

A Lister engine in North Wales

by Stephen Mills June 2021

We've previously mentioned the fact that Lister engines manufactured in Dursley seem to turn up everywhere, driving everything from boats, to pumps, to dumper trucks. On a recent visit to the National Slate Museum at Llanberis in North Wales, I unexpectedly came across yet another application. This time it was providing power for a small 4-wheel drive narrow gauge (1ft 11½ inches) locomotive named 'Cilgwyn', built in 1936 by Ruston and Hornsby. This was tucked away in the corner of the museum's engine shed, somewhat overshadowed by its pretty little steam-powered sister. Steam engines were increasingly replaced with petrol and diesel locomotives from the 1930s onwards. One big advantage was their quick and easy starting – unlike steam, no time was needed to raise steam and there was no necessity of carrying enough coal on board for 3-4 hours of operation. Small diesels such as Cilgwyn were once commonplace in the region's many quarries, but few have survived.

Cilgwyn's 2-cylinder Lister diesel engine that provided the motive power obviously came from the Dursley works and was rated at 18/21 HP. Power was fed through a 3 speed gear box. The loco was initially supplied to the huge Cilgwyn slate quarry at some point between 1938 and 1940 – it presumably took its name from here. Cilgwyn was one of the earliest slate quarries in the country, with production starting as far back as the 12th century.

After pulling innumerable slate wagons around the Cilgwyn quarry, the loco later found its way to the Moel Tryfan slate quarry near Nantlle. In 1985, it was at the Vale of Teifi Railway in Dyfed, before being moved briefly to the West Highland Railway at Porthmadog, eventually ending up at the Slate Museum in December 1993. At this point, it was fully restored to working order by one mechanic. Apparently he would only work on the loco when alone, with no-one else allowed in the repair shop when he was working!

It's remarkable just how widely spread Lister engines were – probably every country in the world has examples still working. Equally remarkable was the range of uses they were put to. We've mentioned a few of these in earlier articles, but here is yet another niche application to add to the list.

[Pictures follow]

