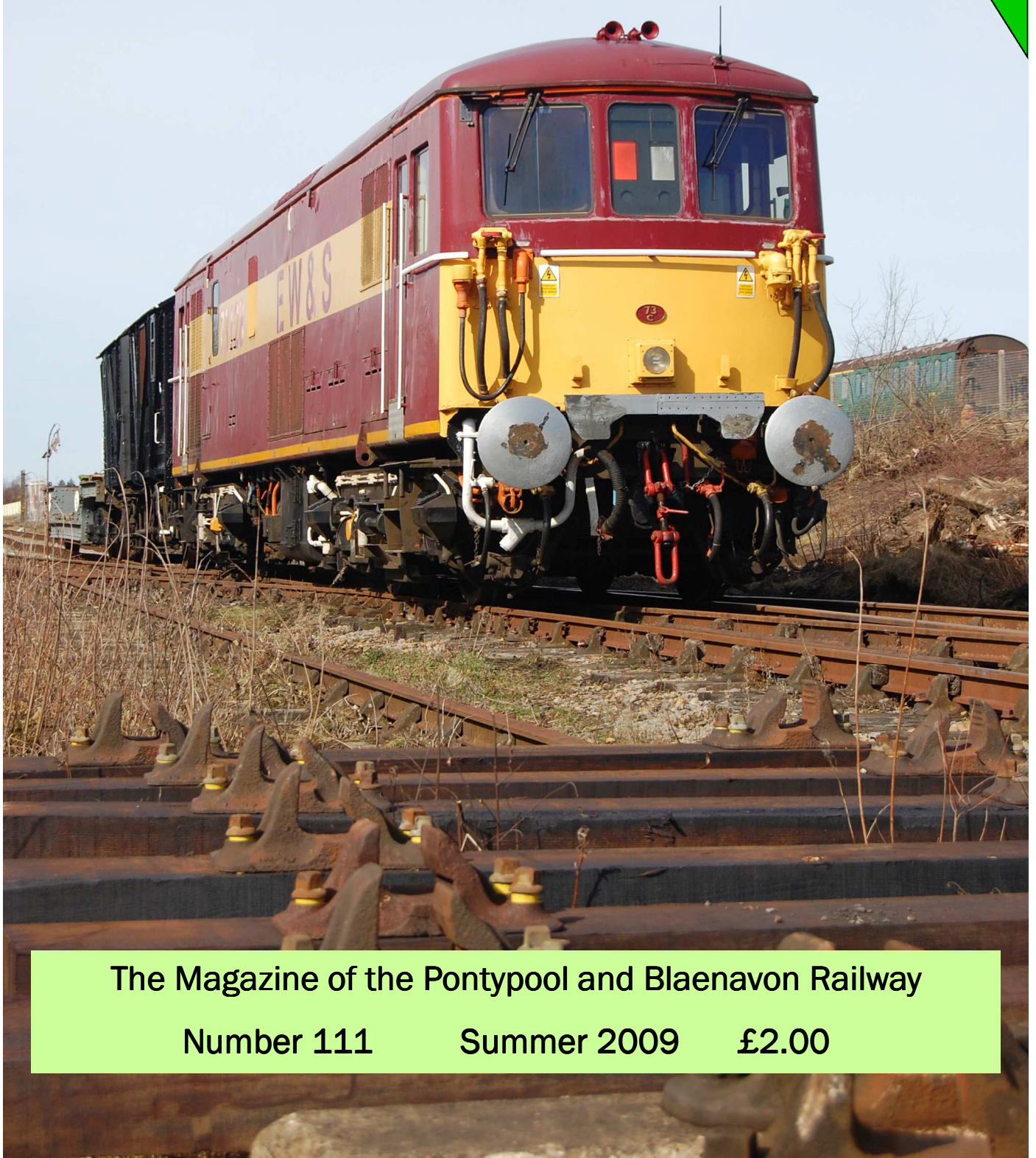


TOP LINE

Development
Special



The Magazine of the Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway

Number 111

Summer 2009

£2.00

Timetable

Trains usually operate a half-hourly service from 11:30 to 16:30. Intensive services run on special events—check our website or call for details.

Fares

Furnace Sidings to Whistle Inn Return—£3.00 Adult

£1.50—Children (aged 3 to 16)

£7.00—Family Ticket (2 adults + 2 children)

Calendar of Events 2009

	S	Su	M	T	W	Th	F	S	Su	M	T	W	Th	F	S	Su	M	T	W	Th	F	S	Su	M	T	W	Th	F	S	Su	M
APR														10	11	12	13					18	19						25	26	
MAY	2	3	4					9	10						16	17						23	24	25					30	31	
JUN								6	7						13	14						20	21						27	28	
JUL								4	5						11	12						18	19						25	26	
AUG	1	2		4	5	6		8	9		11	12	13		15	16		18	19	20		22	23		25	26	27		29	30	31
SEP								5	6						12	13						19	20						26	27	
OCT																												31			
DEC								5	6						12	13						19	20	21	22						
JAN								2	3																						
	Steam Days												Diesel Days											DMU Days							

April 12 & 13	Easter Bunnies	June 28	Garn Lakes day	Sept 12 & 13	140th Anniversary Gala
May 3 & 4	Teddy Bears Picnic	July 11 & 12	1960s Beer Festival	Sept 26 & 27	Southern Region with Altitude
May 24 7 25	Country & Western Week-end	July 25 & 26	Diesel Gala	October 31	Ghost Train
June 6 & 7	Little Engines Weekend	August 15 & 16	Ivor the Engine	December Dates	Steam Santa Specials
June 20 & 21	Model railway Show and fathers Day	August 30 & 31	Transport Rally	January 2 & 3	New Year DMU Specials

Editor Alistair Grieve - Topline@PBRly.co.uk

Published by the Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway Society on behalf of the Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway Company.

Society Shop and Headquarters

Pontypool & Blaenavon Railway
'The Railway Shop'
13a Broad Street
Blaenavon
Torfaen
NP4 9ND

Well behaved dogs are welcome to travel on our trains and you will always find a bowl of water on our stations.

Please note that fares may differ for Special Events

Email info@pbrly.co.uk

Contact number - 01495 792263

Website -

<http://www.pontypool-and-blaenavon.co.uk/>

TOP LINE—THE MAGAZINE OF THE PONTYPOOL AND BLAENAVON RAILWAY

NUMBER 111 SUMMER 2009

Table of contents

Page 4— Development Report	Page 16— Easter Opening Weekend
Page 9— Off Season Work	Page 18— February Snow
Page 11— New Arrivals	Page 20—Where We're Going
Page 12— Bill Caddick	Page 30—Directory
Page 13— Coming Soon. 6435	Page 30—Coal House Correction
Page 14— Running Line news	Page 35—Membership

EDITORIAL

As 2008 was the 25th anniversary of the PBR the past few issues of Top Line have been looking back at the railway and its early years, whilst TL110 concentrated on the actual celebrations and the visit of the excellent 5619. Completing the set this issue now looks at where we're going as we extend our running line back into Blaenavon. Along with this, the actual work involved is covered in depth and adds substance to John Down's detailed reports. As you will see for a mile and a half there's an awful lot of work to be done but so far we're still on target for opening at Easter 2010 (so you can guess what TL 114 will be all about). Thanks to Andy Knock for the initial idea that became the second half of the Where We're Going feature.

As this issue shows there's also been a lot of work going on in the off season as we prepare not only for 2009 but 2010 as well. We are lucky that everything is coming together at the right time and in the right order, imagine how it would be if we opened to Blaenavon and nothing more than 104 and the thumper unit to run with. We're now building up a very useful collection of items, locos and rolling stock as well as developing a good infrastructure, which is all important if we want to offer people a good day out and get them to come back again. After so long in the "wilderness" the railway is now getting itself known and so far even with only half a mile to play with we're building up a good reputation. Imagine what we can do in the future.

Whilst the credit crunch still dominates the headlines it's pleasing to see that people are still willing to spend money if they deem it worth while and passenger figures at our early season events suggest that people deem us worthwhile as they're up on last year. Rather than the lack of money it seems the main deciding factor when visiting us is the weather and that is one thing we can't control. Hopefully though good days will outweigh the bad, we'll have a bumper year this year and it will set the stage for 2010.

Regards Alistair Grieve

Front Cover—Since the replacement of its batteries with a brand new set 73128 has been a very reliable performer and an essential part of the extension development work. Seen here in early Spring it stands guard over some new wooden sleepers in the cutting during another day of track work.

DEVELOPMENT – John Down

Funding

I promised to keep reports on funding slightly shorter. That's easy. In our last issue I was able to tabulate, with some confidence where, how and when funds would become available. However when the formal offer letter finally arrived by the railway via Torfaen CBC from the Heads of the Valley (HoV) programme office, it seems that what HoV were thinking was not the same as TCBC were thinking – and I, for one, am completely confused. Until the fog clears I don't think it is useful to quote any figures. However the amount earmarked for 2009/2010 is much more than had been anticipated – and 2010/2011 is not mentioned at all! Following discussion with TCBC, it is clear that the work on Bridge 19 (Varteg Road) has been moved up the priority queue and work is likely to begin anytime – indeed I would not be surprised to report that work is well in progress on Br19 in our next issue. The reason for this is not because there is a need to accelerate the bridge from the railway standpoint, but because of a desire by the road people to see the bridge lifted to improve the headroom. It is Br19, which I think has so inflated the figures. So far as we are able to determine, the design is effectively complete. But with 2010/2011 seemingly out of sight, how does that affect the two-year Big Pit program? To be frank, I haven't the faintest idea however I am in more or less regular contact with HoV, and I am quite certain that they would not abandon a half-finished Big Pit branch – after all, they were its major champions. The important thing however is that 1 April has come and gone, and:

on 15 April we were formally advised that spend on Big Pit branch could begin.

Our second big HoV funded development project is therefore underway. This would not have happened had we not spent the Step 1.2 funding on time and on budget to the penny. We have not yet delivered everything – we never said we would. We said we would deliver by 1 April 2010, and indeed we will unless something exceptionally grave or unusual trips us up.

Progress on Step 1.2

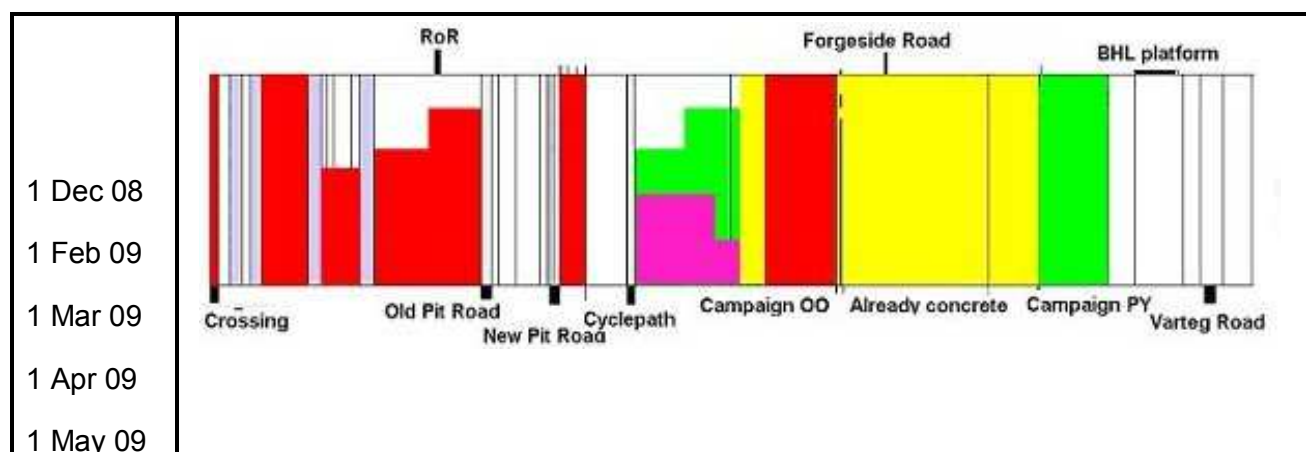
Bridges – I reported in our last issue that work had just started, I can now report that work is all but finished. The due date is the end of Monday 18 May, though, realistically, it might overrun till Friday 22 May, which from our viewpoint is inconsequential.

At this point, probably before you read this, what had once seemed an impossible hurdle to overcome before any progress southwards could be made has been swept aside as if it hardly ever existed as a problem. It must be said that after all the trials and tribulations, the bridges themselves look very clean and smart, and are probably good for another century. There is a tiny sting in the tail, in that PBR have been contracted to replace the chairs and rails on the bridges, but this is a detail, and in any case, work has already begun in marking out and collecting the necessary fittings. The real bonus is that this yields some useful 'free' and un-obligated money into PBR coffers.

Track – We were not long into 2009 when the programme for taking out wooden sleepers and replacing them was severely curtailed. The work started on 4 October 2008 and came to an abrupt halt on 4 January 2009, three months later, when the rails on Bridge 17 (Doncaster's culvert) were lifted, making access to the track south of that point 9 and the crew at BHL) impossible.

The next few months saw extraordinary levels of activity at increasingly northerly positions up the line as the rails were lifted by PBR on bridges 16, 14 and 13, and sleepers were exchanged. The diagram below tries to tell the tale graphically, which from left to right on the diagram represents north to

south down the line. Time extends from top to bottom – if you see what I mean! The yellow parts represent those parts of the track that were already concrete before PBRCo came on the scene. The green areas are the areas where sleepers have been dropped in recent months and the red areas are those areas ‘converted’ from green by having wooden sleepers changed for ones made of concrete – so as time goes on the rash of red gets bigger. The purple areas represent something rather special – these are the areas in which the PWay team refused to accept the blockade and took themselves and their equipment and the minidigger down various paths, roads and the cycleway, and, with precious little support, and certainly without the support of the PWay train, continued with the sleeper-swapping programme. This was heroic stuff and removes what was in danger of developing into a very-high risk element in the overall extension project. They have already started on the so-called the so-called ‘Campaign PY’ and, going on present for, by the time you read this have done that as well. Viewed from BHL there was something oddly symbolic about seeing the team emerge from under Br18 for the first time and inch towards BHL. By the end of May, when the blockade is removed, it will be time to relay track at the bottom end of the extension, and particularly through BHL station. The end is clearly in sight, though there is still ballasting, packing and lining to do. During the early months of the year new timbers for the points were been ordered, and have been stacked up on the site. On the diagram, the points are shown in pale purple. Sufficient timbers have been ordered to change the points on the Big Pit branch too, and changing these timbers will be the final job on the trackwork for the extension.



Station at Blaenavon (High Level) – It’s a pleasure to report that the something that six months previously was a few stones hidden in the undergrowth, has emerged as a brand new platform. The platform is finished – all 267ft of it – 310ft 3ins if you include the ramps. It looks a picture, as the illustration on page 28 shows. It was all a bit of a rush at the end, especially getting the tarmac contractors in, because the council were to visit it in early April. They came, they saw, and they went away happy.

There’s a little bit of re-work to do, in order to repair damage caused by vandals, and some titivation required on the front wall, but the platform itself is fine. There are several jobs outstanding – install the fences and a short stone wall, install the lighting, sympathetically and safely treat the hole left by the signal box and finally build a ticket office. We have detailed drawings of LNWR fencing, and we are identifying contractors who can manufacture the various parts for us to assemble a full length creosoted fence. The gas lamps are on order and seven, to be lit with LPG when required, are due to arrive in late June. But the ticket office became a problem. After suffering break-ins and vandal damage in the early part of the year, it became obvious that a simple 6ft x 4ft B&Q shed, or something similar, from which to issue tickets would be impractical in the face of such a threat.



The walls of the building go up, whilst Charles James digs himself, little by little into one of the cellars. The cellar floor looks to be about 8ft 6ins below the original wooden floor. To his left lie the remains of the fireplace and chimney, which we are keen to preserve if possible.
John Down

We had considered that it would be wise to test some of the slightly unusual techniques proposed for the 25.3m x 5.3m station building at Furnace Sidings, and the smaller BHL Waiting Room at 13.07 x 4.88m seemed an ideal candidate. Unfortunately, as time went on, it became obvious that the apparently simple BHL building had some unusual features of its own. The first was that platform on which it stood was backed by a steep bank, and that the building, which extended behind the width of the platform, had its back wall supported on a massive masonry wall some 10 to 15ft high. The second was that we discovered that the building was built with deep cellars, into which the original building had been pushed when it was demolished. We wanted to retain the cellars as they were an important historical feature of the original building.

We were also concerned that the weight of this rubble, especially when wet, might disturb the back wall, so work began to excavate the cellars. There were some fascinating bits amongst the rubble, all of which gave additional clues to the construction of the building, so excavation had to be done by hand. The building appeared to be fast developing an agenda of its own. Additionally our members were becoming increasingly critical of the design proposal to use corrugated iron cladding to the building, in favour of wood cladding. Now a wooden skin on the proposed wooden frame would have been a fire-risk too great to contemplate, and accordingly, on top of the 550mm high dwarf block wall, the walls are to continue upwards in block to the height of the soffit.

Progress on Step 1.3 and Step 1.4

Furnace Sidings (Step 1.3.1) still looks remains rather bare, and has changed little, however, the foot-bridge (Step 1.3.2) has made good progress. On platform 1 the tower now has its stair flight walls fitted and the massive cast iron newel posts at the bottom of each flight concreted firmly into the ground. There was a twist in one of the flight walls to due poor storage conditions whilst at Rushden, but this has been corrected. There are still a few outstanding details, but visually the tower will change little before it finally has its wooden steps and deck fitted. Meanwhile, after some delay, the number two tower is also just about assembled and will be pulled into its final upright position in a week or two. Work will then return to concentrate on the main deck. We have now got our grit blaster working, and the team who have been honing their skills on the pannier tank will, by the time you read this, will have turned their attention to cleaning up the main deck, prior to welding in new patches, plates and angles. Towards the end of the summer season, we hope to lift the central span into position, and the bridge will then really start to look like a bridge.

The first job for the Furnace Sidings station building is to build up the ground behind the platform to carry the enlarged building. Much of this work was done by Messrs. Griffiths using spoil arising as a result of work on the bridges, but there is still some outstanding profiling to do. During the summer we hope to lay the foundation with work on the actual building starting immediately after the summer season, if building work on the extension is complete. Again, the wooden framed, corrugated iron

plan is likely to be abandoned in favour of a concrete block, wood clad design.

The situation regarding the Barry Town footbridge has finally clarified and terms have been formally agreed. The mechanism has been both complex and decidedly unusual, but we have a deal, and as soon as it has been rubber-stamped by Vale of Glamorgan County Council, the bridge will be transported to the works of DB Engineering at Barry Docks for reconstruction. This is likely to be a long and involved process, and as an insurance against failure, the opportunity to secure yet another footbridge at an astonishingly low price was considered a chance not to be missed, and the deal was done very quickly. The bridge was recovered by the Bluebell Railway from Mitcham, Surrey, but had become surplus to requirements. Mitcham was on the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway and is very, very similar to the lattice pattern used by the LNWR. There is even a suspicion that they were manufactured by the same foundry. A similar bridge, which took five years to restore has just been unveiled by the Swanage Railway, and their specimen came from Merton. Both Mitcham and Merton bridges (and several others) were displaced as part of the Croydon Tramway project a few years back.

Step 1.5 Big Pit branch

Pressure on manpower to complete the Step 1.2 (Blaenavon extension) work has meant that physical work on the branch has not really started yet, but sleepers (both concrete and wood) and timbers are being amassed, and a large quantity of rail will shortly be purchased. A more recent survey shows, subject to confirmation, that it will be possible to build a platform under the massive brick abutment near Big Pit's overflow car park just as envisaged though it will have to extend past the wall towards the car park in order to be long enough to operate easily. Initial work will be ground clearance, so that surveying can be refined, and relaying the up loop south of the level crossing, using this as an opportunity, once again, to take out wooden sleepers and to replace them with sleepers of concrete.

More crystal ball gazing.

We are still constantly wondering whether the next extension will be to the north or to the south. Earlier in these notes, I reported that significant funds were to be spent on Bridge 19 – and soon too! Members have not been slow in coming to the same conclusion as I have – why spend so much money renewing a bridge if the local authority have no intention of supporting our drive southwards? It would have been much easier simply to have removed the bridge. I am sure that I have accurately picked up other coded signals from both officers and members within Torfaen in recent months to suggest that there is a real political will to see the dream of a southward expansion become a reality. It was never possible to guess just how TCBC's planners would view the proposed British development and the horrific plan to breach the south-bound leisure route, near Talywain and the Big Arch. However, recent events make it difficult for me not to revel in vicarious pleasure to hear news that developers, Spring UR, have imploded under the current pressure wrought by the current world-wide economic woes

But in many ways it is development to the north, and to the far north, that is to say Phase 4 and Phase 5 where uncertainty has been thrown firmly into the spotlight. The phase 5 extension, from Waunavon to Brynmawr is perhaps the most contentious. Sustrans have spent a decade buying land, seeking leases and refining plans to lay a cycleway along the route, and now have the funding and a three year timescale to complete the work. In their eyes it seemed a simple fait accompli before PBRCo came along and upset their plans. They of course, were unaware that our plans had been quietly rumbling along since I first wrote to the late Peter Law in February 2003. In all fairness, they have

been prepared to discuss matters, though they have been necessarily guarded. It must be difficult for them. I reported in our last issue that I as to give a presentation on our plans to the leader of Blaenau Gwent and other officials in a meeting arranged by Dai Davies MP and Trish Law AM. The meeting came, the officials smiled, seemed mildly encouraged, said they had open minds, and I thought that was largely the end of the matter for the time being. All the same I remained concerned about the Sustrans issue, and studied things further, relentlessly hassling the Land Registry, and cadging sufficient money from the Company to purchase accurate computer mapping data. It soon became clear that we were going to have to do something concrete to build our extension, whilst doing everything we could to avoid damaging the Sustrans plan. Although it is clear that Sustrans could scupper our plans, being a decade ahead of us, I am certain that by working together we can deliver something in which the whole is bigger than the sum of its parts – I just hope we are able to convince them

I spoke of my concerns to HoV and asked if it might be possible to fund a feasibility study. His response was that he would want to gauge the response of the four planning authorities involved in Phase 5 (that is, Torfaen, Monmouthshire, Brecon Beacons, Blaenau Gwent), and Sustrans), before making any decision. A meeting was held on 5 May. Unsurprisingly Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen supported us, as did Monmouthshire who had only very recently been made aware of what was going on. Beacons, for whom this was their first intimation appeared cheerful, open-minded and to quote 'were there only on a fact-finding mission'. The important thing was that the man from HoV went away happy. If that was all that happened, the meeting could have been described as 'an important step', but it was a fairly oblique remark, made out of context by Duncan Smith, Torfaen's Chief Planning Officer which really did make the meeting a bit of a watershed. "I'm meeting Walter's Mining towards the end of June" said he, briefly, "Why don't you come along and talk about the path for Step 4 (Whistle Inn to Waunafon)".

PBR negotiators, before my time had been wary of approaching Walters (the landholders of the track-bed) on the basis (or so I am told) that Walters made proposals to PBR that would have compromised our relationship with TCBC. So after a 12-15 year impasse, negotiations can finally begin. Within a few hours of the meeting I was approached by several Torfaen officers, to walk the Phase 4 route with Sustrans in order to secure a good route that would satisfy both our needs. And if that were not enough I am to make a presentation to Blaenau Gwent's members in plenary (and publicly viewed) session, about Phase 5 on 13 May, so it will have happened by the time you read this. If then, the members are happy, and vote to adopt the scheme (and I think they will), then the scheme will be embodied into their local development plans, and their continued support will be effectively mandatory. So, a lot has happened since our last issue and the spotlight certainly seems to be on the northwards extension. Getting to Waunafon of course is central to our operational flexibility, for, until we get there, we cannot find sufficient level ground to permit locos to run round their trains, unless we involve ourselves in massively expensive earthworks. But Brynmawr? What a dream - a railway serving three counties, running through the national park, with peerless views to the east and north, and running through the highest station in the UK. But can it be made to pay its way on a day-to-day basis? This could well be the biggest challenge PBR has ever faced, since once capitalised we will not be allowed to walk away from it. I leave it for you to ponder. I know what my views are.

Whilst this issue of the development report may seem a little light on pictures do not worry as pages 20 –29 provide a pictorial record of the ongoing work and illustrate much of what John has written about over the past few issues.



Off Season Work

Whilst the bridge and track work are major items of work there has been a lot of other work going on over the winter, all as important to keep the railway going. Most obvious has been a move around of the buildings on site to fit in with the future plans for the railway.

Left—The ticket office is relocated to sit at the end of the platform beside the foot bridge as work will soon commence on the new station building. The white blob on the platform below the van body is the fridge as the floor came off when the van was lifted, much to the photographers delight until he realised he had to help tidy it all up. Andy Knock

Middle—The tea room has been moved to a better place at the front of the compound and the model railway Portacabins placed in a U shape where it once resided. This is to free up space for the Top Shed extension and allow a better control of passengers. Andy Knock's picture shows one of the cabins being lowered into place.

Bottom— As stated above the tea room now sits at the front of the compound in a much better place. It is now in a more obvious location so its usage should increase, there are much better views of the railway and there is space outside for tables and chairs (weather permitting) .

As well as being relocated the tea room has had the kitchen replaced to bring it up to current hygiene standards as described overleaf by Alex Drummond.



Following a complete refit of the kitchen, the Tea Room now has a clean bill of health from Torfaen's Environmental Health Officer Jason Austin. A frantic ten days of work saw the whole kitchen gutted out and a new design installed featuring an easy to clean open plan layout (ensuring there's nowhere for mice to hide!) just in time for the Easter opening. Mary Mahabir

Following an inspection last year it was clear that to allow us to prepare food for the public it was essential that we made changes to meet basic legal requirements for food hygiene. This has led the Board to appoint a head of catering (Mary Mahabir) to oversee the implementation of Food Safety Systems and HACCP protocols to ensure we work within the law and provide food safe for public consumption. Upgrading the facilities was next on the list and this has not been cheap. However money raised from the series of barbeques run last year has paid for the materials needed, whilst professional services were provided free by Russell Lark and Alex Drummond aided and abetted by Mary. The board is grateful for the many hours of labour they put in to see this project delivered on time.

At a meeting in April, Jason Austin (EHO) approved the new facilities for the production of light snacks but cautioned against being over-ambitious given the lack of space. He advised us to keep it simple to start with: - sandwiches, pre-packed cake and biscuits, chocolate and drinks. We can look forward to the completion of the new station building before we offer such things as pie and chips!". **Alex Drummond**



Above left—Beaver away in the background Ken Perkin has been getting on with the task of supplying water to the Bottom Shed for filling up the steam locomotives. This will make things a lot easier when preparing the locomotives for a day's service as they can be watered at the same time. With the task nearly complete Ken is seen here at pipes end down by the Bottom Shed.

Above right—A very useful engine to have is Hudswell Clarke 1387 which has been out of action undergoing engine work. The locomotive returned to service at Easter and here we catch two of our camera-shy grease monkeys trying to avoid getting their picture taken as they complete the work.

New Arrivals

GUV



Grampus



Testing our siding space to the limit we had three more items of rolling stock arrive on the railway since the last issue of Top Line, a GUV (General Utility Van) and two Grampus wagons . The GUV (95136) is owned by Stuart Thomas (owner of 03141 and Pontyberem) and will be used as a stores vehicle whilst the two Grampus wagons are hire from CambrianCo for a minimum of two years and will be used as designed to transport ballast and spoil from the work sites as required. With the two dog-fish reported on last month the railway now has a very useful ballast and PWay train.

Off season work continued from previous page



The recent acquisition of the TSO Sc4300 necessitated some extra work as the seats needed reupholstering . On the left the bare seat frames and on the right freshly covered and just waiting tables and luggage racks to complete.

Following the success of the reupholstering of the seats in the TSO work is to commence (funds permitting) on the reupholstering of the seats in the other coaches.



Left —Soon to dominate everything, Alex Drummond's engineering work shop goes up. Officially the Middle Shed, but nicknamed the Cathedral due to its size, there is no truth in the rumour that a bell tower is to be fitted (well not yet anyway). This will also have space to fit wagons and coaches under cover for protection from the elements whilst they are being restored.



Bill Caddick

The latest acquisition by the railway is the very useful 0-6-0 shunter “Bill Caddick”, named after a founding member of its previous owning group. Already fitted for passenger work it should prove to be as useful an engine as 104 has been.

Basking in the late spring sun Bill Caddick spends its first weekend at Furnace Sidings in the company of the Gower Princess.

Over the past few years the PBR has been changing beyond almost all recognition. Not only are we extending the line but our locomotive fleet has been growing to provide a modest but ideally sized selection of engines which will set us in good stead for the future. One constant throughout all this has been number 104 Llanwern which has soldiered on day in and day out. However, lately 104 has been showing considerable signs of wear and tear and needs a major overhaul plus a new and expensive set of tyres which at the moment the railway can ill afford.

A shunter of the size and capabilities of 104 is highly desirable especially when the Big Pit Branch starts and luckily one was available from the Vale of Glamorgan Railway at Barry Island in the shape of Hunslet 8526 “Bill Caddick”. As detailed in Top Line 110 we had already been successful in purchasing the TSO coach SC4300 so it was with some relief that we were also successful in our bid for 8526, Norman Clymer and Alex Hinshelwood driving a hard bargain and getting a very useful 6 lever ground frame thrown in as well. The deal was completed just after the last issue of Top Line went to press with 8526 arriving just before the start of the 2009 season on Thursday March the 26th.

Bill Caddick was built in 1959 by Hudswell Clarke of Leeds and delivered to the Manchester Ship Canal Company in December of that year. Works number D1186 it was numbered 2001 and named Ashdown, the last locomotive to be named by the MSC. Subsequent members of the class (14 in total) however were numbered D2–D14 and 2001 was soon renumbered to D1. The locomotive is fitted with a Gardner 8L3 engine giving 204BHP and was initially put to work at the Partington Coal Basin. Like the other class members it proved extremely reliable and sure footed on the steep gradients - something that will defiantly be tested on the PBR.

By the 1970's with traffic being reduced the diesels began to be sold off and in 1976 D1 was sold to the Hunslet Engine Co (Leeds) who then promptly loaned it out to NCB Cronton Colliery. In December 1977 it returned to Hunslet and became the works shunter before being rebuilt in 1986 and sold as works number 8526 to the NCB for use at their Gwent Coal Distribution Centre, Newport. Named “Pride of Gwent” it replaced 03 D2181 previously named “Pride of Gwent”. With the run down in the domestic coal traffic the locomotive was sold into preservation in 1991 to the Butetown Historic Railway Society Ltd adjacent to Bute Road station in Cardiff. In 1997 they relocated to the Vale of Glamorgan Railway at Barry Island where Bill saw both plenty of running including passenger service. However the change in management saw the loco up for sale and the PBR were quick to respond and now have a vital and useful addition to the fleet.

Coming Soon—6435



Following on from the amazing visit of 5619 last September the railway is very pleased to have secured the use of ex GWR pannier tank 6435 from our friends at the Bodmin and Wenford Railway for this years September Gala. The pannier tank is a truly iconic locomotive and if anyone locomotive could be said to represent the GWR this is it. Whilst all the railway companies had 0-6-0 tank engines the GWR stood out by having the majority of these as pannier tanks. With almost 900 built it was one of the most common designs on the railway and could be found all over the GWR system with the last pannier tanks actually being built by British Rail in 1950.

6435 was one of the 54xx class of pannier tanks first introduced in 1930. Whilst the 54xx had 5'2" driving wheels the 40 64xx pannier tanks had smaller 4'7 1/2" driving wheels primarily for use in the Welsh Valleys and were also auto train (push pull) fitted. 6435 was introduced in April 1937 and has a good Welsh pedigree spending most of its life at Cardiff Cathays and then Abercynon sheds before final withdrawal in October 1964 from the more tranquil surroundings of Yeovil Town having run over 570,000 miles in service.

6435 was then purchased direct from BR along with 6412 and 6430 to work on the Buckfastleigh—Totnes Dart Valley Railway before moving to their Paington to Kinsgwear line. In 2008 6435 was purchased from the DVLr by the BWR and saw service there from July onwards. Not only were 64xx pannier tanks common on the service to Blaenavon Low level but the Eastern valleys was one of the last places to see a working pannier tank as 7754 worked for the NCB in 1969 and '70 on the Talywain—Blaenserchan line. Thus 6435 is proving to be a popular choice already and will be a taste of things to come when our own pannier tank 9629 is completed. Let's just hope we have a some sunshine to go with its visit.

RUNNING LINE NEWS. Andy May

At last the Furnace Sidings North ground frame is back up and running, As reported in the last issue of Top line, all that was left to do was to re connect the rodding and the Annetts locking system. Only problem was trying to find the parts for the job which were scattered over various parts of the site and buried under the snow which fell in the early months of this year. However after a lot of searching and digging (thanks to Findlay and his trusty little spade again) all the parts were located and then over the following weeks fitted and adjusted to working order.

The Main running line itself has also seen a lot of attention, with Green Light Rail and Training continuing with the replacement of sleepers on the North loop point. Work on the point was completed by the beginning of the running season whilst work has also been progressing northwards with the on going replacement of rotten sleepers and packing of dipped rail joints. Due to a very urgent requirement the PBR permanent way have also been working on the main running line replacing very bad rotten sleepers at the north end of the line to bring it up to scratch for the running season.



Above—The Greenlight trainees replace sleepers on the main running line. Andy May

Left—In atrocious conditions the PBR Pway gang take a break during sleeper replacement work.



Above—Andy May makes the final adjustments to the refitted ground frame. Andy Knock

Below— Findlay May works hard in the snow to uncover the parts of the ground frame. Andy May.



Features and articles wanted

I'm always on the look out for contributions , either articles or pictures so if you wish to contribute please email me at TOPLINE@PBrly.co.uk or write c/o the Railway Shop. If you just have an idea let me know and we can work something out.



Oakfield B&B



1 Oakfield Terrace, Varteg Road, Blaenavon, Gwent, NP4 9DS

Tel: 01495 792 829

e-mail: enquiries@oakfieldbnb.com

www.oakfieldbnb.com

- 4 Star awarded by Visit Wales
- Double en-suite
- Twin en-suite
- Family room with private bathroom
- Non-smoking
- Private parking
- Colour TV in rooms
- Tea/Coffee facilities

A warm and friendly welcome awaits you at Oakfield B&B.

Situated within the World Heritage town of Blaenavon and only 100yds from the proposed extension of the Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway line to High Level Station.

Bring this advert with you in 2009 to get a 10% discount on all bookings.



Specialist cheddar company with a range of 8 cheddars and 4 goats cheese products available in shop and online
www.chunkofcheese.co.uk

MOUNTAIN TOURS



Guided walks and mountain bike hire for the able bodied and disabled with a range of speciality cycles
www.chunkofwales.co.uk

80 Broad St. Blaenafon, Torfaen. NP4 9NF Telephone: 01495 793123

achunkofwales@btinternet.com

Bring this advert with you and receive a 10% discount in 2009

Easter Opening Weekend

One minute it was Christmas and then before we knew it, it was Easter and the opening weekend for our 2009 running season. For the first time we ran trains all four days with 73128 operating on the Friday and Saturday and No. 19 handling the Easter Bunny Specials on the Sunday and Monday.

The forecast didn't look too hopeful with lots of rain forecast and Friday morning started out dull and damp but then it got better and better. Friday closed out dry and sunny and the rest of the weekend was glorious.

Whilst two coaches were enough for Friday and Saturday we put the TSO on the train on Sunday and Monday and that proved to be a wise move. Over 700 people travelled on the Easter Bunny trains, the buffet and tea room were buzzing, number 19 romped away with the coaches and all opening weekend records were smashed.

The Easter Bunny was very busy and thanks to Bridgette Thomas for making him a brand new suit, he looked just the part and was a hit with everyone young and old.

The only slight problem on the Monday was the number of line-side fires caused by sparks from No.19. and very strong winds which fanned them. Small fires quickly grew and expanded and it was only quick responses by the PBR volunteers that stopped them getting out of control and affecting the services.



Top—73128 skirts the Lower Garn Lake on Saturday afternoon

Middle—No.19 Blasts up hill past the farm on Easter Monday

Bottom—OOPS, remains of one of the line side fires.



A selection of images taken during the excellent opening weekend. It's amazing how a bit of sunshine can lift the spirits and bring on a smile. Let's just hope this is a sign of things to come and the weekend is just the first of many dry and sunny ones throughout the year.





February Snow

One of the things you hear a lot these days is that we no longer have proper winters, how the ones today are much milder than they used to be. And it has to be said that if we do get snow it's normally a light dusting and gone in a few hours.

Unless you live in the North of England and Scotland severe winters seemed to be a thing of the past. Well that was until February 2009 when a combination of factors ensured that the whole country was blanketed in snow for days, even Cornwall and Kent had their fair share.

At Blaenavon of course, being over 1200 feet above sea level, we're used to getting snow although it never lasts long. However the 2009 snows not only fell in some depth but remained for weeks rather than days .

Normally we keep running and working whatever the weather but due to the depth of the snow all work was called off over the weekend of the 6/7th February (after all you can't work if you can't see the track). However with the sun shining there was a chance for some memorable pictures (and a snow ball fight).



Opposite page top—The snow hides the works site and general scruffiness that currently is Blaenavon High level Station.

Opposite page middle—Whilst no trains were running there was still the opportunity to photograph some of the rolling stock in the crisp snow. Here 73128 and the Pway train are stabled for the week-end in the Down Exchange Sidings.



Opposite page bottom—Also in the DXS the CEP and the CIG wait in the cold.

This page top—Looking north from Furnace Sidings Station. There is a railway line there somewhere.

This page middle—Furnace Sidings looking south giving a good idea of how deep the snow was. In some of the fields it was a good foot to a foot and a half.



This page bottom—Any excuse to play with the toys as Dave Perham and Andy Knock clear the entrance road to the site with the JCB.

Now if only we could have more days like this when we run the trains.

Where We're Going



In Top Line 108 I featured some pictures showing the railway as it was in the 1970s before the PBR took over. Topline 109 featured the early years of the railway whilst Top Line 110 brought the story up to date with the Silver Jubilee Gala. Carrying on this theme I'll now take a trip down the line from Furnace Sidings to Blaenavon High Level so everyone can see where we're going, what we're working on now and what a difference it will make to the railway when we open there in 2010.

Above—Looking south from Furnace Sidings, on the left is the deviation into the shed yard whilst straight on is the mainline to Blaenavon. The left hand track will be the main running line, the right hand track will be the route of the Big Pit Shuttle. The cross-over is by the orange, crane test weight.

Below— Further south from the above shot and it's a beautiful summers evening as 104 returns from Blaenavon High Level with a Pway train. 104 is on the mainline with the rail over rail bridge (bridge 12) in the back ground, the DMU is on the headshunt behind the bottom shed whilst the EMUs are in the Down Exchange Sidings. The Big Pit Shuttle will run along the right of the picture in front of the telegraph pole and on the hill side behind all this can be seen Blaenavon.





One of the things preventing the railway heading south has been the number of bridges present in such a short distance and the need (and associated costs) to bring them up to passenger standards. To best explain the locations I've used two shots taken by Tim Goss in the early years looking south (and merged them together in Photoshop) as today trees make this rather more difficult to achieve.

At bottom left is the track from the rail over rail bridge leading to Big Pit. Above it is the mainline and initially bridge 13, then bridge 14 which is now the road to Big Pit, then an area of ballast which marks the infill of bridge 15 and at far right bridge 16, once for an internal narrow gauge system but now used by the cycle track. Blaenavon occupies the hillside in the background.



Above—Looking back from the Forgeside Road Bridge to the rail over rail bridge and Furnace Sidings, the skew in the track can be seen where BR swapped from the up to the down line when they singled the branch, linking the best bits of track together. Behind the trees on the left was the site of the tyre mill and where Doncasters foundry now stands.



Top—Looking south from Forgeside Bridge — Blaenavon High Level lies just round the corner at the far end. Not long now until you'll be able to stand here and watch a train pulling out of Blaenavon High Level Station and heading north to Furnace Sidings and the Whistle Inn.



Middle—Half way along the straight looking back towards the Forgeside Bridge, in the foreground is the cycle track whilst the other side of the railway behind the large tree are the houses of Upper Glangtorvaen Terrace.



Bottom—Looking the other way this view shows just what commanding views the railway has with Blaenavon laid out before it, Blaenavon High Level station lies just out of sight to the right.

These views and those on the previous pages show how in just a short distance the railway changes from a rural one to one with a more urban aspect as it enters the environs of Blaenavon and Forge-side.



Above—Journeys end (for now) and the view looking backup the line from Blaenavon High Level Station. Forgeside Road Bridge can just be made out in the distance, as can be seen the rebuilding work leaves a lot of rubble to be tidied up.

Below—Blaenavon High Level with freshly laid tarmac, now the station is really taking shape.





To actually get us down to Blaenavon High Level is taking a lot of work and with an opening date of April 2010 it's a very labour intensive and focussed operation.

Key to the reopening has been the overhaul and refurbishment of the bridges to passenger carrying standards. Thanks to the funding from the Heads of Valleys (See TL 107) this massive and expensive project has enabled the dreams of the railway to be brought that much closer.

In fact it is probably safe to say that the railway would be stuck operating "the same half mile" for years to come without the funding.

Whilst John Down has talked about the bridge work in his development reports these pictures will give a better idea of the scale of the project and the work undertaken. One bridge would be a big enough project on its own but the PBR never does anything by half and we currently have the 5 on the go.

Of course even after all this there is still bridge 19 to deal with, but that is south of Blaenavon High Level and is to be dealt with at a later date. So that's a feature for another Top Line. In the meantime we'll just focus on getting to Blaenavon High Level to start with.





Opposite page top - Bridge 12 (Rail over Rail Bridge) and the latest of the bridges to be dealt with. Currently without track and isolating the bottom yard.

Opposite page middle— Bridge 13 (Old Pit Road) needed most of the work done and as seen here it's no small job. The scaffolding supports the work area for the work men whilst the cover keeps the debris and waste contained as the bridge is worked on.

Opposite page bottom— Bridge 13, with the preparatory work complete, the scaffolding is removed and it awaits the fitting of the supporting beams.



This page top—Bridge 14 (New Pit Road) with the huge baulk timbers that will lie along the bridge supporting the track.

This page middle—Bridge 14 again showing the disturbances the work is causing. The road had to be widened and traffic lights installed—great fun when they failed and stuck on red!



This page bottom—Bridge 16 (Cycle track) , and the rebuilding work is complete. The scaffolding is coming down and once the work on the other bridges is complete the track will go back and we'll one huge step closer to Blaenavon High Level.



Of course the bridges are not the only piece of the BHL extension jigsaw. Whilst the weekdays sees a hive of activity on the bridges, come the weekends it's the turn of the track work with the volunteers turning out come rain or shine to make it happen.

With a careful planning and forward thinking the track work has been pushed along at an amazing rate. Rather than try to do everything at once the work is done in stages with new sleepers deposited on the work site and old ones collected on the Saturdays whilst Sundays are purely for the relaying of the sleepers.



Old sleepers are removed, the ground cleared of debris and then new sleepers put in their place. By doing this one sleeper at a time the new sleepers have bedded in very well already and even doing it by eye there is very little misalignment. Once a track panel is laid (24 sleepers) the rails are put back in and secured, before moving onto the next one. Doing this the track gang is relaying up to 4 panels a day which puts many railways to shame, especially as we are doing it all by hand.



The majority of the sleepers are 2nd hand concrete ones from the Severn Valley railway which will provide us with a good solid base and low maintenance requirements. On the embankments and in the stations though, new wooden sleepers are used. On the embankments to keep weight to a minimum and in the stations for effect.



Opposite page top—Just south of bridge 14 new wooden sleepers are dropped into place ready for relaying the following day. Whilst the wooden sleepers can be man-handled the concrete ones require the mini digger to lift them as they are somewhat heavier.

Opposite page middle— Having been replaced the previous week the wooden sleepers are picked up from the trackside ready to be taken back to Furnace Sidings for disposal. The re-laid replacement concrete sleepers can be seen below the train.



Opposite page bottom— With the wooden sleeper removed the ground is prepared to take the replacement concrete sleeper. To the right are already laid concretes whilst just in front of the mini digger the next wooden sleeper waits to be removed. Andy Knock

This page top— With the concrete sleepers in place the rail is dropped back in the chairs. This is the most labour intensive part of the job.



This page middle— Having the correct tools helps as the bolts holding the fish plate on are undone with a minimum of fuss.

This page bottom— It doesn't always go to plan. A miscount saw an extra concrete sleeper needed. Even with 8 people to lift it and the right tools it was still heavy work. Andy Knock



The final piece in the jigsaw is Blaenavon High Level Station, after all what's a railway without a destination. Quite rapidly a platform and station is rising from the remains of the old one. Again this is mainly weekend work with a separate gang involved in breathing new life into the station aided and abetted by the track gang when they have completed their days tasks.

Top— Looking north from platform 2 at BHL. The Warflat carries a lot of the bricks recovered from platform 1. These are from the old signal box and platform building which were just pushed over. The track bed on platform 2 has also been cleared out.



Middle—This gap on platform 1 was where the signal wires and point rodding came out and where the signal box and platform building were pushed into. The wooden beams show the work being put into to rebuild the station and as on the original this is now covered by a wooden decking.



Bottom— In early April the platform, with its new tarmac, is seen stretching away to the north, whilst close to the back edge, in the foreground is the original 4¾ milepost, placed within millimetres of its original position. John Down



And where would we be without the volunteers who have turned up in all weathers to eat biscuits, drink tea, raid the chippie, have the occasional snowball fight and even manage to fit in some work. It's a mammoth task but as you can see it's all done with smiles and plenty of laughs. Thanks to them the dream of reaching Blaenavon High Level comes a step closer every week. Alistair Grieve and Andy Knock



Directory

The Society Committee comprises:

Chairman David Haylins – 236 Llantarnam Road, Llantarnam, Cwmbran, Torfaen, NP44 3BL, 01633 483244
david.haylins@gmail.com

Treasurer Peter Hunt – Peter@floridahouse.co.uk, 5 poplar Avenue, New Inn, Torfaen NP4 0EX, 01495 757166

Secretary Norman Clymer – skip@erwbant.freesevice.co.uk, 22 Erw Bant, Llangynydr, Powys, NP8 1LX, 01874 730755

Editor Alistair Grieve – topline@PBrly.co.uk

Committee members

Charles James – 01495 790599 Warwick Davis – 01384 892442 John Down - 01495 760242

Colin Boor – 01495 772533 Ian Longworth – 01495 312445

The Company Board:

Chairman Robin Cornelius 18 Bryn Heulog, Griffithstown, Torfaen, NP44 2XB (01495 756919)

Treasurer David Haylins

Secretary Norman Clymer

Committee members

Alex Hinshelwood - 07980 595818 Paul Gane— 01179 608349 John Down – 01495 760242

Mark Vrettos – 01746 761387 Bernard Morton – 01495 753638 Alastair Warrington – 01495 774491

Coal House Correction

In the previous issue of Top Line I had a feature on the Coal House at War and the shows visit to the PBR. Unfortunately I managed to get a name wrong, it should have been Mary Howard-Jones, NOT Hammond-Jones as I put, meeting the evacuees. Mary has also corrected me on my history, during the war it was the Women's Voluntary Service (WVS), it only became the WRVS in 1966 when the Royal was granted by the Queen. The WRVS was initially formed to help civilians during the Second World War - in evacuation, emergency feeding and providing general care and support but now carries out a much wider role. Mary hopes to visit the railway soon but is undergoing physiotherapy following a car crash so it maybe some time, she does however pass on her best wishes to the “crew of little “19”” and we wish Mary a speedy recovery.

Back Cover— The snow hides all the building work and gives this view looking north from Blaenavon High Level an almost otherworldly feel. On the left the magnificent snow clad bulk of the Coity Mountain dominates the proceedings. In less than a years time we should be running trains to here.

Welcome New Members

Huw Parfitt	Blackwood	David Tapper	St Dials
John Hall	Pontymister	Jonathan Sanger	Pontlliw
Ryan Jenkins	Roose	Steve Jenkins	Llanellen
Teresa Gill	Upper Race	Mark Thinton	Blaenavon
Jonathan Veitch	Parcplace	Lynn Morton	New Inn
Paul Smith	Sirhowy	Martin Griffin	Griffiths Town
Alwyne G Moreton	Garndiffaith	Graham Gatehouse	Coleford
Mark A Robinson	Pantyscallog	Patrick Jenkins	Nantyglo
Barrie Wreford	Risca		

Membership

Membership of the Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway Company costs £12 per year for adults and £6 per year for associate members (second member at same address) at the time of writing. Junior members (under 18) become members of the supporting Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway Society.

Each member receives a copy of our regular magazine "Top Line" (published three times a year) and "Bottom Line" (our bi-monthly news-sheet) and full Company members receive six free rides on the passenger service. Membership is essential if you are interested in becoming a volunteer on the Railway as this gives you full insurance cover in case of any accidents. We tend to ignore train rides made by regular working volunteers - especially if they buy tea on the train!

The Railway is managed and operated exclusively by volunteers who are all members of either the Railway Company or Railway Society

Volunteers on the Railway are split broadly into the following categories:

- Operations
- Permanent Way
- Locomotive Department
- Carriage & Wagon Department.
- Civil Engineering Department

For more details ask anyone of the volunteers or write to the address at the front of the magazine. All are welcome and we can no doubt find a job for you to do if you wish to become a working member.



Parting Shot

