OPENING OF THE CENTRAL WALES LINE BETWEEN CRAVEN ARMS AND LLANDOVERY : 1861-1868

Page uploaded 27 October 2026

This paper is concerned with three local companies:

Knighton Railway: Craven Arms – Knighton
Central Wales Railway: Knighton – Llandrindod (Wells)
Central Wales Extension Railway: Llandrindod (Wells) – Llandovery

Each company was promoted to obtain powers for and to build their own section of line. Although nominally independent of each other, the three shared the same Engineer (Henry Robertson, MP) and contractors (Brassey & Field) as the Shrewsbury & Hereford Railway, and they all passed the operation of services to established operators. South of Llandovery – where a route existed before the Central Wales Extension arrived in 1868 – is not within the scope of this paper.

The early history of line between Craven Arms and Llandovery, which completed the route by which the London & North Western could access southwest Wales, has been ill served by railway writers, from early railway periodicals down to today's internet. Perhaps the most egregious – and wide spread – error is that which gives the opening date of the final section to Llandovery some four months adrift, when there is ample contemporary evidence for the correct date. Amongst the sources of historical mis-information (not an exhaustive list) are *Railway Magazine* May/June 1906, Sep 1938, and May 1964, *The Locomotive* 15 Feb 1936, *Railway World* Sep 1958, *Regional History of Railways of Great Britain* vol.11 (2nd edn), pp.214-217, and vol.12 (2nd edn), p.210, the internet, such as https://powysenc.weebly.com/railways-central---lnwr.html , and, alas, *L. & N.W.R.: Opening dates of stations and sections of line*, pp.57 and 58 (RAIL 1005/260 at The National Archives). Unfortunately, little seems to have survived of the three companies' paperwork – even Powys Archives has only a few of their half-yearly reports to shareholders – so it is fortunate that the local press usually reproduced the text of those reports. Even so, they are annoyingly vague on the dates of commencement of goods and mineral services where these took place before passenger opening.

This paper seeks to at least remedy the misinformation that 'circularity of sources' has produced, and to note those events for which definitive dates are still required.

Acts of Parliament

Knighton Railway Act: 21 May 1858; 21 & 22 Vict. c. xix (19)
An Act for making a Railway from the Craven Arms Station of the Shrewsbury and Hereford Railway in the County of Salop to the Borough of Knighton in the County of Radnor; and for other Purposes.

Central Wales Railway Act: 13 Aug 1859; 22 & 23 Vict. c. cxxi (121)
An Act for making a Railway from Knighton to Llandrindod in the County of Radnor, to be called "The Central Wales Railway"; and for other Purposes.

Central Wales Extension Railway Act: 3 July 1860; 23 & 24 Vict. c. cxli (141)
An Act for making a Railway from Llandrindod in the County of Radnor to Llandovery in the County of Carmarthen, to be called "The Central Wales Extension Railway"; and for other Purposes.

Central Wales Extension Railway Act: 22 June 1863; 26 & 27 Vict. c. lxxvii (77)
An Act for enabling the Central Wales Extension Railway Company to raise additional Capital; to make working and other Agreements with the London and North-western Railway Company; and for other Purposes.

Central Wales Railway Act: 22 June 1863; 26 & 27 Vict. c. lxxix (79)

An Act for the Amalgamation of the Knighton and the Central Wales Railway Companies; for authorizing Arrangements between those Companies, or either of them, and the London and North-western Railway Company; and for other Purposes.

No 'effective date' for the amalgamation (which did not include the CWE) is given in this Act as it was not intended to occur until the line was completed to Llandovery (company report, Shrewsbury Chronicle, 6 Sep 1867). Thus it did not take place until 30 June 1868, as part of the vesting of the three companies in the LNWR at that date (co report, Eddowes's Shrewsbury Journal 2 Sep 1868).

Clause 59 also provided for agreements with LNW over working and traffic.

Central Wales Extension Railway Act: 30 April 1866; 29 & 30 Vict. c. iii (3)

An Act to extend the Time for the Completion of the Central Wales Extension Railway; and for other Purposes.

London and North Western Railway (Knighton, Central Wales and Central Wales Extension Railways Transfer) Act: 25 June 1868; 31 & 32 Vict. c. xxxviii (38)

An Act for vesting the several Undertakings of the Knighton, the Central Wales, and the Central Wales Extension Railway Companies in the London and North-western Railway Company; and for other Purposes.

This led to vesting of the three predecessor companies – effectively from 30 June 1868 (see the provisions of clauses 6 and 8).

Opening dates of lines and stations

Unless otherwise stated:

- stations opened from the same date as the section of line
- station name changes are as derived from *Bradshaw's ... Guide.*

Knighton Railway

Worked by Thomas Brassey (lessee of Shrewsbury & Hereford Railway) until 30 June 1862 and by LNWR from 1 July 1862.

Craven Arms – Knighton :
Goods Jan 1861

First special train to Knighton, for VIPs, ran 16 Oct 1860 (*Hereford Journal* 17 Oct 1860)

Company's return to government for year ended 31 Dec 1860 (RAIL 1053/28) shows no "working expenditure" so line not in traffic that year. *Such traffic figures did appear for 1861, so they had not been subsumed within Shrewsbury & Hereford statistics. Sources asserting Craven Arms – Bucknell opened in Oct 1860 must therefore be discounted.*

Opening notice (dated 21 Feb 1861) for passenger service from 6 Mar 1861 added: "Knighton and Bucknall *(sic)* stations will be opened for Goods and Mineral traffic." but no intermediate station names or timings shown in the timetable. (*Shrewsbury Chronicle* 1 Mar 1861)

Letter in *Hereford Times* 19 Jan 1861 states "engine" (presumably goods train) running "daily" – but not serving Bucknell regularly while report in *Hereford Journal* 13 Mar 1861 noted that goods had already been operating to Knighton. Company's half-yearly meeting 16 Mar 1861, in confirming line had opened for "general traffic" on 6 Mar, added that "previous to that date it had been used for mineral traffic" (presumably coal) from an unspecified date (*Hereford Journal* 20 Mar 1861). The Central Wales Extension Railway half-yearly meeting on 28 Feb had already observed that the Knighton Railway "has been opened for goods traffic for some time." (*Hereford Times* 2 March 1861).

Passengers 6 March 1861

Inspected for Board of Trade by Col Yolland 2 Mar 1861 (report dated 4 Mar 1861 – MT6/23/19).

Line first appears Bradshaw March 1861, p.40: "Opens 6th inst." (with intermediate stations shown in station bank but no intermediate *times* until April issue)

Opening notice (somewhat prematurely dated 21 Feb 1861) for passenger service from 6 Mar 1861 likewise shows no intermediate stations (*Shrewsbury Chronicle* 1 Mar 1861)

Company's half-yearly meeting 16 Mar 1861 confirmed line had opened for "general traffic" on 6 Mar (*Hereford Journal* 20 Mar 1861).

Stations:

Broome: given as Broom in Mar 1861; Broom & Aston from Apr 1861 to Nov 1862; Broom from Dec 1862 to June 1863; Broome from July 1863 to June 1864; Broome & Aston from July 1864 to Mar 1867 (except that northbound was Broom & Aston for Mar and Apr 1866 only – *presume typo?*); Broome from Apr 1867 to *at least Dec 1868*

Hopton Heath

Bucknell: given as Bucknall in Mar 1861 *(typo?)*; Bucknell from Apr 1861 *(appeared as Bucknall in company's advert in Eddowes's Shrewsbury Journal 16 Apr 1862 and in RCH Hand-book of Stations 1862 until amended 1865 - typo?)*

Knighton: suffix "for Presteigne" added June 1867 to Sep 1867; suffix (Presteigne), in parentheses, from Oct 1867 *to at least Dec 1868*

Central Wales Railway

Worked by LNWR

Knighton – Knucklas :

Goods ca. Aug 1862

Special train to Knucklas, for VIPs 25 May 1861 (*Hereford Journal* 28 May 1861) *but this did* ***not*** *mark start of goods service*

Company's half-yearly meeting 8 Mar 1862 reported: "The station at Knucklas is now nearly ready for the reception of goods and minerals, and when completed, the portion of the line from Knighton to Knucklas will be opened for the above traffic." (*Hereford Times* 15 March 1862). Adverts in July 1862 for a local property said the station would "shortly be opened". Company's half-yearly meeting on 30 Aug 1862 reported "now open for mineral traffic" (*Shrewsbury Chronicle*, 5 Sep 1862)

Passengers 1 Dec 1865

Inspected for Board of Trade by Capt Tyler (reports dated 25 Oct 1865 – MT29/26 p. 527 – and 18 Nov 1865 – MT29/26 p. 570)

Ceremonial opening 10 Oct 1865 (*Eddowes's Shropshire Journal* 11 Oct 1865)

Line first appears Bradshaw Dec 1865 ("opening this month") *No press report traced of start date*

Station:

Knucklas

Knucklas – Llandrindod:

Goods ca. Oct 1865

Ceremonial opening 10 Oct 1865 (*Eddowes's Shropshire Journal* 11 Oct 1865); date *may* also have marked start of goods service (for which no press report traced)

Passengers 1 Dec 1865

Inspected for Board of Trade by Capt Tyler (reports dated 25 Oct 1865 – MT29/26 p. 527 – and 18 Nov 1865 – MT29/26 p. 570)

Ceremonial opening 10 Oct 1865 (*Eddowes's Shropshire Journal* 11 Oct 1865)

Line first appears Bradshaw Dec 1865 ("opening this month") *No press report traced of start date*

Stations:

Llangunllo: a crossing place (but not station) here, named Llyncoch, appears in Tyler's report but did *not* open as station under that name; first appears Mar 1866, as Llangunlo, until Jun 1866; Llangunllo from Jul 1866

Llanbister Road: not mentioned in inspection reports; first appears Bradshaw Apr 1867, for all trains Thursdays only; reduced to one round trip ThO from July 1868 to Nov 1868; most trains call all weekdays from Dec 1868 (*confirmed by LNW Officers' Meeting min.3727 (RAIL 410/588).*

Dolau

Penybont: did *not* open as Crossgates or Cross Gates; appears, as Penybont, Dec 1865 *to at least Dec 1868*

Llandrindod: suffix (Wells) (in parentheses) added June 1867 *to at least Dec 1868*

Central Wales Extension Railway

worked by LNWR

Llandrindod – Builth Road :

Goods 1 Nov 1866

Passengers 1 Nov 1866

Inspected for Board of Trade by Col. Yolland (report dated 15 Aug 1866 – MT29/27 p.485 – with subsequent comment by Capt Tyler 30 Oct 1866 – MT29/27 p.667)

Line first appears Bradshaw Oct 1866 with no timings

Opened 1 Nov 1866 (*Times* 13 Feb 1867 in LNW company report; *Eddowes's Shrewsbury Journal* 3 June 1868 *(sic)*)

Station:

Builth Road: prior to opening, known as Cwmbach in Yolland's report and Llechrhyd in Tyler's follow-up; a further report about this station by Maj Hutchinson 27 Mar 1867 – MT29/28 p.138

Builth Road – Garth:

Goods 1 Nov 1866

LNWR officers' Meeting minute 1519 17 Oct 1866 - RAIL 410/587 – implies same date as opening to Builth Road

Passengers 11 March 1867

Inspected for Board of Trade by Capt Tyler (report dated 6 Nov 1866 – MT29/27 p.672). *Tyler noted that, at this date, exchange siding with Mid Wales line not complete.*

Opened 11 March 1867 (*Brecon County Times* 16 Mar 1867; LNWR Officers' Meeting minute 1891 13 Mar 1867 – RAIL 410/588; *Times* 15 Aug 1867 in LNW company report)

Line first appears Bradshaw Apr 1867

Stations:

Cilmery: opened as Cefn-y-Bedd until June 1868; Cilmery from July 1868 *to at least Dec 1868*

Garth

Garth – Llanwrtyd:

Goods 6 May 1867

Passengers 6 May 1867

Inspected for Board of Trade by Capt Tyler (report dated 2 May 1867 – MT6/45/7)

Line first appears Bradshaw June 1867

Opened 6 May 1867 (LNWR Officers' Meeting minute 2054 15 May 1867 – RAIL 410/588; *Times* 15 Aug 1867 in LNW company report; *Eddowes's Shrewsbury Journal* 3 June 1868 *(sic)*)

Stations:

Llangammarch: had opened by Aug 1867 (letter *Hereford Times* 31 Aug 1867) (no mention in Tyler's report nor LNW Officers' Meeting minutes); first appears in Bradshaw Sep 1867 *to at least Dec 1868*; suffix "Wells" added subsequently

Llanwrtyd (Wells): suffix (Wells) appeared in parentheses *to at least Dec 1868*

Llanwrtyd (Wells) – Llandovery:

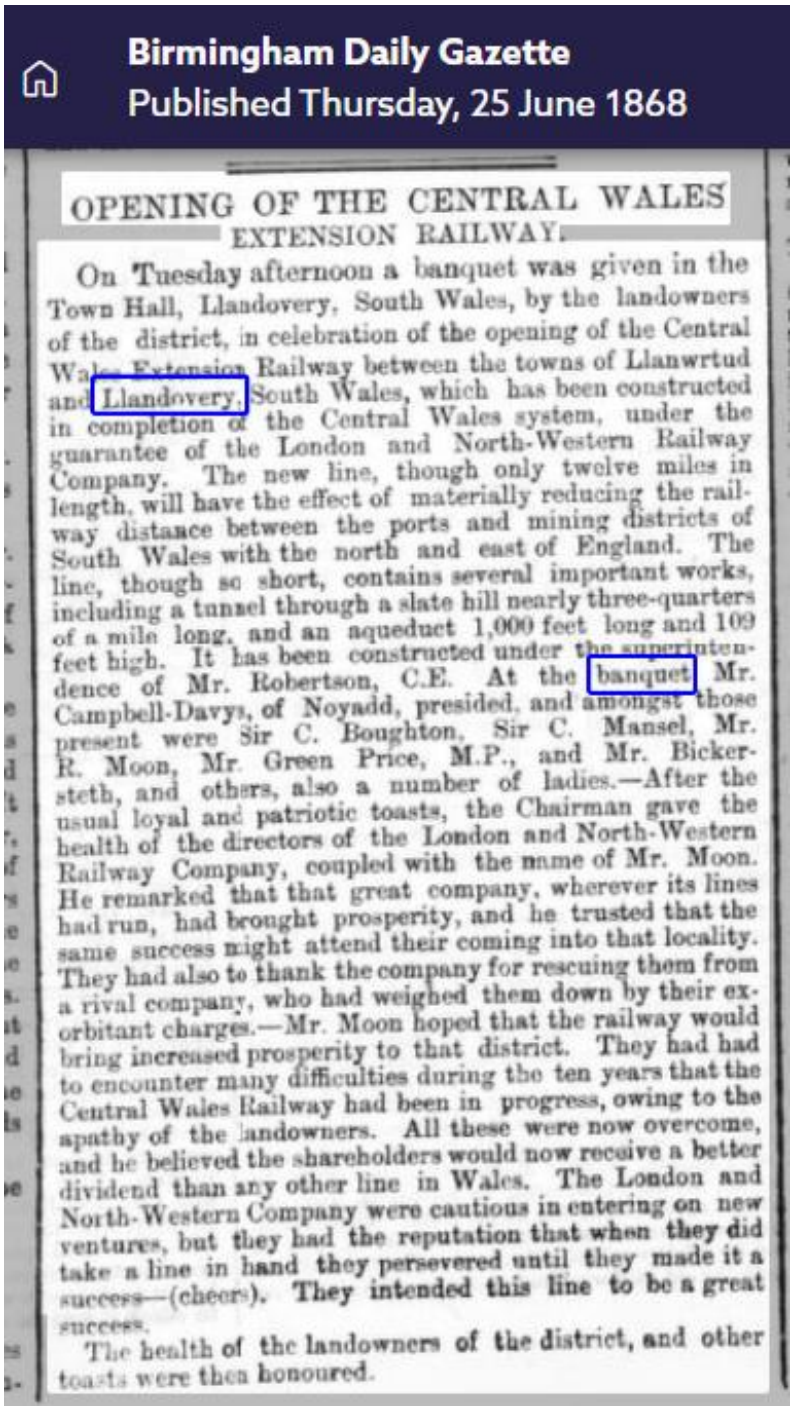
Goods 1 June 1868

First freight ran 7 or 14 May (*Welshman* 15 May 1868) – *presumably a test train*

Opened for regular traffic 1 June 1868 (*Welshman* 5 June 1868; RCH Goods Managers' Conference min. 2999 of 23 Jul 1868 (RAIL 1080/182))

Passengers 8 June 1868

Inspected for Board of Trade by Lt.Col Rich (report dated 1 June 1868 – MT29/29 p.207)
Line first appears Bradshaw June 1868 with note "The line ... is expected to open in the middle of the month"; full service in July 1868 issue
LNWR advert in *Welshman* 5 June 1868 confirms date as 8 June.



Birmingham Daily Gazette
Published Thursday, 25 June 1868

OPENING OF THE CENTRAL WALES EXTENSION RAILWAY.

On Tuesday afternoon a banquet was given in the Town Hall, Llandovery, South Wales, by the landowners of the district, in celebration of the opening of the Central Wales Extension Railway between the towns of Llanwrtud and Llandovery, South Wales, which has been constructed in completion of the Central Wales system, under the guarantee of the London and North-Western Railway Company. The new line, though only twelve miles in length, will have the effect of materially reducing the railway distance between the ports and mining districts of South Wales with the north and east of England. The line, though so short, contains several important works, including a tunnel through a slate hill nearly three-quarters of a mile long, and an aqueduct 1,000 feet long and 109 feet high. It has been constructed under the superintendence of Mr. Robertson, C.E. At the banquet, Mr. Campbell-Davys, of Noyadd, presided, and amongst those present were Sir C. Boughton, Sir C. Mansel, Mr. R. Moon, Mr. Green Price, M.P., and Mr. Bickersteth, and others, also a number of ladies.—After the usual loyal and patriotic toasts, the Chairman gave the health of the directors of the London and North-Western Railway Company, coupled with the name of Mr. Moon. He remarked that that great company, wherever its lines had run, had brought prosperity, and he trusted that the same success might attend their coming into that locality. They had also to thank the company for rescuing them from a rival company, who had weighed them down by their exorbitant charges.—Mr. Moon hoped that the railway would bring increased prosperity to that district. They had had to encounter many difficulties during the ten years that the Central Wales Railway had been in progress, owing to the apathy of the landowners. All these were now overcome, and he believed the shareholders would now receive a better dividend than any other line in Wales. The London and North-Western Company were cautious in entering on new ventures, but they had the reputation that when they did take a line in hand they persevered until they made it a success—(cheers). They intended this line to be a great success.

The health of the landowners of the district, and other toasts were then honoured.

A very full report of the celebration banquet, held at Llandovery on 23 June 1868, to mark the opening, appears at page 5 of Liverpool Mercury, 25 June 1868. Thus, the widely quoted date of 8 Oct 1868 for the opening (which appears to have originated from Railway Magazine June 1906 p. 475) is without foundation.

Station:
Cynghordy
(Llandovery was already open from the south)

[*,*] Note that none of the (goods) station openings shown above was reported through the RCH Goods Managers' Conference minutes (RAIL 1080/165 to /168 or RAIL 1080/180 to /182), although the opening for goods of the Llanwrtyd – Llandovery section of line was reported.

Extracts from annual Railway Returns reports compiled by Board of Trade for Parliament (RAIL 1053/28 and /29)

Return at 30 June 1860: Knighton Railway: Employees: 1 Manager, 1 Engineer; 12 miles in course of construction *(so none in traffic). No mention of Central Wales.*

Return at 31 Dec 1860: Knighton Railway: no "working expenditure" *(so no line in traffic). No mention of Central Wales.*

Return at 31 Dec 1861: Knighton Railway: 12 miles open (909 passenger trains plus 1130 mixed trains run during year); rolling stock "provided by Shrewsbury & Hereford Rly".
Central Wales Railway: not yet in traffic

Return at 31 Dec 1862: Knighton Railway: 12 miles open; rolling stock now provided by LNWR.
Central Wales Railway and CW Extension Railway: not yet in traffic.

Return at 31 Dec 1863: Knighton Railway: "see L&NW" *(figures included in L&NW totals)*
Central Wales Railway and CW Extension Railway: not yet in traffic – but CW noted as worked by L&NW from 12 Aug 1863 under 26&27 Vic. c.77 *(which makes no sense!)*

Return at 31 Dec 1864: Knighton Railway: "see L&NW" *(figures included in L&NW totals)*
Central Wales Railway and CW Extension Railway: no traffic return provided *(from which no conclusion can be drawn…)*

Return at 31 Dec 1865: Knighton Railway: "see L&NW" *(figures included in L&NW totals)*
Central Wales Railway and CW Extension Railway: no traffic return provided *(from which no conclusion can be drawn…)*

Return at 31 Dec 1866: Knighton, Central Wales Railway and CW Extension Railway: all worked by L&NW *(figures included in L&NW totals).*
Central Wales and Central Wales Extension worked by L&NW from 1 Jan 1866 under 26&27 Vic c.79 and c.77 respectively *(which makes no more sense than it did in 1863 return!).*

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References prefixed MT6, MT29 and RAIL refer to files at The National Archives, Kew.

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