

**‘The Eyes were Picked out  
of the Slate Quarries’:  
Causes of and Responses  
to Decline of the North  
Wales Slate Industry,  
1900-1970.**

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# Abbreviations

North Wales Slate Quarry Association (NWSQA)

North Wales Quarrymen's Union (NWQU)

Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU)

# Chapter One: Introduction

Discussing the decline faced by the slate industry in Northwest Wales in 1943, Dylan Pritchard noted 14 962 workers across ninety-three business units in 1900 had become 8233 workers in thirty-two business units by 1937.<sup>1</sup> By 1970 following the closures of Dinorwic, Dorothea and Oakeley quarries, only nine quarries remained with 490 workers between them.<sup>2 3</sup> Such significant decline in the space of seven decades of an industry that once held significant cultural and political sway in the region deserves analysis of both the causes and how different parts of society responded to it.

The changing fortunes of industry, industrial conflict, and the eventual decline of these industries are central to the historiography of twentieth century Wales. However, discussion of the slate industry within this historiography is significantly limited. The Penrhyn strike is often discussed, with these historians placing it within the narrative of Labour's rise in Wales, neglecting the continued support for liberalism from quarrymen following the strike.<sup>4 5 6</sup> Discussion of the decline of slate is repeatedly limited to a brief mention, placing it within homogenous narratives of national Welsh industrial decline.<sup>7 8 9</sup> By merging the decline of different industries into a single narrative the diversity of causes, experiences and responses to decline are omitted from these accounts. One exception is John Davies' *A History of Wales* (1993), which attempts to explain the causes of decline alongside contrasting the timeline of this decline with other Welsh

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<sup>1</sup> D Dylan Pritchard, 'Aspects of the Slate Industry 2: Causes of Contraction in the Slate Industry', *Quarry Managers' Journal*, (June 1943), Available at [http://www.slateroof.co.uk/Causes\\_of\\_contraction.html](http://www.slateroof.co.uk/Causes_of_contraction.html). Accessed 8 March 2024.

<sup>2</sup> David Gwyn, *Welsh Slate: Archaeology and History of an Industry* (Wales, 2015), p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Secretary of State for Wales, *Cymru: Wales 1970* (Cardiff, 1971), p.14. Available at <https://parlipapers-proquest-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/parlipapers/result/pqpdocumentview?accountid=14697&groupid=95579&pgld=aaf39d57-ebe2-495c-a52e-869296ab40a0&rsId=18F20A571AF>. Accessed 21 April 2024.

<sup>4</sup> Geraint Jenkins, *A Concise History of Wales* (Cambridge, 2007), p.289.

<sup>5</sup> Philip Jenkins, *A History of Modern Wales 1536-1990* (Oxon, 2014), pp.350-351.

<sup>6</sup> Gwyn Alf Williams, *When Was Wales?* (London, 1991), pp.243-244.

<sup>7</sup> Jenkins, *A History of Modern Wales*, p.374.

<sup>8</sup> John Graham Jones, *The History of Wales* (Cardiff, 2014), pp.148-149, 165.

<sup>9</sup> Williams, *When Was Wales?*, p.256. William's analysis of the slate industry here is focused on the transition towards tourism with no discussion of the causes for the industry's decline.

industries.<sup>10</sup> Overall, the historiography of Wales in the twentieth century provides a limited account of the decline of the slate industry.

Analysing the historiography of the Northwest Wales slate industry does offer more fruitful discussion of this decline; however, there are significant limitations to what currently exists. The most extensive account of decline comes from Jean Lindsay's *A History of the North Wales Slate Industry* (1974). This book covers the entire history of the industry from the Early Modern period through to the 1970s. An example of the usefulness of the book is provided by a section discussing how increasing competition of alternative roofing materials contributing to decline in the 1930s.<sup>11</sup> The source does suffer from being dated, with new sources available in the archives having passed the 30-year exemption offering new insights on decline. This new primary source material has helped inform the argument within this dissertation that the state and both World Wars played a greater role in decline than presented in Lindsay's account, showing the value of retreading this topic. Only two of the book's fifteen chapters cover decline as the book covers the entire history of the industry, causing a lack of focus on the decline. Lastly, the book dates decline to 1882, while this dissertation argues it begins later in 1903, as it is only with the rise of competing alternative roofing materials following the First World War that the link between the fortunes of the slate and building industries is severed, turning the cyclical depressions into a permanent decline.

Another crucial book in the historiography of the Northwest Wales slate industry is Merfyn Jones' *The North Wales Quarrymen* (1982) which offers an account of the initial period of decline from the workers and union's perspective. His argument of how the employers changed their perception of the NWQU following the First World War, seeing the union as an ally in fighting for the interests of the industry, provides an example of actors responding to decline.<sup>12</sup> Only covering the NWQU up to the amalgamation with the TGWU 1922, the book leaves space for analysing the role played in decline by the union following amalgamation. Despite this, Jones' idea around how

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<sup>10</sup> John Davies, *A History of Wales* (London, 1993), pp.487, 559, 626. Despite providing a better account of decline than other book in the Welsh national historiography, it nevertheless has significant shortcomings. Neglecting to discuss the labour shortage following the Second World War is one example of this.

<sup>11</sup> Jean Lindsay, *A History of the North Wales Slate Industry* (Devon, 1974), p.291.

<sup>12</sup> Merfyn Jones, *The North Wales Quarrymen 1874-1922* (Cardiff, 1982), p.310.

both the union and quarry ownership responded to decline provide a basis which this dissertation builds on to show that trends he identified continued throughout the period of decline examined. Other literature on the Northwest Wales slate industry offers useful but limited insights into decline, whether due to the limited geographic area or period covered.

Alun John Richard's *Slate Quarrying at Corris* (1994) offers a useful insight on local quarries within the Corris area, such as the impact of the Second World War on Aberllefenni showing a reduction in workers from 120 to 40 by the end of the war.<sup>13</sup> David Gwyn's work is important in the historiography of the slate industry in addition to its value in providing ideas for where to find primary sources on the industry. His argument that the closure of Dinorwic in 1969 marked a turning point where the industry did not die but had to adapt to survive in a new environment, marking the end of a chapter in the history of the industry and its communities as the number of workers within the industry became relatively insignificant, provided the idea for the endpoint of this dissertation.<sup>14</sup> Decline is never a focus in his work, instead focusing on the archaeological and mechanical side of the industry where he specialises. The historiography of the Northwest Wales slate industry has significant shortcomings when addressing decline of the industry. This dissertation is an attempt to address this.

Other works which need addressing when discussing responses to the slate industry's decline are works analysing the changing politics of Northwest Wales during the twentieth century. Cyril Parry's *The Radical Tradition in Welsh Politics* (1920) covers the first two decades of the period, tracing the beginning of the end for Liberal domination of Northwestern Welsh politics. The main argument of this work is that underneath the electoral dominance of the Liberal Party the social conditions that allowed its supremacy were undermined, alongside the middle-class background of Liberal MPs making them inattentive to Labour issues allowing Labourism to increasingly inherit the radical tradition formerly represented by the Liberal Party.<sup>15</sup> The

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<sup>13</sup> Alun John Richard, *Slate Quarrying at Corris* (Llanrwst, 1994), p.81.

<sup>14</sup> Gwyn, *Welsh Slate*, p.14.

<sup>15</sup> Cyril Parry, *The Radical Tradition in Welsh Politics: A Study of Liberal and Labour Politics in Gwynedd, 1900-1920* (Hull, 1970), pp.2, 19-20. This book includes Parry's 1968 article 'The Independent Labour Party in Gwynedd Politics, 1900-1920' as a chapter and therefore reviewed alongside this book.

second work within this field is *Labour's Crisis* (2011) by Andrew Edwards, which provides analysis of the regional politics post Second World War, especially focusing on the decline of the Labour Party's fortunes regionally during this period. Edwards developed Parry's approach, arguing that Labour combined this Liberal inheritance with proposals for local economic prosperity to create its local appeal.<sup>16</sup> In addition, he argues that Labour's failure to deliver economic affluence to the area in the 1960s and 1970s was combined with the decline of the Welsh language to undermine this appeal and provide an opportunity for Plaid Cymru to establish itself locally. This dissertation attempts to build on this existing literature to establish how much these shifts were a response to decline of the Northwest Wales slate industry.

Responding to these issues in the existing literature on the slate industry, this dissertation will analyse its decline in two sections. The first will analyse different causes of decline such as increasing competition from imports and alternative roofing materials, mistakes by quarry owners, the World Wars, and the actions of the government to establish which were the most significant causes of decline. Alongside utilising primary sources from the Gwynedd Archives used by the existing literature on the industry, this dissertation will also use primary sources recently made public from the National Archives, ultimately arguing that it was the rise of competing alternative roofing materials which has been identified as a significant cause by the existing historiography, combined with decisions made by the state during the World Wars and peacetime, which were the main causes of the industry's decline. The second chapter will analyse the response of different local actors to decline such as the quarrymen, quarry owners and management, the local government, and regional voters. While past accounts have provided a narrative decline, this chapter seeks to provide agency for different sections of society in industrial regions, demonstrating that each made choices and responded in their own ways to the decline. Together, it aims to provide the first focused account of the decline of the Northwest Wales slate industry from 1900 to 1970.

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<sup>16</sup> Andrew Edwards, *Labour's Crisis: Plaid Cymru, The Conservatives, and the Decline of the Labour Party in North-West Wales, 1960-74* (Cardiff, 2011). p.13.

## Chapter Two: What caused the decline?

Periodical depressions had occurred in the slate industry during the nineteenth century. The depression of the industry in the 1880s occurred due to stagnation in the building industry causing lower demand for slate, with recovery coinciding with returning expansion of building during the 1890s.<sup>17</sup> The twentieth century decline of the slate industry began similarly, with a 'great depression' of building following 1903 causing a depression in the slate industry which lasted up to the First World War.<sup>18</sup> Rising competition from alternative roofing materials caused a shift from a temporary depression following trends of past depressions into long-term decline. As these alternatives became increasingly competitive throughout the pre- and inter-war period, the Northwest Wales slate industry found it increasingly difficult to capitalise on any upturn of the building industry and therefore unable to break out of this downturn.

Foreign slate imported into the UK was one of these alternatives competing with Welsh slate. It was also consistently blamed for the industry's decline early in the period. As early as 1905 Welsh newspapers were blaming wage cuts and quarries working short time on the ability to 'place French slate on the market in England cheaper than Welsh slate can offer'.<sup>19</sup> However, this importation of foreign slate often occurred due to issues in both supply of Welsh slate and cost of transporting it across railways. The Penrhyn strike provided the initial stimulus for importation of French and Portuguese slate, with imports of both doubling from 1900 to 1902, as Penrhyn had supplied a quarter of all Welsh slate prior to the strike causing a shortage in supply.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, in the early 1960s supply issues of Welsh slate caused by labour shortages led suppliers of building materials to turn to French slate to meet demand.<sup>21</sup> While this increased competition from imported slate was an additional issue for North Wales

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<sup>17</sup> Lindsay, *A History of the North Wales Slate Industry*, p.247.

<sup>18</sup> Pritchard, 'Aspects of the Slate Industry 2'.

<sup>19</sup> Anon., 'Y Chwarelelau Llechi', *Y Herald Cymraeg*, 7 November 1905, p.8. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3458925/3458933/118/llechi>, accessed 19 May 2024. I have translated this quotation. Original Welsh text: 'y gellir rhoi llechau Ffrengig ar y farchnad yn Lloegr yn rhatach nag y gellir cynnyg llechau Cymreig'.

<sup>20</sup> Lindsay, *A History of the North Wales Slate Industry*, p.256.

<sup>21</sup> Caernarfon, The Gwynedd Archives, Caernarfon Record Office, XD/40/27, circular letter sent by R. Tennant of Sharpe and Fisher Limited publicising importation of French slate, March 1964.



slate during an already difficult period, it was alternative roofing materials such as cement and asbestos which increasingly caused more problems for the industry.

While imported slate posed a problem for North Welsh slate, alternative roofing materials were a far greater cause for the industry's decline. Concerns about the impact of alternative roofing materials were raised by quarry owners as early as the 1830s, as proposals to reduce the duty for zinc importation caused fears of growing competition from cheap zinc and iron roofing.<sup>22</sup> However, it was tiles alongside cement and asbestos roofing which provided the most competition to slate. Between 1912 and 1935 clay tile annual output increased from 200 000 tons to 823 000 tons, which combined with cement tiles and other roofing tile production, totalled around 1 200 000 tons.<sup>23</sup> Alongside this significant increase in production was a change in architectural taste which increasingly perceived roofing tiles as better aesthetically than slate. A report produced by the Joint Research Department of the Trade Union Congress and Labour party in 1923 on the slate industry explicitly stated as a matter of fact that tiles were better 'in appearance' than Welsh slate.<sup>24</sup> While the same report noted that at that point slate was still cheaper than tiles, by the 1930s tiles were the cheaper option as well. When applying for a reduction of wages in 1932, the NWSQA argued that this measure was necessary to reduce the prices of slate and remain competitive with the by then much cheaper alternative roofing materials.<sup>25</sup> While it may have been in the interests of the quarry owners to exaggerate this difference in order to secure a cut in quarrymen's pay, this is corroborated by other sources. In prior discussions with the NWQU, the union noted that labour costs for slate production made up seventy percent of the costs of production, compared to less than half of the total cost of production for tiles.<sup>26</sup> As noted by Dylan Pritchard, in addition to the labour cost, the cost of running quarries

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<sup>22</sup> Lindsay, *A History of the North Wales Slate Industry*, p.118.

<sup>23</sup> D Dyland Pritchard, 'Aspects of the Slate Industry 3: Slates v. Tiles', *Quarry Managers' Journal*, (July 1943). Available at [http://www.slateroof.co.uk/Slates\\_v.\\_Tiles.html](http://www.slateroof.co.uk/Slates_v._Tiles.html). Accessed 3 May 2024.

<sup>24</sup> Caernarfon, The Gwynedd Archives, Caernarfon Record Office, X/PYO/2533, Report Produced by Joint Research Department of the TUC and Labour Party on the slate industry in North Wales, June 1923.

<sup>25</sup> Caernarfon, The Gwynedd Archives, Caernarfon Record Office, X/Dorothea/1624, Summary of the Quarry owners' case for reduction of wages for information of Sir Richar Redmayne (Minister of Labour), October 1932.

<sup>26</sup> Caernarfon, The Gwynedd Archives, Caernarfon Record Office, X/NWQU/6, Adroddiad cyfarfod efo NWSQA ar 9 Awst yn cofnodion Cyngor Gweithiol, 13 August 1932. My translation of the manuscript description: Report of meeting with NWSQA on 9 August in Working Committee minutes.

tended to increase due to the production of rubble which needed to be transported over continually longer distances over time.<sup>27</sup> His prediction that the gap in prices between slate and alternative roofing tiles proved correct, as by 1955 it costed councils £45 more per small house to use small slate than alternative roofing tiles, and by 1962 Goronwy Roberts noted that he assumed the difference between slate and tile to be ‘about £60’, expressing his surprise that a constituent had even been quoted a difference of £200 in one extreme case.<sup>28 29</sup> Competing against an alternative that was both seen as more desirable and cheaper caused significant problems for the North Wales slate industry and was a significant cause of its decline, also contributing to the labour shortage discussed below as wages could not be increased to try and be competitive with these tiles.

Disentangling the roles played by both World Wars and the state in the decline of the North Wales Slate industry is difficult, as both wars were high points of state intervention in the industry during its decline. Both World Wars were also periods of accelerated decline, with the role of the state in this acceleration having been underestimated by previous literature covering the decline of the industry. The initial impact of the declarations of war upon the North Wales slate industry in both wars were extensive, with the cessation of both domestic housebuilding and export markets causing short time working, layoffs and closures of quarries.<sup>30 31</sup> Following both wars, pre-war levels of output and numbers of quarry workers would never be reached again following the war. The extensive use of alternative roofing materials in the building of temporary war buildings instead of slate is one example of how they benefited at the expense of slate during both wars. In response to a question by David Davies MP in the House of Commons in 1917, Albert Stanley, then President of the Board of Trade, confirmed that alternative roofing materials had been used due to a shortage of timber,

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<sup>27</sup> Prichard, ‘Aspects of the Slate Industry 3’.

<sup>28</sup> London, The National Archives, BD24/151, Letter from W. F. Deedes (Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government) to Lord Mancroft (Home Office), 13 April 1955.

<sup>29</sup> Caernarfon, The Gwynedd Archives, Caernarfon Record Office, X/DQ/1809, letter from Goronwy Roberts MP to T. E. O. Williams, 23 May 1962.

<sup>30</sup> Anon., ‘The Slate Trade’, *The North Wales Chronicle*, 28 August 1914, p.3. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3412455/3412458/35/quarry>, Accessed 24 May 2024.

<sup>31</sup> Caernarfon, The Gwynedd Archives, Caernarfon Record Office, XPQ/133, Notice to workers of Penrhyn quarry from I. Griffith, 2 October 1939.

concluding that he did not see the industry being ‘permanently injured’ by this.<sup>32</sup> In addition to the only potential significant market for the use of slate during the war therefore not being available for slate, the war also significantly impacted the supply of labour, especially after slate was declared a non-essential industry in 1917. A memorandum produced by Port Penrhyn in 1917 on the impact of the war on the industry stated that by October 1917 seventy percent of the quarrymen working in 1914 were either serving in the Armed Forces or National Service.<sup>33</sup> Significantly this impacted on the ability of the quarry industry to capitalise on the resumption of domestic housebuilding after the war. While initial post-war planning involved the slate industry providing enough slate for 300 000 houses to be built within a year of the end of the war, the labour shortage caused by the industry’s non-essential status undermined these plans, with quarry management accepting that the government would use alternative roofing materials because of supply shortages in slate.<sup>34</sup> Labour shortages continued several years following the war, with a quarter of the skilled slate splitters having died and many of the remaining quarrymen being less productive due to ‘shaken nerves’, with a government report stating in 1921 that output per hour had been reduced due to ‘a loss in skilled men’.<sup>35</sup> <sup>36</sup> The Second World War and decisions made by the state during it would prove even more detrimental for the industry. While the number of workers returned to about 8200 just before the Second World War, following it the

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<sup>32</sup> Caernarfon, The Gwynedd Archives, Caernarfon Record Office, XPQ/133, Newspaper cutting of Liverpool Courier article titled ‘Slate-quarrying industry’, 15 November 1917.

<sup>33</sup> Caernarfon, The Gwynedd Archives, Caernarfon Record Office, X/DQ/1776, Memorandum showing how the slate trade in North Wales had been affected by the war, 13 October 1917.

<sup>34</sup> Caernarfon, The Gwynedd Archives, Caernarfon Record Office, XPQ/100/76/39, Letter from Walter. D. Hobson to R. T. Jones, 10 June 1918.

<sup>35</sup> Anon., ‘Price of Building Materials’, *The Times*, 27 May 1919, p.9. Available at [https://go-gale-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Newspapers&resultListType=RESULT\\_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&retrievalId=f4b73f57-9f48-49d1-85ce-f7917752caab&hitCount=2&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&currentPosition=1&docId=GALE%7CCS151194811&docType=Article&sort=Pub+Date+Forward+Chron&contentSegment=ZTMA-MOD1&prodId=TTDA&pageNum=1&contentSet=GALE%7CCS151194811&searchId=R2&userGroupName=tou&inPS=true&aty=ip](https://go-gale-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=Newspapers&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&retrievalId=f4b73f57-9f48-49d1-85ce-f7917752caab&hitCount=2&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&currentPosition=1&docId=GALE%7CCS151194811&docType=Article&sort=Pub+Date+Forward+Chron&contentSegment=ZTMA-MOD1&prodId=TTDA&pageNum=1&contentSet=GALE%7CCS151194811&searchId=R2&userGroupName=tou&inPS=true&aty=ip), Accessed 21 May 2024.

<sup>36</sup> HMSO, *Report on Slates: Report by the Sub-Committee appointed by the Standing Committees on the Investigation of Prices and Trusts* (London, 1921), p.5. Available at <https://parlipapers-proquest-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/parlipapers/result/pqpdocumentview?accountid=14697&groupid=95579&pgld=c8e31b88-bce4-473f-8af8-978f07d1e697&rsId=18F209FF8F8>, Accessed 22 April 2024.

number of quarrymen would peak at 4600 in 1949 with a continual decline for a rest of the period.<sup>37</sup>

In a 1949 letter following a visit to quarrying communities in North Wales, Harold Wilson stated that ‘for war causes, the eyes were picked out of the slate quarries’, such was the extent of the impact, in his view, on their development.<sup>38</sup> The report commonly known as the *Rees Report*, produced in 1946, examined how the war impacted the industry. It highlights how following the government taking control of the quarries in March 1941, the quarries faced a high demand for slate because of older buildings being damaged by German bombing. As a result of this, the quarries were made to use as much ‘readily accessible slate requiring the minimum of labour’ as possible, leaving quarries after the war not only with a labour shortage but also a significant amount of labour intensive developmental work just to be able to access usable slate veins.<sup>39</sup> Because of the way the quarries were worked during the war, the industry was left in a position of needed significant capital and labour to recover its position, which the Rees Report identified, recommending the state finance loans to support the industry with this.<sup>40</sup> As detailed below, this did not take place. Another intervention from the state that proved damaging for the industry was the ban on the use of slate for new buildings from 1946 to 1949. The Ministry of Works instituted this ban so that all slate produced by the quarries could go towards repairs while also refusing to increase the price of slate.<sup>41</sup> This meant they missed supplying new houses in addition to supplying these houses with slate for future repairs. However, the impact of the war on the industry meant that they would not have been able to produce enough slate to fully benefit from new house building, lessening the impact of this measure on the industry.

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<sup>37</sup> The Council for Wales and Monmouthshire, *Third Memorandum by the Council on its Activities* (London, 1957), p.105. Available at <https://parlipapers-proquest-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/parlipapers/result/pqpdocumentview:imgLinkUri?imgLinkUri=http%3A%2F%2F0.0.0.0%2Fcgi-bin%2Ftest1.pl%3Fr%3D1956-046478%26p%3D105%26t%3D%22slate%5Eindustry%22>, Accessed 26 May 2024.

<sup>38</sup> London, The National Archives, CRE5 49/4591, Letter from Harold Wilson MP to Charles W. Key MP, 22 January 1949.

<sup>39</sup> HMSO, *The Welsh Slate Industry: Report by the Committee appointed by the Minister of Works* (London, 1946), pp. 12-14. This report is commonly referred to as the ‘Rees Report’.

<sup>40</sup> HMSO, *The Welsh Slate Industry*, p.30.

<sup>41</sup> Lindsay, *A History of the North Wales Slate Industry*, p.299.

In peacetime, the state contributed to the industry's decline in different ways. Following the damage done to the industry by both wars, different governments repeatedly chose not to intervene to support the industry. An example of this was the proposal for the state to enforce the use of slate by local governments building housing. As early as 1917 the quarry owners called on the government to ensure the use of slate in local government housebuilding.<sup>42</sup> Likewise in 1928, a deputation representing quarry owners met with the Chief Architect for the Ministry of Health calling on the government to 'issue instructions to local authorities ordering the use of home-produced slates in all government-subsidised schemes'. The Chief Architect responded that they could not force local governments to use slate.<sup>43</sup> A concession on this was eventually gained following further requests in 1958, when Lord Brecon informed the NWSQA that the government would allow for local governments to spend more to use slate when asking for their consent to take loans for house building.<sup>44</sup> This partial support after decades of campaigning demonstrates the pattern faced by the industry when looking for state support where any concessions gained were of a limited nature. Despite this concession, the view of post-war governments towards the industry can be summarised by the response of Charles Key MP to the already mentioned Harold Wilson letter: 'The long-term future of the Nantlle Valley will depend on other activities rather than an expansion of the slate industry'.<sup>45</sup> This same letter also rejected Wilson's proposal for the industry to be paid war damages to help cover the aforementioned costs for development of the quarries out of fear that it could cause a 'swarm' of applications for war damages.<sup>46</sup> This approach was continued by the Conservative governments of the 1950s. Even the suggestion of a new inquiry into the industry in 1958 was rejected by Lord Brecon, then Minister for Welsh affairs, on the basis that the Rees

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<sup>42</sup> Caernarfon, The Gwynedd Archives, Caernarfon Record Office, X/Dorothea/1016, A Statement on the availability of North Wales slate as a roofing material by deputation representing the North Wales quarry proprietors, 8 November 1917.

<sup>43</sup> Caernarfon, The Gwynedd Archives, Caernarfon Record Office, XPQ/133, Newspaper cutting from *Manchester Guardian* titled 'North Wales Plea', 6 November 1928.

<sup>44</sup> London, The National Archives, BD24/151, Letter from Minister of state for Wales to Mr. Richmond (Secretary of NWSQA), 25 February 1958.

<sup>45</sup> London, The National Archives, CRES 49/4591, Letter from Charles W. Key MP to Harold Wilson MP, 10 March 1949.

<sup>46</sup> TNA, CRES 49/4591, Letter from Charles W. Key MP to Harold Wilson MP, 10 March 1949.

Report already provided ‘a very thorough investigation’.<sup>47</sup> This was despite continued decline and the return to an open market significantly changing the conditions faced by the industry since the Rees Report. Further evidence of the state’s post-war approach is provided by its response to an attempt by the NWSQA to secure financial or legislative support for the industry during the late 1950s and early 1960s. The civil servant working in the Welsh Office who reviewed the possibility of this support concluded that ‘ministers may have to tell the owners frankly that there is no prospect’ of this support.<sup>48</sup> This same source does however provide some insight into the why the government made these choices to not support the industry. Mr. Morgan notes an expensive failed attempt to support the Scottish slate industry in 1949 which left the government with ‘burned fingers’, not wanting to unfairly support slate over alternative roofing material producers, and slate being a relatively unimportant industry by the 1960s as causes for not providing financial or legislative support for the industry.<sup>49</sup> Throughout the post-war period, the state repeatedly made the decision not to intervene and support the industry in recovering. These examples also show that these were choices made by governments, with different options for supporting the industry presented.

Following the Second World War both labour and capital shortages significantly impact the industry. Even during the period of prosperity during the first half of the 1960s, the labour shortage caused the closure of both Votty and Bowydd quarries in 1962 as their running costs were unable to be covered by their output.<sup>50</sup> This shows the impact that continued post-war labour shortages had on the industry, limiting its capacity to take advantage of spells of high demand for Welsh slate. Poor wages combined with the threat of silicosis made the industry increasingly unattractive for potential apprentices, with new industry and public building works such as the nuclear power plant in Trawsfynydd providing attractive alternatives to work at slate quarries.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> London, The National Archives, BD 24/151, Letter from Lord Brecon to H. Leighton Davies (Chairman of the Board of Welsh Industries), 1 July 1958.

<sup>48</sup> London, The National Archive, BD 40/32, Letter from D. Morgan (Welsh Office) to Mr. Jarman, 2 March 1964.

<sup>49</sup> The National Archive, BD 40/32, Letter from D. Morgan (Welsh Office) to Mr. Jarman, 2 March 1964.

<sup>50</sup> London, The National Archives, BD40/32, Letter from A. D. Fordham to Geraint C. Walters, 4 October 1962.

<sup>51</sup> Caernarfon, The Gwynedd Archives, Caernarfon Record Office, XPQ/994, Newspaper cutting of *Liverpool Daily Post* article titled ‘Low Pay Problem at Bethesda, says Quarry speaker’, 12 April 1960.

<sup>52</sup> <sup>53</sup> One potential way to address the labour shortage was mechanisation, making the quarries more efficient and reducing the required labour. As this required capital investment, few quarries were able to do this. One of the quarries that did attempt to develop and modernise was Dorothea quarry, which spent £25 000 on a quarry development scheme in 1963.<sup>54</sup> Jean Lindsay notes that the financial strain of this investment was cited as a cause of its closure in 1970.<sup>55</sup> The post-war labour and capital shortage was a symptom of decline, becoming increasingly unattractive both for workers and potential investors. While both contributed to decline, they were not the most significant when compared to other causes.

There were other smaller causes for decline, with the credit squeeze of the late 1960s alongside the removal of De Gaulle from office causing the French state to end importation of slate, the last significant export market for Welsh slate, one of the final blows leading to the closure of Dinorwic in 1969.<sup>56</sup> However, by this point the already discussed significant factors had already caused decline to the extent where short term factors could cause the closure of a major quarry like Dinorwic. While evaluating each primary cause of decline independently allows for evaluation of the extent each one contributed to decline, it is important to emphasise that none of these causes operated in a vacuum. Following the Second World War, the already discussed permanent labour shortage combined with the competition from now cheaper alternative roofing materials to create a vice in which the industry was trapped. The industry needed wage increases to attract labour to the quarries to meet supply, however this would cause the price of slate to increase, making it less competitive with competing roofing materials. Reducing wages to lower prices would correspondingly make slate more competitive but push more quarrymen towards other industries. This was a conundrum which the quarry owners were unable to solve, and the state was unwilling to provide the support

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<sup>52</sup> London, The National Archives, BD 40/32, Letter titled 'The Slate Industry at Blaenau Ffestiniog' from F. Blaise Gillie (Welsh Office) to D. W. Jones-Williams, 28 November 1962.

<sup>53</sup> London, The National Archives, BD 40/32, Letter from Aneurin Owen (TGWU) to Blaise Gillie (Welsh Office), 28 March 1963.

<sup>54</sup> London, The National Archive, BD 40/32, Newspaper cutting from *The Times* of article titled 'Slate Men Try Out New Ideas', 7 August 1963.

<sup>55</sup> Lindsay, *A History of the North Wales Slate Industry*, p.306.

<sup>56</sup> Caernarfon, The Gwynedd Archives, Caernarfon Record Office, XD/40/6/10, Statement made by the Managing Director to workers for why the company needs to be placed in receivership, 20 August 1969.

required to break out of this problem. All the discussed issues interacted with each other in this way, further accelerating the decline. Another example of this is a letter from the Dorothea quarry director to Goronwy Roberts in 1954, stating that the issues caused by government management of quarries during the Second World War had created a negative impression of the industry, further dissuading potential apprentices from joining the industry and contributing to the post-war labour shortage.<sup>57</sup> All of these different causes interacted with each other to cause the decline of the Northwestern Wales slate industry. However, the primary causes were the increasing competition from alternative roofing materials which turned the pre-war depression into a permanent decline, alongside the role of the state which both caused the significant acceleration of decline during both World Wars but especially the Second, followed by the state repeatedly choosing not to intervene to support the industry during peacetime to recover from the damage done during periods of wartime state intervention.

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<sup>57</sup> Caernarfon, The Gwynedd Archives, Caernarfon Record Office, X/Dorothea/1435, Letter from Col. J. G. Wynne Williams to Goronwy Roberts MP, 26 June 1954.



## Chapter Three – How did different actors respond to decline?

As established in the introduction, past accounts on the decline of the slate industry have either provided a chronological narrative of decline which did not analyse how different sections of society responded to decline or have only looked at short periods within the overall period of decline. This chapter will analyse how different sections of Northwest Wales society responded to decline, demonstrating the agency different groups had in responding to decline alongside how their responses to it throughout the period.

The impact of labour shortages during the post-war period demonstrates just how important the workers were for the slate industry. As David Gwyn argues, the industry was also important for the communities in which these workers lived, as these urban spaces were built by workers around their place of work.<sup>58</sup> Consequently, these communities were geographically isolated from other industries meaning depression in the slate industry had a disproportionate impact on these communities as there were no other industries nearby which could offer employment. A common response to decline by these workers therefore was emigration. During the depression of the industry from the late 1870s to the early 1890s, the NWQU had even spent £631 during 1878-1879 supporting quarrymen and their families to emigrate from Wales in search of work.<sup>59</sup> Following the resumption of the depression from 1903, this tradition of emigration was continued in response to decline. Table 1 shows statistical evidence of this emigration, as the population of the county of Merionethshire declined alongside the industry. The trends of population in Caernarvonshire are more complicated, as noted by Andrew Edwards who argues that the shift towards tourism caused population increases in tourist towns such as Pwllheli, Criccieth, and Abersoch during the same

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<sup>58</sup> Gwyn, *Welsh Slate*, p.178.

<sup>59</sup> Anon., 'The North Wales Quarrymen's Union', *North Wales Chronicle*, 7 June 1879, Available at <https://go-gale-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/ps/i.do?p=BNCN&u=tou&id=GALE|BB3200932215&v=2.1&it=r&sid=bookmark-BNCN&asid=16afb16f>, Accessed 7 May 2024.

period.<sup>60</sup> With these urban centres in the country growing, it meant that others, primarily the quarrying ones, were losing population. Overall, the statistical evidence points towards emigration from quarrying communities during the industry's decline.

Table 1 Population of Caernarvonshire and Merionethshire, 1901-1971<sup>61</sup>

Year	Caernarvonshire	Merionethshire
1901	125,649	48, 852
1911	125,043	45,565
1921	130,975	45, 087
1931	120,829	39, 860
1951	124,140	41,465
1961	121,767	38, 310
1971	123,064	35, 330

Alongside this statistical evidence, more anecdotal evidence exists for emigration as a response from quarry workers to decline. Whether in 1914 when a delegation representing the slate industry met with Lloyd George where emigration to colonies was discussed, or a local councillor stating that voluntary emigration had lessened the local unemployment problem during a council meeting, throughout the period emigration is noted as a response of workers to decline.<sup>62 63</sup>

The collective response of the workers to decline was mediated through the NWQU. R. Merfyn Jones argued that the union was conciliatory by nature, with R. T. Jones professionalising conflict in the industry from the 1910s onwards, arguing that R. T. Jones primarily 'acted with the security of the union and overall interests of the industry'.<sup>64</sup> While Merfyn Jones' study ends with the amalgamation of the NWQU into

<sup>60</sup> Edwards, *Labour's Crisis*, p.35.

<sup>61</sup> John Williams, *Digest of Welsh Historical Statistics: Population, 1570-1974*. Available at <https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/studies/study?id=4093>, Accessed 10 April 2024.

<sup>62</sup> London, The National Archive, T 172/150, Transcript of shorthand notes taken by J. H. Roberts of meeting in Criccieth of deputation of the slate industry to the Right Honourable the Chancellor of the Exchequer, 30 May 1914.

<sup>63</sup> CRA, XPQ/994, Newspaper cutting of *Liverpool Daily Post* article titled 'Low Pay Problem at Bethesda, says Quarry speaker'.

<sup>64</sup> Jones, *The North Wales Quarrymen*, pp. 310, 325.

the TGWU in 1922, this approach by the union of prioritising the interest of the slate industry as a whole over the interest of the workers as a response to decline continued up to 1970. There are several examples of this. Accepting wage cuts to help reduce the price of slate is an example of this, such as in December 1929 when the union accepted a wage cut of eight pence a day, or in a letter by Aneurin Owen of the TGWU to the NWSQA secretary in 1960 which discussed the ability of the union to ‘restrain our members’ from demanding wage increases in the interest of the industry.<sup>65</sup> <sup>66</sup> A different example of the union prioritising the interest of the industry is provided in 1959, when it organised an advertising campaign on behalf of the industry. Circulating seven hundred letters to local authorities across Britain, they argued this campaign ‘embarrassed’ the quarry owners into improving their own advertising efforts.<sup>67</sup> This shows again how the approach of the union was to work on behalf of the industry in response to decline. The union also responded to decline by articulating its own vision for how the industry should be managed and operated. Throughout the period the union argued that the industry should be centralised, with a motion unanimously passed at their annual conference in 1929 calling for a centralised body to handle advertisement, selling, and price setting.<sup>68</sup> This vision was continually re-articulated by the union, with a representative of the union arguing in 1961 that amalgamation of the quarries and the establishment of a central sales organisation was required to address the industry’s decline.<sup>69</sup> What’s striking about this vision is its acceptance of private ownership of the industry, providing a stark contrast to the vision articulated by the miner’s union of South Wales in response to decline, which successfully articulated and advocated for the nationalisation of the industry.<sup>70</sup> Evidently, the response of the union to decline was

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<sup>65</sup> Caernarfon, The Gwynedd Archives, Caernarfon Record Office, X/Dorothea/1034, Minutes of Meeting between owners’ association and the Union in Caernarfon, 13 December 1929.

<sup>66</sup> Caernarfon, The Gwynedd Archives, Caernarfon Record Office, X/Dorothea/1435, Letter from Aneurin Owen to J. Richmond, 17 February 1960.

<sup>67</sup> London, The National Archives, WORK 45/258, Magazine cutting from *The Voice of Welsh Industry* of article titled ‘The Challenge: Now is the Time to put Welsh Slate on Top again’, October 1961.

<sup>68</sup> Caernarfon, The Gwynedd Archives, Caernarfon Record Office, X/NWQU/6, Rhaglen Cynhadledd Undeb Chwarelwyr Gogledd Cymru, 6 Mai 1929. My translation of the item’s description: ‘Program of North Wales Quarrymen’s Union Conference’.

<sup>69</sup> TNA, WORK 45/258, Magazine cutting from *The Voice of Welsh Industry* of article titled ‘The Challenge: Now is the Time to put Welsh Slate on Top again’.

<sup>70</sup> Daryl Leeworthy, *Labour Country: Political Radicalism and Social Democracy in South Wales, 1831-1985* (Cardigan, Parthian Books), pp. 7, 190-191, 424.

one of conciliation, working for the general benefit of the industry and articulating a limited vision of change within the industry. The union was willing to make sacrifices in workers pay or through working short time to support the industry in response to decline.

Outside of the union there is little record of collective action by the quarry workers independent of the union. One episode of workers acting collectively without support of the union in 1956 provides insight into why the quarry workers did not respond to decline by fighting against it through collective action. Robert R. Davies was sacked for penning an article for the *Caernarvonshire and Denbeigh Herald* criticising working conditions at Dinorwic quarry. Following a defence of working conditions by the quarry's manager, 26 workers of the 'Swallow' gallery at Dinorwic co-wrote to the paper attacking the working conditions at the quarry, while the union refused to publicly comment as it had a policy of not being 'embroiled in the press'.<sup>71</sup> This letter demonstrates frustration at the low wages, wet and cold working conditions, and risk of silicosis, concluding with the argument that quarrymen not wanting their own children to work in the slate industry spoke for itself.<sup>72</sup> This significance of this letter is shown by the risk taken by these workers, as the sacking of Mr. Davies demonstrated the risks of being publicly critical of quarry conditions. These workers must have been frustrated about their incomes and working conditions, hardly the frame of mind that would motivate action to save an industry. Not wanting future generations to work in the same quarries provides an explanation for why there was not a collective response seen by other industrial workers facing decline.

Responding to the industry's decline saw significant changes in the way quarry owners managed their industry, both in industrial relations and co-operation between each other. Merfyn Jones argues strongly that the near collapse of the industry caused by the First World War created an alliance between quarry owners and the union, institutionalised through a Board of Arbitration and agreements between several

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<sup>71</sup> Caernarfon, The Gwynedd Archives, Caernarfon Record Office, XPQ/994, Newspaper cutting from *Caernarfon and Denbeigh Herald* of article titled '26 quarrymen write', 4 May 1956.

<sup>72</sup> CRA, XPQ/994, Newspaper cutting from *Caernarfon and Denbeigh Herald* of article titled '26 quarrymen write'.

quarries and the union.<sup>73</sup> This response to the decline of the industry by quarry owners was continued throughout the duration of the industry's decline, who utilised their allyship with the union to secure their cooperation in lobbying efforts, presenting a united front when trying to gain concessions from the state, in addition to support from the union in gaining concessions from the workers during to try mitigate the impact of decline on the industry. This shift was especially significant considering the hard-line taken by employers in the industry before the decline set in, especially by the management of Penrhyn Quarry in the run up to the Penrhyn lock-out of 1900-1903.<sup>74</sup> In addition to the examples already given of the union accepting pay cuts demonstrating this, another example is a joint letter in 1957 by the owners of the Dorothea quarry and the NWQU requesting state intervention with their bank to extend their credit facilities to help the struggling quarry.<sup>75</sup> While this lobbying effort was unsuccessful, it shows how the quarry owners used the alliance with the union in an attempt to respond to decline. Another response from ownership was increasing co-operation between themselves. The first attempt at an association of quarry owners formed in 1917, responding to the difficulties faced by the industry during the First World War. Even with this there were still divisions among owners, with complaints in 1918 of Porthmadog slate sellers undercutting Penrhyn slate sellers.<sup>76</sup> Increasing infighting between quarry owners lead to two of the biggest quarries, Dinorwic and Penrhyn, to secede from the association in 1931.<sup>77</sup> It took the even bigger collapse of the industry during the Second World War for the owners to establish a quarry owners association which represented the whole industry, which was achieved two years after formation in 1945. By 1947 the NWSQA was even publishing a single price list across all Northwest Wales quarries, showing the owners responding to the recommendations of the Rees Report and the

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<sup>73</sup> Jones, *The North Wales Quarrymen*, p.308.

<sup>74</sup> Jones, *The North Wales Quarrymen*, pp.210-211.

<sup>75</sup> London, The National Archives, BD 41/228, Enclosed memorandum by company and union within letter from Goronwy Roberts MP to Henry Brooke MP (Minister of Housing and Local Government), 7 August 1957.

<sup>76</sup> Caernarfon, The Gwynedd Archives, Caernarfon Record Office, X/DQ/1776, Letter from Walter D. Hobson to Lloyd Williams, 23 November 1918.

<sup>77</sup> Caernarfon, The Gwynedd Archives, Caernarfon Record Office, X/PYO/1871, Notice of meeting of Directors of Pen-Yr-Orsedd Quarry, 23 July 1931.

extent of this unity.<sup>78</sup> That both attempts to form an association occurred during the points of most accelerated decline demonstrate the extent to which it forced a response from owners, changing their approach of industrial management towards greater co-operation with each other and the union in the general interest of the industry.

None of the currently existing literature has discussed how local government in Northwest Wales responded to the decline of the most significant industry in the region. While central government played a much larger role in the slate industry, county councils also responded to the decline. During the First World War and the inter-war period, local government played a role organising the response to the industry's decline through arranging conferences and delegations to meet with central government departments. Newspapers of the time provide evidence of this involvement. Responding to the immediate collapse of the industry at the beginning of the First World War, Caernarvonshire council unanimously adopted a motion to appoint a deputation from the council to meet with central government to secure greater support for the industry.<sup>79</sup> The next year the Urban District Council of Porthmadog organised a conference of local authorities, railway companies, quarry owners, and the two local county councils to consider how to respond to revive the industry, with a new committee formed to advocate for the industry within the press alongside another deputation to meet with government departments being elected.<sup>80</sup> This proactive response to decline changed during the post war period. Indeed, by 1953 the Caernarvonshire County council's development plan accepted the continued decline of the slate industry, deciding instead to focus on tourism and 'scenic beauty preservation'.<sup>81</sup> This shows the change in response from local government to the

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<sup>78</sup> Caernarfon, The Gwynedd Archives, Caernarfon Record Office, X/Dorothea/545, Letter from J. Richmond secretary of NWSQA to Director of Cost and Prices of the Ministry of Works, 8 December 1947.

<sup>79</sup> Caernarfon, The Gwynedd Archives, Caernarfon Record Office, XPQ/133, Newspaper cutting from *Caernarvonshire and Denbeigh Herald* article titled 'The Slate Trade', 12 March 1915.

<sup>80</sup> Caernarfon, The Gwynedd Archives, Caernarfon Record Office, XPQ/133, Newspaper cutting from *Liverpool Daily Post* of article titled 'The Welsh Slate Trade', 29 April 1916.

<sup>81</sup> Caernarfon, The Gwynedd Archives, Caernarfon Record Office, X/Dorothea/1435, Comments on the Caernarvonshire Development Plan: The Slate Industry by J. Richmond, 11 December 1953.

ongoing decline, from proactive organising to revive the industry to acceptance of decline and attempting to support alternative industries.

A notable change within the northwest Wales region that happened concurrently with the decline of the industry was the major political shifts which the region went through. In the space of seventy years, northwest Wales went from Liberal, to Labour, and finally Plaid Cymru. The slate industry's decline played a role in this process, with local voters punishing the Liberals and later Labour for failing to address the social issues caused by decline or offer alternatives for communities reliant on slate. Cyril Parry argues the initial shift from Liberal to Labour begun as local Liberal MPs did not take interest in labour issues, and therefore increasingly lost the support of workers as representatives of their interests.<sup>82</sup> This failure of the Liberals to address these problems lead to the shift to Labour, which in turn saw a familiar loss of local support when Labour governments also failed to address these problems. Goronwy Roberts argued in 1960 Parliament that government assistance should be provided to the slate industry to support its modernisation, in addition to providing advance factories to address unemployment in quarrying communities.<sup>83</sup> After six years in government in which he had been a minister, a pamphlet attempting to publicise the successes of Labour government for North Wales failed to mention the slate industry, with only one of the eight advance factories built in North Wales placed in a slate quarry town.<sup>84</sup> With Labour's appeal having been built on the promise of affluence, these examples illustrate the contrast between rhetoric out of office and delivery once in. With this weakness in Labour's appeal, Plaid Cymru looked to address the changing social conditions caused by the decline to cultivate its own local appeal. Emigration of quarry workers produced depopulation which, combined with the shift to tourism creating demographic shifts within the region which produced a growing threat to the Welsh language which became a theme of post-war Plaid Cymru literature. A leaflet published

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<sup>82</sup> Parry, *The Radical Tradition in Welsh Politics*, pp.19-20.

<sup>83</sup> House Of Commons, *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates: The Official Report* (23 November 1960, vol. 630, cols. 1273-1274) (London, Hansard). Available at <https://parlipapers-proquest-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/parlipapers/result/pqpdocumentview?accountid=14697&groupid=95579&pgl/d=8d5fdb14-f816-48e9-8b10-45465c0fc74e&rsId=18F2BC200A3#t0339>, Accessed 20 May 2024.

<sup>84</sup> Caernarfon, The Gwynedd Archives, Caernarfon Record Office, XD/89/9, Pamphlet for Labour Party titled 'Labour's Record in North Wales', 1970.

in the mid-sixties by Plaid demonstrates how its rhetoric attempted to position itself as a response to these issues, attacking the Labour government for its failure to halt depopulation and failing to protect Welsh rural industries due to prioritising British 'national interests'.<sup>85</sup> While the industry was numerically insignificant by the time of Plaid's electoral victories in Northwest Wales during the 1974 election, the social conditions produced by its decline undermined both Labour's local appeal and provided the basis for Plaid Cymru to cultivate its own appeal.

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<sup>85</sup> Caernarfon, The Gwynedd Archives, Caernarfon Record Office, XM/4595/66, Plaid Cymru pamphlet titled 'Develop all Wales', N.d. While this pamphlet does not have a date on it, it can be dated to either 1965 or 1966 due to it mentioning James Griffiths as Secretary of State for Wales.



## Chapter Four – Conclusion

This dissertation has aimed to provide a focused study on the decline of the Northwest Wales slate industry between 1900 and 1970. Firstly, it aimed to identify and analyse the most significant causes of decline. While post-war labour shortages alongside the importation of foreign slate were important contributors to decline, they were comparatively less significant than the rise of alternative roofing materials, the World Wars, and the choices made by the state. Foreign slate certainly caused difficulties and provided additional competition for Welsh slate already struggling, however it was the mass production of not only cheaper alternative roofing material, but that these alternatives were seen as aesthetically more appealing, which transformed a depression following past trends into a near continual decline. Likewise, while the labour shortages post-war limited the ability of the industry to benefit from periods of high demand for slate, the damage was done by both World Wars and how the state managed the industry during wartime. The choices made by both Labour and Conservative governments not to intervene during peacetime to support recovery from this damage accelerated the demise of the industry.

The second chapter demonstrates that for all the difficulties caused by the decline of the region's major industry, different sections of local society did still have agency to respond to this decline. Workers responded in a variety of ways, such as emigrating in the hopes of finding better opportunities elsewhere. As a collective, the workers were represented by the NWQU which institutionalised industrial conflict and allied with management in the general interest of the industry in response to decline. This, combined with little evidence of unofficial collective action, demonstrates a different response to decline than workers in other industries, such as miners, taken by the quarry workers. Alongside their alliance with the union, a significant change to their past policy towards the union in response to decline, the quarry owners also came to increasingly co-operate together throughout the period. While local government has been neglected in past studies of the industry, the role played by it in organising a response to the collapse of the industry during the First World War shows that they too had agency in responding to decline. Lastly, the impact of the decline of most

significant regional industry had a significant impact on local politics, as the social conditions which lead to both Liberal and Labour successes were undermined by it. Evidently, decline elicited diverse responses by different parts of Northwest Wales society.

There are points which have been excluded from this dissertation to meet the word limit that would provide scope for more future research on the decline of the slate industry. There is much more detail and analysis to be done on the role of slate's decline on regional Northwest Wales politics. Moreover, the lack of discussion on the role of women in the decline of the industry, especially in how they responded to it and how gender relations were impacted by decline demonstrates a further avenue for research. Another would be to look at the failed attempts to find economically viable uses for slate waste, both as a response to decline from owners and as a cause of decline. Nevertheless, by identifying the extent of the role played by the state in decline alongside alternative roofing materials, in addition to building on the arguments of Merfyn Jones on how both the quarry workers union and ownership responded to decline demonstrate this dissertation has built on previous studies of the slate industry's decline.

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