

SAUNDERSFOOT



*Naws am Le
Sense of Place*

Saundersfoot

The name has been in existence for many centuries, but it referred originally to a property and not a village. It is likely that the first element was the name of a local family, and that 'foot' was a topographical feature.

Prehistory

The present landscape contains only the occasional standing stone from the Bronze Age to recall prehistoric times. However, finds and placenames indicate activity here in the Neolithic, Bronze and Iron Ages. Perhaps Harry's Tump was a burial barrow of the Bronze Age, and the original Hean Castle, an Iron Age hill fort. The placename 'rath' also indicates a fortified enclosure or camp.

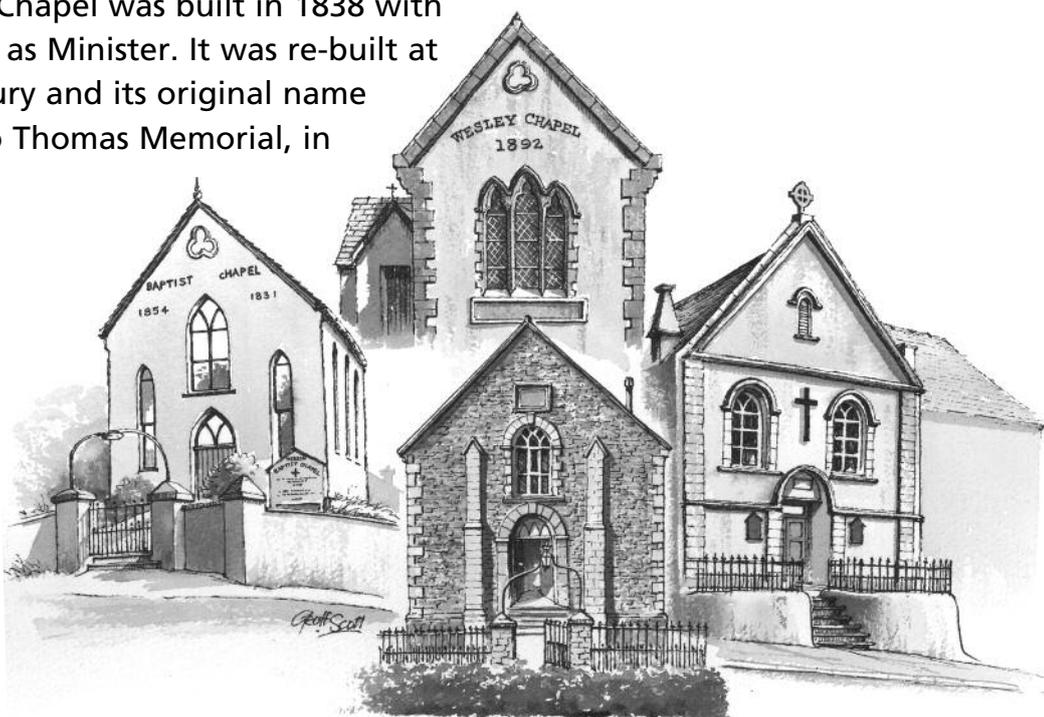
The Middle Ages (Medieval Times)

Celts came to the area in the Iron Age and from them developed the Welsh people who were the main inhabitants until the Middle Ages. The Normans invaded England in 1066. A whole generation later they penetrated this area, and it became part of the Earldom of Pembroke. The forest of Coedrath, which extended over much of the land between Tenby and Amroth, was preserved by the Earls of Pembroke for the use of the Castle of Pembroke and their other demesne properties, and the repair of their mills. The parish church was re-built in stone and the tower from that time survives today. The restored cross in the churchyard also originated in this period.

The first Bonville Castle or Court was a fortified medieval dwelling; it was built possibly by Nicholas de Bonville, who held land here in the early 14th century, or by a member of his family. Another early 14th century person, Andrew Wiseman, who held half a Knight's fee, is recalled by the placename Wiseman's Bridge.

Chapels

The first Congregational Chapel was built in 1838 with William Thomas of Sardis as Minister. It was re-built at the end of the 19th century and its original name of Bethel was changed to Thomas Memorial, in honour of Dr. David Thomas of Stockwell, a distinguished divine and son of the first minister. Hebron Baptist Chapel was erected in 1854 by a group of Baptists who before that time had held religious services in a cottage near where the Saundersfoot Railway Station was built.



The Wesleyan Chapel was opened in 1892. Previously the local Society had met in a loft above a stable. The land was leased from Picton Castle Estate for a 99 year term at an annual rent of 5d (later converted to 3p). Bethany, a daughter church of Bethesda Calvinistic Methodist Chapel was erected in 1865 and renovated about 1910. A few years ago the building was converted into flats.

Catholic Church of St. Bride

This was built in 1966. Previously, local Catholics worshipped in Tenby.

Schools

In 1846, there were 3 schools in the parish: recently established 'private adventure' schools at Woodend and Cater's Hook Gate, and St. Issell's National School held in a school house in the churchyard. This school had been established in 1745 and the building is still there today. Saundersfoot British School was opened on 10th January 1870, and is now the Community Centre. The present village school was opened 11th December 1973.

Hean Castle

The original fortified place - called retrospectively 'Yr Hen Gastell' ('The Old Castle') when people still spoke Welsh in the parish - gave the estate its name. Its various owners in recent centuries were involved in industrial development. There was a colliery, probably a Wogan enterprise, near Coppet Hall by 1764. In the first half of the 19th century, Thomas Stokes worked coal and iron ore and established a brickworks. Charles R Vickerman's purchase of the Castle in 1863 confirmed his local importance. A Londoner, he was the son of the Treasurer of the Saundersfoot Railway and Harbour Company, and step by step he came to dominate local industry. Charles Vickerman also reconstructed Hean Castle in red sandstone with dressings of Forest of Dean stone in the Elizabethan manner. However, reverses followed and at the time of his death in 1897, his industrial interests were in decline. In 1899 Hean Castle was sold to Sir William Thomas Lewis, the first Baron Merthyr of Senghenydd, and has continued in the hands of his descendants.

Pubs

The Milford Arms was the earliest known on a site now occupied by the rear wing of the Cambrian Hotel. The Cambrian seems to have succeeded to its role, since it was here that the Picton Castle rents were collected. Another inn, the Picton Castle, became the Hean Castle Hotel.

**Town
Centre 1845**



The Wogan Arms (recalled today by the property name Wogan House) existed in the early 19th century. Railway Inn is recalled by Railway Inn Cottage in Brooklands, and the Brewery Tap by Brewery Cottage and Brewery Terrace.

During the Second World War

Saundersfoot escaped enemy action, apart from a few incendiaries in the Church and Coppet Hall area. St. Brides Hotel was used as a Signals Training School for the Royal Marines, with many personnel being billeted in the local hotels. Exercise Jantzen, a rehearsal for the landing of troops and supplies, was carried out on the beaches during 1943. The fact that so many servicemen visited the area led to a boom in tourism in later years, when many of them revisited with their families on holidays - with many marrying and settling in the area.

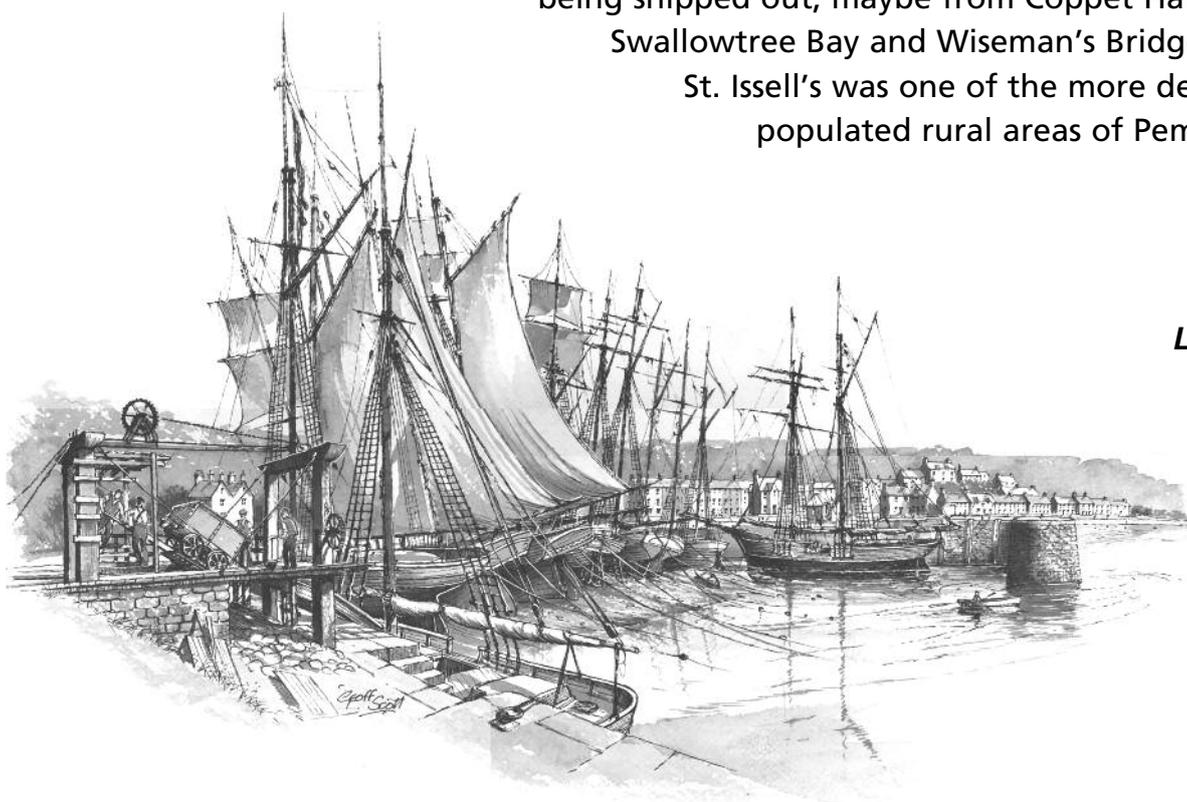
Sandersfoot Farm

In relatively modern times this property belonged to Picton Castle estate. A survey of 1770 shows the farm house and buildings were near the present seafront car park. Other houses or cottages on the farm at that time were: Little Griffiston, Maryhole and Upper Ridgeway.

The survey shows that Sandersfoot Farm was more than an agricultural unit. The ten acre field known as Lower Ridgeway is described as "Colepitts and Furze", and the Upper Ridgeway field as "Old Colepitts and Furze". The location of Sandersfoot Farm on the Pembrokeshire Coalfield was crucial in its late 18th and 19th century development. (It will be noticed that the 18th century spelling survives in local pronunciation).

The Coal Field

There is a reference to mining in the locality of Saundersfoot as early as 1324. This continued, with an acceleration of industrial activity from the late 18th century. Coal was being shipped out, maybe from Coppet Hall, Swallowtree Bay and Wiseman's Bridge. In 1801 St. Issell's was one of the more densely populated rural areas of Pembrokeshire.



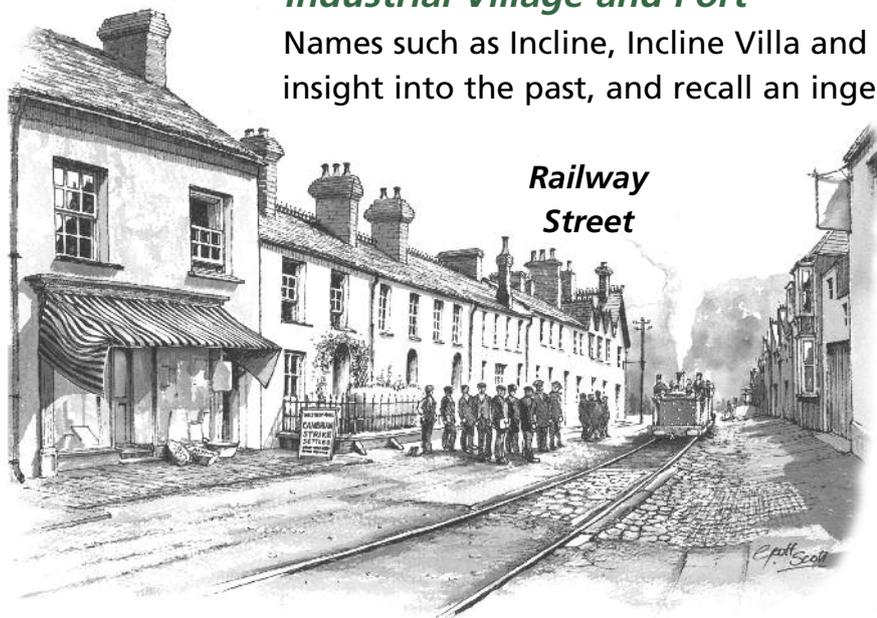
**Loading
coal**

Industrial Take-off

Increased output of coal stimulated the desire to transport it by sea, and in 1829 the Saundersfoot Railway and Harbour Company was authorised by Parliament. This involved a 4ft gauge tramroad worked by horses connecting some of the collieries with a new harbour at Saundersfoot. The chairman and principal shareholder was Sir Richard Bulkeley Philipps of Picton Castle. By 1837 five jetties were in full use, loading coal from Begelly, Kilgetty, Thomas Chapel and Bonville's Court collieries, and iron ore from workings along the Wiseman's Bridge line, and the village of Saundersfoot grew; there were upwards of 30 houses by the mid 1840's. Other industrial interests were the Stepside Ironworks, (founded 1849) and a firebrick works near Wiseman's Bridge (founded about 1850). Pig iron and firebricks were also exported from Saundersfoot. Local anthracite coal, claimed to be the best in the world, is said to have been shipped to Southern and Eastern England for the brewing industry and to Cornwall for the tin industry, and also to France, Germany and Scandinavia.

Industrial Village and Port

Names such as Incline, Incline Villa and Incline Way all provide an insight into the past, and recall an ingenious and skilful system of



moving coal trams down hill on the tramway by means of steel chains operated from a winding house at the top of the incline; the loaded trams, by their weight, hauled up the empty ones. Westfield Road used to be Lower Cart Road while the Ridgeway was Upper Cart Road. Fan Road recalls the ventilation system at Bonville's Court Colliery

where a 15ft fan by Waddle of Llanelli was operational from 1863 to the closure in 1930. Railway Street is the old name for the Strand. The tramway went along here to the tunnel and through to Wiseman's Bridge. In the 1870's the line was relaid and a locomotive operated along it. Inhabitants remember the Rosalind drawing trams along the street, and old photographs show Saundersfoot harbour full of vessels. It is said that in 1890 - 1910, there were 5 blacksmiths working on the harbour.

Ship Building

It has been shown by Barbara George that locally built sailing vessels were registered at the Ports of Milford Haven, Pembroke and Cardigan: 3 in the 1840's, 3 in the 1850's, 1 in the 1860's and 2 in the 1870's. George and Francis Beddoe were amongst local shipbuilders in the middle decades of the century. The 1891 Census demonstrates the continuation of this tradition with a shipwright/boat builder living in Railway Street and another (with 2 sons in the same trade) living at Picton Cottage. In Milford Street there was a further shipwright and 2 others by then retired.

Village to Seaside Resort

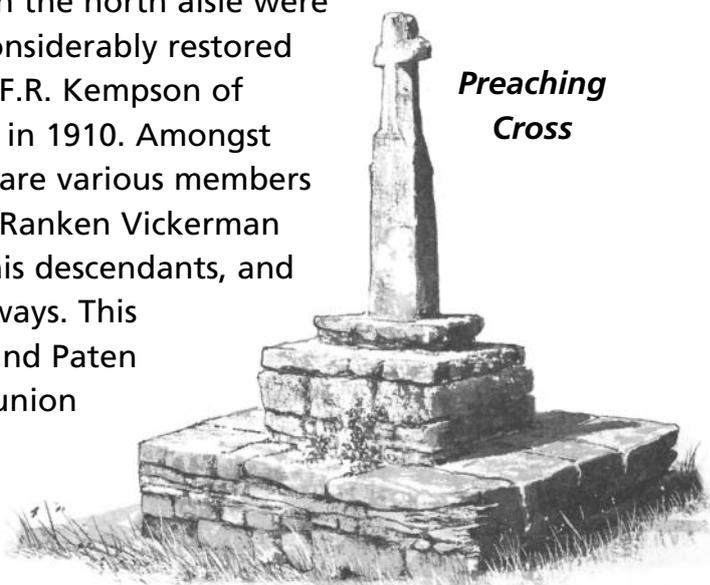
Alongside industrial activity and trade there was, from the 1850's, an increase in summer visitors, a trend helped by the opening of the Great Western Railway from Whitland to Pembroke Dock in 1866. By the end of the century Saundersfoot's importance was confirmed by the meeting of the Petty Sessions, the residence in the village of three Ministers and the Vicar of St. Issell's, as well as a Doctor and Board Schoolmaster, a wide variety of dealers and craftsmen, including a watchmaker and a foundry. The foundry originated as a repair shop for colliery and agricultural machinery, but developed into a business exporting brass and iron goods.

St. Issell's

St. Issell's is an ancient parish, older than the village. The name dates back to the early Christian period when Welsh saints were evangelising in the area. The church, which bore the name of Usyllt (or 'Issell', an anglicised form), presumably on or near the site of the present church, was important in the early period of Welsh Christianity. It was the focus of a number of routes, a road from the present sea front, to St. Issell's, was known as the Church Way. (Church Terrace is on the same line).

St. Issell's Church

There is a late Norman font and parts of the church, including the tower, date back to the 13th century. The chancel, arch and arcades in the north aisle were added in the 14th century. The church was considerably restored and extended in 1864 under the direction of F.R. Kempson of Llandaff and Hereford. The vestry was added in 1910. Amongst those commemorated by tablets or windows are various members of the Child family of Begelly House, Charles Ranken Vickerman and relatives, Sir William Thomas Lewis and his descendants, and others who had served the parish in various ways. This beautiful church has an Elizabethan Chalice and Paten cover and other presentation items of communion plate, and some good stained glass.



**Preaching
Cross**

Changing Fortunes

The coal industry declined in the 20th century for a variety of reasons including the difficulty of working the local seams. Bonville's Court Colliery closed in April 1930, and by August 1939 all pits had closed. As indicated by the author of "Industrial Saundersfoot". Wood Level was worked as a private mine in 1944 - 50, but when this was abandoned, coal mining in the district came to an end. The Saundersfoot railway was closed in 1939. Shortly after the outbreak of war the line was dismantled and the material sold for scrap. However, visitors and day trippers provided some encouragement to the local economy and hotels were established. Since World War II the village has become an important residential area. This variety of influences secured for the parish of St. Issell's an overall growth of population between 1801 (974) and 1981 (3,478), unparalleled amongst the rural parishes of Pembrokeshire.

Country Code

Respect • Protect • Enjoy

- Be safe - 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.

Text researched and written by Saundersfoot Local History Society
in conjunction with Cambria Archaeology.
Design by Waterfront Graphics & Geoff Scott
Illustrations by Geoff Scott
PLANED © 2007