

# WELSH HIGHLAND HERITAGE

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## The Welsh Highland Railway Centenary

Each page of *WHH* has, since Issue 2 back in March 1998, been headed with a four-word precis of this Group's "raison-d'être", "Recording Yesterday for Tomorrow". Our fundamental concern is to ensure that in future an accurate raft of knowledge regarding the Welsh Highland Railway is available for anyone who might have an interest in the Railway. We cannot at this stage postulate what such interests might be nor, for that matter, just when "tomorrow" might prove to be.

Right now, however, we are looking at an immediate "tomorrow" as plans to celebrate the centenary of the establishment of the WHR are being developed. The end of July 1922 saw the reopening of the North Wales Narrow Gauge Railways' main line from Dinas to Snowdon, their terminus at Rhyd-ddu. The station was renamed South Snowdon by the WHR although this revised name did not appear immediately in all relevant documentation.

Work to establish the "missing link" to enable through running thence to Portmadoc was completed in May 1923, allowing travel over the full WHR to be inaugurated on June 1.



PB&SSR works in the Aberglaslyn Pass, circa 1904  
Arch 3486 (John Pritchard Collection)

We should not forget that work on the Rhyd-ddu to Croesor Junction section benefited significantly from civil engineering works that had been carried out some 20 years earlier in pursuit of the Portmadoc, Beddgelert and South Snowdon Railway's and the Northern Counties Traction Co.'s aspirations to bring electric-powered railways to this area. Neither should we neglect the contribution to the Welsh Highland ideal made by the promoters and engineers whose much earlier work led to the construction of the Croesor Tramway, without which there would have been

no "Croesor Junction", nor of the North Wales Narrow Gauge Railways, whose line to Rhyd-ddu was to become a key element in the WHR structure.

The Croesor undertaking was finally enabled on completion of Pont Croesor in July 1864 whilst the NWNCR emerged some years later than the Croesor efforts.

The visionaries, perhaps overenthusiastic in their approach, whose work led to the establishment of the North Wales Narrow Gauge Railways Co. Ltd. in 1872, following Royal Assent to the railway's Act in August of that year, made a vital contribution. Yes, their grand scheme failed to materialise but their small, comparatively, and out of the way "Moel Tryfan Undertaking" survived to become a pivotal enabling element in the Welsh Highland story.

Over the next two years we will be celebrating not just the opening, 'the beginning', of the Welsh Highland but also the works that, from the 1860s, 60 years earlier, had contributed to this same long-term ideal, 'the end of the beginning' of the process that culminated in the WHR. Thus, our celebrations should look both back, as well as forward, from the 1922/3 viewing point.

Hopefully, those who now enjoy today's WHR, whether as supporters, volunteers, staff or passengers, will appreciate, with the benefit of hindsight, how crucial the original Welsh Highland and therefore all of its predecessors and constituents were, despite their commercial trials and tribulations, as the essential foundation of the modern railway.

When considering possible celebratory milestones, where to begin? If we accept, first and foremost, that had there been no NWNCR it is highly unlikely that there would ever have been a WHR, it follows that key NWNCR dates should be highlighted.

Following the launch of the Prospectus at the beginning of November 1871, notification of the intent to present a Bill in the 1872 Parliamentary Session was published shortly thereafter. The Bill proceeded through its several phases and the Act finally received Royal Assent on 6 August 1872.

This latter date surely represents a key milestone, without which the Welsh Highland, at least as we know it, probably could never have been realised. 6 August 2022 will be the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of this achievement.

The Company held their first Ordinary General Meeting in Carnarvon on 17 December 1872.

It is well-known that the history of the NWNCR might best be described as 'rocky' and that political developments followed quickly. First there was the North Wales Narrow Gauge Railways (Lease) Act, which allowed the NWNCR to Lease the Moel Tryfan Undertaking to Hugh Beaver Roberts, given Royal Assent on 16 June 1873.

On 25 October 1875, the proposal to bring a Bill to the 1876 Parliamentary Session to authorise abandonment of the General Undertaking was announced. Again, following due procedures, the Act was given Royal Assent on 13 July 1876.

We might well speculate, with the benefit of hindsight, whether the Moel Tryfan Undertaking would have been completed had the Company remained committed to the General Undertaking. However, it remains a fact that the Moel Tryfan Undertaking **was** completed, albeit not until May 1881, bringing narrow gauge rails to a point less than 3½ miles (by road) from the centre of Beddgelert. Perhaps, in a perverse way, 13 July 1876 was a critical date in the history of the Welsh Highland?

From the completion of the Croesor Tramway (the Croesor and Portmadoc Railway after 1865), in 1864 there were aspirations to bridge the 4 miles or so gap thence to Beddgelert. The Beddgelert and Rhyd-ddu Railway Bill was announced in November 1889 for inclusion in the 1890 Parliamentary Session. However, this was superseded by the Portmadoc Beddgelert and Rhyd-ddu proposals announced in November 1891, ahead of the 1892 Parliament, proposals which also came to naught.



**Preliminary excavation of the Goat Tunnel, looking south towards Aberglaslyn - ca. 1905 - Arch 3926.**

Back in 1884, the NWNCR were pursuing extensions, but in the opposite direction. On 11 November the solicitors for the Bill notified that the NWNCR (Extensions &c) Bill would go to Parliament in 1885. The resulting Act received Royal Assent on 31 July 1885. This Act proposed a line from Dinas to Carnarvon and an extension to the Bryngwyn Branch designed to bypass the incline and take tracks all the way to Drumhead, giving direct access to the quarries.

Nothing happened and this Act was given a formal time extension on 4 July 1890 when the North Wales Narrow Gauge Railway 1890 Act was given Royal Assent.

The NWNCR did not address the Beddgelert Extension until application was formally made to the Light Railway Commissioners at the end of 1898, trumping the Portmadoc, Beddgelert and Rhyd-ddu Light Railway's submission for a Light Railway Order prepared one year earlier.



**The Goat Tunnel excavations from the other end, looking towards Beddgelert Station - ca. 1905 - WHR 200**

However, events took a different turn when the Portmadoc, Beddgelert and South Snowdon Railway Bill was announced in November 1900, promoted by the Northern Counties Traction Company. The Act received Royal Assent on 17 August 1901. This element of our history was explored in the Group's publication *Ghosts of Aberglaslyn*, available through our website. Suffice it to say here, much initial ground work was completed in the early 1900s, work that subsequently benefited the Welsh Highland, before NCT aspirations became focused on electricity generation, transmission and sale to the detriment of their proposed railway electrification developments. However, a subsequent PBSSR Act's Royal Assent, on 15 August 1904 is perhaps another milestone worthy of recognition, leading as it did to significant infrastructure development, developments utilised and enjoyed by the 'new' WHR today.

Of course, because of the failure of the company's electrification aspirations, not all of the PBSSR infrastructure that was built, or more accurately partially built, could be, utilised by the WHR!



**The 'Bridge to Nowhere', and the embankment down to the proposed PBSSR Glaslyn crossing, under construction - 1905 - WHR 203**

## NWNGR Fairlies (Part 4)

At the end of Part 3 of these notes (*WHH92* - not yet available on-line) we had reached the point when both Fairlies were re-boilered at Davies and Metcalfe Ltd. We noted that *Snowdon Ranger* was re-boilered in 1902, followed by *Moel Tryfan* in 1903.



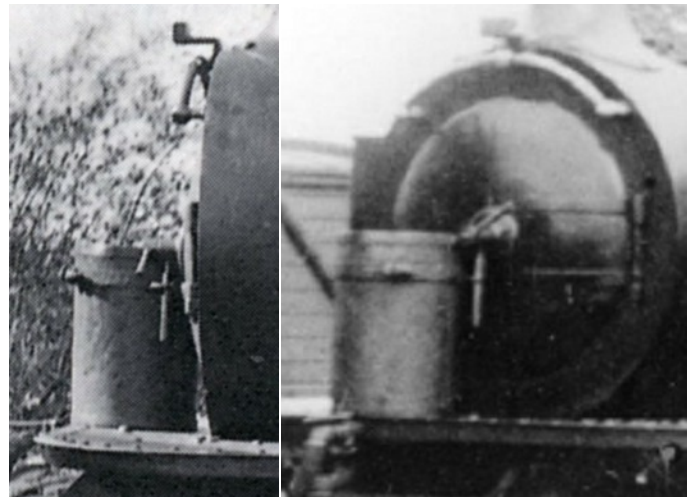
*Snowdon Ranger* by Dinas Junction's N.G. signal box, ca. 1902  
LPC 5633 (REAL 77872) - Arch 3765

By way of a recap, this photograph shows *Snowdon Ranger* recently returned to service after being fitted with a new boiler. We can see that the locomotive retains the high-mounted sand box installation that had been restored well before the re-boiling exercise but the locomotive nevertheless carries a drum, possibly for sand, on the front buffer beam. Close examination of the original photograph shows no sign of a feed-pipe from the sand box, suggesting that, although present, the system was out of use. It is also apparent that repairs had been carried out to the lower right-hand corner of the visible side tank indicating that, whilst the boiler might have been new, the rest of the locomotive structure was 'showing its age'. Nevertheless, the generally 'spruce' appearance of the locomotive would appear not to contradict my suggested date of late 1902 for this image.

So far in these summaries we have identified nine 'original boiler' images of *Snowdon Ranger* against 14 equivalent images of *Moel Tryfan*. However, as we look forward from 1902 to the start of World War 1 we see eight images of *SR* against only one image of *MT*. Post re-boiling, *Moel Tryfan* appears to have remarkably camera-shy!

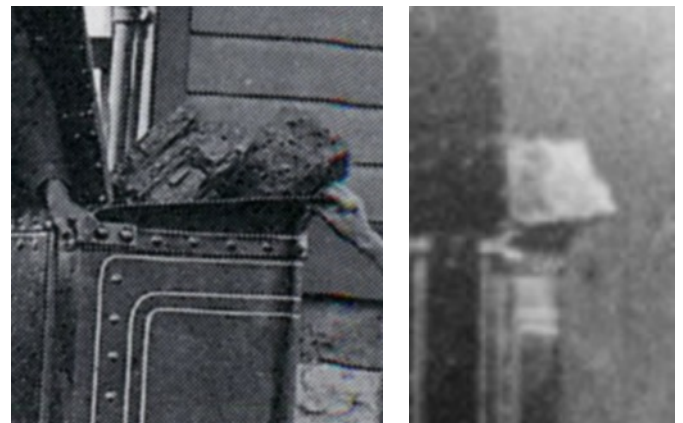


*Snowdon Ranger* with a two-coach train awaits departure from Dinas - Arch 4828



Details from Arch 3765 (left) and 4828 (right) showing the drum visible on the front footplate in both, but, more importantly, the positioning of the smoke-box door latches and how the drum is apparently secured to the long, vertical, handle. The shorter handle is not in the same position in both photos.

If we compare the details visible in Arch 3765 and 4828, it seems likely that the two were closely, if not precisely, contemporary. Apart from general appearance, a comparison of small details is potentially compelling. Similarities between the two are clear, but the differences appear to rule out absolute concurrence. As will be seen, other photographs of *Snowdon Ranger* show a cuboidal box or crate rather than the drum shown here, serving as a sand-hopper.



Coal detail from 3788 (left) and 4828 (right)

Whilst coal detail is perhaps less relevant, there are nevertheless similarities.

Having dated 3765 using the arguments laid out in the last part of these notes, my conclusions regarding the date for 4828 is that, probably, it was broadly similar - say 1902 or 1903.

If we accept that the Pickering brake composites were acquired to replace the, by then, venerable *Cleminson* brakes then the date for 4828 can be no later than 1907.

Our next view is from WHR 99, a photograph showing *Snowdon Ranger* at Snowdon Station, presumably shortly after arriving at the then terminus with a service from Dinas.



*Snowdon Ranger at Snowdon Station - WHR 99*

We see nothing of the train, save for a glimpse of the southern end of one of the 6-wheelers, however, whether this was the all-3<sup>rd</sup> or one of the brake vehicles cannot readily be determined. The appearance of the locomotive in this image, when compared to Arch 3765 and 4828 suggest broad concurrence, especially, perhaps, as in this image the loco is carrying the same, apparently, barrel in the front footplate.

When dating these photographs, questions regarding *Snowdon Ranger's* sanding 'system' remain. Was the barrel seen in early post-boiler renewal images eventually replaced by the crate as the crews' number one choice or was the one replaced by the other in general use? If the latter, it would follow that 'barrel' photos necessarily pre-date 'crate' images.



*Snowdon Ranger on a south-bound train at Waenfawr - Arch 4287.*

Highlighting this question, in the next image, Arch 4287, we see *Snowdon Ranger* with a train of at least two carriages heading south through Waenfawr. The carriages we can see in this image are, as seen in 4828, one of the Ashbury *Corridor* carriages and one of the Gloucester *Cleminson* brakes. The *Corridor* was the all-3<sup>rd</sup> example, NWNGR No. 9.

However, despite train make-up similarities with 4828, the locomotive here is carrying the crate rather than the barrel.

A possible answer to the sand-box question is suggested by this photograph, which shows that the control rod running to the dome-mounted steam valve had been removed - the presence or absence of this rod is another indicator as to whether the locomotive had been re-boilered or not. However, it has been suggested that this image, regrettably not brilliant in terms of quality, shows surviving evidence of the steam valve installation. This is difficult to confirm,

but if this were conclusively to be proved it must then be noted that WHR 99 shows no such evidence, in which case there would be no alternative but to accept that 4287 pre-dates WHR 99, demonstrating that the barrel and the crate were, in fact, interchangeable.

Currently, I have Arch 3765 dated to 1902 with Arch 4828. WHR 99 and Arch 4287 dated to the period 1903 to 1906.

In Arch 3821 we see *Snowdon Ranger* with a train, the



*Snowdon Ranger awaits departure from Snowdon with a Dinas train. The presence of a Pickering behind the locomotive indicates a date no earlier than 1907 - Arch 3821.*

visible part of which comprises one of the Pickering brake composites and both Ashbury *Corridor* carriages. Beyond dating the photo simply to 1907 or later, for reasons that will become apparent, we can conclude that the date was either 1907 or 1908. As the Pickering has, apparently, 'lost its shine', I lean more towards 1908 than 1907.



*Two pictures of Snowdon Ranger at Dinas - Top, WHR 6, credited to H.L. Hopwood, June 1909 - Bottom, Arch 3180, also Hopwood, also June 1909.*

Two features of note are clear from these 1909 Hopwood images, both taken on the same day at, given time to allow camera relocation, reloading, etc., the same time. First is the

evidence of what appears to be a relatively crude re-plating of the coal bunker. Note the smaller number of rivets (bolts?) and the loss of any lining detail. Examination of Arch 3821 above shows the original bunker plating, hence my comment regarding the 1908 latest date. The second detail of importance is the appearance of wire stays installed between the front handrail mounting and the footplate alongside the front of the smoke box. The purpose of these, it would seem, was the provision of a degree of security for the crew when involved in sanding on the move, rather than any reinforcement of the footplate. Although the viewing angle is not ideal, it seems clear that there were no such wire stays fitted when Arch 3821 was taken, suggesting that these were fitted when *Snowdon Ranger* underwent bunker rebuilding, i.e. over the winter of 1908/9. Hopwood's visit to the NWNCR in June 1909 appears, from what we know of NWNCR timetable details, to have fallen in the first month of operations that year.

We should also note that the Hopwood 1909 images show that additional patches had been applied to the lower part of the smoke box. These 'repair' reinforcements have appeared, and disappeared, over the lives of both *Snowdon Ranger* and *Moel Tryfan*. After the 1902/3 re-boiling they were, perhaps unsurprisingly, not to be seen however, here, only seven-years later the repairs apparently were needed again!



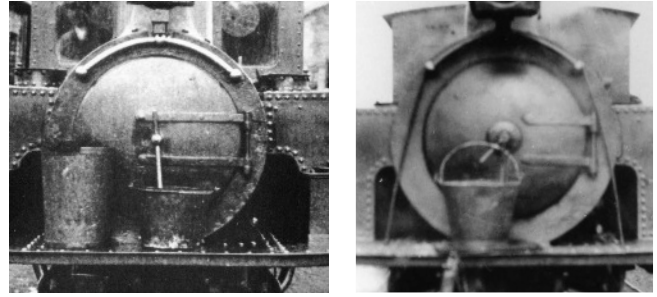
*Snowdon Ranger* with train at Snowdon Station - Arch 4241

Next we will jump forward to the early years of the Great War. Not only does this final image complete a sequence of just *Snowdon Ranger* photographs, but within our Archive this is the last photograph we have of this locomotive. Points worthy of note include the disappearance of the high-mounted sand boxes. It seems that these had not been operable for some time, hence the presence of barrels or boxes as stand-in sanding provision. Quite why they remained in situ for so long is not known.

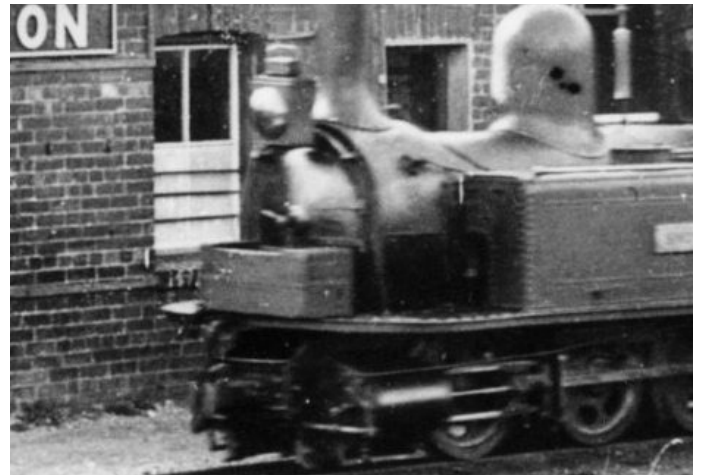
The locomotive retains the wire stays between the front hand rail and the footplate and the same 'crude' bunker re-plating seen in the Hopwood images is also present here.

The generally accepted wisdom is that NWNCR passenger services ceased from November 1916. It is noticeable that the station building is devoid of advertising, however the battens that supported the advertising hoardings are clearly visible. We have previously suggested that this probably indicates an early wartime situation, a war which, at the time,

was expected to be over quickly. This logic indicates the date for this photograph to lie within the range 1914 to 1916.



*Moel Tryfan* before re-boiling (left) and post re-boiling and still in NWNCR configuration (right). The left hand image predates the fitting of continuous brakes and on the right the locomotive was still air-braked. Photographs from NLW (Arch 3684) and Ken Nunn, May 1923 (Arch 3181) respectively.



Arch 4241 showing the same, or similar, shortened hinge bars seen in the Ken Nunn photograph above.

I will end this instalment by taking a quick look at smoke box doors. *Snowdon Ranger* was apparently very shy, hiding good photographs of its smoke box door details through the pre re-boiling period. However, we have good photographs showing the detailed layout of *Moel Tryfan*'s door to show the differences on that locomotive.

The photographs appear to confirm that *Moel Tryfan*, when re-boiled, was fitted with the same pattern of smoke box door that had been fitted to *Snowdon Ranger* a year earlier. It seems likely, although this cannot be proved from the photographs we have, that both locomotives were fitted with the same pattern smoke boxes when first built. There seems no reason to suppose other than that this change was made as part of the re-boiling program.

As we will find in future instalments of these notes, *Moel Tryfan*, by then the only surviving loco of the pair, underwent a second smoke box door change, introducing a third door pattern, the change being made between the 1928 and 1929 operating seasons.

Next time I will look at the Archive's only remaining pre-Great War image of *Moel Tryfan*, as a precursor to describing the integration of the two locomotives and the transition to the Welsh Highland.

# Welsh Highland Dawn

The Welsh Highland Railway was incorporated by Light Railway Order of 30 March 1922, acquiring the assets of the NWNCR and PBSSR Companies, backdated to 1 January 1922, in the process. A later Amendment Order, authorising various route deviations which had become necessary, was granted on 7 February 1923. Financing arrangements imposed strict, and, in the event, somewhat optimistic, implementation time scales on the new Company, exerting pressure to open the new line at the earliest practical date. The Festiniog Railway, with which the WHR would link at Portmadoc when construction was complete, also obtained a Light Railway Order, and the two railways were effectively under common direction and management even though financially separate entities.

The NWNCR had ceased to operate passenger services in 1916 during the Great War, but still operated goods and mineral services from Dinas Junction to Bryngwyn and, less frequently, Snowdon, using its only two remaining locomotives *Moel Tryfan* and *Russell*, with, seemingly, *Russell* doing most of the work. Both locomotives were serviceable, but very run down, in 1922 when the revived South Snowdon passenger service would dictate the regular use of both locos, at least in the mornings when the Bryngwyn goods ran. Contemporary photographs depict *Moel Tryfan* on the resurrected passenger service. The passenger rolling stock of the erstwhile NWNCR was still extant and, although out of use since 1916, storage under cover at Dinas had ensured that much of it would, after refurbishment, be usable by the new company. Those carriages which were to be used in 1922 and 1923 were given a repaint (in plain red) with their doors gaining FR-style enamel class plates but, for the time being, they retained their former NWNCR numbers (although neither these nor any form of insignia were displayed).

One important constraint once the WHR and FR were linked in 1923 was the continuous braking system, as the NWNCR had used the Westinghouse air brake but the FR used the vacuum brake. By 1924 both the locomotives and the surviving coaching stock of the former NWNCR would be converted to the vacuum brake system, but, for 1923, just a limited number of vehicles were dual-fitted to provide some flexibility in train formation:

- ex-NWNCR Pickering brake composite no. 4
- ex-NWNCR Ashbury corridor composite no. 10
- ex-NWNCR Gladstone observation car no. 8
- FR brake van no. 4 (without balcony)
- FR brake van no. 5 (with single balcony)

*(Both the FR brake vans were vacuum-braked conversions from former 4-wheeled quarrymen's carriages. They may well have been equipped with Westinghouse gear from the two NWNCR carriages, nos. 3 and 7, which it had been decided would not be retained for the new railway, ostensibly*

## David Woodcock considers the first operations over the new Welsh Highland.

*because of their condition but possibly because neither could easily accommodate the more bulky vacuum brake gear).*

Some adjustments to couplings, which differed in detail between the two railways, were also undertaken. The converted Pickering brake compo no. 4 apparently demonstrated a tendency to derail and doesn't appear to have been used initially pending a cure to the problem, FR brake van no. 5 and the Gladstone car no. 8 being used instead in the dual-braked set.

The new WHR Company had maintained the goods services of the erstwhile NWNCR until the main line between Dinas and the newly renamed South Snowdon was sufficiently refurbished for a limited passenger service to restart on 31 July 1922. Goods services continued on the Bryngwyn branch (and would continue to do so for another dozen years) but early suggestions that passenger services there would be restored in time would come to nothing.

The initial passenger service was largely limited to three round trips on each weekday. It seems that, from the outset, additional round trips on Saturdays were added. From 1 December the timetable showed:

WHR TT		1 December 1922 – 31 May 1923									
		Saturdays excepted			Saturdays only						
DOWN TRAINS											
South Snowdon		10:50	15:55	18:30	10:50	13:00	15:55	18:30	20:45		
Waenfawr		11:21	16:26	19:05	11:21	13:31	16:26	19:05	21:16		
Dinas Junction		11:45	16:45	19:28	11:45	13:55	16:45	19:28	21:40		
UP TRAINS											
Dinas Junction		9:45	12:40	17:20	9:45	12:00	14:55	17:20	19:40		
Waenfawr		10:08	13:10	17:42	10:08	12:19	15:14	17:42	20:03		
South Snowdon		10:40	13:45	18:20	10:40	12:50	15:45	18:20	20:35		

The through line of rails was established between the two railways in early May 1923 and this facilitated a series of pre-opening movements. We have positive evidence of movements on:

**Saturday 19 May:** Various press reports record an FR Fairlie and three (FR?) carriages carrying WHR, McAlpine and Fox managers and executives, presumably from Portmadoc to Dinas and back.

**Thursday 24 May:** MoT inspection train from South Snowdon to Portmadoc with FR Fairlie *Merddin Emrys*, WHR carriages nos. 8 and 10 and a FR brake van, FR Fairlie *James Spooner* piloting the ensemble from Beddgelert to facilitate bridge testing.

Boyd notes additional construction or test workings, for which we have no corroborating evidence, as follows:

**Wednesday 9 May:** From this date, on various occasions FR small engine *Palmerston* ran through from Portmadoc to Dinas in support of McAlpine's activities.

**Saturday 12 May:** *Palmerston* worked an inspection special for directors and contractors comprising the Oakeley open carriage and ten loaded slate wagons to facilitate testing of the girder bridges.

<b>WHR TT 1 June – 7 July 1923 synthesis</b>													
	<b>Saturdays excepted</b>					<b>ThO</b>	<b>Saturdays only</b>						
<b>DOWN TRAINS</b>													
Portmadoc New	8:15	12:55		15:20		17:15	8:15		12:55		15:20	17:15	20:30
Beddgelert	9:03	13x50	15:20	16:00	16:53	18:08	9:03	12:30	13:40	15:20	16:00	18:08	21x46
South Snowdon	9:45	14:20	15x55		17:28	18x40	9:45	13:03		15:55		18x40	22:25
Waenfawr	10x16		16:25		18x00	19:08	10x16	13x35		16:25		19:08	22:58
Dinas Junction	10:35		16:45		18:20	19:30	10:35	13:55		16:45		19:30	23:20
<b>UP TRAINS</b>													
Dinas Junction	9:50	11:40			15:12	17:40	9:50	11:00		13:00		17:40	20:00
Waenfawr	10x19	12:00			15:33	18x05	10x19	11:19		13x32		18:05	20:20
South Snowdon	10:55	12:35	14:25		16x14	18x46	10:55	11:58		14:25		18x46	20:57
Beddgelert	11:25	14x12	15:05	16:10	16:43	19:17	11:25	12:23	14:12	15:05	16:10	19:17	21x45
Portmadoc New	12:12	14:57		16:50		20:02	12:10		14:57		16:50	20:02	22:35

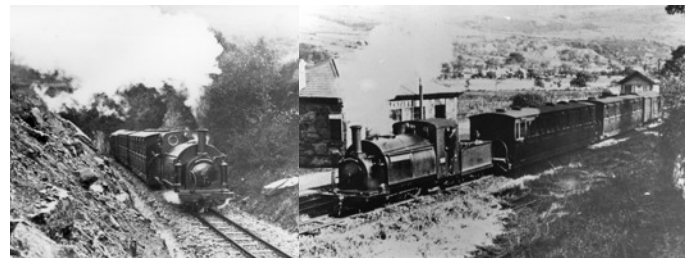
**Tuesday 15 May:** FR double engine and three FR carriages ran through from Portmadoc to Dinas with directors and managers from both the railway and the contractors (and presumably subsequently returned to Portmadoc). This is possibly a misdated description of the 19 May journey, however, it seems likely that a Fairlie would have made the trip ahead of the ‘showcase’ event on the 19th.

**Tuesday 22 May:** thought to have been a mock-run for the MoT inspection two days later - this may have been a misinterpretation as Tyrwhitt’s ‘instruction sheet’ for the 24th was clearly, perhaps distractingly, dated the 22nd.

The formal letter of approval to open the extended railway, subject to conditions, was issued by the Ministry of Transport on Tuesday 29 May, although the Company would already have been made aware of the imposed conditions so that the necessary work could be started. Perhaps the biggest such task was widening the spacing between the two passing loop tracks at Beddgelert. With conditional approval given, the WHR train service, to a necessarily revised timetable, was extended from South Snowdon to Portmadoc New with effect from Friday 1 June 1923. Careful research by Richard Maund [WHH47 at <https://is.gd/Kxd149>] has established that the FR also started to use the New station at Portmadoc from that date.

Although seemingly no record of the new timetable has survived, details of the projected timetable as previously notified to the Ministry of Transport, plus the entries in the extant Beddgelert trains book for June 1923, have enabled a close approximation to be synthesised and that is reproduced here. It will be seen that it generally required just two vacuum- or dual-braked train sets headed by FR small engines, which alternated their overnight base between Dinas and Portmadoc. On Thursdays and Saturdays an additional Dinas Beddgelert round trip operated using an ex-NWNGR locomotive, probably *Russell*, with a Westinghouse-braked carriage set (Pickering brake compo no. 5 and Ashbury corridor no. 9). The purpose behind the additional Thursday round trip isn’t obvious and it was to run only for the five week duration of this timetable. Press reports of the first day noted that the initial departure from Dinas was headed by *Prince* and the initial departure from Portmadoc by *Princess*, the two trains crossing at Waenfawr. All three FR small engines being used on the WHR at this time were turned to face Dinas.

Although surviving photographic coverage of the nascent WHR cannot be described as anything better than patchy, three somewhat sparse collections of photos, plus other odd photos, taken in May 1923 have survived and these, when considered along with the timetables (and details of special workings), do provide rather more enlightenment on this critical period for the new railway than has been available hitherto.



**Four Topical Press images showing the ‘special’ train en-route between Portmadoc and Dinas:**

**Top left - approaching Beddgelert - WHHG 3**

**Top right - At Waenfawr - WHR 159**

**Upper left - At Tryfan Junction - WHR 164**

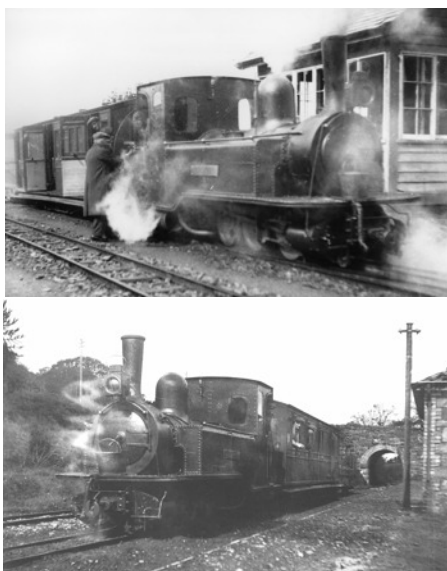
**Lower left - At Dinas Junction - WHHG 9**

The critical photographs are the small number (probably no more than four) taken for the Topical Press Agency during what was obviously a special press run using *Palmerston* on two FR Bowsider carriages (on the northbound trip, either 19 or 20, from Gloucester next to the locomotive, with either 17 or 18, from Brown, Marshall, behind) tailed by FR van no. 3. These photographs are well known but seemingly have never been more precisely dated than “1923”, or even “1924” (which they can’t possibly be!). The crucial dating clue is provided by photograph WHHG 16 (Arch 0285), as depicted in enlarged glory on the front cover of the immediately previous WHH93 (not yet available on-line). This depicts the special standing in the down loop at South Snowdon

alongside a train from Dinas in the up loop, *Prince* hauling ex-NWNGR corridor no. 10 and the Gladstone car no. 8 tailed by an FR brake van, almost certainly no. 5. It is most unlikely that the press special would have been organised before the MoT letter of 29 May authorising the actual opening, so it probably ran on 31 May (or just possibly 30 May). It cannot have run after 31 May as there is no mention of any such special train in the Beddgelert trains book for June nor would it have been possible to fit such a special into the timetable for June or even the rest of the summer. As to timing, photos of the same special train while standing in sunshine in the down loop at Waenfawr show that it ran in the afternoon. Therefore the train from Dinas depicted in the up loop at South Snowdon must be the 13:45 arrival (12:40 from Dinas) which would appear to have arrived some little time earlier, so the photo was probably taken a little after 14:00. Given that photographic stops of perhaps half an hour were made at Beddgelert, South Snowdon, Waenfawr and Tryfan Junction, it is possible to surmise that the special left Portmadoc a little after noon and reached Dinas around four hours later, waiting there for the arrival of time-tabled train from South Snowdon at 16:45, before returning to Portmadoc (where the carriages would be required for the next morning's 08:15 departure to Dinas behind *Princess*) more or less non-stop ahead of the scheduled 17:30 departure to South Snowdon.

The photographs of this train enable one to surmise that the loops at South Snowdon and Waenfawr were indeed operational, as required for the new timetable, while at Tryfan Junction main line trains used the north side track in both directions, the loop not becoming operational until Spring 1924. The lack of photographs of the station itself at Beddgelert might suggest that the work of slewing the down loop was only nearing completion.

**Ken Nunn's May 1923 photographs taken at Tryfan Junction (above) - WHHG 7 - and at Waenfawr (below) - Arch 3136(2).**



The second collection of photos are those taken on Tuesday 15 May 1923 by the late Ken Nunn when he, and doubtless his friend Harry Hopwood, visited the line, apparently unaware that a "directors' special" was to be run from Portmadoc to Dinas later the same day (however, was this the train that actually ran on the 19th?). They appear to have travelled on the 09:45 from Dinas, formed of *Moel Tryfan*

(still facing away from Dinas) heading Pickering brake compo no. 5 (as yet unfitted with the vacuum brake) and an open wagon. They photographed the train at Tryfan Junction (on the non-platform line, contrary to the Inspector's instructions in 1922) and again at Waenfawr (correctly on the up loop). These photographs are important in showing that the "old order" prevailed as late as just 17 days before trains were extended to Portmadoc.



**Three Valentine post cards:**

**Top - 88231.JV shows *Moel Tryfan* and train leaving Bryn-y-felin Bridge en-rout to Beddgelert (and South Snowdon?)**



**Middle - 88229.JV - *Moel Tryfan* and train pause at Beddgelert - the crew were examining the interior of the smoke box.**



**Bottom - 88230.JV - back at Beddgelert somewhat later in the day than the photograph above.**

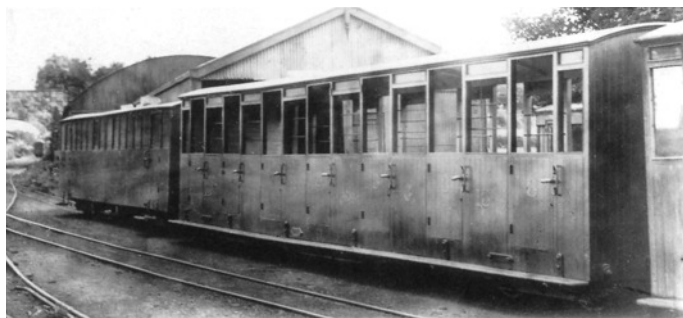
The final collection of relevant photos are the three which were reproduced as postcards by J. Valentine, all taken in the Beddgelert area, one (of the train apparently Dinas-bound) at the new Bryn-y-felin bridge and the other two looking down on the station, and all depicting *Moel Tryfan*, now turned to face Dinas, with Ashbury corridor no. 9 and Pickering brake compo no. 5. Although undated (at least the Valentine reference numbers indicate 1923), there was only a very small window during which the scene they depicted existed. We know from Nunn's photos that *Moel Tryfan* was still facing the other way on Tuesday 15 May and yet the shots show that not only had *Moel Tryfan* been turned but that work of slewing the down loop at Beddgelert had yet to start (although the necessary widening of the cutting might be under way), a task that had to be completed before services could commence on Friday 1 June. *Moel Tryfan* could only have been turned by visiting Boston Lodge, accompanied by the two ex-NWNGR carriages, and it seems unlikely the move thence from Dinas would have been made on the same day as one of the recorded special workings; furthermore Monday 21 May was the Whit Bank Holiday (although it is possible that that was little observed in the area). Perhaps the most likely dates are Wednesday 23, Friday 25 or Monday 28 May. One of the Beddgelert shots shows the front end of *Moel Tryfan* receiving attention and the other, obviously subsequent, shows that the loco then ran round in order to return the train to Portmadoc, doubtless for more work to be undertaken at Boston Lodge. Both loco and carriages would then have had to return to Dinas before the end of the month



because the carriages, at least, were required there for working the ThSO round trips to Beddgelert. It is interesting that one of the Valentine photographs shows a couple of passengers in the train, presumably relatives of a railway employee out for a novel ride.

There has been an assumption that *Moel Tryfan* went to Boston Lodge for overhaul and ultimate conversion to the FR loading gauge at this time. However, unless *Russell*, the only other Westinghouse brake fitted loco, made a special journey to Portmadoc to collect carriage nos. 5 and 9, which seems unlikely, *Moel Tryfan* would have had to return the two carriages to Dinas and may well have been retained there for a while as a spare engine against emergencies, before moving to Boston Lodge later.

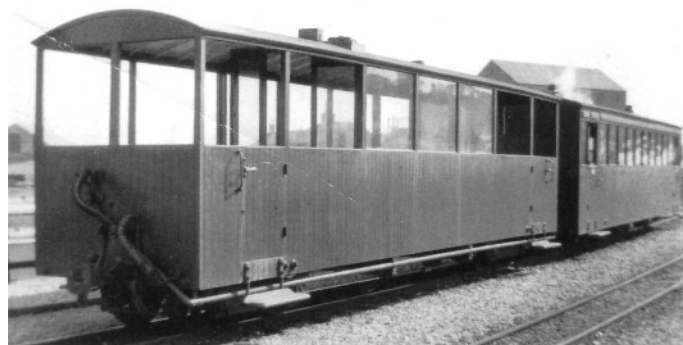
Five other odd photographs each add a little to the story of the WHR at this early period.



G.B.(?) Perkins' photograph of 'ex-NWNGR stock' outside the carriage shed at Dinas Junction.

A photo taken by G. B. (?) Perkins at Dinas shows three ex-NWNGR carriages coupled together, one an Ashbury semi-open, one an Ashbury open (both of which were eventually retained for the WHR and had vacuum brake gear fitted) and one the Metropolitan *Workmans* car no. 7 which was in due course disposed of. Furthermore, just visible through the open carriage is the ex-NWNGR Gloucester all-third Cleminson car, seemingly recorded as no. 3 at this time, which was also disposed of. We know little of Mr Perkins, beyond his (possibly) being 'G. M.' Perkins, the brother of T. R. Perkins the renowned railway photographer, and thus of the provenance of the photo. However, through the arch of the road bridge, one can glimpse the unmistakable end silhouette of an FR small engine, most likely *Palmerston*, and therefore the photo cannot have been taken prior to 9 May 1923.

Two photos most likely taken in June or early July 1923 show that where trains included a separate brake van this was

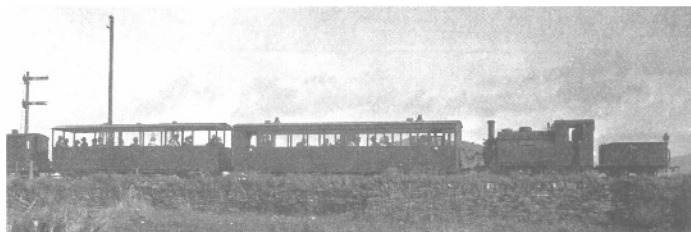


G.H.W. Clifford's photograph of carriages no. 8 and 10 on the loop at Portmadoc New - WHHG 33



*Prince* at Snowdon Ranger with a train comprising carriages no. 8 and no. 10 with 4-wheel brake van to rear - Arch 4189(2)

shunted at each turn round so as to always follow the carriages. These photos were one by G. H. W. Clifford depicting carriages nos. 8 and 10 standing alone at Portmadoc New, and one of unknown provenance showing *Prince* being watered at Snowdon Ranger while hauling carriages nos. 8 and 10 plus an FR brake van.

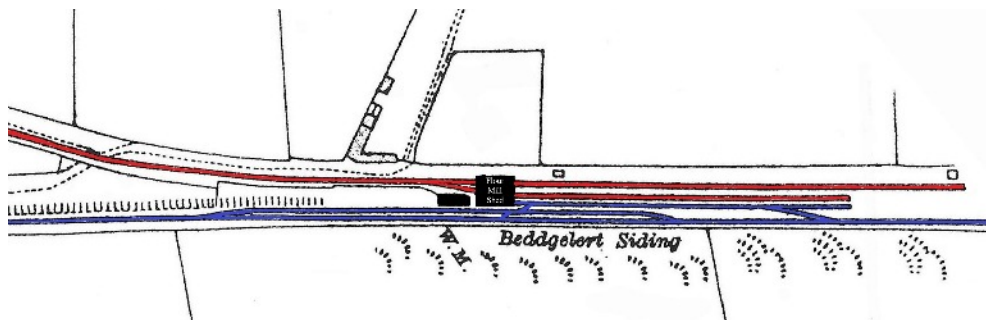
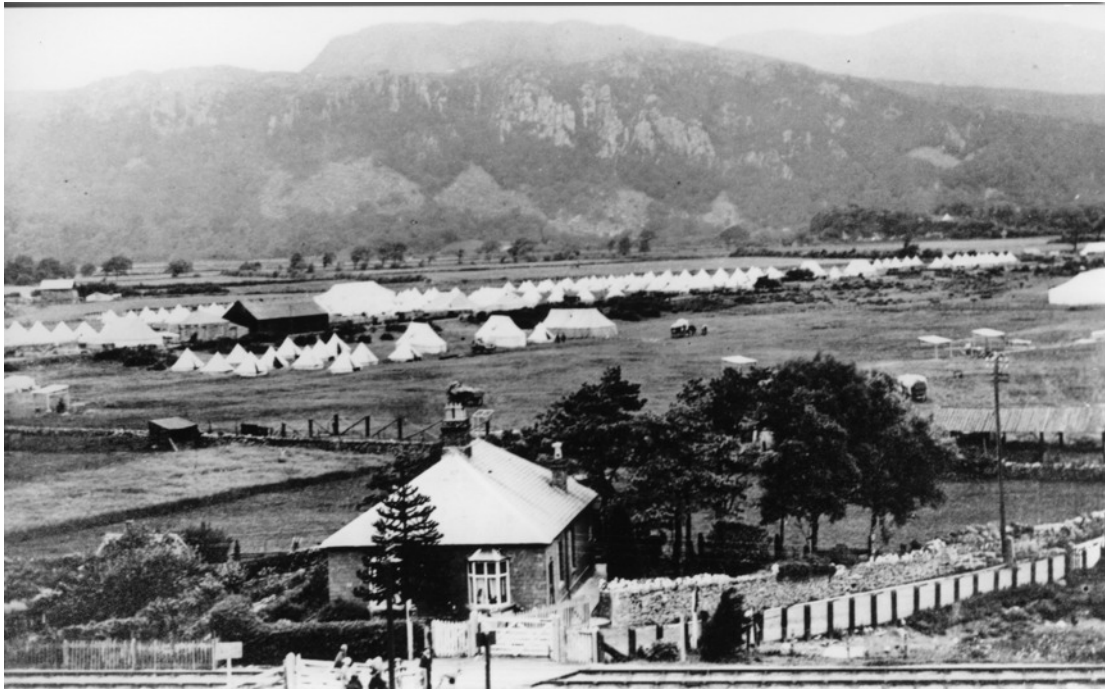


*Prince* heading into Portmadoc New from the north. Above - Arch 5398 Below - WHHG 4 (Arch 0273)

Finally there are two photographs taken in the vicinity of the Cambrian Crossing which both depict *Prince* heading a WHR train into Portmadoc New station. One shows a train formed of carriages nos. 10 and 8 tailed by FR brake van no. 5, which might possibly depict the inaugural working of the 09:50 from Dinas on June 1 (although that can only be supposition). However, this is the same train formation seen in WHHG 16. The other (WHHG 4/Arch 0273) is a Topical Press photo which also depicts *Prince* arriving at Portmadoc New but this time hauling Pickering brake compo no. 4 plus a train that cannot be seen, thus confirming that the problems with no. 4 were quickly solved.

The inaugural timetable continued until Saturday 7 July, being replaced from Monday 9 July by a more ambitious three train service made practical by the arrival of Baldwin no. 590 at Dinas to work the Bryngwyn goods, thus releasing *Russell* for full time passenger work. The story of that timetable and its train workings has been covered previously, in WHH20 (<https://is.gd/pCZw0n>), in notes presented by Michael Davies.

# Portmadoc Flour Mill Tragedy.



Looking north over the level crossing by which Snowdon Street crosses the standard gauge railway to the east of both the main-line station and today's Gelert's Farm. The Croesor Tramway's tracks ran between the tents, in front of the Weigh House and the Flour Mill's shed seen above, and to the left of, the bungalow by the crossing - photo ca. 1914 - Arch 3641. The sketch map shows the relative positions of the shed and the weigh house and the standard gauge tracks (red) and narrow gauge tracks (blue)

A tragic accident to an employee of Portmadoc Flour Mills occurred in the afternoon of Thursday 15 September 1904 at the site of the Flour Mills shed on Pen-y-mount sidings, Portmadoc.

At the inquest held by Mr. O. Robyns Owen, the South Carnarvon coroner, the following day, it was found that John Jones, aged 32, of Saw Mill Terrace, Portmadoc, was run over by a shunting train at the Pen-y-mount [recorded as 'Penmount' by the *Cambrian News*] siding on the Cambrian Railways on the previous afternoon and fatally injured. Amongst those present at the enquiry were Mr. C. Roberts, foreman of the jury; Mr. W. K. Minshall the Cambrian Railway's solicitor; Mr. Caer Jones on behalf of Mr. Jones' family; and Mr. J. Humphreys of the Flour Mills Company.

The inquest heard that John Jones and Robert Evans, a checker employed by the Railway Company, were covering a loaded truck of flour bags when the accident occurred. Evans was on the outside and Jones on the inside stood in

## Once again, Dick Lystor has been delving into his 'Health and Safety' Files.

the space between the two tracks. The truck they were covering was on the line alongside the Mills shed, and the shunting train was on the other line. The train caught Jones at the back, causing him to fall backwards onto the line, and three wagons of the train passed over

both his legs at the thigh, causing extremely severe injuries to both limbs.

Three doctors attended the scene, the first being Dr. W. Williams, who was called about three o'clock. He said that Jones lay where the train had run over him and was conscious and moaning with pain. He was in a state of collapse and quite unfit to be moved. Both his legs were very severely damaged and all that could be done was to keep the circulation going, and to alleviate the pain. Doctors Jones Morris and H. Griffith arrived a little later and after some discussion the three doctors decided to move him by ambulance to his home. At six o'clock, some three hours after the accident, Jones sadly passed away due to heart failure and shock as a result of his injuries. In reply to questions from the coroner and jurors, Dr. Williams

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# From the Editor

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As we enter 2022, as well as wishing each other 'all the best' for the coming year, we recognise that a period of focused celebrations will shortly be upon us as we enter the WHR 'centenary years'.

Much of this issue of *WHH* has, quite deliberately, been focused on this particular moment in history. Each of these articles (page 1, page 6 and even my photo analysis on page 12) speak for themselves. My efforts to bring the NWNGR Fairlie notes into line by covering the NWNGR to WHR transition haven't quite worked out so that will have to wait for a later issue. As we will be covering this process probably up to *WHH* 99 (June 2023 - the 100th anniversary of the official opening of the complete Welsh Highland) it is perhaps as well that not all material should be used now!

**Continued from Page 10** understood that from what Jones had said, that he blamed the shunter.

R. Evans, Portmadoc, a flour checker working for the Railway Company, said that he, Jones, and J. Williams also from Portmadoc, were working together, but Williams was not present when the accident happened. Jones was on one side and he was on the other side of the truck, and as it was loaded high up he could not see Jones. Suddenly he heard cries from Jones and going round saw him lying on the line over which the shunting train had just passed. He then went on board the engine and travelled back to the railway station and called for a doctor. He could not say whether the mill hands were to help cover the trucks, but they always did. He also said that the shunting train had passed up and down several times before the accident.

G. Humphreys, pointsman, said he was on the shunting train. He was in a wagon some distance in front when the accident happened. When he passed Jones he did not think he was in a dangerous position. There was plenty of room between the two lines, (it was found that the space was 3ft 4 ins.) and Jones greeted him as the train went past. When the additional wagons were coupled on immediately before the accident, no special warning was given. It was not customary to warn those working on stationary trucks.

G. Pheby, shunter, who was six or seven wagons away when the accident occurred, was of the same opinion as the previous witness in that he did not consider that Jones was in a dangerous position. He directed the pointsman to see if everything was alright and on his signal to that effect, the train started.

In his summing up, the coroner said that it was clear from the evidence that it was a pure accident and no blame could be attached to anybody. The jury returned a verdict of accidental death and passed a vote of condolence to the family of John Jones who left a wife and two children.

The funeral took place on Monday 19 September at the Cemetery. However, it was disturbed by an extraordinary incident. The procession was nearing the cemetery when a runaway horse and cart from Pentrefelin, nearly two miles

Apropos of this point, I would like to remind readers that this Journal can only be as good as its inputs and your Editor would really appreciate your assistance in this matter - I would like something to edit!! The next five issues of *WHH* (95 to 99) will be all the better for inputs on 'centenary' topics, either specifically focused or of a more general nature. We currently have 268 members and it would be of considerable assistance if even a small percentage of members were able to contribute articles covering their own areas of interest.

Meanwhile, from my own notes on pages 1 and 2, I am struck in particular by the coincidence that the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the NWNGR Co. enabling act and the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the formal opening of the complete WHR will, later this year, lie within one week of each other!

away, almost collided with it. One of the mourners managed to catch hold of the horse and stop it, but not before one of the shafts of the cart had caused serious injury to a horse in the procession. That horse sadly died the following day.

In late October/early November, a compensation claim was made against the Portmadoc Flour Mills Company by Ann Jones for £164 damages in respect of the accident to her husband. At the Portmadoc County Court on Wednesday 2 November, it was heard that she and her two children aged five years and five months respectively were dependant on the late John Jones.

Her barrister said that the Flour Mill Company not only carried on business in Portmadoc, but also in Liverpool, Chester, and other places. He said that the accident happened on the premises of the Cambrian Railways. Describing the working methods of the mill, he said that some materials were delivered to the premises from a steamer along the Croesor Railway, and some via the Cambrian Railways at Pen-y-mount sidings. There was a loading stage and shed which was part of the mill's property. The narrow gauge line was rented by the company for £75 per annum, a fact that was disputed by the Flour Mills barrister who said that the line was not exclusively rented by them. When the Cambrian brought goods to the loading stage, the Mill Company took their own trucks alongside. Plans were produced showing the position of the various lines and sheds. He further said that the mill employees worked both inside and outside the mill and on the day of the accident three trucks had been loaded in the morning and Jones was covering them with a tarpaulin in the afternoon on the sidings.

The Judge was satisfied from the evidence that the accident did not happen on Flour Mills property, so did not implicate them. The Cambrian Railways Co. was under an obligation to cover the goods supplied by the mill but allowed mill employees to help in covering the wagons. The appeal was dismissed, each party having to pay their own costs.

(Adapted from Reports in the *Carnarvon & Denbigh Herald* 23 September, & 4 November, 1904, and the *Cambrian News* of the same dates.)

# Peter Liddell's Photo Analysis



The Toy Railway Postcard - 1923 - WHR 155

When the photograph was taken, the Pickering had yet to be cut down - No. 4 had its roof lowered in March 1924 and its livery was enhanced in July 1924, when it gained the additional markings *W. H. RLY.* and was given the number 8.

The carriage adjacent to the locomotive, Baldwin 590, was indeed an Ashbury but, as examination of the enlargement below will confirm, this was one of the FR Ashbury carriages acquired by that railway in 1897/8, some 4-years after the NWNCR had acquired their Nos. 9 and 10.

This combination of carriages indicates that this particular train was vacuum-braked and therefore, at that time, would



I do, on occasion, follow the Group's Facebook page - I normally would have nothing to do with 'social media' - and I couldn't help but notice discussion regarding the photograph above (top left). In light of articles elsewhere in this issue, it struck me that it would be worth examining this photograph here.

When I first acquired the Group's electronic photo Archive, the description appended to this photograph suggested that the carriages were both NWNCR vehicles, Ashbury Corridor No. 10 and Pickering Brake Composite No. 4.

Careful examination of this photograph showed the notes almost to be correct. The rear carriage was a Pickering and the routing of the vacuum brake pipe across the rear face of the vehicle shows this to have been No. 4. This carriage was one of those select few briefly to be fitted with both air and vacuum systems - vacuum brakes fitted alongside the existing air brakes to allow additional stock flexibility when the railway was operated by both NWNCR and FR locomotives. The vacuum pipe and hose mountings had to be installed whilst the air brakes were still in situ, hence the distinctive pipe routing.



*Prince*, fitted with chopper couplings, at Portmadoc New with a train comprising an FR Ashbury (21 or 22) and a WHR Pickering, because of braking restrictions, Pickering No. 4 - Summer 1923 - G.H.W. Clifford - WHHG 39 (Arch 0308)

have required an FR locomotive or 590, the first of the WHR locomotives to be fitted with vacuum brakes.

As we see in the Clifford photograph above, this carriage pairing appears to have been retained at least for a short period over the early weeks of full WHR operation. Here, of course, it was again operating with a vacuum-fitted loco.

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