

Thomas Brassey and his link to Heritage Railways No 5

The Bala Lake Railway

The photograph below taken at Llanuwchllyn Station in 2019 shows former quarry locomotive Maid Marion.



The Bala Lake Railway is a narrow gauge line operating between Llanuwchllyn and Bala (Pen-y-Bont) in Gwynedd, North Wales, a distance of 4½ miles.

The narrow gauge line is built on the track bed of part of the former standard gauge railway between Ruabon and Barmouth. The section between Ruabon and Dolgellau, a distance of some 48 miles, was originally built by Thomas Brassey under four separate contracts. The contract for the construction between Bala and Dolgellau, on which the Bala Lake Railway runs, was awarded to Brassey in 1866 by the Bala and Dolgellau Railway Company.

The line opened in August 1868 and included stations at Bala Junction, Llangower, Llanuwchllyn and Bont Newydd. At Dolgellau the line connected with the Cambrian Railways route from Barmouth. The separate operating companies were gradually absorbed into the Great Western Railway although Cambrian Railways remained independent until 1922.

Picture The Ruabon to Barmouth line was included for closure in the Beeching Report of 1963 as a result of which traffic on the line was gradually reduced. Passenger services through Bala Junction ceased in January 1965 when the line from Ruabon to Barmouth closed. Some goods traffic continued until January 1968. By 1969 the track had been lifted.

However, local engineer George Barnes saw the potential of the lakeside section for both local and tourist traffic. Together with Tom Jones CBE, the then Chairman of Merioneth County Council's Finance Committee, the company Rheilffordd Llyn Tegid Ltd (Bala Lake Railway) was established with the objective of restoring a section of the line as a narrow (2-ft) gauge railway. The first length of the Bala Lake Railway between Llanuwchllyn and Pentrepiod, a distance of 1½ miles, opened in 1972. The railway was progressively extended and by 1976 had reached Bala (Pen-y-bont) the current extent of operation. The railway continues to develop and there are plans to extend into the town of Bala.