

BAILEY family, of Nant-y-glo, Aberaman, etc.

CRAWSHAY BAILEY (1789 - 1872), iron-master and M.P.

Crawshay Bailey was born in 1789 at Great Wenham, Suffolk, the younger son of Joseph (or John) Bailey of Wakefield, and Susannah, sister of **Richard Crawshay**, iron-master, Cyfarthfa. When only about 12 years of age he joined his older brother, Joseph, at Cyfarthfa and to assist at their rich uncle's iron-works. He was one of the witnesses to his uncle's will (26 September 1809), and was bequeathed the sum of £1,000. It is probable that he remained for some time at Cyfarthfa after his uncle's death, but it is uncertain whether he left with his brother when the latter, with the assistance of **Matthew Wayne**, commenced work at Nant-y-glo in 1811. In any case, he took over partnership in the Nant-y-glo works on **Matthew Wayne's** departure in 1820. From then onwards the two brothers co-operated in developing the Nant-y-glo works, and, later on, the Beaufort works.

A tradition persisted in the Rhymney district that he was the owner for some time until 1825 of the iron-works there. This seems to be corroborated by the Crawshay papers (now in N.L.W.); from these it would appear that it was his cousin **William Crawshay I**, of London, the then proprietor of Cyfarthfa, who prevented Crawshay Bailey from continuing in possession. It was Crawshay Bailey who constructed the tramway from Rhymney to Bassaleg, and this appears to confirm the tradition that he was connected with the Rhymney iron-works. During 1835, when the Calvinistic Methodist Association of South Wales held its quarterly meeting at Salem, Nant-y-glo, Crawshay Bailey, who was an Anglican, provided hospitality for the moderator and five leading ministers, possibly in gratitude to the denomination which had decided in its Association at Tredegar, 19 October 1831, the year of the riots at Merthyr, that no trade unionist could be admitted to church membership.

Though himself a great iron-master, Crawshay Bailey distinguished himself from the others rather by his attitude towards the future of the coal industry. He foresaw the wealth that could be obtained from the development of the South Wales coal basin, and bought up many large areas at their agricultural value - at Aberaman, Mountain Ash, and in the Rhondda valley. He bought the Aberaman estate with its mansion, the home of generations of the Mathews family. This had been used as a summer resort by the descendants of **Anthony Bacon**, and it was from the executors of Anthony Bacon II (died 1827) that Crawshay Bailey bought the estate in 1836, conveyed to him by indenture dated 17 February 1837. Underneath were some of the finest seams of coal and iron-ore in the world, but so far nothing had been done to develop them, and it was nine years before he appeared to avail himself of his purchase; he continued to live at Nant-y-glo. In the meantime collieries were being sunk at Cwm-bach alongside the Aberdare canal. He waited until the valley seemed ripe for a railway. Then, with **Sir Josiah John Guest**, he obtained a Parliamentary Act in 1845 for the Aberdare Railway, to connect with the Taff Vale Railway at 'Navigation' (now called Abercynon). He came over from Nant-y-glo and left his nephew in charge of the Nant-y-glo and Beaufort works. Work now commenced in earnest in sinking the Aberaman colliery, and in constructing blast furnaces, etc. By 1 August 1846 the railway was opened, and leased to the Taff Vale Railway from 1 January 1847. By the first week in May 1847, a quantity of iron was puddled for the first time at Aberaman. He promoted the formation of the Aberaman and Aberdare Gas Co. in 1846, became a member of the Aberdare Board of Health on its formation in 1854, and was appointed high sheriff of Brecknock in 1837, and of Monmouthshire in 1851. He contested and won five parliamentary elections for Monmouth boroughs, which included Newport, etc., being M.P. from 1852 to 1868.

He was a great promoter of railways, which again helped him by creating a demand for rails. Besides the tramway from Rhymney to Bassaleg, and the Aberdare branch of the Taff Vale Railway, he made a new line of tramway from Beaufort and Nant-y-glo down to the Clydach valley to Llanfoist, to join the Brecon and Abergavenny canal. In 1852 he promoted a railway from the Forest of Dean, by Coleford, Monmouth, and Usk to Pontypool, etc.

By indenture dated 2 February 1867 he conveyed the Aberaman estate with the collieries, ironworks, brick-works, private railway, etc., to the Powell Duffryn Steam Coal Co., at an aggregate price of £123,500. By 1869-70 the Nant-y-glo and Beaufort works had been disposed of. Crawshay Bailey retired to Llanfoist House, where he died 9 January 1872, leaving an only son and heir, CRAWSHAY BAILEY II, of Maindiff Court (1821 - 1887), who married Elizabeth, countess Bettina, only daughter of Jean Baptiste, Count Metaxa. Crawshay Bailey II left two daughters, (1) Clara, who married William James Gordon Canning, Hartpury Court, Gloucestershire, and (2) Augusta Emily, who married William Carne Currie, Itton Court, Monmouth

Author

Watkin William Price, (1873 - 1967)

Sources

Personal researches

Further reading

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