

CENTRAL WALES RAILWAY – 150TH ANNIVERSARY OF ITS OPENING

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the official opening of the 20 miles of railway between Knighton and Llandrindod Wells by the Central Wales Railway Company.

The opening of the Line, on Tuesday 10th October 1865, was marked by the running of a special train from Shrewsbury to Llandrindod followed by a banquet for 150 people in a marquee in the grounds of The Rock House (which later became The Rock Park Hotel), a short walk from Llandrindod Station.

When the train left Craven Arms, it was composed of 18 coaches hauled by two steam locomotives decorated with flags and bunting for the occasion. On arrival at Knighton Station, the train was met by a large crowd of well-wishers. Various dignitaries joined the train, foremost amongst whom were the Lord Lieutenant of Radnorshire, Sir John Walsh, and the local M.P., Mr. R.D. (later Sir Richard) Green Price.

The band of the Radnorshire Rifle Volunteers also boarded the train and was to entertain the passengers “with stirring marches and popular tunes of the day” during the journey to Llandrindod. As the train departed from Knighton Station, there was loud cheering from the townspeople and the air also resounded to the noise of detonators placed on the Line. A local newspaper reporter on board the train commented that “the line skirts round the town, commanding a good view of the church with its quaint old tower”. Describing the scenery in the Teme Valley between Knighton and Knucklas as “very grand”, the reporter also mentioned “the Creig-don rocks, so famed as the pleasant resort of picnic parties” and “the Castle Hill – a very prominent object”. Knucklas Viaduct was described as “massive and imposing” and “has at each approach small castellated columns and commands a good view of the little village of Knucklas, lying in the valley beneath. It is built entirely of local stone”. The reporter goes on to refer to “Llwyncoch (Llangunllo) Tunnel...cut through slate rock”, another major engineering achievement on this stretch of the Line.

When the train reached Llandrindod, the passengers were greeted by local people with “hearty cheering” despite heavy rain and the passengers, forming themselves into a procession and headed by the band of the Volunteers, then proceeded to the reception at The Rock House to the strains of “Men of Harlech”.

Rousing speeches were made by a number of the dignitaries present. The chairman of the Central Wales Railway Company, Sir Charles Rouse Boughton, proposed a toast first to the Queen (Victoria) and immediately afterwards to “the Bishop and clergy of the Diocese”, an illustration of the importance of the Church in Victorian Britain. Sir Charles said that he “believed it is one of the strongest signs of the popularity of the Church of England that whenever the toast is proposed, no matter in what district, it is always equally well received, although a large majority of the inhabitants may in some respects differ from her doctrine”.

The Rev.T.J. Thirlwall, Vicar of Nantmel, responding on behalf of at least eleven other clergymen present at the banquet, spoke of “the advantages which will be afforded by the ‘iron horse’ to the clergy of so large a diocese as St. David’s, enabling them to visit the Bishop when necessary”.

The 150th anniversary of the opening in 2015 is to be marked by events currently being planned to take place on Saturday 29th August and Saturday 10th October. In conjunction with the anniversary, volunteers are making a special effort this year to improve the general appearance of the stations along the Heart of Wales Line and in particular those stations on the Knighton to Llandrindod stretch of the Line. New volunteers willing to lend a hand in the work at Llangunllo and Knucklas stations would be much appreciated. If anyone is interested, please contact me at the following e-mail address: ‘georgescarfe357@btinternet.com’

Thank you. George Scarfe (Heart of Wales Line Travellers Association)