

TOP LINE

Packed With
New Arrivals



The Magazine of the Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway

Number 108

Summer 2008

£1.50

Timetable

Trains usually operate a half-hourly service from 11:30 to 16:30. Intensive services run on special events—check our website or call for details.

Fares

Furnace Sidings to Whistle Inn Return—£2.50 Adult

£1.50—Children (aged 3 to 16)

£6.50—Family Ticket (2 adults + 2 children)

TRAINS RUN ON THESE DAYS IN 2008

	S	Su	M	T	W	Th	F	S	Su	M	T	W	Th	F	S	Su	M	T	W	Th	F	S	Su	M	T	W	Th	F	S	Su
MAR																						22	23	24					29	30
APR	5	6						12	13						19	20						26	27							
MAY	3	4	5					10	11						17	18						24	25	26					31	
JUN		1						7	8						14	15						21	22						28	29
JUL	5	6						12	13						19	20						26	27							
AUG	2	3		5	6	7		9	10		12	13	14		16	17		19	20	21		23	24	25		27			30	31
SEP	6	7						13	14						20	21						27	28							
OCT	4																													
DEC	6	7						13	14						20	21	22	23				27	28							

SPECIAL EVENTS 2008

March 22nd	25th Season Celebration	June 14th	God Train	August 24/25	Transport Rally
		June 22nd	Fathers Day Specials	September	25th Anniversary
March 23/24	Easter Bunnies	June 21/22	Model Railway Show	13/14	End Of Season Gala
April 19/20	DMU Gala	June 29th	Garn Lakes Day	October 4th	Blues On The Train
May 4/5	Teddy Bears Picnic	July 12/13	Cowboys And Indians	December 6/7,	Santa Specials
May 25/26	Lucky Dips	July 26/27	Diesel Gala	13/14, 20–23	
June 7/8	1960's Weekend	August 9/10	Ivor The Engine	December	New Year DEMU Specials
				27/28	

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TOP LINE—THE MAGAZINE OF THE PONTYPOOL AND BLAENAVON RAILWAY

NUMBER 108 SUMMER 2008

Table of contents

	Page 21— It's Electric, 3CEP 1198
Page 4— Development Report	Page 22— Pontyberem
Page 8— Loco And Plant Report	Page 23— 03141
Page 10—Whispers From The Buffet	Page 24— Retrieving The Toad
Page 11— All Change At Furnace Sidings	Page 25—The Gloucester Gang
Page 12— 812 And 816 Follow Up	Page 26—The Departures
Page 14— Opening Day	Page 27— Coming Soon—5619
Page 16—The year So far	Page 28— Before The PBR Came To Town
Page 18— Arrivals And Departures	Page 31—Off The Rails
Page 19—73128	Page 32—Membership

EDITORIAL

First of all I'd just like to say thank you for all the positive feedback I had about the last issue of Top Line and I hope you enjoy this one just as much. I had planned for the majority of this issue to be devoted to a now and then section showing changes in the railway from its early years to the present day. Unfortunately or should that be fortunately by the time I'd finished dealing with all the arrivals and departures there was little space left so that will have to wait until next issue (I hope).

And what can I say about the last few months, in our 25th year we've suddenly had almost as much stock arrive in 4 months as in the past 24 years and there is more in the pipe line. New locos, new wagons and new coaches have made the railway a busy and packed site but as John Down details, steps have been taken to provide more secure space using the current infrastructure. In fact we should be thankful that not all the track work has been removed from the BR days.

All these arrivals and great coverage in the local press as well as the national railway press show that people are beginning to notice us. As we work on getting the railway ready for April 2010 and the opening to Blaenavon High Level the rolling stock will be more useful than ever, the mainline diesels will provide much needed oomph on the loco hauled trains up the hill, the DMU and DEMU will allow a flexibility of operation and with Llantarnam Abbey , Pontyberem , 9629 and even 5668 all waiting in the wings the future as they say is bright.

Oh and if you're planning on bringing something new to the railway can you wait until after the next issue of Top Line so I can fit it all in.

Regards Alistair Grieve

Front Cover—One of our many new arrivals and star of opening day, 73128, stands outside the Top Shed at Furnace Sidings after a rain storm (no surprise there). The thumper unit 1118 alongside gives a very Southern Region feel to the scene.

DEVELOPMENT – John Down

Well, we've really gone and done it now! After more years than I can remember begging for the funds to go down to Blaenavon - High Level, (or simply 'BHL'), the fifteenth of April finally saw funds become available, and with it the awful challenge of actually running trains down to High Level in less than two years. Little time was lost (about twenty minutes in fact) in advising TCBC to place their first order on us for Step 1.2.6.1 'Work on Bridge 12 to permit trains under'. Bridge 12 is the Rail-over-rail bridge. Sure enough, a few weeks later Finance Director, Dave Haylins was holding aloft a sizeable cheque. We were on our way!

What all this means is a shift from our existing development work to concentrate nearly all our efforts onto Step 1.2 work. The remaining jobs for PBR are:

Step 1.2.1.1 - Track - Furnace Sidings to Forgeside

Step 1.2.1.2 - Track - Forgeside to Blaenavon HL

Step 1.2.2 - Fences

Step 1.2.3.1 - Station at BHL - preparation

Step 1.2.3.2 - Station at BHL - finals

The only exception to this is Step 1.3.2 'Furnace Sidings Platform 2' which must be completed by this August, if the work there is not to fall foul of the new ROGS regulations.

Meanwhile Capita Symonds have been busy working on the remaining bridges down the route, namely:

Bridge 13 'Old Pit Road' bridge

Bridge 14 'New Pit Road Bridge

Bridge 16 'Low Cycletrack' bridge

Bridge 17 'Doncaster's Stream' culvert

All of the assessment work is complete, and the design work close to completion at the time of writing. You will see contractors and materials arriving from early September, with the actual work starting a few weeks later. The work is expected to be completed by Christmas. You will note a few absentees from the bridge list:

Bridge 15 was a very long bridge passing over a fan of lines. It was filled in during 1975, though traces of the abutments can still be seen. Bridge 18 is the bridge carrying Forgeside Road over the line. Informally, a recent visit from Senior Rail Inspector Chris Jacquier, advised that he was happy with the situation, moreover, responsibility for the deck lies with the highway authority. Bridge 19 is the bridge over the Varteg Road, and work has been deferred on this due to insufficient funding at present. It fell victim to exceptionally high and totally unexpected costs associated with Bridge 13. Capita Symonds are of the opinion that it needs a new deck. Our bridge engineer is not so convinced, and at present heavyweight discussions are in progress. Bridge 19 is not an absolute requirement to reach BHL but it would be useful operationally, and would give us a useful 'edge' into the Phase 2 work 'BHL to Varteg'.



The troublesome and expensive 'Old Pit Road bridge' (Bridge 13), looking east which will as likely as not receive a completely new deck –John Down

By the time you read this 300 wooden sleepers will be arriving on site, ready for drilling and for furnishing with chairs with an area of site to be set aside for this work and jigs built to assist accurate drilling. New drilling equipment is also on the cards to replace our worn out kit. Meanwhile down the line, the length of it will be divided in to zones M to R and on the track, Zones O and P (which are mainly concrete sleepered) will see clearance of remaining grass and vegetation. That poisonous pair, Agents Orange, otherwise known as Dave Perham and Andy Knock will be doing the necessary in that area to improve the drainage, as well as laying sundry weeds and shrubs to waste with chemicals foul and various. From October, large numbers of concrete sleepers will be delivered to site and to selected points along the route.

As yet we have not completely assembled a PWay team for this work although Trevor Chappell, late PWay supremo at the Dean Forest Railway, has agreed to head up the crew. It is absolutely vital that we have an effective crew for this work and whilst 'vital' is perhaps an overworked word, it is overwhelmingly true in this case. Failure by PBR to complete its part of the work will permanently damage our capacity to get further funding, despite the fact that, at present, funders are viewing us increasingly favourably. Although I have to be a little selective so as not to dilute or divert those who already do important work on the railway, I am appealing to EVERYONE to consider volunteering for this essential work. Since much of the renewal work will employ heavy concrete sleepers, specialised plant will be needed to be brought in if we are to make timely progress

WANTED

People with stout boots and stout hearts for a 21 month stint, laying track down to Blaenavon—High Level, every weekend, come sun or rain, come hell or high water.

Absolutely no reward other than all the tea you can drink - and a few beers at the end!

Please ring me on 01495-760242, or email yogidown@aol.com

We will also be starting around September on the platform at BHL. I have asked Wayne Evans to lead this group, which, in some senses, can be a little less defined in terms of start date. The first step will be to provide some accommodation at BHL and to that end Derek Bounds will be modifying our War-flat wagon to carry a 40ft container in order to provide storage for plant and materials as well as somewhere both to shelter from the rain and to prepare a regular brew-up. We also plan to have Derek modify one of the plate wagons in order to aid loading and unloading plant from the container, to provide a place for the deckchairs when it's sunny, and as a base from where the string quartet can provide soothing music for hard-pressed platform builders!

If all the work promised for the near future sounds exciting, it is no more so than the work that we have been progressing on the development front to date.

Platform 2 at Furnace Sidings.

This work is referred to locally as 'FSP2' or , formally, Step 1.3.1. In our last issue we reported that the load bearing block wall was in place and that we had made a start on the infill. We also reported that we were looking for a 'professional' bricklayer to lay the cosmetic front brick skin. Warning: do not ask bricklayers for a quote without somewhere to sit down, and a stiff drink in one hand! Ian Longworth and Wayne Evans took on the task and, aided by Wayne's family and volunteers, are ahead of schedule for completion in August. Work was initially slow, cold and difficult due to frequent unrelenting rain and the backbreaking difficulty in laying courses of bricks below ground level. But gradually things got easier, the bricklayers were able to straighten up, till, finally well over 500 bricks a weekend were being laid. Things are now moving so fast that it is difficult to accurately report progress, but 2512 of the 3902 bricks or 64.4% of the total are now laid, with completion scheduled for 15 June. In addition we have the somewhat complex shuttering designed, provisioned built and in

place, with the first two of the 26 platform slabs poured. The need to acquire ready-mixed concrete in lorry load quantities has meant that we have also taken the opportunity to lay the second footbridge plinth. This work was rather more fraught than we had intended, because the lorry load of concrete was insufficient to complete the fill and Andy Knock and Wayne had to labour against the clock to mix another ton of concrete using our long-suffering and decrepit cement mixer

Behind the front wall Dave Perham and Andy Knock have been the main force in moving about 350 cubic yards of material to level off the area under the platform slabs, and behind the platform toward the boundary fence. At the north end it was bowling green smooth

before we finally put the shuttering down. The channel at the back of the platform has been cleared since this is used to divert water running down the mountain (and there is a lot of it) . Large bracken fern roots and boles had to be dug out complete in order to clear the long blocked channel. Dave Perham has since planted a few Rhododendrons, which, if they survive, should look most attractive. At the south end a muddy puddle has been dug out to form a small pond



The north end of platform two showing the brick frontage, the completed backfill and the shuttering ready for the pouring of the concrete.

Footbridge

On the footbridge, the first tower is now complete and awaits painting and erection on platform one (and this may well be the case by the time you read this). There has been a delay due to a decision at a late stage to include the two side walls, on the east and south sides of the tower with the assembly and not for them to go up later. The speed with which Derek Bounds and George Pope can remove offending rusting detritus and rebuild it into something special is very impressive. The trouble is, is that Derek is not available every weekend, and in order to speed up production of the second tower, he will be taking the complete kit of second tower bits down to his works at Barry for construction 'in between times'. We just hope he has plenty of 'in between's'.

Down Exchange Sidings fencing

This was an initiative to make use of the Down Exchange Sidings, which, for many years, have been used for little more than to store wagons in which we have little interest. The idea was to fence them in so that they would form an adjunct to the main site. But how, when we couldn't afford it? The fact is, there are a lot of railways with absolutely no space to store stock – so why not let them use the outside sidings – for a fee of course! It proved difficult to put a financial package together very quickly, but, with the help of the Society and some generous loans from one member we were able to let the contract. The actual fence was laid in little over a week. The idea is that tenants will occupy two of the four sidings now protected by a fence whilst we would use the other two.

Seeking tenants was aided by a remarkable coincidence as in early January, Ealing Community Transport had pulled the plug on the heritage railways at Dartmoor and at Weardale. At Dartmoor, an Electric Multiple Unit, a 3-Cep No.1198 (and described elsewhere in this issue) was under threat, and after lengthy negotiations was finally offered a home here. Arriving a carriage at a time, the last vehicle arrived on 8 May. But there was an unexpected spin-off to getting an EMU as a tenant – we have a Class 73 on site, and suitable EMUs can provide 'through control' to such a loco, that is, an unmanned loco at the rear can be controlled by a driver in the front of the leading coach. This feature was ably demonstrated after the public service on 11 May. At present the possibility of a 4-Cig unit coming to Blaenavon from Dartmoor is also being explored



At times anyone passing would have thought that we were running a building site rather than a railway what with all the work going on platform 2 at Furnace Sidings.

Here pallets of bricks for the front of platform two dominate the scene. Behind, stalwart performer 104 can be seen standing in for the failed 73128.



As mentioned in the report the footings have been poured for the footbridge tower on platform 2 and the concrete has also been poured for the north end of platform 2

Wayne Evans and Ian Longworth spread the poured concrete into the hole made ready for FSP2 footbridge footings. Seconds later – disaster, as the lorry ran dry. John Down

Below left—Andy Knock, Ian Longworth and Wayne Evans spread the concrete as it pours into the first platform slab shutter John Down.



Below—Dave Perham and Andy Parry fill and level the north end of platform 2.



Locomotive And Plant Report – Jon Goss & Team

In a dark dark town there's a dark dark railway, on the dark dark railway there's a dark dark shed, in the dark dark shed there some grease monkeys live!! There's a sane-ish one, a saner-er one and one that puts the kettle on (now and again) and these are their murmurings.

03141/ D2141

With the turbo replaced in 73141 the Bottom Shed had an empty space but not for long with the arrival of 03141. The whole loco is being inspected and repaired quicker then the owner can comprehend “we are the grease monkeys; you will put the kettle on!” chant the dark shadows of the shed *(at least they haven't started singing like the mice in Bag-puss – “We will mend it, we will fix It” – Ed).*



73128 “Silver Jubilee / Jiwbili Arian”

The new arrival is slowly learning to control its temper, after throwing the turbo out of the pram *(it failed with a seized turbocharger on its 3rd day of running – Ed)* it now refuses to re-charge its own batteries! Hastings Diesels repaired and overhauled the failed turbo but focus is now being given to the charging circuits on the 73 as the batteries are not being charged during a days running which has caused problems.

37216 / D6916

Still undergoing a major bodywork overhaul and re-paint in the top shed; delayed further due to the new shed ventilation system installed *(the high winds have blown most of the roof off – Ed).*

D1249 / 104 “Llanwern”

After its visit to the doctors the treasurer walked away a little straighter and lighter of pocket. With the head gasket replaced, overhauled starter motor, new batteries and a service 104 stands proud as the Thunderbird proving herself to beat the ole Virgin class 57's at their job.

D1226/ 106 and D7063/170 - Nothing changes they are both still sulking on Number 1 siding

10083 “Panteg” - Still awaits further inspections

D1387/ DL16

Awaiting proof that fire breathing is not a good thing to practise while at work *(the air filter caught fire whilst on weed killing duties, don't ask – Ed).*

200793 “Gower Princess”

Still being serviced by Chris, whilst looking for the next light job, what a retirement – the loco that is, not Chris.

JF.22497/ RT1 & D615

With other railway priorities taking place once again they have been shunted to the back of the pack (so to speak) .

DMU, DEMU

The 108 has finished soldiering on and is currently requesting some back up! With injectors and pumps going off to be overhauled the unit is slowly being revived into a cheaper (i.e. less expensive) version to run.

The thumper still soldiers on being a reliable back up for the service especially as it has working lights and oh joy of joys heating. The 117 DMU has moved and run a public service, work on finding the little niggles has already commenced and now and again one runs away forcing the unit to follow suit up the main line.

Plant

JCB 3CX In need of some TLC, but more than proving its capabilities

JCB 3D Looking tatty, worn out and missing the odd bit. Needs a good nip and tuck

Massey

Believe it or not it is currently out on hire even though poor Ken Perkins thinks it's been stolen! It's on hire to The Newport Model Engineers as part of a bridge building relationship and yes, they are building a bridge with it as well.

Noddy (dumper truck)

Is still looking for some help looking for its steering wheel, Noddy has complained that its hard to find anything when you can only move in a straight line. If anyone does have access to dumper truck spare parts please let us know as they are always in demand and a steering wheel is top of the list.



Big Ears (another dumper truck)

Was looking like Andy Knocks personal transport as they rambled on back and forth each weekend infilling Furnace Sidings Platform 2.

Andy Knock and Big Ears await Dave Perham and the JCB to provide another load of backfill for FSP2.

New Dumper (un-named at present)

Is being serviced, having its motion box repaired and a licking of paint, not saying the colour yet as its free but you'll be able to watch this space from space!

Lancer - Continues to boldly lift things it wasn't supposed to

Manitou - Is looking for its hernia after some strenuous work, used and abused but still lives on!

And just remember friends when the shed is a rocking don't come a knocking!

Whispers From The Buffet—Angela Porter

Sometimes it's difficult to know what to write about for Top Line. I know how to make a fairly good cuppa, how to chat to passengers with a smile, and I sometimes surprise people by knowing something about trains and railways! However, I'm no expert on particular classes of locos, or of railways, or history, or liveries, or, or... or... But then there's plenty of room for all willing volunteers at the PBR!

We can usually make use of any talents people have. Sign writing, making tea, counting money, socialising, public relations, writing, musical entertainment and of course cleaning/painting/photographing/building/taking apart/putting back together/demolishing/burning/fixing/relocating and organising stuff. Most probably people have a lot of talents we don't know about, and some we possibly couldn't mention in a publication such as this that has a wide readership!

Back in April Alex Hinshelwood came up with a cunning plan to recognise some of the lesser known talents and other unsung heroes at the AGM and to this end he enlisted the help of yours truly. Over a meal and several mugs of tea we came up with the Golden Screws 2008, an awards ceremony second to none in the heritage rail scene. If you missed the AGM this year, then you certainly missed a giggle, and here's a list of some of the award winners, and some of the nominations.

The Golden Brick Construction Award went to the FSP2 team for FSP2 – that's Furnace Sidings, Platform 2 if you didn't know. They've promised to put the golden brick in the platform wall where all can see it!

Mick Parker won the Lee Marvin Award for his painting and sign writing work on the wagons that made the photo charter train 'the prettiest little train ever'.

The Arkwright award went to Eric for keeping the Emporium 'Open All Hours' when we are running services. Mark 'make me an offer I can't refuse' Vrettos was a close runner up for his supply of railway paraphernalia to the masses. Mary Bore in the Ticket Office was also nominated for her sterling work in making sure few people escape paying the fares.

Andy Knock and Dave Perham won the Environmental Golden Screw for de-bundooing the line all the way to Blaenavon High Level whilst Jonathan Goss was a runner up for being a human oil and diesel magnet. A second Golden Screw went to Dave Perham for the extension to his 5-inch gauge line!

Arthur Llewellyn was Caretaker of the Year for his work in tidying the car park, putting up signs, looking after the loos, putting the urn on, and so many other things. One of our younger members, Aled Williams had an honourable mention for cleaning the coaching stock.

Roger Lewis won the Demolition Derby award for rearranging the bottom shed wall. He also gained the Erection of the Year award for the same accident, assuming that as all buildings on site should be flat-packed (Alex Drummond's Cathedral of Engineering, Ian Smith's little shed, and Norman Clymers extension to the top shed were the other nominations for this award, and they're all still flat-packed) he'd make a start demolishing the bottom shed.

The Athletic Endeavours Award went to Wayne Evans for his spectacular dive into the inspection pit by the bottom shed whilst the 'I can't do the service because ...' award went to Robin Cornelius for 'It's summer, I've got to do the garden'.

Recycler of the Year went to Norman Clymer for his work in ensuring some 300' of scrap weighing approx. 400 tons found its way to other unsuspecting railways around the country.

Coming Soon—5619



As you will be aware by now (and if not where have you been) 2008 is the Silver Jubilee of the PBR and over the weekend of the 13/14 September we will be holding our 25th Anniversary Gala with special guest engine GWR 0-6-2T 5619 courtesy of the Telford Steam railway. 5619 is enjoying its first year back in traffic after a very long and slow restoration and the PBR are very grateful to have secured this iconic locomotive for the weekend.

If you're wondering what is so special about 5619, well, the 56xx class was actually designed for the South Wales coal fields and followed a long tradition of tank locomotives of the 0-6-2 wheel arrangement used by GWR constituent companies such as the Rhymney, Barry and Taff Vale Railways. With the wheel arrangement showing itself to be ideally suited to the demands of the Welsh Valleys, sharp curves, steep gradients and heavy trains the class was designed as a direct replacement for its predecessors and in all some 200 were built.

Whilst designed and built primarily for the South Wales coal fields the class could be found all over the GWR empire with the last (6668) being withdrawn from Croes Newydd, Wrexham in December 1965. 5619 itself was originally allocated to Chester in 1925 but migrated south and worked out of Abercynon and Barry sheds, the latter from where it was withdrawn in 1964.

For a class that was synonymous with the South Wales Valleys this is the first time since the end of steam that one of the class has actually returned to the Valleys and will no doubt bring back memories for many people. Several of the volunteers and footplate crews have already been to sample 5619 on the West Somerset Railway and Telford Steam Railway and are all of one opinion, she's a lovely engine and we can't wait to bring her home to the valleys. See you in September.



Oakfield B&B



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A warm and friendly welcome awaits you at Oakfield B&B.

Situated within the World Heritage town of Blaenavon and only 100yds from the proposed extension of the Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway line to High Level Station.

Bring this advert with you in 2008 to get a 10% discount on all bookings.

Continued from previous page



John Down won the Take-over Bid of the Year category for his great efforts in trying to convert our LNWR/LMS line via GWR to Southern Region! It was a close run thing though, as the Llantarnam Abbey Steam Loco Group are working hard to oust all 'tin boxes' (diesel locos) from the railway!

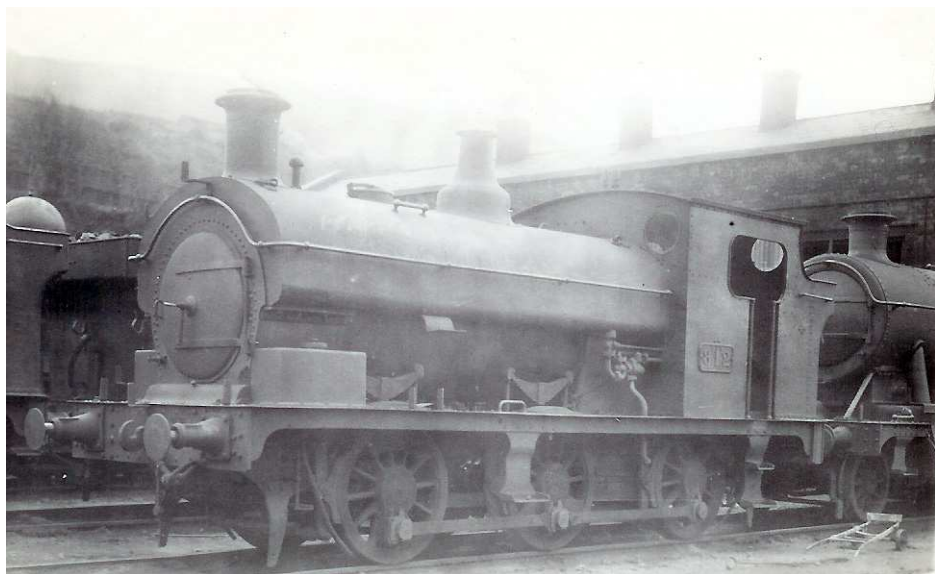
Key-holder of the year went to Rhys Davies for looking for a missing key – no, not the main-bunch of site keys that seem to go missing on an almost daily basis, but the smoke-box door key for 813/816!

The final award, the 25 Years and getting stronger, bigger, and much, much longer went to every volunteer who gives of their time and talents to the PBR to ensure that it is growing and developing! And a Golden Key was given to the whole railway in recognition of this.

And that brings me almost full circle, back to the start of the article and the bit about talents being useful. We all have them. We can all help out in whatever way. And you know that 'Every little helps!', it really does!

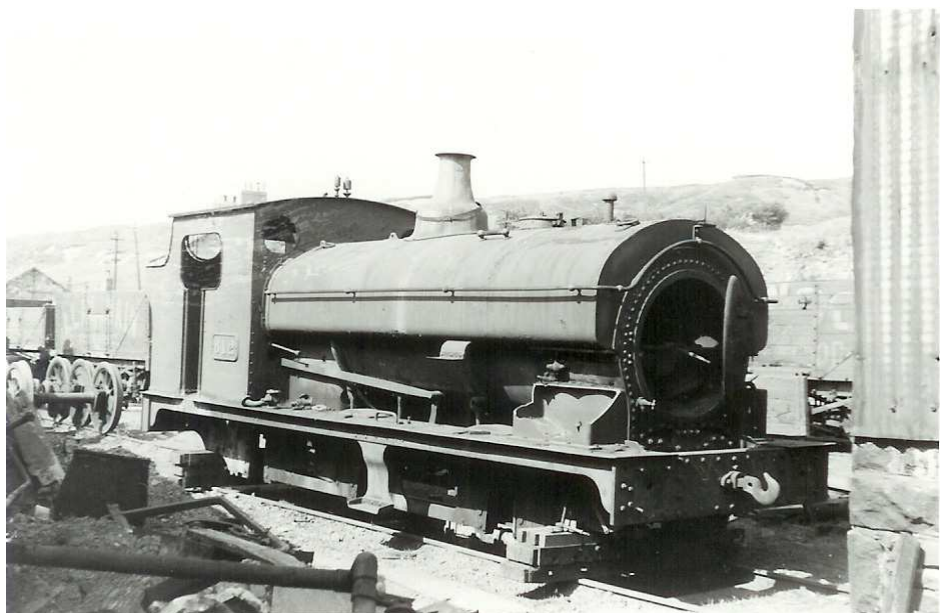
Alex Hinshelwood presents John Down with his Golden Screw Award for take-over bid of the year at the Whistle Inn with 3CEP 1198 in the background—all part of John's cunning plan.

816 And 812, The Follow Up—Alastair Warrington



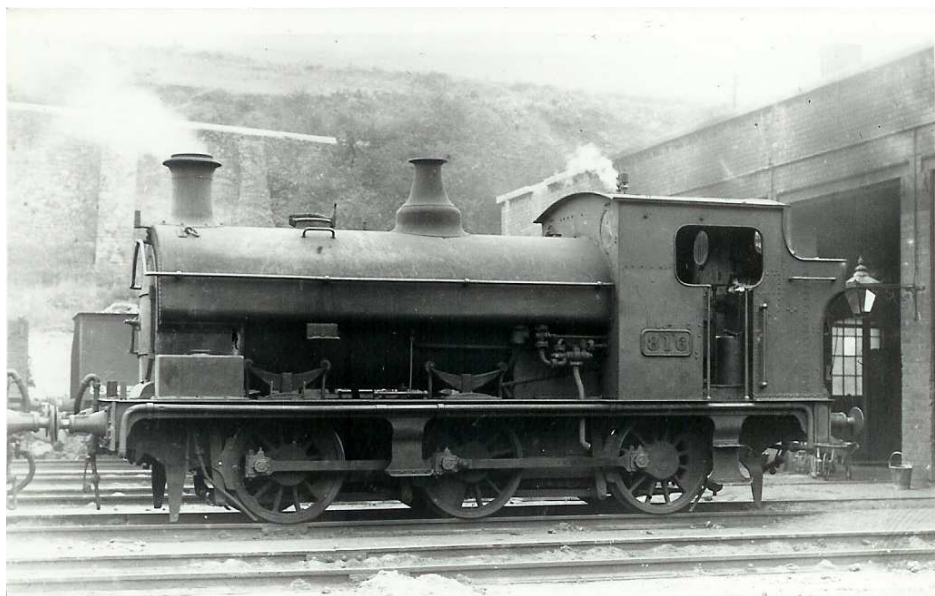
Following on from the feature on 816 and friends which appeared in Top Line 107 I received the pictures featured here from PBR member Alastair Warrington which deserve to be published. All pictures are courtesy of the AJ Warrington collection as the details of the original photographer (s) are unknown. Words by A Warrington.

Top— 812 at Duffryn Yard motive power depot, Port Talbot, c1927 when it was still in service with the GWR.



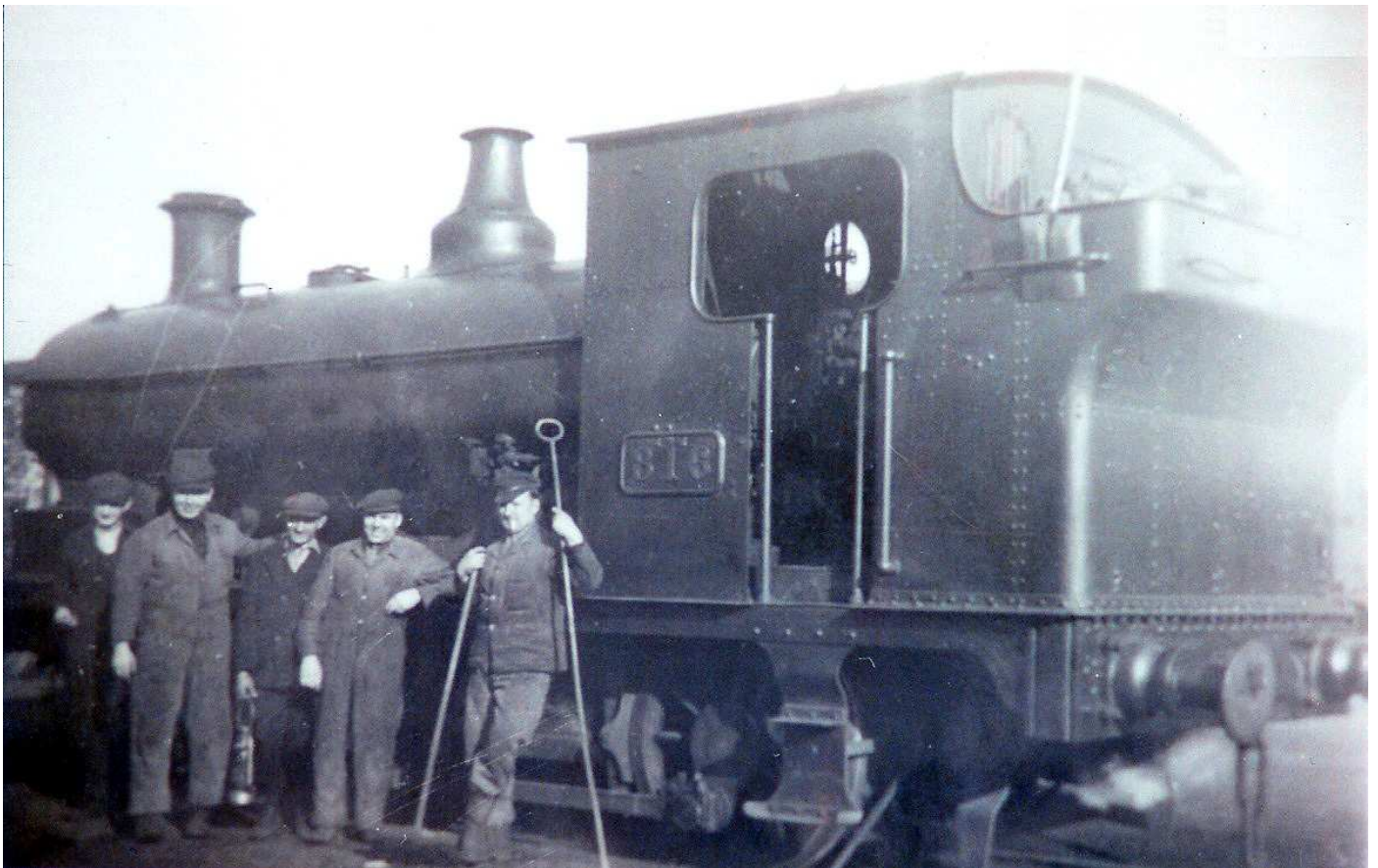
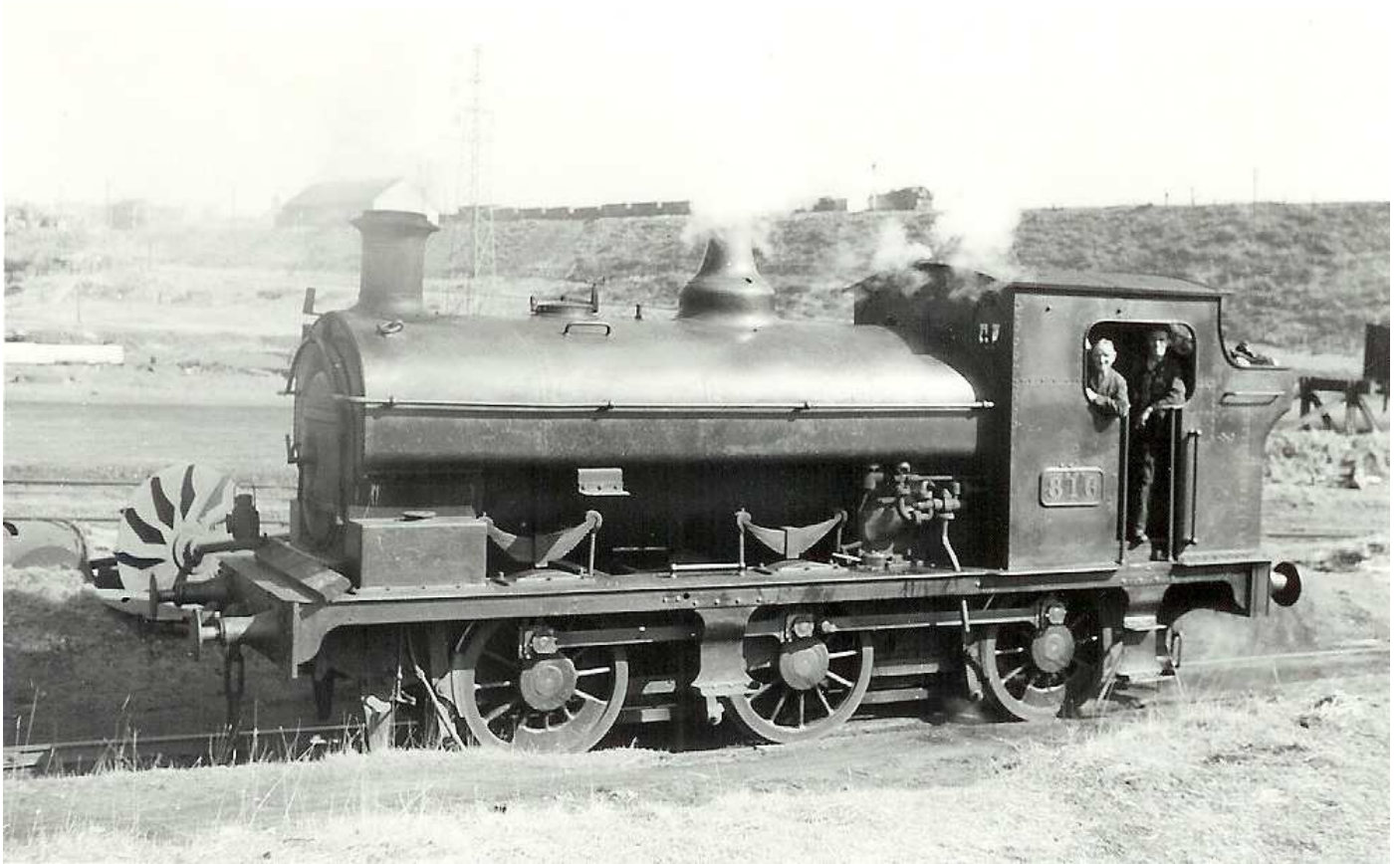
Middle— the same locomotive at Varteg Hill in July 1948, partially dismantled. My records have 1950 as the scrapping date for this locomotive, which is slightly at odds with Phil Williams' date of 1948. However, I am not sure which is correct.

Bottom—816 again at Duffryn Yard. This photograph is undated, but was probably about the same time as that of 812, as the locomotive came to Talywain in July 1929.



Top Right—816 at Big Arch Yard, Talywain, at an unknown date. In the background, a GWR 42XX 280T can be seen just south of Abersychan & Talywain station with a Down freight train.

Bottom Right— another view of 816 with several railwaymen at an unknown location and date, although I suspect that this was also taken somewhere near Talywain. If anyone can recognise any of the men in the photograph this would be a clue as to the location.



Finally, with reference to ex-GWR No 808, this was formerly Port Talbot Railway No 22. I guess that this was inadvertently omitted from Phil Williams' article.

Opening Weekend 2008—73128 Naming

2008 marks 25 years of continuous operation by the PBR and to celebrate this milestone 73128 was named Silver Jubilee / Jiwbili Arian in a short ceremony at Furnace Sidings on March 22nd. In attendance were several local dignitaries including Bob Wellington leader of Torfean County Borough Council who performed the naming and Lewis Evans, Mayor of Blaenavon, seen here with Alex Hinshelwood, Traffic Manager.

Both Bob and Alex paid tribute to the relationship and support from TCBC and Blaenavon that we have enjoyed over the past few years and that as our 25th year commences the railway is on the verge of big things and the relationship goes from strength to strength.

Following the naming everyone boarded the train where there were teas and cakes for all including a lovely 25 birthday cake made by Pam Clymer. The fairy cakes were made and supplied by various volunteers (okay so I

brought mine from my local bakers but she made them by hand).

As well as the dignitaries the general public turned out despite the bitter weather giving us an increase in numbers over opening day last year and the local press turned out to cover the event ensuring excellent coverage in the local papers.

Of course one has to mention the Blaenavon weather which didn't want to miss the fun and threw everything at us from brilliant sunshine to driving rain and sleet backed up by a bitter wind. It rounded the day off in fine style with a 10 minute bliz-

zard with dumped half an inch of snow on the ground just to ensure we didn't forget it was there.

The Saturday provided a marvellous start to our 2008 season and gave the railway some excellent publicity and also highlighted the ongoing support that the railways receives from the Torfean Council and the town for its operations.



All Change At Furnace Sidings

The old ticket office at Furnace Sidings was way past its prime so during the off season it was dispensed with and the box van upgraded to ticket office and waiting room with a fresh coat of paint giving a much more welcoming sight.



Paul Stockford of Undy was the first passenger to buy a ticket from our new ticket office, Bernard Morton

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The Year So far

Aside from the arrivals and departures it has been a very busy running season already, what with opening weekend, the DMU gala which saw the first public runs of the 117 DMU and the Teddy Bears Picnic. Alongside this the Blaenavon weather joined in giving us everything from snow fall and thick fog to high winds, torrential rain and brilliant sunshine. Oh the joys of operating at 1200 feet above sea level.

Left and below—following the snow storm on opening Saturday



Below—the last train of the day races into Furnace Sidings ahead of the oncoming snow storm





During the celebrations for Big Pits Birthday a vintage bus ran the circuit from the Railway to Big Pit, the Iron Works and the new Heritage Centre.

The same weekend Gower Princess had its first ever passenger turns when it ran in conjunction with number 104 on one train Saturday and Sunday for testing purposes following mechanical work.



The 5 inch railway was in use during the second day of the Teddy Bears Picnic and here we see a very happy chappy on the train. The little boy passenger seems happy to!



Thick fog for the second day of the DMU gala and the 117 DMU waits time at Furnace Sidings during its first weekend of public operation.

Arrivals And Departures

Since the last issue of Top Line the railway has been very busy with arrivals and departures , thankfully more of the former. As the final two large steam locomotives from the Barry Five have left the site the railway has seen a whole raft of new arrivals , steam, diesel, coaches (of a sort) and wagons, most in an operating condition.

The first to arrive was the GWR Toad Brake Van from the Gwili Railway in late March which was quickly followed up by the Class 73 Electro Diesel 73128 and then the 0-6-OST "Pontyberem". After a short break the GWR 2-8-0 3855 left for the East Lancashire Railway on April the 17th and then the three box vans from Gloucester Docks arrived on April 25/26 whilst on Sunday 27th Class 03 D2141 was brought up from the Swansea Vale Railway. If that wasn't enough Southern Region Electric Multiple Unit 3Cep 1198 arrived from the closed Dartmoor Railway in May and there are yet more in the pipeline.

For a little railway we are amassing a varied and useful collection and whilst it's been a tight squeeze we have been able to fit everything in. Fortunately the fencing of the Down Exchange Sidings has created more secure space allowing goods wagons and the 3CEP to be stored out there and free up vital space inside the shed area.

The next section details our new arrivals and also documents the departure of the two steam locomotives 2874 and 3855 plus our forthcoming guest engine 5619.



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Class 73 Electro Diesel 73128



73128 stands at Furnace Sidings on Friday March 21st prior to a test run up to the Whistle Inn .

In the foreground can be seen the infill for platform 2 whilst to the left can be seen the re-painted van body, now the ticket office, in matching colours.

73128 is not the first of the class to visit the Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway, as members will recall we played host to 73133 back in 2006 for six months although 73128's visit should be substantially longer, the initial contract being for a 2 year stay.

The 73s were introduced back in the 1960s by the Southern Region of British Rail to provide motive power for freight, passenger and parcels workings on the electrified lines and as such drew their power from the 3rd rail via retractable shoes. To enable them to work "off the juice" they are also fitted with a small 600hp English Electric 4SRKT diesel engine. The initial 6 locomotives 73001–006 were built at the Eastleigh Works and classed JA whilst the remainder, classified JB, 73101–142 were like our very own 37216 built by English Electric at their Vulcan Foundry, Newton le Willows, Lancashire, with 128 being built in 1966.

For much of their early career and indeed into the mid 1980's they were keenly sort after by haulage enthusiasts as their passenger duties were usually nocturnal, working the once common parcels and newspaper trains overnight and early morning. During the day they gravitated towards freight and other none passenger carrying duties. In 1984 however they gained new and intensive work with the introduction of the Gatwick Express Service. Replacing the aging Electric Multiple Units with refurbished coaches and a fleet of 12 dedicated class 73/2s modified to work in push pull operation the fleet provided a fast and efficient none stop London Victoria–Gatwick service. Like most things now this is back to EMUs again.

The 73s could also work in push pull mode with the Southern Region EMUs and this was used to good effect in the late 1980's when the traction motors of Southern Region 4REP EMUs were removed to be reused in a new build of EMUs. To keep the Waterloo–Weymouth service running the demotered 4REPS were used in push pull formation with pairs of class 73s at the London end. 73128 retains the high level pipes and jumper cables so it could quite easily work in push pull mode again should an EMU ever make it to the railway (oh what a coincidence, one has). Whilst also of Southern Region origin the Thumper units were configured differently so unless a rewire takes place we cannot use the 73 and 1118 in push pull mode. Although nothing precludes us using it as hauled stock.

Following privatisation two of the class 73s were repainted into the Maroon and Gold of English Welsh and Scottish , they being 73128 and 131. This was an early livery style and the EW&S initials as carried on the side of 73128 have now been simplified to the EWS seen on the majority of the fleet. 73128 never had these changed and still carries the old style now.

Withdrawn from traffic in February 2002 73128 was stored at Hither Green Depot before being sold for scrap and moving to Booth's scrapyards at Rotherham in May 2004. Less than a month later it was extracted from the scrapyards and moved to the Chasewater Light Railway where it was restored to service making its first public runs on the 30th January 2005.

With only the stalwart industrial shunter 104 Llanwern available for traffic as 37216 is undergoing extensive bodywork repairs the railway was on the look out for a suitable diesel locomotive to cover the railways 2008 services. With little booked work at the Chasewater Light Railway the locomotive's owner was more than happy to provide 73128 and it duly arrived on March 11th. 73133 was a popular engine with the crews and 73128 is proving to be just as if not even more popular.

On March the 22nd the locomotive was named Silver Jubilee / Jiwbili Arian in a brief ceremony at Furnace Sidings to celebrate our 25th year of operation (see page 14) but unfortunately on the 24th suffered a seized turbo charger and had to be taken out of traffic. The turbo charger was removed and dispatched to Hastings Diesels who repaired and overhauled the unit, returning it to the railway in time for the 73 to be back in service by the beginning of May.

Current plans see the 73 working most Sundays and bank holidays throughout 2008 and then a fresh repaint of the red and gold ready for 2009. With 3CEP 1198 arriving (see next page) it may not be too long before we see 73128 regularly working in push pull mode being driven from the EMU. Test runs on the evening of the 11th May confirmed that this works—see below.



It's Electric—3CEP 1198



The first coach of 3CEP 1198 just after unloading on May 1st, the other coaches arrived the following week—A Knock

Now at first glance you might think that the railway offering a home to an electric multiple unit (EMU) is a bit silly as we have no electric supply to the rails and are also forbidden from adding this by the terms of our TWAO (Transport and Works Act Order). However, the EMUs built for the Southern Region of British Rail were all based on the Mark 1 coach body like our own maroon loco hauled coaches and like them they can be hauled around by our locomotives as normal coaching stock so at stroke we increase our passenger carrying capacity. An added benefit of the 3CEP 1198 is that the class 73 can be driving from the cab of the EMU much like an auto coach and steam locomotive which increases operational

1198 started off as a Phase 2 Kent Coast Electrification 4CEP [Corridor Electro-Pneumatic] unit, number 7175 built in 1960; it saw regular use on boat trains and other services from London Victoria, Charing Cross, Blackfriars and Cannon Street. It went for refurbishment at Swindon in 1983 and lost its TSK (Trailer second Corridor) carriage for a buffet car, and emerged as a BEP [Buffet Electro-Pneumatic] unit, numbered 2304, allocated to the South Western division working mainline services from Waterloo.

It remained there until retirement; in its last years it lost its buffet car and gained a TSO, (Trailer second Open) reverting to a 4CEP, numbered 2314. It was then required to run on the Lymington Line, and lost the TSO it had for a few months, becoming a 3CEP, numbered 1198 with the unofficial name of 'Linda' the Lymington Flyer. Less than a month after withdrawal in January 2005 1198 was purchased by the EMU preservation society and moved to the Dartmoor Railway in Devon. Whilst there the unit has had a full internal clean, windows replaced and modifications have begun to enable the set to be heated by ETH (Electric Train Heat) from any suitable locomotive. Further modifications are planned to either enable a wheelchair to access the train or to fit a bar/buffet area but these have yet to be finalised.

Currently in undercoat the set will initially be painted into all over BR blue before moving onto the later blue and grey. Whilst some may query the fact that blue and grey would not fit in with steam locomotives or our maroon coaches the set is air braked only so would be restricted to working diesels and we do have some matching diesels in the pipe line. With the recent arrival of 73128 and our Thumper unit this now gives the PBR a unique Southern Region collection in addition to its own Welsh fleet. The 3CEP is an extremely useful addition to the Railway and we welcome the EMUPS onboard.

Left—during its initial test runs which showed that the push pull and PA system work 1198 departs from the Whistle Inn led by 73128.

Pontyberem—Stuart Thomas



Left—It's not much to look at, at the moment. This is Pontyberem on its new section of track at Furnace Sidings. The Chimney and Cab roof were removed to facilitate its movement from the Didcot Railway Centre to the lorry transfer site. Behind it can be seen fellow Mountain Ash stable mate Llantarnam Abbey under restoration.

Below left— Pontyberem in 1900 at the BPGVR. Photograph Courtesy of the Gwendraeth Railway Society

“Pontyberem” is the only former Burry Port & Gwendraeth Valley Railway (BPGV) steam locomotive to have survived into preservation. This locomotive is a rare example of an independent Welsh pre grouping company passenger locomotive which spent its entire operating career in the South Wales Valleys.

“Pontyberem” was purchased new in 1900 from Avonside and became the first in a series of similar but all slightly different batch of 0-6-0 outside cylinder saddle tank locomotives most famously represented by “Kidwelly” and Cwm Mawr” which in “Westernised” guise operated Weymouth boat trains in the 1950's.



The loco was in service with the BPGV during the interesting transitional phase of the railway between the turn of the century and the outbreak of the Great War when the company passed into a profitable phase after spending many years in receivership as a mineral only line facilitated in part by the innovative and eccentric Edwardian engineer Colonel H F Stephens who in 1909 re-engineered the line to full light rail passenger standards. It is interesting that during the time at the turn of the Century when “Pontyberem” was purchased the main motive power was still provided by

an aging pair of early experimental double Fairlie locomotives dating from 1866 & 1869. Photographs of “Pontyberem” from the Edwardian period show she carried fully lined light green livery complete with polished brass dome and copper capped chimney which still exist and will be refitted to the loco upon refurbishment.

In 1914 Avonside 1421 was sold into colliery service operating at Mountain Ash and later in the 1960's transferred to Penrhyber Colliery and at some time losing its external bunker and acquiring an extended flush back cab. She was purchased for preservation and moved to the Great Western Society depot at Taunton before spending the past 30 years or so awaiting restoration at Didcot. The loco has now been purchased by a member of the Gwendraeth Railway Society after campaigning for many years to repatriate the loco to Wales and a change of circumstance of the current owners.

Class 03 Shunter— 03141



03141 after arrival at Furnace Sidings prior to unloading

During the 1950s British Rail had been trying all sorts of different makes and models whilst looking for an ideal “small” diesel shunter before finally trying to standardise on a particular model.

The chosen design utilised a well proven Gardner 8L3 engine delivering 204hp on an 0-6-0 chassis and construction began in 1957. Split between Doncaster and Swindon workshops it was Swindon who had the initial build and built the engines with a steam engine style chimney for the exhaust stack.

230 were originally built and could be found all over the network but in particular in their later years as station pilots, small yard engines and on dock lines. Gradually the need for them diminished and they were withdrawn from service although many found a second lease of life in industry. 03079 remained in service until 1998 on the Isle of Wight and 03179 is still used as the shed pilot at Hornsey Depot.

03141 built in 1960 at Swindon and originally carrying the number D2141 was allocated to Landore depot Swansea where it spent the majority of its working life. It was one of a batch of 03s that had their cabs modified at Landore to enable them to work on the clearance restricted Burry Port & Gwendraeth Valley Railway where they operated in pairs and even threes. After replacement by modified class 08 shunters 03141 was withdrawn in 1985 and purchased for preservation in 1986. It moved to White Wagtail Limited near Coventry before purchase by Cotswold Rail in 2000 and a move to Long Marston. Whilst there no1 cylinder head and piston were removed to repair sister loco 03145 before that was sold on in 2002.

The same year 03141 moved to the Dean Forest Railway and it was from there that the locomotive was purchased by Gwendraeth Railway Society member Stuart Thomas for restoration and moved from the Dean Forest Railway to the Swansea Vale Railway for storage. With the closure of the Swansea Vale Railway the owner moved the 03 to the PBR so that restoration work could begin, the engine arriving on Sunday April the 27th.

The locomotive is essentially complete apart from the missing piston and the air compressor but replacing these should not prove too difficult. Whilst the locomotive was at Swansea the owner was sourcing various spares and these will enable restoration to commence very quickly.

When restored the locomotive will carry the original British Rail green and the number D2141. With the societies other locomotive Pontyberem also on site the PBR now has two representatives of a unique Welsh railway and one day they could be running side by side. The BPGVR will live again.

Retrieving The Toad



Now unless you are intimate with railway terminology you may think I'm writing about amphibians and wonder if I've lost the plot. Well don't panic, the Toad in question is a 1946 built Great Western Railway brake van W35978, Toad being the classification name given to brake vans by the GWR. This one was recently purchased by PBR volunteer Ian Smith and was located at the Gwili Railway in South West Wales. It was situated on isolated siding and to make matters worse that sat at a lower level than the main line.



When Ian enquired with the Gwili Railway about getting the brake van out he was informed that they (the Gwili Railway) would not be able to do it until after their running season was over, because it would take up a diesel shunter for the whole day. Now not wanting to besmirch the Gwilis reputation but the amount of track slewing to reconnect the siding was a matter of a few feet and knowing the work ethic of the PBR volunteers this would have taken a morning at worst but I digress.

As Ian required the Toad to be at the PBR before then so it could be made presentable for use with ex-GWR 0-6-2T 5619 at the September 25 years celebration the Toad had to be removed the hard way. With the assistance of PBR volunteer John Richards and using hydraulic jacks and timbers the brake van was over a series of weekends manually (and slowly) moved out of the siding and onto the mainline. The at times atrocious conditions and occasional shattering of timbers did nothing to help the situation but finally after much hard work the Toad was free and ready to come home.



The Toad arrived at Furnace Sidings in early March and the first order of business was to secure the roof so it can dry out. It will then be made presentable in BR colours for use with BR liveried 5619 in September. After this a full restoration will take place, alongside the other Toad already on site, to a late GWR condition. When complete it will replace the LMS style brake van in the GWR goods train which will be restored to a BR condition as it was built in 1950 and used in a BR era freight train the railway is putting together.

The Gloucester Gang



The ROF van at Gloucester docks—Andy Knock



The Wolverton van at Furnace Sidings



The salt van and ROF van at Furnace Sidings

Whilst preserved railways like the PBR are primarily about carrying passengers it should not be forgotten that the original purpose of railways was the carriage of freight, passengers were a secondary concern. So although heritage railways look to ensure they have a good selection of passenger carrying stock they must also remember that they are into railway preservation and freight wagons are a part of this.

Many railways do have a collection of wagons on site and the PBR is no exception but trying to increase that collection proves increasingly difficult as the supply of older style wagons suitable for use on preserved railways diminishes by the year and indeed the supply from the mainline has dried up as the wagons are all modern air braked stock.

However the PBR have been very lucky to be offered 3 wagons, ideal for the railway and in very good condition from the collection at Gloucester Docks. Due to a reorganisation of the museum the wagons were surplus to requirements and needed a good home which the PBR were more than willing to offer. The wagons were tripped from Gloucester Docks on the 25/26th April to the PBR and now onsite will be repainted in the near future .

The wagons are a 12t box van built at Wolverton works in 1951, a rare 1940 built wagon for the Royal Ordnance Factory at Glascoed to a North Eastern design but plated to run on the GWR and a salt wagon built for ICI of which little is known but it is believed to have been built in the 1940s by the Gloucester Carriage and Wagon Works.

After The Arrivals The Departures



2874 departs Furnace Sidings Andy Knock

As well as the new arrivals, 73128, Pontyberem etc the past few months have seen the departure of two of the railways longstanding occupants GWR 2-8-0s 2874 and 3855.

Having stood outside the Top Shed for nigh on 20 years these engines have now been sold by their owner to pay for the restoration of one of his other engines GWR 0-6-2T 5668 which will be moved into the Top Shed extension (to be built on the area previously occupied by 2874 and 3855).

2874 was originally to be moved to a restoration base in the Pennines but that fell through and instead it was snapped up by the West Somerset Railway, departing for there on the 3rd of April.

3855 had a brief two weeks on its own outside the Top Shed before it too departed the PBR, leaving on April the 17th for the East Lancashire Railway.

Whilst it was sad to see the locomotives leave and the vacant space outside the Top Shed takes some getting used to it is the best move all round. The railway wishes the new owners well and we all look forward to seeing the restored engines treading the rails again in all their glory. Who knows, one day they may even visit us in a working capacity.

The space they previously occupied will now be used to extend the Top Shed and provide much needed covered working space.



3855 on its own for the first time



A strange site indeed after 3855 left, the first time in almost 20 years this site has been empty. Andy Knock

Before The PBR Came To Town

As mentioned in the editorial I had planned on a whole section of old and new photographs of the PBR to celebrate 25 years but due to circumstances I've had to hold that over until next issue. However as a starter here's some photographs by Arthur Llewellyn in the final years of BR operation



In this shot 37286 is shown as it rumbles through the site of Blaenavon High Level Station. Even today this scene is recognisable, the platform is still there although recent thefts have seen the edging stones gone and the grass is not as neat. Over on platform 2 the concrete yard has gone and a cycle track now occupies the platform.

In contrast look at the picture below of 37286 and train being loaded at Furnace Sidings and how things have changed. The station now occupies the land either side of the mainline, the sidings are now just grass and the spoil heaps, well they're now the Garn Lakes.





It's our old friend 37286 again seen here rolling down hill light engine at Tyre Mill Sidings.

The background is dominated by the massive washery spoil heap, now reclaimed and to the left of it the old washery, long since demolished although the water tower remains.

We round off this all to short section with the cracking shot below of a pair of 25s shunting just South of the level crossing. In the back ground the spoil heaps stand proud like the pyramids of Egypt, above the locomotives can be seen several empty wagons in what today would be the Top Shed and the deviation to link the mainline to the shed area now runs across the embankment above the 25s. If anyone has any old photo's of the area, please let me know as I'd like to showcase them here.



Off The Rails



Caption Competition

No prizes, just a bit of fun and the knowledge that if you're picked you're funnier than everyone else. Please send entries to Topline@pbrly.co.uk or via letter c/o the railway shop. So what's going on here? Results next issue.

As for last issues competition thanks for those who entered, my favourite goes to Andy Knock with "So that's what a working engine looks like" although his "So who's going to the chip shop then" was a close second.

Should Have Known Better

Now anyone involved in railway preservation and in particular anyone involved in diesel preservation should know the difference between diesel and petrol and what goes into what engine. Well you would have thought so, however this doesn't seem to be the case for Stuart Thomas, new member and owner of 03141.

Recently, in a rush at the petrol station and not watching what he was doing, he managed to fill his diesel Landrover full to the brim with petrol. Luckily he did realise before and not after he started the engine so major problems were averted, although his wife, Diane, did have to go to the petrol station loaded down with jerry cans so they could drain the tank and fill it with diesel! Stuarts excuse was that it wasn't his normal petrol station and the pipes to the nozzle were a different colour (!). If the 03 ever fails during normal operation remind us to check to the fuel. Oh and if anyone things I'm picking on Stuart it was Diane who insisted that this goes in the magazine (obviously revenge for spending the new kitchen money on an 03).

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Features And Articles Wanted

I'm always on the look out for contributions , either articles or pictures so if you wish to contribute please email me at TOPLINE@PBRly.co.uk or write c/o the Railway Shop. If you just have an idea let me know and we can work something out.

I'm currently on the look out for pictures and details of the industrial diesels that worked at Blaenavon prior to closure and also the diesel locomotive that worked at the Pickford, Holland & Co LTD Basic Brick Works at Forge Side from 1961 to 1969. Any and all information greatly received.

Back Cover— Following on from Before The PBR Came To Town a magnificent panoramic view by Arthur Llewellyn taken from the washery spoil heap looking up the valley. The railway can be glimpsed on the left and the Garn Terraces on the right. Compare this view with that today, you wouldn't believe it was the same place.

Welcome New Members

K Smith, Carisbrooke IOW	S Cross, Rhymney	M Mahler, Maesycmmer	C Gauntlett, Abersychan
G Horton, Newport	P Clymer, Llangynidr	B Fisher, Rhiwbina	D Pope, Rushden
D Price, Griffithstown	P Butler, Malpas	A Gauntlett, Abersychan	K Bird, Pontypool
P Evans, Monmouth	P Symes, Monmouth	A Mutton, Chatam	S Thomas, Ferryside
D Thomas, Ferryside	G Hardy, Milford Haven	P Mear, Chepstow	W Butterfield, Ilanbradach
L Emery, Brownhills	M Boor, Pontnewydd	D Jones, Griffithstown	M Hopkins, Rhymney
N Mellor, Govilon	R Davies, Penyrhysol	M Russell, Ponthir	R Roberts, Newport
D Roberts, Newport	J Kelsey, Forest Row	C May, Newport	G Keyte, Blackwood
B Channon, Yate	R Potts, Newport	C Hampton, Griffithstown	G Stokes, New Inn
J Owen, Griffithstown	P Wilson, Mile End	D Evans, Redhill	D Brixey, Newport

Membership

Membership of the Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway Company costs £12 per year for adults and £6 per year for associate members (second member at same address) at the time of writing. Junior members (under 18) become members of the supporting Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway Society.

Each member receives a copy of our regular magazine "Top Line" (published three times a year) and "Bottom Line" (our bi-monthly news-sheet) and full Company members receive six free rides on the passenger service. Membership is essential if you are interested in becoming a volunteer on the Railway as this gives you full insurance cover in case of any accidents. We tend to ignore train rides made by regular working volunteers - especially if they buy tea on the train!



The Railway is managed and operated exclusively by volunteers who are all members of either the Railway Company or Railway Society

Volunteers on the Railway are split broadly into the following categories:

- Operations
- Permanent Way
- Locomotive Department
- Carriage & Wagon Department.
- Civil Engineering Department

For more details ask anyone of the volunteers or write to the address at the front of the magazine. All are welcome and we can no doubt find a job for you to do if you wish to become a working member.

Parting Shot

