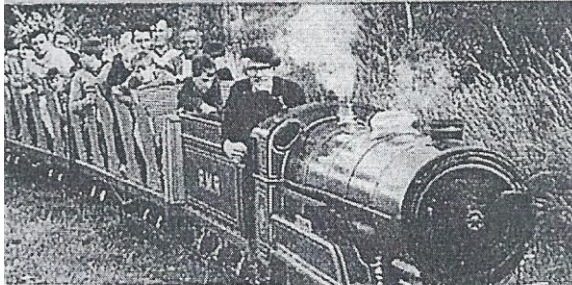


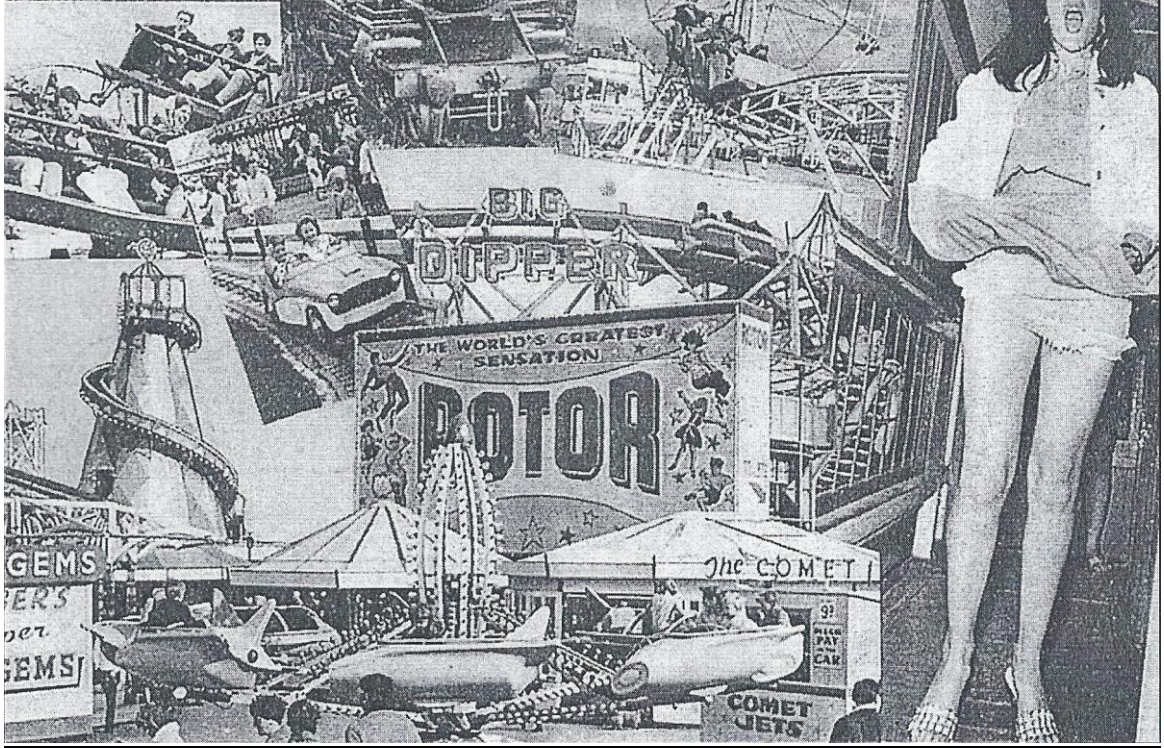


# RAILS BY THE SEA

# Ocean Deception GIANT FUN FAIR



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## **RAILS BY THE SEA**

**In what ways was the development of the seaside miniature railway  
influenced by the seaside spectacle and individual endeavour from  
1900 until the present day?**

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**MA By Research and Independent Study.**

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**Department of History**

**September 2012**

## **Abstract**

Little academic research has been undertaken concerning Seaside Miniature Railways as they fall outside more traditional subjects such as standard gauge and narrow gauge railway history and development.

This dissertation is the first academic study on the subject and draws together aspects of miniature railways, fairground and leisure culture. It examines their history from their inception within the newly developing fairground culture of the United States towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup>. century and their subsequent establishment and development within the UK.

The development of the seaside and fairground spectacular were the catalysts for the establishment of the SMR in the UK. Their development was largely due to two individuals, W. Bassett-Lowke and Henry Greenly who realized their potential and the need to ally them with a suitable site such as the seaside resort. Without their input there is no doubt that SMRs would not have developed as they did. When they withdrew from the culture subsequent development was firmly in the hands of a number of individual entrepreneurs.

Although embedded in the fairground culture they were not totally reliant on it which allowed them to flourish within the seaside resort even though the traditional fairground was in decline. Unfortunately the fortunes of SMRs were ultimately associated with that of the host resort and the leisure industry in general.

Consequently when they went into decline the fortunes of the SMR followed. However, individual entrepreneurs still maintained these lines even within severe economic downturns and as long as such support is available the SMR should still be around in another 100yrs.

SMRs were the orphans of their day finding it difficult to compete with the thrill of the more exhilarating fairground rides and yet were not welcomed in the more sedate leisure gardens where they would have been more suited.

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**Cover picture.** A wonderfully evocative poster advertising Rhyl and its fairground in its heyday between the 1950s and 1960s. The spectacle may have been somewhat diminished by the appearance of the bowler hatted engine driver! Compare with 26, “*hitting the buffers*” to witness the loss of this spectacle.

## **Preface**

My aim when planning this dissertation was to show how and why the SMR developed within the leisure culture and seaside spectacle; especially with the participation of the individual entrepreneur and enthusiast.

To achieve this it was necessary to delve into the early development of the seaside culture, which could constitute a dissertation in its own merit.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to take the opportunity to thank Barbara Schmucki for her tireless efforts in the production of my MA dissertation. This has involved two years of a graduate course and another two years for the MA; the latter being whilst she has been on sabbatical. She has been faced with the daunting task of leading a retired dental surgeon and amateur poet through the necessary hoops to reach the ultimate goal.

I would also thank all those who have contributed in one form or another from the University of York; not least the finance department who were always on the ball when it came to delayed payments.

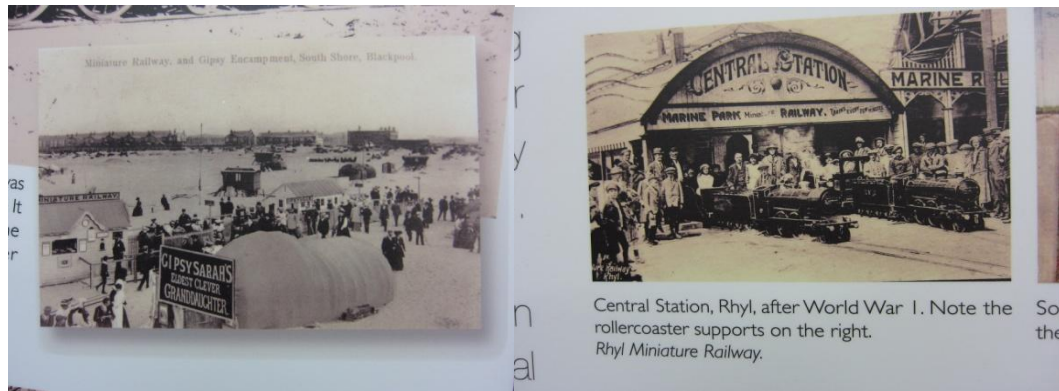
Also thanks to the Master of Trinity Hall, Prof. Martin Daunton, who was always willing to lend an ear to a struggling historian and for the timely lending of books from his personal library; a resounding thanks to them all!

## **Declaration**

I hereby certify that I am the sole author of this dissertation and that no part has been published or submitted for publication.

I certify that to the best of my knowledge my dissertation does not infringe on any copyright and that any quotations or work from other people are fully acknowledged in the appropriate way.

I declare that this has not been submitted to any other university or institution.



1: Two of the earliest seaside miniature railways: Left the railway on Blackpool's South Shore was opened in 1905. It was laid directly on the sand next to other amusements. To the right is the Rhyl Miniature Railway opened in 1911 built around a marine park in the shadow of a roller coaster; a truly wondrous spectacle for the time. Both were 15inch G. using Little Giant locomotives built by the Greenly/ Basset-Lowke partnership. (Courtesy; Miniature Railway Society)

### a. Overview

“Marvellous, most enjoyable, it took me back to a different time when everything seemed somehow different, more innocent; not like the modern fun fair.”<sup>1</sup> This statement was by an anonymous visitor to the Cleethorpes Seaside Miniature Railway on a dreary November day in 2011. (For our discussion seaside miniature railway will be abbreviated to SMR). Even today, with modern rides and thrills, there is something special, an intangible feeling, about a trip on an SMR; according to the historian, Anthony Coulls, “they were fun”<sup>2</sup> and who could disagree with such a statement?

An SMR is a miniature railway built for the leisure industry as part of the spectacle associated with a seaside resort, having no practical use although in some instances it may have a secondary role of connecting various parts of a resort. The first pleasure miniature railway of any type was opened in 1895 when the Duke of Westminster commissioned Sir Arthur Haywood to build a 15”G miniature line at his countryseat at Eaton Hall in Cheshire;<sup>3</sup> subsequently this gauge was adopted as the standard for all early miniature railways.

However, it was not until June 16th 1905 that the first SMR in Britain was opened at Blackpool when The Miniature Railway Company of Great Britain, under the control of Wehmann Bassett-Lowke, (B-L) opened the *Little Giant Railway* on the South Shore Pleasure Beach. This was considered a novelty at the time as indicated by the advertisement for the opening of the line in the local Blackpool Gazette & News.<sup>4</sup>

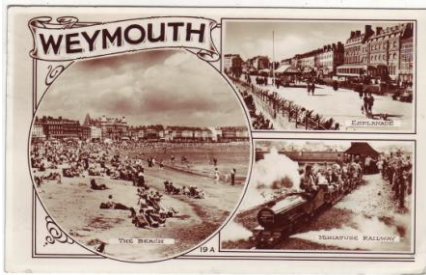
<sup>1</sup> Comment from an anonymous visitor to Cleethorpes Miniature Railway. November 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Coulls, Anthony, *The Ephemeral Archaeology of the Miniature Railway*. Industrial Archaeology Review, 2003: XXV: 1. P31.

<sup>3</sup> Heywood collection. [www.heywood-collection.org](http://www.heywood-collection.org). Accessed Jan. 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Blackpool Gazette & News. Friday 16<sup>th</sup> June 1905. (Classified advert).

SMRs began a steady increase in popularity<sup>5</sup> and they, along with their associated seaside resorts, had their golden age between the 1930s and 1960s,<sup>6</sup> although it was also the beginning of a steady decline in popularity which was associated with a gradual loss of spectacle associated with the seaside resort. Both were then still popular as holidaymakers in their millions still thronged the resorts for the summer period. At that time there were well over fifty SMRs in operation, plying their trade in fairgrounds, piers and promenades.<sup>7</sup> Any resort worth its salt would have had one and often would put it forward as a major visitor attraction. An



**2: An undated postcard advertising Weymouth; probably from the 1950s, showing the prominent attractions including the miniature railway. (Source unknown)**

undated, possibly 1950s from the dress, postcard from Weymouth (2) shows the beach, esplanade and importantly the miniature railway; all the ingredients for a happy summer holiday!

Although today, their numbers may not be as great as in previous decades they are still popular attractions and importantly can still be profitable.<sup>8</sup>

The SMR has become very much a part of the heritage, preservation scene; a necessary approach that has allowed them to remain open. There has been a concerted effort by the Miniature Railway Society to promote them by the opening of an exhibition; *Rails to the Sands*, hosted by the Cleethorpes Miniature Railway (see 3). It was open during the summer of 2011 and closed as planned in the December, however, it is hoped to transfer the exhibits to a more permanent site.<sup>9</sup>



**3: RAILS to the sands exhibition at Cleethorpes, November 2011. Photograph by the author.**

The SMR has shown a resilience and popularity that, despite changes in public attitudes towards leisure, still remain as an integral part of the leisure facilities of many seaside resorts, albeit with the help and assistance of charities, preservation societies and much voluntary unpaid help. What is the continuing appeal of an SMR? Introduced in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century they are still part of the leisure culture of seaside resorts a hundred years later. This is despite the fact that they have not significantly progressed or evolved during the intervening century; in contrast, the leisure/fairground industry has taken advantage of changes in technology and public awareness to provide ever more daring and exciting rides. The technology used in SMRs is basically the same; in some cases even the same locomotives are in use and the general format has remained unchanged in that visitors are still carried with no specific aim except for pleasure and entertainment.

<sup>5</sup> See appendix 1 for details of numbers of SMRs.

<sup>6</sup> *Rails to the Sands 2011*: Miniature Railways Museum Trust.

<sup>7</sup> Appendix 5. This is not a comprehensive list but gives an indication of the venues and the opening and closing dates of the known SMRs.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with David Humphreys, owner of the North Bay Railway, Scarborough. Jan. 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Correspondence with Tim Dunn, curator of the museum. October 2011



Today a trip to the seaside may be commonplace and it would seem unlikely that a visitor would react in quite the same way as Charlotte Bronte did when she visited Bridlington in 1834, when she was quite overpowered and was unable to speak until she had shed some tears.<sup>10</sup> However, it is still special when we consider the longevity of the SMR and its continuing appeal to the public.

### **b. Definition of a Seaside Miniature Railway.**

There are miniature railways in various locations within Britain and the SMR is but one variant; although the term SMR may seem self-descriptive, there has not been a formal definition; a working definition of an SMR could be: “*A miniature passenger railway of 21” G or less, operating within the environs of a seaside resort, whose primary function is purely for leisure and amusement.*” (Rooks)



*4: The seaside spectacle at Mablethorpe showing a small SMR, sandwiched between other attractions.*

There may be secondary defining points, such as the absence of any Act of Parliament regarding a public railway. An important feature is the use of scaled down miniatures of well known locomotives, as noted by Anthony Coulls<sup>11</sup> rather than what we may understand as a narrow gauge outline. My definition is broadly in agreement with that put forward by Anthony Coulls<sup>12</sup> and encompasses what I believe to be the most important facets of the SMR; leisure, technology and environment. Leisure encompasses the

fairground and general amusement industry. Technology encompasses the development and building of these SMRs and environment encompasses virtually any aspect of the SMR from location to individual entrepreneurs. These will very loosely form the structure of the analysis but it is not possible to keep these isolated from each other so there will be certain amount of overlap.

### **c. Aims.**

SMRs have a different *raison d’etre*, ethos, genesis and running, so consequently require a different approach and it should not be assumed that they operate in the same way as their full size counterparts. My aim is to show how the seaside-resort and its associated fairground provided the spectacle that was to allow the formation of SMRs and ultimately how the loss of this spectacle was to have a profound effect on the demise of the resort holiday and the SMR.

Concurrently, I would like to identify the role of the entrepreneur with the initial development, running and subsequent saving and preservation of the SMR. By preservation, I mean ensuring the continued operation of these SMRs not just as

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<sup>10</sup> Smith, Anthony, *Beside the Seaside*. George Allen & Unwin. London. 1972., P4.

<sup>11</sup> Coulls, Anthony, *The Ephemeral Archaeology of the Miniature Railway*. Industrial Archaeology Review 2003. XXV: 1. P31.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p31.

museum exhibits. The importance of voluntary labour and the intervention of heritage and charitable trusts in keeping many of the larger lines open.

SMRs have been viewed as toy-like<sup>13</sup> by the public, academics and even some stakeholders. As a corollary, I will aim to show that SMRs were not just *toys for boys* and are deserving of study within railway (transport) history.

#### **d. Literature review.**

Michael Robbins, founder of the Journal of Transport History, claims that, “*Enthusiasm is no bar to good history*”.<sup>14</sup> This statement is of paramount importance when we consider SMRs, where enthusiasm is an all-important facet of the subject. Without the enthusiasm of the people involved, they would not be in existence today.

Mom stated, “*transport as a whole*”,<sup>15</sup> should be studied, but as SMRs fall outside the accepted spheres of narrow and standard gauge railways, they have been neglected. Little has been written about SMRs within the field of either transport or leisure history. Colin Divall<sup>16</sup> has suggested the very nature of (seaside) miniature railways has stopped any serious study, arguing that the function of a railway is to get from A to B with some specific goal or purpose in mind; the concept of the journey itself being the most important aspect of travel does not hold any meaning.<sup>17</sup> Barbara Schmucki,<sup>18</sup> in a similar vein, implies that such a topic is on too small a scale to interest dedicated historians, who are more interested in larger enterprises.<sup>19</sup> In an earlier time Robert Louis Stevenson may not have agreed, as to him; “*I travel for travel’s sake. The great affair is to move*”.<sup>20</sup>



**5: The tunnel railway was a precursor to the SMR. The gauge was 20” and ran on a curved track about 40ft. in diameter. The curvature is clearly visible. Courtesy Haynes Publications Ltd..**

Anthony Coulls is one of the few academics to have written about SMRs in his article *The Ephemeral Archaeology of the Miniature Railway*. (As part of the general miniature railway scene within an archaeological framework), arguing that they “*both merit and require archaeological study*”. He was referring to the assorted remains of these railways but clearly believes that they have historical merit within archaeological history.<sup>21</sup> The article is written in a scholarly way and yet manages to transcend that rift between full size and miniature railway. He

<sup>13</sup> *Southport’s “Toy” Railway Damaged by Fire*. The Manchester Guardian, Sept 17, 1938.

<sup>14</sup> Robbins, Michael, Quoted in “*What kind of transport history did we get*”. Mom, G., Journal of Transport History, 2003. 24/No2, p121.

<sup>15</sup> Mom, Gils, “*What kind of transport history did we get*”. Journal of Transport History, 2003. 24/No2, p121.

<sup>16</sup> Colin Divall is Professor of Railway Studies and head of the Institute of Railway Studies and Transport History, University of York/NRM.

<sup>17</sup> Colin Divall; Personal correspondence with the author. January 2012.

<sup>18</sup> Barbara Schmucki is a lecturer in the history dept. and Institute of Railway Studies, York University/NRM.

<sup>19</sup> Schmucki, Barbara, Personal correspondence with author. Jan 2012.

<sup>20</sup> Stevenson, Robert Louis, *Travel’s with a Donkey*. 1878.

<sup>21</sup> Coulls, Anthony, *The Ephemeral Archaeology of the Miniature Railway*. Industrial Archaeology Review, 2003. XXV: 1. p35.

acknowledges that they lay outside the normal parameters of industrial archaeology but importantly that they do have a place in history that is worthy of note.

It concentrates on the physical remains of these SMRs and the locomotives used but the role of the enthusiast is highlighted along with their importance in the now thriving heritage scene.<sup>22</sup> He places the genesis of the SMR squarely on the shoulders of industrial society and the development of leisure time.<sup>23</sup> SMRs were “*a major social and economic force being used as entertainment for the masses*”.<sup>24</sup> He recognises the important role of early fairground attractions such as the Tunnel Railway (see 5)<sup>25</sup> in the development of the SMR.<sup>26</sup> The Second World War is cited as a major cause in the demise of the SMR, which undoubtedly would have been for many other leisure enterprises as well.<sup>27</sup> (Toy making suffered under shortages of material and manpower and had virtually ceased by 1942) However, it is difficult to be certain about this point as the figures supplied by the Miniature Railway Society do not indicate that there was a mass, *permanent* shutdown during the war and there were certainly no new lines built<sup>28</sup>. Clearly many lines on the coast were closed but only during the war and as with other aspects of the leisure industry there was a post war boom. However, it is altogether a groundbreaking study on the subject, which has unfortunately not been followed up by other scholars.

David Croft in his, *Survey of Seaside Miniature Railways*,<sup>29</sup> is probably the only person who has written specifically on the subject. However, this is not a critical investigation into SMRs but a gazetteer, chronicling the various lines and giving some technical details such as gauge and extent. There is little background information especially regarding ownership and social context of the lines. The data also has to be interpreted with a degree of caution, as it is often very vague in nature and conflicts with information supplied by the Miniature Railway Society. This is supported by conversations with Tim Dunn<sup>30</sup> and Austen Moss.<sup>31</sup> However, it is an invaluable source when we consider the limited information that is available regarding SMRs.

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<sup>22</sup> Coulls, Anthony, *The Ephemeral Archaeology of the Miniature Railway*. Industrial Archaeology Review, 2003. XXV: 1. p35.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. P33.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. P33.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. P32.

<sup>26</sup> This was a simple circular steam train with half the ride covered by a tunnel, which at the time was considered extremely *Avante Garde*.

<sup>27</sup> Coulls, Anthony, *The Ephemeral Archaeology of the Miniature Railway*. Industrial Archaeology Review, 2003. XXV: 1. P34.

<sup>28</sup> Appendix 1.

<sup>29</sup> Croft, David J. *A Survey of Seaside Miniature railways*. Oakwood Press. Usk, Monmouthshire, 1994.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Tim Dunn, curator, *Rails to the Sands*, exhibition. Oct. .2011.

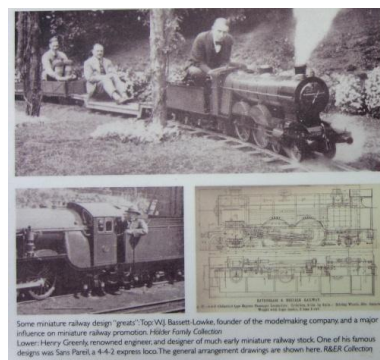
<sup>31</sup> Interview with Austin Moss, curator of Windmill Farm Museum. Jan 2012.

Despite the fact that Simmons, in his book, *The Railways of Great Britain*, acknowledges that, “*One of the functions of the railways has been to give pleasure*”<sup>32</sup> and goes on to explain that one of the purposes of the book is to “*display a wide range of pleasures that the railways continue to offer*; there is no mention of miniature railways (seaside or otherwise).<sup>33</sup> He was referring to the use of railways for seaside excursion traffic and the then new narrow gauge preservation scene. Even so, this may seem to be a surprising omission, considering that SMRs were the only railways commissioned solely for the purpose of pleasure and amusement. Over the years, extensive SMRs such as the Romney, Hythe & Dymchurch Railway and the Ravenglass & Eskdale Railway have become national attractions but even so, they are not deserving of a mention.

It is a recurring omission of Simmons, as no builders of (seaside) miniature railways are mentioned in his books, *The Men Who Built the Railways* (1983) and *Railways in Town and Country* (1986); avoiding any subject that is considered slightly outside the norm. I quote the lack of any information on the subject of railways and burials as indicated in my essay on the subject.<sup>34</sup>

His omission of miniature railways, in any form, is further highlighted by the fact that Gerald Nabarro, although not normally associated with railway topics, has written on aspects of railway preservation and selectively covers the topic quite well. In his book,<sup>35</sup> *Locomotive and railway preservation in Great Britain*; he includes the, Fairbourne, Ravenglass & Eskdale and Romney, Hythe & Dymchurch Railways in his discussions as these were the lines that were operating under preservation conditions. He clearly saw the relevance of these miniature railways within the overall preservation, heritage scene, which is even more interesting in that it was written in 1972 when the preservation scene, for any railway, was in its infancy.

Michael Bonavia, another well-known popularist railway writer, also has nothing to say about SMRs in his book, *Historic Railway Sites in Great Britain* (1987). Once again the omission of a railway such as the RH&D seems surprising considering the history and general appeal of the line. Clearly, they were not of sufficient note to be mentioned. Ossie Nock, another popular railway writer does not mention them, although in his



**6: Three giants of the seaside miniature railway; top Bassett-Lowke on a Greenly designed Little Giant. Below, Henry Greenly, himself. (Courtesy Rails to the sand exhibition).**

<sup>32</sup> Simmons, Jack, *The Railways of Gt. Britain*. Sheldrake Publications. London. 1986, P63.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. P63.

<sup>34</sup> Rooks, Marcus, *To what extent were railways and other forms of transport affected by changes in burial practices between 1827&1880*. University of York. 2011, P3.

<sup>35</sup> Nabarro, Gerald, *Locomotive and railway preservation in Great Britain*. Routeledge and Keegan Paul. London 1972.

volume, *Railway Archaeology* (1981), however, he does touch on the importance of excursions and the seaside.<sup>36</sup>

Ronald Clarke, in his book, *The Steam Engine Makers of Norfolk* (1988), does cover the topic in a roundabout way.<sup>37</sup> The steam engine makers: Savages, Tidman and Dodman all made steam driven fairground rides. One of the most famous being a direct precursor to the SMR; known as The Tunnel and is illustrated nicely in (see 5).<sup>38</sup>

When looking at the broader aspect of social and cultural interaction, Michael Freeman's, *Railways and the Victorian Imagination*,<sup>39</sup> deals with the railways' relationship with society and other cultures. It is noted that in the early histories, railways were seen as a social phenomenon and tries to indicate that their history can be seen through the eyes of poets, artists and artisans.

Although SMRs are not described (they were not around in Victorian times) it can be extrapolated to include SMRs; I think that this does not detract from the argument that they can be considered in their own right. Their cultural and social importance on the seaside resort and fairground should be considered and not just the bricks and mortar and statistics of railways, how many passengers carried, tons of coal moved and other statistics that we normally associate with railway history. This social and cultural aspect is at the very heart of the SMR; they are railways with very little infrastructure in the way of bricks and mortar and do not perform a worthwhile commercial function.

Another well-known writer on alternative aspects of railway history, Ian Carter, who has studied railways in relation to culture, in his book, *British Railways Enthusiasms*, does not seem to have studied SMRs.

The leisure industry and SMRs have been intimately associated since the very beginning. Surprisingly, given the close relationship between fairgrounds and the SMR, there are virtually no references to SMRs within the realms of fairground or leisure academia. Prof. Vanessa Toulmin, the director of the National Fairground Archives, gives no mention to them and the archives exclude them almost universally.<sup>40</sup> Even the historian, Jeffrey Stanton, in his series on the history of Coney Island only gives them passing reference and that is in relation to the Cagney brothers rather than the railways themselves.<sup>41</sup> However, that does not mean that literature on leisure does not have any relevance to our study.

Nick Evans's, *Dreamland Remembered*, a major work on the Margate Fairground, includes the Dreamland Miniature Railway, concentrating on the infrastructure of the line. However, the description is somewhat swamped by the importance of the Scenic Railway, which was always at the heart of the enterprise. What it indicated was that the SMR was very much at the mercy of the owners of the fairground and that as other more profitable rides came along the SMR was gradually reduced in size to

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<sup>36</sup> Nock, Ossie, S. *Railway Archaeology*. Book Club Association. 1981.

<sup>37</sup> Clark, Ronald, *The steam engine builders of Norfolk*. Haynes Publications. 1988.

<sup>38</sup> The importance of these tunnel locomotives is highlighted by Antony Coulls. See p12.

<sup>39</sup> Freeman, Michael, *Railways and the Victorian Imagination*. Yale University Press. New Haven. 1999.

<sup>40</sup> National Fairground Archives. Western Bank Library, Sheffield S10 2TN.

<sup>41</sup> Stanton, Jeffrey, *Coney Island-Independent Rides*. 1998. www.westland.net. Accessed March 2012.

accommodate them. When the owners fell on hard times the railway, although still functioning, was forced to close along with the rest of the attractions.<sup>42</sup>

This aspect is reinforced by Peter Wilson in his article, *The Dreamland Miniature Railway*,<sup>43</sup> published in *Miniature Railway*. This gives a detailed history of the Margate SMR although from a somewhat personal standpoint.

John Walton<sup>44</sup> and James Walvin,<sup>45</sup> two respected writers on the subject of the seaside resort mention the arrival of the SMR but only in relation to the arrival of the fairground. Although it is significant that they both mention the arrival of the SMR; they do not specifically mention other rides such as roller coasters, which could be argued had a far greater influence on the development of fairgrounds than SMRs. Although they are only mentioned briefly, they must have had an impact on the fairground/seaside resort to bring them to the attention of the authors. Although in view of the groundbreaking arrival of the SMR in Blackpool, one would have expected Walton to have given it some space.<sup>46</sup> They do not refer to their builders or other aspects of the SMR. Generally speaking, their works concentrate on the development of the seaside resort. As the resorts were well developed before the arrival of SMRs much of their writings are not relevant to the period covered by this study.

On the broader theme of the leisure industry, perhaps one of the most important works to consider is John Walton and Gary Cross's work *The Playful Crowd*.<sup>47</sup> This does not deal with SMRs or any fairground ride directly but attempts to deal with the different cultural attitudes of "Pleasure Seeking Crowds" in America and Britain at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by comparing two important fairgrounds at Coney Island (America) and Blackpool (Britain) both of which were at the heart of the early SMR.

The authors indicate that although they were based on similar concepts they differed fundamentally in the long run, Coney Island continuing to appeal to the more hedonistic tastes of Americans whereas Blackpool forged close links with more family orientated rides. This fundamental difference led to the downfall of Coney Island and the continuing success of Blackpool.

According to John Walton, "*the seaside resort can be viewed as a gateway between land and sea, culture and nature, civilized restraint and liberated hedonism.*" It is liminal in that culturally people stand on the threshold of change when they visit a seaside resort.<sup>48</sup> Gary Cross argues that all ages have their *Saturnalia*<sup>49</sup> and that at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the fairground spectacle provided an *Industrial Saturnalia*.<sup>50</sup> Although I think that may somewhat overstate the situation as the spectacle was not solely that of the fairground but that of the resort as a whole, it does, however, mirror the

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<sup>42</sup> Evans, Nick, *Dreamland Remembered, 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*. Nick Evans Publishing. 2009.

<sup>43</sup> Wilson, Peter, *The Dreamland Miniature Railway*. *Miniature Railway Magazine*. Autumn 2011.

<sup>44</sup> Walton, John, *The English seaside resort 1750-1914*. Leicester University Press. 1983.

<sup>45</sup> Walvin, James, *Leisure and society 1830-1950*. Longmans. London. 1978.

<sup>46</sup> Walton, John. *Blackpool*. Edinburgh University Press. 1998.

<sup>47</sup> Walton, John & Cross, Gary, *The Playful Crowd. Pleasure Places in the Twentieth Century*. Columbia University Press. New York. 2004.

<sup>48</sup> Walton, John, *The Victorian Seaside*. 2011. BBC History. [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk). Accessed June 2012.

<sup>49</sup> Saturnalia started as a Roman festival when there was a sacrifice to the God Saturn. This was followed by continual partying and a carnival atmosphere that overturned the established Roman normality.

<sup>50</sup> Cross, Gary & Walton, John, *The Playful Crowd. Pleasure Places in the twentieth Century*. 2004. Columbia University Press. P5.

sentiment of Coulls who argued that the fairground was firmly rooted within industrial society.<sup>51</sup>

The concept of a spectacle is covered by Johnathan Crary<sup>52</sup>, who defines spectacle as *enticing, distracting and superficial*,<sup>53</sup> in his. *Suspension of Perceptions, Spectacle: in Modern Culture*. He examines the effect of modernization of subjectivity and the industrialization of sensory culture, showing that we have a multitude of stimuli simultaneously attacking the senses, causing pleasure whilst at the same time disorienting the onlooker; a description that aptly summarizes a visit to an average resort with its myriad of attractions and leisure facilities.

Entrepreneurship was an integral part of the SMR culture and we can look to some works that may enlighten us on the subject. William Weber<sup>54</sup> editing “*The Musicians as Entrepreneurs*” proposes some fundamental observations about entrepreneurship, which are relevant to this study. The original concept of the entrepreneur was someone who used personal capital (hence risk) to take advantage of an unexploited area. However, during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a new concept was introduced when cultural and economic values become intermingled. In other words, financial gain may not always have been the primary motive.

The entrepreneur has always been at the heart of innovation and the development of the SMR, which according to Martin Daunton in, *The Entrepreneurial State, 1700-1914*, could be accounted for by the openness of British society. There was willingness for society to accept the entrepreneur because of their achievements rather than purely because of their birthright; it was a meritocracy where achievements were the measure of a person’s worth. Daunton<sup>55</sup> importantly goes as far as to suggest that this entrepreneurship is not necessarily just one person acting alone but can be a symbiotic relationship between a small number of people; where one could provide the financial and organizational skills and another the mechanical knowhow, citing the relationship between Boulton and Watt.<sup>56</sup> The relationship between B-L and Henry Greenly exemplifies this aspect perfectly. It is unlikely that SMRs would have developed as they did without the close co-operation of these two individuals.

Two of the major entrepreneurs in the early development of SMRs were Wehnman Bassett-Lowke<sup>57</sup> and Henry Greenly<sup>58</sup>, (both are shown in 6). Both have extensive biographies; however, despite the fact that SMRs were the start of their involvement in miniature railways, they have not been researched in any great depth. There are no reasons given why they undertook the construction of such railways and why the various sites were chosen. It would have been interesting to know how B-L gained control of the R&E Railway when his chief competitors were the wealthy individuals

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<sup>51</sup> See P11.

<sup>52</sup> Professor of Modern Art and Theory. Columbia University.

<sup>53</sup> Crary, Johnathan. *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture*. MIT Press. 2000.

<sup>54</sup> Weber, William. (editor) *The Musicians as Entrepreneur, 1700-1914: Managers, Charlatans and idealists*. Victorian Studies, Vol. 49, Number 3, Spring 2007. Pp534-536.

<sup>55</sup> Daunton, Martin. *The Entrepreneurial State 1700-1914*. History Today. Vol44 (6) 1994 Pp11-16.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. Pp11-16.

<sup>57</sup> Bassett-Lowke, Janet, *Wehnman Bassett-Lowke: A memoir of his life and achievements 1877-1953*. Rail Romances. Chester.1999.

<sup>58</sup> Steel, Ernest & Steel Elizabeth, *The Miniature World of Henry Greenly*. MAP. Hemel Hempstead. 1973.

who formed the RH&D Railway. *Little Giant Story*<sup>59</sup> does give more information about the railways but as with most histories it is more about the locomotives rather than the places and people involved. This criticism can also be directed towards Peter Van Zeller in his book on 15”G railways<sup>60</sup> although it does give some insight to SMRs and his personal involvement with the preservation of the R&E Railway should not be overlooked.<sup>61</sup>

In conclusion, there is no doubt that SMRs have been neglected within the realms of mainstream history. It has proven very difficult for historians to adapt conventional railway history onto a miniature stage. “*You can’t scale nature*” is a common phrase within the model engineering profession<sup>62</sup>. Simply making something smaller does not mean that it will necessarily work; can the standards and concepts of full size railway transport history be transferred to a world in miniature? The answer is that probably not, without modification. A completely new set of parameters may be required, totally different from traditional historical studies. However, if the boundaries are expanded somewhat to include social and cultural issues within the leisure industry as a whole then the SMR can be included under the overall canopy.

There is very little primary or secondary literature on the subject. That which is available, however, can be pieced together forming a fascinating insight into the formation, entrepreneurial aspects, development and subsequent decline of the SMR.

#### **e. Question.**

The overarching question to my dissertation is...

**In what ways was the development of the seaside miniature railway influenced by the seaside spectacle and individual endeavour from 1900 until the present day?**

As stated in chapter 1b, I am broadly basing the study around three aspects: leisure, technology and environment. Within the realms of leisure I shall highlight the development of the seaside spectacle and the arrival of the fairground, which provided the necessary impetus for the arrival of the SMR. This will involve looking at the entrepreneurial aspects as well as the traditional Romany involvement in fairground and SMR development. The diminishing role of the seaside resort as a spectacle is an important factor in the changing fortunes of the SMR.

Within the realms of technology, which I consider a minor aspect of the study I shall be looking into the development of SMR technology.

Environment is the broadest canvass and can encompass virtually anything about the leisure culture and SMRs. It will especially concentrate on the individuals involved with SMRs; preservation societies, charities economic conditions will be included.

These aspects are intimately linked together with SMR culture and it is unlikely that any SMR would have developed without the close relationship between them. The

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<sup>59</sup> Butterell, Robin, & Milner, John, “*Little Giant*” story: *The story of the Bassett-Lowke “Little Giant” 15ins. G locos and the railways on which they ran..* Rail Romances. Chester. 2003.

<sup>60</sup> Mosely, David. & Van Zeller, Peter, *15inch gauge railways: their history, equipment and operation.* David & Charles. Newton Abbott. 1986.

<sup>61</sup> Personal correspondence with Peter Van Zeller. March 2012

<sup>62</sup> Anecdotal from articles in the Model Engineer magazine.



overarching question will be answered by dividing the study into a number of chapters as indicated:

Chapter 2: leisure in relation to the seaside and fairground spectacle.

- a. In what ways did the development of the seaside resort as a spectacle contribute to the establishment of the first fairgrounds?
- b. How did the seaside fairground contribute to the establishment of the first SMRs?

Chapter 3. Technology in relation to SMRs.

In what ways did the SMR culture rely on the development of the miniature steam locomotive?

Chapter 4. Environment.

- a. What factors lead to the opening and subsequent development of the first SMR in Blackpool?
- b. What was the role of the entrepreneur in the subsequent development of the SMR culture?
  1. Those associated with B-L.
  2. Those not associated with B-L.

**f. Methodology.**

The study will be broadly based on my definition of an SMR which encompasses the three important aspects: leisure, technology and environment. Information has been gathered from various sources, as academic literature is sparse much has been obtained from alternate sources such as: newspaper, film and poster archives and collections, The General Dental Council, Companies house and the Charities Commission have all yielded much useful information.

An important source of first hand information was from unstructured telephone interviews with interested stakeholders such as owners of SMRs their archivists and historians; notes were taken but it was not possible to record the conversations. I corresponded with different stakeholders, such as historians and railway academics. There were fieldwork trips to a number of SMRs to gather information first hand, which yielded much local information. (Cleethorpes, Southend, Rhyl and Southport). The Windmill Railway, under the direction of Austen Moss, has become a repository of not only SMR hardware but also much literature and original written information and this has been acknowledged. Illustrations, graphs and tables have been obtained once again from a variety of sources, which are acknowledged accordingly.

Information gathered from these sources was collated with information gathered from the literature review, especially with regard to the more abstract parts of the study such as entrepreneurship and the concept of spectacle.

The study will be carried out in a logical chronological fashion by examining the seaside resort until the point when they were ready to accept the arrival of the first fairgrounds and SMRs, studying the technology involved that allowed SMRs to become established and finally discussing in some detail individual lines and entrepreneurs within the SMR culture combined with the loss of spectacle.

### **g. Contribution**

SMRs should not be considered in the same way as full size railways but regarded as individual enterprises within the leisure industry. We should not just be looking solely at the physical remains of SMRs as indicated by Coulls, which are obviously important but also looking at the social, individualistic importance of SMRs. This is a major diversification when scaling down from full size as this tends to concentrate on the physical aspect of the line.

It will be necessary to expand the boundaries of traditional history to include more social and cultural aspects. To know more about the inter-relationship between SMRs, the individuals involved and the leisure industry can only help to advance our knowledge of social and leisure history.<sup>63</sup>

This study treats SMRs as unique enterprises and will shed new light on the subject. It will show that SMRs have been opened, operated and rescued within a different environment and by a very different type of individual, rather than large corporate bodies and institutions

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<sup>63</sup> Coulls, Anthony, *The Ephemeral Archaeology of the miniature railway*. Industrial Archaeology Review, 2003. XXV: 1.

**In what ways was the development of the seaside miniature railway influenced by the seaside spectacle and individual endeavour from 1900 until the present day?**

## **Chapter 2. Leisure and the Seaside Spectacle.**

**a. In what ways did the development of the seaside resort as a spectacle contribute to the establishment of the first fairgrounds?**

According to John Walton, the seaside is a gateway between sea and culture a place of liberated hedonism.<sup>64</sup> Anthony Smith, in *Beside the Seaside*, suggested that the desire to see the sea is just a rational urge for people living in an island nation.<sup>65</sup> Ruth Manning Saunders, in *Seaside England* suggests that there is something about being by or near the sea.<sup>66</sup> Who could deny any of these somewhat subjective, emotive statements? A seaside view from a house or hotel always commands a premium over those that do not.

The enduring popularity of the comic song, *I do like to be beside the seaside*,<sup>67</sup> is a lasting testament to the relationship between Britons and the sea. However we may look at seaside resorts, since the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century they have become part of the fabric of British society.

A seaside resort refers to any town on the coast that caters for recreational activities and actively attracts visitors as its primary means of livelihood. The overall history of the British seaside resort has been well documented over the years; works by John Walton<sup>68</sup> and James Walvin<sup>69</sup> should be studied as they give a detailed account of their development. The seaside resort was well established as a place of leisure and relaxation by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when British society was looking upon the sea as more than just a means of transportation (passage) or a way of earning a living (fishing).<sup>70</sup>

As a result of and to cater for this new recreation, seaside resorts developed along the coast of Britain. Because villages and towns had different Wakes Weeks,<sup>71</sup> the early resorts, especially in the North West, could expect a full season between Whitsun and September.<sup>72</sup>

Once established, improvements in transportation and the advent of bank holidays increased their popularity even more. The arrival of the railways opened resorts up to mass urban migration but they did not trigger the development of spectacle and miniature railways.<sup>73</sup> By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century road traffic was beginning to make

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<sup>64</sup> See P17.

<sup>65</sup> Smith, Anthony *Beside the Seaside*. George Allen & Unwin Ltd.. London. 1972. P27.

<sup>66</sup> Saunders, Ruth, *Seaside England*. B.T. Batsford. .London 1951. P3

<sup>67</sup> Glover-Kind, J. *I Do Like To Be Beside The Seaside*. 1907. (Comic song).

<sup>68</sup> Walton, John, *The English seaside resort 1750-1914*. Leicester University Press. 1983.

<sup>69</sup> Walvin, James, *Beside the Seaside: Social History of the popular seaside holiday*. Allen Lane. London. 1978.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. P4.

<sup>71</sup> Wakes Weeks. These were traditional holidays, centred in the N.W., initially connected with a religious festival but later became associated with travelling fairs. During Victorian times in Lancashire it became a tradition to take time off work when the mill/factory would close for a week for maintenance and the workers would travel to a nearby seaside resort. There were also attractions at home for those who did not go. As the tradition was associated with travelling fairs the time of each town's Wakes Week was different.

<sup>72</sup> Barton, Susan, *Working Class organisations and popular tourism, 1840-1970*. Manchester University Press. 2005. P48.

<sup>73</sup> See appendix 3, for SMR opening compared with the arrival of the railways.

progress, consequently most seaside resorts had become readily accessible and visitors could travel by road, rail and sea.

During this period of development, there occurred an increase in the standard of living for most workers; gone were the days of barely scratching a living.<sup>74</sup> Birth rates were falling and people had sufficient money not only just to live, but could save for such things as consumer durables and importantly for leisure.<sup>75</sup> Holidaymakers needed money not only for accommodation and transportation but importantly for spending. When this spending money became available, it allowed the development of fairgrounds and attractions such as SMRs as they were commercial enterprises that ran for profit.

Once these factors (holiday, transportation and finance) were in place, it became possible to take a holiday. Although living conditions were improving they were still dire, Daunton;<sup>76</sup> where would these people go? The newly developed seaside resorts were now readily accessible; the air<sup>77</sup> and water had not been polluted, entertainment was available and the bracing smell of Ozone in the air was advertised as being invigorating;<sup>78</sup> thus, the headlong rush to the seaside began.

A resort town, such as Blackpool was remarkably similar to a visitor's home town, with row upon row of lodging houses, emulating their own environment; as a result, visitors could feel comfortable within the seaside resort because of this very sameness. However, once deposited at the resort by train the visitor was trapped for the duration of the holiday. There was very little private transportation to visit other resorts if they were not satisfied with the leisure facilities on offer. It would probably mean that they would not return in the future so the resort would suffer a loss of future income.

If a resort was to attract and importantly encourage visitors to return it was not going to be sufficient just to be beside the sea, it would need something extra to ensure their popularity, it became necessary to provide a memorable experience.

Visitors wanted something different, a change of scene; according to John Urry, the holiday destination was becoming to be "*looked upon as a spectacle*".<sup>79</sup> Shaw looks upon the resort "*as a place of escape, pleasure and spectacle*",<sup>80</sup> all this was echoed in Marion Grierson's film documentaries, *The Way to the Sea*, which loudly proclaimed that visitors to the seaside "*seek a spectacle*"<sup>81</sup> and *Beside the Seaside*.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Mitchell, B., *Abstract of British Historical Statistics*. Cambridge University Press. 1962. Pp338-358.

From 1850-1900 there had been a drop in retail prices (100-89) : during the same period wages had increased from 100-189. Pp343-344.

<sup>75</sup> Daunton, Martin, *Wealth and Welfare. An Economic and Social History of Britain, 1851-1951*. Oxford University Press. 2007. P378.

<sup>76</sup> Daunton, Martin, *House and Home in the Victorian City, working class housing 1850-1914*. Edward Arnold. London. 1983.

<sup>77</sup> Crowther, C. & Ruston, A. G. *The Nature, Distribution and Effects upon Vegetation of Atmospheric particles in and near an Industrial Town*. Journal of Agricultural Science, 4. 1911. Pp25-55.

<sup>78</sup> The Victorians believed that the bracing smell was due to Ozone. It has been shown that this is not the case but due to another compound, DMS. Karl S. Kruszelnik. *Ozone Smell at the Seaside*. News in Science. [www.abc.net.au](http://www.abc.net.au). Accessed July 2012.

<sup>79</sup> Urry, John. Quoted in Walton, John, *The British Seaside Holidays and Resorts in the 20<sup>th</sup> century*. Manchester University Press. 2000. P20.

<sup>80</sup> Shaw, G. & Williams, A., *Rise and fall of coastal resorts: cultural and economic perspectives*. Pinter. London. 1997. P1.

<sup>81</sup> Grierson, Marion, *The Way to the Sea*. Strand films. 1937.

<sup>82</sup> Grierson, Marion, *Beside the Seaside*. Strand Films. 1935.

It was the provision of this spectacle that became the true allure of the seaside resort and within the broader aspects of leisure culture enticed the working class out of their own environment and placed them in familiar surroundings but in a different more spectacular world.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the basic infrastructure was in place: theatres, ballrooms, cafes, restaurants and sports facilities.<sup>83</sup> There were travelling showmen, Punch and Judy, donkeys and all manner of sideshows but there was still something missing to finally establish the spectacle; the fairground .

We have reached the stage of development of the seaside resort when it was the primary holiday destination providing leisure facilities for the visitor. However, that quintessential hedonistic spectacle, the defining attribute of the seaside resort, the fairground, had yet to be established. To understand the origins of the fairground the study has to turn to America.

#### **b. How did the seaside fairground contribute to the establishment of the first SMRs.**

In the UK, the forerunner of fairgrounds, leisure parks, had been open since the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century and were conceived either by municipalities, such as Rosherville Gardens in Gravesend or philanthropic ventures, such as Roath Park in Cardiff (Bute Family). In America, leisure parks were the brainchild not of municipalities but tram and trolley companies who developed a leisure facility at the terminus of their line. These were commercial enterprises to attract more passengers and for this reason, initially they were not called leisure parks but trolley parks.<sup>84</sup>



*7: Shows a scene at Coney Island circa 1900, showing one of Timothy Gagney's locomotives in use.*

Leisure parks were developing in many large American cities, such as Idora Park, Youngsville, Ohio,<sup>85</sup> due to the vastness of America many were not necessarily on the coast. The public considered them the new venues for mass entertainment, being constructed alongside housing, industrial and public buildings.<sup>86</sup> By 1919, it was estimated that there were between 1500-2000 such

<sup>83</sup> Saunders, Ruth, M. *Seaside England*. B.T. Batsford. London. 1951. P59.

<sup>84</sup> Wikipedia; Online dictionary. Retrieved June 2012.

<sup>85</sup> Deblasio, Donna, *Youngstown's Idora Park, a Fantasyland in an industrial setting*. Ohio History, Vol. 117. 2010. Pp74-92.

<sup>86</sup> Cross, Gary, *Crowds and Leisure: Thinking comparatively across the 20<sup>th</sup> century*. Journal of Social History, Vol.39 No.3 Spring 2006. Pp631-650.

parks in the United States.<sup>87</sup> Leisure parks were places to spend leisure time and relax not necessarily to be thrilled or amused.

What caused the transformation from places of relaxation to the hedonistic Saturnalia places indicated by Cross? The development of Coney Island outside New York may provide some of the answers. Coney Island had developed as a leisure resort and horse-racing venue from the early 1840s, as a place where people could escape the heat of New York. However, it attracted a reputation for criminal activity although holidaymakers still thronged there in their tens of thousands.<sup>88</sup> It was not yet the place of Industrial Saturnalia. The change was brought about by people such as George C. Tilyou, who was a major entrepreneur and thought himself an amateur psychologist who felt that he knew what people wanted, stating, “*we Americans want either to be thrilled or amused and we are ready to pay well for either sensation.*”<sup>89</sup>

He became a major investor in Coney Island and the concept of an Industrial Saturnalia seems to fit in very well with such sentiments. The metamorphosis from a leisure resort to a major fairground resort was underway and the arrival in 1876, of a steam-powered carousel further enhanced this change. Followed in 1884, by possibly the most popular of all fairground rides, the roller coaster; patented and built by LaMarcus Thompson. Captain Paul Boyton opened the first enclosed attraction, the Sea Lion Centre in 1895.<sup>90</sup>

When the streetcar serving Coney Island was electrified it further increased its popularity; by 1905, (the time Blackpool opened) over 200,000 visitors would visit during a weekend.<sup>91</sup> The blue-print had been drawn-up for a successful fairground development at Coney Island; attractions that would thrill and excite coupled with rapid communications with the host population; a recipe that would be copied throughout the world, including Britain.

In Britain the development of the fairground was not so rapid or simplistic. Before the establishment of seaside resorts, travelling fairs<sup>92</sup> were the preserve of a number of families of Romany origin, travelling throughout the country to regular sites such as Nottingham and Newcastle Moors. Although it was only from the 18<sup>th</sup> century did they bear any resemblance to what we imagine a funfair to be; that is with attractions, rides and sides-shows.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, new venues started to become available, in the form of seaside resorts. For the first time, there were permanent venues that could provide a living, if not all year round, certainly during the summer months. Permanent fairgrounds sprung up in or alongside seaside resorts, dwarfing traditional fairs and becoming major capitalized places of entertainment.<sup>93</sup>

The tradition of the seaside entertainment industry was born, largely run by a small number of Gypsy Romany families. Contemporary photographs clearly show the

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<sup>87</sup> Adams, Judith, A., *The American Amusement Park industry: A History of Technology and Thrills*. Twayne Publishing. Boston 1991.

<sup>88</sup> *90,000 at Coney Island...* New York Times. July 8 1895.

<sup>89</sup> Harrod, Horatia, *The Phantom's New Home: Coney Island*. Daily Telegraph 17/2/2010

<sup>90</sup> Jones, Karen R. & Wills, John, *The Invention of the Park*. Polity Press. Cambridge. 2005. P95.

<sup>91</sup> Stanton, Jeffrey, *Coney Island- Independent Rides*. 1998. www.westland.net. Accessed March 2012.

<sup>92</sup> Fair; from the Latin, *feria*, meaning holiday.

<sup>93</sup> Walton, John, *British Seaside: Holiday Resorts in the 20<sup>th</sup> century*. Manchester University Press 2000. P95.

influence of these families (1) in such resorts as Blackpool. If an independent operator wished to set up a ride then they would have to negotiate with these families.

The transformation of Blackpool into its own Industrial Saturnalia was largely due to the efforts of one entrepreneur, William George Bean. He had visited Coney Island and witnessed its attractions and wanted to emulate such a spectacle in Britain and in 1896, he opened the first Pleasure Beach Fairground,<sup>94</sup> which was literally on the beach itself.<sup>95</sup> This was not the Coney Island spectacle that he was attempting to produce as it still largely was dependant on the Romany travellers.

To avoid this relationship, in 1902, Bean went into partnership with John Outhwaite, (an operator at the South Shore) to promote a new fairground that would emulate Coney Island. They were quite specific in their aims, "*We wanted an American style amusement park; the fundamental principle of which is to make adults feel like children and to inspire gaiety of a primary innocent character.*"<sup>96</sup> However, the concept of being innocent in character seems to run against the general perception of Coney Island, where it had become to be seen as somewhat Hedonistic and being tolerated as a necessary evil.<sup>97</sup>

It is interesting to note that for all the early stakeholders, the entertainment of children was not the primary aim but to make adults feel like children (see 9). This is borne out when studying photographs of early rides, including SMRs, showing that there is a preponderance of adult passengers.<sup>98</sup>

They purchased 30 acres of land near the South Pier from the Watson Estate and Pleasure Beach was born and their intention was to lease out plots for other independent attractions in a similar fashion to Coney Island.<sup>99</sup>

For an entrepreneur with a sound idea it became relatively straightforward to gain a concession as there would be no need to go through councils or negotiate with the gypsy community. This became an accepted method of allocating pitches and was still in operation in the 1930s when it was used by the local council to generate revenues.<sup>100</sup> Such an arrangement was the true spur to the rapid development of the fairground industry.

The early rides at Blackpool were all of American descent and reflected the somewhat hedonistic attitude the Americans had towards the attractions.<sup>101</sup> Blackpool, although attracting the working class tripper was also staunchly middle class in its attitude towards entertainment. In the long term, more sedate, moderate entertainment would be necessary.

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<sup>94</sup> Pleasure Beach was a common name for such attraction during the early years of fairground development.

<sup>95</sup> He had also built a similar fairground on the east coast, The Gt. Yarmouth Pleasure Beach, However, by 1903 he had relinquished his stake at Gt. Yarmouth and concentrated his efforts on Blackpool.

<sup>96</sup> Jones, Karen R. & Wills, John, *The Invention of the Park*. Polity Press. Cambridge. 2005. P97.

<sup>97</sup> See page 23.

<sup>98</sup> See Fig. 1 at Rhyl and P54 at Southport where the train had a clear partition to prevent cinders setting ladies' hats on fire!!

<sup>99</sup> Stanton, Jeffrey, *Coney Island- Independent Rides*. 1998. www.westland.net. Accessed March 2012.

<sup>100</sup> *Sands Site Values: Higher Bids for Blackpool Stands*. Manchester Guardian. May 18<sup>th</sup> 1934.

<sup>101</sup> Cross, Gary & Walton, John, *The Playful Crowd. Pleasure Places in the twentieth Century*. 2004. Columbia University Press.

In 1904 one of the first to take a concession was Hiram Maxim's "captive flying machines" and in 1905 we see advertised the "newest of Blackpool's attractions", *The Little Giant Railway*: The first seaside miniature railway had been established.<sup>102</sup>

Once the seaside fairground had been established others followed; Margate, which had always been a popular destination for Londoners, was a typical example. Here was an established resort with a considerable market for amusements. Dreamland Fairground was the brainchild of another entrepreneur, John Henry Iles, who had already created amusement parks in diverse places such as Cairo and Pittsburgh.<sup>103</sup> In 1919, he bought a site Margate to develop Dreamland. Having established a market for visitors he capitalized on this success by quickly installing other attractions including an SMR.

We have seen that the fairground was a result of the resorts developing into a spectacle to attract visitors. These were based on the blue-print set down at Coney Island in America and exported to Britain: The seaside spectacle was born.

The turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the scene was set for the arrival of the SMR. This would not be a great innovation or breakthrough in the leisure industry;



**9: A typical summer scene with an SMR on the promenade with visitors of all ages enjoying the ride. (Unknown source.)**

SMRs to flourish in places where fairgrounds may not have been so successful. To study the arrival of the SMR it is necessary to assess the developments in technology relating to miniature locomotives especially, that allowed the SMR to become established.



**8: The Blackpool Gazette advertising the opening of the Little Giant Railway. Clearly something new for the age.**

that had already occurred with the arrival of the permanent fairground. They would become part of the general development and ongoing improvement to the resort attractions. Although SMRs had a direct link with fairground spectacle they were not necessarily tied directly to a fairground and could be opened any where within the general vicinity of a resort. Eventually they could be found on piers, pleasure gardens and along promenades. This versatility was to enable

<sup>102</sup> Butterell, R., & Milner, J. "Little Giant" story: The story of the Bassett-Lowke "Little Giant" 15ins. G locos and the railways on which they ran. Rail Romances. Chester. 2003. P15.

<sup>103</sup> Wilson, Peter, *The Dreamland Miniature Railway*. Miniature Railway Magazine. Autumn 2011. P34.



### Chapter 3. Technology in Relation to SMRs.

#### In what ways did SMRs benefit from the development of the miniature steam locomotive?

The technology for full size railways had been established at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the technology for miniature railways had been extant, certainly from the mid 1870s but the commercial desire to utilize such knowledge was not there until the 1890s, with the arrival of Timothy Cagney in America and B-L in the UK. Before that, the building of miniature steam locomotives was in the hands of small precision watchmakers such as Newton's, companies such as Carsons and a handful of model dockyards.<sup>104</sup> As their name suggests they produced models and fittings of ships of the period, initially for The Admiralty but then branching out to cater for the public. They expanded into steam ships, stationary engines and locomotives; firms such as the Clyde Model Dockyard and especially Stevens's Model Dockyard in London offered ready-made steam engines and locomotives in kit form and un-machined castings.<sup>105</sup> However, these were never bigger than about 5"G. (see 10) and really were designed as toys for scenic garden railways, definitely not for heavy commercial work.<sup>106</sup> At the time, steam toys ran on low steam pressure, so were unsuited for any form of commercial use.<sup>107</sup>



10: An illustration from the 1874 Stevens's Handibook, showing a suburban villa with a large garden railway of 5"G. Impressive but not suitable for a commercial railway.

The standard gauge for railways in the UK is 4' 8 1/2" anything smaller than this is can be described as narrow gauge.<sup>108</sup> The earliest *commercial* miniature railways in Britain used 15"G as this was deemed the most stable as determined by Sir Arthur Heywood.<sup>109</sup> As early as 1874 he had been experimenting with small gauge railways to determine the smallest practical gauge; finding that 9"G was satisfactory, providing that the passengers remained stationary but of course this could not be relied upon!<sup>110</sup> By trial and error he determined that 15"G was the smallest practical gauge for commercial operation, building an extensive 15"G layout at his home at Duffield Bank. This could not be considered a pleasure line as it was built to transport coal and materials around the estate.

Whilst Heywood was establishing his minimum gauge of 15 inches, McGarigles in America had started with the smaller 9" G, but under the influence of Timothy Cagney

<sup>104</sup> Bassett-Lowke, Janet, *Wehnman Bassett-Lowke: A memoir of his life and achievements 1877-1953*. Rail Romances. Chester. 1999. P11.

<sup>105</sup> Stevens's Model Dockyard Handibook. 1874 Facsimile reprint. Rooks 1995.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Small gauge locomotives were considered either as low or high pressure. The *toy* locomotive is illustrated by Mamod steam engines of today utilizing low pressure, approximately one bar. They were made from thin brass, soft soldered and fired by methylated sprits. High pressure locomotives, which would be needed to run an SMR, required fully riveted boilers (later silver soldered) running at over 6 bar and coal fired. These required regular maintenance and insurance against explosion.

<sup>108</sup> The transition from narrow gauge to miniature gauge can be somewhat vague but anything under 21"G can be accepted as being miniature.

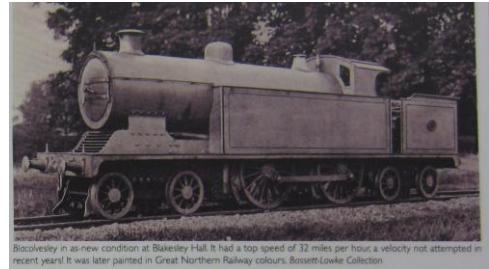
<sup>109</sup> Mosely, David & Van Zeller, Peter, *15inch gauge railways: their history, equipment and operation*. Davis & Charles. Newton Abbott. 1986. P4.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. P5.

soon were providing a series of locomotives, including 15" G, the largest being 22" G., four of which were built for the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair.<sup>111</sup> By 1899, Cagney/McGarigles had developed one design of locomotive based on the New York and Central 4-4-0 No.999 and were using the same basic design for all their gauges. When B-L started to manufacture locomotives, he concentrated on 15" G, thus perpetuating the format of 15" as the standard Gauge.<sup>112</sup>

In 1905, Henry Greenly designed the locomotive that was to prove successful over a number of years and at numerous places. Known as *Little Giant*, although not based on a specific prototype it bore a striking resemblance to the new Atlantic 4-4-2 locomotives then appearing on the railways. The locomotive was designed for ease of maintenance with robust construction of bearings etc. It was the locomotive that changed the face of miniature railways.

*Little Giant* was the result of a number of years of experimentation with large scale commercial locomotives starting with Sir Arthur Haywood. Until the arrival of *Little Giant*, the development of large scale locomotives was done



**11: Blacovesly, the pioneering diesel powered steam outline locomotive built by B-L in 1909. This design was not developed any further.**



**12: A powerful battery powered locomotive built by Maxitrak for commercial use. Contrast this with Blacovesly (10) and Ian Allan's Meteor (25). (Courtesy Maxitrak Ltd.)**

on an amateur basis, there being no real market for the product. It needed the intervention of an entrepreneurial spirit to utilize these developments and put them in a commercial setting. It was an important development as it allowed owners, who did not have access to a workshop to operate a miniature railway, such as that at Southport.

Customers could buy a complete layout from B-L, very much as a family would have bought a model train-set. Track-work and coaches all could be supplied as a turnkey project. A *Little Giant* cost £323 and the standard coaches £21 each.<sup>113</sup>

The one continual disadvantage of using steam traction is the ever increasing cost of maintenance and repair, eventually crippling the finances of the line. When SMRs first came on the scene there was no alternative but as time went on developments in electric and diesel traction meant that there were viable alternatives.

<sup>111</sup> Terry, Jeff, *Lineside Legacy*. 2002 [www.steamlocomotive.info](http://www.steamlocomotive.info). Carstens Publications. Accessed March 2012.

<sup>112</sup> By the 1970s technology in boiler design<sup>112</sup>, had advanced and it became possible to use smaller gauges such as 7 1/4" G as found at Weston-Super-Mare. Such smaller gauges have the advantage that they do not require the same scale of engineering equipment as the larger gauges and could be built virtually single handed such as the Eastbourne Miniature Railway, built by Mike Wade.<sup>112</sup> Over the years the gauges have polarized into possibly four; the smallest being 7 1/4" G, the largest being 15" G and 21" G and possibly the most common being 10 1/4" G.

<sup>113</sup> Butterell, R., & Milner, J. "*Little Giant*" story: *The story of the Bassett-Lowke "Little Giant" 15ins. G locos and the railways on which they ran*. Rail Romances. Chester. 2003. P18.

In 1909 B-L constructed Blacolvesly, (see 11) using frames and running gear from a Little Giant, it was the first example of a hybrid steam outline diesel powered locomotive; he did not capitalize on such an innovative design, doggedly keeping to steam locomotives and consequently was left behind when a later generation of SMRs began to use them.

With the introduction of diesel locomotives on mainline railways from the 1950s there was an opportunity to produce miniature diesel locomotives that copied these designs. They were the glamour locomotives of British Railways, such locomotives as Deltic could be copied in miniature without having to copy a steam outline.

Electric traction had the disadvantage of using batteries that required charging. However, in the 1960s the firm of Triang developed and marketed a small electric “train set” based on the then new Beyer Peacock Hymek diesel hydraulic locomotive and could be used commercially or as a garden railway. Such a set is illustrated in 25, a far cry from the spectacle in 1. Ian Allan developed the Meteor, giving no pretence at copying any full size prototype (see 21) but did allow an operator to buy a locomotive at a reasonable price. With the available technology diesel, electric and various combinations could be produced in gauges as small as 5”G. A number of firms, such as Maxitrak<sup>114</sup> were established to produce such locomotives and provide project management and infrastructure for a complete railway.

We have seen how the technology required for SMR continually developed over the life of the SMR, adapting to financial and social needs. Initially what was needed was the impetus to adapt this technology to the SMR culture and spectacle. An entrepreneur with an insight into the possible benefits in investing in such technology was needed.

## **Chapter 4**

## **Environment**

### **a. What factors lead to the opening and subsequent development of the first SMR in Blackpool?**

Having made the necessary preliminary steps, in April 1905, the company actually opened their first venture. This was not a Seaside Miniature Railway but a temporary miniature railway at Abingdon Park, St. Albans, but they were to discover that the opening of a miniature railway was not always met with universal approval. They were novel and as with their full size counterparts when they first arrived, their social effects were not known and they were not without their critics and the general feeling towards these early railways can be assessed by the comments made by the local St. Albans council.

*“...there has been a good deal of talk whether we are to allow a **toy railway** (my emphasis)....”* There was a distinct feeling that such a toy should not be allowed to disrupt the quiet of the park.<sup>115</sup> B-L had to carefully negotiate with such councils as ultimately they could close down any enterprise that did not meet their criteria;

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<sup>114</sup> Maxitrak produced SMRs from 71/4”G -36”G with battery electric or diesel powered locomotives. They provide a complete installation service or their products. [www.maxitrak.co.uk](http://www.maxitrak.co.uk).

<sup>115</sup> Abingdon Park was not a fairground but a traditional leisure park where people went for quiet relaxation; the fairgrounds, which catered for thrills and amusement, which would have been more suited to an MR. had not yet opened.

permission was not granted for the railway to run within the grounds but was able to run outside the park's boundary.<sup>116</sup>

At that time, surprisingly, the MRCo.GB still had no rolling stock or infrastructure of its own so a second hand railway, utilizing a tank engine, *Nipper*, was used, which had been designed by Greenly but built by Flooks & Co; this had been built to the smaller 10 1/4" G. which was not ideal but there was no alternative. The line was a commercial success, which Bassett-Lowke later transferred to a permanent site at Sutton Park, a pleasure park in Sutton Coldfield, a popular spot for residents of Birmingham.

Bassett-Lowke had found out that miniature railways were a good investment but leisure parks may not welcome such a miniature railway due to the disruptive effects to the general peace and ambience caused by the noise, smoke and general activities that accompany a miniature railway. It would be necessary to find an alternative type of venue, not just another leisure park. Seaside resorts had established themselves as places of spectacle where people could enjoy themselves out of their normal environment. Pleasure Beach Fairground, Blackpool, was a recent attraction running on the lines of New York's Coney Island where Cagneys had successfully provided equipment for a number of SMRs. It would be unlikely that there would be any such objections regarding noise and disruption caused by an SMR. Such a venue would be an ideal venue to promote the first major SMR.



*13: The first SMR at Blackpool's South Shore Pleasure Beach c1905. Packed with visitors of all ages with a B-L Little Giant with a full head of steam. This shows the track laid directly on the sand with the consequences of "sand Troubles".*

As the line was to be purely for pleasure with no obvious commercial use it would be advantageous to site it as close to as many other attractions as possible. It was not possible to run the line along the promenade as from 1886 onwards there had been a regular tram service; a similar situation had occurred at Brighton with the Volk's railway preventing the development of an SMR.

The company still had neither suitable: infrastructure, locomotives or rolling stock for such a venture. The stock for Abingdon Park was second hand, smaller gauge and was earmarked for another venture. It is somewhat surprising that, having started the company to promote SMRs they had not actually any suitable infrastructure (track, buildings etc.) or stock locomotives & carriages etc.).

The situation was rectified when Greenly set about designing a suitable locomotive, *Little Giant* and travelled to Blackpool to survey the line. In the meantime the first *Little Giant* was being constructed in the workshops of B-L and was completed in less than eight weeks from the first designs to trial steaming; a remarkable achievement.

The track and buildings were not built by B-L but subcontracted to the firm of Trener and transported to South Shore. It has been written that the Blackpool line had

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<sup>116</sup> Butterell, Robin, & Milner, John, "*Little Giant*" story: *The story of the Bassett-Lowke "Little Giant" 15ins. G locos and the railways on which they ran.* Rail Romances. Chester. 2003, p15.

been transported lock stock and barrel from the Eaton Hall estate, which was erroneous. This misconception came about because *Little Giant* had come to Blackpool from Northampton via Eaton Hall, where it had undergone extensive running-in trials.<sup>117</sup>

When the line opened in 1905, it was 433 yards long, oval in shape and transported visitors to and from the Gypsy encampment from a station known as Gypsyville, giving acknowledgement to the Romany connection with the fairground trade



14: Just like the real thing only for a miniature railway.

The line played its part in promoting the fairground spectacle, although it was a miniature pleasure line it was run like a full size railway; Gypsyville station was paved with a separate booking office employing a suitably dressed stationmaster, guard, two engine drivers and two maintenance workers and issued proper railway style tickets. Like the rest of the attractions, it was miraculously laid directly on the

sand. The Little Giant Railway was the first SMR in Britain so it is worthwhile discussing the line in some detail. It carried 9000 visitors in its first week of operation and on a good day, there were possibly 120 circuits completed.<sup>118</sup> The numbers carried were not as great as other attractions such as the scenic railway, however, over the season it carried 33,000 holidaymakers, who not only visited Blackpool but also were prepared to pay the 2d.<sup>119</sup> fare.<sup>120</sup>

By 1909, the SMR had an income of £376 with operating costs of £289 (coal, maintenance, staff etc.) so it managed a small profit of £89. Although making a modest profit, in 1909 it was removed and transferred to premises at the newly opened Halifax Zoo. The 1910 directors report gave the reasons for not renewing the lease at Blackpool, as wet and stormy weather and the rather vague term “*sand troubles*” causing mounting maintenance bills.<sup>121</sup>

The B-L/Henry Greenly partnership made the initial SMR breakthrough with the opening of Blackpool’s Little Giant Railway during the 1905 season but it closed in 1909 before other SMRs opened in 1911. (Rhyl and Southport) When these SMRs became established there was a steady increase in their numbers.<sup>122</sup>

## **b. What was the role of the entrepreneur in the subsequent development of the SMR culture?**

<sup>117</sup> Mosely, D. & Van Zeller, Peter, *15inch gauge railways: their history, equipment and operation*. David & Charles. Newton Abbott. 1986. Pp6-11.

<sup>118</sup> Butterell, R., & Milner, John, “*Little Giant*” story: *The story of the Bassett-Lowke “Little Giant” 15ins. G locos and the railways on which they ran*. Rail Romances. Chester. 2003. P27.

<sup>119</sup> These are old imperial costs. There were 240d in a pound so 2d was less than 1p. (Not adjusted for inflation).

<sup>120</sup> There is some confusion regarding the cost of the ride; variously recorded as 2d. or 3d. a passenger. This may seem trivial but it would reflect in the numbers of passengers carried to make the final profit. The railway ran a first and second-class service, emulating a full size railway, which would account for the two figures.<sup>120</sup> The ticket in 14, clearly indicates a first class ticket.

<sup>121</sup> Butterell, R., & Milner, John, “*Little Giant*” story: *The story of the Bassett-Lowke “Little Giant” 15ins. G locos and the railways on which they ran*. Rail Romances. Chester. 2003. P27.

<sup>122</sup> See appendix 1 for the number of SMRs and the dates opened.

## 1 Those associated with B-L.

B-L was to build and oversee other SMRs at Rhyl, (1911), Ravenglass & Eskdale (1915) and Fairbourne (1916). The latter two were similar in that they were built on an existing narrow gauge track and they all shared a similar fate in that within a few years of opening control of the lines passed from B-L. There are no adequate explanations for this; Peter Van Zeller suggested that B-L only took a short three year lease at Ravenglass so clearly did not intend to stay long.<sup>123</sup> Ronal Fuller and Janet B-L in their works do not give any reasons at all. One possible explanation was that in 1912 B-L changed the name of his company to Narrow Gauge Railways Ltd (NGR Ltd.) after the original company went into voluntary liquidation. This was a subtle change in name but indicated a possible change in direction of B-L away from the traditional SMR to narrow gauge. It did not, however, herald the immediate disappearance of B-L from the SMR scene.

### Rhyl and Margate SMR

Rhyl had steadily developed as a seaside resort since the arrival of the railways in 1848 and the migration of Romany Gypsy families to the area bringing fun fairs with them. The Marine Lake, owned by the council, near the promenade, had been open since 1895 and had become well established and was popular for bathing and recreation. At this time the area could not be considered a spectacle; this was not achieved until the arrival of the fairground, built by Rhyl Amusements.

Towards the end of 1910 Greenly travelled to Rhyl to survey The Marine Lake for a possible SMR and the MRCo.GB was granted a lease in March 1911. The line opened in May of that year and was initially very successful. Despite the success of the line, in 1912 the line was sold to Rhyl Amusements Ltd. and then became part of the fairground spectacle.<sup>124</sup>



*16: Margate Dreamland SMR showing the popularity of such an attraction.*

fairground) flourished.<sup>125</sup>

The development of The Marine Lake showed the positive symbiotic relationship between the fairground spectacle and increased trade for the SMR. This increase in trade enabled Barnes to open his own engineering company which would in turn benefit the SMR. With the assistance of the parent company, Barnes founded an engineering company, Albert Barnes & Co. based at Albion Works, constructing fairground rides for

<sup>123</sup> Correspondence with Peter Van Zeller, archivist to the R&ER. March 2012.

<sup>124</sup> See 1. A photograph of the Rhyl SMR and associated fairground; a spectacle in the truest sense.

<sup>125</sup> All information regarding Rhyl SMR and the associated fairground was from [www.rhylminiaturerailway.co.uk](http://www.rhylminiaturerailway.co.uk). Accessed throughout the study. Although written by the owners of the SMR and is basically historically correct.

the amusement industry and importantly for the SMR, built 6 locomotives under the direction of Henry Greenly. Two locomotives were earmarked for Rhyl but the others were built speculatively, with no potential buyer. As with Cagney and B-L before him Barnes had sought work for his workshops and locomotives.

He found a use for one of the displaced Rhyl locomotives at Margate Dreamland, which had just opened and was looking for attractions. Under the direction of Barnes, Henry Greenly surveyed, designed and built an SMR between May and June 1920, thus we have the beginnings of a small SMR with Barnes at the head.

This was an almost exact copy of the development at Blackpool with Barnes looking for an established spectacle where he could use his locomotives. This was on a typical lease basis, with Barnes supplying the hardware in the shape of track-work and his redundant B-L locomotive. The line was a success, on peak days carrying upwards of 1000 visitors an hour according to the Model Engineer and Electrician magazine.<sup>126</sup> However, despite this success, by 1923 Barnes had sold his stake to the Dreamland owners; thus the line was no longer under the control of an individual but a company.

During the heyday of the British seaside, the line operated successfully but with the downturn in the seaside tourist trade by the 1970s Dreamland was beginning to struggle financially and was taken over by Associated Leisure Ltd.. The line was run by a concession and suffered from lack of investment and the railway closed in 1980 after 60 years of continuous operation; illustrating that such a line could be a practical proposition. However, it may not have been always profitable and the line was probably subsidized by other more successful ventures.<sup>127</sup> The resort and associated fairground had lost its spectacle which was vividly illustrated in Lindsay Anderson's film *Oh Dreamland*<sup>128</sup> which showed Margate as a run-down leviathan from a different era.

It was sold to Les Hughes, a business man from Rhyl, who had taken over as the benefactor of Rhyl SMR, and the infrastructure was returned to Rhyl, where it had come from in the first instance. Dreamland SMR had been a success under the direction of an enthusiastic entrepreneur but when that association was broken it was very much dependant on the fortunes of the parent company, which in turn was very much linked to the fortunes of the resort itself.

An almost similar fate had almost overtaken Rhyl SMR, when, during Barnes' management, Rhyl Amusements had been taken over by the conglomerate, Trust House Forte leisure Ltd.. They became embroiled with the local council over the length of a new lease, which could not be resolved. Consequently the Marine parked was stripped



*17: Dreamland was not the only SMR in Margate. In an undated photo this shows an SMR running along the pier. Not much of a spectacle here, with few passengers.(Source unknown.)*

<sup>126</sup> Wilson, Peter, *The Dreamland Miniature Railway*. Miniature Railway Magazine. Autumn 2011. P36.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid. Pp34-44.

<sup>128</sup> Anderson, Lindsay, *O Dreamland*. Free Cinema Films. 1953.

of its attractions, including the SMR and handed back to the council in 1969. This was the end of the Rhyl SMR through the actions of other parties.

However, after a hiatus when there was no SMR, in 1977 there was a general move to improve Rhyl and the line was to be reopened and operated on a concessionary basis, which in 1980 was assigned to a local businessman, Les Hughes, who had bought the Margate SMR when that had become available.<sup>129</sup> Les Hughes then became instrumental in reviving the fortunes of the Rhyl SMR and from 1994-2000 he ran the line along with a preservation group under the banner of the Rhyl Steam Preservation Society, which took over complete running of the line in 2001 and achieved Museum Status in 2010.

Rhyl and Margate SMRs are prime examples of SMRs that had been run directly by enthusiastic individuals to the direct benefit of the line. However, when corporate interests took over the parent fairground company and compounded by a general run down in the resort spectacle the SMRs suffered accordingly.

### **Fairbourne Railway.**

The Fairbourne Railway was a speculative venture by B-L under the banner of the NGR Co.. Fairbourne is on the West Wales coast in a somewhat isolated position but since the opening of the Cambrian Railway in 1865 there had been plans to develop a seaside resort on the banks of the Mawddach estuary and to this end a Cardiff entrepreneur, Solomon Andrews built: brickworks, sea wall, promenade and a row of terraced houses over-looking the estuary. He also built a tramway running along the promenade to transport visitors and the necessary building materials from a local quarry to the ferry landing at Penrhyn point.<sup>130</sup> However, this was not the site of the future Fairbourne SMR.

In 1896 Sir Arthur McDougall (of self raising flour fame) also started to develop the area in and around the village of Fairbourne. McDougall's contractors built another tramway from the brickworks to the various developmental sites and ultimately extended it along the dunes towards the ferry. It was later converted to horse power and passenger carrying and it was this line that was the basis the future SMR. In 1912 the whole estate was sold to Sir Peter Peacock.

In 1916 the NGC GB re-laid the track to 15" G.<sup>131</sup> using Little Giant locomotives. As the line connected the village, railway station to the ferry stage it had a secondary social use of transporting passengers to and from the ferry.

Although a ready-made track-way is an ideal start for any future railway it is a little surprising that B-L chose Fairbourne as much of the line was laid directly on the sand, (see 18) bearing in mind the problems that sand had caused at Blackpool.

At that time Fairbourne could not be considered a resort and did not possess a fairground. It was a



*18: The track at Fairbourne showing the problems of construction the line on sand. A similar situation as Blackpool. (Source unknown.)*

<sup>129</sup> See p54 for details.

<sup>130</sup> Nabarro, Gerald, *Locomotive and railway preservation in Great Britain*. Routledge and Keegan Paul. London 1972. P187.

<sup>131</sup> Hyde, Bill, *Return to the Ferry*. [www.return2ferry.co.uk](http://www.return2ferry.co.uk). Accessed April 25<sup>th</sup>. 2012.



speculative venture on two accounts. Firstly as there was little traffic it was hoped that the line would attract customers by its presence. Secondly if the area developed then the line would be handily placed to benefit from such expansion.

The line passed out of B-L's ownership and had several owners during the interwar periods including some of the local ferrymen. It is known that in 1927 the line was leased to Sir Peter Peacock<sup>132</sup> when the line settled down to a decade of uneventful running. However, despite the best efforts of all parties the line closed in 1940; this was due to a combination of factors, the retirement of the general manager, locomotive failures and the commandeering of the area by the military.<sup>133</sup>

The post war years are the most interesting as after the war the line was in a poor state with much of the line completely derelict but in 1947 it was reopened by a consortium of Midland businessmen lead by John Wilkinson, this is a similar situation to Rhyl when it too was rescued by local businessmen. This led to an Indian summer in the 1960s and early 1970s when at its peak some 70,000 passengers were carried annually. However, with the advent of cheap foreign holidays there started a steady decline in patronage. The Fairbourne Railway also suffered because of its position in relation to other narrow gauge lines such as the Tallylyn and Vale of Rheidol. Although this put the Fairbourne Railway in the thick of it so to speak it also had to deal with intense competition from far more glamorous lines, which could only be detrimental to visitor numbers.

The line was sold to the Ellerton family in 1984, when once again major redevelopment took place especially re-gauging to 121/4" G. The line was subsidized by the family and in 1990 its finances were such that they were able to construct their own locomotives. However, the line was still in decline and was once again sold in 1990 and again in 1995 to Professor Atkinson.

Since then there has been further major investment in infrastructure and improvements to maintain the line. The Atkinson family took neither salary nor dividends from the line and covered annual losses in an effort to keep the line running. (Contrast with Llewellyn's Railway, p55) In 2009, after the death of its benefactor the railway became a charitable trust "*The North Wales Coast Light Railway Ltd.*". Unfortunately there was now no one who could cover the annual losses of the railway so The Fairbourne Preservation Society was set up to help fundraising activities under the banner of the somewhat ominously named "Crisis Fund".<sup>134</sup>

Fairbourne is different from most SMRs in that it was built in an attempt to generate a spectacle and to start a resort/leisure culture in the area but was never directly involved with a seaside spectacle as none developed in Fairbourne. Consequently there was never an associated spectacle to draw people to the area in sufficient numbers to make the line economically viable.

The line has been kept going by a series enthusiastic entrepreneurs, who out of love of the line itself have been willing to inject money into the scheme. On the death of the last

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<sup>132</sup> Nabarro, Gerald, *Locomotive and railway preservation in Great Britain*. Routledge and Keegan Paul. London 1972. P189.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid. P189.

<sup>134</sup> [www.fairbournerrailway.com/crisis-fund](http://www.fairbournerrailway.com/crisis-fund). Assessed Jan. 2012.

benefactor a crisis developed which has only been superficially dealt with by the formation of a preservation society. As a new entrepreneur has not come forward the long term future of the line is in doubt.

### **Ravenglass & Eskdale Railway.**

The original narrow gauge railway was opened on May 24th. 1875 and was used to transport iron ore from the hinterland to the coast at Ravenglass. In early 1915, Proctor Mitchell, of the NGR GB visited the line to assess its worth as a testing ground for their locomotives.<sup>135</sup> He and Henry Greenly agreed that it was suitable and they acquired the track bed and converted it to their standard 15”G and it was ready to open in the summer of 1915. This was reported in the August 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the Manchester Guardian, stating that the well known model making firm of B-L had taken a lease on the line. This was great news for the local people and property owners who had bought property next to the line.<sup>136</sup>

Initially B-L only took out a short three year renewable lease on the line, which is a little surprising considering the set-up and running costs of such a line.<sup>137</sup> B-L secured the lease against other interested parties, namely Count Zborowski and Capt. Howey, both wealthy individuals who were looking to set up and run their own private miniature railway.



*19: R&ER c1919 showing a hive of activity, with a double headed train. (Source unknown.)*

NGR GB was wound up in 1924 and subsequently relinquished control of the line and it was taken over by an individual, Sir Aubrey Brocklebank, of the nearby Iron hall. He used his money to run the line and was such an enthusiast that he had a branch line to his house surveyed and opened the granite quarries to give the line a commercial footing once again.<sup>138</sup>

After WW2 the line was sold to the Keswick Granite Company but by 1958 they had decided to concentrate on the Granite side of the business completely and sell off the railway and that meant that the line would have to survive solely on passenger receipts and 40,000 per year were not enough to keep the line going.<sup>139</sup>

The Daily Telegraph posted an advert for the sale in 1958 at the same time quoting the local villages who wanted to form a limited company with villages as shareholders in association with the local parish council, to run and maintain the line.<sup>140</sup>

The advertisement stated...”*For sale as a going concern by private treaty, the Ravenglass & Eskdale Miniature Railway...inclusive price £22,500*”.<sup>141</sup> There were no takers.

<sup>135</sup> Nabarro, Gerald, *Locomotive and Railway Preservation in Great Britain*. Routeledge and Keegan Paul. London 1972. P172.

<sup>136</sup> *Ravenglass and Eskdale railway to be reopened*. The Manchester Guardian; Aug.4<sup>th</sup> 1915.

<sup>137</sup> Correspondence with Peter Von Zeller, archivist to the R&E Railway. April 2012.

<sup>138</sup> Nabarro, Gerald., *Locomotive and Railway Preservation in Great Britain*. Routeledge and Keegan Paul. London 1972. P172.

<sup>139</sup> *Holiday Railway for Sale at £22.500: Threat to Village’s pride*. The Guardian; Oct.17, 1958.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid*.

After this, once again it was the enthusiast that took control of the situation in the form of the R&E Railway Preservation Society. It was reported in the Guardian on August 11th 1960 that a preservation society was formed to negotiate with the Keswick Granite Company, whose secretary, Mr. Bridge, expressing that there was considerable financial support forthcoming from all over Britain.<sup>142</sup>

A week later The Guardian then reported that that the council would act as trustees for any donations and that there would be a combined effort to purchase the line by the Preservation Society and a certain Mr. Green, a Sussex pathologist.<sup>143</sup> Thus there was obviously considerable interest in the line and once again spearheaded by a professional.

On September 7<sup>th</sup> 1960 the line was sold to the society for £12,000, however, the situation was not as simple as first seems. The society could not raise sufficient funds and it was only with the last minute intervention of two wealthy enthusiasts that saved the line. They were a Midland stockbroker, Colin Gilbert and the MP, Sir Wavel Wakefield. The latter already had interests in the area, operating a steamer company in the Lake District. It was their money and enthusiasm that really saved the line.<sup>144</sup>

Gilbert became the managing director and on his death in 1968 the Wakefield family took complete control which is the case today. The line was refurbished with a continuing series of developments such that now the line carries upwards of 250,000 passengers a year and has become one of the most well known miniature railways.

The R&E was associated with neither leisure culture nor resort spectacle, very much like the Fairbourne SMR. There is no doubt that the line was built as a freight line and the carriage of passengers was of a secondary nature. However, once the source of freight diminished it was left supported only by passenger receipts.

It would have closed but for the timely intervention of the individual entrepreneur and in recent years the line has thrived. This is partly due to the very nature of the line being supported by the public on the grounds that it is there; a unique attraction in the area, standing on its own merits.

Once again this is a striking example of the individual contribution to the preservation of the SMR. It is not only with money but with the necessary enthusiasm to follow the initial purchase to ensure its continuing success.

## **2. Those not associated with B-L.**

### **Southport SMR**

Southport SMR was a contemporary of Rhyl, opening in the same year, May 1911<sup>145</sup> and has the distinction of being the longest continuous operating miniature railway in Britain. The origins, running and ultimate fate of this line were totally dependent on

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<sup>141</sup> Daily telegraph, 4<sup>th</sup>. Sept. 1953. Quoted in Nabarro, G., *Locomotive and Railway Preservation in Great Britain*. Routeledge and Keegan Paul. London 1972. P179.

<sup>142</sup> *Saving Miniature Railway: Preservation Society formed*. The Guardian; Aug. 11, 1960.

<sup>143</sup> *Joining forces for miniature line*. The Guardian; Aug. 18, 1960.

<sup>144</sup> Daily telegraph, 4<sup>th</sup>. Sept. 1953. Quoted in Nabarro, G., *Locomotive and Railway Preservation in Great Britain*. Routeledge and Keegan Paul. London 1972. P179.

<sup>145</sup> Which was before the opening of the adjacent Pleasure Beach Fairground in May 1913. There was however, a pleasure fair before the turn of the century. Mirroring Rhyl, the line was not associated with a spectacle until after it had been built, however, the ground work for such a spectacle was well under way.

individual enterprise and involvement. The line took advantage of the turn-key operations provided by B-L; their equipment was used which included two B-L, *Little Giant* locomotives, but the line was not run by B-L.



20: *Llewellyn's Miniature Railway at Southport soon after opening showing a B-L Little Giant locomotive. (Courtesy Rails to the Sand exhibition).*

Its genesis lies firmly with private, individual, enterprise at its heart, when a then well known, Southport dentist, Dr. Ladmore<sup>146</sup> put up the money for the railway. The owner must have had some wealth as the line used two B-L *Little Giants*, which would have cost nearly £700 plus the cost of coaches, infrastructure etc..

He provided the money and the line was operated by Griffin Vaughn Llewellyn, a local postman, after whom the railway was initially named. The line suffered from the common fate of diminishing revenues and increasing costs but the

steadily increasing popularity of Southport as a seaside resort ensured that there was a steady flow of visitors keeping the railway busy. However, clearly the situation came to a head in 1933 when the line went bankrupt with debts of nearly £4000. This could have been due to a certain amount of mismanagement on the part of Llewellyn. He admitted a basic salary of £156 but to also having taken twice that amount from the company. Clearly this was an unsustainable drain on the company's finances and the examiner suggested that the company had been run solely for his own benefit,<sup>147</sup> which he totally denied.

Many SMRs would be considered as *one man band operations*. In his examination during bankruptcy proceedings in 1933, G. V. Llewellyn of the Southport Miniature Railway admitted that: "*he was virtually the company*".<sup>148</sup>

The company was put into liquidation with a total loss to creditors of some £5000.<sup>149</sup> Southport Council were very anxious to continue with an SMR as in December 1933 the Southport Parks and Foreshore Committee were applying to borrow £9710 to construct an SMR in Princes Park on the sea front; this clearly was a different venture. It would have been cheaper to buy out the existing SMR, rather than build a completely new one.

Another individual, Leonard Lucas from Hove had tendered to run the line. He would provide the locomotives and run the line for 15 years, on payment of "*sums equal to*

<sup>146</sup> Unfortunately I have been unable to find any information about Dr. Ladmore; the General Dental Council has no records about him. This would be because he was working before the 1926 dentists Act that required all dentists to be registered. However, his involvement is part of the long association of professional people, such as the clergy and the medical profession, with miniature and model railways.

<sup>147</sup> See page p37 regarding Cagneys business practices.

<sup>148</sup> *Miniature Railway's Failure*. The Manchester Guardian, Nov. 22, 1933.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

50% of the gross annual receipts, with a minimum payment of £1200 per annum”<sup>150</sup> In all probability the Llewellyn line would have been moved to the new site.

This is an interesting quote as it gives some idea of the money involved in setting up an SMR; nearly £10000 to construct the basic line. This did not include the cost of locomotives and rolling stock. Two little Giants would have cost another £1000. These were quite considerable sums for the time, especially when we consider it was the time of a general depression.<sup>151</sup> It would appear that an SMR was considered a financial secure venture otherwise the council would not have applied for such a sum.

The line, however, was never built and Llewellyn’s line was bought by Harry Barlow in 1934, who would own the line until 1968. The similarity between Rhyl and Blackpool becomes more apparent as Harry Barlow owned an engineering works that was capable of constructing and maintaining miniature locomotives, thus reducing costs and providing suitable work. Steam locomotives were retained until 1948 when they were replaced by steam outline diesel locomotives that were built in Harry Barlow’s workshops. They are still in operation today; a testament to the longevity of some of these locomotives.

Harry Barlow also used his workshops to build a new tram for the Southport Pier Railway when it was reopened in 1950. The possession of a suitably equipped workshop was a distinct advantage when it came to running an SMR.

In 1968 the line was bought by John Spencer until it was bought by its present owner, Don Clark in 2002 for £225,000. This sum does not include the land but included the locomotives and rolling stock and the rather elusive phrase goodwill. That is the value of the business itself which is usually calculated on the basis of the year’s revenues.

In conversation with Don Clark, the reason given for buying the railway was that he had a mechanical background in aviation and was a keen model engineer. He had money available by way of a gratuity from his previous employer and used this to buy the railway.

The line is leased from the local council who have suggested that the line be extended around a nearby lake. However, the funds for such an expansion are not available and complying<sup>152</sup> with the present day health and safety rules (fencing etc.) would pose a considerable extra financial burden on the line.

The line is advertised as the *longest continually operating miniature railway*, although this may not be strictly correct it does add marketing value to the line. The line had gone into administration at the end of the 1933 season and was open for the 1934 season so theoretically it continued running but there was a definite hiatus during the winter of 1933/34 so the claim to be the longest continuously operating SMR has to be called into doubt. The present owner, Don Clarke could not shed any light on the subject.<sup>153</sup> It is not known what will happen to the line when he retires, Don Clark would not say.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> *Miniature Railway for Southport?* Manchester Guardian. Dec30, 1933.

<sup>151</sup> Where did the money come from? The answer may partly lie in the government’s attempts to boost employment and industry in parts of the country, especially the north. It started in 1920, with the Unemployment Grants committee, which was set up to approve public works apart from roads or housing. However, the main impetus was the 1934 Special Areas Act. This allocated £2million pounds to local authorities for projects to boost unemployment.

<sup>152</sup> Interview with Don Clark, owner of Lakeside Miniature Railway. Jan 2012.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

The Lakeside Railway (Southport), from the start to the present has continually relied on the efforts and finances of the entrepreneur to keep the line running; although an individual almost brought it to the point of closure! This shows a continuous link with individuals rather than a corporation, council or private company. One of the principal owners, Harry Barlow not only provided motive power for the railway but also to a number of other railways<sup>155</sup> and was instrumental in the reopening of the Southport Pier Railway. In its simplest form the line has been kept going by enthusiasts.

### **Billy Butlin.**

Billy Butlin has always been associated with the development of the seaside holiday camp, his background was that of a showman and his first commercial ventures were running fairgrounds in seaside resorts. He also had the concession for all of the amusements in the Empire Exhibition at Glasgow in 1938 that included an impressive miniature railway. Butlin was a showman and like Tilyou knew what the public wanted; that was spectacle and over the coming decades that is what he provided in his holiday camps.



*21: A true spectacle of an SMR provided by Butlin's at one of their holiday camps.*

In 7 out of 9 camps Butlin installed a miniature railway, which were to 21" G and powered by hybrid diesel/ steam outline locomotives, built by Hudswell Clarke, the suppliers of Blackpool and North Bay SMRs.<sup>156</sup> There is no doubt that Butlin would have been aware of these SMRs and the reasons behind using these locomotives. They were run entirely for pleasure except at Pwhelli, North Wales, which was used to ferry holidaymaker from the camp to the beach.

The first holiday camp was opened at Skegness in 1936; one of the features of the camps was the all inclusive package and there were no extra costs. As the attractions were totally within the confines of the camps it is difficult to assess their impact on the local tourist trade.

One exception was at Clacton, where initially the fairground was outside the camp and open to the public. It is worth describing as it gives an insight into the popularity of SMRs.

The Clacton Times and Gazette describes the line quite enthusiastically. It opened on Sat. May 27th 1939, the paper going on to say, "a wonderful miniature railway" and on Sat. June 3<sup>rd</sup>. goes on to say... "a popular feature was the miniature railway which carried more than 3000 passengers on Monday."<sup>157</sup> The line closed in 1954<sup>158</sup> and was subsequently re-opened within the confines of the camp, which was completely closed in 1985.

<sup>155</sup> Scott, Peter. *The History of Butlin's Railways: Minor Railways Histories*. P69.

<sup>156</sup> Scott, Peter. *A History of Butlin's Railways*. Minor Railways History-No2. 2001. P108. SMRs were a lifeline to companies such as Hudswell Clarke during the 1930s depression. They built 9 locomotives for Butlin's alone, enough to keep the works ticking over. This is a similar situation that faced companies such as Barnes and Barlow.

<sup>157</sup> Clacton Times & Gazette; June 3<sup>rd</sup>. 1939, quoted in Scott, P. *A History of Butlin's Railways*. Minor Railways History-No2. 2001.

<sup>158</sup> Scott, Peter, *A History of Butlin's Railways*. Minor Railways History-No2. 2001. P24.

As SMRs were only one of the fairground attractions they did not need to pay their way but they may not have been all that successful as by 1996 they had all been removed. By this time the ownership of the camps had passed out of Billy Butlin's control; firstly to Bourne Leisure Ltd. and then to Rank in 1972. They had become part of a far larger conglomerate whose interests and aims were not necessarily those of Butlin, who had a showman's background and understood the need for spectacle. In latter years the spectacle associated with holiday camps has become somewhat tarnished and the SMR has suffered accordingly.

### **Ian Allan.**

Ian Allan is a well-known entrepreneur within the main-line railway world; starting the famous ABC trainspotting books, Locospotters Society and going on to found a considerable company based around railway matters. He was able to identify a niche market and exploit it; this was exemplified in the start-up of the ABC, locospotters books.<sup>159</sup>

Allan was involved with many projects including the SMR culture when in 1948 he became a partner in the Hastings<sup>160</sup> SMR.<sup>161</sup> It is still thriving today and there have even been suggestions that it should be enlarged and expanded to serve other parts of the town.<sup>162</sup>



*22: The utilitarian Meteor by Ian Allan was to provide the motive power for a number of SMRs. However, its plain appearance already heralds a loss of spectacle.*

In 1968 Allan bought a complete 71/4" G railway for his own use that became known as the Great Cockcrow Railway,<sup>163</sup> which was the spur for a major investment in SMR culture, when, as with B-L, Barnes, (to a certain extent Barlow who already had an engineering workshop) and Cagney before him he set up a company to exploit the market and supply the needs of the railway and other customers; the holding company, Ian Allan (Miniature Supplies) company was incorporated in 1969<sup>164</sup> and promoted the idea of "Rent a Train" where a complete 101/4"G miniature railway could be bought.<sup>165</sup>

The company was not in existence for very long and between the years 1969-1971 its main product was a diesel powered locomotive Meteor,<sup>166</sup> which was used not only on Ian Allan lines but others such as at Buxton and Sandown. Ultimately he was involved

<sup>159</sup> Rooks, Marcus, *Trainspotting*. Essay towards MA, U. of York. 20011. P9.

<sup>160</sup> Not the major RH&DR but a smaller line running along the promenade, which had developed from a line that had been built and run by J E P Howey. It had been originally sited at St. Leonard's on Sea but ran for less than a year due to local opposition, when it was transferred to the seafront at Hastings where it was bought and developed by Ian Allan.

<sup>161</sup> [www.ianallangroup.com](http://www.ianallangroup.com). Accessed May 2012.

<sup>162</sup> "Owner of Hastings Miniature Railway Speaks out Against Extension". [www.hastingsobserver.co.uk](http://www.hastingsobserver.co.uk). Dec 2011. Accessed May 2012.

<sup>163</sup> [www.cockcrow.co.uk](http://www.cockcrow.co.uk). Accessed Jan 2012.

<sup>164</sup> Companies House.

<sup>165</sup> Madigan, Stuart, *The Meteors*. Narrow Gauge No181. Summer 2003. Pp22-23

<sup>166</sup> Meteor was a basic locomotive in 101/4"G. Diesel powered with no pretence as disguising it as a steam locomotive, hardly what one would expect from a spectacle. They could be bought for £1350 ex Shepperton Works. Compare the appearance with the Triang Minic engine in 26.

with 10 different railways, including his own SMRs at Hastings, Bognor Regis (two), Whitley Bay and Prestatyn.<sup>167</sup> At one time Bognor had a total of five SMRs, indicating that although it was a successful place to operate by the mid-1970s only one was operating at Hotham Park.<sup>168</sup>

Whitley Bay is still a popular resort for visitors from the North East of England, possessing a spectacle by way of an extensive fairground with the strange name of Spanish City. The SMR, however, closed in 1985, after about 25yrs of operation showing that an SMR associated with such a spectacle would have had a good chance of success in such a setting.

Allan's background was totally different from that of Butlin as he had no connection with fairgrounds or the resort spectacle. They, however, were both astute businessmen who exploited the market to their advantage. Allan did not engage directly with the resort spectacle, simply keeping to the business of providing and running SMRs, which although run by a holding company were directly as a result of Allan's association with railways.

### **Robin Butterell.**

After Ian Allan, Robin Butterell was possibly one of the most well-known miniature railway commentators, having written and broadcast extensively on the subject, with numerous references to his works within this dissertation. However, writing and being knowledgeable about SMRs is only one aspect; opening and operating SMRs requires a totally different aptitude.

Butterell could be considered an enthusiastic amateur, being attracted to the periphery of the resort spectacle. His interest in miniature railway started after he had read *Liliputbahnen*<sup>169</sup> and was further aroused by a visit to the Fairbourne SMR in 1939, when he came across the locomotives of B-L.<sup>170</sup> However, due to the hiatus caused by The Second World War, it was not until 1948 that he opened his first SMR at Llandudno. This was very much a hands-on affair; he was of

the opinion that he could run an SMR during the summer months, later describing it as “*a labour of love*”.<sup>171</sup> The line was not a success but in 1950 he transferred it to Bridlington, where it was much more successful.<sup>172</sup> His third venture was at Weston Super Mare and is discussed in more depth as it illustrates very well the



*23: Weston SMR, started by Robin Butterell. It is a small 7 1/4" G line running along the front but was not financial viable until another concession was granted.*

<sup>167</sup> See appendix 5 for details of these lines.

<sup>168</sup> [www.hothamparkrailway.co.uk](http://www.hothamparkrailway.co.uk). Accessed May 2012.

<sup>169</sup> Strauss, Walter, *Liliputbahnen*. Kircher. 1938.

<sup>170</sup> Peake, Colin, *Robin Butterell; An Appreciation*. [www.miniaturerailwayworld.com](http://www.miniaturerailwayworld.com). Accessed 16 May 2012.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid .

<sup>172</sup> He sold the line to a local barber who thought that he could run the line during the summer months and cut hair during the summer. This is in contradiction to the information supplied by Croft, who indicates that the line was planned in 1950 but never built. As mentioned some of the information in the book is erroneous and this appears to be one incident. The film, *Miniature Steam Railways*, shows a trip on the line in 1951, which clearly indicates that it had been built.



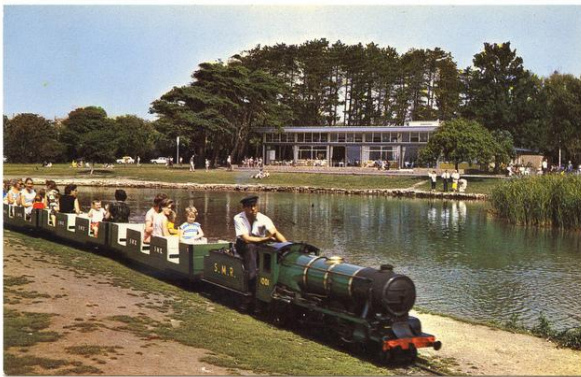
problems of running an SMR. Opening in 1981, it was not financially viable and in the following year it was sold out of Robin Butterell's hands to Peter Webb, who also found it not viable and was taken over by Bob Bullock for the 1983 season.

At this point the situation was discussed with the council and it was agreed that the owners could take over the concession for the adjacent putting green. On the Western Miniature Railway website,<sup>173</sup> it gives information about the extra attractions, such as the putting green but also tearooms, gift shop etc. all of which are needed to make the line financially viable; the line is still open today. The need for extra income is an important issue, which possibly B-L or indeed any of the earlier owners had not appreciated when he set up SMRs in the UK.

Robin Butterell, although involved with three SMRs was only associated with them for one season in each case. Llandudno was approached in an amateur fashion and was not financially viable. The move to Bridlington meant that it was associated with a much more active resort spectacle than Llandudo, although within a year he had sold his share. Weston-Super-Mare, although sited in an established resort, the SMR was not in the most advantageous site being remote from the main attraction and illustrated the need to generate extra income from the general resort ambience. What Butterell illustrated was that being knowledgeable is not sufficient to promote an SMR; a certain amount of financial entrepreneurship such that Ian Allan possessed is also required.

#### **George Vimpany and the Southern Miniature Railway Co..**

The Southsea Miniature Railway should be mentioned as this was the precursor to a small SMR empire on the south coast. At Southsea, in 1933, Portsmouth City Council set up an SMR, operating uneventfully but successfully until the advent of WW2, when it was forced to close and it then fell into disrepair.



*24: Poole Park in the days of steam c1960. The somewhat run down state of the area can be seen in this photograph. (Source unknown).*

After the war, in 1945, the line was bought from the council by Lou Hathaway and George Vimpany who formed the *Southern Miniature Railway Company*. George Vimpany was a demobbed engineer from the local Supermarine Spitfire factory and (as with Don Clark at Southport) used his gratuity to buy the line.<sup>174</sup> Although they re-

energised the line it was not entirely successful and was closed in 1957.<sup>175</sup>

However, it was the impetus for a small empire as after the initial opening they immediately expanded the business. Firstly in 1946 they took over an existing SMR in Bognor Regis<sup>176</sup> and in 1949, started a new line at Stokes bay in Gosport. Both these

<sup>173</sup> [www.westernminiaturerailway.co.uk](http://www.westernminiaturerailway.co.uk). Accessed 2/4/20012.

<sup>174</sup> This is an almost identical background to that of Don Clarke, owner of the Southport, Lakeside SMR. Coming from an engineering background is always an advantage when dealing with an SMR. The use of a gratuity as a source of capital is also an important factor.

<sup>175</sup> *Poole Park Railway; A profile*. Miniature Railway Magazine. Issue 1 June 2006. Pp 29-30.

<sup>176</sup> [www.Hothamparkrailway.co.uk](http://www.Hothamparkrailway.co.uk). Accessed July13 2012.

lines were operated on the then more popular 101/4" G. It should be noted that at this juncture the size of new lines was reducing from the previous 15" G standard.

They were both relatively short lived but for different reasons. The line at Stokes bay was closed in 1951; there were suggestions that this was due to local opposition but in fact was due to line running at a loss for three years. The local council had a stake in the line, leasing the land for 25% of gross receipts and it was on their insistence that the line be closed.<sup>177</sup>

The line in Bognor Regis was successful but in 1957 (at the same time as the Southsea line) it had to close when the site was taken over by Butlins to build a new camp. The camp also started to run its own miniature railway so there was a certain amount of continuity.

It was a time when a number of seaside resorts were trying to recover their pre-war fortunes and Poole was no exception and the local council wanted to renovate the area to attract more visitors. In 1948, George Vimpany obtained exclusive rights to run a 101/4" G line around the lake at Poole Park. This had not been the only site looked at by Vimpany as Sandbanks was a much more touristic site, however, possibly with the ill fated Blackpool Pleasure beach Railway in mind, he was concerned that the sand would damage bearing etc. and cause maintenance concerns: the site was rejected.<sup>178</sup>

The opening of the line was attended by many dignitaries, but not the mayor who was against the railway; some attitudes had not changed since B-L attempted to open his line in Abingdon Park in 1911. Poole Park was more (and still is) leisure than fairground orientated and a raucous SMR was not seen as a suitable attraction. However the opening was recorded in the local newspaper, indicating the importance to the local society and economy.<sup>179</sup>

It was a very popular line and the 1950s were the most successful years and by the end of the decade it was the only line the company was operating. However, its history started to follow a familiar pattern of diminishing returns. In 1975 its founder George Vimpany retired and the line passed to Geoffrey Tapper, who was the owner of the boating concession on the lake around which the railway ran. However, despite this connection the decline continued and was becoming run down. So much so that the borough amenity officer was not at all happy with the situation as the area looked dilapidated and rundown.<sup>180</sup>

The familiar tale of ownership followed, in 1990 the line was sold to Brian Merrifield and in 1999, Chris Coles joined the company and there was some improvement but in 2005 the line was sold to the present owner Chris Bullen.

From 1995 onwards it was saved by the intervention this time not of an individual but the local council, which became interested in the line and wanted to preserve it in a running state. Also coming to the rescue was another familiar body in the form of voluntary help; in 1995 The Friends of Poole Park Railway was formed. The visitor

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<sup>177</sup> [www.fortgilkicker.co.uk/pleasure](http://www.fortgilkicker.co.uk/pleasure). Accessed 10th march 2012.

<sup>178</sup> Guy, Keith, *Poole Park Railway; the first 50yrs, 1949-1999*. Keith Guy. 2000.

<sup>179</sup> *Poole Park Celebrated*. Bournemouth Daily Echo. May 26. 2009.

<sup>180</sup> Poole Park Railway; profile. *Miniature Railway Magazine*. Issue 1 June 2006. P34.

numbers continued to shrink to about 60,000 PA which has to be compared with approx. 200,000 PA carried in the peak seasons at the end of the 1950s.

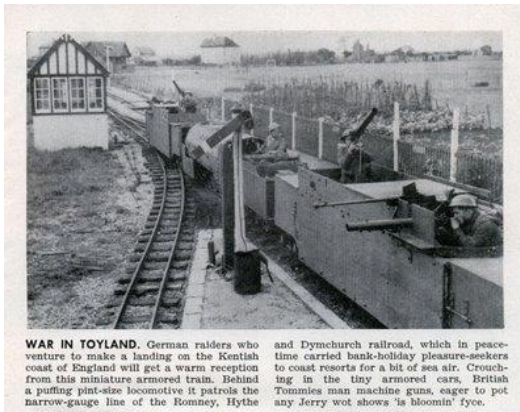
Poole Park is the last vestige of the Southern Miniature Railway Company, whose fortunes were somewhat varied. Despite efforts in the past to combine the SMR with other concessions (as at Weston-Super-Mare) Poole Park has only survived because of the interest taken by the local council. Poole lacks the spectacle of Brighton or nearby Bournemouth and the SMR culture has had to survive by association with individuals and preservation societies.

The line now operates with purely diesel hauled stock as it has not been possible to re-introduce steam haulage as the initial costs and especially maintenance are too great. This is a catch 22 situation for all operating lines; the public want to see, smell and be hauled by steam locomotives but for mainly financial reasons this is not practical. The line is secure at the moment and with the increasing interest in such lines in all probability for the foreseeable future.

### **Count Zborowski & J.E.P. Howey and the Romney Hythe & Dymchurch SMR.**

A number of SMRs have been saved by the intervention of individuals but the RH&D owes its very beginning to two wealthy individuals, with an interest not only in railways but also GP motor racing. Capt. J. E. P. Howey had commissioned a 15G" line at Staughton Manor, Cambridgeshire, as motive power using an enlarged class 30 Little Giant from B-L. Having run at Staughton it was to find its way to the R & E as

Colossus.



**WAR IN TOYLAND.** German raiders who venture to make a landing on the Kentish coast of England will get a warm reception from this miniature armored train. Behind a puffing pint-size locomotive it patrols the narrow-gauge line of the Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch railroad, which in peacetime carried bank-holiday pleasure-seekers to coast resorts for a bit of sea air. Crouching in the tiny armored cars, British Tommies man machine guns, eager to pot any Jerry 'wot shows 'is bloomin' eye.

Count Zborowski was another wealthy individual, who had opened a miniature railway at his house at High Park, Kent and also had an interest in GP motor racing. Together they considered opening a fully functioning 15" G railway and initially attempted to buy the R & E Railway but lost out to B-L. Peter Van Zeller, the R&E archivist could not give a satisfactory explanation<sup>181</sup> except that B-L only took a

short three year lease which may not have suited their opponents. It is doubtful that finance was the reason as they were both extremely wealthy and set their eyes set on a railway. Possibly the geographic location of the railway was not really

*25: The RH&DR at war; a far cry from the resort spectacle. Notice the use of the word Toyland in the caption, attempting to indicate something special, unusual, rather than just making fun of the line.*

suited. Although it was associated with the popular Lakes it was not actually in the tourist area and thus may not have attracted enough visitors. Ravensglass although on the coast could not really be considered a resort and certainly lacked spectacle that would lure the necessary numbers of holiday makers. When the line had to exist on passenger receipts this indeed was the case.

<sup>181</sup> Correspondence with Peter Van Zeller, archivist R&E railway. April 2012.

The decision was made to open a new line and Henry Greenly was commissioned to locate and survey suitable sites, which he did on the south coast between Romney and Hythe. The Count had agreed to donate stock and infrastructure from his private railway as well as also commissioning two locomotives designed by Henry Greenly.

These were not to be built by B-L but by Davey & Paxman in Colchester. This anomaly can be explained by the fact that B-L had stopped manufacturing 15" G locomotives in 1911. Greenly had commissioned a steam locomotive from D&P and was impressed by it.<sup>182</sup> When the RH&D railway required motive power he had approached Davey & Paxman.<sup>183</sup> Greenly had also moved on from his early days at B-L and was now employed as the chief engineer for the line

Unfortunately Count Zborowski was killed at the Monza GP before the railway opened, so Howey continued alone. The official opening took place in July 1927 and by 1928 the line was running as double track all the way from Romney to Dungeness, a grand total of 13.5 miles. This was by far the longest and most elaborate of any of the seaside railways. In its early days it was known as "*The Smallest Public Railway in the World*".<sup>184</sup> Such a title mirrors the early efforts of the Cagney Brothers to promote their SMRs; it was always necessary to provide something novel.

The RH&D was requisitioned during the war and ceased carrying passengers, which led to an inevitable run down of the line. It was reopened after the war to great fanfares and as with many such railways the immediate post war years, the 1950s/60s were very successful. However, the familiar tale of dwindling returns was beginning, coinciding with the arrival of cheap foreign holidays.

Howey, the major benefactor, died in 1963 and the line passed through a number of owners; investment was reduced and the line deteriorated, resulting in fewer visitors and entering into a deathly downward spiral.

As with other major miniature railways, salvation came in 1973 in the form of a benefactor, this time the industrialist, Sir William MacAlpine.<sup>185</sup> Under his management, using his money, new investment in infrastructure, locomotives and carriages took place. The line is now a major attraction carrying over 100,000 visitors a year, as well as providing a public service carrying the mails, running a regular timetable and looks set to remain a viable concern.

Today the line is run as a PLC with several hundred shareholders, none of whom take any dividends. There is a central core of about 35 volunteers that run the line, which again illustrates the importance of the enthusiast in running these lines. It also illustrates the need for finance to make the line a success. This does not have to come from an individual but another source, such as another concession, café, shops or friends of the railway who are dedicated to raising the necessary funds.

### **David Humphreys and the Scarborough North Bay Railway.**

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<sup>182</sup> Davey & Paxman had built a large freight engine, designed by Greenly for the Ravenglass and Eskdale railway in 1925. This was done as a favour because of the connection of Lord Brocklebank with the Cunard Steamship Company who used engines made by Davey.

<sup>183</sup> *Steam Railway Locomotives*. [www.paxmanhistory.org.uk](http://www.paxmanhistory.org.uk). Accessed May 2012.

<sup>184</sup> Hollingsworth, Brian, *Railways of the World*. W. H. Smith. London 1982. P54 and P79.

<sup>185</sup> *Romney Hythe & Dymchurch Railway*. [www.rhdr.org](http://www.rhdr.org). Accessed May 2012.

The North Bay Railway was similar to the Southsea Miniature Railway in that its genesis was grounded with a local council; albeit with an individual within that council. In 1932, the then borough engineer Herbert Smith decided to apply for money from the Special Areas Fund to build an SMR around the lake. This would not only provide immediate employment with the railway but was hoped to increase the number of tourists. They decided to use diesel engine steam outline locomotives made by Hudswell Clarke, similar to the ones supplied to Blackpool Pleasure Express, thus the gauge was set at 21”G..<sup>186</sup>

Such hybrids came into their own in the mid 1930s when firms such as Hudswell-Clarke began to manufacture and Scarborough council put out to tender for suitable locomotives for their proposed North Bay Railway and H-C offered their steam outline diesel locomotives, which the council accepted. They would have been persuaded also by the fact that they could run on about 3 gallons of fuel a day (at a time when oil was very cheap) and there would be huge savings on maintenance costs.<sup>187</sup>

David Humphreys, the present owner of the railway, was able to shed some light on the matter. H-C were also suffering from the depression and were able to apply for money from the Special Areas Fund to make these hybrid locomotives, which turned out to be popular and were used on a number of SMRs.<sup>188</sup> They then became the standard motive power for lines such as Scarborough North Bay, the new Blackpool Pleasure Express and Butlin’s holiday camps used them exclusively.

The council ran the line continuously but it had suffered from neglect and under investment<sup>189</sup>, until 2007 it was sold to a local businessman, David Humphreys, under the name of the North Bay Railway Company Ltd.. In conversation with David Humphreys the reason for taking over was not merely financial; he had a life-long interest in model engineering and possessed a passion to run his own line. When he bought the line it was in a run-down condition after many years of neglect. It took three seasons and the injection of £250,000 of his money to make it profitable. As with other lines he declined to take any salary as director to help cash flow.<sup>190</sup>

It is clear from David Humphreys that taking on such a concession needs much enthusiasm, as well as finance. The line makes a profit but only because of ancillary activities such as a cafe, shop and toy sales and employs 30 people. Without the intervention of David Humphreys it is unlikely that the NBR would be open today.

Apart from the original Blackpool, Little Giant Railway and Margate Dreamland Railway, the railways discussed are in operation today. Certainly the intervention of the individual at a critical time was paramount, this along with the formation of charitable bodies and preservation societies were the saviour of many SMRs. Once the running of any SMR was in the hands of corporate bodies it is unlikely that they would survive any economic downturn.

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<sup>186</sup> Conversation with David Humphrey, owner of the North Bay SMR. Jan 2012.

<sup>187</sup> [www.users.globalnet.co.uk](http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk). Accessed May 16 2012.

<sup>188</sup> [www.users.globalnet.co.uk](http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk). Accessed May 16 2012.

<sup>189</sup> Conversation with David Humphrey, owner of the North Bay SMR. Jan 2012.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter 5

## Discussion

There is little doubt that SMRs have been a neglected part of history although there are few among us who have not either ridden on one or at least seen one. They have been around for over 100yrs. and have come to the very brink of extinction at more than once.

At this time of economic recession (2012) it is difficult to assume that any enterprise that relies on public money (paying passengers) and patronage will continue running. However, since the early 1960s, around the time of the Beeching era, there has been an increased awareness of the necessity to preserve what the country has to offer; that is its heritage. Consequently society is becoming less willing to dispose of anything that may have a cultural heritage.

Initially this was the case with standard gauge heritage railways, following on from this, attention turned to narrow gauge preservation and restoration such as the Talylyn railway.

Travelling down the scales, miniature railways then came under the spotlight. Gerald Nabarro, in his survey of preserved lines, chose to include them, although most mainstream historians did not. Many miniature railways are of recent origin, and as such, may not have a great deal of historical merit. SMRs, however, generally are from an earlier time, some are centuries old and still up and running. Although they may seem insignificant, the fact is that they are still running, still attracting visitors in considerable numbers have been and still are part of the social fabric of the resort as indicated by Anthony Coulls in his article. This is highlighted by the quite extensive coverage of the opening of such lines, not only in the local newspapers but also on a national scale. The prominence given to the opening of the Poole Park Railway and the Clacton SMR are typical examples which featured in the local press.

The saving of the Ravenglass and Eskdale railway in the early 1960s merited quite extensive coverage in the national press, being an important asset to the local social and economic scene, they were worthy not only of saving but of national coverage.

The press may have been somewhat condescending on occasions, referring to them as toy, child, rather than miniature railways but this did not detract from their basic appeal to the public. In fact it may have enhanced their appeal, especially when it came to supporting a preservation movement. A toy railway was something different, out of the ordinary and unusual and perhaps was worth preserving. Most people who would have been interested in the preservation scene would have been at an age when they would have undoubtedly experienced an SMR. Anthony Coulls has made a start on this promotion of the miniature railway but there is still a long way to go.

We have seen that over a period of some 200yrs. the seaside resort had become the premier destination; initially for the wealthy but in late Victorian times there was a change in emphasis towards providing leisure facilities for the newly emancipated working masses.

There were other recreational destinations which attracted considerable numbers; zoos especially, were beginning to be major attractions. Large urban areas were developing; pleasure gardens such as Rosherville gardens, Gravesend and Sutton Park, Sutton Coldfield, but these were not places for fun and enjoyment but more for relaxation.

They had the advantage over seaside resorts in that that they were generally speaking readily accessible as they were within large conurbations, whereas seaside resorts were somewhat remote. This was still very much the case even after the arrival of the railways and coastal steamer trade but was only finally negated with the opening of the road network.

The seaside resort was far and away the obvious place to base an attraction. The arrival and subsequent development of fairgrounds in the 1880s, was the spur for the establishment of the first SMRs but subsequent development was not necessarily linked with a fairground.

John Walton has highlighted the liminal hedonistic culture. Whether people think in such abstract ways when they arrive at the seaside is debateable; some may possibly think in such terms but the vast majority just want to enjoy themselves without thinking too deeply about it. Visitors wanted to feel comfortable in the seaside spectacle they also wanted to get away from the everyday humdrum aspects of their working lives.

However, this concept of liberated hedonism is an important observation when we deal with the development of seaside resorts as this aspect caused considerable friction between those entrepreneurs who wanted to develop the resort to attract more tourists and the more conservative middle class residents who wanted to retain the *status quo* and if necessary, attract a "better class" visitor.<sup>191</sup> Gary Cross has tried to show that the seaside and associated fairground had their roots in an industrial Saturnalia.

The seaside resort and fairground provided the necessary spectacle for the development of the SMR, what was lacking was the motivation to provide them. Profit was and still is the motive for any company and without the chance of making a return on capital no business would ever start. Fortunately, Individuals and not companies were the catalyst for the development of the SMR. They were entrepreneurial in their outlook but more importantly possessed an enthusiasm for miniature railways: both of which were necessary for success.

In America the development of Coney Island outside New York was a major milestone, allowing the Cagney brothers to develop their range of miniature steam engines for use in SMRs. They did not run the lines but sold turn-key operations to anyone who wanted to open an SMR.

This blueprint was used, although not without alterations, in Britain by B-L, whose efforts, along with Henry Greenly established the SMR in Britain. Rather than wait for customers to come to them, they took their products to the market place, actively seeking suitable sites for their SMRs and subsequently setting up and running them under the umbrella of the Miniature Railway Company. They also sold equipment for other entrepreneurs to start SMRs, such as Southport. This flexibility in approach was to allow the SMR to develop concurrently at a number of venues throughout Britain.

The turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a time of great advancement in the area of model and miniature steam locomotives and a time of great opportunity for people such as B-L and Greenly. Model engineering clubs were being formed and in 1898 Percival Marshall

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<sup>191</sup> Walton, John, *Resorts and Regions*, in Brown, Alyson (ed). *Historical Perspectives on Social Identities*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing. Newcastle 2006.

started to publish *The Model Engineer* magazine (still being published today). In 1909 Greenly and B-L edited and published another magazine, *Model Railways and Locomotives*. This along with an expanding, emancipated working class provided a fertile background for the development of the early SMRs.

B-L was the engineer who had access to large scale workshops and was already marketing and selling small scale steam items, and was becoming interested in developing a large scale railway. Henry Greenly was the trained engineer and designer who could provide B-L with the designs he needed. He was also able to survey and supervise the construction of SMRs.

The importance of this relationship should not be underestimated; it was one thing to manufacture locomotives but to design, manufacture, survey and finally run a commercial miniature railway was another prospect. It is unlikely that the SMR would have developed as it did without their intra co-operation.

B-L actively sought suitable sites for his miniature railways and the seaside resort with its associated fairground was the obvious place to start as that is where the masses went on vacation. It provided the hedonistic pleasures that would transport the visitor from their normal world into another surreal world although within familiar surrounds, such as Blackpool. These holidaymakers were virtual prisoners of the resort on arrival and would ensure a constant stream of customers.

However, the initial reception for the SMR was not encouraging. What were the reasons behind this disappointing performance of the SMR? The Little Giant Railway had closed even before another SMR had opened, leaving a hiatus when once again there were no SMRs. Had the owners closed the line prematurely before the line could be properly assessed? Possibly even the appearance of a rather stern faced stationmaster may have put off many potential (especially children) customers. On cursory examination the SMR seemed to have an advantage in that it was a novelty in the truest sense; being unique in Britain, plying its trade in the newest and most popular form of mass entertainment, the fairground. It should have been a runaway success. However, it was not the only unique attraction, virtually all the other major attractions were novel and provided more thrill oriented experiences. Unfortunately, the SMR also had a number of major disadvantages compared with other attractions, especially in that it had to operate with considerably more staff in relation to its size.

Over time the SMR developed a clear pattern of expenditure as the cost of maintenance became a huge drain on finances. As the locomotives and rolling stock aged, more had to be spent on keeping them track-worthy. In places such as Blackpool, the sand acted as an excellent grinding paste thus hastening wear and tear. When a locomotive was taken out of service it could not be making any income and when the novelty aspect of the SMR waned, the numbers of passengers, hence, profit, waned with it.

In comparison to other, thrill orientated fairground rides; the SMR was not such a good economic proposition. Although undoubtedly popular, it was a minor attraction requiring expensive upkeep, maintenance and basic running costs, all eating into the profits. Although adding to the general fairground spectacle, as an individual attraction it lacked that added spectacle that visitors craved. Undoubtedly, B-L and other



entrepreneurs would have taken note of such failings but overall, it could be seen, in the right venue, as a profitable venture; one that could be repeated elsewhere, learning from the mistakes of Blackpool.

The provision of sufficient working capital was always a problem and if this could be provided without the usual strings associated with banks etc. then this would always have a positive effect on the business. When wealthy benefactors such as J. E. P. Howey and Count Zborowski, were involved there was actually no need to consider the need for profit making as the sponsors would always be available to bail out the project as and when necessary.

This concept may be easier to understand when compared with today's Premier football clubs. The major clubs are owned by individuals who may have bought the club as a prestige venture, injecting millions of pounds into the clubs; nominally running at a loss which is absorbed by the owner.

Once established SMRs invariably required such sponsors as there was a depressingly familiar history to all the major SMRs. After the initial novelty had worn off they all suffered a drop in receipts due to the reduction in the number of customers. This was not necessarily because the line was not popular but if it were situated at a fun fair there would always be newer and better attractions that would reduce the takings.

SMRs have never been able to charge a really competitive rate. Even in the days of Blackpool Pleasure Beach when the SMR was charging 2d a head, major attractions such as the scenic railway could charge almost treble that amount. Supply and demand has always operated in the market place and the fairground is no exception. The SMRs had to charge lower rates to attract customers from the more spectacular rides. If they had been able to charge the same rate then many would have been much more financially viable.

In any business one of the chief expenses are wages, SMRs suffered from the need to have far more personnel than contemporary rides. The infrastructure also required stations, engine sheds and if the line were to have a suitable scenic effect bridges and tunnels would be needed. All these needed upkeep and personnel to do it.

This squeeze on profits followed a similar trend and within five years of opening such lines reached a critical financial position. Sometimes the lines were sold to other enterprises that had a much larger capital base and a greater cash flow. This was the case with the Rhyl Miniature Railway that was sold to the owners of the amusement park. They had access to more capital and as owners of the park would be able to subsidise such a venture. However, the great disadvantage of such an arrangement was that the SMR then was tied to the fortunes of parent company, in this case the fairground. When the situation changed for the worse the line had no option but to close along with the fairground.

Visitors wanted to see steam locomotives and be given a ride by one of them. Unfortunately as with their full sized counterparts they required constant maintenance to keep them at maximum efficiency. Boilers always had to be inspected to ensure that they were safe to operate. The very nature of a seaside railway ensured that they were subject to corrosive effects of the salt air and the abrasive actions of wind blown sand. It was this latter problem that caused so much trouble with the Blackpool railway.

The need to generate extra revenues was reinforced by David Humphreys, owner of the North Bay SMR, Scarborough. Although the railway was making an operating profit he also had concessions to run food stalls etc. which were necessary to make a decent return.<sup>192</sup> This undoubtedly highlights the need to generate extra income if an SMR is to survive or the owners to have deep pockets to cover continuing losses.<sup>193</sup>

In an attempt to reduce such costs there was a move away from steam locomotives to diesel power; this was not possible in the early days as the technology was not available. With the development of small diesel engines it became possible to construct locomotives to 15" G or even 10 1/4" G standards.

The chief problem with such locomotives was that they did not look the part, visitors still wanted to see a steam engine. Thus the steam outline locomotive, actually powered by a diesel engine came into being. They were cheaper to construct and certainly cheaper to operate. They were easily driven by one man without the need for extensive backup. Don Clark of the Southport Railway called them a *godsend*.<sup>194</sup>

Thus the tide started to turn against the B-L/Greenly partnership. They were still able to offer design and surveys but they never attained the same prominence as they had in the early days when they had provided a consistent product that had allowed the formation of SMRs. The focus was now turning from a single cohesive, overall product, to locomotives and stock supplied by one company and an SMR being run by an individual with no connection to that company. The concept of the family run concern came to an end.

We have seen that the opening of these lines seemed not to be directly related to the general state of the economy although the subsequent running and in some cases closure did have a relationship. In fact it would appear that it was in times of economic distress that a lot of the major railways opened.

It is possible that between the planning and opening of these railways the economic tide could have turned against them. This does not seem to be the case as the railways operated by B-L were often planned, surveyed and built within a remarkably short period.

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the principal holiday for the average British worker was at a sea side resort as there was no real alternative; foreign package holidays had not yet been developed.<sup>195</sup> Although it was a time of general depression, the General Strike of 1929, there was a large section of the workforce gainfully employed that were able to take holidays; along with the expansion of middle class housing and values during this period, allowed the continued development of the seaside holiday and the SMR. The introduction of paid holidays in 1930 was an impetus for the middle class to take a two week break. Thus although there were pockets of extreme deprivation there were still enough people working to keep the holiday resorts buoyant.

In a time of reduction in heavy industry, coal mines and shipyards for instance, seaside development provided an outlet for engineering works, in this case locomotives

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<sup>192</sup> Interview with David Humphreys, owner of the North Bay Railway, Scarborough. Jan 2012.

<sup>193</sup> [www.westernminiaturerailway.co.uk](http://www.westernminiaturerailway.co.uk). Accessed 2/4/2012.

<sup>194</sup> Conversation with Don Clarke, owner of the Southport SMR. Feb 2012.

<sup>195</sup> See appendix 4 for details of holiday numbers.

and infrastructure such as rails associated with SMRs. Although not a great volume it was a way to keep the works ticking over especially if it were directly associated with an SMR such as at Southport and Rhyl.

It was also in the interests of the railway companies to encourage visitors to the seaside as a way of bolstering receipts. It was when the classic railway posters such as “bracing Skegness” were published. Having used the national railway network to reach their holiday destination it was up to the resorts to entertain them so they became in direct competition with themselves to provide these amenities and consequently visitor numbers. It was the advent of the cheap foreign holiday in the early 1970s that heralded the death knell of the traditional seaside holiday. Although numbers visiting the resorts remained static<sup>196</sup> the amount of money spent in the resorts has not kept pace with other spending.

The holidaying pattern has changed; tourists are no longer captive of the resort, the advent of road travel and the private car nailed the lid on that coffin. Visitors can come and go as they please; in this climate the seaside railway does not benefit from the popularity of the resort and has struggled to keep revenues up.

Once popular resorts such as Rhyl and Margate are typical examples where the fortunes of the miniature railway/funfair have fallen victim to the demise in the popularity of the resort. Both have suffered a loss of their traditional fairgrounds; Ocean Beach at Rhyl and Dream Land at Margate have both closed with a disastrous effect on the SMR. The one at Margate has had to close completely; Rhyl has remained open as it was not actually within the perimeter of Ocean Park and fortunately benefitted from a major drive by the local council to re-establish Rhyl as a premier holiday resort.

There has never been a shortage of interested individuals willing to take over the running of an SMR. The fairground culture has a magnetic effect along with the thrill of being able to run one’s own railway; however small. The motives may have varied from at one end of the spectrum, businessmen such as Sir David MacAlpine at the RH&DR, to gifted professionals who were willing to take the risk such as at Southport and Fairbourne; although they were not always successful.

It would be difficult to class them as entrepreneurs, although they would fall within our definition. I believe they were amateurs who wanted to have the thrill of running a line and were prepared to cover any financial deficit. It is doubtful whether they ever expected to make any money from their investments. David Humphreys of the North Bay Railway had to invest nearly £250,000 of his own money just to make the line competitive, let alone to make any return on the investment.<sup>197</sup>

The enthusiastic individual has become an important factor in the survival of these SMRs. I have used the term enthusiastic rather than enthusiast which may seem pedantic but I think that there is a difference. The enthusiast may study and morally support the venture but it is the enthusiastic person, with the energy and drive, as well as enthusiasm that will eventually preserve these SMRs.

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<sup>196</sup> See appendix 4 for details of holiday numbers.

<sup>197</sup> Conversation with David Humphrey’s March 2012.

There is a definite similarity between the characters of some of the major entrepreneurs associated with SMRs. There is a connection with the engineering world as in the case of Cagney, B-L, Barnes and Barlow, who had access to major engineering works. Ian Allan set up his own works to supply the trade. Others had an engineering background such as George Vimpany and Don Clarke, which is very useful when dealing with engineering items. What does come out, in the most general of terms is a love of the product, the SMR, allied with a general interest in model and miniature engineering. In conversation with Don Clarke and David Humphreys there was a desire to run a miniature railway. Although there is no direct evidence this is probably true of most of the other entrepreneurs, certainly Sir William MacAlpine was well known in model engineering circles.

Being enthusiastic meant that profit may not have been the main guiding force behind the venture. Certainly once a railway was running and losses could be quantified why should any sane individual take on such a business? But this is exactly what happened with the SMRs such as the Llewellyn, North Bay Railway and the Fairbourne Railway. The Fairbourne Railway especially highlights the importance of the individual benefactor, keeping the line running. This patronage ceased on the benefactors death and the line immediately began to decline.

The final stage in the development, (although one can quite arguably call it decline rather than development as this gives the impression that the line was continuing to expand its services) often was the formation of a trust, voluntary enthusiast group or conversion to a charity or a combination of all three.

The change to a charitable trust status is important as it avoids payment of income tax, thus boosting the revenues. The trusts are sometimes separate from the main railway and are used as fund raising instruments, making a tax free donations to the SMR. Most major SMRs, such as Cleethorpes and Fairbourne are now run by volunteer groups. Without this enthusiastic support the railways would not be able to continue, as they are volunteers they do not take any salary for their work. There is normally a small number of permanent staff who would be responsible for the railways management, but the day to day running of the line would be left to these volunteers or amateurs.

A railway such as the RH&D; set up by wealthy individuals who did not need to be concerned about the economic climate. However, when these individuals are no longer around to support the venture then they suffer the same fate as many others, eventually being run by volunteers to keep it going.

In today's climate such railways are now viewed almost as preserved main line steam lines are; part of British heritage and should be maintained. Much of the steam heritage has been lost over the last 50yrs. but the preserved heritage steam scene is well supported. It will be along these guide lines that these miniature railways will survive, allying themselves with such nostalgia.

## Chapter 6.

## Conclusion.

The origin of the SMR culture was without doubt grounded within the development of the seaside resort and fairground into a spectacle, within which the SMR played its part. Without the seaside spectacle to provide the visitor numbers and money it is unlikely that the SMR would have developed at all. There were few suitable sites outside the resorts that would have been suitable to develop a miniature railway.

At seaside resorts new recreation venues were opened (gardens, theatres, piers etc.) including fairgrounds to provide entertainment for the newly franchised working class who were able not only to take an annual holiday but importantly now had sufficient funds to indulge in entertainments, including SMRs. In places such as Fairbourne, they played a key role in the establishment of the resort and generally encouraged tourism in the area, which was even before the arrival of a fairground.

The SMR, however, unlike traditional attractions, was not confined to the fairground but was able to develop as an independent attraction in other areas associated with a resort. Over the years they could be found on promenades, piers and pleasure gardens amongst other sites.

By diversifying in these ways their fortunes were not wholly dependent on that of the parent fairground, whereas SMRs that were totally within the perimeter of a fairground were obliged to follow the fortunes of that fairground which were not always favourable to the SMRs.



*26: Hitting the buffers. The end of the days at Rhyl Ocean Beach; with a commercial Triang "Minic" SMR. A far cry from photograph 1 in the heyday of the seaside spectacle. A depressing scene on which to finish.*

The development of the SMR, throughout its history, was almost entirely the result of the efforts of a small number of individuals.

Timothy Cagney in America was perhaps the most influential as he started the first SMR anywhere in the world at Coney Island and introduced the miniature railway to Britain.

In the United Kingdom that honour goes to B-L along with Henry Greenly; although almost always mentioned in the same sentence, they were not an equal partnership but more a symbiotic relationship as one was reliant on the other in the early days.

Once the SMR had become established, it was the individual that drove them on; Barnes at Rhyl and Margate, Barlow at Southport and Howey at the RH&D. SMR empires were forged and abandoned by people such as Ian Allan and George Vimpany, unfortunately like all empires they expanded and eventually contracted to a single entity or none at all. SMRs were built by individuals and subsequently were saved by individuals; coming from diverse backgrounds that allowed them to indulge in the past time of SMRs but without whose finance and enthusiasm the SMR would have undoubtedly foundered.

Although SMRs were able to diversify they were ultimately subject to the vicissitudes of public taste and the fortunes of the host resort and suffered along with them in the general run down of seaside resorts, which in part was due to the loss of spectacle



27: *The end of the line for many SMRs, leading to dereliction as at Littlehampton.*

associated with them.<sup>198</sup> Although seaside holidays were still popular in 1953, Lindsay Anderson's film, *O Dreamland*, shows the fairground at Margate, once one of the most popular attractions in Britain as a disenchanted spectacle. Photograph 26 of an unknown SMR<sup>199</sup> at Rhyl says it all, showing the tawdry, run down state of an erstwhile spectacle

compared with the vibrant spectacle of Rhyl in 1. Unfortunately it is with this image that many of the current generation are familiar; not the

previous age of spectacle.

The seaside resort was a spectacle and in the end, the SMR although new and relatively popular did not provide the visitor with that "extra" spectacle to allow it to compete on a par with the more thrill orientated rides that would have made it more successful. The irony was that a miniature railway was more suited to the slower pace of a traditional leisure park; but the operators of such parks (usually council run) saw the miniature railway as an unwelcome intrusion to the quite running of the park (a typical example being Poole Park). The SMR culture was caught between two totally different cultures and was not really suited to either; something of an orphan without a suitable home.

Although they may have been the brain child of a small number of entrepreneurs, in later years the need for charitable trusts and friends of SMRs indicated that both economic and enthusiastic support are essential to keep SMRs running. As long as this support is forthcoming then there is no reason not to assume that some but probably not all of these lines may still be in operation in another hundred years.

## Chapter 7.

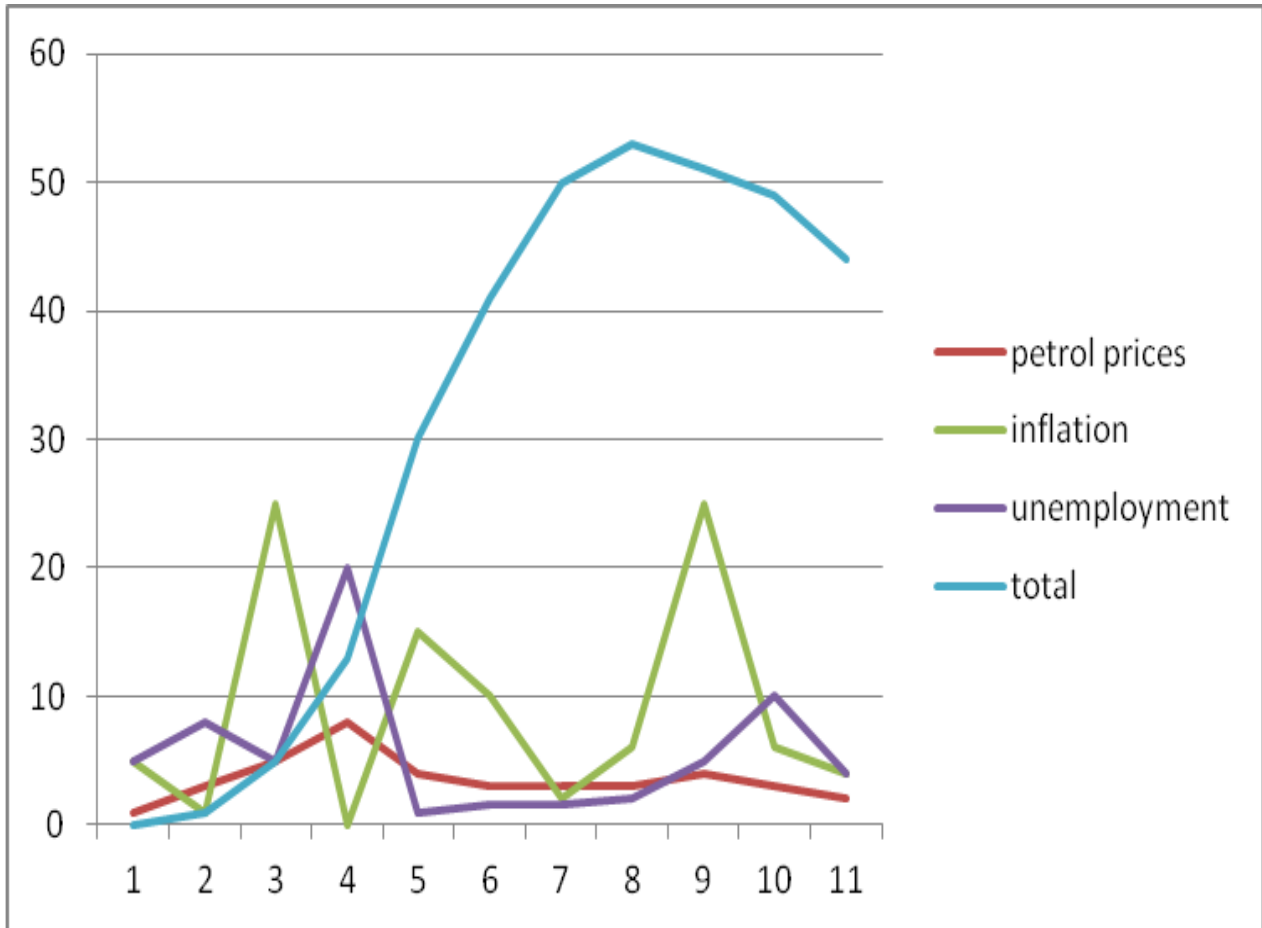
## Appendix

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<sup>198</sup> Shaw, G. & Williams, A. *Rise and fall of coastal resorts: cultural and economic perspectives*. Pinter, Wellington House, London. 1997. P4

<sup>199</sup> In 1963 the firm of Triang under the name of Minic Garden Railways offered a complete 101/4G railway for home or commercial use. Based on S.R. electric prototype it was designed to be remotely operated from the line-side they were extensively used in the children's amusements at Butlins.

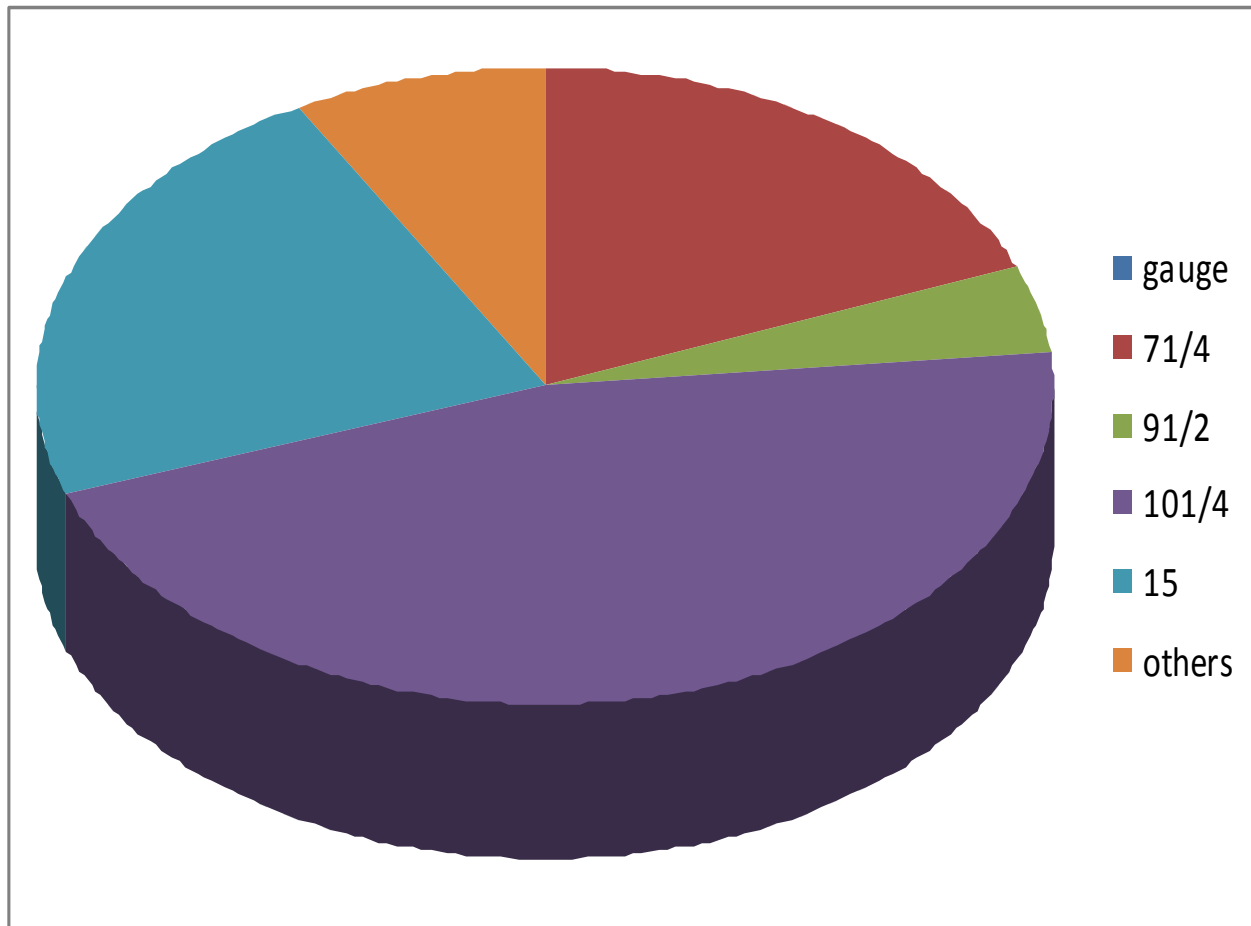
APPENDIX 1



The chart illustrates the relationship between the number of SMRs open to petrol prices, inflation and unemployment. It shows that The number of SMRs opened increased rapidly from the 1930s onward; the total peaked at about 53 in the 1980s when they went into a steady decline. It also shows that there was no direct correlation between the number of SMRs and the other economic indicators. In fact the increase in the 1930s when inflation and unemployment were high was possibly due to the recession and the governmental efforts to reduce unemployment by way of making Special Areas for development.

Sources: Miniature Museum Trust.

## APPENDIX 2



This illustrates the popularity of the various gauges; this only relates to those lines open today. The original standard was 15" as devised by Heywood. However, due to the costs in building such lines smaller gauges were introduced. 10 1/4" being the most common. 7 1/4" has been a relatively new introduction since the 1970s when suitable designs became available. Larger gauges of 20 inches were introduced but have only been adopted by a small number of lines.

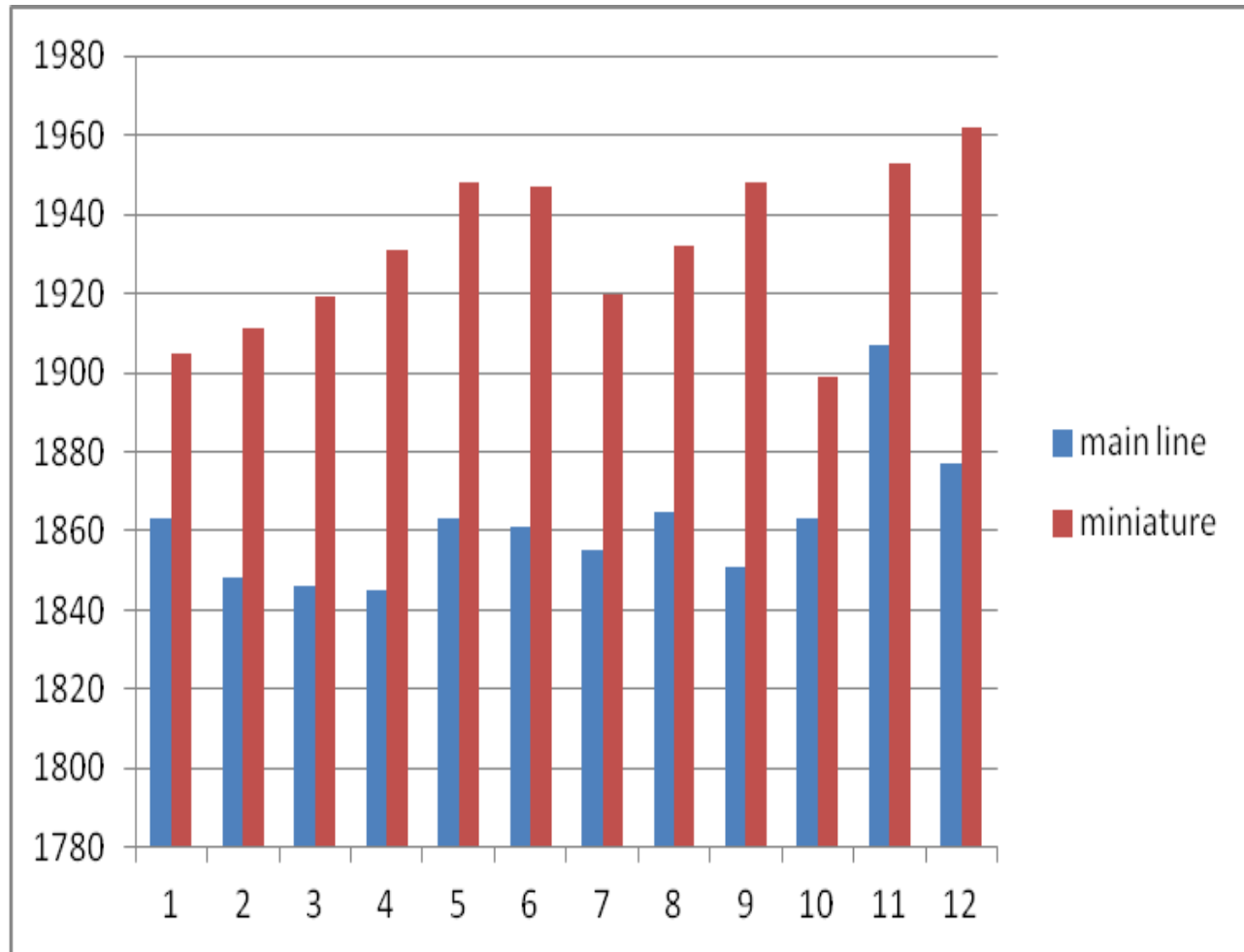
Sources.

1 Miniature Railway Museum Trust.

2 David Crofts: Survey of Seaside Miniature Railways.



### APPENDIX 3

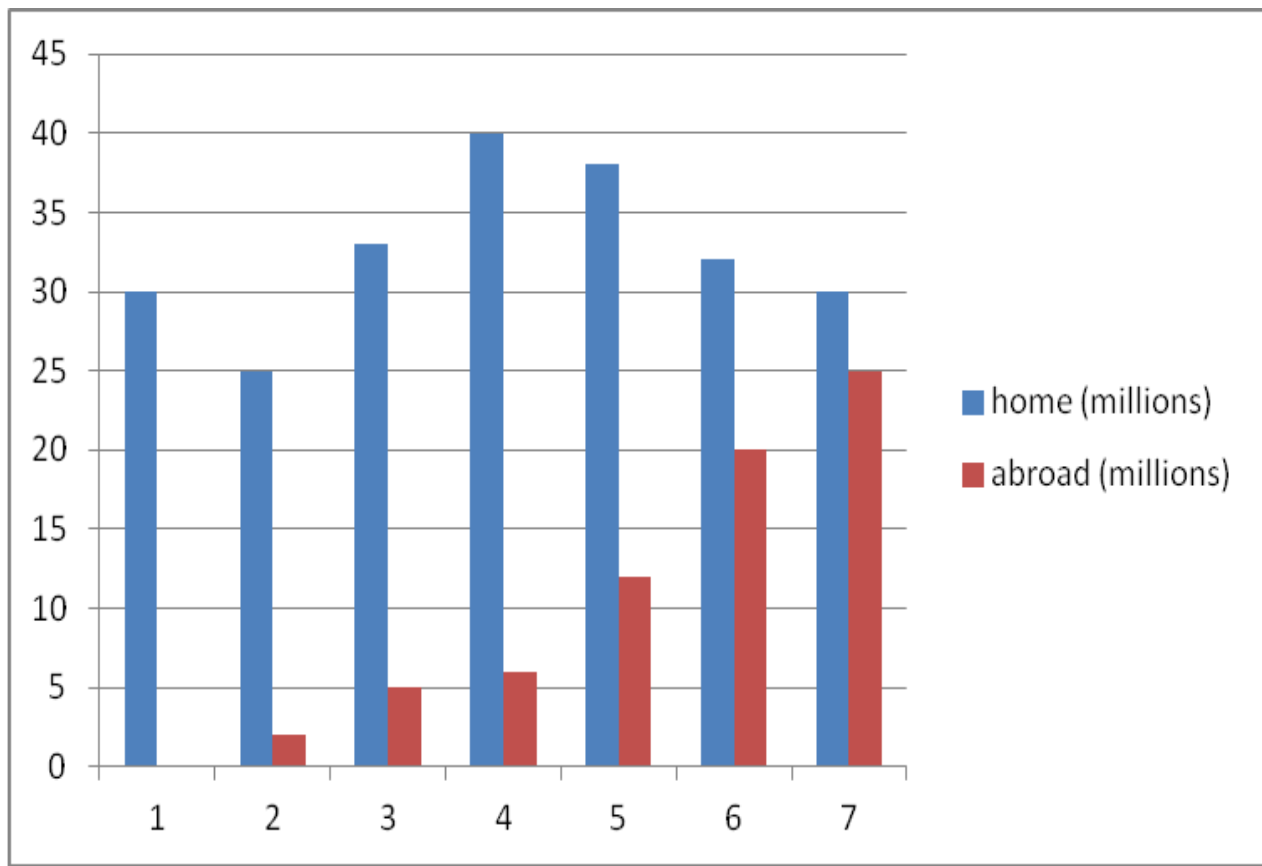


The chart illustrates the time lag between the main line railway reaching a resort and the opening of an SMR. As can be seen most resorts had been served by a railway by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first seaside resort was established in Blackpool in 1905. Consequently there was a gap of more than 50yrs before the arrival of SMRs. This was due firstly the resorts had not developed an amusement industry when the railways arrived and secondly the technology was not available to construct commercial miniature locomotives at that time.

Sources.

Davis Croft: A Survey of Seaside Miniature Railways for the opening of SMRs.  
 Various sources for the opening of mainline stations.

#### APPENDIX 4



The chart shows the changes in holidaymakers at home and abroad. It shows that the number of holidays taken in the UK Peaked in the 1930s-1940s but have held up remarkably well. The number of foreign holidays has steadily increased from the 1920s. The numbers only go to the 1970s and the recent recession may have had an influence on these numbers. What the chart does not show is the possible change in the pattern of holiday. The traditional two week holiday may have been reserved for a trip abroad and shorter breaks taken in the UK.

## APPENDIX 5

resort	opened	closed	gauge	comments
Aberarth	1990		15	Leisure Park
Aberdour	?	1975	71/4	Silver Sands Leisure Park
Abergelli	1970s	1985	101/4	Magic Dragon Railway
Arbroath	1935	present	71/4 101/4	Kerr's miniature Railway increased G in 1938
Ayr	1946	present	101/4	
Banff	1984	1986	15	
Barry Island	1938	1945	91/2	
Beer	1975	present	71/4	Peco land
Barrow				
Blackpool	1905	1909	15	First miniature 15 Rlwy. Transferred to Halifax
Blackpool	1934	present	21	
Bognor	1909	1956	101/4	
Bognor	1940	late 1950s	101/4	
Bognor	1971		101/4	Ian Allen from the promenade
Bognor	1970	1975	101/4	Beaulieu gardens
Bournemouth			101/4	base of cliffs
Bournemouth	?	?	71/4x2	no details on the seafront
Bream	1982		71/4	
Bridlington	1950s			planned but never built
Brighton	1883	present	15	Volks electric railway
Broadstairs				
Burnham	1930s	N/E	101/4	
Burry Port	1970s		101/4	along the shoreline Caravan park
Caernarvon	1970		91/2	
Carlyon Bay	1974		101/4	Cornish Leisure World and Coliseum
Christchurch	1946	1983		
Christchurch	1973	present	101/4	Tucktonia Leisure Park, rebuilt 1981 71/4
Clacton			21	Butlins holiday camp; line replaced by 2ft. Nar
Cleethorpes	1948	present	101/4	1971
Cleethorpes			71/4	ran by the boating lake
Clevedon	1952	N/E	101/4	Wonderland Miniature Railway/North end of pr
Clevely	1978	1988		
Clovelly	?	?	2ft	no details
Colwyn Bay		N/E	101/4	
Colwyn Bay	1946	1988	101/4	
Craigmore	1976	2011	101/4	situated on Mull
Dawlish	1970s		101/4	
Dinas Dinlle	1978	N/E	71/4	
Eastbourne		1971	71/4	
East Tilbury		1984	71/4	
Ettrick Bay	1936	1939	15	
Exmouth	1920s	N/E	101/4	
Fairbourne	1895	present	15	line built to promote the town
Falmouth	1970s	N/E	101/4	Swanpool Beach
Felixstowe		present	71/4	two lines on sea front
Felixstowe	1974	?	101/4	Peewit Caravan Park
Fleetwood	1954	N/E	15	
Fleetwood	1975	1982	15	
Folkstone	1950	1955	71/4	

Gateshead					
Gillingham	1970s			71/4	
Goodrington					
Sands		1971	1987	101/4	Peter Pan Playground
Great Yarmouth		1929	1977		15
Guernsey				71/4	
Hastings		1948	present	101/4	no details on the seafront
Hayle		1976	1982		15 Bird Paradise
Hayle			1983	101/4	The Towans
Hayling Island		1930	N/E		12
Hayling Island	1970s		N/E	101/4	
Herne Bay		1899	ww2		battery operated tramway on pier
Herne Bay		1950		71/4	
Hornsea	1930s		1936	101/4	council opposed Sunday running. 71/4 line open
Hove	1970s		N/E	101/4	
Hunstanton		1933	1960s		line washed away after storm
Hythe	?		?	2ft.	
Ingoldmells					
Inverness	1984	present	Oct-14		
Jaywick Sands		1936	1939		18
Jersey			1971	71/4	
Kessingland					
Kingsbridge		1969		71/4	
Littlehampton		1948	N/E	12/01/2004	
Llandudno		1949	N/E	71/4	Built by Robin Butterell, not a commercial success
Llandudno				101/4	Gt. Orme
Llanelli					
Lowestoft	1950s		1980	101/4	Claremont Pier
Lytham St. Anne's	?		?	?	
Mablethorpe		1962		101/4	
Maldon		1948		101/4	
Margate		1919	1980		15
Margate		1947	1964	101/4	old stone pier
Margate		1975	1976	101/4	relocated to true pier
Maryport	?		present	101/4	
Minehead		1965	present	101/4	Butlins holiday camp changed to 21
Morecombe		1953	1980		20
Morecombe	?		?		16 Frontierland Theme Pk.
Morecombe	?		?	101/4	Happy Mount Park.
New Brighton		1907	1930s		
New Brighton		1948	1965		18
New Brighton		1968	1971		12
New Brighton		1984	1985		15
Newquay				71/4	Little Western railway
Paignton		1937		12/101/4	Paignton Zoo
Penmaenmawr			N/E		no details on the seafront
Poole		1949	present	101/4	
Port Erroll		1980	N/E	71/4	
Porthcawl		1932	1986		15
Prestatyn		1970	1980s	101/4	
Pwllleli			present		24 Butlins; used to transport holidaymakers to the
Ramsgate	1960s			101/4	
Ravenglass		1916	present		15 Originally built to carry iron ore 2ft. G
Rhyl		1911	present		15 old line closed 1969 and reopened

R H & D	1927	present		15	1977 school train introduced
Rochester	1921			15	
St. Andrews	?	1976	71/4		
St. Andrews	1976	present		15	
St. Leonnards	1947	1980	101/4		
Saltburn	1948	present		15	from sea front to valley gardens
Saltwood					
Sandown					
Saundersfoot	1991			15	
Scarborough	1931	present		20	
Seaburn					
Seaton Carew	1950	present		15	owned by a Mr. Dunn
Severn Beach	1936	1960s	101/4		relocated to Longleat in 1965
Silloth					
Skegness	1922	1928	101/4		
Skegness	1951	present	101/4		
South Shields					
Southend	1920	1938		15	
Southend	1945	1953	101/4		buried by sand
Southend	1977		101/4		close to boating lake
Southend	1889	present		15	Southend Pier railway
Southport	1911	N/E		15	
			91/4 &		
Southsea	1920	1984	101/4		
Southsea	1988	1989	101/4		Sea Life Centre
Stranraer	??	71/4			Sea Front Railway; Agnew Pk.
Stokes Bay	1946	1948			
Wells N T T Sea	1976	1976	101/4		1982 new line to Fakenham
Wells Harbour	1976	present		15	
Weston S Mare	1977				Birnbeck Pier
Weston S Mare	1981	present	71/4		Beach lawns
Weymouth	1934	N/E	91/2		
Weymouth	1947	N/E	101/4		
Weymouth	1975				children's entertainment area
Weymouth	1987	N/E	101/4		
Whitby					
Whitley Bay	1969	1985	101/4		operated by Ian Allen organization
Withersea	1934	N/E	91/2		

This chart illustrates the SMRs that have been in operation since 1900. There is no claim that this is a complete list but it shows the major lines that have been surveyed. Many of the lines are no longer in operation or have changed their location or gauge. I have tried to show when this has happened.

Sources.

Various. However, the major source is David Croft, Seaside Miniature Railways

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