

Treharris: A Community Profile



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Summary

Treharris is a community of around 7700 people located at the southern end of the Borough of Merthyr Tydfil and includes the villages of Treharris, Edwardsville and Quakers Yard. Once rural, the area experienced rapid industrialisation from the mid-nineteenth century that helped create a thriving economic and civic community. However, de-industrialisation has meant the community has suffered from deprivation and stagnation expounded by the 2008 economic recession and many claim a higher than average level of benefits.

Many shops and businesses have closed and a large part of the community now commutes out to find employment. Banking and retail opportunities are limited. However there are still a number of businesses spread over the three areas with most located in Treharris. Recently there have been a number of new businesses opening. It has good transport links with the A470 and a railway at Quakers Yard

The sense of community is strong and is focused around its community assets like the library and boys and girls club. However it not as strong as in the past and the social life of Treharris – especially its nightlife has significantly reduced.

Its population suffers above average levels of poor health however it is well served with modern care facilities for young and old. A real asset is its environment – especially around Parc Taf Bargoed which provides opportunities for local wellbeing, tourism and even energy generation.

Overview

This paper has been produced as part of a Bevan Foundation project exploring the potential to grow the everyday economy (also known as the foundational economy) in Treharris.

To grow the everyday economy, place matters. The kinds of businesses, people, community assets, services and facilities are the things that allow us to live our daily lives with a degree of comfort and safety. They are important factors in opening up both opportunities and barriers to harnessing the power of the everyday economy.

To understand them well requires an in depth understanding of a place itself. What Treharris looks like, what makes the local economy tick, its relationship with the places around it is critical for understanding the latent potential. As is what currently exists, what has been lost and what is changing. By identifying what is there, we can better understand what needs to be supported or nurtured or what problems may need to be addressed if the potential benefits of the everyday economy are to be realised.

This profile was compiled through desk research and on the ground engagement in Treharris. It provides a brief overview of its history, business profile, local services, community activity and assets.

If you would like more information on what the core principals of the everyday economy are then please read our factsheet which can be found on our website or by contacting us.

1. A brief snapshot

Situated at the southern end of the county borough of Merthyr Tydfil in the Taff valley, the community of Treharris comprises the villages of Treharris, Edwardsville and Quakers Yard, with a population of 7,705. Of these, Treharris is the largest settlement and where the majority of the businesses and community assets are located.

There was a broad consensus amongst many community stakeholders that we spoke to that Treharris has struggled over recent decades due both to the legacy of the closure of the mines and as a result of the 2008 economic crisis and subsequent downturn. However they also view the community as tight knit and one in which people will help others. Indeed, there is a sense these challenges have highlighted the ongoing importance of community involvement and engagement. Yet some spoke of Nelson (in neighbouring Caerphilly) having a better community feel and better facilities despite the smaller population (4000) and much trade is being lost there.

Similarly to a trend seen across many communities, some community members outlined their concern that whilst there is a lot of community activity, it tends to be the same people who help. It is hard to engage new people especially those who are not youths or the elderly.

Nevertheless, high spirit cannot change the fact that many foundational shops are closing such as the post office, butcher (which sold produce from a local farm co-operative) and bookmaker. Whilst there have been many new businesses opening (mainly hairdressers and takeaways) there is a worry that they are not sustainable in the long term. Another widely held belief is that the area does not get the same level of attention in terms of funding and cultural events as Merthyr (which interestingly mirrors a belief that towns like Merthyr does not get the level of attention of cities like Cardiff) despite the recent increase in funding from Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council (MTCBC).

2. A brief history

Until the mid-19th century Treharris was mainly rural in composition with a few scattered farms and communal life centred on the parish of Llanabon. The main source of employment was farming and the population would have numbered no more than approx. 500.

Industrialisation began apace after the sinking of a mineshaft by F.W Harris (hence the name Treharris or Harris' town) in 1872. This mine became Deep Navigation and was followed by Taff Merthyr in 1926 and finally Trelewis Drift in 1954. Trelewis Drift closed in 1989, Deep Navigation in 1991 and finally Taff Merthyr in 1993. It was during this rapid expansion that many of the civic amenities were built such as Treharris library (1909), Treharris park (1912), the Boys and Girls Club (1923) as well as a dance hall and cinema that was demolished in 1995 (to much local protest) and most of the terraced housing that still exists today.

The employment and wealth generated from the pits helped to create a thriving community. Fox Street, which serves as the main high street, was one of the longest in

Britain and many came from the surrounding villages to shop and socialise. The community had 4 railway stations, 3 banks and 4 shoe shops. However, heavily reliance on mining meant that their closure resulted in severe consequences for local economy. Jobs became scarce, people commuted further away and Treharris, like many ex-mining communities, suffered from increased levels of deprivation and ill health.

In 2001 Treharris was designated a Communities First area as part of the national Welsh Government scheme to regenerate areas of deprivation (according to the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation). The scheme was scrapped in 2018. More recently, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council has invested in specific regeneration projects including improving the bus stop and providing refurbishment grants to local businesses. In 2008 a new primary care centre was also built.

3. Economic profile

Treharris has 21 shops and there are 1,260 of its population in employment. It has a lower percentage of people in managerial/professional roles (14.3% compared to 17.9% national average), higher numbers in semi-skilled/unskilled roles (33.5% compared to 29.7%) and a higher number of people claiming employment benefits (12% compared to 2.5%). 7% work from home with 72% commuting between 5-30km for work. Most commute to Merthyr, Cardiff, Pontypridd, Newport and Blackwood. Earnings are below the Welsh average. Key industries of employment are manufacturing and constructing with higher levels than the national average.¹

The area has a number of business assets spread over the three communities with most being located within Treharris itself. However, many people shared their opinion that much has been lost compared to the past or compared to towns like Merthyr or Nelson. There was also worry about the recent closure of the post office, butcher (supplied by a local farming cooperative) due to retirement and bookmaker in quick succession and what that could mean for the future alongside the worry of the long term stability of the recent growth in hairdressers and takeaways. Plans are currently be considered to re-open the post office at another location (possibly the library as a temporary measure) as many people missed the services once they ended (this is a good point to highlight the importance and fragility of goods and services in our communities).

During the years the community was part of the Communities First programme it saw its rankings on the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation improve. The table below shows the overall deprivation rank of the communities for areas with 1 being the most deprived.

| | 2005 | 2019 |
|-------------------|------|------|
| Quakers Yard | 1170 | 1662 |
| Edwardsville | 613 | 777 |
| North Treharris | 236 | 585 |
| Central Treharris | 230 | 552 |

¹ <http://www.understandingwelshplaces.wales/en/compare/W38000017/>

Source – Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Community-Safety-and-Social-Inclusion/Welsh-Index-of-Multiple-Deprivation>

4. Business profile

The profile of visible enterprises with business premises in the area has seen a steady growth in some sectors. Fox Street serves as the main high street for many of the retail and commercial businesses in Treharris. At the last count, there were around 10 hairdressers/barbers within a 2 mile radius. The local Co-op store is the only large store in the community with a decent selection of fresh goods. It also has one of the few cash machine facilities but being located inside the store, and only available during opening hours of 7am-10pm. Treharris also has a Veterinary Service ([Ash Veterinary](#)), a Solicitor ([Hugh, James and Jenkins](#)) an estate agents ([Bayside Estates](#)), a gym, a couple of franchise convenience stores ([Premier](#), [Spar](#)), a school uniform shop/baby clothes shop ([Treharris Child and Baby Clothing](#)) and a seasonal/fancy goods shop.

In nearby Edwardsville there is the [Great Western](#) pub (a reference to the Great Western Railway that ran through the village) a fish and chip shop ([Troz Takeaways](#)), and a petrol station with an attached convenience store and cash point ([Gulf and Londis](#)).

Quakers Yard is home to two pubs ([Quakers Yard Inn](#) and [Glantaff Inn](#)), a franchise store ([Premier](#)), two hairdressers ([Hair By Brett](#) and [Salon 2000](#)) and a garage with a petrol station and free cashpoint (the only one in the village).

5. Banking

There were three major banks in Treharris at one point, now there is only the [Principality Building Society](#) where people can draw money only if they have an account. The Co-op on Fox Street has a cash machine facility but is only accessible during opening hours (7am-10pm), otherwise there are free cashpoints in the petrol station in Edwardsville and Quakers Yard. Many spoke of the frustration (especially now the post office on Fox Street in Treharris had closed) of needing to travel to Nelson or Merthyr to do any more complex banking and fitting this around work/commuting.

6. Transport

Treharris is characterised, like many towns in the south Wales valleys, with steep narrow streets that cling to the hillside. As such there are problems with traffic flows at peak hours as well as lack of ample residential and business parking. The main roads in the area are:

- A5054 (Cardiff Road) that runs through Edwardsville and Quakers Yard
- B4254 that runs through Treharris

With 70% plus of the population commuting 5-30 km for work it is approximately 2 miles from the A470, 9 miles from the A465 Heads of the Valleys road and approximately 13 miles from the M4. According to the 2011 census 78 % have access to a car ² compared to the MTCBC average of 70%.³

The community has a well-served bus network during the weekdays with regular services to Merthyr, Pontypridd, Nelson and Cardiff. However, in the evenings and on weekends the services are drastically reduced with many commenting on the limited services being a major problem. Many elderly make good use of their bus pass to travel out of the area to shop which causes a problem for local businesses.

There is a railway station at Quakers Yard where once there were 4 stations in the area (there is a freight line still running past the climbing centre to Fros-y-Fran but no firm plans to re-open it to passengers anytime soon). The service offers a twice hourly service up to Merthyr and down to Cardiff. The south Wales Metro plans aims to increase this service to four in the next few years.

7. Environment and tourism

Treharris has a lot of potential when it comes to its green spaces and there was a real sense that tourism had the potential to help regenerate the area. However there was a sense that more could be done to improve local facilities to increase tourism such as with accommodation and refreshment facilities. However it is important to try and make sure that any money generated through tourism is retained locally.

Opened in 1999 with funding from The Millennium Commission **Parc Taf Bargoed** encompasses around 140 hectares of parkland built on the site of three local mines (Trelewis Drift (now the site of the climbing centre), Taff Merthyr (just below it) and Deep Navigation (opposite Treharris Boys and Girls club). It is owned by the local authority and run jointly with Friends of Parc Taf Bargoed. It also hosts Taf Bargoed Angling Association, Aberfan Canoeing Club and the Motorboat Club . The park is home to many species of wildlife and has a green flag award and runs nature clubs/wildlife classes with local school children.

The Climbing Centre , opened in 1997 as the Wales Climbing Centre on the site of the former Trelewis drift mine, it has been significantly re-developed over the last decade after being taken over by Rock UK - a Christian charity that provides adventure facilities for young people. It is owned by Taf Bargoed Development Trust who lease the site to Rock UK. The centre offers a wide range of activities including climbing, archery, abseiling, bush craft and canoeing and has accommodation for 100+ people in bunk houses and conference/meeting space facilities and a café.

There are also two cycling trails in the area:

²<http://www.infobasecymru.net/IAS/themes/2011census/travel/tabular?viewId=971&geoid=78&subsetId=>

³https://www.racfoundation.org/assets/rac_foundation/content/downloadables/car%20ownership%20rates%20by%20local%20authority%20-%20december%202012.pdf

- **The Trevithick Trail** (Sustrans route 477) meets the Taff Trail just north of Treharris then runs alongside Quakers Yard.
- **The Celtic Trail** (Sustrans route 47) runs through Trelewis and Treharris on its way down to Abercynon.

8. Community Assets

Treharris has a number of community assets that act as focal points for community activities, and services as well as opportunities socialise. These services are vital given that the wellbeing assessment compiled by the local health board – Cwm Taf highlighted that people within its boarder suffer from higher levels of mental and physical health problems.⁴ They especially can help with the younger members of the community as there is a sense from engagement that there is a lack of activities for them to engage in which increases concern about incidents of anti-social behaviour. There was once a swimming pool in Edwardsville but it was closed and demolished too much local anger and frustration.

Some of the key community assets are:

Treharris Boys and Girls Club

The club was founded in 1923 through subscriptions from the local mine workers and is the oldest such organisation in the UK. The miners also paid for the upkeep and operational costs until the pits were closed. A campaign by the local community in 2001 saved it from planned demolition. The building was redeveloped in 2005 with a new roof (£650,000) and they have recently upgraded the lights and carpets. The club is owned by the local authority Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council and run by a board of trustees who lease the building from the council on a concessionary basis. The council also provide funding for a staff of 5 (part time and one cook) and some general funds. Due to reduced budgets and funding cuts the future of the building was at one point uncertain. In response the trustees have formed a company limited by guarantee with a view to becoming self-sufficient in the near future. They have received professional support and advice with this from a local solicitor and the local county voluntary council; Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil (VAMT).

The building is host to and runs a variety of activities. A youth club/drop-in centre takes place on a weekly basis. As many as 130 a week have been known attend, so the club is divided into groups to cope with demand. It also provides young people with financial advice, a job club and support for young adults in care and facing homelessness. The club also runs Duke of Edinburgh classes and promotes fitness and healthy eating with children and teenagers with their M Girls clubs by providing them with healthy meals.

Adult fitness classes at the centre include an over 50s fitness classes (as many as 80+ attendance) and table tennis. A ramblers (not affiliated) club who walk to Parc Taf

⁴ <http://www.ourcwmtaf.wales/cwm-taf-wellbeing-assessment>

Bargoed and back also use the building as a meet point and are provided with soup made by the Duke of Edinburgh members. The club also hosts a parent support network, Treharris Male Voice Choir/Curling/Boxing/Dodgeball and a Welsh language nursery (Cylch Meithrin)

The club is the hub of the community. This is perhaps evidenced by the fact that the trustees help run a quiz every Christmas to raise money for a tree (the council no longer provide this service) and for Santa to hand out sweets and chocolates – this tradition goes back to when the miners would fund it out of their pay. The local chemist manager also donates a few hundred pounds every year from the money raised in carrier bag charges.

Treharris Community Centre

Treharris Community Centre is owned by the local leisure trust – the Wellbeing Trust and managed by a core team of volunteers who generate a small amount of income for general upkeep through lottery funding and putting on activities and events as well as rent from some community groups. One main volunteers act as fundraiser, manager, organiser and cleaner with occasional help from volunteers.

Activities that are hosted and run at the centre include: Nursery Rhymes; a not-for-profit company that runs free children and toddler classes 5 times a week and a pre-school club runs out of the centre. Local Police Community Support Officers run a football class once a week for teenagers which is well attended and popular, and convenient for the police station next door which has seen reduced staffing presence in recent years. The centre also arranges pantomimes for local children after realising that children's shows tended to be in Merthyr or Nelson and transport/costs might be prohibitive.

The centre also runs rugby sessions and karate classes and has plans to start a roller disco and provide a film night.

Taf Bargoed Development Trust

The trust was setup in 1995 on the site of the former Trelewis Drift mine to help create new business and investment opportunities. The majority of the site is leased to Rock UK (a Christian youth charity) and the climbing centre (see tourism section) but the trust has a presence (known as "the tower") and also lease a number of industrial units to local businesses. One of the aims of the trust is to create jobs and investment locally. The tower has a fitness centre/gym and industrial units it leases to local businesses. Its industrial units are leased to a local tour operator (Gibbons Coaches), a company that owns and maintains classic cars, a tree surgeon and 40% of its workshop space to a company that builds and repairs furniture that it then sells locally.

The development trust is reliant on its rental income to deliver its core aims but also invests locally via sponsorship of the local rugby and bowls club. It is also able to draw on the £5,000 revenue generated by solar panels on the site to provide grants to local groups and causes of around £500 each.

Friends of Parc Taf Bargoed

The organisation completed a £500,000 hydro-electric scheme in 2016 that harnesses the power of the Taf Bargoed river to generate clean energy (480 megawatt hours – enough to power 150 homes) which it then sells back to the national grid generating around £100,000 a year. It is hoped the money will pay for wardens and staff at the park and keep it self-sufficient. However the scheme borrowed a large amount to setup thus it will be a while before the money can be re-invested locally. There have been many teething problems getting the scheme functioning and there is a sense that the board are struggling to get new younger members involved to take the project forward.

Treharris Library

The library was opened in 1909 and is managed by the Wellbeing Trust. Having once had four members of staff, it now has just one staff member, reflective of the economic pressures that persist. In addition to providing library services, it also acts as a hub and drop in centre for many local people (the staff recently arranged for one elderly member to have her cooker fixed). It distributes and organises food parcels/essentials for the homeless as well as provides some food refreshments for local children in the school holidays. The library also hosts the Communities For Work programme - the Welsh Government's successor scheme to the Communities First programme, providing support and advice on employability to jobseekers.

Fir Tree Centre

Located in Quakers Yard and run by the Fir Tree Community Organisation, the centre was built in 2014 to serve the Fir Tree estate partly through grants and partly by the housing association HAFOD who manage over 120 properties on the estate. Their aim is to improve the quality of life of people on the estate and foster a better sense of community spirit. Other than one paid member of staff the centre is run exclusively by volunteers.

The centre has a café which offers food and coffee throughout the day and has full wifi access and offers the ability to book parties and events. A meeting room/conference room that can be rented out at £15 an hour. It encourages walkers from the Taff Trail/Trevithick Trail who can park their bikes and use the facilities including a decking area that overlooks the valley.

St Johns Ambulance Hall on Thomas Street (next to the fire station) run first aid classes, Scout and Brownies clubs as well as martial arts classes and have guest speaker nights (recently had Roy Noble)

9. Health and wellbeing

Treharris is part of the Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board, an area where people have some of the lowest life and healthy life expectancy in Wales.

In line with wider demographic trends, Treharris has an aging population. However, the proportion of people aged 75 and over is lower than the Welsh average (7.1% compared to 9.2%) therefore it is well served by two local care homes: **Ty Bargoed Newydd** and **Pantanas** care home complex. Ty Bargoed Newydd opened in 2014 after the demolition of Ty Bargoed House on the same site in 2010 which had been a nursing home. This facility is owned and run by the local authority. It has a high number of staff from the local area and the assumption is it pays a living wage (though this is not confirmed) and the general sense is it is well connected to the local community. **Pantanas** is a privately owned care home that can house up to 30 people and is run by Broadway Care Centre Ltd.

There are 21 GPs and dentists for the population and medical facilities In the locality include **Treharris Primary Care Centre** located at the bottom of Fox Street overlooking Parc Taf Bargoed . Built in 2008 the centre is a modern facility with disabled access and offers a surgery, pharmacy and a physiotherapist in one location. The centre has 5 GPs, 3 nurses and a healthcare assistant and is open from 8:30am until 6pm. There is also a dental clinic on Bargoed Terrace. The nearest major hospitals are Prince Charles Hospital in Merthyr Tydfil (9.5 miles away) and Royal Glamorgan in Llantrisant (11.5 miles away)

The community is blessed with many assets for people to keep fit and healthy and act as social hubs that can strengthen the ties between people in the community. Whilst some are well used there is a perception that these assets could be better utilised and promoted and also that many do not engage with the social clubs as in the past.

10. Faith, cultural and sporting life

There are a number of faith groups active in the community that offer vital services despite declining religious affiliations or attendance. Those that do attend also tend to be elderly who rely on the social aspect that faith groups provide. There does not appear to be any faith groups other than Christian and they include **St Mathias Church** which hosts People Together; a social club for over 50s which draws large crowds (50+) from beyond the local area including from Troedyrhiw and Merthyr Tydfil. A scout club run from a building behind the church and the Mothers Union (a Christian movement) helps the homeless out of the church.

There is the sense that the nightlife in the community is not what it once was (there were around 13 pubs/clubs now reduced to 6). On social occasions many (especially the young) now go to Merthyr/Cardiff and a lot of the local businesses are suffering as a result. Some of the main pubs are:

- Navi – A large Victorian hotel situated in the centre of Treharris on the high street. It was recently refurbished as part of a wider regeneration scheme. Offers meals during the day and is a pub in the evenings. There is a sense that attendance, especially on the weekends is far lower than it used to be/should be for a once thriving area
- Cwtch – a small pub in the centre of Treharris. A feeling that it is a little unwelcoming to non-regulars

- Danygraig Labour Club – again struggling to attract people at large events (such as rugby matches) and perhaps the perception is the prices are too expensive
- Glantaff Inn - situated in Quakers Yard and popular with locals they can hire out the pub for parties/events and even have Treharris male voice choir singing to guests on certain days

The community has a large and varied sporting life though not like it once was – many spoke of the fact that although busy the clubs are not as well attended as in the past. A local cricket team, a once thriving pool league and the swimming baths in Edwardsville (demolished in 2008 to much local anger) have all gone. The main clubs, unsurprisingly, revolve around football and rugby but the community centres and parks offer opportunities to engage in a wider variety of sporting activities. The clubs are also places where local people can meet and socialise which can only strengthen community cohesion – many people stressed how the clubs build relationships where everyone knows one another. Clubs include **Treharris Western Athletic** – The football club plays its matches in Parc Taff Bargoed and has junior and senior as well as male and female teams. The club is the oldest in south Wales having formed in 1889 and a founding member of the Welsh Football League. In 2018 it moved to a new astroturf all weather pitch in Parc Taf Bargoed with new dressing rooms and stand. **Treharris Phoenix RFC** also around 11 teams from mini and juniors through to seniors.

11. Housing

Approximately 45% of the housing stock in the area is made up of terraced housing, 26% semi-detached and 25% detached.⁵ Treharris has a higher percentile of married with children (24.1% compared to an average of 20.3%) and a significantly lower proportion of single people (23.2% compared to 30.3%). The majority of homes are privately owned (75.2% compared to 67.4%).

However, there are 338 homes in the area allocated as social housing with the most being owned by Merthyr Valley Homes 138 and Merthyr Tydfil Housing Association (Tai Merthyr) 116.⁶ These organisations have the potential to act as anchor organisations by generating income and revenue locally through employment and procurement. The areas where the social landlords are most active in are:

- **Cilhaul** – built in the 1930s and located above Fox Street overlooking Park Taf Bargoed. The main social landlord in this area is Merthyr Valleys Homes. They recently refurbished the roofs of many of their properties and used local construction firms.
- **Fir Tree** – an estate built in the 1950s in Quakers Yard and the main social landlord is **Hafod** who manage around 120 houses. They part fund the community centre in Fir Tree and are engaged in many outreach projects in the estate

⁵<http://www.infobasecymru.net/IAS/themes/people.communitiesandequalities/housing/profile?profileid=399>

⁶<https://www.merthyr.gov.uk/media/1596/merthyr-tydfil-lmha-2014.pdf>