

Luke Atkinson 2000643

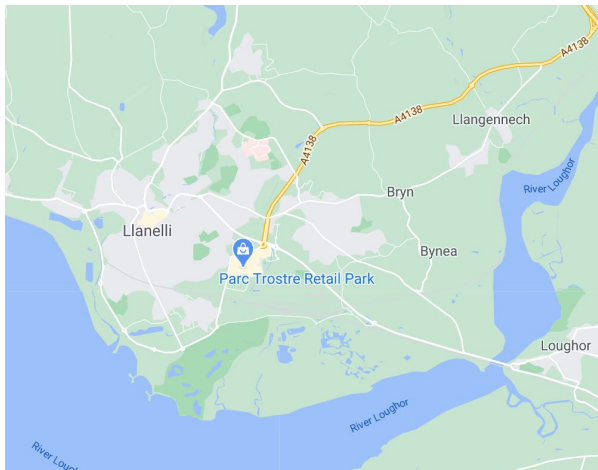
Distinctiveness and Regeneration BMSP4005

Fieldwork report

Llanelli

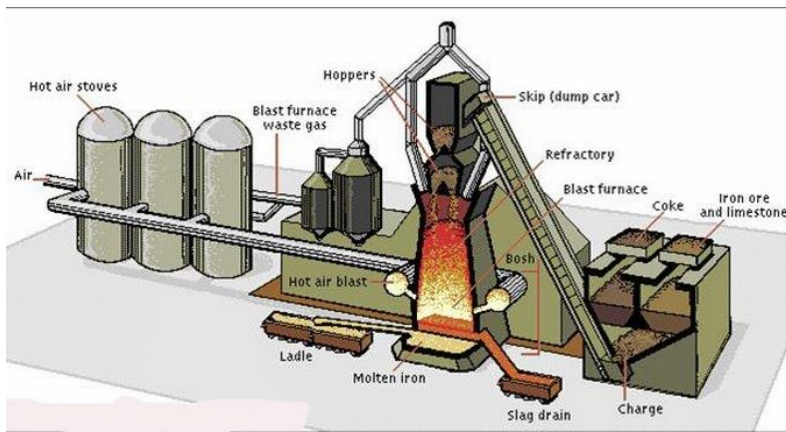
Llanelli was very much different to what it was today in the era preceding the industrial revolution, with the change referred to by Lyn John (2018) as going from a “small fishing village of 56 houses and a parish church into one of the major coal and steel towns of South Wales”. This quote highlights the impact on Llanelli and its distinctiveness owed to the industrial revolution as it was transformed from a humble parish village into one of Britain’s most prosperous coal strongholds as remembered today.

Over 150 years, beginning in 1700 although primarily spanning from 1750 onwards, Llanelli experienced the growth in coal production that set in stone its reputation and modern distinctiveness. For an area to experience such growth, it needed three resources- land, money and workers. Llanelli met all three of these conditions; it had ample space for industrial infrastructure and land full of rare high-quality bituminous and anthracite coal, (Geoinvestigate, 2015) sufficient money for investment in industrial infrastructure, needed to support such growth, and lastly a healthy supply of workers able to be employed in relevant industrial settings of the time as shown in the above quote by John (2018). Furthermore, the town is situated close to the river Loughor and the ocean- this made for easy shipping in and out of goods.



A map of Llanelli and the surrounding area. Note its proximity to the River Loughor and the ocean.
Image ©Google 2020

Ironstone was found extensively in Llanelli among other places in Wales, dating back to carboniferous times, with the continuous setting of ‘beds’ of ironstone. The first step in the creation of useful iron is that of Pig Iron, produced in blast furnaces. It involves chemical processes involving intense heat combined with coke and limestone. As Pig Iron itself is not useful due to its brittle nature, it is converted to cast or wrought iron in a foundry or forgery. (BBC Teach, 2016)



Pig Steel Production with a blast furnace.

Image ©P.G. Steel Company <https://sites.google.com/site/pgsteelcompany/blastfurnace>

There existed a few key players to whom much of Llanelli's distinction is owed. The first of which was Chauncey Townsend, who had extensive interests in Welsh coal mines. Townsend managed to gain the leases of as many Llanelli coalfields as possible, although did barely anything with them in order to create a region-wide monopoly. This was perceived by many as an attempt to stifle competition because he already had successful mines in Llansamlet and Neath. Consequently, under Llanelli's coal monopoly by Townsend, the town could not realise its potential for coal extraction. (Protheroe-Jones, Craig & Symons, 2002) Townsend died in March of 1770 and, when his son-in-law who continued his minimal activity policy passed in 1797, the area was opened up to new entrepreneurs.

One of the most influential figures in Llanelli's industrial past is Alexander Raby, whose first connection to the town was forged when he provided finance to Gevers and Ingman who had set up an iron furnace in 1791. (Bowen, 1856) As they were unable to repay Raby, he foreclosed and then took control of the iron furnace in 1796, with Gevers working with Raby for many years thereafter. (John, 2018) One of Raby's key mining operations was located at the Stradey estate, where he owned pits called Caerelms, Caemin and Caebad. With his now-owned ironworks, Raby produced and supplied armaments during the French wars. (Kennard, 1986) By the turn of the 19th century, it was evident that Raby's empire was expanding; by 1804 he had constructed a new forge, turning pig iron into useful wrought iron; he then ordered the construction of the then-called Squire Raby's Dock and, in the same year, installed high-pressure steam engines at the Caebad colliery (The Cambrian, 1804, p.3; The Carmarthen Antiquary, 1959) before then setting up tramways linking all of his sites from his furnaces to the dock. At approximately this time, Llanelli- only a small town at the time- experienced a population boom, from under 500 in 1795 to just less than 3000 in 1801. This meant there was a huge demand for housing, which Raby fulfilled with the construction of over 100 cottages. The most notable street was named Forge Row, which was the name of 34 cottages on the site of his forge, demolished in the 1930s. (John, 2018) Because Raby had to source the coke and limestone for his iron production from much further afield than Llanelli, he decided to launch construction of a railway funded by public subscription, officially passed by Parliament in 1802. He then sold his section of the railway to the newly-formed Carmarthenshire Rail Road Company for £3117, with this section becoming one of the oldest public railways in use in Great Britain. (John, 2018) Having one of Great Britain's oldest public railways certainly makes Llanelli an area of industrial distinction.

Other influential groups included the Nevill family and the Pemberton family. Both were industrialist families who settled in Llanelli from elsewhere.

The Nevill family initially came from Birmingham. They had close ties with the Llanelli Copper Works and other collieries in Carmarthenshire in the 19th century. By 1811, the family became synonymous with the industrialisation of the town and, through strategic lending to colliery owners, came to hold most of the area's coal district by 1829. (Archives Hub, n.d.)

The Pemberton family hailed from County Durham and instead invested vast swathes into the locality, into projects such as the sinking of additional mines or installation of steam pumping engines into existing mines. However, this family never saw the long-term success that the Nevill family saw- by 1829, it had advertised for sale all of its collieries and returned back to County Durham.

The distinction of Llanelli is owed to these people and their achievements, with each playing an important part in its industrial history. The lasting legacy of these figures is acknowledged by Llanelli in modern times through street names such as Raby Street, Nevill street, Railway Place and Copperworks Road; testaments to their achievements are also present such as the Carmarthenshire Dock and old railway spanning from Llanelli to Mynydd Mawr. (John, 2018)

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