

# Britain's Great Little Railways

Newsletter 68



July/August 2017

## Great Laxey Mine Railway

**May to July; 3 months in the life of one of Britain's Great Little Railways!**

The last contribution to the BGLR newsletter from the Great Laxey Mine Railway was in April after "the blow" when the front axle on "Bee" failed after a relatively short period of time in steam engine terms.



The Railway opened at Easter for the operating season and the loss of one engine has left the Railway with only “Ant” running. There is the backup of the battery engine “Wasp” but this vehicle’s working function is to support maintenance work and does not provide passengers with a steam engine experience.

Anyway with the Railway located in Laxey Isle of Man the Volunteer Team overcame the logistical challenge of delivering the chassis to Alan Keef Limited in Ross-on-Wye with the Irish Sea being in the way! The Great Laxey Mine Railway congratulates Alan Keefe Limited on an excellent job which was well done with good ongoing communication. “Bee’s” chassis was successfully delivered to our engine shed on Tuesday 25 July and now the hard work commences for the Team in terms in putting all the parts back together to meet regulatory standards.



Readers may realise why I am Company Secretary and not “hands on” as I have no engineering experience (although trying to rectify that!) but I am reasonably good at the paperwork and I am trusted and qualified to operate the station. However in my last newsletter I did make two mistakes. Wasp our back-up train is battery operated and not diesel as the latter would have definitely an endearing feature in a coal mine and “Bee” took three months to fix rather than my optimistic 6 weeks! However in my defence the quality of the original product was far worse than we had anticipated. As I have already mentioned in terms of Alan Keef Limited the work was far more extensive than our original assessment.

There is a moral to this newsletter. If you plan to re-open a heritage railway with replica trains do not necessarily accept the cheapest quote. Quality (which comes with additional cost) is paramount and cheaper in the long run.

However notwithstanding “Bee’s” absence, the operating season has been good fun to date with the Tourist Trophy (TT) Festival in June when up to 40,000 bikers travel to the Island, many of whom enjoy the heritage transport experience including our railway. It is always a surprise to see so many motorbikes parked up by the railway and our coaches full of bikers in their leathers and crash helmets. Our visitors’ book was overflowing with comments from New Zealand to the United States of America and most jurisdictions in between.

Interestingly “bikers” are fascinated by the railway’s Victorian technology and ask many technical questions.



1 July was Laxey Fair Day which has its roots in distance history when the “Washing Floors (lead and zinc ore processing) of the Great Laxey Mine come to life with cultural events and stalls. The children of the Parish’s two Primary Schools dress up as Victorians and entertain the visitors with local songs.

The Great Laxey Mine Railway Team entered into the spirit by having a Victorian Day and we all dressed up in the same traditional manner. We also greeted visitors in Manx Gaelic and there was a special offer for Fair visitors to encourage youngsters to ride the track.

However the Victorian theme has persisted as the railway hosted a visit by International Rotary with visitors from Macau to France on 30 July which is all part of the service. This weekend 29 and 30 July the Island hosts a Heritage Transport Festival and again the Victorian regalia comes out!

The Team is also trying to help David Powell OBE BA (Hons) FAPM MCFM MCILT MEI with a project on the prevention and control of dementia. We are hoping to help David with a clinical trial regarding the positive impact of heritage railway participation on dementia and David can be contacted on david.powell@waitrose.com.

An unusual passenger statistic is emerging in that our railway attracts far more adults than children as passenger except for themed events. We are now trying to engage with the community and schools to raise awareness of our rich industrial archaeology and history which with a lot of work could lead to World Heritage Status over many years.

We are preparing to engage with the local Primary Schools (both of which support the Laxey Fair) and we have been successful in securing a very generous donation from the Lockington Marshall Trust on the Island to build a "Play Train" at the end of our railway for both the benefit of local children and visitors. This is part of our strategy to be part of the community.

Sadly we lost a founder member, Tod, who was one of the first volunteers on the railway back in 2004. Tod got the bug and spent a summer holiday volunteering as a Guard on the railway at Ravenglass in Cumbria. He was always cheery and ready for any task even though he was not the strongest of individuals. Tod managed to retire from the railway but was dragged back in! Tod will be missed but the Team enjoys lunch and good memories sat on Tod's commemorative seat.

The story will continue.....

*Tony Wild, Company Secretary and Director. Photographs by fellow director Andrew Scarffe who is worth googling for the many books that he has written on the history of our Parish, heritage and railway and provides the services of an official photographer.*

## **BGLR NEWS**

David Humphreys has offered to host the Autumn General Meeting at his North Bay Railway, Burniston Road, Scarborough, North Yorkshire YO12 6PF on Wednesday October 11th at 11.00 am. This venue will also be convenient for members to visit the National Rail Museum in York and make for an interesting midweek break. I look forward to a good turnout as I am sure most members have been to the NRM but probably not for a good many years so here's your chance. I hope to see you there.

It was with surprise and sadness when I received this email from Mizens Railway (Woking) as I had spent some time chatting to Joyce when she attended the meeting at Exbury.

*Dear friends,*

*It is with great sadness that I write to you all to let you all know that mum, Joyce Griffiths, has passed away on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2017. It was all very sudden and as you can imagine we are all devastated.*

*Joyce was hard working in every aspect of her life and very active until the end, not just at the railway, but also in the church and in all the things she did for us, her family. She was always happy arranging events and doing everything she could for everyone else and did so until the very end. Andrew, Jonathan and Roger*

We will all miss her presence at the BGLR Meetings and remember with pleasure the meeting she organised at the Mizens Railway back in October 2014. Roger, her husband has already contacted me to say that he will continue to attend our meetings whenever possible.

## **HRA, LEGISLATION, & SAFETY REPORT**

*BGLR is a corporate member of the Heritage Railway Association. Members can read HRA "members only" publications on [www.hra.uk.com/](http://www.hra.uk.com/) by entering the username bglr and the password kcnsy37*

There is nothing to report in this section

## **NEWS FROM OUR MEMBERS**

### **Eastleigh Lakeside Steam Railway**

2017 is a momentous year in the annals of Eastleigh Lakeside Steam Railway being the Twenty-fifth year of operation, and the opportunity was taken, over the weekend of the 22<sup>nd</sup>/23<sup>rd</sup> July, to celebrate this special milestone, and to commemorate the growth of the railway from its humble beginnings to one of the finest miniature railways in the country and a vital tourist attraction within the Borough of Eastleigh.



Volunteers and permanent staff, with the support of Clive Upton, organised a special Anniversary Gala during which all available locomotives were used in the order they arrived at the railway.



The celebrations were attended the Mayor of Eastleigh, Councillor Maureen Sollitt and her escort Mr. Roy Sollitt, Mims Davies, M.P., and guest of honour Mr. Paul Atterbury. Following a short speech by the Mayor, Paul Atterbury then said a few words declaring the event open at which point Clive Upton opened up the regulator on No: 7 'Sandy River' – the first ever locomotive on the embryonic railway – and drove the inaugural train of the day, to the sound of celebratory cheering and a cacophony of whistles, through a Twenty-fifth Anniversary banner stretched across the rails.

With the formal events out of the way, the Mayor and Paul Atterbury donned boiler suits and grease top caps and taking the controls of Bullock locomotives, No: 1001 'The Monarch' and No: 1002 'The Empress' respectively, drove a train, under expert guidance, around the railway's mile and a quarter circuit. The M.P. meanwhile took the more leisurely option of riding on the second train.



Further attractions at Parkway Station were three model railway layouts courtesy of Romsey Model Railway Society and a display of photographs of the railway from its earliest days up to today.

Throughout the weekend there was an intensive timetable of both passenger and freight trains with some unusual combinations of motive power. Two visiting locomotives assisted the resident fleet of engines



these being, 'Tinkerbelle' 'Talos' from the nearby Moors Valley Railway - it is interesting to note that 'Sandy River' also ran at Moors Valley before coming to Lakeside - and Phil Cutler's small diesel shunter. The final public event and highlight of the day on Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> was the parallel running of two trains both hauled by Bullock locomotives; No: 1001 'The Monarch' and No: 1002 'The Empress'.

Saturday concluded with a splendid barbecue hosted by Clive Upton for all volunteers, paid staff and invited guests with

special trains running until late into the evening.

The running arrangements for Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> July were similar to those of Saturday although the climax of the



day was a non-stop run double run with the two latest engines, un-rebuilt Merchant Navy No: 21C1 'Channel Packet' and rebuilt Merchant Navy No: 35004 'Cunard White Star' double heading and despite a torrential downpour and heavily laden train, they coped easily with the steep gradients especially on the second, reverse run – not so sure about the drivers!



The whole weekend was a successful way to mark a very special occasion and although the weather was a little inclement, to say the least, there was a steady flow of visitors to and much praise for the railway.

Our next events are Day out with Teddy' on the 13<sup>th</sup> August, 'Punch and Judy and Magic Shows' on 18<sup>th</sup> August and 'Big Engines Visiting Loco Weekend' on 19<sup>th</sup> August.



*Lionel Kay, A selection of photographs by Lionel Kay Top to bottom - Paul Atterbury observing the departure of 'Sandy River' Romulus 'Sanjo' double heading with 4-4-2 Atlantic No: 4789 'William Baker'. A distinctly unusual combination! No: 1001 'The Monarch' and No: 1002 'The Empress' parallel running 22<sup>nd</sup> July Phil Cutler and his 7¼" gauge diesel shunter. A fine pair of Bulleid Pacific locomotives double heading Reverse of commemorative mug*

## Fairbourne Railway – Sian Returns

In May 2017, the theme of the Annual Fairbourne Railway Steam Gala was the Return of Sian. The Guest built 2-4-2 was built for the Fairbourne in 1963, and, after an absence of 30 years, she finally returned.



Pulling the two ex-Fairbourne glass screen ended coaches from Windmill Farm, Sian was running on the newly extended 15 inch gauge line up Beach Road to Tremorfa Close, a run of around  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile. Resplendent in an Indian red livery and with a few modifications to bring her into line with modern regulations, Sian was a little different but still looked as if this was where she belonged. The other visitor on the 15 inch was Mountaineer, which has been to Fairbourne before with the kind permission of Austin Moss. The van der Heiden 0-4-0T with tender was built in 1970 and is now resident at Windmill Farm via Beekbergen, Harderwijk, Tasmania and Cleethorpes!

Steam was also to be seen at the other end of the line. At Barmouth Ferry, the 5 and 7  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch gauge track laid by Rob Millard was once again in use. In the nearby marquee, 5 layouts entertained the visitors. These included a rare Lone Star 000 set belonging to Mick Mobley. Martin Rich had a 09 layout, Afon Adit, while Charles Benedetto's 009 layout, Rob Bushill's Japanese N gauge layout and Chris Russell's 7mm narrow gauge Trenarren and Hensbarrow Railway were joined by the live steam 16 mil Gwernol Fach.

Sherpa, Yeo and Russell were taking turns on the 12  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch gauge main line with support from diesels Tony and Gwrl. Meanwhile the first Gwrl to run at Fairbourne, the Lister, posed for photographs on the



traverser and also assisted with shunting duties. On the platform at Fairbourne, members of the



Fairbourne Railway Preservation Society entertained the visitors with a variety of stalls and games. Once again, the sun shone and the visitors arrived in numbers.



The 15 inch gauge resurgence continues at Fairbourne and we seem to be successfully weaving the old 15 inch gauge into the newer 12 ¼ inch gauge, a fact being noted by the railway press over the last couple of years. It does leave manager Murray Dods with a problem, though. After bringing back Sian, Katie, Count Louis, Prince Edward of Wales, Whippit Quick and Gwrl, which rabbit will he pull out of his hat next year?  
*Graham Billington*