

Roads and tracks to the south of the River Usk between Crickhowell and Llangynidr.

Abstract

This paper examines the early roads, tracks and crossings of the River Usk on the south side of the river between Crickhowell and Llangynidr. A similar paper (Ref. 1.) discusses the same area to the north of the river. Some of the routes taken by early travellers from the south are also considered.

Introduction.

In "The north of the River Usk between Crickhowell and Bwlch" (Ref. 1.) the development of the road system in the area from earlier origins was considered. The Myarth figured large in this paper and it was shown to have been of considerable historic significance. Of particular relevance to the study of the roads in the area to the south of the river was that the river crossings were, obviously, co-related. In this paper the southern approaches to these river crossings will get particular attention. Most of the work involved with deriving information enabling this paper to be written was carried out with the full involvement of R. G. Burchell but all speculation on the significance of the data is entirely that of the author.

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Narrative.

In Tracks, Volume 1, "Dowlais Top to the Usk" (Ref. 2.) detailed consideration was given to the area from Milgatw, at the northern end of present-day Tredegar, to Blaen Onneu and to the river Usk crossing by the bridge at Llangynidr and the ford at Cyfreddin. This was shown as route "L" in Fig. 9.4 of that Volume and duplicated as Fig. 1 in this. At that time the other river crossings from the mountains to the south were not considered as the Volume was already of considerable size and the author did not want to lose focus.

In this paper the southern bank of the River Usk, the roads and tracks approaching it and the crossing points have been given a close scrutiny. During the course of attempting to consider all the relevant data the matter of the "Spiteful Inn", which is of particular interest to Professor Geoffrey Williams, is also considered as it is mentioned in the context of the area by some historians and their descriptions of its believed position has had to be taken into account, as any inn is likely to have relevance to people travelling on roads, tracks or on river crossings.

Of particular interest have been the routes descending the mountain to the south but the relationship of the canal bridges to them has also been taken into account. The area being considered in detail in this paper can be seen in Fig. 2, taken from the 2002 1:25,000 Ordnance Survey map and Fig. 3 of a similar area taken from the First Edition 1" to the mile O/S map of 1832. On each of these the main routes off the mountains have been lined in green and given an identification letter. Track "L", shown on Fig. 9.4 of Tracks Volume 1, leading to Cyfreddin Ford was examined in Chapter 9 of that Volume and will not be considered in any further detail in this paper. The letters used for identification of sites and routes are the same in this paper as in the two previous ones (Ref.1. and Ref. 2.).

Two other routes leading to river crossings are "C" on Figs. 2 and 3, which descend from the mountain through Gwern Cilau, Pencroeslan and Llwyn Celyn and crossed the Usk a little way downstream of the present Glan Usk estate bridge and the "driftway" (route "Q") funnelling from the mountain through Dyfnant, which can be seen with an enclosure pattern very different from the areas to the east and the west in having a distinctive funnel shape as it descends from the mountain to the south narrowing until it reaches Dyfnant. This can be seen clearly on the O/S Surveyors map (1815-1817, Fig. 4.) and on the First Edition published O/S map of 1832 (Fig. 3.). The other descending route, "D", continued downhill, before the canal and the somewhat later, Glan Usk estate were built, to meet the then Llangattock to Llangynidr road near "X" – clearly to be seen on both the O/S surveyors map and the first published 1" edition and on the modern maps.

The early road, following the course of the River Usk and predating Glan Usk estate, can be seen on the O/S surveyors drawing (Fig. 4.) on which the stretch from Llangynidr to Dyfnant and hence to the ford across the Usk (lined in orange) is quite clear. It appears, and further research seems to confirm

this, that the section of road from Llangynidr to Dyfnant was very early and that the section from Dyfnant to Llangattock once ran near the river over most of its distance. Subsequent to the enclosure of the Glan Usk estate this earlier road near the river was closed and rerouted north of Park Farm, as it still is at present, and crossed the canal by the bridge at Fro (No. 122.) It then ran on the southern side of the canal to Dyfnant after which it continued to Llangynidr on the old route – this can be clearly seen by comparing Fig. 4 (O/S surveyors) and Fig. 6 (modern map).

As is clear in Fig. 4, which was first surveyed about 1813, that even after the canal was constructed in 1797, this earlier route was still in use but the Glan Usk estate soon caused this route to be modified and, together with the turnpike upgrading of about 1830 and the first published map of 1832 (Fig. 3), shows the present road to the north of the canal westwards of the bridge crossing the canal at Fro but not very clearly defined (It has been lined in orange in Fig. 3.).

An Usk crossing which was clearly of at one time of considerable importance was the "driftway" "Q", which originated on the mountain to the south and funnelled through Dyfnant to cross the Usk just upstream of the island. On the north bank it met the ancient route "E" (on Fig. 4.) which it could have followed either upstream past Gliffaes and hence Bwlch and onwards or downstream towards Pen Myarth and Tretower or Crickhowell and beyond. It could also have used "E" to pass Cyfreddin ford and mill and hence meeting route "F" subsequently turning towards either Bwlch or around the eastern end of Myarth by either route – "E" to join the main road east or "F" directly to Tretower, crossing the main road in the process. Myarth hillfort and the earlier existence of a similar funnel shaped access to the mountain in the direction of the Heol Saeson from Tretower was discussed in Ref. 1. We will discuss the "driftway" from the mountains to the south at Dyfnant more fully presently but Fig. 5, which is a Google Earth image of the area being discussed, gives a graphic view of the area under discussion with the "funnel" from the mountains to the south focussed on Dyfnant labelled as "Q" – still clearly to be seen..

It must be noted, when looking at old roads, that much depends upon the date. For example, I have been unable to ascertain the date by which the route of the present A 40(T) was in use. It was shown as a route essentially similar to that taken today by the time of Ogilby's map of 1675 and this is confirmed by the 1587 Beaufort estate map of Tretower. However the Rees map of Wales in the 14 th. century (Ref. 11.) shows that the then main road ran through Tretower, past Pen-y-gaer and continuing west past Blaen Llynfi castle.

It is also worth noting that the surveyors drawing (Fig. 4) and, rather less clearly on the First Edition O/S map (Fig. 3), that immediately after crossing the river to the north bank, there are several buildings and small enclosures including a large building ("Y") associated with a sizable enclosure. We shall return again to this feature when discussing the "Spiteful Inn" in order not to lose the primary purpose of this paper, which is on the old roads and river

crossings, and will be woven in where it is of relevance to the area being discussed. Today Myarth is densely covered with plantation forestry (Fig. 2. and Fig. 5.) so that more detailed examination on the ground is very difficult.

Professor Williams has found literary material which appears to indicate that Bridge No. 124 was known as the "Spiteful Inn Bridge", this is one of the reasons why he felt that the building near "X" on Fig. 8. was most probably the "Spiteful Inn". This is borne out by CADW, which gives the bridge a Grade 2 listed status (Ref. No. 20692). This bridge is near Pen-y-bryn rather than Bridge No. 123, which is on what might appear the most direct route to "X". Pen-y-bryn today (Fig. 6) still has a right of way footpath to Dyfnant (Bridge No. 125). Some insight into the utility of Bridge No. 124 at the time of the first published O/S can be seen on Fig. 7 where the Pen-y-bryn track, the Dan-y-wern driveway and the route "D" below Llwyn-on all had clearly defined routes to it. Although without further information it can be no more than speculation the relationship of Pen-y-bryn to the driftway at Dyfnant ("Q"), route "D" and bridge No. 124 is curious and might be significant. It seems possible that Pen-y-bryn might have offered sufficient attraction for the traveller as to cause them to divert from the seemingly more direct route, catered for by Bridge 123, to the early riverside road. If so, then the traffic using this route must have predated the canal and was sufficient to cause a bridge (No. 124) to be provided. Clearly there is scope here for more research.

To make things clearer the area under discussion is shown enlarged in Fig. 6, taken from the 2002, 1:25,000 O/S map, and Fig. 7, of a similar area taken from the First Edition O/S map of 1832. A careful study on foot was made of the canal bridges west of Fro (Bridge No. 122.) and photographs taken.

That the old track past Llwynon ("D") on Fig. 7 (1832 O/S) originally seems to have crossed the canal by bridge No. 123 and continuing to meet the early road near "X" is clear. It is also clear from the first edition O/S map (Fig. 7.) that the point "X" near the river bank was accessed by route "R" via Fro – or had it existed – or continued to exist – using the mystery bridge at "S". This would seem to indicate that this point "X" held attractions at one time. What this could have been is discussed further presently. What is also clear is that the Surveyors map (Fig. 4) shows that the main road appears to have run more or less as it does today from Llangynidr to Bridge No. 125 at Dyfnant and that east of bridge No. 125 there was only the towpath (lined in yellow) alongside the northern side of the canal but that, by the time of the first published map in 1832 (Fig. 7.) the road on the south side of the canal east of Llangynidr had been established from bridge No. 125 to 122 at Fro to avoid the new Glan Usk enclosure. The old tracks off the mountain through Dan y wern and Pen y bryn ("D") can be seen in good detail in Fig. 9 which is taken from a 1885 25" O/S map on which the old road has been superimposed in orange and the point where this old road crossed the canal at Dyfnant has been reconstructed. The old downhill tracks from the mountains to the south have also been lined in orange as has the track towards the Usk from Dyfnant. Before the canal was built and the road changed the old routes off the mountains were likely to have been of greater importance.

It is also interesting that the road and canal changes between 1813-1817 (Fig. 4.) and the First Edition O/S (last revision 1828) (Fig. 3.) led to the loss of a canal bridge which seems to have been some 100 m. or so on the Llangynidr side of the Fro bridge (No.122). Perhaps it was intended but never actually built or it could have been for a wooden right of way bridge but Photo No.1, taken at SO 18413 19434, shows the narrowing of the canal one might expect to find associated with a bridge. This feature is marked with the letter "S" on Fig. 6 (Modern 1:25,000 O/S) and on Fig. 3 (1832 1") at this point and, on close scrutiny, the O/S surveyors drawing (Fig. 4.) shows a bridge crossing the canal at this date. This can be clearly seen on the magnified inset.

When comparing Fig. 7. (1832 1" O/S) and Fig. 6. (2002 1:25,000 O/S) it would seem to be likely that on the earlier map the path from the mountains through Llwyn-on could at that time have run directly to the river bank – later crossing the canal by Bridge No. 123 and meeting the pre-Glan-Usk road at, or near, "X" or it could have swung eastwards to cross the canal by Bridge 122 at Fro. Today the configuration of the field and footpath can be postulated by comparing Fig. 6 with Fig. 7.

It can be no more than speculation without closer examination that the canal cut crossed an accepted right of way and that a crossing provision was made for a possible bridge but it could be that the road extension to cross the canal nearby at Fro (Bridge N. 122) resolved the problem satisfactorily. It is however clear from the O/S surveyors map (Fig. 4.) that track "D" had, prior to the building of the canal, continued directly to meet the original Llangynidr to Llangattock road at "X".

When was the canal built? James Eyles in his "Cruising along the Mon and Brec canal" (Ref. 3) says that:

"Theophilus Jones in his "History of the County of Brecknock" in 1805 states that the canal was started in April 1796 and that the embankment and aqueduct at Gilwern was finished in 1799, but the Canal Company's minutes book gives the starting date as early in 1797.....The eight and a half miles length from Gilwern to Llangynidr via Llangattock, was finished and in use by November of 1797."

(See also Hadfield. Ref. 4.)

So, both the O/S Surveyors drawings of the area (Fig. 4) and the the 1832 O/S Fig. 7.) show route "D" as crossing the canal directly, by Bridge No. 123, to join the original road, which at that date ran from Dyfnant, where the Llangynidr to Llangattock road crossed the canal at Bridge No. 125 and then ran eastwards through what is now the Glan Usk estate (road lined in yellow). By the time of the First Edition O/S (Figs. 3 and 7) the Glan Usk estate was enclosed over most of the present area and the yellow lined road was closed at about SO 182 198 – near "X". On the 1832 map (Fig. 3) the main road from Llangattock continued on the north side of the canal as far as Fro where it

crossed to the south by bridge No. 122. It then continued west to Llangynidr – this is still the position today (Figs. 2 and 6).

The track north towards the river from Bridge 123, clearly shown on the Surveyors map and the First Edition O/S, is also seen on Fig. 8 which is a section of the 1845 Llangattock Tithe map suggesting that access to the river bank was still possible at this date. On this map "X" shows the position believed by Professor Williams to have been the site of the "Spiteful Inn" and a building is shown to exist here (filled in red) - we will return to this presently. On Fig. 8 the route of the original road towards Dyfnant has been shown with a broken orange line. It also shows a short stretch of the old road heading towards Dyfnant. It should be noted that many of the field boundaries have changed between 1845 and the present day. However, it is clear from the Llangynidr/Llangattock tithe map of 1845 (Fig. 8.) that, at this date, there is no apparent connection from Pen-y-bryn to Bridge No. 124 despite being clearly seen on Fig. 7 (1832 O/S). So, a bridge which once had a purpose had fallen completely out of use.

Geoffrey Williams was also exercised about the bridge problem and he refers to a report of 1857 by John Kirk to the Committee of the Brecon and Abergavenny Canal on repair work. In this report the bridges were numbered from Brecon as:

No. 35 Dwfynnant (i.e. No. 125 leading to the original riverside road.)

No 36 Penybryn (i.e. No. 124. An accommodation bridge.)

No. 37 Spiteful Inn (i.e. No. 123. Via Penybryn.)

No. 38. (i.e. No. 122. at Fro)

It should be noted that this report calls Bridge. No. 123 the "Spiteful Inn" bridge but CADW (Historical Environmental information in Wales.) gives bridge No. 124 that appellation with a listed status and Reference number 20692. Grade ii.

Returning to Fig. 8 i.e. the composite map taken partly from the Llangattock tithe map and partly from that of Llangynidr. This was made possible because the boundaries of each map were down the Dyfnant stream - an area of particular interest in our researches. To do achieve this was a bit tricky as not only were they scaled differently on the copies available but they were also on a different orientation but the result is satisfactory. Fig. 9 is based on the 1875 25" O/S map and on this it has been attempted to recreate the area centred on Dyfnant by super-imposing the pre-canal road (derived from the O/S Surveyors drawings - Fig. 7). The present main road (B 4558) is coloured red and the old road and other tracks of significance in orange. Pre-canal the situation at Dyfnant was that the present main road east of Dyfnant did not exist but the old road from Crickhowell descended into the stream gully of Nant Dyfnant and crossed it via a bridge before climbing up the western bank to continue west passing the track leading to the ford on the right hand and

the emergence of the driveway “Q” on the left. Today there is a high-quality metal pedestrian gate at the drove exit.

The general area as it is today is shown in Photo. 2, taken at Dyfnant on the track descending to the ford with the canal-side barn in the background.. The track immediately in the foreground passes to the right and descends towards the river and, eventually, to the ford on the upstream side of the island - lined in orange in Fig. 9. From the direction of Llangattock the track can be seen descending to cross the stream by means of a bridge, shown in Figs. 3.and 9. and Photo. 3. This old bridge, now a culvert carrying the stream below both the canal and the road, judging by the stonework at its exit, appears to have been well-built as can be seen in Photo. 4. It also seemed that the stonework arching the culvert had been built in two stages - one up to the point of the arch springing and a higher one now carrying to present track – clear in Photo. 3. Examination inside the culvert substantiated this as, about seven feet from the entrance, there is a clear change in the masonry as seen in Photo. 5. This seems to provide good confirmation that the original bridge was extended upstream by means of a culvert sufficiently far to meet the needs of the canal and the road and the top was arched in order to carry the load. After this initial section the culvert can be seen continuing beneath the canal and the road (Photo. 6.). It is strongly suspected that the original bridge carrying the old road across the stream was a flat wooden structure at a lower level below the springing of the arch – this change in the structure can be seen in Photo. 3. To the left hand side of Photo 2., the lane leading up to the gate, can be seen crossing the tunnel/culvert, with the embankment carrying the canal and road above it.

This embankment closely upstream of the bridge/culvert was built to carry the canal across the deep gorge of the Dyfnant, Looking over the wall on the south side of the road it is now about 8m. (25ft.) above the height above the Dyfnant stream. To reach the original bridge from the east the road crossed some of the presently wooded area seen at the extreme left hand of Photo. 2 passing over another, smaller and now dry culvert (Photo. 7.). This culvert probably originally carried a stream which was diverted upstream of the culvert by the canal constructors.

The 1972 1:25,000 O/S map shows the now-vanished building nearer the stream but the 1845 Llangynidr tithe map (Fig. 10) clearly shows a building on the site of the present barn (coloured in yellow), another nearer the stream (coloured in blue) and further large buildings at the bottom of the lane leading down to the river (coloured in pink).

Fig. 9 is based on the 1885 25" to the mile O/S map with the reconstructed pre-canal road system imposed – lined in orange. The position of the Usk ford seems to have been where rocks are shown some short distance upstream of the island and is clearly seen in Photo. 8. taken from the north bank of the river at SO 17632 12893. In this photograph a gate can be seen on the south bank which is the one accessed from Dyfnant by following route “1”, shown on Figs. 9. Descending the old track from the vicinity of the barn at Dyfnant another old building with an enclosure was shown on maps until

recently but this too has been demolished in recent years (labelled as “4”, coloured in pink on Fig. 10). From here the ford can be reached by two possible routes - one by continuing to the river bank and then turning downstream (route “2”) or otherwise by following a route a short way from the river (route “1”) – both routes are indicated on Fig. 9 in broken orange. This latter path is sound underfoot, has an old stone wall on the uphill side and leads to a gate near the river. This is the gate seen from the north bank of the river and is shown in Photo. 8. Route “2” is most likely to be a riverside path.

The Llangynidr Tithe Apportionments (1845) of the fields around Dyfnant are worth mentioning and are shown in Fig. 10 on which the descriptions have been superimposed .

<u>Field No.</u>	<u>Name.</u>	<u>Translation.</u>
1	Y Ynys	The island.
2	Y Ynys	The island.
2a	(Associated with the house and garden.)	
3	Cae Cenol	Middle enclosure.
4		House and garden.
5	Cae dy hwnt y stable	Thy enclosure beyond the stable.
6	Rhaneren vach	Little part or share.
6a	Cae Davenant	Enclosure [with a} ravine.
134	Cae dy hwnt yr scybor	Thy enclosure beyond the barn

n. b. In the bottom left-hand corner of Field 5 there could possibly have been another building but a crease in the map make it uncertain.

The building “Barent” still exists, a barn on the southern side of the canal is shown in Photo. 9. but it would appear from Photo. 10. that it has been considerably modified and extended over the years.

Geoffrey Williams from his own researches on the “Spiteful Inn” thought that it was probably located at a position adjacent to the old road up the valley at a point marked “X” on the maps used to illustrate this paper. The position is derived from a building (filled in red” on Fig. 8 which has been taken from the Llwynon tithe map (1845). On Fig. 8 the route of the old road west from Crickhowell - taken from the Surveyors drawings of 1813 (Fig. 4) - has been added in broken orange. This map also shows a short length of the old road running in the direction of Dyfnant. Examination of the Llwynon tithe entries reveals that it comprised 29 fields or enclosed areas, 23 of which were clustered high on the valley side about the Llwynon homestead, while the

other 6 lay separately in a strip along the valley bottom adjacent to the Usk river. It is in the latter group that the putative site of the "Spiteful Inn" is suggested. He continues with reference to the "Spiteful Inn" in a quote from John Lloyds "Historical Memoranda of Breconshire (Ref. 5) which he believes throws light on this. We will return to this quotation presently but first it is important to realise that it is uncertain that there ever was a hostelry with such a name. It was a name often bestowed locally on an establishment which opened and was perceived to be stealing or "spiteing" the trade of an existing one. This is, or was, a very common practice and, for example, the author (Martin) found just such a case in Merthyr when researching the route taken by the Ogilby coach road from Chester to Cardiff south past Merthyr (Ref. 6).

In this case an old inn seemingly called "The Mountain Hare" which lay at the crossroads of the Ogilby coach road from Chester to Cardiff via Brecon of 1675 and the Neath road crossing the Taff from the west and which, after passing Dowlais Top, continued east and north. It is of interest in the context of this paper that one of its routes subsequent to Dowlais took it through Milgatw and hence to Llangynidr and Llangattock (Figs. D.4. and D. 5.).

However, the early old coach road from Cardiff to Brecon and on to Chester, was supplanted by the turnpike built in the first decade of the 19th. century following the Turnpike Act of 1787 and another inn - the "Farmers Arms" - was built in Market Street and immediately called the Spiteful inn or simply the "Spite" as it appeared to be spiteing the ancient inn. Now the Mountain Hare is remembered only by the name of the area. This was apparently a quite common practice as there was another "Spite" in Ebbw Vale and it is interesting that Lloyd (Ref. 5.) in Book 3, page 53, in his consideration of cattle droving, mentions another Spiteful Inn approximately a mile west of Aberbwllch (approx SN 853 413, i.e. possibly at the road junction at SN 840 415).

The reason for this discursion is that the "Spiteful Inn" presently being discussed might have originally had a different name or no formal name at all. If the property was opened and operating at the time of the canal building it is quite possible that some enterprising local, perhaps a farmer, might see an excellent opportunity to set up a place of refreshment and possibly lodging.

Geoffrey Williams also suggested the possibility that a traveller on the old road from Llwyn On on route "D" from the mountain to the south having reached point "X" (Figs. 4 and 3 and others) would either turn upstream some 800 yards to reach the "driftway" crossing at "Q" or continue to Cyfreddin at just under a mile away or, alternatively, turned downstream to the ford which allowed track "C" to cross the river Usk at "M" (Figs. 3 and 4) – which by 1832 passed through Glan Usk estate. However it seems clear enough that the point where the track "D" via Llwynon farm met the old road from Crickhowell to Llangynidr could have provided a good site for a hostelry. It is also quite possible that in earlier times, perhaps during favourable conditions, the Usk could have been crossed here and examination of Fig. 4. (O/S surveyors) appears to support this idea. Although not as clear as one would wish there appears to be tracks on both sides of the river crossing from the old road on

the south bank at "X" to join the low-level road ("E") on the north bank near the building and enclosure at "Y".

This area is clearly interesting, and Fig. 4. (Surveyors map) has an area of detail superimposed (this is the greatest level of detail that the map can support.). It shows a complex of small buildings and enclosures and means of access to Myarth Hill. Although the purpose of these small enclosures cannot be certain to have been connected with cattle crossing the Usk as they might equally have been connected with fishing or providing services for travellers. The Ogilby map of 1675 shows a turning (marked as "E" on the maps used in this document.) and posted on his map as "To Llangonyder."). Nevertheless, crossing the Usk by fording with cattle was very much affected by the state of the river and holding enclosures on each bank would have been a necessity. It might also possibly be relevant that a putative crossing of the river near "X" was only some tens of metres from the "Fish Stone" and a further point of interest is that the Google Earth image (Fig. 5) shows a shoal here (this can be seen in much more detail by zooming in) which indicates shallow water although it does not look good under-feet at present. But, even if this is true, it does not establish whether this building ("X") was the Spiteful Inn or an inn which had been spited – perhaps by another hostelry near bridges No. 123 or 124. However, certainly it would seem that any inn sited at "X" would have lost its purpose when the old road was closed after the Glan Usk enclosure. I will return to a possibility of a ford here and a more general note on river crossings in the Discussion.

If a bridge was required then upstream to Llangynidr or downstream to Crickhowell were the only realistic alternatives, although it must be remembered that both of these were unusable at one time or another. The ford crossing of "M", which was later replaced by a private bridge owned by the Glan Usk estate a short distance upstream, was indicated on Ogilby's strip map of roads in the area in 1675 and has been discussed more fully in "To the North of the River Usk between Crickhowell and Bwlch" (Ref. 1). Having said all that, a traveller having crossed from the mountains to the south would certainly have welcomed a stop for refreshment and it is likely that the track via Llwynon was much used in earlier times by man and animals

Returning to the Usk ford at Dyfnant and Professor Williams' quotes from Lloyd

"There is a very interesting old driftway across the Usk between Gliffaes and Penmyarth at the island, which deserves notice, and there are also large maen-hir in the glade leading to the driftway, and higher up at Pantyfedwen, near Llangynidre. This driftway to which common land led down from the hill all the way to the waters edge, before enclosure was made, enabled the Cwmdu side people to cross the river, because in those early times there were no permanent stone bridges, to bring their lime and coal from the Llangattock mountain; and having crossed the Usk, they then found the Roman road to take them, either up or down the valley, and the "Spiteful Inn", as the Hospitium or hostelry of ancient days, ready to receive them and to entertain both man and beast." (Lloyd Vol.1 p. 129. Ref. 5.)

This passage is very interesting because it appears to throw light on the position of the "Spiteful Inn" but it is also far from clear and need to be looked at a bit more closely.

1) "*There is an interesting old driftway across the Usk between Gliffaes and Penmyarth at the island.*" i.e. a ford across the river from the low-level road "E" (Ref. 4) on the north bank of the river (Ref. 1.). "...*at the island.*" seems to indicate the crossing at Dyfnant.

2) "*enabling the Cwmdu side people to cross the river*". i.e. clearly travelling from the northern bank to the southern in order to reach the lime and coal.

3) "*and having crossed the Usk*" - this is the bit which causes trouble. Crossing which way?

4) "*found the Roman Road*". This surely must refer to the well-known Roman Road referred to by Theophilous Jones in his "History of Brecknock" (Ref. 7.), as the Julia Strata running from Brecon to Caerleon - definitely on the northern bank of the river. Indeed on the northern side of Myarth and, at earlier times, through Tretower itself – see Fig D. 5.

5) "*up or down the valley*" - the Usk valley or the Cwm du valley? - "*and the Spiteful Inn.....ready to receive them*" - this seems to place the Spiteful Inn and its enclosure for animals on the north bank of the river.

6) The Maen hir are found on the north bank of the Usk. Of the several the most imposing is that now called the "Fish Stone" - probably named because its shape resembles a leaping fish. It is a very imposing stone being something of the order of 5m. (15ft.) tall. It clearly originated as a slab of the Old Red sandstone exposed in the nearby river bed but whether it has been modified by the hand of man is uncertain. This stone was commented on by H. T. Payne (Ref. 12) but not by the present name. A stone is shown here on the 1832 First Edition O/S map (Fig. 7.), where it is referred to in gothic script – which was used to denote something ancient - but not on the O/S surveyors drawings of 1813 – 1817 (Fig. 4). Both the Royal Commission (Ref. 13.) and Cofflein (Ref. 14.) mention the "Fish Stone" – although there seems to be some discrepancies as to the O/S grid positions they give - the actual position, taken directly from a 1:25,000 O/S map is SO 1843 1985. I had a worm of doubt concerning whether the stone depicted on the 1832 O/S map is the "Fish Stone" because of possible confusion with the "Turpilius Stone" which was removed to Brecon Museum in 1948 (Cofflein date) but they give its position to have been SO 1965 1930, which was clearly sufficiently different as not to be confused. The Royal Commission describes a stone (SS 29) and suggest. on page 74. that "*This may have been used as a Mediaeval boundary marker stone*". It might be noted that Fig. 4. shows this area to have been occupied with connections between the lower route "E" and the higher level route "F".

There are other possible occupied sites on the northern bank such as that most clearly shown as marked with a "Y" on Fig. 4. - the Ordnance Survey surveyors drawing of 1813 showing such a site conveniently positioned very close to the Dyfnant ford. Today the area of this site has some scattered stones but no sign of a structure, however it is now covered in dense commercial forestry which makes it impossible to examine properly. The other possibility, depending upon which interpretation of "spite" one takes, is that the early Gliffaes might have been involved either as the inn which was spited or which carried out the spiting. Gliffaes was rebuilt in 1835 but a property of great antiquity lay at or in the near vicinity of the present hotel and is shown on the Rees map of Wales in the 14th. century (Fig. D. 5., Ref. 11 where it is labelled as "Gwlithfaes" and Cofflein says that it existed in 1234 but gives no reference.

To add to the confusion Professor Williams gives further quote from Lloyd in his paper under preparation presently called "The puzzle of the Spiteful Inn and a lost ford over the river Usk." which mentions the driftway at Dyfnant and gives a further quote from Lloyd (Ref. 5.) in his notes on Breconshire crosses;

*218. Derwen-y-groes, or the oak tree of the cross, is situate in the parish of Llanvigan, where the road divides, one part leading to Talybont, and the other to Aber. Probably there was a cross for worship fixed here. This road is also an very ancient one, up the vale of Usk from Crickhowell to Brecon. Near Dyfnant we have the "**Spiteful Inn**" (Latin, hospitium, same derivation as Llanspythid, the ruins of which I have often seen, and where an ancient roadway led down to the island in the Usk, and so across to the Penmyarth side."*

As Geoffrey Williams remarks -

"The implication here is that Lloyd (1833-1915) on journeys along the valley road saw, near Dyfnant, the ruins of the inn. This suggests that the ruins were still evident as late as the 1840s."

While the present discussion has noted that the "Spiteful Inn" has several possible interpretations it is important to note that Lloyd did not seem to have had any uncertainty of the derivation of the name in mind. He specifically brings up the derivation from the Latin "hospitium" which might well have been the name of a rest place or hostelry for travellers rather than an ale-house. With the near vicinity of the Sarn Helen and a later coach road it could imply a considerable history.

There is no doubt that Dyfnant is on the southern side of the river and near the valley road (the present B 4558) and that canal bridge No. 125 provides a good viewpoint but Fig. 4 (Surveyors map) and Fig. 7 (First Edition O/S) both show the site "Y" on the northern side of the ford i.e. the Myarth side. With this heavy afforestation on the Myarth and the strip of woodland leading down from Dyfnant to the island it is not possible today to say whether the putative building at "Y" would have been visible. Certainly, in winter particularly, Gliffaes is clearly visible.

To make the general position clearer Fig. 5, a Google Earth image of the area being discussed, on which the identification letters used throughout this paper have been added gives a good overview of the area. Gliffaes has been given the letter "T" because the Google image places it a little way uphill where Gliffaes Fach and a "Chantry" were to be found - this could be of some interest for research.

So, depending upon the tree cover at the time of the year of his visit (incidentally he must have been quite young at the time) Lloyd could have seen both "X" and "Y" and Gliffaes. This latter site raises the question as to whether Gliffaes, i.e. "Gliffaes Hotel" today had a history as a hostelry. If so, it could be a very old one which could possibly have been "Spited". However his second quote specifically says *"near Dyfnant we have the "Spiteful Inn"*. and, seemingly, he had seen ruins where the ancient way ran down to the ford. If there was an inn at Dyfnant it would have been in a very good position, being on the ancient driftway and adjacent to either the old or the new valley roads from Llangattock to Llangynidr. It might be worth while in the present context to draw attention to the now vanished building sited very conveniently at Dyfnant and labelled as Plot 24 – "House and garden" most clearly shown in Fig. 10. of the 1845 Llangynidr tithe map where it has been coloured in blue. While this is pure speculation its position fits that described by Lloyd very well and it would certainly also to have been very well sited for a hostelry lying as it does close to the old main road and at the neck of the driftway. It should be noted that the greatest number of the trees around Dyfnant are beech and seemingly planted at around the same time. More careful examination of these trees is needed but the superficial impression is an age of 150 to 200 years. This would mean that at the time of Lloyds visit they would have been much smaller and would have been less of an impediment to his view particularly from horseback and even less so in winter. Another possibility worth some consideration is the property "4" on Fig. 10 (1845 Llangynidr parish map). It is shown as being of considerable size – much larger than the barn adjacent to the canal and has large enclosures which could hold animals waiting for conditions to allow a river crossing.

Dyfnant is clearly important, perhaps because of a possible connection with a "Spiteful Inn", but certainly for its unique position in relation to the canal, the old road and the driftway crossing to the Usk ford, as is clear on Fig. 9. On this 1885 25" O/S map the old road has been superimposed and lined in orange and is shown crossing the stream. Other old tracks in the area have also been highlighted in orange. This reconstruction is based on several visits to the area some of which have been discussed previously in this document.

Certainly Lloyd could have seen all the old buildings at Dyfnant, almost certainly Gliffaes and possibly others on the north bank. Whether he could have seen any ruins at position "X", which are nearly 1 km. away would have depended upon the tree cover and how complete the ruins were at that time.

Having made these observations without really resolving the mystery of the Spiteful Inn, which might have to wait until more documentary evidence is

found, I must remember my original purpose for investigating the early roads, tracks and fords over the wider general area. I will attempt to place this work in the wider context in the Discussion.

Discussion.

Although the “Spiteful Inn” has been widely discussed the main intention of this paper is to be part of the wider examination of old roads and tracks in northern Monmouthshire and southern Breconshire which have been reported on in a series of Volumes under the general heading of “Tracks”.

The area covered by the main Volumes are shown highlighted on Fig. D.1. and that of the more local area in Fig. D.2. In addition to the main Volumes there are other papers each covering smaller areas in greater detail. The present paper is intended to add to this corpus. In some of these other papers the area between Crickhowell and Llangynidr on the northern side of the Usk (Ref. 1.) is discussed in some detail and includes the early roads, the large iron age fort of Myarth, the Roman fort of Y Gaer, the Norman castle and the mediaeval manor of Tretower. Also in this paper there were some observations on the possible use of the River Usk as a waterway.

The present paper is intended to examine the southern side of the river and to pay particular attention to the routes from the south over Mynydd Llangynidr and their relationship to the various crossing places of the River Usk.

Chapter 1 of Volume 1 (Ref. 2.) contains a discussion of the origins, characteristics and their reasons for being of old tracks and their significance at different times in the past. Many of these old tracks have disappeared, being no longer of value, while others have been subsumed by modern roads, tramways and railways.

A good, and very relevant, example of an early road for wheeled traffic, now long abandoned, ran from Milgatw, at the top end of Tredegar, over the moors to Blaen Onneu and subsequently to Llangynidr and Crickhowell. This route is shown on several old maps such as Bowen (1729-1760), Coltman (1798, Fig. D. 4.) and is also to be found on the Rees map of Wales in the 14th. century (Fig. D. 5.). In more recent times it was used by the Ordnance Survey to put a series of benchmarks over the mountain – these can be seen on the 25” O/S maps. Such old routes were clearly still in use when the Ordnance Survey team used them for benchmarking and many have been examined on foot with a GPS and reported on in Ref. 2. As a typical example, Fig. D. 4. shows the Milgatw to Blaen Onneu early road with small crosses marking the positions of GPS readings taken at the points where small cairns, erected by the O/S team, could be found. The pink lined sections of track are where reasonably clear sections of the old road could still be found.

I have included a section of Rees’s map of Wales in the 14th. century (Ref.11.) for two reasons a) it comes as a surprise to many that long-distance roads existed at such a date and b) these early roads can still be found. Fig. D.5. shows some of these and I have highlighted some of those most relevant to the present paper with yellow dashes because it is not always easy to find the fine red lines he used to delineate roads on a background which is generally rather ruddy. Perhaps the most important of these for the present paper are

the ones running north from Milgatw either to Llangynidr or Llangattock, the latter passing through Blaen Onneu. While this, because it is a section of a long distance route and because of the occasional remains still to be found in places, seems clearly to have been suitable for wheeled vehicles, this cannot be assumed with any degree of certainty for the extended section to Llangynidr – although Rees depicts it in a similar fashion.

I have added the name of Milgatw to the map but the existing labelling is sufficient to make the routes quite clear. The routes along the mountain ridgeways to the south have also been highlighted as they run through large areas of grazing land as well as being the only practical routes in earlier times. I must add that there are other ancient routes, which I have described in more detail in one or another of my Volumes on “Tracks.” of which Rees was unaware at the time of his writing and, in this context, I was interested to see that from the vicinity of Brynmawr he shows a truncated road heading over the Llangattock moors. I have found just such a road and reported it in some detail in Volume 1, Chapter 7 of Tracks (Ref. 2). As this road is 12’ 6” wide, heavily metalled with stone edge stones and parallel ditches I have proposed that it is a remnant section of the earliest heads of the valleys road – another surviving section being the paved ford above Rhymney Bridge (Ref. 2.)

Closer to the area being discussed in the present paper the old road over the moors from Milgatw in the south to Blaen Onneu is labelled “A” on Figs. 1., D. 3. and D. 4. All the roads shown on Figs. D.1 and D.2. are discussed in the relevant Volumes of Tracks. It should be noted here that the present main road from Blaen Onneu to Llangattock is relatively recent and the old “yellow” road via Pen Croeslan-isaf (lined in green in Fig.1.) is much the earlier one.

It would seem that routes “L”, “Q”, “D” and “C” (Figs. 2 and D.3) all ran downhill northwards from the early Blaen Onneu to Crickhowell road to reach the old direct Crickhowell to Llangynidr road running parallel to the River Usk and could then cross the river by the bridges at Llangynidr and Crickhowell (although both were not useable at various times in the past) or by the fords at Cyfreddin (“E”), Dyfnant (“Q”) or Penmyarth (“M”) and, possibly, near the “Fish Stone”.

Between the then main road from Blaen Onneu to Llangattock and the moors to the south there were the limestone scarps of Craig y castell, Craig y Cilau and Darren Cilau to negotiate and although a way through by foot can be found in a few places any passage was difficult. Although we cannot be certain of the configuration of the scarp before the intensive quarrying activities its nature would seem to have always been challenging. In addition the moorland to the south is not only rough but also very boggy in many places.

Having reached the old main road from Blaen Onneu to Crickhowell however the traveller would have had a choice of several routes (Figs. 1 and 2.).

1) Via Llangynidr by track "G" from Blaen Onneu – making use of the bridge if it was viable although a ford (at SO 1445 2030 near Cil-wich fawr) existed a short way upstream of the bridge which could be used if the river condition was favourable.

2) Via Cyfreddin by track "L".

3) For herds of animals via the driftway "Q" at Dyfnant.

4) Crossing at Penmyarth and hence to the east, the west or north via Cwmdu.

5) Otherwise continuing eastwards on the old road to Crickhowell and via the old bridge – again when it was useable.

Where did the traffic over the mountains from the south originate? Fig. D. 2. can give some of the answers. This map is extracted from Tracks, Volume 1 (Ref. 2.) and on it the early heads of the valleys road, is lined in green, running west from Neath and Glyn Neath and running from later Brynmawr over the eastern flank of Mynydd Llangattock to the river Usk a short way downstream of the bridge – which it could quite probably pre-date. This route is discussed in detail in Chapter 7. of that Volume.

The present road down the Clydach Gorge did not appear to be available at earlier dates – except perhaps as a rough path or track. There was a track part of the way down the valley before the turnpike - and one is shown on the 1760 estate maps – but only as far as Black Rock where it turned northwards to Llanelly before continuing to Crickhowell. This route might have been satisfactory for some purposes until the needs of more modern times demanded an improvement in transport

We have a definite date for the turnpike road passing Tredegar in a letter from Henry Thomas Payne to Col. Richard Colte Hoare dated Sept. 14th. 1804 in which he says, when talking about the Bedwellty Common and the old ridgeway road continuing northwards, "*The green road now ascends the hill called Trefil Ddu, by a tolerably early rise, and crosses the turnpike road now forming between Merthyr and Abergavenny.*" In Volume 1 it is shown that there was a road in existence long before the turnpike and old maps also make it clear that there was no problem in reaching the Rhyd y blew. Passing through Brynmawr presented few difficulties but descending the gorge was another matter and had to take three stages and contracts to reach Gilwern, probably in 1817. There is a very useful paper on this by F. J. Ball – "Transport and the Industrial revolution" (Ref. 10.).

South of the heads of the valleys the ridgeway routes running up the mountains from the south are shown in purple on Fig. D.1. and all of these would have found the routes via Milgatw (Orange), Beaufort to Blaen Onneu or over the Llangattock moors from Brynmawr (green) to Crickhowell to have been very convenient. These mountains to the south could have provided a

good area for grazing livestock and, indeed, Welsh Black cattle and hardy sheep are still to be found on them.

The old road from Milgatw is discussed more fully in Chapter 9 of Volume 1 (Ref. 1.) and the following quotation from that Volume refers to a figure, which I have reproduce here as Fig. D. 4., as it makes clear both this road and present day B 4560.

“It was found that the Milgatw to Blaen Onneu track (“A”) was used by the Ordnance Survey for its first survey in 1813 (revised in 1830) for bench marking as was also the present day B 4560 confirming its existence at that date. Walking the route showed no broad arrows as there were few, if any, places on which they could have been cut – but I found frequent, mainly small, way-marking cairns, shown as small crosses on Fig. 9.2 (Fig. D. 4. in the present paper). Many of these could be matched with quite good accuracy, using a hand-held GPS satellite navigation instrument, with the indicated bench mark positions on the 1890 25” O/S map.....”

There is more on this in Chapter 9 of Tracks, Volume 1. (Ref. 2.).

Fig. D.4. also shows the present Beaufort to Llangynidr road (B 4560). This road has been discussed in Chapter 5 of Ref. 2 and here the modern O/S base map has been overlaid with the 1760 estate maps, where they are available, and on Fig. 5.3 of that Volume is shown a short section of the roads running both northwards and southwards from Beaufort existing at that date – these were later called appropriately “North Road” and “South Road”. Fig. 5.3 of that Volume shows a road running up Mynydd Carn y Cefn through Beaufort and continuing northwards. This road is also shown on the O/S surveyors maps of 1813 – 1817 but this section, immediately south of the main road at Beaufort was later extinguished by mining activities on the northern outcrop of the coal basin.

Route “B” on Fig. D. 4. is only lined in green as far as the head of the Glaisfer valley but Rees shows it continuing on the line of the indicated footpath to descend to the church at Llangynidr which he named “St. Kenedr” which clearly accords to the its present name of St. Cynidr and St. Mary’s. This route is easily walked today but there is no good evidence than it was other than a track for foot, horse or mule other than a section of revetted stone wall on the uphill side of the track at SO 13614 15148. Rees also shows the route running north up the ridge of Carn y Cefn as far as Beaufort, but no further. From this point there is a lordship boundary, somewhat to the west of the present B 4560 road but no depiction of an early road. This boundary seems to have met the river Usk at Cyfreddin ford and he indicates “Gwithfaes” – i.e. present day Gliffaes – on the northern side of the Usk. He does not show a road down Clydach Gorge via Black Rock or the other “over the moors” road which is discussed in detail in Chapter 8 of Volume 1 (Ref. 2.) although as has been noted he shows a truncated road leading in the general direction of Crickhowell over the moors (Fig. D.5.)

It must be noted that other early tracks ran northwards from Carno and, while the southernmost were likely to have suffered interference from the building of the reservoirs, further north some are still well-defined in many places. The most prominent track is labelled "D" on Fig. D. 4. (lined in green,). Other good tracks of unknown utility such as "E" (lined in purple) are also to be found. The nature and age of these early tracks is unknown but it was very apparent that "E" was much used by sheep. Many old relatively narrow and unmetalled tracks were for mountain access rather than of a longer distance utility and some were associated with early iron ore extraction such as was carried out at Cwm Odyn Ty at SO 148 145 and in a large "Swallow Hole" at SO 177 153. These activities, and others, are described in "Assorted Archaeology (Ref. 14.).

Old maps are often of limited value because a) they were often compiled from the work of others while sitting at a desk and b) they tended to sketch A to B routes rather than carrying out an actual survey. They are also very irritating for this kind of work because the usually stuck rigidly to county boundaries and, even if surveyed, were usually of a specific area. High quality maps of the larger area improved dramatically with the Ordnance Survey. The first published 1 inch to the mile maps of 1832 were quite accurate although not able to show finer details at this scale – more detailed maps, such as 6" and 25" to the mile followed later. However, particularly for the area of the heads of the valleys, where industrial development was extraordinarily rapid, the Ordnance Survey surveyors drawings of between 1813 and 1817 are of very great value although with so few feet on the ground they could not possibly cover everything which did not seem to be immediately relevant and the situation was changing almost daily.

The routes over a wider area as far as Brecon and Talgarth are shown in Fig. D. 2. Fig. D. 3. is a modern 1:25,000 O/S map of the area discussed in detail in this paper.

It is worth reminding readers that crossing rivers had always been a problem, and one which was greater when water levels were high. Fords were often convenient at times of low water level – particularly ones such as Dyfnant, Cyfreddin and Ciwch-fawr (above Llangynidr) because the river bed comprised solid sandstone rock which not only allowed a firm passage but was resistant to flood damage.

For most of history general traffic consisted of pedestrians, horse riders and horse drawn carts or carriages and the latter two could easily cross water of 12" to 18" depth, depending on the speed of the current and if on a firm bed. Because of this they were still widely used until the motor age. An example of this is to be found at the ford at "The Old Ford Inn" near Scethrog. This carried an important old road from Dowlais Top through Cwm Criban past the Ogham Stone, Pen Rhiw Calc and down the old parish road through Talybont on Usk. After crossing the Usk at the ford it then continued north to Talgarth. This old ford is now abandoned but was still in use until a big flood in 1979 which caused damage which was not repaired. The landlord of the inn told

me that it was used by horse and cart and tractors up until this event but easy alternatives eventually made it redundant.

Bridges were the crossings of choice for most travellers but cattle droves normally used fords – a practice which eventually disappeared with driving itself once the railway system was sufficiently developed. This was, of course, the same development which ended the great days of the American cowboy. Unfortunately bridges also often proved to be vulnerable to flood events – for example:

1) Llangynidr had a chequered history with the old wooden bridge being swept away between 1587 and 1630. In 1770 it was rebuilt in stone but has needed regular maintenance.

2) Crickhowell bridge was carried away in the winter of 1808-1809.

3) Llanfoist timber bridge was recorded in 1620 and still in use at the time of Coltman's map of 1801 but was subsequently destroyed. It was never repaired but was replaced with a ferry.

4) The bridge for the Clydach tramway across the Usk at Gwlangwryne was very transient being built in 1793-1794 and swept away in 1795.

As the Industrial Revolution and its rapidly increasing volume of traffic got fully under way fords became disused and new roads and bridges built. It is worth remembering that all these changes in ways of life happened in little more than a persons' lifetime.

And what of the "Spiteful Inn"? Although it has been of considerable interest it appears that more historical records are needed to resolve this matter with any degree of certainty.

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Figures.

Fig. 1. Modern 1:25,000 O/S map. Blaen Onneu to Llangynidr.

Fig. 2. Modern 1:25,000 O/S map Blaen Onneu to Myarth.

Fig. 3. 1832 1" Ordnance Survey Blaen Onneu to Myarth.

Fig. 4. Ordnance Survey surveyors map roads and tracks south south of the Usk. Llangynidr to Llanfair.

Fig. 5. Google Earth. South of the Usk.

Fig. 6. 1:25,000 O/S Cyfreddin to Fro.

Fig. 7. 1832 1" O/S Cyfreddin to Fro.

Fig. 8. Llangynidr/Llangattock 1845 tithe map.

Fig. 9. 25" O/S . Llangynidr, Myarth, Crickhowell.

Fig. 10. Llangynidr parish map. Area of Dyfnant.

Fig. D.1. Annotated map. Trecastle, Brecon, Talgarth, Abergavenny.

Fig. D.2. Annotated map Torpantau, Abergavenny.

Fig. D.3. 1:25,000 O/S Llangynidr, Myarth, Crickhowell.

Fig. D.4. 1:25,000 O/S. Milgatw to Blaen Onneu.

Photo. 1. Canal restriction at SO 18423 19434.

Photo. 2. Gate near barn at Dyfnant.

Photo. 3. Old bridge over stream at Dyfnant.

Photo. 4. Close-up of arch of stream bridge at Dyfnant.

Photo. 5. Junction of masonry with the bridge/culvert at Dyfnant.

Photo. 6. Photo taken upstream through culvert.

Photo. 7. Old, now dry, culvert at Dyfnant.

Photo. 8. Fording point at Dyfnant taken from SO 17623 12893 on north bank.

Photo. 9. Barn at Dyfnant.

Photo. 10. Barn at Dyfnant showing building changes.

Fig. D. 5. Rees map of Wales in 14th. century of area discussed.