



NEWSLETTER 108 : Apr 2022

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Editorial

Andrew Chrysler

Firstly, can I apologise for the late arrival of this month's newsletter. I have been trying to console myself for getting another decade older, by taking a holiday, but I'm now back to reality. For a few days at least... this weekend it's off to Tamworth for the inaugural Statfold Model Railway Event. At least there is no queueing for airport security or passport control on this occasion.

One thing that I want to see is Mark Pretious' model of Ventnor West. I saw his model of Bembridge at the NEC show a few years ago - my interest being because I lived and worked in Bembridge for several months in the 1980's. Ventnor Heritage Centre has two models of that town's stations - Ventnor West in N gauge and Ventnor in OO gauge, but they were not running, being displayed as static models. I understand that Mark's model is 45 feet in length, and includes Merstone and St.Lawrence stations, as well as Ventnor West.

While Ventnor station, the original terminus of the Ryde line closed in 1966, with the line now terminating at Shanklin and being electrified and still open, it could be imagined that - in an alternate universe - it could have remained

open, allowing for the running of model Class 483 stock as well as steam. Possibly "rule one" would need to be applied...

(Rule One - It's my layout and I can do what I like)



Above - the model of Ventnor Station at Ventnor Heritage Centre

While Statfold are holding their first model railway exhibition, Miniatur Wunderland in Hamburg has been open for 21 years and has recently been experimenting with sound - but not the DCC variety. Take a look on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aBNHmUT3GPg>

I will be returning to the Isle of Wight again this summer, when I will finally get the opportunity to ride on the long awaited Class 484 trains, and will be able to see what progress has been made on the restoration of 483004 at Holliers Park. If it is (as planned) open as a cafe, then a coffee (and possibly a bacon roll) will be in order.

As for the “new” trains, the full Class 484 fleet has now arrived on the Island, shown in this photograph taken 28 February 2022. From left to right - 003, 002, 004, 001 and 005. (Photo - James Pilbeam)



Finally, sincere thanks to those who responded to my appeals for newsletter articles. Contributions from Malcolm and Ian are now safely in my “article cupboard” and will appear in next month’s newsletter. Please keep them coming!

As I write this, I can see that it is still light outside and so I guess that this is good news for those who have garden railways – no more freezing hands, less likelihood of rain swamping the track and gale force wind extinguishing the gas burners. But against that is the problem of herbaceous growth doing its best to overcome the track and cause derailments. For us modellers of smaller scales, spring and summer and better weather brings a different problem - urgent tasks in the garden mean less time to do any modelling.

This has definitely affected continued work on my new small N gauge layout, compounded by the little (or as far as Heather was concerned not so little) problem I encountered earlier this month. Maybe April showers will drive us indoors to allow 'real' work to be done.

I was very pleased to see the great progress that has been made on the new Talisker layout – it is coming on in leaps and bounds and, with a fair wind, should be in an operational state in time for our show. Talking of which, I would like to remind you that our Autumn exhibition is on Saturday 12th November so please reserve that date in your diaries. As well as (hopefully) our own Talisker, we have sourced a variety of different layouts from around the area. More about them in the May or June newsletter.

I would also like to mention that we have been invited to exhibit Claremont Old Quay at the Wigan Show on 1st and 2nd October. I will be asking for volunteer operators in early summer, but in the meantime we will need to erect the layout and carry out some cosmetic maintenance as well as operator training.

Where's Andrew?

Last month, I was in Flam, Norway. The Flamsbana (or Flam Railway) is a 20 kilometre long branch which connects to the main Bergen line at Myrdal, and is a popular scenic excursion for cruise passengers.

This month, I am again on a railway which is close to water. But where am I?



The following interview was found in the Daily Telegraph in early December. Broadcaster Peter Snow explains his love of model locomotives — and his wife, Ann, her bafflement. From our own experience, I am sure that we can all empathise with Peter and Ann.

'I lose myself in my trains like a Beethoven symphony' – Peter Snow

I must admit it is very odd the way our grandchildren divide up. "Can we go up to the attic, Grandpa?" they all say, where they know they will find my much-cherished model railway. But by the time I puff upstairs, the boys are all pressing the buttons and turning the knobs that control the engines, and the girls are on the floor juggling the furniture in the dolls' house. However hard I try to enthuse my granddaughters about the enchantment of the trains, they stare blankly at me and dive back into the little boxes. It baffles me that they are so uninterested when model railways are so fascinating. Who wouldn't enjoy spending hours playing controller on your own private line?

Yet I must acknowledge that not everyone is as enthusiastic as myself and my grandsons. Indeed, this week, 53-year-old Simon George, who has just unveiled the biggest model railway in Britain, admitted that he had kept quiet about his eight-year labour of love when he met a new girlfriend last year. "Model railways don't have a great reputation," George has said. "I didn't want her to leave me in horror." George revealed that his passion had started in childhood, when as a 12 year-old he used to watch the real trains rumble by. From there it was a short trip across the tracks, as it were, to model railways.

My first memories of trains begin with the miniatures, not the real things. I still dream about my first loco - a really big, yellow beauty. It only went round in a small circle, but I played with it all day. The passion had been ignited and I was never able to resist admiring a new engine or piece of landscaping, even though for much of my early working life there was nowhere to lay out a scenario, at least not permanently.

So my real break came in the 1970s when we moved into a house with a top-floor bedroom - and bingo, the stairs came up in the middle. I was able to thread a double train line around the walls, behind the bed head and through the en suite bathroom. It was a delight. Now we have a rambling house in south-west London with an even more spacious top floor - perfect for the Eurostar to zip along the outside rail while snakier trains can potter round the sharper corners of the inside lines.

Like most enthusiasts, I am a stickler for details. It was a challenge designing the layout and massaging papier-mâché hills and tunnels into shape. Maddeningly, I failed to crack a circular junction that would have allowed me to make a train swing around and run back along the same track. I was told it was easy -just solder in some little cut-out switches. But after a day's work, I threw the whole lot up in the air and settled for turning the trains around manually.

I did a lot of travelling as a correspondent and made a point of picking up a foreign carriage wherever I went. The only problem is that the couplings often vary and I am hopeless at fidgeting with little fittings that need changing. I'm lost in admiration and envy at the complexity and realism of layouts like Simon George's - which cost around £250,000, and features scale models of 30 trains running on 1,500 metres of track to a specific timetable displayed on arrival boards.

For me, nothing can beat the delight of placing my eye at track level and watching the trains rattle towards me. The vision is best when the approaching locomotive is followed by a whole variety of wagons and trucks loaded up by the kids with piles of bits and pieces from the dolls' house that weigh the wagons down and stop them falling off the line. It is hard to explain this obsession. But, for me, it's like sitting in a gallery in front of a fine painting or lying back in an armchair lost in the sound of a Beethoven symphony. Gazing at the comings and goings of the trains and their cargoes is a refreshing source of relaxation and escape.

When I was caught up in inventing graphic ways of illustrating election results, some of the best ideas flashed across my mind in our attic: one of the best was the one-time Tory leader William Hague being tossed around on

a roller-coaster that represented his ups and downs in the opinion polls. It came to me in an inspired moment with my model Pendolino racing along under the rafters.

It remains a mystery to me why my wife, Ann, and all the women in the family have no interest at all in the miniature funfair at the top of the house. They're missing out on a whole world of joy.



'He designed a freight car to send me soap in the bath' - Ann MacMillan

I first realised Peter was a bit over the top about trains when he insisted that our bedroom have a clear space around the walls so that he could install a track and run his model trains around it. He designed a special freight car to send me soap while I was in the bath. Once, when I was making a late-night work call to Canada, the operator asked if I was in a railway station. Peter nearly burst with pride.

When he moved from ITN News to the BBC's *Newsnight* and we crossed London from Islington to south of the Thames, the trains were banished to the loft. Much to my delight, he would disappear upstairs with our three children, but I soon discovered that while he obsessively replaced bits of rail and tinkered with broken carriages, the kids would run riot. Our three-year-old pulled a portable television down on her head without him noticing. Only when I spotted dried blood on her nose did the truth emerge.

Over the years, the number of tracks has increased along with the pile of broken equipment, and Peter's enthusiasm remains undimmed. He likes nothing better than turning on the display panel with its flashing lights and watching hopefully as first one, then two and, very occasionally, three engines pull an assortment of carriages through tunnels, past faded landscapes taped on to the walls, and slowly circle round and round the room.

One unexpected joy is that our grandchildren have not inherited most of their parents' aversion to model trains. They love nothing better than going up to the attic "to play with Grandpa". Perhaps it will inspire them to become engineers - or at the least become a new generation of model railway enthusiasts while keeping Peter busy, too.

Ventnor Station

Andrew Chrysler

Ventnor, on the Isle of Wight, was served by two stations, both in rather inconvenient locations. Ventnor West, which was joined to the Newport - Sandown line at Merstone and was opened in 1900 (the last station to be built on the Island), was some distance away from the town, and plans to extend the line never came to fruition, with the whole line being closed in 1952.

The subject of this article is the rather longer lived station which was the terminus of the line from Ryde, which now terminates two stations earlier, at Shanklin. It was also in an inconvenient location, being on a ledge quarried into the hillside 90 metres above sea level, at the end of a 1.2 Km tunnel. It had a service life almost double that of the other station, being opened in 1866 and closing in 1966. The remainder of the line (Ryde to Shanklin) was electrified. Many Ventnor residents had already started to use the more convenient bus service and the station was demolished in 1970.



Ventnor station had a platform connected to the station buildings, and an island platform. There was only one track between the side platform and the island platform, which was served by neither a footbridge or underpass. When an incoming train arrived at the island platform, passengers were required to cross through the carriages of the train on the inner track. Once this train had departed, a ship's gangway (as used to access the Ryde - Portsmouth steamer) was pushed into place across the gap.



A turntable (later replaced by a three way switch) allowed locomotives to run around their carriages, the tracks merging just before the tunnel mouth, so it was necessary for the locomotive to enter the tunnel to complete the manoeuvre.

Very little now remains, the tunnel portal is still visible (now used by Southern Water which runs pipes through the tunnel), and the site is now occupied by an industrial estate.



Above - Ventnor station in the early 1890's
Below - April 1966 (the last weekend before closure)



And Finally...

Leaves on the line? Island Line can go one better!



Island Echo

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BREAKING: A fallen tree on the railway line at Brading has forced the suspension of Island Line trains this afternoon (Monday).



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TREE ON THE TRACKS FORCES SUSPENSION OF ISLAND LINE