

MUSEUM MONTHLY # 3

Welcome to the third Museum Monthly, a newspaper of general interest from the Rossendale Museum, that takes a look at the way different people in Rossendale view, or value, nature. This edition, the best model railway ever, is a collage of responses from a group of local railway enthusiasts

Thanks to the East Lancashire Railway Society for sharing their thoughts with us, and to Orbital Design for sponsoring the project.

Rawtenstall Station is not just the northern terminus of the East Lancashire Railway, but also the gateway to the Irwell Sculpture Trail, which shares much of the Irwell return of the railway with the line down to Bury. Not only did the area again, but it also provided an important wildlife corridor with its largely untouched embankments, which make a fine haven for wildlife and wild flowers throughout the year.

As a railway photographer I like to walk down the Sculpture Trail to Irwell Vale, and this not only provides lots of fine locations to take my pictures, but also many opportunities to see the local wildlife too, and in all the various seasons of the year and many weather conditions at that. During my walks I've seen the shy Geese proudly display their newly born goslings on the River Irwell, and also watched the Canada live in the sewage works at Irwell Vale and are often only visible when a big steam loco passes by and sometimes them out into the open. There are Kingfishers on the riverbanks, and on a lovely Spring morning there is nothing nicer than to sit on a bench on the platform at Irwell Vale Station and watch and listen to the Spring lambs as they call out for their mothers.

We are very lucky to have such beauties on our doorstep, and travelling by steam train reveals many sights that harassed road users never get to see. Walking the route and taking a steam train ride back afterwards is even better, it gives us the best of both worlds, lifts the spirits and makes us thankful to have such things of beauty on our doorsteps.

In the summer, I volunteer with the East Lancs Railway helping to organise the "Evacuee Experience" for visiting school parties. Part of their day involves "evacuating" them from Bury to Rawtenstall, and pretending to "biller" them with local people. I find their observations during the train ride fascinating: the children are always curious, and there is always something new to see. Another class couldn't believe their eyes when a fox trotted alongside the track near Stubbins. A third class thought a heron, spotted flying near Edenfield, was some sort of eagle! Then there are horses [sometimes with foals] and cattle to see, plus the river twisting under the bridges, bluebells and campion and of course the hedges themselves; hawthorn dripping with blossom like a dusting of snow. Beautiful!



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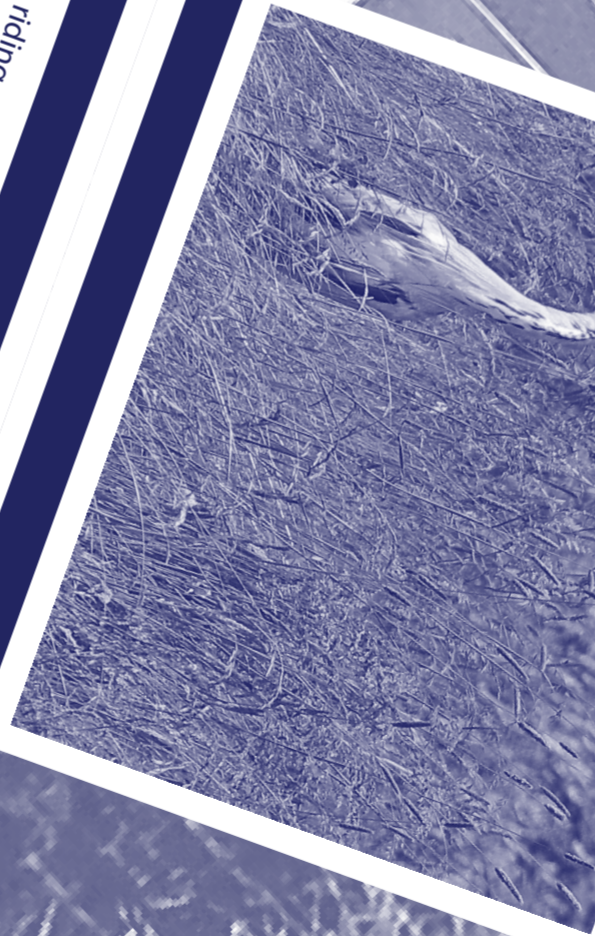


RENAISSANCE



As a walker, there's nothing I like better than being out on the moors: it doesn't matter if I have company (human or canine) or if I'm on my own. I love the splendour of the hills, the changing patterns of light and shade and the wide sky. In the summer I could listen in a series of miniature waterfalls, possibly with skylarks singing their way aloft as an added bonus. Even in the winter, I enjoy being on the tops, where a light snowfall or heavy frost brings out the "bones" of the land. One of my favourite spots is on a high path above Edenfield. From here, you can see the farms and settlements laid out like a miniature landscape. When the trains go through, it looks like the best model railway layout ever designed! I have tried to photograph this view, but it never turns out right - details are always too insignificant - so now I simply collect memories. They work every time!

Horse riding gives you a completely different perspective of an area - it's being high enough to see over walls and hedges! I particularly love riding along the Acricrington branch railway line from Irwell Vale towards Stubbins. You're riding through woodland, with the sunlight dappled by the trees. There's a good level stretch for a canter alongside the path and a fallen tree provides a natural jump, which the horses all enjoy as much as the riders. You have to slow to a walk crossing the old viaduct, then another canter stretch looms ahead. To your right the land drops steeply away with a long drop towards the river Irwell. On your left, the embankment drops for a short distance to the East Lancs Railway line. When we ride on a Friday in summer we are sometimes lucky enough to have the steam train pass, heading from Rawtenstall to Ramsbottom. Because we're high up, we get a great view from an unusual angle, followed by that fantastic smell of hot water, oil and coal: mmmmm!



The newspaper of general interest is part of 'New Light on old bones', a research project exploring the social history context for natural history exhibits at the Rossendale Museum. More information can be found on the project blog: newlightmanchester.wordpress.com

READERS CORNER

How do you relate to nature? What shaped this relationship? Do you ever collect anything from nature? Why do you do this? If you would like to add something to a future edition of this paper please send your thoughts to kasper@traclitheatre.co.uk