

HUMANITIES — WELSH HISTORY · YEAR 4–6

Welsh Coal & Slate — Industrial Wales

Knowledge Organiser — Years 4–6

Key vocabulary

1

South Wales Coalfield

The coal-bearing region stretching across south Wales — the Rhondda, Merthyr Tydfil, Aberdare, and Swansea valleys. At its peak (1913), Wales produced 57 million tonnes of coal per year, mainly exported.

2

Penrhyn Quarry (Bethesda)

The largest slate quarry in the world at its peak. In north Wales (Gwynedd). Employed thousands. The Penrhyn Quarry Dispute (1900–1903) was the longest industrial dispute in British history.

3

The Merthyr Rising (1831)

A major workers' uprising in Merthyr Tydfil against wage cuts and the truck system. The red flag was raised for the first time in British history. Richard Lewis (Dic Penderyn) was hanged — he became a martyr.

4

Truck system

Workers paid in tokens redeemable only at company-owned shops — often at inflated prices. Widely used in Welsh mines and quarries. Banned by the Truck Act (1831).

5

Valleys communities

The mining valleys of south Wales developed intense, close-knit communities centred on work, chapel, and choral singing. Male voice choirs originate in these communities.



History of Welsh industry

From boom to deindustrialisation

- **PEAK:** 1913 — south Wales coal employed 250,000 men. Cardiff was the world's largest coal-exporting port.
- **INTER-WAR DECLINE:** mass unemployment in the 1920s–30s. Wales suffered some of Britain's worst depression-era hardship. Hundreds of thousands emigrated.
- **NATIONALISATION:** coal and steel nationalised in 1947 under Attlee government.
- **PIT CLOSURES:** 1960s–1984. The Miners' Strike (1984–85) was deeply significant in south Wales — most Welsh pits eventually closed.
- **SLATE TODAY:** the Dinorwig and Penrhyn quarries still operate at reduced scale. The Slate Landscape of Northwest Wales was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2021.
- **LEGACY:** the valleys still carry the cultural imprint of the industrial era — choirs, chapels, rugby, and a strong Labour tradition. Merthyr Tydfil remains the most deprived local authority in Wales.

