

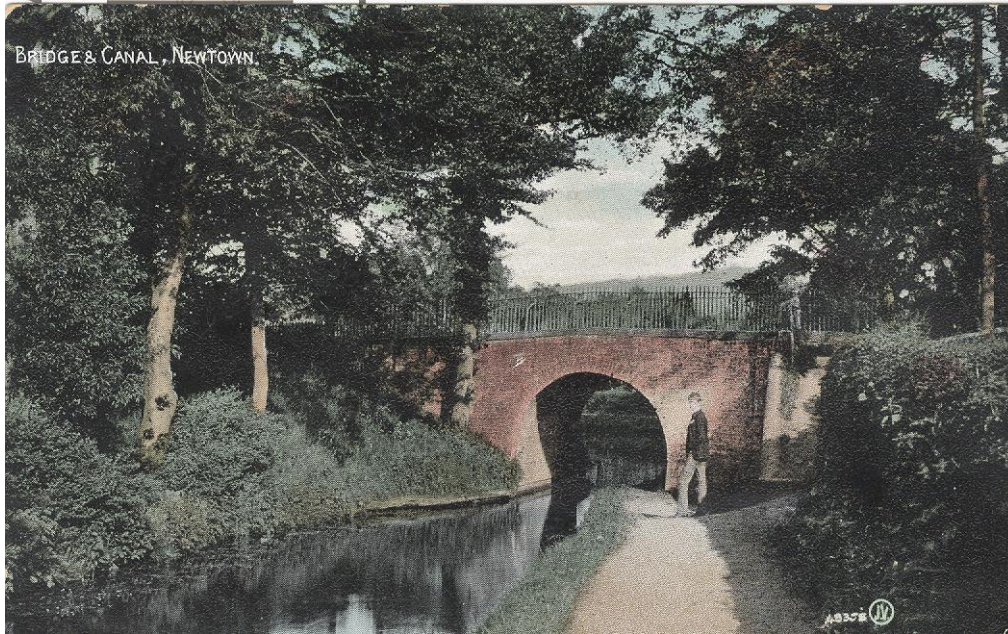
William Pugh



NEWTOWN'S UNSUNG VISIONARY

William Pugh of Brynllwarch Hall, Kerry was a significant figure in the re-shaping of Newtown in its heyday as the flannel capital of Wales. Yet he does not receive the same attention as other Newtown entrepreneurs, such as Robert Owen and Pryce Jones, perhaps because ultimately his life ended in failure. Born in Berriew in 1783, he received a legal training at Lincoln's Inn, London before returning to Montgomeryshire and settling at Brynllwarch. Pugh was convinced that the key to Newtown's success as a manufacturing centre rested on improving its communications with the rest of

the country. For this reason he financed the extension of the Montgomeryshire Canal from its then terminus at Garthmyl to Newtown. The canal, he believed could bring in coal to power the steam powered flannel mills which he wanted to introduce into Newtown and transport the finished flannel out to compete with Lancashire cotton.



He was thwarted in his dream for steam powered factories by the refusal of the handloom weavers to convert to power looms. Pugh also planned a new bridge over the Severn near the canal basin to link up to a toll road he was planning to go south to Llandrindod, Builth and, ultimately, South Wales, which would provide a new market for the town's flannel. This would be a 'County bridge', and, as such, free from the tolls collected on the existing timber bridge through the centre of town. The tolls on the old bridge were collected by the parishes of Newtown and Llanllwchaearn, who saw the new bridge as competition and, thus, his plans were opposed by the parish councils who needed the income to pay for the existing bridge's upkeep. Pugh was forced to compromise by agreeing to build the new Long Bridge in 1827 and thus relieving the parishes of their responsibilities. Although thwarted in his original intentions, the building of the new bridge did lead to the rapid growth of Penygloddfa as a manufacturing suburb of Newtown. In addition to improving Newtown's transport links, Pugh was also instrumental

in building the new Flannel Exchange which wrested control of the textile trade from Welshpool. In politics, Pugh was a Liberal agitating for parliamentary reform and believing strongly in education for the poor. Unfortunately, his heavy financial commitments to Newtown's improvement resulted in his bankruptcy following a banking collapse and he was forced to flee the country to France. But even after this disaster, he continued to campaign for a railway to carry the Irish mails through Ludlow and Newtown, and Dolgellau to Porthdinllaen on the Llyn (instead of Holyhead). He died in 1842, and was buried in Caen, Normandy.