

# WELSH HIGHLAND HERITAGE

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## Snowdon Mill Turnout Mystery

There is no better way to pass the day than staring down a hole. What do you think attracted me to the world of civil engineering? It's not so much the hole - it's what's *in* the hole of course that makes it interesting, so when the remains of a turnout was excavated adjacent to Snowdon mill in Porthmadog I just had to go and have a look. My interest was strictly professional of course!

### Dave High Investigates

By the time I got there the hole had gone, but fortunately the bottom of the hole had been laid to one side, and as is often the way with the bottom of holes what I saw was not what I expected to see. The photograph says it all.

The materials recovered are part of a turnout. No surprise there, it is well known that the siding at Snowdon mill was a loop, accessible from both ends. The recovered remains include a bell crank, a length of point rodding and the permanent way materials include a slide chair, so the rail is a stock rail. What is surprising is that the rail is a classic Festiniog double head rail, complete with 'S' chairs and a Spooner & Huddart fishplate. This gave me cause for thought, and to be honest I'm pondering still, as the bits and pieces I've gathered so

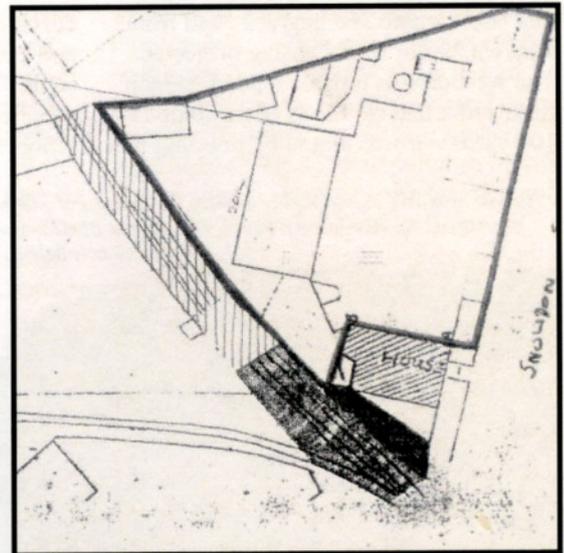


The excavated remains of the point in September

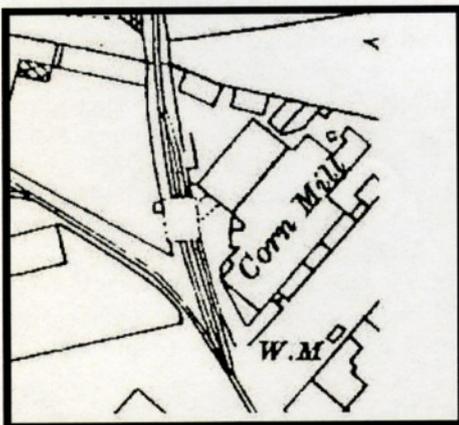
far take me further from, rather than nearer the scent.

The various bits of confusing evidence are:

- \* The extract of the 25" Ordnance Survey map for 1914-19 contained in Vic Mitchells' 'Branchlines around Portmadoc 1923-46'. (Below left)
- \* Part of the Land Registry map for Snowdon mill. This is dated 1980, but the information it contains and the style of the drawing clearly show that it dates from a much earlier era. (Right)
- \* The Boyd photograph of Pont y Cyt from the closure period. (Centre photo back page)
- \* The tender document for the junction railway prepared by Sir Douglas Fox & Partners
- \* The location of the materials recovered from site. (Top photo back page)



1980 Land Registry plan



Extract from 1914 - 1919 O.S. Map

The 1914-19 OS map and the Land Registry drawing both show the north end turnout of the loop to be on the embankment between y Cyt and the mill, and it is not unreasonable to assume that the Land Registry drawing reflects the trackwork from the same (Croesor Tramway) era.

Continued on back page

# The Welsh Highland at War

1941 was a frightening year for the British nation. There was an air of expectancy all around. If ever the cool reserve of the British was to be tested, this was the time; the Welsh Highland Railway was being lifted, and there was a war on. We all know of the existence of the Blacker Bombard Mortar bases, the best known example of which is in the Aberglaslyn Pass. However, not many people know what it is or how it was deployed. In this article I hope to shed some light on this weapon, how it was to be used, why it was there and about the men who may have used it. (See also *WHH journal No. 12 page 6*).

Our experience in France had shown that the tank was one of the major weapons the Germans possessed and they had a real knack for using them to best advantage. Therefore it was imperative that a simple, cheap, reliable, accurate and effective anti-tank weapon was available.

One of the weapons developed was the Blacker Bombard Mortar, or to give it its official title "29 mm Spigot Mortar (Blacker Bombard)", of which some 12,000 were ordered for Southern Command alone. It consisted of four support legs upon which a shield was mounted that could rotate 360 degrees, and from where a 29mm spigot casing projected. The weapon was muzzle loaded, breach fired and it had an effective range of 75-100 yards. It was aimed by pointing it at



the enemy, then raising the barrel until a pointer coincided with the appropriate range mark on the gunner's shield, the trigger pulled and the 20 lb bomb was 'lobbed' at the target on a

## Stacey Baker Reports from the Home Front

curving trajectory. There was also a 14 lb anti-personnel bomb. This had a range of some 785 yards. The whole ensemble weighed in at 350 lb, without any ammunition, therefore a large crew was re-

*Blacker Bombard 'plinth' at Plas y Nant (bottom left of picture), showing the 'field of fire'. The second mortar mount here was located on the trackbed at the northern end of the bridge.*

quired to move it into position. Hardly the thing that the Home Guard would be fit for; still it was all we had and its accuracy was described as being 'adequate'.

As its effective range was only 100 yards, it would be best deployed in a very well camouflaged ambush, getting off maybe two or possibly three shots before the enemy would pin-point its position and counter attack. Concerns regarding the weapon's portability led to the introduction of fixed firing bases, the now familiar cast concrete block with a stainless steel pin (officially known as the 'thimble') projecting from the top. The mortar itself was not popular with either the troops or the officers who had it at their disposal. Colonel Herbert, Officer Commanding Third Battalion Wiltshire Home Guard in 1941 complained, "It is apparently now only for use against moving targets up to 75-100 yards. Charming for the Home Guard who have to load it, from the front in full view of the enemy 100 yards away". A few days later he was writing to Southern Command again, "I have been told that fifty of these weapons are to be issued to my battalion, but I have no possible use for them; so they will merely add to the dumps of scrap iron already lying about in our Wiltshire villages." Apparently some commanders tried to trade them in for Tommy guns!

*The pile of stones, bottom right, indicate the remains of a defensive position above the middle tunnel in the Aberglaslyn Pass. The Blacker Bombard was located on the trackbed immediately below.*



So what role was this weapon intended to fulfil and why were they placed where

they were? To begin to answer this we need to look at some maps, firstly using a good atlas of the British Isles. Following the fall of France, the powers that be, with some accuracy, realised that invasion from the neutral Republic of Ireland was a very real possibility. An invasion fleet could sail from Norway and use Ireland as an attacking platform, (in much the same way that the UK was used in the liberation of Europe). Therefore not only was North Wales the potential 'soft underbelly' of the UK, but with clever use of its natural terrain, it could become a formidable defensive barrier to the industrial heartland of Britain.

Evidence of this can still be seen today at Fairbourne, where the remains of the beach defences are clearly visible from the adjacent A493. A glance at the Ordnance Survey map of the area (sheet 124) clearly shows that if the high ground was captured that it would make a perfect beach head for invasion. Nationally, High Command had decided to implement a 'Defence in Depth' strategy using a system of 'Stop Lines' and 'Nodal Points'. The idea was that the enemy would run up against a series of pre-prepared defensive lines each one slowing down the momentum of the attack and exhausting the attacking force until an overwhelming counter attack could be mounted on the, by now, exhausted attackers.

Extensive use was made of natural features such as rivers, cliffs and mountain passes, all of these features would 'funnel' the attackers to one easily defended point. Rivers were the preferred feature for the 'back bone' as these usually had a bridge at some point, and they often have a flood plain which is usually devoid of much natural cover and forms

*Blacker Bombard 'plinth' recovered from the northern end of Plas y Nant bridge*



an excellent 'killing ground'. You could sit on one side and then tactically withdraw as soon as the enemy looked like getting across.

*A typical Blacker Bombard installation. Compare with the installation at Plas y Nant on page 2. Photograph courtesy of the Imperial War Museum, London (neg No H30181)*

Three bases were constructed on the route of the WHR. One in the Aberglaslyn pass at and two just to the North of Plas-y-Nant halt. So why here? Again we need to look at the maps in question and observe the features around the located sites bearing in mind the above criteria.

Considering the Aberglaslyn pass first we can see from examination of the map that it controls access from the south to Beddgelert and was the only route to Caernarfon until the A487 was built. It is surrounded by very steep and rugged ter-

rain. A few men placed on the lower/eastern slopes of Moel Hebog would have a good view back towards Porthmadog. Also, due to the steepness of the pass itself, attack from the air would have been quite difficult and with three tunnels close by, air raid shelters were no problem. The importance of this feature can be gauged by the fact that not only was there the Blacker Bombard Mortar but also a sniper position on top

*Blacker Bombard 'plinth' sited in its permanent position in the Aberglaslyn Pass in tribute to the men of the Home Guard to whom we owe so much*





Above - 1942 photo of the demolition train at Rhyd Ddu by Arthur Rimmer, with two soldiers in uniform leaning against the end vehicle.

Below - ammunition recovered from the Pitt's Head/Beddgelert Forest

*had not remained a private soldier.... Our arrival more or less trebled the population... One was constantly hungry on a tedious diet of rabbit stew. Fortunately, because of the shortage of officers following Dunkirk, the training period was cut to ten weeks, and because of the shortage of equipment, we had to train with wooden models of mortars and anti-tank guns, both of them totally inadequate weapons. Andrew*

*(Cruikshank - 'Dr Finlay') and I had to guard the Beddgelert Pass against all invaders"*

of the middle tunnel. However this emplacement for the mortar was unusual as it was normal practice to sink them into the ground to provide cover for the crew whilst in combat - and somewhere to sit and drink tea while waiting. The War Department provided specification for the construction of these embrasures - but the Pass installation was mainly above ground level because of the obvious difficulty of digging a pit in solid rock. It now stands besides the track not far from its original position. (See photo in WHH No 37 for its original position).

One really must feel for the crews who installed these concrete bases as they were manufactured off site and, once set, moved into position with very little or no mechanical assistance.

An eye witness account of the defences in the Aberglaslyn comes from an unlikely source. Writing in his autobiography 'Anything for a Quiet Life', the actor Jack Hawkins, recalls - *"Once I joined that Officer Training Corps at Pwllheli in North Wales I began to regret that I*

Moving on to Plas-y-Nant, which was defended by two Blacker Bombards and two pill boxes. From the photograph on page 2 it is clear what an excellent field of fire these emplacements afford. Not only is the area is completely devoid of cover but the position is easily defended as the river is fast flowing at this point and there is a steep climb to the top. Also by damming under the bridge it would be very easy to flood the area in front of the position, where it already appears to be quite marshy. This would mean that tanks would be at a significant disadvantage when assaulting such a position. The only way to move any tanks up close would be by the railway embankment itself or the road, both of which could be very easily mined and/or 'pre registered'. Thus defensive artillery already knew where they were firing and at a pre arranged signal - usually Very Pistol flares - accurate fire could be brought down on the attackers. Review of the local maps show just what

a good defensive position this is. A deep fast flowing river to the front, clear lines of sight for at least a mile, also notice the high ground behind, which should provide excellent views in the direction of Beddgelert. Notice too how the trees in front of the position are comparatively young. I am only guessing but the Home Guard may well have deliberately cleared them to give a clearer line of sight while leaving the ones close to the

position to conceal them from the air.

The defence of this position at Plas-y-Nant could have been made even more effective by placing infantry in Beddgelert forest to snipe at the attackers as they moved up the A4085. A few more at Craig Cwmbychan would make this a bloody awful place to attack, not to mention using the buildings to force the enemy into house to house fighting. As part of the big picture, if the invaders had committed to this axis of attack, i.e. up the A498 and A4085 towards Caernarfon, one would guess that the Aberglaslyn Pass and Plas-y-Nant were designed as successive "Stop Lines" allowing the British Army to move up quickly from Caernarfon six miles away. If this is the case, the Home Guard would have had to hold out for at least an hour, if not two, from first contact at Aberglaslyn - no small task in the face of well trained, motivated and experienced troops of the Wehrmacht. However, there is no doubt that they would have stuck stoically to their task, and the mute remains of the mortar mounts in the Aberglaslyn and at Plas-y-Nant are a lasting tribute to their heroism.

It is well known that some rail was left in the area of Pitt's Head and that old slate trucks were used as targets for gunnery practice. No documentary evidence for this has yet come to light. However, to lend credence to the story the two pictures (left) are of a .303 rifle round (made safe!) found wedged in a dry stone wall on the trackbed near Beddgelert station and a 20mm heavy machine gun round recovered from the Beddgelert forest area. Thanks to Chris O'Connor, the Construction Company's Site Agent, for recovering these items and donating them to Welsh Highland archives.

In addition it is known that the Home Guard used Snowdon Ranger station as a Head quarters building, it must therefore be highly likely that South Snowdon station (Rhyd Ddu) was similarly used.. The photograph at the top of this page, sadly of indifferent quality, taken by Arthur Rimmer in 1942 shows the demolition train with two soldiers, clearly in army uniform, leaning against the rear truck.

Welsh Highland history is a fascinating blend of many facets that reflect the era, but even this remote and beautiful place did not escape unscarred from the mayhem that engulfed the world in 1939 - 45.



# What's in a Name

John Keylock

It has long been accepted that the bridge over the Afon Glaslyn between Prenteg and Llanfrothen became illogically referred to as 'Pont Croesor' with the advent of the WHR. Even today some local people refer to this location - more logically - as Pont(y)Traeth. Although the junction of the WHR with the Croesor Tramway is appropriately named Croesor Junction perhaps this naming did not come in to use immediately in 1923. 1923 conductors' (guards') forms for recording ticket sales refer not to Croesor Junction, but to Tanlan which is a hamlet between Pont Carreg hyllidrem and Garreg (Llanfrothen). A further earlier name is Ewr-fawr (large acre) Crossing. Ewr-fawr is off the main road between Pont Carreg-hyllidrem and Nantmor but is accessed by a track from near Carreg hyllidrem farm. A further track took one across two fields to within spitting distance of the junction. Another footpath took one the short distance from Carreg hyllidrem farm to the Croesor Tramway. Either of these points of contact would have qualified as Erw fawr Crossing. Initially there was a train staff section between Beddgelert and Portmadoc; HMRI. (Lt. Col Mount) regarded this as too long a section, so it was divided at Tanlan/Erw Fawr Crossing. Could this be the occasion when Croesor Junction became official? It will also be noted (see panel right) that Erw-fawr Crossing was referred to as late as 1926. In this context it is interesting to note that in February 1926 the railway was delivering 'deals & boards' and 'piling caps, timber & wire' from Porthmadog to Pont Croesor - see WHH No. 37. It is reasonable to assume that these items were for the purpose stated.

This article was prompted by Brian Paul, who kindly provided the translation from Herald Tach.

Map shows the place names which are mentioned in the text.

The red lines delineate the route of the Welsh Highland Railway. The green line shows the route of the Croesor Tramway. 'Croesor Junction' is located at the joining of the two lines.

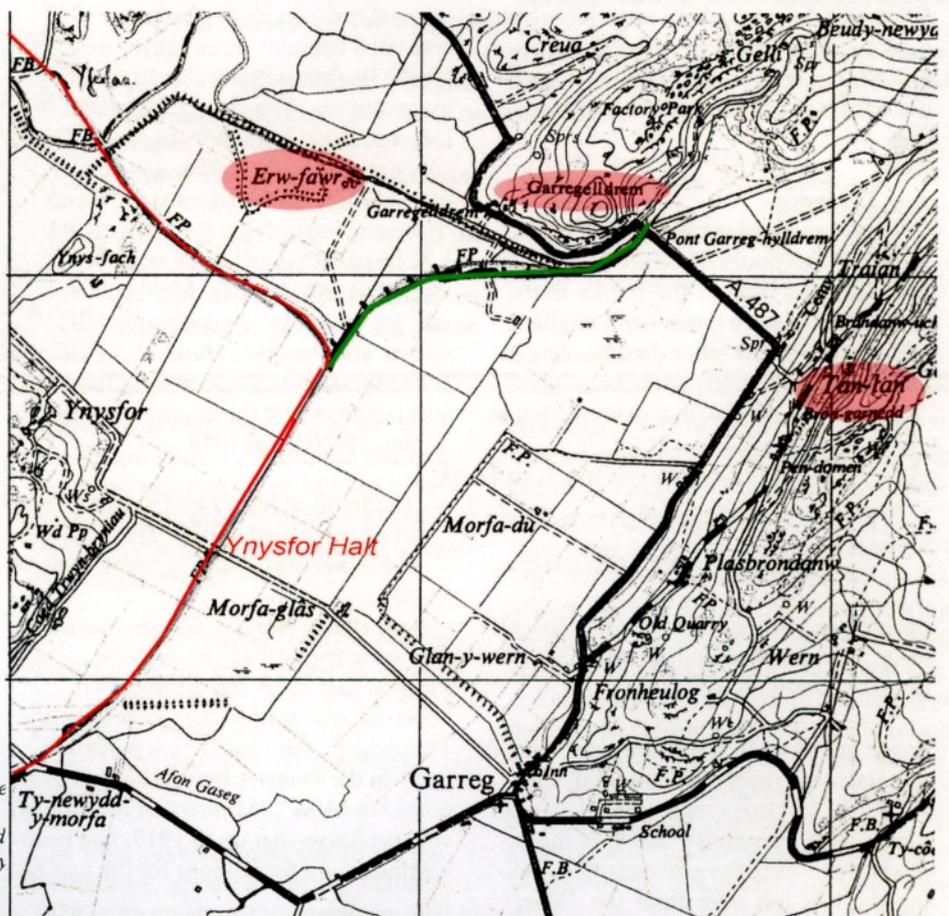
Extract from Iuan Brothen's column in 'The Welsh Herald' (Herald Tach) for 16th November 1926

## Misleading Name - and Advice

"There is a small station on the 'Welsh Highland Railway' near Prenteg that the company named 'Pont Croesor'. And if that name was unsuitable, would 'Prenteg' not have been a good name for it?"

It was heard recently that a guest preacher was making his way to Croesor Village and he bought a ticket for this station, which is miles from Croesor. Thinking he was going there or at least near to it, he was very disappointed since he had to walk that great distance through a storm until he was soaked to the skin.

So that no one else has a similar experience care should be taken to buy a ticket to 'Ynysfor Station' or better still to Erw Fawr Crossing, when going in the direction of Croesor. Also, certainly the name of the station should be changed to 'Pont y Traeth' or 'Prenteg'. At the present time the part of the bridge carrying the road is being made more structurally sound and safe, and when it is re-opened it will be suitable for all types of vehicles to cross it."



## Thought for Tomorrow

**"As the reconstruction of the railway moves nearer to completion increasing numbers of people will turn their thoughts to the heritage aspects of the project. We must be ready to enlist their help."**

**Chris Hazlehurst - Membership Secretary**

**See panel on page 12**

# The Life of "Gowrie"

## Background

The fate of 'Gowrie', the Hunslet locomotive purchased by the North Wales Narrow Gauge Railway in 1908, has always been something of an enigma. Indeed even the timing of the locomotive's departure and its subsequent arrival at J F Wake's yard in Darlington is a matter of speculation.

## Reasons for Disposal

Why did the NWNGR get rid of 'Gowrie'? Poor steaming has always been cited as one of the reasons. Many years ago, Keith Catchpole, when lecturing on the FR, defended criticism of the scrapping of 'Moel Tryfan' by saying that the cylinders were of gun metal, and had a high scrap value. Maybe the same motivation occurred in 1916/18, especially with a war going on. Whatever the truth, there must have been a basic reason that persuaded the NWNGR management to sell a 10-year-old Fairlie in preference to a 40-year-old one.

## The Evidence

Official returns made by the NWNGR from its Liverpool Office are confusing. They suggest that on the books from 1913 to 1915 were three 0-6-4 engines, and one 0-6-2, the latter disappearing in 1916. Just possibly the 0-6-2 was 'Russell', but maybe, due to confusion at

*Michael Bishop & John Keylock  
trace the final days of this  
enigmatic locomotive*

distant head office, or perhaps a clerical error, it could be an indication of the disposal of 0-6-4 'Gowrie'.

Sometime in 1916 the renewals reserve in the Balance Sheet was credited with £108.13.2 but this seems a small sum for a complete locomotive and it is more likely that this is the proceeds from selling the bits left over from the 'Moel Tryfan/Snowdon Ranger' amalgam.

It is certainly not unreasonable to speculate that the railway hung on to 'Gowrie' until the hybrid loco was ready for duty.

In the *FR Heritage Group Journal* No 36, Vic Bradley wrote: "The final evidence I have of 'Gowrie' being on the NWNGR is the spares order of 7<sup>th</sup> January 1916.

(The spares were for six brake blocks). The next positive evidence was a Wake's sales list which appeared in 'The Engineer' and 'The Contract Journal' in their issues of November 14<sup>th</sup> 1919". The sales list in 'The Engineer' stated the engine was rebuilt by Wake in 1918.

Vic Bradley therefore has veered towards a date nearer 1916 for the disposal, based on the last spares order, as mentioned above.

However, recently to hand, Hunslet's internal order book for the years 1917 and 1918 contains three orders from the NWNGR (but without identifying the locomotive). The first, K797 dated 20<sup>th</sup> December 1917 was for 'one steam spindle complete with stuffing box, gland and nut'. K925 of 29<sup>th</sup> January 1918 was for '6 brake blocks drilled' for £4. 5s, while K2215 of 19<sup>th</sup> April 1918 was for the same, but only £3. 6s. Maybe one set was for 'Gowrie', replacing the 1916 spares, and the other 'Russell'. If indeed one set was for 'Gowrie', then this also suggests that the engine was still on the NWNGR in 1918.

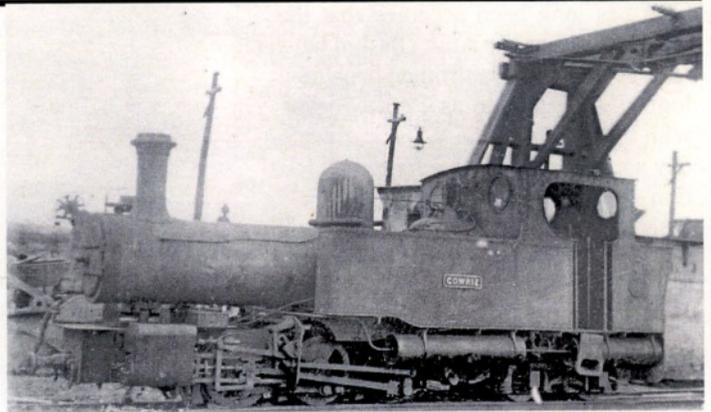
The issue of May 24<sup>th</sup> 1919 of a short-lived periodical called 'The Locomotive News and Railway Notes' reported:

**'North Wales Narrow Gauge Railway'**-  
*'We have heard it on the highest authority that last year the Locomotive 'Gowrie' was sold to the Government'*.

This may be confirmed by a pencilled entry in the Hunslet Engine book which notes "to M/M", (Ministry of Munitions) who we know that up to 1917, had been writing round for engines for the war effort.

In February 1917 an order was made that railway material was to be classified as 'war materials'. So any intended sale should have been brought to the Ministry's notice when a permit (to sell) was applied for.

A further clue is provided by another pencil note in the Hunslet Engine Book.



'Gowrie' at Wake's Yard in Darlington circa 1919  
-collection late J.A. Pedon

According to Geoffrey Horsman (in 'The Narrow Gauge' No 118) this reads 'Scottish Boiler Insurance Co. report it at

## 'Gowrie' - chronology

### 1916 - January

Order for spares to Hunslet

### 1917 February

In February 1917 an order was announced that railway material was to be classified as war material.

### 1918

An advert in 'The Engineer' (see 1919) stated the engine was rebuilt by Wake in 1918

### 1919 - May

Report of it being sold to the Government

### 1919 - November

Wake's sales list in 'The Engineer' and 'The Contract Journal' in their issues of November 14<sup>th</sup> 1919".

### 1922 - Summer

Seen in Wake's yard with a Wake rebuild plate

### 1923 - March

Offered for sale both to the Great Western (for the VOR) and to the Festiniog by Messrs Ridley & Young of Darlington (presumably acting for Wake).

### 1926 - October

The Real Photographs photographer recorded it still at Wake's yard in October 1926

### 1927 - April

Subject of a correspondence to 'The Railway Magazine' of April 1927

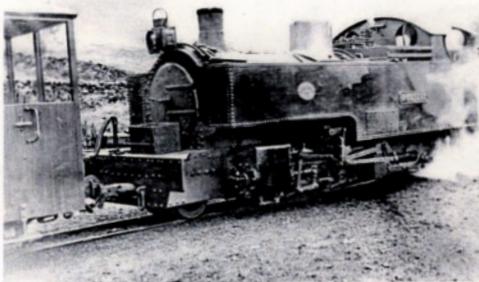
### 1927 - December

Wake's last traced advert appeared in December 1927.

### 1928 - January

Last known advertisement for the sale of the loco by Hughes Bolckow

# Roger Kidner



**O**n Friday 14<sup>th</sup> September Roger Kidner died peacefully in Tregaron, aged 94. The funeral was in Aberystwyth the following Friday. Roger was an honorary member of the Heritage Group and we were represented at the funeral by Jane Kennedy, the current owner of the Oak-

wood Press which Roger had founded in 1931

Roger visited and travelled on the WHR in 1926 and in 1934; on the latter occasion taking several photographs of the line. He kindly lent us the negatives of these in recent years so that our photographic archive contains the best possible print.

A comparatively private man with a fund of railway knowledge – the writer visited Roger in his home in Bow Street on at least three occasions. Discussion – accompanied by a mug of tea – invariably centred around narrow gauge and minor railways. Effectively, one was listening to someone who had witnessed so much of that which subsequent generations would have dearly loved to have seen and are busy trying to recreate. It is consoling that we have his photographs which so vividly captured the original WHR.

Although Roger Watkin Kidner died in September it would be remiss of this Group not to record his passing. In an occasional series about photographers of the original WHR he was featured in WHH No.18. By way of a tribute to Roger we reproduce here two of his photo-



graphs, which, to the best of our knowledge, have not been previously published.

#### Photographs

*Above left - Russell at Beddgelert ready to return to Dinas*

*Lower left - Southbound train at Waunfawr showing the 'goods shed'. Note higher profile of the Gladstone coach (nearer the camera).*

*Wakes, Darlington - to be sold*. Unfortunately this note is undated.

A correspondent to the *'The Railway Magazine'* of April 1927 confirms that he saw it in Wake's yard in the summer of 1922, carrying Wake's rebuild plate No 1526 as well as the HE maker's plate 979/1908. A later writer corrected the Wake's rebuild number to 1526

J I C Boyd states that in March 1923 Messrs Ridley & Young of Darlington (presumably acting for Wake) offered *'Gowrie'* to the Great Western for the recently acquired Vale of Rheidol, which was short of engine power. He records that the GWR declined, but suggested the engine be offered to the Festiniog. This appears to have been taken up because the FR sent its Locomotive Superintendent, Robert Williams to inspect it under steam (one presumes at Darlington?). Williams's report (quoted in *NG in SC* p 328) said *'it appears that the engine has not been working since 1918 when it was sold to the disposals board, previous to*

*which it had been repaired by Mr Wake . . .*. Despite this Tyrwhitt, the General Manager, recommended buying it because of the acuteness of the FR's engine shortage, but Henry Jack refused to sanction the purchase.

The Real Photographs photographer recorded it still at Wake's yard in October 1926 (see p78 Peter Johnson's *'Portrait of the Welsh Highland Railway'*), Wake's last traced advert appeared in December 1927.

One final advertisement traced for the locomotive, appeared on 6<sup>th</sup> January 1928, with an almost identical wording to the Wake adverts:

*"For sale - 2 foot gauge Hunslet 0-6-4 9. ½ x 14 (boiler on swivelling bogie) - Hughes Bolckow & Co. Ltd, The Aerodrome, Marske-by-the-Sea."*

The involvement of Hughes Bolckow is interesting. They are best known as ship brokers and for selling artefacts recovered from famous ships broken up at

*'Battleship Wharf'* in Blyth. So what they were doing at *'The Aerodrome, Marske by the Sea'* is a mystery. The aerodrome was decommissioned in 1919 - could they have won the contract to carry out this work? The land (plus huts) was offered for sale by the Disposals Board in July of that same year. There must have been no takers as the land was again advertised in 1921. Perhaps they stayed on there, as in December 1921 Guisborough RDC granted Hughes Bolckow planning permission for the conversion of offices on the aerodrome site into dwellings. Did *'Gowrie'* go to the Aerodrome at Marske by the Sea after 1926, and if so - why?

According to Kelly's Directory for 1929 they were still at *'The Aerodrome'* and described as *'engineers and merchants'*, but in August 1931 *'the liquidator'* is reported as holding a sale at Marske of *'engineering and woodworking plant and machinery'*.

*Thanks to Andrew Neale & Vic Bradley for information incorporated in this article*

# When Did the Buffet Car Enter Service?

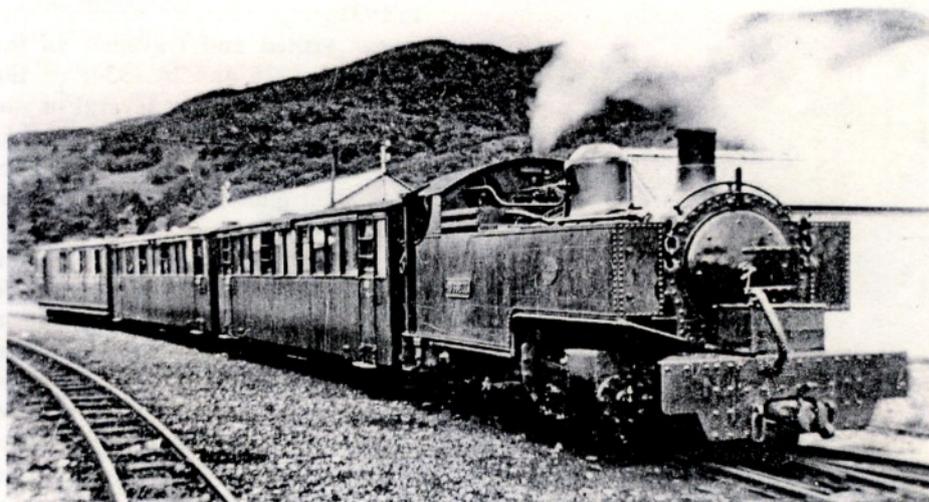
In their notes on the Buffet Car in Welsh Highland Heritage Issue 17, Derek Lystor and John Padley muse over the date when "number 23" was converted. Their notes read: "The year that the conversion took place is commonly given as late 1927, the coach entering service the following year running on the noon departure from Dinas. However, the memo discussed in WHH No 9 suggests early 1927 as the conversion date, with the coach up and running that summer as born out in Jack Steel's account in 'Narrow Gauge' 90 of his trip in 1929 during which Hamilton Ellis recalled a trip two years previously when the "Buffet Car sold only biscuits and fizzy lemonade".

The "memo" referred to is discussed in WHH Issue 9 on page 2. It was found in the "Quellyn hoard" and originally it was sent by Robert Evans at Portmadoc to H.D. Jones, the stationmaster at Beddgelert, informing him that "the Buffet Car is being sent up today by the 4.00pm from Portmadoc and must be unhooked at your station so that it can be made ready to run on the trains as per circular". No copy of "the circular" appears to have survived. In his notes in Issue 9, Derek Lystor observed that, whilst the memo was not dated, it was "of a style which only appears in WHR paperwork for 1927". He also observes that there was a 4.00pm departure from Portmadoc only between July 11<sup>th</sup> and September 25<sup>th</sup> in 1927 (see comment on timetables below).

The photo by Geoff Platt (WHR(P) series 151) taken at Beddgelert, shows Russell with a three carriage train, comprising the Buffet Car, the other Ashbury "Corridor" (number 25) and Pickering Brake Compo number 9. The train is standing on the loop and therefore has recently arrived from Dinas.

The most telling factor determining the date of the picture is the presence of the bookstall behind and to the right of Russell.

**Peter Liddell explores the Buffet Car in fascinating detail in a 32-page, copiously illustrated publication 'The Buffet Car', produced by The Heritage Group & available from John Keylock (£5.00 post paid).**



The W.H.R. Chronology for 1927 (WHH Issue 9) states: "28<sup>th</sup>/29<sup>th</sup> October – Buildings at Beddgelert damaged by freak hurricane. Bookshop sold off as a consequence." The notes do not say specifically what damage was actually incurred or when the bookshop was actually sold off, but a close examination of those parts of the bookstall visible in the photograph show no sign of the effects of anything even approaching the strength of a "hurricane", suggesting most strongly that the picture was taken before the end of October 1927.

Linking the evidence in this picture to that presented by Derek in WHH Issue 9 would appear to confirm the date of this photograph as the late summer of 1927, by which time the Buffet Car was clearly running in service trains.

Hitherto unpublished work by David Woodcock, in which he examines W.H.R. timetables in considerable detail, shows the Buffet Car operating patterns in 1927, (as well as in 1928 and 1929 – the service only appeared to be offered over these three years) confirming that the above photograph must have been taken before September 25<sup>th</sup>. Further, to amplify Derek Lystor's observation re timetabling, this work shows not only that the "4.00 pm from Portmadoc" operated only between July 11<sup>th</sup> and September 25<sup>th</sup> 1927, but also that, within the operational lifetime of the Buffet Car, a departure at this time only occurred in 1927, confirming the date of the memo as being from this particular year. As the carriage was ready to be "sent up today" by this train, we can show that the Buffet Car service could not have started as early as July 11<sup>th</sup>.

## Crossing Box Appeal

Even though Network Rail have elected to style the Cambrian Crossing 'Cae Pawb' it is felt that most of us will continue to refer to it as the Cambrian – or even Croesor – Crossing.

The appeal leaflet was distributed both with our own journal and with November's Snowdon Ranger. At the time of writing it has produced the magnificent total of £6,500. This is truly a most heartening response and is a great encouragement for our modest organisation as sponsors of the project

When added to already pledged funds, and with the added benefit of gift aid, we shall soon have achieved the target. There may even be a bit extra as a hedge against the inevitable inflation which will occur between the date of the original quotation and the date of the final order.

The Appeal has highlighted two aspects of the Group's ambitions – the almost overwhelming generosity of WHR 'supporters', and the attraction of providing such a poignant feature of the old WHR at the southern end of the line.

Writing letters of thanks to Donors has provided much satisfaction. We can now look forward to a replica crossing box – and associated gates and fencing 'in situ' for 2009. Thank you very much.

John Keylock  
Project Sponsor

# A Scheme is Born.....

Having arrived too late on the scene to see trains running on the original WHR the late Arthur Rimmer nevertheless determined to witness, photograph and travel on the demolition trains. More important for us today he set in motion 'a train of events' that led to the establishment of the original WHR Society.

In January 1941 – before track lifting had started – Arthur put 'an interesting suggestion' in *The Modern Tramway* magazine that as a last resort the line could be purchased and run by railway enthusiasts. His letter is regarded as the initiative for railway preservation as we know it today. In March 1941 Owen Prosser, that delightful eccentric then living on the Isle

duced here in full on page 11. His similar plea was printed in *The Caernarfon & Denbigh Herald* for the same month. Not to be thwarted by the Ministry of Transport Owen replied that the railway should be considered as a post-war development with longer periods of continuous operation for the benefit of both

goods traffic and tourists. But that same month the track and rolling stock were requisitioned by the iron and steel control department of the Ministry of Supply. From the subsequent demolition and asset disposal Russell, the Gladstone and buffet coaches, together with coach No

23 (now on the FR) are the most significant survivors.

In July 1941 The Ramblers Association was quick off the mark with their 'proposed dedication of the derelict track (bed) as a walking route' quoting the Leek and Manifold Railway trackbed as a precedent. The previous month the *Railway Magazine* published the first of three 'in memoriam' articles.

In August George Cohen Sons & Co, who had won the dismantling contract, were already trying to sell on their acquisition. 'We have never handled a finer parcel of second hand rails, the majority of them being as new, and the remainder first class second hand.'

Also in on the demolition trains act in 1941 and '42 were J.F. Bolton and Vivian Boyd-Carpenter. The latter was assistant secretary at the Federation & British Industries Manchester office and was in a good position to establish a working relationship with Cohens. As we know Mr Bolton took photographs too and was heartbroken to witness the WHR's demise. Arthur Rimmer wrote to Mr Boyd-Carpenter expressing his hope that 'someone will write a book on this very interesting line'. He was not to be disappointed!



## *John Keylock charts the convoluted events, and the people, that led to the reconstruction of the Welsh Highland*

of man, prompted by *The Modern Tramway* article wrote to the Ministry of Transport pleading for a 'stay of execution'. The reply he received is repro-

In November 1942 Robert Evans wrote to Mr Iggulden at Tonbridge; 'I am also very glad to hear that we are getting rid of the WHR and trust that it will not be long before everything is cleared up!' The final paragraph of his letter states; 'I hope both your good self and the family are keeping quite well and not bothered much by any bombs'!

And so the FR was released of its lease. Mr Aubrey Thomas, accountant of Llandudno was appointed liquidator to the WHR and the war ended. Mr Boyd visited the railway and took photographs of some of the remains with a view to doing the railway better justice than Charles E, Lee! In the 1950s other enthusiasts did the same thing but it was 1961 before positive steps towards reinstatement of the WHR were made. In February 1961 Mr R.S. (Bob) Honychurch of Shrewsbury enquired of Mr Thomas as to the legal position if a railway preservation society was to acquire the trackbed. Having obtained a satisfactory response he asked Thomas in March whether the deeds could be inspected by the proposed preservation society's solicitor. Mr Thomas advised that he would arrange personal delivery. Mr Honychurch then asked what would be the lowest acceptable price for the trackbed and requested a personal interview.

In order to promote the idea Bob Honychurch wrote to the *Model Engineering* magazine, and his letter was published in the edition of the 27<sup>th</sup> April 1961. The *Daily Telegraph* took up the story with a short piece.



## WELSH HIGHLAND RAILWAY



In May Mr Thomas was approached by 'Minitrains' regarding a price for the trackbed but stated that any offer was unacceptable in view of Mr Honychurch's enquiry.

On July 16<sup>th</sup> Thomas went to a meeting in Shrewsbury with those interested in forming a preservation society. He advised the meeting that he would accept £750 for a quick sale of the trackbed. The embryonic society had employed a firm of Shrewsbury solicitors to act in their best interests and after further enquiries Thomas "received offer from Honychurch on behalf of the WHR Society; £750" in November. Thomas asked that the offer be rephrased and telephoned Honychurch on the matter. Negotiations were obviously going well for an electricity board wayleave and Beddgelert Parish Council's wish to cross the trackbed to access the cemetery were both referred to Honychurch. In December Honychurch advised Thomas that 'the Society in waiting' had been refused planning permission for the railway's reinstatement but he was pursuing the matter'.

In February 1962 negotiations continued and in April 'further advices Honychurch' likewise in June when Honychurch sent Thomas a copy of the planning application for the section between Beddgelert and Nantmor. Merionethshire County Council gave their permission but Caernarvonshire didn't. By this time the Society had 150 members, was a year old and at the start of some thirty years of trial and tribulations and constant council prevarications.

It has been proposed to form a Preservation Society to restore a section of the old Welsh Highland Railway.

While first impressions might be that such would be an impossible task, certain investigations have suggested that a section could be re-laid with second hand track and a service eventually run for tourists and, of course, enthusiasts of the narrow gauge.

Suggestions have been made that the section from Beddgelert to Nantmor, approx 3 miles, might prove to be the most fruitful from an operating and revenue producing aspect.

Track could be purchased at approx £2000 per mile, transport costs excluded, and it is believed that the trackbed could be obtained from the Liquidator for a certain figure which would have to be negotiated.

In order to achieve some sort of working capital it has also been suggested that a number of people should come forward to subscribe, say £100 each, and this would form the basis of a new company to operate and administer the railway. At the same time a society could be formed with the object of recruiting 1000 members, this income being used to purchase track, as available, and society members would be able to assist in many ways to restore the railway, the most practicable form would be clearing the trackbed and laying track under skilled supervision.

It would probably be necessary to have at least two years of track laying before sufficient was laid to commence running a service, subject of course to Ministry of Transport approval and inspection.

One big point in favour of such a scheme is that it is believed that there will be a great number of people willing and anxious to see the Welsh Highland Railway restored, once again to carry passengers through the lovely Aberglaslyn Pass. Another point in its favour is that main bridge over the Glaslyn near Beddgelert is still in place, and if this is once removed, as has been suggested at some future date, the possibility of restoration will be gone forever, as it would cost thousands to replace it.

While it is ultimately desired to operate a service with a suitable steam locomotive, it is felt that for economy and operation convenience a diesel loco and one coach will be all that a proposed society would be able to afford.

If anyone is interested in this scheme, would they kindly fill in the questionnaire at the foot of this sheet. All information contained therein will be treated as confidential and it's hoped to compile a list of potential members who will be advised as soon as a meeting can be arranged or any definite news discussed.

Please do not send any donations at this stage, it would only embarrass the sponsors, but it would help if some indication could be given of amounts which individuals can subscribe. Any help however small will be most gratefully appreciated.

R.G Honychurch.

-----Please tear along this line-----

To: R.G. Honychurch  
111, Oakfield Road  
Shrewsbury  
Shropshire  
tals

Please complete in Block Capitals

Surname.....Christian Name.....

Age (if over 21 write A).....Occupation.....

Please delete as applicable.

I will subscribe annually either £1 or £2

I will donate

£.....s.....Pounds/Shillings

I will donate £.....to form a company

I will give practicable help as possible

Any specials qualifications which would assist a railway company.

Address.....Town.....County.....

### Photographs

Page 9 (top) - Arthur Rimmer (with flag) on the Talyllyn Railway

Page 9 (bottom) - Owen Prosser on the Talyllyn in 1951 (TR Collection with thanks to David Mitchell)

Page 10 (top) - Bob Honychurch pictured at the opening of the extension from Porthmadog this year.

Above - Bob's original 1961 letter seeking support for the project.

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to be used this would normally be highlighted in the documents.

When you review the information held it all appears to be as clear as mud.

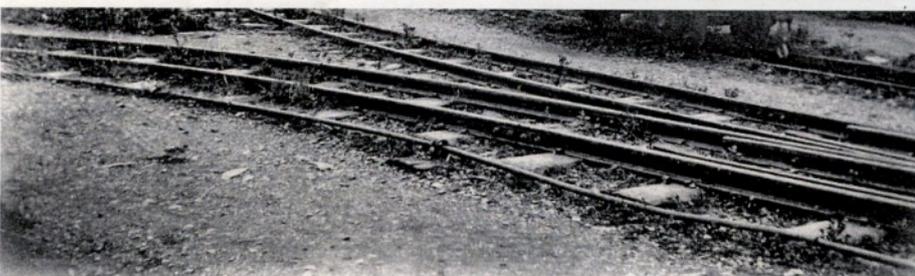
- \* The remains found are at a location commensurate with the location of the Croesor era turnout.
- \* The materials do not appear to be those used by the Welsh Highland Railway.

So, is it a Croesor tramway point buried by subsequent WHR construction?

Did the Croesor Tramway ever use double head rail material? (We do know that the Croesor generally purchased second hand rail from T.W. Ward of Sheffield.)

Is there an obscure fact about the WHR that needs to be explored?

Or is it a complete red herring, such as scrap materials that have arrived on site from elsewhere in the town and which have become buried just to confuse future ponderers of holes?



(Top) The mystery point was found on the trackbed adjacent to the gable end of the first building on the right hand side. (D.W. Allan)  
 (Centre) The northern end of the loop in WHR days. This is clearly a flat-bottomed turnout located on the bridge over "y-Cyt" (J.I.C. Boyd)  
 (Bottom) The turnout (left) to the Gorseddau tramway. In the top right hand corner can just be glimpsed the start of the 'flour mill loop'. (R.E. Hartley)

The remains found on site were in the approximate location of this point.

The materials in the WHR era photograph (centre) appear to be flat bottom rail. This is in part reinforced by the tender document. While the latter makes no specific reference to the section of rail used, it does refer to 'In two sets of 1 in 6 crossings, laid complete with timbers, fastenings and point levers (2nr), 'Allow for new set of points and crossings to item No 3 (slate wharves siding) and 'In 2 sets of 1 in 8 crossings laid complete with all timbers, fastenings and point levers', the latter being specifically for Portmadoc New Station. By infer-

ence this suggests use of flat bottom materials, prevalent elsewhere on the WHR. In 'Johnsons' An illustrated history of the Welsh Highland Railway' Peter appears to quote from Lieutenant Colonel Mounts' inspection report. The text is imprecise, but the rail weight may be 40lb/yard, the line between the GWR crossing and the FR is described in the text as 'new'. The tender document makes no specific reference to the installation of turnouts in double head rail using client supplied materials. The rhetoric of tender documents has not changed greatly in the intervening 84 years, and if second hand materials where

### "We need more of you!"

That was the conclusion of a meeting held to discuss the best way to further the aims and objectives of the Heritage Group and how we can improve services to our members.

The ideas discussed included having a promotional presence, perhaps a small platform-based stand during busy weekends, on open days or galas, and at special events at say the NRM, a promotional poster, a smaller promotional brochure, a member's day (Saturday before the Sunday AGM?), adverts or advertorial articles for WH volunteer journals, a new WHHG web site (in hand), a promotional 'give away' CD.

We are also very much aware that with the completion of the 'basic railway' in 2009 that thoughts and energies will turn towards the 'nice-to-haves', and heritage will be high on the agenda here.

If you have any ideas or would be willing to man the promo stand for an hour or two then please get in touch with Chris Hazlehurst - contact details bottom of page 11