

Chwiorydd y Chwareli | Slate Sisters

Merched y Streic Fawr | Women of
the Great Strike

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DIWRNOD
RHYNGWLADOL Y
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INTERNATIONAL
WOMEN'S DAY 2026



Côr Merched y Penrhyn c.1902. Llun drwy ganiatad Amgueddfa Cenedlaethol Cymru / Photo by permission of Amgueddfa Cenedlaethol Cymru

Ar Ddiwrnod Rhyngwladol y Menywod, daw'r cyfle i gydnabod cyfraniad pwysig merched Dyffryn Ogwen yn ystod Streic Fawr y Penrhyn (1900–03), anghydfod diwydiannol gyda'r hiraf a chwerwaf yn hanes gwledydd Prydain.

Am dair blynedd hirfaith, rhwygwyd cymunedau clos Dyffryn Ogwen gan ddrwgdeimlad, cyni a thlodi. Erbyn heddiw, mae hanes yr anghyfiawnder a'r dioddefaint wedi dod yn rhan o lôn gwerin Cymru ac mae iddo le amlwg yn ein diwylliant poblogaidd. Er hynny, ers dros gan mlynedd, mae stori'r streic wedi cael ei hadrodd yn bennaf drwy weithredoedd dynion. Mae profiadau menywod – gwragedd, merched a mamau – wedi cael eu hepgor o'r llyfrau hanes, er bod eu cyfraniad wedi bod yn ganolog i gynnal eu teuluoedd a'u cymunedau yn y cyfnod hwn.

On International Women's Day, we recognise the often-overlooked role of women during the Great Penrhyn Strike (1900–03), one of the longest and most bitter industrial disputes in British history.

For three years, the strike tore apart the close-knit communities of Dyffryn Ogwen. Families endured poverty, division and hardship, and the injustice of this period has become deeply embedded in Welsh cultural memory. Yet for over a century, the story of the strike has largely been told through the actions of men. The experiences of women – wives, daughters and mothers – have been sidelined, despite their central role in sustaining their families and communities.

Roedd menywod yn rhan allweddol o'r streic. Roedd tua thraean o'r protestwyr yn fenywod. Un ohonynt oedd Mary Ellen Parry, merch 22 oed oedd yn byw ym Mhenybryn, Bethesda. Mewn ymateb i'r caledi, bu Mary'n arwain côr o ferched a deithiodd ledled gwledydd Prydain am ddwy flynedd, gan godi swm sy'n cyfateb i tua £325,000 heddiw i gefnogi teuluoedd y streicwyr.

Mae stori Mary hefyd yn adlewyrchu profiad ehangach llawer o ferched. Pan ddaeth y streic i ben, ni chaniatawyd i'w gŵr ddychwelyd i'r chwarel, gan orfodi'r teulu i adael Bethesda a symud i Llangynwyd ger Maesteg. Gorfodwyd cannoedd o ferched a'u teuluoedd i symud i chwilio am fywyd gwell.

Roedd menywod hefyd ar flaen y gad mewn protestiadau. Ganwyd a magwyd Elizabeth Williams ym Methesda, a phriododd chwarelwr yn 1898. Yn ystod Haf 1901, gyda'i mab dwyflwydd oed yn ei breichiau, dilynodd Elizabeth rai o swyddogion y chwarel i'w cartrefi yn Rachub. Cafodd ei dwyn gerbron y llys, lle honnodd cynrychiolydd yr Arglwydd Penrhyn, perchennog y chwarel, fod "merched Bethesda yn waeth na'r dynion.

Nid brwydr ddu a gwyn oedd Streic Fawr y Penrhyn ac mae profiadau trawmatig gwagedd y chwarelwyr a ddychwelodd i'r gwaith yr un mor bwysig ag enghreifftiau o wragedd streicwyr yn protestio. Yn 1902, llewygodd Sarah Hughes o Landygái ar ôl i griw o wragedd ymosod arni mewn siop ym Methesda. Cafodd eraill, gan gynnwys Margaret Morris a Catherine Roberts o Fethesda, eu carcharu ym Mangor am werthu rhyw gan amlygu pa mor enbyd oedd amgylchiadau llawer o ferched.

Ymhlith casgliadau'r Penrhyn ym Mhrifysgol Bangor mae toreth o lythyrau a anfonwyd at Arglwydd Penrhyn gan wragedd cyffredin; rhai yn ymbil am ddatrysiad i'r sefyllfa ddyrys tra'r oedd eraill yn honni mai ef oedd yn gyfrifol am nifer o achosion lleol o hunanladdiad. Collodd llawer o fenywod hefyd ffynonellau incwm pwysig, megis golchi dillad, gwnïo a rhoi llety i chwarelwyr sengl.

Ar Ddiwrnod Rhyngwladol y Menywod eleni, rydym yn cofio gwydnwch a dewrder menywod Dyffryn Ogwen. Roedd eu lleisiau'n rhan hanfodol o Streic Fawr y Penrhyn, ac mae eu straeon yn haeddu cael eu clywed.

Women were active participants in the strike. Around a third of those who protested were women. One such woman was Mary Ellen Parry, a 22-year-old living in Penybryn, Bethesda, when the quarrymen were locked out in 1900. In response to widespread hardship, she helped lead a women's choir that toured Britain for two years, raising the equivalent of around £325,000 in today's money to support striking families.

Mary's story also reflects the wider experience of displacement caused by the strike. When it ended, her husband was not allowed to return to the quarry, forcing the family to move away from Bethesda to Llangynwyd near Maesteg. Hundreds of women and their families were similarly uprooted in the search for a better life.

Women were also at the forefront of protest. Elizabeth Williams, born and raised in Bethesda, married a quarryman in 1898. In the summer of 1901, she followed quarry officials from the quarry to their homes in Rachub, carrying her two-year-old son in her arms. She was later brought before the court, where a representative of Lord Penrhyn, the quarry owner, claimed that "the women of Bethesda were worse than the men".

The strike was not a simple story of right and wrong. Women whose husbands returned to work faced hostility and violence too. In 1902, Sarah Hughes of Llandygái collapsed after being attacked by local women in a Bethesda shop. Others, including Margaret Morris and Catherine Roberts of Bethesda, were imprisoned in Bangor for selling sex, a stark reminder of the desperate circumstances many women faced.

Letters held at Bangor University reveal the emotional toll of the strike on women – from pleas for a settlement to accusations that Lord Penrhyn was responsible for local suicide cases. Many women also lost vital sources of income, such as washing, sewing and lodging single quarrymen.

This International Women's Day, we remember the resilience, courage and hardship of the women of Dyffryn Ogwen. Their voices were essential to the Great Penrhyn Strike, and their stories deserve to be heard.



ELIN TOMOS

Mae Elin Tomos yn gynhyrchydd, hanesydd a 'sgwennwr o Eryri. Ers bron i ddeg mlynedd mae Elin wedi bod yn ymchwilio i hanes cymdeithasol y diwydiant llechi Cymreig gan ganolbwyntio'n bennaf ar brofiadau merched. Cyhoeddwyd ei chyfrol gyntaf 'Y Mae Y Lle Yn Iach' Chwarel Dinorwig 1875-1900 ym 2020. Mae Elin yn gweithio fel cynhyrchydd i gwmni teledu, Cwmni Da yng Nghaernarfon. Yn ddiweddar cafodd Elin ei henwi ar restr 30 o dan 30 cylchgrawn hanes y BBC. Rhestr yw hon sy'n cydnabod cyfraniad sylweddol pobl dan 30 oed i hanes.

Elin Tomos is a producer, historian and writer from Eryri. For almost ten years Elin has been researching the social history of the Welsh slate industry focusing mainly on the experiences of women. Her first book 'Y Mae Y Lle Yn Iach' Chwarel Dinorwic 1875-1900 was published in 2020. Elin works as a producer for a television company, Cwmni Da in Caernarfon. Elin was recently named on the BBC history magazine's 30 under 30 list. This is a list that recognises the significant contribution of people under the age of 30 to history



FFAITH YMIS

Fact of the month

