



NEWSLETTER 111 : July 2022

Newsletter Editor : Andrew Chrysler

Email apc253@gmail.com

Editorial

Andrew Chrysler

There has often been an Isle of Wight flavour to our newsletter - so much so that people could be mistaken in the belief that I was editing the MRS newsletter of Southampton, not Southport. From the outset, in July 2020, the "Where's Andrew?" photo came from the Island, and since then, we have followed the trials and tribulations of the rebuilding of Island Line, the last days in service of the Class 483 and the beginnings of preservation for several of these pre-WW2 trains.

In January 2021, I reported on what - at the time - appeared to be welcome news for commuters on the Isle of Wight, with the delivery of the first of the Class 484 trains. It appears that I was over-optimistic, and on my visit to the Island in August of that year I was not able to try the new trains due to the re-engineering of the line taking longer than planned, together with software problems on the new trains adding to the list of woes. The saga is still not yet at an end, despite four of the 5 trains entering service, as the platform superstructure on Ryde Pier is apparently "time expired" and in need of urgent works, which will necessitate the closure of the line north of Ryde Esplanade for several months.

Stirring into the pot the threat of forthcoming strike action and I'm not at all confident that I will be able to use the Island Line later this month. At least we can take comfort in the fact that Merseyrail is not the only train operator experiencing difficulties putting new trains into service.

In a bid to widen the geographical spread of my editorial efforts - and to visit family that we haven't seen for a few years - I shall soon be heading to Canada (Manchester Airport permitting) where, as well as visiting family in Indian Head, we will be spending a couple of nights in Moose Jaw (why don't we have place names like these in England?).



Trains in Canada are primarily used for freight, and we have in previous years waited for what seems like almost half an hour at the level crossings leading to Indian Head from the Trans-Canadian highway while a cargo train passed. Cargo trains in Canada can measure up to 3700 metres in length (4200 metres on certain routes) To accurately portray this even in "N" gauge would require 25 metres of rolling stock - so it would be rather a squeeze, even on the clubroom's top floor layout! The cargo train in question was double headed, with two additional "intermediate" locomotives located part way along the train, and so I have resolved to never again complain while waiting at the level crossing on Portland Street.

I was composing last month's words when two and now three interlocked themes took a hold. I went to Oxford for the Tramway & Light Railway Annual General Meeting at Oxford Bus Museum on Saturday 14th May. Mr Google told me it was 182 miles each way by road. So I booked very efficiently and effectively with Trainline. Off Southport at 0730 which meant up at 0600ish, and into Oxford at 1113 in time to catch a special heritage Guy bus to the Museum in the old Goods yard at Long Hanborough Station, 8 miles west of Oxford on Cotswolds line, first station west from Oxford.

Just before I left home I checked my email to find a note from Trainline at 0236 that the Avanti train I was to take from Wigan to Wolverhampton was cancelled due to no crew. So I went an hour later missing the heritage bus. There was a handy train to Long Hanborough for a derisory £3.20 return which I bought at Southport. Got down Ok and returned OK, albeit 20 mins late off Oxford and right through to Wigan. The first thought is that technology is wonderful. How did we do without it? The message is not so clear cut. I applied online to Avanti for delay compensation. Within two hours they rejected my submission, sending me a full print out lifted from my Trainline Booking reference of my trains. The train from Wigan had run after all. The Cross Country service was two mins early into Oxford. Not everything is sweetness and light.

This leads to a second thought. Timetabling is very intense these days. There are more trains and connections. 50 years ago I could not have got to Oxford before mid afternoon. As Scotrail prepared to cull 700 daily services last month I was sent their revised timetables the week before. Fortunately no last minute changes were required for Sleeper Trip. An item in one of my magazines about timetabling caught my eye about Summer Services in 1966 finishing on 04th September. The 2022 date for next Service alterations starts on 11th December! Back in good old days (we all remember them) you could ring up via pay phone (or your office phone) or go into a station. Both involved queues. From 18th April 1966 all BR Timetables ran from 18th April through to 05th March. If you bought the Regional Annual ones you could apply in person at stations for one of the three chunky updates, July, September and December. In 1972 Western, Eastern and Midland Regions cut their services by about 40% in Autumn as new faster trains were being introduced! Life was harder then, much easier now.

The pace of change is getting swifter. The above is only an illustration. There is more. Virgin added two coaches to their Pendolino from 2012. These created two additional Second Class coaches for non reserved seats. This was in response to leisure traffic increases. These 11 coach units are now being refurbished and remodelled following changing traffic demands post Covid. One of the four first class coaches is remodelled (demoted) to Standard Premium and one of the Second Class remodelled up to Standard Premium. In Standard Premium you get First Class roomy seats without any catering. The market for ordinary First is well down and not recovering except on the really busy trains. Second Class regularly gets packed so there is a market for comfort at enhanced fares. Three units are already in service. Avanti are also trialling new passenger counting techniques on 6 units so they can be speedier in response to changing times. We got caught up in this when booking Sleeper Ticketing. There is a flaw in technology. The Avanti website said no First Class tickets were available; I booked the same ones on Trainline. You win some, you lose some.

The third thought is that nothing ever stays the same. You may have seen that PECO is moving into a new range of TT:120 Track and Accessories. Announcement appeared on YouTube. Back in the late 1950's a school friend of mine had a TT set. It was wonderful. Easy to set up, took less space and was both realistic and robust. Is a new revolution with us? Only time will tell.

Some ominous news is reaching me about pending operational issues on the Isle of Wight. DfT have realised that a 30 minute frequency cannot be provided with two trains as the passing loop at Brading is not in the middle of the line. Three units will be required but with long dwells in Brading Loop. The number of drivers and guards is increasing from 9 to 13. Our Editor may know more.....

And back in Portland Street all is calm and serene progress in small bites. We are in a holiday period which is reducing our numbers. When we are all refreshed we can leap ahead once more.

Secretary's Notes

Timothy Cascoyne

Timothy has told me that there is very little to report this month, so he will wait for next month's issue.

- Ed

Where's Andrew?

Last month I was in Skagway, Alaska. The railway was the White Pass and Yukon Route, nicknamed locally as the "Wait Patiently and You'll Ride". A "gold rush" town, Skagway once boasted that it had more houses of ill repute than it had bars! The reason behind this curious fact was that every saloon had "girls" in the upstairs rooms, and there was also a temperance bar with similar facilities for the few non-drinkers in town.

This month, I am again abroad, but where am I? (or - to be precise - where was I in May 2016?)



In these uncertain times, it's a brave person who decides to do a new thing, with no guarantee of success and some potentially unpleasant consequences if it all goes wrong. The thing of which I write is the Llangollen Garden Railway Festival, held for the first time last month in Llangollen, which was a happy coincidence. With the show postponed twice because of Covid, the organisers must have wondered whether they should have just accepted that it was not to be, and reverted to the potting shed for some therapeutic railway modelling.

Fortunately Keith Potts and his crew were made of sterner Welsh stuff, and persevered with the project. Their chosen location was the Llangollen Pavilion, a sort of half-tent half-function hall on the outskirts of the town. It has impressive credentials, being both a World Heritage Site and the home of the Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod, complete with real Druids. In truth it looked a bit strange, but no doubt it grows on you. The show occupied both halves, although by some quirk of risk assessment the two sections were accessed only by going out and coming back in again, the stairs being judged too hazardous for the railway public. We were in the tent, which was a light and airy structure contrasting favourably with the somewhat smaller and darker hall.

Who 'we' were became a somewhat variable factor. It all started well, with a quorum of four operators assembled without undue difficulty to operate my end-to-end-with-turntables layout *Kingsdown Roads*. Perhaps inevitably, things then went rapidly downhill on the personal front. One acquired an untimely medical appointment and another discovered they had double-booked the exhibition with a foreign holiday. That the latter should take precedence over the former is a sad reflection of modern social values. I would have done the same, almost certainly. Fortunately there were back-ups in the wings, and two more were promptly recruited to fill the gap. Then Covid struck a double blow, and there were just two of us left standing, myself and a young student named Tom from somewhere out on Greater Manchester's dark side. And as I was the sole remaining driver, it was immediately clear that the layout of choice was a non-starter for travel, and realistically for operation as well. Someone has to twizzle those turntables...

A rapid re-think was required, and I sat on the bench in the garden and re-thought rapidly. Pulling out altogether was one option, but I was loath to leave a hole in the exhibition manager's carefully-crafted layout plan, version 15, and anyway I did want to see this newborn event for myself. I even had a few trinkets I wished to purchase, nothing major, honest. The other option was to take a different, smaller layout that would fit in one car and could be operated by two people. And lo, one such item existed, namely *Pendlebury Fold*, an end-to-end shunting layout I had built during lockdown to run some wagons donated to the West Lancashire Light Railway. A phone call to Keith confirmed he was happy with the switch - he had little choice really.

Fortunately the replacement layout had been exhibited at West Lancs only a few days before, and was therefore in a reasonably fit condition. The considerable time invested in fettling *Kingsdown Roads* would not be wasted, as it has its card marked for appearance at the Corris exhibition in August, when only the best performance will do.

Llangollen, as I'm almost sure you are aware, is in North Wales, which some might consider to be Abroad. Fortunately there is as yet no requirement for passports on crossing the border, or we might never have got in, such are the current delays courtesy of HM Passport Office. However the Wirral has its own version of border control, in the form of the Wallasey Tunnel, or to be more specific the new, improved way of paying the toll to use it. For many years I have been accustomed to driving up to the toll booth and flinging assorted coins into a metal basket. This managed promptly to collect, identify, sort and count said legal tender and, if satisfied as to both its quality and quantity, to instruct the barrier to briefly raise to the near-vertical. Real human attendants were on hand to provide both change and helpful advice, as required.

Now however you are encouraged to sign up to an online account, which you top up with funds and which the system drains down whenever its cameras think a vehicle registration number matches the one you have helpfully given it. I duly set up my account, which required submission of several documents proving that I existed, had the correct name, drove the right car and lived at the designated address. This last item was crucial, as it entitled

me to a useful discount on the toll I was looking forward to paying, being a resident of Liverpool City Region, whatever that is.

All this was completed only on the morning of departure, with a helpful note added that I could start using the system after 30 minutes. Some two hours later we approached ground zero with some trepidation, wondering if we were to suffer the embarrassment of being denied access to the tunnel, with much haranguing of officialdom and much honking of horns from vehicles behind us. In the event, all was well, Big Brother graciously approved of our passage and raised the barrier just high enough and for just long enough for us to slide underneath, grateful that we weren't towing a trailer that might get entangled with the descending metal pole.

Predictably, our arrival with a different layout confused the steward who greeted us, and he was a bit vague as to where we should find our allocated layout space. Eventually we came upon it, right in the middle of the tent and with plenty of room around it for the hordes of admiring visitors we confidently expected would accumulate come showtime. Setting up *Pendlebury Fold* is relatively quick, so we had time to do a reconnaissance of the other attractions before adjourning to the Hand Hotel. Conscious of the need for alertness and energy the next day, we turned in early, after a fish and chip supper and a short stroll around the town.

After a definitely-no-lunch-required breakfast we returned to the venue, negotiating the road works and three-way traffic lights that the local council had helpfully placed at the bridge over the River Dee, and prepared to do battle. Happily, the event went off with no dramas and plenty of visitors, not a few of whom seemed to appreciate our efforts to run the layout as if we had been doing it for years. Some expressed concern at the lack of robust barriers at either end of the main line, to deter runaway locos from launching themselves over the edge into an abyss that any director of train-disaster films would have been proud of. The fact that said engines were fitted with slow-running flywheels did not assuage the worry, so I may have to modify the layout to minimise spectator stress levels, at the expense of prototypical accuracy. Also a comment by Tom that I could fit another baseboard in the car prompted the thought that extending the layout by a couple of feet at either end would give a little more room for

wagon-shunting, not to mention additional opportunities for scenic modelling. And I know where I can get the plywood for free...

Shows like this fulfil the important function of bringing together people who otherwise can only make somewhat impersonal contact by email, text, Whatsapp or the new-fangled electric telephone. By this criterion alone, the show was a big success, with much informal chat interspersed with the serious business of buying railway goods. Faces are put to names, old acquaintances are renewed and new identities added to the ever-growing mobile phone directory. And being a new show in a new location, a good number of contacts were novel ones, with modellers taking advantage of not having to travel so far to actually appear in person. However this does depend on where you live in the first place. Nevertheless a number of comments were heard along the lines of 'the Peterborough show is just too far for me, but I can get here quite easily'.

As a postscript, I received a phone call from the organiser shortly after the show, to advise that the Editor of Garden Rail, in his infinite and unquestionable wisdom, had decreed that not only the exhibition was officially open but also that *Pendlebury Fold* was his second-favourite layout there. Perhaps next year *Kingsdown Roads* can go one better?





Photo: Tom Reeds operating his Mamod Boulton on the layout, closely watched by Jonathan Day from the Merseyside 16mm group.

The birth of 00 scale?

I came across this on the internet on the World of Railways website. However, there did not seem to be any source reference, so it is probably better labelled as "source unknown". Ian Shulver

The most common gauge of track used on model railways in the UK has an interesting history, here's how it was created...

In the early 20th century, many models for the British market were built to O gauge standards of 1:43 scale or 7mm:1ft. Though popular at the time, houses of the 1920s and 1930s were becoming smaller, the average living room measuring 16.01 sq.m. with an average of 3.21 bedrooms. Model railways remained within the preserve of the wealthy, but with smaller houses becoming more popular, a change of scale was required that would make building a model railway an achievable ambition in the average British house.

Launched in 1921 as 'The Table Railway', the first OO (Double-O) scale model railway system was to revolutionise the affordability and accessibility of railway models. A year later, in 1922, the first models of British prototypes appeared. There was a problem, however, because the clockwork mechanisms wouldn't fit inside the models. Many railways in Europe and North America run on the same 4ft 8 1/2in gauge track as established in Britain by the early railway pioneer George Stephenson, though the distance around the tracks to such objects as bridges, walls and tunnel ceilings (known as the loading gauge) was far more generous. This allowed continental locomotives to be wider and taller than their British counterparts.

If British models were to run on the same 16.5mm gauge track as their continental counterparts, the body shells would be smaller and the larger motors and gear mechanisms of the time would struggle to fit inside. Rather than make the model track wider and increase the scale of the entire model, the solution was found to be a compromise. By keeping the track gauge the same and increasing the size of the body shells from 1:87 (the common European scale) to 1:76, the motors and gear mechanisms of the era would fit without being on show.

Despite the advances in motor technology, the over-scale body shells have remained in the UK, a standard that modellers have come to expect and commonly refer to as OO gauge. The 4mm:1ft scale also refers to OO gauge modelling, where a foot measurement in real life depicts 4mm in model form, as does 1:76, the ratio at which a real model should be reduced in size to depict an object in OO gauge. Track in OO gauge is set at a distance of 16.5mm between rails. Some modellers have sought to widen the gauge of the tracks to provide a more prototypical appearance, EM gauge being the most common with a track gauge of 18.2mm. P4 gauge at 18.83mm is to dead scale.

It was in the 1970's that a road collapse in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, Canada, uncovered the existence of tunnels that had been effectively whitewashed from public knowledge by the local authority. Originally built in the early 1900's for steam pipes, they were used by Chinese immigrants to escape persecution and to shelter illegal immigrants from the "Head Tax" (1885-1923). The tunnels passed underneath the buildings along Main Street and Canadian Pacific goods sheds, and proved invaluable to bootleggers during Prohibition in the United States, who aided by the Chinese stored illegal alcohol in the tunnels before continuing their train journey to Chicago, and earning the town of Moose Jaw the sobriquet "Little Chicago".



The Soo Line runs from Western Canada to the Eastern coast of the United States, with Chicago about 1100 miles from Moose Jaw, and it was an open secret among residents that notorious gangsters including Al Capone and Diamond Jim Brady passed through their sleepy town. Although Capone asserted in Court that "Do I do business with Canadian racketeers? I don't

even know what street Canada is on” many Moose Jaw residents tell about ancestors’ encounters including a dentist who removed Capone’s wisdom teeth and a barber who was called to cut the gangster’s hair. Of course, there is no conclusive proof, but I would ask the reader to judge which account is more credible. In any case, Capone’s grand-niece confirmed that he had been in Moose Jaw before his 1931 arrest for tax evasion, and there is no question that the Soo Line was a prime conduit for Canadian Booze entering the United States during Prohibition.

The Tunnels of Moose Jaw now operates as a tourist attraction, offering two tours, one touring the underground dormitories of the Chinese immigrants who mostly worked in local laundries and the other concentrating on their use during prohibition. Naturally considerable artistic licence is used in dramatising this story, but the basis of the tale lies firmly rooted in fact, and rather appropriately, Moose Jaw station now houses an off licence.



