

Tracks

Volume 3.

Roads centred on Tredegar.

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Summary.

Volume 3 is centred on Tredegar and examines routes to the north, south, east and west. It also examines ancient routes northwards over the Llangynidr and Llangattock moors as far as the River Usk.

Contents.

Introduction.

Chapter 1. Before Tredegar. The 1760 map.

Chapter 2. Roads to the East and the West.

Chapter 3. Roads to the North and South.

Chapter 4. Other roads to the north of Tredegar.

Discussion.

Bibliography.

Introduction.

I wrote the first edition of this Volume on the old roads and tracks around Tredegar in 1999 largely because the late Mr. Ted Smart, with whom I had many discussions, had made available to me a set of old estate maps of the area dating from 1760. They were not easy to decipher as they were in A3 sections and in the form of negatives i.e. with white lines on a black background. Nevertheless they were a treasure which enabled me to produce a pretty good map of the area before the main industrial period. Using this map as the central feature I explored the old roads and tracks running to and from Tredegar to the north, south, east and west and, subsequently, to produce an item for my web-site. I also placed printed copies in Tredegar Library and the Royal Commission for Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales.

Now, seven years on, it is time for a re-write as I have carried out much more research both literary and on foot and other old maps have also become available. These extra maps now allow me to give details of the field boundaries, tracks and roads at the top end of Tredegar and Dukestown, which were undefined in the first edition of this Volume, and those to the north, south, east and west of Tredegar. Those running through the top of Tredegar to the east and west have been discussed in detail in Volume 1 of Tracks (Dowlais Top to the Usk) and it is inevitable that this Volume will overlap in some areas but whereas Volume 1 was focussed on the early long-distance east-west route across the heads of the valleys this volume will focus on roads radiating from Tredegar.

This re-write has, however, caused me a dilemma in that the first set of Volumes on Tracks and on other matters relating to archaeological features of the area were specifically written for the internet and, because of this, the maps and other images used were constrained in detail by the demands of that media especially with the slow rates of data transmission then available. It became clear, when re-writing Volume 1, that to do justice to the new material it required me to produce maps and other images of a far higher quality not really suitable for the internet until broadband is normal. The same is true of this Volume. So the dilemma I faced was that when all the first editions of the Volumes were available on a web-site a simple meta-link could enable the reader instantly to refer to the other Volumes but this facility is not possible with individual printed documents. The result is that the top end of Tredegar and Dukestown and the roads to the north, east and west, used in Volume 1, will have to be repeated to some extent in this Volume. This is perhaps repetitious but I

can see no way of avoiding it. This Volume contains four chapters describing Tredegar and its relationship to the roads and tracks to the north, the south, the east and the west.

In the first edition of this Volume I faced a very considerable difficulty in being unable to use modern Ordnance Survey maps on which to overlay the information supplied by the early maps but I was fortunate in 2004 to get permission to use these under the Blaenau Gwent Borough Council licence number LA 0900 2L. This has not only enabled me to work more accurately but also to present the information in such a way that the relationship of early features to modern ones is made quite clear. However, I give precise Ordnance Survey grid references to features whenever possible and anyone attempting to follow the tracks on the ground, or to find specific features mentioned, are advised to purchase a new 1:25,000 O/S map of the areas discussed.

Readers may note an inconsistency in the use of metric and imperial measurements. It is deliberate. Whereas when referencing modern maps with the National Grid and positions taken using a GPS instrument the metric units are the obvious ones to use, for historical measurements this is not the case. Sometimes it is of little importance but I have tried to use whichever appears to be the most relevant in the context.

For those who would like to see the other Volumes in this series all of which I intend to update as and when possible, my website www.karlmartin.co.uk holds the following.

Gwaun Nant Ddu – A Study of an Ancient Lake Site.

Assorted Archaeology.

Tracks 1. “Dowlais Top to the Usk”.

Tracks 2. “Dowlais Top to Bwlch ar y fan”.

Tracks 3. “Roads centred on Tredegar”.

Tracks 4. “Roads centred on Pen Rhiw Calc.”

These are not the latest editions for reasons already stated but these will become available in Tredegar library as they are completed – some will be extensively re-written but others, such as “Assorted Archaeology” are more likely to have extra features added from time to time. Printed copies of all these are lodged in Tredegar Library and in the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales and these establishments

will receive the latest versions as I produce them – the latest Volume 1 is already available.

The first edition was stimulated largely by the late Mr, Ted Smart making his collection of old maps available to me but since then others, realising my interest, have helped considerably. I would like to thank in particular Martin and Pamela Redwood for drawing my attention to many other old maps, to Roger Burchell who has shared a great deal of his knowledge of the area and given unstintingly of his time, to Keith Rogers - the local authority Rights of Way and Access Officer to Frank Olding – Blaenau Gwent Heritage Officer, and Dr. John R. P. Evans - Tredegar Town Clerk, both of whom took the trouble to read my drafts. Also to Janet Kahn – the Tredegar librarian who was a great help in my literary researches, but also to many others who I consulted on points of detail on early railways and industry such as Gerald Davies, who has a great fund of knowledge of the early transport systems and a seemingly endless supply of reference books.

Having seen how my first volume has improved in detail since 1999 due to new information I would like to repeat my plea to anyone who has any information which might be relevant - no matter how unimportant it may seem - to let me see it. I will use it in further updates and will make it available to all for the future.

In Volume 1 I dedicated the first chapter to general observations concerning roads and tracks and observations on the maps used and some of the particular problems relating to the Heads of the Valleys area. I continued this theme in the Discussion. It would be repetitious to repeat all this in the present Volume but those interested in the subject would probably find these comments of value.

K. A. Martin. 2006.

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Chapter 1.

Before Tredegar. The 1760 map.

The 1760 map, a reduced tracing of which is shown in Fig. 1.1, has been re-constructed from a set of approximately A3 negative copies each approximating to A4. Those of the lower part had been made available to me by the late Mr. Ted Smart and the rest were taken from further maps lodged in the library by his son. These map sections overlapped sufficiently to enable them to be joined into a whole and, with strong back illumination, to be traced first onto thin paper and subsequently onto cartridge paper. The maps covering the lower half of Tredegar – from approximately below Stable Lane diagonally to the bottom of Sirhowy were surveyed with such accuracy that, by taking the National Grid position of such buildings which are still present today and allowing for the shift in magnetic north, a full grid overlay could be constructed for the entire area. This turned out to be so accurate that Stable Lane could be matched and, at the same time, the position of Glan yr afon (SO 143 099) at Sirhowy to within about 10 meters. Similarly, the northern parts of the map were accurate in themselves but, as the relationship of the two areas could not be precisely determined, the overall accuracy for the whole area of what became Tredegar left much to be desired. At this time it seemed evident that the central area was occupied by the mineral extraction related to the scouring process and that the map was interrupted by this so that the two well defined areas surveyed were not accurately related to each other. It is only recently that other old maps, including more from the 1760 survey have come to my attention which allow me to bring together the various surveys so as to cover the entire area and to match the early maps to present-day features. Those for the northern areas, which include Sirhowy, have already been examined in some detail and are reported in Volume 1 of this series in Tracks – “Dowlais Top to the Usk” – an updated copy of which is lodged in Tredegar Library. This Volume traces old roads from Merthyr to various places on the River Usk and is particularly focussed on the earliest heads of the valleys road. Those interested in this aspect of the work might care to refer to this Volume but, to minimise the need for continual cross-referencing, I have included the most relevant diagrams in the present work.

It is important to note that from the Bedwellty tithe map of 1839, and other early maps, that the Nant y Bwch stream was diverted to a more northerly course when the Turnpike road was built. The streams original course was closely parallel to, or even under, the course of the later turnpike road.

From the 1760 maps several things are evident.

1) Tredegar town did not exist at this time and the maps only show 26 properties - mainly farms and, presumably, cottages. This would mean that the population of the area could be numbered in the dozens while, as Evan Powell relates in his "History of Tredegar", by 1801 the population was 619, but grew rapidly to :- 4,590 by 1811, 6,382 by 1821, and 10,637 by 1831. According to "Bartholomew's Road Atlas and Gazetteer for 1900", the population reached 23,195 in that year and, even after the later collapse of the traditional coal and iron industries was still 15,500 in 1997. The population growth from such a low start to that at the peak in the early 1920s was due to the influx of people into the industrial areas of South Wales not only from other parts of England and Wales but also from further afield, particularly Ireland, and even from parts of Europe. It does raise the question of how many of today's population in this area are Welsh by blood as well as by place of birth? In a recent paper ("The Migration of people into Tredegar in the nineteenth century" [10]) Hilling has made a significant contribution to this issue.

2) Some properties, or their former sites, can still be determined with precision although care must be taken – for example Pen Rhos on the 1760 map is now Cwm Rhos, and was so shown on the 1839 tithe map (Fig. 1.5), but most have been swept away by developments of one sort or another. Most of present-day Tredegar was not built until the late 1820s when the basic layout of the town was planned in relationship to the new iron works and this still forms the skeleton of the modern town. In "Britains first planned industrial town? The development of Tredegar, 1800 –1820" Hilling, uses, as one of his illustrations, a 2" to the mile O/S map – date 1813, reproduced here as Fig. 1.6 which, as he suggests appears to be a little distorted, but which seems to show that the then main north/south axis of the lower end of the town was aligned on the upper and lower end of Coronation Street and the present Castle Street is truncated near the present Circle. Morgan Street is not present and the lower end of Castle Street curves to meet the lower end of Coronation Street at the point where it was joined by Shop Row, the combined roads then continued south on the line of the present Promenade. The area which later became Bedwellty Park was not encroached upon, although the 1813 map shows no park, nor any building on the site of Bedwellty House. This is also the situation shown on the 1760 estate map and Hilling suggests that the land now occupied by the Park was purchased by Samuel Homphrey, Senior. A later map used by Hilling, undated but before 1820 although not covering the area of the Park specifically, also does not show any development in this area ("Plan of Tredegar Village", NLW).

So, the first real reference to Bedwellty Park comes from Powell where, on page 39, he states *“Bedwellty House was reconstructed and enlarged as a residence for the future manager and partner”* (Samuel Homfrey, Junior). The term *“reconstruction”* implies an earlier building on the site and, on page 12 he had clearly mentioned *““Ty Lodwig Rees”, or at present Bedwellty House. The original name of this splendid mansion was “Y Cynghordy” which means THE COUNCIL HOUSE. The land where the house was situated was sometimes termed “Coedcae ‘r Cynghordy,” and, at other times, “Coedcae ‘r Geifr.” Bedwellty House at the commencement of the present century was a low thatched roofed house; its owner was Lodwig Rees, and although an old house, it was not so ancient as many farmhouses in the district. The present park defines the limit of the land, a large portion being arable; produce, corn and hay. ”* As Fig. 1.2, an actual reproduction of part of the 1760 estate map, shows no such house while Fig. 2.2 (1832 1” O/S) shows the park in a recognisable state it would seem that between 1760 and 1817, when this first edition O/S map was edited (or 1813 according to Helling), there was a short period when the Lodowig Rees house could have been built, but this does not accord very well with Powell’s description. This apparent conflict between the map evidence and Powell’s account leaves a considerable degree of uncertainty about the origins of Bedwelty House and Park. As Frank Olding has pointed out Cynhordy means Meeting House and, as Fig. 1.1 and 1.2 show, a Meeting House was situated on the east bank of the river in the vicinity of “Surrowy Bridge”. Because of the historic value of Bedwellty House Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council commissioned Austin-Smith Lord as consultants to make a study with two main objectives, first to attempt to clarify the history of the house and park and secondly to suggest ways in which the house and park might be preserved and developed to make it an even greater asset in the future. Their report is detailed and interested parties should contact Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council but the Council has given me permission to use one of the story-boards prepared to inform the public and to provide the basis for public consultation. This can be seen in Fig. 1.7 and it clearly shows the phases of development of the house uncovered by their researches. In the present context it would appear to show a small property on the site but no property is shown on the 1760 estate map - Fig. 1.2 nor on the Hilling map dated 1813 – Fig. 1.6. Some light as to the survey date of Hilling’s map can be gained from Margary’s introduction the “ The Old Series of Ordnance Survey Maps of England and Wales” where, on page viii he states, *“The first Welsh Ordnance Surveyors’ Drawings, of parts of the counties of Pembroke and Carmarthen, seem to date from 1809-10, and the military bias of the work is indicated by this area, containing the naval base at Pembroke, being surveyed in advance of those parts of south-east Wales, of economic more than military importance, which were adjacent to work in England.”*

This would imply that the survey of the Bedwellty Park area was only a short time before the publication date and this make the absence of a property on the site of Bedwellty House. although others, such as Ashtree House were shown, difficult to understand.

It is worth commenting on Lodowig Rees as his name crops up in a paper recording - *"In Chancery between DIXON, OVERTON and SCROOP, 7th. December 1821", concerning the BRINORE TRAMROAD – "That when the treaty and discussions relating to such retirement and arrangements were proceeding the said Defendant he with his privy employed Lodowick Rees a confidential clerk of the said partnership to examine and take the accounts of the said partnership and concerns with the view to the final winding up of the said then proposed arrangement between the said James Dixon and Defendants and that afterwards in the early part of (NOTE ASIDE Lodowick Rees employed to settle accounts) January 1820 Defendants and the said John Dixon having come to a general understanding and conclusion together touching the heads of agreement and arrangement that were and should be intended unto and be made between them touching and relating to the said joint concern and the said retirement of the said John Dixon and the terms thereof they the said three persons communicated such heads of agreement and arrangements to the said Lod Rees and desired him to reduce the same into writing in order that the same might be signed by the said Defendants and J Dixon (a Signature?) NOTE ASIDE Heads of agreement from J Dixon and Overton and Scroop)".* All this would suggest that Lodowig (Or Lodowick or Ludwig, according to Powell) was a person of some stature and with legal skills. There might be some confusion about the name and, one supposes, that the legal document concerning the BRINORE TRAMROAD would have it right, and it is just possible that there is more than one person of this name although the Bedwellty Park connection would seem to argue against this.

Passing on, it is clear from the depiction of the "Present Scoury" that even in 1760 scouring for iron ore (or "mine") was in full swing and the presence of the "Old Scoury" would indicate that even at this date the activity had been carried out for some time. In this context Scandrett (in "Old Tredegar Vol.1, Page 73) mentions - *"The earliest reference to Tredegar is the granting of an industrial lease to Francis Lewis in 1697 'with liberty to turn water for the scouring of mine' in the Sirhowy area"* – which gives some indication of the approximate date of these operations. The presence of surface exposure of coal to the west of Bryn Bach is indicated as a "Fine Coal Cliff" in Fig. 1.1. Such "cliffs" were an indication of coal outcropping on the surface and Roger Burchell informs me that the same term was used in the records for Blaenafon.

The Tredegar we see today was still at the early stages of development at the beginning of the nineteenth century - as Powell, in his "History of Tredegar", states that in 1811 (page 33) "... the road from Sirhowy to Tredegar had been completed, and thoroughly macadamised with broken cinders; also the road from Abergavenny to Merthyr, which had been in course of construction for many years, was by this time completed." This latter road referred to was, of course, part of the turnpike from Neath to Abergavenny.

3) In Fig. 1.1 the river is indicated as meandering, wide in places with two distinct islands, and presumably shallow. Later the river became "canalised", being straightened with its banks being built up, frequently with large slabs of solidified iron furnace slag, to allow flat areas to be created for industrial development. The wider, shallower river prior to this development would mean that fords would normally be quite adequate for the traffic of the times. As will be mentioned in a later Volume a ford across the much larger river Usk at "The Ford Inn" at SO 092 262 was regularly used by horse drawn traffic up until 1979 when it was washed away by a flood and left unrepaired. Nevertheless a bridge is shown crossing the Sirhowy some 50 metres or so downstream of the more recent Georgetown bridge, which makes clear the importance of this road crossing the Tredegar area. This route will be discussed in Chapter 2.

It would seem that the "Surrowy Bridge", as it is called on the 1760 map shown in Fig. 1.1 and Fig.1.2, which is an enlargement of the area discussed taken directly from the original, was still shown on the 1877 1:2,500 Ordnance Survey map (Fig. 1.4). Fig 1.4, In fact, shows two bridges crossing the river in that area (lined in orange) but careful plotting and super-imposing on a modern 1:25,000 O/S map (Fig. 1.3) strongly suggests that "Surrowy Bridge" is almost certainly the one indicated at SO 1452 0863 (marked as "A" in Fig. 1.4). The other crossing (marked as "B" in Fig. 1.4.) might still be evidenced by what seems to be the remains of a ford crossing the river at this point, with collapsed brick abutments on the east bank, which might be associated with a co-incident later bridge (Photo. 1.4). By the time the later 1920 1:2,500 O/S map was surveyed both of these bridges were gone. Clearly the "Surrowy Bridge" was some distance downstream from the later Georgetown Bridge which was also not shown on the 1839 Bedwellty tithe map (Fig. 1.5) although, clearly it was planned, as Bridge Street is shown and named on this map. The 1877 1:2,500 O/S map (Fig. 1.4) shows a road bridge crossing the river into Vale Terrace at more or less the same position as the present one but an edition of the map printed in the original colours (not available to me now) shows that the main road down the valley to Blackwood was on the west bank of the river alongside the railway line. This feature is also

apparent on the 1839 tithe map (Fig. 1.5) although on this map, perhaps understandably as its purpose was chiefly for assessing tithes, there is no distinction shown between the tramway and the associated road which preceded the railway. This map also shows that a road ran up Georgetown Hill aligned on Bridge Street but, at this time, was connected to a river crossing some way upstream at the iron works – a route taken today, in part, by Bethel Avenue. It also shows that Stable Lane aligned, across the river, with the road running east uphill past the present St. James Church. Both of these features will be discussed further in later chapters.

The field boundaries shown in Fig. 1.5 and a study of the general topography of the area has enabled me to show the most probable locations of the “Old Scoury” and the “Present Scoury” (lined in purple on Fig. 1.5). It is worth mentioning here that, as I demonstrated in Volume 1, where the original field boundaries, invariably stone walls, are still to be found the 1760 features can be overlaid onto a modern map with a very high degree of accuracy but where development has erased them then such precision cannot be guaranteed. The “Present Scoury” seems to have run past the rear of the Fire Station (i.e. down the onetime “Shop Row” (Photo. 1.1) and met the river at about SO 1443 0892. The roads indicated on the 1760 map (Fig. 1.1) and the “Present Scoury” have been overlaid on Fig. 1.3 (a modern O/S map) as have some of the original field boundaries. The route taken, via Stable Lane, to the east after crossing a ford, approximately opposite the bottom end of Stable Lane, will be discussed in the next chapter.

Examining the area of the southern end of present-day Tredegar on the 1760 map, which was drawn to a scale of 6 chains to the inch (or 13.3” to the mile), several important features can be seen.

1) From the west there is a distinct road passing Cwm Rhos, crossing the north/south road near the top of the later Market Street and continuing east to the “Surrowy Bridge”. It is noted that the 1760 map is incorrect and has confused Cwm Rhos and Pen Rhos (unless there was a subsequent name change) and this is made quite clear by Powell in his “History of Tredegar” – *“Cwm Rhos” (Moor Valley). This farmhouse is situated on the left hand side at the top of Queen Street” (Page 11).*

2) From the south the road descends from the direction of the Bedwellty ridgeway road and, in the vicinity of the old Ashtree Pit, splits with one branch heading north crossing the Cwm Rhos/Surrowy Bridge road in the vicinity of the upper end of Market Street (Fig. 1.3) and vanishing northwards into the scoury area and the other branch turning eastwards and downhill and still exists as Stable Lane. This relationship is very clear

except at the bottom end where the TICC offices were built which might have caused some degree of re-routing and at the top where the corner between Ashtree House and Ty Mary Isaacs was modified so that the main road down from Cefn Golau hill and north into the present town was redirected to the west of Ashtree House. Stable Lane then curved to meet it near this point passing closer to Ty Mary Isaacs. These changes might have come about when the Park was enclosed around 1817, if not before. Certainly the present alignment seems to have been present by the time of the first Ordnance Survey which took place by 1808-1809 “Margary page xi) - the opening of Ashtree Pit in 1826 might also have been involved. The 1760 map (Figs. 1.1 and 1.2) show a building here which seems to correspond with Ty Moss as described by Powell (page 13) – *“Ty Moss (Moss’ House). This old habitation was situated opposite to the entry to the Company’s stables, and very near to the site of the Tredegar (Railway) Station. Moss, whose descendants are among the inhabitants of Tredegar at present, resided in the old house for many years, hence the designation, It was one of the oldest houses in the district.....”*. Although the apportionments on the 1760 map records the property as belonging to Moses rather than Moss there would seem to be little doubt that they are one and the same. In this case the road in Powell’s day (1884) is the same as it was in 1877 (Fig. 1.4) and the present day and the putative ford crossing the river to continue up past St. James Church to meet the Manmoel road must have been at approximately SO 1452 0828.

It was considered whether the present day Stable Lane does not precisely follow the original route of the old road which might have run nearer to Ty Mary Isaac (Fig. 1.2) and reached the river at the property of Mr. Harry. Such an alignment would have taken it very close to, if not co-incident with, the footpath running down the southern side of the park and exiting where the present gated entrance stands. This path can be seen in Fig. 1.5 (1839 Tithe map) where it has been lined in purple. After careful consideration of the maps, however, I still consider the present Stable Lane route to have been more likely but accept that some changes might well have been made at its lower end. Since then, of course, the river banks have been built up on each side with blocks of slag and in-filled to make level ground and later use of the area by the railway station makes any examination of the area impossible. This route passing to the east via St. James will be discussed further in the next chapter.

It is not always easy to match the 1760 estate map (Figs. 1.1 and 1.2) with the modern (Figs. 1.3, 1.8 and 1.10) but there are just sufficient features such as field boundaries, named properties and certain roads remaining to make a reasonably accurate match but some degree of doubt – perhaps as much as + or – 10 m. for such things as the Old Scoury courses to as little as + or – 2m. for the course of Stable Lane and the position of

“Surrowy Bridge”. Such has been the level of industrial and commercial development over most of the central area of the town that this might be as close as it is possible to get without further evidence coming to light.

The stream (Nant Rhos) shown on Fig. 1.1 now seems to be channelled through a culvert down Upper and Lower Salisbury Street (called West Lane and South Lane respectively until at least the 1920s) with a very tall – perhaps 40 ft. – cast-iron air vent on the corner between South Salisbury Street and Market Street (Photo. 1.2). After entering the park it appears to descend to the lower path, running past the war memorial, before leaving the park towards the river near the bottom gate. Its emergence into the river is most probably through the culvert on the west bank of the river just below the present road bridge at SO 1458 0836 (Photo. 1.3). It is clear from examination of the topography of the area that the New Scoury passed to the south of High Street (the entire length of which is on high ground) and, after passing to the north of the fire station (Photo. 1.1), reached the river somewhere upstream of the Georgetown bridge - perhaps just north of the present Gwent Body Repairs building reaching the river at about SO 1445 0899 – just about where the river passes beneath the bye-pass.

Stable Lane is shown on Fig. 1.5 but there is no indication of a bridge across the river where the road seems to have crossed it, to continue up present day Poplar Road, on the opposite bank, so presumably a ford had to be used. Bridges were not too common in these times with high local costs of construction and maintenance and, as there was one just a short distance upstream which could be used at times when the river was high, a second bridge would almost certainly not be considered.

4) An equally important feature of the 1760 map is a clear indication of a route from Bedwellty, to the south, northwards through what is today Ashvale to a cross-roads where “A Smiths Forge” is indicated. The present position of this cross-roads can be clearly discerned by comparison of the field boundaries of the 1760 map (Fig.1.1) with Fig 1.5, taken from the tithe map of 1839 and Fig. 1.9, taken from a 6” Ordnance Survey map from the 1870s, as being immediately to the north of Ashvale House. The 1839 map (Fig. 1.5) shows one long field (No. 1855) described as “Old Road” and another long field (No. 1887) “Cae Main” further south also corresponding with the 1760 map. The area to the north of Ashvale House, including Sirhowy, has been discussed quite fully in Chapter 3 of Volume I of Tracks particularly in the context of roads and tracks to the West, East and North but, in the context of the present Tredegar town, the road south from Ashvale House through Ashvale, is most relevant. Fig. 1.8 is a duplicate map to Fig. 3.1 in Volume 1 showing the 1760 field boundaries and roads superimposed on a modern 1:25,000

O/S map of the area. This road would seem to join the road heading north shown in Fig. 1.3 but there are further alternative, but non-contradictory, explanations which will be discussed in Chapter 3. For the moment, while considering the general context of the early roads in the area, I will merely mention that there might well have been a high-level road passing to the west of Tredegar as a continuation of the Bedwellty ridgeway that also descended to Ashvale House. Such a road would have suffered the same disruption caused by mineral working at the Old Scoury site as the lower level one just discussed – it is indicated with a dotted green line in Fig. 1.11.

The evidence from the maps and the topography indicates clearly that the “Old Scoury” ran just to the north of the Gwent Shopping Centre (Photo.1.5) to meet the river just below the roundabout on the by-pass road. Such is the degree of development that this cannot be too precise but the boggy strip of ground seen in Photo. 1.5 probably approximates to its path.

With this information it is possible to join the northern area with the southern and to overlay them onto modern maps. Fig. 1.9, taken from a 1886 1:2,500 O/S map gives a good idea of the destruction of the landscape caused by the industrial developments by this time but some older features are still discernable particularly the remnants of Hoel y waun fawr and sections of the road south through Ashvale. Taking this map and the 1839 Bedwellty tithe map (Fig. 1.5) with other information found so far we can re-draw the entire area onto a modern 1:25,000 O/S map (fig. 1.10) and onto the modern Tredegar guide book maps (Fig. 1.11). Photo. 1.6 is an aerial photograph of a similar area to Fig. 1.10 on which many of the features discussed can still be discerned.

It is interesting here to quote what Powell said about Ashvale House in his “History of Tredegar” (page 9), *“Ty Pantygerdinen” (Ash Vale House). This house, previous to its re-construction, was generally known as “Ty Rhewl”, or “Ty yr Heol” (Road House), from its proximity to the road, or more properly, footpath or pass, from Abergavenny across the hills to Merthyr &c.: nevertheless, it was termed by the old inhabitants “Y Ffordd Rufeinig” (The Roman Road)..... The present house was designed and built for Theophilus Jones Esq., the well known “old Fe Jones”, who was beloved by master and workmen, and a successful mineral agent under the Tredegar Iron and Coal Company for a great number of years*. The reference to the Roman Road seems clearly to have referred to the east/west road and not the one south from Bedwellty, although other references in Chapter 3 of this Volume imply that the one from Bedwellty to Abergavenny was also believed to be Roman. This area and its implications in the context of the old route from Dowlais Top to the Usk is

covered in some detail in Tracks Volume 1.

It is worth noting that, even in 1760 (Fig. 1.1) encroachments were being made onto Heol y waun fawr and this is typical of the tendencies of landowners with adjacent properties who have long practiced such manoeuvres. This process continued apace over the whole area stimulated partly by the grab for minerals and particularly by the building of the turnpike (opening around 1805-1806) which provided a far superior route. Once the old routes ceased to be regularly used they quite quickly vanished and became forgotten by the next generation.

Fig. 1.2 shows a very odd feature which is difficult to explain. Between the "Present Scoury" and "Sorrowy Bridge" a feature is shown which is either a branch of the river or, just possibly, a leat. It is even odder that the feature appears to run upstream and turn up the "Old Scoury" and, in so doing, appears to cross the "Present Scoury". If this is true then it cannot be a natural feature and if a leat, and by implication an associated launder, to cross the "Present Scoury", it suggests the existence of a mill immediately upstream of the "Sorrowy Bridge". The only reference to a possible mill which I can find, other than Y Felin over 1 km. downstream, is by Oliver Jones (page 18) where, after discussing Y Felin, mentions *"...and not far away was a place called Y felin fach but what its function was is not recorded,"*. This hardly seems to fit the bill so, at present, this remains a mystery but it is certain that the vicinity of "Sorrowy Bridge", where the road from the west passed to continue via Pont y gof to Brynmawr and beyond, and the nearby "Meeting House" was a clear focal point where a mill might have been sited.

Fig. 1.12, taken from the 1832 1" O/S map (probably drawn in 1811 from survey data of 1808-9) shows a clear picture of Tredegar at that time with various roads to the north, south, east and west. These roads will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

The date of the first Ordnance Survey maps will be mentioned frequently in this Volume. Details of how the survey in Wales was carried out and the relevant dates of the survey for different areas can be found in Margary's "The Old Series Survey Maps of England and Wales", Volume VI.

Chapter 2.

Roads to the East and the West.

There are several roads running to the east and the west in the area of Tredegar. I will discuss them in turn, starting from the south.

Stable Lane clearly aligns, at least approximately, with the 1760 route, although probably as a result of enclosing the park, it has been straightened somewhat. The present alignment was established by the time of the 1839 tithe map (Fig. 2.1). This map, curiously, does not show a bridge at a position corresponding with the "Surrowy Bridge" as shown on the 1760 map (Figs. 1.1 and 1.2), where it is shown as "A" in Fig. 2.1, but rather further downstream at the southern end of East Place ("B" in Fig. 2.1) which, by comparing closely with a modern map, would have been positioned at approximately SO 1450 0850. This bridge would have been approximately 100 meters upstream of the present road bridge into Park Place.

The reason for this difference in position to the present bridge is not certain but a comparison of Fig. 1.4 (1877 1:2,500 O/S) and Fig. 2.1 (1839 tithe map) shows, on the earlier one, the tramway/road running down the west bank of the river with no clear crossing point to the east and that, by 1877, a quite sudden curve of the road near the bottom end of the park takes it across a river bridge into Park Place. This bridge is at the same position as the present one.

We know, and this will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, that by 1877 the tramway had been converted to a railway and as a result road access down the valley had been severely restricted and this was a factor in developing an alternative route down the east bank of the river. This route was also influenced by considerable development taking place in this area such as the railway down Glyn Terrace, by the development of Vale Terrace, the school on Poplar Road, Whitworth Terrace and the new workhouse. This would suggest that the 1877 O/S map (Fig. 1.4) shows a stage in the development of this part of Tredegar which was largely completed by the opening of the Heathfield Bridge in 1891 which re-crossed the river to connect to the New Road down the valley.

Stable Lane aligns with the present road to the east past St. James Church but there was no bridge here. Presumably before the river was "canalised" it was probably forded particularly as there was a bridge a little way upstream which could be used if the river was high

It is interesting to note that the first edition of the Ordnance Survey

(Fig. 2.2) shows a track up the west bank of the river (lined in yellow) which curves suddenly towards the west at about the position of the later "Garibaldi Bridge" (SO 1465 0795). The map, unfortunately, is insufficiently detailed to show any river crossing but it does show enclosures on both banks of the river at this point. The enclosures to the east of the river are linear (tinted in red in Fig. 2.2) and have the appearance of short rows of small houses. No such properties of such a date have been recorded so this must, for the present remain a mystery but, if real, their position would have been co-incident with parts of Vale Terrace. Whether such properties were upgraded or replaced in the general building of the terrace unknown.

Further south, at about SO 1509 9740, there is a definite bridge shown crossing the river at a similar position to the later Heathfield Bridge. The 1890 1:2,500 O/S map (not shown but in Tredegar Library) shows a foot-bridge here and a closely adjacent ford, both providing access to the corn mill, but the road down from the direction of the Rhyd past Llyswedog has been obliterated by tipping of shale and refuse carried by the tramway (later the basis of Glyn Terrace) from the Tredegar Company coalyard at Sirhowy. According to Scandrett (page 114) there was such a volume that the land was raised by some 45ft. above the river level. Although clearly shown on the first edition O/S map neither the possible pre-Garibaldi Bridge or the pre-Heathfield Bridge are shown on the large scale 1839 Bedwellty Parish map although it does show, and names, the mill. It seems very possible that the pre-Heathfield crossing continued to be used as a right of way and as access to the mill from the west, with the associated ford used by carts. The 1901 1:2,500 O/S map (Tredegar Library) shows the present Heathfield bridge crossing the river at almost exactly the same position as that shown on the first edition but now the considerable embankment has closed off the ford.

The crossing which became the Garibaldi bridge might well have been built or up-dated with the development of Ty-Trist Colliery and the increased building of housing on the eastern side of the river. By this time any possible fording place would have been made difficult by the raising of the river banks caused by "canalising".

It would seem that in all matters, except property boundaries and ownership, the first edition O/S is superior to the larger scale and somewhat later parish map.

The row of house then known as East Place (later River Row or Bowen's Terrace) is shown on the 1839 map with a footpath or track leading both northwards aligning with the present Park Place to the foot of the Georgetown Hill and southwards to connect with the present Poplar Road

past St. James Church but, judging by its position relative to the river, via. what are now Elmwood and Richmond Terrace. This row of houses is not shown on the first edition O/S map (Fig. 2.2). It is also to be noted that the “planned town” area of Tredegar is not quite identical to that on the later 1839 map with the alignments of Market Street, Iron Street and, particularly, Bridge Street differing significantly. This would suggest that the Ordnance Survey drew up the mapped plots rather than any actual building development and construction and that the projected Georgetown Bridge position was not certain.

The Bridge Street/ Georgetown Hill river crossing is interesting because Fig. 2.2, taken from a first edition O/S map clearly shows that although there is no bridge aligned on Bridge Street (i.e. at “C” in Fig. 2.2) and the present Georgetown Hill there is a clear passage between two field boundaries on the east bank. This passage, which aligns on Bridge Street and the present uphill road through Georgetown is lined in orange in Fig. 2.2. Although the field boundaries are quite clear the nature of the contour “hatching” used on the map makes the section between them and the top of the hill, where it once again becomes clear, undefined. It would seem, however, to be more than co-incidence that this was the route subsequently used.

By the time of the 1839 estate map (Fig. 2.1) this problem seems to have been resolved by the adoption of the uphill route by a road on the east bank of the river which we now know, in a some what truncated form, as Bethel Avenue which, at this earlier date crossed the river by a bridge at approx SO 091 145 as shown on the 1839 estate map (Fig. 1.5). There is a bridge shown about here on the 1886 1: 2,500 O/S map (Fig. 1.7) although it is not clear whether this is over the railway or the river. This made the position of the present Georgetown Bridge a natural position. Having said that, the alignment of Bridge Street on the 1832 1” O/S map (Fig. 2.2) is somewhat different to the later tithe map (Fig, 2,1), which would suggest that the actual position of the planned bridge was modified later.

Fig.2.2, taken from the 1832 1” Ordnance Survey map, shows a view of a similar area and indicates that the road up Georgetown hill, at the time, did not follow the present direct but steep route, with the double hair-pin bend near the top, but took a more gradual route (lined in orange) crossing the River Sirhowy by a bridge (As “D” in Fig. 2.2), the position of which, as far as the maps allow, appears closely to approximate to the position of the “Surrowy Bridge” (SO 1452 0863), some 170 metres downstream from the Georgetown Bridge. This bridge is marked as “A” in Fig. 1.4. This early route can be traced to the present day and is shown as a bridle-way on the 1996 1:25,000 Ordnance Survey map - this feature has been added as

a green broken line in figure 2.3 taken from the Blaenau Gwent Street Atlas. Of course much of the west/east route is broken in places such as the park and hospital grounds and the development over the years of road, rail, housing and light industrial development near the river but it can still be made out on the street plans. What is gratifying is that the old track through Georgetown can still be found on the ground - Photos 2.1 and 2.2 show its upper end at the top of the hair-pin bends on the Georgetown/Ebbw Vale road at SO 149 087. This track, which is well metalled and of full cart width, continues towards the river past the rear of Mafeking Terrace (Photos. 2.3 and 2.4), descends between the allotments above Mafeking Terrace and continues through Kimberly Terrace, between York Terrace and Elmwood, and past Victoria Terrace towards the river (Photos 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7) on a very good alignment with the 1760 map (Fig. 1.1 and 1.2). It would seem that when Georgetown and the present road to Ebbw Vale were built, and the street names are the clue to the date, i.e. around the end of the 19th. century, the old way was still recognised and not built over. It is also noted that traffic along Kimberly Terrace is subject to a "Slow" sign when it crosses this old route.

From this crossing of the Sirhowy the old road from the west continues over the mountain to Pont-y-Gof on the Ebbw crossing the Manmoel ridgeway road at SO 1563 0934 and then descending via Tredegar Road to the ancient bridge over the Ebbw river at Pont-y-Gof. It is worth mentioning here that Oliver Jones in his "Early days of Tredegar" refers to the point where the Georgetown road crosses the Manmoel road (SO 1563 0934) as Clwyd y Sarn, which he interprets as "The Roman gateway". This route is shown in Fig. 2.4 from the 1832 1" map and Fig. 2.5, which is post-war 1" O/S map of the area showing more recent features, in both case lined in red. From Pont-y-Gof it passed over the mountain to the east to descend, past the West Monmouth Golf Club, to near the present round-about at SO 190 113, although the original route seemed to run somewhat to the north of this point joining the Blaina Road to run up Bailey street (or Lower Bailey street) and Intermediate Road to meet the old Head of the Valleys route suggested in Volume 1. There is still a good road over this stretch (Photos. 2.8 and 2.9), although it has been damaged by water a few hundred yards uphill (at approx. SO 174 104) from Pont-y-Gof just above "Brynmawr Road", a name which also seems to confirm its once greater importance. It may also be significant that its surface dressing is of broken stone and not ash or slag waste as was common on roads constructed during the industrial expansion. Powell, in his "History of Tredegar", in this context records (page 27) that at the commencement of the Tredegar works around in 1801 - *"The construction of roads was taken into consideration, and cinders from the furnaces were 'tipped' in various directions for the purpose of macadamising the roads"*. This route is also discussed in Tracks,

Volume 1.

Although it's immediate relevance to the roads east of Tredegar may not be clear to the reader at present note must be made of another road to the east from Nantyglo. This passes over the ridge of Cefn Arrail at about SO183 097 and passes down the western side of Cefn Arrail to Cwm and is known locally as the Parish Road. From Cwm this road can be followed past Manmoel, Bedwellty Church and Capel Gwladys subsequently to meet the Roman Road from Cardiff to Brecon at some two and a half kilometre north of Gelligaer. The significance of this road will be discussed further in the Discussion.

Running the full length of Cefn Arrail is a ridgeway road which runs from Aberbeeg (and to the south-east to Mamhilad via St. Illtyd and west to Gelligaer) northwards until it descended Mynydd Carn y Cefn to arrive at the east/ west early heads of the valleys road at South Street in Beaufort. This it crossed and continued northwards by North Street in the direction of Llangattock Moors. The entire stretch of this old road north of where the Pont-y-Gof to Brynmawr road crosses the ridgeway has been completely destroyed by mineral extraction (This is discussed in detail in Volume 1). The road westwards from Nantyglo, on reaching the ridgeway on Carn y Cefn, at approx. SO 103 097, turns southwards to descend gradually to cross the river Ebbw at Cwm by a stone bridge associated with an old corn mill. This road is known locally as the Parish Road. There were also roads descending from the main Cwm to Nantyglo ridgeway road particularly at Victoria where there was another of the three mills mentioned by Gray-Jones (Page. 33) – *“....They could cross the river by one of its three stone bridges at Pontgof, Tyllwyn or Dyffryn. The Tyllwyn bridge was built for the Bedwellty Parish in 1732 by John Edmunds: it was ten feet broad, with side walls three feet high: he was paid £23.10.0d and given the timbers of the previous wooden bridge.”*. This passage would imply that Pontygof and Dyffryn bridges were older and that the stone Tyllwyn bridge was a replacement for an even older one so it would seem that crossings of the Ebbw were a reflection of considerable east/west traffic. Of the three mills Gray –Jones (Page 30) – *“The local corn was ground on one of the three watermills at Pontygof, Tynyfid (Victoria) and Dyffryn (Cwm).”*

Roger Burchell comments that Dyffryn Bridge was not in Cwm. He also states that there was a mill at Ty Llwyn as well as at Tynyffid near Dyffryn Bridge and that Pontygof Mill dates from the 1240's.

Gray-Jones also has useful and relevant comments on local roads (Page 33) – *“The local roads and bridges were the responsibility of the parishes. One parish road still survives from Manmoel through Cwm to*

Torycrug and then along the west side of Carn y cefn towards the Beacon, below which it meets the old road from Sirhowy through Pontygof to Abergavenny. The other parish roads have either been abandoned or buried deep below heaps of shale or slag or superseded by modern roads.

Briefly their routes were:-

- (a) Sirhowy to Pontygof –Nantyglo-Abergavenny.*
- (b) Rhyd-y-blew-Gantre-Uchaf-Pontyfog (sic).*
- (c) Pontygof-Cwrt y gollen-Heol-y-Mwyn (Briery Hill)-Manmoel-Bedwellty-Caerphilly.*
- (d) Pontygof-Tyllwyn-Bwlch-y-garn-Aberstruth Church. (this latter was known as Heol y Felin a'r Eglwys – The Mill and Church Road.*

As was mentioned by Gray-Jones, from Cwm the parish road ascended to Manmoel but, as can be seen in Fig. D1, it subsequently continued westwards via Bedwellty Church to meet the Cardiff to Brecon Roman Road near Capel Glwadys (approx. ST 123 995).

The descent to Victoria, or Ty Llwyn, might have had industrial relevance until well into the 19th. century as it appears that, although the canal and tramway system, surveyed by Dadford for the Act of Parliament of 1792, was constructed as far as the canal wharf at Crumlin by 1794 (Hadfield. "Canals of South Wales and the Borders") and by 1796 most of the tramways had also been built (Hadfield, page 136) – except the one to Nantyglo. It appears that Nantyglo were happy to use the tramroad down the Clydach Gorge to meet the Brecknock and Abergavenny canal (Hadfield, page 143) and it was not until 1833 that an agreement was reached to connect to Crumlin (Hadfield, page 168). So, there was a period from 1796 until 1833 when Nantyglo was not connected by tramway to Crumlin although Ebbw Vale was. It is a matter of speculation that some trade might not have gone down the Clydach Gorge but over the mountain to Ebbw Vale and hence onto the tramway.

In recent years the Pont-y-Gof to Brynmawr road has fallen into disuse and the Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 "Explorer" map of 2002, although showing the road, does not even delineate it as a footpath. However, it has recently been designated as a "Road suitable for all traffic" thus preserving its historical importance. Because of the golf club occupying a large area of the mountain to the immediate south of this old road the easiest access to Mynydd Carn-y-cefn from the east is now via a bridle-way from Nantyglo. It has been pointed out that the ridgeway road on this mountain was extinguished early in the 19th. century by mineral extraction to the north of the Pont-y-Gof road so this bridle-way from Nantyglo now reaches the ridgeway at about SO 183 100 and continues south along the

eastern side of the ridge eventually to descend into Aberbeeg. What is also evident from the first edition Ordnance Survey map (Fig. 5.3 in Volume 1) is that from SO 183 100 a road also descended into Ebbw Vale at "Ebbw Vale Furnace". Whether the furnace itself or the tramway down the Ebbw valley to meet the canal at Crumlin (surveyed in 1792 and constructed in 1793 – extended to Newport by 1809) or even the Victoria Bridge across the Ebbw river is not clear. The modern 1:25,000 O/S map shows that this track over the mountain, now a footpath, developing as a "yellow" road as it enters the present Ty-Llwyn Estate. From the Victoria Bridge good tracks ascended to the Manmoel road and to the west

East of Tredegar, in addition to the route passing through Georgetown and over the mountain, through Ebbw Vale, to the bridge at Pont-y-Gof and beyond, there is another which is a continuation of the one passing down Stable Lane and continuing uphill in the direction of St. James's Church. This road leaves the Parish Road running north through Tredegar from Bedwellty at the head of Stable Lane, almost where it does today, but it should be noted that this Parish Road is also joined at the top of the hill (SO 139 079) by the present main Cefn Golau road just discussed so that Stable Lane might well be considered as the continuation of this road to the east. After leaving the bottom of Stable Lane the road crossed the river Sirhowy, presumably by a ford, which was quite feasible before the banks of the river were "canalised", at approximately a few metres downstream of the present road bridge (Fig. 2.6 taken from a 1879 1:2,500 Ordnance Survey map in original colours). After here it passed over the mountain by a route mainly identical to the present one except for a stretch between Whitworth Terrace and the top end of the present housing estate of St. James's Park which was first a workhouse (Ty Bryn) and later a hospital. It should be noted that this map shows the road to be coloured in ochre, which is used for more important routes, and thus given equal status to the main road down the valley which at this date is to the west of the river. The road itself is very well constructed, with substantial pitching beneath a stone surface dressing, with culverts and embankments to attend to the drainage and to maintain a level surface across its width. At the top of the mountain it meets and crosses the Manmoel road and continues downhill through Ebbw Vale closely following the alignment to Pont-y-Gof where it joins the more northerly route through Georgetown (shown lined in purple on Fig. 2.5), it also crosses and descends southwards to Cwm – a route which is clearly shown on the first edition O/S map (Fig. 2.4 where it is lined in green. This road from the bottom of Stable Lane past the present St. James Church would have served the useful purpose connecting the lower end of Tredegar with Ebbw Vale but I believe that it also formed part of the regular road network linking ridgeway to ridgeway. I will expand further upon this in the next chapter

To the west of Tredegar there is much of interest and some of the early routes have been studied in more detail in Volume 1. Volume 1 traces the old heads of the valleys road from Merthyr and the west past the top end of Tredegar and onwards to various points on the River Usk. The evidence for its route from Merthyr is based on the maps of Emmanuel Bowen, dated 1729-1760 (Fig. 2.1 in that Volume) and Nathaniel Coltman dated 1798 (Fig. 2.2 of that Volume). These two maps, which largely concur and were accepted by Professor William Rees (Volume 1, Fig. 2.3), gave a route which was readily traceable on the first edition O/S map (Volume 1, Fig. 2.4). This information was transposed to a modern 1:25,000 O/S map (Volume 1, Fig. 2.5) and shows that the road (which had arrived from Neath) left the southern end of Merthyr passing through Twynnyrodyn and, after crossing the Roman road from Gelligaer to Brecon on the Waun Hill, arrived at the top end of Rhymney by two adjacent routes. One of these passed down Cwm Carno and subsequently over the top end of Bry-oeir through Hoel y Waun fawr to the road junction near the later Ashvale House and beyond (Fig 1.8 of the present Volume).

Figs. 2.7 (1832 1" O/S) and 2.8 (1" post-war O/S) clearly show three routes west of Tredegar. The first is the Cefn Golau road, the present B4256, and it appears from the first edition O/S map (Fig. 2.7) that its most important function was to reach, and cross, the River Rhymney at Pontlottyn by an indicated bridge and then to ascend, both northwards and southwards, to join the recognised Roman road from Gelligaer (and the south) to Dowlais Top (and the north). The relationship of this road with Pontlottyn is borne out by Fig. 2.9, which is taken from an old parish map of the Bedwelly Parish where its direct connection, with no indication of Rhymney or its works, is clear. This map is undated but would appear to be earlier than the 1839 tithe map. Unfortunately the map ends at the parish boundary. The second road (lined in purple) will later be shown to have been constructed in the early days of the 19th. century to carry iron from the Bute Ironworks in Rhymney to Tredegar for further processing. This matter is discussed in detail in Volume 1 (Dowlais Top to the Usk). Further north still is a road across Bryn Adam (lined in orange) which is ancient and which connects directly to Carno and the crossing of the Rhymney River towards Merhtyr and beyond. The likely significance of this route is described in more detail in Volume 1. Today these old tracks can be clearly discerned and the most northerly route still retains substantial metalling and frequent stone cairn markers.

Although this chapter is titled "Roads to the east and the west" those crossing Rhymney Hill have proved to have been of particular relevance for Chapter 3 and they will be discussed in much more detail there.

In Figs. 2.6 and 2.7 I have also included a great deal of the area to the south and west because I feel that it helps to place Tredegar in a broader context. I will be dealing with this area to the south and west in more detail in the next chapter but perhaps it is worth a reminder here that neither New Tredegar nor Abertwsswg existed until the middle of the nineteenth century – this is discussed in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3

Roads to the North and the South.

The road down the valley.

It is generally accepted, and such old maps which are available seem to confirm, that there was no north/south roads down the valley before the construction of the Sirhowy Tramroad which got Parliamentary approval in 1802. There was a period of negotiation with various landowners with three stages involved – Tredegar to 9 mile Point (Cwm Felin Fach), Cwm Felin Fach to Tredegar Park, Newport and the remaining stretch through Tredegar Park. According to Powell (Page 35) *“At length the Sirhowy and Tredegar Company petitioned Parliament for a charter to open a tramroad from Sirhowy to Risca and Newport, which was granted in 1812. The tramroad was completed in a temporary manner as early as possible, and the company was called the “Sirhowy Tramroad Company”*”. This would imply that the tramroad was fully working in perhaps 1813 or 1814. Both Scandrett and Powell give more detail on the early days of the tramroad but perhaps the most valuable document, giving a detailed history of the tramroad is *“The Tramroads of the Sirhowy Valley (in Gwent-Uchoed) Newport to Sirhowy, &C.,”* by Wm. Lewis-Meredith in which he says (Page 3) *“The main Sirhowy Tram-road from the Canal at Newport, i.e. from Cryndau, behind the Castle of Newport, the old Dock Street Station, by The Gaer, through Tredegar Park to the Nine Mile Point, and on to Tredegar and Sirhowy Iron Works – then called Sirhowy Furnaces – was constructed mostly by my grandfather, William Lewis-Meredith, between the years 1800 and 1811. This Tramway was opened and brought into use on or about the 11th. of August, 1811, parts of it were in use by Tredegar and Sirhowy Iron Works Companies before this date. The Tram-road from Sirhowy Furnaces to Trefil and Bryn O’er Mines was made about the years 1795 to 1800.”*

This gives a pretty definite date of 11th. August 1811 for its opening for full service. The agreement with the Canal Company for the construction of the railway included the statement that *“Such tramroad to be of sufficient width for carts to pass by the side, and the road to be open to the public on payment of the same tolls as are taken in the Newport District of Turnpike roads.”*. Further, Oliver Jones in an article *“The Sirhowy Tramroads and its Locomotives”* (Gwent Local History Journal, No.1) quotes T. G. Cummins writing in 1824 – (Page 36) *“This rail-way was completed about 20 years ago, also a turnpike road by the side of it for about 17 miles, the total expense amounting to about £74,000 or about £3,000 per mile”* and later in this article (Page 37) - *“The first regular passenger service, according to Barrie and Lee the railway historians, was*

introduced on the tramroad in 1822 by John Kingston of Newport with a horse drawn vehicle called the Caravan and others, they say, soon followed. The stage coach of a few years later, carrying the master-timer which synchronised the valley's clocks travelled faster still, covering the distance in little more than two and a half hours." Scandrett remarks (p.106) *"By 1810 the roads had been improved sufficiently for mail coaches to run in the county, and there was soon a daily passenger service from Tredegar Iron Works via Abercarn to Newport."*

Certainly its width as indicated on the 1839 tithe map and on the 1832 first edition Ordnance Survey map, published in 1832 (but originally surveyed in 1813-14 and edited in 1829-30) was substantial and able to carry the mail coaches now coming into use coupling the heads of the valleys turnpike road to Newport. It is, of course, quite possible that some form of track connecting properties existed down the valley prior to the tramway and its associated road but no evidence of such a route has been found.

There is also a great deal of confusion about what happened to the Turnpike road when the tramway was converted into double track railway in 1885. Most of the problems seem to stem from the Act of Parliament - *"Changing the Name of the Sirhowy Tramroad Company to the Name "The Sirhowy Railway Company", to make New Works, and to Maintain and Work the Sirhowy Line as a Railway, and to raise further Funds, and for Regulating their Capital and Borrowing Powers and for Other Purpose", which achieved Royal Assent on the 25th. May 1860. The most relevant parts of the Act seem to be:*

XXXVIII. Provided always, that the Company shall, within twelve months from the passing of the Act, make and effectually fence off, and dedicate to public use as a public highway, the road in this Act eleventhly described.

XXXIX. Provided always, that so much of the lands of the Company as lie between Argoed and the point at which the turnpike crosses the Newport, Abergavenny and Hereford Railway, near to the Tredegar Junction Station thereon, as is now used as a footway, or bridle-way, or a carriage-way, may be used in like manner until the Company open for public use the Carriage-road which they are by this Act required to make.

There would seem to be no doubt that the Act required the Company to allow continued access for non-rail traffic and to build a new road to replace the previous one. But it seems that they did not comply.

Scandrett in his book makes the point that (Page 116) *"The Tredegar to Argoed section of the old turnpike road had been seriously damaged by*

the Sirhowy Tramline and the Sirhowy Railway Company's modifications and improvements and for many years there was no authority to compel them to keep their obligation to maintain the road which they had agreed to provide". It was not until 1894 that the new Urban District Council completed the "New Road" to Argoed.

Powell on page 176 discusses the – *"THE NEW ROAD TO ARGOED" – "As the old road to Argoed was practically destroyed by the making of the old tram-line, and finally closed by the construction of the railway, there was no direct road to Argoed."* He elsewhere clearly states that the old road was closed. It would seem that the road to Argoed was believed by some authorities to have been destroyed and by others that it was seriously diminished and that for a period of approximately 10 years there was no satisfactory road down the valley. The big question, which is not addressed by historians, is what did wheeled traffic do during this 10 years period? Gerald Davies, who has for many years taken a great interest in the early transport systems in this area, believes that such traffic had to return to using the old ridgeway roads on Bedwellty and Manmoel mountains.

The answer (although for my purposes I will only examine the route as far as Hollybush) lies in the 1884-86 1:2,500 Ordnance Survey map - Fig. 3.1, which shows, the railway lined in orange and the track then being used by road traffic thus displaced, in green:

a) The road ran alongside the railway, to the east of the river, from Tredegar as far south as approx. SO 150 073 i.e. where the present southernmost roundabout of the Tredegar by-pass meets the road from Vale Terrace crossing the river by the Heathfield Bridge. This bridge, constructed in 1891 (No. 16a) allowed the New Road to run down Vale Terrace and cross the river and for the western road to be extinguished.

b) From here south as far as Bedwellty pits the early tramway still existed, together with its associated road, and formed the basis of that section of the New Road.

c) From Bedwellty Pits a narrow track can be seen running alongside the railway as far south as SO 157 058 – just north of Lower Farm.

d) The track now left the side of the railway and passed through fields to the west cutting through existing field boundaries. This route was later used by the New Road as far south as Hollybush station.

e) The track is narrow and clearly expedient. How good its quality was is unknown but the sections not co-incident with the earlier turnpike are

unlikely to have been metalled or drained and, at least initially, it was probably poor, particularly in wet weather.

f) Clearly such a poor track allowed the railway to take most of the traffic, not only the bulk tonnage of minerals and metal but also passengers and it was not in their interest to be helpful in replacing the turnpike road. Probably the ridgeway roads saw an increased use by wheeled traffic during this period by those unable or unwilling to pay the railway plus the need for cartage at each end - which a railway journey implies.

While any reliable pre-tramway all-weather route down the valley is very dubious there is no doubt about the importance of the ridgeway roads on the Bedwellty and Cefn Manmoel mountains. The earliest accurate map which we can compare directly with a modern version is the 1832 1" Ordnance Survey (Fig 3.2) which can be compared with a modern 1:25,000 of the same area (Fig 3.3). In each of these maps the main route down the valleys correspond to the early tramways and, in the case of the Sirhowy valley by this time a turnpike, is coloured in orange. The ridgeway roads are coloured in green and linking roads in yellow.

The Bedwellty Ridgeway.

The existence of a Bedwellty ridgeway road is well chronicled. Starting from the south, the parish road runs northwards from the direction of Bedwellty Church. This road has long been considered to be a Roman road although today archaeologists are more circumspect, as is the present fashion, and my personal belief is that ridgeway routes are likely to have been used long before the Romans arrived in these islands.

The earliest reference I can find is in "An Historical Tour in Monmouthshire" by Archdeacon W. Cox, published in 1801. Volume 1. Page 24. (It might be noted here that this book contains the first really good map of the county, produced by Nathaniel Coltman, one better than any which followed until the first edition of the Ordnance Survey in 1832). *"There seems also to have been a Roman Road from Abergavenny communicating with stations in Glamorganshire. Bad weather and want of time prevented me from exploring the whole of the track; but in an excursion to the western boundaries of Monmouthshire, I travelled over that part of it which stretches from Penllwyn, north of Bedwellty, and the Sorwy furnace. It forms a straight line, from forty to fifty feet in breadth between the hedges, which is an uncommon circumstance in this county, where the roads are usually narrow; in many places I observed vestiges of a causeway, paved with large flag stones; in some parts there was little more than a pathway in the midst of this broad road; but in others, the*

whole causeway remained entire and swelling, though furrowed by the tracks of horse. These appearances are particularly striking about half a mile beyond Bydellty (sic) church, near which are the remains of a strong entrenchment. I traced it only for four miles but I am informed by gentlemen who have much frequented these mountains for grouse shooting, that it continues north for some miles further and then turns to the east and north-east over the moors, in the direction of Abergavenny. This road is called by the locals Sarn Hir, or the long paved causeway, a name which bespeaks it to be Roman, Sarn in Welsh having the same significance as Stane or Street in English”.

A little later is a letter from Thomas Henry Payne to Sir Richard Colt Hoare dated Sept. 14th. 1804. He writes - *“I have paid my visit to the hills, and made as I conceive, some interesting discoveries respecting the tendency of the Bedwellty causeway”.* He then describes the route south of Bedwellty to Caerphilly in some detail before writing about the route north of Bedwellty. He continues *“Having returned to Bedwellty, we passed the church from whence, for the first half a mile or more, we rode between the walls, where the road is built 30 feet wide, and the same appearance (as to the south - my comment) of pitching, pavement and filleting is continued. From thence a broad green road is continued for several miles in a direct line northwards, along a narrow ridge of mountain, which divided the river Sorwy from the Rhymney. But to describe the country more particularly: It first passes the whole length of Bedwellty Common, leaving the Sorwy Ironworks about a mile and a half to the right, to the upper end of the Brynoer Coal and mine works, where a small stream called Nant y bwch divided the counties of Monmouth and Brecon. A narrow causeway of stone here crosses some boggy ground, but whether of ancient construction or not I will not pretend to determine. 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, (The Duke of Beaufort’s bird house is seen upon the left hand, Rhymney Iron Works about three quarters of a mile to the left), and is continued forward to Blaen-cwm-Carawnant. Let me observe that a ford called “Rhyd-y-milwyr”, or the Soldier’s Ford, at the head of the Rhymney, not far away from the ironworks, is noticed as an ancient boundary between the counties of Brecon and Glamorgan.”* He then describes the journey further north to Brecon Gaer.

Later the same year, Dec. 11th. 1804, Thomas Henry Payne writes again to Colt Hoare and refers to Theophilus Jones stating: *“He is fully satisfied with our Roman road across the mountains, that he has clearly marked it on his map. His surveyor met him here (Llanbedr) for the purpose. Indeed, I have not a doubt of it being perfectly correct. The weather has not since permitted me to ascend the heights, but every enquiry I have*

been able to make confirmed me in the truth of my former optimism. I had some conversation the other day with an experienced mason who has worked a great deal at Brynoer. He tells me that he recollects observing the causeway, across the bog there about 20 years since, that it was then much wider than it is at present. That it appeared to have been regularly and strongly made, and of real antiquity. He particularly noticed that the stones were much worn as if by carriage. This may readily be accounted for if we admit that it was a road used for the conveyance of iron."

It might be noted that the map of Breconshire used in Volume 1 of "A History of Brecknock", edited by Theophilus Jones, is drawn directly connecting Cardiff (Caerdaff) to Brecon (Bannium) via Bryn Oer – which is specifically named.

They were in regular communication on this and other matters and on Sept. 10th. 1805 a further letter was sent: "*Since I wrote to you last, I have taken another view of the mountains and am still more satisfied that my first conjectures as to the Roman Road were correct, but still propose another view. A labourer upon the mountain brought me a small brass celt (axe) which he found upon the line of ye road as he was raising stone for building*"

Another early reference is by Theophilus Jones in Volume 1 of his "A History of the County Of Brecknock" (1909) when discussing Roman roads "*..... we find one running nearly N and S from Cardiff to Caerbannau. The road proceeds from Cardiff to Caerphilly, though its track is not easily discerned, but from the latter place, leaving Bedwas on the right, it proceeds in the same direction to Pont yr ystrad, on a high ridge between the rivers Sirhowy and Rhymney and enters Breconshire at Brynoer, 15 or 16 miles from Caerphilly. It is known to the inhabitants by the name of "Sarn Hir" or long causeway. Its track during the whole or the greatest part of this distance is perfectly discernable, kerb stones occasionally appear on the sides; it is about 10 feet wide and whenever it crosses bogs, large flat stones have been laid down as a foundation for the superstrata of smaller gravel or earth. After entering Brecon ([shire] - my note.) it still retains the same direction along the Trefil Ddu, or Trefil foel ddu, to Blaencrawnon, Penrhiwcalch, down the Glyn collwm, from whence to Llanfrynach, where, from the discovery of some Roman baths there seems to have been a Roman General's villa or perhaps a 'campus aestivus'. From thence it followed northwards, crossing the Usk somewhere near Brecon and joined the other branch of the Julia Strata leading to the Gaer. At Brynoer, about half way on this road from Cardiff to Brecon, Roman cinders are now frequently found. Where a bloomery seems to have been established at Llanfrynach, the iron was probably brought down to be manufactured. at this latter place there is now a*

field called Clos y Gefailion, the Smiths Field or Field of the Smith's forges."

From these quotations several points emerge:

1) There is no doubt about the reality of the route of an old road from Bedwellty Church as far as the point where it meets the Tredegar to Rhymney road at SO 139 079, near the cemetery, as it is shown on many old maps and there is still a road from Bedwellty running down the west side of the Bedwellty Ridge in use today by modern traffic, having been tarmaced some years ago. Its route north from here is a bit less clear as there seem to be two alternatives i.e. down the hill and north through Ashvale as shown on the 1760 map (Figs. 1.1 and 1.2) or continuing over the mountain at a higher level to descend at or near Bryn-Oer. The disappearance of any trace of the road over this second route can be easily explained by, not only the extensive mineral extraction which has taken place over much of this area, but by the comment in T. H. Payne's Sept. 10th. 1905 letter to Colt Hoare - "...*raising stone for building*". If this latter route was used then it is possible that it did not cross the Nant y bwch brook above Ashvale House but a little further west past Bryn Bach farm as indicated on the 1760 map. Of course, an over-mountain route might have been in use for those on foot or mounted and for animals, and as such would need little metalling, and a lower-level route for wheeled traffic - the two routes would not be mutually exclusive, particularly for traffic heading towards Milgatw or Abergavenny on the early heads of the valleys road described in Volume 1 of "Tracks".

2) Having suggested that a high-level road might have descended to the vicinity of Bryn Oer it will be shown later in this chapter that the most likely route was via the cross-roads at Ashvale House. The relative importance of this route and the more western one to the vicinity of Bryn Oer farm is difficult to assess but they would probably served different purposes. It would really depend on the destination of the traveller i.e. the "western" route would have served better for continuing to the west or north to Brecon while the Ashvale cross-roads would been more useful to travel to the east or to the Usk valley.

Despite all this narrative there is a lack of clarity concerning the route from the vicinity of Cefn Golau to the north of Tredegar, and I will return to this a little later in this chapter. For the present I would like to discuss the roads subsidiary (lined in yellow) to the main ridgeway roads (lined in green) connecting them to properties and crossing the valleys from ridgeway to ridgeway as shown in Figs. 3.2 and 3.3. Today most of these are reduced to footpaths but in the first edition of the Ordnance Survey, surveyed in 1813 and 1814 and using their General Cartographic Signs,

they are clearly delineated as tracks of some consequence predominantly for wheeled vehicles.

The importance of the ridgeway roads to access the properties then existing and the existence of roads connecting ridgeways is clearly shown in Fig 3.2. Both of these functions suggest that any route up the valley floors were likely to have been of minor, local importance. A particularly interesting complex of such minor roads which illustrate the ridgeway to ridgeway connections can be seen centred on Pont Gwaithyrhaearn (N.B. The spelling of the name of this old furnace has changed several times over the years – I will adopt the spelling use by the modern Ordnance Survey.) with roads ascending both to the west and the Bedwellty ridgeway and to the east to the Manmoel ridgeway and beyond. To the west one road ascends (to be joined by another, now a footpath) from the vicinity of SO164 042 to meet the Bedwellty ridgeway road at SO 1580 0314. This track is joined at, or near, SO 161 033 by another which left the tramway at SO 0647 03050. What is of particular interest is that there is another track shown partly defined as a road and partly as a dotted track, clearly ascending from Pont Gwaithyrhaearn west and north to meet the Bedwellty road close to where it meets the Cefn Golau road from Tredegar to Rhymney. This road is shown continuing as a path over Rhymney Hill to the Bryn-oer mineral exposure, and will presently be discussed in some detail, but first some points concerning Pont Gwaithyrhaearn of both general and relevant interest.

Perhaps this is a good place to clear up what seems to be a certain degree of confusion as to what constituted a furnace or a forge with some people thinking in terms of a large blast furnace producing liquid cast iron which could be run off into moulds. In fact, through most of history iron was not made this way for two reasons (n.b. except in China – but that is another story) – the first that such a system demanded very high temperatures (exceeding 1500°C) and this was not easy to obtain on a small scale and, equally important, cast-iron was of no use to the smith - it was brittle and could not be forged. Iron for smithing before the 18th. Century was normally made by a lower temperature (from as low as 900°C but more normally about 1150°C) processing which produced a “bloom” comprising a mixture of iron and slag. This bloom was hammered while still hot to expel the silica and produce a pure ductile iron ideal for most general blacksmith work. For this process charcoal was normally used. When demand for iron grew in the 17th. and 18th. Century much larger furnaces were built and when Abraham Darby discovered the secrets of smelting with coal coke production expanded greatly. The downside of this for the blacksmith was the cast-iron needed further processing in “Finerys” and “Chaferys” to produce, by an indirect process, a malleable form he could use. As the demand for wrought (malleable)

iron grew so “Puddling” replaced the “Finery” and “Chafery”. This process, invented by Cranage in 1766, was later developed by Onions and by Cort who added rolling mills to his furnace to produce bar and rod etc. This use of coal coke was just the period when the great iron boom took place at the heads of the valleys where the iron, coal and limestone needed was abundant (Raistrick’s book – “Industrial Archaeology” - is excellent for those who are interested in early industrial archaeology.) Tredegar’s puddling furnace was completed and working by 1807 “...being the year when the Puddling mills were completed and commenced working”, (Powell. Page 30.)

We know that cast-iron was produced at Pont Gwaithyrhearn, and Mr. Ron Jenkins has a cauldron which he found at the site on display in the local history museum, but this might have been the result of the rebuilding of the site by the two Breton gentlemen who ran it from 1738 to 1748 - what form of iron production took place there before this time is difficult to determine. Both Scandrett and Oliver Jones discuss the history of the site and both seem to be of the opinion that it was very old – possibly 16th. Century. If its original value was partly due to its position on the old road system it is quite possible that it is very much older. Similarly the 1760 estate map of Tredegar area shows “a smiths forge” at the crossroads by Ashvale House (Fig. 1.1). Until more recent times shoes were essential for horse, mule and cattle being “driven” as well as for general repairs to wagons etc. and blacksmiths forges are commonly situated at cross-roads.

Such an establishment could originally have combined general farming activities with a modest iron production to have made a good living. It would not be hard to imagine that, with increasing demand for iron, it could have been developed for more production until the much larger enterprises nearer the outcrop in the north, now using coke, started production. A thorough archaeological investigation of the site might make the evolution of the furnace clearer with a layer of bloomery cinder and forging scale underlying a layer of blast furnace slag and waste typical of a high temperature furnace producing cast iron.

The reason for the position of the Pont Gwaithyrhaearn furnace has been questioned by such as Oliver Jones (Page 27) – “*Another puzzle about Pont Gwaith y Haeearn is its location. Why the dell of Nant Helig at the foot of Cefn Manmoel was chosen in preference to the more convenient places on Abercarn lands much nearer the sources of mineral supply is not very clear. It was so much out of the way.*” But, looking at it from a different point of view, it was not out of the way – it was at a focal point. It can be seen from Figs 3.2 and 3.3 that several tracks (lined in yellow) converge on Pont Gwaith y Haeearn from both the Manmoel ridgeway road to the

east and the Bedwellty road to the west to cross the river by the bridge. Whereas fords were common, bridges were more rare and important as all-weather crossing places.

If the farm property pre-dated the iron works – and Jones suggests this - with the Bretons taking over an existing forge in 1738 - then it seems to me probable that the site, on a river, at the foot of a stream (the Nant yr Helig) which could have provided power, with access to timber for charcoal (Coed Fedwgwaith and other nearby woods) and at such a focal point on the then road system would have made it an ideal site for a blacksmiths forge.

In his “A Gazetteer of Charcoal-fired Furnaces in Great Britain in Use Since 1660”, Riden refers to the furnace under the heading of Bedwellty, Mon. and was rather scathing about some of the local historians who have commented on it. For this reason I will quote his entry in full.

“Bedwellty. Mon.

SO 165043 [171]

A furnace in the parish of Bedwellty, in the Sirhowy valley, is mentioned in Exchequer dispositions in 1597, when it was said to be in the hands of John Challenor, a London haberdasher, and Thomas Moore, a Bristol ironmonger (Schubert 1957, 367; Hammersley 1971, 88). It is mentioned again in Challenor's will of 1606 but not that of his son, William Challenor (1620). The approximate position of the furnace is indicated on the modern map by the name Pontgwaithyrhaiarn (i.e. Ironworks Bridge) for a crossing of the Sirhowy about three miles south of Tredegar, where indeterminate earth-works can be seen today on the east bank of the river.

The site would not merit inclusion here were it not for a confused statement in an essay written for a local eisteddfod in 1862 (Morris 1868, 20-4; cf. Jones 1969, 110-12), based on oral evidence collected about 1825-30, that the furnace at Pontgwaithyrhaiarn was in use in the 1740s, although for how long is not clear; remains of the structure were apparently also visible in the 1820s. A later history of Tredegar (Powell 1885, 19-22) complicates the issue further by claiming that the site was in use in the late seventeenth century, while a modern antiquary note references to an “Old Iron Works” in Bedwellty in a rental of 1727 (Jones 1969, 26). All this requires confirmation from record evidence but it appears that the furnace may have operated, if only for short periods, after 1660.”

However, returning to the idea that a smiths forge might have been the original business on the site. Raistrick remarks however, that coal was used in blacksmiths forges since Roman times so the presence of coal ash might not be too surprising. If coal had been required for any purpose

there would have been ample supplies easily obtained from the Brithdir beds less than 2 km. north of the forge and lying actually on the pack-horse route to Bryn Oer, of which more presently. In the context of a forge such a focal point would have made it valuable for horse shoeing and general blacksmithing. It would have been easier to have brought in the iron ore for processing, probably initially by blooming rather than smelting, than to have relocated. It only seems rather an odd place in the later context of the large smelting furnaces using coke which were later constructed nearer the outcrop. The Bretons might have been better advised to have set up a new furnace from scratch further north than to have attempted to develop an existing small scale enterprise established for a different purpose based on its location

Continuing with the discussion of the ridgeway, the maps (Fig. 3.2 and others) also show a link from the bottom end of Tredegar through Troed y Gwair rising to meet the Manmoel ridgeway road and another descending north and eastward from just above Manmoel into the Ebbw valley.

Fig. 3.4 is taken from a 1947 1" to the mile Ordnance Survey map of the area between Brynoer to the north and Pont Gwaithyrhaearn to the south intended to give a general overview of the area being studied. The colour-coded tracks will be explained as they are discussed. This area has been split into two areas for research i.e. between Bryn-oer and Cefn Golau Cemetery and between Cefn Golau Cemetery and Pont Gwaithyrhaearn. Both of these areas have been studied using maps ranging from the first edition Ordnance Survey 1" to the mile map to modern maps and using a 12 channel Global Positioning System in order accurately to position any features found. Such features have been overlaid onto modern 1:25,000 Ordnance Survey maps.

Fig. 3.2 is taken from the first edition Ordnance Survey map on which I have superimposed the modern National Grid in order to correlate features to the modern map with accuracy. The tramroad and Turnpike has been coloured orange, the Manmoel and the Bedwellty ridgeway roads in green and the lesser roads in yellow. Here I will draw attention to a curious, and possibly important, feature. Fig. 3.2 (first edition Ordnance Survey) shows a road running down the entire length of the Bedwellty mountain, well to the east of the present road. This road, which I have lined in pink, is double for a couple of kilometres, leaves the present road a short distance south of the present Cefn Golau reservoir and rejoins further south on Bedwellty Ridge where the road leaves the open mountain and becomes constrained between stone-walled property boundaries. Of the portion of the road which is doubled for part of its length, the western arm is a true ridgeway road passing over the highest part of the mountain with the eastern arm running around the flank of the

highest part. The reason for this doubling is not known for certain although its probable relationship with access from the Sirhowy valley via Bedwellty Pits is discussed presently. This road is real and can be seen clearly on a modern aerial photograph (Fig. 3.5) where its course has been indicated with arrows with colours corresponding with Figs. 3.2 and 3.3. The blue track, which can be seen in Fig. 3.3 but not Fig. 3.2 will be discussed presently.

The road is approx. 10ft. (3 meters) wide, is very well graded and sufficiently robust as to be able to withstand off-road vehicles, and even tractors, without rutting except where there is occasional wet ground caused by seepage. Photo. 3.1 is of a section of the track, facing south, taken at SO 14566 06403, where it can be seen continuing over the skyline, and Photo. 3.2 a little further south (at SO 14757 05713), at the point where the two branched re-join, facing north. On this latter photograph both tracks can be seen rising up the mountain beyond. Fig. 3.6 is the significant portion of the 1832 Ordnance Survey map enlarged and it can be seen to correspond with the reality on the ground very well except that the eastern branch is drawn somewhat further east and dips into the upper part of the valley which runs down into Bedwellty Pits. This might have been a mapping error – I have found others in the first edition which, if deemed significance, were later corrected. What is surprising is that neither branch of this road is shown on the 1884-86 1:2,500 Ordnance Survey map (Fig. 3.7) nor on the modern 1:25,000 map (Fig. 3.3). An enlarged version of the modern map (Fig. 3.8) has been used to plot this ridgeway road as it is today, and other significant features, more accurately.

Although it is clearly shown as a double track over much of its length the western branch is a true ridgeway passing close by Carn Stwpa and the Ordnance Survey triangulation point before continuing southwards – again on the highest ground until it merges with the present tarmaced road at SO 156 037. The big questions are:

1) Why is this track clearly shown on the first edition 1" Ordnance Survey map but not on any subsequent one and,

2) Although the existence of an old road, believed by many antiquarians to have been Roman, has long been known it is not clear from any of their descriptions whether it refers to the ridgeway road or to the present tarmaced road which skirts to western flank of Bedwellty ridge. The descriptive passages of Thomas Henry Payne and Theophilus Jones given earlier in this chapter are not precise but meet the description given by Thomas Henry Payne to Colte Hoare in his letter dated the 14th. of September 1804 travelling northwards on the old road when, after leaving

the walled section (about SO 155 044) – “*From thence a broad green road is continued for several miles in a direct line northwards, along a narrow ridge of mountain, which divided the Sorwy from the Rhymney*”. This is a very close description of the ridgeway road shown on the first edition O/S map (Fig. 3.2).

The reason for its loss in importance on later maps might be due to the construction of the present road in the early years of the 19th. century – presumably after 1804. I shall return to this matter presently as it has some relevance to further survey work I have carried out on the mountain.

If the earliest road was the ridgeway road just discovered then I would expect to find connections from it to properties in the valleys and from this ridgeway road to other ridgeway roads and, with one exception they can be found.

The southernmost cross track or link road, which is within the walled section of the road and thus is common to both the present and the putative earlier track, is to be seen on Fig. 3.8 at SO 1559 0367 (all the cross-tracks have been lined in orange) crossing from Pen-yr-heol in the west to Ty'r Cwrt in the east. Further north, until the vicinity of Bedwellty Pits to the east, the mountain on the east is too steep for good access but the ridgeway road is accessed from the west at SO 1546 0440 by the two tracks from Cefn Rhychdir via Bedlwyn and another from the valley via Dafalog (see Fig. 3.7). This dual route can be clearly seen crossing the present Bedwellty road to reach the older road. North of here is a very clear direct connection from Cefn Rhychdir, via Derlwyn meeting and crossing the present Bedwellty road at SO 1506 0525 with both a direct access joining the ridgeway road with one curving towards the north (lined in orange on Fig 3.8). Although this track is very clear this is a bit misleadingly as it was also used as access to the old engine house connected with Bedwellty Pits the ruins of which are still to be found at SO 15110 05288 (Marked as “X1” on Fig. 3.8). It can, however, still be seen to the west of the present Bedwellty road. From the vicinity of the engine house a lesser track descends to the head of the valley above Bedwellty Pits (Photo. 3.3) – marked in blue on Fig. 3.8. Where this path crosses the stream which runs down the valley it crosses a revetment (at SO 14997 05772 – Photo. 3.4) and, as it passes northwards from this point, it can be seen (Photo. 3.5) that it is of about 6 ft. (2 meters) width and was metalled. Again, this path might have been pre-industrial but might well have been connected with, or enhanced by, the need to access the engine house but this short section of track corresponds well with the eastern branch of the ridgeway road where it crosses the head of the valley.

Northwards from the crossing link road near the engine house there are no more to be found which, at first, might seem to be a bit worrying for the theory concerning an old ridgeway road in that no connection is to be found eastwards from the Mountain Lodge. This Mountain lodge, now demolished, lies at the end of a long drive past an old barn and Cefn Rhychdir Isaf to Cefn Rhychdir Uchaf and it might have been expected to have continued over the present Bedwellty Road to meet the ridgeway. Unless, the drive and lodge were only constructed when the new Bedwellty road was constructed sometime around 1800. This would account for the very long drive and any lack of continuity to the ridge.

I have not yet been able to determine the exact date for the track from Cefn Rhychdir to the Mountain Lodge or for the building of the Lodge but it is very possible that it fell in the period when Richard Fothergill was very active at Sirhowy Ironworks i.e. starting in 1794 and ceasing in 1818 (Details of the ironworks and Fothergill's involvement can be found in the works of Powell, Oliver Jones and Scandrett). Richard Fothergill owned Cefn Rhychdir Farm, of which some parts are reputed to be Tudor (Ref. "New Tredegar in Focus"), and a direct connection with Tredegar and Sirhowy would have been very useful to him. The road up to Cefn Rhychdir from White Rose Cottages (Abersyfi Cottages) was, and still is, called Fothergill's Road and the Cefn Rhychdir to the Mountain Lodge track might be seen as an extension of this. This long track is present on the first edition Ordnance Survey map (Figs. 3.2 and 3.6) which also shows the present Bedwellty road so it may have been built between 1794 and 1817. Its existence probably depended on the "new" Bedwellty road (unless the "new" road used a pre-existing track from Cefn Rhychdir to Cefn Golau for the northern part of its present route!) and this was unlikely to have been built in its present state before the turnpike from Merthyr to Abergavenny, the Tredegar section of which opened for traffic in 1804. Figs 3.7 (1884-86 1:2,500 O/S) and 3.8 (modern 1:25,000 O/S) show the features discussed most clearly.

Figs. 3.6 and 3.9 show the tracks in the area of Bedwellty Pits very clearly and 3.6, in particular, shows how these tracks connect to the eastern of the two ridgeway roads - although it seems that the mule track to Bryn Oer also maintained a more gentle route northwards around the flank of the mountain. Descending the valley above Bedwellty Pits the maps show a complex of routes, one down to Lower Farm and another curving northwards in the direction of Troedygwair which was converted at a later date to form the inclined plane associated with the balance wheel. This feature is shown in Fig. 3.9 of the area taken from the 1884-86 1:2,500 O/S map. Through the valley both the first edition O/S (Fig. 3.6) and the later one (Fig. 3.9) show a clearly defined track from Pontgwaithyrhaearn northwards - lined in yellow on both maps.

It is worth mentioning that today there is a small reservoir to be found where the spring is shown although it is not at all certain of the date of its construction (Photo 3.8). The modern map of the area (Fig. 3.10, which is a close-up of the area of the quarry on which the features being discussed can be more clearly seen, is based on the 1:25,000 Ordnance Survey) shows remarkably few differences except in the area of the quarry itself where, in addition to the quarrying operations, the working of two levels and, in particular, there has also been dumping of waste from Bedwellty Pits. Today the mine waste has been largely removed as part of a landscaping operation but this, in itself, has caused difficulties because of the construction of a track for heavy machinery running up through the most interesting part of the valley. Photo. 3.7 shows the view down the valley from the old quarry with the modern disturbance on the right and the old track continuing down the valley above the line of trees near the centre of the picture.

Fig 3.9 taken from the 1884-86 1:2,500 O/S map also shows two coal levels the most important of which would seem to be Bedwellty Levels (opened 1856-57. Powell p. 74). On the modern map at the same scale (Fig 3.10) the three seams of the Upper Coal have been overlaid (lined in purple - taken from the maps of the British Geological Survey). It seems most likely, from the map positions, that the Brithdir Beds was the attraction although the somewhat higher Brithdir Rider and the lower Tylacourt might each have had attractions. What does seem clear is that the Brithdir Beds, and possibly the others must originally have been exposed on the flanks of the very steep-sided valley.

From the vantage point on the hillside to the south of the head of the valley another track could be discerned by vegetation change passing northwards which corresponds with the most eastern, of the two tracks shown on this flank of the mountain shown on the early map. This track, which has been lined in yellow on Figs. 3.6, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9, 3.10 and others shows the route from Pont Gwaithyrhaearn to the area of Cefn Golau and, as will be shown presently, to Bryn-Oer. As for this track, the earlier map shows it skirting outside the wall of the enclosure to its west and continuing northwards, where it can be discerned over most of its distance by vegetation changes, as shown in Photo. 3.8 (SO 148 063) and Photo. 3.9 (SO 150 059). This preservation may be found, on excavation, to be due to some reinforcement with stone but most of the ground is firm and it is more than likely that such methods would only have been needed occasionally and that the track is, in the main, still visible as vegetation changes because of the compaction caused by the laden animals and the regular dowsing of manure. The compaction would also account for the reeds growing uphill of the track which would act to hinder drainage.

An example of the problems which can arise by over reliance on modern maps is that on Fig. 3.10 (modern 1:25,000 O/S map) the path (yellow) from the head of the valley northwards is shown to the east of the enclosure boundary i.e. running inside the field as a dotted line while the earlier maps show it to the west of the wall where it has been lined in yellow. Today there is a sheep fence running outside the now-crumbling stone wall of the original enclosure and it is likely that the earliest section of the track lies beneath it.

So, what is the nature of the old high-level ridgeway route? At present there are as many questions as there are answers.

a) If it is old, just how old is it? It may be significant that it passes the Bronze Age cairn of Carn Stwpa?

b) It comes to mind that, in addition to the remarks concerning the “*broad green road*” mentioned by Payne, Theophilous Jones, writing in 1809, also describes the causeway road as on a “*high ridge*” and about 10 ft. wide.

c) Why is it marked on the first edition Ordnance Survey map, surveyed in 1814, revised in 1827 and published in 1832? but not on the large-scale 1:2,500 1884-86 Ordnance Survey map nor the more recent 1:25,000 publication? Its reality can be seen on the ground and it is also discernable on an aerial photograph of the mountain (Fig.3.5).

d) By 1814 it was already indicated only as a dotted path so it would seem that its existence was recognised but that it was just a footpath by then. Was it then an earlier, possibly the original ridgeway road?

e) Are the tracks through the valley of Bedwellty Pits to Pont Gwaithyraearn or across the valley to Troedygwair examples of the several roads which link the Bedwellty and the Manmoel ridgeways? It might be relevant that the western side of the Sirhowy Valley is very steep from above Bedwellty pits to as far south as Hollybush and the route up the valley above Bedwellty Pits onto Twyn y Hyddod (Twyn y Rhythod on Fig. 3.6 – 1st. edition O/S and Fig. 3.7 – 1884-86 1:2,500 O/S) and the ridgeway was a convenient approach. In this case the branching of the track at the head of the valley, both northwards and southwards, to meet the ridgeway follows a pattern seen elsewhere in the eastern Gwent valleys.

North of the Cemetery.

Having seen that the track from Pont Gwaithyrhaearn crosses the Cefn Golau road near the present cemetery it is time to consider the area of mountain from this point to the northern end of Tredegar. The 1832 1" OS map of this area (Fig. 3.11) shows three tracks of interest. The first crosses the Rhymney Hill from Cwm Rhos to the bottom end of Rhymney (lined in purple), the second crosses Bryn Adam from the area of Pittau Bach to the upper end of Rhymney (lined in orange) and the third is the dotted track which I have traced southwards from the area of the present cemetery to Pont Gwaithyrhaearn (lined in yellow).

For the sake of continuity with the preceding material I will discuss the last of these tracks first. I first imposed modern National Grid lines on the 1832 map (Fig. 3.11) and used these to plot the position of the track onto a modern map of the same area (Fig. 3.12) using the same colour coding. Using this map and a GPS system I attempted to follow the path which was still discernible except where it crossed boggy ground as it had been over most of the distance from the vicinity of the cemetery to Bedwellty Pits (Photos. 3.8 and 3.9). I have not carried out any excavation so I do not know whether or not any metalling was used in the construction of this track but, as most of it was over pretty firm ground, I doubt this except possibly where some such reinforcement was used for boggy patches. Nevertheless the track was clearly discernable having a different vegetation on its surface with clumps of rushes on the uphill side of it indicating water retention, similar to that shown in Photos, 3.8 and 3.9. Whatever the reason for survival it is there and a regular series of GPS fixes showed it to follow the 1832 OS map very exactly as is indicated on the modern map (Fig. 3.12). At the head of the Bryn-oe'r scarp the track becomes very distinct where it crosses (Photo. 3.10, taken at SO 12498 0922 looking towards Nant Trefil) but there is no hope of tracing it in detail from here on northwards because of the extensive mineral working which has taken place over the intervening years. It appears today to descend downhill in the general direction of Tarfanau bach but this is not necessarily the path followed by the old route, which might have terminated in the mineral exposures, but which was very likely, as is shown in Fig. 1.6, to have continued northwards towards, and past, Bryn Oer farm or the Blaen Rhymney area.

Of the other two tracks crossing from east to west, both of which are metalled and very clear, the southern of the two from Cwm Rhos is little changed until Rhymney is neared where the 1832 route, transposed to the modern map (Fig. 3.12, lined in purple), becomes rather different from the present bridleway. When the "purple" route reaches the lower end of Rhymney it may have divided with one branch swinging north towards

Carno – meeting the “orange” route or southwards towards Rhymney Lower Furnace. If this latter destination was the most important then this track may well date from the early industrial period. E. E. Edwards in his “Echoes of Rhymney” says *“Pig-iron, made at the Rhymney Works was, in 1807, purchased by the Tredegar Works to where it was conveyed across the hills on the backs of mules or in carts and waggon,”* (Page 19). The remains of the Bute Ironworks were cleared in the 1970s. The northern route (lined in orange) is the same as it was in 1832 over much of the distance except that, as it nears Tredegar, its heading seems to change rather abruptly at about SO 1335 0892 where it takes a curve southwards towards Cwm Rhos.

It is near this point where it would have met the putative north/south high-level road passing the later Tredegar town to its east, which I will discuss presently. If the present route taken by this track is the original one then it would have reached the head of Cwm Rhos, meeting the lower (purple) track from the southern end of Rhymney and taken a common route down to “Surrey Bridge”. But, if it had continued on its alignment across the mountain it might have descended through Pittau Bach as, perhaps, the short stretch of footpath originating at SO 1333 0893, near Mountain Pit Cottages (lined in green on Fig. 3.12), suggests. If so then its possible route can be seen on Fig. 3.11 where I have enhanced some field walls immediately south of Pittau Bach – in which case its destination could have been Sirhowy. Presumably a traveller from the west arriving at the area of the head of Cwm Rhos could have decided which route to take but the possible Pittau Bach route ceased to be an option when the “Old Scoury” started operating.

In many ways this northern track (orange) is of considerable interest because, after arriving at the upper end of Rhymney it continued west of the Rhymney River up Cwm Carno and west over Bryn Pyllog - shown in dashed orange in Fig. 3.11 (details of these routes can be found in Volume 1 “Dowlais Top to the Usk”, Chapter 2).

The important issue here is whether there is any evidence on the ground for the proposal that the Bedwellty ridgeway road, in addition to descending the hill from the present cemetery into Tredegar, as was shown on the 1760 estate map (Figs. 1.1 and 1.2) and as it still does today, also continued northwards. From the immediate vicinity of the abandoned quarry, which lies just west of the upper cemetery which was opened in January 1901 (Powell p. 189), there is a very heavily reinforced stone road running to the west of Cwm Rhos (Blue in Fig. 3.12) and this can be clearly seen in Photo. 3.11 (taken facing north at SO 13452 08210) where the surface has been disturbed by stolen cars “bottoming”. It would seem reasonable to attribute this road to the quarry although why such a road

would have needed to have been constructed when the main Tredegar to Rhymney road ran past it is difficult to see. Before the upper cemetery was opened in 1901 a footpath ran from the southern side of this quarry to meet the main road into Tredegar at approx. SO 136 082 – near the modern garage. Whether this might have been used for carrying stone from the quarry is not known. Close examination of this road, however, shows that it is joined at SO 13469 08154 by a stretch of similar construction running from the north east corner of the cemetery and another, lesser, metalled track continuing southwards alongside the western fence of the cemetery – this latter part might have been an alternative to the now-blocked original route (lined in green on Fig. 3.12). This track aligns very accurately with the Bedwellty ridgeway road to the south (To the east of the cemetery there is another abandoned quarry but this provided its own track downhill to join (and cross?) the main road to Tredegar at SO 1347 0815 (Ref. 1884-6 1:2,500 map)) and it is perhaps significant that it meets the other tracks over Rhymney Hill from Rhymney at the head of Cwm Rhos. From this point another old track is still to be found running northwards (lined in green) past the old Pen Rhos farm at SO 1330 0895. This northern track is marked on the modern map partly as a green Right of Way and partly as a black dotted footpath (i.e. customary use but not a Right of Way). Because of the extensive mineral working in the area of the north scarp of Rhymney Hill it is impossible to be certain of the route of the putative road north of this point but Fig. 3.13, which is an aerial photograph of the area, with the routes discussed lined with the same colour coding, and the 1760 track and property boundaries outlined at the top. The southwards pointing 1760 road aligns very well indeed with this putative high-level road. The possible route has been shown on Fig. 3.12 lightly dotted over a distance of approximately 600m.. From this aerial photograph and from Fig. 3.12, where the 1760 features have been overlaid, it may also be seen that the track from Pont Gwaithyrhaearn (yellow) might have continued northwards either past Bryn Bach farm or through Blaen Rhymney and possibly continued to Merthyr or Brecon. (See Volume 1 for a full discussion of this area).

In Volume 1 (Dowlais Top to the Usk) I superimposed the 1760 estate maps onto modern Ordnance Survey maps (Figs. 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 of that Volume) and onto the 1839 Bedwellty estate map (Fig. 3.7). I have also discussed in Chapter 3 of the present Volume earlier routes which might have passed over the flanks of Rhymney Hill and continuing northwards thus obviating the need for a descent into the valley, - the lesser of these passing through the area of Bryn-oer. The most western of the tracks shown on the 1760 map (Figs 1.1 and 1.6) is that which passed via the old Bryn Bach farm. This appears to align with the over-mountain route originating at Pont Gwaithyrhaearn and subsequently passing near the present Cefn Golau cemetery although it would seem that the northern

section of this track was equally useful for general use by hoof or foot by travellers up the Bedwellty Ridge. This route is shown, lined in yellow, on Fig. 3.11 (first edition 1" O/S) and 3.12 (modern 1:25,000 O/S). Such a track could have crossed the road running from Rhymney Bridge to Sirhowy at about SO 124 101 – a position confirmed by an extract of the David Davies map of 1801 (Fig. 3.14). The putative high-level road past the head of Cwm Rhos is likely to have been a substantial metalled one which descended through the “Old Scoury” to the south-pointing arm of the cross-roads at Ashvale as is shown in Fig. 3.12 and 3.13. It is suggested that the present road north through Tredegar which descends Park Hill and, today, continues through Commercial Street was likely to have been an alternative to the “high-level” road which was extinguished by the “Old Scoury”. This would seem to date to the early days of the 19th. century as Powell states (Page 33) *“1811. At this date great improvements had been accomplished; the road from Sirhowy to Tredegar had been completed and thoroughly macadamised with broken cinders; also the road from Abergavenny to Merthyr, which had been in the course of construction for several years, was by this time completed”*.

A road linking the area at the top of the later Market Street, where the Cwm Rhos to “Surrowy Bridge” road crossed this north/south road was also probably met by other roads such as the road from Manmoel via St. James. From here, prior to the building of the new Commercial Street, the route to the Ashvale crossroads was probably that suggested in Chapter 1.

Once the “high level” road ceased to be used its destruction was undoubtedly rapid as the land was enclosed and its materials re-cycled. Payne’s comments concerning a workman *“digging stone from the road”* and an abandoned ford across the Nant y Bwch might have a relevance to such a disused road. It might also be significant that in his letter of September the 14th. 1804 to Sir Richard Colte-Hoare he uses the term “Bedwellty Causeway” to describe this area. It must be remembered that the course of the Nant y Bwch was changed during the construction of the turnpike road from Merthyr (opened in 1804) but this would have resulted in a modest north/south shift rather than an east/west movement.

Some of the old tracks discussed can be seen quite clearly on Fig. 3.15, which is an aerial photograph of the area around Cwm Rhos, but it must be viewed with caution as modern off-road vehicles have made their own tracks which take close examination to distinguish. Nevertheless the blue and green routes northwards from the vicinity of the cemetery are quite clear, as is the green route north of Cwm Rhos. This is why the green indicators have not been used over the section where the blue clearly dominates and there are signs on the ground, and on the aerial

photograph (Fig. 3.15), that its route over this section was slightly to the west.

Pontlottyn to Cefn Golau.

It is worth noting before passing on that comparison of the first edition Ordnance Survey map (Fig. 3.11) with the modern one (Fig. 3.12) shows that the present road from Rhymney past Cefn Golau differs substantially from the earlier one and passed directly below Cwm Twsswg farm and below Cefn Golau farm. Careful examination of the route suggested by the earlier map shows a section of metalled road with a culvert where it crosses a stream at SO 13521 07604. Photo 3.12 shows this section of road with the culvert in the middle distance and the road heading towards the present reservoir at Cefn Golau. The construction of the reservoir and the lower cemetery clearly blocked the original route of this old road and the 1884-86 1:2,500 Ordnance Survey map shows it deviated from Cwm Twsswg farm to meet the present main road a short way to the west of the cemetery. The route shown as a green footpath on modern maps does not follow this earlier road (Fig. 3.12).

New Tredegar.

To the south-west of Tredegar lies New Tredegar in the Rhymney Valley. The earliest map I have of this area is the first edition Ordnance Survey (Fig. 3.16) which was published in 1832 (but surveyed in 1813-1814 and edited in 1829-1830). Although the scale of 1" to the mile does not show smaller details it is clear that New Tredegar did not then exist and that there was only a small hand-full of properties – the most important of which were Cefn Rhychdir, Cwmsyfiog Farm and White Rose Cottages, or Abersyfi Cottages as they were also called (see modern map of the same area Fig. 3.17). Again, the present ridgeway roads are lined in green and the roads connecting properties and those crossing from ridgeway to ridgeway are lined in yellow. The putative original ridgeway along the crest of Bedwellty Ridge is lined in red.

More detail is to be found on Fig 3.18, which is an extract from the 1839 Bedwellty Parish tithe map. This figure is not as easy to read as I would wish because the original map is of a very large scale (6 chains to 1 inch – 1 chain being 22 yards) which causes the details to appear very small and fine. To improve the clarity of this figure I have used the same colour coding, with the tramway lined in orange, as all the other maps previously shown and have named more important features in larger script. Before the tramroad (lined in orange in Fig. 3.19), originally to Pwll y llaca

(Abertwsswg), was built in 1825 there is no evidence of any road or track down the Rhymney Valley and although the 1832 O/S does not show it this is possibly due to its earlier survey data - this does not excuse the omission of such an important feature from the published 1832 edition (Fig. 3.16). However, this being so we can again see the importance of the ridgeway roads as the main communication arteries of the eastern valleys. In the case of the New Tredegar area we see a road (shown on both the first edition O/S map - Fig 3.16 and on the Bedwellty tithe map of 1839 - Fig. 3.18) descending from the Bedwellty road at the Mountain Lodge (SO 1422 0560) to Cefn Rhychdir (SO 1450 0376) and continuing downhill, following the later Fothergills Road, to Abersyfi Cottages (SO 1462 0293). From this point it continues in two directions – the first uphill to the southeast to rejoin the ridgeway road at SO 1605 0816 – the second descends along the line of the present Dyffryn Terrace and James Street to meet the Rhymney River some short distance downstream of the present main road bridge.

Neither the 1832 O/S map (Fig. 3.16) nor the 1839 tithe map (Fig. 3.18) give any indication of a road coincident on the western, Tirphil, side of the river although this is not unexpected on the tithe map. There are strong indications on the O/S map (Fig. 3.16) of a descending track from near Cefn Rhychdir (and such a track still exists today on at least a similar alignment) which meets the river at about SO 1385 0375 near the playing field although no such route is shown on the 1839 tithe map. It is provocative that there is a modern girder bridge across the river at this spot which is also easily fordable except when the river is running high.

Along the western side of the river no track as such is shown on the 1832 O/S map but elongated narrow fields are shown nearly as far north as Troed-rhiw'r-fuwch and, nearer Pontlloftyn, these take the form of clear roads ascending westwards towards the Cefn Brithdir road (today's Rhymney Valley Ridgeway Footpath). It might be significant that there is still a track to be seen on the modern 1:25,000 O/S map (Fig. 3.17) running northwards alongside the west bank of the river from the river crossing at SO 1385 0375 climbing to cross the railway by a bridge (now removed) across the railway at SO 1320 0460 and meeting the present main road near Troedyfuch Farm (SO 1305 0455). Leaving the main road at SO 1227 0515 today a footpath follows the line just described, uphill to the west of Pontlloftyn to join the junction, with one road bearing southwards and the other northwards to meet the Roman road from Gelligaer to Brecon, at SO 1080 0600. After meeting this road it could have turned northwards towards Rhymney Bridge or continued climbing to join the Gelligaer to Dowlais Top section of the Roman Road. The first edition O/S map (Fig. 3.16) shows the track downhill from the Cefn Rhychdir crossing the river Rhymney at SO 1385 0375 and curling first

west then south to climb the hill to join the Capel Brithdir road (also lined in green). The lower section of this old road, below the present railway and main road, is no longer to be found but the section uphill of the main road, which it crosses near the “Rising Sun”, continues up the mountain and is still in use.

Some idea of the antiquity of this road can be gathered from the presence near Capel Brithdir (at SO 1373 0292) of the Romano-British “Tegurnicas Stone”. The original is in the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff whilst its site is marked with a concrete pillar. From here there are several routes leading either south via Pont Cradoc to Gelligaer or to Pont Aberbargoed or north via Dowlais Top to Brecon. It should be noted that the present road to Capel Brithdir (now, sadly, destroyed by vandals) as it ascends from the Rhymney to Bargoed main road at SO 137 035 differs somewhat in its route from the earlier one shown on the 1832 O/S map or the later 1885 1:2,500 edition, both of which kept slightly to its east in the vicinity of Capel Brithdir. This deviation is most probably associated with the building of the extremely large coal waste tip and improvement to cater for heavier wagons

Neither the 1832 O/S nor the 1839 tithe maps show any direct road from Tredegar to Abertwsswg and Pontlottyn down the Twsswg valley (shown in purple on Fig. 3.17). Indeed, at this time Abertwssyg comprised one farm and was completely undeveloped, the first road from Tredegar to New Tredegar – shown on the 1884-86 1:2,500 map (Fig. 3.19) ran simply from New Tredegar past the much later Powell’s Dyffryn Colliery, shown on the 1885 1:2,500 map (Fig. 3.19 lined in purple) continued up the Twsswg valley to meet the Bedwellty ridgeway road at SO 1415 0700. The New Tredegar section of the road was damaged near the colliery by a landslide, first partially on the 18th. of March 1901 but later, in April 1930 by a much larger slip which destroyed the colliery, the road and the railway. Since then the direct link from Tredegar to Abertwsswg remains and has become quite well used by modern traffic.

It would appear that there was little disturbance of this part of the Rhymney Valley until the opening of the tramway in 1825 but development soon started with a tramway spur shown on the 1839 Bedwellty estate map (Fig 3.18) crossing the river and heading to Tirphil (the Tirphil Colliery?), the Hope Pit at Cwmsyfiog established in 1832, the New Tredegar Colliery in 1853 followed and afterwards development was rapid. This development has been so intensive that there is little hope of making new discoveries on the ground and it would seem that the new road, following the early tramway for much of its path, completes an era spanning about 200 years.

Chapter 4.

North of Tredegar .

In this chapter most of the roads and tracks to the area north of Tredegar will be discussed. There are many, some important and others less so, but I have covered the ground assiduously and I do not think that I have missed any except, possibly, the most minor. A major difficulty in writing this chapter has been the fact that probably the most important old road north of Tredegar, that from Milgatw to Blaen Onnau and beyond, has already been covered fully in Volume 1, "Dowlais Top to the Usk", and so, in this chapter, I cover it in no more detail than is necessary to put it into context.

In the region of Ashvale and Sirhowy the early road system (1760) is very clear with major crossroads near the present Ashvale House and centred on Dukestown and Sirhowy. These can be seen in Figs. 1.1, 1.9, 1.10 and others of the present Volume, and in much more detail in Figs. 3.1 and 3.3 of Volume 1, and this shows that there are several tracks or roads heading northwards from the area of Tredegar.

Thus north of Tredegar in the area covered by the 1760 maps we have:

1) The most westerly of the tracks is that which might have followed the track from Pont Gwaithyrhaearn, and which probably served as a general over-mountain route, to continue northwards, although a traveller could just as easily have headed for the western route via the Llechryd. The northern edge of the Rhymney hill overlooking the Bryn-oe'r mineral exposures are the last point at which the track can be traced with any degree of confidence. Photo. 3.10 was taken from there (SO 124 092) looking towards the north. From the area of the Llechryd a traveller could have passed to the west via the old ford at SO 102 104 (see Volume 1, Chapter 2), passed northwards over Trefil Ddu eventually to the head of the Cwannon valley or over Cefn yr Ystrad to meet the Merthyr to Brecon road, as will be discussed in this chapter.

2) In Fig. 1.8 of this Volume, and in greater detail in Fig. 3.3 of Volume 1, a track is shown heading directly northwards from the Ashvale crossroads towards Milgatw but its subsequent course is not clear. I have shown in Volume 1 (in Chapter 9) that a road suitable for wheeled vehicles ran from Milgatw to Blaen Onnau and beyond but there is no clear indication on the

1760 map of a direct route to Trefil. This is discussed in some detail in Volume 1.

3) Figs. 1.8 and 4.13 of the present Volume (and shown more clearly in Figs. 3.3 and 3.4 of the Volume 1) show a road marked on the original 1760 map as "Road to Brecon". This is shown as reaching Milgatw but from here it is less certain. I have established, however, that there was a good road from Milgatw to Blaen Onneu and Llangynidr - was this the road to Brecon? But another road is also shown heading northwards towards Trefil. While it is clear that the present road to Trefil closely follows that of the Brinore Tramroad there are indications that there were others.

a) A shorter and more direct "Road to Brecon" via Trefil rather than via Llangynidr.

b) The evidence in Figs. 1.10 and 3.12 of a route crossing the Nant y Bwch brook and the "Plymouth Arms" (now closed) at approx. SO 124 101.

c) It can be seen from Figs. 4.1 and 4.3 (both using the first edition Ordnance Survey) that just north of Trefil village the road up the Nant Trefil, running mainly to the west of the stream, was not based on the tramroad but ran parallel to it and largely to the west of the Nant Trefil before descending into the Dyffryn Cwannon. The continuation of this road over Blaen Dyffryn Cwannon and subsequently joining the Dolygaer to Talybont Roman road is discussed later.

The antiquity of the road running north via Trefil cannot be ascertained with certainty at present, one early route which passed over Mynydd Llangynidr to the Cwannon valley via Tyle and Waun Ddu is discussed in Volume 1 Chapter 9 and is shown in Fig. 9.8 of that Volume. This was unlikely to have been more than a packhorse route although some stretches were clearly made for carts. It is indicated as "J" in Fig. 4.1 and others.

We do know, however, that there was a road past Trefil, independent of the tramway, as shown on the first edition of the Ordnance Survey. The South Breconshire area of the survey, which is most relevant for this chapter, was surveyed in 1813 although this date is probably that of the completed map the field survey must have been about earlier at about 1811-1812 (Ref. Margary, page xi). The Brinore Tramway was surveyed and constructed as far as the limestone scarp by 1795 so it was a very new construction at the time of the Ordnance Survey and it would seem reasonable to assume that the road was in existence before the tramway

as it was unlikely to have been built afterwards. On this basis it can also be reasonably be called an old road north of Tredegar until a better resolution of its antiquity might be found. The route of the BRINORE TRAMROAD, taken from the original indentures is shown in Fig. 4.5.

The name “BRINORE” seems to be causing some confusion. I can do no better than to quote Rattenbury where, in “Tramways of the Brecknock and Abergavenny Canal” (page 101), he says *“The next meeting was held on 14 March (1814 – my comment) when it was announced that £13,000 had been subscribed, and that a further £1,000 had been promised should it be required, The meeting proceeded with the normal business of an inaugural meeting, appointing Pierce, Williams & Co. of Merthyr Tydfil, bankers, to act as treasurers, selecting committees, and laying down procedures for meetings. It was decided that the title of the company should be “THE BRINORE TRAM ROAD”, which, while it may offend lovers of Welsh orthography, was nonetheless the correct style of the company.*

A route north of Sirhowy heading for Milgatw and onwards to meet the present Trefil road near the cattle grid, at SO 123 123, can still be traced. Today this crosses the bridge over the Heads of the Valleys road at SO 137 102, and continues north past the cemetery on the left hand and, from here, the road continues to SO134 114 where it divides. Straight on the road leads over the moors to Blaen Onnau (discussed in detail in Volume 1 of Tracks) but to the west it turns downhill. This track has been lined in green on Fig. 4.6, which is derived from the 1839 Bedwellty tithe map, and Fig. 4.7 from the first edition Ordnance Survey. It should be noted that the field boundaries shown on Fig. 4.6 (1839 Bedwellty Tithe map) are still the same on the modern map (Fig. 1.8). Also, perhaps an indication of the rapidly changing requirements and relevance of the time, the Milgatw to Blaen Onneu road shown on Fig. 4.7 (first edition O/S) is not shown on the Tithe map because the primary function of the tithe maps were to track revenue rather than for more general geographical purposes.

Although there appears to be nothing of interest on the maps, nor is any more shown on the modern 1:25,000 map, and even the 1:2,500 1920 O/S only shows the walls which enclose the track on each side but not the track itself, there is, in fact, on the ground, a very well founded old cart track (Photo. 4.1) at SO 133 114 dropping down to meet the ford (now a simple bridge) across the Sirhowy at SO 132 115 by Garn Ddu. This track, which descends through Blaen-y-cwm towards Garn-ddu, while not shown as of any significance on the modern 1:25,000 map except in faint outline and not even as a Right of Way but the route is clear on the tithe map and the road is actually defined on the 1832 Ordnance Survey map.

Once the river is crossed the road continues to meet the Trefil road at the “Mountain Air” but the old maps show a more northwards connection, still present in a truncated form, which was interrupted by the construction of the Shon Sheffry reservoir. This met the Trefil road at SO 126 114. Fig. 3.1 of Volume 1 is of an overlay of the 1760 estate map on a modern 1:25,000 O/S map and gives a graphic overview of this area.

There is also good evidence for a continuation of the Manmoel ridgeway road northwards of the Sirhowy to Beaufort road, just to the west of the Aneurin Bevan memorial stones. This is shown in Fig. 1.8 where an overlay of the 1760 estate map on to a modern 1:25,000 O/S shows a clear road from Bryn Serth heading towards Milgatw. Today a footpath is shown on the map but it was clearly once a metalled track which contoured around the hillside. The putative route is discussed in detail later in this Chapter.

Another possible route from Garn Ddu, which can also be seen on Fig. 3.3 of Volume 1, is to turn north before crossing the river and take the path alongside the eastern bank of the reservoir; this is a modern route but the double wall features shown on the 1832 map suggests that there was at least an access route present, and this continues north skirting the stone wall which predates the reservoir. At the northern corner of the wall at SO 127 121 a well-trodden track descends to cross the Nant Trefil at SO 123 123 where today there is a bridge of wooden railway sleepers but where there are signs that there might once have been a fording place (Photo. 4.2). This point, which has been identified on Fig. 4.6, taken from the 1839 tithe map, is approximately a hundred yards or so from the cattle grid at SO 121 121 and the stone walls are clearly made to allow passage. Such a connection can be seen clearly in Fig. 4.7 which is an enlargement of the same area of the 1832 Ordnance Survey 1” map. Note that the field boundaries in this area were unchanged between 1832 and 1964 (Fig. 4.9) and, with minor modifications, are still the same today. This is an intriguing route where the very good road at SO 133 114, and the now truncated access to the Trefil road at SO 126 114, suggests a route capable of allowing wagons to join the Trefil road while the other possible route up the eastern bank of the river suggests that it was only suitable for flocks and herds. The branch which emerges in the vicinity of the present cattle grid at SO 121 121 might well have continued onto the complex of routes over mountains to the west of Trefil which will be discussed presently.

North of Trefil.

The most important modern road running north from Tredegar is the one

to Trefil village and beyond. At the head of the Dyffryn Cwannon at SO 111 152 one branch descends via Cwm Pyrgad to the top end the Cwannon valley, near Pergad farm, and from here down the valley to Llangynidr. This road has been in a bad state due to wash-out but was useable by ordinary motor car up to the late 1950s. I am informed by Dr. Evans that it has recently been repaired and is again useable – presumably with a suitable vehicle. What is less well known is that a track, which appears to be a continuation of the track descending into Cwm Pergad from the south and crossing it at a ford at SO 0995 1607, ascends the north side of the valley through Glascwm Isaf.

This track up the northern side of the valley is of similar width and of similar quality of construction to that descending into the Dyffryn Cwannon from the south. At SO 099 169 the present route cuts diagonally upwards across a field to reach the tramway and the, turning north up a short lane, emerges onto the Dolygaer to Talybont road at SO 0890 1725 near what is believed to be the ruins of the “Rock Inn” (see Volume 4, “Assorted Archaeology” Chapter 5. for details). Most of this uphill track is marked as a bridle-way on the modern 1:25,000 Ordnance Survey map except for the few yards near the Llangynidr road which is shown as a footpath: this is at present causing some degree of conflict with users. This route is shown, lined in purple, in Fig 4.1, which is taken from a first edition Ordnance Survey map, and Fig. 4.2 from a modern 1:25,000 version.

Just before reaching the tramway it is met by another ascending track from Ty Canol (lined in yellow in Figs. 4.1 and 4.2) which crosses both the road uphill from Pyrgad and the Dolygaer to Talybont road to meet the descending track from Pen Rhiw-calch to Abercanafon – also lined in yellow on Fig. 4.2.. This track has, at present at least, more of the appearance of a track for animals. The relationship of the various tracks crossing Pen Rhiw-calc is discussed in some detail in Volume 4 of “Tracks” – “Roads centred on Pen Rhiw-calc. The existence of a short and steep section of track, now more of a watercourse, ascending the hill directly to meet the Pontsticill to Talbont road at SO 098 169 might be relevant to understanding an earlier version of this road.

Although only shown today as a bridle-way and ruinous in places, a situation which might well be exacerbated by the recent felling of the forest in this area, the road via Glascwm Isaf once clearly served a function as a cart road, although, as is clear from Fig. 4.1, it was not considered to be of importance by the first Ordnance Survey team and is thus likely to have been out of use before 1817 or so. What function this road served is not easy to see today but its construction clearly indicates that it was sufficiently important as to warrant the effort that was expended on it (Photos. 4.3 and 4.4). In Volume 4 of “Tracks”, the earlier version of

which is available on the website, is discussed the importance of the Pen Rhiw-calch area as a cross-roads between east and west and north and south: perhaps the function of this road is related to the several others which cross here e.g. to Brecon and Talybont.

Also shown on modern Ordnance Survey maps (fig. 4.2, 4.4 and 4.9) is a footpath leaving the present road to the quarries at SO 112 150 and passing west below Clo Cadno and continuing to Llangynidr. This path, which is likely only to have been suitable for foot or for pack animals, has been lined in green on Fig. 4.2 where it enters enclosed land at Tyle and hence to Llangynidr either directly via Court Farm or indirectly via Llwyn-deri. This track is not shown on the first edition Ordnance Survey map (Fig. 4.1) so it was probably considered to be of little importance.

There can be little dispute that a road ran north from Trefil village to descend Cwm Pergad, it is clearly shown on the 1832 Ordnance Survey map (Fig 4.1), where it is lined with orange (also in Figs. 4.2 and 4.3), running to the west of the Nant Trefil, which would have meant it passed close the “Duke’s Table”. It has been suggested that the road did not exist before the “Brinore Tramroad” was constructed but this westerly route of the road, additional to and separate from, the tramway, together with the road down Cwm Pergad would make this situation unlikely. Returning to the head of Cwm Pergad the road today heads north into the Ystrad Quarries and passing through a headland at SO 0985 1485 to continue until it reaches the old road from Pontsticill to Talybont (at SO 086 148) and then turns west into the quarry complex.

More contentious is the existence of a route north and west of the head of the Cwannon to meet the Pontsticill to Talybont road, some believing that such a track could not have existed before the headland was cut through by the quarrying activities. However, despite the changes caused by the quarrying operations, there are traces of an old track passing over this headland as can be seen in Photos. 4.5 and 4.6 and this must have predated the quarry as it is clearly cut away by quarrying in places. Even within the quarry area a track continues northwards the alignment of which makes it almost certain to have been a continuation of the original one (Photo. 4.7). I suspect that an existing track could have been very useful in the early stages of development of the quarry complex i.e. until the cutting through the headland made it redundant and allowed better access to the lower levels of the limestone. It is worth mentioning here that there are other tracks which were supposed to have passed over this area, which will be discussed presently, and that the distance between the northern end of the track (lined in red on Figs. 4.1 and 4.2 and as “D” on Figs. 4.3 and 4.4) at approx. SO 093 148 and its meeting the track from Pontsticill at SO 086 148 (Photo. 4.8) is a little more than 400 metres.

Before considering some of the other tracks over the Trefil Ddu from the south a few facts relating to the Brinore Tramway should be made. It was completed to Talybont on Usk in 1813 and this might indicate that the Ordnance Survey had been completed in this area by the time the map used for Figs. 4.1 and 4.3 was surveyed. The tramway ran from a canal wharf at Talybont-on-Usk to Trefil Quarries before continuing to the The Union Iron Works at Rhymney via Trevil quarries; the plan of the route from the canal wharf to Trefil, taken from the original indenture of 1805, can be seen in Fig.4.5, where the distances from Talybont in miles and the grid reference point for these positions have been added. It is relevant to note that if the surveying error made by the Ordnance Survey team (reported in "Archaeology in Wales" 1977, Vol. 37. and in "Assorted Archaeology" on the web-site) is taken into account it moves the Trevil end-post south by nearly 184 m. which takes it to a flattened conical mound which had long been suspected by Mr. P. Morgan-Jones to have been a surveying point. At about the same time quarrying had started at Blaen Dyffryn Cwannon with the Duke of Beaufort recorded as having a quarry here in 1815 and Benjamin Hall in 1813 although the source material is not very clear and I think it refers to "The Duke of Beaufort" quarries run by Hall. Either way we are talking about a date at least as early as the tramway itself but I suspect that the earliest quarrying was that on the south and east side of the bluff which preceded the driving of the cutting (Photo. 4.9). After this the quarry working seem to have moved progressively northwards. The cutting through the bluff can be seen in Photo. 4.10 (centre) and the track rising over the bluff can also be seen - as can some others above the quarry workings.

On the tramway, at SO 0950 1495, there is at present a stile on the valley side but, over the stile there is a cart road. It is rather steep in places but quite wide and it connects to Cefn Crug and to the ruins of Dan y Darren farm and on down the valley (lined in purple on Figs. 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4). From Dan y Darren there is another track flanking the hillside and connecting to Glascwm Isaf. This would suggest that there was once a road continuing uphill from the present stile through the later quarry which was, presumably, cut by the tramway. Returning to the present quarry road, Photo. 4.11 is taken from the level area just to the north of the cut through the bluff looking down towards the head of the Cwannon and there are two features, which are likely to be connected, which probably allowed loading of stone onto wagons on the tramway below. The first feature seems to comprise a wide bridging platform over the stream and the second is a cut leading to a platform immediately above and adjacent to the tramway. The stile marking the track down to Cefn Crug is nearly opposite this point and it is probable that the tramway now doubled as a suitable access for the track. This, together with the disturbance cause by

the tramroad and the quarrying activities, probably caused the previous section uphill of the present stile to fall into disuse.

Looking uphill to the west from the same point on the present quarry road, almost opposite the old road down the valley to Cefn Crug and Dan Y Darren, there is a track, rising through a natural easing of the steep scarp, which might have once joined the Cefn Crug track to the route over the top of the quarry, as is shown on the first edition Ordnance Survey map (Figs. 4.1 and 4.3). Fig. 4.2 is of a matching area of a modern 1:25,000 map which is lined in the same colours and which, being originally of a larger scale, shows the route of the track being discussed in greater detail. This section of track is actually shown on the first edition O/S as a descending spur of the track lined in red on Fig. 4.1. Today this uphill road turns abruptly north to rise to the top of the quarry near a large derelict structure but, as can be seen in Photo. 4.12, it also continues straight uphill to the south/west.

Other Tracks over Trefil Ddu.

In describing some of the other possible roads or tracks north over the mountains in this area I will use the position of the present cattle grid, adjacent to where the newly merged Sirhowy river and the Nant y lechau pass under the road to Trefil at SO 121 121 as a reference point. Apart from this being a point which can be defined with precision on all maps of the area, it appears to be a focal point where several tracks, from north and south and east and west, meet.

The first track to need consideration is one shown on the 1832 Ordnance Survey 1" map which is shown to run from immediately to the west of the cattle grid, over Trefil ddu, and to descend into the area of the Hendre quarries. This track has been lined in red in Fig. 4.1 (First edition O/S) and 4.2 (modern 1:25,000 O/S). The same colour scheme is used in Fig. 4.3 (First edition O/S) and in Fig. 4.4 (modern 1" O/S) both of which cover a larger area of mountain and, on these, the track has been labelled "D". At the northern end the track splits into two at about SO 096 147, one branch descending eastwards into the Dyffryn Cwannon towards Cefn Crug and Dan y Darren (SO 093 153), as previously described. So, it seems to be pretty clear that the "red" route shown on the first edition O/S map can be verified with reasonable confidence in the vicinity of the quarry and the northwards spur, although apparently truncated on the map, is so close (approx, 400m) to the Pontsticill to Talybont road that such a connection must have existed. Below the tramway this track, in turn, splits into two with one branch leading to Ysgubor-isaf, Cefn-crug and Pyrgad and the other via the now ruinous Dan-y-darren farm joins the track through Glagwm-isaf, whence it could descend either to the main

road up the Dyffryn Cwannon or climb to Pen Rhiw-calch. The other branch heads northwards over Cwar yr Hendre subsequently to meet the Pontsticill to Talybont road as has been described.

While the descending spur of the old track can be ascertained with reasonable confidence the other spur continuing through the present quarry workings, to the limit shown on the 1832 map, is more difficult but there is still a track to be found which corresponds with the branch shown on the 1832 map and possibly the quarry owners considered it to be useful enough to continue using it, possibly with some modifications. Uphill and to the west, in the direction of the southward over-mountain section of the track, lined in red in Fig. 4.1 (first edition O/S) or as "E" on Figs. 4.3 (first edition O/S) and 4.4 (modern 1:25,000 O/S) both of which latter cover a wider area of the mountain, the terrain is very broken. The problem of matching the track shown on the 1832 map, which appears to stop at about SO 093 147, may be solved by a track on the ground at this point where it is truncated by quarry working. This is shown in Photo. 4.13, the photograph being taken uphill to the south/west. Apart from this concrete evidence of the existence of the track, when one considers that it was shown to stop when only some few hundred metres short of the old track from Pontsticill to Pen Bwlch Glasgwm, and is most unlikely to have been built just to be so truncated, I think it is reasonable to assume a mapping error or, perhaps, incomplete mapping. Photo. 4.8, taken at SO 086 148 facing west, shows two old roads descending from the west, the right hand one in the photograph being the old road from Pontsticill and the left hand road rising and curving to the south in precisely the right direction to meet the northerly branch old road (red lined in Fig. 4.1 and labelled as "E" in Figs. 4.3 and 4.4) shown on the map - the intervening section of track, some 400m., passes through the quarried out area.

The junction shown in Photo. 4.8 has recently become obscured by earthworks but about 50m. north of this point the track is very clear where it skirts the western end of the ancient lake site of Gwaun Nant Ddu. This track, which is well metalled and graded, is discussed in detail with track profiles and photographs, in Tracks, Volume 2 and in a separate Volume - "Gwaun Nant Ddu, "A study of an ancient lake site", both of which can be found on my web-site.

Having now made out a case for a direct track from the south around the head of the Dyffryn Cwannon continuing to Pen Rhiw-calch it leaves the difficulty of explaining why anyone who was not visiting the farms or travelling down the Cwannon valley to Llangynidr would contemplate descending into the valley only to climb up again unless the two roads descending into the Dyffryn Cwannon were more in the nature of access

roads to that end of the valley. This almost certainly applies to the one down Cwm Pyrgad, indeed it was still used for this purpose until recent times when it fell into disrepair, and there may well be a similar explanation for the Glagwm-isaf route. Perhaps they were simply better roads with better maintenance, as they served local needs as well as that of through traffic, and they were certainly wide and well-metalled and still are in places today. They were also definitely cart roads with good pitching and substantial surface dressing while the quality of the track over the top is less certain. The valley route, although steeper, is also considerably shorter and less exposed to inclement weather and would have provided access both to the north and to the south from the top of the Dyffryn Cwannon for traffic to and from Llangynidr. There may well have been some other inducement for travellers, such as lodgings and refreshments, to be found in the vicinity of Pyrgad.

But, the *big problem* with the old track shown on the 1832 map (lined in red on Figs. 4.1 and 4.3 and shown on the corresponding modern maps, 4.2 and 4.4) is that, despite the closest examination of the route using transparency overlays of the old map on modern ones and a satellite ground-position indicator as guidance, no trace of a track can be found between the vicinity of the cattle-grid on the Trefil road at SO 121 121 and the point above Cwar y Hendre, at SO 093 147 (shown in Photo. 4.13) where the track is shown descending over the mountain from the south. There are tantalising arrangements of stones which appear to be the result of human intervention and an occasional appearance of short stretches of ground sufficiently level to be a possible track but nothing which can be taken as confirmation of that shown on the map. In addition the ground is very rough indeed with considerable areas of broken stone and of very uneven surface.

However, walking the ground a track is to be found some distance to the west. This was plotted at intervals using a GPS and has been drawn, lined in blue, on Figs. 4.3 and 4.4. and labelled "K" which is joined by another from the direction of Rhymney bridge (marked as "E") at about SO 102 132. This track then continues to the north and drops towards the Dyffryn Cwannon at a point which is approximately coincident with the northern end of the track shown on the 1832 map. This leaves us with the choice of assuming that the 1832 Ordnance Survey route was wrong or that it was correct and has since vanished without trace but that they failed to include the more westerly route, which is quite clearly present, in its place. The whole issue is complicated by the fact that there are many old tracks which led to suitable areas for quarrying and/or burning limestone and certainly the western route ("E") passes through just such an area. As I have previously mentioned, I am not entirely convinced of the accuracy of the first edition Ordnance Survey map when it comes to minor tracks

and paths. They had a big task to cover the entire country in a short time and I suspect that, while the ends of a track over the mountains were well defined, the actual line of the track, particularly one which by this date was considered to be of little importance, was simply sketched in. I have found this to be the case on more than one occasion. That mistakes did occur was evidenced by the previously mentioned surveying error south of the "Trig" point near Carn y Bugail and Carn Melin. From this survey point sighting could to be made in all directions except to the south. This necessitated the use of a bronze stud as a secondary point to the south near Carn y Bugail – but – this was forgotten when they engraved the plates. The result was an error of approximately 164 M. (Martin). This error was corrected in later editions but it indicates their fallibility. Although some stone reinforcement seems to have been used in places on both the "E" and the "K" sections of this track there is no convincing evidence of either having been a cart road. Most probably they were well-established improved routes for pack animals. A short section of metalled track was found here some years ago at SO 100 135 but this has since collapsed into the wet area to its west and is no longer visible.

Other Tracks to the west of Trefil.

Over the entire area of mountain bounded by Pontsticill to the west to Trefil to the east there are many other old tracks to be found. These other tracks have been found by a very close examination of the area on foot and using a GPS to plot the positions of the traces of track-way found. It should be noted that the accuracy of the instrument used at this time was limited to a circle of roughly 50m. but by taking frequent readings a reasonable plot of the route can be obtained. The instrument I have used for the last few years has an accuracy of +/- 2 Metres under good conditions and some of the early readings have been rechecked and found to approximate closely. The main difficulty is that although the remains of the old tracks are unmistakable in some places, such as where track "K" crosses the Nant y lechau (Photo. 4.14) and particularly on the rising ground at approximately SO 118 121 (Photo. 4.15), there are very few traces to be found for extended stretches although occasionally erosion of the peat will show the metalling - an example of this may be found at SO 113 121 some hundred yards or so down the track towards the cattle grid from the rifle-range warning marker post at SO 1135 122 (P1 on Fig. 4.4). The presence of this post which warned of the range at around SO 120 113 might well be taken as confirmation that this was once a frequently travelled route (as might also the one on track "E" (marked P2) at SO 1015 122), Here the track surface was exposed by erosion of the peat and lay about a foot beneath the surrounding ground surface but whether this was due to sinking of the track bed or to slumping of the

underlying peat downhill from above is uncertain. The other places where metalling can be found is where the track crosses streams but whether this is due to water action exposing the track or whether the track was only metalled in soft places can only be determined by excavation. Track "K" continues north and west rising to approx. SO 101 132 where it is joined by track "E", which will be discussed presently. Significantly, track "E" has been traced south to a point only 300 yds. north of where the old parish road from the west, after crossing the ford, met the open mountain at SO 109 109 (see Volume 1. Chapter 2.) and it continues southwards where the track has been traced as far as the boundary fence of the industrial estate (Photo. 4.16. SO 113 104).

At the northern end of the mountain the combined tracks ("K" and "E") arrive at the same point (SO 095 145) shown on the 1832 map. From here the track splits (Photo. 4.13) with one branch descending into the Crawnnon and the other continuing northwards to meet the Dolygaer to Talybont road (Photo. 4.8) discussed earlier in this chapter.

More recent work has shown that yet another section of track is likely, that shown as "H" in Fig. 4.3 and 4.4. This section leaves "K" just to the south-east of the range warning post at SO 1135 122 and turns west crossing on firm rocky ground to the north of the extensive marshes at the head of the Sirhowy river, and then rises to meet track "E" at SO 104 123, less than 300 yds. north of another range warning post (P2) at approximately SO 1015 122. On this route mention must be made of an artifact in the shape of piece of steel some 4ft. long by 8" wide and perhaps quarter of an inch thick with a rolled section partly buried in the ground which might throw some light on the provenance of the track (Photo. 4.17). It was much distorted and how it got here is unknown but it may have been dropped from a pack-horse – it is most unlikely to have been a cart track. This link track is interesting because it is the first point one gets to when travelling up the valley where one can cross, on firm ground, to the high ridge of Cefn Pyllau-duon to the west. One can only speculate as to its purpose but it might have been intended to access track "E" and then to have crossed over to track "I" which eventually met the Gelligaer to Brecon Roman road.

In addition to the tracks originating directly from the top of Tredegar there are many others which need further consideration. One which has already been mentioned in Chapter 3 is that which seems to have been the one most probably used by T.H. Payne in 1804 (Chapter 3 and Volume 1. Chapter 3.) which I now believe to have passed Bryn Oer farm and continued northwards a little to the west of the "Plymouth Arms" at SO 124 104. I have no knowledge at present as to whether this now closed public house has any connection with this north/south route or

whether there was another in the vicinity - as was the case with the original siting of "The Prince of Wales" public house in Princetown before the construction of the turnpike road (discussed in Volume 1. Chapter 3). The likelihood that this was the route has been increased by other findings between the Nant y bwch and the early Sirhowy discussed in Chapter 3. To most clearly describe these it is best to start at the cattle grid on the Trefil road (at SO 121 121).

To the west of the cattle grid is the stream which is the start of the Sirhowy River. Standing on the western side of the road by the cattle grid and looking west the river Sirhowy (Note: that the 1832 map (Fig. 4.3) calls what is now known as the Sirhowy the Nant Llechau and the Nant Llechau is not named.), here no more than a stream, passes through a culvert under the road which until 1998 was an earlier undated one of arched stone but which has sadly been recently replaced by a modern concrete tube. From here two metalled tracks can be seen, one ascending on the northern bank of the stream ("K" in Figs 4.3 and 4.4), as just discussed, and the other ("P") descends to cross the stream and rise up its southern bank and can be followed easily as far as the vicinity of the gate into the field to the south. At this point, before continuing further in this direction, it was observed that the track, which had been dressed with a variety of materials including modern tarmac scalplings, led north from this gate to cross the river, a short distance upstream, by means of a rough, stony fording place at SO 118 120. Some 30 yds. downstream of this spot, at SO 118 119, were two more crossings one comprising a somewhat worn and weathered bridge of railway sleepers (Photo. 4.18) on steel or iron tramplates of an unusual section (Fig. 4.8) and, immediately downstream of it, another ford comprising large concrete slabs resembling heavy lintels laid in the bed of the river parallel with the flow. The southern approach to these structures had the edges of the track revetted with large stones (Photo. 4.19) and the track itself is heavily pitched. From this it would seem that this stream crossing has been used for many years and is still in use, presumably as a route onto the mountain for farm vehicles, and it is perhaps significant, particularly in the present context, that it aligns precisely with the western route ("K") over the mountain described in Chapter 4.

But what of the route south of this stream crossing towards "The Plymouth Arms"? Here there are two significant finds - the first being that the present fence, lined in red on Fig. 4.10 taken from a 1971 6" to the mile Ordnance Survey map, is not there on Fig. 4.9 from a 1971 map of the same scale. The earlier fence line formed a smooth curve, lined in yellow, which would correspond very nicely with the direction the southerly continuation of track "K", identified as "P" on Fig. 4.4, and for the connection, via "P" to Nant y bwch from the cattle grid (SO 121 121). It is

interesting that, as has been remarked, the fence-line in Fig. 4.9 is unchanged from that shown on an estate map of the 1820s. The validity of the suggested route can only be settled with certainty if a track can be shown connecting with the "Plymouth Arms" and, happily, one can be found, on the right alignment, running around the flank of the mountain, where it crosses a small stream at SO 123 115, to the east of the rifle-range, some metalling is exposed (Photo. 4.20 – printed larger to make the range warning post P3 (SO 112 113) visible). This track, from its junction with route "K" to the north to the fence line at Nant y Bwch to the south is shown as route "P" on Figs. 4.3 and 4.4.

As the track north from Tredegar reaches the infant River Sirhowy at this bridge/ford area (SO 118 119) it seems there were two possible routes north, the one over the mountain shown as track "K" in Figs. 4.3 and 4.4 or to descend a very short distance to meet the main Trefil road by the present cattle grid which is likely to have been of a similar quality to that descending Cwm Pergad, that is, a wagon road. At present I am at a loss to explain why a mountain track should have held any attraction when a good wagon road existed unless

a) non-wheeled traffic preferred a mountain route which was kinder on unshod animals and

b) many of the over-mountain routes were very direct. It is known that drovers preferred a route where they did not have to shoe the cattle, where they could graze as they travelled and, in some cases, where tolls could be avoided and these factors apply to any movements of livestock.

Those on foot or on horseback would always seek a direct route if possible.

The old Parish Road and other tracks north of the old ford.

One of the most important old roads to the north of Tredegar must be the old parish road which crossed the Rhymney river from the west by means of an old stone paved ford at SO 102 105 and emerged onto the mountain at SO 109 107. Although the most important part, which turned southwards from here to descend into Princetown as "The Old Parish Road" (Cart Road No. 6) from Dowlais Top (See Volume 1) there are other old tracks which run northwards and these are shown as "E" on Figs. 4.3 and 4.4. It is from this point (SO 109 107), as it has been shown in Volume 1. Chapter 2. that the old parish road turned south towards Princetown and Tafarnaubach (Photo. 4.16), with a possible continuation south over Rhymney Hill. From here the track, shown as "E" runs north,

with metalling exposed at SO 109 114 (Photo. 4.21) and SO 106 114 (Photo. 4.22) to SO 103 120 where it divides with one branch ("I") running north-west. This track traverses very rough ground with many sinkholes and surface rocks and I do not think that a track here would be likely to have carried more than foot or hoof traffic. It might be of significance that this track passed not too far from the lime-burning site of Odyn Fach (SO 088 124) and is still marked as a path over some of its route on the modern 1:25,000 Ordnance survey map but can only be seen again with any certainty on Twynau Gwinion at SO 082 128. The track is reasonably clear from here north/westwards until it starts to descend from Cefn y Ystrad when it loses definition. No continuation beyond the Ogham stone (SO 0733 1320) is shown on the early map but the modern 1:25,000 Ordnance Survey map shows a bridle way continuing to Dolygaer (track "I" on Figs. 4.3 and 4.4). This bridle-way is indicated by a marker post some 100yds. or so to the west of the Ogham stone but, on walking the ground and studying the terrain, it is almost certain that the stone itself marked the cross-roads. The track to Dolygaer has to pass above the eastern end of the steep gully of an un-name stream which descends towards Pontsticill reservoir and the post presently marking the footpath is too far down the valley. Walking westwards from the stone, traces of a track can be picked up in places but only becomes indisputable after passing through the stile into the forestry at SO 061 132. From here downhill to the bridge beneath the railway the track is clearly well graded and metalled although now severely damaged by heavy forestry machinery (Photo. 4.23). The bridge under the railway (Photo. 4.24) would indicate that when the railway was built this route was sufficiently important for such a provision. The dimensions of the bridge are such that it was clearly intended for pack animals rather than wagons. Its continuation to the west is seen in Fig. 4.3 (1832 O/S) as passing through Car and joining the Roman road from Gelligaer to Brecon. In Fig. 4.4 (1947 O/S) this detail is obscured by the present reservoir, the construction of which necessitated a diversion of the old road. It would seem that this track could have provided a direct route from the north and east of Tredegar for traffic to and from the Brecon Beacons and the north.

It is worth noting here that the well known "Princetown Hoard" of bronze age spear heads was found adjacent to Cart Road No. 6. - the position (SO 117 101) is indicated on Fig. 1.8. This hoard was discovered when the Heads of the Valleys road, which very nearly followed the line of the previous railway, was first built. The site has now been completely destroyed by the present upgrading of the road to a dual carriageway. Full details of this hoard can be obtained from the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff in the "Guide Catalogue of the Bronze Age Collection" by H N Savory (1980) and from "Bulletin of Celtic Studies"(1972), Vol. 25, Part

1. All the relevant material can also be found in Chapter 6 of “Assorted Archaeology” on my website.

The other branch from SO 103 120 – shown as a continuation of “E” runs northwards to the head of the Crawnnon being joined by “H” at SO 102 124 and “K” at SO 103 133. At SO 113 120 it crosses a stream which exposes the metalling and, continues past the rifle-range marking post P2 (SO 1015 1220) on its western side (Photo. 4.25).

There are also indications of a rough path north of SO 103 120 leading to the vicinity of Carn y Melin and Carn y Bugail which is most likely the route used to take the millstones quarried here off the mountain by sledge.

North and east of Tredegar.

By far the most important and relevant discovery to the north and east of Tredegar is that of a road running from Milgatw to Blaen Onnau. This has been verified as a metalled road for wheeled vehicles both by studying old maps and by carefully examining the ground and had been written up in detail “Tracks Volume 1, Dowlais Top to the Usk, Chapter 9”. This old road, which descended into the Usk valley, is shown as a road (“K”) on the first edition O/S map (Fig. 4.11) and as a footpath on the modern equivalent map (Fig. 4.12). It was clearly important at the time of the first Ordnance Survey, as it was used for benchmarking, as can be seen on the 1891 1:2,500 O/S map. Professor William Rees has drawn it on his map of “Wales in the 14th. century” (although it is largely obscured by other details) and it is very clear on Emmanuel Bowen’s map of 1729/1760. It would seem that this once-important road fell into disuse when the turnpikes were built and industrialisation of the area led to changes in transport needs and patterns.

Other tracks over this area shown on the first edition O/S map, such as “N” and, particularly, “J” are difficult to find and of uncertain quality although they too are discussed in detail in Volume 1. For some reason, probably due to the patterns of trade and industry, the present Beaufort to Llangynidr road “M” became the route of choice and has since been continually developed.

If one continues up the main road to Trefil in the direction of Pen Rhiw calc the 1832 Ordnance Survey map (Fig. 4.11) shows a path over the mountain heading in the general direction of Llangynidr, marked as “J” and lined in yellow, which at SO 126 147, splits into two with the northern track being indicated as a road and the western branch remaining as a track descending into the Glaisfer valley on its southern side where the

limestone was worked. This track has been added to Fig. 4.12, which is a 1946 map of the same area. This route has been examined in detail and is fully reported in Volume 1, Chapter 9, and it would seem to have been a pack animal route for most of its length although the stretch from Trefil as far north as the limestone outcrop at the head of the Glaisfer seems to have been wide enough for a cart in places. What must be mentioned here is that the footpaths shown on the modern 1:25,000 O/S maps do not follow the 1832 route – particularly in the region of the head of the Glaisfer valley; neither is this track shown on the 1947 1" O/S map (Fig. 4.12).

Which track from Trefil was taken by the Rev. Jenkyn Edwards and reported in his *"The History of Dyffryn Cwannon etc."* in 1934 – this one or the more northerly one skirting below Clo Cadno - as previously mentioned, is uncertain but there is little difficulty in making one's way over either route on foot or on horse-back.

The discovery of the Milgatw to Blaen Onneu road caused me to think again about something which had puzzled me for some time. This was that the Trefil ridgeway road presented a problem in that it seemed suddenly to end where it met the much later turnpike road (1804 - 1806), now the A 4047, at the top of Sirhowy Hill. The pattern of use of such old roads suggested that it should have continued north of here, possibly to Trefil, but there was no strong evidence in favour of the idea. The old road from Milgatw to Blaen Onneu now strongly suggested the usefulness of such a link.

Taking a fresh look at the pattern of boundaries and roads shown on the 1760 estate maps in this context it was immediately obvious that a road shown crossing south to north through Hirgan was the likely "missing link". This can be seen in Fig. 1.8 and maps with better detail can be found in Chapter 3 of Volume 1. With this Hirgan section of track with one end pointing in the direction of Milgatw, some 700 metres away, and the other towards the Manmoel road a similar distance to the south the probability of there being a connecting section of road becomes strong.

Fig. 4.13 is a section of the modern 1:25,000 O/S map of the area under discussion, Fig. 4.14 is of the same area of a 1886-88 1:2,500 O/S map and Photo. 4.26 is an aerial photograph covering most of the important features being discussed. It must be noted that, although tracing the 1760 property boundaries is difficult or impossible in built up areas, it is fortunate that in most of the area under discussion that the field walls and boundaries shown on the 1760 maps are still present today allowing very good accuracy. The 1886-88 O/S map (Fig. 4.14) is valuable in that it shows quite clear parallel features, typical of a road or track passage, across most of the western side of Bryn Serth, this feature clearly aligning

on the Manmoel road at its southern end - at the northern end, approaching Milgatw it also shows a footpath continuing to Penmark. On both Fig. 4.13 and 4.14 the putative track is indicated in dotted green.

Today a designated footpath is drawn as a straight line across the western side of Bryn Serth and the same footpath can be seen on the 1886-88 O/S map but the putative track lies to the west of this and follows a flanking route curving around the mountain on an essentially level course. It might be noted that while this track can be seen clearly, although quite braided, on the aerial photograph (Photo. 4.26) the designated footpath is not visible.

Summing up the evidence for a road between the Manmoel road and Milgatw we find.

1) The Manmoel ridgeway road was of considerable importance, as has been shown in previous chapters, connecting properties in the valleys on each side to a long-distance route, and having ridgeway to ridgeway inter-connecting links. It would be odd if it suddenly stopped just where a subsequent (1804) turnpike road would be built.

2) The 1760 estate map shows a road passing north through Hirgan aligned closely on its putative connection with Milgatw (Figs. 1.8 and 4.13).

3) At Milgatw we have what would seem once to have been an important junction.

a) A road south from Milgatw towards Tredegar which was labelled "Road to Brecon" on the 1760 estate map.

b) A weight of evidence discussed previously of a link to Trefil and beyond. Perhaps this is the "Road to Brecon".

c) A known (see Volume 1, Chapter 9) road for wheeled vehicles northwards from Milgatw to Blaen Onneu and beyond.

d) A short length of road drawn pointing towards Hirgan. On both Figs. 4.13 and 4.14 I have indicated the putative link with dotted green but I suspect that it probably ran to the south of the fence line clearly shown on Fig. 4.14. The distance from Milgatw to Hirgan is approx. 700 metres.

4) If an early road followed the suggested route around Bryn Serth, shown dotted green on Figs. 4.13 and 4.14, some trace of it should remain despite the passage of time.

Much of the area of Bryn Serth has been extensively exploited for minerals over many years and such activities involved different access requirements but, following the route suggested by the 1884-86 boundary feature, highlighted with orange dots on Fig. 4.14, several traces of an old track can be found which approximate to the tracking which can be seen on the aerial photograph – Photo. 4.26. The section from the A4047 to SO 14753 10664, where it swings eastward uphill over Bryn Serth has been reinforced with a variety of materials of quite recent origin but from this point north there is little to be seen other than its use as a footpath. This may be due to sinkage, slumping or robbing out of stone for other purposes but still some indications of its possible earlier status such as :

a) At SO 14627 10778 the track passes over a constructed causeway over a stream channel.

b) On the northern flank of Bryn Serth the track becomes clear and shows substantial metalling as it descends towards Hirgan (Photo. 4.27 taken at SO 14613 10793). It is accepted that a road running from Bryn Serth to Hirgan might have been sufficiently useful to justify some level of maintenance.

Unless some excavation is carried out the old road cannot be proved but if one looks at the pattern of traffic, as seen in Fig. 4.14, and taking into account the section of old road shown on the 1760 estate map, I feel that the evidence is persuasive.

The importance of the area at the top of Sirhowy Hill as a cross-roads is also evidenced by the old road connection from Sirhowy complex as shown on the 1760 estate map. This feature can be seen in Figs. 1.8, 1.10 and 4.13, but is dealt with in more detail in Volume 1 where in Fig. 3.7 of that volume, which is based on an early nineteenth century parish map (probably 1839), the eastern end of St. Lukes road, on reaching the Nant Melin, is indicated as continuing eastwards “To Abergavenny”. This link from present day Dukestown via Bryn Pica to the top of Sirhowy Hill became reduced to a footpath because of the development of the Sirhowy Ironworks, its associated tramways, to mineral extraction in the area and to the construction of the new turnpike road which offered a superior route. Today this early road has been in part built over and reduced to a designated footpath which, because of encroachment and rubbish dumping, is practically unusable.

If the route continuing the Manmoel road through Hirgan to Milgatw is accepted then the early road patterns become clear. Travelling northwards from Manmoel one could have turned right at the top of Sirhowy to

continue eastwards on the old “head of the valleys” road which was the subject of Volume 1, turned left to continue to the west on the same old road, or continued straight across to through Hirgan to Milgatw. From here a traveller might have continued north-west via Trefil and Pen Rhiw-calch or north-east to Blaen Onneu and beyond.

An interesting aspect of the moors to the east of Trefil which was discovered while walking over them is that a sinkhole at SO 126 139 has had its southern bank artificially raised with stone and the entire bank to below the water level reinforced also with stone. At a time when there had been low rainfall a 3” cast-iron pipe could be seen heading in the direction of the quarries on a bearing of 220° and can be seen again in another sinkhole just to the east of the track at SO 123 136 where it has broken allowing the water to escape. It continues down into the old part of the quarry and heads towards the main road but this part has not been traced. This augmented sinkhole is connected to an extensive drainage system with another sinkhole at SO 124 137 adding storage capacity. This feature, which was clearly a water supply probably for the quarry, has been reported more fully in “Assorted Archaeology”.

It is worth noting that the 1832 O/S map gives many of the routes over the mountain to the north equal status but, other early maps show that the present Llangynidr road from Beaufort was the more important even then. Other routes are shown clearly on the 1890 1:2,500 O/S map, but have, since then, been forgotten. Continued use of the Beaufort to Llangynidr road has led to it being developed and maintained while the others have been left to decay.

Discussion.

While researching this Volume and the earlier Volume 1 (Dowlais Top to the Usk.) it became clear that the entire area for many miles around Tredegar was crossed by very ancient roads. The easiest to find were the ridgeway roads which, with some minor deviations in places, are still fully accessible and in many cases have been upgraded to carry modern traffic but it became clear that there were also several important old roads running east and west across the valleys. The most important of these early roads have been lined in green on Fig. D 1 with some of the more important ridgeway to ridgeway roads lined in yellow. Details of each of the routes may be found in the relevant Chapter of this Volume and probably the most important one ("A" in Fig. D1) was covered in detail in Volume 1. The track lining is not exhaustive and has been restricted, for the sake of clarity, to those old roads which seem to be the most important relative to this Volume.

A. Roads running north and south.

- a) Cardiff to Brecon Roman Road. The most westerly road, although not a ridgeway is of such importance that it must be brought into consideration; this is the Roman Road from Cardiff passing through Gelligaer and continuing, via Dowlais Top, to Brecon. The route north of Dowlais Top has been described in Volume 2 of Tracks (Dowlais Top to Bwlch ar y Fan) which can be found on the web-site although this version is in need of some updating. This road is of relevance to the present Volume because some of the east/west routes described here clearly connect to it.
- b) Cefn Brithdir ridgeway. For much of its length comprises two roughly parallel routes, the western one which appears largely to service the Darren valley while the eastern passes the site of the ancient Capel Brithdir and the memorial stone for Tegurnicas – son of Martius – which is now in the National museum of Wales in Cardiff. This eastern route also allows access to the western side of the Rhymney Valley.
- c) Cefn Bedwellty. Runs north from Cardiff via Caerphilly past Bedwellty Church to meet, and cross, the early heads of the valleys road at the northern end of Tredegar. There is definite evidence of it continuing across the Llangynidr Moors to Blaen Onnau and to the river Usk and good evidence for it also passing northwards to the west of the head of the Dyffryn Cwannon to join the Dolygaer to Talybont on Usk Roman road. It has been shown in this Volume

that it is very probable that the route of the present Bedwellty road south of Cefn Golau has been modified, probably around 1800, and that, although its precise route north of Cefn Golau past Tredegar is now lost due to mineral extraction, there is considerable evidence that such a route once existed.

- d) Cefn Manmoel. This ridgeway runs from the vicinity of Sirhowy at its northern end, southwards past Manmoel - the site of an ancient church, and continues to the other ancient church of Mynyddislwyn. This road appears to have been less modified than the Bedwellty ridgeway with an obvious diversion only to pass to the west around the Domen – it may be noted that the stretch of road north of this point to where it meets the Sirhowy to Beaufort road is remarkably straight over most of its distance. After meeting the Sirhowy to Beaufort road there is reasonable evidence that this route continued northwards as perhaps would be expected of a true long-distance route.
- e) Cefn Arrail. From the northern flank of Bwlch ar y fan (at about SO 183 097) to the south this old road seems to be completely undisturbed descending eventually to cross the pack-horse bridge at Aberbeeg to ascend to, and pass, St. Illtyd's Church and onwards to Mamhilad, or from Aberbeeg westwards to Gelligaer. This route is discussed in detail in Volume 1. However, to the north of Bwlch y Garn the old road, which once crossed the original head of the valleys road in Beaufort via South Street and North Street, has now been completely destroyed by mineral extraction. Its original route can be seen clearly in Fig. D 1 and is described fully in Volume 1.

B. Roads to the East and West.

- a) Probably the most important east/west road has been described in detail in Volume 1. "Dowlais Top to the Usk.". This road (route "A" in Fig. D1) seems clearly to have been the original heads of the valleys road and the later turnpike road followed its route very closely except the section which descended to the Usk valley via the Clydach Gorge. This section presented considerable difficulties to the turnpike builders as it did to the construction of the present Heads of the Valleys and faces the future upgrading with similar challenges. As I understand it the road builders are actively considering avoiding the Gorge altogether and passing over part of the Llangattock Moor and this was the option taken by the builders of the original road. After arriving at the southeast of the later Brynmawr, in the general area of SO 195 120, they passed over the

Llangattock Moor to reach the River Usk a short way downstream of the present Crickhowell Bridge. It is not directly relevant to this Volume but there are strong suggestions that this road continued from the north bank of the Usk over the mountains to Talgarth. This possibility has been explored and will be described in another Volume.

- b) To the south of this important and ancient route lies another which starts in Neath (and possibly beyond), continues through Merthyr and passes down Cwm Carno to reach the Rhymney River at Carno. Here it is joined by another road over Bryn Pyllog which connects to the Roman Road. From Carno the road crosses Rhymney Hill through Cwm Rhos (lined in orange in Figs. 3.11 and 3.12) and after crossing the Sirhowy at “Surrowy Bridge” continues eastwards over the Manmoel ridgeway to cross the Ebbw at Pontygof. After Pontygof it continues over Cefn Arrail to descend to Brynmawr where it joins the early heads of the valleys road just described to continue over the Langattock Moors (“B” in Fig. D1).
- c) Also running from the present Tredegar town, and probably from “Surrowy Bridge”, is a road in everyday use today running to the lower end of Rhymney and to Pontlottyn (B4256) (“C” in Fig. D1). Originally it seems that the main objective was the bridge over the Rhymney River at Pontlottyn from where it ascended westwards by two routes, one northwards and the other southwards, to meet the Roman road from Gelligaer to Brecon. Eastwards of “Surrowy Bridge” it joined with the more northerly route just described (B).
- d) The last, important east/west route (“D” in Fig. D1) lies to the south. In the west it originates on the Roman road running from Cardiff to Brecon (via Gelligaer) – about 400 meters west of the site of Capel Gwladys (ST 1250 9927) and about two and a half kilometres north of the Roman forts at Gelligaer (ST 134 971). Travelling eastwards it follows the route crossing the Rhymney River at Aberbargoed to Bedwellty Church. From here it descends to cross the Sirhowy River at SO 174 014 and ascends to Manmoel. From Manmoel it descends to cross the Ebbw River at Cwm before ascending by a gentle gradient the western side of Cefn Arrail (this stretch is known locally as the Parish Road) to cross the ridge of Cefn Arrail at approximately SO 183 097. It then descends to Nantyglo and meets the previous two roads (“A” and “B”) at the southern side of the present Brynmawr and continues in common over the Llangattock Moors.

I must admit that I felt a certain satisfaction that the claims which I made in Volume 1 for the importance and antiquity of this over-moors road to the Usk would seem to have been vindicated by the convergence of all these long-distance east/west roads justifying a high quality common road to the Usk valley.

Also shown on Fig. D1 are the most important of the lesser roads or tracks linking ridgeway to ridgeway. Of these two sets of tracks have been discussed in some detail i.e. a) those crossing from the Manmoel to the Bedwellty ridgeways at Pontgwaithyrhaearn and b) those in the area of present day New Tredegar.

- 1) It can be seen in Fig. D1, and is described in much more detail in Chapter 3 of this Volume, that the river crossing at Pont Gwaithyrhaearn is of greater significance as a focal point of roads crossing from ridgeway to ridgeway than just as the site of a forge/ furnace. It is also interesting that the first edition O/S map shows a direct link from the forge site to the mineral exposures on Bryn-oer – a route which can be traced on the ground.
- 2) The area of New Tredegar is a good example of the low level of development of this area before the Industrial Revolution but roads or tracks of uncertain quality have been shown to cross from the Bedwellty to the Brithdir ridgeways. Links can also be found on the west bank of the Rhymney river connecting to Pontlottyn and hence to the main north/south Roman road. These relatively undeveloped roads did, however, enable me to demonstrate that the original Bedwellty ridgeway passed along the crest of the ridge and that the present Bedwellty Road is a later modification.

Bearing in mind that Tredegar, and most of the other valley towns, did not exist at the time of the first maps of this area, there are two main outcomes of the research for this Volume and Volume 1. They are:

In addition to these wide, metalled and graded roads there is a whole network of lesser tracks used by pack animals, which were the normal means of transport even for bulk goods such as iron and ore, coal and limestone, until well into the last century, and still used to a lesser extent until much more recent times, by riders and by those on foot. These tracks used the minimum of engineering, perhaps using stone to give a sounder footing to heavily laden animals when crossing streams or boggy ground, and generally took the shortest route possible bearing in mind the

sometimes difficult terrain found in the mountains and the often inclement weather. If one walks these old mountain tracks frequently, and in all sorts of weather, the reason for the tracks being where they are is soon made clear as many routes, which seem obvious on a map, are just not feasible on the ground because of such problems as excessive inclines, boggy ground or area strewn with broken stone. Carrying a heavy rucksack is a great help in getting some sort of understanding of the difficulties endured by pack animals and no driver, no matter how indifferent he might be as to the suffering of his animals, as some might well have been, wanted one to go lame or to cast its load. It made good sense to minimise any danger they might be faced with while, at the same time, keeping the distance to be covered to a minimum.

One of the difficulties in deciding the exact status of an old road or track is the degree of engineering such as grading, metalling and the provision of water drainage and in many cases it is far from easy to decide. Even if a road bed has not been robbed for its stone, which was seemingly quite a normal practice, lack of maintenance of the drainage channels and culverts to carry the water under the tracks can cause a road to be washed out in a very short time so that they soon become impassable and, once disused, might vanish from casual view within a few years. Indeed, old roads and tracks carry the seeds of their own destruction once the drainage is damaged: it is quite common for tracks on a slope to become water-courses as water finds the stone in the track bed more permeable than the surrounding ground. Roads can also quickly become lost in the mountains due to sinking into the underlying soft ground or by peat slumping over them on sloping ground, vegetation soon covers the last traces. To find confirmation of the existence of the old tracks, and their nature, requires one to walk their length, to be very observant and able to see the occasional short stretch, which might have survived; or a place where running water might have exposed the stone base as, from such exposures, the character might be assessed. In the case of a cart track then one might find stretches where, on traversing a slope, the uphill side will be cut into the mountainside and the downhill built up or revetted so that a level track surface was maintained. Vegetation, although covering a track, can also give its existence away by the change in the types of plant growing on it, e.g. an old track-bed retaining water will frequently support rushes and mosses while those which dry out more than the surrounding ground will carry plants favouring such conditions. Regular pack-animal routes may show change in their vegetation due to the past liberal applications of manure from the pack-animals, by lime or limestone dropped from their loads or by compaction of the ground.

Examples of all these have been discovered over the last few years and have been reported on in this and in previous volumes. Sometimes what

appears to be no more than a footpath can hide a much more exciting track beneath and, in some cases surface clearance of vegetation will disclose its true nature, as was shown in Volume 1. Chapter 7 where a 12' 6" wide fully pitched and metalled track was shown to run over the mountain from above Brynmawr to Waun Watkin.

In the Introduction to this Volume I remarked that what had originally been thought of as a chapter in another volume turned out in the end to warrant a volume of its own. It seems always thus as each bit of information leads to another but in this case there was, in addition, a major find - that of missing sections of estate maps of the Tredegar and some of the heads of valleys area dating from 1760, which enabled the reconstruction of a map of the area from below Bedwellty Pits to the north as far as the Nant-y-Bwch brook. These maps dating from a time before the Tredegar Works and the town existed, became the core on which several years of research on seemingly disconnected old roads and tracks around the area could be fitted.

So, I am once again left with making a plea to all who might read this that any bit of information they might possess should be made public; it might seem insignificant but it might provide the key to understanding. As I have explained in the Introduction to this Volume, and in much greater length in Volume 1, one of the problems with old roads is in deciding just how old they are and this can be only be determined with certainty by artifacts found in an indisputable context. Because of this I also repeat the plea that any find made either accidentally or by such means as metal detecting should be reported either formally to such as local or national museums or even informally to local historians. As pretty obvious examples a) the old road from Pontsticill to Talybont passes by an "Ogham Stone" which must date from around 600AD and hence the road must be at least as old, b) the road I am presently researching from Crickhowell to Talgarth passes a memorial stone to "Terpillius" (presently in the Brecon museum) which is also Romano-British of around the same date thus pushing the date, for at least this section of the road, back further from the 14th. Century suggested by the Rees map. This work is still under way but, should it be confirmed, it might indicate a very long distance road from either Cardiff/Caerphilly or Neath/Merthyr across the heads of the valleys, crossing the Usk below Crickhowell, to Talgarth and possibly beyond.

The point is, that while such prominent features as inscribed stones can be very definitive so can smaller objects provided they are carefully recorded in their context and particularly if more than one such object is found. Such objects, it must be remembered, can only give the most recent possible date unless excavated with the most careful attention to

the stratigraphy. Which brings us to the most important point which is that amateurs should not dig. It's fine to observe, measure and even expose a covered surface by removing obvious vegetation and debris but if you find something by digging you are unlikely to convince professional archaeologists of the true provenance of your find and a possibly important find will be ruined.

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Captions.

Fig. 1.1. Tredegar area in 1760.

Fig. 1.2. Tredegar today from local guide map.

Fig. 1.3. Estate map of the 1820s.

Fig. 1.4. From the 6" map of the area in the 1870s.

Fig. 1.5. 1832 1" Ordnance Survey map.

Fig. 1.6. 1946 1" Ordnance Survey map.

Fig. 2.1. Estate map of the 1820s.

**Fig. 2.2. From a 1832 1" Ordnance Survey map.
Note the position of the bridge over the river.**

**Fig. 2.3. From local guide map. Note green bridle-way which
Is shown on the 1:25,000 O/S map.**

**Photo. 2.1. Present Georgetown road carver to right. Old
route straight ahead along fence line.**

Photo. 2.2.

Photo. 2.3.

Photo. 2.4.

Photo. 2.5.

Photo. 2.6.

Photo. 2.7.

Fig. 2.4. 1832 1" Ordnance Survey map.

Fig. 2.5. Line drawing of same area as Fig. 2.4.

Photo. 2.8. Aerials at SO 133 087.

Fig. 2.6. 1832 1" Ordnance Survey map.

Fig 2.7. Line drawing of same area as Fig. 2.6.

Photo. 2.9. SO 175 104 facing east.

Photo. 2.10. SO 175 104 facing west.

Fig. 2.8. Old Bedwellty estate map.

Fig. 2.9. 1877 1:2,500 map.

Fig. 2.10. 1877 1:2,500 map.

Fig . 4.1. 1946 1" Ordnance Survey - west of Trefil.

Fig. 4.2. 1832 1" Ordnance Survey - west of Trefil.

Fig. 4.3. Head of the Dyffryn Cwannon.

Fig. 4.4. Bryn Oer tramroad.

Fig. 4.5. Blaen Dyffryn Cwannon. 1" 1832 O/S map.

Photo. 4.1. SO 098 165 - facing uphill.

Photo. 4.2. SO 098 165 - facing uphill.

Photo. 4.3. SO 099 149. Head of bluff - looking north.

Photo. 4.4. SO 099 149. Head of bluff - looking south.

Photo. 4.5. Track cut by quarrying.

Photo. 4.6. Old track above quarry.

Photo. 4.7. Early quarrying at Duke of Beaufort quarries.

**Photo. 4.8. View of bluff at Blaen Dyffryn Cwannon showing
Cutting for later quarry road.**

Photo. 4.9.

**Photo. 4.10. Track rising over crest matches that indicated
on 1832 1" O/S map.**

Photo. 4.11. Taken from SO 101 148 facing N/W.

**Photo. 4.12. Facing mountain to S/W. Taken at SO 093 147.
Near end of track marked on 1832 O/S map.
(Marked in red on Fig. 4.2.)**

**Photo. 4.13. Convergence of tracks from south and from
Pontsticill at SO 086 148.**

Photo. 4.14.

Photo. 4.15.

Photo. 4.16. Old parish road south towards Princetown.

Photo. 4.17. Artifact found at SO 111 1225.

Fig. 5.1. 1946 1" Ordnance Survey map - east of Trefil.

Fig. 5.2. 1832 1" Ordnance Survey map - east of Trefil.

Photo. 5.1. Track uphill at SO 109 114.

Photo. 5.2. Track crossing stream at SO 106 114.

Photo. 5.3. Track descending towards bridge under railway.

Photo. 5.4. Bridge under railway at SO 058 1335.

**Photo. 5.5. Track at SO 113 120 facing north. Note
Range warning post on horizon.**

Fig. 5.3. Section of rail supporting bridge at SO 118 119.

Photo. 5.6. Bridge and ford at SO 118 119.

Photo. 5.7. Bridge and ford at SO 118 119.

**Photo. 5.8. Strongly revetted approach to bridge at
SO 118 119.**

Fig 5.4. 1964 6" Ordnance Survey.

Fig 5.5. 1971 6" Ordnance Survey.

**Photo. 5.9. Track at SO 120 115.
Note range warning post on the horizon.**

Photo. 5.10. Old track at SO 133 113.

Fig. 5.6. Estate map of approx. 1820.

Photo. 5.11. SO 123 123 (approx).

Fig. 5.7. Extract from 1832 1" O/S map of same area as Fig. 5.6.

Fig. D.1. 1948 1" map of the area covered in this Volume.

Fig. 1.4. From the 6" map of the area in the 1870s.

Fig. 1.4. From the 6" map of the area in the 1870s.

Fig. 1.4. From the 6" map of the area in the 1870s.

Fig. 1.4. From the 6" map of the area in the 1870s.

Photo. 4.2. SO 098 165 - facing down hill.

Photo. 4.2. SO 098 165 - facing downhill.

Photo. 4.2. SO 098 165 - facing downhill.

Photo. 4.2. SO 098 165 - facing downhill.

Fig. 3.15. Aerial photograph of Cwm Rhos area.

Bryn Bach Farm. Bryn Bach Farm. Bryn Bach Farm.

Bryn Bach Farm. Barn. Barn. Barn. Barn.

Fig. D 1. Gelligaer to Brynmawr. 1st. Edition O/S.

Gelligaer Fort. Roman Road. Bedwellty Church.

Manmoel. Pontygof. Brynmawr.

Nantyglo. Carno. A B C D

E F G H To Blaen Onnau. To Trefil.

Capel Gwladis

Fig. 1.6. Tredegar around 1813. 2" Ordnance Survey. After Hilling.

Fig. 1.7. Development of Bedwellty House.

Fig. 1.8. Modern 1:25,000 map of north of Tredegar with 1760 overlays.

Fig. 1.9. 1886 O/S map of Tredegar with 1760 features.

Fig. 1.10. Modern 1:25,000 O/S map of Tredegar with 1760 overlays.

Fig. 1.11. Tredegar street map with 1760 roads.

Fig. 1.12. 1832 1" O/S map of Tredegar and the west.

Fig. 4.13. Modern 1:25,000 O/S map of Sirhowy and Bryn Serth.

Fig. 4.14. 1886-88 1:2,500 O/S map of Sirhowy and Bryn Serth.

Photo. 4.26. Aerial photograph of Sirhowy and Bryn Serth.

Photo. 4.27. Road descending towards Hirgan at SO 14613 10793.

St. Lukes Road.	St. Lukes Road.	To Blaen Onneu.	To Blaen Onneu.
Putative link to Hirgan.	Putative link to Hirgan.	Route via Bryn Pica.	
Route via Bryn Pica.	Turnpike road (Present A 4047.)		

Turnpike road (Present A4047).	Manmoel road.	Manmoel road.		
Present day footpath.	Present day footpath.	Footpath.	Footpath.	
St. Lukes Road.	To Blaen Onneu,	Putative link to Hirgan.		
Route via Bryn Pica.	Turnpike road (Present A4047).	Manmoel road.		
Present day footpath.	Footpath.	Hirgan.	Hirgan.	Hirgan.
Milgatw.	Milgatw.	Milgatw.		

Fig. 2.9. Part of an early parish map of Tredegar and the west.