

Return of the War Veteran

Andrew Charman profiles a locomotive with an interesting European history, soon to steam again on the Welshpool & Llanfair.



With 2014 marking the centenary of the start of the First World War, several locomotives built for or during that conflict will take centre stage this year. On the Welshpool & Llanfair Light Railway in mid Wales, however, the focus will be on a rather younger war veteran, as after almost 14 years out of use, 0-8-0T no 699.01 'Sir Drefaldwyn' is restored for a projected return to service in early 2015.

Long before it was called Sir Drefaldwyn or even numbered 699.01, this loco was one of a planned class of 55, known as the KDL11 and commissioned by the German military in 1938. However the design process was delayed and not until 1944 was no HF2855, the later 699.01, constructed, by the Société Franco-Belge loco works in Northern France. This firm had been sub-contracted to do the work by

Germany's war-stretched factories.

First steamed on 18th April 1944, HF2855 was an 0-8-0 loco with compensated front and second axles, allowing 22mm play left or right to allow it to negotiate sharp curves. It only had half-length tanks to keep the weight down and help it run on poor-quality track, and was intended to run with a bogie tender that was at least as long as the loco.

How many of the class were eventually built is now not known, but it was at least 24 and they were intended to be dispatched to the Eastern Front, but with the Russians advancing and pushing the Germans back eight of the class were instead sent early in 1945 to Mittersill in Austria. Five were quickly moved further on but HF2855 was still at Mittersill when the depot was overrun by Allied forces, the loco having never been used in anger.

Above: 699.01 'Sir Drefaldwyn' as many enthusiasts know the loco, pictured here in 2000 near Coppice Lane on the Welshpool & Llanfair Light Railway. Photo: Keith Halton/W&LLR

Below: Photos of HF2855 in its original tender form are very rare, seen here on shed at Itzing near Salzburg on the Salzkammergut Lokalbahn. Photo: W&LLR archives

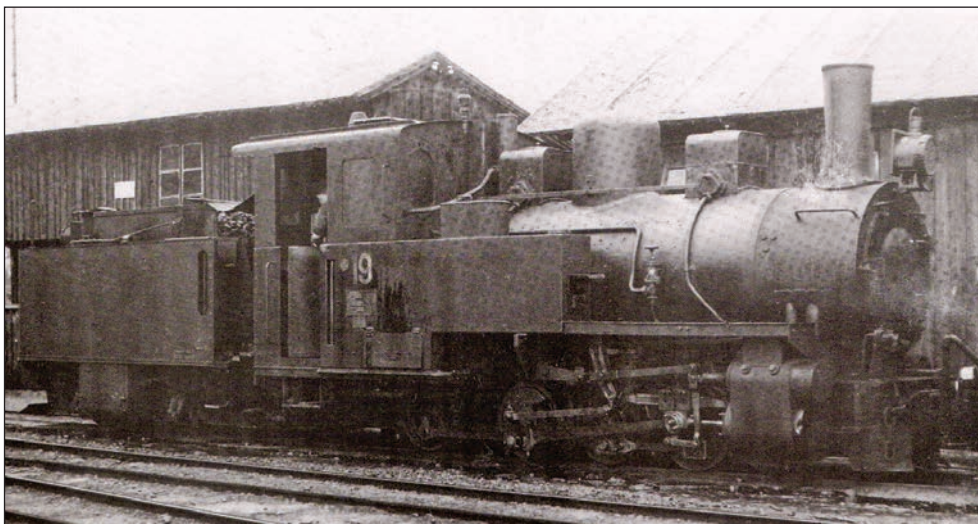
In January 1946 the occupying US Army loaned HF2855 to the 67km-long Salzkammergut Lokalbahn (SKGLB), which ran out of Salzburg. The loco was modified from its original 750mm to 760mm gauge, given a four-wheel tender – only two of the KDL11s are thought to have ever received bogie tenders – and began work as SKGLB no 19 in August of that year. The line bought HF2855 in April 1950, but only got two years' service out of it. By 1952 it was out of use and in July 1955 was sold on, minus tender, to the Steiermärkische Landesbahnen network in Southern Austria.

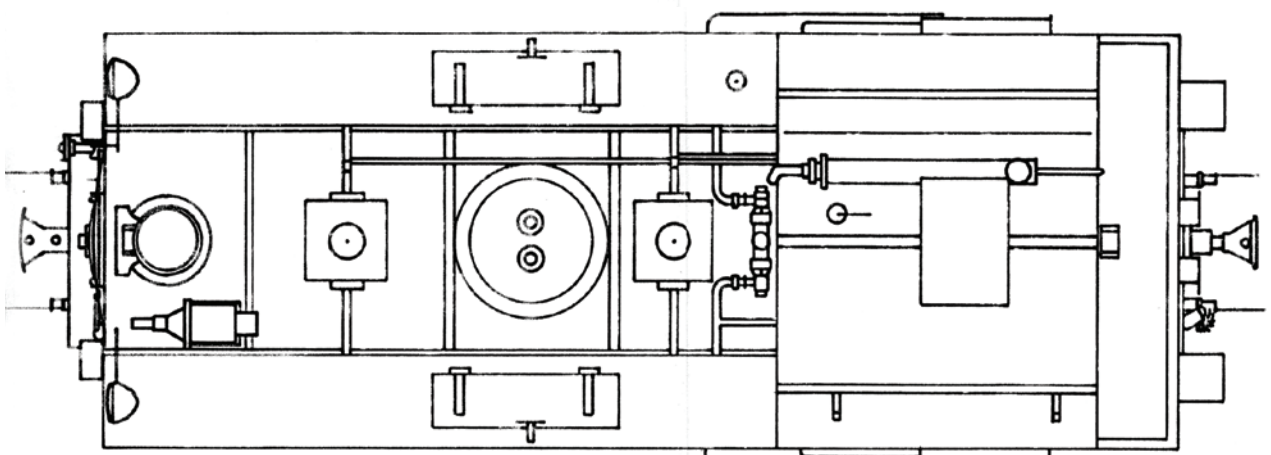
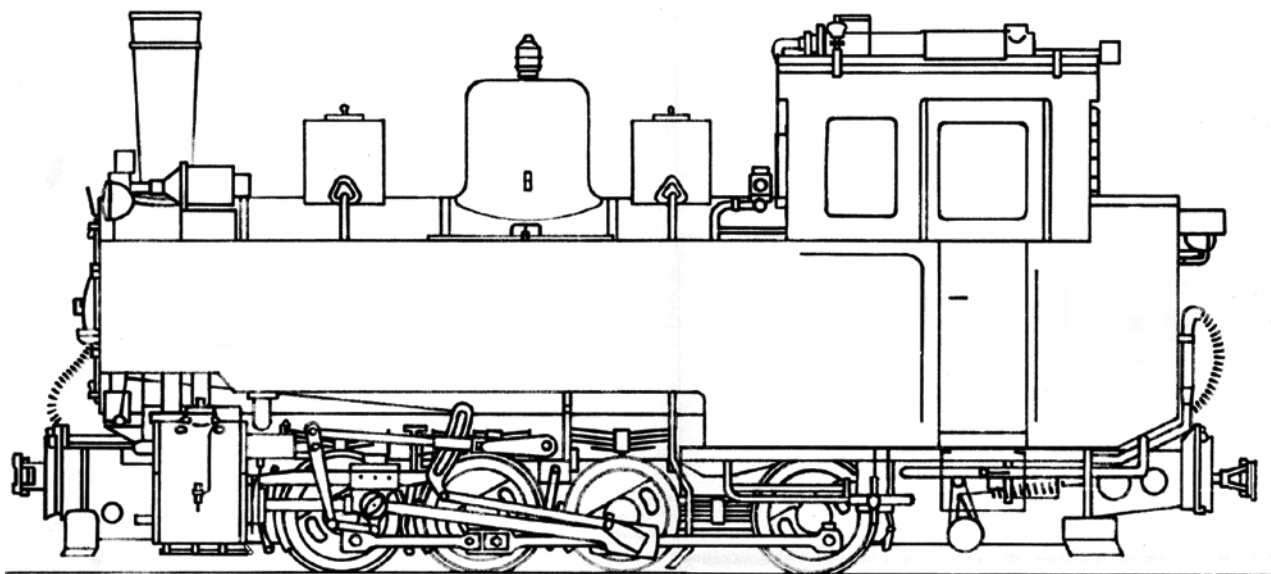
From tender to tank

Here HF2855 was considerably rebuilt into the tank loco form that we know it today, with full-length tanks and an enclosed cab, increasing its adhesive weight by some five tons. It was also given the number 699.01, which was a bit odd as there was already another 699.01 working on the Austrian narrow gauge, and said loco was also a KDL11! Cue much confusion ever since – one W&LLR member even enthusiastically forwarding a picture of the 'wrong' 699.01 to the *NGW* office as this feature was in preparation!

The new-look loco worked on the Feistritzalpbahn, a 77km-long branch line running from Weiz to Ratten, until 1965, when it was withdrawn and stored on a siding.

Here it was discovered in 1969 by a delegation of W&LLR members led by General Manager Ralph Russell. The Welsh line had already formed excellent relations with its



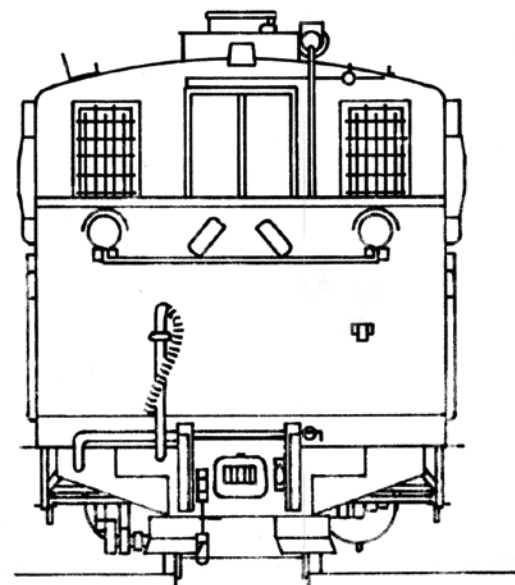
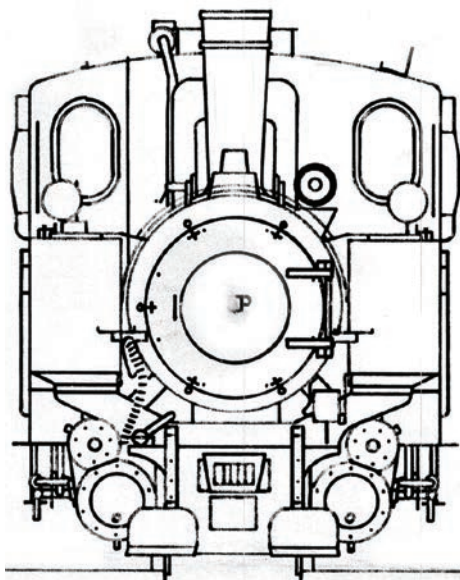


similarly-gauged Austrian counterparts, culminating in the transfer a year earlier of four carriages from the Zillertalbahnhof, greatly enhancing the W&LLR's passenger-carrying abilities.

The prospect of a heavy-hauler loco to take the strain from the line's two original Beyer-Peacocks and the complicated Bagnall articulated Meyer 'Monarch' acquired from Sittingbourne in 1966, was too good to miss, and an appeal amongst members soon brought in the £1,200 needed to send 699.01 to Wales. Having battled HM Customs and a lorry driver who didn't know the way, the loco was finally unloaded at Llanfair Caereinion on 11th December 1969, the operation illuminated by the headlights from W&LLR members' cars.

New surroundings

Paperwork delays resulted in the first steaming not taking place until 1st May 1970 but 699.01 entered service the following day and immediately proved a reliable and powerful loco on the W&LLR's challenging route. All that remained to be sorted was a name – a ballot was held among members at the 1970 AGM and on



Above: General arrangement of Sir Drefaldwyn in current form, reproduced to approx 7mm/ft scale. Drawing courtesy Bruce Webber/W&LLR

5th September 699.01 was officially named Sir Drefaldwyn, which is Welsh for Montgomeryshire through which the line runs.

Soon nicknamed 'Sir D' (though also dubbed 'The Black Pig' by some due to the alarming rolling motion imparted by her inside frames when driven over enthusiastically), 699.01, now W&LLR no 10, proved a stalwart member of the fleet, and also

created a little history in hauling the first trains to both Sylfaen and Welshpool as the line was extended back to its original length. It also featured in two TV dramas, *The Prisoner of Zenda* and *Fall of Eagles*, the latter starring Shakespearian Actor and Star Trek captain Patrick Stewart no less.

In 1977 Sir D received a major overhaul which included renewing »



the boiler tubes and the superheater elements, the latter a regular problem area, while it also liked to break springs until the design of them was improved beyond the original tender loco specification. Another overhaul was commenced in 1984 and not completed until 1990. This work included disabling the original articulation system, which used a

pivoting swing arm, in favour of longer crankpins and removing the flanges from the third of the four wheel sets. Sir D then gave another decade of good service until with boiler work becoming necessary, and the newly restored Finnish Tubize 2-6-2T 'Orion' providing the requirement for a heavy hauler, no 10 was withdrawn in 2000.



Top: 699.01 out of use at Weiz in 1966. Photo: David Mitchell

Above: Cover of the W&LLR Journal in 1970, soon after 699.01 entered service with the loco still in undercoat.

Above left: Now named Sir Drefaldwyn, no 699.01 proved a stalwart member of the W&LLR fleet, seen here crossing Coppice Lane in 1973. Photo: Brian Tucker/W&LLR

Left: Later in its career Sir D heads a mix of Austrian and Sierra Leone stock towards Welshpool. Photo: John Tedstone/W&LLR

A further restoration to service was considered in 2006 when Orion was sold back to its home Jokioisten Railway in Finland, but faced with a highly expensive quote for the required boiler work, the W&LLR decided instead to purchase a newly overhauled Resita 0-8-0T from Romania. No 10 had to bide its time, latterly in the newly built display shed at Welshpool.

The best option

The loco's sojourn ended in late 2013. Reliability issues with the Resita culminated in it shearing a crank while pulling up the Golfa bank out of Welshpool, sparking a root-and-branch review of the line's loco requirements. Options studied included an early repatriation of former Sierra Leone Hunslet 2-6-2T no 85/14 from a five-year stay at the National Railway Museum's Locomotion outpost in Shildon, County Durham, and even putting Monarch back into service, but the recommendation was to restore Sir D. A closer boiler study had revealed that the work needed was not nearly as expensive as had been indicated in 2006, and it was concluded that the loco could be restored in around a year at a cost of around £65,000.

Having put their views to members and received overwhelming support back, particularly from past and present footplate crews, the W&LLR board approved the restoration on 10th November and within days Sir D had been stripped down to its frames in the railway's Llanfair Caereinion workshop, and the boiler lifted for dispatch to the



Severn Valley Railway – the same workshops that recently built a new boiler for the Tallylyn Railway’s Fletcher Jennings no 2 ‘Dolgoch’.

Other work will include the building of new side tanks and smokebox, along with refurbishment of the loco’s bottom end, and an appeal has been launched to raise as much as possible of the £65,000 needed. Incentives are being made available to major donors – anyone donating £250 or more will be offered a seat on the inaugural Austrian train hauled by Sir D; those contributing £500 will also have their name added to a plaque in the loco’s cab, while for £750 they will also get a footplate ride at some point in the loco’s first year of service.

Since Sir Drefaldwyn last ran on the Llanfair line, another Austrian carriage has been acquired and superbly restored. In only a year’s time there is the prospect of this much-admired locomotive hauling a complete Austrian train through the hills of mid Wales... **NGW**

Above: Evident in this front view are the loco’s generous boiler dimensions.

Photo: John Tedstone/W&LLR

Above right: Sir D preparing for one of its last runs at the turn of the millennium.

Right: Once the restoration was approved the W&LLR workshop wasted no time – this was Sir D in early February.

Both Photos: Andrew Charman

Below: Posed before restoration began, evoking future possibilities of Austrian trains.

Photo: Kevin Heywood/W&LLR



More Information

More details of the appeal to restore Sir Drefaldwyn, and how to donate to the cause, are on the W&LLR’s website at www.wllr.org.uk or at the specific appeals site, www.89a.org.uk (for the curious, 89a was the British Railways shed code for Welshpool).

The author thanks fellow members of the W&LLR for their help with information and images for this feature, particularly Gareth Houghton, Keith Halton, Bruce Webber and deputy general manager Kevin Heywood.

