

LIVING HISTORY

**SAUNDERSFOOT BAY
COAL INDUSTRY**

**HIDDEN HERITAGE
DISCOVERY TRAIL**

Come with me, Tomos, on the journey, and we will find out about some of the history and heritage of Saundersfoot Bay. You can imagine what life was like for me 150 years ago. Our circular walk is about 9 miles. You can choose much shorter walks or add detours along the way. You will find a map of the walk(s) on the back.



The villages in Saundersfoot Bay are set in beautiful coastal scenery and have a fascinating past which is unknown by most visitors. The area had small mining developments owned by local farmers. From 1830 onwards with the onset of the industrial revolution, coal was needed in all parts of Europe. Coal was found in large quantities in the area and over fifteen coal mines came into operation.

Begin your walk at Saundersfoot Harbour 1.
See the old Coal Office close to the harbour 2.



As you enter Saundersfoot today, you will get an idea of the past with your first glance of the sand and sea. There is a harbour which gives a clue as to how the people of that time lived and worked. A harbour of this size was not built for a few fishing boats to land their catch. So what was it built for? The answer is COAL. The coal boats would leave the harbour loaded with coal, returning with a range of materials used as ballast which they dumped on local beaches. You can still find interesting stones from this ballast including Connemara

1. Saundersfoot Harbour



To find out about **Charles Ranken Vickerman**, a leading industrialist at the time, and boat building in the Strand (previously **Railway Street**) go to www.saundersfoothistory.org.uk

The original well-sheltered harbour in **Saundersfoot**, was built in 1829, in response to the rapid growth of the thriving coal industry in the area which was developed by the **Vickerman** family. They lived in Hean Castle (which you will see on your walk), and latterly at St Issells' House – which is now The Captains Table on the harbour. Prior to the harbour's development, coal was loaded into boats at Swallow Tree Bay and **Coppet Hall**, (believed to be a corruption of coal pit haul) and it was from here that the first load of Pembrokeshire coal was shipped to London. Until the railway was built in the early 1830's, the coal carts were pulled to the beaches by horses and oxen from the pits around the church,. The route became known as **Black Walk**. Slater's Directory of 1868 referred to Saundersfoot and the harbour as "a flourishing little port, connected by tramways with extensive collieries, the coals from which are excellent.....altogether forming a favourable picture of future prosperity". In 1840, 39,405 tons of coal were shipped from the harbour.

2. The Saundersfoot Coal Office



The **Coal Office** in Saundersfoot stands proudly by the harbour. Together with the harbour, the Coal Office was the operations centre of the coal industry in the area. It was built in 1860 and was the operations hub of the **Saundersfoot Railway and Harbour Company**. When the coal industry ceased, the Coal Office was utilised in a variety of ways including some years as a Tourism Information Centre.

The building has sadly deteriorated, and it is hoped that it will soon be refurbished so that future generations can enjoy its historic and important roots.

To find out more go to www.saundersfoothistory.org.uk

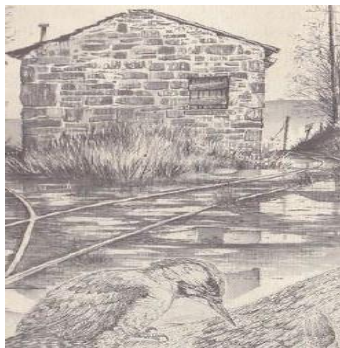
You can follow the route the miners would have taken to the pits by walking up the **Incline** or down the **Strand** through the tunnels at Coppet Hall and onto Wiseman's Bridge. To find out more about the railway engines **Rosalind** and **Bulldog** that transported the miners and coal go to www.saundersfoothistory.org.uk

You can detour here if you wish to see the Incline above the village 3 Follow the Blue Route from the Coal Office.

Walk up to the Incline to see where the 'drams' (also known as trams) were hauled up the hill by a small Winding House at the summit. The Bulldog engine was then used to transport the drams to the pits at Bonville's Court Colliery and on to Thomas Chapel. I used to work down the pit at this colliery. I was a 'trammer'. I had to crawl through the tunnels dragging a tram full of coal. It weighed about the same as 4 grown ups. It was hard work and dangerous. I got my foot crushed but now I have an easier job, showing visitors like you



3. The Incline



Bonville's Court Colliery was the largest in Pembrokeshire at the height of the mining era. The main line of the new railway was constructed for transporting the mined coal from the pits that followed a route from Saundersfoot to Thomas Chapel – about 4 ½ miles.

A feature of the railway was a self-acting incline, 300 yds long at a gradient of 1 in 5. This was situated half a mile west from the harbour. At the foot was a siding and railwayman's hut, whilst at the summit, was a small winding house. This can be seen in the picture here.

The Incline (as it is now known) and the remains of the winding house can still be seen today.

From the Coal Office, walk into The Strand (old Railway Street) and follow it through the first of the tunnels at the end of the street. 4.
You will then come in to the Car Park at Coppet Hall.



The Strand, as it is now called, was known as Railway Street in my time, because the railway ran along it from the harbour. Here there were lots of trades. My dad's mate worked at the busy ship-building yard down here. At the end of this street you will see the first of the tunnels hacked through the cliff side through which the railway ran. The Rosalind engine would take miners to work at Stepside - returning loaded up with coal.

4. The railway line running through a tunnel along the coast to Wiseman's Bridge



To find out more about the **coal industry** in the area, and the value of the precious **anthracite** mined here go to www.saundersfoothistory.org.uk



Cross the road at the car park entrance and follow the footpath (Black Walk) through an open field. Pass through the kissing gate and bear left up the track. Walk through the caravan park to St Issells Church. If you are not doing the long walk and would like to visit St Issells Church, then you can detour here, up Black Walk to the church. If you are not doing the long circular walk, then continue following the footpath through the tunnels to site 9.

The footpath across the field is known as the Black Walk. This is because before the coal industry developed in the area, the coal carts were pulled down through this walk to the beach by oxen and horses to the waiting boats on the beach. My dad remembers this when he was a boy. Coppet Hall was by far the busiest area before the harbour was built in Saundersfoot. The coal was mined further up the valley beyond St Issells Church.



This is what the Black Walk looked like in the mid 1800's. In the early 19th century there were no railway lines.

This was before the massive industrialisation of the area took place



St Issells Church is where I used to go to school – you can find the old school house behind the church. The church marks the place where the original hamlet of Saundersfoot began. The name dates back to the early Christian period when Welsh saints were evangelising in the area.

At the church turn right on to the road and walk up the road to the T junction - opposite Hean Castle Estate. Turn left here then left again for Sardis, keeping on the road.



St Issells



HEAN CASTLE is an anglicised form of the original Welsh name, Hen Gastell or Old Castle. It is known that Hean Castle was at one time a property owned by the powerful Wogan family. In 1863 it was bought by the influential London solicitor and industrialist Charles Ranken Vickerman, who was the main driving force behind the industries of the Saundersfoot district during the last half of the 19th century.

Vickerman died in 1897 and his son sold the mansion and estate to Sir William Thomas Lewis, Lord Merthyr. The Lewis family still resides here and the house, gardens, parkland and estate retain much of the character of a Victorian country estate. Many of the local farms and cottages are owned by the estate and identifiable by their colour scheme, as estate properties are generally painted in cream and green. The mansion is now a listed building, as is the Gate Lodge and a monument erected in the grounds in memory of Lady Anne Lewis, wife of the Sir William Thomas Lewis, who died in 1902.



As you enter Sardis there are 2 cottages known as Harry's Tump. This site is believed to be a burial barrow of the Bronze Age, and the original Hean Castle, an Iron Age hill fort.

At the Post Box, signposted - No Through Road - turn right down this track and follow to a marked gate.

Keep to the edge of the field to a second gate, climb the stile, and follow the hedge on left to the bottom of field (towards the sea) Climb another stile and walk through a 6 bar metal gate.

You will pass through a farmyard and past a row of caravans on the right. Follow the footpath sign and climb another stile following the yellow arrow.

There will be another stile to climb, following the fence with another stile and down a woodland path.

When you come to the road, take a right to Tramway Cottage.

Turn left at Tramway Cottage. You are now on the old railway line which transported the coal from the Grove Colliery to Saundersfoot.

Follow this flat well defined path to Mill House, and Harvest Mill (with old millstone in the garden). Left here into the Ironworks . Just past these houses turn left into the Ironworks and take the steps up to see the remains of the old Grove Colliery 5 & 5a.

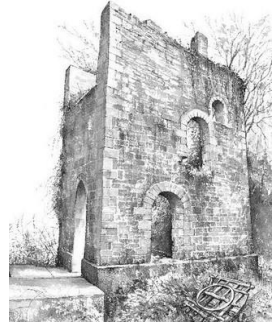




The path by Tramway Cottage is the old railway line that took miners to work in the Grove Colliery and Ironworks. Carts of coal would be returned to the harbour in Saundersfoot to be shipped. It is said that the quality of the anthracite in our area was thought of as being very special.

5. Ironworks Stepside

The iron ore dug from the patches was loaded into open boats and beached on the sand. In order to develop this source of wealth, the **Grove ironworks** at Stepside was opened. Men would drive loads of ore to Stepside from the beach using carts and horses. They were paid 9s 6d per ton of ore hauled. In the 1840's, the Ironworks were in full operation. There was a row of lime kilns, two blast furnaces with blowing engines, coke ovens and a foundry. Advantage was taken of the hilly land behind the works to charge the blast furnaces from the higher ground. The Ironworks buildings are still impressive to this day.



5a. Grove Colliery



The **Grove Colliery** in Stepside was begun in 1853. It was one of the deepest shafts at 182 meters. The aim was to reach the Kilgetty anthracite vein. It was finally linked up in 1858 at a cost of £30,000.

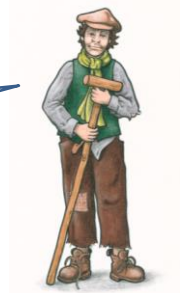
Coal from the Grove was carried both to the Saundersfoot Railway via **Stepside** and to a self-acting incline to the Ironworks below. Grove Colliery was later connected to Kilgetty Colliery via an underground tunnel some 795 metres long.

The Grove had its own smithy, carpenters' shop, stores and stables which housed the pit ponies. You can climb up to the colliery remains via steps to the right side of the Ironworks.

To find out more about **the Grove and Ironworks** go to

<http://www.experiencepembrokeshire.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/stepside-pleasant>

Can you imagine what it was like working in a busy colliery and foundry like this. I knew lots of people who worked here. Stifflingly hot during 12 hour days and yet people would come from all around the area to





Mill House



Retrace your steps to the entrance to the Ironworks, cross the road and turn left at the green footpath sign and walk through the grassed area to the footpath (Tomos) between the Mill House and Harvest Mill. Climbing up, ignore the second yellow arrow and continue the climb following a sharp right bend in the track.

At the road turn left and then right continuing up the road to Green Plains Bungalow. Here follow the footpath sign to the left. At the next green sign, take a right down the path through a kissing gate.

Follow this path up to Cwmrath Farm, through a wooden gate and follow the track up to the main road. At the road turn right and then left by the Summerhill sign. By the entrance to a farmyard, follow the bridledways sign down a dirt track. (A small section of this path can get muddy - so go with caution)

Continue down this winding track to the bottom and turn right. You are now in Colby Woodland Gardens on Long Lane 6.

Here is a good place to take a break across the gardens at the Bothy tea-rooms in Colby Gardens.

6. Colby Lodge and Woodland Gardens



Coal mining thrived here for over 100 years. Colby has a number of capped off mineshafts for you to discover. Many labourers lived in mud hovels. There were no proper beds, tables or chairs, just a covering of loose straw and filthy rugs. *"In no part of the country have I witnessed such abject and wretched poverty."* - said an observer at the time of John Colby's ownership and management of the mines. Today Colby's extensive, beautifully laid out woodland gardens are owned and managed by the **National Trust** and the site attracts over 25,000 visitors a year.



One wealthy mine owner John Colby Snr. lived close to his mines at Colby Lodge. The anthracite mined here was highly praised by Queen Victoria who would use nothing else on her Royal Yacht. John Colby built his Lodge in 1803. It was a very hard life being a miner. The working conditions were very poor, and there were many accidents- some so bad that nowadays I think they would be called disasters. Working like slaves, the lives of women and children forced down the mines through hunger and wanting a better life for their families was so difficult they often became ill and would end up with nothing. Many would be sent to the workhouse, near Narberth. This is what happened to Mary Prout, who lived near us at the time. You can read her story later on your journey. As you take a woodland walk along the anthracite pits that dot the hillside, picture the miners on their way home after a long hard day down the mines.

A young boy drags the cart, full of coal, up the narrow mine shaft



To find out more about the **mining industry at Colby** go to www.nationaltrust.org.uk › Visit › Wales › Colby Woodland Garden

The mineshafts at Colby were small and narrow and hence children as young as 5 were sent down the pit. A child's work would involve being fitted with a girde which was fastened round the body, and a chain between the legs, which enabled the child to drag the cart through the narrow shaft on all fours. It was very hard and painful work. Children suffered with bleeding feet; raw skin on the head and on the back, causing outbreaks of boils. Asthma and bronchitis were common with the inhalation of coal dust. Stunted growth, spinal distortions and short life span of about 45 years were the norm. "I have been down since aged 8, working from 6am to 6pm. My feet are blistered and raw because it is easier to pull the cart without shoes". Elias Jones (aged 14). There was no Welfare State to help families in difficulty during the 1800's and early 1900's.

Despite the fact that the area was growing and prospering, conditions for ordinary folk was far from good. For many of us life was hard and unhealthy. I was lucky to have some schooling before I was sent down the mines at 10 years old, when my father died. Many of my friends were much younger than me.



From the Colby Car Park, you can detour to visit St Elidrys Church and the grave of Mary Prout. (detour about 3kms 7.)

7. The gravestone of **Mary Prout** at **St Elidrys**



Mary Prout was born in 1842 and she became pregnant, thought to be by her employer, while working as a maid in Saundersfoot. Her mother had died and her father disowned her and sent her to the workhouse. Mary had a baby girl, Rhoda, and had to leave the workhouse. The baby was found down a mineshaft at **Colby**. Mary was charged with murder and sentenced to death by hanging, but received a reprieve from Queen Victoria and was committed to 20 years imprisonment in London. She served 10 years and returned to Saundersfoot, married and had 2 children. The inscription on her grave at **St Elidrys Church Amroth** says "*Mary Rees (Prout) late of Saundersfoot Dear mother, thy work is o'er. Thy loving hands shall toil no more. No more thy gentle eyes shall weep. Rest, dear Mother, gently sleep. Erected by her sorrowing children*".

We can only speculate as to what went through the young Mary's mind, but being an unmarried mother was viewed as a scandalous crime in those days.

Find out more about her life at hellohistoria.blogspot.co.uk



To continue the main route, walk along Long Lane where there are numerous mine shafts on the hill side now covered in shrubs. (There are also several paths through the woods that you can explore)

At the end of Long Lane you will go through a 5 bar wooden gate. Take a left here down over the stream. Bear right and follow this path down into Amroth village. Note the Coal Authority secured site where an old mine shaft is behind some metal railings.

Proceed right into the village, (or detour left about 2/3 mile to the start of the Pembrokeshire Coast Path by The New Inn).

In Amroth, there are several lovely village cafes for you to take a break.

8. A coal seam as it appears today in the rocks on the beach between Wiseman's Bridge and Amroth



The cliffs between **Amroth** and **Wiseman's Bridge** are the most complete section of this type of rock sequence in the Western South Wales coalfield and the story began 315 million years ago with mud, sand and gravel being laid down in the swamps and lakes of the coastal plain. The swamps became land whilst other areas became seas. New layers of rocks and soils were formed. Amroth beach is also home to a **sunken forest**, which can be seen at very low tide. The layers of decaying trees were slowly compressed through pressures and heat. The climate changed and so did the flora of the land. **Coal** was no longer formed. The forest was engulfed by water long before Roman times. It was here that Neolithic Britons hunted. The forest was submerged 5,000 to 7,000 years ago. Today, you can see the coal seams (derived from the forest all those years ago) in the rock that forms the cliffs, and you can pick up pieces of coal as you walk along the cliffs at Amroth beach.

To find out more about the formation of **coal**, in particular the precious **anthracite** found in this part of Pembrokeshire, go to www.pembrokeshireonline.co.uk/geology2.htm

I used to play on the beach between Wiseman's Bridge and Amroth. We used to swim there in the summer to wash off all the coal dust from our work. The bathing is very safe on all the beaches around here as they do not shelve steeply. If you walk along this stretch of beach at low tide, you can see the sunken forest. It shows you how far the sea has encroached on to the land over millions of years. The wood from these forests formed the coal that we are mining today.

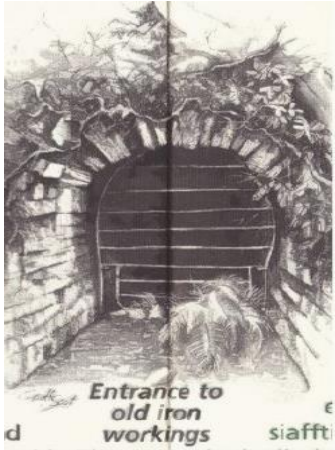
If the tide is well out, you can then go on to the beach via the slipway by the toilets and see the sunken forest on the beach and the coal seams in the cliffs 8. Walk up from the beach at the next inlet - Wiseman's Bridge and join the road.

If the tide is in, then walk to the toilets and take the footpath clearly marked up the cliff. This is part of the Coast Path. Follow this path over the top (magnificent views) down into Wiseman's Bridge, bearing left when you reach the road.

At the Inn follow the road through the hamlet over the bridge, turning left off the road, onto the old tramline (the old railway route), following the coast just above the beach. On the path you will see 9.



9. Entrance to the old shafts between Saundersfoot and Wiseman's Bridge



On the walk between Saundersfoot and **Wiseman's Bridge**, the entrance to the old shafts can be clearly seen. Iron ore was dug at various points beyond the cliffs along the bay. Some of the greatest activity was eventually at the 'patches' between Wiseman's Bridge and Amroth.

Watch out for the mine shafts between Wiseman's Bridge and Saundersfoot as in the picture. This one is the entrance to one of the old shafts which are scattered along the cliffs and were called 'patches'. They lead directly to tunnels both inland and under the sea.

Keep to this path through the long railway tunnel and into the Coppet Hall car park. Retrace your steps through the small tunnel and back via the Strand into Saundersfoot.

If you have enjoyed finding out about the area's industrial past, you might like to discover other interesting facts about Saundersfoot Bay.

You will quickly appreciate that the area boasts a treasure of local history just waiting for you to discover it. This includes:-

- **The Roman settlement near Amroth**
- **Oliver Cromwell's visit**
- **Allied forces D Day landings – Operation Jantzen**

Thanks go to **Graham Brace** for his original drawing of Tomos, and to the *Pembrokeshire Coast National Parks Authority, Amroth Community Council and Saundersfoot Community Council* for their help and support

For further information the following websites are useful:

www.pembrokeshireonline.co.uk

www.visit-saundersfoot.com

www.pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk

www.saundersfoothistory.org.uk

