The Landmark Trust

COED Y BLEIDDIAU

History Album

Researched & compiled by Caroline Stanford

June 2018

The Landmark Trust Shottesbrooke Maidenhead Berkshire SL6 3SW
Charity registered in England & Wales 243312 *and Scotland* SC039205

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BASIC DETAILS

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Listed	Grade II
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Landmark tenure	99 year lease
Landmark project surveyor	Richard Burton
Building Surveyor	Peter Napier, Napier & Co.
Quantity Surveyor	Adrian Stenning, Stenning & Co.
Building Archaeologist	Richard K Morriss
Ecologist	Chris Hall
Contractor	Mark Roberts of Mark Roberts Building & Restoration, including Peter Griffiths - Joiner & Decorator James Ashman - Plastering & General
Assisted by:	Melfyn Hughes: Decorating Keith Jones: Drainage work Gareth Wilson: Plumbing
Electrical services	Kevin Parry & Llyr Evans (GP Electrical)
Opened as a Landmark	April 2018

Landmark gratefully acknowledges the Ffestiniog Railway for their advice and logistical support throughout this project, and Peter Johnson and John Alexander for their input to this album.

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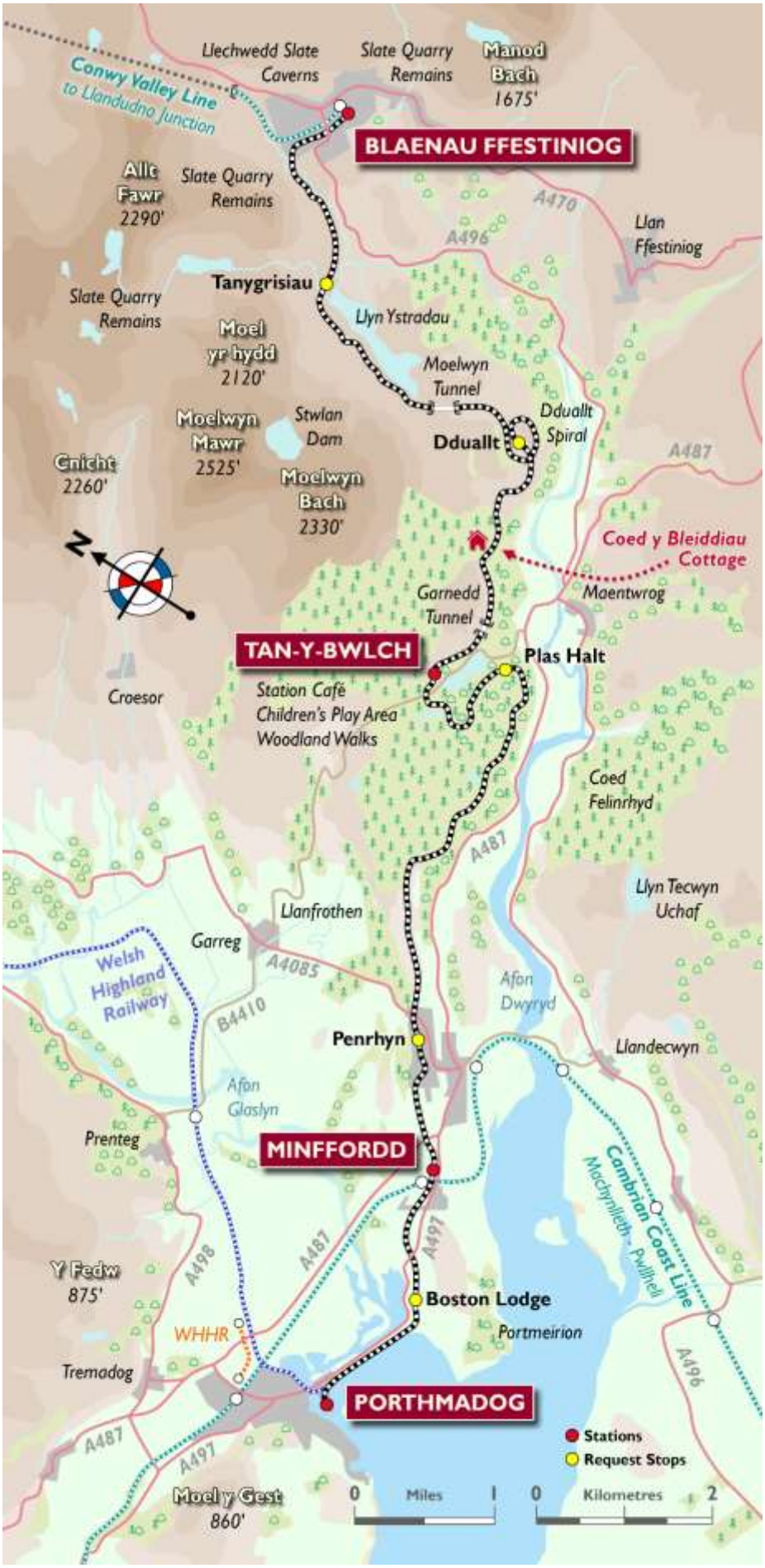
We are also grateful to the generous supporters who have chosen to remain anonymous, and numerous others who supported the appeal, including those who took part in the Landmark raffle which helped to support this project.

Thank you!


Llechwedd Slate Caverns
Slate Quarry Remains
Manod Bach 1675'
Conwy Valley Line to Llandudno Junction
BLAENAU FFESTINIOG
Allt Fawr 2290'
Slate Quarry Remains
A470
A496
Llan Ffestiniog
Tanygrisiau
Slate Quarry Remains
Llyn Ystradau
Moel yr hydd 2120'
Moelwyn Tunnel
Ddualllt Spiral
Moelwyn Mawr 2525'
Stwlan Dam
Ddualllt
A487
Cnicht 2260'
Moelwyn Bach 2330'
Coed y Bleiddiau Cottage
Maentwrog
Garnedd Tunnel
TAN-Y-BWLCH
Plas Halt
Station Café
Children's Play Area
Woodland Walks
Craesor
Coed Felinrhyd
Llyn Tecwyn Uchaf
Llanfrothen
Garreg
Welsh Highland Railway
A4085
B4410
Afon Dwyryd
Penrhyn
Llandecwyn
Afon Glaslyn
Prenteg
MINFFORDD
Cambrian Coast Line
Machynlleth - Pwllheli
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A498
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Boston Lodge
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Tremadog
A496
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Stations
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Coed y Bleiddiau newly completed in March 2018, once again resplendent in the brown and cream of the Ffestiniog Railway's original livery, in use today for intermediate stations on the line.

SUMMARY

Blaenau Ffestiniog was built as a centre for the slate mining industry that sprang up in the area from the mid-18th century. By the early 19th century, the industry was booming. A narrow gauge railway was laid between 1833 and 1836 to bring slate in wagons from the quarries around Blaenau Ffestiniog down the 21.3 km to Porthmadoc, another new town created to serve the needs of this new industry. This was still the dawn of the age of steam, so gravity (managed by brakesmen) took the slate wagons downslope; they were hauled back up by horses.

By the late 1850s, this horse tramline was reaching its operational capacity, with output from the Ffestiniog slate quarries still rising. In 1862, it was decided to adopt steam locomotives. At just under two feet wide, the track hugged the contour line on the steep slopes and during the 1850s and '60s some of the sharper curves, including the line at Coed y Bleiddiau, had been reduced. Steam engines had not been built for such routes before but George England & Co in London took on the challenge. The first official train ran on 23 October 1863, and in 1865, the Ffestiniog became the first narrow gauge railway in Britain to carry passengers.

Coed y Bleiddiau was built in 1863-4 for the eventual Superintendent of the line, Thomas Henry Hovendon, between Hafod-y-Llyn station (from 1872 replaced by Tan-y-Bwlch) and a watering stop at Dduallt. At the railway's peak, nine trains a day puffed merrily past. The cottage originally had just three ground floor rooms, with a single first floor bedroom at the rear. Superintendent Hovendon had two wives and seven children. The family continued to live in the cottage after his death on 30 December 1903, aged 64, but by 1913, the railway no longer needed the cottage for its employees.

Coed y Bleiddiau was then let as a holiday home, and here the associations of this humble cottage become more glamourous. From 1925 until 1933, it was rented by composer Granville Bantock, a leading figure in early 20th-century British music. Bantock was a conductor of the Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, and moved easily through the international worlds of the arts and classical music, counting as his friends Edward Elgar, Richard Strauss, Thomas Beecham and Sir Henry Wood, founder of the Proms. Bantock was knighted in 1930. He enjoyed many family holidays at Coed y Bleiddiau with his family and friends. His daughter Myrrha wrote that 'No one who stayed at Coed y Bleiddiau was anything but happy there. The lovely mountains all round, the feeling of peace and of being completely cut off from the civilised world was peaceful to the spirit.'

From 1930, Bantock's friend Harry St John 'Jack' Philby became a visitor to the cottage, taking over the lease in 1933 and keeping it until 1947. Philby was

Double Fairlie 'David Lloyd George' steams through the Vale of Ffestiniog

A delivery of building materials being craned off the works train outside Coed y Bleiddiau in November 2017, when restoration works were almost complete.

a leading authority on, and sympathiser with, the Arab world, who could not, most felt, be relied upon to put his own country's interests first. In 1939, Philby stood as parliamentary candidate for both for the Labour Party and the right wing British People's Party, founded by Oswald Mosley.

In 1951, Babs and Bob Johnson took up the lease. Still remembered by many, they were a popular couple on the line, who tended a well-kept flower garden in front of the cottage and gathered sphagnum moss locally for use as medical dressings in Merseyside hospitals. The Johnsons lived at the cottage until 2006, until finally their advancing years made this no longer practical.

Meanwhile, from 1955 the Ffestioniog Railway Company was heroically reviving and then operating the railway line. This continues to absorb all their resources and after 2006 Coed y Bleiddiau became a sad eyesore, too remote to justify repair for permanent occupation. The Railway Heritage Trust suggested Landmark might help, and in 2013 we took a long lease on the cottage. By then, the cottage was severely dilapidated, and needed complete repair and refurbishment when Landmark took it on. The roof was tackled first thanks to an unsolicited donation, and once we had met our overall funding target, work began in earnest in 2016.

Rotten woodwork, plaster and ceilings was stripped out carefully, retaining all we could of the original fabric. Where necessary, new slate floor slabs were fitted on the ground floor, and wooden floorboards replaced on the first floor. We discovered that the cottage's small rear extension was put on very soon after its first construction – perhaps due to Mr Hovendon's growing family.

Although the building is tiny and its construction fairly simple, its isolated location made the project difficult logistically, even with sterling help from the Ffestiniog Railway. Delivery of materials took three days; a day to load up, a day to transport down the line, (sometimes in the old hand operated trolleys), and a day to unload. The building was completed rewired and new services installed (including a septic tank) before re-plastering, putting in a new bathroom and kitchen and rebuilding the chimney stacks. Sash windows and the tiny, rickety porch were dismantled and taken to our furniture store to be re-made. Externally, the joinery has been re-painted in brown and cream, traditional livery of the Ffestiniog line for its intermediate stops.

Two exciting discoveries were made: the first, an 1837 railway mile post from the days of the horse tramway that had been used as a lintel for the bathroom window. This is only the fourth such post to be found, and has been returned to the Railway. We also found the name 'Hovendon' scratched into a window pane in curly script. We can only speculate whether this was engraved by the Superintendent, or by one of his mischievous children. Now anyone who chooses can experience the magic of this place, and of occasional steam engines passing the front door.

Introduction

At first sight, a dilapidated cottage and then unlisted, Coed y Bleiddiau might have seem too unremarkable for Landmark. But from its beginning, Landmark has been guardian to the unremarkable and overlooked just as much as the spectacular, and the unremarkable often turns out to have just as much interest as the flamboyant. This is certainly the case for Coed y Bleiddiau.

It was first brought to our attention by the Railway Heritage Trust, empty and decaying, a cottage that could easily slip into oblivion. It is owned by the Ffestiniog Railway, and they were reluctant to sell on the open market a cottage that had played such an integral role in the Railway's own history. However, the Railway's funds are absorbed by saving and maintaining the line and its historic rolling stock. They did not have the resources to refurbish Coed y Bleiddiau themselves, and were keen for some element of public access.

For Landmark, there were other challenges. Coed y Bleiddiau's setting at the heart of the spectacular Snowdonia National Park is glorious, but there are operational challenges in such a remote location, with no easy access by car, or for building materials and furniture. However, we soon realised that with the help of the Railway, the cottage could be brought back to the symbiotic life it had enjoyed since it was built. This very reliance and remoteness could prove delightful for Landmarkers. As for Coed y-Bleiddiau's history, that of the Blaenau Ffestiniog line is relatively well known, a fascinating tale of the resourceful projectors of the early Industrial Revolution. What also emerged is the story of Coed y Bleiddiau's own tenants over the decades, a chain of people illustrating very varied aspects of British life since 1860, from diligent railway officer, to internationally renowned composer, to shadowy Arabist, to well-loved moss gatherers. Humble Coed y Bleiddiau turns out to hold a cornucopia of history and people, and well worth its place in Landmark's portfolio.

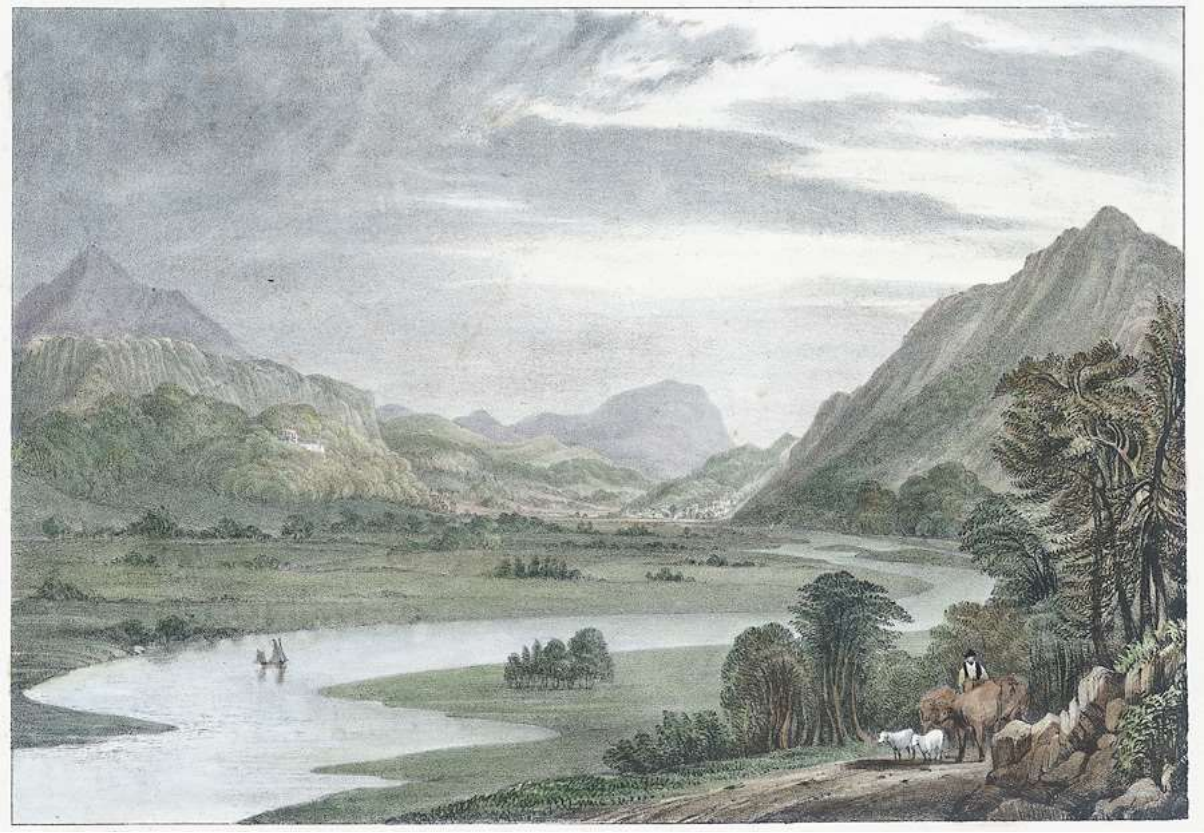
Brief History of the Ffestiniog Railway

Coed y Bleiddiau's history cannot be told without that of the Ffestiniog Railway, which in turn is inextricably linked to the history and development of the slate industry and the building of an embankment. What makes the Railway so unique is that it was both enabled by, and permanently hampered by, its origin as a converted horse tramway of extremely narrow gauge (the width between the rails) of just 1 foot 115/8th inches, passing through very restricted tunnels. While lines elsewhere adopted broader gauge tracks, the Festiniog Railway stuck to the narrower gauge that first allowed the horse-drawn slate trams to navigate the contours of this challenging mountainous terrain.

It became the first railway to operate double–bogie[1] narrow gauge locomotives, wagons and carriages, and to use wrought iron under-frames for carriages. The challenges of transferring goods onward to different gauge tracks and roads had to be studied and overcome as the Festiniog Railway developed into a monument to well-planned and integrated industrial evolution, one of the few successful commercial enterprises of the industrial history of North Wales. It served not only its region but the world beyond, transporting raw materials down to the sea to be carried to far-off continents, and managers of other Railway Companies regarded its profits with envy and incredulity. This brief narrative provides an overview of the stories of the Railway and the slate industry story, which are told in detail in the many books on the subjects in the Coed y Bleiddiau's bookcase.

For centuries, high in the mountains around Blaenau Ffestiniog, slate deposits had been exploited in small quantities and laboriously taken by packhorse and farm carts over rough, steep roads down to the River Dwyryd.

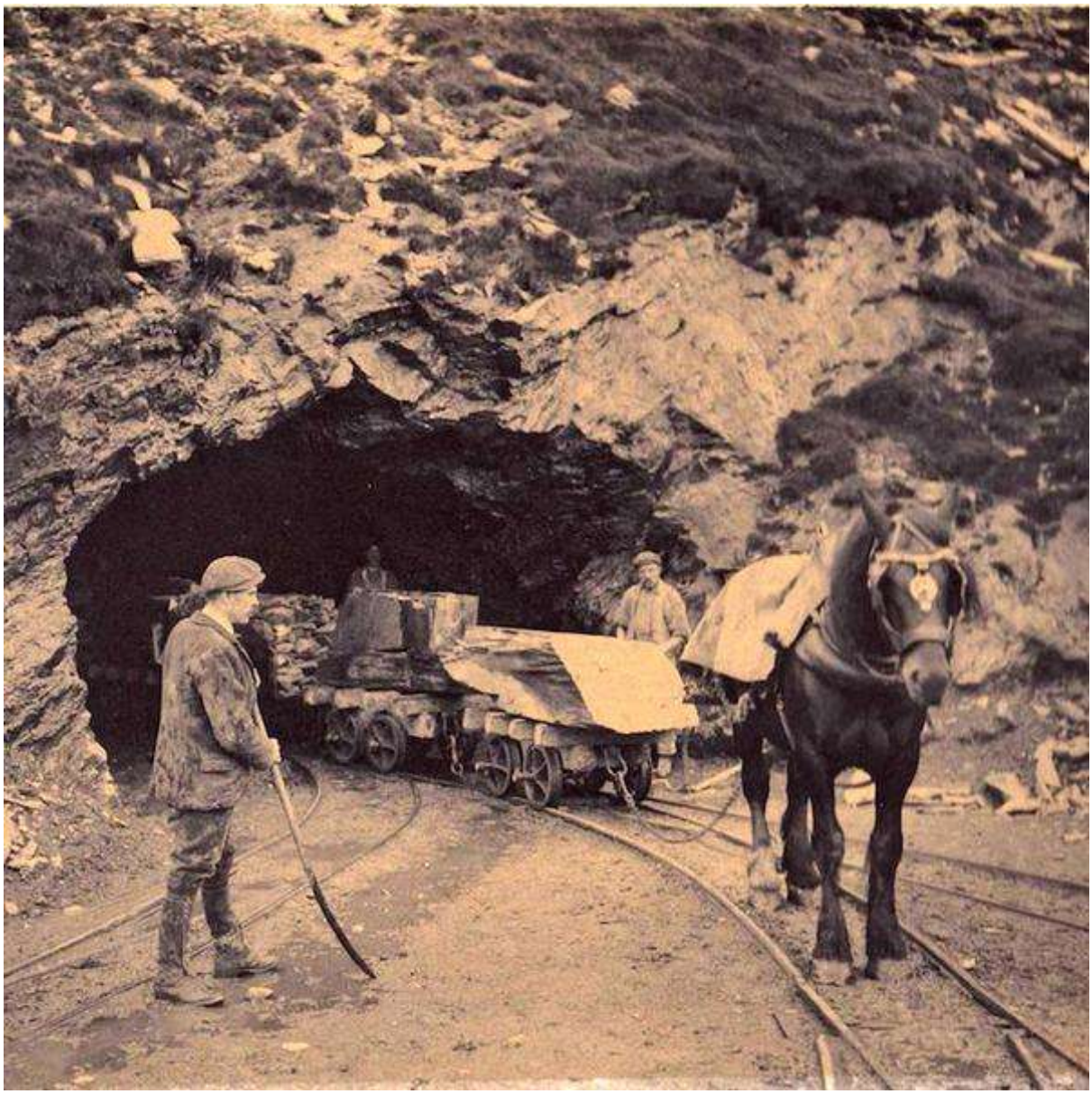
[1] A bogie is a structure underneath a railway vehicle (wagon, coach or locomotive) to which axles (and, hence, wheels) are attached through bearings. By acting as a pivot, it facilitates the passage of the otherwise rigid vehicles around bends.



Views of the Vale of Ffestiniog in the early 19th century, illustrating both the meandering progress of the River Dwyryd to the sea and the appeal of the Picturesque as gentry began to build their villas. (Both views by David Cox.)

Here the slate was loaded into river boats for transport downstream to the sea, and then loaded again into sea-faring sailing ships.

Port facilities at the end of the line were still virtually non-existent, and the exit to the sea lay across treacherous marshland. The slowness of this laborious transport system was a brake on any acceleration of production, and resulted in high levels of broken slates.



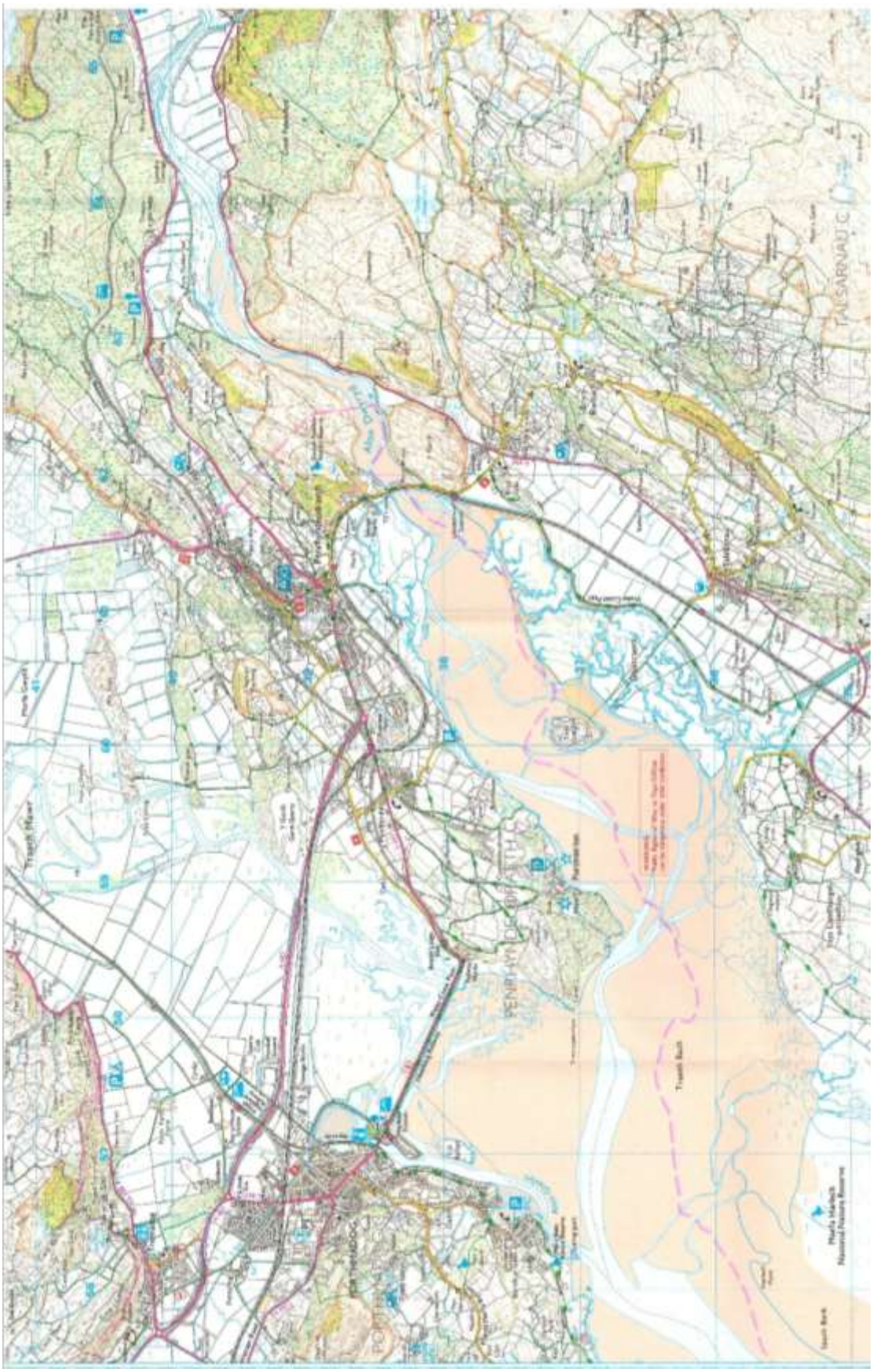
Early photo of a horse drawn slate tram. The wagons (or bogies) are rudimentary, the slate being simply piled on top.

The Building of the Embankment

Land reclamation was therefore an essential precursor to more efficient transport. Tides and frequent floods made the River Glaslyn estuary and its large expanse of sand and marshland, known as the Traeth Mawr, both difficult to cross and agriculturally worthless. However, the square-ish natural basin into which the Rivers Dwyryd and Glaslyn drain had clear potential as a naturally sheltered harbour. The first step to opening up communication routes with the outside world was to create safe passage across this estuary marshland.

Proposals to drain Traeth Mawr (which means 'the big sands') had been made as early as the 1620s, when Dutch engineers were so successfully draining the East Anglian fens, but William Wynn of Wern's small experimental banks in the Mawr proved ineffectual, even when later improved by William Williams of Plas Brondanw.

Then in 1798, William Alexander Madocks bought the estate of Tan-yr-Allt on the western bank of Traeth Mawr. Madocks, a Foxite Whig, reformer and speculator, was born in 1773 in Denbighshire, and had followed the traditional gentry path to study at Oxford. His father was a successful barrister of Lincoln's Inn, and Madocks inherited his father's fortune and served as MP for Boston in Lincolnshire from 1802 to 1820. He came to North Wales with a grand vision to develop the potential of this remote area, with land reclamation his first goal.

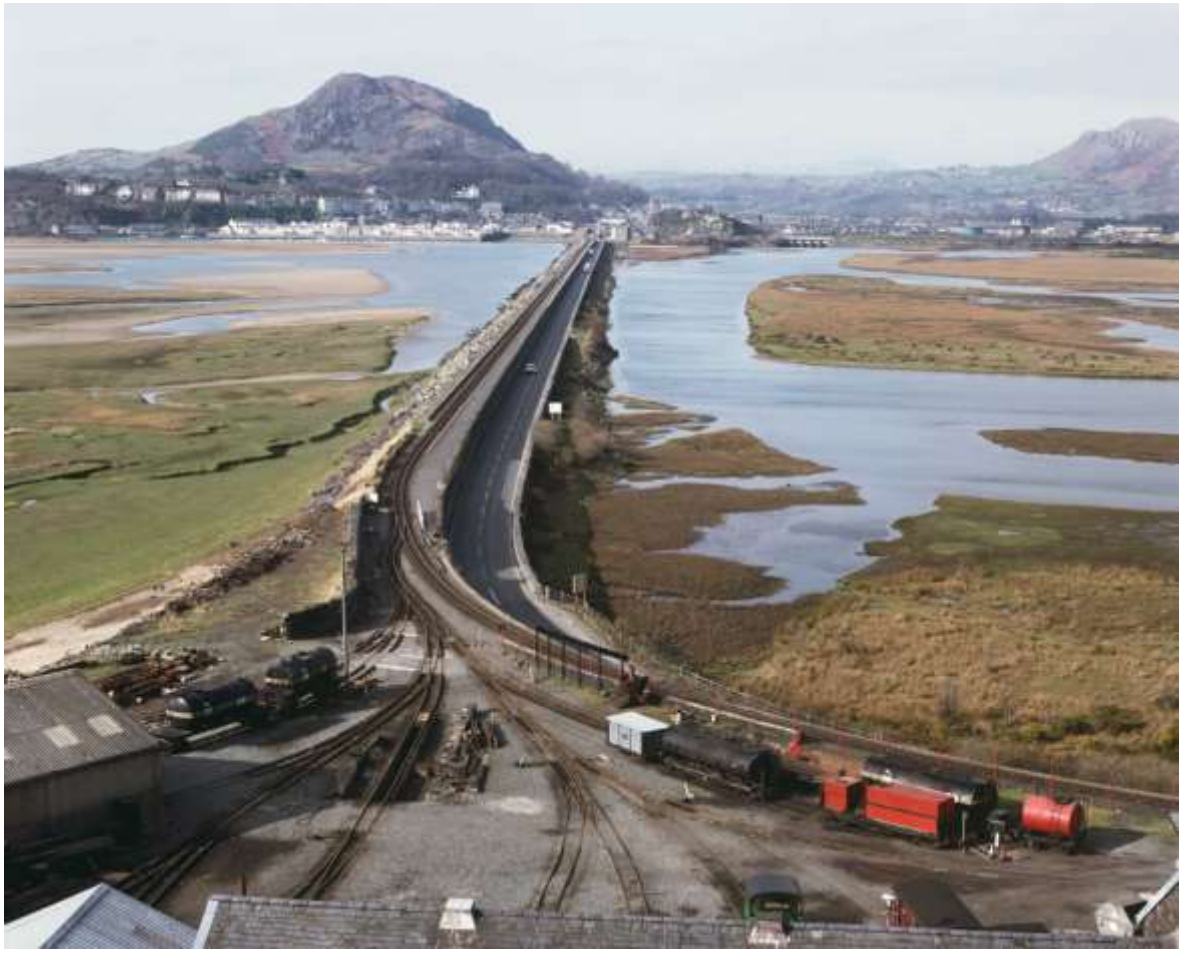


OS map of the estuaries of the Rivers Glaswyn and Dwyryd and the Railway as far as Plas Tan-y-Bwlch. The Traeth Mawr refers to the whole of the Glaslyn estuary below the Aberglasyn bridge, encompassing the treacherous marshlands the Embankment had to cross. Not to scale.

In 1800, the British and Irish governments had passed the Acts of Union to create the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, heightening the need for improved communication between the two countries. The west coast of Wales was to develop closer links with Ireland through the nineteenth century. Madocks hoped for a route across his estate, to reach Porthdinllaen, on the northern coast of the Llŷn Peninsula, to provide a terminus for a ferry to Dublin. However, such a route would involve a crossing of the dangerous Traeth Mawr sands.

Madocks aspired to create a communication route from his Tan-yr-Allt estate to Irish shipping lanes on the north side of the Llyn peninsular.

Madocks's first attempt to control the seas set out to reclaim Penmorfa Marsh from the estuary, assisted by surveyor and civil engineer James Creassy. Creassy had experience of land drainage schemes in the Lincolnshire Fens around Madocks' Boston constituency on the other side of England. They built a semi-circular 2 mile (3.2 km) embankment, running parallel to the course of the river, thus reclaiming some 1,082 acres (438 ha) of land. This embankment was between 11 and 20 feet (3.4 and 6.1 m) high, and was made of sand, covered in turves. The project cost £3,000, and took 200 men with 150 barrows about six months to complete.



This modern view across the Embankment towards Porthmadoc shows the challenges faced in crossing the treacherous Traeth Mawr.

Creassy also supervised the construction of two catchwater drains and a large sluice, to drain the area behind the embankment. By 1803, Madocks was growing wheat and rape on the reclaimed land, and planting barley and grass.

Emboldened by the success of this first embankment, Madocks revived the plan for a more substantial stone-filled embankment across the mouth of the River Glaslyn, to enclose a further 3,042 acres (12.3 square km), and also provide a safe passage across the estuary. Around 1805, Madocks began building a model town called Tremadoc, or Tremadog today, which he planned himself.

But Madocks was dividing his time between Boston, London and Tan-yr-Allt, and had limited time to devote to his Welsh projects. He needed someone to manage them, someone who spoke Welsh and knew the area and its people. John Williams, a gardener from Anglesey, had arrived in search of work in 1800, and had helped with the construction of the first embankment. He went on to manage the gardens and nurseries of the Madocks estate and became instrumental in Madocks's engineering schemes as their partnership developed.

It took Madocks three attempts to obtain passage of an Act of Parliament for a stone embankment across Treath Mawr, finally achieving this in 1807 (it seems previous reclamation took place without parliamentary authority). He was to bear its cost, and in return receive ownership of the enclosed sands and rent from reclaimed marshland. Williams decided on the alignment of the 1,600-yard (1,500 m) embankment, 21 feet (6.4 m) high, with five sluice gates, each 15 feet (4.6 m) high, to allow the Glaslyn to discharge into the sea. Engineer Thomas Payne was employed to design the embankment. It was an astonishing feat of construction, costing more than twice Madocks's estimate of £25,300. The work proved to be more difficult than expected: stones tipped into the water were carried away by the sands, and the work was battered by both the tides and the outflow of the Glaslyn. Eventually, rush matting was used to form a foundation onto which the stones could be tipped, a technique well known in Lincolnshire, but new to Wales.

William Alexander Madocks, MP
(mezzotint after portrait by James Ramsay, *c.*1808. NPG)

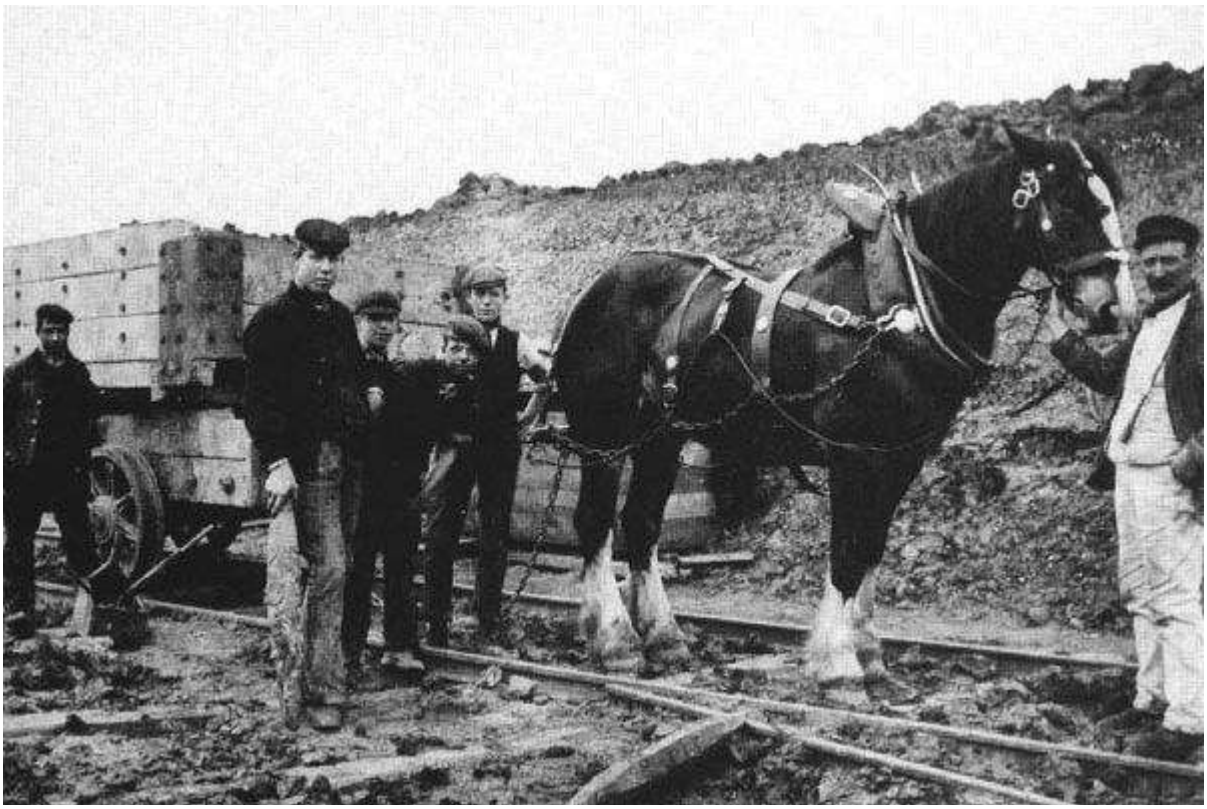
The Embankment created a new harbour, which Madocks predictably christened Port Madoc, and is known today as Porthmadoc.

Some three hundred men were employed on the construction of the Embankment and barracks and workshops were built on both sides of the river at Ynys Towyn and at Penrhyh Cottage). The latter barracks, renamed Boston Lodge after Madocks' Lincolnshire constituency, later became part of the Festiniog Railway's Boston Lodge Works, and are still in this use today.

By now, Madocks was in ill-health, and was being pursued in the courts for debts, but he remained enthusiastic. In July 1811, the last gap was finally closed. In September, a four-day Embankment Jubilee was held, with an ox roast at the middle of the Cob, horse racing at Morfa Bychan and an Eisteddfod, which included prizes for the best Welsh Poem on Agriculture and for playing the harp.

Madocks was, however, very heavily in debt. As a Member of Parliament, he was immune from civil arrest while Parliament was in session, but only for forty days afterwards. The long recess at the end of 1811 put him at risk of being thrown into Fleet prison. Parliament did not re-assemble until January 1812, and Madocks spent his time in Wales trying to resolve his financial affairs and consolidating his Embankment.

Then in February 1812, disaster struck. A great gale blew and high tides breached the Embankment. Madocks, by now near penniless, could not finance further work, but such was their pride in its accomplishment that hundreds of workmen volunteered to repair it. A local campaign began to raise funds, in which the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, who came to Tan-yr-Allt in September 1812, participated with enthusiasm. Williams circulated the news in the region, and though many landowners and farmers had initially been hostile to the project, they now understood its importance, and volunteered any assistance they could give.



The Embankment was a huge feat of engineering (top, under construction- note Madocks' initials on the wagon). It was executed with the simplest tools and equipment such as this later photo of a horse tram bringing a load of sleepers (location not known).

Madocks, effectively bankrupt, transferred his estate to his brother to foil his creditors. Finally, in 1814, the breach in the embankment was repaired, and it opened for traffic again. Madocks' persistence in the face of such adversity is a vivid illustration of the stoicism and belief needed to complete such feats of engineering in the early years of the Industrial Revolution.

However, Madocks still had his regional plan in mind, to exploit natural resources as well as to improve communication. Blaenau Ffestiniog (at this date just a small settlement) had plenty of slate deposits, but quarrying was still hampered by the difficulty of getting the slate to market. Madocks had tried to develop a port at Ynys Cyngar, some 2 miles (3.2 km) from the Embankment, called Y Cob in Welsh, but the effects of diverting the Glaslyn through its exit sluice were such that it had scoured out a conveniently deep channel by Ynys Tywyn, the island at the western end of the Cob. He had already built a canal from there to Tremadoc, and the Ynys Tywyn location was now better suited for a harbour than Ynys Cyngar. He also realised that a railway from Blaenau Ffestiniog could transport slates from the quarries across The Cob straight to ships in the Ynys Tywyn harbour, and so set about obtaining Acts of Parliament to sanction both railway and harbour, despite some local opposition.

By late 1824, the harbour was authorised for use by vessels of up to 60 tons. The route for the railway proved more problematic. John Williams was by this time the Director of Works for the newly named Port Madoc Harbour, and took on responsibility for the railway plans, as Madocks' health declined. Taken on an extended holiday by his wife, Madocks died in Paris in 1828, and so did not live to see his vision for the integrated infrastructure that would transform the area.

In 1830, Samuel Holland, who was quarrying slate at Rhiwbryfdir, joined forces with Henry Archer, a young businessman from Dublin, to promote the Ffestiniog Railway, a horse tram incorporated by Act of Parliament on 23 May 1832. The Act gave permission for its use as a 'gravity' line, and is still invoked today by the Railway on (rare) occasions when a gravity train is run as re-enactment.

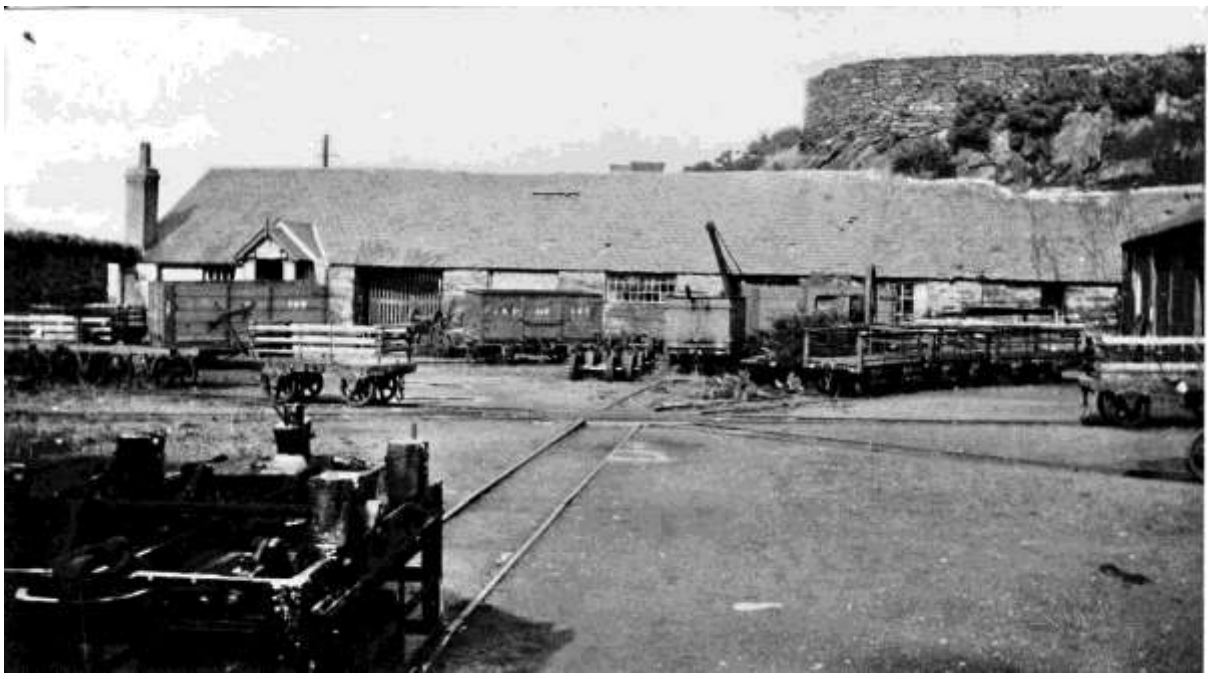
A horse-drawn tram carrying slate at Dyffryn Nantlle on the northwest edge of Snowdonia, in 1959.

James Spooner from Worcestershire was responsible for the line's survey and construction from Blaenau Ffestiniog to Porthmadoc. Steam technology was already on the horizon: the iron ore industry in South Wales had prompted Richard Trevithick to invent the first locomotive engine driven by steam, and in 1829, Robert Stevenson won the competition to design an improved steam engine with his famous Rocket. For now, though, steam still represented the cutting edge.

The Ffestiniog route relied instead on simple gravity and horsepower. Its final mile crossed the Cob, and this enabled the loaded slate trains to run all the way down to the coast by gravity. Horses were carried and fed on the Down in 'dandy' wagons before hauling the empty wagons back up the line. Smaller branch lines were already in use to bring slate wagons down from the quarries to central collection points, most as double track counterbalanced inclines on which the loaded wagons going down hauled the empty ones back up. On a few, a drum winch hauled the empty wagons back up the steep slope. The 1 foot 11 5/8th gauge (just short of 2 feet) used for the new railway matched that being used in the quarries, being wide enough to allow the horses to work efficiently when pulling the empty wagons back up, and narrow enough to allow the railway to negotiate the sharp curves made necessary by the mountainous terrain. The wagons were small enough to be loaded easily and then man-handled in the quarry and at the port.

In 1847, James Spooner's son Charles Easton Spooner suggested that Boston Lodge, originally used to house the men who built The Cob, and the stables built for the tramway horses against the side of the house, be used instead as a workshop for the Railway. The Boston Lodge Works came to play a crucial role in the life of the railway, everything the Company needed being made here, eventually, locomotives. Originally, only passenger coach bodies, requiring different skills of joinery and varnishing, were always made by outside firms.

The remains of the winding house at the head of the Rhiwbach Tramway No. 2 incline in 2007. The Rhiwbach Tramway was one of the narrow gauge tracks connecting the remote slate quarries east of Blaenau with the Ffestiniog Railway.



Sheds at Boston Lodge, built in 1843 to house wagons and demolished in the 1950s but the other workshops now flourish again. The small office on the left survives.

The Arrival of Steam

As slate traffic increased thanks to the new tramway and port, the horse and gravity system of operation could no longer cope with the quantities being produced. Blaenau Ffestiniog was growing, as the booming quarries drew workers and their families. Steam engines were developing fast elsewhere, and provided the obvious solution. But in the 1840s, steam locomotives on so narrow a gauge were thought to be impossible to build; indeed carrying passengers was illegal on new railways of less than the eventual British standard gauge of 4 feet 8½ inches.

These factors delayed the introduction of steam on the Ffestiniog. In 1856 Charles Easton Spooner succeeded his father, to serve as Manager, Engineer and Clerk of the Railway Company for 30 years. Spooner printed the first timetable on 16 September 1856 for up to six trains running each day, and he also looked more closely at the possibility of steam locomotives for a narrow gauge track. Eventually contracts were signed with George England and Co. of London, for four small narrow gauge engines. In July 1863 *The Princess* and *The Mountaineer* were delivered and they entered service in October. The remaining two, *The Prince* and *Palmerston,* arrived in 1864. Remarkably, these last two are still in service on the line today, even if by now almost all their parts have been renewed.

Also in 1864, the Board of Trade gave the Railway the transformative permission to run passenger trains, the first on a narrow gauge in Britain. The four-wheeled carriages were very low to keep the weight as central as possible and some of these early vehicles still survive in the Railway's collection today.

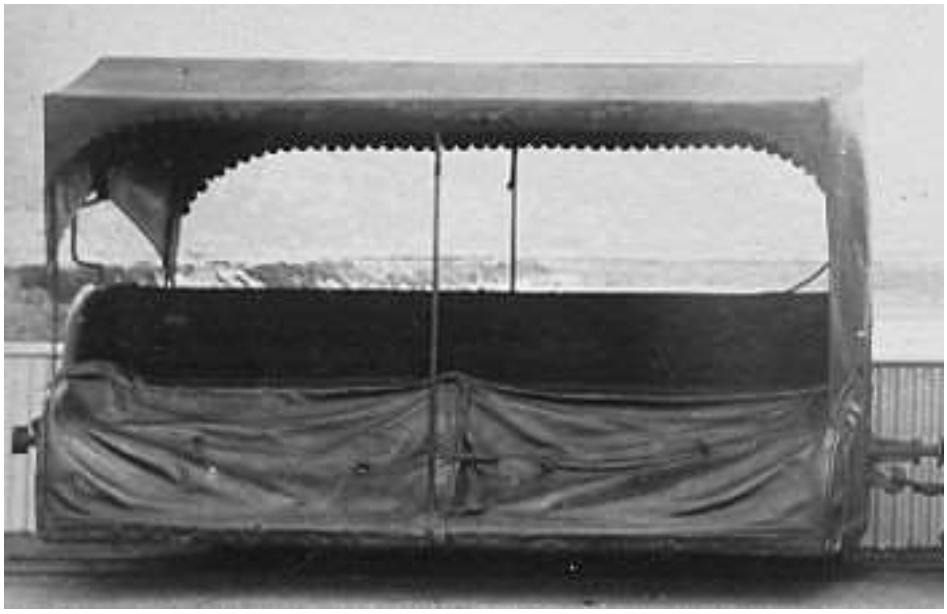
The official fare-paying passenger service was duly inaugurated on 6 January 1865, every day except Sunday when no trains ran.

Prince **(top) and** ***Palmerston*** **were among the first narrow gauge steam engines to be delivered by George England & Co. in 1864. While almost all their parts have been restored by now, they still ply the line today.**

Carriage 2, built in 1863/4 by Brown, Marshall & Co of Adderley Park Birmingham. It had a first class capacity of six each side. Believed to have been part of the first batch of narrow gauge passenger coaches built in the world for public service (along with Nos. 3, 4, 5 and 11), to designs assumed to have been made by C.E. Spooner. Rebuilt before 1887 as an observation car. Still in service on the line's 1870s Train.

Carriage 3, also built by Brown, Marshall & Co in 1863/4, had a third class capacity of seven on each side and is also believed to have been part of the first batch of narrow gauge passenger coaches Still in service on the line as part of the line's 1930s Train.

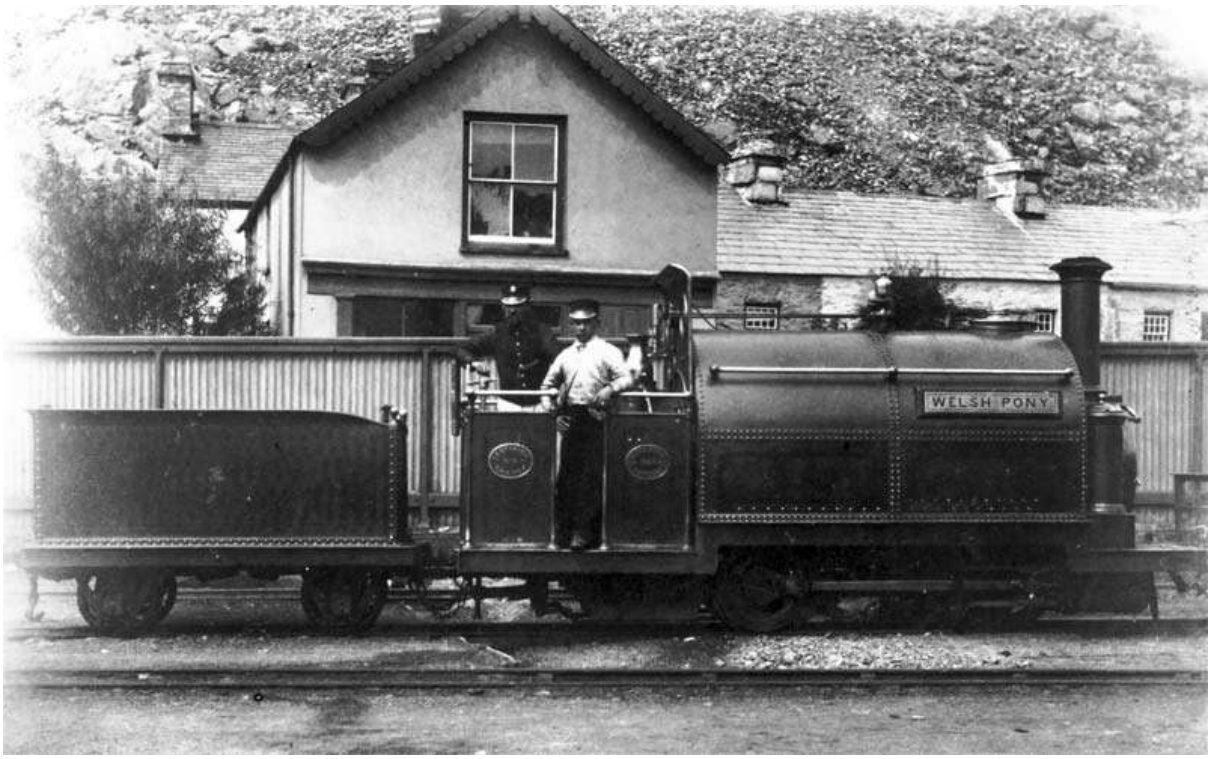
Carriage 8 is a third generation quarryman's carriage built *c.*1885. The first quarryman's carriages were little more than open wagons with seats. A second generation provided sides and a roof, but no doors. Built at Boston Lodge, the seating is arranged around the sides and end of the vehicle, and in the centre of the floor over the brake cylinder.



A so-called 'Flying Bench', Carriage 11, shown here in about 1887, was another of the earliest forms of third class accommodation. It is shown below after restoration in 1990; today's Health & Safety strictures mean that this carriage is very rarely sighted, although according to the Railway's Festipedia website, one side at least offers 'an unparalleled view of the line.' All the carriages shown here have been heavily restored today.

Slate wagon 212, built between 1858 and 1865 and still used for demonstrations of gravity trains today. The brakesman rode on top of the loaded wagon and applied the brake when necessary. Each wagon could carry two tons of slate.

There were three classes of accommodation, initially in squat, four-wheel ‘boxes’ that barely cleared the ground, single compartments with a long seat set lengthways down the carriage. By 1866 these had been replaced by higher running, more roomy carriages with two compartments and lateral seating. Semi-open and open observation carriages soon followed. More basic carriages continued to offer a cheap service for quarrymen, travelling to work in the quarries. Quarrymen initially travelled in open wagons, some with crude roofs fastened over, making them look rather like a beehive. As traffic increased two more, slightly more powerful engines, 'Welsh Pony' and 'Little Giant', arrived in 1867, with a longer wheelbase and larger water tank.



***Welsh Pony*, shown here at Dwffys in 1881, has been a true workhorse of the line. By 1887, it had already done 280,000 miles. Stored in Boston Lodge for 72 years from 1938.**

Tan-y-Bwlch Station around 1900

Dduallt watering stop in 1984, after the Railway re-opened. Dduallt later acquired its own station, and was an important stop on the line.

Development of the Line

The only stations in 1865 were Port Madoc, Penrhyn, Hafod-y-Lyn (the intermediate passing station) and Dinas. In 1866 a stop at Tan-y-Grisiau was added. The intermediate stop where Up trains stopped for water was just a water tank near Dduallt, just upline from Coed y Bleiddiau. Dduallt station was built nearby *c.*1880 and became n important stopping place with its own stationmaster and clerk-porter. Up goods trains were obliged to stop here, especially those carrying beer barrels to Blaenau. The bungs in the barrels were loosened at Dduallt to counter the effect of any change of temperature in the Moelwyn Tunnel, and perhaps the agitation of the journey. The station master and clerk are said to have made the most of this opportunity to sample the goods!

When Tan-y-Bwlch station opened in July 1872, a short drive from the road and with goods facilities, Hafod-y-Llyn was abandoned, and Dduallt ceased to be a watering stop. Tan-y-Bwlch was built on an S-curve which meant special signalling arrangements were needed. A roadway was made connecting with the Maentwrog-Llanfrothen road, and a new water tank was built at the Up end. The scenery around Tan-y-Bwlch is among the finest on the line, including the dramatic drop to Llyn Mair below. Invasive rhododendrons have long been a problem along certain stretches of the line, dead vegetation creating a fire risk: in earlier years, boys were employed by the Company to walk the length of the line stamping out fires caused by embers flying from passing trains.

Plas Tan-y-Bwlch (listed II*) was home of the Oakeley family. The present estate dates back to at least the mid-16th century. Ieuan ap Iorwerth ap Adda is recognised as its founder, tracing a lineage back to the Princes of Gwynedd in the late 11th and early 12th centuries. In the late 18th century, an Oakeley heiress brought new slate money into this ancient lineage, long since transmuted into Evanses and Griffithses.

Scenes of Plas Tan-y-Bwlch and its builder, William Edward Oakeley. Today, it is a study centre.

The first Plas is thought to have been sited elsewhere, perhaps on the site of the Oakeley Arms, and the earliest house on the present site is the one built (though perhaps not completed) by Robert Griffith in 1748. The character of the current house is as built by the Oakeleys, who owned a huge slate mine at Blaenau Ffestiniog. William Edward Oakeley inherited the estate in 1878 and set about extensive rebuilding, overseen by Chester architect John Douglas. The estate was also beautified with specimen trees: Plas Tan-y-Bwlch has four UK champion trees, nine Welsh champions and a further 16 Gwynedd champions (largest of their species in the region) on the Tree Register of the British Isles.[2]

The Oakeleys had the right to flag down any train at a small halt behind the house, on which stood a single seat. The railway carried heavy traffic of timber, coal and other goods to and from the estate. The estate had a bathing pool, filled with seawater brought up by train from Porthadoc to the Plas in a tank mounted on a chassis and emptied through a tap at the side into a reservoir tank beside the line. The estate became a byword for progress under W.E. Oakeley, who extended the house considerably, and built a hydroelectric system that made Plas Tan-y-Bwlch the first house in north Wales to be lit by electricity created on site. In 1968, Meirionnydd County Council bought the estate from the Oakeleys, and in 1975 the house re-opened as a Study Centre for the Snowdonia National Park, still thriving today.

Slate production continued to increase rapidly and by 1868, the Railway was carrying 126,745 tons of slate a year. Its running expenses were low, at just 42% of revenue compared with around 50% for standard gauge lines. In August 1868 the Ffestiniog Railway declared a dividend of 6% for the half year. 'Hear that, ye holders of ordinary [broad gauge] railway stock!' trumpeted *The Engineer* for 24th September 1869. '12% per annum from railway property! Why is this result obtained? Simply because the line that made it is cheaply made and

[2] The UK Champions at the Plas are a Japanese red cedar, a golden-leaved Lawson cypress, a Sawara cypress and a variegated holly olive tree. The Welsh Champions include a downy birch, a Katsura tree, a Sawara cypress, Japanese red cedar, pocket handkerchief tree, oriental spruce, Chinese rhododendron, Smith's rhododendron and silver lime.

is cheaply worked. It is adapted to the purpose; it is not too big for its traffic.' The article continues to compare unfavourably the enormous dead weights of standard gauge stock against their paying loads, with the low dead weights of narrow gauge equipment in proportion to its loads.

In 1872, the engineer and locomotive designer Robert Fairlie described a typical load for *Welsh Pony* as 'One First Class, One Second Class and One Third Class Carriage, a guard's brake van, four goods wagons and twenty-four slate wagons, these last being empty. The total gross weight of such a train will be 55 tons, of which 16 tons consist of passengers and the goods carried. During the Down journey, the goods wagons then being empty and the slate wagons loaded, the total weight of the train will be about 93 tons, of which about 54 tons is the paying load carried.'

Gravity working for passenger trains ceased from around 1871 although the Down slate trains still ran by gravity alone with no engine. While this contributed somewhat to keeping fuel costs down, such savings were offset by the increased number of staff required to bring the trains down to Portmadoc by gravity. Slate trains were on average manned by three brakesmen for trains of more than 80 wagons, who scrambled along the tops of the loaded wagons, jumping perilously from one to another when adjusting the brakes.

The Ffestiniog's example of a narrow gauge railway was by now sweeping the Empire and beyond, bringing improved transport to barren areas that might otherwise have waited long for the benefits of rapid transport opening up commerce. But by now, the limitations of a single line were becoming restrictive due to the sheer quantities of slate being transported. The solution seemed to be to double the Ffestiniog line, and in 1869 an Act was passed permitting this.

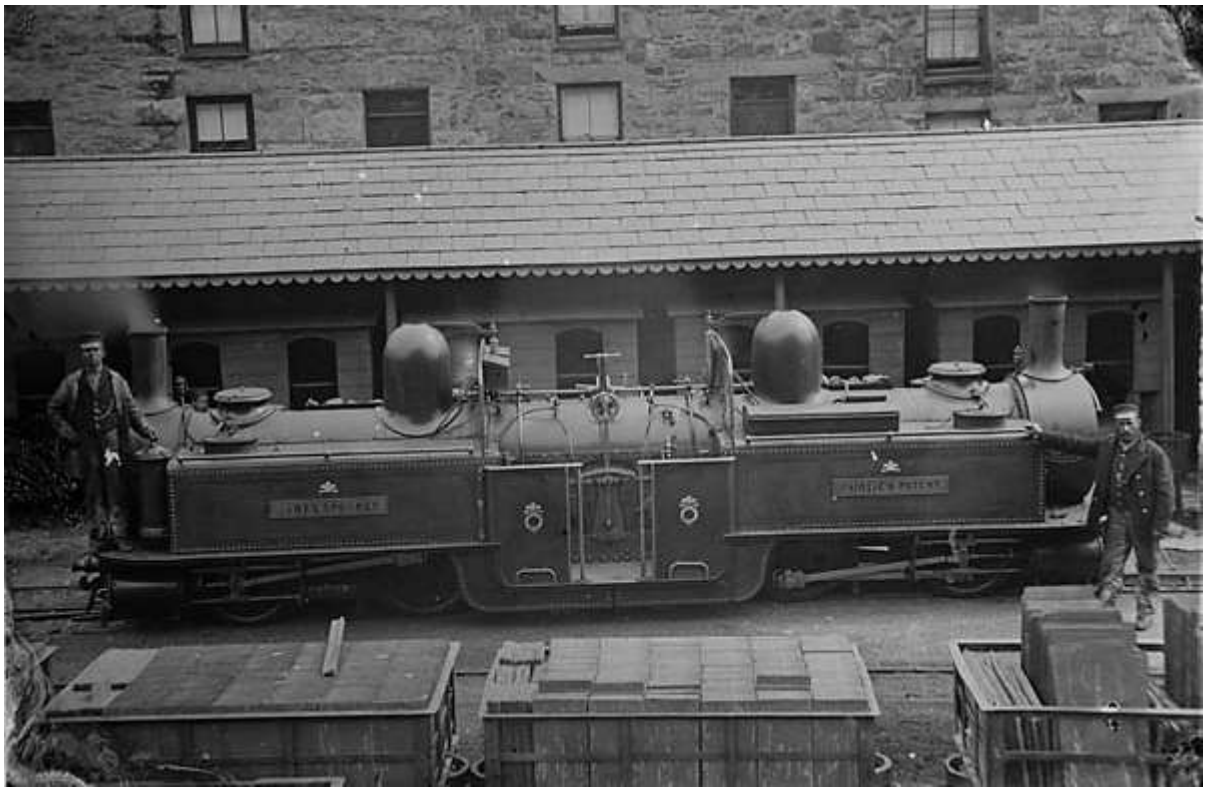
However, doubling the line would have been extremely expensive and instead the Railway turned to the ingenuity of Robert Fairlie. The problem was how to build a more powerful locomotive that could still get safely around the sharp

curves of the line, and up its steep gradients. In 1863, Fairlie had patented a new ‘double-bogie’ engine, which had its driving wheels and cylinders mounted on separate frames to the boiler assembly. These auxiliary frames pivoted to the locomotive frames to form independently swivelling bogies (the structure beneath a railway vehicle to which the axles are attached). This gave sufficient flexibility to take up the inequalities of the track and tight curves, providing a longer wheelbase and so spreading the weight of the engine and keeping the weight per axle to a minimum. The engine could pull longer trains such as were dictated by the narrowness of the Ffestiniog track.

The ‘double-bogie’ engine looked like two locomotives placed back-to-back, but was in fact one long rigid boiler with central fireboxes and driving position. Each end of the boiler was mounted on a swivelling powered bogie, allowing the two halves of the locomotive to swing round tight curves. The same principle is used in most of today's diesel and electric locomotives. In 1870, before a distinguished assembly of railway engineers, including the Imperial Russian Commission, the first Fairlie double engine 'Little Wonder' was demonstrated and proved to have more than double the power of the earlier locomotives. It was a pioneering moment.

In 1869, George England’s works produced the first narrow gauge double-bogie engine, the Festiniog Railway’s No. 7, Little Wonder. Narrow gauge had definitively proved its worth. In July *The Engineer* reported ‘the Little Wonder left Portmadoc for Festiniog [sic] in such a storm of wind and rain as we do not care to encounter again. She had behind her a train consisting of 111 slate wagons, 6 carriages, 12 goods wagons, and carried 60 passengers. The train weight was almost 114 tons, and its length 339 yards.’ At one point a speed of 35 mph was reached; observers noticed throughout that the bogie engine rode the curves smoothly without strain or jerkiness. This load and speed exceeded the performance of the existing small engines considerably, which had the tendency to proceed up the slopes in short bursts of noticeable effort.

Ffestiniog Railway's first double Fairlie locomotive "Little Wonder" with long mixed train rounding Cei Mawr in 1871, pulling a very long train loaded goods wagons, passenger carriages, and empty slate wagons.

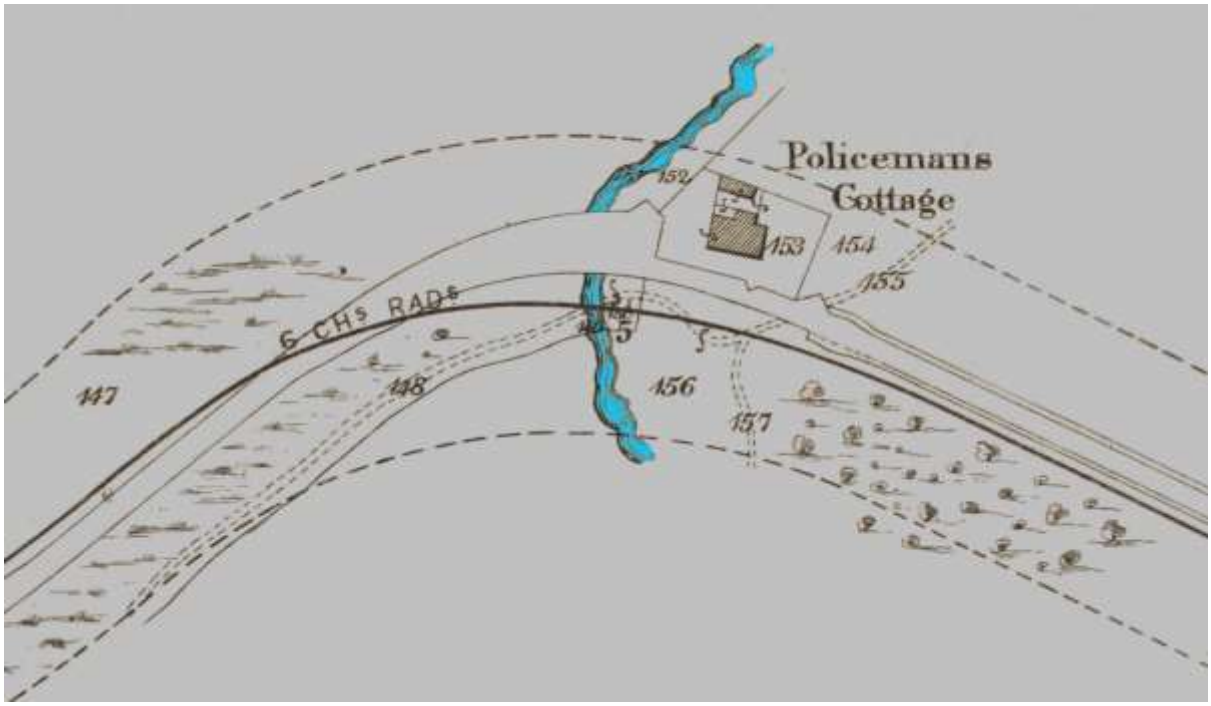


Steam up, the *James Spooner* and crew pose behind loaded slate wagons. This kind of double-bogie, 'push-me-pull-you' locomotives on centrally hinged pivoted bogies allowed engines to navigate bends more safely and smoothly.

The Railway soon introduced more of the improved Fairlie engines and in 1872 the *James Spooner* entered service, followed in 1876 by a single-bogie version, *Taliesin*. Boston Lodge, by now a fully equipped workshop, rose to the task of building two more double engines, *Merddin Emrys* (the bard known as 'Merlin' in English) in 1879 and *Livingston Thompson* in 1886. From 1873, the bogie principle was applied to passenger coaches and goods wagons as well as engines. Passenger coaches 15 and 16 were the first bogie coaches in service in Great Britain and were among the earliest iron-framed bogie coaches in the world. Both these vehicles are still in service today. So reliable is the double-bogie engine design that when the Railway required new large locomotives in more recent years, it again chose the Fairlie double-bogie design for *Earl of Merioneth* in 1979 and *David Lloyd George* in 1992, both built at Boston Lodge.

Improvements were also made to the tracks in the late 1860s and early 1870s including improving the rails themselves and their 'chairs' or fixings. Cheap 'Hamburg ballast' from Port Madoc was available for the ballasting of the line in these early years, though ballast later became harder and much more expensive to obtain as the ships discovered more valuable cargoes to carry on their way to collect Welsh slate. All the curves on the line were relaid as true parabolas, one such realignment happening on the stretch where, six years earlier in 1863, Coed y Bleiddiau was built. The former horse tram track bed and bridge are now part of Coed y Bleiddiau's little garden.

The Railway Archive at Gwynedd Archives has the agreement signed by the builder, John M. Evans, on 23rd November 1863, who agreed to provide all the materials for two cottages, 'one at Coedybeliddiau and one at the Tunnel' which he would complete on or before 31st March 1864 'to the entire satisfaction of C. E. Spooner, Esquire' (then General Manager of the line). If in default of completion, he was to pay £1 per week for each cottage that overran.



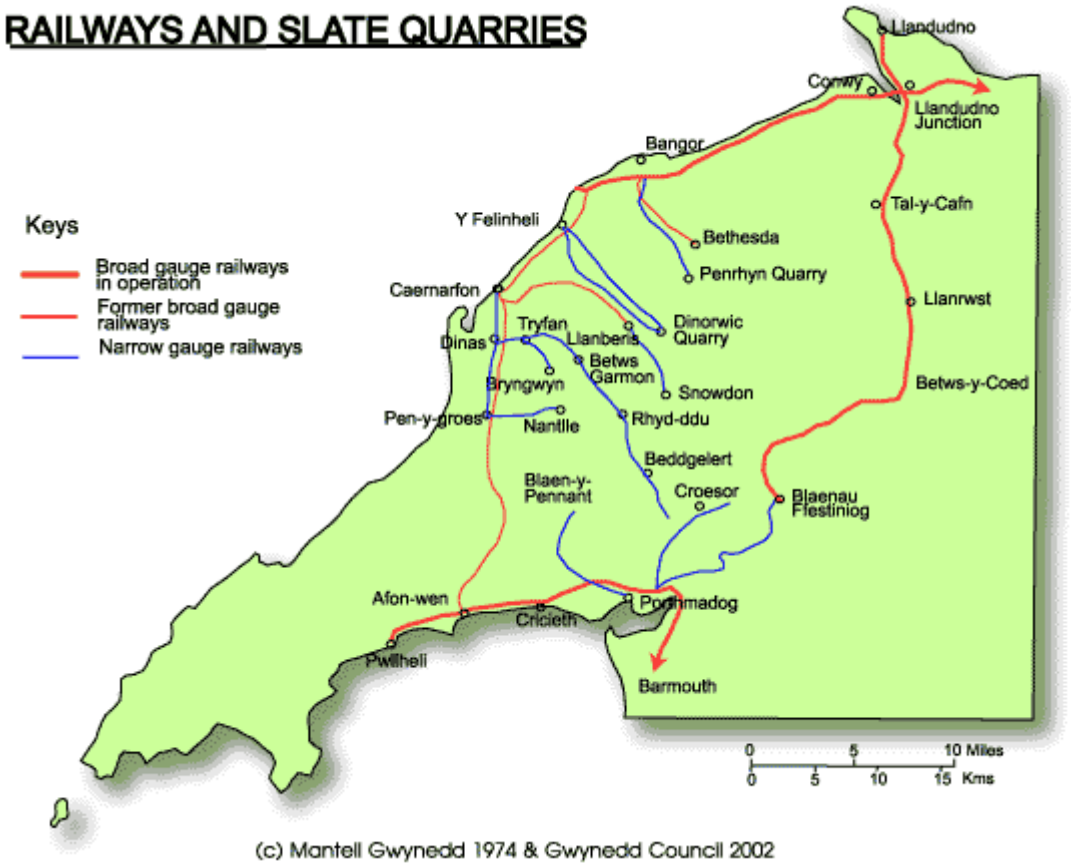
Survey map created in 1868 in support of the 1869 Act of Parliament, showing Coed-y-Bleiddiau as built, the tighter curve of the old horse tramline embankment and the proposed new double track steam railway (bold line). In the early days of railways, control of the movement of trains was done by policemen, the national force newly formed by Sir Robert Peel's government in 1856. The signal sticks used by the earliest operators were therefore exactly the same as those issued to the police force, and the early signalmen bore the same nickname of bobbies. Only later did such men on a railway become known as signalmen. Hovendon was already in residence in Coed y Bleiddiau by 1868, fulfilling this role as signalman and enforcer on the line. The dotted lines show the limits of deviation within which the Railway had to be built.

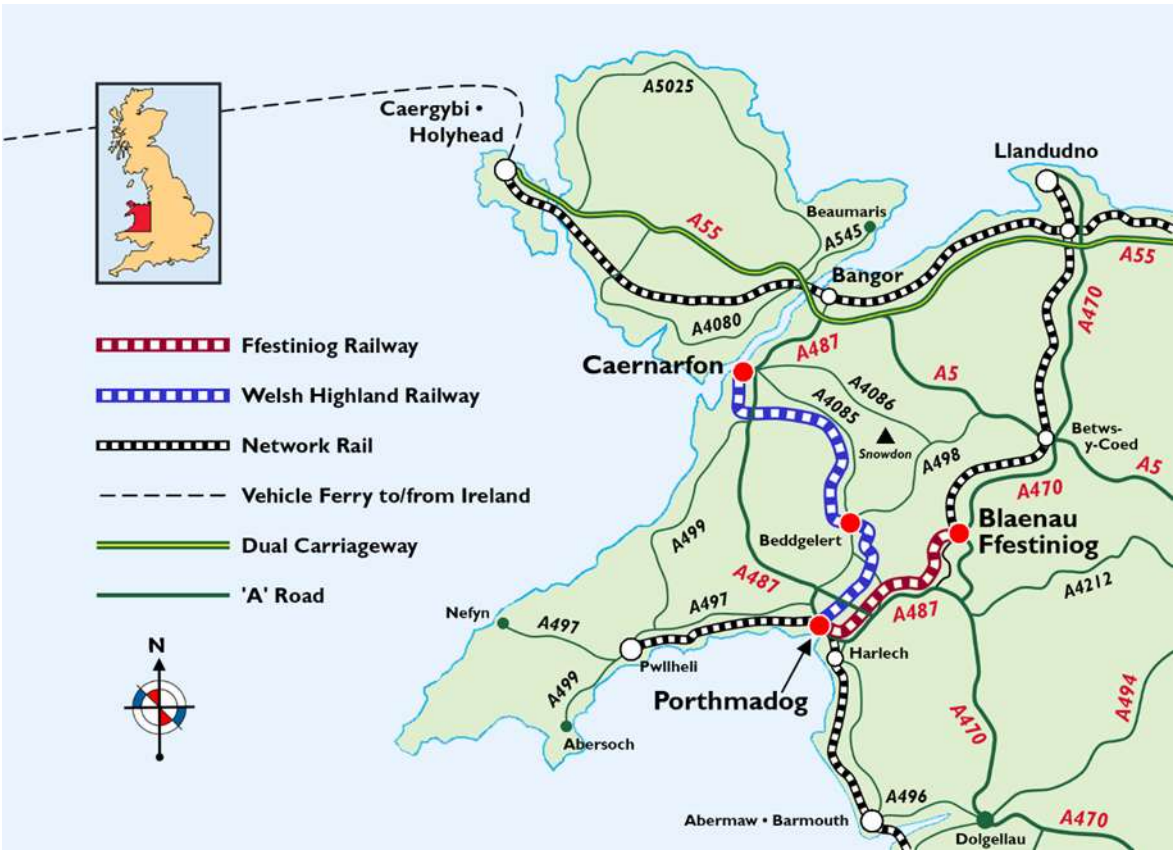
It is an interesting insight into the speed and resilience of these Victorian builders, that they were able to commit to such a programme in the cold winter months – and there is no evidence to suggest they overran.

The 1868 map of the proposed line incorporated in the 1869 Act of Parliament to double the line labels Coed y Bleiddiau as 'Policeman's Cottage' and by 1865 Hovendon is signing himself 'Inspector Hovendon Police Department' in letters in the Railway archives. In these early days, the movement of trains was controlled by policemen, and the signal sticks used by the earliest operators were the same as those issued to the police force. The early signalmen were also nicknamed bobbies. In 1867, however, Hovendon was appointed Inspector for the Railway.

The cottage took its lasting name from a nearby farm, meaning 'wood of the wolves' (it is said that the last wolves in Wales once roamed nearby). Nor is it known why it was decided to build a cottage in this remote spot, unless potential derailment on the bend above Coed y Bleiddiau was a concern. This indeed happened, despite the realignment, on 4th October 1901, when a passenger train completely derailed on the bend. The engine was slightly damaged and the rails dislodged from their chairs for about 60 yards.

By the 1870s, coastal sea transport was being overtaken by the network of inland railways. Many schemes for other, sometimes competing narrow gauge railways and branches came and (mostly) failed. By 1883, the standard gauge railways of the region had reached a settled state, and the Ffestiniog was left as the only successful narrow gauge operator. Standard broad gauge lines were also appearing in Snowdonia. A standard gauge line through Minffordd opened in 1867, and exchange sidings with the Cambrian Railway were built at Minffordd in 1872 to transfer the slate from one gauge to the other and provide an outlet for slate to the north through Machynlleth to Shrewsbury. In 1881 standard gauge came to Blaenau too as the London & North Western Railway out of Euston and the Great Western Railway from Paddington reached Blaenau Ffestiniog in 1883.





The development of the transport network in Snowdonia in the 19th century (top) and as it stands today (below).

This opened up routes to transport slates direct to other parts of Britain without using the Ffestiniog Railway and Porthmadoc, but such was the demand for slate that shipments from Portmadog still increased through the 1880s. By the end of the century, there were more men employed in the slate industry in Wales (15,000) than in the coal industry (13,000). However, as far as slate traffic was concerned, the Ffestiniog Railway's heyday was coming to an end. Charles Spooner died in 1889, bringing the long family connection with the railway to an end.

While standard gauge railways captured a growing share of slate traffic, they also brought visitors to the area, and tourism became increasingly important, as Coed y Bleiddiau's own story demonstrates. The popularity of other new roofing materials beside slate and a series of disastrous strikes in the quarries hastened the decline of the slate industry, and by the 1920s the Railway depended as much on its summer tourists as on its traditional slate traffic.

It was at this time that the Welsh Highland Railway was built to link the former North Wales Narrow Gauge Railway with the Ffestiniog, creating a circular route from Dinas (near Caernarfon) to Blaenau Festiniog. The new line opened in 1923, with a huge debt burden and with meagre rolling stock. This, combined with a long journey time, doomed the venture to failure and the Welsh Highland Railway closed in 1937. Its tracks were eventually taken up during the Second World War, but have been relaid as part of the restoration movement and the line is once again open from Porthmadoc to Caernarfon.

During the Great War, the Boston Lodge Works was commissioned by the Ministry of Munitions from June 1915 to November 1918 to manufacture 13 & 18 lbs shells. It was women's work, as this photo shows.

In 1930s Tan-y-Bwlch was made nationally famous by its characterful station mistress, Bessie Jones, who carried out her duties in full Welsh national costume and even had her own card in a Senior Service cigarette card series.

The outbreak of the war cut short the summer holiday season in 1939 and on 15th September Ffestiniog passenger services ceased. Hopes of a revival in slate traffic after the war were not realised and by 1945 there was no revenue coming in to repair the worn-out track and rolling stock. The quarries were finding that more versatile road transport could meet their needs. On 1st August 1946, at the start of the traditional quarrymen's holidays, the Ffestiniog line closed. The original Act of Parliament had made no provision for abandonment, so everything was left where it stood, exposed to souvenir hunters, vandals and the weather. Not only had the railway languished to the point of extinction but the ancillary industries of the neighbourhood died too. Shipbuilding ceased at Porthmadoc; iron foundries closed, and copper and lead mining became uneconomic.

Restoration and Rebirth

From 1949, however, various groups of rail enthusiasts began attempts to revitalise the railway. In 1951, on the initiative of Leonard Heath-Humphreys, a small group of people met in Bristol to see if anything could be done to restore the Railway. Railway enthusiast Alan Pegler was approached by friends to buy and clear the outstanding debt to the bank on the derelict Ffestiniog Railway, to obtain control of it. Lent £3,000 by his father, after many difficulties he and the volunteers obtained control of the company on 24 June 1954.

Pegler was appointed the new company's first Chairman. The Company aimed to restore the line to working order and operate the railway as a tourist attraction. Pegler later transferred his shares to the Ffestiniog Railway Trust, which owns the company that runs the railway today. These first enabling volunteers included Allan Garraway who later became General Manager (a position he held until 1983). Guided by a wholly volunteer board of directors, a small paid staff and enthusiastic volunteers set about rebuilding the line to Blaenau Ffestiniog.

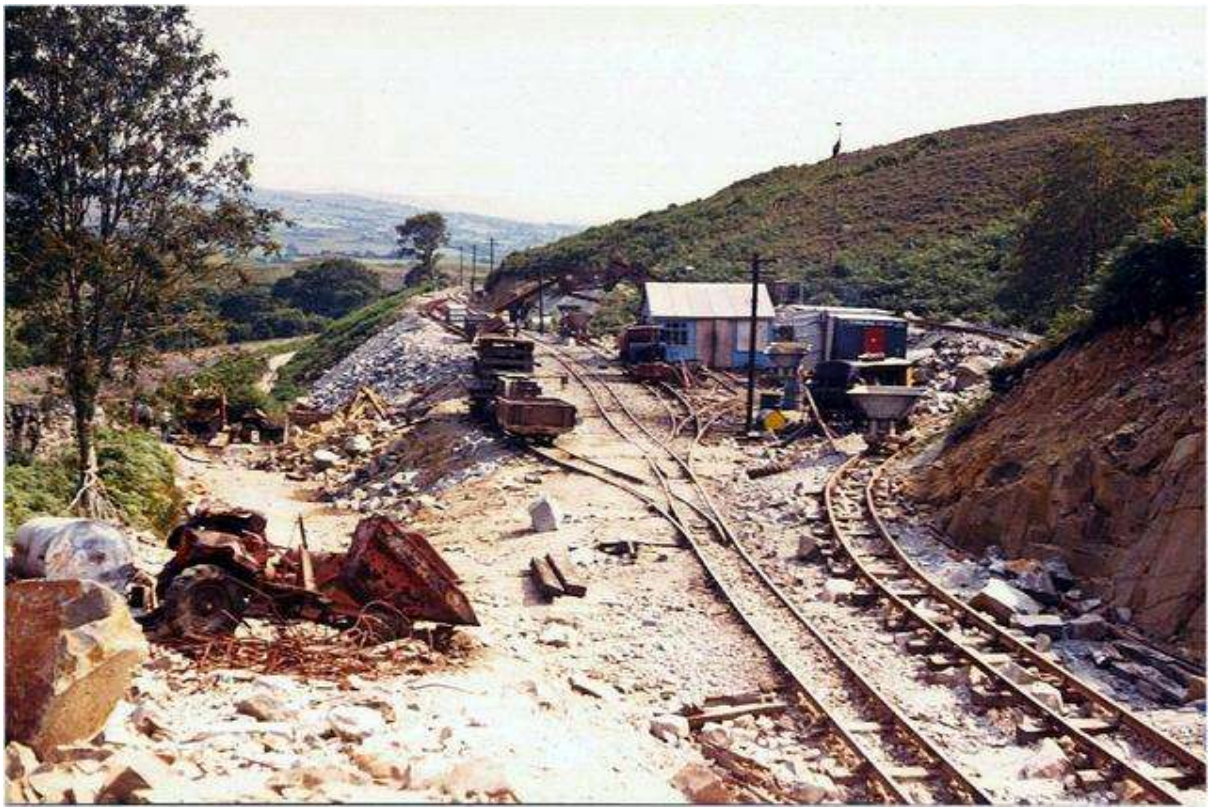
Porthmadoc Harbour Station in the early 1950s when the railway had been left abandoned, slate trucks left standing empty and rusting.

Moelwyn on the Ffestiniog Railway in 1956.

On 23 July 1955, after a formal Ministry of Transport inspection, a passenger service started up again from Porthmadoc across the Cob to Boston Lodge, first with a small Simplex diesel and then with steam locomotive *Prince*, which had meanwhile been reassembled. In 1956 services were restored to Minffordd and in that autumn the double-bogie Fairlie locomotive Livingston *Thompson*, by this time renamed *Taliesin*, ran trial trips. Easter 1957 saw trains running to Penrhyn and in the summer a tremendous effort was made to get the track cleared to Tan-y-Bwlch, the service beginning at Easter 1958.

The Deviation

Meanwhile, in 1954 the British Electricity Authority had produced a scheme for a hydroelectric power station near Tanygrisiau designed to boost the national grid at peak demand times. The Ffestiniog Railway opposed the Parliamentary Bill in 1955 because its route was to be flooded by the lower reservoirs of the scheme. British Electricity regarded the Railway's directors and supporters as amateurs 'playing trains' and compulsory acquisition of the line above Moelwyn Tunnel went ahead in 1956. The construction of the lower reservoir for the power station presented a major problem if the Ffestiniog Railway was to re-open back to Blaenau Ffestiniog. Its original route passed through the Moelwyn tunnel, but the northern end of this was below the water level of the new reservoir and so it was plugged. However, the Railway Company was determined to reinstate the line back to Blaenau. In 1962 a route was surveyed on the east side of the reservoir that gained height by a spiral around Dduallt and rejoined the old line at Tan-y-grisiau by running over the crest of the Authority's dam. The 4km Deviation ran at a higher level but still needed a 310 metre tunnel. In 1964 the company and its supporters announced their determination to build this line with largely volunteer labour, no money and no plant, across land they did not own! In April 1968, the re-opened Ffestiniog line reached Dduallt, the last station before the reservoir.



The Deviation tunnel construction underway in 1976. This stone crushing and grading plant produced track ballast and other aggregates from the spoil for use elsewhere on the railway.

The continued existence of the Ffestiniog Railway is testimony to the hard work and dedication of volunteers of all ages. Here, Deviationists gather beside the Tunnel Mess in August 1971.

By establishing the line's commercial and tourist value the Company aimed to prove that it had a legitimate compensation claim for the loss of track, so that it could, somehow, reinstate a line around the new reservoir. To allow work to start on this Deviation, as it became known, land was given to the Railway by the Economic Forestry Group and on 2nd January 1965 the first sod was turned. Many of the 'Deviationists', as the workers on the project became known, had no interest in railways as such, relishing rather their weekend battles with stubborn rock and heavy peat amid superb mountain scenery as a change from their full-time activities. Meanwhile, on the working part of the Railway, traffic was growing steadily; all the existing carriages were overhauled; new ones were being built, and much of the track was being relaid.

In 1970 an alternative route to the west of the Tan-y-grisiau reservoir was agreed and the Dduallt spiral, required to raise the line, was completed in 1971. In the same year the crucial legal battle for compensation, which had been going on since the 1950s, culminated in a hearing at which the Company was awarded £106,000 for loss of profits. But much more money and resources were needed to get to Blaenau Ffestiniog.

First there was a new Moelwyn Tunnel, completed in 1977, which allowed trains to run as far as Llyn Ystradau, just short of the new power station. Then bridges had to be built over the four power station water pipes to reach Tanygrisiau and get back on the old track bed. On 24th June 1978 the opening of the deviation between Dduallt and Tan-y-grisiau was celebrated with speeches, a party and a 'golden spike' ceremony. The 'seemingly impossible' had been achieved. Just one mile of track remained to be restored to bring trains back to Blaenau Ffestiniog, but there were still many problems. The rock face just beyond Tan-y-grisiau was unstable, and a serious rock fall required costly repairs when money was tighter than ever.

Cutting the line of the new track.

Volunteers working on widening the Dduallt station site in the early 1970s. Note the body of the old brake van being used as a site hut.

Hard weekend graft in August 1974…

…finally came to fruition in May 1982 (middle) when the Ffestiniog's re-extension to Blaenau was re-opened by George Thomas, later Viscount Tonypandy. Today, the interchange of narrow and broad gauge tracks at the station looks deceptively modest for the heroic effort involved.

Meanwhile, it was generally agreed that Blaenau Ffestiniog would benefit from a joint British Rail/Ffestiniog Railway station near the town centre. In 1977, Gwynedd County Council sponsored a scheme to allow the Ffestiniog Railway access to the centre of Blaenau. Thanks to financial support both nationally and internationally from the European Economic Community, the work was complete by 1982. As with the Deviation, the final slog back to Blaenau became a joint effort of the Company, volunteers, engineering contractors and labour provided under a Manpower Services Commission scheme. The Deviation organisation was reshaped and 'Project Blaenau' was launched in July 1980 to coordinate the volunteer share of the work.[3]

Work was pushed ahead despite appalling weather to reach the opening date, 25th May 1982, the 150th anniversary almost to the day of the Company's first Act of Parliament. The Ffestiniog Railway once again ran from Porthmadoc to Blaenau Ffestiniog. The Rt. Hon. George Thomas M.P., then Speaker of the House of Commons, officially opened the station at Blaenau Ffestiniog on 30th April 1983. The line has thrived ever since and become world famous all over again as an exemplar of a revived steam railway reinvigorating a region and delighting all who encounter it.

[3] Thanks are due to those Deviationsists who have posted photos online, as featured here. Where so stated at source, the copyright remains with them.

Past residents of Coed y Bleiddiau

A summary of tenants at Coed y Bleiddiau:

1864-1904	**Inspector T. Henry Hovendon**
1904- at least 1908	Signalman Thomas Hovendon
May 1913 – Dec 1915	John W. Sudbury, bank manager from Wydle Green, Birmingham
June 1915- at least 1923	A. W. Wellings / Bertha Wellings
1924	Edward Owen
15 Feb 1925-1 Mar 1935	**Dr Granville Bantock**, composer
(Backdated to) Mar 1930 – 1947	**Harry 'Jack' St John Philby**
Jan 1948 – Dec 1949	Mrs Mary C. Roberts
1951 'for three months'	R. E. G. Hughes
Feb 1952-2006	**Babs & Bob Johnson**

Of these, the longest serving tenants are also the most interesting.

Thomas Henry Hovendon (T. Henry Hovendon, 1839-1903)

Thomas Henry Hovendon (sometimes spelt Hovenden) was the first inhabitant of Coed y Bleiddiau, an employee of the Ffestiniog Railway for more than forty years. He was born in Durrow, Co. Laois, southeast of Dublin, and must have travelled due east to Porthmadoc in search of work as part of the closer links between Ireland and Wales after the Union. His birth family illustrate the wide Irish diaspora in these years: a letter from T. H. Hovendon in 1900 requesting leave of absence from his railway duties tells us that he had a brother and sister who had emigrated to America, and were coming to visit their mother (who must have been very old) in Dublin. The young Irishman clearly impressed Samuel Holland and Henry Archer, the projectors of the horse tramway in the 1840s, as Hovendon was just 24 years old in 1864 when he was given brand new Coed y Bleiddiau to live in.

T. Henry Hovendon in Spring 1901.

T. H. Hovendon was a handsome chap with fine whiskers, and we can imagine Coed y Bleiddiau almost immediately as a noisy family home. The early census returns are patchy for this remote area, and it is from headstones in the Anglican church of St Twrog's at Maentwrog that we discover that Hovendon married Mary Ann, probably in the late 1860s. From early 20th-century census returns it can be deduced that children soon followed: Frank in 1870/1 and John Robert in 1873. Mary Ann herself died on Christmas Eve 1873 aged 33 years old, perhaps as the result of complications from giving birth to John. Her headstone records that the couple also had another son and daughter, Robert Henry and Mary Anne, who died as infants before their mother. Hovendon & Mary's eldest son Frank appears in the 1901 census as a fire salvage officer working in Liverpool, and his brother John in 1911 as a Foreman in the Locomotive Department in Durham – still on the railways.

T. H. Hovendon remarried a few years later, to Isabella, born in 1847 in Witherley, Leicestershire. She appears in the 1881 census as 'railway officer's

wife'. A son, Thomas, was born in 1879. He was still living in Merioneth in 1901, by then aged 22, and became a signalman on the Ffestiniog Railway.

In 1883, Hovendon and Isabella had a daughter, Maria. Eighteen years later, tragedy struck the family again. On 10th May 1901 the *Cambrian News* carried the following obituary:

> *The death took place on April 29th at the age of eighteen of Miss Maria Hovendon, only daughter of Mr Hovendon, inspector under the Festiniog Railway Company. Deceased, who was taken ill in February, bore her lot with Christian fortitude and courage. She was a promising teacher and greatly loved by her colleagues and scholars. She headed the list of successful candidates from the National School in connection with the entrance scholarship examination of the Festiniog County School, and subsequently returned to the National School as pupil teacher. The funeral took place on Thursday, the chief mourners being Mr and Mrs Hovendon (parents); Messrs Frank Hovendon, Liverpool, John Hovendon, Newcastle, and Thos Hovendon (brothers); the Rev C. P. Price MA, rector; Nurse Edwards, Blaenau Festiniog; Mrs Roberts, Bronygraig, Maentwrog and Mrs Davies, Cliff Cottage. At the Railway Station, where the school children had assembled, the latter sang a dirge in a touching manner and at the Church the Choir and the children sang "Christ will Gather in His Own" and "Peace, Perfect Peace." The Rev C. P. Price officiated at the Church and at the graveside. The many floral tributes received included beautiful wreaths sent by the school children and the school staff. General sympathy is felt for the family in their bereavement.*

Yet happy family years must have predominated at Coed y Bleiddiau, as well as all the daily routines and occasional dramas of life beside the Railway. Hovendon was appointed Inspector of the line in 1867, despite describing himself as 'Inspector Hovendon, Police Department' in an 1865 letter about the poor conduct of some of those working on the line, and a year later issued a warrant for the arrest of Dorothy Williams for the theft of some flour. Like many of the Company's employees, Hovendon spent the rest of his working life on the Railway; he would have seen the replacement of Hafod y Llyn by Tan y Bwlch station around 1872 and all the other developments that took place as the Railway hit its stride.

The Hovendon family gravestones in the church yard at Maentwrog.

The Railway correspondence in the Gwynedd Archives[4] gives a good flavour of Hovendon's everyday life on the line, with regular letters on all aspects of railway life, and maintenance of its tracks and rolling stock sent to C. E. Spooner, manager and clerk, and from November 1879 to his successor, J. S. Hughes. The written correspondence continues even after the installation of the first telephone line between Porthmadoc and Duffws in December 1877.

Flying coals and embers from the blazing furnaces hurtling through the countryside could provide a fire hazard, and Hovendon was asked to provide the names of careless engine drivers 'who set fire to the gorse.' Boys (perhaps including Hovendon's own sons) could earn extra pocket money by walking the line to stamp out live embers, although boys could equally be a hazard in their own right.

There seem to have been a particularly mischievous bunch in summer 1899. In July, Hovendon reported two boys on the end of a slate train, one of whom jumped off and one who fell off. 'One is a post delivery lad…how the lads could have got on without being seen seems strange', he wrote to J. S. Hughes. The next month, August 1899, Station Master Williams at Dduallt wrote to Hovendon about boys interfering with the brakes on the slate trains. The brakesman had in his turn complained to Williams – 'does he think his responsibility for the safety ceases as soon as he leaves a few yards below his station?' In March 1902, Hovendon read out a notice to schoolchildren travelling on the Ffestiniog Railway, informing them that anyone opening the carriage doors when travelling would be prosecuted. He also took down all their names to deter further misdemeanours.

[4] The references to correspondence in this section all come from the Ffestiniog Railway Company Archives, deposited at Gwynedd Archive in Caernarfon under XD97.

The perils of livestock on the line: a ram (held by one of the rescue workers) caused this derailment at Bryn Mawr in January 1904.

Livestock on the line were a persistent problem, broken fences allowing sheep and even pigs to stray onto the line. The Railway was responsible for keeping the fences in good repair; a tender in February 1873, for example, gives a list of prices for a wire fence to be erected from the newly completed station at Tan y Bwlch to Coed y Bleiddiau on the left hand side of the line.

Owners had to be compensated for their dead animals, like the 5s paid to Richard Jones Creauau in May 1880 for a lamb killed at Little Tunnel. Livestock were also a hazard for the trains: in August 1898, the Down train from Tan-y-Bwlch had to be stopped suddenly as 'some of Mr Oakeley's men must have gone through with a horse and left the gate not properly secured.'

Hovendon was involved with explanations for late trains; maintenance of the tracks and the railway buildings; petty employment issues of lateness and the

giving of notice. Minor accidents and derailments also happened to the trains themselves, especially in extremes of weather. A telephone message noted down in late May 1905 that the staff on the Down slate train had noticed that the 'curves at [Signalman Thomas] Hovendon's house and Ty Fry are bulging with the heat' cannot have been the only such occurrence in hot weather. At the other extreme, storm winds could be strong enough to blow carriages right off the Cob, as happened to four quarrymen's carriages in November 1899. The cutting between Coed y Bleiddiau and Dduallt was notoriously susceptible to snowdrifts.

Fatalities on the line were rare, but one in the autumn of 1901 may also have been caused by schoolboy naughtiness. On 24th October Hovendon wrote to J. S. Hughes about a boy who had had been dragged down the line by a slate train near Pantroch, which resulted in the amputation of his leg. The boy died soon after, and on 12th November Hovendon duly reports the verdict of 'accidental death' from the inquest, with the 'recommendation to [Railway] Company to put the fence in proper state of repair especially where the houses are so close to the line.'

The tight curves of the line meant badly loaded slate wagons could become unbalanced and derail. Just occasionally, there were more serious accidents and these seem to have increased in the early years of the 20th century when the line's condition was perhaps deteriorating. The Board of Trade kept track of all these, thanks to reports in the *Cambrian News* and sometime anonymous reports, as well as the notifications the Railway manager was obliged to send. On 4th October 1901 the 6.15pm from Duffws was completely derailed near Coed y Bleiddiau. According to the *Cambrian News*, the train was within eighteen inches of falling down the cliff. Only fifteen or so crew and passengers were on board and none were hurt, but there was damage to the engine and seventy-nine rail chairs were broken. It took all night to clear the track and it must have been a long one for the Hovendons living so close by.

Hovendon was by now in his sixties and one wonders whether his, as well as others', supervision was not as close as it had once been. A Major E. Druitt

conducted an enquiry, and concluded three weeks later that the accident was due to the faulty condition of the track and the 3-inch super-elevation on the bend (the camber across the rails). Rather defensively perhaps, J. S. Hughes described to Druitt all the improvements he had 'already decided' to put in place: longer, rectangular Baltic pine sleepers to replace the current half round larch ones; more stone ballast and check rails on the steeper curves; improved drainage, and replacement fishplates. He was also going to employ a new foreman track layer. Poor track had clearly played a part in this and other derailments, and the *Cambrian News* weighed in with a comment from a correspondent who signed himself simply 'Festiniog' that 'The time has come when the "toy" railway managers must be taught that what are called "accidents" must cease.'

From 1901, Hovendon's health was deteriorating. On 5th December he writes of being 'too unwell to be out today, sciatica.' There are further explanations of absence from work in 1902 due to a painful leg and foot. Inspector T. Henry Hovendon died at Coed y Bleiddiau on 30th December 1903, aged 64. His obituary called him 'a hardworking and conscientious employee to the Company' and noted that he was considerate and kind to those who worked under him. 'His death is mourned in many circles, deceased having formed staunch friends in all the spheres he moved.' Hovendon is also buried at the west end of Maentwrog churchyard, an Anglican like all the other Irish directors and employees associated with the Railway.

After Hovendon's death, it seems his son Thomas, the signalman, took on Coed y Bleiddiau: a letter in 1908 refers to an agreement with Hovendon for the cottage. On 28th July 1905, Signalman Hovendon became something of a hero when, out for an evening stroll, he discovered that the timber roof of the small tunnel above Tan-y-Bwlch was on fire, probably started by a smouldering coal from an engine earlier in the day. The *Cambrian News* reported that:

> *He made for the station and telephoned to the Boston Lodge works at Minffordd. An engine was got in steam promptly and shortly after midnight a breakdown gang were hard at work pulling down the burning timber, it being impossible to have any effects by means of buckets of*

water. It may be explained that the inner roof of the tunnel is made up of iron girders on which tons upon tons of timber sleepers have been placed. The outer roof consists of loose debris on the sleepers and had the inner tunnel given way completely traffic would of necessity have been interrupted for some days. The tunnel is near to a curve and it is probable that the workmen's train on Saturday morning would have been wrecked had it not been for the providential discovery of Signalman Hovendon. The fire was confined to an area of about 175 square feet and by four o'clock on Saturday morning the breakdown gang had got the flames under control. A considerable quantity of the outer roof fell in, but the men were able to make things sufficiently secure to enable traffic to proceed without interruption on Saturday. The probability is that the sleepers rendered very dry by the recent heat, became ignited by sparks from the engine. It might be stated that the big tunnel is absolutely free from timber roofing and it is understood that iron sheetings will now be substituted for the wooden sleepers in the small tunnel.

It is another illustration of the increasingly ramshackle nature of the Railway as its slate traffic declined. It was becoming more of a tourist line instead, as the mainlines from Birmingham and the North West brought more and more visitors to this beautiful part of Wales. This was also to be reflected by the tenants of Coed y Bleiddiau.

The first non-railway tenant was J. W. Sudbury, a bank manager from Wydle Green in Birmingham. He was the first to use Coed y Bleiddiau as a holiday cottage, taking a lease in May 1913 at £5 pa. He was soon writing to get the train to stop at the cottage, although sometimes the train failed to stop as arranged.

In February 1915, Coed y Bleiddiau's lease was transferred to A. W. Wellings, who applied to buy the cottage two months later, an offer rejected by the Company. He and his wife (or perhaps sister) Bertha clearly loved the cottage and in July 1918 took a lease for a further five years, now at £6 13s a year. This of course was wartime, and in the febrile atmosphere someone reported to Inspector Owen of the Blaenau Ffestiniog police that a German had been staying at the cottage, and Owen wrote to Wellings to enquire who was staying at Coed y Bleiddiau. No reply has survived. When the Wellings' lease expired in 1923, the tenancy passed briefly to Edward Owen, and the following year Coed y Bleiddiau's next significant tenant appeared on the scene.

Sir Granville Bantock (1868-1946) was knighted for services to music in 1930. He rented Coed y Bleiddiau from 1925 until around 1933.

When Bantock died, his ashes were scattered from the top of Moelwyn, the mountain in whose shadow Coed y Bleiddiau stands.

Granville Bantock (1868-1946) - composer

According to a recent biographer, 'Sir Granville Bantock probably has the unenviable distinction.....of being the most unreasonably neglected composer in the whole pitiable chronicle of neglected 20th century British music.' In his day, however, Bantock was a popular and powerful figure on the English Classical scene, years that coincided with the years when Coed y Bleiddiau was his holiday cottage. His music is romantic and (while seeing something of a revival in recent years) not now known by most.

Bantock's father was an eminent Scottish surgeon and gynaecologist practising in London, who initially forbade his son to make music his profession. Only after failing to take to the Civil Service was Bantock allowed to become a student of the Royal Academy of Music. There (1889–1893) he studied composition with Sir Frederick Corder, widely regarded as a man of progressive musical sympathies. Bantock proved to be an apt pupil, and an exceedingly ambitious one.

On leaving the Academy Bantock gradually became involved in conducting and in 1897 he became Musical Director of The Tower, New Brighton on Merseyside, transforming the small variety orchestra he found there, and introducing his audiences to serious classical music as well as marches and waltzes. Bantock also featured the music of living British composers and was keenly interested in contemporary European composers—Debussy, Richard Strauss, and, most particularly, Sibelius who dedicated his Third Symphony to Bantock.

Bantock was an outstanding educator as well as conductor and composer. He became Principal of the Birmingham and Midland Institute of Music (1900–1914), and from 1908–1934 was Peyton Professor of Music at Birmingham University in succession to Sir Edward Elgar. Elgar was a longstanding friend who in 1901 had dedicated his second Pomp & Circumstance march to Bantock. Bantock was also instrumental in founding the Birmingham Symphony Orchestra as a single, permanent, municipally funded orchestra.

50 Sir Granville Bantock, Agnes Maisky wife of the Soviet Ambassador Mischa Maisky, Benjamin Britten, John Ireland and Sir Arnold Bax at the British Council, Margaret Street, on 26 August 1942. As part of the cultural diplomacy of the time, Bax is handing Mrs Maisky a letter signed by various British composers sending greetings to their Soviet counterparts.

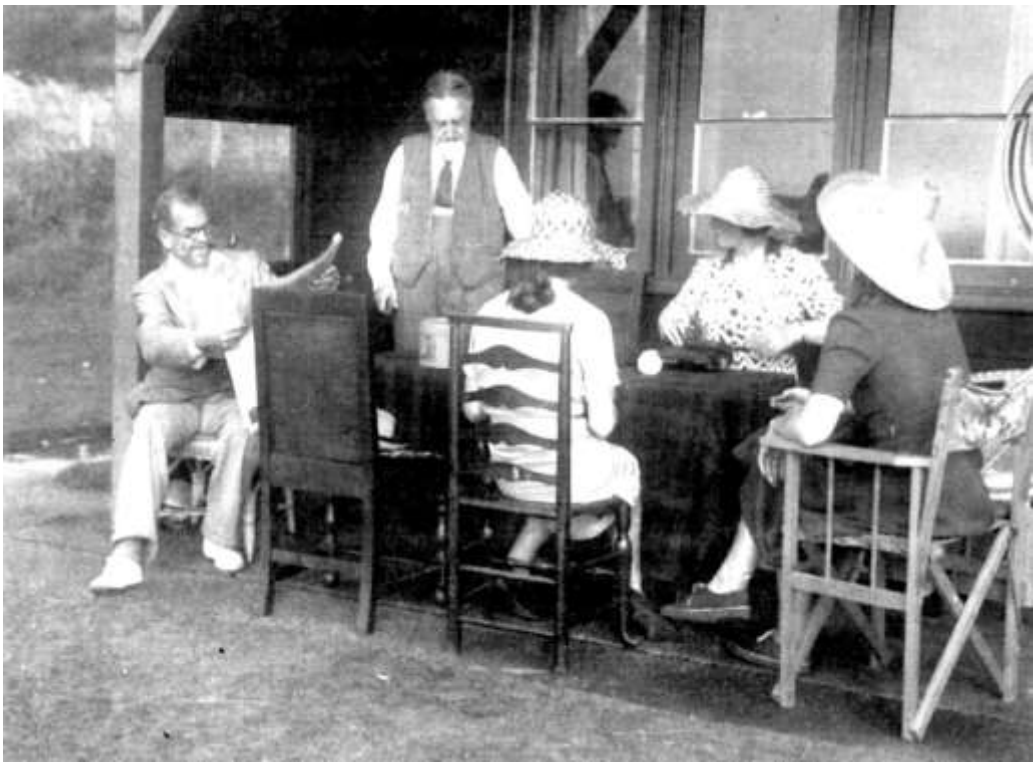
Scenes from Bantock's life: clockwise from top left: Bantock and his wife Helena; Bantock in Eastern garb – he enjoyed fancy dress; Bantock with his great friend Edward Elgar; Bantock representing his peers during World War II in rapprochement towards the Soviet allies.

Birmingham had developed a strong civic identity since radical Liberal Joseph Chamberlain had been mayor in the 1870s. A leading member of the campaign for a city orchestra included his son Neville Chamberlain, who was also Lord Mayor of Birmingham from 1916 to 1918. At first the group planned to support Thomas Beecham's New Birmingham Orchestra, but this was wound up when the government requisitioned the Town Hall for the issue of First World War ration books, so depriving it of its main concert venue. A few weeks after war ended, Bantock revived the idea and in March 1919 submitted a proposal to Birmingham City Council for an orchestra of 70 musicians to be engaged annually from October to May, at an estimated annual cost of £8,500 and with projected annual revenue of £6,000. The city council agreed to support the proposal with an annual grant of £1,250 for an experimental period of five years. It was the first time that public funds were used to support an orchestra Britain.

Bantock was a man of wide and eclectic cultural interests. He was an omnivorous reader (he knew French and German, Persian and Arabic and was as likely to correspond in Latin as in English). He was a man of sudden, all-consuming enthusiasms, but his abiding interests were in all things Oriental—both Near and Far East—and Celtic, acknowledging his own Highland ancestry. These enthusiasms, which influenced his personal behaviour and style of living almost to the point of eccentricity, meant Bantock cut a bohemian figure, with a wide circle of similarly artistic friends. The early 20th century was a time of great energy in the dissemination and popularisation of classical music, and Bantock was at its heart.

Edward Elgar thought Bantock had ‘the most fertile imaginative brain of our time,' and that 'what Bantock did not know about the orchestra is not worth knowing.' Vaughan Williams noted his regret in not having become Bantock’s pupil. Bantock was also good friends with Jean Sibelius and Frederick Delius. Bernard Shaw, Laura Knight, Malcolm Sargent and Henry Wood (founder of the Proms, where Bantock’s works were performed) – were all part of Bantock’s wide circle of friends.

Granville Bantock outside Coed y Bleiddiau, 'his favourite Welsh cottage' according to his daughter Myrrha.



Bantock with Jack Philby (left) in 1938, at Traethdy in Harlech, from 1930 another Bantock family holiday cottage. Also shown (L to R) are Philby's daughter Diana, his wife Dora and other daughter. Philby took over Bantock's lease of Coed y Bleiddiau in 1933, backdated to 1930.

Composer Josef Holbrooke studied with Bantock at the Royal Academy of Music, and his grandson got in touch with us during the project to say that his grandfather, who lived in Harlech, was a regular guest at Coed y Bleiddiau. Myrrha Bantock's biography of her father also gives the impression that this tiny cottage hosted a succession of Bantock's celebrated friends. One of them was the Arabist Harry 'Jack' St John Philby who shared Bantock's captivation with the Middle East, and would become Coed y Bleiddiau's next tenant.

Bantock's cultural enthusiasms found expression in his music. Among his more extravagant works was an enormous three-part setting for soloists, chorus and orchestra of Edward Fitzgerald's popular translation of the *Ruba'iyát of Omar Khayyám*, composed between 1906 and 1909. Today, Bantock's Celtic works, especially his *Hebridean Symphony* (1913) are the best known. He was knighted in 1930, and there has been a revival of interest in his music in recent years.

There is a tantalisingly empty envelope in the Festiniog archive addressed to Professor Granville Bantock (The University) Birmingham dated 11th August 1916, but he did not take up the lease at Coed y Bleiddiau until 15th February 1925. His daughter Myrrha's biography of him reveals that Coed y Bleiddiau was not the first holiday getaway from Birmingham the family had rented in the Ffestiniog Vale.

This was a corrugated iron shanty (Llywnythyl) on a disused mining site, originally built to house mining officials and previously rented by the artist Augustus John. Bantock initially shared this shack with his friend Joseph Holbrooke and the leading tenor Frank Mullings. Myrrha remembers it being lined with varnished tongue and groove, and reached by a climb up a disused trolley-shaft with a broken cable winch at the top. Everything had to be carried up 'including my mother's large, square hatbox, which she always took with her on holidays, packed with everything except hats.' Myrrha's mother was a beautiful poetess and artist, Helena von Schweitzer, whom Bantock married in 1898. They clearly loved Snowdonia, and on 15 Feb 1925 Bantock signed a 5-year lease on Coed y Bleiddiau, the rent by now £10 a year.

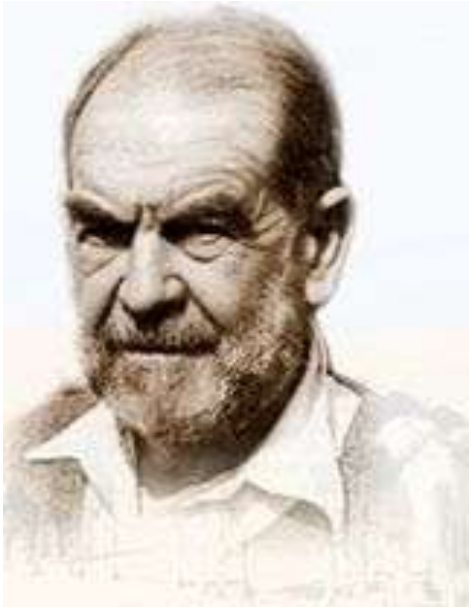
Bantock took great care in furnishing Coed y Bleiddiau. 'White bookcases and a dulcitone[5] were installed in the room he used', wrote Myrrha. 'In the living room there was a tall oak dresser topped by a large pair of china dogs which G.B. named Fido and Fifi. Pairs of brass candlesticks stood on the mantelpiece. There were bright embroidered Numdah rugs on the polished floors, and we made orange curtains for all the windows. On our beds were brightly coloured Indian cotton covers.'

The family bought groceries from Maentwrog, walking several miles through the forest by a narrow pathway. For fresh milk and butter, they walked about a mile up the line to the nearest farmhouse. Like previous tenants, 'we arranged with the engine-drivers to put us down when we arrived on holiday. They also used to post our letters; we would stand beside the line outside the house, waving them in the air, and the train would slow down to enable the driver or fireman to snatch them from us without stopping the train.' Unbreakable groceries from Ffestiniog were delivered the same way; the guard rolled the parcels out of his van by the gate, blowing his whistle as an alert that they had arrived. Sometimes Helena Bantock's shopping list and basket were handed to the guard on the Down as it passed, to be returned full of the required provisions on the Up.

'Our bath was the mountain pool' and the bucket from the privy was carried to a bog some distance away to be emptied – though never by Bantock himself. Everybody read a great deal and recited poetry. The Bantock children brought their friends to stay there, just as Bantock and Helena hosted their more famous ones in this tiny cottage. According to Myrrha, 'No one who stayed at Coed y Bleiddiau was anything but happy there. The lovely mountains all around, the feeling of peace and of being cut off from the civilised world, was restful and healing to the spirit. There were times when the mist came down, covering the little house and the forest below in a ghostly veil; or it would rain for days, soft, clean Welsh rain that was gentle on the face.'

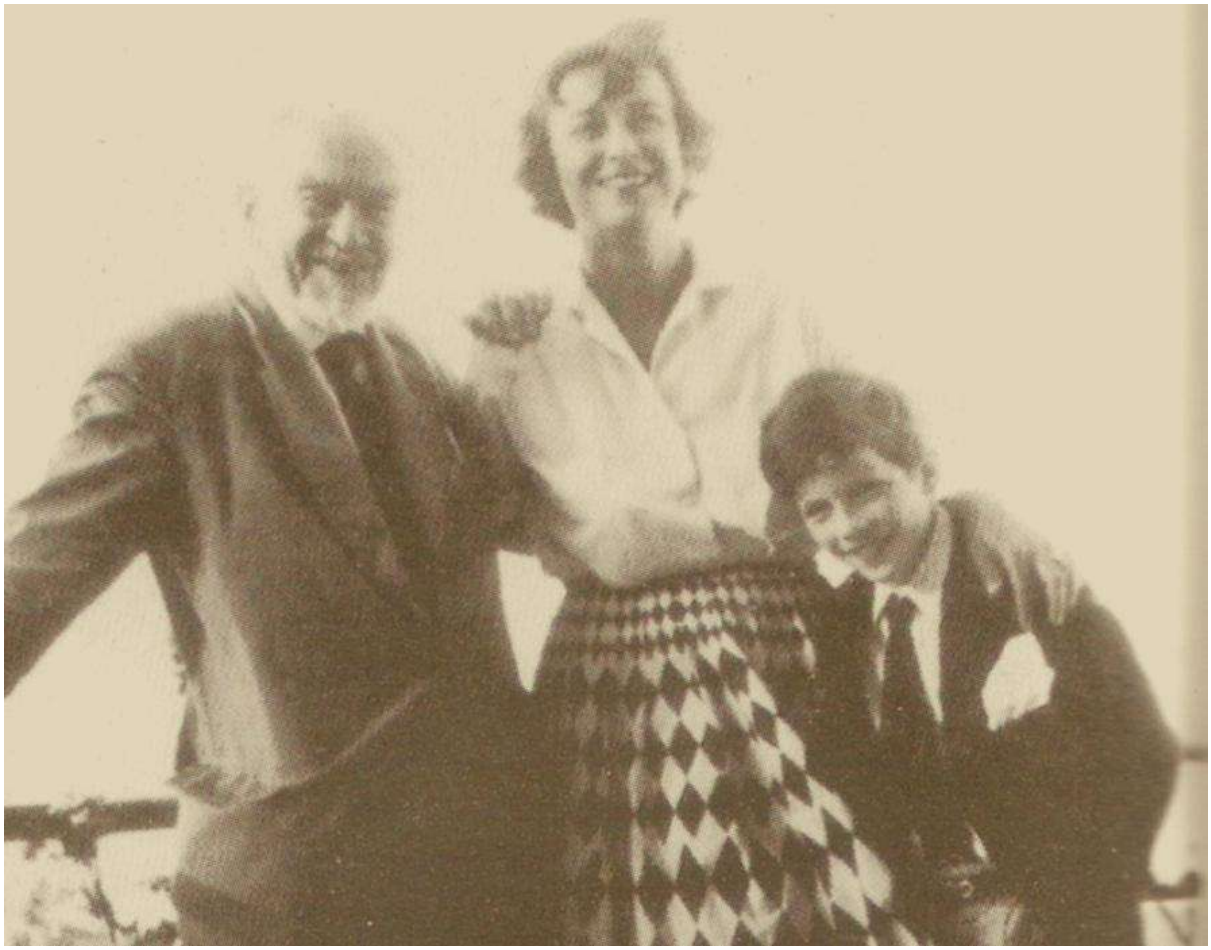
[5] A small keyboard instrument that produces notes by felt-covered hammers hitting a range of tuning forks.

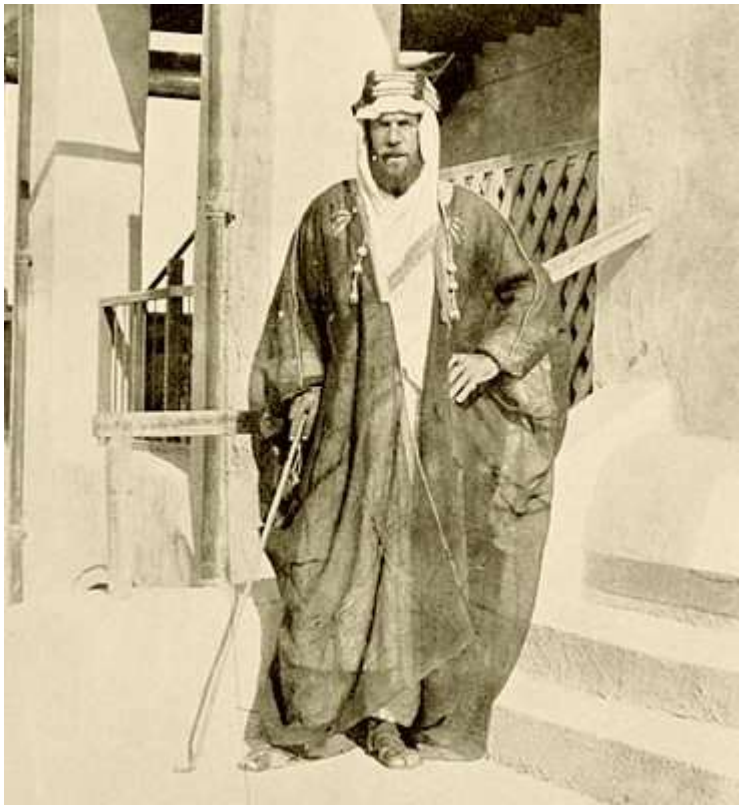
Harry 'Jack' St John Philby (1885-1960)



One of Granville Bantock's many friends of note was Harry St John Philby, more often known as Jack – and also as Sheikh Abdullah. Philby and Bantock met in 1929 at the home of Sir Barry Jackson, founder of Birmingham Repertory Theatre, during the first Malvern Festival.[6] Both were members of the Athenaeum Club in London and they shared a passion for the Middle East. Myrrha Bantock's biography of her father mentions Philby visiting her father's flat in Maida Vale after his retirement. 'He looked,' she wrote, 'a little like Ernest Hemingway.' This is a perceptive comment; though keenly interested in the natural world, Philby also enjoyed hunting in Arabia and was a prolific (non-fiction) writer. As a sort of Arabian Hemmingway, he had similar potency and flaws. His biographer sums him up as 'a hot-tempered Englishman whose principle was to speak his mind whatever the cost to himself. He was at odds with the British Government for most of his career over broken promises to the Arabs.'

[6] Pers. Comm. Cuillin Bantock





Top: Philby with his wife Dora and son Harold, always prophetically known as Kim (after the Kipling novel of the same name set in the political conflict between Russia and Britain in Central Asia).
Below: Philby in Arab dress in Riyadh *c.* 1922.

On 29 Sept 1933, Bantock's lease on Coed y Bleiddiau was assigned to Jack Philby for five years, backdated to 1 March 1930, still at £10 pa. On 29 Sept 1937, Philby renewed for further ten years at £15 pa, his tenure of the cottage spanning seventeen years. Philby was a British Arabist, adviser, explorer, and colonial office intelligence officer. He was born in British Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), the son of a tea planter, and educated at Westminster School and Trinity College, Cambridge, where he studied oriental languages. Philby married Dora Johnston in September 1910 and was the father of Harold 'Kim' Philby (1912 -1988), the MI6 recruit who gained notoriety as a double agent for the Soviet Union (one of the 'Cambridge Spy Ring') who defected to Moscow in 1963.[7] Kim Philby too almost certainly stayed at Coed y Bleiddiau.

Jack Philby writes in his autobiography that as a young man he 'became something of a fanatic' about the East and in 1908 'the first Socialist to join the Indian Civil Service.' After Cambridge, he was posted to Lahore in the Punjab in 1908. He became fluent in Urdu, Punjabi, Baluchi, Persian, and eventually Arabic.

In 1915, Philby became head of the finance for the British administration in Baghdad, a job which included fixing compensation for property and business owners. Their mission was twofold: to organise the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Turks and to protect the oil fields near Basra and the Shatt al Arab, which was a source of oil for the Royal Navy. The Revolt was organised with the promise of creating a unified Arab state, or Arab federation, from Aleppo in Syria to Aden in Yemen. The influential traveller and administrator Gertrude Bell, a rare female in this Middle Eastern context, was Philby's controller and taught him the finer arts of espionage. In 1916 he became Revenue Commissioner for British Occupied Territories.

[7] The Cambridge Spy Ring passed information to the Soviet Union during World War II and into the 1950s. Beside Philby, three other members of the ring were originally identified: Donald Maclean, Guy Burgess and Anthony Blunt. The ring was initially dubbed the Cambridge Four and renamed the Cambridge Five only later when John Cairncross was also revealed as a member.

In November 1917 Philby was sent to the interior of the Arabian peninsula as head of a mission to Ibn Saud, the chieftain who professed Wahhabism, the movement within Sunni Islam, and bitter enemy of Hussein bin Ali, Sharif of Mecca, leader of the Hashemites and of the Arab Revolt, both contenders to

The charismatic King Ibn Saud, founder of Saudi Arabia, whose interests Philby promoted in the face of official British policy.

become 'King of the Arabs'. By now in his early thirties, it was here that Philby began to take a tangential path, secretly beginning to favour Ibn Saud even though British policy was to support Hussein.

In November 1917, the Balfour Declaration had expressed British support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Exactly a year later, Britain and France issued the Anglo-French Declaration to the Arabs, promising their self-determination. For Philby, current official policy was a betrayal of this assurance of a single unified Arab nation. Philby argued that Ibn Saud was a 'democrat' guiding his affairs 'by mutual counsel' as laid out in the Quran, in contrast to Hussein. Despite this secret divergence of views, Philby was appointed Minister of Internal Security in

the British Mandate of Iraq after the Iraqi revolt of 1920. In November 1921, Philby was named chief head of the Secret Service in Mandatory Palestine, working closely with T. E. Lawrence. 'Lawrence of Arabia.'. At the end of 1922, Philby travelled to London for extensive meetings with parties involved in the Palestine question, including Winston Churchill, King George V and the Prince of Wales, the future Edward VIII.

For Philby, Ibn Saud represented the best chance of bring in order to Arabia. He believed that both British and the Saud family's interests would be best served by uniting the Arabian peninsula under the latter's government, stretching from the Red Sea to the Persian Gulf, with the Saudis supplanting the Hashemites as Islamic "Keepers of the Holy Places" while also protecting British interests in the shipping lanes along the Suez Canal–Aden–Mumbai (then Bombay) route. His loyalty to the Saud cause began to outweigh his loyalty to Britain.

In 1924, Philby was forced to resign his post over differences on allowing Jewish immigration to Palestine. He was found to have had unauthorised correspondence with Ibn Saud, sending him confidential information and raising suspicion that he was involved in espionage. Shortly afterwards Ibn Saud began to call for the overthrow of the Hashemite dynasty, with Philby continuing to advise Ibn Saud on how far he could go in occupying Arabia without incurring the wrath of the British, then the principal power in the Middle East.

In 1925 Philby settled in Jeddah, albeit returning regularly to London. Over the next few years he became famous as an international writer and explorer, mapping the Saudi–Yemeni border on camel, for example. He was a known anti-Zionist (at this date of course Israel did not yet exist). In a plan that bore his name, Philby outlined proposals to reach a compromise with Zionism, after consultation with Arab leaders. In line with his Arab sympathies, his Plan foresaw continued Jewish immigration into Palestine in exchange for a renunciation by Zionists of any desire to seek political dominance, with representation of the two groups to be based on their numerical proportions.

Jewish groups initially reacted positively to the Philby Plan, but Nazi persecution of Jews during the war would of course alter the region's complexion into more rigid territories and stances.

Converting to Islam in 1930 (the year to which his lease on Coed y Bleiddiau was backdated), Philby became Ibn Saud's chief adviser in dealing with the British Empire and Western powers, a position of even greater power once oil was discovered in the Arabian peninsula. The early 1930s were difficult years for Philby and his wife Dora. He was peripatetic and often broke; he had put too many backs up. In July 1933 Philby was on leave back in London, and for once had some money. This was when he first sublet Coed y Bleiddiau from his friend Bantock – we can infer he already knew the cottage.

In summer 1934, his wife Dora, alone in London, tore D. H. Lawrence off a strip at a Middle Eastern party for enquiring when Philby 'was going to get out of his rut.' She was furnishing Coed y Bleiddiau at this time, though Philby wanted her back in Jeddah. 'Apart from the place [Coed y Bleiddiau] being more comfortable for my occasional visits, it will be a good thing for you to be here to open the correspondence.... Some of our affairs are, as you know, very confidential.'

The Philby family spent the next summers at Coed y Bleiddiau, where he claimed he was teaching his daughters, Pat, Diana and Helena, domestic economy. In summer 1935, for example, he packed Dora off to London and made the girls keep house 'as Arabs do,' washing the clothes on the stones of the stream. He was not a faithful husband, and Dora had to tolerate many affairs.

Philby continued to tread what was to many a dubious path, sometimes playing off the interests of American oil companies with their British counterparts to the benefit of Ibn Saud, with whom his chief loyalties still lay. Through his agency, Standard Oil of California signed a 60-year contract with Saudi Arabia for the

exclusive concession for exploration and extraction of oil in the al-Hasa region along the Persian Gulf. Philby won few friends at home for thus undermining British influence in the region by facilitating the entry of American commercial interests, leading to a political alliance between the US and the Saud dynasty that persists today.

Philby's record through the rest of the 1930s and the World War did little to improve his image. When the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1937, Philby arranged for his son, Kim Philby, to become a war correspondent for *The Times*. There seems little doubt that Kim Philby's oblique stance to the British Establishment was inspired at least in part by father's disregard for British interests.

Philby is said to have undertaken secret negotiations with Germany and Spain about Saudi Arabia's role in the event of a general European war, to allow neutral Saudi Arabia to sell oil to neutral Spain, which then would be transported to Germany. He seems to have admired the policies of Hitler's Nationalist Socialist Party: though previously a member of the Labour Party, in July 1939 just two months before Britain and France declared war on Germany, Philby fought a by-election in Hythe, Kent for Oswald Mosley's right wing, anti-Semitic British People's Party. He declared 'no cause whatever is worth the spilling of human blood' (for which read that Britain should not go to war against Hitler) and stood up for 'the small man against big business'. He won 2.6% of the vote, and lost his deposit.

After war broke out, Philby was arrested in Bombay in August 1940 under Defence Regulation 18B, deported to England and briefly interned. Shortly after his release from custody, it was Philby who recommended his son Kim to the MI6 deputy who recruited him into the British secret service. Through all these years he was renting, and sometimes staying in, Coed y Bleiddiau. There is a persistent local rumour that William Joyce stayed at Coed y Bleiddiau. During the War, Joyce became the propagandist with cut-glass British accent who

broadcast for the Nazis as Lord Haw Haw, seeking to undermine British morale. He may well have been a friend of Philby's, but recent research has disproved either that he came to the area or that he referred to the area in his broadcasts. In November 1945, Ibn Saud made Philby, by now 60 years old, the present of a sixteen-year old girl from his household, Rozy al Abdul Aziz, re-christened Firuza by Philby. Philby the Muslim apparently saw nothing reprehensible in the arrangement. He brought Firuza to Britain, and she became his housekeeper and mistress. She too came to Coed y Bleiddiau. She bore him two sons, both of whom died in infancy.

After Ibn Saud's death in 1953, Philby was soon openly critical of his successor King Saud and of the post-war settlement in the Middle East, and continued to work against the existence of the Jewish state. He was exiled to Lebanon in 1955, where he lived for a while with his son in Beirut. Not yet revealed as a double agent, Kim Philby was re-employed by MI6 as an outside informer with the rather remarkable assignment to spy on his father. Jack Philby meanwhile helped further his son's career by introducing him to his extensive network of contacts in the Middle East. In 1955, Jack Philby returned to live in Riyadh. Both he and his son were sympathetic to Nasser during the Suez Crisis of August 1956, again counter to official British policy. Between Jack's Arab contacts and Kim's access to British intelligence, there was little they did not know about Operation Musketeer, the French and British plan to capture the Suez Canal that precipitated the Suez Crisis. The Soviet Union exposed the plan in the United Nations and threatened Britain and France with long-range guided missiles equipped with atomic warheads.

While in bed on a visit to Kim in Beirut in 1960, Philby reportedly exclaimed 'God, I'm bored', and died. He is buried in the Muslim cemetery in the Basta district of Beirut.

Jack St. John Philby was a maverick and an outsider, who led an exotic and rip-roaring life largely according to his own lights. His seventeen-year tenancy of

remote Coed y Bleiddiau seems in many ways at odds with his life in the heat of the desert and of Middle Eastern political intrigue. That the cottage provided him with a remote and secluded base in a cooler clime may have been part of its appeal. And to end this account of a turbulent and controversial life on a positive note, throughout his life Philby was a keen naturalist, which perhaps also explains his loyalty to Snowdonia. He contributed numerous specimens to the British Museum and named the Arabian woodpecker (*Desertipicus* - now *Dendrocopos* - *dorae*), as well as a subspecies (no longer valid) of a scops owl (*Otus scops pamelae*) - most of his birds were named after his women. Philby the keen ornithologist is in the name of a partridge (*Alectoris philbyi*): some contrast to mapping the desert on a camel.

In the words of writer Jan Morris reviewing Philby's biography in *The Spectator,* 'when all is said and done, what a life it was!'

Philby's partridge, native to south western Saudi Arabia and Yemen – so unlikely to be spotted in Snowdonia!

Mrs Roberts & daughter Pat

In January 1948, the year after Philby relinquished the lease on Coed y Bleiddiau, the Railway records show that a Mrs M C Roberts leased Coed y Bleiddiau for 'about a year.' Thanks to our direct mail appeal for its restoration, we can add a bit more to this. Mrs Roberts' daughter Pat turned out to be a Landmarker, and she wrote to us to say that she already knew Coed y Bleiddiau. Pat grew up at the Oakeley Arms at Tan-y-Bwlch, which her parents owned from 1932-1948. Wanting to keep a foothold in the area, Mrs Roberts leased Coed y Bleiddiau for the following year. Pat remembers:

> *we drove to Tan-y-Bwlch station and loaded all our bedding and food into a slate truck and pushed it up the line…I do remember that it was cold damp and uncomfortable! I don't know if my mother ever went there again.*[8]

Babs & Bob Johnson

In 1951, Babs and Bob Johnson came to live in the cottage, where they stayed for more than half a century. The Johnsons became characters on the line in their own right, sometimes offering bed and breakfast to visitors, and we received letters and photos from several Landmarkers giving their own memories of this warm and engaging couple.[9] A few had even stayed at Coed-y-Bleiddau during these years, and no doubt others too who have known the Ffestiniog line in recent years will remember the Johnsons.

Bob Johnson worked in the nuclear industry, and he and Babs originally moved from London to Snowdonia for his health, after which he worked on the Trawsfynydd Nuclear Power Station. The mid-1950s were of course years of renewed activity on the line, as volunteers restored it to re-open as a passenger

[8] Pers. Comm. 14/1/16

[9] Dot & Keith Drummington-Bass, Clive Baker, Michael Davies and Gwen Thomas have all contributed memories and/or photos to this section. Peter Napier's Feasibility Report of November 2012 also provides some of the anecdotes.

service in 1955. Landmarker Michael Davies was one of the volunteers and met the Johnsons in August 1955, when they were invited to look around the cottage. The Johnsons had goats tethered to the tracks – not a problem in those days of infrequent trains and perhaps helping to clear vegetation from the tracks (interestingly, the Hovendons also kept goats at the cottage).

Long term Landmarker Keith Drummond-Brassington stayed in the Vale of Ffestiniog as a boy in the early 1950s. 'As a boy I remember climbing up on the old engines in the Boston Lodge workshops. It was heaven for a small boy.' Largely because of his family's lifetime friendship with the Johnsons, Keith later spent holidays here with his wife Dot and their children, Coed y Bleiddiau therefore known through three generations of family holidays.

Let Keith's memories speak for themselves:

> *My Mother and Father first met Bob and Babs Johnson when we were on Holiday near Porthmadoc in the early 50's.*
>
> *Railways were always an interest so exploring the then derelict Ffestiniog Railway was heaven and we walked nearly all of the line. Whilst at Tan y Bwlch Station one evening, Mum and Dad met Bob and Babs getting ready to push a slate wagon loaded with coal and provisions up the line to their line side Cottage. The following day we all walked up the line to Coed y Bleiddiau to see where they lived and there after visited whenever we could, so much so that my brother and I called them Uncle Bob and Auntie Babs.*
>
> *Sometimes Uncle Bob used to come down on the slate wagon and he and my father would push us back up the line. What an adventure for two small boys, but it was even more fun coming down as we would all get on the wagon and after pushing us to get started, jump on and off. We would roll down the line, through the tunnel, all the way to Tan y Bwlch Station where Bob would get off onto the rails and slide along them to slow us down. I'm not sure how long his boots lasted! I don't know what people must have thought below when they saw a wagon trundling down the tracks with us all laughing riding down to Tan y Bwlch in the evening. I also remember Uncle Bob telling us that when the wind was in the right direction and strong enough he would put a sail on the wagon and sail it up the line!*

Babs & Bob Johnson (left) welcome Keith Drummond-Brassington, his brother and mother outside Coed y Bleiddiau in the early 1950s.

Babs Johnson beside her vegetable plot on the curve leading to Coed y Bleiddiau with the Drummond-Brassingtons.

Babs and Mrs Drummond-Brassington in the kitchen at Coed y Bleiddiau.

'It was heaven for small boys.' Bob pushing the slate trolley from Tan-y-Bwlch to Coed y Bleiddiau…and returning on the Down laden with provisions.

One of the goats that provided the Johnsons with their milk. In these years when only an occasional goods train passed, the goats could be tethered to the line.

A carpet of Sphagnum moss, and a dried sample.

Coed y Bleiddiau was a lovely cottage and Auntie Babs kept it beautiful and homely with a wonderful garden full of flowers and had a vegetable garden alongside the track just below the cottage. They kept goats for their milk and the water came from a small dam above the cottage. The dam was in the shape of a D (for drinking water). I can't remember if they had electricity when we first went there but cooking was by calor gas.

Bob and Babs had come from London for reasons of Bob's health and worked on the Trawsfynydd Nuclear Power Station being built across the valley but more interestingly collected Sphagnum moss in woods all around and sent it to off to Hospitals in London for treating wounds. My mother and father regularly visited them having retired to Anglesey. We last visited them in the 90's with our two daughters walking up through the woods as the railway was fully running then. They were the same as ever, so welcoming and the cottage was as I remembered it as a small boy.

My memories will always be of walking or being pushed up the line, exploring the railway – there were no trains running then, feeding the goats, and riding down on the wagon in the evening. Wonderful. I hope that when it is restored others will be able to enjoy it as much as we did.

Bob and Babs would be so pleased to see it lived in and enjoyed again.

This mention of the Johnsons gathering Spagnam moss is another interesting insight into the vale's connections with the wider world. Fiona Bantock, the composer's granddaughter, fondly remembers visiting 'the moss gatherers' cottage' with her mother. Sphagnum is a genus of some 380 accepted species of mosses. It can absorb many times its own weight in liquids and is extremely acidic, which gives it antiseptic properties that inhibit the growth of bacteria and infection. As well its decorative appeal in flower arranging, these further properties make the moss useful for shipping seeds and live plants. More notably, Sphagnum moss has also been used for centuries as a dressing for wounds, including through both World Wars when cotton for dressings was scarce. It thrives in the mild, damp conditions of Snowdonia and the area was an important supplier to the Liverpool hospitals. Bob Johnson also supplied an orchid grower in Slough, and was featured for this in *The Countryman* magazine.

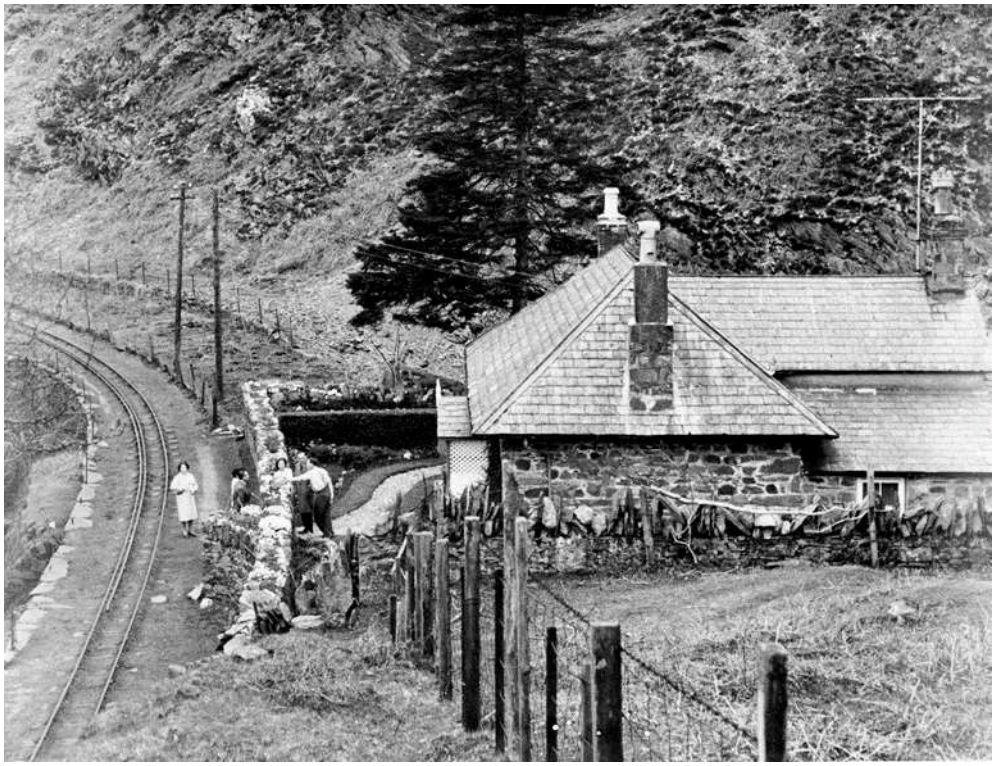
In due course, Keith Drummond-Brassington married Dot, and they in turn returned to see the Johnsons with *their* daughters, here in 1985 on their last visit.

Babs and Bob outside Coed y Bleiddiau in April 1997, the garden as immaculate as ever (Photo: Michael Davies, one of the volunteers who worked to rescue the railway in the 1950s).

The Johnsons maintained a pretty front garden, remembered by many who passed on the train, and grew roses round the pretty porch with latticed sides and pointed finial.

By the turn of this century, Babs and Bob had reached an advanced age. They still parked their three-wheeler car in the forest and walked to Coed y Bleiddiau down the uneven footpath, but life in such a remote spot became increasingly impractical. Their tenure finally came to an end when they moved to more suitable accommodation.

Further up the slope on the east side of the cottage there is a memorial stone to Lilian Mary Jackson, 1911-1995. Lilian was Babs's sister; they both had childhood links in the area, Lilian having recuperated from meningitis at Dduallt. In due course, the Johnsons' ashes were also scattered around this memorial in the place they so loved. Coed y Bleiddiau, meanwhile, was standing empty as the Ffestiniog Railway pondered its future.



The Johnsons greeting visitors in 1964. Coed y Bleiddiau's little platform was added during the restoration phase of the Railway.

Coed y Bleiddiau in 2010

A ramshackle conservatory linked the rear extension to the main rooms. Vestiges of the Johnsons' planting scheme were still apparent.

View from the rear, and the kitchen, just as it was when the Johnsons left two years earlier.

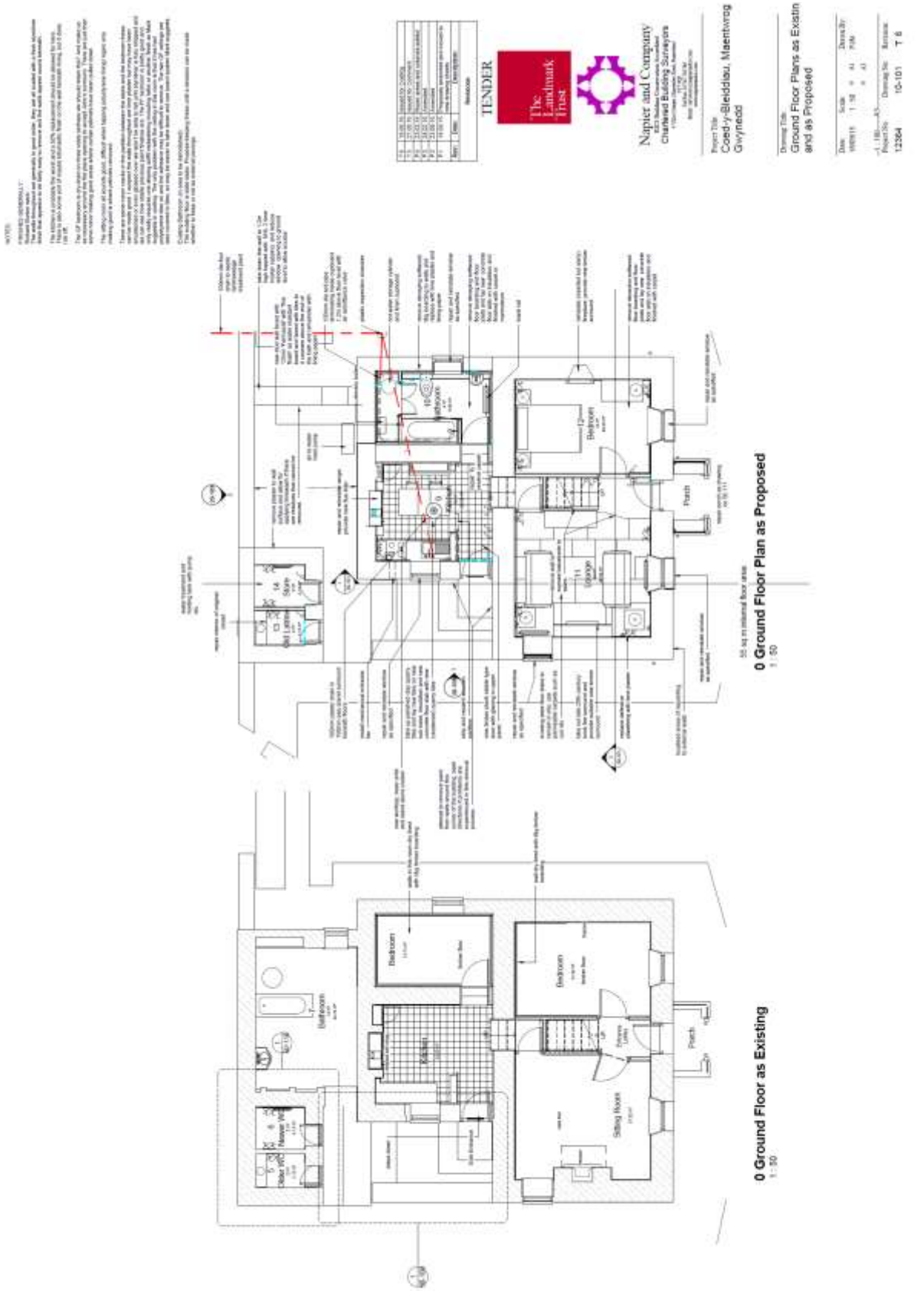
Before restoration: Coed y Bleiddiau in 2012

By now, the glazed link to the rear extension had had to be taken down. The roof was leaking badly due to missing slates and the joinery was rotting.

Description and restoration of Coed y Bleiddiau

In the autumn of 2011, Landmark received an approach from the Railway Heritage Trust, suggesting that a little unlisted cottage on the Ffestiniog Railway might be worthy of our attention. We wrote to Paul Lewin, General Manager of the Railway, who confirmed that the cottage had indeed been empty for several years, and had become increasingly derelict. Its repair, unfortunately, lay beyond both the means and chief priorities of the Ffestiniog Railway Trust. Its beautiful but sensitive setting in the Snowdonia National Park hard by the steam railway, and the chance to help a like-minded organisation concentrate on fulfilling its own mission, as well as the little building's peril, all made Coed y Bleiddiau a suitable project for Landmark. The roof was already leaking and if action was not taken soon, it was clear it would deteriorate fast. First, however, we had to evaluate if Landmark use was feasible in such a place, given no car access and the logistical difficulties of delivering building materials, bedlinen and so on.

In 2012, a detailed project evaluation and feasibility report was commissioned from building surveyor Peter Napier. Peter's report reassured us that, with the Railway's help, rescue and onward use as a holiday let was possible and a 99-year lease was agreed with the Railway. Although Landmark had its usual full project load, Coed y Bleiddiau's rescue was given a timely boost by a generous initial donation by railway enthusiast Richard Broyd OBE, which allowed us to re-roof the cottage ahead of our main appeal. Soon after the repairs to the roof were completed, the cottage received a visit from the local Conservation Office, and was immediately listed at Grade II. We launched our main appeal in November 2015, and the main works began on site exactly a year later.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The Landmark Trust
Napier and Company
Chartered Building Surveyors
Project Title
Coed-y-Bleiddiau, Maentwrog
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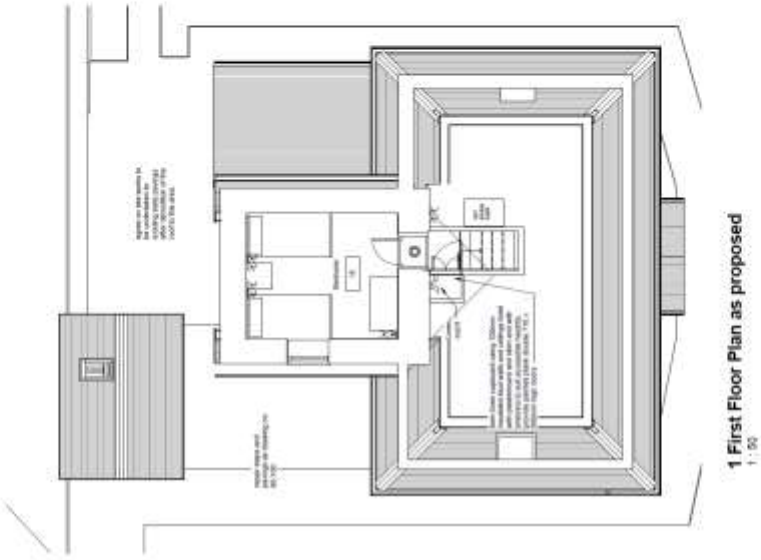
TENDER
The Landmark Trust
Napier and Company
Coed-y-Bleiddiau, Maentwrog
Gwynedd
First Floor Plan as Existing and as Proposed
1 First Floor Plan as proposed
1 First Floor Plan as Existing

By 2014, the roof was in a desperate state. The slate rolls to the hip joints were never a very satisfactory detailing as installed, and were failing.

The flaunching around this chimney stack had cracked and crude earlier attempts to mend the roof were doing little to help. Vegetation was also a problem.

Thanks to a sizeable donation from Richard Broyd OBE before the launch of the Landmark appeal, in summer 2014 the cottage was scaffolded and the roof stripped, re-battened and fully repaired. This helped stave off further decay while Landmark set about raising the finds necessary to restore the rest of the cottage.

Coed y Bleiddiau is built of solid random stone drawn from whatever was at hand in the Vale. Some of the stones have been quarried; there is some granite, and some slate and mudstone, some of which bears saw marks. (Geologically, slate occurs between levels of granite that enabled the miners to create vast chambers to extract the slate. Large quantities of granite waste would have been generated, and perhaps some of this too was brought down from Ffestiniog in the slate trucks.) There are even a few old sleepers built into the walls, recognisable by the two holes drilled in them to receive the chairs to which the track is fixed.

The cottage's shallow pitched, hipped slate roof has wide overhanging eaves. The soffits beneath the eaves are finished with roof tiles nailed at each end to the rafter ends and to a timber subframe. Another unusual feature is the finish to the ridges, where flat slate slabs are fixed on top of the main roofing tiles on either side of a slate roll. The windows are mostly vertical sliding sashes of varying size, ranging from sixteen panes at the front to twelve or nine panes.

The cottage was initially built in a T-shape with three integral chimney flues. A detached stone-built privy was built close behind. Very soon after completion, an extension was added to the rear in one angle of the T, presumably to accommodate the growing Hovendon family, and then a further extension was added at the rear on the line of back wall of the outside WC. In the 20th century, a glazed link or small conservatory closed the other angle of the T, linking the main rooms with a modern WC and bathroom in the rearmost extension. A little slate roofed porch with wooden lattice sides was also added during the 20th century.

The interior was simple, as might be expected: there was a nice slate floor in the sitting room and an old cast iron range in the kitchen. The cottage had already suffered badly from water penetration from missing roof slates and all the joinery and rotting timber floors were in urgent need of repair. Patches of lath and plaster ceiling had collapsed.

Signs of accelerating decay: the cottage before the main works began.

The cottage had electricity but clearly needed rewiring, while water was brought from the stream by pipes and the foul waste discharged into a hole in the ground beneath large slate slabs.

Predictably, there was a bat in residence, and a bat licence was duly obtained before the main works began in November 2016, working with local contractor Mark Roberts. As we were reliant on the Railway for the delivery of all building materials, special diesel service trains from Porthmadoc had to be laid on. These were as important for the removal of building waste as for the delivery of new materials, and loading and unloading added further work for Mark Roberts and his team – as well has having to walk every day to and from the site through the forest. Each train load took three days: one to load up, one to get steam/diesel up and transport the goods, and a day to unload. The furnishing process at the end of the project required similar logistical planning.

Restoration

It was decided that the cottage was right for a Landmark for four people, and that some of the rear extensions could therefore be removed, including the ugly glazed link and the bathroom. The ecologist observed the taking down of the rear extensions, and advised on the creation of a bat loft in the roof.

Externally, guttering was renewed throughout and a chimney pot replaced. We moved the original 'hogsback' chimney cowl to the flue above the working fireplace in the sitting room, to ensure best draw for it. Pointing was checked across the entire building, raked out anywhere necessary, and once a pointing sample had been approved by the Conservation Officer, the walls were repointed and flashing completed around the chimney stacks in lime mortar. A septic tank was installed, and a water filtration plant for the water, which is still drawn from the stream.

Clockwise from top: The stair partition dismantled in Dec 2016; creating a new, direct access to the platform; the 1837 slate mile post being used as a lintel, one of just four that have survived (now given to the Railway's archive), and old newspaper packing found beneath the floorboards.

The paths, steps and rear yard have all been relaid with found and salvaged slate slabs, and retaining walls for the banks have been repaired or, in the case of one such wall that collapsed during the works, rebuilt. A new gate was hung leading to the platform.

Internally, rotten joinery was repaired in lintels and windows, although it was found most of the first floor floorboards were sound and could be relaid. New external doors were hung for the kitchen and Ty Bach (privy). The wall plaster had failed due to water ingress on much of the ground floor so this was removed and then replaced, once archaeological recording had taken place. The whole cottage was rewired and a new heating system installed, with insulation introduced to floors and ceilings. The tongue and groove partition inside the kitchen door was reinstated, and the kitchen floor quarry tiles, which had to be lifted to introduce services, were carefully relaid as they had been previously. The later enclosing partition wall of the staircase was removed.

The timber porch, whose uprights had rotted badly, was carefully photographed in situ and then dismantled and taken to Landmark's workshop at Wormington in the North Cotswolds for careful repair. Sash windows were repaired on site. All sound timber was saved, with new elements carefully scarfed to replace sections where rot had taken hold. The kitchen units were also made at Wormington, the last such Landmark kitchen to be made there before the Landmark workshop relocated to nearby Honeybourne. The old range was cleaned down and oiled, and new cast iron surrounds for the fireplaces were sourced and fitted. Once re-erected, the porch was re-roofed.

There was a brief debate about the paint colour for the external bargeboards and fascias. These were painted green when we took Coed y Bleiddiau on, but this turned out to be the Empire Green (renamed 'Vampire Green' by the local youth) that 1950s General Manager Alan Garraway had decreed should be used across the line for buildings and railways alike.






Works underway in 2017. Top: scratch coat of lime plaster in the first floor bedroom and quarry tiles relaid in the kitchen, now above a layer of insulation. Middle: a sash window removed for repair on a bench, and another repaired window back in place. Bottom: new steps to the bathroom, and 'Hovendon' found scratched into a window pane.

While renovating Penrhyn Station in the 1980s, re-used timbers were found that were thought to have come from the original, wooden Harbour Station which was demolished the year that Penrhyn was built. On this basis, railway historians identify a mid-brown and a cream as the original 19th-century Ffestiniog Railway livery. Today, the line chooses to use a more colourful maroon for the terminal stations and brown and cream for the intermediate stations. As Coed y Bleiddiau is unquestionably an intermediate station, we have followed the Railway's convention and used brown and cream.

There were two exciting finds during the works. One was a railway mile post, made of a single piece of slate, that was found re-used as a window lintel when the rear bathroom extension was being taken down. Dating back to the days of the horse tram days, this was an important find and one of only four known to have survived. It has been returned to the Railway for their collection of railway artefacts.

The second discovery was the name 'Hovenden' or 'Hovendon' scratched into one of the window panes, more likely to have been done by one of the younger Hovendons than the upstanding Superintendent!

Mark Roberts and his team worked through the seasons with remarkably few breaks through bad weather, on a project that was one of Landmark's most logistically challenging. Throughout, they and we were dependent upon, and very grateful for, the Railway's support and willingness to assist. Arrangements for linen storage have been made at Tan-y-Bwlch as there is no room in this tiny cottage; the housekeeper too needs to be resilient in caring for this remote cottage.

Autumn 2017. Top: preparation for pointing repairs and the kitchen partition reinstated. Middle: the porch ready for reassembly, and weather protection for drying external paintwork. Bottom: Luke Rose & Mark Smitten install the new kitchen units made by them offsite; laying the rear yard.

Few Landmark projects have generated more interest and enthusiasm among our supporters than Coed y Bleiddiau. Landmark's birth was prompted by concern for humble, overlooked buildings: Coed y Bleiddiau's setting and railway provenance alone might have justified its rescue, but when its varied and colourful past residents are added to the mix, this little cottage has as rich a history as any in Landmark's portfolio and more than justifies the collective effort involved in its rescue.

Both the delivery of new materials to site…

…and the removal of debris from site had to be accomplished by the hard working engines of the Ffestiniog Railway.

(March 2017)

Percy Bysshe Shelley, painted by Amelia Curran in 1819, five years after Shelley's sojourn at Tan-yr-Allt. Here, amid the scenery of Snowdonia but also amid the penury of the workers, he was inspired to write his poem of radical social change, *Queen Mab.*

Heaven's ebon vault,
Studded with stars unutterably bright,
Through which the moon's unclouded grandeur rolls,
Seems like a canopy which love has spread
To curtain her sleeping world.

- **Queen Mab, Canto 3**

Tan-yr-Allt, the pretty villa built by William Madocks in Tremadog and rented by Shelley in 1812-13 with his first wife Harriet Westbrook, until the couple fled to Ireland after an apparent assassination attempt in the house.

Percy Bysshe Shelley at Tan-yr-Allt

While the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley's association with the area does not relate directly to Coed y Bleiddiau and predates the railway, his involvement with the Embankment phase is nonetheless a lively illustration of the ferment of the Madocks years, and is one of the less well-known episodes of Shelley's own dramatic life. One of the best-loved Romantic poets, Shelley came to the area in 1811 as something of a refugee. His time here is an illustration of his social radicalism as much as his poetic sensibility.

Sent down from Oxford in March 1811 aged 19 for publishing a pamphlet on atheism, in August Shelley eloped to Scotland with Harriet Westbrook, a 16-year-old pupil at the same boarding school as Shelley's sisters. Harriet had been writing Shelley passionate letters threatening to kill herself because of her unhappiness at the school and at home. Shelley, heartbroken after being jilted by his cousin, Harriet Grove, and convinced that he did not have long to live, impulsively decided to rescue Westbrook and make her his beneficiary. Outraged that his son had married the daughter of a former tavern keeper, Shelley's father Sir Timothy Shelley, disowned him. Harriet also insisted that her sister Eliza, whom Shelley detested, live with them. They lived briefly in Lynmouth in Devon, but Shelley was by now heavily in debt and in September 1812, they fled by boat to North Wales, pursued by debtors and authorities who wished to question the poet about his radical political activities. These were the years of the Napoleonic Wars and the reverberations of the French Revolution still sent shivers of fear among monarchical regimes.

The Embankment was being re-built when the Shelleys arrived, and Tremadoc was newly built. They stayed initially at the Madocks Arms Hotel, where they learned that a local house, Tan-yr-Allt, was for rent. Madocks had built Tan-yr-Allt, overlooking the Glaslyn basin, in 1794 but in 1812, threatened by his own debtors, he sold his lease to a creditor. It was for rent although the new owner, a Mr Girdlestone, was at first understandably reluctant to let it to Shelley -

Shelley's alienation from his family and known debt record made him a poor credit risk - but he was eventually persuaded to lease the Shelleys his house in November 1812, where they spent the winter.

The house is like a small Italianate villa in design, long before Clough Williams-Ellis's took similar inspiration for Portmeirion. The west and south facades have large windows and verandas with magnificent views – a fittingly Romantic setting, and Shelley and Harriet were initially content in their new home.

It will be remembered that in February 1812, the central section of Madocks' Embankment collapsed in high spring tides, and that Madocks, near bankrupt, was desperately in need of funds to renew it. Shelley threw himself with youthful enthusiasm into the fundraising. The *North Wales Gazette* for 1st October 1812 gives a flavour of the poet's rhetoric at a public meeting:

> *'The Embankment at Tremadoc is one of the noblest works of human power – it is an exhibition of human nature as it appears in its noblest and most natural state – benevolence, it saves, it does not destroy. Yes! The unfruitful sea once rolled where human beings now live and earn an honest livelihood. Cast a look round these islands, through the perspective of these times – behold famine driving millions even to madness; and own how excellent, how glorious, is the work that will give no less than three thousand souls the means of competence. How can anyone look upon that work and hesitate to join me, when I here publicly pledge myself to spend the last shilling of my fortune, and devote the last breath of my life to this great, this glorious cause.'*

Shelley was now 20 and close to taking up his inheritance at 21, believing his father could not overrule the entail. Meanwhile, of course, he *was* almost down to his last shilling. He threw himself into campaigning for the poor, inflamed by his own penury, seeking to alleviate hardship, walking out at night to speak to the labourers who tended their little garden patches by moonlight, an image that vividly evokes their hardship in an exceptionally hard winter. The poem *Queen Mab* was written in these months, advocating radical social change and Shelley's first major poem. It was essential for its survival that the Embankment was not breached as in the previous year, and that there was no trouble amongst the labour force. Shelley's radicalism and defence of workers' rights

put him at odds with the projectors of the area, who may have decided they needed to force him out.

On Friday, 26th February 1813, it seems an intruder broke into Tan-yr-Allt, perhaps a government agent in search of incriminating radical pamphlets. Shelley and Harriet later vividly described the event in their letters, claiming that the poet surprised the man and fired two pistols, hitting him in the shoulder with the second shot. Supposedly, after screaming threats against Shelley's wife and her sister, the man fled, but returned later that night and fired a shot at Shelley. The bullet was apparently embedded in the wainscoting. There remains some mystery about exactly what happened, but either way Shelley and his little household fled the next day, terrified for their lives. They borrowed money and crossed to Ireland, where they stayed at Reen Point in the Lakes of Killarney area.

Shelley's experience at Tremadoc cured him of direct political activism once and for all. From then on, he became a mouthpiece for political change rather than himself seeking to be its instrument.