

A HISTORY OF THE  
**YARMOUTH**  
**MINIATURE**  
**RAILWAY**

**A short history of an east coast  
15" gauge railway**

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***MINOR RAILWAY  
MINI HISTORIES - M9***

## **YARMOUTH MINIATURE RAILWAY**

**15" gauge. 1930 - 1937**

### **Introduction**

Between 1930 and 1937 Great Yarmouth boasted a 15" gauge miniature railway as one of its many seafront attractions. The Yarmouth Miniature Railway operated as one of the concessions on the Pleasure Beach site, located at the southern end of Great Yarmouth's famous seafront.

The railway was built and operated by the father & son team of Richard & Nigel Parkinson of Sheringham, north Norfolk. Richard was an accomplished railway and drainage engineer, while Nigel followed his father in this line of work he was also a mariner. As we shall see, the Yarmouth Miniature Railway was the work of Nigel, who built much of the rolling stock, but the railway was owned and financed by his father who was by then in retirement. Although small by some standards the railway was (after its first season) fully signalled, staffed and included a terminal station with a roof modelled on that at St Pancras in London. Aside from a Bassett-Lowke steam locomotive the railway had some innovative motive power and probably some of the finest coaches ever to grace a 15" gauge railway.

### **Great Yarmouth**

The Norfolk seaside resort of Great Yarmouth lies on the east coast at the mouth of the River Yare. It is situated at the eastern edge of the Broads National Park and lies 19 miles east of Norwich, 9 miles north of its near neighbour and rival Lowestoft and some 115 miles north east of London.

Built between 1284 and 1396 the walled town developed in medieval times as a fishing port due to the surrounding seas being rich with herring. As with many other seaside towns, it became a fashionable upper class watering place during the 18th century. The arrival of the railway opened up the town to middle and working class holidaymakers and changed Great Yarmouth into a popular seaside resort. The first railway opened from Norwich, via Reedham, to Vauxhall station on 1st May 1844. This was followed by a line into South Town station, which opened on 1st June 1859 allowing trains to operate directly into the resort from London as opposed to running via Norwich. On 7th August 1877 a line opened into Beach station, running in from the north, allowing holiday trains from the Midlands to run direct to the town. Finally, a more direct line from Norwich via Acle opened on 1st June 1883. Therefore, the resort was well served by the railway with three stations serving lines to the west, south and north.

With the holidaymakers came the need for attractions to entertain them. Two piers were constructed: Wellington in October 1853 and Britannia in July 1858. A revolving tower was erected in June 1897 and the Winter Gardens opened in July 1904. In July 1909 a Scenic Railway opened on a site, which would later become the Pleasure Beach, at the southern end of the resort. It was here the subject of this work, the Yarmouth Miniature Railway, was located. The First World War dealt the fishing industry a severe blow from which it never fully recovered. However, after the war the seafront was developed with extended sea walls, promenades, tennis courts, bowling greens, boating lake, waterways and gardens.

During the Second World War the town was a restricted area and it suffered more air raids than any other coastal town. Following the war there was an enormous boom in seaside holidays as war-weary people once again sought out the seaside for a holiday. In the 1960s, as car ownership increased, the railway system shrank, especially after the infamous "Beeching Cuts". Beach station closed from 2nd March 1959 and South Town station from 4th May 1970. The two routes to Norwich remained open, with Vauxhall then being Yarmouth's only station. Holiday patterns were also changing in the late 1960s and early 1970s as more people sought guaranteed sunshine abroad. The 1970s and 1980s were challenging times for seaside resorts throughout the country. Fortunately, Great Yarmouth fared reasonably well and today it is still a major seaside resort, its seafront "Golden Mile" attracting thousands of tourists each year to its beaches and attractions.

### **The Parkinsons**

The builders and operators of the Yarmouth Miniature Railway were father and son, Richard and Nigel Parkinson. Richard Marion Parkinson (1856-1942) was born in Essex and educated at Dedham Grammar school near Colchester. He was apprenticed to the Great Western Railway and became an accomplished railway and drainage engineer. Richard acted as Assistant Engineer for the Swindon & Andover Railway and the widening of the Great Eastern Railway, including work to extend Liverpool Street station in London. He was Resident Engineer for the Saxby & Bourne Railway and the Holt - Cromer section of the Midland & Great Northern Railway (MGNR). Away from railways he was Engineer for water, gas & drainage at Sheringham, and drainage at Overstrand and Caister. In July 1892 he married Grace Rouse, who was apparently the sister-in-law of William Marriot (1857-1943), later the traffic manager of the MGNR. In 1921 they were living in Bedfordshire, but by 1927 they had moved to Sheringham. Presumably, Richard was retiring and they chose the town as he was familiar with it through his work on local services and on building the MGNR in the area. The couple settled at St Hugh's Cottage on the north side of St Austin's Grove, a close of large dwellings on the eastern edge of Sheringham near the railway.

Nigel Godfrey Parkinson (1906-1976) was born in Peterborough. Following in his father's footsteps, he served an apprenticeship in the locomotive workshops of the MGNR at Melton Constable. During the May 1926 General Strike he drove mainline trains and later worked on the Southern Railway at Wimbledon in the Signal & Telegraph Department. At the time of his wedding in April 1938, when he married Pamela Hawksley, he was the Resident Engineer for the sea defences at Horsey, north of Great Yarmouth. Nigel served in the Fleet Air Arm during the Second World War and the Merchant Navy in peacetime, reaching the rank of Commander. He was made an Honorary Captain in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve in 1959 and awarded the OBE in the 1961 New Year's honours list. Nigel died in London in 1976 where he had been a Conservative councillor.

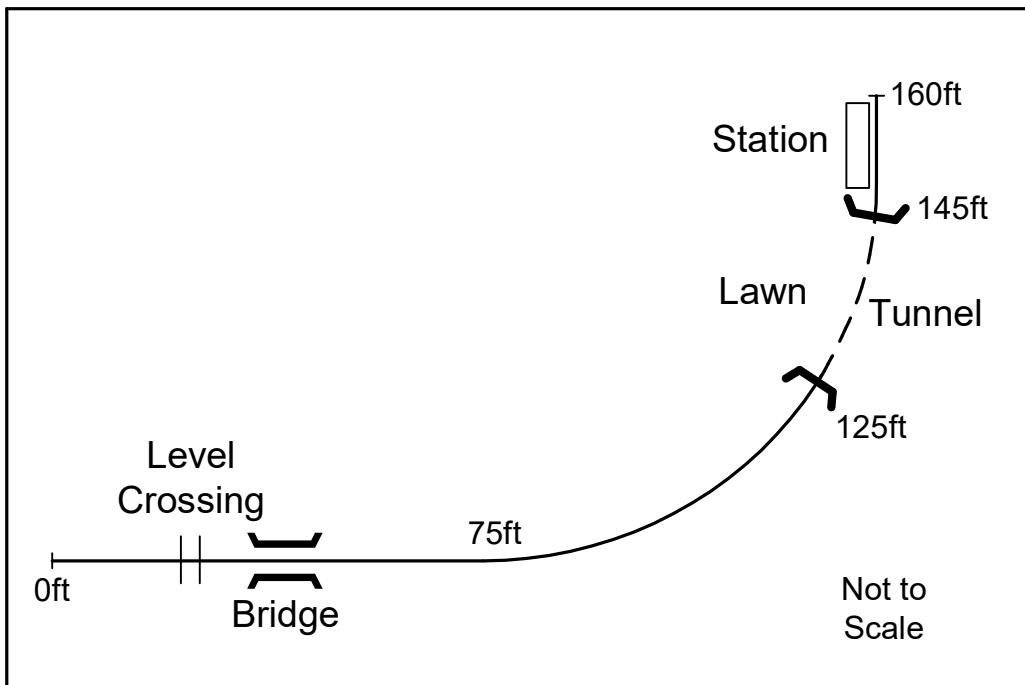
### **Private Electric Railway**

Before embarking on opening a public miniature railway, Nigel Parkinson built a short private miniature railway in the grounds of the family home, St Hugh's Cottage (now No.2, TG16454316) on St Austin's Grove in Sheringham. Fortunately, this railway was fully described in a detailed article in the *Model Engineer* of 22nd September 1927 and later in *Liliputbahnen* by Walter Strauss (English edition 1988), which called the railway

"experimental". However, the *Model Engineer* article does not refer to it as such. Although credited to Nigel (then aged only 21), as it was constructed in the grounds of the family home it must have been approved and supported by his father! In fact the *Model Engineer* article states Richard Parkinson had paid for the materials for the tunnel, which "*did not cost as much as a holiday would have done, and the work did him a lot of good, as he acted as assistant engineer, mason, labourer and carpenter*".

The railway was 160ft in length laid with 14 lb rails. Gauge was  $14\frac{1}{8}$ " - one quarter standard gauge size. One 18ft length had a gradient of 1 in 36, while there was a 51ft radius curve with a gradient of 1 in 100. Other features were a level crossing, a bridge over a stream with a span of 3ft and a cut & cover 20ft long tunnel under one corner of the tennis lawn (one wonders what Mrs Parkinson thought about that during its construction!). There was one station, located in a cutting between the orchard and the tennis court. The sole item of rolling stock was a nearly exact model of a 60ft long Midland Railway bogie coach. This was 15ft long, 2ft 2in wide and 3ft 8in high, weighing 10 cwt. Passenger capacity was stated as 6 children. The coach was powered by a  $\frac{3}{8}$ hp electric motor - driving wheels were 30in in circumference ( $9\frac{1}{2}$ in in diameter). Speed was quoted as 10mph. The coach picked up its power supply from a centre third rail mounted on china insulators. Power was supplied from the house.

This rather unusual private electric railway must have provided very useful experience for the young Nigel Parkinson for his future miniature railway operations, including as it did a curve, gradients, a tunnel and an enclosed passenger coach. It is not certain how long the railway lasted. It may have been removed not long after the Parkinsons opened their railway in 1930 at the Pleasure Beach in Great Yarmouth. It would have certainly been lifted after the death of Richard Parkinson in 1942.



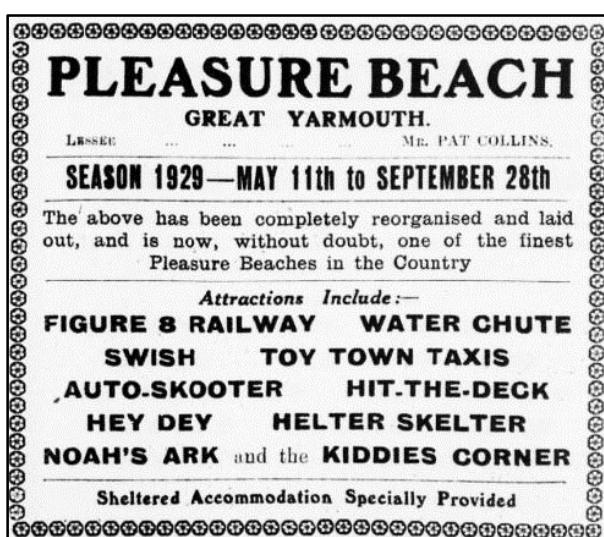
Plan of the electric railway redrawn from a sketch plan in the *Model Engineer* of 22nd September 1927.

## Pleasure Beach

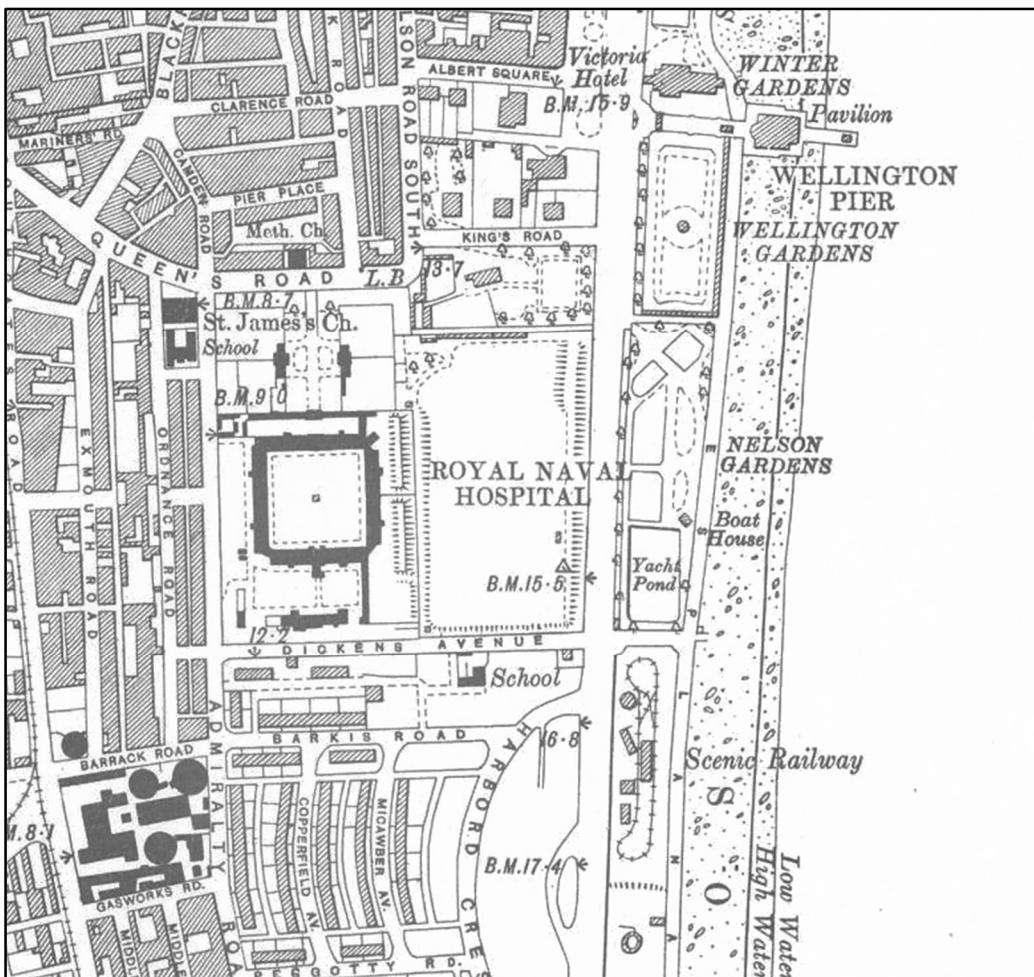
The origins of the Pleasure Beach Amusement Park go back to before the First World War. In 1909 a site at TG531062 on the sand dunes about  $\frac{1}{3}$  mile south of Wellington Pier was leased to Charles B Cochran (1872-1951) through his Great Yarmouth Beach Amusements Limited who erected a Scenic Railway and a Katzenjammer Castle (a type of Fun House), which both opened on 24th July 1909. A Scenic Railway was a rollercoaster with added scenery, such as mountains with snow-capped peaks and illuminated grottos. By July 1912 the Park had become known as the Pleasure Beach. After the First World War the lease was transferred to John Henry Iles (1872-1951) and the park expanded to cover much of the area still used today.

When Iles's tenure expired at the end of 1928, Yarmouth Borough Council transferred the lease to Pat Collins (1859-1943) and Iles removed his Scenic Railway, which was taken to Aberdeen. For the 1929 season Pat Collins added a Figure of Eight rollercoaster and a Water Chute. In 1931 he visited the Colonial Exhibition in Paris where in the amusement park the largest ride was a Scenic Railway built by Erich Heidrich of Hamburg. When the Exhibition closed Pat Collins purchased the railway and it was dismantled and shipped to Great Yarmouth, where it arrived in February 1932. It was then re-erected at the Pleasure Beach, slightly further south than the original one. Built entirely from wood, the Scenic Railway opened on 14th May 1932 and has been operational ever since, capable of handling 2,500 passengers per hour. It remains the most popular ride and is now a rare example of the Scenic Railway design of rollercoaster, there being only two such rides in Great Britain (the other is at Dreamland in Margate).

Following the Second World War the Pleasure Beach reopened in 1946. The Botton Brothers took over the lease at the start of the 1954 season and set about a period of annual improvement. In 1992 the various Botton Brothers companies were amalgamated into Pleasure & Leisure Corporation PLC, with the freehold of the site being purchased at the end of 1993. Aside from the Scenic Railway there are now 25 other large rides as well as children's entertainment, amusement arcades and catering outlets.



An advert from the *Yarmouth Independent* of Saturday 4th May 1929 listing the various attractions available. This was the first season of Pat Collins's ownership and the Parkinson's miniature railway did not open until the 1930 season.



An extract from an Ordnance Survey 6" map, revised in 1926 and published in 1928. To the top (north) of the map are the Winter Gardens and Wellington Pier, while towards the bottom is the 1909 Scenic Railway and the various buildings of the Pleasure Beach (although it is not separately named as such).

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## Planning

If plans had come to fruition there might have been a much earlier miniature railway at the Pleasure Beach. The initial proposal came in 1912 from the first leaseholder of the Pleasure Beach, Great Yarmouth Beach Amusements Limited, for a "miniature or toy railway" running for 1½ miles from the Scenic Railway south to the Harbour's Mouth. A terminal station would be erected each end. The Beach Committee of Yarmouth Borough Council refused the application, mainly because in the future the Council might want to extend their tramway along the same route (which in the end never extended south of Wellington Pier). The Borough Council supported this decision at their meeting on Tuesday 9th April 1912 after a lengthy discussion, which was reported in full in the *Yarmouth Mercury* of Saturday 13th April 1912.

Undeterred, Great Yarmouth Beach Amusements Limited tried again just before the First World War. The *Yarmouth Independent* of Saturday 18th April 1914 reported that their Secretary had asked the Beach Committee at their meeting on Tuesday 14th April 1914 for a "lease of a strip of land between the Scenic Railway and the Marine Parade, for a Toy or

*Miniature Railway, with a way-leave down to the Harbour's Mouth, for a narrow gauge track".* The Beach Committee refused the application due to "future developments" in the area. In response the Company revised their application, this time asking the Beach Committee at their meeting on Tuesday 12th May 1914 for a "miniature railway round the Scenic Railway and north alongside the sea wall to the jetty". The Beach Committee also refused this application and, with the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914, there the matter rested. These two applications may well have originated from Narrow Gauge Railways Limited (a successor company to Miniature Railways of Great Britain Limited) as at the time they were virtually the only operators and suppliers of suitable miniature railway equipment in the country. They had opened their first 15" gauge railway on the South Shore Sands at Blackpool in June 1905 and another more successful line around Marine Lake at Rhyl in May 1911. The other possibility is an imported American Cagney locomotive and coaches.

Similarly, the Parkinsons constructed their Yarmouth Miniature Railway on a sub-lease of part of the Pleasure Beach site from Pat Collins. The first we hear of the Yarmouth Miniature Railway was at the meeting of the Beach & Promenade Committee of Yarmouth Borough Council on Tuesday 24th June 1930 where a "letter, dated the 19th instant, was read from Mr P Collins, requesting permission to run a miniature railway with a steam engine upon the pleasure beach". The Committee agreed that the application should be granted and this decision was approved at the meeting of the General Purposes Committee on Friday 27th June, with the condition that the railway would "be removed at the expiration of a week's notice to do so". Both these decisions were ratified by the Borough Council at their meeting on Tuesday 8th July 1930. We can assume from this the Parkinsons approached Pat Collins directly, as opposed to requesting the Borough Council for a suitable site. Perhaps they thought an already established amusement location would provide better passenger traffic prospects.

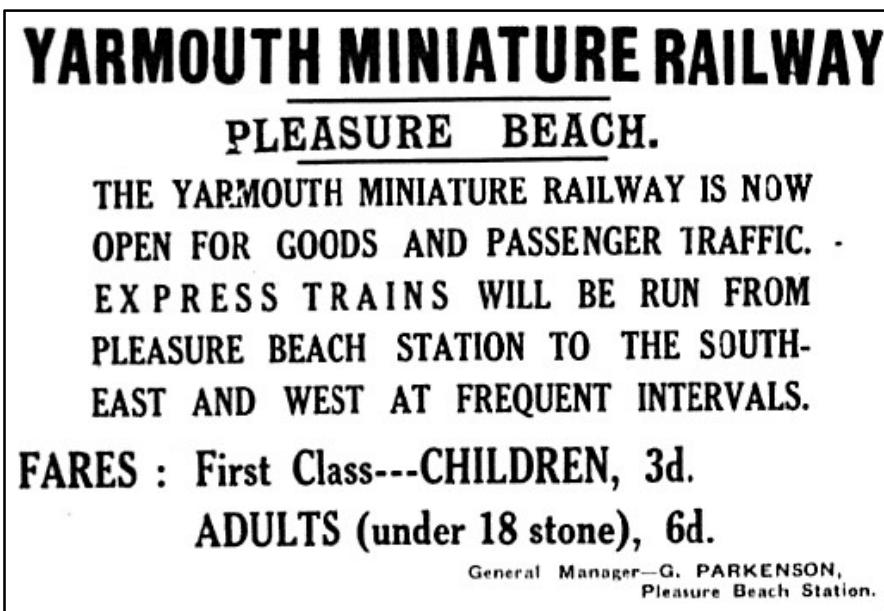
The Pleasure Beach had opened for the 1930 season on Whit Saturday 7th June and with the agreement in place between Pat Collins and the Borough Council, presumably the construction of the railway was quickly undertaken. As the railway was effectively part of the Pleasure Beach it virtually escaped the attention of the local newspapers. The *Yarmouth Mercury* and the various Norfolk and Norwich newspapers ignored its opening. Only the *Yarmouth Independent* briefly mentioned the new railway. Both local papers thereafter failed to report further on the railway, leaving few primary sources of information. However, we are fortunate that John Tidmarsh, when he was researching the railway for his book *The Sutton Coldfield Fifteen Inch Gauge Railway* (Plateway Press 1990), made contact with Nigel Parkinson, receiving two detailed letters in March 1965 and January 1966 about the railway and its rolling stock. He also spoke to Nigel's widow in 1989.

## Opening & Description of Railway

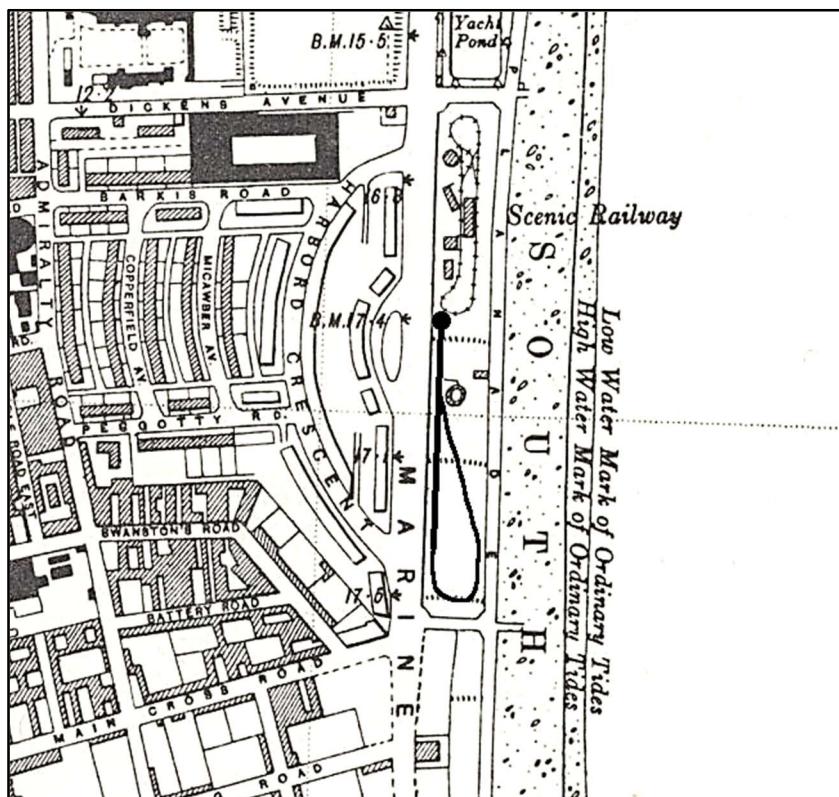
The railway opened towards the end of July 1930. The *Yarmouth Independent* of Saturday 19th July contained no reference to the railway, but the Saturday 26th July edition contained an advert stating "*The Yarmouth Miniature Railway is now open for Goods and Passenger Traffic*". The same edition also had a short note advising "*It may be news to visitors and towns-people that Yarmouth has a new railway. But such is the case. It has no connection with any of the big groups but may be found at the Pleasure Beach. A wonderful miniature it is, and everything is done with all the completeness of a real service. Cheap trips are its speciality*".

The new railway was clearly open by Saturday 26th July 1930 - just a week before the August Bank Holiday weekend (2nd-4th August). The weather that weekend was rather wet, but despite this the *Yarmouth Independent* of Saturday 9th August 1930 noted it had been "stated on good authority that the crowds who flocked to the Pleasure Beach numbered somewhere in the region of 150,000". No doubt many of these had a ride on the new railway and it got off to a very good start, which is confirmed by the *Model Railway News* for September 1930. The magazine reported that the railway had "recently been installed at the Pleasure Beach at Great Yarmouth" and went on "During the first three weeks the train carried nearly 20,000 passengers". It concluded by stating the General Manager was Nigel Parkinson.

*Model Railway News* for September 1930 also gave a brief description of the railway as it was originally built. "The total run is about 560 yards out and home, the time taken for the trip being 2 to 2½ minutes. There are eight trucks carrying six children and four adults". The line was a simple balloon loop with a terminal station in the Pleasure Beach, close to the Giant Slide and between it and Marine Parade South. From the station, at approximately TG53110608, the line ran to the south before opening out into a balloon (return) loop. The west side of the loop was immediately adjacent to Marine Parade South. At this time the original Scenic Railway at the Pleasure Beach had been removed and replaced by the rollercoaster.



An advert from the *Yarmouth Independent* of Saturday 26th July 1930 advising the railway was "now open for goods and passenger traffic". It is unlikely any goods traffic was ever carried - the only wagons were employed for carrying passengers! The advert also suggests a much more extensive system, than a simple return loop, with trains running "to the south-east and west at frequent intervals". Note the fares - did the station have scales to weigh the adult passengers? The newspaper has misspelt Nigel Parkinson's name and used his middle name as his initial.



An extract from an Ordnance Survey 6" map, revised in 1938 and published in 1946. The railway escaped being depicted on any Ordnance Survey map, but its approximate position and route has been added. Despite being revised six years after the Scenic Railway opened in 1932, this map still shows the 1909 version! Marine Parade South runs north - south down the middle of the map.

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## Locomotive & Coaches

To operate their new railway the Parkinsons obtained one of the 4-4-2 class 10 "Little Giant" locomotives designed by Henry Greenly and built by Bassett-Lowke of Northampton. Originally named "Mighty Atom", it was built in 1908 (works number 11) for the new 15" gauge Sutton Miniature Railway near Sutton Coldfield, which opened at Easter 1908. In 1919 the locomotive arrived at the Llewelyn's Miniature Railway (later known as the Lakeside Miniature Railway) at Southport where it was overhauled in 1921 and renamed "Prince of Wales". It was from there the Parkinsons purchased the locomotive in 1929 for £280. Passenger stock for the railway was eight newly built 4-wheel open wagons. Although the *Model Railway News* for September 1930 stated these each carried "six children and four adults" photographs show more likely capacity was two adults and two children, or four children. These were constructed by Nigel Parkinson in his workshop in Sheringham.

## Ongoing Operation & Other Plans

### 1931 season

As the railway was such a success in its first season the Parkinsons decided to improve it over the winter of 1930/1931 and add to its features and rolling stock. The *Model Engineer* of 27th August 1931 contained a detailed article on the railway with drawings of the track layout and station buildings. The article noted the railway had opened a year ago "*but this year it has been almost entirely reconstructed*". The track layout was the same balloon loop (but here stated as a 530 yard long run) but a new four platform station, with a booking office, waiting room and a part glazed curved roof were added. The roof was a copy of that at St Pancras station in London, but with only a 10ft span. The station, called South Denes Junction, was formed of three tracks and two wooden island platforms. No.1 was on the east (Pleasure Beach side), with No.2 & No.3 serving the centre road and No.4 adjacent to Marine Parade South. The *Model Engineer* reported "*intending passengers walk up an incline to the booking office, then pass through the waiting room, and in general down on to platform 3, from which they enter the waiting train*". The train then departed and took the right hand track and ran around the return loop (of 88ft radius) in anticlockwise direction, passing through a 95ft long tunnel and returning to the centre road. The passengers then alighted on platform 2. The locomotive ran forward, passing under the booking office and waiting room, and turned on the turntable before running back through platform 4. Platform 1 was noted in the article as "*only being used when traffic is considerable*".

4-4-2 "Prince of Wales" was numbered 53 and had "YMR" added to its tender sides. As noted above, in the General Strike of May 1926 Nigel Parkinson drove mainline trains. In their book *The Little Giant Story* (Rail Romances 2003) Robin Butterell & John Milner quote Nigel Parkinson stating "*The numbers given to my locomotives were all from real engines that I had driven. No.53 was a "C" Class rebuild on the M&GN Railway*". To give back up to "Prince of Wales" and to allow a two train service to run at busy times, Nigel Parkinson built a petrol locomotive. This was a 4-4wPM with a 10hp Chapuis Dornier petrol engine driving through a gear box to one bogie. It was constructed to resemble a centre cab North Eastern Railway electric locomotive and was numbered 7449. As with "Prince of Wales", 7449 was the number of an engine Nigel Parkinson had driven during the General Strike - apparently in this case a Great Eastern Railway 2-4-0 locomotive.

Three enclosed bogie coaches were also constructed, presumably drawing on the experience of building the enclosed electrically powered coach on the 14½" private railway at St Hugh's Cottage in Sheringham. These were 18ft long, 4ft 8in high, 3ft 3in wide and had three compartments each with 4 seats, but without full-height partitions. There was also an extra seat at either end. They were fully enclosed with glazed windows and had corridor connections between them. Vacuum braked, the coaches were also electrically lit. No doubt they were the grandest coaches ever to grace a 15" gauge railway! The original passenger carrying wagons were also retained.

Semaphore signals were added worked from a small signal box above the platforms with a 10 lever frame. The signals and points were worked by hydraulic power by means of a pump and accumulator. There were also track circuits to detect the position of trains. The *Model Engineer* of 27th August 1931 commented that "*All signals are interlocked with the points, and no signal can be lowered when the train is on a protected section, the position of the train being shown in the signal-box on a diagram*". As a finishing touch "*The staff are all in uniform, Mr*

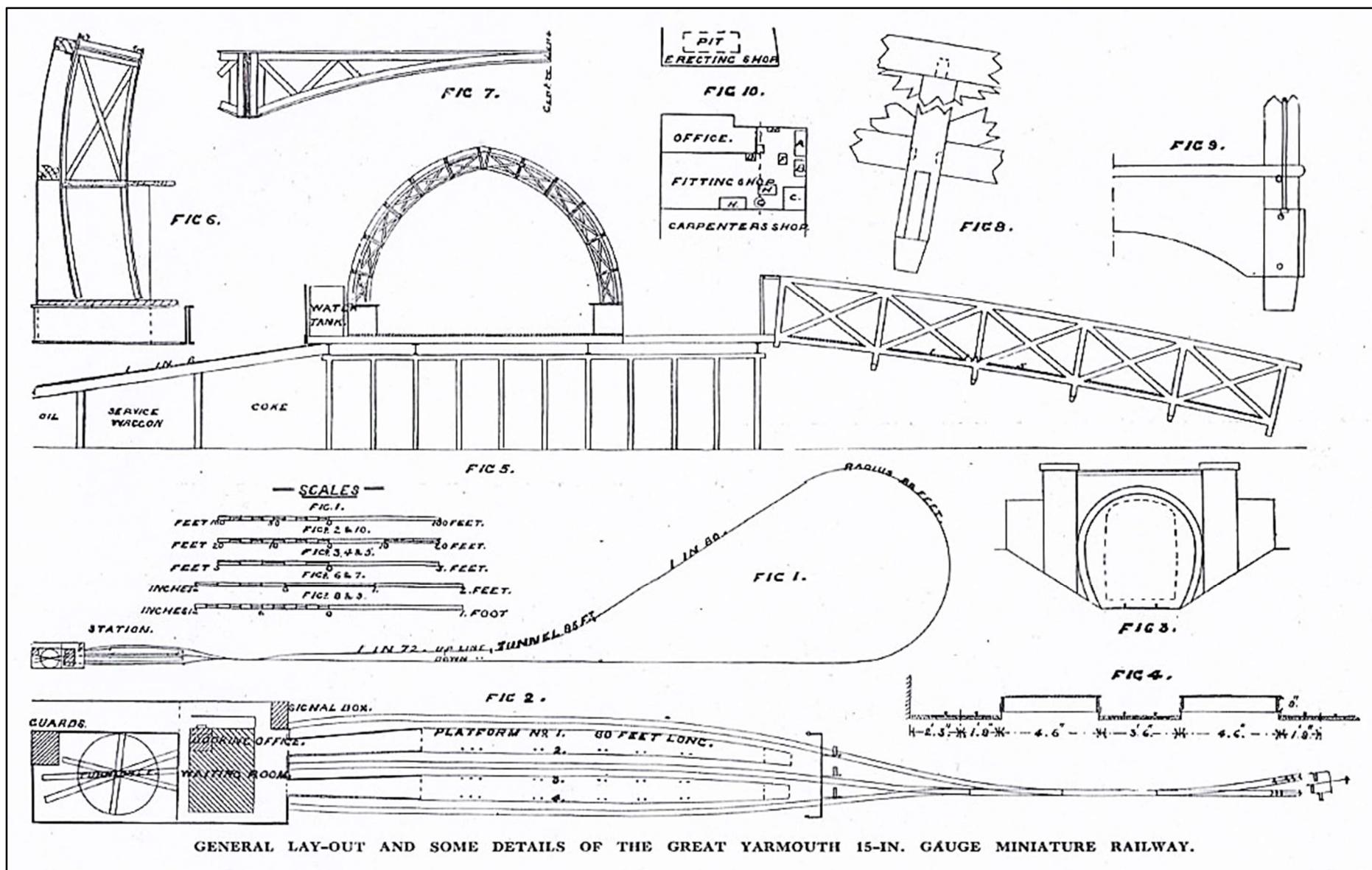
*Parkinson himself [presumably Nigel] wearing a gold station-master's hat!*". The *Model Engineer* also noted the station roof, station building, the 3 coaches, the 8 wagons (used for passenger carrying during the 1930 season), petrol locomotive, signals and locking frame, were all made in Nigel Parkinson's workshop in Sheringham.

This was no simple basic miniature railway. Few other miniature railways at the time could boast a station with a roof modelled on St Pancras, fully enclosed corridor coaches, steam and petrol locomotives, tunnel and a full interlocked signalling system with track circuits!

In the summer of 1931 Richard Parkinson made a tour of various miniature railways around the country and submitted a letter to the *Model Engineer*, subsequently published in the 22nd October 1931 issue, describing his tour and his views of the various railways he visited. He had previously seen the Rhyl Miniature Railway and the Romney, Hythe & Dymchurch Railway. Being driven around by his daughter, they covered 807 miles in 4 days and visited the 20" gauge North Bay Railway at Scarborough and the 15" gauge Ravenglass & Eskdale Railway and Llewelyn's Miniature Railway in Southport. He commented the North Bay Railway "*lacks realism*" and at Rhyl the "*opportunity had been missed to make a picturesque line*". As for the Romney, Hythe & Dymchurch Railway he "*preferred our coaches*". He rounded the letter off by saying "*we can claim to be the best at Yarmouth as regards rolling stock, signals and stations*".

Next page: A copy of the page of drawings and plans from the *Model Engineer* of 27th August 1931, reproduced with the kind permission of the Editor of the *Model Engineer & Workshop* magazine.

- Figure 1 Track plan of whole of the railway, showing station and return loop with gradients and 95ft tunnel.
- Figure 2 Enlargement of station showing platforms, signals, turntable and layout of station building.
- Figure 3 Elevation of tunnel portal with outline of coach inside.
- Figure 4 Cross section of station platforms with dimensions.
- Figure 5 Section through station showing the approaches and engine shed under the waiting room.
- Figure 6 Enlarged view of part of the roof truss.
- Figure 7 Cross section of the roof truss showing half of a roof purlin.
- Figure 8 Part elevation of the approach bridge.
- Figure 9 Half cross section of figure 8.
- Figure 10 Plan of Nigel Parkinson's workshop in Sheringham.



### **1932 season**

With all the improvements and additional rolling stock, the 1931 season was very successful. In his book *The Sutton Coldfield Fifteen Inch Gauge Railway* (Plateway Press 1990) John Tidmarsh records that on August Bank Holiday Monday 1931 a record 3,600 passengers rode on the railway. Also during that season "*the record for intensity of service was achieved one Monday evening the same year when, after a wet start, some 2,000 passengers were carried after 7pm using two trains, running at almost two minute intervals*". This would have been using the railway's entire rolling stock: "Prince of Wales" and the petrol locomotive 7449, with the three enclosed coaches and eight original open wagons.

With such heavy traffic, over the winter of 1931/1932 the Parkinsons looked to increase the rolling stock further. What transpired was a two car petrol electric railcar set (4w-4 + 4-4w PER). The power car was new, built by Nigel Parkinson in his workshop in Sheringham, while the driving trailer car was adapted from one of the three enclosed coaches. The outline and dimensions of the power car matched the existing coaches. This allowed two trains of two enclosed coaches to operate if required. The railcar was powered by an Austin 7 car engine in the power car, driving a shunt wound 80 volt 6kw generator feeding two 2.5hp series wound traction motors on one bogie of the power car and the driving trailer. (This was soon modified to a traction motor on each of the two power car bogies [4w-4w PER] as the driving trailer was sometimes used to strengthen trains with the remaining two enclosed coaches). The throttle was vacuum controlled and braking was by back EMF on the traction motors together with a handbrake. Performance was impressive; apparently the unit could accelerate to 12mph in its own length and reach a maximum speed of 24mph. Internally the power car was fitted out as a dining car with tables, electric table lamps and curtains; lemonade and biscuits were served to the passengers! This was a unique and impressive railcar and it would have been interesting to see it at work on a longer railway. It could complete the 530 yard long run at Yarmouth in 1m 50s; 15s faster than "Prince of Wales"!

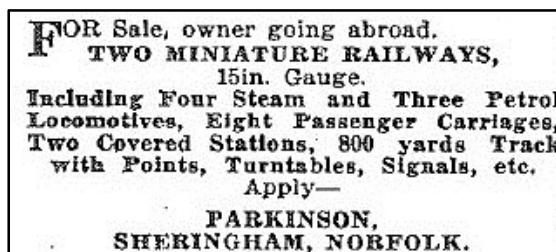
Over the winter of 1931/1932 4-4-2 "Prince of Wales" was overhauled and gained smoke deflectors. Another change for the 1932 season was installation of a new Scenic Railway immediately alongside the railway at the Pleasure Beach. 1932 also saw the Parkinsons open another 15" gauge railway on the east coast - this time in the Kursaal Amusement Park at Southend. They completely rebuilt this line for the 1934 season and the *Model Engineer* of 31st May 1934 noted the central station was "*made somewhat like that at St Pancras*". The Parkinsons obviously admired the London terminus of the Midland Railway!

### **1933-1936 seasons**

By the summer of 1933 there were signs that passenger traffic may have started to decline. In his book *Liliputbahnen* (English edition 1988) Walter Strauss noted that on August Bank Holiday Monday 1933 a total of 1,960 passengers were carried. This was somewhat lower than the 3,600 who rode on the railway on August Bank Holiday Monday in 1931 noted above. Another indication of falling passenger numbers was that the Parkinsons were looking for a new site for the railway in Great Yarmouth. At the meeting of the Recreation Grounds Committee of Yarmouth Borough Council on Monday 28th August 1933 the Borough Engineer submitted correspondence from Richard Parkinson with reference "*to his request to be found another site for his miniature railway (now on the Pleasure Beach)*". His requested new site was "*alongside the Tennis Courts and Waterways on the North Denes*". The Parkinsons

probably felt this was a more lucrative site, being north of Britannia Pier and close to Beach station. The Waterways were also one of Great Yarmouth's main attractions. However, the Recreation Grounds Committee refused the request and the railway remained at the Pleasure Beach.

Following the refusal of the Council for a new site, in September 1934 Richard Parkinson put the railway, together with the railway at Southend, up for sale. As mentioned above, the Parkinsons had only just completely rebuilt the line at Southend - perhaps passenger traffic during the 1934 season had been disappointing. However, there were presumably no serious offers and both railways remained open.



The advert from *The World's Fair* of Saturday 15th September 1934 placed by Richard Parkinson advertising both the Yarmouth and Southend Miniature Railways for sale. Oddly, the reason for the sale was given as "Owner going aboard". As far as is known, neither Richard nor Nigel ever moved abroad.

Having failed to sell the railway, sometime around 1935 the Parkinsons extended it by creating a complete spiral loop in which the line ascended a gradient of 1 in 60 to cross over itself in the tunnel - possibly in a bid to boost passenger numbers. The extension was being planned when Walter Strauss visited the railway, probably in 1934, for his book *Liliputbahnen*, which was published in 1938. He noted in the finished book that the planned extension had "since been carried out". This was now the fullest extent of the railway.

Still not satisfied, towards the end of the 1935 season Richard Parkinson made an application to Yarmouth Borough Council to considerably extend the railway. The Beach & Promenade Committee meeting of Tuesday 24th September 1935 considered an application from him to "establish a miniature railway service between the Pleasure Beach and the Harbour's Mouth". This was the same proposal as that submitted in April 1914 by Great Yarmouth Beach Amusements Limited (see above) and would have comprised a railway of some 1¼ miles in length. However, as in 1914, the Committee refused Richard Parkinson's application.

At the meeting on Tuesday 26th May 1936 of the Beach & Promenade Committee, the Borough Engineer reported about a plan "which had been submitted to him with respect to certain structural alterations to the carriages used" on the railway. The Committee agreed that the plan "be disapproved pending improvements being made to the interior of the tunnel" as recommended by the Borough Engineer to "ensure the safety of passengers using the carriages proposed to be reconstructed". There is nothing more recorded about this in the Yarmouth Borough Council minutes and whatever the "structural alterations" were, they probably did not take place. In any event the railway was on borrowed time.

## Closure & Afterwards

Sadly, the railway closed at the end of the 1937 season, probably in September. The track was lifted, the elaborate station dismantled and the rolling stock sold on. By this time the railway was losing money. It must have been an expensive line to operate with around four staff employed, steam & petrol locomotives and a working signalling system. Nigel Parkinson was generally at the railway during the summer, during the winter he was at sea. Another reason for the closure may have been Nigel Parkinson's forthcoming marriage in April 1938. At that time he was also Resident Engineer for the sea defences at Horsey, north of Great Yarmouth, so probably thought he would be too busy with married life and his "day job" to spend enough time on the railway. In any event the Second World War was only two years away and the railway was unlikely to have survived, given Great Yarmouth became a restricted area. The Parkinsons also closed the railway at the Kursaal Amusement Park in Southend in 1938, which was losing more money than Yarmouth.

All the track, signal box and signals, together with "Prince of Wales", the passenger wagons, driving trailer of the railcar and the two enclosed coaches had been sold directly to Pat Collins during the 1937 season when the railway was still operating. At that time Pat Collins was the owner of the Pleasure Beach and he also ran an Amusement Park in Sutton Park near Sutton Coldfield, where there was a derelict 15" gauge railway.

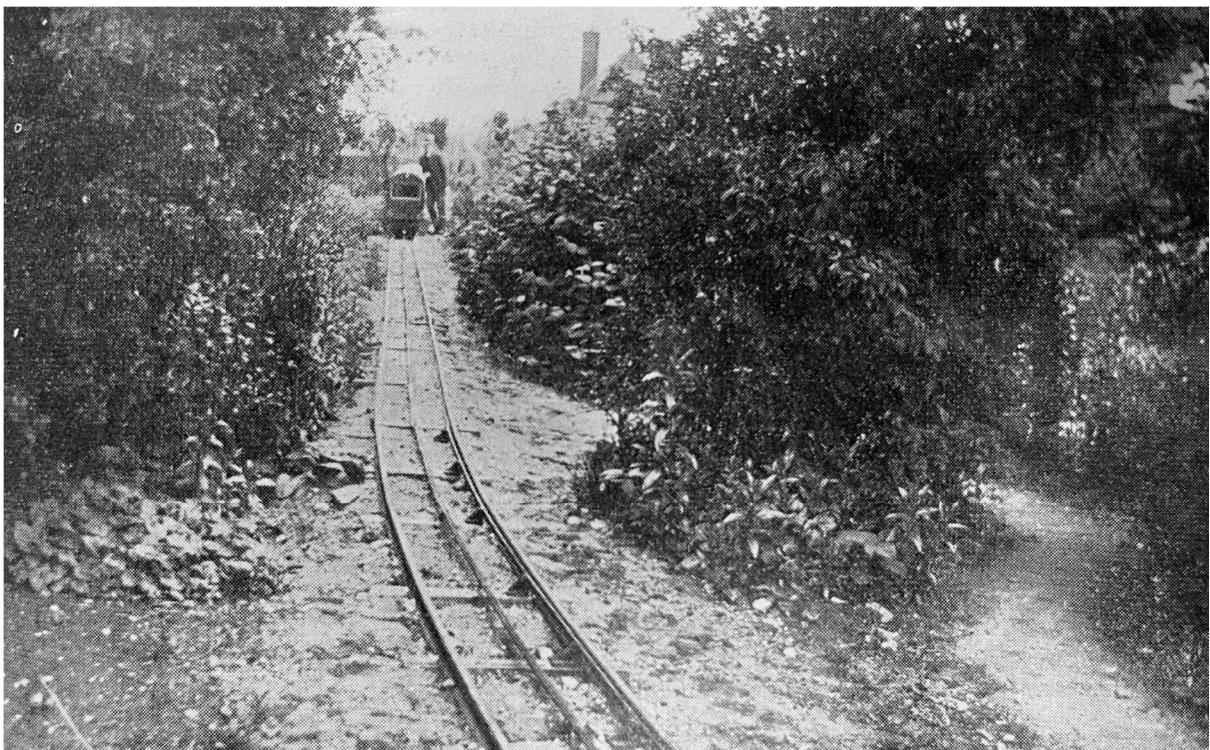
*The World's Fair* of Saturday 16th October 1937 contained an advert of a sale by auction by William Gambling & Duffield for the remainder of the railway to be held at the Pleasure Beach at 12 noon on Wednesday 20th October 1937. Included in the sale were "*Petrol Electric Locomotive 15in gauge*" and "*Petrol Locomotive 15in gauge*" - both said to be in working order. These were the power car of the two coach petrol electric railcar and 7449. Also included was "*The station as fixed in one lot, and if not sold then in sections*". The advert noted "*The top section, partly glazed and with steel arching making a useful Summer House or Garage*" - this was the roof modelled on St Pancras. There were also two foot bridges with oak bracing.

7449 was also acquired by Pat Collins and the power car of the railcar moved briefly to the Parkinsons railway Southend, where it was probably stored, before being sold on to the north east dealer and miniature railway operator Herbert Dunn. Pat Collins used 7449, "Prince of Wales", the passenger wagons, driving trailer and the two enclosed coaches to reopen his railway at Sutton Park, thereby returning "Prince of Wales" to the railway it was originally built for! John Tidmarsh in his book *The Sutton Coldfield Fifteen Inch Gauge Railway* (Plateway Press 1990) records that it was Richard Parkinson who handled the sale of the bulk of the railway direct to Pat Collins and then over the winter of 1937/1938 arranged for its transportation to Sutton Park. He then oversaw the reconstruction and extension of the line, which reopened in May 1938 - no mean feat for someone who was 81 years old! 7449 was used only briefly at Sutton Park, being laid aside when "Prince of Wales" was put into service. It was later stored and then scrapped. The driving trailer (with controls removed) and the two enclosed coaches were used as a three coach set. The original line was extended using the track from Great Yarmouth. So, in some ways the Parkinsons unusual and short-lived 15" gauge miniature railway lived on at Sutton Park, long after trains ceased to run at Great Yarmouth's Pleasure Beach.



Nigel Parkinson with his electrically powered bogie coach on his 14½" gauge private railway in the grounds of the family home in Sheringham. The coach was modelled on a 60ft long Midland Railway bogie coach and is standing just outside the 20ft long tunnel.

*(Model Engineer. 22/09/27)*



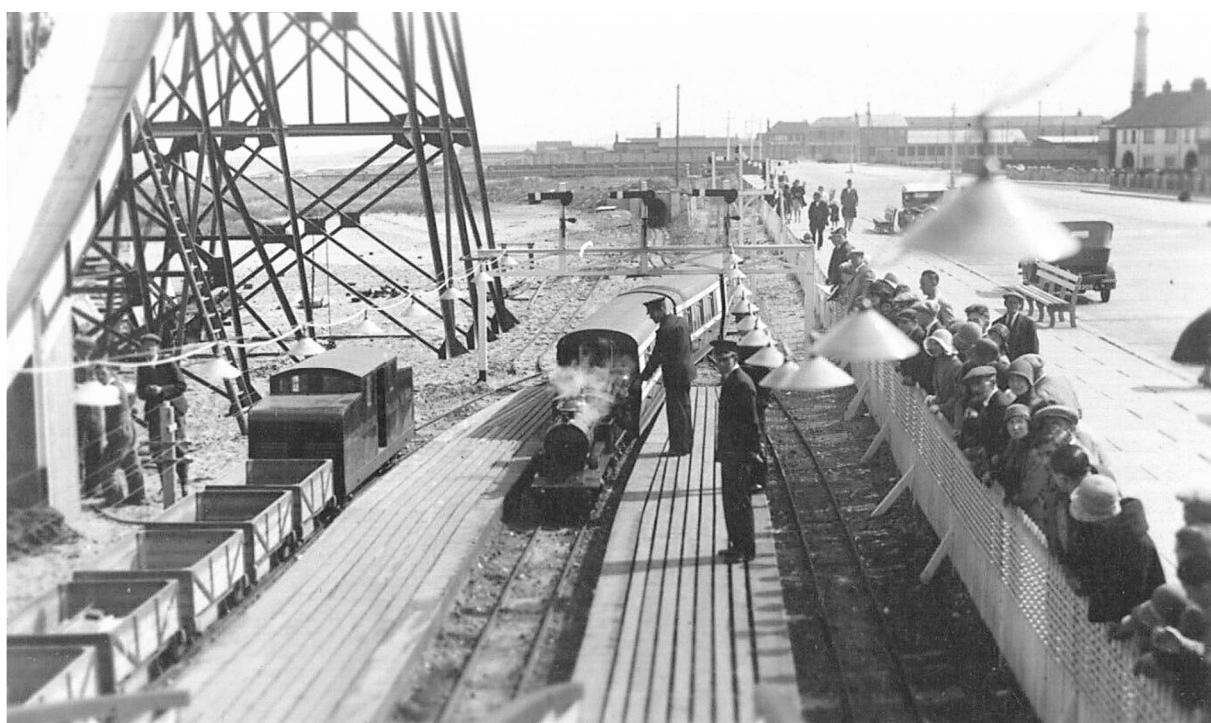
A view looking in the opposite direction to that above, showing the coach at the end of line, beyond the under bridge. Note the centre third rail and check rail on the curve.

*(Model Engineer. 22/09/27)*



"Prince of Wales" returning to the station not long after the railway opened in July 1930. The locomotive is still lettered "Llewelyn's Miniature Railway" on the tender. The train is formed of five of the original passenger carrying wagons. Driving is Nigel Parkinson, while his father is seated in the leading wagon. Note how the track is laid directly on to the sand.

*(Yarmouth Independent. 09/08/30)*



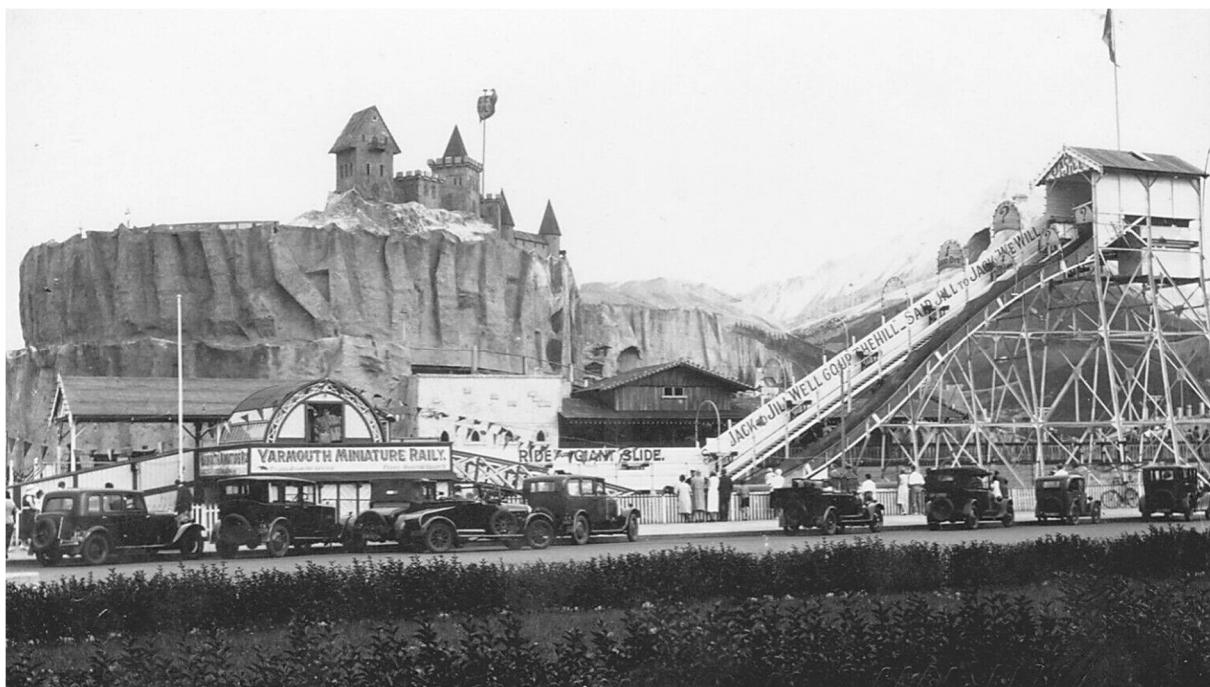
"Prince of Wales" arrives back in platforms 2 & 3 at South Denes Junction station with a train of three enclosed coaches. 7449 stands ready in platform 1 with a train of the passenger carrying wagons. Note the signals, uniformed staff and the tunnel in the background. To the left, the legs of the Giant Slide loom over the railway. A good crowd by the fence look on.

*(Postcard)*



The power car of the petrol electric railcar stands with 7449 in platform 4, while "Prince of Wales" is inspected by a hatted young boy. Note the covered station building, with its partly glazed canopy and stairs down to the platforms. The signal box is far right.

(Postcard)



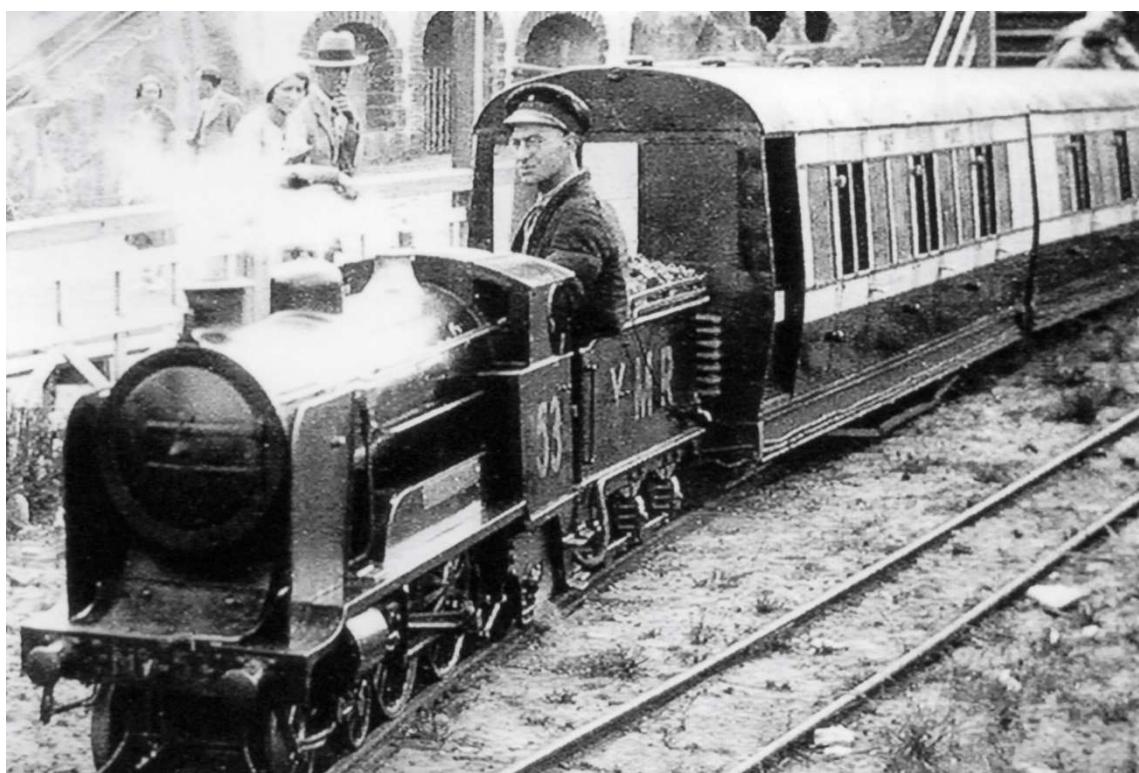
This view shows the Scenic Railway, which was erected in 1932 alongside the railway. Note the Giant Slide to the right and the entrance to the station with its curved roof modelled on St Pancras. An interesting selection of 1930 motor cars are parked on Marine Parade South.

(Postcard)



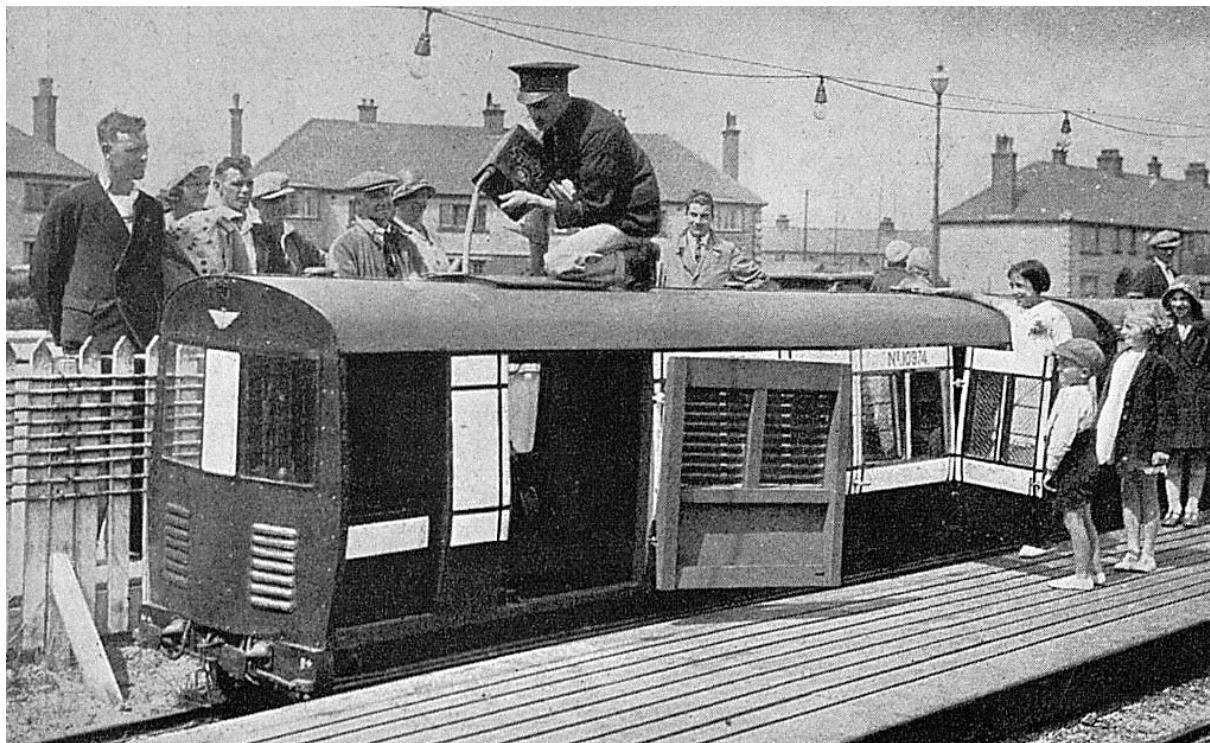
"Prince of Wales" (now with smoke deflectors) sets out from the station and passes under an attractive two arch footbridge. The train will return through the other arch in a couple of minutes having run round the return loop. The Scenic Railway is clearly visible with its mountain scenery and castles. The rear of the Giant Slide towers over the scene.

(Postcard)



"Prince of Wales" arrives back at South Denes Junction station with a train of the enclosed coaches. It is now numbered 53 and lettered "YMR" on the tender sides.

(Author's Collection)



The power car of the railcar has its petrol tank topped up in platform 4 of South Denes Junction station. The newspaper stated it was a "scale model of a District Railway train".  
(*The Sphere*. 03/09/32)



Were there any other miniature railways where one could obtain travel information from a uniformed member of staff? Here, a mother and her children pose for the camera in the waiting room above the platforms, while a member of staff consults the LMS timetable. The rear is annotated "A Porter giving information about Real Railways in our waiting room".  
(Author's Collection)

## Summary

Opened: July 1930

Closed: September 1937

Layout & length: Balloon loop, 530 yards

## Locomotives (15" gauge)

53 "Prince of Wales"	4-4-2	Bassett-Lowke 11	1908	Little Giant class 10	1
7449	4-4wPM	Nigel Parkinson	1931	NER centre cab	2
	4w-4+4-4wPER	Nigel Parkinson	1932	2-car railcar	3

- 1 From: Llewelyn's Miniature Railway, Southport 1929.  
To: Sutton Park Miniature Railway, Sutton Coldfield 1938.
- 2 From: new.  
To: Sutton Park Miniature Railway, Sutton Coldfield 1938.
- 3 From: new.  
To: Southend Miniature Railway 1938.

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### Acknowledgements

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Neil Wyatt (Model Engineer).

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A HISTORY OF THE YARMOUTH MINIATURE RAILWAY  
A short history of an east coast 15" gauge railway

MINOR RAILWAY MINI HISTORIES - M9

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