

Some Notes on Railways in the Molesey and Walton Area

By Greg Martin

Introduction

Many of us are likely to be surprised that temporary railways were once used in the Molesey area, as virtually no sign of them remains. Temporary railways were used across Surrey during construction of the Kingston Bypass, the Brooklands Motor Racing Track, the Guildford Bypass and the River Wey Improvement Scheme. However, the notes below concentrate on those industrial railways that once existed in Molesey and Walton.

John Aird & Sons, Knight & Bessborough Reservoirs

John Aird & Sons used two standard gauge steam locomotives when they constructed the Knight and Bessborough Reservoirs in Molesey for the Southwark & Vauxhall Water Company. The locomotives were both made by Manning Wardle & Co Ltd of Leeds. Work on the reservoirs commenced in April 1901 and finished in April 1907, the water company having become the Metropolitan Water Board during the construction period in June 1904.

Thomas Docwra, Enlargement of Molesey Reservoirs

Thomas Docwra used five standard gauge steam locomotives when enlarging existing reservoirs in Molesey. The enlargement work was carried out from May 1898 to April 1904. The locomotives were by Black Hawthorn (one acquired second-hand), Hudswell Clarke (one acquired second-hand) and Manning Wardle (one acquired second-hand and two new from the makers). One of the locos later moved to Brentford, where Thomas Docwra had a contract to construct the main road between Brentford and Osterley.

Dick Kerr & Co, Walton Pumping Station

Dick Kerr & Co Ltd constructed the Walton Pumping Station for the Metropolitan Water Board using an unidentified standard gauge steam locomotive. The pumping station's foundation stone was laid on 24th October 1908 and it was officially opened on 10th June 1911.

Robert McAlpine & Sons Ltd, Island Barn Reservoir

Robert McAlpine & Sons Ltd used five 3ft gauge steam locomotives when building the Island Barn Reservoir in East Molesey for the Metropolitan Water Board. The first sod was cut on 24th October 1908 and the reservoir was inaugurated on 4th November 1911. The railway ran 2.5 miles to the River Thames adjacent to the Lambeth Pumping Station. The locomotives were built by Thomas Green, Hudswell Clarke, Black Hawthorn and W Bagnall. Two of the locomotives came to Molesey from a contract that built the Strabane to Letterkenny line in Ireland, the others came from Scotland and Lancashire.

W Noble Ltd, Walton on Thames

W Noble Ltd had a fleet of 2ft gauge diesel locomotives which they hired out to industrial railway users. These eighteen machines were all built by Ruston & Hornsby of Lincoln between 1953 and 1956. They were acquired second-hand from Charles Brand Ltd, who had used some of them on a contract to widen the main line railway at Potters Bar. All eighteen locomotives are recorded as later exported to Ghana.

North Surrey Water Company, Walton on Thames

In modern times the North Surrey Water Company experimentally used a narrow-gauge diesel locomotive to haul open and to shut the covers over settling tanks. The locomotive was built by Alan Keef in 1998. The experiment was short-lived and the redundant locomotive lay unused until cut up for scrap in late 2010 or early 2011.

Thames Water, Molesey

Circa 1990 Thames Water was involved in constructing a water main that ran under the River Thames. The water main was constructed using a Boring Machine to create a tunnel which was lined with concrete segments as the tunnelling machine moved forward. A temporary narrow gauge railway line ran along inside the tunnel, bringing in concrete tunnel segments and taking away spoil. The locomotives were battery-electric powered and I was told were hired from a plant hire company at Swynnerton in Staffordshire. The access shaft has a round concrete cap and can still be seen adjacent to Hurst Road, between Freeman Drive and Weston Avenue.

Other Notes

It is thought that one of the reservoir construction contracts in Molesey involved a temporary aerial ropeway over the River Thames to Platt's Eyot, where spoil was dumped, making the western end of the island significantly higher than the eastern end.

Hopefully, some Molesey LHS members will have relevant photographs or notes covering both the railway equipment used in Molesey and the people who operated it. If so, please forward copy to:

website@moleseyhistorysociety.org

as we would be very happy to display on this web site with your permission.