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The Spooners and Beddgelert

In the article about the restoration of the Spooner Graves in *WHH* 88, Nick Booker noted that the graves of Charles Easton Spooner and many of his family lie in the churchyard of St Mary's Beddgelert. This may seem surprising given that he lived in Porthmadog for many years. However, Charles and family had a long association with the parish of Beddgelert.

"Hafod Tan-y-Graig" (sic) as seen in an A.W. Hutton post card - from the Vawdrey Family Collection, with thanks to Margaret Dunn.

Charles married Mary Barker, who was born in Birmingham, at St Marylebone Church near to Regent's Park in London on 14th Sept 1848. The census of 1851 gives his occupation as an engineer and the family were living at Hafod-tan-y-graig, in the valley of the Afon Llyn Edno on the south side of Nantgwynant. He had leased it from the Vawdrey family and the Spooners lived there until 1856. The house and the estate date back to at least the 16th century and was acquired by Daniel Vawdrey very early in the 19th century and his descendents still have a house on the estate.

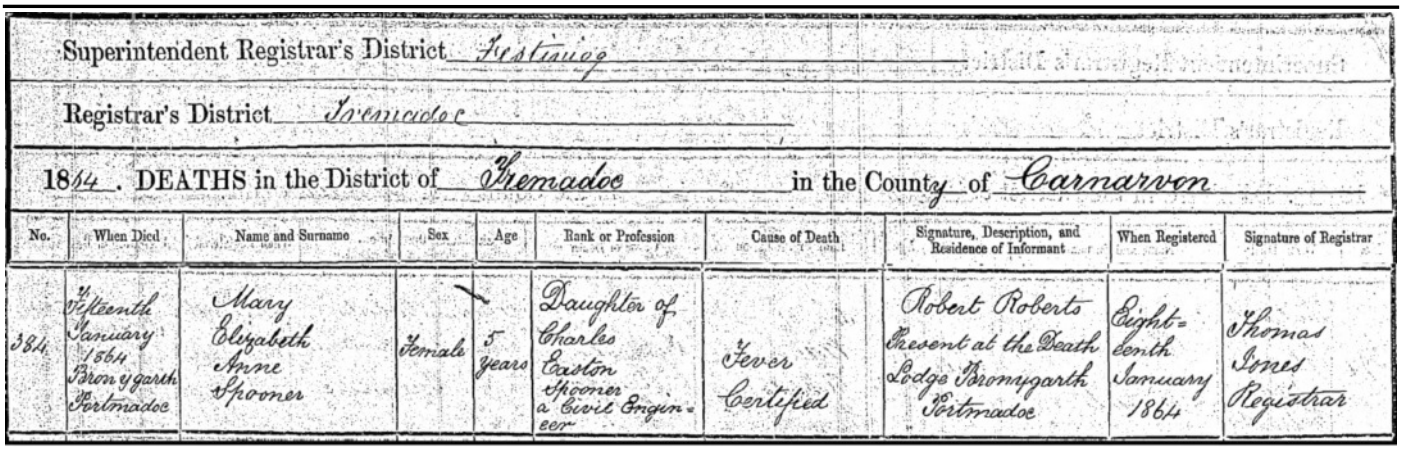
A water-colour rendition of Hafod-tan-y-graig from the Vawdrey Family Collection. The view is down the Afon Llyn Edno, across the Gwynant and up the valley opposite, past the South Snowdon Quarry towards the summit of Snowdon.

In 1850, the Spooners' first son George Percival was born at the house followed by the next three children, John Eyrie, Charles Edwin and James Alfred. James was only six weeks old when he died in 1855 and it's conceivable that it was then that Charles purchased the family plot in the graveyard at St Mary's, Beddgelert. Purchase of a family plot was common amongst the wealthy in Victorian times when, for many, the only alternative was a pauper's grave. The wealthier you were the bigger the plot purchased; Charles bought a double plot indicating a person of some importance.

Tuhwnt-i'r-bwlch, Porthmadog.

When James Spooner, his father, became ill Charles Easton Spooner returned to the Festiniog Railway to pick up the reins, his father dying in August 1856 aged 67 years. James Spooner was buried in a family grave at Ynyscynhaiarn churchyard near Pentrefelin with his first wife and several of his children.

Charles's appointment as engineer with the Festiniog probably prompted him to move from Beddgelert parish and Mary Elizabeth, his youngest, was born in 1858 in Portmadoc. This was presumably at Tuhwnt-i'r-bwlch, just off the Penamser Road leading out of Porthmadog towards Criccieth, which he occupied in 1861 (next door



Superintendent Registrar's District Festiniog

Registrar's District Tremadoc

1864. DEATHS in the District of Tremadoc in the County of Carnarvon

No.	When Died	Name and Surname	Sex	Age	Rank or Profession	Cause of Death	Signature, Description, and Residence of Informant	When Registered	Signature of Registrar
384	Fifteenth January 1864 Bron y garth Portmadoc	Mary Elizabeth Anne Spooner	Female	5 years	Daughter of Charles Easton Spooner a Civil Engineer	Fever Certified	Robert Roberts Present at the Death Lodge Bromgarth Portmadoc	Eighteenth January 1864	Thomas Jones Registrar

Mary Spooner's Death Certificate, registered on the 18th January, 1864.

to Edward Breese, Solicitor). By that time he was a widower as Mary, his wife, had died in 1860. Four years later, Mary Elizabeth died at the age of five in January, 1864 and she was buried in the family plot in Beddgelert.

With *WHH* being a Journal of record, Nick Booker was concerned that in writing the original article, he had simply accepted that Mary Elizabeth died of typhoid, so he obtained her death certificate. This states the cause of death was 'Fever Certified'. Her nursemaid, Elizabeth Price died, presumably of the same condition, two days later. Childhood diseases such as Diphtheria and Scarlet Fever can probably be ruled out. Typhus and typhoid claimed many lives across Wales in the nineteenth century and frequently hit the poor hardest, not least as they often swept through institutions such as workhouses with alarming speed and ferocity.

Typhus was one of the major killing diseases of the nineteenth century although it was not clearly distinguishable from typhoid fever until about 1866. 'Fever' was used, at that time, as a generic term for a number of pyrexial (fever) diseases, as early symptoms were similar. The disease is caused by a bacterium that lives in infected humans and is transmitted from person to person by the human body louse. Poor nutrition, close confinement and unsanitary conditions are predisposing causes. These are thought to be the reasons the disease rarely affected the upper classes eg the Spooners.

Typhoid, also known as enteric fever, is an infection of the intestinal system caused by bacteria of the Salmonella genus and is a condition that does not respect status. It is transmitted by food or drinking water contaminated by the faeces of infected people or carriers. Sporadic infections of typhoid fever continued into the twentieth century and these can be seen as a sensitive indicator of sanitary conditions. In Swansea a hundred people died of typhoid fever in 1879 and in Bangor in 1882, about 690 people contracted the disease, resulting in 89 deaths from Typhoid.

Perhaps the local doctor, good though he undoubtedly was, had not yet got the distinction clear and played safe in his diagnosis. Only three years earlier, Edward Jenner had stated the cause of Prince Albert's death as typhoid and this was not universally accepted. On balance typhoid was most likely the cause of the two linked deaths of Mary and her nurse.

An additional piece of information from Mary Elizabeth's death certificate reveals that by 1864 the family had moved to Bron-y-garth, above the Borth Road overlooking Portmadoc harbour. Interestingly, and according to Spooner's draft of his CV, he was responsible for constructing the Borth Road.

A final and, to me, interesting piece of evidence from the death certificate is that it was reported to the registrar by Robert Roberts of Bron-y-garth Lodge. Robert Roberts was born in Beddgelert in 1826 and in 1861 was living next door to Charles Easton Spooner on Tuhwnt-i'r-bwlch and is described as an agricultural worker. The truth I am sure was that he had accompanied the family from Beddgelert, lived in a cottage provided for him in the grounds of Spooner's residence and would continue to do so at Bron y Garth for at least the next thirty years, during which the census reports he was their gardener. His daughter, Catherine, was in 1871 the 15 year old housemaid in the service of the family of Hugh Unsworth McKie in Tremadoc.

Elizabeth Price, Mary's nursemaid, was born in Condover, just south of Shrewsbury, in about 1833. She hadn't moved far by 1851, being employed by a 37 year old retired farmer and his wife at Ryton a couple of miles away from Condover. How and why she came to be employed by the Spooners we may never know, but the 1861 Census says she was their housemaid and she is listed at the end of the staff below the then nursery maid.

At about this same period, Charles Spooner was involved in surveying first the route of the Croesor Tramway, opened in 1864, and then in 1865 was named as engineer in the Act of Parliament which created the Croesor and Portmadoc Railway. It was possibly around this time that Hugh Beaver Roberts, Hugh Unsworth McKie and Spooner conceived the idea of a network of inter-connected narrow-gauge railways across North Wales. Only the first two of these lines, known as the "Moel Tryfan Undertaking", authorised by Act of Parliament in 1872 were built and of course not until the 21st century was the spirit of their dream realized with the opening of the Welsh Highland Railway from Caernarfon to Porthmadog. .

Dave Rogerson - 13/09/2020

Acknowledgments & Sources:

Thanks to:

Nick Booker for obtaining Mary Spooner's death certificate, commenting on my original draft and identifying some additional material..

Margaret Dunn for her notes on the Spooner family and her research on the history of Hafod-tan-y-graig published as part of the Snowdonia Dendrochronology Project / Dating Old Welsh Houses

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1841 to 1891 Census Returns

James I. C. Boyd *Narrow Gauge railways in South Caernarvonshire Vol 1* - Croesor Railway Section

A Brief History and a Remembrance.

Nick Booker

Dave Rogerson's article on the impact of typhoid on the Spooner family and their staff, mentions that the family's final move was to Bron-y-Garth, a house above the Borth Road and overlooking Porthmadog harbour. It was here that in 1869 Charles Spooner laid a 3⅛" gauge track garden railway for *Topsy* which, technically, was the first steam locomotive to be built at Boston Lodge.

Following Spooner's death in 1889, the house passed to his sons Percy and Charles Edwin. They lived in it for a brief period, until selling it in 1891 to Randal Casson, a solicitor with the partnership Breese, Jones & Casson. 'Situated on the opposite side of the harbour to the FR station and high above the slate wharves on Y Garth it was, and still is, just about the most imposing house in Porthmadog…'

Edward Breese, the senior partner in the firm was a friend of William Madocks and Breese, Jones & Casson had the duty of collecting the rents and insurance premiums for the houses that formed part of the Tremadoc Estate built on the land reclaimed from the estuary.

Following Randal Casson's death in 1914, his widow Lucy remained in the house, and continued with her life of public activity and involvement in local affairs. She was a guardian of Festiniog Union, the Work House and public assistance union that later became Bron-y-Garth Hospital, she was strongly interested in politics and travelled very extensively each year. Sadly, Randal and Lucy's only son Randal Alexander had been killed in action at Ypres in 1917 so that after Lucy's death in 1933, Bron-y-Garth passed to Randal's nephew, Lewis Casson, the actor and theatrical producer husband of Dame Sybil Thorndike, the celebrated actress.

The saga of the Casson family in North Wales commenced in 1800 when two brothers, William and Thomas Casson, arrived in Ffestiniog from the Lake District, with their friend William Turner. They bought their first slate quarry there and following early struggles turned Diphwys Casson Quarry into a thriving business. For over four generations and 150 years, the Casson family lived in North Wales, spreading from Ffestiniog to Porthmadog, Pwllheli and Denbigh.

The whole story is told in the book '*The Casson Family in North Wales, A Story of Slate and More...*', written by the granddaughter of Sybil Thorndike and Lewis Casson, Diana Mary Devlin, who died in September. Tracing the family's history, Devlin describes how the Cassons affected, and were affected by, their adopted country, moving from slate to banking, the law, music, soldiering and finally, to the theatre.

Diana was born at Bron-y-Garth in 1941. Her father was William Devlin, whom she first met at the age of four when he returned from war service. He was a leading Shakespearean actor and her mother, Mary, was an actor and musician and a daughter of Lewis and Sybil. Diana studied English at Girton College, Cambridge, and was later a Fulbright scholar at the University of Minnesota, from where she gained a doctorate in theatre arts. For most of her career, she lectured and wrote on theatre and drama and was a key figure in the development of Shakespeare's Globe in London. She wrote a biography of her grandfather, '*A Speaking Part: Lewis Casson and the Theatre of His Time*', which inspired her to explore the family's Welsh roots.

With the family using the house less frequently, the Cassons sold Bron-y-Garth in 1949. Sybil loved the house, but Lewis had found it increasingly depressing to be there. At one point, he considered having the house exorcised. Diana Devlin described it has having '…a powerful and brooding atmosphere, which either enveloped you in a romantic attachment to the place, or drove you to black, despairing moods and melancholy'. However, it cannot all have been gloom as among visitors to Bron-y-Garth were the Hollywood actor Douglas Fairbanks Jr. and the singer Paul Robeson.

Diana Devlin continued to visit North Wales regularly after the sale of the house and as recently as 2019 had travelled to Beddgelert to give a talk to the local History Society about her research and her book.

It was a Facebook post by Clive Briscoe, a WHR and FR volunteer that first drew my attention to Diana Devlin's obituary in *The Guardian*. In the post, he recalled that his grandmother worked at Bron-y-Garth until 1907 and that Randal Casson's articled clerk was David Lloyd George,

Above - Sir Lewis Casson and Dame Sybil Thorndike (The John Oxley Library - State Library of Queensland) with a view of Bron-y-garth from the garden (post card courtesy of Martin Pritchard). Below - Diana Devlin (courtesy of *The Guardian*).

the future Prime Minister. Both Randal and DLG used the FR regularly to go up to Blaenau Ffestiniog to do business and to visit Diphwys Casson quarry. Clive's grandmother told him tales of being whisked up the inclines from Duffws in a man rider when she accompanied Randal and his wife Lucy on their visits. Around 1890, the Diphwys Casson Slate Quarry company went into liquidation although working continued intermittently until the whole site closed in 1955 after almost two centuries of operation. As for Bron-y-Garth, it was sold to Alderman Samuel Victor Beer, a local businessman and Sheriff of Caernarvonshire. He died in 1981 and the house remains privately owned.

This brief history of Bron-y-Garth, and remembrance of Diana Devlin and the Cassons, may on the face of it have little to do with either WHR or FR heritage, however it nevertheless illustrates how both railways were, and continue to be, intimately connected with many aspects of both local and national life.

Diana Devlin's book '*The Casson Family in North Wales - A Story of Slate and More...*' is published by Gwasg Carreg Gwalch, Llanrwst

Thanks and Sources

My thanks to Clive Briscoe for prompting me to look further at Bron-y-Garth, to Margaret Dunn for her reminiscence of Diana Devlin and to Martin Pritchard for providing the scan of the post card of the house.

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Liverpool Echo 28 July 1939 - Dame Sybil Thorndike

Simplexes (and others) on the Welsh Highland

Andrew Neale

All of today's heritage narrow gauge railways rely on internal combustion engine locomotives to provide at least some of their motive power. However, the old Welsh Highland Railway was unique amongst Britain's former common carrier narrow gauge lines in using internal combustion locomotives in all phases of its life, i.e. during its construction, operation and demolition after closure. Most of these originated (a careful choice of phrase, as this article will show) from Motor Rail at Bedford although for the sake of completeness those of other makes will be described as well in this article.

The first such use occurred towards the end of 1916 when the semi moribund North Wales Narrow Gauge Railways was seen as an ideal location to test out the new petrol electric locomotives that had just been built for the infant War Department Light Railways in France. Most published accounts of this suggest that "several" such petrol electric locomotives were sent to the NWNGR, presumably at least one each of Dick Kerr and Westinghouse makes. That may be so but the only firm evidence is three photographs of a single Dick Kerr locomotive on trial at Dinas Junction in February 1917. It is rumoured a Westinghouse petrol electric was also sent here but no evidence exists to confirm that. These petrol electric locomotives did not carry manufacturer's works numbers and the painted WDLR running number was not applied, so we have no idea which particular Dick Kerr went to Dinas. However if by chance it was the first of the hundred built, delivered as WDLR 1901, it must have deteriorated sharply when it saw active service. In his classic first hand account, *The Light Track from Arras* (Plateway Press, 1999) the author, T. R. Heritage, recalls his experiences of using both of the first two Dick Kerr locomotives built and recalls 1901 as a horror to drive, in sharp contrast to the first Westinghouse PE 2001, which was a delight.

In Spring 1922, the work of building the new Welsh Highland Railway began, involving the reconstruction of both the North Wales Narrow Gauge Railways and part of the horse-worked Croesor Tramway, as well as building the link between them. This work was undertaken by Sir Robert McAlpine & Sons Ltd who began with the rehabilitation of the NWNGR main line south from Dinas.

The first McAlpine locomotive used on the contract was a standard Bagnall 6" by 9" cylinder 0-4-0 ST, maker's number 2080 of 1918. This had been previously used by the contractor for the construction of the Cowlyd Reservoir serving Dolgarrog Aluminium Works in the Conway Valley. The job had been completed at the end of 1921 so the saddle tank was immediately available for use at Dinas when work started. However, one locomotive was clearly inadequate for such a large contract so other than briefly hiring *Palmerston* from the Festiniog Railway in the last month of the contract, McAlpine's other locomotives all came from Motor Rail.

McAlpine had been one of the first major civil engineering contractors to recognise the value of both lightweight two foot gauge railways and the Motor Rail petrol locomotive after their extensive use by the British Army in World War 1. By 1922, they already possessed a large fleet of ex-WDLR 20 HP Motor Rail petrol locomotives and we cannot be certain that none of these were transferred to the Welsh Highland contract. However, what is clear is that a total of five more were supplied by Motor Rail specifically for this job. All were second hand machines bought back by Motor Rail for rebuilding and resale as "reconstructed locomotives". First to arrive was Motor Rail 2179 which left Motor Rail's works at Bedford on 31st May, 1922 for delivery to Dinas Junction a day or two later. The makers did not record whence it had originated, WDLR or otherwise, or what its original works number was, but clearly its rebuilding was extensive as a new Dorman 2JO engine, number 8423, had to be fitted, rather than reconditioning the original one.

The other four Motor Rails definitely used on the Welsh Highland were taken from a large batch of machines jointly purchased from the French Disposal Board on April 1st, 1922 by Motor Rail and the Greenwich based light railway engineers William Jones Ltd. McAlpine ultimately purchased no less than fourteen of these between June 1922 and March 1923 for various contracts, the four coming to North Wales being allocated new Motor Rail works numbers 2192, 2193, 2197 and 2199. All four were sequentially delivered to the Cambrian Railways station at Portmadoc for use on the southern end of the new railway, thus lending strength to the idea that McAlpine could have also used other unidentified Motor Rails already in their fleet alongside the Bagnall and Motor Rail 2179 at the Northern end.

Of these four new arrivals, three were rebuilt from identifiable WDLR locomotives and in two cases, they retained the same Dorman 2JO engine with which they were originally built. Details are:

MR 2192 ex-works 2nd September 1922. Fitted with Dorman 2JO engine 6829, originally Motor Rail 1739, WDLR 2460.

MR 2193 ex-works 2nd October 1922. Fitted with Dorman 2JO engine 6583, originally Motor Rail 1684, WDLR 2405.

MR 2197 ex-works 10th January 1923. Rebuilt from unknown ex-WDLR locomotive, Dorman engine number unknown.

MR 2199 ex-works 28th February 1923. This locomotive was now fitted with a Dorman 2JO engine 6802, which may have been a spare engine from WDLR stock. This

was rebuilt from Motor Rail 992, WDLR 6580, which was originally fitted with Dorman 2J0 engine 6580.

On completion of the Welsh Highland contract, all five Motor Rails were presumably sent to McAlpine's plant depot at Great Stanney (Ellesmere Port) in Cheshire for further use. Their known subsequent history is as follows:-

MR 2179:- Possibly used on another McAlpine contract; recorded by McAlpine as sold to "Hall, Middlesboro" in 1927. However, my suggestion is that this entry is possibly a mistake for "Hall & Co., Middlesex". Hall & Co. were major sand and gravel pit owners in the South East and owned a large fleet of similar Motor Rail locomotives. If MR 2179 did go to them in Middlesex in 1927 it was probably to their East Bedfont Gravel Pits which opened in that year when three new Motor Rail petrol locomotives were delivered there to work what ultimately became a very large rail system.

MR 2192 – Remained in McAlpine ownership until at least 1942 but its only known use was at New Southgate, London in 1931. This was presumably McAlpine's contract for the London Electric Railway's extension to Cockfosters on which various steam and petrol locomotives were used; but it might have been the construction of the LNER bridge over the North Circular Road at New Southgate, also undertaken at this time.

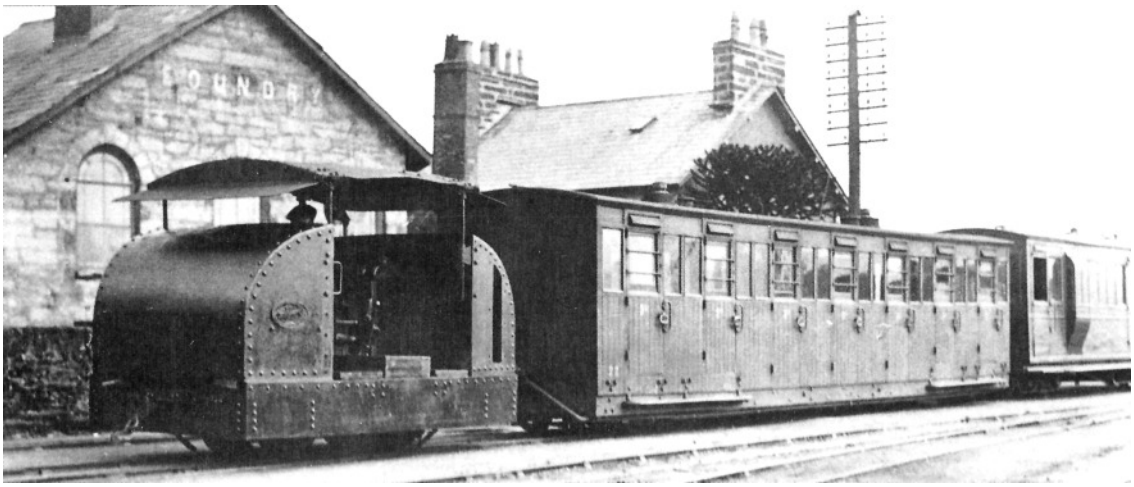
MR 2193 – Remained in McAlpine ownership for many years but its only known use was on the construction of the ICI explosives factory at Dalbeattie in 1941.

MR 2197 – Remarkably, this survives today. Although possibly used elsewhere earlier it was ultimately employed with similar locomotives and a fleet of standard and 3 foot 6 inch gauge Hudswell Clarke steam locomotives on the building of the new Wimbledon-Sutton Railway for the Southern Railway. At a sale of plant at Sutton on completion of the job in September 1930, it was one of four such machines bought back by Motor Rail's subsidiary company Petrol Locomotive Hirers Ltd. and then transferred to the parent company. Given a new engine (2JO or 2JOR, number 10589) and a total rebuild it was renumbered 3874 and dispatched to the Cleveland Bridge & Engineering Co. Ltd where it was one of a fleet employed on quadrupling the GWR main line between Olton and Lapworth in Warwickshire. That job done, it was sold on to the nearby Minworth Sewage Works of Birmingham Corporation. Later rebuilt with a Dorman diesel engine it was eventually sold into preservation at Rev. Teddy Boston's railway at Cadeby Rectory. Now fully restored by its owner Simon Lomax, it is part of the Moseley Railway Trust collection at Apedale near Stoke.

MR 2199 – Later used by McAlpine on contracts at Tilbury Docks in 1927, Appleby Frodingham steelworks, Scunthorpe in 1938 and also helped in the building of Burghfield Ordnance Factory near Reading in 1941. Final disposal unknown.

Once the Welsh Highland opened throughout in June 1923, it soon became apparent that it would struggle even to cover operating costs, let alone even to contribute to capital costs, so more economical working methods were soon sought. By now, the redoubtable Colonel H. F. Stephens had been appointed Civil Engineer and Locomotive Superintendent of both the Festiniog and Welsh Highland railways. Fresh from his military experiences in World War 1, he was an enthusiastic advocate of the petrol engine as a cheaper alternative to steam.

In July 1923, he purchased a reconditioned 40 HP ex-WDLR "Open" Motor Rail petrol locomotive, Motor Rail 507 of 1917, from the Kent Construction & Engineering Co. Ltd for use on the Festiniog Railway. He was soon considering whether another similar one could be used with two coaches either to work the Bryngwyn branch or a winter service on the WHR main line. The full story is told in the excellent book, the *Bryngwyn Branch* by Dave Southern and published by the WHR Heritage Group (see Group Website or Sales Flyer herein). However, in essence the lack of a suitable braking system meant that the Ministry of Transport vetoed the idea. However, the Festiniog Simplex (today always known as *Mary Ann*) was given a series of trials on the WHR before the MoT was approached.



F.R. Simplex with a trial train heading onto the Cross-Town Link from Portmadoc Harbour
***Railway Gazette*, November 9th 1923, page 585 - Arch 3456.**

Despite this refusal, the Festiniog's Simplex was frequently used to haul whatever traffic there was from the Croesor tramway until regular use of that line ceased in 1930. For a few months in the winter of 1927 a passenger coach was attached to the Friday only Portmadoc - Croesor slate working. Nominally this was supposed to drop any passengers off at Croesor Junction but as this remote spot had no proper public access, it has been suggested that anyone using this facility was possibly taken on to Llanfrothen Road Crossing. However, the track from Croesor Junction to this point was not re-laid as part of the 1923 reconstruction and such suggestions are almost certainly apocryphal.

For the sake of completeness, it is necessary to mention two more petrol locomotives that had a turn on the Welsh Highland. Colonel Stephens had been the driving force behind the standard gauge North Devon & Cornwall Junction Light Railway. Following its opening on July 27th, 1925, there was a three day auction of the contractor's plant, from September 9th to 11th, 1925, and on its last day Stephens purchased a two foot gauge Austro-Daimler four wheel petrol locomotive. For a time from early 1926 this undertook the Croesor Tramway trip but was withdrawn and stored at Boston Lodge in 1929 and cut up for scrap in 1934.

In February 1925 Colonel Stephens bought another locomotive from Kent Construction, this time a former French Government Artillery Railways Baldwin 0-4-0 petrol locomotive, Baldwin 49604 of 1918, FGAR 1491. Despite its weight, in its early days it did the odd turn on the Croesor run. As part of its duties as Festiniog Railway "Bottom Shunter" it later took in the working of traffic from Portmadoc flour mill and Richard Williams & Co. slate works, a duty that involved using the first short stretch of the Welsh Highland from Harbour Station. This traffic officially ceased in August 1943 although in reality no train had run for some years.

The events of February 1917 were repeated in 1928 when another pioneer internal combustion locomotive was loaned to the Welsh Highland Railway for a period of trial working. This was Kerr Stuart's first diesel locomotive and only the second such built in the UK. Kerr Stuart 4415 was a 6 wheeled diesel mechanical locomotive fitted with a 6 cylinder McLaren Benz engine developing 60 horse power. Following its completion, it was sent by the builder to Dinas Junction arriving in July 1928. It was accompanied by Tom Rolt, then a premium apprentice at Kerr Stuart but later to rescue the Talyllyn Railway. Here it was used for both shunting at Dinas and for working the by now freight only Bryngwyn branch. Following a press day on 15th November 1928, where it performed faultlessly, the locomotive received enthusiastic reviews in both specialist magazines and the national press. However, its slow speed made it unpopular and eventually in March 1929 it was sent on to the Festiniog Railway for further trials and then returned to the builder in July 1929. After re-gauging to 3 foot, it spent more time on trials in Northern Ireland on the Castlederg & Victoria Bridge Tramway, eventually returning to Hunslet (Kerr Stuart's successors) for reconditioning and ultimate sale to Mauritius. As is well known it was eventually repatriated to the UK a few years ago and is now undergoing a very comprehensive restoration.

4415 with a goods train about to depart Dinas in 1928 - Arch 3625.

Following the Welsh Highland's final closure in June 1937 the line lay derelict for several years until 13th March, 1941 when it was requisitioned by the Ministry of Supply for scrap or further use elsewhere and then, in July, sold to George Cohen, Sons & Co. Ltd. for demolition and disposal. The Ministry requisition did not cover the line from Portmadoc Harbour to Croesor Junction as both this and the Croesor tramway were to be left intact in case any of the Croesor valley slate quarries reopened after the war. A further short section southwards from Pitt's Head was also retained as it was in use by the War Department. Ex-Festiniog slate wagons were run down the line by gravity as targets for anti tank gun practice.

Cohen's depot at Stanningley, near Leeds was responsible for the Welsh Highland job and they decided to use their own petrol locomotives. Two former WDLR 40 HP Motor Rails, subsequently rebuilt by F. C. Hibberd or their predecessors Kent Construction, were sent to Dinas Junction. Such 40 HP "Planet-Simplex" rebuilds are easily distinguished from original Motor Rail examples by their unusual curved cabs, fitted following the removal of the original armour plate. Hibberd undertook a number of such rebuilds. No clear record of Kent Construction's output is known to survive, making identification of the Cohen pair very difficult. They were certainly at Stanningley and up for sale in May 1941. Present opinion is that the Welsh Highland ones were two of Hibberd works numbers 1677, 1678 and 1779. The first two had been built in May and June 1930 to the order of the Leeds based light railway and plant dealer J. C. Oliver & Co. as part of a contract Oliver had to supply £4,000 worth of new plant to Colchester Council for building the Colchester Bypass. Hibberd 1779 was also supplied to there by Oliver in February 1931. On completion of the road in 1933 Colchester Council sold the surplus plant back to Oliver. Assuming this included at least two of the Planet-Simplexes they would have been

available for purchase by Cohen's nearby and advertised for sale as mentioned.

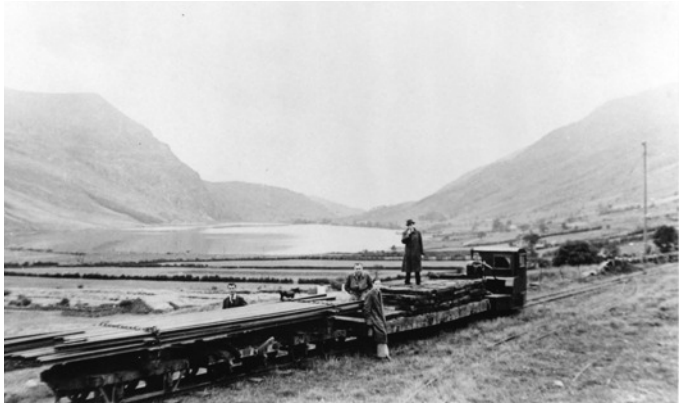
The complex history of Hibberd and its predecessors deserves a book of its own but it is worth mentioning that, as with all locomotives supplied to Oliver, Hibberd 1779 was fitted with Oliver's own works plates, not those of the actual builder. The same probably applies to the first pair but this is not recorded. These two were in fact erected on Hibberd's behalf by George W. Bungey, a former foreman at Kent Construction and later well known as a dealer in narrow gauge locomotives in Middlesex for many years.

One of Cohen's tractors in process of removing Ashbury 'Corridor' No. 24 (the ex-Buffet Car) from the Dinas carriage shed, completing the outdoors line-up of surviving carriages seen in other photos.
J. F. Bolton - 1941 -WHR 78

Cohen's began their demolition contract in August 1941. On the morning of the 13th one of the Simplexes took a first train consisting of a slate wagon and a WDLR bogie wagon chassis down the line, managing to reach as far as the Aberglaslyn Tunnel having had to clear undergrowth and obstructions en route before returning to Dinas. The following day they went right through to Portmadoc (New) station. After that the demolition was done by two separate groups each with a Planet-Simplex. One started at South Snowdon working back to Dinas as well as removing the Bryngwyn branch, the other worked south from South Snowdon to Croesor Junction, leaving intact the track from Pitt's Head to a point south of Hafod Ruffydd. Ultimately the useable recovered rail and the two locomotives were taken back to Stanningley. Having no more immediate use for them, Cohen's again advertised the two Simplexes for sale in July 1942. Their subsequent history is unknown. Cohen's were obviously very pleased with their purchase, mentioning in a letter to one prospective customer just how good much of the recovered 40lb rail was.

After the war it soon became apparent that slate quarrying would never be revived in the Croesor valley, hence the remaining part of the Welsh Highland from Croesor Junction to Portmadoc Harbour was lifted by W. O. Williams Ltd. of Harlech between August 1948 and August 1949. His contract may well have included the allegedly relaid section of the Croesor tramway from Croesor Junction to Llanfrothen level crossing but this is unclear, but he did remove most of the stretch left at Pitt's Head. The last eight lengths here were recovered by a Festiniog Railway working party in November 1958 whilst almost all of the light bridge rail on the Croesor Tramway from Llanfrothen road to the foot of Croesor village incline was illegally removed by locals after Williams had finished work.

Cohen's Demolition Train to the south of Glanrafon Sidings. J. F. Bolton - 1941 - WHR 83



The Demolition Train at Glanrafon.
J. F. Bolton - 1941 - WHR 80

W. O. Williams also used a Simplex petrol locomotive on his main lifting contract. This was a standard bow frame 20 HP locomotive, carrying the lettering "Shanks & McEwan No. 14" but no other identity. Shanks & McEwan Ltd. were contractors specialising in the crushing and resale of steelworks slag but also undertook some significant civil engineering work, such as the construction of the Nottinghamshire Joint Railways (an LMS and LNE joint venture) Farnsfield to Ollerton line in 1929-1931. The Simplex petrol loco used at Portmadoc was last noted at the Shanks depot at Carnbroe in Lanarkshire on July 8th, 1943. It seems unlikely that Williams would have gone to Scotland to buy it and thus presumably acquired it from a war time job in North Wales. Although its definite identity remains unknown there is an entry in Motor Rail records that they supplied spares to Shanks & McEwan Ltd for Motor Rail 4165 of 1927, a 20 horse power petrol locomotive of this type, on 24th May 1938 at an unknown location. In the absence of any other candidate, it seems likely this was the Portmadoc locomotive. Some mystery attaches to 4165. Motor Rail record it as being renumbered from their 3836, an otherwise a blank in their list, but this would normally have been one rebuilt from an older second

hand Motor Rail. However, Motor Rail make no mention of 4165 being reconditioned rather than new, but do record that its Dorman 2JO engine was number 10363, so that this at least was brand new in 1927.

W. O. Williams' abandoned Motor Rail near Portmadoc New. D. Rendell - 1952 - Arch 4025

On conclusion of the lifting contract in August 1949, for whatever reason Williams abandoned the Motor Rail by the site of Portmadoc New Station alongside the GWR crossing. This turned out to be highly fortunate when five years later work began on reopening the Festiniog Railway. Until August 1955 the only operable FR locomotive was the 40 H.P. Simplex, which was intensively, used on track clearance duties. Such continuous hard work ultimately took its toll and one day it ran a white metal connecting rod big end bearing hot. The FR General Manager, Alan Garraway, needed his faithful Simplex back at work as soon as possible and remembered the dumped one. As its 2JO engine was simply a two cylinder version of the four cylinder Dorman 4JO in *Mary Ann* it was comparatively simple to dismantle the engine and remove one connecting rod for use in its bigger sister. Exact details of what arrangements were made to allow this are unknown. However W. O. Williams (always known as "Will Scraps") was a good friend to both the Talyllyn and Festiniog Railways in their early days, buying their unwanted scrap and selling them reusable railway material at advantageous prices, so undoubtedly the cannibalising of his dumped locomotive was done with his blessing. It was cut up on site soon after.

As reopened heritage railways, both the Festiniog and Welsh Highland railways continue to use Motor Rail locomotives but these are well recorded and outside the scope of this article. My hope is that at least some of the details will be entirely fresh to readers but as research is never complete any constructive comments would be warmly welcomed by both myself and the Editor. I have consulted many published sources in writing this article but in particular I would like to thank Vic Bradley with whom I have corresponded on North Wales' matters for very many years. His 1968 and 1992 Industrial Railway Society Handbooks on North Wales are essential reference works for anyone interested in the subject. Grateful thanks are due also to Adrian Gray for checking over my text and providing the photograph of the dumped Simplex from the Festiniog Railway archives.

Replica Pickering Brake Composite

Bob Menzies has supplied these notes and photographs as a Pickering Replica progress update.

The brake composite coaches built for the NWNGR in 1907 by R. Y. Pickering are a feature of almost every photograph of an original Welsh Highland train. It has long been an ambition of the Welsh Highland Heritage Railway to build a 'Pickering Brake', so we were delighted when a sponsor offered to fund the construction of a replica.

One of the sponsors few stipulations was that the replica should be dual-braked (air and vacuum) so that it will be able to operate with locomotives from both the WHHR and FR. It was also decided after some discussion to build the coach in its original form, i.e. before it was cut down. I expect this won't please everybody, but even in its original form the internal height was only 5'11".

For the purists, one of the two NWNGR Pickerings, No. 4, was, for a short time, fitted with dual brakes and operated in this form before its roof was lowered in March 1924. Its livery was enhanced and it was given its FR/WHR number (8) about three months later, at the beginning of July.

The first-class compartment has been converted for wheelchair users by installing bi-fold doors from the guard's compartment allowing wheelchair users to board through the double doors in the Guard's compartment.

The coach is being built under contract at Boston Lodge. Work started in late 2019 and as the pictures, show it is now well advanced, and should be completed early in 2021.

I am grateful for the assistance of members of the Welsh Highland Heritage Group for assistance in researching the details of the original coaches.

These three photographs give a clear indication of progress with building the WHHR Replica Pickering Brake Composite at Boston Lodge.

Top left - the new bogie sets awaiting assembly with the carriage body.

Top right - a view looking forward from the Guard's compartment showing the viewing ducket, the brake control gear and the revised access to the first class compartment mentioned in Bob's notes.

Lower - a general view of the essentially complete carriage body awaiting final decoration and assembly.

More Archive Additions

Dick Lystor has provided an update on recent acquisitions for our Archive.

Once again, our Chairman has successfully acquired further items to add to our archive, following a tip off from another member.

The illustrated tickets were amongst a Lot in the latest Paddington ticket auction, along with a clipped WHR single, Dinas to Portmadoc, issued on 20th August 1930, since sold to another member, and a Talyllyn Railway single from Dolgoch to Towyn, issued on 11th August 1922, which will be sold on eBay at a later date. However if any member is interested in acquiring this ticket please contact Nick Booker.

The NWNGR ticket, a Parliamentary Single from Waenfawr to Dinas, was issued on 15th May 1907. Parliamentary rates were introduced by the Railway Regulation Act 1844 and came into force on November 1st that year. It compelled all railway companies to provide at least one train a day, with covered accommodation and seating, at a speed of no less than 12 miles per hour, stopping at all stations and at a rate of no more than 1d per mile. According to information that we have at present, it seems likely that this ticket would have been issued by the Waenfawr Station-Master, James E. Hughes, who began his career there in 1877. The 1911 census shows him occupying the same post, and it is highly likely he remained there until the end of passenger services in 1916. He had certainly left the NWNGR by the spring of 1922.

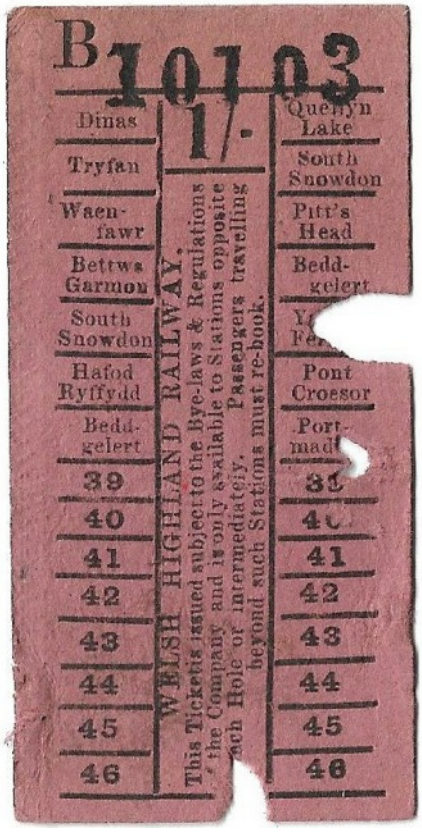
On completion of the WHR through route to Portmadoc, a range of singles-only geographical punch tickets covering all stations and halts (with the exception of Croesor Junction) were brought into use alongside the normal card Edmondsons, and were issued by the guard on-board train. The original series were printed by Colley's Ltd of Bermondsey, London, but the ticket acquired was a reprint, and was supplied by the firm of John B. Edmondson of Cheetham, Manchester. It was for a journey from Portmadoc to Beddgelert as indicated by the small v shaped clip. It is assumed that the larger cut out meant that it had been issued to an adult member of the general public. There is no date on the ticket as it was issued by the guard, but as Portmadoc booking office closed in 1928, and a new set of tickets were introduced when the FR took a lease on the WHR, the time period can be narrowed down to 1929-1933.

The firm synonymous with railway tickets, Edmondson, was set up by Thomas Edmondson who took out his first ticket patent in 1839. He died on the 22nd May 1851, a few weeks before his 59th birthday. For about twelve months, his elder brother Joseph managed the company until succeeded by Thomas's son John, who changed the name of the firm to John B Edmondson. He died in 1887, when two of Thomas's grandsons became joint proprietors, the name remaining unchanged. The firm finally ceased trading in 1960, when the goodwill passed to Alfred Williamson Ltd of Ashton-under-Lyne.

For those who wish to know more about Thomas Edmondson and his tickets, there is an excellent article by Bob Miller on the Manchester Locomotive Club website, at:

https://tinyurl.com/y5h69vv5

Information on tickets of the NWNGR is available in the pamphlet by Trefor David, '*Tickets of the North Wales Narrow Gauge Railways*' published by the Group in 1998, now unfortunately out of print. At the date of writing, September 2020, a copy was available for sale at Besley Books in Beccles, Suffolk.



Peter Liddell's Photo Analysis

As we approach what may very well be a most unusual Christmas, I thought I might take a holiday from my analyses and for a second time defer to my 'Random Photograph Selector' in the hope that this might better indicate the range of photos encompassed in our Archive. I will show the next three in my random list, Arch 803, 1458 and 3769. As it turned out not only are these random numbers but the subjects of the selected images are also fairly random. In addition to these three, I will also include a personally selected item, Arch 4991, with a question.

The first of these shows one of the Survey Parties 'hard at work' near Bryn Cloch (Ch. 7530) in this April 1997 photo by David Allan. John Keylock was perched on the stile studying the map - Cedric Lodge and Alan Donaldson were perhaps awaiting his conclusions?

In the second, moving on to January 19th 2000, another David Allan photo, simply captioned 'Lunchtime', shows us a pause in the rebuilding of the accommodation under-bridge at Bod Aden (Ch. 960).

That the 'system' threw up the third number is a pure coincidence - 3769 is a second copy of WHR 158 which recently was a subject of discussion on the Group's Facebook page. It is a Locomotive Publishing Company image taken in 1928 at Beddgelert (their LPC 1659). This copy shows a partly-obliterated, handwritten '77875' towards the bottom left - this was the number allocated to this image by Casserley when he 're-structured' what had been a somewhat random LPC identification system.

The final image, Arch 4991, poses a simple question - where was the photographer standing? I have looked long and hard at this image, which dates from June 1957 and was taken by George Hearse, and have developed theories as to the answer to this question but as yet with no positive conclusion.

I do have one preferred solution, but this only matches most, but not all, of the evidence. So, following the best Zooniverse tradition, may I make this a team effort? Any thoughts or suggestions would be most appreciated - over to you!

Membership renewal time approaches! Reminders will be sent out with *WHH* 90 - however, earlier action, where necessary, would be much appreciated. Thank you!

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