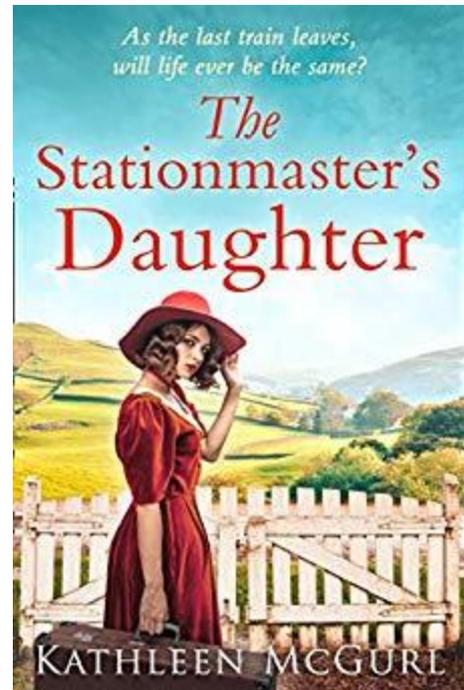


NARROW GAUGE RAILWAYS IN NOVELS

The Stationmaster's Daughter by Kathleen McGurl

A fictionalised railway in Dorset, where the author lives, but readers will recognise Woody Bay, Chelfham and Lynton from her descriptions.

Published in October 2019, it is a dual timeline novel – the historical story tells the tale of the last weeks of the Lynton & Barnstaple Railway's operation in 1935 and the contemporary story follows its restoration. And there's a mystery and a surprise or two along the way of course!



Dorset, 1935. Stationmaster Ted Morgan has never cared much for romance. Occupied with ensuring England's most beautiful railway runs on time, love has always felt like a comparatively trivial matter. Yet when he meets Annie Galbraith on the 8.42 train to Lynford, he can't help but instantly fall for her. But when the railway is forced to close and a terrible accident occurs within the station grounds, Ted finds his job and any hope of a relationship with Annie hanging in the balance...

Present day. Recovering from heartbreak after a disastrous marriage, Tilly decides to escape from the bustling capital and move to Dorset to stay with her dad, Ken. When Ken convinces Tilly to help with the restoration of the old railway, she discovers a diary hidden in the old ticket office. Tilly is soon swept up in Ted's story, and the fateful accident that changed his life forever. But an encounter with an enigmatic stranger takes Tilly by surprise, and she can't help but feel a connection with Ted's story in the past ...

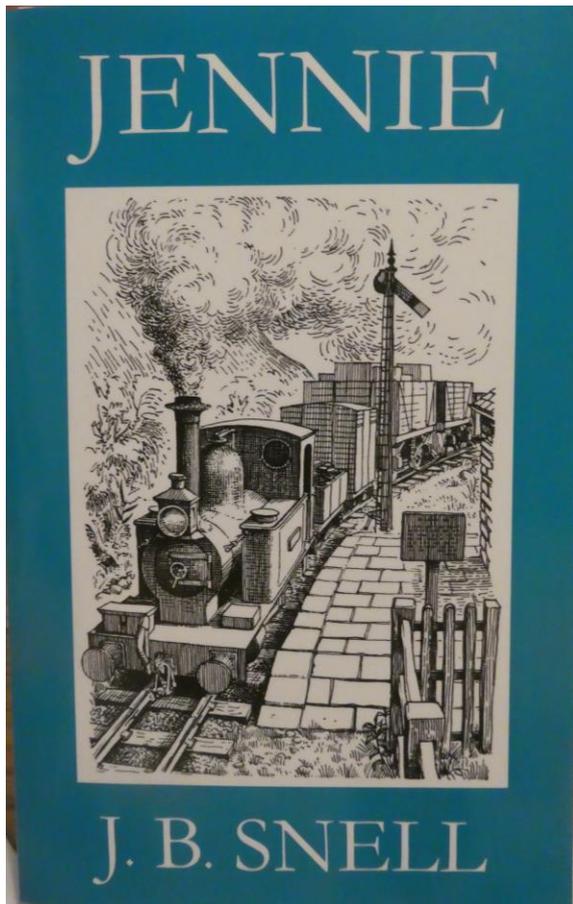


Scenes from the revived Lynton & Barnstaple Railway, taken at Woody Bay Station in May 2018. The locomotive No. 762 is a recent “new build”, a replica of the original 2-4-2T built at the Baldwin Locomotive Works, Philadelphia, USA, in May 1898; Works No. 15965.

Jennie by John B Snell

Owen Roberts was 15 when he joined the new railway company building its narrow gauge railway among the Welsh slate quarries. The locomotive “Jennie” arrived soon after him and the two of them grew old together.

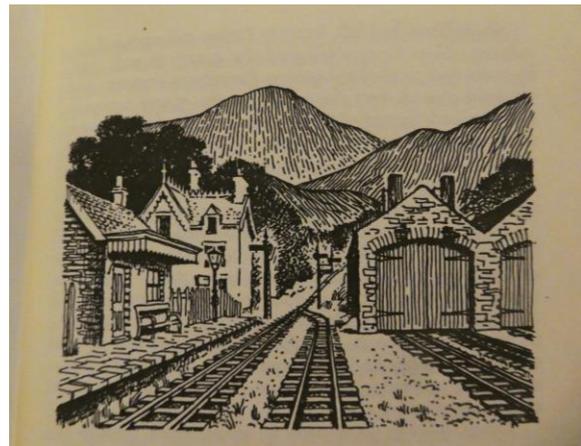
This is the story of triumphs and troubles, successes and failures among the Welsh hills. A story where son succeeds father and where grandson and later great-grandson take over. A human story in which the engines that pull the trains are almost human too.



First published in 1958, and written when the author was in his twenties, Jennie remains the only family saga which is based around a Welsh narrow gauge railway and arguably the only family saga written based on a railway anywhere of any gauge.

Although much embroidered, there is no denying that indirectly the book grew out of the first 3 years of the Talylyn Railway in preservation on which John Snell was one of the early staff members.

The incidents depicted have their counterparts on various narrow gauge railways past or present, at home and abroad. And while there never was such a locomotive as Jennie on any railway, there were many people like Mr Pearson who built some even odder ones!



Illustrations by G K Sewell



14th May 1951. Author John Snell, as a schoolboy fired the first trains when the Talylyn Railway Preservation Society took over operation of the Talylyn Railway – the first preserved railway in the world. He is seen above on locomotive No.2 “Dolgoch” at Rhydyronen station and below on 14th May 2011 marking the 60th anniversary.



Peacocks on the lawn by Winston Clewes

A novel about “Michael Donnelly’s fantastic railway” (page 64). Published in 1952, by when only the remains of the closed line dotted the landscape, it describes how an English visitor pieced together the story of the people involved in the building and operation of a railway in a remote part of Ireland.

“From the harbour, which he found dreary, he turned to contemplation of what had, obviously, been the terminus of Michael Donnelly’s fantastic creation, the Bunmeara and Rosderg Light Railway. But for the element of fantasy the small flat plain of black cinders running along the quay would have been drearier; the rails had been lifted, there was a circular pit once housing a turntable, a water-tank on stilts, a great shed the roof of which was in the process of falling in; and from the end farthest from the town the track plunging steeply into the hill, winding away upward out of sight. It was fantastic that anyone could have been found to advance the money for such a project, fantastic ever to have thought there could have been traffic for it to pay its way, fantastic now to envisage the cheerful warmth, sounds and movements of locomotives in this setting; even the station building, huddled into the hill for protection, was fantastic ...”

It tells of the local solicitor, Tod O’Brien who proved “... in chapter and verse over a succession of glasses (of whiskey) that the British Government was ready and even anxious to underwrite such lunacy.” Various Acts of Parliament in the 1880s and 1890s were passed to encourage railway construction in the west and north of Ireland, with various provisions for loans, grants and subsidies (page 75).

It tells of the short cuts taken during construction to save money and the death of a navy in a landslide caused by a skimming on the provision of adequate drainage. Of locomotives purchased on the cheap, that were unable to haul heavy trains up the steep gradients.

In operation, it describes how the services were disrupted during “the troubles” (page 202) and the setting up of the Irish Free State. The novel also depicts two major accidents; firstly the wind blowing a train off a viaduct (page 154); secondly a fatal accident in 1924, when a train ran down a steep gradient out of control and derailed on a sharp curve over a viaduct, killing 5 people and 62 pigs (pages 206-211). In this narrative we can see echoes of Owencarrow viaduct accident of January 1925 on the Londonderry & Lough Swilly Railway and of the derailment at Camp village on the Tralee & Dingle Railway on Whit Monday 1893 respectively.



Above - Old funicular car, out of service since 1975.

By © Traumrune / Wikimedia Commons,
CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=22728705>



Above - A modern view of the summit station at Rochers de Naye

By Whgler - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=70234120>

Both lines survive in modernised form as part of the transport infrastructure of Vaud Canton around Montreux.

F Scott Fitzgerald's final novel, of 1934, "Tender is the night" describes a journey on the Territet – Glion funicular;-

"Mountain climbing cars are built on a slant similar to the angle of a hat-brim of a man who doesn't want to be recognized. As water gushed from the chamber under the car, Dick was impressed with the ingenuity of the whole idea – a complimentary car was now taking on mountain water at the top and would pull the lightened car up by gravity, as soon as the brakes were released. In the seat across, a couple of British were discussing the cable itself.

The ones made in England always last five or six years. Two years ago, the Germans underbid us, and how long do you think their cable lasted?

How long?

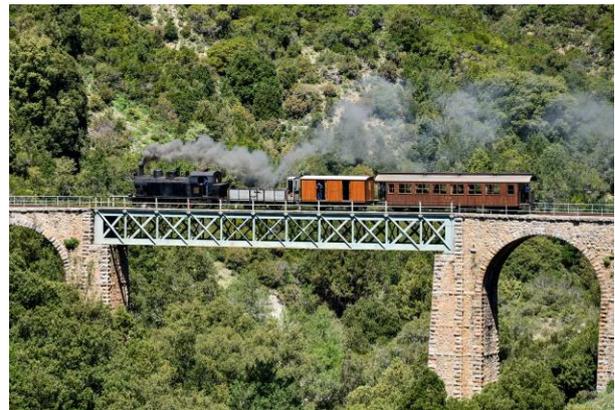
A year and ten months. Then the Swiss sold it to the Italians. They don't have rigid inspections of cables."

At Glion, they changed onto the Montreux – Glion – Rochers de Naye Railway, an 800mm gauge rack line, where;-

"a leather lunged engine pushed the passengers round and round in a corkscrew, mounting, rising, they chugged through low-level clouds ..."

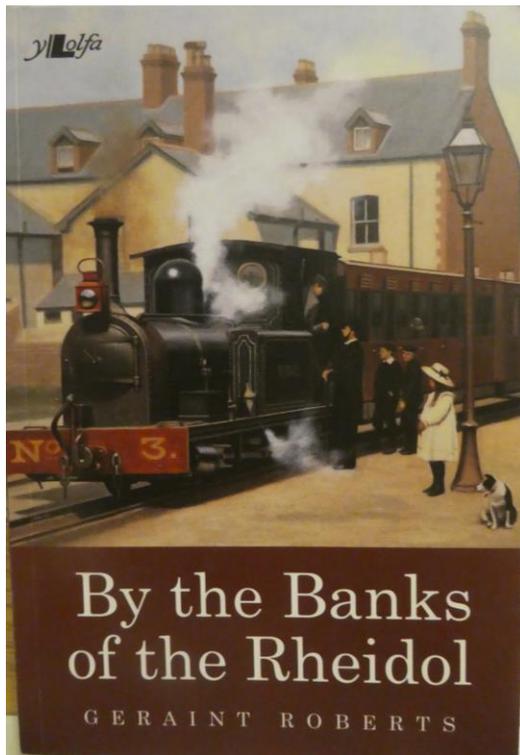
It may not be *Lady Chatterley's lover* or *Sons and Lovers*, but in *Sea and Sardinia*, **D H Lawrence** [1885-1930] described a ride along the 95km line from Mandas to Sorgono among the mountainous regions of Sardinia, with the dubious pleasure of travelling on a mixed train.

"[Mandas] a junction where these little trains sit and have a long happy chat after their arduous scramble over the downs. ... We were always climbing. And the line curved in great loops. So that as one looked out of the window, time and again one started seeing a little train running in front of us, in a diverging direction, making big puffs of steam. But lo, it was our own little engine pelting off round a loop away ahead. We were quite a long train, but all trucks in front, only our two passenger coaches hitched on behind. And for this reason our own engine was always running fussily into sight, like some dog scampering in front and swerving about us, while we followed at the tail end of the thin string of trucks. At every station we were left ignominiously planted, while the little engines – they had gay gold names on their black bodies – strolled about along side-lines and snuffed at the various trucks. There we sat, at every station, while some truck was discarded and some other sorted out like a branded sheep from the sidings and hitched on to us. It took a long time, this did."



Photos taken in 2014 by Gareth Jones, the top 2 showing contemporary service trains and the lower 2 taken on a railtour of the island by RTC (Railway Touring Company). Locomotive No. 400 [Reggio Emilia works no. 133 of 1931] hauled a mixed train, the wagon next to the loco was for spares / tools etc. 950mm gauge.

“By the banks of the Rheidol” by Geraint Roberts



A historical novel, set mainly in the Aberystwyth area with the twin themes of local industry and romance. Young lead miner Dafydd is forced to flee his family after being targeted in a violent confrontation. He runs to the port of Aberystwyth, where he is helped by local Trefechan girl, Gwen. He slowly begins to rebuild his life, falling for Gwen in the process.

Dafydd works his way up from navvy on a nearby quarry railway [the 2'3" gauge Plynlimon & Hafan Tramway] to become an apprentice in W G Bagnall Ltd's workshops in Stafford.

In doing so, he is parted from Gwen, but she promises to wait for him. When he finally returns, to work on Aberystwyth's new Rheidol Railway, can he progress as a railwayman; track down the family he's lost and – most importantly – find Gwen?

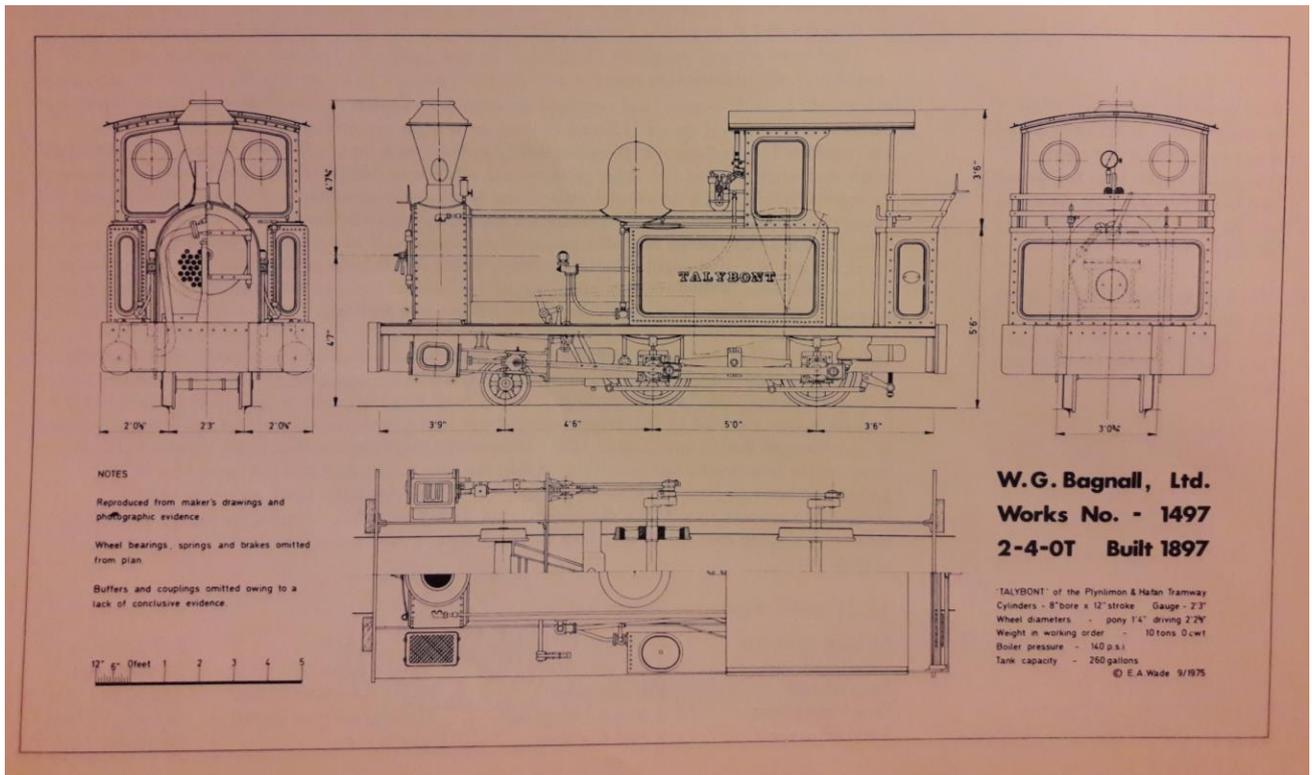
The following review by Andrew Charman is taken from the October 2018 issue of Narrow Gauge World [page 48].

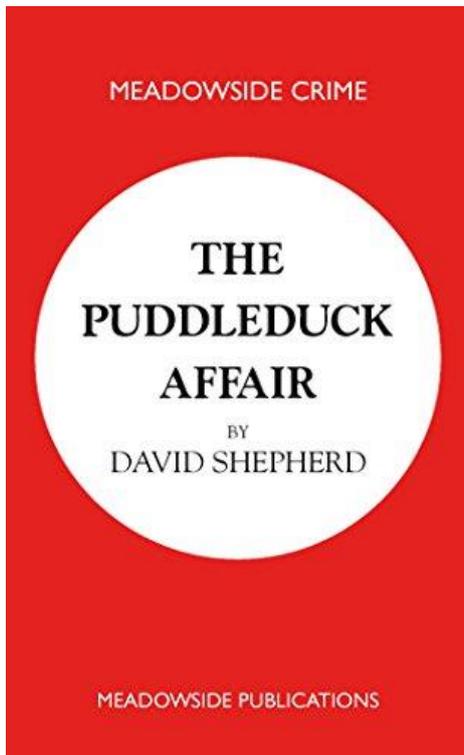
“This is somewhat different, and perhaps can provide a brief respite from reading railway histories that through their subject matter can be somewhat dry in tone. It's a historical novel, telling the fictitious story of Dafydd, a lead miner who is forced to leave Aberystwyth and finds work on firstly the Plynlimon & Hafan and later the Vale of Rheidol Railway, then under construction.

The author has lived in Aberystwyth all his life and today works on the Rheidol line, as well as having an interest in local history. This is evident in his descriptions, because while overall this is an enjoyable tale of rural Welsh life at the dawn of the 20th century, knowledgeable railway types will not suffer the usual irritation of poorly documented working practices. With one or two minor exceptions the railway stuff is accurately documented, from the navvies building the Rheidol

moaning about cost-cutting construction methods to, in particular, Dafydd's relationship with Bagnall 2-4-0T 'Talybont' (which later became 'Rheidol' on the VoR). This is a well-written novel and an entertaining and enjoyable diversion."

This other star of the novel, "Talybont", is the 2-4-0T locomotive built by W G Bagnall Ltd in 1897 as Works Number 1497. The drawing [below] of this locomotive was produced by E A Wade and his models of the Plynlimon & Hafan Tramway locomotives and carriage are in the display case alongside this exhibition.





Invited over to Wales, under false pretences, Detective-Inspector Raynes is expecting to spend a happy weekend on the Puddleduck Railway. But, instead, he finds himself involved in a murder investigation. Derek Barclay, a shameless womaniser, has been found in the station yard with both legs cut off. The coroner has said that it was an accident; but his widow insists it was murder. Possibly a copycat murder? The maiden voyage of a small saddle tank locomotive - Lady Ermintrude - is eclipsed by the "quantum of wickedness" which engulfs both the village and the Railway. When the smoke clears, who will be seen to be holding the keys to this devilish plot?

"A splendid concoction of delicious food, wicked women and small trains chugging up and down ancient tracks - all designed to publicize the great little railways of Wales."