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**‘Wages, welfare and arbitration’: Were the
Penrhyn Quarry workers able to express their
agency in response to methods of control
exerted by English management and ownership
pre-unionisation c. 1842-1874?**

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List of abbreviations:

GAS = Gwynedd Archive Service

NWQU = North Wales Quarrymen's Union

PLA = Pennant Lloyd Agreement

Chapter 1: Introduction

‘The working class, when acting under a feeling of undeserved injury, will generally retaliate, when the opportunity presents itself’.¹

Amongst the Welsh industries slate quarrying offers an almost unique opportunity to explore the dichotomy between Welsh workmen and English land owners. The quarrymen themselves were part of a ‘sophisticated and informed working class culture’.² The context of the workmen set apart from Lord Penrhyn - Edward Gordon Douglas-Pennant, the first Baron Penrhyn – exhibits a community which retrospectively appears a distinctively Welsh society. Henry Richard famously came to describe the idealised definition of ‘Welshness’ in the nineteenth century: that of Liberal politics, Nonconformist religion and a connection to the Welsh language.³ The quarrymen of North Wales represent all of these traits. The value of the workers was not necessarily met in terms of payment, but other provisions were available. This dissertation will cover the worker’s remuneration for effort, welfare in terms of hospital and financial help but also try to address the shifting boundaries of the relationship in 1874. There are questions to be answered which revolve around the relationship, wages and provision of care. Was it an exercise of compassion or were there elements of social control? It is important to consider that it was not exclusively the owner who may provide welfare. The workers too were part of a ‘Benefit Club’, similar to other friendly societies of the era, for which a subscription was paid that helped to provide welfare. Issues of discontent will frame the closing of this dissertation considering how both parties attempt to address the terms of the relationship.

The slate industry itself has had extensive historical coverage, owing mainly to its importance as an integral part of the North Welsh industrial landscape. The industry grew at a significant rate in the mid-nineteenth century. Davies

¹ Morgan Richards, *Slate quarrying and how to make it profitable*. (Bangor, 1876) pp. 100-101.

² David Gwyn, *Welsh Slate, Archaeology and History of an Industry* (Wales, 2016) p.9.

³ Henry Richard, *Letters and essays on Wales* (London, 1884).

places the figures at a production growth of 45,000 tons in 1851 up to 150,000 tons in 1881 for the wider North Welsh region.⁴ The North Wales slate industry never grew to the scale of the South Wales coalfields but nonetheless was a leader in the global slate market. Recently the North Wales slate quarries have garnered focus from the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales. To this end David Gwyn has produced the definitive source for the industry: *Welsh Slate, Archaeology and History of an Industry* (2016).⁵ The book covers all aspects of the practical implications of slate quarrying in which he offers an approachable exploration of the industry. One of the first truly expansive works into the socio-political aspect of the industry was R. Merfyn Jones' *The North Wales quarrymen 1874-1922* (2015 [1981]).⁶ He explores the nature of the quarrymen's existence as defined by a tumultuous relationship with Lord Penrhyn's successor; George Sholto Gordon Douglas-Pennant. He also covers the implications of the Pennant Lloyd Agreement (PLA) (Appendix I) of 1874 which will inform the closing discussion of this dissertation. A key figure operating within the industry was that of William John Parry, colloquially known as the 'Quarryman's Champion'. Jones explores Parry's career and influence.⁷ Parry operated as a representative of the quarrymen and as such plays an important role in their relationship with Lord Penrhyn. Of particular interest for this paper is Edward Davies' *The North Wales Quarry Hospitals and the Health and Welfare of the Quarrymen*.⁸ The quality of his research is impeccable; however as a research piece there is room for further interpretation. The work Davies has compiled covers all aspects of welfare across the industry but his analytical approach allows some room for additional inquiry into the human story. Another detailed study which focuses upon the relationship of workers and ownership at Penrhyn Quarry is

⁴ John Davies, *A history of Wales* (London, 2007) p.394.

⁵ Gwyn, *Welsh Slate*.

⁶ R. Merfyn Jones, *The North Wales quarrymen 1874-1922* (Chippenham, 2015).

⁷ For another detailed perspective of W. J. Parry's career see: J. Li. W. Williams, 'W.J. Parry: Quarryman's Champion' in *Llafur* vol.8 no.1 (2000) pp. 97-110.

⁸ Edward Davies, *The North Wales Quarry Hospitals and the Health and Welfare of the Quarrymen* (Aberystwyth, 2003)

Manning's article 'English Money and Welsh Rocks'⁹ in which he covers the important implication of the language barrier. It is a thorough article of which little addition can be made; it is therefore this dissertation's aim to focus predominantly on the socio-economic issues rather than the cultural.

It would be impossible to explore the provision of welfare and worker's agency without an understanding of the wider debate. A. P. Donajrodzki had brought the issue of social control into the historiography with his publication of *Social Control in Nineteenth Century Britain* (1977).¹⁰ As an edited collection of essays it offers some interesting insights into forms of social control. There is perhaps too great a focus upon policing such initiatives and is also based upon state policy, whereas in this instance it was a private venture. Much more pertinent to this paper is Gertrude Himmelfarb's *Poverty and Compassion* (1991).¹¹ Himmelfarb offers a nuanced approach to Victorian philanthropic activities stating that it may be a case of 'feeling good rather than doing good'.¹² In either case, altruistic acts or definitive forms of social control are polarising ideas which do not fully explain the situation at Penrhyn Quarry. Instead this dissertation will try to explore how payment and welfare operated as forms of socio-economic control at a time the proletariat were beginning to express their agency within the context of their working lives. The debate was also a contemporary one. Samuel Smiles' publication *Self-Help*¹³ demonstrates the relevancy of poverty, and the principles of charity in enabling the poor to express their own agency. Whilst this helps frame the argument, some discussion of similar philanthropic or self-help situations across Wales should help define Penrhyn Quarry amongst British welfare provision. Discussions of urban hospital provision are available, including one particular case study focussing upon Cardiff infirmary in the nineteenth

⁹ Manning, H. Paul, 'English money and Welsh rocks: Divisions of language and divisions of labor in nineteenth-century Welsh slate quarries', in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 44, no. 3 (2002), pp. 481-510.

¹⁰ A. P. Donajrodzki (ed.), *Social Control in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Trowbridge, 1977)

¹¹ Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion, The Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians* (New York, 1991)

¹² Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion*, p.5

¹³ Samuel Smiles *Self-Help* (Gateshead, 1986 [1859])

century.¹⁴ Other ongoing research is concerned with exploring industrial welfare in the South Wales coalfields.¹⁵ The same author has explored the debate regarding the 'mixed economy of care',¹⁶ currently an underexplored topic, it tries to combine methods and types of care into a cohesive discussion. In some ways determining what factors catered for welfare provision in unique circumstances. By exploring the provision of welfare and hospital care at Penrhyn Quarry alongside such studies as these, it should be possible to ascertain if Penrhyn Quarry's situation was atypical or part of a wider trend.

The ultimate exercise of this dissertation is to explore the context to which Penrhyn's workers were able to express themselves despite forms of socio-economic control, and how they sought to impress their own agency prior to industry wide unionisation. Their care was an issue; was it largely by way of an owner widely regarded by English sources to embody the accepted model of a fair and just philanthropic capitalist? Or did the informed quarrymen have their wishes fulfilled through self realised means? To answer these questions three main areas will be given thorough exploration by means of three chapters of study. The second chapter shall evaluate the 'bargain system'. This form of contractual payment has an important place in the discussion of control and agency. For the workmen it granted a level of autonomy, and minimal interaction with the management hierarchy. For the owner and management it offered a way of impressing financial dependency upon the workmen. Chapter 3 will address the welfare question. By exploring the provision of the quarry hospital – almost unique in an industrial context in this period – and also the Benefit Club it will be apparent that it was not universally successful in terms of placating the workforce. Despite this, these mechanics fulfilled an important role as an outlet for both Lord Penrhyn's and the

¹⁴ Neil Evans, "'The first charity in Wales": Cardiff infirmary and South Wales Society, 1837-1914' in *The Welsh History Review Cylchgrawn Hanes Cymru*, vol. 9, no. 3 (1979),

¹⁵ Steven Thompson, *From Paternalism to Industrial Welfare: The Evolution of Industrial Welfare Capitalism in the South Wales Coalfield* (unpublished).

¹⁶ Steven Thompson, 'The mixed economy of care in the South Wales coalfield, c. 1850-1950' in *Healthcare in Ireland and Britain from 1850: Voluntary, regional and comparative perspectives*, Donnacha Seán Lucey and Virginia Crossman eds. (London, 2014), pp. 141-160.

quarrymen's agency. Finally, Chapter 4 will analyse the PLA, where workers and owner redefine and legitimise their relationship. Whilst discontent seems rife throughout the industry at this time efforts were made to stabilise the situation, but this was not wholly successful.

Chapter 2: Wages and the 'Bargain System' as methods of economic control.

The Penrhyn Quarry, similar to most Welsh quarries, remunerated its workforce by means of a contractual payment known as 'the bargain'. The mechanic of this meant that a group of quarrymen, usually four or five but up to eight would be assigned a particular face of the quarry to be worked by themselves or representatives for the following month. Many bargains remained the sole preserve of a particular kinship group and were closely guarded. At the beginning of each month a negotiation known as 'setting' was undertaken between the workers and the manager. A key component of quarrying was the quality of the slate formed by the natural geology. The bargain was a way of encouraging the workers to create the greatest quality material from the available resources, whilst also being able to earn a wage if the rock was of poor quality. The assessment of the quality of the rock face has become a central point for modern discussion regarding discontent caused by payment; a successful month's work may result in a reduced bargain the following month.¹⁷ At the conclusion of the month's work the manager would assess the bargain's fulfilment and payment was then undertaken. This final step was known as 'settling'. The years 1842 to 1874 cover a period in which William Francis was the quarry manager, latterly being joined by his son: John Francis. The static nature of the managerial position at Penrhyn seems to indicate stability, but the bargain system was an imperfect method of payment and was seen as a way of artificially keeping wages low.

Whilst this dissertation's focus shall be upon the socio-economic impact of control methods and agency it would be impossible to assess without some discussion of language. Manning's assessment upon the importance of language is extensive and helps to define the manager and workmen's relationship as tenuously poised. The worker's were almost exclusively Welsh speaking, the managers were not. As such the process of setting and settling

¹⁷ Manning, 'English money and Welsh rocks', p.502. Also, Merfyn Jones, *The North Wales quarrymen*, p.81.

were often undertaken in a form of 'pidgin Welsh'.¹⁸ Despite this the relationship in a professional context of manager and quarrymen was limited to these two key monthly interactions. In this instance the autonomy of the workers to work under their own expertise allowed a professional agency, for which theoretically they would be rewarded for their ability. One letter from Mr. Francis (John), addressed to Lord Penrhyn dated 2nd June 1874 demonstrates the limited nature of these interactions. In assessment of the present feeling of the men he reports 'that the "letting" was finished this morning and that I never found the men easier to deal with'¹⁹. Two points can be taken from this short phrase. That 'letting' is enclosed in quotation marks emphasises that despite the context of the letter, this is not a vocabulary which is embraced as an anglicised term and remains an industrially Welsh professional device.²⁰ More pertinent is that 1874 is an important year regarding the expression of the workmen's agency (Chapter 4). Despite this, Francis decides to either not report agitation or that he is ignorant to its presence at the quarry. In either instance his position as Lord Penrhyn's representative agent is undermined and helps show that the men can affect the relationship with limited managerial intervention.

At the Penrhyn Quarry the bargain system was a closely guarded privilege by those fortunate to be afforded one.²¹ Richards describes it as the workmen's bargains are 'sacred and so well established'.²² The industry employed many other men. Labourers, splitters and other workers could find themselves in a position of particular financial hardship without the partial security of a bargain. Regarding the quarrymen there is an unfortunate paucity of statistical data to help create a mathematical argument for the workmen's grievances leading to wage disputes. Despite this, evidence provided by newspaper articles and correspondence help build a picture of the perceived shortfall of

¹⁸ Manning, 'English money and Welsh rocks', p.496.

¹⁹ GAS XPQ1966 J. Francis (1874) letter dated 2nd June 1874, addressed to Lord Penrhyn.

²⁰ The difficulty in negotiations is highlighted in: Anon. 'The Penrhyn Slate Quarries in North Wales' in *The Illustrated London News*, vol. 32, no. 913 (1858) pp.392-393. Available at http://quarriesandbeyond.org/articles_and_books/pdf/penrhyn_slate_quarries_the_illustrated_london_news_april_17_1858_p392-393.pdf (Accessed 4th March 2019).

²¹ Gwyn, *Welsh Slate*, pp.52-53.

²² Richards, *Slate quarrying and how to make it profitable*. p. 20.

wages in respect to the skilled labour provided.²³ There are comparisons made from other quarrying areas that favourably highlight the realised wages of a quarryman to those of agricultural labourers in the mid-nineteenth century.²⁴ Comparisons such as these are only useful to a point, in real terms the agricultural workers would not have consumed resources in the same fashion. Perhaps they had available land to grow food and keep some livestock, and the daily risk of injury was less immediate. It is perhaps unsurprising to find politically astute men questioning their rate of pay. One contemporary commentator surmised that:

'There has been a time, and not very long ago, when the workman was, in many instances, no better than a serf to his employers, to carry out the bidding of his haughty task-master, the agent, for wages far too low to provide himself and family with when the first and most scanty necessaries of life. I well remember the time when wages of the best quarrymen, working by the day, were only fourteen shillings a week, and the fortunate bargain-man, that could, perchance, on a pay-day take home three pounds to his wife and family [...] was looked upon as having done uncommonly well.'²⁵

Eventually the quarrymen would come to be represented by a committee (Chapter 4) and correspondence from this committee highlights the relevance of the historical argument regarding wages. A letter from the committee addressed to the arbiter, Mr. Pennant Lloyd, strongly disputes managerial claims that the wages have been "very considerably" increased when we take into account the great increase in the price of necessities of life'.²⁶ As an engaged, and ever more so, able community the North Welsh quarrymen began to question their existence and value to the industrial community in a time legislation and working practice were beginning to help represent those previously without a voice.

²³ An average of as low as £5 a year is cited in Anon. 'The Penrhyn Slate Quarries in North Wales'.

²⁴ Davies, *The North Wales Quarry Hospitals*, p.23.

²⁵ Richards, *Slate quarrying and how to make it profitable*. p.3.

²⁶ GAS XPM/1647/3 Committee (1874) letter dated 26th August 1874, addressed to Mr. Pennant Lloyd.

The question of inadequate remuneration for work was not a new one in the period in question. The research undertaken by Edward Davies shows that the men felt engaged within the professional sphere to directly address their grievances with the owner. A particular case in 1825 based upon dissatisfaction regarding the price of their bargains meant they addressed, in Welsh, a letter to the then owner: Richard Pennant.²⁷ This practice continued into the mid-nineteenth century, although now in English, with correspondence regarding the bargain system justifying reason to engage with the owner.

The bargain system's main mechanical deficiency related to the personal relationships of the parties involved. The owner's representatives, in this case W. Francis and John Francis, could be found to manipulate the system in regards to personal grievances. To this end a quarryman's resort to communicating with the owner seems to be a last resort. One case which shows the importance of a man's place at the quarry, and the guardianship of one's 'bargain' in particular, demonstrates that under duress there was a means to express his agency. Dated 12th December and addressed to 'My Lord' a Mr. William J. Evans sought to highlight a particular grievance regarding the management. In a direct challenge to the manager Evans begins 'I had occasion to complain to you of Mr. Francis' conduct towards me'²⁸. The letter describes a complaint regarding the manager's actions, in that despite removing Evans' bargain he had promised to be reallocated the following month. This promise was not upheld, and in Evans' words 'clearly shows that he acts towards me from feelings of revenge'²⁹, his use of language effectively critiques the personal bias he feels he has suffered. Going on to lament that Lord Penrhyn does not desire that a 'feeling of revenge would govern the dealings of your Agents with the workmen'³⁰. The outcome of this exchange is not known, however the fact the workman felt empowered to express his desire for fair treatment is the key issue. The

²⁷ Davies, *The North Wales quarry Hospitals*, p.236.

²⁸ GAS XPQ1174 William J. Evans (1867) letter dated 12th December 1867, addressed to Lord Penrhyn.

²⁹ GAS XPQ1174

³⁰ GAS XPQ1174

language is subservient and pleading, and in many ways represents a petition for action rather than a direct complaint. Evans would not have sought any real decisive, practical change other than an outcome that would benefit him personally. Of course, it can not be assumed that the Evans' issue was definitively a just one; indeed the management's explanation that there was 'not room'³¹ seems justifiable. It was not just the whim of the manager's will that defined the workman's place at the quarry; the owner too could potentially dismiss those contracted with little reason underlining their means of control.

Lord Penrhyn is documented as making himself available for communication regarding the quarry and apparently allows himself to be a directly accountable part of the relationship of owner, manager and worker. W. J. Parry sends a letter to Lord Penrhyn in order to apprise him of matters regarding two workers' dismissals.³² Parry becomes an important figure leading up to 1874, and indeed beyond. This letter shows Parry's earlier involvements in worker disputes but also his educated and legal skills are represented. As stated Lord Penrhyn is noted as wishing to 'be communicated with on such matters'³³. The reason for dismissal is portrayed as the men voting against the owner's wishes. Politically the Caernarvonshire region had been represented by the Pennant and Douglas-Pennant families. Indeed this was still the case as a strong Conservative representation continued at this time, only losing out in the 1868 vote. This led to some more controversial dismissals in 1870.³⁴ This helps show another form of social manipulation at the quarry, that coercive voting was practiced by means of withdrawing work – a practice which was not uncommon. As has been established a quarryman's bargain was a closely guarded privilege, in the eyes of both owner and worker. By removing a man's bargain there was an inherent power to manipulate an individual's agency towards self determination. The two men referenced in W. J. Parry's letter were reported as voting against the

³¹ GAS XPQ1174

³² GAS XPQ1175 W.J. Parry (1869) letter dated 20th March 1869, addressed to Lord Penrhyn.

³³ GAS XPQ1175

³⁴ Merfyn Jones, *The North Wales quarrymen*, pp.50-52. This section also provides a concise political context.

established Conservative representatives.³⁵ In turn this led to the dismissal. The question is posed to Lord Penrhyn that this could not be a direct request from himself, owing to his charitable endeavours. Parry extends an opportunity for Lord Penrhyn to align himself as a just employer by framing the premiere rationale for him sending the letter as: 'an opportunity to contradict these false rumours'.³⁶ Not long after this occurrence the region would move away from Conservative representation helping to show a politically engaged community granted the agency for an independent vote could rebel against the owner's wishes.

³⁵ GAS XPQ1175

³⁶ GAS XPQ1175

Chapter 3: The hospital and Benefit Club as a subtle means of socio-economic control.

Whilst the workmen's votes were bought by the ultimatum of removing employment, Lord Penrhyn did also extend welfare and healthcare provision to his quarrymen. The motives for this philanthropic endeavour are questionable, and the men were made to contribute significantly to the Benefit Club, also known as the 'Sick Club'. A contribution from the men's wages were forcibly apportioned, as part of the contract of working at Penrhyn Quarry to the running of the club which in turn provided payment to those injured; the families of those who died; and also hospital treatment. A compulsory benefit club was not unique amongst the nineteenth century Welsh industries as Thompson highlights in regards to the southern coal and iron industries.³⁷ The club itself is construed as a means of assisting the workmen in times of hardship although this is not the apparent perception felt by the quarrymen. Indeed it is possible to argue that from the workmen's perspective matters such as the fear of injury and death may not have been as immediate as their concern for increased pay. Stripping the men of the agency to decide how they spent a proportion of their wages meant that mistrust and agitation may ensue. Indeed one 'Old Quarryman' is quite vociferous in his claims against the payment to the club, 'we are made to subscribe to it [yet] get no voice in managing the money'.³⁸ Here it is shown that some men wish to have an input in the running of the club and distribution of welfare, and this is evident in the drafting of the PLA. The actual payment levels were not necessarily enough for the club to be considered a viable means of charity, with contributions having been reduced to 3s. / 6d. per week, per person.³⁹ For an injured or sick worker the payment granted may only equate to a third of an individual's weekly wage which in its entirety may

³⁷ Thompson, S., 'The mixed economy of care in the South Wales coalfield, c. 1850-1950' in *Healthcare in Ireland and Britain from 1850: Voluntary, regional and comparative perspectives*, Donnacha Seán Lucey and Virginia Crossman eds. (London, 2014), p. 144.

³⁸ 'Old Workman' in Davies, *The North Wales quarry hospitals*, p.22.

³⁹ Anon. 'Reminiscence of the Penrhyn Quarry hospital', *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 6th September 1890 [Online]. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4454774/4454782/62/penrhyn%20AND%20hospital> Accessed 6th March 2019.

not have been enough even in positive economic circumstances.⁴⁰ It should not be said that the Victorian philanthropic model statesmen was not in evidence in Lord Penrhyn. The pensions which were granted were solely from Lord Penrhyn's personal wealth.⁴¹ Despite this apparent altruism Gwyn rightly asserts a quarryman's fate would largely be one of poverty and potentially the workhouse.⁴² For all of the philanthropic activities of the landlord the workers were ultimately destined for a life of relative difficulty, illness and poverty.

A particular point of interest in determining the extent of socio-economic manipulation extended by Lord Penrhyn and his management requires an exploration of the quarry's hospital. Industrial hospitals at this time were rare. The three largest quarries of North Wales all built one at different times through the mid-nineteenth century which suggests a desire to maintain a healthy workforce in this industry. Penrhyn was the first to be on site, moving primary care from nearby Bethesda. Parallels of hospital provision do exist although the bureaucratic structure was not necessarily directly comparable. Studies of the South Wales coalfields demonstrate that care was available, paid for and provided for by similar clubs and owners to those in evidence at Penrhyn although not directly controlled by the coalfield owners. The hospitals themselves were distinct entities set apart from the industry, and surgeons and care were provided as required, without the investment in on site facilities.⁴³

The provision of a hospital helps to underline the immense skill and worth of the quarrymen, particularly in an economic context. It was 'in no-one's interest in a commercial economy that highly-skilled men should die young or become incapacitated'.⁴⁴ Thompson draws parallels to the Dowlais Iron Company and their facilities and comprehensive cover due to a 'premium on skilled labour'.⁴⁵ If the value of the workmen is framed in this way, we can discount the men

⁴⁰ Davies, *The North Wales Quarry Hospitals*, p.23.

⁴¹ Davies, *The North Wales Quarry Hospitals*, p.30.

⁴² Gwyn, *Welsh Slate*, p.176.

⁴³ Evans, "The first charity in Wales"

⁴⁴ Gwyn, *Welsh Slate*, p.174.

⁴⁵ Thompson, 'The mixed economy', pp. 144-145.

affected by long term illness, and forced to remove themselves from work.⁴⁶ For this discussion a focus on the care of those men who may be rehabilitated and remain to affect the wider trend towards representative agency in the quarry is required. The welfare of workers and the wider population becomes a social issue in the mid-nineteenth century. Indeed the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, whilst a contentious policy which has garnered much subsequent debate⁴⁷, offers a state led initiative to standardise the welfare of the populace.

The nature of slate quarrying undertaken at Penrhyn meant that accidents and fatalities were a common occurrence. The quarrying technique operated by means of a gallery system, with tiers of platforms worked by the men in their bargains. Morgan Richards describes his concern for the quarrying practice: '[I] convey my abhorrence, and to suitably condemn a system of working quarries that unavoidably leads to such dire accidents'.⁴⁸ The profundity of this statement shows that the concern for the workmen's health was a contemporary issue but balancing this against the need to work and earn a wage is a difficult task. That the worker's sought to ensure a properly managed benefit club and hospital also shows both an interest in how their contributions were allocated, but also that in certain circumstances they and their families would come to be cared for in some measure. The magnitude and significance of Penrhyn Quarry meant it was a destination for contemporaries interested in the scale of the industry. Travel writers frequented the site multiple times, one such writer assessed both the danger but also found the provision of a hospital worthy of report:

'These operations, which are of almost daily necessity in one part or other of the quarry, are so dangerous, that, according to the statement of the overseer himself, they calculate on an average of one hundred and fifty men wounded, and seven or eight killed in a year. An [sic] hospital, exclusively devoted to the workmen on this property, receives the

⁴⁶ For an extensive exploration of long-term quarry related illness see Davies, *The North Wales Quarry Hospitals*.

⁴⁷ A succinct overview can be found in Peter Murray, *Poverty and Welfare 1830 – 1940*, (London, 2004)

⁴⁸ Richards, *Slate quarrying and how to make it profitable*, p.26.

wounded; and on my way I had met, without being aware of it, the body of one who had fallen the day before yesterday.⁴⁹

Whilst this writer reports the situation before the timeframe of this dissertation, there is no evidence to suggest that the numbers of injured and dead are arrested in subsequent years. In 1879 a booklet was compiled and published focussing on the deaths which had occurred at Dinorwic and Penrhyn quarries between 1822 and 1879.⁵⁰ Between 1842 and 1874 a total of 170 deaths were recorded, which averages to approximately five men per year (Table available as Appendix II). The only year which recorded no fatal accidents was 1850 and highs of ten or nine deaths occurred five times. There are caveats to this source however. The collation of names and dates was done through means of accident reports recorded in newspapers, specifically the *Herald Cymraeg*. This leads to potential inaccuracy in regards to the numbers reported. Despite this the already significant numbers would likely have only increased, not reduced. Also the creation of such a booklet shows that the issue was significant enough to record and disseminate. The provision of hospital care it seems was one which was required, although in the historical context not necessarily expected. It is this provision of a physical manifestation of Lord Penrhyn's philanthropy which requires further discussion.

Provision of a hospital helps to portray Lord Penrhyn as a considerate employer, an assumption as true now as then. Lord Penrhyn paid for the construction of the hospital at an expense of £1200.⁵¹ Despite this the construction and maintenance of the hospital and care provision can also be proven to be a means of covertly maintaining the subservient relationship between owner and worker. The charitable provision of care in the United Kingdom comes under much discussion in Victorian Britain; Himmelfarb underlies the Victorians' charitable societies were a known and quantifiable

⁴⁹ Hermann von Pückler-Muskau (1828) *Briefe eines Verstorbenen* (trans.).

⁵⁰ John Evans *Cynauaf Damwain: see Rhestr o'r Damweiniau yn chwarelau Dinorwig a'r Penrhyn*, (Caernarfon, 1879).

⁵¹ Davies, *The North Wales Quarry Hospitals*, p.37.

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Figure 3.1. The hospital's location at the main route into the quarry, access to the quarry necessitated viewing the building.⁵²

reality.⁵³ Despite this, details such as the location and media portrayal of the hospital defines it as a means of social control both in regards of the quarrymen but also Lord Penrhyn's public image. The grandeur and importance of the quarry were espoused by contemporary commentators, and Penrhyn Quarry was acknowledged as an important centre of both industry and human interest. Another travel writer, Smyers travelled to Penrhyn to 'get an idea of this immense centre that is unparalleled worldwide'.⁵⁴ Hyperbole such as this is largely justified, but as a travel writer his own economic interests required a dramatic flair. Penrhyn Quarry acted as an advert for Lord Penrhyn's character and by placing the hospital, his overt display of compassion; at the entrance of the quarry (Figure 3.1) he effectively advertises his philanthropic endeavours. By placing the hospital in this fashion

⁵² Adapted from historical maps (1880s) provided by Digimap. Available at <https://digimap.edina.ac.uk/roam/map/historic>

⁵³ Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion*, pp. 185-186.

⁵⁴ L. Smyers (1850) *Essai sur l'état actuel de l'industrie ardoisière en France et en Angleterre, suivi de quelques observations pratiques sur la formation du schiste ardoisier*. (trans.).

it is also a daily reminder to the men of the owner's hold over them. That they pay towards the maintenance, with little recourse over the use of their contributions is of little consequence to the owner. By manipulating his working population in such a fashion through means of welfare he creates a subservient set of workers whilst maintaining an outward display of compassion.

There are further examples of Lord Penrhyn's apparent generosity towards the workmen. He also built accommodation, Smyers going on to say that 'Lord Penrhyn had a whole village built to accommodate his workers; 'I admired the symmetry, the tidiness and the good taste of these houses, perfectly aligned around a wide main street'.⁵⁵ He also built schools and a church, although the church was of Anglican denomination and therefore another way to impress a level of manipulation. It should be said that other chapels were present in Bethesda although these were community concerns and not under the direct influence of Lord Penrhyn.⁵⁶ The hospital itself was lauded as a positive addition to the community. In almost every respect this was true. One newspaper article describes and heralds the facility.⁵⁷ The summation of the authors' piece reads:

'We can imagine no greater boon to the workmen than this sanatory [sic] institution- no more acceptable beneficence, nor any one observance of the duties of property better calculated to strengthen the ties of attachment which bind a kind-hearted people to their employer and benefactor.'⁵⁸

It seems a fair assessment of the situation at the time. The newspaper is an English language paper, and would most likely not have been consumed by the quarrymen who would more likely read the Welsh 'radical' newspapers.

⁵⁵ Smyers, *Essai sur l'état actuel de l'industrie ardoisière*

⁵⁶ Slater, (1844) *Pigot and Co.'s Royal National and Commercial Directory and Topography of the counties of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Cornwall, Devonshire, Dorsetshire, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Herefordshire, Monmouthshire, Oxfordshire, Somersetshire, Wiltshire, and North and South Wales 1844. [Part 2: Hampshire to Wiltshire, and Wales]* p.352.

⁵⁷ Anon. (1843) 'The Quarry Hospital', *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 19th September 1843 [Online]. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4519898/4519901/13/penrhyn%20quarry> Accessed 7th April 2019.

⁵⁸ Anon. 'The Quarry Hospital'

The outward projection of benevolence is apparent, and it is impossible to truly know the motives of Lord Penrhyn. Despite this, one worker is reported to having commented 'there would be no need for charity if they were paid a fair wage'.⁵⁹ It is this position which helps frame the PLA and the motivation for its creation.

⁵⁹ Davies *The North Wales quarry hospitals*, p.19.

Chapter 4: The Pennant Lloyd Agreement and attempts at realising the workmen's agency in response to wages and welfare.

The PLA (Appendix I) was laid out for a number of reasons. Principally the quarrymen wished to express their agency and have a larger impact upon determining their working lives. This would prove troublesome for all of the quarry owners, and indeed Lord Penrhyn fought the creation of a union at his quarry. The PLA goes some way in placating the men with the hope that Lord Penrhyn would be able to deny the unionisation of Penrhyn Quarry. Pennant Lloyd himself was brought in as an agent of Lord Penrhyn as arbiter, it seems the workmen were able to successfully impress their agency and make some gains. Parry published a book entitled *The Penrhyn Lock-Out 1900-1901*⁶⁰ which usefully chronicles the events and communication between the key players of the PLA. Amidst the historiography there has not been as much attention paid towards the PLA as on subsequent industrial action at Penrhyn. This is mainly owing to the fact it was largely deemed a failed experiment. Once Lord Penrhyn's successor and associated manager inherited the quarry they did not adhere to the terms of 1874. Also unionisation began for a second time, but more successfully in 1874. Starting at Dinorwic in April and spreading amongst the quarry communities the North Wales Quarrymen's Union (NWQU) seemed inevitable in this context. The narrative of the agreement and eventual unionisation, whilst interesting, offers little insight into the determination of the terms in the PLA. Instead a few of the key points of the agreement which relate to the issue of workers' agency in response to Lord Penrhyn's socio-economic manipulation will be focussed upon.

Articles 3 and 4 both relate to a higher rate of pay for quarry workers. Lord Penrhyn had fought the insistence of the men to introduce what we may consider a minimum wage of 28 / - per bargain, regardless of their output.⁶¹ His main objection being that it would insight idleness, whereas the current bargain system rewarded industriousness. These articles reference the

⁶⁰ William John Parry *The Penrhyn Lock-Out 1900-1901. Statement and Appeal* (London, 1901) pp.5-34.

⁶¹ GAS XM/1647/5 Lord Penrhyn's representative in reply to the Committee, dated 5th September 1874.

workers remuneration at Dinorwic, 'if those wages were granted at Dinorwic Quarries'. The NWQU was established at Dinorwic and as such any concessions made at that establishment would be replicated in accordance with the PLA. In some ways it represents unionisation by default, in that the Penrhyn men were to be equal in wages to those represented by the union. Indeed article 2 calls for the abolishment of an upper limit. This seems incongruous with Lord Penrhyn's and his manager's defence of the bargain system as a just form of payment, as a worker able to exceed expectation should be rewarded for his industriousness. The unequal letting method of the bargain system is also targeted for reform. The quality of the geology could greatly affect the upper and lower limits of a quarryman's earning potential. Articles 15 and 16 seek to standardise the undulating levels of the monthly bargain, hoping to limit any impact of an unfair managerial assessment of the rock face. Parry, in his role as the quarrymen's representative, claimed that 'to control the quarrymen, they should be kept on a small enough wage'⁶². It is this assertion that they hope to affect by seeking to standardise their wages.

The hospital and Benefit Club are also institutions targeted for reform. Article 7 seeks to arrange a management group to improve the effectiveness and legitimacy of the club's finances. In this statement Lord Penrhyn remains as president, perhaps owing to his integral role in the funding and creation of the facility. Despite this the men wish to have representation. By placing some of themselves in the Committee they have a potential channel to use their agency to affect change. Taking some measure of control of the hospital and sick club means that the potential for corruption or manipulation of the men's contributions is limited. Parry was at one time brought in by Lord Penrhyn to assess the hospital's finances.⁶³ He had found inaccuracies and as such this article shows an effort for real change and self determination.

Finally in regards to the PLA articles 8 and 13 attempt to regulate the terms of employment. As shown in Chapter 2 men had been dismissed for potential personal bias but also due to voting practice. These articles seem to address

⁶² Parry in Davies, *The North Wales Quarry Hospitals*, p.21.

⁶³ Davies, *The North Wales Quarry Hospitals*, pp.23-30.

the power of the manager and owner by removing the ability to manipulate a working, and voting man's income as a means of coercion. This is important as the reliance of the workmen on the owner had been established for decades. The closed industrial community could finally be afforded the personal agency to realise their own identities. In response to the forming of the NWQU the owners and representatives of eighteen quarries had gathered on the 23rd May 1874 in an attempt to solidify their ultimate control. One resolution agreed upon at the meeting was that 'every Quarry Proprietor in North Wales should refuse to employ any Man who is ascertained to be a Member of the proposed Union'.⁶⁴ Assuming that the 'supreme manager' was to be an experienced quarryman and he was afforded the power to determine a man's dismissal then this again wrests some control away from the owners.

The agency of workers can not be considered to be ubiquitous for all those employed at the quarry, and uniting them as an ideological homogeneity is not representative. Evidence exists which supports Lord Penrhyn. Workers who seek to ally themselves with Lord Penrhyn and believe the worker's representatives; the Committee, are ruinous to the established order.⁶⁵ There are assumptions that the agitators for change are 'persons unconnected with Slate Quarries'⁶⁶ or are the younger members of the workforce and are not employed as part of the established bargain system. Despite these reservations it seems apparent that a wider movement towards the worker's engaging as self determining entities in their employment structure was a real one. The men sought to change their payment, their welfare and the use of their contributions by means of an official agreement. They wished to realise their agency despite some feelings of goodwill towards their employer.

⁶⁴ GAS XPQ1273 Broadsheet for *At A Meeting of Quarry Proprietors* (1874).

⁶⁵ GAS XM/1647/5 Robert Jones and John Willaims (nd. context places it as 1874). Letter to Lord Penrhyn.

⁶⁶ GAS XPQ1273

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The period prior to 1874 is largely underexplored in the context of the North Wales slate quarries, and the human story is often lost in order to try to find definitive answers. The socio-economic control of the owner and management over the quarrymen by means of payment, but also impressed by subtle means, is not surprising or in any way unusual at this time. That the men in this period began to push against such means of control helps to frame subsequent research such as Merfyn Jones' into the formation of the NWQU.⁶⁷ Proving motives and agendas is an impossible task, but evidence of their impact is often traceable.

This dissertation has sought to explain how the quarrymen of Penrhyn felt over the course of the mid-nineteenth century, and their desires to express their agency. In so doing it also explains how this led to the PLA being required and created at the Penrhyn Quarry. Legislation such as the Employers Liability Act 1880 and the Secret Ballot Act show how Britain was undergoing political changes and the working class were beginning to hold a greater sway over their own destinies. It has been a conscious effort to limit the argument and avoid discussing it as a class driven conflict. By the nineteenth century the landed elite had established hold over the working class. In the case of Penrhyn Quarry it was not simply a revolt against a manipulative overseer. As has been shown Lord Penrhyn's provisions of welfare were real, but his motivation can never be fully ascertained. Instead this dissertation argues that the continuation of payment practices that had gone relatively unchanged for decades, and the extension of welfare fitting the model of Victorian philanthropy⁶⁸ were in fact a means of socio-economic control whether deliberate or subconscious: it was in evidence at Penrhyn Quarry.

The fact that these practices had continued unabated and largely unquestioned shows the engrained nature of a working peoples' tradition. The

⁶⁷ Merfyn Jones, *The North Wales quarrymen*.

⁶⁸ Evans, "The first charity in Wales", p.319.

move towards the politically engaged workers' expression of agency seems dependent largely upon the historical context. There is rarely a single moment that decides upon the complexities of human relationships and that is true in the case of Penrhyn. Through use of personal correspondence, newspapers and contemporary published sources it seems the overarching sentiment of the men was a desire for real change. The PLA was not wholly successful and subsequent ownership eventually led the North Wales slate industry into ruin. Despite this the mid-nineteenth century saw a hope for the working men of North Wales, the very definition of 'Welshness', to express their own personal brand of agency upon the yoke of English control. Shortly after the drafting of the PLA, W.J. Parry targeted Lord Penrhyn's vindictiveness towards his men, in that they were 'cruelly punished by being thrown upon the parish for any provision Lord Penrhyn was ready to make for them. This is certainly not charity!'.⁶⁹ The difficulties of the men to truly establish their agency and exert their own control did not conclude in 1874 with the drafting of the PLA.

⁶⁹ GAS XM/1647/1 Parry (1874) Address following second strike of 1874

Appendices:

Appendix I:

The Pennant Lloyd Agreement⁷⁰

1. The following prices for working slates:-

Blocks	4s. a ton.	Best :	20 x 10	£1 0 0
Writing Slate Blocks.....	3s. „	—	18 x 10	0 18 4
Best Ton Slates	7s. „	—	16 x 10	0 15 0
Seconds.....	5s. „	—	16 x 8	0 11 0
Queens	10s. „	—	14 x 12	0 11 0
Fourth Tons	5s. „	—	14 x 8	0 8 0
Moss Slates	5s. „	—	13 x 10	0 9 2
		—	13 x 7	0 5 10
	per	—	12 x 6	0 5 6
	thousand.	Seconds:	24 x 12	1 5 0
Best :		—	20 x 10	0 18 0
—		—	16 x 10	0 12 1
—		—	22 x 12	1 0 1
	24 x 14			
	£1 12 6			
	1 8 4			
	1 5 10			

2. The fixed maximum scale of wages of quarrymen was abolished.

3. The wages of masons were fixed at from 3s. 6d. to 4s. a day, according to merit; and up to 4s. 6d., if those wages were granted at Dinorwic Quarries.

4. That platelayers' wages be from 15s. to 18s. per week, according to merit; and up to 21s., if those wages were granted at Dinorwic Quarries.

5. That the wages be paid every four weeks.

6. That a supreme manager and umpire be appointed with powers to decide all disputes.

7. That a Committee be appointed to manage the Penrhyn Quarries Sick Benefit Club, to consist of Lord Penrhyn as president; the supreme manager

⁷⁰ Recreated from: Parry, *The Penrhyn Lock-Out*, pp.28-9.

as vice-president; a treasurer, a secretary, and one workman from each district in the quarry.

8. That the power to turn men out of the works be in the hands of the supreme manager.

9. That the power to take men into the works be in the hands of the chief working manager, under the direction of the supreme manager.

10. That the right to stop men until their case is inquired into by the supreme manager be in the hands of the chief working manager.

11. That the workmen who are working on rocks at 10s. in the £ are to be taken into bargains as circumstances will permit; and that the places that are being worked by them now, that can be so let, be let as regular bargains.

12. That the same terms be allowed rubble men as are allowed at the Dinorwic Quarries.

13. That one month be allowed all workmen to return to their places in the quarry.

14. When necessary that partners be allowed to name their new partner to be placed before the chief working manager, and if refused by him that the name be placed before the supreme manager, whose decision till be final.

15. That if a quarryman by extra work makes 35s. a week, that the agent is not to reduce his price if the rock is of the same quality next month.

16. That the bad rockmen be similarly placed at 24s. 6d. a week.

17. That all complaints about letting be first referred to a committee appointed by the workmen; and if considered by them to be a proper case that it be placed before the supreme manager for his decision.

18. That in the event of quarryman failing to earn 27s. 6d. a week for two consecutive months, he is entitled to lay his case before the Committee, and through them before the supreme manager for his decision.

Appendix II:

Deaths at Penrhyn Quarry 1842-1874⁷¹

Year	Deaths	Year	Deaths	Year	Deaths
1842	9	1853	9	1864	6
1843	5	1854	4	1865	3
1844	6	1855	1	1866	4
1845	5	1856	8	1867	2
1846	2	1857	3	1868	6
1847	10	1858	5	1869	5
1848	9	1859	7	1870	5
1849	5	1860	6	1871	3
1850	0	1861	4	1872	5
1851	5	1862	4	1873	2
1852	8	1863	9	1874	5

⁷¹ Adapted from: Evans, *Cynauaf Damwain*

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