

# Now it's getting harder....

Year five of the Arkwright Saga.

By Robert Maskill Orton Mere Station, Nene Valley Railway

Well here we are at the end of my fifth year on the railway, and like the previous four it's had its good and bad parts.

One thing I have found is that I find it harder in the face of regular frustration to not only keep myself motivated but also hopefully motivate others that help me at Orton Mere.

The year did not start well with the station closed during January due to me having a leg infection which is still not 100% better even now. But January is always a quiet non-descript month so I was not that worried.

February was business as usual with me running on 3¾ cylinders, we got back a lot of the regulars from the previous years, complete with dogs, moans, groans and general complaints. But I had been touched by the number of emails and even callers to the door at home I had received whilst I was ill asking how I was, it was nice to know that I must be doing something right at the station.

I knew that 2009 was not going to be an easy year with the economic climate being what it was, so the accent had to be on profit not just turnover, now I know that the concept of profit is alien to many on the railway, they think that money is the till is all that matters. This is of course rubbish, no matter how much money you take if none of it is profit then you might as well throw in the towel.

So there we were as in previous years short of staff and often wondering where the support was. The out of the mist in the year came three bright lights called Paddy, Sally & Nigel three volunteers. All have proved worth their weight in gold and we could not have done the year without them as well of course as the other regulars Peter H, Peter C, Roger & and Stewart all have, however much time they have been able to commit have played an important part in the stations year. Plus of course Harry who looks after the garden and allotment, he put a lot of hours in making sure it was looking nice. Special mention of course for the wife Sue, as always she has helped often when she did not want to and for that I am as always very appreciative. Thanks also to the staff at Wansford especially Jayne and the crew in the cafe not to mention of course those in the Office who have supported the stations during the year.

Highlight of the year has been the bridge repairs, from the time they have taken you would have thought they were rebuilding the damn thing from scratch. I am sorry to say that despite living in constant hope I have yet to see any of them fall in the river

from their scaffolding. The bridge which at the best of times does nothing to enhance the station has looked even worse covered in scaffolding.

One question that I was asked on a regular basis during the year was, are tickets cheaper because of the recession? People seemed genuinely surprised when I said No!!

People seemed under the impression that we should slash prices because they had no money.

Early in the year we had the power cable to the station cut in two places, I don't know which was harder getting it fixed or finding the brakes. Why oh why is it so hard to get anything done without great debate about where, when & cost!!! Judging by the big charred mark round one break whoever tried to cut it must have had a big flash and surprise.

Through the year regulars will have noticed a shortage of steam locomotives this has been due to a variety of reasons and it is not fair to I think go into them here.

However, this hasn't I don't think affected passenger numbers, and to the best of my knowledge nobody has decided not to travel from Orton Mere due to it having been a diesel service. Mind you some of the diesels emit as much in the way of smoke clouds as steam locomotives.



Star of the year in my opinion was the visit by the Deltic, the diesel fans were wetting themselves during its first few runs along the line. Here for the diesel wetting fans is a picture of the said locomotive pulling the TPO.

There were not many days when it ran that we had such nice sunshine and the chance of decent pictures.

The year as well as bringing frustrations also bought out the normal quota of daft questions and amazing expectations.

One gem was a woman who asked if any trains were running that day, this was during the diesel gala and we had a locomotive at each of the two platforms. She was I think related to the person who once moaned that we did not run steam trains during the diesel gala!

The other regular gem was the question of when the next train was due, normally after they had looked at the chalk time board outside and one of the printed timetables. One snotty individual asked if the train times were correct on the chalk board, my reply was that they were not there to lend an authentic air to peoples visit.

But prize for dope of the year must go to the woman who came in with a suitcase one day when I was single manned and asked where the self purchase ticket machine was that had been there on her last visit as she wished to buy a ticket to Edinburgh. She took it well when I pointed out that she was at Orton Mere on the NVR and not Peterborough on the national network. A train was due so I sold her a single to PNVR with detailed instructions of how to get to the main line station. Before anybody asks no she was not "Blonde".

Harry in the allotment has through his commitment given us another excellent year with plenty for the visitor to look at, if he chats to many more people whilst pottering about I may get him a bench so he can sit down and chat properly! The allotment to my mind brings us more benefits in customer pleasure than most other things we do and many regulars follow proceeding through the year with great interest commenting on what's being grown and often how it's doing much better than what they have at home.

Finally in this shorter than normal article special mention must be made of the something for nothing brigade, those who moan when trains are late, try and walk over the allotment to take pictures, complain it's not steam but don't contribute a single penny to the railway as they buy nothing and never travel. Well if you fall into that category then be warned I am on the war path for 2010 and will be after your money!!!!

Robert

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