

## Welcome to Wales - 1965-67

After a relatively easy-going school life, 1965 was proving to be a year of big decisions. One morning during the Summer term in the lower sixth we were summoned to congregate in the school dining room, and declare publicly to our headmaster, Mr. Brady, and all our classmates, exactly what we intended to do for the rest of our lives. No prior warning, no “careers advice”, no opportunity for discussion, or perhaps I had missed something previously?

James “Jock” Brady was one of the old school, something over six feet tall, always dressed in flowing black robes, and with a stern, no-nonsense manner. He was one of the few members of staff that still commanded absolute respect at all times, from everyone. This was therefore serious stuff. I was lucky I did not have to speak first. One by one my peers spoke out, all somehow confident, and Mr. Brady inscribed their decisions in a large book. In the background, a clatter of pans and crockery, and the memorable smell of school dinners cooking wafted across from the kitchens. One of my friends, Nigel Walters, announced his intention to study Electronics. This seemed like a good idea, very much the thing for the future, suitably exotic-sounding, something not many people knew much about - myself included - as it was not then taught as a school subject. “Electronics, Sir”, I said, and was glad I was not asked to elaborate further. Thus was a lifetime career decided (and never regretted!)

A few weeks later we faced yet more decisions; which University, what was the best course? The UCCA application form required a shortlist of six establishments, in order of preference. The summer break was spent perusing the handbooks, weighing up the issues. The question of “Oxbridge” did not seem to arise in my case, and I was glad about that, not wishing to be grouped with those “swots” who were already obviously being groomed. In any case, it was unlikely they could offer such an avant-garde discipline as “Electronics”. So the choice seemed to lie between the traditional city redbrick establishments such as Birmingham or Manchester, and the new out-of-town-campuses at Sheffield, Southampton or Sussex. And Bangor. Bangor seemed to stand out on its own, and certainly had much to offer. It was a small college, an integral part of a small community; close to both the sea and mountains. It was far enough from home (but not too far). Steam trains still ran on the main-line railways, and there was the additional attraction of a multiplicity of narrow-gauge lines nearby. Even more exotically, it was in a foreign land, with a different language and culture (I had not previously ventured nearer to it than perhaps Exeter). Oh and yes, the course was reckoned to be good too, with a big, brand-new extension to the department under construction that would make it one of the largest and most modern engineering institutions in Europe.

A draft version of the form was duly completed, with Bangor shown as first choice. Mr. Brady scrutinised it, and was clearly disappointed. Where was Trinity College, Dublin, he asked, surely the only place for the best students to be (coincidentally this seems to have been the one he attended)? Even worse, he obviously disliked the Welsh intensely for some reason. Veiled threats of a poor reference were made, should Bangor remain as my first choice. One did not argue; a compromise move into third place, after Sheffield and Manchester, was grudgingly accepted.

Interviews at all six of the short-listed choices were arranged. Mr. Brady’s oft-quoted motto was “make the most of your opportunities” (this was **not** the school motto, but might as well have been). Here was a splendid opportunity to travel around the country by some of the more obscure railway routes, at someone else’s expense. I certainly intended to make the most of it!

First off was Sheffield. Whereas others with more sense would have gone speedily via St. Pancras or even Kings Cross I deliberately chose Marylebone on this dismal, damp November morning, for the 8.38 departure to Nottingham Victoria. This was the only occasion I ever ventured by train out of this lesser-known London terminus, and by then the old Great Central line was at the absolute nadir of its fortunes. The main-line services once the subject of such great hopes by its promoters (even extending to a vision of a Channel Tunnel) were about to face the axe, and it seemed quite possible that Marylebone itself might soon close down altogether as well. It was already no longer possible to travel “Great Central” all the way

to Sheffield as in earlier years, so I planned to change onto the Midland route in Nottingham for the final leg. Even buying a ticket for this journey was a complex and long drawn out affair, involving long-hand calculation of the fare, handwritten documents and various oblique asides questioning my sanity. The morale of the staff seemed every bit as run-down as the rest of the service.

In due course a decrepit steam-leaking LMS "Black Five" locomotive with morose crew, trailed by four dull maroon, cold and damp Stanier coaches shuffled off into the drizzle, about twenty minutes late. I settled back into my seat, glad to be off on my own private adventure at last (I think I was the only passenger on the train) and assuming all would now be well. This was not to be, the pathetic pace worsened if anything; we were 40 minutes late by Rugby, and I had to bail out at Leicester to avoid the possibility of missing my connection northwards, which started from St. Pancras fully one-and-a-half hours after I had left the Metropolis. It seemed quite probable that this last vestige of the once-proud G.C that I left behind hurriedly and thankfully at Leicester Central might not make it to Nottingham at all.

Needless to say, my return from Sheffield later that day was made to Kings Cross, thus ensuring a reasonable chance of catching a train home to Staines before services ceased for the night. After the melancholy that was Marylebone, regaining the bright lights and relative civilization of Paddington or Waterloo was always a great relief!

For Birmingham, since the recent West Coast electrification, the "normal" route was deemed to be from Euston, but the old Great Western direct main line service from Paddington to Snow Hill via High Wycombe was still functioning, albeit somewhat reduced. So this, the "proper way" was the way I went, having been greeted with a knowing smile and the usual prompt service at Paddington ticket office. The train was of course "Western" diesel-hauled, and I had seen nothing but diesels all day, apart from a solitary 2-8-2 tank 7207 stored outside the old steam shed at Banbury. However, waiting for my train home, what should appear out of the gloom of Snow Hill's tunnel but a pair of "56XX" 0-6-2 tanks double-heading a long coal train through the station centre roads, working hard and raising the echoes around the cavernous roof. These were nos. 5605 and 5658. Even more remarkably, only a few minutes later came a repeat performance, with nos. 5606 and 6667. They were all Tyseley-based engines, by then part of the Midland Region; I never did see any of this locomotive class where most people did, in South Wales! The four had, unknown to me then, only a couple more weeks' work left, so I was very lucky indeed to have had this last emotive glimpse; preservation could never offer a sight such as I witnessed that day. This was, as it turned out, to be real end of *everyday* Western steam for me.

There was not much scope for originality with the visit to Southampton, but it did at least involve steam-hauled trips both ways, and by changing at Eastleigh I managed to cover the short stretch of line into Southampton Terminus, due to be closed shortly afterwards. By this time I was tiring of seeing modern, campus-style colleges, so decided not to bother going to the University of Sussex at Brighton at all. All the trips so far had been one-day affairs, but saving the best till last, the conveniently combined Manchester and Bangor bash was to occupy a total of 4 days.....

A Thursday lunchtime appointment at Manchester University meant a direct and efficient electric-hauled run up from Euston in the morning. Manchester was damp, dark and dismal. Dull red and dull blue trolleybuses swished around Piccadilly Gardens, but could not be photographed due to lack of light. The university laboratory was a masterpiece of Victorian craftsmanship in brass and polished wood (as was that at Birmingham also) but not quite the vibrant, high-tech image I was seeking. Dull green LMS "Altrincham" electric trains rattled past the second-floor windows, on the viaduct between Piccadilly and Oxford Road stations.

It was very dark by the time I boarded the Holyhead train at Manchester Exchange, disappointingly diesel-hauled (English-Electric type 4, D2xx series). Arrival at Bangor was somewhat late, but I had only a short walk to the convenient Greystones Hotel, overlooking the station near the Belmont Tunnel portal (and now long-since demolished). Scouring the town centre in the darkness and rain looking for sustenance, everywhere seemed to be closed, but I eventually resorted to fish-and-chips from the famous "purple" chippie (with its notice on the door helpfully and permanently reading "CLOOPSEEND"), consumed in the doorway of the Ford dealers showroom next door - an uninspiring start.

Nevertheless excited by my first-ever visit to “another country”, and due to a hot, stuffy bedroom, I could not sleep. At around 1.30am I had worked out how to prise open a long-defunct sash window, and stood there breathing in the cool, fresh air just as a long train of carriages and vans headed by two LMS class 5 4-6-0 locomotives clattered through the middle road of the station which lay spread out in front of me, bathed in soft light from the platform lamps reflected in the numerous puddles. Was this perhaps the down “Irish Mail” of fond romance? This place was not going to be quite so bad after all!

Using the sketch-map provided, I found my way down to the Engineering Department at Dean Street in good time for my interview, but came upon a scene of utter chaos. Construction of the vast new four-storey building was well under way, dwarfing the existing facilities, but the previous day a tower crane had collapsed onto the roof of the old main lecture theatre, most fortunately in the few minutes or so between lectures so that miraculously no-one had been hurt.

Structural damage was as yet un-assessed, so my main interview (with Dr. Das Gupta) was conducted in a builders’ cabin! Despite the major setback to the expansion programme, I could see the potential, and was more determined than ever to come here. I mentioned the “Brady” problem, and was assured that negotiations would be suitably discreet.

The formal proceedings over, I had the whole weekend in a new country to enjoy myself. I explored Bangor station then made a quick return trip out past Menai Bridge Junction and over the Britannia Tubular Bridge to Llanfair PG station by a Metro-Cammell diesel unit train, taking a few photographs before it got too dark, noting that closure notices were posted for these local stations for the following February. Firstly, here is Bangor station that day....



And here is Llanfair PG.....



Then it was onto another Met-Camm unit back to Llandudno Junction, and yet another down the Conway Valley line.

I was pre-booked into the Lledr Valley youth hostel, according to the YHA handbook just a hundred yards or so from Pont-y-Pant station. As the train drew to a stand, I struggled to open the door while clutching my bags, and literally fell out of the train - the platform was *very* low here! Regaining my composure as the warm, well-lit train growled off into the night, I realised I was now in total darkness, and

totally lost. Taking care to move in the right direction, away from the platform edge, I promptly fell over the set of portable steps that was obviously provided for the assistance of passengers, but on this occasion had been carelessly discarded by the station fence. Welcome to Wales, indeed!

It took some minutes of groping around along the fence just to find a way out of the station. The rain poured down in torrents. I scanned across the valley looking for the lights of the youth hostel, but saw none; there was only the sound of rushing water from that direction. Following the only road, after half-a-mile or so this crossed the river to reach the main valley road, and a house that turned out to be the vicarage. Knocking on the door, I heard a sash window above me fly open, and the vicar appeared shrouded in steam, wearing only a bath towel. He showed remarkable tolerance in the circumstances, directing me another 3/4 mile back up the main road to the welcoming lights of the youth hostel. I was the only visitor that night, indeed that week. I cooked myself a meal, ate in silence, and washed up. The warden mentioned that the old wooden footbridge leading directly from the station had been washed away in a flood many years ago. I was glad I had not followed the handbook instructions to the letter, and tried to find it in the dark! All in all, it had been an interesting day.

Saturday morning dawned brighter, and after a hearty breakfast I hastened back to the station for the 8.38am to Blaenau Ffestiniog. I had plenty of time to spare, but could be sure I heard the diesel unit growling up the gradient, in and out of rock cuttings, getting ever nearer, above the sound of rushing water. Even so, I had a wait of some 5 minutes on the platform before it finally arrived, time to look round and take a photo or two in this idyllic rural setting. On arrival at the then Blaenau Ffestiniog North station, a further few minutes were available to explore the old Festiniog Railway premises opposite, with its grass-grown rusty rails and a derelict wooden signal, before catching the 9.30am Crosville bus down to Portmadoc.....



Portmadoc Harbour station was tidy but totally deserted at this time of the year.

Arrival at the Cambrian (B.R.) station at the other end of town coincided nicely with that of the down morning goods train, headed by a standard type 75xxx 4-6-0 locomotive, which paused at the platform to take on water.....

I then boarded yet another Metro-Cammell diesel train (these things seemed to be universal throughout North Wales) for a delightful run down the coast. I can't remember changing onto another train at Dovey Junction or Machynlleth, but presume I must have done, since a journey all the way through Central Wales to Shrewsbury in the two-car unit without lavatory etc would seem inconceivable. There was evidently not much steam about that day, though it did survive on this line for another few months at least.





There was not much activity either at Shrewsbury, just a solitary parcels train with grubby LMS “black-five” 4-6-0 locomotive, rather disappointing. I found a late lunch in town, and booked into the youth hostel, large, centrally situated, civilised and totally different in character to that at Lledr Valley.



Walking around before it got dark, I was fascinated to find an Engineer’s Inspection saloon carriage, still resplendent in Western Region brown and cream livery, parked up at the end of a siding at Abbey Foregate, the old Shropshire & Montgomery Railway station.



After a good night’s sleep, I boarded a slow, Sunday-morning “Western” diesel-hauled train from Shrewsbury to Paddington, the classic journey via Wolverhampton Low Level and Birmingham Snow Hill, but including a last-minute surprise back in more familiar haunts, a diversion via the Greenford-West Ealing loop line, over which I had not previously travelled.

Back at home for the duration, “A” levels were endured, arrangements were finalised, and Mr. Brady seemed to avoid speaking to me whenever possible. The last summer at home before starting at University (1966) was one long, marvellous holiday, during which I visited Wales a second time, but now much more extensively, by car. We borrowed my long-suffering father’s Morris Minor saloon, with Chris driving most of the time and myself as a practising learner otherwise. We slept in the car at Much Wenlock, revisited the Lledr Valley youth hostel, and bedded down in a small and totally inadequate tent at Penrhyndeudraeth amongst other adventures during this ten-day tour. This is described fully in the section “In Search of the Great Western” of our website.



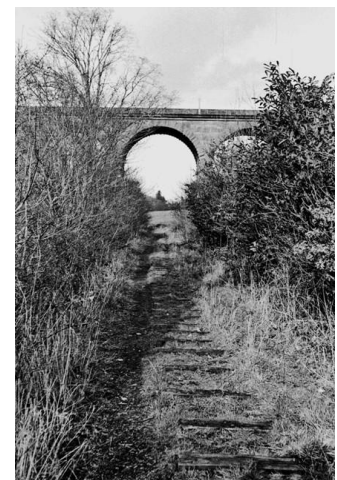
This was a good opportunity to see more of the area where I was destined to spend the best part of the following eleven years. We rode on the Festiniog Railway from Tan-y-Bwlch to Portmadoc and back (its then full extent), visited the Bala line stations for the first time (gathering ideas for a future model), then going on to mid- and south Wales, Devon and Cornwall. I finally passed my driving test on 24th September, leaving just a week to explore the area around our Staines home properly by car for the first time, before departing for Bangor.



On 3rd October 1966 Nigel Walters and myself joined my father on the 8.27 fast electric from Staines Central to Waterloo, and made ourselves very popular with bulky student luggage in the rush-hour throng in London. The LMR journey was uneventful - electric power from Euston to Crewe, thence EE type 4 diesel. Hoards of students with baggage descended from the train onto the wide island platform at Bangor, clomped noisily up the wooden steps of the footbridge and dispersed rapidly, most heading for the halls of residence along Ffriddoedd or College Road. My destination was however to “digs” in Maesgeirchen. Not yet knowing about the short (and very steep) cuts over Bangor Mountain, I found my way to the Wellfield bus station, and onto a smart Crosville “Bristol K type” double-decker on the N78 service, right through to the end of its run.

My “home” for the year was with the Williams family at 54, Min-y-Ddol, the third house up from the former L&NWR main line, hard by the eastern portal of Bangor tunnel, at very much the smarter end of this post-war council estate, and with quite rural surroundings. Although the Bethesda branch track that used to diverge here had recently been lifted, both the Bethesda Junction signal box and the junction points themselves remained. There were still some occasional steam workings, mainly LMS “class 5” 4-6-0’s on parcels or van trains.

Glyn, my landlady’s husband had been made redundant from Bangor locomotive shed at its closure a few months previously, and suffered from a bad chest due to inhalation of coal dust and ash over many years. In the evenings I often walked with him and his dog, Sandy, down to Bishop’s Mill, right under the L&NWR viaduct. On the far side of the stream we came upon the Penrhyn Railway narrow-gauge track bed - the rails had recently gone (purchased by the Festiniog Railway) but most of the wooden sleepers and some chairs were still in situ. I was curious to explore further as soon as possible.



This first week at college was intended as an “acclimatisation” period, before the rest of the students returned and work started in earnest; we had talks with our tutor and sorted out administration details. The Wednesday afternoon was scheduled as a “Fresher’s Exhibition” exposing the new recruits to the vast array of university clubs and societies, and “persuading” them to join as many as possible. I was not keen on this cattle market and decided to spend the time quietly exploring the Penrhyn Railway instead. In this way I completely avoided the undoubted delights of the “Railway Society” stand, and also the inevitable press-gang into immediate service as a Penrhyn Castle volunteer! (In many subsequent years, this was a role I was to relish, from the other side of the table!)

I followed the Penrhyn route down from Bishop’s Mill, through the tunnel under the A5 road down to Port Penrhyn, the former slate shipping point on the Menai Strait, and here found extensive track still in situ, together with numerous wagons of different types and other artefacts. I sketched the layout here - a very timely opportunity as it happened, as all was to be stripped bare within the next few weeks by the scrap men.

By the end of October, I had also visited the Penrhyn Slate Quarry workshops at Coed-y-Parc, Bethesda, where just one steam locomotive “Sanford” remained in recognisable form, plus many different types of wagons strewn around. I went to Penrhyn Castle (“incognito” for the first and last time) on the last Wednesday afternoon before its closure for the winter.

The Penrhyn Quarry locomotive “Hugh Napier” had just arrived at the museum - little did I know then how involved I would become with this machine in the future - it was also the first and last time I saw it in a reasonably complete state!





Delay to the completion of the new Engineering building meant that our college activities were accommodated in every available temporary space. The electronics laboratory was located in a former “Antique Shop”, an old building on the corner of Tabernacle Street and Dean Street (pictured).



A high-voltage laboratory was in Tabernacle Chapel behind the old cinema opposite, and the embryo Computing facility (with punched-card typing equipment) in the former MANWEB electricity showroom, a classic 1930's edifice on Deiniol Road. The name on the main contractors' hoarding “Pochin” became mysteriously altered to “Bochin”.

Pressure on lecture-room facilities meant that we had Saturday morning lectures from 9 to 11am for the whole of that first year, which was somewhat restrictive as that day was the only one suitable for exploring the surrounding countryside - travel by public transport on winter Sundays being dire then (and probably still is). We were usually set free just before 11, and raced across to the Wellfield bus stands. Most buses to anywhere interesting seemed to leave on the dot of 11 o'clock, so we jumped on any one we could flag down as it waited to turn out onto Deiniol Road; often not knowing where it was going, we had a magical mystery tour, and the drivers thought we were all quite mad!

Penrhyn Quarry with its curious water-balance wagon lifts and aerial ropeways was thoroughly explored in incessant rain.

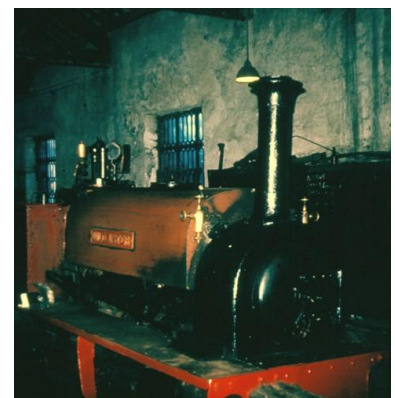


The wagons were dumped at the foot of the first incline up from the Coed-y-Parc workshops. On the red Lion Mills level, Nigel Walters is bemused by the “portable” rail crossing outside one of the sheds.....



We first found the upper reaches of Dinorwic Quarry by means of the rare extension of a Deiniolen service bus through the lanes to Dinorwic village.

The lower parts of Dinorwic Quarry - the workshops and slate yards beside the lakes opposite Llanberis – were very difficult to penetrate without being turned away by angry officialdom, even on a Saturday. The one time we did manage to sneak undetected into the Gilfach Ddu locomotive workshop, we got locked in when the morning shift finished work at around 12.30! Having examined and photographed the various engines stored or under repair at leisure - including “Velinheli”, “Jerry M”, “Elidir” and “Michael”, the only possible way out was to unfasten and slide across one of the large and heavy main doors just far enough to squeeze through. Another engine, “Wild Aster” was in



pieces, and the saddle tank and cab sides were strewn around the yard outside, rusty but still with brass name- and works-plates attached. Naively I wrote to the company the following week asking if I could buy these, but was told that the locomotive was scheduled for rebuilding, and would soon be running again!

A bright and sunny autumn Wednesday afternoon was spent exploring the track bed of the Padarn railway around Pontrhythallt and along the shore of Llyn Padarn, and other Saturdays at the Port Dinorwic incline, tunnel and quayside; on the old Nantlle Tramway above Talysarn, where much of the 3ft 6ins gauge track was still in situ, and to Caernarvon and Pen-y-Groes stations. To go any further afield however, a car was becoming essential

Having missed the initial indoctrination, I was able to wander along to “Railway Society” meetings entirely of my own free will. I gradually learned who all these characters were:- a fair contingent of railwaymen or ex-railwaymen from Bangor locomotive shed and station; Barry Wynne and his photographer colleague Norman Kneale from Ferodo in Caernarvon; older students David Jones, Bill Parkes, Geoff Luckhurst, and Engineering Laboratory steward Eric Williams - standard-gauge stalwarts all, brooding over the demise of steam and the local branch line closures. Plus one Iorwerth Jones and his sidekick Dafydd Jones (no relation) - who seemed to have something to do with Penrhyn Castle - representing the narrow-gauge camp.....

Come the Spring (1967) we ventured out on some interesting tours - the best-remembered being on 4th March to Saltney Junction and then Chester to see the locomotives



“Pendennis Castle” and “Clun Castle ” arrive on their special trains from Birmingham marking the demise of the through GWR Paddington - Birkenhead route. At Saltney Dee Crossing in the morning, things were relatively quiet, and Dafydd proceeded to carefully set up his tripod and expensive camera equipment right in the middle of the Up Main line, completely oblivious to the possibility of southbound trains.....



We had a grandstand view of the second special passing, along with ordinary service trains hauled by LMS “Black 5” 4-6-0’s, from the top of the cutting near Saltney Junction signal box.....





At Chester, both “Castles” came off their trains to be serviced on the LNWR shed, while the tour participants went to Birkenhead and back behind more Black 5’s.....



Later on, everything and everybody re-convened on Chester General station at the same time, and chaos reigned. The only way to get decent photographs of this momentous occasion was to climb up any convenient signal or lamppost!



After the main college exams in May, it was time to relax and explore the locality more thoroughly, in the company of old hands David Jones and Bill Parkes, who seemed to know some very useful people. In a busy and varied week we visited derelict GWR stations on the Corwen - Bala section, had a footplate trip up Snowdon on the rack locomotive “Moel Siabod”, completed the Cambrian Coast line journey from Portmadoc to Pwllheli, went to the heart of Dinorwic



Quarries to photograph and try driving little Hunslet loco “Holy War” (the very last one working here), had a footplate trip with Alan Garraway over the length of the Festiniog Railway on his ex-Penrhyn



locomotive “Linda” (a very rare privilege as it turned out), and looked at some of the then-moribund Welsh Highland Railway and the upper reaches of the Croesor Tramway - with track still in situ and many wagons strewn around. The picture shows (from right to left) Bill Parkes, David Jones, Wendy Wooster, Nigel Walters and another college girl whose name I forget, at the Croesor adit level.

The climb up the hill has taken its toll on the radiator of Nigel’s Morris Minor van with 6 people aboard, and it was a good excuse to climb over the gate in search of a can and water tap to top it up!



And also, at last, a behind-the-scenes tour of the Penrhyn Castle Railway Museum. Resulting in a pledge of Hard Labour, starting in the next term in October, by yours truly. In return, I saw the opportunity to develop a small-relics collection, based on some of those we already had stored down in Staines, where we were being somewhat hounded for space. The first were duly transported and delivered to the museum a few weeks later.

Back at home, that was a sad summer as my beloved “Bulleid” pacific locomotives were finally ousted from the Southern main line, as a result of the Waterloo - Bournemouth electrification scheme. The future with steam definitely lay in North Wales!

### **XXD341 - The joys of basic motoring, 1967-1971**



In 1966, the college was operating a “car ban” for year 1 and 2 students, but many simply ignored the rule and brought their vehicles to Bangor, despite the threat of expulsion if discovered. Some even openly kept them in the hall-of-residence car parks at Plas Gwyn and Neuadd Reichel!

Our select group got mobile in November 1966, courtesy of Nigel Walters, who was to procure the use of quite a few different vehicles in the coming months. The first was HXT940, a circa-1948 Morris 8 series-E type saloon in black, for which he paid the princely sum of £10. This purred sedately around the country lanes, almost getting stuck in snow up at Deiniolen on one occasion; here Dai Davies holds the all-important OS map!.....



However, the journey south for Christmas with a full load of students and luggage proved too much for it - one of the rear springs came up through the floor! It was dismantled for spares, for which £8 or so was recovered and invested in a Triumph 500cc motorbike, complete with sidecar. Travelling as a passenger in this was really quite civilised, but Nigel quickly decided that the machine would go far better without the sidecar and removed it. A subsequent journey on the pillion seat down to Pwllheli, clinging on for dear life and freezing cold, is well remembered: I could still hear the thumping of the engine in my

sleep that night, and was unable to sit down comfortably for several days. The journey south for our Easter break in 1967 was made in Dave Fisher's maroon Reliant Robin 3-wheeler, which had to be push-started around 13 times in the first 220 miles or so before expiring completely around Watford, from where I eventually reached Staines by bus.

The summer term was a vast improvement, as Nigel bought a Morris Minor Post-Office delivery van at Easter, from a local dealer for £35. It was still in the distinctive red livery, but with "Royal Mail" and coat-of-arms on the body sides painted over. The inscription was quickly restored as "Loyal Male", and thus adorned we were parked illegally by a post-box in Staines High Street one sunny afternoon with the cab windows open, when a large volume of mail was thrust into my lap by a passer-by who said "I hope I'm not too late" and disappeared before we could say anything. Nothing for it but to get out and post the letters in the box! I myself wanted one of these useful vehicles. The college car ban was lifted for year 2 students that summer, and I worked for several weeks at the London Transport Signal Engineering offices at Acton (on the Victoria line tube construction project) to raise the necessary funds.

At the GPO stores depot in Guildford (next to the Dennis bus works) one Saturday morning, we inspected a motley collection of red Morris Minor vans, all with high mileage, priced at around £30-35, and just one green Telephone Engineers van, XXD341. This was £50, stretching things a bit, but the comprehensive logbook showed it had spent most of its life as a spare vehicle on standby at the depot, used only when others were being serviced. It had done only 17,000 miles, and had received a "re-con" engine (803cc) only 6000 miles previously. The bad news was that the differential needed replacement, but we knew already from an embarrassing incident involving a broken half-shaft on Nigel's van while negotiating the Thorpe Lea roundabout in Staines that this was a relatively simple job.

A £5 deposit was handed over, tax and insurance arranged, and the vehicle collected one evening during the week. That differential screeched painfully on the journey home - I hoped it would not seize up before we could replace it. XXD341 joined my father's Morris Minor saloon 300KCG, parked on the pavement outside our house in Fenton Avenue, and we were now a "two-car family", one of the first in the area at a time when private cars were still relatively uncommon! Insurance was an outrageous £10 for Third Party Fire & Theft cover only, but the following summer I happened to be working in a temporary job at Frizzells' London offices, and realising that I could reduce this to £2-10s per year, wrote out and then implemented my own insurance renewal.

A new differential was obtained from a local scrap yard, and fitted without difficulty (the old one was found to be filled with a mixture of very thick black oil and sawdust!). On the test-run, I was amazed at how quiet and smooth running the van now was. There was just one slight snag, we had overlooked that the new differential had a different ratio to the old one; when travelling at 30mph the speedometer now showed 24, at 60mph, 48 and so on. Acceleration was of course rather sluggish, but adequate. The mileage recorder also read low, in the same proportion. These little quirks were to remain through four years of ownership. Other peculiarities were discovered later, from bitter experience; when a new water-pump was needed, it turned out that the correct replacement was not the 803cc-engine part, but the 948cc one. Although a one-piece, post-1956 type windscreen was fitted, the old roof-mounted "flashing ears" indicators were retained. All these details were the result of a special hybrid vehicle specification unique to the GPO, who bought many hundreds throughout the 1950's

The mechanical work completed, XXD341 was taken into the Walters' garage in Grosvenor Road for a smart repaint job, emerging some 10 days later in "GWR style" chocolate brown and cream, with white roof, black wheels and hand-painted GWR crests on each





side! The interior was cleaned out and painted white, with wood-effect Fablon to brighten up the door panels. The vehicle gained the nickname “Flying Banana”, which was later painted discreetly on the bonnet, with the Welsh version “Y Banana Hedegog” on the opposite side.

The trip up to Bangor passed uneventfully, and this distinctive vehicle quickly gained attention alongside other classic student transport, with a mention in the Union newspaper. There were, amongst others, one or two beautifully restored Austin 7's, Ivor Jones' ancient grey Morris Minor 1940UN (apparently the 1940 referred to his birth year, not that of the car), and Jon Godwin's similar model with a gaping rusted hole where the driver's foot well should have been, and a rope-operated clutch.

It was found that XXD341 quickly gained the attention of the local constabulary, who picked upon the most trivial faults; the lack of a rear number plate light one evening in Beaumaris (naively I had not realised one was necessary; inspection revealed that a pair of bulbs was indeed fitted, but both had blown), and that the number-plate characters were painted silver instead of white, easily rectified.

In autumn 1967 I was by now living in Neuadd Reichel hall of residence, and one early and unexpected duty for which XXD341 was requested was the carriage of a black plywood coffin (empty!) to and from storage at Penrhyn Castle, in connection with the “Reichelian Festival of Benedycemus”. This was a regular student ritual on the night of 5th November. Increasing incidents of violence had been encountered in previous years, once culminating in the real coffin being catapulted through the front-room window of a private house in College Road. It was therefore necessary to have one or two “decoy” coffins available, to ensure the exercise could be completed satisfactorily - and this is where we came in.



Bangor saw heavy snowfall in the winter of 1967-68, here is the station on one such day....



The night before while parked at Maesgeirchen on a trip to see my former landlady XXD341 became impossibly snowed in, and I had to trudge home in Wellington boots along the centre of a bleak and deserted main A5 road at around midnight. The following morning - a Saturday - I returned carrying a shovel and sacking and dug her out, proceeding with difficulty back to Neuadd Reichel where, we were amused to note, Geraint Jones' minivan was buried nearly up to its roof in a snowdrift, and several other vehicles were rendered unusable.



Later that same day, we struggled up the drive to Penrhyn Castle (the main one from Llandegai, as the Port road was impassable) but failed to get up the very last steep bit in the shadow of the museum wall. Lady Janet Douglas Pennant was also stuck here in the family Rolls with her daughter "Fifi", and there followed an entertaining hour or so with all concerned mucking-in with shovels to clear the way. Apart, that is, from Ian Jones and Fifi, who sat together talking on the tailgate of my van, ostensibly to provide weight for better adhesion on the slope!

The GWR livery was to prove unexpectedly useful when we stopped off en route from London to Bangor to visit one of the first major gala events of the embryo Severn Valley Railway at Bridgnorth on 15th April 1968. On entering the car park, we found the melee of general public to be miraculously swept aside for us by officialdom, and we were directed to a prime reserved parking space right next to the station door! Such honour was short-lived however, as when it dawned on said officialdom that we were not after all the higher echelons of SVR management, there was a tannoy message for the "owner of vehicle XXD341 to remove it forthwith as it is causing an obstruction"

In the beautiful late spring of 1968, after our exams were over, XXD could be found in the Neuadd Reichel car park, serving as a restoration workshop for small parts off the Penrhyn museum loco "Kettering Furnaces No. 3"; many happy hours were spent sitting on the tailboard in the sun, polishing and painting various bits of the mechanical lubricators, and trying to fit them all together again!



Around this time, a set of side windows was obtained from an old Bedford dormobile and fitted to XXD341, also in Reichel car park. This entailed noisily sawing out the thin metal side panels with a somewhat inadequate electric jigsaw, then wrestling with yards of rubber sealing strip. Kevin Handford is busy here, while Dai Davies drinks tea....

The finished job provided vastly improved all-round visibility when driving, and a much more elegant-looking vehicle. The radical alteration had to be notified to H.M Customs & Excise for re-assessment of taxation, and after a few weeks I was amazed to receive a letter from their Bangor office stating, very wordily, that the ".....amount of duty payable will be .....NIL" (since the vehicle was over 6 years old)





Other distinctive features of XXD341 included the useful GPO ladder rack on the roof and a stout metal toolbox. A huge second hand heater was obtained, but could only be fitted in between the steering column and the offside wing. While successfully combating the draughts from around the doors this was liable to burn my knees when going full-blast. And a fluorescent light! This was quite an innovation at the time, and had started life as a student prank. It was a full-size 4-ft tube powered from a car battery via a high-frequency transistor inverter circuit, made possible with then-recent advances in semiconductor device technology. It was first seen being carried around the streets of Bangor by a group of students on a freezing cold winter night, the battery well concealed, and caused some very strange reactions among passers-by. Its novelty value exhausted, the whole kit was installed in the back of the van, where it performed faultlessly for many years.

A second horn was acquired, with a loud and very deep tone (it reputedly came from a London Taxicab) and together with the original provided a two-tone fanfare almost indistinguishable from a BR diesel train - it certainly made other motorists move out of the way quickly when occasion demanded! A very useful feature not found on more modern vehicles was the crank-handle, which could be used to turn the engine over, or even start it up on very cold mornings, thus saving strain on the battery. We were not greatly concerned about vehicle security in those days, but some students were designing basic electronic burglar alarms for their cars. XXD341 had just a Dymo-tape warning label stuck on the offside cab window:- "This vehicle is fitted with a Burglar"

Motoring was not without its occasional problems, though there was no need to agonise annually over the dreaded "MOT"; its predecessor was required only when vehicles reached 10 years old, hence the "ten-year test". As it happened, the annual MOT was brought in during 1969, just before XXD341 reached its 10th birthday.

One morning, when leaving Reichel with a full load of five or six people bound for Dean Street, I pressed the brake pedal and nothing happened. Fortunately - and most unusually - there was no-one crossing the wide exit from the driveway onto Ffriddoedd Road, so I was able to make a safe emergency stop using the handbrake and gears only. With the problem - a leaking wheel cylinder - understood, and composure regained, we proceeded to complete the journey with care, with just the handbrake operative. A new cylinder was obtained at lunchtime and fitted the same afternoon.

On these vehicles it was possible to do most repair jobs easily by the roadside, with simple tools. One common problem concerned the electric fuel-pump, whose contacts would arc then burn so that we would coast to an abrupt halt through fuel starvation in the middle of nowhere. A couple of minutes spent fettling the contacts with a piece of emery cloth would see us on our way for a further few miles, and if this remedy proved too temporary, a spare set of contacts carried in the toolbox could be fitted almost as quickly!

After summer 1969, the "Penrhyn Gang's" principle residences were a couple of furnished flats in a rather elegant Victorian house "Bryn Onnen", situated on the lower slopes of Penmaenmawr mountain above the village of Llanfairfechan, about 9 miles east of Bangor. One morning coming in to college



it was noticed that the old girl was "steaming" rather well past Llandegai, due to a broken fan belt. Our



all-male crew could not provide the well-known temporary remedy of a pair of ladies' tights or stockings (not even Ian Jones had any in his pocket) so we proceeded into town very cautiously with frequent stops to top up the radiator.

On another occasion the top rubber radiator hose burst, but a piece of rag tied up in the form of a neat bandage worked well enough to complete the journey, followed by yet another lunchtime repair in the college car-park.

The road up to Bryn Onnen was narrow, twisting and quite steep in parts. It gradually got too much for XXD341 with four people aboard, so two (usually Eddie and "Haggis") had to get out and push. Something was very obviously wrong. The experts diagnosed a burnt valve, and removal of the cylinder head showed that she had been running on only 3 cylinders, or some 600cc! Refurbishment was again relatively straightforward, taking a few hours in the corner of the engineering car park, and the first test run showed amazing reserves of power; climbing all the way up Glanrafon Hill in third gear, a feat never previously achieved! The downside was the additional strain that all this power placed upon the clutch, which duly expired about two weeks later on the long climb out of Port Dinorwic towards Caernarvon. This necessitated a tow from Tony Parkins in his little blue Ford Anglia and an expensive repair job at Jones the Garage.

Bodywork problems - the dreaded "rust moth" - also appeared before long - indeed Nigel's red van did not last long as a result of this, being broken up for spares at Easter 1969. The picture shows how easily the whole thing comes apart.....

One particularly troublesome corrosion spot was the cavity at the back edge of the front wings - so that the metal rusted through from the inside - but these could be unbolted and a new pair fitted easily within an afternoon's work.



As a digression, it is interesting to recall some of the other vehicles in daily use in Bangor at about this time. The above-mentioned Ford Anglia TEW830 had an alarming imprecision in its steering linkage, causing some consternation when trying to steer a straight line down a narrow lane between two stone walls. Another special feature was the vacuum-operated windscreen wiper, which expired completely when you needed it most -when putting the foot down to overtake! Then there was the Student Union Austin J2 mini-bus - I had been warned about the gear lever, but it was still a pleasant surprise when it came adrift in my hand in the middle of Staines High Street on a busy Saturday afternoon, having performed faultlessly all the way down from Bangor the previous day. It took some few minutes to re-locate it correctly so that we could continue on our way! Another union vehicle, a Ford Thames van, had seats that were so uncomfortable we had to stop every 50 miles or so on a Bangor-London journey, and have a walk around in the rain to get our legs to operate properly again!

Iorwerth Jones (the "Captain" at Penrhyn Castle) owned three more-or-less identical Lambretta scooters. Only one was ever on the road at any one time, so to save all the hassle of re-arranging tax, insurance and MOT every time he felt like a change, it seemed that one set of number-plates and documents sufficed for all three machines. There was a National Trust Land-Rover, circa 1949 vintage, which was discovered lurking in the undergrowth at Erddig Hall during the early renovation work there, and brought to Penrhyn in response to Iorwerth's plea for "additional transport" for the grounds. The logbook showed it had about 30 previous owners! On a trial run, it went well down the driveway to the Port lodge, but coughed and spluttered on the way back up, finally expiring about half way. The immediate problem seemed to be lack of petrol; we tramped up to the Castle and back with another can, but despite a thorough search could not locate the filler-cap anywhere. We were rescued by Tom Allcott, just passing, who was familiar with these vehicles from wartime days in the army. "Look under the driver's seat" he said, and there it was! We got back OK, but the fuel

consumption appeared to be around two miles per gallon, much to Iorwerth's annoyance. The engine was later stripped and rebuilt in the museum workshop, and this vehicle then sold yet again, this time for a vast profit!

Ivor Jones' Morris Minor has already been mentioned. One day, he unfortunately pranged it into the back of another car, which had unaccountably stopped at the "Antelope" roundabout even though the road was clear. After some subtle re-arrangement of the radiator to clear the fan, we were able to proceed. However, a few miles further on, at higher speed along the Caernarvon Road, the bonnet lid flew open with such force that the hinges snapped. The heavy slab of metal landed first on the roof, causing a very large dent, then on the road behind us, nearly causing a very nasty accident to the vehicle behind had it not stopped instantly. The bonnet was duly recovered, tied on much more securely with rope and wire, and the dent in the roof pushed out with our feet while lying on the rear passenger seats! As far as anyone can recall, 1940UN was run in this state for a few years further yet, before its final demise. The only one of us who had a halfway "decent" car was David "boy-racer" Mills, who did after all have a proper job (at Laird's, Beaumaris), rather than being an impecunious student. His GT Cortina JDM72D regularly left us behind in a cloud of dust on our Sunday excursions.



XXD341 did however serve us very well for several years. It went with full load of passengers to the infamous Festiniog and Talylllyn AGM "dos", often returning in the small hours of a dark, Welsh Sunday morning with the assembled company somewhat the worse for wear. Iorwerth's attempted renderings of "Sospan Fach" and the Welsh national anthem are well remembered.



The "Penrhyn Castle" lettering on the back doors of the van was initially applied for its role as support vehicle during the moves of "Fire Queen" and the saloon coach from Dinorwic Quarry in 1969, appearing on national television, and continuing to provide publicity for the museum on its subsequent travels.

There were longer holiday tours, to South Wales at Easter 1969, to Yorkshire later that summer, and to West Wales then down into Devon and Cornwall on several occasions.

In January 1968, the trip from Staines to Bangor for the new college term was a 13-hour epic through deep snowdrifts, with only one route passable, via Evesham, Chester and the North Wales coast road through Prestatyn.





She was frequently grossly overloaded, as when returning from the Wnion valley with a good haul of GWR signs and notices for the museum, or a section of the “wooden railway” track from Glyndyfrdwy. The pictures show the “dismantling gang” for this: Dave & Christina Mills and Ian Jones.



Here is the section of wooden railway track, of approx 2ft 8in gauge, complete with iron tie rods and fishplates, back at the museum. Unfortunately as the wood dried out after years of submersion, it disintegrated to a pile of dust, thus saving us the bother of constructing a display area for it!

By late 1970, signs of terminal fatigue were beginning to show on our old van. An annoying quirk was that of jumping out of top gear as power was re-applied coming out of a bend. This was due to very worn linkage and not easily rectifiable, so I generally drove thereafter with one hand permanently holding the gear lever (a long, spindly thing in those days). This habit continued, though totally unnecessary, on other vehicles for many years afterwards!

During an ambitious West Country holiday tour in June 1971, XXD341 with a full load of 4 people + luggage became hopelessly stuck in riverside mire down in the woods at Dunmere, while seeking out the Wenford Bridge mineral railway. Charlie Young and Tony Parkins were deputed to get out and push, and a sudden adhesion rendered them covered from head to toe in thick mud! We got out OK, but when returning unladen from Bournemouth to London later in the week, a curious banging noise was coming from the back of the van every time it went over a slight bump in the road. Close examination showed that the brackets holding the body to the chassis had completely rusted away and it was kept in place during our holiday tour only by the heavy load! Worse, one of the rear spring shackle pin welds had failed, and the pin was drifting up and down about 1/2 inch in its mounting hole.

Temporary repairs were made to enable return to Bangor in September, the latter problem involving driving a wooden wedge into the hole to secure the suspension pin. In the course of this, the hammer slipped, and made a large hole in the side of the main chassis member - the whole thing was found to be held together by paint, rust and Cornish mud! It was quite obvious that, however it had managed to get through its previous MOT, it would definitely not pass the next one, due in October.

My father conveniently bought himself a new car, and I took over his Morris Minor saloon, 300KCG, becoming, albeit very briefly, a two-car student in Bangor. XXD341 was stripped down at the museum and assessed for potential complete re-building, but it was a hopeless case with all chassis metal paper-thin. With the body removed, the chassis was taken for a last spin down the castle drive, and proved surprisingly nippy in this form!

All useful spares were taken off and on a sad Sunday morning, the last day of October 1971 the remains were towed to Pant Dreiniog quarry, Bethesda, and tipped over the side into the pit.





I was somewhat dismayed to learn only a few weeks later that I could have obtained a complete, brand-new chassis frame for the sum of £5, and rebuilt it after all!

Most of the spares were sold, raising a total of around £35, thus the net capital cost of over 4 years happy motoring was a mere £15. The side windows and fluorescent light saw further use on a similar van, DYY203J, one of the last Morris Minors made, from 1972 until 1975, when it was sold. Of dear old XDX341, only the logbook and number plates survive, together with the photographs. Motoring was never to be quite so much fun again!

## Signs of the Times

By the mid 1960's, the railway preservation movement was already beginning to cater well for locomotives and carriages - or so we thought, knowing nothing of what was yet to come! But the small relics were disappearing fast, many into the hands of private "enthusiasts", illegally or otherwise, never to be seen again. Indeed, watching almost daily the devastation being wrought by "Beeching" and the adoption of "Corporate Image", we ourselves felt we had to procure our own piece of local railway history.

Thus it was that the first acquisition of what was to become a fairly large collection was obtained from Staines West station on the evening before closure (when there were still some left!), a brown-and-cream BR "double-sausage" totem nameplate just 17 years old.

It was taken down by the stationmaster, Mr Bye, with the aid of a rickety stepladder, the sum of fifteen shillings paid over, receipt duly provided, and carried home on the number 90 bus.

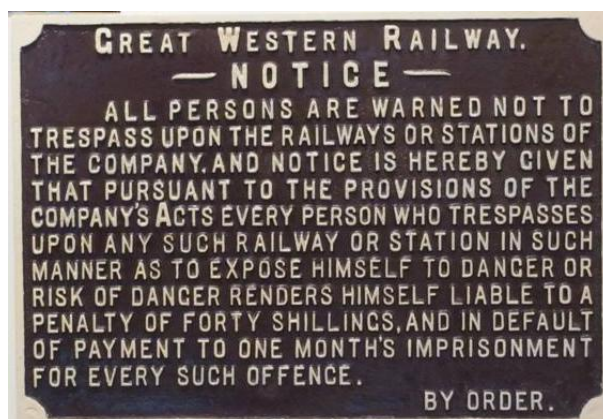


Not long afterwards, noting that the old Southern Railway "bulls-eye" nameplates at Ashford were being taken down (along with the distinctive "candy-twist" lamp-posts that carried them), I enquired about obtaining one at Staines Central station. I was asked to come back the following evening; one of the signs in excellent condition was duly delivered by train and collected from the up-side ticket office. The price was a 7s 6d (37p) donation to the SR Children's Home at Woking. How about that for service!



The collecting bug was beginning to bite. Paul Chamberlain showed signs of developing an unhealthy interest in loo door locks - the old heavy brass penny-in-the-slot type - which came in an amazing variety of ornate designs and could be made to function again as well as look pretty. Chris Leigh meanwhile set his sights on somewhat larger items - the decaying GWR roadside timber name boards at Poyle Halt, on the Staines West branch, which just had to be rescued before they collapsed into the undergrowth. A Sunday afternoon excursion in his Hillman Minx brought both these, plus the platform name board back on the roof rack to his house in Chandos Road. The most rotted large one was cannibalised to repair the other, and replace missing letters, and the whole repainted smartly in BR brown and cream.

Several futile attempts were made to acquire a standard GWR cast-iron "trespass" notice, still very



common then. One memorable occasion saw the large spanner slip when trying to undo well-rusted fixing bolts, while balancing on top of a wooden paling fence. The somewhat rotten fence gave way, and I ended up being pitched headlong into a standard GWR thorn bush, much to the amusement of the assembled company! Success eventually followed some months later.

That summer we collected all our relics together in Chris's back garden, to photograph them in sunshine.....

I'm sure at least one driver of the electric trains on the adjacent SR line braked hard in amazement to have a closer look at our display! The "Poyle" boards in fact proved to be something of an embarrassment as they were so large and heavy. They were finally found a good home at the new Staines Model Railway Societies' permanent HQ in Egham.



The rest went to Penrhyn Castle, forming the nucleus of the "signs collection" there. Only a few could be moved at a time due to their size and weight. On one occasion, when only a couple of miles from destination on the Aber dual-carriageway at about 3 o'clock in the morning after a long trip in the hired Student Union Ford Thames van, we were stopped and thoroughly searched by the local constabulary. I gave them a full story of how we came to possess all the signs, and where they were going, but they were really far more interested in the variety of Morris Minor spare parts that were also being carried at the time.

We found lots of interesting examples of "railwayana" on our travels around North Wales, and were determined to save a good set of representative items for the museum. We did at least try to obtain permission or authority to remove these whenever possible. The first port of call would be the district offices at Bangor station, in the upstairs part of the main island platform building, hopefully to see Inspector Ken Dicks or one of his minions. The response was somewhat unpredictable, and it seemed they quickly grew tired of our repeated requests. If not a flat refusal, we might be handed a pre-printed BR form with some illegible scribbling on - rather like a doctor's prescription - "Just show this whenever you need to, lads". Such a document was useful to cover any number of subsequent situations! At other times, we were told to "contact Stoke". Or Holyhead. Or Crewe. Or even Euston, just to get rid of us. In the case of the "Llanfairfechan" totems, which I'd observed being taken down when I arrived off the London train one afternoon, the resident factotum requested that authority be obtained from Bangor before he would release one to me. Bangor advised Stoke, Stoke led to Crewe, and Crewe said "its a local matter". We had gone to a lot of trouble, and no one had actually said "no".

I returned to Llanfairfechan station next evening, and all the man really wanted to know was that Bangor had said "yes". Then, amazingly, **how many** did we want? Boldly, I said "two" please (one for the museum, one for myself). They duly appeared without



further comment. The folks in the museum workshop seemed surprised to see me back so soon, I think they had expected an arrest and several hours' interrogation at least, for my cheek! We would've had a couple of the fluted lampposts as well, given suitable transport. As it was, a few days



later they had all been smashed to pieces with a sledgehammer where they lay, and the remaining totems neatly folded up to fit in the rubbish bins.

The saga of the Pen-y-Groes signal box name board was more nerve-racking, and rather sad. I was looking around there one afternoon, and got chatting to a local gentleman who bemoaned the fate of the railways, the dereliction and the vandalism. I told him about the Penrhyn museum, and what we were trying to do. He said, of the remaining sign “you had better take this then, before someone else does” (the other had already gone, and there was not much else of interest left here) - “come back next week, I’ll get it down for you”. He didn’t, of course.

I returned the following Sunday with minimal tools, and spent some time performing contortions on the signal box steps in pouring rain to get the board down without serious damage either to it or myself.

The picture shows the signalbox, *sans nameboard*, some months later. Eddie has been playing with the signal levers.....



The following Wednesday evening at the museum, on presenting the latest acquisition to the assembled company, Iorwerth appeared to suffer a fit of apoplexy. He insisted that the object be immediately secreted away in a remote storeroom, covered up then “carefully buried” beneath other junk (rather than “accidentally buried” - which happened quite normally). Why all the fuss? Apparently, on the previous Monday evening the local Welsh-language television news programme had featured various incidents on the railway that were attributed to the “student vandals” during college Rag Week. Firstly, the slogan “Bangor Rag” painted in letters about 12ft high had somehow appeared overnight on the sides of the Britannia tubular bridge. We of course knew absolutely nothing about this - just contemplating how it might have been done was terrifying! From there, the intrepid newshounds went to Caernarvon station, where some unspecified damage had apparently been done - “it must be those blasted students again” (but not us). There they were told about the mysterious event at Pen-y-Groes. An old chap - self-proclaimed custodian of the station, but evidently not the one I had talked with - was hauled before the cameras:- “It was our last old relic. It was there on Saturday when I checked, but on Monday it was gone” (the sign, that is). Cut to show the blank space on the signal box wall. How very embarrassing. But at least **we** knew it had gone to a good home!

A couple of years later, renovated and repainted, the signboard was displayed with several others at a very successful railway show at the students union in Bangor, receiving many favourable comments.

Afterwards, the exhibits were returned to Penrhyn and stacked up in the main workshop awaiting storage. At this time there was an “Ideal Home Exhibition” taking place in the castle grounds, at which the Gwynedd police had a large stand. One of the officers was a steam enthusiast, and IWJ invited him into his den to view progress on the 10” gauge Webb compound locomotive “Orion”. Before long, the room was filled with his colleagues! Realising what he had done, Iorwerth tried to conceal the offending word “Pen-y-Groes” with his body, fidgeting around awkwardly and mumbling something about it being “the other one”. Eyebrows were raised. Their spokesman said “come now, Iorwerth, we all know what you’re up to. And we approve. But just make sure we don’t catch you red-handed!” All because of “those blasted students”!





There were other adventures, fortunately far less dramatic. The closed Ruabon to Barmouth railway was falling into decay, with relics disappearing fast. Seeking authority here was even more complex than usual, as these former Western Region lines had passed to the London Midland Region - Stoke, Crewe, Derby, whatever - shortly before closure. As on the Afon Wen - Caernarvon line, the infrastructure had to be retained for a period of some years after closure by order of the then Labour government under Harold Wilson, thence the railway land would revert to County Council ownership. However, everyone we met on our travels approved of our work at the museum. The faithful brown and cream van went everywhere, and often returned grossly overloaded. At least once, it was assumed to be a British Railways vehicle, presumably not repainted since before 1948!



At Bala Junction, a number of useful parts for a GWR wooden-post signal were obtained from the contractor engaged upon demolition there, in exchange for a packet or two of cigarettes (standard currency in such circles), but they had to be lugged some 3/4 mile across fields to the nearest road. We attempted to remove the signal box nameplate, but after an hour or so of struggle with inaccessible rusted bolts, the long and heavy cast-iron plate slipped from our grasp and smashed into several pieces on the ground some 10 feet below. Maybe someone, somewhere later rescued the bits and repaired it?

We had one other notable failure, trying to obtain a suitable wooden post on which to mount and display the GWR signal components. We had seen one such in situ at Ffestiniog station, and Tony Parkins negotiated with his friends at Paddington for its sale, as “firewood”, for ten shillings (50p). To collect, we had to seek permission for our vehicles and tackle to pass through the old station yard, now part of a car repair workshop premises. The proprietors were most indignant, claiming (rightly) that they owned the signal, and there was no way we were going to remove it! “That’s yours, over there” they said - it seems that BR had sold us a **metal-post** signal, not what we wanted at all. I don’t know whether Tony ever got his ten shillings back!

All this fun and games however paled into insignificance in 1969, the year of the “Great Welsh Train Robbery”.....

## **Dinorwic Days:- An Engine for Christmas, and a Saloon “Sometime Previously” (1969)**

The initial Penrhyn museum collection was at least partly based, naturally, upon exhibits from the nearby Penrhyn Quarry and its railways. It became apparent however (some years before the advent of the North Wales Quarrying Museum at Llanberis) that the mighty Dinorwic concern should be represented also. Too much had been lost already, after closure and dismantling of the 4ft-gauge Padarn Railway, from the quarries to the sea at Port Dinorwic, in the period 1961-63.

All we had on show at the museum was the hand-cranked velocipede “Arthur”, a fascinating and unusual item, but not on a par with the quality of the Penrhyn Quarry exhibits (pictured here in 1968, with Ian Jones).....



Within Dinorwic Quarries, their very first locomotive “Fire Queen” of 1848 vintage had been stored away in a shed since around 1890.....

She was by now officially the property of a separate body, the “Manifold Trust” set up by John Smith M.P., nephew of Sir Michael Duff of the old quarry-owning family. Several other museums were interested in acquiring the “Fire Queen”, notably our rivals at the Narrow-gauge railway museum based at the Tallylyn Railway down at Towyn, but due to the superior and extensive covered accommodation available at Penrhyn, Smith simply decided in our favour.

Also at the quarry, locked up in another shed at the far end of the Gilfach Ddu workshops complex, was the 1896-built Dinorwic saloon carriage, last used on the Padarn Railway in 1961 on a weekly journey to collect the quarrymen’s wages. There was, apparently, a “gentlemen’s agreement” that we should have this also, but nothing further positive had occurred.



One day, Iorwerth was advised that there had been some damage to the roof of the shed where the carriage was stored; someone had tried to gain entry presumably to remove the ornate brass handles and other fittings. We went over on a lovely spring evening to investigate and report back to the quarry authorities, so that appropriate action could be taken. The main site gate was shut; so we had to go up the lane to the old quarry hospital, and then scramble down slate screes to reach the shed. There was indeed a hole in the roof, but no other damage as far as we could see.

We returned to Llanberis village for some fish-and-chips, then back to Penrhyn Castle at dusk. By coincidence, Colin Pealling from Walsall visited us in the museum that evening, and was later to regret this. He had a Morris Minor van, just like mine, but painted all-over brown. Sometime after 11pm, we all left the Castle grounds by the Port Lodge as usual, XXD341 followed closely by Colin in his van and Iorwerth on his scooter. We found out afterwards that the police had been lurking in the shadows at Port Penrhyn, presumably having followed us from Llanberis after receiving reports of suspicious activities in the quarry, but stopped Colin’s van instead of mine..... and subjected him to the third degree!

During the following week, Iorwerth went over to Dinorwic, working with the staff there to make the coach shed secure again. When we saw him on Wednesday evening, he had his arm in a sling. Apparently he had a mishap with his scooter on the railway bridge at Cwm-y-Glo, but would never admit whether his attention had been distracted by the old station on one side, or a couple of the local young ladies on the other!

A month or so later, my parents joined me in North Wales for their summer holiday, and we stopped for a picnic lunch by Llyn Peris opposite the main quarry (beside an old copper mine adit) on a glorious sunny day. There was something uncannily strange though; no hooter followed by muffled sounds of blasting on the hour, no distant tinkling of waste slate down the tips, no rattle of wagons down the





main inclines. Just a few screeching gulls swooping around the upper-most galleries. That evening we heard on the local news that the quarry company had gone into liquidation; the last few hundred men were laid off, and the mighty workings had fallen completely silent for the first time in some 200 years. The implications of this for us were not immediately apparent.....

On our return to college in late September, an enigmatic Iorwerth beckoned us into a huddle in the corner of the museum workshop. "We have a Plan" he announced. As the details were revealed, it appeared likely to result in arrest at least, possibly even long-term imprisonment! We headed as one for the door; volunteering to do a bit of engine-painting twice a week was one thing, this was something else altogether. But, curiosity aroused, we drifted back, asked questions, and then pledged our support.

What had happened was that receivers had just been appointed at Dinorwic; they surveyed and listed all the assets, but had not seen our coach in its shed. Lying at the far end of the site and obscured by trees, Hugh Jones, former Chief Engineer at the Quarry and host had dismissed this as of no interest for the day, and the visitors were keen to get back to London to start compiling their auction catalogue.

Frantic discussion took place between Iorwerth, the quarry staff and John Smith; the company records were searched, and a "Caniatad" or authority for removal - the vital piece of paper appropriately signed and dated - duly materialised. We all knew that the coach was probably the private property of the Vaynol estate, rather than that of the quarry Limited Company, but could not prove it conclusively. At this stage it seems no one had thought to ask Sir Michael Duff himself, at Vaynol Hall. If the coach went to auction, it would undoubtedly be sold abroad, perhaps going to the USA or Canada. We had just two weeks to get it out of Dinorwic before the receivers returned!

Messrs Pickford the well known haulage contractors were summoned, and expressed surprise at both the urgency and the change of plan, since the layout at the museum meant that logically, "Fire Queen" should be brought in before the coach and now we were demanding the exact opposite!

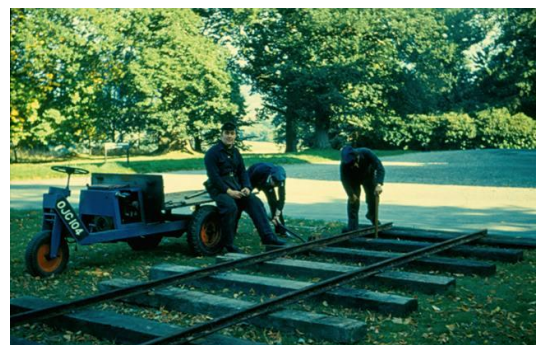
A short length of temporary track was needed out in the Castle car-park to stand the coach on, and some of us students were called away from work one afternoon to help construct it. So it's off to work we go, in the faithful Bonser truck (Ian, Dafydd & Iorwerth).....

Sleepers were lugged out of storage, aligned, jacked and packed, and a couple of lengths of light flat-bottom rail spiked down to gauge. By the time we had finished, it was pitch dark.

The following morning, Mr. Parry, the Castle curator had obviously been round to inspect our handiwork:

"Iorwerth, I really think you should check over your track again," he said. That light rail really was light - you could see daylight where the web had rusted right through, and the rest was not much better....

So we had to come back that evening to do the whole job again, this time "under floodlights" using heavy Penrhyn bull-head rail in cast-iron chairs. This one really was a work of art!.....







Iorwerth then went up to the quarry to prepare that end. All the trees and bushes blocking the coach shed entrance were cut down, revealing the old 4-ft gauge rails in situ, which just needed a bit of fettling up.

The main shed doors were opened up with some difficulty, and we judged that the

coach would just pass through, without needing to remove handrails or footboards. Only the roof-mounted oil lamps had to come out.



As soon as the Pickfords crew arrived, a ramp was constructed, and the coach winched aboard the low-loader.....



All was made secure as dusk fell.

The following morning we were up at the quarry yard before dawn. Both Mr. Parry's Hillman Minx and XXD341 had been adorned with "Wide Load" signs, one to precede and one to follow the lorry. The Pickfords men could not understand why we had not asked for, indeed certainly did not want, a police escort!



The quarry workshop staff lined up with us for a last photograph at Dinorwic, and the convoy was duly waved on its way.

Unfortunately no one had thought to check the height, and the coach roof promptly tore down all the quarry phone lines!





The journey to Penrhyn proceeded slowly via the Llanberis pass, Capel Curig and Bethesda. Iorwerth somewhat dramatised this, saying we could not go through Llanberis or Caernarvon “in case we were seen by the authorities” but in fact this was probably the only viable route due to the low railway bridges in Port Dinorwic and Caernarvon Road, Bangor. Ian Jones rode on the coach veranda, and lost his cap (complete with special limited edition Penrhyn Museum enamel badge) overboard due to a fierce gust of wind somewhere up in the hills. The progress of the coach through the narrow main street of Bethesda was a fine sight; we brought the place to a standstill and narrowly avoided wrecking more overhead power lines. Stopping outside the Penrhyn Grand Lodge gate at Llandegai, it was found that the coach would just clear the archway, without the need to deflate the low-loader’s tyres as had been expected.....



Soon the vehicle was unloaded onto our temporary track and the lorry crew retired to the museum workshop for a well-earned cup of tea; only then did Iorwerth tell them the circumstances of their mission. “Fat Sam” turned to his mate and said “do you know what we’ve just \*\*\*\*\* well done? We’ve only gone and pinched the \*\*\*\*\* thing!!!” They were back on board their rig and roaring off down the road before anyone had a chance to explain further.

The new exhibit was immediately covered up with a large blue tarpaulin which reached right down to rail level all round. It sat there in the middle of the car park looking just like a British Railways long-wheelbase fruit van in the new, modern image Rail Blue livery. As it was near the end of the season, there were not too many visitors, but we were amused to note one obvious enthusiast-type chappie walking all around it, scratching his head, having correctly estimated the track gauge by reference to his shoe size as somewhat less than the expected four feet eight-and-a-half inches! (and why would a museum like ours want a BR fruit van anyway?)

Authentic Padarn Railway rails were now needed for both the “Fire Queen” and the coach to stand on at Penrhyn, in the planned permanent display. What better than those upon which the coach had stood in its shed at Dinorwic? For some strange reason, “Fat Sam” was unavailable, so a local flatbed lorry was commissioned, the rails and chairs dismantled and loaded up. To complete the task here, Iorwerth carefully stacked up all the trees and bush cuttings he had removed a few days earlier, back in front of the shed door, to make it look as though nothing had been disturbed!

The lorry was grossly under-loaded, so on the way back up the yard, the pedal-operated Velocipede “Black Bess” was wheeled out and hoisted aboard (well we did need to clear the space it occupied in order to get the “Fire Queen” out!).....

Not content with this, Mr. Parry negotiated further with Hugh Jones, and one of the little yellow narrow-gauge “Royal Coaches” (used by HRH the Duke & Duchess of York in 1899) was manhandled down the

stairs from the pattern-loft above the main workshops and added to our collection to make up a decent load on the lorry that day. Iorwerth’s motto was “never leave anywhere empty-handed!”

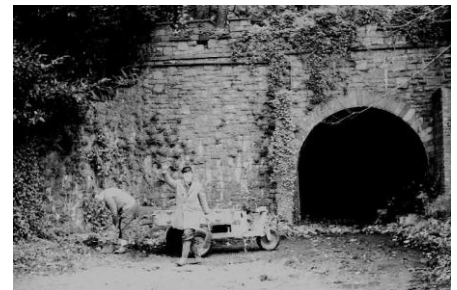


(We learned later that much more such “negotiating” seemed to have taken place in previous weeks, as the accumulation of many years in the Dinorwic workshops was explored and sorted out. On at least one occasion, Mr. Parry expressed surprise at how the steering of his car appeared to be very light on the return home to Bangor, the boot presumably having been filled up with assorted scrap metal by Iorwerth while he had been engaged in the meetings with the quarry management!)

All attention was now focussed on moving the “Fire Queen”, as the receivers wanted it off site by the end of the year. The 2-day auction of quarry equipment was scheduled for 12-13 December and we decided to give the old engine its first public airing since 1890 on that occasion, maximising publicity for our venture and for the museum. We had just five weeks to prepare things.

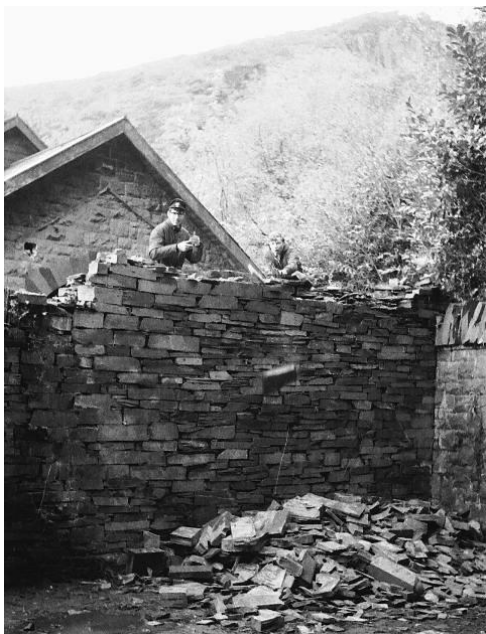
Firstly, the walled compound between the loco shed and the tunnel entrance had to be cleared of vegetation, several large trees, slate waste, mud and numerous rusty oil drums.

The latter were stacked up neatly within the tunnel itself, but the receivers would not allow any dumping elsewhere on the site, so Iorwerth had to bring in his little 3-wheeled “Bonser” truck



from Penrhyn and carry all the other material right across to the slate tips by the shore of the lake. Underneath all the rubbish we found a fine slate-slab floor, so no further preparation of the site to carry the weight of the engine was necessary.





After “Fire Queen” had been incarcerated in its shed some 80 years previously, a lean-to extension had been constructed across the entrance doorway to house the Velocipedes and other small relics (including a wooden leg from the quarry hospital!) to form the company museum. This had to be demolished next.

We feared the receivers would insist it was put back identically afterwards, and had visions of having to paint an identifying number on every single block of slate. Fortunately common sense prevailed, as any future users of the shed would also need access.

The lean-to roof came off quickly, but the end wall comprising some 40 tons of large slate slabs had to be taken down row by row by hand and carried away in the Bonser truck, which was fit for little else after completing its stint here.

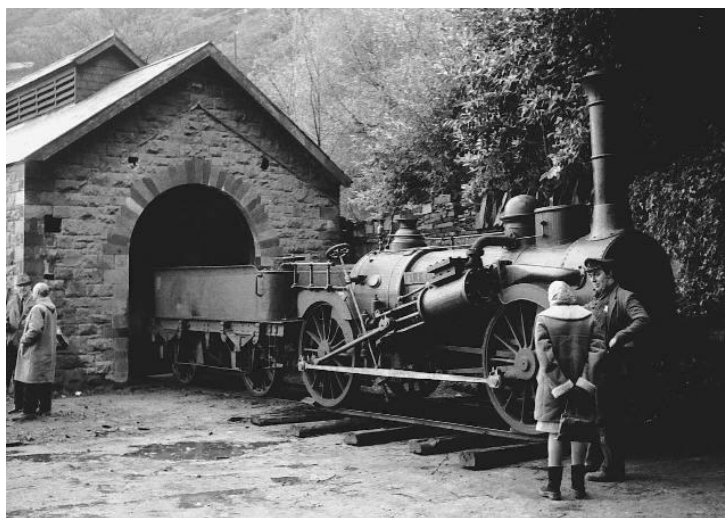


All was ready with a few days to spare. Temporary track was laid out into the yard. But the locomotive would not budge one inch!

Pinch bars were tried under the wheels, then a winch attached to a Land Rover. It was found that the wheels had corroded themselves into little pits in the rails through all the years of standing; the pistons were seized up, also the tender handbrake. The cylinder covers were taken off, and all accessible motion parts either removed or cleaned up as best we could. Easing oil was poured liberally everywhere; our tools were

secreted away in the smokebox and we retired overnight for the oil to do its work.

In the morning, we were beaten to it at the shed by a party of “learned experts” who had come to examine the engine thoroughly and report on the engineering significance of this venerable machine, “the only one in existence to show what locomotives were really like in the mid-nineteenth century, not what we *think* they were like” One of these was Rodney Weaver, who was shortly to write several articles in the railway press describing his findings and theories. In the course of swarming over the engine with tape measures and cameras, they found our spanners and other tools in the smokebox, and a piece of scaffold pipe protruding from the end of one of the boiler tubes (we used this as a tommy-bar to give extra leverage on the spanners when necessary, and Iorwerth had put it there out of the way). Some months later, we were intrigued to read in a learned engineering article that the experts concluded from the presence of the tools and the piece of un-expanded tube they saw, that the engine was in the middle of an overhaul and re-tube in 1890, when the boiler was deemed to be not repairable and so it was condemned on the spot. So much for experts!



Once we had the place to ourselves again, the engine was made to roll up and down the track quite freely, and on the morning of December 10, 1969 - the auction viewing day - she was pushed out of the shed while being filmed by BBC television cameras. We had to push it back in and do a re-run later for HTV!

We were disappointed to note that both films in the final broadcast version did not show the team of "pushers" working hard at the rear, just the locomotive gliding along, "puffing gently down the track" as one commentator put it.



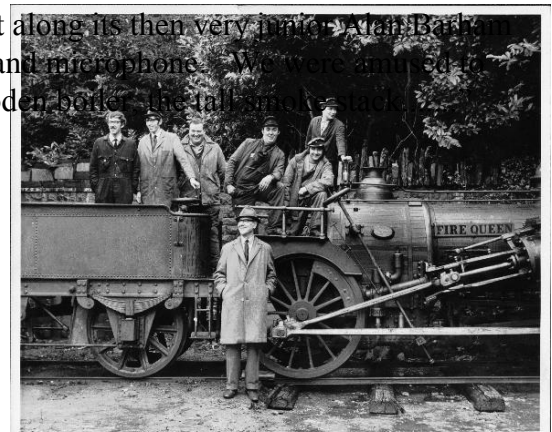
They even asked Iorwerth to arrange for some burning rags in the smokebox for special effect, but he refused point-blank to allow such a farce in his valuable relic.

Our new engine was photographed by all and sundry, from all conceivable angles.



The BBC radio programme "Good Morning Wales" had sent along its then very junior Ian Basham on one of his earliest assignments, with heavy tape recorder and microphone. We were amused to hear his report the following morning: "its all there - the wooden boiler, the tall smokestack, followed by the inevitable question "how much is it worth?"

We fended off various persistent enquiries from the enthusiast fraternity about the Saloon Coach - they searched around the site doggedly, but strangely did not find it! All we said was "it's safe, and would not be sold". The "Liverpool Daily Post" reporter overheard one such conversation, and duly recorded for posterity that there was another engine just like "Fire Queen" already





preserved, called "Saloon".

At the end of a most interesting day, the nameplates and other valuables were removed; the engine pushed back into the shed and locked up to await its journey to Bangor.

The quarry auction was also extensively filmed and reported by the media. Highlights of the television coverage for us were Iorwerth behaving very furtively, "Haggis" eating a bar of chocolate, and Mr. Parry bidding. Both he and us thought he had bought the 4-wheeled "Rail Cycle", the brass dome cover from the loco "Jenny Lind" (one-time "sister" to Fire Queen), and various assorted spare parts, but there was some kind of mix-up when he came to pay. It transpired that the bidder number on his card was "86" but by carelessly holding it upside down it was recorded as "98" for some of the purchases. This took some considerable time to sort out, involving tracking down the real no.98 and finding out what *he* thought he had bought, before we could remove our goods!

One amusing feature of the auction was that many very useful valve gear parts, gauge glasses etc for the standard quarry "Hunslet" locomotives which everyone wanted, seemed to be deleted from the catalogue (presumably no-one could find them), whereas a lot of obscure remnants could not be sold at any price, as no-one knew what they were for! There was speculation at the time as to the reason for this, but Iorwerth was just being furtive again.

The quarry workshop buildings themselves had also been withdrawn from the sale at the last minute, as Caernarvonshire County Council had secured a preservation order on them, leading after a few years to the fine North Wales Quarrying Museum that now occupies the premises. Two more-or-less complete narrow-gauge Hunslet locos "Dolbadarn" and "Red Damsel" were sold for the then-huge prices of £1050 and £1500 respectively to the promoters of the Llanberis Lake Railway scheme, which was envisaged as a *circuit* around Llyn Padarn using the former BR Llanberis branch track bed as well as the old Padarn line. And the pile of bits that was once "Wild Aster" was sold for £700 - it was eventually rebuilt to run again, as predicted way back in 1966!

Back at Penrhyn Castle, preparations were made for the arrival of "Fire Queen"; various Penrhyn wagon exhibits, the Nantlle tramway wagon and the velocipede "Arthur" were moved and set up elsewhere, and the permanent Padarn Railway 4-ft gauge rails laid and ballasted. Great fun was had by all trying out the newly delivered Dinorwic "rail-cycle" on this stretch of pristine track!

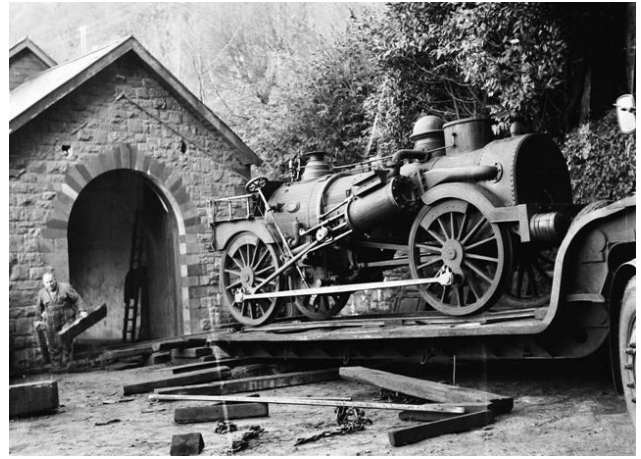
The full story of the actual locomotive move was told in an article in the "Railway Magazine" issue of March 1970, "An Engine for Christmas". On Tuesday 16th December "Fire Queen" was winched out of her shed for the last time, up a ramp onto the Pickford's low-loader - yes, "Fat Sam" and his mate were back to help us again, suitably reconciled!



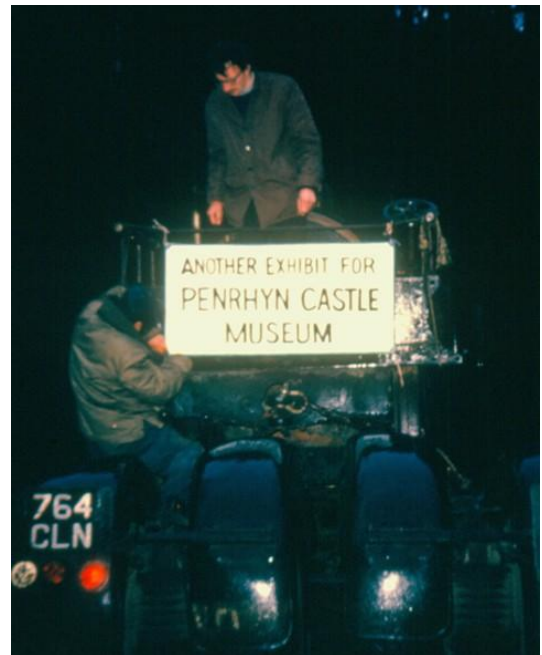








On reversing over the rough ground back into the main workshop area, the engine jumped off the rails, putting a noticeable dent in the lorry platform, but apparently suffering no damage itself.



We were up at the quarry for a 6am start on Wednesday 17th. The loco was successfully re-railed, secured down, and re-adorned with our “Another Exhibit for Penrhyn Castle Museum” signboard.

The journey to Bangor was this time directly via Llanrug and Bethel, in a blinding snowstorm much of the way, and she was off-loaded at the museum by early evening. The tender followed separately on Thursday 18th, without incident.







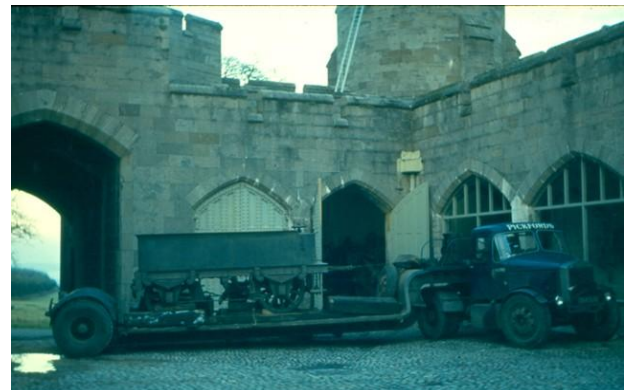
Several days were spent in sliding firstly the engine, then the tender across to the permanent track on skates. At one stage, the engine took matters into its own hands, and rammed into the wall. The leather-clad wooden buffers

demonstrated their superb resilience, and once again no damage appeared to be done to our prize exhibit. We were however greatly relieved when it reached its final position with handbrake firmly screwed down!



At last, the Saloon Coach could then be moved in behind "Fire Queen", from its temporary resting place outside in the cold.

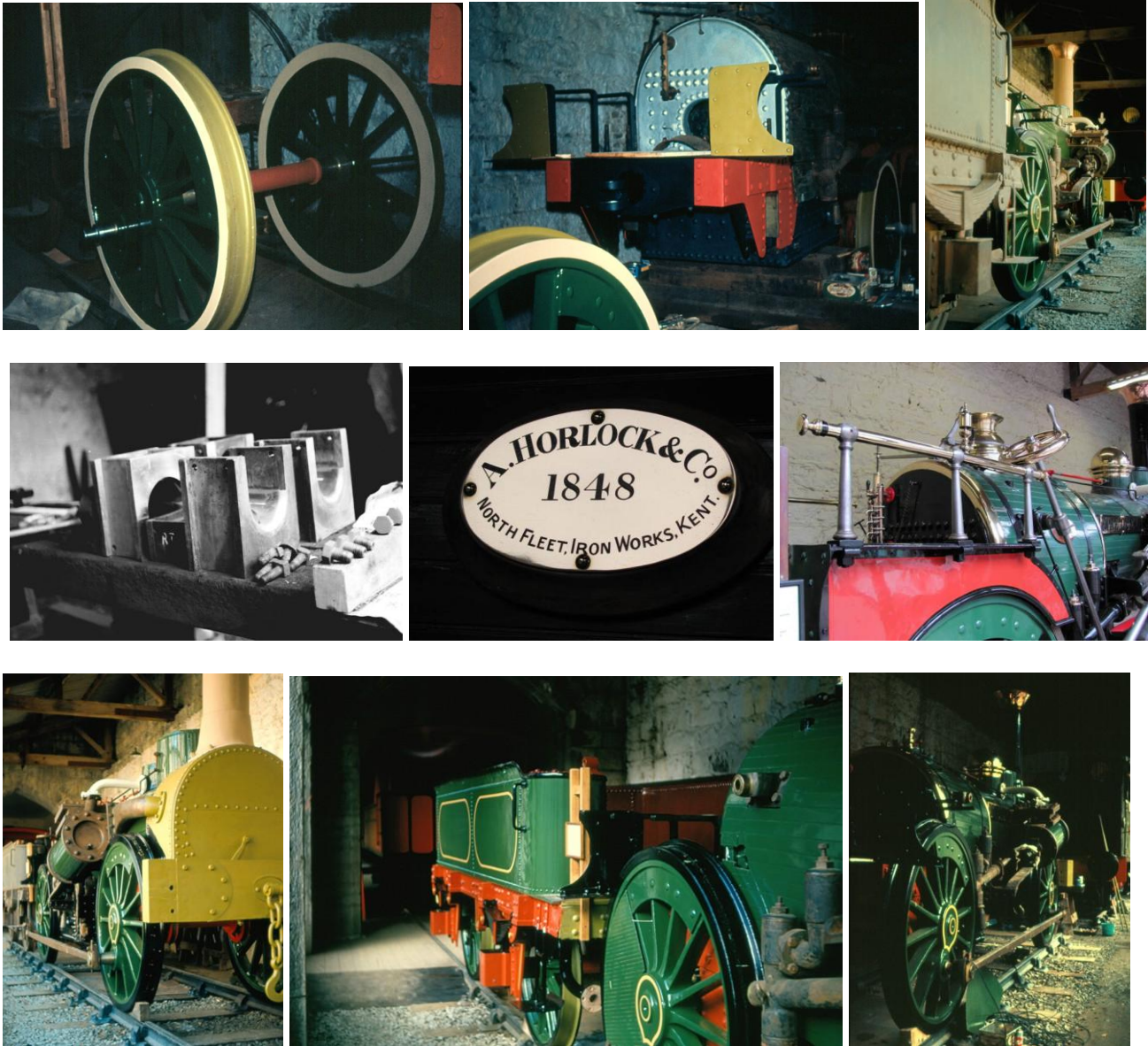
We could not resist including some reference to the coach in the "Railway Magazine" article - the contrived statement "was *taken* from the quarry..... *sometime previously*" having special meaning to those of us directly involved!



The delicate subject of the restoration of "Fire Queen" involved difficult decisions. Both it and the coach went on display for the 1970 season in "as received" condition, the coach by now also being in the assumed custodianship of John Smith. It was later agreed that the engine and tender would be completely stripped and restored to "as new" (but, regrettably, though probably sensibly, still static) condition. This involved yet more posed publicity shots at each stage of the work, with numerous appearances in the local and national newspapers. In at least one of these, it was noted that the colour of the paint in the tin did not match that on the wheels!







The restoration was never deemed to be quite finished - there are no doubt still a few bits missing, stored away in some remote part of the workshops, as was indeed traditional for many of the museum's exhibits!

The saloon coach has never needed major restoration - its smart red livery dates from the 1950's - but perhaps one day it might also be returned to its original condition, with striking primrose-yellow panelling edged in black, and adorned with the Vaynol coats-of-arms?

At our annual museum re-unions we joked about the "Great Welsh Train Robbery" (slightly different in concept to that other well-known one - we stole the train!) But the saga of the saloon coach had an unexpected ending.....

In the spring of 1972, I became a temporary tenant at the "Barracks Flat" - the former staff quarters adjacent to Vaynol Hall, near Port Dinorwic. One of Sir Michael Duff's endearing traditions as estate landlord was to invite his all tenants to morning coffee up at the hall, served in the drawing room by his butler, using full silver service and all the trappings. I managed to steer the conversation around to Dinorwic Quarries, in the hope that Sir Michael might reveal some family albums with hitherto-undiscovered pictures of "Fire Queen" or the Coach. Such were unfortunately not forthcoming, but he did say: "I once had a lovely old carriage up there (*at the quarry*). I never did find out what had happened to it!" I was thus able to fill in all the details, assuring him that it was now safely preserved in the museum at Penrhyn. He was very glad it had been kept in the locality, confirmed

that it was indeed his family possession and not that of the quarry company, and promised to visit shortly.

I don't know if he ever did, but he died only a short while later, the last in that line of the family associated with North Wales, the Vaynol Estate and Dinorwic Quarries. So it seems we had not after all *stolen* the carriage, but had undoubtedly saved it from being illegally sold at the auction and taken abroad. All's well that ends well!

## Sayings of the Times - and some Odd Goings-On

Some of the events, catch phrases etc in the everyday world of Penrhyn Castle Railway Museum, 1967-77, are recalled.....

**“The Captain”** Iorwerth, from the contemporary pop record “I am the Captain of your Ship” (I think ?) Surely not “Captain of Industry”?! Can anyone recall how this first originated?

**“Big Wheat Country”** This referred to the less well-manicured extremities of the castle lawns, which Iorwerth was required to keep in trim as his main paid employment during the summer season (the museum being deemed not to need any such attention). The real Big Wheat Country was a contemporary TV cereal ad featuring macho Canadian driving a macho reaper somewhere out in the prairies, where the corn was as high as an elephant's eye. Iorwerth's little blue tractor was somewhat out of



proportion by comparison, and there are other inconsistencies:- 1) The grass was often higher than the tractor, so you just saw Iorwerth's head and shoulders cruising serenely along in the hazy afternoon sunshine; 2) The tractor was not macho enough. He was always asking for a new, bigger one. 3) Iorwerth was not macho enough?

**“The Jaggoy”** The poor man's Tannoy system, cobbled together in the university electronics laboratory. Installed in the museum workshop, it enabled the Saturday afternoon play and pop music from the “Steam Radio” to be relayed to speakers down the “ride” and in the more remote storerooms. It also allowed us to be addressed periodically:- “This is your Captain speaking”

Mr. Parry, the National Trust administrator, was unaware of these enhancements to his property. Until, one morning, he happened to be standing under one of the speakers and heard:- “Vernon, Parry has just gone into town. Let's stop for a brew!” His reaction is not recorded, but the system survived somehow.

**“Everything stops for Tea”**  
Iorwerth's favourite expression (from another song).....





**A “Panad”** the local (Bangor area only) Welsh dialect form for “a cup of tea”. Not recognised by the Collins Welsh dictionary or the BBC; the correct expression is “Cwpan o de”

**“Day Off, Yor-weth?”** Standard greeting from Allan Garraway, General Manager of the Festiniog Railway, when Iorwerth appeared at Portmadoc on a “busman’s holiday” asking to be allowed to fire or even drive his favourite engines “Linda” and “Blanche”. (He did, apparently, once drive these on the Penrhyn Railway but, strangely, no direct photographic evidence of this has come to light)

**“Running late again, Yor-weth?”** The inevitable result of such rash and irresponsible behaviour on the part of Mr. Garraway in granting Iorwerth’s wish (see above)

**“Join the Railway Builders”** This was the slogan used by the Festiniog Railway to recruit volunteers to help build their new “deviation” line above Dduallt towards Blaenau Ffestiniog. Quoted by Iorwerth every time we picked up a hammer to bash a few rusty spikes in a length of temporary track at Penrhyn - not quite in the same excitement league. This occasion was in preparation for the dismantling of the “Hugh Napier” loco for restoration; note the enamel “spike bowl” which appears to have been appropriated from some former domestic use!



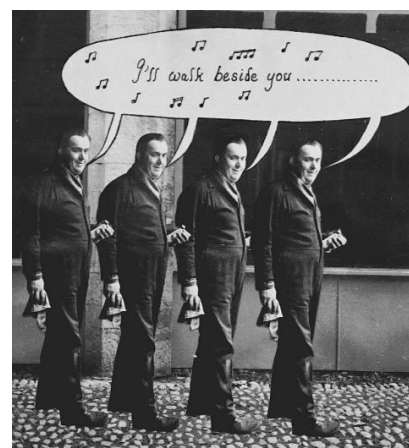
This one looks a bit more challenging.... After the passage of the very last train from Caernarvon to Bangor, Iorwerth seems to have “acquired” a large spanner from somewhere, and got to work near Port Dinorwic in the gathering dusk!



**The “Runs & Holidays” Inspector** After we had spent hours lovingly applying the final coat of gloss paint to some engine bits, we would retire drained of all nervous energy to the workshop for tea. It was then that the R & H inspector (Iorwerth) would strike. It was amazing how, having carefully watched over all critical points throughout the job without any problems showing up, the moment our back was turned, a “Run” in the paint would suddenly materialise. And the R & H inspector would find it - and be very annoyed, requiring “botching” of the job to correct it. The next time, we would be so terrified that a “Holiday” (lack of paint - usually just a “pin-prick” - where it should be) was the inevitable result - detected with equal glee.

**“Painting the Captain Black”** Not sure of the exact circumstances in which this arose, but probably the result of two worthy volunteers, Keith Walter and Tony Parkins, carelessly choosing to pick an argument with the R & H inspector. On this occasion, the latter got painted as well as the engine parts.

**“I’ll Walk Beside You”** One day, the BBC radio programme “Down Your Way” came to Penrhyn, and Mr. Parry chose this stirring but somewhat dated melody. For some months after, we were regularly treated to another, less-than-technically-perfect rendition from that famous tenor IWJ, via the “Jaggoy”. This resulted in the first-ever Penrhyn Museum Christmas Card, depicting the massed voices of the Penrhyn Male Voice Choir, complete with “Brasso” cans and polishing rags!



Some subsequent cards depicted the Velocipede “Black Bess” supposedly en-route from Dinorwic to the museum (for which I spent some considerable time “stalking” a policeman in Bangor High Street, in order to get a suitable photo for use in the montage).....



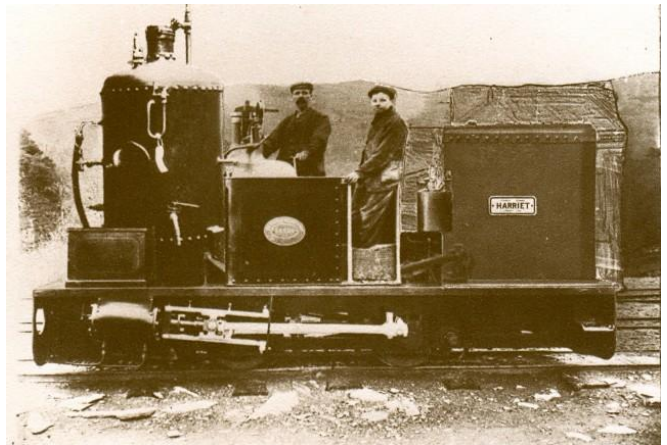
The original picture.....



and the end result!

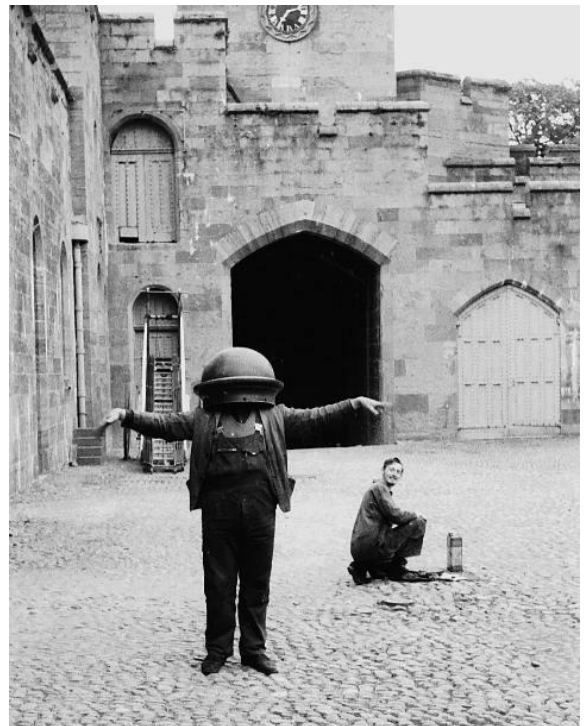
Yet another was a light-hearted interpretation of the mystery Dinorwic locomotive “Harriet”, which had been the subject of much speculation by the engineering “experts” resulting in not one shred of definite evidence as to its true appearance.....

In fact, when a picture of probably similar locomotive “Peris” turned up many years later, this was seen to be not entirely unlike the creation we depicted!



A fourth card was proposed for the year 1973, but did not materialise due to “technical problems”. The intention was to use the “Urban Spaceman” picture of Iorwerth prancing around the museum yard wearing the “Fire Queen” brass dome on his head, multiplied many times to make a line of such aliens coming off Westminster Bridge in London:- “Take me to your leader” (there was a general election due shortly)...

The technical problem arose when I went to Westminster Bridge at 4am on a sunny summer morning, hopefully to take a photograph completely free of traffic to use as the background. You may not know this, but Westminster Bridge is an incredibly busy place even at this time on a Sunday!



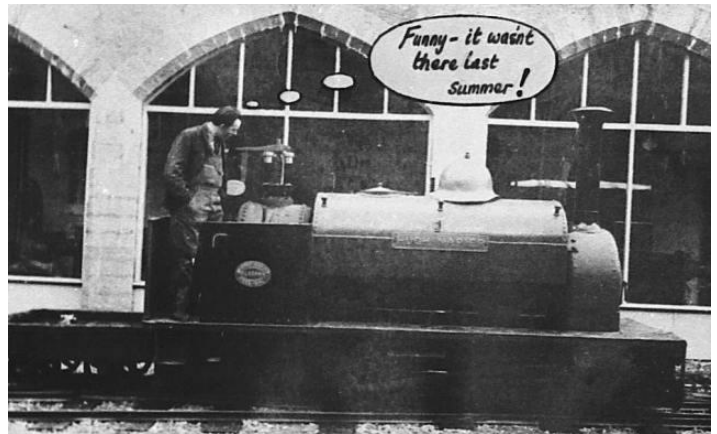
**“There was a young lady from Ealing, who had a peculiar feeling.....”** with various continuations, all quite rude. Used by the Captain to try to get a conversation going over Workshop Tea, usually when everyone was tired and fed up.



**“Nellie the Elephant.....”** another frequent rendition by the Captain, this time usually when he had dropped an engine part on his toe, or when the bits would not fit back together again in the manner expected. Much better than losing one’s temper, I suppose.

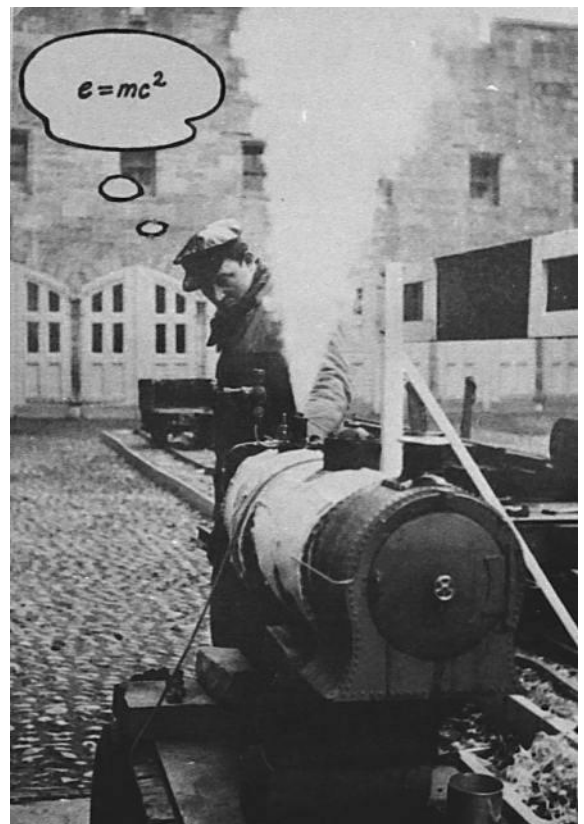
**“It wasn’t there last summer”**

Apparently this referred to Iorwerth’s surprise at finding the safety valves had mysteriously re-appeared on “Hugh Napier” when the tarpaulin was removed, as he thought he had taken them off the previous year. And we thought it referred to his “beer belly”, as in the contemporary TV advert!



**“E = mC squared”** Iorwerth deep in thought, during the first steaming of the boiler from locomotive “Orion” (and, we thought, the first steaming of anything, ever, at Penrhyn, but this was not quite true.....)

**“I’ll have steam for you in the xxxx on Saturday!”** (where xxx = the Kettering Furnaces loco, the “Beckton”, “Charles”, “Vesta”, “Fire Queen”, “Watkin” (!), the Demon boiler.....) A threat, or a promise? It was apparently a tradition for Iorwerth to light a fire in any new exhibit arriving at the museum, and see what happened. It was before my time, but apparently what happened with the “Kettering” was everything was shrouded in leaking steam, and there was so much wear in all the valve-gear linkage that no movement at all was possible.



The “Beckton”, seemingly in very good order, was lit up and left to raise steam while Iorwerth and Dafydd worked on the track in front of it. Unfortunately they did not realise it had a reversed regulator lever, so that when it appeared to be closed it was in fact fully open. Until the engine sprang into life and started moving towards them.....

The last epic attempt was with the “Watkin”; after trying to fill the boiler with water for some time, Iorwerth realised his feet were getting very wet - it was leaking out faster than it was going in!

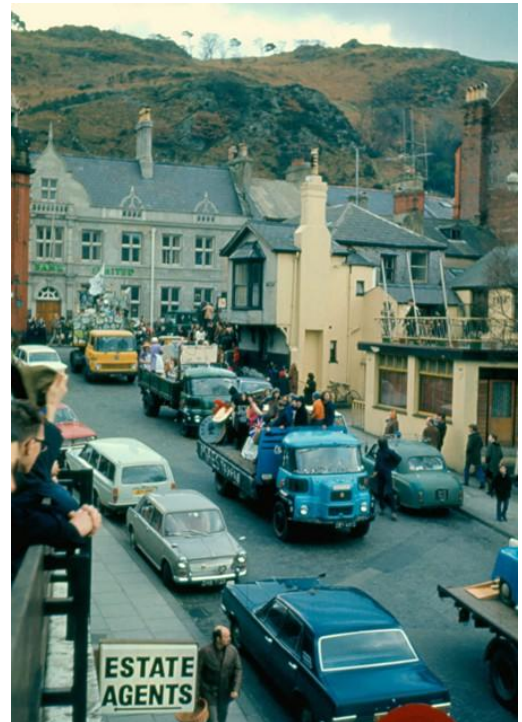
**“The Mad Axe Murderer of Menai Bridge”** One Saturday evening while driving home from Penrhyn at about 11pm I was stopped at a police check-point on the approach to the Menai suspension bridge, by the Antelope Inn. Having just bought a house at Llandegfan, I was keen to get started on clearing the garden of builders rubbish on the Sunday; in the back of the van was a selection of pick-axes and other implements borrowed from the museum. I was somewhat concerned about these - perhaps they would think they were stolen - but told the officers the facts; they did not bat an eyelid. The following edition of the local paper carried the bold headline “Police Hunt for Mad Axe Murderer in North Wales”

**“But I am the Senior Student”** This frequent and plaintive appeal from Charles Young arose from a newspaper report at about the time of the “Fire Queen” move which referred to yours truly as the “Senior Student”, on the basis of having been one (a student) for the longest time. Although Charles had not been a student for as long, he was actually older than me. This major contentious argument was never resolved satisfactorily!

**“The Senior Chinese Restaurant”** located by the town clock (*on the right, with the balcony in this College Rag procession picture*).....

Where all the best Senior Students go for Lunch (or *went*, as it was demolished sometime in the 1980’s). This was actually cheaper for a 3-course meal than the College refectory at one time, and a lot more enjoyable; going there also avoided the need to do much cooking at home in the evenings.

Our group had a large table permanently reserved every day, and we would come and go at various times to suit lectures etc. The waiters were very versatile - it was amazing to hear fluent Welsh spoken with a Chinese accent! - but they struggled with the introduction of decimal money in early 1971. After a couple of days, they reverted to using the familiar old cash till, and calculated the bill in old money!



This met with the full approval of Tony Parkins, who was waging a one-man campaign about the evils of decimalization. One such concerned the tendency of shopkeepers to round up all prices on conversion, which made him see red and led to an embarrassing row one evening at Carol’s, our local “corner shop” down at the Penrhyn end of Bangor High Street. The rest of us pretended not to know this character, but the quality of service here was never quite the same afterwards.

Another problem arose with our regular Saturday-evening fish-and-chip run from the museum to the “Valla” (not “Valhalla” - but it almost could have been). How this disreputable dive kept going as long as it did was a constant source of amazement, but the end as far as we were concerned came with the publication of a major health scare in the local newspaper. We switched to the Dean Street chippie, which tellingly always had much longer queues, and as Iorwerth says, evermore complained that we could no longer get fish, chips and those special mushy peas all for one shilling and ten pence like in the old days.

**“It’s OK. I’ve been here before.....”** yours truly, pretending to be a professional guide during our Sunday excursions, usually a prelude to getting hopelessly lost.

**“It’s not much further now, just around the next bend.....”** ditto, trying to find suitable words of encouragement to flagging ramblers, having missed the last Sunday bus somewhere out in the wilds, and having to walk about eight miles more than intended.

**“There must have been a wagon turntable somewhere around here.....”** my usual learned comment when the obscure old quarry tramway track we had been following suddenly came up against an impenetrable cliff face, or an improbable gradient. Sometimes indeed there was, confirmed by reference to an old O/S map, but otherwise it probably meant we had missed our way some time ago, and were now nowhere near the intended route.



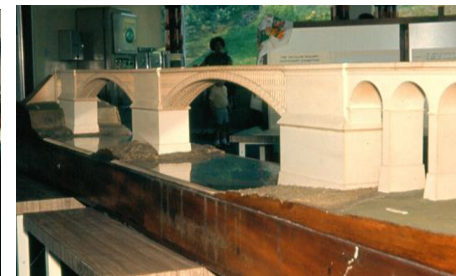
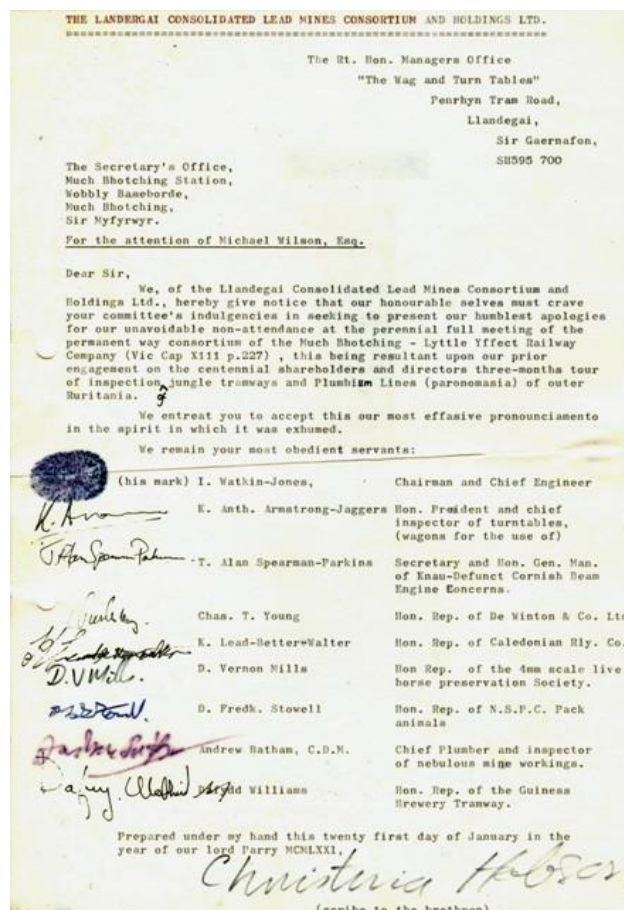
**“The Wag and Turn Table Public House”** - the fictitious hostelry, habitual meeting place of the fictitious Llandegai Lead & Silver mines Consortium Inc. This worthy institution arose as an excuse for unavoidable absenteeism from the forced Model-Railway Building Labour Camp, operated by one Mike Wilson in the student’s union during 1970-71.

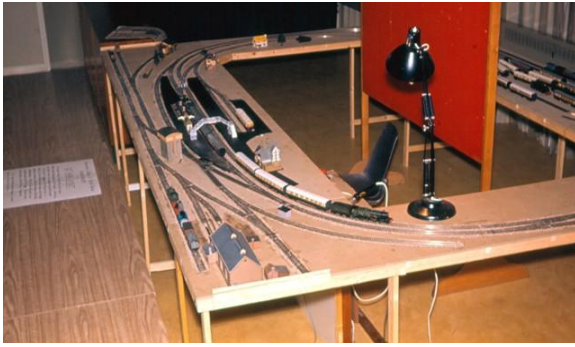
His intention was that we should construct an impressive layout for a planned exhibition, and had everything organised in great detail before retiring for the summer vacation leaving others to proceed methodically with the work - or so he thought.

Some sporadic activity did continue for a while, until more track was required and the allotted funds ran out. A letter demanding regular Progress Reports was countered by a reply demanding money, which to Mike’s credit did eventually materialise.

On the return of the prime instigators to college for the autumn term, panic set in, but the indigenous enthusiasts had already found a pleasant alternative Sunday pastime poking around in the remains of the Llandegai Lead Mines (yes - they really did once exist - linked by tramway to the nearby 1801 Penrhyn Railroad route) where that eminent geologist Edmund N. Calvert-Harrison once triumphantly held aloft a prime specimen of Iron Pyrites, setting many a speculator’s heart a-flutter.

Despite press-ganging of new recruits into the model railway labour camp, it was not quite finished in time for the exhibition (or ever). Here are some pictures of what however did turn out to be a very ambitious and successful event:





The large model of the bridge was borrowed for the occasion from the L&NWR Railway Institute in Euston Road, Bangor (the railwaymen's staff club); it dates from 1846 and depicts one of the structures proposed by Robert Stephenson for the railway crossing of the Menai Strait. It was not adopted due to Admiralty concerns about restricted headroom for shipping, and the famous "Tubular" Britannia Bridge was constructed instead, from 1848.

Of course, they wanted the model back, and I have to confess that this valuable relic was transported to and fro strapped to the roof of the trusty van.....

Here it is outside the Institute buildings; a good thing it wasn't raining!

We have no idea what has happened to this splendid model in subsequent years – does anyone know of its current whereabouts?



**"The Trousers", John Pickard, various Wronged Women, and Mice.** Penrhyn Castle at night often looked suitably sinister and foreboding, especially during the winter, and it was perhaps inevitable that it should have a ghost, or ghosts. The first recorded encounter was by Iorwerth alone, when riding his scooter down the Port Lodge drive late one dark and stormy night. As he peered into the gloom, a "pair of trousers" strode silently across his path and disappeared into the undergrowth. No one believed him of course, despite protestations that he was neither drunk nor unduly tired. This apparition was never seen again.

John Pickard was once Keeper of the stables in which the railway museum was situated (his slate bust still had pride of place beside the main entrance doorway). It was quite evident he did not approve of some aspects of our activities, such as storing a load of rusty engine parts in his beloved Tack Room. One afternoon I borrowed the key to get some items from here, and left the door open, planning to return several times for more. When I came back, the door was found closed and locked, no one else apparently having been near. The key was back on its correct hook in the main workshop. The door was unlocked again and left just as before; once more it was found locked and the key replaced neatly. I kept the key with me after that. Spooky, or what? (Or just the Captain, up to his tricks again?)

The Castle itself was reputed to have its own ghost, in the form of a ladies' ashen face which appeared in the window of one of the upstairs apartments, sometimes even when visitors were looking round during the summer season. None of us ever saw her though. Was she perhaps the same



women whom we *all* heard, in the museum courtyard one dark Saturday evening? We were peacefully arrayed in the workshop drinking tea, when the still night air was pierced by a woman's blood-curdling scream, running footsteps, and the sound of one of the heavy main doors slamming shut. Having overcome the initial shock, we trooped as one body out of the workshop, armed with torches and suitable iron bars for self-defence, but of course found nothing whatsoever untoward.

Determined to nail this Ghost thing once and for all, a group of us decided to spend several nights at the museum during one Easter vacation, sleeping in one of the empty former staff flats over the workshops. There were no ghosts whatever in evidence then, just rather a lot of mice!

K.A. Jagers    March 1998