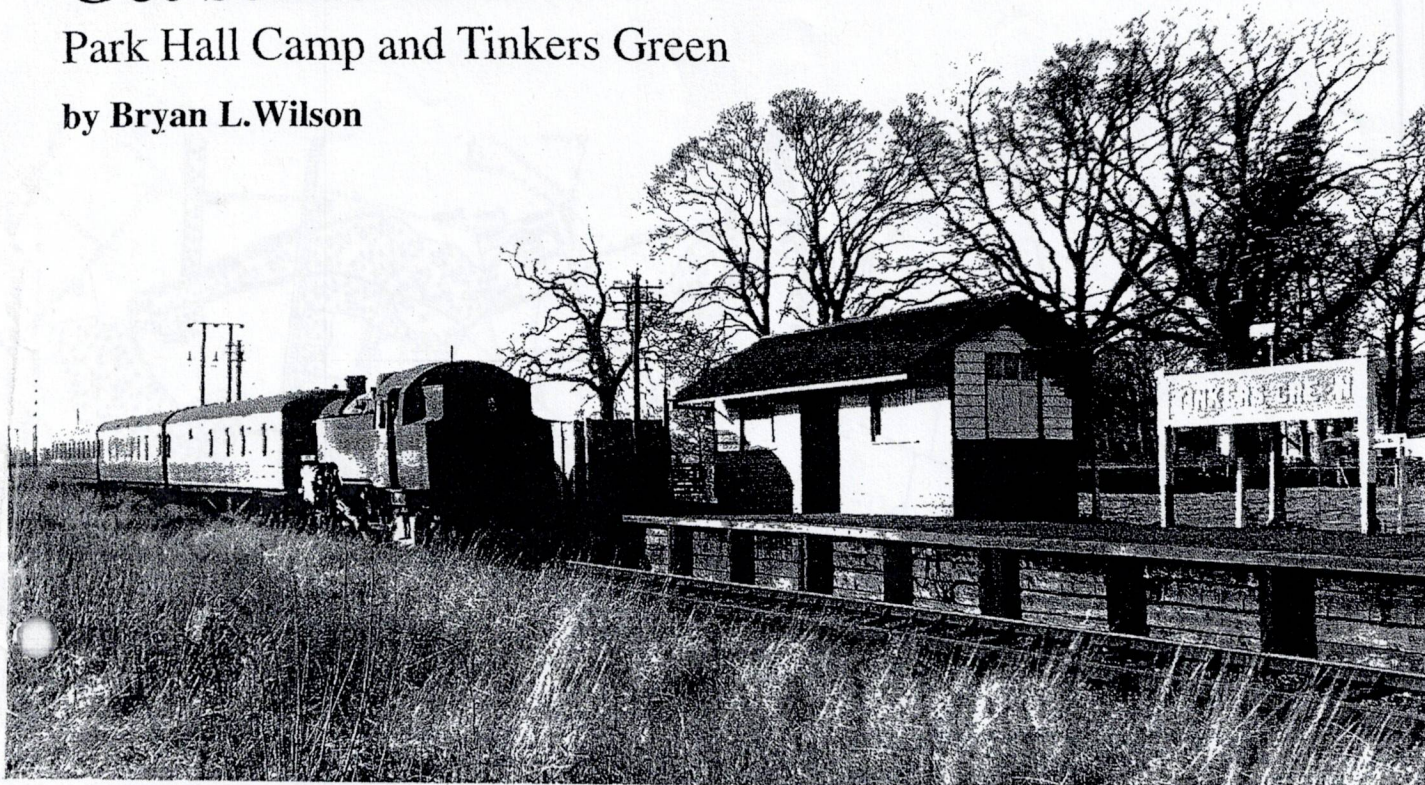


# Get some in....!!

## Park Hall Camp and Tinkers Green

by Bryan L. Wilson



In strong winter sunshine in 1964, an unidentified Standard Class 4 2-6-4T pulls into Tinkers Green with an eastbound train. The simple construction of the halt is evident, though the platform building seems to be well maintained. PHOTOGRAPH: PETER WARD

Following the outbreak of War in 1914 the number of men who volunteered for military service was so great that many new service camps had to be hurriedly set up. Some of the new camps were initially tented ones but, before long, it was realised that these would have to be replaced by permanent camps; one of these was at Oswestry in Shropshire. As early as 9 August 1914 no less than 4,000 troops were transferred to Oswestry from Pembroke Dock, arriving by eight separate Cambrian Railways trains. By 26 August the troops of the Welsh Border Infantry were under canvas at Gobowen Road (opposite the railway works at Oswestry) but they all departed on 2 September. Nevertheless, by this time plans were already in hand for a permanent camp at Park Hall, about one mile north-east of Oswestry.

The construction of a more permanent camp at Park Hall was well under way by 20 November 1914 as, on that day, the Cambrian Railways submitted to the Board of Trade a plan for a siding from its Oswestry-Whittington line; it was noted that the siding was being constructed '...at the request of the Office of Works... in connection with the military camp now in course of preparation at Park Hall'. On the following day the BoT gave (in advance) provisional sanction to use the siding, provided that the locomotive was at the lower end of the train - this was a sensible safeguard, as the siding was on a rising gradient of 1 in 116. It should be explained that, although it was intended to use the siding for construction traffic - i.e. *not* for passenger trains - the Board of Trade's approval was nevertheless required as the siding connected with a passenger-carrying line.

### The camp siding

The siding was brought into use by December 1914, and was retrospectively inspected by Colonel Druitt for the Board of Trade on 23 February 1915. It was noted that the siding was facing to Up (eastbound) trains on the single-track Oswestry-Whittington line, and was worked by a 2-lever ground frame, released by the electric train tablet for the section. Colonel Druitt stated that, as the traffic for the military camp siding came from Oswestry, the locomotive would have to be at the lower end of the train; this was highly irregular, but Druitt noted that the Cambrian had '...issued special instructions for the working...' and, given that the procedure described in the instructions was very stringent indeed, he felt that he could sanction the arrangements.

Colonel Druitt's report stated that: *'The siding points are locked by the Section Tablet and trains will be worked under a "short tablet" regulation from Oswestry - i.e. they will not have to go through to Whittington, but could return whence they came'*. It was noted that the traffic would be by special trains which would run on as 'as required' basis, leaving Oswestry at 9.30am, 11.50am and 3.05pm; it was announced that 'Mr. Williams, Oswestry, to arrange for the specials to run when required' - in those days, it was common for a specific individual to be named. The maximum number of loaded wagons per journey was 15, which would be propelled from Oswestry with a brake van at the leading end. Before the engine was uncoupled the Guard had to '...be careful to see that the handbrake on his van was firmly screwed down and secured by its chain...',

while the brake van had to be 'spragged' - i.e. a stout piece of wood was pushed through the spokes of the wheels as an additional safeguard against a runaway. As if these safeguards weren't enough, an assistant guard had to be sent with the train - he had to remain in the brake van, ready to attend to the brake if necessary, during the whole time the train was standing on the main line. The Board of Trade certainly wasn't taking any chances - although the 1 in 116 gradient of the siding was fairly steep in railway terms, it wasn't exactly precipitous!

The siding crossed the public road from Oswestry-Ellesmere (the present day A495) on the level. The crossing had to be protected by contractor's men before a shunt was made across the road, the men having to open and close the gates before and after each manoeuvre. It was the train guard's responsibility to see that this rule was complied with.

At the siding, the engine first had to draw the empty wagons away from the camp before it could propel the loaded wagons in. The locomotive was not permitted to go '...beyond the chaired railway' (the track inside the camp was 'rail on sleeper'), and the wagons had to be placed inside the rail block just beyond the catch points (the catch points - an obvious precaution to prevent wagons rolling back to the main line - were on the north side of the crossing with Oswestry-Whittington road). The foregoing implies that loaded wagons from the camp were not anticipated, but the local Goods Manager had the responsibility for giving instructions as to the invoicing of traffic for and from the siding. Down trains from Whittington to Oswestry were not





VIEW PARK HALL CAMP OSWESTRY

The only picture of the internal railway at Park Hall Camp which has come to light is this postcard; in its entirety the internal system comprised 3¼-miles of track. This card was posted on 9 November 1917, and was from 'Len' to all at 31 Marshall Road, Levenshulme, Manchester. Len wrote: 'Round the whole place must be 12 miles or more - some camp, eh! Part of the camp is empty as they are preparing it for Hun prisoners (wounded), and a grand place they are making of it. The huts are now just like a hospital with easy chairs and sprung beds. We are only Tommies, and have to be satisfied with boards. A number of men from here have been sent to Italy - a draft last night left for there at 9.30pm'. COURTESY JOHN RYAN

initially permitted to stop at the siding, as until circa 1919 there was no 'shutting in' facility.

On 30 April 1915 a meeting between the Cambrian Railways and the camp authorities was held at the offices of the

Western Command at Chester. The railway company was represented by Messrs. W.H. Williams and W.H. Gough, while the camp was represented by Colonel Huleatt (engineer) and Colonel French. The railway company enquired about po-

tential traffic - men, parcels and goods - to and from the camp, but the military could only reply that the hutments would not be ready for 'some 6 to 8 weeks' and that a brigade '...may shortly be sent to assist with the works'. Colonel French opined that

parcels for the camp would be dealt with at Oswestry station '...as the camp will be provided with transport for this purpose'. As for the brigade, it was intended that they should be accommodated under canvas on land opposite the camp.

The question of erecting a platform or halt adjacent to the camp was discussed. The military authorities thought this was very desirable and suggested that the railway company should communicate with the Director of Barrack Construction at the War Office, but it was subsequently decided that any representation for a station or halt should come from the military. Colonel French announced that the men encamped at Park Hall would travel in large numbers each day to Fenns Bank, between Ellesmere and Whitchurch, for musketry practice, but there appears to have been no



Tinkers Green halt in August 1964, by which time it was under LMR administration. The locomotive at the head of the eastbound train is an Ivatt Class 2 2-6-0 (possibly No.46515), in which case the train is the through working from Llanfyllin to Whitchurch. This view shows the extent of the platform. Telegraph poles are things of the past on Britain's railways but, as is very evident here, weeds were not a Railtrack invention. PHOTOGRAPH: ANDREW MUCKLEY



vided, but not until 1939; more of this anon. On the south side of the Oswestry-Whittington line, incidentally, a siding was laid in June 1915 for use by contractors engaged on sewerage works; the connection to the siding was removed by October 1917.

On 23 July 1915 - just five weeks or so after being given the go-ahead - the Cambrian's engineer proudly announced that the platform had been completed and was ready for traffic. There had been a minor niggle in that it had not been possible to obtain permission from the landowner, Lord Harlech, to cross a corner of his field with a footpath. Instead, it had been necessary to make a footpath '...on the land we already have alongside our siding - this entailed considerably more expense and is a few yards longer, but gives very satisfactory access to the platform from the main road'. The final bill for the halt worked out at £26.11s.8d - this was almost double the original estimate, but some of the additional cost had presumably been incurred by the new footpath.

And so, thanks to the Cambrian Railways having extracted its corporate digit, Mrs. Lodge had got her platform, complete with a 'very satisfactory' footpath, just seven weeks after she had first raised the matter. One can therefore imagine that the Cambrian felt a little miffed when Mrs. Lodge announced - on 26 July - that the special trains would not now be required until September, or maybe even later. In fact, the halt which had been specially built was *never* brought into use.

Park Hall Camp and its internal railway - which ultimately extended for no less than 3½ miles - came under the control of Western Command; in April 1918 all military camp railways were taken under the wing of the Director of Movements at the War Office. During World War I, Park Hall Camp acted as a Prisoner of War camp.

Although the halt had been provided on the Oswestry-Whittington line adjacent to Park Hall Camp, the military discussed the possibility of providing a platform *inside* the camp. Unlikely though this might sound, it is confirmed by a memo from Lieutenant Wintour on 31 October 1916 which suggested that, if the Cambrian laid on passenger trains from Oswestry to the camp every evening, the military '...would arrange for a platform and other facilities to be provided at Park Hall Camp'. However, this idea was soon pooh-poohed by General Buchanan, the officer in charge of Western Command, who was not in favour of a train service to the camp; he stated that '...that the walking does the men good'.

#### Post war

After the war, activities at Park Hall Camp inevitably decreased, though the Cambrian Railways WTT for May 1919 reveals that at least one goods train was still required each weekday. This was timed to leave Oswestry at 7.00am, arrive at Park Hall Siding at 7.05am, depart from Park Hall at 9.25am and be back at Oswestry at 9.30am. A path was also made available for a second trip, if one were required: 9.50am ex-Oswestry, with the return departing from Park Hall at 12 noon. In 1921 part of the site was taken over for use as an orthopaedic hospital. The siding

The first ordinary train calling at Tinkers Green in the morning was the Wrexham auto. This unit was based at Oswestry - it departed at about 7.35am (though the precise time varied over the years) and spent the day on the Ellesmere-Wrexham branch. Until the 1950s the practice at the end of the working day was for the unit to return light from Ellesmere to Oswestry, but from 1952 this was an advertised trip on Mondays-Fridays (9.50pm ex-Whitchurch), which called at Tinkers Green. Because of the times at which the auto train was scheduled to call at Tinkers Green, pictures of these workings are rare (though the editor would love to learn otherwise!), but this view of 0-4-2T No.1438 leaving Hightown halt with the 4.20pm Ellesmere-Wrexham on 18 April 1960 is an example of the outfit provided. PHOTOGRAPH: MICHAEL MENSING



to the camp, being somewhat superfluous, closed on 15 November 1924, and the connection with the Cambrian line was removed on 28 April 1925. Nevertheless, on 5 July 1926 a new halt - titled Park Hall halt\* - was opened on the Oswestry-Gobowen line which passed the western extremity of the hospital site. This new halt was provided in connection with further development of the hospital, that being emphasised by the nameboard at the halt which was suffixed 'for the Orthopaedic Hospital'; the halt did not see any military usage, save for the few who 'escaped' from the back of the camp and avoided the guard room. (\* *It must be emphasised that this halt was a completely different entity - and on a completely different line - to the one which was discussed earlier*).

#### World War II and after

As the threat of war escalated during the latter part of the 1930s, Park Hall Camp once again saw an increase in military ac-

tivity. This time, the railway company (by now the GWR) wasted little time in providing a new, publicly-advertised halt adjacent to the camp on the Oswestry-Whittington line - its precise location in relation to the earlier, unused, halt is not known, but it must have been very close indeed. The naming of the new halt created something of a problem as the obvious title - Park Hall halt - had already been used for the stopping place on the Oswestry-Gobowen line. Instead, the new halt was named Tinkers Green, and it made its debut in the public timetables on 16 October 1939.

The name Tinkers Green, incidentally, is known to have dated back to 1754, and is thought to have been coined as a family of travelling tinkers regularly stopped there. On the tithe apportionment map of the 1830s, Tinkers Green is shown as being on the very site which was later occupied by the military camp. It seems that the 'village' of Tinkers Green actually com-



D: 3.47am	(MTO - 3.15am Whitchurch-Aberystwyth)
U: 7.43am	(7.40am Oswestry-Wrexham via Ellesmere)
U: 8.24am	(6.30am Llanidloes-Whitchurch)
D: 9.01am	(8.17am Whitchurch-Oswestry)
D: 10.38am	(9.55am Whitchurch-Aberystwyth)
U: 11.23am	(7.40am Aberystwyth-Whitchurch)
U: 1.43pm	(12.50pm Welshpool-Whitchurch)
D: 2.51pm	(2.05pm Whitchurch-Aberystwyth)
U: 3.50pm	(12.50pm Aberystwyth-Whitchurch)
D: 4.53pm	(4.05pm Whitchurch-Aberystwyth)
U: 5.28pm	(4.35pm Llanfyllin-Whitchurch)
U: 6.58pm	(2.30pm Aber-Whitchurch)
D: 7.37pm	(6.50pm Whitchurch-Llanidloes)
D: 10.07pm	(9.20pm Whitchurch-Oswestry)

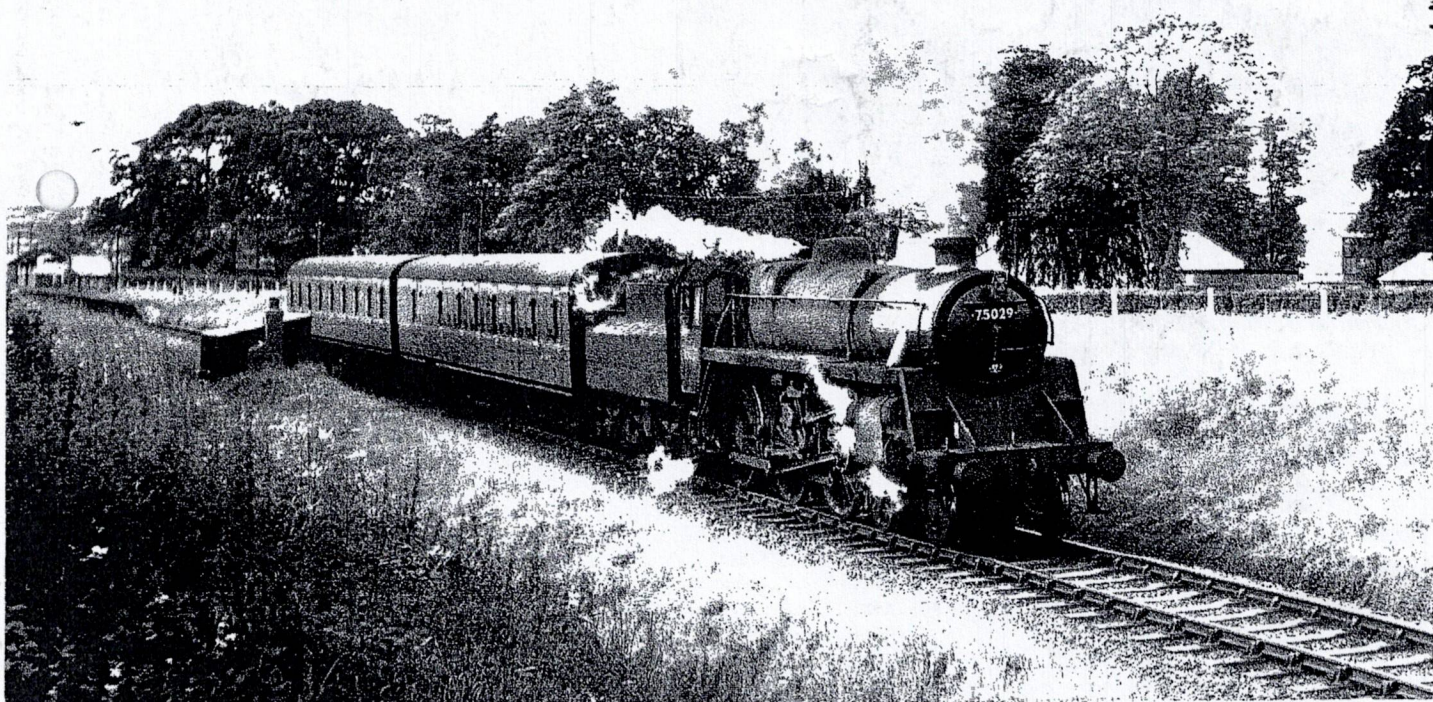
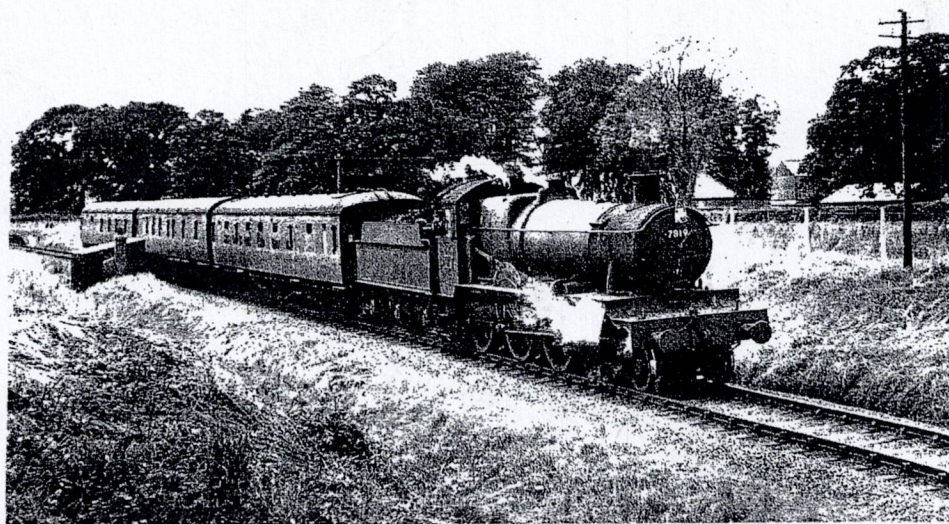
wider A495 road. Parts of Park Hall Camp still survive, and the site is occasionally used as the Oswestry Showground. But in terms of railway history the location is unusual - nay, probably unique - in that it was the site of a platform that never was a station, one that never material-

ised because it did the troops good to walk, and one which managed to exist for over 25 years, despite having only one source of traffic.

**Acknowledgements:** Much of the material for this article was sourced at the Public Record Office, Kew - the relevant files are RAIL 1057/1985, MT6/2386/3 and MT29/85/38. The information about the origins of the name 'Tinkers Green' were kindly provided by Mr. Pryce Jones of Walsall.

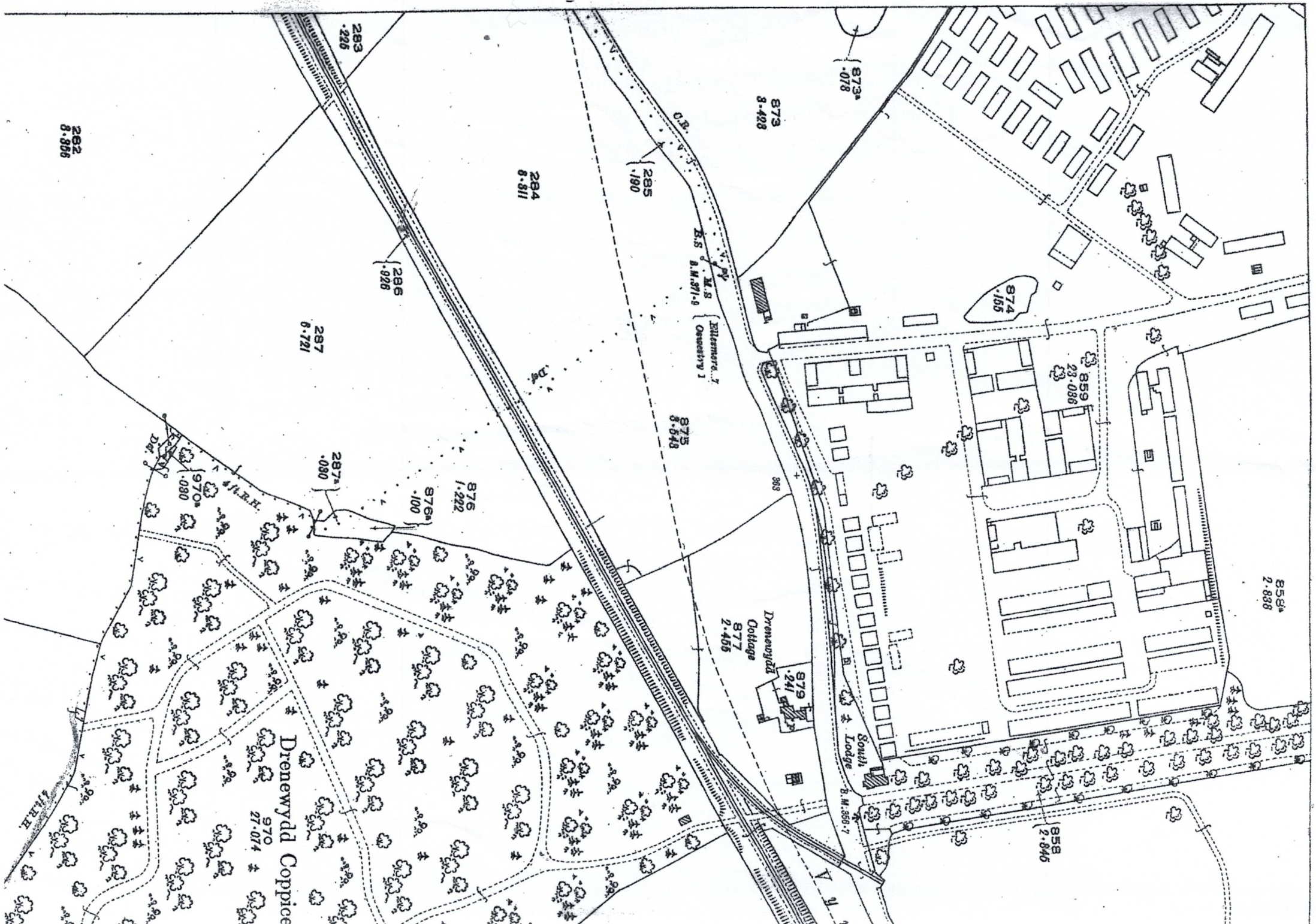
from Oswestry, which took the National Servicemen back to the camp after a heady night out on the town. This pattern of train services continued until the early 1960s but, with the reduction in the numbers of National Servicemen, the late night train from Oswestry was discontinued. Sunday services had never been plentiful on the former Cambrian lines, but one of the few trains that *did* run - the eastbound Aberystwyth mail - called at the halt on Sunday nights from the mid-1950s onwards. This was another train offering a 'back from a night on the town' service to the camp's residents.

Tinkers Green halt closed on 18 January 1965, the same date as the withdrawal of services between Oswestry and Whitchurch. By this time, Park Hall camp had long since gone. In the thirty-odd years since, some of the area has reverted to nature while other parts are under the new,

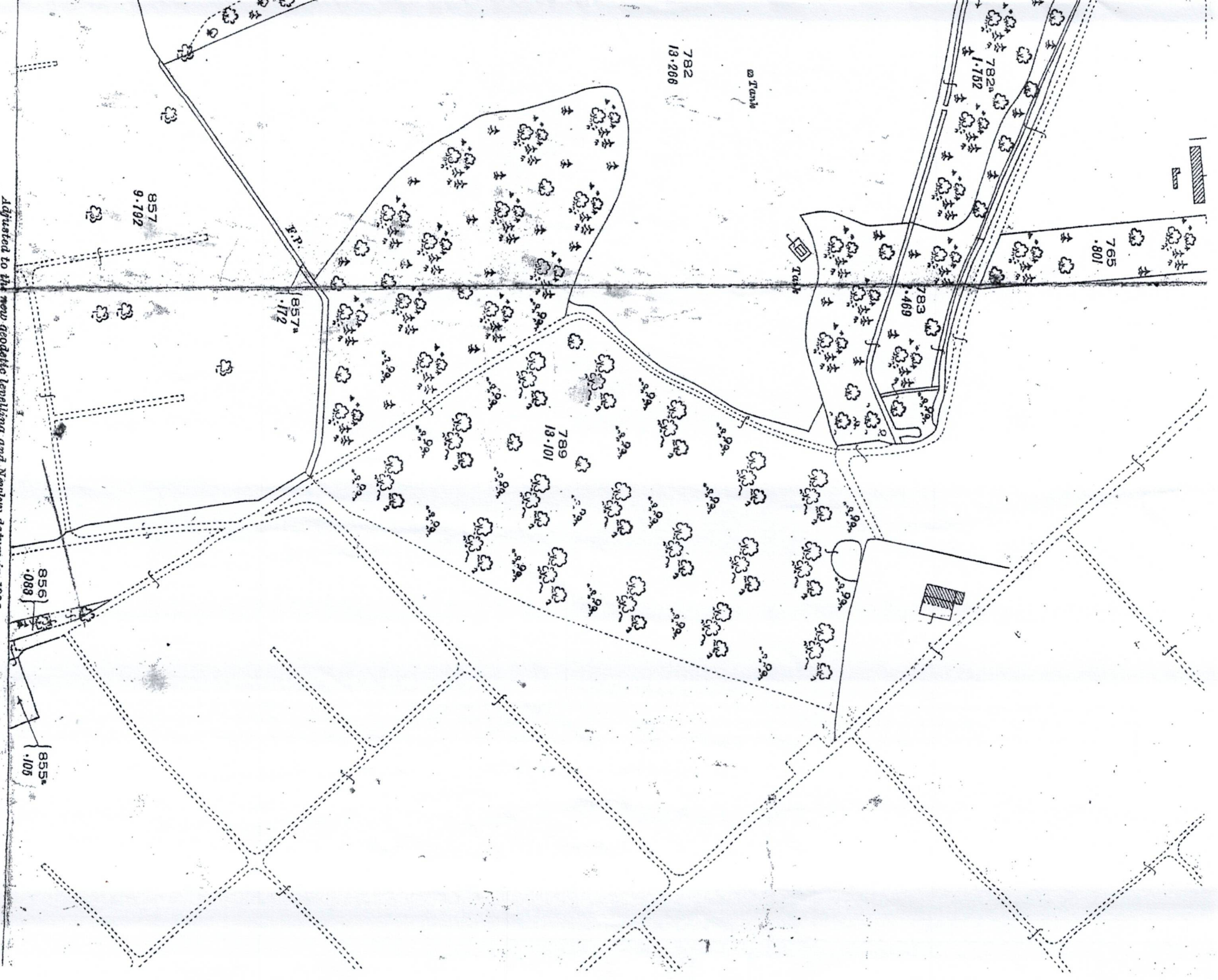


Although these two photographs are similar, and although they show locomotives which are not usually Bylines-style fare, they highlight the 1964 scene at Tinkers Green when things were decidedly mixed up between the Western and the London Midland Regions. The top picture shows Manor 4-6-0 No.7819 of Aberystwyth shed working with three attractive GWR coaches, but the locomotive displays the 6F shedplate of the LM Region. The lower picture shows Standard Class 4 No.75029 on a local working - the locomotive was allocated to Croes Newydd which, by this time, was an LM Region shed, but the 89B shed-plate is plain for all to see. One oddity about this picture is that Croes Newydd didn't usually cover this section of line, their usual patch being Ruabon-Barmouth. In both pictures, part of Park Hall Camp can be seen lurking behind the trees. Imagine being dropped off here at 3.36 on a Monday morning, straight into the Guard Room opposite the halt, to book in for a further period of incarceration. BOTH PHOTOGRAPHS: PETER WARD









ARIES, &c.		
cutting the point at boundary changes		27
Soft		4.970
<p>Every parcel is numbered thus Its area is given underneath in Acres thus Braces indicating that the spaces so connected are included in the same reference number and area.</p>		

*Printed and Published*  
*The altitudes of bench marks and surface heights*  
*Altitudes indicated thus (B.M. 54.7);*  
*Note - To convert Decimal*