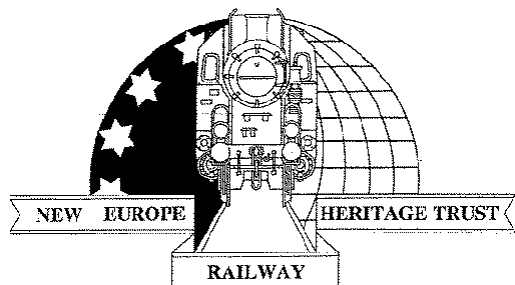


Eastern Star



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

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Night closes in at Panevezys in Lithuania, during the 2016 Feldbahnen festival. Andris Biedrins

The NERHT Annual General Meeting

Once again, NERHT enjoyed the hospitality of the Model Railway Club headquarters near Kings Cross for its AGM. 2016-2017 has been a quite busy year, as is detailed in our Chairman's annual report (*see next page*).

NERHT ANNUAL REPORT 2016-2017

In the past year we have pursued our objective of helping railway preservation in our area of benefit, the former Soviet Union and the ex-Communist countries of Eastern and Central Europe, the region which is sometimes called the New Europe. As well as continuing to work with our long-standing partners we have developed new links, in particular in Croatia, Poland and Russia.

As as a result of health problems and other factors our activists went on fewer expeditions in the past 12 months than in previous years. As recorded in our journal *Eastern Star*, one notable pioneering journey last June was to the former Soviet Republic of Georgia where our delegates visited the Borjomi- Bakuriani narrow gauge railway, and made contacts with those seeking to preserve the country's railway heritage, which we expect will lead to further co-operation.



On the Borjomi - Bakuriani narrow gauge railway.

Andris Biedrins

Our work has always involved arranging for railway preservationists from our area of benefit to spend time in Great Britain on study tours and work experience, and in recent weeks the committee has been preparing to receive various groups. A year ago we welcomed delegates from the Covasna – Comandau railway in Romania who enjoyed a visit to the Welsh narrow gauge lines, and since then our experts have given them further help with their campaign to save and develop the Covasna railway with its historic incline.

Under our constitution the objectives of NERHT include tramway as well as railway preservation so it is good to welcome this year's guests from Bulgaria where they are working to set up a tramway and urban transport museum in Sofia. Sadly, their

efforts have not always been supported by the public sector, and NERHT has lobbied the Bulgarian authorities on behalf of the museum project. In recent months NERHT, Fedecrail and Heritage Railway Association have also lobbied Ukrainian diplomats over the historic depot at Tsvitkove in Ukraine and the steam locomotives there which are threatened with destruction.

We also work with Fedecrail in supporting the Fedecrail youth camp, and in 2016 and again this year we have provided funds to enable young volunteers from Romania and Ukraine to take part in it. Following the sad death last year of our Secretary, Jonathan Sutton, our youth fund is being reconstituted as the Jonathan Sutton Memorial Fund which will be used to enable preservationists from the New Europe to travel abroad to obtain information and experience, and we are most grateful to those who have contributed to the fund so far.

Obviously the New Europe today is very different to what it was when NERHT was founded, yet we are convinced that there is as much work as ever for us to do. As a non-political association we refrain from expressing opinions on political matters, including the impending departure of Great Britain from the European Union; our aim is to share expertise in railway preservation, and hopefully this will continue whatever the political situation.

As always, we must remember that our work would not be possible without those who assist us in all sorts of ways, including railway companies and museums in Great Britain and elsewhere who have welcomed our guests, other helpers of all kinds and, above all, NERHT members who donate funds or help in other ways. After a period during which several preservation activists – both NERHT members and others – have died or fallen sick, those of us who have been bereaved or unwell have been overwhelmed by sympathy and support from other enthusiasts, all of which shows that there really is such a thing as the railway preservation community. We in NERHT must now complete the task of bringing our friends in the East into this community.

On behalf of the Committee I should like to thank all of you for your support.

Stephen Wiggs, Chairman, NERHT

20 May 2017

Livius Kooy takes over as NERHT Secretary

We are delighted to report that at the annual general meeting on 20 May Livius Kooy was elected as Secretary of NERHT. Livius was Secretary of Fedecrail for over twenty years until he decided to retire last year; during this time he took part in several expeditions to the New Europe, and by joining our team he will help strengthen our links with the Federation. Although NERHT is based in Britain we always emphasise that the United Kingdom does not have a monopoly of expertise in railway preservation, and Livius's wide experience of railways in the Netherlands (his own country), Eastern and Western Europe will be a great asset to our Trust. In the meantime our thanks go to Graham Farr for his service during the past year as Acting Secretary.

Changes at Fedecrail

At this year's Fedecrail conference held in Antwerp David Morgan stood down as President, having held office since the Federation was established in 1994. He remains a member of the Fedecrail Council. We in NERHT and our friends in the East owe a great debt of gratitude to David for his support for railway preservation in the New Europe, especially in the pioneering days following the end of Communism when he made several visits to the ex-Soviet countries in challenging conditions, including a memorable trip to Lithuania in the freezing winter of 2001-2002 arranged by NERHT at a few days' notice in response to the threat to close the Panevezys - Anyksciai narrow gauge railway, which probably would no longer be running but for David's advocacy before the Lithuanian Parliament. We now look forward to working with Jaap Nieweg, sometime manager of the Hoorn - Medemblik steam tramway in the Netherlands, who has taken over as Fedecrail President, and wish him all the best in his new post.

Support for Bulgarian Tram Preservation

The Public Transport and Infrastructure Association of Bulgaria ('PTIA') is campaigning to establish a tramway museum in Sofia. During the recent Fedecrail conference this project - which faces many challenges - was the subject of a presentation by John Jones of NERHT at the inaugural meeting of the newly-formed Tramway Operating Group, which was given a positive reception. It is hoped that the Sofia project will be treated as a priority issue by the Group.



On 20 May delegates from the PTIA attended the NERHT annual general meeting where Tzanko Simeonov gave his own presentation on the Sofia project which was greatly appreciated by those present.

Stephen Wiggs (*left*) introduces Tzanko Simeonov (*right*) at the NERHT AGM.

The Bulgarians then went on to the National Tramway Museum at Crich where they were welcomed by the Chairman of the Board of Management Colin Heaton and other leaders of the Museum. Tzanko said later how much the group appreciated their meeting with representatives of the Museum, and how impressed they were by the tramway village and by the standard of restoration, maintenance and operation of the historic tram cars. We in NERHT are most grateful to everyone in Crich who helped with the visit and look forward to co-operating in future with those concerned with the Sofia project.

The first vehicle acquired by PTIA (as an organisation) is this trolley bus, which has been brought to Sofia and is awaiting a quite substantial restoration.



Baltic Interlude

Michael Davies has sent us an interesting travelogue covering a trip to the Baltic States this spring and we present the parts most likely to interest preservationists. (The full text is obtainable from the Editor).

In Riga ... the tram routes were full of interest varying from some partly single-line routes to leafy suburbs, and busy double-track routes to areas full of Soviet-built high-rise apartment blocks. Every route finished with a turning circle which in some cases one could travel over, but in others one must alight and the tram proceeds round empty.

Using the most frequent train service in Latvia we travelled out to the Art Deco beach resort of Jurmala, once a favourite of Soviet leaders. This is an electric train of six carriages and very well filled on our Sunday visit. To those of us used to British rolling stock we found these trains very roomy and of course we were riding on the 5ft Russian gauge...Thanks to the good offices of our NEHRT friends in Britain we had made contact with Mr Andris Biedrins in Riga and our second day of travel was in Andris's car for the 2h30m journey to Gulbene to enjoy a ride on the 2ft 6in gauge 'BANITIS' railway to Aluksnes. Unfortunately we couldn't manage to fit in with the fortnightly Saturday service of steam trains but that disappointment was more than compensated by the welcome we received from Mr Raitis Melders, their Manager. He most thoughtfully added an extra carriage for our convenience, which also included coffee and a tray of cakes.

This journey was full of interest as we proceeded through the very rural landscape, calling occasionally at an intermediate station to pick up or set down locals with their shopping bags. In Gulbene we were shown over the extensive railway works which included both narrow gauge and Russian gauge facilities with a mixed gauge



turntable. Originally each gauge had its own impressive station building but the narrow gauge now uses the broad-gauge station (see picture left). Sadly broad-gauge passenger trains only run to Gulbene on festive days which is about three times annually. In addition to the station there is a housing 'colony' for railway workers, built during the early years of Latvian independence. We retraced our steps by road to Riga... We had allowed time for a trip by

canal boat round the city and later we went out on a tram to the Railway Museum which was most interesting. There was a comprehensive section devoted to the history and operation of the railway in Latvia whilst outside was a fine display of rolling stock, including steam locomotives.

Baltic Railways Magazine

Tony Olsson writes: Members will be aware that printed copies of this magazine ceased in early 2015. The online version, the Facebook page and the new BRM App have also recently stopped operating. They can still be accessed on line, but haven't been updated since late 2016. I understand this is due to financial difficulties. . . Sadly this has resulted in work being stopped on other projects, the most important of which is the book about internal combustion railway vehicles (mainly railcars) of Lithuanian Railways during the period of independence 1919 to 1940, a complementary volume to the book about steam locomotives during the same period which was published in 2012. From my involvement in checking the translations into English, I gained the impression the book was not far off being published. When I receive more information from Zilvinas Urbutis I will pass it on, but if any members are able and willing to help get this project back up and running, I would be delighted to hear from them via tonyolsson124@btinternet.com.

Russia

New Preservation Items

Sergei Dorozhkov informs us that a new narrow-gauge locomotive has arrived at Ekaterinburg. This is Floridsdorf 3150 of 1938, an 0-4-0 side-tank locomotive, which originally worked at Alpine Montan Gesellschaft in Austria. This is the sole example of Floridsdorf's *Erzberg type*, designed for the metallurgical industry. Following a career in industry and changing several owners in preservation the loco was again offered for sale last year and eventually arrived in Ekaterinburg from the Czech Republic on Tuesday, March 21. As it is a historical item destined for museum use the local customs authorities declared it free of any tariffs or taxes.

The railway newspaper *Gudok* on 24 May reported the restoration of what is said to be now the oldest operable locomotive in Russia and one of more than 30 locomotives that have, over the years, been restored by St Petersburg's *Moskva Sortirovochnyi* locomotive depot. It is a broad-gauge side-tank shunter described as being of the 'soft-sign' class. It was built in the late 19th century, worked at a Moscow area locomotive depot until the 1970s and was then put on a pedestal for a few decades. The news item did not identify the locomotive, but it appears to be 'soft sign' 2012, an 0-6-0T once plinthed at Roslavl (*picture below*).



b-2012, the Kolomna type 62 built in 1897 for the Vladikavkaz Railway, plinthed at Roslavl and bearing its 'soft sign' class symbol

Photo Lvova Anastasiya

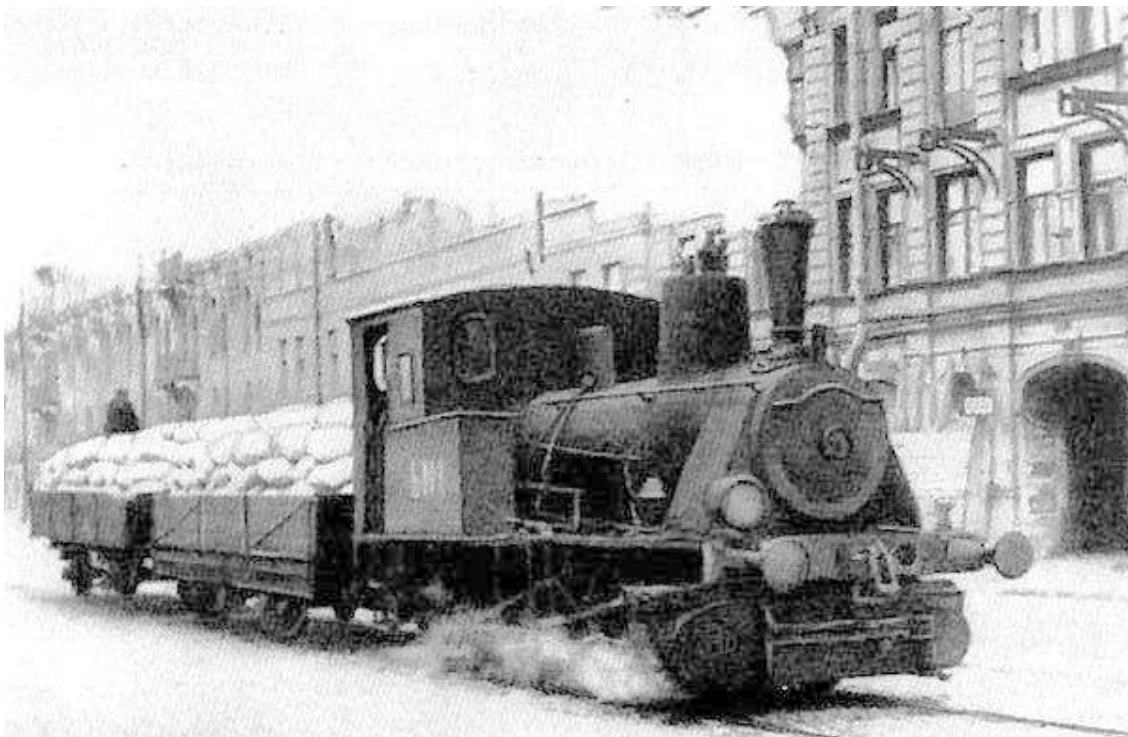
The Russian 'Soft Sign' Locomotive Classification

Another 'soft-sign' locomotive brought to the attention of *Eastern Star* readers was the unit 'stolen' from the Donetsk Railway Museum in 2014 (see *Eastern Star of December 2014*). Allocating the soft sign, an unvoiced typographical symbol, as a class indicator (rather like identifying a UK design as the 'apostrophe' class) does require some explanation. The practice began in 1912, when the alphabetical system of locomotive classification was imposed on all railways. The change seems to have been an attempt at clarification; individual railways had often reclassified a given standard type into their own systems, or non-systems, of identification. Thus a given prefix might signify more than one design, depending on ownership, which could cause confusion. But the Russian alphabet had a limited number of letters, after all, and because there were so many different types it was decided that all tank shunting locomotives of whatever design should be reclassified as soft-sign (б) units. Strictly speaking, this meant that they lost a classification and became a category. As for those units that went to industry rather than the mainline railways, the picture is clouded, but for the most part they seem to have escaped this change, while the locomotive builders themselves continued with their own type designations.

At one point it seemed that the hard sign (Ъ) would also be used to categorise passenger tank locomotives, and this was applied to a few types. Sometimes a superscript was added to indicate the builder. Thus б^л indicated a tank shunter built by the Lugansk works.

The practice ended when the five-year plans began and new designs like the numerous 9P type were introduced. However, the soft-sign categorisation reappeared after the war when German Type 92 eight-wheel tank shunters were taken into Soviet service as Тб units (the T signifying 'trophy.') Interestingly, the larger German 2-8-2 tank locomotives were accorded the hard sign, becoming ТЪ in Soviet service.

J N W



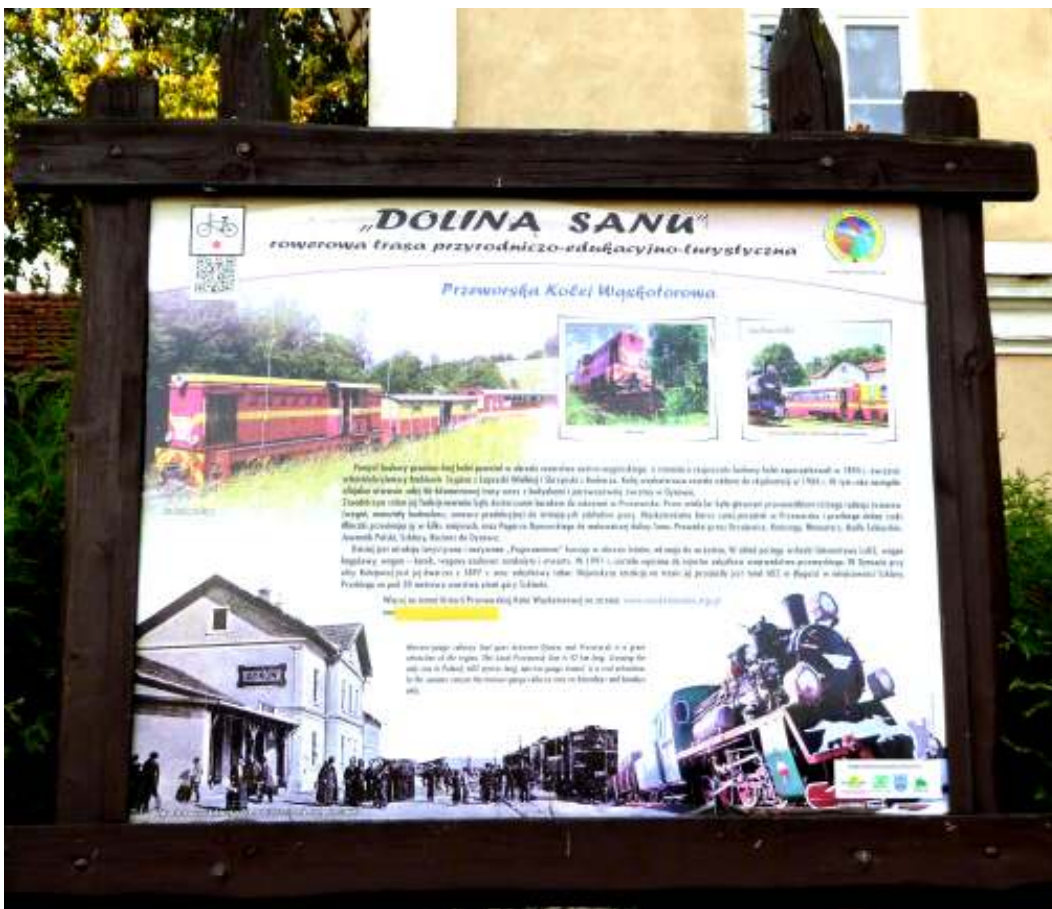
A 'soft-sign' locomotive, possibly numbered б111, runs over tramlines to take flour to a bakery in besieged Leningrad, 1942

A Polish Anniversary

Nick Fletcher concludes his report, begun in our last issue:

After staying overnight in Cisna we drove back north to visit the region's other working narrow gauge railway which is also 750mm gauge. This runs for 46 kms from Dynow in the south to Przeworsk in the north where it connects to the standard gauge network. In fact, there is still a busy mainline station at Przeworsk and it was from there that we dropped off our hire car and later caught the train back to Warsaw. Unfortunately the line was not running that day and it was quite difficult to see any operational motive power. At Dynow, a dead class Px48 0-8-0 is displayed as a 'monument'. From 'desk research' we discovered that the mainstay of the line's motive power comprises three operational Lxd2 class Romanian Bo-Bo diesel-hydraulics. Two other Lxd2s await heavy overhaul, and one loco has been relegated to the role of 'monument' and donator of spare parts to the operational locos.

The line was originally built between 1900 and 1904 to serve a big sugar refining plant in Przeworsk. Like the Bieszczady line it was originally 760 mm gauge. It was closed by PKP in 2001, but by 2002 the line's infrastructure had been licensed to the Przeworsk District Council, the District Council sub-licensed the line to SKPL, a private operator, and weekend tourist trains ran during the summer holidays with the occasional freight working until about 2010. Today the line is run by Przeworsk District Council's Roads Department.



Poster advertising the line to tourists.

Nick Fletcher

The line has two rather unique features. Firstly, it is the only operational narrow gauge railway in Poland to have a tunnel (600m long). Secondly, a few kms north of Dynow, the railway virtually runs through a restaurant which forms an intermediate station and is, of course, a good place to stop for lunch.



The 0-8-0 at Dynow

Nick Fletcher

A comparison between the two lines would not be fair as the Przeworsk line was not operating when we were there. However, what was apparent was the advantage that the Bieszczady had in terms of location. It clearly benefits from running through some spectacular scenery and its location in a popular tourist area, even though it is so remote from Warsaw or any other major Polish city. The Przeworsk line in comparison is much closer to an important city, Rzeszow. Similarly to the Welshpool and Llanfair line, it starts its run through typically nondescript agricultural land, even though the scenery does improve considerably towards the top end of the line. A personal view is that this is a major problem faced by a lot of the railway preservation centres active in Poland at the moment. Poland still has a lot of historic railway infrastructure rusting away in odd corners of the country, but sadly not in places that tourists are in the habit of visiting. The challenge faced by those in charge is so to develop their facilities so that their repositories of railway relics become transformed into major tourist destinations in their own right.



The station building at Dvnow, now used as a residence for railway workers.

Nick Fletcher

David Woodhouse 1932 - 2017

The railway heritage community was saddened to hear of the passing of David Woodhouse who died on 11 April. As well as serving as General Manager of the Tal-y-Llyn Railway and helping set up and run the Great Little Trains of Wales marketing organisation (for which he was made MBE for services to tourism in Wales), he was Managing Director of Heritage Railway Association, and was also active in Fedecrail. Before NERHT was founded David gave advice on the development of historic railways outside Great Britain for tourism, and in our early days we were grateful to him for sharing the benefit of his experience with us, and for representing NERHT at our exhibition in St Petersburg on British heritage railways almost twenty years ago. Our sympathy goes to his widow Margaret and family.



Another view of the 2016 *Feldbahnen* event at Panevezys, Lithuania.

Andris Biedrins

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).

Chairman: Stephen Wiggs sandgw@hotmail.com tel. +44(0) 2085053186

Secretary: Livius Kooy l.j.kooy@planet.nl

Membership & Sales: Richard Tapper 39 Grange Court, Boundary Road, Newbury RG14 7PH
tel. +44(0)1635 30464

Treasurer: Robert Raynor, 2A Avenue Road, Forest Gate, London E7 0LD

Editor, *Eastern Star*: John Westwood, 9 Whitefriars Meadow, Sandwich, Kent CT13 9AS
jnwestwood@tiscali.co.uk