

MONTGOMERYSHIRE CANAL BUILT HERITAGE ASSESSMENT

APPENDIX 3: ROAD TRANSPORT.

One major incentive for the building of the canal was that it would relieve the local roads of the burden of limestone, coal and timber that was destroying them. In the late C18, water was by far the best method of transporting stone and coal, and offered a much higher capacity than road transport till well into the C20.

However, road transport was an indispensable complement to the canal throughout its working life. The canal was a bulk transport route. For local distribution, road transport was essential. This was particularly true of the lime industry, and the output of the numerous kilns was distributed by road to a surprisingly small hinterland.

Although railways challenged the canal's position as a bulk carrier from the mid C19, they too were carriers of bulk goods on trunk routes. The Welshpool and Llanfair light railway was one of many attempts to extend the coverage and flexibility of rail routes.

Like the others, it was unsuccessful.

The internal combustion engine was what revolutionized road transport, and by 1900, motor vehicles were numerous and reliable enough to challenge older forms of transport. In 1900, a bus service opened between Llanfair and Welshpool. From the mid 1920s, and clearly by the early 1930s, lorries were taking trade away from the local railways, and more so from the canal. By 1932 A & A Peate of Maesbury Mill were the canal's principal users, carrying grain from Ellesmere Port in 11 of their own boats. In that year, Peates abandoned the canal because of its poor

state and unreliability, but more because lorries offered much greater efficiency and availability. In particular, lorries could carry as much in a day a boat in a week, and employ much fewer men.

The photograph opposite symbolizes the change. Although the canal still has water, the crane in the foreground is disused, and lorries are carrying the distribution traffic. The SURCC has given up its warehouse to the Morgan Edwards company, who were wholesale grocers. This confirms that the essential business of the canal was to carry limestone and coal. When those trades declined, as they had done by the 1930s, the canal's chances of survival were nil.