

Friends of Rhyl Miniature Railway

Newsletter No. 1

September 2001

Record crowds help to celebrate the railway's Ninetieth Birthday



Saturday 5th May 2001 was a special day in the railway's history, being the exact ninetieth anniversary of its opening. We organised a special event, in conjunction with Rhyl Water Ski Club, Rhyl Sea Cadets, and other Marine Lake users.

Our own four engines all made appearances, whilst steam locomotives *John* (from Oxfordshire) and *Effie* (from the Cleethorpes Coast Light Railway) visited us especially for the event.

John and our own *Joan*, seen above, were both built in Rhyl by Albert Barnes & Co, and worked together on our railway for over forty years up to 1969, but this was the first time that they had been reunited since then. It was also the first time ever that the railway had seen so many locomotives working, albeit three of them diesels. A massive team effort by all the volunteers and visiting crews was rewarded by bright sunshine, and saw 850 passengers ride on the trains just that day.

Successful first season for new Trust

The 2001 season has been the first for Rhyl Steam Preservation Trust as operators of the railway. The Trust Chairman is Les Hughes and its Secretary is Simon Townsend. Other Trustees are Councillor Joan Butterfield JP, Carol Hughes and Justin Bell.

During the season the railway has operated on 45 days and has carried 5,500 passengers. This is over double the number from the 2000 season.

We hope that improved publicity should bring us more visitors still in 2002.



Photos on this page by N H Spilsbury.

5th May Highlights

The ceremony: We were pleased to welcome Councillor Margaret McCarroll, Mayor of Rhyl, who joined us to cut the tape at the anniversary ceremony. It was also a particular pleasure to hear from Eric Hughes, whose father in law Albert Barnes built *Joan* and *John*. Eric was himself manager of Rhyl Amusements for many years. His excellent book 'Rhyl at the Funfair' is available for sale from our Trust.

Visitors that almost didn't arrive: Owners Jim and Helen Shackell worked all hours on *John* to renew all its cab pipework prior to the annual boiler inspection, which it passed only a few days before coming to us. Transportation of *Effie* was put in doubt two days before the event, when it was found that the trailer it was supposed to come on had been stolen. New vehicles had to be arranged at 12 hours notice to bring it to us, and to take it to its next destination on May 8th.

New coach enters service, just: In September Justin Bell spotted two spare coach bogies in our shed, and announced that he would build us a completely new replica body to run on them. The coach had its first run on Easter Monday 2001, with seats and painting still to be completed. After a heroic effort in the last week it entered service at 1pm on the 5th, and nobody found the wet paint!

Would it fit? Never before had our shed housed six locomotives, five red coaches and four smaller vehicles. Even after lifting five of them off the track bets were on whether it would all fit, which it did, with only inches to spare!

Not the perfect coupling: *Joan* and *John* had never run double headed before. It took Austin Moss's ingenuity with ironmongery to get them hooked together safely.

Another close shave: It had always been our intention that the KD1 multiple unit should appear in our cavalcade of locomotives, even though at the time it could not propel itself in the right direction. We did run it round, and it transpired to clear the new blue bollards (by the side of the track) by a margin of nil.

Our own Local Hero

Justin Bell applied to his employer for sponsorship under their 'Local Hero' scheme. We were all surprised and rather delighted when a cheque for £100 arrived from Sainsbury's made payable to the Rhyl Preservation Trust.

Trust building proposal

Rhyl Steam Preservation Trust has been developing its proposal for a new station building, which would also house all our equipment and allow the present railway shed to be demolished.

In January 2001 an exploratory meeting was held which was attended by various officers of Denbighshire County Council, together with Chris Ruane MP and Ann Jones AM.

Since then we have had preliminary discussions with the Heritage Lottery Fund, which have been favourable. The scheme is to incorporate acquisition of the railway's locomotives and stock by way of partnership funding. It may be possible for the new building to incorporate a museum display, and interpretation of the special environment at the Marine Lake.

Shortly the Trust hopes to appoint architects to design and cost the building, following which various steps must be taken, including a full application to the HLF, preparation of a business plan, progress with our application for charitable status, and lease negotiations. Further details will be given in the Spring newsletter.

WDA funding for Marine Lake improvements, possibly

At a meeting of the Marine Lake Users' Forum on 30th July it was announced that the Marine Lake may benefit from improvements costing up to £100,000, funded by the Welsh Development Agency.

In order for a grant to be available a Management Plan must first be prepared, covering a 5 year period. Possible uses of the money include development of an attractive 'gateway', and provision of CCTV security cameras to combat vandalism. Either of these would be complementary to our building proposal. If this funding is to be drawn the expenditure must be made by 31st March 2002, so it is hoped that all the necessary steps can be taken quickly.

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 £5.00 per annum and runs to 31st May each year, including newsletters issued in April and September.

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

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



The railway's volunteers with two engines in steam, on 7th May 2001. *Simon Townsend*

Repair Book

Operating our railway with our three, sometimes four locomotives might seem easy. The answer to this is that with our present group of working volunteers it is certainly easier than it once was, but one still needs ones wits to keep the wheels turning. Following are some of the tasks carried out since March 2001.

Joan

Over last winter the injectors went away to Preston Services to have their clack valves re-machined. Some replacement of pipe fittings was necessary, which became steam tight at the second attempt, in time for boiler inspection. A new smokebox inner liner was also fitted, together with repairs to one of the buffer castings, which had split.

May 6th: Very poor steaming was rectified the following morning by a thorough clean of the tubes and grate.

May 28th: Much consternation was caused when the right hand side injector failed. Proposed remedies involved varying sizes of hammer! Dismantling on 16th June brought to light scale caught in the eye of the cone, following which the loco was test steamed and all was well.

July 7th: The boiler got its mid season washout.

July 8th: The LHS drain tap linkage fell apart (an old wound) and was replaced; a recurring problem.

July 29th: A hiss inside the smokebox was traced to a small hole caused by decay of one of the main steam pipes. A patch repair was attempted on 2nd August.

August 5th: Upon steaming the repair was found not to hold, not only that but on its test run the front bogie hit an errant check rail, which both derailed it and broke a cast bracket. The engine had to be jacked up, pony truck run out, dismantled, bracket welded by Dave Jones and the whole thing reassembled. On the 8th a new pipe was fitted so that *Joan* was back in fitness for Thursday 9th. Since then she has remained in good health.

Clara

After the winter shutdown the engine proved very difficult to start. On boiler inspection day, using a flaming rag to start the loco resulted in frying a fuel line, which then had to be replaced. During this process we lost a special bolt, which had itself to be replaced.

July 5th: Two links on the main drive chain disintegrated, one never to be found again. On the 7th the missing one was found to be a 'half link', it took until the 21st to obtain the right size of link and then 10 minutes to fit it.

July 26th: New battery and fuel filter fitted.

July 29th: Whilst putting the loco away the engine completely packed up. Bleeding the fuel system on 30th proved of no avail, then on 2nd a passing mechanic suggested checking that fuel was coming from the fuel tank – it was not! Shaking the tank upside down yielded a rag which had impaled itself over the fuel outlet. Once the tank was replaced we were back in business.

August 4th: Halfway around the track the 'woodruff key' which connects the drive gear to the main axle fell out. Fortunately it was found, and replaced later in the day.

August 5th: The woodruff key fell out again in the morning, the second attempt to secure it in place was more successful and *Clara* was back in service that afternoon.

Lister

May 5th (when else?) the spring on the gas pedal gave way, and had to be reconnected

June 15th: Whilst in use for re-sleepering the exhaust emitted black smoke, following which the engine refused to re-start. Draining the fuel system and replacing the fuel and air filters solved this problem. At the same time an extra segment was welded into the fuel valve linkages so as to get the gas pedal working in the correct quadrant.

June 29th: Weld on fuel valve linkage broke, repaired on July 1st. The clockwork start mechanism has become unreliable during the season, sometimes releasing itself too early. The normal starting handle has been used as an alternative, but this has lost its engaging lever.

August 1st: The driver's seat broke away from its column, due to rust, and because someone sat on it. Repaired the following day.

Sept 1st: Spring on gas pedal detached, adjustments made to linkage again.

Sept 6th: Seat fell off again!! Replaced on the 9th.

KD1

In March the main air tank was removed for its hydraulic test, then replaced.

The capacitor used for starting the engine expired and was renewed.

During April the unit lost all power in reverse, and it was subsequently found that there was only drive on one bogie. A determined effort with the multimeter in June finally led to a faulty connection in the contact box,

Repair Book, Cont'd

following which full power (in both directions) was restored.

We had been progressing towards restoring the whole unit to active service, but changing priorities in view of the HLF application suggest a different plan.

Coaches

All four of our 'heritage' coaches were repainted over the winter, and one of the seats, which had collapsed, replaced with a spare one donated by Austin Moss.

In June whilst climbing over the coaches in the shed, a further seat collapsed. New sides were obtained and this seat is now ready to go back into place.

Track

At a meeting of the Marine Users Forum it was suggested that cars could gain access to the lake shore by driving over our track, and that this could be prevented by new bollards. A great many phone calls later the bollards are still rather closer to our track than we would like, and are to be moved

A further concerted effort on re-sleeping resulted in our supplies being used up, and 150 more were obtained.



Trustees Joan Butterfield JP and Simon Townsend, with the Mayor of Rhyl, a memorable image of 2001. *Eric Doyle*



Putting the engine away on September 9th, the last steam day of the year. *Simon Townsend*

RMR Winter Work Programme 2001/2002

Joan

Our steam locomotive is to be 'winterised' in mid September. The front valve gear linkages, rockers and valve rods are worn, and are to be overhauled for us by the Bala Lake Railway.

Two drain cock valves are to be replaced.

There has been talk of cleaning up the bottom of the tender and re-hanging the footbrake linkages.

Clara

Our passenger diesel is not in bad form but the paintwork and lining may be touched in.

Lister

The starter handle is to be fixed.

The locomotive is to be fitted with a canopy, and may be shuttered in to resemble 'Toby the Tram'.

KD1

The future of this unit is presently under review, but it has been suggested that the engine car should be separated and turned into a locomotive.

Air brake project

One of the Trusts' objectives is to fit at least two coach bogies with air brakes. If we master the first stages of this we will progress to fitting air tanks and a compressor, which will probably be carried underneath the new coach.

Station Improvements

We plan to make a signal, which will stand next to the platform end on operating days, also some removable white picket fencing.

The two new platform benches require finishing off.

We hope to make some 'sandwich boards', and possibly to improve access to the station platform.

Track

There are now plenty of new sleepers in stock to enable further replacement of our 20 year old specimens.

Publicity

We intend to have a colour leaflet giving our operating days next season. The 2002 timetable will be discussed at our AGM in November. We need to improve in this area to increase visitor numbers and support our lottery bid. All ideas welcome.

Volunteering

If you would like to help any of the above projects, please contact Simon, 01352 759109, Justin or Dave 01745 339477, or Alan 07944 525271.