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Chairman's Report 2022/2023



***Russell*, piloted by *Lyd*, climbs through the Aberglaslyn Pass towards Beddgelert. Photo by John Wooden.**

The Welsh Highland's Centenary Celebrations steamed off in fine style in 2022, most notably over the weekend of July 30th and 31st with a weekend of heritage trains (and road vehicles) operating between Dinas and Rhyd Ddu, aka South Snowdon, to celebrate the 1922 reopening this section of the line. The 'second bite' at the anniversary, the celebration of the complete re-opening to Porthmadog, was held over the weekend of 23rd/24th/25th June this year. There are plenty of photographs, videos and print over social media and the 'net' that show the success of the events in terms of participation and raising the profile of the railway.

Both years' activities were the product of a lot of hard work from all who have been involved over the last two years. This is an excellent example of what can happen when there is a common objective. As a press release said, '…the Ffestiniog & Welsh Highland Railways, Cymdeithas Rheilffordd Eryri, Welsh Highland Railway Heritage Group and the Welsh Highland Heritage Railway will be working together to organise the celebrations'. One of my major WHRHG related pre-occupations over both years has been as your representative on the monthly Zoom meetings that organised the WHR 100 events (some of which I chaired).



Another John Wooden photograph shows *Russell* and train at Beddgelert ahead of their return journey to Porthmadog.

There were many memorable scenes including seeing *Russell* with the rake of vintage coaches heading out of Dinas to Rhyd Ddu and later passing of course our flag ship restoration project at Tryfan Junction! And of course, *Russell* powering into Beddgelert.

The main event to celebrate the opening through to Portmadoc was over that June weekend and fulfilled the promises to be a great event involving all three railways and some of the original locomotives that operated on the railway. Unfortunately, the Baldwin not only looked like 590 but also seems to have acted up like the original locomotive so was unable to play a starring role.

The over-arching activity linking both years was the competition for the best piece of original research on the history of the WHR, the North Wales Narrow Gauge Railways Company (NWNGR), its associated activities and personalities for which a prize of £500 was awarded. This was supported by Mortons Media Group, publishers of *Heritage Railway* and *The Railway Magazine* and who gave the Centenary activities and the competition excellent coverage in their magazines. The competition was essentially the Group's key contribution to the events and, as we know, Stephen Murfitt, the FR's solicitor, won the prize with his essay, *The Saints Way*, which explores the history of negotiation and manoeuvring behind the original Welsh Highland Railway, its failure, and its subsequent resurrection. Stephen very kindly agreed to the publication of the essay as an electronic book on our website with a rather nice painting of a Garratt commissioned by him on the title page.

I must thank the judges Dr Dafydd Gwyn and Gareth Haulfryn Williams for their hard work in choosing a worthy winner and to Lord Hendy for agreeing to present the prize – incidentally he was at Tryfan Junction on a wet and windy day 7 years ago when we received the NRHA award.



From left to right; Cedric Lodge, Lord Hendy and Stephen Murfitt in front of rebuilt Kerr Stuart 4415 for Stephen's prize award

While the WHR 100 events were memorable and captured in pictures, print and sound there will be a physical legacy. With the agreement of the Ffestiniog & Welsh Highland Railways, the WHRHG and the WHRS have jointly funded the installation of replica NWNGR style name boards at closed historic halts along the route of the WHR.

The boards are positioned as close to their historical position where known. They are also situated as far as practicable so as not to indicate to passing walkers and indeed passengers on the trains that they represent an official halt or station!

The name boards are proposed at the following locations:

Betws Garmon
Croesor Junction
Glan-yr-Afon
Hafod Garregog
Hafod Ruffydd
Pitt's Head
Salem
Ynysfor (for Llanfrothen)

The earlier work and research on WHR/NWNGR font styles by Cedric Lodge played a key part in the successful development of this project that was managed by Adrian Strachan of the WHR Soc.

The Group has been consulted on the development of the physical interpretation that will be installed in stations along the WHR in 2024 along with web based apps as part of the Boston Lodge National Lottery Heritage Fund project. While in the past there has been some very limited provision of interpretation along the route of the WHR, some of it through the efforts of David Allan, the late John Keylock and others, this current project promises to significantly enhance that provision both through traditional methods and those of a more advanced nature.

In March this year your Committee and I, or (now) your Board of Trustees, sighed with relief when we received an email from the Charity Commission that said:

> *We are satisfied that THE WELSH HIGHLAND RAILWAY HERITAGE GROUP is a charity and it has been entered onto the Register of Charities with the Registered Charity Number 1202400.*

It was a tortuous long drawn out process for a variety of reasons and there is still some work to do in terms of setting up Gift Aid etc. However, we are now an incorporated body with the advantages and indeed responsibilities that go with that.

I now come onto buildings - Tryfan Junction has absorbed some of our funds for maintenance and repairs including painting, a new side door and window repairs. I must thank the WHR Soc and their contractor for looking after this work.

As for the Cambrian Crossing Box / Pen-y-mount, this has proved to be a continuing problem. Despite the replacement of most of the cladding and the fitting of what we believed was a new exterior hardwood door in recent years the building has continued to deteriorate. If there is a lesson to be learned from the 'Pen-y-mount saga' it's that with timber buildings in particular there are no short cuts to be had in building design, material specification, construction practice and ultimately maintenance. We have therefore taken the decision to terminate any further expenditure and to dispose of it to the WHHR or, if they do not want it, to anyone who is prepared to remove it at their own expense and liability.

Over the last few years, I have given several talks about the history of the WHR to various groups mostly on the subject of James Cholmeley Russell and his legacy. I have a couple coming up, one of which has the working title of *Welsh Highland Heritage – Past Present & Future* where I reflect on the WHR's Centenary Year with an illustrated talk.

The Past is easy to deal with and that has largely been the Group's role and without pressing the point too much – yesterday is also our interest – indeed the purchase of the Bob Honychurch archive three years ago, where I found a legible handwritten letter of mine in ink, brought home to me that I, and indeed we, are all part of that heritage. However, I'm not so sure how we deal with the future as our membership numbers indicate that we are a dwindling group. Although we played a key role in the Centenary Celebrations, we have new initiatives such as the Photo Archive. we have become a Charity, and we are evolving our website with a first new electronic book. What is the next big thing? – answers please!

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to Cedric Lodge who has stepped down as Secretary and welcome Mike Hadley who has kindly stepped into the breach. Cedric as you will know has been involved with the WHR over many years and with the WHRHG and we all owe him a debt of gratitude for his enthusiasm and hard work and he has been of course a volunteer on the reborn WHR until very recently.

I must also thank my fellow trustees, and all those others, who keep the Group functioning.

Thank you

Nick Booker, October 2023





Two further photographs of *Russell* to round of these notes and, in particular, the Centenary celebrations discussed therein.

First (left, above), captures the atmosphere resulting from the combination of rain, wet roads and swirling steam. *Russell* and train are seen leaving Britannia Bridge and crossing the High Street en-route to Beddgelert.

In the second image (right, above), we see *Russell* and train awaiting departure from Beddgelert in less than ideal weather conditions.

Portmadoc WHR Signalling Revisited.

MRFS

In the never-ending story of unravelling the signalling and operating of the small combine, it pays continuously to review what you've written in the past and critically assess that writing to see if it stands up to new evidence. I am very grateful to Richard Maund, Chris Jones and Peter Johnson for causing me to revise that which I wrote back in *WHH* 64. It turns out that things were even more unusual than previously thought! I have now had sight of most of the appropriate Inspection Reports by Lt. Col. Mount, and they do indeed shine a very illuminating light on what both the FR and the WHR did to cut costs and operate efficiently. I have railed against the "inherited gloom" of some accounts in the past, and I stand by those comments.

I maintain that the WHR and the FR were quite conscientiously run and run well if it were not for the quality of the coal: economy was certainly the watchword. Nothing was wasted, nearly all of the Portmadoc signalling installation was either reused or re-purposed from Blaenau. The first diagram is about as accurately as I can record the situation after May 1923 when Mount came to visit; Harbour Station was broadly as it had been since the turn of the century, with only minor alterations to allow passenger trains over the junction railway. The points leading from the platform line to the Britannia Bridge had been fitted with a facing point lock to prevent the blades moving under a passenger train, but everything else was unaltered. Lt-Col Mount visited the area on the 24th May 1923, and wrote up his report on the 29th.

There is a special section covering the operation of this section of the railway in the May 1923 Working Instructions for the WHR [1].

Mount decreed that even if passenger trains were not yet to be run over the Junction Railway, there must be staff working between the old and the new stations, all the dock sidings near Portmadoc Old were to be fitted with Stop Blocks unlocked by a key on the new Train Staff and that there must be a STOP board erected by "No 6 points of the Old Station". No 6 points were the further connection into the Good Shed at Harbour (the 6 is merely a reference number on the linen plans). The May 1923 Working Instructions record that the Train Staff for this section was wooden and coloured Blue; I have a suspicion that this Train Staff is the former wooden (pre-Iron Crucifix) Staff from Beddgelert to South Snowdon, but the truth of that suspicion may be lost in the mists of time. The Stop Board by No 6 points does not appear in many photographs, but there is one of the Simplex with a sign in the background that can only be the Stop Board mandated by Mount.

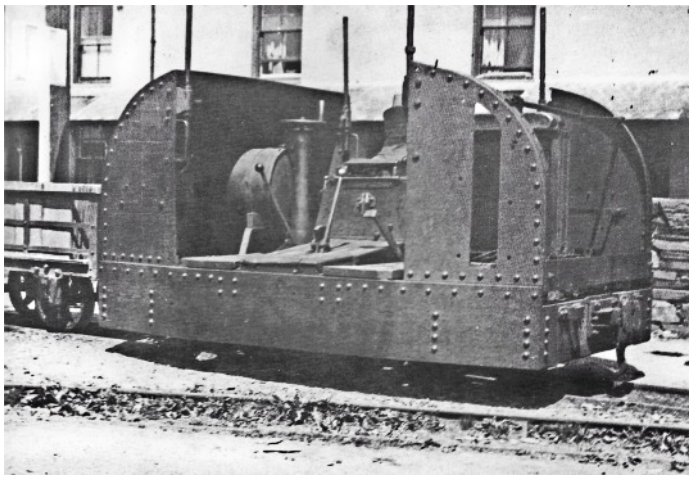


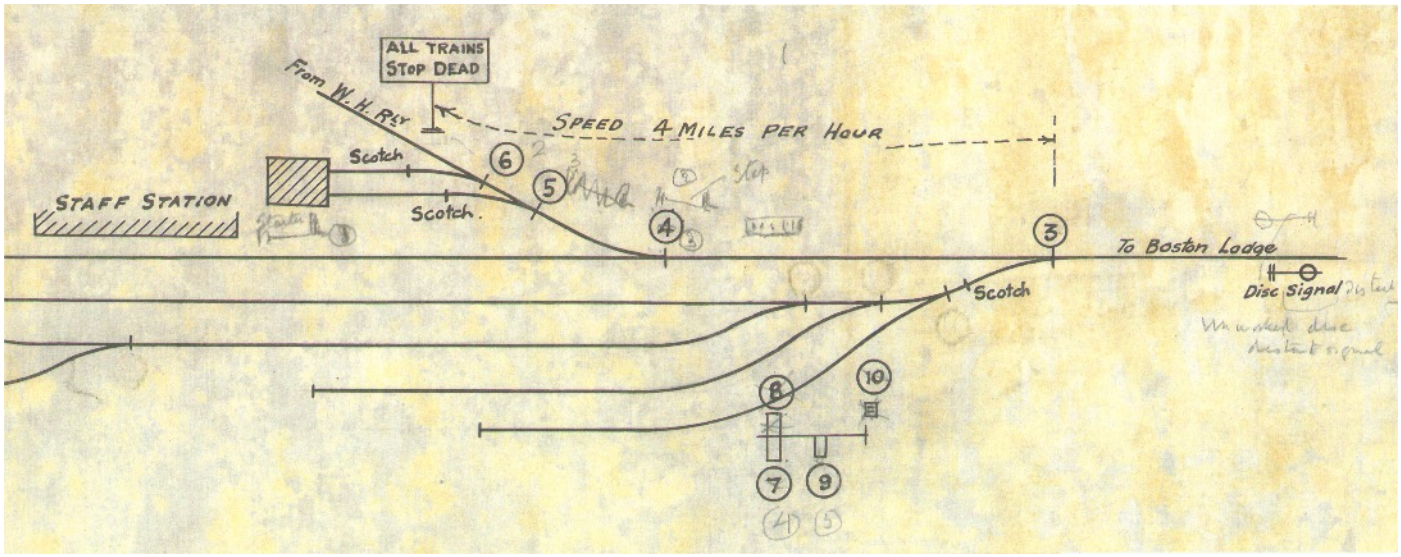
Photo MRFS Collection

I have never seen a picture of the wording on this board, but it is recorded in FR records as "ALL TRAINS STOP DEAD".

In the 1923 diagram (below) A is a quadrant working Disc Signal "A" on the Cob, and wire locking points and indicating disc "A"; B is a two lever ground frame working the WHR/Britannia Bridge points, FPL and indicating disc "B"; and C is the stop board required by Lt. Col Mount.

Soon after the inspection, the Pointsman's Bothy at Portmadoc was removed as there is a photograph of Taliesin taking the Junction Railway [2] with the indicating discs and two lever frame in shot, but no bothy. I am not sure why this occurred, it may simply be that the structure was succumbing to the ravages of time, as it had been exposed to the balmy weather at Portmadoc since the 1860s! The same could also be said of the signalling, as apart from piecemeal additions the installation was essentially as provided in 1863 and reworked in 1879 when the station was rebuilt. Therefore it is not unreasonable to think that the entire installation was a bit out of date by the mid-1920s. Of course, at the same time the Festiniog was transforming from a heavily-staffed railway into a far less labour costs-intensive Light Railway, so the signal boxes in Blaenau were





Gwynedd Archives XD97/455110, with historic pencil annotations.

progressively closed. The first, on 29th August 1923 was Duffws Station, followed by No 2 box in August/September 1925 [3]. During 1925 there was a great deal of planning to simplify further the workings in Blaenau, and by (almost) all records a five lever frame was acquired from Tyers [4] to replace No 3 box, to control the level crossing and easternmost connection at Glanypwll. For reasons as yet unclear, this particular simplification never happened, so the lever frame was going spare!

Somehow, and the records are not at all obvious about this change, the five lever frame grew another lever; T.L. Piercy's [Blaenau Station Master, F.R.] handwritten response in XD97/19493 records the delivery of a SIX lever frame at Blaenau LMS in 1925. Perhaps in preparedness for the 1926 season, this frame ended up at Portmadoc, as shown in XD97/455110.

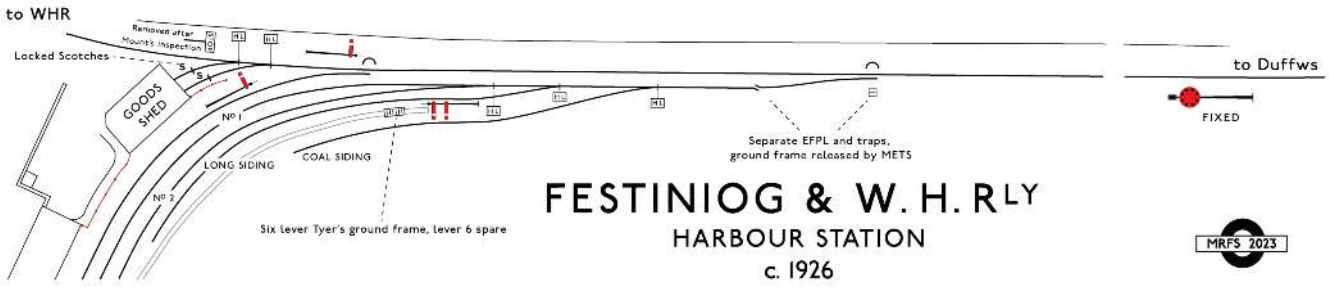
Later versions of this drawing (as seen in *WHH*61) clearly state that this frame comes from Festiniog, as indeed did a lot of the new installation. Looking at the signal posts provided, I'm tempted to suggest that the signals too came from Glanypwll, as they would have been only 25 years old at this stage. The original T semaphore that stood by the pointsman's bothy gained a new smaller top signal arm to match the lower one for the Wharf line and the two old arms from the 1860s were retired. Out on the Cob, the Disc signal was fixed at caution, with the outermost points and new traps now being worked by a single lever groundframe unlocked by the Portmadoc – Minffordd ETS.



The scene was captured well in this photograph by CL Mowat taken in 1926, although, as explained on page 6 below, this picture may well be from 1927, it is certainly no earlier than 1926. It is clear from this photograph that Lever No 6 is spare, as it is undoubtedly white. Lt. Col Mount returned to the small combine in October 1926 in order to formally re inspect as well as inspect a good deal of new works across the whole of both railways as part of the simplification towards a more economical operation.

The diagram below records the situation at Harbour, as reported in Mount's inspections of both the WHR and FR on the 6th and 7th of October 1926 [5] You will note that I have removed the lever numbers from the diagram, this will be explained later on. This part of Mount's inspection is best summarised in his own words:

> *4. <u>Portmadoc Old Station</u>. The old home and starting signals here have been dispensed with and a ground frame of 5 working with one spare lever has been*



provided, operating the junction points of the Welsh Highland section with the platform main line of the Festiniog section, and also the four relevant home and starting signals, all of which are of up-to-date type. An unworked distant signal of old-fashioned disc type remains to act as a distant signal. The loop siding connection at the Boston Lodge end of the station, which provides access to other sidings, is now worked by a single lever ground frame locked by the electric staff. As mentioned in my report, S.R.104, Welsh Highland trains entering the station need not now be brought to a stand as they will be controlled by stop signal, and the necessary instructions should be given to this effect, speed over the junction being limited to 5 m.p.h. The locking is correct and, subject to the abovementioned restriction and a similar restriction for all traffic approaching the station between the siding facing points and the terminus, I consider that the arrangements are generally satisfactory.

It is odd that he refers to the single aspect signals (just a red lens) as being of up-to-date design, though anything would be more modern than the old T semaphore! Mount then turns his eye to the operating of the Junction Railway, and expresses disquiet that the ticket boxes for the block section should were not being locked by the staff itself, rather than a padlock and a key on the staff. I presume that he was concerned about the security of the single line. This, perhaps, shines a light on a curious gift given to the FR Heritage Group over the "Bygones" weekend in October 2023



I am sure that many hares will be started running over this very interesting survivor, but Mount specifically mentions in his 1926 reinspection of the Junction Railway that the Staff Ticket boxes must be unlocked by the staff itself, rather than the key on the staff and a padlock. It is clear to me, before I even started digging, that this item was a Tyer's product, cast in gunmetal and perhaps with an aluminium end. It came as no surprise when reading through Richard Maund's copies of MT6 and MT29 files that Colonel Stephens (HFS) himself reported to the Ministry on 5th April 1927 that: *"[…]and to say that suitable Staff and Ticket boxes for the section between Portmadoc Old and New Stations are being sent through Messrs. Tyer and Co. and if they have not yet reached Portmadoc, they will do during the next few days, when they will be put into operation."*

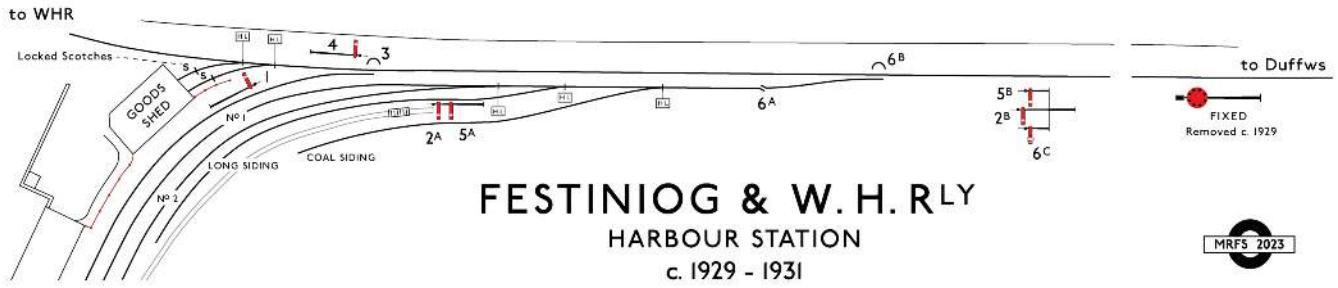
Those familiar with WHR operation will remember that the Portmadoc New to Beddgelert staff section was split ready for the 1924 season, with the new sections being Portmadoc New – Croesor Junction and Croesor Junction – Beddgelert. According to the evidence of the surviving Staff Tickets, this gave rise to an interesting situation where the wooden Train Staff for the sections either side of Portmadoc New was blue. One wooden train staff could look much like any other, so I am not surprised that when the opportunity presented itself the Staff on one side was changed to a different form: or even that it only changed because it had to change. Interestingly, there seem to be some vestiges of a green (perhaps greenish-blue) paint on the back of the Staff, although all known surviving Tickets still refer to the Train Staff on that section being Blue. There are suggestions that the locking arrangements on the Junction Railway were amended, but that needs exploring further, as too does the date of the Mowat picture: if it were 1926 the Britannia Terrace Stop board should still have been visible until after Mount's inspection, as once the signalling was provided the need for a compulsory stop at Britannia Terrace no longer existed.

I am very grateful to Chris Jones for drawing to my attention the next stage of the evolution of the signalling, which came to light during research for *Little Giants*. Buried deep in file XD97/21780, which is a bundle of papers concerning locomotive repairs during 1928-1930, is an offhand comment at the bottom of a note written by HFS*: "Also, please get the points and signals connected up on Portmadoc 3-Arm signal"*, dated 19th March 1929. Furthermore, through the kindness of both Richard Maund and Peter Johnson, I now have considerably more information about the 1929 arrangements than hitherto. Peter has very kindly provided an extract of a photograph from the 1929-1931 period that features the Tyer's lever frame, and coupled with the files from Kew via Richard [5] , it means that a much more accurate numbering scheme can now be deduced.



Portmadoc Lever Frame (from Peter Johnson)

Lt. Col. Woodhouse visited the Festiniog on 22nd May 1931 to inspect new works at Tanygrisiau, Blaenau and Portmadoc Old. Woodhouse was inspecting the Portmadoc work as advised on the 13th December 1929: the loop points and associated single blade trap out on the Cob were now on the Portmadoc lever frame, the bracket signal had been erected on the Cob (see above). Most unusually, the signal that features in the Mowat photograph was still in commission acting as an inner home and the appropriate arms co-acted between the outer and inner homes.



Woodhouse saw this as a source of confusion and stipulated that the inner signal should be removed. The ringed arm on the former Glanypwll bracket signal co-acted with the new economically-locked points, Woodhouse commented:

> *"The arrangement by which the arm on the bracket signal is worked by the same lever as the facing points is an unusual one, but having regard to the nature of the traffic and the slow speed at this point I see no objection to it".*

It is perhaps noteworthy that although the loop signal was inspected, it was recorded as being out of use at the time of the inspection. However, Woodhouse did find significant problems with the adjustment of the points during testing, which led him to refuse the lifting of the speed limit through the area from 5 mph to 15 mph until the points were adjusted correctly. In fact, unless further evidence comes to light, it seems that a raising of the speed limit was the reason for this work unless the loco crews found waiting for the section to Minffordd to be clear was a hindrance to their work. So, rather later in time that I originally thought, the signals at Portmadoc Old took their final form sometime after May 1932. The apportionment of the frame is most likely (using the terminology from XD97/455110):

1. FR Starting Signal
2. FR Home Signal
3. FR/WHR Points
4. WHR Stop Signal
5. WHR Junction Signal
6. Loop Points and Bracket Signal

There is still some uncertainty about the exact apportionment between levers 1 and 4, but the arrangement shown minimises the amount of locking needed (see plan below).

My sincere thanks to Richard Maund, Chris Jones, and Peter Johnson for their help in drawing together the information for this revision.

References

[1] These are available to download from our Website, at https://www.welshhighlandheritage.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Instructions-for-working-1923.pdf - (the Junction Railway instructions are the final page thereof)

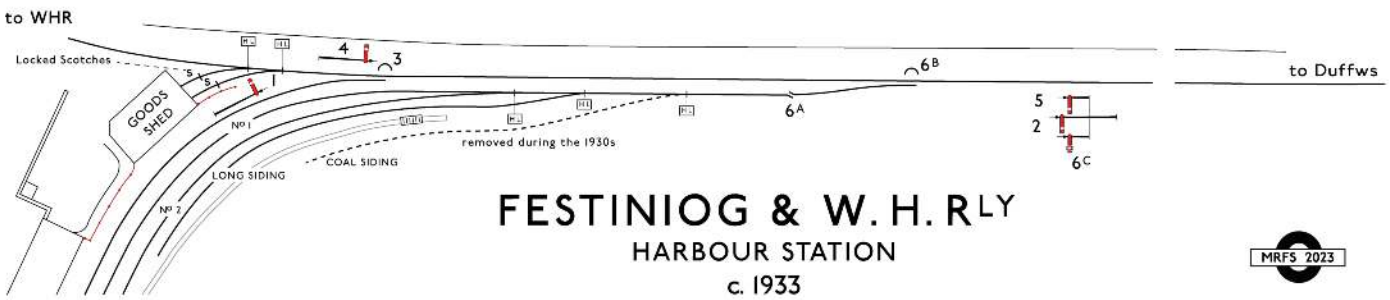
[2] *Railway Magazine*, published August 1924, iBase 2580, probably taken in 1923 before *Taliesin* was withdrawn in November 1923.

[3] there is much discussion in XD97/19495 about the closing of No 2 and No 3 signal boxes, culminating in a note from T.L. Piercy to Robert Evans on 1/9/1925: […]"*As you must be aware, that the signal box at Glanypwll must be still open, the arrangements for dispensing with it not having being completed, it is impossible to bring into force the five lever frame as instructed by you*"

[4] 1925 is a very complex year to unpick for signalling goings-on up and down the Festiniog. There were lots of subtle changes. XD97/19492 reports that HFS ordered a 5 lever type B5 frame from Tyers on 23/2/25; there is a drawing of a five lever frame and locking (XD97/450008) by Tyers dated 10/3/25. XD97/450008 seems to suggest that the frame would be used at the bottom end of LMS Exchange, where two signals could control the level crossing, the points and trap for the eastern connection at Glanypwll and two further signals adjacent to the LMS platform. XD97/19493 suggests that the frame was delivered to the LMS station, and vanished. HFS enquires of its whereabouts on 18/5/25. T.L. Piercy at Duffws responded on 1st June that he felt it was better left where it was until required, although he did tell Inspector Griffith and the late J.P. Roberts. Perhaps Mr. Roberts expired before passing the message on!

[5] MT6/3286, MT29/83 MT29/86 at Kew.

All XD97/ referenced items mentioned in the text are at Gwynedd Archives, Victoria Dock, Caernarfon



Ruthin & Cerrig-y-druidion Railway - Part 3

Barrie Hughes has been tidying-up loose ends remaining after completing his first two parts of his R&C description.

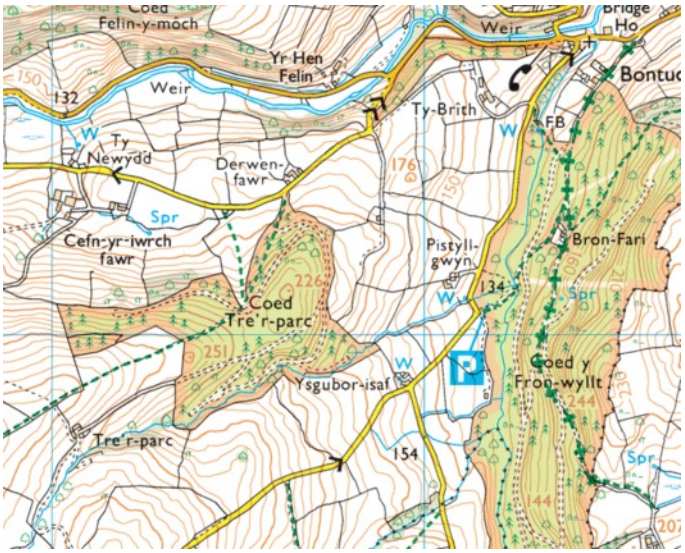
This is the third part of the story of the Ruthin and Cerrig-y-druidion Railway (Parts 1 and 2 appeared in *WHH* 91 and 93 respectively). The R&C was a railway of the late Victorian period that was part constructed across the Clocaenog Forest west of Ruthin and had great pretensions of reaching Portmadoc. In its later days the railway company was in consultation with the Tramways Corporation which was promoting the Croesor Tramway to complete the abandoned NWNGR scheme from Corwen, through Cerrig-y-druidion, Bettws-y-coed, Capel Curig, over the Pen-y-gwryd Pass and via Beddgelert to meet the Croesor Tramway route into Portmadoc.

Withdrawal of the major R&C supporters, who were also giving land in the Clocaenog Forest, led to the demise of the whole scheme which was abandoned by the 1884 Act of Parliament. Over 5 miles of earthworks in the Afon Clywedog valley between Ruthin and the village of Gyffylliog had been completed but no structures had been built. Some of these works were built outside the limits of deviation, after a poor survey and the need to maintain a ruling gradient of at most 1 in 33 over the Clocaenog Forest summit.

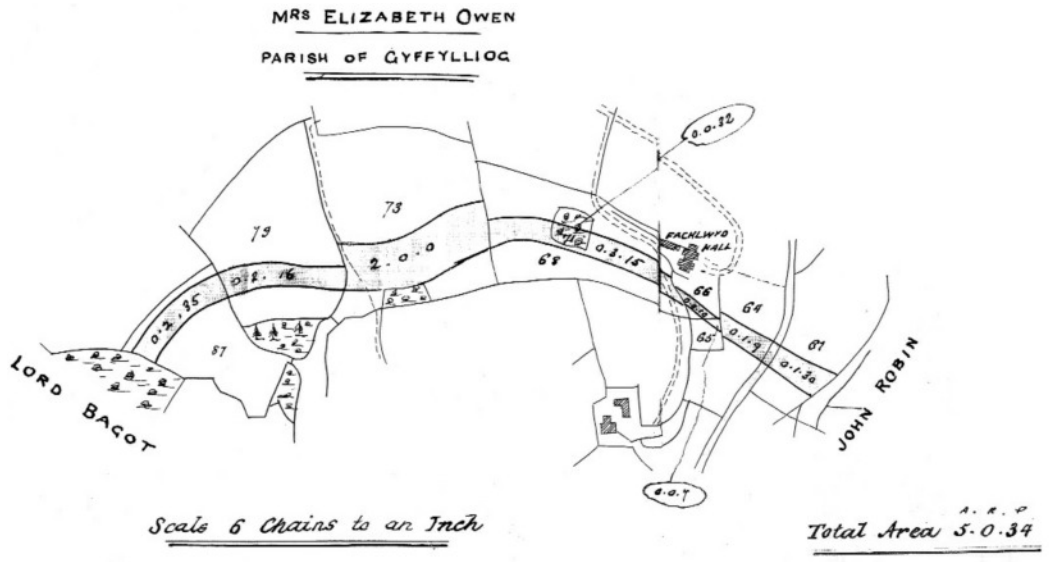
The author is grateful to Richard Maund for his contributions in finding a missing early OS map of the route west of Bontuchel on *The National Library of Scotland Website* (Sheet Denbighshire XIX.9) and asking some pertinent questions which I have attempted to answer with further research. The following additional notes cover the section Gyffylliog to Bontuchel which needed revision after further research. This section is initially covered from west to east as Gyffylliog station is a pinch point that decides the rest of the analysis of the route.

Gyffylliog station

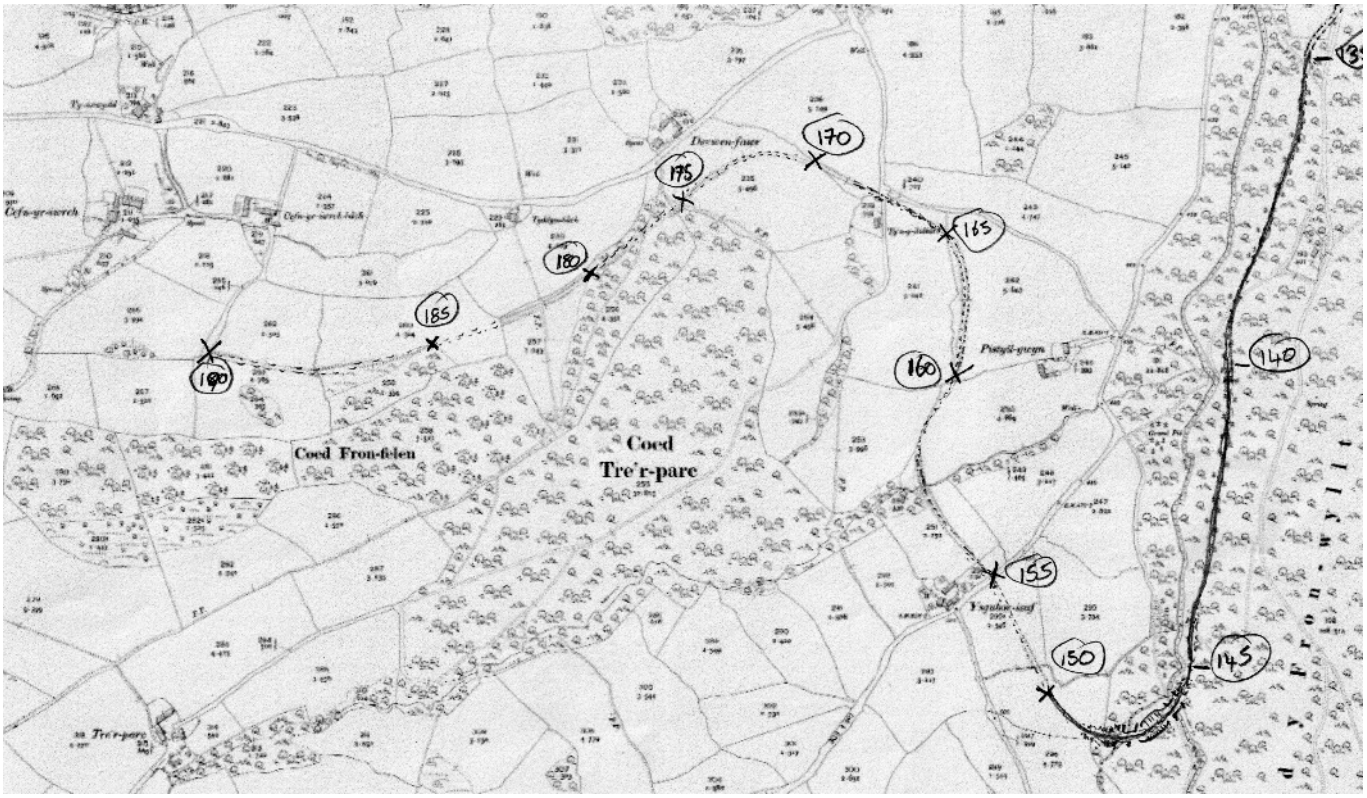
While the contractor stopped work at Cefn-yr-iwrch farm between Bontuchel and Gyffylliog, the solicitor for the R&C had reached an advanced stage in negotiating the next phase and a planned land take map for Gyffylliog station site survives in the R&C file at Ruthin Record Office. The station was to be constructed high above the village on the hillside to the south. The land take plan shows a significant widening of the formation for a passing loop, sidings and station offices at the 210 m contour. A steep public footpath that leads down to the village graded at about 1 in 10 might have been converted into a road access. An alternative access might have been available from the access road to Fachlwyd Hall that the plan shows being passed on the hillside above at the 200 m contour.



Extract from the modern 1:25,000 Ordnance Survey mapping for the Bontuchel area showing the valley of the Afon Melin-dwr and the Cefn-yr-iwrch farm. Copyright Ordnance Survey.



The Gyffylliog Station 'Land Take' Plan



Extract from the 1912 1:10,000 Ordnance Survey mapping of the same area with spot heights in metres showing where the route crosses modern-day 5 m contours. Copyright National Library of Scotland.

A vehicular access alongside the railway to the station site seems possible with gentler gradients.

Cefn-yr-iwrch farm mystery revisited

There are at least two sets of earthworks visible on Google Earth at different levels on the hillside above and to the south of Cefn-yr-iwrch farm. Working back from the Gyffylliog station site and its 210 m height, the ruling gradient fixes which of the earthworks is the termination of the constructed earthworks for the R&C. It is the upper level of earthworks at the 190 m contour. The question that was left hanging in the air in the previously published notes of the R&C was how the railway was constructed between Bontuchel and this 190 m point at Cefn-yr-iwrch farm. It seemed impossible to achieve within the short distance from Bontuchel station which was clearly defined by LIDAR at the 125 m contour. Richard Maund found the missing map in the National Library of Scotland's repository of 1912 Edition 25" maps. The map clearly shows the embankments and cuttings of the route west of Bontuchel despite it having been abandoned over 25 years previous to the survey.

Nant Melin-dwr deviation

The extract of the map sheet shows the railway formation taking a much deeper penetration of the Nant Melin-dwr valley south of Bontuchel than originally thought before it doubles back to gain the necessary height to attain the fixed point above Cefn-yr-iwrch Farm. LIDAR is able to confirm some of this route and modern maps show forest tracks on some of the track bed.

Working from east to west the as-built railway earthworks enter this side valley from the Bontuchel station site on the 125 m contour and follow the unmade road past housing and a pasture heading south. At the end of the pasture there is evidence of an embankment in the form of a chicane off the unmade road and into the forest. The earthworks follow the east bank of the river for about 1.3 km, rising from 125 m to 145 m in the process. While there is no direct evidence of the route south of the chicane, the deciduous forest has a thin line of coniferous forest marked which appears to be a later planting on the track bed. This can be traced for the whole length of the formation along the east bank of the river. On modern maps, a forest track follows this formation at a lower level than the bridleway higher up the hillside. There is a car park marked 'P' near Pistyll-gwyn on the lane that runs south from Bontuchel and a public footpath crosses the river from there to give access to the formation.

The formation now makes a sharp U-shaped turn, crossing the river and a tributary before heading north along the west side of the valley. There is evidence on Google Earth of a sharply curved embankment at the point of bridging the Afon Melin-dwr. The 1910 map clearly shows the formation reappearing in fields close to Ysgubor-isaf then crossing the lane at the 155 m contour between there and the aforementioned car park. Embankments and cuttings are clearly shown in fields passing above Pistyll-gwyn at the 160 m contour. Just north of there, the earthworks take a shallow turn to the left into the Clywedog Valley, crossing the 165 m and 170 m contours as the track bed passes Ty'n-y-llidiart. A final left-hand curve in fields to the south of and above Derwen Fawr sees the earthworks enter Coed Tre'r-parc woods at the 175 m contour. Now

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Letters to the Editor

I recently received the following letter from James Hewett:

Dear Mr Liddell

Now that the WHR 100 celebration is a relatively distant memory, it may be time to consider how to ensure that the heritage and history of the railway remains in front of the public in the future. In that context, I would like to suggest two possibilities.

The first is that the station signs which were installed for the event (and very nice they look too) might be completed – for example, there's no sign for either Portmadoc (sic) New 1923 or its later incarnation of Portmadoc (sic) New 1931, and Glan-yr-Afon (staff) halt is absent as well. I couldn't see the Salem board, but I guess I may have missed it. And, as the modern (and complex) history of the restoration of the railway is as important as the original 13 years, perhaps a designation of the temporary terminus at Traeth Mawr might also be appropriate (after all, this was the first section which saw regular coal-fired steam-hauled trains on WHR) – and one might perhaps stretch a point to showing the planned - but never seemingly built - Aberglaslyn halt just south of the mouth of Aberglaslyn Tunnel #4 – and even maybe the temporary terminus at Quellyn (sic) Lake. One would hope that, when all this is done, the signage could take its place within any future edition of the railway guidebook, as useful reference points for passengers *en route.*

The second suggestion is purely for enthusiasts of the WHR's history (a category which I hope contains all your readers!). It would be a very appropriate historic re-enactment if a special train could be arranged which would traverse the line, stopping briefly at each original station and halt. No entry or exit would be allowed at the non-platformed ones, of course, although ideally a local resident might meet and greet the train at each halt (a Certificate could be handed over by Guard or loco crew). It would need to be organised on a day when there is no other WHR service, as journey time would be protracted. Stock comprising an England (when Welsh Pony is again available) and suitable 1920s carriage stock (either WHR or FR) would be ideal if Russell is not available – although I understand that it is hoped that Russell will run during 2024 (I won't mention the Baldwin!). Or if there is lots of demand which requires more stock, a Fairlie (historically appropriate for the first couple of years of operation). I see this as a one-off – but it could be annual if there seems to be a wish and demand to make it so.

On a more general note, it may be useful for the Heritage Group to now think seriously about the future (if that doesn't seem to be a contradiction…), and organise a strategy to ensure that the line's history continues to be celebrated. For example, the anniversaries of the following - closure of the railway as an all-year operation, the establishment of the new station to the north of the main line, the FR lease, and of course the closure separately to passengers and to freight - will all be upon us in a few short years. How would this group like these anniversaries to be celebrated? And perhaps WHHG might promote a WHR version of the FR's Bygones event, each year?

Yours sincerely

James Hewett

On receipt, I invited our Chairman to respond:

Comment from the Chairman, Nick Booker, on James Hewett's letter

The 'Station name boards at historic halts along the WHR' project was proposed as a WHR Centenary Legacy Project and agreed with 'The Company' in the early spring of this year. It is a credit to Adrian Strachan, who managed the project, his team of volunteers and the company who manufactured them, that nearly all of them have been installed at the closed historic halts along the route this year.

The name boards have been manufactured from modern hard-wearing and low maintenance materials, but follow the NWNGR style as far as possible, using the previously recorded Bryngwyn sign as a guide and Cedric Lodge's work on the font style.

The work was jointly funded by the Welsh Highland Railway Heritage Group and the Welsh Highland Railway Society from current funds with the proviso that 'offers of donations… received …will be accepted' !

The final agreed list for installations was as follows:

Betws Garmon	Croesor Junction
Glan-yr-Afon	Hafod Garregog
Hafod Ruffydd	Pitt's Head
Portmadoc New	Salem

Ynysfor (for Llanfrothen)

I can comment on the points made by Mr Hewett as follows. 'Portmadoc New' was in the original list but removed at the request of 'the Company' on the grounds that it would be vulnerable to vandalism, given its proximity to the town. 'Salem' as far as I know has been manufactured and may have been installed – I have not had the opportunity to check yet. The problem with 'Glan-yr-Afon' is the poor accessibility and the state of the vegetation on the site. There is a longer-term proposal to cut back the vegetation, create a safe access for sheep, who would naturally keep any undergrowth in check as happened for many years prior to the rebuilding of the railway, and to conserve the remains of the weigh house building.

As for signs elsewhere, e.g., at the temporary terminus of Quellyn (sic) Lake, this can certainly be considered but will have to be balanced with issues such as creating unnecessary clutter and maintenance.

When it comes to heritage trains, the Journey into the Past trains of 2018 and 2019 certainly created a good deal of interest and the WHRHG played a big part in their success – I've always liked 'dressing up'! However, Covid brought an end to them, and they are resource and volunteer intensive.

The Interpretation and Boston Lodge Project funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund has brought a very welcome focus on the importance of heritage and interpretation. Anniversaries are certainly a good excuse for having a party

e.g. a special train or something more permanent such as new or improved interpretation. Technology does of course allow us some new approaches and if anyone has some good ideas on 'apps' please let me know – who, for instance, would like to develop an app for a virtual signal box at Tryfan Junction?

Nick

An interesting range of ideas! However, should any reader have additional ideas, or simply would like to comment on the ideas presented above, please let me know!

As I said to James in response to his letter "Constructive debate is always worthwhile. Let us hope that your input prompts such a debate!"

Over to you!

Peter

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heading west, the earthworks form a shelf on the south side of the Clywedog valley rising steadily and emerging from the woods on sidelong ground at the 180 m contour between two footpath crossings. Curving due west, the final visible earthworks rise steadily through the 185 m contour and terminate at the 190 m contour at a farm track crossing above Cefn-yr-iwrch bach farm.

Conclusion

It is now clear that the earthworks do terminate at the 190 m contour in fields to the south of and on the hillside above Cefn-yr-iwrch bach farm as previously identified in Part 1 of this feature. The station site at Gyffylliog has previously been clearly identified and fits the ruling gradient.

The contractor used the side valley of the Afon Melin-dwr creatively to ensure the gradient did not exceed the planned ruling gradient which, at 1 in 33, would have presented a harder slog than that required by the Garratts in the Beddgelert Forest on the modern WHR! If the line had been continued to Portmadoc, there would have been similar heavy gradients in Nant Gwynant up to the Pen-y-gwryd summit involving, it is rumoured, spirals.

Food for thought and another day's investigation!

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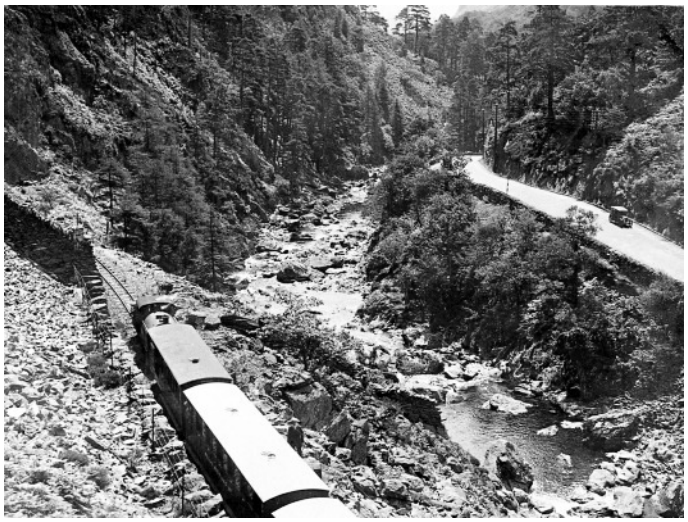
29th July 1997, on which date the head of steel lay somewhat to the north of Bontnewydd, roughly where the new road now crosses the railway. The head of steel arrived at Hendy about one month later, towards the end of August.

Not only does the availability of the negatives allow us to ensure that we have the images in the correct order but cross checking the declared dates with that image sequence would throw up any date anomalies, were there any of course.

As scanned, at 300 dpi, the JPEG file is only 165 kB and after scanning a couple of films I settled on 600 dpi as my standard for this type of image.



This next image is the last of those I scanned at 300 dpi, this time David's negative F47-19, a view taken from atop the remains of the station building at Betws Garmon on 30th April 1997 during one of the Survey Walks discussed recently in *WHH*. This file is only 128 kB in size.



Finally, I thought I would look at the first negative I scanned as a 600 dpi JPEG. As it happened, this was one of David's Copy Negatives, G61-01, and the image is one that should be instantly recognisable - Topical Press Agency L.4369, taken on the 17th July 1934 Press Day. This picture appeared, for example, in the *Daily Mirror* 7 days later.

The train was stationary and the view posed. For 'proof' of this, note the guard standing on the trackbed adjacent to the second carriage.

There is much still to do with, and to learn from, David's considerable contribution to the Archive.

Peter Liddell's Photo Analysis

This time, I thought it appropriate to move away from discussing specific images but instead to talk of photographs in general. The thought was prompted by our Archive recently more than doubling in size.

I well-remember acquiring John Keylock's photograph collection from Dick Lystor after an AGM held at Canolfan in Prenteg. This was over 8 years ago but recently history almost exactly repeated itself.

As we have noted here before, the John Keylock Collection took the form of a photographic print collection. John had assembled seven photo albums but in addition had built up a set of wallet files with numerous prints in each. Typically, although not exclusively, these were of too large a format to be considered for inclusion in his Albums. His Albums contained, indeed still do contain as I have determined that, in his memory, these be left as they were, 428 photos, 20 of which appeared as duplicates elsewhere in the wallet folders.

In parallel with John's Collection, I also had a copy of David Allan's electronic collection, stored using the Cardbox database software. On acquiring John's collection these two were merged, primarily by adding to David's Archive images from John's collection that hitherto had not been recorded there. Many of John's prints were, of course, taken from David's negatives so already were in the e-Archive.

Our electronic archive has grown steadily since that time through our new acquisitions and the discovery of other 'new' images. However, whilst we had scans from David's negatives, the future of the negatives themselves was always a matter of great concern.

Ahead of the recent AGM at Waunfaur, this situation coalesced when David's collection, primarily, although not exclusively, a negative collection, was transferred from his car to mine. My immediate reaction was that his collection was of considerably greater bulk, and weight, than John's had been. However, that they were now all together allows us to build what henceforth will be known as, at David's request, *The David Allan and John Keylock Archive*.

I now have a broad assessment of the contents of David's Collection and I am currently trying to expand this to ensure that we have a detailed record of his Collection's contents. That both Collections are now here with me focuses my mind on the importance of establishing a proper home for this material, material which, quite simply, is irreplaceable.

At this stage it is not possible to offer more than just a brief appraisal of David's collections' contents. The larger part of the contents are negatives of various formats, largely either 120 or 35 mm. The 'film' collection also includes many slides, again both 120 (70mm square frames) and 35 mm (50mm square frames).

However the collection also includes prints, mostly colour, of 6 x 4 and larger format. A quick tally currently tells me there are over 1,000 of these - a detailed account will take a little longer!

Whilst full cataloguing of the collection will take some time, its acquisition has already proved useful. Since I acquired David's electronic archive, the source of our current Archive's numbering system, I was aware of a few anomalies therein, ranging from missing images to duplicated images supposedly from one film or duplicated use of particular negative numbers. However, once the actual negative strips were available, correcting these was a relatively straight forward matter.

As this occasionally required scans of particular negatives, the slow process of scanning all of the collection has started. A full negative count is still someway off, but, as I write these notes, my provisional count has already passed 3,730. These are only the negatives from Series F, G, H, J, K, L, and N, from which the bulk of the current Archive is drawn. Other niches within the collection await a full exploration.

These notes need illustrations, but which? My first choice is the first of David's negatives that was scanned into my system.



I carry out two runs of each slide strip, the first a modest resolution JPEG and the second a hi-res TIF. This image is an Allan original, negative F59-02, and is the first image on that 10-shot film. It is a 120 format image showing what later will become the level crossing at Hendy, looking south towards Dinas. The date, according to David's notation, was

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