

SPIRIT OF NARROW GAUGE STEAM

Robin Jones

Narrow gauge railways played a vital part in the Industrial Revolution which laid the foundations for the steam railway concept. Just as the development of the coal, iron and steel industries in County Durham and Teesside paved the way for the development of the steam locomotive, so the slate industry of North Wales nurtured the narrow gauge version. Outside Wales, other industries started to use narrow gauge railways to move freight, notably ironstone, limestone, china clay, brick clay and metals. Britain often also chose narrow gauge for lines serving sparsely-populated rural communities. The 1ft 11½in gauge Lynton & Barnstaple Railway in Devon is but one classic example. By late Victorian times, the public fascination with steam railways had reached the point where they began to be built for pleasure and tourist purposes. The 3ft gauge Ravenglass & Eskdale Railway in the Lake District, employed scaled-down versions of main line locomotives for motive power. These paved the way for the Romney, Hythe & Dymchurch Railway, opened in 1927, which for decades boasted that it was the world's smallest public railway.

The advent of cheaper road transport and mass car ownership halted the expansion of the British railway network in the 20th century, and many classic narrow gauge lines either lost their passenger services or were closed altogether in the 1930s. However, the takeover of the near-defunct Talylyn Railway by a team of volunteers in 1951 followed soon afterwards by the revival of the Festiniog (now Ffestiniog) Railway, launched today's railway preservation movement, which has grown to be a major player in the 21st century tourist market. Not only have many of the great narrow gauge lines along with their locomotives and stock been restored, but new lines have been laid along disused standard gauge trackbeds, and more revival schemes are underway.

Robin Jones looks at the finest of Britain's narrow gauge steam today. In more than 60 images and with a sharp and incisive text, *Narrow Gauge Steam* is the ideal brief guide, in Halsgrove's new collectible, pocket-size format.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A graduate of the University of Central England, Robin Jones, founding editor of *Heritage Railway* magazine, was a news editor and chief investigative reporter at the *Birmingham Evening Mail*, and over the years has produced several books and special publications, along with historical features for numerous other newspapers and periodicals.

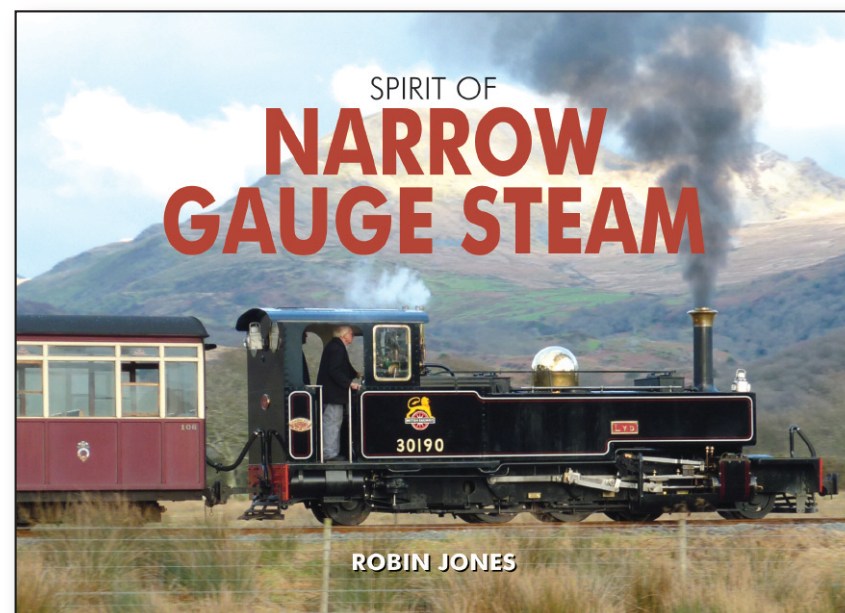
He has been interested in railways from a very early age, when his elder brother Stewart took him trainspotting at Widney Manor station in Solihull at the age of four; at the end of the British Railways steam age.

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1949, 1991 — This 0-4-2T is a new locomotive 'by the back door'. Tom Rolt, named after the founder of the Talylyn Railway Preservation Society, was built at the line's Pendre Works, incorporating components of a little-used 3ft gauge Andrew Barclay 0-4-0WT built in 1949 for Bord na Mona (the Irish Turf Board) nicknamed Irish Pete.



Vale of Rheidol Railway No 8 Llewellyn, built to a similar design to the Aberystwyth-Devil's Bridge line's original Davies & Metcalf 2-6-2Ts, none of which survive.



Example of a double-page spread.



A landmark on the preserved Ffestiniog Railway came in 1979 when, 110 years after Little Wonder appeared on the line, a brand new double Fairlie, Earl of Merioneth, based on the original patent, although with modern box-like side tanks, emerged from Boston Lodge Works.

1889, 1904, 1922 — Three ex-Dinorwic Quarry Hunslet 0-4-0STs together on the Llanberis Lake Railway in 2009; opposite, in blue is Wild Aster (built 1904), red Elidr (1889) and yellow Dolbadarn (1922). This modern-day 1ft 11 1/2in gauge railway which opened in 1971 is laid on part of the 4ft gauge Padarn Railway which closed in 1961.

1891 (below) — Former Dinorwic Quarry Hunslet 0-4-0ST Cloister now hauls passenger trains at Amberley Museum in Sussex.



Beyer Peacock supplied two 0-6-0Ts for the 1903 opening of the 2ft 6in gauge Welshpool & Llanfair Light Railway, one of the few narrow gauge branch lines to be built under the 1896 Light Railways Act. A Centenary Special working on 5 April 2003 sees No 1 The Earl and No 2 Countess climb towards Coppice Lane crossing.



The oldest of the six Festiniog double Fairlies to survive is No 10 Merddin Emrys, named after the sixth century Welsh poet, was delivered in 1879 and is still in regular service today. It is seen heading a vintage train along Tank Curve in deepest slate country.