

INSOLE, GEORGE (1790 - 1851), colliery proprietor

Name: George Insole
Date of birth: 1790
Date of death: 1851
Spouse: Mary Insole (née Finch)
Child: George Frederick Insole
Child: Julia Ann Insole
Child: Julia Insole
Child: Emma Insole
Child: James Harvey Insole
Child: Helen Insole
Parent: Phebe Insole (née Stinton)
Parent: William Insole
Gender: Male
Occupation: colliery proprietor
Area of activity: Business and Industry
Authors: John Prior-Morris, Richard L. Ollerton

George Insole was baptized in Worcester on 5 December 1790, the fifth of six children of William Insole (1757-1811), a tenant farmer, and his wife Phebe (née Stinton, 1757-1824). George married Mary (née Finch (1791-1866) in Worcester on 11 August 1819 and they had six children: Helen (1820-1895), [James Harvey](#) (1821-1901), Emma (1823-1906), Julia (b. and d. 1825), Julia Ann (1830-1904), and George Frederick (1836-1837).

George Insole worked as a carpenter/cabinet-maker in Worcester until at least 1825, and then, assisted by family loans and inheritances, he moved to Cardiff, Glamorganshire in 1828, and by 1829 was trading in bricks, timber and coal, in partnership with Richard Biddle (1799-1896). In 1830 he was developing markets for house coal along the Severn estuary coasts and in Ireland. In the same year, he pioneered the introduction of South Wales steam coal, in particular Waun Wylt steam coal from [Robert Thomas](#)'s mine at Abercanaid, Glamorganshire (see [Lewis, Sir William Thomas](#)), to the London market where Tyneside coal had held sway since Tudor times.

After the partners were bankrupted in 1831, George received another family inheritance and set up at the mouth of the Glamorganshire Canal as a coal merchant. He is reported to have been the first to bunker a Royal Navy steamship with coal from South Wales. To eliminate supply uncertainties, in 1832 he leased a pit at Maesmawr (in Llantwit Fardre, Glamorganshire), becoming a coal producer in his own right.

In 1844, in order to source coal that would compete on the Irish house-coal market with [Walter Coffin](#)'s coal from Dinas, Glamorganshire, he and his son, James Harvey Insole, leased and revived collieries at Cymmer, Glamorganshire, in the name of George Insole and Son. In 1848 they opened 36 coking ovens to supply the Taff Vale Railway, by which time George had developed an international trade, with customers in France, the Mediterranean, Southeast Asia and South America.

George also served as a town councillor, South Ward, Cardiff, from at least 1845 and as a Cardiff Street Commissioner from at least 1847. He died at his residence in Crockherbtown, Cardiff, on 1 January 1851, due to 'heart disease many years, paralysis one week' and was buried at St Margaret's Church, Roath, on 7 January.

George Insole Esq. was eulogised at the Cymmer Eisteddfod of 1851 in two lengthy prize-winning elegies. These three samples from different parts of the elegies appear to exceed the requirements of politeness:

All through life, it was his honest pride
To cheer the widow and the orphan guide...

With clear integrity his name is bound
Where e're his promise, there was Insole found...

His men he paid in sterling money down
And spurned all meaner payments with a frown.

From humble beginnings but with significant financial assistance from his wider family, George Insole built a large and successful coal extraction and shipping business in South Wales. While there are conflicting claims for exactly who first introduced South Wales steam coal to the London and international markets, George can be credited with much of its subsequent early success.

Authors

John Prior-Morris

Richard L. Ollerton

Sources

Richard L. Ollerton and Catherine O'Brien, '[The Insoles of Insole Court](#)'

Richard L. Ollerton, 'Hereford Cider, Worcester Leather, Birmingham Iron, Rhondda Coal: Foundations of a Welsh Coal Mining dynasty', *Morgannwg* (2012), LV1, 62-83

Glamorgan Archives: '[Biddle & Biddle, Biddle, and Insole & Biddle, timber, brick and coal merchants, Cardiff](#)'

E. D. Lewis, *The Rhondda Valleys: a study in industrial development, 1800 to the present day* (London 1959)

E. D. Lewis, 'Pioneers of the Cardiff Coal Trade', *The Glamorgan Historian* (1976), 22-52 [NB Later research indicates that Lewis is mistaken about George Insole's arrival and early business activities in Cardiff up to 1830.]

Geo. Insole & Son, *Cymmer Steam Coal* (Cardiff 1880)

David Evans, *The two successful marwnadau (or elegies), on the late George Insole Esq., which obtained the chief prizes, at the Cymar Eisteddfod* (Cardiff 1851)

[Deaths](#), *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian*, 4 January 1851, p.3

[Death of Mr J. H. Insole](#), *Evening Express*, 21 January 1901, p.4 [NB Some details given in this obituary are not correct]

Further reading

Wikipedia Article: [George Insole](#)

Wikipedia Article: [Lucy Thomas](#)

Additional Links

Wikidata: [Q73118085](#)

Published date: 2019-10-31

Article Copyright: <http://rightsstatements.org/page/InC/1.0/> 

The Dictionary of Welsh Biography is provided by The National Library of Wales and the University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies. It is free to use and does not receive grant support. A donation would help us maintain and improve the site so that we can continue to acknowledge Welsh men and women who have made notable contributions to life in Wales and beyond.

Find out more on our [sponsorship page](#).

