Snailbeach District Railway

The Beginning
The Snailbeach District Railway opened in 1877 to serve the lead mining district on the western flank of the Stiperstones range of hills in Shropshire. Originally envisaged as a public railway, it evolved because of lack of capital, as a 2ft 3¾” narrow gauge mineral railway and never carried passengers. It was totally reliant on the mining and extractive industries and, for the first 30 years, it was run largely as a subsidiary of the Snailbeach Mining Company Ltd, its principal customer.

Under an Act of Parliament dated August 5th 1873, the Snailbeach District Railways Company was incorporated, with power to build a total of just over 5 miles of line. It was intended to consist of two railways. Railway No.1 ran three miles along the hillside, from sidings a few hundred yards to the west of Pontesbury station on the GWR & LNWR joint Minsterley branch line, to a terminus at Crowsnest. From Crowsnest, a reverse loop ran, on a gradient of 1 in 25, into the Snailbeach Lead Mine. The railway's locomotive shed was built at the mine and still remains today.

Railway No.2 would have been a continuation of Railway No.1, some two miles to lead mines at Pennerley but it was never built. Another extension to Tankerville Mine seems to have been considered on at least two other occasions but was not undertaken.

The Route
The railway was engineered by Henry Dennis and built by a local contractor, Elias Griffiths. The sidings at Pontesbury discharged by gravity from standard to narrow lines and vice versa and, at least till the early years of the century, included a transhipment shed. There was also a tarring plant here which took the stone.
The line crossed the Shrewsbury - Bishop’s Castle road by an over bridge and headed in a southerly direction, passing through open country. After one mile it passed Callow Hill Quarry and, after a further 2½ miles, it reached Crows Nest. Owing to the steep configuration of the ground, it was found impossible to build the line direct to Snailbeach, so at Crowsnest a reverse loop headed back ¼ mile to the mine. Between Callow Hill and Crows Nest there was once a loop leading to the lead smelting works. The line is noteworthy for its severe gradient of 1 in 37, Snailbeach being 47ft higher than Pontesbury, whilst Lordshill Enginehouse, where the line finally terminated, is higher still. The roads it encountered crossed its course by bridges rather than level crossings, thus it was ideally suited to gravity working of outward minerals. Although there was for many years a heavy inward flow of materials (mainly coal to feed the mine’s boilers) this layout, like that of the Ffestiniog Railway, permitted the inexpensive power of gravity for the heaviest traffic flows. Although there do not appear to be any accounts of the working of the line in its early years, the main function of the locomotives in later years was to haul trains of empty wagons back up the line that had previously come down loaded by gravity.

**Early Years**
Although desperately short of capital from the beginning, the Snailbeach Railway prospered at first, paying dividends of 3% for a few years. No more dividends were paid after 1883, as a result of the failure of the Snailbeach Mining Company, which more than halved the line's traffic. As foreign competition increased, the market for English lead declined and further local mine closures followed. The mine was reopened in 1885 under a reformed Snailbeach Lead Mining Company Ltd but the good times in mining were never to return. Traffic must have been at low ebb in 1887 for both locomotives were loaned during the year for
reconstructing the Glyn Valley Tramway, reputedly at the same time. In 1892 the railway, for the first and by no means the last, time, actively considered closure and an unsuccessful attempt seems to have been made to sell it. From this point on, the reliance on mine traffic was almost total and the railway ceased to be a stand-alone business, being run as part of the mining company.

The Dennis Connection
At the turn of the century, great efforts were made by the Dennis family to revive the railway and to separate it from the mine. Henry Dennis was its original engineer and was closely associated with the shareholders, led by the Lovett family. In late 1899, Dennis revived the old company, without the Lovetts, and set about reviving the railway. Snailbeach Mine had not been as affected as its neighbours by the turn of the century slump in lead prices as it had particularly rich reserves. However, in the early 20th century the price dropped so low that no profit could be made. Output fell to only 200 tons in 1905, rising to 1,000 tons in 1910, but lead ceased to be the important railway traffic it had been. The mine proved crucial, however, in providing injections of capital to the railway through the buying of debentures, on which there was little or no prospect of a return. This was a drain on the slim resources of the mining company but it had little choice if it was to continue to have efficient transport.

The railway’s revival proved that Dennis was a very effective manager and, in the wake of revivals in sales of mine waste and road stone, he secured enough traffic to ensure that the railway was reasonably solvent. All borrowing had ceased by 1907. Regrettably Henry Dennis did not see the full fruits of his work for he died in 1906, to be succeeded as Chairman after a short time his son H Dyke Dennis. The memorial to Henry Dennis was the continued existence of the railway and an innovative approach to traffic promotion. In particular the Dennis family promoted, with a local businessman contractor and County Council inspector of explosives Mr William Toye, the Granhams Moor Stone Quarry at Eastridge. This quarry was actively exploited and a branch to it was opened in 1905. This, and processing of barytes, gravel and fluorspar from 1900 at Snailbeach Mine by a company called Halvans, was the mainstay of the railway until after the First World War.

Upon takeover, one of the revived company’s first moves was to secure the thorough overhaul of the Henry Hughes locomotive 0-4-2ST “Belmont” but both it and the other engine were worn out by 1905 and the prospect of the new quarry traffic meant that one locomotive must be repaired or a new one bought. The board borrowed the money from the mining company and acquired “Dennis”, a new Bagnall 0-6-OT in 1906. The other locomotive at this time was an 0-6-OST named “Fernhill”. It is likely that one of the locos was disposed of and the other dismantled and written off in 1912 when the company sold a locomotive boiler to Halvans.

Traffic was now restored to a very healthy level with a record 38,000 tons being carried in 1909. However, by 1912 traffic had fallen to 8,800 tons when quarry traffic dramatically declined. With the final failure of the Snailbeach Lead Mining Company Ltd, closure was considered in 1913 and the railway was unsuccessfully offered at a knock down price to the local landowner, Lord Bath. Quarry traffic picked up, however, probably connected with the
passing of control of the Granhams Moor Company from somewhat confused ownership and management (the Dennis family having apparently given up their interest) to those associated with the Criggion and Ceiriog Quarries (later to become the British Quarrying Company). The railway was kept going though the First World War with this revived quarry and barytes traffic. It was, however, again brought to its knees by the final closure of Eastridge Quarry in 1921 and traffic dropped below 3,000 tons in 1922. There have been suggestions that the line's sole surviving locomotive, “Dennis”, had to be taken out of traffic about this time and that the line was reliant for a period on gravity and horse power, but there seems to be no hard evidence for this.

**The Stephens Connection**

In 1923, Colonel Stephens, and a group of his friends, including H Montague Bates and J C White, took an interest in the railway. Stephens bought the railway company, virtually as his personal property, and set about re-equipping it. Worn out sleepers were replaced with second-hand standard gauge sleepers cut in half, and much of the “main” line was re-laid with 45lb rail. The Eastridge branch seems to have been taken up about this time. Three second-hand ex-government locomotives were acquired and converted to the local gauge. The first of these was “Skylark”, a Kerr Stuart Class 0-4-2T. It became No.2 and “Dennis” was called No.1. The other purchases were two of the familiar War Department surplus 60cm gauge Baldwin 4-6-OPTs, also used by Stephens on the Ashover and Welsh Highland lines. The Snailbeach examples were from a batch that had been refurbished by Bagnall after war damage and then held in the UK. They were No.3 and No.4. It was not just the locomotives that had been worn out but its wagon fleet was also severely depleted. The line had started out in 1877 with 29 coal wagons, 12 hoppers, 6 timber wagons and 6 goods wagons. In 1912 the line's official return claimed 8 open wagons, 1 covered wagon, 41 mineral wagons and 7 timber trucks. By 1913 the figures had dropped dramatically to 4 open wagons, 1 covered wagon, 17 mineral wagons and 4 timber trucks. This drop may have been due to revised arrangements with the Granhams Moor quarry and it is possible that the new management took wagons into their ownership only to sell them back much later (see below). By 1922, the stock was recorded as only 8 mineral wagons and 4 timber trucks, appallingly low even for the traffic figures recorded. Stephens certainly augmented the wagon fleet by the purchase of some surplus War Department class C bogie wagons but it is not known what other purchases he made.

The return for 1924 gave 3 open wagons, 33 mineral wagons, 4 timber trucks and 1 'miscellaneous' vehicle. These returns continued unchanged for many years but, as so often with Stephens, they concealed as much as they revealed. For instance, the company's minutes recorded on 24 April 1935 “18 4-ton hopper wagons had been purchased from British Quarry Co Ltd ex Granhams Moor Quarry at £2-15-0 per wagon including haulage to the company's line”. The arrival of these hoppers does explain why in notebooks of wagon movements in the Colonel Stephens Archive, new numbers suddenly appeared. It is possible that the wagons had previously been privately owned, probably since the 1913 restock reduction, and were bought back into company ownership. Presumably they had been left
behind when the Eastridge quarry closed about 15 years before and had been unused all that time.

Although initial traffic results were disappointing, Stephens was ultimately successful in his reconstruction. Steady traffic from the old mine tailings near Crowsnest, together with fluctuating quantities of barytes from the mine itself, accounted for the bulk of the line's carrying until 1928. However, the tide turned with the opening in 1927 of a new roadstone quarry at Callow Hill by Haywards’ Quarries. Stone traffic, only 199 tons in 1924 and 2,589 tons in 1927, leapt to 4,821 tons in 1928 and from then on the railway enjoyed a modest prosperity. Stephens initially seems to have had plans to start a passenger service and bought land to build a half-mile extension to Pontesbury station. It was not to be, however, and a mineral line it remained.

Shropshire County Council took over the quarry in October 1930 and, with assured traffic flows, more wagons were bought in 1935. Plans were laid in 1937 to reduce engine mileage by moving the locomotive shed to Pontesbury from its remote site at the end of the line amongst the old mine workings.

**The Last Years**

Shropshire County Council took over the Callow Hill quarry in October 1930 to exploit the high-grade stone (Ordovician siltstone - not granite as often reported). It was too near to the terminus at Pontesbury to gain satisfactory revenue mileage but they had a good contract with assured traffic flows. A loop siding was put in, over which a crushing plant was erected. Crushed stone could therefore be loaded directly into wagons that would run to Pontesbury by gravity. At Pontesbury, the County Council erected a tarring plant, thus creating an efficient unit for the supply and delivery of road making materials. There was also steady traffic from Snailbeach Mine as a result of tip re-working by Gravel Trading Company and this ensured very good traffic flows through the 1930s. Stephens had died by this time and the traffic of the 1930s was overseen by a Mr Austen, manager, engineer and part owner. He was assisted by two long time associates and retired railwaymen. John Pike (formerly Goods Commercial Manager LMS) became Chairman and James Ramsey (formerly Goods and Mineral Plant Superintendent of the Caledonian Railway) joined the Board. This same team were also running the Shropshire and Montgomeryshire Railway. One of Austen’s first actions was to realise his inheritance by trying to sell the railway in 1931-32 to its principal customer, Shropshire County Council. As the Council did not have the necessary legal powers, this fell through.

It is often said that the railway operated only three days a week and, although this may have been true for the 1940s, movement sheets show that in Autumn 1927 locomotives steamed on four days a week. During the 1930s they seem to have worked for five days every week. It has also been claimed that services on the railway at this time were entirely in the hands of one man, driver-fitter Gatford (Thomas James Gatford), who was a veteran of the Bishops Castle Railway. This is simply incorrect and would indeed have been impossible during the 1930s, even if not the mid 1940s. One man could not have worked as brakeman on the gravity trains, driven and repaired the locomotives, kept the track in order and carried out the
myriad other tasks necessary on even a small line such as the Snailbeach. Austen noted that there were four Snailbeach staff - one driver-fitter, one platelayer, one junction man and one brakeman, with occasional casual assistance. Certainly at the beginning of July 1946 the staff were Junction Man - William Jones, who left on 3rd July after at least 30 years service, Platelayer - John Rawson, Driver-Fitter - possibly Gatford but more likely George Edwards. Other driver-fitters named in correspondence around this time were Gostow and Preece.

With the onset of the Second World War, the council was forced to cut back on road repairs, so any modest prosperity disappeared. The railway survived with traffic at about half pre-war levels but the longer haul feldspar traffic had gone. The Halvans Company seems to have stopped shipping under its own name in the late 1920s but may have continued as the Gravel Trading Company (although they may have been a completely separate company). However the waste processing companies had stopped shipping early in the War. Gravel Trading Company finally ceased and was reported as dismantling its plant in March 1944. The Halvans Company gave up its lease on the mine area in the same month.

The engine shed, coal yard and carpenter’s shop, with their associated water supply, stood on land that had been leased by the Halvans Company from the landlord the Earl of Bath. However they had surrendered the lease in March 1944 to Mr Joe Roberts of Snailbeach Mines, Minsterley (trading as the Snailbeach Barytes Company), who mined barytes from the shallow mine workings. By June he was claiming an increased rent (in the middle of a fixed lease) and that land on which rails were laid on the main line was now on his land. By March 1945, Roberts had cut off the water supply at Snailbeach and removed two lengths of rail with sleepers on the main line by the Wharf Bridge. Luckily one of the engines was customarily kept below this point but the other two engines were stranded at the engine shed at Snailbeach. An injunction was applied for against Roberts, and given that he had removed rails from a statutory railway in wartime this was speedily delivered.

Final settlement was more prolonged, however, and the court delivered its final judgement on 16 August 1945. In the settlement, Roberts agreed that the Snailbeach District Railway Company were the owners of the main line from Pontesbury to Snailbeach and the branch leading to the engine shed at Snailbeach. He also agreed to give the company a 14-year lease (with a 7 year termination option for the company) of the engine shed, its immediate service siding and water supply for £10 per annum. Roberts agreed to pay £50 or the costs provided that the railway company’s counter claim for loss of water supply and costs of track restoration was dropped. Tenancy of the coal yard and carpenter’s shop was no longer necessary for the railway and was surrendered to Roberts.

The railway had now become dependent on Shropshire County Council traffic and was making a loss. Gravity trains ran from Callow Hill as required, and two or three times a week a locomotive would be steamed at the far end of the line to run light to Pontesbury to bring back the empties. The company was in any event nearing the end of its operational life and actively considering closure in February 1946. They approached the Council’s Chairman for help, this was none other than Thomas Ward Green, an associate of Stephens from early in the century and briefly a director.
A crisis soon arose. Stephens is reported to have devised a rota for the operation of the locomotives that was intended to extend their working life and reduce maintenance costs. Each locomotive would run for a spell of 2-3 weeks and then enjoy a period of rest and recuperation until its next turn came. The system may have worked well and was reputedly continued under Austen. However, the system had changed subtly, for during June to November 1943 the engines worked a rota of one week each. It has been speculated that the uniformity of wear of this system could have brought about the simultaneous failure of all three locomotives following a boiler inspection in July 1946. It is more likely, however, to have been through the lack of boiler making skills and money during the war, combined with inspection by a more meticulous inspector sent by Shropshire County Council during leasing negotiations. The railway was now without motive power.

The solution was to hire an agricultural tractor to haul the empties back to Callow Hill. By chance, the original Snailbeach District Railways Act had required sufficient land to be acquired, and formation laid out, for conversion of the line to standard gauge if so required in the future. This meant that there was sufficient level ground on either side of the track for a tractor to run with one pair of wheels between the tracks and the other outside. The earliest confirmed use of the tractor was January 1947 with a hire bill for £24 but its use was probably initiated when the loco boilers were failed.

On 14th April 1947, Shropshire County Council effectively became the sole operators of the line when they leased the Pontesbury to Callow Hill section of the railway, continuing to use tractor operation. With Mr Roberts’ lease window for the loco shed looming, the remaining locomotives were cut up by T W Wards in 1950. The loco shed building and its approach lines reverted to Mr Roberts.
The line between Callow Hill and Snailbeach, which was only used for light engine working from about 1940 and unused after the locos failed, was lifted shortly afterwards. However, the engine shed and its approach tracks remained and do so to this day. By 1959, road access had been provided to Callow Hill Quarry and the remaining section of line fell out of use. The final lengths of rail were lifted in 1962, some being sold to the Talyllyn Railway, and the last wagons disposed of. By 1980, Shropshire County Council had bought the section of track from Callow Hill to Pontesbury and the railway company ceased to exist. There has been talk of a railway society being formed to reconstruct part of the track and create a tourist attraction. However, to date this has not yet happened. The mine site, including the engine house and much of the track, is now managed by the Shropshire Mines Trust.

**Locomotives**

**Belmont**

For the opening of the line in 1877, the Company acquired a 0-4-2 saddle tank locomotive, built by Henry Hughes & Company and named Belmont after one of the principal shareholders’ house. The Company was desperately short of capital and the locomotive was obtained second-hand, at an advantageous price as the result of colliery liquidation, with the happy coincidence that its gauge was correct. She had been built by Henry Hughes and Company of Loughborough and was supplied new, probably in 1874, to the Lfton-Rhyn Colliery, near Chirk, and was named ‘Salome’. It had been supplied to help in the construction of a railway that was planned to connect with the 2’ 4” Glyn Valley Tramway but in the event this was never completed.

![Belmont locomotive](image1)

Although no full photograph is known to exist it is likely that Belmont was similar in appearance to the Hughes locomotives on the Corris Railway (one of which survives as the Talyllyn Railway’s ‘Sir Haydn’), because all known Hughes saddle tanks have a strong family resemblance. The Corris locomotives weighed about the same as Belmont, but had smaller driving wheels and cylinders. Belmont appears from a part photo to have had a cab, with the rear open above waist level. It was a relatively small 0-4-2 saddle tank weighing around ten tons in working order, with 10” x 15” cylinders and 2’ 7 ½” diameter driving wheels.

It was moved on 15th February 1877 from its colliery home to Oswestry, where it received a number of weeks' work at the hands of the Cambrian Railways’ workshop staff. This consisted mainly of a repaint - white lead undercoat and red lead topcoat - but some repairs and refitting too, including new gauge glasses, some new metal work and a pair of Cambrian Railways buffers. It was kitted out with an oil feeder, a gauge lamp, a signal lamp and sundry...
other items. New Belmont name plates do not seem to have been fitted, although the scrap value of two old name plates was subtracted from the final bill, together with other items cashed in to keep the cost down. Work had finished at the end of June. The Cambrian company delivered Belmont to Pontesbury Station by rail ready for the Snailbeach District Railways being opened for traffic in July 1877.

By 1882 Belmont was well worn and had to be ‘renewed’ at a cost sufficient to require a slice of a newly issued Debenture. By the late 1890s she was again much worn and had gone to the Wrexham firm of Cudworth and Johnson for extensive repair. One of the first acts of the Railway Board after Dennis reconstituted it was to raise cash ‘so that the engine [Belmont] be delivered’. Raising the cost of £340/1/2 took from January to April 1900 and another special debenture was issued to cover the cost. This must have been a very substantial repair and it seems likely that it would have been sufficient to ensure that Belmont was the last survivor of the original two engines, disappearing from the books in 1912.

**Fernhill**

By 1880, Belmont was literally feeling the burden of carrying the railways’ heavy traffic and was in need of overhaul. The Board therefore authorised the acquisition of a second locomotive at a cost of not more than £1000. They had reported this need to shareholders on 16 February 1880. They did not however formally give approval till August.

The locomotive was bought through sales agency Lennox, Lange & Company. This agency sold the products of such locomotive builders as Andrew Barclay and Barclays & Company, both of Kilmarnock. Receipts indicate a total cost of £900 some of which had to be paid for with a debenture issued in 1882. Given the price there can be no doubt that the purchase was a new locomotive. It carried maker's plates showing its builder as Lennox, Lange but this was a common practice for agency sales of locomotives. It is likely that the locomotive was one of Barclays & Co's, probably one of works numbers 279, 280, 281 or 285. On 23rd August 1881 the Directors reported the new locomotive received and working. It was named after another shareholders’ house.

The only known photograph of Fernhill is damaged but shows that it had much in common with Barclays 0-4-0 saddle tank locomotives of that period, which were built for track gauges from 3’ 0” up to standard gauge. In this case, for such a narrow gauge, Barclays put the wheels
inside the main frames, spreading the estimated weight of 19 tons by adding a third axle under the cab and behind the firebox, with flangeless centre driving wheels for the sharp curves. Fitted with 12” x 20” cylinders and 3’ 0” diameter wheels Fernhill no doubt pushed the axle loading to a maximum on the 40lbs per yard wrought iron rails on the railway. Barclays were fitting steam brakes to their products at the time Fernhill was built, and this locomotive may well have had them too, although there is no hard evidence.

Fernhill was much larger than its predecessor. However with the prospect of heavy coal traffic uphill and lead ore downhill the new locomotive needed to be as heavy and as strong on braking as possible. A clue to this need can be found in the Directors' report to shareholders in 1881 "In view of the present and prospective condition of the Traffic of the Line, and of the possibilities of accidents, your Directors consider that the time has arrived when additional Locomotive power should be acquired ...". To assist in controlling such heavy loads, the later Bagnall locomotive Dennis was certainly fitted with steam brakes and sand boxes. Such features were particularly important when you consider the damp, greasy rail conditions prevailing in the railways hilly location.

Dennis (No 1)
Henry Dennis, by now the Chairman and engineer and after whom the engine was to be named, advised the Board at its September 1905 meeting that with the opening of the new Eastridge quarry either one locomotive must be repaired or a new one bought. This advice and course of action was confirmed. This was just as well as the locomotive had already been ordered from W.G. Bagnall Limited of The Castle Engine Works, Stafford, by Dennis & Son from its "Engineers Office, Ruabon" on 15th February 1905. The locomotive was a 0-6-0 side tank with 12” x 18” outside cylinders, 2’ 9 ¾” diameter wheels and an 8ft 6” wheelbase. It was equipped with Bagnall-Price valve gear. At 85% of the 150 lbs/sq in working pressure, the locomotive had a tractive effort of 9900lbs, making it very powerful indeed for the narrow gauge. Delivery was on 20th February 1906. The cost was £970, with £370 down and 12 quarterly payments of £50 commencing on 25th June 1906. The SDR’s difficult financial position meant that even this extended payment system required the sale of Debentures to the mining Company.
The weight in working order of Dennis was comparable to Fernhill at 22 tons. The locomotive was clearly a direct replacement for Fernhill and it is probable that this locomotive was withdrawn around this time. Dennis did all that was required of her and for much of her career was the only working locomotive hauling, perhaps with assistance from one other engine before 1912, the heaviest traffic the railway ever carried. Spares for the engine were consistently ordered from Bagnall until the last record on 20th March 1923 about which time the loco was probably set aside for repairs.

Although Stephens provided ample replacement motive power for the resurrected line there were continuing hopes of repairing the loco and he numbered it 1. During November 1924 called in H. Nevitt, a consulting engineer and retired LMS official, whom Stephens used for day to day engineering matters on the Welsh Highland/Festiniog. He examined Dennis to report on the progress of boiler repairs. Out of a total of 271 copper stays in the firebox, 132 had been drilled out and paid for, a further 108 had been drilled out and not paid for, and Nevitt goes on to refer to the number of rivets needing to be removed from the foundation ring, firehole door, and smokebox tubeplate. He further reported that W. Crawley (who was apparently carrying out the repairs) could not proceed until the boiler was lifted completely out of the locomotive frames, and that he had offered him £1 to do this work. We know that this work was undertaken, as photographs exist of the locomotive by the shed at Snailbeach, with the firebox completely removed and lying alongside the engine; and with the smokebox tubeplate removed too. Work seems to have then virtually stopped. However there does not seem to be any real substance to the claim that this was because Driver–fitter Gatford did not like the engine. Hopes of resurrecting Dennis still continued during the period of Stephens’ active management. In 1929 there was correspondence between Gatford and Tonbridge about firebox repairs. This is the last mention we have of attempts to repair the locomotive and hopes were probably terminated when Austen, with his more pragmatic attitudes to the real need for the locomotive took over. 'Dennis' remained dismantled until officially withdrawn in 1936 and its components were recorded as sold for scrap in 1937.

**Skylark (No 2)**

This relatively small 0-4-2T No. 802 was built in 1902 to 2' 6" gauge. The dainty little ‘Skylark’ was the prototype of a Kerr Stuart standard class and had a varied career. She had been built for the contractor H Lovatt and Co for construction of the 2’ 6” gauge Leek and Manifold Light Railway. With that work finished in 1904 it passed to another contract in Salford docks and was sold in 1907. It then disappeared until 1914 when the Admiralty had it stored on Hoo Ness Island. It played its part in WW1 by working on the Ridham Dock Salvage Depot system operating on Edward Lloyds narrow gauge tracks from some time in 1917. It was still stored at Ridham in September 1920 but moved to storage at a Central Storage Depot at 31, Dog Lane, Neasden, London from where it was bought by dealers E C Cornforth sometime late in 1922. Cornforth were based at Kidsgrove, north of Stoke, who claimed to be rolling stock contractors and suppliers of locomotives, wagons, rails, passenger stock, steam excavators, steam cranes, hauling and winding engines, boilers and metals and advertised locomotives for sale between 1894 and 1924. They seem to have sub-contracted most engineering work. The Kerr Stuart
was sold to Stephens on 11 December 1922 (before he formally took over the Snailbeach) and it was delivered to the Snailbeach on 10th March 1923 probably after re-gauging.

The Baldwins (Nos 3 & 4)

The first was Baldwin 44383 built in 1916, refurbished by Bagnall in December 1918-April 1919 and delivered to the Snailbeach still carrying WD No 538. The second was Baldwin works number 44522 (not 44572 as frequently recorded) built in 1917, refurbished by Bagnall in October-November 1918, and carrying WD No 722. On the Snailbeach these locomotives were official numbered 3 and 4 respectively and carried these numbers latterly. They could be told apart by No.4's being from a later batch equipped with water lifting equipment and protective hoods over its cab front spectacle plates. The two Baldwins are recorded as purchased in
January 1923 from Messrs Learoyd & Son of Clapton, London, and delivered in April 1923. They carried Rebuilt Bagnall 1918 plates.

Snailbeach subsequently ordered spares for the Baldwins in March 1926, February 1930, October 1934 and July 1935. Spares were also obtained from the Ashover who ran (and cannibalised) similar locomotives. The Bagnall October 1934 spares order is especially interesting and reads 'General Order No.7904, Baldwin No.3 loco, built to 2' 0" gauge, but adapted to 2' 3 ¾" gauge by drawing the tyres from the wheel centres, flange alterations now desirable'. Presumably Bagnall had the wheels and axles at Stafford for re-tyreing. This statement confirms the report in The Locomotive magazine for October 1926 that the locomotives were adapted to the Snailbeach track by the simple expedient of shifting the tyres outwards on the wheel centres. This was a very cheap and unsatisfactory method that nevertheless appears to have lasted for over ten years until Bagnall provided new purpose-built tyres.

All the Stephens’ purchases proved effective and reliable on the Snailbeach and appear to have been used turn and turn about without trouble until limited funds and manpower caused their tubes to fail at the same time in the summer of 1946. With the satisfactory substitution
of a farm tractor on the only remaining active part of the railway and then lease to Salop County Council they were never needed again and succumbed to the scrapman, T W Ward, in May 1950.

<table>
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<th>Loco</th>
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<th>Cylinders</th>
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<td>1915</td>
<td>9 x12”</td>
<td>178 lb</td>
<td>14½ tons</td>
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The Wagons

Just before the Second World War, traffic was worked by approximately 50 wagons, all but one 4-wheelers, and having an average capacity of 3 tons. Most were of the hopper type to enable the load to be discharged through the bottom of the wagon, which rendered them most suitable for stone traffic. All wagons were fitted with combined centre buffer and drawgear, painted stone grey and lettered S.D.R. in white. The company carried out its own repairs to the wagons and also effected light repairs to the locomotives. The engine shed at Snailbeach was equipped with a lathe and other tools.

General purpose 2½ ton capacity wagons

Hopper wagons for stone
When the line closed in 1959, all of the rolling stock was sold off and two of the hopper wagons ended up at the Talyllyn Railway. In 2008, the Shropshire Mines Trust arranged to bring them back home but all that remained were the bases and axles. Over that winter, one of them was lovingly restored to its original condition by Trust member Barry Ellis and delivered back to the Locomotive Shed on Good Friday 2009.
Present Remains
The line of the track can be followed for most of its way but a lot of it lies on private land. The abutments of the road bridge at Pontesbury remain but little is left at the sidings. At the southern end of Snailbeach village, the old station building is now a holiday cottage. The engine shed still remains at the Snailbeach Mine and has been preserved. If members of Shropshire Mines Trust are on site, they will allow you inside where the rails and inspection pits are still there. The restored hopper wagon is located in the engine shed and is pushed out for visitors to see when the mine visitor centre is open.

Sources
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Colonel Stephens Archive
SDR Minutes and Records
Industrial Railway Record - various articles by Rodney Weaver, Allan Baker and Andy Cuckson
PRO Files - particularly company files BT 285/506, BT31/17523/85429 and BT31/14691/15895