The first Ebbw Vale Iron Works emerged out of a partnership established in 1789 between Walter Watkins, of Danygraig and former High Sheriff of Breconshire, his son-in-law Charles Cracroft, a capitalist in a small way residing at Sunny Bank, Crickhowell and Jeremiah Homfray an iron master who had connections with Penydarren Iron Works at Merthyr.

Walter Watkins was the owner of a forge at Glangrwney. The lack of an adequate supply of pig iron for the forge led the partnership to lease land at Pen y cae farm, Ebwy Fawr in the parish of Aberystwith from John Miles, they also had permission to erect furnaces.

Situated on the northern outcrop of the South Wales Coal Basin the raw material for iron making could be found in abundance in the Ebbw Valley and, at first, was easily accessible.

Coal and iron ore were obtained by ‘patch’ workings and by drifts and levels. Limestone was transported by mules from Llanelly Hill, near Blaenavon.

Thus, a single blast furnace and casting shop was constructed against the hillside near the river with a weekly output of between 25 – 30 tons of pig iron per week. It led the local inhabitants to call its emergence and the community which grew with it, ‘Pen y cae’ after the farm.

But from manorial times the locality was referred as ‘Ebby Fawr’ then later ‘Glyn Ebbw’. But the usage and anglicised reference by the ironmasters to their enterprise as ‘The Ebbw Vale Furnace’ brought acceptance of the name from which the Works and township was to develop.

In 1793 the original partnership was dissolved and Homfray was joined by the Harfords, capitalists and Quakers from Bristol.

By 1796 the entire operation was taken over by the Harfords.
History of Ebbw Vale Steelworks - 1800's

1818 – 1820 - The forge, and extensive iron bottom puddling furnaces for refining iron were introduced and rolling mills for bars and plates were built. The Sirhowy Iron Works and Colleries which had been in operation since 1760 was acquired. The single furnace operation was expanded and four blast cupola furnaces were subsequently built.

1829 – 35 - These years heralded the start of the railway era. Ebbw Vale Works was well equipped to supply rails for Liverpool and Manchester railway and the Stockton & Darlington Railway Co.

A tunnel for a horse tram road was driven for over a mile under the hillside to the Sirhowy Works enabling iron to be brought to the Ebbw Vale forge speedily. The Works also introduced steam locomotives on its own tram roads.

1842 - Through some commercial mischance Messrs Harford’s business dealings in the southern states of the USA took a set back. The Ebbw Vale Works was taken over by Trustees.

1844 - The Company was bought by Messrs Abraham Darby & Co of Coalbrookdale. The partners were – Abraham Darby, Henry Dickenson, Joseph Robinson, J Tothill and Thomas Brown the latter being designated managing partner.

1848 – The lease of the Victoria Iron Works, was acquired from Lord Llanover (Sir Benjamin Hall). The works was located two miles south consisted of three blast furnaces puddling mills built in 1836 by Monmouthshire Iron & Coal Company.

1850 – Great economy in blast furnace practice was achieved at the works. George Parry, Messrs Darby’s chemist, was the first to adopt the cup and cone successfully on blast furnaces.

1852. The Ebbw Vale Co bought the Abersychan Works consisting of six blast furnaces.

1853. Iron ore fields were purchased in the Brendon Hills Somerset followed by the acquisition of ore fields in Bilbao, Spain and the Forest of Dean.

1855 The Company expanded and acquired extensive interests in Pontypool comprising of four furnaces, a forge, tinplate works and collieries.

1857 George Parry of Ebbw Vale conducted experiments in converting iron into superior wrought iron or steel. He was one of a number of chemists who successfully produced a process. It was Henry Bessemer who patented one which was commercially viable and afterwards it was adopted at Ebbw Vale. The Steel Age had arrived.

1863 Approximately 100,000 tons of rail and merchant bars were being produced per annum. Apart from the Iron Works and Collieries at Ebbw Vale, Sirhowy, Victoria, Abersychan, Pontypool and Abercarn it also had six wharfs at Newport, the Hematite mine in the Forest of Dean and Spathic ore mines in Brendon Hills. At various works there were 19 blast furnaces, 192 puddling furnaces, 99 heating furnaces and 1200 workman’s houses. The colliery leases comprised of 7500 acres of land.

1864-1871 Darby converted the whole enterprise into a limited Company to be called The Ebbw Vale Company Ltd under the general management of William Adams before later restructuring it to form The Ebbw Vale Steel Iron and Coal Company Ltd. He also
erected a new blast engine, the most powerful blowing engine in the world to serve four of the Ebbw Vale furnaces, new rolling mills and a Bessemer converter shop which produced the first steel ingots. It was also the first time 'spiegel-eisen' (mirror iron) was successfully manufactured and commercially produced at Ebbw Vale for use in high carbon steels.

1880-1883 The Coppee system of cooking ovens became fully operational. The Sirhowy furnaces were blown out and two large modern furnaces were erected at Victoria.

1892 The business ran into difficulties. Changes were made to the Company’s Board and to local management. The head office of the company was also switched from Manchester to Ebbw Vale.

1897 A spring making plant was set up in Ebbw Vale. One of only a few at the time in South Wales.

1898 - In order to make use of the scrap made in the Bessemer department and to meet the demand for ‘Siemens steel’ (largely used in the manufacturing of tinplate), two Siemens open hearth furnaces were erected.

**History of Ebbw Vale Steelworks - 1900 to present**

1904 - A new blast furnace on the most modern American lines came into service at Victoria with a weekly output of 2300 tons.

1907 - Iрthlingborough Ore Field was acquired.

1911 - Despite working to full capacity and with little warning the works was closed. The chief reason given was cheap foreign imports.

1912 - The works was reopened and a new sheet mill erected. This provided a regular market from part of its output of steel bars by the manufacture of galvanised steel sheets. Output was 600 tons per week. On May 25 the foundation stone was laid for the new general offices. The architect was F.J Veall of Cardiff.

1914 - With the outbreak of the war the company was the first of the bigger employers in Great Britain to grant an allowance to the dependants of all those who joined up.

1915 - A shell factory was established in the fitting shop which employed mostly female labour.

1918 - At the instigation of the government, work commenced on two additional furnaces at Victoria both capable of producing 2,750 tons per week.

1921 - The post war boom was at an end.

The heavy capital investment expected between 1918 – 1921, in expectation of continued prosperity, did not materialise. The Company made a profit of £399,388. It was the last time it would do so.

1922 - The restructure of industry in Europe following the devastation of the war enabled continental countries to undercut Britain’s world markets. Prices for pig iron and steel fell sharply.
1925 - The iron and steel plant at Ebbw Vale was working at 75% of its capacity. The Siemens furnaces closed.

1929 - Up to the 12 months ended March 1929 the Company had produced 6,000,000 tons of coke, 364,871 tons of pig iron, 248,379 tons of steel, nearly reaching the production of 1920.

Investments in new machinery included new electrically operated rolling mills, replacing steam and a new hot metal receiver capable of holding 1,500 tons, the world’s largest, which was installed at the Bessemer department.

Despite the optimism, the steel plant was closed, this time permanently. A number of departments were left operation, for example, the sheet mills and collieries but 4,000 men found themselves out of work causing great distress in the community.

1935 - Following a period of intense speculation, Sir William Firth, Chairman of Richard Thomas & Co Ltd, made the announcement that his company had purchased assets of the Ebbw Vale Works where the first continuous hot strip mill outside the USA would be located.

1938 - The new works was commissioned. The continuous hot strip mill with a capacity of 600,000 tons per annum and facilities for sheet and tinplate manufacture was the first integrated Steel Works in Europe.

1945 - The fusion of Richard Thomas & Company Ltd and Baldwins Ltd was finalised. It created one of the largest companies in the UK.

1947 - The first electrolytic tinplating line in Europe was commissioned at Ebbw Vale.

1949 - The Government of the day nationalised the steel industry.

1953 - The Steel Industry was denationalised although Messrs R. T & B, Ebbw Vale Works remained in state ownership.

1961 - The first UK top blown LDAC process was introduced at Ebbw Vale.

1967 - The British Steel Corporation was established. RT & B Ebbw Vale Works formed part of the South Wales Group.

1970 - British Steel Corporation announced a 10 year development plan which included a statement on Ebbw Vale that proposed the cessation of iron and steel making operations at the works.

1972 - The Coke ovens closed on 16/03/72. Work commenced removing a 19th Century tip (Drill ground) containing nearly 500,000 tons of material. This work enabled the extensions to be built to the cold mill.

1973 - As part of a restructuring of the steel industry, a new tinplate complex was announced for Ebbw Vale Works.

1974 - A new hydrochloric Pickle line commissioned, a feat of modern engineering - straddling the calley floor from easy to west.

1975 - The Converter shop closed on 19/07/75. The Blast furnaces closed on 17/07/75 having produced 16,916,523 tons of iron on A, B & C furnaces.

1976/7 - Tinplate Development Phase 1 commenced.
1977 - Effluent Plant Commissioned August (works win a clean river award). 4&5 Hallden Shears commissioned September. 4 E.T.L. commissioned December. 5 cleaning line commissioned December.

The continuous hot strip mill rolled its last hot rolled coil on 29/09/77. It has rolled, from slab, 23 million tons of steel. F5 (the fifth mill of six) was erected at the north gate.

1978 - The final cast was made at the open hearth department and the last ingot was rolled at the slabbing mill. The Hot Mill Slabbing Mill closed on 22/05/78. It had slabbed 24 million tons of steel. Final Cast at the open hearth on 19/05/78.

Single Stack Annealing A. Commissioned.

Double Reduction (DR.) mill commissioned March 1978.

No. 4 Coil Prep Commissioned December 1978

1978 - Saw the official opening of the New Tinplate development on 15/06/78, by Derek Hornby, The President of the Food Manufacturing Federation. Costing £57 million, it increased the output of Tinplate at Ebbw Vale by 35%. This was the completion of phase 1 of development but after a Government white paper on "The Road to Viability" was published, phase 2 was suspended, never to materialise.

1980 - A National Steel Strike from January 2nd to April 3rd.

An expensive 5 stand upgrade was completed and commissioned mainly comprising computer controlled settings for each of the 5 rolling mills, leading to automatic gauge control. Also a new automatic roll change system was put into place.

1981 - The demolition of the iron / steelmaking end of works were well in advance, also a new southern boundary was now in place.

1983 - A Plan was put before the local council to apply for the site of the 1992 National Garden Festival, on the site of the former iron / steelmaking end of the works. (In November 1988 Ebbw Vale was named as the winner)

1988 - A new automatic Warehouse was announced costing £11.9 million. (It was commissioned in 1991)

1991 - An extensive refurbishment of No. 2 Temper Mill took Place, costing £8.5 million. Comprising computer control plus a new automatic roll change system.

1995 - No. 2 E.T.L. closed down is August, initially planned to be demolished and redeveloped, however, this plan was found to be too costly with the result that the unit was effectively mothballed and kept as a very useful source of spares for the 2 remaining tinning lines until their demise later on.

1999 - on 06/10/99 a merger was announced with Hoogovens (Holland) and British Steel plc. to become a new company called CORUS.

2001 - on 01/02/01 the Total Closure was announced of Ebbw Vale works with a final loss of 780 jobs.

2001 - 01/06/01 - No. 2 Galv Ceased production, subsequently the line being dismantled and sold to an Indian Company. (With India also buying the Lurgi plant.)
Double reduction mill (DR Mill) ceased production - this mill was dismantled and re-assembled at Ijmuiden (Holland)

July - No. 4 Electrolytic Tinning Line ceased production - this line was dismantled and is now No. 6 ETL at Trostre (Llanelli).

2002 - **July 2002 - Ebbw Vale Works Officially ceased production.** Although a stockpile of finished products were shipping out by a skeleton staff until December 2002.

2002 - A Scottish firm of demolition experts (Morton) were brought in to demolish the works whilst leaving the site fit and ready for future development. Demolition commenced in August 2002.