

Onllwyn by John Crook

The sounds of the valley come easiest to mind

The shrill scream to end the shift.

The clank of the coupling engine to the trams

On and on until the penultimate tram was connected to the final one.

The buckets or little drams of waste

Depending on which tip you were looking at,

Tipping their contents and hearing the pebbly rumble

As the unwanted slag added either to the black pyramid - the little drams

Or the straggling line of serrated tip going up the mountain - the buckets.

My School stood at the base of the pyramid

Fortunately there was no secret Spring oozing into

The middle of the pyramid - fortunately for us I mean

Or Onllwyn would have been infamous before Aberfan.

There were seven collieries in the valley.

Cefn Coed nearest to Neath

Then Crynant and after Crynant Seven Sisters

Up to Onllwyn No 1 then Onllwyn No 3.

I never did find out what happened to Onllwyn number two.

But between numbers one and three we had the Rhas

Then on up to the sharp end of the valley to Banwen

Onllwyn also had the Washery and the Brickworks.

The coal was washed in the Washery and the first lagoon I knew

Was black, viscous and very dirty.

John Lewis fell in one night

We fished him out and took him into a warm unbricked up kiln

In the Brickworks. He dried out stiff. We walked him home

But did not stay,reckoning, rightly, I think

Our rescue would have been subsumed

In awkward questions.

On the other side of the tip that meandered up the mountain

Were the worked out drift mines of yesteryear.

We would make lamps out of tin cans string and candles

But only the boldest would adventure far enough

To have to rely only on our home-made lanterns.