

18) Southern Anglesey

On leaving Holy Island by the Stanley Embankment and rejoining the Anglesey mainland, the derelict site on the left of the main road is that of the former Valley Foundry, renowned over a wide area, which manufactured and supplied much equipment for the local quarries and mines. However, the crossroads community at Y Fali, or Valley is nowadays more usually associated with the island's modern industries; the Wylfa nuclear power station and the major military installations of RAF Valley nearby. The local railway station was closed for passengers in 1965 and has remained so ever since despite various re-opening proposals. Although the L&NWR station house has lost its platforms, the picturesque wayside crossing recently retained the old-fashioned heavy wooden gates and lamps, with signal box adjacent. Valley must also be one of the smallest stations still to retain two goods yards in operation, for as well as the usual general traffic facility there is a modern fan of sidings with transporter crane, built to handle the transshipment of nuclear waste containers brought here by road from Wylfa.

The RAF installations at Valley airfield cover a large tract of flat land towards Rhosneigr, and the aerodrome buildings and runways are surrounded by stereotyped workers' housing dating from the last war and after. Helicopters providing the famous and efficient Snowdonia Mountain Rescue Service are operated from here.

Several mills in the area to the south of the A5 road are of interest; Melin-y-Plas at Bryngwran (346774), built as late as 1867, was working until recently but has now lost its waterwheel. Just to the north of a minor road near the mill, the strange-looking brick tower in the middle of a field (349768) once contained a pumping engine to supply fresh water from the adjacent stream to a dwelling house nearby, and also possibly for irrigation purposes.

Melin Gwna at Bodorgan (384702) is a very old site, being recorded in the twelfth century, and thus dating from the period of Prince Llewellyn's administration prior to the Edwardian conquest. The present building has been disused for many years but the 14 ft diameter waterwheel survives, together with much of the internal machinery.

Nearby Bodorgan station (picture right) is one of several in mid-Anglesey that are still served by passenger trains (others are at Ty Croes and Rhosneigr) although outwardly seeming to offer little custom. At Bodorgan there are but a few houses grouped opposite the station, and, remarkably, two hotels still functioning in this otherwise thinly populated area. The station house itself is in the pleasant Chester & Holyhead Railway "country" style with a small goods shed adjacent, being virtually identical to those at Valley and Ty Croes.....



Melin-y-Bont at Ty Croes (346725), latterly more usually known as Bryn-du Mill, although outwardly a windmill with only the tower surviving as usual, will be found on examination to contain the remains of a waterwheel within the base. This once drove the same milling machinery as the sails, a unique dual arrangement ensuring less frequent stoppages due to the vagaries of the weather. The mill was operated by water-power alone after 1934, thus depriving the site of the claim to be the last windmill in operation in the county. Final closure occurred sometime after the last war, but survival and restoration of the machinery was precluded by a fire, and little now remains internally. The course of the leat on either side of the windmill base, and the millpond close by are still very easily traced.

The well-known restaurant and nightspot at Glantraeth Farm (410699) has a 15 ft diameter waterwheel raised above ground and driven electrically as a somewhat unconvincing "feature". The wheel is assumed to have been "imported" from elsewhere as the old maps do not show any evidence of a mill here.

Frogwy Mill at Bodffordd (427773; picture right) is another example of a combined site utilizing both wind and water power, but is this time the more usual arrangement of two separate mills each with their own machinery. The 15 ft diameter cast iron overshot waterwheel survives adjacent to the main mill house which has been converted to a private dwelling: the stone windmill tower overlooks the hillside behind, atop of which is situated the very large millpond shown on modern maps as Llyn Frogwy.



The main A5 road cuts straight across the flat marshy central area of Anglesey for some 15 miles, missing even the principal county town and administrative headquarters of Llangefni on its unhindered way to Holyhead. Fine examples of Telford's octagonal two-story Tollhouses will be seen, in addition to that at Penrhos already mentioned, at Caergeiliog (305786) and Gwalchmai. Just east of the latter village, towards Bodffordd, the large area of land now forming the permanent home of the Anglesey Show is the old Mona Airfield, first established during World War One. It originally had no runways because it was opened, in September 1915, as the "Royal Naval Airship Station, Llangefni", a base for gas-filled airships used by sea scouts for aerial observation of the sea approaches to Liverpool, then threatened by German "U" boats. The administration buildings and barracks were situated beside the A5 road, and there was an airship shed accommodating four craft. After later use as an isolation hospital, the old buildings were demolished and conventional runways constructed in time for a new lease of life during World War Two as RAF Mona. Subsequently operations were transferred to Valley, and now only occasional private aircraft and a local flying club make use of the aerodrome.

Llangefni railway station was the principal stopping place on the Anglesey Central Railway branch to Amlwch, opened in 1865-7 and closed to passengers in 1965. It is the last survivor of the buildings constructed by the original company (the others being of standard L&NWR pattern) and has an unusual upper storey gable built out over the platform, which probably once contained signalling apparatus. The buildings are now occupied by the offices of a builder's merchant, using the station yard for storage purposes. The small goods depot retains its sidings, though long disused. The only traffic on the line now consists of a daily train of chemicals from Amlwch, lately supplemented by construction trains for the oil terminal works, which pass straight through this and other intermediate stations without stopping for business.

In the centre of Llangefni the small stream passing beneath the main street once provided power for the wheels of the Town Mill (corn), which straddled it adjacent to the road bridge. Although disused by 1893, the foundations of the mill building are still clearly visible. The former Anglesey County Council's first and only steam road roller was operational until 1969 and is usually kept at the Cildwrn depot (450760), clearly visible from the main road. It is at present temporarily removed for restoration (1978). Built by Aveling and Porter of Rochester, Kent it carries their works number 2439 and dates from 1889.

Near to the point where the main road link to Llangefni joins the A5 opposite Llangristiolus Church stands a very well preserved bank of two limekilns. The lime-pit is adjacent and connected by a gently inclined ramp used to carry the stone up for tipping directly into the top of the kiln (note how the building has been set into the natural slope of the hillside to facilitate this). A quarter of a mile to the northeast across the fields lies another larger bank of kilns (picture right), prominent on the skyline, with an attendant's cottage close by. This set was served by several pits in the field behind, and the tracks of old tramways converge onto a



stone bridge leading to the top of the kiln range. Dating like most similar ones from the late eighteenth century, these kilns are in a somewhat unexpected location, since, as we have seen, the majority were sited near the sea because the coal used had to be shipped in from elsewhere. The district encompassing the marshes on either side of the Afon Cefni from south of Llangefni to the sea has, however, been worked sporadically for coal over the centuries, and this explains the presence of these kilns hereabouts.

What is now commonly known as the “Anglesey Coalfield” had been worked from the fifteenth century to about 1642, then again on a trial basis from 1810-12. Compared with the very much better-known Welsh coalfields of the South Wales valleys and the Wrexham area, these ventures were small and relatively insignificant. The marshes caused insurmountable drainage difficulties before the more recent “canalization” of the Cefni, and no deep mining was possible. The best coal near the surface was quickly exhausted, and all work finally came to an end with the bankruptcy of the Anglesey Colliery Company in 1865. Most of the output was used locally for lime burning and for copper smelting at Amlwch; in both cases it was totally inadequate to meet the demand and was supplemented by large quantities brought in by sea. Associated with the coalfield was a proposal for the construction of a tramway, the “Anglesea Railway” of 1812, from Penrhynmawr (465728) near Holland Arms to the sea at Red Wharf Bay. Despite contemporary writers referring to this railway being complete and in operation, much argument has ensued during the present century as to whether construction was ever actually finished, or even started. The evidence is still somewhat inconclusive, but what is certain is that there is little or nothing to be seen today on the ground.

Of the coalfield itself, the best-preserved relics are at Berw Colliery (463724); a chimneystack with circular shaft-head adjacent, a smithy and some cottages in ruins. This site was known as Pwll-yr-Engine Fawr during a brief reworking from 1849-51. Some stone blocks with peg-holes can be found, suggestive of an old tramway (the layout and levels of trackways in the vicinity would support this). However, this was probably only a short line down to the old coal-weighing machine on the main road at Penrhynmaur, and having no connection with the above-mentioned scheme.

Lying approximately on what would have been the route of the Anglesea Railway, the later L&NWR branch to Red Wharf Bay & Benllech, opened in 1909, leaves the Amlwch Branch at Holland Arms station (471727). The red-brick buildings including the usual stationmasters cottage still stand here, although the passenger service to Red Wharf Bay was short lived and the branch had closed completely by 1950. The junction station remained open only for a further two years, although passenger trains passed through until the end of the Amlwch service in 1965. Less than a mile to the south, the Anglesey Central Railway itself joins the Chester and Holyhead main line at Gaerwen: the station here has all but disappeared although some of the extensive sidings remain.

There are no less than three windmills in the mile past Holland Arms to Gaerwen village proper, all visible from the A5 road, and all on its northern side. The first appears to have a very unusual brick tower of square section (475723), but this is of a circa 1920s house conversion; the original round tower is totally enclosed within it! The other two, Gaerwen Mill and Maengwyn Mill, retain their familiar circular stone towers.

The Afon Cefni was artificially deepened and straightened in the period 1790-1811, but only as a means of improving drainage; it has never been officially navigable and the seaward outfall at Malltraeth Yard is controlled only by a sluice in the 1,400 yard long embankment or “cob” built as part of the scheme. The hamlet at Malltraeth grew up as a result of shipbuilding activities here in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; it was also a small port. Another similar south coast harbour at Aberffraw was frequented by small ships dealing in typical domestic commodities of butter, cheese, grain and fish. There are traces of quays just below the single-arch bridge that dates from 1731. On the up-steam side of the later crossing, Cellar Mill (356692) has all its machinery and millstones intact, but the waterwheel has been removed.

The village of Newborough was noted before the Second World War for its rush-mat industry, which utilized the marram grass growing profusely on the coastal dunes. Many of the older womenfolk can recall how their time was spent cultivating, gathering and weaving the grass during the summer months. Although a pure cottage industry which has left no traces apart from such memories and a few treasured samples, it was once organized to the extent that each family of workers had their own specific territory allotted to them out on the dunes.

At the southern end Llanddwyn Island, a sandy promontory actually connected to the mainland at most states of the tide, has a derelict lighthouse which was commissioned in 1846 and cottages inhabited by the pilots who operated into and out of the port of Caernarfon. The lifeboat station dates from six years earlier, and the crew were summoned from the village by the firing of the cannon, rusty but still extant, on the cliff top by the cottages. Latterly, before its abandonment in 1907, the boat was launched by a cradle running on rails down the slipway and winched by the windlass also surviving. Steps cut into the rock face lead down to the foreshore.



The stone tower on the headland “Twr Bach” (picture right) predates the lighthouse proper, being constructed circa 1800 as a landmark to shipping. It was whitewashed for good visibility and a bonfire was kept burning on the top at night and during fog.

Derelict buildings of two watermills are to be found in Dwyran, at Melin Wen (444656) and Melin Bach (449667); the latter had a 10 ft wheel driving the main machinery and another 4 ft one in a separate small hut which drove an electrical generator, but little now remains.

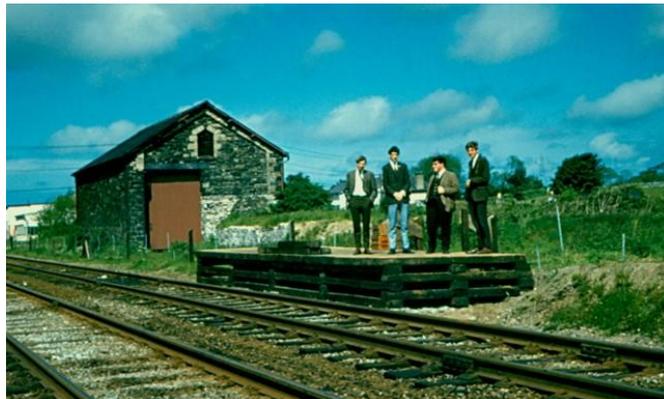
Brynsiencyn is the home of a museum that is somewhat unusual in several respects other than its very erratic opening hours. “Amgueddfa Rhoddfa'r Seirph” (480670) is a kind of folk museum, originally established by one man as a hobby in his house “Brynbellla” and developed into a veritable treasure trove of mainly Victorian paraphernalia. Of special interest to the industrial archaeologist are several mementoes – quarrymen’s pay checks, wages and prices books from Dinorwic Slate Quarries, and outside a fairly complete portable rock-crushing machine by “The Steam Stone Cutter Co., Rutland, Vt. (Wardwells patent no 385)”. It is a pity that this collection is apparently little known and not more easily accessible to the casual visitor.

We complete our circular tour of Anglesey at the famous village with the long name (said to have been invented by a publicity-minded tailor circa 1890), usually abbreviated to Llanfair PG. Despite repeated openings and closings the trains still halt here at present, though the world-renowned station buildings (1866) are now in private hands and function as a cafe. The giant-sized platform ticket is, however, available, and one of the old name boards - though not the original - may be seen in the museum at Penrhyn Castle. The old goods shed has become an exhibition area and auditorium, and a restored LMS 1928-period carriage stands on an isolated section of line outside, doing duty as a craft and gift shop. Here is a selection of photographs of the station as it was, the first three just before closure in early 1966....



At left below, by 1969 the goods sidings have been disconnected from the main running lines, and the unusual survival of a wagon turntable with spur lines serving loading docks off to the right will be noted. This arrangement made best use of the available space at the expense of awkward manual or horse-shunting of individual wagons. Our right-hand picture shows the same area in 1970; the sidings and

turntable have gone, and in their place a hurriedly-constructed timber sleeper platform for the temporary Llanfair PG to Holyhead diesel shuttle service, following closure of the Britannia Bridge after the fire.....



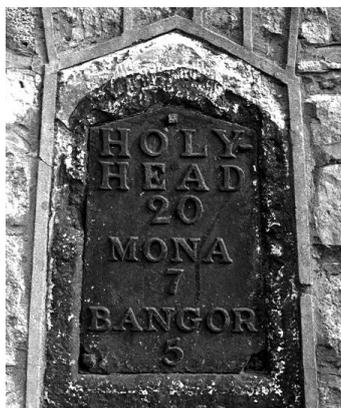
The remaining pictures show the station as existing currently (1978).....



A well-known and very finely maintained example of a double-storey Telford Tollhouse (right), complete with board displaying the list of tolls, stands at the junction of the A5 and Newborough roads in the shadow of the Marquis of Anglesey's miniaturized version of Nelson's column. The toll was last collected in 1895, a victim of railway competition. Next door (to the right) is the home of the first Women's Institute in the British Isles, established 1915.....



One of the cast-iron Telford-era milestones survives nearby, built into a modern wall.....



The beautiful waterside mansion of Plas Newydd, the family seat of the Marquis now administered by the National Trust, has interesting vaulted brick landing stages on the foreshore (circa 1800) and a small dock that was used by the "HMS Conway" sea-training school before its recent closure.

Nearby Plas Llanfair, another mansion now in similar use as "HMS Indefatigable" also has its own dock (530710) with circular turret remarkably similar in appearance to the communal "loo" at Port Penrhyn already described (picture below left, with the partly-rebuilt Britannia Bridge in the background). The large building on the opposite bank of the stream was known as Pwll Fanogll Mills (below right), a grist mill dating from 1795

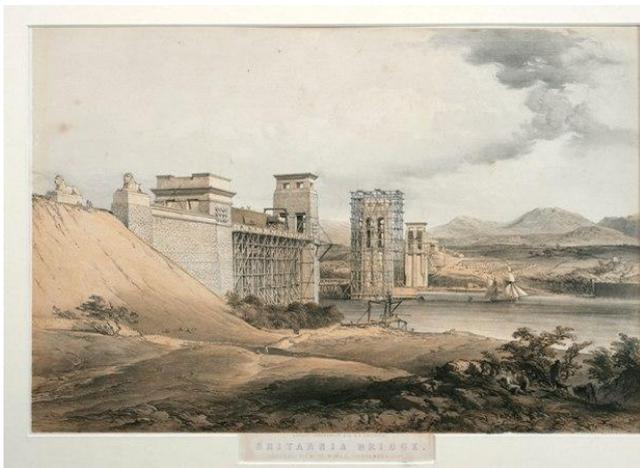
which has its own quay and miller's house adjacent. The other row of cottages once housed workers at the Britannia slate works (now completely demolished) which was a major supplier of school slates; its raw material was shipped across from Port Dinorwic.....



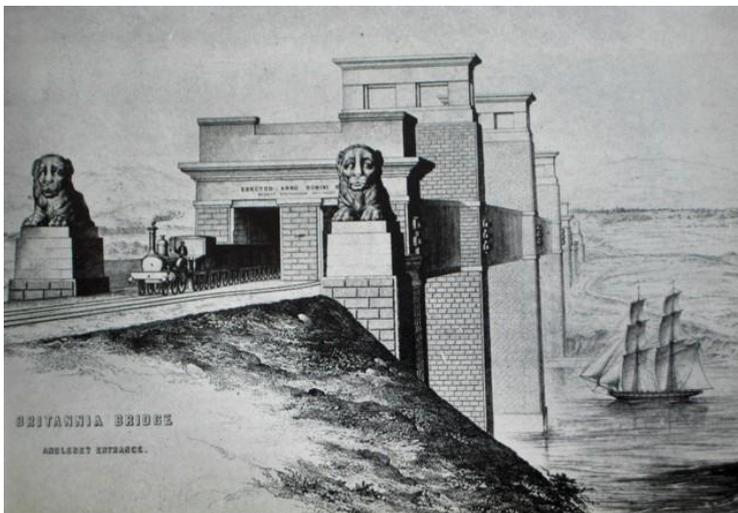
Pwllfanogl was, indeed, once a thriving port for Llanfair PG village. Under the auspices of one Colonel Cotton, who organized a whole range of co-operative enterprises in the district, flower bulbs, chicory and the Newborough rush mats have all been handled here. There was also a bacon-curing works and the Crogan margarine factory operating within this compact community, and the marble for the Marquis's column arrived here by sea in 1817.

The railway line crosses from Anglesey back to the Welsh mainland by means of the Britannia Bridge (542710), which may be approached by a footpath from the road to Llanfair Church, but is more easily appreciated from the Caernarfonshire side. The motorist, pending completion of a road deck on top of this bridge, must perforce return the same way as he came, via the suspension bridge. Taking the Caernarfon Road, and turning off to the right before Treborth village, a bridle road leads down to the end of the bridge. You should park in the vicinity of (547704) and walk down to the Straits foreshore.

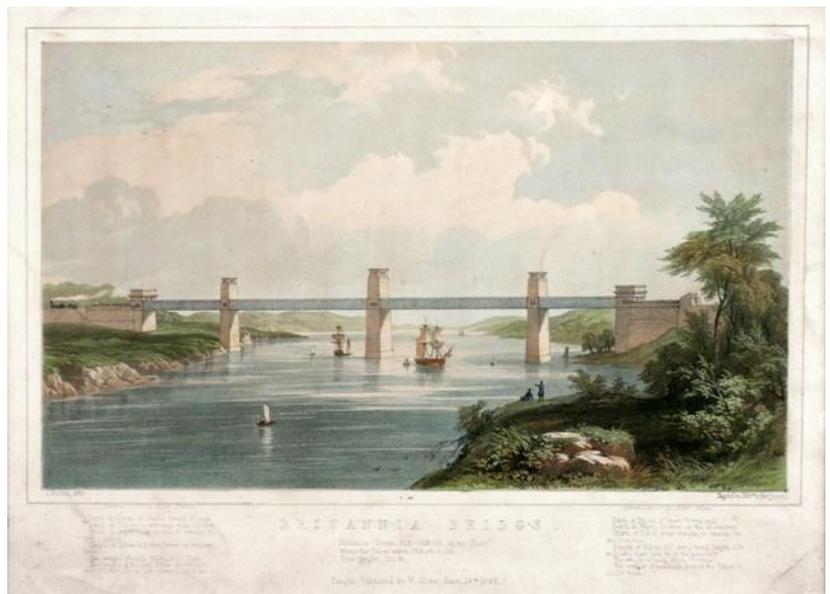
The original (and revolutionary) method of construction of the bridge, which occupied a period of five years from 1845, comprised wrought-iron tubular "Boxes" 1511 ft in total length resting in towers of Penmon marble; a much-enlarged version of that still to be seen at Conwy.....



The designers of the bridge were Robert Stephenson and Sir William Fairburn, and its opening in March 1850 (pictures below) completed the rail link from London to Holyhead which had reached Bangor by 1848.....



This magnificent piece of engineering would have survived unaltered to this day but for the disastrous fire which occurred on the night of 23 May 1970, started by some boys attempting to smoke out birds which were nesting within the stone towers. The iron tubes had long been protected from corrosion by a wooden roof, coated with layer upon layer of pitch - this provided excellent fuel after a long dry spring, and the structure was soon well alight from end to end, showering white-hot molten metal and other debris into the straits below.



When the tubes had cooled, extensive cracks up to $\frac{3}{4}$ in wide appeared, and these together with the very pronounced $2\frac{1}{2}$ ft sag in the centre of the main spans necessitated immediate closure. Complete rebuilding followed in the period 1971-3 into a form not unlike Stephenson's original idea, with steel arches supporting the tracks from underneath; the height requirement of tall-masted sailing ships having long since become irrelevant.



In July 1972 we were fortunate to be able to participate in an organized group visit to the work in progress.....



Subsequently the massive tubes, temporarily supported by the new arches, and the exhilarating walk across the top of them, have disappeared forever but a good view may now be had from the trains instead.

The original stone towers have been opened out to take the planned road deck above the railway lines, and the “inscription” cut into the central one is thus not the original, but a 1972 copy.

Four enormous stone lions still guard the approaches and add to the “Egyptian” flavour of the architecture.

On the Caernarfonshire side, a relic of disaster during the original construction work is the broken cylinder of a hydraulic jack that exploded while one of the tubes was being raised into position upon the masonry towers. It now rests on a plinth amidst contractor’s debris from the latest work. There were formerly cottages for the construction workmen and a short-lived platform (Britannia Halt) adjacent to this end of the bridge; a stretch of grass-grown embankment that gave rail access to the original construction site may still be clearly seen.



Keith A. Jagers November 1978

Updates – January 2012

The **Valley Foundry** site is now occupied by a filling station and house. **Valley railway station** is open again, with new short platforms on the original site. The old station house and the signalbox both survive, together with the triangle of lines serving the power station, also used occasionally for turning steam locomotives working excursion trains into Holyhead, but the general freight facility has long gone. **RAF Valley** continues to function.

At **Melin y Plas** the watermill building and limekiln have been converted to smart private residences, with no machinery remaining. The nearby **pump house** remains as a ruin, visible from the road on the north side. **Melin Gwna** is a roofless, ivy clad ruin; there may be some remains of the wheel and mechanism in the undergrowth? The station house and goods shed both survive at **Bodorgan**. The two former hotels, the Meyrick Arms directly opposite the station and the Bodorgan Arms a few yards to its east, have both been converted to private residences. **Ty Croes** station still has its staggered platforms, one either side of the level crossing which retains old-style manually-operated gates. The signalbox and station office are combined in one brick building, an unusual arrangement.

Melin y Bont is a listed structure, with surviving machinery restored. The windmill tower has a neat new cap, and until very recently was advertised by owners the Bodorgan Estate as holiday

accommodation, but is now shown as not available. It is not known what the longer-term plan is for the property. **Glantraeth** appears to have long reverted to a private property; presumably the water wheel has been sold for re-use elsewhere? At **Frogwy Mill**, all structures have been converted to private residences; the iron parts only of the waterwheel survive in situ, the rest having rotted.

The **toll houses** at both Caergeiliog and Gwalchmai are smart private residences, easily visible from the main road. The RAF presence at **Mona Airfield** is re-established as a back-up to Valley, and the Mona Flying Club continues to operate here also.

Llangefni station house is a private residence, little altered externally and visible from the approach road; on the opposite side the old stone goods shed retains its heavy wooden main doors and forms part of a retail development. The railway track still passes through on its way to Amlwch, though much overgrown and barely visible in the trees. The foundations of the old **Llangefni town mill**, astride the river in the centre of town, have been conserved and form a distinctive feature of a paved public seating area adjacent. The Anglesey County Council **steamroller** is now in the care of the Anglesey Vintage Equipment Society and is undergoing restoration in their workshops at Dolwen, Star, Gaerwen.

The **limekilns** near Llangristiolus Church survive, but are almost buried in thick undergrowth. The others nearby may be glimpsed a few yards to the north side of the A55 Expressway road, an overgrown ruin; the lime burner's cottage was obliterated by the new road.

Remaining buildings and the chimney stack on the **Berw Colliery** site are being restored for site owners RSPB, and may become a visitor centre; a useful reminder to many who find it hard to believe that Anglesey once had a coal-mining industry!

Holland Arms railway station's main building has been smartly renovated as a private dwelling, easily visible from the entrance gateway, but at **Gaerwen Junction** most of the large former station site has been cleared and remains as wasteland. A 1950s era grain warehouse survives, as does the old signalbox.

Of the three **windmills** along the main road from Holland Arms to Gaerwen, the westernmost one has recently had the later additions stripped away, revealing the original stone tower once more, but is being re-enclosed in a new dwelling! The middle one was recently still a ruin but retaining some timber parts of the former cap and turning mechanism; it is now owned by a builder who intends to convert it for residential use. The third, to its east, is a derelict tower owned and cared for by a local family who intend eventual restoration.

The "canal" section of the **River Cefni** is now accompanied by a leisure route cycleway and footpath, "Lon Las Cefni", from the A5 road down to Malltraeth harbour. At **Aberffraw** the old bridge is a listed structure with pedestrian access, but little trace of the old quays is now evident here. Cellar Mill is now used as a builder's store, in apparently poor external repair but with some internal machinery.

Llanddwyn "Island" is a popular summer leisure spot, where the old stone tower has been restored, albeit with a modern directional navigation light on top. The signal cannon and Pilot's cottages are also smartly renovated.

At Dwyran, **Melin Wen** is a derelict ruin now surrounded by modern bungalows. **Melin Bach** is undergoing restoration; the mechanism has been removed for refurbishment off site. The **Museum** at Brynsiencyn was disbanded during the 1980s after the death of the owner. His collection of Dinorwic artefacts, including the "Velocipede", went back home to the Slate Museum at Gilfach Ddu, Llanberis.

Llanfair PG railway station house continues to function as a tourist venue, but the former goods shed and LMS carriage have gone, replaced by a modern retail development. The station itself is now open again, with original footbridge in situ, and the old signalbox eastwards is retained to oversee the adjacent road



level crossing which still has its 1950s-era manually operated gates.....



The Telford **tollhouse** and WI meeting room next door are smartly maintained, as is the quay and dock at **Plas Newydd**, now used as a base for water sports activities. At **Plas Llanfair** the dock is in similar use by cadets, with the circular building now restored. **Pwllfanogl Mill** is renovated as a fine residence with boat storage facilities and workshop. The former terrace of slate mill cottages opposite has long gone, but a couple survive in residential use on the south side, near the beach.

The mainland foreshore adjacent to and beneath the **Britannia Bridge** is accessible for public use and forms an interesting walk. A restored very short section of the Stephenson “tube” is mounted on a plinth nearby, on the west side. The old grassy siding embankment dating from original construction days is still evident within the curve of the main railway line, forming the southern boundary of the adjacent playing fields. The road deck on top of the bridge structure was completed in the 1980s and now forms the Expressway main route into Anglesey. In February 1980 we were again privileged to visit the works, enjoying spectacular views of and from the new structure.....

