

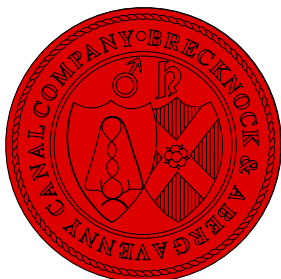
The Brecknock & Abergavenny Canal PURPOSE and PROMOTION

What was the purpose of the canal?

Walter Davies, in his *General View of the Agriculture and Domestic Economy of South Wales*, Vol II, 1814, wrote that the Brecknock and Abergavenny Canal “was the only one as yet in the district which originated with the consumers, being undertaken with the laudable view of lowering the price of coals, lime etc.” The perceived importance of the carriage of coal and lime is also supported by canal engineer Hugh Henshall in his report in May 1794,¹ where he states that “... it cannot fail of being an advantageous undertaking to the Proprietors, as the resources of lime coal, &c. appear to be so convenient, cheap and inexhaustible on the hills adjoining the canal. These articles never fail to produce ample returns to the adventurers, especially when the supply of so extensive a country as this canal will serve stands in so much need of both lime and coal.” However, some ‘adventurers’ evidently put potential dividends before lower local prices as the first published proposal was that the canal should run from Llanelly (Gilwern) to Newbridge, enabling the transport of coal from collieries at Brynmawr, above Llanelly, down to Newport. Coal shipped coastwise from Newport to destinations east of the Holms – islands in the Bristol Channel west of Newport – had the competitive advantage that its sea passage was free of government duty.²

In any case the carriage of coal and lime cannot have been the whole story. Coal, limestone and lime were certainly the principal cargoes in the early years, before the completion of the canal to Pontymoile in 1812, but iron carrying must have been in some minds right from the start – there were ironmasters among the original shareholders and the preamble to the Canal Act authorising the canal specifically referred to “making and maintaining Rail Ways and Stone Roads from such Canal to several Iron Works and Mines in the Counties of Brecknock and Monmouth”. Not for nothing did the company seal include the ancient symbol for Iron (Mars) above the shields bearing the arms of Brecon and Abergavenny.

[Puzzlingly, the ancient symbol for Lead/Saturn also appeared on the seal. It seems unlikely that there was ever any expectation or intention of carrying significant quantities of lead or its ores. Perhaps the inclusion of lead – believed by mediaeval alchemists to be the root of all metals – was intended to represent iron ore?]



What were the first steps?

An essential pre-requisite to the construction of a canal in the 18th century, unless it was to be an entirely private affair not requiring land purchase powers, was obtaining a Parliamentary Act. Such an act would prescribe how much money could be raised and how it was to be divided into shares; it would state how the construction and operation of the canal was to be directed and managed; it would specify the tolls that could be charged and it would define the rights and responsibilities of the canal company and of the owners and occupiers of the land through which the canal would pass. Perhaps most importantly of all, it would give the shareholders – listed by name and united as “One Body Politick” into a company for “the carrying on, making, completing and maintaining of the said canal” – the authority to purchase the land required.

By the time the Act for the Brecknock and Abergavenny Canal came to be sought, thirty years of legislative experience had elapsed since the passing of the Act for the archetypal Bridgewater Canal in 1759. Armed with this experience, and faced with a flood of intending bills in the period of canal mania in the 1790s, Parliament had introduced a special set of Standing Orders in 1792. These prescribed that: all canal proposals should first be advertised in the *London Gazette* and in local papers, a map for public inspection should be deposited with the local Clerk of the Peace, proper estimates should be made, a list of subscribers should be drawn up and also a list of affected landowners indicating those in favour and those not.

It was also essential, to ensure a smooth passage through Parliament, to canvass support from MPs and Peers and to win over potential objectors. To have a good chance of parliamentary success, a proposed canal needed to offer benefits to the landowners affected and opportunities for profitable investment, not least to those whose support was needed to authorise it!

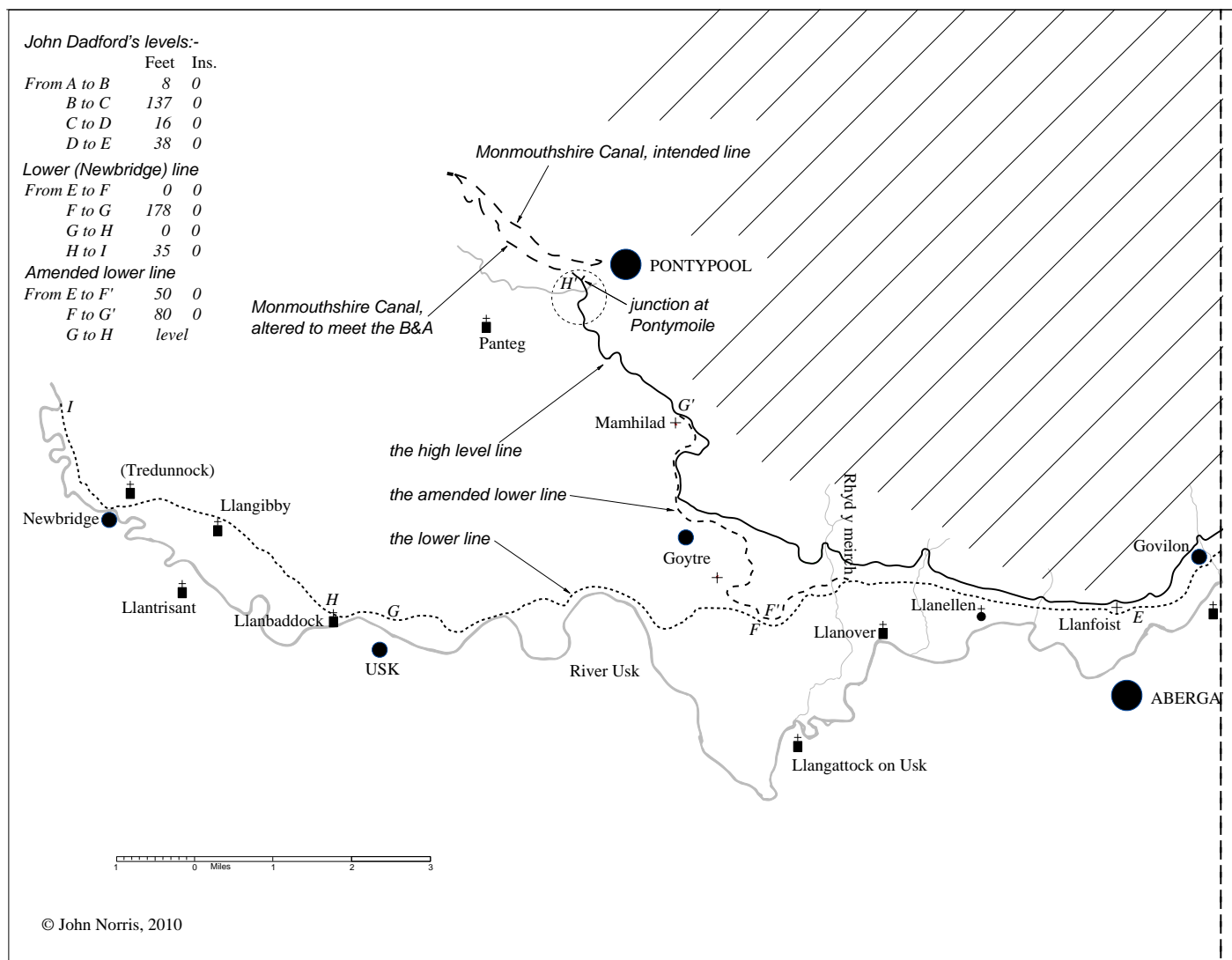
ABERGAVENNY CANAL.

PURSUANT to a standing Order of the House of Commons, made on or about the seventh day of June, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-two.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN.

That application will be made to Parliament in the ensuing Session, for leave to bring in a bill for making a CANAL from or near Newbridge, otherwise called Tredunnoch Bridge, in the county of Monmouth, to or near Llanelly and Llangroiney Iron Works, in the county of Brecon thro' the several parishes of Tredunnoch, Llangibby, Llanbaddock, town and parish of Ufk, hamlet of Monkwood, Kemeys Commander, Buttwis-newith, Mamhilad, Goutrey, Llanvair Kilgedin, Llanarth, Llanfant-fread, Llanvihangel and Llangattock near Ufk, Llanover, Llanellen, Llanforyt, Abergavenny, and Llanwenarth, in the county of Monmouth aforefaid, and through the several parishes of Llanelly an Llangeney, in the said county of Brecon; and to be called or entitled, ABERGAVENNY CANAL.

first public notice
British Chronicle 29th August 1792



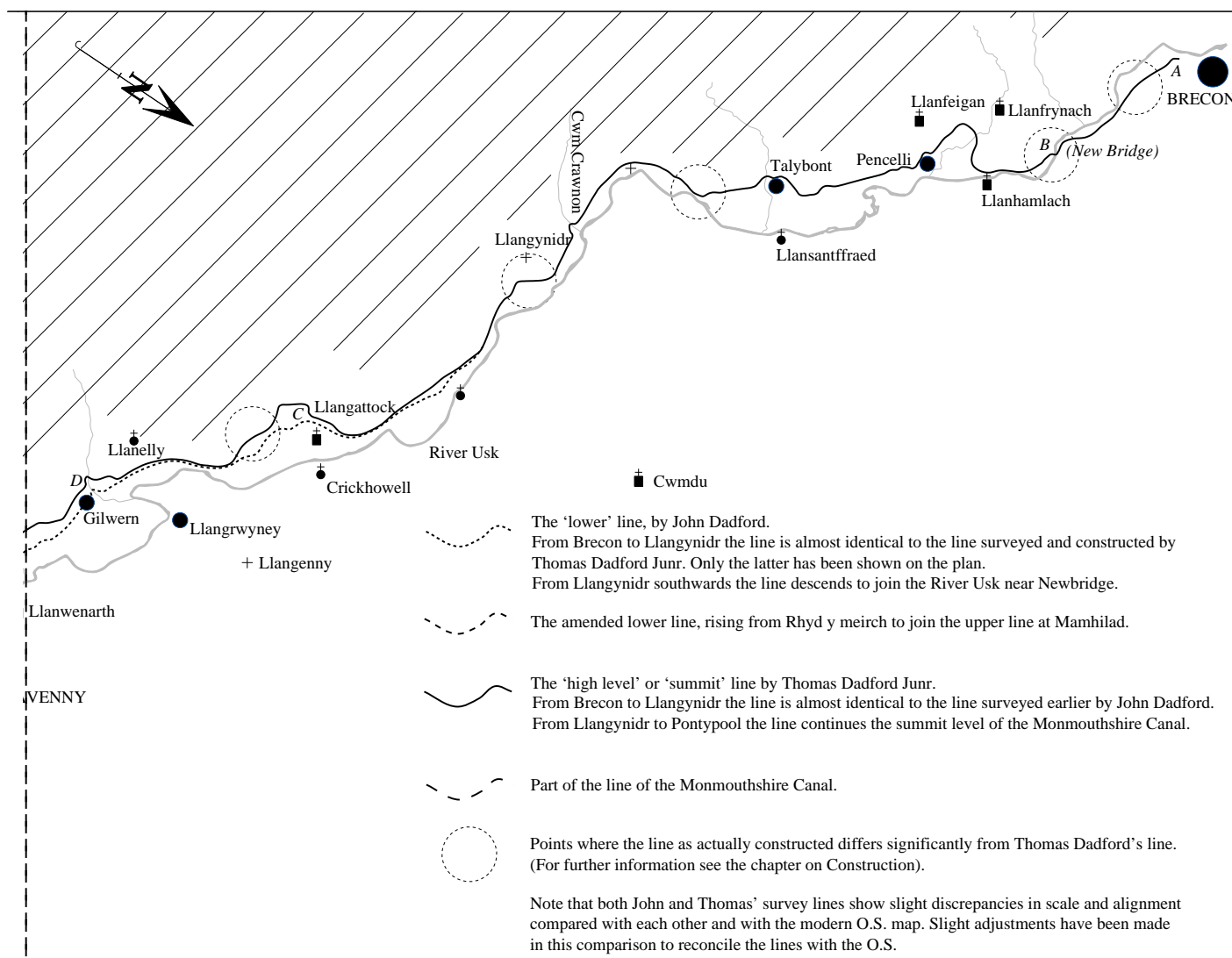
Lines surveyed by John and Thomas Dadford

So how did the Brecknock and Abergavenny Canal fit this pattern? The first public notice of the proposed canal was published in the *British Chronicle* (Hereford) on 29 August 1792. This announced that application would be made to Parliament in the ensuing session for leave to bring in a bill to make a canal – to be called the Abergavenny Canal – from or near Newbridge, (on the River Usk six miles north-east of Newport), to Llanelltyd (Gilwern). This was not, however, the beginning of the story. As early as September 1788 Thomas Dadford Senr. had written in a letter that he was planning to see “Mr. powell on my journey to Abergavenny”,³ which may well be an indication that thoughts of a canal were already in the air. Certainly by the spring of 1792 his son John Dadford was at work surveying. His first line (not shown on the above plan) was for a canal “from Clydach [Gilwern] to join the Monmouthshire Canal near the Town of Pontypool”.⁴ The idea of such a junction seems to have been quickly dropped by those employing Dadford at this early stage and in September he surveyed a new line, from ‘Langroina’ [Llangrwyney] to join the River Usk near Newbridge – the line proposed in the *British Chronicle* on 29 August 1792. Matters evolved and the line was soon extended, a notice in the *British Chronicle* on 19 September stating the route as “from or near Newbridge ... to or near the town of Brecon” and giving

the name as the *Monmouthshire and Breconshire Canal*. This survey⁵ kept John Dadford busy for 36 days, from 21 September to 26 October. His father assisted for 6 days.

By this line the canal would have descended progressively from Brecon to the level of the River Usk at Newbridge, a total fall of 412 feet. As well as a connection to the Usk at Newbridge another was shown at a point a mile and a quarter further south. The section from Brecon to Llangynidr was almost identical to the line eventually constructed. However, from Llangynidr southwards the proposed line locked down the hillside, with a fall of approx. 87 feet between Llangynidr and Llangattock, 16 feet between Llangattock and Clydach, and 38 feet between Clydach and Llanfoist. The line then stayed on this level as far as Goytre, before descending the remaining 213 feet to Newbridge. There would thus have been over 30 locks between Llangynidr and Newbridge.

The Monmouthshire Canal Company were not unnaturally concerned at the loss of prospective trade if the new canal ended at the River Usk rather than linking with their own intended canal and the *British Chronicle* on 3 October announced a meeting, probably arranged at the behest of the Monmouthshire company, to be held on 15 October, “to take into consideration the best line for a collateral Cut or Canal from some place near Pont-y-Pool to or near to Llangattock-Crickhowell ... and by a Cut or



Rail-way to communicate with the town of Abergavenny". The following day the Monmouthshire committee instructed their own Engineer Thomas Dadford Junr. (John's elder brother), with the assistance of Mr. [James] Cockshutt (a partner in Richard Crawshay's iron business and a leading shareholder in the Monmouthshire Canal Co.) to "make a Plan and Estimate of the Expenditure of making a Canal from the most convenient place below Pontypool to the Town of Brecon with Rail Ways to or near Abergavenny, Llangrwyney Forge, the Coal Works in Clydach, and from Clydach Ford to Nantyglo, and to or near Llwyl Coed and from thence to Ebbw Vale Furnace. ...".⁶ It has been generally assumed that the Monmouthshire company had in mind the 'high level' line that was ultimately constructed. This may well have been so but it is clear that Thomas Dadford Junr. was given no such formal brief. He was in effect given a blank sheet to take a fresh look at the issue, the only requirement being to provide a canal link between Brecon and the Monmouthshire canal near Pontypool, together with appropriate connecting (horse-drawn) railways.

At all events, a meeting of prospective Brecon and Abergavenny shareholders at the Angel Inn, Abergavenny, on 8 November 1792, chaired by Thomas Hooper, approved the line from Brecon to Cwm Crowdon

(Llangynidr) recommended by both Thomas Dadford Junr. and John Dadford but from Cwm Crowdon as far as Llanover approved the 'lower line' (i.e. to Newbridge) suggested by John Dadford. From Llanover a survey was to be taken of "the easiest and most practicable line to join the Monmouthshire Canal near the Town of Pontypool (sic)".⁷ This survey was made by John Dadford between 8 and 11 November. The meeting at the Angel on 8 November 1792 also agreed that a Rail Way should be made up the Clydach Valley from Llangrwyney Ironworks to Ebbw Vale, with branches to Beaufort Furnace and "the Coal above Llwyl Pwll".⁸

Also on 8 November, Edward Kendall, in his capacity as Chairman of the Monmouthshire Canal Committee, formally agreed "to and with the Subscribers to the Abergavenny and Brecon Canal that the Proprietors of the Monmouthshire Canal shall unequivocally supply the Abergavenny and Brecon Canal with a sufficient quantity of water for their Pontypool summit." This agreement followed a similar agreement made two days earlier in which the word 'unequivocally' was missing and the words 'if practicable' had been present.⁹

Several points can be inferred from this agreement and the account of the meeting at the Angel on 8 November:-

1. Thomas Dadford Junr. had already been at work but his preliminary suggestions for the line south of Cwm Crawnon, whatever they were, had not met with the immediate approval of the meeting. [We don't know why but, assuming he was advocating the 'high level' line, it seems likely that prospective subscribers to the Brecon and Abergavenny canal had misgivings about "the extreme difficulty and danger of carrying the Canal along the steep and treacherous hillside at Llanfoist".^{10]}
2. John Dadford had not completely surveyed his line from Llanover to Pontymoile at the time of the meeting but had made sufficient progress, perhaps with just an 'ocular' survey – a visual assessment without instruments of the lie of the land – to indicate that a practicable route existed, rising up from the level at Llanover to reach the level of the Monmouthshire canal to the north of Pontypool.
3. The Monmouthshire promoters were aware, and had been aware in advance of the meeting at the Angel, that Thomas' proposals were unlikely to find favour. Any connection being better than none they were thus prepared to support John Dadford's amended line.

By the amended line, shown on John Dadford's plans¹¹ and drawn up between 21 and 25 November, following a survey from 8 to 11 November,¹² it is apparent that the amended route left his original line near Rhyd y Meirch [by Llanover], on the Llanfoist-Goytre level, rising 130 feet through a series of locks to Mamhilad, three miles to the north of Pontypool. From there it ran on the level to join the Monmouthshire at Pontymoile. To facilitate the connection of the two canals at this level, the two miles of the proposed line of the Monmouthshire from land occupied by Rubin Jarrett (close to the present Five Locks at Cwmbran) towards Pontymoile were to be moved approx. ¼ mile eastwards. The locks between Llanover and Pontymoile would have needed a supply of water which the Brecon and Abergavenny were in no position to supply and it was to meet this need that the Monmouthshire made their offer. The 'Pontypool summit' was the pound between Pontypool and Mamhilad, not, as sometimes supposed, the pound all the way from Pontypool to Llangynidr that eventually resulted from the adoption of Thomas Dadford Junr's. 'high level' or 'Summit' line. [Author's Note: I am greatly indebted to Ray Haydon, archivist of the Monmouthshire, Brecon & Abergavenny Canals Trust, for this point, which had escaped my attempts to unravel a complex chain of events].

The *British Chronicle* on 7 November announced a public meeting to be held at the Angel Inn, Abergavenny, on 15 November 1792, where intending subscribers to the canal – now styled the Abergavenny and Brecon Canal – were asked to come prepared to pay 3% on their respective shares to defray expenses incurred so far. The meeting would also "consider of Mr. [John] Dadford's Plan and Estimate".

As interest in the canal broadened it was perhaps to be expected that dissension would begin to creep in and a

meeting of "several gentlemen of the Co.^y of Brecon", chaired by Philip Williams and held on 14 November, the day before the meeting at the Angel, laid down 'preliminaries' that were to be insisted on or

otherwise that the Breconshire Subscribers divide from the Monmouthshire and take that Part of the Line within the Co.^y of Brecon to make separately and apply for an Act for that Purpose. If that cannot be obtained the Breconshire Subscribers at all Events must insist on half the Railway up the Clydach or give an Opposition in Parliament.¹³

This was a clear indication of the perceived importance of the rail road and the coal trade to both the Breconshire and the Monmouthshire groups.

As well as specifying that shares to a total value of £4000 should be allotted to tradesmen, these preliminaries laid down that shares should be equally divided among subscribers from each county, there should be a treasurer for each county, and there should be equal representation on the committee. The 'Clydach Rail Road' was to be the first work undertaken. Construction of the canal was to begin at Aberclydach (Gilwern) and be "divided between each end as nearly equal as possible".¹⁴

The actual meeting on 15 November – "a very numerous and respectable Meeting of the Subscribers to this undertaking" – was chaired by Thomas Hooper and broadly agreed the points required by the Breconshire party; shares were to be equally divided between subscribers from the two counties, a committee of seven was appointed to apply for an Act (four from Monmouthshire and three from Breconshire), solicitors William Powell of Abergavenny and Walter and John Powell of Brecon were appointed joint Solicitors to the Bill and Dr. Thomas Hooper and Messrs. Wilkins' Bank of Brecon were to hold the funds for Monmouthshire and Breconshire shareholders respectively. A share call of 2½% was agreed.¹⁵ The meeting also agreed the line¹⁶ and resolved that Mr. Young, a surveyor, should be engaged to resurvey the Brecon to Llanover section with John Dadford. Mr Morgan of Mamhilad and Mr Watkins of Danygraig were to accompany them on the line rising from there to the proposed junction with the Monmouthshire,¹⁷ i.e. the amended line surveyed by John Dadford between 8 and 11 November.

The subscription lists were apparently filled up in the latter part of November for on 18 November John Powell wrote to Walter Wilkins at Maeslough inviting him to state what he wished to subscribe "liable to be reduced with the rest in the case of an overflow" and telling him that "Your Relations at this Place [Brecon] subscribe largely".¹⁸

The total cost of the survey work by John Dadford and his father was £262.1.9, paid in irregular stages between December 1792 and June 1793.¹⁹

So far so good, but all was not to be plain sailing. On 20 November 1792 James Cockshutt wrote to William Powell, expressing his disappointment at not getting five shares in the new Navigation.²⁰ He was not alone; the *British Chronicle* of 12 December reported "a numerous and respectable Meeting" at the Angel on 6 December

objecting, amongst other things, that the canal had been “privately projected, the subsequent measures respecting it, more especially the subscription, having been carried on in a private and partial manner ...”. The meeting also noted the uncertainty of the line, with two plans having been deposited with the Office of the Clerk for the Peace (presumably John Dadford’s line from Brecon to Newbridge and his amended line rising from Rhyd y Meirch to connect with the Monmouthshire) and “the plan of a third line being now preparing” (presumably Thomas Dadford’s high level line). The meeting appointed a committee, among its number Mr. Cockshutt, to organise a petition to Parliament seeking to delay the proposed Act until a full and open public meeting had first been held. Such were the actions of thwarted would-be shareholders, who feared that they had been deprived of an opportunity for profitable investment and/or speculation. The meeting evidently had some effect, for three of the objecting committee, John Hanbury Williams (the chairman), Christopher Chambre and the Rev. John Williams eventually emerged as significant shareholders in the Brecknock and Abergavenny Canal Company.

Not all were welcome. Ironmaster Samuel Homfray wrote on 21 November “Mr. Hill Junr. attends on behalf of his father & myself & I hope the Gentlemen who made the objections to our continuing Subscribers, will have considered the illiberality of such a proceedg. & permit him to write our names down”.²¹ Homfray and Hill were successful but others on the proposed subscription lists²² were removed or had their shares reduced

The line of the canal continued under discussion in December 1792 for John Powell wrote to Edward Kendall on the 18th regarding a forthcoming meeting at which Kendall was expected to produce the plan of the proposed canal on the summit level with an estimate of the expense (a clear indication that Thomas Dadford Junr.’s. plan was not yet complete). Powell noted that if agreement were not reached the inevitable consequence would be the “adoption of the Newbridge line”.²³ Certainly when the petition was presented to Parliament on 31 January 1793 it was John Dadford’s low level line that was described, albeit in the amended form described above, rising to join the Monmouthshire near Pontypool instead of joining the Usk near Newbridge, and it was John Dadford who was examined by the committee set up to consider the petition. Preparation and bringing in of the necessary parliamentary Bill was entrusted to Sir Charles Morgan, Bt. and his son Charles, at the time MPs for the county of Breconshire and the borough of Brecon respectively. The committee also included William Lygon, MP for Worcestershire.²⁴

The Bill continued its progress forward to the second reading on 18 February 1793. However, eleventh hour moves to change the Bill in favour of the the high level line were afoot. A joint meeting of the proprietors of the Monmouthshire and the (intending) proprietors of the Brecon & Abergavenny on 15 January had agreed that the Monmouthshire company would “give every aid and assistance in their power” to an Act incorporating the ‘Summit line’ and a junction with the Monmouthshire Canal at Pontymoile, as well as £3000 towards the extra

expense involved and an agreement to limit tolls on goods passing between the two canals to not more than the rates prevailing on the Brecon & Abergavenny.²⁵ Accordingly, on 21 February a petition from the Proprietors of the Monmouthshire Canal was presented by Edmund Estcourt, Edward Kendall and Alexander Raby, objecting:-

That the said intended Navigable Canal, if made according to the Line now proposed for that Purpose, and described in the Map or Plan referred to by the said Bill, will be highly prejudicial to the Interest of the Petitioners and the rest of the Company of Proprietors of the Monmouthshire Canal Navigation; but, the said intended Canal might be carried on a Level from a Place called *Cwm-crawnnon*, in the County of Brecknock, to *Pont y moile*, in the County of Monmouth, which would not only prevent the particular Disadvantages apprehended by the Petitioners and the rest of the said Company of Proprietors, but be as convenient and advantageous to the Subscribers to the said intended Canal, and of equal Utility to the Public: And therefore praying, That provision may be made in the said Bill for carrying the Line of the said intended canal upon the the said Level, from *Cwmcrawnnon* to *Pont y moile* ...”.²⁶

The committee examined Edward Kendall, the chairman of the Monmouthshire Canal Committee, and Thomas Dadford Junr. and reported that only one landowner objected to the proposed high level line while the (Brecon & Abergavenny) subscribers were willing to accept the varied line, and additional expense, “upon certain terms which have been agreed between them and the Company of Proprietors of the Monmouthshire Canal” – i.e. the £3000 described earlier.²⁷

The “disadvantages apprehended by the Petitioners” in John Dadford’s line were presumably the inconvenience of the extra locking and in particular the difficulty of finding water for the twelve or more locks ascending from Llanover to Mamhilad.

The amended Bill incorporating the high level line was read the third time on 5 March, approved by the House of Lords on 21 March and received the Royal Assent on 28 March. The Act authorising the Brecknock and Abergavenny Canal Navigation was one of thirty six under consideration in March; eighteen other canal Acts were also passed during 1793.

What was the canal to cost?

How was it to be paid for?

The estimated cost of the works specified in the Act – the canal from Pontymoile to Brecon and the Clydach ‘rail way’ linking the canal with the iron works at Llangroiney and collieries at Waindew – was evidently close to £100,000. Thomas Dadford’s estimate does not appear to have survived but an independent estimate by Hugh Henshall in May 1794 costed the canal at £85,632.10.0.²⁸

The Act provided for £100,000 to be raised in 1000 shares of £100, the maximum individual shareholding being limited to fifty. Shares were to be paid for in

‘instalments’, in response to ‘Calls’ for payment as the work progressed. The interval between calls could not be less than two calendar months and no call could exceed £10 per share. The Act also provided that if necessary a further £50,000 could be raised by Calls on the existing shares.

In the event even the full £150,000 proved insufficient and by April 1804 funds were exhausted. The canal was less than two-thirds complete and the eastern end had barely reached Govilon. A further Act had to be sought and this was passed in May 1804, authorising the raising of an additional £80,000. The circumstances are described in more detail later, in the paper ‘Extension to Pontymoile’.

Who were the investors and why did they invest?

There were 252 shareholders listed at the first General Assembly of the Proprietors in May 1793 (compared with 241 named in the Act). Approximately 100 were nominally from Breconshire and 110 from Monmouthshire – some counties of residence were not given and some shareholders with residences elsewhere, e.g. London, were not listed under Breconshire or Monmouthshire),

Among the 252 there were, in round figures, 40 ‘gentlemen’ (among them Thomas Dadford, probably Thomas Dadford Junr.), 30 clergymen, 100 ‘professional’ people (surgeons, doctors, barristers, ironmasters and unspecified ‘esquires’), 10 farmers, 40 tradesmen and a good sprinkling of widows, spinsters and infants, totalling about 20. There were also three peers – the Duke of Beaufort (local landowner), Earl Camden (son and successor of Charles Pratt, who had married into the wealthy Jeffreys family, local mercers of Abercynrig) and the Earl of Oxford – and seven MPs: the Rt. Hon. Thomas Harley (Herefordshire), William Lygon (Worcestershire), Charles Morgan (Monmouthshire), Sir Robert Salusbury, Bt. (Brecon), John Scudamore (Hereford), Samuel Smith (Ludgershall, previously MP for Worcester), and Sir Charles Morgan, Bt. (Breconshire).

Prominent local investors included John Lloyd of Aberamel and Walter and Jeffreys Wilkins of the Brecon Old Bank. Ironmasters among the shareholders included Edward Kendall of Beaufort, Samuel and Jeremiah Homfray of Penyarden and Richard Hill of Plymouth (Merthyr Tydvil). Hill, the Homfrays, Kendall, the Duke of Beaufort, Sir Charles Morgan and Sir Robert Salusbury were also prominent shareholders in the Monmouthshire Canal Company.

Individual motives for investing in the canal would have varied. Some people would have bought shares as an investment, hoping that commercial success would bring good dividends as a source of income. Others would have bought shares as a speculation, hoping to make capital gains by selling as the share price rose.

Landowners and occupiers also stood to benefit directly from the canal as a means of communication. The Act allowed them to erect wharfs and warehouses on their land and to use on the canal without charge “any Pleasure Boats, or any Boats for the Purpose of Husbandry (except for the Conveyance of Lime) and for

conveying Cattle from any Farm or Land to any other Farm or Lands of the same Owners or Occupiers ... ” provided the boats were not more than five feet in width or twelve feet in length, did not pass through any locks and did not carry goods or merchandise for sale or passengers for hire.

For some landowners, the prospect of selling land to the canal company at a good price might also have been a factor.

The Act conferred what amounted to compulsory purchase powers for the land required. However, no “Building, or a Garden, Orchard, Yard, Park, Paddock, planted Walk, or Avenue to a House, or Lawn, or Pleasure Ground” could be taken without the consent of the owner and occupier, unless specifically listed in a schedule attached to the Act. This list included 2 houses, 1 barn, 1 shed, and 23 gardens and orchards required, in whole or part, for the canal, plus others required for water feeders and the Clydach railroad. 29 separate landowners had property falling into this category, 23 of them on the line of the canal. Nor could the line of the canal deviate by more than one hundred yards from the approved line without the consent of the landowners affected. Altogether there were over a hundred different landowners along the canal; nearly half of them were also shareholders.

Amongst the tradesmen there would have been some, such as innkeepers and saddlers, for whom the principal benefit of the canal would have been the trade it would bring them; others, such as grocers, would have hoped to benefit from cheaper transport costs for the goods they hoped to sell. For some, like the hairdresser and the hatter, the incentive to invest must have been the prospect of share dividends and capital appreciation.

Though numerically the tradesmen formed a significant proportion of the total shareholders, their actual share holdings were small. Most of the investment was concentrated in the hands of a small number of large investors. £72,500 of the £100,000 initial authorised capital was in holdings of £500 or more, subscribed by 102 subscribers, and £8,800 of this was subscribed by the six largest investors:-

Thynne Howe Gwynne of Buckland	£2,000
John Capel Hanbury of Pontypool	£2,000
The Revd. Richard Davies, of Brecon	£1,200
Thomas Harcourt Powell of Brecon	£1,200
Jeffreys Wilkins of Brecon	£1,200
Walter Wilkins of Maeslough	£1,200

Who were the real prime movers behind the canal?

It is likely that those who had most to gain from the canal would have been amongst those who first promoted the idea. One can hazard a guess at some of them, for example:-

The Duke of Beaufort

A substantial shareholder in the Monmouthshire Canal, the Duke owned much of the mountain land in the parishes of Llanelly and Llangattock. The canal would lead to an increase in trade in iron, coal and

limestone from the works, mines and quarries on the land he owned and this could only be to his advantage. Theophilus Jones writing about the Clydach Ironworks in 1805 stated "The ore is raised at the distance of two miles from the works upon a part of the mountain called Llamarch, the property of the Duke of Beaufort, who receives from these and other mines in the neighbourhood, and hundred, £2,000 a year, which did not produce him, twenty years ago, above £60 annually."²⁹

Edward Kendall of Dan y Park

Edward Kendall, chairman of the Monmouthshire Canal Committee and founder of the Beaufort Ironworks, wanted a connection to the proposed Brecon & Abergavenny Canal from his collieries at Gellifelen. He also wanted a connection to the canal from the Clydach Ironworks, in which he was a partner with Edward Frere and Thomas Cooke. As Theophilus Jones noted:-

The [Clydach Iron] Company carrying on these works have, however, still to lament the interruption in the cutting of the Brecon Canal. The sale of their iron is at Newport, where they are obliged to carry it on horseback, or in carts, a great part of the way over bad roads and high hills, at the same time, that of the proposed conveyance by water was completed, they would be enabled to load the mineral in barges within a few yards of their furnaces, and the proprietors of the ironworks as well as the Canal Company would be mutually benefitted ...".³⁰

Kendall attended the Parliamentary hearings preceding the passing of the Act in 1793. His expenses, and those of Thomas Dadford³¹ were paid by the Monmouthshire Company. (Dadford and Kendall evidently had a good working relationship and Kendall acted as Dadford's proxy at the first General Assembly of the Brecon & Abergavenny proprietors.

Walter Watkins of Dan y graig

Walter Watkins was "the first pioneer of the iron industry in the district, and he at least of the Welsh had the intelligence and enterprise to take up the trade of an ironmaster of his own accord, and not as the follower or agent of Englishmen – capitalists or prospectors – coming there to introduce the manufacture of iron".³² Watkins needed coal and pig-iron for his forge at Llangrwyney and the 'railway' up the Clydach valley specified in the Act would provide the vital means of transport. The mention of Llangrwyney Ironworks in the first published announcement of the proposed canal is a strong indication that Watkins was involved, as is the fact that he contributed towards John Dadford's survey costs.³³ As Philip Williams said, writing from the Grwyney Works 12 November 1792, "We are ... Canal Mad & ... full of Canal Business".³⁴

The Wilkins

Walter and Jeffreys Wilkins and two other partners founded the Brecon Old Bank in 1778, largely funded by a considerable fortune amassed by Walter and

Jeffreys in India. The Wilkins supported many commercial endeavours in Wales, including every important canal except the Monmouthshire.³⁵ [The original building survives in the High Street, Brecon as Lloyds TSB, Lloyds having absorbed the Old Bank in 1890.]

John Powell, John Lloyd, John Peirce

John Powell, a Brecon solicitor, and one of the two joint solicitors to the Brecon & Abergavenny Bill, was clerk to the Breconshire subscribers; he succeeded Edward Kendall as a partner in the Clydach Ironworks. John Lloyd, descendant of an old established Welsh family from Builth, was a former Captain in the East India Company and took a keen interest in the new canal.³⁶ John Peirce was an accountant. The three Johns, together with Jeffreys Wilkins, established the Brecon Boat Company in or before 1798. [See the later paper on 'The Development of Trade'.]

Samuel Homfray

Long before the first meetings of potential subscribers there must have been a small 'round the table' gathering where someone first mooted the idea of a canal. A minute of a meeting in January 1813³⁷ referred to Samuel Homfray, the ironmaster, as 'The Father of the Canal', so he may have been the man who first had the idea. This is not unlikely. Samuel's father Francis had a forge at Stewponney,³⁸ near Stourbridge on the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal, and an ironworks at Broseley on the Severn near Ironbridge. He arrived in Wales in 1782, with his sons Jeremiah, Samuel and Thomas at the invitation of John Guest (who had moved from Broseley in 1759 to manage a furnace at Dowlais). In 1784 the Homfrays built the Penyarden ironworks near Merthyr Tydfil.

The Homfrays would have been well aware of the advantages of water transport and Francis was probably the proposer of the Glamorganshire Canal. In his turn Samuel may well have proposed the Brecon & Abergavenny Canal. Although his motives in suggesting the canal may have been largely altruistic, he too stood to gain directly. He would have been aware that the canal company would need iron rails for its tram roads which he would be in a position to supply and indeed a contract was awarded to him in June 1793 for the supply of Iron Rails for the first part of the Clydach Rail Road "from Llangrwyney to Cwm Gelly felen opposite Gelly felen Coal Pits ... to be delivered at Pendarren within six Months".³⁹

Altruism versus Opportunism?

It is understandable that most investors would have been motivated more by thoughts of private gain than the public good. However, it is a sad reflection on human nature that several of the larger shareholders were only too ready to put their own interests before the company's when there was a conflict.

Perhaps the most outrageous example was Mr. William Morgan of Mamhilad, a substantial shareholder

(£500) in the canal company. One of the last landowners to reach agreement with the canal company for land purchase, he took full advantage of the company's desperation to complete the canal to Pontymoile and sought compensation far beyond the value of the land required.

The committee at first resolved that "they do not feel authorized to make any specific tender to him as a compensation for the injuries he apprehends, exclusive of the admitted value of his Land" but "being well disposed to accommodate any differences"⁴⁰ invited him to mention the sum he had in mind so that they could put it to the consideration of a Special Assembly. The General Assembly of 26 April 1810 approved £500 for the purchase of the land required (and buildings which happened to be on the Land) and the Committee Meeting on 7 May sent the Agent cash in hand to "immediately tender" the money to Mr. Morgan. He would have none of it. Faced with this rejection, the Committee at first bravely resolved "that immediate steps be taken for calling out the Commissioners and proceeding in the business in conformity with the directions of the Act"⁴¹ but then weakly decided to send a high powered delegation to wait upon Mr. Morgan, resolving "that whatever sum they should agree to give for such Lands the same will be confirmed by the Committee." The deputation returned empty handed, except for the information that Mr. Morgan "will not suffer the Line of Canal to be carried through his Lands near Mamhilad unless the Sum of Fifteen Hundred Pounds be given him for the liberty of cutting through his Grounds" – in addition to being paid for the purchase of the land "in the same proportion as other Land owners on the line". So much for Mr. Morgan's "small proposition of Compensation"⁴² Amazingly, the Committee resolved that they considered it "highly necessary for the advantage of this undertaking that his proposition be complied with",⁴³ and in October the General Assembly authorised the

payment of "Fifteen Hundred Pounds the Compensation Money for Cutting the Canal and Works through his Lands." Arguably Mr. Morgan had no right to any such compensation and the Act laid down clear procedures for appointing Commissioners to agree values in case of dispute and, if agreement were still impossible, for the appointment of a jury to settle the matter. But time was not on the company's side and so they gave in. One wonders what were the feelings of other landowners who had settled within the legal provisions of the Act!

Rather less serious was the example set by Revd. Charles Vaughan, who sold the company two acres of land at Llanelly⁴⁴ without any right of access. This may have been just an accidental oversight by both parties but it certainly led to a strongly worded recommendation by a committee appointed to survey the state of the canal in 1820 for "an immediate enquiry into the circumstance".⁴⁵

Yet a third example was that shown by Thynne Howe Gwynne of Buckland, one of the two largest shareholders (£2000), who in 1813 sold the canal company a field called Cae Recorder, a prime site near the end of the canal at Brecon badly needed for wharf expansion to meet the growing trade following the completion of the canal to Pontymoile. Having at first agreed on a figure of £1000, Mr. Gwynne then insisted that this was for land sufficient for one wharf only and that if the whole field were wanted he would require £1300. This time the company showed more mettle than in its dealings with Mr. Morgan three years before and eventually reached agreement at £1050.⁴⁶

It is nice to be able to record that there were at least some men of honour. Admiral John Gell, writing to the Brecon & Abergavenny solicitors in November 1792 to express the hope that the stream serving his land would be safeguarded, added "but that my opinion is all private considerations should be given up for any public utility."⁴⁷

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