

HUMANITIES — WELSH HISTORY · YEAR 5–6

Gwrthryfel Merthyr 1831

The Merthyr Rising — Years 5–6

Key vocabulary and events

1

Merthyr Tydfil in 1831

The largest town in Wales — an iron-making boom town. Conditions were brutal: wages cut by ironmasters, workers paid in truck (company store tokens), extreme poverty alongside extreme industrial wealth.

2

The truck system

Workers paid in tokens redeemable only at the ironmaster's company shop, at inflated prices. Combined with wage cuts, it reduced workers to near-starvation despite producing enormous wealth for the ironmasters.

3

The Rising (June 1831)

Workers attacked the court where debt records (court rolls) were held and burned them. Then seized control of the town for several days. The army was called in. Between 16 and 24 workers were killed; an unknown number wounded.

4

The red flag

The Merthyr Rising is the first recorded occasion in British history that a red flag was raised as a symbol of workers' revolt — almost certainly in the Rising itself.

5

Richard Lewis — Dic Penderyn (1808–1831)

A 23-year-old miner hanged for stabbing a soldier during the Rising. There is significant doubt about his guilt. On the scaffold he reportedly said 'O Arglwydd, dyma gamwedd' — 'O Lord, what an iniquity.' He became a martyr of Welsh radicalism.



6

Political significance

The Merthyr Rising helped pressure the Reform Act (1832). It is a founding moment of Welsh radical and Labour tradition. Merthyr returned the first Independent Labour MP — Keir Hardie — in 1900.

