

Recording Yesterday for Tomorrow

WELSH HIGHLAND HERITAGE

£1.00

Issue No. 24

ISSN 1462-1371

June 2004

JAMES CHOLMELEY RUSSELL



26th June
1841

29th August
1912

Collision at Nant Mill

NORTH WALES NARROW GAUGE RAILWAY

Evidence.

Railway Department, Board of Trade,
8, Richmond Terrace, Whitehall, London, S.W.,
August 15th, 1906.

Sir

I HAVE the honour to report, for the information of the Board of Trade, in compliance with the Order of the 2nd August the result of my inquiry into the causes of the collision which occurred on the 31st July, between a passenger train and a runaway truck at Nantmill, on the North Wales Narrow Gauge Railway.

In this case, a coal truck attached to the 9.47 am mixed train from Tryfan Junction, broke loose when nearing Snowdon and ran back on the steep gradient, meeting the 10 am excursion train from Dinas to Snowdon, near Nantmill over-bridge.

Seven passengers complained of slight injuries, and the driver, fireman, and guard of the train were also slightly injured.

The train consisted of a six-wheels-coupled bogie engine with a trailing bogie, and of two bogie coaches and a bogie van, fitted throughout with the Westinghouse automatic brake.

The mixed train consisted of a similar engine, and of one bogie coach and a bogie van, with a coal waggon attached to the rear of the train.

Only the wheels of the trailing bogie of the engine left the rails:

Details of damage to rolling stock are given in the Appendix.

There was no damage to the permanent way.

Description.

This railway runs from Dinas to Snowdon, and is a single line of 1 ft 11½ in gauge, with passing places at Tryfan Junction and Waenfawr.

It is worked on the Train Staff and Ticket system, combined with the absolute block telegraph system.

The section in which the collision took place is between Waenfawr and Snowdon. The gradient between the point of collision and the place near Snowdon where the waggon broke loose, is a rising one, mostly steep, varying from 1 in 74 to 1 in 100, but for a length of 47 chains just ahead of the point of collision it is only 1 in 551.

T. Beaumont, driver, states:

I have been 15 years in the Company's service, all the time a driver. I came on duty on the 31st July at 7.45 am to work till 5.30 pm, having come off duty at 5.30 pm on the 30th. I was driver of the 10.00 am excursion train from Dinas to Snowdon, and reached Waenfawr about 10.25 am to drop passengers, and gave up my train staff to Mr. Hughes, the station master. He gave me the Train Staff for the section Waenfawr to Snowdon, and he made no remarks. We stayed about 2 minutes, and had got as far as Nantmill Bridge when I ran into a coal waggon. There was a speed restriction just there, and I was slackening speed. I only got 15 yards view of the waggon owing to a curve and the overbridge. I shut the regulator and put on the brakes but could not prevent the collision.

Report of an accident at Nant Mill (between Salem & Plas y Nant) on the 31st July 1906. Research by Dr Jarvis

Mr J Hughes, station master, Waenfawr Station, states :

I am 68 years of age. I have been 29 years stationmaster in charge at Waenfawr. On the 31st July I was offered the mixed train from Tryfan Junction at 9.57. I accepted it same time and received "Train entering section" signal same time. It was accepted by Snowdon at 10.03 and left Waenfawr 10.03 am. I did not get "Train out of section" for this train from Snowdon. I accepted the excursion train at 10.19, I got "Entering section" at 10.19. I offered it to Snowdon and it was accepted by the man there at 10.25 and it left Waenfawr at 10.25am. On the 30th and the 31st July I did not wait to get "Out of section" signal for the mixed train before letting the excursion train go forward, but worked to the same timetable. About 10.37 am I got a message from Idwal Owen, the station master at Snowdon, saying "not one of the trains arrived here yet", but I could do nothing.

Idwal Owen, station master, Snowdon, states:

I have been 17 years in the Company's service, all the time at Snowdon. On the 31st July I accepted the mixed train at 10.03 am, and I received "Entering section" signal for it at 10.03 am. I was offered the excursion train at 10.25 am and accepted it at once, although the mixed train had not arrived. We never give "Train arrived" signal, as under our regulations this need not be sent unless special instructions are given for so doing. The mixed train arrived a little after 11 am.



Nant Mill overbridge 97 years after that heart stopping moment on the 31st July 1906. This is the view that driver Beaumont had as he saw the loaded coal waggon in front of his train. "I only got 15 yards view of the waggon owing to a curve and the overbridge"
 Photo D.W. Allan - July 2003

Conclusion.

This collision was due to the ordinary rules for train signalling by block telegraph on single lines of railway not being carried out.

A mixed train with a coal waggon attached in rear left Waenfawr at 10.03 am. An excursion train was following, and although Mr. Hughes, the station master at Waenfawr, had not received the "Out of section" signal for the mixed train, and though the train had not arrived at the end of the section at Snowdon, Mr. Owen, the station master at the latter place, accepted the excursion train when offered to him at 10.25 am by Mr. Hughes, and the latter allowed it to leave Waenfawr at that time. But the coal waggon at the rear of the first train got loose, by the centre buffer coupling becoming unhooked when about a mile from Snowdon, and this ran back on the steep gradient until it met the second train about two miles beyond Waenfawr. Fortu-



Panoramic view of the line showing the path of the runaway. Date & photographer unknown - track looks new therefore probably 1923

point there was 47 chains of 1 in 551 gradient so the waggon was running slowly, and as owing to the curve there is a speed restriction, the train was also running slowly, and the collision was not a violent one. Had it occurred further on, it might have been disastrous, as the waggon would have been running back at a very high speed.

It is most important for safety that the block regulations should be strictly carried out, and no train be allowed to enter a section until the previous train has arrived and a signal to that effect passed between the signal-boxes at either end. The Company's regulations which say that "The signal is only to be given at stations where special instructions are used to that effect," should be immediately altered, and the signal be

invariably used.

When the guard of the mixed train found the waggon at the rear of his train had disappeared, he stopped the train, and, after making the passengers alight, had the train backed down the single line to try and pick up the coal waggon again. This of course was an improper proceeding, and the train should have gone forward to Snowdon, where it was due at 10.27 am, and the Waenfawr station master informed that the train was divided, and the section obstructed. This would not have prevented the collision, unless the mixed train had arrived at Snowdon before 10.25 am., when the second train was improperly allowed to leave Waenfawr.

It is to be hoped that in future the regulations for block working will be strictly carried out in all cases.

The centre buffer book couplings in use on the coal waggons are evidently not to be relied on, and, to prevent breakaways, chain couplings should be fitted as an additional precaution.

I have, &c.,

E. DRUITT,
 Lt.- Col. R.E.

The Assistant Secretary,

Railway Department, Board of Trade.

APPENDIX DAMAGE TO ROLLING-STOCK. Excursion Train.

Locomotive - Leading end buffer and coupling smashed, and end plates broken; cylinder covers cracked; headstock plate bent; steam chest covers cracked; trailing end buffer broken, and headstock plate bent

Carriage No. 9 - Headstock smashed, and end plates broken; two panes of

glass broken, one seat disturbed.

Coal truck - End smashed in.

Eighty Years Ago - Part II

In \square Journal No. 20 of June 2003 I discussed Welsh Highland passenger services during the first summer of operation in 1923, and I will now conclude with some details of the services provided during the winter of 1923 and the summer of 1924.

The timetable dated October 1st 1923 was issued by S.E.Tyrwhitt, General Manager, Portmadoc on 28th September and showed no less than four through trains in each direction with an additional train on Saturday evenings. These last crossed in Beddgelert at 9.30pm and Portmadoc and Dinas were reached at 10.30pm and 11.10pm, the latest scheduled trains ever to run. Needless to say, they were not well supported.

Some interesting correspondence has survived from this period and an anonymous letter to Evan R Davies, the FR Secretary in London, is of more than passing interest. It is dated October 9th 1923 from 'a local well-wisher'.

'Sir, Pardon me for drawing your attention to the Time Table which you have for the Winter months? You have trains running too early in the morning and too late in the evening from Dinas to Portmadoc. Take last Saturday, for instance. The last train travelled all the way from Dinas to Portmadoc without a single passenger. Naturally one does not expect much revenue from the Railway during the Winter months, but deliberate and ruthless running of trains, regardless of cost, which can only result in Bankruptcy, is surely to be deplored!
Yours truly'

Davies wrote to Capt. May the Traffic Superintendent on Oct 11th requesting he give the matter 'Urgent attention', and in his reply the Captain states 'it is obvious to me whence the letter emanated' \square It seems rather odd that Davies should write to Capt. May rather than S.E. Tyrwhitt but the answer probably lies in the internal politics of the day. The October 1st \square Timetable Instructions were prefaced with some interesting notes. Notice was drawn as usual to the



alterations to the service, but it was then stated that the timetable 'has been made to last

until the end of the Winter season.

Michael Davies concludes his fascinating account of the Welsh Highland's 'Indian Summer'

Particular notice to be taken of what trains run in October, and from November on'. In fact, deep cuts became the order of the day as early as November 1st when the late Saturday trains were withdrawn after only four weeks operation. From December 1st even more cuts were made and the service was reduced to two through trains with an additional short trip to Beddgelert and a Saturday evening train from Portmadoc to Beddgelert.

We now come to 1924, the 'Indian' summer of WHR train services. Commencing in May four through trains were restored with two additional services between Portmadoc and \square Beddgelert. The first of these departed Portmadoc at 6.15 am to provide a 7.15 am depar-

Double Fairlie and crew posing on the water tower road at Beddgelert station in 1923. Only one of two known photos of this loco on the WHR

ture from Beddgelert, to enable passengers to join early morning departures on the

Cambrian Line. This is the earliest scheduled train I have found in a WHR timetable.

Commencing Monday, July 14th, the full summer service commenced with no less than five through trains and two short workings to Beddgelert, one of these running Thursday and Saturday only.

This was an all time high never to be repeated, indeed it may never be exceeded by our 21st Century railway! \square Fortunately, some notes survive amongst my records concerning the locomotive rosters for August 1924 which prove the fact that FR Double engines were rostered over the WHR in those early days. Two Double engines, a Single engine, a spare engine and the Top shunting engine were rostered for FR/WHR services, together with three WHR engines at Dinas.

See separate panel

It will be noted that the FR Double Engine worked one trip to Croesor Junction and then returned through to Bl Festiniog before making a second trip over WHR metals, this time to Beddgelert and back. It should also be

WHR/FR Loco Roster

BOSTON LODGE ENGINES

Double Engine 1

This turn covered five return journeys from Portmadoc to Bl Festiniog between 5.15am and 8.20pm.

One crew 4.45am to 1.49pm (Portmadoc New)
 Second crew 1.49pm to 8.50pm (Boston Lodge)

Double Engine 2

One crew on 9.00am to 4.00pm
 Second crew on 4.00pm to 11.00pm

9.38am (dep)	Portmadoc to Croesor Junction	(arr) 9.54am.
9.56am (dep)	Croesor Junction to Bl Festiniog	(arr) 11.29am
11.35am (dep) (SX)	Bl Festiniog to Beddgelert	(arr) 2.06pm
12.15pm (dep) (SO)	Bl Festiniog to Beddgelert	(arr) 2.06pm
Coaling at Bl Festiniog		
3.15pm (dep)	Beddgelert to Bl Festiniog GW	(arr) 5.16pm
5.18pm (dep)	Bl Festiniog GW to Portmadoc	(arr) 6.10pm
8.28pm (dep)	Portmadoc to Bl Festiniog	(arr) 9.25pm
9.35pm (dep)	Bl Festiniog to Portmadoc	(arr) 10.30pm

Single Engine

One crew on 10.00am to 5.45pm (ThSX)
 Or 10.00am to 9.30pm (ThSO)

10.10am (dep)	Portmadoc New to Croesor Junc	(arr) 10.35am
10.45am (dep)	Croesor Junc to Portmadoc	(arr) 11.14am
11.25am (dep)	Portmadoc to Dinas	(arr) 1.45pm
3.05pm (dep)	Dinas to Portmadoc	(arr) 5.38pm
7.35pm (dep)	Portmadoc to Beddgelert	(arr) 8.17pm (ThSO)
8.30pm (dep)	Beddgelert to Portmadoc	(arr) 9.19pm (ThSO)

Spare Engine

Spare crew.

5.40pm (dep)	Portmadoc to South Snowdon	(arr) 6.54pm
7.00pm (dep)	South Snowdon to Portmadoc	(arr) 8.24pm

Top Shunting Engine

One crew
 Out 7.00am shunt until 4.00pm (12noon SO).

DINAS ENGINES.

'Russell'

One crew 7.40am to 5.15pm (SX)
 One crew 7.40am to 12.15pm(SO)

8.10am (dep)	Dinas to Croesor Junction	(arr) 9.52am
9.57am (dep)	Croesor Junction to Dinas	(arr) 11.44am
1-20pm (dep)	Dinas to Bryngwyn	(arr) 2.11pm
3-55pm (dep)	Bryngwyn to Dinas	(arr) 4-35pm

'Moel Tryfan'

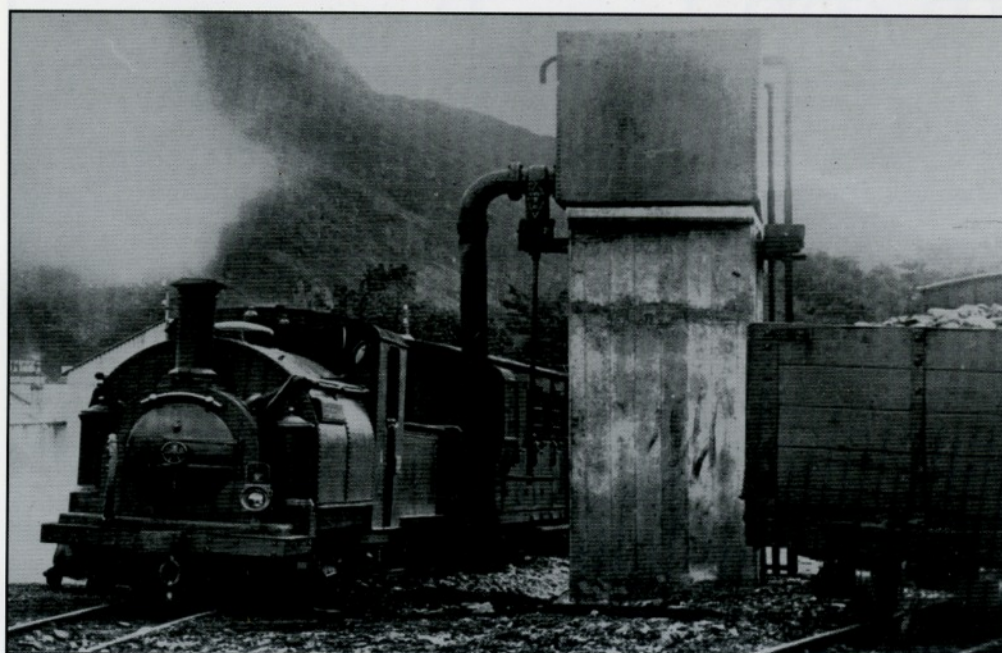
One crew 9.20am to 6.50pm

9.50am (dep)	Dinas to Bl Festiniog	(arr) 2.21pm
3.00pm (dep)	Bl Festiniog to Dinas	(arr) 6.15pm

Baldwin (or a Single FR loco)

One crew on 11.30am to 8.15pm

12.00 (dep)	Dinas to Portmadoc	(arr) 2.05pm
2.25pm (dep)	Portmadoc to Dinas	(arr) 4.45pm
5.40pm (dep)	Dinas to South Snowdon	(arr) 6.28pm
6.57pm (dep)	South Snowdon to Dinas	(arr) 7.45pm



'Little Giant' with a train of FR stock arrives at Beddgelert water tower in the summer of 1923. Note the loaded coal wagon in the siding.

noted that an FR 'Single' engine would be an England loco, and not the single Fairlie 'Taliesin'. The roster worked by 'Moel Tryfan' was the longest scheduled journey by any loco over the combined system, and the Dinas loco men (or at least the driver) worked through. This fact is confirmed by an Accident Report concerning the 3.00pm Down train from Bl Festiniog to Dinas on Saturday August 23rd 1924. The train consisted of FR loco 'Palmerston' piloting 'Moel Tryfan' and three WHR carriages. They were two of the Ashbury 'Corridor' carriages Nos 23 & 25, and Pickering brake compo No 9. The driver on 'Moel Tryfan' was Hugh Roberts, a NWNG man, whilst 'Palmerston' was in charge of Tom Davies from Boston Lodge. The guard was an FR man,

E Jones Griffiths, actually only a 'porter guard'.

The train became divided half way through the Moelwyn Tunnel due to Brake Compo No 9 becoming detached from the train. This appears to have been the result of incorrect use of the NWNG type coupling by the FR guard, and the train was stranded in the tunnel for about twenty minutes before 'Moel Tryfan' was able to propel back to Moelwyn Halt. Some twenty of the one hundred and ten passengers refused to continue their journey! We are not told what time the train eventually reached Dinas. When the Chairman, Henry Joseph Jack, demanded to know why the train was double headed, it was pointed out to him that the FR engine was going to

Portmadoc to work 'a trip from Portmadoc to Beddgelert and back, which arrangement was cancelled on the 28th instant as the public did not patronise the train in question'.

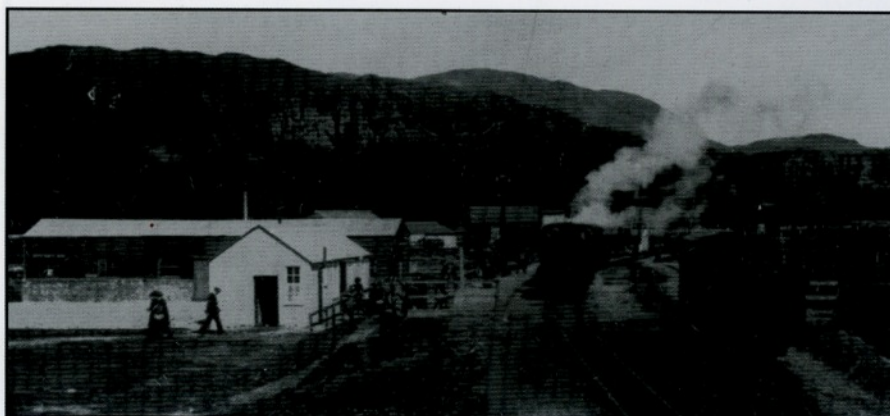
Despite the intensive train service offered, the public did not flock to the trains in 1924, and traffic figures (50000) were down by 8000 on the previous year. With the end of the summer service we once more find only two through trains from September 24th, but such were the losses that even these disappeared on December 15th. A sad day indeed only eighteen months after the first through trains and the high hopes of June 1923. Never again did the WHR enjoy the frequency of service provided in 1923/4, and

whilst 1925/26/27 summers saw at least two through trains and a Beddgelert 'short', by 1928 the service was reduced to one daily train. This continued, sometimes only on three days per week, until 1934, when the FR lease period at least restored two and sometimes three trains from Portmadoc to Dinas.

Now, nearly seventy years later, we can all once more enjoy the thrill of a ride over the NWNG section of the WHR, and let us hope that before too many summers have passed, we will be able to join a reincarnation of that 3.00pm train from Blaenau to Dinas, perhaps even rostered to 'Moel Tryfan'!

James Cholmeley Russell

Details of the life of this enigmatic man, whose activities were so intertwined with the North Wales Narrow Gauge Railway, have until now remained somewhat sketchy, and photographs of him were unknown. Thanks to some persistent research by WHHG member Nick Booker this has now been remedied. With great patience Nick has tracked down JCR's (as he was known) remaining relatives and he has gained access to the family's photo album which contained photos of Russell towards the end of his life, including the splendid hand-tinted picture on the front page of this issue. Nick's full account of the life of JCR will appear in the September Journal.



A busy scene at Portmadoc New (1923) station in those halcyon days of 1923. An England loco has just arrived from Beddgelert, and it looks as though the Snowdon Mountain Tea Room (left middle) is going to see some custom!

WHR Chronology 1940 - 1941

1940

23rd May 1940

Counsel's opinion sought regarding Winding up and associated matters

5th June 1940

Opinion delivered by W. Gordon Brown QC. The Company could be wound up under Sec 338 of the Companies Act 1929 after first determine the lease. An Abandonment Order would not be necessary

22nd July 1940

John Lloyd commissioned by Caernarfon County Council to inspect the railway. He reported that all stations were in a bad state of repair, although Snowdon Ranger and South Snowdon had been converted into dwellings. Obstacles had been built across the line in places

1941

January 1941

Meeting between Caernarfon CC's London solicitor and Chief Clerk at Chancery Chambers. Opinion suggested that if the Ministry of Supply requisitioned the rails under Emergency Powers, the undertaking could be effectively wound up and track disposal could take place.

January/February 1941

First mention of possible WHR preservation by Arthur Rimmer in 'Modern Tramways' magazine

March 1941

Letter (from Owen Prosser living in Peel, Isle of Man) to Caernarfon & Denbigh Herald - "something must be done to save the WHR"

5th March 1941

In reply to an enquiry the Ministry of Transport stated that there was "No justification in re-opening to continue to run at a loss"

13th March 1941

Ministry of Supply, (Iron and Steel Control) - requisition order granted, covering track, wagons, locomotives etc. Caernarfon CC petitioned for Winding-up Order

25th June 1941

Meeting at 56 Buckingham Gate, London between LMS and acting secretary of the FR Co arising out of a proposal that the LMS acquire 'land and other facilities' at Dinas station. LMS owed £150 for signalling expenses at Dinas 1/6/37 - 1/6/41! Vanwil Oil Company renting refreshment room from Snowdon Mountain Railway for use as a store. LMS paying D.O. Jones £170 per annum.

July 1941

Letter from the Liverpool and District Federation of The Rambler's Association to Gregory Williams (Receiver), proposing that the WH trackbed be dedicated as a walking route. The Leek and Manifold trackbed is quoted as an example.

1st August 1941

Supplementary order granted, covering coaches and other rolling stock. Assets sold to Cohens, who immediately began work on site

11th August 1941

First demolition train, petrol tractor & Gladstone Car, broke down near carriage shed

12th August 1941

Clearance train reached Tryfan Junction

13th August 1941

Tractor, bogie flat & slate wagon left Dinas at 10.45am and travelled through to Aberglaslyn tunnels, and then returned to Dinas

14th August 1941

Same train (as 13th Aug) ran right through to Portmadoc New (1931) station

21st August 1941

Letter to Liverpool Federation of The Rambler's Association from Clough Williams-Ellis (Council for the preservation of Rural Wales) in support of 'pedestrian right of way' along the trackbed.

16th September 1941

Preparations begun to free FR from the lease dated 26th June 1934

10th September 1941

Letter from holiday fellowship in London to Caernarfon & Denbigh Herald suggesting use of trackbed as a walking route for the public rather than it falling into private hands.

26th September 1941

Letter from V. Boyd Carpenter to J.F. Bolton informing of Cohen's intention to commence demolition on 29th instant. It was proposed to work from South Snowdon in both directions - it was hoped to have the Baldwin in steam.

20th September 1941

Letter from Sharples (Cwm Cloch) to D.G. Jones (clerk to C.C.C.) pursuing 1927 claim for £675. Because of 'financial difficulties' the railway company had still paid nothing.

October 1941

J.F. Bolton and V. Boyd-Carpenter visit WHR

1st October 1941

Demolition began on South Snowdon to Dinas section.

7th October 1941

Council's winding-up summons issued as WHR had no directors; meeting was arranged for 29/5/42 (q v)

10th October 1941

By this date only half a mile of track had been lifted

18th November 1941

Rhostryfan and South Snowdon stations requisitioned by the War Office (for Home Guard use)

9th December 1941

Cohens informed Boyd-Carpenter on demolition progress presently working on lifting track between Betws Garmon and Waunfawr. Two 26 HP diesel locos sent during week, one each for both northern and southern sections. It was hoped to complete demolition through to Dinas before commencing work on the Portmadoc section.

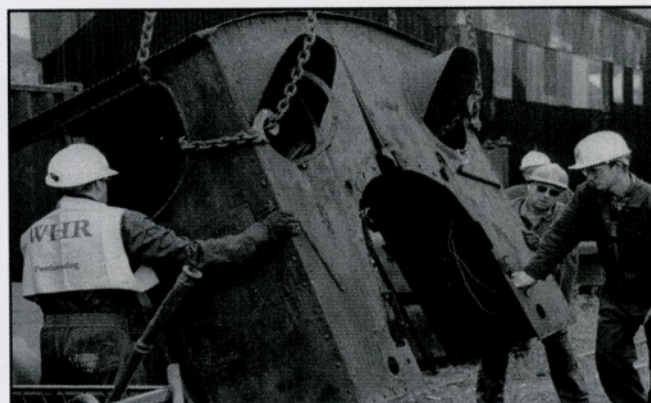
'The Baldwin' Arrives

The former Upper India Sugar Factory (Khatauli), Baldwin No WD794 arrived at Gelert's Farm on Friday 4th June 2004. The 'remains' were expected to be those of 'Tiger' but in the event the side tanks clearly carried the legend 'Lion'. But whatever this hybrid's ancestry it will be reborn as the former Welsh Highland Locomotive '590', known to WHR staff, rather unflattering, simply as 'The Baldwin'. The plan is to rebuild the machine as near as possible to the ex-WD Baldwin loco as purchased by Col Stephens in 1923, which ran on the line until closure in 1937.

The original machine was cut up in Dinas yard soon after the 'final' days of the line

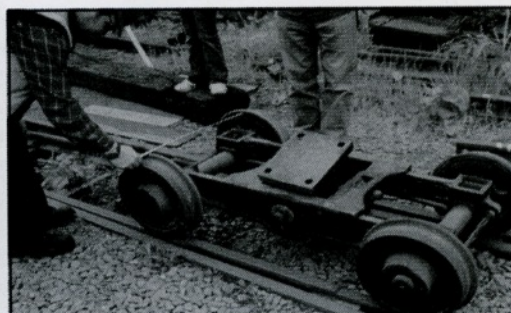
and the oxyacetylene cutters would have no doubt done a thorough job. How surprised they would be today to see the ghost of '590' re-appearing as it were from the cutters ashes!

The chassis and superstructure are now on display in the Gelert's Farm museum whilst the job is being assessed. Each component will be expertly surveyed and a management plan drawn up for the reconstruction work, which is expected to take some four to five years.



Above - the cab with its characteristic 'eye shades' is safely lowered to terra firma.

Left - the chassis of a Baldwin returns to Welsh Highland metals after an absence of over sixty years



Above - Making sure it fits! Measuring the 'back to back' of the pony truck. All photos David Allan 4th June 2004

Speculative Interpretation of a WHR Photo - C.J. Keylock

The accompanying photograph is from one in a series of postcards produced for sale at Beddgelert Post Office. Judging by the motorcar on the Beddgelert to Portmadoc road - to the left of the large tree in the foreground, it is of 1920's vintage. Of real interest is the length of track running from the gate/road bottom left to centre bottom. Being so close to the road this is obviously not Welsh Highland alignment as built, but more likely a length of contractor's track giving inclined access from road level to the trackbed. Thus assuming it would have provided the means of getting the

Bryn y Felin river bridge components to site - they having arrived at the gateway by the road. The gateway is still obvious today

between the cemetery entrance and Bryn y Felin. Unlike the PB&SSR there are no photographs showing McApline's construction of the WHR, so we can but speculate!

