

A BEAUTIFUL SUNNY AFTERNOON UNTIL.....

Tuesday 2nd June 1970 was a blazing hot day, the residents of Pembroke Ferry a small hamlet outside Pembroke Dock, were tending their gardens and enjoying the unusually hot weather. High above them workmen were constructing a 150 tonne steel box girder section of the partly built Cleddau Bridge.

The afternoon turned to disaster as four workmen lost their lives – Phil Lloyd was one of the first officers at the scene and recalls the tragedy that reverberated around the world.

(Photographs can be found at the end of the article).



Phil standing where the bridge section came to rest

PC Phil Lloyd No. 534 with five years service had just begun a 2pm – 10pm shift at Pembroke Dock Police Station and was completing paperwork before going out on patrol. Shortly after 2:15pm he was told to pick up the phone as his mother-in-law who lived in Pembroke Ferry wanted to speak to him. Phil recalls that her first words were 'The bridge has come down' – his initial reaction was to tell her not to be so dull.

His mother-in-law, Mrs Ivy Lewis, lived in Pembroke Ferry, on the south side of the river, directly under the bridge which had begun being built across the estuary the previous year.

'I could then see and hear fire engines passing the station so with the late Bryn Phillips who was my Sergeant, we jumped in the station van and drove to Pembroke

Ferry which is situated at the end of a single-track road less than a mile from the station. When we arrived, I saw that a section of the bridge had come down and between two houses and was resting at a 45-degree angle in a garden' said Phil.

'It was pandemonium with workmen, some injured and in a state of severe shock, searching and shouting for their mates. More and more emergency vehicles started to arrive at the scene, Bryn and I helped to search for survivors.'

Two workmen were killed outright, one was crushed to death by a wheeled platform while his mate standing next to him walked away with a broken thumb. It was decided that two of the very seriously injured workmen should be conveyed by ambulance to Glangwili Hospital, Carmarthen. Sadly, both passed away during the journey.

For the next few weeks, engineers visited the site to establish the cause of the collapse as various theories were put forward. The construction involved completed sections being pushed out on railway lines and dropped into place onto reinforced concrete piers rising over 100' above the river linking the north and south of the county.

(It was later discovered the diaphragm above the pier of the bridge had not been thick enough and buckled as a 230-foot box-section was cantilevered out).

During the summer, it was the job of the Police to keep onlookers away from the site including coach parties from the Midlands that had travelled to Pembroke Dock on organised excursions.

Life in Pembroke Ferry gradually returned to normal, but construction of box-girder bridges ceased worldwide within 18 months as bridges of similar design collapsed in Australia and Germany with more loss of life. Construction of the Cleddau Bridge recommenced in 1972 and the bridge opened to traffic in 1975 avoiding a 28-mile journey by road.

A memorial plaque to William Baxendale, George Hamilton, James Thompson, and local man Evan Phillips was unveiled in 1995 to mark the 25th anniversary of the disaster.

Today, Phil and his wife Chris live in Pembroke Ferry in the shadow of the bridge which is a constant reminder of the disaster.

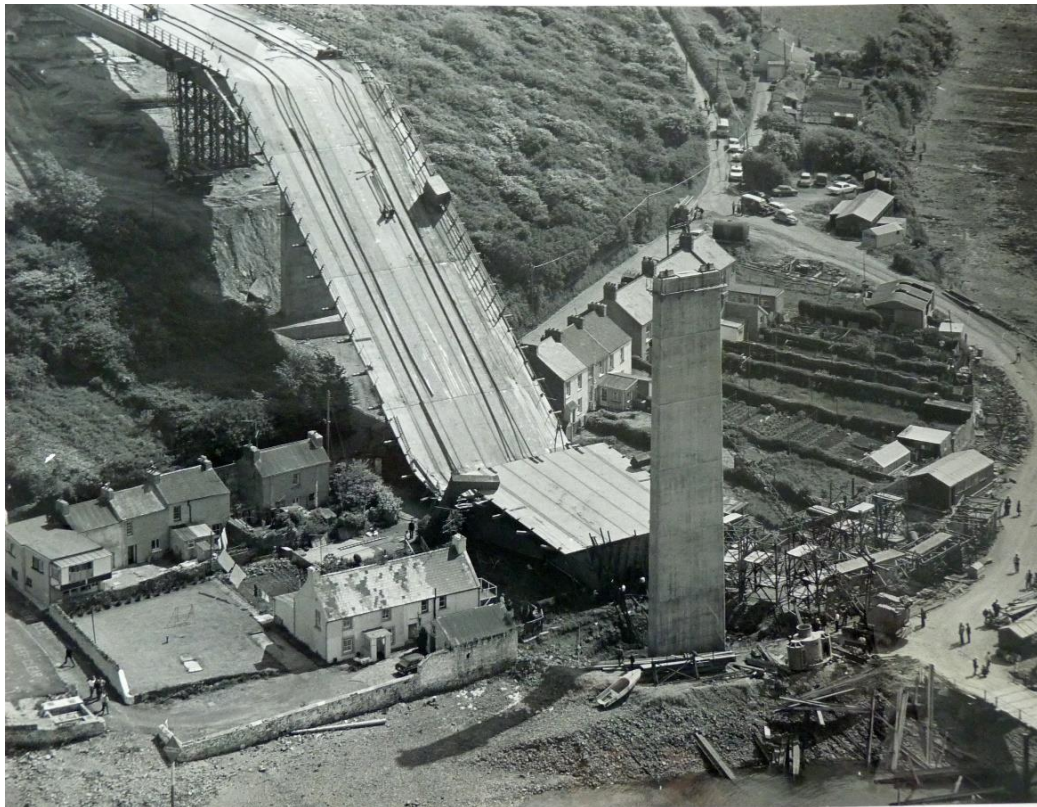
During his Police career Phil was a SOCO for many years and on his retirement in 1995 was the Community Affairs Sergeant at Pembroke Dock. He was Town Clerk to Pembroke Town Council for 11 years and is the long serving secretary of Pembroke Male Voice Choir. For over 30 years, Phil helped to organise the Festival of Massed Male Voices concert at the Royal Albert Hall which he compered on several occasions.

Many thanks to Phil for the use of his photographs and his recollections of the tragedy.

Article compiled by Hugh Colley.



The steel section came within a few feet of landing on houses



A view from the sky taken the following day



Some idea of the size of the steel box section



Taken when construction re-started in 1972



The Cleddau Bridge today – Pembroke Ferry on the right



Phil with the bridge towering above.