

THE PRESENT BLAENAU STATION

from Andy Savage

I was very involved in the design of Blaenau Station in the 1980's. When we re-opened to Blaenau in 1982, there was no funding for platform buildings at all. At the time I was BR's Assistant Divisional Civil Engineer at Reading, with responsibility for bridges and buildings, and I was heavily involved in works to upgrade the stations on the line out of Paddington.

At one of the lesser-used stations, Acton Main Line, I was commissioned to provide improved platform shelters. I was able to sell the Ffestiniog Railway the two redundant Abtus bus-stop-style shelters for a nominal amount (I think £5 the pair!), and they went to Blaenau shortly after it opened. However, whilst along with basic timber toilets and staff accommodation these were better than nothing, they were clearly inadequate and the then General Manager David Pollock obtained grant funding for the current platform building and canopy which was built at the end of the 1980's.

As I had recently designed the canopy for Harbour Station I was commissioned to do the same for Blaenau. Whilst I used the same basic design as at Harbour, the need for two columns to support a free-standing roof, and the tapering nature of the platform, enabled me to design a gradual change in the arches between the columns from a semi-circular arch by the building to a gothic one at the Porthmadog end – 40 years later I still think it's one of the best-looking structures I designed in my career.

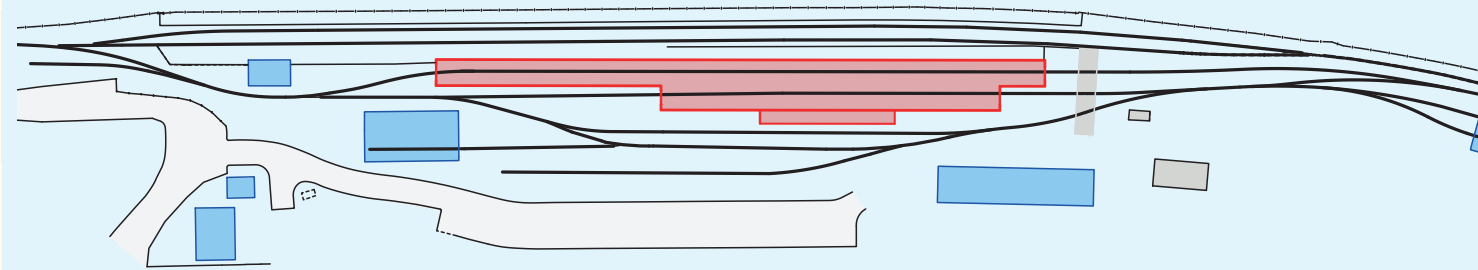
That said, the ramped approach from the original footbridge and the use of Isallt as a station building meant that the new structure was good for keeping off the rain and for providing some toilet facilities, but it didn't offer much else. So I'm delighted to see the proposal to extend 'my' canopy towards the town and include much better booking office and shop facilities – the present container owes more to the 'Acton Main Line' style of railway station than what we need on today's Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland railways



The collection of buildings at the station in 1984, with the two toilet buildings moved from Tan-y-Grisiau, the Abtus shelters from Acton, and the Bunny Hutch which had started life at Tan-y-Bwlch in 1965.

Photograph from the collection of Peter Johnson.

THE DINAS CARRIAGE SHED APPEAL



We had set a target of £300,000 – and the appeal for a new Carriage Shed and improving the North Yard at Dinas has now raised £385,000 from the kindness of all who have donated – a very big 'thank you' to you all !

The focus of fund-raising is now shifting to the Blaenau Station Appeal, and as a closing report on progress at Dinas we have an update from Ian Hartill below –

At the February Project Steering Group meeting, a small number of changes to aspects of the shed design were discussed and agreed for inclusion in the final drawings. This has required some additional work to finalise the design before invitations to tender can be issued for the Civil Groundworks and Shed Build contracts.

The project has now received approval for both the SuDS Sustainable Drainage design and the Licence for discharge of trade waste effluent. Without these approvals it was not possible to begin the practical civil engineering works, and it has taken many many months of investigation and consultation for these to be granted.

The current plan is to let the first Civil Groundworks contract this summer, with work starting in the second week of October. Before this, volunteers will carry out the staged dismantling of the North Yard track.

- Siding No. 3 – end of July
- Clearing the former Catering Container – during June
- Dinas Yard sidings – end of July
- Release Road run-round track – end of August
- Release Road main siding – start of September
- Goods Shed track and connections – October and November
- Temporary revision of existing north end track to allow access to the existing carriage shed direct from the running lines will then take place overwinter to allow the 2027 passenger service to run utilising the old carriage shed.

Overwinter the Civil Groundworks will see the construction of the main building foundations, the inspection pit, the external SuDS drains, oil interceptor, main sewer pumping equipment and the track slabs in the shed area.

This will be followed in February/March 2027 by the Shed Build contract for the steel frame erection and cladding to give a completed shell by May. Building fitting out and completion by both contractors and volunteer teams will then follow to complete the staff and store facilities, including fire alarms, water provision within the building, and carriage sewage pump-outs.

The target is for this all to be completed in late 2027, followed by the start of tracklaying to give at least the necessary basic yard layout for the commencement of passenger services at Easter 2028, utilising the new Carriage Shed.

All with the usual provision that the schedules are subject to weather conditions, and the unexpected !



FFESTINIOG & WELSH HIGHLAND RAILWAYS TRUST
DIAMOND JUBILEE APPEAL



FINISHING BLAENAU STATION

A NEW BOOKING OFFICE AND SHOP



HELP US TO REPLACE THE TEMPORARY FACILITIES WITH A NEW BUILDING, EXTENDED CANOPY AND IMPROVED TOILETS

A NEW ERA FOR BLAENAU STATION

Reinstating the full length of the Ffestiniog Railway was achieved in 1982, when train services were restored to Blaenau Ffestiniog – a truly triumphant occasion.

However, one major project that remains to be completed is the provision of facilities at Blaenau Ffestiniog that are more fitting for a terminus station.

In 1982 the station booking office and shop were located in what is now 'Isallt' guest house above the railway on the High Street. These facilities were later moved to a room on the ground floor of the Queens Hotel. Both of these locations, whilst convenient to occupy, suffered from remoteness and lack of visibility from the station itself.

A station building on the platform, with toilets and canopy, opened in 1990. The booking office and shop had first moved from the Queens Hotel to a smaller portable building on the platform in 2006, and then in 2012 our current booking office and shop arrangement made an appearance following the transfer of the portable station building from Pont Croesor.

The station environment at Blaenau Ffestiniog creates an important first impression for those passengers starting their 'Ffestiniog Experience'; including those travelling on the 'Quarryman' service, those arriving via the TFW Conwy Valley Line, or as one of the many coach parties who join there. The station also provides important facilities for those visiting on the "Mountain Spirit" service from Porthmadog.



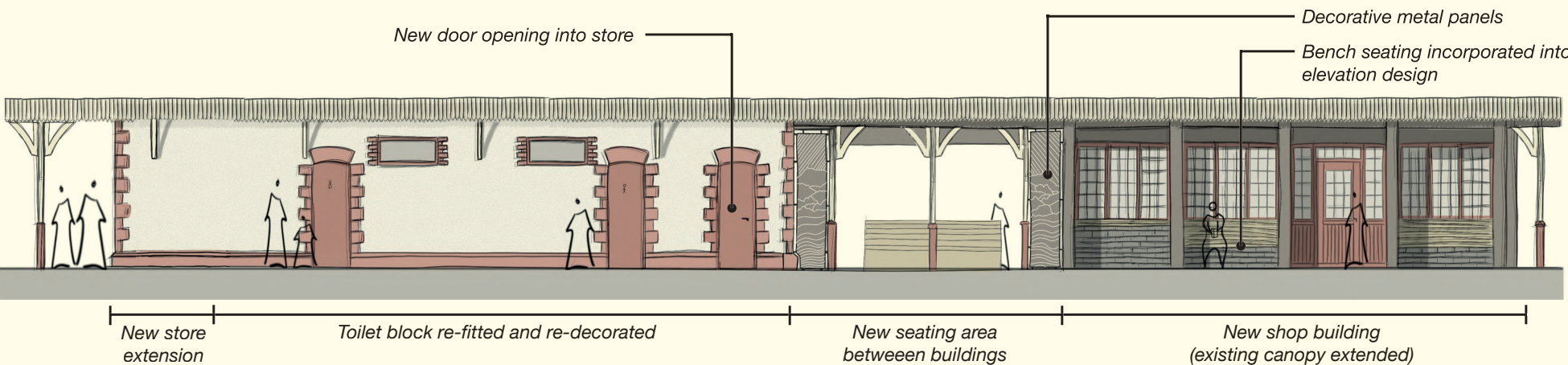
The current facilities both do not meet and also fall behind what is on offer at many of our other stations, and we are now looking to complete the improvement of the whole station.

The first stage in the upgrade at Blaenau Ffestiniog has been to renew the platform edge, surfacing and drainage at platform level. This was completed in the early part of 2024.

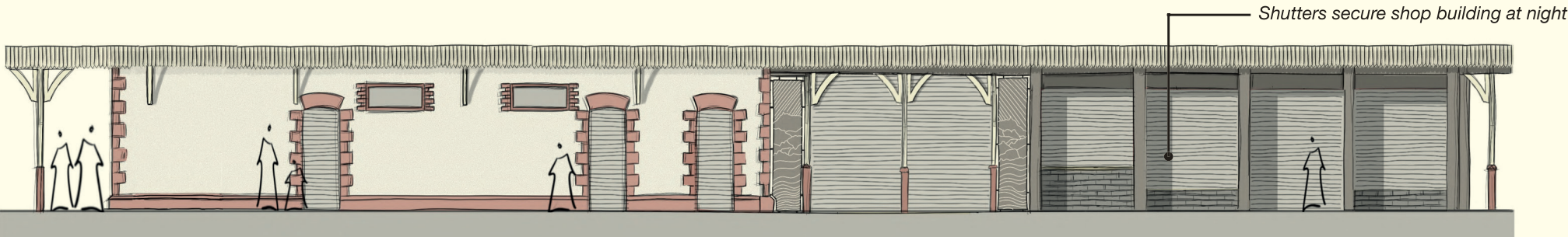
Funds are now needed to support the next step in providing permanent buildings, including refurbished toilets, new seating area, and extended canopy to encompass a permanent booking office with shop and take-way refreshment facilities.

Our architects Chambers Conservation have produced the draft designs and illustrative drawings, and detailed design work now continues with the aim of commencing construction in October/ November 2026.

Proposed South Elevation (when open)



Proposed South Elevation (when closed)



FUNDRAISING TO MAKE THIS HAPPEN

In addition to the new building, extended canopy and improved toilets, the metal stairway of the station footbridge will need replacing. The main footbridge is the responsibility of Network Rail, but the stairway down to our platform is ours.

The initial estimated cost of the whole project is £400,000, and current inflation means it will almost certainly be more.

The project is to be jointly funded by the Ffestiniog Railway Society Stations Fund and the Ffestiniog & Welsh Highland Railways Trust Diamond Jubilee Appeal.

Can you help ?

A donation form is enclosed, for either lump sum donations or for regular monthly subscriptions.

... and if you give over certain amounts – you can receive five years membership of the Ffestiniog Railway Society, the Cymdeithas Rheilffordd Eryri/Welsh Highland Railway Society, or even five years membership of both Societies.

... and there is also the opportunity to receive a 'Share for Life' in the Festiniog Railway Company.

See the donation form for further details.

IT'S TIME TO RAISE OUR GAME AT BLAENAU ...



The Ffestiniog & Welsh Highland Railways Trust
Harbour Station, Porthmadog, LL49 9NF
Charity Number: 239904