

# Friends of Rhyl Miniature Railway

Newsletter No. 7

October 2004



## Pirate Capers at Marine Lake attract 1,400 passengers

Over the weekend of 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> August we participated in 'Pirates and Parrots', a community event organised by the Marine Residents Association together with Communities First. Over 700 passengers were carried on each of the two days, at a reduced fare of 20p each. We received from the Communities First Trust Fund a substantial grant towards this subsidised fare.



Event supported by



communities first cymunedau yn gyntaf



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government

During 'Pirates and Parrots' members of the Chester Re-enactment Group entertained visitors with mock battles, together with the firing of muskets and a cannon. 'Rescues' on the lake itself were carried out using boats provided by Rhyl Sea Cadets. There were complementary attractions, a bouncy castle, refreshments, storytelling and competitions. On Sunday there were performances from members of the George Formby Society.



*Both steam trains were in action all weekend, Joan being renamed Blackbeard. The railway volunteers all enjoyed themselves, many also dressed up in pirate costumes.*

Photographs above, below, and p1 lower: John Myers



## Customer Survey results

We carried out a customer survey during Pirates Weekend for which there were 103 respondents. All said that they would like to see more events held at Rhyl Marine Lake, and there were some useful suggestions for different themes that we could try in future. All respondents thought that our proposed station building and museum would improve visitor facilities on the site.

69 (72%) of the respondents were resident in Rhyl. Of those who had heard about the event in advance 39 (52%) had read about it in local newspapers, 15 had seen posters and the remainder heard about it by word of mouth, or direct mail. Of the 30 non-residents in the sample 13 had not heard about the event beforehand (scope for improvement in marketing of events to holidaymakers).

62 (62%, 22 of whom were visitors) did not know that RMR is the oldest miniature railway in the UK, demonstrating the scope for improvement in interpretation that would be provided by the station project. 31 (31%) of respondents were on their first visit to the railway, 16 of these were non-residents. The average party consisted of two adults and two children. 73 (73%, of which 18 were visitors) thought that the present normal train fare of £1 represents good value.

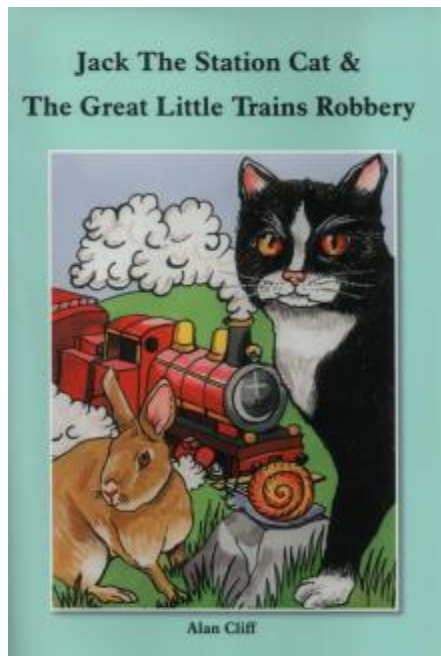
Only 6 (6%, 1 visitor) thought that it is too expensive. We also asked what we should charge in 2006 for a train ride and admission to museum displays. Here opinion was mixed: 34 (35%, 11 visitors) said only £1; 34 (35%, 5 visitors) said £1.50; 28 (28%, 11 visitors) said £2.00; the remainder said £2.50. This reinforces how important it will be for us to maintain a strategy of relatively low prices, £1.50 being the charge anticipated once the building project has taken place.

This event showed the Marine Lake and our railway at their best. We are certain that it will lead to further co-operation with the Marine Residents Association and with the Communities First team in Rhyl West. The customer survey demonstrated unanimity of support for our station building and museum project. It also reinforced some key elements of our business plan and gave us useful pointers for future events and publicity.

## A year in the life of Jack the Station Cat

*Written by the feline himself, with assistance from his 'human',  
President of the Friends of RMR, Rev Alan Cliff*

Quite a busy year really. In January Wendy Webb Books pulled out of children's publishing. Jack the Station Cat Ltd has bought up all remaining stocks of the five Jack books WWB published and is now sole distributor. Gwasg Helygain of Rhyl undertook to publish the latest of my books "Jack the Station Cat and the Great Little Trains Robbery" which features the RMR's *Joan*. Within three months over 1,000 books had sold and sales continue steadily. This has given the RMR a lot of publicity.



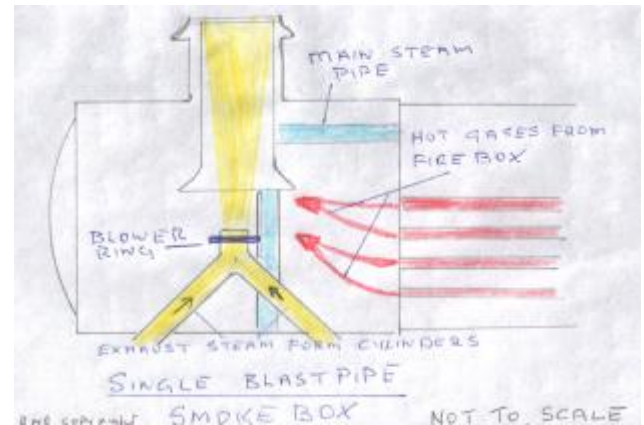
Five heritage railways held "Meet Jack the Station Cat" events this year and there are provisional bookings for next year both from this year's participants and other railways. We held an event at Rhyl the week after a very special and heavily attended community event. Result practically nobody came. Not deterred, the two events will probably be combined next year.

To date some 15,000 of my human's children's books have been sold based on figures provided by both publishers. Articles about me have appeared in the American railway press as well as the British. As Friend Number One of the charity "The Railway Children" I have been receiving bulletins from railway photographer Colin Boocock who with his wife Mary is on a "Round the World by Rail" trip in aid of the charity. Reports will be appearing in my human's column "Lock's siding" in British Railway Modelling magazine. If readers would like to know more about the charity and its work amongst abandoned and orphaned children who turn up at world's great railway stations please contact: Jack the Station Cat, 38 Clifton Park Road, Rhyl LL18 4AW.

## The Smokebox

By Vernon Aynsough

Having so far dealt with fire and water, involving the firebox and boiler, the third 'compartment' of a steam loco is the smokebox. This is where the hot gases from the firebox, having passed through the boiler tubes, meet the steam being released from the cylinders. Other than the chimney opening, the smokebox has to be airtight; any leakage, such as through a bad fitting door, has a detrimental effect on performance.



Fittings in the smokebox include main steam pipes, taking steam from the boiler to the cylinders; and also the blower, a steam jet used to induce a draught on the fire, when the regulator is closed, and on lighting up, once pressure is reached. The main feature is the blastpipe, this is formed by joining together the exhaust steam pipes from the cylinders, into a vertical nozzle, in line with the chimney.

The trick here is to get the size right; too small increases steam raising, but creates back pressure in the cylinders; too big makes for a free running engine, but a poor steamer. An ideal setting is for a strong but slow and steady blast, that provides for a fast passage to exhaust steam from the cylinders.



*The Cagney visited Evesham Vale Light Railway for their gala weekend on 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> July. Most of its trains around their steeply graded track were operated double headed with Red Dragon from the Windmill Farm Railway. Three other locomotives were also in steam: Prince William, St Egwin and Ursula.*

## RMR Winter Work Programme 2004/2005

### **Joan**

Our main locomotive has been running well. Only minor maintenance will be required to prepare her for 2005.

### **Cagney No 44**

In October the Cagney was removed to Arthur Jones' Wrexham workshops. Winter work is to centre on improving the valve gear timing, together with other minor jobs.

### **Diesels**

*Clara* will also be visiting the workshop this winter to see what can be done to improve the transmission. When we change to 100 days of operation per year this locomotive will be much more important.

The Lister's new 'tram' body is now largely complete, just needing to be painted, and to be fitted with 'skirts'. The wooden body is free standing and bolts onto the loco frame. The front panel hinges down for access to the clockwork start mechanism, whilst the two side panels are removable so as to give access to the engine for maintenance.

### **Coaches**

Two seats on our 'heritage' coaches are receiving new sides. The sixth coach, with its all-new hardwood seats, needs the seat 'ribbing' to be completed.

Our enclosed saloon coach was delivered from the Windmill Farm Railway on October 19<sup>th</sup>. It may be possible to restore it in time for use during next summer's gala weekend.



*The new coach at Rhyl on 23<sup>rd</sup> October. It can also operate independently as a battery powered railcar.*

We have received earmarked funding from Rhyl Town Council towards building a new coach able to accommodate wheelchairs. This will be based on the traditional 'cars de luxe' design, but being new will need to be submitted to the Railway Inspector for 'type approval'.

### **Air brake project**

Control boxes for the new system are to be fitted to the two diesel locomotives. Some other minor improvements to the system are planned.

## Better Publicity in 2005?

There is no doubt that we need to work harder to bring people to us. Until the Trust took over operation of the RMR the annual budget for publicity was nil. For the last two years this has been our highest category of expenditure, and our business plan shows the spend on this rising further.

### **Events**

There is no doubt that events such as 'Pirates and Parrots' work wonders at Marine Lake. They show what can be achieved when local residents and the different lake users all work together, with the support of Denbighshire County Council. This event is set to be repeated in 2005, or something similar to it. There have also been discussions in the Marine Lake Users Forum about other types of event that we could put on.

### **Signage and site improvements**



The support that we have received from officers of the Council lately has been most encouraging. One outcome of this was the arrival in late August of large 'white on brown' highway signs directing visitors to us. There is even one on the Promenade, together with pedestrian finger post signs – improvements that we have needed for a long time.

This signage is soon to be complemented by the new 'gateway' feature at the site's main entrance. This will feature a large archway, to make the site conspicuous to all passers-by along the Wellington Road. These developments have all been financed mostly by the WDA, being part of the phase two site improvements, along with further seating areas and extension of the cycle path (all now complete).

### **Railway leaflet**

This year we printed 11,000 leaflets, most of which were distributed professionally to hotels, guest houses and caravan sites etc. Next year's leaflet will have four pages, and will be bilingual.

### **So, what is the most cost effective way for us to improve publicity?**

More leaflets?

More leaflets distributed professionally?

More leaflets distributed by volunteers?

Leaflets distributed to Tourist Information Centres?

'Hanging cards'?

Press advertising?

We would welcome suggestions that 'Friends' might make, especially those backed by offers of practical help. We will be discussing this topic further at our forthcoming Friends' Annual General Meeting.

## Other RMR News

### Building project

We are pleased to say that plans for our new station building and museum are still moving forward. Although we have Heads of Agreement we have not yet seen a draft lease from our landlords Denbighshire County Council. We hope that this issue will shortly make faster progress, as the absence of a lease will otherwise be a barrier to obtaining funding.

### Rhyl Town Council

We would like to thank Rhyl Town Council, who wrote to us in August offering us financial assistance towards our project totalling £10,000. They wrote that 'The Town Council hopes that this offer of funding demonstrates its commitment to your scheme which will deliver a sustainable leisure and tourism facility to the Rhyl Community on one of its most strategic leisure sites. As a further mark of the Town Council's commitment to your project it has agreed, in principle, to place its own miniature steam engine *Billy* on permanent display in the museum.'

### Volunteer Training

We have been pleased to welcome five new volunteers to the railway operating group this year. On some weekends completely different teams of people ran the railway on successive days. We will continue to offer varied opportunities for volunteering, as we work towards opening on 100 days per year.

### 2004 season

In 2004 the railway carried 5,584 passengers on 36 operating days. The Trust's business plan envisages this rising to 6,500 passengers next year on 35 days, then in 2006 9,000 passengers on 100 days.

### Shed break-ins, again

Kids broke in to the train shed on Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> October. It would seem that they got in at first underneath one of the doors, and then bashed the padlock on the inside to get the doors open. They discharged the fire extinguisher and emptied any containers they could find, including a tin of silver paint smeared all over *Joan* and the *Cagney*.

Fortunately a passing resident saw what was going on, called the police and community support officers were soon on the scene. We were also notified promptly and fortunately, because all the paint was still wet, little lasting damage was done.

Police were on site again on 21<sup>st</sup> October. This time another child got into the shed, but was disturbed, and escaped, before he could make much impact on the lock. The gang was known to the police, and was even chased by a police helicopter.

We are reinforcing the shed doors at the moment. Past experience is that these sorts of incidents come and go in phases. They emphasise the importance of the building project in ensuring that we will be able to do a better job in caring for our collection in future.

## American Enthusiasts visit Rhyl



*On 15<sup>th</sup> September we entertained a party of American enthusiasts on the Grand Scales Quarterly UK Tour 2. As on the first tour in 2002 they all had a great time.*

### RHYL MINIATURE RAILWAY 2005 TIMETABLE

Trains will run on Bank Holiday Sundays and Mondays  
Every Sunday from 12<sup>th</sup> June until 11<sup>th</sup> September  
Every Thursday and Saturday in the summer school hols

### Special Events in 2005

Centenary of Seaside Miniature Railways Celebrations, at  
Cleethorpes Coast Light Railway: 30<sup>th</sup> April to 2<sup>nd</sup> May

*Joan* at Evesham Vale Light Railway: 22<sup>nd</sup> May

Cagney No 44 at Athy Waterways Festival :  
28<sup>th</sup> & 29<sup>th</sup> May

RMR Enthusiasts' Gala: 13<sup>th</sup> & 14<sup>th</sup> August

### RHYL STEAM PRESERVATION TRUST Registered Charity No 1103953

Trustees: Les Hughes (Chairman), Carol Hughes, Louise Hughes, Lucille Green, Cllr Joan Butterfield JP, Simon Townsend (Secretary), Justin Bell.

Enquiries about railway operations should be addressed to the Trust Secretary, 10 Cilnant, Mold, CH7 1GG, Tel 01352 759109.

## Friends of Rhyl Miniature Railway

Our group has been formed to support the Rhyl Steam Preservation Trust in its aims to preserve and operate the railway.

Membership costs £7.50 per annum and runs to 31<sup>st</sup> May each year, including newsletters due in April and September.

President of the Friends is Rev Alan Cliff, whilst its Chairman is Simon Townsend

For Subscriptions and Enquiries: Secretary and Treasurer of the Friends are Dave and Justin Bell, of 22 River Street, Rhyl LL18 1PT, Tel 01745 339477.

**Friends' Newsletter**  
Editor: Simon Townsend

