

*Correspondence relating to the Ordnance Survey's mapped locations of Gwalia (nprn 309216) and Victoria (nprn 419707) Tin Plate Works, Briton Ferry:*

**From: Brian Malaws**  
**Sent: 08 January 2014 12:48**  
**To: Robert Protheroe Jones**  
**Subject: Tinplate works at Briton ferry**

In the piece of land that lies between the River Neath and Briton Ferry Dock were the Victoria Tin Plate Works and Gwalia Tin Plate Works. They are not shown on the first edition Ordnance Survey 25-inch map of 1880 but both appear on the second edition of 1899, where Victoria works is shown to the north of Gwalia. On the third edition of 1918 both works are shown but neither is named and on the fourth edition of 1937 Gwalia is shown to the north of Victoria. Can you offer any explanation for this?

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**From: Robert Protheroe Jones**  
**Sent: 08 January 2014 18:17**  
**To: Brian Malaws**  
**Subject: Tinplate works at Briton ferry**

I am certain that the discrepancy merely reflects an error on one of the two editions rather than an exchange of works' identities.

Whilst Victoria Works was so named, most published sources refer to it by the owning company's name and hence term it Villiers Works.

Brooke provides a useful summary of both works in his 1944 Chronology and in his 1949 Appendix. Villiers / Victoria is well covered in C.W.Roberts, A legacy from Victorian enterprise: the Briton Ferry Ironworks and the daughter companies, author, 1983. In the only map in this volume that shows the works, Villiers / Victoria is shown north of Gwalia. Had there not been a discrepancy of works names between OS editions, ordinarily I would have taken Roberts as a wholly reliable authority, as he was descended from the owners of the ironworks and wrote with the benefit of a considerable inherited private archive. However, with the tinplate works being somewhat marginal to the main focus of his study, the suspicion arises that he may have relied on an OS map for the location map. This suspicion is strengthened by the sketchy nature of the map and its broad geographical coverage – the entirety of the area from Neath Abbey to Briton Ferry Dock.

As the Briton Ferry Steel Co Ltd (latterly owners of both works) was not nationalised in the second nationalisation of the steel industry, no body of archives entered BSC / Corus / Tata archives and no body of archives was deposited by the company or its successor, Duport Steel Co Ltd, last owner before closure of the residual works.

The online catalogue of the Briton Ferry Estate collection (freeholder of both works' sites) at West Glamorgan Archives contains numerous references to deeds pertaining to the Gwalia and Victoria / Villiers Works, some of which include plans. Reference to these will undoubtedly provide definitive clarification.

When I first visited the site twenty years ago, the eastern portions of both works had been demolished and the surviving portions of both works were derelict (all that survived of the northern works was a portion wholly rebuilt in the circa early 1950s – it is clearly visible in an oblique air photo dated May 1956 (NMW Dept of Industry P.74.3202) – undoubtedly for the use of the immediately adjoining iron works). In a west-facing gable of the southern works was a large circular date stone inscribed with two years separated by a horizontal line: “1898 / 1899” (NMW Dept of industry photo P.93.363, 30 July 1993). Brooke, 1944; stated that the Villiers Tin Plate Co Ltd was registered in October 1888 (p.121), and that the Gwalia Tin Plate Works was started in November 1892 (p.66); neither date accords with the date stone. Brooke does not note the date of extensions to either works although does make clear that both incrementally expanded over time, as was wholly typical in the industry.

Brooke 1944, p.122 in his account of Villiers Works, states that “Two years earlier [i.e. 1886 – RPJ] the same directors had acquired the Briton Ferry Iron Works . . . the site adjoins that of the Villiers Works.” This indicates that the northern works was the Villiers / Victoria Works. This would accord with a north to south sequence of development, which is what would be anticipated, for the Briton Ferry Iron Works was oldest, followed by Villiers / Victoria, and Gwalia the last development on this stretch of river frontage. Nevertheless, Brooke’s statement is not utterly unequivocal, and an anticipated sequence of development could readily differ from the actual sequence of construction.

The 1956 air photo referred to above shows both works closed and idle. The northern works has five small chimneys at its west end and the southern works had three small chimneys at its west end. They appear to be mill furnace chimneys rather than tinhouse chimneys Brooke records that Villiers / Victoria possessed seven hot mills in 1944 (1944, p.121), decreased to four by 1949 (1949, p.219) and that Gwalia possessed four hot mills (1944, p.66; 1949, p.198). The disposition of chimneys accords with Villiers / Victoria being the northern works and Gwalia being the southern works. Additionally, the differing footprint of each works (the northern was significantly larger than the southern) also accords with Villiers / Victoria being the northern works, and Gwalia being the southern works.

Taking all the foregoing into account, I am confident that the northern works was Villiers / Victoria and that the southern works was Gwalia. Categorical documentary proof can only be obtained through research in the Briton Ferry Estate Collection at West Glamorgan Archives however.

**Robert Protheroe Jones**

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