

PONTYBODKIN HILL



Pontybodkin Hill today with the former Laura Ashley factory in the foreground, now converted to an industrial packaging factory providing a service for adhesive and sealant manufacturers.

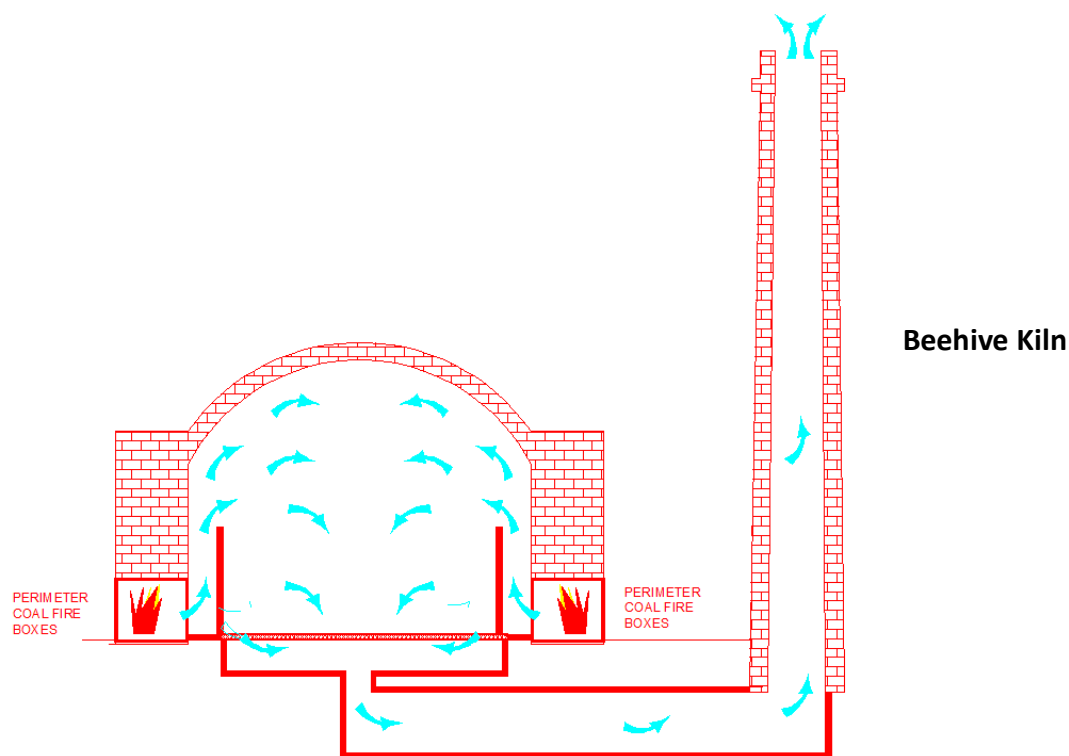
When you drive up Pontybodkin Hill, it is hard to imagine that it was the industrial heart of Leeswood in the mid-1800s. At the bottom of the hill, it started with Leeswood Green Colliery, which eventually worked its way underground towards the Flue Pit behind Heol-Y-Goron and the more recent Phoenix Colliery, now reclaimed as Phoenix Park behind the Community Centre. Coal extraction at Leeswood Green led to the development of the adjacent Brickworks and Erith Oil Mineral Co. Oil was distilled from the oil rich Cannel coal seam. The railway came at the same time, along a line parallel to Pontybodkin Hill, behind the bungalows leading to a junction and sidings at the bottom of the hill linking to the Mold/Treuddyn and Brymbo Line. The oil distillation was short lived and the brickworks continued as Erith Brick and Terra Cotta Works. Following various changes in ownership, it closed in the 1970s as a distribution yard for Hepworths clay pipes. The photograph below shows the works in 1958 with six beehive kilns.



Pontybodkin Hill Brick and Terracotta Works

Pontybodkin Hill Erith Brick and Terracotta works

The photograph shows the Beehive kilns; this type of kiln was first used in a simple form to produce charcoal for smelting metals and for quicklime production. They developed into the more sophisticated ones shown in the photograph. These kilns used convection to evenly distribute the heat through the kiln.



The coal fires had to be maintained 24 hours a day, for four or five days, to fire clay to manufacture bricks and other clay products. There was no forced ventilation and setting up the convection airflow through the kiln was a skilled job, usually done by a specialist worker covering a local area.

The railway came to serve the industry, travelling alongside Pontybodkin Hill and County Road under the bridge at the top of Constitution Hill, which remains on the bend. It then turned alongside the Dingle, behind the petrol station and over a (now demolished) bridge crossing the Mold Wrexham Road heading for Padeswood and the Chester/Mold line. This branch had steep gradients and there was a derailment on the Dingle section of the track in July 1934. This branch of the track never reopened. The Mold/Treuddyn branch became the favoured route.

The motor vehicle then dominated rural transport and Davies Coaches established a depot on Pontybodkin Hill; this remains there today with the Davies family, in their fifth generation, serving the local community and beyond.

The Laura Ashley factory was built in 1985 and closed in 1990, leaving a legacy in the village with the Patchwork and Quilting club and the chain of office presented by Laura Ashley's son to the Community Council.

This article was inspired by Mrs Davies of Davies Coaches, who kindly provided the copy of the photograph of the brickworks on Pontybodkin Hill.