

# Great Archaeological Sites in Torfaen



## 3. BLAENAVON IRONWORKS



The Blaenavon ironworks (SO 2499 0928) were established in 1787 by a consortium of businessmen from the English Midlands taking advantage of the ready supplies locally of raw material – iron ore, limestone and coal for coke – to feed the furnaces, and a hillside site convenient for the building of blast furnaces where the charge could be prepared and fed in from an upper yard the top. However, it lacked a convenient water supply for power, and was therefore designed from the first to be powered by steam. Three furnaces had been constructed by 1792, making it one of the most productive ironworks in the world at the time. Two more furnaces were soon added, in 1801 and 1807. Unusually, two of the furnaces retain their attached casting house in the lower yard, where the molten iron tapped from the furnace was run into a bed of sand to cool.

In the early years the Napoleonic Wars created a huge demand for iron, but this plummeted after Waterloo and the iron industry struggled. Later, with the development of the railway industry, an increase in demand led to new plans for the company in the 1830s. These saw the construction of a tower to house a water balance that was designed to transport wagons between the lower and upper yards, as well as plans for new furnaces, forges and rolling mills on a separate site at

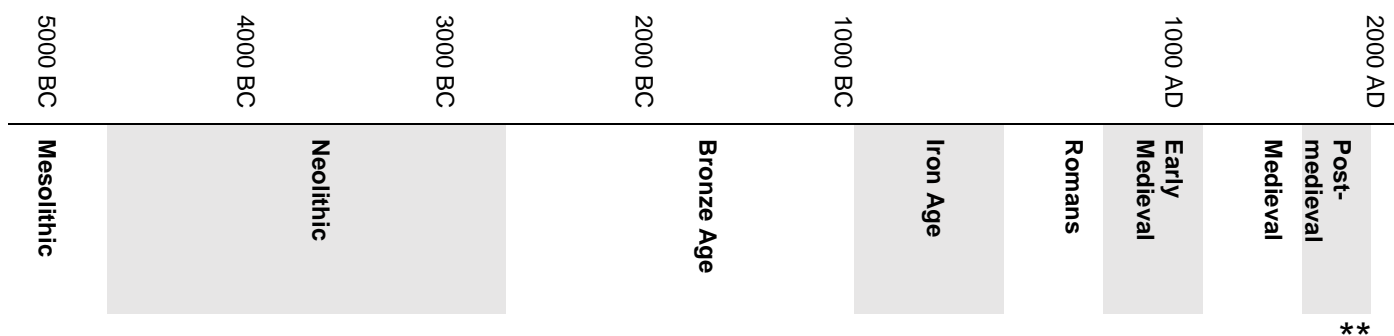
Forgeside. However the favourable conditions did not last and the Foregside project had to be mothballed until the late 1850s.

The fact that the plant was never significantly upgraded on the original site means that it now has international importance as a rare example of a fairly complete late 18th century ironworks. In 2000 it was granted World Heritage Site status, along with the surrounding landscape of the mining and quarrying for the raw materials. The terraces of houses that were built for the workers add to a rounded picture of ironmaking at the time it had just taken off, when South Wales was the most important producer in the world.



Blaenavon ironworks (NP4 9RQ) is a guardianship site run by Cadw. See the Cadw website for opening times and entrance charges. There is a visitor car park adjacent to the site. Maps: OS Landranger Series sheet 161, Explorer Series Outdoor Leisure sheet 13.

### Timeline (the asterisks 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. The overall PRN (Primary Record Numbers) for the Blaenavon ironworks is 02221g, with individual ironworks structures at 04842g – 04859g and workers' housing at 02320g and 03393g . You can search for other similar sites here too. You can find more about the South Wales iron industry via the industrial pages of our timeline <http://www.ggat.org.uk/timeline/timeline.html>, and learn more about the Blaenavon landscape on our Historic Landscapes pages at [http://www.ggat.org.uk/cadw/historic\\_landscape/main/english/historical.htm](http://www.ggat.org.uk/cadw/historic_landscape/main/english/historical.htm).