

Friends of Rhyl Miniature Railway

Newsletter No. 40

Website: www.rhylminiaturerailway.co.uk

October 2020



Bumper August eases Coronavirus woes at Rhyl Miniature Railway

Following the Coronavirus shutdown, the operating team at RMR met on 5th July to work out a plan that might enable the railway to reopen, in accordance with guidance from our safety regulator.

It was decided that the railway would be able to reopen for the last two weekends of July and daily during August, subject to Welsh Government guidance, and that is what was then achieved. Operation continued into September at weekends only.

Social distancing on our train was achieved by using our enclosed coaches with plastic screens between the compartments, together with the new Guard's coach 12. Attention was also paid to making a one way system in and out of Central Station, and providing customers with a means of registering their details for NHS Test and Trace.

Passenger numbers at the RMR during August exceeded all expectations, despite there only ever being one train in operation. We guess this was caused by relief from the lifting of lockdown regulations; during August the railway carried 11,200 passengers.

Following the imposition of a virus local lockdown on Denbighshire, we decided to end the 2020 season on Sunday October 4th.

At the moment our website is busy taking bookings for **2020 Santa trains**. We are expecting that these trains will operate, but it will all depend upon the Welsh anti-virus regulations in force during December 2020.



Bank Holiday Monday, 31st August, was the last day of operation for RMR's locomotive Michael under the present boiler certificate. This loco is now withdrawn pending new boiler tubes being fitted and a new ten year certificate being issued.

BBC Great Railway Journeys



The TV production company Boundless were at Marine Lake on 9th September shooting for their next series of Great Railway Journeys, featuring Michael Portillo. After several circuits of the track behind *Prince Edward of Wales* driver Dave Bell and author and historian Kathryn Nedd were both interviewed. This TV episode is not expected to be broadcast until 2021.

New Sculptures at Marine Lake



A hand made bench sculpture was installed during September at the south west corner of Marine Lake, made by chainsaw carver Ian Murray of Dyserth. Funds for the bench were raised by the the Marine Lake Users Forum from Ørsted, through a grant from the Burbo Bank Extension Community Fund. The sculpture depicts wildlife indigenous to Marine Lake.



After completing the bench, Ian Murray continued on to carve this childrens' train. This new feature has been sponsored by Rhyl Miniature Railway, as part of our commitment to help improve the Marine Lake site as a whole.

Three New Engineering Projects

The new Coach 12 has been in service every day since train services re-started. It has its own air compressor and controls for charging and controlling the train brakes. The front compartment is for a wheelchair passenger, and has wide opening doors for access. The back compartment is for the train guard.

The 'virus' train set has been operating with a single open car, and one of the two axle driven air compressors was moved over to run under this, to help the set maintain its air pressure.



Work has continued off site on the boiler of RMR locomotive *Joan*. This is the new inner firebox.



Cagney No 44 is currently at an engineering works in the Midlands.



One of the driving wheels was found to have a defective casting, and has been fitted with a sleeve, then pressed back onto the axle. The pistons and slide bars have been replaced to enable the loco to use steam more effectively. Work will move on to replacing the tubes in the boiler, so that when the loco returns it should be able to continue in steam for a good long time yet.

Vernon Aynscough



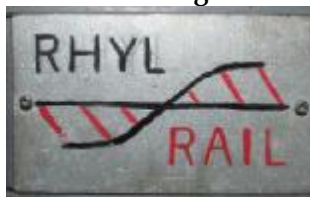
Vernon, who died on 13th June at the age of 85, had been a familiar sight at Rhyll Miniature Railway for over twenty years. He often lit up and drove one of our steam locomotives on Sunday morning, but he also repaired our track and carried out a host of odd jobs around the railway at all times of the year.

Vernon was brought up in Appleby and was proud of his countryside roots in Cumbria. In 1996 he and his partner Gwenda bought a house in Kinmel Bay where they planned to live in peaceful retirement. Vernon was a keen cyclist and soon found his way to the Marine Lake railway. Latterly Vernon and Gwenda split their time between Kinmel Bay and Gwenda's family farm east of Penrith in Cumbria.

Vernon was unusual amongst our volunteers in having a widely based background in steam before he came to us. He was passed out as a steam driver at the Keighley and Worth Valley Railway, where he had driven some prestigious locomotives including 70000 *Britannia*. He also liked road steam and had had a share in a steam roller. From this he had a good appreciation of steam technology and all its mysterious ways.

Vernon's repertoire also stretched to diesel engines, carpentry, plumbing, and painting. He particularly liked projects where he could express his craftsmanship by making something from nothing, either on his own or with one of his grandchildren. He would turn up riding a bicycle he bought for £10, he built the workbenches and tool racks in the RMR workshop all on a nil budget.

He also liked colour and design. He gave the permanent way vehicles their own branding in the style of EWS!



When he saw that there were a large number of blank walls at Central Station he painted a series of replica advertising signs to give the place more of a period ambience.

Another characteristic Vernon job was to clean the workshop and particularly the workshop sink – the

way it was treated by other volunteers always left him fuming.

Vernon followed a healthy active lifestyle, and had passed his medical to continue driving trains at the RMR during 2019. He had hoped to rival his father, who had lived independently into his nineties, but alas it was not to be because cancer intervened instead.

Vernon had four children and his partner Gwenda had five; between them they had sixteen grandchildren. All were represented when Vernon was laid to rest in the Cumbrian foothills.

We have mounted a sign celebrating Vernon's life at Central Station above the advertisement he painted for Heinz baked beans.

If there was ever anyone who truly lived life in all 57 varieties it must have been Vernon.



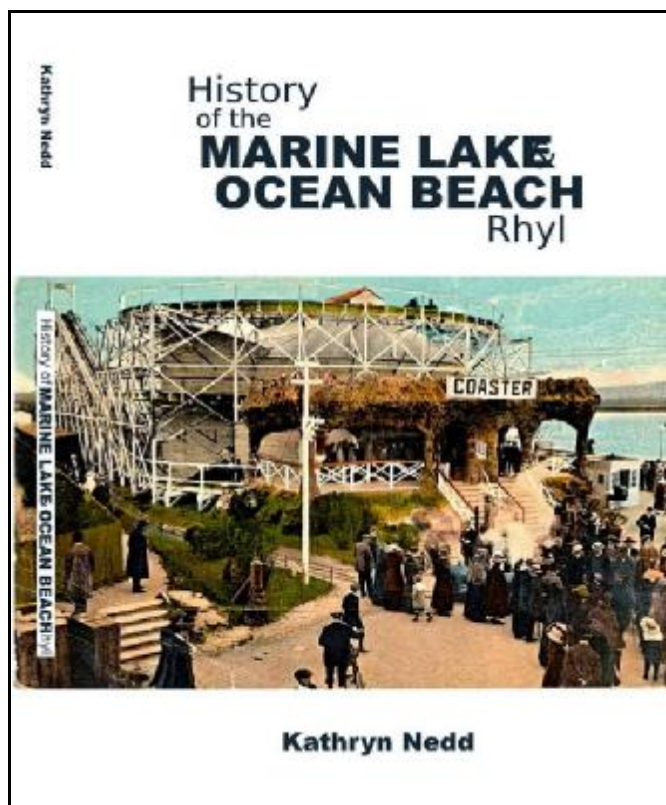
RMR Locomotive Drawings

At the time of writing, our conservation project under way at Caernarfon Record Office has almost been completed. Most of the studio time has focused on the fragile tracings like the safety valve drawing and tender tank drawing shown here.



By the time of the next newsletter the drawings will be deposited at Denbighshire Archives, which will be their permanent home. This project has been entirely grant funded, by the National Manuscripts Conservation Trust and by the Welsh Assembly Government via the Federation of Museums and Art Galleries of Wales.

New History book about Marine Lake



Friends member Kathryn Nedd's second book is a long, thorough, and entertaining history of the Marine Lake and Ocean Beach. The book has 223 A5 format pages and includes 103 photographs, many in colour. Many of the illustrations Kathryn has inherited from her father the late Eric Hughes, to which she has added recently another box of old photographs sent to her by Rhyl showman Dave Skelly.

The story started in the 1890s when the concept of forming the lake was originated by Townshend Mainwaring MP, who could see the site from his home at Foryd Hall.

Once it had opened to the public the boating concession was let to a Mr Hudson, and the local press regularly carried colourful accounts of swimming and boating competitions held there, written by a correspondent under the name "The Plunger"!

The book covers in some detail how the Marine Lake came to be transformed into a fairground, through the construction of a Water Chute built to the design of showman Lot Morgan. It was this which introduced to Rhyl the Butler family and their manager Albert Barnes (Kathryn Nedd's grandfather), an association which was to endure for eighty prosperous years.

Kathryn was brought up in one of the company bungalows on the Wellington Road, surrounded by the fairground on all sides. As she grew older she spent the summers working on the fair, and is therefore able to provide a personal perspective on this way of life from fifty years ago at Marine Lake.

As time went on members of the Butler family sold their interests in Rhyl, and Ocean Beach passed through the

ownership of various groups of amusement parks, before being sold in 1998 to three local showmen. Eric Hughes was an important steady hand through all those times. Lesser historians could easily have become baffled by what happened, because it was so complex. Finally the book brings the Marine Lake and Ocean Beach stories completely up to date.

The book also has an album of more than fifty amusement park stalls, and rides and scenes. In an appendix there is a list of rides and games known to have been at the Marine Lake and Ocean Beach fairgrounds, set in date order – many of which were built 'in house' by Albert Barnes & Co.

So much has gone into this book that it is bound to remain a defining work of history, and we should be grateful to Kathryn Nedd for setting it all down in writing.

This book has been privately published by Kathryn Nedd and resale copies are only available at Rhyl Miniature Railway. The price is £12 or £15 including postage. To buy one by post please email us at info@rhylminiaturerailway.co.uk or shortly look out for the special page for the book on our website.



RHYL STEAM PRESERVATION TRUST Registered Charity No 1103953

Trustees: Les Hughes (Chairman), Carol Hughes, Louise Webster, Lucille Green, Cllr Joan Butterfield JP, Simon Townsend (Secretary), Justin Bell. Enquiries about railway operations should be addressed to the Trust Secretary, 10 Cilnant, Mold CH7 1GG, Tel 01352 759109.

Friends of Rhyl Miniature Railway

Our group has been formed to support the Rhyl Steam Preservation Trust in its aims to preserve and operate the railway.

Membership costs £8.00 per annum and runs to 31st May each year, including newsletters due in April and September.

President of the Friends is Rev Alan Cliff, whilst its Chairman is Simon Townsend

For Subscriptions and Enquiries: Secretary of the Friends is Liz Wright, of 6 Bryn Ithel, Abergele LL22 8QB.

**Friends' Newsletter
Editor: Simon Townsend**

Photographs in this issue by John Myers, Justin Bell, Betty Smith, Andy Walton and Simon Townsend