Three Penrhyn Quarry engines back from USA

Three Penrhyn Quarry locomotives on their way home after half a century: Glyder (left), Ogwen (centre) and Winifred. JULIAN BIRLEY

THREE 2ft gauge locomotives which were exported to the United States after the end of steam at Snowdonia’s giant Penrhyn Quarry have been repatriated.

As we closed for press, the three – Quarry Hunslet 0-4-0ST No. 364 of 1885 Winifred and two locomotives supplied new to the County Durham Water Board’s Burnhope Reservoir railway system near Weardale, Andrew Barclay 0-4-0ST No. 1994 of 1931 Ogwen and Avonside No. 2066 of 1933 Glyder – were crossing the Atlantic on the last lap of their journey home and were set to arrive in April.

The three have been acquired for restoration in Britain by North Norfolk Railway director Julian Birley, who already owns Bala Lake Railway-based Quarry Hunslet Alice.

He set out to bring Winifred back from its Indianapolis home, and ended up repatriating all three, with the help of seasoned industrial locomotive restorer Graham Morris and locomotive dealer Martyn Ashworth.

The locomotives ended up in the US after American antiques dealer C B Annette happened to be visiting the UK in 1965 and saw a BBC Tonight documentary about the dying days of the North Wales slate industry and its now redundant locomotives.

Not being a railway enthusiast but sensing a business opportunity, he bought six engines at hugely inflated prices for export, sadly setting the value for UK preservationists who wanted to follow suit.

The six quarry engines, Nestia, Cegin, Winifred, Marchlin, Ogwen and Glyder, were then loaded on to the SS Manchester Progress and on July 23, 1965, set sail for Norfolk, Virginia. They were auctioned in Tennessee and Winifred, Ogwen and Glyder were bought by businessman Tony Hulman who wanted to establish a transport museum in Terre Haute, Indiana, called the Early Wheels Museum.

The project did not take off and Ogwen and Glyder were dry stored in a stable in a forest on the family estate in Terre Haute 80 west of Indianapolis. When Julian and Graham visited the stable on February 21, they were the first people from the UK to have seen them in nearly 47 years.

Winifred had, since 1970, been stored in a temperature controlled warehouse in one corner of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, home of the world famous Indianapolis 500 race, still with the carb in its smokebox from the last time it had been steamed in Wales.

Julian said: “To me there is only one thing better than being the proud custodian of a Quarry Hunslet and that is to be the proud custodian of two.”

“When Chris Scott allowed me to acquire Alice he could not have passed it to anyone who would care and appreciate it more than myself. But in some ways I feel a fraud. Chris had spent many years painstakingly restoring it to its former glory. For me to take it over with a new boiler certificate ready to go I felt contributed little to narrow gauge preservation.

Having now completely fallen under the spell of these delightful locos and the beautiful setting of the Bala Lake Railway, where Alice is based, I set about looking for an opportunity to try and make a small difference to preservation. ‘All the Quarry Hunslets in this country are accounted for, safe and well cared for. Those overseas were identified in four distinct locations: two in Canada, one in the US and one in Puerto Rico. The last was discounted as my command of Spanish extended as far as knowing how to order paella... and that was not going to be sufficient for the task.

‘Confirmation from Indianapolis also came that along with Winifred were the Avonside Ogwen and the Barclay Glyder which worked in the quarry right up until the end of the railways there in 1964. If I was going after one loco I might as well try and get all three repatriated. It was then that I looked for other prospective custodians who would be prepared to take on a project and take advantage of the remarkable condition the machines were in.

‘These locos were among the many varied transport artefacts bought by the hugely successful industrialist Tony Hulman in the Fifties, Sixties and early Seventies. ‘Born into one of the wealthiest families in Indiana, Mr Hulman was responsible for buying the Indianapolis speedway after the Second World War and making the Indy 500 the popular race it is today. When he passed away in 1977 his family was keen to retain everything in his memory he had acquired whether it was an enamel sign, a stagecoach, an Indy car or a steam locomotive.

‘With this strict policy, it was going to be hard to persuade the board of directors of the Speedway Foundation that to release the engines was the right thing to do.

‘Therefore during most of last year there was a constant flow of emails backwards and forwards across the Atlantic; with letters of reference being sent and with continuous persuading that we were not looking just to trade with them but to provide a good sustainable future for the three historic locomotives that Mr Hulman had played such a significant part in saving.

‘Their present day excellent condition was entirely down to him. This credit could never be taken away and their future operation would be a testament to him and his decision so many years ago.”

The foundation eventually agreed to the repatriation of all three. Julian and Graham flew out to meet museum director Ellen Bireley and a deal was agreed.

Winifred will go to the Bala Lake Railway while the other two will go to Beamish Museum in County Durham, in the region where they first worked.

Regarding Winifred, Julian said: “Nowhere in the world is there such an opportunity to bring back to life a locomotive in such immaculate original condition whose useful working life quite simply has been put on hold for half a century.”
Restaurant gives lease of life to community centre

THE Great Central Railway was set to open its new Leicester North restaurant with a two-day spring festival on April 11–12. As reported in Heritage Railway issue 160, the railway has taken over the controversial Greenacres community centre next to the station.

The Greenacres complex was originally developed in 2008 as a community facility using European funding, but when funds ran out, it remained empty. In March, the GCR entered into a partnership with Leicester City Council, Leicester College and Apex to operate it, establishing a new tourist attraction, cafe and future training centre.

The restaurant has been named The Platform. GCR marketing manager Kate Tilley said: “For our passengers it can be a new gateway to the city and it will help us build links with other local attractions, but for people who live nearby we hope it will be so much more.”

Epping-Ongar names the day for steam launch

PUBLIC steam services on the ‘new’ Epping-Ongar Railway will be launched on Friday, May 25. It is hoped to have newly acquired GWR 4-6-0 No. 4953 Pitchford Hall and Hathorn Leslie 0-6-0ST No. 3437 of 1919 Isabel in steam.

They could be joined by GWR prairie No. 4141 which, as exclusively revealed in Heritage Railway issue 159, was also bought from Dr John Kennedy with Pitchford Hall. The prairie is currently undergoing an overhaul at the Llangollen Railway and it is not sure whether it will be ready in time.

A gala weekend will be held over May 26-27. Steam services will run from Ongar to North Weald, both former London Underground stations having been returned to their steam era appearance. From North Weald, the line’s Southern Region ‘Thumper’ DEMU No. 205205 will be employed running trips into Epping Forest.

The ‘Thumper’, which was acquired from the North Yorkshire Moors Railway, is being repainted into Network SouthEast livery, which accurately reflects the layout of its interior which was refurbished by that operator.

The repainting also marks the 30th anniversary of the creation of NSE, one of three passenger sectors of British Rail which were launched in 1982.

The last passenger train still in NSE livery was Class 465 No. 465193, which on September 15, 2007, entered Stewarts Lane depot for reviving into Southeastern livery.

Prior to the launch of the public steam services, a VIP day for invited guests is set to be held at Ongar.

Cob widening: first phase now complete

THE first phase of the £1.1 million project to redevelop Porthmadog Harbour station so that it is able to accommodate Welsh Highland Railway trains is now complete.

Contractor Jones Brothers of Ruthin has placed almost 40,000 tons of fill material and armour stone, sourced from nearby Minffordd Quarry, to widen 260m of the 200-year-old Cob embankment which stretches for a mile across the Glaslyn Estuary.

The work will enable the construction of a second platform at the station, which opened to passengers in 1865, enabling a cross-platform interchange between Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland trains. At present, both railways have to share a single platform, which places severe operating restrictions on service levels.

When the widened section of the Cob has settled later this year, contractors will return to level the surface, remove the existing wave wall and build a new one along the seaward side. After that, a start can be made on relaying track in the station area and the construction of a new island platform serving both railways.

All main line points and signals will be electrically operated and a prototype point motor has already been installed for testing purposes.

It is anticipated that work will be complete in late 2013 or early 2014 as the intensive service on both lines which starts at the end of March precludes any significant civil engineering work before next winter.

The Ffestiniog Railway has produced a DVD, available from Harbour station shop or by mail order, detailing the project and including stop motion footage covering the entire construction phase.

Pease descendant backs Darlington heritage call

A DESCENDANT of founders of the Stockton & Darlington Railway has given his support to calls to upgrade heritage sites to create a global tourist attraction.

Conservation architect Matthew Pease, who is a descendant of Edward and Joseph Pease, is backing Darlington borough councillor Alan McNab who is keen to enhance the area around North Road station and highlight the town’s pivotal part in the creation of the world’s first public steam railway.

Coun McNab said: “Darlington could be a global tourist attraction, which would benefit the economy and the town, creating jobs and helping local businesses.”

Fellow councillor Fred Lawton said: “This is something the council should have done a long time ago.”

Anyone with ideas on how to improve the S&D’s heritage or who is willing to provide support is invited to contact Coun Chris McEwan at chris.mcewan@darlington.gov.uk

The widened Cob seen from Harbour station. ANDREW THOMAS