

Britain's Great Little Railways

Newsletter 59



April 2015

2015 AGM and Spring General Meeting

On a cold misty morning some 30+ BGLR members gathered at Ferry Meadows for the AGM and Spring General Meeting hosted by David Cogin and his small hard working team. The venue was excellent with plenty of room and good acoustics so that everyone could participate in the discussions. Wally Pearson from the Stansted Light Railway was elected as the new Director to replace Chris Halsall who retired at the AGM. At some stage during the meeting the sun might have broken through the mist but when we retired to the dining room after the meetings closed the mist was down again. Inside it was warm and the food was good so the weather did not matter. The minutes of both meetings have been circulated.

The posters and brochures were available for collection after the meetings and many members undertook to deliver to nearby railways who couldn't attend. Mike Hanson will be posting them to the remaining members as soon as he can after the Easter running at his railway.

Following the pleasant lunch the members retired for the most important part of the day - a chance to chat with other members and ride on the train. Once again many thanks to David Cogin for organising a most enjoyable day.



Laurence, our driver and builder of the lovely engine waiting for his passengers



No 44 - A Darjeeling style loco



David and Laurence also built the carriages with their articulated bogies and the recently introduced wheelchair coach which can take up to 3 wheelchairs. It can also be used for prams, pushchairs and bicycles if there are no wheelchair requirements

The lowlight of the meeting was the sad story told by Ron Stanbridge of the fire at his railway the result of which is seen below



BGLR NEWS

The numbers attending the AGM this year were lower than usual due to a clash with an HRA meeting which I did not know of at the time of setting the meeting. Thankfully the members who did attend rallied round and the distribution of the posters and brochures went well as many members took them for nearby railways. The next meeting is scheduled for October 7th, to give a decent gap to half term which starts on the 23rd.. If anyone knows of any clashes with these dates please let me know before I firm it up with our hosts John Edmunds and John MacDougall at The Beer Heights Light Railway in Pecorama.

HRA, LEGISLATION, & SAFETY REPORT

BGLR is a corporate member of the Heritage Railway Association. Members can read HRA "members only" publications on www.heritagerrailways.com by entering the username bglr and the password kcnsy37

There is no update since the Spring General Meeting. The latest issues of Broadlines and Sidelines is available from the HRA website – the login information is given above.

NEWS FROM OUR MEMBERS

Kirklees Light Railway

15" Gauge Forum

At the beginning of March the Kirklees Light Railway hosted a forum for 15" gauge railways. This was organised jointly by the KLR and Martyn Ashworth of Heritage Transport Supplies. Martyn through his work as an ICP and safety advisor to a number of narrow gauge and 15" gauge lines had been finding common issues or problems and the forum aimed to cover these and look at solutions. It should be noted a number of 15" gauge lines have recently had routine visits from the Railway Inspector with follow up actions points.

All 15" gauge railways on mainland Britain were contacted and invited to attend this ranged from private lines right through to those in Theme Parks and Zoos which carry far more passengers than many of us can possibly imagine. Speakers included Steve Turner from Her Majesty's Railway Inspectorate. Presentations aimed to explain what legislation 15" gauge lines operate under whether it is HMRI or HSE and additionally RAIB. What is ADIPS? Establishing standards of maintenance. What happens when things go wrong and what policies and procedures railways should have in place. All of which were aimed to have as practical application as possible.

The event, which was intended to be a one off, was well attended with railways from the far, far south and far north been represented including a good number of BGLR members. Feedback from the event has been very positive and as ever it was an excellent opportunity to exchange ideas and knowledge. The event may be repeated next year, if anyone did not receive their invite for this year's event please could they get in touch with Stuart Ross at the KLR. Please be assured the Forum was not intended to be a basis to establish yet another members organisation for railways as both the Heritage Railway Association and BGLR provide support and advice.

News

At the Kirklees Light Railway it used to be claimed that the January to Easter period was one of the quietest. This does not seem to be the case this year! Winter weekend passenger numbers have been very good and the Day Out With Thomas event the railway held in March was one of the busiest for a number of years. Similarly Easter saw a good number of visitors, Easter has become a harder event to stage as



competition from other attractions has increased significantly. We know have to justify why we charge the fares we do especially as you can go down the road to such and such a place for a fraction of the price.

The Permanent Way programme has been progressing. Following attention to the curvature of some of the lines at the railway's Shelley terminus attention is now being turned to those at the Clayton West end of the line. Though not that exciting the railway is having a new water main installed which should mean that a loco taking water at Clayton West will no longer take all the water for the ladies toilets!

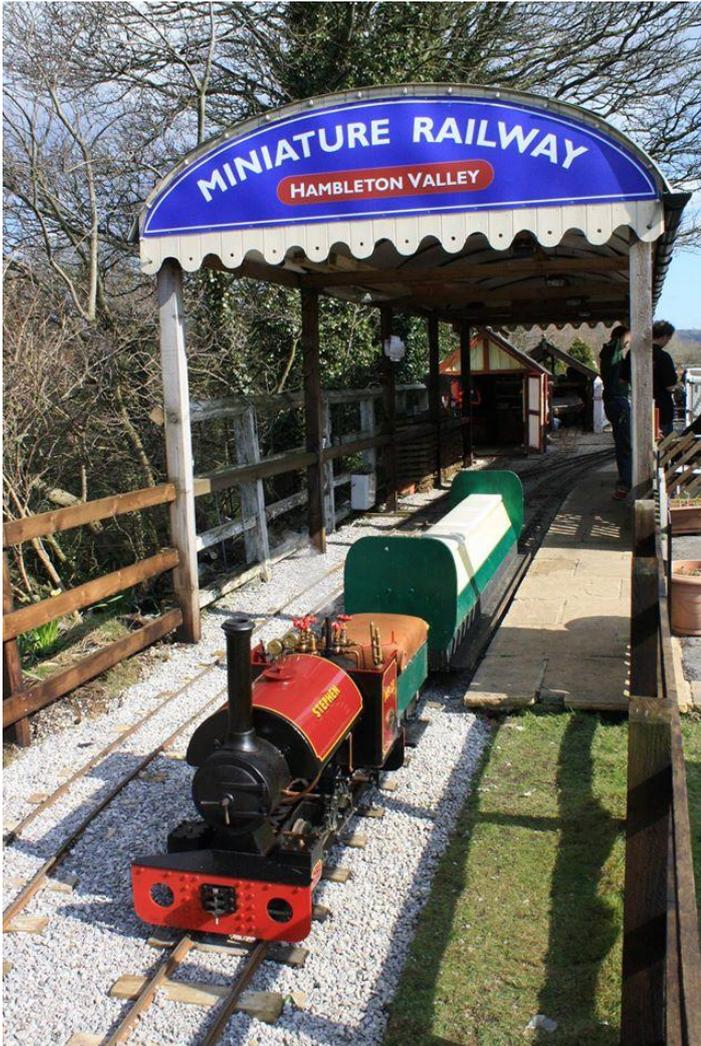
One piece of slightly unexpected news is that the KLR have acquired *Katie* the Trevor Guest 2-4-2 which worked at Dudley Zoo but is mainly known for its time at Fairbourne. Although in full working order there are a number of small workshop jobs to complete before the loco can enter service, notably the fitting or air brakes to enable it to work with the KLR's rolling stock.

Hambleton Valley Miniature Railway

Saturday 5th April 2015 marked a new chapter in the history of the HVMR with the arrival of a Station Road Steam "Stafford" – a 7 ¼ " gauge 0-4-0ST loco curtesy of Phil and Stephen Durrell of Thornes Park Miniature Railway, Wakefield. Being the 1st ever steam loco to operate on the railway, it was a fantastic moment for all to witness and ran without any major issues, at times hauling well loaded trains of children and adults alike.

From the loco owner:

“It’s not often nowadays you can be part of a 'first ever'. Let’s face it, most countries have been discovered and every civilization just about known about. So it was great to part of the Hambleton Valley Miniature Railway 10th Birthday celebration by being the first ever steam to run on this 7 ¼” gauge railway next to the Embsay & Bolton Abbey Steam Railway at Bolton Abbey, situated in the magnificent Yorkshire Dales. The loco we took was our ‘Stafford’ – “Stephen / Ashley” (named after Phil’s two sons). Other than a small lubrication fault on the Sunday (which was quickly fixed), the loco ran well over the two days we ran and was an additional attraction to this already popular railway, and very much appreciated by passengers and staff. We plan to have the loco there for a while giving the railway the opportunity to have regular steam days and appearances at the popular Gala events.”



Phil Durrell (loco owner) - A quiet moment at the Railway. The loco proved itself capable to take 2 fully loaded coaches on this tightly curved, very up and down railway. Thanks to everyone who helped out - you were great



Stephen Durrell (Steam Driver) - Little & Large both running round at Bolton Abbey Station. First for steam traction on this lovely yet challenging little line.

In other news, Hambleton’s new platform continues to make good progress and should be completed in time for the 10th Anniversary of the line in July.



Hollycombe Steam Museum

There was a great feeling of pride and satisfaction at Hollycombe on Good Friday when the world's oldest mechanically operated fairground ride 'steamed again' after an extensive period of restoration. 'Mr Field's Steam Circus' is believed to date from the late 1870s, and features a set of Savage platform horses, or *Dobbies*.

Over the last three years, Hollycombe's team of volunteers have overseen the servicing and replacement of many



of the rides component parts and repainted the Steam Circus façade and many of the *Dobbies*. These were the fore-runner of the Gallopers, a later development which saw the introduction of an additional 'galloping' motion compared to the *Dobbies* circular motion. Mr Fields Steam Circus is driven by a Savage steam centre engine and riders are entertained by an 1880s 62 key Gavioli trumpet barrel organ.

Hollycombe volunteer Amanda Hollingshead operated Mr Field's Steam Circus on Good Friday: 'It is both a relief and a great pleasure to be operating this wonderful ride once more. Its importance and significance is probably lost on a lot of its riders – this is a true Museum piece which is living and breathing steam once again.'

William Philpott, aged 10 from Southampton, had visited Hollycombe especially to try out the Steam Circus and wasn't disappointed: 'I wanted to have a go on the world's oldest fairground ride. I liked seeing all the painted circus animals, and I spotted the steam coming out of the top when I went on the Big Wheel. It was good to ride on the steam railways too and pass through the Gardens and the disused Quarry.'

'It was a very satisfying opening weekend' said Hollycombe Trustee Brian Gooding. 'It was grey and drizzly on Good Friday but there was a great atmosphere with the steam hanging over the fairground rides. Whilst it was a real tonic to see Mr Field's Steam Circus re-open we still have a lot of work to do, including restoring our Haunted House – the world's oldest – in time to mark its 100th anniversary later this year. Everyone who pays to visit Hollycombe helps with our ongoing restoration projects. They can keep up with progress too, as an entrance ticket is valid for an entire 12 months.'

RHDR - Full Circle

With Easter on the horizon and a very successful Santa Specials behind us, we are looking forward to another great year on the Romney. Our passengers have really taken the Santa trains to heart, and every year we do better than the previous one. However, this means we have to improve our themes and services to give those that come year after year something different. This can be very challenging for our staff to think of changes, but on the other hand very rewarding when the positive comments come pouring in.

Way back in the mid twenties when Captain Howey and Henry Greenly designed and built the railway, they 'added' adjacent to the station at Hythe a restaurant, (The Light Railway Café) with a meeting/dance hall at the rear. After building was completed they decided "as people will not want to eat and drink before riding the train" that they would sell it on! As we all know now just how wrong can you be? A facility catering for hot food and drink is a necessity not a luxury now a days, and with this in mind our management and board decided to buy back the Light Railway Café when the present proprietors' wanted to retire after fifty odd years of ownership. The plans at the moment for what we do with the hall area are still at the 'thinking stage', but it has been muted that it be turned into a RHDR heritage centre and railway museum. The restaurant has reopened and is now running as part of our existing catering facilities along with Dungeness and New Romney. So the railway has come full circle and the possibilities are endless. Exciting times for us here at the Romney.

Exbury Steam Railway

There is a last chance to see 'Dougal the Diesel' at Exbury Gardens Railway this spring, before it returns to its home railway of Exmoor. The little iron work-horse has been busy at Exbury over the winter months, a very able stand-in for 'Eddy the Diesel' who has gone to Trevor Stirland's workshop in Devon for servicing and repairs. 'Dougal' has been of great assistance and in many ways we'll be sad to see him go' said Exbury's Railway Foreman Ian Wilson. 'Dougal has been involved with our main winter project which has seen the completion of a maintenance pit. It gives our team greater flexibility to undertake routine work on the Railways' steam engines – Mariloo, Rosemary and Naomi – not forgetting Eddy when he returns. The pit is good news as day-to-day greasing, oiling, re-aligning of springs and adjusting of chains for the compressor will all become much simpler to perform.



We've also seen the restoration of our Viaduct Bridge and the clearing of vegetation in its immediate vicinity this winter, with Dougal playing his part ferrying our teams and their work tools to and fro.' Exbury Gardens and Steam Railway will remain open on a daily basis until early November. Dougal the Diesel is expected to return to Exmoor Steam Railway in early summer with Eddy the Diesel making the return trip to Exbury following restoration works.

Bure Valley Railway

In the winter of 1984 British Rail lifted the track of the line between Wroxham Junction and Aylsham. Many local people felt this was the end of the line for the route, but Norfolk County Council had a more enlightened approach with a wish to preserve former railway routes as footpaths. The application of this policy was delegated to District Councils. Broadland District Council agreed with the policy, but did not have the financial resources to implement it. At this time the leader of the Council, and certain key local government officers were members of the local railway society and the suggestion was floated that if the private sector was engaged to build a narrow gauge railway along the route, the works would create the footpath as the narrow gauge line would only occupy half of the standard gauge formation. The Council would supply officer time and support with planning permission and obtaining the light railway order. The railway company would build the railway and associated buildings.

Thus was born the Bure Valley Railway.

Inspiration was drawn from The Romney Hythe and Dymchurch Railway and Ravenglass and Eskdale Railway. A 15" gauge line of this length had not been built for over 60 years and so was a bold venture. The railway had a traumatic early life. As the railway was built the available funds were very quickly spent and whilst the railway had a fleet of high quality carriages, it had no locomotives or funds to build any. Against this background locomotives were hired from the Romney Hythe and Dymchurch Railway.



After less than a year of operation the Railway Company went into administration with the failure of its parent Company owing to the high interest rates at the time. For a year the railway was run by the administrator. A sale was agreed with The Hart family who took over in 1991.

The locomotives returned to Romney to be replaced by Sandy River No.24, Sian (Sydney) and Tracey Jo.

The latter being a steam outline Diesel locomotive. None of these locomotives in their current form was well suited to the line. Tracey Jo was rebuilt as a true Steam Engine and renamed Wroxham Broad.

In 1993 Mike Hart felt he wanted to focus his attentions on his own business and on the rebuilding of the Welsh Highland Railway. The railway was sold to Robert Baker of Baker's dog food fame. Robert and his family ran the line for 2 years. During this time the first two ZB locomotives arrived at the railway. The initial problems with these locomotives and subsequent improvements have been well documented elsewhere. In 1995 Robert decided the railway was too much of a burden for his available time and it was sold to a consortium of enthusiasts – Westernasset Limited.

In its first six years the railway had 5 owners and was always short of funds. Westernasset were to run the railway for the next 4 years. The railway was able to survive on the basis that much of the equipment was

new. By 1999 much of the equipment was in need of maintenance and improvements to the buildings and visitor facilities was also required.

It was at this point that ownership again changed. The focus of the new owners was to stabilise the Company with debt being repaid and much needed improvements being made. A stable period of improvements brings us to 2015.

This year sees the railway celebrate it's 25th Anniversary.

The railway now has a fleet of 5 powerful well maintained locomotives well suited to the undulating Bure Valley Route. In 2014 the original loco shed come workshop was augmented with a new purpose built running shed, allowing the original shed to be used exclusively as a workshop. The entire site at Aylsham has been rewired to modern standards. The fleet of coaches has been supplemented with 6 wheelchair accessible coaches. All the coaches have undergone a mid-life refurbishment with new roofs and side panels.

Passenger numbers have steadily increased over the years.

The operating season has increased such that the railway now operates services trains for at least part of every month of the year and daily from the start of April to the start of November. The railway now has 18 staff in addition to the numerous active working volunteers, supported by a thriving and vibrant supporters organisation.

At last the railway is fulfilling the vision of those who promoted it 25 years ago.

To celebrate the anniversary the railway will be holding a number of events

23rd – 25th May – Everything Goes – All our available locomotives and carriages in use with an intensive service.

July 10th – Steam Back in time – Our 25th Anniversary of opening. Winston Churchill from the Romney Hythe and Dymchurch Railway which hauled our first train will return to the railway and on this day only our 1990 fares will apply.

July 11th & 12th – Jubilee Gala Weekend. Winston Churchill and Green Goddess from the RH&DR will be visiting. An intensive timetable will be in operation together with all available BVR locomotives. Standard fares will apply over the weekend.

September 26th & 27th Steam in Miniature. Over this weekend will have a visit from Northern Rock of Ravenglass and Eskdale and Sandy River No.24 from Cleethorpes. We shall also have a number of model exhibits from 15" gauge downwards. An intensive gala timetable will operate over the weekend.

Fancott Miniature Railway update

Ron has sent me a picture of the site after the clear up, see below. Although it looks very promising Ron informs me that the concrete base of the carriage shed is badly damaged and will need renewing. He is hopeful that the F40 and the Class 47 can be refurbished and that the 0-4-0 Pippa will also be recovered.

There is still a lot of work to do but the outlook is improving.

A big thank you from Ron to all the members of BGLR who have rallied around to help him.



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