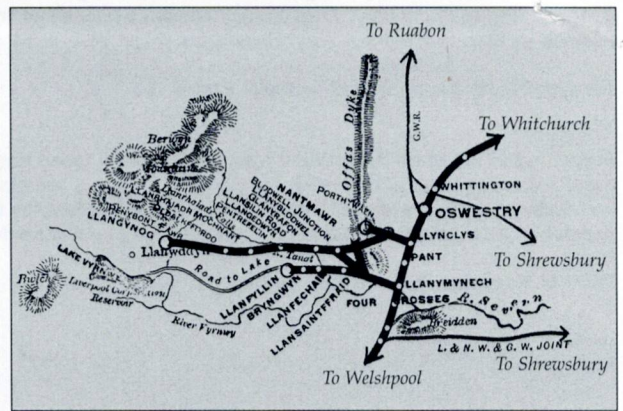


THE LLANFYLLIN BRANCH



Stanley Jenkins provides a short history, and details of train services, both passenger and freight, of a small rural branch line which ran from the Welsh border town of Oswestry to Llanfyllin in the Berwyn mountains of Mid-Wales.



Many present-day enthusiasts regard the Cambrian Railways system as a lengthy cross-country route from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth and Pwllheli, although in reality this former pre-Grouping company once operated several interesting branch lines. Some of these were in the Welsh border area around the company's headquarters at Oswestry, the lines in question being the Llanfyllin, the Tanat Valley, and the Wrexham & Ellesmere lines. This present contribution will examine the Llanfyllin branch which left the Whitchurch to Welshpool main line at Llanymynech and terminated in the pleasant Welsh market town of Llanfyllin.

Above: The branch line to Llanfyllin left the Oswestry & Newtown Railway at Llanymynech, where the station nameboard advised passengers to change there for Llanfyllin and Lake Vyrnwy. The lake was, and still is, a nearby beauty spot where there is a man-made reservoir providing water for the City of Liverpool. From the mid-1950s most of the trains over the Llanfyllin branch were hauled by Ivatt '2MT' 2-6-0s, these engines running tender-first towards Llanfyllin as there was no turntable at the terminus. Returning to Oswestry with its 2-coach train from Llanfyllin on 2 May 1956 we see the train pausing at Llanymynech with Ivatt '2MT' No 46506 in charge. G. F. Bannister

Origins of the Llanfyllin Branch

The Cambrian Railways system originated during the 1850s with the promotion of the Oswestry & Newton Railway. This company was incorporated on 26 June 1855 and its first section from Oswestry to Pool Quay was opened on 1 May 1860. A separate section between Newton and Abermule was opened in August 1860,

while on 10 June 1861 the railway was completed throughout between Oswestry and Newton in Montgomeryshire where connection was made with an existing line to Llanidloes. At Oswestry, the Oswestry & Newton line made an end-on junction with an earlier GWR branch line from Gobowen, which initially formed the company's eastern outlet for through

Right: In 1932 there were five up passenger trains between Llanfyllin and Llanymynech plus one Wednesdays-only train, one Wednesdays and Saturdays-only train, and one Saturdays-only service. In the down direction there was one less train — in this direction omitting the Wednesdays-only service. There was no Sunday service. On Saturday, 28 May 1932 we see a train having arrived at the Llanfyllin branch terminus, and it appears that the locomotive is in the course of running round the train for the return journey to Llanymynech. It is possible that one of the '517' class 0-4-2Ts was the train engine on this occasion, although the GWR did introduce the Collett 0-4-2Ts in the '4800' series to replace the '517' class engines in 1932. H. C. Casserley



important adjunct to the rail network. Unfortunately the undoubted success of the GWR bus fleet led to complaints from the road transport industry to the effect that the Great Western Railway (and other railway companies) did not have the Parliamentary consent to operate road services, and for this reason the railway bus routes were said to be illegal.

There was an element of truth in the allegation of illegality, and to formalise the situation whereby the GWR could operate its road services the company obtained new powers under the provisions of the Great Western (Road Transport) Act of 1928. This new legislation enabled the GWR to own, work, and use motor vehicles in its own right, and to enter into arrangements with other parties for the operation of road transport services. By virtue of these powers the railway company at once entered into detailed negotiations with certain road transport companies, and by 1933 all of the GWR motor-bus services had been handed over to 'associated' bus companies such as Crosville Motor Services Ltd.

As a result of this agreement the Oswestry-based road motor services were all passed to the Crosville Motor Services company on the understanding that the bus company would not compete with the railway. This arrangement was supposed to lead to greater co-ordination between road and rail transport, but there is no doubt that in many areas the buses began to compete with the railways for what little transport was available in rural areas. The situation in respect of the Oswestry area seems to have been particularly disadvantageous as far as the GWR was concerned in that many buses ran on a Llanymynech-Oswestry-Gobowen axis in open competition with the rail service.

In some instances Crosville (or the other railway-associated bus companies) assisted the GWR by collecting and delivering parcels traffic, while goods traffic was handled by GWR motor lorries, some of which had been converted from former railway buses. Oswestry-based road

motors Nos 801, 807, and 861, for example, were adapted for use as lorries between 1926 and 1929, and as such they retained their old GWR fleet numbers (the Great Western numbered all of its road vehicles in one sequence). Motor-buses were in many ways more flexible than the railways, although to mitigate this problem the GWR opened numerous unstaffed halts in an attempt to combat road competition. One of these new stopping places was established in 1938 at Carreghofa on the Llanfyllin branch, near Llanymynech

Train Services on the Llanfyllin Branch

The Llanfyllin line was worked as a branch from Llanymynech, but it became the practice for some services to work through to Oswestry for operational purposes, while on Wednesdays and Saturdays additional trains were provided between Llanfyllin and Oswestry in connection with Oswestry market days. The July 1939 Working Timetable provides a useful glimpse of the railway in operation at that time, the basic service of five workings in each direction having been in force for several years.

Daily operations between Llanfyllin and Llanymynech began with the departure of the first up service from Llanfyllin at 7.23am, and there were, thereafter, four further up and down workings during the day. The 1.43pm service from Llanfyllin ran through to Oswestry, while some of the other down services were unadvertised through workings from Gobowen. On Wednesdays two through trains ran through from Llanfyllin to Oswestry in the morning, with balancing return workings in the early afternoon and evening respectively. A similar situation pertained on the Saturdays, when extra trains were provided.

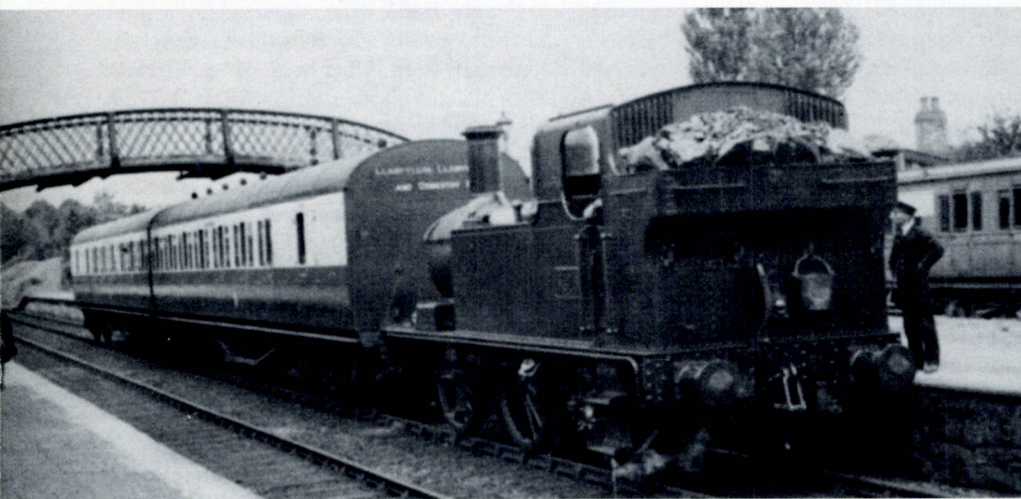
Freight traffic was conveyed by a daily branch goods train which generally departed from Llanymynech at 12.25pm and arrived at the terminus at 1.35pm, having called intermediately at Llansantffraid where half an hour was allowed for shunting operations. The return working left Llanfyllin at 2.30pm and, after spending another half an hour at Llansantffraid, the branch freight arrived at Llanymynech at 3.42pm. Llanfechain had, by the late 1930s, been down-graded to such an extent that the daily freight train no longer called on a regular basis, small consignments being handled by road vehicles from neighbouring Llansantffraid.

The train service provided on the Llanfyllin branch at the end of the GWR period was very similar, with five trains each-way. Although GWR public timetables suggest that the line was worked as a branch line with trains shuttling backwards and forwards between Llanfyllin and Llanymynech, some of these workings were, as in the 1930s, unadvertised through trains. The 4.35pm afternoon service, for instance, was a through service to Oswestry and Whitchurch. A slightly modified service was provided on Saturdays, but there was no Sunday service.

The line was worked by short-wheelbase coaching stock for many years, although in GWR days 2-coach 'B-sets' and other formations were employed. The first 'B-sets' were built shortly after the Grouping, in 1924, and they remained in production until 1936. These characteristic GWR branch-line formations consisted of pairs of close-coupled steel-panelled brake composites. Most examples had six third-class compartments, one first-class compartment, and a guard's compartment in each vehicle, the 'B-sets' used on the Llanfyllin branch being of this type. If necessary the basic 2-coach formations could be strengthened by the addition of an extra third-class vehicle.



Above: Freight traffic to and from Llanfyllin comprised just one daily train, and in the late-1950s this could be seen in the early afternoon, the journey including a stop for shunting at Lansantffraid. On 14 August 1959 the short daily freight train is pictured under the loading gauge at Llanfyllin preparing to depart for Oswestry hauled by 0-6-0PT No 7410 — one of three members of this class allocated to Oswestry at this time. Seen arriving at Llanfyllin with the 12.55pm train from Oswestry, and just passing the water tower, is Ivatt '2MT' 2-6-0 No 46526. *V. J. Vinten*



Left: For many years the Llanfyllin branch trains took the form of an 0-4-2T and a Great Western 2-coach 'B Set', as seen here at Llanymynech on 5 August 1935. On the end of the 'B Set' can be seen the wording LLANFYLLIN, LLANMYNECH AND OSWESTRY, and in charge of the train is Collett '5800' class 0-4-2T No 5816. This engine arrived at Oswestry in 1933 — the year that construction of these '5800' class engines commenced — but the '5800s' had no ATC or auto-gear. The Llanfyllin branch was the first to receive flush-sided steel bow-ended carriages. *H. F. Wheeler*

Motive Power

The Cambrian Railways system was worked by a fleet of mainly Sharp Stewart locomotives, many of these being 0-6-0, 0-4-2, or 4-4-0 tender engines. The company owned very few tank engines suitable for employment on lines such as the Llanfyllin branch, and for this reason such lines were worked by tender engines such as the well-known Sharp Stewart 'Queen' class 0-6-0s which worked on goods services for many years. The Cambrian had 23 of these engines, several of which had been acquired from the Oswestry & Newton Railway or other constituent companies. These engines had 16in x 24in cylinders and 4ft 6in wheels.

Some of the 'Queen' class 0-6-0s survived for many years after the Grouping, the last one in service being No 4, which was scrapped (as GWR No 898) in 1947. Other ex-Cambrian 0-6-0s in use around Oswestry at that time included Nos 849, 855, 857, 895 and 896; all of these engines had been rebuilt by the Great Western Railway, and in their final form they resembled the well-known

'Dean Goods' 0-6-0s. A handful of Cambrian 0-6-0s lasted long enough to become British Railways locomotives, Nos 895 and 896 being the very last examples in service.

Great Western locomotives were used on the line in increasing numbers following the 1922 Grouping. Oswestry became the headquarters of the GWR Locomotive Department's Central Wales Division, but in practical terms there were very few changes, and Oswestry shed continued to supply motive power for the Llanfyllin branch. The indigenous Cambrian classes were not entirely displaced, but the appearance of Armstrong '517' class 0-4-2Ts and other GWR locomotives underlined the change of ownership that had taken place. These newcomers included '517' 0-4-2T No 848 which worked on the branch at various times until its withdrawal in 1945, being out-stationed in the branch sub-shed at various times.

The familiar Collett 0-4-2Ts were introduced by the GWR in 1932 as replacements for the veteran '517' class 0-4-2Ts on local passenger services. The first examples appeared in September of

that year and then further locomotives emerged from Swindon Works at intervals until 1936, by which time there were 75 engines numbered in sequence from 4800 to 4874. These were all auto-fitted for push-pull duties, but a sub-class of twenty non-auto engines numbered in the '58XX' series were also introduced, and these engines soon appeared on the Llanfyllin branch.

Collett '58XX' class 0-4-2T No 5816 was sent to Llanfyllin shed as early as August 1933, while in 1947 the resident branch engine was No 5806. The latter engine worked on the branch for several years. Oswestry had also had an allocation of auto-fitted '48XX' (later '14XX') class 0-4-2Ts, Nos 4812 and 4815 being stationed in the area in 1934, while in March 1938 Oswestry's allocation of auto-fitted 0-4-2Ts included Nos 4815, 4832 and 4859. These locomotives often

Right: In the early days on the Cambrian a variety of locomotive types worked over the lines around Oswestry, including the Sharp Stewart 0-6-0s. One of these locomotives which was withdrawn before the GWR take-over, No 6, was originally named *Marquis*, but its name was removed sometime between 1886 and 1891. This 0-6-0 locomotive is pictured at Llanymynech, having called there with an up passenger train for Oswestry. Built in July 1873, this engine was withdrawn in December 1919.



Below: Former Cambrian Railways Beyer Peacock 0-6-0 No 29, in this May 1932 illustration now carrying the GWR number 849, is pictured passing through Llanymynech with a long freight train heading for Welshpool, and maybe beyond. Oswestry had many of these former Cambrian 0-6-0s on its allocation, and they were a pleasing sight for enthusiasts into the 1950s. *H. C. Casserley*



worked through to Llanfyllin with the 6.30pm down service and the 7.30pm return working which was diagrammed for a push-pull set.

The 'Dean Goods' 0-6-0s were to enjoy a long association with the Oswestry area, being employed on both passenger and goods workings at various times. On 30 April 1946, for example, 'Dean Goods' 0-6-0 No 2535 was noted at the head of a Llanfyllin to Llanymynech passenger working, while sister engine No 2482 was recorded at work on the branch on 7 August 1948. Other 'Dean Goods' 0-6-0s stationed at Oswestry at various times probably worked on the Llanfyllin branch at one time or another.

In addition to these veteran tender engines the Oswestry to Llanfyllin line was worked by the usual range of GWR 0-6-0PTs. In 1947 Oswestry's allocation of 0-6-0PTs included veteran '2021' class

engines Nos 2032, 2054, and 2075, together with two Collett '74XX' class 0-6-0PTs, Nos 7405 and 7410. The visually-similar '64XX' class 0-6-0PTs were also used in the area during the 1950s, Nos 6404 and 6405 being stationed at Oswestry for many years, and Oswestry also became home to a number of '54XX' class 0-6-0PTs.

The nationalisation of railways on 1 January 1948 did not bring about any immediate changes, and the Llanfyllin branch continued to be worked by former GWR locomotives and rolling stock until the mid-1950s when a group of Ivatt '2MT' 2-6-0s were transferred to the Cambrian Section. These eventually took over the operation of the Llanfyllin branch, several examples being employed on the line, including Nos 46505, 46509, 46512, 46514 and 45616. Although of LMS design, some of these locomotives had in fact been built at Swindon after nationalisation, and

some examples (including No 46509) were attractively turned-out in Great Western-style lined-green livery.

As there was no turntable at the terminus the Ivatt Moguls generally ran tender-first towards Llanfyllin and then returned to Oswestry facing in the right direction. Several Llanfyllin branch services were at this time through trips to Gobowen which continued northwards over the Great Western branch to connect with the Shrewsbury & Chester main line. At Gobowen it was found that the clearance between the stop block at the end of the down bay platform was insufficient for an Ivatt 2-6-0 running tender-first, and drivers were therefore instructed to enter the bay running chimney-first; this instruction probably explains why the engines normally faced northwards when they were running on the Llanfyllin route!



Above: Waiting to depart from the Llanfyllin terminus with the 1.25pm train for Oswestry on 14 September 1956, Collett 0-6-0PT No 7410 is pictured with the customary 2-coach 'B Set' used at that time on the branch line's passenger services, incorporating vehicles Nos 6773 and 6774. The train stands at the single 385ft-long platform with its brick & timber signalbox. It appears that some form of track maintenance is taking place in the station area. R. M. Casserley

The Stations and The Route

Having outlined the history of the Llanfyllin branch from its inception until the British Railways era, it would now be appropriate to examine the stations and infrastructure of the route in greater detail, and the following section will therefore take readers on a guided tour of the line.

As mentioned earlier, many branch services ran to and from Oswestry, and it would seem sensible to start our trip to Llanfyllin at that station. However, as it is intended to publish an article entitled 'Steam Days at Oswestry' at a later date in this magazine, only brief details of this station, and those concerning trains to and from Llanfyllin at Oswestry, have been included. The details that follow will be correct for the late GWR and early British Railways periods, while the datum point for the calculation of distances will be Oswestry station.

Oswestry

The first railway to reach Oswestry was the Shrewsbury & Chester Railway branch from nearby Gobowen, the original station being a temporary wooden structure. In 1854 the Gobowen to Oswestry branch passed into GWR ownership. Six years later, in 1860, the Oswestry & Newton Railway opened its station to the south-east of the GWR terminus and there were thus two entirely separate stations in Oswestry, with a running connection to the north-west and an additional link

through the Great Western goods yard. Although these two stations were sited more or less side-by-side there were no covered footways or luggage lifts between them, and this caused considerable annoyance and difficulties for through travellers. To eradicate this problem the GWR took matters in hand after the 1922 Grouping and work then began on a rationalisation scheme that would concentrate all passenger traffic in the former Cambrian station, while allowing the Great Western terminus to be incorporated into an enlarged goods yard.

The Cambrian platforms were extended by 300ft, and a new branch bay was created on the west side of the station on a site that had previously been occupied by a large goods shed. At the same time the main up and down platforms were equipped with new canopies, and electric lighting was installed in place of gas in the goods yard and engine sheds.

Goods facilities were provided on a lavish scale, with sidings at both the north and south ends of the station. The main goods yard, which incorporated the original Great Western terminus, was situated to the north of the passenger station; the former terminus remained largely intact after its conversion to a goods depot, although part of the platform canopy was boxed-in to form a goods loading area (see picture on Page 628).

With its two stations sited more or less side by side, Oswestry had an impressive layout, even after the post-Grouping

changes. The Cambrian station was aligned on a south-west to north-east axis, with the Whitchurch line and the Gobowen branch diverging at the north end, while the Oswestry & Newton route diverged from the other end of the site. The station had long up and down platform lines together with a third or 'middle' road which was signalled for through running in both directions.

Oswestry engine shed was situated to the north of the station on the up side of the running lines; it contained six terminal roads. A standard GWR raised coaling plant was erected as part of the post-Grouping improvements, and this replaced an earlier Cambrian coaling stage. The Great Western coal stage was surmounted by a 45,000gallon water tank, while the old 45ft-diameter locomotive turntable was taken up and a new 65ft-diameter GWR one erected.

Llynclys

On leaving Oswestry, down trains ran southwards along the double-track Cambrian main line, passing *en route* Llynclys Junction (3miles 51chains from Oswestry), where the Tanat Valley Railway diverged westwards on its way to Blodwell Junction and Llangynog. The Tanat Valley line was opened by the Cambrian Railways as a light railway on 5 January 1904, and was worked as a branch line between Oswestry and Llangynog, ex-Cambrian 'Seaham' class 2-4-0Ts Nos 1196 and 1197 being used on



Above: On 27 October 1962 the 2-coach 12.40pm train for Llanfyllin is pictured at Oswestry with Ivatt '2MT' 2-6-0 No 46509 in charge — the regular motive power for these branch trains at this period in time. The scene also provides an excellent view of the substantial two-storey red brick Cambrian station building on the up side of the line at Oswestry with its six squat chimneys, together with the large canopy that protected passengers on the platform from the elements. This building contained a booking office, waiting-rooms, refreshment room, and telegraph office. *E. Wilmshurst*

Right: As the Cambrian main line from Oswestry headed towards Llanymynech and Welshpool, Llyncllys Junction was reached just after three miles. Here the Tanat Valley Railway to Blodwell Junction and Llangynog branched away to the west just before Llyncllys station. The junction is pictured here in 1904, and shows the Tanat Valley line going away to the right, together with the junction's brick & timber signalbox and large water-tower behind. Signals on the Cambrian, such as the ones pictured here at Llyncllys Junction, were of particular interest, as those controlling main-line operation had 'ruby gold' glasses for danger, the deep violet effect being created by fine gold dust. Shunt arms had pale magenta glass, and for 'all-clear' shunting operations the glass was pale green.



the route for many years. Llyncllys station was situated a short distance beyond the junction.

Llyncllys was a wayside station with a small but substantial station building on the up side and a waiting shelter on the down platform. In architectural terms the station building, with its two-storey stationmaster's house and single-storey booking-office wing, was very typical of Oswestry & Newton practice. The nearby goods yard contained facilities for coal, livestock, and general merchandise traffic.

Llanymynech

From Llyncllys, the trains continued southwards, via Pant, to Llanymynech (5m 78ch), where the Llanfyllin branch parted company with the Cambrian main line. Llanymynech was also the junction for trains to Shrewsbury which ran eastwards over the Shropshire & Montgomeryshire Light Railway.

The presence of the Shropshire & Montgomeryshire line added an element of complexity to the railway history of Llanymynech. This eccentric line was first

opened as the grandly-named Potteries, Shrewsbury & North Wales Railway on 13 August 1866. As its name implies, this undertaking was promoted as part of an important cross-country link between the Midlands and North Wales, but having failed to reach its intended destinations the railway never achieved main-line status. Traffic was so poor that most of the line was closed in 1880, although on 12 April 1911 the Shrewsbury to Llanymynech portion was re-opened as the Shropshire & Montgomeryshire Light

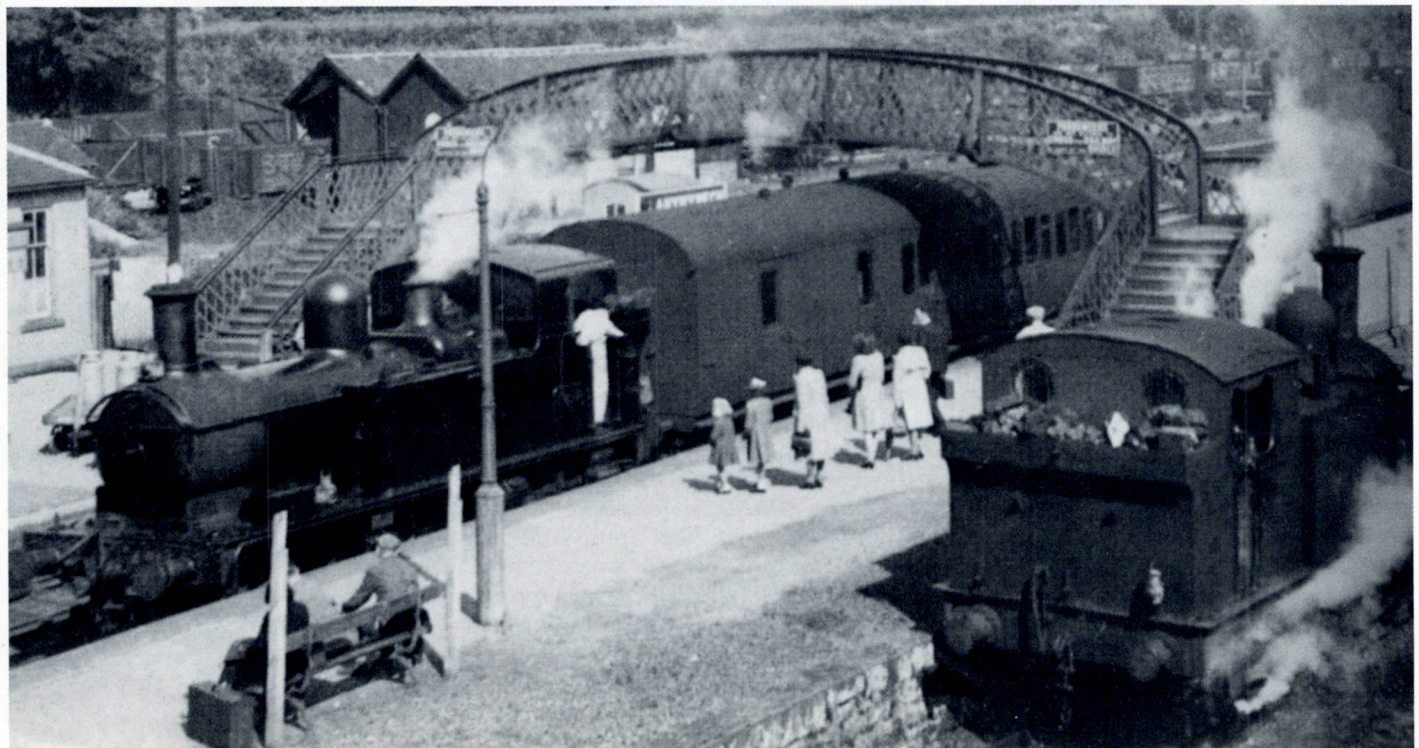


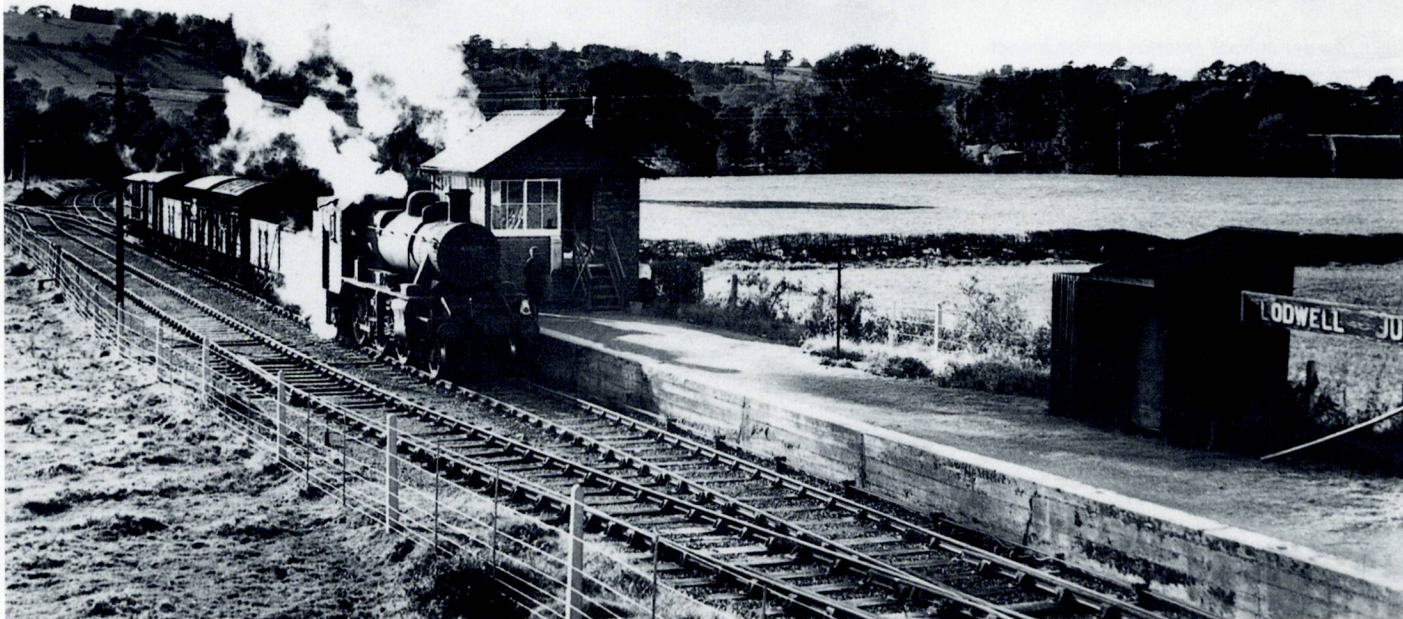
Above: The substantial station buildings at Llyncllys, pictured here in 1904, were on the up side of the line, and were original Oswestry & Newtown Railway buildings. During 1904 around six main-line trains in each direction stopped at Llyncllys station, with no Llanfyllin branch trains starting from Oswestry at that time.

Right: What seems quite extraordinary for a country station in Mid-Wales are the refreshment facilities that were on the station at Llanymynech, where it appears that there were two separate refreshment rooms for first-class and third-class passengers, as pictured in this September 1956 scene. Perhaps there is just one room behind these doors! *R. M. Casserley*



Below: A scene showing plenty of activity at Llanymynech station on 26 August 1946 where Great Western Collett 0-4-2T No 4812 has just arrived with the 11.13am train for Llanfyllin. However, standing in the adjacent platform, on the Shropshire & Montgomeryshire line, is a former Great Eastern Railway 0-6-0T. From 1941 the S&MR was placed under War Department control, and the WD engine pictured here, WD 70084, is former GER 0-6-0T No 388 (LNER 'J69'). *W. A. Camwell*





Above: Blodwell Junction, pictured here, was actually on the Tanat Valley Railway, but here there was a connection which joined the Llanfyllin branch at Llanfyllin Line Junction, just west of Llanymynech. As a short freight train from Llangynog for Oswestry, hauled by Ivatt '2MT' 2-6-0 No 46509, prepares to pass through Blodwell Junction station we see the connection to the Llanfyllin line branching off to the left, behind the train. G. F. Bannister

Railway by Colonel Holman F. Stephens. In the meantime the western end of the former Potteries, Shrewsbury & North Wales line had been leased to the Cambrian Railways who thereby gained access to Nantmawr Quarries at the very end of the former through route from Shrewsbury.

The PS&NW line had originally crossed the Cambrian main line on the level *en route* to Blodwell and Nantmawr Quarries, and when the Llanfyllin branch was opened in 1863 a bridge was necessary in order that branch trains could cross the PS&NW route. However in 1896 the Cambrian Railways opened a loop between the Nantmawr line and the Llanfyllin branch, and Llanfyllin branch trains were then diverted over part of the Potteries, Shrewsbury & North Wales line. This remodelled layout enabled branch trains to serve Llanymynech station without reversing, although the new junction arrangements necessitated the abandonment of a small portion of the original Oswestry & Newton branch.

Further changes ensued in 1911 when a connection was established between the former PS&NW line and the Tanat Valley route at Blodwell Junction. This new line created a useful loop line between the Llanfyllin and Tanat Valley branches, although in the event the two-mile connecting line between Llanymynech and Blodwell Junction had a comparatively short life, and it was closed in the mid-1920s.

Llanymynech itself was a largely Victorian village which first became important following the opening of a branch of the Ellesmere Canal in 1796. The original waterway was extended

from Carreghofa to Welshpool by the Montgomeryshire Canal in 1797, and in 1815 the latter canal was itself extended to Newtown. These waterways later became part of the Shropshire Union Railways & Canal Company and, as such, they passed into London & North Western Railway hands. Final abandonment took place under LMS auspices in 1944. Despite its Welsh name, Llanymynech was on the English side of the border; indeed Offa's Dyke, which marked the historic boundary between England and Wales, ran through the parish.

Carreghofa Halt

Leaving Llanymynech, branch trains immediately diverged south-westwards on to the former Potteries, Shrewsbury & North Wales route which curved sharply towards the right as it left the main line. Carreghofa Halt, the next stop (6m 65ch) was only a short distance further on. This unstaffed stopping place was opened by the GWR on 11 April 1938 and its facilities comprised a short platform on the down side of the running line. The platform was of earth & cinder construction with revetting of old sleepers. A small wooden shelter was provided for the comfort of waiting travellers, while the simple platform was fenced with tubular metal railings.

Other features of minor interest at Carreghofa included a sleeper-built permanent-way hut to the east of the platform and an unusual overbridge immediately to the west of the halt. The bridge, which crossed the railway on a skewed alignment, was a single-span structure carrying the B4398 road and the Montgomeryshire Canal. Having passed

beneath this interesting structure, trains reached the junction between the Potteries, Shrewsbury & North Wales branch to Nantmawr and the short connection which gave access to the original Llanfyllin route. This 26chain curve was opened on 27 January 1896 as a means of linking the PS&NW route to the original 1863 branch.

Llansantffraid

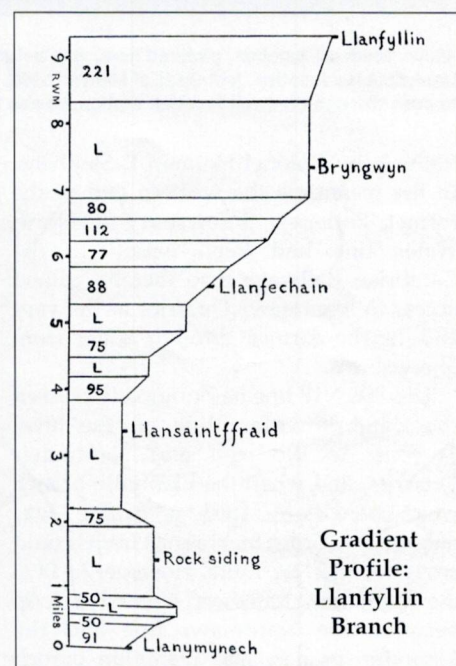
Heading due west across a tract of pleasant agricultural countryside, down trains soon reached the 90yd Grove viaduct (7m 57ch), beyond which the route continued westwards alongside the Afon Cain to Llansantffraid. Situated some 9miles 14chains from Oswestry, this was the principal intermediate station on the branch. Its facilities included a single platform for passenger traffic on the up side of the line with a crossing loop immediately to the west, and a gated level-crossing to the east. The well-equipped goods yard included accommodation for coal, minerals, livestock, vehicles, and general merchandise traffic.

Llansantffraid was the only crossing place between Llanymynech and Llanfyllin, although it was not suitable for passing two passenger trains because the loop was sited beyond the platform. It was nevertheless possible for one passenger train and one freight train to pass here, although the timetable in force in later GWR days ensured that this was not normally necessary. In the 1930s this only took place on Wednesdays when the 9.05am (WO) passenger service from Llanfyllin to Oswestry passed the 9.12am (WO) light engine from Oswestry to Llanfyllin at 9.27am.

Right: As per normal practice for the branch, working tender-first towards the Llanfyllin terminus we see one of the regular 2-coach trains hauled by a BR-built Ivatt '2MT' 2-6-0 calling at the small unstaffed Carreghofa Halt, opened by the GWR in 1938. A sleeper-built permanent-way hut is seen beyond the platform. Behind the photographer, just beyond the Llanfyllin end of the platform, was a minor road bridge, and directly behind this was a wrought-iron trough which carried the canal across the railway line. Mike Esau



Below: Llansantffraid station was the only crossing place for trains travelling between Llanymynech and Llanfyllin, but two passenger trains could not pass here. In this September 1963 view of the station, looking east from the rear of the 3.45pm SO train from Oswestry, we see the station layout with the small signal cabin, with access to the box across the track from the end of the single platform. Peter E. Baughan



The station building at Llansantffraid was a brick-built structure incorporating a two-storey residential portion for the stationmaster and his family. Although, like many Welsh stations, it was of comparatively plain appearance, the facade was enlivened by the provision of a bay window in the house portion, together with elaborate bargeboards and tall 'ball & spear' finials at the end of each gable. The stationmaster's house was to the left (when viewed from the platform), while the booking office was to the right; the house was an L-plan structure with its gabled cross-wing facing the platform and a subsidiary wing that was parallel to the track.

Llanfechain

Resuming their journey, trains passed beneath the A495 road bridge and proceeded westwards, with the B4393 road running parallel to the right. Climbing at 1 in 75 the single line continued to Llanfechain, the next station,

which was 10miles 71chains from Oswestry. The layout at Llanfechain echoed that at neighbouring Llansantffraid in that there was just one platform on the up side. A small goods yard was able to deal with coal, livestock, and other forms of traffic.

The station building was of 'Victorian house' design incorporating residential quarters for the local stationmaster. The presence of a two-storey house portion made these stations appear much bigger than they actually were, the booking office and waiting-rooms being only one portion of the main structure.

Bryngwyn

Now heading south-westwards, the single line climbed steadily through pastoral countryside towards the penultimate stopping place at Bryngwyn (12m 60ch). This was not an original station, having been opened by the Cambrian Railways as

an unstaffed halt in the mid-1860s. The single platform was sited on the down side of the line with access from a nearby road. Interestingly, Bryngwyn was an early example of a 'request stop', a semaphore stop-signal being worked by intending travellers. The platform was originally of timber trestle construction with a small open-fronted waiting shelter, although a concrete platform and corrugated-iron shelter were later provided.

Llanfyllin

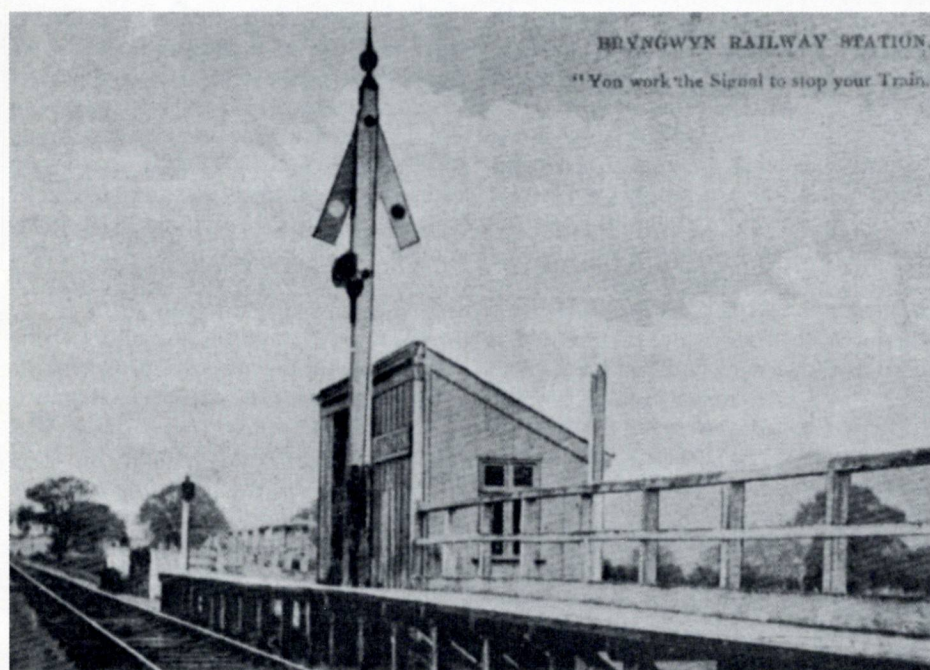
From Bryngwyn the route continued westwards for the final two miles to Llanfyllin. With the A490 road running parallel to the left, the line passed beneath a minor road bridge and, slowing for the final approach to their terminus, branch trains passed an array of parallel sidings before finally coming to rest beside a single-platform station some 8miles 41chains from Llanymynech, and 14miles 48chains

Right: Llanfechain station layout was very similar to that at Llansantffraid, also having goods-handling facilities, as seen here. With the goods yard in the background on 23 March 1959, the 12.40pm Oswestry to Llanfyllin train is pictured pulling into the station behind tender-first Ivatt '2MT' 2-6-0 No 46510. *R. J. Leonard*



Below: At the small unstaffed halt of Bryngwyn (known as a 'flag' station) it was a 'do-it-yourself' job for intending passengers at this request stop as they had to operate the train to stop. Here we see the halt and the DIY signal, and the train would only stop if a passenger had pulled the red arm up to show the white disc on the arm. The arm was then returned to the down position by the train guard prior to the train continuing its journey.

M. E. M. Lloyd Collection



from the start of the through journey from Oswestry.

Llanfyllin was a surprisingly spacious station, and although its track-plan was relatively simple, the goods yard and other facilities were laid out on a generous scale, the distance from the turnout at the eastern end of the run-round loop to the terminal buffer stops being around 34 chains, or slightly less than half a mile. The passenger platform was situated on the down side, and it had a length of around 385ft. The platform was flanked by two long parallel lines, one of which functioned as an engine release road while the other formed a lengthy goods reception line. These two lines were linked by intermediate cross-overs which allowed greater flexibility during shunting operations.

The goods yard contained two goods sheds, one of these being situated on a loop siding that was laid on a parallel alignment to the passenger station. In addition a long

Below: This view at Llanfyllin clearly shows the substantial goods shed which was situated on the up side of the line across the track from the passenger platform. Also in the scene we see yet another Ivatt '2MT' Mogul, No 46520, as it runs round its passenger coaches to return to Oswestry on 4 June 1960 with the 1.30pm train, having run bunker-first with this train to Llanfyllin. *H. J. Mills*



mileage siding for coal and other forms of wagon-load traffic extended along the rear edge of the goods yard; this siding branched into two shorter sidings at its western end, the second goods shed being served by one of these short spurs. The main goods sidings ended at loading docks at the western extremity of the station, while a further siding to the east of the platform on the down side served a cattle-loading dock. The latter siding was entered by means of headshunt from the engine shed siding, a reverse shunt being necessary before vehicles could be propelled into the cattle dock.

The nearby engine shed was single-road structure with a length of about 50ft, and this normally accommodated just one locomotive. Water was supplied from a stilted metal tank beside the engine shed, this structure being fitted with flexible hoses through which the water could be delivered.

Llanfyllin station building was similar to the other station buildings on the branch, being a typical 'Victorian house' design with a two-storey stationmaster's house and attached single-storey booking-office wing. The window and door apertures were simple square-headed openings with large-paned window frames, but this otherwise plain brick building was enlivened by the provision of decorative barge-boards and elaborate pointed finials. The front of the booking office was slightly recessed to form a covered waiting area, and this feature contributed further visual interest to this former Oswestry & Newton Railway building.

The station was well-sited in relation to the town, which was a small settlement with a population of around 2,000. The town was granted a Charter in the 13th century by Llewellyn ap Gruffydd and it was famous for its strong ale, which is supposed to have given rise to the saying 'Old ale fills Llanfyllin with young widows'. In more recent times this pleasant but unassuming place was perhaps more famous as a starting point for walking tours or fishing holidays in the Lake Vyrnwy district. In this context tourism generated a certain amount of traffic for the branch, but this form of traffic could not protect the railway against threats of closure during the post-war period.

The Final Years of the Branch

The end of World War II was followed on 1 January 1948 by the nationalisation of the 'Big Four' railway companies. Thereafter the Llanfyllin to Oswestry route became part of the Western Region of British Railways, although this change of ownership had little effect on the day-to-day life of the branch which continued to operate very much as it had done during the Great Western era. The Llanfyllin branch remained a bastion of Great Western influence, with most trains being worked by Collett '58XX' class 0-4-2Ts.

A significant change took place on 1 January 1963 when the Cambrian lines and other parts of the former Great Western system were transferred to the London Midland Region of British Railways. As a result of this organisational change Oswestry became a London Midland shed, although LMS-type locomotives in the form of the Ivatt '2MT' 2-6-0s had already appeared on the Llanfyllin branch under Western Region auspices.

The Oswestry to Llanfyllin branch line continued to serve the public during the 1950s and early 1960s, but like other rural lines its passenger traffic declined as local travellers turned to buses or private road transport in increasing numbers, and by the end of the 1950s many trains were running with virtually no passengers. In the meantime there had been a marked change of a Government policy towards the nationalised railways, particularly after Ernest Marples became Minister of Transport in October 1959. Ernest Marples appointed Dr Richard Beeching, a brilliant scientist and former World War II armaments 'boffin', as Chairman of British Railways, the new Chairman being told to solve the railway's financial problems.

In 1963 the publication of Dr Beeching's famous report entitled *The Reshaping of British Railways* had recommended the withdrawal of many passenger services in

the British Isles. One of the routes to be deleted under the 'Beeching Axe' was the Llanymynech to Llanfyllin branch which was condemned as 'uneconomic' under the very rigid criteria adopted by the Beeching Report.

The line was closed as planned with effect from 18 January 1965, the last scheduled passenger trains on the Llanfyllin branch running on Saturday, 16 January 1965. The last day was cold and wet, the miserable winter weather being, in many ways, appropriate for the funereal nature of the proceedings. As usual on such occasions, numerous people turned up to see the last trains, and the 3-coach branch set was packed with extra travellers. The morning trains were worked by Ivatt '2MT' 2-6-0 No 46516 while sister engine No 46514 was rostered for the afternoon trains.

The demise of the Cambrian main line between Whitchurch and Welshpool did not entail the immediate withdrawal of services from Oswestry because a local passenger service was still maintained on the former GWR branch from Gobowen, and freight traffic was still dealt with at Nantmawr Quarries. Sadly the Gobowen to Oswestry branch was closed on Saturday, 5 November 1966, while Oswestry Works was officially closed at the end of that same year.

The Llanfyllin branch was subsequently lifted, leaving the abandoned earthworks to mark its course. Llanymynech station was obliterated by a coal depot and factory, although Llansantffraid fared rather better, having been purchased by former signalman John Williams, who turned the ticket office and waiting-room into a restaurant offering dishes such as 'Footplate Grills' and 'Express Snacks'!

Thanks are due to Chris Turner for the loan of timetables and other documents used in the preparation of this contribution.

Right: The final passenger train on the Llanfyllin branch left the Cambrian terminus on Saturday, 16 January 1965, and on that final day we see the standard form of motive power of the 1960s, an Ivatt '2MT' 2-6-0, No 46516, preparing to leave with its passenger train for Oswestry.

G. W. Morrison

