

# Photographic Souvenir

and

# Historical Notes

in connection with the

# LAST TRAIN

on the

# ABERGAVENNY - MERTHYR

Line of the former

LONDON, MIDLAND AND SCOTTISH RAILWAY

EX-

LONDON AND NORTH WESTERN RAILWAY

and the Ebbw Vale and Rhymney  
branches

**SUNDAY, 5th JANUARY, 1958**

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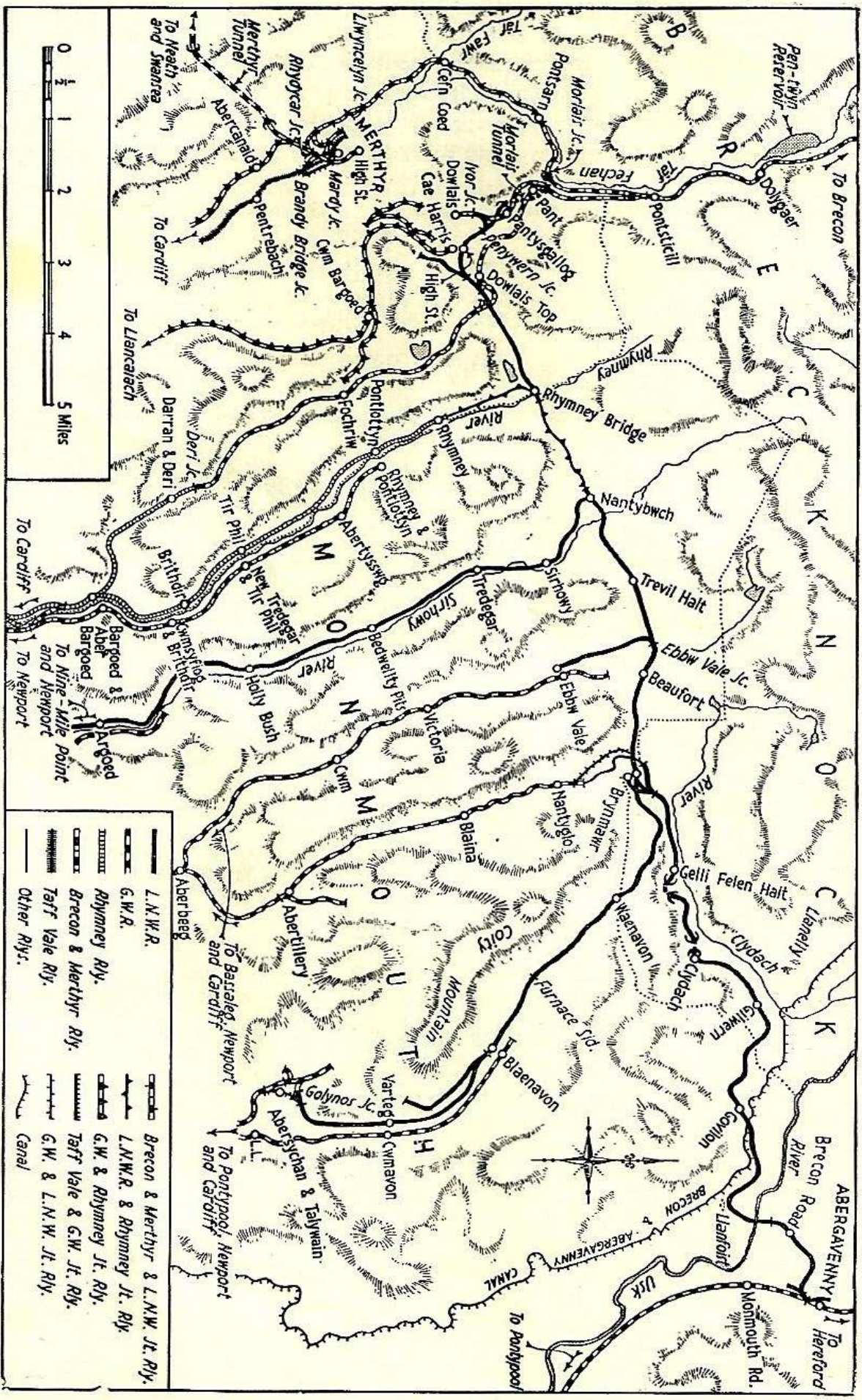
Organised by the

**THE STEPHENSON LOCOMOTIVE SOCIETY**

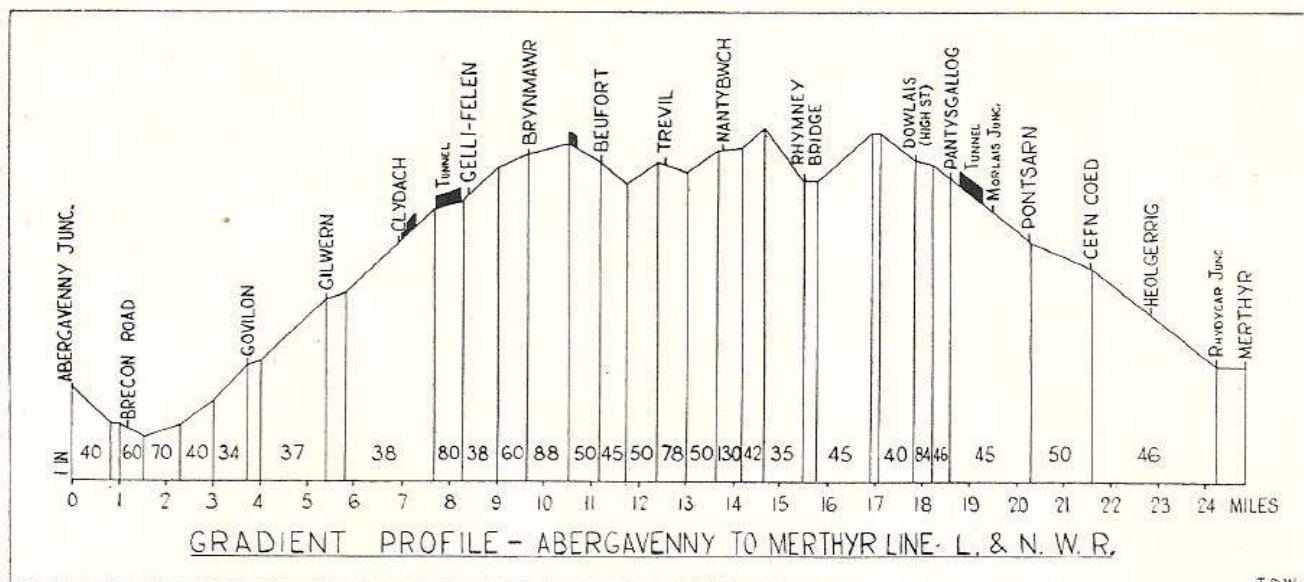
(Midland Area)

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The sincerest thanks of the Society are made to Mr. H. A. Vallance (of the *Railway Magazine*) and to Mr. K. G. Mansell (Editor, *Railway World*) for their generosity in loaning the photographic blocks used herein, and to Mr. D. S. Barrie for permission to quote historical matter from his articles in the *Railway Magazine*, April and May, 1957.



Map of the London and North Western Railway's Abergavenny-Merthyr line with connections, showing pre-1923 grouping ownership. By courtesy of the Railway Magazine.



From a drawing by J. D. Wood.

The gradient on the Ebbw Vale branch is 1 in 42 from Ebbw Vale up to Ebbw Vale Junction (Beaufort); the gradient on the Rhymney branch is 1 in 35 from Rhymney up to Rhymney Bridge.

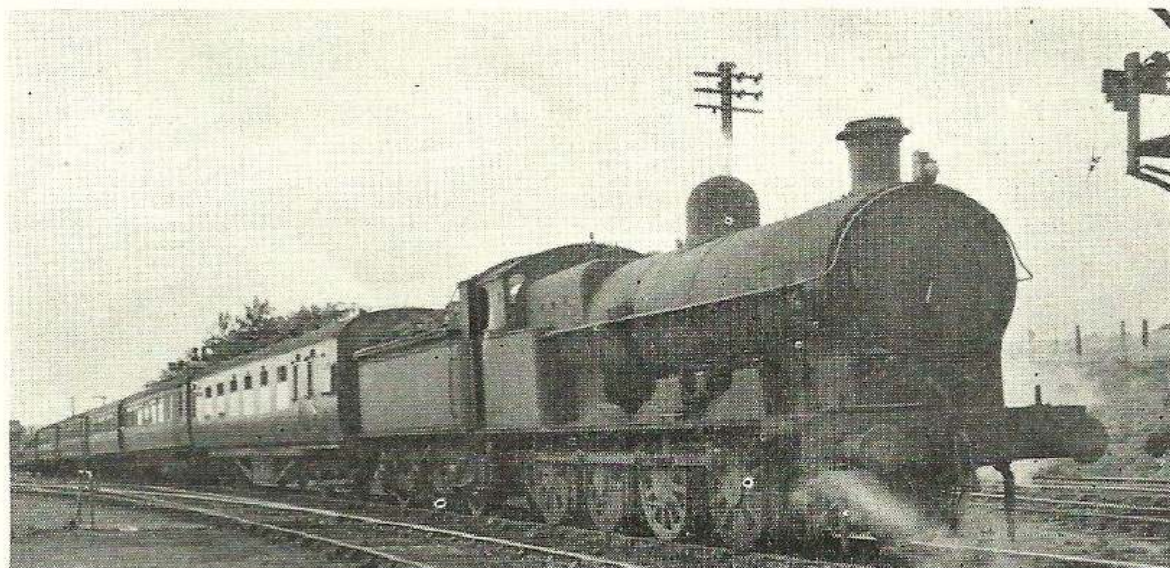


Photo.: W. A. Camwell.

Block courtesy *Railway World*.

L.M.S.R. (ex L.N.W.R.) 0-8-0 No. 8899 with tender cab, on the 5-5 p.m. Abergavenny Junction to Merthyr local passenger train at the side platform at Abergavenny Junction station, 6th August, 1946. In the train of 6 coaches will be noted 4 ex Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway open saloons which had been used originally on Manchester-Blackpool "club" trains. On Tuesdays (Abergavenny Market day) it was usual to strengthen some trains and replace the normal Webb 0-6-2T by an L.N.W. 0-8-0 or an L.N.W. 0-8-4T.

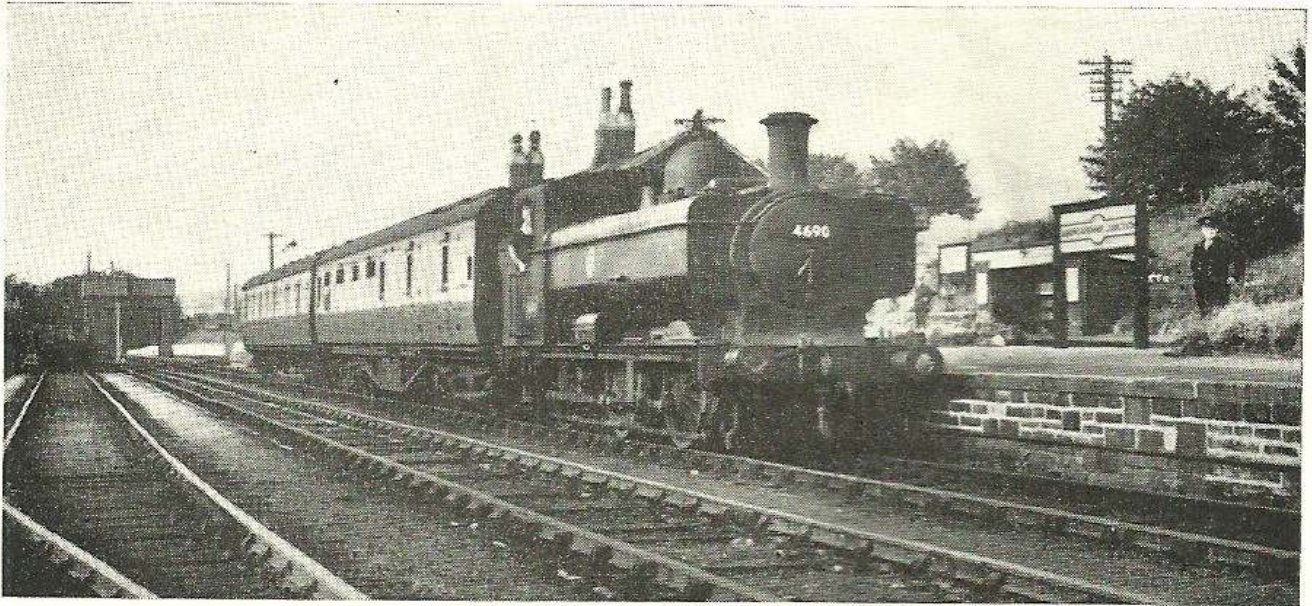


Photo.: W. A. Camwell.

Block courtesy *Railway Magazine*.

B.R. (ex G.W.R.) 0-6-0PT 4690 on the 8-30 p.m. Abergavenny Junction to Merthyr train at the side platform at Abergavenny Junction station on 22nd July, 1955.

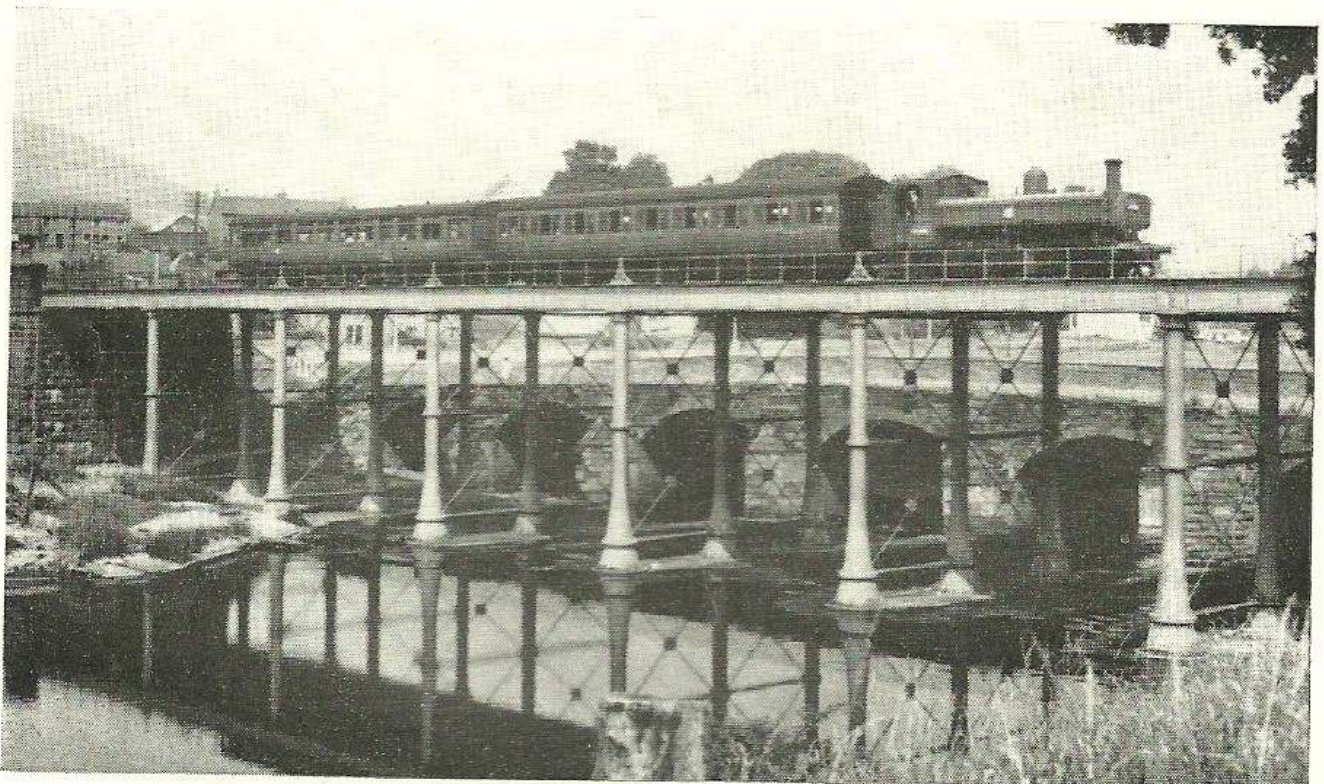


Photo.: W. A. Camwell.

Block courtesy *Railway Magazine*.

B.R. (ex G.W.R.) 0-6-0PT 6408 on the 2-35 p.m. from Abergavenny Junction to Merthyr auto (pull/push) train crossing the bridge over the River Usk on the outskirts of Abergavenny on 22nd July, 1955. After the closure of Abergavenny Locomotive shed, and the diversion of goods traffic, the remaining passenger services were worked from the ex-G.W.R. shed at Merthyr. Most of these were auto trains except the 4-50 p.m. ex Merthyr (and its return working, the 8-30 p.m. from Abergavenny Junction).



Photo.: W. A. Camwell.

Block courtesy *Railway Magazine*.

B.R. (ex G.W.R.) 0-6-0PT 6408 at Gilwern on the 2-35 p.m. auto train from Abergavenny Junction to Merthyr, 22nd July, 1955.



Photo.: W. A. Camwell.

Block courtesy *Railway Magazine*.

The western portals of the tunnels at Clydach; the bore on the right was made when the line was doubled in 1877. The course of Bailey's tramroad (from the canal at Govilon—Brynmawr) was too sharply curved for the railway to follow when built, at Clydach and Gelli Felen, wherefore the tunnels at these places.

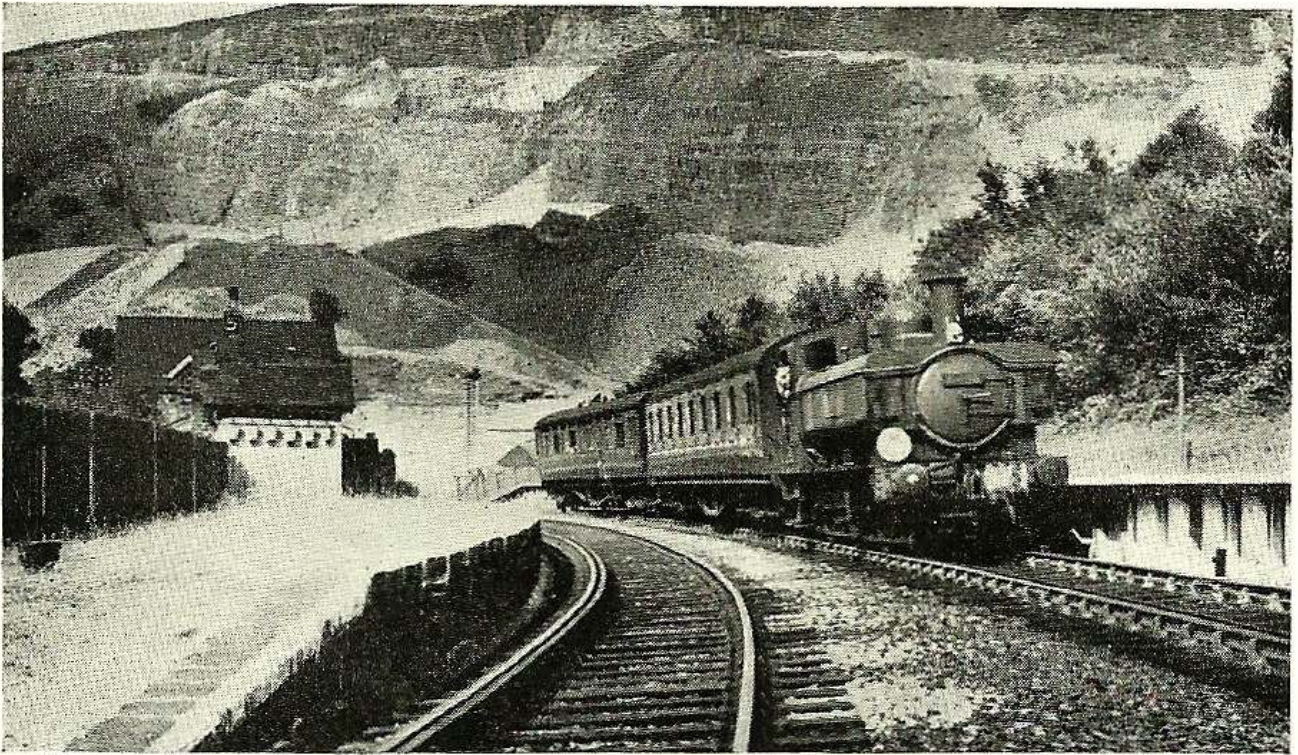


Photo.: W. A. Camwell. Block courtesy *Railway Magazine*.  
 B.R. (ex G.W.R.) 0-6-0PT 6436 at Clydach halt on the 5-5. p.m. Abergavenny  
 Junction-Merthyr auto train on 22nd July, 1955. Note quarry workings in  
 background.

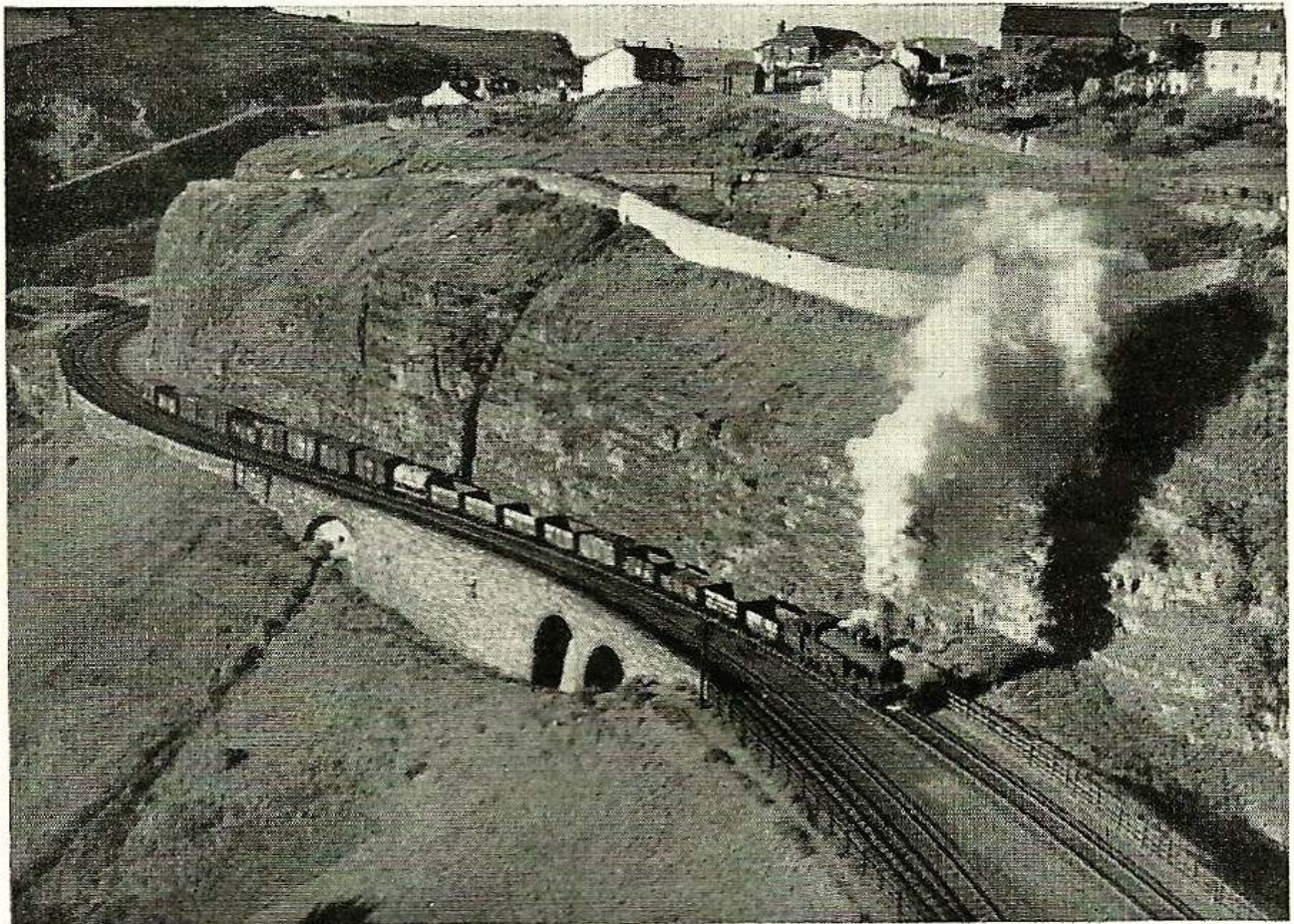


Photo.: O. Elsdon. Block courtesy *Railway Magazine*.  
 Freight train from Abergavenny to Brynmawr hauled by an ex-L.N.W. 0-8-4  
 tank, approaching Gelli Felen tunnel. This photograph (believed taken in the  
 1930's) shows the winding nature of the line and how it clings to the mountain  
 side of Clydach gorge. The 0-8-4 tanks were built specially for the line and its  
 branches to relieve the Webb 0-6-2 "Coal" tanks.

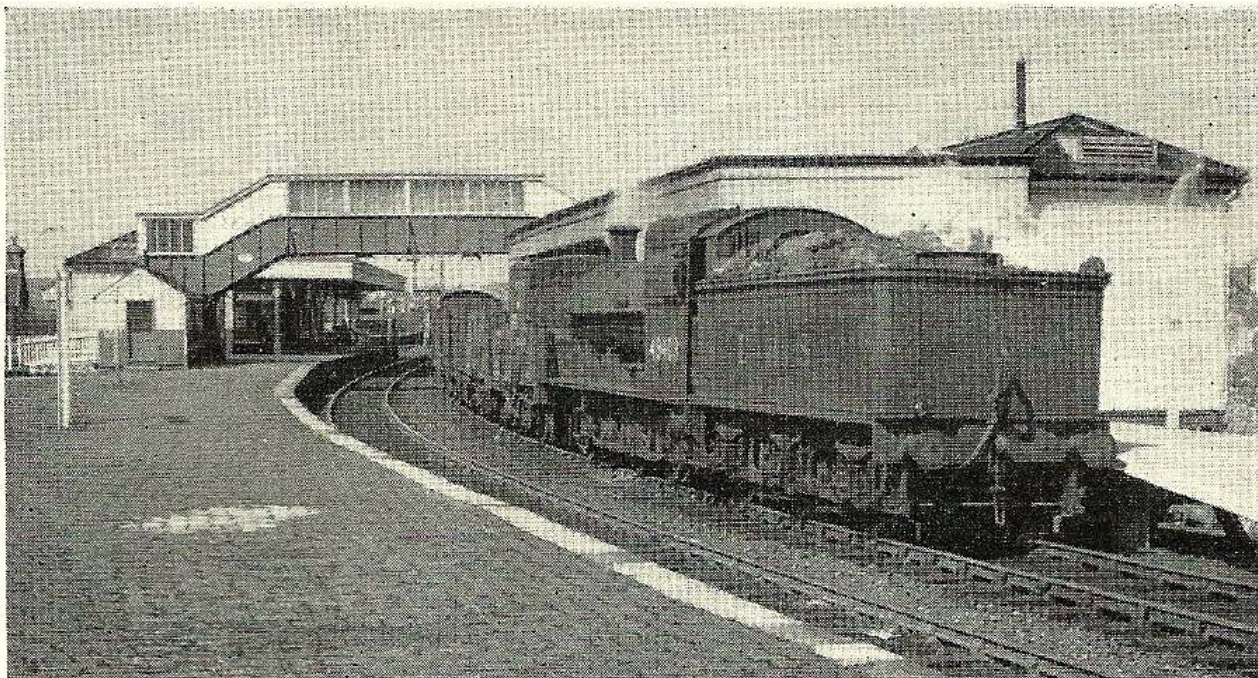


Photo.: R. C. Riley.

Block courtesy *Railway Magazine*.  
 Brynmawr station, looking west, in May, 1951, showing freight train to Abergavenny hauled by ex L.N.W.R. 0-8-0 No. 49403. The Brynmawr-Newport trains start from a separate platform at west end of station (in background).

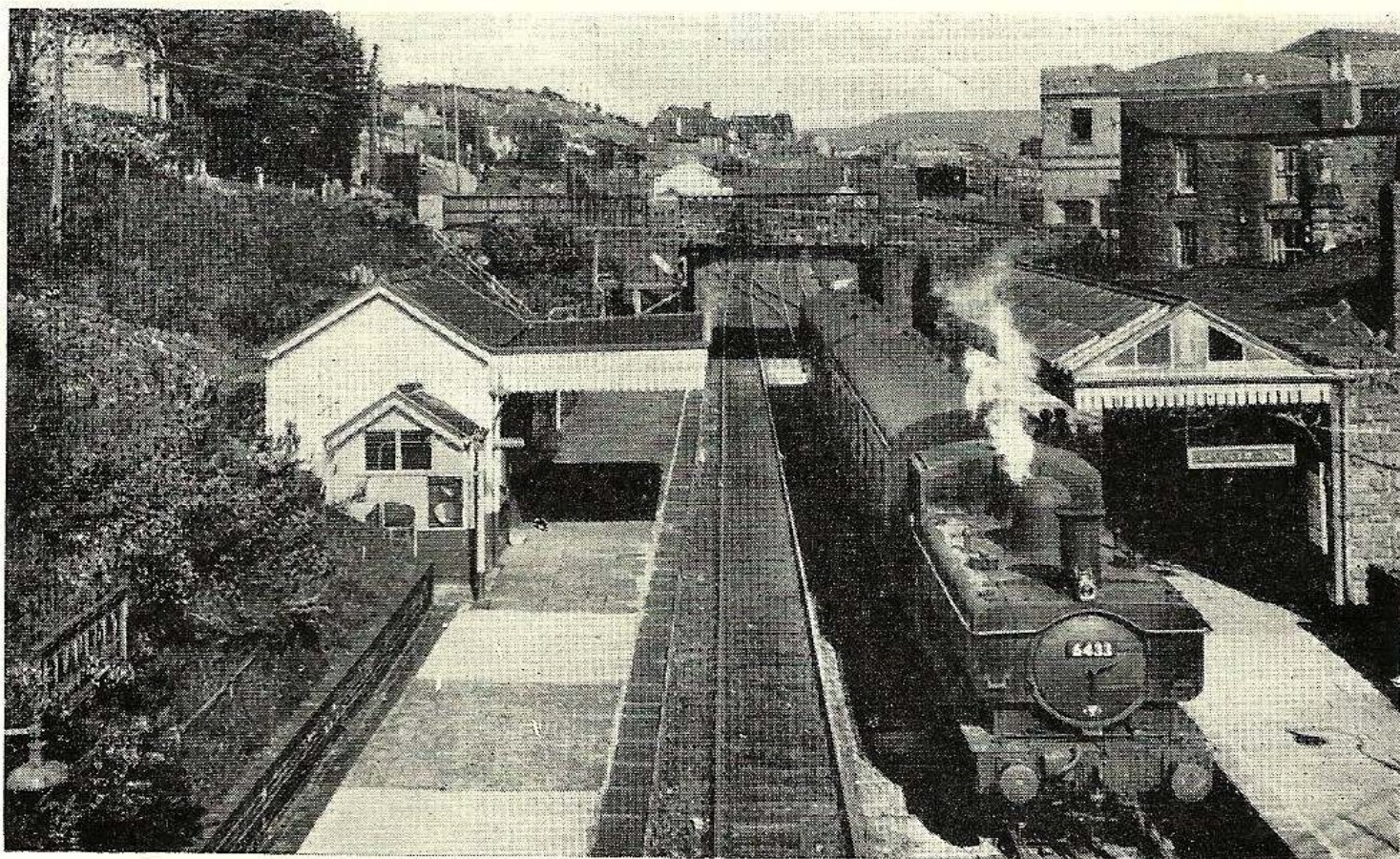
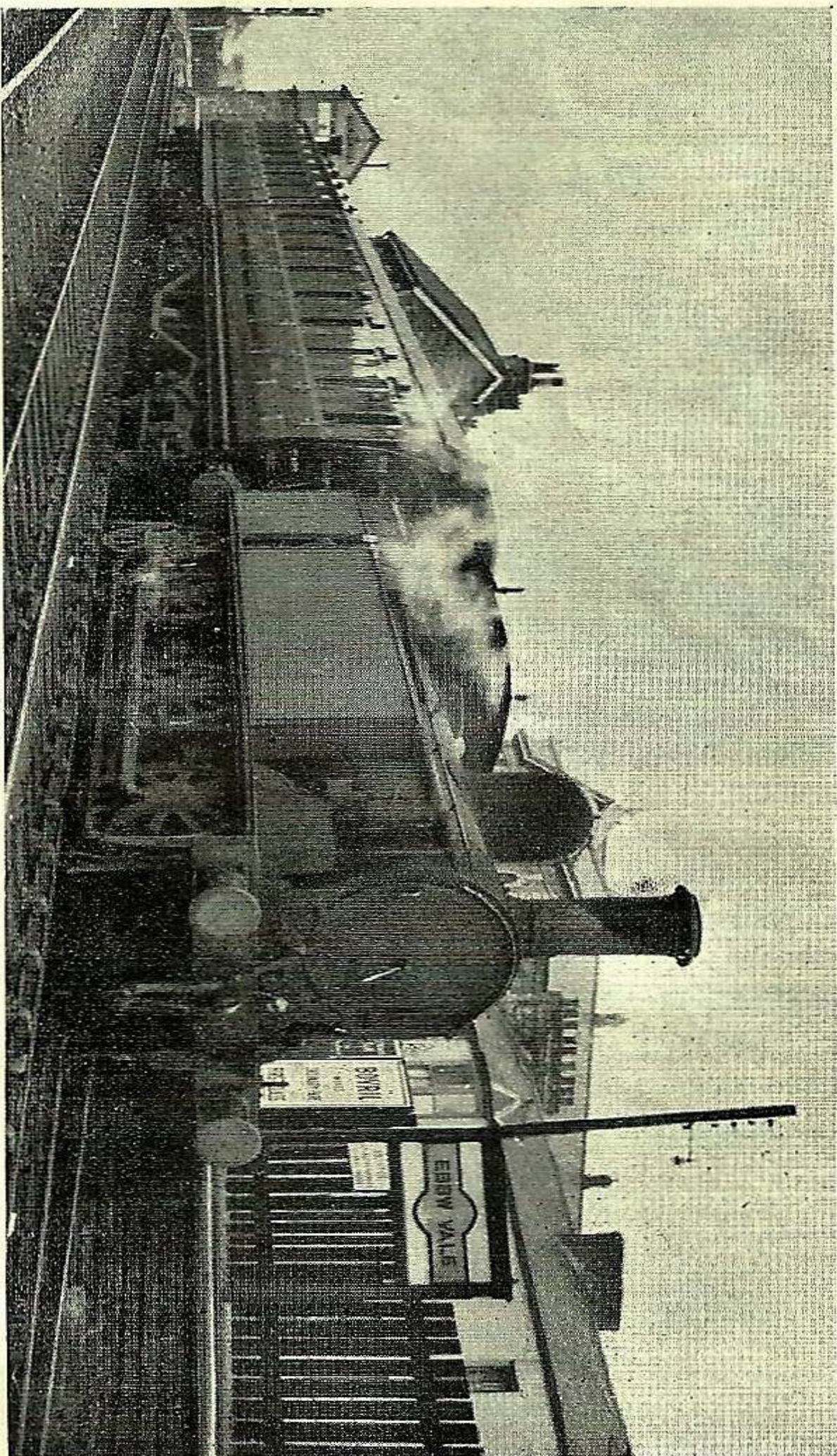


Photo.: W. A. Camwell.

Block courtesy *Railway World*.  
 B.R. (ex G.W.R.) 0-6-0PT 6433 at Beaufort station on the 5-5 p.m. Abergavenny Junction-Merthyr auto train on 18th June, 1955. Note original L.N.W.R. name board. Beaufort is the junction for the Ebbw Vale branch although most of the trains for Ebbw Vale started from Brynmawr.



*Photo: W. A. Carnwell.*

*Block courtesy Railway World.*

Ebbw Vale station, L.M.S.R. ex L.N.W.R., on 5th August, 1947, showing L.M.S. 7709 on the 6 p.m. pull/push train to Brynmawr. Note the old L.N.W.R. "motor" coach.



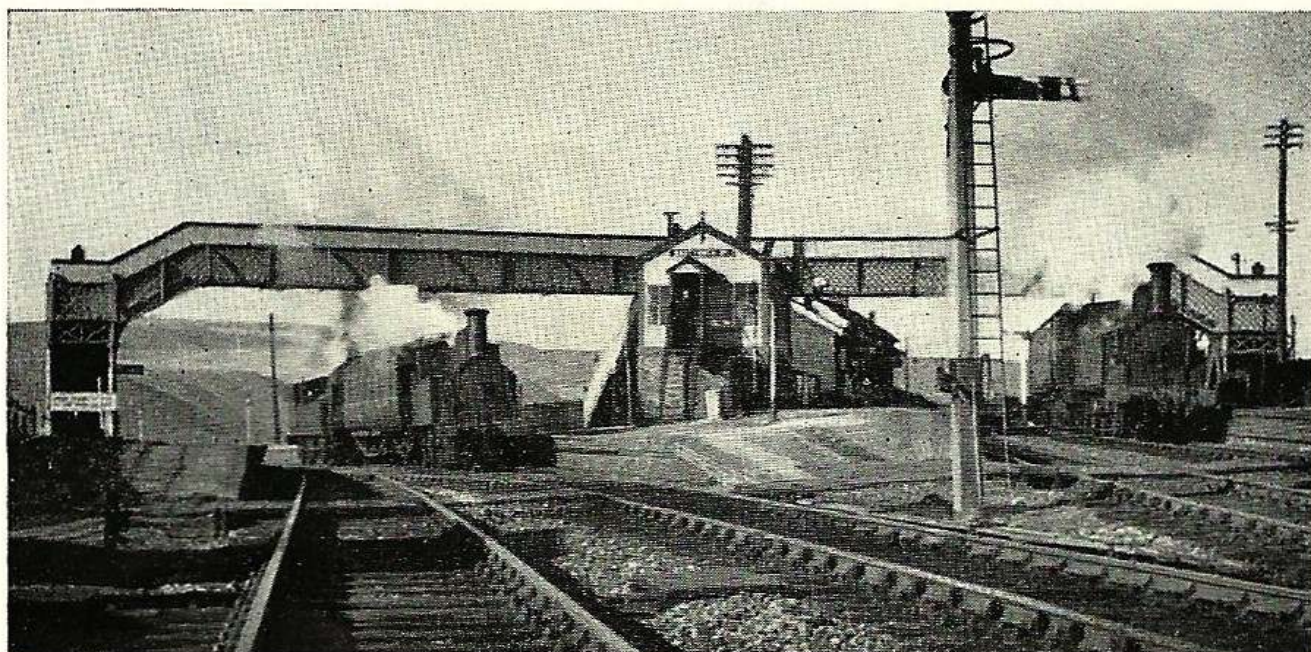


Photo.: W. A. Camwell.

Block courtesy *Railway Magazine*.

Nantybwch station from the east showing Tredegar and Sirhowy Valley line to left, and Merthyr line to right, 26th April, 1948. The line on right was built jointly by the L.N.W. and Rhymney Railways as far as Rhymney Bridge (and thence Rhymney)—the L.N.W.R. secured running powers over the R.R. to Cardiff Docks. Webb 0-6-2T 27621 is on the 7-30 a.m. from Merthyr to Abergavenny; 27586 is on the 8-17 a.m. to Newport whilst 7711 (which had brought the coach in) returned with the 8-50 a.m. to Tredegar.

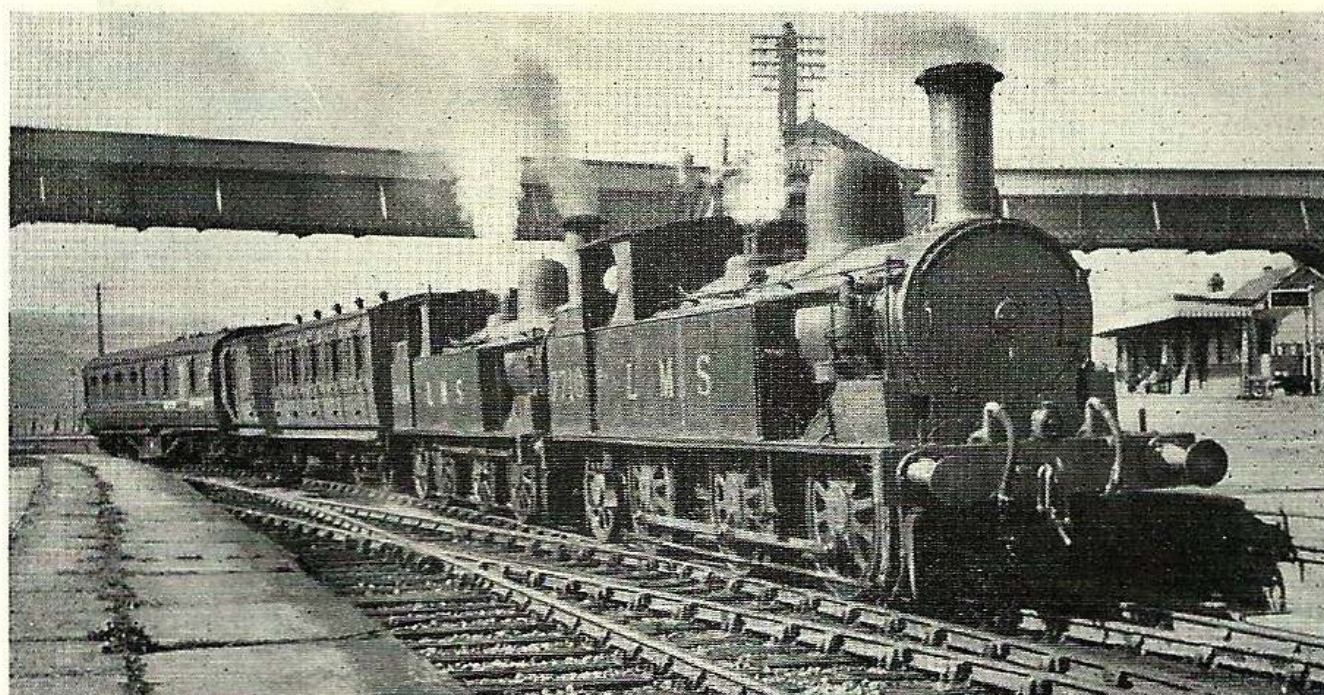


Photo.: W. A. Camwell.

Block courtesy *Railway Magazine*.

Nantybwch station, Tredegar and Sirhowy line platform, on 26th April, 1948, showing ex L.N.W. 0-6-2T's 7710 and 27654 on the 9-5 a.m. from Newport (7710 was attached at Tredegar). The first coach (22339) was built by the L.N.W.R. at Wolverton in 1901. The Nantybwch-Tredegar-Sirhowy valley line to Newport is worked by Tredegar locomotive shed, which till 1954 was a sub-shed of Abergavenny; as with the Merthyr line, Webb 0-6-2 tanks monopolised the passenger traffic for well over half a century till the immediate post war period.

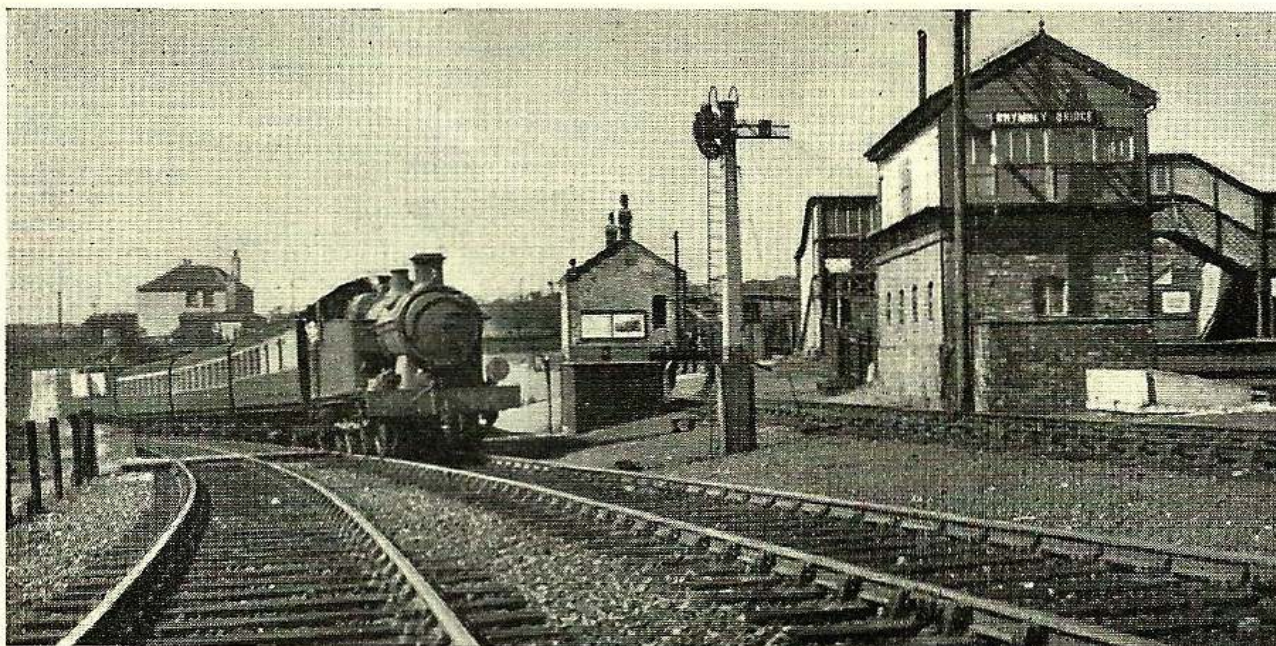


Photo.: W. A. Camwell.

Block courtesy *Railway Magazine*.

Rhymney Bridge station, Rhymney line platform, from the east, on 26th April, 1948, showing G.W.R. 0-6-2T 5678 on the 9-45 a.m. from Cardiff. Behind the L.N.W.R. signal can just be discerned the coaches of the 10-0 a.m. from Abergavenny Junction to Merthyr which was being hauled by a new 2-6-2T, L.M.S. 1203.



Photo.: W. A. Camwell.

Block courtesy *Railway World*.

Rhymney Bridge station, from the east, on 26th April, 1948 and showing to left Rhymney line, and to right Merthyr line; the former was built by the L.N.W. and Rhymney Railways jointly, from Nantybwich to Rhymney. Standing on the Merthyr line is ex L.N.W. 0-8-0 8921 on tank wagon traffic from Dowlais for the north via Abergavenny. This traffic has been diverted via the Brecon and Merthyr line as far as Tallylyn, thence Hereford.

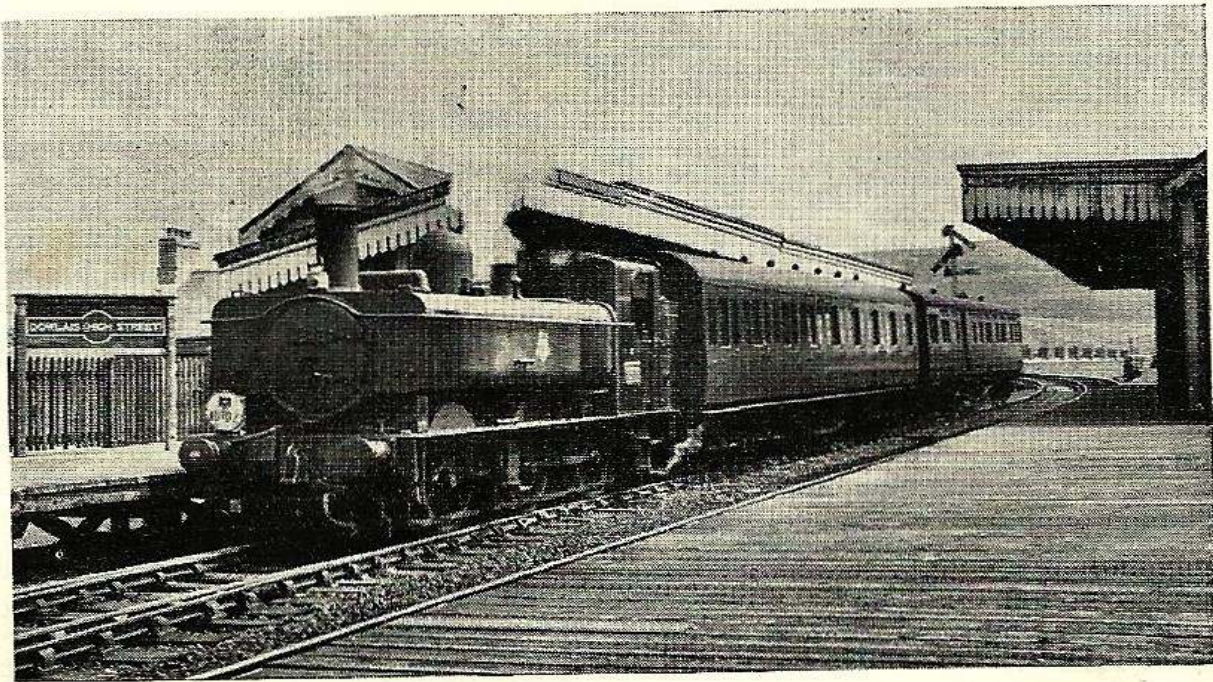


Photo.: W. A. Camwell.

Block courtesy *Railway World*.

Dowlais High Street station, looking east on 22nd July, 1955, and showing B.R. (ex G.W.R.) 0-6-0PT 6436 on the 12.46 p.m. auto train from Merthyr to Abergavenny Junction. Note the L.N.W. signals, the L.N.W. wooden platform and the L.M.S. style station name board. This station was not opened till 4th May, 1885 when it replaced Dowlais Top station—a dwelling house in a cutting marks the site of the latter.

## The Abergavenny-Merthyr line and its branches

### Historical Survey

On several counts, the Abergavenny-Merthyr line and its associated branches form one of the most interesting sections of the Western Region of British Railways in South Wales. Historically, they are derived from some of the earliest tramroads in South Wales and Monmouthshire (i.e., tramroads connecting the industrial areas with canals before the railway era) and were developed by the London and North Western Railway as an important, if isolated, foothold in that industrial region. The L.N.W.R. became part of the London, Midland and Scottish Railway in 1923 and in turn, within one year of the nationalisation of our railways in 1948, these sections were transferred from London, Midland Region to the Western Region, which was formerly the Great Western Railway and a rival of the former L.M.S.R.!

The Abergavenny-Merthyr line is one of the most scenically spectacular and from an engineering point of view one of the most striking and most severely graded in the British Isles. From the Usk valley at Abergavenny it ascends for 9 miles on a very winding course nearly to Beaufort, practically reaching 1,200'; from the gradient profile it will be seen that there are nearly 3 miles at 1 in 34 before Govilon and over 5 miles at 1 in 37 or 38 or 40 from Govilon to Brynmawr. It is more heavily curved but more broken and less exposed than its principal rival, the 6½-mile bank on the former Brecon and Merthyr Railway which has an adverse gradient of 1 in 38 between Talybont and Torpantau tunnel.

The course onwards from Beaufort is undulating, with steep ascents and descents until the final summit at Dowlais Top. From here the line falls steeply (at first 1 in 38) to Morlais Tunnel Junction signal box where the double track ends, 19m. 34c. from Abergavenny Junction—the last L.N.W.R. signal box on the line. From this point it is 5½ miles to Merthyr High Street station, descending continuously (with stretches at 1 in 45 or 50) and the line describes a complete 360 deg. turn, while the two streams of the Taff are crossed by tremendous viaducts—Pontsarn and Cefn Coed—the line ending as it began, by one of the heaviest grades in the country.

The Merthyr, Tredegar and Abergavenny Railway Co. was incorporated on 1st August, 1859 and was leased by the L.N.W.R. by Act of 7th August, 1862, after a struggle between the L.N.W.R. and the West Midland Railway (which later became the Great Western Railway)—the latter having submitted a bill to Parliament to lease the line! On 29th September, 1862, the line was opened from Abergavenny Junction to Brynmawr, to Nantybwhch 1st March, 1864, to Rhymney 5th September, 1871, and then on 1st January, 1873, from Rhymney Bridge to Ivor Junction, Dowlais, thereby reaching the Brecon and Merthyr Railway station there. To reach Merthyr, the final link of  $1\frac{1}{4}$  miles between Penywern Junction on the Dowlais branch and Morlais Tunnel Junction (on the B. and M. Ry.) through Morlais tunnel was opened on 1st June, 1879. The former B. and M. line thence to Rhydyar Junction, Merthyr became L.N.W./B. and M. Joint and the L.N.W.R. paid half the cost retrospectively (it had been opened in 1868). Merthyr G.W.R. station was reached by virtue of running powers from Rhydyar Junction (44 chains).

The branch to Ebbw Vale ( $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles) was opened from Ebbw Vale Junction, Beaufort, on 1st September, 1867; the branch from Nantybwhch to Tredegar was opened on 2nd November, 1868, and it later gave access through one of the richest coal-bearing valleys to Newport (the branch southwards from Nantybwhch remains open of course); the Brynmawr and Blaenavon Railway was opened on 1st November, 1869 (1st January, 1870, for passengers) by when it had been absorbed by the L.N.W.R. and it was later extended southwards to gain access to Pontypool; the last branch to be opened was the joint line (with the G.W.R.) from Brynmawr to the G.W.R. line at Nantyglo on 12th July, 1905, also affording access to Newport (this line southwards from Brynmawr also remains open). Thus while the trunk route closes from 6th January, 1958, two stations thereon remain open for what was, branch traffic (i.e. Nantybwhch and Brynmawr).

The great trade depression of the 30's hit South Wales hard and with the closing of steel works and collieries in the area traffic diminished; from 1st July, 1933, the L.M.S.R. diverted its Cardiff traffic from the Abergavenny, Rhymney route, to the G.W.R. route via Newport. However, despite trade conditions, the L.M.S.R. improved the passenger services as by 1939 they were as good as 1914; in addition there were through coaches (Saturdays only) Blackpool—Merthyr and Merthyr—Manchester. After nationalisation and absorption into the Western Region, all through goods traffic was diverted to former G.W.R. routes (e.g. mostly via Pontypool Road and the "valley lines") as from 22nd November, 1954, leaving passenger traffic only. From same date Abergavenny locomotive shed was closed officially and became an overnight "stabling" depot.

In its hey-day, Abergavenny locomotive shed had 12 roads and would hold 100 tank engines easily. By comparison, on 4th June, 1933, there were 46 engines "on shed" viz. 20 Webb 0-6-2 "Coal Tanks" (inc. 7799 now 58926), 10 0-8-4 tanks, 7 0-8-0's, 5 M.R. type Class 4's, 2 L.N.W. 19" 4-6-0's, 2 Hughes 2-6-0's (and Engineer South Wales also). This was at the depth of the trade depression and just before the diversion of Cardiff traffic (worked by the Class 4's) —on same date Blaenavon sub shed had 3 0-8-4 tanks. Just before nationalisation, on 28th December, 1947, there were "on shed," 13 0-8-0's, 9 "Coal" tanks, 2 1200 2-6-2T's and 2 Salop 2-8-0's. The 1200 class tanks had just commenced to displace the Webb "Coal" tanks on passenger trains after a reign of well over half a century.

#### The final story

Passenger services were withdrawn between Brynmawr, Blaenavon and Pontypool from 5th May, 1941, and the line closed entirely between Brynmawr and Furnace End (near Blaenavon) after 1953; from the Ebbw Vale branch from 2nd April, 1951; from Rhymney Bridge to Rhymney from 21st September, 1953, and the section closed completely; now, from 6th January, 1958, the passenger service between Abergavenny and Merthyr. From the latter date, the line between Abergavenny Junction and Abergavenny Brecon Road Goods will be open for goods traffic; from this goods yard (exclusive) to Morlais Tunnel Junction (exclusive) will be closed completely, except for Brynmawr and Nantybwhch stations and the stretch of line between Beaufort Brickworks Sidings and Nantybwhch (to permit of coal traffic being conveyed between Tredegar and Ebbw Vale High Level via Nantybwhch and Beaufort)