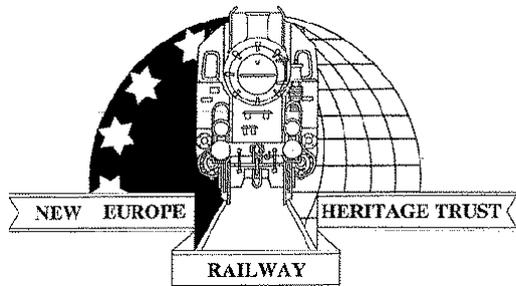


Eastern Star



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Railway preservation in the
New Europe

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Our Annual General Meeting

Once more, on 14 May, we held our AGM at the Model Railway Club and we are grateful for the hospitality we received there. Our Treasurer reported that our financial situation was stable, members' subscriptions being the mainstay of our income. Nevertheless members of the Committee are only too well aware that NERHT could do more, if only it had the funds. After the

formal business our guests from Latvia made a presentation which turned into a useful discussion about how to attract tourists. But the main business was to hear our Chairman's report on the year's work (see *next page*)



NERHT over the last year has been exploring current developments in Bulgaria, where vintage trains like this are having some success.

Photo by courtesy of Stefan Stoitschkoff

Chairman's Report to Members

The past year has seen NERHT as active as ever in pursuing our objective of helping railway preservation in our area of benefit, the former USSR and the ex-Communist countries of Eastern and Central Europe.

One field of activity over the past months has been the Balkans. Although we are not a travel club, NERHT nonetheless helped arrange for a group, including representatives of various British preserved lines who have welcomed our guests, to attend the centenary celebrations of the narrow gauge Sibiu Agnita Railway (SAR) in Romania in September. Members of the party raised funds to restore one of the SAR coaches and our Romanian friends appreciated our interest and support. The celebrations received coverage in the UK railway press and saw some useful networking, resulting amongst other things in the British ambassador to Romania visiting an exhibition in Constanta marking the 160th anniversary of the British-built Danube and Black Sea Railway. Another result of the SAR celebrations has been the formation by some of the British visitors of a support group, SAR UK, which with help from NERHT is now working actively with the Romanian volunteers to assist with the reopening of this historic line.

In October last year NERHT Committee members (who are also Fedecrail officers) John Jones and John Fuller visited Bulgaria along with other Fedecrail delegates for talks with the Bulgarian Association of Train Modellers which, in fact, is concerned with all aspects of the railway heritage. With help from NERHT, delegates from this organisation attended the Dresden conference where its admission to full membership of Fedecrail was completed. Following news of a scheme to preserve the Gorna Orjahoviza – Elena railway in Bulgaria as a heritage line, enthusiasts throughout Europe have been concerned to hear of threats to close the Septemvri – Dobrinishte line, Bulgaria's last passenger-carrying narrow gauge railway. We are in touch with our contacts in Bulgaria with a view to offering assistance in relation to both of these railways.

As in previous years we have been active in Ukraine where we have worked with long-established partners and have developed new links. We continue to support the Znesinnya Park Railway project in Lviv and are receiving assistance through Heritage Railway Association in making plans for a visit to Britain this Autumn by officials of Lviv City Council and others who are involved with this scheme. Later this month I shall be travelling to Kiev for a meeting with the Ukrainian Railway Heritage Association (in which some of our existing contacts are active) concerning the new railway museum proposed to be established in Kiev.

In the Baltic States John Jones of NERHT and Fedecrail has helped with the submission of an application for European funds for preservation schemes in Latvia and Lithuania which involved a visit to these countries in somewhat



A view of the 'Sweet Narrow' railway in Lithuania, another NERHT interest.
(Photo. David Allan)

extreme weather conditions! In Latvia we are maintaining our long-established connection with the Gulbene-Aluksne Railway (or Banitis) whose delegates are now with us. Banitis was of course the first railway outside Russia visited by some of the founders of NERHT way back in 1997. In Russia we keep in touch with the Pereslavl Narrow Gauge Railway Museum and have been glad to publish the reports by Sergei Dorozhkov in our magazine *Eastern Star*.

Apart from our core activities NERHT continues to develop as a networking organisation for all who are involved in railway preservation in the New Europe. John Westwood continues to edit our newsletter *Eastern Star* which regularly contains news and articles sent in by our friends in the East. *ES* is distributed to large numbers of people (including those on the Fedecrail network) and is quoted in the main railway press as a source of information.

Our task would be impossible without the hard work of our activists and the aid given by our members and others, including the railway companies, museums and others who have supported NERHT, especially by welcoming our guests. On behalf of the Committee I should like to thank you for your generosity and support.

Stephen Wiggs
Chairman, NERHT

14 May 2011

From our Latvian Guests

WALES – A PLACE TO RETURN TO OVER AND OVER AGAIN

We, Lauris Melkers, Renate Tuce (both students of tourism at Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences) and Raitis Melders (from the Gulbene – Alūksne 'Bānītis' railway) want to say a *big* thank you to The New Europe Railway Heritage Trust (NERHT) of Britain and to the 'Bānītis' narrow-gauge railway of Latvia for this unforgettable experience exchange trip to Wales which took place from 7th – 16th of May this year.

Everything started with a visit to the Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland railways which are centred on the very charming highland village called Porthmadog, full with excitement and rich with positive vibrations and practical information about the concept of this very touristic business. It was very clear and useful for us to see the actual fruits of labour and effort of strategic tourism marketing. It's really impressive to see the progression of this narrow-gauge railway. One of the main tools which have been used to make things even more attractive is the authentic appearance and excellent manner of operating staff – with great communication skills in evidence. Souvenirs in their wide range and the cuisine in Wales are just perfect. We appreciate the accommodation and dining as well – really good service and everything was well planned and went smoothly. And we believe it's quite unnecessary to repeat how picturesque steam locomotives look against a Welsh mountain peak background . . .

A lot of interesting historical facts about railways and steam locomotives are given in the Welsh Highland Heritage Railway Museum which is especially made for educational purposes, with loads of tiny details which are specially created for children. In some way it sent us back to our childhood with the extra-small railroad in its back yard. That was great fun through learning new things and facts. We are more than thankful to our private guides and amazing people who are so passionate about railways, especially David, Alasdair, Roy and Stuart. It was a

pleasure to meet those great men. We are still amazed at those energetic people who made all this happen.

Later on we were introduced to the Llangollen Railway which is another tourism railroad in Wales. It's running on slightly wider rails but still uses steam locomotives. This visit was another proof of how important it is to have volunteers in those historical railways to keep them going and renovate them. This railway has many common things with our Latvian heritage railway – the same structure of events to attract tourists as well as sheds with locomotive restoration.

As one of the most important event of this visit we can highlight our participation in the NERHT Annual General Meeting which gave us an opportunity to present our own railway and answer some questions. It was very good that we could discuss opportunities and threats concerning own 'Bānītis' railway. It gave us some ideas to pick up and try to raise tourist visits back home. Thank you for this chance.

At the end we must say a very big thanks to Stephen Wiggs and his great family who helped so much, and to the NERHT for initiating this amazing opportunity to come over and experience everything in such detail. We highly appreciate that and hope for further cooperation in the future.

See you all at the Gulbene-Alūksne Bānītis annual festival in September!

Cheers,

Raitis, Lauris and Renāte



A recent view of Latvia's 'Banitis.'

Photo: Mike Lister

More on closure threats

Ukraine's Gaivoron line. Rumours about closure plans come in all shapes and sizes, and *Eastern Star* tries to do some sifting before publishing such forecasts. In our last issue we mentioned a report about the imminent closure of Ukraine's narrow-gauge Gaivoron line. This surprised many of those on the spot, who questioned the accuracy of this report. Our NERHT chairman visited the line in May and found no signs of impending mortality. Indeed, at that very time a newly-overhauled locomotive was being returned from works.



*TU2-274 is returned by broad-gauge flatcar after a visit to main works.
Photo: Ivor Harding*

Investigations so far suggest that the original source of what appears to have been tainted information was a Ukrainian TV channel.

Bulgarian narrow-gauge lines. As *Eastern Star* went to press confusion surrounded the truth or otherwise of reports in the Western European railway press that the 75cm gauge Septembri-Dobriniste Railway, Bulgaria's last public narrow gauge line, was due to close at the end of the Summer. This came as a complete surprise to us said Ilija Iliev of the Bulgarian Association of Train Modellers when asked to comment on the story. According to Ilija no statement about the closure had been given by the Ministry of Transport or Communications or any other Bulgarian authorities and any announcement was unlikely to be made before the presidential and local elections due to be held in the Autumn. Questions have been raised over the years about the future of the line although in Ilija's view the closure would be problematical in the extreme, not least because the line provides essential access to mountain communities where roads can be obstructed by snow. In recent years moves have been made to exploit the tourist potential of this 125-kilometre line, with occasional steam specials hauled by a Polish-built 2-8-2T loco.

Ilija emphasized that in winter snowdrifts block roads in the Rhodops and the railway becomes a true lifeline. Also, the Pomak people live beside the line and the treatment of ethnic minorities has become a delicate issue in Bulgarian politics. Little action can be expected until after this year's elections. What happens after those elections is not necessarily a cause for pessimism. There has been no official statement regarding closure, as preceded the closure of that other valued railway, the Gorna Orjahoviza - Elena line.

Bulgaria at Fedecrail.

With some encouragement from NERHT and Fedecrail the Union of Bulgarian Train Modellers (founded 1909) has become a member of Fedecrail. The Union is Bulgaria's central railway preservation organization, following its new legal status approved by the Court of Justice.

At the Fedecrail conference in Dresden the Bulgarian 2-man delegation made a presentation and took part in other activities. Of the latter, Ilija Illiev writes:

. . . we had two train spotting train trips with the rest of the conference public. They gave us the chance of looking into the process of preparation and operation of similar tourist attractions! It was of particular interest for us to see the high level of agreement between the local authorities, tour operators, railway operators and volunteers! This is a goal we should look after in our country! The railway museums we have seen gave us a clue how to organize our own museum we have taken over most recently!

During the train trips to Radeburg and into the Presnitztal we had very interesting discussions on the train with people from different countries on topics from different aspects of the railways. . . practical activities for preservation and restoration of the railway heritage, legislation, environment, cooperation with the local authorities. We learnt many different points of view and on our side, we shared also some experience with our companions. It was for them interesting to learn about our conducting of training seminars for young steam drivers and their role for both keeping intact the heritage, training the staff for its future operation and making publicity! We also told our colleagues from different countries how we combine learning and fun by attracting students from the vocational schools for operation of our scale model and thus reinforcing their interest for railways and railway heritage in particular! . . . After our return trip to Bulgaria we organized a general meeting with all our members for informing them on our attendance in Dresden and setting up guidelines for our all future activities. We are also in the process of sharing the same experiences with the Bulgarian State Railways, some local authorities and the travel agencies engaged in the promotion of railway interest tours.

Book Reviews

Ona Stasiukaitiene, *Siaurasis Lietuvos Gelezinkelis, Versus Aureus*, Vilnius, 2010, pp.160.

This book on the history of Lithuanian narrow-gauge railways has just a three-page summary in English but is exceptionally well illustrated with maps and diagrams as well as photographs. These lines appeared from the very end of the 19th century and served to link the hinterland with the

broad-gauge St Petersburg - Warsaw main line, which passed through Lithuania. Narrow-gauge lines also enabled Klaipeda to develop as port and metropolis. Then in World War 1 the Germans occupied the land and brought their own narrow-gauge lines with them, some of which proved useful for non-military purposes. In the 20 years of Lithuanian independence that followed there was a determined effort to develop the narrow-gauge systems so by 1940 (when the country was absorbed by the USSR) there were 467km of line. The ensuing war was damaging and afterwards there was a decline until at the end of the 20th century the system no longer functioned, apart from the line over which the trains of today's 'Sweet Narrow Railway' still run. (Yes! NERHT gets a mention on p.142, and its chairman and secretary make modest appearances in the pictures).

The illustrations in this book cover not only trains, locomotives and operation, but also infrastructure, which includes not just stations, tracks and bridges but also details such as signals, lamps, and a pagoda-roofed station toilet. Given the paucity of books on this subject, even non-native-speakers might well find this volume of considerable interest.

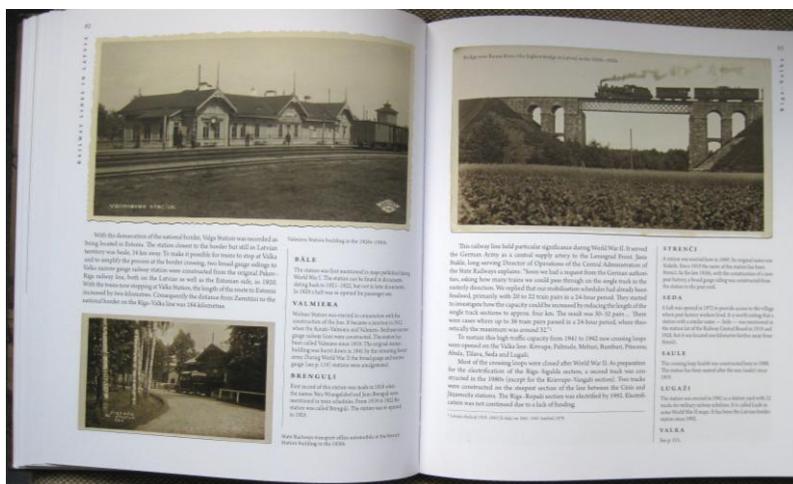
J N W

This book is obtainable from Richard Tapper (see p.10) and costs £15.00 post-free.

Toms Altbergs, Karina Augustine, Ieva Petersons, *The Railways of Latvia*, Riga, Jumava Publishers, 2010. pp. 198.

This large-format hardback, competently translated by Daina Grosa, is likely to be the standard reference work on Latvian Railways for a long time to come. It begins with a general overview of Latvian railway history, then devotes most of its pages to detailed line-by-line histories, each route being accompanied by a map and numerous illustrations carefully reproduced (some are full-page, and deservedly so: despite a chequered and often violent national history a surprising number of old pictures and documents has survived). The chapters present, side-by-side, a general view of a route's history and detailed if brief accounts of each station.

The history of Latvian railways, like that of the country itself, is conventionally divided into the tsarist Russian period, World War1, independence (1919-40), World War 2, the Soviet regime, and the new independence. Of these, the 1919-1940 period is regarded as the best time for the railways, with large resources



devoted to their improvement, in line with the renaissance of the country as a whole. Not surprisingly, this is the period best covered in documents and photographs. However, using largely Russian sources, the authors have

managed good coverage of the tsarist epoch when, after all, the first mainline railways appeared (a section of the St Petersburg - Warsaw line in 1860 and the Riga - Daugavpils line in 1861). In both world wars Latvia was a battlefield, a circumstance that not only damaged the infrastructure but also gave some prominence to narrow-gauge field railways. Changes of regime were accompanied by changes of language, often resented, and the book in review, like the present-day Railway itself, takes care to use present-day terminology (not least with place names, which are notorious for their several versions).

The newly-independent Latvian State Railway as early as 1994 established a national railway museum, several of whose personnel joined to compose this book (whose publication was also supported by the Railway), and all concerned can take justified pride in its accomplishment.

This book can be obtained from Richard Tapper and is priced at £41.00 post-free.

Anthony Heywood, *Engineer of Revolutionary Russia: Iurii V. Lomonosov (1876-1952) and the Railways*, Farnham, Ashgate Publishing, pp.400. £75.00.

Not all our readers would wish to spend the equivalent of 250 Mars Bars for this book, but it is nevertheless worth mentioning, and not only because its author Tony Heywood is a founder-member of NERHT.

Lomonosov is known in the west, if known at all, for his development of locomotive line-testing and for his pioneer work in mainline diesel traction. In fact he did much more besides, not only as a traction engineer but as a railway administrator, and academic. He tried his hand as a conspirator in the 1905 and 1917 revolutions in Russia, briefly did well in Lenin's Russia but got out in time to escape the purges.

His locomotive work occupies only part of this book, which looks at his career as a whole. He was obviously highly talented and original in his thinking, quite boastful, pushy and aggressive. His readiness to start a quarrel alienated many, and his undoubted ability aroused envy (there seems to have been a stream of anonymous letters about him addressed to the authorities). This meant that even when he was right - often about vital matters - he was rarely heeded. He also changed his job repeatedly, partly because of difficult personal relationships and partly because he was very ambitious.

So we have here a study of how talent is not enough. And of how a railway engineer's career can depend so much on the luck of timing, on how many influential friends or enemies there are in his background, and even on his sex life: at one period Lomonosov held simultaneous posts in Kiev and Warsaw, enabling him to enjoy a different partner at each end (a railway pass does have its fringe benefits). In the end, his final marriage to a Jewish girl did his career in Russia no good at all.

This book has loads of footnotes, usually referring to archival sources, and is probably a model of the academic monograph. But the text itself is comfortable reading, and the pictures are well rendered.

So when are we going to see similarly deep studies of British locomotive engineers? When is the crankiness of Collett and Bulleid going to be properly explored?

J N W

Baltic Railways Magazine. Issue No 7 has now appeared, and is obtainable as before through Richard Tapper. As usual, this well-produced bilingual publication provides current news from the three Baltic states and the Russian Kaliningrad system and has a historical section which this time deals with the chequered history of the Darbenai - Sventoji line, the abandoned Soviet plan for a Riga underground railway, and the 2010 fatal collision of a passenger and freight train in Estonia.

More on the Gaivoron line. We are grateful to Sergei Dorozhkov for this 1924 picture made on the Gaivoron line in early Soviet times. The vehicle still bears the markings of its original owner, The First Company of Feeder Lines.



* * * * *

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