

CRAWSHAY family, of Cyfarthfa, Glamorganshire, industrialists

This family had a preponderating influence on the industrial welfare of the people of South Wales, particularly through the heavy industries connected with the manufacture of iron, coal and iron-ore mining, etc. [In the earlier generations, the name appears as 'Crashaw' and 'Crashay'.

RICHARD CRAWSHAY (1739 - 1810),

Born at Normanton, near Leeds, son of William Crawshay, a Yorkshire yeoman; quarrelled with his father and, when 16 years of age, left home. After travelling for twenty days, he arrived in London without money. He sold his pony for £15, and took employment in an iron-warehouse selling flat-irons. He won his master's confidence and his daughter, and eventually became sole proprietor and wealthy. Hearing of the establishment of iron-works in South Wales which offered scope for the investment of the wealth, he arrived in Merthyr, took over **Homfray's** lease at Cyfarthfa for boring cannon, and after the death (1786) of **Anthony Bacon I**, secured the lease of the Cyfarthfa works during the minority of **Bacon's** sons; eventually he bought the share of **Anthony Bacon II** and became sole proprietor (1794). He adopted **Cort's** methods of puddling and rolling mills, built new furnaces, forges, and mills, and became one of the chief promoters of the Glamorgan Canal which was opened from Merthyr to Cardiff in 1794. He took advantage of the boom in the iron trade and of the need for cannon caused by the Napoleonic wars and the dearth of iron from Sweden and Russia. He was much helped by his two young nephews, **Joseph** and **Crawshay Bailey**, the sons of his sister Susanna, but was much troubled by his only son, 'who would never follow my advice, and has treated me rudely'; father and son were, however, reconciled, the son receiving, under the terms of his father's will, a three-eighths share. Another three-eighths share went to **Benjamin Hall**, husband of his daughter Charlotte - they were the parents of **Sir Benjamin Hall**, **baron Llanover** - and the remaining quarter share going to his nephew **Joseph Bailey**. He died 27 June 1810, and was buried at Llandaff.

WILLIAM CRAWSHAY I (1764 - 1834),

Richard's only son, did not take any interest in the actual manufacture of iron, but took charge of the selling agency at the George Yard, Upper Thames Street, London, leaving his son, William Crawshay II (infra) to manage the works at Cyfarthfa and Hirwaun. His is a far more important personality than that portrayed by **Charles Wilkins** and others. 'He was the most statesmanlike of the Crawshay Iron Kings,' and guided the huge enterprise in all its aspects with a steady hand - on its production side and on its commercial side. He so guided its affairs that he bought both **Benjamin Hall's** and **Joseph Bailey's** shares and became the sole proprietor. He died 11 August 1834 at Stoke Newington, Middlesex. Probate of his will was granted at £700,000. He left three sons and two daughters.

WILLIAM CRAWSHAY II 1788 - 1867),

was the actual manager of the Cyfarthfa and Hirwaun works, and bought other iron-works at Treforest and in the Forest of Dean. It is he who is generally called the 'Iron King' and who built Cyfarthfa castle and the Caversham Park mansion. During his period the works grew immensely, and enormous quantities of iron were manufactured and great quantities of coal raised to feed the furnaces. His attitude during the celebrated riots at Merthyr tended to exasperate and defy the men. He left Treforest iron-works to his son **FRANCIS**, the Forest of Dean to **HENRY**, and the Cyfarthfa works to his youngest son, Robert Thompson Crawshay (infra). Besides these important works, he held many shares in the Taff Vale Railway, etc. He died at Caversham Park, 4 August 1867.

ROBERT THOMPSON CRAWSHAY (1817 - 1879),

was born at Cyfarthfa, 3 March 1817, the youngest son [by a second marriage] of the 'Iron King,' and was given Cyfarthfa works and its castle. He carried on the works until the great depression set in and the discovery of the Henry Bessemer converter radically transformed the making of steel. He died 10 May 1879 and was buried at Vaynor parish churchyard. He and his wife, Rose Mary Crawshay, helped in the provision of schools and in providing books to read. His sons carried on the business under the name of Messrs. Crawshay Bros. until their absorption by Messrs. Guest, Keen, and Nettlefold (1902).

Author

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Sources

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Crawshay papers in N.L.W.

The National Library of Wales Journal, vii, 12-32

pedigree in Theophilus Jones, Edwin Davies, Joseph Russell Bailey, *History of the County of Brecknock* (1909-1930), i, 140-3, with portraits

Images

S. Arbus, Mrs. William Crawshay of Cyfarthfa Castle & Caversham Park

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