



28 Portmadoc and the Festiniog Railway: Short Introduction



The town of Portmadoc is of particular interest to the industrial archaeologist. From virtually nothing at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was developed into a town and harbour of considerable importance by the end of that century.....around 1800 William Alexander Maddocks, a local landowner, decided as a result of experiments in the Tremadoc

area to construct a huge embankment across the estuary. This enabled about 2000 acres of land to be drained and cultivated, adding considerably to his estate.....the embankment also lead to greatly improved communications in the area.....the lower part occupied by the present road was added in 1836 as a result of the construction of the Festiniog railway. The siting of sluice gates at the northern end resulted in a silt-free channel being scoured out on the seaward side, making an ideal site for a deep-water harbour. By this time the slate quarries twelve miles inland at Blaenau Ffestiniog were being developed, and so the town of Portmadoc was born.....

.....Much of interest dating from the heyday between the 1860's and 1880's can still be seen around the harbour area.....the Portmadoc Maritime Museum is established in one of the former slate sheds.....a selection of old photographs and exhibits is on display.....the Portmadoc Newsroom, whose upper floor is reached by an external flight of eleven stone steps, was where news of Portmadoc ships was posted from all over the world; it became an important meeting-place for ship owners and managers.....

.....Prior to the opening of the Festiniog Railway, output from the Blaenau Ffestiniog slate quarries had to be carried by packhorse or cart down to small quays on the Afon Dwyryd at Maentwrog, from where it was brought round the coast in shallow-draught vessels for transfer to the deep-water ships. As built, the railway was horse-worked with no provision for the carriage of passengers; such services were inaugurated soon after the pioneering introduction of small steam locomotives in 1863.....at the further end of the "Cob" embankment lies Boston Lodge, named after Maddocks's Parliamentary constituency in Lincolnshire. A tollhouse dating from 1847 was the last to serve as such in North Wales. Above it stands the Festiniog Railway's Boston Lodge workshops complex. The pair of white Georgian cottages seen at the front of the site are the original barracks built for the construction of the cob in 1808; the ground floor part served as stables for the horses used in the construction work.....

.....The F.R. Minffordd passenger station (1872) has been finely restored to preserve much of its original appearance and atmosphere; as such it is now the best example remaining on the line. Just beyond it stands Bron-y-Garth, latterly a hospital, which once served as the Ffestiniog Union

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workhouse.....Pont Briwfod is an interesting railway bridge, built entirely of wood, and still in use.. such bridges were often used to save money in the construction of railways, particularly on lines where much other expensive work was necessary; on this coastal route of the Cambrian Railways a costly cliffside section further south had caused the directors to economize in this way.....

.....The 1970's "deviation" section of the Festiniog Railway line gains height by means of a spiral section crossing over itself, then passing through a 250-yard tunnel to emerge above the lake.....The original course continues straight ahead at Dduallt and passed through the half-mile long Moelwyn tunnel, the northern end of which is partially submerged below the new lake. The entrances can still be seen.....before it was opened in 1844, the horse tramway was carried over the hill using an incline on either side, the one to the north being driven by a waterwheel which hauled up the loaded slate wagons; some of this alignment may also still be seen.....with stone sleeper-blocks in situ in places or used in walling.

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