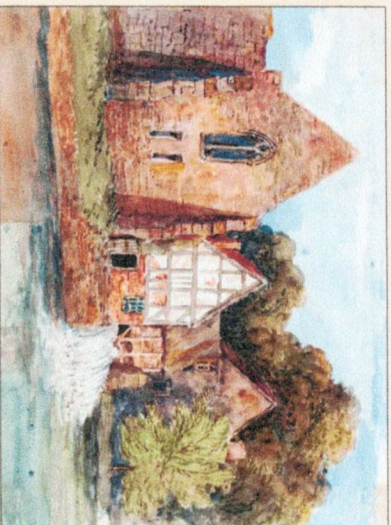


Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury



Shropshire Archives (600111860)

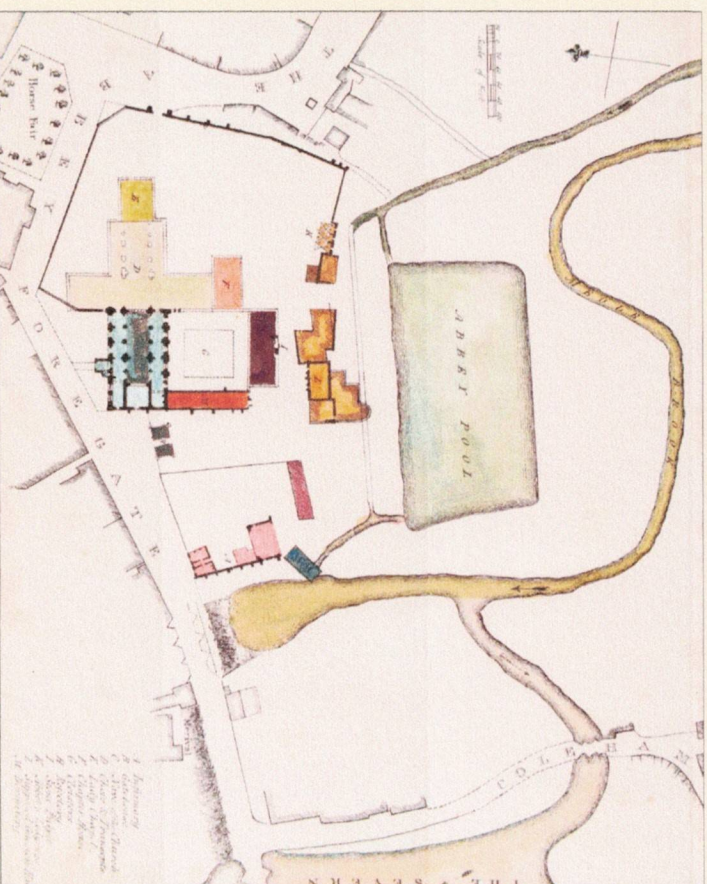
Many historic buildings grace Abbey Foregate, which plays host to England's tallest Doric column - Lord Hill's Column which was erected on the first anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo.

The London to Holyhead and Dublin coaching road ran through Shrewsbury via the narrow streets on the northern side of the Benedictine Monastery (now Shrewsbury's Grade I listed Abbey Church).

This was founded in 1083 as a Benedictine monastery by the Norman Earl of Shrewsbury, Roger de Montgomery.



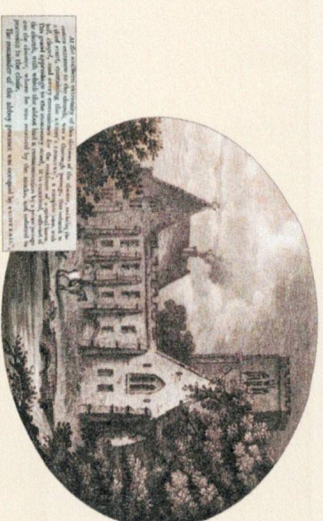
Shropshire Archives (683311111)



Ground Plan of the Monastery of St Peter and St Paul, Salop. John Carline's plan of the abbey precinct, published in Owen and Blakewor's 1825 History of Shrewsbury (north is to the bottom), Shropshire Archives (60011198).

In 1815, the Holyhead Road Commission, with Thomas Telford as its engineer, gained funding to improve the main road and in 1824 a new route was 'contemplated' through the ruins of the Abbey's domestic buildings. It was opened on the King's birthday in June 1836, when 15 coaches from the Lion Hotel and two accompanying bands were the first to use it. Thomas Telford was dubbed 'The Colossus of Roads'. This was a pun on the Colossus of Rhodes; and a nickname given to him by his friend Robert Southey, (the eventual Poet Laureate). Thomas Telford never saw his 'new' road, as he had died in London in 1834.

All images and the map are courtesy of Shropshire Archives. © All rights reserved.



Shropshire Archives (68331118)

In the autumn of 1863 local Shrewsbury man, Richard Samuel France acquired Abbey Mansion with three other houses; orchards, pleasure grounds and ornamental waters, together with 6 acres of meadow. He demolished the mansion and cleared its gardens for the station yard. He also drained a nearby mill pond. The railway station was opened in August 1866 on the actual site of the Abbot's Lodging.

In July 1866 during the excavation for the foundations of Abbey Station; where you are standing today, Mr France's workmen found 30 skeletons, buried without clothes or coffins and with vertical stones placed between each body. Most of the skeletons remain, other than the two taken to the local museum at the time.



Shropshire Archives (600111860)

Colonel Stephens and the Shropshire & Montgomeryshire Light Railway



Colonel Holman Fred Stephens (known as Holly to his family) was born on 31st October 1868. After serving an apprenticeship with the Metropolitan Railway, he started his career as a 'light railway' engineer at the age of 22. He was passionate, and charismatic. He built and managed numerous rural light railways across England and Wales to serve small towns and villages. He personally owned the Snailbeach District Railway in Shropshire from 1923. Both the SDR and the Shropshire and Montgomeryshire Light Railway had

'day to day' issues dealt with from Abbey Station. Second-hand and two new locomotives were purchased; with many given classical names, ranging from *Hesperus*, *Hecate* and *Thisbe*, to *Dido*, *Daphne*, *Pyramus* and *Gazelle*. Colonel Stephens ran the SMLR until his death on 23rd October 1931. The 'King of Light Railways' left a remarkable legacy. More information is available from <https://colonelstephenssociety.co.uk>



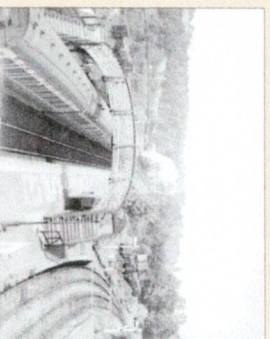
Colonel Stephens seated at his desk in his office, being the centrepiece of the Colonel Stephens Museum, Kennerley, Kent



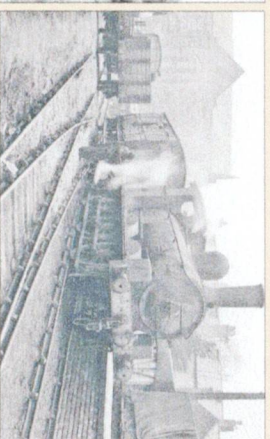
The Loving Cup used at the launch of the Shropshire & Montgomeryshire Light Railway 1911; Image courtesy of Shrewsbury Town Council

The Shropshire & Montgomeryshire Light Railway

The official opening was performed by the Mayor of Shrewsbury, Major Charles Ralph Borlase Wingfield, on Maundy Thursday, 13th April 1911. Around 200 invitations were issued to travel on the first train to Llanyrnnech, and the mayor climbed on to the roof of the leading carriage at Abbey Station and toasted the railway from the town's Loving Cup! Hesperus and its eight coaches leaving Abbey Station accompanied by flag waving and cheers from sightseers, would have been most impressive!



Llanymynech Station looking north with the SMLR platforms on the right



SMLR 'Hesperus' with the daily goods train from Abbey Station in 1939. Image courtesy of Llanymynech Station

The public opening took place on Good Friday, 14th April 1911. Around 250 people travelled, a figure which rose to 500 on the following Monday. The railway line stretched across an area of Shropshire and into Wales; with stations and halts at various locations that included for example Shrewsbury Abbey, Meole Brace, Redhill, Hanwood, Shoothill, Ford & Crossgates, Shrawardine, Nesscliffe, Kinnerley, Maesbrook and Llanyrnnech. Over the years many tons of minerals were transported, in addition to the passengers who took advantage of the line to take their produce to Shrewsbury Market. However a new era was about to begin...
At 11:15 on 3rd September 1939 Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain announced that Britain was at war with Germany. Consequently, from 1st June 1941 all trains on the S&M main line were operated by the military. A list of books about the SMLR is available from Abbey Station. This information display panel has been sponsored by the Colonel Stephens Society.



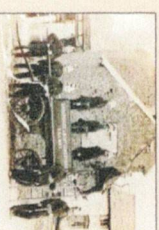
Kennerley Station looking towards Llanymynech with empty stone waggons



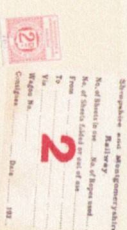
Driver Owen at Kennerley



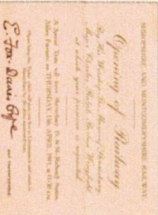
Side tank engine 'Pyramus' of the SMLR built by Harrison Leslie Hornsby near Fordon Works, Newcastle upon Tyne in 1911



The Merryweather & Sons of London fire engine with the fire crew ready in the morning, belated from 'Memories of a Lost Line' by Paul Lawton and Neil Robinson



SMLR Letter Stamp 2d & SMLR wagon label



FE Fox-Denon's invitation to the SMLR's official opening on 13th April 1911. W&A LN collection. Image courtesy of the National Archives

Gazelle - the little railway locomotive that survived



Gazelle in February 1911 still in its original 2-2-2 form. The other locomotive is Morous seen at Kinnelley when Gazelle first arrived.



Gazelle with the modified ex-London Horse Drawn Tram Numbered 16 in the S&M fleet. The conversion was the last job ever done by the Midland Carriage and Wagon Works in Shrewsbury.



Gazelle's name plate. Image courtesy of David Ward.

The iconic 2-2-2 Well Tank engine was built in 1893 by Alfred Dodman and Company of King's Lynn to the specification of William Burkitt Esq a director of the King's Lynn Docks & Railway. After Mr Burkitt's death in 1906 the engine was sent to machinery and scrap dealer Thos. W. Ward & Company of the Albion Works of Sheffield. It was purchased by Colonel Stephens in 1911, for use on the Shropshire and Montgomeryshire railway.

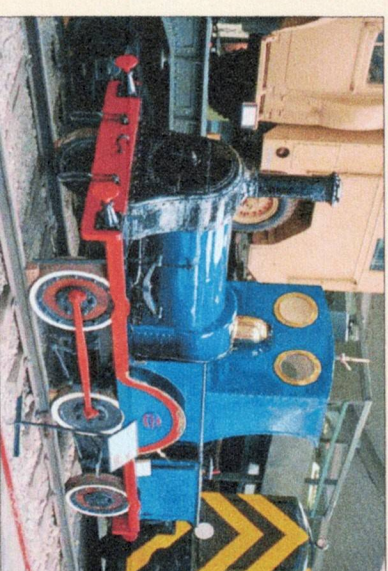
This little engine provided many interesting stories...

The Reverend Brock, Vicar of Criggion wrote to the board of Trade on 23rd November 1912 about his trip on the Shropshire & Montgomeryshire railway, and commented about 'the horror of riding on Gazelle.'

'Preceding to the branch to Criggion I was put with another man and two women into the back part of an engine with only a screen between us and the fire, no roof and the sparks and smuts falling over us, one spark nearly got in my eye, with danger of being blinded my clothes too injured by the same. I have occasion to use the Rly for my wife and daughter and friends from London and of course I cannot subject them to such risk and barbarous treatment.'

In 1938 the Birmingham Locomotive Club ran probably the first-ever enthusiasts, exclusive railtour over any minor railway in this country, using Gazelle and her coach.

The War Department acquired the S&M Railway in 1941 and the ownership of Gazelle, and many other engines. With nationalisation of the railways the ownership of Gazelle was transferred to British Railways Western Region. In 1950 the Longmoor Military Railway in Hampshire took ownership. In 1975 Gazelle went to the National Railway Museum, and was then loaned to the Museum of Army Transport at Beverley. In 1997 Gazelle was placed on loan to the Colonel Stephens Museum at Tenterden where it remains on display. <https://kesr.org.uk/museum>



Gazelle as seen at the Museum of Army Transport at Beverley in 1994.



Gazelle in the Colonel Stephens Museum at Tenterden on the Kent & East Sussex Railway.

Under Military Control

After Operation Dynamo - the code name given to the rescue of the British Expeditionary Force from Dunkirk in June 1940 - nearly all the equipment was left behind in France so Britain had to re-arm. Munition factories were set up around



Abbey Station. A busy time at Abbey Station, with 8236 in the goods yard, and the Deans Goods still carrying 1s GWR numberplates 2425 and W/D96 stencilled on the cabside. Image: S.H.Pearce Higgins, reference S&M2.

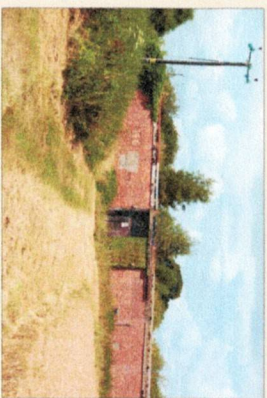


Kimmerley Station. The Permanent Way gang attending to the packing of a length within Kimmerley Station. Two vans of the breakdown train were in the bay platform - the nearest lettered 'S.M.R. No 1 WD Breakdown Train' - together with the ex-L&SWR Royal Saloon No 1A and a WD standard brake van. Image: David Peterson, from the Detachment Photograph Album.

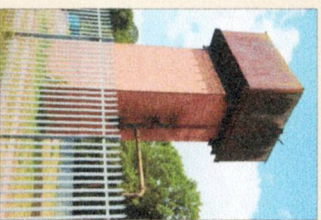
the country; but required storage and distribution facilities, so a large ammunition depot was built near Nesscliffe and

Shrewardine in Shropshire. The perfect site was found which had the advantage of being close to a railway (considered essential for safe transport of explosives). The chosen line was the Shropshire and Montgomeryshire Light Railway.

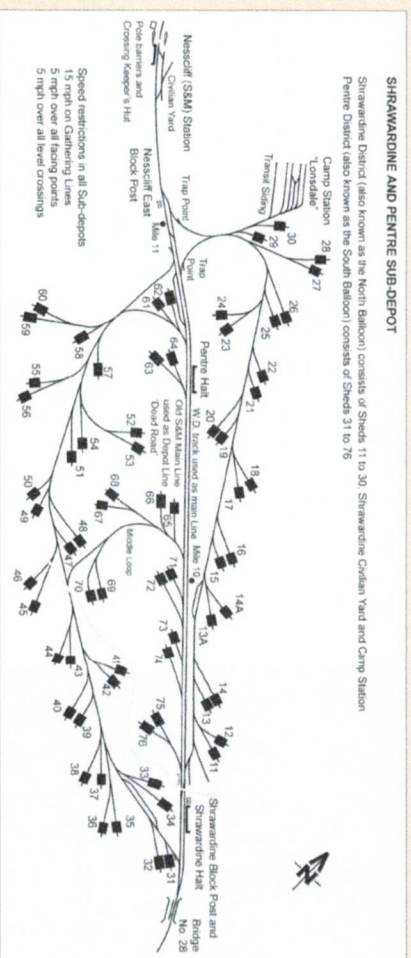
The S&M was leased by the War Department and operated by the Royal Engineers Regiment who surveyed the line in November 1940. It was found to be in a poor state with much of the rail too light for the proposed traffic, so there was a large scale reconstruction.



A surviving ammunition storage building at Kimmerley Ammunition Depot. Image by Trevor Jones.



Water Tower at Kimmerley Ammunition Depot. Image by Trevor Jones.



200,000 TONS OF HIGH EXPLOSIVE

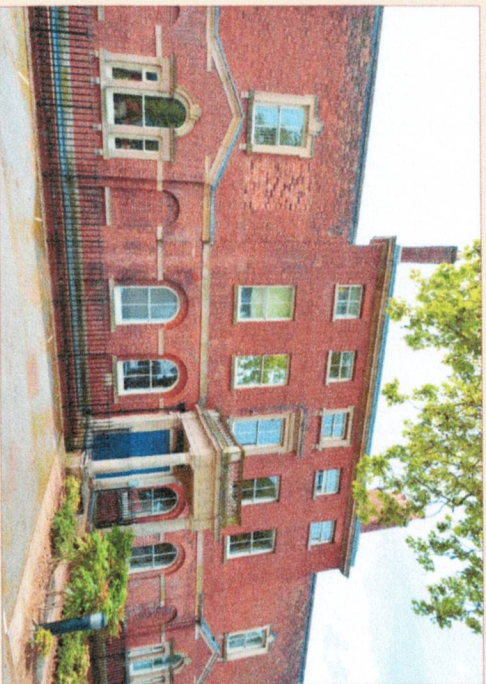
There were 200 explosive store houses at Maesbrook, Kimmerley, Nesscliffe, Shrewardine, Pentre and Ford with the total storage capacity in excess of 200,000 tons. Each location included extensive sidings with rails leading into each storehouse. The envisaged traffic was 2,000 tons per day (200/250 wagons). Exchange sidings were built at Hookagate and a marshalling yard at Ford with a passing loop at Cruckton.

Sir Alfred McAlpine & Sons Ltd were contracted to build the store houses and the new railway infrastructure. Work began before the end of 1940 and the depots started to open in January 1941. Operations continued after the war and ceased in 1960. The Shropshire and Montgomeryshire Light Railway closed at the same time after what had been the busiest and most successful period in its history. Our appreciation to Mike Christenson, OBE for his assistance and the provision of images from his book *The Shropshire & Montgomeryshire Light Railway, Under Military Control 1940 - 1960*.

Richard Samuel France... founder of The Potts Line!



Shrewsbury-born, and married twice he is buried at Plealey Chapel, in a **Grade II listed** family tomb (accessible to the public).



The Monklands. Image courtesy of Halls, Shrewsbury

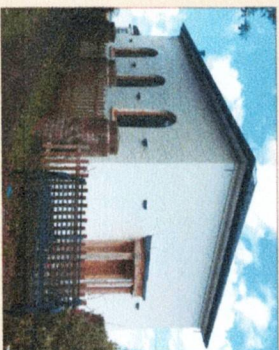
He promoted The Potteries, Shrewsbury & North Wales Railway (PS&NWR) in 1862 and constructed the line; (colloquially called The Potts), which followed nine Acts of Parliament.

He built Abbey Station to provide his own terminus after permission was refused by rivals the LNWR and GWR for him to have access to Shrewsbury Station.

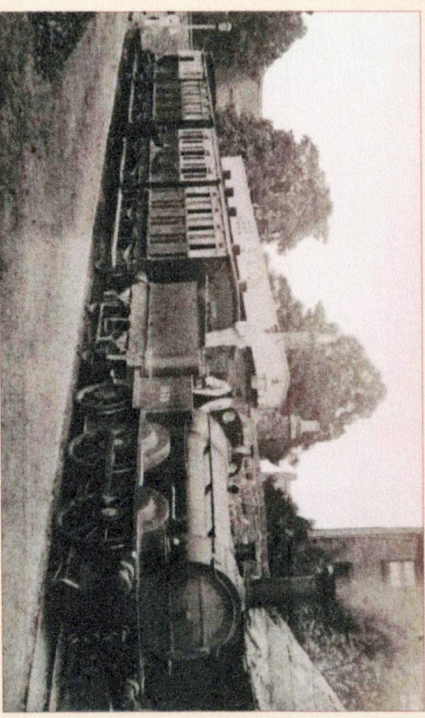
The first part of the line was opened on 13th August 1866 but on 21st December 1866 a receiver was appointed and the line closed for the first time. The PSNWR Winding Up Act received royal assent on 18th July 1881.

He had antagonistic business rivals; disputes with members of the House of Lords and was called 'before the Bar of the House of Commons' on 1st June 1874 for an official admonishment by the Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli.

For a while he lived at The Monklands, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury. Richard Samuel France died on 8th August 1882 at Bryntirion, on Morda Road, Oswestry aged 56. Despite all his endeavours, hard work and enthusiasm, he left just £142 gross (£89 4s 6d net) in his will.



Plealey Chapel



The magnificent Bury, Curtis and Kennedy 0-4-2 locomotive (Number 34) at Abbey Station

Shropshire Railways Company. On 14th March 1888 an act of Parliament authorised them to enable the railway to be transferred, but in 1895 receivers were appointed to the failed project. In 1906 the Shropshire Railways board of directors met with Colonel Holman Fred Stephens the chairman and managing director of the Kent & East Sussex Railway.

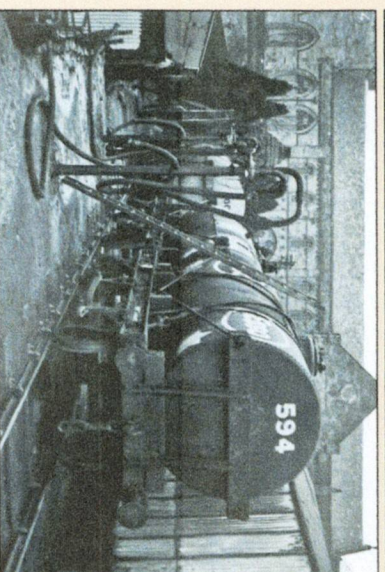
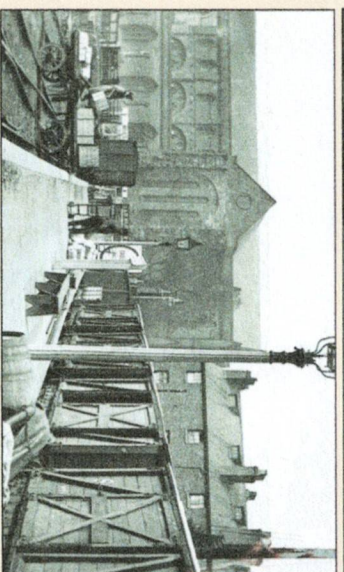
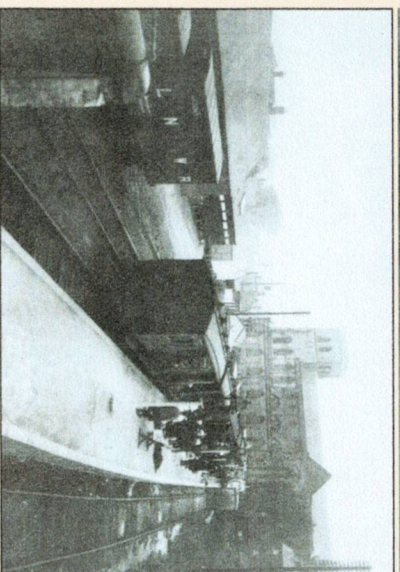
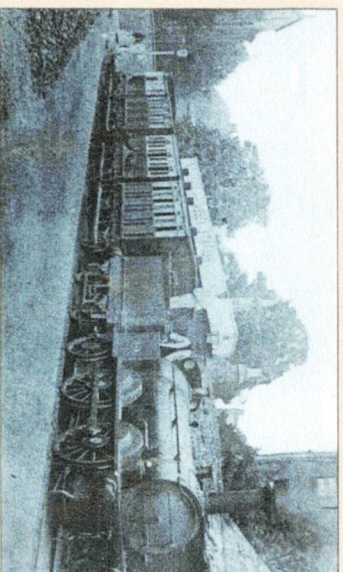
The line from Abbey Station was intended to be part of a grandiose scheme to provide a shorter sea route to Ireland than that via Holyhead, by using Nevin, a small port on the Caernarvon coast.

Several rival proposals eventually amalgamated and gave themselves the ambitious title of "THE POTTERIES, SHREWSBURY AND NORTH WALES RAILWAY" - 'The Potts'. The GWR and the LNWR refused to allow the PS&NWR to use the General Station and it therefore built its own on Abbey Foregate.

The line from there to Llanymynech was opened in August 1866. By then the route to Holyhead had opened and the financial crisis of the 1860s led to the abandonment of the connection to Stoke-on-Trent.

The PS&NWR had to remain a small concern serving a quiet country district with a branch to the extensive quarries at Criggion. The line pattered on until it became bankrupt and closed in 1881.

The 'Potts' continued in a state of suspension until 1908, when Colonel Holman Fred Stephens took charge. He used the recent Light Railway Act to reconstruct the line. It re-opened in April 1911 as the "SHROPSHIRE & MONTGOMERYSHIRE LIGHT RAILWAY"



Colonel Stephens personally owned the Snailbeach District Railway in Shropshire from 1923 and the SDR and the Shropshire and Montgomeryshire Light Railway had 'day to day' issues dealt with from Abbey Station. Second-hand and two new locomotives were purchased, a diminutive 0-4-2 WT, an ex Royal coach dating from 1844, an ex London single deck tramcar and a set of Model T motor buses on railway wheels. Colonel Stephens died in 1931 and in November 1933 the passenger service ceased. Stone traffic from Criggion continued.

In 1941 the line was taken over by the War Dept and run by the Army to service a vast series of ammunition depots built on 23 sq miles of countryside around Kinnerley and Nesscliffe. The line had never been busier or better run. More modern coaches were used to transport the many workers from Shrewsbury. After the war the Army began to close the depots. The stone traffic from Criggion ceased in December 1959.

In 1960 the line was released to BR for dismantling but a link was put into the end of the Severn Valley line to Abbey goods yard which became an oil depot. This continued until 1988 when the last part of the line finally closed.

Shrewsbury Railway Heritage Trust has overseen the restoration of Abbey Station which opened in 1866. Its use as a regular passenger station ended in 1933 and over succeeding years it deteriorated and became a derelict ruin. It was about to be demolished when the Trust stepped in. Both the town and county councils funded the rebuilding and the Station re-opened in September 2015.

Abbey Station is now available for use by local community groups for meetings, exhibitions etc.

The railway related aims of the Trust include :-

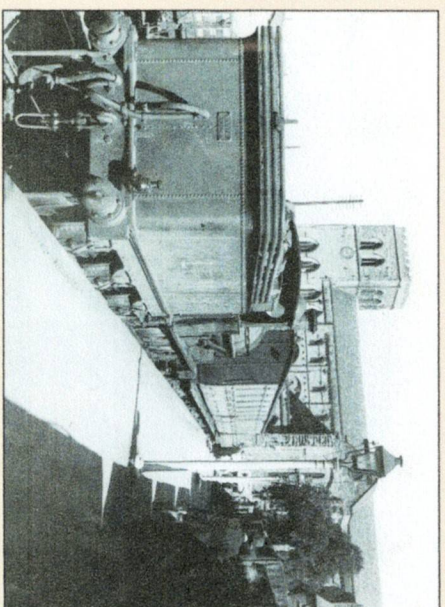
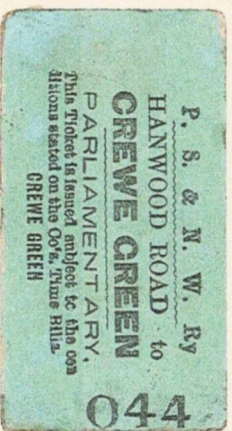
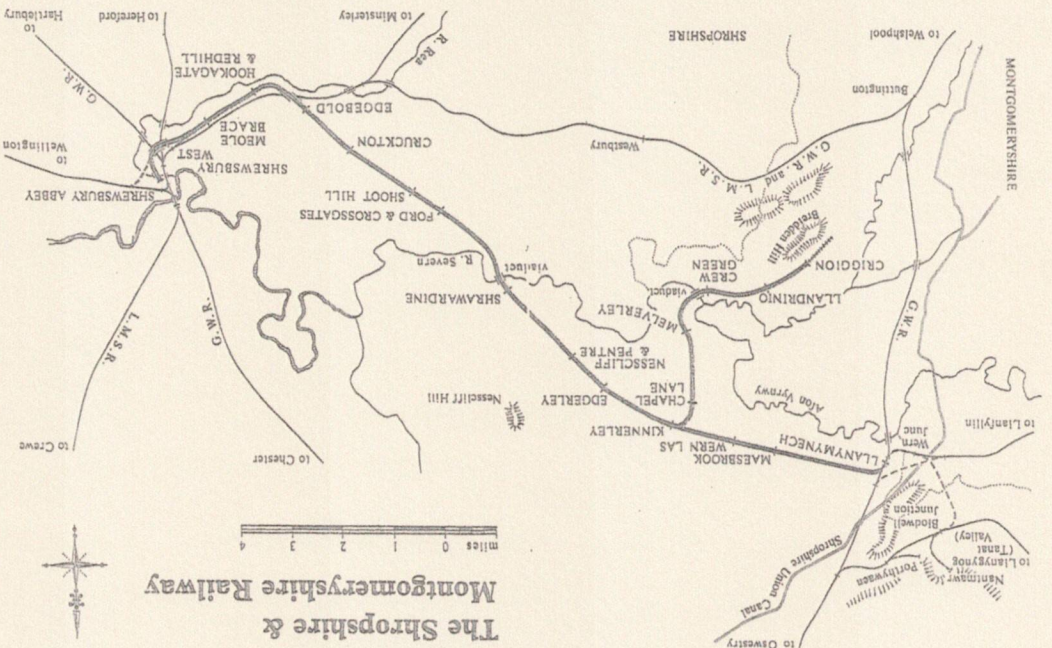
Raising awareness of Shrewsbury's role as an important railway town.

Advancing education about our railway heritage through exhibitions, meetings and the Trust's newsletter 'Abbey Lines'.

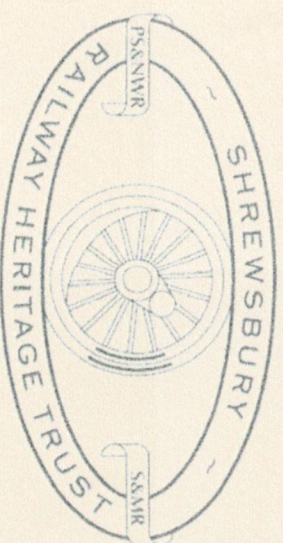
Collecting, documenting, and conserving evidence. Many items have been deposited with Shropshire archives.

New member are welcome
Details from:

Abbey Station, 192A Abbey Foregate,
Shrewsbury, SY2 6AH
E: abbeystationshrewsbury@gmail.com



SHREWSBURY ABBAY STATION



www.abbeystationshrewsbury.com