

The Story of the Site – Material and Immaterial Heritage Framework

St. Fagans National History Museum, Cardiff (Wales)

Gwalia Stores

Inventory Number

Accession Number: F94.18

Map Number: 16

Photos



Gwalia buildings, Ogmere Vale, about 1914



Gwalia Stores at St Fagans National History Museum



William Llewellyn with his family and chauffeur photographed in their Austin 15 Tourer outside Gwalia Stores, about 1912.

Description

The Gwalia is a good example of a late-Victorian general store from the south Wales industrial valleys. It was originally built in 1880, next to the railway in Ogmore Vale, and goods from all over the world were delivered to its doors. Tea came from China and India, sugar from the Caribbean and Africa, and coffee beans from Brazil. Bacon, cheese, eggs and butter were supplied by local farms.

William Llewellyn owned the shop. He ran it with his wife Mary and lived with his family upstairs at first. The original building was just the central section, flanked by the storeroom and Llewellyn's house. The shop was fitted with mahogany shelving, counters and bins by Parnalls of Bristol, and by 1912 the ground floor of the house had been taken over and a drapery established. The shop soon expanded to include the first floor and the ground floor of the adjoining three houses. By 1916, Gwalia Stores comprised a bakery, ironmongery, grocery, gentlemen's outfitters, chemist and a section selling animal feeds. Members of staff slept in the attics and were paid 8 shillings (40p) per week.

The success of the Gwalia Stores made the Llewellyns a very wealthy family. In 1902 they built a mansion overlooking the Ogmore Vale and owned the first car in the area. Alderman Llewellyn died in 1924 and the shop has been shown as it would have been in the late 1920s in the ownership of his sons.

Gwalia's success didn't last however. The Depression got people into debt and bills were left unpaid during the 1926 General Strike. The Llewellyns sold the shop in 1945. It finally shut in 1973, having lost its battle with the supermarkets at Bridgend. The building was moved to the museum in 1988 and it opened to the public in 1991.

Further reading

- Tibbott, S. Minwel & Thomas, Beth, *The Gwalia The Story of a Valleys Shop* (Cardiff 1991)
- <http://www.peoplescollectionwales.co.uk/collections/376945>

Sources

- Fraser, W. Hamish, *The Coming of the Mass Market 1850-1914* (London 1981)
- Jones, Philip N., *Mines, Migrants and Residence in the South Wales Steamcoal Valleys: the Ogmore and Garw Valleys in 1881* (Hull 1987)
- Winstanley, Michael J., *The Shopkeeper's World 1830-1914* (Manchester 1983)