

# WELSH HIGHLAND HERITAGE

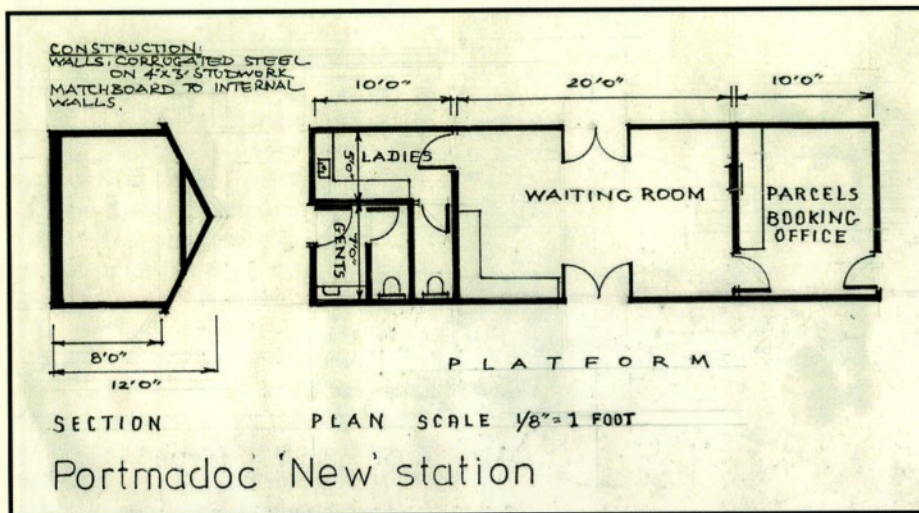
£1.00

Issue No. 39

ISSN 1462-1371

March 2008

## Original Welsh Highland Drawings Saved



A remarkable series of events has led to the preservation of a highly significant, indeed unique, Welsh Highland Archive.

In 1922 Sir Douglas Fox & Partners were commissioned as consulting engineers for the connecting section of the Welsh Highland Railway between South Snowdon station (Rhyd Ddu) and Croesor Junction. They produced a series of drawings for the scheme and also relied on some 1904 drawings produced for the abortive electric-powered Portmadoc, Beddgelert & South Snowdon Railway.

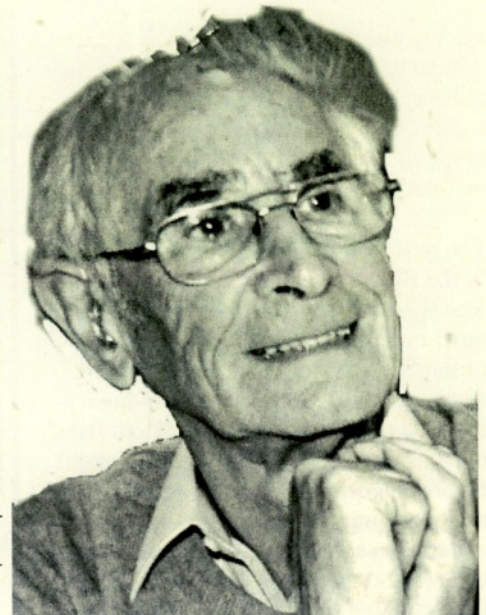


*This plan of Portmadoc New (1923) station was taken from a tiny corner of one of the Freeman Fox drawings, less than 1 mm long on the original negative. It has been kindly redrawn by Lewis Esposito.*

Astonishingly, the majority of these drawings have survived, albeit on microfilm, including those of 1908 covering the Snowdon & Bettws-y-Coed Light Railway as well as the earlier Dinas to Caernarfon extension. Their rescue is a tribute to a moment of inspiration by Group member Ian McKenzie with the splendid assistance of his daughter Fiona.

Fiona, a civil engineer, was working at the Bristol office of Acer Consultants, – an amalgamation of John Taylor and Sons and Freeman Fox & Partners. Ian was aware that Sir Douglas Fox & Partners were the 1922/3 engineers for the line and, stimulated by a talk by John Keylock who had mentioned the lack of drawings, asked Fiona to see if anything was left. Fiona duly found 'a few Welsh Highland drawings', which on further inspection turned out to be two whole films containing nearly 300 images.

Thanks to Fiona's boss, Mr Alan Cartwright, permission was given to borrow the films for a few weeks during which time Colin Hill arranged to have three copies made on microfiche. These tiny



images have now been scanned at high resolution and committed to a hard disc.

Acer was subsequently acquired by Welsh Water and renamed as Hyder Consulting Ltd. Ian duly wrote to Hyder requesting permission to reproduce the drawings. Mr Robin Tyler, who was their joint engineering director at that time, responded positively but asked that any reproductions are credited "Reproduced by kind permission of Hyder Consulting Limited, successors to Sir Douglas Fox & Partners". Hyder are now an independent company and have just celebrated their 150th anniversary.

We hope to reproduce examples of these drawings from time to time.

Everyone mentioned in this incredible story deserves the thanks of all who are involved with the reconstruction of the railway. Without people like Ian and Fiona and the others involved, then our railway and its history would be much the poorer.

*Photos  
Above - Ian McKenzie  
and left - daughter, Fiona.*



# Iron Ore Mines of Betws and Waunfawr

One of the most striking visible industrial sites seen from the railway is the spectacular series of cave-like mineral workings that climb up the mountain slope to the south-east of Waunfawr station. Without recourse to archival sources or specialist journals, little information is readily available about these former ironstone mines that are usually mistaken for disused slate quarries.

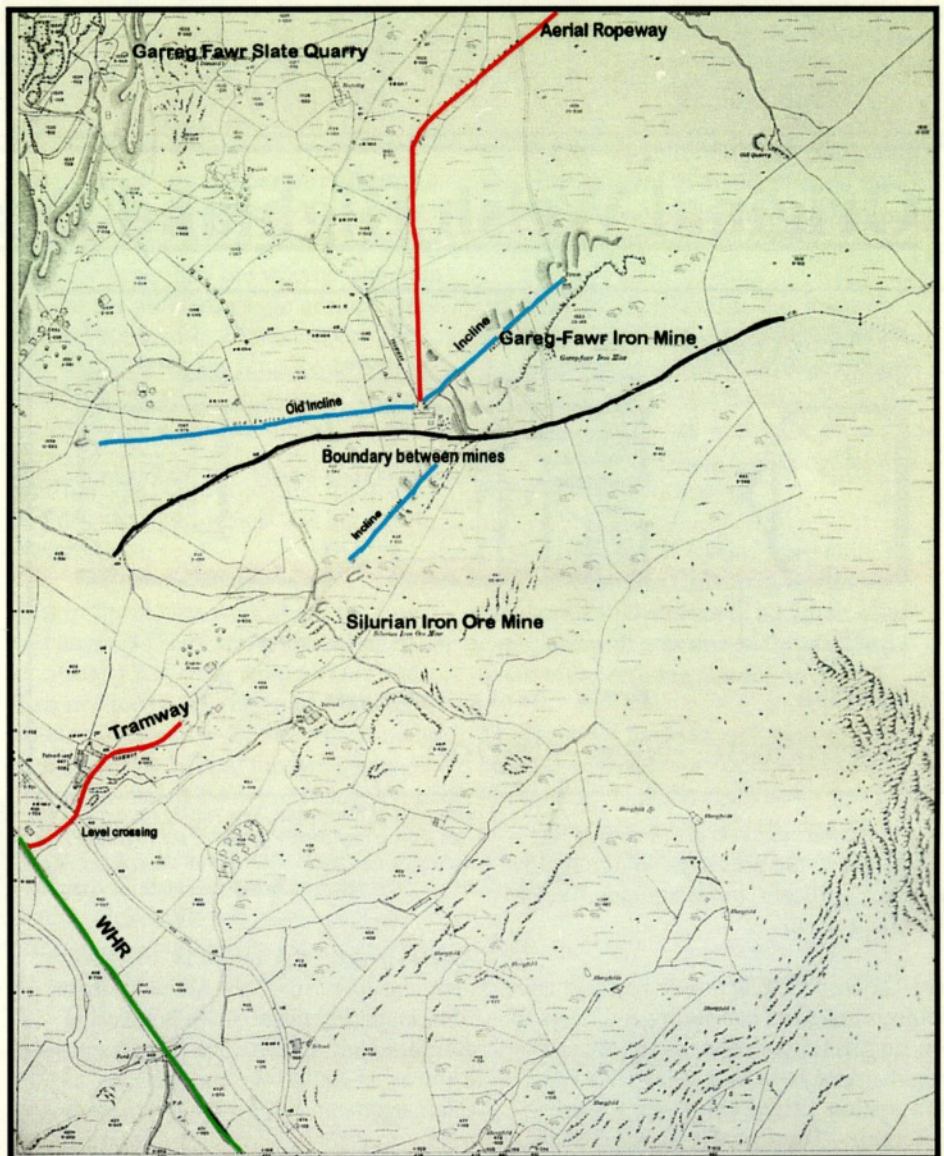
## Background

Although slate quarrying became the main industry of the County by the mid-nineteenth century, the exploitation of metal ores had a much earlier origin as a commercial activity.

The most common metallic ores exploited in the County were ores of copper and lead. Less well-known are the workings of ferro-manganese ores. One important vein in the Upper Cambrian strata, running south-eastwards from the granite-quarrying village of Trefor to the northern flank of Mynydd Mawr ('Elephant' Mountain) before entering the Gwyrfa Valley. Minor quarrying on this ironstone vein was undertaken south of the WHR at Cwm Bychan (Nantmor) and Tyddyn Bach (Betws Garmon), but the major workings were those north of the railway, on the steep slopes of Moel Eilio. The ironstone vein then re-outcrops and was worked at Llandegai (near Penrhyn Castle) and on the hill-sides east of the famous waterfall at Abergwyngregyn.

**Garreg Fawr mine (SH 545 579)** was the higher portion of the twin main ironstone working in the area. It is physically on the outskirts of Waunfawr (Llanbeblig parish), being delineated from the lower Ystrad mine (in Betws Garmon parish) by a prominent ecclesiastic and estate boundary wall climbing diagonally up the hill. The Garreg Fawr mine originated as an unsuccessful eighteenth century trial for copper ore, but its identified ironstone was briefly quarried in the 1840s, apparently by the Aberdare Iron Company. It was subsequently occasionally worked in conjunction with the adjacent slate quarry, of which the first known joint operator was the Carreg Fawr Slate & Mineral Co Ltd (1862-68), which seems to have constructed the fine visible zig-zag cart-road from the slate quarry up to the iron workings.

A separate ironstone mineral lease dated August 1883 to one Owen Lewis is recorded, but his activities are unrecorded. Inter-



Extract from the 1913 OS map showing the various features in the article

estingly, a route for a tramway connection to the NWNGR was reserved in this lease, though it seems unlikely if this was exploited at this juncture. There is no real evidence of working at the mine until the whole property was bought by the Bangor Range Slate and Mineral Company Ltd (of 1900). This concern immediately leased the iron mine site for 18 months (with a purchase option) to the British Iron Syndicate Ltd of

## *Dr Gwynfor Pierce-Jones surveys these little known mines*

20 Abchurch Lane London, a new £5,000 fully-capitalised concern which was 90% owned by Edward Ascherson and Alexander Sowerby Hay of London.

Under the local management of a J.W. Thomas and executive control of A.H. Strong, the Company only employed nine men in 1900, reducing to two in 1901, but seeing a brief final flurry of activity with 42 employees in 1902 after the lease was renewed and Ascherson loaned £4,000 as a debenture. This failed to save the day, and the Company went into liquidation in February 1904. The freeholder Bangor Company (working the slate quarry only) was already in Receivership (in 1903), and both it and the iron mine were let for the following two years to the former mine's chief manager, A.H. Strong.

There then followed a short period of abandonment before the most important phase of the mine's history commenced in 1907. Taken over by (Sir) Alfred Hickman Ltd of Spring Vale Furnaces, Wolverhampton, the

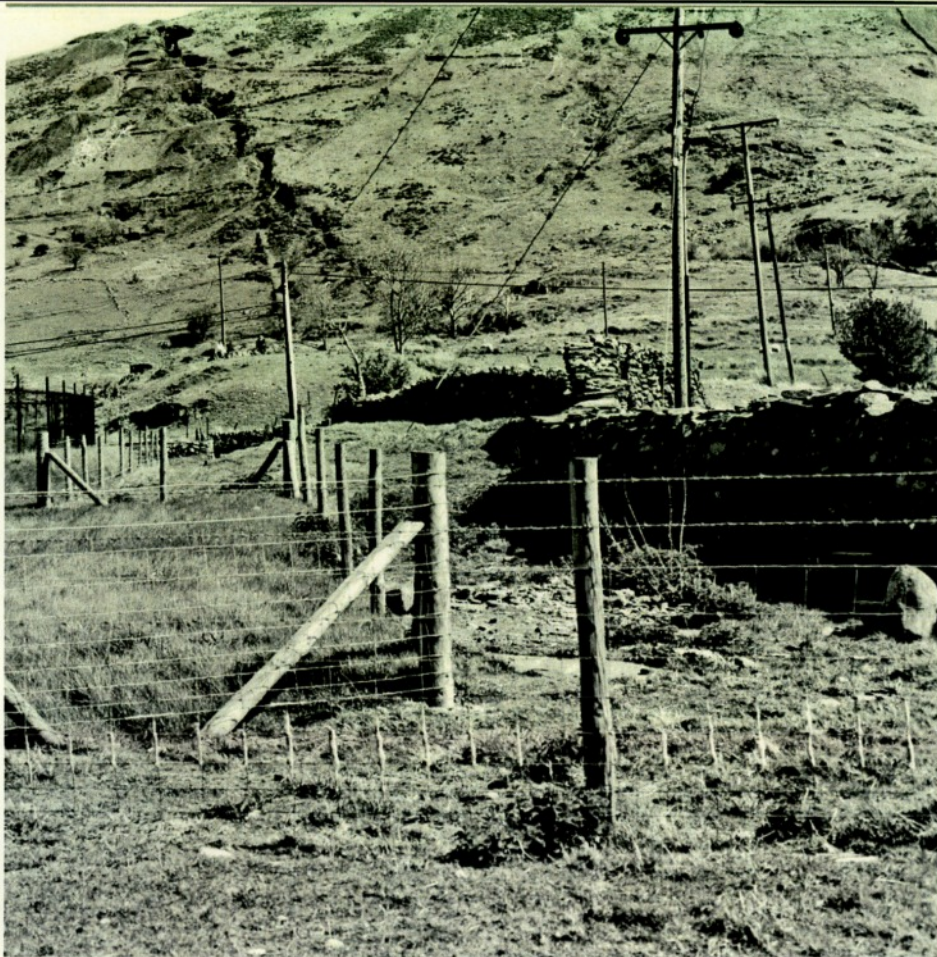


opening workforce under the re-hired J.W.Thomas comprised 25 'outside' men, presumably installing the machinery and building the extensive infrastructure. The centre-piece of the site was a substantial stone-rubble engine house containing a 100 hp 'National' producer-gas engine and associated plant, powering an Ingersoll-Rand Type B (14 ¼" by 14" cylinder) belt-driven air compressor, and a Robey 24" by 18" jaw-crusher that could handle 300 tons of rock daily. All the remainder of the buildings were built of timber and corrugated iron.

A 230-yard long gravity incline (9ft long x 6ft diameter drum and 1½" diameter steel operating rope) connected the operating levels by a 3-ft gauge tramway system (14 lbs per yard track on timber sleepers) to the rock-crusher on the lowest operating floor. Wagons discharged ore into a 15ft square x 10½ ft steel-plate ore bin, which had two chutes for loading the 6 cwt. capacity buckets of a 5,166 yds aerial ropeway, which was similar to the partly-surviving 1920s one at Cwm Bychan copper mine. Steel angle-iron pylons mounted on concrete bases supported a 1½ inch diameter steel multi-stranded main wire-rope, providing the 'track' for the tubs which were presumably powered by a lighter 'endless' haulage cable. In order to facilitate the easiest route over the brow of the hill, the ropeway initially ran north-eastwards to an 'angle station' where it turned eastwards over the col of Bwlch y Groes and thence down to a siding on the L&NWR Llanberis branch-line (SH 572 609).

Hickman & Co pursued the iron ore vein underground at Garreg Fawr on at least eight productive floors (and three trial floors) of around 60 – 70ft vertical separation. Large caverns were excavated where the ore body was wide, and pillars of arched rock were left *in situ* to support the

*Line of tramway from the WHR near Tan-y-Ffordd to Garreg Fawr Slate Quarry. The girder spans the Afon Gwyfrai.*



roof. Where the best ore was found, the lower 'stopes' were worked through into the higher chambers, following the 60 – 80 degree dip of the vein. Official data records 37 men working 'inside' the new underground workings in 1908 and 42 'outside', possibly finishing off the reserves in the opencast pits. In 1909 there were 37 men 'inside' and 12 'out', extracting 18,800 tons of ore. In 1910 there were 37 and 13 men, respectively, winning 13,200 tons; and 33 and 13 won 13,000 tons in 1911. The output for 1912 appears to have been similar to the previous year, with 37 miners and 12 outside men.

However, it appears that the company had rapidly worked out the narrow productive

ore body, because all of the trial tunnels driven north and east from the main ore body found barren ground, and the three upper trial adits (floors 8 – 10) were not developed.

Hickman consequently closed Garreg Fawr mine in October 1913, but it is possible that an

*The iron ore adits as viewed from the WH trackbed. The connecting tramway ran between the new fence and the old wall in the foreground. Compared with the 1913 OS map this 2002 image shows several more adits, indicative of increased mining activity during WW1.*

amalgamation with the new Ystrad mine had been considered in 1910.

The Garreg Fawr mine saw one brief flurry of activity during the height of the U-boat menace of 1916-17. With imports severely under threat, every source of UK mineral and material resources were being tapped, and procurement 'agents' were particularly sourcing metal scrap (such as the Glanrafon quarry plant). Under the working title 'Bettws Iron Ore Mine', a W. J. Roberts of Bryn Meddyg, Bangor (new freehold owner of mine and quarry) employed Owen Hughes to supervise 10 men at the mine in 1917, all employed in an opencast working. In 1918 the declared proprietor was Johnson Jackson of Spar Road, Bolton (brewer and quarry owner), simultaneously involved with Roberts in (unsuccessfully) developing the nearby Tyddyn Bach, but both this and Garreg Fawr had closed permanently before the end of the year. There is no official record of any activity until 1929, when Roberts and the Welsh Mineral Corporation Ltd took a secured loan from Barclays Bank. This concern briefly operated the slate quarry, but it is unknown whether any work was commenced at the iron ore



mine. However, all activity by this company had ceased by 1931.

### Ystrad Isaf Mine (SH 541 574)

The lower half of the hillside workings visible from the railway was an independent concern operating on a separate small freehold property known as the Ystrad Estate. The 1900 sale catalogue of this land shows that the only exploitation of the iron ore to that date had been a number of shallow opencasts dug in the exposures adjacent to the main road, next to the entrance of Ystrad Isaf farm.



*This modern photograph shows very prominently the boundary wall between the two parishes, together with the upper Garreg Fawr and lower Ystrad workings.*

The development of the mine proper commenced with a 25-year lease dated 25 September 1909 to David John Williams, a mining engineer of Ty Newydd, Garn Dolbenmaen. In partnership since December 1908 with William Pritchard Morgan, mine owner and speculator of London (Merionethshire's 'gold king'), and Henry James, a mining engineer of Belsize Avenue, London, their joint portfolio also included a lease of the ore bed at nearby Tyddyn Bach and three other mineral leases elsewhere.

Williams, Morgan & James had no intention of developing the mineral sett themselves, selling the lease of Ystrad and Tyddyn Bach for shares to the new Bettws Garmon Iron Ore & Smelting Co Ltd, incorporated in October 1909. Baldwin Ltd, a major steelworks owner from Swansea, (later to become the well-known steel-makers Richard, Thomas & Baldwin), had an option on half the share capital, but did not exercise it. In default, these shares were taken by the promoter of the company, a prodigious 52-year old Amsterdam entrepreneur named Jacobus Spijker (the first Dutch car manufacturer), who also collected a free £500 as a bonus as well as sharing a further bonus of £500 worth of issue with a London solicitor as payment for forming the company.

Spijker (9,892 shares), W. P. Morgan (1,301), H. James (1,026) and the barrister Conrad Frikker were the first directors of the Company, registered at Morgan's office at 1 Queen Victoria St., London. A report of May 1910 provides an insight into the economics at the birth of the venture. The main points were:-

- The ore vein at Ystrad was 750 linear yards long between the main road and the Garreg Fawr mine boundary. It was very hard, and 5 – 15ft thick with a 60 – 80 degree dip to the south-east. Above river-level there were some 160,000 tons of extractable

ore, at 2s. 6d (12½ p) per ton cost (uncrushed).

- The mine was to be connected across the road to the NWNCR by a level crossing for which permission of the County Council had been already sought. The Railway Company required a guarantee of 2-years traffic and a maintenance charge on the Dinas Junction discharge gantry before they would build the connecting branch. Narrow-gauge rail charges would be on a sliding scale of 7d (3p) per ton on 60 ton per day, 6½ d on 120 tons and 6d (2½ p) on 180 tons daily. The L&NWR charge for travelling the 3½ miles from Dinas to the Caernarfon Coal Siding was 12d (5p) per ton, plus an extra 4d (2 p) per ton to forward the trucks to the steamer loading point at Victoria Dock. The Mine Company thought, however, that these transport charges were too high, and for the venture to work they had to be negotiated down once regular traffic ran. A switch to a road motor-wagon with 12-ton payload could be threatened as a viable alternative.

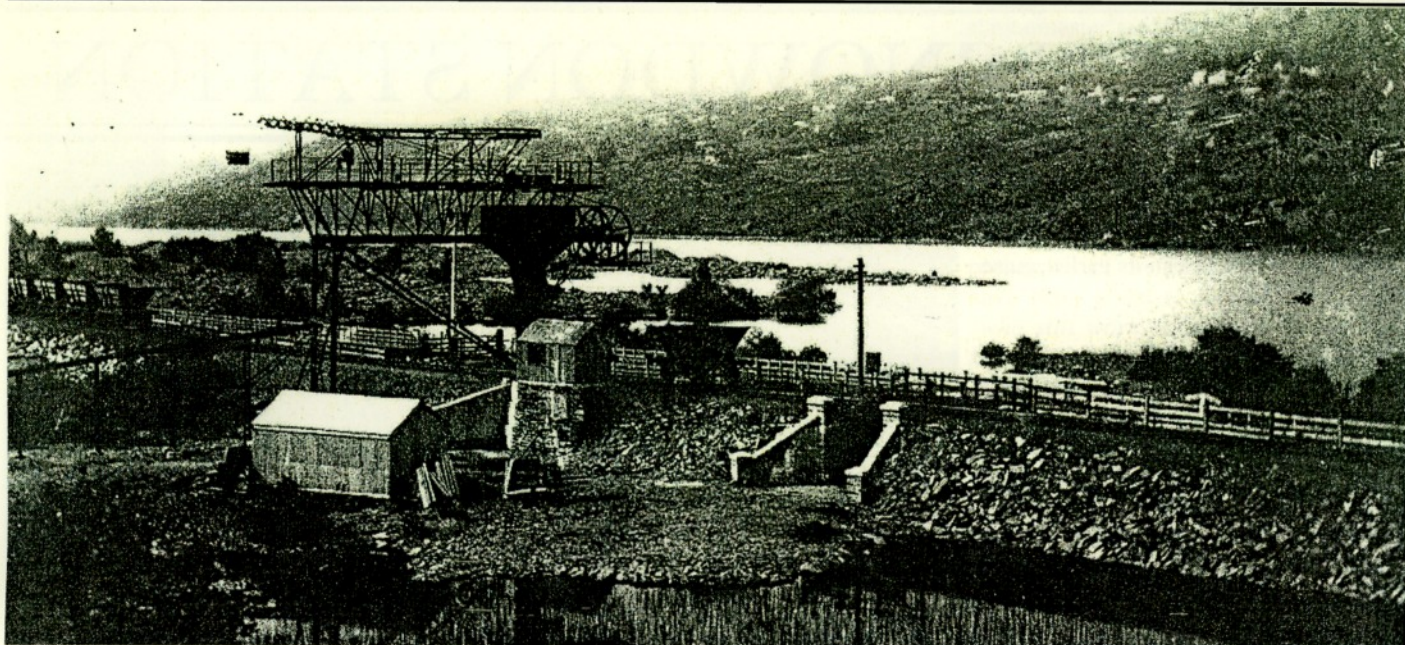
The HM Inspector's reports gives employment figures of 14 men 'outside' under J.P. Williams in 1910 and 11 outside in 1911, with no underground work being recorded. In 1912 there were 22 outside workers at the site, but the company had been re-titled the 'Phosphoric Iron Ore Co Ltd' in September of that year. Yet, in less than a year the concern was in trouble, and a 'paper' sale to a new concern was made in 1913. Spijker's new Silurian Iron Ore Co Ltd of Wind St., Swansea (later at St Mary Avenue, London EC3), bought the old company's assets for £4,000 in cash and 18,000 ordinary shares, allowing any previous creditors to be sidestepped. Be-

tween 1911 and 1914 Spijker lived at Plas-y-Coed between Salem and Plas-y-Nant.

The new Silurian company was potentially a major player on the north Wales mining scene, having also bought Messrs Roberts & Morris' lease of the Penrhyn iron mine at Llandegai, for a £6,000 share allotment only (no cash!). Spijker also (conveniently) sold his interests in mineral leases in the parishes of Llandegai, Llanengan (nr Abersoch) and in Merionethshire, to the Company for £10,000 in preference shares and £52,000 in ordinary shares, but also including £6,000 in cash. Baldwins, the Swansea steel works, also bought £20,000 of preference shares plus an option of purchasing the whole output at 10% below market price, of which one-third of any purchase money was to go to Spijker personally! A certain Roger Beck, who bought £5,000 preference and 10,465 ordinary shares from Spijker, joined the board of directors in 1913.

The Ystrad site was now rapidly developed, with allegedly £25,000 being invested in machinery alone. By 1913, the 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. OS map showed about eight levels driven into the hillside, served by gravity inclines and a short aerial ropeway that led to the crusher plant near the farmhouse. The late Owen Pritchard of Plas Isaf, Bettws Garmon recalled that the site was provided with modern plant, including a large producer-gas plant and engine that drove an electric generator – the first use of this power source in the district. In fact, a 1919 valuation inventory listed two such engines (one of 45hp), powering three AEG belt-driven dynamos. There was also an Edgar Allen rock-crusher and ore calcining (primary furnace) plant.





The outbreak of World War 1 in August 1914 had a profound effect on the Ystrad mine. According to O. Pritchard, the "German" nationals involved in it's running had to leave the country in a hurry (they were actually monoglot Dutchmen, part of a multi-national workforce managed by a 'pidgin tri-lingual' Cornishman). Nevertheless, the combination of a soaring demand for iron ore and the virgin site at Ystrad led to a rapid development. In 1913-14 there were only 3 men 'inside' and 11 outside the mine, but in 1915 the figures were 2 and 26 respectively, increasing to 15 - 23 in 1916, 35 - 8 in 1917, 25 - 15 in 1918 and 24 - 6 at closure on 13 September 1919, when the ore bed was economically exhausted. This was the end of working here.

#### Effect on the NWNG

Garreg Fawr mine contributed nothing to the NWNGR due to the construction of the 1907 aerial ropeway to Llanberis, an expensive alternative to the probable dearer costs of shipping ore to its Wolverham-

ton furnaces via Dinas Junction. Yet, it had a branch railway route to the NWNGR in lease in the late nineteenth century, and some construction work on this was undertaken by the Bangor Range Company in 1900-01. A long unfinished gravity incline descends from the mines lowest floor towards a slate-rubble embankment that would have carried a tramway across the floodplain and over the Gwyrfai River. Part of this route, was later used by the Treflan Quarry (post-1902), making a junction with the NWNGR main line south of Waunfawr station near Tan-y-Ffordd.

During the First World War, a very large tonnage of iron ore was extracted from the Ystrad mine, this generating major traffic on the moribund NWNGR. This amounted to an average 300 tons per month, probably representing two or three trains per week. Barry Williams of the WHR Gwynedd Group has suggested that it was this iron ore traffic and the timber consignments from Parry's sawmill at Rhyd

*Llanberis end of the aerial ropeway marked on the 1913 OS map*

Ddu that directly or indirectly initiated the (unsuccessful) trial of the Dick, Kerr petrol-electric locomotive on the railway in 1917 under government patronage. He argues with some persuasion that the otherwise almost-closed line would not otherwise have required such a machine nor would it have obtained one for such trials.

It is this present author's suggestion that the failure of this trial caused the expedient answer to the motive power deficit at that time of National crisis. This was the in-house amalgamation of the lesser-worn power bogie and undamaged frames of the 'Vulcan' SNOWDON RANGER with the newly re-tubed (1913) boiler of MOEL-TRYFAN, the latter probably being the loco that had its frames bent in an accident at Salem bridge in 1906.

## Tickets Please!

WELSH HIGHLAND RAILWAY.  
NOTICE.- This Ticket is issued subject to the conditions & regulations in the Company's Time Tables, Books, Bills & Notices.

DINAS  
TO  
SOUTH SNOWDON  
Third Class Actual Fare 1/1

The ticket illustrated is a good example of the second printing of a standard Waterlow 3<sup>rd</sup> Class Single, bearing the "Third Class Actual Fare" legend. Serial numbers started at 500 and it is thought that one thousand tickets were printed. With an average issue of twenty tickets a month in 1936 recorded in the Dinas ticket register, about 125 survived to go into present day collections.

The first printings, with serial numbers 000 - 499, were probably exhausted by mid 1923. They bore no printed fare - this was added by the booking clerk - in this case 2/3. The fare was reduced to 1/1 by the time the line opened to Portmadoc, and a further reduction to 1/0 took place in 1934, although the printed fare on the example shown has not been altered.



# SOUTH SNOWDON STATION

With the rebuilt WHR now firmly established at Rhyd ddu, it is timely to reflect on life at the station back in its earlier guise as South Snowdon.

Of the three main WHR stations, if one accepts that Portmadoc (New) 1923 was to all intents and purposes a Festiniog station, South Snowdon remains the least documented. By comparison a considerable amount is known about Dinas, thanks to its prominence to the very end of the WHR and the survival of many of Daniel Jones' records, and of Beddgelert, principally through 'the Quellyn Lake papers'. Indeed it is because of this archive's remarkable survival that we are able to discover a little more of what went on at South Snowdon.

To set the scene, reference may be made to the reports carried out for the Ministry of Transport by both Col. J.W. Pringle and Lt. Col. A.H.L. Mount, the Railway Inspectors.

On 25<sup>th</sup> July 1922, Pringle noted that South Snowdon was the present terminus, and the section of line from there to Tryfan Junction was to be worked by one engine in steam carrying a staff. He also commented that the working instructions were unclear in the respect of staff-working over this section and that certain trains must needs carry a ticket and not a staff. Working of passenger traffic was recommended by Pringle subject to these matters being dealt with. A series of inspections were made by Mount in 1923 and 1926, and his first, on 29<sup>th</sup>

May 1923 gives further details. The loop had been reconditioned and new points and crossings laid in, but trap points were required on the siding at the north end of the loop. He noted that the station building was in a bad state of repair, with the floor falling in, and in need of reconditioning. No lighting was supplied, but electric light was expected within the next two years. In the meantime he recommended that some other form of lighting be provided if it were proposed to run trains after dark. It was proposed to work the section to Beddgelert by Staff & Ticket, and Mount suggested that the station mistress should receive full training and supervision in respect of staff working and the locking of points. A box was to be provided in which to keep the tickets, to be kept locked by a key secured to the staff. The following month, on 4<sup>th</sup> June, he noted that the name had changed to South Snowdon and that accordingly the nameboard should be so altered. On a visit



in September 1926, he found that the Staff Box needed securely fixing to its bracket.

*A fine view of the station in its NWNG heyday. Photo by Francis Bedford in 1894*

In the Quellyn Lake papers, the earliest surviving document is a receipt for goods from an old NWNGR Moel Tryfan Undertaking Receipt Book dated 15<sup>th</sup> July 1922, for £12-11-1, which predated the resumption of passenger services over the northern section. It was signed by Myfanwy Williams, the Clerk in Charge. In the latter part of that year she was having to deal with an unsettled account with the Royal Goat Hotel at Beddgelert who were unable to pay as a result of being in administration. Two

## *South Snowdon in the Welsh Highland era: Derek Lystor Explains*

further receipts survive from 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> January 1923 showing passenger takings of 2/3d and 13/11d respectively. Further use was made of ex NWNGR forms (sometimes over stamped WELSH HIGHLAND RAILWAY) in the shape of consignment notes for slate from both Glanrafon and Clogwyn. A group of quarrymen, trading under the name of David Ellis & Co., were working the tips at Glanrafon in 1923/24 producing small roofing slates and 4½" slates for damp courses. It was to this traffic that a memo from S.E. Tyrwhitt to Jones at Beddgelert dated 25<sup>th</sup> July 1923 concerning the running of a special goods train from Portmadoc to South Snowdon and back probably refers. It was timed to fit in with the 3.10 pm Up ex Dinas and the 8.25 pm Down ex Beddgelert. At this time, such slate traffic as there was mostly found its way to Davies Bros wharf at Portmadoc.

The first memo concerning South Snowdon is dated 12<sup>th</sup> July 1923 some six weeks after the WHR had opened through to Portmadoc. In it, Robert Evans gives instructions for the issue and recording of Holiday Contract (Season) tickets, optimistically enclosing 10 each of both Weekly and Fortnightly tickets for good measure. Apart from the 7 passengers who attended the Bettws Garmon Sheepdog Trials on September 21<sup>st</sup>/22<sup>nd</sup> (details of which can be found in WHH No. 10), we have no knowledge of passenger figures from South Snowdon, but in the first three months of operation there was a steady flow of inward traffic from Beddgelert with nearly 500 single journeys and over 330 returns being made, a total only bettered by that from Beddgelert to Portmadoc.

With poor passenger traffic being noted in October's correspondence, is was not surprising that from 1<sup>st</sup> November South Snowdon lost its full time staff i.e. Miss Williams. The full story of this period, during which responsibility for affairs here were passed to H.D. Jones at Beddgelert, is to be found on page 8 of WHH No. 16. The accounts for November of just over £14 were paid on December 23<sup>rd</sup>, and were principally made up of costs for coal for the local merchants, Messrs Limerick and Gissing. John Limerick's name appears on many a WHR document, and it may be that he acted as a local delivery man, signing for goods received at the station, to supplement his income from delivering coal. We are fortunate that many consignment notes, invoices and indeed the Parcels Delivery Book have survived, although the latter appears to have fought a losing battle with damp and mice! From these various sources, the role of the WHR as 'common carri-





Still called 'Snowdon' in the early 20's. Note the WHR noticeboard. (Topical 1923)

er' can clearly be seen, but by far the biggest volume of good's traffic was in coal and beer!

1924 began with the GWR, in a memo regarding non delivery of a case of wine to South Snowdon, being informed to address all future letters to Beddgelert Station "as South Snowdon is now closed", - not strictly true of course, but convenient for HD Jones. On 11<sup>th</sup> January there was an inspection special to Portmadoc, leaving South Snowdon after the departure of the 9.50 am ex Dinas and one wonders if the Directors aboard noticed the unreturned empty beer casks lying around that Allsopps of Burton on Trent had complained about that same day. The Chairman certainly had some harsh words to say following another inspection on March 30<sup>th</sup> regarding parts of motor cars, belonging to

Bill Rear's camera captures the now derelict station building in 1948



none other than John Limerick, being in the goods shed and of goods being in the ladies waiting room!

Wool, to Meredith & Son of Pwllheli was another important traffic. The 'sheets' of wool were weighed at Beddgelert and delivered to South Snowdon by the ever resourceful Mr. Limerick. It would appear that at Meredith's request, 'old timber trucks' be used to convey the fleeces to Dinas. In May, not only did the WHR manage to lose a batch of 2 'sheets', but Meredith's also lost the relevant consignment note. It is not clear from the record how this dispute was resolved!

The village Sunday School had arranged an outing to Barmouth in June, and tickets were available not from the station, but from Mr Owen's shop, Tanygraig. Any left over were returned to Jones at Beddgelert. According to the records, 47 Adults accompanied 12 children on the trip. The remaining documents in the archive for 1924 refer to South Snowdon's accounts, dealt with of course by Jones. Three A/c Paid entries have survived, totalling just under £24, and all but £1-1-0 was for coal.

There is no further mention of the station until 11<sup>th</sup> August 1925 when Jones was asked to find a house in Rhyd ddu for a WH Rees. At some time during the year he and his wife moved into the vacant

stationmaster's accommodation in the station building, referred to as "South Snowdon Cottage" in the memo, whilst the electoral roll for 1926 had them living at "Station House". Who WH Rees was remains unknown. Later in August there was some consternation regarding the spare key to the station. Apparently it was in the possession of the platelayer and it should have been given to Guard Ellis Jones - "who still works to the station without a key". It is presumed he was able to gain entry by borrowing a key from one of the WHR guards, as Evans instructed Jones to get hold of one and send it to Boston Lodge for a duplicate to be cut. It transpires that there were originally three keys and one had gone missing. Consequently arrangements either had to be made between the Dinas guards to exchange keys as and when, or alternatively for one key to be "put under the mat" for all to use! The saga carried on until November when it was revealed that Inspector Griffith had put the key in an envelope addressed to Ganger JB Williams, but Jones had opened it and given the key to Platelayer JO Thomas, without Evans' authority!

Ultimately it was platelayer Thomas, along with his wife, who took possession of the station cottage early in 1926 at 2/- a week rent. As one or the other of them acted as Agent at South Snowdon, for which they received 2/- a week, they effectively lived there rent free! According to Boyd, Mrs Thomas appeared to have had more to do with the running of the station than her husband and a memo issued in July instructed her to keep the waiting room clean. That same month, Jones was reminded to keep the Train Time Books up to date - a duty which he may well have delegated to Mrs Thomas. The Thomas's were still at South Snowdon in May 1928 when J.O. Jones, whilst going about his duties as platelayer, sent a memo to D.O. Jones at Dinas noting that the people from the Royal Goat Hotel had erected a clothes line on WHR property at Beddgelert. One wonders why H.D. Jones did not deal with this matter.

We know virtually nothing about activities at South Snowdon up until closure, other than the fact that along with passenger services, goods still continued to be received. The archives last record was for 11 tons of coal from Dinas Junction for Messrs Limerick and Gissing and the Audit Office Revenue Book gives April 1937 as the last date when coal (8 tons) was brought in. Who, apart from John Limerick, dealt with this traffic is unknown. After the closure of the booking office at Beddgelert at the end of the 1928 season, assuming that he had remained in the railway's employ, H.D. Jones would have had ample time to



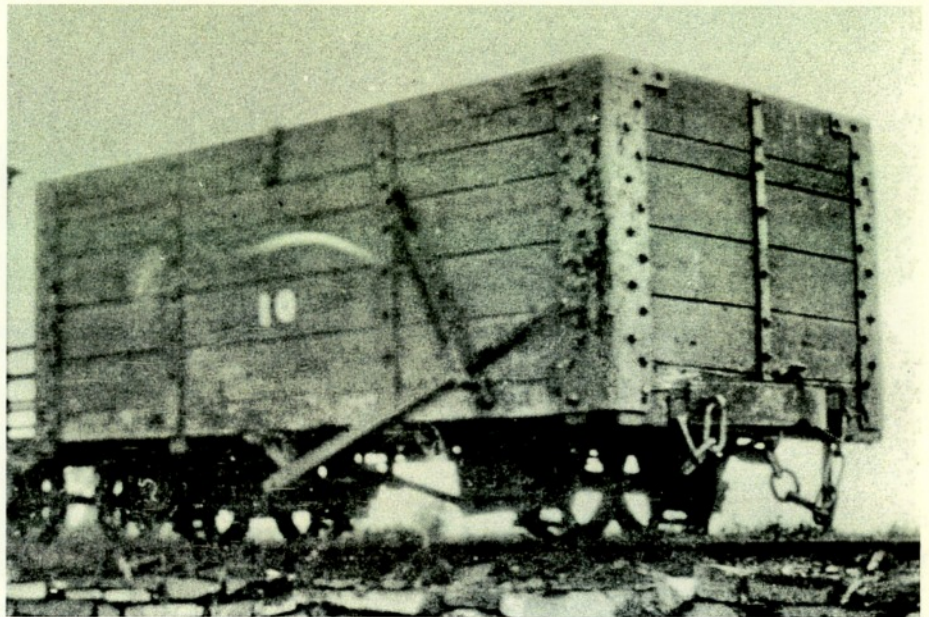
# Excursion by Gravity

The building of the WHR in 1922/23 has been described as a job creation scheme in which the then Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, had an involvement. In his autobiography '88 Not Out' published in 2001, his (D.L.G.'s) nephew makes reference to travelling on the WHR both as a conventional passenger and as a 'joy rider'. It is the latter excursion that is of interest here. It would seem that it happened in the mid 1920's during that part of the year when - for a variety of reasons - no passenger trains were operating and Mr George was a young teenager.

On this occasion he had been taken to Rhyd Ddu with three other boys - one of whom was old enough to drive the family motorcar - and in the company of a 'young love' called Chrissie. Willie Higham was the car driver and the other boys were called John and Graham. Now let the autobiography take up the story: -

*The resurrection of the North Wales Narrow Gauge Railway in the shape of the Welsh Highland Railway in 1922/23 was promoted as a means of reviving the economy of North West Wales. The then Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, who had strong ties with the area, undoubtedly had some involvement in supporting the project. His nephew, William George, who died at the age of 94 in November 2006, grew up in Criccieth. In his autobiography "88 Not Out" published in 2001 Dr George mentions spending a summer holiday with his family in Rhyd Ddu and travelling with his family several times on the WHR presumably from Porthmadog to Rhyd Ddu. In more detail he describes an illicit ride by gravity on the on the WHR from Rhyd Ddu northwards (towards Dinas). Dr George does not give a date for this escapade but one can make a reasonably informed guess from internal evidence in the autobiography. Dr George was born in 1912. He was probably in his mid teens at the time of his ride on the WHR wagon, which would place it in the mid to late 1920s at a time when for whatever reason there was no passenger service.*

*In the lead into the passage from "88 Not Out", which describes the gravity run Dr George describes his journey by car to Rhyd Ddu. The car was driven by Willie Higham, the eldest of the four Higham children and ten years older than William George who was the youngest in the party.*



*Also present were Willie's brothers, John and Graham and their sister, Chrissie. John had sometime during World War I escaped death when he fell out of an express train between Liverpool and Euston. Fortunately the hair raising gravity run from Rhyd Ddu appears to have been completed without serious incidence.*

## *Paul Bradshaw digs out an extract from the biography of William George*

*The passage from "88 Not Out" is reproduced with the consent of the Executors of Dr George, who continues his recollection of the ride.*

"On arrival at the Welsh Highland Railway station the sentimental motor car journey was over. The boys started pushing some empty trucks for a short distance along the line. I remember being very alarmed because, when I was a small boy, I had spent a summer holiday with my parents in the village and had travelled several times on the train which ran on the narrow gauge railway from Porthmadog through Rhyd-ddu and then on to Dinas near Caernarfon. Willie asked: 'What are you worrying about, Will?' I replied in my heavily laden Welsh accent: 'The truck may collide with a train engine and you will get killed'. John shouted: 'Don't worry, the railway company has gone bust'. I had never heard the word 'bust'

*WHR coal wagon pictured here at Dinas by Roger Kidner in 1934. Note 'the heavy iron lever' used to control the vehicle on the hair-raising ride! A superb replica of this vehicle has been constructed by Dave Gledhill at Gelert's Farm*

before. Noticing that I was perplexed Chrissie told me that the trains had stopped running because nobody could afford to run them. 'Come on you two, jump into the truck with us,' one of the boys shouted.

This heralded the commencement of the most hair-raising excursion I have ever had in my life. What the boys had done was to push one of the larger empty trucks from the siding onto the main single narrow-gauge line up to a point where the track went downhill for two or three miles in the Caernarfon direction. With the five of us in the truck there was sufficient weight for the truck to go hurtling down the line; Willie Higham who, I understood, had some engineering experience was in charge. Our safety depended entirely on his expertise in operating a heavy iron lever fixed to the outside of the truck, with which he was able to slow the truck down as we approached bends in the track. The clatter of the iron wheels of the truck as we spun along made speech inaudible. I remember thinking that if John were thrown out of the truck he would not be as lucky as when he fell out of an express train. There were rocks around everywhere. It was a long walk along the narrow mountain road back to Rhyd-ddu and the family car.



## J.E. Simpson

John Egerton Simpson died in Cambridge last September in his 93<sup>rd</sup> year. A lifelong railway enthusiast he visited the WHR in the summer of 1935 and took several photographs – essentially of the locomotives – of excellent quality. This visit was recorded in a booklet published in 2001 entitled 'Light Railways Explored' which covered many of the small independent lines in England and Wales.



Simpson's photograph here reproduced, showing Moel Tryfan ready to return to Porthmadog, has been available in its basic form for many years. Quite by chance the writer acquired from the NRM this

enhanced version with the 'human interest' on the right. A member of the train crew appears to be talking to a mother, father and daughter. Summer dresses are apparent. Extreme right is part of the

platform seat and a toilet sign attached to the gable end of the station building. Adjacent to the goods shed siding point lever is one of the extraordinary tall telegraph poles. The train could well be the

## Gratitude!

Response to the crossing box appeal has been fantastic. It once again highlights WHR supporters' remarkable generosity. So, from a delighted 'project sponsor' – 'very many thanks'. Before the benefit of gift aid over £8000 has been raised equating with an installed and ready for use cost of £9,500. The base on which the box will sit is a separate construction company funding.

Delivery – and erection by the supplier – has been brought forward from December to August after which the Welsh slate roof will be fitted, the cost of which is included in the £9,500. Volunteer input will take the form of further timber treatment and painting.

The original Dutton box was installed by 1894 and the replica's supplier contends

that visually it will look 90-95% like the original. (An article about the original box will appear in a journal later this year). Maybe the box could be a contender for a future Heritage Railway award? Reflecting on this appeal perhaps its success can be attributed to three reasons. First – along with the already installed crossing gates it will represent an enhancement at the bottom end of the line. Second, it was the first serious heritage building appeal by the Heritage group. Third, members obviously appreciate the necessity of re-instating or replicating this unique railway's infrastructure.

Tryfan Junction here we come!



*Project sponsor, John Keylock, demonstrates the position of the crossing box.*

## Excursion by Gravity cont.

On the walk back I told Chrissie about the summer holiday I'd spent with my parents at Rhyd-ddu; my father used to hire a boat from Robert Williams, a confirmed bachelor, who lived on the edge of the lake within sight of the Welsh Highland Railway station. I used to sit in the bow of the boat, my father in the stern with his fishing rod as Robert rowed steadily towards the open lake, the boat's prow cleaving a furrow like a plough through the reeds and water lilies. I stood and marvelled at the beauty of the water lilies in the clear water, the blueness of the summer sky and the water lilies resurfacing

unharmd, so slow was the boats progress. Chrissie asked me if my father had caught any fish. I told her that all I remembered was the glass-like surface of the lake with occasional rings breaking the surface as trout rose to some real flies on the surface. Robert Williams had told my father that you never catch fish when the surface of the lake is unruffled, without any breeze. As we started our journey home in the family car, I suggested to Willie that he should stop the car for a few moments so that we could look at a large boulder on the roadside.\* I said that the outline of the boulder was reputed to resemble the profile of the Duke of Wellington. They all looked and agreed that the resemblance was strik-

ing, were impressed with my local knowledge and that made me feel good as the youngest in the party. Whether or not our escapades in free-wheeling down the line from Rhyd-ddu reached the ears of Mr. Higham or my father, these outings stopped."

*\*On a journey from Rhyd Ddu to Criccieth 'a large boulder on the roadside' is most likely likely a reference to Pitt's Head, but even today some local people refer to this rock as 'The Duke of Wellington', as did young William George in the 1920's. However it is said that on the face of Moel-y-Gest there is a rock outcrop with quite a resemblance to the Duke of Wellington 'in repose'. - CJK*



# THE ADVENTURES OF JOHN HUGHES Y WERN

**I** LEFT Derwen Fawr in response to a request from a farmer at yr Erw Fawr, Llanfrothen, to follow the horses that were used to carry the slates from Croesor and Rhosydd Quarries in the mornings, and to work on the land in the afternoons. Being able to come nearer home appealed to me, and I accepted the offer gladly. Having worked with horses extracting timber in Nant Gwynant during WW1 I felt well qualified for this morning job.

I was last to follow 'the run' with Shire horses, and I'd better explain that wagons full of slate was 'the run'.

My task was to provide the horses to pull the wagons to Porthmadog and to return by one o'clock. I had to be at the bottom of the incline by seven o'clock in the morning, summer and winter.

## *Working on the Croesor - a first hand account*

Some days there were seventeen or eighteen wagons and it was necessary to go there the previous evening to see how many horses were needed. If there was a large load, three or four horses were needed, but if there were eight or ten wagons, two horses were enough. Amongst them was an old horse, that knew exactly when to pull along the line and when not to. His name was Sam and one back leg was bent.

As John Jones released the full wagons at Croesor down the incline, the empty ones



went up to be refilled. Each wagon had to be weighed at Porthmadog, as haulage fees are paid by the ton, then the horses went from the mill, Porthmadog with the wagons to the quay where the slates were loaded onto ships that took them to every part of the world.

Sometimes I had a full run for the return journey – flour, coal and all manner of goods. I left some things at Tynllwyd Crossing, perhaps. The next station was Gatws Bach and often I would leave some things there, like coal and animal feed for the farmer to collect by horse and cart. Afterwards, I would stop at the Yard, as it was called, and William Roberts, a shop keeper at Garreg would collect the goods there.

I sometimes had the company of a coal merchant from Croesor. Huw Roberts was his official name but Croesorydd was his Bardic name. I saw him often soaked to

the skin, and he threatened each time to give up the work when he was wet, but he carried on for several years. I saw him several times sheltering under the tarpaulin. He would ask from time to time, "Where are now?" I would reply "Pont Traeth" even though we had almost reached the bottom of the incline. He would tell me off for misleading him like this.

I would reach Yr Erw Fawr about one o'clock, and I had to work on the land for the rest of the day, ploughing, opening ditches and so on.

*Published in Welsh by Cyhoeddiadru Mei, 40 Stryd y Wyddfa, Penygroes, Caernarfon, Gwynedd 1992.*

*Edited by Marian Elias*

*Translated from the Welsh by D.B. Paul*

## Tanlan Memories

My grandmother (Nain to me) grew up at Tanlan and her parents kept the shop at No 2 Tanlan – until fairly recently it was still possible to see trace of the original lintel that spanned the shop window. My father's cousin is still a resident of Garreg and has lived all her life in the area. Coincidentally the bridge in question came up in conversation some months ago and she confirmed to my father that, locally, the bridge has always been known as Pont Traeth. (As an aside, my Nain was fortunate to secure a place at the High School in Blaenau and her daily commute consisted of walking from Tanlan to Penrhyn station and then completing her journey by way of the FR.)

My father went on to recall some memories of the area which I quote below. By this time, Nain and Taid had

In the naming of bridges in the area, it is interesting to note that Pont Garreg Hyllidrem is just called Pont Garreg on a photograph I have.

## *Group member Phil Jones' father remembers Tanlan*

moved to Birmingham and my father's memories were of long school holidays spent with family members in the area.

"The work referred to in the article on the bridge reminds me that before the war the bridge was in such a state that when travelling by Crosville bus from Porthmadog to Llanfrothen we as passengers had to get off the bus on arrival at the bridge to lighten the load and rejoin it on the other side. (This was just a temporary measure).

This bridge is quite close to Croesor Junction and I recall travelling by the 'trên bach' from Port with my father on our way to Tanlan in the mid 30's. At the junction was a solitary slate wagon and my father pushed me in this, (the line still being in situ) as far as the above bridge taking us a short distance from our destination.

### Photographs

*This page : Tanlan cottages*

*Page 11 : Top 'The Yard' was just over the Llanfrothen Road in this picture by James Boyd*

*Page 11 : Lower the frowning prominence of Garreg Hyllidrem*



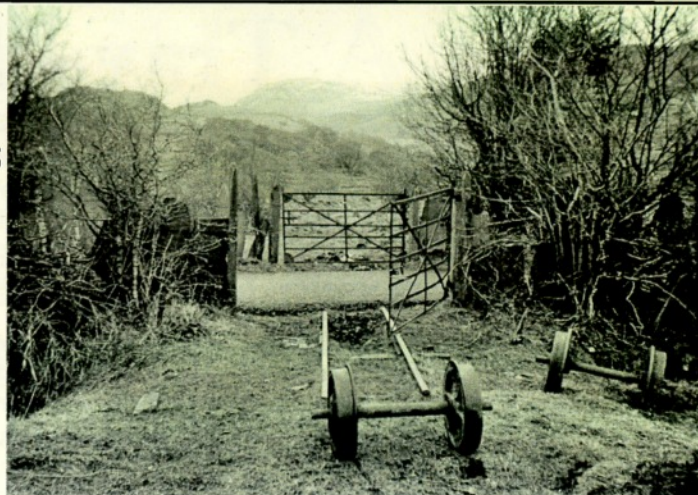
## Interpretation of 'The Return Run'

Near Ynysfor Hall there is a farm called Tynllydd. At the end of the long straight, north from Pont Traeth – where the road bends right near Ty Newydd Morfa farm to Garreg/Llanfrothen – an access lane to Ynysfor Hall crosses the railway. It is suggested that this is the location referred to as Tynllydd Crossing.

On the opposite side of the railway to the site of Ynysfor halt is a lodge. A level crossing here was for the lane from Garreg/Llanfrothen - passing Erwglass/Morfa glas - before the crossing to Ynysfor Hall. It is suggested that this location was Gatws Bach. Gatws can be

interpreted as lodge/gatehouse and 'bach' would distinguish it from the gatehouse at the top of the first incline on the Croesor Tramway.

What John Jones refers to as 'The Yard' – to which shopkeeper William Roberts came from Garreg to collect goods – raises a few queries. However, allowing for the fact that recollections were written down some fifty years after the events immediate thoughts suggest



'The Yard's' location to be the sidings immediately north of the Nantmor to Llanfrothen road, by Pont Carreg hyllidrem. Here was also a shed to temporarily store perishables and the sidings could accommodate wagonloads for unloading as convenient. However a shorter distance for Mr Roberts from Garreg would theoretically have been along the lane from the village to Gatws Bach. By the early 1920's it is possible that this lane had fallen into dis-use and access to the Lodge would have been via the current access to Ynysfor Hall. Furthermore, even though the journey time to Pont Carreg hyllidrem via Tanlan was obviously greater the road surface would have been much better for Mr Roberts – particularly if he had a motor vehicle.



## A Journey to Beddgelert on the Welsh Highland Train

*Translated from the Welsh by Brian Paul*

1 On a pleasant afternoon in mid-June  
And myself in good health, and long daylight hours,  
I went on a trip on the Highland train;  
In the company of an old friend, feeling joyful,  
The engine whistles leisurely, before starting.  
To signify that all was well to the travellers.  
"Alright" said the guard, "puff, puff" says she  
And off she went with full carriages

2 We soon came to 'Pont Croesor' station  
And the Glaslyn River was crossed without fright,  
And then whizzed along to Ynysfor.  
Through beautiful meadows on each side,  
After accepting the travellers safely  
The engine again whistled as it went forth  
And onwards quickly through the Erw crossing  
Onwards towards Ferlas as quick as the wind.

3 In a short time the beautiful village of Nantmor was  
reached  
The home of literature and famous bards,  
Namorydd and Glaslyn, Cwm-Bych, and Charneddog  
And Rhys Goch, Eryri and Dafydd – old bards.  
'Next stop' was Beddgelert through tunnels and cuttings,

And Aberglaslyn Pass, the area's splendid scene  
That attracts numbers of English visitors  
To the surroundings each year for a visit.

4 At last, the village station was reached,  
And the travellers were happy – young and old alike,  
Most of us coming the first time  
To the capital city of fortified Snowdonia, by train,  
By seeing the magnificent valley mountains  
And the high towers reaching the heavens,  
We feel over-awed, in the midst of the great wisdom  
Of the Creator – high praise – Amen!

5 Now one must joyfully think about returning home,  
Proceeding to the station in good time for a train,  
I believe that if I had an occasional trip like this again  
I'd remain young, I wouldn't grow old  
I arrived at my cottage near the Alltwn  
In the company of my friend feeling happy  
Praising the journey on the Welsh Highland  
Through the beautiful places that are found in our country

Pen Morfa  
July 1923



# A Traveller's Tale

**L**ife was seldom easy for regular passengers on the Welsh Highland. Writing in 'Railway Modeller' John de Frayssinet relates how his mother used to tell him horror stories of her adventures on the WHR when she went to university at Bangor. The following is John's recollection of those 'adventures'.

My mother, who came from Barmouth used to regale us when we were young with WHR stories and a few FR. For us, the stories were better than anything out of a book! I generally believe that most were reasonably accurate. My grandfather was a property owner in the Barmouth area and had some sort of deal with the WHR for much reduced rates. This apparently had arisen because a quite valuable shipment somehow got lost between Dinas and Portmadoc. Quite how the shipment went by WHR was a bit uncertain, however, it was a complete American soda fountain with bar, stools, apparatus etc. It was to be the first such installation in Wales! For some reason, the mainline offloaded it to the WHR at Dinas. The WHR probably had no idea of the destination! My grandfather had made much hullabaloo about the Yanky soda fountain to the press and the delay was very embarrassing.

I understand that it was eventually found on an intermediate station still in timber packing cases. It would appear that the only possible customers, the local sheep had little interest in the affair.

From then on, my mother carried her belongings from the Portmadoc main line to the WHR 'new' station, often in pouring rain. She never told me whether the train crossed the standard gauge or not. Every trip was apparently an adventure. The only time that a train actually arrived remotely on time was when once, a double engine took the train all the way to Dinas. She used to take a picnic with her in the hope that she could enjoy the trip from the Gladstone car, which was her coach of preference.

Most of the stories were about the England engines. They were, according to her, usually suffering from asthma and often needed to take rests. My mother imitated this very well! She remembered once travelling behind the American engine which failed between Beddgelert and South Snowdon. She recalls the fire burning on the track along with the fire bars and a driver, by then beside himself who roundly kicked the locomotive several times, using invective that did not shock my mother because she was reading Anglo Saxon! It took me a long time to figure

that one out! The best part was that the driver hurt his foot while metering the punishment and spent some time writhing on the ground with further invective!

On one occasion, returning to Barmouth, she was stranded at Beddgelert as the Portmadoc train never arrived. That was one night at the Royal Goat!

As already described in the Railway Modeller, she finally spent a night out 'on the mountain' (I think Moel Hebog) with Palmerston which had failed. She also did try the buffet car which she described as worse than anything that could be mustered up in a workhouse.

I understand WHR stories were quite favoured at Bangor University as quite a number of students could add their own experiences. It was one of the standard excuses for arriving late for anything!

That is about the long and short of it. We camped at Beddgelert station in the 60s. My mother wistfully said, as we cowered in our tent sheltering from tipping rain, "If you only knew how familiar this experience is"!

*John's website at [www.009.cd2.com](http://www.009.cd2.com) is well worth a visit for L&B fans*

## More on 'Gowrie

**NARROW GAUGE LOCOMOTIVES.**  
Main Line, 2ft. gauge, Six-coupled **SIDE-TANK LOCOMOTIVE**, by Hunslet, with 4-Wheeled Trailing Bogie, copper box, 150lb. working pressure, overhauled; a fine Locomotive. **PRICE £375.**

**TWO 18in. gauge Four-coupled SADDLE TANK LOCOMOTIVES**, 6in. cyls. **PRICE £60 each.**

**THREE 18in. DITTO, 0-4-2 type SIDE-TANK LOCOMOTIVES**, 7½in. cyls. **PRICE £70 each.**

**TWO 18in. DITTO, 2-4-0 type OIL-DRIVEN LOCOMOTIVES**, Hornsby Engines. **PRICE £70 each.**

**ONE 18in. DITTO, 2-4-0 type Hornsby Double-cyl. OIL ENGINE**, 9½in. cyls. **PRICE £80.**

**TWO 3ft. 6in. gauge, Four-wheel Coupled PETROL LOCOMOTIVES**, Two-cyl. Engines. **PRICE £90 each.**

**JOHN F. WAKE, DARLINGTON.**

*Advert one in which Wake was trying to dispose of 'Gowrie' - (top)  
The ad had appeared in 1926 & 1927, but stopped on 2nd December 1927*

WHH No 38 carries a comprehensive article on the fate of 'Gowrie'. Michael Bishop has unearthed the adverts in 'Machinery Market' in which both Hughes Bolckow and Wake tried to dispose of the loco. Advert one from Wake was pub-

lished in 1926 & 1927, and last appeared on the 2nd December 1927.

Advert two by Hughes Bolckow commenced on 13th January 1928. The clear implication is that Wake gave up, sold his stock to Hughes Bolckow, (or they acted as agents) perhaps for scrap, but Bolckow tried one more time to find a buyer for the loco

**2FT. gauge Steam Locomotive**, 6-wheel coupled, with 4-Wheeled Trailing Bogie, cyls. 9½in. by 14in. stroke; Boiler on swivelling saddle; excellent order.

**HUGHES, BOLCKOW and CO., LTD.,**  
**THE AERODROME,**  
**MARSKE-BY-THE-SEA, YORKS. 1-t.u.419**

*Advert two, which first appeared on 13th January 1928, sees Hugh Bolckow, trying perhaps for the last time to sell 'Gowrie' as a running machine.*

Editor : David Allan, 132 Eastham Village Road, Eastham, Wirral, CH62 0AE. Tel 0151 327 3576 Email [david.allan132@ntlworld.com](mailto:david.allan132@ntlworld.com)

Secretary : John Keylock, Weathervane Cottage, Childswickham, Broadway, Worcestershire, WR12 7HL Tel : 01386 852 428  
Membership Secretary : Chris Hazlehurst, 23 Leagate Rd, Gipsy Bridge, Boston, Lincolnshire, PE22 7BU. Tel : 01205 280923  
Email [Westernpatriarc@aol.com](mailto:Westernpatriarc@aol.com)