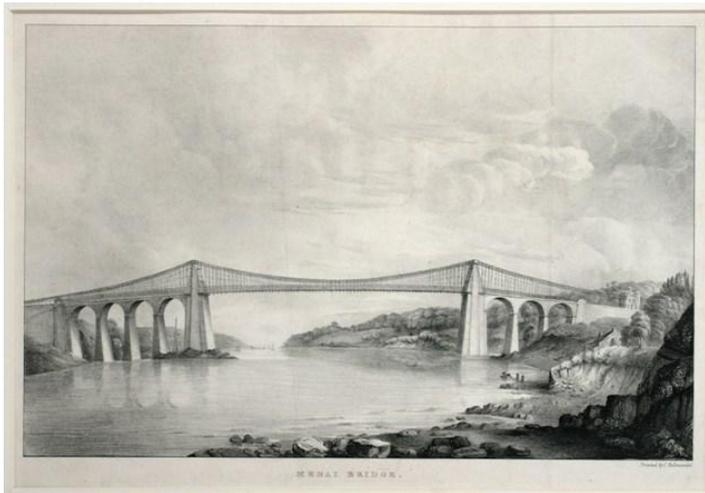
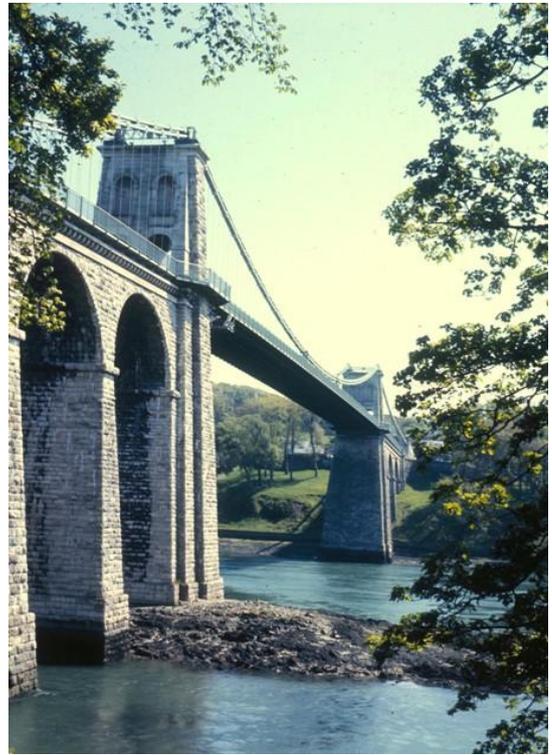


### 13) Menai Bridge – gateway to Anglesey

The island of Anglesey is gained, as every tourist is aware, by Telford's Menai Suspension Bridge, 250 miles out from London by the Holyhead Road. To appreciate fully the elegance of this structure however, it is necessary not merely to drive or even walk across it, but to descend through the streets of Menai Bridge town to the shores of the Straits, and so pass beneath it.....

The bridge in its early years was of course a popular subject for lithographic prints:



Even in the age of such modern technological wonders as the Severn Bridge, the structure as seen today is most impressive: as you gaze upwards try to visualize the somewhat more startling impact it would have made on the traveller of our primitive roads in the year 1826, shortly after its completion.

Translating this into hard engineering facts, the main span is 580 feet in length and the complete bridge 1000 feet; the road deck stands 100 feet clear of high water. The design was at least the fifth proposed to make the crossing, which has its origins in the 1776 suggestion of a Mr. Golbourne for an embankment with a small bridge at the centre. A timber structure with a drawbridge was proposed in 1785, and designs in stone and iron were prepared by Rennie and Telford in 1802 and 1811 respectively before the suspension scheme of 1818 was finally adopted.

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The foundation stone was laid by the chief assistant, William Provis in August 1819 and construction occupied a period of five and a half years. Contemporary plans show a network of horse tramroads, workshops, offices and yards used during the work.

The bridge towers are of Penmon Marble. The suspension chains, originally of wrought iron, were hung from the completed towers during 1825, and the structure was opened as a toll bridge on the 30th of January 1826, being at that time the longest single span bridge in the world.

Much difficulty was encountered with the fragility of the timber decking in early years, and this was gradually strengthened and rebuilt in iron without modification to the chains. However, a major rebuilding was carried out by Messrs. Dorman Long in 1938-9 to assume the present form; their engineer Sir Alexander Gibb was appropriately a descendant of Telford. Without interruption to traffic, the suspension chains were reduced in number from sixteen to the present four, of steel, and the side footways were cantilevered outwards from the decking to increase the width of the carriageway (the footpath was previously down the centre).

Apart from the towers, other original features are the latticework parapet fencing at each end of the bridge, and two of Telford's "rising sun" tollgates at the mainland end. The tower from which the suspension chains are tensioned is at this end, and still contains the wooden block and tackle used for hauling the chains both during the original construction work and the rebuilding. The bridge master's house is also incorporated into the tower, and was rebuilt exactly as previously following necessary demolition during the 1938 works.

A recent inspection of the bridge pronounced the structure sound for a further fifty years, nowadays carrying traffic far beyond the dreams of its designer. It is now maintained by four men, and painted from end to end every three years.

The toll was relinquished upon re-opening after completion of the alterations in 1940. Provisions for collecting the dues were elaborate and included a telephone link between the booths to trap would-be evaders. The last toll board (1935) is still kept in the storeroom, but the freeing from toll was obviously regarded as an event of major significance, since it is recorded on a stone plaque at the Anglesey end with equal prominence to that at the mainland end proclaiming Telford's involvement with the original structure.

The toll removal has undoubtedly led to the postwar growth of Menai Bridge town and its surrounding villages as a dormitory suburb of Bangor, which tends to obscure its former importance amongst the townships of the island: unlike the others, no indigenous industry is nowadays apparent, and only a few miscellaneous items of interest remain to be recorded.

The timber yard at Cerrig y Borth (558718) and warehouses date originally from the bridge construction and in 1828 passed into the hands of Richard Davies of Llangefni, whose family became prominent Anglesey ship owners and operators. Though having undergone various changes of ownership the site still functions as the principal source of timber for the island, some of which is brought in by sea to a small wharf adjacent.

Along the shore towards the bridge two interesting survivals from the days of the ferry service will be seen; the "Cambria Inn", by the landing place opposite the George Hotel on the mainland side is now a private dwelling but is prominent as much of its previous character remains; it dates from the seventeenth century. Nearby are the lowlier cottages of the ferrymen, also still in domestic use.

The several boatyards in the town have dwindled to one, this doing only minor repairs to small craft. St George's Pier (opened in 1904 by David Lloyd George) was once the boarding point for numerous coastal cruises by Edwardian Paddle steamers, but is now used even less than hitherto since the demise of its opposite number at Bangor from commercial use. Now it also is in dangerous condition and may soon be closed. Coastal pleasure cruising itself has also become a thing of the past with the growth of the private motorcar, and latterly private boats and yachts. In North Wales regular summer services had commenced as early as 1821, when the St Georges Steam Packet Co. operated from Liverpool to Menai Bridge. From 1881 most of the excursions were provided by the Liverpool, Llandudno and Welsh Coast Steamboat Co. The ship's bell at the pier head is now the only reminder of this traffic; it is from their vessel "Snowdon" (1892-1931)

The waters of the Straits had long been put to yet another use in this locality, since there was a tide mill with two waterwheels located on the foreshore (554719). Although it was first recorded in 1578, today only traces of the mill dam walls are to be seen as the mill itself went out of use 150 or more years ago.

Also gone without trace is the Town Gasworks, which would otherwise have been an incongruous blot on the landscape; the Menai Bridge Gas and Coke Co. was wound up in 1873. The fire station is modern, but houses an interesting relic in the form of a horse-drawn Merryweather “Gem” steam fire pump. It dates from 1913, and was in use during the last war in Cardiff. It is fully restored and often appears at local shows.

An unusual and beautiful collection of examples of the Victorian toy-makers’ ingenuity is to be found at Robert Brown’s unique “Museum of Childhood”, open during the summer months. Inside is a fine display of trains, cars, music boxes, pottery etc covering the last 150 years.

The town’s one factory, and now the principal local employer, presently manufactures lingerie under the name of Mona Products Ltd. The older part (with chimney stack) adjacent to the road was built circa 1880 and was originally a steam-powered corn mill, unusual in these parts. An interesting feature is that the mill itself, and the adjacent workers housing are constructed as one building to a uniform style. There was a smithy opposite, of which some of the outbuildings remain within the present bus depot site.

To the east of the town, the pretty but quite inaccessible Cadnant Dingle was once a hive of industrial activity, making use of the abundant supply of water which has cut a deep gorge in descending from the upland plateaus of Llandegfan and Llansadwrn. At the seaward end, on the main Beaumaris Road, the old Cadnant Bridge (560729) was superceded by the sweeping new concrete one early in 1975. It was to this creek that the earliest straits ferry plied, from the thirteenth century, as we have already noted; and it was also used by Telford for trials of the suspension chains used in the Menai Bridge construction. The two large buildings on either side of the old bridge, now in residential use, comprised a flannel and tweed factory, established by the Earl of Uxbridge in 1812. It ceased operation in the early 1930's.

Another interesting old building is at the head of the inlet; originally a water-powered woollen mill (the leat and wheel pit may be traced), but for forty years up to 1975 operating as a smithy. The smith, Mr. Hugh Morris, now works at Llandegfan in semi-retirement at another long-established smithy, Glyn-yr-Afon, but he has left an anvil set in the garden wall at Cadnant as a reminder of his long tenancy there. The mill building is now derelict, but its appearance has not altered much from the original and it is to be hoped that some further use will be found for it.....

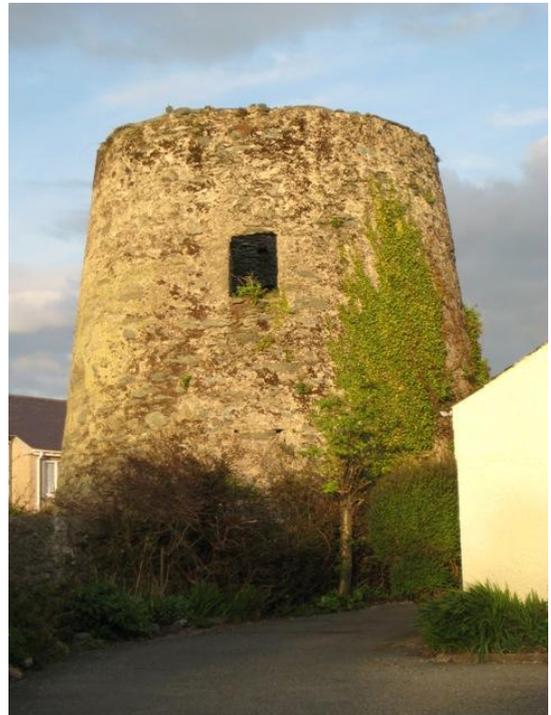


The adjacent dwelling “Smithy Cottage” was once the smithy for the woollen mill complex when this was in operation.

Higher up the same valley (and accessible more easily from Llandegfan village) are derelict remains of a corn mill (Melin Cadnant) and the fulling-mill, Pandy Cadnant. The corn mill buildings are situated beside a deeply scoured gorge with an impressive waterfall from the mill dam after heavy rain. The waterwheel was thirty foot in diameter, but has been removed since operation ceased before the last war. A hundred yards or so downstream and almost obscured by the luxuriant vegetation, stands the derelict shell of the Pandy, a tiny building which included living accommodation as well as the machinery under the one roof.

Llandegfan windmill (566741) is the first of many to be seen, mostly unfortunately in this somewhat attenuated condition, during a circular tour of the island. Anglesey windmills were almost without exception of the old “tower” variety since the timber construction of the more modern derivatives, post- and smock-mills, would have been incapable of withstanding the severe winter gales sometimes experienced hereabouts. The “tower” was constructed of stone or brick, invariably weatherproofed by cement or pitch rendering, and save for one or two examples to be recorded later is usually the only part of the building and machinery that still survives.

Llandegfan Mill was built like most of the others in the mid-eighteenth century, and was disused as a corn-mill by 1900. It latterly carried a tank at the top of the tower which constituted the village water supply and was denounced as a derelict eyesore as early as 1915. Despite this, the authorities responsible for the recent overwhelming spread of residential development in this once peaceful village have chosen to recall its presence in the names of no less than three of the surrounding new housing estates. The white painted miller’s cottage still stands in front of the old ivy-clad tower, adjacent to the roadway.



Keith A. Jagers November 1978

## Updates – January 2012

The **Menai Suspension Bridge** is of course still open, but with traffic levels fortunately much reduced following the opening of the new Expressway road deck over the top of the railway route crossing the Britannia Bridge further to the west. The history of both bridges is commemorated in the splendid Bridges Exhibition at the **Thomas Telford Centre** in the town, where the old toll board is now to be found on display.

The **Cambria Inn** nearby on Cambria Road is a listed building nowadays solely in private residential use, with an explanatory plaque. The ferrymen’s cottages on Beach Road survive, though much altered and modernised.

The former timber yard by **Princes Pier** wharf is now a boat storage area; the pier itself was demolished in the 1940’s though the name is retained locally for the quay. A warehouse and old crane survive here; the former is being renovated as a new home for the Telford Centre collection and a permanent exhibition of the town’s history. No commercial vessels have called for many years, and there are no longer any traditional boatbuilding yards.

The former booking office and gates of the public **St George’s Pier** are listed structures. The pier is now used only for small boat cruises during the summer season, and for the University’s marine survey vessel. The present location of the “Snowdon” ship’s bell is not known.

The **tide mill and gasworks** site has been reclaimed and levelled as a rugby playing field.

The preserved **Merryweather steam fire pump** has been restored by apprentices at Wylfa nuclear power station; its boiler was recently at the Festiniog Railway’s Boston Lodge workshops for assessment, but was deemed to be in need of complete replacement. The machine has been re-assembled as a static exhibit, and is expected to be back on public display in Menai Bridge soon.

The **Museum of Childhood** relocated from Menai Bridge to Beaumaris many years ago, but was closed down upon the death of the owner; the collection was then presumably split up and sold off.

The steam powered **corn mill** and adjacent worker’s accommodation in Dale Street has been completely demolished and replaced by a modern apartment block. The former **Tanycoed bus depot** premises and workshops (“Jones the bus”) have been part demolished with the rest adapted as a film

studio producing the Welsh language 'soap' "Rownd a Rownd". The former smithy remains have been removed for car and van parking.

All of the former **woollen factory, mill and smithy** buildings around the old Cadnant Bridge have been converted to private dwellings. The former brew-house, dairy and coach house of the Plas Cadnant estate are now available as holiday cottage lets. Glyn yr Afon smithy site in Llandegfan is a much modified and extended private house. The remains of **Melin Cadnant** were demolished some years ago, and the site incorporated into the garden of the former Mill Cottage. The **Pandy** ruin survives, in a densely wooded area on private land.

**Llandegfan windmill** tower remains much as previously, with the miller's cottages now heavily modernised.