

NEWSLETTER AUTUMN 2001

Clydach Pumping Station.

This was constructed in 1887 to pump water from the River Tawe into the Swansea Canal at times of a water shortage in the canal. The buildings were erected between the canal and the river immediately south of the Toll Bridge spanning the canal at Clydach.

The buildings consisted of a boiler house, chimney stack, engine house, and pump house. They were built of a mixture of pennant sandstone and brick. The bricks were used to form supporting pillars to the engine house and to form the arched doorway at the south end of the building. Corrugated zinc sheets were used for the roof. A date stone was inserted half way up the stack bearing the date 1887.

No records survive as to how often the pumps were used or when they were last in use but an interesting set of document was discovered in the Swansea City Archives at the Guildhall Swansea by the author in 1990. This collection has since been relocated to the West Glamorgan Archive Service Swansea.

It is recorded in the Swansea Docks reports that they had not been used after 1935.. The documents gave information on the equipment installed at the pump house and the disposal of the machinery in 1951. The documents consisted of a number of letters and replies to and from Swansea Docks engineers and the Inland Waterways Executive. A letter was received from the Inland Waterways Executive (the canal operators at that time) on the 15th February 1951 enquiring into the condition of the machinery in the pump house at Clydach. A reply was sent back to the Executive on the 27th August 1951 from the Great Western Railway Civil Engineer at Swansea Docks. The Civil Engineer recorded the following equipment in the pump house complex at that date.

Lancashire boiler 30 feet long, 7 feet diameter, about 12/15 tons weight. This would have been housed in the boiler house and used to provide the steam to drive the machinery in the engine house. In the engine house were two steam engines which powered the centrifugal pumps housed in the adjacent pump house alongside the river. The first engine installed (1887) registration number PWM 1117 was of an unknown type. The second engine was of the vertical type, single cylinder 12 inches diameter with 10 inch stroke, single flywheel, Reg. No. PWM. 1115. The second steam engine installed was presumably larger than the first due to it powering a pump with a higher capacity.

The first pump installed (1887) had a capacity of 5000 gallons per minute. Reg No PWM. 1116. The centrifugal pump was used to pump water from the river to the canal. A second larger centrifugal pump installed, registration number 1114, had a capacity of 8000 gallons per minute. This implies that the first pump installed did not have the capacity to raise sufficient water from the river and that the canal required additional water at times of low flow. The smaller pump and steam engine were both recorded as installed in 1887. The additional pump and steam engine were installed some time later. No information of when this occurred has survived. The boiler must have been replaced at the same time as the new steam engine and pump was installed because of the additional steam required to power two engines.

The Civil Engineer also recorded that the machinery had not been used for some considerable time. He said “The above equipment was installed many years ago to boost up the canal with river water at times of drought. The pumps have not worked for many years. We hold the view that the pumps will not be required in the foreseeable future and recommend that they be sold to demolition contractors. The items to be sold complete or broken up on site and removed as scrap”.

The equipment was removed by taking the roof off the building and hoisting the machinery through the roof space. The buildings were left in a partly roofless condition and were photographed by Ian Milne in 1970. The buildings were demolished soon afterwards. The date stone was rescued by John Hutchins (the canal foreman in the 1970's) and adorned his garden at Clydach for a number of years. John donated the stone to British Waterways when the pump house area was landscaped and it was built into the Toll Bridge abutment nearby.