

'Noddy' train's debut

Christchurch Herald April 5, 1968



Nearly time to go, as Mrs. Patricia Jowitt waits at the controls of the Hengistbury Head "toytown train" on Monday when the new service to Mudeford Sandbanks began.

A police car, a motor-cycle patrol, three park keepers, the parks chief, two reporters, and a television cameraman all turned up to see the fun at Hengistbury Head on Monday morning, but there wasn't any.

Whether the freezing wind and lowering clouds had deterred the chants and banners, no-one knew, but the only hairy demonstrator in sight was a small dog, and far from protesting at the new "toytown train" service to Mudeford Sandbank, he blessed it.

WONDER AT FUSS

The only public to show an interest were two middle-aged ladies. They may have wondered at the fuss of the last few months as they bumped along the winding road in the strangest form of transport in the history of the Head.

Ancient Briton and Saxon invader alike would have popped their heads from behind the scrub in startled surprise had they been there. Even some railway pioneer in civilised top

hat and frock coat would have been affronted, for after all the talk about a train it turns out to be a tractor thinly disguised as an ancient locomotive, pulling a number of plywood coaches each with two pneumatic tyres, and a couple of wooden trailers described as tenders.

This was the vehicle which some of its detractors fear will turn the Head into another Battersea Fun Fair and draw even more people to violate the vanishing vegetation and scare away what creatures are left.

Other critics, especially those who stay in Christchurch Corporation's unlovely row of beach huts on the sandbank, are scathingly sceptical that it will be able to do what their cars can certainly do, that is carry all their goods and chattels as well as them and their families.

Bournemouth Council has decided, however, that the right of the municipal road should be denied motorists during the six months of the year when they most want to use it.

Furious letters have raged in the press and the town hall letterbox, and a deputation to the council has pleaded for a change of heart.

A special council meeting held solemn conclave on the odd little train, but the majority remained unmoved, even in face of threats that the objectors would lay down in front of those evil rubber wheels.

Perhaps the threats caused Monday's constabulary to turn up expecting to get their helmets knocked off as they dragged away the freedom fighters of Hengistbury Head just like their colleagues in the televised protests in the big cities.

But there'll be no smashing newspaper photographs to stick in the scrapbook, and Bournemouth Corporation appeared to win a very quiet, first round. It may be they were encouraged by the mild response of Christchurch Council which did not complain even though—or perhaps because—it makes a profit out of the sandbank it leases from the junior borough.

Certainly Bournemouth Corporation grasped eagerly at their opponents' own weapon of argument that the natural beauty of the Head was at stake. Cars, said the Corporation, are ugly—at least, they are on Mudeford Sandbank.

They are less ugly in Double Dykes car park where a nice, kind attendant will take the money and the Corporation accepts no responsibility for loss or damage.

So when the hordes arrive they'll park their cars and lug their suitcases, bedding, transistors and buckets and spades to the gravel turning circuit that's been provided for the "Noddy" train. It never blows or pours at Double Dykes, everyone knows, so there is no shelter for children, old folk, or softies.

JACK DWYER

Noddy train trials and tribulations

Christchurch Herald April 12, 1968

It's been a week of problems for the little Noddy trains which take holidaymakers from Hengistbury Head to the beach huts on Mudeford sandspit.

Over the weekend somebody tried to put them out of action by putting sharpened roofing nails in their path. They caused eight punctures in the rubber wheels of the trains which are trackless.

Now park inspector Alf Little who, for two years has been issuing permits to cars as they pass from Double Dykes on to the road to the beach huts, is leaving his job, because—he says—the Noddy trains mean he no longer has one.

"I'm not really leaving in protest against the train itself— it's just the way the council are running things here," he said.

"SORT OF REFEREE"

"I used to be on the gate here issuing permits to cars as they go through. Now all I am is a sort of referee at the gate for complaints and inquiries."

The trains were introduced by Bournemouth Council to ease heavy traffic going to Mudeford, but Mr. Little thinks that "this is something that is not going to work."

He feels that the trains haven't the capacity to deal with "a load of holidaymakers and their luggage in the pouring rain," and that the traffic problem was minimal anyway.

Besides having puncture trouble, the train operators have been ambushed. As one of them chugged along at 8 mph a man leapt from some bushes and ran alongside, shouting abuse at the driver. "I hope you lose a lot of money," he screamed, and, to passengers: "You're all blacklegs."

TOWNS AGREE ON 'GROWN-UP' NODDY

Christchurch Herald November 8, 1968

Bournemouth parks committee and department, promoters of the Hengistbury Head "Noddy" train, met the Mayor of Christchurch Mrs. Dorothy Baker, the chairman of the Christchurch beach committee, Ald. Jas Bell, and the vice-chairman Coun. Wm. Bridge, on Monday and shook hands.

All are agreed that the train between Double Dykes and Mudeford Sandbank should run again, though when it reappears it might be seen to have outgrown its "toy" characteristics and to have become a more sophisticated form of public transport—more a real train, with roomier carriages, doors, windows and springing, and a more powerful traction unit, not necessarily designed as a "funfair piece."

NO ACRIMONY

Gone was all acrimony between the two boroughs. Forgotten were angry accusations about Bournemouth's treatment of the sandbank chalet owners and tenants and Christchurch's revenue harvest at a cost of damage to the special archaeological and historical terrain.

All Christchurch wishes is the "bumpiness" taken out of the ride down to the sandbank and shelter for the waiting passengers at its end of the track.

Christchurch found Bournemouth willing to meet it more than half-way on an endeavour to improve the ride and comfort and to upgrade Noddy to say, "The Headland Terraplane," daily pullman service, winter as well as summer.

Ald. Bell said his committee had no adverse observations to any Bournemouth proposal to keep a train or replace it with some other transporter. Its concern was only that people should have transportation to the sandbank from the Bournemouth end if Bournemouth were again to ban private cars.

LACK OF SHELTER

Then he came to the lack of any shelter at the Mudeford terminal of the track, being mindful that the Bournemouth end also had no provision other than a bus shelter which was

hardly close to the Double Dykes "railway station" and indeed had its back to the terminal. So he asked if Bournemouth could at least shift the shelter nearer to the train, turning it round or fitting windows in the back of it.

Ald. Benwell recalled his committee's intention of having shelters, turned down by its council. Could Christchurch put a shelter at its end?

The Christchurch delegation could not commit its council to the expense, but agreed to look into Bournemouth's enquiry if one could be built into the conveniences being constructed at its end.

Ald. Benwell told the visitors he thought Bournemouth would like to renew a train service and his committee had heard a proposal that the contract to the operator should be for a year-round service.

The delegation left, saying its beach committee would meet that night and have a report of the joint meeting.

Bournemouth parks committee then agreed to recommend to the council that it offer the operator and owner of the train terms suggested by him—a three-year contract, he to pay the corporation £1,000 a year for the rights.

AUTHORITY SOUGHT

Mr. R. Faris, a director of the trackless train contractors and engineers company, to whom the offer will be made if the council approves, paid the corporation £750 for an experimental six months last year.

Subject to the council's approval of the three-year contract, beginning next April 1, the committee is to ask the council for authority to build shelters under town planning and financial approval for this provision and improvement of the roadway used as the transporter track.