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The remains of the station building at Betws Garmon as photographed in the 1960s (left) and as it appears 'today' (right)
Photos by Barry Gray and Nick Booker respectively.

The WHR Heritage Group came into being initially to save and record as much as possible of the line's physical history that was potentially at risk during the reconstruction of the WHR. Since then the Group has ensured that, wherever possible, the buildings, mostly from the NWNGR era, and other features have been preserved, helping to enhance the experience of today's passengers and preserving the ambiance which made the line unique. The Group has been instrumental in either rebuilding or re-creating several of the buildings of the NWNGR and the WHR. The most significant and most expensive project has been the restoration of the Tryfan Junction station building, for which in 2014 the Group won the National Heritage Railways Volunteers' Award. This year following delivery of the locomotive water delivery pipe, we will be able to commission the Beddgelert Water Tank. The signal box base at Tryfan Junction will be conserved and stabilised by a contractor and later the storage container will be moved elsewhere and the site will be cosmetically improved including the installation of new fencing. Later this year, we are aiming to hold the inaugural meeting of the Friends of TJ.

In addition to all this physical activity, we have continued our publishing programme with a book on the Bryngwyn Branch, a revised and improved second

Nick Booker has been reviewing Group progress and looking forward to possible future Heritage Group projects and activities.

edition of The Buffet Car book, while a history of the PBSSR electrification scheme awaits completion. So for a small group we remain remarkably active and indeed financially sound.

For the future, to remain an active and a growing group, we need a major new project, as well finishing

off the work at TJ and Beddgelert. We have been offered, informally, the opportunity to rebuild the station at Betws Garmon. Such a project would be on a scale of the Tryfan Junction project, but with slightly better access. However, before committing ourselves, and initiating the formal application process to the FR/WHR Heritage Company, we need to assess the likely level of support from members, and indeed the potential for attracting new members, who can devote the time to such a major project. This is therefore a call for your views as a WHRHG member on both the embryonic Betws Garmon scheme and the more general question, some might call it 'strategic', regarding 'what next for the Heritage Group?' In May we have the Group's AGM and it is my intention that at that time, we should discuss the whole issue of 'where next?' In the meantime please send any comments to me. I look forward to hearing from you all.

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NWNGR (?) / WHR COVERED VANS

A PERSONAL VIEW

In *WHH64* I speculated at some length on the 'vexed' history of the two Welsh Highland covered vans. I use the word 'vexed' to cover my frustration that we know so little of the actual history of these vehicles and therefore are driven to speculation. However, I greatly prefer that where we speculate we should do so on the basis of those facts we actually can identify, accepting that in some cases these 'facts' may well be few and far between.

The *Railway Gazette* dated October 26th 1923 carried a long article on the then 'new' Welsh Highland Railway. In a short paragraph on Rolling Stock (p. 516) we find the following sentence:

There are 124 four-wheeled vehicles adapted to the slate and general traffic carried on the railway.

As with many of our researches, there is a strong temptation to review Boyd's contribution to the written history, recognising, of course, that this history is often flawed due entirely to the limited information available to him at the time he produced his various works. However, Boyd was not the first in this field and, apart from periodicals such as the *Railway Gazette* he was preceded in the field of book authorship by Charles E. Lee whose *Narrow Gauge Railways in North Wales* appeared in 1945. However, in his Chapter VI – *Predecessors of the Welsh Highland Railway* – Lee makes but scant comment (albeit highly inaccurate) on NWNGR passenger stock and makes no mention of goods stock at all.

Boyd's *Narrow Gauge Rails to Portmadoc* was published by Oakwood in 1949 and his summary therein of the NWNGR Goods Stock situation was brief, reading as follows (pp 122/3):

GOODS STOCK

There appear to have been about 150 wagons employed on the line, the bulk of these being frame-type slate wagons similar in appearance to those in use on the Festiniog Railway, but of more up-to-date construction. These had axleboxes proper and were sprung, each having a hand brake. The earlier slate and general mineral wagons (used chiefly for stone traffic) were solid-sided wagons of two sizes, having in the smaller size fixed sides and in the larger a drop door on one side only. The dimensions of these wagons were in almost all cases identical with those larger types in use on the Festiniog system.

There were a few goods vans of plain box-like appearance. These, too, had but a door fitted on one side only. There was also one goods brake van having an outside wooden frame, sliding side doors and glazed windows fitted at one end. An outer pair of sliding doors gave access to the guard's end and small footsteps were fitted.

All these wagons had four wheels only and most were fitted with side lever hand brake.

On page 133 of this same work, in his section on the Welsh Highland, he simply said:

The four-wheeled goods stock numbered 124 vehicles, covering a majority of slate wagons and a minority of fixed-sided open wagons, timber bolster wagons and vans.

The similarities between this sentence and that quoted from the *Railway Gazette* published 26 years earlier are striking.

By the time Boyd produced his first edition of *Narrow Gauge Rails in South Caernarvonshire* in 1978 this brief text had expanded to about 8½ pages. Within this longer text we find the following paragraph:

COVERED VANS

There were at least two covered vans carrying numbers 2 and 4, and they were based on the 5-ton Coal Wagons. There were double opening doors on one side only, the brake handle being on the east side. No. 4 had wider doors arranged with the opening in the form of an arched curve; quite unusual. Buffing and couplers, and running gear was the same as the Coal Wagons. The Official Returns ignored them under the heading 'Covered Wagons'!

In the Welsh Highland section of this same work we find, on page 341/2:

Among the vehicles used by the Welsh Highland were two covered vans which like all NWNG goods stock, continued to carry their original numbers 2 & 4. Repainting was done in lake (brick-red of the Festiniog fashion) with black ironwork and white lettering which was done by stencils 'WHR' with the number below. There was no standard method of lettering etc. These vans had had corrugated iron sheets to replace the original roofs; they do not feature in any of the Returns of c.1922, even in that of Major Spring who at least embraced the fitted Brake Van which the others missed!

When Boyd produced his extended two-volume 2nd edition of *NGRinSC*, he used essentially the same text in his NWNGR section (Volume 1, 1988), but without the final 'official returns' comment. In the Welsh Highland section of this later work (Volume 2, 1989) he reproduced verbatim his text from the 1st Edition (on pages 70/1), thus restoring at least in part his 'missing from returns' observations.

We have to wonder on just what basis Boyd made these assertions as there is little if any evidence that either of these vehicles existed under NWNGR auspices. It seems probable that Boyd was aware that these two vehicles were in WHR service and he simply assumed that the WHR must have inherited these from the NWNGR. His comment on their roof design was perhaps prompted by his refusal to believe that the NWNGR would have condoned the use of corrugated iron for such applications? He seems to have been happy to reconcile this assumption by dismissing NWNGR Returns as 'unreliable' and he clearly chose not to wonder just why these vans were apparently "ignored" by the earlier Railway.

We will simply note this point for now, observing that had these not been NWNCR vehicles then it would be entirely unsurprising that they did not appear in their stock returns.

So what DO we know of the covered vans and their history? The answer is very little indeed. The vans were, it would seem, apparently very successful in eluding the photographer. Having trawled through several photographic collections I have managed so far to identify only 12 images showing complete or partial views of these vans. Of these, two are very 'partial' indeed with but a glimpse of a van roof in the background. Not one of these 12 images dates to the NWNCR period, indeed the earliest date that can be applied to any of these is 1928 – the two partial views noted above and one other image in the same LPC series. Bar these 3 images, all of the photographs can reliably be dated to the 1930s.



A northbound train stands on the 'main' line at Beddgelert in 1928. The roof of a covered van can just be seen beyond the open door of the Buffet Car - WHR24 (LPC1661)



An enlargement from LPC1661 to show the covered van roof. Note probable goods transfer from the east side of the vehicle.

However 'unreliable' NWNCR wagon returns are characterized by various authors, the fact remains that they do record numbers of 'covered goods' wagons from the outset right up to the First World War. As well as Board of Trade Returns, the Company's Accounts also contain information which is many ways more informative. If we look at the Account statements concerning just the 'covered vans', on 30th June 1881 the Company declared 3. This total was consistently reported until 31st December 1906 when the total was reduced to 2. Three years later, on 31st December 1909 the total reduced again to only 1. After 1912/1913, when accounting law changed, in such returns as there are there is no mention of any 'covered goods' vehicles,

suggesting that the last of the three original vehicles had finally been withdrawn. I am indebted to Michael Bishop for this summary of NWNCR Accounts information.

The 'covered goods' vehicles noted in these returns presumably were of the 'ridge-top' design of which we know, from photographic evidence, that the Company possessed at least 2. One of these carried the number '1' and we have photographs showing the number '2' applied to one of the 5-ton open coal wagons during the NWNCR period. Comparison of known wagon numbers would appear to indicate that the 'covered goods' wagons might have been numbered in a separate series to the coal wagons, possibly carrying the numbers '1', '2' and '3'. Just which of these was retired at each reduction in the total number of these vehicles is not known.

We have already noted Boyd's observation that none of the 'transition' listings made at the time of the establishment of the Welsh Highland made any reference to the existence of 'covered goods' or 'covered vans'. However, having previously made no mention of these vans, the WHR reported 2 of these vehicles in 1929 and for the three subsequent years up to the cessation of returns in 1933.

In my previous notes, we showed that in all probability the 2 Welsh Highland vans had been converted from 5-plank (nominally 4-ton) coal wagons. Assuming that goods vehicles retained their numbers through their NWNCR and WHR histories then the numbers '2' and '4' allocated to the vans should be indicators of their history. There were 5-plank coal wagons numbered 2 and 4, indeed the only NWNCR-era photograph that clearly shows the wagon number on a 5-plank open coal wagon is of no. 2 at Bryngwyn. I have not seen a photograph definitively showing no. 4, but eagle-eyed readers will have noted in Dick Lystor's account of the career of 'HDJ' (WHH69) the following passage:

However, far worse was to befall HDJ on October 18th that year. He was not on duty that day, and an incident at the station ultimately led to him being sadly dismissed from the Company. On that fateful afternoon, employees of W.S. Jones – the local carrier – were engaged in shifting empty coal wagons from the coal siding to enable them to remove a full wagon onto the main line. The key to the siding padlock was obtained from HDJ by one of W.S. Jones' employees, the siding was unlocked and a prop inserted to keep the points open. Once the loaded wagon was out on the main line, the prop securing the points dropped out and the wagon started to roll down the gradient before the siding could be opened. Despite frantic efforts by all concerned, the loaded wagon could not be stopped and had gained speed and ran away toward the Goat tunnel, finally becoming derailed at Brynnyfelin bridge. W.S. Jones then drove his lorry along the Aberglaslyn Pass road and successfully warned the guard of the 3.10 up train from Portmadoc, Dafydd Lloyd Hughes, and a collision with the derailed wagon was avoided. The four passengers on board this train continued their journey by bus.

An enquiry was held into this incident on the 26th October at Beddgelert and evidence was heard by all concerned. The wagon in question was coal wagon no. 4, which although being a braked

vehicle, the brake handle had recently got broken thus rendering the brakes ineffective. It appeared that this damage had been done before the wagon left Dinas, and should not have been used in traffic.

Thus we appear to have, on record, confirmation that coal wagon no. 4 was still a coal wagon in October 1927. In other words, if this wagon was converted to a van then this must have happened after this date. Perhaps the damage suffered in this accident rendered this vehicle as candidate for conversion?

Now perhaps it is time for a little speculation?

A fundamental philosophical principle that can be traced back to Aristotle or perhaps even earlier states:

We may assume the superiority ceteris paribus [other things being equal] of the demonstration which derives from fewer postulates or hypotheses (Aristotle)

or

We consider it a good principle to explain the phenomena by the simplest hypothesis possible. (Ptolemy).

This principle is most commonly known today as ‘Occam’s Razor’, reflecting the work of William of Ockham who studied, but clearly did not originally postulate, this principle in the late 13th and early 14th century.

So how do these principles apply here?

In order to argue that Vans 2 and 4 were originally NWNCR vehicles, we have to explain why they did not appear latterly in NWNCR wagon returns or accounting returns, why repeated analyses of the surviving NWNCR stock at the time of transition to the Welsh Highland failed to recognise these vehicles and why there are no photographs of these vehicles pre-dating 1928. We also have to explain why, if they were converted from 5-plank open coal wagons, van number 4 existed in parallel with coal wagon number 4 for apparently a considerable period. We also have to identify which coal wagon it was that was converted into covered van 4, and, of course, which was similarly converted into van 2.

To support this overall assertion, we are forced to address each of these issues or questions by constructing hypotheses or

theories. We attempt to describe ‘what must have happened’ to explain away these apparent anomalies.

On the other hand, were these not NWNCR vehicles but rather were they converted into covered vans by the Welsh Highland then we are faced with no such problems. There are no discrepancies with the available facts. We need no additional hypotheses or theories to explain the known circumstances.

We cannot with certainty state that the latter option is therefore correct – these principles do not constitute proof. However, we can say with some certainty that the latter option is more likely to be correct. Indeed, should the first option require a large number of explanatory hypotheses whilst the second requires none, we can assert that the probability that the second is true is actually quite high.

Of course, if these vans were the subject of conversion under the WHR regime then we would expect to see evidence of the costs incurred in the Company’s accounts.

Boyd summarised accounts data in *NGRinSC* Volume 2 (on page 119), showing the following annual costs for “Repairs and Renewals (Locos, Carrs & Wagons)”:

1922, £511; 1923, £717; 1924, £318; 1925, £153; 1926, £213; 1927, £292; 1928, £229; 1929, £26; 1930, £103; 1931, £190; 1932, no data; 1933, £78.

These data suggest a generally falling level of expenditure after the initial investment in refurbishing ex-NWNCR stock (including, for example, cutting down locomotives and carriage stock) with two exceptions - a local increase relative to this trend over the period 1926 to 28 and another over the period 1930 to 33. Whilst this analysis is inevitably speculative, the 1926 to 28 ‘bump’ would appear to indicate an additional spend of approximately £520 relative to the general trend and similarly the 1930 to 33 increase appears to have been approximately £450.

We know that *Russell* was withdrawn from service towards the end of 1929 not to return until the 1931 season and this may well explain much of this second deviation from the trend. As to the first, it would appear that this could well have included the costs of the Buffet Car conversion, sundry repairs to locomotives, particularly diesels perhaps, and other wagon repair activity.

Perhaps at least some of this expenditure represented the costs of converting open wagons no. 2 and 4 into covered vans?



A mixed train photographed behind Moel Tryfan at Dinas Junction in the early 1930s. Note covered van no. 2 between the un-glazed ‘Summer’ carriage and the open coal wagon. This is the only image I have identified so far that shows the van from the east side - F.E. Box



An enlargement from the ‘mixed train’ photograph showing the east side of van no. 2. The photograph shows not just the brake lever but also clearly shows 4 door hinges indicating that, contrary to previous accounts, this van at least had doors fitted to both sides.

GIMME SHELTER

Not to be confused with the awesome waxing released in 1969 by Messrs Jagger, Richards & Co of the same name, this article deals with the provision of passenger accommodation at the halts on the WHR, with particular reference to those at Hafod Garregog and Ynysfor.

The first mention of shelters is given in Col. Mount's report of 29th May 1923, where he notes (at paragraph 11(d) of National Archives file MT6/3286) that buildings were still to be put up at Ynysfor, Hafod Ruffydd and Pont Croesor. Tyrwhitt, in his note to the MoT of 28 May 1923 (National Archives file MT6/3286), described these as "Corrugated Iron Shelter" in each case. As will be seen later in this article, that at Pont Croesor had been erected before 23rd October 1923, and it is not unreasonable to suppose that Hafod Ruffydd had been similarly enhanced by this date. It would appear that passengers waiting at Hafod y Llyn halt unfortunately never enjoyed such luxury and had to brave the elements as best they could! Certainly there was no shelter here listed in Tyrwhitt's note to the MoT.

On 16th October, Col. Stephens informed John May (Superintendent of both the FR and WHR) that he had two old box trucks and three or four old signal boxes available for shelters. May replied that there were four halts in need of such, and that an application had been made for a stopping place opposite Plasynant House. The house had recently been bought by the Christian Endeavour Holiday Homes, and May thought it was likely to be a good source of revenue during the summer. He asked Stephens to retain the trucks and signal boxes until he had decided whether they could be of use. Although a halt was provided at Plasynant some time in mid June 1924, and was well used for a time, no evidence has yet come to light to show whether a shelter was ever erected there, indeed the 1934 Lease makes no mention of the halt at all.

Stephens' letter of the 16th was quite timely, as exactly one week later the Glaslyn RDC wrote to May saying that strong complaints had been made at the last council meeting that there was no shelter for passengers at Hafod Garregog. They went on to say that the halt was considerably used by the residents of Nantmor and by anglers and others, and asked if a shelter similar to that at Pont Croesor (qv) could be erected. May passed this letter to H. J. Jack at Dolgarrog, adding that *"timber and corrugated sheets of one shelter, intended for Ynysfor but not yet put up, were lying at Boston Lodge and could be used at Hafod Garregog"*. Jack agreed to this, adding that unless WHR staff could erect it, that a price be obtained from a local builder.

May explained to Stephens that the reason why the materials were not used at Ynysfor was owing to some issue over the land required. At that time there was simply not enough space, but the problem was eventually overcome as will be explained later. He went on to suggest that Stephens design *"something about 12 or 15 feet long, 4 feet wide, with the ends boarded, and a veranda to cover, or partly cover, the platform. We have plenty of timber at Dolgarrog"*. He went on to say that they could be constructed by one of the company carpenters assisted by a platelayer, as local builders would be too expensive. Not surprisingly, Stephens responded by saying that he would try a

Dick Lystor has been looking into the histories of the passenger shelters provided at some of the Welsh Highland Railway's halts.

box van first and if that was a success, a shelter could be put up later!

An old quarrymen's coach duly arrived at Hafod Garregog fitted with a seat and painted inside, and was installed by early December. May still harboured the thought

that a proper shelter would materialise and that the carriage would become a platelayer's hut, but this was not to be, and the carriage remained the only passenger accommodation until closure. He was in correspondence with G. L. Griffith (Permanent Way Inspector for both FR and WHR) on a number of occasions in 1924 regarding proper shelters at both Hafod Garregog and Ynysfor, without success.

On 7th February that year, there was also talk of complaints regarding damage to goods put out at Ynysfor. Robert Williams, loco Superintendent at Boston Lodge, was reminded that he was supposed to be fixing up another old carriage, and to have it taken to the halt by the Croesor engine as soon as possible. Two days later, Mr Jones, the Stationmaster at Portmadoc, received instructions to have this carriage placed at the end of the siding, and to ensure that guards placed any goods inside for safe keeping. In August it was reported that the door to this carriage had been wrenched off making the vehicle useless for storage purposes. Perhaps it is not beyond the realms of fantasy to suggest that this had been done by irate passengers seeking some shelter fed up with standing out in the rain!! However, by the beginning of September the door had been fixed and made a little wider to enable easier access for sacks of flour and corn.

It was not until January 1926 that the question of passenger accommodation at the halt was finally addressed. Much of the land in the vicinity was the property of Major E. Bowen Jones of Ynysfor, and at a site meeting with Messrs Evans and Griffith on 19th January, he was prepared to let the WHR have a small

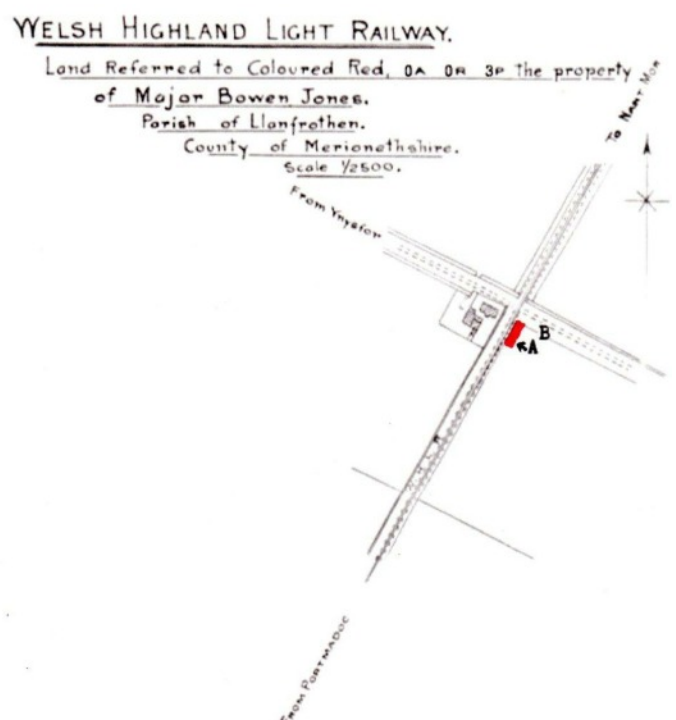


Figure 1. Plan of land required for Ynysfor halt.

plot of land some 50 feet by 15 feet at a right angle to the level crossing on which to erect a shelter (marked A on the plan), for a nominal rent of 5/- per annum. It was necessary to close up a small culvert (B) in order to create a cart road to the shelter. The plan and agreement were submitted to Bowen Jones for his approval, which finally came in March.

With the agreement in place, Stephens wasted no time in instructing Evans to get quotes from local contractors for the erection of the shelter. E. Thomas & Owen Williams of Portmadoc priced the job at £19, to include erection of the building with a concrete floor, the new cart road and the culvert work, providing that they got sand from Farmyard embankment or ashes from Boston Lodge for filling, and conveyance of same. Evans, passing on this estimate to Stephens, suggested that unless there was sufficient ash at Boston Lodge, that the contractors be given a few wagon loads of turf and earth from the top of Farmyard embankment. Stephens promptly wrote back asking for an estimate which didn't include a concrete floor and using WHR employees for the filling work. This money saving ploy met with success, as the new quote was only £6, but on the proviso that the shelter was in a proper condition for erection, and any additional materials required would be extra!

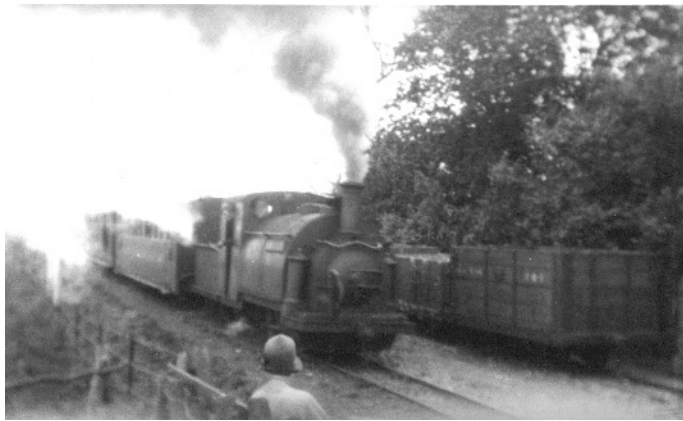


Figure 2. England loco and train passing Ynysfor in 1926 – possibly before shelter was erected.

Stephens, not unsurprisingly, was quick to take up this offer, telling Evans on 20th May to arrange for Griffith to set men at work levelling and filling the site without delay. Of course, being the WHR, nothing ever went smoothly and by 18th June nothing had been done as the platelayers were busy making the railway fit for Colonel Mount's inspections due on 6th October. Despite letters urging progress, it wasn't until 12th October that, having heard that the site had been levelled, he instructed Evans to get the contractors in right away. However, by this time the contractors were busy elsewhere, but they promised to be on site on the 25th. Fortune was again not on the railway's side as this day turned out to be extremely wet, and despite all the materials being on site, work was rescheduled for the following day. It is assumed that the shelter was that which was originally earmarked for Ynysfor way back in October 1923 and not used at Hafod Garregog!

All work had been completed by 1st November and Thomas & Williams, the contractors were pressing for payment, which included a further £2 for additional materials. Payment from



Figure 3. Timetable notice board rescued from inside the shelter.

Stephens was forthcoming on the 10th, and passengers at Ynysfor could now enjoy their long awaited shelter from the elements! One final twist remained however, with Bowen Jones complaining in March the following year that the fences around both the shelter and his property were too loose and asking that they should be tightened to prevent cattle straying from the adjoining fields.

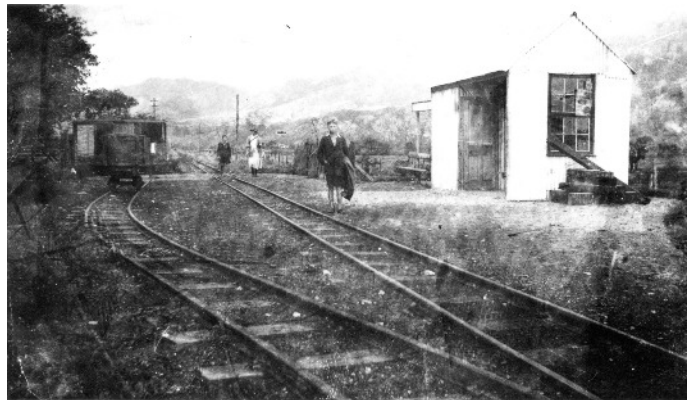


Figure 4. Ynysfor Halt complete with shelter, with old FR quarrymen's carriage beyond the siding (left).

By the time the FR took the lease of the WHR in 1934, it was recorded that there were two "zinc and timber" huts at the halt. As there was no mention of the old carriage used as a goods shed, it is possible that this was replaced by a corrugated iron hut.

As an aside from halts, in February 1924, May had received complaints about the state of the road leading to the halt from Llanfrothen, and wrote to Major Bowen Jones asking who was responsible for its maintenance. In his reply, the Major explained that the road was private and had in the past been maintained by himself, but as it had now become more public, he was disinclined to continue repairing it and would be prepared to hand it over to the public "on certain conditions" of which we have no details. May then wrote to Llanfrothen Parish Council asking if they could do anything, but the outcome of this enquiry is unknown.

Gwynedd Archive Services reference records:- XD97 23176; 23177; 23181; 23186; 23195 & 23253

Gremlins strike *WHH69*!!

Somewhere between the wilds of Dartmoor and the bleak plains of The Fylde, gremlins struck and stripped Dick Lystor's account of HDJ's career of its final paragraph (*WHH69*). The following sentence should have appeared just before the final acknowledgements:

"After all his trials and tribulations, he finally got steady work at Cooke's explosives works at Penrhyndeudraeth – a job he held for 30 years until retirement in 1960."

Apologies both to Dick and our readers for the omission!!

Capstans and Stop Boards.

A re-examination of the Cambrian Crossing.

Just occasionally when researching a mystery, you end up finding more answers than you had bargained for and as ever, there are more questions. I have long been puzzled by the lack of surviving preserved Disc Signal capstans on the Festiniog; one remains at Amberley and some have now been restored at Job Williams' (Lotties) Crossing near Minffordd. However, after 1926 when the majority of Disc signalling equipment was recovered from the Festiniog, nearly all of the capstans simply vanished! Knowing how the FR very rarely threw anything away this has always seemed an unusual occurrence. Fortunately, while researching the stop boards at the Cambrian Crossing, I think I have managed to account for four of the capstans.

At Portmadoc New, between the northern ends of the 1923 platforms and the gates that protected the standard gauge, there was a water tower (the concrete piers survive to this day) and between the water tower and the standard gauge there was something that from photographs looks very similar to a coaling stage. After much discussion in the production of this article, I think that this structure was never used in anger for the regular coaling of engines. Why? When the use of the Crossing was reduced and Welsh Highland trains started terminating on the north side of the standard gauge, there was no similar facility provided and a careful perusal of the working diagrams as drawn up by David Woodcock suggests that engines almost always returned to Dinas or Portmadoc Harbour/Boston Lodge for coaling and servicing: in other words engines would swap at the crossing points on the WHR and return to their shed of origin. It seems that this 'stage' was a speculative

MRFS (aka The Marquis de Carabas) continues his investigations into the signalling arrangements at the interface between the Welsh Highland and Festiniog Railways.

construction to allow for operational flexibility. Curiously the 'stage' outlived the water tower, as will be seen later on in this article.

The real starting point for this research was an attempt to analyse the signalling arrangements between Portmadoc New and

Portmadoc Harbour; Boyd/Lloyd makes reference to 'signalling here omitted from official diagram' [Reference 1] in the 1923 drawing of the High Street crossing. To the best of my knowledge I have never found any substantive evidence for a missing 'signal' adjacent to the proposed 1923 realignment of the Croesor's line to the wharves, or for that matter any semaphore signal north of the Britannia Bridge during the WHR period. The most complete version of what was actually on the ground between Harbour and the New stations exists in plans prepared for Mount's 1926 inspections, and I am grateful to Richard Maund for supplying images of the file held at The National Archives at Kew. I have copies of the relevant plans held at Caernarfon, which are slightly different to the Inspection copies (Figure 1)

Unfortunately, photographic records for this area are rather patchy to say the least. There is some evidence for a potential stop board near the rightmost '9' [Reference 2], but as these are only rear views, no firm conclusions can be drawn. As will be seen later on, it is unsurprising that the stop boards may not have been exactly where they were drawn. The stop board at Portmadoc New was not fixed where drawn although, unlike the other end of town, in this circumstance we do have a helpful picture of Merddin Emrys at the Water Tower (Figure 2).

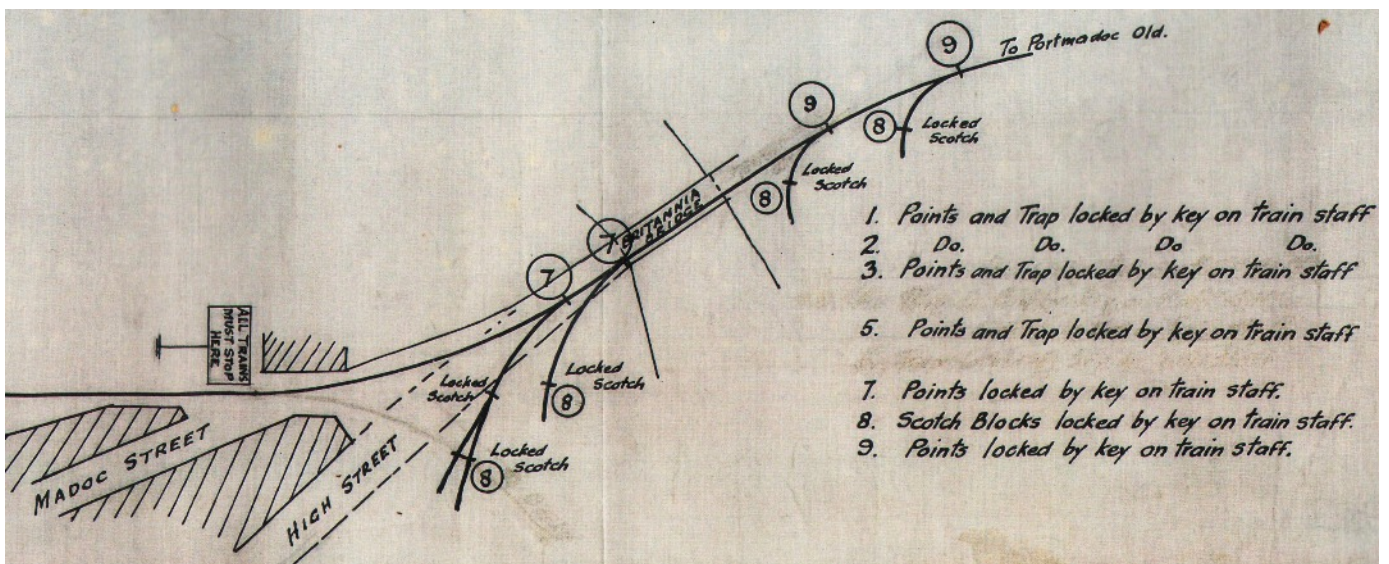


Figure 1 - Extract from XD97/459032, Britannia Bridge Area, courtesy FR Archives.

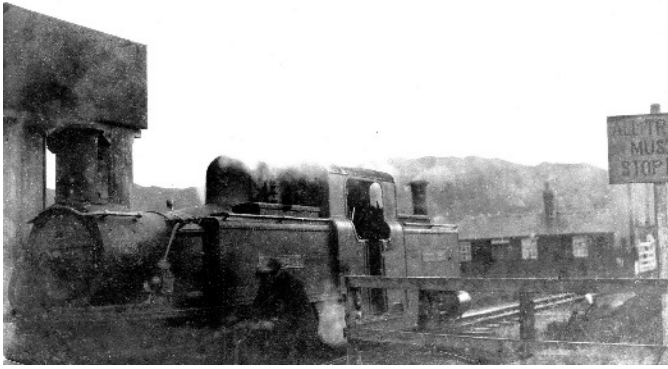


Figure 2 - Merddin Emrys at Portmadoc New, c1923/4.
(Photographer/Collection unknown, any offers?)

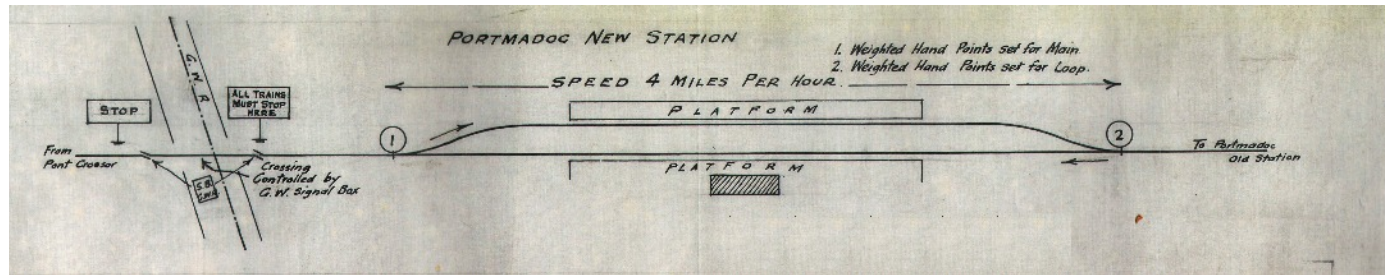


Figure 3 - Extract from XD97/459032, Portmadoc New;
courtesy FR Archives.

The first item of note is that the wording on the stop board protecting the standard gauge is identical to that drawn in Figure 3 – therefore it is tenable to suggest that the wording on the other stop boards in this area were at this time also as drawn in this Figure. Unusually the stop board is actually seemingly applicable to the loop line, but I think that its placement is such that it would cover both lines. Secondly, note that in the photograph of Merddin Emrys, the weight of the McNee pattern lever for the loop points can just be distinguished in the raised position. The engine has clearly drawn forward for servicing, prior to returning up the Festiniog. Unfortunately what we gain on one hand we lose with another, the engine is hiding the ‘stage’ between the Water Tower and the standard gauge line. Thirdly, note that the fence round the platform is unpainted; the knots can be seen.



Figure 4 - Prince at Portmadoc New, mid to late 1920s. Courtesy
FR Archives, via Chris Jones.

Although somewhat later than the photograph of ME, Figure 4 shows there to have been some changes, not the least of which is that the stop board has changed; although remaining in the same position relative to the Cambrian, it

has moved some distance eastwards. I wonder if it is the same board from the other side of the crossing as shewn in Figure 3, where Portmadoc-bound trains just had a blunt ‘STOP’? I have previously speculated on the e-groups whether the apparent ‘waisting’ of the post was due to it being a reused FR Disc Signal capstan – sadly not. The apparent ‘waisting’ is an illusion from people with mucky overalls leaning against the post. Yet there are reused Disc capstans in the picture of Prince. Look carefully at the elevated stage, beyond the water tower.

The support posts underneath for the three sided enclosure screamed ‘Disc signal capstans’ as soon as I saw them: the 180° arcs were detachable, presumably to allow some

degree of site adjustment. I suggest that these were some of the missing Disc capstans, reused for economy. Peter Liddell has kindly supplied a pair of photographs that permit a closer view of the columns and changes to the stop boards (Figures 5 and 8). The first was taken by Ken Hartley in 1931.



Figure 5 - Extract from Arch3938, Ken Hartley, 1931 (See Editor's
comments on photo references at the end of this article)

This photograph exemplifies the general air of desuetude that has settled on the southerly Portmadoc New. There is a clear view of the later stop board and the three-sided stage beyond the water column. Visible too is the southern trap point for Croesor Crossing, and the fence beyond the steps has now gone. Interestingly for a photograph of this era, the wires are visible on the telegraph pole sited on the loop platform. There are four wires – I suggest that the top two are the WHR telephone (and possibly the line to Croesor, but that needs further examination) and the lower two are most likely to be the private line from Greaves' Quarry in Blaenau that would have been heading off to Wern via the Cambrian Railway – this was not the single ‘quarry wire’ (Oakeley), so beloved of Festiniog linemen as it was on

the very top of the posts and took the majority of the lightning strikes! The line to Wern was a pair coming down the valley through Minffordd and then Portmadoc. Although not quite visible in this shot there was another ex-FR telephone wire, running left to right and it would have run along the Cambrian from the small manual exchange at Minffordd. However, given that the lower pair of lines diverge both left and right from the post, this is a subject for further research.

Figure 6, taken from Figure 5, reveals more constructional



Figure 6 - Detail from Arch3938, Ken Hartley 1931. Disc capstans visible underneath.

details about the 'stage'. It seems to have been quite solidly built with thick timber sides bolted to iron strapping, and the longitudinal timbers are visible at the front of the base. Clearly by 1931 it was suffering slightly from *anno domini*, and had begun to sag somewhat. It is tempting to suggest that the sides may be recycled from surplus Festiniog wagons or vans. The columns underneath are very clearly Disc signal capstans, the splayed shape and octagonal base are a dead giveaway!

Interestingly, the floor of the stage looks remarkably clean; this may be a product of the light in the picture, but it certainly looks unlikely to have been used for coaling. As has been observed, this facility was not moved north of the crossing in later years, so its true purpose seems to be a bit of a mystery. I suspect that it was built speculatively from largely recovered material to provide a coaling stage if one was ever needed, but would have very rarely been used for this purpose. It may even have been built as a sop to the



Figure 7 - FR Disc Capstan at Amberley, March 2015, picture courtesy of Rob Palmer

residents of Britannia Terrace. Perhaps it was just used to store some consumables like lubricating oil and a supply of wood if there was trouble with fires?

Figure 8 dates from 1936, and shews that the water tank has been recovered from Portmadoc New but the 'stage'



Figure 8 - An LGRP photograph showing the whole Portmadoc New complex - Contemporary with Figure 9 (Arch3356 - 1936)

remains.

Notably in Figure 8 the large single-worded stop board has been removed and seemingly replaced with a different board on the other side of the line and nearer the standard gauge (visible between the photographer and the western end of the crossing 'box'). Beyond the crossing, the boards

seem to have moved, and I think a detailed analysis of the boards may prove fruitful for another article, if the Editor is willing. It seems that during the life of the crossing the elusive 'northern' board (just reading 'Stop') was copied and put on the southern side; at some point after 1931 this board was removed and replaced with a three-worded board. Unfortunately this later board seems to elude attempts at enhancement, though I am a great believer in looking for similarities (or, in other words, there's nothing new under the sun): I suggest that the three words are most probably 'Trains Stop Dead'. I suggest this because in the drawings produced for Mount's inspection there was a board reading 'All Trains Stop Dead' for movements entering the Bryngwyn Branch at Tryfan Junction. It may be just a coincidence; but in the well-known picture of the later north platform (beyond the standard gauge) of Portmadoc New, the rear of another board of the same size and proportions as the possible 'Trains Stop Dead' on the southern side of the crossing is visible (Figure 9).

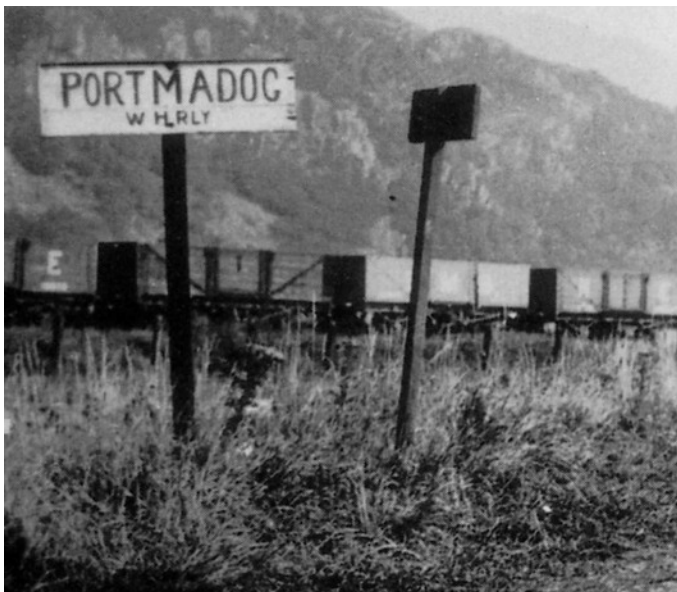


Figure 9 - Extract from an LGRP photo of the north part of Portmadoc New (WHR0011).



Figure 10 - 590 stands at Portmadoc New with a north-bound train - G.H.W. Clifford 1934 (WHHG34)

This does not seem to be the whole story, and I would like to revisit the entire question of signs in the environs of the crossing hopefully in a later article; we are fortunate that the 'Beware of Trains' signs did not move during the life of the crossing. Notably, in a picture by GHW Clifford,



Figure 11 - A somewhat extreme enlargement of a detail from WHHG34

dated 1934 a white board on the northern side of the crossing is visible in the rear of a photograph. This 'northern' white board is in approximately the same position as the stop board shown in XD97/459032 and is very much of the same kind as the second 'southern' stop board (Figures 10 and 11). A closer examination of the backgrounds of photographs looking north is in order.

In conclusion, I would like to thank Peter Liddell and Richard Maund for their assistance in drawing this article together; and especially Rob Palmer for the recent photograph of a Disc Signal capstan.

References

- [1] NGRISC (Vol. 2), 2nd Edition (1989), p20: top diagram.
- [2] The rear of a board sited about half-way down Britannia Terrace and a suggestion in a Mowat photograph of 1926, again of the rear. This board is almost identical in size to the 'ALL TRAINS MUST STOP HERE' version of the stop board, and like the two earlier versions pictured at Croesor Crossing the board and supporting post are all white.

Comments on Photograph References

Photographs supporting this article have been drawn from several collections and therefore several numbering systems appear in the captions. Photograph references of the form WHRx, xx, or xxx with no leading zeroes indicate the 'official' WHR collection. Similarly WHHGx or xx, again with no leading zeroes, indicate the Heritage Group's 'official' collection.

Your Editor has a considerable index of all photos that have been published, using references of the form WHRxxxx with leading zeroes for reference numbers less than 1000. These references are used where the image is not included in the 'official' collections.

Finally, some images not included in this latter index have been drawn from a personal archive and are indicated by reference numbers of the form Archx, xx, xxx or xxxx.

From the Editor

Historical Fact and Speculation.

When producing a journal such as ours it is a chastening thought that what we write today could well become the research reference material of tomorrow. Recognising this, there are obvious pressures to ensure the accuracy of our editorial content. Whilst it would be of great benefit to have a thorough and complete set of historical records to support our research, regrettably this is not the case and 'gaps' in this information inevitably prompt speculation as we try to complete the picture.

This has been a problem for all researches into our railway's history and we should remember that with the passage of time and the 'discovery' of additional background information the need for speculation has been diminishing. The early books covering our history, produced when the factual data base was significantly less than it is today, necessarily were based on a fair degree of speculation and supposition. Of course, today's authors might well naturally treat these earlier works as robust research sources.

I would prefer that our content were entirely fact-based, however this is not possible and therefore I make no excuse for occasional forays into the realms of supposition or 'what ifs'. For example, in this issue, following earlier notes on NWNCR Goods Stock I have set out my personal thoughts on the possible histories of the two WHR Covered Vans (Nos. 2 and 4). I hope that exercises such as this will prove stimulating and will encourage continuing

efforts to seek out those elusive missing elements in our historical background.

If I speculate here, I would be just as happy were these speculations subsequently proved right or wrong, so long as such proofs were based on documented fact.

As I develop further notes on that most elusive of subjects, NWNCR Goods Stock, there will be more, maybe much more, speculation involved. However, I hope my notes clearly identify which elements are factually based and which are not.

Superpower 2016 Great and Small III. September 9th, 10th and 11th.

This year the Heritage Group will have a stand at Dinas where the event is centred. Its purpose will be to advertise what we do, perhaps attract a few new members and sell a few publications. Help would be greatly appreciated to man (or woman) the stand.

Friends of Tryfan Junction

It is hoped to open Tryfan Junction Station Building on many more days this year, but particularly on high days and holidays and also Superpower (September 9th to 11th) when it is likely that vintage trains will be running and stopping at TJ (if requested). It's a lovely spot and it's a fantastic building to show people, as well as being at the start of the Slate Trail. Friends of Tryfan Junction is a very informal organisation, formalities are kept to a minimum but, if you've not already had one, you will need a safety induction, which can easily be organised.

To help with either of these, please contact Mike Hadley, 01386 792877/07860 828876 - mike@mandhhadley.co.uk

(Continued from page 12)

Secondly, there are scenes that the "modern" photographer on the same trip would almost certainly have shot, for example Moel Tryfan and train stopped at South Snowdon or Beddgelert. Also, there are no pictures of Moel Tryfan's train at Croesor Junction.

Significantly, perhaps, we have just eight photographs.

An appreciation of Ken Nunn in *British Railway Journal* Issue 68 by John Minnis included the following paragraph;

For all his life, Ken Nunn used a heavy reflex camera using 4 1/4 in by 3 1/4 in glass plate negatives. Today's photographers, so used to the modern reflex cameras and 35mm film, with cars crossing the countryside by motorways, can hardly appreciate the physical hard work that the early photographers had to endure in lugging their cameras on and off trains and boats. All Ken Nunn's photographs were meticulously listed with details. He was willing to photograph the branch lines and decrepit light railways, as well as the main lines for which his official position often gave information as to when and where important events were to occur.

It is noteworthy that in the 1920's and 1930's photographers were often limited by their cameras to taking very few photographs in one "session" unless, like H.F. Wheeler, they were fortunate to own one of the newly emerging 35mm 36+ shot cameras. We can therefore only suppose that Nunn was being economical with his glass plates.

What Nunn's photos appear to show is the following:

- 1 Moel Tryfan and mixed train arrive at Croesor Junction first, possibly stopping short of the loop points which it would have had to do if, as scheduled, the Portmadoc train had arrived first.

- 2 Consequently, Nunn was able to photograph the arrival of Princess and the Pickering, but standing on the single track short of the loop. It would appear that Princess left the Pickering on the single track and ran around the loop to pick up the train from Dinas.
- 3 Princess drew forward onto the loop line at Croesor Junction
- 4 Moel Tryfan headed away from its train, left the loop and went to pick up the Pickering.
- 5 Moel Tryfan drew the Pickering into the "station"
- 6 Meanwhile, Princess picked up the train from Dinas, paused to pick up Nunn and headed back to Portmadoc.
- 7 Moel Tryfan left with the Pickering to travel back to Dinas.

Now if we correlate these events to the images we find:

- 1 No image - presumably Nunn was husbanding his film? (He had already taken several shots of this locomotive and this train.)
- 2 Arch. 3139 - note Princess is on the single track south of the loop
- 3 Arch. 3138 - Princess now stands on the loop.
- 4 Arch. 3141 - Note the south loop points and lever beyond the locomotive
- 5 Arch. 3140 - again, note the south loop points shortly beyond the far end of the Pickering
- 6 No image - presumably no film left?
- 7 No image - Nunn would already have left for Portmadoc behind Princess.

Ken Nunn has left us with an interesting series of images taken shortly before the Railway's operations were curtailed by the General Strike (from May 4th, 1926).

Peter Liddell's Photo Analysis



Moel Tryfan with a south-bound mixed passenger and goods train at Waenfawr on 3rd April 1926. In that month there was only one daily departure from Dinas - at 12:45 - Ken Nunn (WHHG 8)



Ken Nunn's three photographs showing the same train before its departure from Dinas.



(Above left Arch 3135, below left Arch 3137 and above Arch 3144)



The four photographs taken by Ken at Croesor Junction (from the left: Arch 3139, Arch 3138, Arch 3141 and Arch 3140)

Occasionally we come across groups of photographs which when assembled in the correct order tell us a story. Sometimes the chronology is simply established as was the case with *Wheeller's Day* thanks to his detailed record-keeping. In 1926 Ken Nunn visited the Welsh Highland and left us a series of 8 photographs which show Moel Tryfan heading from Dinas Junction to Croesor Junction with a mixed train and there exchanging trains with Princess, which had come from Portmadoc with a train comprising a single Pickering (WHR No.8), prior to heading back to Dinas. Unfortunately we do not have a record that confirms the sequence in which these were taken so a little 'detective' work is needed fully to understand their narrative.

One of these images is fairly well known, having appeared in at least 6 publications, and shows Moel Tryfan at Waenfawr with a southbound mixed train (WHHG 8). The other 7 comprise 3 taken at Dinas and 4 taken at Croesor Junction. One of these, a photograph showing Princess with the Pickering at Croesor Junction, has been published – to my knowledge the remaining 6 have not.

In general sequence, these images comprise;

| | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Arch. 3144 at Dinas Junction | M.T. plus mixed train |
| Arch. 3137 at Dinas Junction | M.T. - glimpse of train |
| Arch. 3135 at Dinas Junction | M.T. - glimpse of train |
| WHHG 8 at Waenfawr | M.T. plus mixed train |
| Arch. 3139 at Croesor Junction | Princess plus Pickering |
| Arch. 3138 at Croesor Junction | Princess |
| Arch. 3141 at Croesor Junction | M.T. |
| Arch. 3140 at Croesor Junction | M.T. plus Pickering |

(Note my comments on page 10 re photo numbering)

Moel Tryfan's mixed train comprised: FR Brown Marshall 6-compartment bogie carriage (either No. 17 or 18); WHR Brake Van No. 4 (converted Type 3 Quarrymen's coach); two FR 5-plank open wagons; and one three plank small open wagon (possibly one of the ex-NWNGR 'boarded' iron crates?).

All the above photographs are dated 3rd April 1926.

According to David Woodcock's research into Welsh Highland timetables, in April 1926 the sequence of events at Croesor Junction should have been as follows:

| | |
|-------|--|
| 14:37 | Arrival of the 14:10 ex-Portmadoc |
| 14:38 | Arrival of the 12:45 ex-Dinas |
| 14:41 | Departure of Portmadoc train - due at Portmadoc New at 15:02 |
| 14:42 | Departure of Dinas train - due to arrive there at 16:35 |

Trains were time-tabled 'through' but the locomotives were changed to allow their return to their original starting point. These timing appear to allow only a very rapid exchange of locomotives and, with only one loop available, just how this was achieved was problematic. However, can we deduce the actual sequence of events from Nunn's photographs?

Firstly, it would seem that he travelled from Dinas on Moel Tryfan's mixed train. As an aside, we have no evidence that when it reached Croesor Junction this still was a mixed train - the goods wagons could have been left at one of the several stations passed en-route from Waenfawr. Conceivably he did not travel by train at all, but given that Croesor Junction is literally in the middle of nowhere it seems reasonable to suppose that he was in fact on the train. (Continued on page 11)

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