

What a way to run a railway...

The Perrygrove line's 'Railway Experience' puts ordinary enthusiasts in charge with predictable results, as *Andrew Charman* found out.



“Come and have a go at our Railway Experience,” exulted the e-mail in the editorial inbox. A day playing trains in the Forest of Dean? How could we refuse?

The Driver Experience is these days a well-established part of the roster across many a heritage line, and a vital revenue-earner. The usual scenario is that you pay to spend several hours on the footplate driving a steam locomotive, usually pulling a train – though not usually, we hasten to add, with paying passengers. Such days are very popular – ours on the Welshpool & Llanfair are normally sold out pretty early in the season.

According to the e-mail, however, the Perrygrove has taken the whole idea a stage further. I was informed I would be one of a team of three, taking part in a whole day's activity as part of a 'magazine challenge' devised by the Perrygrove to launch the new Experiences. Curious...

Now I had never been to the Perrygrove before, and I must admit I had a rather incorrect idea of what it was all about. I regarded the three-quarter mile line as a typical example of the several 15-inch gauge railways that have sprung up in recent years mainly as attractions at ornamental gardens, parks and the like. As I very quickly discovered on arrival, the Perrygrove is rather more than that.

“I had a rather incorrect idea of what the Perrygrove line was all about...”

Above: “Well it's simple really...” Andrew Charman and David Williams discuss tactics at Perrygrove, and finally read the operating instructions...

Right: Mission control – the chalkboard from where railway operations should be worked out...

Photos: David Williams (senior – team-member David's Dad!)

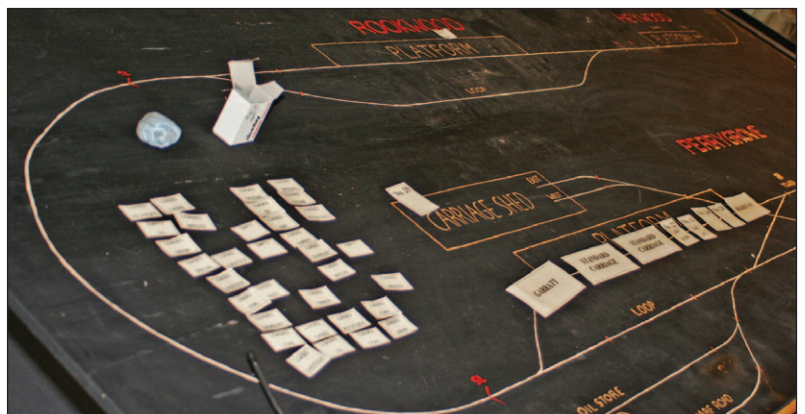
While not that old, established in 1995, the line is an effective recreation of a typical estate railway, as promoted by engineer Sir Arthur Heywood late in the 19th century at Duffield Bank and Eaton Hall, and long consigned to history. Perrygrove is home to the Heywood collection of vehicles, including such notables as the dining car that my wife found particularly cute. And it was the running of an estate railway that would comprise our day.

Dream team

Our team, comprising myself, David Williams the Features Editor of our sister magazine *GardenRail*, and Editor of *Miniature Railways* magazine David Henshaw, was first

introduced to Perrygrove manager David Nelson (there are an excess of Davids in this story...). Over the first cup of what would be a river of tea served by Dani (described as the one “really in charge”) it was explained that we would be running the estate line of Lord and Lady Foppington-Smyth – and at some point during the day each of us would serve as Locomotive Driver, Guard/Shunter and Railway Controller.

We were each given a set of operating instructions (which we really should have read more closely to begin with) and told we would start with 100 points, with a point taken off on every occasion the Perrygrove team considered we had done something wrong. Finally it was »





The 1994-built four-wheel diesel-hydraulic 'Jubilee' is a very easy-to-control yard shunter, as David Williams here discovers.

revealed that we were the penultimate team in the magazine challenge, with only *Steam Railway* to come in a couple of weeks' time and apparently determined not to be beaten by a lot of narrow gauge types...

So, gauntlet thrown down! In

front of us was a large chalkboard table with the entire line marked on it. There were various bits of paper, each designating an item of rolling stock, plus some dockets describing required goods movements.

A quick conference saw David H

"Our train should have left rather earlier than when we started thinking about it..."

take first turn as Controller while David W and myself disappeared outside towards the trains. It seemed our first task was to run a passenger train on a return trip up the line. Before us were the awaiting carriages, various items of goods stock dotted around the scene, yard shunter diesel 'Jubilee' and, simmering nicely, the largest steam loco in Perrygrove's four-strong fleet, the seven-tonne 0-4-0+0-4-0 Garratt 'Tasmania', built in 1990 originally for the Bush Mills Railway in that country.

Now as David W spends much of his time firing Garratts on the Welsh Highland Railway, including K1 the full-size version of our Perrygrove loco, he took the first designated driver slot, while I grabbed the guard's flag, offered a "right away" just like I've seen Mrs C do on the Llanfair line, and settled back to enjoy the ride. If I'd read the operating instructions more closely I would have noticed the passenger timetable, indicating our train should have left rather earlier than when we started thinking about it...

Look and learn

As we arrived at the first passing place, Rookwood (apparently the sawmill on our fictitious estate railway) I noted another clutch of wagons in the loop and siding. The expression on the face of 13-year-old Perrygrove team member Ben (described by David N as "the best driver I haven't got..."), suggested I should be looking at these more closely, and indeed they also had little dockets on them – 'wood to be taken to Oakiron' and such like. These were duly noted and details radioed back to our Controller.

At the next station, Heywood Farm, there were baskets of produce on the platform, which we weren't allowed to load on our passenger train – more notes taken...

By the time we had reached the upper terminus Oakiron (supposedly the big house, with Perrygrove being the estate's wharf connection with the outside world), Tasmania had run round and started to head back, I had read the operating instructions. In them I'd found individual pictures of each wagon in the fleet stating what it could and could not carry, along with other neat touches such as the fact you could take a train of four goods vehicles as far as the halfway loop of Rookwood, but only three vehicles plus brake from thence to Oakiron. You couldn't put a livestock wagon next to an oil wagon, or the oil wagon next to the loco... I quickly realised that our second, goods train would require quite a bit of complex shunting at the intermediate stations,

For whom small was beautiful...

■ Born on Christmas Day 1849, Sir Arthur Percival Heywood became renowned for his strong advocacy of the 'Minimum Gauge Railway'. He believed that lines of 15-inch gauge were the ideal solution for transport needs in the agricultural sector, particularly on country estates.

Heywood constructed a line at his home, Duffield Bank in Derbyshire, to demonstrate his techniques. Built on the side of a hill, it included stiff gradients, and indeed the layout of the Perrygrove line is reminiscent of that at Duffield Bank. However Sir Arthur failed to convince those in power, just one further line being built for the Duke of Westminster at Eaton Hall near Chester.

When the First World War arrived and military authorities ignored Heywood's pleas to use 15-inch gauge and instead turned to 2ft lines, the Minimum Gauge concept was dead. The Duffield Bank line lasted until 1916 and Heywood's death, that at Eaton Hall until 1946.

To work his lines Heywood built a series of neat 15-inch gauge locos, some of which ended up heavily converted on the Ravenglass and Fairbourne lines. He also designed a wide variety of rolling stock, passenger and freight, extending to a remarkable dining car. Surviving and recreated stock today forms the Heywood Collection which has its home at Perrygrove along with 0-6-0T 'Ursula', one of several replicas of Heywood locomotives



'Ursula' (above) and the dining car (below) form part of Perrygrove's Heywood collection.

that have been built in recent years. ■ More information on the lines of Sir Arthur Heywood can be gained from the Heywood Society – www.theheywoodsociety.co.uk



and my head was beginning to hurt.

Not nearly as much as David H's, who while we had been away had been using Jubilee to form up our goods train for the second trip. In this task he was aided by his sons Alexander, 14 and five-year-old Orlando – while the Experience days are not aimed at children the line is very child-friendly, both in letting them get involved and enjoy various other attractions, such as the adventure playgrounds on the site. David's efforts were also being closely watched by the Perrygrove team who remained conspiratorially non-committal when asked for opinions.

How hard David H's job had been I discovered when, having guarded the goods train (and noticed new things appearing at stations *en route*) I took the second stint as controller. Trying to marshal a goods train into the correct order to achieve all the aims that the various dockets and notes indicated needed to be achieved was mentally highly taxing – especially as right in the middle of deliberations the office phone would ring and a posh voice at the other end (expertly put on between tea rounds by Dani) would state; "Hello, it's the house here, we've run out of produce for the kitchen – farmer so-and-so has delivered supplies to Heywood, can you ensure they are up at the house in time for lunch?"

Challenging route

Cleverly, or perhaps connivingly, your Editor saved the best for last, taking the control of Tasmania for the final third of the day, after an excellent light lunch again masterminded by Dani. After all that mental arithmetic it was great to sit back and concentrate on driving this beast, assisted by Ben's dad Jez alongside, over a surprisingly challenging route.

While quite short the Perrygrove line loops back and forth up the side of a hill, gradients including a 1 in 50 around the first sharp curve, 1 in 29 starting away from Heywood station, and 1 in 50 into Oakiron, a slope that only ends just shy of the loop points and adds rather a lot to shunting manoeuvres.

I could quite happily have driven that loco all day, but I was equally impressed with the way the team ran the line to proper railway practice, with safety always the prime concern and any errors pointed out in a firm but friendly manner – along with a point deducted from the team score.

There were other crafty little tricks too, designed to catch one out and lose a point or two – I won't give further details because that would be spoiling it for those of you who might want to have a go, and lead to



you getting a better score than us!

Our score? At the end of the day, in a debrief over yet more tea in the cafeteria, we were told we had achieved 72 out of 100 – best of all the magazine groups so far. One major *faux pas*, apparently, was down to me, the big house not getting its lunchtime veg until afternoon tea... An anxious wait of a couple of weeks followed, before we were contacted to be told that the *Steam Railway* team had duly done their day – and scored just 58. Champions!

Summing up, the day was an eye-opener into the potential challenges any estate railway might have faced in its daily life, and perhaps also an indication as to why such lines died out pretty quickly. Most of all, however, it was a great deal of fun.

The Estate Railway Experience Day is intended to become a regular, bookable, part of the Perrygrove's calendar, and David Nelson hopes such days might also be attractive to companies looking for team-building exercises for their staff – if I was working for a big company I'd certainly be first in the queue for



Top: Shunting at Oakiron, 'the big house', with a Garratt is not as easy as it looks. Note the various wagon loads scattered around and about.

such a day. The price is planned at £200 each, based on a team of three and basically putting you in charge of the railway over a whole day. But for a limited period, if you let the Perrygrove team know that you read about the day in these pages, you'll pay only £150 each. Go for it, we recommend it highly! **NGW**

More Information

Firstly thanks to the Perrygrove team of David N, Jez, little Ben, Tim, Alan, and Dani the real boss, for a great time had by all. Details of the Experience days and the Perrygrove line (well worth a visit on a normal operating day) can be found online at www.perrygrove.co.uk

Above: "Oh no another docket..." The Editor taxes his brain while David Henshaw looks after coupling duties.

Below: I could get used to this...

