



# FRIENDS OF SIERRA LEONE NATIONAL RAILWAY MUSEUM

Registered Charity No: 1179579

**Honorary President Col. Steve Davies MBE**

**Honorary Patron Mr. Kamal Nassar, Sierra Construction Systems**

## **WINTER NEWSLETTER 2021**



Officers' Coach No 1256 (General Manager's Coach) in service in the early 1950s (Bob Wall Collection).  
The coach is now preserved in the SLNRM.

With the major changes to the UK's Red List on 4<sup>th</sup> October 2021, we were finally able to make plans for a visit to Sierra Leone and managed to get flights with Air France at a reasonable affordable price, provided we returned to the UK before the end of November (the price escalates from 1<sup>st</sup> December onwards because of the volume of diaspora travelling at Christmas). Travel was somewhat more complicated this year, given the extra room-filling and Covid19 testing that had to be completed, but nevertheless we were excited to get there again after almost two years!

We flew from Manchester, with little problem other than a delay in take-off because the extra burden of vaccine and test-checking meant that checkin was much longer than usual, which had not been compensated by earlier opening or more staff. The transfer at Paris was a nightmare, largely due to the inefficiency of Aeroports de Paris and the confusion over where our plane had actually landed on arrival from South America. Arriving about an hour and a half later at Freetown Lungi, we were impressed by the speed and efficiency of the transfer. The bus bringing us from the aeroplane to the terminal building picked up some twenty passengers at a time, allowing for social distancing (unlike Paris where distancing was impossible), and we were through passport control in a matter of minutes. On to baggage claim, where our bright pink and red suitcases were very easy to spot, and then direct to the Covid19 testing point, where we did both a lateral flow and a PCR test. As our lateral flow tests were negative, we were released to find the ferry to

Freetown and to retire to our accommodation, where we were to isolate until the results of our PCR tests were uploaded onto the travel portal.

For the return trip, we paid the premium price for our Covid19 PCR tests, which meant that the health worker visited us at home to take the swab and our results were uploaded in less than 48 hours. The efficiency of this service meant that we were relieved of the stress of wondering whether our results would be available before we were due to fly.

All of these precautions have clearly paid off, since the incidence of Covid19 has remained extremely low in Sierra Leone, and almost all restrictions have now been removed. However, vaccination take-up is still relatively low as many people are suspicious of the side-effects and afraid of being made sick.

The most unfortunate effect of the pandemic in Sierra Leone is the further weakening of the economy and the high rate of inflation, which is putting stresses and strains on all aspects of daily life for most Sierra Leoneans. The exchange rate now stands at almost 15,000 Leones to the British Pound, which is great for us, but not so good for a country that relies almost exclusively on imported goods.

Many of you will have heard the news of the NP tanker explosion at Wellington, on 5<sup>th</sup> November, the death toll of which is unknown, but which had reached 144 by the time we left. I was very disturbed to know that the news had reached the UK as quickly as it reached us in Freetown – the UK media only ever pick up bad news stories from Sierra Leone and never issue any positive report. Happily, none of the Museum team or Friends was directly affected by the fire, but it has left many people homeless and mourning the loss of their families.

*Helen Ashby  
Chair*

### **Update from the Sierra Leone National Railway Museum**

Despite the lack of funding the Ministry of Tourism & Cultural Affairs has continued to support the museum, which has become much more a focus of attention since the Presidential visit in April. At the beginning of our visit we were privileged to pay a courtesy call to the Ministry, where we were welcomed by the Hon Deputy Minister, Mr William I K Robinson, the new Senior Permanent Secretary, Mr Andrew Sorie and the Director of Culture, Mr Foday Jalloh. The team were very supportive of our work, in particular with the development of the Railway Heritage Club at Bauya and were able to facilitate transport to Bauya through the use of Ministry vehicles.



Mr Sorie was particularly interested in the work of the Railway Museum as his father was a railwayman, and he recalled travelling by train as a youngster.

I am hoping that they will be able to bring a delegation to the UK in 2022 to visit the National Railway Museum in York and to see our work on SLR No 85.



On our arrival at the museum, we were also delighted to be met by the local Chief and Chief Imam who kindly visited the museum to welcome us back to Cline Town. They are active members and great supporters of the Freetown Chapter of the Friends of the Sierra Leone National Railway Museum.

### **Museum Visitors**

Whilst the pandemic has led to a reduction in international tourists, during our stay in Freetown we were delighted to see visitors starting to arrive from the USA and the museum has continued to welcome domestic visitors, host community events and provide exciting programmes for school parties.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> October, the museum hosted the local Children’s Advocacy Network, who deliver community projects in the Cline Town area. Support was provided by the Danish Government, via Save the Children, to help adolescent girls who have dropped out of school because of pregnancy and other related issues.



So far, some 40 girls have benefited from such projects - 20 are being supported to enter mainstream education, whilst a further 20 are receiving vocational training to enable them to develop their own businesses as needleworkers. To kick start these enterprises, starter kits including sewing machines and other sewing materials were distributed to the trainees at this special event in the Museum.

On 29<sup>th</sup> October, staff of World Hope International visited the museum as part of their weekend break. World Hope International is an international non-governmental organisation, which aims to provide those in need with opportunity, dignity, and hope so they can possess the tools for change in themselves, their family, and their community. The organisation supports all people regardless of ethnicity, gender, race, or religion.



The team were very enthusiastic and fascinated by the history of the railway system in Sierra Leone.

On 16<sup>th</sup> November we were very pleased to welcome a very special visitor, the recently appointed British High Commissioner, Ms Lisa Chesney MBE, who had heard all about the museum from her predecessor. She was very complimentary about the museum in her follow-up 'Tweet' about her visit.



Another interesting group of visitors have joined us from the ship MV Logos Hope, which is currently moored at Queen Elizabeth Quay, close to the museum. There are approximately 250 volunteers on board the ship, from all parts of the world, and they are visiting in small groups over the six weeks that they are staying in Freetown.

The ship is operated by OM Ships International, a private, non-profit, charitable organisation set up in 1970 as part of the global Christian training and outreach movement. The ship provides a floating bookstore, open to all visitors, selling Christian books, educational books, textbooks, and other publications at affordable prices, open to anyone who cares to visit.

Another interesting visitor was Mr Abu Solomon Tarawalie, who was the media man attached to Steve Davies in 2004-2005, when the museum was being set up. Mr Tarawalie's most recent contract has now come to an end, and he is seeking alternative employment, back in journalism. He asked if he could do an interview and try to get an article into the newspapers. Usually in Sierra Leone, the media expect to be remunerated for PR work, but we had explained the tightness of our budget, which had all already been accounted for and he very kindly did the article at no cost. We were quite excited when we found that he had succeeded in getting his article into the *Independent Observer*.



## School Visits

It has also been gratifying to see the number of school visits taking place, now that the rains have passed. Henmat International Primary School made two visits during our visit, with over 100 pre-school and Class one children visiting on Monday 8<sup>th</sup> November, and Class two children visiting on Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup>. The kids had a guided tour, and engaged in craft, song and dance activities. After eating their packed lunches some of the tiny tots had an afternoon nap, whilst the other kids played on the swings and slides, on the bouncy castle or on the sit and ride toys.



In between the two Henmat visits, on Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> October, we were the first port of call for the Class 6 children of the Dele Preparatory School at Allen Town, who were on a field trip to see various landmarks and sights of Freetown. As they only had a short visit, they concentrated on their guided tour, taking lots of notes and asking questions, but of course they could not leave without learning the Bo Train Song:



The train for Bo, he no wan gree for go  
The train for Bo. He no wan gree for go  
The train for Bo he tire  
Because he no get fire  
The train for Bo, he no wan gree for go.



On 24<sup>th</sup> November, we had another visit of youngsters from St Teresa's Preparatory School, which is just round the corner from the Museum. The children were divided into three groups for their guided tours with Mohamed, Umaru and Abdul. Even the teachers loved their ride on the pump trolley and their head teacher told us that they had all had a wonderful day at the museum today and that they had learned a lot.



## School Heritage Clubs

The St Peter's Junior Secondary School Railway Heritage Club at Bauya has continued to thrive, following the successful activity programme last July. In October, the Friends of the Sierra Leone National Railway Museum was able to provide a further donation of funds to support the request of club members for a visit to Freetown to see the Museum for themselves.

The majority of the children had never travelled outside Moyamba District, their immediate surroundings, and of course, none of them had ever seen a train.

On 5<sup>th</sup> October Education & Outreach Officer, Abdul Karim Kamara, made the long journey to Bauya by bus and motorbike taxi to meet with the teachers leading the Heritage Club and to make the necessary arrangements for the field trip.



A bus was hired to transport the kids to Freetown and a promotional banner drawing attention to the part played by the various organisations and agencies involved in supporting the trip, including us, and after an early breakfast on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> October very excited St Peter's Junior Secondary School Railway Heritage Club members set off for Freetown.

The journey by bus from Bauya takes about four hours, so it was almost lunch time when the bus arrived at the Cotton Tree, Freetown's most famous landmark.



The children were then welcomed to the Sierra Leone National Museum and given a tour explaining the history and culture of their country.



After this visit, the bus took them to Cline Town, where they enjoyed a guided tour and a programme of educational and fun activities, including the ever-popular pump trolley ride.



The kids had a wonderful day and it has been reported since that many children in the school who had not previously joined the Club have now expressed interest in joining having heard what a great time was had by all.

As a follow up, we were able to take a trip to Bauya during our visit in November, along with members of staff from the Museum and Mr Foday Jalloh, Director of Culture from the Ministry of Tourism & Cultural Affairs to meet with the teachers and children of the Heritage Club.

The children wrote letters to the children of St Peter's School in York, for me to bring home and deliver and made a welcome speech, and a request for some help for the school, including help to create a school song and to help with the provision of football kits and boots, school bags, pens and exercise books.



We took Umaru Conteh with us from the Museum, along with a supply of paint brushes and paint, so that he could put a good coat of paint on the original station signs which are still intact at Bauya station. This was felt to be important from the conservation point of view, in sealing the concrete and protecting it from the sun, but also in making a statement to the community about the Museum's commitment to the preservation of the railway relics at Bauya, following its listing as a protected heritage site in March 2020.

### ***Museum Developments***

As reported in 'The Independence Day Special' newsletter, the Monuments & Relics Commission carried out some infrastructure improvements earlier in the year, including the paving of the car park – which is excellent and makes a huge difference to the museum frontage – and the installation of a reception booth.

During October, when the rains had finished, we were able to send a donation to enable work was able to continue to complete the reception area. The first task was to tile the floor, which will help to allay the dust and make it easy to keep clean.



Then came the task of fitting a ceiling, again to minimize the ingress of dust.



When the ceiling was complete, we were able to help with the installation of furniture and fittings, and to install an operational reception desk and gift shop. This is important since it ensures that all visitors have the opportunity to view the items on sale and to make purchases before they leave. In the past, the gift shop has been kept completely separate and was too easy to miss!

The reception and shop now work well and provides a much more professional approach to the museum for visitors.



## Conservation Projects

As our visit this time was to be relatively short, we had not planned any major conservation projects and everything seemed to be in reasonable good condition. The water supply installed in 2020 had ensured that the team were able to keep the museum and the collection clean.

However, Adrian thought it wise to do a thorough inspection of the General Manager's Coach, in the knowledge that some work had been needed to arrest rot at one corner in 2019. On closer inspection, he identified an area of decay on the plywood exterior panel at the same corner as the original repair, and further damage to another panel on the opposite side of the coach, which also had signs of small holes showing through the paint. Removal of the suspect panels revealed an infestation of termites, which had eaten away at the plywood, leaving the paint and the hardwood frames intact.



Adrian and Ibrahim set to and removed the damaged panels and cleaned up the affected areas. The infested boards were put outside for burning, prompting a wildlife party in the compound as the lizards scurried to feast on the bugs!

A thorough coating of a proprietary termite killer was liberally painted onto the surrounding woodwork and plywood panels and will hopefully prevent any spread of the infestation. The damaged plywood panels replaced with new. Unfortunately, we were only able to acquire single ply panels, rather than 2 ply, so the coach side is not quite as even as it ought to be. We have a future plan to re clad the whole side, to ensure that we have completely removed the risk of further damage. Whilst this was being done, Umaru and colleagues set to and rubbed down the rest of the coach ready for painting.



Having refitted the new panels, Adrian and Umaru mixed a tinge of 'Opal' green paint with six cups of black to create an appropriate colour for repainting the coach, in a colour as close as possible to that used when the coach was in service. Umaru then set to and single-handedly repainted the whole coach.

He managed to finish it just after we left, and the team sent us a photograph of the completed job.



### **Employee of the Year**

As is becoming traditional at this time of year, I was asked to make the announcement, on Mr Nylander's behalf, of the winner of the Employee of the Year award for 2021.

This year, Mr Nylander and Abdul Karim Kamara had done their assessment of the team and nominated Mohamed Jabbie for the honour. Mohamed has been with the museum since Steve



Davies first established the restoration team in September 2004 and has stuck with the job through some very difficult times, including a period when the team did not get paid for eighteen months, but still continued to go to work. Mohamed works six days a week, rarely taking his allocated day off and is always willing to open the museum for visitors on Sundays if requests are received. He is devoted to the museum and passionate about his job, setting an excellent example to his fellow workers. Many congratulations to Mohamed!

### **Sierra Leone Railway Locomotive No 85**

As reported in the Autumn Newsletter, we are continuing to develop plans for the overhaul of Sierra Leone Railway No 85, which is based at the Welshpool & Llanfair Light Railway. We have now received the inspection report from the Vale of Rheidol Railway workshop, who have carried out the stripping and inspection of the locomotive on our behalf.

We are delighted that the work required is not as extensive as might have been feared and we have now reached an agreement with the Welshpool & Llanfair Light Railway that we will raise the funds required for a major overhaul to bring the locomotive back into operation in time for it to take part in the events celebrating the 200th anniversary of the world's first public railway, the Stockton & Darlington Railway, in 2025.

We hope that the project will include training and development for the museum team, which will enhance their understanding of steam locomotive operation and maintenance and of the history

of this class Hunslet of 2-6-2 tank locomotives, which served the Sierra Leone Railway well from the 1920s to the 1970s.

The fund is now open for donations, so please share the news with all your railway or Sierra Leone enthusiast friends.



Donations can be made by cheque, made out to the Friends of the Sierra Leone National Railway Museum and posted to Helen Ashby, 141 Manor Drive North, York, YO26 5SD

Or by BACS to Friends of Sierra Leone National Railway Museum (NatWest), Sort Code 56-00-70, Account 42630045

### **New Acquisitions**

This lovely painted panel, depicting the Sierra Leone Coat-of-Arms, was donated recently by Charles Gardner, a friend of Trustee Sir Philip Williams. As you can see it is marked as belonging to the Sierra Leone State Railway and is identical to the panel fitted to the balcony of the Governor's Coach. Charles is unsure of the provenance, but we think it is probably a test panel for the Governor's Coach since it is so similar in size and shape.



## Research

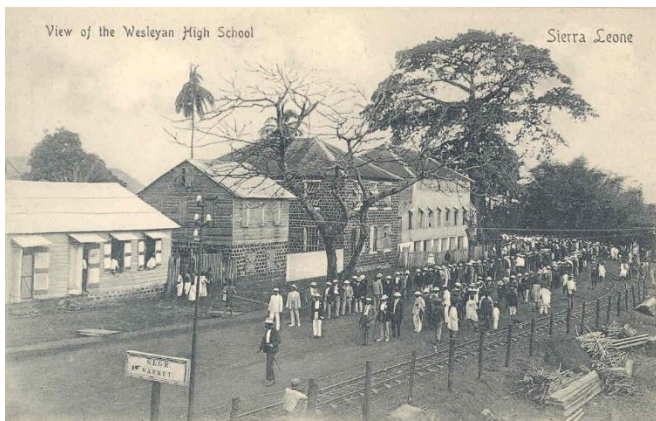
As you know, we are always researching for more information on the Sierra Leone Railway and finally in October, William Bickers-Jones and Helen Ashby managed to make a long-awaited trip to Bristol City Archives. We had been planning the visit for almost two-years but kept getting stalled by lockdowns and travel restrictions.

The trip was well worth the wait and yielded lots of interesting new images and information. A particular excitement was the discovery of the original photographs of the Governor's Coach, as built in 1913 by the Metropolitan Carriage, Wagon & Finance Company, which shows not only the original livery of the coach but also the completed interior of the vehicle. This is fantastic, since the museum team have an ambition to recreate the interior, which was stripped during the rebel war in Sierra Leone. This will really enable us to plan that project.



## More photographic discoveries

The Facebook Page 'Old Photos of Sierra Leone' continues to fascinate:



On the face of it, this is a picture of a school, but look closely. The parade is running alongside the railway line. Zoom in and look

This lovely set of photographs was posted on the site by Jacques Debaene and is simply entitled 'Sierra Leone Railway c1990'.



Photograph 'Freetown-Moyamba 1934' sent by Madam Adrea Stultiens with the comment "This photograph, made early August 1934 by Dutch traveller Paul Julien is captioned 'Freetown - Moyamba'.

### **Friends of the Sierra Leone National Railway Museum Annual General Meeting**

Last year's Annual General Meeting on Zoom was very successful and enabled more people to attend that have previously been able to get to in-person meetings, so it was agreed that future AGMs will continue to take place online. We had planned to hold the meeting in December, but my sudden decision to visit Sierra Leone as soon as the opportunity arose, meant that I have not had chance to plan the meeting and get the papers out in good time.

In view of this the Trustees have agreed that the 2021 AGM will take place on Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> January 2022 at 1900 hours.

We would be delighted if you could join us. The agenda for the meeting is attached for your reference. The login details are as follows:

FoSLNRM Annual General Meeting

Meeting Id: 846 6542 4829

Passcode: 125602

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84665424829?pwd=L3RKbVdqdzVSV3c2dHpKTmI3WGRmdz09>

The agenda for the meeting is attached at the end of this newsletter along with the Trustee nomination form.

There are no Trustees due for re-election this year, and all of the current Trustees are happy to continue to serve. However, there is room for another couple of Trustees, should anyone wish to pick up the baton and we will be happy to accept nominations for any member who wishes to join the Board and help to run the organization. Please do let us know if you are willing to stand. The Trustees nomination form is attached for completion and return to the Secretary, Anthony Coulls via [foslrm@outlook.com](mailto:foslrm@outlook.com)



## **FRIENDS OF SIERRA LEONE NATIONAL RAILWAY MUSEUM**



**Hon. President: Col Steve Davies MBE**  
**Hon. Patron: Mr Kamal Nassar**

Chair: Helen Ashby  
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**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2021**  
**Zoom: 846 6542 4829 Password: 125602**  
**Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> January at 19.00 - 21.00**

### **Agenda**

- |       |  |
|-------|--|
| 19.00 | Welcome and introduction   |
| 19.05 | Apologies  |
| 19.10 | Chairman's Report  |
| 19.20 | Update from Sierra Leone National Railway Museum by President Steve Davies MBE |
| 19.50 | Treasurer's Report   |
| 20.00 | Election of Officers   |
| 20.10 | Any other business   |
| 20.20 | Questions and answers  |
| 20.25 | Date and venue of 2022 AGM   |
| 20.30 | Close  |



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## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2021

ZOOM

**Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> January 2022 at 19.00**

### Nomination of Trustees/Officer Bearer

I wish to nominate \_\_\_\_\_

for the Office of Trustee of the Friends of Sierra Leone National Railway Museum

\*(delete as appropriate)

Proposed by \_\_\_\_\_

Seconded by \_\_\_\_\_

I am willing, if elected, to serve the Board of Trustees of the Friends of Sierra Leone National Railway Museum in the Office of Trustee in accordance with the Constitution.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ (Nominee).