

WELSH HIGHLAND HERITAGE

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TWENTY YEARS AND COUNTING!

Twenty years ago a new Journal appeared for the first time. Under the title *Welsh Highland Heritage* it announced the formation and goals of a new Group dedicated to recognising and preserving the Welsh Highland Railway's heritage. The then Chairman of the Group and Editor of the new journal, David Allan, introduced our *raison d'être* and objectives with the following statement, reproduced here in full from that first issue:

WELCOME!

This is the first edition of a Newsletter devoted entirely to the heritage aspects of the Welsh Highland Railway. It is the voice of the Welsh Highland Heritage Group and reflects the views of the Group. The W.H.H.G. has the full support of The Welsh Highland Railway Co., The Festiniog Railway and The Welsh Highland Railway Society and it will work closely with all of these organisations to achieve its aims.

It will cover and explore all aspects of the line's history, from its early beginnings to the present day but it will concentrate on 'preserving and restoring' those essential elements which made the line unique amongst narrow gauge railways.

Nor will it forget those isolated communities which the line attempted to serve, together with the industries

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WELSH HIGHLAND HERITAGE
Volume 1 Issue 1 November 1997

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WAUNFAWR STATION
There was dismay in Welsh Highland Heritage circles when the FR revealed that their plans for rebuilding the line included, per se, the demolition of the derelict station building at Waunfawr. This was to accommodate a new layout designed to facilitate the passage of the Garratt locomotives and to allow for a new footbridge to connect with the carpark of the adjoining 'Snowdonia Parc' pub. Although the plans for this footbridge are now under review it still leaves only two options for the old station building - demolition or removal. The former is unthinkable and the latter costly.

However at a meeting with representatives of the Heritage Group, FR director Mike Schumann, and project manager Tony Smeat, agreed that the building could be moved a few yards from its current site and rebuilt on fresh foundations.

In spite of having stood for over 150 years the building continues to attract the attention of modern day vandals who have recently removed the valuable cornerstones from the front/left elevation.

Architect, and WHHG member, Graham Cartland-Glover has agreed to produce plans to help in the relocation of the building, but restoration may have to be left in the hands of professional restorers.

Contact has been made with St Fagans Welsh Folk Museum in Cardiff. They have had over 50 years experience of restoring Welsh buildings and would be glad to help. They have suggested using local contractors and would be willing to brief them on techniques which could be used, albeit for a small professional fee.

Upper Photo Bill Rees 1948
Lower Photo D Allan 1987

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The Heritage Group is open to all who support its aims and it will work with everyone who wishes to help to achieve those aims. The Group will be a focus, a forum and a coordinator for all the heritage activity along the line.

It is unthinkable for example, that the superb restoration work at Gelert's Farm, including Ray Ollier's wonderful achievements with the old coaches, Mark Wiggley's efforts to restore the weigh house and Dave Meller's evocative replica of Nantmor station should somehow be isolated from the proposed reconstruction of Waunfawr or the refurbishment of Dinas station building.

THEY ARE ALL WELSH HIGHLAND!

That first issue ran to four pages and, in addition to David's 'Welcome' address, presented the first part of a summary discussion of Welsh Highland tickets, together with a summary of the Group's longer-term objectives. This latter, the Group's Aims, or 'Mission Statement', appeared on page 3 and read:

To locate, record, categorise and preserve all buildings, bridges, mineral lines, quarries and all other artefacts associated with the former North Wales Narrow Gauge and Welsh Highland Railways, with a view to their preservation, restoration and eventual re-incorporation in the rebuilt Welsh Highland Railway.

However, straight away 'Heritage' concerns were raised in respect of the fate of the surviving, albeit dilapidated, NWNCR station building at Waunfawr (Waenfawr in both NWNCR and WHR time-frames).

Despite the positive 'noises' and planned actions noted on the front page of *WHH* 1, all would come to nought as the carefully dismantled and recorded bricks and stones (the remains were dismantled in 1999 - see *WHH* 6 October 1999) were later simply to 'disappear' as the Waunfawr site was subjected to considerable rebuilding activity ahead of the arrival of the 'new' railway in 2000. There had been further assurances from the FR regarding Waunfawr rebuilding (reported in *WHH* 5 June 1999), funds were being established, but nevertheless the stones simply disappeared.

Perhaps surprisingly this loss was not actually noted in *WHH* until Issue 25 (September 2004) in a front page article describing a letter sent from the Group to Michael Whitehouse, then FR Chairman. This article appeared under the sub-headline:

"No more Waunfawrs - Keylock".

This proved to be a salutary lesson regarding the 'uncomfortable' relationship between the new railway and the infrastructure surviving from the Welsh Highland, without whose original existence the new line would not have been achievable.

There were, however, positive benefits from the rebuilding at Waunfawr, notably perhaps the uncovering of the original coal yard, reported on the front page of *WHH* 7 (February 2000), duly recorded before the site disappeared under the new station.

By the time the second edition of *WHH* appeared in March 1998, the journal had taken on an appearance that, by and large, it still carries forward today.

The the four-word abbreviated version of our 'mission statement',

"Recording Yesterday for Tomorrow"

had appeared in the header, together with the Journal's official ISSN and, indicative of at least one of the Group's forward objectives, a cover price.

Issue 2 was expanded, doubling the four pages of Issue 1 to eight, a standard that was to be maintained until Issue 21

(September 2003) which was the first to adopt a twelve-page format.

Issues subsequent to this reverted to eight pages until Issue 29 (twelve pages). Thereafter the format varied between eight and twelve pages until twelve became the standard from Issue 44 (June 2009).

There have been notable exceptions to this trend - we have seen occasional sixteen and even one twenty page issue and two issues have appeared with twelve-page supplements. One of these, Issue 50 (December 2010), was a sixteen-page issue so, together with its Supplement, the combined twenty eight pages represents the largest issue to date.

Issue 2 opened with a positive story regarding building restoration - the Group's refurbishment of the NWNCR station building at Dinas Junction. It also included the first instalment of the 'Chronology' series, looking specifically at 1922, a series that was to run until coverage of 1943/44 in Issue 27.

WHH was originally designed and printed as a black-and-white publication and

remained in that format for about six years. Colour first appeared in Issue 22 (September 2003) in David Newham's article "Crests & Devices of the N.W.N.G.R." Colour was to be seen occasionally over the next few years until becoming 'commonplace' in *WHH* from Issue 40 (June 2008).

In deference to the journal's early standards, and, perhaps, as an exercise in nostalgia, I have arranged that this anniversary issue should appear in the original black-and-white format.

Throughout its twenty year life, *WHH* has reported on developments - indeed on occasion the lack of desired developments - in the 'Heritage' domain whilst at the same time reporting the progressive unearthing of detailed aspects of Welsh Highland, and its predecessors', history. I am confident that our knowledge of this history is, as a result, more solidly founded and better understood than was the case when our Group was established.

This record stands for all to see via the Group's website. To examine previous issues of *WHH* go to:

<http://www.welshhighlandheritage.co.uk/journal.html>

and follow the links to each separate issue. It is currently Group practice to 'open' all issues more than two years old, so it is currently possible to read in full all copies of *WHH* up to and including Issue 68 (September 2015).

"Recording Yesterday for Tomorrow"

WELSH HIGHLAND
HERITAGE

£1.00 Volume 1 Issue 2 ISSN 1462-1371 March 1998

TERRIFIC!

The WHHG certainly seems to have caught the imagination. Suddenly we have 80 members and this issue of the newsletter already runs to eight pages! A correspondent writes "What is it about this dinosaur of a railway that has caused so much trouble since it first ran?" I don't know - but the fascination of reconstructing the line as a thread with which to weave the pattern of the present on the backcloth of such an intricate past and set amongst such wonderful scenery must surely be unique.

This chance for the past and present to come together in harmony must be handled with great care if discord is not to prevail and it is up to the Heritage Group to ensure that this happens.

It would be foolish to anticipate the outcome of the inquiry, but it would be equally foolish not to have plans to put in place if the outcome is positive. To this end a meeting has been arranged with construction manager Roland Doyle to discuss the Heritage implications of the next phase to Waunfawr.

DINAS 1922



Dinas Station 1948 - Bill Reay

Dinas Station building is the first item of authentic Welsh Highland Heritage which is to occupy the attention of the Heritage Group. Victorian pattern cast iron guttering and down pipes, manufactured to the original profile will be supplied and fitted by the Group.

The standard NWNG station had two doors; in the case of Dinas one of these was part blocked up to form an eight pane window. Photographic evidence suggests that this was done before 1927. The expert work with granite blocks can be clearly seen on some of the early photos.

However plans are afoot to restore the building to its two door status with the northern half reserved for operational matters, and the

southern half restored to its original interior condition. Again the Heritage Group will assist with this. Further it is proposed to retain the door which had been made by the previous occupiers, in what was formerly the main line side of the building. The original window in this situation will be restored.

Sixteen-pane, original pattern windows have already been made and will be fitted in place of the modern single-pane ones.

The two windows in the northern elevation will be returned to their WHR status, although the right hand one was originally a door in NWNG days!

Offers of help will be warmly welcomed and first please contact John Keylock.

It is New Year's Day 1922. The "feel good" factor which is sweeping the country, based on a mood of economic optimism, has even filtered to that remote and beautiful region of Snowdonia, centred on the almost inaccessible village of Beddgelert.

A few weeks ago an application was made to re-visit an obscure narrow gauge railway which for some half remembered reason used to ply its trade between a small village near Gwernafon up to a dot on the map on the foothills of Snowdon. A 'local' takes up the story.....

".....Some people who used to live up at Rhyd ddu but had now moved down to Beddgelert to escape the cold, remember the line with its smoky old engines and the hissing steam which the farmers said frightened the sheep (not that anyone ever remembered the sheep taking any notice)

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History and Origins of the Welsh Highland Railway Heritage Group

A happy juxtaposition of circumstances, a shed full of enthusiasm and four blokes with a common purpose was all that it took to create the Welsh Highland Heritage group.

As a board member of the then WHR ('64 Co) I had already received agreement from the board to establish a group where WHR supporters with a common aim of restoring the line but without the politics could meet to discuss things in a rational manner. This swiftly evolved into the Welsh Highland Railway Heritage Group. But the real engine behind the group's formation was a series of track bed walks undertaken by the four founders of the Group – Michael Davies, John Keylock, Cedric Lodge and myself (David Allan).

It was on one of these walks when, having settled down for a picnic lunch in warm sunshine at the Plas y Nant River Bridge, that the idea of forming the Group coalesced.



The Plas y Nant Picnic - from the Left Messrs Davies, Lodge, Keylock and Allan. Photo taken by Alan Donaldson (1997).

When we started on that first track bed walk on the 12th March 1997 we could not of course have had any idea what we were letting ourselves in for. The reconstruction of the line by the FR was imminent and we thought it sensible to try and record what was left before the bulldozers moved in. Fortunately I jotted down a diary of these walks which will be helpful to place in context the formation of the group.

The four of us had assembled at Dinas at 9.45 am prompt and the diary notes that in addition to the founding members four others had expressed an interest - Tom Sherratt, Mark Wigley, Rupert Lodge and Nick Booker. Of these Nick Booker is now chairman of the group, Tom Sherratt was involved for a while before health problems intervened, Mark Wigley directed his energy in helping at Gelert's Farm and Rupert Lodge didn't take up any options.

I will now allow my diary notes to take up the story.

We were rather unexpectedly greeted by Mike Hart on arrival at Dinas who, after a consultation with Mowlem, agreed to let us have a look round the Dinas site. So,

suitably attired in an orange high-viz waistcoat and white hard hat, we toured the area. An impressive amount of tarmaced roadway had been laid, the old goods exchange platform had been demolished, levelling work had begun on the track bed and some rather pretty red paving had been laid in front of the goods shed - between the old station building and the new roadway. I was surprised to learn that the new Welsh Highland would not be using the original alignment but rather it would use the standard gauge track bed and leave Dinas under the standard gauge overbridge before regaining the original formation just short of the old loco shed.

We took the opportunity to look round the Welsh Water site. A large concrete building is located more or less on the site of the old carriage shed and the former loco shed site is occupied by an apex roofed building, not dissimilar to the original building. It was not possible to walk from this area onto the track bed, as a large chain fence was in the way and the area was badly overgrown with scrub.

So we walked up the station approach road, onto the main road and viewed the deep Glan Rhyd cutting from the bridge which carried the road over the railway. It was overgrown with brambles and very wet at the bottom. On the other side of the main road the cutting had been filled in by the landlord of the adjacent Mount Pleasant Hotel and would need to be re-excavated.



The east side of the Dinas to Pwllheli Road showing the 'buried' track bed adjacent to the Mount Pleasant Hotel - David Allan

Cedric Lodge had very kindly supplied us with a 25 inch to 1 mile scale map of the route with 36 A3 pages and Michael Davies was nominated 'surveyor' to note down all points of Welsh Highland heritage interest. Michael commented, "strangely the NWNG does not appear to have installed mileposts - nor did the WHR!"

Having re-gained the track bed by walking a 100 yards or so through the rubbish strewn area at the back of the pub the first item of interest to come to our attention was an earthenware drain pipe running along the length of the track bed on the southern side. This was exposed in many places and broken. Also running parallel, to the track bed on its

southern side is a fairly wide stream, called the Afon Rhyd. Between the stream and the track bed a dried up mill race was noted, which ended in the remains of a sluice gate. It was concluded that this mill race led into the drain pipes and was probably a means of supplying water to the Dinas yard.



The water pipe found alongside the track bed to the east of the Dinas-Pwllheli road bridge - David Allan

A few yards further on a raised metal pipe crossed the track bed. However the next real point of Welsh Highland interest was the road over bridge at Cae-moel. This extraordinary bridge not only carries the Rhos Isaf road over the railway, but also carries the railway over the river. In fact walking on the girders of the track bed under the road bridge one was only too aware of the river flowing beneath. Secured on the underside of the arch of this bridge, as on nearly all the other bridges, were the insulators which carried the telephone wires.



The road over bridge at Cae Moel as it was, showing the girders that had carried the track above the Afon Rhyd



Our 'scribe', Michael Davies, with John Keylock at Cae Moel - David Allan

Many occupation crossings were noted, all of them being defined on either side of the track bed by 5 foot high slate gateposts, looking in many cases, in their splendid isolation, like some Neolithic monument to ancient gods! It was here that we learned of an entirely new aspect of railway preservation. Michael Davies scrutinised each gatepost with great precision perhaps giving rise to the generally held view that people who attempt to restore old railways are a couple of sleepers short of a length of track! But in fact Michael was looking for ancient graffiti, and for one name in particular who had inscribed his initials and date on several of the Welsh Highland gateposts.

The way was much clearer now, with the track bed being raised several feet above the meadow which it traversed. Slate gateposts were still very much in evidence as were fence posts made of sections of old rail, presumably following repairs to the old North Wales Narrow Gauge track which had been modernised prior to the opening of the Welsh Highland in 1923. The few yards of track before the road which led to Bod-aden farm were blocked so we had to divert via some of the yards adjoining the farm buildings. Before continuing we took the opportunity to speak to the owner of Bod-aden, an elderly man on two sticks who was accompanied by an old and affectionate collie. The railway crossed the road to his property by means of a level crossing



The occupation under bridge at Bod Aden, before (1998) and after (2000) rebuilding (UB10) - David Allan.

and he was most concerned about having to open and close the gates every time he wanted to get to or from his property. He recalled in the old days, when the line was open, that it took six men to get cattle across the railway - two on the gates, two on the track to warn trains, and two to drive the animals. He said that in those days it was all right as there were plenty of servants in the house, but that this wasn't

possible today. We suggest that installation of cattle grids is needed here.

However an extremely interesting feature of this crossing is an underpass dug out either side of the line. This is an unusual and substantial earthwork, and its preservation would go some way towards helping the farm owner with his crossing difficulties.

On the next section, John Keylock kicked at a piece of metal buried in the trackbed. This turned out to be a tie bar (or track gauge). A slightly bowed iron bar with the last few inches at both ends bent over to form a loop. The author carried the find for the rest of the walk, almost losing it on one occasion, and hopefully it may eventually come to rest in the Welsh Highland museum. *(This track gauge is still with the writer and needs an appropriate home!)*

On this next section the trackbed was raised about three feet above the surrounding field and was bounded by a slate retaining wall, which had been damaged and which needed replacing. Could we perhaps hope that walls such as this will be reinstated in their original form by the contractors and that indeed where fences are now non-existent that they will be rebuilt of suitable materials?

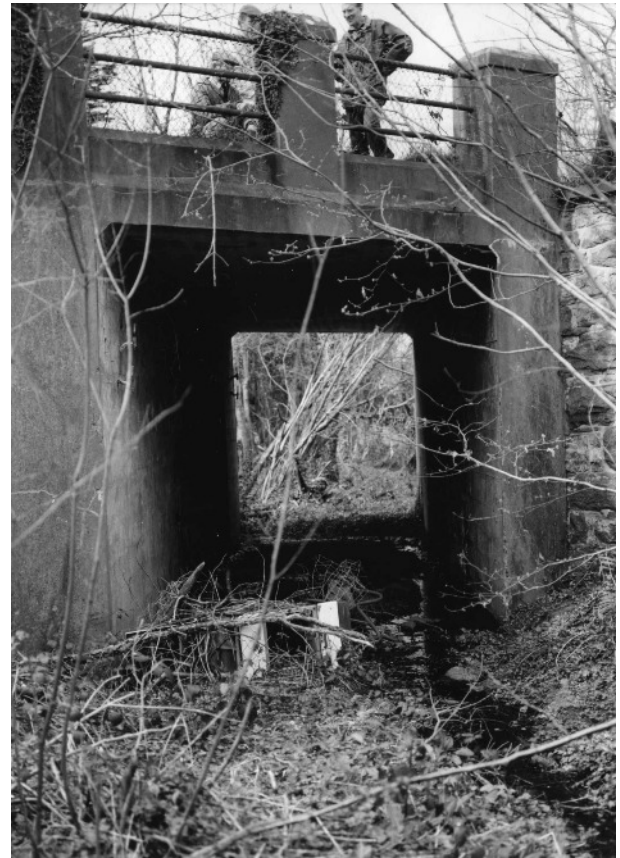
The next point of interest, just before the line touched the Rhostryfan road, was the second crossing of the Afon Rhyd, which had been channeled and also stepped under the track bed. Here the bed was supported above the stream on a couple of rotten RSJs and on the very outside of the bed by a couple of even more rotten lengths of old rail.



The girder- and rail-built bridge over the Afon Rhyd near Bod Aden - since fully re-built, this is today's UB12 - David Allan.

The next section, which bordered the Rhostryfan road, was overgrown and impassable and again the river was crossed by both road and railway. So we walked on the road until just before the 1933 road bridge which had replaced a standard NWNG arch. We scrambled down into the deep cutting which preceded the road over bridge and examined the bridge portals. Once again the insulators were in place and inscribed in the right hand side of the original wall was a bench mark.

Beyond the bridge the track bed was very overgrown with willow. However a footpath led down one side of the line which we followed and, after a struggle, we regained the track bed. After a few hundred yards an interesting



The road over bridge near Wernlas Ddu (today's OB14) as it was at the time of the first survey - most of the survey party were keeping their feet dry on the road above, it would seem! - David Allan

accommodation crossing appeared with a rail-built stile either side of the line with metal steps welded to the rail. This was in the vicinity of Wernlas-ddu. An encroachment on the track bed had been made here by the garden of a fairly new home; approximately half of the width of the track had been taken into the garden.

The next section was muddy and was clearly fairly well used by cattle. Indeed the appearance of a Charolais bull necessitated a fairly rapid, but dignified departure from the line down to the banks of a stream where lunch was taken.

After lunch, and an extremely muddy detour around the bull, the trackbed was rejoined in the vicinity of Cae-hen. A substantial building marked on the 25 inch map was no longer apparent nor indeed was the track bed itself, having been ploughed and returned to the field. The road bridge too which had taken the farm road over the track had been demolished.

A hundred yards further on however, was the road over bridge at Bicall which signalled the entrance to Tryfan Junction. Just before the road bridge was the Afon Rhyd once more, over which the track was carried by a single arched low bridge, built in typical North Wales Narrow Gauge style, with the arch outlined in yellow Ruabon brick.

The trackbed under the bridge on the hundred yards or so to Tryfan Junction was a running stream, so we took the easy option and walked on the narrow road which paralleled the railway. Then through the leafless trees loomed the ruined spectre of the roofless building of Tryfan Junction. The on end slates still marked the platform edge and the sod-



The bridge over the Afon Rhyd as it appeared at the time of the surveys (1998) and after clearance (2000) - today's UB19
David Allan



Bicall Bridge at the Dinas end of the Tryfan Junction layout, looking towards Tryfan Junction and Waunfawr - David Allan

covered base of the signal box was still obvious on the far side of the track. We located the earth closet which had been a feature of these buildings and were able to discern the outline, in the mortar, of the slate slab on the wall in the gents' urinal.

We noted the track of the branch which curved away at 180 degrees and could discern in the distance the arch of the bridge which carried the Waunfawr mountain road over the railway. At this distance the bridge looked almost like a main line affair.

However we elected to follow the main line so we walked across the line and through a gate onto a private road which ran parallel with the line. The next object of interest was an accommodation bridge over a deep cutting and there was some speculation as to whether this was the location of a well-known 1934 photo of the railway which showed a loco with four coaches near Tryfan Junction. (*Michael Davies comments on the draft that he is now having doubts about this location*). The side wall of this bridge had been damaged and the brick arch of the road was showing through the road surface.

The road we were following suddenly dropped sharply down and turned right under a splendid example of North Wales Narrow Gauge architecture, a bridge which carried the track bed over the road to Tan-yr-allt. Here we climbed back on to the track bed and set off through a heavily wooded section to Waunfawr station.

Within a hundred yards we came across a large badger sett which had been made in the side of a cutting, large rocks had been placed in and on the newly dug burrows.

The track appeared to go downhill, but according to the map the formation was now level. This was a very pleasant sylvan section with the river Gwyrfai gurgling some thirty or forty feet below the track bed, the sun had come out and made its contribution to the feeling of well-being. There was little of historical interest here however save for several culverts and a sheep creep at Tan yr allt. The numerous slate gateposts continued to be examined and one contained a date and a set of initials which Michael Davies recognised. A bad slip was noted here, the result of a collapsed culvert.

Eventually the bridge which carried the A4085 to Waunfawr came into view. A remarkable feature of this bridge is the encrusted smoke on the line of central bricks running right through the arch. Taking a sighting through the bridge it was difficult to see why the FR needed to demolish the remains of Waunfawr station in order to accommodate the Garratts. We crossed the road and entered the station area from the approach road via an iron gate which actually opened on its hinges.

Further removal of large granite corner stones had obviously taken place recently from the station; there was no sign of the base of the signal box which had once stood on the site. There was evidence of incursion into railway land from the adjoining pub. We concluded that there would be no need to demolish the remains of the building if the points for the loop could be located in the region of the station building itself. As at Tryfan Junction, we found the Gents' urinal and closet.

We then crossed a wet piece of ground behind the caravan site associated with the pub and came to a barbed wire fence across the track; here, discretion being the better part of valour (there was a problem with the owner) we abandoned the track bed and took to the adjoining road, regaining the route some half mile further on.



'Ugly Bridge' (OB24) as it appeared at the time of the first surveys in 1998 - David Allan

Within a few hundred yards there was to the left a long, low embankment which had carried a feeder line to the slate quarries at Treflan and Garreg Fawr in the hills above, but we were too tired to explore this further, and besides which a welcome cup of tea was beckoning from Cedric's house, which was now in sight.

David Allan

Nick Booker Reminisces

Memories of the WHR and WHRHG

In the summer of 1963, my parents rented a cottage in Nant Gwynant, overlooking Snowdon and the Watkin Path and I went with them as a skinny teenager. Over the two weeks and in between the rain and the sunshine, we explored Snowdonia and in doing so spotted the WHR Society's Morris Commercial lorry and later bumped into some members of the Society on the FR at Harbour Station who told us about the station site at Beddgelert and that's where it all started. One of my photographs from this time features in one of John Stretton's 'then-and-now' books.

I then joined the Society and met Brian Critchley and Barry Gray at an early WHR working party the following year and we have remained firm friends ever since. Brian incidentally bought several original WHR posters at the auction in London (c.1968) of Bob Smallman's railwayana collection from Yieldingtree Railway Museum near Weston Super Mare.

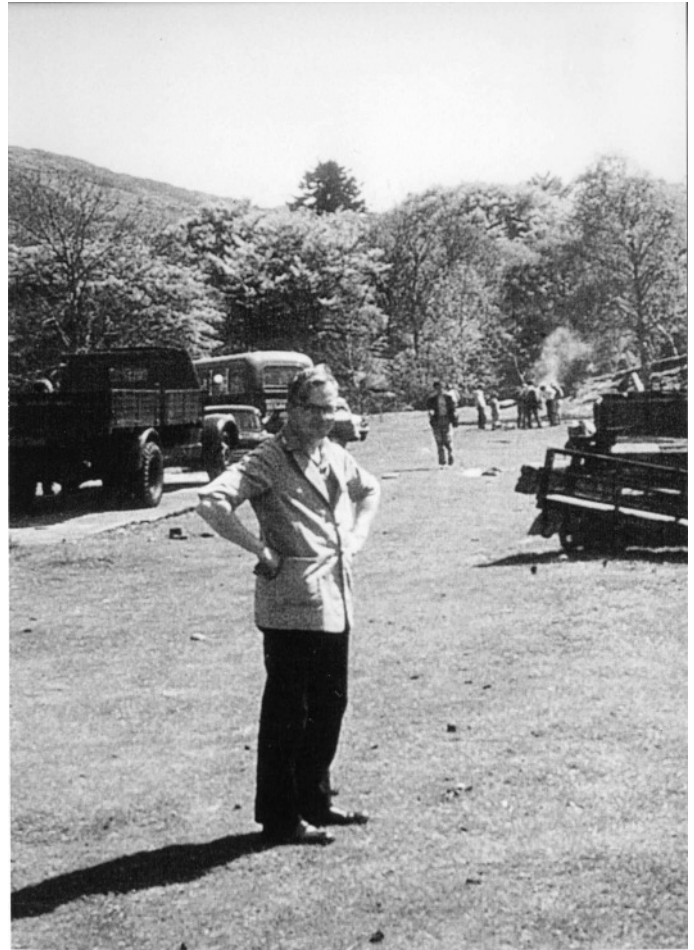


Nick Booker (left) with three companions, including Brian Critchley (second right) at Waenfawr - 1962

My memories of the early working parties are not all that exciting. I was about 19 and we were all rather naive. Carrying spades on a Black & White coach from Bristol to Caernarfon via Cheltenham and Shrewsbury was just one example of a rather simple approach to the business of attempting to rebuild a railway. I suppose I also had my Wellington boots.

Bill Rear was in evidence those days; he lived in Waenfawr and drove the Crosville bus that took us from there on the Sunday morning of one working party. I believe the sun shone! At one of the weekend working parties, there was a film show in the local hall. Several of us walked up the track bed to Tryfan Junction on the Saturday afternoon. The building remains were still visible and there was little or no vegetation around them. Later we explored the track bed to Betws Garmon. At some point we had a walk along the track bed by Salem. I also remember a very wet Beddgelert cutting, sheep at Glan yr Afon Weigh House, no trees then, and balancing on the track timbers of Glan yr Afon Bridge.

I think it was in 1965 that I had a week up in Waenfawr and spent a few frustrating days trying to dig a drainage ditch on the station site - a complete and utter waste of time and effort. I remember some horses that were kept on the site stole my lunchtime sandwiches from the ruins of the station building! I also found a fish plate but did not think to keep it. I spent the rest of the week exploring the quarries at Nantlle amongst other things and met a man who could only speak Welsh. He and his English speaking chum were recovering slate from the waste tips.



Bill Rear with a working party at Beddgelert in the 1960s

There is a memory of moving rail near South Snowdon on one working party and nobody had quite the right gear while there was the impression of material being moved from one place to another and back again. I guess those early working parties, certainly the Bank Holiday ones, were simply "get togethers" with a bit of work thrown in.

Of the people involved, few faces stick in the mind and even fewer names: the late Bill Brown who was the chairman, Brian Evans, Laurence Brydon and Richard Hilton the civil and mechanical engineers respectively. Some were refugees from the FR who it was said had fallen out with Allan Garraway. The last two later defected to the mysterious Mr Green who was going to buy the track bed from the Official Receiver. Bill Rear seemed to fade from the scene fairly rapidly. He was previously involved

with the early days of the FR and renowned for not answering letters! The Company Secretary was Bob Honeychurch, the ironmonger from Shrewsbury. Quite unrelated to this tale, I believe he was once seen towing a very rusty Sentinel steam wagon through the town with a Land Rover!

AGMs were usually held in the Old Contemptible in Birmingham just by Snow Hill Station and Brian and I usually attended. One year, it must have been 1966, we decided to put ourselves up for election as directors, nominating each other and we thus became company directors for the first time. The saga of what went on has been told elsewhere but as we all know the Receiver died just as it looked that the '64 company might triumph. Brian used to run the foot ball competition for raising funds during this period



A 'working' party at Beddgelert in the 1960s. Nick Booker on the left with colleagues and the splendid 'Welsh Highland Railway' lorry in the background.

I stayed on as a director until around 1970 by which time I was working in London, but then decided to go to University at which I point resigned as director. However I still followed what went on from time to time. I later rejoined the '64 Company and eventually became involved in writing a heritage lottery bid with the late Lewis Roberts for the museum project at Gelert's Farm. By this time I had got to know David Allan and John Keylock having bumped into the latter while he was restocking the '64 Company shop when it was in a shed at the front of the car park. Some how I found myself on the Board of CRB Ltd, the trading subsidiary of the '64 Company. That introduced me to publishing among other things and we redid Alun Turner's book on the WHR with pictures and an extra chapter on the then recent history which I wrote. We also did a history of '*Russell*' written by Andrew Neale. You can still buy copies of both!

Suffice it to say, I became disenchanted with life at Gelert's Farm and ultimately resigned as a director of CRB but not before I organised a Dog Show in 1996 as part of a series of events for the 90th anniversary of *Russell* - fantastic fun! Round about this time Nick Gerrard and I managed to get sponsorship from Butlin's at Pwllheli

At some point after all this I joined the Heritage Group. However in the FR Heritage Group Journal for the winter of 1996/97 I had an article published on JC Russell which I then picked up again in 2004. Through the help of Dewi Thomas and some serendipity I tracked down both of Russell's granddaughters. Evelyn Pangman, the younger sister was the great find in Canada as she had the family photographs and they arrived courtesy of DHL. Around this time I went to my first WHRHG AGM at The Royal Sportsman, taking our newly acquired large terrier Mr Timmy who was well looked after in Reception. This got me involved with John Keylock and David Allan again and I was persuaded to join the Heritage Group committee. I never received the volume of calls from John that David claimed but he used to call on a fairly regular basis with some question, anecdote or suggestion for doing something. I went a couple of times to Weathervane Cottage when we were putting together the article on Russell and it was here I reconnected with Michael Bishop who I had first met in the 60s at the London NGRS meetings in a pub in Petty France, St James'.



Over 250 years of membership and anecdotes of the early days of the restoration of the Welsh Highland Railway ! From left to right

Nick Booker (WHRs member from 1964 and '64 Company director in the 1960s); Graham Farr (WHRs member and current WHRR director); Brian Critchley (WHRs member and '64 Company director in the 1960s); Barry Gray (WHRs member from 1961 and still has his membership card to prove it!); Mark Smith (WHRs member from the 1960s - and currently Vice Chairman of the HRA). Superb photograph by Neil Evans who also remembers the early days of the WHRS and the late Bill Brown, the chairman of the original WHRS, et al

Barry's WHR Soc membership card with the number 31 is dated to expire on 4th August 1962 and he has two duplicated letters circa July 1961 from Bob Honeychurch the then Hon Sec.

Ultimately I became chairman and shortly afterwards, Andy Savage encouraged us to put Tryfan Junction into the National Railway Heritage Awards competition. We won the volunteers award and later on a very rainy day when the NRHA plaque was unveiled at Tryfan by the great and the good, 40 people crammed into the station building.

If there is lesson to be learnt from any of this, it's that if you don't want to get involved, don't ask questions at AGMs or ever say anything at any meetings whatsoever

and do not demonstrate any skills or knowledge of anything, because if you do your arm will get twisted to do participate in some way! However, over the years I've had splendid fun, some frustrating and indeed infuriating times but have also met some great characters and made some good friends.

As for the future of the Group and the WHR, it has been said that "He who lives by the crystal ball soon learns to eat ground glass." Bill Brown and his chums would probably have been appalled, to be told that it would take nearly 40 years for their plans for the rebuilding of the original WHR to be realised. However, it did happen and

it has been a great achievement with the Group and its members making a valuable contribution to the recording, conserving and restoration of the spirit, history and physical assets of the Welsh Highland Railway and its predecessors. I have no intention of eating ground glass even if I'm lucky enough to be still breathing in twenty, let alone forty, years time. Yet, I have no doubt that others will still be riding and living the dream of those who in 1872 arranged for the Act of Parliament for the North Wales Narrow Gauge Railways (Moel Tryfan Undertaking) to be authorised; incidentally a mere 145 years ago.

MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTION RENEWALS.

In the past, members who have not renewed after receiving the Annual Renewal Form normally enclosed with the last Journal of the year, have been sent a reminder with the next edition. Those who have not responded to that, and have not indicated that they no longer wish to remain a member, have been sent a final reminder along with the covers only of the following edition.

We are only a small group, and with rising costs of both postage and printing, the money spent on these various reminders could be better put towards the Group's projects. As Membership Secretary, it is pleasing to note that most members renew within a matter of weeks, some in a matter of days! My thanks are due to you all.

However, as from 1st January 2018, it has been decided that reminders will no longer be sent out, and as stated in Section 5, (Para. d) of our Constitution, any member who has not paid by 31st March (excepting those who now use PayPal and whose renewal dates fall after this date) will be deemed to have lapsed, but can simply rejoin on payment of their subscription.

Therefore could I please ask you to renew promptly, as this does make life easier, especially for our Journal Editor. We do not want to lose a single member, but if you feel that you do not wish to renew, a quick line or email to me would be most appreciated. I would also ask the same of those members who have chosen to renew by PayPal.

May I also remind members that if they wish to receive a new membership card, that they enclose an SAE. along with their subscription. I will assume that if one is not enclosed, a card is not required.

Finally, could I also ask members to ensure that when renewing by cheque, they are made out to **Welsh Highland Heritage**. This is our official account name, and our bank will often reject the various other combinations that I receive!

Dick Lystor - Membership Secretary.

MICHAEL DAVIES (Member No. 4) REMINISCES

Some readers will know of my life long obsession with all things Welsh Highland which dates back to the early 1940s. Visiting Snowdonia in the autumn of 1940 we sadly missed a bus which would have included a visit to Beddgelert, but in 1947 I did finally reach Portmadoc and Pont Croesor, and the following year cycled the length of the railway, staying a couple of nights at the Snowdon Ranger Youth Hostel. By 1950 I had walked the whole of the line including the Bryngwyn branch and such was my obsession I would devise imaginary time tables signed 'A.M. Davies Secretary & Manager'. This was done during periods of boredom whilst working in a Base Ordnance Depot during National Service 1952/4!

Those of my generation know of all the frustrations attached to plans for reviving the railway which lasted some forty years, and in 1995 it was indeed wonderful news to learn that the Secretary of State had overturned the recommendation of his inspector and made the WHR Transfer Order in favour of the Festiniog Railway Co where I had been a volunteer since October 1954.

Later that year my old friend Trefor David told me I should make contact with a certain John Keylock in Worcestershire who was proposing to establish a Welsh Highland heritage group and whom he was sure would be interested to see some of my own WHR material. Much of this had been acquired years earlier from Colonel Stephens' chief Indoor Assistant, Arthur Iggulden in Tonbridge.

John duly visited me at my Cheshire home in 1996 and I was invited to become a founder member and treasurer of his proposed group. An early plan was to walk the whole line listing everything still existing from the NWNG/WHR era before any actual restoration work by contractors.

Our first walk was planned for Wednesday March 12th, 1997 and I was to go by train to Chester where I would be met by David Allan from Eastham in Wirral, and driven in his car to Dinas Junction. Here John Keylock awaited us with local resident Cedric Lodge. Progress was not easy at first as the railway cutting beneath the A487 road was filled in and a sewer pipe straddled the line beyond the site of the loco and carriage sheds. However, progress was faster beyond Cae Moel bridge where it was noted a stream flowed beneath the railway formation which was supported on iron girders. The elderly resident at Bodaden farm was polite but not at all in favour of restoration of



Michael Davies relaxes on Glanrafon Viaduct
June 18th 1954

the railway, pointing out that in the 1930s they had several farm hands to ensure safe passage of livestock across the railway but now he only had family members. The going became more difficult around Wernlas Ddu and the half mile straight up to Cae Hen proved the most difficult of the whole NWNG section. What is now little more than a one minute rail journey took nearly an hour. The line was almost totally choked with bushes and very wet and we had to resort to leaving the track bed and floundering through bog and woodland. To add to our miseries a further diversion had to be made when we were confronted by a very large white bull!

Emerging from the wilderness we found the Cae Hen farmer had not been kind to our railway. The track bed had been totally ploughed out and his cattle grazed in the meadow where trains had once run. Further on, the NWNG overbridge leading to his farm had been demolished and his main access track now crossed the former track on the level. The next overbridge still carried the minor road to Tryfan Junction station but was almost impassable whilst the station building was a total ruin surrounded by thick vegetation.

We then had a little respite before tackling the very difficult section just beyond Aspinall's curve where the whole formation had slid into the Gwyrfa. The last section to Waunfawr was very waterlogged indeed and only our stout footwear saved us very wet feet.

At Waunfawr Cedric's home beside the line at Betws Garmon beckoned and so after a quick look at the Dudley Park granite quarry siding we took to the main road for a very welcome pot of tea and cakes from Janet, Cedric's wife, in the welcome warmth of their kitchen.

Further track surveys were done that year taking us right through to Portmadoc New station. Our first on a fine spring day, April 30th, took us to Rhyd Ddu where we concluded with more tea and cake at the home of Dave and Gina Kent at Ffridd Isaf. The going was very much easier south of Betws Garmon although we did have a memorable encounter with the farmer at Caeau Gwynion near Snowdon Ranger. In fact, all the farmers between Plas-y-Nant and Rhyd Ddu were quite hostile towards us.

Two more surveys were conducted over the 1923 section of line before the start of the T&WO public inquiry in the winter of 1997/8.

This enquiry certainly stirred public opinion and there were times when I began to think that my dream of travelling over my beloved railway was not to be achieved in my lifetime. Trains were now running over the former L&NWR line from Dinas to

Caernarfon hauled by mighty Garratts but what if

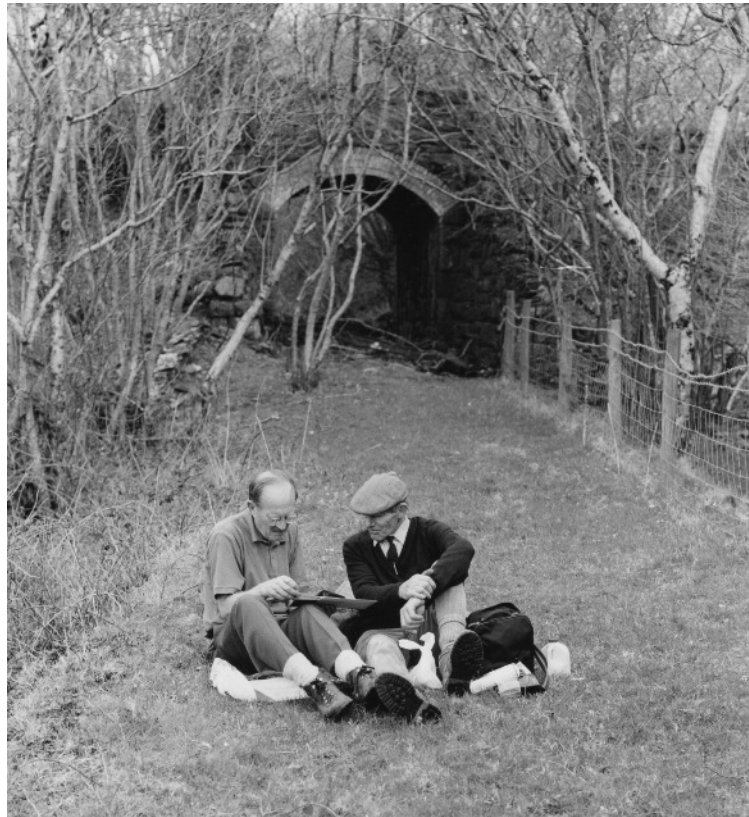
My fears were unfounded as on Monday June 28th, 1999 we learned that Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott had made the Welsh Highland Railway Order to take effect on June 30th - my 65th birthday - what better birthday present could I ask for! It was also the last day of his jurisdiction over Welsh affairs as the new Welsh Assembly became effective on July 1st.

Our survey parties revisited the Bryngwyn Branch in the lead-up to the establishment of the new footpath along the line of the original track bed. The new footpath was formally opened on May 21st, 2011.

Our Group is now in its 21st year and, without doubt, has contributed significantly to the preservation of historic artefacts relating to the Welsh Highland and its predecessors. Only yesterday (Aug 24th) I sat on the platform at Tryfan Junction, to wait for the train to Porthmadog and, whilst listening to the sharp blast as it climbed the 1 in 40 from Dinas, I was able to admire our wonderfully recreated building, and thought particularly of our dear friend, the late John

Keylock, whose idea it was to form our Group and who would be so proud to know it had won a National Railway Heritage Award.

Michael Davies



Michael Davies (left) and John Keylock pause by Bicall Bridge (Tryfan Junction) - David Allan (April 1st, 1998)



Michael Davies and Derek Buckles negotiate a particularly muddy stretch of the Bryngwyn Branch track bed - David Allan (18th October 2005)

Anniversary Photo Quiz

One of the joys, at least to my eyes, of reading *WHH* has been the introduction to a very wide range of photographs of the Welsh Highland and its predecessors. These days, with so much of the original having disappeared either at the time of railway's closure or through the recent rebuilding process, photographs are often all that we have as records of the railway infrastructure and features. Just for once, I thought, I would place the onus of photographic analysis on yourselves, dear readers, in the form of a photo quiz. There will be no prizes, save perhaps for the personal satisfaction that derives from determining a correct solution.

I will by way of a clue note that I have limited this only to those photographs that have appeared in the first 76 issues of *WHH*. In each case the questions are simple - what? where? and, if possible, when? In the best cliff-hanger tradition, I will include the answers next time.



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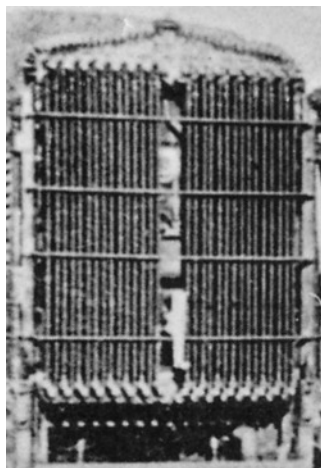
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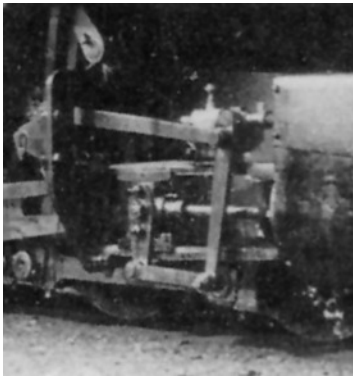
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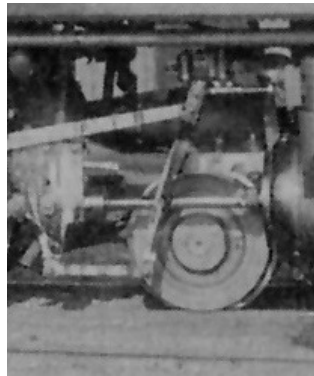
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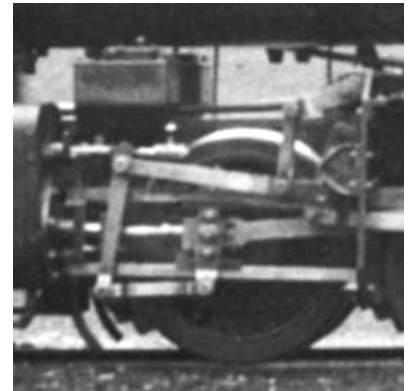
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I started by saying that all of these images had appeared at one time or another in *WHH*. This is not entirely true as one of the photographs here has never appeared in this journal, up to now that is.

For an additional dose of self-satisfaction, can you identify which image is the odd one out?

The Beddgelert Water Tower

“The Nearest Run Thing You Ever Saw!”

‘Making sure we get the history right’

The now reinstated water tower at Beddgelert is one of those Welsh Highland structures that might fall into the perhaps over-used category of the ‘iconic’. I guess it must be because of all those photographs taken in the 1920s and 1930s with locomotives alongside it and then subsequently the gaunt concrete pillars featured in desolate views of the abandoned station site. Fortunately, the pillars were saved from demolition during the rebuilding of the WHR.

In my recent chairman’s report posted in *WHH* 75 I commented on how the pillars of the tower came not to be swept away which has elicited an email from Michael Whitehouse, a former chairman of the Festiniog Railway Trust. It seems I was unwittingly in danger of rewriting history, so we are happy to provide a correction.

Michael comments as follows:

‘I read the *WHH* newsletter with interest. When I read this sentence in the June edition: “It was through the far sightedness and diligent lobbying of the founders of our Group that the original tower was preserved”, I realised you certainly didn’t know how the tower was very nearly lost...

‘When I was Chairman of the FR I still attended WHRCL (Welsh Highland Railway Construction Ltd - Ed.) board meetings but, on one occasion, I arrived a little late to the discussion about the Beddgelert station layout. Mike Hart briefed me on what had been decided. In order to get 14 car trains into the loop and comply with all the overrun

regulations, it had been decided to slightly alter the station and platform layout. This meant that the two concrete towers of the old WHR water column would need to be demolished to allow enough room for the loop. Was I okay with that?

“Not really”, I said. “Two reasons. The business one is that I thought there should be a siding in the station long enough to take, say, *Harlech Castle* and the green/white push pull set if a need was ever found to run shuttles from Port to Beddgelert. The emotional one is that I would rather like to keep the water tower so that, one day, I could sit on *Welsh Pony*’s footplate waiting to take a train up to Rhyd Ddu and replicate the famous shot of *Little Giant* sitting there.” I thought most members would agree.

‘So the layout was altered to allow the siding to be put in, the water tower to remain and the loop we now know

‘It was a close shave. Had I missed the meeting who knows what would have happened’

So there we have it and the anecdote illustrates very well an issue that has been becoming higher on the ‘agenda’ recently on both railways. How do we reconcile operational needs with the desire to conserve and interpret our heritage assets so that our passengers and visitors understand how and why the railways were built and operated in the first place? Answers on a post card please or more realistically please drop me an e-mail.

Nick Booker



Nick Booker’s own 1963 photograph showing the water tower pillars alongside the inspection pit and the lamp-room base.

From the Editor

Following my request in *WHH76*, I received two letters, from Robin Leleux and Dick Lystor, which I reproduce in full here.

Dear Sir

In "From the Editor" in the current issue you appeal for past memories, I assume of the past twenty years rather than just twenty years ago.

My abiding memory within that time was in 2009 when, on a howling wet day, an Adjudicator from the National Railway Heritage Awards and I, as Chairman of the Awards Judges, were shown a selection of surviving NWNHR structures which the new administration had been able to incorporate into the new railway. Our guide was Alasdair Stewart who proved both knowledgeable and enthusiastic. Dinas we admired having been restored much earlier and indeed was an Award winner back in 2000 (I was Ian Allan's bag man when he came to unveil the plaque); Tryfan Junction we inspected more in hope of full rebuilding than expectation (its promise then was brought to fruition in 2014 as an Award winner) while we lamented over the ruinous state of Bettws Garmon station building and hoped its stones could be saved for appropriate use elsewhere on the line.

On the way several under and over bridges were photographed, noting their distinctive yellow brickwork against the grey stones.

Finally we came to the surviving bow string girder bridge at Plas-y-Nant; memories of crossing the derelict WHR bridges on our classic hike in 1960 came back (detailed in *The Snowdon Ranger* no. 10). The insistent rain had flooded the track nearby, suspending train services, so a damp but well satisfied pair made their way back to Dinas and Bangor. The Railway won the top Award in that year's competition for its conservation and incorporation of heritage structures into the new line.

Yours faithfully

Robin Leleux

Dear Peter

Heritage reminiscences.

The things that stand out for me with regard to the Heritage Group are the trackbed survey walks, on which I first met David Allan and Michael Davies, who remain firm friends. I already knew John and Cedric, but it was good that we all eventually ended up on the committee, and the meetings were always friendly and good natured, as were the AGMs. David and John's banter kept us all in good spirits!

Much fun was had on the walks, including wading through a muddy stream whilst carrying my wife who could not endure the walk across one of the old girder bridges, and assuring the walking party that I had a powerful torch to see us through the Aberglaslyn tunnels, only to find that the batteries were flat once we were part way in! There were one or two serious

moments such as one of our party slipping down the embankment outside Beddgelert station and coming off worse, but all in all they were most enjoyable.

Personally I have made many friends through my membership of the Group, especially Ellen Jones and Val Blake who my wife and I see every year. It was a pleasure to be part of the committee for ten years and to have had a minor part in the restoration of both Dinas and Tryfan Junction stations, and my involvement with Membership and Archives continues to keep me busy.

Dick Lystor.

Perhaps your Editor might add a word on my own introduction to matters Welsh Highland?

Readers may well recall (*WHH 71*) that my introduction to the Welsh narrow gauge centred on family holidays in Bangor in the late 1940s and early 1950s, holidays which allowed me access to the working Penrhyn Quarry Railway and to the idiosyncrasies of narrow gauge operation, especially in areas where the double-flanged wheel had once been the 'norm'.

However, it was a chance encounter (serendipity?) with the '64 Co' stand at a model railway exhibition - I cannot remember which - which 'switched me on' to matters WHR, an interest which has never diminished over the subsequent fifty years.

My personal track bed walks and surveys in the 1970s cemented this interest, at least in so far as work would allow. Regrettably I was unable to partake in the rebuilding programme (we lived and worked in the US for six years through the second half of the nineties) but retirement has allowed me to devote more time to the Welsh Highland.

RUSSELL

Finally, much seems currently to be being made of 'low attendance' at Super Power 2017 and the need for additional 'attractions' to focus the public's attention on the 2018 event.

The answer, it seems to me, is obvious. I have made this point before and I will make it again - get *Russell* running on the railway where it spent thirty years of its working life.

No doubt people will say 'it's impossible', 'it can't be done', 'the brakes are wrong' or some other excuse(s) perhaps. However, in my book, nothing is impossible if there is a will to succeed.

Surely it is about time that petty differences should be set aside and a solution to these so-called problems be found.

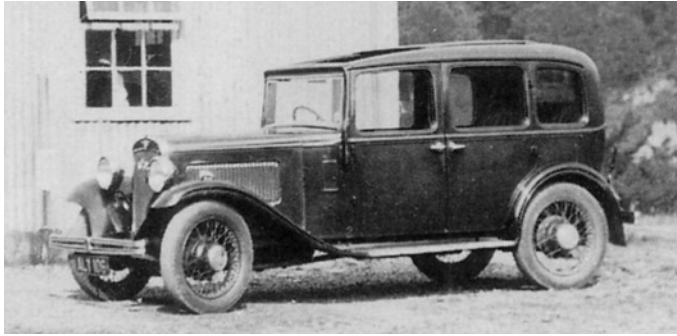
How much longer do we have to tolerate a circumstance where so much genuine Welsh Highland heritage is denied access to the original railway?

We should never forget that had there not been the NWNHR and WHR in the 19th and 20th centuries there certainly would not be a nice new railway between Caernarfon and Porthmadog in the 21st!

Let us recognise this debt with positive action now!

Peter Liddell's Photo Analysis

As this Issue is largely retrospective, I will reserve my next piece of analysis until Issue 78. However, I would like to take this opportunity to tie up some 'loose ends'.



In my piece on Plummer's photos in the last Issue I commented on the impossibility that the car in one of his images could have been photographed in 1928 (the date suggested by Boyd) as 'three-letter' car registrations did not appear until 1932. Thanks to notes from John Padley and David Woodcock I think we can now be a little more specific in the case of the registration 'ALY'.

The 'ALY' letter group would first have been issued after LY 9999 was finally reached. Records indicate that ALY was first issued (i.e. ALY 1) in October 1933. It appears that BLY was first issued in January 1935, giving us a spread of dates between ALY 1 and ALY 999 - a 15-month period. As these numbers were issued serially, we can deduce, at least approximately, a likely issue date for '106' as either November or December 1933. It seems clear from the photograph that we are looking at a summer scene so we can further deduce that this cannot have been earlier than 1934.

Plummer's photograph of *Russell* at the Beddgelert water tower (see *WHH* 76) could not have been taken before the start of the 1935 season (the replacement smoke-box door is visible in the photo). Unless Plummer visited in both 1934 AND 1935/6, and if David Lloyd Hughes only had one suit of clothes, it follows that we can rule out 1934 as a date for the 'car photo' and focus on 1935 or 1936 as the probable dates for the three images discussed.

This exercise in analysis has reminded me just how rewarding, and how educational, this process can be. As one character in a particular series of American crime films repeatedly observes:

"The information is out there – all you have to do is let it in!"

I find this observation particularly apt as I find it applies to the process of photographic analysis. At a simple level this involves a top-level assessment, e.g. which locomotive is that? – where was the photograph taken? However, where details might not be so obvious or where the questions expand to include "when?" the need for additional knowledge ("information") becomes more important. Knowing when locomotives underwent configuration changes or when features at specific locations were altered, as examples, become important additions to the process.

Some photographs demand work at progressively finer levels of detail requiring knowledge of areas apparently far from the general subject. The example of the car number plate is a good one – one starts by looking at a railway photograph and is then inexorably drawn into the history of car registrations. Having done this, it can be embarrassing subsequently as a quiet period watching, say, 'Foyle's War' can be interrupted by observations such as "oh dear, the car Sam is driving wasn't registered until 1946!"

Generating a progressively increasing knowledge-base is obviously time-consuming and, indeed, may not actually be practical. As an example, whilst I know there are data bases out there, it would be a great help if we could pin down detailed weather data day-by-day throughout the life of the railway. Some aspects are readily available, e.g. sun angle data for any date at any location on the railway. This is a help only if the sun was shining when a given photo was taken, however if we knew when the sun clearly was not shining, or when the rain was falling, the identification of possible dates for photos might thus be narrowed down in the absence of more specific clues.

So far I have penned only 17 of these columns - there are many more photographs still to study. If any reader should have a query regarding any WHR photo please let me know - it could inspire a future column!

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