

Sussex Miniature Locomotive Society Ltd

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BEECH HURST NEWS



Cover picture: -

Sad News: It is with deep sadness that I should start a second edition in a row with the news of the passing of a regular SMLS member. John West, a club stalwart since the mid-1970s, passed away at home just before Easter. He will be greatly missed. An obituary appears inside...

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Editor's Notes

I start this latest newsletter with the very sad news that long time member and Vice-President John West passed away on 8th April. John joined SMLS in the mid-1970s and has been a regular attendee since. A very kind and generous man, he was always someone you could talk to or turn to if you needed good advice and John would always be willing to listen. In addition, he was an astute model engineer and someone who was not only happy to share his knowledge but also to get his hands dirty and help where he could. As I sit and write these notes, the boiler for my 'Railmotor' next to me is one such soldering project I could not have completed without John's help and one I will be forever grateful. For much of his time at Beech Hurst, John ran a 5" 'City of Truro' locomotive that he built. It was a regular Saturday runner in my teenage years and was in service on the first day I came to help out early in 1993. John was also building a 5" 'Duchess' 'Sir William Stanier FRS', which has pretty much reached an air running chassis stage. It is a work of art. Along with wife Val, John also kept our kitchen cupboards stocked and helped out with the catering for many of our social events during the past 30 years or so. On a personal level, this has been one of the hardest starts to a newsletter in my 22 years. With a tear in the eye, I write about someone who you could not help but like because John was exactly the kind of person who you would want to be and to have lived the life he did. Thanks for all the help over the years and for the everlasting memories too...

The April issue usually coincides with the start of the new running season or thereabouts, but not 2020! With Coronavirus at large, our 2020 running season will at best be cut short, assuming we ever get going! These are strange times we live in but hopefully each and every member is making the best of a bad situation. Homes and workshops have never looked so tidy and projects laid aside that are finally back on the bench – some of mine certainly are!

Since the last edition, I would like to thank Mike W for producing the weekly 'Wharfedale News', which has kept regular members up to date during the 'lockdown' period. At the time of writing, the 'lockdown' has been mildly relaxed but social distancing and especially gatherings of more than just a couple of people are likely to be in place for sometime to come.

From the February edition, I must start by thanking Andrew S & Ray for their contributions and photographs, in what was another lengthy edition. I must also add an addendum to page 15, where I omitted to include a credit to Mike W as part of the fencing team, despite appearing in the accompanying photograph!

This time, I have written an obituary for John West, there is a report by Chris S on our passenger figures for 2019, an update about work completed since March, articles by Ray about the first Beech Hurst signalling system and from me about Beech Hurst postcards I have collected, and finally a piece by Clive H about the ongoing restoration of his steam roller. In addition, the Diary includes events that may take place depending on Coronavirus restrictions and if you have time try the University of Sussex' archive link and search 'Beech Hurst' for short clips from the 1950s / 1960s - <://screenarchive.brighton.ac.uk/detail/3109/>

Andrew B

Chairman's Notes

Hi all, this is not what I expected this year to be like with my only contact with members being on the phone, by email, or the now established weekly 'Wharfedale News'.

It has been a very sad start to my term as Chairman with the loss of John West. I had started to help John dispose of his workshop as many of you knew and my last conversation with John was to decide what the next stage would be. This in itself was a sad thing to be involved in, breaking up a lifetime of memories. Dan & Nick had also collected John's 'City of Truro' to get it steaming again and were awaiting our opening at Easter to organise a run for John. We will all miss John and our thoughts are with you Val and your family. Sadly we were not able to show our respect in the normal way by attending John's funeral but when life gets back to normal we will have a memorial event to celebrate John's life.

The Covid-19 I am afraid is with us for some time yet but be assured we will open the club again when it is safe to do so and more importantly welcome people back when they are happy that it is safe for them to personally return. This will be a personal call and will be different for all. There will be no demands on anyone to attend or complete any runs for their locomotives until such time as it is safe for all to return.

We are trying to move on the re-roofing of the clubhouse but obviously this is being hampered by the effect of Covid-19. The current position is that Roy P has agreed to prepare a specification for the roof for discussion and when we are happy we can present this to MSDC for planning permission and then to the Beech Hurst Trust for their approval. We are hoping to have this available for presentation in June.

We have also made contact with MSDC with regard to the renewal of our lease and this is under review by both parties so that when we are free of Covid-19 restrictions we can discuss in more detail the renewal.

By the time you read this the new security system will be in place and key holders notified. This new system is monitored which means that now if anyone breaks into the building persons will be notified and the appropriate action will be taken. This is not a number entry system but requires a Fob to be presented to the security system which will be specific to a key holder. This eliminates the risk of people obtaining the entry number. All key holders will be issued with a Fob and if they leave or lose them it can be cancelled.

I will continue to produce the 'Wharfedale News' and would like to thank again all for the articles they have supplied.

Finally my thanks go to Andrew B, Andrew S & Tom for carrying out the checks on the clubhouse on a regular basis.

Stay safe

Mike W

John West – By Andrew B

John was born, raised and lived in Burgess Hill all his life. After completing education and 'O' levels, he went straight to work for the family company age 16.

West's of Burgess Hill were road makers and hauliers. No special treatment for family as John started at the bottom and progressed through the company until he became a driver, mainly transporting bricks and tiles from the yard of the Keymer Brick & Tile Company off Cants Lane and bringing in raw materials by return. During his time working from the yard, John became acquainted with both Alf Funnel & Roger Coleman, who were members at the Mid Sussex Model Engineers (then the 'top club' and now the 'bottom club'). Through these friendships, John was introduced to model engineering and aside helping the MSME with their portable track he also became interested in the engineering side of the hobby. Completely self-taught, John's first ventures into model engineering were the construction of road steam locos, the first of which is still with the family. West's of Burgess Hill continued until 1971 when the company ceased trading. At a crossroads in his life, John spent a short time working for E Hole and Sons of Burgess Hill who specialised in restoring windmills, including Jack & Jill, and the mill on Wimbledon Common. It was then suggested to John to approach the water meter manufacturing company, Sparling, who were based on Victoria Road in Burgess Hill. He applied and never looked back, working there for the best part of 25 years. Whilst at Sparling he met Fred Bailey who introduced him to railway steam locos at the Bluebell Railway and there ignited a desire to build his own model steam loco – 'City of Truro' was born. The 'City' was started around the mid-1970s and at the same time John started to volunteer with SMLS. It took quite a while before he was 'invited' to officially join SMLS by Mike Killick but once a member both he and wife Val were regular attendees, often both days of a weekend during the 1980s. With the 'City' finished and a regular passenger hauler, John started his next project around the mid-1980s, namely a LMS 'Duchess' 'Sir William Stanier FRS'. With no scale drawings available of this modified 'Duchess' loco, John went to the National Railway Museum in York to acquire the necessary drawings to work from. In addition, he also fabricated the wooden patterns that were used to cast many of the components from, long before CAD design and fine casting were so widely available.

In his later life John was diagnosed with Parkinson's which made workshop activities increasingly difficult but he still managed to get the 'Duchess' to pretty much an air running chassis and what a superb job he has made of it too! Despite living with Parkinson's, John was still a regular attendee at Beech Hurst until very recently and with visits only cut short by the Coronavirus 'lockdown'.

Away from model engineering, John was married to Val for nearly 58 years and had 3 daughters with grand and great-grand children more recently too. 'Sheltie' dogs were also very much part of John's life and both Piper and more recently Fergus have been regular attendees at Beech Hurst with John.

Looking in from the outside, if ever there was a life you could lead it would have been John's. Born, raised, lived and worked in the same town virtually all his life, to have been married to someone who enjoyed his hobby and to have had a family life like he did are dreams for many people. Couple that life with a man who was caring, kind and passionate about helping the next generation of our hobby and there you have it – the perfect gentleman. Thanks for everything John.

Pictures next page: With Piper dog (**top**) and in discussion with Brian (**bottom**).



John Padgham

It is also with sadness that I should report the passing of John Padgham on Thursday 30th April. Although not an SMLS member, some of our members will have known John during his time as Chairman of the Lavender Line at Isfield and our annual reciprocal visits, normally inclusive of a sausage and mash supper! John spent many hours developing Isfield into a really nice preserved country station and his weekend English breakfasts are legendary (I consumed many!). He also volunteered as a driver / fireman and instructor at the Bluebell Railway. I for one will greatly miss John, he was always very friendly, a pleasure to talk to and had many amusing stories to tell, he certainly led a full life!

Andrew B

Passenger Figures for 2019

Way back in the early 1950s our founders laid plans to build a dedicated railway track with the specific purpose of running miniature locomotives in a passenger carrying environment. This is why there was a station constructed before a proper clubhouse or engine bay. At that time there were many active model engineering clubs in the area, but until our track was built, nowhere to run!

The formula has been a great success, firstly by offering loco builders somewhere to run their locos and secondly to encourage development of their designs to cope with the rigors of traffic hauling. As an added bonus it has been an ideal school for learning railway practices, that has led to many of our younger members gaining employment out on the 'big railway'.

All of this was to cost a lot of money, especially in those far off days just after the war with shortages of just about everything from food and coal to sheet copper! The founders quite rightly decided that the railway would haul any passengers who turned up for a ride. Not for free, but for a nominal charge equivalent to the price of an ice cream. Here we are some 67 seasons later still doing just that. Steam loco building and development sadly is a bit low key these days, but the development of reliable electric traction is progressing fast.

The latest offerings bear little commonality with 'Bo-Bo' (ask someone who remembers that pioneer).

As a very successful enterprise we are a victim of our own success, with increasing passenger numbers comes a dramatic maintenance overhead. With that comes the need for on-site workshop and storage facilities, and of course a decent clubhouse as a base for the members together with a reference library. All of which have cost a great deal of money, time and volunteer effort (especially when money was tight and the railway had to borrow from the members just to get through the winter).

Many years ago, a professional 'number cruncher', Alan Gettings, started to keep records of how we were doing, to assist the committee with its planning and decision making. He meticulously recorded how many passengers we carried, while the treasurers counted the pennies! About 40 years ago when Alan retired for health reasons and moved to the West Country, where the air was cleaner, I inherited the task.

Questions that have always arisen are why do our numbers vary so much from year to year and just what is our maximum capacity? The second is now relatively easy to answer; it is governed by the length of the queue and the number of car parking spaces. Christmas lights and evening running, rather than bank holidays, produce the big peaks in traffic, but we now know that about 300 per hour is our limit if nothing goes wrong or 1,200 in a 4-hour session (I suspect some full-size heritage railways would be happy with these numbers!).

Why do the annual numbers vary? Is a more difficult question to answer, however I did a comprehensive survey some years back to try for an answer. Interestingly the usual 'it's the weather' can be dismissed as very wet or very hot seems not to affect the numbers very much. 'Ah! It must be the recession' is another reason quoted. This is entirely wrong as we see parents making an effort to give the children a ride even when money is short. There may not be too many multiple rides but as we are relatively inexpensive most kids get at least one ride, keeping our numbers buoyant. So, what is it? I went on the 'www' to see if I could correlate any data from anywhere that matched our actual figures. After a considerable search, Bingo! There was a graph showing the public's 'feel good' factor and that is it, it follows our graph exactly with the same peaks and troughs. It seems to precede real recessions and their recovery by a year or two. If people are worried that a recession might be coming our numbers drop and if they start to rise, they think the good times are coming back. On only one occasion did a fare rise cause a significant fall in numbers, however by regularly keeping the price to that of an ice cream keeps the levels of business under control. Examples can be seen with the 2008 season when we raised the price from 50p to £1, this brought the numbers back down by 35% from the high 30,000s to the mid-20,000s. Now we are experiencing a sharp rise in numbers just before the 2020 price rise, so watch this space at the end of the season!

The graph (**see next page top**) shows the numbers from 1954, our first running season, through to 2019, our 66th. Very impressive I think, and it highlights the huge numbers we have carried; half a million by 1977, one million by 2000 and our recent one & a half million in mid-2018.

As I always say one picture is worth a thousand words, so some points from the graph.

We have completed 66 seasons with an average of 23,321 per year.

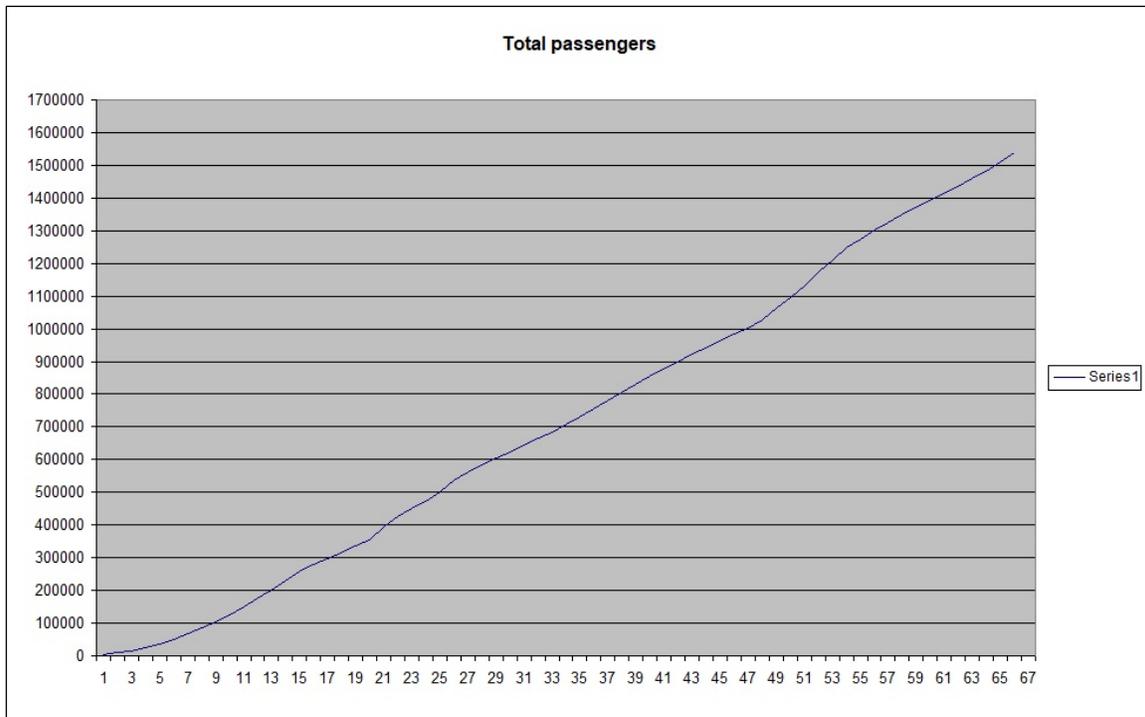
You can see that we had a relatively slow start but as we became better known over the first 15 years, the numbers rose steadily to those we expect now.

Some peaks and troughs can be easily explained, year 10 (1963) started just after the terrible long freezing winter, year 16 (1969) saw a drop as we doubled the fare from 6 old pence to one shilling (5p).

Year 21 (1974) was the year we opened the extension and two years after that (year 23) was the very hot summer of 1976.

Quite what caused the millennium bulge from year 49 (2002) through to year 54 (2007) is unclear (probably the nation's feel good factor prior to the financial crash of 2008) however doubling the 50p fare to £1 slowed things down a bit!

In writing this article I hunted through my archive (shoe box) and found a piece I wrote in 1995.



In it I had discovered that in 1994 the average household expenditure was just over £24 on leisure each week. £5.30 in the pub, £4.28 on holidays, home repairs £2.66, but hobbies only 8p! Spectator sports were 61p showing we are a country of spectators and passive consumers. I expect the proportions have changed over the last 25 years, but we still seem to be ok.

On several occasions I have heard that we are 'too commercial' and we are here 'just for fun', however running a public service for the enjoyment of the public and ourselves has to be taken seriously. Yes, we are a small business, and thanks to some diligent financial planning we are in a very strong position to ride out the current health and economic crisis without having to worry about our viability. Hopefully when this ends we can hit the ground running again and continue to provide entertainment and education for our public.

In conclusion, were the founders right in thinking that there would be a demand for 'train rides'? The numbers confirm they were right. And just as importantly this gives us a very strong bargaining point when negotiating our future with our landlords. We are now considered a major asset to the town and a great attraction in this part of Sussex. Long may it continue.

Chris S

Summer Work

With Coronavirus all but wiping out our attendance since the last newsletter, there is very little to report on the work front. The weekend before 'lockdown', Andrew S, Mike W & I helped to remove the Christmas Lights Event scaffolding from the back field north cutting. This was just in time, since which we have been largely 'confined to barracks'. Also just before 'lockdown', the soldering / welding extraction system was added in the rear workshop (**see picture next page top**).



In addition, the lobby to toilet door has been 'turned' so it opens outwards and gives more room in the toilet cubicle itself (**see picture next page top**). This is a short-term measure and plans are currently underway for a fully accessible toilet to be installed, which is part of our progressive clubhouse upgrade plan.

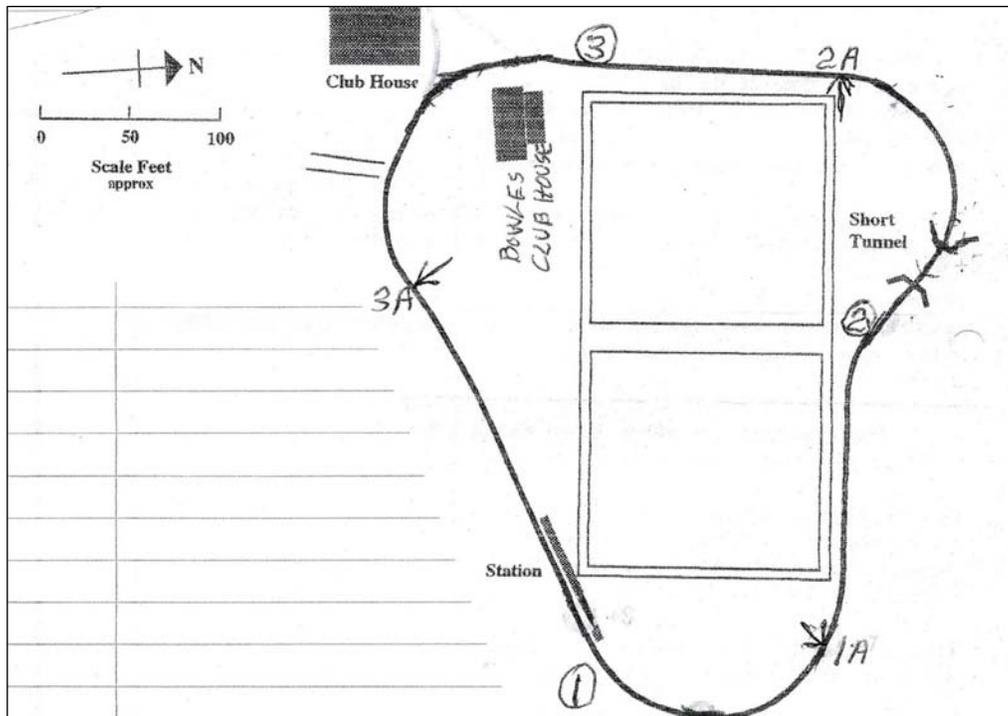
Also as part of the upgrade plan, Andrew S has met with a number of alarm system contractors to look at our current set up and advise on improvements. As such, the committee has recently approved expenditure to upgrade our system so we, and the police, are alerted when the alarm is activated. This early warning system will at least alert us to a potential problem at the club and mean that we can then investigate as necessary. Previously, we have sometimes been alerted by members of the public posting details on social media platforms, which is far from an ideal source of information! In addition, the upgraded system will be operated by magnetic fobs rather than a code and each fob will be unique to each key holder. Hot off the press and the system was installed on Monday & Tuesday of this week and Andrew S will administer fobs, and give a 'crash course' on the operation of the system, to each eligible key holder once a decision to re-open the club has been made.

Despite the recent and ongoing 'lockdown' the committee will remotely progress as many jobs as can practicably be done away from the club and between us, Andrew S, Tom & I will continue our thrice-weekly security checks to ensure our assets are safe.



Andrew B

Beech Hurst 'Permissive Block' Signalling



When I first joined the club and became a regular driver in 1959, the track was only half its present length as at that time the back field was privately owned and the bowls club premises comprised a small stone toilet block with a wooden 'shed' clubhouse alongside. To give the public a fair ride, each train completed 2 non-stop laps per fare and woe betide the driver who miscounted and stopped after 1 lap or did 3 and thus earned the wrath of Miss Hatton our Station Mistress! Our signalling system was totally contained in the station panel and operated from there. There were only 3 signals (**see diagram on previous page**) at positions 1, 2 & 3 in the same places as the present signals. So the track was split into 3 sections by the 3 signals but each section comprised 2 half sections.

Section 1 red commenced at signal 1 and continued until the train came out of the 'jungle' at 1A, where section 1 yellow commenced and ran to signal 2. Section 2 red ran from signal 2 until you came out of the small cutting at 2A, where section 2 yellow ran until signal 3. Section 3 red ran from signal 3 to the steaming bay end of the station straight at 3A, where section 3 yellow ran to signal 1. This ensured that if there was no train in either red or yellow sections of a signal that signal would show green, but if a train was in the red section it would show red and if in the yellow section it would show yellow. So, if a signal was yellow it would permit a second train to pass the signal knowing there was a train in the yellow (second half) of that section. Bearing in mind that each red section was not wholly visible to a driver but that each yellow section had a clear line of sight throughout, therefore this 'permissive block' system required a more careful style than the present 'absolute block'.

For example, when a train was ready to leave the station, if the driver had a green at signal 1, he knew the track was clear to signal 2 and could confidently set off. If he had a red he knew the preceding train was in the 'jungle' and he must not pass signal 1 but when it turned to yellow he could proceed with caution through the 'jungle' knowing that as he came out over 1A he would either see the train in front or signal 2 at red, unless he had been so slow that it was out of the cutting passed 2A in which case signal 2 would be yellow and it behoved him to speed up a bit! Whilst this may sound rather awkward to 'absolute block' drivers, it was reasonably easy to judge the speed you required because whilst on the line of sight 'A' sections you could see across to the next line of sight yellow section and so judge the speed of any preceding train in that section. This also applied to section 3 as the much smaller bowls premises of those days allowed one to see across to the end of the steaming bays. The only other absolute red was put up at signal 3 when the steaming bay transporter was lifted.

Anyway, it made sure drivers kept well alert and had a very good idea of the speeds and whereabouts of the other trains. It also allowed us to happily and safely operate up to 4 trains required in normal passenger service right up to 1974 when the back section opened.

Ray

Beech Hurst Postcards – By Andrew B

Since buying my first Beech Hurst postcard when I travelled as a youngster in the 1980s, I have been on the look out for other examples which feature our railway.

I have been surprised to find (thanks to the wonders of the 'www') numerous examples which depict scenes from Beech Hurst Gardens and from our railway. My first acquisition was the 'standard' Beech Hurst issue sold by the club and which features Les Clarke's GWR 'Hall' (see postcard below – c. late-1970s).



Next up is a black and white example from (I think) the 1960's and features what looks like a Southern 'Mogul' on the old track (see postcard below – c. 1960s).



Third depicts the same GWR 'Hall' as the first postcard in my collection but this time at the other end of the station (see postcard below – c. late-1970s).



Number four is John Seymour's LMS '7F' climbing towards signal 2. I stand to be corrected but I think it is John driving too (see postcard below – c. late-1970s).



Penultimate in my collection is what I believe to be Les Clarke's 'Black 5' depicted approaching the short tunnel (see postcard below – c. late-1970s).



Finally, and not of our railway, is a rare colour example of the old quadrangle and restaurant from the children's play area (see postcard below – c. late-1970s).



'Arthur' – 'Aveling & Porter' No. 5646

Having sold my previous steam roller 'Old Lady' in 2003, I was without an engine for a while. After a couple of years I decided that it was time to look for another steam engine, so I put the word out that I was looking for another project. After sometime I saw an advert in 'The Old Glory' for an 'Aveling & Porter' steam roller. I contacted the owner and he said that it had been sold. He did mention that he had an engine he was working on at that time that would be coming up for sale, it was a convertible engine but required restoration (he wasn't kidding!).

I went up to Durham to see the roller as soon as I could. What met my eyes when the workshop doors were opened was an 'Aveling & Porter' of 1904 vintage and 6 nhp. It was ordered by the Southend-on-Sea Corporation. Although it was a convertible it was only ordered with the rolls so no traction engine wheels. The roller had been in Cluny Square playground Southend since 1953 and the council workers had painted it in all the primary colours they could. There is incidentally a picture on the Traction Talk forum with a note stating that the engine had just been replaced in the playground after some children had put the engine in gear and by pulling on the flywheel had managed to move the roller onto the road! When the council men put the roller back in the playground they welded the gear levers together to stop this happening again! Despite all the multicoloured paintwork and the fact that it was missing the steering wheel and steering shaft, the reversing lever and half the reversing quadrant, the reach rod, gauge frames, clacks and all the boiler fittings, I was smitten. The rest of the parts were shown to me and after a rough history lesson of why it was being sold a deal was struck. The boiler had been treated to plates in the backhead and throatplate, however I did notice some deep grooving on the radius' (**see pictures below**), also the top wrapper and the top of the horn plates were badly corroded probably from children filling the crank pit up with sand!



From this I knew there would be quite a bit of boiler work required, I am not sure why the seller's boiler inspector said that it would be ok to start putting in the new firebox, maybe he didn't!

In July of 2006 the engine arrived home and the full extent of the work that was required hit home..., oh poo! That's worse than I remember it, oops so is that, and that, OH POO! Never mind I've been and gone and done it now. People came to look and point but there were no scathing remarks, just encouragement and the odd remark like you must be mad, brave or both, I think both could be true. I decided to take the cylinder block off first and get that re-bored as all the valve faces and both bores were very badly pitted. It was taken down to Michael Webber Steam Engineers in Lancing who did an excellent job. Next was to remove the firebox, it had been riveted in with some of the stays knocked over. After I cut out the rivets and the stays, the box was ready to come out and with the help of my good friend David Young we got the box out in half a day. When we removed the box we noticed that some of the nuts holding the girder stays down were in fact 2 or 3 threads off the stays! At this point I thought I better get the box looked at by our local boiler guru. On closer inspection it was found that the sides of the box were the same thickness as the back and front (5/8" thick). I had a word with the local boiler guru and he said because the sides were so thick they wouldn't flex which would result in broken stays, also because the box was not made to the recognised standard a boiler inspector could ask for it to be removed. After chewing the fat for a while, drinking lots of tea and eating lots of his biscuits I came to a decision to replace the box. The sides of the firebox now form the top of my heavy duty bench and the rest is a stand for my fly-press! The boiler has now been reduced to its constituent parts (**see picture below**).



The good news is the barrel is in sound condition (10 & 12mm) and the tubeplate (a Stuart Woodbine product) again unused is ok. The riveting that had been done was to say the least novel in places and some of the welding looked like it had been done by a passing bird (**see pictures below**)!



So now the boiler is being worked on by myself and Fred Streeter of Streeter Mechanical Services, and the rest is at my workshop waiting to have money thrown at it! When I met my future wife Jan, she decided to invest in the engine and is now the co-owner of an interesting pile of scrap! We are working on the engine together and Jan's enthusiasm and encouragement has renewed my passion. There has been a new top wrapper rolled by Andy Melrose at Mendip Steam and new horn plates have been roughed out. It did make its first rally appearance at Wiston with the horns and top wrapper clamped together, and the old horns and top wrapper were also there to show the wear.

Other work will be the motion, which is very badly pitted and the expansion links are not at all usable, so these will have to be replaced. Bearings are an unknown factor at the moment, the crankshaft looks like it will be serviceable, but going on the previous engineer's efforts (pah!) he may well have used the crankshaft as a jam back for the riveting. The gears aren't too bad, the final drive being the worst but these will be replaced as time goes by. Next instalment, somewhere between now and then!

Clive H

Work in Progress

Since the last newsletter, and during 'lockdown', Work in Progress has never been so good! I have been ploughing on with numerous jobs, including sorting out my workshop, which I have never got round to. It has never looked so good! The guard's van project is progressing with basic brake gear fabricated, trial fitted and removed for painting. Much of this has begun (**see picture next page**) and should be completed in the coming weeks. Attention will then turn to the tanker wagons which have been on the sidelines for a number of months. They are mechanically very near finished and then require painting throughout. One job at a time but hopefully by the time of the next edition, the tankers should be in the 'paint shop' and well underway...



Andrew B

Forthcoming & Diary of Events – by Andrew B

Given the current Coronavirus outbreak, our 2020 running season **did not** commence on Good Friday, 10th April. The committee will keep members abreast of developments **but for now our club activities remain suspended**. At the time of writing all items below are still 'on' but subject to confirmation depending on government advice at the time.

20th June 2020 – Open Day + Chelmsford to visit SMLS – From 10:00 – TBC

20th June 2020 – Mid-summer 'bring your own' BBQ evening – From 18:00 – TBC

26th / 27th June 2020 – 24 hours run – See details above – From 17:00 – TBC

27th July 2020 – Charity Run – See details above – From 13:00 – TBC

29th July 2020 – Focus Model Engineers to visit SMLS – From 10:00 – TBC

29th August 2020 – Summer 'bring your own' BBQ evening – From 18:00 – TBC

15th September 2020 – 1st Haywards Heath Scouts to visit SMLS – Timings TBC

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.