

# Great Archaeological Sites in Bridgend



## 7. BEDFORD IRONWORKS, CEFN CRIBWR



It may seem rather surprising to have an industrial complex known as the Bedford ironworks in South Wales (SS 8510 8345), but the name is an important part of their history. It was around 1771-72 that John Bedford came to Glamorgan. He had been born into a family in the iron trade in Birmingham, but became interested in the new innovations that were happening in South Wales. Having managed a forge in Monmouthshire he bought a parcel of land at Cefn Cribwr to build an ironworks complete with all the supporting industries it needed – collieries, quarries and brickworks. The Bedford Ironworks was the result, although it was not until 1781 that the ironworks came into production.

Whilst he thought of himself as an expert on furnace building and in quarrying, and in the manufacture of high-class iron products, in particular compass needles and ordnance, Bedford was not an astute businessman, being more interested in research and development, and Cefn Cribwr suffered from the lack of suitable transport. He died in 1791, and his son took over the ironworks with the other enterprises on the same site, which include a colliery in the hillside behind the

ironworks buildings. Iron production continued until 1834, although the works were taken over by Bryant & Co in 1824, possibly because they thought that opening of the Duffryn, Llynfi and Porthcawl Tramway in 1828, would make them more profitable. However, Cefn Cribwr never able to compete with sites in the Llynfi Valley and iron production was relocated.

Because the Bedford Ironworks were relatively unsuccessful and were in production for little more than 50 years before they went out of use, they did not attract the successive upgrades that took place at more profitable sites. One of the results of this early abandonment is that it survives remarkably complete, with much of the layout clear. Much of the blast furnace still stands, with the hearth area and front arch intact. The engine house that provided the blast is at right-angles to it. In front of the furnace is the casting house with the typical circular openings in the gable to let out some of the heat.

Bedford Ironworks forms part of Waun Cimla Country Park north of the village of Cefn Cribwr. It is owned by Bridgend CBC and managed by Y Cefn Gwyrdd volunteer group who arrange open days when possible. They are also working on other industrial archaeology projects. Maps: OS Landranger Series sheet 170, Explorer Series sheet 151.

**Timeline** (the asterisk indicate the time-span)



You can learn more about this site, and other similar archaeological sites in Wales, by going to <https://www.archwilio.org.uk/arch/>. Please read and observe the Conditions of Use. Bedford Ironworks has the (Primary Record Number) 01407m, and you can search for other similar sites here too. You can contact us via social media or through the methods given at the bottom of the page. See more about the ironworks of South Wales via the industrial pages of our timeline <http://www.ggat.org.uk/timeline/timeline.html>