

# WELSH HIGHLAND HERITAGE

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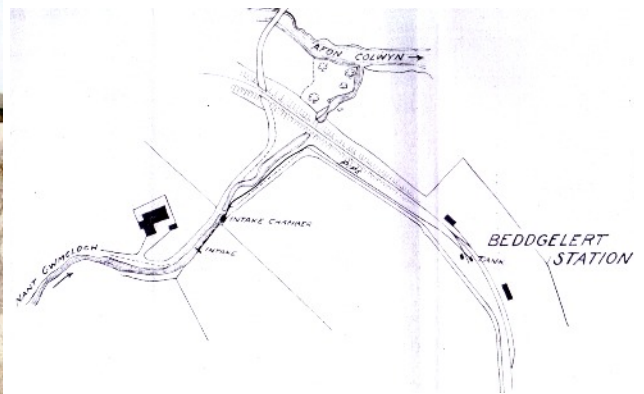
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## The Welsh Highland's Water Supply

Nick Booker



Left: JK 'fettling' the valve assembly from the hydraulic ram pump whose compression chamber is seen in full in the centre image. Right: the original water supply line from Nant Cwmcloch to the Beddgelert water tower.

There is no such thing as a free lunch and the same sentiment just about applies to energy. However, with a hydraulic ram pump one has a piece of kit, of which even Greta Thunberg might approve. I first came across ram pumps, sometimes referred to as hydrams, many years ago, as a child, and I think on a farm where it was used for lifting water up a hill. Many years later and exploring the abandoned garden at Leek Wootton Golf Club, I stumbled across the brick lined pit which still contained the ram which had been used for keeping the ponds full and the fountains squirting in the grounds of the old house, now converted into luxurious apartments. While the investors, builders and managers of the original Welsh Highland Railway may not have been much good at business planning and market research, they nevertheless had a keen eye for saving money and minimising costs and using technology to their advantage. I was reminded of this when reviewing the future of the metal items recovered from Weathervane Cottage where the much-missed John Keylock lived for many years. These are now in the custody of Mike Hadley. The biggest lump of metal is a Green & Carter Hydraulic Ram Pump. John had a dream of recreating the hydraulic ram system for pumping water that used to exist behind the Goat Hotel. Clearly, this will not happen anytime soon but in the present and continuing climate of the need to be environmentally friendly, a pump that requires only gravity to make it work has a significant attraction.

During the reconstruction of the railway, and on the final 180° curve between Cwmcloch farm and its access lane, to the west of Beddgelert, a considerable length of pipe running parallel with the trackbed was unearthed. The pipe represented the second and third alternative supply to the railway's Beddgelert water tank.

The need for an alternative water supply was due to the intransigence of the then owners of the Cwmcloch estate, Messrs Howarth and Walsh, who had previously 'enjoyed' the water rights of the Afon Cwmcloch.

For the 1923 opening of the WHR, McAlpine, the contractors, had installed a water supply from the Afon Cwmcloch. From the intake chamber, a hydraulic ram pumped water from the river to the tank on its concrete pillars at the station. On a verbal agreement, the WHR paid Howarth and Walsh an annual fee in advance for these water rights. In July 1927, Walsh, and Alexander Sharples, who had inherited Howarth's interest, refused to continue the agreement, and would not accept payment until other land issues were resolved. They demanded the removal of the installation from their land. The WHR Receiver and Manager, Colonel Stephens responded by 'making alternative arrangements for a locomotive water supply from one of the streams crossed by the railway'. It's highly probable that these 'arrangements' were at Nantmor where there was a stream-fed water tank in the cutting north of the station on land belonging to Owen Cadwallader Owen.

This supply was used by McAlpines to water their locomotive during the 1922 - 23 construction period.

By September 1927, water was still being extracted from the Afon Cwmcloch, but further upstream and from the opposite bank. The railway erroneously believed that this circumvented the estate's riparian rights. To feed this water to the station a pipeline, the one found during the reconstruction, was laid around the 180° curve. The original pipe of 1923 was removed from the river bank and Mr Owen promptly cut off the Nantmor supply!

In October 1928 Daniel Owen Jones, the Dinas Agent, reported to Stephens that water was still being extracted from the Afon Cwmcloch, but he had found a spring on WHR land which was one of the feeds to the Goat Hotel reservoir. However, not wishing to aggravate Sharples and Walsh any further, he found yet another spring in the abandoned PBSSR cutting and the pipe was moved to there from the riverbank. This remained the source for the Beddgelert tank's water until the line closed.

There matters might have rested and the ram pump that delivered water to the Beddgelert water tower would have been just a vignette in the complicated history of the WHR. However, in 2009, a ram pump, similar to the sort used by the WHR, was spotted at a farmhouse in the Lley Peninsula by David Allan, the then chairman of the WHR Heritage Group, who takes up the story. "The pump came from a farm near Aberdaron where, pre-Covid, we stayed for a week each Spring. Keylock had been banging on about ram pumps for a while and there is maybe a building on the river at Beddgelert, which we think was where the pump was housed. I well remember nearly drowning and I think that Keylock fell in, something he was prone to do, when we went down the steep slope to have a look at it. The pump at the farm was exactly the same one as used by the railway.

"(the pump was) made by Green and Carter, a long-established company in Somerset, specialising in these pumps. They had installed several of them for the original railway, not only at Beddgelert...there was a similar installation at Snowdon Ranger and later at Pont Croesor. The originals have long since disappeared, possibly reclaimed in the 1941 lifting of the line. Arrangements were made to acquire this unit as an example... (for display)... we bought it from the owner for £50, which I think I paid. Green & Carter have offered to repair the ram free of charge and advise on re-installation at a suitable location. So used, it would see a working heritage item and save considerable expenditure on water rates for locomotive water"

The principle of the ram pump is described on the Green & Carter website as follows:

Water, entering the steel drive pipe flows through it by gravitation until it reaches the RAM, passes through the pulse valve into the waste drain. As the water flows, its velocity increases until the pulse valve is no longer able to pass the volume of water flowing: at this point, the pulse valve is

suddenly closed. The outlet thus being closed, the flow of water suddenly stops. This produces a concussion of more or less severity in the body of RAM according to the height and distance from which the water is flowing. The result of this concussion is that a portion of the water in the body of the RAM is forced upwards through the delivery valve into the air cylinder. At the same time, the recoil allows the pulse valve to return to its original position. The outlet being thus reopened, the water which was brought to rest by the closing of the pulse valve recommences to flow through the RAM until it acquires the necessary velocity to raise the pulse valve a second time, closing the outlet, producing a concussion and forcing more water into the air chamber through the delivery valve. The water, which is forced into the air chamber, finds its way through a pipe, known as the 'rising main', to the place where it is required for use with a continuous flow being maintained so long as the RAM remains working.

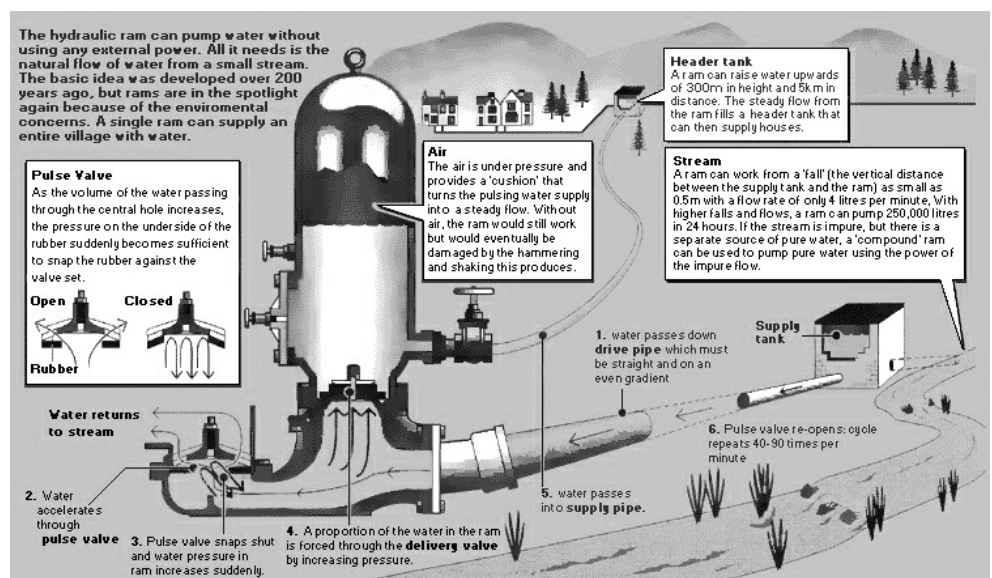
This series of events, which takes time to describe clearly, occurs from 40 to 90 times per minute, according to the size of the hydraulic RAM, the fall of the water driving the RAM, etc. The RAM will continue working automatically, the pulse valve rubber and delivery valve rubber being the only moving parts.

The fall of water necessary to work a RAM may be as low as 500 mm (20 inches) and with such a fall, water may be raised to 18 m (60 feet). With higher falls, such as from 2 m (6.7 feet) to 7 m (23.3 feet) and over, water can be raised to upwards of 300 m (1000 feet) or more in height and distance is more or less unlimited: several of our ram installations pump to over 5 km (3.13 miles).

Due to the action of the RAM, unless the conditions are unusually severe, and provided the RAM is kept working, it will be unaffected by changes in temperature especially low temperatures which might cause a conventional system to 'freeze up' unless some form of heat is provided.

The installation of a ram pump at, say, Beddgelert would represent a significant future heritage project. Clearly, such a project would require the co-operation of a number of different parties as well as the investment in pipe laying and installation. Nevertheless, it would be a project with a quantifiable payback.

*Adapted from an article originally published in WHH47 March 2010*



# Internal Combustion Locomotives on the Welsh Highland Railway

## 1923 - 1926

Dick Lystor

Some time ago an article entitled *New Traction on the Festiniog and Welsh Highland Railways* appeared in *The Colonel*, the house journal of the Colonel Stephens Society. With the kind permission of Brian Janes of the C.S.S., extracts concerning locos used on the WHR form the basis of this article. The trials of both the Dick, Kerr & Co petrol electric loco, and the Kerr Stuart diesel 4415 have been covered in previous issues of *WHH*, so this article deals with the smaller i.c. units brought in mainly in the hope of cutting costs.

In 1923, after years of planning, the Welsh Highland was approaching completion under the direction of a newly combined management with the Festiniog Railway. Henry Joseph Jack, Managing Director of the Aluminium Corporation at Dolgarrog, had over the period since the end of the First World War, obtained control of these North Wales railways. As Chairman, he was a moving force in achieving the opening of the Welsh Highland on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1923. However, the new management was already having cold feet about the cost of running a year-round passenger service. There was the realisation that the railways could not be kept afloat by the slowly floundering slate industry and a limited summer service - buses were already creaming off daily passenger traffic. The Festiniog was already in the financial mire and the Welsh Highland seemed likely to follow.

Although the new railway had been built without the benefit of his advice, Colonel Stephens was hovering in the wings and had been noted in North Wales as early as 1918. With the anticipated completion of the Welsh Highland construction work by McAlpine on 31<sup>st</sup> March 1923, together with oversight by the railway engineers Douglas Fox & Co., a new engineer was needed. Jack turned to Stephens who was formally appointed on 1<sup>st</sup> May.

Earlier in 1923, Stephens had introduced the first set of Ford Railmotors on the standard gauge Kent & East Sussex Railway, where, despite teething troubles, they had proved very promising. Jack was impressed and wrote to S.E. Tyrwhitt, the General Manager, on 27<sup>th</sup> April to study them for use on off peak trains. Tyrwhitt acted quickly, entering discussions with the local Ford dealer, Charles Hughes & Sons and finding the proposal feasible for the 2 ft gauge, a scheme, including an outline drawing, was prepared. However, with opening and summer services imminent, action lapsed, probably not helped by Tyrwhitt's retirement in August and his replacement by a Stephens appointment, Captain John May. The proposal was not forgotten though, as the idea of using Drewry Railcars figured in planning discussions throughout 1923/24, but being rather expensive, the matter was not pursued due to financial reasons.

As mentioned in Andrew Neale's article in *WHH* 89, in June 1923 a 40 hp Simplex 4w petrol tractor was purchased from the Kent Construction & Engineering Co., Ashford, Kent for £350. Built by Motor Rail Ltd., Bedford, it was one of the hundreds constructed for the military light railways in WW1. It was mainly used as bottom shunter on the FR but was used on the WHR for the Croesor goods run to and from Croesor

Junction, capable of hauling 4 tons. It was extravagant on petrol, and on Stephens' recommendation, was converted to run on paraffin (Tractor Vaporising Oil, or TVO). John Keylock's article on this loco can be found in *WHH* 60, and a photo of it on a test train outside Britannia Foundry, Portmadoc appears with Andrew's article in *WHH* 89.

Ever on the lookout for cheaper traction, in mid November Jack's attention turned to Muir-Hill Fordson locomotives. These were primitive adaptations ("not pretty" as Jack admitted) of the then modern Fordson agricultural tractor for rail use. For the narrow gauge, the motor unit was mounted on a heavy cast 4 wheeled chassis with chain drive from the original drive sprocket. The great attraction as always was cost, as they were £100 cheaper than the Simplex, and could also burn paraffin. Jack proposed to buy four to take over the whole running of the Welsh Highland but May rapidly poured cold water on his idea! They were without adequate reverse gears, continuous brakes, suitable couplings or cover from the elements, and were slow into the bargain. A Simplex, with twice the power, although good on the level, could only handle two coaches on a gradient. May counter-proposed that a little bit more money be spent to re-equip with Railmotors with trailers for winter traffic, with steam confined to summer and goods haulage. This proposal was fully costed but the conclusion was that potential savings did not justify the expenditure.



A Muir-Hill Fordson locomotive, as coveted by Jack.

Although May tried to steer him toward a Simplex, Jack still wanted a Muir-Hill, and in April 1924 arranged for the Aluminium Corporation to loan theirs for trials. It arrived at Blaenau Festiniog on 9<sup>th</sup>, and trials took place in early May. The tractor showed up the anticipated problems, being barely able to pull "an ordinary guards van" from Beddgelert to South Snowdon. Now Stephens weighed in against it, advocating the use of the Simplex, especially as it might haul existing, rather than special light coaches. Jack would not let go, proposing short trains and lighter coaches. In a further trial, the Muir-Hill ran very well from Blaenau Festiniog to South Snowdon with a small van but could only return to Beddgelert at 2¼ mph, its maximum speed in reverse! These poor results were reported to the Board in June and the loco



returned to Dolgarrog. Jack persisted, finding variants on the Fordson tractor adaptation by the International Motor Co., the Edwards Motor Car Co., the North Western Motor Co., and H.E. Taylor & Co. All these enquiries came to an end when, in the face of shareholder disappointment at financial results, Jack resigned in November 1924. In his advocacy of these light tractors, he had shown a lack of grasp of the practicalities of the railways' operations but was driven by the desperate need to find affordable economies of working.

Colonel Stephens took over as Chairman and Managing Director from January 1925. Ever the practical railwayman and with limited resources, he turned again to the Simplex design, and had in October advocated two for the Welsh Highland traffic. May was in favour, reporting; *"we have had the present one for about 12 months, and it has been used for shunting – nearly all the time at Minffordd. When we first had it, it did not entire satisfaction, but, as the men got to understand it better, it has proved rather useful. The cost of working is £6-10/- against £10-14/- for a steam locomotive"*. Trials with two coaches between Portmadoc and Dinas were arranged and are thought to have been successful but a vacuum brake was needed. However, finances were desperate and the winter Welsh Highland passenger service had been stopped in December.

Later, in February 1925, as mentioned in Andrew's article, Stephens purchased a slightly larger ex French Government 50 hp American Baldwin 4w petrol tractor for the FR for the bargain price of £248 13s 4d, (although Boyd quotes £343). It was put to work shunting at Minffordd and, together with the Simplex, was also used on part of the Croesor Tramway. At 7½ tons, it proved too heavy for the light track there and was returned to shunting duties. The need for economical winter services remained, and in 1928 it was fitted with vacuum brake for proposed use with one coach on the Welsh Highland. Although no records are known to have survived as to its actual use, it probably did so and was certainly used as a rescue engine for passenger trains on occasion. The loco was not without its problems, however. Probably unbeknown to Stephens, the American Society of Civil Engineers had severely criticised the design in 1920. The petrol motors, mostly built by the Pittsburgh Model Engine Co., needed frequent repairs to a point where the Army engineering regiments asked for new replacements. There were also problems with clutch and gear cases, and the poor spring design was also criticised as were the long overhangs which made its riding lively at service speeds. It had become much worn and broke an axle in April 1929. It was also criticised for heavy fuel consumption in the autumn and had a heavy motor overhaul that winter. Not as popular as the Simplex, it seems to have been increasingly confined to the shed after Stephens' death. Much modified, it is still in service today as No. 11 *Moelwyn*.

Andrew also mentions that this loco was replaced on Croesor duties in early 1926 by another lighter tractor, a 20 hp Austro-Daimler. Stephens had this purchased and transferred to the Welsh Highland in September 1925 after it had finished construction work on the recently completed North Devon and Cornwall Junction Railway. According to Boyd, it ran trials between the foot of the final incline on the Croesor tramway and Portmadoc Wharves, where it displaced the use of horse haulage. It probably worked this service regularly



**An Austro-Daimler tractor.**

for a time and spares were delivered in August 1926. It was tried out on passenger working on 25<sup>th</sup> January 1928 hauling a Hudson bogie carriage from Portmadoc to Croesor Junction, but it proved too light for the job, with the journey taking 45 minutes! With Croesor traffic declining, the loco was then used on shunting before being stored at Boston Lodge in 1929. It was finally scrapped in 1934.

The final trial with i/c locos was the Kerr Stuart diesel no 4415. As mentioned earlier in this article, its story has been told in previous *WHH* issues.<sup>(1)</sup> It proved to be the most successful unit trialled by the WHR/FR and is currently undergoing restoration.

Financial problems had by now finally put an end to all these pioneering efforts as far as passenger services were concerned. With the advent of excellent bus services from 1920 onwards, passengers left in droves. There was now insufficient winter traffic to justify any service at all and the WHR relied solely on its summer tourist traffic. Even if there had been a suitable i.c. loco available, income from this short summer season was not enough to stave off the inevitable.

1) Issues 21/2, 22/9, 43/8, 58/1, 59/1, 68/1 and 73/5

With my thanks to Brian Janes of the Colonel Stephens Society for permission to use sections of his article and selected photographs.

**T**his Journal appears but quarterly. To keep in touch with day-to-day developments, especially in these times of limited personal contact opportunities, be sure to visit the Group's Facebook page:

<https://tinyurl.com/yy6pr3qc>

and our website

<https://www.welshhighlandheritage.co.uk/>

# WHERE TO NOW THEN?

Nick Booker



COVID-19 has had an enormous impact upon all areas of our daily lives. For the railway heritage sector, this has been no different where lock downs have meant that, overnight, long-standing streams of volunteer support have dried up, quite apart from the passengers. One of the most well-covered aspects of this by the press and social media alike has been the loss of income from visitor and passenger related revenue, plunging even longstanding and nationally significant heritage railways including the FR and WHR into rocky financial waters, as well as the smaller railway lines and museum sites. Another key support channel has also been lost, that of volunteers.

Volunteers are, as we know, the lifeblood of most heritage railways, ranging from assisting and running the shop, driving and guarding, to working at the coalface of the visitor experience. As lock-down slowly unfurls during 2021, heritage railways and sites may begin to re-open but the difficulties in volunteer mobilisation will be far from over. Usual organisational practices will remain limited by social distancing guidelines. A key volunteer demographic is those seeking enrichment in their post-retirement years, by virtue of age a more 'clinically at risk' group when it comes to COVID-19 and perhaps more likely to be cautious in their own external activity. Other volunteering positions may be undertaken for example by students on vacation or as part of university placements or college enrichment programmes. Such schemes may now

be difficult to arrange in the new age of online higher education learning.

However, lock down has also provided an opportunity for organisations to adapt their practices, including through innovative uses of digital technology. Is therefore remote assistance set to become a routine part of the 'new normal'? Should we as a heritage group for example, do more to engage with our members online? We have already had one committee meeting on Zoom and while we abandoned our AGM in 2020 because of Covid, maybe we should be having a Zoomed AGM? Should we have talks or webinars for members online?

I have already mentioned that many volunteers are those who have reached retirement, not only a more 'clinically vulnerable' demographic but one which in some cases may not always be comfortable with a digital 'offer'. Not that I'm casting any aspersions on the digital capability of any member! This might be a key challenge to encouraging Group members to become involved and support us and the WHR in new ways. In addition, many working adults who are now working from home may find the prospect of spending more time in-front of a screen an unattractive use of their spare time. I know from my own experience with Zoom meetings that no matter how interesting the subjects under discussion may be, they can quickly become tedious, particularly if the sound or vision is not working perfectly. Indeed, mere access to technology itself is a privilege not



shared by all members of society due to financial barriers, unlike the ability to spend one's free time in a like manner.

Virtual volunteering within the heritage sector is not a new concept. For many years, large organisations from the Smithsonian across the pond to our own Imperial War Museum and National Archives have facilitated online volunteering opportunities such as transcription or research contributions, enabling volunteers worldwide to contribute to internationally significant heritage work on their own terms. However, some organisations have more recently been able to adapt this practice and take it further.

The use of digital communication channels may enable more unique volunteering opportunities to flourish which may not have otherwise been considered or even possible. Recent circumstances have emphasised the need to be more adaptable in our approaches to work and life. What would have previously been a less accessible, office-based position set around particular office hours has become an entirely flexible opportunity. I am in my role as a marketing consultant more able to work with clients on an increased, entirely remote basis, keeping in close contact through Zoom, Skype, Teams, etc., whilst completing tasks at times which work best for all of us around existing commitments.

The social-distancing demands brought by COVID-19 have only emphasised how critical a sound grasp of even basic digital technology is, whilst also suggesting that more versatile, out-of-the-box thinking about how to effectively wield the benefits of technology can bring about success and an enriched experience.

'Virtual volunteering' may be an opportunity which many volunteers and heritage organisations are unable to access in the ways in which some have been able. However, digital solutions may make a real positive difference in effectively enabling the 'new normal' way of operation for many museum and heritage sites including the WHR Heritage Group, providing volunteers and members both old and new with a way to once again do what they do best; support and share the heritage we all know and love.

Should we therefore as a Group embrace digital technologies? Technologies such as:

**Photogrammetry** (creating a 3D model by stringing together a group of photographs) makes it possible for heritage sites to have pieces of their collection accessible

online. People can interact with these objects in a new way and from different angles, all from the comfort of their own living room.

**Augmented Reality** Mobile apps can place historic reconstructions of sites over the current landscape to enable the public to visualise what used to be there, providing opportunities for storytelling to help bring inaccessible sites to life. What about a digital reconstruction of the signal box at Tryfan Junction?

### Mobile apps and virtual tours

There is an increasing awareness of the possibilities of heritage trail and self-guided tour mobile apps another opportunity for interactive engagement with history while maintaining social distancing. Virtual tours have allowed digital access to sites that have been closed during lockdown, as people have been virtually wandering around such sites as the British Museum, the Louvre and the Van Gogh Museum. Should we have an app for wandering around Tryfan Junction station for example?

### Pause for thought . . . and communication

Lock-down has provided us with opportunities to learn and space to reflect. Heritage roundtables and webinars have lent greater clarity to the day-to-day realities of what sites have been going through and what their focus points are. These priorities have included expanding audience engagement through digital opportunities and ensuring accessibility in digital communication for disabilities.

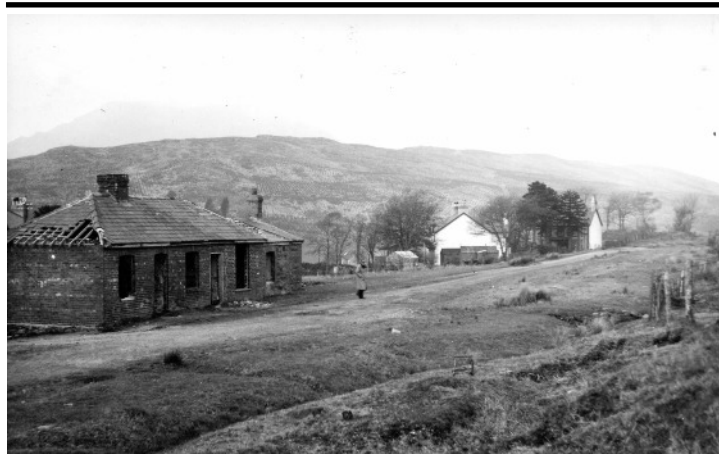
If we like the idea of exploring possibilities for digital engagement, such as photogrammetry, augmented reality or heritage trail apps, then we need to engage with someone or some organisation that can help us achieve that. Please let me know your thoughts by emailing me at:

[nick.booker@welshhighlandheritage.co.uk](mailto:nick.booker@welshhighlandheritage.co.uk)

Adapted from *VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERS" – THE NEW LIFEBLOOD OF THE HERITAGE SECTOR?* Esther Wilson, Social Media and Digital Marketing Volunteer

and

A guest article written by Owen Burton for and originally posted in *Visitor Focus* on the Association of Independent Museums website.



### A Recent Addition to the Photo Archive.

The Group recently acquired a print of this photograph taken at South Snowdon in 1956.

The photo shows the surviving station buildings with, to their right, the two buildings, Glasfryn and Tan-yr-wyddfa, that sit either side of the Snowdon Path as it approaches the railway from Rhyd-ddu. On the extreme left we see one of the chimneys of Bron-y-gadair, across the main Beddgelert road from the station area.

Comparisons with earlier photos, notably perhaps Bill Rear's 1948 images, give a very good indication of how little, or how slowly, this scene changed after closure.

# GLANRAFON QUARRY ACCIDENT – FEBRUARY 13<sup>th</sup> 1899



Glanrafon Slate Quarry as seen from the Rhyd-ddu to Waunfawr road on a misty day in August 1961 -  
S.A. Leleux (P4/18) - Arch 4687

Dick Lystor has been looking at reports of a fatal accident at Glanrafon Quarry in 1899.



Remains of the working levels in the big pit at Glanrafon - Dick Lystor - July 1985

On the afternoon of Monday February 13<sup>th</sup>, a serious accident took place at the Glanrafon Slate Quarry, near Rhyd-ddu, the property of Messrs John Owen and Son, because of which Mr Griffith Owen, aged 45, under manager, sustained injuries which proved fatal, and a

workman, Mr David Jones, of Rhyd-ddu, was severely injured.

It appeared that at about three o'clock that afternoon, Mr Owen was ascending a ladder on the third gallery from the top to superintend the work. When about mid-way, he was met by Mr David Jones, who was descending to the gallery below. To enable one to pass the other, a platform had been placed some distance from the top, and Mr Owen took his place on this so that Mr Jones could descend uninterruptedly. Without warning, the rock above them gave way, having no doubt, been loosened by the incessant and heavy rains of the past few days. Unfortunately, the two men were in the way of a portion of the fall, and the ladder, together with the platform and both men, were hurled into the gallery below, a distance of about twelve feet.

A number of men who were working close by were eyewitnesses to the accident, and at once ran to the spot in order to render what assistance they could. Mr Owen, who was partly covered by debris, was seen to wave his arm, and was heard to advise the rescuers to search for David Jones, this being the first intimation given the men that there was a possibility of others being buried underneath the fall. However, when Mr Owen was recovered, Mr Jones was found lying unconscious under him face down, and it was seen that both men had sustained serious injuries. Both men were removed to their respective homes, and the services of doctors H. Jones Roberts and Shelton Roberts were called for. Mr Owen had had a compound fracture of his left arm, in addition to injuries to his head, and unfortunately passed away the following day.

As to Mr David Jones, it was the opinion of all at first that he had sustained the worse injuries, but this did not prove to be the case, although he was seriously hurt. He

received several cuts about the head, together with a fracture of the left foot, and remained unconscious for 48 hours. Under the treatment of Dr Owen, Penygroes, he made satisfactory progress towards recovery. It was generally believed that it was not the fall that the two men had that caused their injuries, but the fact that they were struck by pieces of rock when the ladder and platform gave way.

Fortunately, owing to the state of the weather, the workmen who were usually employed in the part of the quarry where the accident happened were not at work that Monday, otherwise the consequences may well have been of a much more serious nature. Mr O. Eames, the quarry manager and Mr Owen were together a short time before the rock fall took place, on the gallery onto which the rock fell, and they parted, Mr Owen went up the ladder and Mr Eames went along the level, and was inside when the fall took place, thus having a narrow escape.

On the afternoon of Wednesday the 15<sup>th</sup>, Mr J.H. Bodvel-Roberts, the county coroner, held an inquest, at the Rhyd-ddu School, into the death of Mr Griffith Owen. Also present were Mr G.J. Williams (assistant inspector of mines), Colonel Ruck (chief constable), and Mr Parry was the foreman of the jury. David Jones, a quarryman from Salem, a witness, identified the body, and said he saw Mr Owen ascending the ladder from one gallery to another. After reaching the platform, he stopped there to make room for Mr Jones, who was passing, to descend. Without any warning, the fall took place, and he saw both men being struck. They fell to the gallery beneath, and he was among the three or four men who first rushed to their assistance. They found Mr Owen partly buried beneath some debris, and Mr Jones was completely buried and unconscious. Mr Owen was bleeding from the side of his head, and he had cut his arm above the elbow. He could speak, and the witness heard him say, "David Jones, where is my arm?" He also said that there was a man underneath him, and that

it was a pity he could not be extricated. He was placed on a stretcher and conveyed home. The witness could not say how much stone fell. He sometimes used to go along the ladder, but as a rule he went through the level.

Jeremiah Hughes, another quarryman, said that he was not in the quarry when the accident occurred. He had shot away a part of the rock on Saturday. It was here that the fall occurred, but on Saturday there was no evidence that the rock had become loose, and he believed the whole place was safe. The witness had also been working at the place where the accident occurred about three weeks or a month previously, and at that time he had no idea that there was any danger. The accident was one of the most remarkable things he had seen, and he had worked there all his life. Mr G.J. Williams said that the officials often used to examine the quarry, and it was the deceased who did so the last time.

Robert Hughes, a labourer, gave evidence to the effect that he was at work at the highest gallery when the accident occurred, but he never saw any signs of danger there. In reply to Mr G.J. Williams, he said that he generally heard the sound of a crack when falls occurred but did not hear it on this occasion.

Mr G.J. Williams deposed that he visited the quarry and took sketches of the scene of the accident. He opined that about 400 or 500 tons fell. It would have been impossible for anyone to say that there was a danger, although it could be seen after the accident that the ground was shaky. He could not say that anyone was to blame, and the witness had been given to understand that it was the custom of the deceased to visit such places twice a day. It would have been impossible for the accident to have been foreseen. The witness had seen the ladders placed up, and was of the opinion that they were perfectly safe.

The jury returned a verdict of "Accidental death".

Adapted from reports in the *Carnarvon & Denbigh Herald*, and *North Wales Express*, 17<sup>th</sup> February 1899



A newly-acquired (and badly faded) photograph of Gowrie coupled to one of the Pickering brake composite carriages ahead of departure from Snowdon to Dinas. The rendition here may not be perfect but is substantially better than the original print! Arch 5312.

Following our ongoing support to the restoration of '590' the committee has decided to make a contribution towards the building of the 'new' *Gowrie*.

After discussions with the Gowrie Trust we agreed with them that we would specifically sponsor particular build components. We finally agreed a contribution of £1000 to be split between a Horn-guide Pattern (£200) and Horn-guide Castings (£800).

In response, Paul Stock has replied:

"We at the Gowrie Locomotive Trust are very grateful to the Welsh Highland Heritage Group for their contribution to the project. By sponsoring a number of components for the loco they are helping us achieve our aim of recreating another piece of the lines heritage. We look forward to "Gowrie" being available for use on the Groups "Journey into the past" services in the near future."

The original *Gowrie* was Hunslet's only *Fairlie* locomotive but was not without its problems and a straight replica might have been problematic. However, the Trust have noted these difficulties, primarily concerning the locomotive's inability to generate sufficient steam and then to deliver such steam as was generated to the steam chest before suffering excessive condensation.

Whilst the 'new' *Gowrie* will look much like the original, detailed design changes apropos boiler internals, notably the length and diameter of the tubes, and the provision of an internal rather than external steam pipe between the dome and the steam chest will, it is believed, provide substantial performance improvements.

We wish the Trust well with their endeavours to produce this most interesting locomotive.



# Robert (Bob) Gordon Honychurch

## Ironmonger and pioneer railway re-builder.

While Covid 19 has temporarily stopped trains from passing through the Aberglaslyn Pass, it is unlikely that without the persistence of people like Bob Honychurch, the Welsh Highland Railway would have ever been rebuilt. When Bob had his letter advocating the rebuilding of the WHR, published in the *Model Engineer* magazine of April 27th 1961, the re-born Festiniog Railway had only been operating for little more than five years. Yet that letter, which was picked up by some of the national press, generated sufficient interest for the original Welsh Highland Railway Society to be set up with Honychurch as secretary and for the first Newsletter to be circulated to members in September 1961 setting out the Society's plans and progress of the negotiations with the railway company's liquidator.

An early enthusiast for the WHR, Arthur Rimmer, put 'an interesting suggestion' in *The Modern Tramway* magazine of January 1941, suggesting that the line could be purchased and run by railway enthusiasts. However, later that year, dismantling of the railway began and in 1944 Mr Alwynne Aubrey Thomas, a Llandudno accountant, was appointed liquidator to the WHR. There matters rested and following the end of the War various enthusiasts visited and photographed the deteriorating remains of the buildings and the track bed, and local farmers and others reclaimed what they thought should be theirs.

Twenty years later in February 1961 Bob Honychurch, who by then was a volunteer on the recently re-opened Festiniog Railway, had been considering, along with other FR volunteers, the possibility of re-opening the WHR. Honychurch enquired of Mr Thomas as to the legal position, if a railway preservation society was to acquire the track bed. Having obtained a satisfactory response he asked Thomas in March whether the deeds could be inspected by the proposed preservation society's solicitor, Stanley Keyse. Thomas, with whom Honychurch later established a close rapport, advised that he would arrange personal delivery. Bob then asked what would be the lowest acceptable price for the track bed and requested a personal interview. At this point, he had his letter published in the *Model Engineer* magazine and which was taken up by the national press and railway enthusiast magazines.

### Restoring the Welsh Highland Railway

SIR,—An attempt is being made to form a restoration society for the Welsh Highland Railway, which was unrivalled for its beautiful scenery. Complete destruction of the remains of this line is inevitable unless an effort is made to preserve for posterity the joy of travelling on the narrow gauge through the famous Aberglaslyn Pass, and an appeal is made to all lovers of railways to give this their practical and financial help. Fuller details will be gladly given by writing to me at 111, Oakfield Road, Shrewsbury.

R. G. HONYCHURCH

Robert G Honychurch, always known as Bob, was born in Shrewsbury in 1924, the only son of Walter Honychurch and Elsie Honychurch (née Whitlow). Following his secondary education at Priory Grammar School for Boys, Shrewsbury, Honychurch was apprenticed to the Sentinel Waggon Works Ltd in Shrewsbury. By this time, Sentinel was engaged in the war effort and he was employed in the manufacture of Bren Gun Carriers. He used to cycle there from his parent's home in the middle of Shrewsbury for the twelve hour Night Shift. On his return, he was very often too tired even to eat his breakfast. One morning on a wet road, he skidded and fell off his bike under the railway bridge in the town, as he was so exhausted by the shift work.



Spitfire Mk. XIV - RM908 - UM-G of No. 152 (Hyderabad) Squadron, RAF, aka "The Flying Panthers". Bob Honychurch is seen clutching the poor eponymous animal's hind leg. Burma - late 1945 or early 1946.

However, relief was at hand and in 1942/3 he joined the RAF. Hoping to be a pilot but having failed the eyesight test, he became a Ground Engineer, although after the war he did learn to fly. In the preparations for D Day in 1944, he was waterproofing vehicles, before going to the Far East to maintain Spitfire and Mosquito aircraft.

On his return to the UK in 1946/7, he was demobilised and joined the family firm of W J Honychurch, which then became W J Honychurch & Son, hardware and tool merchants based in Princess Street, Shrewsbury.

Bob married Desley A Davies in April 1957, who was also from Shrewsbury and they went on to have two sons, Andrew and David and a daughter Julie. Desley died in 2011 after a long illness.

The approach by Honychurch in 1961 to the WHR's liquidator resulted in Thomas attending a meeting on July 16th in Shrewsbury, with those interested in forming a preservation society. He advised the meeting that he would accept £750 for a quick sale of the track bed. The embryonic society then 'elected temporary officers' with Bill Brown, an avuncular Staffordshire ceramics company owner as chairman, Peter Bevan, a Shrewsbury accountant as treasurer, Stanley Chadwick, from Weybridge as membership Secretary and Honychurch as secretary.

Later that year, in November, Thomas received an offer from Honychurch on behalf of the WHR Society of £750 for the track bed. Negotiations were obviously going well for an electricity board wayleave and Beddgelert Parish Council's wish to cross the track bed to access the cemetery were both referred to Honychurch. In the December, Honychurch advised Thomas that 'the Society in waiting' had been refused planning permission for the railway's reinstatement but he was 'pursuing the matter'. In fact, the refusal was for the majority of the track bed that lay within Caernarvonshire. However, planning permission had been granted by Merionethshire for the section of just under two miles between Ynys-fach and Pont Croesor.

During 1962, negotiations continued and in June Honychurch sent Thomas a copy of the planning application for the section between Beddgelert and Nantmor. Caernarvonshire subsequently advised that approval would be forthcoming if as the highway authority they could be satisfied that their proposed main road improvements would not be prejudiced, and a satisfactory car park could be provided.

By this time, the Society had 150 members, was a year old and was at the start of some thirty years of trial and tribulations and constant council prevarications. The early newsletters of the Society and later of the limited company, the Welsh Highland Light Railway (1964) Ltd with Honychurch's hardware shop as the registered office tell a sorry tale of stops and starts, culminating in the death in September 1964 of Thomas, the liquidator. It took another forty years for the dream of those early WHR pioneers to be finally achieved. Honychurch continued to be Company Secretary into the late 1960s playing a key role in the company's activities. He was instrumental in the establishment of a depot at Kinnerley, Shropshire, on former railway property that became the temporary home of *Russell*, the sole surviving locomotive from the WHR and other rolling stock and equipment with a

view to moving on to the WHR track bed when access could be secured.

However, he later resigned from the company in order to focus on running the family hardware shop, which had always been a major part of his life. In fact, with Company AGMs held on a Saturday at the 'Old Contemptible' in Edmund St, Birmingham opposite Snow Hill Station, he was frequently absent as he had to work in the shop.

An early WHR society member and volunteer recalls that his introduction to Saturday employment was in the Honychurch ironmongery shop and being tested at interview to see if he had sweaty hands. Bob considered that an undesirable attribute for anyone handling the nails, screws and other ferrous stock in trade prone to rusting.



**Bob with his Land Rover.**

Among Bob Honychurch's many other interests were old vehicles. These included a steamroller and a Jeep that is still owned by the family. Many years ago, he was spotted in Shrewsbury driving one of his Land Rovers and towing an old and rusty steam wagon built by the firm to which many years before he had once been apprenticed.

**Robert 'Bob' Gordon Honychurch was born on April 3rd 1924 and died of old age on December 9th 2020.**

He is survived by his daughter Julie, two sons, Andrew and David, nine grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.



**A wintery scene at Kinnerley. Bob is to the left sitting on a wagon underframe.**



**Correction.**

In the last issue, my Random Photograph Selector threw up, as one of its choices, Arch 0803. When preparing my notes on this image, it would seem that another random selector kicked in resulting in some misidentification of the individuals in the image.

It was Michael Davies, not John Keylock, who was perched on the stile. JK was actually facing the camera more or less dead centre, largely occulted by Cedric Lodge. Alan Donaldson looks on from the right.

Apologies to Michael (and John) for this error!

**Peter**



# Peter Liddell's Photo Analysis



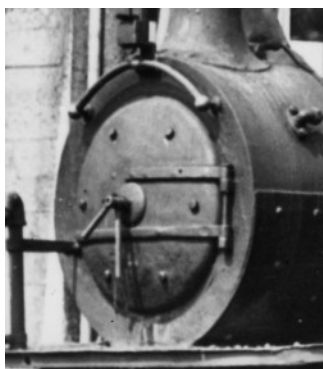
Two photographs of Moel Tryfan from the Archive - WHR 147 (left) and WHR 148 (right) - Geoff Platt - for date, see text.

Since I 'inherited' the Group's photo archive, I have been cataloguing, editing and adding to its content. As I do this, on occasion I find myself faced with queries - more often than not these are dating issues.

In the archive we have eight images credited to Geoff Platt, of which seven were taken on the Welsh Highland, either at Dinas, Beddgelert or in the Aberglaslyn Pass. Not all of these are dated, but those that are suggest 1932. This date has always bothered me, so let us look at the evidence.

First I will look at two photographs showing *Moel Tryfan* by the water tower at Beddgelert (WHR 147 and 148). WHR 147 has appeared in these pages before as it is the clearest example we have of the original style 'No. 11' applied to this loco's rear buffer beam. When we look at both images together, we are presented with strong dating clues.

Firstly, in WHH 148 we can see FR stock, as evidenced by what clearly is one of their 'Bug Boxes', indicating that the image was probably made when the Cambrian Crossing was open. Therefore, if the image were 'pre-Lease' this would appear, but not absolutely, to limit the date to 1929 or earlier. Alternatively, the image could have been taken 'post-Lease', also questioning the '1932' suggested by the Archive record.



A detail from WHR 8 -  
J.E. Simpson

This apparent dilemma can be resolved by examining closely the locomotive in WHR 148. The smoke box door on Moel Tryfan had been replaced circa 1895 and was replaced for a second and final time prior to April 1929. As seen here, after this final change the door was fitted with significantly longer hinge-plates and displayed a prominent ring of six bolts.

Examination of WHR 148 clearly shows an earlier pattern of smoke box door. As the locomotive had been cut down and the date for WHR 148 is consequently no earlier than 1924, we can safely deduce that this was the intermediate standard of door, giving us a latest date for the *Moel Tryfan* photographs of 1928.



WHR 149

WHR 149, also by Geoff Platt but unfortunately somewhat blurred, shows *Princess* with a southbound train passing under the road bridge at Bryn-y-felin. We can see that the locomotive was coupled to one of the WHR Ashbury 'Corridors' and the carriage's vacuum pipe run further tells us this was No. 24, the Buffet Car. The pipe was routed at a higher level than on No. 25 as No. 24, then no 23, was one of the vehicles fitted with dual brakes in early WHR days. Visual inspection suggests that this was not just No. 24 but that it was in service as the Buffet Car, indicating a date no earlier than 1927. However, because we see the Buffet Car south of Beddgelert, we can further say that this WAS 1927 as in subsequent years this service only operated between Dinas and Beddgelert.

Before we move on to Platt's other images, we are inevitably moving towards the question "how often did Geoff Platt visit the Welsh Highland? Do we have the confidence to suggest that he was at the railway in 1927 and 1928, or does it seem more likely that he was there only in 1927?"

My next Platt image, WHR 151, shows *Russell* with a train comprising Nos. 24 and 25 (both of the Railway's 'Corridors') and Pickering Brake No. 9. *Russell* shows no sign of the repairs carried out after she was removed from service at the end of the 1929 season. More importantly, however, in the photograph we see that the station bookstall was still in place. Records indicate that this was removed after a storm at the end of October 1927. Linking this image to those discussed





WHR 151

earlier and accepting that Platt probably took these images on one visit to the Railway, indicates a date of 1927 for the set.

Platt also photographed *Russell* at Dinas (WHR 152), this time coupled directly to No. 25 and *Princess* (a judgement based on what we see in WHR 149) in the Pass heading towards Beddgelert (WHR 150). We see little of *Princess's* train, but what we do see, as with WHR 149, is Welsh Highland stock, this time Pickering Brake No. 8, consistent with No. 9 being seen behind *Russell*.



WHR 152 (upper) and WHR 150 (lower)

If we see the Buffet Car south of Beddgelert (WHR 149) and the year consequently was 1927 we can assess what we see in each image in the context of the timetable for that year. The train seen in WHR 149 was the only southbound train scheduled to include the Buffet Car and would have been the 17:48 departure from Beddgelert.

The buffet service operational patterns are fully explained in Appendix 1 to the WHRHG book *The Buffet Car*. The 1927 Buffet Car operating pattern was based on the carriage staying

in Portmadoc overnight, to leave on the 10:45 train to South Snowdon, marshalled at the front of the train behind the locomotive. This train reversed there to return to Portmadoc. At Beddgelert, the Buffet Car was set back into the Goods Shed siding and detached, there to be provisioned by the proprietors of The Saracen's Head.

After provisioning, the carriage was attached to the rear of the 12:36 from Portmadoc, departing Beddgelert for Dinas at 13:30. The Buffet Car returned to Portmadoc at the front of the 16:20 departure from Dinas.

Whilst there were differences between the 1926 and 1927 timetables, for example in 1927 the first return trip from Port was extended to South Snowdon and only one, rather than two, instance of train crossing at Beddgelert was scheduled. However, in 1926 we know from Casserley's photos (see *WHH 73*), supported by the Beddgelert Train Book, that it was the practice that locomotives were swapped between crossing trains. There is evidence in these Platt photos that this still happened in 1927. The 1927 diagram comprised two daily departures from Dinas and four from Port. The first Port departure ran to South Snowdon and back, the second ran through to Dinas, swapping locos at Beddgelert, the third ran to Beddgelert and back and the fourth was a through run to Dinas.

WHR 151 shows *Russell* heading a southbound train - the train is standing on the loop - and as the Buffet Car is at the front of the train we can deduce that this was the 16:20 Dinas to Portmadoc service. There was no crossing of trains at Beddgelert in this case, the north and south-bound trains had crossed at South Snowdon.

Following this logic, we now have two photographs of southbound trains each with the Buffet Car (WHR 149 and 151), both taken to the south of the final crossing opportunity but with different locomotives. One has to conclude, if the time-table data is correct, that these photographs were taken on different, probably successive, days. Analysis of the 1927 timetable suggests the need for three locomotives, one of which starts its day in Portmadoc and ends in Dinas, whilst another does this in reverse. Thus on successive days one would have seen alternative locomotives operating the final southbound leg into Portmadoc.

A more precise dating can be deduced if we accept Boyd's analysis (*NGRinSC Vol 2 p. 98*) which suggests that *Princess* was replaced on these turns by *Palmerston* "during August" and that *Moel Tryfan* "was little used". The 1927 Summer Season, wherein the Buffet Car was first advertised, opened on July 11<sup>th</sup> although, for reasons laid out in *The Buffet Car*, the full operational cycle described above could not have commenced until the 13<sup>th</sup> at the earliest.

Thus the photos appear to indicate a relatively short time window, between July 13<sup>th</sup> and early August, 1927. Platt's visit also, it would seem, coincided with one of the apparently limited occasions on which *Moel Tryfan* operated the 15:43 return service from Port to Beddgelert.

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