

WEST LANCASHIRE LIGHT RAILWAY NEWS

No. 7 December 2010 edited by Phil

Pacey

Booths

The new Booths store almost next to – and overlooking – the railway, opened on Thursday 11th November. We initially contacted Booths months ago, when they agreed to pay the cost of printing a new leaflet for the railway, including an advertisement for the new store. Paul and Phil attended an 'exclusive preview' by invitation on the evening of 10th November, where they met senior Booths staff including the manager of the Hesketh Bank store and two sub-managers, one of whom lives next to the railway. On Thursday, by prior arrangement with Booths and promoted by them as part of the opening event, we steamed *Irish Mail* and gave free rides to Booths customers (who were asked to show a Booths till receipt) from 10.30, following the official opening at 10.00, to 4.00. Unfortunately the weather was atrocious, with heavy showers and a bitter, gusty wind, but this did not prevent a number of people from taking up the offer of free rides. More significant for us than the event itself is that it opens the way for partnership between the WLLR and Booths which will hopefully be of benefit to us for years to come.

Production of the leaflet was regrettably delayed, pending opening of the new store, leaving us with limited and dwindling supplies of the existing leaflet through the 2010 season. The new leaflet will be ready in time to help us kick start the 2011 season.

Children in Need

This year's event in support of the BBC Children in Need appeal took place on the Sunday immediately following the Booths opening, 14th October. As happens every year, there had been some debate as to whether to hold it on Remembrance Sunday or the following Sunday. In the end we settled for Remembrance Sunday, without causing any offence so far as we know (excepting one e-mail), and without deterring at least some people from coming and enjoying the fun.

By prior arrangement we were visited by a television cameraman who was

covering the event for BBC North West. Largely in his honour we steamed *two* locomotives, *Irish Mail* and *Montalban*. He clearly enjoyed himself, spending longer on site than the hour he had allocated. Some of the video he shot was shown on television on Friday 19th November.

Also visiting us on the day was a group of student journalists from the University of Central Lancashire, working with Radio Lancashire.

The sum raised, £250, was better than the worst of previous years but not the best. At least some people seemed to drift across from Booths, busy on its first Sunday of trading. It had rained in the morning and grew colder and colder through the afternoon. But perhaps the slightly disappointing result, together with the reduced visitor numbers we have experienced through the year, is the unsurprising result of recession and cuts, factors far beyond our control.

PIQAS (Place of Interest Quality Assurance Scheme)

The WLLR has been awarded accreditation as a Quality Assured Place of Interest by VisitEngland. The PIQAS scheme is a relatively new initiative by Visit Britain, designed to complement the VAQAS (Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme) by offering something more appropriate to smaller attractions.

Our accreditation follows a visit from an assessor which took place on 10th , unknown to the WLLR members who were on duty on that day. We had nothing to fear! We have been given a copy of the assessor's report, in which he comments very favourably on the friendly reception he received and says that 'In particular, to be invited into the engine cab whilst the engine was running round the train was a great experience'. 'The volunteer on duty in the workshop area was most hospitable and a delight to talk to'. The ticket office and shop 'was clean, tidy and attractively laid out'. There was praise for our leaflet, guide book, and web site. The site 'appeared tidy' - maybe he didn't go round to the back of the carriage shed? - and clearly the assessor brought with him a sympathetic understanding of what is appropriate – 'Clean and tidy as a working railway'; volunteers 'in appropriate working rig'. The report includes some suggestions but virtually no criticisms; everything is rated as Good, Very Good, or Excellent.

Grateful thanks and congratulations to everyone who contributed to this splendid result, which means that we can use the PIQAS quality marque .

Members' news

Welcome to new members

We are very pleased to welcome the following new members:

Mr & Mrs P. Humphreys and family, Chorley
Ms V. Hughes and family, Newton-le-Willows
Mr G. Payne, Aintree
Mr G. Danter, Southport
Mr J. Marshall, Baildon
Miss C. Lether, Preston

Congratulations to one of our younger members

Graham Townsend was recently passed out as a steam locomotive driver, fully qualified to drive *Irish Mail*. Although he has still to qualify to drive the two O.& K. locos, he is already 'caretaker' of *Utrillas*. (Like virtually every heritage railway, we desperately need young members to join us and to gain experience so that they will be able to take charge of the railway in the future).

...And farewell to former members

Dougie Lester died on 29th August. He had been battling bravely with cancer for some time, although he died of pneumonia. He was an active member, whom many will remember wielding a paintbrush; he also took on the running of the shop for a while. He was always cheerful, and could be counted on to enter into the spirit of the season at Santa Specials, when he sported an extraordinary hat - was it actually decorated with fairy lights or is my imagination running away with me? Whether or not his hat was lit up, he certainly came out with some colourful language (if only in male company in the mess room). As with Pete Crossley (below), so with Dougie – we have got used to missing them already, but it will take a while longer to get used to the fact that we'll not see them at the railway ever again.

In November **Peter Crossley**, an active member for many years, passed away following a prolonged period of ill health. Pete was a Yorkshireman, with a Yorkshireman's pride in the county of his birth; this found expression in frequent good-hearted banter - and in an article in *The Short Axle* devoted to narrow gauge locomotive builders of Yorkshire. A few years ago the Crossleys moved back to Yorkshire, and from being a regular volunteer on site Pete became an occasional visitor (and a supporter of his nearest narrow gauge railway, at the Abbey Light Railway at Leeds).

At every AGM, when we reached Any Other Business and most of those present felt that the end was in sight, Pete would complain passionately about the untidiness of the site. He was right, of course. One way for us to remember him might be to include this perennial topic as a standing item on the agenda of every AGM.

News from the Rillé railway

Good news from our partner railway in France. They have been awarded the sum of 20,134 euros by the Département, Indre et Loire, as a major contribution to the cost of extending the railway. This is tremendous in itself, but it also sets a precedent, as it is the first time that the Département has helped them financially, and it is tangible recognition of the railway's role in attracting tourism to the area; thus it augurs well for the future. Imagine if we were suddenly awarded several thousand pounds by the West Lancashire District Council to extend our railway....! Let's hope that some of the AECFM's good fortune somehow rubs off on us.

The summer issue of the AECFM's newsletter included a note about Cyril Wilkinson, their longstanding English member who was instrumental in proposing partnership between the Rillé and the West Lancs. It seems that Cyril is relinquishing his property in France, and retreating to his permanent home in Otley. His French friends are resigned to seeing him less frequently; they will remember him especially for his skilful and patient work on one of their carriages, the 'voiture du Petit Anjou'. As it happens, the Rillé has acquired another active British member, Peter Williams, from Wales.

Dates for 2011

As usual, in 2011 the Railway will be open, with steam-hauled passenger trains in operation, *every Sunday and Bank Holiday from Easter to and including the last Sunday in October.*

Special Events will be as follows:

Sunday 3rd April - Friendly Engines Day

A day for families rather than enthusiasts. Two steam locomotives with friendly

faces hauling trains.

Sunday 8th May - Teddy Bears' Outing

Another family day which has become a regular feature of our season. Two engines in steam. Visitors are invited to bring a bear and travel half fare.

Saturday 25th June - Diesel Freight Day

Strictly for enthusiasts, and very popular with those who came when we held this event for the first time in 2010. Diesel action; freight trains; workshop tours; photo opportunities all along the line (high-vis jackets required). A charge for admission to the site covers all attractions. *N.B. No steam, no passenger trains*

Saturday 13th & Sunday 14th August - Gala Weekend

The highlight of the year for families and enthusiasts alike. All available locos in steam and maybe a visiting loco as well (although this takes a lot of organising and cannot be guaranteed for 2011).

Sunday 2nd October - Autumn Steam Gala

Fun for everyone! All available locos in steam. We have sometimes had a visiting loco for this event as well.

Saturday 29th October - Halloween

Other railways are making a success of Halloween events, and we have decided not to deprive ourselves of the opportunity any longer. Suggestions welcome - details to be announced.

Sunday 13th November - BBC Children in Need

Two locos in steam. Free train rides. Visitors are invited to contribute to the BBC Children in Need appeal.

11th, 17th, 18th & 24th December - Santa Specials

Income from Santa trains is vital for the survival of the railway. While we are confident that we have sufficient volunteers (presumably including Santa?) to run Santa Specials on Christmas Eve, a commitment to providing Santa trains on four days is asking a lot of our active members, *and* we would like to meet a demand for some weekday Santa trains as well. Offers of help will therefore be more welcome than ever. As well as helping to run the trains, tasks include wrapping presents (lots of them!) and distribution of leaflets... And we have a vacancy for a Santa! Please help if you can.

As the end of 2010 approaches...

...don't forget that we will be operating this year's Santa Specials on the 12th, 18th and 19th of December. Then when it comes to making those New Year Resolutions, how about resolving to come along and get involved (if you're not already) during 2011? Happy Christmas and New Years' greetings to all members.

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