

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

The Cambrians and the Railways: one hundred and fifty years of links

Delivered at the 147th Annual Summer Meeting at Swansea, 2000

By KEITH P. MASCETTI

Firstly, may I thank you for electing me President of the Cambrian Archaeological Association for this very significant year. I feel very honoured, and very humble too. Little did a young archaeology student studying in Cardiff under Nash-Williams dream that he would ever reach such giddy heights.

After the initial euphoria, my mind became exercised by the choice of a subject for my Presidential Address. My main interests are railways and archaeology, interests which it seems probable date back to a very early period in my life. I was born in Rhiwbina Garden Village just north of Cardiff. The house was about 100 yards from Rhiwbina Halt on the Coryton Branch of the Great Western Railway. My toys were often to be found on the railway platform. I also have it on good authority that at that time, on the occasions that my parents went out, I had a young Mr Grimes — later to become the eminent Professor W. F. ‘Peter’ Grimes — as a babysitter.

In looking for a subject it therefore seemed appropriate to link my two interests, under the theme of railway archaeology in Wales. Many books have already been written on almost all aspects of railways in Wales – railway history, locomotives, engineering, and operations being but a few of the topics covered in the literature. Indeed, almost every railway in Wales has had a book written about it. However, I recalled the following phrase in J. B. Sinclair and R. W. Fenn’s book, *The Facility of Locomotion – The Kington Railways*, published in 1991, which suggested a topic little touched upon: ‘In 1863 for the first time the Cambrian Archaeological Association was able to hold its annual summer meeting at Kington because of its railway connections to the rest of the county’. It therefore seemed appropriate to take as my subject the relationship between the development of railways in Wales and the history of our Association. After all, the railways in Wales are only forty years older than the Cambrians. The first railway in Wales, the Carmarthenshire Railway or tramway, was incorporated in 1802 and opened in 1804. By the time the Cambrian Archaeological Association came into being in 1845 twenty-seven railways had been built or were already proposed in Wales.

My subject decided upon, I eagerly consulted the first index to *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, but to my dismay I discovered only two references to railways: a review of *Railway Companion from Chester to Holyhead* in the 1849 volume, and a reference to railway construction near Carno in the volume for 1853. The number of entries in the second index were only slightly more numerous — in the volumes for 1911, 1929, 1933 and 1936. I was certain that there would be other references to railways in over 150 years of *Archaeologia Cambrensis*. There was only one way to find out: to read the journal from the beginning to the present day! I was greatly helped in this task by the existence of a complete set of *Archaeologia Cambrensis* which was made available to me in the Royal Institution Library in Swansea Museum which you visited earlier today. As a result of my researches I can now reveal that I have found almost three hundred references to railways in the pages of *Archaeologia Cambrensis* as well as a number of others in the programme booklets of the meetings. I hasten to reassure you that I will not mention every reference but will confine my remarks to those which are the most revealing of the links between the Association and the railways.

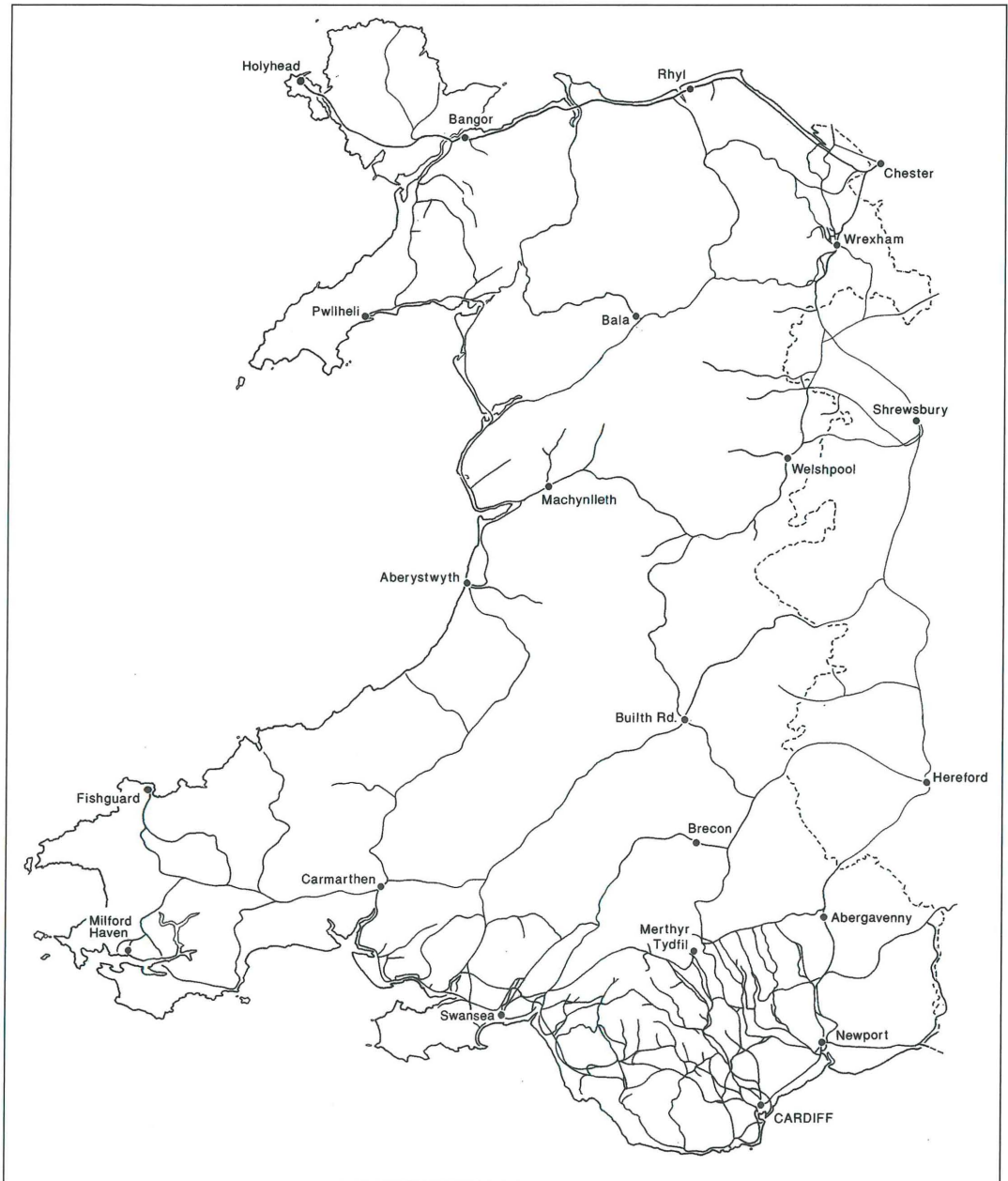


Fig. 1. Map showing the full extent of the railways in Wales in the 1920s.

The coming of the railways brought both advantages and disadvantages to the discipline of archaeology. In the very first volume of *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, published in 1845, the editor in replying to a letter from an un-named antiquarian concerned about the whereabouts of two stone coffin slabs from Llandudno, expressed the fear that it was not improbable that they had been ‘broken up for

the road or railway’, continuing with the aside that ‘such vandalism would not surprise us in the latitude of Conwy’. On the very next page, however, the editor felt able to assure readers that much less damage has been done to the walls of Conwy Castle, ‘the very gem, in point of antiquities, of all Wales . . . by the passing of the Holyhead Railroad through the town than might have been anticipated’. In response to archaeological representations the contractors were to amend the design of the entrance through the eastern curtain wall to ‘a pointed style to harmonize with the castle’ and would also repair and rebuild the tower of the castle that had partially fallen down. Indeed, the question already being asked was ‘Who is going to repair the whole castle?’. As we shall see, Conwy and its railway were to continue to feature in the pages of our journal for a number of years to come.

In the volume for 1848 there is a review of Parry’s *The Cambrian Mirror. A New Tourist’s Companion Through Wales*, which contains a new map of north and south Wales showing all the railways that connect each county, though many of the connecting railways had yet to be built. In 1849 *Parry’s Railway Companion from Chester to Holyhead* was reviewed, the author being praised for making ‘even that most unpoetic and innovating of modern inventions – the Railway – to subserve the cause of Archaeology’. I consulted both volumes at the National Library and they are most informative and forward-looking for their time. It is interesting to note, however, that in order to travel to the meeting of the Association in Aberystwyth in 1847 members still had to use the mail coaches, of which full details are given.

In 1848 the Association visited Caernarfon. In the travelling instructions mention is made of the railroad being completed as far as Bangor, within nine miles of Caernarfon. Details are also given of steamers from Liverpool to Menai Bridge and of mail coaches. The instructions conclude ‘Members leaving London at 6.00 a.m. will arrive in Caernarvon at 6.00 p.m. and vice versa by the Chester and Holyhead Railroad’. The first site visited on the second day of the meeting was the Britannia Tubular Bridge which was then under construction and which opened in 1850 (Clark 1850).

At the same time in South Wales a report appeared in *Archaeologia Cambrensis* in 1848 from Francis Fox, Assistant Engineer South Wales Railway, detailing finds of Roman glass and earthenware found in forming a cutting on the Monmouthshire Branch of the South Wales Railway near Caerleon. In the same issue, a review of *Archaeologia Hibernica* by William Wakeman refers to a railway journey of seventy minutes from the Dublin terminal of the Drogheda railway which will give access to Monasterboice.

We now come to the first reference to a railway to appear in the published indexes of *Archaeologia Cambrensis*. In an article on the history of Carno in 1853 the author states ‘the projected railway from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth, if carried out, will pass through the very centre of the quadrangle [the Roman fort] at Carno’. Some affinity clearly existed between the Roman military engineer and the modern railway engineer, it being ‘deserving of remark that the Roman engineer, centuries ago, had the sagacity to discover what the railway projectors of the present day, with all the aids of advanced science and skill, now admit to be the best line of road to the westward through these hills’ (Fig. 2). The coincidence of the Roman invasion of Wales and the railway network has been commented upon more recently by the late Professor Michael Jarrett (1994).

The railways became an important means of viewing the antiquities of Wales, both from the point of view of making travelling easier but also giving a new vantage point from which the countryside could be viewed. In the volume for 1854, for example, Wat’s Dyke is described as being ‘easily distinguished by anybody travelling along the Chester and Mold railroad, by which it is intersected’. The editor of *Archaeologia Cambrensis* added the following note in the same volume: ‘We have observed something very like the traces of a Roman road crossing the Mold branch line near its point of divergence from the Chester and Holyhead Railway. Have any of our readers noticed this?’. Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century and the twentieth century railway stations or distances along railway lines were

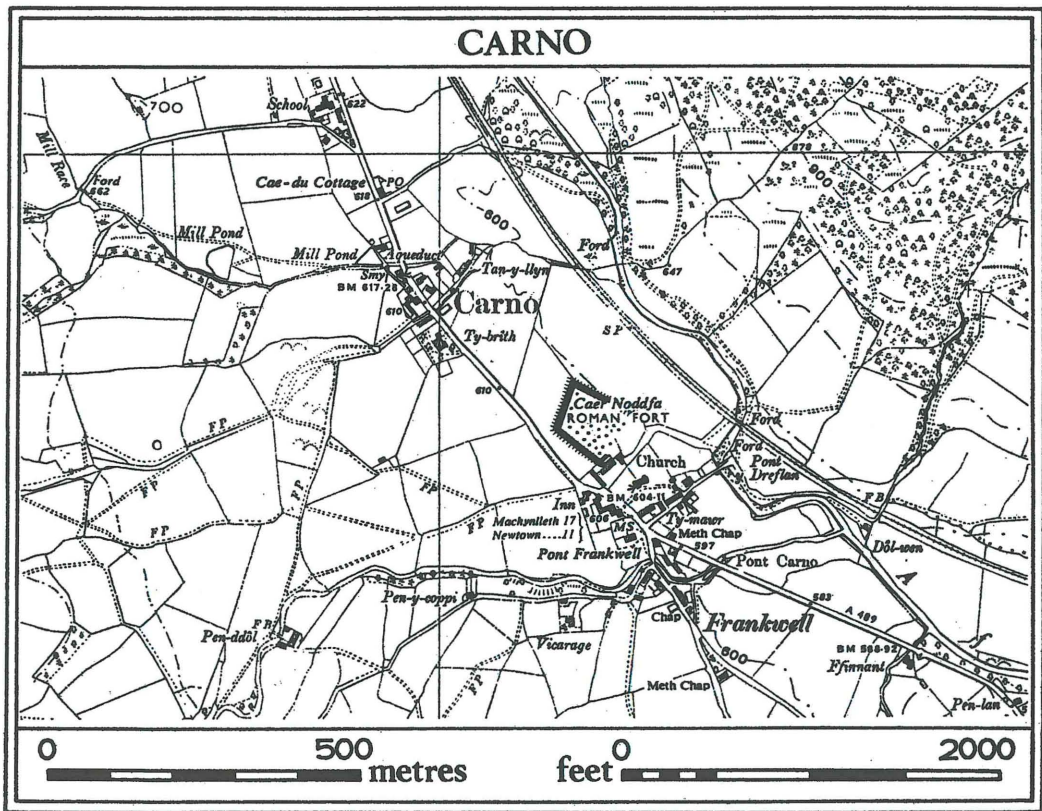


Fig. 2. The Roman fort at Carno, Montgomeryshire. Concerns were expressed in the volume of *Archaeologia Cambrensis* for 1853 that ‘the projected railway from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth, if carried out, will pass through the very centre of the quadrangle at Carno’. The modern plan suggests that the surveyors altered the route to avoid the fort. *Illustration: reproduced from The Roman Frontier in Wales with the permission of the University of Wales Press. Mapping: reproduced by permission of the Ordnance Survey, © Crown Copyright.*

to continue to form a point of reference for antiquities in the pages of *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, evidently being a custom that proved most useful in the days before grid references were established by the Ordnance Survey. Typical of the entries is a reference to the discovery of a stone cannon-ball in Cardiganshire published in 1918, ‘found at Waun, about five fields from Castell Allt Goch, on the right of the Great Western Railway line, about half-way between Lampeter and Derry Ormond stations, on the top of the hill, and behind Allt Goch Wood’. The railways also made it much easier to visit many sites of antiquarian interest. So much so, that a review of the new and enlarged edition of Askew Roberts’s *The Gossiping Guide to Wales* in the volume for 1877 was critical that it had limited itself ‘to those places which lie on the lines of railways, or within easy reach of them’.

The Bangor meeting in 1860 was probably the first where the Friday excursion departed by train. The excursion would be made to Penmaenmawr, and after a full day during which ‘if possible ponies will be provided for ladies, and the less active pedestrians’ the return would be made to Bangor by train.

Members were advised that there were ‘Trains to and fro all day. – see Bradshaw’s *Railway Guide* for August’ as well as being notified of the daily steamer from Liverpool to Bangor and ‘daily coaches from Caernarvon and Dolgelley’. In the same journal reference was made in the report of the meeting of standing on the ramparts of Dolbadarn where

the antiquary may picture to himself the unhappy prince who was imprisoned there by his brother Llewelyn, leaning against the same battlement, and gazing upon the opposite hill, where then a few browsing goats and sheep alone disturbed the solitude, but whose slopes now echo with the rattle of rubbish, shot down into the lake, and the puffing of the locomotive, and teem with all the signs of peaceful industry.

This railway and its associated quarry was to be revisited by the Cambrians in 1978, when the Snowdon Mountain Railway was also viewed.

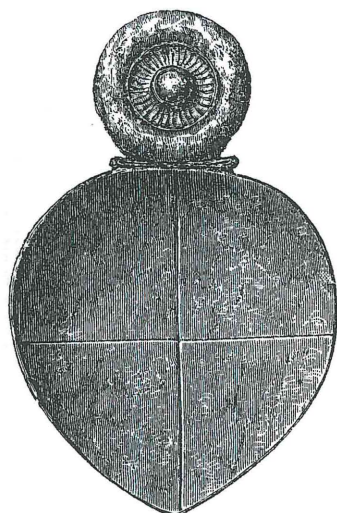


Fig. 3. One of a pair of Iron Age ‘ritual’ bronze spoons found during the construction of the Corwen-Denbigh railway during the autumn of 1861 and published in *Archaeologia Cambrensis* in 1862. They were discovered by a gentleman walking along the line of the railway ‘among the rubbish thrown up by the excavators’ just to the south of Ffynnogion, Llanarmon Dyffryn Clwyd. The two items are now in the National Museum of Antiquities in Edinburgh. Scale 1:2.

The first visit of the Association to Swansea took place in 1861. Members were entertained to luncheon at Singleton by the President. After a cursory examination of the collection of antiquities, ‘one hundred and fifty guests partook of the hospitality provided on a princely scale’. The Association has always prided itself on providing special facilities for members. A special train then conveyed the company to Oystermouth, where George Grant Francis acted as a guide through the ruins of the castle. The little time remaining before the return of the train permitted only a hasty examination of Oystermouth Church. Similar provisions were to be made at the Association’s meeting based at Machynlleth in 1868: ‘Through the courtesy of the Tal-y-Llyn Railway and Slate Quarries Company a special train was placed at the service of the meeting from Towyn to Abergwynolin station, whence Castell-y-Bere was reached by a picturesque walk over the side of the opposite hill’.

The Truro meeting in 1862 was served by the Cornish Railroad. Details were given of Bristol Channel steamers. North Walians were able to leave Chester at the somewhat early hour of 4 a.m. and after changing at Bristol they would reach Truro at 7 p.m.

The volume of *Archaeologia Cambrensis* for 1865 returned to the question of the aesthetics of the railway bridge at Conwy (Fig. 4), compared unfavourably with Telford’s much admired ‘Gothic’ suspension road bridge, opened in 1826.

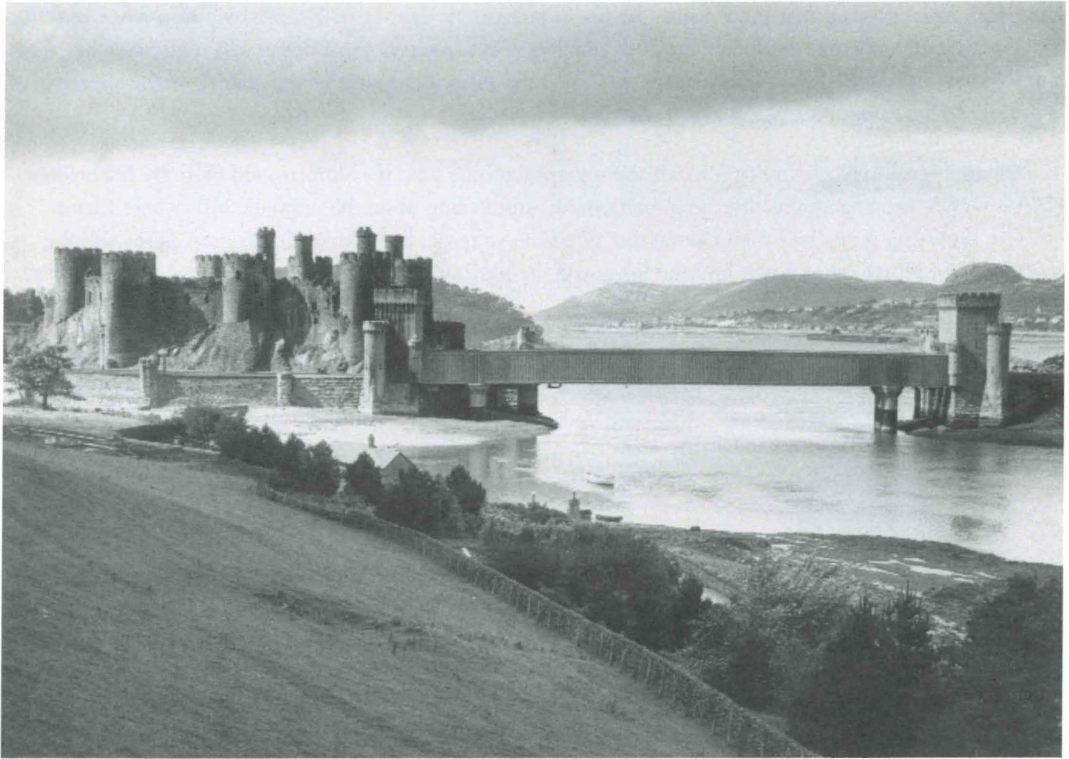


Fig. 4. Robert Stephenson's tubular railway bridge built to carry the Chester to Holyhead Railway across the river Conwy in 1848. Similar in design to the Britannia Bridge completed a year or so later across the Menai Straights, the abutments to either side of the river were superimposed by battlemented stone towers and turrets in an attempt to harmonize with the Edwardian castle. *From the collections of the National Monuments Record of Wales.*

The crushing effect of the heavy iron tube, for conveying the Chester and Holyhead railroad over the Conwy, was painfully felt; and some surprise was elicited amongst the members, that the able engineers who devised this application of the rectilinear principle of rigidity, had not endeavoured to combine with it some curvilinear forms which would have been of real utility, and would have satisfied the requirements of Art. The superiority of design and of adaptation, evinced in Telford's suspension bridge, and flanking towers, appeared to them fully established.

Furthermore, it seems that the hopes of 1845 had not been fully realised: 'the arch-way, under which the railroad is effected, is a clumsy Tudor arch, instead of a bold pointed arch of the castle hall, which it was probably the desire to copy' (Fig. 5).

A number of the new transport schemes mooted in the pages of *Archaeologia Cambrensis* were never to come to fruition. A letter, again in the volume for 1865, remarks upon Porth Dinllaen harbour that 'the day cannot be distant when the locomotive will run up its train into busy jetties here, transferring the travellers on board fast-going steamers plying across the Irish Channel'. As I explained at the Association's meeting at Cricieth in 1994, this is one railway scheme that thankfully never came to pass.



Fig. 5. Railway arch at Conwy, described in the pages of *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 1865 as a ‘clumsy Tudor arch, instead of a bold pointed arch of the castle hall, which it was probably the desire to copy’. © H. C. Casserley: from the Rokeby Collection, National Monuments Record of Wales.

Numerous archaeological discoveries were to be made during the construction of the railways. An article on Loughor in the volume for 1869, for example, refers to finds of coarse ware and other Roman traces near the South Wales Railway, where tradition points to the site of *Leucarum* opposite the modern railway station. It was to be a century before the site was accurately identified, however, by John Lewis, a fellow Cambrian. The journal for 1872 noted the discovery of an urn and Roman coins at Llangammarch, Breconshire, found by ‘some workmen digging in peaty ground near Llangammarch Station of the Central Wales Railway’. The journal in 1888 noted the discovery of ‘a good many fragments of pottery’ at Llanio during the construction of the Manchester and Milford Railway in 1865.

By 1872 at the Brecon meeting railways had become very familiar, the first excursion on the Mid Wales Railway from Brecon to Builth via the Upper Wye Valley being entitled a ‘Railway Day’ involving a special train which probably waited at various halts during the day. During the rest of the week there were to be walking and carriage days.

Cambrians at this period were clearly neither ill-informed nor parochial in their knowledge of railways. In the volume for 1874, for example, a detailed correction is given of errors appearing in an article relating to a journey in America published in *Y Traethodydd* in the previous year: ‘Whereas the altitude of the highest plateau where the Pacific Railway crosses the Rocky Mountains is known to the veriest tyro to be, not 800 or 2,400, but upwards of 8,000, or more in more definite figures, 8,250 feet above the level of the sea’.

Excursions at the Carmarthen meeting of 1875 made use of both the Great Western and the London and North Western Railways and involved quite a complicated timetable. A similar system was used by the Caernarvon meeting in 1877. The latter programme involved several different parties and a number of changes at different stations. However, because of the pouring rain the parties split up: the majority

returned to Caenarvon in the next train, but some members continued and in the process missed the connecting train and no doubt returned very late and very wet. The 1878 Lampeter meeting again had a 'Train Day' commencing with a 'Muster at Railway Station', which appears to have worked quite successfully. But in the following year a downpour prevented a visit to Old Oswestry after a journey by rail from Welshpool. In 1881 the Cambrians met at Church Stretton, the 'well known village, nestling under the mountain [presenting] a very pleasant picture to the railway traveller', the opportunity being taken of travelling by rail to Shrewsbury and beyond on several days.

The Bala meeting in 1884 provided the opportunity of travelling on the 'lately opened Festiniog Line, up the Valley of the Tryweryn', alighting at Maentwrog Road to visit 'the Roman station of . . . Tomen y Mur'. On another day 'the nine o'clock train conveyed the members of the Association down the beautiful valley of the Dee to Berwyn Station, near Llangollen' to see the church of Llantysilio and 'the beautiful ruins of Valle Crucis'.

The opening of new railways had an important impact on publication. A review of *A Handbook for Travellers in North Wales* in the volume of *Archaeologia Cambrensis* for 1885 explained that it was 'rather the changes that have been necessitated by the opening of the new railways, than the defects in that edition that have led Mr. Murray to publish a fifth edition rather than reprint the former one'. The annual meeting that year was at Newport, Monmouthshire, the fullest use being made of the railway system. 'Passing through the extensive village temporarily erected in connection with the works for the Severn Tunnel, we reached the great camp at Sudbrook', the first of a number of visits the Cambrians have made over the years. The railways provided good vantage points from which some of Wales's best known antiquities could be viewed. On a subsequent day, for example, a journey was made on the Wye Valley line: 'a little further, we curve round the Plumbers' Cliff, and a singularly beautiful view of Tintern Abbey and its surroundings lay before us'. The final excursion to Caerphilly Castle was again by train. Other beneficial effects of the railways were claimed: again in relation to Sudbrook Camp, the volume of *Archaeologia Cambrensis* for following year noted that 'the works in connection with this tunnel have materially altered the surroundings of the camp. . . . The heap of debris from the tunnel works . . . acted as a break-water, and thus stayed the work of demolition'.

In 1888 at Cowbridge it was reported 'that all excursions were made by road as facilities for travelling by rail are entirely wanting in this district at present'. How things remain unchanged! The Llantrisant to Cowbridge branch had opened in 1865 but Cowbridge to Aberthaw was not to open until 1892. The Vale of Glamorgan railway opened in 1897. In this instance the Cambrians had come too early for the railways, and had left before they had arrived!

The Association has visited Brittany in 1889, the first time the Cambrians ventured outside England and Wales, other than the visit to the Isle of Man in 1865. In passing, it is interesting to note that in order fully to understand the problems of the dolmen builders it was felt that even an acquaintance with Asia was desirable: 'We must . . . perhaps even go as far afield as India, amongst the Hill-tribes, who erect rude stone cromlechs, menhirs, and circles, even at the present day'. Is this a suggestion for a future Summer Meeting that we should seriously entertain? The twenty-seven Cambrians who took part in the excursion to Brittany were interested not only in Gavrinis and Carnac, but in comparisons between Breton and Welsh, and in following the footsteps of sixth- and seventh-century Celtic saints. For my present purpose, however, the meeting is most memorable in that the circuit of Brittany was encompassed almost entirely by railway, the exceptions being carriages used for short excursions, and a steamer trip in the Gulf of Morbihan. I shall not weary you with the details of the journeys as these are of interest only to railway enthusiasts. A full account is given in *Archaeologia Cambrensis* for 1890. The Cambrians' visit to Brittany thirty-five years later, in 1924, covered some of the same ground, though journeys were made solely by the use of charabancs.

In 1891 the Cambrians once more ventured abroad. This was a joint meeting with the Royal Society of Antiquaries in Ireland, held in County Kerry, Killarney, Dingle and Limerick. After a stay in Killarney they left on a special broad gauge train for Tralee. The twenty miles was accomplished in three-quarters of an hour. The remaining part of the journey was by special train on the new 3ft gauge light railway from Tralee to Dingle, a journey of thirty-eight miles taking about three hours. After about eight miles the train stopped for the party to inspect Killelton Church. The members of the party climbed the pass but 'unfortunately, a dense sea-fog came on, obscuring everything, to the great disappointment of the party'. The next day there was a proposed visit by boat to Skellig Michael, twelve miles out into the Atlantic. I can do no better than read an extract of the account given in *Archaeologia Cambrensis*: 'By the courtesy of the Rear-Admiral commanding, H.M. gunboat *Banterer* was placed at the disposal of the Archaeological Societies, besides which the Commissioners of the Northern Lights were kind enough to allow their s.s. *Alert* to assist in carrying the excursionists to the Skellig'. The sea fog persisted but soon after 8.00 a.m. the party, some sixty in number were rowed out a mile to the gunboat. 'Here a terrible disappointment awaited the ladies, for the Commander, Lieut. Hugh B. Rooper, declined to undertake the responsibility of risking their valuable lives by taking them on the voyage, and so they were sent ashore without more ado'. *Archaeologia Cambrensis* does not record what the ladies thought about this!

Trains also played an important role in the Llandeilo meeting in 1893 and the Oswestry meeting in 1894. The details for the Oswestry meeting reveal the various routes from different directions by means of the Great Western and Cambrian lines, the notice of the meeting in *Archaeologia Cambrensis* quoting the cost of single fares from London for 1st, 2nd and 3rd class. As many of you will recall, the Association visited the remains of the Cambrian Railway station at Oswestry in the autumn of 1992.

Launceston in Cornwall was the venue of the 1895 meeting. Once again, details of fare were given by the competing companies — the Great Western Railway and the London and South Western Railway, whose stations were 'situated a few yards apart at the north side of the town'.

In 1896, after an absence of forty-nine years, the Association returned to Aberystwyth, and on this occasion the details of the Cambrian Railway and the Manchester and Milford railway services were given in the notice of the meeting published in the journal. The mail coaches had long gone. Trains were used during this meeting, and again during the Haverfordwest meeting in the following year, when a journey was made to Maenclochog.

In 1899 the Cambrians again ventured over the sea. This time it was to Belfast where, in company of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland and some members of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland they embarked on the S.S. *Magic*, and embarked upon an eight-day expedition to the Western Isles. On returning to Belfast they used the Irish railways for various excursions. A complaint was made that the London and North Western Railway would not give the same concessions as the Irish companies 'though applied to several times'. The Cambrians were not to visit Scotland again until the Glasgow meeting in 1968. Perhaps another meeting is due.

The 1900 Merthyr Tydfil meeting is noteworthy in that details are given of approaches to the town by no less than six different railway companies — by the Cambrian Railway and the Brecon and Merthyr Railway from the north, by the Taff Vale Railway and the London and North-Western and Rhymney Joint Railways from the south, by the Great Western Railway from the east, and by the Vale of Neath Railway from the west. Excursions were made by rail on three out of the four days — to Llantrissant, Cardiff and the upper Neath valley. The volume of *Archaeologia Cambrensis* for 1900 also contained an obituary for Stephen W. Williams, engineer, architect and antiquary. Members will remember celebrating the centenary of his death at the Autumn Meeting in 1999. Williams became involved 'in the early days of Welsh railway enterprise, and took an active part in the surveying and planning of the Cambrian [Railway] system'. As mentioned in the Presidential Address by the Revd David Williams in 1994,

Stephen Williams's interest in Cistercian archaeology arose when, as a young man, he chanced upon the ruins of Strata Florida while surveying a proposed railway line between Rhayader and Aberystwyth. Subsequently, in a pioneering effort at archaeological conservation during the construction of the branch line to serve the Birmingham waterworks scheme in the Elan Valley in Radnorshire, he caused the line of the track to be diverted in order to avoid the Cistercian grange chapel known as Capel Madog, opposite the Elan Valley Hotel.

The early years of the twentieth century marked the peak of railway development in Wales and also the beginning of its decline. The annual meetings from 1901 to 1906 all used railways for some excursions. The Llangefni meeting of 1907 used the railways which then radiated from the town, to visit a number of sites. However, a combination of bad weather, too many sites and the rigidity of the railway timetables meant the meeting suffered considerable disorganisation.

The volume of *Archaeologia Cambrensis* for 1908 has an account of rescue excavations on the Merddyn Gwyn barrow near the village of Pentraeth, Anglesey, necessitated by railway construction, which has a surprisingly modern ring to it:

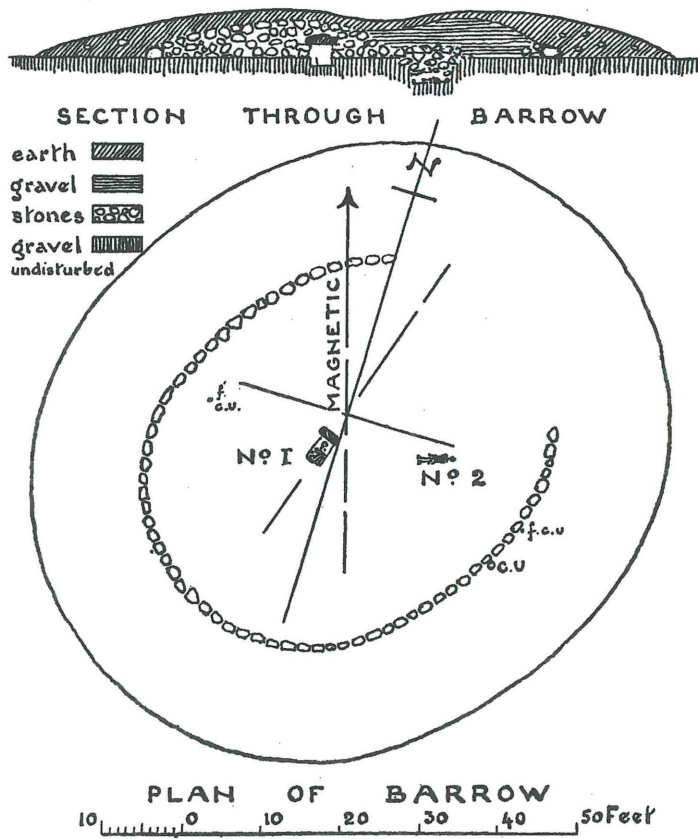


Fig. 6. Harold Hughes's plan of the Merddyn Gwyn barrow, Pentraeth, published in the volume of *Archaeologia Cambrensis* published in 1908, showing the structure of the mound and the location of burials discovered.

That there is anything to record of the contents of this barrow is due to the foresight of the Rev. E. Evans, the Rector of Llansadwrn. He discovered that the line of the new railway from Holland Arms to Red Wharf Bay would cut through the centre of the barrow, and that, as at this point the railway would be in a deep cutting, of necessity the whole mound would be destroyed.

A detailed record was made during the progress of the works with the help of Mr Harold Hughes between the last week of September and the second week of October (Fig. 6). At first 'the navvies employed by the railway contractors proceeded with the demolition' but subsequently 'permission having been asked and kindly given by the contractors, the excavations were carried out with greater care by men employed especially for this work'. Once the steam-powered digging machine or 'steam-navvy' arrived on site 'the excavations had to be carried on with greater haste than otherwise would have been necessary'. The hand digging was called off once the steam-navvy began work since 'it would have been unsafe to work immediately in front of it'.

In 1908 and 1909 trains were used for part of the meetings. In the case of the latter 'reserved carriages for the party, numbering 65, had been secured by the courtesy of the London and North-Western Railway authorities' for the journey into eastern Cheshire. On arrival at Sandbach 'the party was met by waggonettes and carriages, which the contractor had thoughtfully arranged to be covered in, for . . . the rain fell heavily'.

1911 was the year of the Investiture of the Prince of Wales and I make no apology for quoting at length from a special article which appeared in the pages of our journal, which illustrates the vital role that the railways played in the life of Fleet Street in the years before the First World War.

Probably no other ceremony on record has been made the occasion of such enterprise on the part of the various Press photographers as was yesterday's Investiture at Caernarvon. The first photographs of the scenes enacted within the Castle during the afternoon were actually in the hands of the London newspapers at a few minutes after eight in the evening.

The London and North-Western Railway made special arrangements, of which general advantage was taken. A special Press train was run from Bangor in advance of all the other specials after the ceremony. On this train dark-room vans were provided for each of the several agencies and newspapers using it, so that the plates might be developed on the non-stop run to Euston. This train was timed to reach London towards ten o'clock, and by it came photographs of the final scenes at Caernarvon, motors having rushed the pressmen to Bangor.

Not to be outdone, the Great Western Railway did even better:

The special photographic staff of the Central News to whom belongs the honour of having reached London with their finished negatives soon after half-past seven in the evening, underwent experiences recalling the old days of journalism, before the telegraph and telephone did so much to destroy its romance. The camera operators within the Castle collected their slides and lowered them over the battlements in a satchel to colleagues waiting below. A hundred yards away a 70 horse power racing Daimler motor-car was in readiness to start. The car did not take the road for Bangor, but dashed off in an easterly direction for the Llanberis Pass, which was crossed at top speed. One of the staff crawled out on to the bonnet of the motor whilst it was running, and poured water from a special supply into the radiator, so that no time might be lost in unnecessary stoppages. Travelling through the vale of Llangollen, Ruabon was reached at 4.28. Here a special train provided by the Great Western Railway was waiting with full steam up. The motor entered a

siding and ran alongside the special, which left at 4.30 precisely. It consisted of one of the Great Western Railway Company's most modern and powerful locomotives, attached to a saloon, a specially equipped darkroom van and a brake van. In the darkroom, although conditions were naturally difficult, all the plates were developed without the slightest accident and the Great Western Railway set up a record for the journey by reaching Paddington in a little over three and a quarter hours to be exact, at 7.471/2. From Paddington to Fleet Street the journey was quickly traversed and at 8.5 the first finished print was sent out to the papers.

The 1912 Cardiff meeting made full use of the excellent rail services in South Wales, members travelling on successive days to Bridgend, Caerphilly and Blaen Rhondda by means of three different railway companies. Details are given of the timetables and onward connections to Cardiff and Swansea. The railway companies issued return tickets for the price of single fares plus one third on production of vouchers. An innovation for the non-train days and a portent for the future was the use of motor cars hired from the Great Western Railway company. Unfortunately 'the G.W.R. motors could not always keep pace with the eight or ten private motors of higher horse-power, but with such a numerous company [numbering up to a hundred and twenty-five] the unavoidable separation on the road was an advantage'. 'Police constables were considerably placed at different points on the roads to avoid any mistakes in the turnings'.

Private motor cars gradually began to play a more prominent role in the Cambrians' excursions. At the Devizes meeting in 1913 'five large motor-cars had been engaged, several months in advance, to convey the large party, each having as a smart and vigilant attendant one of the Devizes Boy-scouts'. The services of the constabulary were again called upon: 'police constables were on duty at different points where dangerous corners had to be negotiated or mistakes in turnings were possible. The usefulness of this arrangement was evident as, in addition to the above-mentioned vehicles, there were sixteen private cars in the long procession'. Special trains were also provided for the rail journeys when needed: 'The Hon. Secretary for the Meeting had made arrangements with the Railway Companies, as had been done for the last two Meetings, for the issue of return tickets for a fare and a third on the production of Vouchers, an especial convenience owing to the distance from home to be covered by the Members'.

Things had changed by the time of the Association's first meeting after the First World War, held at Dolgellau in 1919. The railways had performed magnificently during the war, but were brought under central control. A need for reorganisation of the numerous individual companies was recognised. Accordingly, the Railways Act 1921 proposed amalgamation into four large companies, Great Western Railway, London Midland and Scottish Railway, London and North Eastern Railway and the Southern Railway. Only the first three operated in Wales, the majority of lines forming part of the GWR and LMS. The Act came into force in 1923 leaving only ten standard gauge railways in Wales including the Swansea and Mumbles, Milford Harbour and Docks and the Shropshire and Montgomery Light Railway. The remaining narrow-gauge railways all fell outside the amalgamation.

Within a very few years the closure of branch lines had begun and by the beginning of the Second World War twenty-eight lines in Wales had closed. During the course of the war five more lines closed. The process continued during the 1950s, culminating in the draconian cuts of the Beeching era of the early sixties which bequeathed Wales the fragmentary railway system it has today.

The decline of the railway system after 1919 is reflected by an almost complete lack of references to railways in the pages of *Archaeologia Cambrensis*. Henceforth, summer meetings were to be served by charabancs or motor coaches and far less information on rail travel was given. No new lines were being built and the age of the discovery of artefacts by navvies had long gone, though railway lines were occasionally still used to locate new discoveries.

In time, the railways themselves became a subject of antiquarian interest. In the years during and following the Second World War the pages of *Archaeologia Cambrensis* began to see an increasing number of reviews and articles relating to industrial and transport history as many former industries and much of the former transport system became part of our national history. Many tramroads had pre-dated the railways and existed in many parts of Wales that were never to be reached by the railways. We must also not forget the significant heritage of dock and industrial railways, particularly along the south Wales coast and to a lesser degree in north Wales and the military railways that were built in many parts of Wales, from the Flat and Steep Holm islands, and Skokholm, to Caerwent and the complex of Trecwn. Almost all the reservoirs of Wales were built with the aid of railways of various gauges.

The rise of industrial archaeology as a discipline led to an increased awareness of our industrial heritage, including that of railways, and the feeling that these were a worthwhile subject for conservation in their own right. An article in *Archaeologia Cambrensis* in 1964 on industrial archaeology in Wales, for example, was followed by a visit to the Eardisley tram road in 1965. An account of the Kington tram road followed. At the Carmarthen meeting in 1967 visits were made to industrial monuments in the Llanelli and Kidwelly area under the leadership of W. H. Morris, which included Kymer's Canal and the railways that followed it.

The Harlech meeting in 1971 marked another turning point in our story. Members travelled on the narrow-gauge Ffestiniog Railway to Dduallt and Portmadoc and were given a detailed history of the line. An optional evening visit was made to the Boston Lodge Railway Workshop. Later in the week a large number of Cambrians left Harlech railway station on a special train for Towyn. After a visit to the Narrow Gauge Museum, formed in 1951, the train left Towyn, stopping at Llangelynin Halt to pick up some Cambrians and then all returned to Harlech. The hand of the Association's new General Secretary, Harry Rees, a retired railwayman, is clearly to be discerned in arrangements for this excursion. *Archaeologia Cambrensis* for 1971 carried a review by Morgan Rees of *Early Wooden Railways* by M. J. T. Lewis which provides a great deal of information about tramways and railways generally, including those in Wales.

In 1972 the Cambrians travelled on the Vale of Rheidol Railway. In 1974 they visited Bulmer's of Hereford, not only to sample their wares but to inspect the *King George V* steam locomotive. Morgan Rees's *Industrial Archaeology of Wales*, published in David and Charles's 'Industrial Archaeology of the British Isles' series in 1975 was reviewed in *Archaeologia Cambrensis* and gave a great deal of information about railways in South Wales. The Vale of Rheidol railway was used again in the 1977 meeting. However, the highlight of this week for Cambrian rail enthusiasts (who had to be limited to the first twenty-five applicants) was a day in the footsteps of David Davies. This was guided by Professor E. G. Bowen. It featured a walk through Talerddig Cutting. The Cambrians also visited the extant remains of the Manchester and Milford Railway as well as other visits. It is noteworthy that even then concern was voiced about the possible deterioration of the substantial earthwork remains of the railway between Llanidloes and Llangurig. There are now only sketchy remains of the track bed which deteriorates by the year. The Gwent meeting of 1978 had an afternoon devoted to early industry in the Wye Valley and a number of railway and tramway remains were seen. 1982 marked a journey to Cumbria where Steamtown Railway Museum was visited, and one party travelled on the Ravenglass and Eskdale railway. Travelling from Cardiff by coach in 1983 the industrial archaeology of the Taff Valley and Merthyr Tydfil was visited. Later in the week a brief look from the coach was taken of the 'Barry Steam Grave' after an exploration of Barry Docks and railway, another venture of David Davies of Llandinam. The Carmarthen meeting in 1985 concluded with a journey on yet another railway — the Gwili — where I had the honour to speak, supported by Harry Rees who had been responsible for the line under British Rail. I accept no responsibility for the torrential rain on that occasion. From 1987

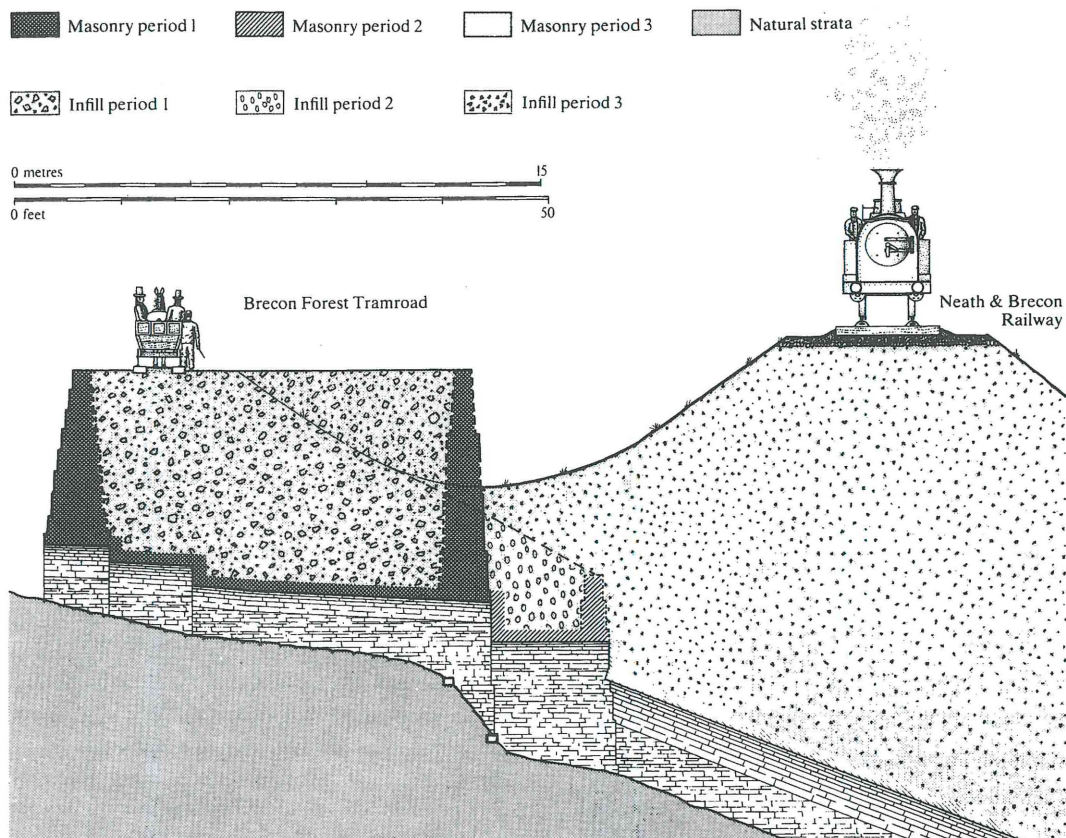


Fig. 7. Cross-section of the Cwm Nant Lloi causeway on the Brecon Forest Tramroad, showing the archaeological evidence for the collapse and subsequent rebuilding of the large masonry wall retaining the earth core of the causeway above the steep valley side. The Neath and Brecon Railway subsequently incorporated the tramroad causeway in its adjacent embankment. *Reproduced with permission from Stephen Hughes's The Brecon Forest Tramroads. Crown Copyright: RCAHMW.*

onwards in both summer and autumn meetings railways have featured and most of you will have memories of those occasions.

Our railway heritage is a worthy subject for recording, research and preservation. Perhaps I might be permitted to conclude with some personal thoughts about the future of railway studies in Wales. There is a wealth of railway remains throughout Wales, a great deal of amateur interest in the subject, and many sources of information about the railways. There are a number of preserved railways in Wales and several schemes for others. There is a great deal of expertise in every aspect of railways amongst the members of railway societies. There are still many people who can remember the great days of the railways in Wales. Any event concerning the railways attracts a large number of people of all ages, particularly if steam engines are present. The National Monuments Record and the National Library in Aberystwyth have fine collections of railway photographs. The local archive services have some holdings related to railways which are always available for study. There are other sources in libraries,

museums and in the Public Record Office at Kew where the majority of surviving records of the railway companies are held.

The pressures for economic development continue and many of the remains of the Welsh railway system are very much at risk. However, the archaeological investigation and recording of railway archaeology is very patchy in Wales at both amateur and professional levels and it is a particular concern that the knowledge held by railway enthusiasts in many cases remains unpublished. All too often it is lost on the death of an individual, some of whom have large collections of slides and photographs which can easily be lost to posterity. The study of railway archaeology, as distinct from industrial archaeology, has little formal literature. Stephen Hughes's study, *The Brecon Forest Tramroad* published by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales in 1990 is model of what can be achieved (Fig. 7). Also useful are the two volumes in the David and Charles 'Forgotten Railways' series, *North and mid Wales* by Rex Christiansen, published in 1976 and *South Wales* by James Page, published in 1979. *The Archaeology of Railways* by Philip Ransom, published in 1981 unfortunately has little to say about Wales, but the similarly titled *The Archaeology of Railways* by Richard Morriss, published in 1999, devotes some space to Welsh railways in a British context and outlines the areas of study of railway archaeology very clearly.

What should or can be done to ensure that our railway heritage is adequately catered for? Over the last twenty-five years or so the Cambrians have accomplished a great deal, drawing attention to the subject in the meeting programmes. The world of amateur railway enthusiasts is an important resource that needs support and encouragement from the statutory and non-statutory agencies responsible for rescue archaeology in Wales. These agencies in turn need support and encouragement, and possibly pressure at government level for adequate funding for railway archaeology. Academic institutions in Wales need to be aware of the importance of the subject. I am not aware that it forms part of any courses; research in the field seems to be confined to other parts of the United Kingdom. The new National Maritime and Industrial Museum planned for Swansea would seem to offer an ideal opportunity to develop the study of railway archaeology in Wales.

Well, there you have it! We have come to the end of a journey combining my twin loves — the archaeology and the railways of Wales. I hope you enjoyed my effort. I certainly enjoyed the task, though I must admit it took more time combing through the pages of our journal than I had at first anticipated. In the meantime I have neglected many things — my house, my garden, but most of all my wife Nancy, who has been a most tolerant and supportive companion in this effort.

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