

Penyclawdd Toll Gate



The site of Penyclawdd Toll Gate in 2023.

Between 1750 and 1770 there was an explosion of turnpike roads across England and Wales. Approximately 10,000 miles of road were placed under trust authority in these two decades. As a result, tolls became commonplace on all roads near major towns.

Turnpike trusts were authorised by Acts of Parliament to build, maintain and operate toll roads in Britain. These organisations were most prominent in the 18th and early 19th centuries, prior to the advent of railways, and they were an important institutional innovation. They originated in the 17th century because local governments, specifically parishes, were unwilling or unable to invest in roads. The finances of turnpike trusts were distinctive because they levied tolls on road users and issued bonds mortgaged on these tolls. Also, they were locally managed and financed.

The trusts provided substantial economic benefits, most directly through improvements in transportation. Overall, turnpike trusts raised land values in nearby communities, promoted urbanisation, and contributed to the growth of the British economy into the 19th century.

However, the proliferation of turnpike roads, and their accompanying toll gates resulted in some conflict. In 1765 yeoman John Dickens of Chirk appealed against a conviction for driving his wagon, with 'five horses hooked thereunto', on a turnpike road. In 1766 Robert Price, vicar of Llangollen, Edward Wynn, gentleman of Dolfawr and an Edward Jones were convicted of forcibly taking horses and carts through the turnpike gate at Llangollen. They had been carrying lime and manure for their lands, which they felt to be sufficient excuse for refusing to pay the toll.

Nonetheless, considerable improvements were made to the major routes westwards to Corwen and northwards across Llantysilio Mountain to Ruthin by the turnpike trusts during the second half of the 18th century. It was at this time that the road leading northward out of Llangollen, and through Pentredŵr towards Ruthin, became a toll road. Thomas Pennant, in his *Tour of Wales* published in 1783, for example, mentioned the 'excellent turnpike-road leading to Ruthyn' past the Pillar of Eliseg. This was the former route across the mountains via Pentredŵr, by way of the pass known to Pennant as Bwlch y Rhiw Velen.

In 1808, according to the antiquary Richard Fenton 'The Road ascending from the Vale, is . . . prodigiously steep, and continues so for a mile and a half. Then we come to a mountain track and open an extensive view. See the Arrennig, our old acquaintances, and have a clear view of Snowdon.'

TURNPIKE TOLLS TO BE LET.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN,

THAT the TOLLS arising at the Toll-gates upon the turnpike-roads in the Llangollen and Ruabon Districts, known by the names of Llangollen, Chwarelau and Bwlch-rhiwfelen Gates, and Ruabon Gate, **WILL BE LET BY AUCTION,** to the highest bidder, at the Eagles Inn, in Ruabon, on Tuesday the 7th day of March next, between the hours of ten and two o'clock in the afternoon, in the manner directed by the Act passed in the thirteenth year of the reign of his Majesty King George the Third, "For regulating the turnpike-roads;" which tolls produced the last year the sums undermentioned, above the expence of collecting them, and will be put up at those sums respectively:

Llangollen, Chwarelau and Bwlch-rhiwfelen Gates,	£ 475
Ruabon Gate,	160

Whoever happens to be the highest bidder, must, at the same time, give security, with sufficient sureties to the satisfaction of the trustees of the said roads, for payments of the rents agreed for, at such times as they shall direct.

And whereas the Trustees of the Llangollen District, have come to a determination to improve a part of the Llangollen Road leading towards Ruthin, to avoid Bwlch-rhiw-felin, by turning of the said road, to the left at Edward Foulk's house, and carrying the road up to Trenant Slate Quarries, and from thence to the Finger-post Top of Bwlch-rhiwfelen, which new road is already staked out, the making of which, will be let at the said meeting, to the lowest bidder.

SAMUEL LOVATT,
Clerk to the said Trustees.

Ruabon, 7th Feb. 1809.

Just a year later plans for a less demanding turnpike road, the now famous Horseshoe Pass (A542), were laid. In an advertisement in the *Chester Courant* in February 1809, the trustees of the Llangollen District stated 'we have come to a determination to improve a part of the Llangollen Road leading towards Ruthin to avoid Bwlch-rhiw-felin, by turning of the said road, to the left at Edward Foulk's house, and carrying up to Trenant (Oernant) Slate Quarries and from thence to the finger post top of Bwlch-rhiw-felin, which new road is already staked out, the making of which will be let at the said meeting, to the lowest bidder.'

What is by no means clear is when the Penyclawdd Toll Gate was built. Was it when the original road through Pentredŵr was made into a turnpike, was it built alongside the new Horseshoe Pass road or at some other time?

Notice of the intended building of the new Horshoe Pass in 1809.

From 1773 local newspapers started advertising that the turnpike tolls from gates around Llangollen were to let, although any mention of the Penyclawdd Gate did not appear until 1828.

TURNPIKE TOLLS.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN, that the **TOLLS** arising at the under-mentioned Toll Gates, between Wrexham and Bwlch Rhufelan, by the way of Rhuabon and Llangollen, in the county of Denbigh, and the Branch of Road leading from Gutter Hill to Bangor, in the county of Flint, called and known by the names of

Felin Polston Gate, with Bryn yr Owen Bars
Rhuabon Gate
Chwrela Gate, and Bar at Rhos y coed
Llangollen Gate, and Two Bars
Penyclawdd and Bwlch Rhufela Gates
{ Gutter Hill to Bangor,
Hafodybwlch, and Bangor Gates

Will be **LET BY AUCTION,** to the best bidder or bidders, at the Wynnstay Arms, in Rhuabon, in the county of Denbigh, on **Tuesday the 18th day of March next,** between the hours of eleven and four o'clock on the same day, in the manner directed by the Acts passed in the third and fourth year of the reign of his Majesty King George the Fourth, for regulating Turnpike Roads.

Whoever happens to be the best bidder or bidders, must at the same time give security, with sufficient sureties, to the satisfaction of the Trustees of the said Turnpike Roads, for the payment of the respective rents at which the same shall be let, and enter into a proper agreement for the payment thereof, at such times as may be agreed on.

B. CUNNAH,
Clerk to the said Trustees of the said
Turnpike Roads.

Ranbom, Feb. 8th, 1828.

To be Let to the highest Bidder,
At the Meeting of the Trustees, to be held at the Bowling-Green in Ofweftry, on Thursday the 30th, Day of December 1773.

THE TOLLS of the following Gates.

	Purveyor Value.
	£. s. d.
Church-street Gate in Ofweftry	105 0 0
Llanymynech and New Bridge Gates	210 0 0
Pool and Croftpleen Gates	219 0 0
Pwilycwrw chain	10 0 0
Llanforda Gate	41 0 0
Willow-street Gate	51 10 0
Llewn Gates	157 10 0
Fern-hill Gates	30 0 0
Whithurst's Gates	210 0 0
Black Park Gate	42 0 0
Bwlchrhufelen Gate	20 0 0
Llangollen and Chwarelau Gates	152 0 0
Afton and Knockin Gates	60 0 0
Queen's-head Gate and Chain	80 0 0
Kefo Bodvach Gate	18 0 0

N. B. At the said Meeting it will be proposed, to erect a Side-gate on the Lane leading out of the Turnpike road on Llangollen Green.

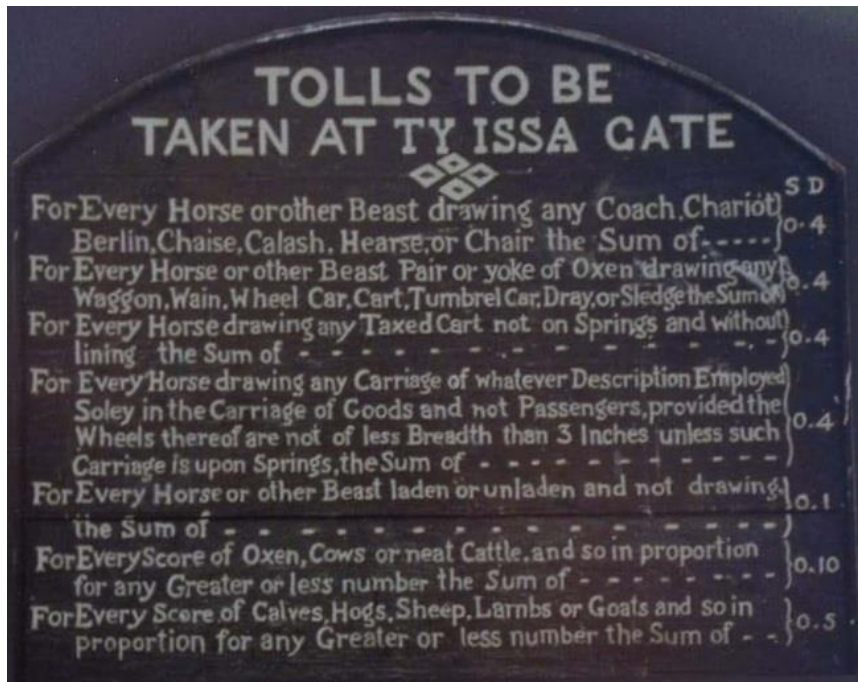
*Advertisements for the letting of
the turnpike tolls in 1773 (above)
and 1828 (left).*

It would seem likely, therefore, that it was around this time that the Penyclawdd Toll Gate was first opened to collect tolls from travellers. The Turnpike Act authorised a group

of trustees to levy tolls on a stretch of road in order to finance its maintenance and improvement. The toll rates were set by the Act which also empowered the trustees to borrow money secured on future tolls in order to invest in road improvements. Money could be borrowed by bonds and loans secured on the toll income or by mortgaging the tolls.

The expectation was that the trust would repay that debt over time, with the road then reverting to the parishes. In 1831 the Chester Courant reported that the five toll gates around Llangollen, Chwarelau, Llangollen with 2 gates, Penyclawdd and Bwlch Rhiwefelin, made £650 after operating costs – around £65,000 in today's money. In reality, however, the initial debt was rarely paid off and the trusts were renewed as needed.

We do not know the rates that were charged in tolls at the Penyclawdd Gate, but the toll board from Tŷ Issa Gate at nearby Glyndyfrdwy indicate what the typical amounts may have been.



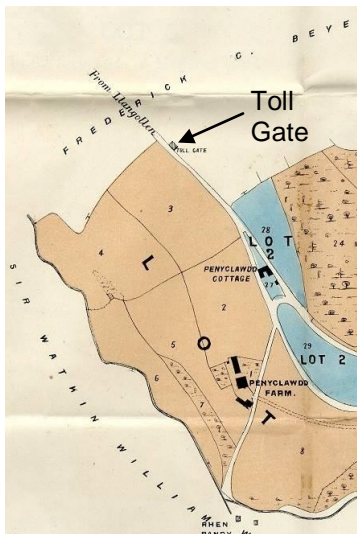
Toll board from Tŷ Issa Gate, presently displayed in the Owain Glyndwr Memorial Hall in Glyndyfrdwy.



1835 Ordnance Survey drawing marking the Toll Point (circled).

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By 1835 Penyclawdd Gate was being marked on maps of the area and in 1841 we find the first record of who was living there. At that time it was occupied by 55 year old labourer John Edwards, along with his wife Elizabeth and their 11 year old daughter Abigail. It was not uncommon for the toll collectors to have a second job alongside collecting tolls, and in 1851 John Edwards had been replaced by shoemaker Edward Roberts, his wife Catherine and their two children Robert and Elizabeth Ann. Not until 1861 was the main occupation of the resident, then 70 year old Elizabeth Hughes, given as a Toll Gate Keeper.



An 1866 map marking the toll gate.

But the end was in sight for the turnpike trusts, roads and gates. Not only were they unpopular with travellers but the rise of railway transport largely halted the improvement schemes of the turnpike trusts due to reduced income. For example, the London to Birmingham railway almost instantly halving the tolls income of the nearby Holyhead Road. From the 1870s Parliament stopped renewing the acts and roads began to revert to local authorities. In 1870 there was a meeting in Wrexham at which it was agreed that 'This meeting approves of the insertion of the Wrexham, Ruabon and Llangollen Turnpike Trusts in the Turnpike Abolition Bill, for extinction on 1st November 1871, and that the Mayor be requested to communicate this resolution to the Home Secretary.'

The Penyclawdd Gate (then referred to as the Tŷ'n y Pistyll Gatehouse) was still being lived in by 27 year old servant Elizabeth Roberts in 1871, and it was marked as Penyclawdd Gate on the 1874 Ordnance Survey map. As late as October 1875 Griffith and Catherine Jones of Penyclawdd Gate were recorded as having a daughter, Emily, but Penyclawdd Gate did not seem to be in any records after that time.

Births, Marriages, & Deaths.

BIRTHS.

Sept. 26th, aged 14 months, the infant daughter of Mr. Thomas Jones, labourer, Willow-street, Llangollen.

Sept. 25th, the wife of Mr. David Ellis, Pentredwr, of a daughter.

Sept. 29th, the wife of Mr. G. Jones, Penyclawdd Gate, near Llangollen, of a daughter.

1875	Griffith Jones	Penclawdd Gate	Rockman	H. Humphrey Vicar.
13.	Emily & Catherine			
No. 168				

The birth and baptism of Emily Jones of Penyclawdd Gate.

In 1876 there was an auction in Ruabon, where the gates, posts, bars, chains and toll boards for a number of toll houses, including Penyclawdd, were sold. Today nothing remains of the toll house that once stood as part of the effort to maintain the roads of the local area.

By Gaynor Evans and David Crane.