

Back at the bus station complete with its 20 stands, we queue to catch the hourly bus to Mumbles; the No 2A.

It leaves at 11.25 and after a short sojourn through some of the city streets the bus will follow the curve of Swansea Bay, which I think must be one of the most scenic of bus routes in the area.

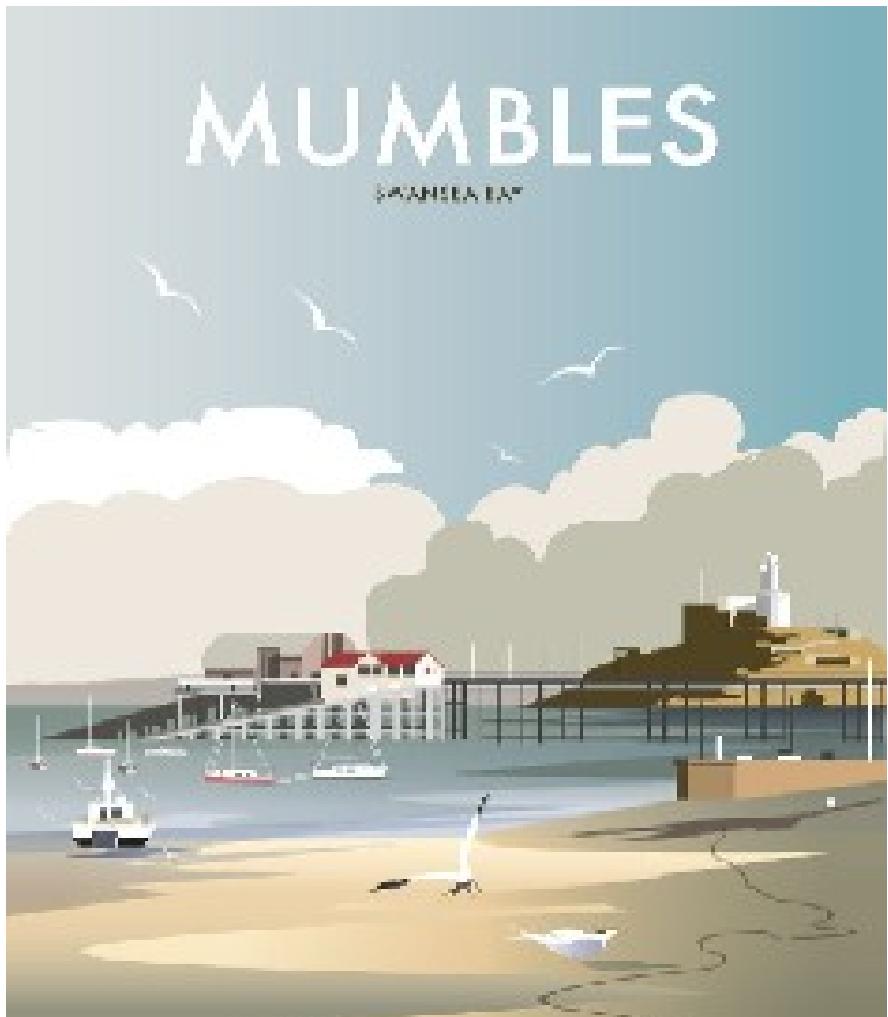


We leave the side roads and join the Mumbles Road, that leads, strangely, to Oystermouth (remember the Usk Road last month!) around the bay eventually to Mumbles. I have a captive audience, so I bring the following for your attention!

"How many of you remember the other mode of transport, whose path we are now following, leading to Mumbles"?

Many of you look puzzled but I can see my question has struck a chord with some of you. Including one wearing a certain garment.

An anorak! No name to protect the innocent.

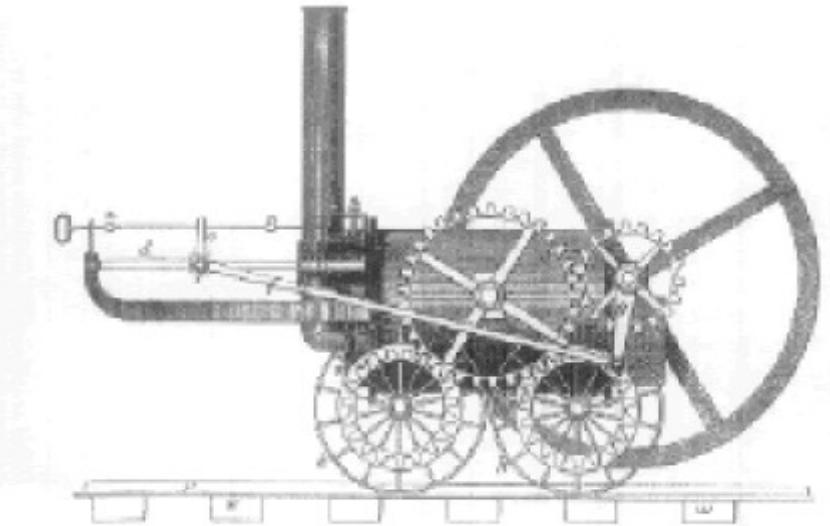


Of course, it's the the

**Mumbles Railway** well done those few of you who worked that one out - mainly the older people in out group so no names here! And the one in the anorak who I am sure is a train-spotter.

There are many significant dates in Welsh history, moments that we should remember and celebrate, but one that seems to have slipped under the radar - at least for lots of people - is 25 March. For on that momentous day in 1807 the Mumbles Railway opened, the first fee paying passenger railway service in the world.

Wales had already seen the advent of the first steam locomotive service. This was in 1804 when Cornish engineer Richard Trevithick built and ran a steam engine that was used to draw iron from Merthyr Tydfil to Abercynnon.



This was, however, clearly a goods line and passengers never came into the picture; not as far as Trevithick was concerned nor the owners of the iron works. Trevithick's engine was not a major success and he soon left Wales to return to his native Cornwall.

The Mumbles Railway was built under an Act of Parliament in 1804, authorising the removal and carriage of limestone from the quarries at Mumbles to the docks area of nearby Swansea. From there the limestone would be sent to all corners of the world. Construction was completed in 1806 and services began. There was no formal opening ceremony and, to begin with at least, it was industrial product rather than people which was the important factor.

However, as Patrick Thornhill has written, the thrill of an illicit ride on this early railway soon became a natural part of the games of children from the area:

"What could be more fun for the children than a coach ride along the shore to Mumbles? One hears the thud of the horses' hooves, the gritting of sand between rail and wheel, the thunder and swish of breakers." At this stage the operation was known as the Oystermouth Railway, only later acquiring the correct name of the Swansea and Mumbles Railway - or the Mumbles Railway as it was soon called. There was no road link between Swansea and Mumbles and, looking at the children hitching rides on the trams, it did not take local entrepreneurs long to realise that some form of passenger service, for people who wanted or needed to make the trip, could be something of a goldmine.

In 1807 permission was given for the line to carry passengers. Benjamin French, one of the early investors in the project, paid £20 for the right to run the line and carry passengers.

The concession was for one year only and on 25 March 1807 the world's first passenger railway began operations. It was a huge success, so much so that French and his partners quickly upped their offer to £25 a year in order to continue with the arrangement.

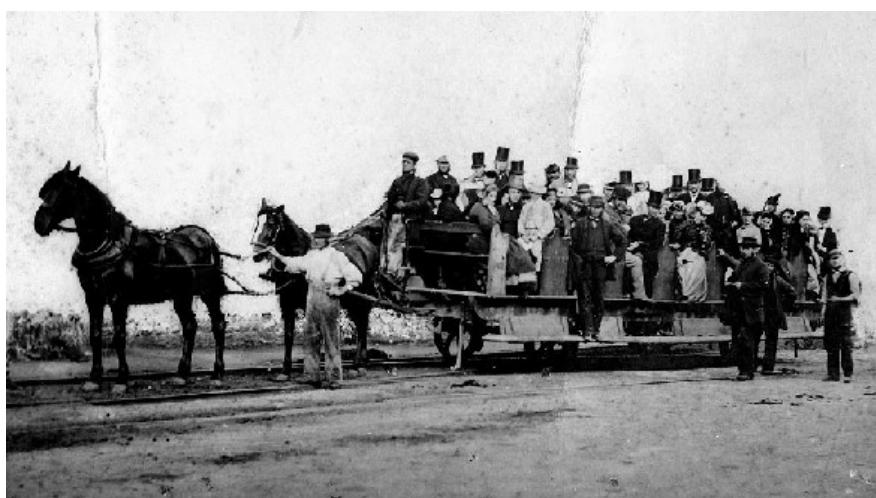
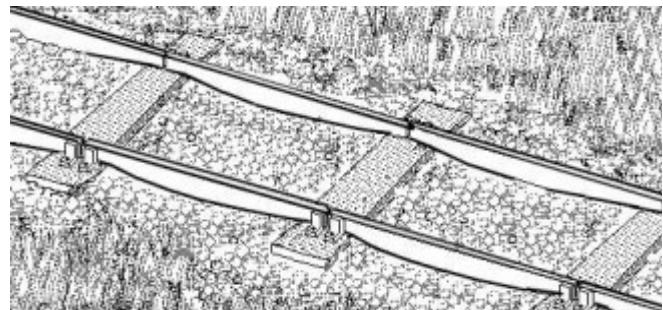
It was an amazing achievement for small investors from south Wales. George Stephenson did not open his Stockton and Darlington Railway (the first public railway to use steam powered



locomotives) until 1825 and by then the Mumbles Railway had been running for nearly 20 years. Despite the ground-breaking achievement of Trevithick's steam engine at Merthyr, the first passenger wagons on the Mumbles Railway were actually drawn by horses. Over the years several other means of transportation were tried, ranging from a short-lived attempt at sail power to steam and electric - more means of different transportation than any other railway ever attempted. However, towards the end of the 1820s a turnpike road was built between Swansea and Mumbles, the road actually running parallel to the railway line. The success of this road deprived the Mumbles Railway of much of its traffic and Simon Llewellyn, who was then running the railway, decided to stop carrying passengers after 1826 - by sheer coincidence, at the very moment when Stephenson's Stockton and Darlington Railway was gathering force and momentum.

For some years the line was almost derelict although it was still used for occasional deliveries of coal from mines in the Clyne Valley. Then, in 1855, George Byng Morris decided to take a hand and invest in the railway.

He replaced the plates on which the original wagons had run with edged rails and installed standard gauge lines (four foot, eight and a half).

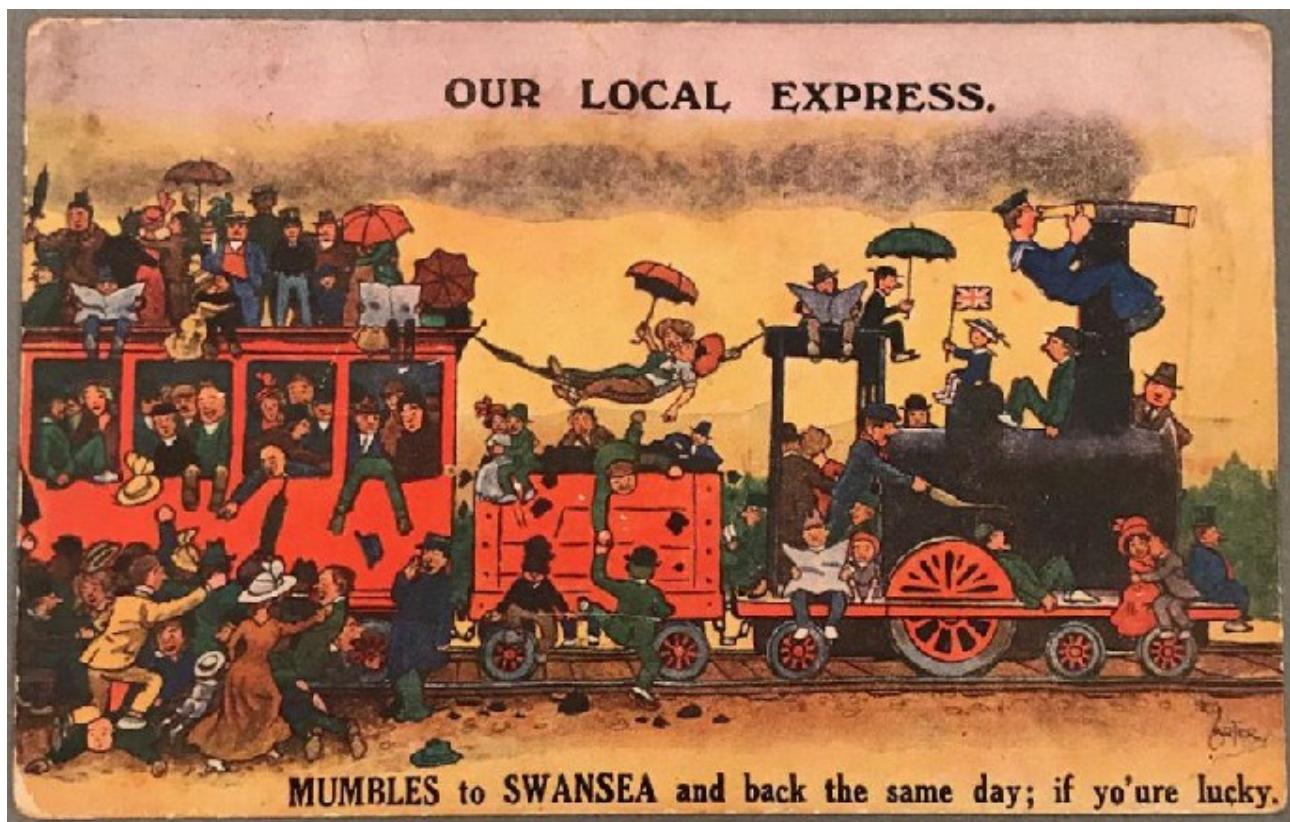


A horse drawn passenger service was duly reintroduced.

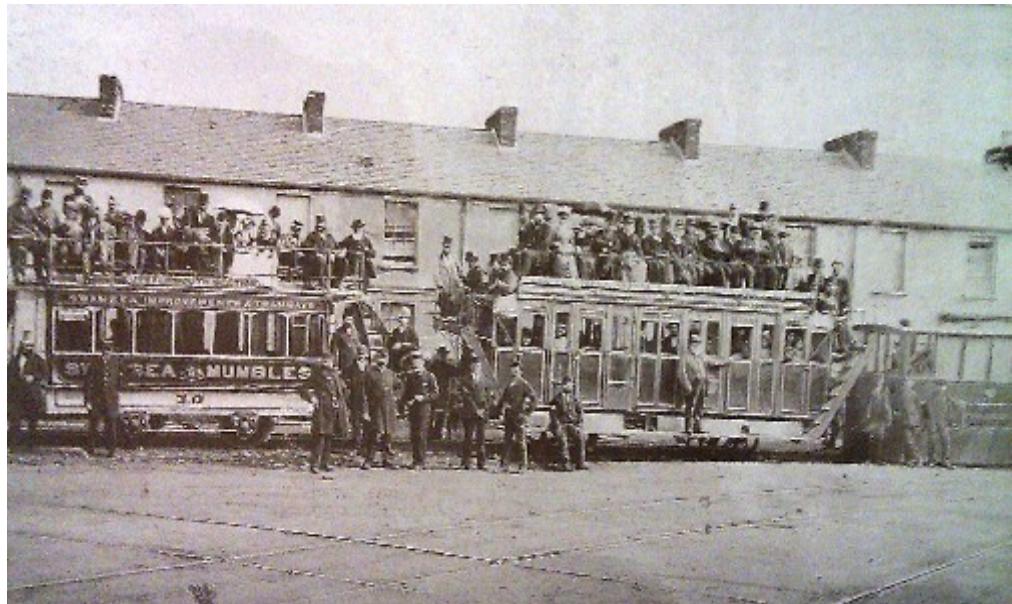




Steam power replaced horse-drawn vehicles in 1877



although, for a number of years, horses were still used as a dispute between the railway and the Swansea Improvements and Tramway Company (which owned the locomotives) rumbled on.



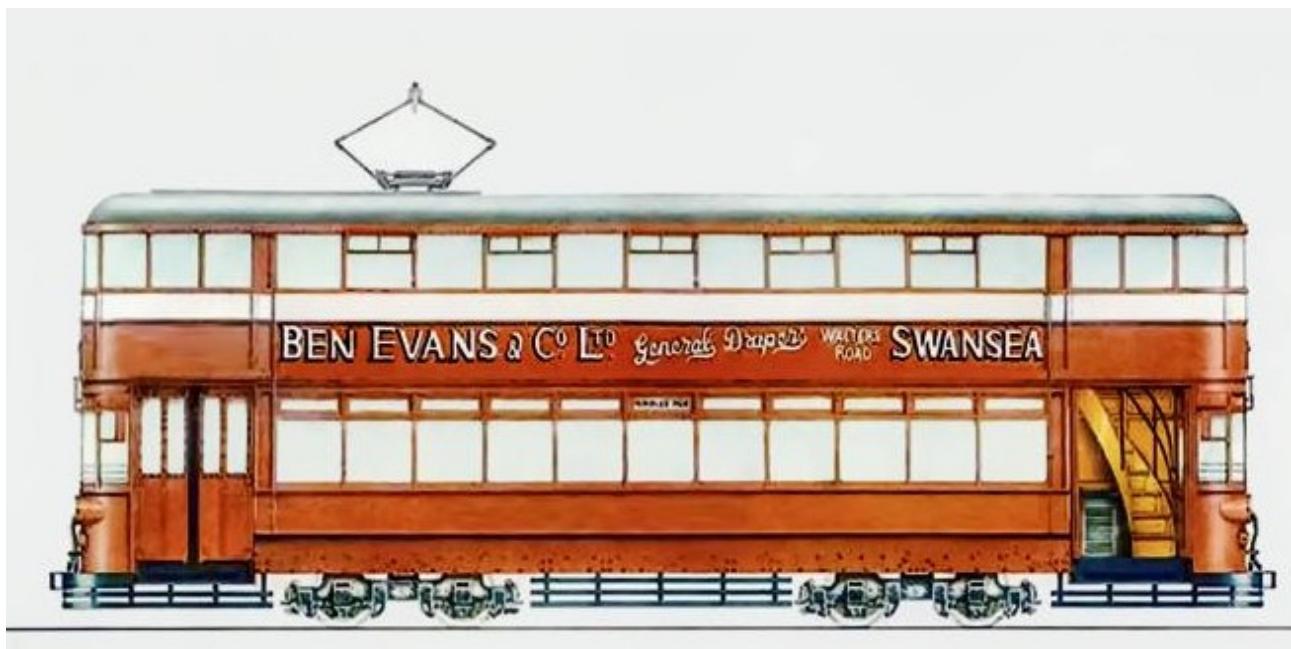
Part of the original line was realigned from the roadway alignment to the run nearer the coastline and also became a double track.



Day - trippers in 1908

The line celebrated its centenary in 1907 and was electrified in 1928, to enable it to run electric trams "Do not call them trolley buses" said the anorak.

A full 'tram' service began in 1929 with eleven double decker trams, the largest ever built in Britain, being delivered for use on the Railway.





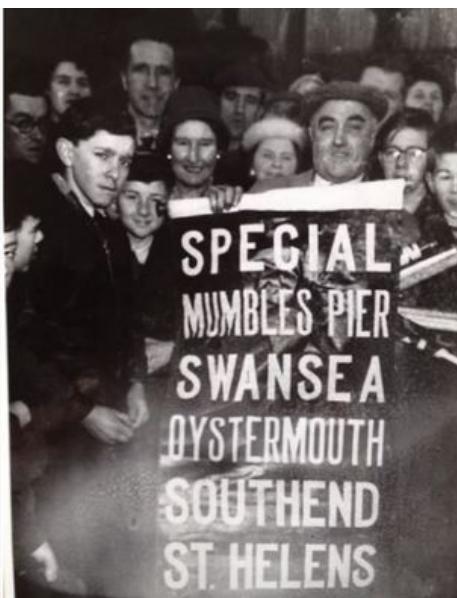


After World War Two it quickly became clear that the age of the tram car was nearly over as modern buses, more effective and efficient than trams - but not nearly so atmospheric - began to be introduced in cities right across the United Kingdom. In 1958 the Mumbles Railway was bought by the South Wales Transport Company. They ran coaches and buses in the Swansea area and it soon became clear what they had in mind.

So on the 5th of January 1960 the last tram left Swansea for the Mumbles and the railway, which had run for over 150 years finally closed down. At the time of its closure the Mumbles Railway was the longest running railway in the world but that meant nothing to the businessmen who were concerned solely with efficiency and with profit. Mumbles from the anorak

There have been many talks about re-opening the railway/tramway but these have never got beyond the discussion stage. Wales - and Swansea and the Mumbles - can be proud, however, because this railway line will always be remembered as the first passenger railway service in the world.

That's something to think about. What an asset and attraction a still operating, perhaps in private



hands, such a railway would be. I wonder how many of you would have chosen to ride on a tram (or train) today in preference to the bus (even though the bus is 'free')?

"Me" said guess who.

The final day of Swansea's Mumbles train on January 5th 1960



How about that for timing? Our bus approaches the village of Mumbles,



where we are due to disembark just past The White Rose to reach our next attraction; Oystermouth

Castle.



After alighting from the bus and the usual head-check we start to walk the short distance to the castle.

Slightly uphill in parts I am afraid. "Not lost anyone yet so no lagging behind please"!

"The former railway track is now a popular cycle and walking route, with a panoramic coastal view described by some as akin to that of the Bay of Naples" mentions the anorak; moodily.