after witnessing the great hardships and unemployment that the depression had wrought on the people of Wales.

This political comment may have won him the hearts of his people but it was not well received by the

Government, whose relationship with the King was already uncomfortable due to his affection for Mrs Simpson. It all came to a head less than a month later when on 10th December 1936 he signed the Instrument of Abdication at Windsor, witnessed by his three brothers.

Turn right and walk back towards the **Police Station**, which replaced the North Street Lock up in 1894, the car park beside the station was the site of the Court House. Cross over the road by the **Heritage Centre** and continue up the road for about 200m where, opposite, you will see a large house behind a stone wall topped with black lumps of 'slag'. Carefully cross the road to the entrance of the drive, and follow the middle path that goes through the trees. (The tracks to the left and right are private drives).

As you walk along the path through the beautiful beech trees you can see why the large house, now on your left, became known as the Beeches during its time as a nursing home. This was the house built by one of the Blaenavon Company partners, Thomas Hopkins. This house became known as Blaenavon House as it was regularly frequented by guests or visitors of the Company. The Hopkins' were very sociable and often hosted parties that were attended by visitors and locals alike. In 1925 it became known as 'Ty Mawr' and it became the Medical Society Hospital. In the grounds are grave stones to two dogs, Billy and Bones, owned by Mr Kennard who in the 1860's was the General Manager of the Blaenavon Works. Another of his beloved dogs, a red setter called Carlo, has a cast iron monument on the southern slopes of the Coity Mountain opposite, where he met his untimely death whilst flushing game during a shooting party organised by the Blaenavon Company. (See the 'Blaenavon Industrial Landscape' walk).

As this short section of path comes out onto a stoned drive, there is a large house off to the right known as **Park House**. Only the roof is visible behind the building that was once its stables.

Park House was built by Thomas Hill, a co-founder of the Blaenavon Iron Company. Three generations of Thomas' were responsible for the foundation and construction of the Iron Works, building tram roads and sinking mines. One of the mines, Hills Pit, has one of the only visible remains of the early mines in the landscape, a spectacular engine house chimney in the beautiful golden local stone. (See Iron Mountain Trail, Part 2). The Hills's had offices, a bank and a house for receiving guests in Nevill Street, Abergavenny. Later they went on to build Park House so they could have somewhere closer to the Iron Works to reside in and entertain the company's guests. Continue straight ahead up the drive and along the road, then up a short section of grassed track that will bring you back onto the **Abergavenny Road**. Turn left and walk down what is now North Street and you are now opposite the **Iron Works**. (See the Iron Mountain Trail Part 2 Leaflet for more information on the Iron Works). Continue



Photo 16: Staffordshire Row/North Street, in 1959

down the road until you are opposite the **Industrial Estate Road**. This road has been cut through an embankment where once stood the houses of Staffordshire Row/North Street.

Staffordshire Row got its name from the workers that migrated from the Midlands, lured to the area by a promise of work in the new state of the art iron works. The two terraces were built literally one on top of the other as they went into the side of the sloping bank. The lower houses were entered from doors which would face onto North Street (as seen in photo 16) and the higher level had their doors out onto Staffordshire Row at the back. The two terraces of houses were separated by brick vaulting supported by iron girders and each house originally had two rooms which were later partitioned to form two up and two down. An extract from a County Medical Officers Report of 1909 describes the occupancy of one of the 'houses'.

'No. 10 North Street consists on the ground floor a kitchen, a lumber/wash room and a pantry. On the first floor there are two bedrooms approached by a steep ladder stair. West bedroom, 11ft x 11ft was occupied by an old lady and a little girl. The east bedroom, 11ft x 6ft 6 was occupied by six children.

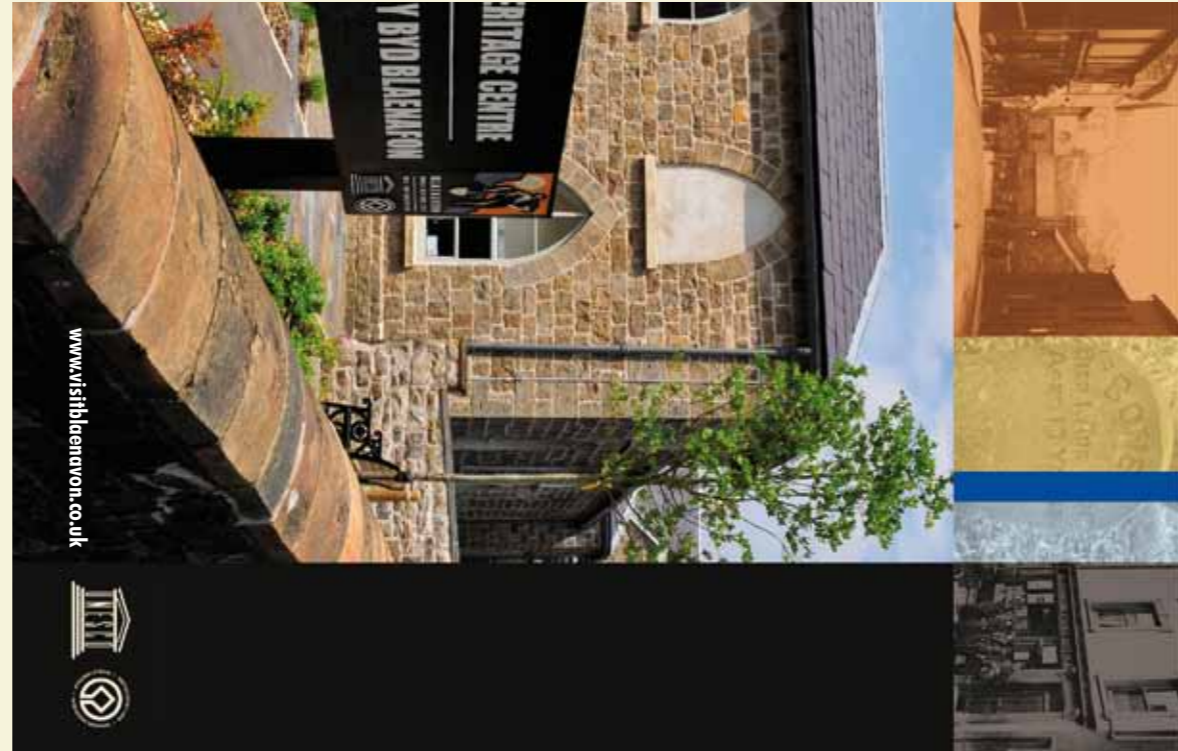
No. 4 Staffordshire Row (this is immediately above and in front of the proceeding house) consists of a ground floor with a small kitchen, a pantry and a bedroom, 11ft 6 x 6ft and is occupied by an old lady of 62 and a girl aged 2. Upstairs one room was partially divided off by a wooden partition into two rooms. Total square measurement of the rooms is 19ft 3 x 11ft 6 and they contain two beds, one of which is occupied in the daytime by a brother aged 24 years (except on Saturdays and Sundays) and at night by husband, aged 32 years, wife aged 28 years and baby, aged 12 months. The other bed is occupied by a sister aged 22 years.

There are too many sleeping in this tenement, thereby taking up the living rooms, the cubic capacity of which are none too ample'.

Part of the wall on the corner of Estate Road and North Street is all that is left of the first police station in the town. Originally there were stocks at Engine Row (the square of cottages in the Iron Works), but in 1838 these were replaced by the new purpose built police station or 'lock up' on North Street. This fell out of use by 1870, and after a brief respite as an air raid shelter in World War II, it was partially demolished in 1960 with only part of one wall left. Further along Estate Road industrial units and factories now stand where once there were rows of workers houses with names like Quick Buildings, Victoria Row, Ten Houses, Pond Houses and Bumblehole; this was also the site of the original St. James' Church. The men of Blaenavon worked hard and 'played' harder. Bare-knuckle fights, though eventually illegal, were often the norm and there are reports of bouts taking place on the hillsides around Blaenavon. One fight that took place at the corner of Victoria Row, ended in the death of Dai Lewis. The fatal blow was delivered by a man known only as Bowen, who was committed for trial but was later discharged.

Carefully continue down the road and cross over opposite **Kennard Place**. Turn and look towards the three story building now opposite. This was once part of a larger row of buildings that formed the company shop. It included a brewery and the public house called the 'Drum and Monkey', later referred to in Alexander Cordell's 'Rape of the Fair Country'. Continue on down the road and you will return back to the start of your walk at the **Heritage Centre**.

With thanks to Pontypool Museum for many of the images, Mrs Pat Sanderson and Blaenafon Community Heritage & Cordell Museum



www.visitblaenavon.co.uk



Circular Walk
Approx 3.5km (2 miles)/ 2 hours/
moderate to energetic

BLAENAVON TOWN WALK

BLAENAVON TOWN WALK A CIRCULAR WALK IN THE BLAENAVON INDUSTRIAL LANDSCAPE WORLD HERITAGE SITE

Approx 3.5Km (2 miles)/ 2 hours/
moderate to energetic

This walk can be increased to 7.5kms or 4.5 miles if you extend your walk to Capel Newydd which can add another hour and a half to your walk. It has some steep uphill gradients, steps and muddy sections so it is advisable to wear stout shoes or boots. It is unsuitable for wheel chairs and push chairs.

This walk starts at the **Blaenavon World Heritage Centre** (SO 250 088).

If you have taken the bus to Blaenavon, walk down to the bottom of the street from the 'High Street' bus stop. (or if you alight at the 'Lion Street' bus stop, by the Library, walk up to the corner and turn left down High Street). At the bottom, turn right and walk to the crossing that will take you safely to the **Heritage Centre** and the start of the walk.

The Heritage Centre is based in the former St. Peter's School buildings, which were paid for by Sarah Hopkins in memory of her late brother, Samuel. When it opened in 1816 it was the first

Many of the Listed Buildings which are seen on this walk are linked to the evolution of the towns industrial heritage. The town itself is the focus of a number of books by Alexander Cordell, the most famous of which is 'Rape of the Fair Country'.

A new impetus for growth was provided by the opening of the Forgeside Works, the sinking of Big Pit and the opening of railway lines to Brynmawr and Pontypool in the mid 19th Century.

The importance of the heritage of the town and it's environs as a resource of World significance is demonstrated by 46 Listed Buildings, eight Scheduled Ancient Monuments, its designation in the register of Landscapes of Outstanding and Historic Interest in Wales and the designation of a Conservation Area in 1984.

The Blaenavon Industrial Landscape was placed on the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites in November 2000.

The history of industrial activity in the area dates back to the 16th Century but it was the development of the Ironworks in 1789 that led to the growth of the town. The works were the first purpose-built multi-furnace ironworks in Wales. By 1796 it was the second largest producer of iron in Wales, with an annual output of 5,460 tons.

BLAENAVON TOWN WALK

CIRCULAR WALK

Continue on past the Prince's Street car park where once there were cottages and small industrial concerns such as blacksmiths forges and carpenters workshops. You will also pass an old 'dram' that would have been used to transport coal out of the mines along tramways to be loaded into canal barges. This was until the new and faster rail network was built and coal was then transported in large rail waggons. Cross over the Afon Lwyd (grey river) on what was once a tram road bridge taking time to look at the river. When it is in full flow you can understand why once it was called the Torfaen (from torri maen) which in English means 'Rock Breaker'. Once over the bridge, turn left and then carefully cross the main road.

You are now stood on the old railway line that once ran along the bottom of the valley and the GWR 'Lower' station was once where the blocks of flats ahead of you now stand.



Photo 2: Lower Station

school purpose built by an 'industrialist' for the workers' children. More information on the history of the schools, the Iron Works and Blaenavon can be found at the Heritage Centre.

Turn right out of the centre and walk past **St. Peter's Church**. If you have time, now or after the walk, look around the grounds, keeping a look out for the cast iron topped tombs, such as that of Sarah Bissel who died in 1809 aged 84. As you pass the church, pause on the corner of **Prince Street** and look down past the **Post Office**, and then compare the view with that in photo 1.

This shows some of the oldest buildings in the town which were demolished to make way for the grand new post office in 1937; you can just make out the Queen Victoria Pub behind.



Photo 1: looking down Prince Street