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RHEILFFYRDD FFESTINIOG AC ERYRI**

**FFESTINIOG & WELSH HIGHLAND RAILWAYS
TRUST**



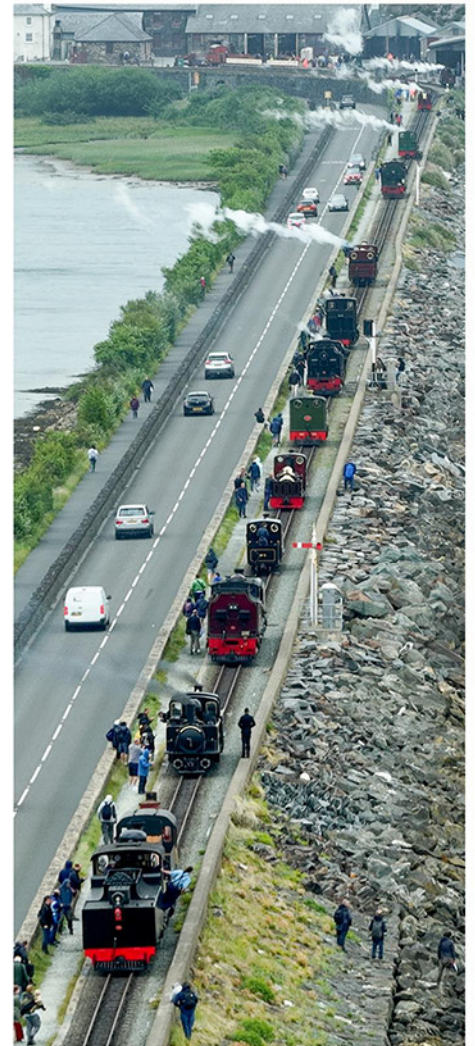
HOW'S IT ALL GOING ?

Your update on all the great progress
our railways are making

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Looking along the length of the Cob, as the locomotives in the '200 Wheels' cavalcade gradually make their way from Porthmadog to Boston Lodge.

Steve Shearn



COVER PHOTOGRAPH:

On the long weekend of 20th-22nd June 2025 the F&WHR held a spectacular event to celebrate two great anniversaries. Locally, seventy years since the restoration of passenger services on the Ffestiniog Railway - and nationally, 200 years from the opening of the Stockton and Darlington Railway.

The weekend started off with the Simplex, MARY ANN, re-enacting the first trains across the Cob.

MERDDIN EMRYS hauled a very special train all the way to Blaenau Ffestiniog. This consisted mainly of slate waggons, but also some other goods waggons, to form a 200 wheel freight train as a nod to the wider celebration theme.

At Dduallt, synchronised departures of a Down train and an Up train (under and over Rhoslyn Bridge) was a large draw for photographers.

The main spectacle of the weekend was Sunday's '200 Wheels on the Cob' Cavalcade - a show that the F&WHR is unique in being able to operate at such a scale. A procession of steam locomotives made their way from Minffordd / Boston Lodge to Porthmadog - accompanied by a commentary from **Anthony Coulls** (Curator, National Railway Museum) and **Tim Dunn** (TV Presenter / Railway Historian), as they passed the gathered crowds.

The locomotives were arranged in the order in which they began work on the restored railway, starting with No.2 PRINCE and ending with the Chinese 'C2', yet to move under its own power.

The cover photograph captures the incredible atmosphere of this 'once in a lifetime' event and shows the locomotives gathering in Harbour Station, prior to breaking a ceremonial banner to start the Cavalcade Photo: **Roger Dimmick**



On its first passenger service over WHR metals, NG15 No.134 - complete with 'Cymdeithas Rheilffordd Eryri' headboard - proudly leads NG/G16 No.87 from Caernarfon to Rhyd Ddu, at the head of 'The Snowdonian' special - Saturday, 26th April 2025. **Chris Parry**

INTRODUCTION:

Welcome to the 2025 edition of the Ffestiniog & Welsh Highland Railways' 'How's It All Going?'. We have a number of updates on ongoing projects, some celebrations of achievements and - further to the big reveal at the Cymdeithas Rheilffordd Eryri / Welsh Highland Railway Society's Annual General Meeting - a look at the team behind the new-build 2-8-4 'Dholpur' Hunslet Tank locomotive...

This booklet is aimed at, and produced for, our core supporters, donors and members as a yearly update on activity and plans. However, it is written to be of interest to everyone. Initially produced as a regular newsletter for those who helped fund the rebuilding of the WHR and the '**Sustainable Railway**' through the **Diamond Jubilee Appeal**, this popular booklet continues to be a key element in keeping our generous supporters up-to-date. We sincerely hope you find this an exciting and informative update.

If you receive this publication we know that you are a keen follower of events around our railways. Do please take the opportunity to 'spread the word' and share it with people you think would enjoy the read - and, of course, we will be delighted to provide further copies if needed...

To start us off in this edition, we take a look at the tourism industry in North Wales. Since Covid, the business model of our railways has significantly changed to adapt to the new conditions and we're very proud of what we have achieved. In these times of higher interest rates and living costs, Tourism is a challenging market - so it is important to understand the dynamic of the wider industry.

From a buildings perspective, a number of exciting projects are ongoing. Boston Lodge is by no means finished and the centre of the site is receiving attention with the reroofing of the 'New' and 'Old' erecting shops. The layout changes at Dinas made good progress over the winter and we look at how plans are evolving and the next steps. This project is the Trust's flagship infrastructure project at the moment and will complement the Boston Lodge carriage shed. The Company has also purchased the Women's Institute building on the Minffordd station site - making a useful addition to our portfolio.

As ever, carriages are firmly in focus. We caught up with the sponsor of the replica North Wales Narrow Gauge Railways' Ashbury Brake Composite, to look at the drive behind the volunteer-led project and how it



Inset: The roundel used on the F&WHR Facebook page - depicting PRINCE breaking through the commemorative banner to start the '200 Wheels on the Cob' cavalcade.

A unique combination of new-build locomotives - Single Fairlie TALIESIN, just back in traffic, leads Double Fairlie JAMES SPOONER along Gwyndy Bank heading for Blaenau Ffestiniog with 'The Snowdonian' special - Saturday, 26th April 2025. **Chris Parry**

will complement our heritage fleet. Additionally, a different sponsor has kindly provided for the rebuilds of Carriages Nos.22 and 26 to their original outline, so we have reviewed their story and how these vehicles will be subtly updated to provide wheelchair access.

Locomotives are our prize assets and the '200 Wheels' cavalcade at the 'Seventieth Anniversary Gala' in June showed off our complete collection. In this issue we have the story of RUSSELL's first solo passenger run in nearly 90 years along the whole of the WHR route.

We include the first article on a project that has been ongoing 'in secret' in Somerset since Covid - the new build of a 2-foot gauge version of a 2-8-4 Hunslet tank locomotive. Five varieties of these engines were sent to the Dholpur-Sarmathura Railways that operated in

Rajasthan in India. The team behind this project are truly driven and are creating something very special, that we hope to see run on the WHR before too long.

Not every project is covered here, but we focus on what has made tangible progress and what is next in line. Items such as the successful culmination of the NLHF project at Boston Lodge or entry into traffic of NG15 No. 134 have had good coverage elsewhere.

None of these projects would be possible without our incredible volunteers, supporters and donors.

If you feel you can help, whether by supporting one of our appeals, or by getting practically involved in the joys and camaraderie of volunteering, there are lots of ways to help us described at the end of this booklet.



FROM THE FINANCE DIRECTOR:

We caught up with Nigel Burbidge - company Finance Director and Diamond Jubilee Appeal Chairman - for his present outlook...

The heritage railway movement faces something of an inflexion point. Up until the start of Covid, the general focus was on expansion and growth. It seemed that there was no limit to the giddy heights the movement could reach. However, signs of coming challenges had appeared. At a Ffestiniog Railway Co. Board meeting in the summer of 2019, the board could see the start of what has become a trend of the minimum wage consistently increasing above the rate of inflation, which is important because wages are by far the largest single cost of any railway. Challenges to fuel supplies and ever-increasing visitor expectations have made balancing the books even more tricky.

The Covid pandemic threw lots of balls in the air and the 2020, 2021 and 2022 seasons were a period of reinvention and adaptation; a process which continues even now. Thanks to the unfailing help of our donors (who responded magnificently particularly in the Covid crisis itself), careful leadership, prudent & imaginative management, accompanied by strong volunteer support, our railways have weathered that storm well.

The company made a very small profit last year - just over £13,000. This year it is faced with high employer National Insurance increases, as well as a further increase in the minimum wage, at over double the rate of inflation. Closure of the last remaining coal mine in Wales has increased difficulties in obtaining good and consistent coal supplies. All of this puts further pressure on our finances.

The Company board and management team is tackling all of these issues in a measured way. There is no 'silver bullet' that will act as a complete panacea; instead, there are a number of actions that will need to be

taken. One thing that is evident is that the long-term, continued success of our railways relies on being able to make significant capital investments in both infrastructure and machinery. This is where you, our supporter base, are key. These projects are not as 'sexy' as restoring a steam engine, but are equally important. Two important projects coming down the line for which we will be looking for sponsorship are:

Upgrading and restoring the KMX tamper:

This is likely to cost the same as a significant loco overhaul, but it will enable our infrastructure team to better look after our forty miles of railway. After all, if the track isn't kept in good order, we would have nowhere for our shiny steam engines to run, so each piece of the jigsaw is as important the other.

Investing in our diesel fleet:

We have had to rely on our fleet of diesel locomotives on several occasions this year, during periods of high fire risk. That has highlighted just how fragile they are. Our most powerful diesels - the Bo-Bo Funkeys - are now over fifty years old, an age at which most railways will have retired their mainline fleet. Many of our other diesels were 'heritage' when the Funkeys were built. We are now looking to provide improved and reliable support for our core steam fleet, to enable us to have a backup in times of difficulty - but again, this will almost certainly come with a seven figure price tag.

There are other parts of your railways that those charged with leading them are looking at; both in terms of improving or widening our offer and in terms of increasing our efficiency and use of volunteer support. Rest assured, all of these thoughts are with the ultimate aim of keeping our railways safe, relevant to our supporters and visitors and something we can all be proud to be a part of. None of this will be possible without your continued support, both in terms of donations and volunteer time. You can be assured that, as the board's plans firm up, we will be writing again, seeking support to turn them into reality.





High Summer lunchtime, Harbour Station - four train services arriving, departing or stabled in the yard, while visitors enjoy the sights with food/drink from Spooner's. **Next page:** The lure of steam continues to attract attention from young and old. **Roger Dimmick**

TOURISM IN NORTH WALES:

As progress shown in this booklet will demonstrate, there are many great things happening across our two railways. We are lucky to win grants and have many generous supporters, but the core railway operates in the wider Tourism industry and success servicing this market is key. The market is ever-shifting and there is a constant need to understand the trends and evolving needs of our customers.

The **Welsh Government** is very aware of the importance of Tourism to the country. It adds billions of pounds to the economy every year and creates around 12% of employment throughout the country. Its importance tends to be higher in more rural parts of the country. To focus attention on this, they have an organisation within Welsh Government called **Visit Wales** who are responsible for the development and promotion of the visitor economy throughout Wales. There is a similar **Visit Scotland** organisation and a **Visit Britain** organisation who report on England and pull together data and insight for the whole nation. Their focus is on domestic tourism.

Looking at the output of reports issued by these bodies, we can see that trips taken inside Wales are down around 10% year on year in 2024. This has been

noticeable throughout all areas of the industry from accommodation to attractions. One of the drivers for this is that overseas trips have been increasing, with data showing around a 9% increase across the UK during 2024. On average people spend about three nights per trip, which is mainly a balance of weeks and weekend getaways. Although total trips have been down, spend per trip has increased in 2024 from £82 per night to £101.

The **Office for National Statistics** also publish figures on international visitors. For Wales this amounts to around 0.9 million a year. Whilst this has rebounded significantly in the past couple of years, it has not yet reached its pre-pandemic high of over 1 million. Directly after Covid there was limited focus on this due to the swell of domestic tourism - however, it is firmly in the Government's sights at present.

There are a lot of facts and figures available, but what does it all really mean? To help put it into context, it is important to remember that there was a surge in domestic tourism after the pandemic, with people keen to get away. It is taking longer for foreign travel to recover. Tourism is also generally considered a cyclical industry and broadly follows general economic

patterns. What is key is an understanding of what tourists are looking for and tailoring our offer to meet that - here Visit Wales surveys can be very helpful.

Firstly, they show that the most popular type of destinations are 'Scenic coastline and harbours' and 'Traditional seaside resorts' - which plays well to our bases in Porthmadog and Caernarfon.

Secondly, their surveys show what sort of experiences people are most keen on when choosing activities to enjoy during their trip. The top four here are 'visiting outdoor attractions', 'trying local food and drink', 'visiting heritage sites and castles' and 'visiting cultural attractions'. This shows that people are looking for a more in-depth experience of, and with, the area that they are visiting and the activities they partake in. They are hoping to go away with a greater sense of the landscape, heritage and culture of the area, and attraction, they have visited.

We believe that our railways are well placed to be able to serve this growing desire within the market. The move to a range of experiences at different price points and durations satisfies the different segments of the market. On top of this the personal experience offered by Platform and On-Train hosts - being there to answer general questions, but also able to offer insight on our heritage and local surroundings - has really resonated well. Our guided tours of Boston Lodge and experiences such as the 'Drive an Engine' workshops now give the more intrepid visitor 'behind-the-scenes' access and leaves them with a deeper, personal connection to the history of our railways.

It is notable that Wales has been rebranding along their cultural lines - a prominent example being the move to use the Welsh names for areas and features. We have become more used to hear and see the Welsh 'Yr Wyddfa' instead of 'Snowdon', for example. Across the whole nation we have also seen a move to locally-sourced food and drink. Spooner's always offers a selection of Welsh beers and spirits which helps add to the experience of visiting a different community.

There is a lot of work currently being done to promote tourism in a sustainable way, as over-tourism can harm local communities. Gwynedd and Conwy Councils have come together to create a '**Sustainable Tourism Partnership**' - involving communities, businesses and other stakeholders - on which we have representation.

Their core principle is to create 'A visitor economy for the benefit and wellbeing of people, environment, language and culture of Gwynedd and Eryri'.

It is also likely that a 'Visitor Levy' will be introduced. This will be applied to people staying in any visitor accommodation in Wales, and will be payable by all visitors - whether or not they have a permanent residence in Wales. This is a system that a number of countries operate around the world - the idea being that all funds raised would be used for improving infrastructure that enhances the visitor experience.

With our moves to provide a strong customer offering and in view of the large focus being placed on growing sustainable tourism in Wales, we are looking forward to a bright future...





Fireman Nigel Muskett and Driver Nigel Burbidge proudly show off our National Tourism Awards for Wales '25 'Best Attraction' and Go North Wales' 2024 Tourism Awards 'Go Attraction of the Year' trophies at Harbour Station. **Chris Parry**

WINNING AWARDS:

Over the past couple of years the Ffestiniog & Welsh Highland Railways have been recognised in quite a number of regional and national awards. While these are reported at the time, it is worth standing back and putting into perspective the wide range of activities for which we have been recognised.

Winner - 'Go Attraction of the Year'

• Go North Wales Tourism Awards.

These awards, hosted in November 2024, celebrated the hard work, achievements and dedication of those working in the region's tourism industry.

The other nominations were Plas Cadnant Hidden Gardens, Penderyn Llandudno Lloyd St Distillery and Aber Falls Distillery Ltd.

Winner - 'Best Attraction'

• National Tourism Awards for Wales.

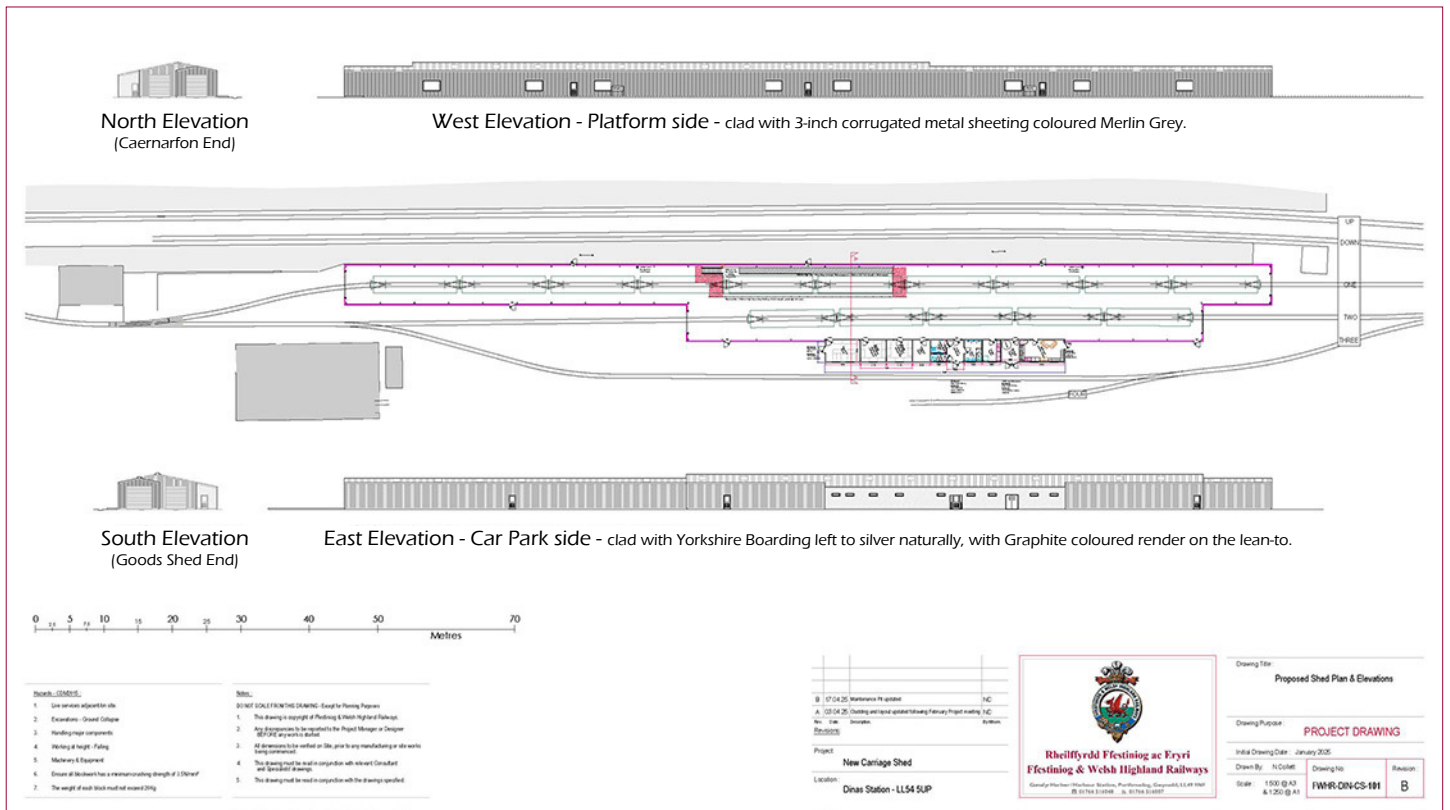
These awards, hosted by Visit Wales on the 27th of March 2025, celebrated the best of the wider tourism industry around the country. We qualified for this year's award after winning 'Go Attraction of the Year'. The award ceremony was a chance to meet people from all over the sector to celebrate, share ideas and promote innovation. This year there were 48 finalists from across Wales, shortlisted in 12 categories ranging

from 'Best Attraction' to 'Best Event' and including awards for 'Sustainable Tourism', 'Accessibility and Inclusivity' and 'Dog Friendliness'. For the 'Best Attraction' award our railways beat the following very worthy attractions: Dan-yr-Ogof - The National Showcaves Centre for Wales in the Brecon Beacons, Carew Castle and Tidal Mill in Pembrokeshire and Tredegar House in Newport.

Nomination - Morgan Award for Rolling Stock

• Heritage Railway Association Awards 2025

Hosted by the HRA on the 8th of February 2025, these awards saw more than 200 staff and volunteers attending to represent railways, tramways and rolling stock groups from across the country. Our Carriage Truck, which debuted in the freight train at the 'Bygone's Weekend' in October 2024, was nominated, alongside the Embsay & Bolton Abbey Railway-based restoration of 1877-built Great Eastern Railway Royal Saloon No.8 and the Bahamas Locomotive Society breakdown train at the Keighley and Worth Valley - the narrow winner being the splendid restoration of Pullman Car No.54 from the Bluebell Railway. The carriage truck has been a volunteer-led and privately-funded project, which gives us a truly unique addition to our rake of vintage waggons.



This plan shows the new carriage shed on the Dinas site, along with elevation views from each side. N. Collett

DINAS:

Dinas remodelling is the Trust's current flagship project and the main focus of our fundraising - these changes to the site, including a new carriage shed and other facilities, will make a massive improvement to the operation. We are grateful for all the momentum this project has had from our supporters so far.

While perhaps not as exciting as a new locomotive, this kind of investment really helps the long-term sustainability of our railways. This is why we are still seeking further funds to finish the job.

Over the last winter much work was completed 'on the ground', with new points installed for the connections to the main line and a lot of site clearance achieved. After many years out of use, the former Construction office has now also been taken down. Detailed design work for the shed itself has been progressing.

While the shed size and shape, track layout etc. has been agreed for a while - in that the main road will be capable of holding a ten carriage WHR set, and the smaller road can be used to stable a heritage set - things such as foundations, services, and a two-road pit for carriage exams are all being fleshed out.

There are two key areas of particular focus.

- Firstly, building regulations stipulate that any building with more than 100 square metres of roof needs to have a sustainable drainage solution in place. The new carriage shed has about 1,400 square metres.

A test hole has been dug which demonstrated poor soakaway properties, due to the site sitting on glacial till. However, there are ways of creating a solution, so Cadarn Consulting - a local firm who have helped on other projects - have been engaged to develop an appropriate scheme.

- Secondly, thought is being given to the logistics that will be required on site over a short winter shut-down period to get everything done in time. This challenge is similar to planning the remodelling of Harbour Station, completed in 2014. Maximising use of volunteers will be key and a fascinating project to be involved with.

Your support, either by donation or volunteering on the ground, will be highly valued...



While it is impossible to cover the sheer variety of tasks carried out by our volunteers in a single image, this montage of photographs goes some way to illustrate the wide range of people who give up their time to work on the F&WHR. **Roger Dimmick**

VOLUNTEERING:

Since the start of the preservation period in 1954, our railways have relied heavily on volunteering to develop. In recognition of this, and its continued importance, the Board of the FRCo have appointed **Jo Charles** (WHR Society-nominated Director) to lead a Volunteering Steering Group to help stimulate this part of the railways' growth. We caught up with Jo to understand progress...

Volunteering has been firmly in focus as part of the **National Lottery Heritage Fund** (NLHF) project centred on Boston Lodge. With impact across the whole of our railways, the NLHF allowed an amount of volunteering to be part of the Company's match funding portion of the project. The target of 13,000 hours was doubled - with an amazing 26,000 hours recorded, and gaining around 100 new volunteers. We are looking to build on this momentum, and to learn from the considerable experience gained during the life of the project.

One of the early aims of the Steering Group is to get a better understanding of what volunteering on the railways presently 'looks' like, how much input there is and where it goes. Knowing that the majority of volunteers fill in timesheets, this at first seems easy - but these are not electronic, so collating and analysing

the data is a challenge. Timesheets are also only filled in by those 'on site'. We know that many hours are spent on roles on the Boards of the Societies, the Trust, the Company and by Working Party organisers, engineering, architectural and other specialists who work at home, and whose time has not historically been captured. We are now making progress on developing simple systems to address these gaps.

Volunteers come in many different guises and are interested in very different aspects of the railway. Some are railway builders, as we saw with the Deviation and the WHR; some are pure operators and will drive, fire or guard as many trains as they can get days off for; many more are 'behind-the-scenes' with interests from signalling to adopting a station, to locomotive overhaul, stewarding or hosting on our passenger services. Some of the key numbers we have collated for the 2024 season are shown below - time is recorded in hours, so here we assume an 8 hour day...

| | |
|----------------|--------------------|
| Footplate | 3,391 days |
| Infrastructure | 2,968 " |
| Operations | 1,604 " |
| Workshops | 1,284 " |
| Other Areas | 1,922 " |
| TOTAL | 11,169 days |



Initiatives like the 'Meet the F&WHR Volunteers' weekends have provided a 'behind the scenes' experience, in which people from all walks of life were able to discover ways they can get involved with volunteering on the F&WHR. **Roger Dimmick**

This equates to about 49 full-time employees! At the national minimum wage, this level of effort represents about £1.25m worth of input - although this falls far short of capturing the true 'value' of volunteering.

The Steering Group will address the 'lifecycle' of volunteering. This looks at how we attract volunteers - making sure we respond to requests quickly and assist in making sure that all prospective volunteers find departments that match their interests and skills.

Next on the list is making sure volunteers have a good time when they visit, that jobs are properly planned out, tools and oversight are provided - along with cups of tea! Training needs to be provided and our safety management system, along with our Safety Manager, ensure training is appropriate and that competencies are managed. We have invested in the HOPS (Heritage Operations) management platform where these can be logged and kept up to date. The need for individual refresher courses can then be automatically flagged.

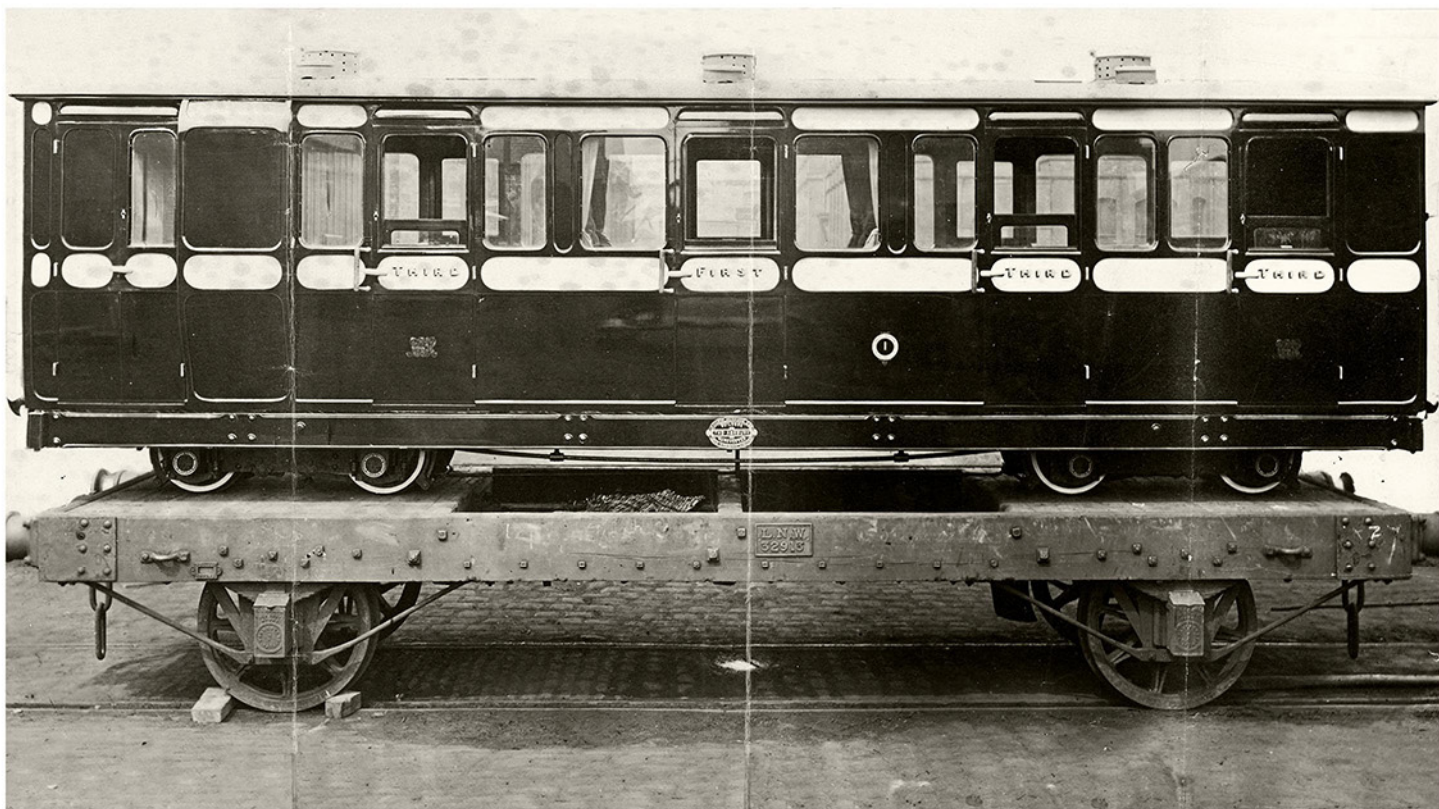
Finally, the Steering Group will try to understand why volunteers leave us. Sometimes peoples' lives get busier - perhaps with their work or starting a family - peoples' interests change or they move far away. Maintaining relationships with present - and past - volunteers will help maintain our large supporter base.

Another important aspect in managing a volunteer population is that they, along with all our supporters and paid staff, need to be appropriately thanked. This comes in several forms - from pride in a job well done, to managers/supervisors giving due recognition, to an opportunity to join staff social events during the year.

To help manage all of this, we are currently recruiting for a 'Head of Volunteering' position. As many of our volunteers come via the supporting Societies, they are also closely engaged in this process. This position will look to promote volunteering within the company as described above, working with departmental heads to identify areas where volunteering would strengthen capacity and match up willing individuals and groups. Over the last few years there has also been a focus on building relationships with various organisations who provide large groups of people for dedicated working parties. Notable successes here include Young Rail Volunteers, Royal Navy, Imperial College, Birmingham University, Alstom Transportation and many others.

It is wonderful to see so much activity ongoing, and to witness the joy and sense of achievement that our many volunteers get from their time on the railway.

If you're interested in joining us - please email volunteer@ffwhr.com to find out more...



Makers' photograph of one of the two Ashbury Brake Composites built for the North Wales Narrow Gauge Railways - showing the fine livery details and the 'Guard / 3rd Class / 1st Class / 3rd Class / 3rd Class' compartment arrangement. **FR Archives**

NWNCR ASHBURY BRAKE COMPOSITE:

Since 2019, tucked away in a corner of the NHLF sponsored section of the carriage works at Boston Lodge, on the 'volunteer' road with the company of a procession of wooden waggons, a replica of one of the original two NWNCR Ashbury Brake Composites has steadily been making progress. This vehicle provides a link between the FR and the northern part of the WHR. It is seen as the main missing link in the F&WHR's remarkable collection of 1870s carriages.

This is also an important vehicle as it represents the second stage in Spooner's evolution of bogie coach design. The early FR bogie coaches, Nos.15 and 16, built by Brown Marshall's and Co Ltd - with the running gear built locally - were delivered in 1872, before the Curly Roofed Vans of 1873. These were long iron-framed coaches with seven compartments each. The Ashburys followed and a shorter five compartment layout was chosen - similar to coaches Spooner designed, but never built, for the Penrhyn Railway.

They were designed towards the end of 1872 - although it is not known for sure exactly when they were delivered. Some of the drawings for details such as the lamps have dates of 1873, so it seems likely that delivery was in 1874, which coincides with the planned

opening of the NWNCR in November of that year. These Brake Composites were by far the highest quality coaches that the NWNCR possessed. Being ordered relatively early on, after the Act of Parliament in 1872, the Company had yet to face its first financial crisis. They were the first Spooner-designed coaches with tumblehome ('bowsiders') of solid timber construction, with a highly-detailed paint job featuring an intricacy level similar to the FR's Victorian set.

The NWNCR finally opened from Dinas to Tryfan Junction and on to Bryngwyn in 1877 - so the vehicles would have lain dormant for a period before being put into regular traffic. It is also important to note that the NWNCR did not have a carriage shed for a number of years after its opening - therefore, the carriages would have been exposed to the full force of the weather all year round. It is recorded that they deteriorated in quality at quite an alarming rate. The DJA sponsored Carriage Shed at Dinas will help prevent this in future!

In 1877, two Brake Composites were delivered from the Gloucester Carriage and Wagon Company. Later, in 1907, the NWNCR took delivery of two Pickering Brake Composites and there are no photographs of the Ashbury's in use as coaches after that. One at least



The replica NWNCR Ashbury Brake Composite on the volunteer-project road inside Boston Lodge Carriage Works - August 2025.
This carriage provided a useful aid in the NLHF-funded 'Carriage Painting Workshops' earlier in the year. **Roger Dimmick**

became a timber truck. The underframe of one can be seen in photos of the WHR demolition trains in 1941/42.

Building a replica of an historic vehicle in the modern era comes with a series of design decisions to make if it is desired that the vehicle is to be of serviceable use. Making these decisions with a sympathetic eye on what one is trying to recreate is key. The original is likely to have had a very heavy oak underframe, but - similar to the Curly Roofed Van - the replica has a steel underframe. (Most of the preserved carriages have been reframed onto steel in the preservation-era.) The replica also makes use of vacuum brakes, so it can be safely operated with the rest of the railway's fleet. A cheaper option could have used 'hand me down' bogies - however, investment has been made to make frames and axlebox covers that match the original.

The Guards' compartment raised some questions. The original double doors were tiny - like cupboard doors - and would only be suitable for really small Guards. At one stage it was proposed that a single large door be made for ease of use. However, it was decided that this deviated from the original appearance too much and original style doors will be fitted after all. As built, there was no ventilation in the Guards' compartment. So, for present-day operations, the Guard will ride in the first compartment along, to avoid the tiny doors

and to have some ventilation - a sensible compromise. However, no deviation is being made in the final finish - Boston Lodge has even dug in its stores and come up with original Ashbury door handles..!

This carriage will enable heritage NWNCR / WHR trains to run - with a core NWNCR formation of Ashbury Brake composite, Ashbury 3rd 7-compartment open 'Summer Car' (NWNCR12, WHR23), Carriages No.24 (another heritage replica of 2002) and No.26 (a further NWNCR Ashbury 'Summer Car' now being rebuilt to its original semi-open form, but with wheelchair space, as a privately-funded project). If more capacity is needed, Ashbury No.23 (restored to WHR condition in 2002) and Carr. No.39 (Hudson Open) could be added to make a five/six coach NWNCR / WHR heritage set.

We would like to thank the dedication of 'Team X' volunteers for building this amazing carriage - the amount of work required for this sort of construction is not to be underestimated and has been carried out to the same high standard in which they have outshopped replica Carriage No.21 and a number of Bug-boxes. The project has also been generously privately funded, with the sponsor keen to replicate as many original features as possible. This collaboration is giving our railways a useful vehicle, while also filling a large historical gap in our collection...



Photo of one of the ZA/5 Dholpur locos in India. Notable are the stars on the front and side of the water tanks which were awarded for reliability. The cabside plate displays the running number - **810** - and the type - **ZA/5**

'DHOLPUR ZA/6' NEW BUILD:

Somewhere in the West Country, something is taking shape that will excite anyone who is a fan of narrow gauge steam and powerful locomotives. A two foot gauge 'improved' version of the largest Hunslet ever built - the ZA/5 class 2-8-4T. These worked on the Dholpur-Sarmathura Railway in Rajasthan, India - hauling, amongst other things, stone that was used in the building of New Delhi. We caught up with **Jon Banfield**, the original driving force behind this plan to build a new 2ft gauge loco, to understand the ambition and team behind this fascinating project.

Jon has had a lifelong love of steam which started with his grandfather's 7¼ inch gauge railway in his back garden. He first visited the Ffestiniog as a boy in the early 1980s and has fond memories of walking the Aberglaslyn Pass in the 1990s, before services were returned in the 2000s. Jon has had a successful career in technology, but steam has always been his passion. He now has his own 7¼ inch gauge railway in his back garden, for which he has built a Hunslet loco with modified - or rather 'improved' valve gear.

Despite many years with miniatures, Jon's love of the two-foot was reaffirmed when visiting the F&WHR for the 'HUNSLET 125' gala and having prime seats on a

train over WHR metals behind LINDA and BLANCHE.

After his success in building locomotives in 7¼ inch gauge, this weekend sparked a thought *"wouldn't it be great to build something in two foot"*. Despite the excitement of the day, practical concerns - such as cost, where it could be built, how to get the family on board etc. - quickly pushed this idea into the deep recesses of his mind, until...

A friend of Jon's, Matt Fairweather (who is also involved in the 7¼ inch community) has connections in Switzerland and particularly a place called 'Swiss Vapeur Parc' in Le Bouveret - not too far from Geneva.

This is a private members' club for 7¼ inch gauge loco owners, which is also open to the public to visit and ride on the lines. Being a Swiss railway park, they had built themselves a rack railway and commissioned Charles Ball of Balson AG to build them a 1:4 scale version of a Furka Steam Railway HG 3/4 rack loco. In total, Charles Ball made parts for three locomotives.

Matt Fairweather acquired one of these sets and then built it himself. Not only that, but he also built a rack railway in his back garden for somewhere to run it!



Driving wheels, rear pony truck & cylinder fabrications for the ZA/6. **Middle:** Matt Fairweather's 7¼" gauge Balson Furka HG 3/4. This is a compound loco, featuring Walschaerts (Heusinger) valve gear on the adhesion engine and Joy gear for the pinion engine.

A term that could be used to describe Jon and Matt would be 'railway adventurers' due to their great excitement and enthusiasm in taking on new projects.

When the rack railway was finished, in Summer 2020, a period of operation was enjoyed - but then, while chatting over a mug of tea at the end of one day, Jon came out and just asked Matt whether he'd be interested in doing some sort of two-foot gauge project together - the reply was an instant... "YES!"

This can be seen as the start of the project, although at this stage there was nothing as firm as a plan - but the commitment to the idea was there. A number of discussions later the pair decided that if one were to build a two-foot gauge loco, it would be great for it to be useful on the 40 miles of railway in the 'top left corner' of Wales! Looking back to Jon's ride behind the Ladies at 'HUNSLET 125', an early thought was to perhaps build another LINDA. However, as there are two working examples of this type of Hunslet, it didn't feel like the right project. This led to reviewing '*The Hunslet Engine Works*' book, by **D.H. Townsley**, which covers over 150 years of locomotive building and looks at many of the types. Of all the locos described in the book the ones that stood out every time - initiating a 'wow' response - were the large 2 foot 6 inch gauge 2-8-4Ts built for the Central Railways of India.

Would it be possible to build one of these and, if so, would it be able to fit and be of use on the WHR?

For Hunslet locos there is an amazing resource - the 'Hunslet Archive', held by the Statfold Narrow Gauge Museum Trust. They have a large selection of drawings and, if you provide them with the loco number, they can look it up. It just so happened that they had a complete set of drawings for these 2-8-4Ts. They were on negatives, as the collection was photographed, so arrangements were made to scan these. Having a full set of drawings was a massive step forward.

The next step was reviewing the drawings and doing some maths to see if it would fit - and amending the design to suit two foot track. Running the numbers, it was evident that only the odd tweak would be needed to make the design fit the WHR's loading gauge. Confidence can be taken from the size of the NG/G16s, but the NG15 project also provided assurance that an eight-coupled loco could cover the whole route.

Having got this far, Jon and Matt decided to have a chat with the F&WHR and - in September 2020 - drove to Porthmadog for a meeting in Spooner's Café-Bar with General Manager Paul Lewin (appropriately socially distanced, since the country was undergoing a start to phased Covid lockdown withdrawal).



The frames rolled outside Jon's shed, with the main team behind the project build - consisting of Stuart, Roger, Jon, Alan and Josh. The frames have been made in three sections - partially due to the shed's size, but also due to cutting machine constraints.

The three have known each other for a while and, as discussion proceeded, it got to the crunch question Jon and Matt had for Paul - the question that would give the whole project meaning. Simply put, this was "If we build it, would you use it to pull trains?"

Jon and Matt didn't want to build something that would have the occasional trip out somewhere, but otherwise sit in a shed gathering dust - the aim was to have something that would be a key part of the fleet. The answer for Paul, knowing the capabilities of the men in front of him and having talked through the practicalities of the design, was simply "Yes"...

In the background, a lot of work had been done on the design (much by Jon himself), in particular on the valve gear. A connection of Jon's, [Simon Bowditch](#) - who'd advised him on improving the valve gear on his self-built 7¼ inch gauge Hunslet - was a great help here. A key early decision, one which Paul had advised, was to go for piston valves instead of the balanced slide valves of the original, since these are more efficient and easier to maintain.

Inspiration was also taken from a paper authored by [W. Pearce](#) on '[Locomotive Proportion & Performance](#)' which advised on why certain locos - particularly the Great Western Railway 'Castles' - were so good. This looks at the ratios of steam pipes and steam chest

sizes and extols the virtues of long travel valves, as they open and close more quickly, so speeding up steam admission and cut-off allowing for greater control. Valve gear design 'Version 6' was the final evolution between Jon and Simon, which should be a very efficient design and save a lot on coal costs.

This neatly drove the designation of the loco as [ZA/6](#). On Indian Railways, the letter 'Z' was used to denote narrow gauge, noting the main-line gauge in India is 5 foot 6 inch. The 'A' is used to denote a 2-8-4 class. Conveniently there were 5 varieties of these locos built at different times - firstly by Kerr Stuart, who were then later bought by Hunslet. The last two locos were delivered in 1959 and had changed from side tanks to pannier tanks. As the locomotive being built by Jon, Matt and team is a further evolution of the design, it elegantly becomes ZA/6. It will carry the number '815', as the last number on the line in India was No.814.

From a performance perspective the tractive effort of the ZA/6 should be a bit less than the NG15. However, the NG15 weighs about 68 tons with tender, 37 tons without - while the ZA/6 is 38 tons. Therefore, straight away, there are 30 tons less to be pulled around - equal to around 18% of a 10-coach train formation. So, like for like, the ZA/6 is 1 ton heavier - but a 2-8-4, not a 2-8-2, with slightly less weight on the driving axles.



This picture shows one side of the main frame sections on the high pressure water-jet cutting machine. It is hard to over-emphasise how accurate these are - especially given the need to turn the steel plate halfway through the operation and maintain alignment.

Slightly less load on the driving axles is balanced by the trains weighing at least 18% less, due to the lack of a tender. The range of a tender loco would, of course, be larger - which is one of the reasons why Fairlie locomotives struggled to make large inroads in America, as with no tender and limited coal storage their range was very limited. However, working over the 25-mile WHR will not be a problem for the ZA/6.

Jon and Matt have been constructing the loco in Jon's garage in Somerset and have built a small, but skilled and dedicated, team to help them. Roger, Alan and Stuart turn up every Monday to help Jon and Matt. This group has known each other for a long time through ESSMEE (East Somerset Society of Model and Experimental Engineers) which has a large layout and a comprehensive set of machines in their shared workshop. Working parties commenced in 2022 - however, much work happens in-between, with Matt helping on a secondary working party every Wednesday. Hal and Miller, Jon's children have put in significant shifts and his wife, Donna, has held more bits of steel than expected at the start of the project.

They have also enlisted the help of Bailey - youngest member of the regular team - who brings his expertise with 3D printing. This has been used extensively to create patterns for castings and which represents a

large cost saving. For example, the driving wheels, made out of 33 individually printed pieces - at a cost of £600 - impressed the foundry, who advised them that making the pattern out of wood would have been in the order of £3500. It is fair to say that all the regulars have become quite addicted to the project.

Not all components can be made in the home workshop environment, so a number of parts are placed with outside contractors. A great deal of the satisfaction comes from the way everything goes together 'just so' - a testament to the CAD process and manufacturing accuracy of modern techniques, such as high-pressure water-jet cutting of steel plate. The main sections of the frame are 5 metres long and were cut on a machine with a 2.5 metre bed, so the plates needed rotating to complete the work. They were so accurately done that contractor now uses it as an example of the quality of their work.

There have been several 'milestone' days - an example of which being 'rods on' day. With all the prep work complete, frames nicely squared up and together, wheel-sets in place and cranks aligned, the big day came and nerves were high - what happens if they don't fit...? Well, not to worry, the whole set went on in about an hour - jubilation ensued and champagne was allowed outside the workshop to mark the event.



Picture showing the frames, some of the team, but also the 'extent' of the Somerset workshop, thus proving anyone with a shed could always do with an extension! **Lower:** Jon's homemade 7¼" gauge 'Milner' Hunslet 'HAL'. All photos supplied by **Jon Banfield**

A lot of progress has been made, but there is a lot left to do - with the outline plan as follows:

Summer 2025 should see the chassis running on air, followed by attention to suspension, brakes etc. Once complete it can be taken apart and painted before all the bits are finally re-assembled - so it will be a 'ready to go' chassis by the end of summer 2026.

The locomotive chassis will then be transported to Boston Lodge, where it will be married up with the boiler (which is being manufactured), superheaters, regulator etc. Moving the chassis to Wales will enable work in Somerset to focus on the cab and water tanks.

These will be mated with the chassis in 2027 - then the final fit-out of components and pipework will commence. There is a lot of pipework to get done!

Hopefully, the ZA/6 will then be able to move under her own steam over the winter of '27/28 and, perhaps, enter operational traffic in 2028. All those familiar with railway preservation know things don't always go to plan, so this is not a certainty. However, with the present momentum behind this project - the willing team on the ground and the wide range of expert advice available - it is certain that any difficulties encountered by the team will be overcome.

It is amazing how this project has been kept quiet, which is a testament to the discretion of those on the ground and their advisors. Having got this far, the team are now happy to be out in the open and, having officially launched the project at the CRhE / WHRS AGM this September, it is now in the public domain. We wish the team every success and look forward with interest to find out what the ZA/6 will be capable of when at the front of a train on the F&WHR.

You can follow the progress of the ZA/6 by visiting the project website at www.za6.co.uk or www.someng.co.uk





Looking from on top of the quarry face above Boston Lodge, it is easy to see the difference between the 'New' and 'Old' buildings - especially now that the 'New' Erecting Shop has its recently fitted roof and skylight panels in place. **Roger Dimmick**

BOSTON LODGE:

Ever since the start of preservation Boston Lodge has changed and adapted on a regular basis, with the removal of life expired buildings such as the 'long shed', erection and eventual demolition of the 'new' den, work on the offices and the NLHF addition to the carriage works followed, plus the 'C2' shed. But over the past ten years Boston Lodge has undergone a true transformation - firstly to the Glan-y-Mor part of the site, with the new running carriage shed and the heritage carriage shed. This has been followed by the amazing collaboration with the NLHF - which has renewed much of the underlying infrastructure (cabling, water, sewers etc), reinvigorated the Top Yard, provided new mess facilities and the new Small Loco shed - where we can display our wonderful collection of locomotives for the tour groups to see.

If you look at a map of Boston Lodge and colour in all the items mentioned above, there is an obvious gap in the 'middle' of the site. This is where the majority of the mechanical work goes on - and you'll be glad to know the old and new erecting shops and running shed are firmly in focus for the next stage.

Plans have been emerging in the background for some time now as to what to do here. This is about how best

to improve the facilities structurally to make them fit for purpose over the next few decades, but also how we can manage this and minimise disturbance to the constant workload undertaken in these facilities.

Looking at the elements one by one, we first consider the 'New' Erecting Shop built in the 1970s. This is a great space with two through tracks, a machining area and the welding bay. There were concerns that this shed could suffer from something called 'concrete cancer', that many buildings from this era have had nationally. This is caused by the materials used, where the aggregate reacted with the metal reinforcing bar making it rust, expand and crack. This then induces stress in the concrete that can build up and lead to structural failures. Cadarn Consulting - a local firm who have worked with the railway on a number of projects - have performed a survey and the good news is that we have escaped this curse. Cadarn believe the structure of the building is strong enough for up to another thirty years!

The next issue was the single-layer roof, made from an asbestos-fibre cement sheet, common in the era. Testing showed that the asbestos material from which the original roof was made was the lowest grade of



A view of the new roofing panels and skylights installed on the New Erecting Shop. These provide greatly improved working conditions for the staff - with better year-round insulation and enabling more light to illuminate work in progress below. **Roger Dimmick**

this form of hazardous material. Of course, this has had to be removed professionally to ensure a clean job. This has now been replaced with 100mm thick Kingspan panels, with double glazed skylights, which are in line with current regulations. This is similar to the carriage shed re-roof a couple of years ago and those used on the Small Loco shed. This will give a dramatic improvement to the energy efficiency of the building, cutting heating bills but also improving the workspace for staff and volunteers and removing issues with condensation that can occur at the moment. This work has been carried out over the summer of 2025 and was funded by the F&WHR Trust.

Solar panels have been installed on the new carriage shed roof and have proved extremely useful, since they generate during the day when Boston Lodge is a large user of power. This matching of supply and demand means no costly batteries are required to make it a valuable addition. It is being investigated as to whether we should also fit solar panels to the Old Erecting Shop roof to gain further benefit.

So, leading on from this comment, the next stage of the work is to re-roof the 1870s 'Old' Erecting Shop. This is a listed building and a source of pride for the F&WHR, in that we still use it for the purpose it was built for. We have taken specialist advice on how to

proceed with this - to retain the original character of the building, but bring the roof into the 21st Century.

The present construction consists of slates nailed straight to the battens. This construction allows the roof to breathe and so stay dry, but does little for insulation. The proposition is to remove all the slates and battens - putting the slates aside for reuse - then to fit a membrane across the purlins. 75mm insulation will be fitted between the rafters, before reinstating battens and slates. The rooflights will be refurbished and double glazed. After this work, the roof will be approximately 1 inch thicker, but will retain its original appearance and character, while introducing a good amount of insulation.

We hope to carry out this work during the summer of 2026, subject to funding. It is also more complicated to schedule, as access to the New Erecting Shop must be maintained so that engineering work can continue.

The third stage of the work being planned involves the section between the erecting shops and the Small Loco shed. Presently, this consists of the remains of the old carriage shed, (interestingly, the only original building never to be listed), and the Ffestiniog Railway running shed. This building was erected back in 1966/67 and has been re-roofed twice already.



Main: In stark contrast, a view of the heritage roof over the Old Erecting Shop clearly shows its lack of insulation.

Roger Dimmick

Inset: Although taken before the new roof was installed, the difference between 'New' and 'Old' Shops is clear to see.

Chris Parry

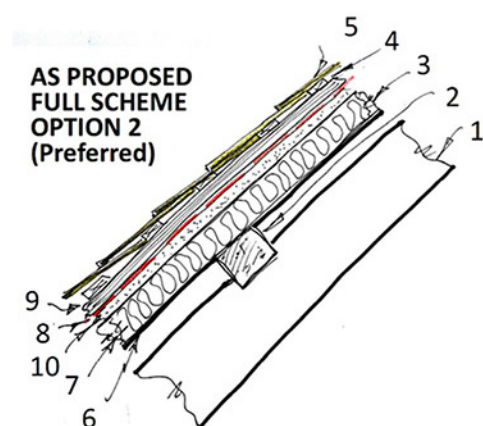
Plans for this are less developed at this stage, but initial thinking is that it would be great to retain the two roads that go all the way through the old carriage shed, but make that area part of the erecting shop.

This would reduce space in the running shed, but it would work now that we have the Small Loco shed to store engines not presently rostered. This is also where the WHR locomotive shed will be built - now being upgraded from 'Garratt running shed' with the introduction of NG15 No.134 KALAHARI. It would fill the present gap and provide a long-required facility.

Workshop areas are planned to follow the design of the erecting shops and be insulated, whereas running sheds are not - as for them ventilation is a priority.

Completion of these three elements will mean that over a fifteen or so year period - under the guidance of the 'Sustainable' and now 'Regenerative' railway strategies - the whole Boston Lodge site will have had attention, making it fit for the decades to come.

This is only possible due to the generous funding that the DJA receives. A huge achievement all round..!



EXISTING ELEMENTS

1. Roof truss principal rafter
2. Horizontal purlins supporting existing common rafters
3. Common rafter 4" deep at 16" centres (estimated)
4. Small section timber battens sitting across the rafters
5. Welsh slate roof (no sarking felt)

PROPOSED ADDITIONAL ITEMS

6. Fire line board fixed to bottom of existing rafters 3.
7. Rockwool batts mineral felt insulation full depth of rafter
8. Breathable sarking felt (bat friendly)
9. Counter batten in line with and fixed to top of rafters beneath
10. Additional layer of roof insulation (Celotex or equivalent closed cell insulation board) set across the tops of the rafters to avoid cold bridging.

Section diagram of the proposed reroof of the 'old' erecting shop showing the blend of the old design with the new elements, including the insulation.

Patrick Stow



The WI Building, seen from the Down platform, as JAMES SPOONER draws an afternoon 'Mountain Spirit' into Minffordd Station.

Lower: Recent vegetation clearance enhances the view of the building from the main road and station car park **Roger Dimmick**

MINFFORDD WOMEN'S INSTITUTE BUILDING:

Nestled between the station house and the Gweithdy at Minffordd Station is a small, unassuming Grade 2 listed building - the 'Penrhyndeudraeth WI' hall.

No longer in use, the opportunity has been taken (funded by the Trust) to purchase this, ensuring that the ambience of Minffordd station is unchanged.

The WI, a voluntary organization, was founded in 1897 in Ontario, Canada. The first WI in the UK was formed in Wales - in 1915 at Llanfairpwll on Anglesey. The WI had the purpose of revitalising rural communities, as well as encouraging women to grow food in support of the war effort. The movement spread across Wales and the rest of the UK - and, in 1917, Alice Williams (daughter of local landowner and Liberal MP, David Williams) donated an agricultural building and some land to the WI at Penrhyndeudraeth. Alice Williams was a painter, author and welfare worker - and a prominent figure in the foundation of the WI movement. She was its first Honorary Secretary and Treasurer, and also Founder / Editor of the Women's Institute magazine, 'Home and Country' - the title of which is echoed in the Welsh motto inside the hall, 'Dros Wlad Ac Aelwyd'.

The Williams family were closely connected with the Lloyd George family and, as a result, the hall was

opened in August 1917 by Margaret Lloyd George - the wife of the Prime Minister, David Lloyd George. It was the first hall in Britain to be owned by a WI and remained in use through the 20th Century, but has now sadly become surplus to requirements.

The final use of the building has yet to be decided, but - looking at the railways' portfolio - it is evident that buildings with purpose get the attention they deserve. Present consideration is that it could be renovated to be a substantial store of archive material, much of which does not yet have a long term home.

Watch this space...





Looking resplendent in the Spring sunshine, RUSSELL attracts plenty of attention having just arrived from Gelert's Farm with the WHHR's rake of heritage carriages, prior to its first of two return trips to Beddgelert - Saturday, 12th April 2025. **Roger Dimmick**

RUSSELL RUNS TO CAERNARFON:

Earlier this year RUSSELL, pride of the Welsh Highland Heritage Railway (WHHR) fleet, worked a passenger train over the entire length of the Welsh Highland Railway for the first time since 1937. This was an exciting and emotive day for many and we caught up with **Mark Seale** - Operations Manager at the WHHR - to understand how the event came to pass and how she performed during the day.

"RUSSELL had been out of action for a little while, after damage to a connecting rod while double-heading with LYD during the Welsh Highland Railway Centenary gala in 2023. The small, but dedicated, team that look after her fabricated and fitted a replacement - taking their time to ensure that it was made to the proper specification, using the correct materials and faithful to the original drawings. This was completed and she re-entered traffic late in 2024.

Looking forward, the team knew that RUSSELL's boiler ticket ran out at midnight on the 19th April 2025 and they didn't have much of the season left to celebrate the return to traffic. Understanding that the 10-year overhaul would take a while, they were keen to make sure she had an appropriate send off.

During autumn 2024 - the time of year when heritage railways are deep in planning for the following season - a decision was taken to reach out to the Management of the Ffestiniog Railway Company and discuss the possibility of celebrating the end of the boiler ticket with some runs over the original WHR route.

The F&WHR General Manager and Operations Team were only too keen to assist, as they could see the spectacle that this would be and understood what it would mean to the team who put so much energy into maintaining RUSSELL, as well as the wider supporter base of both railways.

Discussion between the teams led to the decision that there would be two Beddgelert runs on Saturday 5th of April, followed by two more on the 12th, then a through run to Caernarfon (the loco's first solo run in 86 years) on Friday the 18th - with Saturday, April 19th being the final day of operations on the WHHR itself.

Tickets would be available through the WHHR's new event booking system, its first use, with all the revenue raised from the runs being put towards RUSSELL's impending overhaul. Unsurprisingly, tickets - particularly for the run to Caernarfon - sold quickly..!



Looking across Porthmadog Harbour from Ynys Tywyn, as RUSSELL heads away from Harbour Station and steams onto the A497 / Britannia Bridge crossing with the morning run to Beddgelert on Saturday, 12th April 2025. **Roger Dimmick**

Quite a lot of work has to go on behind the scenes to enable these sorts of runs to occur, as the two railway companies have their own safety management systems and engineering standards that must be adhered to. However, the good news is that the working relationship between the two organisations is strong, and RUSSELL has run on WHR metals several times in the recent past. It is clear from the way they talk about each other that both the operating and engineering teams have built up much mutual respect.

The WHHR uses air brakes on its stock, rather than the F&WHR's vacuum system. However, their use has been reviewed and built into the FRCo's system and policies. Crew training and assessment policies are shared and that enables WHHR staff to operate the train with an F&WHR pilotman, ensuring that appropriate route knowledge and locomotive knowledge are present.

The train of WHHR heritage stock was formed of: No.8 - the 'Gladstone Carriage' (so called as the former Prime Minister once rode in it), which has an open section which gave an 'up front and personal' experience with the business end of RUSSELL for those that wanted it. This was followed by No.9 - an Ashbury corridor replica, No.42 - which is a Hudson 'toastrack' open carriage, No.23 - known as the 'Buffet Car' as it was converted to such in 1927 and retains

this appearance, and finished with the replica Pickering Brake Composite (FR No.8) - which has been kindly individually sponsored and built at Boston Lodge.

The runs on Saturday 5th of April went well - however, the runs a week later were impacted by the incredibly dry spell of weather we had earlier in the year. This limited RUSSELL to running to Pont Croesor and back, while the general service trains were mainly headed by diesels. However, in true preserved railway style, the best was made of the situation and passengers were offered footplate rides up and down Porthmadog platform, along with a chance to get 'up close and personal' with RUSSELL and chat to the crew.

Fortunately, over the next week some rain appeared. The day came for the main event on Friday the 18th - RUSSELL was thoroughly prepped the night before and kept warm overnight due to the early start on the day. The proud crew cleaned and polished the loco as if it was going for a second maker's photo, so when she chuffed in to Harbour Station platform she looked resplendent (ignoring the drops of rain on the day).

The train filled rapidly (again partially due to the rain) as the passengers eagerly anticipated their day ahead. A whistle from the Guard was answered by one from the loco and the train set off on its historic journey...



With the weather failing to dampen the spirits (if not the clothes) of its passengers, RUSSELL hurries towards the summit of the climb from Caernarfon. **Inset:** RUSSELL steams dramatically away from Caernarfon on Friday, 18th April 2025. Both: **Michael Chapman**

RUSSELL, like most Hunslets, is a lovely loco to drive and with the screw reverser there is a lot of control that the driver can exercise. Six miles out of Porthmadog she hit the 1 in 40 and, even with the sizeable load behind her, the pressure needle was solidly on the line with one, sometimes both, injectors on. An even speed was maintained all the way up the bank which is a testament to any regular crew, let alone one less familiar with the route, on a loco that has not done the turn regularly in the past 80 years. On reaching Dinas there was coal available, although surprisingly little was taken as she is a very efficient loco. After running round and taking water in Caernarfon, the journey was made in reverse and everyone agreed that it had been a grand day out!

RUSSELL is now out of traffic (although she made an appearance on the '200 Wheels' event on the Cob in June) and there are two initial stages to the overhaul. First, the boiler needs inspection - the tubes are to be removed and the boiler inspector will advise on what works need to be done. He's not changed for many years and so is up to speed on previous reviews and work carried out. Boilers are always a big question mark, although it is worth noting that the last inspection was positive. Secondly, a plan is being developed for other jobs - and there is work to do on axle boxes, weigh bar shaft, reach rods and reverser -

but nothing that one wouldn't expect at a 10-year overhaul. The aim is to keep a lot of the work in-house with the volunteer team who are her regular carers, but some technical jobs may be outsourced to appropriate contractors. This approach means it will take a few years before she is back in traffic."

The WHHR and RUSSELL team have launched a fundraising campaign and if you are able and keen to support they'd love to hear from you. You can either contact them by email - info@whr.co.uk - or use the QR code below for donations...





Carriage No.26 in Harbour Station sidings on 27th July 2006 - looking in good condition following a repaint during winter 2005, and giving a clear view of the redesigned body that had been fitted to the original underframe in 1986. **Roger Dimmick**

REBUILDING CARRIAGES 22 & 26:

When the present administration took over in 1954 the Ffestiniog Railway still had all but one of its original bogie carriages. These were pressed into early traffic and some were drastically altered. We are now in the enviable position of having reversed many of these amendments and have an almost complete set of original carriages. The rebuild of Nos. 22 and 26 will take us closer to this goal.

The carriages the present administration took over were Bogie Luggage Van No.3 (sadly scrapped in 1956 due to being very rotten); Vans 2, 4 and 5 which are now Nos.10, 11 and 12; Bogie Composites 15 and 16; 'Bowsiders' 17 to 20 and 7-compartment Thirds 21 to 23 (No.23 was ex-WHR) - although Ashbury Third No.21 was dismantled in 1962. All of these have now been restored to one time period or another and see regular use in 'Woodland Wanderer' services and at special events. The FR also acquired ex-WHR 'Summer Car' No.26 and ex-L&BR No.15 which were put into service.

Money was tight in the early days, as were resources for carriage restoration. As the railway prospered, increased in popularity and opened up towards Blaenau there was an ever-increasing need for more carriages. Many of the inherited carriages received

steel underframes and, as bodywork needed doing, panelling was replaced with plywood boarding. First Class interiors were too expensive to replace, so were mainly removed. Also various outside features, such as mouldings, were also removed during the repairs.

From the late 1980s onwards, this policy started to change with some heritage features reappearing. Momentum gathered behind the idea of viewing these old vehicles as important parts of our history and that preservation should come to the fore. This was helped by the increasing number of modern corridor carriages becoming available. This culminated in NHLF-funding for a new workshop and the full heritage rebuilds of Nos.15 and 16. Alongside this, the gaps in the fleet have been filled in, with vehicles like the Curly Roofed Van which entered traffic in 2004, Carriage No.21 which entered traffic in 2019 (note that No.22 is her sister carriage, both being built in 1897) and several Bug-boxes. Now there remains just Nos.22 and 26 that do not have a heritage appearance - and it is time for them to receive the appropriate attention.

In the 1980s, Carrs. 22 and 26 had reached the point of needing very serious attention. No.22 had a steel underframe installed in 1967, as the wooden original



Carriage No.26 inside Boston Lodge Carriage Works on 12th August 2025 - note the adaptation being made to the furthest end of the carriage to provide an accessible doorway for wheelchair users. **Roger Dimmick**

was sagging so much that the passengers had to be loaded in a specific 'compartment by compartment' order so that the doors would shut - and, of course, be unloaded in the reverse order! This would have placed significant strain on the rest of the joints in the bodywork. Once placed on its steel underframe, it needed a new set of doors because of this.

No.26 was rescued from hen-house duties in 1958 - so, after being sold when the WHR closed, it would have spent many years outside with little attention.

Nos.22 and 26 were both rebuilt with completely new bodies, bearing no real resemblance to their original Ashbury design. Their rebuilt profile was designed to match the 'Barn'-style corridor carriages. No.22 was rebuilt in 1984, No.26 in 1986 - so they are 34 and 32 years old respectively. This is not too significant in the world of carriages. However, the Jarrah wood used at the time has proved quite susceptible to damp and rot. Both carriages have had work over the past few years and each time this increases in scope. The decision has been taken to grasp the opportunity to go for a full heritage rebuild which, along with recent new-builds of Nos.21 & 24 and the ongoing rebuild of the NWNCR Ashbury Brake Composite will give a nearly complete set of carriages in heritage form. This decision has also been helped as a very generous private sponsor has

come forward to donate the funds for the rebuilds.

In the design of the rebuilds there is another important consideration. Our railways have been improving their offer to passengers using wheelchairs, and all modern corridor sets have such accommodation, while Carr. 12 provides an accessible area in the 1950s/60s set. This is an important part of our offer and one we want to expand to our other heritage sets, such as the Colonel Stephens, Victorian and WHR / NWNCR vintage rakes. The decision is to subtly provide wheelchair accessible compartments in each coach. This can be done with the use of tip-up seats and 'hidden' doors which can only be seen from the outside by close inspection.

Work has started on No.26 which will likely enter traffic for the 2026 season and No.22 will follow - entering traffic in for the 2028 season. As the work is being carried out by the Boston Lodge Carriage Works staff, we are looking forward to seeing their renowned high-quality of work on these two vehicles.

There are still small gaps in our carriage fleet - such as an FR 'tongue & groove' Bug-box and 4-wheelers for the NWNCR. These are the sort of items that will fit well with private sponsorship and volunteer groups. Although the Carriage Works is very busy, there is always room for such a volunteer project..!



Main picture: 'Combination Car' 1001 stabled at Rhyd Ddu in June 2006, during the push to re-open the line to Beddgelert
Inset: No.1001 stripped for assessment and on display inside Dinas Engine Shed, September 2018 **Roger Dimmick**

MESS COACH 1001:

The Cymdeithas Rheilffordd Eryri / Welsh Highland Railway Society are currently raising funds for the rebuilding of this important vehicle. It has served as the Permanent Way mess coach and as a Brakevan for the Welsh Highland since its introduction in 2002.

No.1001 was built to 2' 6" gauge by D. Wickham & Co. Ltd. of Ware in Hertfordshire in 1957 for the Royal Navy - based at the Chattenden and Upnor Railway at Lodge Hill, near Rochester in Kent. Those of you of an internal combustion persuasion would correctly make the leap that this is also where our diesel loco UPNOR CASTLE worked until 1962. The 'Combination Car' and the loco spent time on the Welshpool & Llanfair Light Railway, with the loco arriving at the Ffestiniog in early 1968 and No.1001 to the Welsh Highland Railway (via the South Tynedale Railway) in the late 1990s. Both were heavily used during the rebuilding of the WHR.

The loco was returned to Boston Lodge in 2010 as the gear box had deteriorated and it was stuck in 4th gear. This was replaced and, along with a full rewire and repaint, returned to service. It is now operating as a works shunter and on works trains, although it can be pressed into passenger use - as seen in some of the very dry weeks we saw this season.

The van has been of limited use since the end of construction and has been out of traffic since 2016. A return to use as a designated Infrastructure mess-carriage to support volunteers and staff on the lineside is planned. 1001 is already at Boston Lodge for what is likely to be a heavy chassis overhaul. The work will also include a full interior refit and a repaint to bring it into line with other Infrastructure Department vehicles. The society is aiming to raise funds to the tune of £30,000 for this work to be completed. The majority of this will be for labour at Boston Lodge, so keeping our skilled staff busy and reinvesting in the Company.





To take advantage of the widespread publicity generated by the Ffestiniog Railway's 'Seventieth Anniversary' celebrations, the tanks and cab of MOUNTAINEER were included in the '200 Wheels on the Cob' cavalcade. **Roger Dimmick**

MOUNTAINEER - 'THE ALCO':

With a fundraising push started during Covid - which many of you have kindly supported - and a young and energetic volunteer team, the rebuild of this favourite loco of many is now well underway. Project Lead **Patrick Knight-Booth brings us up to speed...**

"This project has so far been based at Glanypwll - a site the team have also greatly improved. Much work has been done there to strip the locomotive and assess what needs doing - and, in what feels like a significant step forward, the frames and boiler have recently been moved to Boston Lodge for the next stages of work.

Once stripped and examined, the boiler was found to be in surprisingly good condition. Some welding in the firebox and around the foundation ring will be undertaken by Boston Lodge's specialist welder, then only a full retube is required. The project team will complete this, under the guidance of **Tim Elsbey** - a long-standing volunteer driver, who works full-time at the boilersmiths (Israel Newton & Sons Ltd) who did the last boiler overhaul on DAVID LLOYD GEORGE.

New tanks will need to be fabricated and **Gwion Clark**, one of the project team, has found time to design these around his engineering degree. **Pete Freestone**

- another longstanding volunteer driver and with significant professional welding experience - has offered to teach the team how this should be done.

Fundraising by the Ffestiniog Railway Society has so far achieved over £90k - and the project team has applied to use the funds in grants as follows:

£10k - for tools, grit blasting of the body, paint, boiler and super heater flues.

£20k - to cover the boiler work, materials for the new tanks, front and rear drag boxes, frame supports for the ashpan and other associated materials.

£50k - (in application stage at time of print) for the works staff to overhaul the frames, motion and cylinder block - with the project teams help."

This project is a great example of how different parts of the railway come together to achieve a common goal - namely the project team working side by side with Boston Lodge Works staff and management. Experience elsewhere in the volunteer base has also gladly given their time and guidance to upskill the young team. While well on the way, they are not there yet - so please support this project further if you are able. Details on how to do this are in the '**How you can help**' section at the end of this publication...



Meeting the Challenge: The hot, dry weather conditions this year have seen the railways' fleet of diesels occasionally called into action. CRICCIETH CASTLE passes Rhoslyn Cottage at Ddualt, powering a 'Mountain Spirit' service to Blaenau Ffestiniog. **Roger Dimmick**

HOW YOU CAN HELP:

The Ffestiniog & Welsh Highland Railways continue to be supported by many people in many different ways. We are grateful for everything people do for us. Here we look at ways in which you can get involved.

Be An Ambassador!

As you've received this publication you're likely a keen supporter and visit us when you can. We encourage you to spread the word of the exciting things that are happening here to friends, family and co-workers encouraging them to come for a ride. Sharing this booklet, for instance, is one way to spread the word.

Donate to our Projects:

Much of the work we do requires targeted funding - and there are always a number of active fundraising initiatives in place at any one time. To the right we have summarised details of some of our key projects and how to get involved...

Quick Links:

- 1: Dinas Carriage Shed / North Yard 2: Mess Van 1001
3: MOUNTAINEER - 'THE ALCO' 4: RUSSELL



DINAS CARRIAGE SHED / NORTH YARD

Charity: F&WHR Trust
Aim: It was £600k - updated wider scope now £1m.
Notes: £537k raised to date. Each donation to the fund is being matched by the F&WHR Trust.
How to Help: See the enclosed donation form, scan **Quick Link 1** or email appeals@ffwhr.com

MESS VAN 1001

Charity: Cymdeithas Rheilffordd Eryri
Aim: £30k ... £12k raised to date
Notes: Help support volunteering by refurbishing this very useful vehicle to prime condition.
How to Help: Scan **Quick Link 2** to donate via PayPal, visit whrsoc.org.uk or email rwatson@crhe.uk

MOUNTAINEER - 'THE ALCO'

Charity: Ffestiniog Railway Society
Aim: £150k seems sensible for a return to service.
Notes: The FRS already has raised over £90k and now we are on the final push.
How to Help: Scan **Quick Link 3**, visit alco1265.org.uk or email secretary@ffestiniograilway.org.uk

RUSSELL

Charity: Welsh Highland Heritage Railway
Notes: Help support the team of people who look after RUSSELL and assist in their efforts to return it to steam and pulling trains again.
How to Help: Scan **Quick Link 4** to donate via PayPal or email info@whr.co.uk for information.



Meeting the Challenge: Although the fields and hillsides look green and verdant, there can be a lot of dry vegetation on the ground. CASTELL CAERNARFON rounds the head of the Gwyrfa Valley, with a 'Gelert Explorer' service to Beddgelert. **Roger Dimmick**

Volunteering:

We had a look earlier at how volunteering is a key enabler for all the exciting things we do and that, as such, it currently has a lot of attention focussed on it. Volunteering takes many various forms ranging across the whole spectrum of our operations - from 06:00 track walks, through On-Train staff, to being a Platform Host - but there are still many 'behind-the-scenes' and remote working options available. For example, the Societies are always on the lookout for candidates with a broad range of skills to fill Administrative and Director posts. For more information, visit www.festrail.co.uk/volunteering or email volunteer@ffwhr.com

Young Volunteers Training Week:

There may be teenagers in your family who are looking for something practical to do in the summer holidays. Our original annual 'Kids Week' has grown into a project-led event, aimed at developing young persons' skills and has a great social element too. Again, use either of the two contact suggestions above to find out more.

Large Project Sponsorship:

We are incredibly fortunate to have received strong support over the years, with a number of projects having been wholly sponsored by individual donors -

such as Garratt No.130, the Pullman Car 'Bodysgallen' (both as built and for its recent 25-year full overhaul), Carriage No.808 and the Boston Lodge Carriage Shed solar panel system, to name a few.

If you have a project in mind you'd like to see, or one mentioned here, do get in touch and we can discuss it further. www.festrail.co.uk/appeal/contact

Legacies:

The F&WHR has also benefited from many legacies, which have helped deliver some of the key capital projects that make this top-left corner of North Wales so special. The completion of the WHR, remodelling of the Harbour Station track layout and the present renovation of Tan-y-Bwlch Station House are just some examples.

If you would like further information on how to do this please visit www.festrail.co.uk/appeal and select 'Legacies' at the top.

We hope that you have enjoyed reading this booklet. However you choose to support us going forward, know that the whole team of staff, volunteers and patrons are very grateful and we're all excited about what we can achieve in the future together..!

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