

Lea Bailey Light Railway Society

Summer 2015

Ray Wright



It is with great sadness that we have to report the death of Clearwell Caves and Lea Bailey Gold Mine owner and founder, Ray Wright.

London-born Ray passed away at home in his beloved Royal Forest of Dean, aged 85, on August 7th.

He opened Clearwell Caves in 1968, served as Secretary of the Freeminers Association for 31 years and was one of four Verderers. Ray was instrumental in opening Lea Bailey Gold Mine as a tourist attraction, thwarted by break-ins and vandalism. But his vision continued with strong support and backing for the LBLRS, without which we would not be where we are today. We are thankful to his family, and Jonathan, for their continued support. The photos show Ray with the Hunslet 7446 when it was undergoing restoration. This is now to be named with a brass plaque "Ray Wright" in his memory. Ray is also seen driving the first train at Lea Bailey, over 20 years ago.



NEWS IN BRIEF

The society gained great publicity in May when Rob Needham gave an interview to Forest-based Triangle Radio.

Two brake handles and ratchet gears plus four battery box retaining clips are being made for the WR8 by Tim Hodder of Whitecroft. He is also making an Eimco guardrail and operators platform.

Another ex-brickworks wagon has been moved from Clearwell to Lea Bailey, where it will be regauged and converted into a bogie wagon for general railway use.

The V tipper wagon has returned from Drybrook to Lea Bailey where it is being used to help spread ballast.

At least four new sleepers were stolen in August from the stack beside the container at LB.

Members have cleared muck from the turntable at Clearwell in readiness for the open day. A rubber seal may be fitted around the edge to prevent future mud.



AUTUMN OPEN DAY

Forestry logging operations, heavy rain and mud have hampered progress this summer at Lea Bailey, but the narrow gauge open day on September 19th and 20th will not dampen excitement with a star line-up of locos.



Alan Keef's Skippy (bottom right) should be at Lea Bailey with the Simplex and battery loco collection. The WR5 can be seen at Hopewell Colliery Museum on Sunday, and it is hoped MotorRail 9932 will be at Clearwell, along with the Hunslet. Volunteer permitting, a wagon will be hauled up the incline at Clearwell, and spun on the turntable to meet a waiting loco. The event runs from 11am-4pm each day.



HELPING AT HOPEWELL COLLIERY MUSEUM

Freeminer Rich Daniels is planning a facelift at Hopewell Colliery Museum.

Volunteers from LBLRS have been helping him replace sleepers on the small narrow gauge tourist loop.

Passenger wagons were hauled by a Ruston loco for a number of years until former owner Robin Morgan decided to concentrate on mining.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Four members are setting off for Cornwall in September on a fact finding mission.

Visits are planned to Rosevale Mine, which has a small narrow gauge line, run by volunteers, the Moseley Museum at Tumblydown Farm, King Edward and Geevor mines, and the Camborne School of Mines, Holman test mine.

Loco repairs and restoration, track laying, ballasting and maintenance are draining the society's funds.

Donations will help keep work on track and Treasurer Rob Needham has asked for subscriptions to be paid as soon as they are due. Subs provide the only regular income for the railway.

An appeal has gone out for more volunteers to join the Sunday work parties. Numbers have decreased recently from 6-8 to 3-4 people.

Refreshments are provided, along with the chance to learn how to drive the locos!

Brake parts for the WR8 have now arrived onsite for fitting. The coverplates have also been straightened out.

FROM OUR NEW CHAIRMAN –

Ben Coulson writes:

How I found Lea Bailey
or
How the Forest found me



The Forest of Dean was just another place I had read about in railway magazines as a young boy; fascinated by all aspects of railways I would often stop in WH Smiths to leaf through the latest magazines before catching the bus to school. My local railway was the 2' gauge line at Wicksteed Park in Kettering which was later managed by our friend David Nelson who now runs the Perrygrove Railway near Coleford.

My father is a cricket fan and mother was a primary school teacher and together they conspired to get my teenage self out of the house during the weekend so I was encouraged to join the Northampton & Lamport Railway Preservation Society which kept me busy on Sundays and also kept the teachers wondering why I arrived at school on Monday mornings with coal dust under my fingernails. The arrival of a Class 108 DMU for preservation and its subsequent move to Norchard once again put the Dean Forest on my radar although I never got to visit at this stage.

Fast forward to 2010 and I had been invited by my girlfriend to go on the family holiday with her parents to a log cabin near Ledbury. The owners keep a supply of leaflets for local tourist attractions in the cabin and for her birthday we decided to visit Clearwell Caves. Taking a scenic route via Ross and Monmouth I entered the Forest for the first time. We can thank Ray Wright for bringing me here in the first place.

I was naturally intrigued by the surface railway and the incline at Clearwell, and even took a photograph of a tipper wagon, not realising that in about 3½ years I would be back down there to help haul it back up the incline.

Further visits to Ledbury, Gloucester and the Forest followed, and eventually the house in Northampton went on the market and I ended up buying a house in Mitcheldean. Part of my research into the area included a page about Mitcheldean by our own Webmaster Rob Dickinson and looking around the rest of his website I found the pages about Lea Bailey. Once the dust had settled from the move I signed up as a member and the rest, they say, is history...

ALL HAPPENING AT ALAN KEEFS

Our friends at Alan Keef Ltd have announced that the planned 'Steam-Up and Open Day' will not be going ahead this September 2015 – however, the decision has been taken for the best possible reasons!

"The culmination of a large project in Europe in conjunction with other major project work and the wonderful news that my fellow director and sister Alice Basey will be having a baby around the same time as the Open Day, together with two family house moves, meant we had to review our priorities," said Managing Director Patrick Keef.

The company has recently completed the delivery of the first batch of four Decauville type KG replica carriages for Paira Daiza Zoo in Belgium as part of a project to redevelop their 600mm passenger railway. A further four carriages will be delivered during the Summer. The first set of carriages made a stunning addition to the Zoo's railway and the attached pictures show them in service hauled by a re-built Polish LAS locomotive.





FORGING LINKS

Rob Needham has been busy forging links between LBLRS and other mining organisations and societies. Just recently, restoration enthusiasts at Geevor Mine in Cornwall were on the lookout for a set of Eimco cables.

Rob came to the rescue, having just had a set made in the Forest for our own Eimco shovel. A further set was hand crafted by experts and delivered in person by Rob to Kevin Matthews (pictured) in August. At the same time, Rob and newsletter editor Phil were treated to a “behind the scenes” tour of Geevor, including a tantalising glimpse at a shed full of battery locos that lay in the same condition as they did after being hauled up the shaft when mining operations ceased in 1991.

MUD SLIDING

After a washout summer, the excavation of forest mud and the spreading of another ten tonnes of ballast, the new long siding is taking shape, thanks to hard graft by LBLRS volunteers.



ALL TANKED UP!



With much pushing, shoving and a tow from the Simplex, the tank that has been on site at Lea Bailey for years is now serving a useful purpose as an engine shed for the battery locos.

The tank / shed is located at the far end of the new long siding, which is nearing completion.