

# DOWN THE LINE

A nostalgic journey on the old  
Branch railway from  
Waverton (Chester) to  
Whitchurch

by

R.M.Bevan

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*Front cover: Loading a cheese train at Broxton Station.*

# INTRODUCTION

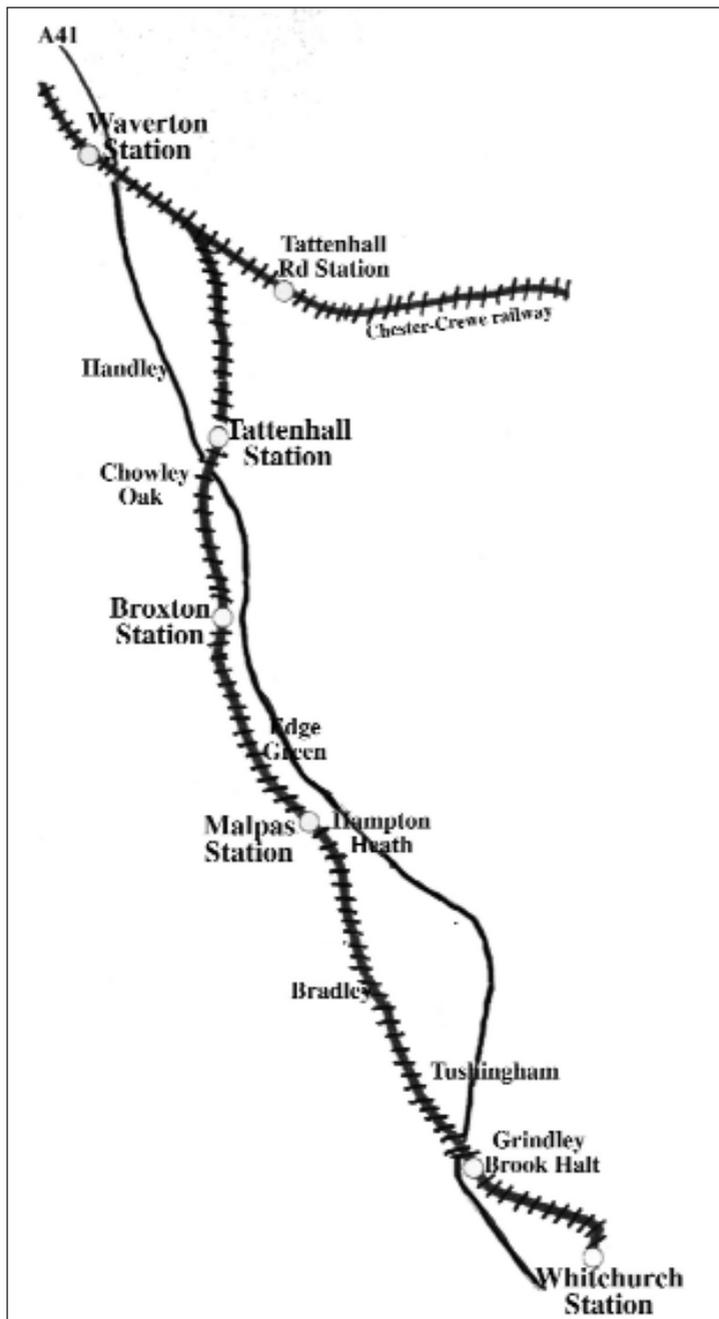
What schoolboy of the 1940s and 1950s didn't grow up fascinated by steam trains? I was no exception although the intricacies of P-Ways, Up-Lines, Down-Lines, Points, Signals and Gradients always passed me by. I simply enjoyed travelling on steam trains, the journey and the destination, what I could see and savour from a carriage window, the catalyst for this book that I have edited and slightly revised to accommodate a considerable amount of additional material.

My interest in the Waverton (Chester) - Whitchurch Branch initially lay dormant for years as I walked part of the track around Waverton and Tattenhall, ruminating occasionally on its past as I scrambled down an embankment, or became entangled in a blackberry bush or bed of nettles, a lasting testimony to the fact that a once-proud country railway had long out-lived its usefulness. And proud it was, quintessentially British, part of the fabric of scattered rural communities, when Chester, Whitchurch and the great railway system were within easy reach, when one could tell the time by a piercing whistle on a dark winter's night, when road transport was still feeling its way.

Just short of fifteen miles in length, the Branch left its mark on the history of the area and, seventy years after closure, it is fitting to turn back the pages on a nostalgic journey, for the most part a fading memory in all but a diminishing few, those who were privileged to travel from Chester and Waverton to Whitchurch. The photographs, the information, the anecdotes and the places I have touched upon are a fleeting glimpse of what passengers might have observed on this wonderful country line of long ago.

Finally, I gratefully acknowledge all those who have contributed in one way or another to the first print and now the new edition. It would, however, be remiss of me not to mention Tony Robinson, of Whitchurch, a far greater authority on the railway aspect of the Branch. Tony's article 'A Long Forgotten LNWR Byway' is a classic, published in the March 2007 edition of the Historical Railway Journal 'Back Track'.

**R.M.Bevan**



# THE BRANCH

Old branch railways conjure up days of nostalgia; an age of innocence when the pace of life was slower, when folk took time to stare and wonder as the steam train billowed effortlessly across a pastoral landscape, its passengers and freight bound for goodness knows where. Practically every country station became a new gateway to the outside world, a hub of the local economy and previously unthinkable horizons. Sadly, in the 21st century, most old branch lines have gone; there are few clues save only the occasional incongruous bridge and tangled undergrowth masking a long-forgotten embankment, or trackbed that once snaked across the fields.

One such line, largely ignored by local historians and, to some extent, even railway enthusiasts, was the Waverton (Chester) to Whitchurch Branch (Tattenhall Junction Railway), a 15-mile double-track running through some of Cheshire's finest countryside, from Waverton and Tattenhall to Broxton, Malpas and Whitchurch. It came into existence as a consequence, in the late 1860s, of the London North

**THE WHITCHURCH AND TATTENHALL RAILWAY**  
London and North Western Railway  
to Contractors and Builders

The Directors are desirous of receiving Tenders for the construction of the Whitchurch and Tattenhall Railway, in the County of Chester, a length of  $14\frac{3}{4}$  miles.

Parties desirous of Tendering may see the Drawings, Specification and Quantities, or may obtain copies of the same, on payment of Six Guineas, upon application to Mr William Clarke, 38 Parliament Street, Westminster, S.W., on and after Tuesday 1 March between the hours of Ten and Four o'clock.

Tenders addressed to the Secretary of Euston Station, and marked outside, 'Tender for Whitchurch and Tattenhall Railway' to be sent in or before Four o'clock on Wednesday 16 March 1870.

The Directors do not bind themselves to accept the lowest or any Tender.

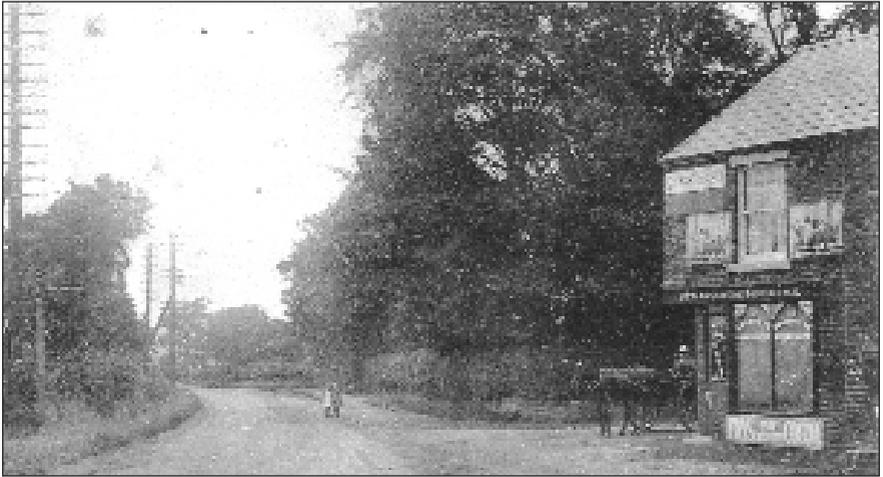
S. Reay, Secretary  
Euston Station, February 1870.



The 'Black Dog' public house after which the first station at Waverton was originally known. Opened in 1840 as part of the Crewe – Chester railway, the name was changed to 'Waverton' after just two years.

Western Railway Company (LNWR) seeking a sort of 'short cut' to challenge the Great Western Railway's monopoly of the Chester to Shrewsbury route and the lucrative coal traffic from South Wales to the Mersey docks at Birkenhead. An LNWR manager, G.P. Neele, writing in his contemporary book *Railway Reminiscences*, explained the Branch was 'a direct line of our own from Ireland to Hereford and South Wales, and a competing route between Shrewsbury and Chester'.

Based on construction costs of £237,000 over a distance of '14 miles, 3 furlongs, 10 chains' the Whitchurch and Tattenhall Railway Bill passed through Parliament in the late 1860s. A junction was to be created, Tattenhall Junction, approximately a mile and a half from Waverton Station on the Chester - Crewe Railway, opened in 1840. Goods traffic was to be the priority and, though passengers were never high on the railway company's agenda, three intermediary stations were planned, at Tattenhall, Broxton and Malpas. The site of



Horse & cart and children at what is now a busy A41 junction. Early 20th century this shows Waverton village post office at the corner of Whitchurch Road and Eggbridge Lane.



Destination Whitchurch Station, circa 1900. The convenience and impact of the first direct rail link between Chester and Whitchurch is best appreciated from an account penned by a traveller on a pre-railway London-bound stagecoach: 'The first day, with much labour, we got from Chester to Whitchurch, twenty miles...'



Early photograph of staff at 'new' Waverton Station.

Broxton Station was obviously chosen for its location at an important crossroads, but otherwise it was quite remote, and only Tattenhall Station was reasonably close to a village settlement. As to Malpas, it may be construed the railway company erred in selecting a station site at Hampton Heath, well over a mile from Malpas village. In fact, Hampton was the choice of local residents who, having gathered at a public meeting to air their views, wrote to the chairman of the LNWR: 'We are desirous of pointing out to you the most suitable site, in our opinion, for the station to accommodate Malpas and its vicinity.

We must urgently recommend that it should be at Hampton Heath.'

**NEW RAILWAY**  
There can be no doubt whatsoever that, when the line is cut, it will be of great advantage to the district through which it will pass. Malpas, Broxton, and similar places, will benefit not a little by it, if only as a convenient means of obtaining the necessary supply of coals. Amongst the advantages would be that of reducing the distance from Whitchurch, Shrewsbury and other neighbouring towns to Chester. A person now travelling from Whitchurch to Chester by rail, after arriving at Crewe, is further off his destination than when he started. The matter, however, is in the hands of a good company, and it is sincerely hoped the line may soon be made.

The LNWR directors were, apparently, considering an alternative site at Bawbrook, but as the Malpas residents pleaded, 'It would be ridiculous to have it there, as it would suit no place except Noman's Heath.' So Hampton eventually received

approval and, with the three station sites firmly fixed, the LNWR commenced promoting passenger traffic, especially the rail distance between Chester and Whitchurch which would be reduced to twenty miles, instead of a roundabout journey of thirty-five miles via Crewe. Furthermore, the Branch

**THE NEW RAILWAY** — The new line to Tattenhall is being rapidly proceeded with, and the work actively pushed forward by the contractors and engineer. Near the station at Whitchurch a bridge has been completed, and is now ready for the iron girders, and the bridge at Allport, and one crossing the Tarporley road at Clapgate, are also finished. In the course of a month it is expected that an engine will be placed on the line near Whitchurch to work a deep cutting near the station and a high embankment near Grindley Brook. From the junction with the main line near Tattenhall the works are in an equally advanced stage, and about 2½ miles of cutting have been done. Bridges there and at Broxton are also ready for girders.

would considerably shorten the journey between Chester and Shrewsbury, and therefore South and Mid Wales. This would, predicted the LNWR, be an 'immense benefit and convenience to the locality'.

Construction of the Branch commenced at Whitchurch during April 1870 following over a year of hectic planning by the LNWR, mapping, surveying and negotiating with landowners, including the freeholders of Bradley and Edge who held rights over the commons. At a meeting in the Lion Hotel, Malpas, railway officials agreed to pay £20 for the railway to cross Bradley Common and £30 for the privilege of traversing Edge Green. However, it was the major landowners, not the commoners, who most directly benefited from the coming of the Branch, including Sir Philip Grey-Egerton (Lord of the Manor of Broxton), John Hurleston Lache (Carden Hall), Robert Barbour (Bolesworth Castle) and Thomas Tyrwhitt Drake (Lord of the Manor of Malpas).

To mark commencement of the project, the traditional first sod was cut just outside Whitchurch Station, the Whitchurch Herald,

noting the ceremony took place without the ringing of bells, or the cheers from a large assembly. Low-key it may have been, but the terrain and gradients between Whitchurch and Waverton were conducive to construction and, with a powerful steam engine turning out 16,000 bricks each day at Mr Snow's farm, in Tushingham, work on the new railway, from both ends, progressed rapidly. The only major snag seems to have occurred in May 1871 when a locomotive, essential for transporting rails and equipment, broke down near to Broxton and, rather ignominiously in this golden age of railways, had to be towed by twenty-two carthorses, all the way back to Whitchurch, a sight said to have created 'a great deal of curiosity'. Time was of the essence, however, and the LNWR contractors, Messrs Scott & Edwards, of Wigan, ordered a temporary locomotive, at a charge of three guineas per day.

The coming of the railway was already making an impact and trade had never been better at Broxton's original Egerton Arms Hotel (Broxton Lower Hall) which was so overflowing with navvies that the landlord had to convert his hayloft into lodging accommodation. However, it was not all milk and honey and there were objectors, one outraged correspondent complaining to the Chester newspaper that he had actually seen two surveyors 'engaged and their men actively employed in their occupation on the day we were commanded to keep holy.'

Finally, on October 1, 1872, the Branch opened for business, the first train setting off from Whitchurch at 7.25am. The Whitchurch Herald, still less than enthusiastic, reported: 'The number of passengers who went by this train was not great, certainly not more than a score. As the train proceeded out of the station a number of fog signals were fired... The opening of the new line was celebrated at Tattenhall, but the proceedings were of anything but of a lively nature and hardly worth the journey we took from Whitchurch.'

**LONDON and NORTH-WESTERN RAILWAY  
Opening of the Whitchurch and Tattenhall line  
NEW AND SHORTEST ROUTE BETWEEN  
SHREWSBURY AND CHESTER**

The line of Railway between Whitchurch and Tattenhall will be opened on Tuesday, October 1st, 1872, for general traffic, parcels and merchandise, and will afford a new and expeditious route from Ireland, North Wales, Birkenhead, and Chester, to Shrewsbury, Oswestry, the Cambrian Line, Hereford, Cardiff, Swansea and all principal Stations in South Wales and vice versa.

In consequence of the saving in distance by the opening of this shorter route, the fares have been reduced between Chester and Shrewsbury, as well as those from other Stations affected. For full particulars see Time-bills

W. CAWKWELL, General Manager  
Euston Station, September, 1872.

The celebrations took the form of a lunch enjoyed by two-hundred navvies and guests in a marquee alongside the Aldersey Arms, Tattenhall. Afterwards there were sports, but with the monkey race and the egg race still pending the Herald man gave up: 'At this stage our reporter left.'

Seven trains a day were initially scheduled to run from Whitchurch, including a mid-morning express which completed the journey to Chester in thirty-eight minutes, a huge improvement on the three-hour slog by conventional horse-drawn transport on the old road, or, indeed, the tedious journey by train via Crewe, or Oswestry.

Prime Minister William Gladstone was the first V.I.P. to travel on the Branch, on October 8, and within three weeks there followed the first fatality when Sarah Matthews, a 70-year-old widow, was killed whilst crossing the line at Grindley Brook. It was stated, when struck by the train, the poor woman was consuming a bowl of soup she had just begged from Hinton Hall.

For over eighty years and through two world wars the Chester to Whitchurch Branch played an immeasurable role in fashioning the future development of the villages and hamlets along its route. All important comings and goings passed through Tattenhall, Broxton and

Malpas stations; businessmen found it convenient to live in the countryside and travel daily to Chester, Liverpool and all places south or east via Whitchurch; mail arrived quicker than ever, there were daily newspapers and coalyards and every kind of commodity from town to country and vice-versa. Workmen, soldiers on leave, prisoners en route to the police courts at Broxton, shoppers for Chester and day-trippers for North Wales all used the Branch, but primarily it served agriculture in the transit of livestock, hay, straw, grain, timber, farm machinery, produce, milk and cheese.

With its goods yard, shed and cattle dock, Malpas was, perhaps, the most important intermediary station, but undoubtedly the busiest, certainly during the Spring and Summer months, was Broxton which handled hundreds of tons of seasonal fruit and vegetables from the market gardens of Holt and Farndon.

Meanwhile Waverton Station enjoyed a privileged connection due to its proximity to Eaton Hall. Members of the Royal Family frequently patronised the Branch when visiting Cheshire, especially King Edward VII on his frequent sojourns to Chester Races. Hugh Grosvenor, did not approve of new-fangled railways but, like Queen

#### **WHITCHURCH AND TATTENHALL RAILWAY**

We notice the opening of this line for public traffic on Tuesday last. It commences at Whitchurch Station, crossing the Shropshire Union Canal at Grindley Brook by a fine skew tunnel bridge. The line is about fifteen miles in length, going through an extremely picturesque country and forms a junction with the Crewe and Chester line near to Tattenhall. The first station, leaving Whitchurch, is Malpas, the next station being Broxton, where there is a famous hostelry, well known in the old coaching times. The third station is Tattenhall, one of those cosy little villages of which there are so many in Cheshire. The new line will prove a great convenience to an important district, and materially shortens the route between Shrewsbury and Chester on the London and North Western Railway. The stations, bridges, &c, are models of good and substantial workmanship, and the whole line is constructed in such a manner as to have called forth the deserved encomiums of the Government Inspector, Colonel Rich. The distance between Shrewsbury and Chester by this route is 38½ miles. The engineer is W. Clarke Esq.; the contractors, Messrs. Scott and Edwards. The line is under the management of E. Wood, Esq. The Great Western Railway Company in anticipation, we presume, of the opening of the Tattenhall and Whitchurch line, have reduced their fares between Chester and Shrewsbury.

Cheshire Observer October 5, 1872.



Waverton Station staff in the mid-1930s. The Stationmaster, George Guest, is in the centre.

Victoria who was equally vociferous in her initial opposition, he finally relented to the march of progress and, in 1898, at his own expense, commissioned a new station to be built at Waverton. The original, close to the point where the A41 crosses the main Chester to Crewe mainline, was demolished and replaced by one of the grandest country stations on the growing railway network. This was to be more fitting for members of the Royal Family and foreign heads of state who could then be conveyed along the Saughton driveway, to Eaton Hall.

New Waverton Station, designed by the Cheshire architect John Douglas, was the best money good buy. It was constructed of red brick and sported stylish bar-

**MALPAS**

**NEW RAILWAY STATION** — The inhabitants of the township of Bradley and district, near Malpas, are petitioning the London North-Western Railway Company to make them a station on their line from Whitchurch to Chester, on the common at Bradley.

Cheshire Observer November 18, 1882.

ley-twist chimney stacks, suites of rooms panelled with pine, and new-fangled flush toilets. For extra convenience the platforms were set higher than normal and the whole was capped by generous canopies to ensure protection from the weather.

The Duke of Westminster died within a year of completion but Waverton Station certainly fulfilled its purpose and over the years many important dignitaries alighted here en route to Eaton Hall. In more modern times the Royal train would occasionally be held in the sidings at Tattenhall Junction, and sometimes at Malpas.

Harold Forster, who had joined the railway service as a messenger at Crewe in the 1930s, became Stationmaster and Goods Agent at Waverton in 1947. In his memories he recalls:

'It was just as the railways were to be nationalised. I was 26 when I moved to Waverton and, no doubt, possessed of a lot of youthful arrogance, but this was quickly dispelled when I met



The Duke of Westminster's grand new station at Waverton with John Douglas's signatory barley-twist chimneys prominent.



Waverton, on the Chester to Crewe mainline and the start of the Whitchurch Branch. Waverton closed to passengers in 1959 and goods traffic in 1965.

the two Waverton porters, Bill Parker and Percy Stoneley, seasoned campaigners. What they didn't know about Waverton Station and its customers wasn't worth knowing.

'The Warehouse was under lease to Messrs Pickfords as a storage depot, whilst the Goods Yard coal traffic was handled by two coal merchants, together with considerable amounts of fertilizers and other farming requirements. But without a doubt the biggest freight customer was Saughton Army Camp and large amounts of traffic, inwards and outwards, was handled each week.

'The train service consisted of 15 trains each weekday destined for Chester, Crewe or Whitchurch and there was a Sunday service of four trains between Chester and Crewe. On the occasion of the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth we made dozens of plywood shields painted in appropriate colours and adorned with flags and bunting, all home-made. We won first prize in a special competition for the best dressed station.

'We also had an important role in accommodating the Royal

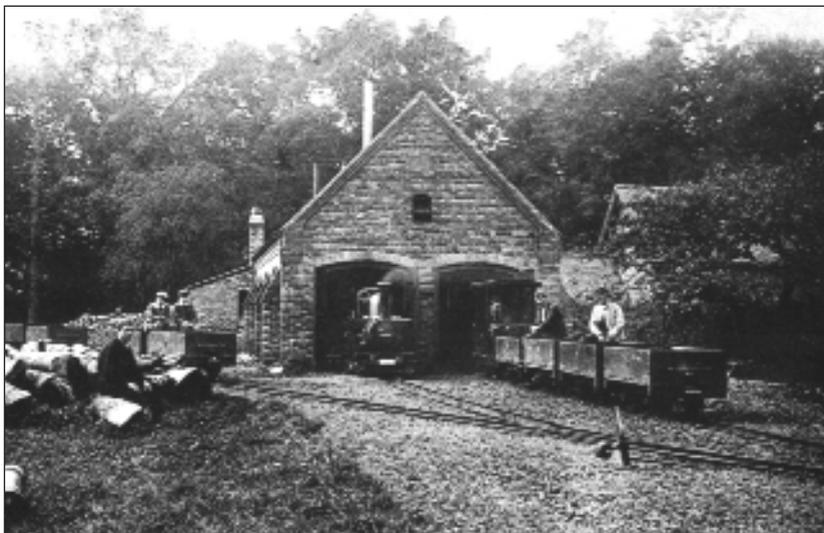
train overnight at Tattenhall Junction. This involved not only the safety of the Royal personages, but also providing essential provisions, like a full set of daily newspapers (including the Sporting Chronicle). A member of the Carriage & Wagon staff was detailed to clean the brass handles of the carriage doors and also ensure a reasonable degree of hygiene. Tin baths were placed under each of the toilet outlets and these had to be surreptitiously removed the following morning, a task carried out by the Permanent Way staff. There was one occasion when the Royal train was held at Tattenhall Junction with H.M. The Queen and a second Royal train, with Prince Philip aboard, was held at Malpas. The next morning The Queen's train travelled to Malpas to collect Prince Philip. But, of course, by then the little Cheshire railway had become part of a railway giant, British Rail, and the Government brought in Dr Beeching. Many, many stations and branch lines were axed, although the 15-mile branch from Tattenhall Junction to Whitchurch had closed quite a few years before Beeching.'

Tattenhall Junction was the scene of a tragic accident on July 2, 1971, when part of a passenger train, carrying 380 children from a summer outing to Rhyl, careered off the rails. The Schools' Party Special, travelling at 70mph on the main line and consisting of ten coaches hauled by a diesel locomotive, was returning to Smethwick when, without warning, the track buckled under the middle of the train. The ninth coach derailed and the tenth, in which the guard was riding, hit the Tattenhall Junction bridge. Two children, aged ten and eleven, were killed and twenty-six other passengers required hospitalisation. The official report into the accident concluded that the poor state of the track at the junction had been noticed and reported some weeks prior to the derailment, but little had been done about it by the engineering hierarchy at Crewe.



The 1st Duke of Westminster's rebuilding of Waverton Station was to further impress Royalty and VIPs visiting Eaton Hall (above) a Gothic pile erected at a cost of over £750,000. At the outbreak of the Second World War the government secured a long lease on Eaton to house an Officer Cadet School. The up-keep was colossal and in 1960 the building was returned to the Grosvenor Estate and so became a pawn in the settlement of £18 million death duties following the demise of the 2nd Duke. The 19th century hall was saved, but the fabric had deteriorated to such an extent that demolition became inevitable. In the early 1970s an incongruous, ugly new building (above), principally of concrete and glass, was erected and has since been re-cased to resemble a French château.



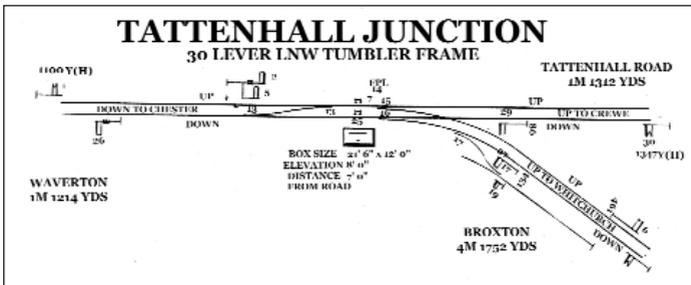


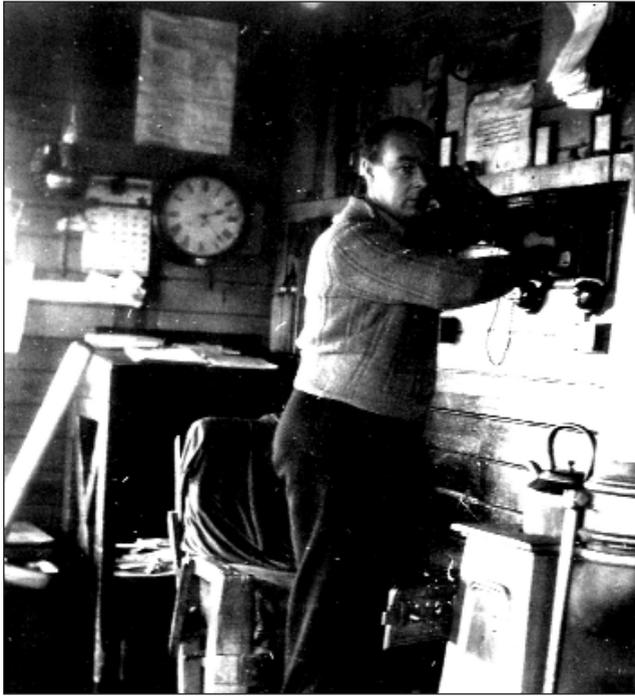
In 1896 the 1st Duke of Westminster commissioned a 15-inch gauge railway for the Eaton estate. Over four miles in length it was connected to the GWR station sidings at Balderton on the Shrewsbury to Chester railway and provided an efficient haulage service for coal and provisions for the estate. The little line closed in 1946 and was lifted in the following year.

# TO TATTENHALL

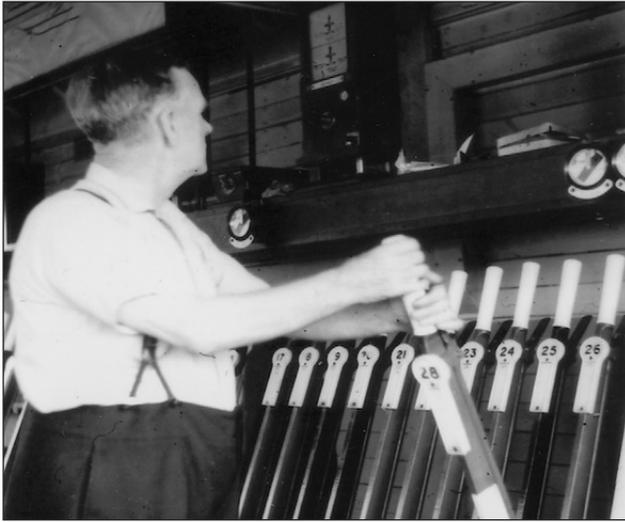


Start of the Whitchurch Branch at Tattenhall Junction, approximately five miles east of Chester. Those who knew the Branch in the 1950s remember the embankments and ponds teeming with wildlife, including otters.





Tattenhall Junction Signal Box with Signalman Stan Moulstone. Approximately one mile from Waverton Station and Tattenhall Road Station, the box, survived in a semi-derelict state until the 1980s.



The Box at Tattenhall.



Opening of the Whitchurch Branch meant that Tattenhall had two stations and, to differentiate, the mainline station was renamed 'Tattenhall Road', photographed here. In its heyday Tattenhall Road was a bustling little station, notably serving a nearby livestock market, one of a string, including Beeston, Calveley, Worleston and Malpas, operated at the end of the 19th century by Booth Hewitt, of Alpraham. Tattenhall Road closed in 1966.



Beeston Castle & Tarporley Station, early 20th century.



A glimpse of the 'newspaper war' of old at the corner of Church Bank and High Street. Amidst the billboards and placards, A.W. Aston advertises as newsagent, tobacconist and shaving salon proprietor.



Bank House Corner where there was a branch of Lloyds Bank attached to the half-timbered Portico Lodge. This view would have been taken from the site of what became Rose Corner, two houses with a striking Palladian facade, designed in 1927 by Clough Williams-Ellis, of Portmeirion fame.



The Branch became a mainstay of Tattenhall's economy until well into the 20th century. The east end of High Street has changed little.



The Barbour Institute, erected in 1897 by the Barbour family of Bolesworth Castle. During the First World War the Institute served as a hospital. In the distance is the former Methodist Chapel Manse.



Tattenhall Home for Boys at Olympus House, High Street, early 20th century. From 1896 until 1936 this was a sanctuary run by the Church of England Children's Society to care for 'waifs and strays'. At any one time up to forty-five boys, aged eight to fifteen, were housed here under the guardianship of a master and matron. The boys were subjected to a rigid



routine but it was generally an enlightened regime and the rural setting of Tattenhall was infinitely preferable to the domestic conditions most had left behind in the towns and cities. In the early 1900s a typical day would see the boys rise at 6.30am for cleaning chores, fifteen minutes of exercise, morning prayers, breakfast and band practice. At precisely 8.50am they would then cross the road to attend the old village school in High Street. Afterwards, on either side of tea, there was an hour's play, further band practice and bed at 8.15. Many Tattenhall Home 'Old Boys' served King and Country in both world wars. The lower photograph shows a group in 1914-15, probably in the Royal Berkshire Regiment.



Tattenhall village, 1920s. The Letters Inn now occupies most of the corner building to the right, but essentially these view remain. There were 'Letters' public houses at Malpas and Tarporley, an obvious connection with the early Post Office service.





Early 20th century: The Sportsmans Arms and the 'Nine Houses' commissioned in the mid-19th century by Thomas Crallan, of Bolesworth Castle.



Burwardsley Road, Tattenhall, circa 1914.

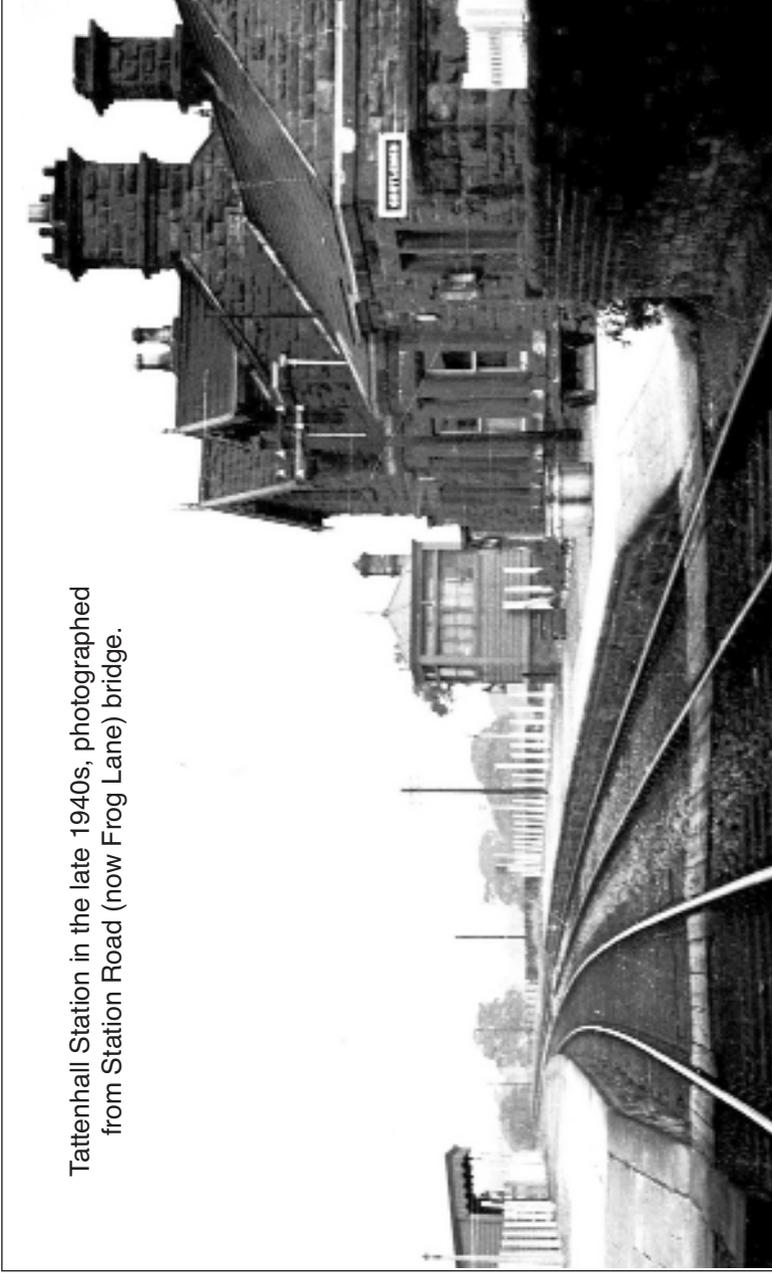


Old days on horseback outside what is now Tattenhall Post Office and the Bear & Ragged Staff public house. The Bear and Ragged Staff takes its name from the arms of the Earls of Warwick.



St Albans Church, Tattenhall, designed by John Douglas, principally dates from the Victorian replacement of an 'inconvenient, incommodious and unsightly' previous structure. There has been a church here since at least 1512. The tower is 16th century.

Tattenhall Station in the late 1940s, photographed from Station Road (now Frog Lane) bridge.





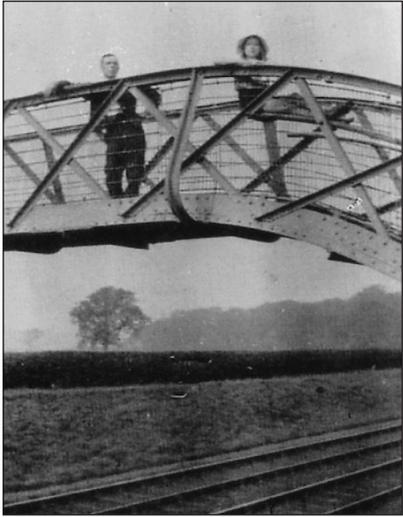
Tattenhall Station with Tommy Davenport (Acting Stationmaster). The Signal Box was closed around the Second World War and the Station building demolished in 2003. The Station House and part of the platform remain.



Motor cars were seldom seen on the quiet country lanes and a horse and trap was the favoured mode of transport to catch the train.



Station Road (Frog Lane), early 20th century. It is said Tattenhall's first Stationmaster, E.B.Peacock, would not allow a train to depart if he could see would-be passengers scurrying towards the station.



A well-earned break on the milk churns, just delivered from Cooke's Creamery, Tattenhall. A special timber ramp was constructed alongside Frog Lane bridge to facilitate man-handling of the heavy churns down the embankment and onto the platform. The photograph to the right shows Tommy Davenport and daughter Norah on the Branch footbridge near Tattenhall.

# TO BROXTON



**B**olesworth Castle had a significant role in the fortunes of the Whitchuch Branch. Built in the mid-18th century by James Tilson, Bolesworth passed, in 1805, to Thomas Tarleton, of Liverpool, one of three generations of Tarletons who made their fortune from the Slave Trade and strongly opposed abolition. Thomas Tarleton's business empire included numerous cotton plantations in the West Indies. Following his death in 1829, the new owner, George Walmesley, rebuilt the mock castle which, with its extensive estate, later came to be acquired by Thomas Crallan and then, from 1856, by Robert Barbour, a Scottish-born Manchester shipping magnate.

The Barbour family remain owners of the Bolesworth estate which, over the past 150 years, has been greatly extended through



Robert Barbour.

building and acquisition, particularly around Tattenhall, Burwardsley and Harthill. Clough Williams-Ellis, a relation of the Barbours and the eccentric behind Portmeirion, North Wales, re-designed and modernised Bolesworth Castle during the 1920s. The Barbours and the great landowning Grosvenors had a powerful say in the route of the Branch and, possibly, insisted it bypassed Bolesworth Castle and Handley village.



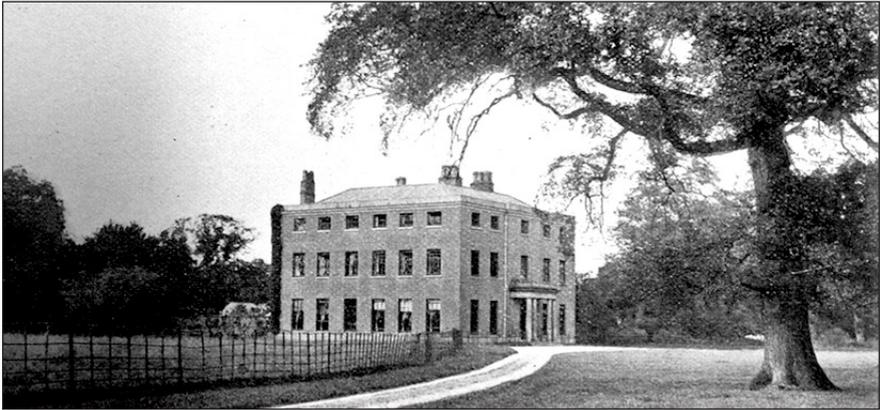
George Barbour.

George Barbour, Robert Barbour's son, served as a director of the LNWR and his local presence ensured the operating efficiency of the Branch. He was proud of Tattenhall, 'his' village, and he had pressed for a station here. A 'model landlord' he died in 1919 leaving an estate in excess of £1.3 million.

Broxton Station served as a vital railhead for the distribution of local cheese and seasonal produce from the many market gardens of Holt and Farndon.



For most of its route the Branch closely followed the A41 and Handley, rather than Tattenhall, might well have been a more appropriate site for a station between Waverton and Broxton.



Aldersey Hall, Handley, the seat of the Aldersey family from the reign of Henry III. Demolished in 1958 the last Aldersey Hall dated from the 18th century. During the early 1930s it was a residential training centre for women, advertised as being for those engaged 'in the lighter branches of agriculture and horticulture'. Houses now stand on the site of the hall though the gate-pillars and a lodge remain at the entrance to the park.

Spring cabbages were first to the fore, freshly picked and delivered daily in enormous nets to the station yard. These were bound for Manchester's Smithfield Market and were 'loaded to the roof' in cattle trucks coupled to the rear of the 4.40pm Whitchurch passenger train which, in latter years, normally comprised six ex-LMS corridor coaches, a heavy load to negotiate an initial 1-100 gradient to Malpas. All manner of perishable consignments passed through Broxton, including day-old chicks, mainly ducklings and turkeys, dispatched weekly by Forbes Bros, of Clutton. The chicks filled two 50ft-long brakes and were destined for Essex, to be reared and fattened for the London Market. Strawberries literally flooded in during the season and in 1893 Broxton Station dispatched 25,600 baskets.

Cheese was, of course, an all-year round activity, Thomas Bamber & Sons, of Balderton, maintaining a permanent warehouse in the Broxton yard. The cheeses were conveyed by road to Broxton and

desposited in the warehouse to mature, a delicate process that generated extra revenue for the railway company as Bamber's required trees around the warehouse to ensure a cool temperature. Some of the trees may still be seen at the rear of the Egerton Arms.

**FARNDON**  
**IMPORTANT MEETING**

An important meeting of landowners, traders and others interested in the promotion of the scheme for a light railway for the Holt and Farndon district was held at the Queen Hotel, Chester, on Saturday afternoon, the Hon. George T. Kenyon presiding. The opinion was expressed that a line running from some point in Holt to join the London and North-Western system at or near Tattenhall would be the most advantageous to the neighbourhood.

The difficulty with Broxton as far as concerned the market gardeners of Holt and Farndon was the road distance, five or six miles, a costly and time-consuming daily exercise. The growers demanded their own station at Holt, but it never materialised and they grumbled on into the 20th century.

Derek Sackett, the last Stationmaster, moved to Broxton from Alderley Edge in 1952. He lived with his family in the Stationmaster's house but, when the line closed, British Rail refused to sell him the building. The entire site was taken over by Cheshire County Council. Derek Sackett was forced to leave the railways to work in Wrexham. He later jotted down some of his memories:



Derek Sackett, Broxton's last Stationmaster.

'The seasonal traffic was heavy. Each year we were visited by Mr Mills, of John Mills Ltd, Manchester Smithfield Market, and arrangements were put in hand for the conveyancing of spring cabbages from the Holt and Farndon district which abounded with market gardens. The cabbages were cut in the morning, packed into nets and then piled high on a farm trailer to be hauled to Broxton Station. Here would be a line of cattle trucks, clean and hosed out. The greens would be loaded to the roof and, in order to reach Manchester in time for sale early the next morning, the trucks would be attached to the 4.40 passenger train to Whitchurch. This normally comprised of six ex-LMS corridor coaches. Each Tuesday during Spring and Summer two full brakes, 50ft long, were loaded with boxes of day-old chicks, mostly ducklings. These were a product of early factory farming techniques by the brothers Forbes, of Clutton, and were consigned to an intensive farm unit in Essex where the chicks were fattened for the London hotel market. There was no yard at Tattenhall but the station handled milk churns in considerable quantities for the early morning train to Chester. A special lowering ramp, made of timber, was constructed alongside the overbridge to facilitate the manhandling of heavy churns down the embankment and on to the platform.'



Derek Sackett's home, Broxton Station.



Broxton Station at its best.



The strawberry growers placed the most demand on facilities during the summer months and staff from Tattenhall and Malpas were often seconded to assist with loading at Broxton.



Station staff on the Signal Box steps at Broxton in the 1920s.



Changing times at Broxton. The LNWR constructed and operated the Whitchurch Branch from its opening in 1872 until grouping with the London, Midland & Scottish Railway (LMS).



The station site is now a lorry-stop and picnic area, and all that remains is the yard crane 'kingpost'.

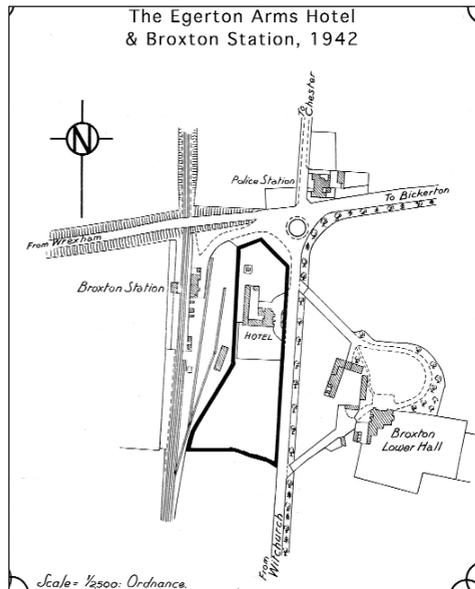


The sidings at Broxton, probably during the 1950s, with Thomas Bamber's cheese warehouse. To ensure the cheeses were maintained in a cool, shaded environment Bamber's paid ten shillings annually to the railway to retain the trees around the warehouse.



The Egerton Arms, built in 1896, alongside Broxton Station. An earlier Egerton Arms, located at Broxton Lower Hall, provided accommodation for many 'navvies' during construction of the Branch. Lower Hall, dating from at least the reign of Henry VIII, later became the home of Lord Arthur Grosvenor, second son of the Duke of Westminster.

In 1942 the 'new' Egerton Arms was put up for auction and the accompanying plan (right) shows the layout of the station. The large building marked alongside the main sidings was Thomas Bamber's cheese warehouse. The Egerton Arms sold for £8,600 and included a 'three-pump petrol filling station', loose boxes, saddle room and just over two acres of land then being rented out at £1 per week.





Broxton Police Station and Court-house, built in 1879. The building included two or three cells and accommodation for the families of a superintendent and a constable. Previously the court was held at the former Egerton Arms, at Lower Broxton Hall. Most of the witnesses, magistrates and prisoners from outlying districts travelled to the court by train. This photograph marks King George V's Coronation, in 1911.

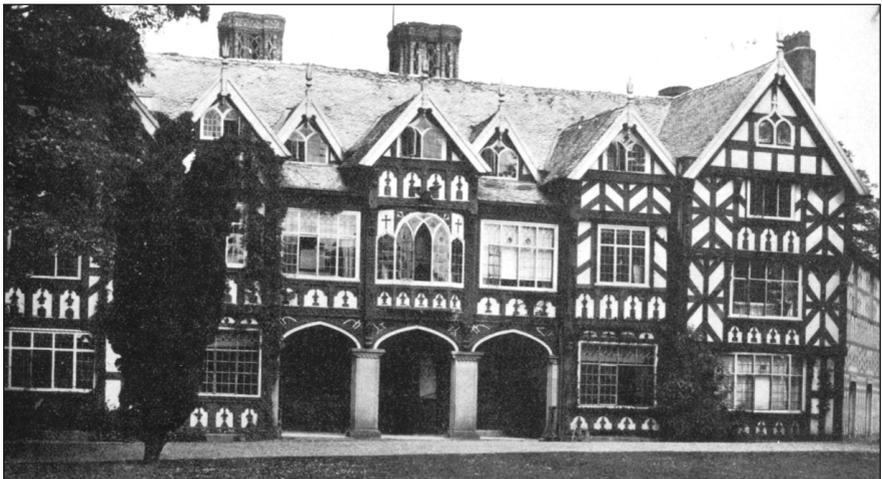
#### POACHING BY PLATELAYERS

A case of considerable interest came before the Broxton magistrates on Tuesday. A platelayer employed on the Chester and Whitchurch Railway named Ankers, was summoned for poaching on Sir Philip Egerton's estate. The defendant was seen to leave the line with a trap which he set. Mr Leche, chairman of the magistrates, said he knew several platelayers who were notorious poachers, but it was extremely difficult to catch them. Defendant would be fined the highest possible penalty, £2 and costs, or two months' imprisonment, with hard labour.

Manchester Courier, September 1878.



Clutton Lodge, like two giant beehives at the side of Wrexham Road, was built in 1830 to control the north drive entrance to old Carden Hall. The building to the right was the lodgekeeper's day quarters, the other, to the left, his bedrooms. The southern drive to Carden Hall passed under triumphal-arched Carden Lodge.



Carden Hall, a half-timbered Jacobean mansion with extensive parkland, was the principal home of the Leches and the Hurlleston Leches who were granted lands here in 1346.



The last of the Hurleston Leche family to live at Carden Hall died in 1906 and afterwards the place was tenanted to Colonel George Holdsworth. On an ill-fated night in September, 1912, after the Colonel and had hosted a house party and everyone had retired to bed, fire broke out in one of the wings. In the words of the Chester Chronicle reporter, 'The ancient mansion was doomed from the start.' The old timbers rapidly fed the inferno and within less than three hours it was all over.

The most bizarre turn of events involved the ladies who, like the other party guests and servants, had fled in their night-clothes, though on leaving the building they managed to open an iron safe in which all their jewellery had been stored. They were forced back by the smoke and flames and it was not until later that firemen were able to drag the safe onto the front lawn. In the glare of the blazing hall, the ladies, many of them 'titled', knelt in the grass as they despairingly tried to pick out their gems from the cinders to which most of them had been reduced. The cause of the fire was never determined and the 'Beehives' of Clutton stood sentinel for decades to a park empty of its noble house.

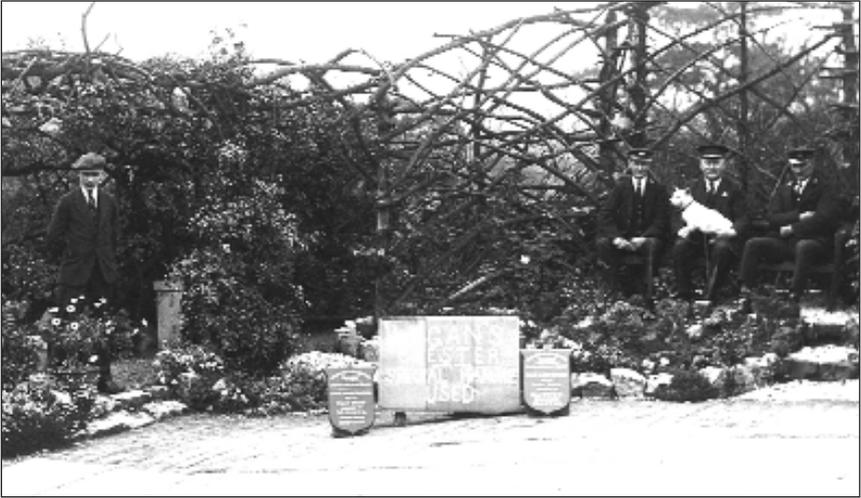
Carden Park was eventually acquired by the leisure entrepreneur John Broome who, having sold the famous Alton Towers Theme Park for a reputed £60 million, gained planning permission to develop the Carden Park hotel and golf resort. A new Carden Hall now stands beyond the 'Apiaries', home of multi-millionaire Steve Morgan.



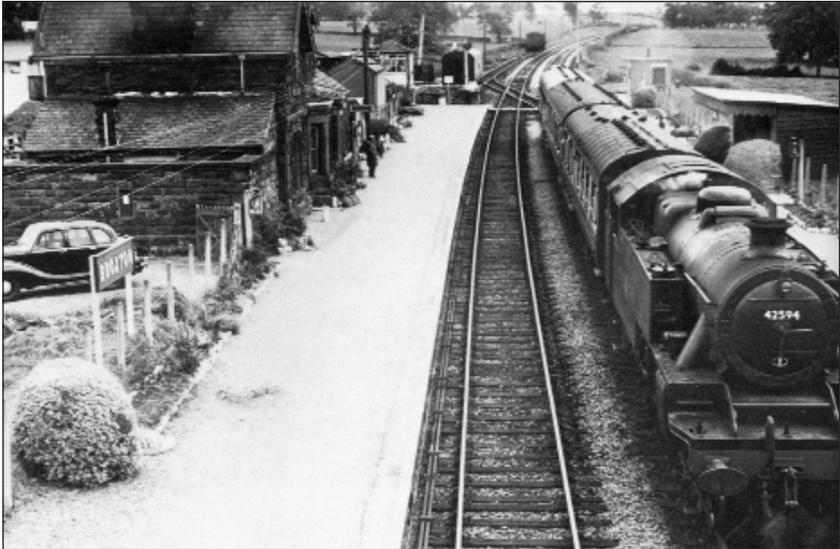
The LNWR at Broxton and the GWR at Wrexham ensured fierce competition. Here, from c1905, a GWR bus collects passengers in Fardon.



Young musicians and masters, possibly from Tattenhall Home for Boys, may have been expecting Royalty on board the train which can just be seen in the distance about to arrive at Broxton.



Broxton Station, under the supervision of Stationmaster, M. Jones, was renowned for its gardens and for three years in succession won the Northern section of the LMS Railway's 'Best Kept Garden' competition. Sadly, tarmac, lorries and lavatories have replaced Mr Jones's horticultural creations.



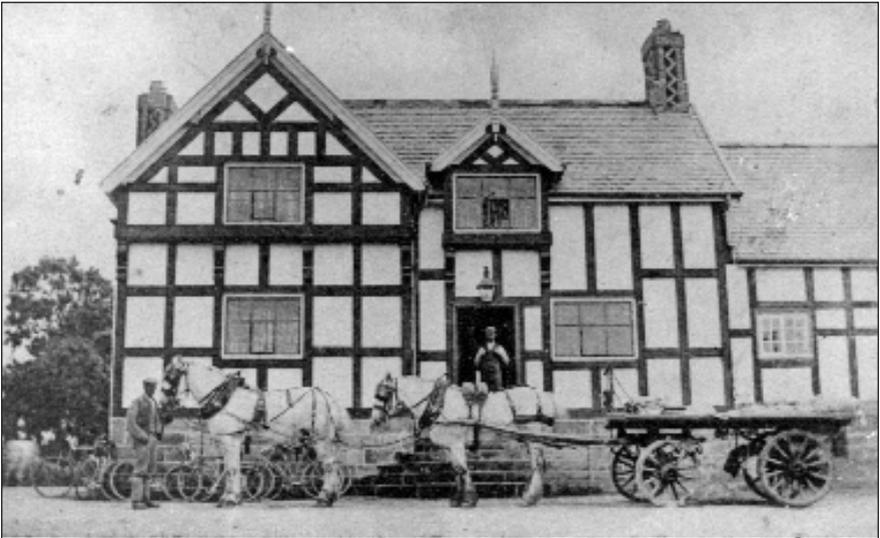
From the bridge over Wrexham Road, a Chester-bound train during the last days of Broxton Station.



Broxton Station shortly before the passenger service ceased in 1957.

# CHEESE COUNTRY

Over the centuries many eminent writers have extolled the virtues of Cheshire cheese, including the Farnon-born historian and cartographer John Speed (1542-1629) who remarked: 'The champion grounds make glad the hearts of the tiller, the meadows imbordered with divers sweet-smelling flowers; and the pastures makes the kins udders to strut to the paille, from whom and wherein the best cheese in all Europe is made.'



Cock O'Barton, Wrexham Road, a temptation perhaps to those carting seasonal produce to Broxton Station from the market gardens of Holt and Farnon. Originally known as the 'Cock Inn' the hostelry was built in 1800 and known far and wide in the 19th century for cock-fighting and bear-baiting.

Thomas Fuller, the author of the *The Worthies of England*, wrote: '... this county doth afford the best cheese, for quantity and quality and yet the cows are not (as in other shires) housed in the winter, so that it may appear strange that the hardiest kine make the tenderest cheese.'

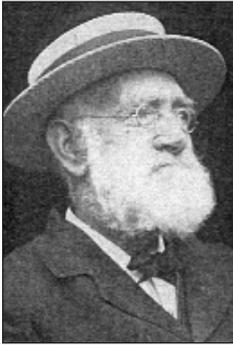
Fuller's contemporary, Sir Kenelme Digby noted '... quick, fat, rich, well-tasted cheese to serve melted upon a piece of toast.'

Cheshire cheese, probably introduced by the Romans and certainly mentioned in the *Domesday Book*, predates all other English cheeses and was a particular favourite of Elizabeth 1st at a time when it was reputed to be the finest in all Europe.

It is said that the 'secret' of best Cheshire cheese emanates from a hint of salt in the soil which is found primarily on the fertile pasturelands within the triangle formed by Chester, Nantwich and Whitchurch. This not only leads to cattle producing quality milk, but also to a highly distinctive flavour in the mature cheese, apparently more noticeable in the traditional farmhouse variety which, before factory production, was less crumbly than and more akin in texture to the Cheddar cheese we know today.

From the 17th to the early 19th century London was the principal market for Cheshire cheese and large quantities were sent by ship from the ports of Chester and Frodsham. Locally, practically every farm produced cheese, most of them on a small scale and a collective commercial approach did not evolve until the advent of the railways and the founding, in 1883, of the Cheshire Dairy Farmers' Association. This organisation, formed 'to promote farmers' interests', redeveloped the ancient Chester cheese fair and established new ones at Nantwich and Whitchurch; these were held on a three-weekly cycle; Wednesdays for Chester and Whitchurch, and Thursdays for Nantwich.

The highlights of the cheesemakers' year were the annual dairy



Thomas Bamber.

shows, held in October and November when the finest cheeses were produced, at the end of the summer season. Valuable trophies and cash prizes were at stake and competition was fierce to win the highest accolade of 'show champion'. The record weight offered for sale on a single day was 265 tons (10,000 Cheshire cheeses), recorded at the 1922 Whitchurch Annual Dairy Show & Fair.

Cheshire cheese production was at its zenith from 1900 to the late 1920s and the Whitchurch, Nantwich and Chester shows always attracted scores of cheesefactors, wholesale grocers and buyers for multiple stores. One of these in the early 1900s was Edmund Driver who, almost single-handedly, took the marketing of Cheshire cheese to new heights. Much of his business was conducted through one of the district's



Competition to produce the finest Cheshire cheese was intense as evidenced by the sheer number of entries at the Whitchurch Dairy Farmers' Association Show, in 1907.

leading cheese wholesalers, Thomas Bamber who had moved from Preston to establish his business in Tattenhall along with a cheese warehouse at Broxton Station. Later Bambers moved their headquarters to Balderton, near Chester.

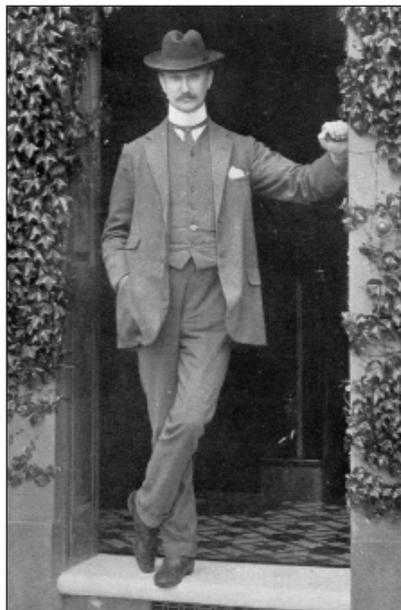
As to Edmund Driver, a self-made entrepreneur who owned a chain of grocery stores in West Yorkshire, he reasoned that as there were milk trains, then there could be cheese trains. So, in 1907, he organised a special train from Cheshire and such was the success of the venture that, in the following December, he purchased 1,720 cheeses (50 tons), almost all of them the champions and class winners from the Whitchurch, Nantwich and Chester shows. These, along with the valuable trophies and gold medals, he conveyed to Yorkshire on board his 'Driver's Christmas Cheese Train'. The trophies and medals



Edmund Driver.



Whitchurch Station goods yard. Cheeses are unloaded for the 1909 Whitchurch Cheese Fair.



Some of the leading cheese-makers: Top right - Arthur Shone, Larkton Hall Farm; Above right - Mr & Mrs Robert Bourne, of Bickerton; Top left - Percy Cooke and Samuel Dickin, of Tattenhall Hall Farm. Top left - Lady Cholmondeley presents the prizes at a Whitchurch Cheese Show. Edmund Driver's advertisement is prominently displayed.

went on display in his main store in Bradford and created so much interest that the cheeses quickly sold out. The 1908 'Christmas Cheese Train' had equal success and included the Whitchurch Champion cheese made by Mrs Thomas Nunnerley, of Bradley Green. This had been sold to Driver at 200 shillings per hundredweight.

Driver always maintained that his links with the Cheshire cheese industry had been the means of bringing to the working classes of West Yorkshire the 'best and most nutritious articles of English produce'. He also claimed, quite justifiably, to be the biggest distributor of Cheshire cheese in the world!

Thomas Nunnerley and his family, who farmed in Bradley Green, were undoubtedly in the premier league of Cheshire cheesemakers and won prestigious honours far and wide, especially at the London and Royal Agricultural shows. Their Whitchurch champion cheese of 1908 was presented to King Edward VII. There were scores of local cheesemakers at the turn of the 20th century and it is impossible to



Buyers and sellers: Whitchurch Cheese Fair, 1902. Straw placed on top indicated that a cheese had been sold.

name them all. Some of the leading 'exponents' were Samuel and Frank Reece, of Hampton; Arthur Shone, of Larkton Hall, and Oswald Manning, of Croxton Green, both tenants of Lord Cholmondeley's estate. Others were Robert Bourne, of Bickerton; and Richard Mullock, of Guy Lane Farm, Waverton, which was part of the Grosvenor estate; and Percy Cooke, of Tattenhall Farm, who in 1909, with his head cheesemaker Sam Dickinson, produced a record-breaking order for Edmund Driver, i.e. twenty Cheshire cheeses each weighing 300 pounds. Tattenhall Farm, with 330 acres, was the largest on the estate of George Barbour, of Bolesworth Castle. Most of the 'cheese' farms operated around 60-100 head of cattle and also successfully maintained pig herds, fattened on the whey from the cheesemaking process.

Unfortunately for local farmers the price of cheese often fluctuated wildly notably during the recession years of the early 1930s. There was always a tale to tell as the following abridged article, written by a contributor to 'The Countryman' magazine, recalls:

"Uncle Joe had taken six fine cheeses to Chester market the previous month, but had refused to sell them at the miserable price of the sevenpence a pound he was offered. But prices had continued to fall and he had no choice but to sell for what they would fetch. Everyone helped to carry them out to his car, a Buick of 1922 vintage. We roared into Chester and I helped carry the cheeses into the Market Hall. A tall grim-looking person in black suit and bowler hat, with gold-rimmed pince nez, strode over: the cheese factor. He began to prod the cheeses with his spigot and daintily taste the samples. The cheeses were then weighed and at the close of the ritual he turned solemnly to Uncle Joe, coughed loudly and in high falsetto offered fivepence a pound. At this Uncle, normally a quiet, good-tempered little man called the factor a vulture, told him he should be shot, and threatened to punch him on the nose

‘They’re the best in the market. Make it sixpence,’ pleaded Uncle. The factor scribbled in his notebook. ‘We’ve been dealing with each other a long time now,’ he conceded. ‘Tell you what, I’ll give you fivepence halfpenny a pound. Take it or leave it.’ Uncle pocketed the money and left the market complaining: ‘A month’s hard labour for less than three pound ten!’



A leading cheesemaker either side of the Second World War was J.A.Bebington, of Flaxyards Farm, Tarporley and, for posterity, the following account describes Bebington’s traditional method of making Cheshire cheese:

Hannah Daniels made cheese at Flaxyards Farm, Tarporley for over forty years. She is with Muriel Bebington who later married into the Rutter family and continued the tradition at Coddington.

“The cheesemaker’s day starts at 6am when the steam boiler is lit to heat the milk which is poured into a vat with a capacity of 200 gallons. The milk is heated up to a temperature of 70 degrees for two hours. About two gallons of starter is added to the milk. The starter is thick, sour milk, prepared specially the day before to create acidity that gives the cheese its flavour. At about 9am it is time to add the rennet (an enzyme found in a calf’s stomach), about 10 ounces to 200 gallons of milk. The vat is left for 40 minutes during which time its contents go thick, like junket. This is the curd and it is cut up, stirred by hand with a wooden rake for three quarters of an hour, and the whey is run off. The next step is to take the curd to the sides of the rectangular vat, break it into big pieces and turn it every half hour. When tests prove that it has enough acidity the curd is ready for grinding. It is weighed off into 20lb batches and put through a small

grinding mill with six ounces of special cheese salt being added to each batch. The salt and the curd is mixed more thoroughly afterwards, by hand, and then, looking something like scrambled egg, goes into moulds which are placed under the presses. The moulds are put under the presses to displace the whey for half a day. Then the moulds are turned upside down and put back under the presses for another half-day. The cheeses are taken out of the the moulds and covered in a calico wrapping, a process known as 'bandaging'. The cheeses are then marked with the date they were made and they stay in the press room for seven days. They are then transferred to a cool room until they are a fortnight old. Flaxyards Farm produces, on average, four cheeses a day from April to November, each weighing about 50lb.



Tattenhall steam-powered corn mill, built in 1858 by Robert Barbour for the use of a Mr Jackson, had a 10hp engine. This photograph is from circa 1910 when occupied by Cooke's Creamery who utilised the Whitchurch Branch for much of its distribution. Earlier Thomas Bamber, cheese wholesaler, established his first warehouse here, later moving it to Balderton. In the foreground is Tattenhall smithy.

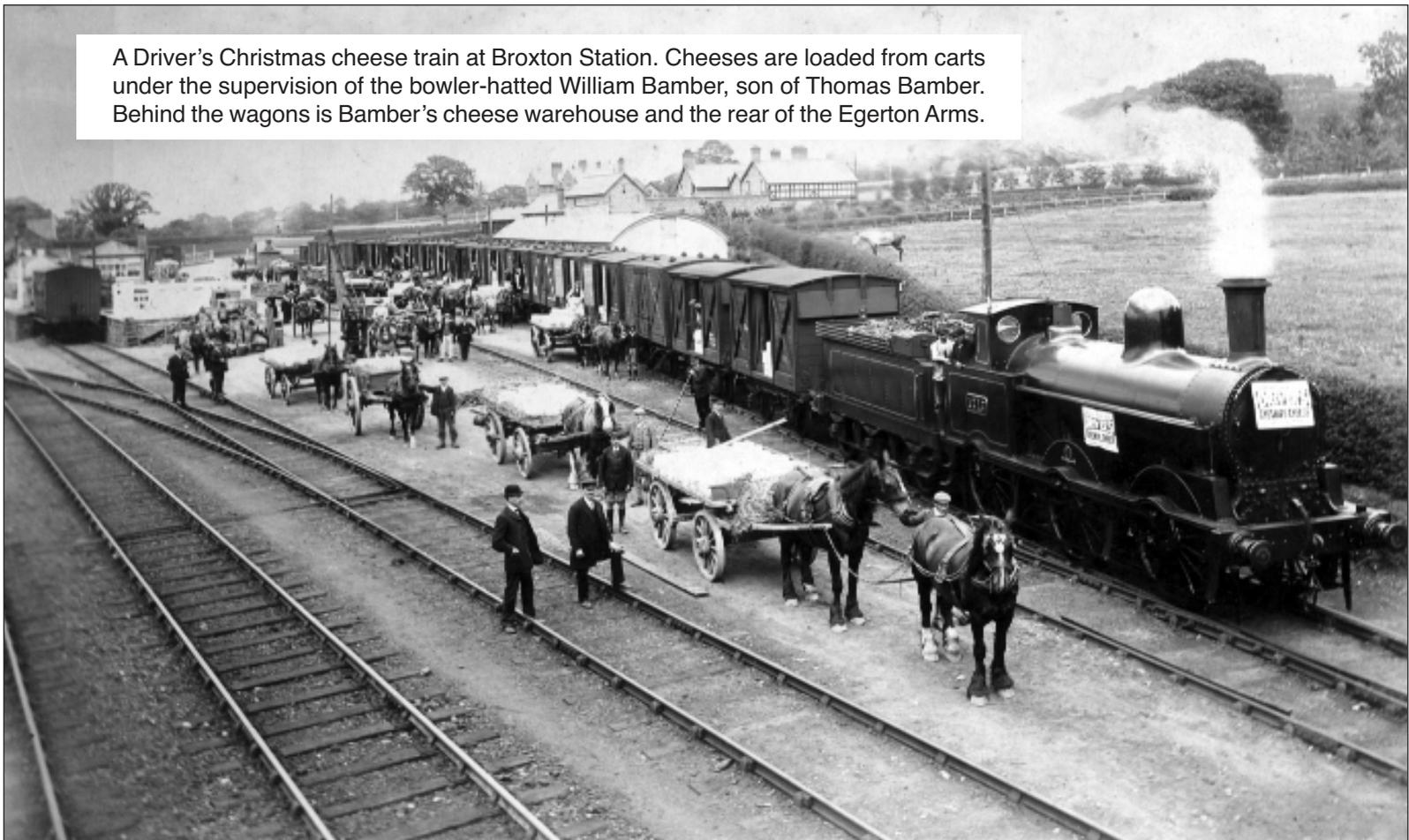


Tattenhall Hall Farm where record-breaking cheeses were made in 1909.



Judges at Whitchurch Cheese Show in 1928. By this time local cheese-making was in decline and only a relatively small number of farms continued after the recession of the 1930s and the Second World War.

A Driver's Christmas cheese train at Broxton Station. Cheeses are loaded from carts under the supervision of the bowler-hatted William Bamber, son of Thomas Bamber. Behind the wagons is Bamber's cheese warehouse and the rear of the Egerton Arms.



# HILL COUNTRY



Old Coach Road, Broxton, and Duckington Hill, circa 1910.

Few walkers of the hills around Broxton have not been moved by the eye-feasting vista of lush Cheshire pastureland sweeping towards Moel Famau and the foothills of Wales. Yet, how many realise they tread in the footsteps of one of Britain's finest wartime poets, Wilfred Owen? As a boy passing into adolescence, Owen spent a memorable holiday at Broxton and it was here, amidst the bracken and the gentle sandstone slopes, that he truly found poetry. Years later he wrote:



Wilfred Owen.

... at Broxton, by the Hill,  
Where first I felt my boyhood fill  
With uncontainable fancies; there was born  
My poethood.

Wilfred Owen, born in Oswestry in 1893, moved to Cheshire with his parents when his father was appointed Station Master at Woodside, Birkenhead. He was eleven when the family were offered the use of a 'small furnished cottage' for a much-needed holiday' in the hills around Broxton. Wilfred's brother Harold takes up the story in his book 'Journey From Obscurity', published in 1963:

'It was impossible for my father to get away so it was arranged that my mother and Wilfred would use the cottage; but for the first part all of us were to go together, my father only for a day or so, after which he would return home, taking me with him for company.

'The cottage nestled warmly brown in the sunshine and seemed a part of the friendly little green hill that it leaned against. That afternoon Wilfred and I wandered in and out of the shoulder-high fern... and the next morning we ran out into thick white night mist that the sun had not burned away and we ate our breakfast on the hillside with the vapour swirling about us. In the afternoon my father and mother went to the village to buy provisions. Wilfred and I gathered the delicate blue harebells and twisted them into sprays and massed them on the table in the cottage as a surprise for them. That evening father and I left them. I can see them now as I saw them then when we turned to wave goodbye – both of them, the little boy and the young-looking woman with her arm around the child's shoulder, both looking so sad to see us go.

'There was a magic about this day and night in Broxton that spread a softness over us all. The woman and the young boy we left standing outside the cottage were to live full, happy weeks in and

around it. It was in Broxton amongst the ferns and bracken and the little hills, that the poetry in Wilfred, with gentle pushings, without hurt, began to bud, and not on the battlefields of France.

‘There was I am certain something epochal about those few weeks in Broxton, certainly for Wilfred, the beginning of realization of a power within himself. They spent many hours either on the warm hillside or in the cottage reading to each other. It was a time of delight and although other happinesses were to come to them together I do not think that any of these ever equalled the perfection of Broxton.’

It is a matter of history, of course, that Wilfred Owen died in 1918, a week before the Armistice. He was twenty-five and in the bleak, uncompromising surroundings of the front-line he had managed to write the poetry of genius.

Dominic Hibberd, in his Wilfred Owen biography (2002), records that in the early years of the war, Owen wrote to his mother, telling her of a sentimental novel. It was titled ‘The Hill’ and Owen described it as ‘lovely and melancholy reading’, consoling himself that there had been a hill in his own life too, at Broxton, ‘whose bluebells it may be, more than Greek imabics, fitted me for my job’.

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Wilfred Owen was clearly captivated by the beauty of the local countryside and, perhaps, he also knew something of the legends and mystery surrounding Bickerton and Peckforton Hills. Man put down a marker here at least two thousand years ago in the form of Maiden Castle, an Iron Age fort of double earthen wall and ditch. The term ‘fort’ is rather a misnomer; time and the weather have left little trace but one does not have to be an archaeologist to appreciate what a commanding location this must have been with Bickerton Hill falling steeply and little need for artificial defences to the west. It is said that Maiden Castle dates from the first century B.C. and that the outer



Barnhill, on Nantwich Road was the nearest 'community' to Broxton Station. These views – the top showing Barnhill Smithy – are from the 1920s. The old stagecoach road to Whitchurch followed a precarious route across high ground from Barnhill to Hampton Post and Nomans Heath. Barnhill Farm, on what is now 'Old Coach Road', served as a halfway house. A sandstone marker still stands with the following inscription: '1716 - the Half - way House - from Chester - to Whitchurch - 10 Miles - Each'.

rampart was reconstructed and strengthened about 50-75 A.D., to counter the threat from the advancing legions of Rome. Like Iron Age hill forts elsewhere in Cheshire its fate was quickly sealed when the Romans built their roads, in this case from Chester to Whitchurch, via Malpas.

Nearby, of less historic significance but nonetheless a good yarn, is Mad Allen's Hole, a cave on the Bickerton slopes which contains a stone shelf, has sockets in the walls for beams, and a chimney. No-one truly knows who Mad Allen was, though there is a tradition that he was John Harris, of Handley, who took up a stone-age existence because his family interfered in his love life. A more imaginative tale surrounds another cave, near to Broxton Old Hall, which has become known as King James' Parlour, apparently a shelter for the monarch and his horse during a battle. The detail is, of course, spurious as no battle involving King James ever took place in these parts, though it is reputed that he stayed at Broxton Old Hall during a visit to Cheshire in 1605. Small depressions abound in the soft red sandstone and it



Black and white, Cheshire at its best: Standing on the site of an original stone house dating from the 14th century, Broxton Old Hall was erected by Thomas Dod during the reign of Elizabeth I and later restored and enlarged by the Grey-Egertons, of Oulton Park.

is more than likely that a past owner of Broxton Old Hall extended the cave and used it as a retreat.

The name 'Gallantry Bank' has more sinister undertones. It is supposedly a corruption of 'Gallows Tree Bank' as here a murderer was hanged in chains and Prince Rupert, during the Civil War, strung up twelve Roundhead soldiers in the branches of a crab-apple tree.

#### THE SWITZERLAND OF CHESHIRE

At this glorious summer season I venture to suggest a route of which, if strictly followed (and given a fine day), the indescribable charms will long live in the memory. There are at least three interesting routes that may be taken after arriving at Broxton Station, at a cost of 10d railway fare from Chester. I will leave the description of Carden and Barton and the Egerton Arms and King James's Hill routes until another time, and go for the high Alpine and wooded dell scenery.

If the temptation to refresh at the Egerton Arms Hotel does not divert, proceed right up the hill called Barnhill bank until you reach the Royal Oak at Fullersmoor. Take the road opposite and go for Harthill. Here all is peace, perfect peace and from here there are views of the Vale Royal of Cheshire and over the Welsh, Shropshire and Montgomery hills.

Go in the direction of the Dropping Well and enjoy one of the grandest panoramic views to be found in Cheshire or any other shire, Old Beeston Castle, or rather its ruins, remind one of the hills which encircle the Holy City. Back to the Royal Oak and we commence the ascent to Rawhead, the highest of this chain of hills. It stands conspicuous for miles around and on its summit there is an old tower or luncheon room used by sportsmen during the grouse shooting season. Here, on breaking into the jungle, you are reminded of the sublime grandeur of a South African forest and fancy, as you follow your leader, that you are a Stanley Expedition. Down the hill and we reach the top of Barnhill Bank before the sun has quite sunk below the horizon.

Cheshire Observer, August 1893

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ISOLATED and incongruous, Bickerton's Copper Mine chimney stands as a monument, not only to an ancient industry but to fortunes lost. For thousands of years men have flirted with dreams of rich pickings in the folds of Peckforton Hills, beguiled by a vein of copper-producing ore running west to east hundreds of feet below in the sandstone bedrock.

There is no evidence that Bickerton was worked in the Bronze Age, but it is extremely likely in Cheshire given that stone tools have been discovered at the better known Alderley Edge Mine. It may not be fanciful either to suggest that the Romans might also have worked Bickerton.

The first record of copper mining here dates from the 1690s but these were small-scale operations that closed and reopened inter-



The derelict remains, circa 1920, of copper mining on the southern slopes of Peckforton Hills. The chimney, a flue for one of the old pumping engines, can still be seen adjacent to Copper Mine Lane, just north of the A534.

mittently over two centuries. Eventually it fell to the landowners, the Grey-Egertons, of Oulton Hall, to kickstart the industrial dream. The incumbent Sir John Grey-Egerton commissioned a survey in the 19th century and was advised that though there were probably rich deposits of copper they would be extremely expensive to mine. So, as 'Lord of the Soil' he effectively placed the mining rights on the open market, provided his share would be one-sixth of the value of the ore.

There were no shortage of takers and in 1854 Messrs Foulkes & Chalkley set out to prove the doubters wrong and, indeed, for two or three years they returned a small profit, so encouraging them to build an engine house, chimney stack and mine buildings to serve three shafts.

By 1860 Messrs Foulkes & Chalkley had vanished from the scene and the mine was closed. However, optimism was high with the formation, in March 1862, of a new company, the grandly-named 'Bickerton Copper, Silver-Lead and Cobalt Mine (Malpas, Cheshire)'. Shortened to the less tongue-twisting 'Bickerton Mining Company' it



Between Broxton and Bickerton, the former Royal Oak, once with coach-house and stabling. In modern times it has been titled the Copper Mine and, from 2009, The Sandstone.

was immediately incorporated, with limited liability, onto the stock exchange and 6,000 £1 shares were floated. Five months later, and presumably without starting work at Bickerton, the company ceased to exist.

For the next forty years the mine was essentially abandoned, though several experts who examined the workings confessed to being at a loss as to why it was not operating.

James Nancarrow, a consultant engineer to the North Wales Freehold Mining & Smelting Company, reported: "Few mines will be possessing a combination of advantages essential for profitable mining. I may further add that, if you work the concern with energy, you cannot fail to succeed."

Encouraged by the thought of 'gold' to be made in them there hills, enter Mr M.J. Regan and his consultant Edmund Spargo, of Liverpool. In the early 1900s Spargo undertook the most comprehensive survey of the mine and concluded that if a shaft was sunk 700 feet, the prospects were enormous. The fact that the orebody had not been proven below 156 feet did not deter Spargo who estimated that about £10,000 of investment would be required to realise the full potential yield of 18,000 tons of copper, worth over £1 million.

The ore graded at a minimum of five percent copper would be sent to the smelters, via the railway at Broxton. The ore below five percent would go for copper sulphate for which there was a ready market in France as a grapevine spray. Spargo's report declared that, compared with the Alderley Edge Mine, there was four times more

It is quite incomprehensible to me... how these Mines have remained so long undeveloped, as there is, in my opinion, no Copper Mine likely to be found in the United Kingdom presenting more assuring evidence when developed – even to a moderate depth – of becoming an exceedingly profitable undertaking.

Edmund Spargo  
(Mining Engineer)  
– 25th January, 1906

copper per ton in the ore from Bickerton, plus four-eighteen ounces of silver per ton.

So, in 1907 Mr M.J. Regan took out a lease and floated the Bickerton Copper Mines Syndicate Ltd. It never took off; the company was dissolved and Regan was declared bankrupt. The last to try their luck, and probably more successfully than their predecessors, were three local men, Michael Burke, licensee of the Red Lion, Peter Dunn and Nathaniel Harding, who, during the 1920s, used nothing more than a bucket, rope and winch, at Number 3 shaft, to bring up ore



containing pockets of bright blue, crystalline azurite.

The shafts, there were six in total, have since been sealed and, with the exception of the chimney erected by Foulkes & Chalkley, the mine buildings were demolished in the winter of 1928-29 in order to facilitate the widening of the A534. It now remains to be seen whether, with modern mining techniques, this is the end of the story. Interest in the Bickerton Mine has never waned!

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Water, water everywhere! Seventy years ago a far-sighted Staffordshire Potteries Water Board undertook a scheme to take water from the hills around Peckforton, studies having shown that here, amidst the triassic sandstone and within a great north-south geological fault, were the nearest water-bearing rocks to supply its fast-growing industrial towns.

The scheme, approved by Act of Parliament of 1937, provided for wells and boreholes to be developed at Peckforton Gap and Tower Wood (Bickerton). These now combine to tap into a vast, endless supply of water, up to 1,000 feet below surface level, which is so pure



A five-star hotel setting for the Severn Trent Water Works building that has dominated the entrance to Peckforton Gap since the early 1950s.

that only the minutest amount of chlorine is added to upwards of twenty million litres supplied daily to Stoke-upon-Trent and neighbouring districts.

The water initially travels twenty-five miles to Audley, along what is known as a twenty-seven inch surge main. To the rear of the Peckforton Works, and often engendering speculation as to its origin and use, is a curious narrow-gauge railway running to the summit of Bulkeley Hill. Some suggest it may have been connected with the copper mines, others that it was built as part of sandstone quarrying operations. In fact, it is a relic of the Peckforton engineering works and the laying of the precarious last few hundred feet of surge main.



Remains of the narrow gauge railway running from Bulkeley Hill to Peckforton Water Works. Wagons were attached to cables and hauled up the incline by a winding engine.

In order to ensure the Peckforton

site remained protected from pollution, the Staffordshire and Potteries Water Board originally purchased a large part of Bulkeley Hill and twice sparked public outcry in the 1950s by attempting to close all footpaths in the vicinity. Opposition was overwhelming and successful as villagers took up a subscription to pay for legal representation. Later the G.P.O. was also thwarted when it submitted proposals to build a radio tower, with attendant service road and buildings, on the hill. United Utilities has an underground reservoir here, but this magnificent beauty spot is now in the ownership of the National Trust.

Peckforton water, analysed from a mineral spring near to Spurstow in the 19th century, was found to be equal to the spa waters of Cheltenham and this encouraged a local entrepreneur to erect bath houses nearby. The idea did not take off, but as one observer noted: 'It would be an admirable site for a spa and cold water establishment, being so near to the railway and to the invigorating Peckforton and Bickerton Hills.'



View from Brown Knowl, Broxton.



The Branch was enormously important to the communities and the rural economy.



Copper Mine Lane, at Rawhead, early 20th century, and pram and parasol on Nantwich Road. Many local views were captured by J.V.Brassey, of Bulkeley. His initials 'J.V.B.' appear on many postcards of the district from this period.



Sandy Lane, Bickerton with Stonehouse Lane to the left. The little boy seems more interested in the photographer than traffic.

The Red Lion (Bickerton Poacher), early 20th century. Landlord Michael Burke and two customers, using a bucket and rope, were the last to 'work' Bickerton Copper Mine.



Bulkeley Methodist Chapel and the road to Nantwich at Four Lane Ends, Bulkeley. To the right is an old lane to Cholmondeley Park.



Bulkeley Post Office, 1907 – bottles, jars and everything a village post office and shop used to be.



The Weaver is Cheshire's principal commercial river. It rises in Peckforton Hills and flows fifty miles via the Shropshire border and Nantwich, to link the salt towns of Winsford and Northwich with the Manchester Ship Canal and the port of Liverpool. The modern, official source of the Weaver is mapped as 'below Stonehouse Farm, Peckforton'. However, as these photographs of a century ago indicate, this was not always so. The top view of the lane across from Bulkeley Mill, has a tongue-in-cheek caption claiming 'the first bridge over the River Weaver'. The lower photograph apparently shows the precise source as being a spring at 'Oak Rock Dale', below Bulkeley Hill. This spring still exists but the water is now instantly swallowed into the Staffordshire water works. The River Gowy rises nearby, at Peckforton Moss.



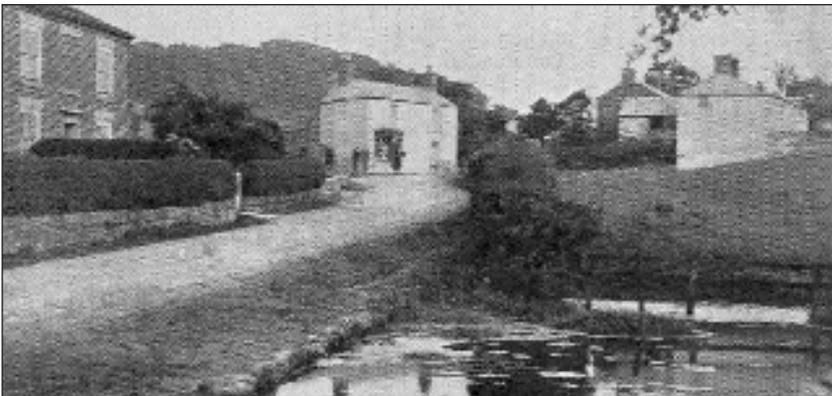
Beeston and Peckforton castles dominate the local countryside. Built by the 6th Earl of Chester in 1277, Beeston has stood guard for over seven hundred years and was at the centre of some of Cheshire's fiercest fighting during the Civil War. Peckforton Castle is mock medieval, erected in 1850/51 for John Tollemache who in 1876 became 1st Baron Tollemache of Helmingham. It is said that practically all of the material, required to build the castle came from Lord Tollemache's 26,000-acre Cheshire estates.



The Pheasant, Burwardsley, previously known as the Leches Arms and then the Carden Arms. Difficult to imagine now, but due to its remoteness there was no piped water until the 1930s, and electricity did not arrive until 1942.



Below:  
Burwardsley Pond, a former marl pit now filled in.





Pennsylvania Lane, Burwardsley. 'Pennsylvania' literally means 'Penn's Wood', though here it probably has connotations with the Quakers and Pennsylvania, the 'Quaker State' of the USA. The Movement was founded in the North West during the 17th century when Quakers were persecuted and forced to hold meetings in remote locations, famously on Pendle Hill, Lancashire. Burwardsley would have been equally remote for Cheshire followers.

Left: A time to meditate: Mr Sandbach, head-teacher of Burwardsley School, a century ago.



Willow Hill Farm, Burwardsley, the site of the famous Candle Workshops. Once a working farm, tenanted from the Bolesworth Estate, Willow Hill became an unlikely tourist destination when Anne and Bob Sanderson moved their cottage-based candle-making business into the former coach-houses, granaries and shippons. The farmhouse was demolished and in 1980, a fire having destroyed most of the original outbuildings.



Harthill is one of Cheshire's most unusual villages. The name simply means 'hill frequented by stags'.



Pevsner & Hubbard in 'The Buildings of Cheshire' have a fitting description for Harthill: 'A bit out of scale, but substantial and nicely different in design'.

The Barbours of Bolesworth family church, All Saints, Harthill, dates from circa 1609. It has been closed since 2003.



Left: Harthill School, founded by Robert Barbour in 1868. His grandson funded a replacement following a fire in 1922.

## TO MALPAS

This is Brassey homeground, Thomas Brassey homeground. Brassey was one of the greatest railway engineers who ever lived, a man whose impact on the world at large is said to have exceeded the exploits of even Alexander the Great.

Construction of the Tattenhall Junction branch line did not actually commence in earnest until after Brassey's death in 1870, though his presence is everywhere along a branch railway that literally dissected his home ground.

Born in 1805, near to the Grosvenor village of Aldford, Thomas was the eldest son of a well-to-do farmer, John Brassey. His forefathers had been tenants of Buerton Manor Farm since at least 1662, though the ancestral home of the family since the 12th century was at Bulkeley Old Hall, later known as Bulkeley Grange. J.V.Brassey, who photographed several of the views in this book, was of this family.

Thomas Brassey was privately educated and served an apprenticeship as a surveyor. In this capacity, the first large civil engineering work upon which he was employed was Telford's Holyhead road, subsequently the A5.



Thomas Brassey, one of the Brassey family of Bulkeley.

Later, as a partner in the Birkenhead land agent's firm of Lawton & Brassey, he developed business interests in quarrying and brick-making. The Penkridge Viaduct (Staffordshire), on the Grand Junction Railway, was his first venture into railways and he was soon involved in other contracts, worth £3.5 million, from the south of England to Scotland. He had an insatiable appetite for railway-building and his reputation eventually took him to the four corners of the globe, to construct railways in (to name but a few destinations) Argentina, Australia, Canada, France, India, Norway and Russia.

One of his greatest feats of international engineering and logistics was in 1862 when he shipped out 3,000 navvies, principally from Cheshire and Lancashire, to construct the 539-mile Grand Trunk Railway of Canada, from Quebec to Lake Huron. Brassey was also involved with steamships, mines, engine factories and marine telegraph; he built harbours and docks, including the Victoria Docks in London, Birkenhead Docks and Barrow Docks; he laid out Cliff Town, from which sprang Southend, and during the Crimean War rendered notable service to the nation by helping to construct a railway to connect Balaclava and Sebastapol. Locally, he built Chester Station



At Edge, between Broxton and Hampton, is Brassey's Contract Road. It seems likely Brassey quarried sandstone at Edge for the building of the Chester-Crewe railway and, perhaps, Chester Station. Brassey was probably living at nearby Clock House which later became the residence of his sister. Coincidentally, the Chester Branch cuts under Brassey's Contract Road and a short embankment section lies within the grounds of the Clock House.

(1848), the railways from Chester to Crewe, Holyhead, Birkenhead and Shrewsbury, and the Runcorn-Widnes railway bridge. At the height of his career it is said that he employed 100,000 workers and, allegedly, acquired more self-made wealth than any other Englishman during the 19th century. When he died, in Hastings in 1870, he left a fortune in excess of £5 million.

It has been estimated that he was personally responsible for constructing one-third of all the railways in Britain and one-fifth of all the railways built in the rest of the world. In the history of railways, Thomas Brassey unquestionably stands alongside the immortal engineers of his age, George and Robert Stephenson, Isambard Kingdom Brunel and Joseph Lock.



In 1845, around an oak tree at Bulkeley Mill, four tribute pillars were erected to mark Thomas Brassey's fortieth birthday and his international standing. In 2007 these sandstone pillars were relocated to a publicly-accessible memorial site alongside the A534 at Bulkeley.



Edge Hall, the earliest part of which dates from the 15th century, has been synonymous with the Dod/Wolley-Dod family for centuries. The Dods were probably hereabouts before the Norman conquest and an impressive pedigree shows one Bishop, one Admiral, three Knights, two Archdeacons, six Members of Parliament, a Chief Baron of the Exchequer, a Baron of the Cinque Ports. Five served with the Black Prince, two at Agincourt, two at the Battle of the Boyne, two attained the age of 104, and two went to the gallows!



A different world! Edge Mill about a century ago. Part of the mill was cut into the same escarpment from which Thomas Brassey probably quarried sandstone.

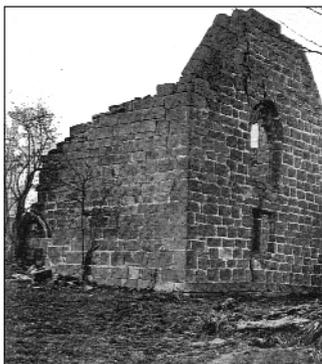
MALPAS is one of those rare Cheshire villages to have escaped the worst ravages of modern development, undoubtedly due to its relative isolation that always set it apart, not exactly off-the-beaten track but rather as somewhere for weary travellers to briefly sup and tarry. Alas, even the stage coaches, with evocative names such as Hero, Albion and Tally-Ho, stopped calling at the Red Lion on their journey from Chester to Shrewsbury and London; the turnpike road via Broxton saw to that and when there was a Malpas railway station it was a trek of over one mile from Hampton to the village centre.

Malpas – some say it should be pronounced *Mawpas* – takes its name from ‘malus passus’, the bad pass, which referred to the state of the terrain in the days of the Romans and Normans. They both had out-stations here, to protect Chester and also to keep a wary eye on the Welsh. The Normans raised an earth mound (it can still be seen behind the church) and on it constructed a wooden ‘castle’ of sorts, surrounded by a ditch and timber stakes. Its purpose, with similar motte and bailey fortifications at Shocklach and Oldcastle, was to guard the pass against the marauding Welsh.

Four principal families – the Cholmondeleys, Egertons, Breretons and Drakes – have since dominated the history of Malpas. The Cholmondeleys, of Cholmondeley Hall, originally Norman barons who came to Cheshire with the Conquest of 1066, are descended from a half-sister of William the Conqueror and received lands hearabouts in return for defensive services on the Welsh border. So too from the Normans came the Egertons whose name derives from the hamlet of Egerton, near to Cholmondeley. The Egertons were early Barons of Malpas and from this family descended, amongst others, the Earls of Wilton, the Grey-Egertons of Oulton (now Oulton Park), and the Egertons of Tatton (Knutsford) one of whom was Thomas Egerton (Viscount Brackley), an illegitimate son who rose to become the powerful Lord Chancellor to King James I.

A major share in the Barony of Malpas passed to the Breretons through marriage to an Egerton daughter in the 14th century and within the parish church there is a 16th century memorial tomb to Sir Randle and Lady Eleanor Brereton whose son, Sir William Brereton, of Malpas, was executed in 1536 by King Henry VIII on a flimsy charge that he had committed adultery with Anne Boleyn.

The Breretons subsequently sold their share of the Malpas estate to Sir William Drake who was descended from the same ancient family, of Ashe in Devon, as Sir Francis Drake, the great Elizabethan navigator and explorer. The Drakes were very much absentee landlords and kept a steward at Malpas to run their Cheshire lands. In the 19th century



Remains of the Egerton family chapel near to the site of Egerton Hall. The Egertons were Barons of Malpas.

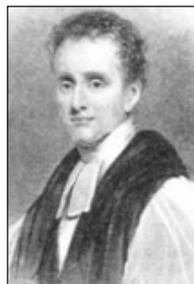


Cholmondeley Castle built at the beginning of the 19th century on the site of Cholmondeley Hall, a half-timbered, moated manor house. The Cholmondeleys have been powerbrokers along the Welsh border since they arrived with the Norman Conquest and currently hold the hereditary title Lord Great Chamberlain of England.

the Lord of the Manor was the Rev William Wickham Drake, a 'hunting parson' of Tarporley Hunt Club, who was also one of the rectors of Malpas. Through marriage to a daughter of Thomas Tarleton, of Bolesworth Castle, he also became rector of Harthill. When Thomas Tarleton died in 1820 he bequeathed to the Rev Drake his slaves, buildings, stores, cotton etc in Dominica and Grenada. What happened thereafter is unknown, but certainly the Malpas rector came to have a vested interest in slavery and, perhaps, received considerable compensation when the trade was abolished in all British territories in 1833. It is on record that the Tarletons claimed £120 for a slave tradesman, £60 for an inferior field labourer, and £30 for a child under six.

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Few Cheshire worthies deserve to occupy a more prominent place than the Rt Rev Reginald Heber, a son of Malpas, Lord Bishop of Calcutta and writer of some of our finest hymns. Born in 1783 at the Higher Rectory, Malpas, he was taught Latin grammar by his rector father and it is said that by the age of five he had read the Bible so thoroughly he could give chapter and verse for chance quotations. From the age of eight he attended Whitchurch Grammar School and later was one of twelve private pupils of a clergyman on the outskirts of London. In 1804 he entered Brazenose College, Oxford, became a fellow of All Souls and, eventually, a Doctor of Divinity.



Bishop Heber.

Having taken up holy orders in 1807 he settled into the family living in Hodnet and married Amelia Shipley, the daughter of the Bishop of St Asaph. This matrimonial connection was to stand Heber in excellent stead and in January 1823 he was appointed Bishop of Cal-

cutta. In those times The See of Calcutta not only embraced India, but most of the Eastern hemisphere. Here he laboured indefatigably and travelled ceaselessly for the good of his own diocese and for the spread of Christianity. His devotion in a trying climate told severely on his health and at Trichinopoly in 1826 he died suddenly of a cerebral haemorrhage while in his bath. He is buried at St. John's Church, Trichinopoly, Tamil Nadu, India. It is said that on the day he died he baptized forty-two people.

Monuments were erected to his memory in Madras, Calcutta and London's St Paul's Cathedral. His name is still remembered in Bishop Heber College, Trichinopoly, and at the Bishop Heber High School in his own village of Malpas. And, of course, his hymns survive, the best known including 'God, that madest earth and heaven', 'From Greenland's Icy Mountains' and 'Holy, holy, holy'.



Malpas Station, similar to Broxton and Tattenhall, was constructed of local mellow sandstone.

The village of Malpas is crowned by one of the finest old churches in Cheshire. It is dedicated to Oswald, King of Northumbria and Martyr who was killed in a battle against the heathen King of Mercia. Though a place of worship probably existed on the site previously, the present church dates from the second half of the 1300s and was greatly remodelled in the following century through the generosity of the Cholmondeley family.



From early times there were two rectors of Malpas, as sometimes occurred over the border in Wales. One held Higher Malpas, the other Lower Malpas. This unusual arrangement continued until 1885 when the ancient parish of Malpas was broken up to form the new parishes of Whitewell, Bickerton, Bickley and Tushingam, and the living became a single benefice.

The magnificent lych gates were erected in 1773 when Philip Egerton began major alterations to the house and grounds at Oulton Hall (Oulton Park). Inlaid with the Egerton crest they had stood at Oulton from about 1715 and may have been designed by the celebrated architect Sir John Vanbrugh. The gates may have been offered by Philip Egerton in lieu of payment of church dues.

WHITCHURCH AND CHESTER BRANCH.																												
Shrewsbury, d	6	35	7	45	1015	1210	2	45	5	35	8	10	Holyhead, dep	2	10	5	15	7	45	9	0	1140	1210	3	0			
Whitchurch, d	7	20	8	30	1042	1256	3	26	8	8	43		Carnarvon ...	..	8	40	8	15	9	25	..	1260	3	30				
Malpas .....	7	47	8	41	..	1	15	3	44	6	25	9		Bangor .....	..	6	20	9	0	1618	..	1	25	4	13			
Broxton .....	7	55	8	47	..	1	21	3	52	6	32	9	10	Llandudno ...	..	6	50	9	25	1040	..	1	50	4	45			
Tattenhall ..	8	2	3	52	..	1	20	st	6	39	9	17		Conway .....	..	6	53	9	37	1050	..	1	50	4	50			
Waverton ...	8	12	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..		Rhyl .....	..	7	45	1046	1140	..	2	55	5	40				
Chester, arr	8	25	9	11	120	1	45	4	15	7	0	40		Chester, arr.	4	25	8	40	1145	1	0	1	45	4	10	7	0	
Whitchurch, dep	..	9	35	1225	2	55	4	40	7	45	1030		Liverpool, d	6	0	7	40	1120	..	1	50	3	40	7	0			
Rhyl .....	..	1050	1	40	3	50	5	40	5	50	1117		Birkenhead	8	20	8	0	1140	..	2	10	4	0	7	20			
Conway .....	..	1130	2	23	4	24	6	23	30	..			Chester, ar.	7	15	8	40	1210	..	3	5	4	55	5	15			
Llandudno ...	..	1145	2	25	4	41	6	30	9	40	..		Chester, dep.	7	30	8	55	1215	1	10	3	30	5	25	30			
Bangor .....	..	12	9	3	0	5	10	6	55	10	0	12	5		Waverton ...	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Carnarvon ...	..	1250	3	40	5	50	8	55	1030	..			Tattenhall ...	7	45	..	1228	..	3	45	5	30	3	45				
Holyhead, ar	..	1	25	4	25	6	25	9	45	1	0	1	0		Broxton .....	7	54	..	1234	..	3	54	5	45	3	51		
Chester, d.	8	50	9	30	1145	2	10	4	30	7	20	1030		Malpas .....	8	7	..	1243	..	4	5	5	50	9	0			
Birkenhead	9	23	1022	1215	2	40	5	10	8	0	1110		Whitchurch	8	5	20	9	30	1256	1	40	4	20	6	5	9	12	
Liverpool, a	9	40	1042	1235	3	0	5	30	8	20	1130		Whitchurch	d	9	18	9	32	1	10	1	50	4	31	6	9	9	17
														Shrewsbury, a	9	58	1013	2	0	2	15	5	10	6	55	9	58	

Market Ticks to Chester on Saturdays from W'church, Malpas, Broxton, and Tattenhall.



Malpas Station in its heyday.



Malpas Cross is not as old as it may seem at first glance. Typically Victorian in design it was erected in 1877 on the site of an ancient market cross. The right to stage a market and fairs (though none have taken place since the 19th century) was granted by King Edward I when he conferred medieval borough status on Malpas. White's Directory, 1860, states: 'The town consists of four streets, diverging at right angles from a common centre. The market, which was formerly held on Wednesday, has long since been obsolete. Fairs are held for cattle and pedlary on April 5th, July 26th and December 8th'. These photographs, from a century ago, show railings on the plinth.



God Save The King! Malpas bedecked with flags and bunting as villagers gather at the Cross to celebrate King George V's Coronation Day in 1911.



The Wynnstay Hunt at Malpas Cross, circa 1910. On several occasions during the 1870s the Empress of Austria hunted with the Wynnstay and it is said 'took refreshment' at the Red Lion.



Church Street: The steps were at the entrance to The Vaults.



Old Church Street with three white-aproned women outside the almshouses. The almshouses were founded in 1636, endowed by Sir Thomas Brereton, and rebuilt by Lord Cholmondeley in 1762.



Church Street, the heart of medieval Malpas, with its Tithe Barn and, in the distance, the Glebe House. St Oswald's Church, often described as the 'jewel in the crown' of Malpas, almost certainly had its origins as a private chapel attached to the castle seat of the Barony of Malpas.



According to White's Directory, 1860, the shops and trades centred on High Street, Old Hall Street and Church Street provided Malpas with a self-sufficiency that we can only dream about in the 21st century. The list included seven tailors, eight grocers, four bakers, five boot-makers, three drapers, two ironmongers, three saddlers, three wheelwrights, a blacksmith, a china dealer and even an umbrella-maker. And for any misdemeanours, Sgt. Henry Foster offered hospitality at the 'lock-up' in Old Hall Street. The Jubilee Hall was erected to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, 1887.



Old Hall Street was so-named from Malpas Hall where the all-powerful Breretons once kept their princely state. The hall was destroyed by fire in 1768, rebuilt and burnt down again less than one hundred years later. In the 18th century there lived at Malpas Hall one Richard Minshull, a staunch Jacobite. He was said to be possessed of great treasure, paid to him by Jacobite families, and kept in the cellars of the hall. There is still a house on the site and the hoard, it is reputed, has never been recovered. The redoubtable Richard Minshull claimed that if he told all he knew of the great families of Cheshire and Lancashire, there would not be enough trees in England to make the number of headsman's blocks that would be required!





Sumner & Stevenson's mill at Hampton was well sited to take advantage of the loading facilities when the railway and Malpas Station arrived in 1872. The bottom photograph thirty years later shows open fields near to present-day Bishop Heber High School.



From the early days of Malpas Station there was a livestock market at Hampton corner and it remained a feature of the district for a hundred years, run by Frank Lloyd's, of Wrexham, and then Jones & Son. This shows the last market, on July 15, 1989.



Malpas station had a sizeable goods yard with warehouse and crane facilities. By 1874 there were no fewer than seven coal merchants operating from the yard.

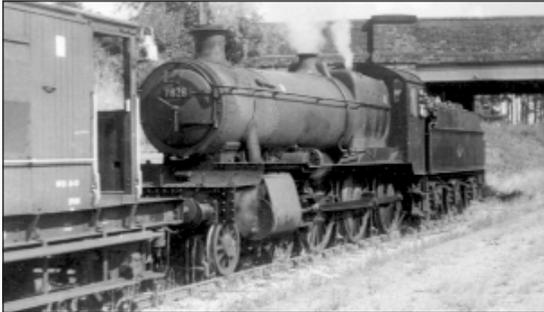


Hampton crossroads with the New Inn and the livestock market. The sign above the inn door shows P.O. Matthews as licensee. Nearer to Malpas Station there was a more convenient watering hole for train travellers, 'Hark to Blue Cap'.



Toll Cottage opposite to the New Inn, at the corner of Bickerton Road. It was demolished during the late 1930s.

# TO WHITCHURCH



Malpas Signal Box working the Branch by Hampton Bridge.



At Bradley and bound for West Yorkshire: Driver's Christmas cheese 'special', 1907, with 18 tons of Cheshire cheese.



The old road through Noman-sheath and past Tushingam Smithy. Such everyday comforts as electricity and mains water did not reach Tushingam until after the Second World War. In 1950 Cheshire Life magazine described Tushingam as a 'forgotten village'. Left: The Blue Bell Inn, or Bell O'th' Hill. An ancient coaching inn the Bell is mentioned on maps from as early as 1670.

Undergrowth and trees now mask the site of Grindley Brook Halt above the Llangollen branch of the Shropshire Union Canal. The coming together here of canal, road and railway was probably long overdue as Grindley Brook had been at the



centre of the local communications network since Roman times. Unmanned, and little more than a timber shelter, Grindley Brook Halt was very much an after-thought as, when it was opened in July 1938, the Branch had already been in existence for over 65 years. The Halt was supposed to service the communities of Grindley Brook, Willy Moor and Bradley, but passenger traffic was minimal.



To Malpas or Chester, at the Horse & Jockey, Grindley Brook.



There are said to be twenty-seven other towns, villages and hamlets bearing the name Whitchurch, but none can claim the historical importance of Whitchurch, Shropshire. Close to the borders of Wales and Cheshire, the old market town has been a strategic location since the Romans established a settlement here, Mediolanum, on the road between Wroxeter and Deva (Chester). The name 'Whitchurch' evolved from a white stone church built by the Normans towards the end of the 11th century, a replacement probably for an earlier structure. A third church collapsed in 1711 and, today, the fourth, dedicated to a Saxon saint, Alkmund, towers above the town.

Sir Henry Percy, 'Shakespeare's 'Hotspur', who was killed at the Battle of Shrewsbury in 1403, was briefly buried at St Alkmund's prior to his body being hung in chains to dispel rumours that he was still alive and plotting against King Henry IV. Also in the 15th century, after the Battle of Castillon (France), the body of Sir John Talbot, first Earl of Shrewsbury, was brought to Whitchurch and his embalmed



heart supposedly lies under the porch of St Alkmund's, his bones beneath an effigy in the Lady Chapel.

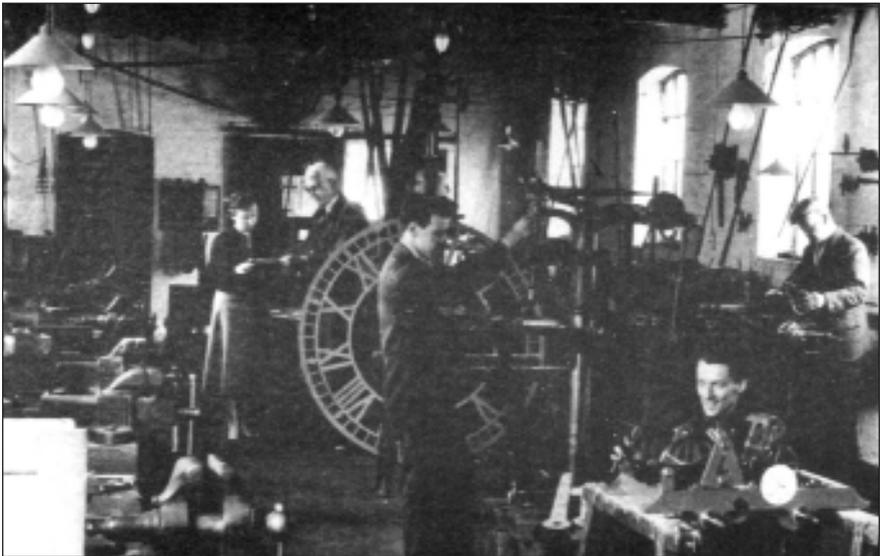
From less bloodthirsty times other Whitchurch notables include the renowned musician and composer Sir Edward German and the internationally famous illustrator and literary artist Randolph Caldecott. Sir Edward German, knighted in 1928, was the first composer to write music for a British film when paid fifty guineas for sixteen bars to accompany the Coronation scene in 'Henry VIII' (1911). Born 1862 in Whitchurch, Edward German was taught music by his church organist father. He died in 1936 and was buried in Whitchurch.

Randolph Caldecott (1846-1886) was born and grew up in Chester and, for six years, worked in a Whitchurch bank, lodging with a yeoman in the village of Wirswall and honing his skills as an outstanding illustrator. Caldecott immortalised the English farming countryside of the 19th century and contributed to two memorable books by the great American short story writer Washington Irvine.

Another who briefly resided in Whitchurch was Mavis Lever, better known by her married name, Mavis Batey, a famously acclaimed

Bletchley Park wartime codebreaker who had an important role in cracking Germany's Enigma ciphers. At the height of the war the Old Rectory, Whitchurch, was one of Bletchley Park's secretive outposts. These were known as 'Y stations' and were set up, principally, to decode thousands of Enigma messages. During her short stay in Whitchurch, probably to train raw recruits, Mavis lodged with Mrs Lewis in High Street, above Perkins' hardware and china shop.

Perhaps Whitchurch's greatest claim to modern fame is time itself and the world famous clockmakers J.B.Joyce, a business established in the town in 1690. Joyces originally manufactured grandfather clocks and then, from the 1830s, diversified into producing tower clocks and large clocks for public buildings. In Whitchurch itself a Joyce clock adorns St Alkmund's parish church and another, a Pillar Clock, stands in the Old Bull Ring. Further afield, and a testimony to Joyce's outstanding craftsmanship, there are dozens of clocks on



Time lords – Joyce's of Whitchurch, early 1960s,

village churches, public buildings, private houses and railway stations. Chester's famous Eastgate Clock, designed by J.B.Joyce to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee is said, after Big Ben, to be the most photographed clock in the world. Other famous Joyce clocks are on the Royal Exchange, Manchester, Worcester Cathedral and Aberystwyth Railway Station, whilst, internationally, some remain a lasting symbol of the British Empire, in Singapore, Shanghai, Kabul, Delhi, Sydney, Gibraltar and Cape Town. Joyce's merged with John Smith & Sons, Derby, in 1965.



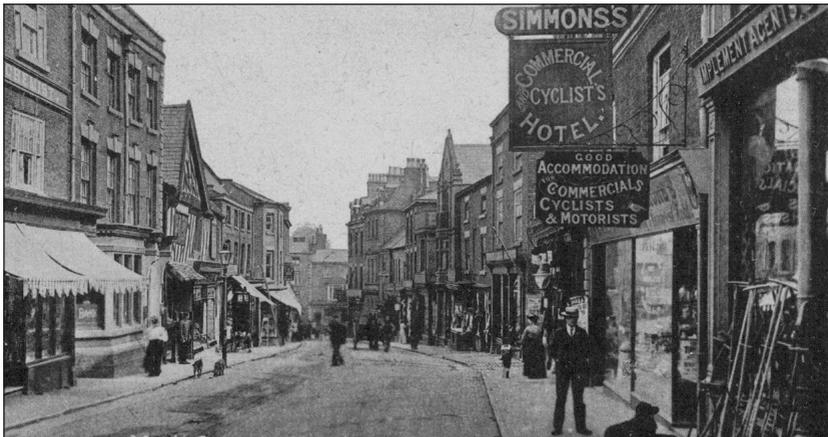
The shopping delights of High Street and Whitchurch Market were available to a much wider rural community with the opening of the Branch. Previously it had taken over an hour by horse and cart from Malpas, whereas the train completed the journey in little more than twenty minutes... and in considerably more comfort.



High Street, Whitchurch from different eras.



A gentler pace in days of old and even a hotel for cyclists. Both views show the Victorian Town Hall, now the site of the Civic Centre.



High Street. The top photograph captures a busy scene on a very wet Election day in 1911.



Green End from the Bull Ring, early 20th century.



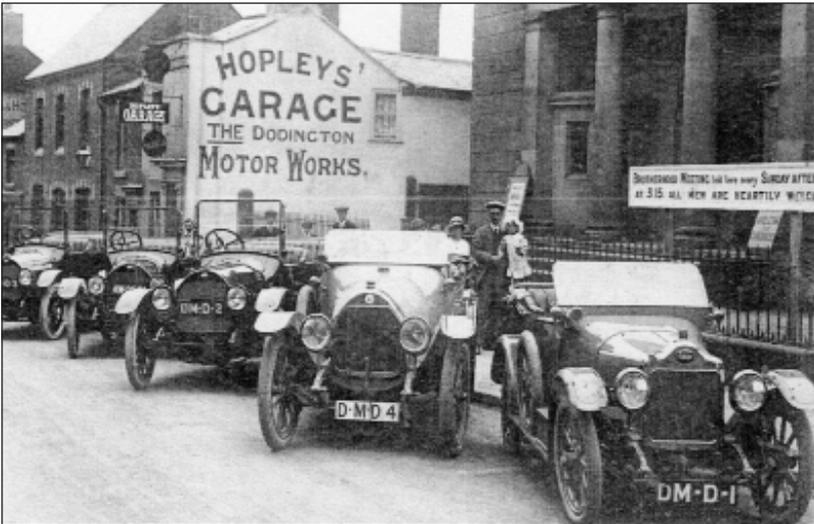
On the way to the station. The old Railway Inn and Whitchurch Fountain before it was moved in 1930 to Brownlow Street. The tall building, extreme right in the bottom photograph, was one of the town's first motor garages.



The Whitchurch Branch was never an economic success, partly due to the advent of motor transport. These views show J.A. Holmes' Railway Garage next to the Railway Hotel.



R.A.C. and A.A. Garage at Watergate looking towards the Bull Ring. The Swan stood on this corner for 250 years until demolished to make way for Whitchurch's first Tesco store.



Taking over: Hopleys of Doddington was at the forefront of the local motor trade.

## Whitchurch Station

Whitchurch Station opened on September 2, 1858 as part of the LNWR-backed Crewe and Shrewsbury Railway. It was also the junction for the Oswestry, Ellesmere and Whitchurch Railway and, of course, the Chester Branch. The Oswestry line closed in 1965. Harold Forster, the former Waverton Stationmaster, moved to Whitchurch in 1964 and took on an entirely different role. He recalled:

‘With the much vaunted and comprehensive plan for the re-shaping of British Railways, the humble Stationmaster became an extinct species and in his place came the so-called Station Manager with managerial responsibility for a number of stations. I was to be the first Station Manager at Whitchurch, in charge of stations from Yorton to Nantwich, together with those from Worleston to Waverton on the Crewe-Chester line. My home



Whitchurch Station, circa 1923. The engine steaming up in the distance may be about to leave the Chester Branch bay.

Whitchurch Station, early 1950s.



base was Whitchurch where one of the many features was the Locomotive Shed. Built in 1883 to replace an original single road engine shed to the standard LNWR pattern, it was designed to accommodate four small locomotives which were used, in the main, on the lines between Chester and Whitchurch, and those between Whitchurch and Ellesmere. The Shed was complete with its own turntable and water tank. In 1936 the staff at the Whitchurch Shed included a Shed Foreman, eight LMSR drivers, eight LMSR firemen, a GWR driver and fireman, and a Shed labourer. With the withdrawal of the Chester to Whitchurch passenger service the Shed was closed and thereafter was used as a store, mainly for brake blocks. Eventually the Shed area returned to its original existence as a green field.'



The Branch Signal Box.



The Branch Engine Shed.

**Table 90** **CHESTER, TATTENHALL, and WHITCHURCH**

	week days only									week day - only								
	a.m.	a.m.	p.m.	a.m.	a.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.									
Chester (General) dep	8 21	15	10	40	10	5	20	10	5	Whitchurch..... dep	7 50	30	30	40	4 30	20		
Waverton.....	8 5	14	9	34	10	5	20	10	5	Woolley Brook Halt.....	7 50	30	30	40	4 30	20		
Tattenhall.....	8 27	17	12	38	10	5	20	10	5	Margate.....	7 50	30	30	40	4 30	20		
Woolley.....	8 33	23	18	44	10	5	20	10	5	Woolley Brook Halt.....	7 50	30	30	40	4 30	20		
Margate.....	8 39	29	24	50	10	5	20	10	5	Tattenhall.....	7 50	30	30	40	4 30	20		
Grindley Brook Halt.....	8 45	35	30	56	10	5	20	10	5	Woolley Brook Halt.....	7 50	30	30	40	4 30	20		
Whitchurch.....	8 51	41	36	62	10	5	20	10	5	Chester (General) arr	7 40	20	20	30	4 20	10		

M Except Saturdays.    W Wednesdays only.    X Except Wednesdays and Saturdays.  
 For COMPLETE SERVICE between Chester and Waverton, see Table 23.

# END OF THE LINE



A goods train passes through Whitchurch Station in 1953. The Chester Branch platform is to the right, beneath the canopy.

**C**losure of the Chester to Whitchurch Branch, with the stations at Tattenhall, Broxton, Malpas and Grindley Brook Halt, was announced in February 1957 by the British Transport Commission. The railways were in a desperate financial state and with anticipated goods traffic never having materialised, the Branch was doomed from the moment the British Transport Commissioners announced operating losses exceeding £14,000 per annum. For six years afterwards, until 1963, the Branch staggered on as a goods line, running between Whitchurch, Malpas and Broxton.

Railwaymen knew this as the 'Broxton branch' and during the final days when it was 'freight only' a strange experiment took place with a Land Rover, adapted with both road and rail wheels. On one particular testing day the local hunt was out and the sight of this rather unusual vehicle speeding across the fields was sufficient to bring astonished riders to an abrupt halt. The Branch was also regularly used for training drivers of main-line diesels and in 1960/61, for a short period, the engine shed, at Whitchurch, housed a gas turbine-powered locomotive built by English Electric at the Vulcan Works, in Newton-le-Willows. Numbered GT3 this made several trial runs past the old stations and onto the North Wales coast line. Later, after the Branch finally ceased, local residents are said to have enjoyed an almost endless supply of free fuel from coal wagons abandoned between Chowley Oak and Broxton.

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Midnight on Sunday September 17, 1957, was set for the official closure of the Chester to Whitchurch passenger line but, as the Sunday service had been abandoned at the end of the war, the very last train



Whitchurch Station c1960.

to run was on the Saturday night, the 11.10pm out of what was then Chester General Station. Naturally a sombre occasion, the Chester Chronicle melodramatically likened it to a funeral. E.L. Thompson, Chester's top-hatted Station-master, conducted the last rites from Platform 7, appropriately witnessed, said the newspaper, by the 'Undertaker', one Ralph Jackson, a Swinton hardware retailer whose hobby was travelling on doomed trains and trams. Apparently he had arrived in the nick of time from Liverpool

where he had ridden on the last tram to leave the Pier Head. 'One doesn't question these things,' he told the Chronicle man. 'One simply obeys!'

At the controls of Engine 41266 was Driver Jimmy Major Picton, with his fireman Peter Heatley and guard Fred Evans, all of Whitchurch. Two misty-eyed lovers declared that a bus would not be the same; a worried mother predicted future travel sickness for her young daughter, and a youth in a tattered mack complained that Malpas by bus would be twopence dearer. Mr & Mrs Sydney Penk, of Higher Wyche, Malpas, shared the 'disgust' of Mrs Seddons, of Old Hall Street. However, Mrs Alice Allman, of Well Lane, Malpas, was more forthright in her condemnation of the decision to withdraw the service: 'Those of us who live in Malpas may now as well be dead. It



The last train. Driver Jimmy Picton, fireman Peter Heatley and guard Fred Evans all set to leave Chester on Saturday September 16, 1957.

will be very difficult for us to travel to Chester.’

The newspaperman noted: ‘It is sad to realise that the steam leviathan, which for almost ninety years has chugged its way along the rural route to Whitchurch, has now been replaced by a fleet of buses operated by Crosville Motor Company.’

The ‘mourners’, the last passengers, numbered forty-five. ‘I’ve just counted them,’ declared Stationmaster Thompson. At precisely 11.10pm, Engine 41266 whistled three times, fog signals detonated to mark the passing, and the Chester to Whitchurch passenger service vanished into history.



Passing Malpas in the final days of the ‘Broxton Branch’.  
Above: Derelict Broxton Station in the 1960s.



Malpas Station and Goods Shed.  
Left: The former trackbed from  
the site of Grindley Brook Halt.



Tattenhall Junction... a branch no more.



The Branch in its death throes. Deserted Broxton Station, early 1960s.



Gone but not forgotten.

Malpas Station, lovingly restored as commercial offices.



Left: Signpost between Tilston and Malpas, still points the way to Malpas Station.



Time to remember. At the start of the Second World War Whitchurch Station had a workforce of over ninety. The top photograph dates from 1964.