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Revolutionary or evolutionary? The significance
of railway expansion for the development of
Rhyl into a popular seaside resort, c. 1794-1880.

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6764 words.

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Introduction

Seaside visits and excursions had become fashionable across Britain from the mid-eighteenth century as a result of urbanisation following the Industrial Revolution. Initially, it was sea-bathing that had grown increasingly popular amongst the aristocracy and was advocated by medical writers for its health benefits from as early as 1702. Many wealthy visitors sought coastal trips to carry out doctor's orders which sparked the initial urban development of seaside towns. Then, in 1783, the popularity of sea-bathing was boosted further when George IV, the Prince Regent boasted of his personal experience of sea-bathing at Brighton to cure his swollen glands.¹ Indeed, John Hirst argued that seaside resorts originated as places for health restoration but soon became places for recreation.² One of the towns that was transformed from a small rural community to an urbanized resort, based on tourism, was Rhyl in North Wales. By 1880, Rhyl was considered a popular seaside resort that appealed to both working and middle-classes. In *Slater's Directory of North and South Wales*, 1880, Rhyl was described as a 'favourite watering place' that featured a range of tourist amenities such as a pier, promenade and hotels of a 'superior description.'³ Upcott

¹ Allan Fletcher, 'The Role of Landowners, Entrepreneurs and Railways in the Urban Development of the North Wales Coast During The Nineteenth Century', *Welsh History Review*, Volume 16, Issue 4, (1993), p.514

² John Hirst, 'Resort Development on the Cambrian Coast, 1840-1914' (Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, University of Aberystwyth, 2017), p.4. Available at

https://pure.aber.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/29207803/Hirst_John.pdf

³ I. Slater, *Slater's Royal National Commercial Directory of North & South Wales*, 1880, Part 1, (Manchester, 1880, pp.204-210. Available at

<https://specialcollections.le.ac.uk/digital/collection/p16445coll4/id/90384/rec/1>, Accessed 1st April 2023

Gill made similar descriptions of Rhyl in her trade directory *Seaside Watering Places*. For Gill, one of the most notable features of Rhyl was how accessible it was via railway. She noted that for railway passengers, Chester was thirty miles away and Liverpool was forty-seven.⁴

The railway was crucial to the development of North Wales seaside resorts, including Rhyl. It was an affordable, relatively quick method of transportation that aided an already emerging demand for leisure time by the sea. Whilst Rhyl had been gradually developing into a resort from the late eighteenth century, the opening of the Chester and Holyhead Railway line in 1848 led to exponential growth and the arrival of a significant number of visitors to the town. In 1875, *The North Wales Chronicle* reported that one train from Birmingham transported between six and seven hundred visitors to Rhyl.⁵ Furthermore, Jenkins noted that between 1840 and 1870, over 1400 miles of railway were built across Wales.⁶ The extent of railway construction and the scale of growth in towns such as Rhyl meant that some historians such as Asa Briggs argued that the railways were responsible for the creation of popular seaside resorts.⁷ Similarly, Walvin argued that the new railway system that emerged across Britain created a ‘profound social revolution.’ He suggested that the development of railways attracted people to resorts such as Rhyl and forced towns to

⁴ U. Gill, *Seaside Watering Places 2/6*, (London, 1899), p.450

⁵ Anon, ‘Rhyl’, *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 3rd July 1875, p.6, available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4514412/4514418/68/rhyl%20%20AND%20visitors%20AND%20600>, accessed 1st April 2023.

⁶ Geraint H Jenkins, *A Concise History of Wales*, (Cambridge, 2007), p.176

⁷ Asa Briggs, *A Social History of England*, (London, 1983), p. 214

expand.⁸ However, the development of seaside resorts was complex and cannot be solely attributed to the railways.

There is a general lack of historiography and research into urban Wales and therefore, the development of Welsh seaside resorts. Much existing research broadly examines a multitude of seaside resorts or British towns such as Blackpool, which is beyond the scope of this research. For Peter Borsay, seaside towns and resort history have been ‘unduly neglected’ and have ‘scarcely rippled’ the surface of Welsh historiography.⁹ Indeed, historians Jenkins and Davies made little reference to seaside resorts in their works on the history of Wales.¹⁰ Borsay questioned this general lack of research and suggested that extensive historiography on English seaside resorts is often broadly applied to Wales also. He considered this to be due to the non-indigenous nature of Welsh seaside resorts.¹¹ This gap in resort historiography has inspired this research. It is hoped that, as well as being able to make conclusions about resort development, this dissertation will show that the history of Welsh seaside towns is worthy of further research. For John Hirst, examining the growth of towns such as Rhyl ‘adds significantly’ to seaside historiography.¹²

⁸ James Walvin, *Beside the Seaside*, (London, 1978), p.35

⁹ Peter Borsay, ‘Welsh Seaside Resorts: Historiography, Sources and Themes’, *Welsh History Review*, Volume 24. Issue 2 (2008), pp.93-104

¹⁰ Jenkins, ‘*A Concise History of Wales*’ and John Davies, *A History of Wales*, (London, 2007)

¹¹ Borsay, ‘Welsh Seaside Resorts’, p.99

¹² John Hirst, ‘Resort Development on the Cambrian Coast, 1840-1914’ (Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, University of Aberystwyth, 2017), p.17. Available at

https://pure.aber.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/29207803/Hirst_John.pdf, accessed 20th March 2023

In respect of existing historiography, Allan Fletcher provided significant, detailed assessment of the development of North Wales coastal towns and Rhyl specifically. He recognised three dominant factors that influenced resort development. These were landowners, the bourgeoisie and the railway. He suggested that landownership was crucial to understanding how railways contributed to Rhyl's development.¹³ John Hirst made similar arguments about resort development in his thesis 'Resort Development on the Cambrian Coast 1840-1914.' He argued that the growth of seaside resorts was more complex than being a direct result of the railways. Instead, it was rooted in economic, cultural and social changes with resort development being a 'significant enterprise.'¹⁴ John Walton also provided substantial historiography and commented on the pattern of resort development. Whilst Walton did not understate the influence of the railway, he considered other factors such as landowners as integral.¹⁵ Borsay commented that Walton's work was 'ground-breaking' due to its inclusion of Welsh resorts.¹⁶

The first chapter of this dissertation will examine the early years of Rhyl's development into a resort. Considering this, the first question that will be explored is: how significant was the role of landowners to Rhyl's development into a seaside resort? To approach this question, individual landowners will be discussed on a case study basis as a means of understanding their influence. The chapter will also explore how Rhyl's landowning and aristocratic élites

¹³ Allan Fletcher, 'Rhyl – The Evolution of a Resort', *Flintshire Historical Society Journal*, volume 33. p.123

¹⁴ John Hirst, 'Resort Development on the Cambrian Coast.' pp.3-10

¹⁵ John Walton, *The English Seaside Resort: A Social History 1750-1914*, (Leicester, 1983), p.45

¹⁶ Borsay, 'Welsh Seaside Resorts', p.98

formed a local government that was imperative to the town's urban growth. In order to understand how significant the railway was, Chapter I will also ask: how popular was Rhyl to visitors and tourists prior to the opening of the Chester and Holyhead Railway line in 1848? To explore this, primary source evidence from newspaper archives will be used to indicate the number of visitors to the town. Many of Rhyl's visitors in the early years arrived on sea-borne traffic such as the steam packet known as 'Gulliver'.¹⁷ Newspaper evidence will be used to show the importance of early transportation methods and how this was indicative of a growing tourist demand prior to the railway.

Chapter II will consider how the railway aided the development of Rhyl. It will ask: how popular was the railway and did passenger numbers increase over time? To answer this, passenger numbers taken from Peter Baughan's *Chester and Holyhead Railway Volume I: The Main Line up to 1880* and a report taken from the National Archives will be analysed.¹⁸ The chapter will also assess population and occupation data to answer: how did the railway aid the town's economic growth?

This dissertation will show that a range of factors were necessary to allow Rhyl to develop into a popular seaside resort. Whilst the significance of the railway will not be understated, it will be evidenced that the growth and development of Rhyl was an evolutionary rather than revolutionary process. Furthermore, it is hoped that this dissertation will highlight that Welsh seaside resorts are a topic worthy of further research.

¹⁷ Fletcher, 'The Role of Landowners, Entrepreneurs and Railways', p.519

¹⁸ Peter E Baughan, *The Chester and Holyhead Railway, Volume I: The Main Line up to 1880*, (Devon, 1972) p.302

Chapter I – Landowners, Local Government and Sea Transport

By the start of the nineteenth century, Rhyl had grown increasingly popular to visitors who sought trips to the seaside for its health benefits and sea-bathing. This tourist demand within the town was recognised and exploited by landowners and a property-owning middle class who developed lands to facilitate visitors. Allan Fletcher observed that Rhyl grew gradually from the end of the eighteenth century until 1848, when the opening of the Chester and Holyhead Railway led to exponential growth for the town.¹⁹ In his article, 'Rhyl – The Evolution of a Resort', Allan Fletcher focused his discussion of Rhyl's development on the actions and investments of the landowning élites, the town's geographical proximity to Liverpool, the creation of a secular form of local government and the coming of the railway in 1848. He argued that aristocratic and gentry landowners were 'acquiescent' in the growth of tourism as they seized every opportunity to exploit tourist potential, including when the opportunity for railway construction arose.²⁰ Fletcher's article is pertinent to the consideration of Rhyl's development and will be considered throughout this chapter.

The role of landowners in Rhyl's development is apparent from the early sales of land that began in the late eighteenth century. Between 1794 and 1840 there were substantial sales of land across Rhyl's coastline, in order to fund a flood prevention scheme by the Rhuddlan Marsh Embankment Trust. Significantly, the trustees consisted of church hierarchy and landowners. The scheme proposed the building of an embankment, in order to prevent the

¹⁹ Fletcher, 'Rhyl – The Evolution of a Resort', p.119

²⁰ Fletcher, 'Rhyl – The Evolution of a Resort', p.144

frequent flooding of the River Clwyd. The intentions of the scheme were to improve agricultural amenities, drain land and improve access to Lancashire through coastal shipping. This led to the sale of lands, the first of which was in 1794, in order to raise capital for the scheme. Initially, the sale of these lands was for agricultural purposes. However, as Fletcher observed, by 1807, the motivation for land purchases changed. Landowners began to recognise the appeal of land by the sea for sea-bathing eligibility, and demand began to reflect this.²¹ This was indicative of attitudes changing amongst the élites, who began to recognise the economic and tourist potential of land by the sea. Moreover, their willingness to sell land allowed for subsequent investment and the emergence of an entrepreneurial bourgeoisie.²²

An example of one of these land sales was in 1825, when John Sisson purchased four acres of land. He used the land to build a house with five bedrooms, stables and a cabin on the beach, specifically for the purpose of being let out in the summer tourist season.²³ Sisson's house later became the Parade Hotel and, in 1874, it became Morfa Hall, a woman's convalescent home which allowed for visitors with disabilities and illnesses to enjoy the sea-bathing and health benefits that Rhyl had to offer. Sisson is described by Marjorie Howe as a great benefactor to the town who served Rhyl for many years.²⁴ Another influential landowner was Edward Lloyd-Mostyn. Table 1 shows he held 8390 acres of land. This

²¹ Fletcher, 'Rhyl – The Evolution of a Resort', pp.120-121

²² Fletcher, 'Rhyl – The Evolution of a Resort', p.144

²³ Fletcher, 'Rhyl – The Evolution of a Resort', pp.120-122

²⁴ Marjorie Howe, *The Commissioners of Rhyl, The Men who Built the Town*, (Rhyl, nd), pp.44-45

included six acres which he purchased in 1838 after its existing landowners were forced to sell. By 1851, Mostyn had developed the land to consist of twelve shops, four hotels and nineteen working-class homes. One of Mostyn's hotels was the Mostyn Arms which had a good reputation amongst visitors.²⁵ This use of land is indicative of Mostyn's proactiveness at recognising Rhyl's tourist potential and his ability to act upon it. Furthermore, Robert Jones, a landowner and later one of the first commissioners of the town, built the Belvoir Hotel in the 1840s.²⁶ The hotel was described by Howe as popular amongst visitors and as having fine views from the third-floor balcony. Howe described Jones as an 'enterprising [...] businessman.'²⁷ These case studies show how the actions of landowners enabled significant investment and how, along with property owners, they capitalized on the town's economic and tourist potential.

It has been evidenced that the sale of lands and the opportunity to build upon them led to the development of tourist facilities in Rhyl. Table 1 lists the estimated acreage of major landowners in the county of Flintshire in 1873:

²⁵ Fletcher, 'Rhyl – The Evolution of a Resort', p.122

²⁶ Howe, *The Commissioners of Rhyl*, p. 1.

²⁷ Howe, *The Commissioners of Rhyl*, p.2

<u>Landowner</u>	<u>Estimated Acreage</u>
The Lord Windsor (minor)	15,383
Hugh Robert Hughes, of Kinmel Park, Denbyshire	15,177
Lord Mostyn	8390
The Lord Hanmer	7318
The Lord Kenyon	7191
Edmund Peel, of Bryn-y-pys, Flintshire	5779
Conwy Grenville Hercules Rowley-Conwy, of Botryddan	5527
Sir Stephen Richard Glynne, Bt., of Hawarden	4773
Philip Bryan Davies-Cooke, of Gwysaney, Flintshire	3454

Table 1

Data taken from Brian LI James, 'The Great Landowners of Wales in 1873'²⁸

Walton observed that aristocratic landowners had access to sufficient capital to allow them to ride out the early difficulties of developing seaside resorts.²⁹ Similarly, Hirst argued that aristocratic families were 'well placed' to exploit the opportunities on offer.³⁰ Indeed, the data in Table 1 supports this as it shows the substantial levels of land held by Rhyll's landowners.³¹ However, it should be considered that in some cases, this data is inclusive of land held outside of Flintshire. Walton, Fletcher and Hirst all considered the role of landowners crucial to Rhyll's development. Whilst Walton provided useful discussion about

²⁸ Brian LI James, 'The Great Landowners of Wales in 1873', National Library of Wales Journal, Volume XIV/3. (2003), available at <https://www.genuki.org.uk/big/wal/Archives/NLWjournals/GreatLandowners>, accessed 05th April 2023.

²⁹ Walton, 'The English Seaside Resort', p.104

³⁰ Hirst, 'Resort Development on the Cambrian Coast', p.11.

³¹ James, 'The Great Landowners of Wales in 1873'

seaside development, it is important to note that the focus of his work is broad and inclusive of many British seaside resorts, rather than Rhyl specifically. Indeed, any generalisations should be avoided.

Also significant to the town's growth was the development of a new, local form of secular government. The 1852 Rhyl Improvement Act stipulated that the town should be governed by a secular Board of Improvement Commissioners, after previous methods of government had proved inadequate for dealing with the growing resort.³² Predominantly, members of the board consisted of landowners or 'well-off' businessmen who Howe described as having ability, imagination and courage.³³ Furthermore, the Rhyl Improvement Act had the backing of many of the town's élites. Parliamentary papers show that the board prioritized public health through the provision of better housing and sewage, as it sought to 'improve the township of Rhyl.'³⁴ Indeed, Howe noted that these changes were the first of the commissioners' priorities.³⁵ An article of *the North Wales Chronicle*, published in 1879, reported on the plans of commissioners to implement a new scheme to improve the town's drainage, as previous methods had become insufficient. The article also praised the work of the commissioners, as the improvements implemented in the town were described as

³² Fletcher, 'Rhyl – The Evolution of a Resort', p.126

³³ Howe, 'The Commissioners of Rhyl', p.3

³⁴ Parliamentary Papers, 'The Rhyl Improvement Act 1852', pp.405-431, available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukla/Vict/15-16/32/contents/enacted>, accessed 01st May 2023.

³⁵ Howe, 'The Commissioners of Rhyl', p.3

'greater' than any developments in other fashionable North Wales resorts.³⁶ The improvement act also intended to create public utilities for gas and water, allow for the building of roads and significantly, the building of more accommodation to allow for increasing numbers of visitors to the town.³⁷ The introduction of the Rhyl Improvement Act was a significant point in Rhyl's development. It meant that local government could concentrate their authority on the town's requirements and make improvements that would be beneficial to attracting visitors.³⁸ The commissioners were so highly regarded and their actions so important to the town that some have had streets named in their honour.³⁹ Furthermore, John Hirst highlighted the importance of local government for resort development. In his discussion of Welsh resort development, he argued that local government had prioritised public health. He suggested that the concern for public health led to the provision of utilities, as well as the opening of amenities such as parks and promenades.⁴⁰ It is important to note that Hirst did not discuss Rhyl specifically in his commentary on local government and resort development. Nevertheless, the changes to local government and the improvements made to Rhyl corroborate his argument.

³⁶ Anon, 'New Drainage, Works at Rhyl', *North Wales Chronicle*, March 1879, p.7, available at link-gale-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/apps/doc/BB3200931817/GDCS?u=tou&sid=bookmark-GDCS&xid=a8ac3ab7, accessed 12th May 2023

³⁷ Parliamentary Papers, 'The Rhyl Improvement Act', pp.405-431

³⁸ Fletcher, 'Rhyl – The Evolution of a Resort', p.144

³⁹ Howe, 'The Commissioners of Rhyl', p.3.

⁴⁰ Hirst, 'Resort Development on the Cambrian Coast', p.15

Many of Rhyl's commissioners were landowners and the development that they implemented showed their willingness to exploit the town's tourist potential. Importantly, many of their improvements were to the benefit of visitors to the town. Indeed, Howe observed that, without the efforts of commissioners, the town of Rhyl may have remained undeveloped.⁴¹ However, Walton suggested that local government was a modest factor in resort development compared to landownership. He argued that the attitudes and policies of landowners, in resorts such as Rhyl, led to positive responses from visitors which increased demand as people sought seaside holidays and excursions rather than alternative forms of leisure.⁴²

Furthermore, Walton argued that landowners and developers were significant to the growth of seaside towns such as Rhyl. He suggested that the quality of a resort's layout, architecture and building were vitally important in moulding visitor perceptions.⁴³ Certainly, Rhyl's landowning élites recognised visitor demand for excursions to the town and built upon their land in order to facilitate this. Nevertheless, as Walton noted, landownership should not be considered in isolation as an influence on resort development. He considered three main factors that influenced urban seaside growth. These were topography, structure of demand and developers. Regarding topography, Walton argued that it set out the likely pattern and style of development in a resort. For early sea-bathing visitors, through to excursionists in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the most important consideration was access to a

⁴¹ Howe, 'The Commissioners of Rhyl, p.3

⁴² Walton, *The English Seaside Resort*, p.45

⁴³ Walton, *The English Seaside Resort*, p.103

clean and sandy beach. Walton suggested that the most ideal topographical landscape was a straight shoreline with 'gently sloping cliffs' as it allowed visitors of different classes to share the same resort harmoniously.⁴⁴

The topographical appeal of Rhyl is evident in *Slater's Directory of North and South Wales, 1880*. Slater described Rhyl as a 'great beauty' with salubrious air and 'sands [...] equal in solidity and smoothness to any in the kingdom.' *Slater's Directory*, published in 1880, provided information and descriptions of hundreds of towns, cities and parishes in North and South Wales, Monmouthshire, Shropshire, Somerset and Cheshire.⁴⁵ Directories are useful sources of primary data, due to the information they can provide about communities and their infrastructure. For the purposes of this dissertation, *Slater's Directory of North and South Wales* is valuable for its coverage of Rhyl. As well as describing the topography of Rhyl, the directory lists various facilities including lodging houses, places of worship and refreshment rooms.⁴⁶

Rhyl's topographical appeal, the sale of lands and the building of tourist facilities led to a demand for transport to the town. Prior to railway construction, transport demand was met using steam packets which boosted Rhyl's development by facilitating the arrival of visitors. Steam packets originally sailed with grain as the staple of their trade but eventually became popular for carrying passengers from Merseyside to the North Wales coast. One of the first steam packets was called 'Gulliver' and sailed between Liverpool and Rhyl from 1829,

⁴⁴ Walton, *The English Seaside Resort*, p.106

⁴⁵ Slater, *Commercial Directory of North and South Wales*, p. 204

⁴⁶ Slater, *Commercial Directory of North and South Wales*, p.204

carrying both goods and passengers. By 1831, there were another two wooden paddle steamers on the route; the 'Vale of Clywd' and the 'St Winifred'.⁴⁷

The significance and extent of steam packet use is highlighted in newspaper evidence. Newspaper evidence is valuable for being able to provide real insight into contemporary events, opinions and topics. An article of the *Liverpool Mercury* from August 1846 described the arrival of a boat to Rhyl, from Liverpool that was carrying 339 passengers.⁴⁸ Table 2 shows timetables of the Vale of Clywd steam packet in July 1832 and May 1833. Both of which were published advertisements in the *North Wales Chronicle*.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Fletcher, 'The Role of Landowners, Entrepreneurs and Railways', p.519

⁴⁸ Anon, 'Excursion to Rhyl', *The Liverpool Mercury*, August 1846, p.406, available at <https://link-gale-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/apps/doc/Y3203965933/GDCS?u=tou&sid=bookmark-GDCS&xid=a7579dce>, accessed 01st April 2023

⁴⁹ Anon, 'The Vale of Clywd', *North Wales Chronicle*, April 1833, available at <https://link-gale-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/apps/doc/BB3200857965/GDCS?u=tou&sid=bookmark-GDCS&xid=553bf719>, accessed 01st April 2023 and Anon, 'The Vale of Clywd', *The North Wales Chronicle*, July 1832, available at <https://link-gale-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/apps/doc/BB3200857323/GDCS?u=tou&sid=bookmark-GDCS&xid=e38d28eb>, accessed 01st April 2023.

July 1832		May 1833	
Date	Time	Date	Time
3 rd July	11am	1 st May	4pm
5 th July	1pm	3 rd May	7am
7 th July	4pm	6 th May	9am
10 th July	6am	8 th May	10am
12 th July	7am	10 th May	11am
14 th July	8am	13 th May	2pm
17 th July	10am	15 th May	4am
19 th July	11am	17 th May	6am
21 st July	1pm	20 th May	7am
24 th July	4pm	22 nd May	9am
26 th July	6am	24 th May	10am
28 th July	8am	27 th May	2pm
31 st July	9am	29 th May	4pm
		31 st May	6am

Table 2

Evidence taken from the North Wales Chronicle in July 1832 and the North Wales Chronicle in May 1833⁵⁰

Whilst this is valuable evidence, it is important to note that it does not provide evidence of all steam packet usage into Rhyl. So, there may be some cases where steam packet usage was not as frequent. Furthermore, it is not possible to research every available newspaper source on the topic. Nevertheless, the articles discussed provide useful insight into how Rhyl

⁵⁰ Anon, 'The Vale of Clywd', *North Wales Chronicle*, April 1833, available at <https://link-gale-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/apps/doc/BB3200857965/GDCS?u=tou&sid=bookmark-GDCS&xid=553bf719>, accessed 01st April 2023 and Anon, 'The Vale of Clywd', *The North Wales Chronicle*, July 1832, available at <https://link-gale-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/apps/doc/BB3200857323/GDCS?u=tou&sid=bookmark-GDCS&xid=e38d28eb>, accessed 01st April 2023.

was developing into a popular resort, years prior to the opening of the Chester and Holyhead railway line through Rhyl in 1848. The table evidence shows that there were thirteen journeys available to passengers in the month of July 1832 and fourteen in May 1833. Furthermore, in the 1833 article, it is noted that an extra packet would be made available, should demand be high enough, to avoid public disappointment.⁵¹ It is evident, therefore, that there was significant demand for excursions to Rhyl in the early nineteenth century and that by the 1830s, early methods of transport were needed in order to facilitate this. Hirst stressed the significance of sea-borne traffic and argued that Rhyl owed much of its early development to direct steam packets from Liverpool. He also noted that the many ships that serviced the route between Merseyside and North Wales during the 1830s attested to the demand for travel to the area.⁵² This increase in shipping activity led to the building of Rhyl's wooden pier, which was opened in 1831, to allow for the embarking and disembarking of passengers.⁵³ The need for the pier to facilitate the arrival of passengers is indicative of how popular Rhyl was to visitors and how vital steam packets were for facilitating their excursions. Steam packets allowed for visitors to arrive at Rhyl within three hours of leaving Liverpool.⁵⁴ This highlights how Rhyl's geographical location was also important to its growth. Indeed, Fletcher argued that Rhyl's proximity to Liverpool aided its early development. The popularity of steam packets is an early indication of how demand

⁵¹ Anon, 'The Vale of Clwyd'

⁵² Hirst, *'Resort Development on the Cambrian Coast 1840-1914'*, p.225

⁵³ Fletcher, 'The Role of Landowners, Entrepreneurs and Railways', p.520

⁵⁴ Fletcher, 'Rhyl – The Evolution of a Resort', p.144

for mass travel to Rhyl was emerging and would be accelerated by the railway. Dodd argued that cheap conveyance through steam 'aided and abetted the railway.'⁵⁵ The opening of the railway aided existing trends and an already emerging demand.

Due to an early enthusiasm for sea-bathing, the proactiveness of landowners and subsequent investment, a tourist demand had emerged in Rhyl prior to the railway being opened in 1848. As will be discussed in Chapter II of this dissertation, the opening of the railway facilitated and expanded this already existing demand, as part of an evolutionary process of development.

⁵⁵ Hirst, *Resort Development on the Cambrian Coast*, p.3

Chapter II – The Chester and Holyhead Railway

In 1848, the Chester and Holyhead Railway line was built by Robert Stephenson and Rhyl railway station was opened.⁵⁶ This was a significant moment for the development of Rhyl into becoming a seaside resort. Indeed, Walton described the 1840s as an important watershed for seaside development.⁵⁷ The railway provided the opportunity for quick, relatively cheap and affordable transport for the masses. The willingness of the middle classes to exploit this opportunity, and the tourist potential it created, led to Rhyl growing exponentially. The railway has often been considered responsible for the creation of popular seaside resorts. Asa Briggs argued that the railways ‘determined the pattern of holiday geography.’⁵⁸ However, whilst the railways were significant to resort development, the process was more complex than the railways being a sole influence on resort growth. Indeed, it has already been evidenced that a range of factors were vital to early resort development. This chapter will show that the railway aided Rhyl in its growth and led to significant development. However, it should be considered as a contributory rather than singular factor.

Early transportation to the town emerged in the form of sea-borne traffic that arrived from Liverpool. Many of the hotels built in the early nineteenth century relied on this traffic for business. Consequently, railway companies realised the town’s potential to develop into a

⁵⁶ Fletcher, ‘Rhyl – The Evolution of a Resort’, p.119

⁵⁷ Walton, ‘The English Seaside Resort’, p.110

⁵⁸ Briggs, *A Social History of England*, p.214

major seaside resort. Walvin noted that commercial potential in 'embryonic' seaside towns attracted railway companies who were instrumental in financing, developing and owning substantial parts of the new resorts.⁵⁹ However, Roy Millward was keen not to overemphasize the intentions of railway entrepreneurs. He argued that politics was a more dominant motivation for railway expansion.⁶⁰ In 1801, an increased demand for better transport and communication across the Irish Sea emerged, following the political union of Britain and Ireland which brought Irish MPs to Westminster. It was Holyhead that had allowed for official links across the Irish Sea, as it provided the shortest sea-crossing to Ireland. Indeed, sea-borne steam packets had served the crossing from the 1820s. However, sea transportation was considered slow, and this led to the consideration of railway development and expansion. Millward argued that the demand for access to Ireland provided the main motive for Welsh railway schemes in the mid-nineteenth century. Despite various proposals for railway schemes, the Chester and Holyhead Bill won in a session of Parliament in 1844, due to its sea-crossing position and support from railway companies such as the Grand Junction and the London and Birmingham Railway.⁶¹ Millward argued that the building of the Chester and Holyhead Railway line was one of the 'greatest achievements' in British railway history.⁶² Rhyl station, which opened on the Chester and

⁵⁹ Walvin, *Beside the Social History*, p.46

⁶⁰ Roy Millward, 'Railways and the Evolution of Welsh Holiday Resorts', in *The Impact of the Railway on Society in Britain: Essays in Honour of Jack Simmons*, ed. By A.K.B. Evans and J.V. Gough, (Aldershot, 2003), pp.211-214

⁶¹ Millward, 'Railways and the Evolution of Welsh Holiday Resorts', p.212

⁶² Millward, 'Railways and the Evolution of Welsh Holiday Resorts', p.211

Holyhead Railway line in 1848, was built by investor Thomas Hughes and was often considered as the most imposing station on the line between Chester and Bangor.⁶³

The significance of the railways to Rhyl's urban development is measurable by passenger usage on the Chester and Holyhead Railway line. The data in Table 3 is taken from Baughan's *The Chester and Holyhead Railway, Volume I: The Main Line up to 1880*.⁶⁴ It shows annual passenger numbers that used the line between 1848 and 1857.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Passenger Numbers</u>	<u>Percentage change on previous year (Rounded to nearest whole number)</u>
1848	189,067	
1849	305,823	62% increase
1850	395,731	29% increase
1851	464,077	17% increase
1852	571,468	21% increase
1853	632,358	11% increase
1854	697,436	10% increase
1855	767,180	10% increase
1856	726,392	5% decrease
1857	691,349	5% decrease

Table 3

Data taken from Peter E Baughan⁶⁵

The data in Table 3 is indicative of the popularity of the Chester and Holyhead Railway line.

However, it is important to note that there are some limitations to this data. For example,

⁶³ Fletcher, 'Rhyl – The Evolution of a Resort', p. 142

⁶⁴ Baughan, *The Chester and Holyhead Railway*, p.302

⁶⁵ Baughan, *The Chester and Holyhead Railway*, p.302

the passenger numbers provided are for the whole of the Chester and Holyhead Railway line, so it does not indicate how many people travelled to Rhyl specifically. Nevertheless, it does show that in the year after the line opened, there was a substantial increase in passenger usage before numbers plateaued and started to gradually decrease at the end of the nine-year period. Overall, the number of passengers increased by 265 percent in the nine-years recorded. An increase in passenger usage was also noted by Fletcher. He suggested that the line had originally boasted around 200,000 people annually but, within the following years, that had almost quadrupled.⁶⁶

Whilst the data above is inclusive of the whole Chester and Holyhead Railway line, a report on passenger traffic on the line in 1855 shows numbers between each destination. The report suggests that over 150,000 passengers arrived in Rhyl in 1855 and that around 713,000 used the line overall.⁶⁷ To some extent, this corroborates the findings presented in Table 3. It also gives an indication of the approximate numbers that arrived in Rhyl by train, although only for one particular year, rather than over a longer period. Both sets of data suggest that a substantial number of passengers used the line including to travel to Rhyl.

Phillip Lloyd argued that the opening of the railway led people to become aware of the attractive North Wales coastline and make use of the rapid travel available for them to visit.⁶⁸ An article published in *The Express* in 1857 described the Chester and Holyhead

⁶⁶ Fletcher, 'Rhyl – The Evolution of a Resort', p.143

⁶⁷ Anon, 'Return showing numbers of amounts for passengers booked to and from Chester Holyhead line for year ended 31 Dec 1855' (1855), available at the National Archives: Ref Rail 113/87.

⁶⁸ Philip M Lloyd, *The Chester and Holyhead Railway: A New History*, (Barnsley, 2021), p.149

Railway line as 'crowded' with visitors to Rhyl, many of whom arrived in the town to find there was no accommodation left available for their stay.⁶⁹ Furthermore, Lloyd argued that by the 1870s, North Wales resorts such as Rhyl could not keep up with other British seaside resorts and the London and North Western Railway (who by this time had taken over the Chester and Holyhead railway) became directly involved in seeking to improve resort attractiveness to uphold visitor appeal.⁷⁰ This suggests that railway companies were directly involved in resort development, not just facilitating the travel of visitors. Philip Lloyd's work is particularly useful for his commentary on the Chester and Holyhead railway line. However, it must be considered that his work is a history of the railway, rather than a history of Wales or resort development specifically. As such, his comments should be considered within the wider context of resort development and understood alongside other historiography.

Rhyl's railway station grew increasingly popular to visitors and within thirty years of opening required improvements. By 1878, it was considered inadequate and unfit for purpose, due to passenger demand as large amounts of visitors arrived in the town. Local contractor, J Rhydwen Jones was given the task of renovating the station which a local newspaper anticipated would be the 'largest and best fitted' on the Welsh railway lines.⁷¹ The need for improvements to the station, due to passenger demand, is indicative of how significant railway travel was for tourism in the town. Whilst sea-borne traffic continued to transport visitors, it was the railways that facilitated the arrival of most excursionists. Indeed, the

⁶⁹ Anon, 'Tourists in North Wales', *Express*, 1857 cited in Lloyd, *The Chester and Holyhead Railway*, p.149.

⁷⁰ Lloyd, *The Chester and Holyhead Railway*, p.151

⁷¹ Fletcher, 'Rhyl – The Evolution of a Resort', p.143

newly improved railway station boasted notably wide platforms in order to allow for the influx of visitors to Rhyl over the summer seasons (Image 1).



Image 1

Rhyl Railway Station after its extension works between 1878 and 1880.

Image taken from the People's Collection Wales.⁷²

Walton suggested that the early days of the railway allowed for cheap travel and opened up seaside resorts to the masses. Ticket prices were often less than the cost of a day's wages for a skilled workman.⁷³ Indeed, an article of the *North Wales Chronicle* in July 1869 advertised

⁷² Anon, *Rhyl Railway Station*, *People's Collection Wales*, c.1910, available at

<https://www.peoplescollection.wales/items/1096556#?xywh=-38%2C-129%2C1674%2C1228>, accessed 01st April 2023.

⁷³ John Walton, 'The Demand for Working-Class Seaside Holidays in Victorian England', *The Economic History Review*, Volume 34., Issue 2 (1981), p.250.

tickets to Rhyl ranging between one and three shillings.⁷⁴ Prior to railway transportation, seaside trips had predominantly been enjoyed by the middle-classes, but affordable travel allowed for the working classes to seek coastal excursions as a means of leisure. Indeed, Walvin noted that dangerously cramped third-class coaches made it possible for low-income groups to use the railway and enjoy leisure time at the coast.⁷⁵ Lloyd made similar comments as he noted that 1880 was a 'bumper' year for resorts, such as Rhyl, with streets and railway carriages that were so overcrowded people were urged to stay at home.⁷⁶

No official statistical evidence is available for comparison of visitor numbers to Rhyl before and after 1848. However, newspaper evidence provides useful insight into visitor frequency and railway demand. In June 1863, the *North Wales Chronicle* reported that visitors to the town were increasing daily and that railways recorded 200 people per day arriving in Rhyl.⁷⁷ Furthermore, in July 1877, the same newspaper reported that visitor numbers were becoming 'very large' with trains arriving frequently. The article also claimed that alterations

⁷⁴ Anon, 'Advertisements and Notices', *North Wales Chronicle*, July 1869, p.871, available at <https://link-gale-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/apps/doc/BB3200918265/BNCN?u=tou&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=6dba327e> (accessed 20th May 2023)

⁷⁵ Walvin, *Beside the Social History*, p.37

⁷⁶ Lloyd, *The Chester and Holyhead Railway*, p.149

⁷⁷ Anon, 'Rhyl', *The North Wales Chronicle*, June 1863, p.6, available at <https://link-gale-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/apps/doc/BB3200904593/GDCS?u=tou&sid=bookmark-GDCS&xid=de038bd8>, accessed 05th May 2023

and new trains were necessary in order to facilitate visitor demand.⁷⁸ Notably, it was the year after this article that the station's renovations began. From newspaper evidence such as this, it is reasonable to conclude that the railways were instrumental in increasing the number of visitors to the town.

Furthermore, it was following the opening of the railway that many of Rhyl's main attractions for visitors were opened. It has already been evidenced that in 1831, the town's first wooden pier opened for the embarking and disembarking of passengers on sea-borne traffic. However, it was in 1867 that the town's main pier was constructed and opened at a cost of £15,000. This was considered the first pier in North Wales.⁷⁹ Furthermore, in *Slater's Directory of North and South Wales*, the building of the new town hall is mentioned, which provided concerts and entertainment for visitors to enjoy during peak season.⁸⁰ Therefore, there was a positive correlation between high visitor numbers arriving on the railways and the development of new facilities and attractions. Walton alluded to this and argued that the railway led to cheaper lodgings and accommodation, which appealed to a wider visitor base that was attractive to entrepreneurs.

In order to understand how the railway aided Rhyl's development, the economic growth of the town should be considered. Population statistics are a useful source of data to show how

⁷⁸ Anon, 'Rhyl', *North Wales Chronicle*, July 1877, p.6, available at <https://link-gale-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/apps/doc/BB3200928852/GDCS?u=tou&sid=bookmark-GDCS&xid=10586cf7>, accessed 10th May 2023.

⁷⁹ *Heritage – Rhyl Town Council*, (2023), <https://rhyltowncouncil.org.uk/heritage.html> accessed 01st April 2023

⁸⁰ Slater, *Commerical Directory of North and South Wales*, p.205

Rhyl grew over time. The statistics in Table 3 are taken from census data and show how the population of the town grew significantly. As noted by Fletcher, population growth is a useful indicator of Rhyl's economic growth.⁸¹

<u>Year</u>	<u>Population</u>
1841	974
1851	1529
1861	2936
1871	3129

Table 4

Source: Census data from www.findmypast.co.uk⁸²

Significant population growth occurred in the thirty years between 1841 and 1871. The census of 1871 recorded an increase of 221 percent, when compared to the 1841 census, seven years prior to railway opening. Census data is not available prior to 1841 to make comparisons to analyse when growth began. However, it is notable that between the 1841 and 1851 census, there was a considerable population increase of fifty seven percent. It was in this decade that the Chester and Holyhead Railway and Rhyl railway station opened. Furthermore, Fletcher noted a population increase of around 208 percent in the forty years between 1841 and 1881. He argued that a proportion of this population growth was the result of in-migration. Significantly, he concluded that only eleven percent of Rhyl's

⁸¹ Fletcher, 'Rhyl – The Evolution of a Resort', p.132

⁸² 1841, 1851, 1861 and 1871 England, Wales and Scotland Census available at www.findmypast.com, accessed

01st April 2023

householders were born in the town. By 1871, much of the town's population were from other Welsh parishes and some from other areas of Britain.⁸³ These increases, and the extent of in-migration, show substantial levels of growth which coincided with the opening of the railway.

Nevertheless, the contribution of the railway to the town's growth should not be overstated. Certainly, other factors would have influenced growth, including those evidenced in Chapter I of this dissertation and others beyond the scope of this research. Indeed, it could be argued that high levels of in-migration were the result of élites seeking the economic opportunities that the developing resort had to offer. Furthermore, Walton argued that, whilst population trends often represented demand for seaside holidays, they were also indicative of decline in older economic sectors.⁸⁴ For example, census data shows how traditional sectors such as agriculture began to decline throughout the nineteenth century. In 1841, almost ten percent of Rhyl's employed population worked in the agricultural and fishing industries. By 1871, this had declined to around three and a half percent.⁸⁵

The growth of Rhyl is also measurable by its economic change. Substantial economic growth emerged from an increase in businesses in the town. There was a particularly significant increase in the number of visitor accommodation facilities. Fletcher compiled evidence from three different trade directories which showed that, in 1835 there was a total of sixty-six listed businesses. This had risen to 744 by 1874. He also noted that, by this time, people

⁸³ Fletcher, 'Rhyl – The Evolution of a Resort', pp.132-133.

⁸⁴ Walton, 'The English Seaside Resort', p.47.

⁸⁵ Fletcher, 'Rhyl – The Evolution of a Resort', p.136

from various backgrounds such as railway workers and grocers, had opened their homes to paying guests.⁸⁶ Therefore, many of Rhyl's townsfolk showed a willingness to embrace and exploit the town's tourist and economic potential.

The growth of the local economy in the years after the railway opened can be measured by occupation data. Table 4 presents data from the 1841 and 1871 censuses to show the number of people employed in the town both prior to the opening of the railway and thirty years afterwards.⁸⁷ Whilst it should be considered that several factors will have influenced occupation growth, an upward trend of around 400 percent in the thirty-year period after railway opening is evident. The data therefore shows a positive correlation between railway opening, increase in employment and economic growth. It has already been evidenced that a significant proportion of new employment opportunities emerged from the development of tourist facilities such as accommodation, shops and greengrocers. However, it is also notable that some of the town's employed personnel worked for the railway itself. In 1871, forty-one of those who were employed in the town worked for the railway in a range of roles including drivers, carriage inspectors, guards and clerks.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, employment levels provided by the railway companies should not be overstated. Fletcher argued that the

⁸⁶ Fletcher, 'Rhyl – The Evolution of a Resort', pp.136-139

⁸⁷ 1841 England, Wales and Scotland Census and 1871 England, Wales and Scotland Census, available at www.findmypast.co.uk

⁸⁸ Fletcher, 'Rhyl – The Evolution of a Resort', p.138

contribution of railways to transport goods and visitors to the resort was far greater than its offering as an employer.⁸⁹

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number Employed</u>
1841	388
1871	1978

Table 5

Data taken from 1841 and 1871 censuses available on www.findmypast.co.uk.⁹⁰

The data presented in this chapter shows that the opening of the Chester and Holyhead Railway led to economic growth in Rhyl and aided its development by facilitating the arrival of large numbers of visitors. It has been evidenced that the railway provided cheap travel to allow for mass leisure, so that large numbers of excursionists could visit the town. The railways gave an opportunity for landowners, entrepreneurs, and in some cases, the town's working class to capitalize on the tourist demand that already existed in the town from the start of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, whilst the railway had substantial implications to the development of Rhyl and led to exponential growth, it was not solely responsible for the town evolving into a seaside resort.

⁸⁹ Fletcher, 'Rhyl – The Evolution of a Resort', p.145

⁹⁰ 1841 and 1871 England, Scotland and Wales Census, available at www.findmypast.com, accessed 01st April

Conclusion

This dissertation has considered a range of factors that were imperative to Rhyl's development into a seaside resort. The first research question that was explored in Chapter I was: how significant was the role of landowners to the development of Rhyl into a seaside resort? By examining individual landowners on a case study basis, it has been evidenced that they were of fundamental importance to the development of the town. Their early proactiveness in recognising the tourist potential of land by the sea allowed for the building of urban facilities and the emergence of an entrepreneurial bourgeoisie, who exploited economic opportunities and invested in the town. Moreover, parliamentary papers and contemporary newspaper articles have evidenced that local government was significant to Rhyl's development. The town's commissioners were proactive in maintaining its tourist potential and exploiting the opportunity of the railway. Secondly, Chapter I asked: how popular was Rhyl to visitors and tourists prior to the opening of the Chester and Holyhead Railway Line in 1848? From the use of newspaper evidence, it has been shown that a considerable tourist demand emerged in the town from the start of the nineteenth century. Indeed, the popularity of sea transport was indicative of early visitor demand. The consideration of these influences on Rhyl's development is pertinent for understanding how significant the railway was.

Chapter two of this dissertation examined the railway in detail. The first research focus of this chapter was: how popular was the Chester and Holyhead Railway line? Did passenger numbers increase over time? Through statistical evidence, gathered from Baughan and the National Archives, as well as contemporary reports taken from newspaper evidence, it has

been shown that the railway facilitated the arrival of thousands of visitors to the town.

Certainly, trends indicated that passenger data generally increased. This suggests that the line was significantly popular and facilitated the town's growth into a resort. Finally, by using population and occupation data obtained from census records, it has been evidenced that substantial economic growth occurred in the town, after the opening of the railway in 1848.

Overall, the evidence presented in this dissertation has shown that Rhyl grew gradually from the start of the eighteenth century, before experiencing exponential growth after the opening of the railway in 1848. An initial, early enthusiasm for seaside trips brought visitors to the town for its health benefits and topographical appeal. Then, following the sale of lands, an entrepreneurial bourgeoisie began to emerge who developed the town and continued to exploit its tourist potential. The opening of the Chester and Holyhead Railway line in 1848 was a pivotal moment for the town's development. The railway accelerated existing demand and caused exponential growth, as it provided an affordable and effective means of transport for a mass number of visitors.

This conclusion supports existing historiography from Fletcher. He concluded that the development of Welsh seaside resorts was dependent on the co-operation of landowning élites, a middle-class prepared to exploit economic opportunities and a willingness of the community to accept such changes.⁹¹ It also confirms his argument that without the presence of these key components, Rhyl's development may not have taken place for many years. However, Fletcher concluded with an attempt to identify the most significant factor.

⁹¹ Fletcher, 'Rhyl – The Evolution of a Resort', p.145.

For him, this was the actions of landowners and the establishment of a property-owning middle class.⁹² The evidence in this dissertation has shown that no factor was more significant than the other. Whilst the railway caused the most significant amount of growth, all factors were necessary for Rhyl to evolve into a popular seaside resort.

Similarly, the findings of this dissertation support historiography from Hirst who also identified several factors necessary for resort development. For Hirst, the growth of Welsh resorts was a complex process that stemmed from the early enthusiasm for sea-bathing and went far beyond transport systems.⁹³ Furthermore, Walton argued that very few resorts were 'created out of nothing.'⁹⁴ Indeed, it has been evidenced that Rhyl's development was an evolutionary process over several years and influenced by many factors.

Significantly, this dissertation has challenged historiography from scholars such as Asa Briggs who argued that railways were responsible for the creation of seaside resorts.⁹⁵ Instead, it has been evidenced that resort development was more complex. The importance of the railway has not been understated and, indeed, the correlation between the railway and exponential growth in Rhyl has been evidenced. However, a tourist demand had been present in Rhyl decades before the opening of the railway. Furthermore, the town's development was the result of a multitude of necessary factors. Indeed, without an early enthusiasm for sea-bathing, the proactiveness of landowners and an emerging bourgeoisie,

⁹² Fletcher, 'Rhyl – The Evolution of a Resort', p.144.

⁹³ Hirst, 'Resort Development on the Cambrian Coast', pp. 1-389

⁹⁴ Walton, *English Seaside Resort*, p. 104.

⁹⁵ Briggs, *A Social History of England*, p.214

the railway would not have been so significant, nor would the town have developed when it did. It can be concluded that the railway was not revolutionary for Rhyl but an important factor in the evolutionary process of the town's development.

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