

Report on visit to the United States in May 2026

Purpose and objectives of visit

The primary purpose of the visit was to visit Historic Tredegar in Richmond, Virginia to explore the potential for creating greater links with the town of Tredegar in my constituency.

The secondary purpose was to meet Welsh Government staff in the British Embassy in Washington to discuss the work of the Welsh Government offices in the US and to explore the potential for further work to promote Wales in the US from the perspective of the Senedd.



Background

The Tredegar Iron Works were established on the banks of the River James in 1836 when a group of Richmond businessmen and industrialists set about to capitalise on the growing railroad boom in the United States. The group hired Rhys Davies, then a young engineer, to construct a new facility. He brought a number of his fellow iron workers from Tredegar to construct the furnaces and rolling mills. The foundry was then named in recognition of the contribution of the town of Tredegar.

By the time of the American Civil War the Tredegar Iron Works was the biggest ironworks in the Confederacy and a significant factor in the decision to make Richmond its capital. The Tredegar Iron Works supplied about half the artillery used by the Confederate States Army, as well as the iron plating for CSS Virginia, the first Confederate ironclad warship. The works avoided destruction by troops during the evacuation of the city, and continued production until the mid-20th century. Now classified as a National Historic Landmark District, the site serves as the main building of the American Civil War Museum.

Historic Tredegar today



There are now a number of museums and historic features on the site of the Tredegar Iron Works. This is a link to the civil war museum which gives a flavour of the site as it exists today - <https://acwm.org/historic-tredegar/> There is also some construction taking place at the moment to bring the old Truck Shop and Tredegar Iron Company offices back into use with the addition of an outdoor auditorium. This significant investment means that in the future the Tredegar site will also become a major arts venue whilst protecting and enhancing the history of the site.

I met with the museum's President and Chief Executive, Dr Rob Havers along with Jeniffer Maloney, Director of Marketing

and Public Affairs and with other senior staff members to discuss their understanding of the role of Rhys Davies and others from Tredegar in the establishment of the works and their other contributions to the city of Richmond.

This site has a number of lessons for Tredegar and for Wales in terms of interpreting and preserving our history and making it accessible to the public and visitors. The focus of the museum is clearly the American Civil War and whilst the contribution of engineers and workers from the town of Tredegar is recognised as a part of the history, there are no exhibits or story told of the history of the establishment of the iron works. There are no existing links between Wales and this part of Virginia. There is clearly some considerable potential to build on this history to further develop understanding of our common history and to interpret this history for today. The history of the establishment of this works and the contribution of engineers and experienced iron workers from Wales appears to have been crucial in the development of the industry in Richmond and in this part of Virginia. This provides a real opportunity for Wales to explore how we can benefit from a greater and increased understanding of the contribution of Wales to the industrial development of the United States.

Virginia State Capital



As well as visiting Historic Tredegar I took the opportunity to visit the Virginia State Capitol and met with the members who represent Historic Tredegar in the Virginian Senate and House of Delegates, Senator Lamont Bagby and Delegate Betsy Carr. I also met with senior officials of the Capitol to discuss areas of mutual interest.

We had a good discussion on the the history of the city and of the ironworks as well as a very positive conversation on how we may continue to develop links between Richmond and Wales in the future. There are greater and richer links than simply the single ironworks site. Much of the early development of Richmond both as a city and its industrial hinterland was created by immigrants from Wales who provided the knowledge, expertise, experience and the work

force which then drove the development of the iron industry in Richmond and the rest of Virginia. There is also some considerable appetite to celebrate and to mark this history in way which allows future generations to learn about and appreciate our past.

Welsh Government office in Washington

In Washington I met with Dr Zowie Hay (Head of WG Office) and Eoghan O'Regan (Deputy Head of Office) who are based in the British Embassy as well as some Foreign Office officials who provided a wider context of background briefings for the visit.

Our discussions covered the work of the Welsh Government office and the other WG offices in the north American network and their priorities for the future.



I was also anxious to ensure that there is an opportunity for the Senedd and MS's to play a wider role in raising Wales's profile and building new links with key stakeholders. as well as potentially supporting the work of the government. We had a very positive conversation about the existing networks which include state legislatures and their engagement with sub-national parliaments and legislatures across the world.

This is something that I will continue to consider, explore and pursue over the coming year. There is also the Friends of Wales caucus in the House of Representatives where the Senedd may have a greater relevance and may be able to make a greater impact.

Outputs and conclusions

The visit was successful in achieving the objectives set. I was able to meet all those people whom I'd planned to meet and those meetings were positive. In addition to this we were also able to look ahead to how we may continue to build a greater profile amongst key stakeholders in the US. The Senedd should also seek to take the lead in establishing and developing inter-parliamentary relationships.

In addition to this I would also hope to establish a programme to take forward links between the city of Richmond and the town of Tredegar. Prior to the visit I had arranged to meet with the local authorities in Richmond and will also meet with the local authority in Blaenau Gwent. The forward programme needs to involve local government, schools, and community groups. Given the distances involved it is not realistic to expect the same twinning relationship that many towns have with other European communities.

However, it is possible to establish learning, understanding, organisational and political and cultural links between the two places. I am aware that there is a film series being made about the history of the iron works and this appears to be a good time to build upon any publicity which is generated by that film.

I would like to record my personal thanks to Eoghan O'Regan in the Welsh Government office for the help he provided in setting up the visit and for helping to make the contacts in Richmond which allowed me to meet relevant people and to hold such positive conversations in the city. I am also grateful to the wider Welsh Government for their support in this work.

Alun Davies MS