

SPIRIT OF THE WELSHPOOL & LLANFAIR RAILWAY

Mike Heath

Opened in 1903 the introduction of a light narrow gauge railway connecting the town of Llanfair Caereinion with the main Cambrian Railway's network at Welshpool brought about a major change for life in the surrounding countryside. Local industry and farming was transformed as a result of this much quicker, and more economic, method of exporting produce and importing necessary supplies. Passenger traffic was never particularly heavy and that service ceased in 1931. Goods traffic struggled on benefiting from a mini revival during The Second World War, surviving until competition from the improving road system brought about cessation of all services in 1956.

That would have been the end of the story but for a band of local people who had fallen in love with the line and were determined to save it. Starting with very limited resources they set about the restoration of the line. The section between Llanfair and Castle Caerinion was reopened in 1963, Sylfaen was reached in 1972 and operations over the full 8 mile line to Welshpool recommenced on 18 July 1981 following completion of the new eastern terminus at Raven Square.

The railway's steam locomotive collection now embraces examples from three continents. Their passenger stock comprises Austrian open balcony saloons dating from the turn of the century, 1950s' second class coaches built for the Hungarian State Railway and 1960s' built carriages presented to the Sierra Leone Railway by the UK government of the time. Thus the line has a distinctly foreign atmosphere but with the retention, in working order, of the W & L's two original locomotives and some of the original goods stock together with replicas of two, soon to be all three, of the original passenger vehicles, the traditional Welsh rural railway experience is still maintained. All this is captured in this pocket sized album which shows why this gem of a railway is well worth a visit.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

For well over 25 years Mike Heath has enjoyed combining his hobbies of photography and visiting preserved railways all over Britain. In that time he has amassed a vast collection of stunning photographs covering all aspects of the railways across all four seasons, day and night. He is the author of more than ten railway titles, all for Halsgrove.

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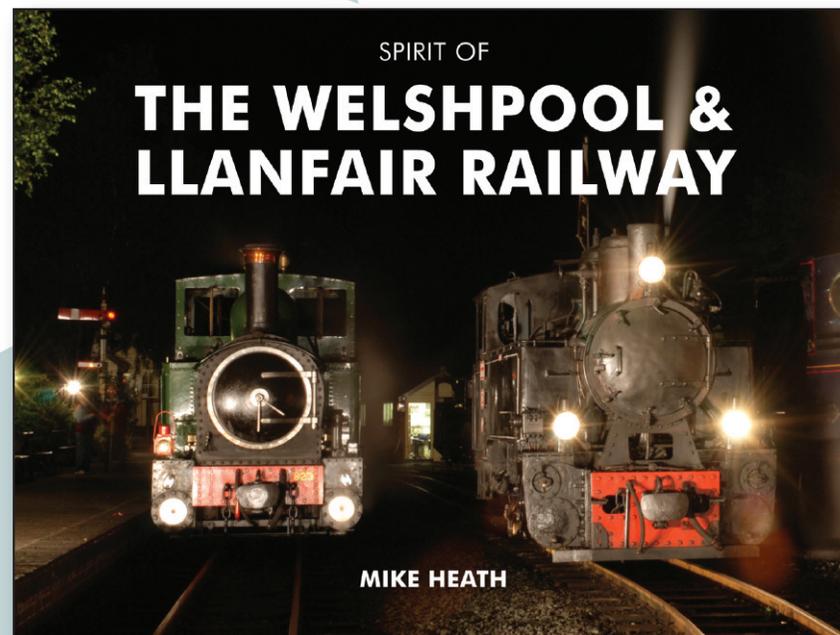
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No. 19 'Resita 764-425' crosses over New Drive and heads for the setting sun.



No. 14 has advanced along the headshunt to take water.



Early evening arrivals at the halt can benefit from some wonderful light from the descending sun. Here the driver is handing the single line staff to the volunteer signalman.



Left:
No. 822 'The Earl' was the first locomotive to arrive on the line in 1902. 102 years later it awaits departure from Welshpool with a September 2004 Gala train. The first carriage is a replica of one of the only three coaches that formed the passenger stock that operated on the line between 1903 and 1931.

Right:
By the time of the 2009 Gala a second replica coach had been added to the fleet. Both were built by the Ffestiniog Railway Company at Boston Lodge. The line's original stock had been built by R.V. Pickering of Wishaw hence the replicas are colloquially known as the 'Pickering' coaches.



Example of a double-page spread.



'The Countess' arrives at Cyfrnydd Station. (Photo Karl Heath)