

STEPASIDE

PLEASANT VALLEY & WISEMAN'S BRIDGE



*Naws am Le
Sense of Place*

Why Stepside?

Inevitably there have been attempts to explain this tantalising name. The fond local belief is that Oliver Cromwell, on his march to Pembroke in 1648 gave orders to his men to 'step aside' and take victuals at this point. In the absence of actual evidence, the tradition - which has given rise to a modern inn sign - must be viewed with caution.

Two holdings called Stepside existed in the late 17th and 18th centuries. One in Amroth parish was the property of the Kilgetty Estate. The other, in St Issells, was acquired by that estate about 1795.

Earlier Jurisdictions

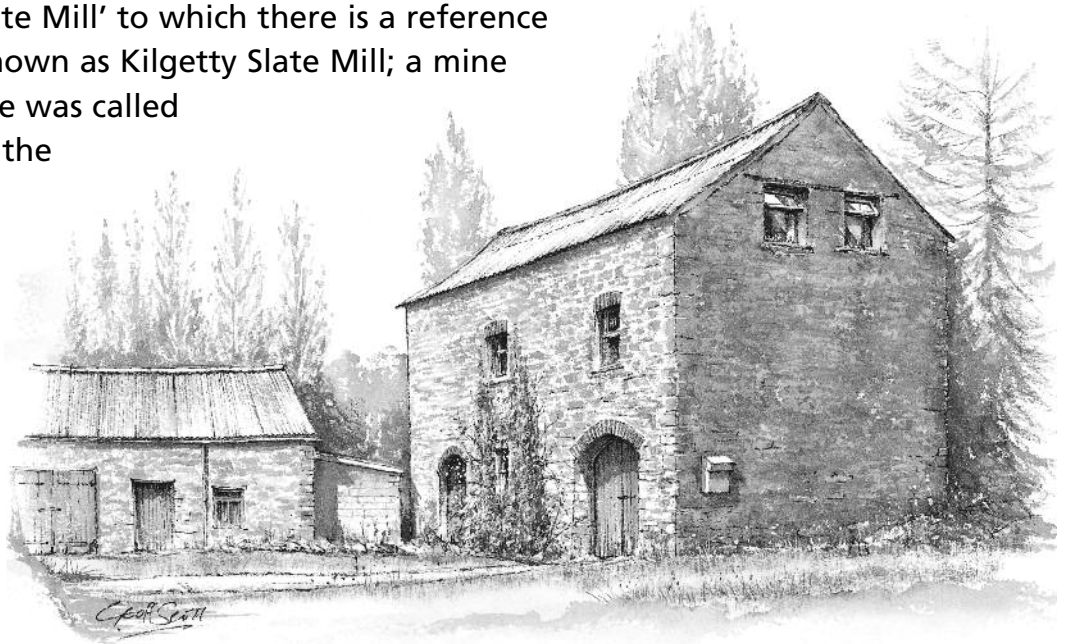
In the Middle Ages the area was part of a subdivision of the Earldom of Pembroke called Coedrath, The name was derived from the woodland which was a feature of Amroth, St Issells, Crunwre and Ludchurch.

Estates and Landowners

The Kilgetty Estate was an important property built up in the 16th and 17th centuries and centred on Kilgetty House. In 1706 it passed as the result of the marriage of an heiress, to the Philipps family of Picton Castle who developed the mineral resources. The build-up of property continued, as demonstrated by the acquisition (by Lord Milford) of Stepside in St Issells.

Kilgetty

The name of the estate was echoed in some of the properties. The 'Slate Mill' to which there is a reference dated 1690, was known as Kilgetty Slate Mill; a mine located at Stepside was called Kilgetty Mine; and the Ironworks was Kilgetty; Kilgetty House in the village (now Stepside Inn) was the dwelling of the Manager of the Iron Works. There was even a Kilgetty seam of coal!



Slate Mill

Kilgetty (Mansion) House

The mansion built in the 17th century on the site of an earlier dwelling and changed and added to later, was occupied by members of the Philipps family during the 18th century, but in the 1830's it was said to be decaying and about the middle of the century was taken down. The tower of the Belvedere - or summer house - survives.

Where Parishes Meet

On the coast at the Western extremity of Amroth parish lies Wiseman's Bridge (recalling Andrew Wiseman, who held land here in the early 14th century). A little over a mile inland, Stepside village grew up in the nineteenth century.

In this valley of great natural beauty are glimpses of earlier history, like the leat which drove the Slate Mill, sites of industrial buildings and a wealth of traditions and memories.



The Belvedere

Industrial Wealth

Stepaside overlies the anthracite coal measures. Coal was being mined in the forest of Coedrath in the 14th century. Till the 19th century most of the initiative in developing the industry came from the local land owners as entrepreneurs or lessors. The O.S. maps show several 'old shafts' dotting the area north of the village and at 2 if not 3 different periods there was a 'Kilgetty Colliery' (M.R.C. Price).

Ironstone is also found locally in the veins between the coal seams. Both coal seams and ironstone can be seen in the cliffs between Wiseman's Bridge and Amroth.

Marketing of Coal

Pleasant Valley - or Merrixton Valley, was the route, by which the local coal was carted to Wiseman's Bridge to be loaded on to small boats. An attempt was made by Lord Milford about 1792 to improve on this by constructing a canal between Stepside and Wiseman's Bridge. This, the only canal on the Pembrokeshire Coalfield, was constructionally not a success - there were problems in achieving a sufficient level of water. There was a Coal Fold at Wiseman's Bridge.

Saundersfoot Railway and Harbour Act, 1829

This resulted in the building of the harbour and a main mineral line from Thomas Chapel and extensions to serve the Stepside district. In 1846 Kilgetty Colliery had a wharf on the main pier at Saundersfoot. The drams were horsedrawn until the line was re-laid in 1874. A steam locomotive (renamed after an interval the 'The Rosalind' or 'Rosslyn') came into service on this Wiseman's Bridge - Kilgetty line, with a wooden housing shed and repair workshop at Stepside.

The Pembrokeshire Coal and Ironworks Co.

Construction began in Pleasant Valley and The Ironworks opened in 1849. The ore was obtained largely from levels driven in the cliffs between Saundersfoot and Amroth and transported by the branch line of the Saundersfoot Railway, which also carried pig iron to

Saundersfoot for export. In its final stage the Iron Works consisted of 2 blast furnaces, blowing engines, coke ovens, workshops and lime kilns. The Works were only moderately successful: no pig iron was produced after 1874 and work ceased in 1877. The workshops were retained for service to local collieries until 1930.

Grove Colliery

Sunk to provide coal for the Works, it is said to have been 640 feet deep, and the deepest pit dug by hand in Wales. It came into use in 1856 and was linked to Lower Level Pit by underground railway in 1878.

Listed Buildings

The Ironworks and Grove Colliery were scheduled as Grade II Listed Buildings in 1982.

The Woodside Foundry

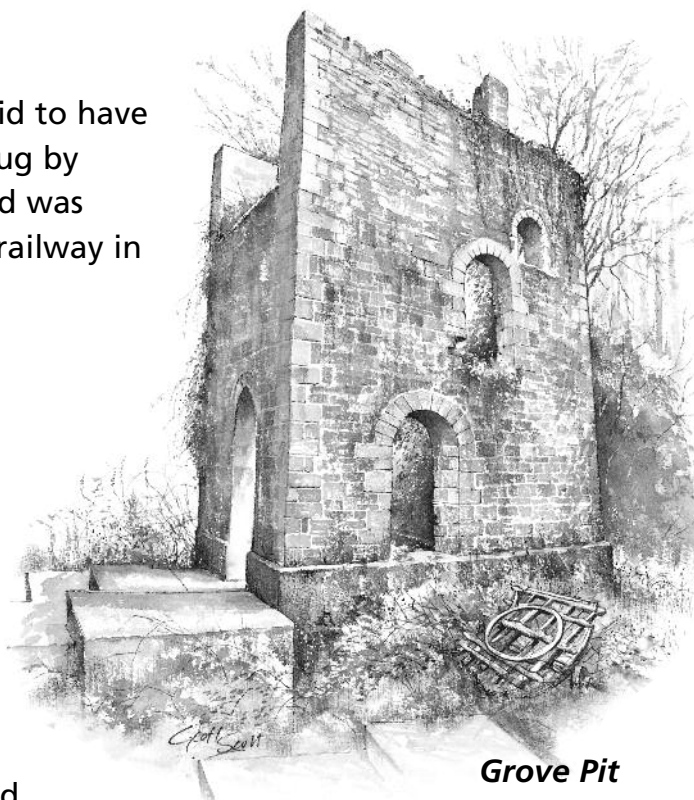
Using Stepside iron, the foundry of David & Co. made castings for collieries, wheels for drams, cast iron sheeting for dram repair and domestic ovens, grates and boilers, cast iron headstones, castings for the Pembroke and Tenby Railway and the Victoria Pier in Tenby. Examples of railings made at Woodside can be found in Wiseman's Bridge and further afield. At closure in 1924 the Foundry was employing 10 men. Cottages associated with the Works still exist but the site of the Foundry is now a caravan park.

Hean Castle Brickworks

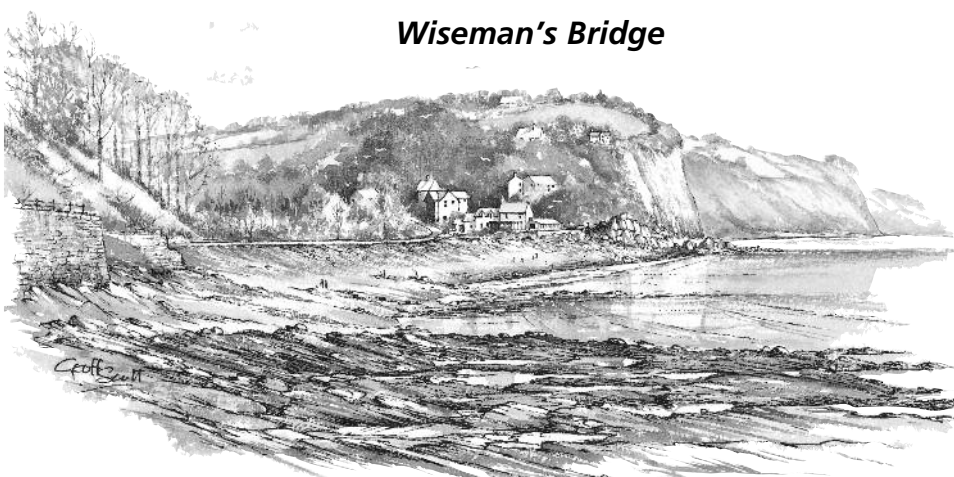
Next to the Foundry at Wiseman's Bridge, just behind the railway, the firebrick works opened about the 1840's, using the black clay which underlay the coal seams. Wilson's Pit was one place where it was mined. The bricks reputed to be the best in the country, were supplied to the Ironworks, and other customers. The Works closed in 1887.

Miners Express

This started in 1900 (M.R.C. Price). The memoir which follows is by the late Gwen Llewellyn one time teacher at Stepside School. It describes a time before World War I. When the local pits were inactive, colliers would travel to seek work elsewhere, particularly Bonville's Court.



Grove Pit



Wiseman's Bridge

'A railway line ran from Stepside to Saundersfoot and as we children came out from school we used to watch the engine with its trams crossing the road at the bottom of the school lane. The first driver that I remember of the engine, which was called The Rosalyn was a Mr John Brinn - a dear old man who used to give us lifts on the engine as far as the mill. In the early morning before dawn he had been picking up the men at various points along the track - Stepside, The Mill, and Wiseman's Bridge and had dropped them off in Saundersfoot at the foot of the Incline I believe. Then in the afternoon he picked them up and did the reverse journey. It was a common sight every day to see the black faced miners coming home from work. From our own home (Golden Grove) we children used to watch the engine or the 'armour' as we used to call it coming along the track below Pleasant Valley and then we would race down the field and over the platform to meet my father. I have also had a ride on the engine to Saundersfoot and it was a great thrill going through the long tunnel - rather frightening too for a small child, although my father was there so there couldn't possibly have been any danger.'

Fluctuating Fortunes

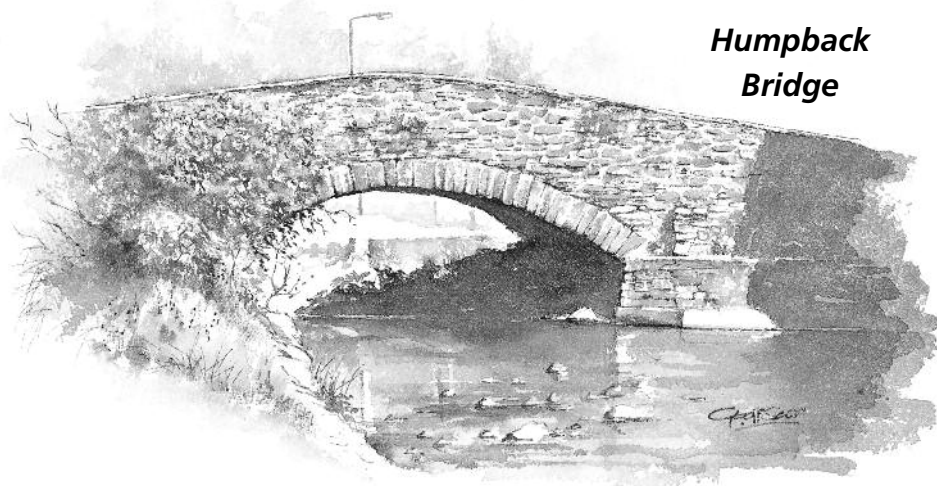
Mining the local coal was often difficult. Hopes were high when Kilgetty Colliery was re-opened in 1935 but because of faults in the seam the owners were obliged to close the Colliery in February 1939. Work at other pits had ceased by August and the recently refurbished railway closed. (M.R.C. Price).

The last local mining was probably at Wood level, an old pit re-opened in 1943 by Mr Edgar Howells Manager of the Gellihalog Quarry as a source of fuel for the production of a patent land fertiliser called 'Carblime'. The anthracite surplus to this need was used to manufacture 'pele' an old country fuel which was a mixture of small coal and clay. The level is in the wood about half a mile north of Stepside and the 'pele' (balls) were mixed on the site where the coach works now stands. The business closed in 1952.

Roads and Lanes

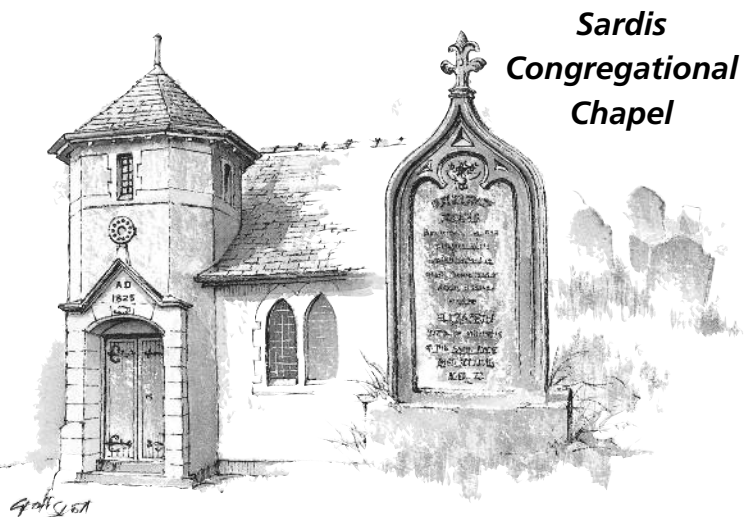
The Old Welsh Road used to bring travellers to the village from the direction of Little Kings Park and Longstone and Ludchurch. After crossing the Lud by bridge or ford it went via the Holloway, Ivy Chimney Lane, and Kingsmoor towards Tenby. The origin of the name is lost in obscurity, but there was also a tenement called Welsh Gate (in existence in 1784). At Camomile Back, according to tradition, there was an inn. When the road system was surveyed a section of turnpike road was built including a bridge, as part of the route from St.

Clears to Hobbs Point (operational 1839). This later became the A477. In recent years the village has been by-passed.

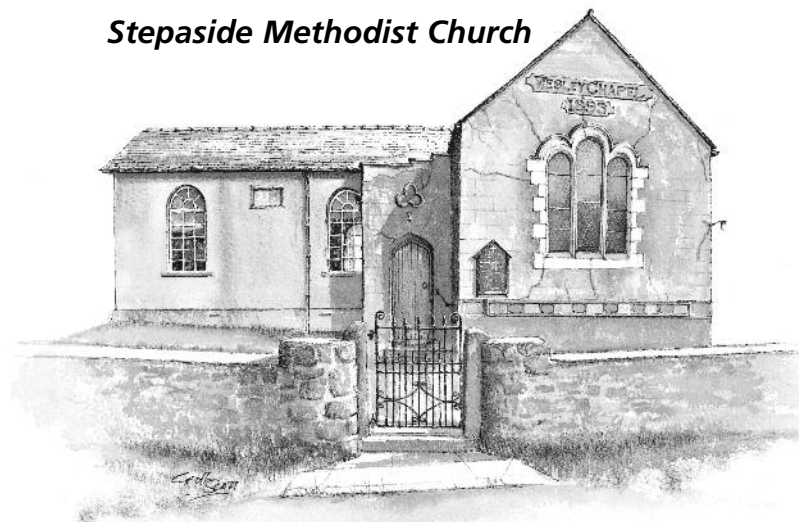


***Humpback
Bridge***

Travellers' needs and the thirst of industrial workers, gave rise to inns such as The Golden Grove, near Grove Pit and The New Ales Public House, (Wiseman's Bridge). The Miners Arms, formerly a pot house serving workers to Kilgetty Colliery, is said to have been the scene of many fights. Opposite was The Prince of Wales which survived until about half a century ago. An earlier Stepside inn was The Angel.



Stepside Methodist Church

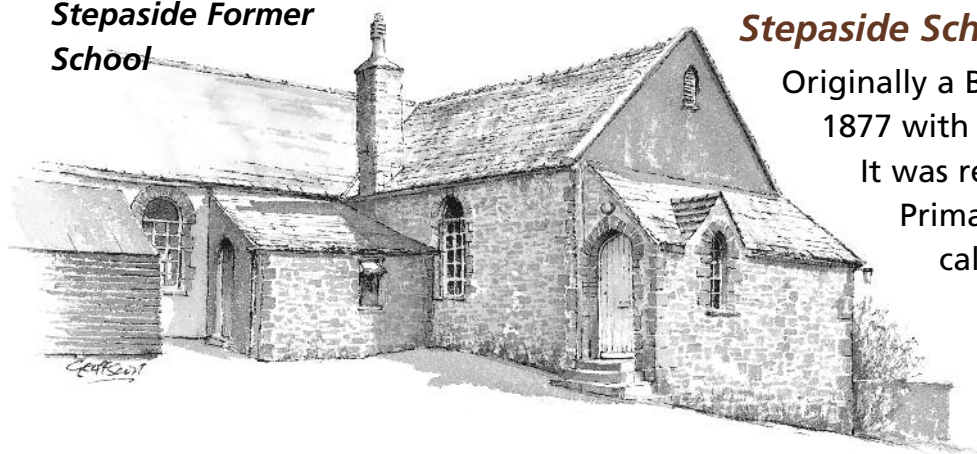


Places of Worship

Anglicans worship at the parish churches of Amroth or St. Issells. Local burials have tended to be at Amroth Church or Sardis Chapel, (in St. Issells parish).

This Congregational Church was formed early in the 19th century, the first Chapel built in 1809, and the present chapel in 1825. Places of worship within the village area are Elim (Congregational, built in 1850 and a branch of Sardis) and the Methodist Chapel in Pleasant Valley (Wesleyan since the union of Primitive and Wesleyan Methodists in 1932).

Stepside Former School



Stepside School

Originally a Board School, it opened in July 1877 with Oliver Skidmore as Headmaster.

It was replaced in 1992 by a new Primary School - in Kilgetty, but still called Stepside Primary School.

Past Amenities

Near Elim was a drinking trough and the village well.

This was modernised to a system of stand taps, and mains water came in 1939.

Houses of the Past

Amongst houses built for industrial workers are Brook Cottages, originally six back to back units, but converted much later into 3 cottages by the local authority.

A feature of the local building style was the large chimney.

Duality

Years ago the occupants of Tramway Cottage, Wiseman's Bridge used to gather winkles from the beach, cook them and sell them, and so the place became known locally as 'The Winkle Works'.

World War II

In June 1943, Winston Churchill, the then Prime Minister, and high-ranking officers of the British and Allied Forces, were provided with tea at the Wiseman's Bridge Inn after watching the full-scale rehearsal of the Normandy Landings.

Country Code

Respect • Protect • Enjoy

- Besafe - plan ahead and follow any signs.
- Leave gates and property as you find them.
- Protect plants and animals, and take your litter home.
- Keep dogs under close control.
- Consider other people.