

FHM recommends:

Coal House

★★★★

Acorn Media DVD, 291 minutes, £19.99 from www.acornmediauk.com or 0845 123 2312

It's a hard life

No central heating, no running water, no gas or electricity. In 2007 three Welsh volunteer families lived for three weeks in a coalminer's cottage, living their lives as in 1927. The men and boys over 14 had to work in the mines and the families had to live on their wages: about 10 shillings (5p) a day for underground workers and half that for surface workers. This seems to have been just enough to feed a family of up to eight until the man was injured and couldn't work, and of course there was no minimum wage and no social security. The only concession

to modern life that the guinea pigs were allowed was access to modern medicine if they needed it.

The women had to wrestle with the coal-fired cooking range – the only source of heat or boiling water – and negotiate with the grocer and butcher. The men were put to work in a real working mine using the tools of the time, which they had to supply, and replace, out of their own pockets. The children were taught at a 1927 local school.

Although not everybody will have ancestors who

'The men had to work in the mines and the families live on their wages: 5p a day'



Three families swap modern luxuries for the harsh reality of life as a coalmining family

mined, the living conditions seen here were replicated in every industrial centre so if you want to understand the lives of your working-class ancestors, this double DVD should be on your shelf.

WIN!
See page 95

Rhyl: A Journey through Time

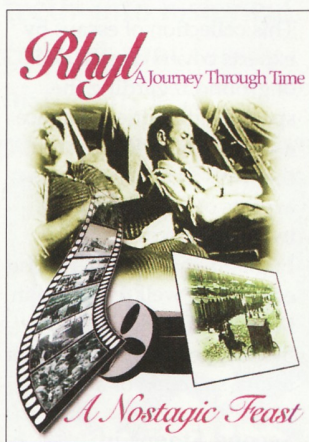
★★★★

Screen Icon DVD, 50 minutes, £12.99 from www.ukhistorystore.com or 01978 366060

Beside the seaside

Thanks to the activities of several local film-makers over the past hundred years, there's plenty of archive material charting the history of the seaside resort of Rhyl in north Wales. An early film from 1899 shows a group of Victorian children on the sands, and Wild West showman 'Buffalo Bill' arrives at Rhyl with his 500-strong horse travelling Rodeo Show in 1903. In the 1920s, an Avro biplane gives pleasure flights, taking off from Rhyl beach. Probably the same plane was used to get aerial shots, capturing moving pictures of the pier.

Other things we learn are that the first council houses were built in Rhyl, as was the first heated mixed swimming pool in 1905, and that its first cinema opened



in 1906, with the original silvered screen. During World War I Rhyl's boarding houses were used to billet troops – mostly Canadians – who popularised dance halls. In World War II, Rhyl's beaches had defences built against air and sea invasion. But even in the 1930s and 1940s Rhyl still hosted holidaymakers. The Fifties saw the arrival of the first day-trippers, taking advantage of the new seafront and promenade. A delightful step back in time.

Story of Welsh Rugby

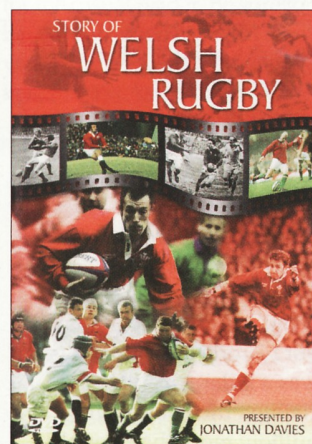
★★

Green Umbrella DVD, 170 minutes, £14.99 from www.dukevideo.com or 01624 640000

This sporting life

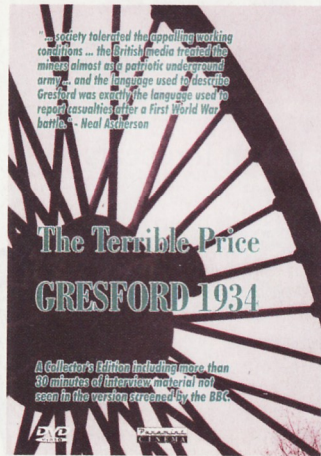
Presented by Jonathan Davies, former rugby international and now a pundit, this video offers archive film and still photos from the turn of the 20th century to the present day, and links the ups and downs of Welsh rugby to the fortunes of Welsh national and political life. In this video, we learn how the game took hold in pit villages following the influx of country-dwellers looking for work in the 1880s and 1890s. Welsh rugby was a 'working class' recreation in the pit valleys until teams improved sufficiently to take on 'middle class' English teams (this may be a simplification).

Game reminiscences are provided by names like Dai Smith, Gareth Edwards and Phil Bennett, described as



'the names that have become the very fabric of Welsh history'. You do need some knowledge of rugby to follow these commentaries and there is some detailed play analysis that may be tedious to non-followers.

For enthusiasts it is a joy! The highlights offered include the 'epic' defeat of the touring All Blacks in 1905, the similarly epic 13–12 victory against the same opponents in 1935, and Cardiff's 'even more remarkable victory' against them in 1935.



The Terrible Price – Gresford 1934

★★★
Panamint DVD, 60 minutes, £15.99 from www.panamint.co.uk or 01506 834936

Disaster underground

Originally shown on BBC2 Wales on the 70th anniversary of the event, this video retells the story of the 1934 Gresford mining disaster when an underground explosion claimed the lives of 266 miners (there's a roll of those who died at www.welshcoalmines.co.uk). Some shouldn't have been there – they had swapped shifts so they could go to the Wrexham vs Tranmere Rovers football game on the Saturday.

Gresford is near Wrexham and, at the time, had an exemplary safety reputation, although it later emerged that some records had been falsified. It was also said that miners had been taking canaries down because of gas, but this was denied. The explosion occurred at 2am on Saturday 22nd September, during the mid-shift break. It could not have been a loud explosion since local residents in surrounding villages had to be told. An enquiry resulted in the employers being charged with 42 offences and convicted on eight. The fine was £140.

This is the Collector's Edition, with an extra 30 minutes of further interviews with former miners and miners' families.

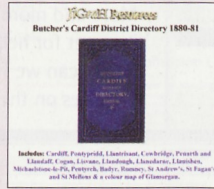
DVD reviews by James Taylor

Welsh CD round-up

Butcher's Cardiff District Directory 1880–81

£11 (plus p&tp). From Mr G J Hadfield, JiGraH Resources, 85 Heythrop Drive, Acklam, Middlesbrough, Cleveland TS5 80X. ☎ 01642 288937; 🌐 www.jigrah.co.uk. CD presented in web browser; Mac and PC compatible. No search facility.

This book contains directories of streets, private residents and traders and professionals for Cardiff itself and for surrounding towns, and similar information for a number of villages near the city, while narrative descriptions of all the places featured help us to visualise life in south Wales some 130 years ago. Anyone visiting the regenerated Cardiff Bay, or Tiger Bay as those from the city affectionately call it, will today find it an area of smart restaurants and leisure facilities. However, for many years it was the world's major coal exporting seaport. This is reflected in the street directory's pages, with Bute Street being home to a large number of coal and iron exporters, ship brokers and bonded stores. Meanwhile, the trade directory even lists a number of individuals who earned their living as stevedores.



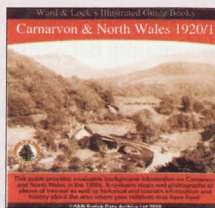
Carnarvon & North Wales 1920/1: Ward & Lock's Illustrated Guide

£17.45 (plus p&tp). From S&N Genealogy Supplies, West Wing, Manor Farm, Chilmark, Salisbury SP3 5AF. ☎ 01722 716121; 🌐 www.genealogysupplies.com. CD presented in Acrobat PDF; Mac and PC compatible. Fully bookmarked and searchable.

This guide was aimed at tourists who would have taken their holidays in north Wales, and contains extensive details of the area's coastal resorts, as well as inland destinations such as Snowdon. It should be remembered that north Wales was a popular destination for folks from Lancashire, who would stay there in the 'wakes weeks'.

Narrative information, photographs, maps and street plans show places such as Carnarvon, Bangor and the Isle of Anglesey, while as the gateway to north Wales, Chester also features extensively.

The advertisements for establishments such as the Empire Hotel at Llandudno, as well as the lists of attractions at such resorts – bathing, clubs, golf, places of worship, tennis and croquet – give a good indication as to how our ancestors might have enjoyed their annual holiday nearly a century ago.



Cardiganshire Census Bundle: 1841, 1851, 1861, 1871, 1891 and 1901

£51.80 plus p&tp. S&N Genealogy Supplies, West Wing, Manor Farm, Chilmark, Salisbury SP3 5AF. ☎ 01722 716121; 🌐 www.genealogysupplies.com. CD presented in Acrobat PDF; Mac and PC compatible. Fully bookmarked.

These sets are available individually, or as a 'bundle' which is significantly discounted. While an 1881 set is not currently available, it might appear in the near future.

The 1891 images have been digitised from microfiche, and lack sharpness. This contrasts with the splendid quality of the images for the other years, digitised from premium quality microfilm. The very faint 1841 census pages are notoriously difficult to scan, but here are crystal clear.

But do these sets represent good value compared to their online equivalents? My belief is that those researchers whose ancestors moved around the country might find the fully indexed online census more useful. However, anyone who is researching a specific county is likely to find CDs more convenient to use, particularly those with a

Cardiganshire 1891 Census



Slater's Directory of Monmouthshire 1868

£7.50 (plus p&tp). From Mr G J Hadfield, JiGraH Resources, 85 Heythrop Drive, Acklam, Middlesbrough, Cleveland TS5 80X. ☎ 01642 288937; 🌐 www.jigrah.co.uk. Presented in web browser; Mac and PC compatible. No search facility.

This directory includes narrative descriptions of the county's main towns, as well as details of traders and gentry in these towns and the county's villages. Unfortunately, 1868

predates the issue of comprehensive street directories, so the researcher will not find their more humble ancestors therein.

As with other directories, this volume paints a vivid picture of life in this county in the mid-19th century. Farming and coal mining appear to have been two principal ways of earning a living, while taverns and beer houses proliferate. However, each town had at least one temperance bar to provide an alternative way of spending one's leisure hours, while non-conformist places of worship also seem to have had a firm hold on the Welsh community at this time.

CD reviews by Paul Gaskell

