



Welsh migration and industrialisation in Donbas, Eastern Ukraine (former Russian Empire) The foundation of Hughesovka

Authors: Clara Defachel and Dr Victoria Donovan, University of St Andrews, Scotland. People's Collection Wales.

This resource invites learners to approach the history of Welsh industrialisation from a different perspective. The city of Hughesovka, today's Donetsk in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine (former Russian Empire) was founded by Welsh and British workers. The Russian Empire existed from 1721 to 1917, when the Tzarist monarchy was overthrown. Many modern-day countries have territories that were previously part of the Russian Empire, including Ukraine, Poland, Finland, Latvia and the even the United States (Alaska).

When Welsh workers arrived Donbas had already been part of the Russian Empire for more than 200 years, having been colonised during the Empire's expansion to the 'Wild Steppe' in the South during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The labour migration from Britain to the Russian Empire at this time reveals the importance of transactions between empires: exchanges of skills, labour and technologies were a key component of industrial expansion.

Using Hughesovka as a case study, the resource aims to enable learners to develop a more nuanced and critical perspective on the history of industrialisation in their country and to critically engage with archival material. Learners are asked to examine the images carefully and answer the questions that can be found throughout the resource.

The source material (photographs and other images) within this resource comes from the Hughesovka Research Archive, held at the Glamorgan Archives, and these are reproduced here with their kind permission.

Curriculum Links:

Key Stage 3 & 4 – History

Curriculum for Wales 2022 – Humanities – Progression Steps 3 & 4

Statements of what matters:

- Events and human experiences are complex, and are perceived, interpreted and represented in different ways
- Humans societies are complex and diverse, and shaped by human actions and beliefs
- Informed, self-aware citizens engage with the challenges and opportunities that face humanity, and are able to take considered and ethical action.

The story of Hughesovka

Hughesovka was founded in 1870 by the Welshman John Hughes, born in 1815 in Merthyr Tydfil. Hughes had a successful career as an ironmaster and businessman in Wales, buying the Uskside Engineering Works in Newport at just 28 and patenting a number of world-famous naval weapons at the Millwall Engineering Company. This success led the Russian government to approach Hughes in 1864 to help revive the state-run metallurgy industries in eastern Ukraine, then part of the Russian Empire.

In 1870, Hughes left for Ukraine with around a hundred specialist iron workers and miners, mostly from South Wales, who brought their wives and children with them. They joined a very cosmopolitan workforce, including Russians and Ukrainians, as well as Germans, Tatars, Jews and Greeks. Hughes and co. founded the 'New Russia Company Ltd' the same year. As the name of the enterprise suggests, it was common at this time for foreigners to conflate 'Russia' and 'the Russian Empire'. Over the next decade, eight blast furnaces, collieries, mines, brickworks and rail lines were built. The new town bore the name of its Welsh founder – Hughesovka – and became a major industrial city in the Russian Empire.

Following the Bolshevik coup, in October 1917, Civil War broke out across the country. This rendered the position of the British in Hughesovka very precarious and led most British families to leave the country.

You can read more about the foundation of Hughesovka on Glamorgan Archives' blog: <https://glamarchives.wordpress.com/2017/11/03/hughesovka-a-welsh-enterprise-in-imperial-russia/> or on the John Hughes website: <http://www.johnhugheswales.com>.

What was next?

Officially renamed 'Stalino' in 1929-31, Hughesovka became a flagship town in the Soviet Union for the process of crash industrialization demanded by Stalin. Following his death in 1953 and Khrushchev's de-Stalinization campaign, the name of the town was changed from Stalino to Donetsk in 1961.

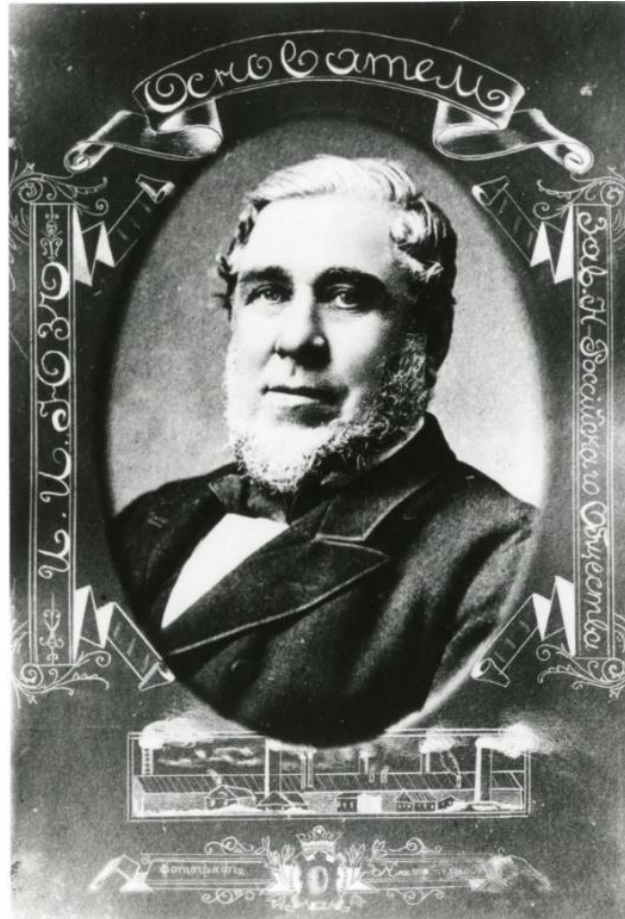
The world's attention was brought to the region once again in 2014 following the outbreak of war in the Donbas region. In April 2014, separatists with covert Russian backing seized Donetsk's government buildings and declared the 'Donetsk People's Republic', asking for Russian intervention.

The subsequent war in Ukraine has had catastrophic humanitarian consequences. Between 2014 and 2021, more than 14,000 Ukrainian citizens were killed and around 43,000 injured, not counting the deaths and injuries resulting from the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Between 2014 and 2022 around 1.6 million people were displaced from their homes because of the conflict, and 400,000 were drafted to fight.

As Russian violence intensified in February 2022, many of these people were displaced for a second time, re-experiencing the traumas of 2014-2015 after making new lives for themselves in the Ukrainian government-controlled regions in which they had re-settled.

Life in Hughesovka

Document 1: Portrait of John Hughes, founder of Hughesovka



The text on the frame reads:

On the left: 'I.I. luziu' (the transliteration into Cyrillic of John Hughes)

At the top: 'osnovatel' ('founder')

On the right: 'Zav. N-Rossiiskago Obshchestva'

Questions:

- How does Hughes look in his portrait (stern, fierce, kindly, benevolent?) Why might he have wanted to be portrayed this way to his workforce?
- The portrait is elaborately framed and decorated. What does this tell us about Hughes' status in Hughesovka and the cult of personality that emerged around him?

You can read about what 'cult of personality' means here:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cult_of_personality

- Nineteenth century industrialists such as Hughes often had philanthropic agendas to improve the lives of the local (British) workforce (through education, healthcare, etc.). Why do you think Hughes paid attention to these things? Did it benefit his business and his legacy?

Document 2: A series of pictures of Hughesovka



Image 1: The Hughesovka works c. 1912



Image 2: This picture highlights the spatial division of Hughesovka. The collieries and factories that you can see in the middle separate the town into two distinct areas: the one with neat bungalows at the front of the picture, where the British workers lived, and the one at the back where the local workforce lived.



Image 3: A street in Hughesovka. The signs on the shops are made of images, not words, because a lot of the local workforce was illiterate.



Image 4: The bungalows of British migrants, who often held higher managerial positions than their local counterparts.

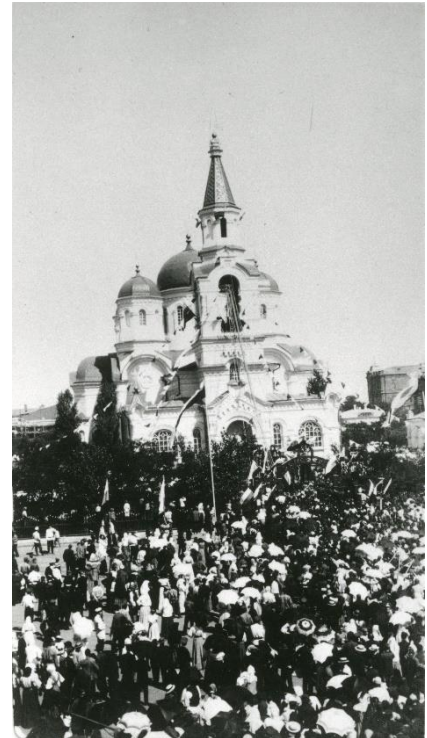


Image 5 - **on the left:** the Anglican church of Hughesovka
Image 6 - **on the right:** the Orthodox church of Hughesovka



Image 7: The tennis court of Hughesovka was founded by the British migrants who moved there, in an attempt to recreate British life abroad. Other leisure activities developed by British migrants in Hughesovka included tearooms and amateur dramatic clubs.



Image 8: British and local residents of Hughesovka having a picnic

Questions:

- Do some of these pictures remind you of familiar landscapes, scenes, or images? Where did you see these (in your hometown, on TV, in history books)? Did you expect Hughesovka to look like this?

Look at images 1 & 2

- How do these images compare to places in Wales during the Industrial Revolution? Here are some examples of historic images of Port Talbot in South Wales.

<https://www.peoplescollection.wales/items/516541>

<https://www.peoplescollection.wales/items/516749>

Can you find other images on People's Collection Wales, or from other sources, that show industry in Wales at this time?

- Was there industrial development in your area of Wales during the Industrial Revolution? What was the impact on the environment? What do you think life was like for people working in these places or living close to heavy industry?
- Are there large industrial works near your locality today? How do they compare to these images? What is the impact on the environment today? What is life like for the workers?

Look at image 3

- Does this image remind you of other images of colonized towns that you might have seen on TV from other time period or other places in the world?
- From the evidence of these pictures, do you think that the British workers had the same life experience as the rest of the workforce in Hughesovka? Why or why not? What aspects of life were different?

Greetings from Hughesovka!

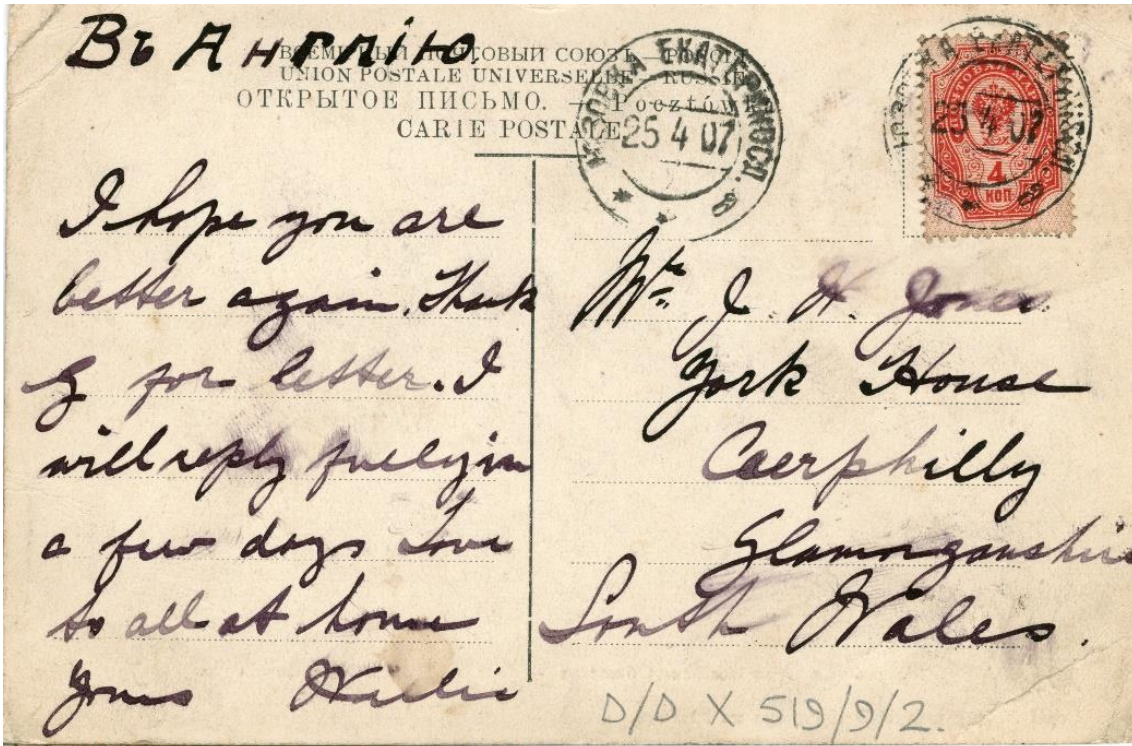
In this section, we will be looking at two postcards sent by William (Willie) Jones to his family in Wales. Willie Jones moved to Hughesovka in 1906 to work as a Colliery Engineer in the New Russia Company. He left in 1909.

This archival material is held by the Hughesovka Research Archive, which contains personal documents of Welsh families whose ancestors moved to Hughesovka in the late-nineteenth/early twentieth centuries.

Document 3: Postcard from Hughesovka sent by Willie Jones on 25 April 1907



Front of postcard: The handwritten line on the front of the postcard reads:
We have 3 large lakes



Back of postcard: The handwritten text on the back of the postcard reads:

I hope you are better again. Thank G for letter. I will reply surely in a few days Love to all at home Yours Willie

Questions:

- Look at this postcard’s front and back covers carefully. How many different languages can you identify?

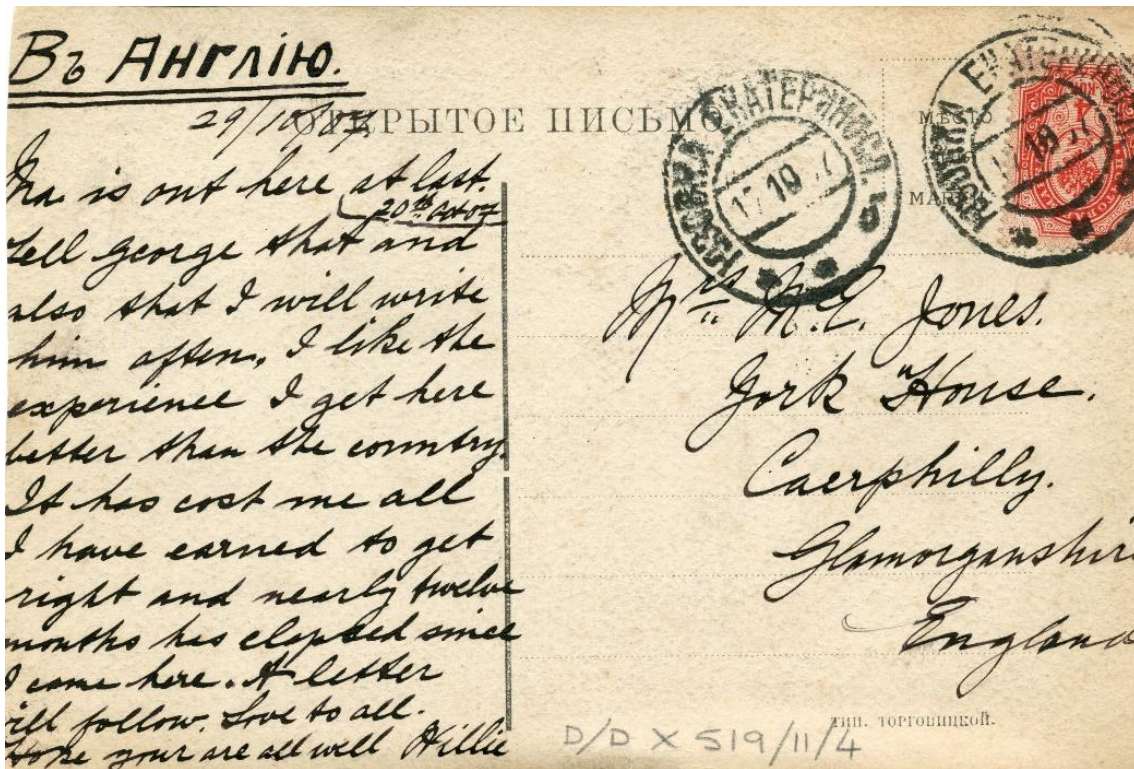
Hint: Like many industrial regions, Hughesovka was a multi-national, multi-lingual place where Russian became the lingua franca used to communicate. The Russian language uses a different alphabet called Cyrillic! You can have a go at translating your name in Russian using the Cyrillic alphabet on this resource:

<http://languages-of-the-world.org/YourNameIn/Cyrillic.html>

Most people in the Russian Empire were illiterate up until the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. However, multilingualism was a key feature of life in Hughesovka since people came from all over the Russian Empire to work there.

- What other languages, apart from those you identified above, might have been spoken in Hughesovka at this time? Why do you think they used Russian to communicate with one another?
- Can we compare this to language developments in other multicultural areas in the UK and Wales, such as docks?

Document 4: Postcard sent by Willie Jones to his mother Mrs M. E. Jones on 20 October 1907



The body of the postcard reads:

20th Oct 07 [1907]

X is out here at last. Tell George that and also that I will write him often. I like the experience I get here better than the country. It has cost me all I have earned to get right and nearly twelve months has elapsed since I came here. A letter will follow. Love to all. Hope your are all well Willie

Questions:

Willie Jones writes: 'It has cost me all I have earned to get right and nearly twelve months has elapsed since I came here.'

- Why do you think British workers like Willie Jones would have thought this long and expensive journey was worth it? Why do you think people might choose to migrate to a different country today?

Using your answers to the previous questions within this resource, answer the following:

- Whose points of view are represented by this archival material? Whose are missing?
- Discuss why it might be difficult to access the experiences of certain groups from the past, and how historians could write the histories of people who have left no written documents behind them?

Cultural assimilation & appropriation in Hughesovka

This section examines 'cultural assimilation' and 'cultural appropriation', and why these are relevant when thinking about the life led by Welsh migrants in Hughesovka.

Useful definitions:

Cultural assimilation: The incorporation of a culture into the general host society. The acceptance of the host culture may result in the loss of cultural identity of an ethnic group.

Cultural appropriation: A term used to describe the taking over of creative or artistic forms, themes, or practices by one cultural group from another. It is in general used to describe Western appropriations of non-Western or non-white forms and carries connotations of exploitation and dominance.

Adapted from Oxford Reference (<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095652793> and <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095652789?rskey=HHunUr&result=1>)

As British workers settled in Hughesovka – sometimes for several generations – British migrants gradually assimilated Russian traditions and culture. They married locals, gave their children local names, and learned to read and write local languages in addition to speaking English and Welsh.

Archival evidence (especially correspondence between Russian and English-speaking cousins of the same family) suggest that when the British workforce was expelled by the Bolsheviks in 1917, all sorts of networks and affiliations existed between the town's British and Russian residents.

Document 5: Photographs of John Hughes' grandchildren



Photograph A



Photograph B

The two children portrayed in these photographs are John Hughes' granddaughters. They are second generation migrants: they were born in Hughesovka and mastered both the Russian and English languages. It is not clear whether they spoke Welsh or Ukrainian, but they had a Welsh-speaking governess!

Questions:

- Where do you think these photographs were taken? Whose clothes are the sitters wearing? What props can you see in the background?
- The pictures show a very romanticized version of Russian folk dress and culture. How does this compare and contrast with the everyday culture of life in Hughesovka at this time?
- Building from your answers and with the help of the definitions provided above, evaluate to what extent these photographs exemplify cultural assimilation and/or cultural appropriation.

Remembering Hughesovka

As the previous sections have demonstrated, the history of Hughesovka is a complex and difficult one. This section will explore how different societies – and not only the Ukrainian one – remember, have remembered, and might remember Hughesovka in the future.

It focuses specifically on the different names given to the town throughout the 20th century and the use of Hughes' figure in imagining a different historical narrative for Hughesovka.

What's in a name? Hughesovka, Stalino, Donetsk

In the first Russian Revolution of 1905, the Russian monarchy was deposed and a Provisional Government was installed in their place. Following the First World War (1914-1917) and the 'October Revolution' of 1917, the Bolsheviks [from Russian: bolshinstvo, 'majority'], a radical, far-left, and revolutionary Marxist faction founded by Vladimir Lenin, came to power. In 1923, Hughesovka was renamed Stalino in honour of the leader of the Communist Party Joseph Stalin and the town became part of the multi-national federation, the Soviet Union (Stalin was a pseudonym that means "Man of Steel," so arguably an appropriate namesake for a steelworks).

In 1961, following Stalin's death and the attack on his Cult of Personality, the town was renamed again as Donetsk. The Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, and Ukraine became an independent state with a fraught relationship to its communist past. In 2015, Ukraine passed a de-communization law that outlawed Soviet symbols.

Document 6: Statue of John Hughes, erected in Donetsk in 2001



Wikicommons, <http://wikimapia.org/175712/Monument-to-John-Hughes>

Questions:

- Why do you think the name Hughesovka was problematic for the Bolsheviks? What did it reveal about the town's past that the communists might not have wanted to advertise?
- Why do you think that local officials may have wanted to commemorate the town's links with Hughes and the British in 2001 with the statue you see pictured in Document 6? How does this monument help them to 'imagine' another history for Ukraine that excludes the Soviet twentieth century?
- In the twenty-first century, the removal of statues of colonial figures has sparked debate in the United Kingdom and across the world*. From that perspective, do *you* think that Hughes' statue in Donetsk should be removed? Do you think that Ukrainians could ask for Hughes' statue in Donetsk to be removed? Should a monument to Hughes be erected in Wales instead?

* On 7 June 2020, a statue in Bristol of Edward Colston was removed by protesters and pushed into the harbour waters. Edward Colston was a merchant involved in the slave trade, and the statue was toppled as part of the Black Lives Matter global protests following the death of George Floyd in the USA.

Fuel for classroom discussion:

- Based on your previous answers within this resource, discuss whose history and heritage is represented in the Hughesovka story. (Wales? Ukraine? Britain? Russia? The British Empire? The Russian Empire? All, or none of these?)
- Can monuments, such as John Hughes' statue in Donetsk, fully represent the complexity of historical experiences? Evaluate to what extent monuments allow us to forget, rather than to remember things from the past.