

TWAO
WE'VE GOT IT!

TOP LINE



The Magazine of the Pontypool & Blaenavon Railway

June 2006

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The Magazine of the Pontypool & Blaenavon Railway

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EDITORIAL

Unlike the regular monthlies, or, even worse, the weeklies, the time when this modest mouthpiece has to be 'put to bed' can become a bit of a variable feast. This issue will be about six weeks late arriving with you. The original editorial deadline was 3 May, for landing at your door on 1 June. This was extended till 17 May, and now till early July, in order to follow some important events in June, culminating in the AGM. Why?

Because I believe that you, as members, have a right to know their news before such information appears in the 'glossies'.

However I don't intend to apologize, since we knew that there was some extraordinarily exciting news coming up, not just on one front, but on three or four. I very much hope that you will share the happiness that I feel at being able to impart so much exciting news. Much of it has been a long time in gestation – some of it for a very long time indeed – but it really does appear that the railway is set to move forward more quickly than it has ever done.

But – 'Steady – the Buffs!' – we are

under threat. From whom? Ourselves, no less – or rather the lack of ourselves. We need more volunteers on site, not only to handle operations, maintenance and restoration but the long physical slog southwards. It's a fact that the 'long slog' is effectively a pioneering activity, which has obvious attractions to fresh volunteers. But the 'long slog' also has the potential to seriously dilute our regular operations workforce. We must take care that after best part of quarter of a century of operations, that the railway does not implode? Clear minds and steady hands are needed.

Perhaps less obvious and certainly less visible is the need for 'background' volunteers who feel they can manage the ceaseless welter of administrative tasks, with which all business undertakings are saddled – for, make no mistake, that is precisely what we are. Even contributions to Top Line either in writing or photographically (but preferably digitally) would make a useful contribution to the railway's future. So come on, we need your help....please!

Cover Picture:

Into 2006! After some serious internal and external 'refreshing', DMU 108 stands at Furnace Sidings on the first day of the new season

From the Woolsack – our new Chairman, Robin Cornelius writes...

My first job as new chairman is to immediately thank my predecessor Dave Haylins, who took on the post four years ago. At that time the railway appeared to be moving forward quite satisfactorily, however this masked some rather worrying internal difficulties, and from which Dave, in his own quiet style, and with masterly footwork, gradually steered us clear. We owe him more than most of us can imagine.

It is with some sadness that we see the departure of Peter Drummond and Angela Porter from the board, and doubtless Dave will have written some valedictory notes, so I won't try and steal his thunder. Their positions have been taken by Roger Mileman, who has been skirting on the edge of the board for some months, and by Norman Clymer who has taken on the demanding post of Company Secretary.

You might imagine that such changes would cause some changes on the inside front pages, but there have been more underlying changes. For some time the board has been concerned that it has been too involved in the nuts and bolts of railway operation. Meeting only once a month however means that the board is often too slow to directly address the daily challenges that an increasingly busy railway throws up. Because of this we have appointed a General Manager (Dave Haylins) to whom two new appointees – Site Manager (Arthur Llewellyn) and Traffic Manager (Bernard Morton) will report. In turn all other department heads will report to one or other of these, or where the function does not fall squarely into the purview of either of the above, directly to the GM. The positions in this area are likely to remain fluid for a while, so keep an eye on the front page. We are not certain at this stage that what we have is the ideal way to proceed, but it's fairly obvious that a structured management is well overdue. I am relying on all regular working members – and even the occasional helper, to support this scheme and the senior managers with all the enthusiasm they can muster.

With the TWAO now in place and a continuous stream of improvements either completed, just round the corner, or on the horizon – particularly the extension work, it really is more important than ever that we attract more members. We believe we can meet all the engineering challenges ahead, funding streams are opening up before us, there is a widespread political will outside the railway to see us succeed. We really are ready to move up a division in the heritage railway fraternity – but we need people. Please make a concerted effort to get just one person known to you to join us, and we'll be on our way with a flying start, and you will have made a major contribution to the railway.

Robin Cornelius

NOTE: A message from our outgoing Chairman, Dave Haylins, appears on page 12

NEWSLINES

The Transport and Works Act Order

Our front cover should leave you no doubt that the railway has reached the biggest milestone since it first operated trains 23 years ago. For over seventeen nail-biting months of legal process the Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway Company has finally been granted an Order under the Transport and Works Act to extend and operate its line from the Whistle Inn in the north to Blaenavon (High Level) some two miles to the south. The Order - believed to be only the second granted in Wales (after the Bridgend Valley Railway) – was prepared by Stephen Wiggs of parliamentary agents Winckworth Sherwood. Orders granted in Wales have to be both applied for, and granted in both English and Welsh and such a requirement adds considerably to the work involved.

Work, which started in December 2004, was initially complicated by difficulty in determining who built the railway. The order allowing most of the initial construction was the Brynmawr and Blaenavon Act of 1866, but a short section in the south was built under the LNWR (Wales &c) Act of 1875. Once the two months spent on this research was complete matters progressed rapidly so that a formal application to the Welsh Assembly was made on 3 May 2005. By the end of June 2005 the application became public with a two month subsequent period allowed for formal objection. Fortunately there were none, and by 28 November 2005, the inspector appointed by the National Assembly for Wales, one Stuart B Wild, MRTPI, MCMI reported in as glowing terms as parliamentary speech would permit. Subsequently a full meeting of the planning Decision Committee of the National Assembly for Wales, chaired by Carwyn Jones, the Assembly minister for Environment, Planning and Countryside, approved the application on 24 January 2006. The minister in turn wrote to Winckworth Sherwood on 31 January. After further delays and frustration, at the Assembly, the Order, called the Pontypool and Blaenavon (Phase 1) Order 2006 was finally Made on 20 June 2006 and Came into Force on the 21 June 2006.

2006 No. 1691 (W. 161)

TRANSPORT AND WORKS,
WALES

TRANSPORT, WALES

The Pontypool and Blaenavon
Railway (Phase I) Order 2006

Made 20 June 2006

Coming into force 31 June 2006

WHEREAS an application has been made to the National Assembly for Wales ("the National Assembly"), in accordance with the Transport and Works (Applications and Objections Procedure) (England and Wales) Rules 2003, in accordance with sections 6, 6A, 7 and 10 of the Transport and Works Act 1992 ("the 1992 Act"), for an Order under sections 1 and 5 of the 1992 Act;

AND WHEREAS the National Assembly has determined to make an Order giving effect to the proposals contained in the application with modifications which in its opinion do not make any substantial changes to the proposals;

AND WHEREAS notice of the National Assembly's determination was published in the London Gazette on 19 June 2006;

NOW THEREFORE, the National Assembly, in exercise of the powers conferred on the Secretary of State by sections 1 and 5 of, and paragraph 1, 6, 12

(1) 11/2006/000
(2) 1992/000, as amended by 11/2006/000

The 'front page' of the TWAO in all its formal glory. If you wish to see it in its entirety, it can be downloaded, in either English or Welsh from:

<http://new.wales.gov.uk/legislation/legislationinforce/localstat/476830/PontypoolBlaenavonOrder2006e?lang=en>

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TOP LINE

In response to the news, the railway will now be concentrating all its efforts to extend the line southwards a further 1 ¼ miles from Furnace Sidings to Blaenavon (High Level). The route southwards is made difficult by the need to refurbish a number of bridges en route. A substantial report which has just been issued by the Company to Torfaen County Borough Council, the successor to the Welsh Development Agency, and other interested parties, estimates the lowest cost for the extension and the provision of a minimal station at High Level at between £235K and £395K, with cost of the bridges lying between £162K and £323K – by far the dominant item in the total cost. The Company is now actively seeking partners to help raise funds to meet the refurbishment costs. Much more on this in our next issue. Blaenavon (High Level) station is close to the centre of Blaenavon town, and, as a result a substantial increase in passenger numbers is confidently expected. Blaenavon is the epicentre of the World Heritage Site of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape, a landscape which includes Big Pit and the famous Blaenavon Ironworks. The presence of the railway there is expected to significantly add to the visitor experience and tourist potential of the town.

Environmental Improvements

Sometimes you can keep kicking a ball at a goal, and the chance of hitting the target are slight, especially when you can't even see the goal posts. It's even worse when the goal posts are always moving, but sometimes, just sometimes a ball flies straight into the back of the net. So it was with a rather modest document that the Company sent to Torfaen County Borough Council entitled 'Furnace Sidings – a Rural Gateway' – if any car parks needed tarting up around Blaenavon we were going to do our bit to ensure that Furnace Sidings got in on the act. Things were quiet for a few months, but as the scope of the plans were drip fed from County Hall it soon became clear that we had done sufficient to ensure that Furnace Sidings was to be not only a car park, but a flagship car park at that, with a particularly up-market information point. Physical work started in early December 2005 after over a year of planning and completion of regulatory detail. Some of our Christmas passengers must have thought they had arrived in a WW1 battlefield with mud and mounds of spoil everywhere. However, except for one or two small details everything was in place by early May.



The right side of our impressive new entrance, with a typical Great Western Railway cast iron plate leaving our visitors in little doubt that they have arrived in exactly the right place.



In the new car park, the information point, provides a fitting centrepiece for the new car park. Upturned reproduction buffers provide seating for the weary traveller, whilst in the background some very convincing reproduction GWR fencing sets the scene. Planting of ericaceous plants improves matters, whilst to the left, substantial rustic fencing serves to frustrate those bent on anti-social behaviour.

Formally the works are described as 'Environmental Improvements', and were undertaken by TCBC's Environmental Regeneration Section using Blakedown of Bristol as principal contractors. The work was completed under the 'Boundless Parks – Naturally' scheme financed by European Inter-reg 3B funding. This project was notable for the first example of really close co-operation between PBRCo and TCBC, during both planning and execution phases alike – long may it continue! A splendid new entrance, flanked by stone wing walls, and bearing our name, in our own house style of lettering on a cast iron plate, opens up onto a well appointed car park with yards and yards of reproduction GWR fencing. The information point is fashioned in a manner to resonate with the ubiquitous GWR Pagoda huts (found on nearly every GWR station in the area), and which bears details of the Blaenavon Industrial Landscape on the one side, and will shortly carry details of the railway on the other. A further, smaller contract, managed by TCBC and using European money released under the Heads of the Valleys Initiative saw a large part of the car park covered in tarmac, and further detailed improvements. Some of this improvement saw the area behind the station, regularly used by young people in cars and involved in drug taking, fenced off. To date the problem seems to have been solved. Finally the car park was unveiled in a flurry of civic and municipal activity. A description of this event, together with photos, appears on page 9, and subsequent pages.

Another arrival

The PBR seems to have a 'thing' about gathering coaches from the south of England. The 4th May saw the arrival of an elderly veteran in the shape of 1923 built Brake Third – Gangwayed (called a 'BTK'). She was originally numbered 1357, but renumbered 3193 within a year. She spent most of her time on the Waterloo-Bournemouth trains, until 1959, when all the passenger accommodation was ripped out, and she was converted to a Breakdown Train support vehicle carrying tools and equipment. In 1981 she was declared 'spare' from Wimbledon and never worked again. For a variety of very odd reasons she escaped scrapping for 25 years, and has finally arrived at Furnace Sidings looking very, very battle weary. Her roof has already been covered, all but one broken window replaced, and a start made on replacing her floor. Much of the side sheeting will be replaced before the end of the year, and then we'll see if we can make something half decent out of this venerable old lady.

A full-blown four page article had been prepared for this issue, but is now unlikely to appear, due to space limitations, however it is reproduced at the bottom of www.lswr.co.uk under the heading 'Give us a brake'



What's this strange place up here in mountains they're bringing me too? I'm a little afraid' thinks the tired and elderly BTK from Wimbledon (almost certainly to be dubbed Madame Cholet Womble), as she approaches a strange new home with GWR spear fencing, high in Welsh moorlands, after the long journey from Warwickshire.

The Southern Invasion

The Southern invasion continues with the arrival of Class 73 No.73133, an electro-diesel locomotive built for service on electrified and non-electrified line on British Railways (Southern Region). The loco is on hire for six-months and is normally resident at the Vale of Glamorgan Railway at Barry. It previously worked at the East Lancs railway. It is expected to work the majority of trains for the remainder of the season. No.73133 originally carried nameplates 'The Bluebell Railway', and is finished in Mainline blue livery, but no longer carries Mainline's insignia. Changes in passenger vehicle availability this season, due to maintenance requirements, means that 73133 will be working three (rather than two) coach trains up the bank this season, and this should provide an impressive sight for our visitors.



ED No.73133 takes its first tentative steps onto PBR territory as it unloads from its road transport on the balmy evening of 12 June.

Development

In terms of development, the TWAO, and the environmental improvements in the car park are complete. The water supply and the sewerage facilities are now all underway. Most of the planning work involved in securing the various consents is virtually complete. The physical work is usually rather less of a hassle, and we expect both water and sewerage facilities to be in place by the end of the season.

One initiative that fell outside that definition was the unexpected chance to secure a pair of 'container' type lavatories

delivered to site without fuss. These have now been installed on site, and they, together with the burgeoning 'Portakabin City' have now been painted in brown and cream to match the car park fittings. The outfall from the loos will be fed to a biodigester which has been strongly recommended by the Environment Agency. The pipes from the biodigester will feed into a culvert that empties to the Avon Llwyd and all have been specified (and by the time you read this should have been purchased). So, at long last, it does look as if our visitors might enjoy some enhanced comfort amenities! Although far

which were almost good enough with a bit of cleaning up to serve as public facilities. They were rescued from a site at Gilwern, thanks to Norman Clymer, who, fortunately, had his ear close to the ground at the time. Some concerted muscular effort from Norman and Roger Milemen, along with Cliff Herbert's Hi-Ab saw them delivered to site without fuss. These have now been installed on site, and they, together with the burgeoning 'Portakabin City' have now been painted in brown and cream to match the car park fittings. The outfall from the loos will be fed to a biodigester which has been strongly recommended by the Environment Agency. So, at long last, it does look as if our visitors might enjoy some enhanced comfort amenities!

Although far less visible to less visible to our members, but very much more important in the longer term is the position regarding development southwards. For the purpose of seeking financial support from potential funders, we have, since early 2003 specified our immediate southward ambitions, formally, in a report called called 'Step 1.1'. That was in early 2003, but an important change in the position of the Welsh Development Agency, not entirely without connection to the absorption into the NafW, forced a radical rethink by the Company, so that in January of this year Step 1.1 was abandoned in favour of Step 1.2, which

simply says:

The relaying of existing, but currently unused track, from the station at Furnace Sidings some 2100m southwards, to Blaenavon (High Level), the refurbishment of bridges along the route, the simplification of pointwork immediately south of Furnace Sidings, the erection of fences insofar as is necessary and the refurbishment of the platform at Blaenavon (High Level) station to minimum statutory standards.

It's worth noting that this simple extension will have no run-round facilities initially, so that the use of the DMUs or Thumper will be the only option until we can fit them. There is no chance of HMRI extending our current approval to work 'push-pull' over the over the extended line.

That's OK then, we clear the vegetation, change a few sleepers, we have the TWAO, we have the DMUs, so when do we start? Steady on – there's the little matter of the bridges! We set out below the cost estimates for step 1.2. The cost of the bridges is, by far, the overwhelming element, as you will see. Insofar as the bridges are concerned, we believe that it may be possible to reduce the costs by as much as 50% but until we have done at least one, we cannot back that assertion with anything concrete. There is also an argument that suggests that some of the bridge costs should be borne by others. We've a way to go yet, but now that the TWAO is safely with us, and the water and sewerage matters have been put to bed, we can now work on getting various funding partners round the table.

Development Step 1.2 Project cost estimates

Bridge 7 Rail-over-rail £70,000	Ballast £9,300
Bridge 6 Old pit road bridge £38,000	Sleepers £42,780
Bridge 5 New pit road bridge £46,000	Fencing £12,200
Bridge 4 Cycle-track 'low' Bridge £30,000	Platform at High Level £20,000
Bridge 3 Doncaster's stream bridge £26,000	

The Great Unveiling – by the Editor

Never in the history of the railway has so much gold and silver chain been seen, as the best part of 50 dignitaries and VIPs from the County Borough of Torfaen, from the major funding providers in Wales, and from the Welsh Assembly, gathered at Furnace Sidings. The occasion was the formal opening, on 14 June, of the railway's 'environmental improvements', to wit, a very expensive car park, and an upmarket information point whose design details were inspired by the ubiquitous GWR pagoda hut. After short speeches by the railway's John Down, Cllr Neil Lewis (Torfaen County Council's Executive Member for Regeneration), and Lynne Neagle (Torfaen's Assembly Member at the Welsh Assembly), the information panel was formally unveiled by Lynne Neagle. John Down spoke of the reduction in vandalism and anti-social behaviour that had been largely suppressed by such a high-quality investment, and spoke of the railways plans for the future. Detailed plans for the extension to Blaenavon (High Level) had received an encouraging welcome from both the local authority and various funding agencies. He was also able to announce that the making of the Transport and Works Act Order was imminent and was expected to come into force on 21 June. Neil Lewis spoke of the opportunity the car park would provide for visitors to enjoy the landscape and the attractions that the World Heritage Site could offer. He noted the exciting part the extension southwards would bring to the town of Blaenavon and also announced

that the car park had been entered for an award by the British Association of Landscape Industries. Lynne Neagle echoed Neil Lewis's sentiments and spoke of how much she and her family had enjoyed travelling on the train on earlier visits, both officially and unofficially. As for the information point 'gazebo', the Welsh Language Board was sufficiently impressed by the welsh translation on the information panel to award a Commendation to the local authority's Regeneration Department who were largely responsible for instigating and managing the project.

After the formal part of the event was completed, visitors were invited to a ride on the train, and tea and biscuits in the railway's tearooms. The event was enlivened by the recent arrival of ED Class 73 No.73133, which propelled its three coach train, consisting of BG 81453, RMB 1854 and SK 25444. All the vehicles have received more or less cosmetic attention this year, with the BG completing its repaint only days before the event. For the BG, 14 June was its first run in passenger operation following its first proving runs two days earlier. Much of the work was funded through the Welsh Development Agency (now the Assembly Government's 'Department of Enterprise, Innovation and Networks (DEIN)'), the European 'Boundless Parks – Naturally!' scheme (a joint initiative between the UK, Belgian and Dutch governments through the, so-called, Inter-reg3 scheme), and the Welsh Assembly Governments 'Heads of the Valleys' initiative.



Lynne Neagle, assisted by John Down unveil the bilingual information point, which only hours before had been recognised by a Commendation from the Welsh Language Board for the excellence of its bilingual translation



The great and the good assemble in front of the 'gazebo' information point, prior to boarding the train



The Mayor of Torfaen, Cllr Mary Barnett is ushered onto the train by railway volunteer Roger Mileman



We're not sure whether such a congregation of chain bearing individuals is a 'clutch' or a 'chain gang', on the left sits the mayor's consort, whilst on the right is the Mayor of Monmouthshire

All photos on these pages courtesy of Bill Hart / Pontypool Free Press

Our outgoing Chairman, Dave Haylins, has sent to the following message, before he takes on his new task as General Manager

At last we have it - the Transport and Works Act Order - which, significantly, came into force on the longest day. Now we can proceed on our extension to the south. I have said it before, but I wish to pay tribute again to all who have worked so hard to keep our small railway going.

That the railway will contribute to increasing economic activity in Broad Street and in Blaenavon as a whole has been accepted - the argument has been won. The service to High Level will provide a useful link to the X24 bus service to take passengers to and from the town. The railway is perfectly positioned to play a role in a park and ride service.

The new car park is a delight to see and the pagoda signage has already won an award. The opening on 14 June was a watershed for the railway, and I am certain that history will record that date as the beginning of a new age in the railway's affairs.

The railway is now entering a new phase in its development southwards. Partly as a result of this, there have been changes in the management structure. The post of Operations Manager has been replaced by General Manager to whom a Site Manager and a Traffic Manager report. In turn the Pway and Civil Departments report to the Site Manager and the Locomotive heads (both Steam and Diesel), and Carriage and Wagon Departments report to the Traffic Manager. You will see the new post holder's names on the inside cover as usual. The Management Team will be responsible for the day-to-day running of the railway (leaving the board to consider matters of overarching policy). We also need to develop a dedicated team whose brief is to extend southwards. We need to recruit now and there will be extensive training for the challenge ahead.

Finally it is not far short of four years since I took the Chair of the Company, and I have decided that the time is now right to stand down. I would like to wish Robin Cornelius well and good luck in the times ahead. I would also like to place on record my thanks to Angela Porter and Peter Drummond who have stood down from board duties, and particularly Angela who took on the demanding role of Company Secretary for the past year. Finally my thanks are extended to Torfaen County Borough Council who have helped us so massively in recent years with both funding which allowed us to secure the TWAO and both funding and project planning which have seen the environmental improvements in the car park become reality.

David Haylins

Diesel and DMU report

English Electric BSC104 'Llanwern' (Works No D1249)

Llanwern is currently presenting a very odd appearance, with its front bonnet cover off, and its cylinder heads off and just back from repair. The decision has been taken to fix all the niggling little problems in one hit, but, unfortunately, this does mean that the planned overhaul has seriously overrun its expected time. The broken wheel spring, which we reported in our last issue, has been re-fitted by Arthur Llewellyn and his team, following repair at the Severn Valley. Jonathan Goss has the engine in bits and cleaned, and is expected to start re-assembly very shortly.

Hudswell Clarke D615

This loco remains sidelined and sheeted by the bottom shed until time, manpower and weather permit further work to proceed..

Hudswell Clarke D1387

With both Llanwern and Panteg out of action, this loco has been busy on both shunting duties, and on Pway trains. She has been notably busy in the bottom yard extracting the two Class 50 bogies that we have stored for the last two years or so for the Renown-Repulse Restoration Group. They have now been taken up to Peak Rail at Rowsley to join 50029 and 50030.

Sentinel 10083 'Panteg'

Nothing new to report on this loco. She remains in the top shed waiting for her turn for a repair, by skilled welders, to her cracked block

Fowler 22497 RT1.

Work on 104 has pushed this loco back down the queue, so she awaits outside, with important parts sheeted over, for her turn in the bottom shed.

DMU Class 108 – DMCL 52044, DMCL 50632.0

With 104 'Llanwern' running late overhaul, it soon became clear that some rapid arrangements would be necessary if we were to have any trains for 2006. Thanks to an initiative from Steve Key, with Alex Hinshelwood and Roger Mileman in tow, the undeniably tatty interior was rapidly turned into something much more acceptable. In particular the worst of the tatty lino was replaced and edges liable to present trip hazards or liable to premature wear were overlaid with aluminium strips. Steve Key spruced up the north cab, whilst outside the north end was finally repainted back to its original yellow. At the south end the rather corroded 'skirt' was removed with a new piece welded in by Arthur Llewellyn. A particularly deft piece of work saw Peter Drummond and Mark Henderson uncover a particularly knotty problem in the control electrics that has plagued 52044 for several years. A loose terminal that had caused the problem was replaced and control is now perfect.

DMU Class 117 – DMBS 51351, TCL 59520, DMS 51397

At long last the promised door pillar arrived in early April, and although the dimensions were correct, and the curvature for the tumblehome perfect, it

took two days of fettling before the pillar was finally made to fit. Now that this work has been done, work to complete the panelling renewal programme on 51351 can proceed without further ado. It is planned to have this unit ready for the Transport Rally, and an intensive schedule of work is planned to start in early July in particular work is needed on a leaking fuel tank on DMS 51397.

DEMU Class 205 - DMBS 60117, DTCL60828

The motor car has now been refuelled for the new season, via its new filler adaptor, which uses an aircraft-type non-return filler and a modified connection thread. Arthur Llewellyn is close to completing the replacement fan clutch which failed soon after its arrival with us. This is a situation that had been observed by a number of heritage railways, and the opinion is that the long periods between heritage operations (as opposed to those on the national network) allow a rust film to build up on the clutch 'driven member' which cause the clutch shoes to 'snatch' when the drive is taken up and consequent damage.

It seems that whilst a number of the windows have been sealed, the work was insufficiently far-reaching to keep the worst of the wet out and the motor car saloon has fared particularly badly. Some repair work here is unavoidable, on the other hand the trailer saloon has stood up rather better to the weather, and Roger Mileman, Alex Hinshelwood, Arthur

Llewellyn and Steve Key have done a better job than BR or any of its privatized successors by cleaning the accumulated ground in hair grease and general grot from the headrests of the seating. Other heritage railways who wish to discover just how should contact the Company for the lowdown on the technique – though it must be said that the first ingredient is elbow grease!. We still need to find a quick half hour to fit the corridor – compartment partition window in one of the first class compartments. The special battery charger mentioned in our last issue, has been fitted and commissioned, and after a few initial sparks and blown fuses, now provides an extremely rapid method charging the set's batteries. In service batteries can be re-charged from dead flat to fully functional in less than 24 hours – and saves the wretched job of not only having to lug out the 24v charger, but having to disconnect the 90v batteries into 24v 'chunks' so that charging can proceed.

After many months of indecision, it has now been decided to paint the unit in its original green with small yellow warning patches at each end, and with an inverted black triangle at the luggage end. Undercoating is progressing rapidly and there are high hopes that she will be in its new livery for the Transport Rally. There remains the problem of window sealing and body repairs, and these must be completed before the livery change can be properly finished.

Carriage and Wagon report

Solid work has been undertaken on the coaching stock during the winter, which has kept Paul Gane and his team fully employed. Progress may have been slow, but a number of difficult problems have been met head-on and largely resolved. The chief recipients of attention have been the RMB and the BG. Hopefully it will not be too much longer before the BCK and BSK get their turn..

Brake Second Corridor (BSK) SC35494

Although this vehicle completed the 2005 season with a number of niggling problems, any possible turn in the top shed was impossible. All available slots were taken by the RMB, or the currently the BG. The BSK thus remains out doors, and for the first time in many years, has been stood down from front-line service – probably just as well since it is noticeably more weathered than its more recently painted

sisters. On the plus side a roll of green 'replin' is expected soon, for the purpose of recovering the rather careworn seats.

Restaurant Miniature Buffet (RMB) E1854

This vehicle has enjoyed the luxury of a few months in the top shed. During that time the roof has been painted, and the west side has been completely repainted, lined and lettered – and very tasty she looks too. At the same time the rather daunting task of fitting a new door threshold was undertaken. The knowledge thus gained will transfer usefully onto other stock whose door entrances are looking a little tired perhaps most importantly of all, new plating has been welded to the end skirts. There just remains some filling to do at this end, and the gangway must be re-aligned and sealed and she'll be ready for action again.



Here is RMB E1854, fresh out of the shed, and lined on the west side for the first time

in preservation. Welding and filling work on the north west corner is plain to see, but the necessary associated cosmetic work is not expected to present any problems

Brake Corridor Compo (BCK) M21034.

The one remaining broken large window has been temporarily covered, and Roger Lewis has been doing some cleaning up and re-varnishing inside. Meanwhile this vehicle must wait her turn before receiving a comprehensive overhaul. At this stage it is not clear whether this carriage or the BSK will be the first to receive 'in-shed attention'

Tourist Second Open (TSO) S4046

No further developments on this coach. There is an increasing possibility that she may be sold in the foreseeable future, but we will not report on this vehicle again, unless there is something of note to report

Gangwayed Full Brake (BG) M81453

In recent months this vehicle has presented a distinctly odd appearance, being newly painted on the east side., whilst remaining 'as arrived' on the west side. She is now enjoying a session in the top shed, and steady progress in being made to redress the balance. There have been problems with the inward opening door opposite the guards compartment, but examination has revealed that this was not due to the door going *down*, but the floor going *up*. So, with new-found confidence borne out of experience gained on the RMB, work is being undertaken to remove the rust swelling underneath the floor, which has given rise to the distortion.



Paul Gane is just about visible in the distance as he prepares the BG for painting.

Restaurant Buffet – Refurbished (RBr) M1954

The big news is that this vehicle has been sold to Bob Austin of C.A.R. Services, we are told, for service on the Dartmoor Railway. Bob has long experience with catering stock, and we wish him well with M1954. The board took the view that without vacuum brakes, and without kitchen equipment that would meet modern standards, the cost of getting it into service would be prohibitive. Also the lack of progress on this vehicle meant that it was decaying more quickly than we could maintain it. This may be true, but the cost of getting a ready to run catering vehicle these days would run easily into five figures several times over. Perhaps the PBR has dashed forever the notion of on-board catering. We shall see in the years to come.

Restaurant Composite (RC) S7832S / LSWR 70

We reported last time that having jacked up the bodyside to install the bottomside timber, the bodyside seemed reluctant to return to its original position. The problem has been traced to the mortices being cut rather tight and the entry angle of the tenon causing interference. The only solution – to jack up the bodyside again, and to fettle the mortices has been delayed by work being directed to the arrival of another LSWR coach – see later.

Restaurant Composite (RC) S7838S / LSWR 76

The cold spring has prevented much progress, but the north bogie has been

painted, and that part of the exterior that has been painted has had the worst damage caused by winter's fury rectified. With the warmer weather here, plans are afoot to replace the south-west (and possibly south-east) corner pillar, so that a new south end can be installed. Inside, the intention is to move the 'workshop' and associated junk so that the outside panel can be refitted and real work started on the interior fittings.

Brake Third (BTK) LSWR 1357 / S3193S / ADS70133

This vehicle is the new arrival. See feature article in Newlines entitled 'Another arrival' for details of this vehicle.

BR Dogfish DB992961

This vehicle is rapidly returning to its original departmental black livery with straw lettering, but it is more likely that it will be pressed immediately into service with the Pway train carrying ballast in connection with track renewal south of Furnace Sidings 'down the cutting', before the lettering is complete.

GWR S&T Van W28304

After all the work that was expended on this vehicle, we were surprised to see her the bottom yard, amongst the 'down and outs'. There are a few jobs outstanding, mainly cosmetic, and we hope we will see these completed soon. There are rumours that she will be taking a significant role in the Pway train soon. She will certainly make an attractive addition in this role.

The Liberty Ships – by Bernard Morton

At the height of the Battle of the Atlantic in 1942 Britain was taking losses of merchant shipping to the German U-boats at the rate of sixty a month. These losses could not be sustained and some answers had to be found. Britain turned to America for help. The USA responded by building the 'Liberty Ships'. These were of a tramp-style cargo ship design with a built in short life span. Of approximately 7000 tons gross, these all welded type boats were powered by a triple-expansion steam engine supplied by oil-fired 'Scotch' boilers.

These quickly designed and built ships were underpowered, looked like unwieldy barges, and were painfully slow at eleven knots. It was discovered that when sailing with no cargo, they rode so high in the water, that their propellers were partly out of the water. The height also made them vulnerable to high winds, which made them handle like sailing ships of old. Easy prey for the U-boats searching for victims.

But for all this they were welcomed with open arms by the Ministry of Transport, if not by their crews. A total of 2700 of these Liberty Ships were built at the rate of two a day in 18 shipyards.

Now for the amazing official statement: 'The Liberty Ships more than proved their worth in supplying beleaguered Britain, and if a ship was able to bring just *one* cargo across the Atlantic before being torpedoed, they had served their purpose'. What if the government announced that if *one* R.O.D. class loco or one Austerity 2-8-0 made just one trip from South Wales with coal for the fleet at Scapa Flow, then got destroyed by German bombers, that they would feel satisfied? So that works out at about forty crew on the Liberty Ships equal to twenty loco crews – so one ship lost to twenty locos would be an acceptable loss!

All I can say is that German submarines made a better job of it than the Luftwaffe. Just as well, eh...?



The 1917 RODs were derived from a 1911 Robinson design for the Great Central. Eventually several hundred were in use by the LNER – and classed as O-4s. Several of the 1917 RODs came on to the GWR who couldn't resist fitting GWR safety valve bonnets and other niceties. They were universally disliked by GW men who preferred their own 28xx type. Photo: Bernard Morton

O&S Department

A makeover for Bridge Five

As part of the overall environmental improvement scheme for Blaenavon, TCBC have also been involved in substantial cosmetic work on some of our bridges. The Whistle Inn road bridge has already seen cosmetic improvements, and, more recently, the 'New Pit Road' bridge (also known as 'Bridge 5') has also undergone cosmetic refurbishment. This bridge is seen by all tourists visiting Big Pit so work here is likely to impress visitors to Blaenavon out of all proportion to the funds used. Well done!

The Railway Shop

The railway shop continues to expand outwards and upwards. Upstairs the office continues to take shape, but progress has slowed with the loss of Warwick Davis to Bridgnorth, and the call on volunteer's time from the new operating season

Our PO Wagon range continues to sell well, and the latest title will be 'Cyfarthfa Colliery – Merthyr Four Feet Seam' in black on rich cream, which is due to appear in mid-July. As previously hinted, it does look as if the local 'Partridge Jones and John Paton' (not the more modern 'PJP') will be our late 2006 offering..

After ticket revenue the shop is the biggest source of regular income for the railway. The depressing thing is that the shop is regularly manned by only a tiny handful of members. It is, of course, not a high-profile job, and it's a million miles from 'playing trains', but without it the Company's relatively tight financial situation would almost certainly fall into danger, and the less stringent financial control that has been exercised in recent years would certainly come to a very abrupt end. You don't have to commit yourself to being a regular performer – just one day a year would allow our regulars some respite. There's nothing to fear from the customers either, most of them are now regulars, and often just come in for a natter or simply to see 'what's new'. Go on, make Peter Hunt's day – give him a call, now. He's on 757166.



David Hamblen, one of our shop stalwarts, does one of his regular Saturday stints. He could do with a holiday – anybody with the odd Saturday to spare?!

Lime Kiln Sidings Signal Box

Still nothing to report on the signal box, but there has been a rather odd but related event. On the other side of the road (but on the same side of the line) from the signal box stood an apparently insignificant little crossing keeper's hut. Some research however revealed that this building was rather special. Network Rail's database suggests that there are only three traces of Monmouthshire Railway and Canal Company's buildings – to wit, Pontypool (Crane St.) (up building stored at Furnace Sidings), Panteg and Griffithstown (though this is strongly disputed locally – it certainly looks more GWR than MRCC) and finally the crossing keeper's hut at Lime Kilns Sidings (Risca).. And so it is that Lime Kilns Sidings Sidings crossing hut (Risca) is now Lime Kiln Sidings crossing hut (Furnace Sidings). Such an event arose on account of the exploits of Norman Clymer, Alex Hinshelwood, Roger Lewis, Roger Mileman and Peter Drummond, who hot-footed it over to Risca to rescue said hut before it was razed to the ground – if there was any razing to be done, it was the PBR who were going to do it! Sadly in their rush to rescue it, few useful record shots or measurements were taken, nevertheless the little hut lies safe, palletised down by the bottom shed, awaiting the day when it can be re-assembled. As yet the base stones remain in situ and action is urgently needed to rescue them, so another trip is on the cards. Fancy joining in? Give Norman Clymer a call if you do.

Website

The website has seen further expansion with the 'Locomotives' section given much the same treatment as has recently been afforded to carriages and wagons. Between them the 'Locomotives' and 'Rolling Stock' sections provide a comprehensive stockbook. Unlike our 'current' printed version – which was published over sixteen years ago – there is no need for this version to go seriously out of date. There are still a few minor bugs, poor photos, and some extra information is needed, but at least we have something.

On a slightly different matter, you may not be aware that an email group called 'pbr-ops' was established some time ago. Membership is by invitation, and is restricted to volunteers who work regularly on site. The group has been quite successful, and traffic is moderately heavy. More recently a group called 'pbr-inter' attempted to promote interest overseas, mainly in North America, Australia and New Zealand. Traffic on this group has been very light, and as a result we are anxious to expand it to include all our regular members – regular or not. 'Pbr-inter' is open to the public, and PBR members, working or not, are cordially invited to apply. The first thing to do is to register yourself as a member of Yahoogroups. Go to

www.yahoogroups.com

and register as a member there. Then simply send an email to

pbr-inter-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

- and we'll do the rest. Go on, tell us what you really think of us!

New members- welcome!

I'm told that not only is our membership growing, but the rate of application for new memberships is growing. We welcomed nine new members in our last issue, for this issue we are happy to welcome fifteen new members up to 21 May -

Stan Gooze of Crickhowell	609
Mr J.N.Bishop of Caerleon	610
Douglas Holderness of New Inn	611
Matthew Hynes of Glasgow	612
Martyn Underwood of Sebastopol	613
Adrian Parry-Welson of Varteg	614
Donald Bowen of Ebbw Vale	615
Philip Hayman of Pontllanfraith	616
Andrew Knock of Abergavenny	617
Trevor Hunter of Crosskeys	618
Mason Douglas of Crumlin	619
Steven Rogers of Usk	620
Geoff Fellows of Blaina	621
Karl Richards of Ebbw Vale	622
John Park of Newport	623

Your Top Line

You may note that the cover price of this issue has risen to £1.50 – fear not, this is not a backdoor method of increasing subs for members, but part of a wider plan to introduce Top Line into High Street and railway station bookstalls. More news on this anon.

The amount of news and information that each issue of Top Line contains, increases almost issue by issue, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to squeeze it all in. When there is the additional opportunity to add photographs, most nowadays in colour, getting the balance right is becoming increasingly challenging. Financial constraints limit the number of colour pages to just four, and there is a stylistic need to place the related text as close to the article as is possible. Also, on the basis that a picture tells a thousand words, we try to make the pictures as large as we can. By now I am surprised that I have not been criticized for failure to rail in the length of lines, which as font sizes reduce in order to get more in, simply increases the number of words per line, and decreasing readability. For that reason, in this issue, most articles will appear in two column format, with a ragged right edge, and paragraphs will be 'close-coupled' and indented. This should both improve readability and increase 'packing density'.

I'm not sure of the average age of our membership, nor do I have any feel for their collective visual acuity, but it's a fact that our print is about 20% bigger than that of Steam Railway, so one more reduction of font size from 10 point to 9 point is definitely on the cards. Please let me know how you feel about this matter – and just in case you are not sure, these last two paragraphs are, indeed, set in 9 point



Newly arrived Electro-Diesel 73133 is reflected in the headwaters of the Avon Llwyd, having just departed from Whistle Inn.

Photo : Alistair Grieve



A view over the fence from Ty Rheinallt farm, as the ED gets into its stride propelling its three coach train up the bank from Furnace Sidings

