



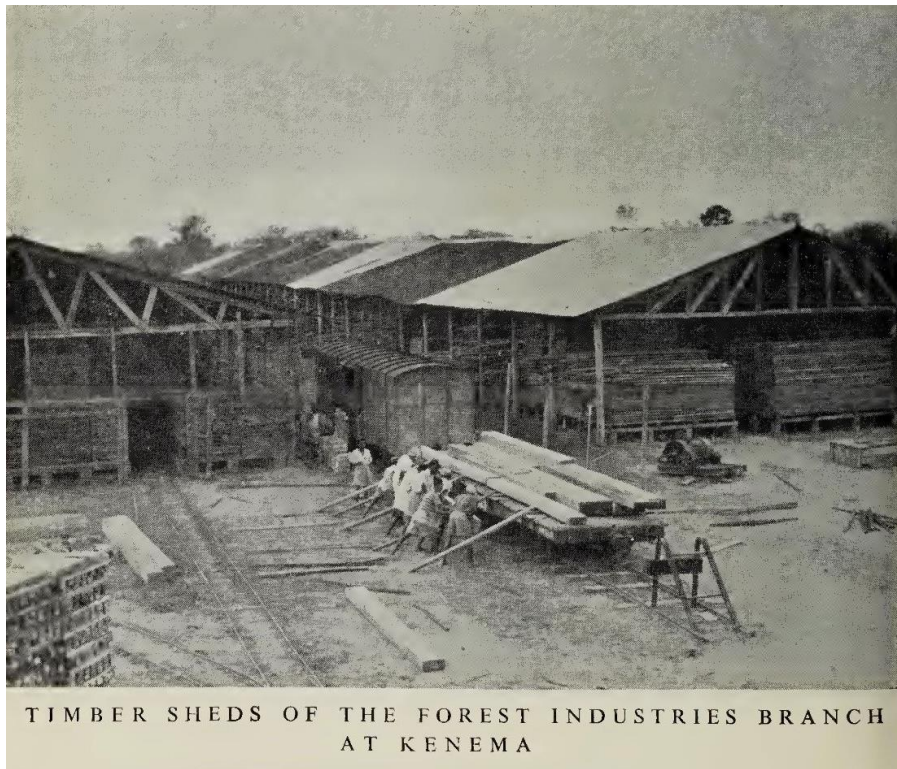
FRIENDS OF SIERRA LEONE NATIONAL RAILWAY MUSEUM

Registered Charity No: 1179579

Hon. President: Col Steve Davies MBE

Hon. Patron: Mr Kamal Nassar

SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2022



Goods train being loaded at the Timber Sheds in Kenema, from the 1952 Colonial Office Report.

The past few months have been as difficult as ever in Sierra Leone, with an outbreak of riots in Freetown, Kamakwie and Makeni in the country during August, in which six police officers and at least 21 civilians were killed. It appears that the problems arose during anti-government protests about economic hardship and a perceived failure of the government to cushion the impact of rising prices.

President Julius Maada Bio made a public statement condemning the rioters and promised that the circumstances surrounding the riots would be fully investigated. As the protests were concentrated in the opposition party's northern heartland and the in the capital, it seems possible that they were carried out by APC supporters seeking to discredit the current SLLP government in advance of next year's General Election.

This year has also seen a particularly severe rainy season and, once again, many communities have been devastated by flooding and mudslides, which have destroyed many homes, with resultant loss of life.

You may recall that in the last newsletter, we reported that a delegation of museum and Ministry staff were due to visit the UK in June. Unfortunately, there has been a long delay between submitting their visa applications and visas being issued, but the visit is finally able to take place, with the whole delegation having finally received their UK visas at the beginning of September. We are expecting Mr Nylander, the Museum Coordinator and Mohamed Jabbie, Senior Tour Guide to arrive in York on 22nd September and a VIP delegation to join us later in October.

Helen Ashby
Chair

Update from the Sierra Leone National Railway Museum

Staff Training

In May Museum Coordinator, Mr Abubakarr Nylander-Kargbo was selected by the Ministry of Tourism & Cultural Affairs, along with Josephine Kargbo, Curator of the Sierra Leone National Museum, to attend a training course in Benin, entitled “The Training of Museum Experts”. The course was provided for ECOWAS members, with three strategic axes:



1. Capacity building for returned cultural heritage assets, which aims to strengthen technical expertise in conservation and the protection of cultural assets, once returned.
2. Strengthening of measures for the protection, promotion, enhancement and transmission of the cultural heritage of Member States.
3. Strengthening regional and international cooperation for the return of cultural artefacts to their countries of origin.

The week-long training programme consisted of online and in-person sessions, enabling participants to discuss international standards for the preservation of cultural heritage and to form useful networks with museum staff in other ECOWAS member states.

Community Action

Over the past few months, the museum has hosted a number of special events and supported the local community in a variety of ways.



On the night of Sunday 5th June, a lorry bringing goods through Cline Town broke down outside the museum totally obstructing both human and vehicular traffic through Cline Street. On the Monday a second vehicle was brought to enable the lorry to be offloaded and towed away. The only way that could be done was by slanting the lorry through the museum gates.

Unfortunately, it meant that we could not open the museum all day, but that, if the blockage was not moved, no visitors would be able to reach the museum anyway. In any case, they were very pleased to be of service to the local community.

On Monday 27th June the museum hosted the funeral reception for one of the Friends of the Sierra Leone National Railway Museum, Marie Sesay (age 40), who sadly passed away the previous Thursday. Marie was an active supporter of the museum and will be very much missed by all the staff and Friends.



As is traditional in Sierra Leone, mourners wore T-shirts printed with her photograph and a special batch was made by the Friends to show her link with the museum.



As mentioned in the editorial above, the rains have been particularly heavy this year, and many areas of Freetown have been badly flooded, including the Cline Town Racecourse Creek and Kanikay slum communities who suffered huge losses due to flooding during late August and early September. On 11th September, the museum hosted an event to provide support for flood victims of these floods, where Save the Children volunteers came to distribute rice, cooking oil, toiletries and sanitary pads, Tarpaulins, mattresses, pillows, school bags, and other household and personal essentials.

Museum staff were pleased to help their work as part of their corporate social responsibility.



Museum visitors

As the rains started, visits to the museum began to slow down a little, but nevertheless, the team has been kept busy with schools, groups and special events.

On 2nd June, the museum hosted a visit from the German Ambassador, who brought his team to familiarise themselves with the museum so that they can advocate for it and encourage visitors to come and see it for themselves.



The Area 10 Scout Brass Band of the Scout Western Rural of the Sierra Leone Scout Association launched their Jazz Musical Band on Saturday 25th June at the museum. The aim was to showcase the talents of the young people in the scout movement as part of the Association 's youth program. The kids enjoyed their day at the museum with lots of games, music and food.



Despite the rains, we have also continued to welcome schools to the museum and to provide a proactive educational programme for them.

On Monday 27th June we were visited by the children and teachers of Apex International School, from Bolling Street, King Tom, Freetown. As ever, the highlights of their visit were the Queen's coach and the Pump Trolley ride!



On 7th July, Class 6 of Tower Kindergarten School came to the museum, along with two of their Development Partners, and participated in a guided tour followed by a range of creative and play activities relating to railways and transport in general.



Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

The museum staff were saddened to hear of the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, and are particularly proud of their 'Queen's Coach', sending their official condolences to the UK Friends as soon as they were able.

**OUR DEEPEST CONDOLENCE TO THE FRIENDS
OF THE SIERRA LEONE RAILWAY MUSEUM
FOR THE DEMISE OF
HER MAJESTY, QUEEN ELIZABETH II**



"Everyone in Sierra Leone especially the staff of the **SIERRA LEONE RAILWAY MUSEUM** is deeply saddened to learn of the death of Her Majesty The Queen. Throughout her long reign, Her Majesty has been a shining



example of devoted service and steadfast duty not only in the United Kingdom but also in Sierra Leone. She embodied the spirit of the nation and today, together with millions around the world, we mourn.

Even though she is gone but we will continue to preserve the train named after her at the Sierra Leone Railway Museum.

Our thoughts and the thoughts of everyone here at the Sierra Leone Railway Museum are with the Friends of the **Sierra Leone Railway Museum** especially members of the **Royal Family** at this saddest of times. May Her Soul Rest In Perfect Peace"

**From the Staff of
The Sierra Leone Railway Museum
Cline town, Freetown, Sierra Leone.
9th September 2022**

They were keen to offer something in the museum as a mark of respect and on Saturday 17th September, they staged a special event at the museum for invited guests from the local community. Local stakeholders were asked to stand and make their statements and then guided tours of the Queen's Coach were given and guests were invited to sign a book of condolence, which will be brought to the UK by the museum staff when they visit.

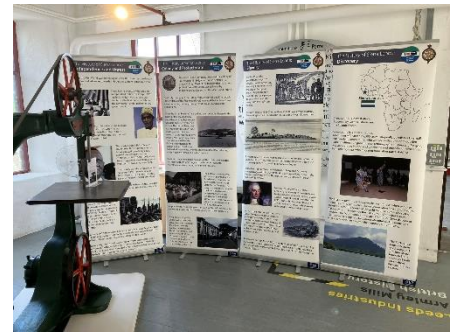


Friends of the Sierra Leone National Railway Museum in action in the UK

Trains, Trains, Trains – Leeds Industrial Museum, Armley Mills, Saturday 27th August 2022



Our annual event at Leeds Industrial Museum was, once again, a great success, with visitors enjoying the pop-up museum telling the history of Sierra Leone and the stories of the Sierra Leone Railway and the SLNRM. William Bickers-Jones had some newly built 16mm scale models of SLR locomotives and rolling stock on display, as well as our old favourites and Helen did an exhibition of Sierra Leonean clothing.



An exciting addition this year was a talk by Dr Nick Evans, Senior Lecturer in Diaspora History at the University of Hull entitled “Wartime railway journeys: Photography from Sierra Leone during the 1940s”, based on a collection of photographs taken by Corporal Fred Birden when on military service.

The photographs will be form part of a great new exhibition at Streetlife Museum in Hull during October 2022, for which Nick was hoping to uncover more about the railway journeys made by the photographer during his leisure time. The audience were asked to help expand the existing knowledge of what the images reveal.



Welshpool & Llanfair Light Railway Gala, 2nd to 4th September 2022

The following weekend saw the Friends at the W&LLR's annual Steam Gala, as usual.

We displayed our usual pop-up museum and sales stand, along with a new display about SLR No 85, which is owned and operated by the Welshpool & Llanfair Light Railway. William's display of 16mm scale models were displayed inside Llanfair Connections, alongside the operating 16mm scale railway and were a major attraction, celebrating the twinning of the railway with the SLNRM.



Unusually, the rain managed to hold off for most of the weekend, with a short heavy shower on the Saturday and another just before we were due to pack up on Sunday evening – so everything had to be put away wet!

Aln Valley Railway Society, Barter Books, Alnwick, 15th September 2022

FoSLNRM events are like buses – there are none for ages and then they all come at once! Also in September, Helen Ashby travelled northwards to Alnwick to give a talk to the Aln Valley Railway Society. This was the first in-person talk held in the Society's usual location since before the first national lockdown- in the Old Waiting Room at Barter Books, a wonderful second-hand bookshop set in the former railway station at Alnwick. The original station building remains almost unaltered but houses a wonderful array of books of all types and the old station buffet serves an equally amazing selection of cakes!

The talk was very well received and attracted some interesting comments and questions. One member was pleased to note that his father had spent time in Freetown on naval service during the war and another participant had worked with the Anti-Corruption Commission in Sierra Leone and had visited the SLNRM whilst she was there!

Future Programme

Rural Life Living Museum, Reeds Road, Tilford, Farnham, Surrey, 30th September 2022

Helen Ashby will be leading a talk in the village hall from 7.30-8.30pm about the incredible journey of 'Da train fo Bo'. The ticket includes a complimentary free drink on arrival and bar snacks can be purchased on the evening. Also included is a ride on the museum's narrow gauge railway courtesy of our friends at The Old Kiln Light Railway. Tickets can be purchased online at:

<https://rural-life.org.uk/events/adult-talk-da-train-to-bo/>

Online talk : Wartime railway journeys: Photography from Sierra Leone during the 1940s, Dr Nick Evans, Senior Lecturer in Diaspora History at the University of Hull, 5th October 2022 at 19.00

Specially for the Friends of the Sierra Leone National Railway Museum, Nick Evans has offered to do an updated version of the talk he gave at Leeds Industrial Museum.

Homelands: Photography from Sierra Leone in the 1940s, Black History Month at Streetlife Museum, Hull. 1st - 31st October 2022.

This co-produced photography exhibition examines the shared homelands of British service personnel and Sierra Leonian people during the upheaval of the Second World War. Wartime photography by Corporal Fred Birden has been selected and reinterpreted by local members of the Hull Afro Caribbean Association who were either born, lived or worked in West Africa. Their insights bring a fresh dimension to an important privately owned collection of photographs of Sierra Leone just prior to decolonisation from Britain.

The project is part of ongoing work between the Hull Afro Caribbean Association, Hull Museums and the University of Hull to increase the visibility of Hull's African Caribbean community.

Admission is free and pre-booking is not required.

Research

Tim Procter has continued his research into archives relating to the Sierra Leone Railway and has provided this fascinating piece about the railway in the 1930s:

Paper tracks Past 2 – Journey through a vanished world by Robert Steel

The second in what is proving to be a very occasional series looking at archive and historical sources for the railway in Sierra Leone.

One of the things we're constantly on the hunt for is first-hand accounts of travelling on the railway, to help bring the railway to life for the museum's visitors in Sierra Leone, and our wider readers and members. It's only through personal accounts of travel that we can really get an impression of the railway was *like*. Sadly no-one (that we've found yet, at any rate) travelled on the railway to write about it. The railway closed before railway tourism took hold, before a Colin Garrett or a Michael Palin or Michael Portillo could turn it into a 'great railway journey'. The pioneering railway photographers who made it to Sierra Leone in the 1950s and 1960s were just that – photographers – so there aren't extensive narrative journals accompanying the pictures of Patrick Ransome Wallis or Prof. H.P. White. So gaining an impression of the railway has become a historical jigsaw puzzle, piecing together snapshots and snippets from those who rode the railway for some other purpose, and who mentioned it in their subsequent writings. Perhaps the most famous of these is Graham Greene, who used the railway in 1935 to get as close as he could to the Liberian border for his trek described in *Journey without Maps*.

In 1937 Robert Steel, who had just graduated from Oxford in Geography, was awarded a scholarship by the Drapers' Company. The aim of the scholarship was to fund travel to increase understanding of the lesser-known parts of the Empire. The way Steel tells it, Sierra Leone was allocated to him, probably because his tutor was aware of Freetown's strategic potential as a harbour during any coming war and thus felt that increased knowledge of the country and its geography would be useful. After spending some time making plans and useful contacts in London, Steel sailed from Liverpool on 5 January 1938, arriving in Freetown on the 15th. He left Freetown on 9th June. In these 5 months he travelled the length and breadth of Sierra Leone. After a bit of time in Freetown and an initial trip to Kent via Waterloo, he started on his 'Great Trek' on February 11th and didn't return to Freetown until 30th May. Along the way he pretty much lived on his wits, as his scholarship was not generous, using the contacts he had made in London and those he made in country, particularly with the staff of the United Africa Company; using rides on the lorries of the government and local traders wherever they were offered, doing a lot of travel by bike, all on his own management, though he was never alone, as, like Graham Green, he had a party of bearers. Quite a feat for a young man in his early 20s, even one with the confidence and privilege of an Oxbridge education. Steel described his trip in extensive notes, which he turned into long letters to his fiancée Eileen Page. Much later in life he started to turn the letters into a book, which he was working on when he died in 1997. The book was completed by his son-in-law Colin Johnson and published by a small publisher which specialised in works about Africa, Ituri Publications. It deserves a much wider audience.

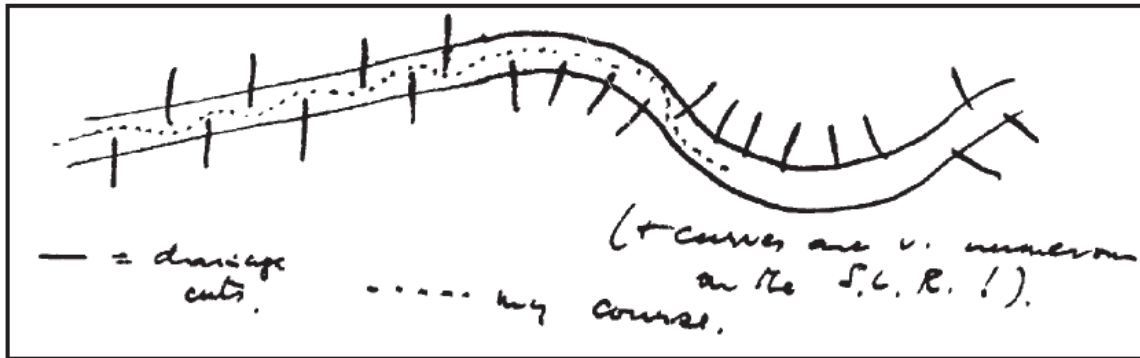


Steel at the wheel of a truck in Sierra Leone, taken from the cover of *Journey through a vanished world*.

Steel is an engaging, intelligent and often forthright commentator, as might be expected from a young man just out of university. He records his intense dislike of the way whites treat the Africans. When pressed into a Europeans v. locals cricket match in Makeni, he ignores "the done thing" by chatting with the African players and takes delight in noting that the local side won by a considerable margin. Like Graham Greene, he finds Freetown petty and gossipy, "too many Europeans", its constant round of social engagements stifling and dull. And, very like Greene, he sees tragedy in the locals imitating European manners, dress and customs. Indeed, it's possible Steel had read *Journey without Maps* as the first edition came out in 1936 while Steel was at Oxford, although it was quickly recalled and pulped following a libel action against Greene's publishers by a Freetown-based doctor.

The railway features large in Steel's trip, in fact it shapes its very nature; when the Colonial Secretary refused Steel a free pass on the railway, he decided to travel the country in one go rather than making several expeditions from Freetown. This initially annoyed him until he realised that by going 2nd class rather than 1st to save money, he'd be travelling with African passengers. He made his first railway journey on February 1st, to Waterloo, from where he trekked to York and Kent. "The viaducts are small and rickety and need to be seen to be believed... the total carriage width is only about 4 feet 6 inches. Some of the curves are so sharp that is quite possible (without putting your head out of the window) to see the engine and the guard's van at one and the same time – rather like a boy's train with its perilously sudden curves. And it is so hot..." That's actually the most fulsome description he gives of actual rail travel, but what comes across from his travels is how the railway wasn't fulfilling its potential. As well as the cost, he found the timetable less than helpful – passenger trains only on alternate days on the branch line, for example. He frequently points out that the trains are never on time and slow – a 2 ¼ hour crawl from Mano to Bo due to culvert repairs was a particular low. At Blama, he decided to cycle

the 10 or so miles to Baoma because “the train times were hopeless.” Ironically he cycled along the railway, as the sleepers were almost covered over, weaving around the drainage cuts.



Steel's sketch of cycling along the railway, noting “drainage cuts, my course (+ curves are v. numerous on the S.L.R.!)”

He even pushed his bike across the Sewa River bridge, “... Clifton suspension bridge if it had no bottom at all, only sleepers every 16 inches or so... There is a wood path at the side, but that is all rotten and collapsing, and the sleepers are safer, even if hazardous in themselves.” The railway's bureaucracy also riled him. Forced to travel by goods trains due to the lack of passenger services on the branch, he had to fill in “a whole series of forms” for indemnity, and by the end of his travels and after a lot of use of lorries and bikes, he expressed an active dislike of the railway “with its need of carriers, ticket-getting, luggage-weighing and all the other palavers such as being there on time and so forth.” It is perhaps damning that, despite making around half his journeys on goods trains, he never once mentions the cargos being carried or the industries the railway was serving.

With one exception. Steel is the one writer so far unearthed who described travelling on the Sierra Leone Development Company's railway between Pepel and Marampa, which had only been open some 5 years. This clearly impressed him, possibly because it was right at the start of his trip – his first day's travel was from Freetown to Pepel by launch, and then to Marampa on the train – but the scale and efficiency of the mining operation and its railway made its mark. “The journey up was great fun – in the guard's van, with 36 trucks between our little van and one of the strongest engines in the world – Garratt 4 cylinder 2-4-2 double unit engines, which fairly pull along these massive loads...” But his admiration was quickly tempered at Marampa by his distaste at the way the workers were treated, and by his rumination that much of the iron ore would go to the arms industry – “it's all a rather grim prospect that everyone is collecting the stuff as fast as they can, and at enhanced rates, just to be able to kill a few more men – and women, and children... it is good to know what's what, and what really lies beneath the things one sees.”



A Garratt locomotive and trucks on the SLDC's railway, from the SLDC publication *Iron Ore Mining in Sierra Leone*, circa 1953.

Steel doesn't comment on the overall value or otherwise of the government railway; it wasn't part of his survey and for him it was another means of travel alongside boats, trucks and bikes, one that felt was costly, particularly in the colony, and one that he seems to have grown more irritated with as his travels went on. His incidental portrait reinforces the notion that the railway had been fatally hampered by decisions on gauge and route taken at its creation, and the failure to fully implement the improvements recommended by the reports of 1920s and 1930s. Steel's account also doesn't show that the railway was crucial to the everyday life of thousands of Sierra Leoneans, but again, that wasn't part of his work, and his descriptions do at least allow a little inference of what life with and on the railway was actually like.

Robert Steel went on to have a distinguished career as an academic geographer, holding senior positions at several universities and serving as President of the Geographical Association in 1973. The love of Africa sparked by his 1938 Sierra Leone trip never left him. The Geographical Association has a blog post on his career [here](#).

Journey through a vanished world – Sierra Leone 1938, Robert W. Steel, edited by Colin Johnson, Ituri Publications, Woodford Halse, 2001, ISBN 0 953643- 2 6

His widow deposited a copy of the manuscript on which *Journey through a vanished world* was based with Cambridge University Library's archives, ref. GBR/0115/RCS/RCMS 140, catalogue entry [here](#).

Copies were also sent to various other universities and institutions including Fourah Bay University in Sierra Leone.

Sierra Leone Railway Hunslet 4-6-2T No 85 restoration appeal

Don't forget that you can still contribute to the overhaul of Sierra Leone Railway Hunslet 2-6-2 Tank locomotive No 85 of 1954

If you would like to see No 85 steam again, please use the attached form to make your donation.



I wish to make a donation to the Friends of Sierra Leone National Railway Museum to help No 85 steam again.

- I enclose a cheque for £ (Cheques payable to Friends of Sierra Leone National Railway Museum and posted to Helen Ashby, Chair – FoSLNRM, 141 Manor Drive North, York YO26 5SD).
- I have donated online at <https://cafdonate.cafonline.org/18554#!/DonationDetails>
- I have donated online direct to the Friends of the Sierra Leone National Railway Museum and referenced No 85 (Account details: Bank: NatWest, Payee: Friends of the Sierra Leone National Railway Museum, Sort Code: 56-00-70, Account No: 42630053)

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<p style="text-align: center;">Boost your donation by 25p of Gift Aid for every £1 you donate</p> <p>Gift Aid is reclaimed by the charity from the tax you pay for the current tax year. Your address is needed to identify you as a current UK taxpayer.</p>
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In order to Gift Aid your donation you must tick the box below:

I want to Gift Aid my donation of £_____ to the Friends of Sierra Leone National Railway Museum

I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

If you pay Income Tax at the higher or additional rate and want to receive the additional tax relief due to you, you must include all your Gift Aid donations on your Self Assessment tax return or ask HM Revenue and Customs to adjust your tax code.

Signed Date

<https://www.facebook.com/sierraleonerailwaymuseum>

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