

WELSH BACCALAUREATE

Advanced

Individual Project

The Regimental Museum of The Royal Welsh



Brief – “Brecon, Merthyr Tydfil and the Industrial Revolution”

The industrial revolution changed Britain for ever. The impact on Wales was particularly profound with the country becoming the world’s first industrial nation, as the census of 1801 showed more people worked in industry than agriculture. This project gives students the chance to explore some aspects of these developments through an examination of events in Brecon and Merthyr Tydfil during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These events culminated in the Merthyr Rising of 1831.

If Wales was the first industrialised country, then Merthyr was the first industrialised town. The development of the iron industry by the Crawshay and Guest families meant the area experienced massive economic, social, industrial, environmental and demographic change. The population struggled to cope and the gap between rich, symbolised by the Crawshay’s home, Cyfartha Castle, and poor, widened so much that the British government decided to take steps to prevent a revolutionary uprising against the established social order.

The building currently occupied by The Regimental Museum of The Royal Welsh in Brecon was part of that response. Built in 1805 at a cost of about £12,000, it was designed both as an armoury from which the local militia could collect weapons and uniforms, but also as a base from which the soldiers could march and crush any revolt in Merthyr. So concerned were the authorities that in June 1829 a contingent of the Sutherland Highlanders regiment moved into the building and it was from there, in 1831, that they marched to Merthyr to crush the violent uprising.

This project offers numerous opportunities to explore some of the changes and contrasts that characterised this volatile period of British history.

- Industrialisation and its impacts on people and landscapes, and agriculture.
- Order and anarchy.
- Lives of the wealthy and lives of the poor.

The issue of democratic political representation raised by these events continues to resonate to the present day. Numerous examples can be cited of people agitating for change, agitation that regrettably sometimes descends into violence. From the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of Communism in eastern Europe to Zimbabwe in 2017, what happened in Merthyr Tydfil in 1831 set a precedent, echoes of which can still be felt today.

Recommended reading

Gwyn A. Williams, *The Merthyr Rising* (Cardiff, 1988; 2nd edition).

Recommended visits

The Regimental Museum of The Royal Welsh, Brecon.

Cyfarthfa Castle Museum and Art Gallery, Merthyr Tydfil.

Contact details

Richard Davies - Curator

The Regimental Museum of The Royal Welsh

Info@royalwelsh.org.uk