

Wiselboom /Wistleboon Bridge

Nr. Old Castle Road, Llanelli SA15 2SW

GPS coordinates: 51° 40' 57.09" N / 40° 10' 18.52" W

Wistleboon or Wiselboom bridge no longer exists, as the river Lliedi which it spanned has been re-routed, and the bridge dismantled with the demise of local heavy industry. However, it was described in the *Cambrian* newspaper in 1897 as a 'stone arch bridge,' and was sufficiently substantial to carry a railway line across the river to a nearby colliery. Stephen Hughes in his book *The Archeology of an Early Railway System: The Brecon Forest Tramroads* states that:

"The ironmaster Alexander Raby carried his branch railway to Cae-Maen colliery over the old course of the Lliedi river 150m upstream of the 'ironbridge' c. 1801. It seems that this [Wiselboom bridge] was also made of iron... The remains may lie under the site of railway sidings at the end of Parkview Terrace."

Looking upriver of the Lliedi as it runs alongside the south end of Old Castle Road (2016)



Photograph: Jill Morgan

In the mid-nineteenth century, missionaries of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (then more commonly known as 'Mormons' or 'Mormonites') baptized converts under the Bridge in the river Lliedi, often at night (no doubt to

avoid hecklers, as there was some opposition to their preaching). Although the river is small, there would have been deep pools under the arches of the bridge, which would have made it a suitable place for baptisms.

The 'Mormon' missionaries had first come into south Wales in 1840, beginning their proselyting efforts in Monmouthshire, and then spreading west through Glamorganshire and across the Loughor. John Innes includes the following information about '*The Mormons*' in his 1902 book *Old Llanelly*:

About 1845 Mormonism spread like a wave over South Wales, and Llanelly felt the movement. The colliers of Caemaen and Caebad were converted in large numbers, as were those of the "Box"; many coppermen also became nominally "Saints." Walter Hodge and one Bassett, were the high priests of the new faith at Llanelly, and it is even alleged that they worked miracles! Longhurst of the Furnace was an early convert, and so was David Williams of Sandy Gate. They baptized at night under the Thistleboon or Wistleboon Bridge, near the Old Castle. There was a "Latterday Chapel" in Island Place – afterwards a woolen factory – the wool gathering having assumed a commercial phase. About the time not a few Llanelly families emigrated to Salt Lake to join Brigham Young. The terrors of several simultaneous mothers-in-law were insufficient to deter these ardent converts.

[This last comment related to the early 'Mormon' practice of polygamy which was highly controversial.]

Old Castle Pond (2017, looking northeast), on the northwest corner of which is the original location of the Wiselboom bridge



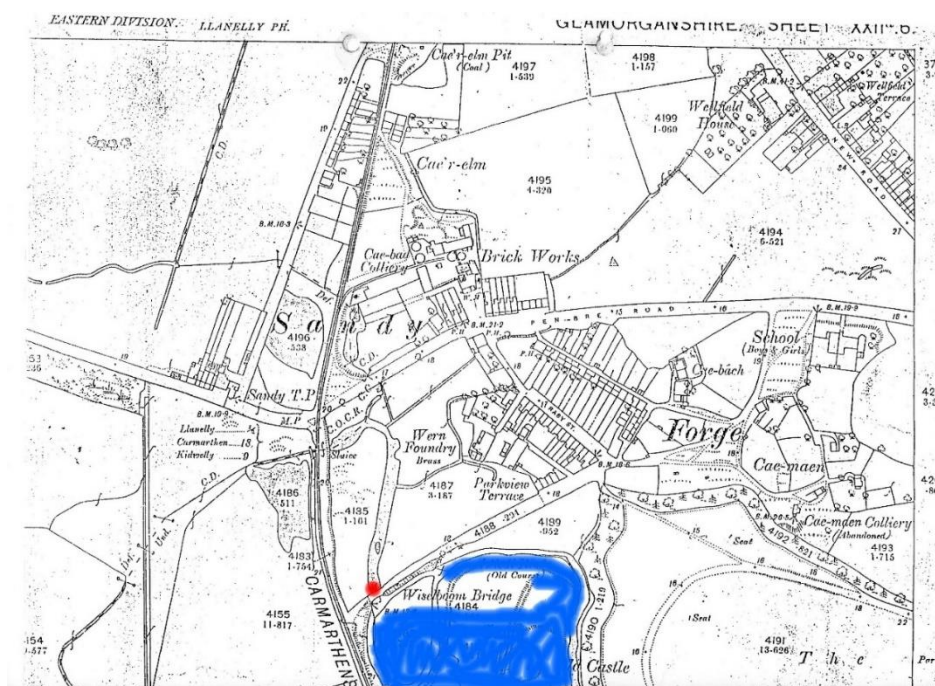
.Photograph: Jill Morgan

View along the north side of Old Castle Pond (2017) – the Wiselboom bridge would have been located on the northwest corner of the Pond (the far right in this photograph)



Photograph: Jill Morgan

This 1880 Ordnance Survey map of the Sandy/Old Castle area of Llanelli shows the approximate position of the Wiselboom Bridge (in red); the position of the present day Old Castle Pond is coloured in blue. Caemaen colliery for which the bridge was built can be seen to the west of the Pond.



Individuals associated with the Mormon church in the Llanelli area

The 'Longhurst of Furnace' referred to by John Innes above may well be William Longhurst who is listed in the 1851 census living in Furnace, Llanelli, as a lodger age 20 and single, in the household of David Manuel and family. This same William is listed as a son of David and Elizabeth Longhurst, living in Furnace, on the 1841 census. His christening (age 3 years) is recorded in the Llanelly Anglican parish registers for 20th September 1833. He was baptized into the 'Mormon' church as an adult in 1853.



The *David Williams of Sandy Gate* referred to by John Innes is undoubtedly the David Williams pictured here (1817-1888) whose history was written by his granddaughter, and appears on the familysearch.org website at: <https://familysearch.org/photos/artifacts/14730977>

In addition to his personal history there are details of the Llanelly branch of the Mormon church. His granddaughter says:

"In grandfather's Welsh record book which I had translated... it stated that he was baptized into the Latter Day Saint Church 11 February 1848 by Walter Rhoge (also called Roche and Roach) and confirmed the same day by elders William Hughes and David Charles. Sarah his wife was baptized 30 April 1849 by elder John Williams, brother to grandfather.

He had been converted by his brother John, who in turn had been a convert of Captain Dan Jones, the famous Welshman who had been with the prophet Joseph Smith the last day he lived.

When David and John Williams joined the Church their brother Joseph was greatly disturbed and whenever he found them preaching on the streets of Llanelly he would kick the boxes out from under them.

Grandfather was the Presiding Elder of the Llanelly Branch at the time of immigration. He helped build the chapel in Island Place and his name is on the old deed."

The Walter Hodge referred to by John Innes was then, according to David Williams' history, Walter Roach/Roche. A Walter Roach appears on the 1841 census for Llanelly in Forge with his father John and siblings. He also appears on the list of Immigrants at:

<http://welshmormon.byu.edu> under the spelling *Roach*. He emigrated to Utah territory in 1850 and died in Spanish Fork, Utah.

There were a number of branches/congregations of the 'Mormon' church in the Llanelli area in the mid-nineteenth century. In the *Llanelli Branch minutes (1855–1861)* the following branches in or near Llanelli are listed:

<i>Ffurnais</i>	<i>Forge</i>	<i>Kidwelly</i>	<i>Pembrey</i>
<i>Pontyberem</i>	<i>Pontyeats</i>	<i>Vangalch</i>	
<i>Llanelli Town/Dre</i>		<i>Wainbaglan/ Gwaunbaglan</i>	
<i>Lanymor/ Glanymor</i>	<i>(most likely Seaside)</i>		

Being close to the Forge area, Wiselboom/Wistleboon bridge would have been a convenient walking distance from Seaside and Llanelli town.

Sources of Information

- Lyn John, Llanelli Community Heritage
- Hugh Jones, former Llanelli resident and amateur 'Mormon' historian
- Dr Ron Dennis, Utah native and descendant of the Mormon missionary Dan Jones; also his website:
<http://welshmormon.byu.edu>
- Stephen Hughes. *The Archeology of an Early Railway System: The Brecon Forest Tramroad*. 1990. Sutton Publishing.
- *Cambrian* newspaper
- www.familysearch.org