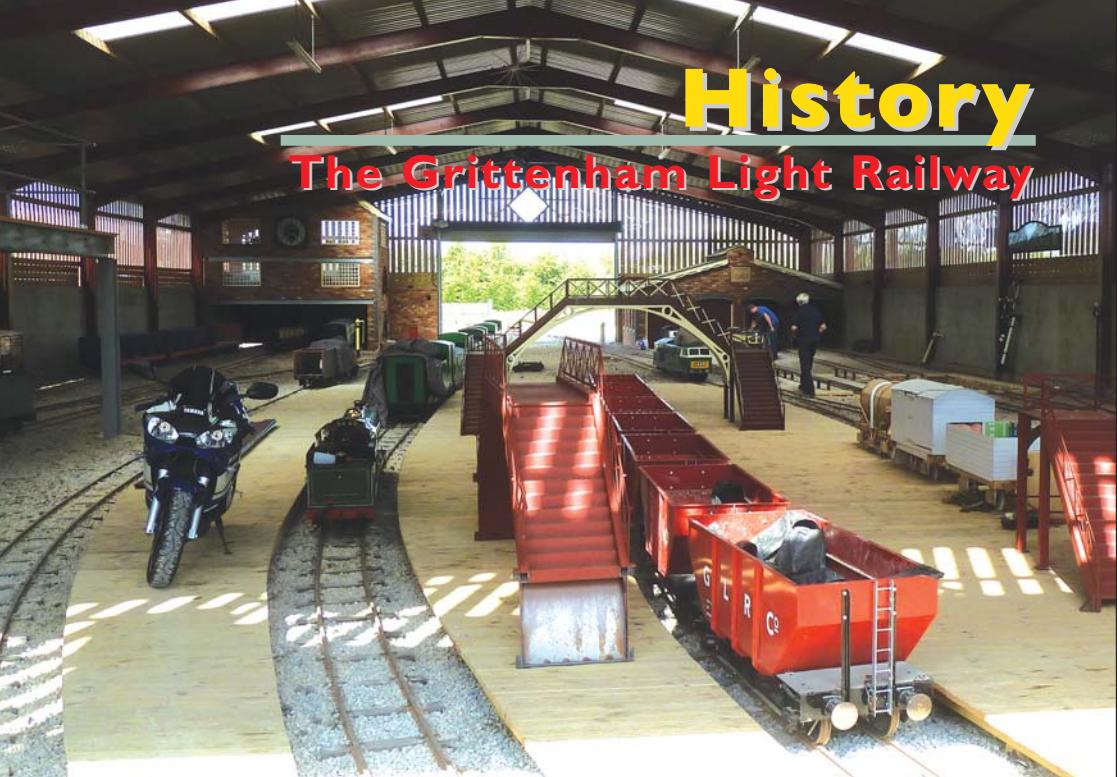


History

The Grittenham Light Railway

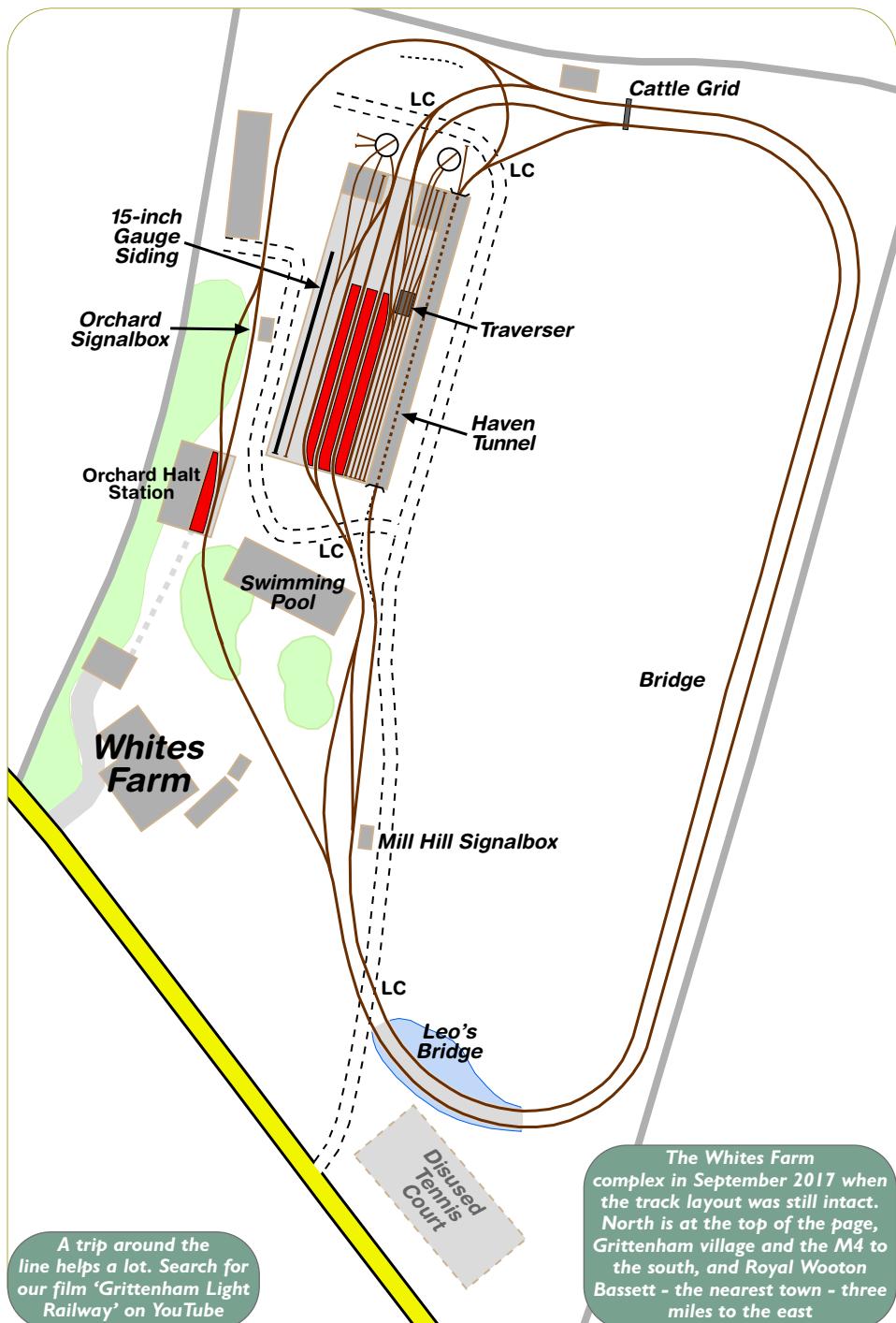


The HQ of the Grittenham Light Railway was a station that really could claim to have an all-over roof. The 15-inch siding and carriage sidings are away to the left, with the loco shed, sidings and traverser on the right

If you have an interest in something, it's reasonable to assume that you might dream about it. Hang-glider pilots no doubt dream about that unexpected stall just above a jagged rock face, athletes about the Olympic gold, and so on. If you enjoy driving miniature locomotives, you might find yourself in charge of something quite big, on a double track mainline, hauling, say, seven bogie coal wagons, passing a variety of other trains, some immediately recognisable as classic machines, then into a terminus the size of a cathedral, with an all-over roof, two turntables, four platforms. And then you wake up, or in Alexander's case, you don't, because it really happened on 1st September 2017, and we've got the videos and photos to prove it. Even a detailed map, so it can't be a dream surely?

A little history. Businessman Richard Davies had a long-standing interest in miniature railways, particularly - but not exclusively - 10¹/₄-inch gauge. With a farm in Wiltshire and enough money to buy up some interesting stock, he set to work on the project, aided in his enterprise by Jeff Price of the Miniature Railway Supply Company. A farm building was needed, but if you're thinking of a grubby old barn, think again. Imagine going to an agricultural building supplier, leafing through their catalogue and putting your finger on the biggest and boldest model ever supplied. In this case, it enclosed a truly breathtaking space without any internal pillars or supports. And inside, the contractors built a railway station with three through platform roads, and one terminating, a traverser and numerous sidings, mostly at 10¹/₄-inch gauge, but with short lengths of 9¹/₂-inch and 15-inch gauge too.

You could house a massive collection of miniature rolling stock in a space like that, and you could have a lot of fun under cover without even taking them out, but Richard also built a massive circuit, double track naturally, with numerous other sidings, a little station or two, a small lake almost buried beneath an awe-inspiring double-track bridge, and much much more. The site would theoretically have been able to handle a large number of bi-directional trains, but the signalling



system never seems to have been finished and it's hard to see precisely how the line was operated.

This became the Whites Farm Railway, or the Grittenham Light Railway. Richard acquired stock as and when it came onto the market, until the vast shed was - if nowhere near full - comfortably *busy* to the casual observer. The Miniature Railway Supply Company provided expertise, points, and some rolling stock, and started work building more. It seemed this was going to develop into one of the most fascinating private collections ever amassed.

Then Richard found himself unable to stay in Wiltshire, following an urgent need to set up a subsidiary in the Mediterranean, and it was decided that the entire place, including stretches of track that had barely been used in 12 years, would be sold, either piecemeal or - unlikely, but possible - intact, as a functioning entity.

If you've been wondering where certain items went to ground in the last few years, they were probably here. Some were sold quickly and quietly, with others taking a little longer. Just to give a flavour, locomotives included various parts of Bob Some collection, including 'Monica', the

"...If you're wondering where certain items went to ground, they were probably here..."



GWR Class 14XX, No. 1466, was Bob Symes' cherished tank loco. It was built by Joe Nemeth Engineering for his Greendene Railway in Horsley, Surrey, which opened in 2000 and closed in 2013



Bob's GWR railcar 'Monica' was another delightful machine, built in 2004 by Jim Rough. Like the tank loco, it came to the Grittenham Light Railway in 2013, and it was re-engined from petrol to diesel while it was there. It could carry two at a pinch, but it was cosy, and clearly a rather uncomfortable arrangement! The railcar has just left the main station heading north and approaching the cattle grid, with roughly 500 metres still to go, to complete the circuit

delightful GWR railcar, and the GWR 14XX tank loco. Oddities included a Thurston 'Bullock-style' Pacific 'Condor', an LBSCR 'K' Class Pacific, and there was a lot of rolling stock too, including a 15-inch NER steam crane. The effect of sucking all this equipment out of the market must have been quite profound, and putting it back must have caused some excitement too.

Today, not a trace of the Grittenham Light Railway remains, apart from the giant shed, which may already have found a new use. Well, actually, there is one sign. The bridge over the little lake is still there for future generations to puzzle over.

We were tempted to try and trace the background to the precipitous arrival and departure of the Grittenham Light Railway, but quite frankly, the story is in the locos and the rolling stock, all of which were well cared for during their tenure at White's Farm. This snapshot of equipment is not exhaustive, as some locos and stock had left before we arrived.



It's wonderful to see the much-travelled Bassett-Lowke Atlantic 'Stanley Baldwin' back in the UK and ready to run again. It has been bought by the Croftorne Light Railway (page 24)



'Springbok' was the first LNER B1, built in 1942 for mixed traffic use, which sounds just what was needed at the time. So much for the original... we don't know anything about the miniature



Mardyke Hymek 'Arctic Fox' jump-starting GWR railcar 'Monica' - not something you see every day. Note the fine 'loco shed within a shed'



No.337 was the first 'K' class LBSCR locomotive, designed by chief locomotive engineer L B Billington and outshopped from Brighton Works in 1913. They continued to give good service until they were all scrapped in the early 1960s. The only survivor was this model, built by Billington in retirement. Being 1:6 scale, it's 9½-inch gauge as can be seen from the unconnected rails bottom right



Alexander demonstrates the Cromar White carriages, but he really wants to be out driving the Hymek. Not the easiest stock for larger people to get in and out of, heavy, bulky, expensive and hopelessly impractical, but probably the finest carriages ever built on this scale



This NER steam crane was 15-inch gauge and sat on its own short siding with three small wagons. Where did they all end up?

The railway had a lot of carriages, and almost as many freight wagons, with more under construction - note the cardboard mockups on the platform in the distance. The shed roads and east side turntable were linked via this traverser keeping shed traffic clear of the running lines



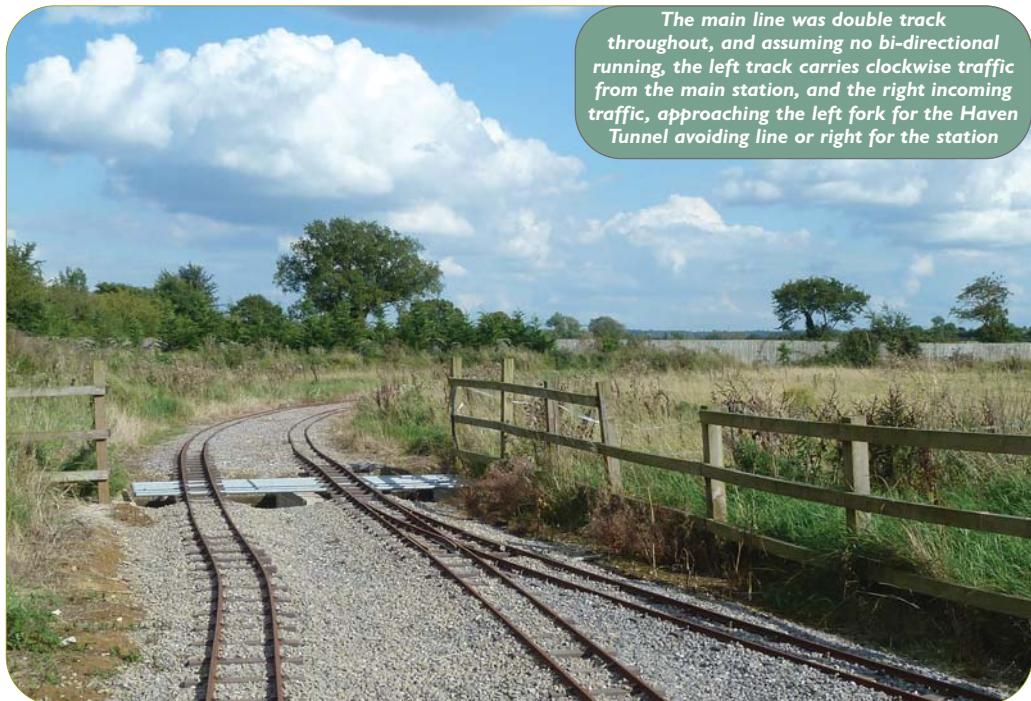
A lovely pair of air-braked wagons, presumably 10 1/4-inch, but it's hard to judge the scale



The Grittenham Light Railway had two identical turntables known as the Two Sisters, just to the north of the shed on the west and east side of the main line. This one is on the west side



Through traffic could either take the longer 'country' route through Orchard Halt station or the 130 foot Haven Tunnel which ran in a sort of superior lean-too



The main line was double track throughout, and assuming no bi-directional running, the left track carries clockwise traffic from the main station, and the right incoming traffic, approaching the left fork for the Haven Tunnel avoiding line or right for the station



Leo's Bridge was an extraordinary affair, dwarfing the pond it crossed! It was substantially built, but offered no protection from a dunking in case of a derailment