

THE FOOTBRIDGE.



The footbridge, August 1975. Picture courtesy Louie T. Morris.



The footbridge, August 1975. Picture courtesy Louie T. Morris.

The first footbridge on the site of the current one in Esgairgeiliog was built when the railway bridge connecting the Era slate mill with the Corris Railway station fell into disrepair in the early part of the twentieth century. As a temporary measure to enable the villagers to reach the station, the Corris Railway manager provided them with some second hand timber to build themselves a wooden footbridge. Although the railway bridge was later repaired, for a few more years at least, the new footbridge proved a popular and much safer means of crossing the river. So popular in fact, that when the wooden bridge eventually needed replacing, a new, much



The old water course opposite the factory, 1998. Picture by Ray Gunn.

sturdier and more permanent one was built in concrete and stone, which remains in regular use today. As can be seen from the two pictures above, taken in 1975 by Louie Morris and the two below, taken in 2002 by Ray Gunn, the crossing can at times be hampered by inclement weather. Brian Rowlands remembers crossing the bridge on his way to catch the school bus one morning in the early 1960's. As he was crossing he heard a sudden roaring sound from upstream and looking towards the factory he saw a wall of water hurtling round the bend and towards the bridge. Of course he didn't linger but sped over the bridge and up the other side as fast as his little legs would carry him. Looking back from a safer spot he saw cattle and even a caravan being swept up against the bridge and water roaring over the footway. He found out later that there had been a cloudburst in Aberllefenni and the resulting flood had caused much damage all the way down the river.

Pictured above right is a curious feature on the river at this point. Starting just level with the factory building but on the opposite bank, is an old water course. It is cut through the rock very finely and accurately and runs around the corner of the river, under the footbridge and finishes at a point just above the waterfall known as the 'ffrwd', about fifty yards downstream from the footbridge. There is no sign of an old mill or building of any sort at this point. It has been suggested that the old ruined house in the field beyond was connected in some way. Although this may be true, the end of the water course appears to be below the level of the house and there is no sign of a channel to it or of a discharge back to the river. Another suggestion is that it fed water to the area behind the islands next to the 'ffrwd' in times of low water to enable it to be used as a 'Pandy', that is a place where wool was washed prior to processing and spinning etc. Given the proximity to the wool factory just across the river and the fact that the channel must be almost two hundred years old and contemporary with the factory, that suggestion warrants more favour in my view. Must look further into this.



The footbridge, Feb. 2002.

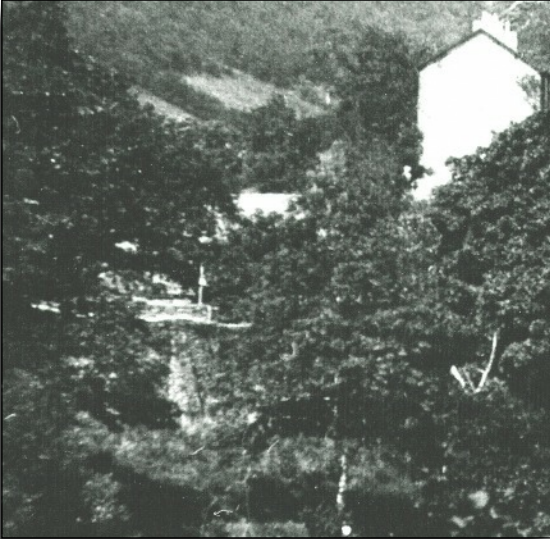
Picture by Ray Gunn.



The footbridge, March 2002.

Picture by Ray Gunn.

BONTDDU RAILWAY BRIDGE .



*Bontddu railway bridge, Esgairgeiliog, 1928.
Picture by D.S. George, from authors collection.*

On the left is a picture taken from a small section of an old postcard by Donald George in 1928. Because of the degree of enlargement the detail is not very sharp but you can just make out the railway bridge in the lower left of the picture, with what appears to be a signal over the central pillar. It was built in the 1870's by the Cambria Wynne quarry to connect their mill workshop to the Corris Railway across the river. It was subsequently also used by the villagers as a convenient if sometimes dangerous route across to the station and the main road. When Dick Jones, pictured above right was



*Dick Jones, Caerbont
1950's
Picture courtesy Marian Jones.*

a youngster, he had been for some milk to Nursery Cottage on

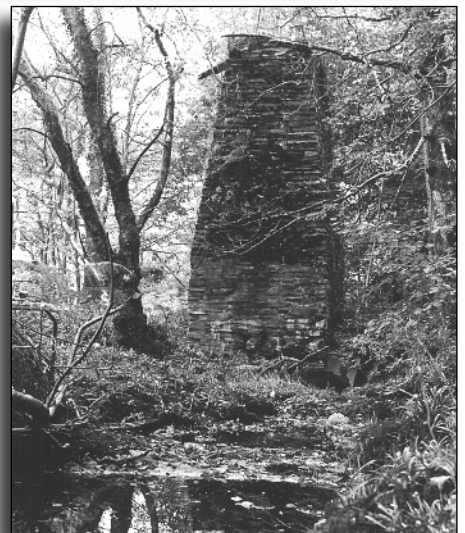


*Esgairgeiliog station, early 1900's, with the siding down to the bridge on the lower right.
Picture courtesy of the Corris Railway Society.*

his bicycle and on the way back, while crossing over bontddu, he fell off the bridge right down to the river below. Lillian Morris found him on a rock in the river, seriously injured. He survived, however.

Another boy had a narrow escape too, when for a bit of excitement Dolly Thomas's son Jim climbed into a quarry truck up by the station and released the brake. The truck started to roll down the steep gradient of the siding, picking up speed as it hurtled over the bridge and into the yard below, Jim ended up in a heap on the yard just about where the Women's Institute later planted the little cherry tree that is growing there today.

To prevent the bridge becoming a public right of way, there were two small gates on the two ends of the bridge, which were closed once a month and a shilling charged for crossing to keep it legally a private way. When, the bridge started to fall onto disrepair, a new lower and much safer footbridge was built further downstream.



*The central pillar of Bontddu railway bridge,
1998.
Picture by Ray Gunn.*

ESGAIRGEILIOG STATION .



Esgairgeiliog station, early 1890's.

Picture by John Thomas, courtesy The National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.

Esgairgeiliog station was built by the Corris Railway in the mid 1880's for the new passenger service to Machynlleth. Originally, as can clearly be seen in the picture above, the ticket office was built in wood but was later re-built in slate to match the waiting area, as shown in the later picture on the right, taken in 1928.

Looking at the background of the above picture, there is a man standing by the left hand tree. This is about the spot where Pine View will later be built. Yr Efail is shown before its renovation of the early 20th century.

Note the proliferation of advertising signs adorning the station in the early picture, shot in the heyday of rail travel in the Corris valley. Then compare it to the later picture above right in the late 1920's, when the line and the quarries were in mutual decline.

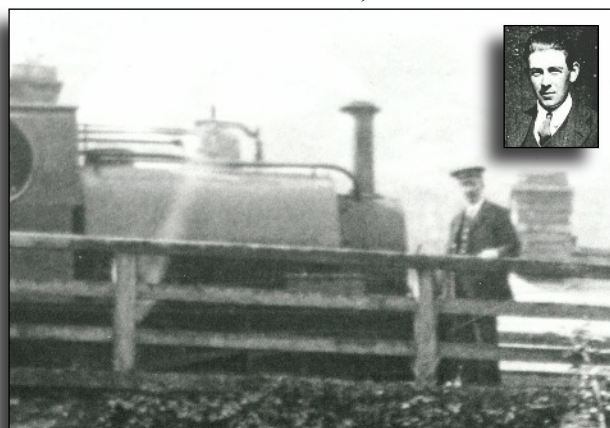


Esgairgeiliog station, 1928. Picture by D. S. George, courtesy Bryn Morgan.

In the 1930's, when Ken Rowlands was a schoolboy he would frequently play truant from Pantperthog school and ride the footplate of the Corris train, helping out with stoking the boiler etc. Whenever the school came into view the driver would shout to Ken to duck down out of sight until they had passed. Much more fun than maths and geography !

The author, Julia Gunn's grandfather, Gomer Jones was a porter on the railway and is pictured left standing by the train on the bridge in Corris. Inset is a clearer picture of him.

Sparks from the chimney and firebox were sometimes responsible for starting small fires by the track side especially in hot dry summer weather, so train crews, official and otherwise, always had to be vigilant and ready to leap into action to prevent the spread of fires into the surrounding forests.



Train on the bridge at Corris early 20th century, with porter Gomer Jones, also inset, the author Julia Gunn's grandfather. Picture courtesy Sara Eade. Inset courtesy Moira Rowlands.

ESGAIRGEILIOG STATION .

To advertise itself to the world in the days when passengers were an important part of its business and the tourist trade in Wales was booming, the Corris Railway commissioned and published numerous postcards for sale to the visitors. Some designs were bought in or just used and adapted by the company. On the right is thought to be one of the latter examples, cheaply printed and sold for a penny or so in local shops.



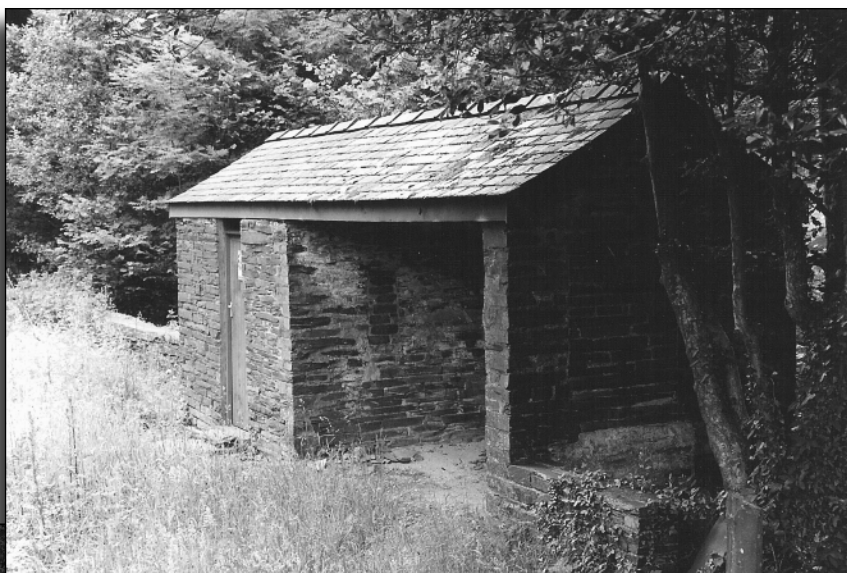
An early postcard sold by the Corris Railway. Picture courtesy Mary Davies, Dyffryn.

Many others though, especially the series of photographs taken and printed for the company by Donald George of Upper Corris were of exceptionally good quality and are now collected and highly prized by postcard and railway collectors alike.

Below right is the station as it looks today. No trains have run passed it since 1948, when the owners, British Rail, closed the line after a storm damaged the river bank close to the bridge over the river Dyfi. After that however, it did remain in regular use as a shelter for the bus stop on the adjacent main road. Right up to the mid 1970's buses stopping here were frequently full up, with standing room only on market days and Saturdays. Even up to the mid 1990's it was common to see upwards of half a dozen people sheltering in the station waiting for a bus to the market.

However, since the buses started running through the village in the mid 1990's and the station stop was abandoned by the bus company, the little station has become a sad and lonely place.

The future though looks much brighter. The Corris Railway Society is keeping the station repaired and has plans to reinstate the line as far as Tanycoed from Corris as a tourist attraction. This will not only give the Society a boost but will also ensure the future of a much loved

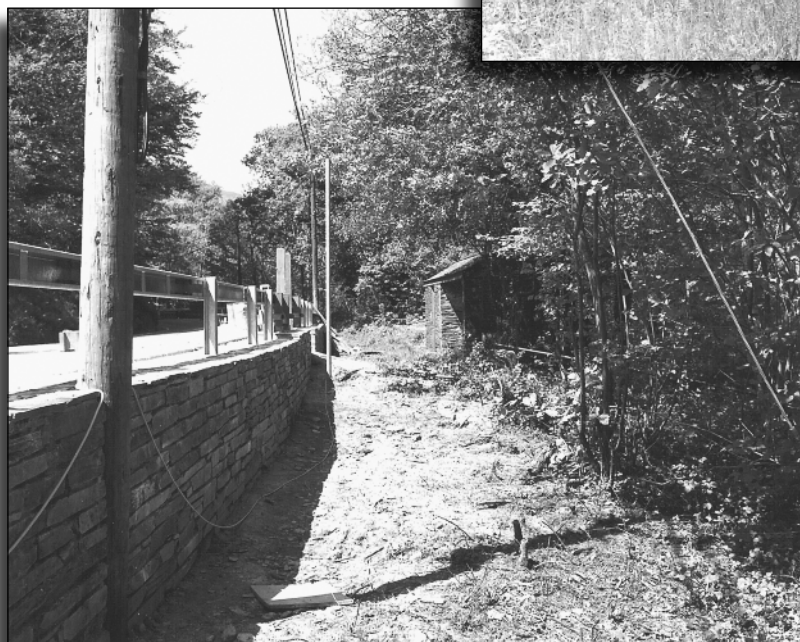


Esgairgeiliog station, 1998. Picture by Ray Gunn.

feature of the village. It may even revive the fortunes of the local retail outlets in the village.

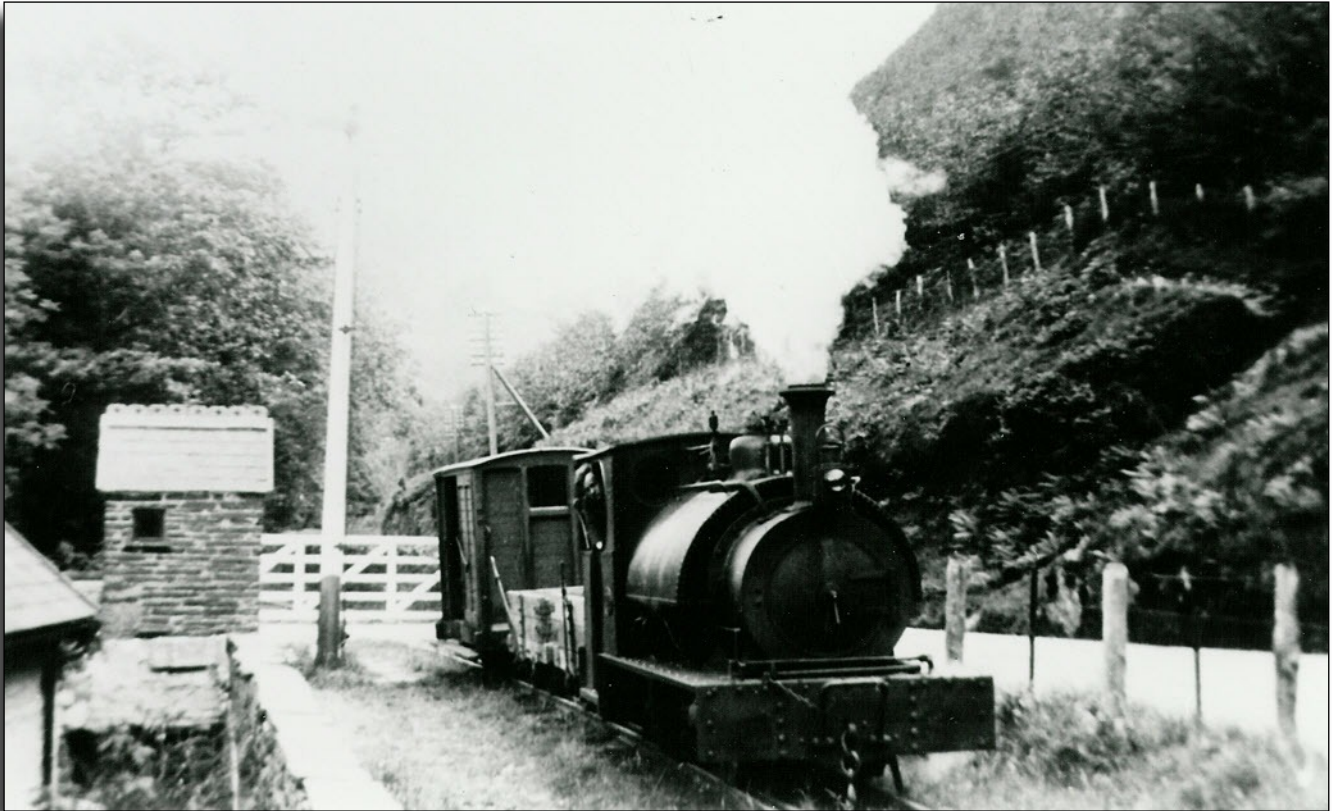
On the left is the new retaining wall built in 2001 to shore up the A487 trunk road, replacing the old wall built over 150 years ago for horse drawn traffic. Typical of such work carried out in Merioneth, it is of a high standard, using slate stone facings to blend in with adjacent buildings, like the station.

Let us hope then that it won't be too long before the sight and sound of a little steam engine running past Esgairgeiliog station will be a regular and pleasurable experience once again.

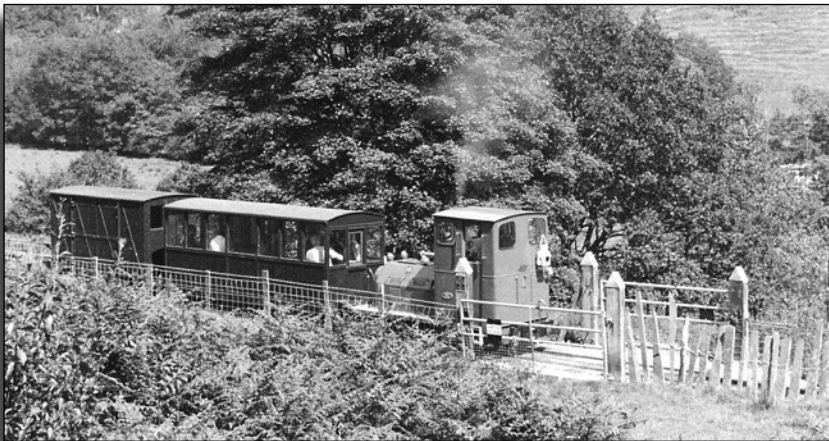


Esgairgeiliog station, 2001. Picture by Ray Gunn.

EVANS BRIDGE .



Evans Bridge level crossing, about 1930's ? Corris Railway engine No. 3 (now owned by Talyllyn Railway). The driver was Humphrey Humphreys. Note the crossing keeper's shelter, later used as a bus shelter. Picture courtesy David Coleman & Corris Railway Society.



The Corris Railway train near Maespoeth carrying passengers again in 2002 for the first time since about 1930.

Picture by Ray Gunn.



David Coleman, 2002, chairman of the Corris Railway Society. Picture by Ray Gunn.



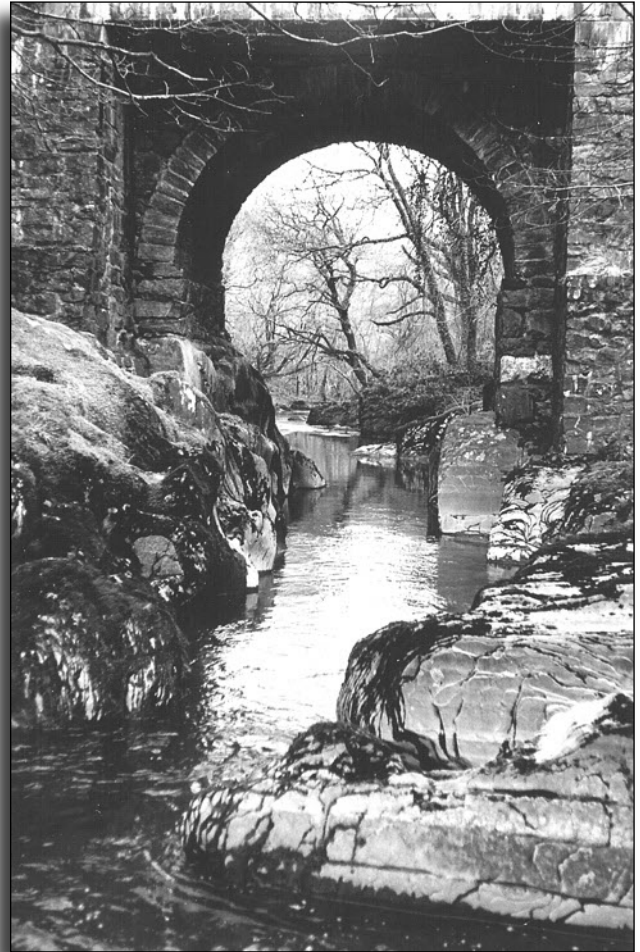
The Corris Railway train on Gala Day, June 2003, pulled by Corris engine No.3, now 125 years old. Picture by Ray Gunn.

The picture at the top of the page shows Corris Railway engine number 3 leaving the level crossing at Evans bridge on it's way to Corris, driven by Humphrey Humphreys. Official passenger services ceased about 1930 and freight services in 1948 when the line closed. However, the Corris Railway Society has worked tirelessly for many years to reinstate the line and has now reopened it for passenger services, with an official 'Gala Opening' in June 2003. The original Corris engine No.3 was borrowed from the Talyllyn Railway for the occasion but a new engine is being built for the Society and plans are in hand to extend the line from it's present terminus at Maespoeth on to the picnic site at Tanycoed. When that happens we will once more see steam trains chuffing past Evans bridge and Esgairgeiliog, thanks to David Coleman and his fellow volunteers, including our own Bryn Morgan.

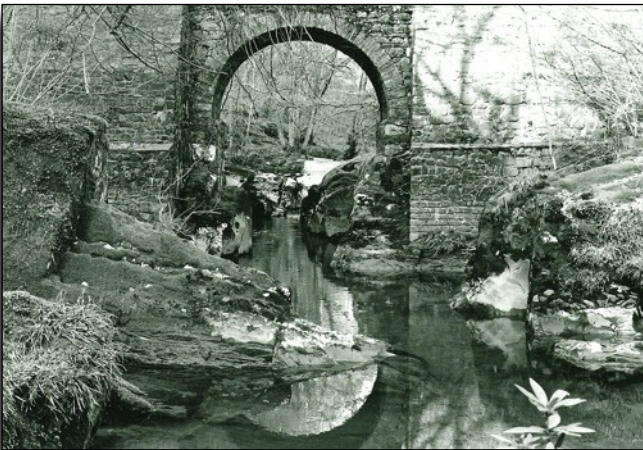
EVANS BRIDGE .



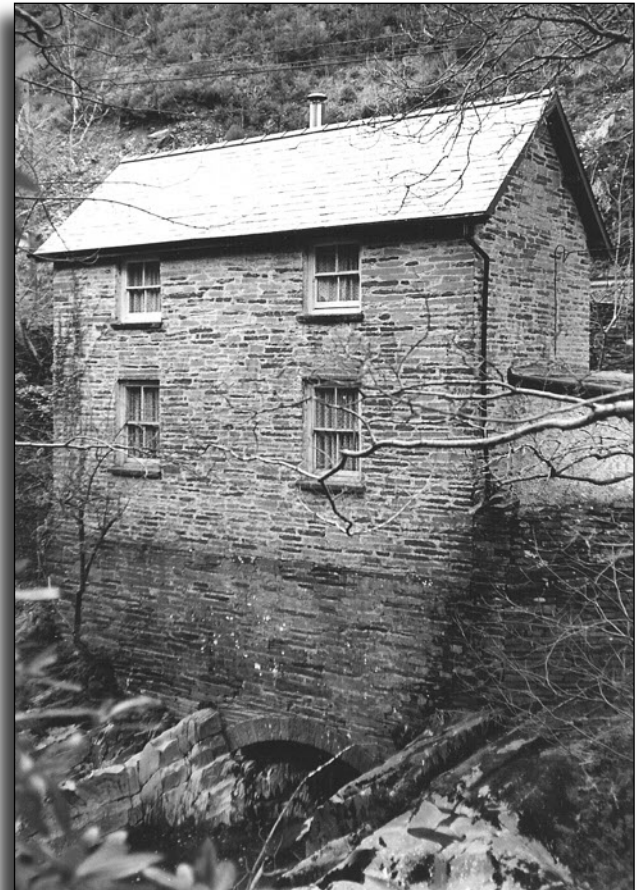
Evans bridge, about 1940's. A Francis Frith postcard, reproduced courtesy The National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.



Evans bridge, 1998. Note the widening section built to carry the footpath across the bridge in the 1970's. Picture by Ray Gunn.



Evans bridge from downstream, 2000. There are further buttresses on this side built to strengthen the bridge in the 1970's. Picture by Ray Gunn.



Evans bridge cottage, 1998. Formally the Corris Railway level crossing keeper's cottage. Picture by Ray Gunn.

According to J. Arthur Williams work 'Trem Yn Ol', Evans bridge was built in about 1816 by a Dr D. P. Evans who lived at Fronfelen Hall. Before this there was a wooden bridge over the Dulas, called 'Pompren Ditw'. Apparently many people fell from it and it is believed, after one young woman died after such a fall, Dr Evans decided enough was enough and paid for the present bridge to be built.

The Corris Railway built the house and the first level crossing keeper was Dafydd Griffiths and his family. Their garden was next to where Swn-yr-Afon now stands.