

WASC 2072

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'Railway News No. 1'

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*The Royal Gunpowder Mills
Railway News No.1
16/06/03*

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Thank you for showing interest in our railway, which after much delay, is finally starting to take shape.

I think it might help if I explain some of the history of the narrow gauge railways at Waltham Abbey and I hope you will bear with me if I am telling you what you all ready know.

The first railway was introduced to feed the new steam incorporating mills around 1857. This was reputed to be a 2'-3" gauge hand pushed system on elevated wooden track with metal (probably bronze) plate screwed to the top of wooden rails. I say reputed because there is some question as to actual gauge.

In 1916 a 18" gauge railway was laid with Ruston Proctor ZLH petrol/paraffin locos being used for motive power. After 1918 a number of battery locos were added, eventually replacing the Ruston Proctors as the main motive power. The Ruston Proctor's were finally scraped some time in the 1930's.

The railway finally stopped working around 1940, when the site turned from an explosives factory to a research establishment. However the track and battery locos survived till well after the war, as ex-employees can remember taking joy rides on them.

With the opening of the site as a Museum, Woolwich, one of the last surviving Charlton Class 0-4-0T, 18" gauge, steam locomotives, & it's carriages came up for sale at Bicton Gardens in Devon, who had been running it as a tourist attraction since the 1960's.

Woolwich and some of the carriages originated from the Woolwich Arsenal, who was a sister factory to Waltham Abbey, so all though we never ran steam locos at Waltham Abbey, there is a tenuous historical connection.

Unfortunately Woolwich's' 10 year boiler certificate ran out in 2000, so she has remained under tarpaulins in a corner of the site, slowly rusting away. However, as there is no money to do any repair or restoration at the moment, it is hoped that we can persuade the trustees to allow us to put her on show with some of her rolling stock, as a static display.



Track being laid in June.

The current work being undertaken is a 2'-6" gauge, demonstration line using a Hunslet 0-4-0 Diesel loco plus rolling stock from another explosives factory (which is being closed) at Bishopton in Scotland. The loco and wagons should arrive towards the end of July, so we are currently working like trojans (all three of us) to get track laid to take the new acquisitions.

We also have two volunteers beavering away painting some of Waltham Abbey's 18" gauge Cordite wagons, which we intend to display on a 100' section of original track dating from 1916.

If you would be interested in joining use in this ventures why not give me a ring and come to see what we are trying to do. Experience is not important, so don't be put off by the technical aspects of laying track & running a railway, because we are all on a steep learning curve here.



18" gauge Cordite Drying Wagon being painted.

If you don't want to get involved with the Railway, why not volunteer for general duties around the site. Phone 01992 707370 and leave a message for Lynne or Sam or speak to them in person, when you visit the museum.

We are always in need of volunteers for guides & other jobs at weekends.

Railway volunteers can contact me, I am on site Wednesdays, Thursdays and most Saturdays and will always be pleased to see potential volunteers who want to help with the Railways. I can always be contacted on my home number as well.

Robin Parkinson (who has been a leading light in the railway) and I, look forward to meeting you and explaining our plans for the future.

*John Wilson
Tel. 01279 426690*



*Woolwich on one of the rare occasions
When she was not under a tarpaulin.*