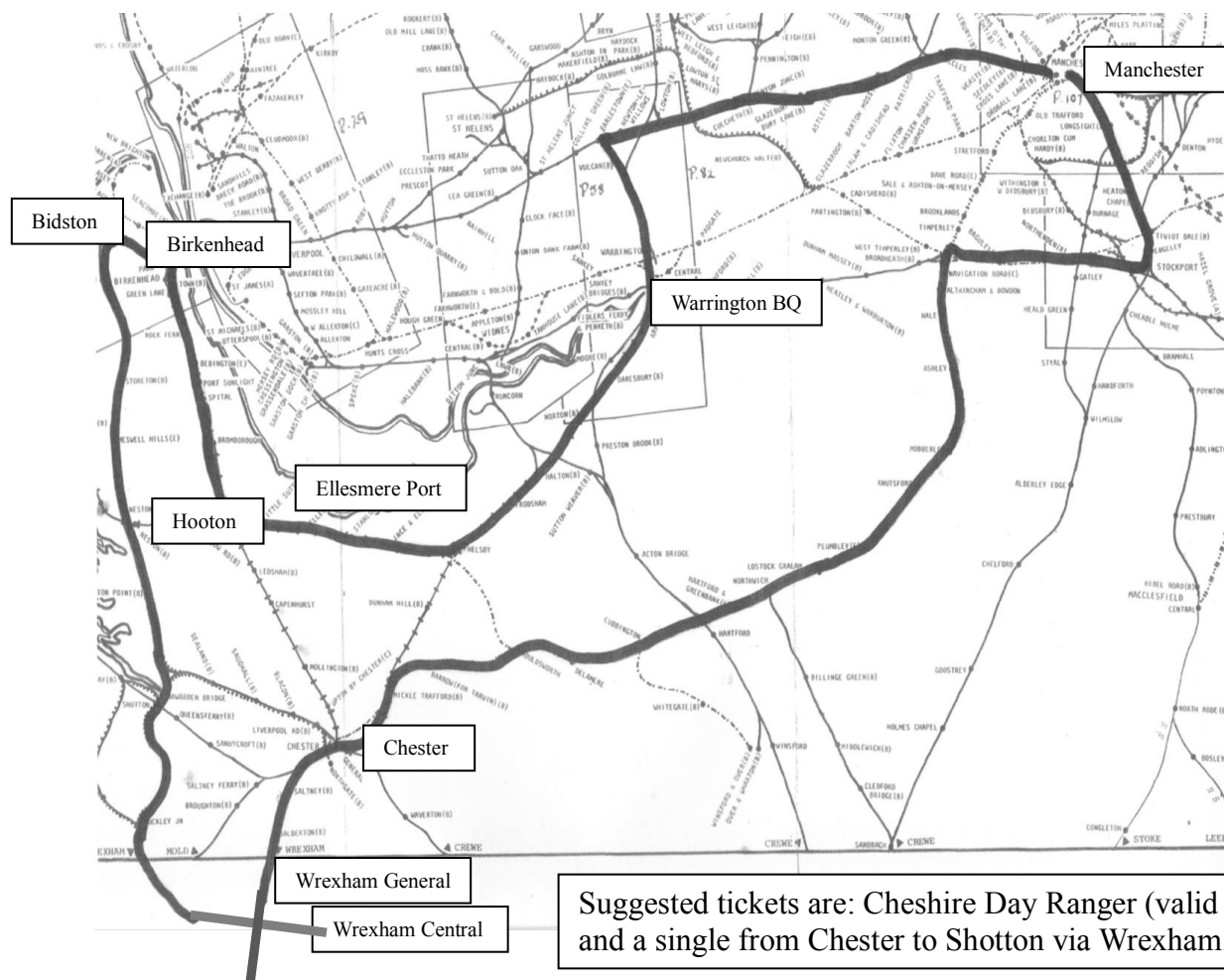




RCHS NW GROUP 2017 RAIL TOUR

Thursday 30th March 2017

A Circular Tour from Manchester around Cheshire, The Wirral & The Mersey



Suggested tickets are: Cheshire Day Ranger (valid from 8:45) and a single from Chester to Shotton via Wrexham.

Depart	Time	Platform	Arrive	Time	Platform
Piccadilly	09:17	11	Chester	10:47	6
Also departs Stockport (9:30), Navigation Road (9:44), Knutsford (10:01) & Northwich (10:14)					
Chester	10:58	Bus	Wrexham General	11:28	Bus
Walk from General to Central					
Wrexham Central	12:30	1	Bidston	13:30	2
Also stops Wrexham Central at 12:32					
Bidston	13:46	1	Birkenhead Hamilton Sq.	13:56	1
Time to View Station Building & Mersey Waterfront					
Birkenhead Hamilton Sq.	14:55	2	Hooton	15:17	2
Hooton	15:26	1	Ellesmere Port	15:37	1
Ellesmere Port	16:04	2	Warrington Bank Quay	16:34	4
One of only two direct trains per day					
Warrington Bank Quay	16:51	4	Piccadilly	17:27	13

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RCHS NW GROUP 2015 RAIL TOUR

Thursday 30th March 2017

A Circular Tour from Manchester around Cheshire, The Wirral & The Mersey

Welcome

On behalf of the NW Group committee, welcome to our 2017 Rail Tour. As most people will be coming from Manchester, these notes are based on a circular route: Manchester, Chester (via Knutsford), Wrexham, Bidston, Birkenhead, Ellesmere Port, Warrington, and Manchester. Alternatively, the journey could be made starting at Chester returning there from Warrington or Manchester.

Due to unavoidable circumstances time in Wrexham is limited. A packed lunch may be advisable.

Overview of the Route

The suggested route is to leave Manchester Piccadilly on the 09:17 Northern Trains departure for Chester. This train follows much of the CLC (Woodley to Chester) line built between 1862 & 1869.

After changing trains at Chester, the next stop (on the 1846 Shrewsbury & Chester/GW line) is Wrexham General. (Note: on the day of the tour this segment is by a rail replacement bus service).

At Wrexham, after a short break, the tour continues from Wrexham Central to Bidston on the former Wrexham, Mold & Connah's Quay/North Wales & Liverpool/Great Central line, opened in sections in 1866 and 1896.

After Bidston there are three short segments:

- Bidston to Birkenhead Hamilton Square (Mersey Rail). There will be time to view the tower built for the station's hydraulic lifts and Hamilton Square, or the waterfront with its views across to Liverpool.
- Birkenhead Hamilton Square to Hooton: mainly on the 1840 Chester & Birkenhead/GW & LNW Joint line.
- Hooton to Ellesmere Port on the 1863 GW&LNW Hooton to Helsby line.

The next segment (requiring a change of trains) is from Ellesmere Port to Warrington Bank Quay using the (now only twice daily) direct service following the River Mersey; also on GW/LNW Joint lines of 1863 (to Helsby) and 1850 (from Helsby to Acton Grange Junc). From Acton Grange Junction the journey continues into Warrington following the Grand Junction line of 1837.

The suggested return train from Warrington Bank Quay to Manchester is the 16:51 service to Manchester, arriving Piccadilly at 17:37.

Notes and Sources

These illustrated notes are available on the society's website or by email with a small number of printed copies (A4 booklet) being available on the day. Most of the photographs, diagrams and maps have been reduced from the original source size and those originally in colour reproduced in B&W. None is intended to be an adequate replacement for the original; more of an introduction to the area and its railways and to encourage further research. The notes cover the route from Manchester to Warrington via Chester, Bidston, Birkenhead, Hooton & Ellesmere Port. We advise they are read with a modern OS map to hand (Explorer sheets 268, 267, 266 are the most important).

Key sources and further reading suggestions are:

The Railways of Great Britain: A Historical Atlas; Col M H Cobb

Railway Stations in Great Britain: A Chronology; Michael Quick

Maps: Alan Godfrey (Wrexham: Sheets 28.12, 28.08; Birkenhead: Sheets 13.03, 07.14) & old-maps.co.uk

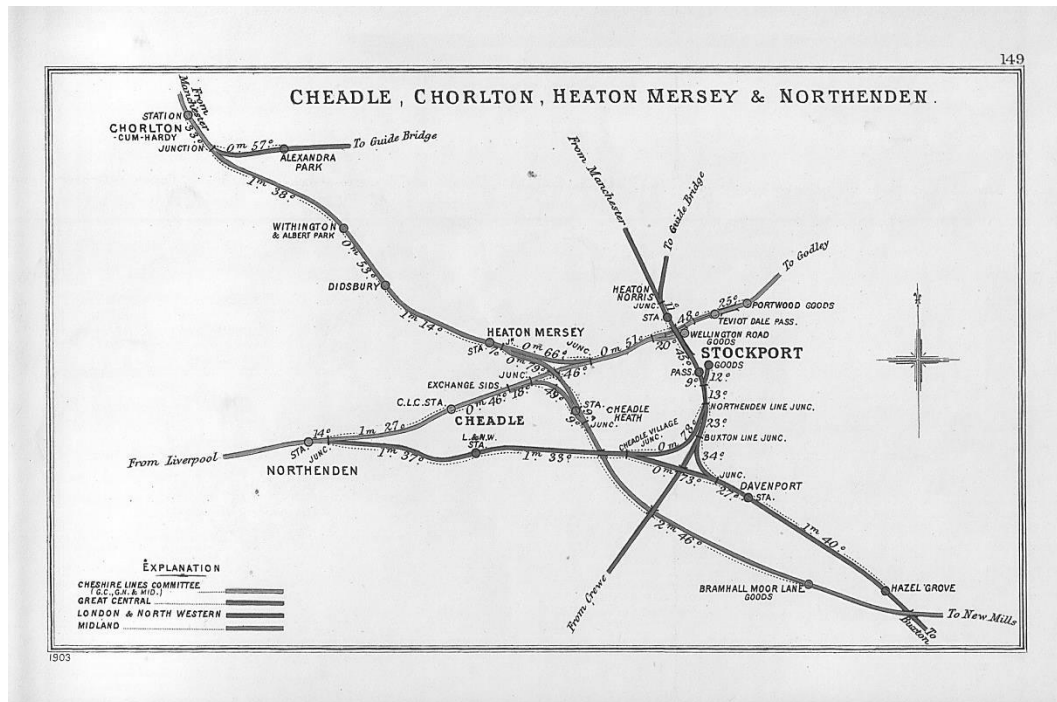
Lost Railways of Cheshire; Leslie Oppitz (Countryside Books)

The Wrexham, Mold & Connah's Quay Railway; James I C Boyd (Oakwood Press)

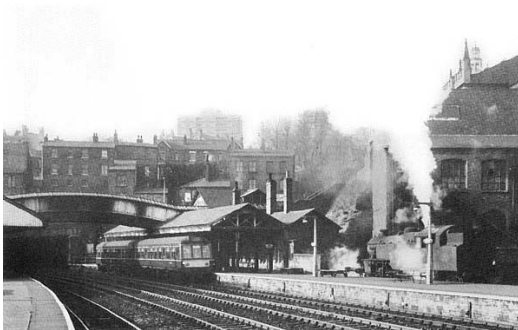
Websites: <http://www.disused-stations.org.uk/> <https://www.old-maps.co.uk/> <https://www.old-maps.co.uk/#/>

Manchester to Chester (using CLC lines)

We leave Piccadilly Station travelling south towards Stockport on the LNW line; opened in 1840 as far as Stockport, and then further to Crewe in 1842 with the completion of the viaduct over the River Mersey. Current references give the start of the Mersey as the confluence of the Goyt and the Tame half a mile to the east of the viaduct. Older sources give the start as the confluence of the Goyt and the Etherow in Brabyns Park, Marple - also half a mile east of a viaduct.



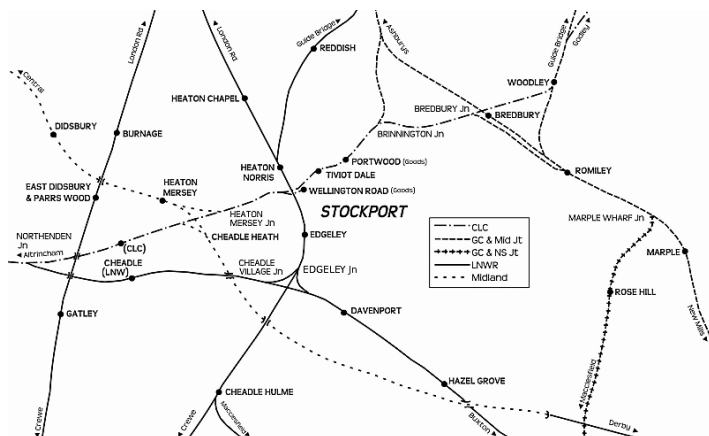
The LNW line crosses the CLC line of 1865 which is in a short tunnel beneath us as we approach the arches of the viaduct: this is the line we will join later at Northenden Junction. If the CLC line had not closed to passengers in 1967, we may well have changed stations at Stockport and joined a train on the CLC line at Tiviot Dale station.



Tiviot Dale, 1964: The first of two tunnels is to the left.



Tiviot Dale station approach and entrance (1950s?)



This map of railways around Stockport shows how CLC lines could be used to avoid Manchester.

Trains could run from Guide Bridge or Godley to Skelton Junction and then on to Chester & The Wirral, Warrington and Liverpool.

After the closure of Tiviot Dale station in 1967, trains carrying coal & limestone aggregates continued to use the line until M60 construction work damaged Lancashire Hill tunnel in 1980. The line was formally abandoned & lifted in 1982.

After exiting Edgeley Tunnel, the train turns west at Edgeley Junction on to the 1886 LNW line to Northenden Junction where it joins the 1865 CLC line. Between the two junctions, we pass over the 1902 former Midland line from Heaton Mersey to New Mills S Junc (look for police station to left). Just before reaching Northenden Junc, and with motorway junctions to our right, we pass under the 1909 LNW Styal Loop line (Wilmslow to Slade Lane Junction).

The bridge over the road at Cheadle should be apparent. The 1866 LNW Cheadle station, to the west of the bridge, closed in 1916 as part of wartime measures, never to re-open. The 1866 CLC station, half a mile north is now a pub.



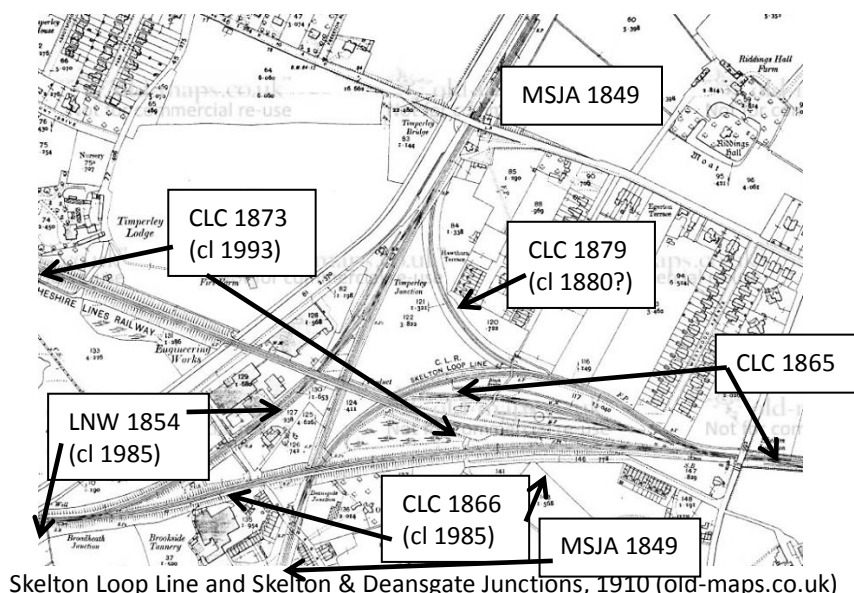
Train approaching Cheadle (LNW) station, 1905 (closed 1916)



Cheadle (CLC) station, 1910 (closed 1964)



Northenden Junction Signal Box.



Skelton Loop Line and Skelton & Deansgate Junctions, 1910 (old-maps.co.uk)

The MSJA main line and CLC Loop Line are all that remain of the through lines and sidings between Skelton, Timperley & Deansgate Junctions. Principal closures were in 1985 & 1993. From Skelton Junction to Altrincham the line is the continuation of the 1849 MSJ&A route from Manchester to Altrincham.

The former double track line through Navigation Road station now forms two bi-directional single track lines: one serves the Metro trams and the other the Manchester to Chester train service.



Navigation Road (opened 1931): early days of the Metro & post modernisation.



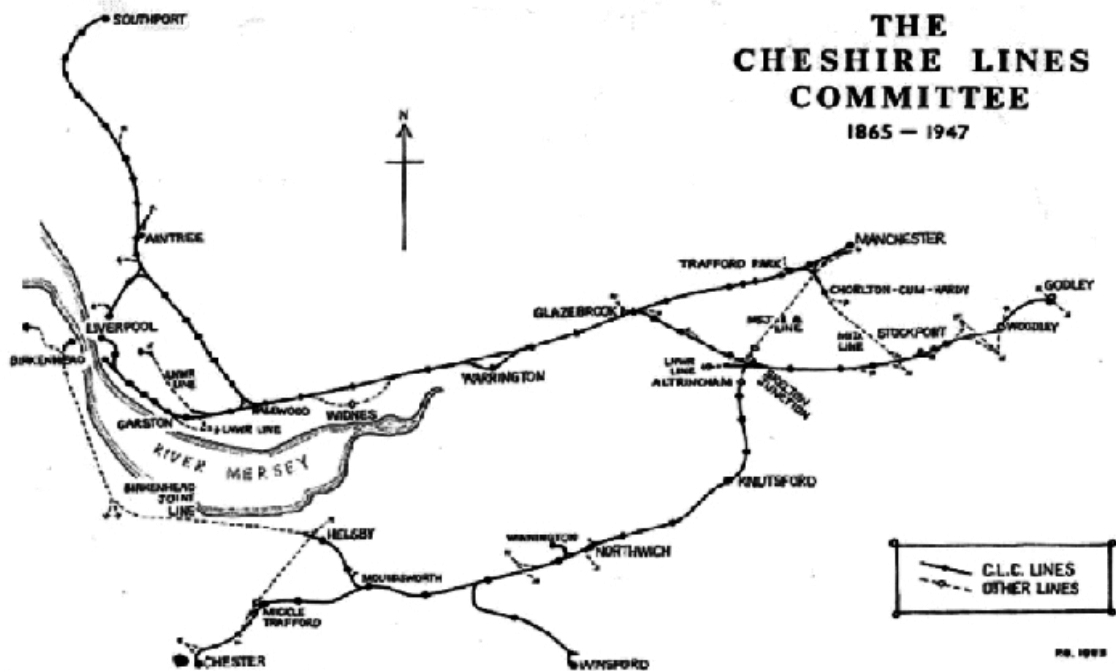
Altrincham (2nd station; opened 1881)

25Kv ac electric trains ran from Altrincham to Manchester, Stockport and Crewe between May 1971 & December 1991.

During that period cricket fans in Wilmslow could catch a direct train to Old Trafford (at that time Warwick Avenue).

Cheshire Lines Committee (from LNER Encyclopedia)

A Brief Chronology



The company was formed by the amalgamation of four lines:

- The Stockport & Woodley Junction Railway
- The West Cheshire Railway
- The Cheshire Midland Railway
- The Stockport, Timperley & Altricham Junction Railway

Key Dates are:

1862 The group of lines brought together and managed by a joint committee of MS&LR and GNR members.

1863 The Great Northern (Cheshire Lines) Act.

1865 The Midland took an equal share.

1865 The Cheshire Lines Transfer Act established the company and included powers to build a line between the cities of Manchester and Liverpool.

1865 The line from the MSJ&A at Skelton to the MS&L at Woodley was completed; and to Godley in 1866.

1865 Absorbed the Liverpool & Garston Railway.

1867 The Cheshire Lines Act formalised the CLC as an independent company.

1873 Premier main line between Manchester and Liverpool via Warrington opened – with a connecting line between Glazebrook East Junc & Skelton Junc.

1874 Liverpool Central opened, replaced the former terminus at Brunswick.

1874 Through route between Manchester and Chester (Northgate) completed.

1880 Manchester Central opened.

1884 The Southport & Cheshire Lines Extension Railway opened between Liverpool and Southport Lord Street. This was an independent concern but the trains were operated by the CLC.

1923 Grouping: The CLC remains an independent railway with three LMS and six LNER directors.

1948 Nationalisation: The CLC finally loses independence and becomes part of BR (London Midland Region).

1969 Manchester Central station closed.

1972 Liverpool Central station closed.

Cheshire Lines Committee Trivia

- In terms of financial data and volume of traffic, the CLC was the most successful and largest of all UK joint lines.
- In the late 1930s, it was carrying over 11 million passengers and over 8.5 million tons of goods per annum.
- Second largest joint railway, in terms of distance, in the UK (after the M&GN).
- Route mileage was 143 miles.
- The CLC never owned any locomotives, but did possess four sentinel railcars.
- Despite its name, the CLC had a greater route mileage in Lancashire than in any other county. (Referencing pre-1974 counties).
- Its Manchester terminus was Central station. This was closed and the building was adapted for exhibitions and events and called the GMEX Centre. It has now been re-named again, appropriately, as Manchester Central.
- By the mid-1880s, it was possible to travel between Manchester and Liverpool in 40 minutes - faster than today.
- By 1905 there were 229 departures and 215 arrivals daily at Manchester Central - more than double those of Euston and St Pancras combined.
- The headquarters was at Liverpool Central (the above ground buildings now demolished). There is a low-level station on the site served by Merseyrail.
- The vans which conveyed salt had a distinctive pent roof; more water-proof than the traditional bow roof.



Evening Star at Northwich, May 1983 (David Ingham).



Mickle Trafford station in 1949 looking SW along the down platform towards Chester. The 1942 junction is to the left with the relocated up platform in the distance (Stations UK)

From Altrincham the train continues on CLC tracks through Cheshire countryside either side of the more industrial landscape around Northwich. The line was built in sections (Altrincham to Northwich in 1862/3; Northwich to Mouldsworth in 1869; Mouldsworth to Chester in 1874). Between Lostock Gralam and Greenbank stations the line crosses the Trent & Mersey Canal, the River Dane and the Weaver River & Navigation. On leaving Northwich station the 1867 line to Sandbach is on the left.

The 1869 CLC line passes the east to north connection with the 1837 Grand Junction line, over the GJ and then through Cuddington and Mouldsworth (junctions west of both stations closed 1967 & 1991 respectively) to join the BLCJ line at Mickle Trafford.



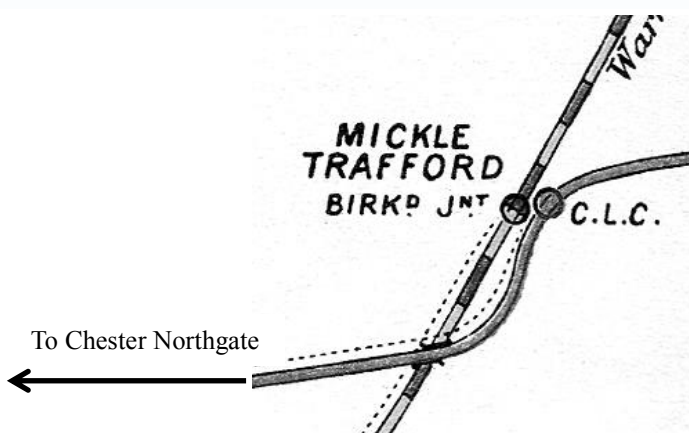
Trent & Mersey Canal at Lostock Gralam.



Northwich Viaduct and the Weaver Navigation.



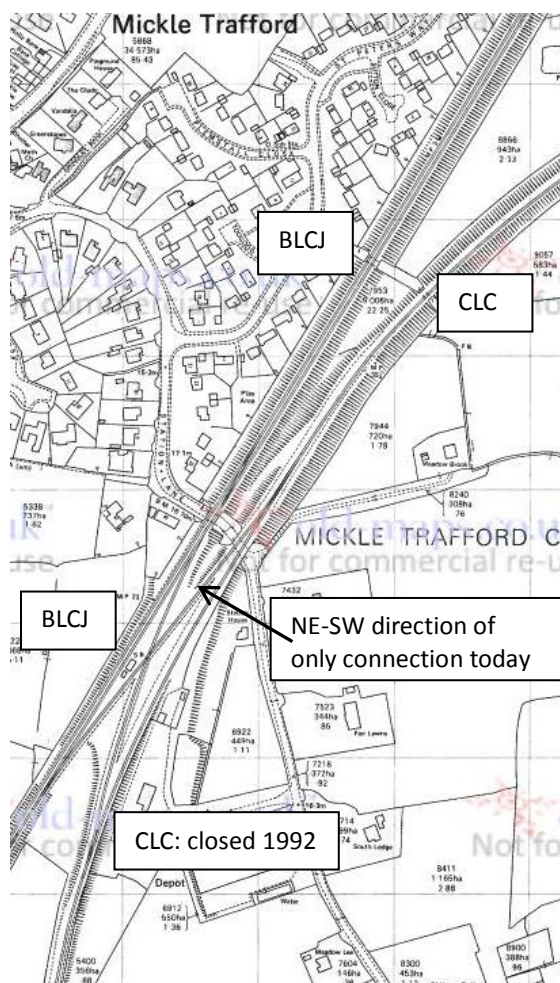
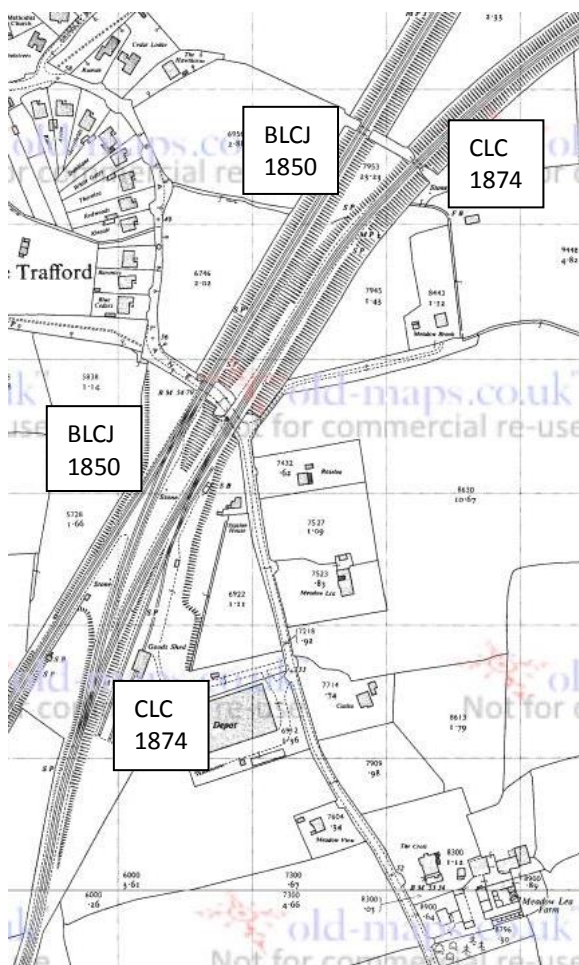
Chester Northgate station, 1914 (John Alsop)



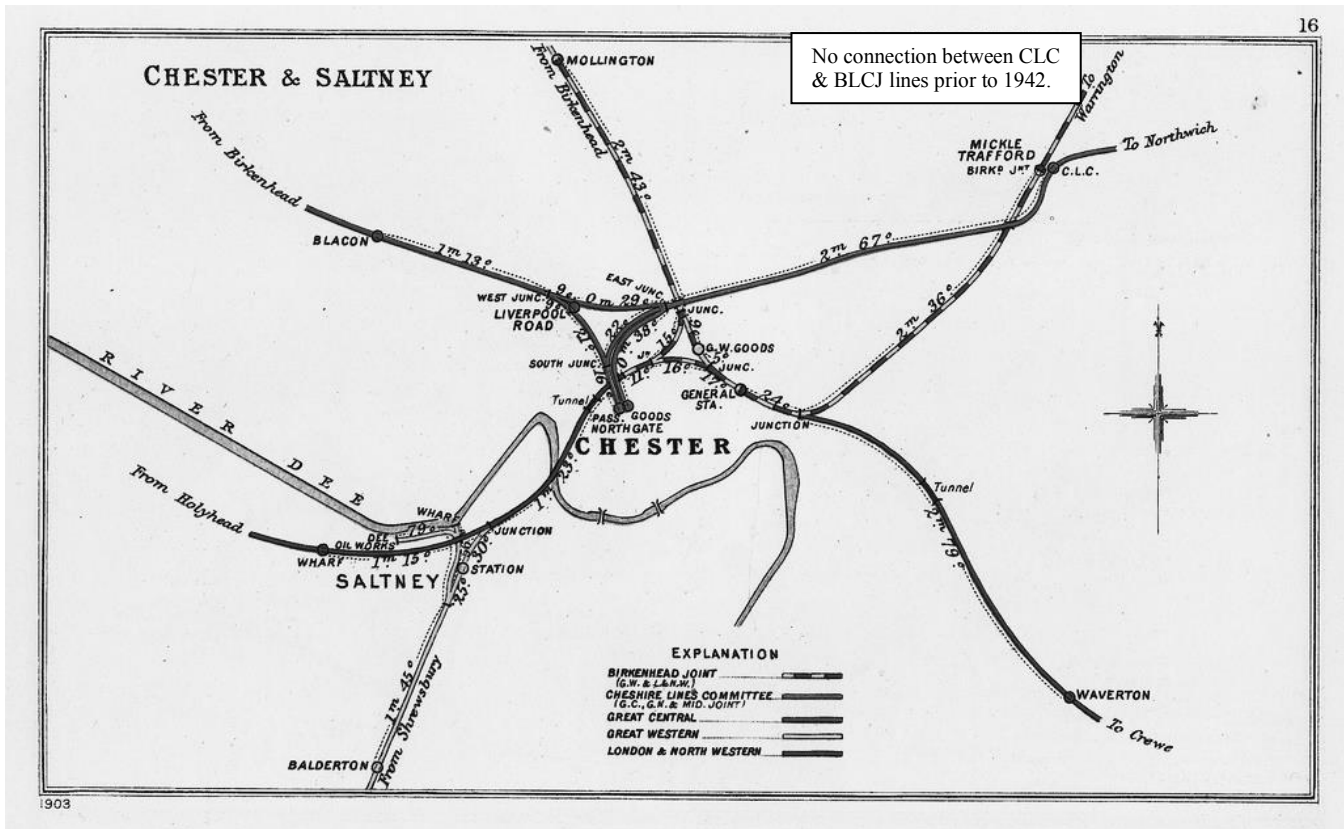
Mickle Trafford Stations before connections between the two lines

The two lines (CLC & BLCJ) ran close together with no connection between them before 1942 – the S to N junction from CLC to BLCJ lines apparently built as a war time requirement. Both companies had stations at the point where the lines ran close to each other. The CLC station opened in 1875 and the BLCJ station in 1889. Both closed in 1951. In 1969, to facilitate the closure of Chester Northgate, the junction between the CLC and the BLCJ was reversed so that CLC line trains could join the BJR and enter Chester by that route. This new junction obliterated the site of the Chester platform. At a later date this junction was altered to create a Scissor Junction allowing trains to access both lines from both directions, although by this time only goods services traversed the former CLC in the Chester direction. In the early 1990's, the junction was altered again due to the closure of the CLC route to Chester and Sealand.

The CLC track south of Mickle Trafford has been lifted but the alignment can be seen to the left as the train travels over the junction.



Mickle Trafford showing CLC & BLCJ lines: left with the 1942 connection & right with the scissors connection. Today, the CLC line from Altrincham forms a (NE to SW) junction with the BLCJ line: the CLC lines to the south having been lifted.



And now to Wrexham

Boyd writes, quoting fieldwork and the GCR survey of 1904 as his source:

Since 1895 Wrexham Central had been both a terminal and a through station, with five platform faces; optimistically, the southernmost three were nominally used by the Wrexham & Ellesmere section of the Cambrian Railways. The WMCQ portion was the northern part retaining its dismal corrugated iron buildings well into BR times. Wrexham (town centre) lay close by on the northern side whilst the southern side spread downwards out of the town over falling ground. The town, in the past the metropolis of North Wales, was not one of beauty, though it possessed certain fine features: it was far from being picturesque or a typically Welsh town and in fact quite the opposite. Its glory lies in St Giles Church, one of the 'Seven Wonders of Wales'.

There were three stations (four if one counts the re-siting of Central) carrying the name 'Wrexham': General (GW), Exchange (WMCQ) and Central (Cam/WMCQ). Wrexham General opened in 1846, Exchange in 1866, and Central in 1887 (WMCQ) & 1895 (Cam). Wrexham General and Exchange were adjacent to each other and were amalgamated, with Exchange losing its identity, in 1981. Central was re-sited 300 yards nearer to General, for shopping development, in 1998. The 1895 line from Central to Ellesmere had been closed in stages between 1962 & 1981.



View of Wrexham General looking north: line to the left is from Wrexham Central.



Wrexham Exchange looking north. The building on the down (north bound) platform is an original WM&CQR structure



Looking west at Wrexham Central station in 1956 as an Ellesmere 'autotrain' crosses from platform 4 to platform 3. Station re-sited 300yds west in 1998.



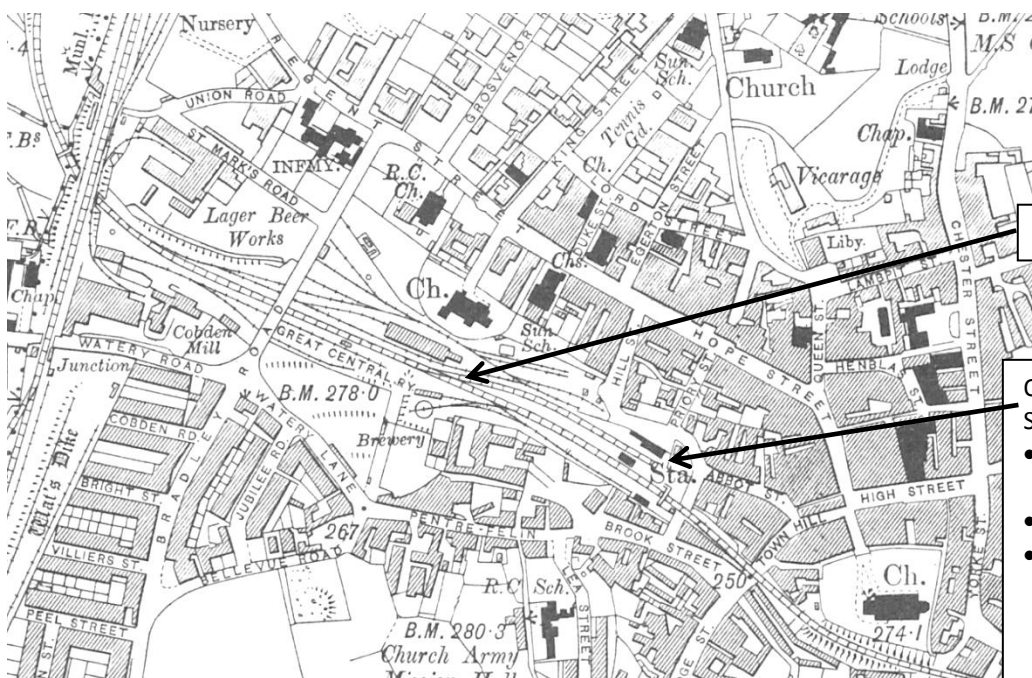
Looking west from the east end of platform 1 of Wrexham Central in the 1960s. Note the brick built goods shed to the right and the Brewery, which was never rail connected and is now grade II listed, to the left



The site of Wrexham Central. The through line platforms 3&4 were to the right, and the terminus platforms 1 & 2 to the left and extended right up to the buildings in the distance. The brewery building (Grade II listed) is seen on the right. The photographer is standing close to the former goods shed.



The yellow brick building at Exchange was typical of WMCQ brick building style.

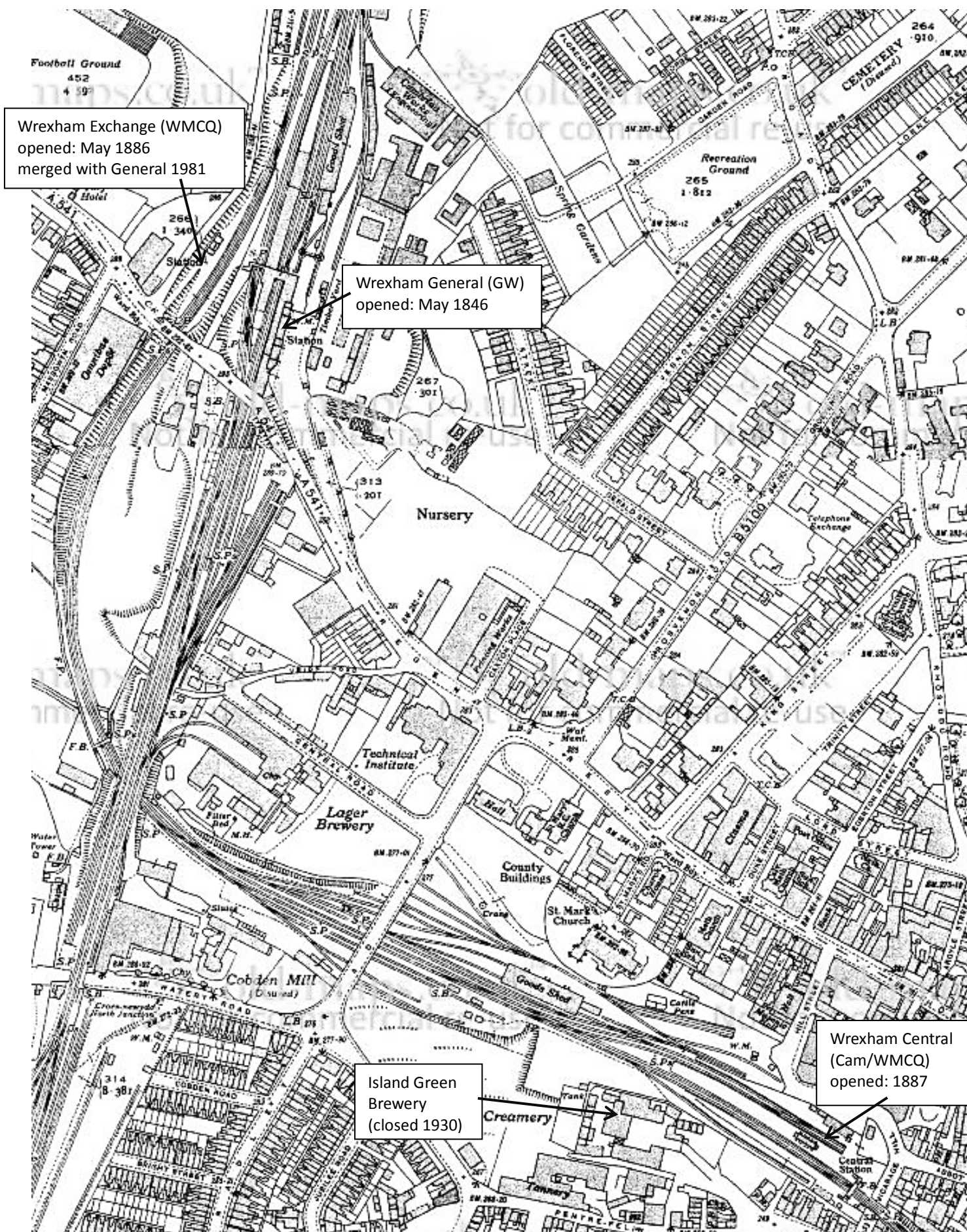


Railways around Wrexham Central, 1899 (maps.nls.uk)

Site of current Central Station

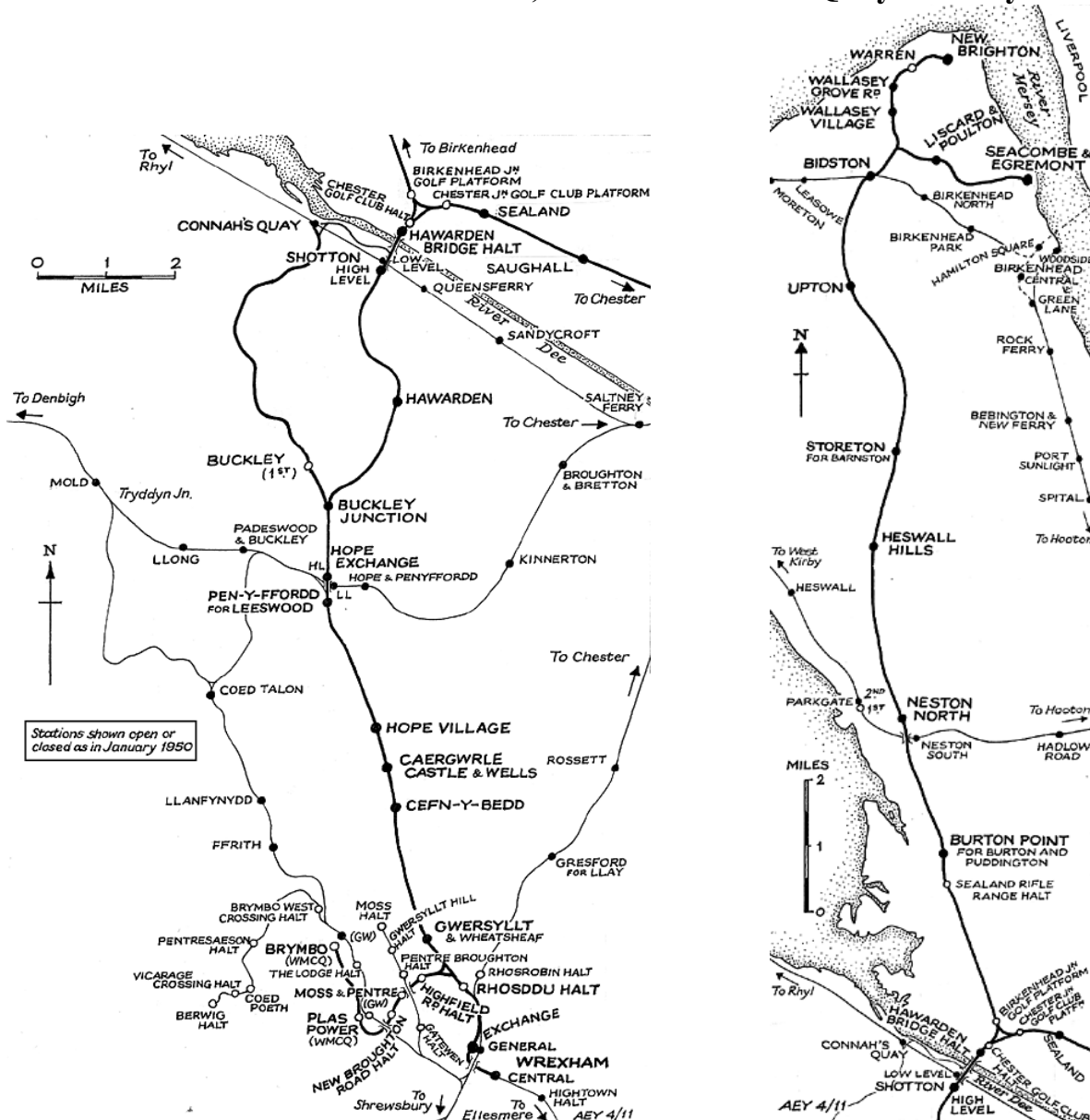
Original 1887/95 Central Station

- WMCQR bay platforms on north side of site
- Cambrian 1895 to south
- Note fall in land height to south and embankment required to take railway around (& beyond) the church.



Railways in Central Wrexham, 1937 (old-maps.co.uk)

Wrexham to Bidston: the Wrexham, Mold & Connah's Quay Railway



Today the junctions between Wrexham and Bidston are no more, but the journey is along what were three quite distinct lines:

WMCQ/CGR: Wrexham to Buckley Junction; opened 1866

WMCQ/CGR: Buckley Junction to Hawarden Bridge/Dee Marsh Junction (Hawarden Loop Line); opened 1890

NWL/GCR: Dee Marsh Junction to Bidston; opened 1896 (this line ran from Bidston to Chester)



Source: Welsh Railways Research Circle (WRR)

Originating as a locally-inspired venture to link Wrexham with the port of Connah's Quay on the Dee, the WM&CQ in time came under the influence of Sir Edward Watkin and thus had the distinction of being the only part of the Great Central Railway, and subsequently of the London and North Eastern Railway, in Wales. The WM&CQ main line survives to this day as the southern part of the Borderlands Line linking Bidston on the Merseyrail network with Wrexham, with an hourly service operated by Arriva Trains Wales and regular freight traffic to Corus at Shotton operated by EWS.

Initially promoted as the WWM&CQ in the autumn of 1861, the first "W" represented Whitchurch and was subsequently dropped before the WM&CQ Act was passed in August the following year. The first sod was cut in October 1862 by Mrs W E Gladstone and her husband, at the time Chancellor of the Exchequer and subsequently twice Prime Minister, made a speech. Construction began under Thomas Savin until his bankruptcy led to Benjamin Piercy taking over responsibility. In January 1865 Colonel Yolland of the Board of Trade inspected the line but, on finding inadequacies in aspects of both the construction and the proposed operational practices, he refused to allow it to open. Those outstanding matters were resolved sufficiently to permit opening of the line between Wrexham and Buckley to goods and mineral traffic on 1st January 1866, although contemporary press coverage suggests that this had been preceded by a period of informal operation. Colonel Yolland made a return visit in April 1866 and gave approval for passenger services to commence, which they did on 1st May following a celebratory outing over the line the previous day.

At Buckley the WM&CQ made a connection with the Buckley Railway, itself having opened in June 1862 to link the collieries, brickworks and potteries of Buckley with the port of Connah's Quay, replacing a number of earlier tramroads. The WM&CQ entered into working arrangements with the Buckley Railway and subsequently took a 999 year lease on the line in 1873.

While the WM&CQ was being built, Parliamentary sanction was sought for various branches and extensions but the only branch built initially was to Ffrith, an industrial district to the north west of Wrexham. There was also a connection with the LNWR's Mold line at Penyffordd and, in due course, with the Shrewsbury & Chester section of the GWR at Wrexham, although the fact that a local GWR Director, Sir Watkin Wynne, had made his opposition to the WM&CQ well known meant that initially there was a degree of animosity between the two companies.

A Bill for further expansion was tabled in November 1881 and after a rough parliamentary ride was enacted in August 1882. This sanctioned the extension of the line to a new town centre terminus, Wrexham Central, and the construction of a branch to the industrial centre of Brymbo, in the hills to the west of Wrexham. The extension to Wrexham Central was constructed during 1887 and opened on 1 November of the same year. Wrexham Central subsequently became a through station eight years later with the opening of the Wrexham and Ellesmere Railway in 1895, thus providing, via the junction with the Cambrian main line at Ellesmere, the connection with Whitchurch aspired to back in 1861. The Brymbo branch was built and opened to freight traffic in stages during the 1880s, with a passenger service from Wrexham Central to Brymbo commencing on 1st August 1889.

A further Act of June 1883 Act granted powers for what turned out to be the WM&CQ's most significant extension, the construction of the Hawarden Loop, a route from just south of Buckley (subsequently Buckley Junction) to Shotton and Connah's Quay independent of the Buckley Railway. This development marked the beginning of the end of the WM&CQ as an independent company as, in addition to providing a more efficient route for through traffic from the Wrexham area to the docks and the LNWR at Connah's Quay, it was to make an end-on connection at Shotton with a new line from Chester promoted by the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire (MS&L) Railway. As one of the three partners in the Cheshire Lines Committee (CLC), the MS&L had unrivalled access to the salt works in the Northwich area which provided a potential market for the otherwise almost worthless slack from the North Wales coalfield served by the WM&CQ. Both the WM&CQ's and MS&L's lines opened on 31st March 1890, with the MS&L's Hawarden Bridge swing bridge completed in the previous summer providing a rail crossing of the River Dee that also satisfied the requirement that navigation on the Dee should not be obstructed.

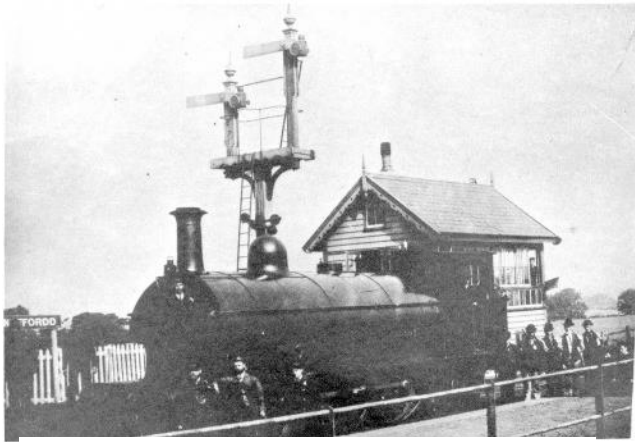
The completion of the Dee crossing gave the WM&CQ the incentive to take up the powers granted jointly by an Act of July 1885 to connect Hawarden Bridge with the Wirral Railway at Bidston, just outside Birkenhead. Three years prior to construction beginning in October 1892 the Wirral Railway had sold their interest to the WM&CQ and the MS&L for a little over £100,000, but the WM&CQ's relatively poor financial health meant that it found it necessary to borrow much of its share of the purchase price and subsequent construction costs from the MS&L. When the North Wales and Liverpool (NW&L) line opened in the spring of 1896 it was nominally operated by the WM&CQ due to the MS&L not initially having running powers over the Wirral Railway from Bidston to Seacombe, the transfer point for ferries across the Mersey to Liverpool, but in practice the WM&CQ was heavily reliant on motive power on loan from the MS&L in order to operate the service.

In September 1897 the Great Central Railway (GCR), as the MS&L had just become, obtained judgement against the WM&CQ for failing to repay the debts incurred in connection with the construction of the NW&L. The GCR's accountant was appointed as Receiver and Administrator and the lengthy demise of the WM&CQ followed, culminating in an Act of July 1904 which vested the WM&CQ, the Buckley Railway and the NW&L in the GCR with effect from 1st January 1905.

The Brymbo branch closed to passengers in 1917, initially as a temporary wartime economy measure but one that was never reversed. The various WM&CQ freight branches and the Buckley Railway gradually closed over a period of 45 years between the mid 1920s and the early 1970s but the core combined WM&CQ and NW&L route, linked by the MS&L's Hawarden Bridge, remains open to this day for both passenger and freight traffic.

Source: Welsh Railways Research Circle (WRRRC)

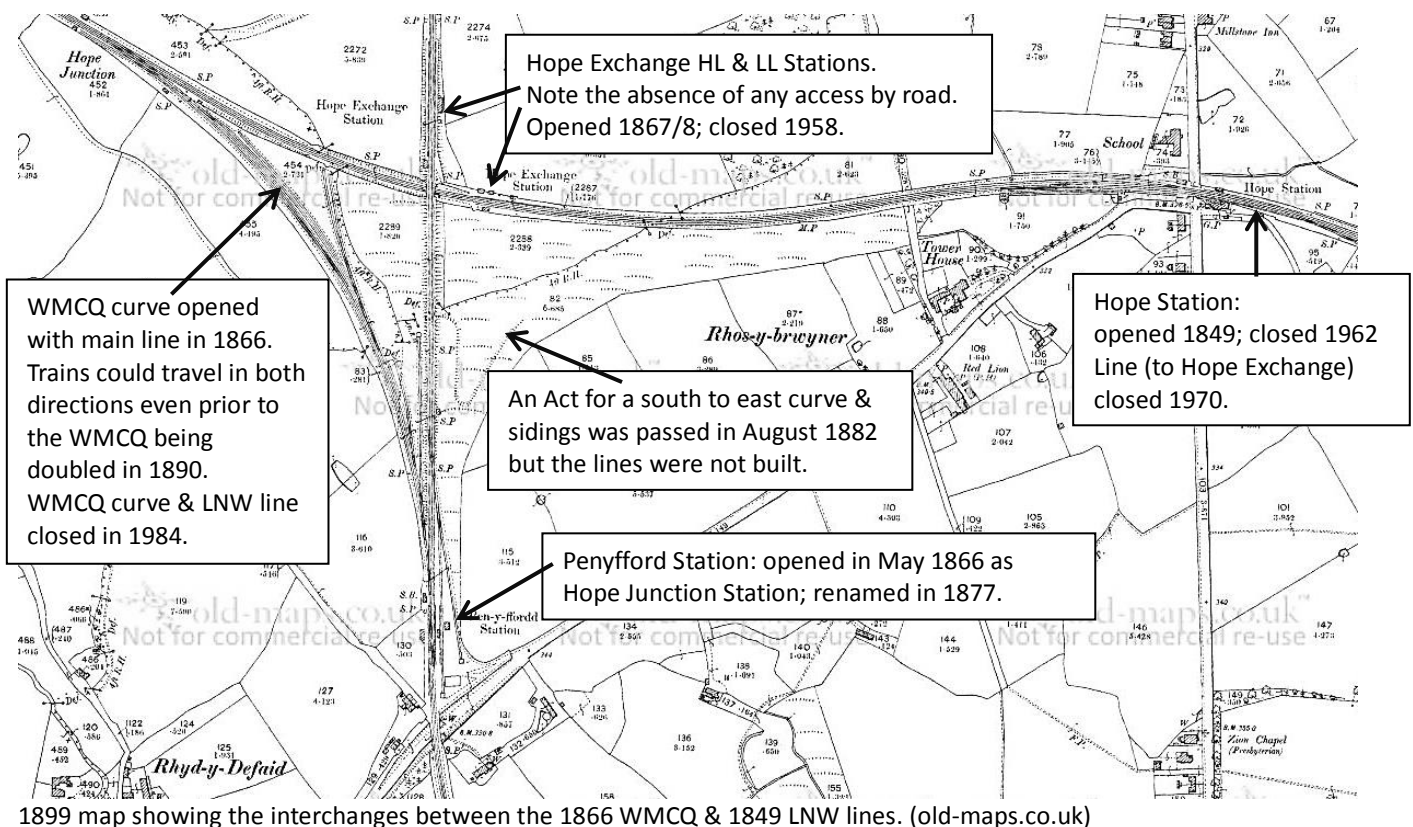
Leaving Wrexham, the line runs close to the River Alyn and, a little further east, Wat's Dyke. The railway leaves the river and the Dyke as the former turns west at Hope station and the latter at Penyffordd station. Wat's Dyke runs SE to NW across the alignment of the railway at the road bridge at the southern end of Penyffordd station: look left as we pass through the station. (Wat's Dyke is of similar construction to Offa's Dyke. The latter was built during the second half of the C8th, but there is controversy as to which Dyke was built first.)



Penyffordd Station and Hope Junction signal box in the 1890s. The box is at the northern end of the station platform. The south to west junction was opened in 1866 along with the original station; called Hope Junction.



Looking north along the southbound (up) platform at Hope Exchange High Level in 1955. The station was provided with a brick building when the station was rebuilt as part of the doubling of the line in 1890.



From Penyffordd station the journey continues on the WMCQ 1866 line to Buckley. The station opened as Buckley Junction in 1890, when the line from Buckley Junction to Hawarden Bridge was opened. It was renamed Buckley in 1974. The first Buckley station was opened with the 1866 line to Connahs Quay and closed finally in 1895. It was approximately one mile north of the 1890 junction.



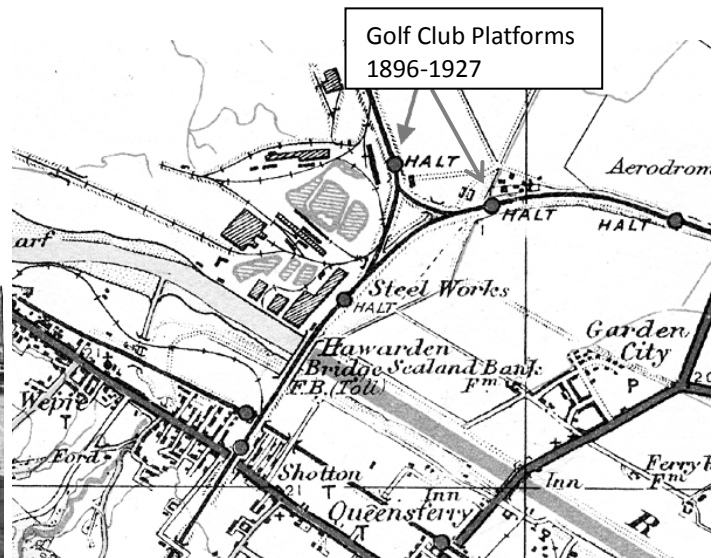
Buckley Junction Station, 1906 (John Alsop Collection). The line curving to the right is the 1890 Hawarden Loop Line. The original WMCQ (1866) line to Buckley, joining the 1862 Buckley Railway to Connah's Quay, was to the left behind the station building.



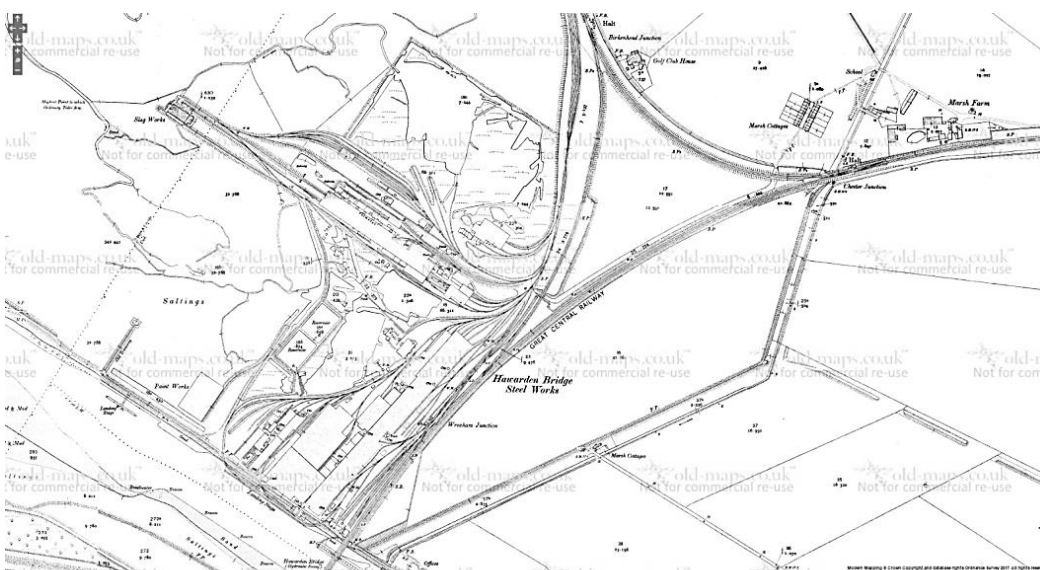
Looking south in the 1890s along the 1890 Hawarden Loop from the north end of Connah's Quay & Shotton station (renamed Shotton High Level in 1953). The station was opened in 1891.



Hawarden Bridge in 1910. The bridge was opened by William Gladstone in 1889: the Gladstone's golden wedding anniversary.



OS map (1920s) showing stations around Hawarden Bridge inc two of the three Golf Club platforms: the first (1890-96) was a little to the north of Hawarden Bridge Halt.



Dea Marsh Junctions (Wrexham Junc, Birkenhead Junc & Chester Junc), 1911-12 (old-maps.co.uk) Note the extension rail network within the steel works. Remains are evident as we pass; to our left.

LNER in Wales

It is interesting to note that the NW&L& WMCQ both became part of the Great Central Railway in 1905 and that, at Grouping in 1923, these GCR lines became part of the LNER – giving the LNER its only line into Wales.

Dee Marsh Junctions connected the line from Bidston to Chester, opened by the North Wales & Liverpool and MS&L Railways in 1896, with the 1890 WMCQ Hawarden Loop line at an end-on connection at Shotton. The line towards Chester closed in 1992 and today little remains of the junctions and stations at Dee Marsh. (Note: NW&L was a joint WMCQ & MS&L railway. The company was dissolved in 1904, seven years after the WMCQ went into liquidation.)

With the closing of the station at Seacombe in 1960, trains from Wrexham terminated at Bidston where we change trains to use Merseyrail to Birkenhead Hamilton Square. Pre-grouping, Wirral Railway ran from West Kirby as far as Birkenhead Park where there was an end-on junction with Mersey Rail.

This 1930s picture was taken looking west from the footbridge at the east end of Bidston Station. At this time the line to West Kirby had been electrified.



From Bidston we travel on Merseyrail to Birkenhead Hamilton Square, where a change of train is necessary to continue the journey south to Hooton and then to Ellesmere Port and Warrington, via Helsby.





Birkenhead Hamilton Square Station 1956



This picture shows the tower for the hydraulic lifts (1950/60s?)



Hamilton Square station had a circular booking office.



The Hamilton Square Underground Station. On Thursday 3rd May 1903 the Mersey Railway brought into service their new electrically driven trains. The new trains were an instant success with passengers, whose numbers then began to steadily rise.

This picture shows the underground platforms in 1903.

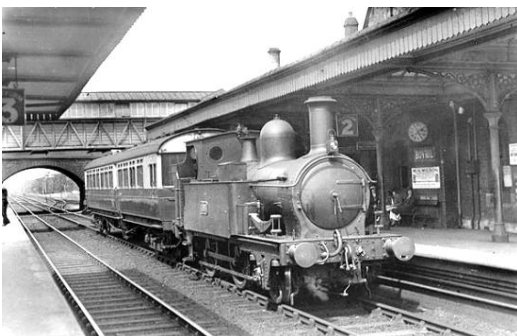
1903 was the date of electrification, often quoted as necessary to arrest a decline in passenger numbers attributable to steam locomotives.



Birkenhead Hamilton Square station was built by the Mersey Railway and opened in February 1886. The station building was designed by G. E. Grayson in Italianate style, and has been designated as a Grade II listed building. It stands on the railway's original route from James Street station in Liverpool to Green Lane, later extended to Rock Ferry and Birkenhead Park. Just south of the station, the lines towards Rock Ferry and Birkenhead Park diverge.

Hamilton Square underground station and Liverpool James Street are the oldest deep level underground stations in the world. The stations were so deep, they required lifts; this gave another world's first: the first lift accessed stations. The original lifts were hydraulically operated with each able to accommodate up to 100 passengers at a time and taking 45 seconds to travel in each direction. The lifts were installed by Easton and Anderson.

The first electric train passenger service ran through the station in May 1903, with a 650v DC fourth rail system and Mersey Railway electric units built by Westinghouse. Despite the journey being far quicker than travelling on the Mersey Ferry service, passengers had not been keen on travelling underground due to the smoke from the previous coal-powered steam locomotives. A *Frequent Electric Trains* sign was erected on the outside of the station's large hydraulic lift tower (slightly below the position of the present sign) to publicise these cleaner trains.



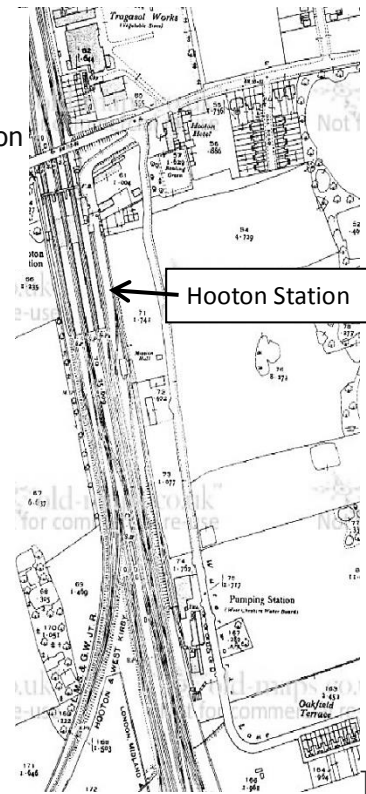
We return to Hamilton Square station for the journey to Warrington via Hooton and Ellesmere Port.

Hooton station was opened in 1840 along with the Chester and Birkenhead Railway, which became a constituent of the Birkenhead Railway and formed, until 1967, the northern end of the GWR's main line from Paddington to Birkenhead Woodside. In its heyday, the station had seven platforms. Today, there are four platforms but only three are electrified.

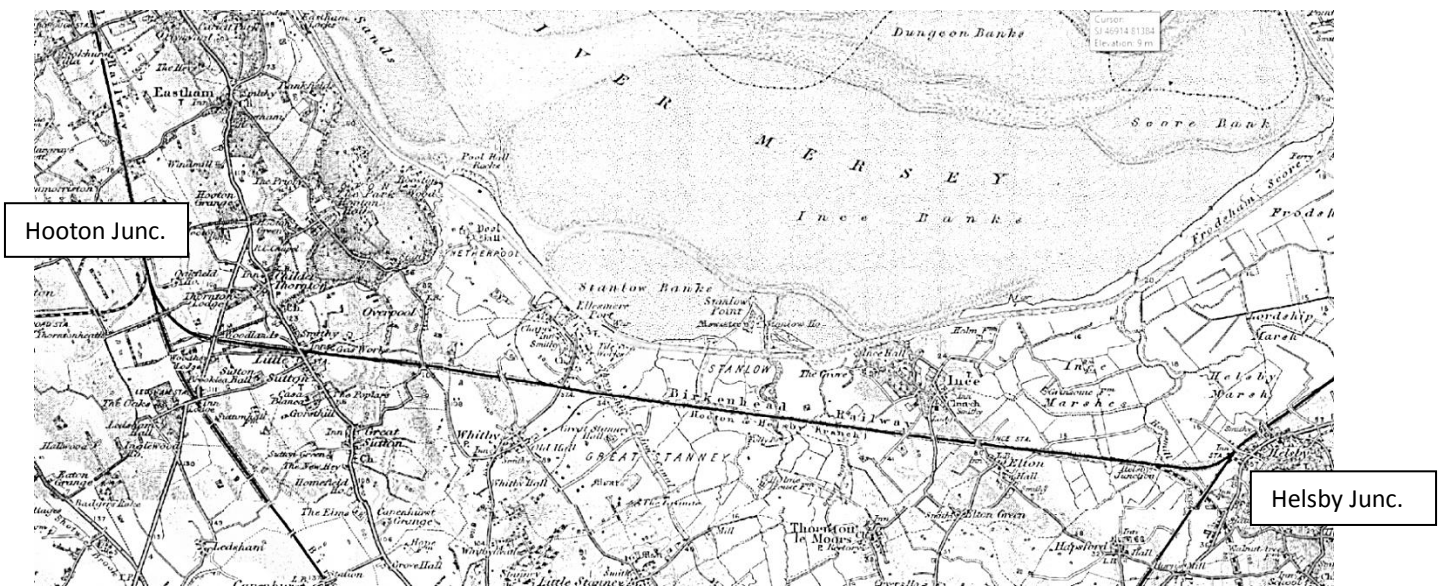
Above: A GWR autotrain pulling into Hooton station platform 2 in 1931 with an all stations service to Helsby.

Unfortunately, Hooton to Helsby is a journey that cannot be made today without a change of trains at Ellesmere Port.

Hooton's architecture is in the style of the BJR; the brick-built station buildings being similar to those at Hadlow Road which date from 1866. The original 1839 Birkenhead Railway was single track, doubled in 1847 and widened to four tracks in 1891. The signalling and the signal boxes of Hooton North (cl. Dec 1973) and Hooton South (cl. May 1985) were replaced with distinctly LNW structures. However, in spite of some local LNW (later LMS) trains and locomotives, it was very much GWR territory.



The previously frequent service from Hooton to Helsby (1863 GW/LNW Joint) and beyond (1850 GW/LNW) has been replaced by two services daily between Ellesmere Port and Warrington Bank Quay, thus no longer serving Hooton.



Hooton to Helsby (OS 1900s): a marshy & rural landscape 40 years before industry became a dominant feature along the route. Intermediate stations: Little Sutton (1863), Overpool (1988), Ellesmere Port (1863), Stanlow & Thornton (1941), Ince (1884).



Helsby Junc looking south from road bridge over the Frodsham line and looking north from the Chester line (also see p18).



Frodsham quay & viaduct (1900s).

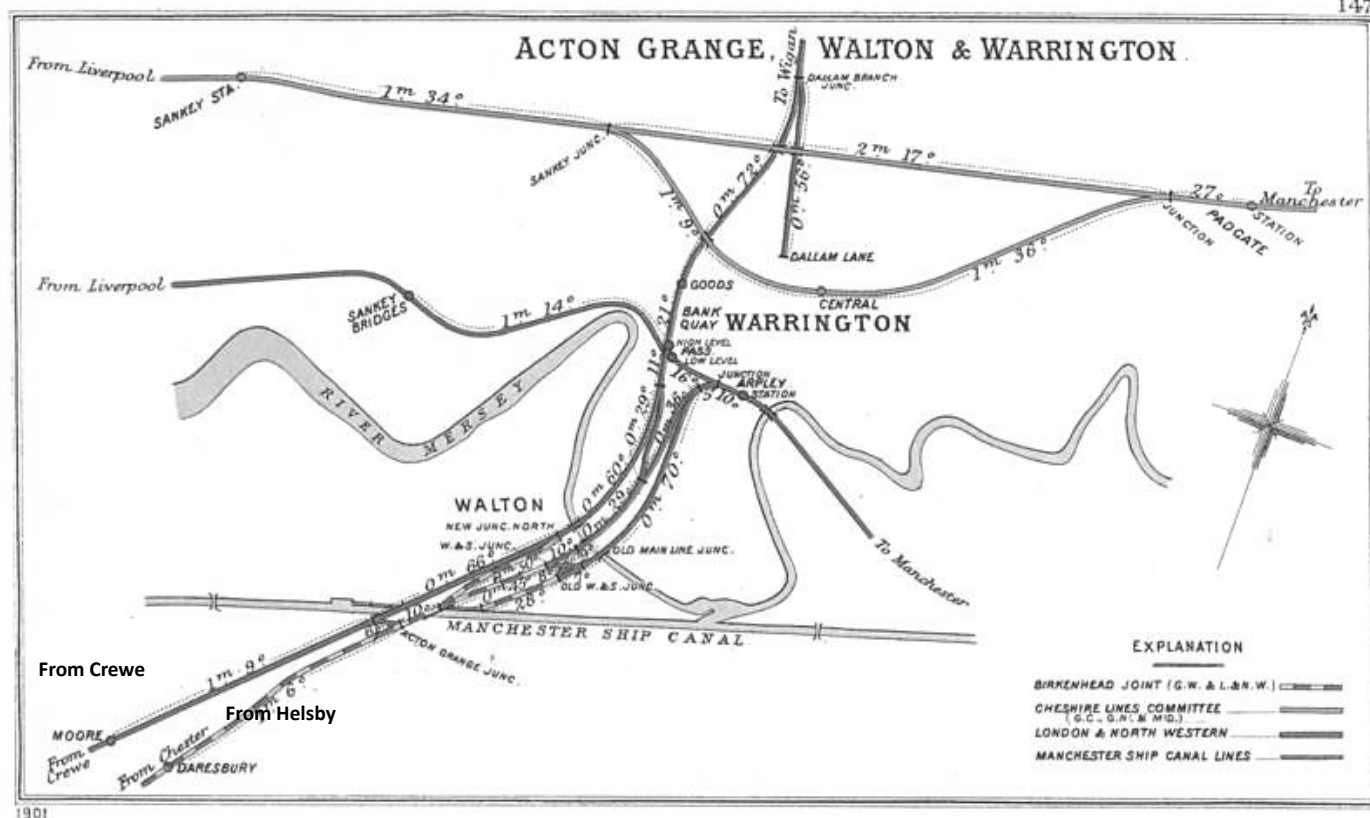
It is constructed in [sandstone](#), brick and [cast iron](#). There are two arched iron spans over the river, with two arches to the west and 21 arches to the east crossing the Weaver Navigation.

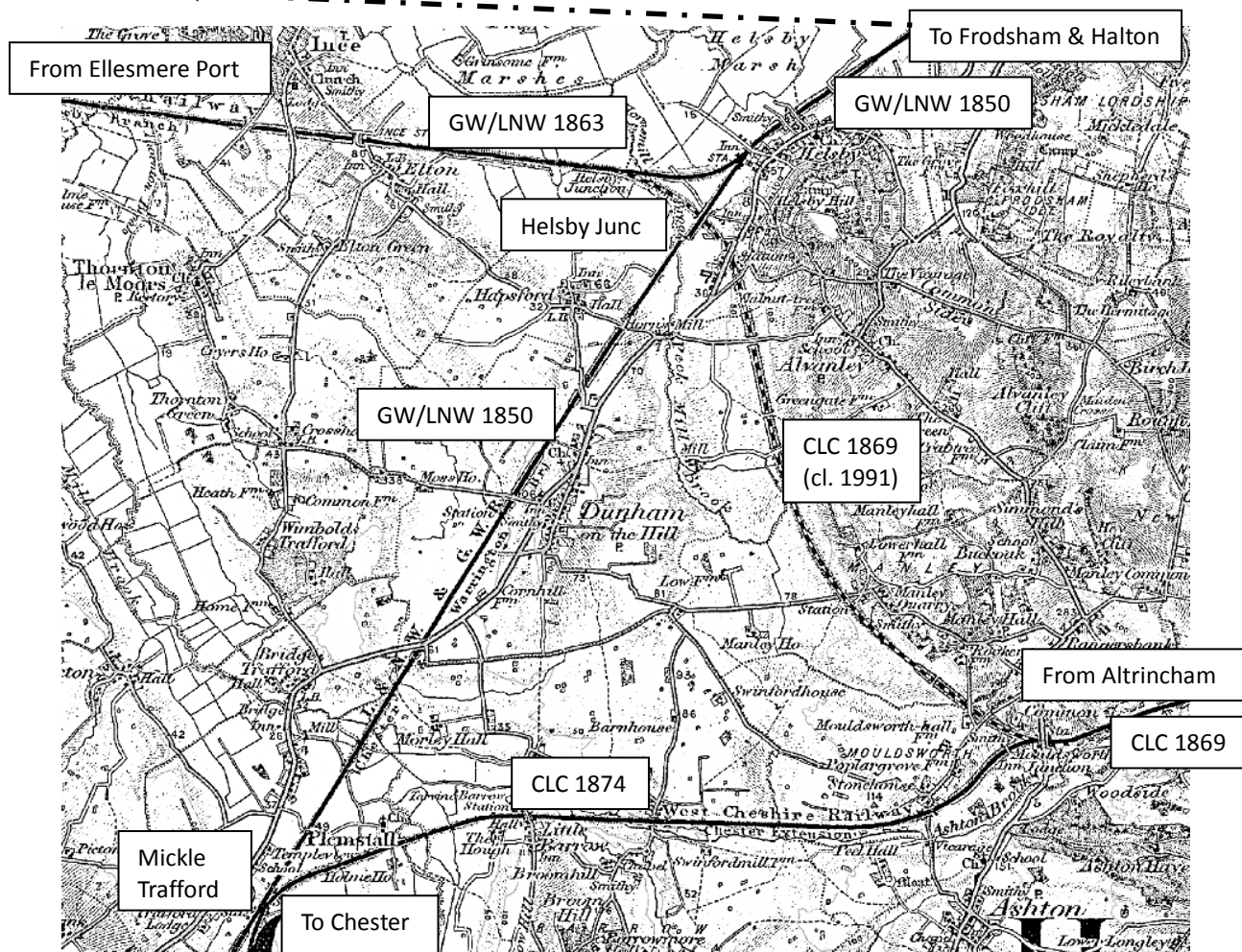
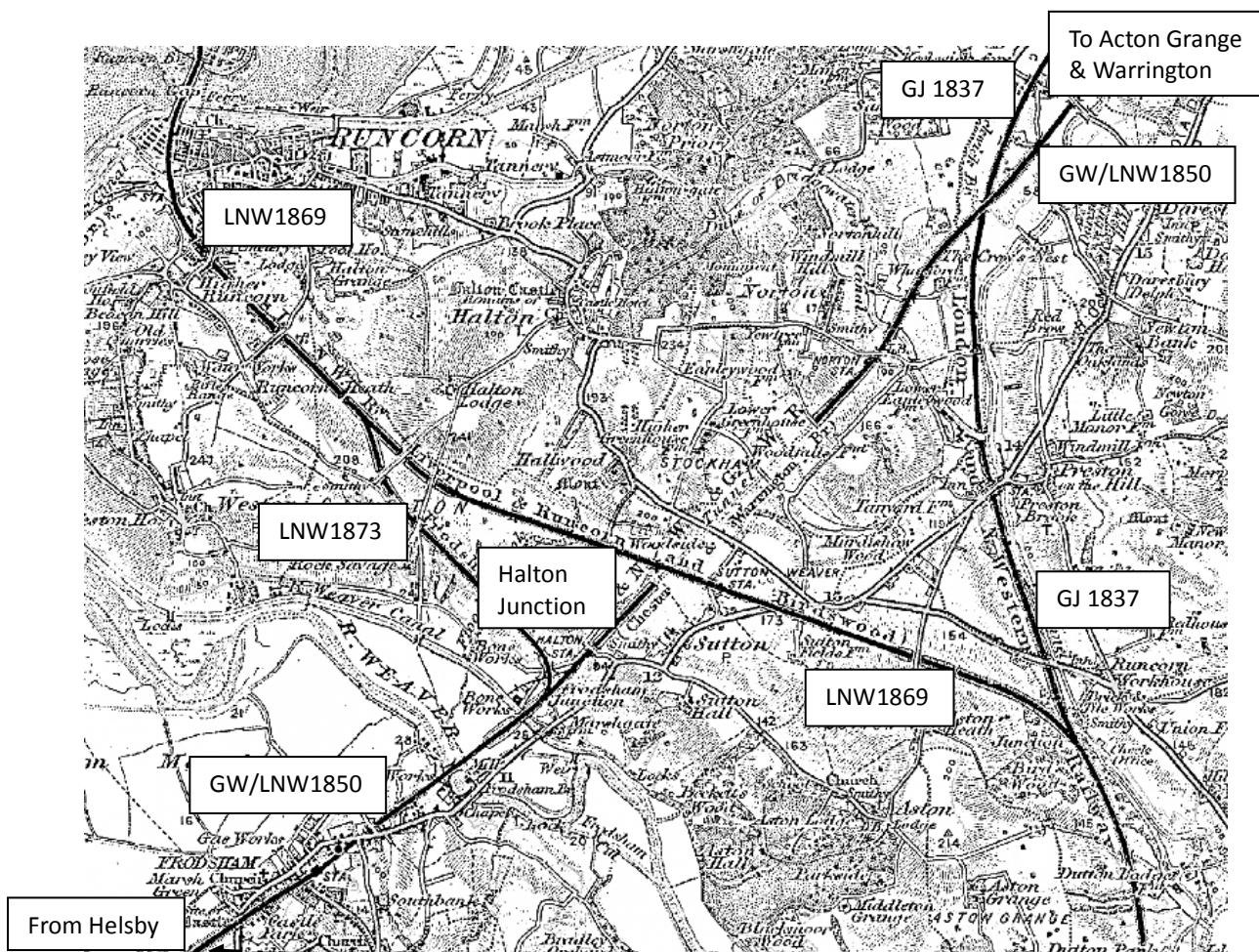


Helsby Station signal box (extant): an LNWR type 4 wooden top on a brick base mounted on the station platform.



Acton Grange Viaduct signal box (August 1939). In the background is the bridge over the Manchester Ship Canal. The box was removed in April 1940.

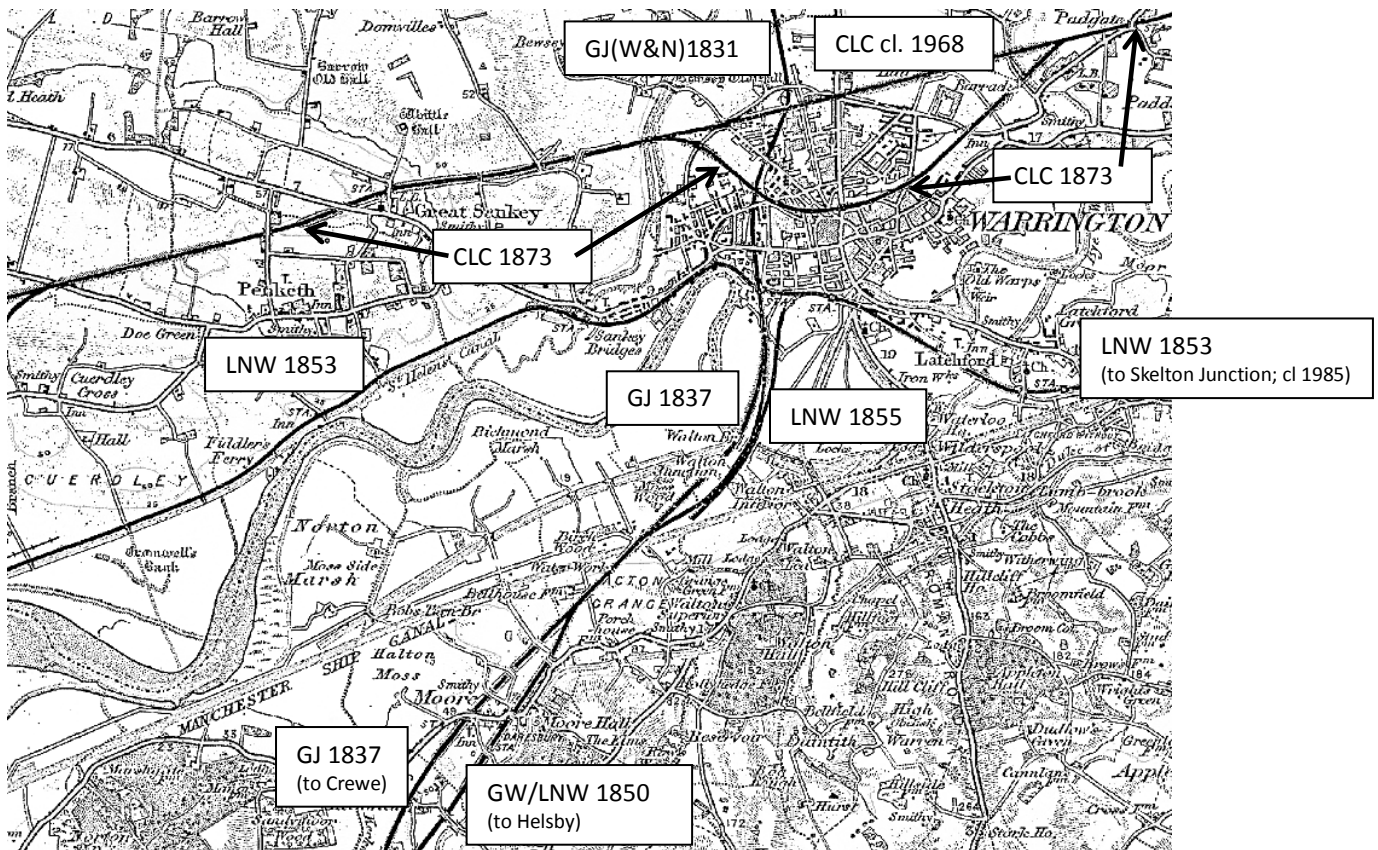




OS Maps 1900s (Memory Map). Note: the CLC 1874 S to N curve at Helsby (cl 1947) is not shown.



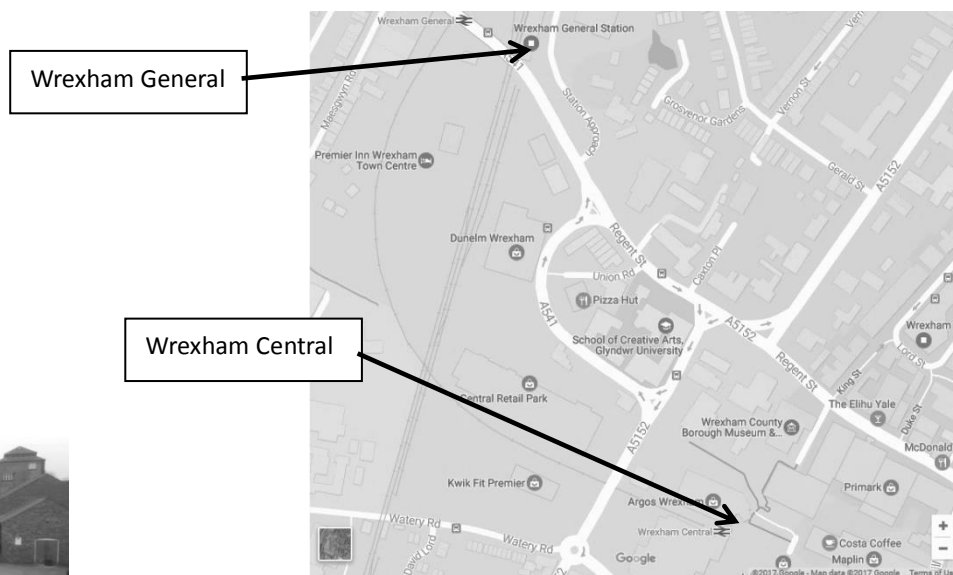
RCHS NW GROUP 2017 RAIL TOUR Thursday 30th March 2017



OS Map 1900s (Memory Map)

There have been several changes to railway alignments around Acton Grange from the original "pre-Ship Canal" lines. Evidence of some of these changes may be seen to the right of our train.

We arrive in Warrington at the 2nd Warrington Bank Quay station of 1868; when the low level platforms were also opened. We leave Warrington on the GJ (formerly Warrington & Newton) line of 1831 to join the 1830 L&M line, via the 1837 GJ curve at Newton-le-Willows. We then follow the 1830 Liverpool & Manchester Railway line, joining the 1849 MSJ&A line for the final approach into Manchester.



The Former Island Green Brewery (Feb 2017).

Street Plan of Wrexham Town Centre.