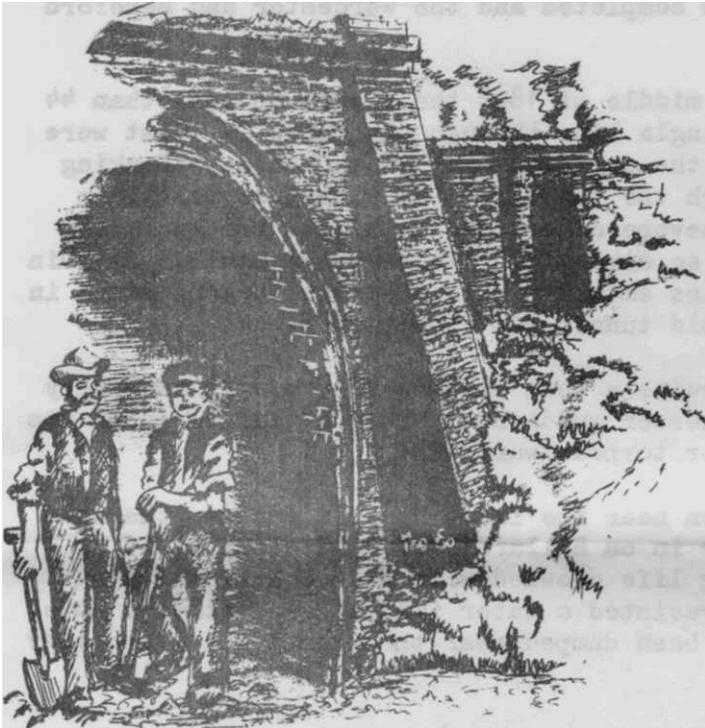


Malvern Fact Sheets

Marion Percy came across a number of interesting 'Malvern Factsheets' that she collected, which were produced by the Tourist Information Office in Malvern. These have all been donated to the Archives, but I have reproduced two below.

Tunnels through the Hills



There are two railway tunnels through the Malvern Hills. The one in present use was built by the Great Western Railway Company and opened in August, 1926. Alongside is the original tunnel, opened in September, 1861 for the Worcester and Hereford Railway Company. Its portals are now crumbling and overgrown and the narrow bore is a melancholy, rubble-strewn, smoke-blackened cave echoing in the long gloom.

The old tunnel measures 1,567 yards between faces, which is no great length. However, the extraordinary toughness of the rock made its construction very difficult indeed. The heart-rock of the Malverns is a very old and very hard granite called syenite which thrusts upwards as a slightly leaning wall, supporting drifts of soil and shale which form the lower slopes. On the Malvern side the slopes are of red marl, and on the Colwall side limestone shales, both much softer and wetter than the syenite. The tunnel passes through all three types of material.

Around 1853 a shaft was begun and eventually 7 ft. pilot headings were driven from the bottom. The work progressed slowly and proved very expensive; a contemporary writer observed that "At the present time (February 1856) the tunnel is closed, and the works have been abandoned from want of funds to proceed with the railway; and it is very doubtful whether it can be carried on to Hereford for many years to come".

This could have been so had not Stephen Ballard entered the project in October, 1856. Ballard was a local man, born in Malvern Link in 1804 and possessed of that catholic talent which distinguished the engineers and scientists of his age. Thomas Brassey, the great railway constructor, had engaged him as agent and partner in several of his contracts and this became his position in the Worcester and Hereford Railway project. By that time he was living at Colwall, on a farmstead whose land lay over the tunnel route.

Things began to buck up. A new Act of August, 1858 enabled funds to be subscribed by the railway companies associated with the Worcester and Hereford Railway, as distinct from merely local interests. Anticipating this Ballard prepared a new design for the tunnel and in February, 1857 set miners to work extending the heading into the hillside.

In those days all the rock cutting was by hammer and hand drill, sometimes assisted by blasting. In May, 1857 Ballard experimented with a steam drill, but it was not a success. On 21st February, 1859 he records that 9 men

and 3 drills were working the headings, for which each was paid three shillings for a 10£ hour day. The extraction rate was a mere 7 ft. 6 in. per week.

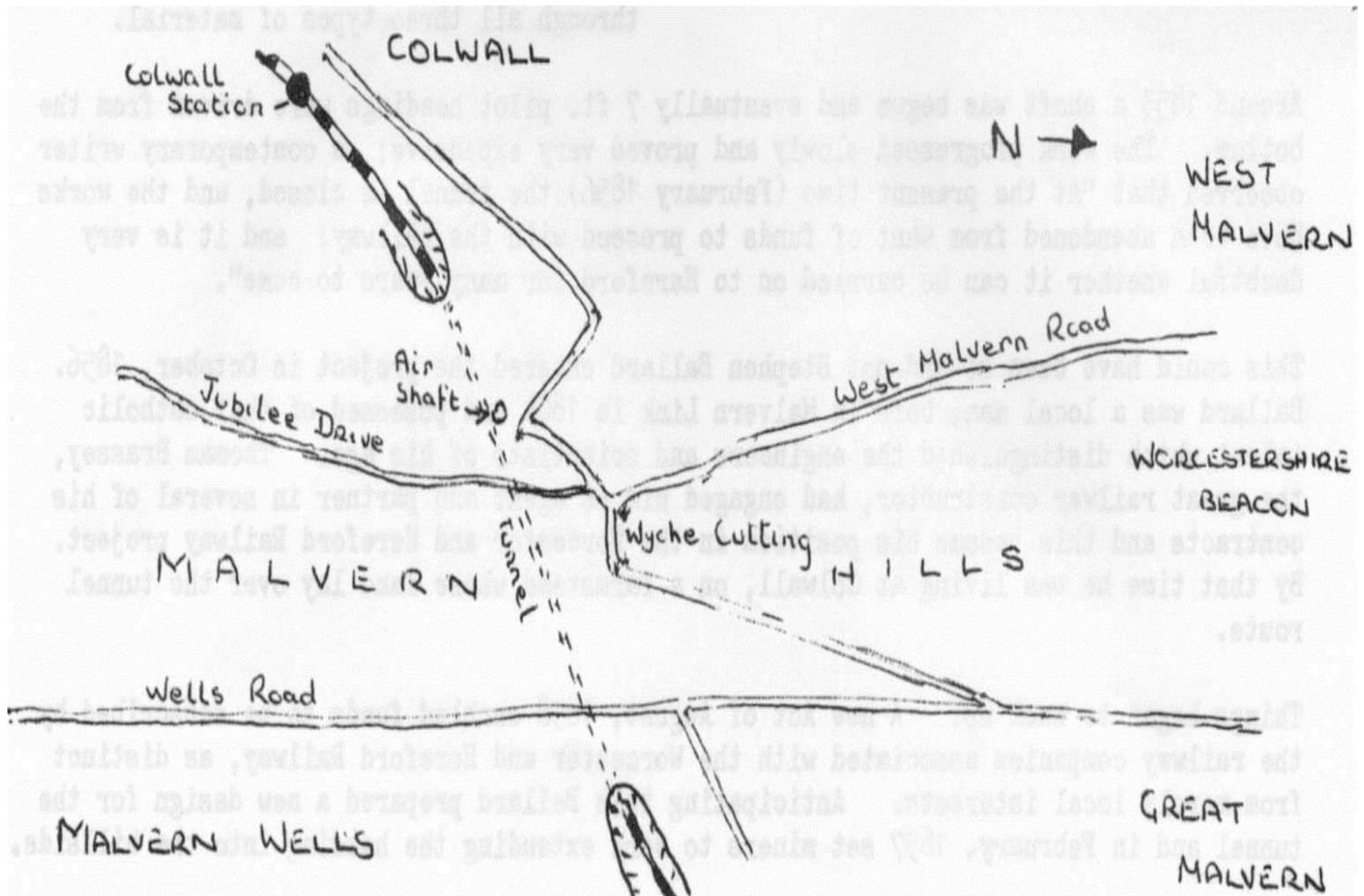
Obviously more working faces were needed for the tunnel to be completed in reasonable time; some 693 yards had to be cut through the syenite; so a second shaft was begun on Ballard land on 28th January, 1860, and later a third. A locomotive was hauled over the Hills by horses and put to work hauling spoil from the Colwall workings. The syenite was not the only problem. The bore intercepted water courses and drained the wells on the hillside, to the displeasure of both miners and residents. Pumps had to be installed and the water piped up to the houses. A stationary steam pump at the foot of an air shaft was a feature of the old tunnel during its working life.

The laborious extraction continued until a way through was made on 21st July, 1860. On 17th September, 1861, the tunnel work was completed and the Worcester and Hereford Railway opened throughout its length.

The growth of traffic was rapid, and by the middle of 1868 there were no less than 44 scheduled services a day passing over the single line through the tunnel. Most were freight trains to and from the Midlands and the coalfields of South Wales. Banking engines helped heavy westbound trains through the tunnel. The vibration from this traffic and the action of the smoke caused severe deterioration of the brickwork. Within a year there was a fall of rock from an airshaft. There was a similar fall in 1907 and later on there were stories of trains emerging with dislodged bricks stuck in the coach roofs. By the early 1920's the old tunnel was almost worn out.

The new tunnel was completed in 2½ years - quite a long time in view of the machinery then available. It is of larger bore and lesser gradient. The old tunnel found its last employment during the War as a store for torpedo warheads.

One of the old ventilating shafts can be seen near the first hairpin bend on the road from the Wyche Cutting to Colwall. Another in on Ballard land, and close by it is Stephen's grave. He died in 1890, his long life crowded with wide achievements in waterways and railways. He would have appreciated a later irony. As railways gave way to roadways the syenite spoil which had been dumped near the tunnel was taken away and used as ballast for the M50 motorway.



The Doomed Pleasure Palace on the Hills

Those who enjoy ghost stories may be entertained by a bizarre episode in Malvern's colourful past.

The ghost itself is a building, long gone and almost forgotten, though a few fragments remain. It was an enormous ornate pleasure palace, built just over a hundred years ago high up on the western slopes of the Hills not far from the Wyche Cutting, looking out from its lofty heights over Herefordshire and Wales. But it was doomed even before it opened.

The creator of this grandiose folly was Mr. W. H. Ryland, in 1868 the Mayor of Bewdley. He came to Malvern in 1869 to take the waters in the hope of arresting the consumption which was threatening his life. Malvern was a booming Spa in those days: people of means were flocking in to exchange good money for water-cure treatments.

Ryland shopped around the various hydropathic establishments but got worse instead of better. He was about to accept his fate and go home to die when an old man -presumably a resident who was not part of the fashionable water-cure business -advised him to try the water of one of the outlying springs high up on the western slopes. He did so, and whether out of faith or because of the efficacy of the water he recovered - or was persuaded to believe so. In gratitude he determined that all should benefit from the water. He bought the spring - he was a man of considerable means - and gave it to the public.

The stone tablet announcing the gift can still be seen, set in the wall over a grating alongside the pavement of the West Malvern Road, about four hundred yards from its junction with the Wyche Cutting with the A4150 Malvern - Colwall road. The inscription reads:-

'This fountain of pure water and tank is the sole gift of W. H. Ryland of Bewdley to the inhabitants of this neighbourhood and the public, 1870. Waste not, want not.'

Ryland should have left it at that, but for some reason a vast ambition seized his mind. He decided to build a huge concert hall near the spring and to set it in magnificent gardens where thousands could find physical and cultural refreshment.

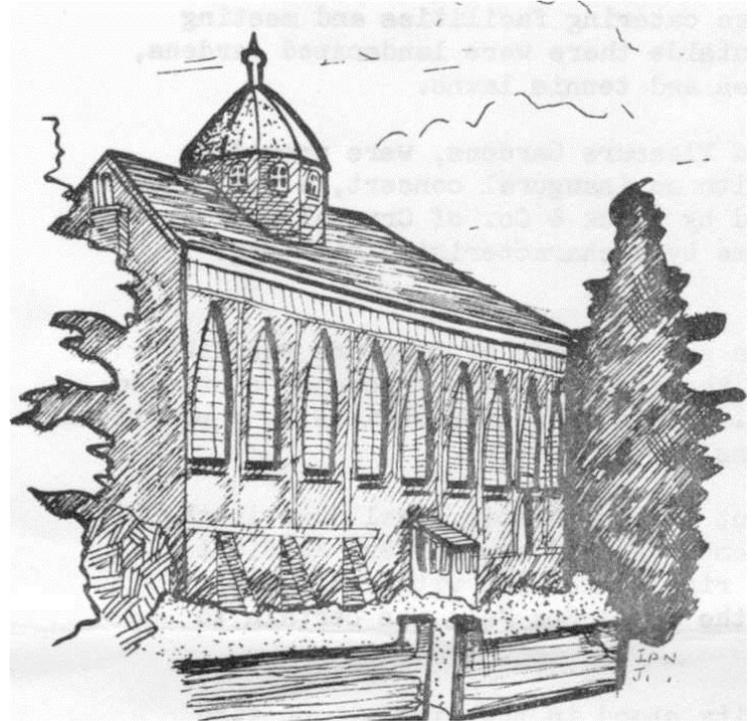
It was an absurd notion. The site was away from the centre of population, difficult of access because of the steep slopes, cramped because of the gradient, having little level ground for vehicles, and at times cut off by bad weather. But there was no stopping him and the construction of the extravagant folly was begun. Ryland studied comparable buildings all over Britain and incorporated their best features in the design.

The concert hall seated 2,200, with standing room for many more. The body of the hall seated 1,100, the gallery 600, and a further 200 were accommodated in boxes and a small dress circle. The whole was surmounted by a great dome rising 76 ft. above the floor of the hall.

There was an art gallery exhibiting valuable paintings on loan from private collections. There were statues and carvings everywhere, especially around the richly ornamented marble fountain in the shape of an angel bearing a water lily inscribed ***'God's water: drink and thirst not: pure water is life.'***

There was a suite of water-cure baths, there were catering facilities and meeting rooms, and everywhere was centrally heated. Outside there were landscaped gardens, a grotto fountain, rustic structures, shrubberies and tennis lawns.

The Royal Malvern Well Spa Hall, Art Gallery and Pleasure Gardens, were opened to the public at 10 a.m. on Monday 7th May, 1883 with an inaugural concert, a ball and, later in the evening, a firework display mounted by



Brock & Co. of Crystal Palace. The proceedings were clouded for part of the time by a characteristic hill fog. It could have been an omen.

Many people came, drawn by curiosity about this great temple of pleasure the like of which they had never seen. It is said that the roads all about were so cluttered with carriages that it took hours to clear them. This drawback, obvious to a practical thinker, was one of the deterrents to the success of the venture.

But a far greater deterrent was a more modest but more realistic rival down in the town which opened shortly afterwards. The Assembly Rooms, now Malvern Festival Theatre, was a solidly-backed enterprise in the right place and with realistic aspirations. It was as certain to succeed as the Royal Spa Hall was certain to fail.

However, for a while hopes were high while reality stood in the wings. On fine days it must have been a delight to stroll about the gardens, to wander into the cool hall, to listen to concerts and to take the water from the exquisite fountain. Sometimes great artists performed. Jenny Lind, the Swedish Nightingale, who lived nearby, once sang there - though she was growing old and it was to be her last public concert.

By about 1890 Malvern's water-cure boom was over and the long decline was beginning. Moreover, such residents and visitors who were looking for entertainment preferred the more convenient Assembly Rooms. Trade for the Royal Spa Hall and Gardens fell away though the running expenses must have been enormous. After only 12 years, in 1895, it was closed down. Ryland died heartbroken, a victim of grandiose delusions.

The great hall fell into disrepair and local boys played in the crumbling structure. Finally, some time before the second World War, it was demolished, though the Royal Spa Lodge next door still stands.

All that remains of the pleasure palace are a pair of gate pillars by the roadside, a stage door up a little alleyway, and some fragments of the mosaic floor in the garden of the house which now occupies the site.

Wilfred Harper.

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Happy new year to all our Readers

Future Talks

22nd January 2018

'Craswell Priory: A triple Unique Grandmontine Cell in the Marches'
by Joe Hillaby

23rd April 2018

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING followed by
'The Design and Planning of the new Colwall Village School'
by Joyce Clifford

10th September 2018.

Directing the Antique Road Show at Eastnor Castle
by Mike Jackson

21st January 2019.

Julia Goldsmith of Catcher Media – Film on Hop Picking in Herefordshire
+ Q&A session on hop-picking.
(all part of the 'Life through a Lens' project based on the photographic archive of Derek Evans.)

From the Editor

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