

RISCA MUSEUM AND MONMOUTHSHIRE CANAL (CRUMLIN ARM) REPORT ON VISIT 25/6/2022.

Due to rail strikes and other problems, a very small party met at Risca Industrial History Museum and were shown various exhibits including tramway and mining artefacts and many other items of local interest, such as the 1832 Columbian printing press which was demonstrated by members of the British Printing Society.



From there, a short walk took us to the canal at Pen y Rhiw bridge, where an interpretive board set the scene. The towpath was then followed to Fourteen locks, sheltering from the heavy showers along the way. Interesting sites included Moriah chapel bridge, a typical arched canal bridge but which was not shown on the 1880's OS plan suggesting it was a later addition as the town of Risca developed. Other roads (Gelli Avenue, Lower Wyndham Terrace, Ruskin Avenue) were seen to have been constructed across the canal after abandonment with piped culverts to maintain the water flow. The site of Giles' aqueduct over the road to Risca House (now Manor Road) was seen. Tony Ford (who has been researching the canal for some 8 years) commented that he had seen several different spellings of Giles and was not sure which was the correct one. At Pontymason Lane the original bridge had been removed and the canal culverted. While nothing is impossible if there is the

political will to make it happen, this canal would not seem to be an ideal candidate for restoration.

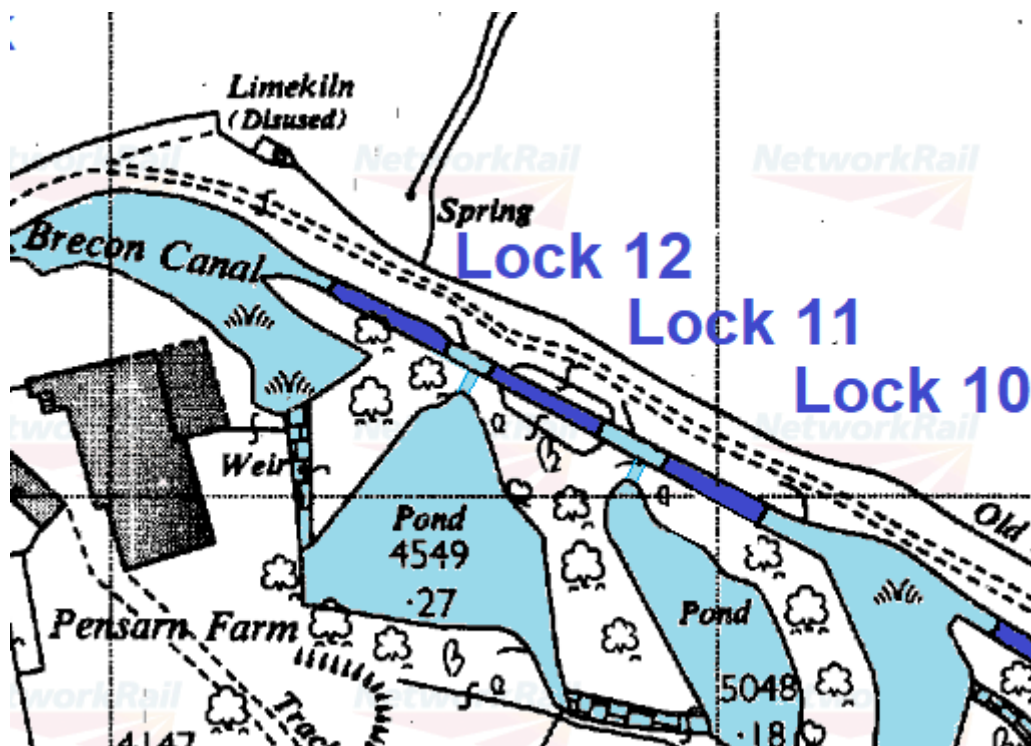
A number of old limekilns and quarries were shown on the 1880's OS map, some of which were no longer extant. All clues as to some of the types of canal traffic in its heyday. The old quarry at Graig was prominent with a possible loading bank alongside the canal overbridge. See photo, right.

As we proceeded eastwards there was less water in canal (for reasons not fully understood) and by the time we reached the top of fourteen locks it had reduced to a trickle.



At fourteen locks, the canal rises 160 ft over a distance of half a mile, the locks being generally in pairs with the shortest possible distance inbetween the pair. A side pond between each pair of lock chambers provided a reservoir so that water did not go to waste when a lock was emptied. Between a pair of locks and the next pair there was enough space for one boat to pass another, but not much more than that.

There was some poring over plans, trying to work out how the flight would have been operated. Particularly where three locks, 10, 11 and 12, adjoined each other. The middle lock chamber was widened out at high level with “shelves” to enable boats to pass each other within the chamber.





Lock 11, viewed looking south-east.

There was considerable discussion as to how it might have been worked. Since the lock would have to be kept full while the passing places were in use to prevent grounding, it is surmised that the upcoming boat would first enter lock 11 which would then be filled and the boat moved into the passing place within the lock. The downgoing boat could then enter the lock and take the other passing place, after which the upcoming boat would enter lock 12. The downgoing boat would then move to the middle and the lock would have to be emptied slowly and carefully. If the boat was not exactly in the middle and grounded on either of the ledges, a capsize would be inevitable!

By mutual agreement the walk concluded at the bottom of the flight and we returned to the 14 locks car park where Tony had left his car earlier and kindly offered a lift back to Risca.

Phil Marshall