



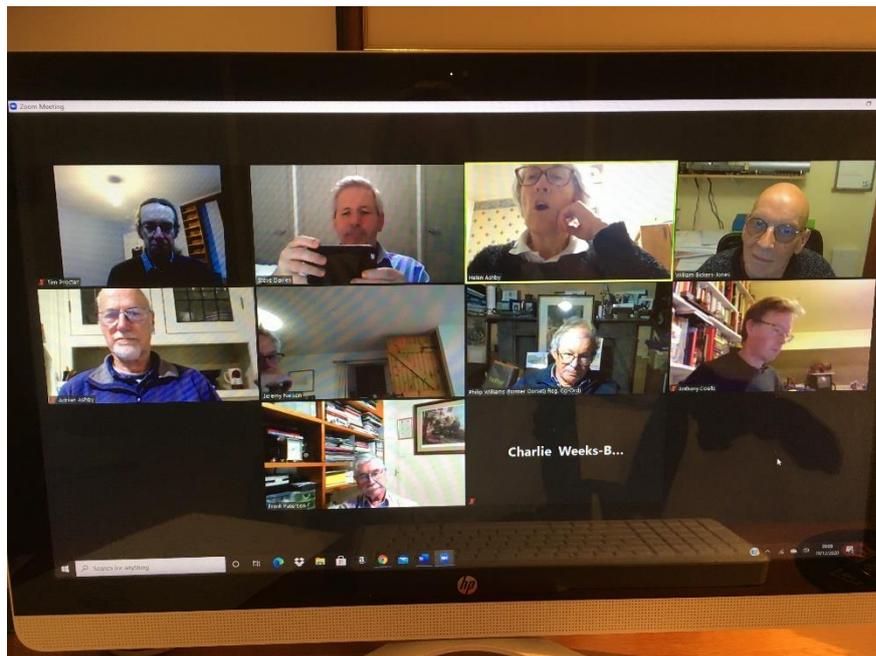
FRIENDS OF SIERRA LEONE NATIONAL RAILWAY MUSEUM

Registered Charity No: 1179579

Honorary President Col. Steve Davies MBE

Honorary Patron Mr. Kamal Nassar, Sierra Construction Systems

AGM NEWSLETTER 2020



Annual General Meeting of the Friends of the Sierra Leone National Railway Museum, held on Zoom on 10th December 2020.

Having circulated the Winter Newsletter early this year, I felt it worthwhile writing an extra one before Christmas to report on the Annual General Meeting and to share a few items of news with you. It's been a strange old year, so I am sure that something new to read will be welcome for most of us!

We have continued to keep in touch with the team at the museum through regular WhatsApp calls and messages. Everyone is well over there and call regularly to find out how we are doing in the UK, as they follow the news online.

The museum remains fairly quiet as tourism has been badly affected by the pandemic, but cases continue to remain low throughout Sierra Leone, with the number of deaths remaining at 74.

We are hopeful of being able to travel during 2021 and have obtained our visas, so that we are ready to go as soon as we can. Our President, Steve Davies MBE visited the Sierra Leone High Commission in London last Tuesday (15th December) to collect them and discovered that his contact Alan Logan, Head of Chancery had been recalled to Sierra Leone and replaced by a new

incumbent, Wiston Yankuba. Mr Yankuba was most interested in our purpose in visiting Sierra Leone since, although he has not yet visited the museum, his father was Station Master at Moyamba and he himself is a railway enthusiast. It couldn't have worked out better!

With all good wishes for a peaceful Christmas and a fruitful and safe 2021.

*Helen Ashby
Chair*

Update from the Sierra Leone National Railway Museum

On 5th November the museum hosted a visit from Mr Torsten William Bellner of Berlin, Germany and his colleague Margaret, from Kenya. They are both working with the railway industry in Kenya and came to Sierra Leone to look at the possibility of working with the government to bring back the railway in Sierra Leone.



The Monuments & Relics Commission has been busy tagging and inscribing heritage sites throughout Sierra Leone, to ensure that their significance is understood and that communities take proper care of them. The declaration of Bauya Junction as a protected cultural asset in March 2020 has now been confirmed through marking with the official declaration stone and explanatory board.



Friends of the Sierra Leone National Railway Museum in action in the UK

Bristol City Archives

Whilst we have not been able to hold any events this year, we have not been idle. Trustees and members have continued to research and gather information and photographs relating to the Sierra Leone Railway and to add them to the growing museum collections.

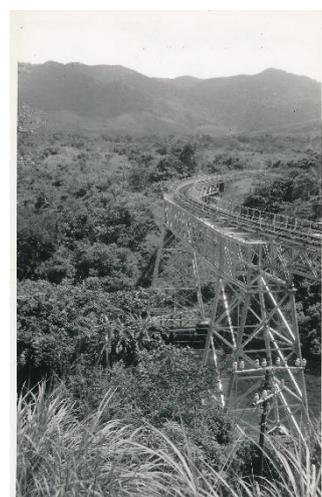
I was delighted to receive an email from Jayne Pucknell, Archivist at Bristol City archives, to let me know that they have recently launched their new online catalogue so we can now access the digitised images from the Crown Agents collection relating to the Sierra Leone Railway much more easily now. The volumes which are already digitised can be seen here – if you click on the ‘Details’ link for each entry you will find the individual images:

<https://becc.bristol.gov.uk/records/1999/221/1/33>

<https://becc.bristol.gov.uk/records/1999/221/1/34>

There are a further 4 volumes specifically relating to Sierra Leone (1999/221/1/35-38) which have not been digitised, plus additional photographs of locomotives, carriages, wagons in later volumes, some of which may detail stock built in the UK prior to shipment abroad. William Bickers-Jones and I are planning to make a visit in the New Year to look at these and to see how we can work together to promote this collection.

Photographs from the Tony Baxter Collection



These amazing photographs of Orogu Viaduct were amongst a group of things sent to us by Friends member, Michael Whitehouse, who is currently sorting the collection of his late friend, Tony Baxter. Many thanks for thinking of us Michael.

One of the last trains to Segbwema

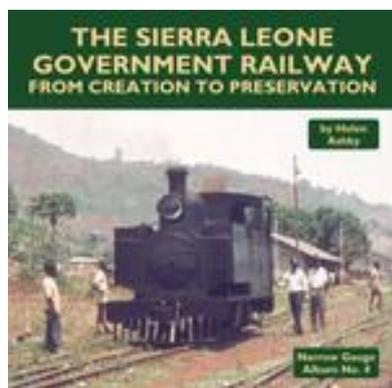
It was also exciting to receive these pictures via Facebook, depicting Beyer-Garratt No 73, which is now preserved in the museum, hauling on of the last ever trains to Segbwema in 1971.



The Sierra Leone Government Railway – From Creation to Preservation

Many thanks to Iain McCall of Mainline & Maritime, a) for agreeing to join us as a trustee and b) for having published the book that was shamelessly advertised in the Winter Newsletter.

Anthony Coulls has written a lovely review for the book, published below:



The Sierra Leone Government Railway – from Creation to Preservation
By Helen Ashby, published by Mainline & Maritime, 120 pages, hardback, monochrome and colour photos, £19.95 (£4.00 per copy donated to the FoSLNRM)

This could be the shortest book review in the world – simply, buy it!

However, it would not be fair not to say a few words about this book produced by our Chair, Helen Ashby, during lockdown. Apart from the Middleton Press Sierra Leone album (sadly out of print) and our own “Sierra Leone Railway Adventure”, there have not been any published books on the SLGR that are readily accessible. Helen’s beautifully produced book meets this need, and in its medium format hardback covers will find a ready place on any narrow-gauge enthusiasts’ bookshelf, or indeed anyone with a love or interest in Sierra Leone itself. Covering two thirds historic images and a third of the museum collection and present-day situation, the photographs cover the entire period from construction of the railway to our museum. If I may be biased, it is in the historic photographs that this book is particularly special. For the first time, pictures from the museum’s collection and our own Friends and supporters are accessible – and reproduced stunningly, especially when you consider some of them are from Box Brownie film hardly bigger than a postage stamp.

I’ll not spoil the content, but both monochrome and colour pictures abound, of both the everyday and the unusual, and printed at one picture per page, there is no cropping to annoy the reader and every picture is able to stand for itself. I particularly enjoyed being able to look at the detail around each photo – not just the railway and equipment, but the environment and the people. It’s a wonderful historic record. In short, if you haven’t already bought this book, please do, £4 from each sale via the publisher Mainline and Maritime benefits the Friends. If you have bought it, then buy another copy for your friends, family, cat or dog – it’s well worth every penny, more so knowing that you are directly supporting the work of the museum.

Anthony Coulls

The publication of the book has been made even more important to me since receiving this message via our Facebook Page from Christine Gemson, the daughter of Bob Wall, many of whose photographs are included in the book:

“Hello, I am very sad to tell you all that My Dad, Bob Wall passed away on November 15th. It was very sudden and unexpected, even though he was 97. I wanted to let you know that one of the last things I shared with him was the book you published using his photographs. He was thrilled and flattered and when he saw the photo of my Mum, he had tears in his eyes. Thank you for giving him such pleasure.”

The book is available online from the Mainline & Maritime website <https://mainline-maritime.myshopify.com/collections/maritime/products/the-sierra-leone-government-railway-from-creation-to-preservation>

FoSLNRM Annual General Meeting

We held a very successful and safe AGM on 19th December on Zoom and it was encouraging that we had our highest attendance from members to date. Apologies to those of you who don't do Zoom, but at least we kept our carbon footprint low and provided an opportunity for participation from people across the whole country – from Orkney to the South West! I have included the notes from the meeting here so that those of you who could not attend can remain up to date with our activities.

Minutes of the 4th Annual General Meeting of the Friends of the Sierra Leone National Railway Museum. 7pm 10th December 2020

Present: Steve Davies (President), Helen Ashby (Chair), William Bickers-Jones, (Treasurer), Tim Procter, Adrian Ashby, Charlie Weeks-Bell, Jeremy Nelson, Sir Philip Williams, Nick Stringer, Frank Paterson, Anthony Coulls (Secretary).

Apologies were received from: Anita Hollinshead, Tom Lee, Keith Doyle.

Chairman's Report, given by Helen Ashby

Welcome to the fourth AGM of the Friends of Sierra Leone National Railway Museum. What a strange year 2020 has been, but at least it has given us the opportunity to try out holding the AGM remotely so that more of our members have the opportunity to join.

The year since our last AGM started well, with Adrian and I spending six weeks in Freetown again, working with the team on a broad range of interpretation, education and infrastructure projects, together with a trip up-country visiting key places along the former railway to identify locations and relics at risk. The trip was facilitated by the Deputy Minister of Tourism & Culture Affairs, who, as a Mende from South Eastern Sierra Leone, was able to facilitate our passage with the local Paramount Chiefs and village elders. As a result of that visit, three station signs that were at risk of destruction were collected and installed in the compound in Cline Town – Segbwema, Hangha and Blama.

During that visit, we began discussions about how the museum could celebrate its fifteenth anniversary in March 2020 and the seeds were sown for a series of celebratory events.

During a discussion with our friends from Sierra Construction Systems about problems with the water supply at the museum, they suggested that the best solution would be to drill a borehole, which would create an independent supply. As they were working on a development in Cline Town they knew that the water table was sufficient to provide a constant supply – the only drawback would be the potential cost of around £10,000 for drilling, connection and plumbing. An appeal was launched, and we are most grateful to all those members who donated. Thanks to a generous donation from the Friends of the National Railway Museum in York, we were able to raise the balance of funds very quickly and drilling started at the end of January, with the work completed at the beginning of March. This was timely, as it coincided with the introduction of preventive measures as coronavirus reared its ugly head, and we were able to provide hand wash facilities to all staff and visitors.

March saw a contingent of Friends and associates heading for Freetown, including John McGoldrick, Curator of Industry at Leeds Industrial Museum, who managed to secure Art Fund sponsorship for his trip, Steve Clews, Chairman of the Welshpool & Llanfair Light Railway, for the fifteenth anniversary celebrations. The visit included a keke and walking tour of the old railway lines through Freetown, workshops for the museum staff, a special reception at the British High Commission, and two major celebratory events. The first event on Tuesday 10th March took place at Bauya Junction, some 64 miles from Cline Town. The event was led by the Deputy Minister of Tourism & Cultural Affairs, Mr William I K Robinson and the Director of Culture, Foday Jalloh and was centred round the declaration of the site as being protected cultural property. As Bauya is the junction between the main line and the Makeni Branch and only exists because of the railway junction, this is most fitting and I hope you will all agree, something that the Friends would wish to support.

The final event of the series was the actual anniversary event at the Museum on Thursday 12th March. This was a typical Sierra Leonean festival, with lot of speeches interspersed with music, provided by Ballanta Music Academy Junior Band, and dance provided by the local community and Freetown Chapter of the Friends of the SLNRM. It included a twinning with the Welshpool & Llanfair Light Railway, the signing of a professional mentoring agreement between the Ministry and me and the reaffirmation of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry and ourselves as the Friends of the SLNRM.

Membership has stayed stable this year with 60 members, including five honorary members and six new members and a few non-renewals.

At the last AGM we welcomed Chris McKenna to the board of Trustees. Chris is working on the website and gradually updating and adding to it. Sadly, as a health working in the US he has had extremely limited time to devote to it this year. We still have space on the board for further Trustees and will continue to welcome volunteers and nominations. I am grateful to existing Trustees for their continued support and for agreeing to stand again for election this year.

This year, we have been unable to hold any of our fundraising and advocacy events, so we have sought alternative means of raising funds and maintaining our advocacy to support the museum.

Steve and Helen have given presentations on Zoom, which have proved useful in reaching wider audiences, including overseas participants from as far afield as Indonesia, Japan and India as well as a number of Sierra Leoneans. These resulted in several welcome donations.

We have continued to trickle money into the Friends through Easyfundraising, Facebook giving, PayPal giving and Amazon smile – if you shop online, please do not forget to sign up and give through these schemes. They do not cost you anything at all and are a useful source of funds. A few pounds have also been raised through the continuing sale of secondhand books.

In seeking alternative ways of raising money this year, I am very grateful to Iain McCall of Mainline & Maritime, who kindly agreed to publish a photographic book about the Sierra Leone Railway, which was published in September this year. It retails at £19.95, with a royalty of £4.00 per copy being donated to the FoSLNRM. The book uses images which are part of the museum collection or which have been shared with the museum by private individuals who have given permission for their use and includes pictures dating from the late 19th century to the present. If you haven't got your copy yet, it is available online.

Whilst we have not been able to undertake our usual November visit this year, we have maintained contact with the team in Cline Town, through WhatsApp. Zoom and email and continue to provide moral and professional support. The team have kept us updated with activity taking place in the museum, enabling us to maintain the Facebook Page on their behalf and to continue to issue the quarterly newsletter for members of the Friends.

We now look forward to 2021 and to being able to plan future visits, events and projects.

All that remains is to thank our membership for your continued support and to open the floor to any questions.

Charlie Weeks-Bell offered to assist with video messaging for a future event commemorating the passing of Mohamed Bangura on 30th December 2020 and would liaise with Helen.

Steve Davies proposed the meeting accept the report and Philip Williams seconded this. The meeting unanimously agreed.

Update from Sierra Leone National Railway Museum by President Steve Davies

Steve began by thanking Helen for all the effort and energy she continues to devote to the Friends and noted that he remained in touch via video meetings with what remains at times a politically turbulent country.

There have been prison riots and the former President Koroma continues to be pursued by anti-corruption forces. Much has been contained however by now, and the country is comparatively stable.

Coronavirus has presented a major challenge to the SLNRM, but by the 15th Anniversary celebrations in March, the country was ahead of the UK with protective measures. The country has been fairly clear of the virus health-wise as people have been disciplined enough to follow guidelines, but it has hit the country hard economically. Despite this, the situation has meant that the Government has kept its cultural focus on the Museum and the Deputy Minister has visited on a number of occasions. The Deputy Minister and Steve intend to have a video conference at some point soon to ask how the Friends can support work at Bauya Junction and what the Minister would like us to do.

The Friends have helped with financial support, which also gives a vast morale boost to the team, as has the International Railway Heritage Consultancy. Our Patron in Sierra Leone, Kamal Nassar has recently celebrated his 80th birthday; Helen and Steve had both sent video greetings, thinking him for the massive support he has given to the museum.

There is growing momentum in Sierra Leone for the President to visit the museum in January 2021. It is quite possible that Steve and Helen could visit Sierra Leone at short notice to support the event and impress the importance of the museum to the Country. Over the next few years, the challenge will be to grow membership of the Friends and look to involve the UK Foreign Office.

Anthony proposed thanks to Steve for his work as President including the 2020 initiative to grow awareness of the museum by Zoom talks and fostering international relationships. This was warmly received by all present.

Treasurer’s report – 2019-20 financial year, and 2020-21 year to date. William Bickers-Jones

2019-20

2019 was a very busy year, with a lot going on financially, including multiple visits to SL, and large projects happening, such as the borehole, to provide a much needed reliable water supply to the museum. This is reflected in the finances, with donations at an amazing £20,760, but these were mostly for specific projects, and project costs totalled £21,919 this year. Operating costs were of course high, due to all the project involvement, at £4,408, but this is why we exist, to help our museum!

To help fund all this activity, we transferred £3,000 from our business reserve account, but we raised Over £1800 from sales, almost £380 from secondhand sales, and received grants of £1097.

We had a variety of events in the year, including the Welshpool and Llanfair Gala, which was incredibly successful on sales, and also netted us some new and renewing members.

We started the financial year with £2985 in the current account, and ended it with £5774.80. Business reserve started at £3076, and ended at £501 (not forgetting that £3000 transfer, to assist with the massive projects).

Then came Covid 19...

	Income		Expenditure	
Membership	£860.00		SLNRM Projects	£21,919.02
Donations	£20,760.80		Acquisitions	£0.00
Sales	£1,833.20		Merchandise	£32.31
Second Hand	£377.27		Operating costs	£4,408.68
Grant	£1,097.00		Refunds	£0.00
Lectures	£0.00			
Easyfundrasing	£198.77			

Gogetfunding	£501.54			
Sumup	£52.09			
Paypal giving	£8.50			
Refunds	£460.00			
Business Reserve	£3,000.00			
Total	£29,149.17		Total	£26,360.01
Balance brought forward 01/04/2019	£2,985.64			
Total current ac	£32,134.81		Total current ac	£26,360.01
Balance current ac	£5,774.80			

Transfer from current account			Transfer to current account	£3,000.00
Donations	£0.00			
Sales				
Second Hand				
Grant				
Gift Aid	£423.26			
Refunds				
Interest	£1.44			
Total	£424.70		Total	£3,000.00
Balance brought forward	£3,076.30			£0.00
Total business reserve ac	£3,501.00		Total business reserve ac	£3,000.00
Balance business reserve ac	£501.00			

Total Income 2019-20	£29,573.87		Total Expenditure 2018-19	£29,360.01
Balance 2019-20	£213.86			
Balance brought forward c/a	£2,985.64			
Balance brought forward br/a	£3,076.30			
GRAND TOTAL 2019-20	£6,275.80			

2020-21 - the year so far

Unsurprisingly, 2020-21 financial year has been something of a disappointment, which reflects in the finances so far. Membership has taken a hit, as have sales, donations and grants. This has left us more dependent on the small but regular income from such things as book sales, and such things as Easyfundraising, and Amazon smile. I think Helen has already mentioned Amazon Smile, as a way to divert a tiny proportion of Amazon's profits of one's spending, to a good cause. I have to say I've made some small contribution to that whilst buying supplies for the "Friends", such as paper, and folders, but in these Covid times, I think we're all using online shopping rather more than previously.

The total lack of events has hit earnings from sales hard, as well as the surge in membership such events tends to bring. Helen and others have managed a few socially distanced or Zoom talks, and maybe this is something to develop further.

I could say that the lack of events also reduces our expenditure, but this isn't really a true reflection, as the cost of attending events is normally borne by those of us who take part, and of course no public exposure to our good works hurts everyone who would ultimately benefit from the projects we could undertake if we were able. Operating costs were down to £313, and projects to £4,534.

So far this year, our income from membership is down to £440, donations £569, sales £893, secondhand £30, with minor support from Easyfundraising, Gogetfunding and the like at around £100. As of yesterday, our current account balance was £2943, and business reserve £939. Obviously, there are some funds which have not reached their final destination yet.

A summary of the 2019-20 finances will be sent out with Helen's next newsletter, and obviously the 20-21 figures will be available after the next AGM.

In comments, Helen noted the intention to hold a virtual auction in support of the SLNRM, run by Iain McCall with a number of exclusive auction lots. The practicalities of this were being worked out, and it is hoped that the auction would run online for 90 days and finish on 27th April, that being the 60th Anniversary of Sierra Leone's independence.

It was noted by William that each sale of Helen's book on the Sierra Leone Railway raised £4 for the Friends and that this was most welcome.

Helen proposed adoption of the Treasurer's Report and accounts, Tim Procter seconded this, and all attendees were in favour.

Election of Officers

Helen read out the list of Officers and Trustees standing for re-election.

Philip Williams suggested re-election en bloc, this was seconded by Charlie Weeks-Bell and carried unanimously. Philip subsequently suggested that the Trustees be appointed for differing periods of time to prevent all being up for election at the same time – this would be looked at after the meeting.

Helen separately proposed Iain McCall as a new Trustee, this was seconded by Steve Davies and unanimously carried by all present and Iain welcomed to the Friends.

Any Other Business

Philip Williams noted that the South Tynedale Railway has a former SL carriage in use as a café, Steve Davies answered that the Welshpool & Llanfair Railway has an ambition to acquire this, indeed, William Bickers-Jones announced that he had found the correct bogies for the carriage.

Steve made the meeting aware of a splendid selection of Crown Agents photographs from 1896-1899 in the collection of Bristol Archives. There could be a second book from these images, Helen and William hoped to visit the Archives as soon as allowed. Philip also noted there could be a tie in with Peaches Goulding, Lord Lieutenant of Bristol, whilst Tim knows the Archivist at Bristol which could be very helpful.

Through the internet, Helen had been contacted by Fatmata Mansaray, whose father was the last Station Master at Hastings and photos had been promised. Likewise, Steve shared some images taken by Richard Hartman in the 1960s, noting that it was great to see so many new pictures still coming to light.

Helen asked how members felt about continuing to hold the AGM via Zoom online rather than in person. Tim commented that this also allowed input from the Freetown members, which was welcome. It was generally agreed that we would continue with this practice, Jeremy Nelson endorsing the use of video conferencing from the far North!

Philip wished to record thanks from the Trustees to the membership in general who contribute from afar to the museum with their continued membership of the Friends.

Date of Next Meeting

This was suggested to be during November or December 2021, a date to be advised.

There being no other business, Helen as Chairman thanked all for attending the meeting and closed formalities at 8.33pm

Anthony Coulls
Secretary, 11th December 2020

<https://www.facebook.com/sierraleonerailwaymuseum>
<https://www.facebook.com/FoSLNRM/>

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