

Friends of Rhyl Miniature Railway

Newsletter No. 41

Website: www.rhylminiaturerailway.co.uk

May 2021



Cancelled Santa Trains at RMR, but Civic Award from Rhyl Town Council

Santa trains at Rhyl Miniature Railway were due to operate on 12th and 13th December, and then from 19th to 24th December, eight days in all. However, in the end the December coronavirus lockdown intervened and the final six days were all cancelled. Every train had been fully booked on line and customers' payments for the last six days were returned.

The railway was assessed for the Town Council Christmas Window competition and received in return the very welcome civic award pictured above.

The arrangements for a virus friendly meeting with Santa at North Pole, in the south west corner of the lake worked well.



Restoration of RMR locomotive *Joan*



During October, at Jim and Helen Shackell's HQ in Oxfordshire, the new firebox was test fitted. Assembly was delayed because it was discovered that there was an internal leak between the steam pipe and the front tubeplate – practically the last bit of the old boiler that had remained untouched! So a series of further new parts had to be made to sort that problem out.



As the boiler is now expected to be good for another twenty years the locomotive injectors and gauge glasses were also overhauled, and all the other cab pipework replaced. This stage of the work was like a big jigsaw puzzle.

During this time of the year we were also carrying out annual maintenance and inspections on our other locomotives. Joan was steamed on Easter Sunday and Monday, 4th and 5th April, (on schedule as we had planned).



On 21st December steam was raised for the first time, on 24th December the boiler was steamed again and this time it reached full pressure. The injectors and safety valves all worked OK.



On 31st December the boiler was delivered by Jim and Helen to the RMR.



After some additional minor adjustments to the pipework, we felt confident enough to fit the lagging and cladding. Joan passed its in-steam boiler inspection on 5th May. Following trials it was able to haul public trains again on 9th May.



During January holes were cut in the smokebox which allowed the boiler to be fixed down and the chimney fitted above the blastpipe.



Rev Alan Cliff, 1936 - 2020



We are sorry to report that Rev Alan Cliff, who was President of the Friends of Rhyl Miniature Railway, died on 26th October 2020. He was 84.

Alan was husband of Rosemary, brother to Kenneth and sister-in-law to Isobel, father of Neil, Nigel, Alison and Ailsa, much loved father-in-law to Jane, Jacqui, Hayden and Dan, and grandfather to Christopher, Catrin, Rosie, Joseph, John, James, George and Theadora.

In happier times Alan had been an important supporter of the railway. He brought his wise counsel to every AGM of the Friends of Rhyl Miniature Railway, and on peak days he and Rosemary would attend Central Station so that he could sign copies of his books about Jack the Station Cat. In our museum he agreed that his character Jack could be used as an 'interlocutor' to help explain the railway's story to children visiting us.

Alan's childhood had been spent in Morecambe, Lancashire, in early life he had been a trainspotter at Lancaster station. He studied law to degree level at St John's College Oxford but then changed career path to a life in the Methodist Church after attending a meeting with the Evangelist Billy Graham. He then went on to study theology at Cambridge University.

He subsequently became a Minister at various locations including Edinburgh then latterly Wrexham. Ill health early in life though meant that he retired from formal roles in the church during his fifties.

Alan had been a lifelong devotee of Bassett Lowke models, and had a formidable vintage collection from different model railway manufacturers, which he could operate in the train room at his HQ in Rhyl. In the field of model railways he was highly knowledgeable. He wrote over 300 articles for model railway magazines, including the long running Chronicles of Lock's Sidings for British Railway Modelling magazine.

Alan had also been deeply involved in railway preservation. He was one of the founder members of the Foxcote Manor Society. In 1975 he purchased the Hunslet locomotive *Holy War*, ex Dinorwic Quarry, which entered service on the Bala Lake Railway in 1979. With this locomotive Alan found that he had also bought parts

of a second Dinorwic loco *Alice*, which was later also restored. Through these adventures Alan retained a close interest in the progress of the Bala Lake Railway.

At Rhyl Miniature Railway Alan was best known as the author of childrens' books about Jack the Station Cat. Jack books were first published by local printer Gwasg Helygain in 2004. In all there have been 11 titles in English and two in Welsh, and in total over 35,000 have been sold.

Alan had started to write the books as a palliative to combat illness, but it soon developed to become a driving passion. He loved talking about the books to anyone and everyone, and whenever he was present for signing sessions he would soon be found selling good quantities of books. When RMR Central Station was built in 2007 the books became regular sales items in our ticket office, and have been ever since.

Alan also liked to show interest in the everyday life of the railway. Most recently he was following the restoration of RMR *Joan*, and when he heard that the loco needed a new traditional brass pressure gauge, he agreed to sponsor the cost.

Alan had had difficult health issues for much of his adult life. Recently he had several spells in hospital and latterly he and Rosemary had both been based in a nursing home.

Alan's enthusiasm for life will be much missed, and we would like to send our condolences to Nigel and other members of his family.



Thanks to Mark Armstrong for help in writing this obituary.

If you are planning a day out at Rhyl, visit the . . .

Marine Lake Miniature Railway

Approximately one mile of 15" track in a delightful setting around the Boating Lake.

Four Atlantic class 4-4-2 Steam Locos are in operation.

There is a continuous service each day from 26th May, 1967, to the end of September.

FOR A REALLY ENJOYABLE DAY VISIT SUNNY RHYL

News from the RMR

The 2021 season: The railway was unable to open on 2nd April as expected, due to continuing coronavirus restrictions. We did open instead on 1st May, and are now hoping to run trains to our regular timetable pattern up to the end of September, all being well. We are still using our compartment train and the one way system and other covid precautions around Central Station are still in place.

Welsh Assembly Government sent the railway a grant of £3,000 to compensate us for loss of income during December, and they followed up with further grants of £3,000 and then £4,000. These grants have meant that our financial situation has remained satisfactory despite the loss of income for the first month of the season.

Railway Queen: Just before the start of the operating season the loco was fitted with new clupet rings in place of traditional piston rings inside the cylinders. This is the first time we have used clupet rings, which are akin to key rings and are better able to adapt to changes in the cylinder bore diameter.

Prince Edward of Wales: The locomotive was suffering from a very stiff regulator and the reason proved to be distortion in the regulator gland where the rod goes through into the boiler. A gear puller tool had to be used to extract the gland, but once it was apart we were able to fix it and now the regulator again works how it should.

Cagney: Cagney returned to the railway on 17th April following its intermediate overhaul by Andy Walton and his team at Denver Light Railway.



Cagney on test at DLR, 31st March

Cagney will be appearing at the Fairbourne Railway gala event on 29th – 31st May and after that at Thorpe Light Railway.

Michael: We dismantled *Michael* and then sent it to Denver Light Railway as a return load for Cagney. The boiler will be fitted with new tubes and a new smokebox; the extent of other work required is not yet clear.

RMR shop sales: Since the last newsletter we have sold quite a few copies of Kathryn Nedd's book 'History of Marine Lake and Ocean Beach', and sales are continuing at the RMR. Arriving shortly is a new history of Bassett Lowke during the war years written by Christine Sanderson.

The railway shop is currently brimming with new fridge magnets, soft toy crabs and other new lines, and we have placed forward orders for 2,500 crab lines!



Marine Lake Users Forum managed to obtain funding from Denbighshire County Council for these two new noticeboards, which will be used to advertise future events at the lake, contact details for watersports, and details of the regular water quality tests.



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 07940 261910.

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.

Chairman of the Friends 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 Justin Bell, Betty Smith, and Simon Townsend