

## The Cefn Viaduct

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Cefn Mawr Viaduct

The Chester and Shrewsbury railway runs at the eastern end of the Vale of Llangollen, beyond the parish boundary, passing through Cefn Mawr on route from Chester to Shrewsbury. It is carried over the River Dee by a stupendous viaduct, half a mile down stream from the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct. It measures one thousand five hundred and eight feet in length, and stands one hundred and forty-seven feet above the level of the river. The structure is supported by nineteen arches with sixty foot spans.

In 1845 rival schemes were put forward for railway lines to join Chester with Shrewsbury.

Promoters of the plan to link Shrewsbury to Chester via Ruabon had to work quickly to get their scheme moving. Instructions for the notices and plans were only given on the 7th November and they had to be deposited with the clerk of Peace by the 30th November 1845. Hostility from objecting landowners meant that Robertson had to survey the land by night. One irate squire expressed a wish that someone would 'throw Robertson and his theodolite into the canal'.

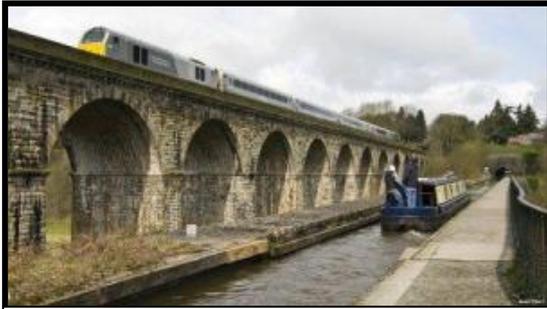
Henry Robertson told a Parliamentary Committee of the advantage of providing a railway line that would open up coalfields of Ruabon and Wrexham to markets at Chester, Birkenhead and Liverpool in the north and to Shrewsbury and other Shropshire towns on the south side. The Parliamentary Committee agreed with him and the bill received Royal Assent on 30th June 1845.

The Shrewsbury and Chester Railway Company made good progress with construction work and the line to Ruabon from the north was opened in November 1846. Henry Robertson completed plans for crossing the River Dee at Cefn Mawr and the railway contractor Thomas Brassey was commissioned to construct the viaduct, taking two years to complete. The ceremony of keying the last stone of the viaduct was performed by Mr. W.Ormsby Gore on the 14th August 1848 and the railway was opened connecting to Chirk Viaduct built at the same time.

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south side and onwards to the Ceiriog Valley.

What was instrumental to the ability to complete the construction of both the Cefn Viaduct and the Chirk Viaduct in only two years was the Shropshire Union Canal or what is now called the Llangollen Canal for the shipment of sandstone from the quarries of Cefn Mawr on the north side of the River Dee valley across the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct to the

### Henry Robertson

Born 1816 - 1888 was a civil engineer and railway pioneer. Born in Banff, Scotland and the youngest of the eight children after winning a scholarship, He went to Aberdeen University where he graduated with M.A. Initially he became a mining engineer, but afterwards decided to take up railway engineering. At an early age he obtained a contract to build the overhead bridges on the Glasgow and Greenock Railway. Through the good offices of a Glasgow contractor, Robertson was sent to report on certain mineral properties at Brymbo, Denbshire in Wales, in respect of which one of the Scottish banks had advanced considerable capital.



Robertson first saw Wales in 1842, when he was 26 years of age. The bankers were so impressed by his report that they gave him support and so, in company with Robert Roy and other Scotsmen, he revived the Brymbo Iron Works and pits of John Wilkinson and gave new life to a decaying industrial area in Denbighshire.

Robertson realised that if the iron-works and collieries were to be run successfully, a railway to the district was essential. He and his friends, therefore, promoted the North Wales Mineral Railway, the first of many measures. Leaving the Brymbo iron-works and pits to the care of W. H. and Charles Darby, Robertson concentrated on building the railways, chiefly with Robert Brassey as contractor. Robertson was the engineer and designer of the railway from Chester to Shrewsbury with its viaducts over the Dee and the Ceiriog. Like George Stephenson in other areas, Robertson had to survey Welsh land for his railways by night owing to the hostility of the owners. Working from Shrewsbury he designed the railways radiating from the Shropshire capital, in addition to the line from Ruabon to Llangollen, Corwen and Bala.

Robertson also maintained an active interest in numerous commercial interests such as Beyer, Peacock and Co, the largest locomotive works in the country, and he took a leading part in the conduct of several collieries and works in Denbighshire. He became the founder of the Brymbo Steel Works in 1884. He was Member of Parliament for Shrewsbury from 1862 to 1865, and again in 1874 and 1880.

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**Thomas Brassey**

Born 1805 to 1870 was a Civil Engineer who was responsible for building much of the world's railways in the 19th century. By 1847, he had built about one-third of the railways in Britain, and by time of his death in 1870 he had built one in every twenty miles of railway in the world. This included three-quarters of the lines in France, major lines in many other European countries and in Canada, Australia, South America and India. He also built the structures associated with those railways, including docks, bridges, viaducts, stations, tunnels and drainage works.

As well as railway engineering, Brassey was active in the development of steamships, mines, locomotive factories, marine telegraphy, and water supply and sewage systems. He built part of the London sewerage system, still in operation today, and was a major shareholder in Brunel's The Great Eastern, the only ship large enough at the time to lay the first transatlantic telegraph cable across the North Atlantic, in 1864.

Please note the new WCBC - WHS website for the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct:

[www.pontcysyllte-aqueduct.co.uk/en-gb/attractions](http://www.pontcysyllte-aqueduct.co.uk/en-gb/attractions)

This has been set up in conjunction with the new Waterways Trust to provide tourist information for the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct at their new tourist information centre at the Trevor Basin.

## **Ty Mawr Country Park**

Ty Mawr has all the fun of the farm in the magnificent setting of the River Dee Valley. There are lots of animals you can meet at Ty Mawr such as donkeys, pigs, and goats. You can even feed our free range chickens and ducks or admire Lawrence the guard Llama, who protects our sheep from foxes! We do not use chemicals and pesticides on the land. That is why we have many species of wild plants and animals and in the summer our traditional hay meadows are full of colour. Why not take a gentle stroll down to the river, sit and relax and see if you can spot a salmon jumping! Picturesquely situated beneath the dramatic Cefn Viaduct on the banks of the River Dee, Ty Mawr provides some of the best scenery around.



Ty Mawr Country Park

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[http://www.wrexham.gov.uk/english/leisure\\_tourism/TyMawrCountryPark.htm](http://www.wrexham.gov.uk/english/leisure_tourism/TyMawrCountryPark.htm)

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Cefn Viaduct and the Orient Express 2012



Ty Mawr Country Park and the Cefn Viaduct