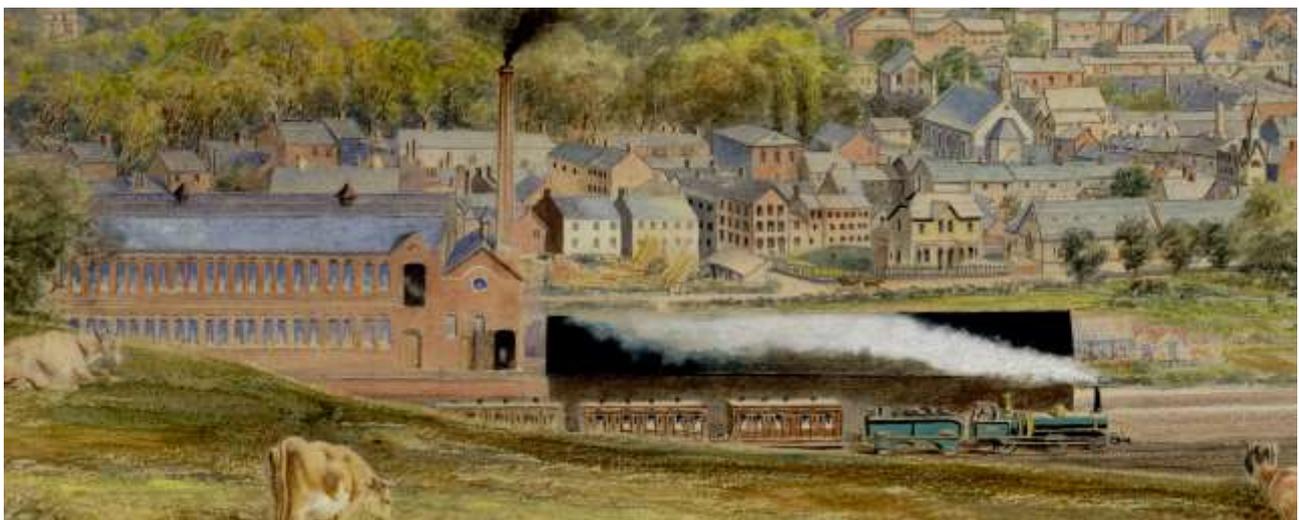




## **A view of Newtown in 1878**

This watercolour painting was completed by R.G. Salter in 1878 and now hangs in the Museum. To modern eyes, this pastoral scene, with cattle grazing on the slopes of Treowen, might appear quaint, offering a glimpse of a 'lost' Newtown. However, to the Victorian viewer, it was more likely to represent an optimistic forward-looking vista of the recent changes within the town. For, in truth, most of the prominent features evident in the painting had been created within the previous thirty years.



In the left foreground, a passenger train of the Cambrian Railway passes the Severn Valley Woollen Mills, one of three new steam-driven mills built in the town in the 1860s and 70s. The train is about to stop at Newtown Station, built-in 1863. The Cambrian Railway Company had been formed in 1864 from several smaller companies that had been active in

constructing short rail stretches, such as between Llanidloes and Newtown, since the early 1850s. By 1878 these lines were connected to what was becoming a national rail network.



St David's Church, which dominates the central foreground of the painting, had in the 1840s, replaced the flood-damaged church of St Mary's which had stood on the banks of the River Severn for centuries. The tower of the former parish church can be seen just to the right of the new church tower. To the left of centre, the United Reformed Church (or, as it was known at the time, the English Congregational Church) rises behind a row of terraced workers' houses. The church opened its doors for the first time in the same year as this painting was created.

Beyond this, the developing Penygloddfa area is visible, and it is possible to distinguish the building which now houses Newtown Textile Museum. Immediately above it and at the very top can be seen the 'Clock' Factory on Bryn St and, just below this, the Southern Factory on Commercial St both built in the 1830s. These new cloth factories would sound the death knell for the handloom weavers of Pengloddfa.



The right-hand side of the painting shows the other two newly constructed steam-powered woollen mills. The multi-storeyed Cambrian mill, which would become the largest of its kind in Wales, is prominent whilst in the far distance on the extreme right can be discerned the chimney of the Commercial Mill (also known as the Cymric). Both mills were situated close to the canal, but it was the railway which, in 1878, represented the future, and one man, more than any other clearly understood its potential. Pryce Jones had opened his first mail-order premises in 1859 on a site near where the town clock stands. His business quickly flourished and provided a welcome boost to the sale of Welsh flannel. Within a decade he could boast Florence Nightingale and even Queen Victoria among his customers. Success soon led him to look for larger premises and just as the paint was drying on Salter's view of Newtown, so too Pryce Jones's Royal Welsh Warehouse was nearing completion. In 1879 his customers were numbering some 40,000 and the railway was transporting his wares to all parts of the country.

Sadly, there is no information about R.G. Salter in the museum and an internet search failed to cast any light on his life. We would love to hear from anyone, who might have any knowledge which could help us. Please contact us at [admin@newtownheritage.com](mailto:admin@newtownheritage.com)