



NEWSLETTER 99 : July 2021

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Editorial

I have tentative progress to report from the Lesley Road Circular Railway, the first curve of track has been laid and ballasted by our gardener, who is considerably more agile than me. Progress has admittedly been slow, because railway works have had to fit amongst pruning, weeding and all those other jobs that he was originally hired to do by the (dare I say) Management, but I think that he (and his daughter) are enjoying the challenge.



On the Isle of Wight, the first two Class 484 two-car sets have been delivered (484001 and 484004), and 001 has passed through Ryde Tunnel, pushed by a Unimog because the track current is off, while 002 and 003 are being tested between Eastleigh and Botley, so that

implies that the software issue is on its way to being resolved.

I will be visiting the Island in mid August, so if the trains are running, you can expect a report (no surprise there) and I hope to also report on the preservation of two of the old Class 483 units. 483007, which ran on the last day of service on 3rd January is now in "Train Story" at the Isle of Wight



Steam Railway, while 483004, which was withdrawn from service in 2019 and subsequently cannibalised for parts and vandalised while at Ryde has now been delivered to "House of Chili" at Hale Common where there are plans to convert it into a cafe, so there is enough to keep me occupied even if the "new" Island Line trains are not running.

(Photo - James Pilbeam)

I'm off on my travels again (so will be absent from a couple of "Zoom" meetings, and again my destination remains strictly on a "need to know" basis, to allow for more "Where's Andrew?" photographs, but I can disclose that one of the places that I visited last month was Barry Island (what is it about me and islands?) and a short article in this month's newsletter has been the result.

It just remains to express my thanks to all those who replied when I made an appeal for articles - the newsletter was looking barer than Mother Hubbard's cupboard but you came to my rescue! Please continue to submit anything, words, pictures, maybe even recipes? Next month will be our 100th newsletter, and it would be nice to make it something of a bumper issue (but probably not 100 pages.)

Chairman's Notes

Ian Shulver

Well. It looks as though we will have to wait another month before we can start to have a proper face to face club meeting. Whilst abiding with government guidelines, a few members have been going to the club to do some tidying up as well as finishing off repairing the shed roof. Over the last eighteen months or so we have amassed a significant amount of model railway items which were cluttering up the lounge and needed to be sorted. Some of the items could only be described as rubbish (it was even debatable whether the tip would take them), but there was a reasonable amount of material that could be used by the club or sold on. Over the next few weeks the 'better' items will be priced and listed with club members having the opportunity to purchase at favourable rates before being offered to the public at our autumn show (if we are allowed one). The income from which makes a useful addition to our bank balance and so helps to keep the subscription as low as it is.

You may very well have seen in the press that Avanti West Coast recently made an attempt to break the speed record between London and Glasgow which has stood for 36 years at 3 hours 52 minutes and 40 seconds, at an average speed of 103.4mph and was made by an APT. Despite the best efforts and meticulous planning between Avanti and Network Rail for this record attempt, it failed by a mere 21 seconds. However, the Class 390 Pendolino did manage to beat the previous Pendolino record (set in 2006) by almost 2 ½ minutes. I assume the record would have been broken if the train crew had not had to stop to take a lateral flow test before arrival in Glasgow!

So far this month, I have done absolutely no modelling. I am still awaiting my double slip points and cannot really do much more until at least one of these appears. Hattons have assured me that my order has not been lost. I did wonder whether I could start fitting point motors (I think I have made the decision to go for standard solenoid ones) but could really do with ensuring that everything works before the delicate task of installing and adjusting them and their associated frog switches. I did, however, toy with the idea of making my own double slip but would really need some code 80 flat bar and copper clad strip for this task. I do have a good supply of code 40 which I have used to make 2mm finescale points (including a slip) but

this is not much good. Perhaps I should revert to doing some more work on the Palace Hotel model.

In a few days time we will be making our first foray outside the immediate environs of Southport in over 18 months, mostly due to Covid but to some extent due to my eyesight. We are off to Saltash and since I am still not confident about driving we will be taking the train and I have to say I am really looking forward to the section past Dawlish Warren and comparing actuality with our club layout of Shell Cove. No doubt we will have a walk from my sister-in-law's house to view the splendour of Brunel's bridge.

That's it for this month folks. Hopefully, by the time I write my next Chairman's note we will have had at least a couple of face-to-face club nights.

Secretary's Notes

Jim Ford

Another month goes by and the lockdown continues – and C19 cases are on the rise again. Let us hope that the vaccination programmes get it under control before the dreaded Indian Delta variant spreads further and hopefully will enable the club to return to some semblance of normal.

I have continued working on improving the PW on my garden railway and the arrival of the rain was greeted with some relief hereabouts as I have been carefully nursing along a number of creeping thyme plants on the edge of the railway. It was nice to see Colin and Andrew who joined us for last Tuesday's Open running session, the last one before the short one week break for our abbreviated sleeper trip to Cornwall, where we expect to visit the narrow gauge Bodmin and Wadebridge section of British Railways Southern Region, hosted by Nick Wood, a former Chairman of our club around 45 years ago!

In preparation for our journey I crept out onto Merseyrail on Monday and Northern on Thursday, the first time on a 'normal' train since March 2020. I also tried out successfully my new electric bicycle to get to the station and the '40' bus. There was only one other passenger on the bus and less than twenty passengers on each train, which is a bit of a contrast with times past when both were crammed. And Northern provided a more than passable presentation of a proper train with a 156/150 four coach set in each

direction – far cry from the days of old when we were rammed into an unspeakably awful Pacer unit.

Whilst we are away (3 members accompanied by two wives), we hope to ride the Bodmin and Wenford Railway once more and to visit the Steam Museum in that Swindon place where our member Malcolm lives, and in the case of Fiona and I to return home via Oxford to visit our daughter.

Once we know that we are able to hold a proper meeting face to face, then we need to hold our AGM, probably in early August.

Where's Andrew?

Last month I was at the Evesham Vale Light Railway, which is a 15 inch gauge line extending for just over a mile opened in 2002 at Evesham Country Park.

Back to standard gauge this month, where I am at a display featuring the locomotive "Woolmer" which was originally used for training soldiers at the Longmoor Military Railway. The display is within a relatively modern museum, but where am I?

Hint- the museum cafe is named "The Rooftop Cafe" and can be seen to the back of these photographs, but actually its name is something of a misnomer, as it is actually at street level adjacent to the museum entrance.



Southport, Sand, Glass and Pilkington

Ian Shulver

Back in May, at the beginning of lockdown, Tony gave a short slide show, titled 'A Circular Tour', which started and ended in Southport but went via Rainford and the Churnet Valley. Some of the photographs he showed brought back memories and so I thought it would be interesting to add a little more flesh to some of those slides. However, this did involve me embarking on a little research, mainly via the internet.

But first some background. I am a geologist by profession, graduating in 1969, with my first, and only, employer being Pilkington Brothers Ltd (as was called then). I frequently travelled between my normal place of work (the research laboratories at Lathom) and St Helens and on these trips, I noticed that many of the fields, particularly around Rainford and the Westhead/Bickerstaffe boundary, contained one or more bucket excavators extracting something from the ground and loading it into small narrow gauge wagons hauled by equally diminutive locomotives. The something was, of course, sand to be used in Pilkington's glass-making operation in St Helens. This was a feature of the area until the late 70's when the operation ceased. It is to my great regret that at this time my interest in railways has not really been awakened and so I have no photographs recording this sand winning operation, the miniature railways, or any of the accompanying infrastructure – only my imperfect memory.



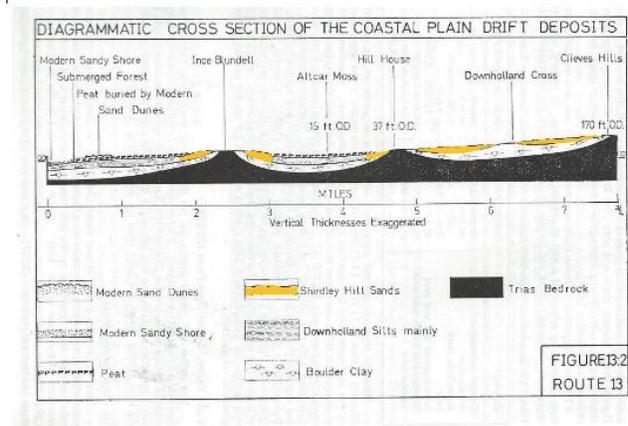
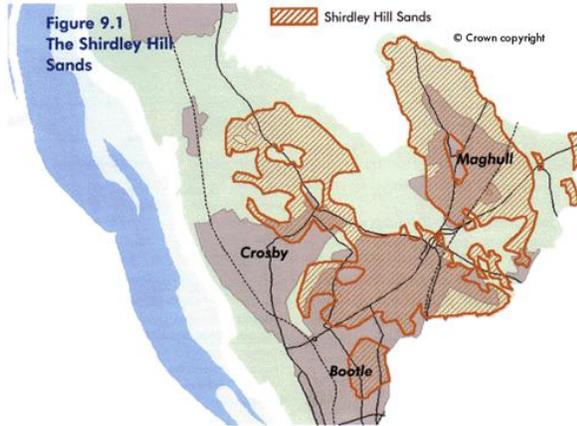
However, I did locate a photograph on the internet that was taken in 1969. This shows that the topsoil is removed before the pure white silica sand (0.5-1.0m in thickness) is extracted and the topsoil along with new drainage replaced. The Industrial Railway Society handbook for 1973 lists fifteen Motor Rail (Simplex) locomotives working here, all relatively modern (1959-69). Operations had ceased by 1979. The gauge is recorded as 2ft and one eighths of an inch! At least one of the locomotives can be seen at West Lancs Light Railway in Hesketh Bank.

Although glass manufacture is still a major industry in St Helens, it was once the life blood of the town. At the time I started work, as well as producing window glass, other manufacturers produced bottles and containers, beer tankards and other household items, fibreglass, CRT tubes and even lead acid battery cases were made. The main raw materials for glass making are sand, limestone, and soda ash (with a few other lesser ingredients. In addition a plentiful supply of coal was needed to provide heat for the furnace. St Helens was well endowed with coal, there were local sources of sand. Soda ash would come from Cheshire and limestone from Derbyshire or North Wales (by rail or canal – both of which were in abundance. However, this article is really about sand and Pilkington.

Although I have not got exact figures, in about 1970 Pilkington would have been producing about 500,000 – 600,000 tonnes of glass per year with perhaps 30-35% coming from recycled glass with the rest from fresh raw materials. Since glass comprises about 70% by weight of silica (sand), this would mean that in the region of 300,000 tonnes of sand would be required each year – or an area of about 0.5km² to be worked.

Glass making sands in SW Lancashire.

Even though I trained as a geologist, I was never really involved on the glass making raw materials side of the business, although inevitably it was always present in the background. Certainly, in the early days of my employment, the extraction of glassmaking sand was very much a feature along the Rainford bypass and thus could not be ignored.



1 *The Shirdley Hill Sand of South West Lancashire.* B S Kear & P Wilson
– North of England Soils Discussion Group Proceedings 21 1986

2 *From "Geological Routes around Wigan"* Ed Grayson & Williamson (1977). Article by F Allan Larkin

As we all know Southport is blessed with sand, but of course there are sands and sands. The first picture Tony showed was of William Rainford's operation along the coast road. The sand going to this plant is of marine origin and was taken from the Horse Bank before being washed and cleaned. This is interesting sand since it is well rounded and well sorted (average grain size 0.1-0.5mm). It was not suited for construction work (grains need to lock together to form a strong structure) but had found a use in the foundry industry as a casting medium and, interestingly, has been used for grinding plate glass (both wired and clear). It is not suitable for glassmaking as such due to both its grain size distribution and salt contamination.



Tony's second photograph showed the coast road covered in a deep layer of blown sand and in many respects is similar to that described above but will be rather more abraded and rounded. This is the sand that forms the range

of dunes along the Sefton coastline. Again, it is useless for the construction industry so at least our coastline has remained largely undisturbed. However, I believe there was a small "quarry" at Woodvale which in the past provided material for grinding glass and for use in the foundry industry.

We now come to the third example of sand found locally. Although not seen within the boundaries of Southport, it covers a large portion of SW Lancashire and is known as the Shirdley Hill Sands. For many years this was considered a dune sand (much as described above) which had been blown inland by strong westerly winds and deposited in hollows or slacks. However, further investigation indicated that it was almost certainly a fluvio-glacial (i.e. river deposits from retreating glaciers) that had been reworked by tides in shallow lagoons. As mentioned above, the Shirdley Hill Sand deposits are very extensive and can be found from Mere Sands in the north, to Kirby in the south, and Formby eastwards towards Rainford and St Helens.

The sands form discrete, but extensive deposits occurring in shallow depression in the underlying bedrock. The schematic cross section from Formby towards Ormskirk and shown below illustrates this. The sands have been dated as having been formed about 10,000 ago with the sequence of deposits in the Rainford area being fairly typical, although in places the sand bed can be up to 3m thick.:

Peaty soil	0.5m
Ash-grey sand	1.0m
Yellow-brown iron-stained sand	2.0m
Boulder clay	+2.0m

The ash-grey upper portion of the sand is very important commercially. As well as its suitable grain size distribution, it is low in impurities and is relatively low in iron. This makes it an ideal raw material for glass and has been used by various St Helens glass companies for many years. The major user was Pilkington Brothers, and they had a large 'quarrying' operation particularly around the Rainford area but also to the west of St Helens. Although I have called it a quarrying operation, in fact the topsoil was scraped off, approximately 1.0m of the ash-grey sand removed (the underlying yellowish sand had too much iron in it for glass making) and the topsoil reinstated. The extracted sand was then loaded on a mineral railway for transportation to a site in Rainford where it was processed and then sent on to St Helens.

Early Ordnance survey maps show several mineral railways in the vicinity of Rainford, and these presumably relate to the feeder routes from the sandfields. But interestingly a 1960 map references an aerial ropeway leading towards Kirby. It probably was taken down some time in the 1960's since I cannot recall seeing it. However, I did manage to locate an undated photograph of the ropeway which is shown here.



A visit to a Different Island

Andrew Chrysler

A few weeks ago, We travelled to an island, but it was not to the Isle of Wight for once. We went to Barry Island instead, both for the "Gavin and Stacey" connection and to visit the Barry Tourist Railway. The weather, just before Bank Holiday Monday, was blissful (or, to quote Stacey, "well lush"). On Friday evening, we ate at Villa Napoli (aka Capriccios) and I enjoyed a steak, but did not have a Caesar Salad. Fans of the series will understand...

Due to Covid, the regular service, which is normally run by heritage multiple unit between Barry station and Barry Island station was suspended, but they were instead doing socially distanced brake van rides, lasting about ten

minutes. On the day that we visited, we were pushed (and pulled) by their Class 08 "Gronk" shunter, 08503. At one uphill section the driver gunned the engine for a moment, and from our position just a couple of feet away, seated on wooden benches (which were rather comfortable, surprisingly) the sound was rather impressive.



Woodhams scrapyards has now gone, and the land regenerated for housing and an Asda supermarket, but the legacy of "Barry scrapyards" lives on. Of the 297 withdrawn locomotives that were sent to the yard, 213 have been rescued for restoration, and a staggering 8 out of 10 steam locomotives currently running in the UK can be traced to here. Dai Woodham was initially concentrating on breaking thousands of coal wagons and the delay in scrapping locomotives proved a godsend to preservation societies. Whilst Wikipedia has a list of all 213 locomotives, locally the Furness Railway Trust have restored 5643 (an 0-6-2T) which is on loan to the Embsay and Bolton Abbey steam railway, and are currently restoring 4979 (4-6-0 "Wooton

Hall”) at the Ribble Steam Railway, and further afield 41313 (2-6-2T) is in operation at the Isle of Wight Steam Railway.

The short platform for the brake van rides was at the Goodsheds complex, where ex- Gatwick Express carriages have been repurposed to accommodate several boutique outlets selling craft items, and a goods wagon has become a florist’s shop. The rides had to cease before 12 noon, as the “station building” was the dining area for a local food outlet. Overall, I was impressed by the novel approach to establishing this redevelopment, which also has several catering outlets housed in the old buildings and 54 repurposed shipping containers providing retail space to around 20 more local businesses.



A Facebook Fancy

Derek Pratt

The editor sounds desperate, so perhaps this will avoid the (golden) spike.

There are those who ‘do’ Facebook and those who don’t. The latter group, with some justification, sneer at the pointless trivia, the slanderous gossip and the invitations to sign up for unmissable dodgy deals. And that’s just the Cabinet account... But the optimist in me says there is good in (almost) anything, if you know where to look, and can brush off the sleet and slush pouring down from those with too much time on their keyboards.

Where I normally look is, perhaps unsurprisingly, amongst the pages relating to garden railways, of which there are many. I will not bore you by reciting long lists of what can be found there, although there is much both interesting and instructive to us green-fingered railway persons. I will just highlight one item on the Garden Railway Trading Group, which is a bit like

eBay for buying stuff you want but don't need. Except there is no bidding, no fees and little or no buyer protection. So not very alike. Fortunately the sellers are invariably garden railway enthusiasts keen to do a decent deal, or their Mum will give them what for.

This particular find goes under the generic description of 'critter', an imported term describing an item built with economy and utility in mind rather than style and appearance. If it's cheap and does the job, all is well. In this case the need, which applies to all railways, is for a basic mobile crane, used for routine maintenance, minor project works and recovery of rolling stock. It might cope with a small industrial diesel loco, but nothing bigger. This example was built by the now-deceased father of the seller, so it may not have been a straightforward decision to pass it on. He might well have been tempted to retain it as an heirloom, but instead I have the perhaps old-fashioned view that I'm its new guardian rather than just another owner.

A scratchbuilt critter is very often an assemblage of whatever parts come to the surface after a good rummage through the 'Do Not Throw Away Under Any Circumstances Whatsoever' box. I have four of these, so I know how it works, a sort of railway modeller's bran tub. Hence the 25mm diameter front wheels and 32mm rears. The motive power is a small 6v motor and some plastic gears, powered by a Li-po battery. Now lithium as a power source is new to the St Aubyn Light Railway, and the CME is wary of such fancy modern trickery, fearing volcano-like eruptions and lava-like meltdowns all over his hardly-rusty-at-all paintwork. Pending a formal re-education course at the People's Semi-Democratic Republic of Crossens Night School (prop. O Mosley, Jr.), it was agreed that conventional battery power would be used, housed in a tool wagon along with Timpdon radio control gear.

The crane already has a selection of interesting accessories, including two large equipment boxes, a floodlight, assorted ropes and chains and a pair of outsize sand boxes. I added a set of air horns, a pedestal brake wheel, a Pratt's petrol can and an only-just-squeezed-in driver. Glazed front windows, an instrument panel and a couple of PW gangers hitching a lift will follow shortly.

A trial run at the Porthmadog and Llyn Railway was successful, after a few hesitant starts put down to voltage irregularities, and the crane is now officially accepted into the growing number of SLR departmental vehicles. It just needs a name. Rather than adopting one of the common crane monikers (Samson, Goliath, etc.) perhaps Delilah would be suitable?



And Finally...

I told my wife to embrace her mistakes.

She must have really appreciated my advice, because she said nothing.

She just hugged me...