

WELSH HIGHLAND HERITAGE

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BETWS BOW BRIDGE LIFTED

It was November 2nd, it was Betws Garmon and it was raining. Not just ordinary rain but that singularly North Wales version of the wet stuff with stair rods in both vertical and horizontal planes. A cold wind whipped down from the snow sprinkled peaks; it was the day on which the 1872 bridge which spanned the Afon Gwyrfai on the NWNGR was due to be lifted. Sadly, the 130 year old bridge was deemed not to be strong enough to carry the proposed new loadings, so unfortunately it had to go. However it will be replaced by one of a similar design.

Although J.I.C. Boyd suggests that the original bridge had been replaced by a steel one, recent test carried out by the FR confirm that it was indeed constructed of wrought iron, which perhaps explains the relatively low level of corrosion. As built, the bridge had a 48 feet clear span, and was supported by masonry piers.

On an historical note, before the re-introduction of passenger services to South Snowdon in 1922, Col. J.W. Pringle inspected the section on 22nd

More photos on back page

July and reported to the Ministry of Transport three days later. In his report he noted that the new longitudinal timbers sleepers had been laid and that timber decking had been renewed on one side of the bridge. However Pringle recommended that decking should be provided on both side of the track to ensure safe passage for permanent way men working in the vicinity. It is interesting to note that the rails were offset from the centre of the bridge, thus creating a wider walk way on the side nearer to



Bridge lifting in progress. Photo D.W. Allan
- 2nd November 2000

the road - see back page picture. But now the time had come to end its 130 year vigil at this remote location. A giant crane posed - silent, alert and unmoving on the banks of the river, like some science-fiction heron waiting to dart into action. An articulated lorry, parked alongside, awaited the lifted bridge. A fenced roadway of compacted slate waste, recovered from the nearby Hafod y Wern slate quarry, had been driven in from the main road to the old station site. This process had revealed the two upright rails which had once supported the station sign, just in from the road. The whole process was under the watchful eye of soft spoken Irishman, Ray, of Messrs Triact.

The removal operation began with cutting the cross members away from the bowed sides of the bridge using oxy-acetylene equipment. The crane then lifted each of the severed cross members from between the sides and placed them on the lorry. Eventually this left only the unsupported bridges

sides themselves. The chains were placed amidships by a member of the demolition team who had scrambled along the outside edge of the bridge side, perched somewhat precariously a few feet above the icy fast flowing waters of the Afon Gwyrfai, which was in full spate. A few bashes with a crow bar, a heave from the crane, and the side came away with barely a protest from its supporting abutments. It hung, somewhat doubtfully for a few seconds, above the river as though reluctant to leave the place where it once had seen the likes of 'Snowdon Ranger' and 'Moel Tryfan' as they went about their daily business of transporting goods and passengers to the village of Rhyd Ddu. It then swung high above the river before being gently placed on the waiting wagon. The second side was similarly treated before joining its partner on the wagon. So one of the enduring features of the WHR/NWNGR is no more, but at least its look-alike replacement will in time mellow and blend with its dramatic location.

OF HARPS AND BUSES

In the 1930's, one member of the Eryri Harp Choir was doing her teenage best to promote the Welsh Highland, whilst the choir's conductor was operating a competitive bus service!!

Most readers will be aware of Miriam Roberts' gracing the Beddgelert station scene, dressed in national costume, and doubtless doing her bit to placate passengers awaiting their connection, particularly as it might well have been raining! Perhaps Miriam should be more accurately described as an 'hostess', as opposed to 'station mistress', greeting and talking to passengers at this frontier station.

The Eryri Harp Choir was formed in 1930 by Edith Mary Evans, often referred to as 'Edith' Cwmcloch, a farmhouse on the route from Beddgelert to the top of Moel Hebog. She had been taught to play the harp by Nansi Richards and that instruction provided the start of a fifty year friendship. The choir is generally portrayed with these two harpists and four or five singers, one of whom was Miriam. Miriam's sister Flo, and Edith's sister were also involved. The first concert was given in Beddgelert in April 1930 and the first outside the village was in



Miriam poses with a passenger on the Beddgelert station seat circa mid thirties.

demise in 1976 had given over

two thousand national concerts. So Miriam's national costume, which she still wore proudly on railway occasions in the 1980's, served a dual purpose.

In 1927, coincidentally the same year that Colonel Stephens was appointed Receiver to the Welsh Highland, William Samuel Jones started 'W.S. Jones Motor Services, Beddgelert, and by so doing presumably put another nail in the

4.00pm. There was a daily service to Caernarfon, which on

Saturdays started at Nantgwynant so that villagers could travel to Caernarfon

John Keylock strays a little from strict railway heritage matters!

market. He also ran Sunday School trips and offered car hire. Perhaps he even provided the transport when

the WHR train failed? His garage was located near where 'Y Warws' now stands, and he usually operated three cream and brown buses whose driver's included Miriam's older brothers Griffith and Pierce. W.S. Jones was also conductor of the Harp Choir! Not unreasonably his buses would be used to transport the choir to their engagements, together with their harps in the trailer, and it is often suggested that they (the choir) would have to find their own petrol money!

Mr Jones also operated a coal merchant's business in Beddgelert - but that is another story!

This photograph taken in 1934 by J.T. Suffield, and almost certainly in Beddgelert, shows one of those early buses with a Pwllheli destination board. It may very well have been one owned by W.S. Jones Motor Services.



Criccieth the following October. The choir travelled far afield to publicise North Wales and had a special trailer for their harps. The choir reformed after the war and by the time of its

WHR coffin! A bus left Beddgelert at 8.00am, long before any train was timetabled, taking schoolchildren to Porthmadog. A return trip for a similar purpose left Porthmadog at

AGM
Advance notice - Heritage Group
AGM is set for May 13th 2001

BETTWS GARMON SHEEPDOG TRIALS - 1923

By good fortune, certain original WHR documents have survived, thus allowing us a glimpse back in time to the earliest days of the railway. A small collection of four such documents concerns the arrangements for passenger revenue from the Vale of Bettws Garmon Sheep Dog Trials, held at Ystrad Farm on 21st and 22nd September 1923. On these two days, excursion tickets were available at reduced prices from both WHR and FR stations, and a special handbill was printed advertising the train service, (see WHHG Newsletter No. 2, p5).

The earliest of the documents is dated 24th August 1923 and is a reply from the FR to R.G. Roberts, Secretary of the Trials Society, stating that excursion tickets were in force from Bangor and Caernarfon to Bettws Garmon and that return tickets would be issued from stations on the WHR at 'less than the sum of two singles'. A table of train times and fares was included, the details of which were slightly modified on the later handbill.

The other three documents detail the takings from the principal WHR stations after the event. Two are memos, both dated 25th

Derek Lystor ponders an accounting mystery!

September 1923, from S.E. Tyrwhitt at the Traffic Office Portmadoc, to the Stationmasters at both Portmadoc 'New' and Beddgelert. They request the total numbers of passengers booked and the receipts. The third is a reply from D.O. Jones on 27th September regarding Dinas and South Snowdon. Both O.C. Davies at Portmadoc 'New' and H.D. Jones at Beddgelert returned the memos to the Portmadoc office with the relevant information annotated, whilst D.O. Jones gave a more detailed answer on LMS stationery which is reproduced here.

There were no passengers from Beddgelert; Portmadoc provided three with a revenue of 9/3 as can be seen; fourteen took advantage of the train from Dinas and seven from Snowdon (sic). The Dinas to

Snowdon return appears to be straightforward, but close examination of the figures reveals some unusual anomalies. Reference to the special handbill of the period shows the fare from both Dinas and South Snowdon to Bettws Garmon to be 10d. Study of the 'small print' confirms that all tickets were returns ('...nor will any allowance be made on return portions not used'), yet Jones reports sixteen singles having been issued. It is reasonable to assume that those wishing to take a single journey were simply charged the usual fare of 6d, the receipts tallying accordingly.

The takings from South Snowdon however are not so easily explained. Assuming that the correct fare of 10d was charged for the return journey and the current 6d fare for a single journey, the total revenue should have amounted to only 4/10d. Even if all seven passengers had been charged 10d, the total would still have been only 5/10d - so how did Jones arrive at 6/6d?

Clearly there is a discrepancy here, but I offer one possible explanation. At the time South Snowdon was staffed and the tickets were issued from the premises. There had been a sheep dog trial the previous year and a handbill had been printed to publicise excursions to it. The fare from South Snowdon was 1/-, with half fare for children between three and twelve years. Could it be that the ticket staff had referred to this old handbill erroneously and charged these prices? If one of the seven passengers was a child at half fare and no allowance was made for single journeys, the revenue would have been 6/6d as reported by D.O. Jones. The three singles were presumably those people who chose not to return by train and thus did not give up the return stub. All this is pure speculation, but it does seem that passengers from South Snowdon paid

WELSH HIGHLAND RAILWAY.
London Midland & Scottish Railway.

7/3/24
In your reply 10/7/24
DEPT. STATION. Dinas
37. 1/2 1923
Bettws Garmon Sheep Dog Trials
Particulars of income are as follows:-
Dinas
Singles Returns Amount
13. 1. 7. 4.
Snowdon
Singles Returns Amount
3. 4. 6. 6
A. Jones
S. E. Tyrwhitt Esq
General Manager

rather more for their journeys than their fellow travellers from Dinas! There is a similar mystery in the reply from O.C. Davies at Portmadoc 'New'. As stated three passengers paid a total of 9/7, two paying 3/- and one paying 3/7d. The handbill quotes the fare as being 3/-, whilst the table contained in the letter to the Secretary of the Trials Society stated 3/7d with 3/- added in pencil alongside. Was 3/7d a typing error and did one poor soul pay 'over the odds' before it was corrected? This would seem unlikely as 7d in 1923 was not an inconsiderable sum of money. Far more likely was the fact that as 3/7d was the fare from Penrhyn on the FR, this may have been a case of a passenger rebooking at Portmadoc. In the absence of any special tickets from the period, and it is doubtful that any were produced, some mystery must remain. I would welcome other reader thoughts.

My thanks to A.M. Davies who supplied copies of the documents. Copies of the handbills are available from Heritage Sales, 5 Brockton Place, Arley Kings, Stourport on Severn, Worcestershire, DY13 0LE.

WELSH HIGHLAND

John Keylock writes - "This tabulation owes much to the work of the late Michael Seymour, who for many years was both the FR's Honorary Archivist and Chairman of their Heritage Group. Over the years he also conducted research into the WHR's history and activities, indicative of the inseparability of the two lines. Inevitably, and pleasingly, new information has been gleaned in recent years mainly by Derek Lystor, who has compiled the accompanying summary. His interest and knowledge of WHR carriages has enabled him to identify most of the carriages in the

vast majority of photographs of WHR passenger trains.

If any reader has comment to make regarding this table they might like to contact Derek at:- 14, Teign Village, Hennock, Newton Abbot, Devon, TQ13 9QJ.

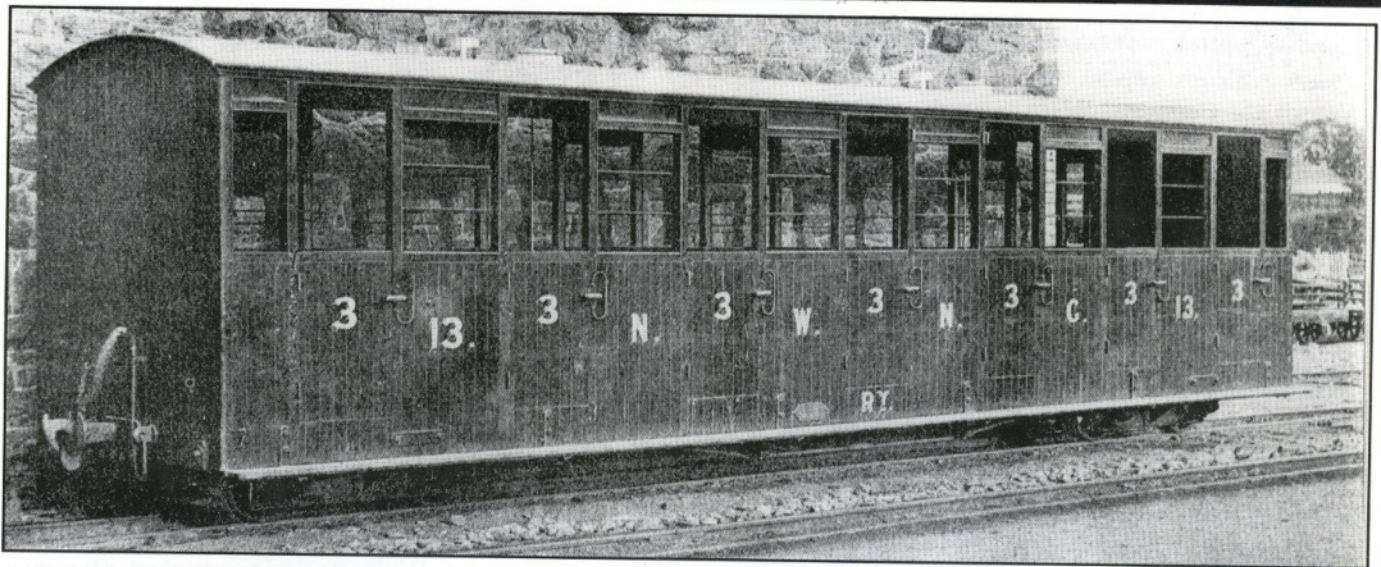
The photograph opposite shows Ashbury No. 13 (NWNG) at Dinas shortly after arrival in 1894. This much improved print comes from a plate glass negative from the collection of the late Arthur Rimmer, and whilst probably a copy, it comes much closer

to the original than anything far. It is print No 1a in the (Porthmadog) series. The carriage was one of the last four passenger carriages purchased with funds made available by a new issue of Debenture. When new the livery was light green on upper panels and chocolate below with gilt lettering etc. on the sides. The formation of the WHR all carriages were painted dark green, retaining this until the line was closed. The company name does not appear to have been carried on the sides. The unglazed 'windows', fitted

BUILDER	DATE	NWNG No.	WHR No.	TYPE	CLASS	COLOUR 1934-36	NOTES
PICKERING	1907	4	8	Brake	Grds 1st 3rd 3rd	Green	3/24 - roof lowered. 7/7/24 - Re-numbered '8'. 8/24 - 'W H R L' in cast iron letters fitted to sides. 2 bars on windows, 1 on central compartment.
PICKERING	1907	5	9	Brake	Grds 1st 3rd 3rd	Grey	5/24 - roof lowered. 17/7/24 -- referred to as 'No. 9'. 8/24 - 'W HIGHLAND RLY' in cast iron letters fitted to sides. 1 bar on 2on guard's compartment.
METROPOLITAN	1891	8	29	Tourist	1st	Red	7/23 - vacuum pipe fitted - 'old material'. GLADSTONE CAR ('Inspection Saloon'), restored by WHR (Porthmadog) and run at Gelert's Farm.
ASHBURY	1893	9	25/35	Corridor	3rd	Green	4/24 - roof lowered. 5/24 - fitting AVB, renumbered '25'. 5/36 repainted. 4/24 'WELSH HIGHLAND RAILWAY' painted on sides, this did not survive later repaint. 14 'windows', 3 roof vents, 1 bar on windows, later renumbered '35'.
ASHBURY	1893	10	23/36	Corridor	1st 3rd	Green	12/23 - renumbered 23, overhauled & painted. 3/24 - roof lowered, repainted. BUFFET CAR (1927). 'W H R' painted on sides, not survive later repaint. 14 'windows', 2 roof vents, 2 bars on windows. Under restoration by WHR (Porthmadog) at Gelerts' Farm
ASHBURY	1894	11	26	Summer semi-glazed	3rd	Blue	4/24 - under alteration. 5/24 - roof lowered, AVB fitted. 7/24 - renumbered '26' & 'WELSH HIGHLAND RLY' in cast iron letters fitted to sides. 15 'windows', partly glazed, full running board on FR
ASHBURY	1894	12	24	Summer semi-glazed	3rd	Yellow	4/24 - Vacuum brake fitted, roof lowered, couplings altered, renumbered '24' & 'WELSH HIGHLAND RAILWAY' painted on sides, this did not survive later repaint. 14 'windows', partly glazed, full running board on FR
ASHBURY	1894	13	28	Summer unglazed	3rd	Green	7/24 - having roof & woodwork completed. 9/24 - renumbered '28' & 'WELSH HIGHLAND RLY' in cast iron letters fitted to sides. Full running boards. 5/36 - repainted.
ASHBURY	1894	14	27	Summer unglazed	3rd	Pink	7/24 - paint burnt off, renumbered '27' & 'WELSH HIGHLAND RLY' in cast iron letters fitted to sides. 15 'windows', with 2 bars fitted to running boards.

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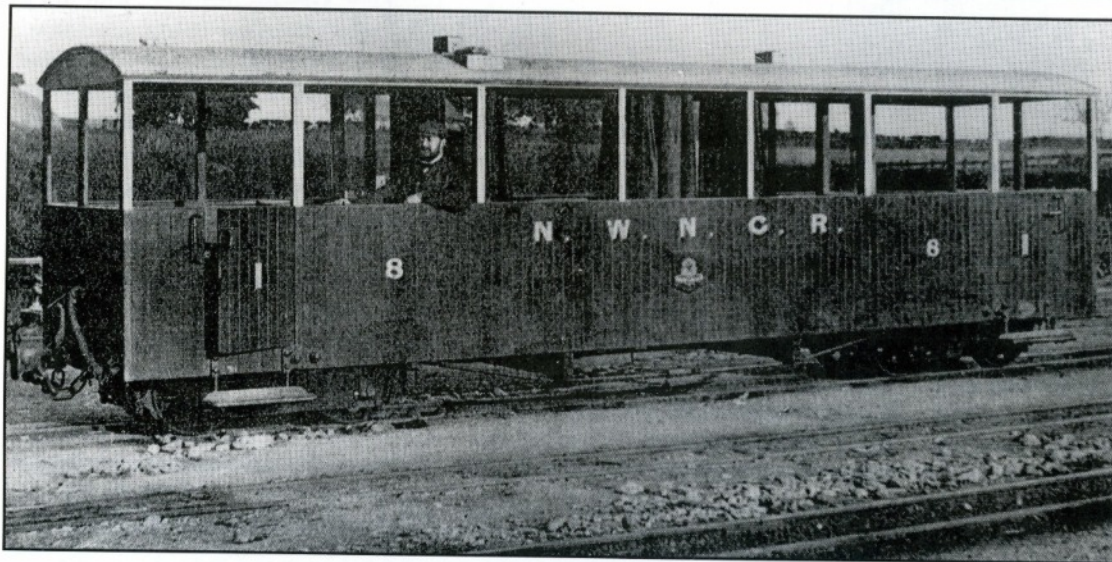
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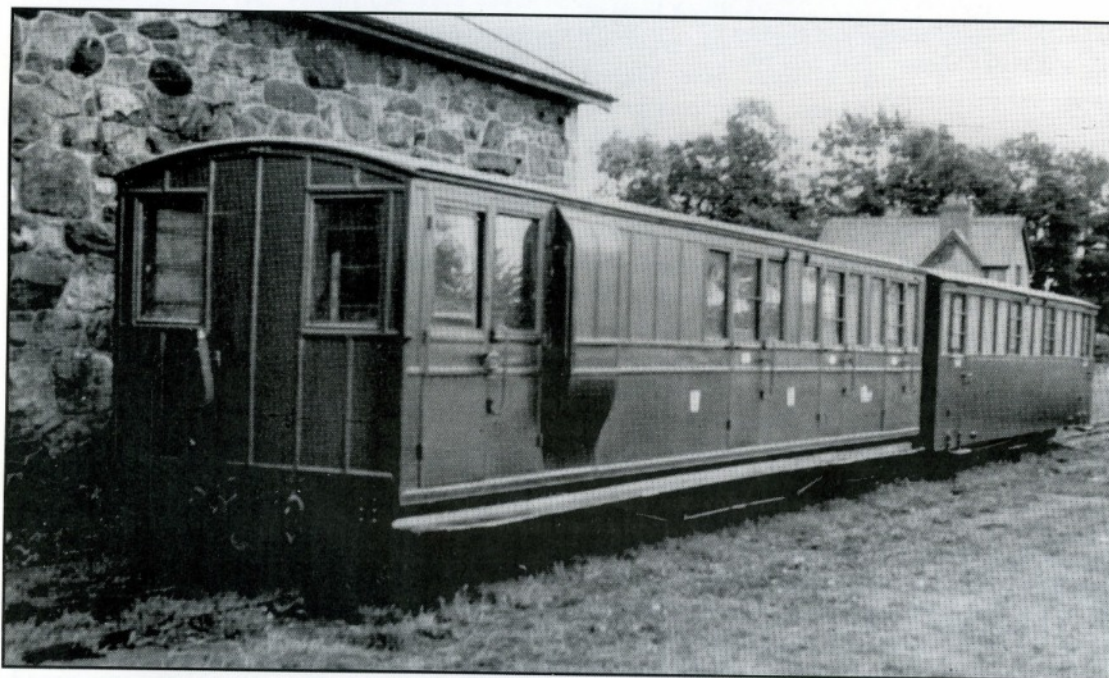
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Well known C1894 print of NWNG No 8, later the Gladstone Car. This print from Arthur Rimmer's collection is of much better quality than previously available. Note the curtained windows of the central portion and the Company Crest below the letter 'N'. The figure posing in the open compartment is Dinas station master - Mr Tanner.



This splendid photograph is courtesy of FR Archives from the collection of the late Michael Seymour. It shows the 1907 Pickering brake composite (WHR No. 8) in the foreground, with the Buffet Car (WHR No. 23/36) coupled behind. The picture is taken at Dinas, the year is unknown, but an educated guess puts it at 1936.

THE VANWIL OIL COMPANY

Contact has recently been made with Mr Evans and Mr Williams - now 80 - who ran the Vanwil Oil Company, which opened for business in the 1920's. Their Caernarfon depot was originally on Victoria Dock before transferring to St Helens Road. (See 'The WHR - a Phoenix Rising' P83 - top by WHHG member John Stretton). The Company also had depots at Llan Festiniog and Dinas and finally sold out to North Western Farmers in 1989. Their depot at Dinas is of most interest to the Heritage Group for it was here that four underground storage tanks were constructed plus an oil store and a petrol pump. The tanks were for the bulk storage of petrol, paraffin and diesel, most of which was delivered to Dinas by standard gauge railway tanker. Such tankers would have been parked on the siding just outside the Caernarfon end of the Goods Shed, parallel with the siding that entered the shed. From this location a pipeline ran along the top of the embankment behind the goods shed to feed the tanks in the yard, between the narrow gauge entrance to the goods shed and the station master's house. The various fuels were simply siphoned

from the rail tankers.

The petrol pump (see photo in Newsletter No 5 P7), was installed in 1934, but subsequently replaced, after having been damaged by a lorry! It was calibrated to deliver - by manual operation - between one and five

John Keylock delves

gallons at a time. At its base was a semi-rotary pump with a five gallon capacity tank at the top. The main purpose of the petrol pump was for filling customers' two gallon cans. Road vehicles were not supplied with fuel at Dinas.

Vanwil blended their own oils in what can best be described as a machine similar to a farmhouse butter churn! The oil store - perhaps as opposed to 'petrol store' as referred to in Newsletter No. 5 - had delivery hoses dedicated to the various products and a sign on one end of this corrugated iron building read "Petroleum Spirit Store; Highly Inflammable; Caution; etc."

It is reasonable to assume that Vanwil were agents for the Vacuum Oil

Company, there having been an advertising sign for this company on the St Helens Road premises. Furthermore - and bringing the story right up to date - during railway rebuilding between Dinas and Waenfawr (sic) most of the original NWNGR metal crossing gates were recovered for preservation and possible reuse. Attached to the centre of one was an 11 inch x 8 inch metal plate. This had been in use for many years as a farm notice. However the reverse of this notice, and clearly its original use, was an enamel Mobil/Vacuum Oil Company advertisement - red and black on a white ground. Fortunately there is an Heritage Group member who may well be able to help with its restoration. A June 1942 aerial view of Dinas Junction, taken by the late Arthur Rimmer shows the pipeline on the embankment behind the goods shed, also the oil store and other familiar buildings. By the time of this photograph the track had been lifted and the areas bounded by the Refreshment Room, the station building, the goods shed and the station master's house were heaped with coal - it was wartime.

WELSH HIGHLAND CHRONOLOGY - 1928

25th January

Unsuccessful trial with Austro-Daimler tractor and Hudson coach between Portmadoc and Pont Croesor. (See July 1925).

March

£7.00 paid to Hugh Roberts for repairs to guard's van. Posts (for fencing?) purchased from Forestry Commission. Evan Jones, Castle Square, Carnarvon - supplied firewood, fence posts and cycle tyres to the line. (WHR employees who had to cycle to work were paid an allowance of 1/- per week).

11th June

Though trains re-introduced with the commencement of the summer timetable.

18th June

Introduction of 3rd Class Cheap Day returns from Dinas and Beddgelert.

July

Arrival of Kerr Stuart diesel at Dinas for trials - mainly working the Bryngwyn branch. '590' available for passenger duties as a consequence.

9th July

Buffet Car entered traffic - working between Dinas and Beddgelert.

24th September

Winter service came into force with one full return working. Portmadoc 'New' and Beddgelert booking offices closed.

October

Service further reduced - Dinas to Beddgelert, Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays only.

31st October

Kerr Stuart fitted with new silencer at Dinas.

Winter

Baldwin petrol tractor (later 'Moelwyn') fitted with vacuum brake in connection with proposals to work winter service with one coach.

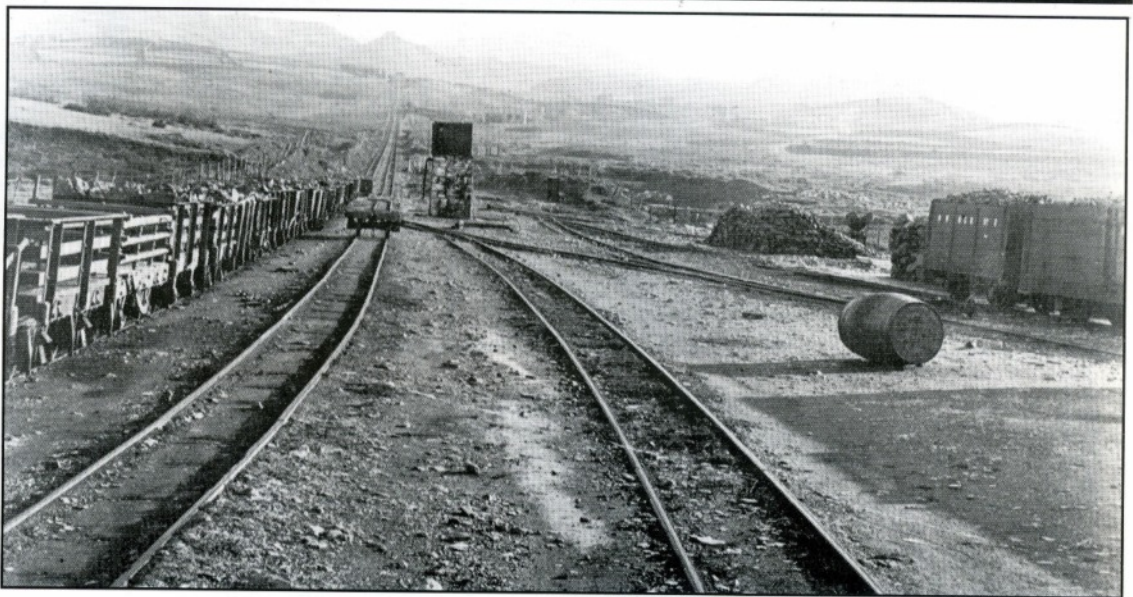
December

Circular issued advertising return tickets at ordinary fares for distances of ten miles or over, available for three months.

Annual loss - £339. Number of tickets sold - 7405.

THE 'UP' BRYNGWYN GOODS

Fortunately several driver's logs have survived for the month of March 1928. Ten of these cover the Bryngwyn Goods 'Up' (and 'Down') workings. Both 'Russell' and the Baldwin, '590' were used on this turn with William Hugh Williams driving and David Lloyd Hughes as guard. Logs of a later period also



record the 'stoker' - please note, not 'fireman' on this railway! The drivers' log noted the weather prevailing during the trip - 'wet', 'stormy', 'very stormy' and sometimes 'fair' - perhaps not surprising for March in North West Wales.

For this 'duty' the stoker would have reported to Dinas at about 5.30am to light the fire. He would have been followed by the driver at 8.00am who would 'oil round' and check the

John Keylock returns to March 1928 to explain the nature of a WHR goods train to Bryngwyn

engine. Departure from Dinas was scheduled for 9.30am but the train seldom got away on time. Consequently the 10.15am timetabled arrival at Bryngwyn was only achieved on two of the journeys under review. Between three and six minutes were spent at Tryfan Junction, and on one occasion two covered wagon loads of 'manure' i.e. fertiliser, were detached here presumably to be collected or unloaded by local farmers. It is also recorded that 'manure' was unloaded at Bod-aden, where a convenient crossing lies adjacent to the farm, and Dolaugwyn, which is located between

Bryngwyn - looking up the incline, photographed during the NWNG era. Note the two stacks of coal and the coal merchant's scales. Also note the two wagon loads of coal - the wagon on the extreme right being half of the Cleminson 6-wheeler. Other items in the picture include a drum of oil and the shadow of the goods shed. To the right of the water tank can be seen Glan Dwr slate mill. Photo is WHR (Porthmadog) series 109, collection C.J. Keylock, original is courtesy of Snowdon Mountain Railway.

Bod-aden and Wernlas Ddu on the same side as Bod-aden.

An average train departing from Dinas would consist of some eighteen wagons and a brake van. Eight would be 'slate empties' for working up the incline, plus nine trucks of coal and the odd covered wagon for such as bagged fertiliser or cement. However the majority of freight was destined for Bryngwyn and consisted mainly of coal, some of the

coal wagons would be detached at Rhostryfan to satisfy the coal merchants there. Besides the cement and fertiliser other items carried included casks (containing what, one wonders?), girders and improbably, slate! This latter item must have been destined for the Bryngwyn slate mill to be 'worked' there. It was probably of a variety or quality not available from the quarries at the top of the Bryngwyn incline.

Up to an hour would be spent working the incline and about half an hour shunting the mill and/or the coal siding. Ten minutes would be spent at the water tank before returning to

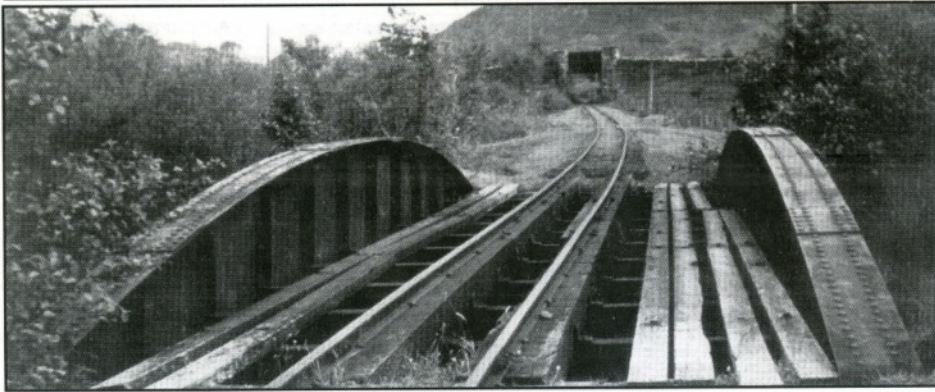
Dinas with essentially loaded slate wagons and coal empties. Departure was scheduled for noon but again this was seldom achieved. However the 'Down Goods' is another story!

Photographs of freight trains on the WHR are few and on the Bryngwyn branch in particular - non-existent. However it is hoped that the above photograph will give some idea of the destination of the 'Up' Bryngwyn Goods.

The original driver's logs were double sided with 'Up' being on one side and 'Down' on the other. Bill Rear has kindly produced transcriptions of all these logs which are single sided. There are thirty-four sheets in all, featuring journeys made in March 1928. These are available at 10p per sheet plus postage, from Derek Lystor 14 Teign Village Hennock, Newton Abbot, Devon, TQ13 9QJ

Membership
Membership of the WH
Hereitage Group now
stands at 159 fully paid up
members

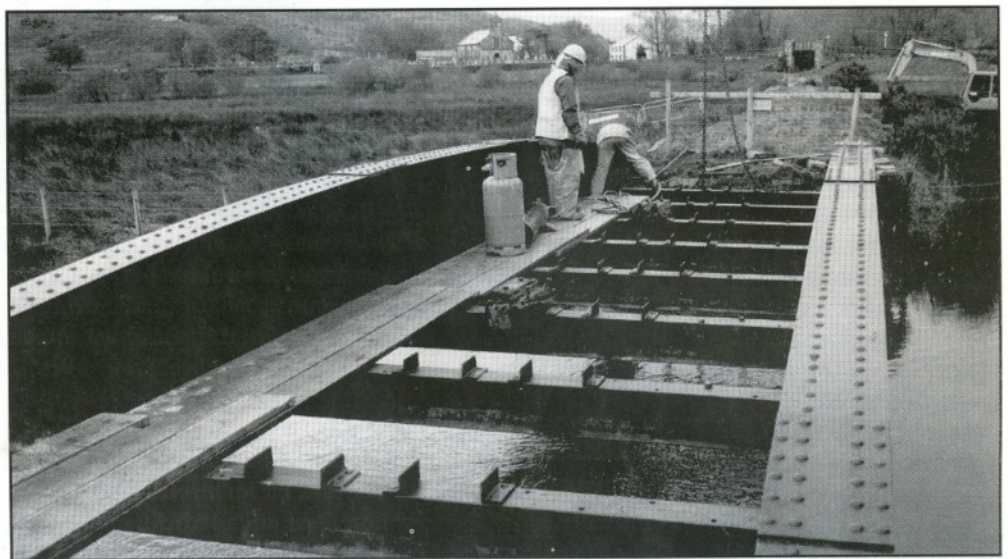
BETWS BOW BRIDGE - PICTURES



Left is the Betws Garmon bridge showing the rails, note how they are offset. The timber walkways insisted on by Col. Pringle in his 1922 report look less than safe! Also visible are the railway's telephone poles (you can see the looped wires on the original print), also the accommodation crossing to the north of the bridge, and in the distance the jack arch bridge carrying the Beddgelert road. Photograph is by kind permission of J.I.C. Boyd. The picture below is of the same scene on the 2nd November 2000 (D.W. Allan)

The pictures below were all taken on the 2nd November 2000. They show the sequence of events during the removal of the Betws Bow Bridge. (L-R top row) - Picture 1 - attaching the chains to the first cross member - note the life saving equipment extreme left! Picture 2 - Only the sides remain.

The jack arch road bridge is clearly visible and the vegetation has gone revealing the delightful church at Betws (Bottom row) - Picture 3 - Lifting the sides - viewed from the road. How would this bridge have been constructed in 1872? Would a crane have been built on site? Picture 4 - Suspended animation! - The last side goes - note the irregular side panels. (All photographs D.W. Allan)



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