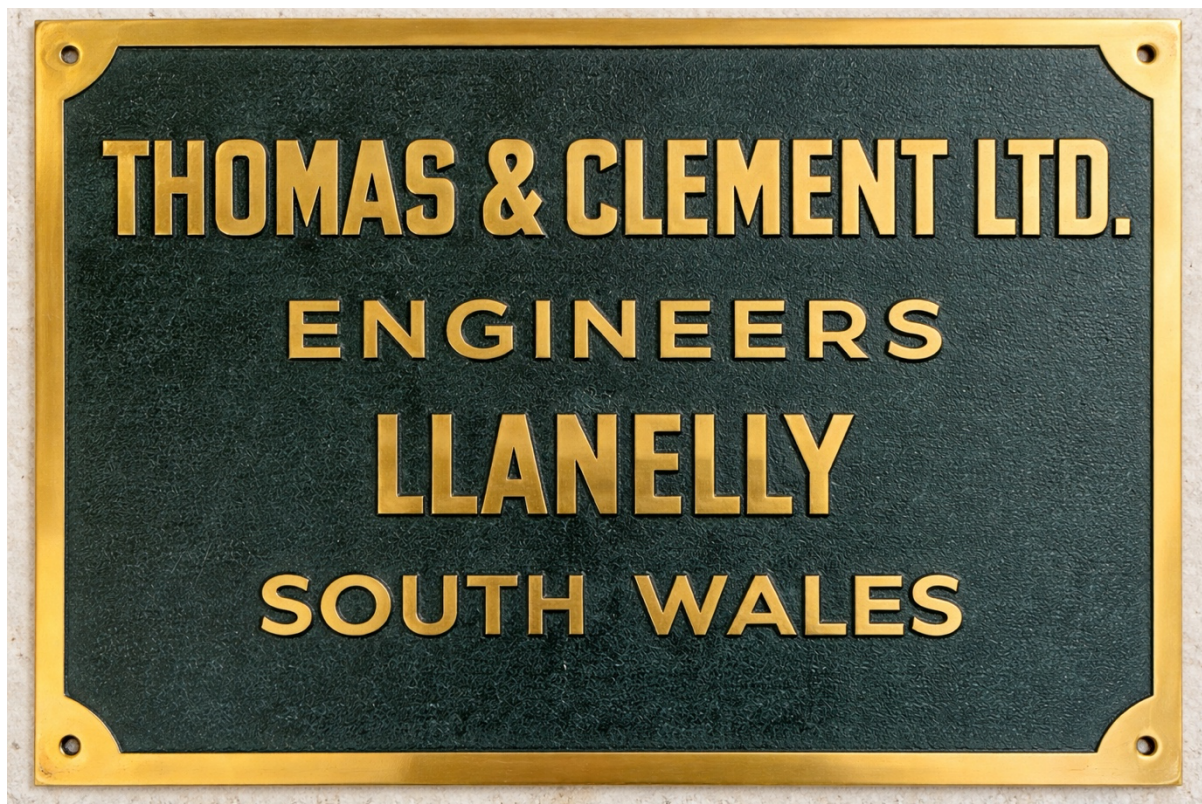


# Thomas & Clement Ltd

*Engineers — Llanelly, South Wales*

*A History of the Morfa Foundry, 1874–1954*



## ***Origins and Founding***

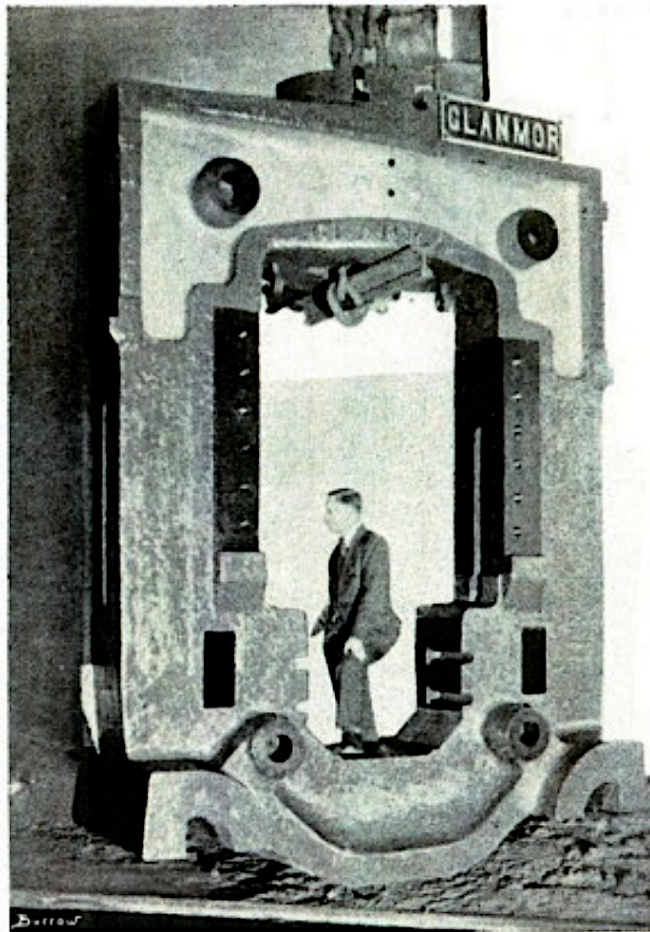
Thomas & Clement had its origins in 1874, when Henry Thomas, an ironworker, and John Clement, an accountant, both of Llanelli, Carmarthenshire, entered partnership as iron founders, trading as Thomas and Clement, Morfa Foundry, Llanelli, and producing various machinery.

They established their foundry on a site at Machynis, which became known as the Morfa Foundry Company, situated approximately a mile south of the rival Glanmor Foundry. The timing was significant: 1874 was the very year of the great tinsplate workers' lock-out in Llanelli, and the town was rapidly expanding as the undisputed capital of tinsplate production in the British Empire a place nicknamed "Tinopolis."

The Morfa district of Llanelli, lying close to the docks and the Loughor estuary, was the natural heartland of the town's heavy industry. The company set itself at the intersection of ironwork, engineering, and the booming demands of the local tinsplate, colliery, and marine trades.

# The GLANMOR FOUNDRY COMPANY LIMITED

Engineers, LLANELLY



24-ton Cast Steel Housing for large Plate Mill at  
Guest Kent Baldwin's Works at Port Talbot

## COMPLETE ROLLING MILL PLANT

- Chilled and Grained Rolls
- STEEL CASTINGS up to 25 tons
- Annealing Pots Electrically Welded
- FLY WHEELS up to 170 tons

**CAST STEEL ROUGHING ROLLS for Plate and Bar Mills**

*Image: A worker at the press, Thomas & Clement Ltd, Morfa Foundry, Llanelli. Reproduced by kind permission of the copyright holder. All rights reserved.*

## ***Incorporation and Growth***

The partnership became Thomas and Clement Ltd in 1907. By incorporating as a limited company, the founders were formalising what had by then become an established and significant engineering enterprise, with records surviving from as far back as 1874 wage books, ledgers, correspondence, and stock records all attesting to steady industrial growth over three decades.

Throughout the company's history, descendants of Thomas and Clement were similarly involved in their business, as successive generations retained their links with the company, passing down their trades and skills from father to son. This was a deeply family-rooted enterprise, mirroring the character of Llanelli's broader industrial culture.

## ***The Industrial Context: Llanelli's "Tinopolis"***

To understand Thomas & Clement, one must understand the town it served. Llanelli was industrialised in the early 19th century as the global centre for tinplate production. Lying near the western fringe of the South Wales Coal Field, the town played an important role in industry, with coal exported through three small docks alongside copper and tin produced within the town itself.

An engineering foundry located at the Morfa would have been kept busy supplying the machinery, castings, and metalwork required by the tinplate works, collieries, dockside operations, and the extensive railway infrastructure that served them all. The neighbouring Glanmor Foundry specialised in moulding and casting chilled and grain rolls for the tinplate industry at home and abroad, as well as brass bearings for marine work and Thomas & Clement operated in the same market.

## ***The Second World War: Bombing and Resilience***

The Morfa Foundry was not immune to the dangers of the Second World War. Thomas & Clement Ltd received a direct hit during an enemy air raid on the night of 9 July 1940. The company reported to Llanelli Town Clerk's Office: "We wish to report that an H.E. bomb was dropped by an enemy aircraft on our works at 2:10 a.m. on Tuesday, the 9th instant. The damage was, fortunately, not very great." The company detailed damage sustained to their water main, railway lines, crossings, and points.

Despite this, the company redirected its full capacity to the war effort. During World War II, sections of the Mulberry Harbour Bridge the extraordinary, prefabricated harbour used in the D-Day Normandy landings were manufactured at Thomas and Clement's foundry. This is a remarkable and little-known contribution to one of history's most significant military operations. The company also produced bomb casings, anchors, tank parts, and anti-aircraft gun components.

## ***Merger and Final Years***

In 1939, Thomas & Clement merged with the Glanmor Foundry Company Limited to form the Glanmorfa Foundry Ltd. The foundry side of Thomas and Clement closed in 1954, but other departments on site were kept going until 1964.

The combined Glanmorfa enterprise continued until 1979, when it went into voluntary liquidation, ending over a century of continuous foundry and engineering work in the town. The Glanmor site was later acquired by the Borough Council for housing development, while the Machynis site was taken over by 3KS Engineering Company.



*Image: Aerial view of the Morfa Foundry site, Machynis, Llanelli. Source: People's Collection Wales ([www.peoplescollection.wales](http://www.peoplescollection.wales)). Reproduced for heritage and educational purposes.*

### ***Archive Records***

The records of Thomas and Clement survive for the period 1874–1956, held at Carmarthenshire Archives. They include the memorandum and articles of association, agreements, minutes, correspondence, account books, ledgers, bills and receipts, wages books, stock books, journals, and photographs. This is an extraordinarily complete archive for a company of this kind and represents a primary source of the first order for any researcher of South Wales industrial history.

### ***Legacy***

The brass plaque bearing the company's name is a tangible survivor of a business that served Llanelli's industrial heartbeat for eighty years — from the height of the tinsplate empire in 1874, through two world wars, to the gradual decline of traditional Welsh heavy industry in the mid-twentieth century. The use of the old spelling "Llanelly" on the plaque is itself historically telling: the anglicised spelling was used until 1966, when it was changed to Llanelli following a local public campaign placing the manufacture of this plaque firmly before that date.

The Machynis site where the Morfa Foundry once stood continues as an engineering concern to this day, and plaques like this one ensure the memory of Thomas & Clement Ltd endures.



## Summary

Thomas & Clement Ltd represents one of the lesser known but quietly essential stories of Welsh industrial history. Founded in 1874 by Henry Thomas and John Clement on the Morfa at Machynis, Llanelli, the company grew over eight decades from a modest iron founder's partnership into a fully incorporated engineering works serving the tinsplate, colliery, and marine industries of South Wales. Through two world wars, a direct bomb strike, and the long decline of traditional heavy industry, the Morfa Foundry endured its workers passing their skills from father to son, generation to generation, in the manner that defined so much of Welsh working life.

The company's most remarkable and most overlooked contribution came during the Second World War, when sections of the Mulberry Harbour Bridge were manufactured within its walls. That prefabricated harbour made the D-Day Normandy landings of 1944 possible. It is a fact of extraordinary significance, quietly carried by a small foundry in a South Wales town, and largely unknown to this day.

By 1939, Thomas & Clement had merged with the neighbouring Glanmor Foundry to form Glanmorfa Foundry Ltd. The foundry itself closed in 1954, with remaining operations continuing until 1964. The combined Glanmorfa enterprise finally ceased in 1979, ending one hundred and five years of continuous engineering on the Morfa.

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## Legacy

What remains of Thomas & Clement today is held, fittingly, in two very different kinds of archive. The formal record wage books, ledgers, minutes, correspondence, and photographs spanning 1874 to 1956 survives at Carmarthenshire Archives, a collection of rare completeness for a company of this scale. The human record survives in memory: in the annual reunions held by former Glanmorfa employees for over four decades after the foundry closed, and in the oral histories, photographs, and personal mementos carefully gathered by those who worked there.

The brass plaque that prompted this research is itself a piece of that living legacy a tangible object that outlasted the works it named, preserved by someone who understood its worth. Its use of the old spelling *Llanelly* dates it firmly to before 1966, placing it in the heart of the company's working years.

The Machynis site today continues as an engineering concern. The town of Llanelli, once Tinopolis, has long since transformed. But the story of Thomas & Clement its founders, its families, its wartime work, and its century of quiet industry deserves its place in the permanent record of Welsh heritage.

*This article was researched and written by Graham Tudor Emmanuel, Digital Heritage Researcher, Wales.2026*

## Sources

*Carmarthenshire Archives / Archives Hub (records 1874–1956) • Llanelli Community Heritage (llanellich.org.uk) • GENUKI Carmarthenshire records • Wartime bomb damage reports, Llanelli Town Clerk's Office, July 1940, Peoples Collection of Wales.*