

## MEMORIES OF OVERTON

### The Railway

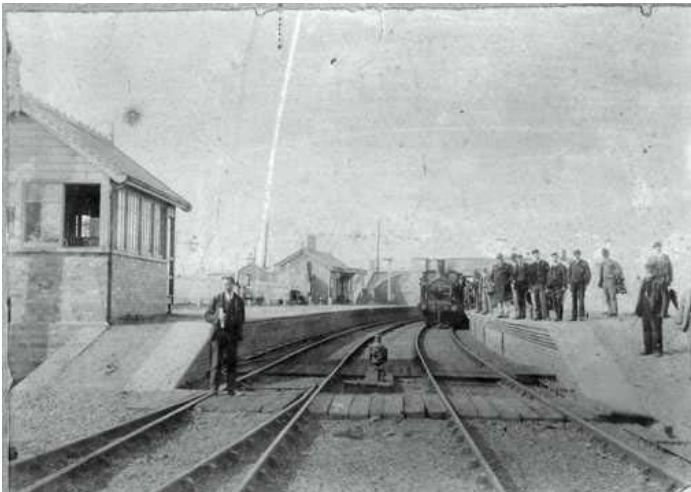
The Cambrian Railway obtained an Act of Parliament in 1885 to build the Wrexham to Ellesmere Railway. Its Chairman was Hon George Thomas Kenyon MP of Hardwick Hall, Ellesmere. Mrs Kenyon cut the first sod on 11<sup>th</sup> June 1892, followed by luncheon at the Wynnstay Arms, Wrexham. The line, running via Marchwiell, Bangor Is-y-coed, and Overton, was completed in 1895. Crossing the Dee was a major feat of engineering requiring a single 58-metre span, latticed steel girder bridge just to the north Bangor Is-y-coed, one of the longest single spans in the country, resting on massive sandstone abutments, and manufactured by Pearson and Knowles of Warrington.

The railway had intermediate stations serving Marchwiell, Bangor Is-y-coed and Overton (occupying part of the former open common at Lightwood Green).



*Overton Station c1900*

The Wrexham & Ellesmere line was opened July 2 1895 and was worked by the Cambrian Railways and, for a few years at least, this single track branch formed part of a tenuous cross country link between Manchester and Liverpool and the districts served by the Cambrian system.



The 1922-1923 Grouping ensured that the line became part of the Great Western Railway and it treated the route as an ordinary country branch line, and in the 1920s and 1930s this 12 mile single track route would have been very similar to scores of other rural lines.

It was the GWR that named the local station **Overton-on-Dee**. With the publishing of national railway timetables there was confusion between stations with similar names and GWR changed many place names to suit. This new name has since been adopted by many village organisations.

**Additional local stops** known as Trench Halt (east of Knolton) and Cae Dyah Halt or Cloy Halt (see *picture right*) were built to serve the scattered rural populations of these areas in 1914 and 1932 respectively. One memory is of catching the train from Elson to Cloy where it forgot to stop and had to back up. . One let the guard know if you wanted to get off by ringing a bell.



**In World War II** on Jun 10 1940, the line was closed to passengers as a wartime economy measure, but carried heavy munitions traffic. The route carried extra traffic to and from a large ordnance factory that had been established at Marchwiell, and in post-war years the site of this factory became an industrial estate that continued to provide freight traffic for the railway. Overton on Dee station was used for transporting wounded soldiers to the Military Hospital at Penley.

**The line reopened to passengers** on May 6 1946.

In 1948 it was absorbed into the western region of British Railways

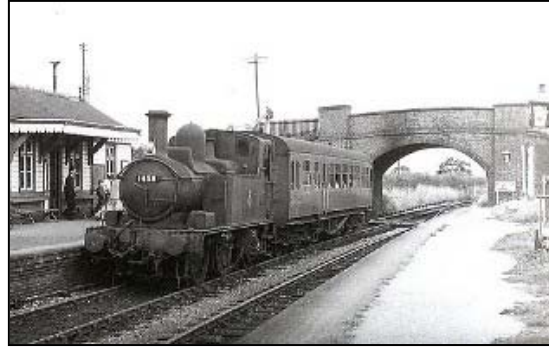
### **Overton Station**

Overton on Dee was the biggest and busiest of the three stations along the line, being located just under one mile north west of the village at Lightwood Green. To build the station and yard several squatters cottages (home to 5 families) were demolished and 3 more to create the road bridge. A nearby cottage was elevated to status of Stationmasters House. During the building it had been rented from the Bryn y Pys estate as the foreman's residence.

In 1901 David Rowland was Railway Porter and Richard Parry was Station master. Other Station masters included Mr M H Evans and Mr Hughes (1948-1961). The last station master / foreman was Mr A E Gregory, (*pictured right outside the Stationmasters house*)



The station had two through platforms with the main station buildings being situated on the down platform with a smaller shelter on the up. Both buildings were made of timber with timber clad. Two road bridges enclosed the station and goods yard area. The road bridge nearest the station acted as a footbridge giving access to the station platforms.



The station benefited a long loop which was 675 ft in Length, both platforms, being connected to adjoining land so were unusually wide.



The signal box which had 24 levers was situated at the Ellesmere end of the down platform, it controlled the passing loop and access to and from the Goods yard. The goods shed which had a 6-ton capacity crane was very similar, to that at Bangor on Dee.



The station was opened on October 2 1895. The picture shows local people from Penley and Overton waiting on the platform for the first train to go through the station. The boy second from the left is Frederick Owen (father of Miss Owen of Turning Street) next to him is Lord Kenyon of Gredington.

**Memory from George Cottrell of Whitchurch** His grandfather, Jobias Martindale was headmaster of Penley Madras School and is the man with a beard in the centre of the photo. On his left is his young son, and behind him his elder sister. The lady in the long black dress and small hat is his wife, who was senior mistress of the school.

The station worked a 14 hour day with 23 trains on Mon to Wed which were Wrexham and Oswestry market days. Generally five times a day trains crossed over at Overton. The last train to Ellesmere left Overton at 8.45pm, waited 15



mins at Ellesmere and returned to Overton for 9.25pm before carrying on to Wrexham.



(The picture shows exchanging tokens)

In the morning there was a “school train” at 8.10am taking “scholarship” boys and girls to Grove Park School and the Convent, Wrexham. It was never late even in snow or frost and never failed to run.

**Memory of Betty Williams** “All the station buildings looked similar. When travelling back from Wrexham to Overton, I thought the station was Bangor so did not get off but it was Overton. I had to stay on till Ellesmere where they made me get off the train and wait the 15 minutes and before I could get on again to return to Overton – very late!”

“There was a fire in the Waiting Room at Wrexham and the porter would check up Vicarage Hill to see if any passengers were coming before leaving.”

Those with babies remembered travelling in the guards’ van with the pram.

People walked or cycled from Overton to the station.

Servants from the big houses would meet trains to collect newspapers and packages,

Game, fish etc could be ordered from London by telegram,

Coal, bricks, stone were transported.

The accounts for the White Horse, Overton show they were running a carting business e.g. in 1902

*March 25 2 horses carting boards from Station*

*Sept 1 Carting 7 tons of bricks from Station*

*Oct 30 Wagon & 2 Horses to Station*

In 1905 the station was used for the transportation of huge pipes for the new Vyrnwy pipeline which crossed the area taking water to Liverpool.

There was an accident on Wednesday January 10th 1912 as the 4.30pm “Up” goods for Wrexham was leaving the station. Two wagons came off the line. A breakdown gang from Oswestry arrived and the line was cleared by 9pm.

### Tickets prices

There are memories of it costing 4d to travel from Elson to Cloy.

### Special market day tickets



Ellesmere Market: Tuesday 8.35am 10.10am 6d return

Oswestry Market: Wednesday & Saturday 8.35am, 10.10am and 1.52 pm on Saturdays 1s 8d return.

Whitchurch Market Friday 8.35am, 10.10am, 2s 1d return

Wrexham Market Monday, Thursday & Saturday 9.15am, 12.00, 2.30pm 3.40pm 1s 9d return

Passengers with market tickets were allowed 60 lbs of luggage or market produce "free at their own risk". Memories of when children, enjoying looking in the the Waiting Room and seeing what was awaiting collection and what people had ordered.

There was a weighbridge in the station yard.

**A number of local industries** were to benefit from proximity to both the canal and railway networks crossing Maelor Saesneg.



The Smithfield functioned between 1903 and at least 1919, possibly held every 2 weeks. Nov 1907 Frank Lloyd & Sons of Wrexham Horse Depository behind the Wynnstay in Wrexham started sales here with all kinds of stock. Thorn & Bessell held their "Annual Special Spring Sale" at Overton Station Smithfield May 1 1908. In 1910 Messrs Jones & Bromhead (who had started it in 1903), retook over the Smithfield.

Cattle & sheep pens were at the end of the stations western approach (where now is Rounda Timber). It also held a high reputation as a pig market.

The 1909 Ordnance Survey map shows 2 Auction Marts, one to the west near where the present telephone box is on the A539, and one to the east next to the railway line opposite the station building. It also shows a cattle pen just north of the signal box.

They appear to have closed during WWI and reopened in 1918 on alternate Tuesdays.



Coal merchants based at the station yard included Stocktons, Whitfields, Evisons and H E Roberts (who lived in Salop Road)

The Overton Brick and Tile Works, established at Lightwood Green on the line of the railway in the 1880s, was set up by 1886, and by 1899 the Bryn-y-Pys estate had established a brickyard consisting of engine house, machine shed, The Brick & Tile Works were modernized in the 1920s, and produced bricks, pipes, coping blocks and window sills. The brickyard

closed during the Second World War with the Overton Brick and Tile yard closing shortly after.

Den Owen remembers as a lad sliding down the sides of the pit and having to be dragged out by the manager Mr Haycocks and dried out in the kiln. His wellington boots are still some where in the clay.



Once the pumps were stopped the clay pit filled with water, making the present Lightwood Green pools.

*The brick & tile work chimneys are to the left and the CWS dairy chimney to the right. The station building is on the right hand edge*



A dairy once occupied the land next to the station and was owned by the Co-operative Wholesale Society.

Memory of Mrs. Fox working there making cheese and butter (*she is seated in centre of picture to right*). George Wright (*centre of photo with lorry*) also worked there and then moved to the Fole Creamery, nr Uttoxeter, Staffordshire to be in charge of transport



The siding at Overton had a spur added in December 1928 to the CWS Milk Depot. The Co-op Creamery closed shortly before WWII in competition for Whitchurch Ellesmere etc creameries. The chimney was demolished in the early 1960s.

The site was used as an Ordnance Depot during World War II.

### Closure

Sadly, the Wrexham & Ellesmere line did not survive the anti-railway purges of the 1960s, and its passenger services were withdrawn and the last train ran on on September 8 1962, following which the viaduct over the Dee north of Bangor Is-y-coed was blown up. The bridge at Hollybush was blown up by “Blaster Bates” (Derek Macintosh Bates, well known explosives and demolition expert) but took three attempts.



Freight traffic continued to operate over the northern end of the line until May 1981.

When the Overton signal box was being demolished Den Owen who worked at the brick works at the time found a BR(W)10713 whistle (British Railways Western Region Permanent Way) in the rubble.



Traces of the former Wrexham and Ellesmere Railway are visible in the landscape of the western side of Maelor Saesneg. Much of the former track is visible as embankments or cuttings, some of which form modern field boundaries or have been reused as tracks or have become flooded. Other distinctive visible features include the humped road bridges at Lightwood Green (Overton), the stone bridge abutments at Cloy Bank (Bangor Is-y-coed) and the surviving bridge at Trench (Maelor South).

### Useful reading:

The Wrexham & Ellesmere Railway by Stanley C Jenkins & John M Strange  
Publ: The Oakwood Press

Oswestry to Whitchurch, Country Railway Routes by Vic Mitchell & Keith Smith  
Publ: Middleton Press

A Millenium History of Penley by Shirley & Derrick Pratt. Publ: Bridge Books