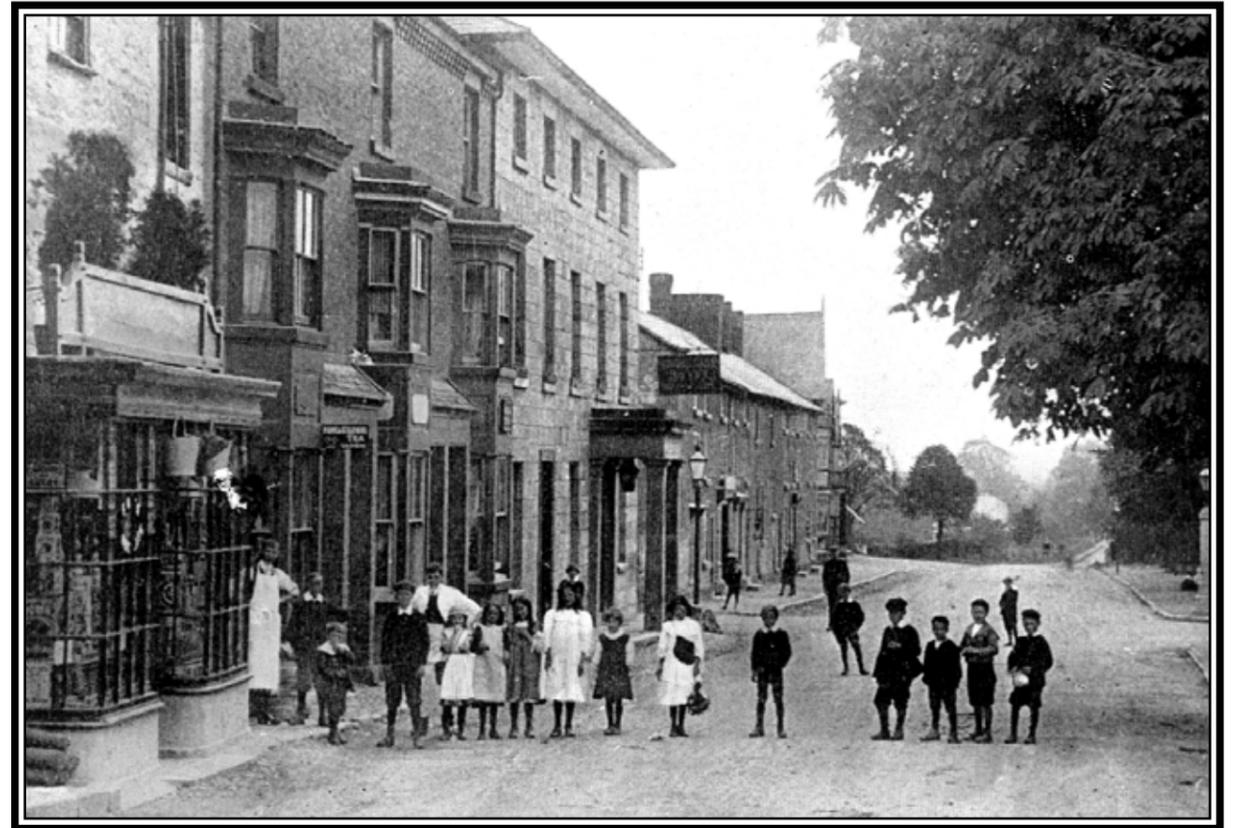


# **Views** *from the* **Hill**

a 2000-year history of the Llanymynech area



**Introduction**

I began this project knowing very little about Llanymynech and the area. After almost six months fairly intensive research, I know more, but realize I have only begun to discover the history and stories of the area.

Most people assured me there was very little history in the village – Caratacus’ last stand was very unlikely. Offa’s Dyke was now invisible. The canals, the quarry, and the railways were now defunct.

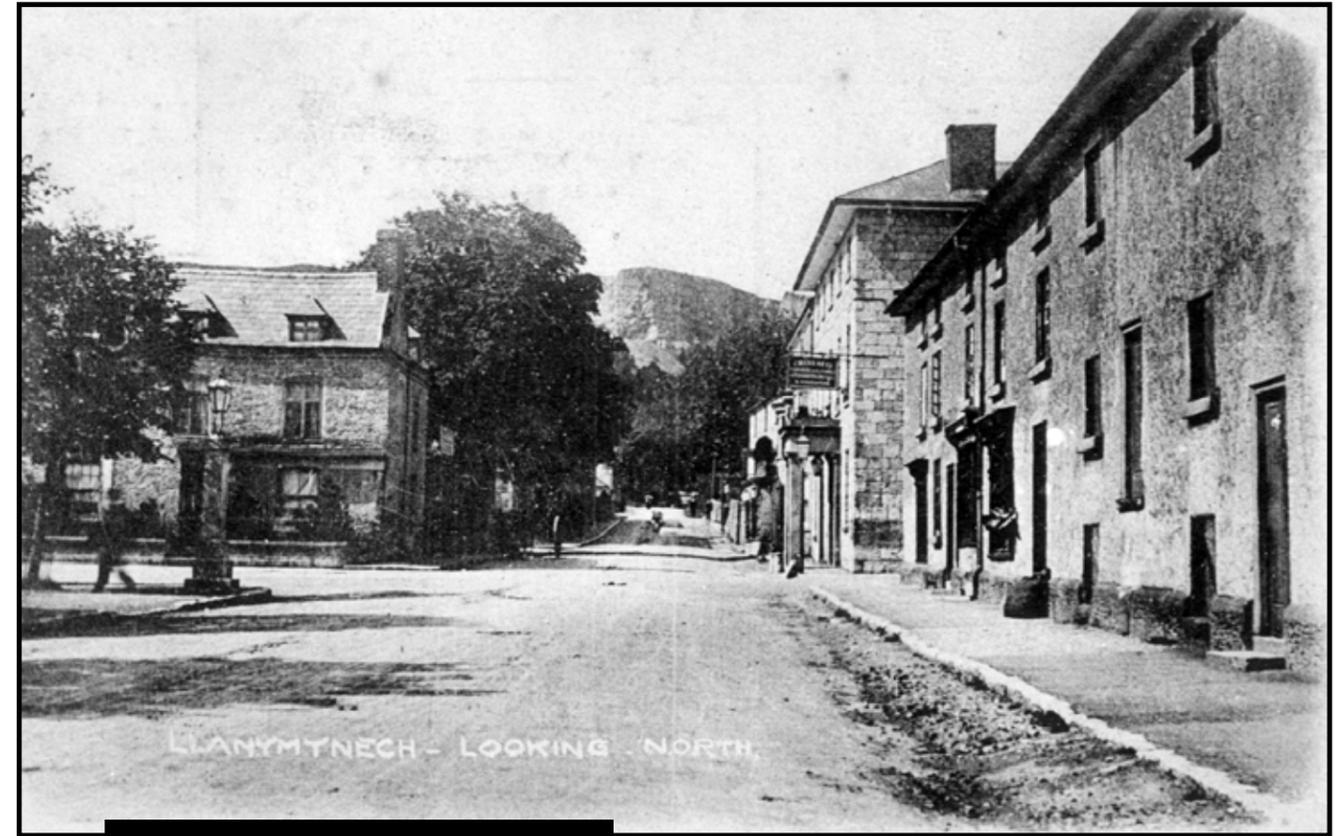
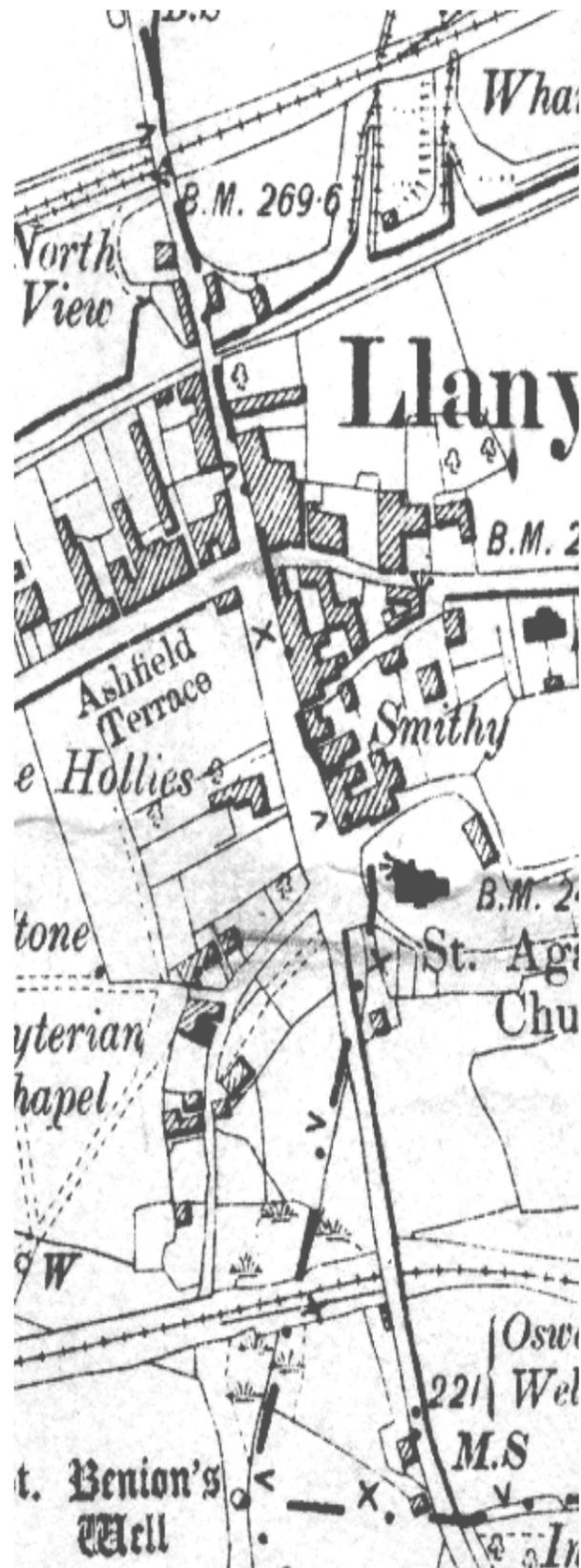
But instead of very little history I found evidence of a long and fascinating past, in this region of mineral wealth on the border between the mountains and the plains.

Perhaps every village in the country has a fertile history, once you begin to look for it. And perhaps some places have one event, a battle, or a building, that has great significance. But I doubt that anywhere has a longer and richer past than Llanymynech.

**Neil Rhodes**  
nrhodes1@ntlworld.com

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**Llanymynech then and now**

ABOVE: Looking north towards Llanymynech Hill.

Below: The same view today.





Darwin and his eldest child in 1842

**People and characters**

# How Darwin got his east and west in a muddle

CHARLES Darwin was born in Shrewsbury in 1809. At Cambridge he studied various subjects, particularly geology, and did field work in Shropshire and Wales in the summer of 1831.

He came to Llanymynech with the 1795 map made by Robert Baugh and John Evans, and coloured it in to show the geological state of the area.

He wrote in his notebooks that Llanymynech was 16 miles east of Shrewsbury – of course, it is west of Shrewsbury.

On his return home in August he received the letter offering him the position of naturalist on the HMS Beagle's voyage round the world. That voyage had a huge influence on his later theorizing. It is possible he also came to Llanymynech on other dates, 1836, 37, 38, or 42, when he did field work in Shropshire.

**How Llanymynech was seen in 1908**

# Pen portrait of the village, from the Montgomeryshire Almanac

LLANYMYNECH is a village and parish in the counties of Montgomery and Salop, the Welsh portion, consisting of the township of Carreghofa, being in the hundred and petty sessional division of Deytheur, and Union and County Court district of Llanfyllin.

The village consists of four streets in the form of a cross, which are respectively the high roads to Oswestry (6 miles), Welshpool (9), Shrewsbury (16), and Llanfyllin (9).

The country around is hilly and romantic, and abound with minerals; a large

quantity of limestone is dug annually, some of which is burnt into lime; small portions of copper ore are also found.

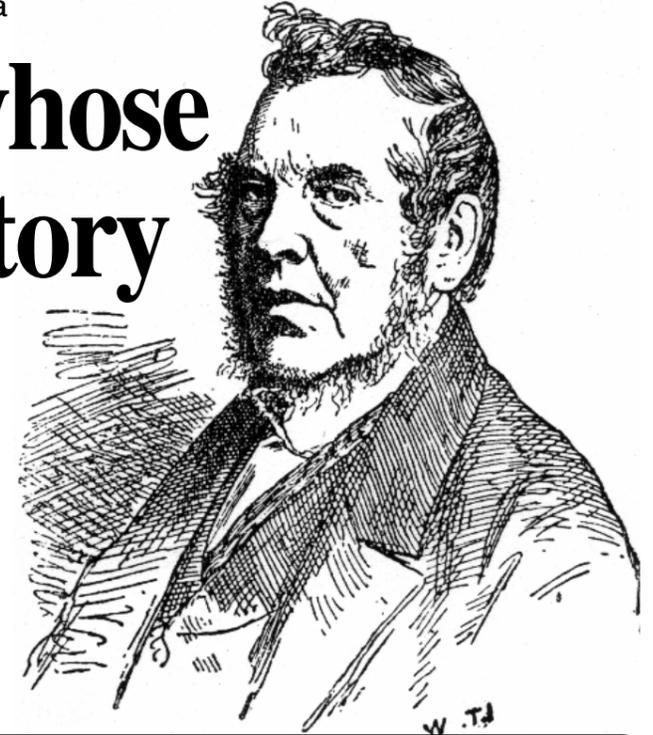
The great hill called "Llanymynech," in this parish, rises to a height of nearly 900 feet, and is celebrated for the beautiful and extensive views obtained from its summit. At its base flow the rivers Tanat and Vyrnwy, the later being crossed in the village by a handsome stone bridge of three arches.

Offa's Dyke, the historical boundary line between England and Wales, may be traced at some distance along

Llanymynech Hill. An immense camp at Clawdd Coch is believed by some antiquaries to be the site of Mediolanum, where once were quartered the ambitious legions of Rome [It is now known that there was no Roman town at Clawdd Coch].

About a mile from the village is the site of Carreghofa Castle, built by Earl Robert de Belesme, and destroyed by Gwenwynwyn towards the close of the twelfth century, when its owner, Owen Vaughn, Lord of Mechain Iscoed, was cruelly put to death.

# The local lad whose skills made history



Richard Roberts: made his mother a spinning wheel when he was 10.

**People and characters**

RICHARD Roberts was born on April 22nd 1789. It seems likely he was born at the gate house that stood on the north side of the canal bridge, on the Shropshire side, although the canal was built a few years after his birth.

The family tomb stone states that he was born at Carreghofa. His mother was from Meifod, and his father from Llwyntidman.

He spent a short time at the village school, then kept in a room in the Church (an account says the school was kept in a room in the belfry of the Church, but from a contemporary drawing the old Church had only a small tower). When he was 10 it is said he made his mother a spinning wheel inlaid with mother of pearl, which so impressed the quarry men of Llanymynech Hill that they collected enough money to purchase him a tool chest. He worked at the quarry, and eventually obtained a position as a pattern maker at Bradley Iron works in Manchester under John Wilkinson.

**Gasometers**

He started his own business in 1816, where he did mechanical work and screw cutting. He erected gasometers for Manchester, and invented a gas meter. He took out his first patents in 1822, for machinery for weaving plain and figured cloths, and for certain improvements in the construction of looms. The next year his firm was established as loco-

motive builders, tool makers, and general machinists. He patented some improvements in steam engines.

Then it is said he invented the Jacquard machine. However, it seems clear that M Jacquard invented the Jacquard machine, which was a punching machine for making patterns in cloth. It is possible that Richard Roberts altered the machine, so that it could punch holes in metal plates. Whatever it was called, his invention was used to punch the plates of the Menai

Bridge.

He also improved the construction and propelling of twin screw boats. His greatest achievement was the self acting mule, which considerably improved the productivity of the cotton mills. He also made and donated the Turret clock on Llanymynech church.

He died on the 11th of March 1864, at the age of 75, and was buried in Kensal Green cemetery..

# Clash with the mighty Romans

**Caractacus's Last Stand**

WHEN the Romans invaded Britain in AD 43, many Britons acknowledged the power of the Roman Empire.

But Caradog (Caratacus) king of the Catauellauni tribe, continued to fight the Romans. He had provided the pretext for the invasion by invading the territories of the Atreabates, whose king, Verica, fled to Rome and appealed for help.

Caradog moved north and west as the Roman army settled Britain as far as the Fosse Way, the great Roman road running from Exeter to Lincoln.

With the help of the Silures in the south-east and the Ordovices in the north, Caradog made life on the frontier unpleasant. The Romans had little choice but to deal with the troublesome tribes.

All we know about Caradog's last stand comes from a passage by the historian Tacitus. Professor Barri Jones, who lived in the area, surmised that of all the possible places, which includes the Breiddyn, three Caer Caradocs, and old Oswestry, the most likely was

Llanymynech Hill.

The site chosen had to enjoy accessibility from lowland Britain, as well as possible escape routes into Snowdonia and northwards, where Caradog fled after the battle, only to be surrendered to Rome by Queen Cartamandua. According to Tacitus, there was a river that the Roman army crossed, and the site was defended at its weakest points by a rampart.

The hillfort had to be large to accommodate the huge British army, and Llanymynech Hill is one of the largest in the country at 58.4 hectares.

In 1991 Professor Jones excavated at Abertanat, and discovered a number of archaeological features surviving in section. "Notable amongst these was a clay filled V shaped ditch forming the northern defences of a camp, the interior of which contained a series of features also visible in section. Amongst these the most remarkable was a field-oven..."

The Roman timbered gateway was reconstructed and opened in 1991. It seems the camp was probably sited to defend the river crossing, and if there was a siege on Llanymynech Hill, would have been used to prevent supplies reaching the fort.

**Robert Baugh and John Evans**

ROBERT Baugh was born in 1748. He engraved several maps of Shropshire and North Wales. He was born at Llandysilio, and was for many years parish clerk of Llanymynech. Robert Baugh, and John Evans of Llwynygroes, prepared the large map of North Wales engraved by Robert Baugh.

# Our stone in great demand

THERE was a great demand for limestone in Shropshire and Montgomeryshire, because of the acidic soils, especially in the Severn and Vyrnwy flood plain. It had other uses, particularly as a constituent of mortar in building, and as a flux in the making of iron.

A turnpike road was built in the 1770s from Burlton, on the Shrewsbury to Ellesmere road, to Llanymynech, via Knockin. The Montgomeryshire and Ellesmere canals were used to take limestone from Llanymynech south to the farms of the upper Severn valley, and east to the ironworks at Oakengates, Dawley and Madeley.

Limestone rock is mainly composed of calcium carbonate. Burning limestone in a

## Limestone Burning

kiln converted it to calcium oxide, or quicklime. Most lime kilns were built into the sides of hills, for the ease of loading. The shape of the kiln was usually two cones joined base to base, tapering towards the top and the bottom. Limestone and coal were poured in from the top, to rest on iron fire bars. Every 24 hours a fire bar would be withdrawn, allowing a quantity of burnt lime to fall into the ash pit at the bottom of the kiln. The process was continuous, although small kilns would only be operated when they were needed.

Limestone burning at Llanymynech probably began well before the 16th century. The Reverend Richard Pococke, travelling from Oswestry to Welshpool, noticed a hill which he

thought local people called 'Tana Manah'. He saw a great number of lime kilns.

By the end of the 19th century traditional lime burners were facing increased competition from the manufacture of Portland cement as a building material. Also, after 1870, iron making in Shropshire and Staffordshire declined rapidly. In the 1860s the number of rockmen working in Llanymynech fell from 45 to 33, and down to 21 by 1881. In Pant the number fell from 43 to 11 during the 1870s.

The Hoffman kiln at Llanymynech was built after 1900, probably as an attempt by the owners to develop a better product, as the market for limestone for use in ironworks was declining. It was shut down only 14 years later.

# 'Treasures' beneath the hill

## Mining in Llanymynech



APART from being quarried for limestone, Llanymynech Hill was once extensively mined for copper, lead, zinc and silver.

Mine entrances and spoil heaps are visible on the golf course. The main mining entrance is called The Ogof, the Welsh for cave, and this could be one of the earliest sites of mining in Britain.

The hillfort dates from the Bronze Age, and excavations have revealed that copper smelting took place here at that time.

Copper is one of the main components of bronze and it would have been visible on the hill as a green stain in the rock.

Copper was mined here in surface pits, and later in small underground passages.

# Roman Mining: The firesetting technique

THE mining technique called firesetting involved lighting a fire against the rock, causing it to expand with the heat. When water was thrown against it, the rock suddenly contracted and split, and primitive antler and bone picks would prise open cracks in the rock.

Deep trenches would have been dug, but when the deposit became too deep it had to be followed underground. Small hand picked passages have been found in and near to the Ogof, and part of a deer antler, possibly a broken pick, was found in one.

The Romans developed the copper mining industry by engineering the workings in a more logical pattern.

Mining was basically the same, with fire-

setting and picking, although they used iron picks and wooden shovels with iron tips. Copper ore was placed in small wicker baskets and dragged out along the low passages.

It is possible that slaves were imprisoned in the mine, although the discovery of Roman coins and skeletons do not prove this. It is unlikely that slave miners would be able to accumulate money, nor would dead people be buried in a working mine where they could spread disease. The burials found in the Ogof probably took place when the workings were abandoned.

A great many Roman artefacts have been found in the mine including, in 1965, a hoard of silver coins found by some schoolboys.

## Rope making in a meadow

THE first rope walk in Llanymynech was in a meadow through which the Llanfyllin railway line was later built.

The rope walk was moved to a field next to the railway station. The rope and twine manufacturer was Joseph Powell of Chester, though there was another rope maker at Pant.

The most well-known rope maker of Llanymynech was Mr John Jeffreys, who lived along the Wern. His father, also called John Jeffreys, was the last weaver in Llanymynech.

# Hammering out a living in Llanymynech quarry

## The Quarry

IT IS believed the quarry opened in 1756, mainly for limestone to be used to improve the land, which, in the flood plain of the Severn and Vyrnwy, was very acidic.

The technique used was first to clear the top soil, then drill down with a drill rod, a long piece of metal with a screw thread on it, another man hitting the top of the rod with a maul, a large metal hammer with a handle made from hazel, to dampen the blows.

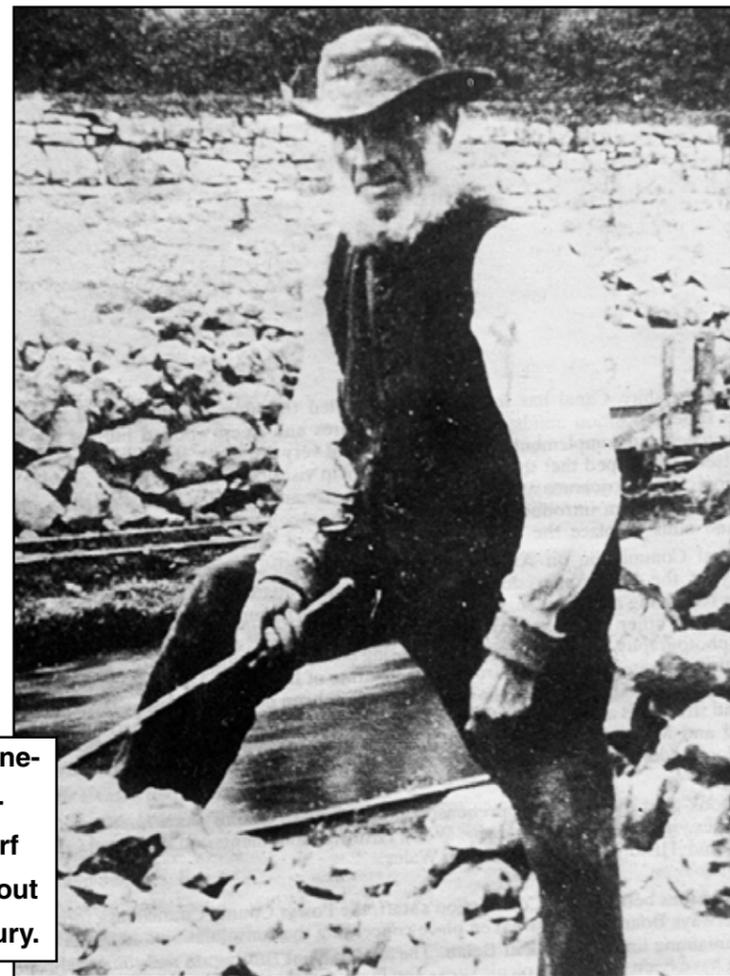
Once they'd drilled down between 6 to 10 feet, the next hole would be excavated. Each hole was filled with gunpowder, fuses were attached and lit, and the two men would find shelter. Once a face had been created, there were levels, or terraces, and the men would climb down ropes to reach their level, and climb up while waiting for the detonation.

The stone had to be no smaller than 6 inches across, or it would be too small for the kilns. The stones were loaded into trucks by the men, and pushed by them (although later ponies were used) to the top of the incline plane, where the trucks were attached to the gin wheel and lowered to the canal quays or the kilns. Many farms took the unburnt stone, having their own kilns. The stone, once burnt, was put on the fields, the action of rain and frost disintegrating the rock, so that the farmers could rake the lime and spread it over the land.

## Blinded by a blast

A PANT quarryman blinded by an explosion lived in a railway carriage that had been turned into a house. He weaved baskets for a living, and his son led him around as he sold his baskets.

**John Roberts, a stone-breaker on the limestone quarries' wharf at Llanymynech, about the turn of the century.**



IN the last half of the 19th century, experiments were made by the owners of the limestone quarries to allow them to obtain a stone in sufficient quantities so they could compete with the quarry owners of Staffordshire. They wanted to offer the fluxing stone to iron masters at a lower price, which they could not with the old method of drilling holes and blasting on a small scale.

The first experiment took place on the 17th of September, 1867. A shaft was sunk at a distance of 12 yards from the edge of the face of the rock to a depth of 60 feet. From the bottom of this shaft, a chamber, 7 feet long, 5 feet wide, and 4 feet high, was cut. One and a half tons of powder was placed in the chamber, and to it three fuses were attached. Men were stationed at various points along the Hill with signals, and traffic was stopped along the adjoining roads. The firing signal was given, the explosion

occurring within 16 minutes. It was estimated that about 8 or 9000 tons of rock was brought down, and half that amount loosened.

The next experiment was intended to make use of electricity. A level was driven into the rock a few yards above the base, to a distance of 12 yards. At the end of the level, a cross level was driven to the right and to the left. At equal distances small shafts were sunk in that level, until the base of the rock was reached. Chambers were cut at the bottom of these shafts and a total of six and a half tons of blasting powder were placed in the chambers. Two powerful electrical batteries were used so that the three charges could explode simultaneously. On the 11th of March 1868, a large crowd of people gathered to witness the explosion. The owner, Mr Savin, gave the final signal. The explosion was instantaneous. The rock was

burst from the base to the summit and poured down on to the floor of the quarry, a tremor passing through the rock where people were standing. Some of the debris fell at a great distance. Part of the tramway bridge on the Oswestry Road was destroyed, and some fragments of powder were carried a mile away. The noise of the explosion was heard at Welshpool, ten miles away. No more similar experiments were carried out on the Hill.

Later that year Thomas Savin went bankrupt. He had financed the development of the Cambrian Railways, and developed the neo Gothic hotel on the sea front at Aberystwyth. Llanymynech Quarry was, however, the project which caused his downfall, leaving him debts of £3.5 million, over £100 million in today's terms, and one of the biggest business collapses of the 19th Century.

## Wakes and festivals in Llanymynech

## The Mayor in a wheelbarrow

THE wake Sunday in the parish was the first Sunday after February 5th. Crowds flocked to the village, mainly to go to the public houses and spend their time in drinking and fighting.

Football was played in the churchyard, after the services were over. The festivities were again carried out on Wake Tuesday in the same week. In the evening farmers and

their friends met at the Lion hotel, when a ball was held until the early hours of the following morning.

There was another day of amusement on the Thursday after. This was the day when the "mayor" was elected. The mayor was decked in ribbons, his face painted red or black, and a huge cabbage suspended on his back, with its head downwards. A quart pot was put in his hand, and he was carried in a

wheelbarrow to the main farm houses, and provided with beer.

By the end of the tour everyone was drunk, the mayor usually ending in the middle of the large puddle which had collected in front of the Dolphin inn.

An old man, Isaac Dykes, was frequently elected. By the late 18th century the wakes had fallen into disuse.

## Who lived where

## Bagshaw's Directory of 1851

Those marked 1 reside at Llanytidman, 2 at Treprenal.

2 Asterley Thomas, farmer Asterley William Lloyd, Esq Batterbee Charles, brazier, plumber, painter, and beer-house keeper Baugh Margaret, victualler Cross Keys

1 Bothel Mary, farmer Bower William, wool agent

2 Broughton Richard Nightingale, woolstapler and maltster, Llwynygroes hall Broughton and Asterley, grocers, drapers, and general dealers Davies Mrs, gentlewoman

1 Davies John, farmer and miller Dovaston Edward Milward, surgeon

1 Dyke Issac, farmer Ellis Letia, tailor and draper

1 Evans John, farmer, gardener, and rate collector Griffiths Richard, blacksmith Griffiths Richard, draper and grocer

1 Griffiths Jn., quarry master Gwynne George, cooper Gwynne George, shoemaker Hackett John, tallow chander

1 Harris Geo., quarry master

1 Harrison John, farmer Hughes Edward, shoemaker

1 Humphreys James, victualler, Cross Guns Jeffreys John, weaver Jones Edward, saddler and harness maker

1 Jones Thomas, farmer Leak Francis, toll collector Lloyd John, farmer, timber merchant, builder, and vict., Lion Inn Lloyd Richard, vict., Dolpin Luxmoore Rev. John, the Rectory Morgan Edward, saddler and dealer Morris John, shoemaker Parkins Charles, shoemaker Poole Mrs., gentlewoman

1 Price Elizabeth, farmer Price Hugh, seedsman

1 PryceWilliam, gentleman, Holly Bush Pugh Henry, seedsman and druggist Pugh James Owen, grocer and draper Ratcliffe Samuel, farmer Richards Richard, farmer, maltster, and vict., Bradford Arms

1 Roberts William, gentleman, Prospect cottage Rodgers Edward, farmer

1 Savage Elizabeth, farmer

2 Sheldon Wm., gentleman Thomas Thomas, farmer Thomas Robert, schoolmaster and parish clerk Watson Miss, post office Whitticose Mary, gentlewoman Williams Sarah, schoolmistress

BELOW: The Dolphin Inn... the scene of much drinking on the village's wakes days.



## A winner in the Grand National

## Llanymynech Races

THERE was a flat race in Llanymynech in 1799, though it was infrequent in the years after. The first steeplechase was probably in 1886, at Pentref Farm, and continued every year until 1889. In 1890 the course used was at Llwynygroes, and that continued, with occasional lapses, and sometimes at Pool Quay, until 1910.

In 1922 the racing was revived at Llwynygroes, and continued until the outbreak of the second World War. In 1925 Tipperary Tim was second in the Llanymynech Optional Selling Steeplechase – but three years later the horse won the Grand National, although only because it was one of two horses still standing, and the other fell.

## Who lived where

## Kelly's Directory of Shropshire 1891

PRIVATE RESIDENTS Baugh Miss Bishton Mrs Davies Mrs Evans David Griffiths Miss Johnson William Henry (H. M. Assistant Inspector of Schools) Jones Rev. Llewelyn Wynne M.A. The Rectory Jones Rev. Richard (Welsh Presbyterian), The New House Jones The Misses Manning Leonard Archibald M.B. The Hollies Moon Richard Normandale Rev. Jn. Wm. (Prim. Meth) Temple Rev. Robert M.A. (H.M. Inspector of Schools), Llwynygroes Hall

COMMERCIAL. Asterley Amelia Mrs.), farmer Baugh Edward, grocer Bromley Richard, farmer, Lower house Davies E. Fox & Co. grocers Davies Evan, blacksmith Davies Jane (Mrs), shopkeeper Davies John Walter, commission agent Deam Thomas, painter, Post Office Ethelston William, miller (water) & farmer, Llwyntidman Evans E, & Sons, grocers Evans John & Sons, nurserymen and florists Harris John, tailor Jeffreys John Morris, rope maker Jeffreys John. linen manufacturer Jones Edward, saddler & harness maker Jones Edward, farmer, Plascerig Jones John, shoe maker Jones John, butcher Jones William, beer retailer Lloyd George, butcher Lloyd Richard, farmer, Carreghofa Manning Leonard Archibald M.B. surgeon, The Hollies Morgan Harriet, (Mrs.), grocer & Owen Robt. Cross Guns P.H. Llwyntidman Owen William, beer retailer Phillips William, Dolphin inn Pitt Alfred, timber dealer Poole Charles, butcher Price Edward, shopkeeper Pugh Francis, tailor Randles John, farmer, Elm Tree farm Richards Richard, Bradford Arms P.H. & malster Roberts Catherine Elizabeth (Miss), ladies' school Roberts Emma (Mrs.), Lion hotel Roberts Wm. Shoe maker Llwyntidman Rogers William, farmer, Llwyntidman Savin & Co. Limited (F. Dunford, manager), lime & limestone works: offices, Llyncllys Soames & Co. Cross Keys hotel (James Compton, manager) Thomas John, Malster Thomas Eliza (Mrs.) farmer, Treprenal Ward Edward Walter, farmer, Llwyntidman

## Kelly's Directory of Shropshire 1929

PRIVATE RESIDENTS Brimelow Joshua David, Glanvirnew Bromley Mrs. Elizh. C. The Laurels Bromley Richard. Hafod Davies Mrs. Elizabeth. Fulshaw Evans R.W. School. Llanymynech Jackson Miss Mary, The Gardd Johnson Thomas Henry, The Hollies Jones Charles Owen. Vron Vyrnwy Jones Mrs. Mary Hannah, Fyrnwy bank Moon Miss Morfydd, Pen-y-voel house O'Conor Hy. Stratford, The Willows Poole-Hughes Rev. John Prytherch M.A. (rector), The Rectory Randles John Frederick. Bronwyfa Roberts Capt. Hy. Fras. Belwood Symond Rev. Oscar S. B.A. Vernon Mrs. I.C.W. Blighty Williams Mrs. Llwyn-y-groes

COMMERCIAL Marked thus o farm 150 acres or over. Barraclough Jn. & Son. clog solemakers. Rock view o Bromley Rd. N farmer. Lower ho. Brown Chas. blacksmith Bryan Thomas. Farmer, Plascerig Capper Chas. Rowland, garage Clarke Wm-shopkeeper Cross Keys Hotel (John Edward Lewis. Proprietor); family & commercial hotel; charabanc parties catered for; fishing, golfing, tennis; terms moderate. Day Wm. Ernest. Chemist & druggist Ethelston Ernest, miller (water) Llwyntidman Evans Eliz. Ashford (Mrs.), farmer, Beechfield Fox-Davies Edwyn & Son, grocers & c Fox-Davies Frank, grocer Frank John Wallace, farmer, Treprenal (letters through Oswestry) Guar David, farmer Humphreys Rt. Farmer Jones Arth. & Geo, saddlers o Jones Rt. Farmer, Llwyntidman hall Kynaston Wm, pig dealer, Greenfields o Lewis Ernest, farmer, Llwyntidman Lewis Harriet (Mrs.), farmer, Elm Tree Lewis Mary (Mrs.) shopkeeper, Station Road Lloyd John Harvey, farmer, Carreghofa Lloyd Mar Emily (Mrs.), butcher Marsh William Wallace, Lion hotel Morris Wm. farmer O'Conor Henry Stratford L.R.C.P. & L.R.C.S. Edin., L.R.F.P. & S. Glas. surgeon, The Willows Owen George, cowkeeper, Owen Wm. shopkeeper Pearson Jn. Michael, grocer Porthywaen Lime Co. Limited, quarry owners Pryce Hugh. shopkeeper Pugh Francis & Son. drapers Richards Richard (Mrs.), Bradford Arms P.H. Savage Edwd. cowkeeper Thomas Wm. Farmer, Carreghofa Tomlinson Thomas, Dolphin inn Vernon Leveson Geo. garage Wall Robert John, builder

## How it looked in 1752



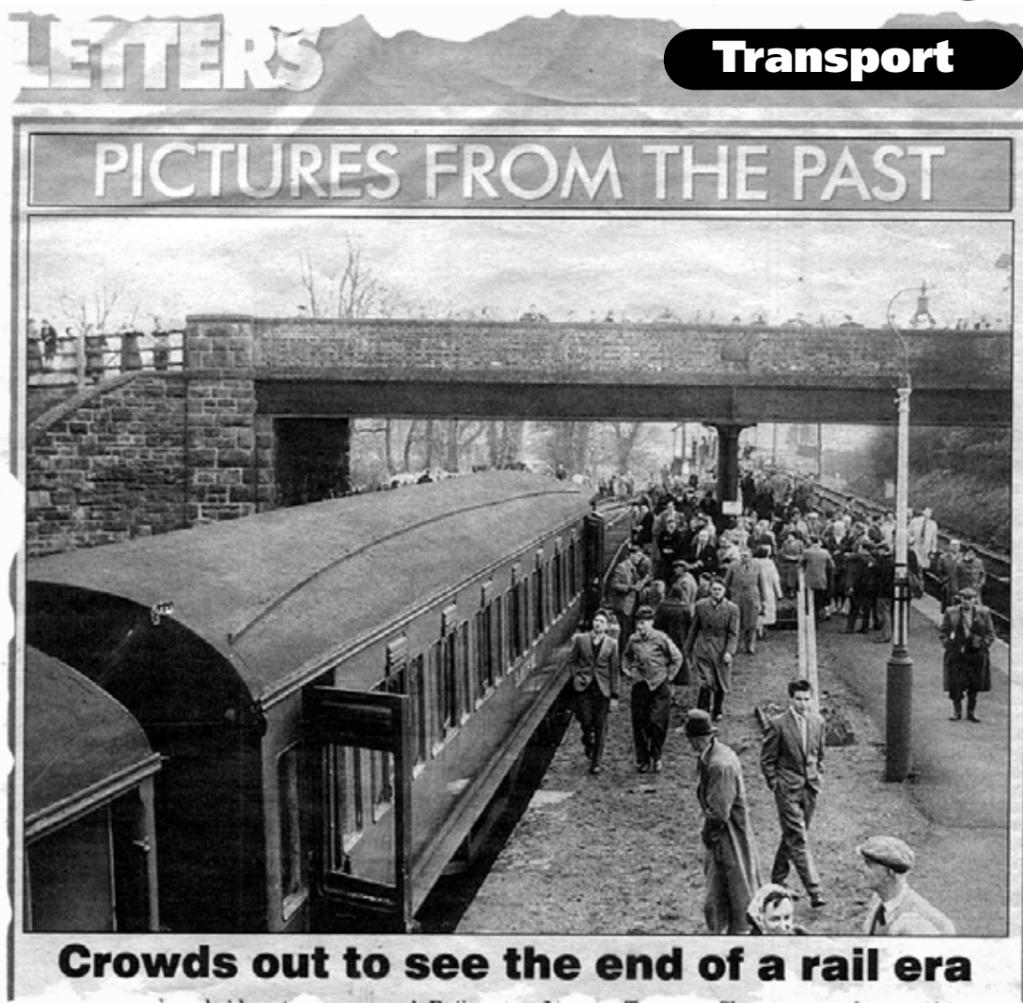
A detail from John Evans' map of Shropshire, before the railways, canal, or bridge over the Vyrnwy at Llanymynech. If correct, the Tanat seems to divert from the Vyrnwy at Newbridge, about two miles downstream of its present course. The thick line going north/south represents Offa's Dyke, but is wildly inaccurate around Llanymynech Hill.

a 2000-year history of the Llanymynech area

# Rise and fall of our railway

## Railway Chronology:

- 15/01/1860: Oswestry to Pool Quay opened
- 25/07/1864: Cambrian Railways formed
- 13/08/1866: Shrewsbury (Abbey) to Llanymynech opened
- 13/08/1866: Llanymynech to Nantmawr opened
- 21/12/1866: Shrewsbury (Abbey) to Llanymynech closed. Llanymynech to Nantmawr closed
- 12/1868: Shrewsbury (Abbey) to Llanymynech opened. Llanymynech to Nantmawr opened
- 18/04/1870: Llanymynech to Llanfyllin opened
- 21/06/1871: Kinnerley to Criggion opened
- 20/06/1880: Shrewsbury (Abbey) to Llanymynech closed. Llanymynech to Nantmawr closed, Kinnerley to Criggion closed
- 01/06/1881: Llanymynech to Nantmawr opened (by the Cambrian)
- 13/04/1911: Shrewsbury (Abbey) to Llanymynech opened
- 05/01/1912: Kinnerley to Criggion opened
- 10/1932: Kinnerley to Criggion closed
- 06/11/1933: Shrewsbury (Abbey) to Llanymynech closed
- 1939: Wern Junction to Blodwell Junction abandoned
- 01/06/1941: Shrewsbury (Abbey) to Llanymynech opened by the War Department
- 26/02/1960: Shrewsbury (Abbey) to Llanymynech closed
- 18/01/1965: Llanymynech to Llanfyllin closed. Oswestry to Buttington Junction closed
- 15/02/1992: Llanddu Junction to Nantmawr closed



Crowds out to see the end of a rail era

## 'Excessive speed' to blame



THERE was an accident at Wern Junction (near Carreghofa School) on 7 August 1908. A livestock train of Great Central stock was derailed as it left the Nantmawr line to join the new spur to Llanfyllin, just past the bridge under the canal. The engine fell on its side, and the track was badly damaged. At the inquiry excessive speed was blamed.

In the year after, a man was knocked down by a train near Llanymynech. A verdict of suicide was recorded, and the directors asked the general manager to report on the question of trespass.

# Vicar of Criggion gets all steamed up!

THIS is a letter from the vicar of Criggion, Robert Brock, complaining about the state of the Criggion branch of the Shropshire & Montgomery Railway:

23rd November 1912

Sir, I booked today my fare by the 3.57 train from Abbey Gate station to Criggion on the Shropshire & Montgomery Rly. I rode to Kinnerley Junction by a properly equipped train.

Proceeding by the branch to Criggion, I was put with another man and two women into the back part of an engine with only a screen between us and the fire - no roof, and the sparks and smuts falling all over us - one spark nearly got into my eye - with danger of being blinded - my clothes too injured by the same.

I wish to know whether passengers can be thus treated and deceived - for the last train I caught about a fortnight ago I was incarcerated in a carriage as I have hitherto been.

I have had occasion to use the railway for my wife and daughters and friends from London, and of course I cannot subject them to such risk & barbarous treatment. If they cannot or will not serve proper accommodation through the journey, they should not be allowed to advertise it - there were carriages at the Station (Kinnerley), and as an engine ran - a carriage could and should have been on the back.

Another matter of which I have complained and which the Supt. has promised to have remedied is the hollow appropriately termed a ditch by one of the officials, formed by sinking the rails, or making proper approaches to the crossing to my church -

trusting that these matters may be inquired into and remedied.

I am your obedient servant,

R. Brock  
Vicar of Criggion

Robert Brock was ordained in South Africa by a bishop who had been excommunicated for heresy. His first wife was said by the locals of Criggion to have been eaten by cannibals in Africa.

When his second wife died he married the Criggion schoolmistress, who had also been courted by his son.

Throughout the years he was Vicar of Criggion, 1900 to his death in 1926, he had constant financial problems, and wrote

frequent letters to the governors of Queen Anne's Bounty, who held the parish church funds, asking for money to be paid him more often, and for credit.

He became bankrupt in 1912, which only made him beg for more money from church commissioners.

In 1918 he sent his wife to London to plead his case, but she too was refused, even though she said she was stranded without the train fare home.

The secretary of the governors wrote: "Mr Brock is not a very estimable old man, I fear, and not very formidable. He regularly begs to have advances against the warrants coming due to him, sometimes by letter, sometimes in person, and not long ago by sending his wife. He never gets them."

Shropshire & Montgomeryshire Rly.

**CHEAP EXCURSION TRAIN**

Will run from SHREWSBURY (Abbey Station) every THURSDAY, until further notice, to the following Stations, at the fares shown below, to

**LLANYMYNECH**

For LAKE VYRNWY, Etc. AND Criggion (for the Breidden Hills), Etc.

BEAUTIFUL SCENERY. CHARMING WALKS.

On Thursday September 16th and three following Thursdays Sept. 23rd, 30th, and October 7th, a MOTOR will run from LLANYMYNECH to LAKE VYRNWY after the arrival of the 9-45 a.m. train from Shrewsbury, and return from Lake to connect with the 5-10 p.m. train from Llanymynech to Shrewsbury. Fare for the double journey, 6/6 each passenger, in addition to railway fare Shrewsbury to Llanymynech.

Depart Shrewsbury for Llanymynech, 9-45 a.m. & 2 p.m.	Fare, Third Class: <b>3/1½</b>
Depart Shrewsbury for Criggion, 9-45 a.m.	

Available for return from Llanymynech 5-10 p.m. same day. Criggion 4-45 p.m.

Tickets issued to Criggion will be available for return from Llanymynech. Teas and Refreshments can be obtained at the Lake Vyrnwy Hotel.

For Handbills and all further information, apply to Mr. J. L. WHITE, Abbey Station;

LEFT: A picture which appeared in a recent edition of the Shropshire Star, contributed by Stan Turner of Shrewsbury shows the end of an era... the arrival of the last train from Shrewsbury on The Potts - The Shropshire & Montgomeryshire Light Railway. Crowds lined the bridge and platform to witness the historic moment.

# Ghostly goings-on

BEFORE the bridge was built at Llanymynech the ford, and the heavily wooded road either side, was meant to be haunted by a white horse.

The horse, bridled and saddled but riderless, galloped furiously along the road, and on its shoulders it had great blood clots.

In 1903 there was a story in *Bye-Gones*, which used to appear in the *Oswestry Advertiser*, about a girl who rode back from Oswestry market one Wednesday, hurrying to cross the ford before dark. She had great difficulty persuading her horse to enter the water, but once out and smelling home it set off at a canter. At that moment she heard behind her the sound of furious galloping. As she looked round she saw coming closer the outstretched head and neck of a white horse. As she reached the end of the wood the sound stopped, but her horse raced on to her home.

On April 23, 1825, Betsy Elliot, who was 15 years old, was crossing the River Vyrnwy by the ferry, during the floods, and the boat overturned. Betsy and the boatman's wife were killed.

Two years later, in 1827, the road bridge to Welshpool was built.

Queen Victoria crossed the bridge in 1832, on her way to Oswestry. She stayed at the Lion Hotel for a short time (not overnight). Quarrymen fired a salvo in celebration.

A crowd had assembled for the laying of the foundation stone of St Agatha's Church in 1843. Miss Sarah Tannatt and her three sisters were riding along the road from Llandysilio when there was a sudden thunderstorm.

Sarah's 'spirited' horse took fright and dashed off in the direction of the river bridge. The horse knocked down a woman who was walking across, and swerved against the right side of the bridge, just above the second arch.

Sarah was thrown over the parapet into the river and carried down the swollen river, and drowned, in her heavy riding habit.

## River crossings



A riderless horse at full gallop with great clots of blood on its shoulders

## Canal chronology

23/10/1792	Meeting held at Welshpool to support a proposal to extend the Llanymynech branch of the proposed Ellesmere Canal as far as Welshpool.
18/10/1793	Meeting agreed to continue the line to Newtown; decision to form a separate company independent of the Ellesmere Canal.
1794 to 1797	26 km length from Carreghofa to Garthmyl, and the 3 km Guilsfield branch, constructed
1796	The Ellesmere Canal completed from Welsh Frankton to Carreghofa
18/07/1794	John Dadford appointed Engineer to the Montgomeryshire Canal
09/1796	John Dadford resigns as Engineer to the Montgomeryshire Canal
1815-1821	12 km Garthmyl to Newtown built.
1823	George W Buck rebuilds the Vyrnwy aqueduct.
1880s	More repairs on the Vyrnwy aqueduct.
1892	Major work on the Vyrnwy aqueduct.
05/02/1936	Breach in the canal about 1 mile south of Welsh Frankton.
07/1980	Williams Bridge demolished.

## Tramways Line started out as a road

THE first record of a railway at Llanymynech seems to be in 1809 when a line was mentioned in the rent book of the Bradford estate.

In 1820 a man was killed at the "Old Rail Road Rock" when boarding in a quarry. That Tramway was probably the line which ran down to the canal along what is now a distinctively narrow plot in which stands the house called Rock Cottage. It seems this Tramway may have started as a public road. It was derelict in 1838, but remained in the occupation of the Carreghofa Lime Rock Company.

There were at least five inclined planes at Llanymynech Hill. Since the traffic was downhill, they would act on gravity, the weight of the stones in the truck going down pulling empty trucks going up.



# The village in the 19th century

Old buildings of Llanymynech, according to John Fewtrell, writing in the *Montgomeryshire Collections* in the 1870s.

**1** Near Elm Tree Farm stood a tollbar, and next to it a sentry box for the keeper.

The old man who looked after the bar was often the butt of practical jokes, once being so frightened by some youths he knelt down and began to pray.

**2** Between there and the Post Office stood a thatched cottage, partly of timber, and near that a pond.

On the Llansantffraid side of the Dolphin pub was a smithy, heavy and tumble down.

The Dolphin was once known as the Holly Bush Inn, apparently because the proprietor used to place a barrel of beer for sale under a holly bush, because a license was not then required. The name 'Dolphin' is a corruption of the word 'Godolphin', the family who once owned the inn.

**3** Ty Croes was once the Corner Shop, although before that it was a small 'by-tack', or farm.

**5** To the north of the village, on the far side of the canal, was the Sun Inn, originally a butcher's shop.

Opposite were two small thatched cottages, at the side of one a smithy, and by that the Gate house, which in the 1870s remained as it was at least 80 years before. Richard Roberts was born in this house.



**6** On the south side of the canal were a shop and two cottages, and before that there were two very old cottages. One had a cellar kitchen and the other was a small shop.

Next to these was a large building with the date 1719. The lower part was a shop. Next were some stables, and over them a granary. Between these and the Cross Keys hotel was a cottage and workshop.

**7** The old Cross Keys hotel was not built as near to the road as the present one. It was thatched with a jutting gable. The front part was surrounded by wooden palings. Most of the inn was rebuilt about 1820, and several large rooms were added. In the 19th century the boundary between Shropshire and Montgomeryshire, and between England and Wales, passed along the foundations of the front walls of the houses to the north of the hotel. It then passed through the centre of the smoke room of the hotel. According to John Fewtrell, an inquest was held in the inn. After the jury had been sworn in, and the inquest began, someone discovered that the jury and coroner was sitting in Montgomeryshire, but the death had taken place in Shropshire.

At the back of the Cross Keys hotel was the 'well house' yard, a corruption from wool house. It had a large room used for the storing and stapling of wool.

Next to that was a garden and then a malt house.

**4** Opposite Ty Croes there was a large field (where Llanymynech garage is now) and in the corner a wooden building known as the Market Hall. Articles were placed there for shelter and sale on fair days. Near this was a large slough, or cesspit, which seems to have been an open sewer for the village.

The field seemed to be the usual place for fights, the losers being thrown into the slough. Fewtrell says, "So low were the morals of some of the inhabitants, that a man has been known to roll himself into the centre of it for a small quantity of beer, a circumstance scarcely to be credited in these days".

The rector managed to arrange for the slough to be drained, and a sewer to be constructed through the village, terminating in the river.

**10** The Lion Hotel was the Red Lion Inn, until the middle of the 19th century. The front part was added by the proprietor and owner, the late Mr Lloyd, in the 19th century. There was a set of stocks by the roadside, just outside the churchyard. People confined in them were usually those found in a state of drunkenness by the constable.

**8** Opposite the malt house was a shop and three cottages. Before that was a refuse pool, similar to the slough.

Further along the road was a building with a slaughterhouse, and a thatched and dilapidated cottage. It was condemned, but the tenant refused to leave, so the roof was taken off to force the tenant to leave.

**9** Before the houses of Bradford Row were built there was a series of barns, one section of which was a malthouse. The houses, until fairly recently, were shops.

The Bradford Arms used to be called 'The Old Coach', when coaches went between Oswestry and Welshpool.

Next to it was a smithy, and a cottage.

a 2000-year history of the Llanymynech area

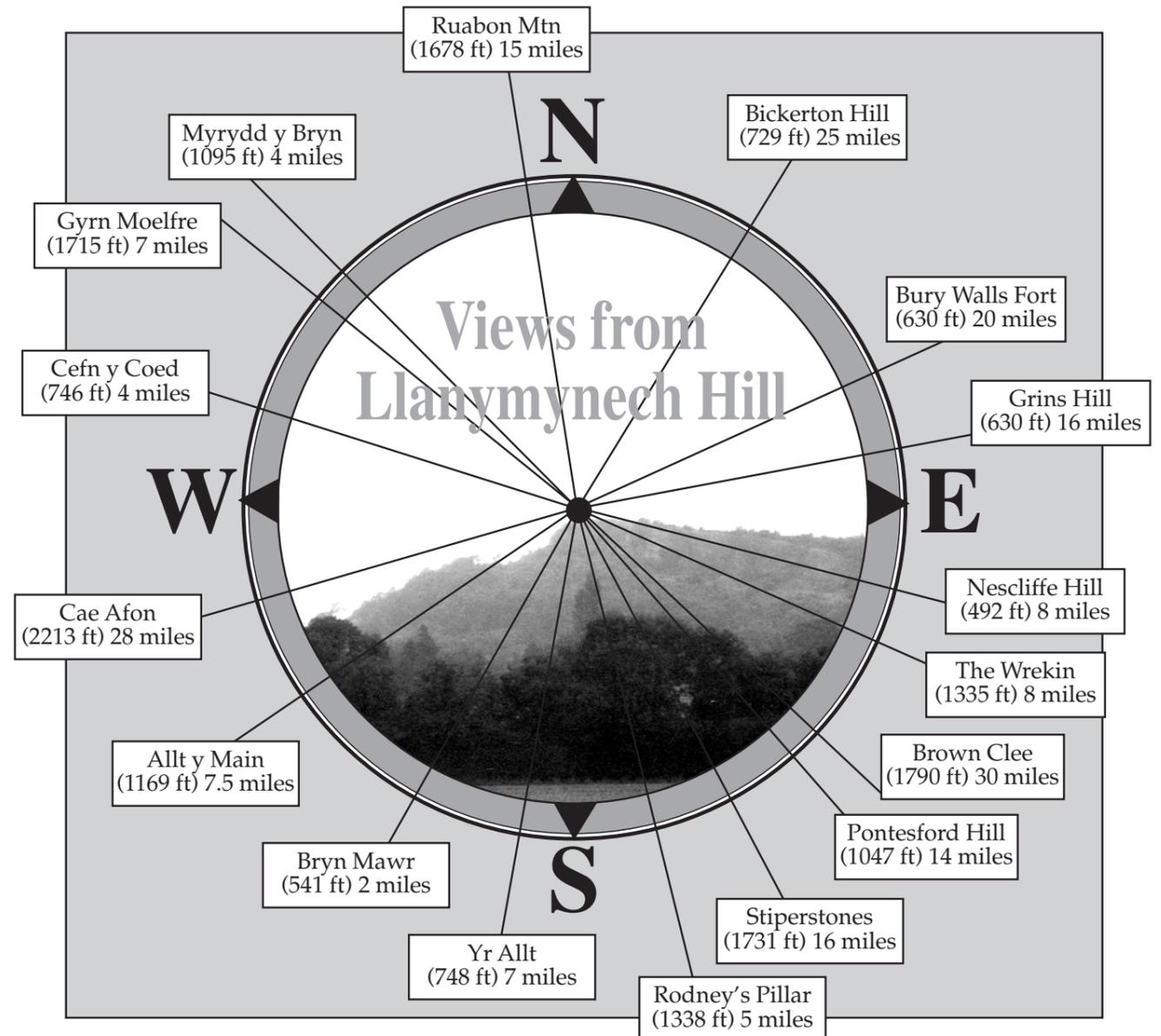


## Llanymynech then and now

ABOVE: Looking south... in the days when it was safe to stand in the middle of the road!  
Below: The same view today.



a 2000-year history of the Llanymynech area



## Name Meanings and Nicknames

Llanymynech means place of the monks, local historians now believe, not of the miners, as was once thought. The first written record of the place name is Llanemeneych in 1254. The plural of monk in Welsh is mynaich. There are lots of such names in the area: Tirmynach (monks land) near Pool Quay, Tirabad (Abbots land) in the same area. Strata Marcella monastery was established in the 12 century.

Vyrnwy, or properly Efyrynwy, has one of two likely meanings: either it derives from the river Severn (Welsh Hafren), as a tributary; or it is named after the Goddess of the efwr, or yew tree. Tanat means the fiery one, or possibly the stream that is bright with fire.

Carreghofa, or Carreghwfa (the correct Welsh spelling) means Hwfa's rock. Hwfa is a medieval

Welsh name occurring throughout Wales (eg Rhostrehwfa on Anglesey - the rough land of Hwfa's township).

Powys apparently derives from the Latin 'pagensis', or country dwellers. 'Pagan' also derives from this word.

Pen-y-Foel means top of the bare hill.

A CORRESPONDENT to 'Bye-Gones Relating to Wales and the Border Counties (Sept 3rd 1873)' mentioned that the nickname for Llanymynech people was 'Llanymynech Cut Tails'.

Apparently it used to be very common many years ago to say: "Take care how you go through Llanymynech or you will have your tail cut!" though it's unclear what exactly was meant by that.

# Tale of an angry giant and a clever cobbler...

ALTHOUGH geologists say that the Wrekin consists of pre Cambrian rock, it is well-known that the hill was made by a giant.

Some fishermen from Shrewsbury had sailed down the Severn to look for eels. When they reached the Bristol Channel, they discovered a huge eel trap, and helped themselves to the eels from inside.

As they rowed away a huge giant appeared in the distance, shouting at them to return his eels. Realising they were far enough away to escape, they shouted back that they were men of Shrewsbury and would not return anything.

The giant spent several weeks in festering anger. Eventually, he lifted his spade, and dug

up a huge amount of earth, and set off upstream determined to dam the river and drown the town of Shrewsbury and all its people.

It was a hot day, and he was tired and fed up

**The giant decided he couldn't walk that far, and dumped his earth beside the river, and that became the Wrekin.**

after several hours walking. He didn't realise that Shrewsbury was around the next bend in the river, when he came across a cobbler. The

giant asked him how far it was to the town of Shrewsbury.

The cobbler, though frightened by the giant, realised that he had to keep his wits about him, and took off the sack of old shoes from his back and emptied them onto the road.

"I'll tell you how far it is to Shrewsbury," he said. "I set out from there two months ago, and I've worn out all these shoes to reach here."

The giant decided he couldn't walk that far, and dumped his earth beside the river, and that became the Wrekin.

He scraped his shoes off on the back of his spade, and that became the little hill beside the Wrekin called the Ercall, and he walked back home.

## The second of three churches

THE present church is thought to be the third on the site. The first church was probably built of wood, and consequently there are no remains.

The second (pictured here) was built in 1272 to 1307, of stone. It was a double building with at the west end a turret with two bells. There were three entrances, two on the south side and the third on the north side.

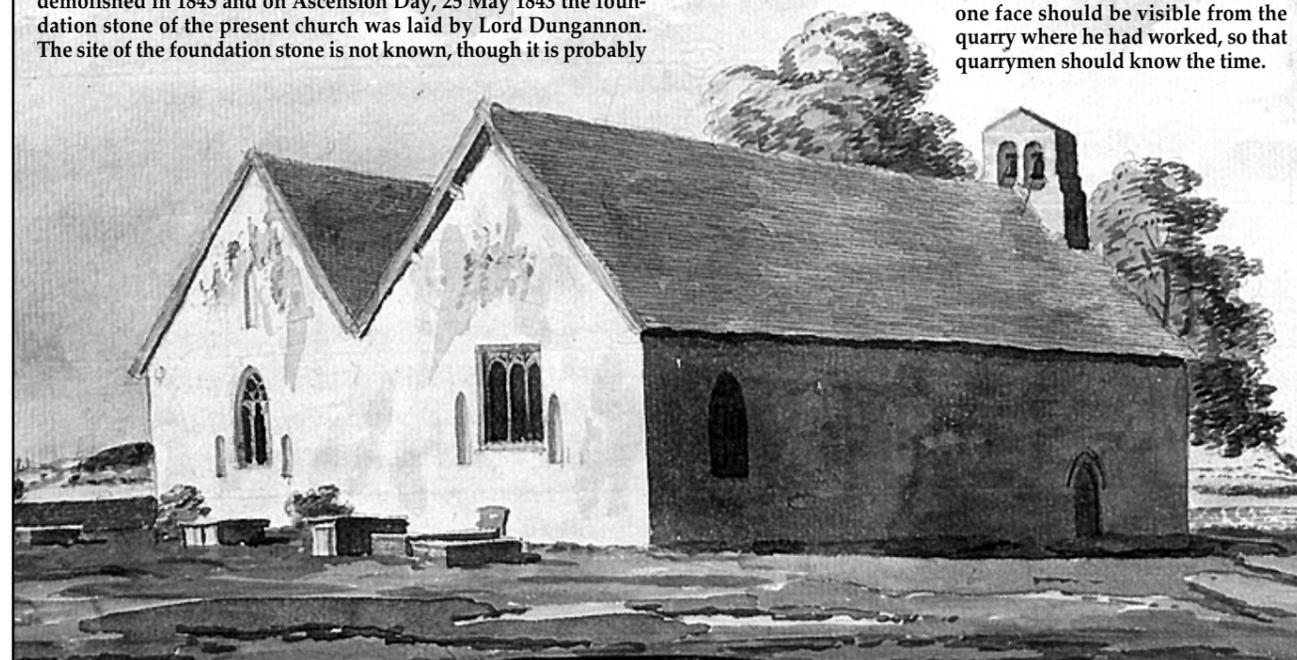
By the 1840s the church was in a poor state of repair. It was demolished in 1843 and on Ascension Day, 25 May 1843 the foundation stone of the present church was laid by Lord Dungannon. The site of the foundation stone is not known, though it is probably

under the floor by the altar.

The church is built in the Normanesque style. It is constructed of local limestone, apart from the arches and ornamental portions, which are terracotta, possibly fired at Morda. The cost of the new church was £2000, most of which was raised by private subscriptions.

The clock was made and given to the Parish of Llanymynech by Richard Roberts in 1844. A condition of his giving the clock was that

one face should be visible from the quarry where he had worked, so that quarrymen should know the time.



## A castle to protect the mine

AFTER the Romans left, the next period of activity of mining on the Hill was in the 12th century.

King Richard I went to the Crusades and was captured in 1193 on his return. The Bishop of Salisbury, Hubert Walter, had accompanied Richard to Palestine and returned to England as one of the commissioners to raise the required £100,000 for his ransom.

He heard of the discovery of silver at the Carreghwfa Mine on Llanymynech Hill, and decided to develop the mine and re-open the mint at Shrewsbury to refine the silver and make it into coins.

To protect the mine, the nearby castle at Carreghwfa was repaired and provided with a garrison of troops. However, silver only occurs in this country in the lead mineral galena, from which it can be refined in small quantities during smelting.

So despite the work that was carried out between 1194-95, very little silver was refined from the mine and the whole venture made a net loss.

A documentary source mentions activity at Llanymynech: a grant of land to the Cistercian Monastery of Strata Marcella in 1198 included rights 'above and below land', which suggests that the monks had an interest in lead mining in this area.

Mining seems to have stopped on Llanymynech Hill until the 17th century.



Day's Shop, which was next to the present corner shop.

## Story of the rock beneath our feet

BETWEEN 290 and 355 million years ago, there was a warm and shallow tropical sea which bordered a peninsula of land to the south.

Llanymynech Hill consists of the Carboniferous limestone which was deposited then. Since the hill was close to land, the deposits are relatively shallow compared to deposits in other parts of Britain.

The limestone is exposed to form the southern end of a west facing escarpment, which

continues northwards to the Eglwyseg escarpment near Llangollen. The strata lies on folded Ordovician and Silurian rocks, and is divided into four distinct layers: at the bottom, basal shales, which are up to 30 m thick; lower limestone, up to 85 m thick; upper grey limestone, 70 to 100 m thick; Sandy limestone, 100 to 200 m thick.

The mineral veins in the limestone dates from the late Carboniferous age, and tend to run chiefly in a north east direction

## Saxon earthwork marks the border

KING Offa of Mercia ruled from 757 to 795. He built the great earthwork as a border between the Welsh and the Saxons. It extends from Prestatyn on the North Wales coast to Chepstow, on the Severn estuary.

The Dyke was originally known as the Mark or March, which name the Normans later used to refer to a much wider area.

The Dyke was probably built in the last twelve years of Offa's reign, and it is possible there was some agreement between the Saxons

### Offa's Dyke

and Welsh as to its whereabouts, though in any treaty the Saxons would have been able to dictate most of the terms.

Certainly it seems the Dyke was designed for maximum military effect, always keeping to the high ground on westward facing hills, and with the ditch to the west side of the rampart. Some English settlements were to the west of the mark, which suggests that the military purpose was considered the most important.

Offa's Laws are particularly concerned about the procedure for tracking and recovering cattle which were taken over the border. They also laid down that any English or Welsh had to have a guide from the other side, who had to ensure they returned safely, without committing any offence.

Only half the usual death fine had to be paid for either an Englishman or Welshman who was killed on the wrong side of the dyke. The law that any Welshman who was found carrying weapons on the English side should have his right arm cut off did not exist.

# Pillar of stone to mark an Admiral's victory

## Rodney's Pillar

RODNEY'S Pillar was built to commemorate the victory of Admiral Rodney over the French. It seems there was already a plan to erect a monument because of the timber taken from trees growing around the Breidden hills and used by the British Navy for its ships.

It was built in 1781, and may have been designed by John Evans of Llwynygroes. Originally there was a round copper ball on the top of the Pillar, but this was destroyed by lightning. It was replaced in 1847, and the whole pillar repaired. Again it was renewed in 1896, and the ball was in place at that time.

In the early part of the 19th century, there was an idea to raise a monument to the memory of Lord Nelson on Llanymynech Hill.

Meetings were held in Llanymynech, and the scheme was agreed, but abandoned, though it is not known why.



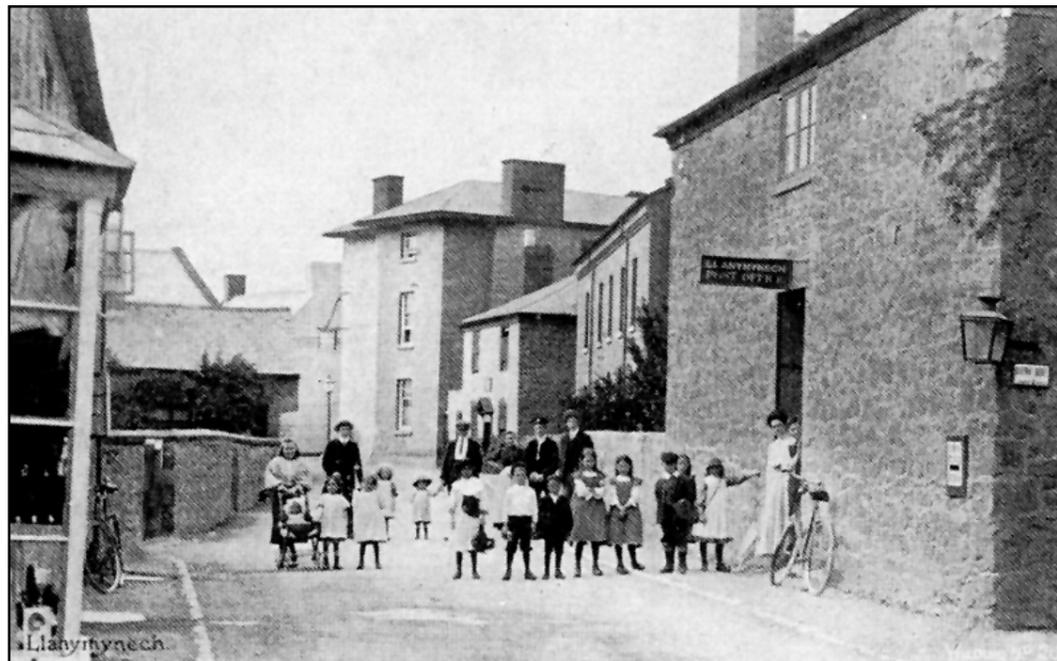
## Carreghofa on the move

AFTER the Second World War, there was a move by some of the inhabitants of Carreghofa to move the parish from Montgomeryshire to Shropshire.

The main cause of complaint was the lack of sewage facilities and mains water and decent roads.

Montgomeryshire did not want to lose the good ratepayers of the parish, and it seems improvements were made, though it isn't known whether the threat to move was merely a bluff to gain better facilities.

# Change of location for post office



The first Post Office was opened at the Cross Keys Hotel, and when the Postmistress moved to the Lion, it went with her. The next place was in a small shop at the end of Bradford Row, then to Ashfield Terrace, a little further west from its present position. Earlier last century it was in the place shown in this photo, on the Maesbrook Road.

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