

# Great Archaeological Sites in Neath Port Talbot



## 6. NEATH ABBEY IRONWORKS



Neath Abbey ironworks, founded at the end of the 18th century on the banks of the River Clyne, is fundamentally important for the history of all heavy industry in South Wales. Established and run by Quakers who refused on ethical grounds to make armaments for the Napoleonic Wars, it quickly specialised in civil engineering. It was a pioneer in the development of steam engines, both locomotives and fixed engines to power the mining and metal industries. The whole process was carried out at the same site (SS 7376 9806), from smelting the ore and processing the resulting pig iron, to designing, building and repairing engines, which it supplied to many other South Wales works.

At the heart of the works were the two blast furnaces which still survive to nearly their full height. As is the rule in this area, they were built against a hillside that had been cut back for the purpose. Iron ore, limestone and coke were loaded from the top along the charging ramps; the one to the southern furnace still survives in part. Slag from the final blast still coats part of the inside of the northern furnace. The blast was provided by a steam engine bought from Boulton and Watt in 1793, the first time this technology was used in South Wales. There would originally have

been casting houses in front of the furnaces, but these have been completely demolished, as have other buildings where the pig iron was processed. One building that does survive is the rolling mill, constructed in 1825 further up the river where a weir provided power for a waterwheel to drive the machinery. Eventually in 1870 it was sold off and converted into a woollen mill.

The final stage of the process was building the engines. This was done in the engine manufactory, the building that stands to the south of the blast furnaces. The technology developed at Neath Abbey included the invention of a machine that could bore perfect cylinders. Sadly, none of the machinery still survives on the site.



The site is open access, on the north side of Neath Abbey Road between Longford Road and Taillywd Road (SA10 7DW), or via the footpath from Longford Road. There is on-street parking in Monastery Road on the opposite side of Neath Abbey Road. Walking access from Neath railway station is via the footbridge over the river and Neath Abbey Road; Neath is on the main line between Cardiff and Swansea. Maps: OS Landranger Series sheet 170, Explorer Series sheet 165.

**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 ironworks have the overall PRN (Primary Record Number) 00854w, with the rolling mill 01555w, engine manufactory 01556w, blast furnaces 01558w and charging ramp 06622w. 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. 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>.