

# Britain's Great Little Railways

Newsletter 79



July 2020

## RE-OPENING BEGINS

### A Letter from our Chairman

Dear Members,

Hopefully, this newsletter finds you all in good health at this time, despite everything that this Coronavirus Pandemic has thrown at everyone.

As I write this some of our member railways have started the initial attempts at reopening in this new situation, I have been keeping up to date with most of the railways plans through Facebook, which I'm sure a number of the rest of you have been doing too.

We at East Herts Miniature Railway have been in a couple of zoom meetings with other railways (Summerfield Miniature Railway (Bedford), Chelmsford & District Model Engineers, Riverside Miniature Railway, North Weald & District Miniature Railway, Swanley New Barn Railway and Poplar Miniature Railway) some are members of BGLR, the others we can work on for next year. Topics covered included some councils approaching Railways to offer grants as they were rateable businesses within the councils area (even if zero rated), this was definitely appreciated, though this did seem to be a postcode lottery as other railways were told that they didn't qualify for various reasons. It was also found that other councils were making grants to voluntary organisations who fell outside the initial rateable scope, though it was necessary to fill out forms stating your previous years revenue to apply for those grants.

In the second meeting we held, some of our members based either in public parks or on their own land were looking to re-open in early July, again there have been Facebook discussions with Bedford(Summerfield) Railway and Swanley New Barn Railway about how their reopening has gone. Which seems to be very successful so far even if the numbers of passengers that can be carried are much reduced from typical summer days. Also the Facebook updates from Jim Haylock's team at Moors Valley has boosted spirits from the comments that I have seen.

Some of our members have made the difficult decision not to re-open this year and we wish them well when they reopen next year, this also goes for some of the other heritage railways who have also decided not to reopen this year.

At EHMR we are waiting for the Garden Centre to allow more public in to the store, they are currently limiting the numbers to about 100, so ourselves and the minifarm are both closed, at this time they are hoping that we can both reopen in early September.

When railways are reopening under their COVID-19 risk assessments there have been a variety of approaches that have been taken, Bure Valley and Romney and some other 15" gauge and above railway

have gone down the route of installing plastic screens between the compartments in their coaches, some railways like Swanley New Barn are using barrier coaches between family bubbles of up to 6 people on a coach, this involves running a 7 coach train with 3 passenger carrying coaches and only using their main terminal station. Other railways have opted to experiment with longer coupling bars between the coaches to separate the bubbles. All railways are cleaning the trains between public services.

I'm sure some of the other members will come up with other inventive ideas to get their railways running again.

Good Luck Everybody

Iain Dinnes

Chairman BGLR

## BGLR NEWS

The Chairman has decided to cancel the Autumn General meeting as it is very unlikely that a meeting of 30+ people will be allowed even in October.

This is a copy of the front page of [www.bglr.org](http://www.bglr.org) as of 25th July giving the current status of our railways. This information comes from direct contact, facebook page or the railway's website, any mistakes please contact me asap and I will change

### Re-opening of our railways

Following the recent announcement by the government our railways were able to reopen from July 4th. However our railways have been shutdown for 3 months and a lot of work needs to be done before they can open. This covers ensuring the safe operation of the railway, updating training of staff to cover changes to operation, modifying the infra structure to meet social distancing guidelines and just getting everyone back up to speed.

This website will keep you informed of when each railway is opening, but for the very latest news of a particular railway click on the name and be taken to their website or facebook page

The following railways are OPEN - best to check to ensure that they are operating normally

[Brookside Miniature Railway](#) [Beckonscot Model village and Railway](#) [Bure Valley Railway](#) [Cleethorpes Coast Light Railway](#) [Eastleigh Lakeside Railway](#) [Evesham Vale Light Railway](#) [Exbury Gardens Steam Railway](#) [Fairbourne Railway](#) [Ferry Meadows Railway](#) [Great Laxey Mine Railway](#) [Hastings Miniature Railway](#) [HMR Alexandra Park](#) [Hotham Park Miniature Railway](#) [Kirklees Light Railway](#) [Lappa Valley Railway](#) [Moors Valley Railway](#) [North Bay Railway](#) [Riverside Miniature Railway](#) [Romney Hythe and Dymchurch Railway](#) [Rudyard Lake Railway](#) [Rhyl Miniature Railway](#) [Sherwood Forest Railway](#) [Shibden Railway](#) [Summerfields Miniature Railway](#) [Swanley New Barn Railway](#) [Thompson Park Miniature Railway](#) [Watford Miniature Railway](#) [Weston Park Railway](#) [Whitfield Light Railway](#)

Below is the re-opening status of our remaining railways

[Barnards Railway](#) – Closed – unlikely to re-open this year

[Beer Heights Light Railway](#) at Pecorama – Closed – Pecorama will not open in 2020.

[Bentley Miniature Railway](#) – Closed – Completing new track works will re-open on August 8th

[Brickworks Miniature Railway](#) – Closed –The museum is planning to open in August but unfortunately, due to the nature of the passenger carriages it has not been possible to adapt them to ensure social distancing and, therefore it is unlikely that public running will be possible during this season whilst these rules are still in place

[East Herts Miniature Railway](#) – Closed - planned re-opening September 6th

[Fancott Miniature Railway](#) – Closed – planned re-opening is August 1st

[Foxfield Miniature Railway](#) – Closed - plans underway to re-open

[Great Cockcrow Railway](#) – Closed – re-opening is under review

[Hambleton Valley Miniature Railway](#) – Closed The HMVR operates in the grounds of the Embsay and Bolton Railway which is opening, by pre-booking only, on July 25th. Will update when the re-opening of HMVR is known

[Hollycombe Steam in the Country](#) – Closed – will not open until Easter 2021

[Littlehampton Miniature Railway](#) – Closed – will not open in July. August re-opening will be reviewed during July

[Mortocombe Railway Society](#) – Closed - will open to society members only

[North Weald & District MR](#) – Closed – Will re-open on August 1st

[South Devon Miniature Railway](#) – Closed

[South Downs Light Railway](#) – Closed – re-opens on 26th July

[Strawberry Line Miniature Railway](#) – Closed - preparing to re-open

[Woking \(Mizens\) Miniature Railway](#) – Closed

## **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*

A list of HRA railways re-openings can be found [here](#)

## **NEWS FROM OUR MEMBERS**

### **Hastings Miniature Railway**

With a very strange start to this year we faced the prospect of sitting around twiddling our thumbs for the unforeseeable future. Like so many other railways we have had a long winter taken up by maintenance and were ready for a new season with little left to do.

Everything was serviced and painted and any track-work that was required had been completed. This left the question of what to do with this extra time we now had.

As most of you know the beauty of railways is there is always things you can do, provided you have the resources and a large pot of money, but with no money coming in you have to turn to what is already available to you.

Our first thing to look at was what changes we may need to make to the railway to be able to re-open. Screening coaches, alterations to the platforms including new in and out gates, places for people to queue, signage, markings etc. Once we had a plan we started to set it in motion. The carriage compartments were screened with 4mm polyurethane, platforms made one way and queuing areas put in. Having been a sign writer many years ago and still having equipment to do so my evenings have been spent making signs up for everything.

This doesn't take 4 months though, barely 4 days! We needed other things to do.

With the possibility of social distancing being an issue we decided more rolling stock may be required, a quick phone call to Rob Hart at Eastleigh Lakeside Railway to see if we can borrow some coaches. This however brings a new issue.



If you have visited us at Hastings you may have noticed that Rock a Nore station is a lot bigger, the platform can hold 8 coaches with ease and has a turntable installed, however Marine Parade station is built on a curve with a run round loop and can only hold 5 coaches. Thankfully planning permission had just been granted at the end of February to install a turntable there.

Having already purchased everything to build the new turntable all we needed to do was decide when would be most convenient to install it, suddenly 4 months fall in our lap. The work was completed over April and May and has now given us room for at least 2 more carriages.



Using the extra time we had we also decided to clear some of the junk that has accumulated over the years. I'm sure we all have an area of bits we say "I'll keep that, it may be useful". We have lots of these areas. However what was in one of these areas were two of the original coaches, kept in case I ever found time to repair them. We pulled them down off the shelf, cleaned them and realised how bad they were.



After some investigation we decided to dismantle them then utilise what we could to build one new coach. This would be a copy of one of our original bogie coaches used between the 1950's and 1980's.

Work started in the middle of May and by early June it was completed.

One of the other jobs that was completed was the installation of a new building to house our new diesel tank. The old steel tank that has been on site for over 40 years finally gave out last year.



The last thing we have spent our time doing is building a new electric locomotive. This is built using bogies supplied by Ride on Railways along with an I-drive and tram controller. Whilst clearing areas around the railway we found various sheet metal and useful bits to use on it so cost has been cut down considerably. This new locomotive 'Falcon' is based on a Bagnall Modified Meyer Fairlie. It will pull a loaded 6 coach train quite happily and will do approximately 2 days on a charge.



With all this work done we are now open again having satisfied our council safety officer that our new measures that are in place based on Covid 19 are more than satisfactory (his words not mine).

Without all the modifications that have been made the worst thing has been making the railways safe to re-open. I've spent over 5K on alterations, the polyurethane alone for screening cost nearly £2,000.



Like most railways this year is going to be a struggle. With no financial help for Alexandra Park whatsoever (I'll explain why in a minute, it may be useful to other members) the railways have had to split the small business grant between them and we had to obtain a loan from the bank to keep our heads above water.

As this is my main income unless new engineering work comes my way this winter I personally may be in financial trouble. A lot of my personal savings have had to be used to keep things going.

On the note about not getting any financial help for Alexandra Park this is an interesting one.

We were told by our council that we were not eligible for a grant based on the fact that we don't pay rates there. My argument was that it still has a

rateable value but was told it doesn't. This is where it may become useful to other members.

Local authorities cannot charge rates to a business that is located within a public park. This is a law that was pointed out to me by my local council. Having checked, they are correct. If the park is open to the public 24/7 ie not closed at night they cannot charge you rates, however I know a lot of railways located in public parks do pay rates. Whilst in light of what has happened this year, to some it has been useful but it is worth people knowing.

Hopefully most of you are now in a position to re-open and can start to get some much needed finances back. Stay safe everyone. *Dan Radcliffe*

## Thompson Park

Well the day has finally arrived. We have been quite lucky really during lockdown a small but dedicated group of members having been coming down to the park twice a week to keep on top of things. All the coaching stock has been serviced and repainted. All the locomotives have been serviced and kept spotlessly clean. The track has had over 100 sleepers replaced and been checked on a regular basis. We



have managed to paint the railings on the station area and all the white edges. Our 100' bridge has been completely repainted and also our club room has had the exterior repainted. As I said at the beginning the day has finally arrived.



comes to a standstill. The track to the station is blocked. It takes us nearly 15 minutes to repair the locomotive and get it into the station.

Luckily after waiting for three months another 10 minutes wasn't that long a wait. The sets we were running comprised of two coaches the first coach for passengers and the second coach for a guard. We were only allowing one family or family bubble

We have produced three documents about reopening under Covid 19 rules. A risk assessment addendum for the council and two documents for our society members. The station was prepared and a new one way system was put into place. To start off with we isolated platform one so all trains would use platform two and three. A good crowd of members turned up and we got four sets and the family coach ready for service. As always all trains do one circuit of the track before they are put into service. 11.50 we have customers ready to ride the trains Sir Richard sets off from the shed area and starts making its way to the station. Disaster ! just before the crossing bang the exhaust falls off and the train



to ride with a maximum of six passengers per coach. we had decided not to sell tickets for the first few weeks and asked passengers to put the exact change in a donation bucket at the station.

We were away, the first train had four family members and they were delighted to be riding again. We didn't have long queues all day but we had a steady stream of passengers. On Sunday the decision was taken to reopen platform one because of the way people were queuing. Sunday was a lot busier than Saturday and over the two days we took in excess of 600 passengers. Thompson Park railway is back up and running. *Mike Bailey*

## Swanley New Barn Railway

The boredom of lockdown, was countered by a few working parties. One working party has been working on the overhaul of Owd Rosie. With quite a lot achieved. The new boiler and smoke box have been united, along with new blast pipe and chimney cap. The cab extension is well underway with the frames extended



by 4 inches, and the new cab body presently being welded up off-site. The Original Jeff Stubbs door was saved and re-used after being machined to actually seal (how it ever steamed before is a mystery!). A new manifold has been finished. Work now moves on to new pistons or be more precise new pistons to replaced the previous teams attempt at new pistons!!!

Our coach body replacement work continues, with another team (or more specific person) turning out new bodies. After completing the green set, and the brown set he has moved on to the blue set. These will have different metal work to the other set and certainly are starting to look very nice.

Track fettling in preparation for re-opening also occurred. For this we decided to use Mrs Darling. Probably the first time we have done track maintenance utilising a steam engine. We removed some heat expansion, replaced a few worn out sleepers as well as sorting out the odd bad joint and lean.

We also repaired our main turntable, which we had planned to replace this season, however Covid has put a stop to that project. *Pete Jackson*



Mrs Darling with the pway freight train

## Fancott Miniature Railway

We are hoping that we can open the railway on the 1 August but it will depend on the footfall at the pub. as there doing the booking for themselves and the railway. We are only going to open at weekends and maybe one day in the week. That way it will be easier to keep the staff numbers low and easier to roster. The train will only run every 30 minutes, so that we can get the train turned round and the carriages cleaned.

We have been updating the signals and point motors. and putting new cable and pipes in - still a bit to go but we will



have some sort of signalling in before we open. We have been cleaning the ballast as two of the members purchased a ballast cleaner for the railway.

Members have been looking after the railway in tiny groups. and keeping the correct social distancing. The railway's steam loco DavAnna is still at the Denver Light Railway, Birmingham. It carried out a successful load test at the Hidcote Valley Railway, the video of which can be seen on the railways facebook page. There is still some work to do before it returns to our railway.

We are still waiting for the new owners of The Fancott pub to sell us the railway, it was all going nicely then covid-19 came along and held up the sale, but hoping we can sort it all out sooner rather than later.

Ron Stanbridge

## Great Laxey Mine Railway

### RUNNING A RAILWAY IN THE TIME OF COVID 19

(bit like 'Life in the time of Cholera' by Gabriel Garcia Marquez)

We all have suffered from the lockdown because of Covid 19, so here are some of the things that have/have not happened with the GLMR. Being on the Isle of Man has made restrictions easier to apply

and one of our bonuses was being able to completely close the borders with the rest of the world, no planes and the only passengers on the boat were permit holders classified as 'Key Workers' which has meant, 59 days clear of no new virus cases reported.

Over the winter we started to strip off, clean, oil, and replace with new bolts, all the fishplates on the line (we are only 350 metres long). Three quarters finished when we went into lockdown. In December we had shipped one of our engine boilers away to Bennett Boilers for its 10 year re-tubing - this came back a week before lockdown so it had to remain in the local newspaper distributor's warehouse for a few months. We safely had it returned to site at the beginning of July - action photograph included. We were also due our annual H & S/Railway inspection prior to



opening, but as the inspector comes from the adjacent island (England in your terms) that did not happen. So that task was delegated to a local inspection team and we successfully passed muster at the beginning



of July, so now we can run, and have done so from the 4th July, trying to raise some income to pay all the ongoing bills that do not go away.

Just before lockdown the local Tourist Department organised a ‘On your Doorstep’ weekend (14 March) to raise the profile of all the local attractions with the local population. For us this was a success as we had over 100 adults through, with accompanying children, on what turned out to be a rather wet day. Unfortunately it did not raise any money as it was a free event for the weekend. I managed to half build a portion of stone wall on the last day before lockdown, and was just getting the hang of it before I had to pack up. Since January, we have had several Planning Applications in for new sheds, new signage and new windows in an old shed. We are in a ‘Conservation Area’ so need to apply for planning for practically everything that does not move: have wondered about one or two of the volunteers? Because of lockdown, most of the Planning Officers were working from home, so things took a lot longer to happen, but that did not matter too much because the companies making the signs and sheds were shut down anyway.

So now we are full steam ahead - we just need customers, which is going to be difficult because our borders are still closed to tourists, who are the largest part of our business and we are now busy

planning for Hop-tu-Naa in October (Halloween to you). *Colvyn Quaggin*

## Evesham Vale Light Railway

Along with every other Railway, we were closed due to the Covid-19 outbreak and the government lockdown. Although this has had a severe impact on our income, it has allowed us time to carry out a lot of the “I’ll get round to that one day jobs”.

Coach number 6 entered service late last year, and then an axle bearing seized causing flats on the tyres, this was traced to an alignment issue, once the lockdown was eased the wheelsets were taken to Alan Keef Ltd who turned them while we waited! The coach has now re entered traffic and seems to be behaving itself.

The spare under frame from the coaches purchased from the Bure Valley Railway has been converted into a bogie flat wagon, using a pair of spare bogies built by Uerdingen Waggon-Fabrik AG in 1937. this wagon has made maintenance much easier than previously, we intend to fit some seats for the maintenance crew during the summer.



New hand rails have been made to make it easier to operate the turntable, which has become tighter since some of the concrete base has been replaced.

All of our carriages have been fitted with acrylic screens between each compartment, which means we can achieve social distancing without losing any capacity. A one way system has been created around the Railway, and all of these measures seem to have been well received.

The Railway reopened on 4<sup>th</sup> July, and traffic has been steady, which has allowed us to tweak our operations, ready for the School holidays! *Adrian Corke*

## North Bay Railway

The NBR enjoyed a steady first week, and numbers are now about 70% of where they should be. Things are looking like that may increase now the children have broken up from the schools they haven't been at!



All engines are in good condition, with us opting to not use Georgina until things quieten down after summer. We are using this opportunity to sort a few improvements.

All our staff were furloughed through the lockdown so there wasn't any activity at the railway over that period. Thankfully our PWay team read the signs of what was coming and got all the track in a state we can run on it before we finished. *Steve Johnson*

Remember when you could meet, mix have a meal together, shake hands and ride on a train without social distancing



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