

company (one authorised by Act of Parliament) it transpired that it was impossible for the management to abandon the railway without getting another Act of Parliament. This would have cost more than the scrap value of the line and the result was that everything was still in place, albeit derelict and very overgrown, in 1954, when a band of railway enthusiasts finally managed to purchase a majority of the shares and begin the task of restoration. One of the original 0-4-0 locomotives, *Prince*, was restored to service with a new boiler which had been delivered just before the closure and passenger services on the mile of line between Porthmadog and Boston Lodge began in July 1955.

Since the reopening of that first mile of the line there have been many landmarks, and much has been achieved which would have seemed an impossible pipe-dream in the early days—especially to those pioneer volunteers who, in 1954–55, raised funds by ‘gas-axing’ hundreds of old iron slate wagons and other ‘useless’ Victorian ironwork for scrap at \$8 a ton. The heroic years of the Deviation Project—the 1965 to 1978 construction, by mainly volunteer labour, of a two-and-a-half-mile bypass round a reservoir which had blocked the line, and which included a spiral and a 930-foot tunnel through hard rock—are also long past, and the 20th anniversary of the final reopening to Blaenau Ffestiniog was celebrated in 2002. It might therefore be assumed that the railway has now settled into a comfortable and rather predictable rut, with trains trundling uneventfully up and down 14 miles of line, with little changing from year to year.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

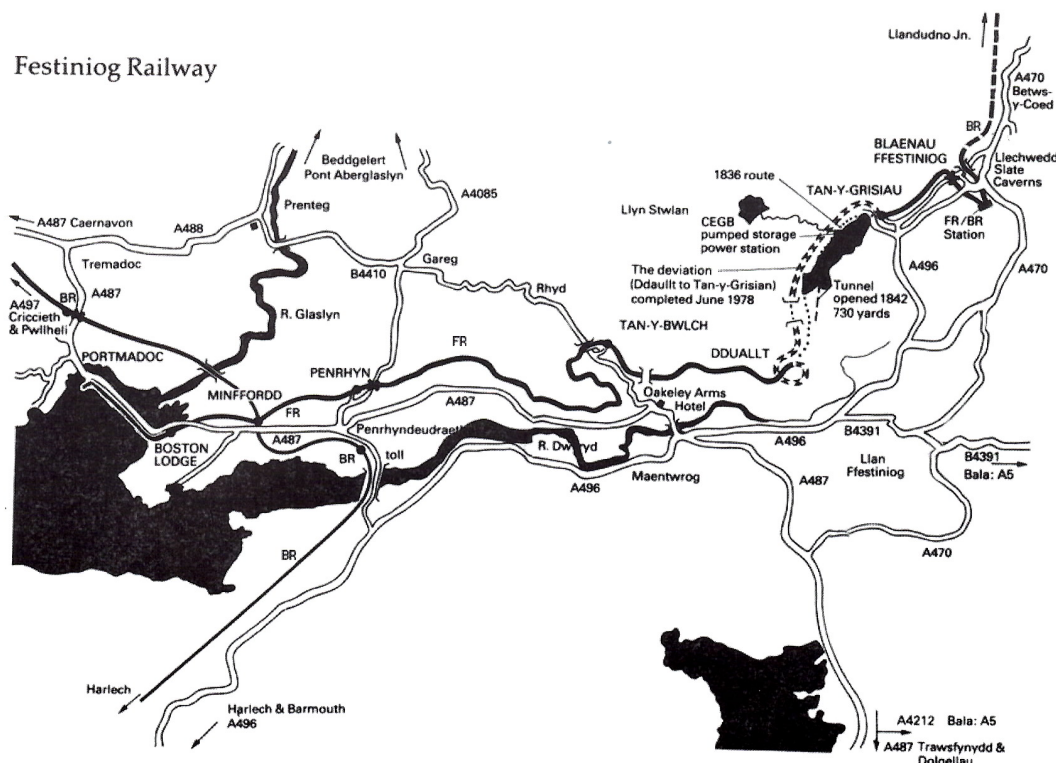


Ladies on the Cob: Linda (right) and Blanche double-head a heavy winter train across the ‘Cob’, the 3/4-mile embankment across the estuary at Porthmadog. The snow-covered Snowdon massif is clearly visible 10 miles away in the background. Despite appearances these locomotives are not Forneys, but 2-4-0 saddle tanks with tenders. Blanche’s tender has a permanent half cab that on Linda’s tender is removable. (Photo by Peter Johnson.)

In the early 1960s it became obvious that the reopened line was becoming a major tourist attraction, and great effort had to be put into the provision of additional passenger carriages. Initially these consisted of old Welsh Highland and Lynton & Barnstaple carriages recovered from retirement as chicken sheds, but it was soon neces-

sary to design and build new carriages, including special vehicles such as observation and buffet cars, entirely from scratch. Additional carriages meant more trains and a demand for extra locomotives, initially satisfied by acquiring *Linda* and *Blanche*, two second-hand Hunslet saddle tanks from the Penrhyn Quarry Railway and

Festiniog Railway





Mountaineer at Boston Lodge: After having been successively 'standard' FR green, then War Department grey, Mountaineer now carries a very smart lined black livery. Here she awaits departure from the carriage sidings with the 'C' set. (Photo by Peter Johnson.)

rebuilding them with tenders and leading trucks. They were much more successful in their new role than anyone had dared hope, and have consistently run high annual mileages on heavy trains; both have now covered around 300,000 miles in FR service. However, even if 'thrashed' they were not quite powerful enough to handle the heaviest high season trains and the two old, 1880s, double Fairlies which remained were still an essential part of the fleet. The railway also acquired, from a French agricultural light railway, an Alco (Cooke) 2-6-2T originally constructed for use by the British army on the 2-foot gauge railways serving the trenches during WWI. This locomotive is something of a fuel hog and has required considerable modification over the years but is rugged and reasonably powerful. Named *Mountaineer*, reusing the name of an 0-4-0 scrapped in the 1870s, it performs much the same duties as the Penrhyn 'Ladies'.

Unfortunately, even well-constructed boilers eventually wear out and, in the early 1970s, new boilers, of a simpler and cheaper pattern than the double-tapered 'wagon-top' originals, had to be bought for both Fairlies. One was fitted to *Merddin Emrys*, the oldest of the pair, but the changes to its outline were such that a major outcry arose when it was proposed to treat *Earl of Merioneth* in the same manner. The

in 1979, was the first double Fairlie built since 1911 and was very much a modernised, utilitarian version, designed to be constructed as cheaply as possible and offer maximum economy of operation. Oil firing had replaced coal in the early 1970s at the insistence of the railway's insurers—they had become tired of paying for incinerated trees in the conifer plantations which had appeared alongside the line in the 1960s—and 'E of M' was designed with sufficient oil and water capacity to do a full round trip from Porthmadog to Blaenau Ffestiniog without replenishment. Needless to say this resulted in a very bulky and angular design, although subtle alterations to the paint scheme and changes to the chimneys and steam dome covers have softened the outline in recent years.

The need to refurbish infrastructure, neglected whilst the 'Push to Blaenau' was taking place, meant that the 1980s was a

upshot was that the company shops at Boston Lodge were asked to use the second boiler as the basis of a new locomotive, whilst the old 'E of M' was preserved and eventually went on indefinite loan to the National Railway Museum at York bearing its original name of *Livingston Thompson*. The new *Earl of Merioneth*, which went into service

decade of consolidation, and few major rolling stock projects were undertaken, apart from the construction of a series of rather basic steel saloons on the underframes of former three-foot gauge Isle of Man Railway carriages. However, one lesson from the building of the Deviation had been the knowledge that grants could be had for infrastructure projects from various official bodies such as regional development boards, tourist boards and the European Community. Applications were therefore made for help with a number of projects, the first being for the construction of yet another double Fairlie—but this time it was to be of traditional FR outline, albeit somewhat enlarged and more powerful than its 19th century cousins by virtue of a proper double-taper boiler working at higher pressure and incorporating superheating. Except for the boiler, built by a specialist firm, the locomotive was constructed entirely by the Company's own shops at Boston Lodge and entered service in 1992, having cost around half a million dollars. It is named *David Lloyd George*, after the celebrated, locally born Liberal Prime Minister and has proved equal to any task required of it—it can comfortably haul trains considerably longer than the longest passing loop can accommodate and is very much the Pride of the Fleet.



Earl of Merioneth at Minffordd: Double Fairlie Earl of Merioneth was the first new steam locomotive to be built at Boston Lodge during the preservation era, going into service in 1979 – the first locomotive built by the FR since 1886. Its angular styling has earned it the nickname of *The Square*. (Photo by Peter Johnson.)



David Lloyd George at Porthmadog: Built at Boston Lodge in the early 1990s to traditional FR outline and style, double Fairlie David Lloyd George is the most powerful locomotive on the FR thanks to increased boiler pressure and superheating. (Photo by John Dobson.)

With the confidence gained from the construction of *DLG*, a project was begun to construct a single Fairlie, a type better known in Colorado as a Mason Bogie. The FR's original 0-4-4T single Fairlie *Taliesin* had been scrapped, thoroughly worn out, in the 1930s but one or two original parts, such as the reversing lever, were still lying around Boston Lodge. The slightly enlarged replica utilised these parts and incorporated a power bogie interchangeable with those under *DLG*. Thanks to the reuse of the old parts the new loco is regarded by some as a rebuild and 'Rebuilt 1999' plates were fitted when it went into service. As expected, it is proving to be a useful medium-duty engine, very similar in power to the Penrhyn engines. It is one of only three full-size single Fairlies anywhere in the world—the others are a single Fairlie 'stuffed and mounted' at Reefton in New Zealand, and a Mason Bogie in the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn. The FR, incidentally, also owns four of the five double Fairlies still in existence—the fifth is in the Pioneer Museum in Dunedin, New Zealand.

In the early 1990s the opportunity arose to purchase a powerful double-bogie diesel locomotive from a South African cement company. Received with a centre cab far too tall for the FR's very restricted loading gauge, it was completely rebuilt to a lower profile with cabs at each end. The

rebuild was financed by sponsorship from National Power—an electricity generating company which had its own fleet of standard-gauge diesels to haul coal and limestone supplies to power stations. Named *Vale of Ffestiniog* and painted in the same blue and grey colours as National Power's own fleet, this locomotive is as powerful as a double Fairlie and

has proved to be an invaluable standby against steam locomotive failures on heavy summer trains. It is also used on lightly loaded off-season trains where a steam engine would be hopelessly uneconomic.

Other locomotive projects have also come to fruition over the years. The early 1990's, for instance, saw the return to service of another of the

1860s 0-4-0 locomotives, *Palmerston*, which had only narrowly escaped the cutter's torch after languishing, a stripped and rusty hulk, for years in the scrap yard at Boston Lodge. This rebuild was financed largely by a small group of enthusiasts from the English Midlands, who had bought the remains in 1974. Boston Lodge's reputation for high-quality steam engineering has also begun to attract outside contract work, the most prestigious example of which is a long-term project to construct a replica of a 2-foot gauge Lynton & Barnstaple Railway 2-6-2T for a private customer. This project has periods of activity followed by long pauses, as the customer raises funds for the next stage. Nevertheless *Lyd* (named, like its L&B forbears, after a 3-letter Devon river) does now have a boiler as well as frames, tanks, wheels and cylinders, and the valve gear is taking shape. When complete, it is intended to use it on light trains on the Welsh Highland Railway, of which more anon.

More recently, attention has had to be focussed once again on the double Fairlie fleet. The spotlight was first turned on *Merddin Emrys*, which had



Vale of Ffestiniog at Blaenau Ffestiniog: In the mid 1990s the FR acquired two centre-cab diesel locomotives with almost new 350hp Cummins engines from a South African cement company. One went to the Welsh Highland Railway project more or less as received, the other was considerably modified to reduce its height for use on the FR. The result is a powerful, economical and extremely useful double-cab machine. It acts as standby to the double Fairlies on heavy summer trains and is also used for lightly loaded 'off-peak' trains. (Photo by Peter Treloar.)



Palmerston in Minffordd Yard: *Having been restored as far as possible to late 19th Century condition, including coal rather than oil firing, Palmerston is only allowed on the upper part of the FR main line if sufficient rain has fallen to prevent sparks causing lineside fires. It is therefore often employed on special duties such as the 'slate shunt' in Minffordd Yard, generating valuable income from individuals and corporate groups wishing to spend a day driving a small steam engine around the old narrow/standard gauge transfer yard whilst solving the problem of putting assorted slate wagons into a specific order. (Photo by Peter Johnson.)*

become an unsightly mess during its rebuild with the new boiler. During a major overhaul, which took place from 1985 to 1987, the tanks, cab, smoke boxes, chimneys and other smaller parts were restyled to return the locomotive to the traditional FR outline, and a 19th Century style, dark red livery was applied. Unfortunately, the 1970s boilers proved to have a design fault which led to serious cracking of the firebox throat plates after several years in service. This resulted in *ME* being withdrawn from service in 1996. Repairs to the boiler proved to be extensive and expensive and were deferred until the necessary cash could be raised. In the meantime, *ME*'s power bogies were used under one of the other Fairlies—on the FR, Fairlie power bogies are interchangeable rather like the bogies on a GM or GE diesel. However, as it is intended to try and maintain all three double Fairlies in service in the future, rather than two out of three as in the past, a new set of power bogies is required and is currently under construction. As a result *ME* will only return to service in 2004. To complicate matters, severe corrosion of the water tanks has

recently been discovered and a new set was manufactured by volunteers over the 2003/4 Christmas and New Year holiday period. At the same time, the team constructed a spare set of tanks for *Earl of Merioneth*, the decision having been taken to modify that locomotive to conform to the traditional FR outline when it comes in for heavy overhaul in 2 to 3 years time.

By 2006, therefore, for the first time since the 1920s, the FR will have three double Fairlies and a single in service at the same time, all of them of the same recognisable FR design. Thanks to the efforts of the craftsmen in the Boston Lodge carriage works, they will also have at least two sets of beautifully restored vintage carriages to haul – but that is another story, to be addressed in a future article.

Incidentally, the Ffestiniog Railway currently bills itself as 'The World's Oldest Independent Railway Company' as the Act of Parliament which authorised construction was signed by King William IV on 23 May 1832—beating the oldest independent railway in the USA, the Strasburg Railroad in Pennsylvania, by 18 days!

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LIBRARY NEWS

There are two new items for the Friends' Library. From Mr. Yoshitaka Matsuo of Yokohama, Japan, comes a wonderful, full-color publication of railroads. This is the latest edition of a quarterly railfan magazine with the title "Steam Era" with full-color photos of our favorite railroad. Mr. Matsuo took the C&TS photos himself, all nine pages of them. He writes that "Most of them are of a freight charter organized by Trains Unlimited Tours of September 1998. I hope you are interested in how the C&TS is introduced in Japan." There is also a section of steam locomotives in Guatemala, also taken by Mr. Matsuo. The rest of the publication is of steam in Japan. He also has a Web site called "American Steam Locomotive." The Web address is: <http://members.aol.com/SteamAmerica>. Are there any of us who read Japanese?

The other item is a copy of Otto Kuhler's *My Iron Journey* by the Intermountain Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society in 1967. We already have a copy in the Library collection, but this particular book has something more valuable in it. It is signed and dated by Kuhler to Bill Biava of Santa Fe "with all good will and wishes, Nov. 24.71." Mr. Biava passed away some time ago. His widow decided the book should go to the Friends and so it has via Carl Turner of Santa Fe. We have a real collector's item.

—Spencer Wilson