

A HISTORY OF THE  
**HUNSTANTON**  
**MINIATURE**  
**RAILWAYS**

**A short history of railways on the  
Pier and at the South Beach**

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## **HUNSTANTON MINIATURE RAILWAYS**

**9½" & 10¼" gauges. 1947 - 1961**

### Introduction

The small east coast resort of Hunstanton had a total of three miniature railways in the post Second World War period. These were of 9½" & 10¼" gauges and have been previously poorly recorded. The most well-known of the trio ran on the Pier and achieved immortality by appearing in the Ealing Studios comedy film *Barnacle Bill* starring Alec Guinness. The history of the three railways has been researched from the few primary sources existing - Council Minutes and contemporary newspaper reports. While the Pier Miniature Railway featured on a number of postcards, only one photograph has been traced of either of the other two railways, which both ran adjacent to the South Beach.

### Hunstanton

The east coast resort of Hunstanton lies on the mouth of The Wash, at the north west corner of Norfolk. It has the distinction of being the only east coast resort to face west. The town lies some 15 miles north of King's Lynn and 41 miles north west of Norwich. London is around 100 miles to the south. Originally known as New Hunstanton, the seaside resort of Hunstanton is situated between Old Hunstanton and Heacham in an area that was undeveloped prior to around 1840. It was local Lord of the Manor, Henry Styleman le Strange (1815-1862), who decided to develop a seaside resort, which became Hunstanton. The very first building was the New Inn (later Golden Lion Hotel) which opened in 1846.

As with so many of our seaside resorts, development was slow until the arrival of the railway. The Lynn & Hunstanton Railway was incorporated on 1st August 1861 and opened its 15 mile 11 chain long line between those towns on Friday 3rd October 1862 - opening up the resort to visitors from the Midlands and London. The railway was highly successful for its promoters and became part of the Great Eastern Railway in 1890. With the expansion of the resort came the usual seaside accoutrements. The Pier - a must for all Victorian resorts - opened at Easter 1870 (see below). The Bathing Pool was opened on Whit Saturday, 26th May 1928 and a Boating Lake opened on Saturday 14th May 1932.

The 1951 holiday guide noted "*Hunstanton (pronounced locally as "Hunston") is particularly favoured in the matter of climate. This is due to the unique position it holds on the East Anglian coast for it faces due west across the renowned Wash, and while enjoying the dry bracing air of Norfolk as a whole, it escapes the keeness of the winds prevalent on that other part of the coast which faces it. As a seaside resort, Hunstanton offers a wealth of pleasures and amenities to the many who enjoy their holidays here year after year. It is a perfect spot for those who particularly look forward to the recreational activities afforded by the beach and sea*".

A storm surge caused extensive flooding and devastation over most of the east coast of England during the evening of Saturday 31st January 1953. In Hunstanton, 31 people died, with another 9 in nearby Heacham. The area in the south of the resort was particularly badly affected - there was no proper sea wall at the time - and the many beach huts, bungalows and chalets were uprooted and destroyed.

The heyday of Hunstanton as a seaside resort was from the arrival of the railway in 1862 until the 1960s, when changing holiday patterns and lack of local government interest brought a decline. In his 1983 book on the town *The History of Hunstanton* (New Horizon 1983) L L Gore states "*In many respects the resort side of the town has been sacrificed to that of the residential side, in as much as the traditional seaside essentials and holiday making amenities have been allowed to run down into almost total extinction, instead of extension, as many other similar sized resorts have done in recent post war years*". Although not included in the infamous "Beeching Report", the railway was run down, with the withdrawal of through passenger trains from destinations beyond King's Lynn and a reduction in capacity. The railway eventually closed on and from Monday 5th May 1969 - with the last trains running on Saturday 3rd May 1969. The closure accelerated the decline of Hunstanton as a seaside resort - the nearest station was now King's Lynn - making access far more difficult for those holidaymakers travelling by train from the Midlands and London.

The resort suffered another bad storm during the night of Wednesday 11th January 1978. Whilst the damage was not as severe as that in 1953, due to improved sea defences and promenades, the 108 year old Pier was totally destroyed. Some of its timbers were deposited 50 yards inland. Hunstanton was not the only pier to be destroyed or badly damaged that night - those at Skegness, Cromer, Walton-on-the-Naze, Clacton, Herne Bay and Margate were all also similarly afflicted. Prior to the arrival of the railway the town's population was just under 400 - at the 2011 census it was 4,229. Although not as popular as it used to be with holidaymakers, it remains a seaside resort and can be busy in the summer and on Bank Holidays with day visitors.

### The Pier

The first we hear of Hunstanton Pier was a notice in the *Lynn Advertiser* of Saturday 23rd November 1867 stating that it was intended to make an application, on or before 23rd December 1867, for "*Powers to erect a Pier and to levy tolls and for other purposes*". Interestingly, the application also permitted the Pier Company "*To lay down tramways upon the said Pier, and to run carriages and trucks thereon for gain*". The same notice also appeared in the *London Gazette* of 29th November 1867. The *Lynn Advertiser* of Saturday 18th April 1868 contained a notice stating that the Hunstanton Pier Company was to be incorporated, with a capital of £6,000. The Engineer and Designer engaged for the venture was London based Joseph William Wilson (1829-1898). The notice noted the development of Hunstanton and added "*A Pier is now considered an indispensable feature in a watering place, whether as affording means of promenading at all times in the full enjoyment of the sea air or as furnishing a point for social reunion*". The order to construct the Pier was deposited on 2nd May 1868 - notice of which appeared in the *Lynn Advertiser* of Saturday 16th May 1868.

The contract to build the Pier was let to Joseph Emerson Dowson of Westminster, London at a cost of £6,500 and construction was well in hand by the late spring of 1869, with at least part of the Pier completed by the beginning of August. A regatta was held in Hunstanton on Thursday 5th August 1869 and the *Lynn Advertiser* of Saturday 7th August 1869 was able to report visitors were admitted to "*That part of the Pier which was finished*". The contractors Messrs Dowson & Son handed over the admission fees to the Regatta funds.

The *Lynn Advertiser* of Saturday 29th January 1870 noted the meeting of the Hunstanton Pier Company the previous day, where the Directors reported they had "*great pleasure in reporting the completion of the Pier*". Cost was said to be £7,385 6s 1d. However, it does not appear to have been opened to the public at this time as an advert appeared in the *Lynn Advertiser* of Saturday 9th April stating that the Company was now "*taking applications for the situation of Pier Keeper and Toll Collector*". The Pier seems to have been formally opened at Easter 1870. The *Norfolk Chronicle* of Saturday 23rd April 1870, reporting on Good Friday [15th April] happenings stated "*About 800 persons visited Hunstanton by the excursion trains and a large majority of these paid for the privilege of a stroll on the newly opened pier*". The *Norwich Mercury* of Saturday 23rd April 1870 stated "*The pier, which has been opened for some time free of charge to the public, was now opened at a toll of 1d each, or 3d for day tickets*". However, the *Lynn Advertiser* of Saturday 2nd July 1870 noted the Directors had reported to the Thursday 30th June 1870 meeting of the Pier Company that the Pier had opened to the public on Monday 2nd May 1870.

Hunstanton was now able to boast a pier as one of its attractions. The Pier was 830 feet in length and 25 feet wide. Cyril Bainbridge described it in his book *Pavilions of the Sea* (Robert Hale 1986) as a "*tall and graceful structure standing on iron-pile columns*". In 1883 paddle steamer services commenced across The Wash to and from Skegness, using the piers in each resort. By 1904 a pavilion had been constructed at the pierhead, which contained a theatre. Sadly, the pavilion was destroyed by fire in the late afternoon of Saturday 10th June 1939. Following the fire the Pier was shortened to a length of 675 feet - the pavilion was never rebuilt. The subsequent history of the Pier is covered below with the Pier Miniature Railway.

## Pier Miniature Railway (1947 - 1961)

### Introduction

Unfortunately, the Pier Company records (minute books, reports, letters etc) for the relevant period have not survived, therefore the history of the railway is based mainly on articles in the *Lynn Advertiser* and the history of its steam locomotive, which has been collated mostly from private records and magazine articles.

Despite the statement in the application for the Pier Company to "*To lay down tramways upon the said Pier, and to run carriages and trucks thereon for gain*", as far as is known no tramway was ever laid on the Pier. The first rails laid on the Pier seem to have been for the miniature railway. The first reference to a miniature railway on the Pier is in the *Lynn Advertiser* of Tuesday 24th June 1947. Under the headline "*Pier model railway at Hunstanton*" it noted, with repair work to the Pier completed and despite the pierhead still in the course of reconstruction, work was "*in hand this week on a miniature railway running the length of the pier. Rails of 9½" gauge have been laid to provide a journey to the pier-head and back of about 500 yards*". It went on to state the locomotive and coaches were built to a scale of 2in to the foot and the "*carriages and trucks will hold 32 passengers and more may be added later*". The railway when completed would "*include signals, points and stations, and the Hunstanton Pier Company think that it is the only miniature railway running on any pier in Britain*". That claim was probably correct, with miniature railways opening on piers at Herne Bay, Lowestoft and Margate in 1948 - perhaps following the example of Hunstanton.

## Opening

The railway was duly opened on Saturday 28th June 1947 and the proceedings were reported in the *Lynn Advertiser* of Tuesday 1st July 1947. Under the headline "*Pier railway on its first official trip*" it stated the railway was "*declared open on Saturday afternoon by the Dowager Marchioness Townshend (Mrs Bernard le Strange). The Marchioness Townshend was accompanied by Mr le Strange and her young grandson, Christopher. Both Mr le Strange and Christopher displayed a keen interest in the model LMS locomotive which draws the tiny trucks and coaches*". The driver, a Mr J Beck, was "*busy with an oilcan*" on the locomotive, while "*small boys - and the odd girl - crowded round*". The report went on to describe the actual opening ceremony "*The Marchioness was welcomed at the pier entrance by Mr W H Brooke and Mr R Pope, directors of the Hunstanton Pier Company. She cut a length of blue ribbon stretched across the pier and declared the model railway open. Afterwards she took her seat in one of the carriages - as did Mr le Strange and Christopher - for the first official trip. After the opening ceremony the Marchioness was presented with a bouquet by Rosemary and Patricia Patterson*". A photograph showed the Marchioness and Bernard le Strange riding in an open coach, along with her grandson Christopher White "*enjoying with the other children this new and enterprising addition to Hunstanton attractions*".

The opening of the railway was also reported in the 8th August 1947 edition of the *Mechanics* magazine, but without the actual date being recorded. Additionally, it informed us Mr J Beck, the driver, was a retired LNER driver and "*Young Derek Ramm waves his flag and blows his whistle from the model guard's van at the rear of the train - to the delight of children - before it leaves for each trip*". Mr W H Brooke, a "*director of the Hunstanton Pier Company*", stated that by next summer it was "*hoped to have a model station erected at either end of the line and a set of points installed at the pierhead when the present reconstruction work*" was completed. The train was reported as "*now making several dozen trips each day to the pierhead and back - a distance of 480 yards*". The report went on "*This unique model railway is complete with a departure-indicator board, buffers and signals, and shingle from the beach has been spread between the rails to give the effect of a proper permanent way*". Unsurprisingly, the magazine gave more attention to the locomotive than the *Lynn Advertiser*. It described it as a "*2-ins scale model of a 4-4-0 Midland compound engine (9½-ins gauge)*". Adding more detail, it noted the locomotive had "*two cylinders, slide valve type, with Stephenson's link valve motion and a working pressure of 100 lbs per square inch. The driving wheels have a diameter of 13ins. Steam brakes are fitted to the driving wheels and there is a handbrake on the tender*".

The article concluded by stating that several members of Hunstanton Urban District Council watched the opening ceremony and "*one of them suggested afterwards that upon completion of the new sea wall promenade running from Hunstanton to Heacham, possibly a model railway of this type could be installed to carry holiday makers to various points along the sea front instead of the water-bus canal at present visualised in the council's plan for future development*". Neither of these ambitious plans came to fruition, but as we shall see later a miniature railway was constructed at the South Beach - although at that time the sea wall had not been completed in that location; rather un-foortuitously as it turned out.

### Description of the Railway

To operate the new railway the Hunstanton Pier Company obtained a 9½" gauge steam locomotive. This was a 2in to 1ft (one-sixth full size) model of a Midland Railway 4-4-0 compound locomotive, which was built in 1928 by Neville Brindley Richards of Finham, just to the south of Coventry. After passing through a couple of owners, it was acquired by Mr R Horsfield and taken to Jhansi, in the present day state of Uttar Pradesh in India, where by spring 1934 it was working on an instructional railway for staff of the Great Indian Peninsular Railway. This railway featured in a number of magazine articles (*Model Engineer* 14th & 28th June and 12th & 26th July 1934, *Railway Magazine* August 1934, *Meccano* July 1935 & *The Locomotive* March 1936). When running on this railway the locomotive was numbered 1102 (indicating an LMSR built example) and turned out in LMSR livery - but seems to have been un-named. By at least January 1938 Mr Horsfield had brought the locomotive back to Great Britain and it was located at Forest Green, between Dorking and Cranleigh in Surrey, where he was building a new 9½" gauge railway (*Model Engineer* 13th January 1938). By January 1944 the whole railway at Forest Green, including the 4-4-0 locomotive, was put up for sale by R Horsfield (*Model Engineer* 13th January 1944). However, the complete railway was later advertised for sale in the Saturday 5th May 1945 edition of *The World's Fair* by "The Regent Automatic & Electrical Supply" of London - presumably an agent or dealer - and it was probably from them the Pier Company obtained the locomotive.

When at Jhansi, the locomotive was accompanied by five open 4-wheel wagons (two lettered LMS, two GW and one LNE) which were used to carry two passengers each. There was also a 4-wheel brake van for a guard. The brake van and some, or all, of the wagons came with the locomotive to the new Pier Railway. They were supplemented by at least one passenger coach, which had four garden style seats and was lettered LMS.

The 9¼" or 9½" gauge railway was laid directly on to the wooden decking of the Pier and seems to have been formed of "jubilee" style track panels with metal sleepers. Although the locomotive was definitely 9¼" gauge, the track it ran on may well have been 9½" gauge depending from where it was obtained. If it came with the locomotive it was no doubt 9¼" gauge. However, on a straight railway such as this, the ¼" discrepancy was unlikely to have caused a problem. As described in the *Mechanics* magazine above, "ballast" of beach shingle was placed between sleepers - more for appearance than anything else. Laid in the centre of the Pier, the dead straight track ran from just outside (seaward side) of the entrance building (OS grid ref TF67154095) to where the pier widened at the pierhead - around 220 yards in length (measured from an Ordnance Survey 25in map). Unfortunately, the railway missed being depicted on either the 6" or 25" Ordnance Survey maps - the relevant surveys taking place before it was built and after it closed. Despite the optimism shown in the various reports, photographs show neither terminus was ever provided with a station, nor did the railway ever have any points. The locomotive normally hauled the train out to the pierhead and propelled it back. At opening the railway appears to have been owned and directly operated by the Hunstanton Pier Company.



An extract from an Ordnance Survey 25" map, revised in 1939 and published 1946.

The Pier can be clearly seen running out from The Green and over the promenade.

The miniature railway ran down the centre of the Pier decking from the just outside (seaward side) of the entrance building to where the Pier widened at the pierhead.

The conveniently located railway station can be seen lower centre of the map.

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### Ongoing Operation: 1948 - 1956

The railway reopened for the 1948 season at Easter - the *Lynn Advertiser* of Tuesday 30th March 1948, reporting on a sunny Easter in Hunstanton, noted "*The pier itself, freshly painted and gay with flags and bunting, was also well patronised and the kiddies enjoyed rides on the miniature railway which is again operating between the entrance and the pierhead*". Whitsun 1948 saw repairs completed to the pierhead and the *Lynn Advertiser* of Friday 14th May 1948 was able to report "*the whole length of pier will be open to visitors this weekend for the first time since 1939*". The 4-4-0 locomotive seems to have needed some attention in the summer of 1949. The *Nottingham Evening Post* of Friday 19th August 1949 reported "*Puffing Peter, a miniature railway engine on Hunstanton pier, is back after a 21st birthday wash and brush up*". The story was also picked up by the *Daily Herald* of Friday 19th August 1949, which

under its *Curio Corner* related "*Puffing Peter*" had "*began to wheeze. His top speed used to be 15 mph, down it went to 12, then ten, then eight. But after oil, grease and a two day rest Puffing Peter was back in form yesterday*". Whether the locomotive was actually named "*Puffing Peter*" at this time, or this was merely a nickname, is not known. The railway must have been busy during 1949, as the *Daily Mirror* of Tuesday 25th October 1949 reported that over 100,000 visitors passed through the turnstile to enter the Pier - the biggest number since the war. However, the railway was not to operate during the following season.

No trains ran on the Pier during the 1950 season. In fact the track had been removed. The *Lynn Advertiser* of Friday 10th February 1950 informs us that the pier-master, Sidney Ali, took charge of the railway and "*at present the rails are stacked at the pierhead*". This may indicate the track was removed for safe keeping each winter, which would have been a fairly simple task given the "*jubilee*" style track. Quite why the railway did not operate during the 1950 season is unknown, but all the evidence points to the railway being operated at the South Beach during the 1950 season instead. The minutes of Hunstanton Urban District Council's Parks & Pleasure Grounds Committee meeting of Wednesday 4th January 1950 noted "*A letter from Botterill's Miniature Railways Limited was read asking if the Council could provide a suitable site for the Pier miniature railway*". They did no more than defer consideration of the matter. However, this indicates by the 1950 season the railway was owned or operated by Botterill's Miniature Railways Limited and that for some reason it could not run on the Pier and they were therefore looking for another site on which to operate it. The story of the South Beach Miniature Railway is related later, but for the 1950 season no trains ran on the Pier.

For the 1951 season the railway returned to the Pier with the same 4-4-0 locomotive and in the same format as previously. The *Lynn Advertiser* of Friday 11th May 1951 was able to report that "*for the first time there will be two miniature railways operating on the sea front this summer, one at the South Beach, the other on the pier. The pier railway, which did not function last year, resumes normal services over Whitsun*". Whit Saturday was 12th May and the *Lynn Advertiser* of Tuesday 15th May 1951 confirms the railway did indeed resume running that weekend noting "*the model railway on the pier, making a reappearance after a year's absence*" had proved popular. The *Lynn Advertiser* of Tuesday 12th June 1951 informs us the driver for the 1951 season was 37 year old Alfred Wilson, formerly a builder's labourer. The locomotive was noted to be "*green and black*" and was "*a model of an LMS train, built in 1929 for an exhibition in India*" - clearly the same 4-4-0 locomotive, which had opened the railway in June 1947.

The *Lynn Advertiser* of Friday 25th January 1952 described a variety of tasks being undertaken in January across the resort to make it ready for the forthcoming season. In his workshop under the Pier cafe "*Mr A J Becks, the maintenance engineer*" for the Pier was hard at work "*dismantling, cleaning and replacing worn parts in the miniature locomotive which gives rides to hundreds of holiday-makers each year*". The paper noted he did most of the work himself, before going on to give a potted, if not entirely accurate, history of the locomotive - claiming it was made "*by the LMS Company and sent out to India for exhibition purposes*". Mr Becks also looked after the diesel powered generator, which provided power for the illuminations on the Pier. The report also noted that a "*small hole burnt in the pier deck by a cinder from the locomotive*" had been repaired. Operating a steam locomotive on a wooden pier came with certain risks! In readiness for the start of the season at Easter, the *Lynn Advertiser* of Friday 11th April 1952 noted the "*final spots of oil*" were being applied to "*the "Hunstanton Flyer", the miniature engine which takes holiday-makers along the length of the pier*".

The railway carried a very unusual passenger on Thursday 26th June 1952 - as the *Lynn Advertiser* of Tuesday 1st July 1952 reported. "*The first seal baby of the season was washed ashore at Hunstanton on Thursday. The little grey pup seal was spotted soon after it landed by council workmen. Mr H Hollanby, deck chair superintendent, carried it on to the promenade, and the 56 pound baby was taken to the pier, put on the miniature railway, transported to the end, and dropped into the sea. But the little seal was back on the shore again before the train came back to the shore end of the pier. Three more times the seal was taken out to the end of the pier, but each time it came straight back. No pleasure craft were due to leave for the seal banks until the next day, so the baby seal was kept ashore overnight. Next morning he was ferried out to the seal banks*". The young seal presumably enjoyed their trip on the railway and kept coming back for more!

As already mentioned, Hunstanton was hit by the storm surge and flooding during the evening of Saturday 31st January 1953, which devastated much of the east coast of England. Fortunately, the Pier and Miniature Railway were not too badly damaged and the *Lynn Advertiser* of Tuesday 31st March 1953 was able to report that "*damage done to the pier during the storm is being repaired. The landing stage at the end was washed away and the waves forced up the planking, putting some of the rail tracks out of place and fracturing some seats*". This suggests the track had been left in place during the winter period. All was presumably ready for Easter, as the paper also noted "*trippers will be able to ride on the pier miniature train*" (Easter Sunday was 5th April).

In early 1955 the 4-4-0 locomotive went to King's Lynn for an overhaul and repair. A photograph appeared in the *Lynn Advertiser* Friday 22nd April 1955 captioned "*The boys have really found something absorbing - the locomotive from Hunstanton Pier, which is in the Nar Valley engineering yard, Lynn, for repair. Explaining points to them is Mr D Shorter*". Nar Valley Engineers was based at Friar's Boat Yard in King's Lynn and were "*General & Agricultural Engineers & Machinists*" according to an advert in the *Lynn Advertiser* of Tuesday 6th July 1954. The company was formed in February 1954 by Dudley Shorter, who according to the same advert carried out all work personally. The company also undertook work for Botterill's Miniature Railways Limited on the locomotives from the railway at the South Beach (see below). Nar Valley Engineers closed when Mr Shorter retired in March 1962.

By May 1954, John William Harris was running the amusement arcade on the Pier and no doubt also the railway. In the Saturday 28th April 1956 issue of *The World's Fair* he was advertising for various staff for the season between Whitsun and September as the Managing Director of the Hunstanton Pier Company. The *Lynn Advertiser* of Tuesday 19th May 1959 noted he was the majority shareholder of the Pier Company and had been at the Pier for eight years - four as a tenant and four as owner.



An advert from *The World's Fair* of Saturday 28th April 1956 for Pier staff required for the coming season. There was certainly a variety of roles offered, including a "Driver for Miniature (Steam Engine) Railway".

### *Barnacle Bill: 1957*

We now come to the event, which brought the railway to a larger audience - quite literally - as it appeared in a black & white British comedy film. This is not something many miniature railways can boast - very few have appeared in big screen films, making this showing of the Pier Miniature Railway a rare pleasure, albeit limited to a brief few shots. *Barnacle Bill* was one of the famous Ealing Studios comedy series of films. It was produced by Michael Balcon, directed by Charles Frend and written by T E B Clarke. The cast was headed by Alec Guinness along with Irene Browne, Maurice Denham, Percy Herbert and Victor Maddern.

Captain William Horatio Ambrose (Alec Guinness) comes from a family of distinguished Naval Officers, but unfortunately suffers from violent seasickness. As a result, his contribution to the Second World War consists of testing cures for the condition. On retirement from the Royal Navy, and wanting his own "command", he purchases a dilapidated pier at "Sandcastle on Sea" (Hunstanton) with his life savings. With the assistance of his new second-in-command, a former Royal Naval rating named Tommy (Percy Herbert), and much hard work with help by a group of bored local teenagers, Ambrose soon has the pier repaired. Then he has to deal with the local Town Council, headed by the crooked Mayor Crowley (Maurice Denham). When Crowley decides to confiscate and demolish the pier, Ambrose counters by registering it as a ship (christened the "Arabella"), under a flag of convenience, which puts it outside the town's jurisdiction. He soon attracts many happy, paying "passengers" for his stationary inaugural "cruise". Thwarted, Crowley attempts to demolish the pier at night. However, Ambrose is able to take to the sea and foil the scheme, but in the process, part of the pier becomes detached and floats away. He remains aboard to prevent salvagers from claiming it and drifts over to France, where he is hailed as a naval hero.

Hunstanton was chosen by Director Charles Frend because the Pier and surroundings were amazingly similar to the descriptions in T E B Clarke's script. Frend had toured the South Coast and worked north until he came to Hunstanton (*Lynn Advertiser* Tuesday 2nd April 1957). The film was shot in Hunstanton and at the Ealing Studios in Elstree. The *Lynn Advertiser* of Tuesday 15th January 1957 reported Hunstanton Urban District Council had granted Ealing Studios facilities for filming in the town, on the Pier and in the Town Hall, at their meeting on Friday 11th January. Shooting in Hunstanton began on Monday 1st April 1957 - starting in the

Town Hall due to poor weather! (*Lynn Advertiser* Tuesday 2nd April 1957). There was a break in filming over Easter, but the Pier remained closed to the public during that period (*Lynn Advertiser* Tuesday 16th April 1957). The Ealing film unit left Hunstanton on Saturday 18th May 1957 to return to Elstree to complete the film, which took until mid-July (*Lynn Advertiser* Tuesday 21st May & 12th July 1957). *Barnacle Bill* had its world premiere at the Empire, Leicester Square, London on Wednesday 11th December 1957. The *Lynn Advertiser* of Friday 13th December 1957 noted that their "chief reporter" had attended that evening and summed up that the film had been given a warm, but "not over-enthusiastic reception". Generally, *Barnacle Bill* did not receive positive reviews. The first screening in west Norfolk was on Monday 23rd December 1957 at the Majestic Cinema in King's Lynn, while the residents of Hunstanton had to wait until Monday 21st April 1958 when it opened at the Capitol Cinema, providing record attendances for the time of year.

The Pier Miniature Railway features in a few short snippets in the film - all times shown below are approximate. We first see the railway when Captain Ambrose visits the Pier for the first time and talks to various staff members (13m 30s - 15m 30s). The track is clearly visible running down the centre of the Pier, with a stop block at the land end by the turnstile. At the pierhead, it terminates at a stop block where the Pier widens out. Ambrose calls the staff to a meeting, where the 4-4-0 locomotive can be seen off the track under a shelter at the pierhead (18m 25s - 19m 30s). Ambrose then spots the locomotive. Tommy: "*She used to run up and down the pier*", to which Ambrose replies "*and she shall again*". There is no name or number visible on the locomotive or tender (20m 42s - 21m 10s). In connection with work to convert the Pier to a ship called "Arabella" the 4-4-0 locomotive is seen in steam, hauling a large wooden building along the Pier towards the pierhead. There is also a nice view out from the cab looking forwards (49m 05s - 49m 30s). For the "launch" ceremony the locomotive sounds its shrill whistle (50m 52s - 51m 00s). As the corrupt Mayor walks past the locomotive, which is in steam, he takes a quick look (51m 36s - 51m 38s). Probably the best view of the railway comes when the first passengers are welcomed aboard the Pier, for their "cruise" on "Arabella". The locomotive is in steam and passengers join a train of two or three smartly turned out sit-in coaches for a trip down the Pier (54m 34s - 54m 55s).

As preparations were being made to film *Barnacle Bill*, the *Lynn Advertiser* of Friday 8th February 1957 reported the overhaul of the 4-4-0 locomotive "*begins on Saturday*" and would be undertaken, as in previous years, by Mr Shorter at Nar Valley Engineers in King's Lynn. It was expected to be a full time job if the work was to be completed in time for the start of filming. The boiler had been removed and would be tested. "*All moving parts will be stripped and those that need replacing will have to be made on the premises*". Interestingly, the report concluded by stating "*Mr Shorter says the engine is destined for the scrap heap next year*". It certainly looks tired in the film - which does fit the plot suitably. Apparently, Mr Shorter taught Alec Guinness how to drive the locomotive, although he does not do so in the film (*Lynn Advertiser* Friday 23rd February 1962).

It is interesting to speculate whether T E B Clarke's original script had a miniature railway as part of the story, or whether he added it, having seen the railway on the Pier at Hunstanton. The latter is thought to be more likely. The film is very much of its time, with a cast of the usual British film comedy characters, with some faces that would have been very familiar to audiences of the 1950s and 1960s. However, it is a pleasant and mildly amusing 84 minutes viewing - brightened up with the appearances of the Pier Miniature Railway! It was released on DVD in 2009 by Optimum Releasing Limited and remains available. Stills are viewable on the British Railway Movie Database (see picture section for details).

### A New Railway

With filming over the Pier could return to normal and running of the railway was able to recommence. John Harris, operator of the railway and the other Pier amusements advertised for an "Engine Driver" in the Saturday 25th May 1957 edition of *The World's Fair*. The driver was required between Whitsuntide and September, for a "9½" gauge steam engine, miniature railway". The *Lynn Advertiser* of Friday 1st February 1957 had speculated that Mr Shorter of Nar Valley Engineers in King's Lynn would drive the locomotive during the filming of *Barnacle Bill*.

The advert from *The World's Fair* of Saturday 25th May 1957 for an "Engine Driver". Note the gauge is correctly quoted as 9½".



The filming of *Barnacle Bill* was both the 4-4-0 locomotive's high point and its swansong on the Pier. As already noted, Mr Shorter had stated in February 1957 it was due "for the scrap heap next year". However, John Harris put the locomotive and the whole railway up for sale - with adverts in *The World's Fair* for Saturdays 20th & 27th July 1957.



The advert from *The World's Fair* of Saturday 27th July 1957 advertising the 9½" gauge 4-4-0 locomotive, carriages and a "small quantity of Rails" for sale.

Given the comment about the locomotive being due "for the scrap heap" in 1958 and the fact John Harris was advertising it for sale in the summer of 1957, it is likely the 4-4-0 steam locomotive last ran on the Pier at the end of the 1957 season in September. Sometime during 1958 the complete Pier Miniature Railway, including the 4-4-0 locomotive, four articulated coaches and track were sold to Charles Reed from Bushey Heath, near Watford in Hertfordshire. In the book *Watford Miniature Railway* (Southern Miniature Railways Limited 2019), Malcolm Webb recalled in 1958 the Pier Miniature Railway was re-equipped and "Charlie bought some of the old track and stock including the steam tender engine *Maid Marion* which was stored in a boatyard at Kings Lynn". However, there is no evidence the locomotive was named "Maid Marion" at Hunstanton - but the boatyard in King's Lynn was no doubt that of Nar Valley Engineers, owned by Dudley Shorter who had maintained the locomotive since at least 1955. Over the winter of 1958/1959 Charles Reed rebuilt the locomotive in his home workshop at Bushey Heath to the more common gauge of 10¼". Now turned out in red livery, numbered 41199 and named "Maid Marion", Charles Reed put the locomotive to work on his new 10¼" gauge railway in Cassiobury Park, Watford, which opened in spring 1959. The rails and the four coaches from the Pier Miniature Railway were also used for this new line. "Maid Marion" ran at Cassiobury Park until 1966 and then spent most of the 1970s and 1980s in Devon and Cornwall with a number of owners. However, it remains active and is now privately owned and based in Sussex.

To return to Hunstanton - the Pier Miniature Railway was replaced with 10¼" gauge track, locomotive and coaches. This was probably in time for the start of the 1958 season, although it has not been possible to confirm this and it may have been for the 1959 season. If the latter was the case, either the railway did not operate in 1958 or the 4-4-0 locomotive ran for one more year, before being sold to Charles Reed in autumn 1958. John Harris probably acquired the 10¼" gauge railway via Botterill's Miniature Railways Limited. The new locomotive was a 4-6-2 (technically a 4-6w-2DM) diesel locomotive with an 8-wheel tender, styled on a streamlined LNER A4 locomotive. It is not known who built it, but it was probably completed in 1950 when it was described as "new" and put to work from June 1950 on Bognor Regis Pier, where it was named "Southern Belle". At Hunstanton it was named "Speed Ace" and had "J.W.H. Miniature Railway" on the tender side (John William Harris, the railway's owner). Passenger accommodation was an articulated rake of 4 sit-in coaches. The back of the rear coach also had the wording "J.W.H. Miniature Railway".

The 10¼" gauge railway was definitely ready for the start of the 1959 season, as it featured in an advert in the *Lynn Advertiser* of Friday 27th March, where the Miniature Railway was among the attractions listed as being offered on the Pier at Easter (Easter Sunday was 29th March). An advert in the *Lynn Advertiser* of Tuesday 12th May 1959 noted the Pier and Miniature Railway would open for "*Whitsun and the complete season*" on Friday 15th May.

The advert, which appeared in the *Lynn Advertiser* of Friday 27th March 1959 announcing the Pier, including the Miniature Railway, would be open for Easter.



John Harris was elected to Hunstanton District Council in May 1960 and at a meeting of the Council in early December 1960, he submitted 31 motions designed to "improve the amenities of the town and to lengthen the summer season". No.18 was to "Install two miniature steam engines and carriages to carry 100 passengers on the promenade from the Sandringham slipway to the North Promenade steps". This probably would have been some 1,000 yards in length. The motion was withdrawn after the Chairman pointed out the "Council were not allowed to enter into any entertainments of this kind" (*Lynn Advertiser* Tuesday 6th December 1960). Of course the Council, if they so wished, could have requested tenders for someone else to provide and operate the railway. This interesting proposal was to resurface in the early 1980s as part of a 15 year plan for Hunstanton.



An advert from the *Lynn Advertiser* of Friday 8th April 1960 proclaiming the Pier would reopen for the summer season on Saturday 9th April 1960. The Miniature Railway was among the attractions under the "personal supervision of John W Harris".

### Closure

Sadly, despite being re-equipped, the railway did not last much longer. It ran for the 1960 and 1961 seasons, being featured in adverts for the Pier in spring 1960 (see example above). *The World's Fair* of 14th May 1960 had a good description of the Pier in an article detailing the attractions to be found in Hunstanton. "*The Pier is the focal point which attracts everyone approaching the seafront. It is situated at the centre of the foot of the famous Green. The attractions presented here are controlled by the firm of John W Harris Amusements Ltd. At the far end of the Pier, which you can approach by a miniature railway, is a rolling skating rink, a pastime appealing to the younger element. Charge for skating includes admission to the Pier and no further charge is made for the rail journey. One must pass through the main hall to get on to the Pier*".

Despite no adverts for the Pier appearing in the *Lynn Advertiser* during 1961 the railway is mentioned in an article in *The World's Fair* of Saturday 8th July 1961, which described all the amusements available across the resort. As to the attractions on the Pier, the article noted these included the "*J.W.H. Miniature Railway on a track along the Pier*". A number of adverts for the Pier appeared in the *Lynn Advertiser* during spring 1962 - Friday 30th March 1962 and Tuesday 26th June 1962 are examples. None of these mention the Miniature Railway as one of the attractions on offer. Therefore, the railway most likely closed at the end of the 1961 season in September. The closure and removal of the railway from the Pier was probably due to the various alterations and improvements John Harris was proposing to make after the 1961 season. These were the erection of a new amusement building at the land end of the Pier and provision of a building to cover the skating rink at the pierhead. He submitted a "Proposed Development" notice in March 1961, but his plans were turned down by the County Planning Committee in July 1961 (*Lynn Advertiser* 14th March & 7th July 1961). John Harris submitted a revised application, with just the new amusement building at the land end, and this was duly approved. Demolition of the old building and construction of its replacement took place over the winter of 1962/1963.

The railway, including the LNER A4 locomotive, may have been sold to Geoffrey Hunt of Clifton, Bristol as he sold the locomotive on to Sam Sunter in Canada for use on his Victoria Miniature Railway in British Columbia, Canada, where it had arrived by June 1967. Interestingly, Sam Sunter noted the LNER A4 locomotive was built only to run on straight track - he had to modify the frame to allow it to go around curves! This makes sense, as the two railways it is known to have run on - the piers at Bognor Regis and Hunstanton - were naturally dead straight. The locomotive had moved away from the Victoria Miniature Railway by the summer of 1968 and was later with Al Powers at Canfield, Ohio in the USA. There it was scrapped or sold - but it has otherwise disappeared.

### **Subsequent History of the Pier**

In August 1970 the Pier was still owned by John William Harris - although aged 60 he was looking to sell it and retire. However, later in the year he died and ownership passed to his son, John Norman Harris. It seems, though, little was done to maintain it, as by 1977 it was reported as being closed to the public. However, the land end amusement building remained open.

As already mentioned, a severe storm during the night of Wednesday 11th January 1978 almost totally destroyed the Pier. Daylight on Thursday morning revealed the only section to remain standing was part of the wider section at the pierhead, which was later demolished. At the time of the storm, negotiations were taking place for the Pier to be sold and what remained - the amusement centre at the land end - was sold in March 1978. Today this is the only remnant of the Pier to survive - although it had to be rebuilt following a fire in May 2002.

## **South Beach Miniature Railway (1950 - 1953)**

### **Planning and Construction**

The first we hear of plans for a miniature railway in Hunstanton, apart from on the Pier, was at the Wednesday 4th January 1950 meeting of the Parks & Pleasure Grounds Committee of Hunstanton Urban District Council. Here "*A letter from Botterill's Miniature Railways Limited was read asking if the Council could provide a suitable site for the Pier miniature railway*". At this time they merely deferred consideration of the matter. As noted in the history of the Pier Miniature Railway above, for some reason it was unable to run during the 1950 season and Botterill's Miniature Railways Limited were looking for an alternative site on which to operate it. At their meeting on Wednesday 1st February 1950 the Parks & Pleasure Grounds Committee deputed the Chairman of the Committee, together with the Town Clerk and Engineer & Surveyor, to meet Botterill's to discuss the "*question of providing a site for the Pier miniature railway*" - clearly indicating they were looking for a new site for the Pier Miniature Railway.

The discussions, which took place on 21st February, were obviously successful as at their meeting on Wednesday 1st March 1950 the Parks & Pleasure Grounds Committee recommended an agreement be made between the Council and Botterill's Miniature Railways Limited for the "*provision thereby of a Miniature Railway system for the period of the 1950 season*". The agreed site was "*on the east side of the private road running from a point adjacent to the Sewer Field conveniences for approximately 100 yards south*". The Council were to provide the required staff and be responsible for the collection of the fares. Botterill's were to "*provide adequate apparatus for the railway, a cashier's box and covered shelter for the*

*engine*". The company also had to pay the Council a sum equivalent to  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the gross receipts and reimburse the Council for the wages of the staff and the cost of the tickets. The charge for a ride was to be 6d per person.

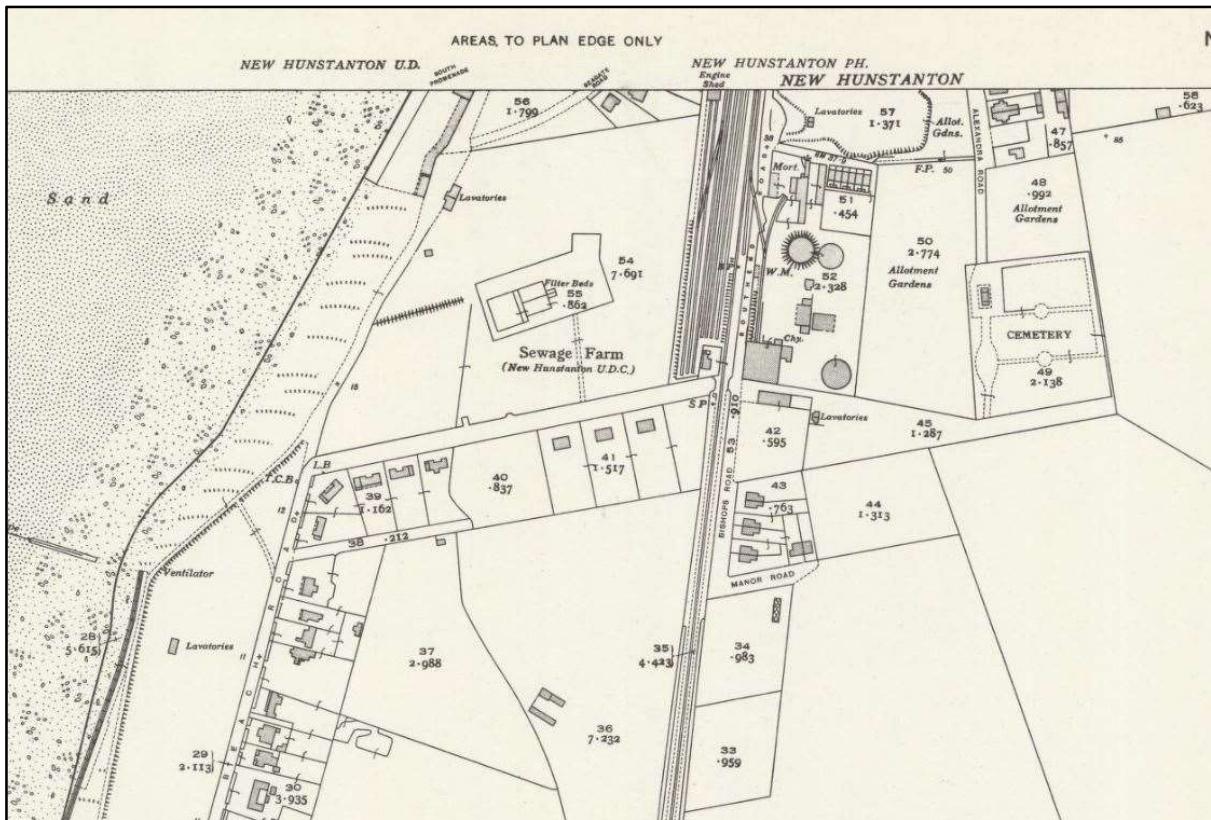
In April the Council were about to advertise for a driver and at least two of the national daily newspapers picked up on the story - with reports in the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Mail* of Friday 14th April 1950 - together with the *Lynn Advertiser* of Friday 18th April 1950. Fortunately, we know from these reports something about the railway. Taking the slightly varying contents of these, the railway was described as the "Hunstanton Flyer" and was 120 yards in length, while the locomotive was noted to be 9 $\frac{1}{4}$ " gauge to a scale of 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ in to 1ft. Top speed was 15 mph and the train had six coaches with a capacity of 30 adults or 50 children. The driver, it was said, would work a 6 day week being paid 2s 3d per hour - guaranteed for 44 hours. In fine weather he should make between £7 & £8 a week. All Sunday work would be paid at overtime rates. The uniform of white coat and peaked cap would be provided by the Council. The *Lynn Advertiser* noted that "*To avoid sand getting in the mechanism the railway has been constructed on the landward side of the amusement park, instead of on the seaward side*", while the *Daily Mail* noted work had "*already started bull-dozing the stretch of beach where the railway will run*".

The *Lynn Advertiser* of Tuesday 25th April 1950 duly reported that the Council had received thirty applications for the job of driver. The applications had come from as far away as Kent, Glamorgan, Leicestershire and Yorkshire - the majority being retired mainline drivers. One applicant had worked for 36 years on the "*North-West British Railway*" in India, while another started on the Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway in 1900. The paper also reported "*A former chief mechanical engineer on the famous Romney, Hythe & Dymchurch Railway*" had applied. With much less railway experience was a 20 year old bus conductor from Nottingham. No doubt the interviews proved very interesting!

### Opening & Description of Railway

The new railway opened on Whit Saturday, 27th May 1950 - the *Lynn Advertiser* of Friday 26th May reporting that it would "*start operating tomorrow*", which was confirmed in the Friday 2nd June edition. The 26th May report informs us the locomotive was called "The Hunstanton Flyer" and would pull three passenger coaches and a number of small trucks, which held about 30 people. The successful applicant for the job of driver was local man Fred Bucking of Ingoldisthorpe, just south of Snettisham. Apparently, he had no previous experience of miniature locomotives, but had worked on a steam driven threshing machine!

The railway was located at the South Beach, about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile south of the Pier at TF66924019 - south of the Boating Lake and just to the south of the Amusement Park. It has to be said the description of the location in the Council Minutes - "*on the east side of the private road running from a point adjacent to the Sewer Field conveniences for approximately 100 yards south*" - does not sound very enticing! However, it was close to the Beach, Boating Lake and Amusement Park. The line was an end-to-end run of 120 yards.



An extract from an Ordnance Survey 25" map, revised in 1939 and published 1946. The railway was located immediately south west of the lavatory block, which is marked towards the top left centre of the map. Note, nearby to these lavatories, the end of the South

Promenade. The area to the south was unprotected from the sea, although an earth embankment started a little further south. This gap ultimately brought an end to the railway and caused devastation in the South Beach area. The Amusement Park is partly off the map to the north - but some of its buildings are marked as a long line ending by the lavatories.

The railway ran on the landward side of the road, which ran south west to the corner of South Beach Road, where the sea front embankment restarted. Note the extensive railway sidings and main line running due south to Heacham, Snettisham and King's Lynn.

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Whilst nowhere does it actually state this was the railway from the Pier, all the evidence is that it was: the unusual gauge of 9¼" and scale of the locomotive, description of the rolling stock and the name "Hunstanton Flyer" (the Pier Miniature Railway locomotive was thus described when it was being overhauled for the 1952 season) - all match. The railway seems to have proved popular - the *Lynn Advertiser* of Friday 2nd June 1950 in its Whitsun holiday report noted that it carried 88 passengers on its first day, 292 on Sunday and, due to much warmer weather, 719 on the Bank Holiday Monday. So the railway completed its first season. The *Lynn Advertiser* of Tuesday 26th September 1950 noted it was now only running on Sundays instead of daily.



An extract from an Ordnance Survey 6" map, revised pre-1930 to 1958 and published in 1959. This map puts the location of the railway in context within Hunstanton. It was located immediately south of the small rectangle (which was the lavatory block), which is just above the "Works" of the Sewage Farm (compare to 25" map above).

(Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland. CC-BY[NLS])

### 1951 & 1952 seasons

By early July 1950 Botterill's Miniature Railways Limited were already considering operation of the railway for the forthcoming 1951 season. The Parks & Pleasure Grounds Committee heard at their meeting on Wednesday 5th July 1950 of an "*approach from the company offering a more modern engine provided the existing track can be extended by 40 yards*". The Committee agreed this suggestion and to the £40 expenditure for fencing the extension. The Clerk also reported to the Committee "*regarding the proposal of the company to operate on the pier*". This presumably meant the railway would return to the Pier for the 1951 season onwards - which is what happened. See history of Pier Miniature Railway above.

Botterill's suggested new terms for the 1951 season - these were 25% of the gross takings to the Council and 75% to the Company, who were also to pay all expenses. The Parks & Pleasure Grounds Committee accepted these terms at their meeting on Wednesday 1st November 1950, provided the new engine referred to was made available. The extension was noted at this meeting as 38 yards in length. The Committee heard at their Wednesday 31st January 1951 meeting the extension had been confirmed and Botterill's had undertaken to "*provide a new engine for operation on the site*". Botterill's placed an advert in the Tuesday 24th April 1951 edition of the *Lynn Advertiser* for an "*Ex-Driver and Cashier*" for the summer season on the railway. A similar advert also appeared in the *Peterborough Standard* of Friday 11th May 1951.

The *Lynn Advertiser* of Friday 11th May 1951, reporting on the forthcoming Whitsun holiday, noted "*The Council's miniature railway on the South Beach may not be ready in time to operate over Whitsun. The track has recently been extended by nearly 40 yards - it is now 130 yards long - to give holidaymakers a longer journey, but the new engine has not yet arrived*". It went on to point out that for the first time there would be two miniature railways running in Hunstanton, as the Pier Miniature Railway "*which did not function last year, resumes normal services over Whitsun*". By June 1951 the new locomotive had arrived and the railway had reopened. The *Lynn Advertiser* of Tuesday 12th June 1951 reported that the engine was painted "*red and black*" and was "*a scale model of the Coronation Scot and was built since the war*". It went on to say that it operated on "*a 130 yard long stretch of line at the back of the sea front amusement park*" and was driven by 26 year old John Hewitt, who had served for 7 years as a fireman on the LNER. The fare was noted to be 6d per ride.

What is not stated is whether the railway retained the 9½" gauge, or was regauged for the new locomotive. Although described by the *Lynn Advertiser* as "*a scale model of the Coronation Scot*", this is very unlikely. The only known locomotive of that type at the time was built by Ernest Dove and during 1951 was at work on a railway in South Shields, and in any event was painted in a blue livery. The most likely locomotive was a 4-6-0 "Royal Scot", built by Carland Engineering Limited of Harold Wood, Essex. The livery of this locomotive would certainly have been "*red and black*" and it fits the description of being "*built since the war*". The August 1989 edition of *Australian Model Engineering* seems to confirm this. An article details the history of a Carland "Royal Scot" built in 1949, which "*worked at Hunstanton in Norfolk for about 10 years*". It would have also been of 10¼" gauge, which meant the railway was regauged from 9½" gauge - or perhaps new track of the wider gauge was supplied instead. The track for the 1950 season may have come from the Pier, returning along with the 4-4-0 locomotive to the Pier for the 1951 season.

The Council's share of the income from the railway for the 1951 season was £141. For the 1952 season the Parks & Pleasure Grounds Committee, at their meeting on Wednesday 5th December 1952, agreed to the same terms as for the 1951 season and set the fare unchanged at 6d per ride. No photographs of this railway have been traced.

### Closure

The railway ran successfully throughout the 1952 season and presumably closed, as was normal, around mid September. Sadly, no trains ever ran again on the railway - it was destroyed in some of the worst floods Norfolk had ever experienced.

During the evening of Saturday 31st January 1953 a storm surge caused extensive flooding and devastation over most of the east coast of England. At that time a concrete promenade ran from the cliffs at the north end of Hunstanton, past the Pier and Boating Lake, to the south end of the Amusement Park. Beyond there, and particularly in the South Beach area, there was a dilapidated old bank, which had long fallen into disrepair. This deficiency in the sea defences was known locally as the "Hunstanton Gap". On that fatal evening this weak bank was no match for the sea. At around 7pm an estimated 7ft tall wall of water completely overwhelmed this feeble defence and flooded a large area - reaching to the mainline railway and beyond. Holiday homes and chalets were flooded and wrecked. The railway was badly damaged - being the closed season the locomotive and rolling stock were probably not on site and were thus saved. A photograph of the devastation shows what appears to be the track ripped up and

distorted in the foreground. However, at their Wednesday 4th March 1953 meeting the Parks & Pleasure Grounds Committee heard that Botterill's Miniature Railways Limited had enquired whether the miniature railway could operate during the forthcoming season on the same terms as in 1952 and "*if the site will be available in view of the recent disaster*". At that time the Council intended the railway would operate again on the same site and agreed to it doing so on the same terms - subject to the land owner's permission. The *Lynn Advertiser* of Tuesday 31st March 1953, reporting on the resort's preparations for Easter, noted "*The South Beach Miniature Railway, damaged by the floods, will not be in operation until later in the season*". However, despite this optimistic note, for whatever reason, the railway did not operate on that site again. Possibly, the belated construction of a new sea wall would cause too much disruption to the area during the 1953 season.

## **South Beach Miniature Railway (1954 - 1957)**

### **Planning**

Construction of the new sea wall to fill the "Hunstanton Gap" commenced on 27th July 1953. The 300 yard long reinforced concrete wall was 67ft wide and 22ft high - with a 30ft wide promenade on top. Cost was said to be around £50,000 and it was completed in January 1954.

The first mention of plans for a replacement miniature railway came at a meeting of the Parks & Pleasure Grounds Committee on Friday 18th September 1953 where the Engineer & Surveyor set out some suggestions as to the form developments could take in the South Beach area after completion of the new sea wall (or link wall as he referred to it). No.1 in his list was a "*Model Railway*" and he noted "*Consideration might be given to a Model Railway running from a station at the end of the Amusement Park behind the Promenade to the Southern Boundary of the Urban District. As a first step this railway might run the length of the link wall*". This ambitious plan for the full line would have entailed a run of around 900 yards. The Committee decided to refer the whole matter of new developments at South Beach area to a special meeting of the General Purposes Committee.

The General Purposes Committee duly held their meeting on Friday 30th October 1953 and agreed in principle to the provision of a miniature railway and authorised negotiations with Bernard le Strange (the land owner), North Parade (Skegness) Rides Limited (operators of the Amusement Park) and Botterill's Miniature Railways Limited. The *Lynn Advertiser* of Friday 17th November 1953 reported the Council was in favour of providing a miniature railway as part of the redevelopment and noted "*The existing one was washed away in the floods*". At their meeting on Friday 27th November 1953 the General Purposes Committee heard that North Parade (Skegness) Rides Limited would raise no objection to a miniature railway and Botterill's Miniature Railways Limited were considering the matter and asked if the Council would be interested in buying the necessary equipment and operating it themselves. However, the Committee decided it did not want to purchase the equipment and would prefer the arrangements to be a receipts sharing basis as previously. However, it seems Botterill's had already decided it needed someone to prepare the locomotive and stock and look after the railway as the company placed an advert in the *Peterborough Standard* of Friday 27th November 1953 (the same date as the Council meeting) for a "*Steam Maintenance Engineer required immediately for servicing Miniature Railway stock, and for operating same at Hunstanton during 1954 season*".

At a special meeting of the Urban District Council on Friday 26th February 1954 the "revised" plan of the South Beach development was approved, while at the Friday 23rd April 1954 meeting of the General Purposes Committee the Clerk reported that Bernard le Strange had approved the "*development of the new "Gap" scheme promenade and at the rear thereof providing for a putting green, miniature railway, lighting standards etc*". The Finance Committee had already fixed the fare as 6d per ride at their meeting on Friday 8th January 1954. The Finance Committee, at their meeting on Friday 4th June 1954, approved the action of the Engineer and Surveyor in providing a water supply at the northern end of the railway - at an approximate cost of £42.

### **Opening & Description of Railway**

The railway opened on Whit Saturday 5th June 1954. The *Lynn Advertiser* of Friday 11th June 1954 reported the weather over the Whitsun weekend had been poor and went on "*the miniature railway, reinstalled this year behind the new sea defences on the south beach, carried 461 passengers*" (presumably the total over the three days). For some reason it took until the Friday 5th July 1954 meeting of the Finance Committee for them to approve and confirm the terms and conditions with Botterill's Miniature Railways Limited for the "*operation of a miniature railway at the rear of the new Sea Wall during the 1954 Season (from June 5th, 1954)*". The Council were to receive 25% of the gross takings and the Company 75% and pay all expenses. The Company would indemnify the Council against accidents or claims, operate "*regularly during the season*" and agree not to operate the railway before 1 pm on Sundays. They were also to provide "*adequate apparatus for the railway*", a cashiers box and covered shelter for the engine and all necessary staff and proper tickets.

The new line was located close behind the new sea wall, immediately south of the Amusement Park - very close to the location of the previous railway, which was destroyed in the January 1953 storm, but slightly to the west and closer to the sea. The railway was a simple end-to-end layout of unknown length - but probably around 250 yards (when later advertised for sale it was stated there was 800 feet of track). Only one photograph of this line has been traced and it merely shows a well-loaded train, with people watching from behind the sea wall - but no other details visible.

To operate the railway Botterill's may have again used the Carland "Royal Scot", which had operated on the previous railway. However, it could have been a 4-6-0 locomotive built in 1939 by G & S Light Engineering Company Limited & Twining Models Limited for the Dudley Zoo Railway in the West Midlands, which was definitely in use during the 1955 season as it appears in the photograph noted above. This locomotive was built to resemble a GWR "Saint", but with outside valve gear. It was numbered 1944 and finished in GWR livery. Prior to moving to Hunstanton the locomotive had been at work with Botterill's on their railway at Cleethorpes until the end of the 1953 season. As the locomotives were probably returned to Botterill's for servicing during the closed season, either locomotive could have been used each season. Passenger stock was a set of at least three articulated sit-in coaches.

### **Ongoing Operation: 1955 - 1956**

By the autumn of 1954, Botterill's were making enquiries about the ongoing operation of the railway in the 1955 season and beyond. The General Purposes Committee meeting of Friday 22nd October 1954 considered a letter from the company "*asking for a renewal of their facility for a miniature railway for a term of three seasons as from the 1955 season, on the same terms and conditions as previous*". The Committee agreed to this application, but drew attention to the fact that the track would require removing to allow the area where the railway ran to be "*resurfaced*". The Committee also suggested that "*the appearance of the Tunnel and Engine Shed needs improving*". This is the only reference we have to there being a tunnel on the railway. The *Lynn Advertiser* of Friday 19th November 1954 reported that the railway made a profit of £44 for Hunstanton Urban District Council, while the Finance Committee decided to retain the fare as 6d per ride at their meeting on Friday 6th January 1955.

An interesting advert appeared in the Friday 20th May 1955 edition of the *Lynn Advertiser* stating "*Engine Driver required for miniature railway. Hunstanton for summer season. Good wages: wife required for pay box. Caravan available - Nar Valley Engineers, Friars Boat Yard, King's Lynn*". Apart from the established sexist segregation of job roles of the time, it tells us by this season Botterill's Miniature Railways Limited had appointed Nar Valley Engineers to manage the railway for them. We have already met this company, which was established in February 1954, in connection with the Pier Miniature Railway (see above). A similar advert was placed in the *Lynn Advertiser* of Friday 13th April 1956. On this occasion, however, there was no mention of a wife being required for the pay box! As before, applications were to be made to Nar Valley Engineers.

By the autumn of 1955 Botterill's were looking to dispose of their interest in the railway. At the Thursday 13th October 1955 meeting of the General Purposes Committee an application was received from the Company to transfer their agreement with the Council to Mr W H Brooke, which the Committee duly approved. At that time W H Brooke was the Managing Director of the Hunstanton Pier Company. However, for whatever reason the transfer did not take place. In autumn 1956, Botterill's sought again to transfer their rights to operate the railway - this time with more success. At their meeting on Tuesday 6th November 1956 the General Purposes Committee approved an application by "*Botterill's Miniature Railways Limited to transfer the residue of their term for operating the Miniature Railway on the South Beach to Mr W H Nunn*". William H Nunn was a lessee on the nearby Amusement Park. The "*residue*" was just the 1957 season and Mr Nunn immediately sought to extend the agreement. In reply, at the Tuesday 20th November meeting of Hunstanton Urban District Council, they advised him "*that subject to his operating the Miniature Railway during the 1957 Season to the entire satisfaction of the Council his application for an extension of the term of the concession would receive favourable consideration at the end of the 1957 Season*". Despite this reassurance, the 1957 season proved to be the last for the railway.

After the end of the 1956 season and their interest in the running of the railway, Botterill's removed the GWR 4-6-0 locomotive No.1944 and it returned to their base at Peterborough. It was noted by a visiting enthusiast on 4th February 1957 in store at North Street in Peterborough. He recorded it as "*Ex No.3 Wingland Grange. Reboilered by Savage Kings Lynn circa 1953 - ex Hunstanton Promenade 1956*" (Wingland Grange was Botterill's home at Nassington near Peterborough). After passing through a number of hands and being completely rebuilt, it is now resident on the Stapleford Miniature Railway in Leicestershire. (For the full history of this locomotive, see: [www.minorailways.co.uk/history2.php](http://www.minorrailways.co.uk/history2.php)).

### 1957 & Closure

To operate the railway for the 1957 season William Nunn acquired a 4-6-0 "Royal Scot", built by Carland Engineering Limited of Harold Wood, Essex. This was almost certainly the same locomotive used on the earlier railway at the South Beach and probably on the second railway as well. William Nunn presumably acquired the locomotive direct from Botterill's who were closing down and selling equipment off at the time. Interestingly, in a piece in the *Lynn Advertiser* of Friday 1st February 1957 about Nar Valley Engineers overhauling the 4-4-0 locomotive from the Pier Miniature Railway, it concluded by noting "*Besides this engine Mr Shorter has maintained two other engines which run on the south beach*" - presumably referring to the GWR 4-6-0 and the LMSR "Royal Scot" - confirming both locomotives did see use on the railway.

The first ominous signs that the Council were planning other things for the site of the miniature railway came at the special meeting of the Entertainments, Publicity and Sea Front Trading Committee where it was resolved that estimates be obtained for the provision of six "*beach chalets, to be placed on the South Beach in the area south of the Putting Green behind the Wave Wall*". Presumably having been informed his agreement would not be extended, William Nunn put the whole railway up for sale via an advert in the Saturday 7th September 1957 issue of *The World's Fair*.

The advert from *The World's Fair* of Saturday 7th September 1957 for the complete railway, which could "*be seen running this weekend*" at Hunstanton. Note the "Royal Scot" locomotive had "*new copper tubes this season*".



The railway presumably closed later in September 1957. The Entertainments, Publicity and Sea Front Trading Committee noted at their meeting on Friday 8th November 1957 that "*the term had expired for the operation of the Miniature Railway on the site near the South Promenade*" and they asked the Surveyor to report on the cost of "*providing Day Chalets on site, as previously resolved*". For its last season the *Lynn Advertiser* of Friday 22nd November 1957 reported the miniature railway had grossed £252 for the Council against an estimate of £200.

The railway did not sell immediately and William Nunn again advertised it in *The World's Fair* of Saturday 11th January 1958 - this time from his address in Heacham - with a note adding "*Reason for selling: Lease has expired*". He may well have still owned the railway in late summer 1959 as he wrote to the Council requesting a suitable site. However, at the Tuesday 15th September 1959 meeting of the Council they decided that he be informed that "*the Council has no suitable site to offer him for the operation of a miniature railway*". The Carland "Royal Scot" locomotive was sold to Mr Stacey North and ran at Drayton Manor Park in Staffordshire from 1960. It went to Australia in 1970, before returning to this country in 2003 with a private owner.

## Unfulfilled Ambitions

September 1957 marked the end of operational miniature railways in Hunstanton, which had covered a period from June 1947 - eleven summer seasons encompassing three different railways. As far as is known, no more permanent miniature railways have run in Hunstanton.

In the *Lynn Advertiser* of Tuesday 11th August 1959, "Beachcomber" reported "*Incidentally, I feel that a word of praise is also due to whoever was responsible for laying out the miniature railway next to the boating lake. This is a most attractive and colourful little site, just the thing to brighten up the seafront*". This was a Peter Pan Railway of the fairground type. The Saturday 8th July 1961 edition of *The World's Fair* noted that at the northern end of the Boating Lake was Kiddies Corner - one of the attractions being "*A Hawes and Co's Peter Pan Railway (very nicely laid out with rock gardens and windmill)*".

The *Lynn Advertiser* of Friday 25th October 1974 contained a plan and details of a scheme for the site of the former railway station and sidings. This was to contain a children's adventure land, complete with a fort and stockade. Included was a "*miniature railway running round the perimeter and passing through the fort*". However, nothing came of the scheme.

The *Lynn Advertiser* of Friday 22nd January 1984 contained details of West Norfolk Council's "Hunstanton Town Plan" - a 15 year programme aimed at boosting tourism and providing housing and new facilities in the town. To connect the "Northern Seafront" (an area north of the Pier Amusement Centre and along the cliff tops to the north) with the "Central Seafront" (an area south of the Pier Amusement Centre to the South Beach Amusement Park) the plan suggested "*some means of public transport, possibly a miniature railway or some other unconventional means. This would be a feature in itself, as well as providing a service*". This proposal was similar to that suggested by John Harris in December 1960 but turned down by the Urban District Council (see above as part of the Pier Miniature Railway history). Unfortunately, the 15 year programme proceeded without a miniature railway (or indeed "*other unconventional means*").

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There is one photograph of the Pier Miniature Railway in the Francis Frith collection. It can be viewed by following this link:

Reference: H135018

[www.francisfrith.com/hunstanton/hunstanton-the-pier-and-miniature-railway-c1955\\_h135018](http://www.francisfrith.com/hunstanton/hunstanton-the-pier-and-miniature-railway-c1955_h135018)

In this view the 4-4-0 locomotive has almost reached the pierhead with a train.

Dated c1955.

There are some excellent stills from the film *Barnacle Bill* which can be seen on the British Railway Movie Database by using this link:

<https://railwaymoviedatabase.com/barnacle-bill>.

These seven views show the scenes from the 1957 film described in the text above.

There are two photographs of the Pier Miniature Railway in the Historic England collection. These can be viewed using the links below:

Reference: aa98/18171

<https://historicengland.org.uk/services-skills/education/educational-images/miniature-railway-on-hunstanton-pier-2606>.

This view shows a two coach train hauled by the 4-4-0 locomotive waiting to depart from the land end of the Pier. A small 4-wheel wagon is immediately behind the locomotive.

Reference: aa98/18169

<https://historicengland.org.uk/services-skills/education/educational-images/miniature-train-on-hunstanton-pier-2605>.

In this scene, what is probably the same train as seen in the view above, has departed and is heading for the pierhead. The brake van can be clearly seen at the rear of the train, with two small children as passengers.

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This undated photograph appeared in the *Lynn News* of Tuesday 12th June 2001 featuring old views of the town. Despite not showing the locomotive, a remarkable variety of rolling stock is seen, including the two GWR wagons and brake van, which came from Mr Horsfield's railway in India. Note also the signal and the shingle placed between the rails.

(*Lynn News*. 12/06/01)



The 4-4-0 locomotive looks smart here, while the train formation is headed by one of the LMSR wagons - the rest is same stock as in the previous view. This is the only photograph that shows the locomotive hauling the train back from the pierhead. In all the other views the train is hauled out from the land end and propelled back.

*(Postcard)*



The 4-4-0 locomotive is well into its journey to the pierhead in this view. The driver is smartly turned out with his white topped cap. The train is only lightly loaded.

*(Postcard)*



Here the train has only just departed from the land end. There appears to be no shingle between the rails in this view and the track is clearly laid directly on the wooden boards of the Pier. The driver is sporting somewhat different head gear to previous photograph!

*(Postcard)*



In this view looking over the Pier from the Green, no train is visible, but we can clearly see the track laid straight down the centre of the Pier.

*(Postcard)*



This steam outline diesel locomotive, based on a streamlined LNER A4, replaced the 4-4-0 locomotive around 1958. Named "Speed Ace", it has just passed two of the decorative shelters added to the Pier for the filming of the 1957 film *Barnacle Bill*.

(Courtesy C. Peake)



"J.W.H Miniature Railway" on the rear of this 4 coach train, approaching the Skating Rink at the pierhead, refers to John William Harris, owner and operator of the railway at the time.

Again we can see two of the ornate shelters added for the film *Barnacle Bill*.

(Postcard)



In this lovely period view of the Pier from the promenade, we can see the LNER A4 steam outline locomotive heading out towards the pierhead. The beach is crowded with holidaymakers. The Amusement Centre building straddles the promenade.

*(Author's Collection)*



This was all that remained of the Pier after the storm during the night of Wednesday 11th January 1978. A truly sad end to a beautiful structure.

*(Author's Collection)*



One of a series of photographs showing the devastation in the South Beach area after the storm surge and extensive flooding during the evening of Saturday 31st January 1953.

Lower right appears to be a section of the track of the miniature railway.

*(Norfolk Floods - An Illustrated History 1912, 1938 & 1953. Page 100)*



This is the only known photograph of either of the railways, which ran at the South Beach. This is the second line and this view dates from 1955 showing the GWR 4-6-0 locomotive running behind the "Gap" sea wall with a well-loaded train.

*(Author's Collection, courtesy the Kerr Archive)*

## Summary

### Pier Miniature Railway

Opened: Saturday 28th June 1947  
 Closed: September 1961  
 Layout & length: End-to-end, 220 yards

### South Beach Miniature Railway (1)

Opened: Saturday 27th May 1950  
 Closed: September 1952  
 Layout & length: End-to-end, 120 yards

### South Beach Miniature Railway (2)

Opened: Saturday 5th June 1954  
 Closed: September 1957  
 Layout & length: End-to-end, 250 yards

## Locomotives (Pier Miniature Railway)

### 9¼" gauge

1102	4-4-0	Neville Brindley Richards	1928	LMSR Compound	1
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### 10¼" gauge

Speed Ace	4-6w-2DM	Unknown	1950	LNER A4	2
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1 From: Regent Automatic & Electrical Supply, London (after May 1945, by June 1947).  
 For 1950 season ran on South Beach Miniature Railway (see below).  
 To: Charles Reed, Bushey Heath, Watford c1958 (after September 1957, by Winter 1958/1959).  
 Regauged to 10¼" for use on Watford Miniature Railway, which opened spring 1959.

2 From: Bognor Regis Pier Railway c1958 (after September 1957, by March 1959).  
 To: Victoria Miniature Railway, Canada (Sam Sunter) - via Geoffrey Hunt, Bristol by June 1967.

## Locomotives (South Beach Miniature Railways)

### 9¼" gauge

1102	4-4-0	Neville Brindley Richards	1928	LMSR Compound	1
------	-------	---------------------------	------	---------------	---

1 From: Hunstanton Pier Railway by May 1950.  
 To: Hunstanton Pier Railway by May 1951.

### 10¼" gauge

1944	4-6-0	Carland Engineering	1949	LMSR Royal Scot	2
	4-6-0	G&S Light Eng Co/Twining	1939	GWR Saint	3
	4-6-0	Carland Engineering	1949	LMSR Royal Scot	4

2 Presumed to have operated the railway for 1951 and 1952 seasons.

3 From: Cleethorpes Miniature Railway (after September 1953, by June 1954).  
 To: Botterill's Miniature Railways Ltd, Peterborough September 1956, then Hastings 1958.

4 Probably same locomotive as 2.  
 To: Drayton Manor Park c1960.

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## A HISTORY OF THE HUNSTANTON MINIATURES RAILWAY

A short history of railways on the Pier and at the South Beach

### MINOR RAILWAY MINI HISTORIES - M3

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