

## 16) North West Anglesey

The main line railway came to Amlwch too late to be of use to the copper industry, whose business was always conducted by sea. It was not until 1867 that the Anglesey Central Railway was opened from a Junction with the Chester and Holyhead Line at Gaerwen, running via Llangefni and Llanerchymedd to Amlwch. The passenger and general freight terminus of the branch has been demolished since closure in 1965, but the long siding running down to the Associated Octel Company's chemical works survives in use. Extensive exchange sidings may be seen at the point (442927) where the company's locomotives formerly took over the trains; since 1968 however BR engines have worked throughout over the three level crossings in the town streets, to collect special tank wagons loaded with liquid chlorine and bromine. The extremely dangerous nature of these cargoes should ensure the continuation of the branch line (now also seeing increasing use in connection with the oil terminal project) for many years to come. Our pictures below show, on the left looking northwards towards the former passenger terminus as surviving in 1967 with the exchange sidings to the right; and a BR diesel locomotive crossing one of the town streets a few years later, with some choice contemporary cars in evidence.....



The beautiful inaccessible and rugged coastline of the North West of Anglesey, from Amlwch round to Holy Island, holds some surprises pleasant and otherwise for the unsuspecting visitor, who may think that here at least he would be able to explore with his family a scene un-spoilt by recent "civilization". Probably even the keenest of Industrial Archaeologists will be horrified in decades to come at the way the mighty bulk of the nuclear power station at Wylfa Head (1966-8) has been imposed upon this landscape, but against this they might find hours of pleasure at such places as nearby Porth Wen (401946; picture right)

The guidebooks over the years have been surprisingly sympathetic towards the derelict remains of the silica brickworks in this small and very "Cornish" cove; interesting, but it must be admitted not exactly beautiful. This works was in operation in the early years of the present century and again from about 1924-45, producing silica bricks from the local porcelain quartz clay, for use as blast furnace linings in the steel industry.



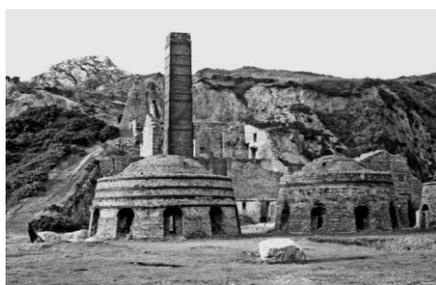
The clay pit at the top of the hill to the west was connected to the works by a cable-worked inclined plane carrying 2 ft 6 in gauge track. The public footpath joins this about halfway down its length; at the summit the drum house is intact and there are remains of sleepers and wagons littered around. At the top

level of the works complex itself stands the only surviving part of the mill machinery, a small jaw crusher bearing the fascinating inscriptions, “Baxters Improved 16 x 9 Patent Knapping Motion Stone Breaker” and “Lubricate the breaker well / tightened bolts prevent all rapping / and be sure all parts are clean / that’s the way to keep it KNAPPING”.

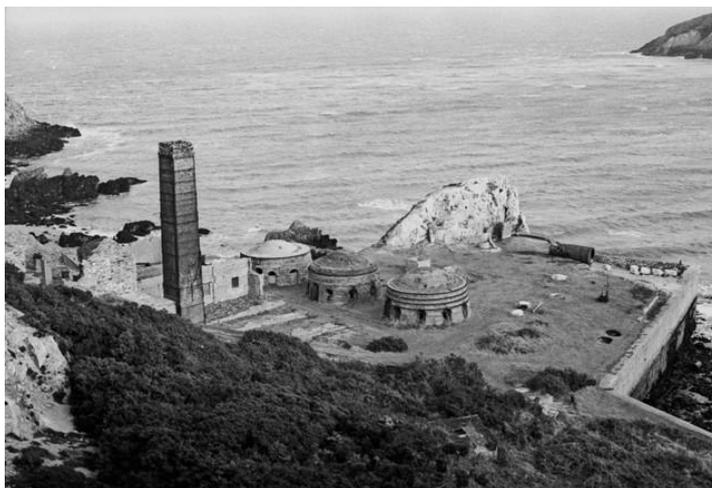
Progress of the quarried stone through the various floors of the crushing mill may then be followed down to the level of the quay. Here amidst the crumbling buildings a water tube boiler range installed circa 1900 stands well preserved (the fire-doors carry the monogram “S. B. Co.” - Stirling Boiler Co.), adjacent to a now-empty engine house that once supplied power to the mill machinery.



There are three circular brick-drying kilns (two of them retaining the original domed brick roof), interconnected by a large network of under floor flues leading to a tall chimneystack.....



On the quay itself there is a 16 cwt. hand winch, a Lancashire boiler shell and the remains of a large two-cylinder steam crane for loading vessels, the sole means of transportation from this isolated spot. Numerous wagons, wheels and pieces of rail may be seen in the water at low tide, some of these doubtless the result of mishaps on the incline.



To the north of the crushing mill a newer building (from the second period of operation) is now in a very precarious state and dangerous to approach, but just adjacent to it are to be found the remains of a small horizontal steam engine by Thos. C. Fawcett (Leeds); another tall chimney stands nearby.

A short walk along a pleasant and dramatic stretch of coast now administered by the National Trust brings us to another isolated works at Porth Llanlleiana. The purpose of the remains is somewhat baffling as a result of long disuse: there are several trial shafts for copper in the vicinity, some supposedly of Roman origin, but the prominent features are undoubtedly those of another clay working, this time for china clay used in the manufacture of porcelain. There is a large stone building (photos below) with many window and door openings most nearly resembling a barrack or administrative block, also a chimneystack constructed circa 1910 and an interesting quay/breakwater arrangement adjacent. There is much scope for further investigation here.....





Yet another brickworks, this time having the more modern arrangement of a tunnel kiln, will be noticed adjoining the new bypass road near the village of Cemaes (375935). The chimneystack has the date 1907 woven into the pattern of the brickwork, and the extensive range of kilns may be entered and explored. This works was closed down by 1949. A narrow-gauge tramway (shown on the 1901 large-scale O/S map) ran from the works down beside the river to the tiny creek at Cemaes Bay; its commencement has been obliterated by the bypass construction but the arch by which it passed under the village road is still extant just a few yards up from the quay, on the south side of the stream. The tramway track is partially intact, but buried in mud above the bridge. On the opposite side of the river there used to stand a woollen mill which although working until the 1930's has now vanished without trace. There was another unconnected tramway, constructed about 1915 along the stone breakwater enclosing the harbour, but this has now been concreted over. The jetty was built in two parts, in the 1850's and 1890's. Shipbuilding was carried on at Cemaes Bay from about 1830-50, as in common with most of the coastal villages and creeks of Anglesey.

Cemaes Mill (367927), seen on the way out of the village, is one of the few windmills still retaining the iron rack gear which was used to turn the cap and sails, atop its rendered brick tower.

The last feature of note along the North West coast, inaccessible to the ordinary traveller, is the Skerries Lighthouse, noteworthy as being the first to be established along these dangerous shores. It was founded as early as 1716 as a coal-fired brazier and was the last private lighthouse in the United Kingdom not to be owned by Trinity House (until 1841). The present light is modern.

Turning inland, there is little of interest to be seen nowadays in the old market town of Llanerchymedd: its tanning, clog and boot making industries became extinct before 1860 without leaving tangible evidence. However, the derelict building at (471849) has some social relevance, as it was formerly the Anglesey Union Workhouse. It has since been occupied as council offices until recently.

A detour along a few miles of typical Anglesey by road is next necessary to reach the village of Llanddeusant, which remarkably contains not only the last working watermill on the island, but also the only one of its windmills to retain much of its character, albeit woefully derelict and totally unsafe. Llyn Mill (341853), built circa 1820, was damaged by a storm in 1918 and never repaired; it was thus not the last to work on the island, but is now the only one to be seen with any remains of the sails and cap.....



It was in a complete condition in 1934 when the Royal Commission of Ancient Monuments survey recorded it in great detail with a photograph and drawings. The tower is 30 ft 6 in high and has a diameter of 19 ft 6 in at the base; the span of the sails was 69 ft 6 in. On the top of the tower a timber curb carried an iron-gear rack upon which the cap was rotated to turn the sails into the wind, by means of an 8 ft diameter chain wheel.

The mill consists of three upper floors; the weather cap, a grain store and sack hoist at the top, the three pairs of mill stones below it, and a ground level room used for bagging the flour carried down the wooden chutes from the stones. The whole interior is riddled with woodworm and is partially collapsed, thus making restoration impracticable without resort to total reconstruction.

It was hoped at one time that the mill might have been dismantled and re-erected elsewhere, possibly at the Welsh Folk Museum, St. Fagans, but this was not to be. Meanwhile the remains of the sails have been fragmented during successive recent winter storms, and if deterioration proceeds at the present rate the mill will be reduced to the status of all the other empty stone towers already noted around the island within a very few years.



It is a much happier proposition to be able to visit, only a mile or so down the road, the restored Howells' Mill, otherwise known as Melin Hywel (picture right). This watermill was in regular use until as late as 1973, when the last of a long line of a family of millers died at 73 years of age. Some £16,000 has since been spent on refurbishing and the mill is once again at work, not merely as another tourist attraction, but for the everyday purpose for which it was intended, under the supervision of Anglesey's last full-time miller.



The building was a very appropriate choice for restoration since the site, dating back to at least 1335, is one of the earliest recorded on the island to survive as a mill to the present time; some parts of the structure and foundations may indeed date from this period. Of the machinery itself, the waterwheel was enlarged from 12 ft to 14 ft in diameter before 1850, the extension cast flanges being tailor-made at a Caernarfon foundry and still in situ. At the same time the number of sets of stones was increased from one to the present four, though not all are in use as their replacement is nowadays prohibitively expensive. The granary section with cart and implement shed below is a typical late eighteenth-century feature. Amongst the roof beams a toll board pronounces "Toll am falu - 1 peg o wenith - 6 chwart" (1 peck for 1½ cwts, or one-twelfth part), a relic of the system of payment in kind which was abolished during the days of enforced wartime rationing. Toll grain was usually fed to the miller's pigs, traditionally the fattest in the neighbourhood.

The whole of the machinery and gearing has been sympathetically restored using traditional materials and the mill is now in daily use as it has been for centuries, a valuable working part of a rural farming community. Here it is possible to see all the processes being carried out, by kind permission of

the owner, whose only regret is that the dust and cobwebs will take a little time to re-establish themselves after the rebuilding, to recreate the true atmosphere of the country mill.

Despite the obvious attractions of the site, it must be emphasized that the owner's wish that it should not become a tourist "magnet" can only be respected by prior application for permission to view, and then only in case of genuine and especial interest. Apart from the obvious difficulties associated with a working mill, there is very little room for cars to manoeuvre in the narrow lane leading down to the river.

The last village along the North West coast before the main traffic artery of the Holyhead road is rejoined is Llanfachraeth, a woollen manufacturing and brewing community that has lost much of its prewar importance. Down a narrow lane towards the sea are situated the buildings of the Mona Brewery (311828) including a sizeable kiln chimneystack. This complex serves now merely as outbuildings and stores, the former brewer's house being still in occupation. It ceased to perform its original function during the 1920's. Such small local breweries (of which there were also several in Amlwch, but none now remain) were established to meet the needs of the large immigrant population resulting from rapid industrialization; in the case of Anglesey primarily due to the copper mines.

Beside the main road by the river bridge at Erw Goch (317822) are the remains of one of the woollen factories, containing an 11 ft diameter cast iron waterwheel with wooden spokes. This site ceased operation prior to 1925. In contrast, nearby Melin Llywenan (344822) was still in operation as the Anglesey Tweed Mill until 1952, (the last such to work in the county), and was the subject of an attempted reopening to cater for the tourist trade as late as 1964. This mill was established for fulling prior to 1710, and spinning machines and carding engines were installed a century after this. Only the axle survives of the former 12 ft diameter overshot waterwheel that powered the equipment; there are but scant remains within the derelict building.

The last relic of the old Anglesey Turnpike, now B5109, is a milestone at (348801), now so totally insignificant as to make its location almost impossible to find, and of interest only to the really dedicated.

Keith A. Jagers     November 1978

## Updates - January 2012

After several changes of ownership and products, the former **Associated Octel** works site in Amlwch was finally closed down in 2005. However, the last rail freight workings occurred during 1993, preceded by some special last passenger trains along the length of the branch line from Gaerwen in 1992. Since then the whole route has been "mothballed" pending a decision on its long-term future, with track intact but increasingly overgrown with lush vegetation. There have been various proposals for reinstatement as a heritage railway supplemented by regular diesel-powered commuter trains, most recently by the **Anglesey Central Railway Co**, and/or as a cycleway, but with little tangible progress to date. Owner Network Rail has recently been studying the viability of re-opening the Gaerwen to Llangefni section with a normal all-year-round passenger service, and ACR have been carrying out vegetation clearance and trackwork assessment northwards from Llangefni. Track remains in situ at all three former road crossings on the **Octel siding** in Amlwch town, but is securely fenced off on either side at each. The remnants of the **exchange sidings** are also still intact. The passenger station site is now occupied by a lorry park and transport cafe, but the former **goods shed** building survives.

**Wylfa nuclear power station** is scheduled to cease generation during 2012 then start to undergo de-commissioning, presently estimated to occupy the next 80 years or so before complete clearance of the site! It is planned to be replaced by a new nuclear generator to be built adjacent to the present one. Its main base-load customer, the Rio Tinto **Anglesey Aluminium** smelter ceased production and was "mothballed" in 2009 due to its power costs becoming unviable – it was formerly the largest single consumer of electricity in the UK.

The **Porth Wen silica brickworks** site remains largely unchanged, mainly due to its remoteness, but buildings have endured steady slow decay and much ferrous material has inevitably disappeared. It is still a very worthwhile and picturesque site to explore though.

More recent research confirms the purpose of the ruined buildings at **Porth Llanlleiana** as a china-clay porcelain works, and some old postcard views of the site and structures are available by searching on the internet. The remains are still in a similar state to that shown in our 1970s photographs, again largely due to their remoteness.

At **Cemaes brickworks**, the chimney and most of the Hoffman kiln structure are intact and have been conserved; they are accessible from the by-pass road opposite the Gwelfor turning. The tramway route down to the village and harbour is a good footpath, amazingly with the rails still embedded into the surface in parts. The former tramway arch under Bridge Road carries the footpath into the harbour area.

**Cemaes windmill** tower is a listed structure which was converted for residential use during the 1980s, unfortunately with a new non-traditional style roof.

The **Skerries Lighthouse** was automated in the 1980s, controlled from Holyhead, and the ancillary buildings now provide accommodation for RSPB wardens and other visitors during the summer months.

At Llanerchymedd, after a long period of dereliction the former **Anglesey Union Workhouse** premises were renovated in 2002 for "Oriol Newydd", a fine art dealership & picture-framing business including residential accommodation.

The watermill and windmill at Llanddeusant have perversely undergone an unexpected reversal of fortunes. The derelict **Llynon Windmill** was fortunately purchased by Anglesey County Council and fully restored to operative order during 1980 – 1986. It is the only working windmill in Wales, open to visitors during the summer months, with its flour available for sale. Our picture was taken shortly after re-opening, a magnificent transformation from our 1970s images in the main article above!.....

In contrast however, the news about nearby **Howell's Selar watermill** is not at all good; after milling ceased a few years ago, the buildings and machinery are falling into disrepair and the water supply has had to be diverted away from the waterwheel to prevent structural damage. It is only to be hoped that further decay can be arrested, and the mill be brought back into use in the near future.

The former **Mona Brewery** premises at Llanfachraeth remain derelict on a now well-wooded site adjacent to the access lane, and the kiln chimney has been taken down. The brewer's house is in private residential use. To the south of the village the **Erw Goch woollen factory** building has become a private house, much modernised, but retaining the restored waterwheel on one end.

**Melin Llywenan**'s main building is derelict but with roof intact; all windows and doors have been blocked up for security. The waterwheel is reputed to have been stolen and was probably cut up for scrap, but the mill interior is said to retain much of its machinery. The nearby and strictly private property of **Pandy Llywenan** is a very well restored and maintained building with its small waterwheel in situ.

On the old Anglesey Turnpike road east of Bodedern village, the **milestone** is nowadays difficult to spot in the wall due to encroaching vegetation. It is on the south side of the road, about 40 yards west of the entrance drive to Tan-yr-Allt farm opposite, and would benefit greatly from a thorough tidy-up then recording photographically.

