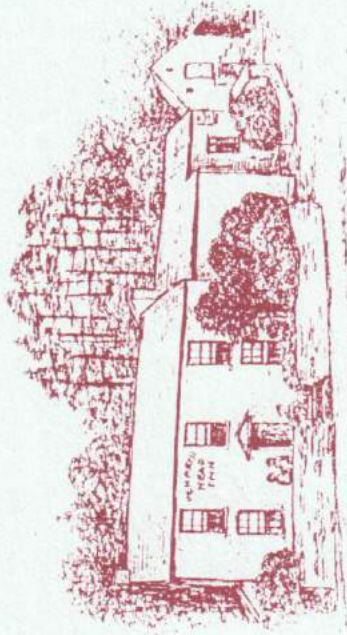


**Town Trails
No. 6**



Penarth Head Inn

PENARTH TOWN COUNCIL

Duration of Walk:
Approximately 1 hour

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(Penarth Head Inn — courtesy of Penarth Library)
(Coal Stairthes — courtesy of British Transport Docks Board)

tower, the Custom House was built on the site of the notorious Penarth Head Inn — home and headquarters of the infamous large scale smuggler Edwards, circa 1730. Alongside is the chateau-style Dock Buildings, originally with accommodation above for dock employees and with a post office (still open in the 1950's), a chemist and butcher's on the ground floor. At the seaward end we find the remains of the Marine Hotel; the entrance steps to both the bar and the saloon, a section of boundary wall and the cellars can still be seen.

In 1881 it was called the Penarth Head tap with a Marion A. Miller, from Holland, as manageress and two servants. Behind, the Marine Hotel (23), on a sheltered shingle strand (24) beneath Penarth Head stood a large boat-building yard, internationally famous. Originally it was a cadet branch of the Cooper's family of Pill, River Avon, in the late 1860's, then later in 1900 the yard was taken over by Harold Clayton, son of Sir Fitzroy Clayton KCVO. Clayton designed and built yachts for the Penarth Yacht Club and also for individual members, e.g. The Mosquito Class for the club and the famous *Faith* for C. E. Moore (Commodore, PYC, 1919) and numerous vessels for the Neale family (Neale/West Trawlers of Cardiff). Alongside the yard was the lifeboat station, originally, 1861 housed in a substantial boathouse at the bottom of the now Cliff Hill. The station moved to the Dock Beach in 1883/84 and until 1905 when it closed, housed the Joseph Denman 11 and 111. After this, Clayton extended his yard by taking over the premises. Clayton was PYC Commodore from 1920-1926. (His father had been Commodore between 1901-1906).

Clayton became Sir Harold Dudley Clayton, 10th Baronet of Marden Park on his father's death in 1913. The Penarth Yacht Building Co was then taken over by Andrew Anderson, who as Andreas Andresen had arrived in Penarth on a Danish square-rigger, the *Lagos*. He married Margaret Dippy, another Dane, in 1888 and settled in Penarth having three children. He worked for Clayton then opened a small shed alongside Clayton's yard, taking over in 1913 and working until the 1950's. One of the sheds and part of the lifeboat slipway could still be seen until the CBDC development started.

Immediately above the 'old yard' stood Northcliffe (25) and its 'cliff house', home to many famous Penarth residents: John Batchelor, Valentine Trayer, Plisson, and in later years the Neale family — all with maritime connections.

Walking back towards the bottom of Dock Entrance Road, (26) known colloquially as Dock Beach Hill, we see among the trees behind the Custom House (27) Penarth's first Coastguard Station, and it is here our short trail ends.



View across the River

The dockside here was the mooring-place of the *Pamir* and *Passat*, (16) four-masted barques, after they completed the last oceanic commercial voyages by sailing vessels, bringing grain from Australia via Cape Horn.

Near here were two buildings erected by the Mission to Seamen — the first of corrugated iron, (17) on the river bank, and the second (18) (only recently demolished) a magnificent building of local limestone and yellow bricks from the Penarth Ridge quarries, at the junction of the basin and dock.

Even given the large-scale destruction that has taken place the dockside still retains a strong romantic hold. As one walks along the north side, especially on a squally day with an ominous looking sky, one follows the footsteps of thousands of dockers and seamen from all the maritime countries of the world. One walks the route followed by Joseph Conrad who regularly walked to the Penarth Dock and Harbour Station to travel to Queen Street, Cardiff, to visit his friends the Kliszowski family who resided in The Parade. Conrad sailed from Penarth on the sailing vessel *Tilkhurst*, 10th June, 1885, after spending a fortnight in the area.

At one time it was possible to cross from the north side to the south side of the dock by crossing one of the two lock gates (19) or the swing bridges, which had a rail and road crossing and two pedestrian walkways, and gave access on the south side to the large boat and large building yard of A. Hill and Co. (20) The barges were used in the dock and also to run between Penarth and Cardiff docks.

The junction area was once the tidal pill Cwsh-y-Cwm, fed by a vigorous stream now culverted, that ran down from the ridge. Pilots kept their 'yawls' there and in 1841 a cottage on the seaward bank was occupied by Elias England and his wife. The pill cut through a large cove, of shingle, lost when the dock was built. This beach would have visitors who included Romans, Vikings, Normans and Moorish pirates.

Moving on, we have to our left the dock basin, now a marina, and to our right a retaining wall (21) built with the durable Radyr Redstone.

The two large Victorian buildings (22) are the Custom House and Dock Offices opened in 1865. With its two arched entrances coach houses alongside and its elegant clock

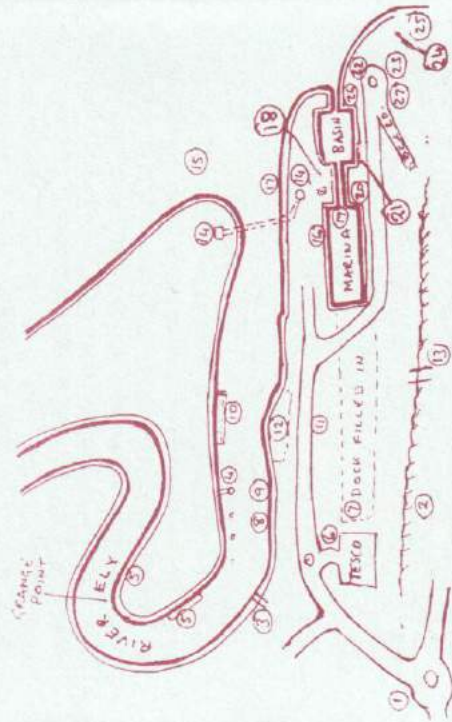
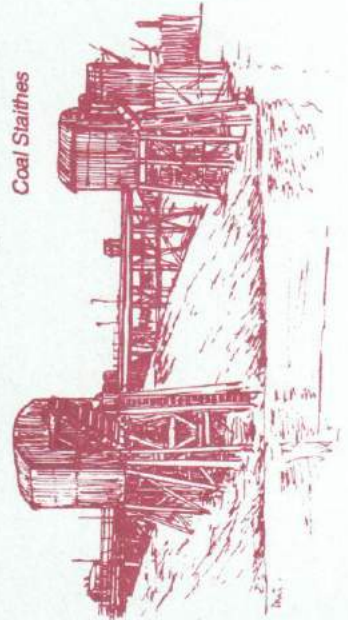
Penarth's raison d'être was the opening of the Ely Tidal Harbour in 1859 and the opening in 1865 of the Penarth Dock. During the late 1980's and early 1990's successive developments have seen a massive degree of destruction of much of the dock buildings and infrastructure, so a casual visitor would be excused for not being aware that this area had once been so dynamic and busy that Penarth was a very well known small town in the 19th century. However, even given the widespread demolition, the interested, investigative visitor can still find and see much of historic interest.

The trail starts at the new roundabout (1) built over the subterranean entrance to the Docks, unfortunately now blocked off by the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation. The entrance road followed the bed of the tidal Cogan Pill and it was around here that during the early part of the 19th century four of Britain's foremost engineers — Brunel, Telford, Smeaton and Stephenson — separately surveyed the area as a possible site for a dock.

From our elevated position we can look eastward and follow the man-made escarpment, (2) formed when the dock was excavated, that shapes the northern edge of the wooded Penarth Ridge, and offers protection from the prevailing south-westerly winds. The area below was once a dock that pulsed with life, darkened all too often by violent death, drownings, crushings, etc.; a dock that echoed to the sounds of ships' hooters and bells, shunting and stationary engines, the clanging and clattering coal wagons and the roar of the coal cascading from the high coal tips into the cavernous ships' holds; all accompanied by the noisy riveters' guns busy at repair work on the pontoon dry dock. A dock full of vessels, sail and steam, all under a permanent pall of coal dust.

Moving down the slope, we see the entrance of the Cogan Pill, (3) now culverted. Before the landscaping, a section of the cliff face edging the original pill could still be seen. Across the River Ely (a diminution — a corruption of the Welsh Afon Llai, mud river) can be seen the remains of the tidal harbour. The original coal staithe, (4) 1859, can be seen as little more than rotting stumps in the mud, with the

Coal Staithe



exception of No. 1 staithe which is in a remarkable state of preservation. Staithe 1 and 2 worked up until the 1960's and were used by the last of the small ubiquitous steam colliers, e.g. *Arran Monarch*, *Crowpill*, *Rushlight* and the last of Britain's sailing vessels, ketches and schooners, e.g. *Emma Louise*, *Eilean*, etc. Much of the massive Victorian Wharf (5) can be seen and splendid examples of stone warehouses circa 1860's. Directly behind on Grange Point surrounded by trees stands the imposing River View House (5) and its attendant cottages. The extensive sidings, to serve the original 12 coal tips which shipped out 27,000 tons in the second half of 1859, have been lifted and the area bulldozed but the searcher can still find in the undergrowth remains of railway lines, turntables, retaining walls, workers' sheds, etc.

On our right we see Tesco's (6) which stands on what were once extensive sidings that linked the dock coal tips with the coalmines of the valleys. The car park stands on what were extensive locomotive sheds and ancillary buildings.

The 'landscaped' area behind Tesco's was the site of the Penarth Pontoon's large office block and engineering yard. (7) The pontoon was built in Westminster in 1909 and towed, in two sections, to Penarth Dock where it was assembled at the western end of the new extension (1884). The pontoon, dry dock, was 382 feet long and 75 feet wide and used for ship repairs — the riveters' guns could be heard all over the Dock town. The first vessel to use the pontoon was the barquentine *The Baltzig of Riga*, 8th March, 1910.

Crossing the road, to the river bank, we see the entrance to a culvert (8) used to pump water into the dock from the river to maintain the water level and nearby, the site of the ballast wharf, (9) now gone. However, due to longshore drift we can see ballast stone strewn on both sides of the wharf. Over 80% of vessels entering the dock in the 19th century

came in ballast; much of the ballast was stone although sand and gravel were also common and used for local building. (A classic example is Ebenezer Chapel in Charles Street, Cardiff).

As we move seaward we see across the river the massive wooden wharf — originally an iron-ore wharf, then later the Anglo-American oil wharf, and until its closure in the 1980's the Esso Wharf. (10) Tankers brought oil for the Petroleum Works, with its 8 distinctive storage tanks now demolished.

On the Penarth side we reach the site of the red-bricked, hydraulic power house building (11) with its tall brick chimney and alongside the stone-built engine house, now gone. The buildings supplied the power for the dock's lockgates, cranes, coal tips, etc. The water came from the reservoir at Llandough Hill. On 28th October, 1894, a burst water pipe cut off the supply, panic ensued, but a potential disaster was averted as the Dock Master just managed to get the sea lockgates closed with the last of the power.

Crossing the road we find the site of the Penarth Ship Repair and Ship Building Company (12) opened in 1879, built under the supervision of James Edwards, TVR (Taff Vale Railway) Superintendent, who built and lived in 'Westwood' now the Conservative Club. The yard was managed by R. Monroe. As well as providing repair facilities at the slipway and on a massive grifiron, ship building also took place — steam coasters, e.g. *Aira Force* and *County of Lancaster* and a paddle steamer for the Cardiff/Penarth Ferry. Much can still be seen: building foundations, retaining walls, sea walls, the slipway and some of the massive wooden wharfage.

Across the now filled-in dock we see a break in the escarpment. (13) This was cut out by a number of streams that ran down from Penarth Ridge, and is the site of the Dock Subway. The subway, a monument to the highdays of Victorian civil engineering, is built of local yellow bricks, tiles and Radyr Redstone, and was the main artery between the dock and the town — the umbilical cord that joined the two. The subway led from the south side of the dock under the wide and busy High Level sidings to a steep, broad flight of steps which joined the Dock Subway Road which led up to Dock Road (now Paget Road) passing the lime-kilns, pits, sidings and tramways up past the spoil heaps and past the three Limekiln Cottages, inhabited until the late 1920's.

Moving ever eastwards we reach the site of the river subway entrance building, (14) now demolished, once a grand red-bricked building which contained the Dock Police Office. Its twin, (14) fortunately still with us, can be seen on the other side of the river on Mud Point. (15) The subway, opened in 1899 to replace a small steam-driven chain ferry, was built on a long curve to reduce the gradients. It closed in 1962.