

BRYNMAWR HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWS UPDATE

August/September 2020. The Railway Issue

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Yet another News Update and as some of you will have already seen on our website that following a meeting held back in July “It was agreed that the Historical Society be suspended until January 2021. This is due to Covid 19 and as most of us are of a certain age, care and safety measures must be taken. This may well change if the situation improves or even if it gets worse. The committee will be keeping you informed during the coming months. We have also agreed to cancel the annual dinner and the Christmas buffet”.

As we don't want to lose you or your enthusiasm for history here's some information about the rail link between Nantyglo and Brynmawr. I hope you find it interesting and if you have any anecdotes about the railway then please send them to the above email address and I'll incorporate them into the next News Letter.

Secretary. August 2020.

The Missing Link or the track that finally connected Brynmawr with Nant y Glo (and more importantly with Newport) was finally opened on the 12 July 1905 but the battle to bring the Western Valley railway all the way to Brynmawr was a long one. This had been suggested as far back as the early 1850s. Bear in mind that the Abergavenny to Tredegar line (MTA) wasn't opened till 1862.

THE PROPOSED LINE FROM NANTYGLO TO BRYNMAWR.

The strong desire manifested throughout this part of the country to obtain increased railway facilities—and not only the manifestation of a desire, but the taking of practical steps for its

accomplishment—indicate the existence of a healthy spirit of enterprise which is highly satisfactory. Whole lines of some length and pretensions are being warmly advocated for the benefit of large towns and great interests we are glad to see that smaller communities are not insensible to the advantages which may be thus derived even on a limited scale. It is certain, for instance, that Brynmawr will be immensely benefited by an extension of the Western Valleys railway from Nantyglo to that town; while other interests will also be promoted, and even Newport may derive some increased advantages. The good people of Brynmawr have "two strings to their bow." The Monmouthshire Railway and Canal Company must go to Nantyglo gate, and it could well be shown that it would be to their advantage to go on to Brynmawr. Looking, however, at the various difficulties with which that company have to contend, it is well that there is a preferable alternative, viz., that the Messrs. Bailey can, with profit to themselves, make this extension, without requiring any application to parliament, or encountering any opposition and might then charge a toll to the company for running on the line, or provide, themselves, for the whole traffic, as they chose. What may be the determination of these gentlemen, we cannot say but we can scarcely doubt that they will be ready to promote the public good by either making the line, or putting it into the power of the inhabitants to make it.

Monmouthshire Merlin October 1852.

It appears that the main reason the railway did not go “all the way” to Brynmawr was some opposition from The Bailey Brothers, owners of the Nant y Glo iron works. They would not allow trains to go through their furnaces yet at the same time it looked as if they would allow this to happen but on their terms and they could

charge a toll on any train travelling on “their lines”. Back in 1855 it had been anticipated that the extension would connect Blaina and Brynmawr but it only got as far as Nantyglo gate, I’m assuming the gate was on the border with the Bailey’s iron works.

The Monmouthshire Merlin reported in 22nd of May 1858 that: *“Even now they were stopped at Nantyglo, and could not get to Brynmawr, as Messrs. Bailey would not allow them to go through their furnaces”*.

In 1871 a special meeting of the Monmouthshire Railway and Canal Company was held at the offices in Newport, to consider the clauses of a line promoted by the London and North Western Railway Company, for constructing a short line of railway from Nantyglo to Brynmawr.

Years later in 1899 they were still commenting on the fact that the valley was only accessible by foot or horse and carriage. The Griffin company were I’m sure quite happy for things to continue in this was as they ran horse drawn carriages down to Nantyglo Station. The M.P. for the area Sir William Harcourt said *“I visited my constituents at Nantyglo a few weeks ago, having only generally known the neighbourhood before, and I became conscious of the extreme inconvenience of the interval that exists without railway communication between Brynmawr and Nantyglo. Many of my friends desired to come from different parts of West Monmouth which consists of four valleys, but the only access is as far as the existing railways go, and the people of Brynmawr have no means of access to Nantyglo and places below, except by foot. In fact, carriage communication in that country is extremely scarce and difficult to obtain. The public inconvenience is very great. How things have been tolerated so long I cannot understand. I know it has been proposed that the little mineral railway there should be maintainable for this purpose but, as I understand, this is the property of a private company. The proposed railway will connect with the Great Western in the south, and with the London and North Western Railway in the north at Brynmawr”* Connecting Brynmawr with Nantyglo would benefit Abergavenny as it would mean those in the Ebbw Fach valley could travel to market in Abergavenny easily instead of heading south to Newport Market; Abergavenny was of course

in Sir William’s constituency. It would also benefit areas further afield as goods from the Western valley could be sent as far as the Midlands. By 1860, the first sod for the MTA had been turned over at Abergavenny and the line as far as Brynmawr opened by 1862. (More on the MTA in future issues hopefully) Shareholders in the line had often urged the directors to make a line to Brynmawr, as it was considered a place of considerable importance.

It was finally opened by the Duke and Duchess of Beaufort. There will be more about the link and the opening ceremony on our website.

And finally something completely different.

I wonder how many of you have noticed a wall plaque on King Street, opposite the K.T’s wine bar (previously the Rising Sun), It claims that this is “Eddy’s Terrace”. Builders often added their name to any buildings they constructed but I was always intrigued as to who Eddy was. He was of course a builder and lived in Victoria House,



Brynmawr. I’m not sure but it may be the house near the roundabout on the border between Brynmawr and Nantyglo. The house has a plaque with an image of Queen Victoria on it.



It was by chance that I found this short snippet about a tragic accident reported in the Evening News on December 31st 1906:

“A skating accident occurred at the big pond, Nantyglo, on Saturday evening, which resulted in the death of two brothers, named Jonathan Eddy (21) and Robert Eddy (18), sons of Mr. Robert Eddy, builder, of Victoria House, Brynmawr”.

Robert Eddy also had a younger daughter who was with her brothers skating; she fell and as one of the brothers went to help her the other fell through the ice. His brother now ran to help him but sadly also fell through.
