

Britain's Great Little Railways

Newsletter 42



January 2011

The Birthday Party

An enquiry was recently received regarding the possibility of mounting a birthday party for one of our great admirers of the railway. A regular visitor to us and a stalwart supporter in all that we have done and of what we do. We did have to take a while to adjust to the fact that she wanted her little get together to be held with us.



Nay, indeed flattered it took us a while to prepare ourselves for the task of wondering how we going to go about the organising of food and drink and dove tailing her requirements into what was after all a general running day.

The organising of the food, drinks and desserts were left to us and settled on a bland luncheon of cold meats, kirsch (limited amount), plenty of salads, hot potatoes, cole slaw and of course the usual dressings.

It was felt a requirement was for fresh hot baguettes from M & S purchased that morning lashed with plenty of butter soaking into the soft mellow dough of the baguette. Naughty but nice, it was after all her birthday and a treat and she felt that she deserved it.



That was something I learned that day as I was settling my dues at the till, the cashier who I suspect was senior management just keeping his hand in on the till (no I did not say dipping his hand in the till) volunteered that "made in France, cooked in England" and apparently the dough for the baguettes is made in Lyons, in France and tankered over to Britain. An interesting fact of life I learned that day.

We finished with raspberries and cream, some meringue and toffee sweets and various other deserts which all went down exceptionally well.



The idea was that the event was to quite a running buffet, her guests drifting in, having rides, oartaking of lunch and drifting off again. The reality was that people did arrive, have their rides, have lunch and stay and stay and stay, have some more food, have some more chatting and stay and stay. What with the general public it was a very busy afternoon which really was a great success and our little birthday girl was overwhelmed.

Her cake came out, a couple of token candles on it and to



our surprise "Happy 70th Birthday" which was quite a shock.

A few photographs are included within the article which I trust may be of interest. The first has the delectable delights of food set out on the table. The Centre Piece of this is a one twenty fourth size dolls house, an exquisite little structure complete with two little flickering open fires one upstairs and one downstairs. Small exquisite lamps are on the walls flickering and casting shadows across the walls. The staircase, old and windy, climbs to the first floor and resting upon a chair and elderly lady reclining and resting her aching and arthritic bones. Made of paper Mache she is also exquisite.



I have also included a collection and a variety of photographs which are here inserted at the discretion of our worthy editor.

Meconopsis is in steam pulling a couple of coaches and driven by Francis. The two GP 40 diesels are on view, number 1643 and number 1644, one being driven by Roger and the other being driven by Terry. Phaleopsis, the claret loco is in the foreground showing its paces and being under the care of Peter Starr performing faultlessly as all the locos from this manufacturer's stable seem to do.



We were very fortunate as we had had the considerable assistance of members of a large railway in Dorset just outside Ringwood who had sorted out and finished a point for us which was invaluable that day and contributed immeasurably to the successful running that day and made things and the general running far smoother with it being in situ rather than the gap that had been there.

It was suggested that to facilitate transport of the point which is after all twenty feet long and is nearly a quarter of a ton that it be cut in two making two sections one about twelve feet long and the other being eight feet long. This having been done it was of course far easier to transport, to do the necessary adjustments and completion at Ringwood and then trailer it back to its home base where it was assembled and reinstalled by Roger and Peter. We could have carried out the work on site but the expertise, the availability of parts and the greater knowledge of the staff at Ringwood was so much greater than ours and was carried out in a scale span that was far quicker than that that we could have done. Further, it works.

I hope I have not waxed out of control on this article and trust it will not bore you our reader. The epistle will shortly come to an end. Suffice to say the day was a stunning success, the Lady had a fabulous day as did her family and there is little more to say apart from that we have been requested to double the size of our modest track which we hope will be coming along in the not too distant future.

BGLR NEWS

The Treasurer of BGLR, Maureen Atkinson, has sent out the Subscription Renewal Forms. If you want your railway to feature on the poster and the brochure then you must return your form with your subscription by the end of January. Space on these very useful advertising media is at a premium so no subscription, no inclusion.

The BGLR AGM and Spring General Meeting will be held at Eastleigh Lakeside Steam Railway on March 23rd commencing with the AGM at 11.00 hrs, followed by the Spring General Meeting. Posters and Brochures will be distributed at this meeting so please do your best to attend or arrange with someone to pick up your posters and brochures for you. This will help to keep postage costs down and ensure that we can maintain this service at the current subscription rates.

HRA NEWS by Michael Crofts

HRA seminar in Birmingham, 10 November 2010

This seminar covered two days, the first being devoted to financial management. I decided that most members of BGLR know enough about that already and I went to the second day. This covered numerous topics of which I thought the following might be of interest to members.

Advertising spend per visitors

The result of some research was presented which suggests a range of 47p to 62p across various types of visitor attraction. Possibly a useful benchmark for us all to think about.

Feedback from members – 2010 results

Very much a straw poll. The railways concerned are all “big” businesses – but when you look at the BGLR membership some of our railways have more visitors than most of the standard gauge lines.

North Norfolk – Visitors up significantly – 10,000 more passengers in 2010 – but secondary spend down so net increase in sales not huge. Passengers happy to take a trip but are not eager to spend in the café (takings down £10k and ice cream down significantly) and the shop where “tat” no longer sells. Shop mark-up remains at 100%+VAT. Spending 25p per visitor on marketing. Customers seem to be taking shorter breaks, 5 day stay replaced by 3 days. More different people in the resort so more potential customers for the railway. Now running every weekend. Big growth in local business via reader offers in local publications.

Keighley & Worth Valley – Business remains sound. Volunteer numbers increased because volunteering is a cheap activity. There are a lot of unemployed clever people. Biggest problem is the increase in engineering costs.

Isle of Wight – 2010 was the best-ever season. 25% increase in gross revenue. Marketing spend per visitor about 60p.

Lynton & Lynmouth Cliff Railway – 2009 was very good but 2010 saw visitor numbers slightly down. However increased fares gave greater gross revenue. Their shop is small but is doing OK. Marketing spend about 10p-12p per visitor.

Middleton Railway – Visitor numbers up 22.8%. Starting to attract ethnic minorities, not for the ordinary ride but to hire a carriage for birthday parties. They don't spend money on marketing apart from a leaflet – relying mainly on the internet and Public Relations.

Heritage Railway Association Report

- The Group Travel guide is doing well – I would be interested to hear if any BGLR members have any experience of using this – please email me if you do and I will add a note in my next report
- Exhibitions – They will display members' leaflets at exhibitions. The contact is John Crane - john.crane@hra.gb.com
- They are distributing material to the USA market
- Members might wish to consider joining the Institute of Railway Operators and this is worthwhile for anyone who wants to make a career in the railway industry

Medical Guidance Notes

BGLR members who are also full members of HRA will know that the HRA recently updated its Medical Guidance Notes. I and another BGLR member were both horrified when we read these. They implied that all railways will need the services of a Doctor and (possibly) a Nurse. The following points were made at the seminar:

- They apply to safety-critical workers
- They are Guidance Notes, not mandatory (my comment: try telling that to a cross-examining barrister in a personal injury case)
- They provide a framework for physical assessment
- There have been a significant number of responses to the consultation period
- A risk assessment may avoid some of the more onerous aspects of the Guidance
- The coloured flag test is still acceptable as a test of colour blindness
- HRA will consider the position of smaller operators

A full meeting to discuss this matter was scheduled for 20 November, again in Birmingham, which I hoped to attend but was unable to do so.

I propose that in due course BGLR should set up a subcommittee to review the HRA Medical Guidance when it has been issued in its final form and produce a simplified document specifically addressed to the conditions found on typical miniature railway. Such a document could be very simple indeed – possibly a single side of A4 – and would be more concerned with how our members might carry out a risk assessment and reach their own decisions about what they should do to ensure that safety critical workers have an adequate level of medical fitness for duty.

Vetting & Barring Scheme

HRA's position is to refer members to the government website – www.isa.gov.org.uk and to note that further implementation of the scheme has been halted pending a review. It is business as usual at the CRB and all members are advised that they need a written Young People and Vulnerable Persons policy. I must admit this is something my own railway lacks – another job at the desk when I would rather be working outside!

Level Crossings

A presentation was given by a senior person from the Law Commission which is reviewing the law on Level Crossings and will certainly be recommending changes. HRA is opposing the suggestion that there should be a "one size fits all" law and are lobbying for the retention of individual Level Crossing Orders. I assume that any BGLR members who are affected by level crossing law are already aware of the details.

As an aside the lawyer answered a question about volunteers and said: "The Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 does cover volunteers, who can be viewed either as unpaid employees or simply as members of the public." In the past I have heard railway operators argue that volunteers are somehow outside H&S law. They are not.

Her Majesty's Railway Inspectorate ("HMRI") – presentation by David Keay who is in charge of Heritage Railways

Some BGLR members are subject to regulation by HMRI (including my own) and HMRI are sometimes called in by local authorities when issues arise where they need advice so any BGLR member might come into contact with them. The following points were made:

- HMRI are unhappy about the number of incidents involving moving vehicles. There is never any reason for any person to join or alight from a moving vehicle. This practice is happening, it is a cultural thing, and it must stop immediately (embarrassing for me because my current publicity video shows a guard stepping off the train before it has stopped!).
- HMRI are worried about the assessment of competence of people working on heritage railways. There is a varied picture. Some railways have very good systems, others not. Some railways have no evidence at all that they manage the competence of their staff. The rules have always been in existence, there is nothing new.

A very clear message was given that HMRI will come down very hard on any railway that suffers an accident where the cause is stepping on or off a moving vehicle or incompetence on the part of a member of staff – or even lack of evidence that staff competence has been properly managed.

After the presentation I asked for an update on the regulation of railways and was told that nothing has changed and no changes are proposed. The Office of Rail Regulation/HMRI are the regulators of any public railway which is over 350mm gauge (in practice 15" and above), and also any railway over 350mm gauge which crosses a public highway as defined in the Highways Act 1980. All other railways which are not over 350mm gauge are covered by the following statement in the Health and Safety (Enforcing Authority) Regulations 1998: A-Z Guide to Allocation (version 2: 10/06/2004, reviewed 06/12/2009)

'Miniature railways are those railways having a gauge less than 350mm which are not statutory railways (the only statutory miniature railway at the moment is the Wells & Walsingham Railway). Miniature railways on discrete sites or within fairgrounds and amusement parks will be HSE inspected. Where the miniature railway is located within a leisure site or a discrete site it may be considered for transfer to the LA.'

NEWS FROM OUR MEMBERS

Exbury Gardens Railway

Nigel Philpott reports



Some Exbury info below and Santa Special pics attached - expect Yule get lots of snow pics (and bad jokes):

A blanket of snow covered Exbury Gardens for the last four days of its annual Santa Specials, but this didn't deter the railway team from running a full head of steam or a delighted crowd of families searching out Santa. Visitors were delighted that Exbury was - unlike the mainline rail operations - running to timetable, and good coverage was given to this fact in the local media.

The Exbury Gardens Railway is celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2011, and will be welcoming its 500,000th assenger shortly after the Gardens open on 19 March. A special railway celebratory event weekend is planned for 13/14 August 2011, which will provisionally see the return of original Exmoor engine Denzil; a display of models

and miniatures in the Engine Shed plus a floral exhibition near the tracks by the National Association of Flower Arrangement Societies.



The Gardens are running a special offer between 19 March - 5 June 2011, when visitors choosing to purchase both Gardens entrance and train ride will receive a FREE ticket to return to the Gardens between 1 September - 21 October to see the developing autumn colours.

Exbury will again be participating in the HRA Pass Scheme, welcoming pass holders foc on the railway, although Gardens admission must still be paid.

Rudyard Lake Steam Railway

Mike Hanson brings us up to date

We finished 2010 in good spirits having beaten the weather to run all our Santa trains as planned and on time despite snow & ice. They were sold out and the feedback was excellent which bodes well for 2011. An exceptional effort over two weeks to break the ice on the lake was worth it so that Santa could perform



his rendezvous with the trains. The Murmansk run as it became known was very cold and the ice on either side of the channel was 6 inches thick. Indeed it still has not gone 3 weeks later. The key development this

year has been the ever increasing importance of the internet to our marketing. We were updating the website several times a day during the Santa operations. We have also drawn customers from a much wider area.

This meant that we finished the year in great style with overall traffic well over 20% up on 2009 our previous best year. We plan to continue plough back the profits into more improvements over the winter



and spring. Another coach is underway to bring the total up to 12 and work on new toilets will start shortly.

On the downside our annual steam gala did not feature any visiting steam locos despite our best efforts. It did not affect the attendance and we compensated by using every single item of rolling stock which went down well. We did get a visitor in the shape of Curwen and Newbury 0-4-0 Diesel Belle which Peter Hanton used to start the railway in 1985. He sold it in 2000 and this was its first visit back.

We always run trains on New Years Day but we were faced with a new problem this year. We had no mains water supply to the site for the first time ever. So we duly

steamed King Arthur, ran it up to the lake, broke the ice and filled the tanks with buckets in true Titfield Thunderbolt style. We found we could do 2 round trips (6 miles) before needing to fill up again. Of course the passengers thought it was great. I wonder what will be thrown at us next.

Moors Valley Railway

Jim and Mary report

The winter season has been busy at Moors Valley Railway, mainly due to Santa Specials. 2010 Santa Special sales were the best for several years and we had some great feedback. The second weekend was exceptional as tickets were completely sold out and the snow had arrived the previous day, creating a magical Christmas scene! Unfortunately, the rest of the winter has been hindered by the snow and cold weather. Passenger figures were poor but we have taken some stunning photos (see attached).

Overall 2010 wasn't a great year - passenger figures down approximately 10% on 2009, which was very disappointing. However, we are looking forward to a new season, and hoping for a better year. 2011 will bring the 25th anniversary at Moors Valley Railway, for which we are holding a celebratory weekend on 23rd & 24th July.

At the moment, the normal maintenance has started. An important addition is a new signal gantry at Lakeside Station.



Rhyl Miniature Railway Centenary Celebrations

Simon Townsend writes



The RMR had a satisfactory season in 2010, carrying just under 10,000 passengers. A few of our volunteers had to work beyond the call of normal duty, but this requirement for commitment seems to be common in our sector, even amongst railways which purport to be aiming for a profit.

For the last eighteen months or so we have been working towards the Centenary of our railway in May 2011.

In September 2010 we attained Accredited Museum status. In fact we are the second miniature railway location in the UK to achieve this, as the museum at Ravenglass is accredited. This has taken us about three years of sporadic effort; it was a course wished upon us by our sponsors the Heritage Lottery Fund. It means that we have

achieved museum standards in Governance and Management, User Services, Visitor Facilities and Collections Management. There has been a whole file's worth of documentation required, from a three year Forward Plan to an Acquisition and Disposals Policy to an Accession Register amongst many others. We now have an emergency cupboard containing items useful in

emergencies, together with an Emergency Plan, all 31 pages of it.



To assist us with the Visitor Facilities requirements of Accreditation we have been inspected under the government's VAQAS quality scheme. This process yielded a list of 30 action points, some pedantic but many constructive. 18 months later, at our volunteer pace, we are just dealing with the last of them. The inspection wasn't tremendously expensive, and enables us to display the Welsh Assembly Government's Quality Assured badge.

We are restoring a second of our Barnes 4-4-2s, *Michael*, to operation. Its new boiler was built by TRS Boilermakers and was delivered last September. We managed a 'boil up' before Christmas and now have to complete and certificate the locomotive in time for Easter. We haven't done a tremendous amount of work



on the chassis, which was mostly satisfactory before we started – at the moment it remains to be seen whether or not our relaxed approach to engineering will catch us out.

We are working with the Marine Lake Users Forum and our partners Denbighshire County Council on a new £40,000 project called the Marine Lake Nature & Heritage Trail; this also has to be delivered over the next four months or so. We hope that the Nature Trail will broaden the scope of what our site can offer to visitors. I'm still optimistic about the likely benefits of this project, although vacillation during last summer has forced us into a demanding timetable for its implementation.

As to our hundredth birthday plans, there will be a Centenary Dinner on Sunday 1st May 2011, the exact anniversary of our railway's opening in 1911. On 28th to 30th May our Grand Gala event will feature all six locomotives built in Rhyl, seen together for the first and only time – although only two of them will be in steam. There will also be fairground stalls at Marine Lake for the first time in thirty years, together with a classic car rally and other family attractions. We are working on the basis that as this is a Centenary none of us will see the event come around again.

That at least is the theory. The fairground element has to be tendered for amongst contractors on the Council's approved list, and this part is not quite in place yet. Generally we're very lucky with the current crop of Council officers who we deal with, but inevitably there is always one who is a bit reluctant to act!

I realise that on these bank holiday dates most members of BGLR will be 'minding the shop'. I hope though that you will wish us well as we celebrate the hundredth birthday of Britain's oldest miniature railway.

Welsh Highland Heritage Railway - Miniature Line

Work has continued to improve the 7.25" line at the WHHR in Porthmadog over the winter closed season. An unpowered replica of a Ffestiniog Railway single Fairlie locomotive is being built, not to haul trains, but to be attached to the back of the stock for children to ride in, and feel like they are in the engine itself. Extensive improvements have been taking place to the station at Porthmadog, where a new platform is being built to allow passengers to disembark without having to avoid a thorn hedge!

Motive power for the 2011 season is likely to include the home-built petrol tram engine No.7, supplemented by replica Planet "Castell Deudraeth" and 0-4-2T "Petunia".

Rides on the WHHR miniature railway are free, but are only available to passengers on the two foot gauge line (which does charge!). The 2011 season starts for both on 26th March. They're open every day from then until October.

Perrygrove Railway

Perrygrove Railway is recruiting a person to drive and help with maintenance from March to October 2011. Details will be posted at www.perrygrove.co.uk in the next week if anyone is interested or knows anyone who might be interested.

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