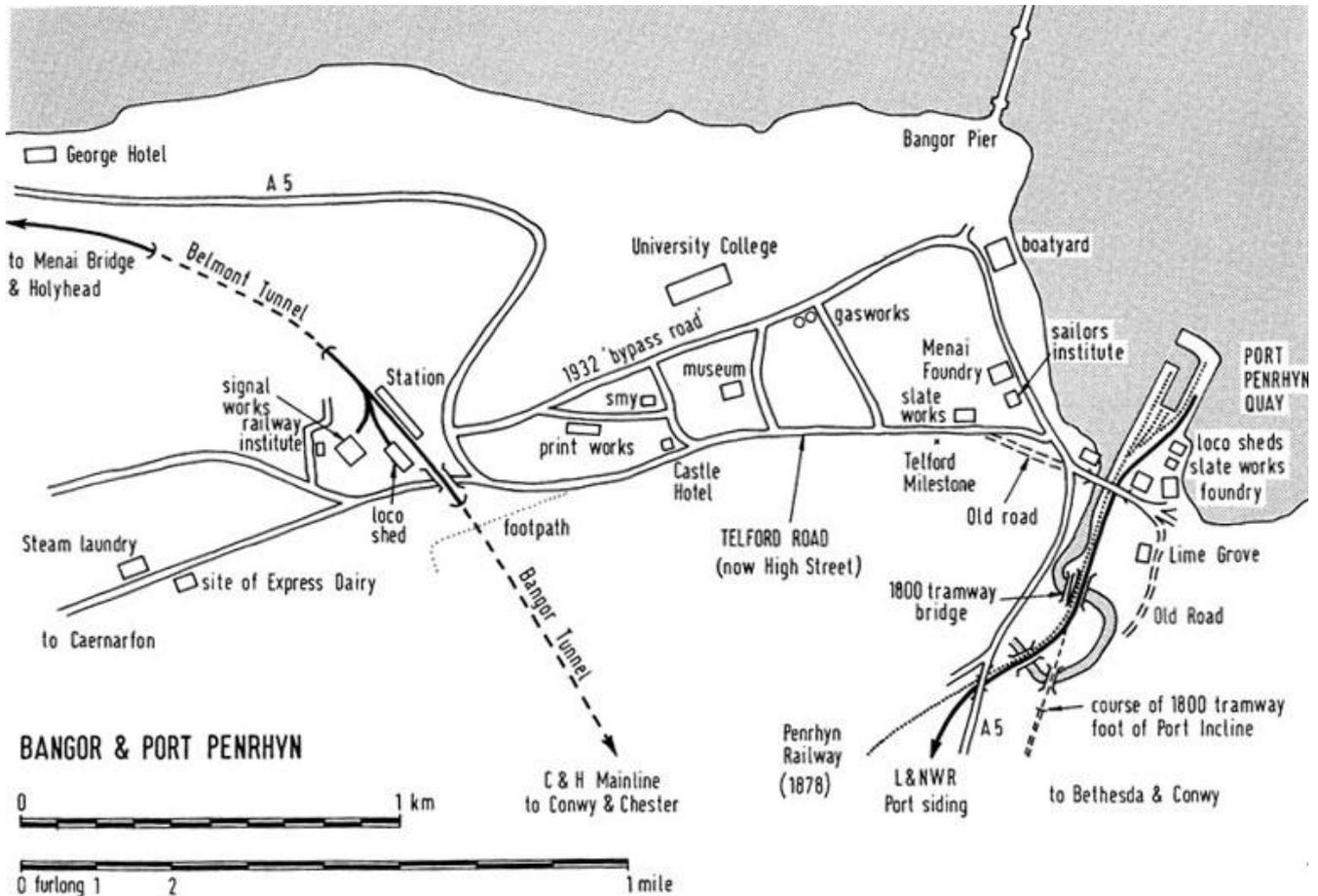


12) Bangor and district

That area of the City of Bangor representing its former industrial importance, the slate quays of Port Penrhyn, has already been described (section 10). There remains to catalogue a variety of miscellaneous industrial relics in what is nowadays primarily a university town and a local government and commercial centre of the County of Gwynedd.



The University College of North Wales was first established in 1889 in the Penrhyn Arms Hotel previously mentioned, where the present main A5 road cuts through a rock outcrop of Bangor Mountain to join up with Beach Road. Nowadays it occupies much property, old and new, throughout the area.

The formerly isolated Victorian suburb of Hirael emphasizes the marine connections of the city. There is a sailors institute ("Admission Free"), long derelict but now restored and in the ownership of the adjoining "Nelson Alehouse". A flourishing boatyard was first established in 1926 to cater for the needs of the local fishing fleet. Increasingly, trade has shifted to the domestic and pleasure markets, but occasional work has been undertaken on the construction of Admiralty cutters and pilot boats up to fifty feet in length. The National Tyre Service Depot (Hacker's) in Beach Road was the "Menai Foundry" of John Owen and Co. until the 1950's, and the area's last sail loft which was next door was regrettably demolished as late as 1973 to make way for the new filling station. The distinctive and enlightened Corporation housing at Maes Isalaw, overlooking the bay and fronted by neat gardens, replaced extensive slum housing in 1933.....



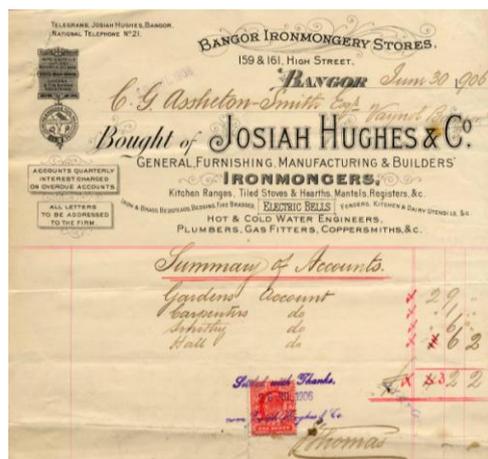
Going up the High Street, Messrs. Humphrey Williams' yard to the right was formerly the Penlôn school slate manufactory, and has most of the original buildings. A reminder that this was once the main Holyhead road is given by the Telford Milestone set in the wall of the large house named Bron Castell - lately the BBC studios - opposite.

The town gas works adjacent to Dean Street was established in 1843 and retains some Victorian features despite extensive modernization. Private gas lighting plant had however been installed at various premises in the town from about 1822 and the works thus represented an early attempt at rationalization and consolidation of a fast-growing industry. It is now reduced to the status of a mere relay station in the North Wales gas network.

Bangor Corporation's grand promenade pier, one third of a mile in length, was declared open by Lord Penrhyn on the 14th of May 1896, replacing a stone jetty built in 1858 and considerably shortening the Garth ferry service which had plied hereabouts across to Anglesey since circa 1350. The pier was declared unsafe in 1971 and has since been the subject of much argument for preservation versus demolition, being the last surviving largely unaltered Victorian pier around British shores. It has delightful regency-style tollbooths, but it is no longer possible to pass the turnstiles and avail of the delightful straits views, or of the Anglesey ferry or numerous paddle-steamer pleasure trips from Liverpool, Llandudno and other places which once called during the summer months. Perhaps, in the early morning mist hanging over the corroded girders, one might even yet catch the faint strains of the "first class military bands performing daily" or the "grand instrumental and vocal concerts..... during the season" - but such are all long-past glories.....



Bangor's mainly Georgian and Victorian High Street is noted for its preponderance of commercial properties – probably a larger number of banks, building societies and estate agents per head of population than any other town of comparable size. Of their architecture, two of the banks are notable, the Tudor-style Lloyds, and the Westminster's Venetian; both date from 1860. Caxton House (now Boots), near the town clock, was an old established printing works and the home of the "North Wales Chronicle" newspaper from 1828. The town's oldest hotel is the Castle, a seventeenth-century coaching inn opposite the Cathedral, and right on the old main road. Just beyond, an interesting old shopfront survival is that of Josiah Hughes.....



Towards the station, the Victorian “Rowlands Commercial Temperance Hotel” still proclaims respectable (though long defunct) lodgings for rail travellers.....

Glanrafon Smithy (579720) functions in its original buildings, though all around has altered much over the years. The old-established printing works adjacent is also still in operation, but its buildings are without much interest compared to another nearby (now “Serck Services”) retaining the characteristic Victorian red-brick premises, but now used for quite different purposes.

The principal employer in Bangor before the University College assumed its present dominance was the London and North Western Railway Company, who established extensive locomotive and goods departments, as well as a civil engineering and signal works, in the city. The station itself was formerly a major traffic centre and junction for numerous branch lines, to Caernarfon and Pwllheli, Llanberis, Bethesda, Amlwch and Red Wharf Bay. This importance diminished through the 1950’s and 1960’s with the closure of all of these feeders, and the engine sheds became a steel stock merchants' warehouse after the demise of the steam locomotive hereabouts in 1967.

A good overall view of the layout of the station area, very unusually situated and cramped between two tunnels, may be had from the footpath rising above the eastern tunnel portal behind the “Plaza” Cinema. This famous print of circa 1860 shows the terrace including the Temperance Hotel in the background, amidst extensive open farmland!.....

From the other end, above Belmont Tunnel, the view is equally good.....

The earliest buildings, now the upside waiting rooms and buffet with offices above, date from 1848; note the “C & H” monograms (Chester and Holyhead Railway) and the solid stone name panels once characteristic of the line, so much more durable than the recent BR enamel substitutes (photos below). The present main station offices at roadway level are of LMS railway origin circa 1932, and were necessitated by the construction of outside platform loop lines which severed direct access to the original buildings.





The track layout has now reverted largely to the old plan as a result of extensive alterations in 1970-1, and the footbridge now spans only the additional car parking area created out of the former branch bays and loop lines. One of the large old L&NWR signal boxes (picture left below) also disappeared at this time and the whole layout is now operated from the former No. 2 box by the entrance portal of Belmont tunnel (right).....



Of the much-extended bridges carrying the lines over the Caernarfon Road, the westernmost span is probably the original cast iron arch of 1848, as depicted on the above early engraving.

Behind the engine sheds and signal works, a large Victorian red-brick railway community survives intact, bearing such evocative street names as Euston Road and West End, patently uninfluenced by any local culture. The L&NWR Railway Institute (1898, extended 1905) houses an interesting contemporary model of how the Britannia Bridge over the Menai Straits might have looked, had the Admiralty not objected to the obstruction of headroom for shipping in 1846, and remarkably similar to the appearance of the present structure since its recent rebuilding. Our right-hand picture below is outside the Institute building, with the model being returned after an exhibition in the Bangor Student's Union.....



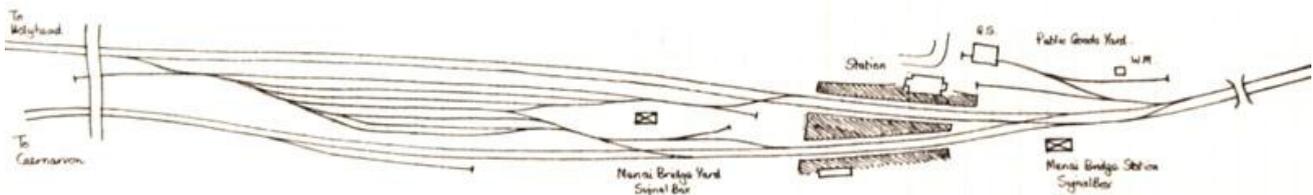


This west, or “Railway” end of the city also once contained the “Express” dairy and the Bangor Steam Laundry among other industries, and the Union Workhouse, Cae Maesidan. The laundry buildings alone survive at (571710). Along the length of the southern side of the main Caernarfon Road there were also several small stone quarries (for building materials) and copper works.

Meanwhile, the Holyhead Road meanders through the University and residential development of the upper town to gain the shore of the Menai Straits once more. Now focal point of the “Normal College” teacher training school, the old “George” Hotel is surrounded by modern buildings. This was the last mainland hostelry on the Irish Road, where winter travellers might have had to wait several days to cross the straits by ferry before completion of the suspension bridge in 1826. The bridge designer, Thomas Telford, himself stayed at the hotel during construction work, and his initials, carefully inscribed onto the glass of his window, may still be seen. The ferry landing stage below the hotel is still accessible (560715), and the “George’s” opposite number on Anglesey, the old “Cambria Inn” of 1697 may be seen across the straits (see section 13).

The last milestone on the mainland section of Telford’s Road (562715) gives the distances to Holyhead, Mona (a once-important staging post on Anglesey) and Bangor. Until recently there was also a rare Chester and Holyhead Railway boundary marker plate here at the foot of the railway embankment but this has disappeared, no doubt in unauthorised hands. The station reputedly serving the town of Menai Bridge was in fact necessarily situated on the Caernarfonshire side of the Straits, which inconvenience contributed to its demise in 1966, but the original C & H station house survives (556711).....

In passenger days there were four platforms here, for this was the junction of the double-track branch to Caernarfon with the main line into Anglesey, but all this has now gone, including the extensive freight marshalling yard between the two sets of lines, to the west. The small station goods yard was last used in August 1973, after a spate of activity in



connection with the tubular bridge rebuilding, appropriately enough for the removal of L&NWR steam locomotive 1054 from Penrhyn Castle (whence it came by road) to a new and perhaps more active life in Manchester.

Updates – December 2011

The **Nelson Inn** and the former **Menai Foundry** (still National Tyre Service) are almost the last surviving fragments of the old Hirael community. Dickies **boatyard** closed down and the site was cleared in 2011. The **Maes Isalaw** houses still have their view over the bay.

Penlôn **slate works**, used by Jewsons as a builder's materials yard for many years is now a derelict and partly cleared site with no old buildings remaining. The Telford **milestone** can be seen beside the entrance to Bron Castell. This Victorian building is now flats, with modern ones added alongside. The former **gas works** site has been completely redeveloped.

The magnificent **Bangor Pier** has been fully restored and is open for public access, complete with cafe and summertime entertainment.....



In the High Street (now pedestrianised), the **Old Bank** at the Town Clock still trades as Lloyds-TSB and the Westminster is now branded as Natwest. **Caxton House** is currently empty, with messrs Boots having moved across the road into the former Woolworths store. The **Castle Hotel** closed in 1989 and was demolished 1996; student flats and shops now occupy the site. **Josiah Hughes' shop** still retains its magnificent cast-ironwork and large name sign; it is now a cafe. The **Rowlands Temperance Hotel** building was part demolished and part hideously “modernised” with concrete slabs, but it now stands derelict, a real eyesore.

The former **Glanrafon smithy** building (in Sackville Road, opposite the “Old Glan” pub) is extant and used as an office. The nearby **printworks** establishment is now a welfare advice centre, and the other one further along Sackville Road was demolished some years ago.

What remained of Bangor **railway station** after the extensive 1970's rationalization has not altered greatly over the intervening years, even retaining the fast, “through” tracks down the centre. The main (LMS era) entrance building has been nicely restored and sympathetically painted, and the main up platform range (original C&H Railway) is still in use.....



The old **locomotive shed** and **goods shed** structures now comprise a Network Rail Engineering depot. The signal works and civil engineers buildings have gone, their site being occupied by a modern

Royal Mail postal sorting and distribution office. The former No. 2 **signalbox** survives in use, but has been so heavily modernised externally that its L&NWR origins are now hardly apparent (compare with our photo above).....



The **Plaza** cinema (the last in the city) has gone, replaced by a block of student flats. The footpath running behind and over the tunnel mouth is now very heavily wooded, such that the previous splendid view across the whole station area is now totally obscured. The original 1848 C&H Railway **cast iron bridge** span over Caernarfon Road is a listed structure and has recently been restored and repainted.

The L&NWR **Railway Institute** building is still in use as a social venue, but now looking rather shabby with the iron railings in front replaced by an ugly wire netting fence. The present whereabouts of the Britannia Bridge model formerly kept there is not known. The railway worker's **terraced housing** in Belmont and Clarence Streets nearby has been smartly renovated. Out along the main Caernarfon Road, the **Bangor Steam Laundry** building has succumbed to redevelopment.

The **George Hotel** close to the suspension bridge is restored and now provides student accommodation, retaining its splendid views across and along the Menai Strait.....



The opposite ferry **landing stage** on the Anglesey shore, a projecting grassy stone wharf off Beach Road just east of the bridge, serves as a recreational viewpoint with picnic table and a wayboard explaining the history of the site. Back on the mainland, the last westbound Telford **milestone** is clearly visible opposite the caravan park (grid location: 562715). The former Menai Bridge main **station building** has long been demolished.