

Newsletter

Issue 62: May 2018 Editor: Allan Trotter
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Editorial.

It's holiday season once again.

Now that the summer and the holiday season are approaching, no doubt many members will have outings and vacations planned. The excursion charter train market seems to have expanded and this year there are more outings on offer from Southport, Preston or Liverpool Lime Street. One such outing we experienced was a day excursion departing from Southport to Stratford upon Avon. It was absolutely enthralling to be able to enjoy the comfort of a 1973 built Mk2f open first carriage instead of a Pacer on the line to Wigan Wallgate.

Never having visited Stratford upon Avon previously, the observation made was that the place seems to exist for one reason only and that is to use the excuse of culture to inflate prices and extort as much money as possible in a quality manner from the visiting tourists, especially the international ones.

Now if any of our society members are participating in such excursions or visiting any heritage railways, or in North American parlance, operating museums and wish to share your experiences with the rest of our members then please send in your observations, anecdotes and photographs for publication in our monthly newsletter.

If however you have endured the dubious delights of attempting to travel by train during a weekend and have had the train substituted by a bus, you may or may not wish to recreate this experience in miniature by using a similar train set as illustrated below.

HORNBLBY

RECREATE THE MISERY IN MINIATURE

Rail Replacement Bus Set

NO FUN FOR LITERALLY HOURS

© Mr Tim Dunn

THIS DELAY-PACKED SET CONTAINS:

- Track under repair
- Two ancient buses
- Breakdown crane
- Harassed staff
- Abusive mob crowd
- FREE WAILING CHILD SOUND EFFECTS
- Crowd-pacifying tannoy
- Windswept bus stops
- Invalid seat reservation
- Dead iPhone battery
- Despair & regret

AGES: AND AGES, IT'LL TAKE FOREVER.

Diary of forthcoming events.

11th May 2018

Annual General Meeting, 19:30, SMRS Clubroom.

Chairman's report.

No report received.

Secretary's report.

Your secretary will be enjoying champagne tasting in France when you read this contribution to the May newsletter. As I write, I am recovering from our one-day Spring show which took place yesterday and appears to have been organisationally a modest success and for those of you who were available to attend, it was a good show with some fascinating layouts.

I am also pleased to report that the external renovation on 57a is now complete and it looks very smart with its new red paint and restored Victorian fittings. Inside there remains (on 29th April) further remediation of the plaster which got damp during the delayed repairs and I have now been advised by Network Rail that the contractor will undertake this work. I am hopeful that it will take place before our AGM at the clubrooms on 11th May.

We are using the clubrooms as we want you to see what has been achieved so far. The main subject for discussion at the AGM will be the plans for the future, especially as this July our building and the adjacent Liverpool Crosby and Southport Railway will jointly celebrate their 170th birthday! What do you want from your club and clubroom and what can you offer yourself to help us to achieve that? **Jim Ford.**

Treasurer's report.

No report received.

Exhibition Coordinator's report.

No report received.

Members' contributions.

Visit to the Ravenglass & Eskdale Railway and Windermere cruise.

On a bitterly cold but bright morning, the intrepid members of the LMS Society set off after a hearty breakfast at the Burn How Hotel in Bowness for Ravenglass by means of a hired minibus.

After a somewhat tedious journey of ninety minutes or so, it seemed so much longer; we arrived at Ravenglass to be greeted by our host Peter Mills for a

brief introduction and we then boarded the 11:25 departure for Dalegarth. As a bonus, Peter had arranged for two of the members to have a ride on the locomotive. At least it was nice and warm there. For the rest of us, accommodation was hastily secured in a closed carriage due to the snow showers and the biting cold wind. On arrival at Dalegarth, refuge was sought in the warmth of the station before embarking on a short but very cold walk to our arranged lunch stop at the Boot Inn Hotel. Most members had the warm soup in an attempt to return some life into our cold bodies. The wind and snow continued unabated outside. After lunch the elements were braved once again and it was then a quick walk back to Dalegarth for the 15:00 departure to Ravenglass, once again in a closed carriage.

On arrival a source of heat was sought and the Ratty museum provided some refuge until we were evicted at 16:00 by the museum closing. Fortunately our return minibus arrived and it was soon off through a blizzard back to Bowness and the warmth of the Burn How Hotel. After perusing the menu and wine list, an excellent dinner was enjoyed by all. After dinner and some convivial conversation, it was time to retire after an exhausting but enjoyable day.

The next day and after breakfast most of the members departed for home. However four of us remained and after a short walk from the hotel to Bowness we boarded the 13:00 cruise boat for Ambleside. Three members, not me though, did brave the open upper deck but not for long and quickly retired to the relative warmth of the lower enclosed saloon. On arrival at Ambleside, lunch was taken at the Waters Edge Hotel and then it was time for the 15:00 departure back to Bowness. No one contemplated trying out the open upper deck this time.

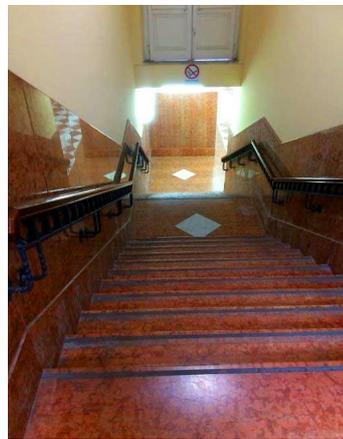
Once back at the hotel our farewells were said thus ending a most enjoyable but in this instance, very cold weekend. **Allan Trotter.**

Visit to Taormina.

While holidaying in Sicily recently I was fortunate enough to discover Taormina Giardini station and as you might guess was very impressed by what I saw. From the impressive booking office to the elaborate passage way ceiling and the marbled underpass staircase onto tiled platforms with ornate supporting cast iron canopy columns and valances and water cranes plus the Italian equivalent of a W H Smith news kiosk. I even managed to capture a train or two. The only regret was there was not enough time to ride on the line.

The railway station plays its part in the in history of cinema, thanks to the many scenes filmed there. Just to mention a couple of examples Roberto Benigni filmed a memorable scene of the film " Il Piccolo Diavolo " which saw the roles of Roberto Benigni, Water Matthau and Nicoletta Braschi; also Francis Ford Coppola was taken by the charm of the place and set a scene of the " Godfather Part III ", with Al Pacino, Andy Garcia and Diane Keaton.

Frank Parkinson.



The St Kitts Scenic Railway and its origins.

The St Kitts Scenic Railway is 2'6" gauge line, which runs for 18 miles along the eastern and northern sides of the island from Needsmust near the airport to Sandy Point. For a narrow gauge line the stock is enormous. The "Island Series" railcars of the St. Kitts Scenic Railway are unusual in that they are double-decked, with an upper open-air observation platform putting you high above the top of the sugar cane and island vegetation, a lower "parlour". This carpeted "parlour" has huge windows, furnished with cushioned rattan chairs at inlaid tables and is air-conditioned. Complimentary drinks (rum punch, frozen daiquiris, fruit juices etc) are served throughout the trip with guests treated to a running commentary as well being entertained by the three voice a cappella St. Kitts Railway Choir singing Caribbean folk songs and so on. The journey lasts about two hours. How did it come into being?



The St Kitts Scenic Railway or "Sugar train" on one of the many bridges. The locomotive was built in Romania in the 1980's but sourced from Poland. The van behind the locomotive provides the power for the air-conditioning in the five "island" series cars.



The "parlour"



The observation platform

What of the origins of the Scenic Railway? The island of St. Kitts in the Leeward Group has an area of 177 km² and a population of about 40,000. It comprises a chain of four overlapping volcanic centres 28 km long and elongated NW-SE along the axis of the active arc of the Lesser Antilles which stretches from Puerto Rico to the north coast of Venezuela. Of these four

volcanic centres, only the northern one, Mt Liamuiga (or more commonly known as Mt Misery), is considered to be active although the last recorded eruptions were recorded over 150 years ago. However, minor earthquakes are reported to be relatively common and active fumaroles occur in the crater and along the coast below Brimstone Hill.

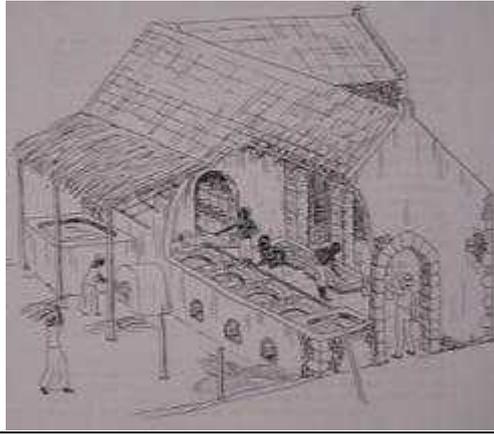
Being of volcanic origin, the soils of St Kitts, and the other Lesser Antilles islands, are very fertile and coupled with the equitable climate (abundant rainfall and a pleasant temperature), makes for ideal growing conditions. Consequently with the arrival of European immigrants in the seventeenth century, conditions were ripe for a burgeoning agricultural industry to develop. As it turned out, the favoured crop was sugar cane which, although native to Asia, was brought to the Caribbean by Christopher Columbus. Of course, growing sugar cane and its processing requires large amount of labour, preferably cheap, and hence the so called "triangular trade" developed, trinkets and goods from Europe to West Africa, slaves from West Africa to the Caribbean, and sugar from the Caribbean to Europe to complete the loop. The increasing demand for sugar made this enterprise in the Caribbean very lucrative and immense fortunes were for the making.

This situation was not to last. In the British Caribbean, although slavery was formally abolished in 1834, in reality things changed only slowly. White planters still owned all land, controlled all employment and controlled the government and so for the next fifty years or so, sugar production continued much it had done for the previous hundred years or more, being centred around estates each with its own crushing and refining facility. The sugar cane was brought to the estate refinery by horse and cart, probably hand loaded and unloaded before being crushed, usually by wind driven machinery, and the resulting liquor refined in open vats. The whole process was labour intensive, inefficient and quality control at best mediocre. It was inevitable that this way of life could not last and indeed it did not.





Kettle for refining the sugar.



Boiling room with series of kettles, "refined" sugar is ladled from one to the next one to improve clarity



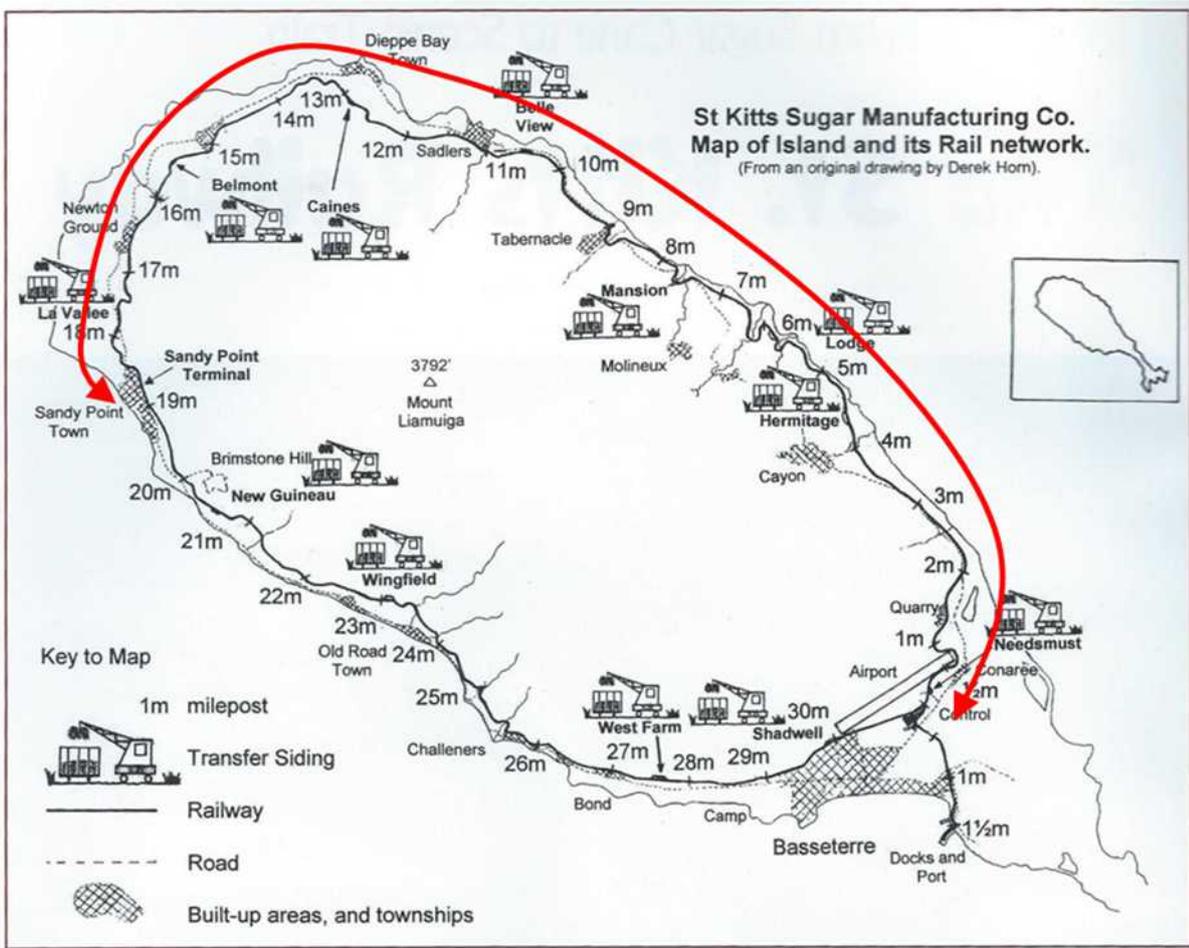
Change came fast. In the early 1900's the cane sugar industry was in a global crisis. The introduction of beet sugar had taken away much of the market and with newer and more efficient cane sugar estates in, for instance, Brazil, South Africa and the Philippines caused global over-production and consequent price reduction to such a level that estates of St. Kitts, and the other islands, were all struggling. Faced with this, the estate owners of St. Kitts embarked on a plan to modernize their techniques by building a central sugar factory - *The St Kitts (Basseterre) Sugar Factory*, thereby abandoning their antiquated and inefficient estate factories. Between 1912 and 1926 a narrow gauge railway around the island to transport the sugar to the factory was also constructed. This move, together with the changes in market and demand brought about by World War I, brought St. Kitts sugar back into profitability for a time.

However, by the 1970's the industry was again in crisis. The private estates were so economically fragile that they could not secure loans without government backing and at this point the government nationalized all sugar lands on St. Kitts, also buying the central factory. This reorganization did return sugar to profitability for a time, but the industry was on the inevitable downward spiral towards its ultimate demise. Unfortunately St. Kitts had to compete with other sugar growing nations that have massive modern industries and huge tracts of land where cane can be planted and harvested by machines whilst the St. Kitts topography necessitated that 80% of the cane still needed to be cut by hand at a huge labour cost. The sugar infrastructure (transport, refining etc) on St. Kitts was by now antiquated for a second time and so would have required modernising at great cost. The final nail in the coffin was the UK's membership of the EU and the Common Agricultural Policy. Virtually overnight St. Kitts lost its main market. It had previously sold almost all of its sugar to the UK at rates much higher than those achievable on the world market. The industry struggled on for a few more years with some subsidies and relief, but in July 2005 the plug was finally pulled.

Indeed, that might have been the end of the St Kitts Sugar Railway as had happened with similar railways on other islands. However, in the 1990's and with the growing dependency of the island on tourism, thoughts were turning to running tourist trains on the existing railway. However, this was very much a utilitarian operation, and would in no way be suitable or tolerated by well heeled cruise passengers who demanded the last word in luxury. A complete

rebuild of the line would have been required, as well as the provision of suitable passenger stock. In addition, the railway administration and sugar company were concerned about intermingling passenger operations with the needs of getting sugar can to the factory. So the idea fell into abeyance. Similar schemes were proposed in 1997 and 2000 but came to nought. However, over the years the *White Pass & Yukon Railway* had shown an interest in developing overseas railways having a tourist potential. The Tourist Railway Manager, Steve Hites, eventually heard about the St Kitts Sugar Railway, but by that time the *WP & Y Rly* had lost interest in those projects. However, Steve Hites began looking at this idea independently and was soon in discussion with the St Kitts Minister of Tourism, and eventually the management of the St Kitts Sugar Manufacturing Corporation and a service commenced in January 2003. Initially only the worst sections of the line were upgraded, the route cleared of various obstructions and rolling stock sourced (the stock that is in use today). This tourist train and the sugar trains co-existed for the next two years until the final sugar train ran at the end of the 2005 sugar season. However, the tourist train continued and is today a thriving business. It is assumed that the section of line from Sandy Point along the west side of the island to Needsmust was abandoned, presumably because much of it ran through the suburbs of the capital, Basseterre. There does appear to be a section of old the Sugar Railway outside the engine shed at Needsmust.





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