COLLIERS' UNADVERTISED STOPPING PLACES ON THE MONMOUTHSHIRE RAILWAY'S NANTYGLO BRANCH

Page last updated 7 January 2025

TYLER'S ARMS, SOUTH GRIFFIN *and* BOURNVILLE (Mon.)

Croughton *et al., Private & Untimetabled Railway Stations,* have Tyler's Arms Platform opening ***by*** July 1897, as an unadvertised colliers' halt, converted to public use from 30 Oct 1933, but no mention of South Griffin Colliery. Michael Quick, *Railway Passenger Stations* (v5.05) - under BOURNVILLE MON – has:

"by agreement dated 23 January 1883 GW agreed to run trains from Lancaster & Co's colliery at South Griffin Colliery (via Tylers Arms Junction); replaced by non-tt PLATFORM for miners at TYLERS ARMS 21 June 1915, service from/to Brynmawr *(South Wales Gazette 18th)*; op to public and renamed B M 30 October 1933 *(Western Mail 30th)*; HALT added GW co tt by 5 October 1942 but *Brad* 1946; clo 30 April 1962 *(T 6 April)*; {Abertillery – Blaina}."

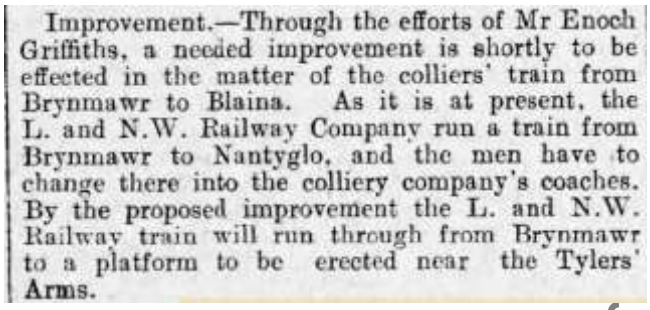
It is helpful to refer to http://maps.nls.uk/view/102186169 (revised 1899) which shows "SB" (signal box – it was named Tyler's Arms Jn.) right at the top of the sheet, at the south end of Blaina. Here, a "mineral railway" diverges to serve John Lancaster & Co. Ltd's South Griffin Colliery. Note that almost opposite the colliery is Tiler's *(sic)* Arms PH.

Under agreement of 23 Jan 1883, the GWR allowed John Lancaster & Co (a limited company from 15 Feb 1884) to have trains carrying colliers between Nantyglo and Blaina. This agreement did not embrace South Griffin (which had been sunk in 1882 and completed the following year) for a private siding connection here was not approved until GWR Board minute of 9 Aug 1883 (RAIL 250/34), the private siding agreement itself being signed on 12 Jan 1884. It can be seen, therefore, that the 1883 agreement – cited by Quick – cannot have referred to colliers' trains running south of Blaina. The 12 Feb 1883 Service (= working) Time Table (RAIL 937/38) shows "new workmen's trains" each weekday at 0520 SO and 0615 SX from Nantyglo to Blaina, returning from Blaina at 1510 SO, 1750 SX – balanced by empty workings in each case (12+ hour days then….). In that the colliery provided the locomotives, drivers, firemen, two "breaksmen", coal, water and stores, while the GWR provided coaches and guard, it's arguable that GWR "agreed to run trains" - it seems to have been rather more of a 'joint venture'! Later, the guard, too, was provided by the colliery.

Timetables show that such trains continued to be restricted to Nantyglo – Blaina until March 1889 whereafter the trains became two-portioned: part detached at Blaina and part extended to South Griffin pit. This is explained in a GWR internal circular dated 14 Mar 1889 (RAIL 937/50), which was thereafter repeated in the instructions pages at the back of the timetables – only later still did passing times at Tyler's Arms Junction begin to appear in the tabular pages. There was a short inter-regnum in 1893: John Lancaster & Co. Ltd's trains were completely withdrawn from 1 April 1893 (RAIL 937/57), although they resumed again from 24 July 1893 (RAIL 937/58).

At, for example, July 1906 there are colliers' trains shown at 0530 SO and 0623 SX from Nantyglo to Tyler's Arms Jn, returning at 1443 SO and alternate Mondays, and at 1737 SX (except the other Mondays). These were shown as passing times because, of course, the trains continued to South Griffin colliery itself. Curiously, there is nothing to suggest these were "jointly provided" trains. The stock was kept at Blaina overnight and at the colliery during the day, with commensurate empty stock and light engine movements.

That a change was in the wind was given in this item in *Brecon & Radnor Express* of 7 Jan 1915:

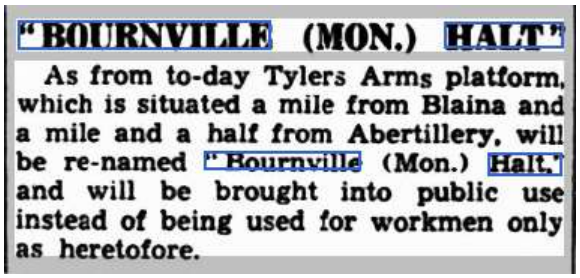


Improvement.—Through the efforts of Mr Enoch Griffiths, a needed improvement is shortly to be effected in the matter of the colliers' train from Brynmawr to Blaina. As it is at present, the L. and N.W. Railway Company run a train from Brynmawr to Nantyglo, and the men have to change there into the colliery company's coaches. By the proposed improvement the L. and N.W. Railway train will run through from Brynmawr to a platform to be erected near the Tylers' Arms.

Until June 1915 the trains continued to run between Nantyglo and the colliery – GWR Notice no. 82 for May shows the service still direct to the colliery. The cited report in *South Wales Gazette* of 18 June 1915 is confirmed by the GWR Running Powers Agreement book which explains that from Tuesday 21 June 1915 the

service became one worked by the L&NWR through between Brynmawr and a new stopping place called Tyler's Arms Platform (approved *post hoc* by the Board of Trade's inspector: MT6/2407/3) on the GWR's line, some 200 yards east of the colliery. While no working timetable amendment seems to survive to show the change (presumably covered by local notice for three weeks) the working timetable dated 12 July 1915 (RAIL 937/116) still has Tyler's Arms Jn, at 3m 16ch from Brynmawr, now joined in the station bank by the platform at 3m 62ch., with trains now running as empty stock beyond the platform to Rose Heyworth to run round. By this date, the trains are shown as "Miner's Federation colliers' trains" rather than Lancaster's.
http://maps.nls.uk/view/102342436 (revised 1915/16) shows a new Bournville Road and a community that has arisen (no mention of either the public house or halt yet - in fact, the halt doesn't appear until http://maps.nls.uk/view/102186160 (published 1951)).

South Griffin colliery ceased production on 26 Feb 1921, although retained for pumping and ventilation purposes for Rose Heyworth. Nevertheless, the platform subsequently continued in use – now carrying miners from the new community of Bournville to pits further south in the valley. All Brynmawr branch colliers' trains were shown "temporarily suspended" in a supplement (RAIL 937/128) dated 4 Apr 1921, even though the miners' strike was not to begin until "Black Friday" 15 Apr (the strike lasted until the beginning of July 1921). The GWR Service Time Tables generally gave Tyler's Arms – whether junction or platform – an apostrophe, although there were exceptions which may simply be compiler or compositor laxity.


"BOURNVILLE (MON.) HALT"

As from to-day Tylers Arms platform, which is situated a mile from Blaina and a mile and a half from Abertillery, will be re-named "Bournville (Mon.) Halt," and will be brought into public use instead of being used for workmen only as heretofore.

The platform was opened to the public as Bournville (Mon.) Halt from 30 Oct 1933, as witness this report in *Western Mail* of that day, confirmed by the Superintendent of the Line's General Instructions circular no. 638 of 27 Oct (RAIL 253/513). In answer to Quick's query: the words "(Mon.) Halt" **were** included from the first appearance in the GWR public timetable (July 1934 issue – although wrongly spelled Bourneville in the Station Index); it was covered by Train Service Alteration pamphlet prior to then. Until after the war, *Bradshaw* simply included it in the list with other halts for which no times were given.

Therefore, the *Railway Passenger Stations* entry **SOUTH GRIFFIN Colliery/Pit(s)** should be amplified as a free-standing entry:
SOUTH GRIFFIN COLLIERY: non-tt colliers' service worked by John Lancaster & Co. Ltd. from Nantyglo via Tyler's Arms Junction from March 1889 (RAIL 937/50); withdrawn 1 Apr 1893 (RAIL 937/57); restored 24 July 1893 (RAIL 937/58); replaced by LNWR service to TYLER'S ARMS PLATFORM (on GW Western Valley line) 21 June 1915 (GWR Running Powers Agreement book) – see BOURNVILLE (MON.) {private siding from Tyler's Arms Jn, south of Blaina}

and the **BOURNVILLE MON** entry should be amended to read:
BOURNVILLE (MON.): non-tt platform for miners at TYLER'S ARMS op 21 June 1915 (to replace SOUTH GRIFFIN COLLIERY (q.v.)); service from/to Brynmawr *(South Wales Gazette 18th)*; op to public and renamed BOURNVILLE (MON.) 30 Oct 1933 *(Western Mail 30th)*; HALT; clo 30 Apr 1962 *(T 6th - line)* {Abertillery – Blaina}.

"Non-tt" denotes "station not in public timetables" (in other words, not advertised).

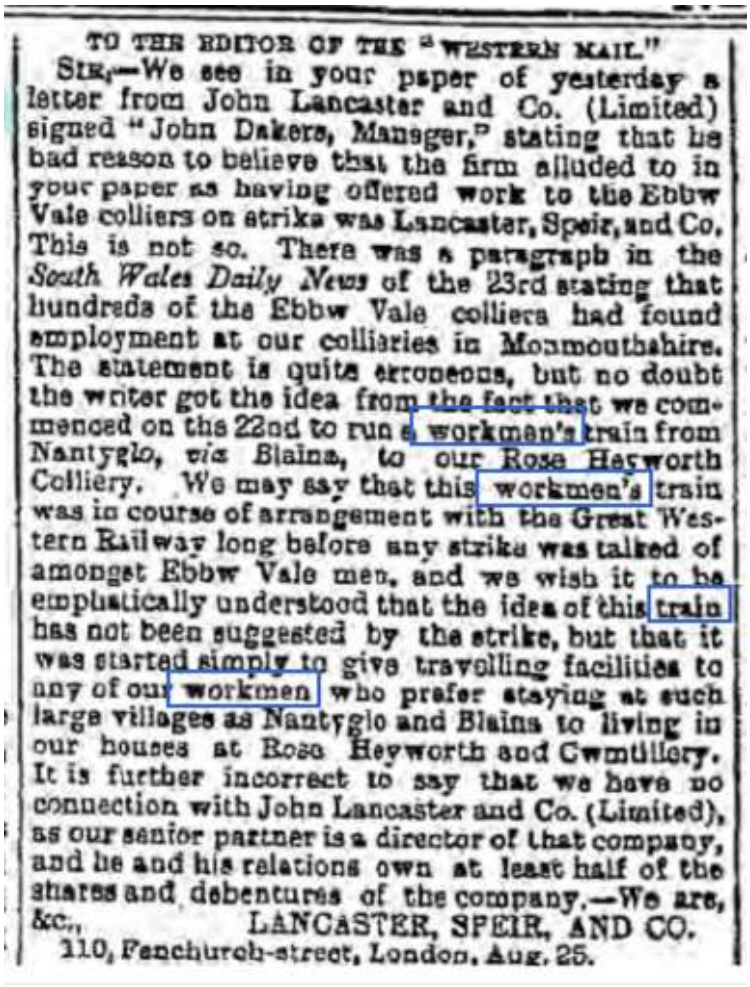
ROSE HEYWORTH

Croughton *et al.* have this location opened ***by*** July 1897, as an unadvertised colliers' halt, closing after 1918. Quick - under ROSE HEYWORTH – has:

for Lancaster's Steam Coal Co's "colliers' trains" (worked by GW and LNW) miners; initial agreement signed 17 August 1888 (by GW and coal co); service from Nantyglo via Blaina began 22 August 1888 *(see letterWestern Mail 27th);*in use July 1921 wtt, not present 9 July 1923 wtt; {Abertillery – Blaina}.

Arguably the location should read ROSE HEYWORTH **COLLIERY**. The initial agreement for colliers' service was signed 17 Aug 1888 and is recorded in GWR archives as being with "Messrs. Lancaster & Co." - in this case, Lancaster, Speir & Co. (a limited company from 13 Feb 1892),

which had just leased the colliery from South Wales Colliery Co. Ltd. The trains, bringing colliers down from Nantyglo and Blaina to Rose Heyworth, started on 22 Aug 1888 and were worked – for the mining company's account - by GWR from Aberbeeg, as confirmed by this letter in *Western Mail* 27 Aug 1888:



TO THE EDITOR OF THE "WESTERN MAIL."

SIR,—We see in your paper of yesterday a letter from John Lancaster and Co. (Limited) signed "John Dakers, Manager," stating that he had reason to believe that the firm alluded to in your paper as having offered work to the Ebbw Vale colliers on strike was Lancaster, Speir, and Co. This is not so. There was a paragraph in the *South Wales Daily News* of the 23rd stating that hundreds of the Ebbw Vale colliers had found employment at our collieries in Monmouthshire. The statement is quite erroneous, but no doubt the writer got the idea from the fact that we commenced on the 22nd to run a workman's train from Nantyglo, *via* Blaina, to our Rose Heyworth Colliery. We may say that this workmen's train was in course of arrangement with the Great Western Railway long before any strike was talked of amongst Ebbw Vale men, and we wish it to be emphatically understood that the idea of this train has not been suggested by the strike, but that it was started simply to give travelling facilities to any of our workmen who prefer staying at such large villages as Nantyglo and Blaina to living in our houses at Rose Heyworth and Cwmtillery. It is further incorrect to say that we have no connection with John Lancaster and Co. (Limited), as our senior partner is a director of that company, and he and his relations own at least half of the shares and debentures of the company.—We are, &c.,

LANCASTER, SPEIR, AND CO.

110, Fenchurch-street, London, Aug. 25.

The final sentence of the letter is also of interest in alluding to the 'relationship' between these two "Lancaster" companies. The colliery itself was acquired by Lancaster's Steam Coal Collieries Ltd. in 1891, but continued to be leased to and worked by Lancaster, Speir & Co. Ltd. until the latter got into financial difficulties in 1908 - thereafter LSCC took over running the colliery and so the trains then ran on their account instead. Both companies remained managerially separate from John Lancaster & Co. Ltd.

The Lancaster, Speir & Co's colliers' trains first appear in the Service (= working) Time Table dated Oct 1888 (RAIL 937/49) when the following new weekday trains were noted:
0540 MX, 0645 MO, 1355 SO, 1555 MO, 1715 MSX Aberbeeg – Nantyglo;
0625 MX, 0715 MO, 1435 SO, 1550 MO, 1800 MSX Nantyglo – Aberbeeg.
These seem only to have been carrying colliers from Nantyglo and Blaina to Rose Heyworth North box (i.e. colliery) and back, the other sections of the journeys being empty stock. They did not call at Tyler's Arms platform when that opened in 1915 but some journeys were doing so by 1921, and some were then also extended from and to Brynmawr.

There were two signal boxes at Rose Heyworth – North and South – with the colliery between the two. Stops by colliers' trains were given a time at North box so it presumably represented location of the colliery's platform. A note in (at least) 1907 Service Time Table reads; "The empty train is to be stabled at Rose Heyworth North."

Calls were still shown at Rose Heyworth North in Oct 1921 timetable (RAIL 937/130) and **not** amended by supplements down to June 1922 incl. (RAIL 937/131) - but all were shown SUSPENDED in timetables dated 10 July 1922 (RAIL 937/132) and 2 Oct 1922 (RAIL 937/133) - and all had been completely deleted in timetable dated 9 July 1923 (RAIL 937/135). The *de facto* closure of Rose Heyworth as an unadvertised workers' stopping point appears to have been 10 July 1922 although it is possible the withdrawal had taken place during the preceding month.

Therefore, the *Railway Passenger Stations* entry **ROSE HEYWORTH** should be amended to:
ROSE HEYWORTH COLLIERY (at North signal box): non-tt colliers' service, initially by GWR for Lancaster, Speir & Co from Nantyglo via Blaina from 22 Aug 1888 *(letter, Western Mail 27th);* suspended (never resumed) 10 July 1922 wtt (RAIL 937/132) {Abertillery – Blaina}.

Richard Maund

This is a slightly modified version of a paper which first appeared in Railway & Canal Historical Society's Railway History Group Circular nol. 198 of 25 March 2024