

**A HISTORY OF THE
WOODLAND
PARK
MINIATURE
RAILWAY**

**A short history of a
15" gauge railway in Kent**

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***MINOR RAILWAY
MINI HISTORIES - M10***

<p>WOODLAND PARK MINIATURE RAILWAY 15" gauge. 1923 - 1926</p>

Introduction

Between 1923 and 1926 a 15" gauge railway ran through Cockham Wood along the north shore of the Medway estuary at Upnor in Kent. The Woodland Park Miniature Railway was operated by a steam locomotive - one of the "Albion" class 4-4-2s built by Albert Barnes and synonymous with the Rhyl Miniature Railway in North Wales. The railway at Upnor was part of a small amusement park built and managed by Albert Barnes, which was popular with the local population of the "Three Towns" - Rochester, Chatham & Gillingham. Sadly, the railway was not a success and only lasted a few years. Consequently, there are few records with only some contemporary newspaper reports and a few photographs to record its short existence.

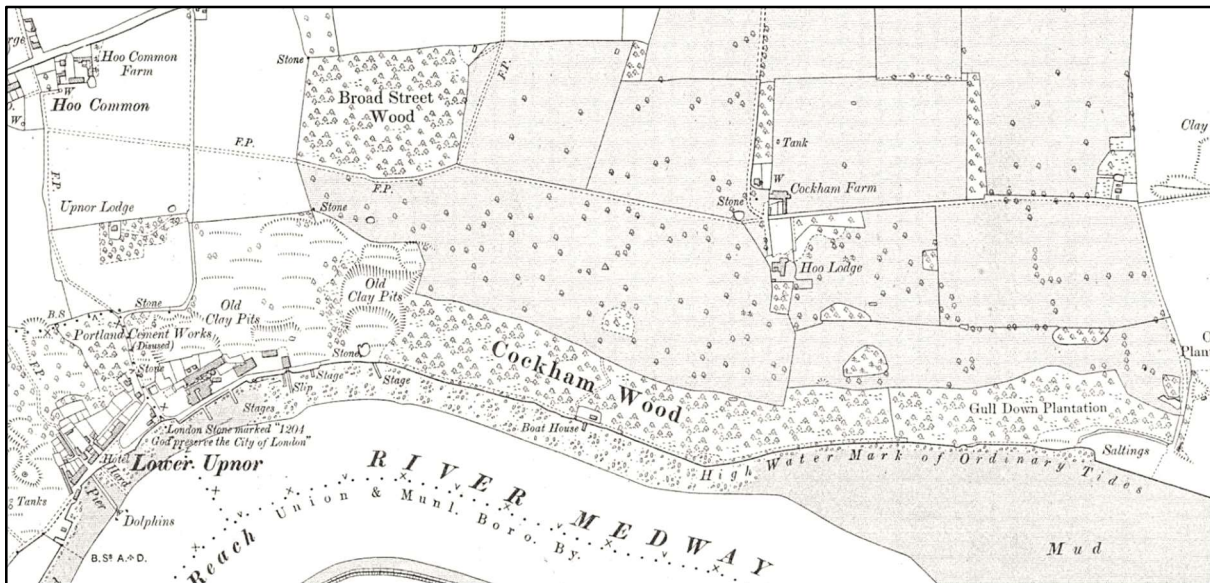
Upnor & Cockham Wood

Upnor, consisting of Upper Upnor and Lower Upnor, lies on the Medway estuary at the south western end of the Hoo Peninsula. Across the estuary and a mile or so upriver are the historic naval dockyards of Chatham. London is some 28 miles to the west, while nearby is Strood, and 3 miles upriver the meandering River Medway lies Rochester.

Due to its position on the strategic River Medway, Upnor has strong links to the navy and its defence of the nearby naval dockyard at Chatham, which had been established by 1570. Upnor Castle was built at Upper Upnor between 1559 & 1567, but was redeveloped around 1600, to protect the warships moored at Chatham. However, it failed to repel the Dutch fleet, which sailed past it in June 1667 to burn or capture the English fleet. It was retained as a gunpowder magazine and ammunition store until the end of the First World War and then continued in military use through the Second World War. It was opened to the public in 1945. Nearby, the 2ft 6in gauge Chattenden and Upnor Railway was built from 1885 to serve the military barracks and depot at Upnor, along with the associated munitions and training depots. It continued to be in use until the end of 1961.

Immediately to the east of Lower Upnor lies Cockham Wood, a ¾ mile long strip of woodland along the shore of the River Medway. Within the wood are the remains of Cockham Wood Fort. This was built in 1669 to defend Chatham Dockyard after the failure of Upnor Castle to repel the Dutch fleet in 1667. The fort was abandoned around 1818. Cockham Wood was part of the large estate of Hoo Lodge, which also included Cockham Farm. The estate was located between the Rochester - Hoo road and the River Medway. Hoo Lodge house was a two-storey early Victorian brick built house. By 1910 the estate was in the ownership of George Francis Armytage (*Sheerness Guardian* 29th October 1910) who also owned the nearby brickworks, just south of Hoo village. When he died in July 1921 (*The Scotsman* 11th July 1921) the estate was put up for sale. The *East Kent Gazette* of Saturday 22nd October 1921 had a notice of the sale by auction of the estate to be held on Tuesday 25th October in the Masonic Hall in Rochester at 5pm. Included were Hoo Lodge and 100 acres of park land, Cockham Farm and Cockham Wood, which comprised 44 acres. Also included were the brickworks and numerous other buildings and land. The whole property to be sold consisted of around 612 acres. Interestingly, as far as the future miniature railway was concerned, the advert noted that

Cockham Wood was "Within easy reach of Upnor Pier, and abutting an extensive length of hard beach along the River Medway, and possessing considerable value for the development as a riverside resort, with sites for villas, tea gardens, bathing establishments etc".



An extract of an Ordnance Survey 6" map, revised in 1906-1907 and published in 1909. Cockham Wood can be clearly seen on the north bank of the River Medway and east of Lower Upnor. Hoo Lodge and Cockham Farm are just right of the centre.

Part of the Clay Pit for the brickworks can just be seen far right.

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**IMPORTANT SALE OF
THE HOO LODGE ESTATE,**
COMPRISING :—

1.—The Early Victorian Residence, "HOO LODGE," surrounded by park-like pastures, with gardens and lodge entrance, together with "COCKHAM FARM," in all about 280 acres. With Possession on completion.

The foregoing will be first offered as a whole in One Lot, and if not Sold, then in Three separate Lots, viz. :—

a.—The Residence, "HOO LODGE," with entrance lodge, gardens, and grounds, and 100 acres of park-like pasture land, with right of way to the beach, affording excellent facilities for yachting and boating.—With Possession.

b.—"COCKHAM WOOD," Gull Down Plantation, and Yacht Cottage, in all 44s. 1r. 5p. Within easy reach of Upnor Pier, and abutting an extensive length of hard beach along the River Medway, and possessing considerable value for development as a riverside resort, with sites for villas, tea gardens, bathing establishments, etc.—With Possession.

c.—"COCKHAM FARM," with Bailiff's House, Agricultural Buildings, 3 Cottages, and various enclosures of park-like pasture, arable, and woodland, in all 135s. 1r. 37p.

Part of the advert for the sale of Hoo Lodge Estate on Tuesday 25th October from the *East Kent Gazette* of Saturday 22nd October 1921. The advert notes the possible development opportunity of the riverside at Cockham Wood, something the actual purchaser obviously took notice of!

The purchaser of (at least) Hoo Lodge and its 94 acres of park land, Cockham Farm, Cockham Wood and the brickworks was Walter St John Brice (1875-1948) (*Chatham News* Friday 26th November 1948). His older brother Solomon John Brice (1864-1946) also became closely involved with the estate. They became the main employers in the area and also had a large barge building business at Lower Upnor.

Albert Barnes

Kathryn Nedd, Albert Barnes's granddaughter, has researched and written an excellent book about his life and work. Titled *White Socks and a Walking Stick* (alluding to Albert's penchant for wearing white socks and carrying a walking stick) it is recommended for further information about "*One of Rhyl's Silent Forces*". Kathryn followed this up with the *History of Marine Lake & Ocean Beach*. The paragraphs below are based on these books.

Albert Barnes (1888-1972) is best known today for his six "Albion" class 4-4-2 locomotives, designed by Henry Greenly (1876-1947) and built in Barnes's Albion Works in Rhyl on the north coast of Wales. However, Albert Barnes was also a designer and builder of amusement park rides and machines, as well as a manager of the parks for their owner, Samuel Butler & Company Limited of Stanningley, Leeds. Butlers were a firm of iron & steel manufacturers, railway bridge and steam crane builders who became involved with the amusement park ride business.

Albert Barnes was born on 7th December 1888 in Stanningley, near Leeds in Yorkshire to a poor working class family. Albert attended evening classes and trained as a draughtsman, joining Butlers around 1910. At that time the company was run by Isaac Gaunt Butler (1878-1943) who had founded the company's interest and work in amusement park rides, mostly at that time Water Chutes. In 1910 Butlers were building a Water Chute at Marine Lake in Rhyl and Isaac Gaunt Butler formed Rhyl Amusements Limited, which was incorporated on 10th March 1910, to operate the Water Chute. Other amusements were added by June and the Water Chute opened to the public in August 1910. In 1911 Albert had been sent by Butlers to oversee the construction of their Water Chute in Luna Park, Heliopolis, Cairo in Egypt. Aged just 22, this must have been an incredible experience for the young Albert. He no doubt pleased his employers, as by December 1911 he had taken over as General Manager of Rhyl Amusements Limited and moved to North Wales - a position he held until his retirement in 1948. He married Rose Hannah Parkinson on 30th December 1911. The 15" gauge miniature railway, running around Marine Lake in Rhyl, had opened on 1st May 1911 and was acquired by Rhyl Amusements Limited in 1912.

Albert Barnes's workshop on Ffynnongroew Road in Rhyl, where he built and maintained the amusement park rides, was known as the Albion Works (Butlers had an Albion Ironworks back in Leeds) and Albert set up Albert Barnes & Company to run the workshop. This was a subsidiary company of Rhyl Amusements Limited, which itself was a subsidiary of Samuel Butler & Company Limited. It was in the Albion Works at Rhyl that Albert Barnes & Company built the six "Albion" class 4-4-2 locomotives - one of which was to run on the Woodland Park Miniature Railway at Upnor.

The World's Fair of Saturday 7th June 1924 stated that, apart from General Manager of Rhyl Amusements Limited, Albert Barnes was also Manager of Albert Barnes & Company, Amusement Devices Limited, Onchan Head on the Isle of Man and Woodland Pleasure Park at Upnor. From at least 1921 he was also running the Aberystwyth Pier Company, which included the Constitution Hill Cliff Railway in Aberystwyth. Aside from his amusement park work, Albert was a Councillor for Rhyl from 1922 to 1937, where he was variously Chairman of the Parks & Gardens Committee, Coronation Committee and the Council. He retired in 1948 and died in Rhyl on 1st January 1972.

Albert Barnes & Co.,
ALBION WORKS, RHYL.

Telegrams: "Barnes, Rhyl." 217 Rhyl, or out of working hours 104 Rhyl. Telephone:

Builders of every kind of Portable and Permanent Fair Ground Device.

We Build, Equip, and Supply all Accessories for:—

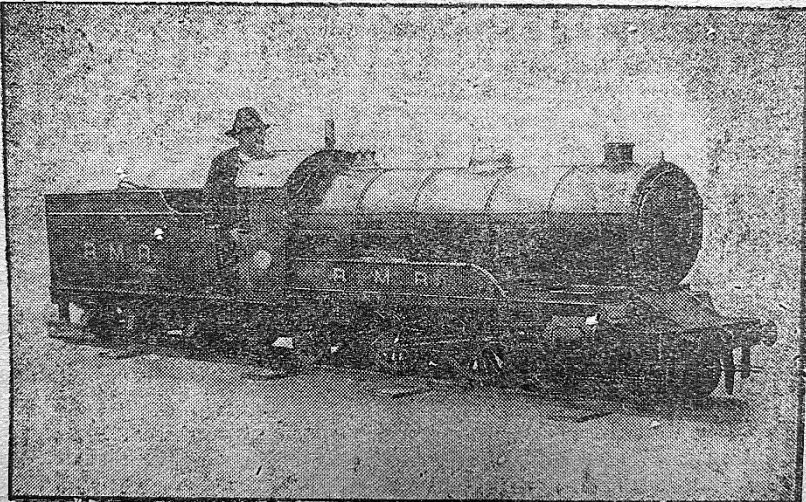
JUVENILE ROUNDABOUTS	GIGGLERS,
FIGURE EIGHT RAILWAYS,	MOUNTAIN GLIDES,
MINIATURE RAILWAYS,	CAKEWALKS,
WATER CHUTES,	ICE CREAM FLOATS,
RIVER GAVES,	GAMES AND STALLING,
	AND MECHANISMS.

GAMES DEPT.,
We are the Originators and Sole Patentees of the SEAPLANE STATION. The game that everyone tried to copy and failed. We have other winners for 1923.

Have You Seen the
CATCH THE FLY; THE DONKEYS' DERBY; THE SWANEE RIVER; ELECTRIC TORPEDOS; LOOP-IT; Etc.

An advert from *The World's Fair* of Saturday 27th January 1923 detailing the many different types of fairground ride Albert Barnes & Company could supply from their Albion Works - including, of course, miniature railways.

THE FINEST MODEL LOCOMOTIVES
and **ROLLING STOCK** are **BUILT** by



ALBERT BARNES & CO.,
ALBION WORKS, RHYL.
TOY RAILWAYS BUILT AND EQUIPPED COMPLETE.

This advert comes from *The World's Fair* of Saturday 24th February 1923, around the time Albert Barnes would have been negotiating with Walter St John Brice and Solomon John Brice for the provision of the 15" gauge miniature railway and other amusement rides in Woodland Park at Upnor.

Planning

There were three local newspapers published during the time of the railway's existence. These were: *Chatham, Rochester & Gillingham Observer*, *Rochester, Chatham & Gillingham Journal* and *Chatham, Rochester & Gillingham News*. To avoid tedious repetition, these have been shortened to *Observer*, *Journal* and *News* respectively.

As already explained above, Cockham Wood had been acquired in October 1921 by Walter St John Brice. The advert for the sale had described how the Wood, lying as it did alongside the banks of the River Medway, could be developed into "*a riverside resort, with sites for villas, tea gardens, bathing establishments etc*". The first we hear of plans for an amusement park and the miniature railway was in the *News* of Friday 9th February 1923 under the headline "*Pleasure Park on Medway. Great Scheme for Development to Begin Next Week*". In an expansive article the paper went on to state that "*Tea Gardens, a dancing pavilion, and a bathing pavilion*" would be "*erected at once and a miniature railway will be laid down*". The whole of Cockham Wood would be lit with electricity and "*£15,000 will be spent immediately*" with a further £50,000 to be spent later. If the "*public show appreciation of the scheme this summer*" it would "*evolve to almost undreamed of limits*". The report noted that "*Everything will be carried out in first-class style, and Upnor will become the Coney Island of North-East Kent*". The *News* explained that the gentlemen behind the scheme were Albert Barnes and land owners Walter St John Brice & Solomon John Brice. The Brices were to be responsible for the Tea Gardens, dancing and bathing pavilions, while Albert Barnes would provide the miniature railway, fairground amusements and rides. Negotiations between the parties "*were not completed until yesterday*". The *News* reporter had gleaned all this information from Mr T A Milner of Chatham, who was to be the manager of the new park.

However, it seems the *News* had been somewhat presumptuous with its article. The *Journal* of Wednesday 14th February 1923 reported that the Brices had no knowledge of the interview Mr Milner had given to the *News* and "*no-one were more surprised than they when they read the story in the News*". They also added that any agreement had not yet been signed! The report in the *News* had resulted in a large number of unemployed men inundating the Brices with applications to work on the park - especially given its prospective large size outlined by Mr Milner. The *Observer* of Friday 16th February 1923 noted the whole scheme was "*still very much in the air*". The *World's Fair* of Saturday 17th February 1923 had a brief note about the park, but without naming any of the individuals involved. However, it concluded by setting out where the public visiting the park were expected to come from. "*The scheme will enable thousands of people to be catered for, and it is hoped to attract the population of Chatham, Rochester, Gillingham, and Maidstone, and the outlying districts*". Although these were large towns, as we shall see access to Upnor was not very easy. Presumably, in due course agreement was reached between Albert Barnes and the Brices. However, what transpired was somewhat smaller than the grandiose plans outlined by the *News* on Friday 9th February 1923.

Taking the reports from the three newspapers we can start to understand the relationship of the main players in the proposed riverside pleasure park. The freehold of Cockham Wood, as has been described above, had been owned by Walter St John Brice since 1921 - although his brother Solomon John Brice was closely involved as well. They probably had the idea to develop the Wood and the river bank as a pleasure park, no doubt spurred on by the advert for the estate, which had noted its development opportunities. To do this they needed the help of an experienced person in the design, construction and operation of various amusements. It would appear that to find this individual the Brices turned to Mr T A Milner, who according to

the *Observer* was "an experienced amusement caterer" and in which case he would have known of Albert Barnes and his work. The *Journal* noted that Milner was "the medium by whom Messrs S J Brice and W St John Brice were introduced to the prospective tenant Mr Albert Barnes of Rhyl". The miniature railway almost certainly would have been Barnes's idea, given his management of the Rhyl Miniature Railway and the construction of miniature railway locomotives. If we believe the report in the *News*, Mr T A Milner was to be the manager of the park, but Albert Barnes seems to have been in overall charge. The *News* also stated that Albert Barnes was "convinced that Upnor contained great possibilities, and he is demonstrating the strength of his conviction by the amount of capital he is placing in the scheme". The above is confirmed by an article in the *Observer* for Friday 4th May 1923 as building of the park was underway. The paper noted that Albert Barnes held the "amusements lease from Messrs Brice of Hoo Manor, with the assistance of Mr J Sherratt, his capable manager, and Mr T A Milner of Chatham, manager to Messrs Brice".

What is not explained anywhere is whether Albert Barnes was working on his own on this venture or for his employers Samuel Butler & Company Limited. The latter is more likely - the scale of the work and money involved would suggest Butlers (via their Rhyl Amusements Limited) were behind the project. *The World's Fair* of Saturday 7th June 1924 stated Albert Barnes was the Manager. It is a little difficult to believe he was able to take time out from his duties at Rhyl to work on the Upnor project without his employers noticing!

Construction

By early May construction of the park and miniature railway had proceeded well enough for the *Observer* of Friday 4th May 1923 to report "Cockham woods are speedily being converted into a happy hunting ground for pleasure-seekers". However, this was a scaled down version of what had originally been reported in the *News* of 9th February - as the *Observer's* reporter noted that the work "did not yet show signs of serious development and very few men are at the moment employed on the work". The reporter had "walked over to Upnor this week" and "In the heart of the green woods and inside the new Upnor Station that has been erected there in connection with the scenic railway" he found "Mr Barnes, a pleasant and courteous gentleman". The reporter was first taken by Albert Barnes "for a walk along the lines which have already been laid for the scenic railway that stretches for nearly three quarters of a mile through a natural avenue of overhanging trees, through which the passengers will catch shy glimpses of delightful water-vistas and a perfect view of the incoming tide".

The reporter also noted that "two picturesque miniature stations are being erected at each end of the line, which runs along the foot of the wood". Apart from the railway the reporter observed "In the open space at the centre of the line there would be a mountain slide and a host of other amusements and various stalls which Mr Barnes intends to lease out to local traders only". At the "far end of the railway" a dancing saloon and adjoining cafe were being erected. Also there Mr Brice "intends to add a modern bathing saloon". A portion of the wood would be "brilliantly illuminated by electric light and the plant for this purpose was being actually landed from a barge" when the reporter was on the beach. The article concluded by adding "the whole of effects of the fair are actually made on the Rhyl premises of Messrs Albert Barnes & Co". Presumably, the locomotive and coaches had yet to arrive, as the reporter made no mention of them.

Similarly, the *News* sent a reporter to Upnor - the Friday 4th May 1923 edition noting he had "*journeyed across to Upnor this week*" where he also had a chat with Albert Barnes a "*young man of marked ability*" (he was then aged 32). The *News* stated the miniature railway "*nearly a mile long - had been laid down, and the finishing touches are now being applied to the station*". The paper ended by stating the park would open on Saturday 19th May 1923.

Opening

Upnor was relatively remote and to reach the park intending visitors from the surrounding towns had two main modes of transport available to them: the steamers and motor boats of the New Medway Steam Packet Company from Chatham direct to Upnor, or the tramcars of the 3ft 6in gauge Chatham & District Light Railways Company. The trams of the latter company served Rochester, Chatham & Gillingham. However, their line to Frindsbury terminated at the Rochester Council boundary - some 1¾ miles distant from the new park and railway.

As stated in the *News* the park and railway duly opened on Saturday 19th May 1923 - the Saturday immediately prior to Whitsun Monday. All three of the local newspapers carried reports in their editions of the following week. The *Observer* of Friday 25th May 1923 noted that on Whitsun Bank Holiday Monday 21st May, Upnor "*presented the appearance of a holiday resort of considerable importance owing to the enterprise of Messrs Brice and A Barnes*". It went on to point out that Upnor normally saw large crowds of visitors on Bank Holidays "*but probably there were never more people there than were to be seen last Monday*". Long queues waited for the steamers and motor boats at Sun Pier in Chatham, while "*fully laden*" tram cars ran every few minutes to Frindsbury, from where "*there was a constant stream of motor vehicles of all descriptions running to Upnor*". The footpath across the fields from Frindsbury was "*thronged with pedestrians all day*" and the river front at Upnor was so crowded it was "*well-nigh impassable for several hours*". No doubt the majority of these day trippers would have availed themselves of a ride on the new railway, the *Observer* reporting "*The tiny engine, with its three carriages, ran with a full load of joyous passengers throughout the day*". In its report the *Journal* estimated there were 20,000 people at Upnor on the Whitsun Monday and the "*Pleasure Park had a thoroughly successful send-off*". It concluded by adding work on improving the park was still ongoing and the "*electric lighting of the woods will soon be completed*".

EVERYBODY SHOULD VISIT
THE WOODLAND
PLEASURE PARK, UPNOR,
AT WHITSUNTIDE

All the Latest Amusement Devices. Miniature Railway, Mountain Glide, The Great Dash, Swanee River, Climbing Monkeys, Roundabouts, Naval Seaplane, Donkey Derby, and a host of Sports and Pastimes.

DANCING in the PAVILION. Ladies' and Gent's **BATHING KIOSK.**
Tea Houses and Picnic Groves. **GARVEY'S ORCHESTRA.**

The Woodland Pleasure Park will be Electrically Illuminated.
There is no Park—North, South, East or West—that has the same advantages
in Point of Location and Natural Beauty.

OPEN ALL DAY from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. ADMISSION FREE.

An advert from the *Observer* of Friday 11th May 1923 announcing the forthcoming opening of the park and listing the various attractions on offer including the miniature railway. Note that admission was free and the long opening hours of 10am to 10pm.

An advert from the *Observer* of Friday 11th May 1923 detailing the services of the New Medway Steam Packet Company Limited on Whitsun Monday, allowing the residents of Strood and Chatham to visit Upnor.

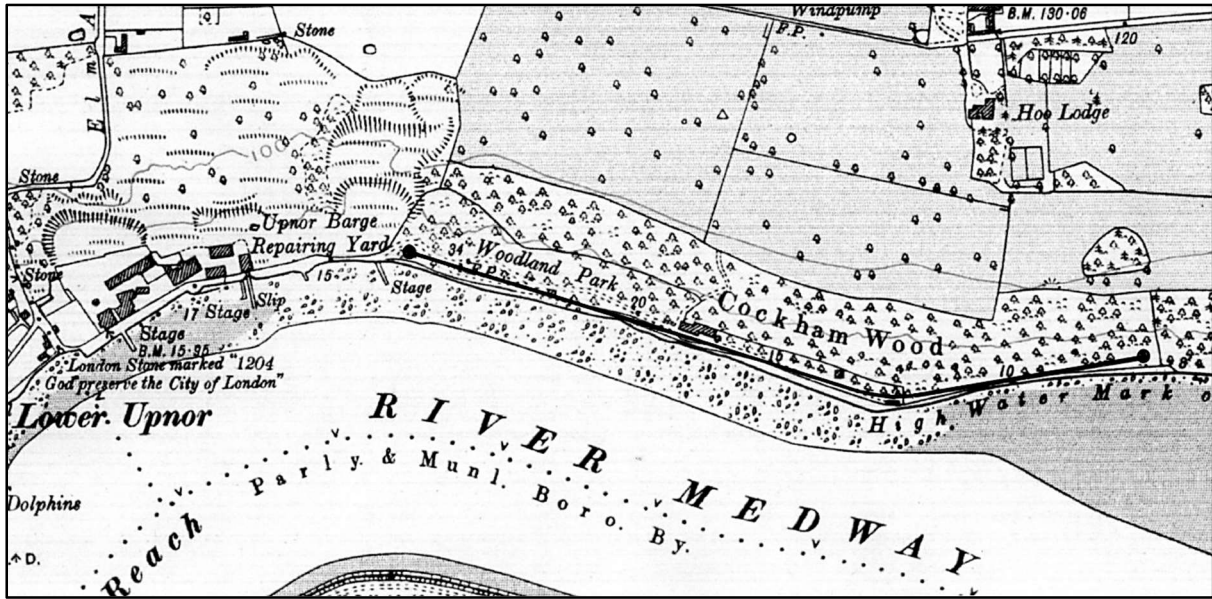
BANK HOLIDAY, MAY 21st, 1923.
UPNOR.
REDUCTION OF FARES.
Steamer leaves Strood 1.15 p.m., Chatham 2 p.m. (weather and other circumstances permitting) for UPNOR ONLY. Returning from Upnor at 7.45 p.m., for CHATHAM ONLY. Return Fare 5d, single fare 3d. Children under 12, 3d. return, 2d. single.
The Motor Boats "Princess Mary," "City Belle" and "Medway" will run at frequent intervals between Chatham and Upnor.
UPNOR.
REDUCTION OF FARES.
On and after Saturday, May 19th, 1923, until further notice, the new motor passenger launches "Princess Mary," "City Belle," or "Medway" leave Chatham Pier for Upnor (weather and other circumstances permitting). Leaving Chatham for Upnor 9.30 a.m., and every 45 minutes after until 6.30 p.m. Last boat from Upnor to Chatham at 7.15 p.m.
Chatham and Upnor 3d. single, 5d. return. Children under 12 years of age 2d. single, 3d. return.
This Company's Motor Launches are the only Boats landing Passengers at Upnor Pier.
Telephone No. 353 Chatham. Office: 220, High Street, Rochester.
S. J. SHIPPICK, Managing Director.
May, 1923.

Description of Railway

The new railway was 15" gauge and probably around 1,000 yards in length, but as it missed ever being recorded on an Ordnance Survey map, it is difficult to judge accurately. The various newspaper reports give lengths of $\frac{3}{4}$ mile and 1 mile, which were probably a little over stated. The railway was an end-to-end layout, running between two terminal stations, each with run-round loops. The Upnor (western) end station was probably located at around TQ767414 near the park entrance, with the eastern end station at around TQ775712. (Note these grid references are purely conjectural and based on various descriptions of the railway in contemporary newspaper reports). There does not appear to have been a turntable, so trains ran in one direction tender first. The few photographs that exist of the railway show that trains worked chimney first towards the eastern end station. It is not known whether a shed for the locomotive and the coaches was erected - none of the newspaper reports mention a tunnel, which could have doubled as a shed.

The line ran through the length of Cockham Wood and not far from the banks of the River Medway - it must have been a scenic journey. Near the station at the eastern end of the railway was a cafe and a dancing saloon. In a clearing in the woods at the middle of the railway there were a number of rides and amusements. These were described in the *Journal* as including a Slide, Great Dash, Naval Seaplanes, Donkey Derby and Climbing Monkeys. Admission to the park was free, but no doubt a fare was charged to travel on the railway.

According to an article (about the Rhyl Miniature Railway) in the April 2015 issue of *Railway Bylines* the "track consisted of flat bottom rail spiked to wooden sleepers and was laid on soft ground. The ground sank under pressure from the trains and in the worst places was underpinned with stones". (The source of this information is quoted as being from respected miniature railway researchers Harold D Bowtell [not Howard as stated in the article] and Arthur G Wells).



The route of the railway and its stations added to an Ordnance Survey 6in map, revised in 1931 and published c1939. Note this is purely conjectural based on the various reports in the *Observer*, *Journal & News*. The railway may have been somewhat shorter than shown here.
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Locomotive & Coaches

To operate the new railway Albert Barnes supplied one of his 4-4-2 locomotives built at the Albion Works in Rhyl, along with three coaches. On the Rhyl Miniature Railway, Albert Barnes found the Bassett-Lowke "Little Giants" under powered for the hard work expected of them and he asked Henry Greenly (1876-1947) to design a new larger locomotive. Work was delayed by the First World War, but was started in 1919. In all six 4-4-2 locomotives were constructed at the Albion Works - four for use at Rhyl and two for use elsewhere. Known as the "Albion" class they were 30% more powerful than the "Little Giants" and had a 6-wheel tender. All were named after the children of Isaac Gaunt Butler. The first locomotive, works No.101 and named "Joan", was at work on the Rhyl Miniature Railway by August 1920.

For the Woodland Park Miniature Railway, Albert Barnes deployed the second "Albion" class 4-4-2 locomotive, named "Michael" (what was by elimination works No.102, although it never carried a works plate at Woodland Park). "Michael" was completed in 1921 and was no doubt tested, and possibly used, on the Rhyl Miniature Railway before being dispatched to Upnor. The *Observer* of Friday 4th May 1923 had a picture of the locomotive taken at Rhyl and lettered "W.P.M.R." on the splashers and tender - seemingly in steam. The locomotive was named after Robert Michael Butler (1920-1956) the youngest son of Isaac Gaunt Butler. At Upnor, the locomotive would have still been in the ownership of Rhyl Amusements Limited. (To add a little confusion, another "Albion" class 4-4-2, works No.105 completed in 1928, was also named "Michael" - presumably because by that time the earlier eponymous locomotive was no longer in the ownership of the Butler family or Rhyl Amusements Limited).

Rolling stock was three open bogie coaches, each with five seats with reversible backs, tram style. The railway was an end-to-end run, so with the reversible seats passengers could always face the direction of travel if they wished. The outer ends of the coaches at the front and rear of the train were fitted with smoke screens. Each coach was able to carry about 10 adults or perhaps up to 15 children. The coaches were no doubt built at the Albion Works in Rhyl - the frames and bogies having a clear likeness to those on the Rhyl Miniature Railway, but with different bodies.

Ongoing Operation

After opening the local newspapers went very quiet on the new amusement park & railway. The only further mention of the railway comes in an article in the *Observer* of Friday 13th July 1923. On Friday 6th July a large party of 1,000 of the "*poorest children*" of Rochester, Chatham & Gillingham, together with 50 adult helpers, took a day trip to Upnor courtesy of Pearson's Fresh Air Fund (this was founded in 1892 by Sir Arthur Pearson [1866-1921] to provide day trips to the countryside for poor children from large towns and cities). Arriving at Upnor by steamer, the children were taken to a meadow above Cockham Wood kindly lent for the day by Walter St John Brice. There the children were given two "*substantial meals*" between which they were free to enjoy the meadow, woods and the amusement park in "*the way they thought best*". Many of the children "*took advantage of the attractions provided in Funland - the miniature railway, roundabouts, climbing monkeys etc*". After an enjoyable day it was no doubt tired, but happy, children and adults who boarded the steamer for their trip home. The trip was repeated in the July of 1924 and 1925.

An advert in the *Observer* of Friday 30th May 1924 stated the Tea Gardens would reopen for the season on Saturday 31st May, while an advert in the same paper of Friday 6th June advised the amusements (no doubt including the railway) would reopen on Whitsun Saturday, 7th June "*with many new attractions*". The amusement park, and presumably the miniature railway, seem to have generally opened for the season on Whitsun Saturday and probably closed in September. Surprisingly, in relation to the present day, the park was open every day during the season from 10am to 10pm. But at that time, before the days of television and the computer, other entertainment choices were more limited.

WOODLAND PARK, UPNOR.

OPEN DAILY FROM 10 A.M. TO 10 P.M.

ALL THE LATEST Novelty Rides, Games & Side-Shows.

Miniature Railway running through the Grounds.

REFRESHMENTS AT THE PAVILION CAFE.

A regular hourly Motor Boat Service has this year been arranged between Sun Pier' Chatham, and the Park. Buses leave Frindsbury Car Terminus at frequent intervals for Upnor.

An Ideal Spot to Spend a Happy Day amid Picnic Groves and Beautiful Woodland Scenery.

An advert from the *Observer* of Friday 19th June 1925 extolling the attractions and scenery at Woodland Park. Note the transport arrangements of hourly motor boats from Chatham and frequent bus service from the tram terminus at Frindsbury.

Closure & Afterwards

Despite knowing a reasonable amount about the conception and opening of Woodland Park and its miniature railway, we know little of their demise. The railway seems to have closed during, or at the end of, the 1926 season leaving just the Tea Gardens and some of the amusements. Albert Barnes probably ceased to have an interest when the railway was closed and probably removed or sold his amusements. We know the track was still in situ in December 1925 as it is mentioned in a report from the *Observer* of Friday 11th December 1925 about the Frindsbury Ladies' Hockey Club paper chase (!). The Ladies being chased on Saturday 5th December "*over the snow-crusted bridge and paths and along the miniature railway lines*".

The last mention we have of the railway in the local papers comes in the *Observer* of Friday 9th April 1926 reporting on the Easter holiday - Easter Sunday was 4th April. The paper reported the weather had been excellent with "*June like*" temperatures. It went on to say that "*thousands*" had visited Upnor on Easter Monday and one of the main attractions was the "*spacious pleasure gardens, where the youth of the Towns [Rochester, Chatham & Gillingham] disports itself either on the scenic railway, with its thrills, or on donkeys, or - if throwing discretion to the winds - the vicissitudes of the helter-skelter*". (Note the *Observer* frequently referred to the miniature railway as the scenic railway in its reports). Assuming the *Observer* reporter had visited Upnor that Easter and was not working from memory, the railway was still active at that time.

After Easter 1926 there is no further mention of the railway and there were no adverts for the amusement park or Tea Gardens in the *Observer* for the 1926 season. An advert in the *News* of Friday 4th June 1926 only mentions the Tea Gardens, with no reference to any amusements or railway. However, the railway was included in a list of "*passenger-carrying miniature railways in this country*" in the *Model Railway News* for September 1926.

The entire railway, including "Michael", was acquired (probably over the winter 1926/1927) by George Valentine Tonner (1884-1958) who had taken over as licensee of the Saracen's Head Inn at Warburton (then in Cheshire) in April 1926 (*The World's Fair* 18th December 1926). George Tonner was described in the *Blackpool Times* of Friday 9th June 1933 as being an amusement caterer, and one time tobacco dealer, jockey, laundry manager and soldier. The Saracen's Head Inn is located at SJ706893 on Paddock Lane at Warburton, between Lymm and Partington. An historic coaching inn, possibly going back to medieval times, it had some 15 acres of grounds to its rear that by 1910 contained a bowling green and a lake with a small island. By June 1920 there were a number of amusements, including swings, a helter-skelter and boating on the lake (*Huddersfield Daily Examiner* Wednesday 23rd June 1920). An advert in the *Liverpool Echo* for Thursday 17th June 1926 mentions the amusements, but makes no reference to a miniature railway. Presumably, George Tonner looked to add a miniature railway to the amusement offering at the Saracen's Head Inn and the first reference to a railway comes in an advert in the *Liverpool Daily Post* of Monday 13th June 1927. The railway probably opened that spring, the advert listed the other amusements as bowling green, helter-skelter, dodgems and a ballroom.

The railway was described in the *Heywood Society Journal* No.85 (Autumn 2019) based on the memories of Gordon Limb, who drove on the line and drew a plan of the Inn and railway. The line was laid out behind the Saracen's Head Inn and consisted of a circuit described by Gordon Limb as 1 mile in length, but probably closer to 500 yards. George Tonner renamed the locomotive from "Michael" to "George V Jnr" after his son (and a nod to the then King).

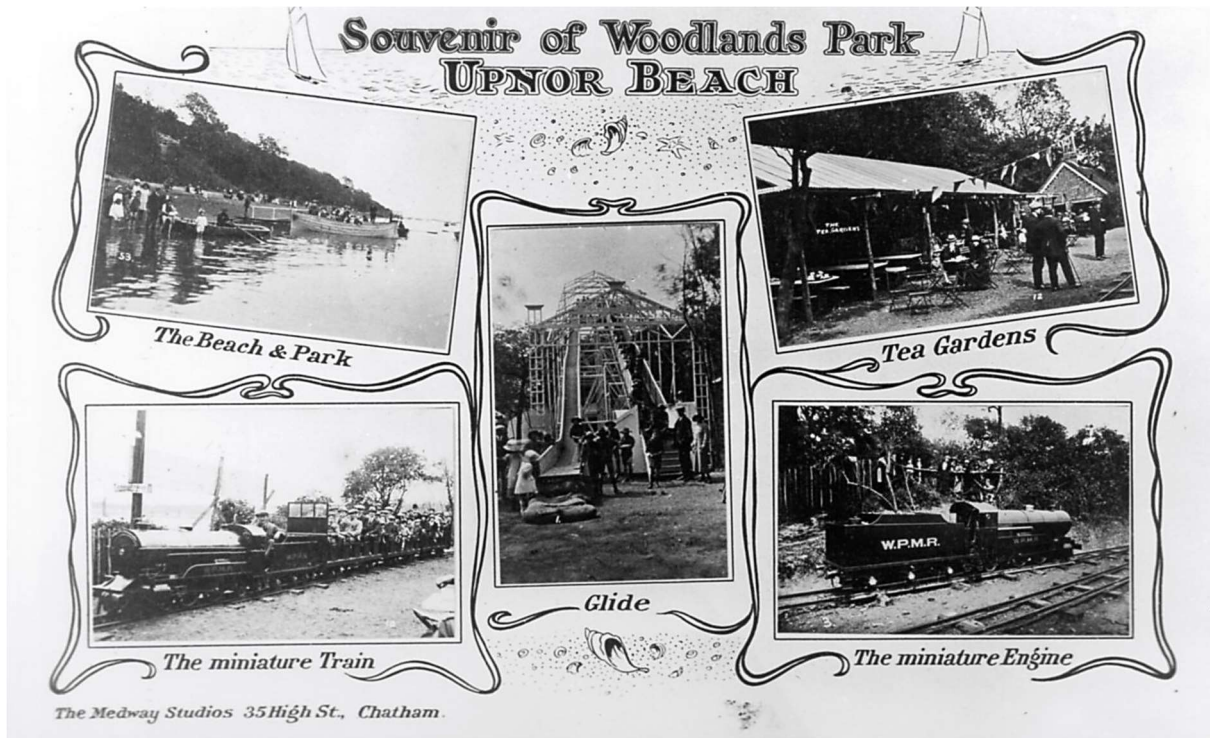
The railway didn't last long at the Saracen's Head Inn - according to Gordon Limb later in 1927 a "*valuable horse broke its fetlock crossing the track*" so the complete railway was sold to the Belle Vue Amusement Park and Zoo at Manchester. There it was laid down as an end-to-end layout of 250 yards and opened on Whitsun Monday, 28th May 1928. The locomotive was renamed "Railway Queen" and by 1980 it had made its way back to the Rhyl Miniature Railway, where it still runs today as "Railway Queen".

Back at Woodland Park in Upnor, the railway had only run for at least the three summer seasons of 1923 to 1925, and also probably that of 1926. It is not known for certain why the railway was so short-lived, but the amusement park never developed in the grand manner originally described by the *News* of Friday 9th February 1923, which postulated that Upnor would "*become the Coney Island of North-East Kent*". The *Observer* of Friday 4th May 1923 reported that further development (beyond that which opened on Saturday 19th May) depended "*largely on how far the project 'takes on'*" - ie how many people visited.

The majority of visitors to the amusement park would have been people from the local "Three Towns" - Chatham, Rochester & Gillingham - this was not a holiday area such as Rhyl. Upnor was rather remote and not the easiest place to reach. In the Friday 4th May 1923 article the *Observer* stated Albert Barnes had "*admitted that Upnor presented some difficulty in the matter of public transport, but hoped to secure the co-operation of motor bus companies*". Those local people visiting would have had to reach Upnor by river using steamers and motor boats of the New Medway Steam Packet Company from Chatham, or via tramcars of the Chatham & District Light Railways Company to Frindsbury some 1¾ miles distant. All this would have proved a deterrent to visiting the park and riding on its miniature railway.

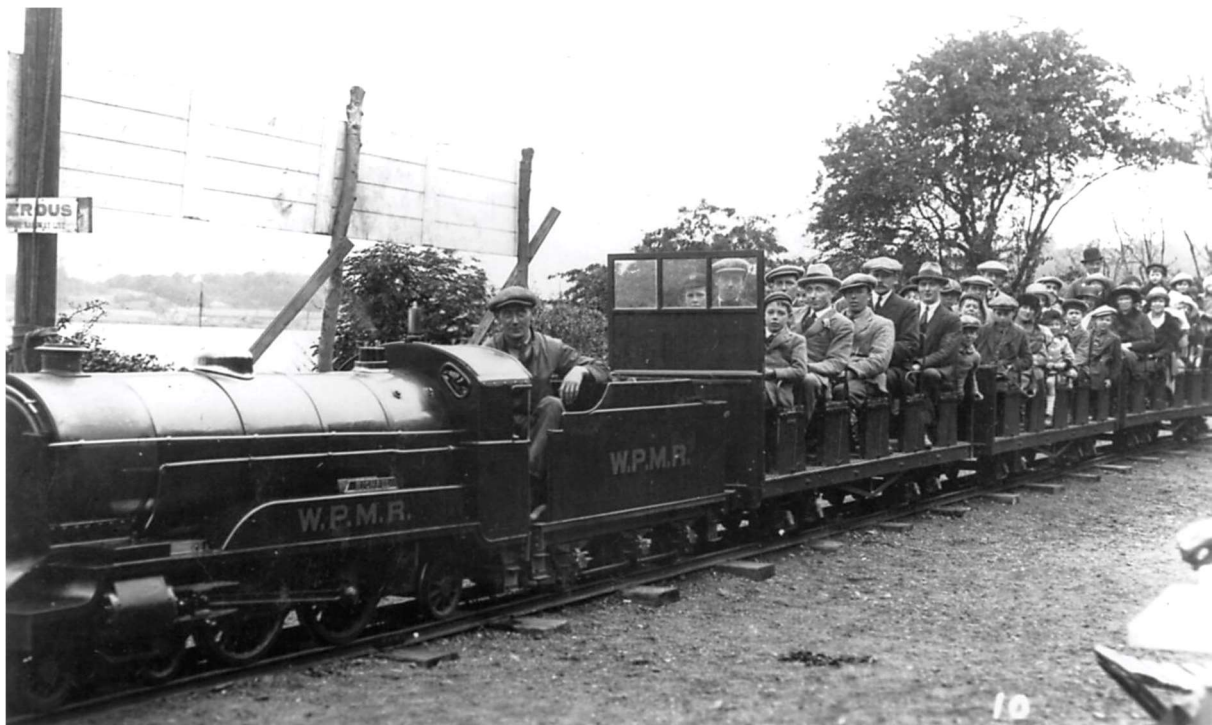
Another reason for the railway's closure was suggested in the article in *Railway Bylines* (April 2015) already quoted above. Here it is stated that track "*was laid on soft ground. The ground sank under pressure from the trains and in the worst places was underpinned with stones. This ongoing situation led to the railway's early demise*". This information had been gleaned from railway researchers Harold D Bowtell and Arthur G Wells.

Woodland Park and the Tea Gardens, along with a small amusement park, kept going until the Second World War. The lease of Tea Gardens was taken over by John Travers Hosgood in June 1929, but the amusements were operated by someone else. Various known during the 1930s as Upnor Beach or The Medway Lido, Woodland Park closed at the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939. The contents of the tea room were put up for sale in August 1940. However, during the 1930s it was still a very popular destination for the local population of Chatham, Rochester & Gillingham. The *News* of Friday 21st May 1948 published a letter from a Mr H C Sweetman of Frindsbury who lamented "*Before the war many hundreds of our townfolk spent a pleasant afternoon on the beach under Cockham Wood, but now a fence and gate and also a quantity of barbed wire blocks the way through the wood*". Today, 100 years since the railway last ran, the England Coast Path and Saxon Shore Way long distance paths pass through along the shore line of the River Medway below Cockham Wood.



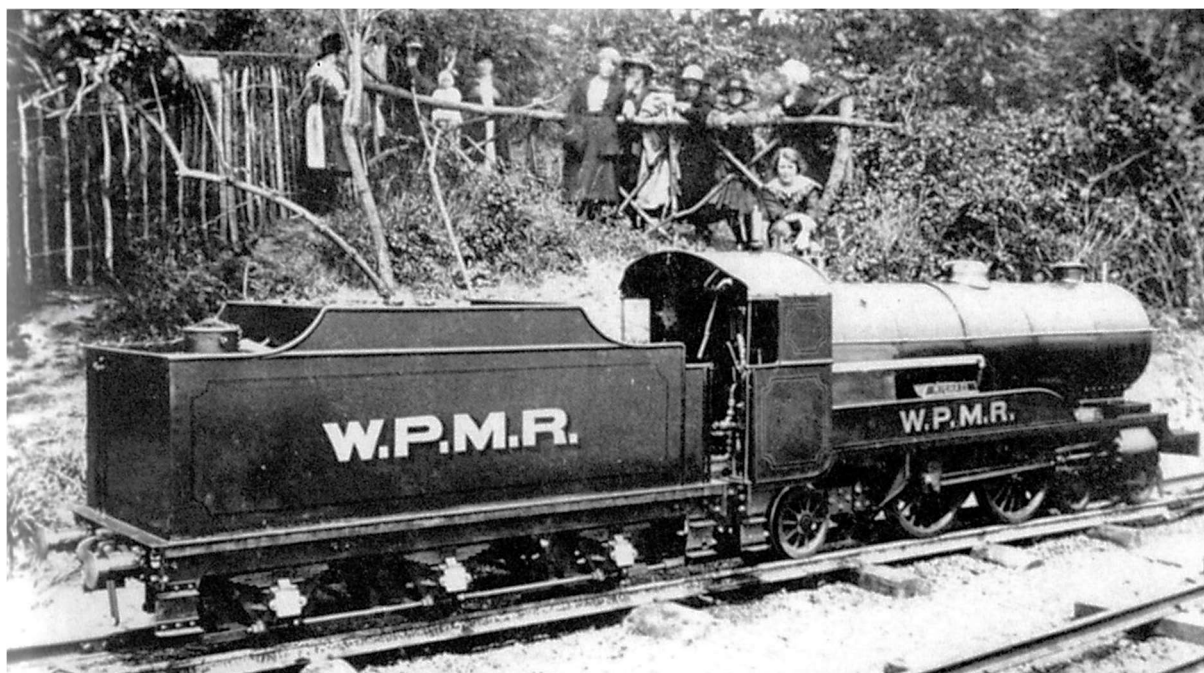
A composition of a number of scenes of the park and railway. Note in the top right view of the Tea Gardens, the track of the railway can just be seen bottom right. The two views of the railway were issued as separate postcards and are reproduced below.

(Postcard)



A rather unfortunately cropped view sees "Michael" heading east past the Tea Gardens with a well-loaded train of passengers sporting the typical headgear of the 1920s. A table and chairs of the Tea Gardens are just visible bottom right. Note the River Medway behind the locomotive and what was probably an advertising board facing the river.

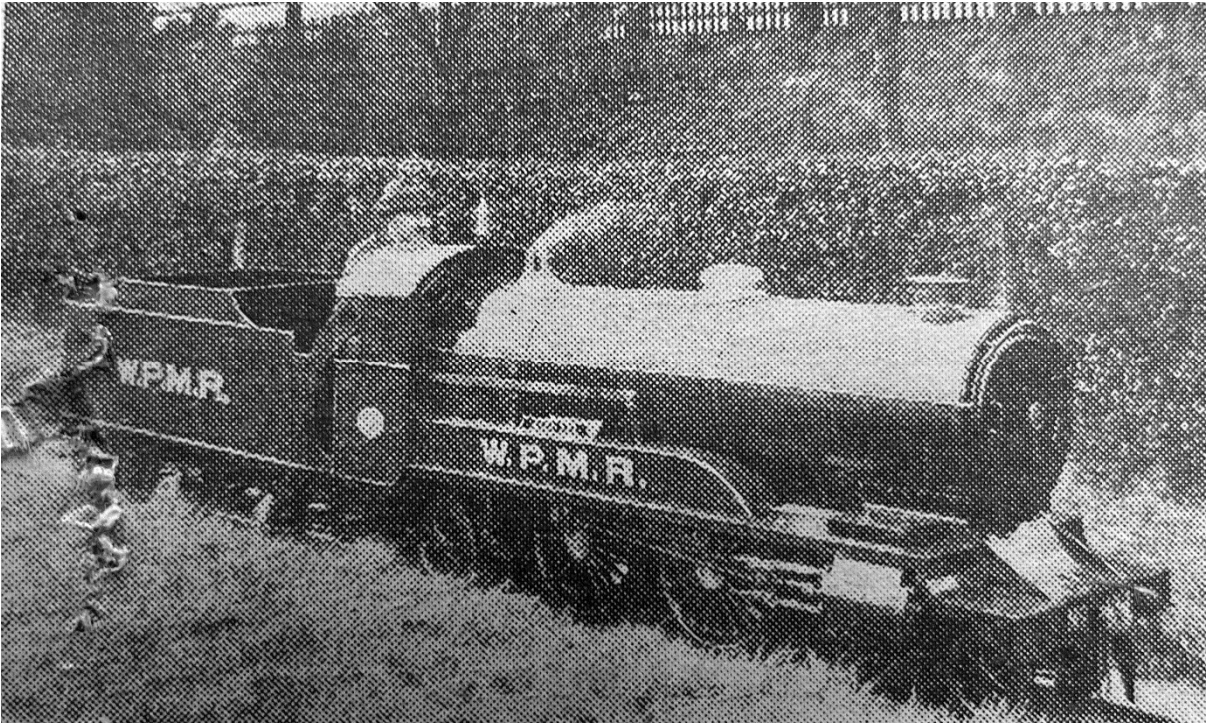
(Postcard)



"Michael" stands in the run-round loop at the eastern end station, while a group of ladies and girls look on. Perhaps the gentlemen and boys were about to enjoy a ride on the railway?
The Barnes "Albion" class 4-4-2 locomotive looks very smart with its W.P.M.R. lettering.
(Postcard)



"Michael" stands at the eastern end station ready to depart tender-first back to the (western) Upnor end. Note the smoke screens at the front and rear of the three coach train. The wide River Medway is clearly visible to the right centre. A ride on the railway would have afforded good views of the river. The two ladies to the far right are dressed in the typical attire of the 1920s, while passengers on the train sport a number of different hat styles.
(Postcard)



A poor and damaged photograph, but interesting none the less. It shows what is presumably "Michael" (the nameplate cannot be read) on the Rhyl Miniature Railway prior to delivery to Woodland Park. Interestingly, the locomotive appears to have a works plate on the cab side, which was not present at Woodland Park - see upper photograph on page 14.

(Observer. 04/05/23)



On Whitsun Bank Holiday Monday, 21st May 1923 a very full train of three coaches waits departure from the eastern end station. The smokebox of "Michael" is just visible.

Perhaps the gentleman on the ground by the train is collecting tickets?

(Observer. 25/05/23)



After the railway closed the Tea Gardens were retained and are seen here in this postcard view probably dating from the early 1930s. The photograph at the bottom of page 13 was taken close to here. The Tea Gardens closed at the outbreak of the Second World War.

(Postcard)



Looking east, in the opposite direction to the view above, we can see to the right a ship on the River Medway. The two school boys, in their caps and short trousers, are walking on what was probably the trackbed of the railway. Note the third boy by the fence.

(Postcard)

Summary

Opened: Saturday 19th May 1923

Closed: 1926

Layout & length: End-to-end, 1,000 yards (estimate)

Locomotive (15" gauge)

Michael	4-4-2	Albert Barnes & Company 102	1921	Albion class	1
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1 From: new, Rhyl Miniature Railway 5/1923
To: Saracen's Head Inn, Warburton after 4/1926, by 6/1927

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Acknowledgements

Rod Bryant, Philip Devonport, Jonathan James, James Nutty, Simon Townsend
British Library (Newspapers)
National Library of Scotland (Ordnance Survey maps)

A HISTORY OF THE WOODLAND PARK MINIATURE RAILWAY

A short history of a 15" gauge railway in Kent

MINOR RAILWAY MINI HISTORIES - M10

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