

ROBERTSON, HENRY (1816 - 1888), civil engineer and railway pioneer

Name: Henry Robertson
Date of birth: 1816
Date of death: 1888
Spouse: Elizabeth Robertson (née Dean)
Parent: Duncan Robertson
Gender: Male
Occupation: civil engineer and railway pioneer
Area of activity: Business and Industry; Engineering, Construction, Naval Architecture and Surveying
Author: George Geoffrey Lerry

Born 11 January 1816 at Banff, Scotland, the youngest of the eight children of Duncan Robertson, an Inland Revenue officer. Winning a scholarship, Henry Robertson went to Aberdeen University where he graduated M.A. His father died about this time and the family moved to Glasgow. The son devoted himself to mining engineering, but afterwards decided to take up railway engineering. At a very 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, Denbighshire, 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 which he was destined to pilot through Parliament; [David Davies](#) of Llan-dinam (1818 - 1890) said Robertson was the best parliamentary witness of his day. Leaving the Brymbo iron-works and pits to the care of W. H. and Charles Darby, Robertson concentrated on building the railways, chiefly with Thomas 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. Removing to Shrewsbury, he designed and made most of the railways radiating from the Shropshire capital, in addition to the line from Ruabon to Llan-gollen, Corwen, Bala, etc. Side by side with these activities Robertson maintained an active interest in numerous commercial enterprises. He was an original partner in Beyer, Peacock and Co., owners of 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. In 1885 he resigned his seat and was then elected for Merioneth. Later he resigned and seceded from the Liberal party on the introduction of Gladstone's Irish Home Rule Bill. He married, 1846, Elizabeth, daughter of J. W. Dean, a London solicitor. There were four children of the marriage - one son and three daughters. Henry Robertson died at Pale, Meirionnydd, on 22 March 1888. There is a very large group of the Robertson papers (including plans and maps) in the N.L.W.

Author

George Geoffrey Lerry

Sources

personal research

Further reading

NLW Archives: [To the Electors of Merionethshire](#)

NLW Archives: [To the Electors of the County of Merioneth: \[Mr. Robertson's amended Address; or what he really meant to say\]](#)

Coflein: [CROEGEN; CROGEN, LLANDDERFEL](#)

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