

Clyne Valley branch railway and its extension

The Oystermouth Railway, to use its original title, or the Mumbles Railway, the name by which it is now commonly known, is generally thought of as comprising a main line from Swansea to Mumbles with a secondary branch running into the Clyne valley. Its original promoters, however, saw it rather differently. To them it was more of a Y-shaped system comprising two branches of equal value and importance, one to carry limestone from Oystermouth, the other coal from the Clyne Valley.

John Morris I had acquired property on the eastern side of the valley in 1771. He was anxious to exploit the coal reserves which he knew lay beneath the ground and for this reason he and his son, John Morris II, were both active in the promotion of the Oystermouth Railway. The railway was authorised and the company incorporated by an Act of 29 June 1804. Construction started in the autumn of 1804 and the railway was complete by 1807. The Clyne branch parted from the Oystermouth branch at Blackpill and followed a course close to the river as far as a spot referred to in the Act as Ynys – in modern terms about 250 yards to the north of the pond beside the cycle track (NGR SS 61249 91599). The sinuous track that now runs on the level beside the east bank of the river follows the course of the railway. The total length of the branch was about 1,450 yards.

The first mention of Clyne Valley coal being carried on the railway comes in March 1812 when the minutes of the railway company (now in the Richard Burton Archives in Swansea University) note that 'Mr Morris' [i.e. John Morris II] had opened a colliery on the line of the tramroad. This colliery can perhaps be identified with the colliery to which the modern name [Ynys](#) has been given. In the last quarter of 1812 the first payment by Morris of tolls on 'Coals from Ynis to sundry parts of Tramroad' is recorded. Similar payments were then made every quarter until September 1814. After that there is no further record of tolls on Ynis coal until entries in the cash book cease early in 1816. This strongly suggests that the colliery was in production for two years only, 1812–14.

After a rather confused passage in the history of the company, Sir John Morris (as he had by then become) became mortgagee in possession of the railway on 21 December 1819. For a time the company continued to have the semblance of corporate existence but by 1847 George Byng Morris, the grandson of Sir John, had assumed the role of absolute proprietor.

George Byng Morris and Rhydydefaid pit

After John Morris II ceased working in 1816 there is no evidence of coal working in Clyne until 1840 when he transferred all his mineral interests to his second son, George Byng Morris. The latter started to sink [Rhydydefaid pit](#) almost immediately and at the same time re-laid the abandoned Clyne Valley branch and constructed an extension to his new pit. As far as Ynys the railway remained legally part of the Oystermouth Railway of which Morris was mortgagee in possession and which by now had come to be regarded as the property of the Morris family. The section north from Ynys to Rhydydefaid pit was a new construction which closely followed the course of the river and was truly the private property of George Byng Morris. The re-laid branch with Morris's extension was complete by 1846 at the latest.

The reconstituted branch connected Rhydydefaid pit to a coal yard at Blackpill which was also the property of George Byng Morris. This yard would have taken care of local land sales which cannot have been

particularly large; the bulk of the output was carried to Swansea on the Oystermouth Railway. One of its main uses of the coal was in the town's gasworks on Oystermouth Road (the site is now occupied by Tesco).

At the northern end Morris extended his tramway a short distance beyond the new Rhydydefaid pit. At this period the coalfield around Duvant and beyond was starting to be developed on a commercial scale and the new tramway was seen by several promoters as a possible means of getting their coal to Swansea for export or use in the town's industries. The railway was never actually extended in this way, but when the [Llanelly Railway](#) was built in the 1860s a short tunnel, which still exists, was provided through their embankment, and the only reason for this tunnel can have been to accommodate a pre-existing right of way.

In 1854 the Swansea Coal and Iron Co was formed in London. It took a lease from George Byng Morris of the Rhydydefaid coal and in 1855 embarked on a programme of improvements at Rhydydefaid. This included re-laying the entire Oystermouth system with edge rails in place of tramplates in order to improve access to Swansea docks. The re-laying of the original Oystermouth Railway, including the branch to Ynys, was undertaken by Morris as the *de facto* owner but the Coal Company was responsible for the extension from Ynys to Rhydydefaid since this section was regarded as part of the colliery infrastructure.

The updated railway was the sole outlet for coal from Rhydydefaid until 1865 when the Llanelly Railway opened their line through the valley, at this date for goods traffic only. A siding to serve Rhydydefaid was put in, probably as part of the original construction and certainly by 1876. However, this did not supersede the Clyne Valley branch which remained in use. A further source of traffic was added in 1868 when [Clyne Wood](#) colliery, across the river from Rhydydefaid, started to produce. Clyne Wood was connected to the Clyne valley branch by means of a bridge across the river and for a year or two sent its coal out by that way

Philip Richard

After various changes of owner, [Philip Richard II](#) took over Rhydydefaid colliery and the private section of the railway in 1870. By 1878 he had introduced a steam locomotive which worked on both the branch and the main line of the Oystermouth Railway to Swansea.

Rhydydefaid pit was closed in about 1883. Since that was the only pit that was served by the Clyne Valley branch, the railway too fell into disuse. However, there was still the occasional train operated by the Oystermouth Railway Company in connection with race meetings at the nearby [race course](#). It is not known whether these special passenger trains ran every year, but in 1890 at least the company advertised a frequent service of trains from Swansea to Rhydydefaid Junction.

In 1896 the promoters of the Gower Light Railway proposed relaying the branch, which was explicitly described as being out of use, and using it as the first section of their proposed railway to Port Eynon, but nothing came of this project which was not finally laid to rest until 1924.

Philip Richard opened a new pit, [Commercial](#) or Rhydydefaid no 2, in 1891 but it was served by a long, newly built siding off the LNWR line which ran through the woods on a high [embankment](#) and not by the Clyne Valley railway. This new colliery did not initially prove a success but in 1898 Richard took a lease of coal under Llanerch and Olchfa which lay between Duvant Road and Hendrefoilan Road and adjoined his

existing taking. This gave him access to an area of more easily worked coal which made the colliery a viable proposition. He re-opened Commercial in 1899.

As part of the preparation for this he started to refurbish what was described as 'the long disused Clyne section of the Mumbles line'. His purpose in doing this is not altogether clear since the 1916 revision of the 25 inch OS map shows that there was no connection between this railway and the siding from the level that connected with the LNWR line. However, it is also clear that coal from Commercial was carried into Swansea on the Mumbles Railway: this was part of an agreement made in 1899 between the Swansea Improvements & Tramways Company, by this date owners of the Oystermouth Railway, and Sir Robert Armine Morris and Philip Richard. Probably coal was carried by the LNWR from the Rhydydefaid siding to Mumbles Road station where a connection existed between the LNWR and the Mumbles Railway.

Twentieth century

Another new colliery, the [Clyne Valley slant](#), was opened in 1903. It was connected to the Clyne Valley branch by a new siding and this was its only railway connection: it had no link to the LNWR. The branch was re-laid in 1904 to the point at which the new siding had been put in, probably with heavier rails to cope with the volume of traffic expected from the new colliery. In 1906 an agreement was made with the Swansea Improvements & Tramways Co (by this date owners of the Mumbles Railway) under which all the coal from the Clyne Valley colliery was to be hauled to Rutland Street by the Tramways Company.

A further period of disuse followed the closure of Clyne Valley colliery in 1915. Then in 1919 James Pridmore opened his [Ynys Slant](#) close to the former Clyne Wood colliery. He entered into negotiations with the SI&TCo in the hope that they would extend their branch from its terminus at Ynys to his new slant – in effect, hoping that they would relay the privately owned extension. Understandably the company was not prepared to do this and Pridmore then laid his own narrow-gauge tramway along the trackbed of the extension to the limit of the SI&TCo line. The company then agreed to send a locomotive up the branch as far as Ynys (i.e. to the limit of their metals) to collect the coal so long as there was a load of at least 50 tons. Pridmore opened a second slant in 1920, the [West Glamorgan](#) slant, close to the point at which the former Clyne Valley colliery siding had joined the branch, but neither this nor the Ynys slant were successful and both were abandoned in 1921.

Thus the last revenue-earning traffic on the branch was in 1921 but the track remained usable and as late as 1936 a diesel locomotive penetrated as far as Ynys Gate, the terminus of the SI&TCo. Presumably this was simply an exploratory move or one intended to maintain the company's rights. The track was lifted in part during World War II but some sections still remained into the 1950s.

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