

# NEWSLETTER



**No. 41: Summer 2003**

**Reg. Charity No. 508092**



*Norman Swindle looks out onto the sunny platform at Zbaszynek, Poland shortly before driving class OL49 No. 111 to Leszno. More about the Wolsztyn Experience inside.*

*Photo: Keith McNally*

## CONTENTS

Editorial	Bob Stapley	3
Progress on 401 - photos	Keith McNally	4
Chairman's report	Malcolm Dunlavey	4
The Wolsztyn Experience (including photos)	Keith McNally and Norman Swindle	5 - 11
A brief history of the Weardale Railway	John Askwith	12 -15
The Weardale Railway Trust	John Askwith	16 -17
A New Environment (continued)	Ken Hedley	18 - 19
More Wolsztyn photographs	Keith McNally	19 - 20

## NORTH TYNESIDE STEAM RAILWAY ASSOCIATION COMMITTEE MEMBERS

<b>Chairman</b>	Malcolm Dunlavey
<b>Vice Chairman</b>	Les Ferguson
<b>Secretary</b>	Bob Stapley
<b>Treasurer</b>	Keith McNally

Other Members: Mark Beresford, Ken Hedley, George Richardson., Joyce Smith and Ian Taylor

**Junior Representative:** vacant

**Correspondence address for the Association, newsletter and the Museum:**

North Tyneside Steam Railway Association, The Stephenson Railway Museum, Middle Engine Lane, North Shields NE29 8DX. Tel: 0191 200 7146

**Association web address:** [www.ntsra.org.uk](http://www.ntsra.org.uk)

**Superintendent:** Lewis Lycett

# **Editorial** by Bob Stapley

Welcome to the summer edition of your newsletter.

A large section of this edition is taken up by an article by Keith McNally and Norman Swindle, in which they describe their "Dream Holiday" on the Wolsztyn Experience in Poland earlier this year - truly a magnificent experience and well worthy of the size of the article which these two members have produced. No doubt there will be more photographs from this adventure in future editions!

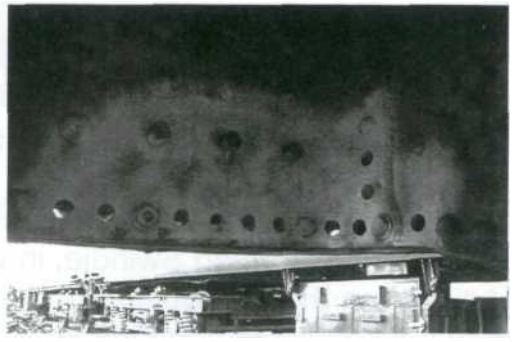
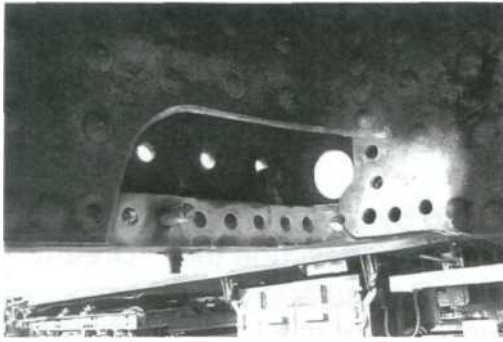
Ken Hedley has, over the last few years, given us a great insight into his work on the systems in the Blyth area. Here, he concludes his description.

The other articles concern developments in Weardale - something which I promised in the last edition. I am grateful to John Askwith of the Weardale Railway Trust for the information contained in an article and a newsletter, which brings us up to date with the exciting news of developments in this area.

Looking ahead, many members will be aware that the Wensleydale Railway has become operational once more, with trains running every two hours between Leeming Bar and Leyburn. I've recently been on a mission to this railway, and will have some information and photographs for the next edition.

Whilst I'm on about the next edition, it is already taking shape, as I already have a couple of interesting articles for publication. However, please don't forget that any railway items which you would like to contribute, particularly from your holidays, would be welcome.

Enjoy your reading.



*Left: The corroded area of 401's firebox rear has been cut out ready for welding.*

*Right: The welded patch in place.*

*Photos: Keith McNally*

### *Chairman's Report, and Carriage and Wagon News*

We are now half way through our season, and it is pleasing to note that numbers of visitors remain high, showing that the railway is as popular as ever.

Work on the entrance and cafe was expected to start during the summer months, but this has been postponed until October. This will be of benefit, as visitors to the museum will not be disturbed by the building work, and when we open in 2004 we will have brand new facilities, which should prove to be a further attraction.

Work is progressing on the Association's brake van; currently most of the work is being carried out by Norman Swindle and David Freeman, as I have been heavily involved with my day job. After the summer holidays I hope to get back into the swing of things again.

Progress to date is still concerned with stripping damaged wood and making good the wood on the van that is still serviceable. Recently wood that was to be provided by North Tyneside Council has been received, and further materials are to be ordered, and paid for from Association funds.

***Malcolm Dunlavy  
Chairman, NTSRA***

## ***Dream Holiday*** *by Norman Swindle & Keith McNally*

It was with a degree of apprehension tinged with excitement that we set off from the North East to distant Poland on a steam enthusiasts dream holiday - driving and firing main-line steam locomotives on the Polish State Railway (P.K.P) network. The weather was on our side throughout the car/air/rail trek to Wolsztyn (pronounced Volsh-tin) where we were met by tour host, Howard. There was time for a few beers and "getting to know you" chat before retiring for the night.

Poland is the last country in Europe which still has some scheduled steam hauled, standard gauge, mainline services which are based around Wolsztyn. Howard and his brother run a company aptly named "The Wolsztyn Experience" which arranges footplate courses for driving and firing on the steam services. Wolsztyn is at the hub of five lines but some of them have already fallen to diesel operation or are mothballed. Passenger services are now the mainstay as, unfortunately, the opportunities for steam hauled freight trains have virtually ceased.

Wolsztyn shed consists of an 8-road, round house and the usual facilities for coaling, watering and fire dropping. Various types of locomotive are operational but availability is dependent on maintenance schedules. Polish Class OL49 2-6-2 tender locomotives were most in evidence but unfortunately the Pacific Class PM36 No.2 was not available as it was being prepared for a steam gala in May. Another popular engine had been the German Kriegslock 2-10-0 but the boiler certificate had expired last October. The operational locomotives were in a dirty state with the running boards and frames covered in oil and muck. Only the wheels and the motion were presentable being painted red with white tyre walls. There were also many rusting locomotives stored in the sidings but some other locomotives have been cosmetically restored and are on static display at various places around the station complex.

On our first day, we arrived at our train with a great feeling of excitement and expectation. We already had a PKP official cap each (at a price!) so

*(Continued on page 6)*

*(Continued from page 5)*

we looked the part. There was no time to get the feel of things though as, following a quick ten minute briefing on the footplate, we were off on the 11:03 passenger service to Poznan, the main city of the region. The train consisted of an OL49 No. 23 and four, double-decker carriages making a total train weight of about 250 tons. The driving controls are on the right hand side of the totally enclosed cab as they are on our line, a screw reverser is fitted and air brakes instead of our usual vacuum system. Advanced features like blow down valve levers at either side of the cab; steam operated fire doors; waist level coal bunker/fire door; adjustable water spray to ash-pan, coal and smokebox; and steam chest pressure gauge made driving and firing that much more refined. A practical but unusual feature was empty beer cans, with strategically placed slits in them, covering the internal cab light-bulbs. These makeshift shades directed the light onto the various gauges without causing glare. Another improvisation was cloths jammed around the mudhole doors to absorb the leaking steam/water!

Creating lots of black smoke seemed to be the normal practice when firing in Poland but the elaborate Polish smoke deflectors were not very effective. Shutting off after a lively climb resulted in dark clouds of smoke obscuring the view forward for several seconds at a time - unnerving when approaching a hazard.

With speeds up to 50 mph and shovelling about a ton of coal, the 50 mile trip took 2 hours and called at 15 intermediate stations. This was equivalent to a run from Morpeth to Berwick in LNER days, with just as many station stops.

On those moments when we had time to gaze out of the cab side windows, we caught glimpses of wild deer, long-legged hares, people tending to their allotment gardens, a not too alien looking flat landscape with sandy-soil, and a fair smattering of neglected buildings.

The final few miles took us onto the main line where overhead electric wires looked alarmingly close to the top of our loco cab. Steam running under the overhead wires is not a problem in Poland!

*(Continued on page 7)*

*(Continued from page 6)*

At Poznan, the carriages were uncoupled and we went to the shed to get turned, oiled, replenished with water etc. ready for departing at 15:45 on the return service to Wolsztyn.

The Polish crew are there of course to keep an eye on us because we have no route knowledge as to gradients, sharp bends, locations of stations, etc and, initially, no understanding of the signalling! Whilst they speak practically no English, the message gets across with hand gestures and a few familiar words such as "brake", "water" and "whistle" (pronounced whiss-ell) which is really all that is required. Of course, being a passenger service, it's essential the crew ensure we keep to the time-table. This did not stop some of them from performing practical jokes at our expense. Such deeds as slipping a bolt into the reversing wheel to prevent its rotation, placing coal on the seat just as you sat down and ducking on the approach to overbridges helped to lighten the day - for the Polish crew anyway.

There are many farm tracks and roads crossing the line and as some roads do not even have warning lights, let alone barriers, the need to watch out for kamikaze cyclists, car and lorry drivers is paramount. Those who do cross at the last second get repeated and lengthy blasts of the whistle, a right mouthful from the Polish crew plus a large lump of coal hurled at the offending vehicle. Summary justice at its best! The railway has priority of course but being told not to worry if you hit something on a crossing is little comfort as you hurtle towards it with one eye on a converging vehicle (smoke permitting). Like most of Europe, the lines are not fenced and it appears not to be against the law for pedestrians to cross the tracks. This was very apparent at Poznan main station where there was a pedestrian crossing right across all the mainline tracks and sidings with no barriers, supervision or warning indication of impending train movements.

Following our first taste of real steam operation and after cleaning those white walled wheels, we headed for the Railwaymen's bar for refreshment and later into town to sample what turned out to be a very inexpensive 3 course meal.

*(Continued on page 8)*

*(Continued from page 7)*

The following day was the same run using OL49 No. 69. On entering one of the stations on the return leg, we saw the tinder dry trackbed weeds were smouldering in several places. The cause had been over enthusiast braking by a diesel driver which resulted in sparks flying from the overheated brake-pad material - a common occurrence we later gleaned. It was pleasing to know that steam crews are not always to blame for such events. A novel method was used to extinguish these fires - driving very slowly over the track, one of the blowdown valves was opened. The resulting burst of steam smothered the fires without any recourse to buckets of water or beating sticks.

On the third day we were again allocated OL49 No. 23 but this time for the 04:16 (yes 4.16am!) service to Poznan which meant getting out of bed at the unholy hour of 03:30. The first hour's running was therefore in the dark which was a new experience. The locomotive had two large lights on the front with electricity being provided from a steam powered generator but, even so, the view ahead was still limited to 20 or so yards (18 mtrs). Dawn broke with a dull, red sun climbing above the horizon. This spectacle made up for the early start. The return departure from Poznan was at 08:10 and we arrived back at Wolsztyn at 10:15. This left us with the rest of the day free for sightseeing and catching up on sleep

On day 4, we were given a change of route which involved leaving Wolsztyn at 13:30 and running light engine, tender first, the 18 miles to Zbaszynek which is on the Berlin to Warsaw main line. Here, four double-decker carriages were coupled up for the 16:05 departure to Leszno (via Wolsztyn), a total distance of 47 miles calling at 17 stations and arriving at 17:50. The carriages were uncoupled and we returned light engine with tender first to Wolsztyn, arriving at 19:00. This service was run using OL49 No.111 which had just come back into service that day after undergoing maintenance. However, it developed a knock and a hot bearing on the back axle so, on our return, it was back in the shed for an examination. It failed to appear the next day.

On the fifth day, our final day on standard gauge, we unluckily drew the

*(Continued on page 9)*

*(Continued from page 8)*

04:16 turn again to Poznan. The weather was much colder and rain fell on the return trip which meant the view ahead was even further obscured but we still had to keep to the time-table.

Our last full day was supposed to be a day of leisure, but we took advantage of an optional visit to the 750 mm (2ft 6inch) narrow gauge line at Gniezno. Built in 1896, the now privatised line originally transported goods for the local sugar factory in addition to carrying passengers. They put on a special train for us which consisted of a Class Px48 0-8-0 locomotive No. 1785. Private enterprise was evident in the form of a young local selling works plates and other railway items from a make-shift on-board shop. We had a driving stint each way and there were several hairy moments when crossing barrierless roads. We also had to be alert to the possibility of cars emerging from house driveways that abutted the line. The train was fully at our disposal so we staged run pasts for our own photographic purposes.

At the end of the trip we headed for a high class restaurant where we treat the Polish crew to lunch as a way of saying thank you. Once again prices were so low.

During the car journey back to base we had time for a not-to-be-missed visit to the old town square at Poznan. Most of the original Italian designed buildings have been restored and the square has been spared tarmacadam resurfacing. All in all we had a nice day but it did not really compare with the trips on the previous five days

Having the opportunity to drive and fire scheduled mainline services day and night, in the sun and rain, at fast speeds just like in BR days, must be the dream of every footplate-man who works on a Heritage Railway. For us that dream came true. The 500 miles covered is about equivalent to a trip from Kings Cross to Aberdeen - if only! This facility in Poland may not be available for too much longer, being guaranteed until 2007, so if you fancy it, don't leave it too late. The "Wolsztyn Experience" is aptly named.

Oh, about that time-keeping - we were never late!



*Upper: OL49 No. 69 with the 11.03 passenger service leaving Wolsztyn for Poznan.*

*Lower: Street scene at Wolsztyn town.*





*Upper: Steam cleaning outside Wolsztyn depot.*

*Lower: The old town square at Poznan.*



## ***A Brief history of the Wear Valley Railway (Foreword by Bob Stapley)***

*July 29 this year marked the fiftieth anniversary of the last train to run from Upper Weardale to Bishop Auckland.*

*Thankfully, the line was not completely lifted, being used by the Limestone works at Eastgate until the early 1990s. When the limestone works decided to start transporting materials by road, some hard work was applied in attempting to re-open the line to passengers.*

*Now, the hard work is being repaid by some exciting results. The following article, by John Askwith of the Weardale Railway Trust, describes the history of the line, and how the campaigning is very close to bringing the railway back to this most attractive part of County Durham.*

*Photographs of the Weardale line will appear in the next edition.*

The first proposals to build a railway up the dale were put forward by the developers of the Stockton & Darlington Railway. A report in 1818 showed a potential traffic of 4000 tons of lead per annum from upper Weardale to Stockton.

However, the first railway to tap the mineral resources of the dale was the Stanhope & Tyne Railroad opened in 1834, which ran from Stanhope Burn on the northern hillside to South Shields, including the climb up the bank at Crawleyside. Owing to various problems the company soon ran into financial difficulties, which threatened its promoters, (including Robert Stephenson) with liabilities for unlimited debts and bankruptcy. Various rescue schemes were put together and the line was saved.

It was a further nine years before a further attempt was made to reach Weardale. This came in the form of the Bishop Auckland & Weardale Railway, with a proposal to build a line up the valley to Frosterley, with

*(Continued on page 13)*

*(Continued from page 12)*

an extension to Crook. Strong opposition from local landowners in the dale prevented the scheme from succeeding therefore, for the time being, the promoters had to be content with a line to Crook. The line was opened on 8th November 1843, and ran from Shildon Junction to a terminus near the West road in Crook. It was leased and worked by the Stockton & Darlington Railway. An extension of the line to Waskerley in 1845 was opened to serve as another outlet for the Derwent Iron Company at Consett. This section of line was originally called the Weardale Extension Railway but later under a merger with the line from Stanhope to Consett, was known as the Wear & Derwent Junction Railway.

A plan to penetrate Weardale proper was covered by the Wear Valley Act of July 1845, which was to provide a line from Witton Junction (Wear Valley Junction) on the Bishop Auckland & Weardale Railway to Frosterley, with a connecting branch to Bishopley. The line was opened on 3rd August 1847. An even more ambitious plan to extend the line further up the dale via Alston to Carlisle by the Wear Valley Company never got off the ground because of the depressed financial situation at the time.

The Frosterley & Bishopley areas were known to be rich in limestone deposits and soon extensive quarries were established on both sides of the valley. To the north side were Rogerley and Frosterley Quarries and to the south served by the Bishopley branch - the Bishopley Quarries. The limestone was quarried to serve the iron making furnaces on Teesside.

In 1862 the Wear Valley line was extended to Stanhope by the Frosterley & Stanhope Railway, mainly to reach the Newlandside Estate on the south side of the town where again large quantities of limestone were known to exist.

The boom period for the quarries in the Frosterley & Stanhope areas was in the 1870's, when they were either being extended or new ones were being opened. An extension of the Bishopley Branch introduced

*(Continued on page 14)*

*(Continued from page U)*

the quarries of Fineburn and Bishopley Crag and a siding from the station yard at Frosterley crossed the river by the 'fly bridge' to act as another outlet from the now extended Bishopley Quarry - North Bishopley. Parson Byers Quarry near Stanhope established in 1872, was situated high on the south side of the valley. It was connected to the Wear Valley line by a self-acting incline and due to its enormous size had its own internal railway system. There were approximately 13 miles of quarries in Weardale, and most of them were concentrated around Frosterley and Stanhope.

Quarrying in the area declined sharply after the First World War and throughout the 1920's. Some however did survive until recent times, e.g. Newlandside and Parson Byers.

The final extension of the Wear Valley line to Wearhead was opened on 21st October 1895. It was impossible to extend the line from the existing station at Stanhope and therefore a new one had to be built. Within this section of the line was situated the Greenfoot Whinstone Quarry, which had its own narrow gauge railway system. On the northern hillside was the plant of the Weardale Lead Company at Rookhope. It was connected to the railway in the valley bottom by an aerial flight. Between Eastgate and Westgate at Cambokeels, sidings were established to serve the Weardale Iron Company's Heights limestone quarry. This quarry is still operational today.

Passenger trains survived until 29th June 1953. Up until closure, four trains per day had served the stations of Witton-Le-Wear, Harperley, Wolsingham, Frosterley, Stanhope, Eastgate, Westgate-in-Weardale, St. Johns Chapel and Wearhead. The freight service to Wearhead survived until 1961 when the line was cut back to St. John's Chapel. West of Eastgate followed in 1968, which is the present terminus.

Eastgate cement works were established in 1964 and brought new life to the Wear Valley line. Utilising purpose built container wagons, cement was transported mainly by rail from the plant to Teesside, Tyne-side and Scotland. This operation ceased on 17th March 1993.

*(Continued on page 15)*

The line, which exists today, is single throughout between Eastgate and Shildon, with a connecting spur into Bishop Auckland station - the terminus of the 'Heritage Line' passenger service from Darlington.

A summer only Sunday passenger train service to Stanhope operated as an extension to the Darlington service between 1988 & 1992. The success of this service was instrumental in reopening the station at Etherley (re-named Witton Park), in August 1991.

A campaign to save the line west of Bishop Auckland, now known as the Weardaie Railway, began in 1993 with the threat of closure and track uplift a real possibility after the last cement train ran. Led by the Weardaie Railway Society (now known as the Trust), their aim was to save the line for the benefit of the community, its industries and visitors - and succeeded!

In July 2002, Weardaie Railways Limited gained an order under the Transport & Works Act, to allow them to negotiate the purchase of the line from Railtrack (now Network Rail). With the necessary funding and licences in place, the Company hope to run a heritage service in 2004.

Enormous progress has been made in 2003. The Company have appointed a full time Project Manager and Outdoor Works Manager. This will allow the necessary detailed project planning to be put in place ready for the major reinstatement work required. Close links have been forged with Network Rail and the Company, such that permission has been granted for Weardaie Railway Trust volunteers to access the line west of Witton-le-Wear for the purpose of removing vegetation from the line side. Already over 3 miles of the line has been cleared from Wolsingham heading in a westerly direction to Stanhope, the headquarters of the Weardaie Railway Project Team.

***John Askwith,  
Weardaie Railway Trust***

# Weardale Railway Trust

Stanhope Station  
Bondisle  
STANHOPE  
Bishop Auckland  
Co Durham  
DL13 2YS



Telephone (01388 526262)

Date: May 2003.

## The Railway Line Beyond Bishop Auckland

The present day terminus of the passenger train service for the Darlington branch line is Bishop Auckland station. This line is steeped with railway history, some of which dates back to 1825, and the Stockton & Darlington Railway. Parts of the original route can still be traversed today by modern diesel multiple units.

The line west of Bishop Auckland is still intact and runs a further 22 miles through the beautiful valley of Weardale to a terminus near the Eastgate Cement Works site.

On 16th July 2002, it was announced that Weardale Railway's Limited had been granted a Transport Works Act Order, which enabled the Company to formally initiate the process of purchasing the railway beyond Bishop Auckland, as previously agreed from Railtrack. (now Network Rail). These negotiations are at a very advanced stage and an early conclusion is hoped for. As an acknowledgement of the good relationship which has been developed between Network Rail and the Company, permission to access the line for the removal of vegetation has been granted. Since 1st April 03, volunteers have been actively in-

*(Continued on page 17)*

*(Continued from page 16)*

volved with this task, working weekdays and weekends. The process of securing funding and obtaining the necessary licences to operate a passenger train service on the line is already under way. With these in place and infrastructure reinstated into working order, it is hoped to begin a heritage service in 2004.

The Company is supported by the Weardale Railway Trust, who in 1993 (then known as the Society) started a massive campaign backed by the Local Authorities to save the line from closure and the track being up-lifted. Their aim was to save it for the benefit of the community, its industries and visitors - and succeeded! Members are kept informed of progress through the Trust's quarterly magazine 'Between the Lines'.

Working with the Company and Trust is the Weardale Railway Locomotive Preservation Group, who are steadily collecting and restoring their own rail vehicles and track laying at Wolsingham Steel Works. The steelworks site will also be the base for the Company to service and maintain its own rolling stock. Together they all form the Weardale Railway Project Team.

Volunteers are sought to help with the enormous task of bringing the railway back up to standard. Assistance is required for all disciplines, from the skilled to the un-skilled, in manual or administration work. Training will be provided as required.

If you can help or would like further information about the Weardale Railway Project please contact - Weardale Railway Trust, Stanhope Station, Bondisle, Stanhope, Bishop Auckland, Co. Durham. DL13 2YS. Telephone 01388 526262. (24hrs)

E-mail: [info@weardale-railway.co.uk](mailto:info@weardale-railway.co.uk) Website: [www.weardale-railway.org.uk](http://www.weardale-railway.org.uk)

**John Askwith**  
**May 03.**

## **A NEW ENVIRONMENT (Continued)**

In the last newsletter I wrote about the movement to the new depot at Cambois and the problems of getting to it.

Once there however, the change in working conditions was tremendous . Gone for ever was the smoky, sooty, oily and dusty working environment, no more cleaning smokeboxes and ashpans, throwing fires out, filling sandboxes and oiling underneath engines, or hard wood seats to sit on. No more shovelling tons of coal per shift or tender first running in all weathers and putting up tarpaulin back and side sheets for protection. No more stopping for water and pushing coal forward on the tender. We now had covered cabs, soft leather seats, better vision, windscreen wipers, hotplate or cooker, cab heaters and even a toilet on class 37 locos. We could also change ends to the other cab without going outside in wet conditions.

At first the loads we were pulling were the same as for steam, but whilst the 37's could pull vastly bigger loads, their braking power for loose coupled trains was no better than the J27 steam locos. To overcome this, brake tenders were introduced. These were 2 four wheeled bogey vehicles filled with concrete and vacuum braked. This meant that loads could be increased by up to 10 wagons. The tenders were coupled permanently to the loco, so half the time they were propelled in front of the loco which meant that during the hours of darkness care had to be taken when approaching anything like signals or trap points. Some drivers did forget with awful consequences. Again when on the rear, it was easy to forget when approaching wagons that it was there, resulting in a violent collision. The braking power of these tenders always seemed to be better when they were behind the loco. When in front they were prone to sliding or skidding in damp weather.

The introduction of new vacuum braked coal hopper wagons signalled the withdrawal of the brake tenders. The last one was kept for a main line working of coal from Shilbottle Colliery to a cement works at Oxwellmains near Dunbar, for extra braking down the "Path", a steep

*(Continued on page 19)*

gradient between Grantshouse and Cockburnspath in some parts 1 in 49. On this one train per day working, propelling of the brake tender was not allowed on the North Main line, and was withdrawn when new braked wagons was introduced. Later this working was terminated and the coal was dispatched by road motor and when Shilbottle Colliery closed the coal was then taken from Butterwell Opencast. In steam days, the working was originally allocated to Alnmouth Shed but on closure was transferred to North Blyth and before diesel haulage was worked by K1 Locos and latterly by 4MT No 43000.

Sadly when the depot opened, decline was beginning to set in. Many collieries had closed in the early and mid 1960's and were continuing to do so, which meant most of the workings were in the larger collieries in the Ashington area and opencasts at Widdrington and Butterwell. Some of the smaller collieries at Brenkley, Dudley, Rising Sun, Whittle, Shillbottle, Bedlington "A", Netherton and Cambois were still working, but gradually closed one by one. The Port of Blyth was also in decline, and the closure of North Blyth Staithes left only the West Staithes open and down to loading sometimes only 3 ships per week.

This left only the Power Station which was in full flow, and for the first time in years coal had to be brought into the Blyth and Tyne area from the East Durham coalfield - but that is another story.

***Ken Hedley***



*Norman throwing in a round on an OL49.*

*(See the Wolsztyn Experience, p. 5-9)*

*Photo: Keith McNally*



*Upper: A selection of diesels at Poznan depot, Poland.*

*Lower: The latest commuter trains at Poznan, Poland.*

