

The North Dock - Troubled Birth and Sad History

The harbour commissioners at Llanelly flats or shipping place should have just continued collecting the tolls from the shipping using the harbour, loading coal for export, bringing in copper ore from Cornwall. There was also a strong trade in bark and hides from Ireland. The Burgesses or Councillors looked around and saw three private firms trading successfully in importing and exporting goods and decided they would have a go in these ventures. And so they instructed solicitors, lawyers, and barristers to approach Parliament and the Admiralty for a bill enabling them to construct a dock at Llanelly. In 1896 a Bill was passed for a dock to be built at Llanelly to be known as North Dock. The local seafaring people raised doubts straight away, saying it would be facing the wrong direction.

The Burgesses or Councillors had decided in their wisdom and so work commenced.

There is no record of shipping going aground on departure from the private docks, but the people of South Llanelly did not purchase coal for their fires for many months kindly provided by a ship that left North Dock, attempted a dog leg turn around the Pier Head and came to grief, broke its back and deposited its cargo on the beach.

Was the dock facing the wrong direction?

But hold on we have not built the dock yet.

Mr. Nott the contractor was given the job. Construction was begun in 1898. £200,000 was borrowed from The Bank of England for finance. The cost of excavating, constructing concrete quay walls, railway lines, laying pipes for the hydraulic power systems for coal hoists and cranes came to £57,987 13 Shillings. The remainder was spent on purchasing cranes, locomotives and coal hoists. And after two years the dock was nearly complete, except for one vital item; it did not have any water for floating the expected ships, and no entrance for allowing the water to flow into the dock.

A private company shipping coal from loading stages near the pier head held the right of way to run trains of coal on their railway line which had been there for many years across the proposed entrance to the dock. War was declared. The dock contractor's men dug the soil from under the railway lines during the day and the railway people replaced it at night. A truce was declared.

The private company continued shipping coal from its shipping place while the Burgesses or Councillors looked for a solution to its problem of being without water. This took three years, the dock itself took less time to be built. Meanwhile the interest on the loan continued. A meeting was convened between the interested parties and it was agreed that the dock contractor would construct a bridge over the proposed entrance and lay a railway line on it enabling the shipping of coal to continue, while they dug out the entrance to the dock to allow water to flow into same.

Score Round 1 to the private contractor.

But these were canny people having been in business for many years. Fearing that they would be at the mercy of the authorities in that the dock bridge would be kept open for long periods, or breakdowns etc, they demanded that if this happened they should be allowed to ship coal from the No. 1 hoist at North Dock at reduced rates for the inconvenience to them.

Score Round two to the private contractor.

And he shipped coal from here for many years until he was taken over by the G.W.R. and they decided to ship their coal from Swansea. Payments were made regularly to the Bank of England to service the loan, year in and year out. And in the month of July 1964 the sum of £551,322 Pounds and Nine Shillings and Sevenpence was repaid to the Bank of England in settlement of the loan. Vast sums continue to be spent on this man made area. Perhaps

global warming, tsunami waves, Atlantic hurricanes will reclaim what was once the province of the sea. It has happened once before. It is recorded that the sea took the railway embankment of over one hundred yards and threw it out to sea, and flooded the land inside. The remainder of the embankment prevented the water returning to the sea when the tide went out, and the swamped area took a long time to dry out.

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