

Sussex Miniature Locomotive Society Ltd

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BEECH HURST NEWS



Cover picture: -

'New' Loco: Albeit not new, Graham Miller's 'Britannia' locomotive has now proved a reliable runner after a lot of trials & tribulations during the 2018 season. A little more work is required to refine her but successful passenger runs during September have made those trials worthwhile!

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Editor's Notes

As I write these notes, the clocks have just been wound back by one hour and it seems strange that by 17:00 it is getting dark – winter will soon be upon us! That said, we have been very lucky during the early part of the autumn with generally mild and dry days, no major storms and only now are we experiencing the first real cold snap. It is hard to think that barely a month ago we were still running trains and enjoying the late summer warmth! With the end of season in mind, our milestone year ended extremely well, which I shall describe in a little more detail later in this edition. Suffice to say we all enjoyed ourselves on that final Saturday! Overall, 2018 has been a good season for us, although be it not for that final weekend, barely an average one compared to recent years. The mid-summer heat certainly curtailed numbers on some days when the beach seemed like the better option! However, all our special days and visits passed off with fine weather, so for that we should be very thankful.

As we are now a month into the closed season, winter work is well underway and I shall report on the latest progress in this edition.

From the August newsletter, I would like to thank Dave M & Mike W for their respective articles and photographs in what was a pretty sizeable edition! This newsletter is somewhat slimmer by comparison; however there are reports about Passenger Figures for 2018, the aforementioned last running weekend and Winter Work, as well as short pieces about the recent talk by Bill Gage and our Bonfire / Firework evening last weekend. In addition to the usual writings I have also updated our Diary to early 2019, so please read on and enjoy...

Andrew

Chairman's Notes

Our running season ended on a high note with fine weather and high passenger numbers, especially for our first evening run with passengers. Fully prepared with lighting, guards and marshals, and risk assessment, and in conjunction with the café, we ran into the twilight. Thanks to good publicity on the local Facebook, we were extremely busy. We have ended the year with excellent finances. This was due to a combination of exceptionally warm, dry summer and autumn weather, combined with a lot of hard work from the running members who turn out each weekend to provide such a reliable service which would be the envy of any full sized railway. I can honestly say we have never failed to have trains running promptly at 2pm for year after year. Only rain stops us. Thanks to everyone from ops managers, to track workers, signal engineers, station masters, drivers, and guards, who keep this club functioning so efficiently through the running season.

This year, in agreement with Joanna in the café, we are changing our Christmas running plans. Following the success of our autumn evening run, Steve Steer, Dan & Mike Wakeling, put forward a suggestion to run evenings for Christmas, no Santa's, just a lighting show around the track and around the station and café. The committee discussed it and agreed to spend on producing a special light show in the back field section of the railway, along with the station. It will require a lot of support, not least because it will highly likely be cold in mid-December.

Dan will produce a roster that should make sure no one need be outside all the time. Mike W will do the risk assessments; Steve S will devise the lighting, with input from our electrical wise men. Our station will be used as the station this year, not a grotto, so no passengers need cross the track now. The council has also widened the pathway along our platform, moving our railings back 18", filling in the gap and laying new tarmac. This should help if we are lucky enough to be very busy, which, weather permitting, I think we will be. Dan is already putting out publicity on local Facebook and we have 1,300 'interested' people. We are operating on 3 consecutive nights so that hopefully if we get rained / snowed off on any night we maybe lucky to get at least two running evenings for our efforts and expense. The event is 'weather permitting', but an occasional shower should not stop the operation. There are sign-up lists on the blackboard or contact Dan if you can help. Drivers, guards and marshals are required. We have set a fare of £2 per ride for this special event, and all being well, we will get back the considerable cost of the lighting and a little profit for our efforts. Hopefully, too, it will be fun to do, after all, it is a hobby! Despite what some may think, we actually enjoy to run for the public, because it makes all the time we spend, (repairing track, clearing leaves and maintaining everything to a high standard) worthwhile. One main item I would like to bring to the attention of drivers for this event, and that is to travel at a very gentle pace! 1) It will be dark, and even windy, so there may be sticks or twigs falling, although I would expect marshals to be patrolling the darker sections, 2) give people time to enjoy the ride, get some photos and see the lights. A slower pace may require us to run 6 trains to keep any queues moving. Anyway, let's see how it goes. It's a first for us.

Back to the present and I would like to thank the track gang for all the hard work so far in replacing an ageing section of track, from the South end of the long tunnel to the end of the 'Nursery Straight'. Special thanks to Roy P, Graham Miller & Mick Robinson who have put in so many days, and to Dave M & Graham Mundy, and a few of us others who played cameo roles to help the progress.

Steve T & Geoff have been working on buffers for the new truck set, which hopefully will be painted this winter. Outside, I'd like to thank both Sam's, and others, for their help with leaf clearance. Winter work has got off to a good start.

A fortnight ago, we had a most excellent talk given by Bill Gage. This was on the history of railways around our area, and included slides and old film clips. On everyone's behalf, I send Bill our thanks for entertaining and enlightening us on a cold October afternoon.

As I write this, Firework Night is looming fast. Andrew B will obtain fireworks and Val will provide our usual hot dinner of baked potatoes, beans and cheese. Thanks to them both.

Lastly, I have been in contact with Kevin Jordan, Peter Chapman's son. Peter's family have been arranging, in conjunction with the council, to provide a bench for the club in recognition and remembrance of Peter's love of being at our club on Sundays. The committee has suggested that we put the bench at the station where Peter loved to be during the running season, taking fares and dispatching trains! Very fitting I think! We wait to see it.

So, good luck for all our autumn / winter events, and I send early Christmas wishes (as the next news will be after the Xmas period).

Mike

Beech Hurst Annual Passenger Figures for 2018

Well here we are at the end of our 65th season and my 42nd report.

At last some good news on the numbers; we had a pretty good increase over the last few years and seem to be recovering to the old levels around 25,000 for a reasonable year.

Last year we just scraped 22,500 with the previous two somewhat lower, now we achieved a brilliant 25,243. This now means a better than average year for a change. The long-term average has been about 23,201 for some time and dropping each year, however this year it has begun to increase a little.

The best day was the last Saturday in September with a score of 1447 passengers (I am told an all time record), the evening run beating the regular afternoon, there was also one other day with 592.

The grand total continues to increase now passed the milestone 1 ½ million mark.

At the end of last season, we were expecting to reach this target in early August and in spite of just 5 washout days we made it pretty much on time. The grand all-time number is now 1,508,106. This might not tie up exactly with the fares as we sometimes do a '£3 Special' and the likes that throws the count off a bit. There are always the few extras added for family, friends (and the odd dog!), but I don't count the dogs. Now we look forward to the 2 millionth in about 20 years time.

For the big celebration I ran up a few statistics (but no graphs) that made very interesting reading and if the editor wants I could do an article just based on that in the future.

Oh, and the telephone numbers? 01508 106xxx is in the greater Norwich area in Suffolk.

For the newer members, this light-hearted bit has traced the phone number map around the country after a remark from some wit that all this stuff is just telephone numbers!

Good steaming...

Chris

End of Season Weekend

Generally, September was a quiet month and aside the last but one weekend, which was not great weather wise, it was very pleasant. On the final Saturday, Mike W had long ago proposed a dusk / night run (including a 'son et lumiere') as something a bit different to finish the season with. This was agreed and although the latter 'son et lumiere' did not transpire we did continue our normal afternoon session through beyond dusk. Fortunately the weather of the previous weekend did not repeat itself and although a bit chilly, the Saturday was otherwise very nice. The plan was to run from 14:00 – 17:00, swap locomotives and station master, before continuing on until at least 19:30 depending on the demand!

The reason I finish with an (!) will shortly become apparent. The afternoon session went well and we were lucky to have a bonus locomotive in the form of John H's 'B1' as additional motive power. Passenger numbers were very steady and by 17:00 Fraser's season record had been broken (for the next 3 hours at least!). Thereafter, and with a steady queue still waiting at the station, locomotives were swapped as quickly as possible for the evening session. Thanks at this point to Graham Miller for keeping his 'Britannia' locomotive on for nearly an extra hour whilst these exchanges took place! With dusk approaching and 5 trains on the track it soon became clear this run was going to prove popular. The queue had not really subsided from 17:00 and was soon beyond Joanna's café and round the corner towards the Harvester. Even with addition of Norman's MLV as a sixth train, the demand kept going until nearly 20:00 when it fairly quickly disappeared. Perhaps the cool temperature or the Burgess Hill fireworks drew people away but to be honest by that stage many of our members (and locos) were getting tired too! As we packed away and the numbers added up, Fraser was pleased to announce that he had once again claimed the season's best with 784 rides in 3 hours, a record Linda had held for only that long! Combined, that meant we had carried 1447 passengers on that Saturday alone, which is barely 100 short of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Day back in 2012. On reflection, and like that Jubilee Day, the last Saturday will be one of those days to be remembered for many a year to come. It ultimately boiled down to a really good group of members, all working together to do something different and having great fun at the same time! Yes it was hard work to prepare for and carry out but it did work and very well too. The novelty of riding in the dusk / dark certainly appealed to many people and as such it will be interesting to see how our Christmas Run fares by comparison. Thanks through these pages to all those who helped out before, during and after this event, and particularly to Dan for the initial advertising, Linda and Fraser as busy station masters, and of course to Mike W for spawning the idea in the first place. We all did very well and during my afternoon TC duties I also had the pleasure of showing round Neil Mortimer and his family who come from the Ickenham club. Neil may be familiar to those of you who attend the Alexandra Palace show, because he helps to run the 'Polly' railway and owns 'Endeavour', which is arguably the best 'Polly' running to this day. They certainly enjoyed their visit, were very impressed by our facilities and would very much like to pay a proper visit in the future, which I am sure we can facilitate! From the actual day itself, sadly no photographs exist; however the following YouTube video does and is available to view at this web address: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0LxrlFq2x1g>

The Sunday was somewhat quiet by comparison and any hope I had of breaking Fraser's record was all but blown by the night before. It was however a good day all the same and Steve S & I had great fun at 17:00 by rounding up as many people as we could to fill the last train of the season and give everybody a very last free ride. Sure enough we managed to do so and it was a really nice way to round off our 2018 running season. Here's to 2019...

Andrew

Winter Work

Since the last running day, winter work has started once again and as such, so has this column. I took the opportunity last weekend to grab some up to date photographs for the newsletter, which appear on the next couple of pages.

Outside, Roy P, Graham Miller and a team of willing (or otherwise) volunteers have been working on the section of track from the South entrance of the long tunnel down the 'Nursery Straight' passed signal 5. As of last week this work had been pretty much completed and below is a piece written by Roy about this work.

Autumn 2018 Track Renewal

This year we renewed the track from the long tunnel South portal to the South end of the 'Nursery Straight'. This is a track length of about 230ft and it gave us a few problems. The first was that about half the 'roofing' bolts holding the track down on the steelwork were heavily rusted. We did not have the services of our expert angle grinder, so we did it ourselves and spent a morning grinding the heads away. The second problem was that all piers are single and the surrounding ground is high which meant that we could not remove the piers for cleaning and painting the steelwork where the pier sits. We had to dig away the ground at the side to enable the piers to be slid along to get access to part of the steelwork. Normally, we would be able to dig even deeper to allow the piers to be tilted and removed, but not in this case.

The third issue encountered was that the welds for some of the cross steel members protruded above the top level but worst still, the top level of some of the cross members were higher than the main steel tops. This meant that the sleepers did not sit on the top of the longitudinal steel surfaces. John Green looked at the old sleepers and found that some had been rebated over the central region, clearly to ensure they only bed down on the longitudinal steel. So, we decided to do the same and I machined a dozen sleepers on one Sunday only to find on the Monday we needed at least another 10. Fortunately Dave M came to the rescue and machined another dozen on the Bridgeport on the Monday. All these sleepers now bed down nicely on the steelwork.

So we have now finished the bulk of the work and will leave the track to settle for a few weeks. Steve S has cut the new stainless steel studding and Andrew B will weld the nuts on ready for the final assembly. We will then be ready for final bolting down and level adjustments.

We have been fortunate with assistance this year, and Graham Miller and myself are grateful for the help of quite a few members over the five weeks. Our particular thanks go to Bob Youldon, Graham Mundy and Mick Robinson who all spent four or more days with us. Other members that helped were Dave M, John G, Adrian L, Andrew B, Chris G, Colin H, Mike P, Norman P, Sam H, Sam R, Steve S & Tom B. (**Picture next page:** The new track on the 'Nursery Straight').

Also outside, Andrew S, Fraser & I spent part of the first Sunday of the closed season checking through the truck fleet and making a list of jobs that are required during the winter period. A number of bearing replacements will be made as well as the skimming of a few wheel sets.



Inside, the 3 new trucks that Steve T has been building up are now mechanically well advanced and have been temporarily put in the carriage shed until it is their turn for final assembly and then painting. Currently the buffers are being fabricated and once complete, these 3 trucks will form a useful 15' set.

Leaf clearance has also continued during the past few weekends with various teams helping to clear the autumn fall bit by bit. A particularly large contingent started on the first Sunday by clearing almost the entire rear area from the carriage shed round to the South end of the long tunnel, including quite a large portion of the back field too! This was quite hard work but it was a really nice afternoon to be outside and the job was helped by great team spirit!

I will continue to keep members up to date with the latest winter work during the next 5 months of our closed season and of course help on any given day is always most welcome...

Andrew

Station Work

The pathway through our station, although much improved over the years, can be a bottleneck at times when we are operating. In addition, it is very narrow for those with larger pushchairs or powered mobility scooters even when we are not running trains. As such, MSDC contractors have recently widened this thoroughfare (**see picture next page**) to help ease congestion and improve access. Hopefully this will be useful when we are busy and passengers are queuing for their next ride...

Andrew



Bill Gage Talk & Bonfire / Firework Night

The past two weekends have both played host to a social event, with the first on Saturday 27th October when Bill Gage gave a talk about railways in Sussex, complimented by archive footage and photographs. The talk was well attended by 18 members and I am reliably informed it was very interesting too. Bill is an excellent speaker and has a wealth of knowledge from the West Sussex archives. Hopefully this is something we will be able to replicate in the future, perhaps with different footage and photographs.

Last Saturday, 3rd November, an almost identical number of family and friends attended our annual Bonfire / Firework evening at Beech Hurst. Scaled back from years past, we used the incinerator bin as our fire and placed it behind the clubhouse, so it could be viewed from inside if desired. Thanks to Ian & Sharon, plus some pallets from me, we had sufficient wood for a decent fire with our sole intention of seeing how much of the drum we could get to glow red! As it turned out, nearly halfway up, which was not a bad effort given our limited resources! Light up was at 17:30 and following a half hour or so, Val served up the baked potato, beans & cheese supper, which was certainly enjoyed by all and a good fill! Andrew S & I then set off the fireworks at about 19:00 and these were done and dusted in about 20 minutes. A good display, hopefully enjoyed by our members and residents of the nearby nursing home alike! Thanks through these pages to Val & John for the preparation and cooking of the food, also to all those who attended to make this a nice evening, including Sam H who turned 18 last Sunday and shared two chocolate cakes with us all (**pictures next page**).

Andrew



Picture Top: With the fire well alight, we managed to get the bin glowing about halfway
Picture Middle: Sam R having fun, flying paper airplanes through the flames of the fire
Picture Bottom: As members relax inside, Sam H with one of two 18th chocolate cakes

Development around Beech Hurst

Last weekend, I took a photograph of the area behind our back field / long tunnel. The area, which used to form part of the land of Parkfield School, and contained the remnants of a swimming pool, has been completely cleared and levelled. This development is planned to encompass the existing Downlands nursing home. I will keep members up to speed with any further development in due course. **Picture below:** Looking North West towards the Downlands building (left).



Bristol Model Engineering Exhibition

Following a conversation at the Midlands Model Engineering Exhibition, I thought it worthwhile to give readers advance notice that after 17 years the Bristol Model Engineering Exhibition will not take place in 2019. Some of you may know of the struggle the Bristol Society currently faces with their Ashton Court lease and because of this they have taken the decision to cancel next year. It is a great shame because their exhibition was always one of the highlights of the year and a great achievement given that it is laid on by a club and not by a professional organisation. In this respect I take my hat off to them for their efforts. Hopefully by 2020 the situation will have settled down and a new exhibition, potentially at a new venue, will come to fruition. In the meantime I hope their problems are solved quickly and Bristol City Council realise what a great asset the railway is to the wider community (on one of their October running days they carried 2,700 rides in a single afternoon!) and not just a cash cow there for milking!

Andrew

Work in Progress – 'Royal Scot' & Wagons

Progress on both projects has continued, however the tanker wagons have taken a slight precedent for the past couple of weeks with my ML7 lathe being set up for several batch production jobs.

Work continues to add extra weight to the 'Royal Scot', mainly in the form of 'beefed up' frame stretchers and this will continue over the coming weeks, prior to the initial re-wheeling of the chassis.

On the wagon front, both of the oil / petrol tankers are now really coming together and a test run towards the end of the running season proved very successful. Since then, time has been spent manufacturing the straps, which hold the tanks down on the chassis', as well as the 'L' brackets on the frames to which these straps are secured. In addition, 120 ladder rungs have been fabricated from 1/8" steel rod, each 1" long, which in turn have been drilled 1/4" deep at each end and then tapped 8BA. The idea was to avoid the need to weld the rungs to the strips which form the sides of each ladder and therefore prevent potential distortion. The drilling / tapping method takes a little longer in the first instance but has certainly saved time in the long run(g)! So far, 48 of the 120 rungs have been used to fabricate 4 ladders (**see picture below**) with a further 72 rungs sitting on the lathe bed waiting to be drilled and tapped. The use of a fairly simple steel jig (**also see picture below**) to face the rungs to length and then hold them during the tapping process certainly proved worthwhile. With a fair wind (and no rain), two tankers should run on New Year's Day, completed but not yet painted...



Andrew

Forthcoming & Diary of Events

Below is an updated Diary, which takes us through to mid-January 2019.

Looking at each entry in a little more detail and the Christmas Run has now been pencilled in for Friday 14th, Saturday 15th and Sunday 16th December from 16:00 to 19:00. Strange times you might ask? Well, following the success of our dusk run on the final Saturday of the season, the Christmas Run is planned to be a dusk / night run with the added bonus of festive lighting around the track. Rides will operate as normal and to make life easy there will be no Santa's Grotto / presents to deal with. Hopefully this will be a more attractive proposition to those who prefer not to pre-book or who are on a limited budget. Obviously it is very much volunteer / weather dependent and we will need to wrap up warm! Lists have been started on the white board, so if you are available on any of the 3 days then do add your name to these lists or speak to Dan as soon as possible.

The New Year Fun Run & Lunch is planned to be the same format as previous years with trains running (weather permitting) and a lunch around 12:00. In order to provide for those wishing to attend, a list will be on the white board shortly and if you would like to be fed and watered then please add your name to list so we can cater accordingly.

Finally for now, we have confirmed our attendance at the 2019 London Model Engineering Show and lists for this event will also be on the white board shortly. So, if you would like to volunteer a model or your services to man the stand on any of the show days then do add your name to the lists as soon as possible. There is no particular theme for 2019, so all offers of models will be gratefully received and we will duly put on the best display we can...

14th – 16th December 2018 – Christmas Run – From 16:00 to 19:00 – see above

1st January 2019 – New Year's Day Fun Run & Lunch – From 10:00 – see above

17th – 20th January 2019 – SMLS to display at Alexandra Palace – see above

NB. Certain events may be organised at short notice and will not therefore appear in the newsletter. Please check white / notice boards in the clubhouse for details of such events.

Andrew