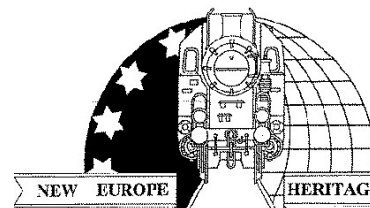


Eastern Star



Journal of the New Europe Railway Heritage Trust,
helping railway preservation in the New Europe

Russian Narrow-Gauge Delegation Visits the Welsh Lines



Charles Spencer, general manager of the Welshpool and Llanfair Railway, with his Russian guests.

Photo Alastair McNichol

When NERHT was founded in 1999 one of its first interests was the Pereslavl Railway, a defunct narrow-gauge line north of Moscow, which a certain Sergei Dorozhkov and his friends were struggling to preserve. This early contact helped NERHT to see what it could do (and what it could not do) in the field of railway preservation in the former Soviet bloc. Meanwhile the Pereslavl project survived early disappointments and problems to emerge as the Pereslavl Railway Museum. Its success encouraged similar projects in Russia, and notably the narrow-gauge activities at Ekaterinburg. Last year NERHT was glad to arrange a visit by Russian narrow-gauge activists to the Welsh lines, and is grateful to those railways for the help they gave to make it a success. On the following page one of the Russian visitors offers his own appreciation.

The Russians' Visit as Remembered by a Participant

The visit of the Russian delegation for the exchange of technical experience in the field of railway heritage was from the 7th to the 15th of September, having been initiated at the April AGM of NERHT (which provided UK living and travel expenses funds).

The delegation consisted of Sergei Dorozhkov (Director of the Pereslavl Railway Museum), Dmitri Kalinovsky (counsellor of that Museum) and from the Sverdlovsk Railway, involved with the development of the narrow-gauge railway museum in Ekaterinburg, came Evgenii Zdorovenko (Head of the Sverdlovsk Railway's Technical Information Centre and library), Sergei Danilov (Deputy Head of that Centre), and Anton Sharypov (brigade-leader in the Railway's infrastructure operations section).

The trip had been preceded by indirect communication with NERHT in September 2017 at the Second All-Russia Forum on narrow-gauge railway preservation at Ekaterinburg for which Gordon Rushton, a member of NERHT, sent an illustrated talk on the successful Welsh narrow-gauge tourist railways. Thus began a fresh relationship based on shared experience of preserving railway history.

In April 2018 representatives of the Pereslavl Museum had presented a well-received report on Russian narrow-gauge history and preservation to the NERHT's AGM, following which arrangements were made for this visit by the Russians and a possible 2019 Russian visit by the British.

In the course of the following weeks a programme was worked out that enabled us in a short time to visit six narrow-gauge and one standard-gauge museum line, as well as seeing how the Alan Keef business repaired boilers and locomotives. We saw Perrygrove and the Dean Forest on 8th September, the Ffestiniog on the 10th, the Talylllyn on the 11th, the Welsh Highland and Welsh Highland Heritage on the 12th, and the Welshpool & Llanfair on the 13th.



The Russian visitors enjoy the Welsh Highland Heritage Railway.

Photo. Graham Farr

Visits to workshops at Boston Lodge on the Ffestiniog Railway as well as those of the Talylllyn and Welshpool & Llanfair railways proved of great interest. The Russian delegates were also deeply impressed by trips on the Ffestiniog and Welshpool & Llanfair lines. Although each of the visited lines had its own particular flavour, on each of them it was possible to find answers to longstanding questions and to gather a lot of new information.

In particular on these lines it was possible to see in action the organisation of operations on preserved railways and their infrastructures, to study the experience of working with tourist flows, and how to provide rest and convenience for tourists at stations. Also important was the study of how locomotives were fuelled and watered at intermediate and terminal stations, the application of modern autoblock as well as vintage systems of block signalling with the use of semaphores and electric token systems.

Studying the electric token system on the Talylyn Railway.

Photo. Evgenii Zdovorenko



It was also interesting to see how safety at level crossings was assured with modern warning systems and signalling as well as reconstructed vintage crossings. It was very useful to see how the safe movement of passengers on stations was assured, with comfortable places to rest or from which to take photos of the surroundings.

A different theme was studying the experience of working with volunteers on heritage railways: attracting young people and the passing of experience from the old to the young; the participation of volunteers in the operation and repair of rolling stock; the organisation of operating the railway itself and of organising services for passengers. There was a detailed study of how museum exhibits could be arranged at stations with generous provision of souvenir and book outlets, the organisation of places to eat and rest, and of access for visitors with mobility problems. Repair depots and workshops were of great interest, especially their restoration of rolling stock. For the Russians it was important to find out how existing laws permit the operation of historical relics and how their work and serviceability are guaranteed.

It should be noted that we would have seen and learned much less had it not been for the help of some notable people, namely Stuart McNair and Graham Farr. Thanks to them the Russian delegates found their Welsh visit a great success and give their deepest thanks and appreciation. Great thanks are also due to the colleagues from the Pereslavl Museum and especially to Sergei Dorozhkov, who negotiated with NERHT the details of the visit and also served as interpreter, where his patience and fortitude meant that he was always there to translate conversations with our British friends.

Special thanks are due too to NERHT and especially Stephen Wiggs. Thanks to his initiative and thoughtful endeavours this trip was very successful and most friendly. It left us with a strong desire for further collaboration involving the transfer of experience and regular exchange visits between Russia and Great Britain. For our part we are convinced we shall long remember this trip, proudly and with gratitude to our British friends.

Evgenii Zdovorenko

Romania

James Waite informs us that the Sibiu-Agnita Railway has benefitted from an unexpected gift from Switzerland. The Basel Public Transport Authority, in possession of former assets of the narrow-gauge Waldenburgerbahn, found there was no prospect of using them in its own operations. So two quite modern passenger coaches, some open cars, and an antique (1881) saloon coach have been donated to the SAR.



*The vintage
saloon carriage*

*Photo
James Waite*

Poland

Steam Railtours in Poland

Many NERHT members will be aware of the Anglo-Polish Wolstyn Experience organisation, which since 1996 has been arranging footplate courses based at Wolstyn in central western Poland, and also has been instrumental in having certain local train services remain steam-hauled on a regular basis.

Perhaps less well-known is that more recently, since 2010, Wolstyn Experience has been cooperating with a small specialist Polish travel agency, Turkol, and running multi-day special steam-hauled railtours which virtually reach all corners of Poland, and in so doing bring steam traction before a public audience which has either never, or only long since, had the opportunity to see or travel on a steam train.

In August 2018 I joined one such railtour, which over all four days had PKP 2-6-2 OI 49-69 as its motive power. The intermediate overnights were spent in Wroclaw (two nights) and Lodz. The itinerary was arranged to give opportunities for local people to take short train rides at certain locations, and the publicity machinery had certainly prepared the ground well, because both lineside observers and potential travellers often presented mob scenes.

The train itself consisted of only four carriages, including a catering vehicle. The latter with a dedicated crew working long hours ensured that long-haul passengers such as myself had hot and cold snacks available during the inevitably lengthy days on the move. These railtours will continue in 2019. Four trips are planned, in April, June, July and August, which together will cover almost all of the Polish regions. The availability of steam locomotives for mainline running in Poland remains fragile, so the more distant perspective of these tours is undetermined.



No.01 49-69 takes on coal at Wolstyn.

Photo J N Westwood

Wolstyn Experience and Turkol are to be congratulated for this major initiative in bringing Poland's steam railway heritage to the attention of a vast and growing domestic audience.

Mike Hudson

(Further information on these tours can be obtained from Julian Worth, Appleton House, West St., Childrey, Wantage, OX12 9UL)

Ukraine

A NERHT delegation last year visited Ukraine and in our next issue there will be more details of this. Meanwhile a resolution, intended for state institutions, to clarify rules and procedures for the preservation and operation of the railway heritage, is under way. The NERHT delegation took part in discussions about this document that took place in the Railway Club at Lviv and which were attended by influential professional and political figures.

Wolfram Wendelin tells us that a new container has been acquired for the Korostiv worksite, which will be a useful shed for storing tools. A project week is anticipated there in April or May. But there is bad news from Haivoron, where despite protests two valued items (the Zim/GAZ railbus and the hundred-year-old track maintenance vehicle) have been taken away for static open-air exhibition in Kiev. But on the bright side a new and evidently businesslike group has appeared in the shape of the 'Steam Team.' In November it organised a photo exhibition of Ukraine's narrow gauge in a location unbeatable in terms of gaining political contacts, the foyer of the Parliament Building in the capital.

(Below) The narrow gauge exhibition in Ukraine's Parliament building, and a poster advertising the event. (Pictures courtesy of Wolfram Wendelin)



New Life for Line 102

(Line 102 runs through attractive countryside, and the Austro-Hungarian forts around Przemyśl – a charming historic town - are some of the few World War I Eastern Front sites easily accessible to foreign visitors. It is good to see that moves are being made to exploit the area's heritage (including links with the fictional Czech anti-hero the good Soldier Svejk whose statue may be seen in Przemyśl!) so a tourist train would surely be a great asset. NERHT delegates visited Line 102 in October and met the Polish and Ukrainian leaders of this interesting cross-border project for talks on possible co-operation).

Not long ago the Polish city of Przemyśl near the border with Ukraine also had its own abandoned railway. Long ago this was part of First Galician-Hungarian railway which had been built in 1874 between from Przemyśl, Khyriv, and Ustrzyki Dolne in order to provide the fastest connection with Vienna and Budapest. It was a strategic route up to the end of World War I but its importance decreased after state frontiers fell across its way in 1918. After World War II the Polish and Ukrainian part of this 1435-mm railway known as Line 102 was active up to 1994 with the Solina passenger train which passed from Warszawa to Zagorz over a 30-km stretch of the territory of Ukraine without stops and passport control and was the only chance for foreigners to see life in the Soviet Union without a visa.

In 1994 after expiry of the international agreement between Poland and Ukraine all trains on Line102 on the Polish side were cancelled, and the line was abandoned. During years of disuse the 8-km railway disappeared in a debris of trees and bushes but actually was preserved by them. The only traffic on the Ukrainian side of Line102 is a local train once daily on the 1520-mm wide railway; the 1435-mm rails were partly destroyed. The period of oblivion ended in Autumn 2016 when a group of railway fans from Przemyśl initiated a public action where over 200 people (mostly firemen, policemen, border guards

and soldiers) cleared the railway from trees and debris. In a few days, the technical train successfully reached the border with Ukraine via old cleaned rail track. Later the initiators of Line 102 recovery started to seek ways to cross the closed border by train and successfully found partners on the Ukrainian side. The result of this work was the first entry of a Polish train to Ukraine via a specially arranged temporary border checkpoint. It happened in December 2016 when the train brought New Year presents from Przemyśl to Ukrainian children (*see picture by Victor Halchynskyy*). So far ten cross-border train runs on this route had been made with politicians, tourists, journalists and volunteers on board. Thanks to Ukrainian Railways, which repaired 1435-mm track, such trains are able to reach Ukrainian border station Nyzhankovychi.

Now the initiative has become a non-governmental organization with the goal of restoring Line 102 firstly for passenger

movement from Poland to Ukraine and vice versa. Using crowdfunding, it created a unique railway hand car which became an interesting

attraction of the city and is used for tourist rides both on Line 102 and over a special 700m rail track at Przemyśl station which is made available by Polish Railways. In September 2018

two passenger cars were awaited as a present from Polish Railways which are going to arrange the museum of Line 102 and its history. Up to now, the Polish government has declared plans to rebuild Line 102 for regular use and is discussing the conditions of its work with the Ukrainians. Meanwhile, a similar Ukrainian NGO has been established in 2018 with the same revitalising goal.



Victor Halchynskyy (Deputy Head, Linia102, Ukraine)

Bulgaria

Tzanko Simeonov writes that the recent activity of his association, following two successful crowdfunding campaigns to acquire a trolleybus Skoda 9Tr (year of manufacture 1981) and an articulated bus Chavdar B14-20 (1989) has been the continuing restoration of these vehicles at the Sofia premises. So far as locomotives are concerned, Tzanko writes: 'I can report that employees of the Sofia locomotive depot are undertaking restoration works on steam engine 26.26 (Henschel, 1908). The work had to be completed by the beginning of 2018, however due to lack of adequate support from the operator, it is now obvious that the term will be changed to 2019. Standard gauge steam engines in operation are: 01.23 (Sofia; Wintherthur 1935), 03.12 (Gorna Oryahovitsa; Henschel Kassel 1942), 05.01 (Sofia; Krupp-Essen 1941), 16.27 (Gorna Oryahovitsa; Floridsdorf 1948); 46.03 (Sofia; H. Cegielski 1931).



*Locomotive No
03.12 in 2011*

The narrow gauge steam engine 609.76 has passed the necessary overhaul and its revision was extended. Currently it is also operational and has hauled one special train in September. The regular operation on the narrow gauge line Septemvri - Dobrinishte is successfully ongoing. The volume of passenger trains for the next timetable was not changed, which guarantees relatively good service for the passengers from the region. All passenger coaches are undergoing regular maintenance, even a bistro coach was added on one of the services. BDZ has reported that the number of passengers on this line grew by 6% in 2017, which is an excellent result for a branch line and having in mind the general performance of BDZ . . .

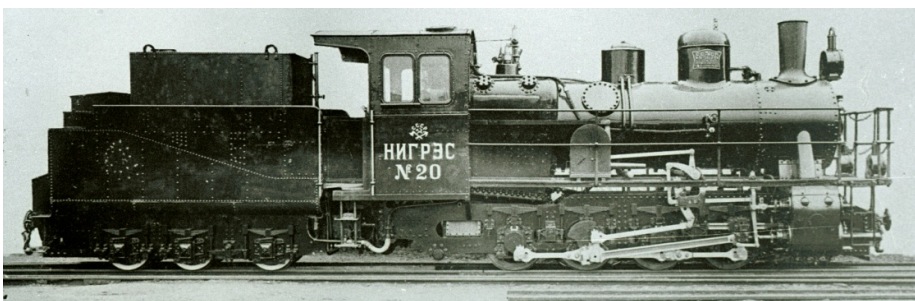
In parallel, we have managed to convince BDZ to begin a through train service on the territory of Sofia Municipality. This is a big success, especially having in mind that the national carrier is facing huge problems with the provision of relatively suitable rolling stock. The process of convincing BDZ and Sofia Municipality took us more than two years . . .'

Russia

Russian Narrow Gauge and the Planned Economy

(This is a further instalment of Sergei Dorozhkov's presentation at our AGM)

New realities asked for new machines. Production of locomotives was reduced to just two types, developing roughly 150 and 250 hp, rather weak by world standards. Both came as further developments of pre-revolutionary designs, but only the larger class 157 became a real pride and joy.



*A type 157 locomotive of
Nizhnii Novgorod power station*

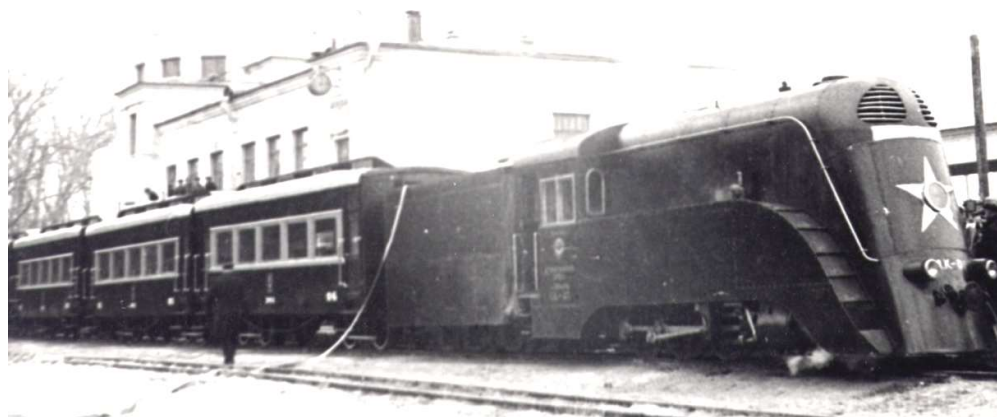
Many industrial lines needed more powerful engines, and these had to be ordered from abroad, mainly from Germany, which became the main foreign economic partner of the USSR in the early 1930s. When Adolf Hitler came to power, co-operation rapidly ended, and further orders were placed in Belgium. The last batch came from Porter of the USA in 1941, just before the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War.

In the 1930s a brand-new institution was born within the planned economic system of the USSR. This was the network of 'young pioneer' educational centres, where boys and girls of school age mastered various adult professions. There were courses of young botanists, young sailors, firemen and even young machine-gunners, but only young railwaymen proved to be really viable. Across the country, mainly in the towns with major railway junctions, educational centres were established for teaching railway professions to children. Each such establishment had educational classes and its own narrow gauge railway, sometimes quite complicated. Rather unexpectedly the idea received ready response from children and parents, and big railways soon began to receive a constant supply of well prepared and skilled cadres.

The Second World and Great Patriotic War brought severe strain on the country. Both at the front and in the rear, the railways fought and worked for victory. Surprisingly, for a time of military trucks, tanks and planes, armoured trains found an honored niche. At least three armoured trains were known to exist on the narrow gauge in the USSR. Their fighting qualities might have been uncertain, but in a war effort all means were good.

In the deep rear many new narrow gauge lines were built during the war years to supply the economy of a country at war. Locomotives were often driven and maintained by women, and young pioneers from children's railways, too young for the front, stood on the footplates, showing their skills.

May of 1945 brought long-awaited peace, new life and new realities.



The Gorki (Nizhniy Novgorod) pioneer railway in 1939 fitted a streamlined cowling to its Type 63 0-8-0 (ex Moscow Co. of Feeder Rlys).

Following post-war rehabilitation industrial narrow gauge in the USSR continued to blossom, first boosted by numerous victory-trophies and later by new supplies from the countries of the newly formed Soviet bloc. With the Baltic States and Transcarpathia becoming parts of the USSR, the mileage of public narrow gauge lines suddenly sprang up, but this was not for long. Towards the 1960s political and economical reasons, as well as road competition, caused massive closures of public lines or severe decline of their traffic.

Extraction of peat and cutting of wood remained the main jobs for the narrow gauge, and in these industries 750mm tracks remained the backbone of transportation for years to come.

In the mid-1950s there came a brave attempt to recover the agricultural significance of the narrow gauge, when over 500 miles of new railways were planned for development of the Virgin Lands in Altai and Kazakhstan. Poor planning and the rise of the lorry held back this initiative, and just a handful were actually built.

Another unexpected and painful blow came from the politicians: the XX session of the Communist party of the USSR in February 1956 announced transition of Soviet railways to so-called 'progressive traction'. Soviet steam locomotives of the time were quite modern and efficient, and this was true for narrow gauge too. However, it was diesels and electrics, not steam locomotives, on the political agenda. That same 1956 the last broad gauge steam engines left locomotive works at Kolomna and Voroshilovgrad, and feverish attempts to master mass production of diesels and electrics began to be taken. With narrow gauge

this just did not work. There simply was no suitable machine, capable of replacing the robust 0-8-0s of the PT-4 family. Thus, 'unofficially', Votkinsk continued production of the VP-4s until 1960.



The Shatura peat line in the 1950s

All the same, dieselisation was knocking at the door. With the introduction of the diesel-hydraulic Tu4s from Kambarka it went very rapidly, and towards the mid-1970s industry switched to diesels completely. According to Soviet plan targets, all redundant machinery had to be scrapped. Thus towards the 1980s narrow gauge steam, even of modern types, became largely extinct. This happened much faster than on the broad gauge.

And then came 'Perestroika' . . .

* * * * *

Annual General Meeting. NERHT's 2019 AGM will be on May 18 and as usual at the Model Railway Club's premises in Calshot Street. The formal business will be followed by an illustrated talk on Croatia's railway heritage by Dr Tamara Stefanac, Director of the Croatian Railway Museum.

The New Europe Railway Heritage Trust ('NERHT') is a voluntary organisation established to help railway preservation in the former USSR and the ex-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe (registered in the UK as charity No 1099229).

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