



Picton Rail & Sail¹
on the Picton Foreshore
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NEWSLETTER April 2021

Brian Morris, Editor 021 192 2936

Picton stars on the small screen



On Sunday 14 March, at 8am sharp, Picton’s foreshore bird-life received some serious competition in the form of hordes of young people filling the air with the sound of their early-morning greeting to, and support for, the stars of TV2’s *What Now* programme. The producers decided on a live broadcast from Picton, and made a special request

for Rail and Sail to put on a ride for its presenter – during which Charlotte and its driver received an unexpected “foaming” (you can see it all on **TV on Demand**). Our seating and picnic tables also featured – for an on-air birthday party, and most important of all, for exhausted children and parents to have a quiet sit-down before, during and after the excitement, fun and noise. Afterwards we had our usual Sunday schedule, and with the wind picking up, the yachts were doing an America’s Cup race of their very own on the pond. to the later shifts



to all the members who arrived early to help, and that coped so well throughout a very busy day.



*The passenger carriage looks great with its new upholstery, and the new valve that Crafar Crouch installed **did** seem to be doing the trick with regard to preventing unexpected pool drainage. However, the pool mysteriously emptied itself again, over 17 / 18 March.*

¹ *Picton Society of Model Engineers Incorporated*

Paul alerted Bob who checked it out, and found that everything seemed to be operating correctly. So this is hopefully a one-off mystery which will never have to be solved again! **Paul Van Der Werff** has updated the pool SOP booklet, and has also taken on another of Kerry's duties – maintaining the yachts. We are so lucky to have this kind of expertise and willingness - and **Faye Doig** is another such treasure, having volunteered to take over Kerry's kitchen and pantry duties!

Roster-reminders: thanks to Quentin's call-out in the last newsletter, we now have three members who call to remind drivers and station-managers the day before their shift. Such a helpful action, as we all have busy lives and the roster does change, so it's great to have a personal, friendly and above all timely heads-up. Thanks as always to **Carol, Chris and Doreen**.



A farewell "do" for Les and Gwen Remnant who, as reported in the last newsletter, are retiring to Christchurch. We will also use the occasion to acknowledge the immense contribution to the Society over the year made by **Kerry Johnson and Brian Henstock**, who are stepping down from their respective roles on the Committee. All members are

invited to the Picton RSA, Wellington Street, on Wednesday 07 April, from 6pm, to say their farewells, share some stories, enjoy a beverage (everyone pays for their own) and each other's company. The Committee is arranging for some snack platters, so please, RSVP Deb Parker (railandsailpicton@gmail.com) to ensure we get the catering right!

Editor's pick ...

Question from last newsletter: What happened to NZ Railways' old steam locos?

Of course we've all seen *Passchendaele* steaming up the Elevation, its carriages filled with tourists back in pre-Covid days. Weka Pass, Taieri Gorge, Glenbrook, Shantytown, Ferrymead Railways, to name but a few, all run steam locos occasionally (click on this link for more information

<https://teara.govt.nz/en/railways/page-4>. But some



steam locos have had much sadder, more undignified fates, being cut up for scrap or dumped in rivers to strengthen banks for flood control, like the one above, being retrieved from the Oreti River last year. Try the following link for more information about this retrieval (a real two-for-one endeavour, as it turned out!): <https://www.stuff.co.nz/motoring/news/119115296/rare-locomotives-pulled-from-river-bank-in-northern-southland>



If you ever go on the TranzAlpine, you might see the remains of old steam engines in the banks of the Grey / Mawhera River near Greymouth. Click on the following link for the history and possible future of this loco, photographed as it was being deliberately tipped into the river decades ago.

http://www.whitebusfamily.co.nz/omoto_salvage.htm

Still on the subject of steam, these locos and rails had their own specialist workers to maintain them in tip-top condition. Wheeltappers, gandy dancers and shunters were employed in very specific roles (and some still are, although there are fewer of them, and they use modern electronic technology instead of muscle).

Wheeltappers carried a long-handled hammer that they would use to tap each railway wheel, listening to the tap-echo. A wheel in good condition produced a healthy ring, rather as a bell would sound, while a cracked wheel would not ring 'true' in the same way as a cracked bell does not ring true. Such damaged wheels were declared dangerous and were promptly replaced.

Gandy dancers worked in gangs of 10 to 12, wrangling steel rails when railway lines were built or repaired. This was hard work, carried out in all weathers and over all terrains. An efficient gang could lay 100 metres of track in a day, and often sang songs like "*I've Been Working on the Railroad*" to keep up a good rhythm.



A 'gandy' was a 1.5 metre steel bar (crowbar-like) used to position and align the rails; it was especially useful when a curve had to be engineered. Workers moved about their task fluidly, in choreographed, ballet-like moves. Frankie Laine even immortalised their workflow in his 1952 song "*The Gandy Dancers' Ball*" which you can enjoy by clicking on this link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gUtcK3WtVno>

Shunters were responsible for assembling the assorted wagons parked in various sidings into one long train of 10-50 carriages - more if the loads were light and the route straight, and fewer carriages when heavy loads had to navigate tortuous lines with tricky sloping bends. Other shunters had to take apart arriving trains at journey's end. They rode the footplates as they worked,



shouting and using hand signals and lanterns to direct the shunting engine driver. It was dangerous work, as one slip on a frosty morning and it was “goodbye leg!” Nowadays, most shunting is done remotely and electronically, thankfully reducing risk to life and limb.

President's call

An eventful month, with the pool mystery and Charlotte's motor ill-advisedly taking up smoking in her old age! Repairs should see her back on the rails by Easter. The new motors arrived this week and when the engineering team get them installed into Charlotte and Endeavour (a two- or three- month task), we will have proper motive security into the future.

*Cheering to see new members coming on board (**welcome Helen, thank you Trainer Derek!**), and others being willing to plug our personnel gaps (see above).*

With Brian Henstock's resignation, we call for nominations to replace him as Vice-President – please contact the Secretary with your thoughts.

*Huge thanks to **John Aldridge** who has made every effort to get the banking hand-over sorted out (from last year's Committee members, to this year's). It should have happened right after last year's AGM; and now there's been some pressure on, with Picton's last bank branch closing at the end of March.*

*As always, thanks to everyone who has been out there promoting what we do (see Picton's Library's electronic noticeboard) – as **editor Brian** often notes, our 20-cent fare is the cheapest, best-value family activity in NZ, judging from the feedback we receive from customer! Certainly scores of grandparents and parents give us this very welcome message every Sunday. Thank you all!*

Society contacts

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