
Synopsis

Celebration of the opening of the line

Themes: Opening ceremony
 Navvies
 Locomotive Drivers
 Locomotive Firemen

Text

Well now we've got a railway, / The truth to you I'll tell,
To be opened in August, / The people like it well;
We've heard a deal of rumour / O'er all the country wide,
We'll never get a railway, / The people can't provide.

Well now we have the carriages, / For pleasure trips to ride;
The Milford it shall run us, / And Henry lad shall drive;
There's also Jack the stoker, / So handy and so free,
He lives now at Llandiman, / A buxom lad is he.

We have a first rate gentleman / Who does very nigh us dwell,
And he has got a partner, / The people like him well;
Look at the trucks my boys, / Their names you'll plainly see;
They've took another Railway, / There's plenty of work for we.

Well now our gen'rous masters / Do handsomely provide
A store of meat and drink my boys, / Come out and take a ride;
For we are in our ribbons, / And dress'd so neat and trim;
Drink up my charming Sally, / We'll fill it to the brim.

When these few days are over, / The navvies they will part,
And go back to their gangers / With blithe and cheerful heart;
And Jack he will be hooting, / And getting drunk full soon;
I wish there was a railway / To be opened every moon.

And now I have to finish, / And shall conclude my song;
I hope and trust my good friends, / I've stated nothing wrong;
All you young men and maidens, / That are so full of play,
I hope you'll all take tickets / On that most glorious day.

Glossary:

Buxom	Full of health, vigour, and good temper
Gangers	Ganger: Leader of a gang of navvies often combining the roles of foreman and sub-contractor for labour.

Source of Text: Gasquoine, C. P. *The Story of the Cambrian: A Biography of a Railway*.
Wrexham and Oswestry: Woodall, Minshall, Thomas & Co., 1922. pp. 23-
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An online version of the book has been created as part of the Gutenberg project: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/20074/20074-h/20074-h.htm>

Music. No tune given

Source of Music: No tune given

Date: 1859

Printer: Not known

Where Printed:

The source says that the author brought a stock prints for sale so the ballad was probably printed in or near Llanidloes.

Author :

The source says that "One of the workmen, who was also, at any rate, in the opinion of his colleagues, something of a poet, stepped forward, and [sang], amidst roars of laughter and tremendous cheering,"

Notes of the song:

This is one of the few songs in the collection definitely attributed to a navvy.

"*And Henry lad shall drive / There's also Jack the stoker, / ... / He lives now at Llandinam*" :- The railways created new sorts of employment, in this case driver and stoker. Llandinam (rather than "Landiman") was a station between Llanidloes and Newtown

"*Well now our gen'rous masters / Do handsomely provide / A store of meat and drink my boys*". :- The navvies were often provided with a meal and sometimes drink as part of the opening celebrations.

"*For we are in our ribbons, / And dress'd so neat and trim*" :- Navvies were sometimes provided with special clothes (such as smocks) to be worn at opening ceremonies. Often they marched in procession. Trimming such clothes with ribbons would not have been unusual in the mid-19th century.

"*And Jack he will be hooting, / And getting drunk full soon*" :- Train crews were notorious for being drunk on duty.

Historical Background

The opening ceremony was held on Wednesday, August 31st 1859. It was described by C. P. Gasquoine in *The Story of the Cambrian; A Biography of a Railway* as follows.

"The day fixed was Wednesday, August 31st, and a local newspaper gives us some account of the proceedings:—
"Preparations were made on an extensive scale, and the day was ushered in by cannon firing, bell-ringing, and the

hearty congratulations of the people of the town, with their country friends, who flocked in to take part in the proceedings. The houses were elegantly decorated with flags and banners, flowers and evergreens, and a variety of mottoes, more or less appropriate. Amongst others we noticed, on the Old Market Hall (which, by the way, it was a charity to hide from the gaze of strangers), a profusion of flags, with a large banner in the centre, 'Hail, Star of Brunswick.' The Red Lion exhibited a local tribute to its friend, by placing on the door 'Welcome, Whalley, champion of our rights.' The Railway Station was profusely decorated, and the Queen's Head displayed an elegant archway of leaves and flowers. The Trewythen Arms was also gaily covered with flags, and numbers of private houses displayed a variety of gay decorations. The cold and wet state of the weather in no way damped the ardour of the men of Montgomeryshire, and they were rewarded by a speedy dispersion of clouds, and the grateful warmth of the noonday sun. Llanidloes was all alive; business was entirely suspended and soon after 9 o'clock a large crowd collected near the public rooms, where a procession was formed, headed by the Plasmadoc Brass Band, and accompanied in the following order by:—

The Mayor (W. Swancott, Esq.), and the Corporation consisting of Messrs. R. Homes, E. Clayton, T. Davies, T. F. Roberts, D. Snead; L. Minshall, Pugh, J. Jarman, Hamer, J. Mendus Jones,

Flag.

Banner,—'Whither Bound?' 'To Milford.'

Streamer. Banner. Streamer.

(With the inscription):

'G. H. Whalley, whose unceasing exertions are now crowned with success.'

Mr. G. H. Whalley, Chairman.

Deputy Chairman and Secretary, Directors.

Banner,—'The spirited contractors, Messrs. Davies & Savin.'

Streamer. Streamer.

Banner,—'Our Esteemed Patroness, Mrs. A. W. Owen.'

Mrs. Owen followed in a carriage.

Guests and Shareholders.

Ladies (two and two).

Gentlemen (two and two).

Streamer. Streamer.

Banner,—'Prosperity to the Towns of Llanidloes and Newtown.'

Excavators (with bannerets).

Flag,—'Live and let Live.'

The Public.

"The procession was marshalled by Mr. Marpole Lewis, and after parading the streets, was met by Mrs. Owen, of Glansevern, who was accompanied by some lady friends and Mr. Brace, and at another point by Mr. Whalley, the chairman of the company. These arrivals were acknowledged with vociferous cheering. The procession, like a rolling

snowball, gained bulk as it proceeded, and before it reached the station, comprehended a very large proportion of the inhabitants,—ladies and gentlemen,—with a good sprinkling of their neighbours. At the station there was a considerable delay, awaiting the arrival of the train from Newtown. At last it made its appearance, and the band struck up ‘See the Conquering Hero comes,’—an air far more appropriate when applied to the ‘locomotive’ than to one-half of the heroes to whom it has hitherto done honour. The Mayor of Llanidloes, with the Corporation, Mrs. Owen and party, and Mr. Whalley, accompanied by a very large number of the inhabitants, then took their seats, and amidst the cheers of those left behind, and counter cheers of the passengers, the train moved off and proceeded slowly towards Newtown.

“The train arrived shortly after 12 o’clock, when the procession re-formed and escorted the Mayor and Corporation of Llanidloes, Mrs. Owen, of Glansevern, Mr. Whalley, and other visitors, to Newtown Hall, where an elegant *déjeuner* had been provided by Dr. Slyman. The decorations at Newtown Hall were chaste and beautiful. The verandah at the front, was tastefully ornamented with flowers and evergreens, surmounted by a number of elegant fuschias, in the centre of which stood out a prettily worked ‘Prince of Wales’ Feathers.’ A variety of flags were placed around the pleasure ground, which gave a very striking effect to the scene.”

After the party had partaken of refreshments, there were toasts and mutual congratulations, and the procession tramped back to the station.

“Again there was a little delay, awaiting the train from Llanidloes (says our chronicler), and it was half-past three o’clock before *The Train* of the day fairly started. Filling the carriages and trucks was no joke. Admirable arrangements had been made, and the ladies were first accommodated with seats. One or two gentlemen did attempt to take their place before this arrangement was fully carried out, but they were very unceremoniously brought out again, amidst the ironical cheers of the outsiders. At last the forty-eight trucks and carriages were loaded, and, at a moderate estimate, we should say, 3,000 people were in the train. The two new engines, The Llewelyn and The Milford, were attached to the carriages, and were driven by Mr. T. D. Roberts and Mr. T. E. Minshall. Although the train was so heavily laden with passengers, there was a large crowd of people left to cheer as it slowly passed out of the Station. The appearance of this monster train was magnificent. More than 2,000 of the passengers were in open trucks, and at certain points, where there was a curve in the line, and a good sight could be obtained, the train, as it wound its way through the valley, presented a scene not easily to be erased from the memory.

“Soon after four o’clock Llanidloes Station was reached, and the passengers alighted amidst the shouts of the inhabitants, who had come to welcome them. A large circle was formed in the field adjoining the Station, and Mr. Whalley introduced to those assembled Mrs. Owen, of Glansevern, who declared the line to be opened.”

It hardly required her stirring words to enlist the enthusiasm of the company concerning the economic change which the railways were to bring to Wales. Derelict acres were to be brought into cultivation; “the very central town of the ancient Principality,” in which that ceremony was taking place, was to become the capital of a new prosperity, and as for Mr. Whalley, were not that day’s proceedings “a chapter more honourable than any wreath of laurel that could be won on the battle field by success in war?” The plaudits of the assembled confirmed the sentiment, and “a rush was then made for the tent where the luncheon was provided. Here again the ladies had the same proper attention paid to them; the sterner sex was kept out until they could be accommodated with seats. After a short delay the tent was well filled with visitors, and upwards of 300 sat down to lunch. Grace was said by the Rector of Llanidloes, and for a season the clatter of knives and forks was the only sound to be heard.”

Small wonder! For the afternoon was well advanced, and the time-table had gone rather awry. But that did not in the least damp the ardour of the company. Refreshed by their belated meal, more toasts were honoured, more speeches made, and the future continued to assume the most roseate hue. The district, declared one orator, was destined to become “the abode of smiling happiness,” and Newtown and Llanidloes “the haunts and hives of social industry.” It was, said another, the first link in a chain “which must, ere long, form one of the greatest and most important trunk lines in the kingdom.” “People,” exclaimed a third, “laughed at it because it had no head or tail”; but let the scoffers wait and see! With all these glowing anticipations, proceedings became so protracted that the ladies had to withdraw, but the gentlemen went on drinking toasts with undiminished energy. They drank to the Chairman; they drank to the Secretary; they drank to the Engineer, and the Contractors, and the Bankers who had lent them the money, and to the success of the other railways springing up around them, including the Mid-Wales, the first sod of which was to be cut in a few days’ time, with what strange accompaniment will be noted in a subsequent chapter. Not until the health of the Press,—“may its perfect independence ever expose abuses and advocate what is just, through evil and through good report,”—had been duly honoured did the company disperse.

The workmen, too, were entertained, with good fare and more speeches. Salvers and cake baskets were presented to Messrs. Davies and Savin. Master Edward Davies, aged 5, and Master Tom Savin, aged 6, were held up aloft, and presented with watches, and the cheering, which had gone on almost continuously for hours, broke forth afresh. One

of the workmen, who was also, at any rate, in the opinion of his colleagues, something of a poet, stepped forward, and, "amidst roars of laughter and tremendous cheering," sang his thanks as follows:—"

Here appears the song reproduced above

"When the song was concluded, Colonel Wynn purchased the first copy, for which the fortunate bard received a shilling. Several other gentlemen followed this example, and the poet must have regretted that his stock in trade was so limited.

"During the latter part of the proceedings, several had left the enclosure to join the merry dance, to the strains of the Welshpool Band, in the adjoining field. We cannot use the usual stock phrase of the penny-a-liner and say to 'trip it on the light fantastic toe,' for in several instances a pair of stalwart navvies might be seen in anything but dancing pumps kicking out most gloriously. In another part of the field, a party were deeply engaged in an exciting game of football. All was mirth and jollity. From the oldest to the youngest, the richest to the poorest, every one seemed to try to get as much enjoyment out of the evening as possible, and if there were any grumblers to be found at Messrs. Davies and Savin's monster picnic, the fault must have been with themselves.

"The same evening rejoicings were being kept up at Llanidloes. All the school children of the place were feasted in the tent. Mr. Whalley (the 'champion of the people's rights,' as the flag had it) was chaired through the town, and the evening was finished by a ball. And on the following day, several loaves of bread and gallons of porter were sent by Messrs. Davies and Savin to the poor people of Llandinam." Finally, a medal was struck in commemoration of the event, and presented to the workmen.

Thus, sixty-three years ago, did the community, already conscious of the momentous influence the steam engine was exerting upon the social and economic condition of the countryside, but yet to discover the not less remarkable potentialities of the electric or the petrol spark applied to the problems of transport, herald the birth of the infant Cambrian."

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/20074/20074-h/20074-h.htm>

The Llanidloes and Newton line was part of a greater scheme to provide links to the deep water port at Milford Haven. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Llanidloes_and_Newtown_Railway. hence the banner bearing the words '*Whither Bound? To Milford.*' Carried in the procession.

See also Bar203, *Manchester & Milford Railway; A Journey With the Railway from Pembroke to Strata Florida*.