

Ton Pentre Workmen's Hall and Institute

The Institute in Church Road, adjacent to the Crawshay Bailey Estate Office was officially opened in September 1895. Prior to its opening a meeting was held at which Mr. William Jenkins J.P. performed the official opening and a number of speeches and songs were given. Many of the speeches applauded the workmen's desire to educate themselves in their spare time as opposed to spending their time in the public houses of the area.

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The Rhondda Chronicle newspaper report of the opening of the 'Maindy and Eastern Workmen's Institute', (as it was then known after two of the local collieries whose workmen paid for the Institute), gives us an insight into the formation of such an institution in the nineteenth century. It describes how prior to the passing of the Education Act workmen of the District paid for the education of their children through a system of 'poundage' whereby a penny was deducted from every pound they earned. With the introduction of free education a meeting was held by the workmen of Maindy and Eastern collieries, whereupon they decided to continue with the poundage system in order to fund the building of a workmen's institute. According to the report a site containing two shops and a number of cottages was purchased for £1,200 and the buildings demolished to make way for the institute, plans were drawn up by Abel Richards and the building erected by Alban Richards. The original hall consisted of a ground floor with a news room, refreshment room and caretakers room and a first floor library and committee room whilst in the attic were two bedrooms and storerooms.

With the success of the Institute it was decided to expand the original premises and thus in 1904 a workmen's hall attached to the Institute was opened. Mrs. Jenkins of Ystradfechan performed the opening ceremony and the key to the hall was presented to her by the daughter of the architect Jacob Rees. By 1908 the trustees had begun to rent the hall out to a private company for the showing of 'animated pictures' or early silent movies. Very quickly the committee and trustees of the hall realised the profits that could be made from this enterprise and saw it as 'their duty

The Reading Rooms



that Institute members reaped the rewards'.
As such they started to show moving pictures themselves, using the profits gained to set up a relief fund to 'alleviate the distress of sick and disabled workmen'.

The Library



The cinema was converted in 1931 with the installation of a 'talkie' machine enabling it to show talking pictures, developments such as 'Cinemascope' and stereophonic sound were also pioneered in the Rhondda at the Hall. The Institute and Hall suffered in the 1940's with the closure of the local mines and the subsequent dwindling of revenue from miners' contributions. Changing it's name to the Ton Pentre Workmen's Hall and Institute it continued to show films until 1971 whereupon it changed its usage to a bingo hall. This itself closed in 1989, leaving the Hall derelict until in 1991 when it was reopened as a cinema under the new name of 'The Phoenix'.