

EARLY 19TH CENTURY

The Landscape from LLanelli via Pwll, Burry Port (which was known only as Towyn Bach at the time) Pembrey and on to Kidwelly, has changed considerably during the last two hundred years. Mainly because of mans will to build harbours and change river courses during this time, and the receding seas from this part of the world (whereas on the East coast of the United kingdom the sea is reclaiming the land) have all helped to change the coastline of the Burry Estuary to a shallow inlet barely navigable except at high water.

The sea at Stradey used to reach what is now known as Stradey Bridge at high tide and almost up to Pembrey road as far as Pwll which was a Rabbit warren, A road ran from Pwll to Achddu which was basically a dirt track, this was the main road, there was a pedestrian track over the burrows to Pwll there was also atrack from the main road from Pwll to the sheep pastures at Towyn Bach, this is now called Church Road and Elkington Road similar, from the sheep pastures (the sheep pastures stretched from Dafad-ty (meaning sheep fold) to the Derwydd in the West) at Towyn Bach another track lead to the Derwydd and farther onward to Pembrey Village. From the end of Pembrey Mountain West as far as the Gwendraeth River was a long stretch of sand hills called Towyn Mawr and Towyn Canol which were littered with rabbit burrows. A part of the these low lands (flats) were being worked as farms named 'Towyn' 'Pen-y-Bedd' and 'Pwll-du'. The shortest way to Kidwelly was over the burrows to the point where the river Gwendraeth was crossed by a ford, this ford was used until the Commissioners 'Bridge' was built in 1842, which is still known as 'Pont-y-Rhyd (Bridge over the ford)'.

From the end of Pembrey Village (where the Butchers Arms now stands) to Kidwelly and as far as LLandry were known as the the 'Pinged Marshes' which were flooded at high tides, Further East and South of Towyn Bach (Now Burry Port) were the 'Bacau' or marsh lands which was covered by the sea at high tides.

Pembrey Village was still very small and mainly centred around St. Illyd's Church with farms scattered around, further along towards 'Towyn Bach' was 'Gors Farm' and further north only a few farms existed and some cottages on the Graig. The whole of Pembrey Parish only had 1455 inhabitants in 1801, and LLanelli Parish only 2972, of the 2972 inhabitants of LLanelli Parish in 1801, it is stated that in 1795 less than 500 people lived in LLanelli Town. In comparison Pembrey Parish had 6448 and LLanelli Parish 32034 inhabitants in 1891.

Earlier Pioneering

Although 1800 seemed to be the turning point of Carmarthenshire's introduction into the Industrial Revolution, Industrial development did not arrive overnight, infact industry had arrive in Trimsaran as early as 1540 in the shape of coal mining and shortly after at Pinged, A small Brewery was started in LLanelli in 1700, later to become 'Buckleys Brewery', Kidwelly lower tinplate works was founded in 1734, and in 1766 'Kymers' Canal was built at Kidwelly, which was the first Canal in Wales. A Dock was also constructed at Kidwelly in 1766, Achddu Mill was built in 1770, the 'Wern' iron-foundry was established by Yaldon in 1784 in LLanelli, and by 1797 Eleven Coal Pits were mentioned in the LLanelli area. All the above industry had arrived before 1800 on the north coast of the Burry Inlet, between LLanelli and Kidwelly, and after 1800 the industry was about to change the way local inhabitants had lived for hundreds of years, and without doubt the Industrial Revolution changed the shape of the Burry Inlet Coastline.

Transportation

Coaches

Before 1815 West Wales had two Mail Coaches Daily:-

One from London Via Gloucester, Brecon and Carmarthen

Another from London, via Bristol, Swansea, Pontardulais, and Carmarthen.

LLanelli was not on the main line from London to Carmarthen, because at that time the Loughor Bridge had not been built, and LLanelli was a long way off the main route.

Local coach services did run via LLanelli, the route was Swansea, Pontardulais, LLanelli, Carmarthen and back. The Coach fare to Swansea was 3shillings and to Carmarthen 4shillings.

Poor people obviously could not afford to travel by Coach, they would either walk, or travel by stage wagon, if they ever travelled at all, they would then sleep in the straw and hay at the inns they came

across on there travels.

Canals

Canals were the best means of transportation, as they could transport large amounts of merchandise from one place to another reasonably quickly compared to the horse and cart on uneven unkept roads which were not very good at all.

Kymer's Canal

Thomas Kymer Originally from Pembroke obtained permission to build a Canal from Kidwelly Quay to Pwlllyllygod, which is near Carway. The Canal was said to have opened in 1769, from then until 1800 Kidwelly appears to have grown as a small port and shipbuilding town.

Earl of Ashburnham Canal

The Earl of Ashburnham Canal started at a coal level at FFrwd near Pembrey, with a shorter branch built later at Coed, and served also by tramroads to other collieries near Pembrey, from there it ran straight to the far side of Kidwelly-LLanelli road, and then turned sharply to take it into what was later called Swan Pool Drain, and on to a creek called 'Pill Towyn' on the south side of the Gwendraeth Fawr. This Canal was built around about 1796.

Kidwelly & LLanelly Canal

It had been suggested around about 1793 to build a Canal with nine locks up the Gwendraeth Fawr valley to a point below Pontyberem. And a Canal branch from Spudders Bridge on Kymer's Canal to LLanelly. But the work on this Canal was delayed for some considerable time and was probably started at around 1815. The Canal was to run from Kymer's Canal at Spudders Bridge to Penn-y-Bedd on the way to Pembrey with a lock at 'Ty-Mawr'. This line passed the end of 'Bowser's' level and ended at a junction with the 'Earl of Ashburnham' Canal about half a mile from FFrwd. From this 'Spudder's Bridge' - 'Pen-y-Bedd' line a short branch about three-eighths of a mile long to Moat Farm which was continued to Trimsaran Colliery by a tramroad. Lastly, from a point near the top end of Kymer's Canal, the company extended their line up the river valley with two locks to Pontyates, at these points construction stopped for many years probably because of lack of money. Eventually in about 1825 when the New Harbour was built at what is now Burry Port, the canal was extended to end at the New harbour.

Pembrey Canal

Pembrey Old Harbour was built in 1819 and towards the end of 1823 a private canal was began by Gaunt & Co. It was about two miles long with one lock near Penn-y-Bedd, and ran to a point about 400 yards from Pembrey Old Harbour, too the Pier it was connected by a tramroad, with branches of tramroad connecting the Harbour along a specially built embankment for about half a mile northwards to Pembrey New Pit.