



## NEWSLETTER 112 : Aug 2022

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**Editorial**

**Andrew Chrysler**

I have stumbled across yet another connection between the Isle of Wight and the London Underground. When the Metropolitan Line was electrified in the early 1900's, some of the redundant rolling stock found a new home on the island, and they are still in use today. The distinctive arch top to the carriage doors was a design feature to facilitate opening the doors whilst in a tunnel for evacuation in the event of a breakdown.

While they are no longer mobile or even being used for passenger transport, they have been repurposed as beach huts and were located on the Duver at St. Helens over 90 years ago. The Duver is owned by the National Trust, and occupies land once occupied by the Royal Isle of Wight Golf Club, whose first President was later to become King Edward VII. Read more in the County Press-

<https://www.countypress.co.uk/news/16967980.isle-wights-historic-railway-carriage-beach-huts-centre-redevelopment-discussions/>



*Above - the repurposed railway carriages on the Duver at St Helens, just a couple of minutes from "Baywatch at the Beach" Cafe.*

More about railway carriages being repurposed - this time at Selsey - where there were 50 plots available for £10 a year, with rail coaches being sold for £25-27 at

<https://www.destinationseley.co.uk/heritage/selsey-s-railway-carriage-cottages>

and at <https://www.mwhg.org.uk/the-railway-carriage-houses>

Once we arrived on the Isle of Wight, our first call was to Brading where the station houses a heritage centre and tea room run by local volunteers, George and Vlad. George told me that because the station is grade 2 listed, Network Rail were obliged to lower the trackbed as opposed to raising the platform with steel frames to accommodate the new trains, and when Network Rail wanted to use chain link fencing at the back of the down platform, they were refused consent, and picket fencing had to be erected.

This story was recounted to us with apparent delight, and I was also told of a gentleman who was trying to attract the Stationmaster's attention in the days of steam, when Brading was the junction to the Bembridge line (now

gone) only to be told "Not now - I have three trains in the station to deal with!" Once the trains had been dispatched, the gentleman was still present and he apologised for the interruption at a busy time, saying "I quite understand your problem. I am the Stationmaster at Waterloo"



*Above - Brading Station, showing temporary footbridge (towards camera) and signal box to the rear. The island platform (down platform) also served the Bembridge branch, on a (now lifted) line behind the new white fencing.*

The following day was a Sunday, and we took the opportunity to ride on the class 484 train - 484004 - which was operating an hourly service. First impressions were good, the train was much brighter, more airy and comfortable, and the ride was much smoother, especially over the previously bad section between Sandown and Smallbrook Junction. When the sun came out, we were also grateful for the air conditioning, something that was not present on the previous rolling stock.

I missed the traditional sounds of the doors sliding and banging shut, being replaced by an electronic beep, and the distinctive shrill whistle of the class 483 is also no more, being an unremarkable toot.

Monday's schedule shows a half-hourly train service during the morning and evening peaks, and presently there is no issue with operating this with just two trains running, because Wightlink are only operating one passenger ferry per hour from Portsmouth to Ryde Pier Head. It is the time taken from Brading to the Pier Head and returning that exceeds 30 minutes that would cause an issue, as Tony outlined last month, but until (and indeed if ever) the ferry timetable is increased to two sailings an hour only one train an hour proceeds to the Pier Head, the other terminates at Esplanade and things muddle along well enough for the moment, with the service to Ryde Esplanade being timetabled around 33 minutes after the service to the Pier Head.



*Above - class 484 on Ryde Pier.*

The scheduling problem is caused to some extent by the introduction of revised speed limits on station approaches - most noticeably around Ryde St John's - but late running ferries cannot be accommodated by a late running train due to the knock-on effect on the following services, and passengers have already reported having to walk down the pier because the supposedly connecting train has already left. Perhaps a simple solution would be to introduce a shuttle train from the Pier Head station (where there are already two platforms) to the Esplanade station where passengers could then

connect to the next train or to road transport at the adjoining Bus interchange - which is currently undergoing redevelopment.

Brading station also offers guided tours of the signal box - again given by the volunteers, and as there is currently a temporary footbridge in place while the original (also grade 2 listed) is refurbished, crossing the tracks no longer needs to be done one person at a time. There is no charge for the signal box tours (although a donation is gratefully received) and with cups of tea priced at just £1 it is a great place to spend a few hours.

The one destination that I was unable to visit was "Off The Rails" cafe, which occupies the former station building at Yarmouth. Ah well... perhaps next year.

On the topic of plans going awry, we were due to fly to Canada on Tuesday, to visit family after several years. Firstly we could not fly in 2019 because of my health, then when I had recovered and been able to get travel insurance it was 2020 and again travel was off the cards. On Tuesday morning we checked in with Air Canada, no queues at check in, no queues at security, we were early at the departure gate, and that's when things started to go wrong.

The incoming aircraft was an hour and a half late. No real problem. Then there was a technical issue, maintenance crew required. Another couple of hours passed, then the flight was cancelled. Apparently somebody opened the wrong door and triggered an escape slide. Back through the airport, collecting cases and to a hotel for the night. On Wednesday we were bussed back to the airport to queue for two hours at check-in, only to find that we would not be seated together, we would be routed through Toronto and Vancouver and would only arrive at our destination after 36 hours travelling. That's when we said enough is enough - and that is why I'm now sitting at home writing this editorial (and a letter of complaint to Air Canada). Apparently 38 out of 40 flights from Manchester with Air Canada have been delayed, 27 of them for in excess of 9 hours.

We have rebooked with WestJet for next month - fingers crossed it will go smoothly (or at least smoother than this month). I guess it puts transport chaos caused by bus and train strikes into perspective...

The final paragraph of last month's words has not worked out as anticipated. Calm it may be but neither serene nor in small bites has proved realistic. The opportunity arose to substantially cut back the sycamore tree belonging to the building next door which was beginning to substantially foul our premises. Thanks to Timothy's support on the early Sunday morning we achieved our objective in far less time than anticipated. Without the superbly engineered loppers that Timothy borrowed from his partner we would not have had the reach that we obtained. His lady has a background in Maritime Engineering which is why the loppers were at top specification. Thank you from SMRS. As a bonus our neighbours removed all the debris. They may well take the tree down fully. Two days later we had the bulk of our Exhibition leads and cabling PAT tested courtesy of The BIG Model & Hobby Show. Andrew kindly PAT tested a further box of leads and all our portable electric equipment from kettle and vacuums through to heaters and where accessible layout transformers.

Out of the blue we received a letter from The Arch Co who are the appointed property managers on behalf of Network Rail. They wish to meet us and inspect the premises. Their last visit was in 2017. Normally this would be worrisome. This time we are virtually all prepared in advance – good luck rather than good judgement? Our electrics are all tested, the tree is no longer an issue, the garden looks respectable, and we are pretty tidy. And as a bonus we are working on the 2022 Fire Risk Assessment. The second bonus is that the visit will be carried out by Keith Luty who has been to us twice in the past. When I spoke with him he remembers us well as a low risk tenant. Middle of October has been pencilled in, the exact date to be agreed later. This will be his last visit as retirement beckons. In the meantime we will respond to their shopping list of documentation.

An underlying theme of technology continues. Last week I had an email from Scotrail that their dispute with ASLEF was settled and that 700 services were being restored - the following day. The Scottish angle is interesting as whilst in Kyle of Lochalsh on Sleeper trip I took a call from a lady in Glasgow acting on behalf of HTV Production Company for Channel5 about using our premises for filming a quirky spin off from Antiques Roadshow featuring unusual locations, buildings and items brought by the public. She had found us via the internet then Google Earth. We had two half hour discussions (the

second was from Portree on Skye). The good news is that we are visible, recognised and easily contactable. The not so good news is that our internal room profiles are unsuitable and that the garden requires too much initial work. The lady was excellent to deal with and very proactive. I have agreed that they may retain us on their database should anything else materialise.

The final Scottish and technology mention for this month is that Scottish Power has sent us a nasty unwelcome bill. For some years they have been chaotic in communication and administration. This is a whole saga being looked at within the Committee. We have complained and with one positive immediate outcome which is that they are replacing our current meter with a Smart Meter on 12<sup>th</sup> August.

On the modelling front work continues steadily upstairs. These are important - nay vital activities as the lifeblood of SMRS. We have our Exhibition coming up in November and an appearance at The BIG Model & Hobby Show on 06<sup>th</sup> August and Wigan at the beginning of October. Next May will be our 50<sup>th</sup>. During August our minds now need to focus towards these. And of course the sheds/garden conundrum.....

Your committee met on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> July 2022. The minutes of the meeting will not be circulated until September. A number of important decisions have been taken and it is worth bringing them to the attention of the members before September.

**FIRE**

A key for the front door has been hung on a hook on the front door. This is not to be removed. Members should ensure that they lock the door when they come in, and do not leave the key in the lock. In the unlikely event of a fire they can leave immediately and use the key on the front door, rather than hunting around for their own key, if not immediately to hand.

Once outside 999 is to be called. Smoke is the killer so **GET OUT**.

Members are also no doubt aware that there is a fire exit at the rear of the building.

**LONE WORKING**

Members who come in and find they are working on their own at the clubhouse are asked to WhatsApp the group they are there and WhatsApp when they leave. This is to try and ensure that no one is taken ill in the building and does not get help for some time.

This applies only if the member is lone working. Anyone dropping in for a few minutes is asked simply to record their attendance in the usual way in the book.

**OWN PROPERTY**

Will members please ensure that if they bring tools or models to the club they take them back home. This is to try and ensure that members personal property is not mislaid.



## **Where's Andrew?**

Last month, I was at Port de Soller, Mallorca. The photograph showed the Tranvia de Soller, a 3ft gauge tramway line which first opened in 1913 and links the port to the town of Soller, 3 miles away, where it links with the Ferrocarril de Soller which links the town to the Mallorcan capital, Palma, 17 miles away. Congratulations to Frank Parkinson who answered correctly (and did so in about one hour from the newsletter being emailed). Honourable mention for the correct answer also goes to Tony Kuivala.

This month, I am back in the UK, at a Funicular Railway. Did you know that "funicular" derives its origin from the Latin "funiculus" meaning rope? Fortunately rope is no longer used, steel cables being substantially stronger - and far more reassuring for passengers. Most cliff railways are on the coast, but this one is unusual in having an inland location. But where am I?



## **The 2022 Sleeper Trip - Back to a sort of normal.      Derek Pratt**

After a pandemic-ravaged couple of years, it has been a relief to get back to somewhere approaching normality, although I am aware that 'normal' is a term with some very flexible meanings. None more so than the Annual Sleeper Trip, which didn't happen in 2020 and happened in biannual form in 2021. This year we were back to the once-a-year format, and all the better for it, in my opinion. The fact that I didn't make either expedition last year was a source of regret, so I was looking forward to getting back on the trail again this year.

Before we start, a memo to self. Don't leave booking a sleeper trip, particularly the accommodation, until April, and don't plan to be away over a bank holiday. Particularly the Platinum Jubilee version, as everything will be booked up. By March. Otherwise much stress will ensue, threatening to put a damper on expectations of a smooth, trouble-free rail-based excursion.

In the event, we did manage to secure what were quite probably the very last rooms in the whole of the Western Isles, and there were no transport failures to speak of. How we manage to achieve the latter year after year is a mystery to me, as each trip brings with it a new set of eminently missable connections and entirely feasible last-minute cancellations. Even the Great Citylink Omnibus Disappearance of 2011, when a bus service abandoned a stop in Kyleakin in its haste to cross the Skye Bridge before bandits overran it, caused us only minor inconvenience. And as for the Great Southern Train Failure of 2004, we dodged that one by re-routing via Crewe, and scored free beers from the restaurant car to boot.

For the 2022 trip five of us started in the traditional manner with the journey from Liverpool Lime St to London Euston, with two more programmed to join at Kyle of Lochalsh. Departure was preceded by what is in danger of also becoming traditional, namely a visit to a Wetherspoons, to get in the party mood before boarding our reserved seats in a fairly empty carriage. An uneventful run, punctuated by free refreshment appropriate for our first-class status, saw us arrive on time, ready for proper eating at the Doric Arch, a hostelry of some renown just outside a rather damp Euston station.



This time we made no attempt to sample any additional delights of the metropolis (have we run out of them already?) but headed straight for the sleeper awaiting us on Platform 2.



For those unfamiliar with the genre, the two-berth cabins are bijou to say the least, but now have the significant benefit of being en-suite. No more padding half-asleep along a narrow swaying corridor to the end-of-coach facilities, which may or may not have suffered from the attentions of previous occupants. The price paid is a reduction in luggage space from very little to pretty much nil.

We had been promised fine weather for the duration, and the initial scenery offerings did not disappoint. Surveying the Highlands in the fresh, low-angled light of a summer morning is one of the highlights of Scottish sleeper routes, particularly if a salmon-based breakfast is being consumed contemporaneously. At Inverness we somehow found another Wetherspoons for a second breakfast, followed by a stroll down to the river, always a pleasing aspect irrespective of the time or season.

The train ride to Kyle of Lochalsh, one of only two a day following recent 'timetable revisions', continued the scenic theme, and likewise was in a near-empty carriage. Apparently a tour company had booked most of the seats but their tourists had failed to turn up. One wondered what had happened to them - perhaps attacked at the Culloden Visitor Centre by a rampaging band of Highlanders, fully armed, kilted and determined to

avenge the defeat of 1746. Or maybe stranded in Brigadoon after staying slightly too long in that one-day-in-a-century mystical village. Whatever their fate, we enjoyed the mountain vistas and the extra legroom in equal measure.

After checking in at the Kyle Hotel, we set out to explore the village environs, including the harbour and the newly-discovered micro gin distillery. For licensing reasons this latter attraction offered free tastings but little in the way of sales opportunities. However coffee and cake was available, so all was not lost. Noticeably lacking was the railway museum, despite some prominent signage, no doubt a victim of the Covid closures. We had already identified the absence of any attempt to promote the local tourist attractions on the train, normally a feature of this line, sometimes even with a running commentary from a somewhat over-enthusiastic guide person. We dined in the hotel, as it seemed the simplest option.

Next day it dawned warmish and sunnyish, so we ventured across the Skye bridge by bus to the small village of Kyleakin, just opposite. After a reviving coffee on the waterfront we paid our respects at the local war memorial, noting the many and splendid views all round, and then embarked on the return journey, this time on foot. The walk over the bridge was spectacular, only slightly marred by the vehicular traffic which insist on sharing it with us.

Back on the eastern shore we late-lunched on assorted seafood at a harbour takeaway before splitting up for afternoon rest, souvenir shopping or just mooching around, one of my specialist subjects. We again dined in the hotel, neatly avoiding any complex decision-making on where else to try.

Day four saw us back on the Skye bus again, this time to Portree, which according to the Visitscotland website is 'a bustling port and a thriving cultural centre'. Well it certainly bustled, with every café and souvenir shop busy and every ice-cream vendor doing profitable business. And there was culture too, with a young piper serenading innocent tourists on the waterfront and an evening all-comers ceilidh in the town square. Regrettably two of our number felt compelled to join in the latter event, but true to the open-minded inclusive nature of our trip, their names are not mentioned here. It is however safe to record that Fiona and Tony enjoyed a wildlife sea cruise, the highlight of which was a sea eagle taking advantage of a free



lunch thoughtfully provided by the boat's skipper. Clearly some form of inter-species business agreement had been struck, to the advantage of all parties.

The evening meal was largely fish-related at the yellow-painted Seabreezes restaurant on the quayside, right next to the Pink House where five of us were accommodated, and very close to the Rosedale Hotel, where Pat and Mick were staying but which could only muster a plain white frontage. We were assured that the inside was more multi-coloured.



Next day we had a leisurely start, as the bus to Uig was not due until lunchtime. We spent the morning exploring the environs of the town, noting the quality of the maritime views and of the weather, which was unrelentingly sunny. Apparently it has been wet and windy ever since, evidence that, as in so many tourist events, timing is of the essence. The bus turned up on time and after a half-hour's drive through varied and scenic landscapes it deposited us at Uig ferry terminal. Upgrade works were in progress, so a pair of minibuses were on hand, manned by a pair of taxi-drivers grateful for an extended contract which didn't involve any tedious touting for business, or even much actual driving. After being shepherded through the cones, barrier tape and assorted hi-vis-jacketed

workers we were deposited at the bottom of the ferry's quite long and quite steep boarding ramp. At the top of tis final obstacle we presented the appropriate number of tickets and boarding passes to a seaman who cheerfully disregarded all such tedious paperwork and ushered us on board.



After a good quarter-century of assorted sleeper trips I have acquired a few modest preferences regarding where we go and what we do. Calmac ferries, whatever their size or destination, are pretty well up the list. This applied particularly on a day like Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> June 2022, when careful scanning of the sky was needed to spot what few clouds there were, and equally rigorous examination of the sea, preferably with a suitable optical instrument, was rewarded with glimpses of what might possibly be dolphins. With the eye of faith, as Fiona remarked.



Lochamaddy is a tranquil and scenic introduction to the delights of the Hebrides, where the sea is crystal-clear and the seaweed a riot of more shades of green and brown than one might think could realistically exist without merging into an amorphous blob of colour. However our priority was the bus connection, as we were some distance from our overnight accommodation and the day was well on. An enquiry at the ferry service

desk gave us some hopeful reassurance that the required service would materialise, bolstered further by the presence of another potential passenger, who might just be a North Uist resident rather than another optimistic tourist.

Almost on time a minibus appeared in the distance, but kept us on tenterhooks for far longer than we would have wished, with the driver keen to engage a bystander in a detailed conversation about something evidently of keen interest to them both. Eventually however she drew up alongside and issued us with brisk instructions on how to open the sliding door, where to pay, how to pay and where to sit. Once fully compliant, we were whisked along what passes for main transport arteries in this part of the world, sometimes spotting as many as two other vehicles at the same time, until our destination at Balivanich, a small village on the island of Benbecula. There is a causeway, in case you were wondering.

As well as housing stock that was clearly ex-military, the village boasted a supermarket, a hospital and an airport, so we were not going to be lacking in essential comforts. We just needed to find the Airbnb where five of us were staying. The remaining two, Pat and Mick (again) were moved across to another waiting minibus to complete the journey to their accommodation, a proper hotel no less. For the rest of us, finding the right house in such a small place as Balivanich was more difficult than it might have been, but eventually we located both it and the box holding the all-important front door key. Inside was a comfortable residence that the two occupiers (adult female and male teenager) had clearly vacated only very recently.

After settling in and exchanging pleasantries with the owner (male) who called in briefly to see what sort of guests he had invited into his house, thoughts turned to an evening meal. Richard had booked us into the local bistro, this being a) a suitable restaurant we could all enjoy and b) the only eating-place for several miles around. We elected to walk rather than try to book a taxi. It was further than it looked on the map, but not disastrously so, the evening was fine and it helped to work up an appetite. Charlie's Bistro lived up to expectations, with the bonus that the owner offered to run us home in his Alfa Romeo rather than allow us to suffer the indignity of a taxi. Apparently he was intending to buy a minibus for such duties, to encourage the island's residents to patronise his establishment free of

transport worries, and possibly also to keep the riff-raff out of his posh wheels.



Next morning it dawned fine and sunny (again) so we elected to explore the nearby beach, which despite not being sandy had a quality of pebble and seaweed not found in more southerly examples of the genre. No doubt the winter gales had something to do with this. Back at the house, we packed up in a somewhat leisurely fashion, to the extent that we were still in occupation when the two occupiers returned to reclaim their rightful abode and start on any essential cleaning before carrying on with their lives. After exchanging pleasantries we left them to their labours, and set out for the airport.



Fortunately this was nearer than the previous night's eating-house, but as we drew near we were a little concerned to see a pair of fire engines leave their parking place and roar off along the runway. Just an exercise, we told ourselves. We met up with the aforementioned Pat and Mick (strange how we kept running into them), checked in without incident, observed the fire engines returning unscathed by heat or smoke, and settled down to wait for departure time. The security staff however could not settle, and took a mischievous delight in selecting random passengers for baggage search.



Nothing of consequence was found, which must have been a big disappointment to them. The flight itself was uneventful, and would have been exceptionally scenic, given the height of flight and the prevailing weather, but I didn't have a window seat. Assurances from other passengers that this was the case only partly made up for it.

Glasgow airport was a parting of the ways, with only a subset of the group taking the bus to Paisley station, the train to Glasgow Central and another train to Preston for Southport and Ormskirk. All-in-all a most satisfactory adventure, with proper sleeper-tripping firmly back on the map, much smugness about the weather, and plans already being hatched for next year.

A link to more images of the trip:

<https://www.railwaygardener.co.uk/Sleeper-trips/The-trips/2022-Kyle-Skye-Benbecula>

### **And Finally...**

