

# It's full steam ahead for the Ffestiniog & Welsh Highlands Railways thanks to a £3.1 million National Lottery grant

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North Wales's largest tourist attraction – the [Ffestiniog & Welsh Highlands Railways](#) – is celebrating after securing £3.1 million from The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

The £3,144,000 investment will boost the railways' plans to attract more visitors by providing "a high-quality tourism experience", and work, training and volunteering opportunities for the community of Porthmadog.

It will also fund the restoration and conservation of buildings including the Boston Lodge Works which is in the Guinness Book of Records as the 'oldest railway workshop in continuous operation'.

And supporters will be providing an additional £900,000 of matched funding for the three-and-a-half-year project which, once it is complete, should help attract up to 250,000 visitors to the railways annually.

**UNESCO World Heritage Site**

At their peak, the railways were at the centre of the global trade in Welsh slate and served the largest underground slate mine in the world – the Oakeley quarry in Blaenau Ffestiniog.

Today, the Ffestiniog & Welsh Highlands Railways which became part of the UNESCO Slate Heritage of Northwest Wales World Heritage Site in July, brings in up to 200,000 visitors a year.

And its two railway lines – the Ffestiniog Railway and Welsh Highland Railway, share an impressive railway heritage with the Ffestiniog Railway being the world's oldest narrow-gauge railway and the Welsh Highland Railway is the UK's longest heritage railway.

Andrew White, Director of The National Lottery Heritage Fund in Wales said: "Thanks to National Lottery players, this £3.1 million investment will allow the Ffestiniog & Welsh Highland Railways – a truly world-class, high quality attraction, to provide work and training opportunities for the local community and boost the economy of north west Wales by bringing an additional 50,000 visitors to the area every year.

"As well as the many economic and employment benefits of the Ffestiniog & Welsh Highland Railways, this project which centres on the Boston Lodge works is a great example of how heritage can help us understand who we are and where we come from and how the communities we are part of have been shaped by the past by bringing history to life."

### **Shipping Welsh slate across the world**

Built between 1833 and 1836, the Ffestiniog Railway carried slate from Blaenau Ffestiniog's slate mines to the seaport in Porthmadog and shipped across the world.

The Ffestiniog Railway carried its last load in 1946 and in 1954 volunteers started bringing it and the Boston Lodge Works back to life.

The Welsh Highland Railway was restored in the 1990s and the Ffestiniog & Welsh Highland Railways was created.

Commenting on the Boston Lodge Works project, Paul Lewin – Director and General Manager of the Ffestiniog & Welsh Highlands Railway said: "We are a Welsh railway and our history is intertwined for 200 years with the local community.

"We want to build on those existing links so that the local community can have pride in and be involved in the heritage of the Ffestiniog & Welsh Highland Railways and Boston Lodge.

"Through our project, we want to capture our stories and make sure they're shared with future generations and that we continue to play our part in the economy and success of north Wales.

"Our railway has survived by adapting and embracing technology and thanks to this investment from The National Lottery Heritage Fund we will do that again now to make sure that we offer a high quality tourism experience that brings real benefit to the North Wales economy."

Visit [www.festrail.co.uk](http://www.festrail.co.uk) for more details.

*Photo credit: Chris Parry*