



The Silverdale Light Railway (North)

The first ten years

by IAN MIDGLEY

Set in a fictional location in the lovely North Lancashire countryside, the Silverdale Light Railway (North) is a charming narrow gauge railway. In this article IAN MIDGLEY describes the first ten years of the line.

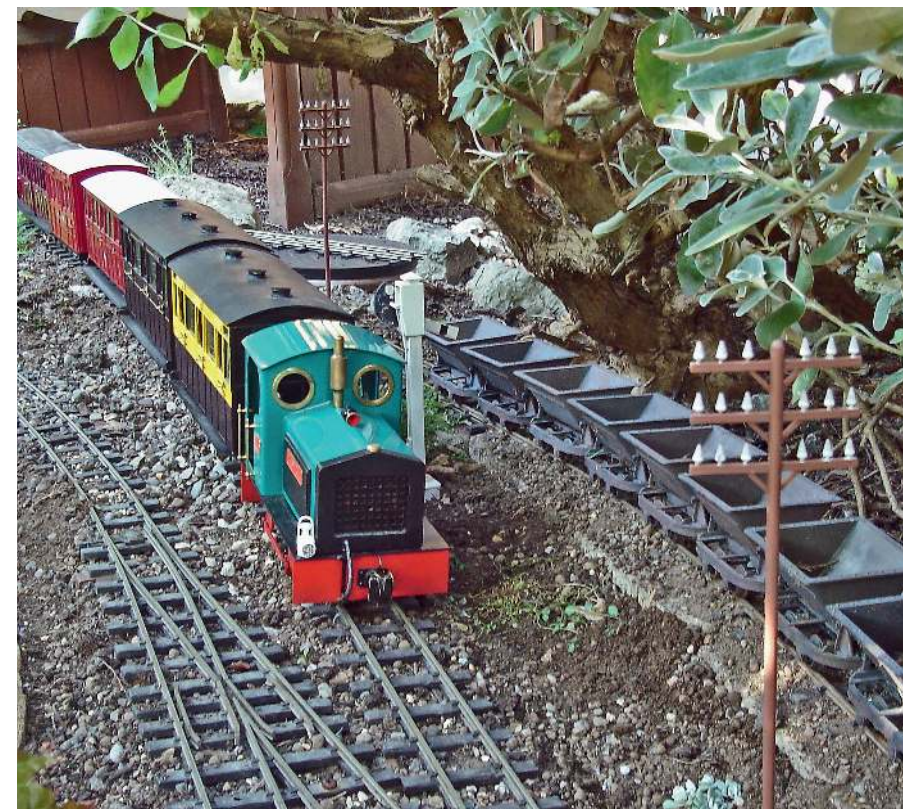
Photos by Ian Midgley.

It all began in Ulverston, a small town situated in south Cumbria, during the August Bank holiday of 2005. I happened upon a news agent that stocked a large number of railway related magazines. By chance I spied one tucked at the back of a shelf called 'Garden Rail'. This immediately evoked nostalgia in me as many years before in 1979 and whilst still a teenager, I had embarked on building a 16mm scale railway in the cellar of where I then lived (there was no garden). I'd recently inherited some money, so instead of investing it or doing something sensible and boring with it, I went out and bought an electronic organ and

an Archangel Sgt. Murphy. The loco was ordered for me by the late and highly individual Tom Cooper when he owned a tobacconist (?) /garden railway shop in the market town of Kendal. I remember seeing the shop for the first time, a section of track emerged from one upstairs window and disappeared into another and every so often a little train would run by. Tom was always a great advertiser. Anyway he did his best to try and sway me into going down the 45mm gauge route, but I stuck to my guns and insisted it had to be 32mm or nothing, so he gave in. For me it was mainly the cost, as Peco's 32mm streamline track (pre SM32 days)

worked out cheaper than its 45mm counterpart. Two hundred breeze blocks were ordered from a local firm, which were duly dumped outside, blocking the road. What fun that day was. Anyway, after completion let's just say that my experiences were not good, as due to difficulties with track laying on breeze blocks and a steamer that had a habit of falling off onto a concrete floor at every possible opportunity, I soon lost my initial interest. I did however join the 16mm Association and remember being

Header photo – Meths fired Chaney Kitten Class 'Tibby' crossing the Hever Estuary, February 2008.



Left – The first run of my KGR Danny, August 2006.

Bottom left – A rare double headed excursion train, May 2014.

excited when an envelope with a couple of typed pieces of stapled pages dropped through the letter box every so often. After a few months of disappointment and not having another member anywhere nearby to get advice from or to moan to, I gave up the whole escapade and let my membership lapse and sold my lovely Murphy, which by then had a permanently bent chimney.

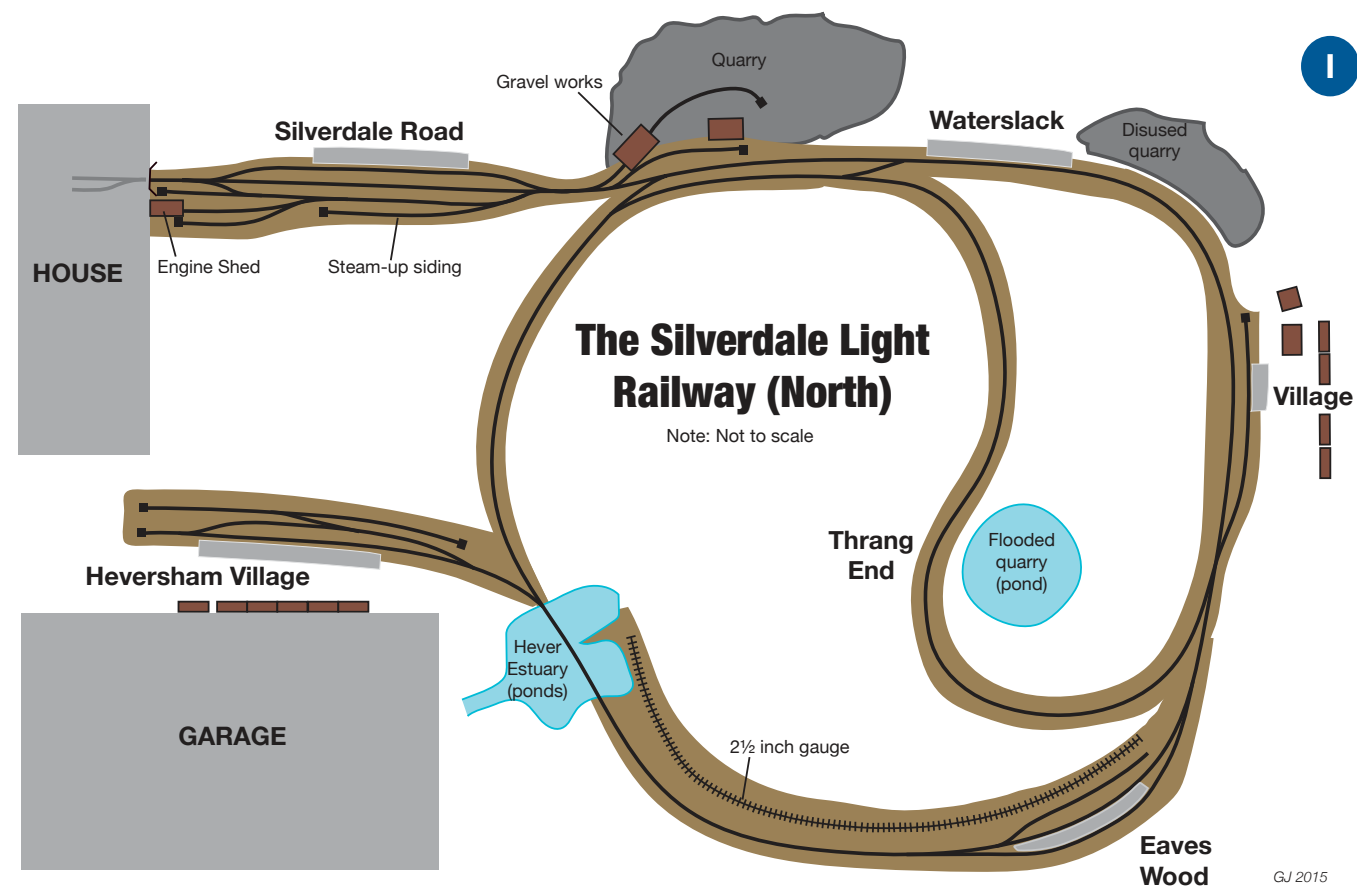
Construction commences

But enough of all that, let's get back to 2005. Well, after buying that *Garden Rail* magazine and reading it from cover to cover I was again hooked on the idea of building my very own railway, this time in a garden around 50' by 30' large, which along with a house and mortgage, I now owned. I was lucky this time in that I found a number of like-minded garden railers in the area via Sam Sparkes, whom I'd also met in Ulverston whilst at a Christmas Fair in late 2005. Sam gave me many words of advice, for instance, rejoin the 16mm Association and don't lay severe 's' bends as they might look good but bogie stock love to fall off them. I even wrote an article on my new line which was published in *Garden Rail's* September 2007 issue. Unfortunately, in my haste to 'get down some track' I didn't build the line to a high enough standard so consequently over the first few years there was many an incident! However, over the particularly cold winter of 2010/11, frost heave occurred and trains could no longer run. So in the early Spring, and with great help from Christopher and Jools, track was re-laid on a solid foundation and derailments have become just a distant memory (well happen less frequently).

What's in a name?

As can be seen from the plan the line is now basically a circuit with a return loop and two termini. There are currently five stations or halts, namely Silverdale Road, Waterslack, Eaves Wood (which replaced Wood Bell), Thrang End and Heversham. On originally naming the line the Silverdale Light Railway, I found out later that by sheer coincidence Peter, another local garden enthusiast, had also called his line by the same name. As I live to the north of him ►





we decided to call mine the SLR(North) and his the SLR(South).

Location, location

My garden railway is based on a fictional location in the lovely north Lancashire countryside around Silverdale, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). There were once many limestone quarries and a couple of lead mines in this area which initially fuelled my imagination in that 'what if' a narrow gauge line had been built to connect

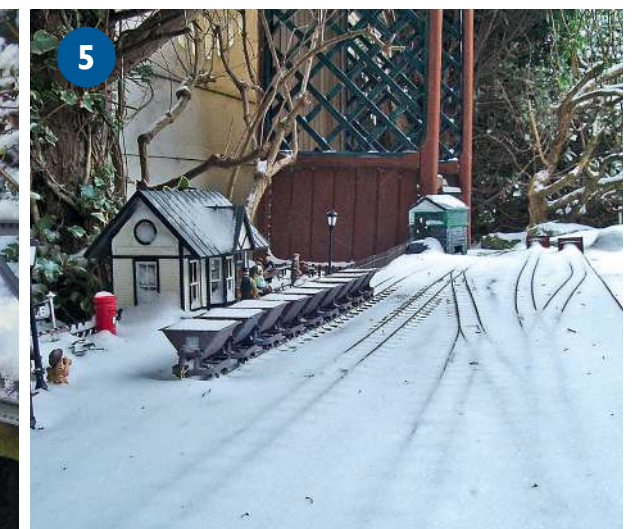
these quarries and surrounding villages with the old Furness mainline which still runs between Carnforth and Barrow-in-Furness. I did actually find evidence of a tramway in my wanderings which connected Trowbarrow Quarry with Silverdale Station but it looked a pretty basic affair. A factory once stood near the station that produced something called Quarrite (a mixture of hot tar and crushed limestone) which was apparently used to cover Blackpool Promenade on its enlargement in 1904.

Export or bust

On my railway I have constructed a transfer point at Eaves Wood (see plan) where gravel from Blackbird Gravel Works is transported by narrow gauge to the transhipment siding to be transferred onto the standard gauge wagons which then run down to the Hever Estuary (a couple of ponds) to be transferred onto a ship for distant lands. I've used 2 1/2 gauge track for this (Garden Railway Specialists call it G64) which in our 1 to 19th scale actually works out at 4' gauge (like the Padarn Railway). It still looks wide compared to the 32mm running alongside. The loco on this short section was scratch-built by my friend Peter and is based on a 1940s English Electric battery powered 0-4-0. The power bogie was bought off eBay for a very reasonable sum.

Plan and photos on this page and the facing page:

- 1 – Plan of the Silverdale Light Railway (North) (SLR(N) as at 2015.
- 2 – A sunny Spring day on the SLR(N), May 2014.
- 3 – The first train in the first snow seen in March 2006.
- 4 – Snow, no problem. February 2009.
- 5 – The first snow. March 2006.
- 6 – Blackbird Gravel Works in all its glory. August 2015.



Operation of the SLR(N)

So in the 10 years since its conception what has changed? Well the railway has seen a couple of line alterations over the years and stations have been moved to different locations. Apart though from the major rebuilding of the track already mentioned and the maturing of plants, mainly the invasive but harmless 'Mind Your Own Business' miniature creeper which is great for ground cover, the railway has remained with much the same feel about it. Over the years I have tried a number of ways of actually operating the line. Apart from the usual free for all attitude at many a steam

up, we've tried a simple block working system where the line is sectioned and coloured tokens used for each block. Also a service running schedule where folk have been given various tasks to perform such as moving goods from A to C via B etc. And finally a combination of both which seemed to push operators to their limit, so has only been tried occasionally.

Photographs

I just love photography and enjoy trying to capture in pictures the run down atmosphere that many a real life narrow gauge railway seemed to end up with ►

in the final years of their lives according to many of the books that have appeared on this subject. I particularly enjoy looking at old photographs of the mossy covered tracks and the run down trains of the Tallylyn before preservation gave it new life in the '50's. Also, at almost all our steam ups, a group photo is taken for posterity's sake, whatever that is.

Thank you and goodnight

I must say it's all been great fun and I hope my railway sees many more years of little beasts chuffing through the garden countryside. I can't finish this article without thanking the people who have helped me over these last ten years and without whom the railway would probably now be but a distant memory. Therefore many many thanks go to Jools, Christopher, Peter, Sam, Simon, Graham and all the other garden railway folk who have helped and encouraged me throughout the years. Also to Mike at Carnforth Models, whose railway shop located on Carnforth Station, is sometimes too handy.

Finally I would like to proclaim three cheers for the Silverdale Light Railway (North) and all who run on her and so here's to the next ten years and the ten after that. ■



Photos on the facing page and this page:
 7 – Waterslack Village. The Bijou Cinema's subsidence is becoming a problem!
 8 – Rush hour at Heversham.
 9 – The new foot crossing. August 2008.
 10 – Standard gauge or 4 foot, well what's 8½" between friends.
 11 – Inspection Railcar 'Bluebottle' (so named because of its habit of annoying other train drivers!) May 2008.
 12 – The Waterslack Farming Company's train is for employees only.
 13 – Sunset at Waterslack. October 2014.
 14 – News flash! Flooding hits the SLR(N). August 2008.
 15 – Eaves Wood Station. March 2014.