# WELSH HIGHLAND HERITAGE

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In November 1997, shortly after our Heritage Group was formed, Issue 1 of this Journal was produced and distributed. Besides articles on Waenfawr Station, Tickets, Station Signs and Archives and Museums, the Issue included the following Welcome Message and also declared the Aims of the new Group:

## WELCOME!

This is the first edition of a Newsletter devoted entirely to the heritage aspects of the Welsh Highland Railway. It is the voice of the Welsh Highland Heritage Group and reflects the views of the Group. The W.H.H.G. has the full support of The Welsh Highland Railway Co., The Festiniog Railway and The Welsh Highland Railway Society and it will work closely with all of these organisations to achieve its aims.

It will cover and explore all aspects of the line's history, from its early beginnings to the present day but it will concentrate on 'preserving and restoring' those essential elements which made the line unique amongst narrow gauge railways.

Nor will it forget those isolated communities which the line attempted to serve, together with the industries which prompted its construction in the first place.

The Heritage Group is open to all who support its aims and it will work with everyone who wishes to help to achieve those aims. The Group will be a focus, a forum, and a coordinator for all the heritage activity along the line.

It is unthinkable for example, that the superb restoration work at Gelert's Farm, including Ray Ollier's wonderful achievements with the old coaches, Mark Wiggley's efforts to restore the weigh house and Dave Meller's evocative replica of Nantmor station should somehow be isolated from the proposed reconstruction of Waunfawr or the refurbishment of Dinas station building.

## THEY ARE ALL WELSH HIGHLAND!

WELSH HIGHLAND HERITAGE

Volume 1 Issue 1 November 1997

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WAUNFAWR STATION

There was dismay in Welsh Highland Heritage circles when the FR revealed their plans for rebuilding the line included, perversely, the demolition of the derelict station building at Waunfawr. This was to accommodate a new layout designed to facilitate the passage of the Garratt locomotives and to allow for a new footbridge to connect with the carpark of the adjoining 'Snowdonia Parc' pub.

Although the plans for this footbridge are now under review it still leaves only two options for the old station building - demolition or removal. The former is unthinkable and the latter costly.

However at a meeting with representatives of the Heritage Group, FR director Mike Schmaan, and project manager Tony Smare, agreed that the building could be moved a few yards from its current site and rebuilt on fresh foundations.

In spite of having stood for over 130 years the building continues to attract the attention of modern day vandals who have recently removed the valuable cornerstones from the front/left elevation.

Architect, and WHHG member, Graham Cartland-Glover has agreed to produce plans to help in the relocation of the building, but restoration may have to be left in the hands of professional restorers.

Contact has been made with St Fagans Welsh Folk Museum in Cardiff. They have had over 50 years experience of restoring Welsh buildings and would be glad to help. They have suggested using local contractors and would be willing to brief them on techniques which could be used, albeit for a small professional fee.

Upper Photo Bill Starr 1948
Lower Photo D Allan 1987

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## THE AIMS OF THE WELSH HIGHLAND HERITAGE GROUP

The Group has formally adopted the following as its aims, probably called a mission statement in contemporary jargon:

"To locate, record, categorise and preserve all buildings, bridges, mineral lines, quarries and all other artefacts associated with the former North Wales Narrow Gauge and Welsh Highland Railways, with a view to their preservation, restoration and eventual re-incorporation in the rebuilt Welsh Highland Railway."

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This first Issue ran to 4 pages, but the second was increased to 8 pages and carried the cover date of March 1998. *WHH* 2 was the first to carry our now-familiar ISSN and Issue 4 was the last to carry a

volume prefix. Since Issue 5, *WHH* has simply carried its Issue Number.

The first 12-page issue (no. 22) was dated December 2003 and the 12-page format became the 'norm' from June 2009. The publication schedule we still use today was 'settled' from the beginning of 2001.

Noting that the 100th Issue of *WHH* coincides with the Railway's Centenary period, it seems that considerable planning was invested in the evolution of the publication cycle! Indeed, had it not been for the '2014 Glitch' due to the editorial handover from David Allan to myself (there were only 3 Issues that year) *WHH* 100 would have been issued in June - spot on!

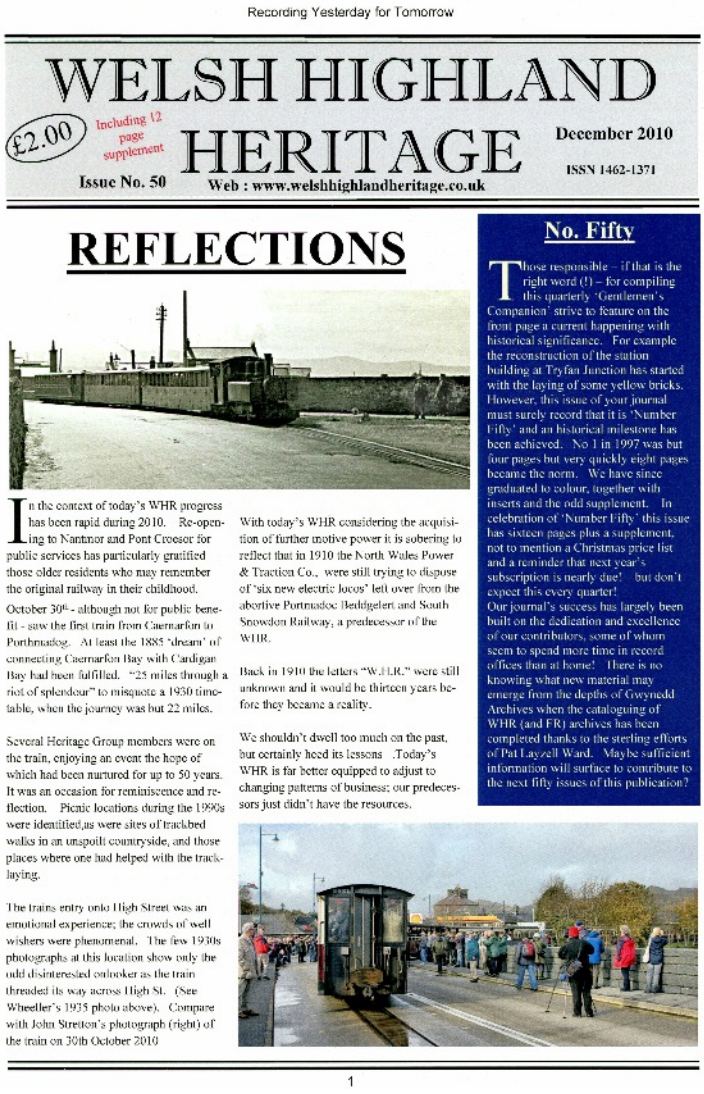
The extent to which *WHH* has contributed to, and supported, the Group's declared aims can only really be assessed through analysis of each Issue, so perhaps now it is more appropriate simply to offer an overall view. As space here is limited, I thought it best quickly to look at every 10th issue published thus far. Let us start with *WHH* 10 (December 2000, 8 pages).

This is, in fact, one of my favourite and perhaps most visited issues, primarily because of the WHR carriage summary (page 4 and 5) derived from Michael Seymour's work. This work has aided, and been expanded by, subsequent work, such as Michael Bishop's analyses (*WHH* 40, 41 and 47) and my own analyses summarised in *WHH* 93 (pages 7 to 10) with notes and references. Besides the carriage data, *WHH* 10 covered the Betws Garmon Bow Bridge; Of Harps & Buses; the Betws Garmon Sheepdog Trials; the Vanwil Oil Co; the 1928 episode of the WHR Chronology; and an article on Bryngwyn Goods trains.

*WHH* 20 (June 2003, 8 pages) opened with a splendid article from Michael Davies entitled *Eighty Years Ago*, which considered in some detail timetable and operational matters on June 1st 2023. These notes occupied four of that issue's eight pages and were continued in *WHH* 24 (June 2004 - pages 4 to 6). The two taken together give a comprehensive picture of operations at the time of re-opening.

*WHH* 30 (December 2005) marked a significant heritage 'milestone' when its page 1 cover story reported that "FR Endorse Tryfan Junction Proposals". This sanctioned what was then, and probably even now, seen as the Heritage Group's biggest single challenge: the restoration, and now the maintenance, of the Tryfan Junction Station Building.

However, it was to be some time before *WHH* 40 (June 2008) was able to announce funding availability sufficient to allow work to start in earnest and the imminent inauguration of focused fund-raising activity to ensure the project's completion. We have already noted Michael Bishop's carriage analysis in this 8-page issue and it is worth pointing out here that the other substantial article in this issue addressed the history and technicalities of the Pont Croesor railway bridge over the Glaslyn.



Recording Yesterday for Tomorrow

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REFLECTIONS

No. Fifty

Those responsible – if that is the right word (!) – for compiling this quarterly 'Gentlemen's Companion' strive to feature on the front page a current happening with historical significance. For example the reconstruction of the station building at Tryfan Junction has started with the laying of some yellow bricks. However, this issue of your journal must surely record that it is 'Number Fifty' and an historical milestone has been achieved. No 1 in 1997 was but four pages but very quickly eight pages became the norm. We have since graduated to colour, together with inserts and the odd supplement. In celebration of 'Number Fifty' this issue has sixteen pages plus a supplement, not to mention a Christmas price list and a reminder that next year's subscription is nearly due! but don't expect this every quarter!
Our journal's success has largely been built on the dedication and excellence of our contributors, some of whom seem to spend more time in record offices than at home! There is no knowing what new material may emerge from the depths of Gwynedd Archives when the cataloguing of WHR (and FR) archives has been completed thanks to the sterling efforts of Pat Layzell Ward. Maybe sufficient information will surface to contribute to the next fifty issues of this publication?

In the context of today's WHR progress has been rapid during 2010. Re-opening to Nantmor and Pont Croesor for public services has particularly gratified those older residents who may remember the original railway in their childhood.
October 30th - although not for public benefit - saw the first train from Caernarfon to Porthmadog. At least the 1885 'dream' of connecting Caernarfon Bay with Cardigan Bay had been fulfilled. "25 miles through a riot of splendour" to misquote a 1930 time-table, when the journey was but 22 miles.

Several Heritage Group members were on the train, enjoying an event the hope of which had been nurtured for up to 50 years. It was an occasion for reminiscence and reflection. Picnic locations during the 1990s were identified,as were sites of trackbed walks in an unspoilt countryside, and those places where one had helped with the track-laying.

The trains entry onto High Street was an emotional experience; the crowds of well wishers were phenomenal. The few 1930s photographs at this location show only the odd disinterested onlooker as the train threaded its way across High St. (See Wheeller's 1935 photo above). Compare with John Stretton's photograph (right) of the train on 30th October 2010

With today's WHR considering the acquisition of further motive power it is sobering to reflect that in 1910 the North Wales Power & Traction Co., were still trying to dispose of "six new electric locos" left over from the abortive Portmadoc Beddgelert and South Snowdon Railway, a predecessor of the WHR.

Back in 1910 the letters "W.H.R." were still unknown and it would be thirteen years before they became a reality.

We shouldn't dwell too much on the past, but certainly heed its lessons .Today's WHR is far better equipped to adjust to changing patterns of business; our predecessors just didn't have the resources.

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*WHH* 50 (December 2010) was the second issue to include a 12-page inserted Supplement (the first had been the Antia and Cambrian Crossing Supplement in *WHH* 46), this time addressing the History of *Upnor Castle* (Richard Watson) and an account of the Heritage Group's visit to Romania, "to help celebrate [the] centenary of the Sibiu to Agnita narrow gauge railway".

*WHH* 60 (June 2013) described how the station building at Tryfan Junction was 'nearly finished' and, amongst other matters also reported, triggered an interesting discussion into the actual layout at 'Beddgelert Sidings'. This also included, on page 12, a 'sting-in-the-tail', as it were, appealing for a 'volunteer' to take over Editorship of *WHH*. I can

only suppose, with hindsight, that I clearly did not step backwards fast enough! However, the handover proved not to as smooth as we hoped. I should have started my tenure with *WHH* 62 but, with the death of John Keylock, it seemed only right that David should produce the issue that recorded our memories of John.

When I finally took over production of *WHH* 63, I sought to ensure that John's memorial service at Salem, held on 5th April, should properly be covered, a decision that delayed the production of this issue and ultimately led to the loss of one issue in this calendar year. Normal service was resumed in 2015 with *WHH* 66 to 69.

*WHH* 70 (March 2016) became the first issue fully to adopt my preferred (after much 'research') 2-column layout.

*WHH* 80 (September 2018) led with coverage of the three *Journey into the Past Trains* operated that Summer. The third of the scheduled trips was too late to meet this edition's printing deadline so Nick's notes focused only on the first two of the trains. The carriage numbering debate was further continued and I included some speculations as to a large coal wagon seen in photographs at Beddgelert in 1923.

*WHH* 90 (March 2021) was prepared in the final throes of COVID-lockdown, but nevertheless contained interesting assessments of of the operation of hydraulic ram pumps, of diesel locomotives used by the WHR in its early days and analysis of a set of photographs taken by Geoff Platt, particularly to determine when these photos were taken. However, perhaps the most significant contribution was an obituary for, and appreciation of, Bob Honychurch who had died the previous December.

The Heritage Group has acquired a considerable portion of Bob's personal archive and this will provide material for articles in the future. As a taster, one extract from this archive has been transcribed by Dick Lystor and will be found elsewhere in this issue.

So we finally arrive at *WHH* 100. As I write these notes the issue has not been fully completed so even I am waiting to see just how this turns out!

I believe that the 99 issues distributed so far, together with *WHH* 100, comprise a valuable resource, however this is a volume of material which we know, in places, has been overtaken by events. We owe it to future historians and enthusiasts to ensure that information published up to 16 years ago is realigned with our current knowledge base. If I may, I offer an invitation to any of our members who feel the need to update, or who would like to assist with the updating of, previously published material to help us with preparing any necessary updates.

***WHH* can only be as good as its inputs!**

**Copies of any Issue of *WHH* over two-years old can be downloaded from our website: https://www.welshhighlandheritage.co.uk/ by following the links from *Journals* on the Home Page**

**Another 'recent acquisition' - no, not the dog or even the garden seat, but rather the NWNGR enamel sign recently 'won' when sold at a GW Railwayana auction in July.**

# Founding of the Welsh Highland Railway Heritage Group

## David Allen recalls the formation of the Heritage Group, an event closely linked to the preparation of the first *Welsh Highland Heritage.*

**The Survey Party (left to right; David Allan, Cedric Lodge, Michael Davies and John Keylock) photographed by their fifth member, Alan Donaldson, before one of their 1997 walks.**

**1997** was a momentous year. Princess Diana died, Tony Blair's New Labour won the General Election, and the Welsh Highland Heritage Group was formed.

Three years earlier, after a week-long public enquiry, ownership of the old track bed had been awarded to the FR. The WHR ('64 Coy) had been in a bitter battle with the FR over ownership, and relations were fraught. I was a member of the '64 Co board and I had recently set up a separate group with the aim of bringing together those in each camp who were weary of the damaging politics. We just wanted to ensure that this unique narrow gauge Welsh railway was respected and celebrated and that its founders and staff were given the credit they so richly deserved for battling against impossible odds. We were keen to make sure that as much as possible of the original infrastructure was retained.

This group included the founder members of the WHHG.

We organised a series of track bed walks divided into sections that we could manage in a day, starting at Dinas. The aim was to record everything we could of the old line. A written report and a photographic record of each day's exploration were kept. The opening paragraph of the first survey report sets the scene:-

*"It was Wednesday the 12th of March 1997, and a small group consisting of John Keylock, Michael Davies, Cedric Lodge and David Allan assembled at Dinas at 9.45 am prompt. Unless they advise otherwise, others who have expressed interest will be considered members of the Group, and will be circulated with all available information. They include - Tom Sherratt, Mark Wigley, Rupert Lodge and Nick Booker".*

The second survey also opened with a scene setter:-

*"It was the 30th of April, the day before a general election that was to change the face of British politics. Still, nothing could have been further from the minds of the five who assembled at Tan-y-Ffordd, Betws Garmon, to complete the second phase of the survey of the former N.W.N.G. section of The Welsh Highland Railway.*

*It was a superb April day, sunny and warm, with the Spring-scented air perfumed like a crisp Moselle wine. The spirits were high, and there was an air of expectancy as the group made their way to the track bed. The team had been joined for this second*

**Lunch at Plas-y-nant on April 30th, 1997, recognised as the first General Meeting of the Welsh Highland Heritage Group (L to R: Messrs Davies, Lodge, Keylock and Allan). Again, Alan Donaldson behind the camera)**

**The survey party setting off from Tan-y-ffordd towards Betws Garmon, this time Alan Donaldson (right) makes it into the photo as David Allan resumes camera duties.**

*excursion by new member Alan Donaldson who had a somewhat unfortunate start. Whilst attempting to leap across one of Cedric's drainage ditches, a gaiter-clad leg didn't quite make it, and there was a rather bloody encounter with some inconveniently located barbed wire, and all before a foot had been set on the track bed itself!*

*However, overcoming this little baptism, the track bed was regained behind the straight row of cottages north of Betws Garmon. The bed was raised a couple of metres above the damper surrounding area, which featured a good show of marsh marigolds and flag iris. The way ahead was straight and clear of vegetation; Betws Garmon church's spire (bell tower) pierced the distant horizon, and a couple of local ponies gazed at us with mild interest".*

The third survey hints that the embryonic Welsh Highland Heritage group had been initiated. The piece commences with this paragraph: -

*"Before cataloguing the third phase of the survey of the remains of The Welsh Highland Railway, it is perhaps pertinent to record that in the rather haphazard way these things have of happening that David Allan found himself chairman of the Group (no chair or chairperson here!), Cedric Lodge - secretary, Michael Davies - Treasurer, and John Keylock - membership secretary; the mysterious mechanism behind this event rather recalled Moses receiving his tablets!"*

Having established the formation of the Group, the narrative continues:-

*"So on Wednesday the 16th of July 1997, at some 600 feet above sea level, the party reassembled at the site of Rhyd ddu station. Unfortunately, neither John Keylock nor Alan Donaldson could be with the group on this occasion, but happily, we could welcome two more Welsh Highland devotees in the form of Dick Lystor and his charming wife, Sue. And in a careless demonstration of the power of their newly acquired office, David Allan and Michael Davies were 25 minutes late, having diverted to Dinas en route for a quick business meeting with Roland Doyle."*

The fourth walk took place on 10th September 1997. This was to take the survey from Beddgelert to Porthmadog. The opening paragraph of the report stated:-

*"For this fourth and final phase of this initial survey of the Welsh Highland Railway, the usual assorted group assembled, this time at the Saracen's Head in Beddgelert. On this occasion, we were without the benefit of Michael Davies and Alan Donaldson but were pleased to welcome back an enthusiastic John Keylock. The rest of the party were Sue and Dick Lystor (all the way from Devon again), Cedric Lodge and David Allan."*

Despite the original intention to have only four walks, we organised a fifth. This was described as "A re-examination of the track bed between Dinas and Waunfawr on Wednesday 1st April 1998."

The opening paragraph declared:-

*"The weather forecast was horrendous - rain, high winds and a chance of snow. The sort of day, which would see the rescue services on high alert and, all things considered, rather than venturing anywhere near Snowdonia, it would be better to stay in bed!*

*And so in warm sunshine and blissfully ignorant of the forecast, and in any case not the sort of people to take much notice of BBC weather forecaster, Michael Fish, the survey party gathered at Dinas station. The party consisted of old hands Michael Davies, John Keylock and David Allan and newcomer Graham Morris. We were warmly welcomed by project*

**On a later walk, Dick and Sue Lystor joined the party. Here we see Dick with John and Cedric on the trackbed above the Pont Aberglaslyn to Llanfrothen road, about 250 m south of Nantmor Halt - David Allan (Arch 0947)**

**The survey party pause en-route from Afon Nanmor to Afon Dylif pause at the site of Hafod-garegog Halt, between the surviving nameboard posts. L to R; John Keylock, Cedric Lodge, Dick and Sue Lystor - David Allan - Arch 0951**

*manager Roland Doyle and fed coffee by his able assistant Jan Woods."*

Given the current problems with Dinas station building it is worth noting this paragraph from the report:-

*"The restoration of the station building was the first area to be inspected Work on the western elevation was almost complete; the ugly plaster had been carefully removed, exposing the original window, which was in remarkably good condition. The new yellow bricks on the corners, so characteristic of North Wales Narrow Gauge buildings, blended in remarkably well with the old random granite. Granite blocks had replaced one of the 'new' doors put in by the former occupiers and this work had been expertly accomplished. The old yellow bricks, rescued from the corners, had been saved for re-use on the eastern elevation - the one which formerly faced the narrow gauge, and from which passengers arriving at Dinas will gain their first impression of the railway".*

I hope this article provides a fair reflection of the mindset of those who wanted to retain and recreate the bucolic atmosphere of the old Welsh Highland. I tried to reflect in those 1997 reports not only our take on the line but also to hint at the struggles, benefits and pitfalls of that original NWNG line. One can only admire the vision of those early pioneers who, with mixed success, created a railway in 1906 that, metamorphosed into the ambitious 1923 railway. It could have led the way for an electric-powered narrow-gauge railway but didn't quite make it.

We understand that in order to create the funds necessary to aid our vision that commercial considerations are paramount. But it's all a question of finding a balance, and that was and is the priority of the Welsh Highland Heritage Group

**John Keylock (left) and Cedric Lodge step out across Pont Afon Dylif with Dick and Sue Lystor visible beyond - David Allan (Arch 0953)**

**The walk that included the previous 3 photos ended at Croesor Junction. Described by David as John's favourite photo, here we see John Keylock standing on the girders that carried the WHR over a small ditch. The photo was taken some years before the survey walks. Arch 4462**

Would a compilation of the five reports lavishly illustrated with the photos taken on each walk make an interesting book?

***David Allan July 2023***

**Michael Davies probes Cwm Cloch cutting David Allan (Arch 0881)**

# A Personal Recollection

As Editor, I have the good fortune to read the many contributions offered for this Journal. Recently, and unsurprisingly as we traverse this Centenary Season, these have included a number of personal Reminiscences. I thought I might join this trend and pen my own!

My first memories of my maternal grand parents centre on Summer holidays at their home in Bangor in what then was Caernarvonshire. We lived in Newcastle upon Tyne, a considerable car journey distant. Their house was one of the eight that made up Gambier Terrace on Garth Road. To the left, Garth Road ran, indeed still runs, to Bangor Pier and to the right it runs to the centre of the town. Behind the house the ground rose steeply towards Roman Camp, but by far the best view was from the front. In the foreground stood the Crosville bus station, a busy place, and in the distance the grandeur of Penmaenmawr. However, it was the middle-distance that caught my attention - Port Penrhyn. In the 1940's, my first recollection, and through the 1950s this was a working port with slate transfers from the Penrhyn Quarry Railway to both ships and to standard gauge steam-hauled trains. I soon learned that were I to walk to the Port and there to hang around looking interested, invitations to ride on the narrow-gauge locomotives would follow. More often than not, this was, I recall, to be on *Winifred's* footplate.

**Your Editor on Winifred's footplate - Port Penrhyn**
**August 1948**

I soon came to terms with riding curves made up from lengths of straight, or inadequately bent, rail. Despite the violence of the ride, I do not recall any derailments. I also encountered for the first time peculiar point work I now know to have been designed to cater for double-flanged wagon wheels. I also noted the inconsistency caused by the presence of one 'conventional' turnout on the approach to the loco shed - clearly there were areas out of bounds to the double-flange.

We did travel the local area, for example to explore Conway, as it was called then, which, with the nearby Llandudno Junction level crossing, was but one of the motoring nightmares facing travellers from the north-east of England attempting to reach Bangor. However, the town had to be explored. Most memorable of these shorter-distance journeys from Bangor was a guided tour of a fully working Penrhyn Slate Quarry. Steam locos were operating on levels both below and far above the mill level. The water-balance lifts were operating continuously, raising loaded slate wagons to the mill. Every so often, the sirens would sound and another load of slate was blasted away from the mountain. The mill was a hive of industry and we were able to try our hands at splitting and trimming slates to thickness and size.

One day, by this time it was 1955, we found ourselves in a place called Portmadoc with what clearly had once been a flourishing port. Whilst exploring part of the area, my father tripped over something covered by grass, to discover that that 'something' was a rail. We were still mulling this over when we spotted steam at the other end of a long embankment. The cloud of steam morphed into a small locomotive and a couple of carriages. Once the locomotive had 'changed ends', who could resist a ride all the way to Boston Lodge?

Once there, the engine shed was the real draw, full, it seemed, of rusting, 'dead', locomotives. There were oddities, for example locomotives with boilers at both ends, I did not realise this then, but I now know we missed seeing a rusty WHR locomotive by about a year. Moel Tryfan had finally been cut-up in 1954.

With hindsight I see now that my enthusiasm for the '2-foot' gauge was triggered in the late 1940s. My awareness that there were many more than just one of these railways can probably be dated to the early 1950s. But why the Welsh Highland? For that I have to thank the organisers of a Model Railway Exhibition in the latter part of the 1960s who had had the foresight to invite the WHR (64 Co) to bring along their stand. After lengthy conversations, and the ability of the railway's representatives to separate me from a membership fee, the rest, as they say, is history.

The 1970s saw long trackbed walks - everyone seems to have done that - but I carried with me a prismatic compass and a very long tape measure. I still have the notebooks with my records of building sizes, orientations, relative positions, and so forth for eventual use as modelling aids. Where buildings survived, they were measured. Where buildings had disappeared, such as at Beddgelert, at least the foundations were still there - the sizes and orientations of the concrete bases noted in my book have proved particularly helpful.

The cycle was finally completed after we returned to the UK after five years working in the US. It was then I discovered the Heritage Group and promptly joined, hence my membership number being comparatively high relative to the original Group stalwarts. What followed were many fascinating and detail exchanges, either by letter or phone, with John Keylock. Other members with whom I corresponded were rather more flexible, both as regards to conversational media and to individual bed times.

That phase of involvement sadly came to an end when we lost John, but new horizons were opened when I failed to step back smartly enough and consequently became your Editor in 2014.

Since then, the very nature of time seems to have changed irrevocably!

**Peter**

# Regarding NWNGR Fairlies (Part 6)

Following my notes in *WHH* 98, John Manners sent me following notes:

Once again Peter congratulations on producing another fine issue of the journal.

In relation to the article NWNGR Fairlies (part 6) I have the following observations to put forward for consideration.

Firstly, you suggest that Arch 3441 predates Arch 0100 and 0234. In addition to your argument given in the article it looks to me that in Arch 3441 the uprights and diagonal timbers supporting the roof of the open waiting area of the station building are light in colour, whereas in the other two photographs they are dark. Now I appreciate early photographic emulsions sometimes give conflicting information concerning shades of grey in relation to actual colours, but my thought is that in Arch 3441 they may be bare wood, or possibly primed in white or grey. In Arch 0100 and 0234 they appear dark, so may have been finish painted by then. This would support the idea that Arch 3441 pre-dates the other two, if only by the day or so it would take to apply a layer of paint.

Incidentally Peter Johnson refers in his caption to these pictures that the painter could be inside (that some windows are open is his reasoning) finishing off the building.

The second point to raise with you concerns the relationship between Arch 0100 and Arch 0234. The same group of three people appear near the North end of the station building. This indicates they were taken on the same day which is likely of course as they are both attributed to Valentines. Based on the shadows, as you say, 0234 appears to be later in the day than 0100, but as the group of three people are still in the same location I think a distinct possibility is that Arch 0100 shows a test train from the FR end where the loco crew, upon inspecting the front tube plate as depicted in Arch 0100 decided that beating a retreat to Port, or Boston Lodge Works was the most appropriate action to take. Of course both running lines would need to be available for this to be the case.

Thirdly, and entering the world of supposition, could this test run with Moel Tryfan be the reason the decision to open the WHR using FR locos and stock from both ends was taken?

Kind regards,

John.

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John makes some very interesting points to which, if I may, I would offer the following comments:

The painting argument seems entirely valid and I thank John for one more piece of evidence that appears to confirm the relative chronologies of Arch 3441 and the Valentine photos.

As to the group of 'three' people some discussion seems warranted. I know I am getting old, but when I look at these photos in each instance I believe I am seeing four people.

The enlargements herewith, pretty brutal, I admit (left Arch 0100, right Arch 0234) appear to show 4 people but, perhaps more importantly, the distinct item of headgear worn by the guy on the right in Arch 0100 appears not to be visible in the group photographed later. That guy does appear to be a taller member of the group on the left. Whoever they were, might they have been forced to 'take a break' due to the temporary presence of the train?

For example, were these (five?) individuals contractors with primary responsibility for the completion of Beddgelert Station, including realigning the loop, ahead of the imminent formal opening?

Analyses such as these do occasionally trigger 'supposition'. Here we have two specific photos that demonstrably were taken 90ish minutes apart and we know which of the two was taken first. We have no direct evidence as to what happened between these two events. However, when public services started, Beddgelert to South Snowdon trains were scheduled to take 30 to 35 minutes and the reverse, downhill, trains 20 to 25 minutes, short enough, it would seem, to allow a return trip within 90 minutes. But because this could be done is not evidence that this was done!

These very helpful notes from John simply serve to demonstrate that there is still much worthwhile discussion to be had regarding many of our photos!

# A Transcribed Document from Bob Honychurch's Collection

Dick Lystor writes:

Attached is a tidied up version of a document that was in the material that was amongst the Bob Honychurch stuff that Nick Booker won at auction.

It would seem that Bob had been in touch with a Mr Davies enquiring as to the construction of the WHR in 1922 and presumably this is the reply that he got. It is quite an interesting read - I particularly like the way they used to mix concrete!! I don't think it was 100% successful going by the state of some of the culverts we saw on our trackbed surveys back in the late 1990's - I think the guy who was in charge of mixing didn't have his heart in the job!

Whilst we do not know precisely what questions Bob asked, the answers nevertheless make interesting reading.

Dick.

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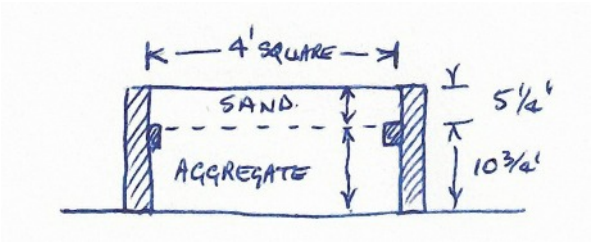
FROM MR. E. W. DAVIES (?) OF SIR ROBERT McALPINE & SONS LTD

215 CHARLES STREET, LEICESTER.

(1) I believe that the 70ft bridges were specially designed. The tunnel in the Aberglaslyn Pass was cut to single main line section in view of any possibility in the future of conversion to main line operation and it is therefore possible that the bridges were similarly designed.

(2) The ballast I believe came from the Penmaenmawr quarries.

(3) The correct term is BANKER which is the box without top or bottom which is used on a platform or stage when concrete is hand mixed. In those days cement was supplied in 200 lbs bags or 11 to the ton. The Banker size is then calculated according to the mix proportions to hold the correct amount of sand and aggregate, for 1 bag of cement. The lath is fixed at a height such that the volume to the top of the lath is the correct volume of aggregate leaving the sand to fill the remaining height of the box.




The banker is then raised clear and 1 bag of cement tipped on the heap and the whole mixed with water to suit.

Thus 4' x 4' x 10¾" - 14 1/3 cu.ft.

4' x 4' x 5¼" - 7 cu.ft.

I trust this is clear.

(4) Rail was laid at any stretch over which the formation was complete and joined up with cut rails as necessary.

(5) The cranes used for erection of the bridges were I think Scotch derricks, probably 5 ton., but I cannot remember on which bank they were erected.

(6) Flooding of the abutments during construction would be avoided by simple sandbag cofferdams.

(7) The navvies were accommodated in a large wooden hut built on a vacant space in Beddgelert village provided with bunks and cooking facilities. I think the labour employed would amount to about 60 men and about 8 to 10 staff.

(8) I cannot find any record of dates but I believe construction took place from early 1922 to about the spring of 1923.

(9) I had left the contract before the first train ran but an earlier inspection was made by officials of the N.W. Power Co. starting from Portmadoc on a train hauled by a Fairlie locomotive. The train got no further than the diamond crossing over the Cambrian main line where the old and rotten sleepers (which we had been pressing the Cambrian to renew for some months) collapsed under the weight of the loco and the remainder of the run was made with our own petrol loco and a hastily assembled train of slate trucks as far as Beddgelert where the run was abandoned in a snowstorm.

(10) The old NWNG was not used for supplying materials which would be brought in by lorries to convenient places.

(11) No soleplates were fitted under the rails which were spiked directly to the sleepers.

(12) I cannot remember any details of the telephone system.

The following notes are, I fear, more of an interest from the civil engineer's point of view, but there may be points of interest to the W.H.R.S. When the contract was let to my firm, the petition was as follows:- Some years previously the N.W. Power Co. Ltd. started to construct a railway which they intended to be run by electric power from Cwm Dyli Power Station. All the land had been purchased and fences erected (which were still in position in 1922). The ruling grade was to have been 1 in 25. Several bridges had been completed including some with brick skew arches, and some earthworks had been started. Owing however to disregard of the vital necessity to balance "cut" and "fill" the line ran into serious trouble and the project had to be abandoned. A large cutting at Hafod

Ruffyd had been completed but the adjoining bank was incomplete with no more spoil available.

The bridge over the main road at the Goat Hotel was complete and the abutments for the cattle creep between the main road and the river, but no spoil was available for the bank.

The Aberglaslyn tunnel had been excavated for 1/3 of its length, but was found to be on the wrong line to bring it out into the Aberglaslyn Pass.

To correct these errors, the following measures were put in hand:-

(1) As it was now proposed to use steam haulage the ruling gradient was altered to 1 in 40 and this entailed a major diversion introducing a very deep cutting and bank above Cwmcloch to regain the height lost.

(2) A diversion at Hafod Ruffyd was necessary involving a deep cutting and bank.

(3) A diversion at the Goat Hotel abandoning the line across the valley and substituting a line south of the main road to a new crossing of the river at the entrance to the Aberglaslyn Pass which involved a road diversion and new overbridge.

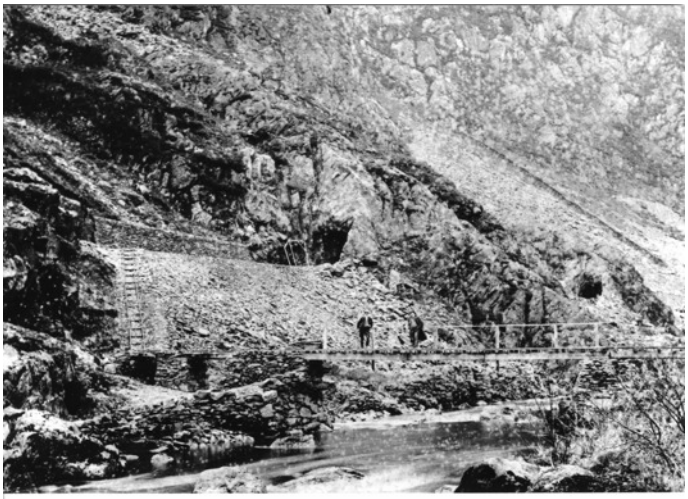
(4) The insertion of a curve into Aberglaslyn tunnel to bring the line out into the Pass as shortly as possible.

The contract was let on the basis of a rough tachometer survey which had shown that the line between the Goat Hotel tunnel (already constructed) and a point south of Rhyd-ddu village, about 4 miles in length would be wholly on the ruling gradient. This possibility could not be confirmed until the detailed location survey had been completed. This was put in hand starting at the two points mentioned. Fortunately, the surveys met roughly half way with height to spare and a short flatter gradient could be introduced for a short distance.

The location survey of the 4 mile section was the only part which was difficult owing to the following factors which all had to be balanced against each other.

Wherever possible it was essential to keep within the existing fences to avoid having to purchase additional land, but at some places owing to the loss of height due to the flattened ruling gradient, diversions were unavoidable. In these cases curves had to be introduced to obtain additional length but then further height would be lost owing to the compensation of gradient for curvature (For example a 3 chain curve necessitated a maximum gradient of only 1 in 48).

The construction contract was of the greatest interest to a young civil engineer as I was at that time and I must apologise for enlarging so greatly on that aspect alone.



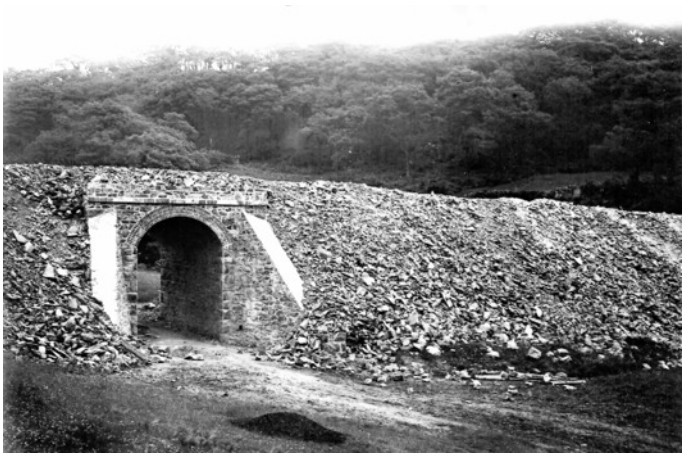
**Some of the works 'inherited' by WHR contractors.**

**Above: The Goat Cutting, Beddgelert - 1906 - Arch 3926**

**Below: Nantmor Cutting - 1904 - P.G. Thomas - Arch 4248**

**Left Above: Works in the Aberglaslyn Pass - ca. 1904 - J. Pritchard coll. - Arch 3486**

**Left Below: One of the 'completed bridges', this one at the entrance to Cwm Bychan - 1905 - Arch 4452**



Following the circulation of *WHH* 99, I received the following message from Michael Davies:

**Hello Peter**,

Reading the obituary of Roy West in *WHH* No 99 took me back to my own early memories of our railway. Roy was fortunate to have lived in Pwllheli early in WW2 as my own association with that part of north Wales didn't start until 1947. At Christmas 1945 I found in my stocking a copy of Chas E Lee's book *The Narrow Gauge Railways of North Wales* and in June 1947 we took our main family holiday at Morfa Nefyn.

On June 22nd I was invited to accompany another family staying in our guest house, as companion to a boy of similar age, and we drove to Barmouth via Portmadoc. Great was my excitement as we crossed the still laid connecting line from Harbour station to Portmadoc New. The return journey was via Tan-y-Bwlch and Llanfrothen and I was able to observe the very overgrown WHR track beside the road approaching Pont Croesor.

I began regular visits to the railway in 1949 and by March 1950 I'd walked the whole line with some minor exceptions where it was totally impassible.

We spent our school Whit holiday week in 1949 on bicycles and stayed three nights at Snowdon Ranger YH. Each evening we'd walk along the line across the Afon Treweunydd viaduct, enjoy a coffee in a Rhyd Ddu cafe, and return to the hostel by the then very quiet main road.

Waenfawr to Tryfan junction was very heavy going until I headed off towards Bryngwyn. I then have a memory of joining a bus (Express Motors) to Dinas Junction where I was able to enter the NWNG booking office which BR then used and purchase a ticket to Bangor. The station closed in 1951.

Derek Lystor mentions the Plas-y-Nant Holiday Home which was a particular favourite of people from the Manchester area. It was not a Church of England establishment but part of a chain of 'CE' homes run I believe by the Congregational Church. The renowned 'Auntie Lena' was matron there for decades. O.R. Williams (Whiteway buses) ran a weekly bus service from Manchester for many years to serve Plas-y-Nant.

I hope this may be of interest to our readers.

Regards,

**Michael.**

**Michael Davies at the Afon Treweunydd (Glanrafon) 'Viaduct' - 18th June 1954**

**Continued from Page 12.**

half-painted office entrance door at the south end of the station building, the apparently fresh appearance of the rest of the building, all point to 1923.

The locomotive, still in its NWNGR configuration with the Westinghouse air-pump, seen still in situ to the left of the smoke box, also indicates 1923.

Behind the locomotive, the train comprised two vehicles, one of the Ashbury *Corridor* carriages and a 4-wheel brake van derived from an FR Quarrymen's coach. The presence of the Van in lieu of a Pickering suggests that the 'missing' Pickering was NWNGR No. 4 which has been noted as suffering frequent derailments over this period, warranting its removal from service for repair. This, unfortunately perhaps, was the Pickering that had been fitted with dual brakes to allow operation behind both FR and WHR locomotives, pending the latter's conversion to vacuum braking. This logic implies that the 4-wheel brake van would also have been dual-braked, so therefore either WHR Brake Van No. 4 or FR 4-wheel Brake Van No. 5. The latter had an end balcony - the former did not.

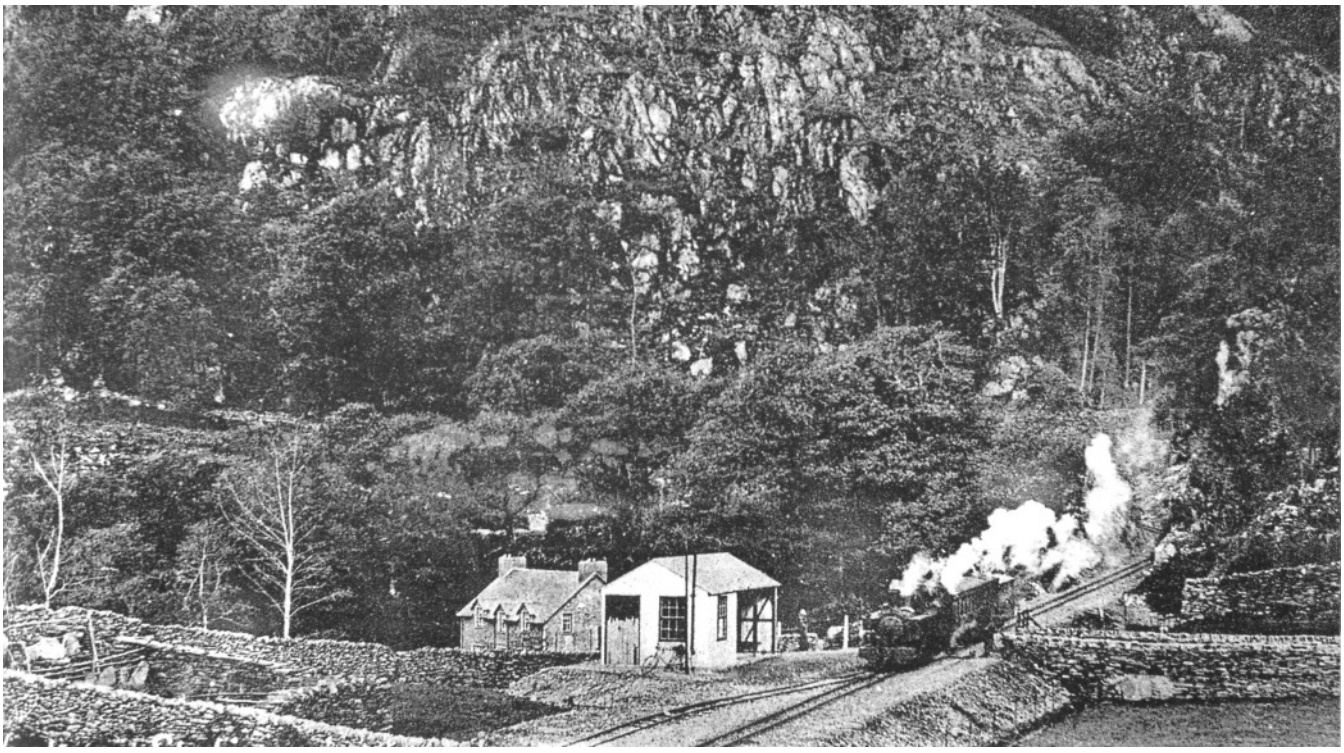
Following this logic further suggests the conclusion that the *Corridor* seen in the train was also dual-braked, therefore NWNGR No. 10. The volumes of steam visible in the photograph obscure much of the carriage's roof, although it is is possible to see the ventilators at either end and it seems just possible from what we can see that the centre installation was missing, confirming, if true, that this was No. 10.

There are other 1923 photographs that show *Corridor* No. 10 operating with a 4-wheel brake van, two of which show the Gladstone between the two; Arch 0285 (see *WHH* 99 p 3) and Arch 5398 (ibid. p 4). In the latter, it is clear that the 4-wheeled brake was FR No. 5, but positive identification is more difficult in the former.

Thus it would seem that the photograph shows an air-braked *Russell* drawing a short train of dual-braked stock.

All we need to complete this story is positive accreditation for this image.

# Peter Liddell's Photo Analysis



For my article this time, I thought I would look at one more photograph from 1923 - a view of the then new station at Nantmor with *Russell*, heading a very short southbound train, crossing the access road to Nantmor Village.

This photograph has been published a few times but with widely differing accreditation. These vary from 'Commercial Postcard' to 'F. Frith & Co Ltd'. It seems clear that the original image was a Commercial Postcard, but the printed caption at the foot of the image simply reads 'Nantmor Station'.

The published reference to Frith appears on page 20 of *The Welsh Highland Railway* - Alun Turner - 1996 - Welsh Highland Railway Ltd ISBN 0950 1178 4 6. There is no mention in this publication of any Frith reference number.

However, when I first had the chance to study David Allan's Archive in detail, I found this image (WHR 156) credited to Frith with the reference number 77837. Quite where this number came from I know not. Normally Frith images would show this reference but there is no evidence of any such number on any of the image versions I have seen. Further investigations soon indicated that if this image were a Frith, its number would not have been 77837 as this is their reference for a picture showing Baldwin *590* heading a train through the Aberglaslyn Pass towards Beddgelert. Secondly, had the reference been in the 778xx Frith series, the date of the image would have been 1925, quite at variance with the appearance of an untrimmed *Russell* fitted with air brakes and with a carriage that had not had its roof lowered.

In my notes under this heading in *WHH* 68, I commented on the unfortunate coincidence between Frith 1925 reference numbers (which ran from 76668 to 79005, which places all 777xx and 778xx numbers firmly in 1925) with the numbering system introduced by Henry Casserley when he re-catalogued the Locomotive Publishing Company images. He elected to use a railway-based system, in which 77700 to 77869 were allocated to the Festiniog and 77870 to 77899 to the Welsh Highland. These numbers were retained by Real and then Ian Allan through successive 'mergers'.

In the photograph we see what appears to be a 'new' Nantmor station - the 'cleanness' of the ballast, the

**Continued on Page 11.**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