

Britain's Great Little Railways

Newsletter 80



October 2020

As this edition goes out to members the railways in England are closed again to meet the Government Lock Down. This edition looks back to better times

RUNNING AGAIN!

South Devon Miniature Railway

Hello all, I am hoping those railways that have been able to re-open have done and had a successful season.

We started looking at possibilities to re-open the SDMR way back in July once we were allowed to volunteer on the railway again.

Our first job was to retake the railway back from nature, the weeks had taken its toll and we had fallen branches, overgrown bushes, 6ft weeds and grass all over the track. It looked like a very disused railway indeed. A few of our volunteers were therefore out with the strimmer for 3 days re-taking the railway so we could run a train on it.



How we found the track up from the tunnel and the bottom of our S bend on our return as you can see fairly overgrown ©Kelvin Stapleton

Once we had cleared the track we then had to inspect the track, this we found to be in surprisingly good condition considering how long it had been left. Then we moved onto inspecting all the stock, this was found to be in good condition.

We then started completing the jobs we couldn't finish during March, this included fitting new brake blocks to the coaches and re-sleeping the track as required.



The insides of our 0-4-0PH Diesel "Phoenix" all uncovered with bonnet and cab off for her annual exam. Luckily there wasn't much wrong this year other than general maintenance. © Kelvin Stapleton

Once the railway was then ready to run again we had to work out what we had to do to operate the railway and change our method of working.

We decided the best way to achieve this was to have an arrivals and departures platform and shunt the train from one to the other each trip. We also have 3 coach trains with the middle coach empty. And a Perspex screen on the diesel tender.

Once we had organized all the new signage and done some trial runs everything seemed like it would work. We then started running again on Saturday 8th August with the Darjeeling Locomotive thanks to Gordon Roberts who returned again, once the main South Devon Railway site re-opened to the public.

We had a very successful weekend.



The Darjeeling locomotive climbing our fearsome S bend with a busy train. © Sam Cook

We then had a chance opportunity of borrowing Otter from Pecorama Thanks to John Edmonds and due to them being sadly still closed and Otter not being winterized yet.

All we had to do then was sort another 3 coach train something which gave us something of a headache, however a plan was formed we reformed our 3 car articulated set as a 3 car set something we hadn't done for at least 10 years.



The newly reformed artic set sitting in the sunshine outside the shed ready to go out on test © Sam Cook

After much testing this set was then also brought back into traffic. We then however had another problem Otter runs vacuum brakes and the coaches are air fitted.

So with help from a few of our members we re-arranged the coach and fitted a copy of the braking system in Phoenix's tender into the front two seats of the front artic coach.

Otter then had to be fitted with a brake valve to use as a setter to apply and release the brakes.

This was duly done and all we had to do then was wait for Otter to arrive. This happened on the 15th of August and we ran both locos for the first time. Again a very busy weekend.



Otter and the Darjeeling at the station I believe just before Otter departs for his test lap © Sam Cook

We have since run every weekend apart from one where the weather was terrible. Although recently passenger number have tailed off we have been extremely pleased, the SDMR as a railway over the last 8 weeks has probably not only run the longest and heaviest trains it ever has, it has also probably run the most intensive it ever has. It has been quite an enjoyable few weeks.

We are hopefully running till the end of October so let's hope it continues! *Kelvin Stapleton*

BGLR NEWS

The website has been updated to reflect the current closure of our railways. I have highlighted those railways that are planning to re-open after the lockdown. Any errors please let me know and I will change. The November Chairman's Letter is now added at the end of the Newsletter.

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/ by entering the username bglr and the password kcnsy37

The HRA members section has a very good webpage on the Corona virus legislation etc and includes details of the Job Retention Bonus. www.hra.uk.com/covid19-coronavirus

NEWS FROM OUR MEMBERS

Moors Valley Railway

It is October already and here we are working our way towards the half term (COVID restrictions permitting of course) but we can look back on our Summer holidays with positivity as a combination of good weather and the Great British public enjoying being out again meant that our July and August numbers were healthy. We ended up carrying over 46,000 passengers over the two months. This operational period has also made us seriously think about how we will operate moving forwards and might re-align our thinking when it comes to our development plans in the future. This year more than ever we have benefitted from the enthusiasm and support of our volunteer group and it is fair to say that we wouldn't have been able to do what we did without them.

In other news along with a number of our attractions we have made the difficult decision to cancel our Santa Specials for this year. We pride ourselves on offering something very special and we just wouldn't have been able to achieve anything that we would have been proud of in line with the COVID-19 restrictions. With this in mind we have been able to accept more private commission work in the workshop as part of our Narrowgauge Services so if you are in need of any engineering services get in touch.

In August we launched our new website. The web address remains the same so check it out at www.moorsvalleyrailway.co.uk. We hope you think it looks as great as we do.

As we reported in July work has continued on both Lord Randall and Sir Goss's overhauls over the summer with Lord Randall now complete and expected to return to the Wayside Light Railway this month. We are extremely proud of how the engine looks and sounds, there are plenty of pictures and videos of our tests with Lord Randall on our Locomotive Works Facebook page so have a look. <https://www.facebook.com/kingsmereworks/>

Sir Goss's progress has also began to accelerate more recently as we collected the new boiler in August which has now been put on the frames and the rest of the bodywork has come together pretty quickly. Since our last update, Swanley have now commissioned us to complete the full overhaul so our attention now shifts onto the tender and ensuring that we get the alignment and styling 100% right as this is extremely important when working with a tender cab locomotive. We will now see the engines overhaul through to completion.

We have included some recent photos below. *James Flay*



Brickworks Miniature Railway

The plans by the Brickworks Museum to develop sheds one and two have meant that the current miniature railway needs to move. This has provided a golden opportunity for the railway group of volunteers to build a whole new railway which will expand the visitor experience.

The new route will be higher up the site and run from the grass area by the 2' railway station over towards the network rail fence, then, following the line of the old 2' railway, up to a loop at the top right hand corner of the main car park. This will produce a ride of over 400 metres with a chance to view previously hidden steam and site artefacts.

Thanks to some generous donations from volunteers at the Museum, the group have been able to contribute to the hire of a digger and operator to clear the route and create a basis for the new loop at the

top of the car park, remove sapling trees, remove heavy brick machinery from the route and level the area by the old 2' station and provide the majority of the funding to build the new line. Some spare track from the current layout has been laid to help the new layout to develop. Tuesday 22 September marked a high point when one of the group drove his engine up the "hill" from the old loco shed to the new layout level. We have also managed to convert a closed old shed into the new three door carriage shed on the



higher level.

However we are still looking for the final £5,000 to build the new line, but also do need new volunteers to join the group to operate the railway, act as passenger guards and learn to drive the trains.

However the best news is that we have raised enough money to get an order into Cromer White for track, sleepers and fixings, just got to get the steel strip and ballast. Work has also started on building the new station which will be better integrated into the museum than the old HNGRT one!

Still Wanted Plans for a 2ft pump trolley, driver's truck project for 7 1/4 inch gauge *David Hubbard*

Great Laxey Mine Railway

Things have been a little different over here in the middle of the Irish Sea, being surrounded by water. We had an early lockdown on events, and a closure of our border with the rest of the world. When the internal lockdown eased, the borders remained closed, and still are and this is keeping us Covid-free for the moment. For a tourist island, this had severe consequences. It meant that the only available customers for the railway were the local population, a great many of whom had been on the railway many times already. What was supposed to be a 25 week season, became a 13 week affair and passenger figures were down by 80%. On our last day of operation, we had 15 people through. We had opened on the 14th March at 11 am, and we closed for lockdown at 4.30 pm the same day! We then opened again on the 4th July.

A slim season, but we managed to get some maintenance carried out, not least of which was the re-fitting of our re-tubed boiler (courtesy of Bennett Boilers) back onto its chassis, and then connecting all the bits. Two years ago, a volunteer had written 2 children's books (The Magic Tunnel and Jinny the Witch and the

Magic Tunnel) about the railway, and these continued to sell during the season: it all helps.



We have now shut for the normal season but are preparing for our two weekends to celebrate Hop-Tu-Naa, which is commonly called Halloween in your country. Spooks and spooky effects rule - never sure who are the most scared, parents or children. This is our biggest event and is important for our income.

After that we have a rest until the New Year. Then the cycle starts all over again, maintenance, repair and preparation for the new season (we hope).

It is sad that the small seaside train in Arbroath has closed after 85 years, but that is how things are at the moment, and we hope that the same fate will not happen to others in the group.

So, we wish you well for Christmas and the New Year and raise a glass for all the hard-working staff and volunteers that we all have. *Frances Quaggin*

Thompson Park Railway

As you may be aware from the last newsletter we reopened to the public on Saturday July 11th. We had 31 possible running days and we managed to lose only 3. The one way system we had in operation worked really well and all our customers stuck to the rules without any problems.



We managed to run both our Teddy Bears Picnic and Super Heroes Sundays when we give free rides to children who participate in the event i.e. bringing teddy bears to the picnic and dressing up for super heroes. Both events this year were well attended.

Because of the restrictions to all our lives several more senior members of our society have been self isolating and unable to attend but we have a good group of younger members who helped out the seniors who did attend.





We managed over 8000 rides during the summer and we have had several extremely good comments from members of the public who attended the railway.

Our final weekend arrived and it was decided not to charge for rides but ask for donations to Pendleside Hospice which is our local hospice. We raised over £600 which was passed to the hospice.

Finally I am sorry to report that we will not be operating our Santa Specials this year because of the ongoing restrictions.

We will reopen again to the public on Good Friday 2nd April 2021 when hopefully things might be a bit more relaxed. *Mike Bailey*

Kirklees Light Railway

Since reopening to the public on 11 July 2020, the Kirklees Light Railway has seen a pleasantly surprising steady trade with lots of praise for the meticulous COVID-secure measures that have been put in place. Trains have been running at half-capacity to allow for social distancing and the move to almost exclusively



pre-booked tickets online has been transformative and a much-needed leap into the modern age.

The first weekend of October saw the official re-launch of the KLR's number one engine, Fox, after an almost six-year long overhaul. Fox had been out on the line for unofficial test services since July but is now safely back in the home fleet and on the passenger services roster just in time for Katie to exit stage left



for her 10 year maintenance at the end of 2020.

In October, the KLR launched three trial 'Young Engineers' days aimed at the midweek toddler/pre-schooler market with a scaled down service (running just one-third of the line and back plus platform rides and rides on the 7¼-inch duck pond railway). The trials went better than all expectations, with each date selling out. Feedback has been tremendous and the viability of introducing regular sessions in 2021 is looking good – a potential new income stream to help in these troubled times!

Although times are anything but certain, the KLR is hopeful that the sold out Wizard Express, Halloween Ghost Trains and Santa Specials will go ahead to provide at least a semblance of normality for visitors as autumn moves into winter. The introduction of Mince Pie Specials on 1-3 January 2021 is also capturing visitor interest, with fingers crossed for those to run as scheduled and positive thoughts for whatever lies beyond! *Erin Towey*

Fancott Miniature Railway

As a general update - In 2015 there was a serious fire at the pub which destroyed the engine shed, locomotives and rolling stock. The members of the railway salvaged what they could including the chassis of Herbie and Pippa, unfortunately the privately owned locomotive was now part of the ashes. In the immediate period after the fire help was received from far and wide in the form of donations, locomotives, carriages and man hours. The railway reopened on 4th July with a locomotive and carriages on loan from the Swanley New Barn Railway. Pippa was taken in by members of the railway as a restoration project which is currently underway.

The railway purchased two new locomotives, a Hymek called 'Dark Star' shortly after opening and an O60 called 'Phoenix' in November of the same year. In October of 2016 Herbie was sent away to be rebuilt by Mr D Radcliffe and was returned to the railway on March 20th 2017 in a like new condition.

In 2018 an appeal was put out on BBC Three Counties radio for additional volunteers as the railway was on the verge of closing due to lack of manpower and was heavily reliant on a few members. The appeal was a great success and new blood duly arrived, resulting in around 20 new members.

Since that time the railway has undergone much improvement, a tunnel has been erected at the bottom of the loop providing an additional attraction and essential storage space. We also now have our own signal