

A Bear back in the Pit

Among many highlights at the Amberley Gala was the return to steam of a favourite, if diminutive, narrow gauge locomotive. *Andrew Charman* was there.





For many years Amberley, the Chalk Pits Museum as it was known then, was this short-axle fan's closest venue in a south east lacking in a lot of narrow gauge to enjoy. I've always joked that I knew Amberley when it was Brockham, the railway collection only moving to Sussex after failing to get planning permission at the original Brockham museum set up in the late 1960s.

I had not been to Amberley in many years, however, so it was a particular pleasure to accept the railway group's invitation to the Gala and, as has been reported in our news pages, the return to steam of Bagnall 2-4-0T 'Polar Bear'.

Celebrations aside, looking around the evocative venue really brings home what a great deal of progress has been made in recent years. The mainly industrial railway collection is just part of a wide-ranging museum but holds enough interest to sustain a gricer such as myself for the day. The exhibition building in particular, which hosted trade stands and model railways during the Gala, has come a long way, with lots to enjoy within its walls thankfully stretching way beyond locos. And the newly-



Left: Bagnall 'Peter' was kept very busy.

Top: 'Polar Bear' simmers in the shadows of Amberley station.

Above: Guest Nicholas Owen enjoyed himself.

Above right: Decauville 0-4-0 'Barbouilleur' was on static display.

Below: Both 2ft, very different loading gauges...

Right: "Here, take hold of this..."

All Photos: Andrew Charman



extended 2ft gauge line maintains the image of an industrial venue with rails poking through the greenery.

The Gala was an excellent event, the majority of services maintained by Polar Bear and 0-4-0ST 'Peter', dwarfing its fellow Bagnall sibling. Visiting Barclay 0-4-0 'Jack' also played its part, while successions of

freight trains hauled by some of the museum's i/c loco collection added greatly to the atmosphere.

Moseley in the north, Amberley in the south – Britain's industrial narrow gauge heritage is in good hands. **NGW**

More Information

www.amberlynarrowgauge.co.uk

