

The Cymmer Band

In the 19th century, the small village of Cymmer, situated near the confluence of the Rhondda Fawr and Rhondda Fach rivers, was dominated by the Cymmer Colliery owned by George Insole. The undulating streets of terraced houses, some of them built by Insole for his miners, clung to the sides of the valley like limpets to a rock. In Cardiff, Insole's first business venture had been a partnership with Richard Biddle as a timber, coal and brick merchant, which had ended in bankruptcy in 1831, but it had shown him that there were far-reaching possibilities in the coal trade. He had made some useful contacts which were to stand him in good stead, and a fairly swift recovery (due to a legacy from his uncle) ensured that bankruptcy was a temporary set-back. He swiftly took a lease on Maesmawr Colliery, and set a new business plan in motion. With prosperity came the recognition, both in Cardiff and Cymmer, that he was an 'enterprising and extensive coal proprietor'¹. He was succeeded by his son James Harvey Insole in 1851, who lived a life far removed in both distance and style from that of his employees; nevertheless, evidence shows that the Insoles were also generous benefactors to the local community.

The 19th century was an era of social change, seen most dramatically in industrial areas where wealth and education sharply divided the 'haves' and the 'have nots'. Public unrest focused on working conditions and inequality of wealth, the Insole family and the mine at Cymmer being just one example of a countrywide phenomenon. At the beginning of each shift, the miner descended into danger, darkness, damp and dirt, the dust corroding the lungs, and invading the smallest scratch on the skin to leave its tell-tale mark – the unlooked for, unavoidable tattoo of the coal-pit. At the end of each shift, the miner emerged into the day that others had lived in light. In general, his life above ground revolved around his home, the pub, and the chapel. But for many miners, there was another facet to life, the joy of making music.

The aftermath of mainland Europe's 'Age of Enlightenment' had found its way to Britain during the early years of the century. The Mechanics' Institutes (often known in Wales as the 'Stwt' or 'Stute') were adult education centres for the working man that filled that growing need for further education. 'Night school' was one route for exploring music, but music and dancing had been associated with less acceptable forms of behaviour. In 1839 Sir John Herschel writing in his *Manual for Mechanics' Institutes*, had pointed out that understanding music was part of education. During the central decades of the 19th century horizons widened. Better communications made travel easier; the TVR² had reached Cymmer in 1846 and roads were improving. Cardiff was booming. In 1851, coal exports from Cardiff reached a record 1,000,000 tons. It was also the year of the Great Exhibition in London. But this time of expansion was not without cost. Every tragedy is regrettable, but the Cymmer Pit Disaster of 1856 was one of the most devastating. Put into the context of music making, one newspaper report³ stated 'of a choir of singers who had attained considerable local celebrity⁴ only one male member is left alive.'

At this time there were some outstanding people and events in music. In the choral world the South Wales Choral Union, later called Y Côr Mawr made a big impact, winning the Crystal Palace Challenge in both 1872 and 1873. The piano became the latest status symbol. Soloists achieved fame helped by the new invention of recorded sound, and stimulated by all of this, the thirst for musical knowledge was quenched by a growing army of music teachers. Through piano arrangements of operatic and orchestral works (which were relatively cheap to purchase after 1870⁵) the public became more aware of the wider musical scene. Newspapers reported the latest views and news in the world of the arts, reporting concerts and commenting on standards of performance.

A combination of technical development, the social scene and the joy of making music together resulted in the rise of the brass band. The early years of the nineteenth century had seen exciting developments in the making of brass instruments. Without being too technical, the invention of valves, operated by keys and pistons, enabled composers and performers to use a very much wider range of notes on brass instruments, and also with greater ease. It was fortunate that August Manns, a German bandmaster, was appointed Musical Director at the Crystal Palace in 1855.

¹ *The Silurian* 11.01.1851

² Taff Vale Railway

³ *Dublin Daily Express* 18.07.1856

⁴ Porth Choir.

⁵ *The Music profession in Britain since the eighteenth century* – Erlich (O.U.P.1988)

His knowledge of bandsmanship and the repertoire was the result of his heritage, where many towns and villages in Germany had its own band. Like his contemporary, Louis Julien, Manns believed in bringing music to the masses. Brass bands are eminently suitable for outdoor performance, for marching as well as bandstand performances, and at this time parks and recreation grounds with bandstands were being created, primarily for the ordinary working man. It is important to remember that the 1842 Mines and Collieries Act had drawn attention to the plight of young children and women working underground and in other hazardous occupations. A half-day off on a Saturday was an exception rather than the rule,⁶ and the working week could be anything between fifty and sixty hours long⁷. Balancing work and leisure as we now perceive it had no place, not for the working man nor for his wife left at home. Sunday was the Day of Rest, and chapel and church-going took precedence. However, from 1856, Sunday bands were permitted to play in parks. Despite all the efforts of Lord Shaftesbury and the Working Men's Lord's Day Rest Association, and pamphlets declaring that some music could produce reactions contrary to a peaceful Sunday, it remained a day of entertainment and music for the poor.⁸ This presented a dilemma for some: Sunday remained the only day for rehearsal for all forms of corporate music-making and, for some church goers and non-conformists, this was unacceptable. However, a comment in the *Cardiff Times* dated November 24th 1888 gives a contrary view. While the writer admits that he has sometimes been annoyed by the sound of bands in the street, he compliments Swansea in their use of a band on ceremonial occasions, and urges other towns to follow their example.

The interest in brass bands was greatest in the industrial north and in collieries, and bands became a facet of industry; an advertisement of prestige no less. Some developed from the fife and drum bands, Parc and Dare and Cory amongst them in Wales, although Cymmer's Fife and Drum Band (still playing in 1894)⁹ remained a separate entity. The Salvation Army, and some temperance bands, with portable instruments well adapted to outdoor playing, took their message to the streets, continuing a tradition of itinerant street musicians.

The earliest mention of the Cymmer Brass Band is in a newspaper report of the fifth anniversary of the Benefits Society in 1855¹⁰. 'Following a meeting at the home of Mr Samuel Smith, at the Red Cow Tavern near Tonyrefail, the members walked in procession to the Methodist Chapel, preceded by the Cymmer Brass Band'.

In the following year (as has already been noted) the disaster at Cymmer colliery took the lives of over a third of the work-force, amongst them, members of the colliery band. An unnamed columnist in the *Monmouthshire Merlin & Silurian* newspaper¹¹ remarked how glad he was to know that Merthyr was to join other towns and villages in contributing to the Disaster Fund, adding poignantly: 'Some of the men [killed] had taken part in concerts [given] here.' Furthermore, he noted that church and chapel choirs intended to join in a concert of sacred music to raise funds for the bereaved dependents – music and actions expressing emotion when words are deemed inadequate.

In 1910¹², the obituary of Samuel Fudge, who had been Postmaster at Porth for many years, revealed that he had conducted both the Cymmer Band and the Ferndale Band, probably about 1870. The competitive spirit came to the fore and contests were popular with players and their audiences. The Cymmer Colliery Brass Band was a competitor at Rhyader on August 5th 1874¹³. Their conductor was James Prestwood and, while the band was not amongst the winners of the contest, he must have been confident that they were all sufficiently prepared for a testing performance. Some five years later, a newspaper report¹⁴ of a concert in aid of the funds, held at Old Chapel, Cymmer, declared that the band '....acquitted itself well under its conductor, Mr J.Prestwood.' The name of a pianist was included which perhaps indicates that, on this occasion, the band was not yet quite self-sufficient in all its forces, a piano having to fill in for missing instruments or to bolster the weaker sections. The local events at which the band played during 1880 vary from a concert in aid of church funds¹⁵ to supporting events at Lodge meetings¹⁶ a Fete and Gala¹⁷ and the third anniversary of the Rose of the Valley Lodge of Philanthropics where the band paraded

⁶ *Victorian Popular Music* –Ronald Pearsall.(David & Charles 1973)

⁷ Ehrlich *op cit*.

⁸ Erlich – *op.cit*.

⁹ *South Wales Daily News* 20.10.1894

¹⁰ *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian, Glamorgan, Monmouth and Brecon Gazette* 26.05.1855

¹¹ 26.07.1856

¹² *Rhondda Leader, Maesteg and Ogwr Telegraph.* 29.10.1910

¹³ Website-brassbandresults

¹⁴ *Cardiff Times* 24.05.1879

¹⁵ *South Wales Daily News* 06.08.1880

¹⁶*Weekly Mail* 24.07.1880

¹⁷*Weekly Mail* 17.08.1880

the streets. This was the last reported event under the baton of James Prestwood¹⁸. In 1885, Richard Martyn succeeded James Prestwood as conductor of the Cymmer Colliery Brass Band.¹⁹ He is known to have been the conductor of the Llantrisant Brass Band in the 1870s²⁰, and there is one report of an event in 1890²¹ which suggests that he might have been a guest conductor on that occasion. Unfortunately, the conductor of a concert is not always mentioned, so that continuity of a conductorship can only be surmised. His family had originated in Cornwall, where his father and grandfather were gunpowder makers. Like so many other Cornish families, they were drawn to the booming economy of South Wales, moving first to Clydey, Carmarthenshire, then to Llantrisant, and finally to Porth. Richard was born in 1838; his brother George Francis Martyn, who was also destined to become a bandmaster, was born in 1851. Music emerged early in his life, the 1861 census showing him to be a bandsman aboard the ill-fated HMS Conqueror, which had been sent to support the French intervention in Mexico. While sailing through the Bahamas on December 29th 1861, she was wrecked on Rum Cay, owing to faulty navigation. Remarkably, all aboard were saved, and eventually returned to Britain. The following year Richard married, and by 1871 was living close to his parents in Cross Inn Road, Llantrisant, where several other Cornish miners lived close by. An early photo of the band²² shows brass players with the usual percussion section, and pride of place given to a large bass drum. In 2002, this drum was presented to the Rhondda Heritage Park. It had a rather florid coat of arms painted on the side of the drum. Three of the four quarters of the shield show the Royal Arms, but the top right quarter is of Fleur de Lys on a blue ground. Could this be a drum which had once belonged to a marching regimental band? Perhaps the drum became surplus to requirements when two regiments were merged? However, early photos of the drum show it to be undecorated, and an enquiry to the College of Arms reveals that the Fleur de Lys quarter was probably a “pleasanterie” or added as a joke – now long forgotten²³



Richard Martyn, as conductor, moulded the players into a cohesive unit, gaining increasing fame and popularity. One

¹⁸ *South Wales Daily News* 18.09.1880

¹⁹ Many references to the Martyn family have been given by Mrs Anne Taylor, great-granddaughter of Richard Martyn.

²⁰ Frequent entries in the *South Wales Daily News* and *Cardiff Times*

²¹ *Barry Dock News*. 11.04.1890

²² Photograph held by the family.

²³ Letter to the author from the Lancaster Herald, 28.03.2018.

of the band's early successes was at a contest held in Merthyr in 1885²⁴ where the band gained fourth place. In the following year, at two of the contests entered, the band was awarded the equivalent of medal status, by winning second (silver) place at Tonypany²⁵ and first place (gold) at Bridgend²⁶. At this distance of time, it is hard to realise the beneficial impact that these successes had on everyone; music in all its variety was the "X factor" of the day among the mining communities. The band appeared at local events too. In 1885, it had entertained the employees of the timber merchant Charles Jenkins during their outing to Porthcawl²⁷. It was part of a torchlight procession to a political meeting,²⁸ at the Independent Chapel in November of that year; several newspapers reported that the Cymmer Brass Band provided an escort for those who came to Cymmer to support Arthur J. Williams as a Liberal parliamentary candidate. As well as leading the Hafod Club outing in 1889²⁹, competitions continued. There followed a stream of successes between 1888 and 1890, winning at Pentre (August 8th 1888), at Caerphilly (June 10th 1889), Bridgend (June 24th 1889) and Caerphilly (May 26th 1890).The least of these successes was a second (silver) place at the Dowlais Contest, incidentally beating the Aberaman Band conducted by none other than James Prestwood³⁰.

There is no doubt that the band appreciated Richard Martyn's expertise. Under his baton, the band's achievements in the field of competition had given it a high profile while at the same time it continued to serve the locality. For the players, membership of the band gave them a sense of pride. Friendships were carved out of shared enjoyment and, within the community, each member was recognised as having something special in their lives. So on Saturday July 12th 1890, they all gathered at the Colliers' Arms 'for the purpose of presenting Mr Richard Martyn...with a marble clock, in recognition of his valuable services.'³¹ In the wider sphere of improving the quality of brass band performance, April 1891 saw the inaugural meeting of the South Wales Brass Band Association,³² which sought amongst other matters to clarify rules of membership and the choice of adjudicators at contests. Mr Martin [*sic*] was appointed Treasurer'.

This final decade of the century saw the band at its busiest yet, and the newspaper reports of its activities reflected The standard of playing it had achieved. At Porth Town Hall, a concert was held on February 4th 1892 to raise funds for the Bath Royal Mineral Water Hospital³³. Established in the 18th century, the hospital utilised Bath's mineral waters in the treatment of rheumatic diseases, but the band's involvement in a concert supporting an English charity is an indication of its wide popularity. The official opening of the Working Man's Reading Room and Institute in 1893 received due coverage in the press³⁴. It had been built by Insole with funds 'supplied voluntarily by the workmen themselves, assisted by generous contributions by the colliery company and other gentlemen interested in the district'.³⁵ The band marched to Porth railway station to greet the guests, and played at the ceremony. Another member of the Martyn family was Secretary of the Cymmer Colliery Workman's Library for 17 years.³⁶ Many years later, Will Paynter, reflecting on the influence it had had on his life said 'it was my Eton and Cambridge'.³⁷ A significant concert was held on February 1st 1894³⁸ in aid of purchasing new instruments for the band. It drew its large audience from a wide area who doubtless not only wished to hear the band, but also to hear Signor Foli as bass soloist. Allan James Foley, an Irishman who was well aware of the then current preference for Italian singers, used Signor Foli as his stage-name, changing the spelling, but not the pronunciation of his surname.³⁹ The concert was 'highly successful in every sense'. The following year, the band played at the opening of the Public Hall in Cymmer

²⁴ brassbandresults.co.uk website 25.05.1885

²⁵ *Ibid* 23.05.1886

²⁶ *Ibid* 25.06.1886

²⁷ *South Wales Daily News* 01.09.1885

²⁸ *South Wales Echo* 13.11.1885

²⁹ *Barry Dock News* 16.08.1889

³⁰ *Ibid* 09.06.1888

³¹ *Barry Dock News* 18.07.1890

³² Reported in several newspapers.

³³ *South Wales Daily News* 06.02.1892

³⁴ *South Wales Daily News* 05.12.1893 (*and other newspapers*)

³⁵ *Ibid*.

³⁶ Percy J. Martyn

³⁷ Quoted at Coalfield Web Materials. <http://www.agor.org.uk>

³⁸ *South Wales Daily News* 03.02.1894

³⁹ Wikipedia.org

(Afan Valley)⁴⁰ where the ‘finished style of playing of the Cymmer Band was noted⁴¹. Invited back to give the evening concert at the Eisteddfod there in April 1895, the band was reported to be playing ‘in their usual good style’.⁴²



Cymmer Institute c.1988

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At the Porth Flower Show in September 1895, the band ‘discoursed sweet music’ as a background to the event⁴³, being yet another example of the many local events both social and charitable at which the band played.

There is evidence that Richard Martyn continued as conductor in competitions until the contest at Newport on August 2nd 1897⁴⁴. He was then approaching the age of 60. It was the last time that the band appeared at a competition under the name of Cymmer Colliery. From this date, the band appeared as Lewis Merthyr Band, and guest conductors took over from the resident conductor for the final rehearsals and for the contest itself. This was common practice. Lewis Merthyr (originally the Hafod colliery) had survived, despite some severe set-backs, and is known to have had bands which have appeared under various names. This is an area still under research⁴⁵. Perhaps taking over the competitive area of Cymmer’s schedule was something Lewis Merthyr could afford? On the other hand, was spending money on travel to band competitions a crucial factor for the Cymmer Colliery? It was also a time of colliery reorganisation; Insoles Ltd were to run the Cymmer Colliery, and a new venture, Windsor Steam Coal Co Ltd was launched.

The band however, continued to flourish. It was frequently placed in the medal-winning categories at contests, while Richard Martyn undertook the painstaking work at rehearsals and conducted local performances, where the band retained its original name. This can be seen at an event on September 1898, when a presentation was made to a long-serving bandsman. An apology for not mentioning the band itself in the original report was printed using its Cymmer Colliery name⁴⁶.

Richard Martyn’s younger brother George, had long been a member of the band. One early photograph shows him holding a saxophone⁴⁷. A similar technical improvement to woodwind instruments, like the earlier developments in brass instruments, facilitated faster playing and better tone. The inclusion of woodwind instruments altered the

⁴⁰ *Cardiff Times*, 03.02.1894

⁴¹ *South Wales Daily News* 31.10.1894

⁴² *South Wales Weekly News* 05.04.1895

⁴³ *Cardiff Times and South Wales Daily News* 07.09.1895

⁴⁴ brassbandresults.co.uk

⁴⁵ See Lewis Merthyr Band website.

⁴⁶ *Glamorgan Free Press* 24.09.1898

⁴⁷ Band photo 1898. This and other photos can be viewed at www.lewismerthyrband.com/historical-images.html

overall character and sound of the band, and George was known to have preferred it. Strictly speaking, this was now a military band, and the opening of Kneller Hall in 1857, as the army's specialist school for the training of military bandsmen, had set an example that was closely followed by others. In Staffordshire, for example, the pottery firm of J & G. Meakin purchased instruments to form a military band⁴⁸. The same firm generously donated £200 to Hanley Corporation to provide high class concerts for working men. This is yet another example of how music was encouraged by owners of large firms and collieries. The mind-set behind this was that while their workers focused on their musical interests, unrest in the workplace was less likely, and it kept them away from the music and dance halls, the worst of which provided other less desirable entertainments. Insole's Colliery certainly supported their brass band,⁴⁹ and the addition of woodwind instruments widened its appeal. The clarinetists were old army bandsmen, recruited by advertising and the promise of work in the colliery.⁵⁰



Cymmer Colliery Military Band, Conductor George Francis Martyn 1905-1926.
(Copyright: reproduced by kind permission of Rhondda Heritage Park)

On the retirement of Richard Martyn,⁵¹ George Martyn assumed conductorship. He was, by now, the colliery's cashier. A levy of one ha'penny per head was raised from the workforce to support the band – collected on pay-day at the office!⁵² It is possible that this inculcated a sense of pride in the band among the workers, and it might have avoided any latent unrest amongst them. So the brass band continued alongside the newly named Cymmer Military Band. Doubtless, some brass players played in both bands, so that technically it was the same band, with different players as and when required; both formats played on into the twentieth century.⁵³ During July 1905, keenly aware of the Wattstown disaster, the band took to the streets to collect money for the disaster fund, this at a time when the Cymmer Colliery had been on three weeks stoppage, protesting against the employment of non-union workers. The re-opening of the Concert Room at Cymmer Workman's Library⁵⁴ in December 1905 must have been nostalgic for those who had played at the initial ceremony, and later in the month the band paraded on Christmas Day. The building of a band-room off School Street in 1907⁵⁵ was further evidence of the colliery's

⁴⁸ *Music of the People* – Edward Lee. (Barrie & Jenkins 1970)

⁴⁹ *Musical Rhondda* – Powell Images of Wales series (Tempus Publishing 2000).

⁵⁰ Family letter. 16.03. 1976.

⁵¹ Thought to be 1901

⁵² *ibid*

⁵³ Unnamed newspaper report of the presentation to George Martyn February 1st 1926, 'the Rhondda Valley's veteran brother conductors who for nearly fifty years had the honour of leading this same wonderful band'

⁵⁴ *Rhondda Leader* 23.12.1905.

⁵⁵ Glamorgan Record Office

support, and probably much appreciated by the players. That year closed with a Brass Band concert on the evening of Boxing Day.

In 1908 Richard retired to Barry, but died only two years later. His obituary⁵⁶ recalls 'His marked ability as a conductor, having captured many prizes in brass band competitions in former days, had gained for him quite a popularity throughout South Wales and Monmouthshire.'

Performances continued. One of the first concerts under the baton of George Martyn was to raise money for new instruments. Research has shown that families would 'go short' of necessities to provide themselves with the wherewithal for music. Firms went so far as to encourage families to have music in the home, and this was particularly so in South Wales⁵⁷. In 1908, a series of three concerts was performed; the last was at the Workman's Library.⁵⁸ At the first of these, the Chairman pointed out to the audience how well the band supported the community by playing at so many events, and this was the community's chance to show their appreciation of the band's efforts⁵⁹. The cost of instruments relative to an average wage meant that few players actually owned their instruments. The ever-present community involvement is often reflected in the band's schedule. In 1910 the Bishop of Llandaff opened the new St John's Hall.⁶⁰ Fred Insole (grandson of George) was unable to attend, but the dignitaries processed from the railway station, led by the Cymmer Brass Band. In the same year, a photograph shows the band leading Porth Carnival⁶¹. In 1912, they paraded during the visit to the Rhondda of King George V and Queen Mary, and also during the Porth Carnival in the same year.⁶² The seventh annual concert at St John's Hall in 1912 was conducted by George Martyn, and there was a reminder in the *Western Mail*⁶³ of the band's forth-coming 'sixth season of annual concerts in [Bronwydd Park] Porth'. There were concerts away from the home ground too. Penarth's Alexander Park had been a popular venue for band performances throughout the inter-war years. However in 1920, the Parks committee decided to charge for seating within the circle of the bandstand on special occasions. Among the few accorded this arrangement was Cymmer Colliery Military Band⁶⁴.

Gwyn Thomas, the author, eloquently recalled his youth in Cymmer⁶⁵ in a series of radio broadcasts in the 1950s. In a description of the area he said: 'Down that side street to the left is the Library and Institute. There I had my first taste of what have been the great merits of life – masses of books, good talk, concerts. There, on a Sunday evening, the Cymmer Band would play under their impressive bearded bandmaster, Mr Martin [*sic*]. He was a grave, Moses-like figure and it would never have surprised me to see his sheet music turn into tablets of stone!' George Martyn had a record of 42 years as a bandsman and conductor at Cymmer. It is fitting that both these brothers should have been remembered at a dinner and presentation to George Martyn given by Mr W.B. Davies, M.E., (General Manager of Messrs Insole and also President of the Band Committee) on February 1st 1926, at the Porth Hotel, Porth. The toast of "Our Guest" was made to Mr North Lewis, (Managing Director of Insoles Ltd) who made the presentation. The local newspaper had already paid tribute to the brothers by reproducing their photographs, and records: 'A change is announced in the leadership of the famous Cymmer (Porth) Military Band, which makes it interesting to reproduce the photographs of the Rhondda Valley's veteran brother conductors who, for nearly fifty years, had the honour of leading this same wonderful band.'

By this time, Cymmer's musicians, like others all over the country, had found that the BBC was happy to broadcast their performances. George Martyn conducting the Cymmer Military Band had broadcast in 1923 and soon after the appointment of their new conductor, a well-known local musician, Percie G. Smith, another performance was relayed.⁶⁶

⁵⁶ *Rhondda Leader* 21.05. 1910

⁵⁷ Pearsall *op cit*.

⁵⁸ *Rhondda Leader* 21.03. 1908 The first concert was held at St Paul's room, the second at Tabernacle Chapel, Hannah Street.

⁵⁹ *Rhondda Leader Maesteg Ogwr and Ogmored Telegraph* 06.11.1909

⁶⁰ 16.6.1910. Note that "Colliery" has been omitted from the band's name.

⁶¹ Rhondda valleys.com/porth.htm

⁶² Newspaper photographs of these two events are identical except in resolution. Both include woodwind. Clarification is needed
⁶³ 06.03.1914

⁶⁴ Note the inclusion of "Colliery" This was used for both bands from time to time, and not strictly applied.

⁶⁵ archive.spectator.co.uk/article14th-august-1964/9/a-welsh-eye

⁶⁶ BBC Genome 30.07.1927



Alexander Park, Penarth

For many years, Percie G. Smith had been conducting his own orchestra,⁶⁷ so working with a military band must have been a new departure for him. Nevertheless, royal approval came in the form of a comment to Col. Watts-Morgan, during the visit of the Prince of Wales in 1932. On hearing the band, he exclaimed: "That's a damn fine band! – What is it?"⁶⁸

Just before Percie Smith retired due to ill-health, there was another broadcast. However, there is no reason to believe that, between these two dates, other performances given by the Cymmer Band were not transmitted from 5WA,⁶⁹ along with others by the local male voice choir and the Cymmer Juvenile Choir⁷⁰. When Percie Smith's health failed, another member of the Martyn family⁷¹ was on hand to help out. But by this time, Insole's Colliery had ceased production.⁷² The colliery was sold to Powell Duffryn who owned Lewis Merthyr colliery at Trehafod, and one Cymmer shaft was kept open for pumping until the closure of Lewis Merthyr colliery in 1983, which is where Rhondda Heritage Park now stands.

In the years between 1832 and 1939, it was not only the physical landscape that had changed. The deserted sheds, chimney stacks and winding gear in 1939 bore witness to the passing of the Coal Age. The structure of society, its manners and mores, attitudes and opportunities were different. As the country teetered on the brink of another World War in 1939, there were more challenges ahead. Neither for the Insole family no longer living in Llandaff nor for the community at Cymmer, would life ever be the same again. There was a new awareness that there was something more to life than grime and toil. Even in wartime's darkest days, all over Britain ENSA and CEMA⁷³ brought drama, ballet and music to unlikely venues, to take minds away from warfare. One of the great theatrical partnerships⁷⁴ toured, bringing Shakespeare and inspiration to the South Wales valleys.

⁶⁷ A poster publicising the 5th annual Symphony Concert on 3.5.1910, is held in the Rhondda Heritage Park Archive.

⁶⁸ Family recollection.

⁶⁹ Cardiff BBC Station

⁷⁰ 11.10.1938

⁷¹ Vivian, son of George Martyn. He had composed a march 'The Devil's Own' which had been played by the Cymmer band and named after the OTC (Inns of Court) to which he was attached at the time. (1916).

⁷² 03.03.1939

⁷³ Council for the Encouragement of Music and Arts

⁷⁴ Sybil Thorndike and Lewis Casson

It all showed that study and work could go hand in hand with the arts, and that in the diversity of the arts it was possible that everyone could contribute to the greater good, be it by art, by singing, playing, writing, either alone or with others, or simply by being an appreciative audience.

Much had been achieved that had added to the musical ethos of the Rhondda as a whole, all played out against a background of wars, mining disasters, issues of health and working conditions and the vagaries of the mining industry. Many from the area made their name on a wider stage than could ever have been imagined in bygone years, and laid the foundations for more ambitious projects in the twentieth century for age groups ranging from school-children to pensioners. Ysgol y Cymmer, a school choir of over one hundred voices, won at the National Eisteddfod in Treorchy in 1928, and the merging of Porth's and Cymmer's civic boundaries gave rise to groups adopting the names of both areas; an award - winning Male Voice Choir, an Orchestral Society and a Choral Society, all demonstrating their musical credibility on the local and national stages, and beyond. They brought fame to their community, and enabled so many to experience the joy of making music together.

Postscript

When Vivian Martyn, George Martyn's son, was called up he was too old for active service, but he was sent to the Cymmer area as part of his war service. While he was there he conducted the band following Percie Smith's retirement, before being recalled to London in 1942. William Baker, Richard Martyn's son-in-law, then took over for a while. Recently, it has come to light that Charles Victor Woosnam who had been a member of the band in the thirties, conducted the band right up until 1949 when Oliver Jones took over⁷⁵. At this point, the band decided to concentrate on competitions, which meant a very different approach to the standard of performance. After the war, there was no Cymmer Colliery to provide the necessary support for the band. As both the Cymmer and Lewis Merthyr collieries were owned by Powell Duffryn, it was natural that the remaining members merged with their neighbouring ensemble and in 1946 took the name of the active colliery, Lewis Merthyr, whose band continues to delight audiences from far and near.

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*This is taken from a fuller account of music in the Cymmer area; **Cymmer: Miners and Music**, ©Insole Court Archive Research Group 2018- Gaynor Howard*

⁷⁵ www.lewismerthyrband.com/history.html