

Colwall and the Railway *by Celia Kellett* **19th Century Accidents and Mishaps**

The Worcester and Hereford Railway opened on Friday 13 September 1861 with little drama, just a small newspaper advertisement of its timetable, confusingly headed 'West Midlands Railway'. To celebrate the sesquicentenary anniversary of the opening of this railway line, Gordon Wood wrote a booklet in 2011, which included much detail of the construction from Worcester, across the River Severn to Malvern, Colwall and Ledbury and on to Hereford.

During the building of the railway there were deaths and injuries, including some involving the boring of the tunnel through Colwall, others during its later maintenance. Victorian railway building involved much manual labour; it was pick and shovel work – no JCBs, hard hats or steel toe-capped boots, and long before today's health and safety measures.

Boring the tunnels involved using gunpowder to blast through the granite and other rock of the Malverns; the much safer dynamite was not invented by Alfred Nobel until 1866. In September 1857 an accidental spark triggered an explosion, as a result of which one man lost his left hand and the little finger of his right hand; many of his workmates escaped seriously bruised. A year later another miner, James Field, a married man with four children, was killed instantly when a flying rock struck his head – the fuse was a little too short, so that he had been unable to reach the safety barrier before the explosion.

On Wednesday 4 April 1860 a fatal accident occurred in a cutting near the Wyche, when a ton or more of soil slipped from the top of the embankment onto George Williams aged 35 years, a navy employed by the railway contractors. He was badly crushed and taken back to his lodgings in Colwall Green, where the Railway Chaplain, Rev E W Culsha attended him. A messenger was speedily sent

to Ledbury for the surgeon, Mr. William Griffin, who came as quickly as he could, but on seeing the patient, immediately said that the injuries were beyond his medical skill. Mr. Williams died within an hour and a half of the accident, and a verdict of 'Accidental death' was returned at the inquest the following Saturday. That same evening he was buried in Colwall churchyard, where an impressive address was delivered at the graveside by Rev Culsha.



Magic Lantern Slide of original tunnel (Colwall end)

In May of 1861, only a few months before the official opening, there was an accident at the Colwall end of the Malvern tunnel. Several workmen were laying bricks near the No 3 air shaft, when about five yards of stonework gave way and fell in, burying two of the men. Thomas Peacock and J Bray were miners from Leicestershire. It took 45 minutes of hard labour to unearth the first man, Peacock who had severe chest and body injuries and was carried to his lodgings and attended by a doctor from Malvern and duly recovered. Bray was not found until some three hours after the fall, but amazingly he had only minor injuries.

Only a year after the opening of the railway, in September 1862 one of the ventilation shafts collapsed, falling some 15 feet into the tunnel below. Luckily no train was in the tunnel at the time, but it took four days to remove the debris and repair the tunnel arch before trains could run again. This caused quite a sensation among the visitors to Malvern, a fashionable resort at that time. The following February another small section fell but was repaired within a few hours. The problems with the Malvern to Colwall tunnel continued; sometimes carriages emerged from the tunnel with a brick or two on their roofs, and eventually, early in the 20th century, it was decided to build a new tunnel.

Boys have always been fascinated by railways. In February 1886 two boys – James Goode and Ernest Whatmore, both aged about 16 – were charged with having thrown iron bars down a ventilation shaft onto the rails within the tunnel between Malvern and Colwall, with intent to endanger the safety of passengers. The offence was reported by a train driver whose train ran over them, fortunately without derailing. Although only teenagers, at the end of the court case the following May they were sentenced to four months hard labour each.

In July 1896 a spark from the engine was thought to be the cause of a fire on a goods train truck full of tar sheets; fortunately it was noticed when halfway between Ledbury and Colwall. On reaching Colwall station the truck was quickly unhooked and the fire extinguished. Considerable damage was done to the truck, and the sheets were completely destroyed.

In November 1899 a further fatal accident occurred at Colwall station. James Gittins, a labourer, had been sent to get some coal from the coal merchant's yard there. While he was waiting, a heavy storm began, and he sheltered under the end of a truck. Unfortunately a goods train began shunting, and he was crushed between the buffers, being killed instantly. The inquest returned a verdict of 'Accidental death', exonerating those involved from blame.

These various incidents were all found by searching the British Library's website of British newspapers, which are also available on 'Find My Past'.

Celia Kellett

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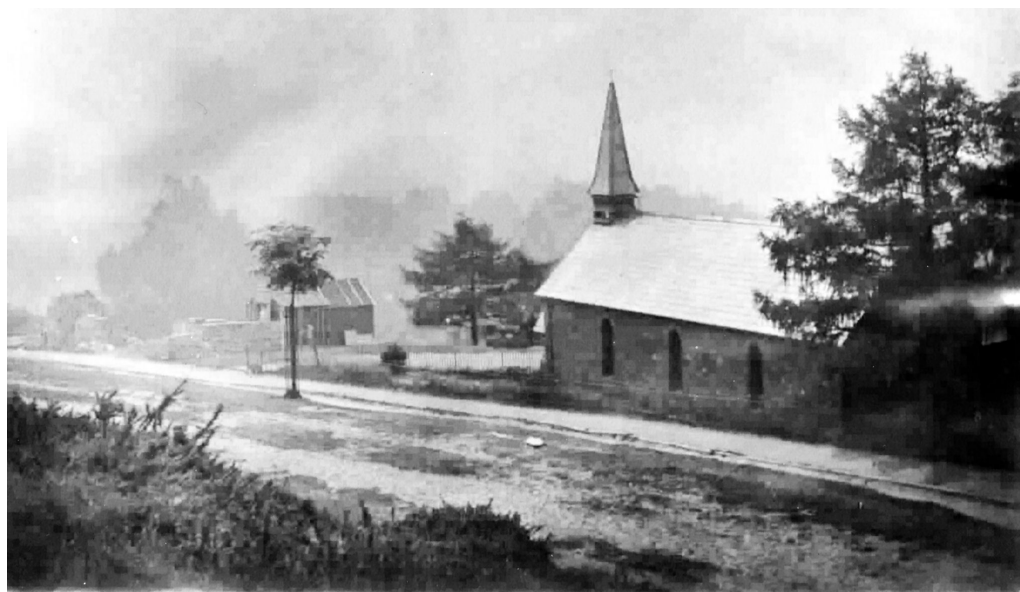
Elementary Education in Colwall *by Jane Adams*

'The poor have not sufficient means of education, but are desirous of possessing them'. This entry for Colwall in the digest of parochial returns made in 1818 to the Select Committee enquiring into education for the poor was typical of many parishes across the county. Provision of schools varied geographically, with the majority of English children receiving no formal instruction, a situation which attracted increasing concern from social reformers. There was also a gender difference, as most schools were for boys only. The situation in Colwall reflected this wider picture. There was one school in the village endowed by Henry Walwyn c. 1614. By the early 19th century this was being run as a private boarding school for boys, which offered a few free places to 'the poorer classes'. (The school, later known as 'The Elms' and still flourishing as a private school, was discussed in an article in the last VCH newsletter.) Most children in the village had no access to formal education. Within 50 years this situation had been addressed, with charitable schools for infants, girls and boys being established. The premises of the Hill School at the Wyche, set up by the Church in 1856, were also used for services for the local population who lived at some distance from the parish church. The Valley School was set up in 1865 at Colwall Green. The Education Act of 1870 made elementary education compulsory between the ages of five and twelve, and by 1918 the school leaving age had been raised to fifteen.

In 1906 there were 78 children registered at Colwall Hill School. Of these, 36 were girls aged eight and over, and 42 were infants aged between five and seven - 17 boys and 25 girls. The staff comprised Beatrice Allen, a certified teacher paid £70 a year, and two monitresses, Rosie Allen and Kathleen Box, paid £7 10 shillings a year. The Valley School was larger; in 1902 there were 123 children registered, 69 girls and 54 infants. Miss Emily Ada Smith, headmistress and the only certified teacher, was paid £80. She was supported by two assistant teachers, one paid £50 and one £25 and a

monitress paid just £6. In 1910 a further certified teacher was appointed, Ethel Stokes, but when she left in 1915 she was not replaced. In March 1919 Beatrice Allen wrote to managers of the Hill School expressing disappointment at her own salary, by now £90, and complaining of pressure in running the school almost single-handed. She noted that 'the work is causing the greatest anxiety. It is not fair to the children, parents or myself. I have managed for the past two and a half years, but I did expect adequate help after the war. I am writing you hoping that the managers may be able to do something at once, as I am sure I cannot go on much longer in this way'. In 1929 there was still only one qualified teacher at each school, although salaries had increased considerably. Elizabeth Ellwood, headmistress at the Valley School, was paid £276 and her two unqualified teachers were paid £139 and £80 respectively.

With limited trained staff and a consequent high pupil to teacher ratio, it is not surprising that the curriculum was limited, although this was also influenced by perceptions of likely employment opportunities. The raising of the school leaving age in 1918 prompted discussion of what the older students should be learning; the subjects considered included cookery, laundry, housewifery, dairy work and handicrafts. However by 1929 an inspector's report commented on a range of academic subjects being taught at the school:



Hill School (New Church being built in Background) - 1909

'The elder girls received effective instruction in the English subjects.

They take a keen interest in compiling and illustrating collections of poems and recite selections from these readily and distinctly. They express their ideas in writing with reasonable ease and accuracy. They have acquired, in the main, a satisfactory knowledge of world geography, but the teacher needs a suitable map for class teaching. The History text books are out of date and need replacing. Both Arithmetic and Drawing are weak subjects. The former should be improved by giving to each group in turn brisk oral instruction; the latter by a better grading of the objects to be drawn and more criticism of the girls' attempts, many of which have been left unfinished. The girls of Class 2 make satisfactory progress generally, though they converse less fluently than usual. They have constructed interesting articles with their hands.

The infants are happy and efficiently managed. They speak without reserve and obtain further practice in clear speech through dramatisation of stories. It was suggested that number games would form a more interesting approach to the different ideas of numbers than the method now practised.' Attention was also paid to religious and moral instruction. The Diocesan inspector of Ledbury Rural Deanery, reporting in July 1931, was struck by the ethos of the school. 'The most noticeable and admirable feature of this school is its tone and atmosphere. To listen to the opening prayers is an education. I am quite convinced in my own mind that a real impression on the girls' minds and character is being made and which will last. That is what matters'.

By 1933 numbers at the Hill School had fallen to 18 compared to 92 at the Valley School, and a proposal was made to consolidate at the latter. However the fabric of the building was in a very poor state. Originally built in 1865, the premises had been enlarged in 1894 but remained small and cramped, with basic sanitation and heating systems. A petition calling for new premises was drawn up by some parents of children at the school, who felt that the buildings 'are obsolete and quite unfitted for the object for which they are intended' and called on the managers to ask the County Education Committee to take them over. A new school was too ambitious a project for the times, but the 1935 refurbishment improved ventilation and heating and included a new boiler system to reduce smoking chimneys. The number of windows was also increased to improve light levels. The Local Authority contributed 75% of capital costs, with the school raising the balance of 25%. The Hill School survived the threat of closure and became a mixed school maintaining its links with the Church. When provision for secondary education was made in the county, older pupils from Colwall travelled to Ledbury to complete their education.

Jane Adams

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Chairman's Report to AGM 24th April 2017

I am very pleased to report on another successful year for the Society, whose membership remains fairly constant at about 180.

We held four public meetings.

- (1) 18th April 2016
Alfred Watkins:
Ron Shoesmith gave us an interesting talk about this member of an old Herefordshire family..
- (2) 20th June 2016
The Restoration of the Ledbury Master's House:
Gary Butler, architect to the project, demonstrated how the House was painstakingly restored.
- (3) 19th September 2016
Schweppes Malvern Water Site Development:
The architect, Edward Nash, explained how various factors had influenced the siting and design of the housing development.
- (4) 23rd January 2017
William Langland:
Peter Sutton, author of a new book about the poem, took us through Piers Plowman in a modern language version.

We exhibited as usual at the Horticultural Show and at the Ale House Festival, attracting a lot of interest.

On 22nd April 2017 we launched our new publication *Colwall Folk*, a companion book to *Discover Colwall* and *Bygone Colwall*.

We made two charitable donations - one of £1000 to the local Victoria County History group to assist it in producing a *History of Colwall*; and one of £100 to the CoCo Church for its funds to buy the Silver Street premises.

I thank all members of our hardworking Committee, without which there would be no Society - John Atkin (Secretary), John Mills (Treasurer), Derek Rees (Newsletter Editor), Susan Bond (Archives), Mary Clayburn (Membership Secretary), Margaret Matthews and Barbara Miller. Penny Milne and her helpers kept the refreshment department in good shape.

Finally, I thank all of our Members for their continuing support, but I end on a note of caution. We desperately need more committee members to ensure the Society remains in a healthy state. At the 2018 AGM both John Mills and myself will be standing down. Further, we also need volunteers (who do not have to be on the committee) to assist in organising our archives. Please contact myself or any committee member to discuss how you could help us.

Michael Milne

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Future Talks

19th June 2017 'The Work of the Malvern Hills Conservators' by Duncan Bridges	22nd January 2018 'Craswell Priory: A triple Unique Grandmontine Cell in the Marches' by Joe Hillaby
11th September 2017 'Hope End and Elizabeth Barrett Browning' by Mike Lewis	23rd April 2018 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING followed by 'The Design and Planning of the new Colwall Village School' by Joyce Clifford

From the Editor

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