



The Magazine of the Pontypool & Blaenavon Railway

Autumn 2006

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EDITORIAL

The Rosebay Willowherb is fading along the railway banks and Keats's 'season of mists and mellow fruitfulness' is upon us. We've run another successful summer season, with increased passenger numbers, but as the darker evenings draw in, not only is there much maintenance to be done, but capital schemes that have been in the planning for many months are now queueing up for execution. Our membership is steadily increasing, and from it we hope we can pluck sufficient committed volunteers to make further progress. It does seem that we are reversing the trend experienced by many other railways - our numbers of active volunteers seems to be increasing. Blaenavon (High Level) beckons.

But something else is happening. For the first time our modest magazine is going to be trialled in small numbers by Ian Allan on the bookstalls. For our potential new readers, we extend a very warm 'Hello'. Whilst we welcome your interest, what we will not do, is to significantly change our style in order to entertain the 'average reader' - whatever that is! There are plenty of other glossier magazines that can do that, and better than us too.

You may find these pages rather parochial, and a little detailed, but what we will show you is something of the internal workings of small but growing Heritage Railway - factually and free from hype. We pray that what you read may be sufficient to inspire you to pay the railway a visit, or even to consider supporting us as a member.

Cover Picture:

In her new coat of green, unit 1118, with her trailer car carrying its original 1129, plays to the gallery. Here she thumps away, loudly and volcanically, up the grade from Furnace Sidings, at notch 6 or 7, to the delight of Thumper fans. Many repeat performances are not planned - the unit's engine has to last many years yet!

Photo: Alistair Grieve

From the Woolsack - our Chairman, Robin Cornelius writes...

Another summer season has come and gone, and once again we have managed to increase our passenger numbers. This year we carried 3756 passengers, a 9.76% increase on last year when 3422 passengers were carried, an excellent show. This total excludes a charter train scheduled for early October. A big thank you to you all - particularly for the leaders and their teams who worked so hard for the Diesel Gala and the Transport Rally - particularly the latter, which attracted a total of 839 passengers over the two days.

Perhaps we do not always appreciate the work of the Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway Society in our business, their support is not only real but substantial. I was delighted to hear that the shop can now accept credit card orders over the phone and will soon be able to engage in full e-commerce. Not only will such a step hopefully increase the Society's income, but the ease by which it will be possible to book seats on our Santa Specials will be greatly facilitated and this will increase our income too. Please give the people that work tirelessly, six days a week in the shop, (and those that work on our running days in the site 'Emporium') your fullest support.

Idly musing, as one does, it seems to me that, we really have come of age as a railway. For a railway of our size we have a collection of stock that might be the envy of many of our peers. Even many substantially larger railways cannot match our eclectic range of stock. It's true that we don't have a working steam engine, or even a main-line diesel of our own. Our primary aim is now to reach Blaenavon (High Level). For a while this will be a single line of rails without run-round loops or other luxuries. To work such a system, we don't need any large single locomotives, we need multiple-units. These we have in sufficient number in both DMMU and DEMU varieties. In short we have sufficient to meet our needs for many years yet.

Perhaps the time has now come to turn our attention away from things with wheels, and to start to invest in bricks and mortar - particularly at Furnace Sidings, which is likely to be the centre of gravity of the railway for the foreseeable future. I know that there have been dark mutterings of a second platform at Furnace Sidings for some time now, and such a development would bring advantages at all kinds of levels to our current modest operations. We have been aware for some time that a footbridge might be available, albeit conditionally, were it to come to Furnace Sidings. It now appears that a second footbridge, might have become available very quickly. Like so many things in this business, it might all be a damp squib, or progress only at a snail's pace, on the other hand, it might be all over bar the shouting before we go to press again. Whatever the outcome I urge you all to get behind any project to build a second platform - just in case the footbridge does come to fruition faster than we had expected. Over the next five or six years we must start to focus on infrastructure, if we are to present a site of substance and one of which we can be proud.

STARK REMINDER!

The 1st January 2007 will pass before the next issue and your subs will become due. To make life easier, we are looking at payment by credit card, but arrangements are not yet finalised. Ring the shop on 01495 792263 to see if this service is available, when you are ready to pay.

NEWSLINES

Diesel Gala 2006

The last weekend of July saw the PBR's first diesel gala since September 2002. Although the flexibility of operations was a little hampered by engineering works further down the line, an impressive two day service was timetabled, with trains running down to twenty minute intervals. The lineup included appearances by a blue and grey Class 108 DMU, Class 205 'Thumper' DEMU newly outshopped (ie still being painted at 10 o'clock that morning!) in Southern Region green, Class 73 No.73133 (once named the 'Bluebell Railway') working a three-coach rake of Mark 1s, the appearance of a pair of industrial diesels (English Electric and Hudswell Clarke) double-heading the heavy train up the bank, and finally some demonstration freight runs as an après ski.

The Mark 1s have all received more or less attention in the last year, and a flurry of painting over the last few months saw the set, consisting of (loco), BG, RMB, and SK looking particularly smart. Some early rain on Saturday saw some loss of adhesion, especially by the Thumper, which has only two powered axles for its 90 tons weight, performing some interesting manoeuvres on the rail, with even the 73 briefly suffering a similar fate. Sunday was warm and sunny, and with dry rail, some spirited departures from Furnace Sidings were performed. On the day, the motive power performed faultlessly, and a very substantially increased number of passengers were treated to an unusual collection of diesel power. Definitely an event to be repeated – look out for it next year!

Transport Rally 2006

August Bank Holiday saw the fourth and largest Transport Rally the railway has held to date. The two day event was held on Sunday and Monday and attracted well over 800 passengers. With distinctly breezy weather and the threat of heavy showers, we might have been nervous about the number of both exhibitors and passengers attending, but there was no more than 30 seconds of rain and with over 150 exhibitors, we saw over 800 passengers – over 80% up on last years total. A rather nice touch was to arrange vehicules (especially cars) in serried ranks, and the sight of a Ford Cosworth police car rapidly 'bluelighting' out of the compound whilst being *chased* by about half a dozen civvy Cosworths was a sight to behold. What we have learnt is that our informal and friendly approach is just what exhibitors are looking for. Many turned it into a social event, and many have threatened to bring their pals along next year – we can't wait!



Doesn't this little picture just remind you of the old CAMP coffee jar labels of years gone by? Captain Charles James, accompanied by his Warrant Officer stands outside his tent, which was included amongst the contingent of military vehicles at this year's Transport Rally.

FOR MORE PICTURES OF THESE EVENTS SEE OUR CENTRE SPREAD AND REAR COVER

DEVELOPMENT

All kinds of things are moving forward on the development front, and I had originally written nearly four pages before I realised that Top Line was in danger of bursting at the seams, so I had to severely prune things. Evening after pruning I think there's enough stuff here to make a section in its own right - so here goes:

Transport and Works Act Order

The grant of the TWAO is now history - albeit splendid history, but there remains a sting in the tail - the final instalment of the bill, which is still awaited. This is all tied up with the manner in which we have allocated the RKF funding towards financing - see below.

RKF reapplication

Unfortunately, due to demands from auditors in Europe, the whole RKF (Regional Key Fund) application has to be done, against different criteria. This was a massive job, first time round, and the second application is almost complete, but until we get the final price for the TWAO, and certain other things, we cannot complete the document!

The drive southwards and funding

We wrote of 'Step 1.2' in our last issue, and of our estimates for getting to Blaenavon (High Level) which were a massive £370,000 with some £323,000 earmarked for the bridge refurbishment. We have presented our ideas to Torfaen County Borough Council (TCBC), and far from being smartly shown to the door, they appeared to be cautiously receptive. Since then it appears that our plans had been seriously taken to heart by TCBC. The latest news is uncertain, but it appears that funding has been secured to enable an official to formally seek funding on our behalf. We will, of course, let you have all the news in our next issue.

Water supply

After a delay of over six months whilst the necessary legal formalities were cleared to allow us to pass our 700 metres of pipeline under a thin strip of TCBC owned land, the necessary deeds were finally signed on 27 September, and within minutes the contract was formally let to one of the three shortlisted contractors. We expect the actual work to take about a month, though exactly when work will begin is uncertain. We very much hope that the water will be available to the Tearooms for Santa Specials season.

Toilets

We mentioned the 'Container' type toilets in our last issue. Some work has been done repairing the roofs and painting the outside, and with the running season now over, work can start on preparing them for use. We have sufficient funds to purchase the local pipework, but whether we will have sufficient to purchase and instal the sewerage digester is intimately entangled with the 'loose change' issue.

Link Road

In connection with their ongoing environmental improvements programme TCBC have been talking to Big Pit. In particular, TCBC were interested in improving the road that links the far side of our level crossing with Big Pit. A constant irritant and threat

to the safety of the railway are the trials bikes and quad bikes that skirt round the flanks of the crossing gates, and ride across the crossing. Big Pit plan to close the road to all motorised vehicles except special traffic on a one off basis, and since the link road belongs to Big Pit, we have little real say in the matter. Of course we may lose some modest custom this way, but we are far more likely to get pedestrians walking over, the more so if they have a smooth path on which to walk, and are not endlessly harassed by 'bikers'. Plans are also afoot to improve the nearby Coity Tip by creating a pathway around the tip, and installing interpretation boards around and atop the tip (from which a very good view of our yard can be seen), and at the small pond at its foot. This will bring visitors over half way along the road. Surely it cannot be too hard to bring them the rest of the way. Plans have already been drawn to replace the far crossing barrier with something that is both more effective and more attractive, whilst its flanks will be comprehensively fenced. Arrangements are planned that will allow unimpeded access to pedestrians, horses and people in wheelchairs. The arrangements will be further refined so that the 'filter' gate can be locked by station staff to permit the safe passage of trains.

Bridges

We touched upon the importance of the bridges in our plans to extend southwards in our last issue. Can there be another heritage railway with so many bridges in such a short distance? In our case, no less than seven bridges in a mile and a half. Tough, very tough, at the funding stage, but what an experience for our passengers to rumble over and whoosh under our bridges - though 'whoosh' is perhaps too strong a word. We have been fortunate in the last month in being able to call upon a pair of bridge engineers to give our bridges an informal look-over. In comparison with the costs we quoted in our last issue for restoring the bridges, two of the bridges, they suspect, will be somewhat above estimate, whilst the remainder are likely to fall below, some well below, previous estimates. Heartening news indeed.

Furnace Sidings Station

Over the last few months or so we have been looking in some detail at developments at Furnace Sidings station. Broadly we have been looking at two areas - replacement of the meagre facilities on the platform with purpose built buildings, and the construction of a second platform. In sketching out a second platform, the opportunities and constraints that improvements around the crossing will impose have been considered. An important consideration has been the presumption that an LNWR footbridge stored at National Museum of Wales Collections Centre at Nantgarw would be available for use at the railway, albeit with a number of strings attached. However in the last few weeks the existence of a second LNWR footbridge has come to light, and seems available for purchase, presumably without strings. This has bought the provision of a second platform into very sharp focus. Our Chairman will be urging all to support the construction of a second platform, probably during the warmer weather in the 2007 running season. Whilst it seems increasingly likely that the actual construction of the rails to Blaenavon (High Level) will need the employment of contractors, we know that we can build platforms. In fact a substantial extension was made to 'Platform 1' only a few years ago.

DIESEL and DMU REPORT

Class 73/1 electro-diesel 73133

As we noted in our previous issue, 73133 is with us for six months - and possibly more. Since her stay here looks increasingly likely to be more than a short term hire, perhaps we ought to say a bit more about her. A feature article appears further on in this issue.

English Electric BSC104 'Llanwern' (Works No D1249)

With the spectre of a Diesel Gala looming much midnight oil was burnt, but in true PBR tradition, Llanwern rolled out, with paintwork on the engine barely dry to join in the fun. As it as was she would have seriously upset the H&S pundits by running with her engine doors open, but it would have been sin to deny the public a full view of her nicely painted innards. Since then she has worked a few passenger services, but has been overshadowed by 73133. More recently she has been returned to depot for work on a defective handbrake, but this is not expected to keep her out of service for very long

Hudswell Clarke D1387

HC D1387 has had a busy season, working PWay trains, shunting the yard in shunts both large and small, and featuring in the diesel gala - you can read all about her exploits elsewhere in this issue.



Hudswell Clarke D1387 plays banker to English Electric BSC104 'Llanwern' as the double-banked three coach train shunts empty into Furnace Sidings platform ready for its journey up to the Whistle Inn during this year's Diesel Gala

photo:Alistair Grieve



Above: During July, working volunteers await the first passengers on Class 108 DMU, on the first train of the day. It's dull but already warm and muggy. The front of DMCL 50632 wears a slightly fictitious livery with black roof dome, and window mask. She also sports 'y ddraig goch'

Left: Panic! It's the morning of the Diesel Gala and DEMU 1118 is going to look rather silly if its yellow panel is not painted.

photos: Alistair Grieve.

Hudswell Clarke D615

Sadly poor old 615 was unable to join the fun of the Diesel Gala and remains partly painted on the bottom shed outside road. There is some serious welding to be performed around the cab doors, but, with the summer operating season now over, perhaps some effort can be directed her way.

Sentinel 10083 'Panteg'

Panteg remains forlorn in the Top Shed, the only daylight she has seen in recent months is to have her storage position changed from the No3 to the No2 road - but still at the back of the shed. Still, Roger Mileman is trying to talk to Rolls-Royce to see if they can help us with her cracked block, and we may just have secured a friendly welder.

Fowler 22497 RT1.

Nothing happens for year and years, then all of a sudden, the sun comes out from behind a cloud and sunshine beams down. In the case of the elderly RT1, there has always been a concern over just how the main engine would be started. Initially it was started by a small petrol-fuelled donkey engine, but recognizing the near impossibility of finding such an unusual piece of kit, its owner, was reduced to considering what sort of electric starter motor could be used - and where to put the batteries to start the starter motor - and where to put the dynamo to charge the batteries to start the starter motor and so on.

Then, out of the blue, all of a sudden a source of an original donkey engine emerged in West Wales - at the Internal Fire - Museum of Power, at Tanygroes in Ceredigion. We are all waiting expectedly for it to be delivered, and seeing some interesting developments on the RT1 front. Try the web at

<http://www.internalfire.com/> - for more information on the museum

DMU Class 108 -***DMCL 52044, DMCL 50632***

This unit has put in a steady season's performance working most Saturdays, and performing the early and late turns during the Diesel Gala without significant problems. One engine still refuses to run reliably, but the unit runs perfectly soundly on the three remaining engines. Another engine has developed an irritating habit of stalling as the train comes to a halt. It is not always easy to determine that this has happened, until trying to get away from Furnace Sidings, when the failure to make any headway without a lot of noise and exhaust smoke, becomes more than a little embarrassing. Still, she looks reasonably tidy, both inside and out.

DMU Class 117 -***DMBS 51351, TCL 59520, DMS 51397***

On 51351 the door pillar still awaits final fitting. Attempts to fit it were not entirely successful, and there was some head scratching before a more properly engineered solution suggested itself. On 51397 the repair to the leaking fuel tank is clearly a large task, and access to a pit is mandatory, however, this job can wait. In the meantime work

is almost complete to T-off a fuel line from the remaining good tank, and which will serve until a more radical repair can be effected. Unfortunately much time has been wasted repairing scorched and blistered paintwork on this car which was damaged when a nearby bonfire was allowed to get out of hand. The centre car 59520 has now been shunted to the bottom yard which will make further work on this unit more difficult. This car contains the unit's only lavatory, so progress here is rather important. All these problems have conspired to make the unit unavailable for the 2006 Transport Rally - still, there's always next year

DEMU Class 205 -***DMBS 60117, DTCL60828***

It's been an exciting season for this unit. The green livery was completed just hours before the Diesel Gala, and our front cover shows that she looks a picture when the sun shines. Even several members who were not keen on the proposed livery were won over by the new green. The yellow patches and black triangle were actually completed during the morning of the first day of the Diesel Gala whilst hidden in the loop behind JB 73133 and its three coaches. On the mechanical front the somewhat Heath Robinson battery charger continues to perform well, Arthur Llewellyn's rather unusual approach to the fan clutch problem has produced a reliable solution which has attracted the attention of at least one other heritage railway who operate a Thumper. Most recently Arthur has fixed the defective lubricating oil priming pump motor. This saves several minutes of back-breaking pumping using a manual bilge pump to fill the filters and engine with oil.

With all of these defects dealt with, the unit is now a reliable unit, and has put in a number of turns both in and subsequent to the Diesel Gala. During August and September she performed a number of training days which has allowed three drivers to pass out, and thus increases those qualified to drive the unit from one to four, and this will significantly increase the potential availability of this unit. Lack of time has meant that the windows remain to be properly sealed, and recent rains have meant that, without plenty of ventilation, the insides smell rather fausty, and give a poor impression to our visitors. This is compounded by the damage that mildew has caused to the fabric within the saloons - particularly in the motor car. Soon the unit must be prepared for winter service. There is a knotty problem remaining - getting the heater circuits reliable. At present they cause the main generator to trip after a few minutes so that further running of any kind is impossible. A solution would make this unit highly attractive during the winter months.

Next issue, Spring 2007, should arrive on your mat during the first week of February.

Contributions by Friday 19 January 2007, please - ideally as a DOC file with separate (un-embedded) JPEG images, and by email or on CD, but manuscript is also very acceptable. News, ideas, opinions, reminiscences, and anecdotes are all welcome. If you really feel you cannot write, just give the editor an outline, or 'bullet points' - we can normally 'ghost' something up. Thank you.

THE CLASS 73 ELECTRO-DIESEL -Part 1 - by John Down

The London Brighton and South Coast Railway started running electric trains in 1909 (albeit overhead), with the London South Western Railway following, using third rail in 1913. By the time the Southern Railway was formed from the grouping in 1923, the vast majority of the suburban network south of the Thames had been electrified. The Southern, which by this time had standardised on the third rail system, continued its energetic programme so that by 1933 the south coast had been reached at Brighton, and by nationalization, most of the coast could be reached by fast electric trains. There remained some exceptions. British Railways (Southern Region) electrified to Dover in 1959, north Kent by 1961, Bournemouth by 1967 and finally Weymouth by 1988, but there remained a few small gaps, and, of course, the line to Exeter and beyond has never been electrified. Notwithstanding the electrification programme by BR(S), there remained a requirement for a locomotive which could run primarily 'on the juice', but with the flexibility to reach along some relatively short non-electrified branches, to work into freight yards and goods sheds where there was no conductor rail, and finally to work in engineering possessions when the juice was off. The solution was to build an electric locomotive and also fit it with a relatively small diesel engine driving a DC generator to provide electricity where there was no conductor rail.

This dual power concept was first considered immediately post World War Two and continued throughout the 1950s, during which time the straight electric classes 70 and 71 were designed and introduced. The class 71 attempted to solve the absence of third rail issue with additional pantograph pick up but the overhead wires were only installed in a limited number of siding locations. Finally an order for six electro-diesel locomotives, later Class 73, was made in July 1959. The Class 73 is almost unique on British Railways today in that it is capable of being powered by two different sources - traction current picked up from the third rail and also from its on board diesel generator set (albeit at reduced power). As such it is termed an "electro-diesel" locomotive (EDL). There was one other electro-diesel type - the class 74 - a later conversion from pure electric locomotive class 71 which was not a success and all have been withdrawn.

These were initially designated class JA, subsequently under TOPS, initially class 72 but 73/0 was the classification that was implemented. They were numbered originally E6001-6, subsequently 73001-6. These six were built at the SR's Eastleigh works and are capable of 1600hp (i.e. similar to the BR(s)'s native diesel electric class 33) on straight electrical pick up and 600hp from its own diesel-electric generator set, which is powered by an English Electric 4SRKT engine - essentially the same as that in our Thumper DEMU but raised to Mark 2 and metered and fuelled rather differently.

The first JA emerged from Eastleigh on the 1st February 1962 and all six were in service by the end of the year. By that time the electrification of north Kent coast, and to Dover had been completed, but so successful was the design that an order for a further 30, subsequently 43, was made. These were built by the English Electric Company at their Vulcan foundry Works in Newton-le-Willows. The first of this series, designated JB (later 73/1), E6007 left the works on 13 October 1965 and all were in service by January 1967. The JB's have different traction motors allowing a top speed of 90mph - 10mph higher than the JAs.

The 73s staple work initially was on freight, parcels and departmental services with only limited passenger workings such as boat trains and overnight services. However the class provided an interim service on the Bournemouth line pending arrival of the 4-Rep EMUs prior to the introduction of the full electrified service in 1967.

The first regular prime passenger workings for the 73/1s came in 1984 with the commencement of the premium Gatwick Express service. The class was selected to power in a push pull mode Mark 2 trailer formations (class 488) with a powered Gatwick Luggage Van (GLV/class 489) on the other end. Initially locomotives were not dedicated to the service and any 73/1 could be called upon.

It was whilst working this intensive service that the only major problem with the class emerged. A problem associated with electrical locomotives picking up from the third rail is that the length between their pickups is considerably shorter than that on an EMU. Thus the locomotive can lose traction power - become "gapped" - when the length of a gap in the conductor rail exceeds the length between the locomotive's pick ups. This is commonly experienced through complex pointwork. The Gatwick Express route encounters a number of significant gaps and it has to be remembered that in the Gatwick Express unit configuration there is no connection of traction power - other than via the third rail - between the EDL and the GLV. Two minor fires in 73s culminated on the 5th August 1984 in a serious fire in the celebrity 'Royal' EDL 73142 'Broadlands'. The cause of these fires was arcing within the locomotive due to adjacent conductor rails at gaps having differing voltages. Class 73s were fitted with flashguards to their bogies and the control gear was modified for when traction power is lost and then restored. No.73142 was rebuilt and returned to service.

We'll have something to say about the Class 73s in preservation in our next issue, due February 2007



EDL 73133 backs on to its train, early one morning during the Diesel Gala

photo: Alistair Grieve



Above: During the Diesel Gala, a distinctly Southern Region look comes to South Wales as 'Thumper' 1118 lays over in the loop, with electro-diesel 73133 waiting for the 'rightaway' to propel its train up the bank to the Whistle Inn. A smart rake of Mark 1s is hidden by the Thumper, which started the day with its green paint still wet, and the yellow warning square not even painted.



Below: A first for the PBR and unusual for any railway, a pair of industrial diesels propel the three car train from a standing start up the 1 in 37 from Furnace Sidings, at this year's Diesel Gala. The train engine was 104 'Llanwern' which had made its first trial run since a six-month engine overhaul only the night before. The assisting engine is Hudswell Clarke D1387 looking distinctly odd working a passenger train with its cabside emblazoned 'NCB-North Derbyshire Area'

photos: Alistair Grieve



An attractive lineup of single- and double-deckers arrived on the Saturday of the Transport Rally. It was 'All change 'on Sunday - and a completely new collection arrived. Now identifying buses is not for the faint-hearted – we'll leave that to the road experts – after all, we want them to come back next year.



This rather large Scammell had decided to stall on the crossing. Not only was this outrage preventing trains from returning to the yard, it was also, and more importantly, making crews late for a visit for their cuppa in the Tearooms. Fortunately steam had returned, albeit briefly, to the PBR and effortlessly removed the interloper

photos: Alistair Grieve

Carriage and Wagon report

The summer generally sees a reduction in work during the season, but this has certainly not been the case this year. However, this progress has been disrupted by several important changes in the way our normal LHCS (Loco Hauled Coaching Stock) is formed. There have been long term plans to remove the BSK from service, perhaps to be replaced with the BCK, since, amongst other things, it has one more compartment. However the work required on the BCK is not trivial. Under the circumstances it was considered that in the short term the brake coach could be replaced by the full-brake BG. On the face of it, this would reduce our passenger carrying capacity to that provided by the RMB alone. The thing is, we *know* that our passengers enjoy riding in compartments, even if for no more valid a reason that it reminds them of Hogwart's Express (what price heritage...?). So the rarely used SK was added to redress the loss. This produces a three car train. We normally reserve three coach formations for special events, but this is the first season that we have worked a three coach train throughout the season. If all this to and fro-ing were not enough, the added requirement to get the Class 205 DEMU 'Thumper' re-painted before the Diesel Gala meant that C&W has barely had a quiet moment.

The changes mean that our previous formation of (loco), BSK, RMB has now been replaced by (loco), BG, RMB, SK. Impressive though this formation looks - and it has been well loaded for both the Diesel Gala and the Transport Rally, the fact remains that pushing a BG (which has no passenger accommodation) endlessly up the bank is heavy on fuel and very expensive.

Gangwayed Full Brake (BG) M81453

As noted above, this vehicle now plays a very important role in our front-line rake. It certainly looks the part with its new maroon paint job, and bright yellow lining. It still has some niggling matters to attend to, it has small holes at each right hand end of the roof, and, unlike most other front-line coaches, lacks our customary through wiring. Perhaps most irritating is that, like any PBR coach, not on the move, it very soon fills up with 'useful' spares. In this case, they really are useful - the complete output of a raiding party to Caerwent that stripped the internals of ex-BR(S) 4-Vep EMU (Class 423 in TOPS-speak) of their seats, furnishings and light fittings. Whatever the usefulness of otherwise of its cargo, there was nevertheless, nowhere else to put it, and so M81453 went into service just as it was. So as to discourage the 'looken-peepers', white sheets were pinned up at the windows, but this, unfortunately, gives it a slightly funereal look.

Restaurant Miniature Buffet (RMB) E1854

We looked at the activity around this vehicle in our last issue, but it became a race against time, as to whether she would be ready in time for our grand car park opening on 14 June. In the event she just made it. There remain a few jobs round the north gangway end, but she is in regular service. Finally, thoroughly fed up with our rather dodgy door internal panels, work will be starting shortly to provide a 'final solution' to the problem, but this can be done whilst she is in service.

Brake Composite Corridor (BCK) M21034

Although likely to remain in the cold for a while, there is a real chance that this vehicle will be next in the race for poll position in the Top Shed after the BSK. This is an attractive vehicle and all steps must be taken to keep it free from deterioration due to the weather, until its turn comes. Rumour has it, that this vehicle may be our first to be finished in carmine and cream (or 'blood and custard') livery.

Brake Second Corridor (BSK) SC35494

Now withdrawn from the operational rake, this vehicle is looking a little forlorn with its faded maroon paint against its more recently painted sisters. There is nothing seriously wrong with this vehicle, but quite a lot of work is needed on the doors, the seats need re-upholstering, batteries need replacing and there are a myriad of smaller jobs to be done. Fortunately we have been able to secure sufficient genuine green replin to do the seats, but a new set of batteries will be quite expensive - even if we use commercial lorry batteries rather than the proper BR pattern. On a slightly oblique note, the sales success of the shore based 'Eric's Emporium', a member of our burgeoning 'portacabin city' means that the role of the BSK shop has been curtailed, so just what to do with the space - and fittings - is a challenge. It's a fact that Eric is much cosier in his electrically heated portacabin - and now he's got a computer there, it's hard to get him to go home sometimes. The latest news is that in mid-September, after languishing outside for a few months, this coach has finally entered the top shed for a relatively light overhaul. As soon as work is complete, then the two car rake can be re-established.

Tourist Second Open (TSO) E4677

This was our first carriage to enter service, though it has been out of service for some years now. It's a fairly open secret that Paul Gane has his eye on this vehicle these days. Roger Lewis is removing internal fittings and re-varnishing them. It has one picture window missing, and both doors and their pillars are in poor condition, but the door pillars will need replacing. This is quite an extensive job, but with our growing expertise, it should not prove insurmountable. Whisperings are that it will be in blood and custard in order to form a matching two-car rake with the BCK.

Tourist Second Open (TSO) S4046

Apart from the loss of two picture windows and further deterioration due to weather, there is no physical change to report. No realistic buyer has expressed an interest in this coach, but there are whispers within corners of the railway, that it may be possible to re-clad the sides with new mild steel sheets. Such an exercise would obscure some of the windows, but no matter. The idea is that the vehicle should serve as a Santa's Grotto. At this stage, these are only dark mutterings, but time will tell.

Restaurant Buffet - Refurbished (RBr) M1954

As previously reported this vehicle has been sold to Bob Austin at CAR Services. Originally it was to have gone to Dartmoor, but it now appears that it is to find a home at Llangollen - perhaps they are having a go at re-creating the Berwyn Belle. It must be

said that the decision to part with this vehicle was by no means unanimous. One reason advanced for the sale was the notion that as an air-braked vehicle, it could not work with our own locos. How odd then, that within a month of the sale, an air-braked loco was hired in, and there is now talk of accommodating air-braked Mark 2 coaches in the near future!

No doubt our next issue will bring forth further information about the Mark 2s.

Restaurant Composite (RC) S7832S / LSWR 70

This coach remains with one bodyside jacked up to allow the tenons on the ends of the pillars to enter the new bottomside section. This work has been rather delayed. Unfortunately, during the delay the cantrail (the long timber that supports the roof) has seen fit to crack. On the face of it, it is a disaster, but in fact it is a blessing in disguise, since much of the roof was cantilevered from the raised section putting considerable weight, and sideways thrust on the tenons. With these forces 'decoupled', and the weight involved being a third of what it was, life should be a lot easier.

Restaurant Composite (RC) S7838S / LSWR 76

Work during the summer has concentrated on the south end carefully removing rotted timber, to expose sound oak. This work has involved the east side bottomside, the SE corner post and the end crossbeam. Complex pieces of new timber must now be carefully scarfed in, and much of a new corner post grafted on before re-assembly can really begin. This re-assembly is critical if the increasing 'lean' of the body is to be remedied.

Brake Third (BTK) LSWR 1357 / S3193S / ADS70133

This relatively new arrival, dubbed 'Madame Cholet Womble' due to inclusion on the Wimbledon breakdown train unit (BTU) spent a fortnight on the long No.4 siding, before being whisked off, unceremoniously down to the bottom yard. Even so, she has seen as impressive list of work, either completed or in progress to initiate her restoration. Her roof is now covered, and has shown itself to be completely water- and more importantly, windproof. It has been a lovely summer, but there have been one or two violent storms.

Along the edge of the roof, the steel cantrail strip has been re-fitted using original bronze screws where possible or stainless steel where replacements are needed. Some of the cantrail strip is rusted through and over sixty feet of new cantrail is on order from local steel fabricators. On the sides some sixteen mild steel sheets have been ordered, in sizes up to a metre wide and three metres long. The long job of drilling and countersinking the screw holes, has been made easier by the manufacture of a special punch, and the rather ugly grill that once provided ventilation for a generator set. compartment, fitted whilst in departmental service has been replaced. All of the steel sheets have had the inside face covered in a thick layer of bitumen paint whilst the outside zinc rich phosphate primer has been applied as a first coat. All the screws used are of stainless steel. Localised areas of bottomside have been found to be in worst condition than first thought, especially at the ends - and particularly around the duckets.

Fortunately a hardwood supplier has been found in the Sirhowy valley - not too far away, and orders have been placed for timber. Most window glass has been replaced, but two droplights remain, whilst their frames are rebuilt, and a window that had become a 'half window' in departmental service has been opened back up to its full size, and reglazed. A dozen bolelection mouldings (the bits that hold in the window glass) were ordered several months ago, and we are hoping these will be ready and fitted well before Christmas. Inside little further progress has been made in breaking out the decolite floor and replacing it with planking, as we have yet to commission the router / moulder used in preparing the flooring timbers. Electricity has been installed, and lighting has been fitted, ready for the darker nights. We are gradually sorting the material that came with the vehicle - notably doors and compartment walls, and burning diseased much wood. Inside the cantrail has a disturbing curve, but we think we have hatched a 'cunning plan' to correct the problem. Laser measurements show the deviation to be 3 1/4 inches. Topcoat outside will be BR Stock Green, the same colour as that used on the Thumper.

S3193S with some of her new panelling. The ducket is in the process of deep surgery, and needs more bottomside scarfed in before the reversed double curved panel can go back.



GWR Brake First Open (BFO) 231

Although previously unreported, this vehicle received some substantial work, both internally and particularly along its east side with new panelling and restored bolelections during the winter months. Sadly this vehicle, with much of the panelling from both east and west sides missing has been ejected from the top shed - for, what, it might be added are perfectly sound operational reasons, and dumped in the bottom yard. It has been there for several years during which time it has had a chance to dry out and microbial activity in the timbers has been arrested. Nevertheless this unique and historically important vehicle must fare as best it can exposed to the Blaenavon weather, and the recent heavy rains have destroyed most of the good that has been achieved. Space in the top shed is now so critical that even the restored (though far from watertight) privately owned Manchester & Milford saloon No. 6479 finds itself suffering a similar fate.

Sleeper First (SLF) M378M

The influx of Southern stock has now come to an abrupt end with the arrival of something from 'oop North'. The arrival this time is in the shape of a very stately twelve wheel first class sleeper, which arrived on site on Tuesday 19 September from the Churnet Valley Railway. It was built by the newly nationalized British Railways in 1950 at Wolverton to an LMS design as lot 1570 on diagram 2166. This carriage is carried on long (12ft 6ins) wheelbase, six wheel bogies, and is just short of seventy feet long. This rather magnificent beast was initially preserved on the North Yorkshire Moors Railway in 1979. After asbestos removal in 1988, she was transferred to the Churnet Valley Railway in 2001. It seems that little was done to her there before she finally arrived at Furnace Sidings.



Sleeper first M378M shortly after arrival at Furnace Sidings. A bit of computer trickery neatly removes the ugly A-frame that is sitting in front of it.

The Blaenavon Model Railway Group gets a new home for its OO-gauge layout - the large cabin arrives, which will house 'Newport (High Street)'

SEE FEATURE
OPPOSITE

photo: P Drummond



Uniquely for this railway, this vehicle was not acquired for restoration with operation as its long term aim, but to provide accommodation for volunteers staying overnight. Although some restoration will indeed be needed, she is, in many ways, largely prepared

for such a role. She is mains powered and lit, and one of the twelve berths has been converted to a shower cubicle with facilities for accepting mains water - just the job when we get the mains water on site. Enough of the attendant's cabin remains that with fresh water coming on tap, overnighters can enjoy a decent cuppa. The berths were originally pressure ventilated, but whether or not these can be re-fitted remains to be seen.

.....This privately owned vehicle was rescued from its previous home by Paul Gane, who spent best part a week screwing the side sheets back to the framing, and digging it out of the sand quarry at Oakamoor where it was stored. Under the body, there is no brake rigging, vacuum cylinders, dynamo, or battery boxes. A few windows need reglazing, and the doors need refitting, but she is generally a well-built vehicle. These LMS First Class Sleepers have done quite well in preservation, for as well as 383, numbers 379, 380, 381, 394, 395 and 398 all remain in one place or another, most in rather shabby condition, it must be said. They are joined by the contemporaneous but far less impressive, Sleeper Seconds 612, 617 and 621

BLAENAVON MODEL RAILWAY GROUP - by Peter Drummond

The model railway group has been active for around 18 months now. We have two layouts an O-gauge layout "Blaen-Rhondda" and an OO-gauge layout "Newport High Street" that is under construction, they are operated on special days at the railway and have proved to be popular with visitors, both adults and children alike. The layouts are currently housed in a cabin on loan from the Railway Company a little bit cramped especially when we have a few visitors, 18 at one time being our best yet!

We have been looking around for the last 12 months for more suitable accommodation and recently we have been successful with a 32ft x 10ft cabin donated to the group by the kind people at Uskmouth Power Station and another cabin 48ft x 14ft has been purchased by myself. Both of the cabins have required substantial renovation including a new floor and rewiring and are now both almost complete. The smaller cabin will house the O gauge layout and the larger one will become the home of Newport High Street.

The cabin for the O gauge layout is slightly longer than the one it is presently housed in so we can extend the layout by around 4ft and we are also planning to add a shed area to the rear, there is also plenty of TLC, needed on the rest of the layout.

With the arrival of the larger cabin it will allow the completion of the building of the baseboards for the Newport layout allowing trains to run around a complete loop for the first time, a complete circuit of the layout will be over 100ft and will allow scale length train to operate, again there is plenty of work to be carried out before the layout is complete.



Still in the small cabin, Society Junior Member, Adam Gane, is involved in a busy operating session on the OO-gauge 'Newport (High Street)'

It is intended that the Newport layout will operate in several different eras i.e. modern day, blue diesel era and 1960's BR steam and green diesel. The intention is that we will decide on an operating period for a weekend and members will bring locomotives and rolling stock appropriate to that time.

Although the layout is DCC controlled it will still be possible to operate non-DCC equipped locomotives on the layout.

As you can see we have plenty of work to keep us busy over the winter months and are always looking for a little extra help. The group meets most Friday evenings from 7.00pm until around 9.30pm, its best to give Norman Clymer a phone first to check that the evenings meeting is on.

So if you've got a little free time on a Friday come and give a hand or just have a chat about railway modelling and the trials and tribulations we are all having, you're sure of a warm welcome.

Just enough room here to squeeze in comment about Top Line itself. Experiments in our last issue proposing nine point type were not well received, and have been abandoned. Although your editor much prefers the look of a two column layout, the response to it was neutral, and in view of the substantially greater workload involved and the ease by which mistakes can creep in (as you may have noticed!), it will not be used in 'normal service'. Fortunately we have been able to twist the arm of the Society Treasurer, and, as a result, this issue is four pages larger and has two extra pages in colour. Thanks Peter!

MORE CHIPS PLEASE - by Bernard Morton

A little more about the saga of my decision to go DCC when I've built my model, of Pontypool Road (86G). I was fortunate when Norman Clymer offered me the use of his control unit, made by Lenz, and some locos for me to get the feel for DCC. This convinced me, as I was a little uncertain of being able to understand the jargon or being able to operate a DCC layout.

Right! Decision made - DCC is for me! I liked the Lenz unit but it had cost against it. I have around forty locos, so if each was fitted with a £17 decoder on top of about £230 for the control unit, it would be enough to pale the cheeks of my bank manager. Then another stroke of luck, Norman had now claimed back his property, which was sad because I was really enjoying having three locos on the same line, and able to move only the loco of my choice. The luck came in a visit to an old friend, who, like me, was keen to try DCC. Now he, like many other, I'm sure, didn't quite know where to start and had no one to ask. After all it was no good asking me - I had read all the articles in Model Railway but was little wiser.

My friend, who, it would appear, knew even less than I, had gone out and bought an Bachmann EZ Command controller and could not work out how and why his engines would not obey his commands. He looked quite dismayed when I explained he would have to 'chip' his locos. 'Well!' he explained 'You may as well have this blinking thing!' throwing the EZ in my direction. Well... , talk about the answer to a maiden's prayer, I now had my DCC controller. How fantastic - not!

.....I visited our shop, purchased a Bachmann chip, went home, opened up my Hornby 'Grange' and - oh dear - it was too big. Never mind, eh, let's fit it and run the chassis just to prove it works. Another 'Oh dear!' - a terrific hum accompanied its progress. Time to phone the Bachmann Helpline. 'Hornby? Hornby!' he repeated in an incredulous tone 'sorry, we know nothing about Hornby! Sorry - can't help!'. 'Just a minute' said I, 'isn't there something about NMRA standards or something?' An invisible shrug and a repeat of his first statement abruptly terminated the conversation. At this point good ol' Norman came to my aid with a Lenz chip. Straight in, no problem, and Llanfrechfa Grange ran - sweet as a nut. Right, I was on a roll now. . Let's get it right now, another visit to the shop, purchase a Bachmann Hall, a small Bachmann chip to supplement my Bachmann EZ controller. You just cannot go wrong....!

Right. All fitted - let's go. Turn the controller up a little - well, talk about slapped in the face with a wet haddock! The 'Hall' took off as if it was on fire, 0 to 60 in four seconds! All attempts to run at speeds below 80mph were to fail. Dare I ring Bachmann's Helpline again. Well, why not? That's what they are there for, isn't it? Full of confidence, I explained my position. 'I see', he said, 'what controller are you using?'. 'Bachmann' I explained. 'Well, that's it' he replied, our 36-553 chip will not work with a Bachmann controller!

Lost for words - I was speechless. He took the opportunity of this gap in the our conversation to tell me that if I reprogrammed the CV (Configuration Variable - Ed) on the chip it would probably work. 'That's it - back to analogue!' was my immediate thought.

Where would I be without Norman. 'Bring the loco up on club night' he ventured 'and let's see what we can do'. Not being computer literate, I let him loose, punching in this, then that. A few minutes later, a beam of triumph on Norman's face, and my loco was running to command.

I tell this tale as a warning - take care which system you choose, talk it over with someone who knows and can give sound advice. Since my experiences, I've fitted one more Hornby and one more Bachmann with Lenz 'Silver' chips and they have run from the box perfectly. Ultimately the EZ with its nine addresses is not going to meet my demands. Still, Hornby and Bachmann are poised to enter the market with new systems - watch this space! I will report, perhaps, in our next issue. Mind, I may be in Pen-y-fal Hospital by then - but here's hoping!

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Planning with the TWAO
It an oft-quoted maxim, and I suspect I am guilty as anyone of propagating it, that with a TWAO safely in place, we could cock a snook at the planning laws and regulations and build willy-nilly. This is not the case, and just what we can do is set out in the text below. Reading between the lines the amount that we can do is actually quite generous when you look into the detail, but we certainly cannot, for example, construct a station without planning approval. This means we cannot just go and build odd halts at Big Pit or Forgeside, or anywhere else for that matter. However at Blaenavon (High Level) there is an existing station. I wouldn't like to say, but on the face of it, if it is essentially the same (albeit only in the part that is rebuilt) as its predecessor then it looks straightforward, and furthermore we are certainly not building any new railway. On the other hand we certainly couldn't build a Paddington there.

However, from the strategic standpoint there seems little point in trying to establish intermediate temporary halts down to Blaenavon (High Level), since this might well involve us in protracted and

expensive negotiations with the planning authorities. It really does look as if a non-stop drive to Blaenavon is favourite. Both on time and on financial grounds.

Permitted development
Class A - Development by railway undertakers on their operational land, required in connection with the movement of traffic by rail
Development NOT permitted
Development is NOT permitted by Class A if it consists of or includes -

- (a) the construction of a railway
- (b) the construction or erection of a hotel, railway station or bridge, or
- (c) the construction or erection otherwise than wholly within railway station of
 - (i) an office, residential or educational building, or a building used for an industrial process, or
 - ...(ii) a car park, shop, restaurant, garage, petrol filling station or other building or structure provided under transport legislation.

For the purposes of Class A, references to the construction or erection of any building or structure include references to the reconstruction or alteration of a building or structure where its design or external appearance would be materially affected.

Classes B and C relate to ports, harbours and canals - and are unlikely to be important to us at well over a thousand feet up!

O&S DEPARTMENT

The Railway Shop

The shop continues to go from strength to strength, now that credit card trading is available - its so easy - just have your credit card handy and phone 01495 792263. In fact one day saw trading at such a level that it approached what we turned over in our first year! We have a growing range of DCC bits and DCC expertise in the shop, so its always well worth phoning or calling in for a chat. Our latest Private Owner Wagon is selling well. We had prepared a lengthy feature about the Crawshay dynasty and the battles royale that they waged with the Guests of Dowlais, but, once again, space limitations got the better of us - perhaps next time.



Our latest Private Owner Wagon, in stock, in its rather unusual cream livery

Weeds-watch out

Weeds have been dying by the thousand along the four foot as Alex Hinshelwood (now re-named Chemical Alix) struggled up the line, with even his substantial frame weighed down by a large backpack of weedkiller. Up until now we have agonized over the environmental impact of using of weedkiller, but its effect seems to have been well contained. Hitherto we have weeded manually, but this makes unacceptable demands on our skilled volunteers - our most precious asset. It looks indeed, as if the weedkiller method of keeping our trackwork clean may well be here to stay.

It's those statistics again!

I can't say I particularly enjoyed statistics when I was at school, but I find them much more interesting when applied to railways. The following snippet, extracted from the Strategic Rail Authority statistics may interest you too.

The national network has 2496 station at the last count. Include Furnace Sidings and the total goes up to 2497. So where is Furnace Sidings in the grand scheme of things? Well, we have a bit to go before we reach London Bridge with about 40 million passengers a year.

However there are 334 stations with fewer passengers than us and in fact we rank at 2162 of the 2497 with 334 stations quieter than ours. Of course we were only open for 66 days last year. Were we open for 365 days a year, proportionately our ranking would improve to 1618, with 878 stations lower than us.

If it seems rather quiet on some days, worry not, instead spare a thought for Barry Links station which is not in South Wales but on the stretch of line just south of Carnoustie on the way to Dundee. This remarkable station attracted the grand sum of just three passengers - all year!

A note from the General Manager

Dave Haylins writes (with his Training Officer hat on):

.....'Having travelled recently on three occasions on the Big Railway, booking my ticket in advance at prices which were very competitive, I was to find when arriving at the station that the train had been cancelled. On the second occasion while sitting at Portsmouth Harbour dismayed at being delayed again, I began thinking of our railway. It's now quite a while since we lost an operating day and I then felt very proud of what we have achieved. We are nearing the end of this Summer season during which we have been scheduled to run more trains than ever before, and we have fulfilled the timetable, even running extra trains on some days. I think this is a tremendous achievement by all those involved with the service.'

'Looking back, we have run the service having only one vehicle for carrying passengers at any particular time. Today, however, we now have four such forms of motive power with a fifth being worked on. Such is the progress the railway has made in recent years. As we extend the railway's operations we have to maximise our potential by training staff to operate these vehicles. We have made a sound start with more recent additions to the fleet with drivers being passed out for the 73 and Thumper. However that training extends to all disciplines, especially guards. So I will end with the words 'training, training, training' - now where have I heard that before?'

Passed out

The Class 73 has worked all most of our Sunday services this season, so there was an urgent need to pass out suitable drivers. Alex Hinshelwood, Peter Drummond and Roger Lewis have now all been passed out to work on No.73133, with its somewhat unusual operating regime. With the Thumper settling down to be, as Thomas's Fat Controller would say 'A really Useful DEMU', it became obvious that the single passed out driver would be insufficient so DMMU drivers Roger Lewis, Peter Drummond, and Steve Key have all received 'conversion' training as DEMU drivers, and have convinced Inspector Morton of their skills. Accordingly he has seen fit to pass all three out as DEMU drivers. A few weeks earlier Norman Clymer was passed out as a DMMU guard.

Passed on

You could be mistaken for thinking that the PBR collects stock willy-nilly, but this is not the case. We collect to an (almost!) clearly defined plan. To make up for recent acquisitions three of our more difficult coaches are going. Although Restaurant Buffet (refurbished) M1954 has been sold, she remains at Furnace Sidings. She has now been shunted up to No.4 siding - the transfer road - ready for departure. Two of our privately owned GWR coaches have also now been sold. The first is the dia.D101 five compartment brake third No.5539. This vehicle is not 'on the system' and must be loaded direct off its accommodation track panel. The other is the Dia.D117 brake third No.5500. Although some criticism has been levelled at the lack of progress in restoring these vehicles, both of which are unique examples of their type, the alternative would have been scrapping - many years ago. At least they have been preserved, even if they have not been restored. We earnestly hope that the new owner will be able to find covered accommodation, and the resources needed to restore these important vehicles.

Hello to our new members!

We reported fifteen new members in our last issue, this time we report fourteen new Full Members, but bolstered to seventeen with the addition of three Associate Members. To both Full Members and Associates noted below, we extend a heartfelt welcome. I implore you to come up and see us on site - I positively guarantee that you will receive a right royal welcome. Don't forget that you have an entitlement to six free train rides as well, though confidentially I must confess that we're not too good at counting... .

Kevin Mayo of Clydach	624
David Lemin of Mid Glamorgan	625
John Buxton of Gloucestershire	626
Peter Bull of Cheshire	627
Alan Whitfield of Weston Super Mare	628
Norman Henderson of Edinburgh	629
Colin Hall of Varteg	630
Roger Lewis of Griffithstown	631
Selwyn Morris of Abersychan	632
Mike Weston-Ashford of Hengoed	633
Mathew Thomas of Gloucestershire	634
David Couchman-Boor of Middlesex	635
Alan Pym of Ebbw Vale	636
Christopher Watkins of Tredegar	637

Mary Boor of Abersychan	A089
Crystal Preece of Abersychan	A090
Julie Couchman-Boor of Middlesex	A091

I'm not sure how we've managed to get away for it for so long, but I cannot remember the time that we last published the names of Society members. The contribution that this minority make to the well-being of the railway is out of all proportion to their number, so it's high time we put the record straight. We name the most recent, below:

Rhys Parry-Welson of Varteg	83
Elfed Woodford of Abergavenny	84
Dai Price of Pontypool	85
Meyrick Alexander of Surrey	86
A Eckley of Pontypool	87
AM Smith of Pontypool	88
Llion W Jones of Aberdare	89
Michael Barwise of Cwmbran	90
Granville Powell of Merthyr Tydfil	91
Adrian Williats of Hampshire	92
David Carter of W Yorkshire	93
AT Winn of N Yorks	94



Above: Austin / Morris / MG 1100s, Triumphs (Stags and Spitfires we believe) and lots of Ford Cosworths form an impressive display Furnace Sidings on the second day of the Transport Rally

Right: Viewed over the lower Garn Lake, Class 108 is dwarfed by the flanks of the Coity mountain as it trundles down from the Whistle Inn. On an early train on the Saturday of the Diesel Gala, rain threatens in the hills – downpour started minutes later.

photos: Alistair Grieve

