

OPENING OF THE MERTHYR, TREDEGAR AND ABERGAVENNY RAILWAY. (M.T.A.)

The Brynmawr to Abergavenny railway was in many ways a very important milestone in the development of the town of Brynmawr. With the eventual opening of the missing link between Nant y Glo and Brynmawr all the Western valleys were connected to the London and North Western railway (LNWR) which meant coal, iron and other goods could be brought to the LNWR to be distributed all over Britain. Sadly, the link came some 40 years after the opening of the MTA so a bit late for the iron works at Coalbrook Vale, Blaina and Cwmcelyn. Was that a deliberate ploy by the Bailey Brothers not to allow the link and so weaken their competitors? We will never know. The link also provided a route to various markets to which many people had been denied. Below is the account of the opening of the MTA line and the first train from Abergavenny to Brynmawr "The City of the Hills". The problems and eventual solution to the "missing link" can be found in one of our August 2020 News Updates. Please return to this page as further reports will be printed in due course.

(This has been taken from The Cardiff Times, June 1862).

The opening of the above line from Abergavenny to Brynmawr took place on Monday last. Since the eventful period of 1831, when the Messrs. Bailey became proprietors of the Nantyglo Works, there has been many great events celebrated in a most becoming manner, but never has there been such a truly grand gala day as that of Monday last. If we may judge by the many arches and devices of evergreens, &c., erected about the town, we should imagine that many of the inhabitants had almost intruded upon the sanctity of the previous Sabbath, for people in general wondered how so much work could have been done since the sacred day had passed. Perhaps the best and most costly decorations were those in Beaufort Street, at the top of which was erected, by Mr. Lewis, of the Griffin Inn, beautifully decorated with flags of various sizes and colours. From thence flags of various sizes and colours. From thence to the

Castle Hotel, at the bottom of the street, was one continued scene of banners, flags, &c., many of them bearing the most appropriate mottoes and wishes for the interest and prosperity of the railway, town, and trade of Brynmawr. The citizens of King Street (which measures nearly, if not quite one mile in length) did their part nobly in celebrating this event. Scores of flags were suspended and mottoes flying in the breeze from one end of the street to the other. Bailey Street and Worcester Street also wore a very gay appearance. Upon the whole the town may be truly said to have presented a really holiday aspect; and as soon as daylight appeared, people were seen and heard scampering over the town, in proof that something of an unusual character was about to take place. At nine a.m., crowds of people began to wend their way towards the Griffin Hotel, from which The procession was to start. About ten o'clock the band of the 2nd Breconshire Rifle Volunteers, headed by a large banner, arrived, bringing with them a large number of people, among whom were several of the shareholders of the new line. At twenty minutes past ten the members of the Board of Health assembled in the street, among whom was their clerk and legal adviser, E. J. C. Davies, Esq., of Crickhowell; next came the clergy of the diocese; then the tradesmen of the town, and shareholders of the *railway*. The procession being formed, they marched off under the inspiring strains of the favourite air "Cheer, boys, cheer," through the town to the new railway station, which is situated within 200 yards of the new church and which place was so crammed with spectators that it was with some difficulty the band and procession could get through to the platform. Nor were the sight-seers confined to this place alone, for on every available spot where a good view of the train could be obtained, people were stationed; every old cinder and rubbish tip in the neighbourhood was dotted with people anxious to get a glance of the first train. The mass stood in anxious suspense for about half-an-hour when the sudden booming of cannon, which was planted on the Blaenavon side of the mountain, was a signal that the great "Iron Horse," with its first load of living freight was approaching. On its approaching the station, the band struck up "See the conquering hero comes and the hurrahs of the excited thousands were almost deafening to everything of a sensitive nature. As soon as the new porters had discharged their promiscuous cargo, the train moved on from the station, and at the assembling of the directors on the north side platform, a congratulatory address was read, and afterwards copies

presented to them, printed on white satin. The address was read by Mr. Cox Davies, chairman of the committee. C. Bailey, Esq., M.P., acknowledged the kindness of the address on behalf of the directors of the railway, and in his speech referred to the rapid growth of the town of Brynmawr. About thirty years ago there was only one farm-house in the locality, and now there was a population, there and thereabouts of nearly 20,000 people. He also made allusion to the other populous districts through which the line would ultimately pass until it joined the Taff Vale Railway and he was sure that having such a populous country to pass through was a good earnest that a large passenger traffic would be secured. It could hardly be expected that they would give such a dividend as the Taff Vale, but he thought they would run them very hard. (Cheers.) And having such a rich company as the London and North Western in the neighbourhood, it would be sure to benefit the place and people. J. Goynes, Esq., Captain Hill, and Mr. Isaacs, alternately acknowledged the compliment paid them by the inhabitants of Brynmawr, and spoke of them in most satisfactory terms as to the future prospects of the railway. Excellent fireworks brought the red letter day to a close.

Actually the day was not yet over as there was a slap up meal to be enjoyed. In the evening a public dinner was held at the Griffin Hotel, when a goodly number of the tradesmen, shareholders, and others sat down to a substantial repast, which did credit to Mr. and Mrs. Lewis who ran the Griffin Hotel.