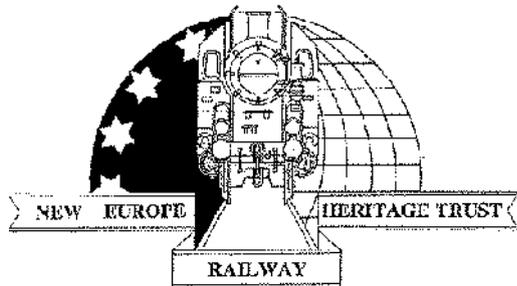


Eastern Star



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Polish Narrow Gauge Festival

NERHT was represented at the Polish narrow gauge railway festival held at Bialosliwie by the Wyrzysk District Railway Association in June.

The Wirsitzer Kreisbahn was a 600mm gauge railway opened in 1895 in what was then part of Prussia. In the years before the First World War it reached a maximum length of 150km and carried passengers as well as freight. After the end of the war the area became part of the new state of Poland and the railway was taken over by the Poles as the Wyrzysk District Railway. It survived the Second World War and was nationalised in 1949, going into a slow decline through the 60's and 70's until in 1994 all services were discontinued. The

track between Bialo liwie and Łob enica remained in place and in 1999 the

Pozna Railway Modelers' Club started running trains between the two towns and in 2000 the Wyrzysk District Railway Association was set up based at Biało liwie, where the engine sheds and maintenance facilities were sited. In 2008 the railway infrastructure, rolling stock and the station accommodation building in Biało liwie were given legal protection and in 2009 ownership was transferred from the PKP to the District of Piła.

NERHT presence at this year's annual festival was assured by Stephen Wiggs (chairman), Jonathan Sutton (secretary), Graham Farr, and Gordon Rushton.

Jonathan Sutton writes:

We successfully got ourselves from the airport to Pozna railway station and proceeded by train to Piła. From there we had been instructed by our Association contact Hermann Schmidtendorf to take a taxi to Biało liwie. The driver overshot the turning off the main road and had to do a u-turn, and directions to the hotel had to be requested from a passing local, but we arrived at the hotel and met up with Hermann. Our accommodation was a hundred yards or so further down the street in a sort of self-catering holiday apartment over two small shops. We were able to eat at the hotel, however, so self-catering proved unnecessary. The reason for our accommodation away from the hotel was that the hotel had been booked out by others coming for the festival. The next morning we walked down the road to find the narrow gauge railway. Biało liwie is on the main line from Berlin to Warsaw and the line crosses the road by a level crossing. Just in front of the crossing narrow gauge rails could be seen in the road surface; it turned out that the narrow gauge station had been situated immediately behind the standard



gauge station, but nothing of the building or tracks now remained. Following the rails off to the right we found an imposing brick building (left) which had provided accommodation to the station master and other workers on an elevation above the tracks and the engine shed, and a fairly steeply graded track leading up to the workshops. There was already a crowd of people; the Association has a

German supporters group, and apart from the Germans we found two more Brits but the vast majority were locals. There were three steam locomotives present: an 0-4-0T O & K and a Polish Ty3471 which belong to the line, and a Borsig 0-4-0 which I believe is normally to be found on the Park railway at Pozna . Passenger trains were being run on the approximately 4km-long stretch of track which the Association had restored; we had been promised a ride but as demand was so great the timetable had been 'thrown away' and the queue was such that it was fairly clear we would not get a ride that day. Instead we were taken by road to Wysoka, the terminus of a branch line, where we found another large station and accommodation building, but built of concrete rather than brick. A group had brought a goods wagon there to carry tools for carrying out some work; the small

diesel locomotive which had hauled it had found no difficulty in crossing the road just before the end of the line but behind the 'works train' came the O & K locomotive and, due to the slope of the pavement each side of the crossing and the height of the tarmac above the rail tops, it was decided not to try and bring it across the road. The discussion with the locomotive steaming gently beside the road was again of great interest to the locals (see picture, p.1).

That evening back at the hotel there was a thunderstorm and a heavy shower, but the weather on the Sunday was sunnier than before. Queues had quickly formed again for the passenger train so a minibus was laid on for us to follow the line by road to Łob enica. On the way we passed a small group of Germans with their own diesel and a goods wagon who were clearing the track with a chain-saw and other tools. The main engine shed and maintenance facilities had been situated at Łob enica until 1922. The ruins of the engine shed – heavily overgrown – could still be seen, but the sidings in front of the station had been cleared and a flowerbed created beside the station building. We were told that the mayor of Łob enica is very much a supporter of the plans to create a tourist railway, and it is intended to create a small museum in the ground floor of the station building.

On our return to Biało liwie we did at last get our ride on the train; not in one of the 'toast-rack' carriages but in one of the maintenance wagons that had been added to the trains to increase capacity. The stretch of line which is available for tourist trains at the moment runs into a forest where a run-around loop has been built.

On the Monday morning we were able to catch a train from Biało liwie back to Piła where Hermann Schmidtendorf took us for a tour of his locomotive restoration company. There were several items of rolling stock being worked on and it was interesting to see a Polish version of the restoration facilities at the Bluebell Railway which Stephen and I had visited some weeks earlier. From Piła we got another train to Pozna where Stephen, Graham and Gordon got a taxi to the airport for their flight back to England and I went into the Old Town to look around before catching the train back to Budapest via Warsaw.

My impressions: this was my first visit to Poland. It was heartening to see the amount of interest in the line from the local population but, because the number of visitors was unexpectedly high, there were occasional signs of overload. We were able to buy postcards but otherwise the only other souvenir available was a book in Polish about the railway (which I bought anyway for the pictures). I understood that the catering facilities were under pressure at times. It is to be hoped that the usable track can be extended to come out of the forest so passengers can enjoy views of the surrounding countryside; this would of course have the downside that the longer the train ride the more comfort and facilities will be required to attract the passengers. There would appear to be political support at a local level for the development of the railway and I look forward to reading news of continuing progress.

(photos are by Jonathan Sutton)

MORE POLISH NEWS

The railway heritage situation in Poland continues to be deteriorate, with both the Warsaw Railway museum and the Pyskowice depot museum facing an uncertain future. It was against this background that Andrew Scott, former

Director of the National Railway Museum (York) and NERHT Chairman Stephen Wiggs flew to Krakow in July, where they were met by Andrew Goltz, who has been active for many years in Polish railway preservation, and by Bill Parker of the Flour Mill.

The main purpose of the visit was to enable Andrew Scott to take part in a seminar held at the Silesia University of Technology, Katowice, on plans to develop the unique double roundhouse in the city as a railway museum. The seminar was organised by Professor Marek Sitarz, Director of the Department of Railways of the University; NERHT is keeping in touch with those responsible for this project, and has offered further help. Apart from the Katowice depot the delegates saw various railway sites, including two sections of the once extensive 785mm gauge system which formerly served the coal-mining and steel-producing areas of Silesian. At the first of these, now run by the Upper Silesian Narrow Gauge Railway Society, a historic director's saloon was attached to a scheduled train to enable the visitors to travel on the Bytom branch, the longest operational section of the system, while at the Ruda Raciborskie Railway Station Museum they rode on a special train on a short section of the line extending into a nearby forest. The group also visited the Pyskowice museum and met Krzysztof and Zbygniew Jakubina who together with a small band of helpers have restored Kriegslok derivative, Ty42-24, the first large main-line steam locomotive in Poland to be restored to working order by a team of volunteers. The Katowice area certainly has much to offer railway enthusiasts, including various town and interurban tram networks, and all of us who made the trip would like to express our gratitude our hosts for their warm welcome and their help in making this an interesting and productive visit. Our thanks also go to Andrew Goltz for assisting with logistics and translation.



Andrew Scott (left) and NERHT chairman Stephen Wiggs at the Ruda Raciborskie Railway Station Museum. Photo. Marek Ciesielski

NEW BALKAN LINKS

While in Romania in September for the conference on the Sibiu Agnita Railway (see below), Stephen Wiggs and Jonathan Sutton made several new contacts in Bucharest, including those actively pursuing plans for a national railway museum and the proposed Romanian national railway heritage association.



Further news of these projects will be given in future editions of Eastern Star. In addition Stephen and Jonathan travelled to the town of Ruse, just over the river Danube in Bulgaria, where they met Tzanko Simeonov of the Union of Bulgarian Train Modellers (our guest speaker at the 2012 NERHT AGM) and visited the Bulgarian National Railway Museum where this picture by Jonathan Sutton was made. It shows one of the Bulgarian railways' initial, Manchester-built, locomotives.

The Fedecrail Youth Camp

In recent years NERHT has encouraged young railway preservation activists from Eastern Europe to take part in the Fedecrail Youth Camp, and has provided financial assistance to enable members of our partner organisations to join this extremely useful and worthwhile annual event. We are pleased to say that the Camp held this August in Austria was attended by young volunteers from Poland, Romania and Ukraine and we hope to print accounts of their experiences in the next issue of Eastern Star. In the meantime a NERHT Youth Fund is being set up which will be used to make grants in future years to those from the East wishing to take part in the Youth Camp.

A Tramway Museum for Sofia?

NERHT has been co-operating for some years with the Union of Bulgarian Train Modellers and more recently with the Public Transport and Infrastructure Association ('the Association') represented by Mr Tzanko Simeonov, who has sent details of the Association's proposals to preserve historic tramway vehicles formerly used in Sofia.

NERHT chairman Stephen Wiggs has written to the mayor of Sofia in support of this project:

' . . . My colleagues and I are convinced that the trams which are of interest to the Association are an important part of your country's heritage and should be safeguarded for posterity. In addition the candidature of Sofia as European Capital of Culture in 2019 will be strengthened, if the historic trams are restored and a museum of public transport is established in the original tram depot. Accordingly we would respectfully ask the Municipality of Sofia to support the proposals put to you by the Association. . . I have offered to arrange for the leaders of the Association and all who are interested in preserving Bulgaria's historic trams to visit the British National Tramway Museum. . . I do hope that it will be possible to arrange a visit to England in the fairly near future, and that either you or some other representative of Sofia Municipality together with members of the Association will be able to join the delegation. NERHT will be pleased to make all arrangements for the tour. . . '

Several places where the dozen or so preserved vehicles could be exhibited have been suggested but the Klokochnitsa tram depot is currently favoured. Opened in 1901, this was Sofia's first tram depot, but is no longer used for that purpose.

UKRAINE



An AZIZU project in Ukraine: a PD-2 draisine in course of restoration at Antonivka. *Photos: Wolfram Wendelin*



Readers of our previous issue may recall the advance notice of two steam runs arranged for September. These duly took place, as evidenced by these pictures supplied by Wolfram Wendelin. The broad-gauge L-3533 is seen above, at L'viv, and the lower picture shows narrow-gauge Gr-280 at work on the Gaivoron (Haivoron) line.



SARUK visits Transylvania

In mid-September SARUK members made their fourth annual excursion to the recently closed 2' 6" gauge Transylvanian railway that had run from Sibiu to Agnita. The visit was designed to coincide with a Conference that had been arranged to decide on the future of the line.

Five years ago a Consortium of local authorities had been formed to lease the line from the Romanian tourist authority - the S.A.A.F. A lease had been arranged which saw the rent rise to 18,000 euros a month from June 2013. This absurd figure had threatened to halt all progress and the line, a National Historic Monument, would then fall victim to the numerous Romanian metal thieves. However, the new general manager of the S.A.A.F. was present at the Conference; he told the meeting that he had been unaware that his organisation even owned the line! He commented that in comparison with the multi-million losses that were haemorrhaging from his company the S.A.R. was fairly small beer. He was able to give a guarantee that he was happy to pass ownership of the line to the Consortium as long as the local County Council of Sibiu became a member. SARUK hailed this outcome as a major step forward in the attempt to preserve one of Romania's historic narrow gauge railways. However, local politics seem to be getting in the way of this sensible solution with Mr Cindrea, the Chairman of Sibiu County Council, yet to make up his mind to become involved.

Meanwhile SARUK members were able to help their Romanian colleagues replace a length of track that had been broken by a plough on the eight km section between Cornatel and the village of Hosman. A similar length was removed from a disused siding at the junction at Cornatel (where a branch goes off to Varpur), taken by draisine to the damaged track and inserted by the SARUK and Romanian track gangs. This meant that the unbroken length between the two villages was once again open for light draisine traffic. A fact taken advantage of by the SARUK party who enjoyed the eight-kilometre draisine ride in pouring rain! David Allan

Baltic Railways Magazine

We are pleased to see the appearance of the latest issue of this highly-praised periodical. BRM14 can be obtained from Richard Tapper at NERHT, over the counter at Ian Allan bookshops in Birmingham, Manchester and London Waterloo, or by post from Tony Olsson (Flat 2, 10 Oxford Grove, Ilfracombe, North Devon, EX34 9HQ. Please include a cheque for £6.00 payable to J A Olsson).

Items included in this issue include the doubling of handling capacity at Draugyst Marshalling Yard, as part of the redevelopment of the Klaipeda railway complex; the green light given to transport the grain harvest (where do you go for grain wagons when you and your neighbours have a bumper harvest to move?); the new PESA diesel trains between Vilnius City and Minsk; FLIRT diesel trains in operation in Estonia since August and the

withdrawal of the last RVR-built Soviet era trains; the new information systems at Riga City Station; the reconstruction of Kaliningrad Northern Station,; the meeting of the heads of Kaliningrad, Belarus and Lithuanian railways in July to discuss ways of attracting freight to Kaliningrad; the VL26 battery-electric locomotives of 1966 and their fate; the first appearance in Lithuania of a Class 66 diesel; and a historical survey of Liepaja's railways from 1838.

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The restored rolling stock at Domaszek, Hungary, mentioned in our last issue.

Photo: Ferenc Dobra

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John Keylock 1937-2013

We were sad to hear of the death of John Keylock, Treasurer and Secretary of SARUK, the British group set up by NERHT members and others to support the Sibiu-Agnita Railway in Romania. Over the years John held various positions within the Welsh Highland Heritage Railway (formerly known as the Welsh Highland Railway 1964 Company) and the Welsh Highland Heritage Group and showed great kindness in welcoming NERHT guests to Wales. Our sympathy goes to John's family, friends and colleagues. S W

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Richard Tapper, our sales manager (richardtapper@btconnect.com or 0163 530464) may be able to obtain copies of The Handbook for Railway Steam Locomotive Enginemen which is no longer obtainable from Ian Allan.



The Vyhoda Railway is still serving its local economy: a recent picture by Szilva Peter

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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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