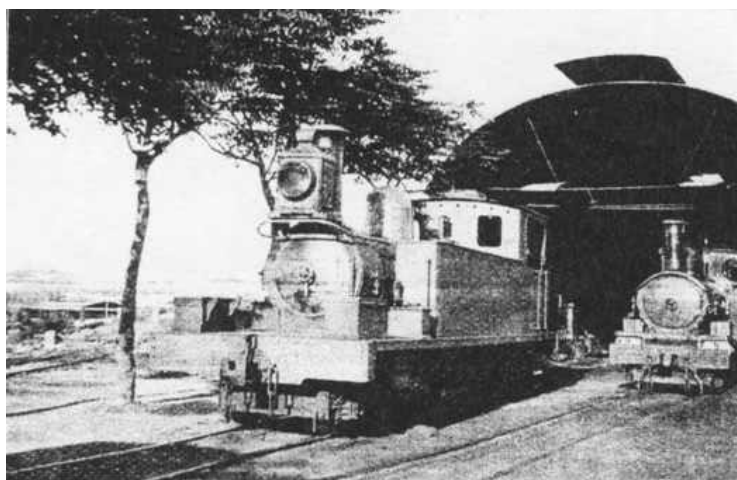


The Malta Railway

By F S W The Railway Magazine March 1912

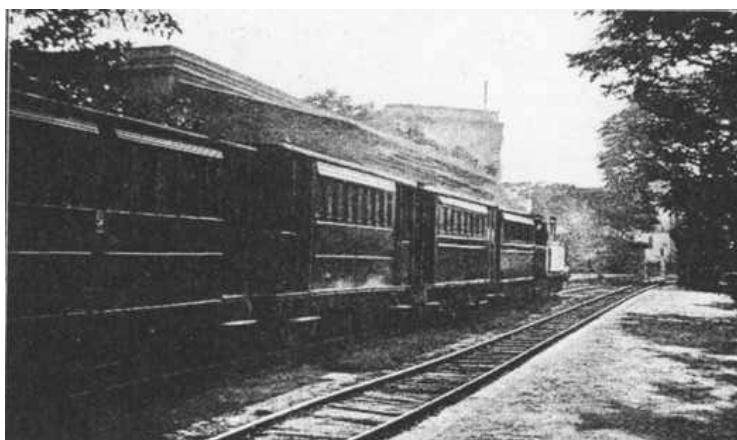


2-6-4 Tank Engine No 5 outside the Engine Shed

This little railway-for it is only $7\frac{1}{2}$ miles long-was built to provide communication between Valetta, the capital and seaport of Malta, and Citta Vecchia, or Notabile, the old capital, which is situated in the interior of the island, at a height of five or six hundred feet above the sea. The line serves also the intervening villages of Hamrun, Birchircara and Attard, and near the latter station is the San Antonio Palace, lately the residence of H.R.H. the Duke of-Connaught, and also the San Antonio Gardens, which are a delightful change to the everlasting bare stone walls, villages, and treeless fields found almost everywhere else.

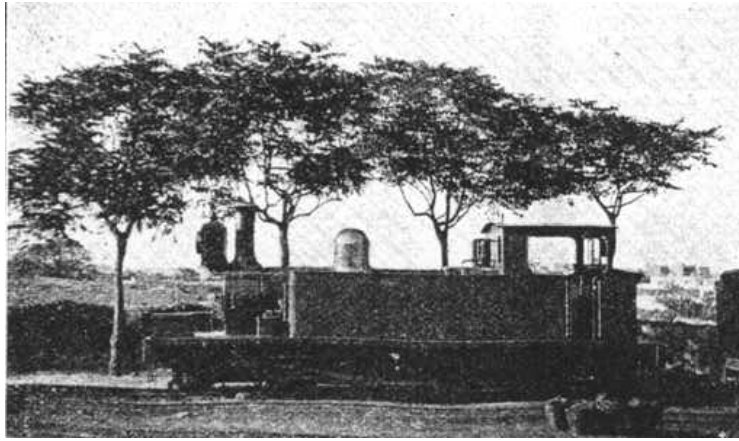
The line was opened on March 1st, 1883, by a private company; but the Government bought it about the year 1891 for a comparatively small sum, the company having failed to make the line pay. Government were, however, quite successful, and began to make some money -in spite of the fact that there is no goods traffic- until tramways were introduced into the island. These caused serious competition, as they run about half the total distance (as far as Birchircara), tapping exactly the same country as the railway; and now in spite of great economy in working, the line does not pay its way. Every effort is made to save money, old rails being used for buildings, and old material, useless for the purpose for which it was originally designed, being employed in some other way. Even the dust from the coal is collected, and turned into briquettes by a machine made partly from unserviceable parts of old locomotives.

Starting from, an underground station near Porta Reale Valetta, the line crosses the old ditch, and enters a long tunnel to beyond Floriana, the immediate suburb of Valetta. Floriana station is also in the tunnel, but where the old fortifications come to an end, the line emerges into the open air, and soon reaches Hamrun. Here are the workshops and running shed. In the shops are carried out all the minor repairs necessary, there being a fair-sized erecting shop, machine and smiths' shop, carpenters' shop, and an electrical room which is also used by the technical students at the local college. There is, too, a small foundry, which turns out a variety of articles, ranging from a brake-block to a lamp post. Besides railway work, a good deal of other labour is performed for the civil Government in these shops, and at the Coronation festivities last year all the decorations in the main streets, electric lighting (exclusive of power) were arranged by the Railway Manager.



Engine No 9 and the train at Hamrun Station

After Hamrun, Birchircara and Attard are passed, the line ascends the whole way, with specially steep Gradients in the last section from Attard to Notabile. The town of Notabile is strikingly situated on a hill, the railway station being short of the town and just below it. There is, however, an extension of about half a mile to the Museum station (built in 1900), which involves a tunnel under the town. During the journey the line is by no means straight or level. On the contrary, the curves are sharp and the gradients steep, the sharpest curve being one of 10 chains radius, and the steepest gradient 1 in 40. The gauge of the line is one metre, and the present rails are 42 lbs. to the yard, which are, however, being replaced by 60 lb. rails.

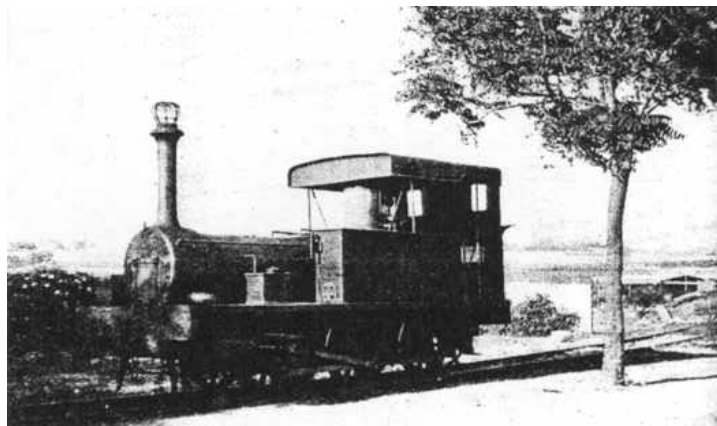


2-6-4 Tank Engine No 5

There are about 14 trains making the entire journey every day (except Sundays, when there are fewer), and about 12 more doing a portion of it (e.g., to Hamrun or Birchirca only), while a certain number are run at a cheap rate for workmen. The quickest train from Valletta to Notabile takes 30 min. in either direction, stopping at all the principal stations. Special trains have, however, done the distance (non-stopping) in a quarter of an hour (ie., 30 miles per hour). The trains are usually very light, five to eight (5 ton) carriages being the normal load. Rolling stock consists of 10 engines and 33 carriages.

The engines are all tank engines, and are divided into three classes :

- (1) Nos. 1 to 4. Sixwheeled coupled (0-6-0), built by Messrs. Manning, Wardle and Co., Leeds, in 1882, purchased by the old company, taken over by the Government, and still in daily use. They have cylinders 13 in. by 19 in., driving wheels 3 ft. in diameter ; approximate weight 22 tons.
- (2) Nos. 5 and 6. Originally 2-6-2 engines, built by Messrs. Manning, Wardle & Co., in 1891, to the order of the Government on taking over the line. They are much the heaviest engines in Malta, and weigh, roughly, 41 tons. They were unsatisfactory, being too heavy for the line and also having too rigid a wheelbase. They were therefore altered on the recommendation of Mr. Buhagiar, the manager, the trailing axle being replaced by a four wheeled bogie. They have cylinders 15 in. by 20 in., and 3 ft. driving wheels.
- (3) Nos. 7 to 10 (2-6-4) built by Messrs. Beyer, Peacock & Co., Ltd., of Manchester, in 1895. The experience of Nos. 5 and 6 decided on this design, which is practically a smaller edition of the rebuilt 5 and 6. These are the most satisfactory of the three classes at present in use. They have cylinders 14 1/2 in. by 20 in., driving wheel 3 ft. 3 in., carrying wheels 2ft., boilers test to 160 lbs., working pressure 100 lbs. to 120 lbs., carry 2 tons of coal and 1,000 gallons of water; average weight 35 tons.



Six-coupled Tank Engine No 2

The carriages are all four wheelers, with an entrance at each end and seats the length of the carriage (as in a bus). All classes are of the same general pattern, the first-class having cushions and being generally cleaner. There are in the first-class, two seats at either end, outside, from which a better view of the country is obtained. All the carriages are lighted by candles, two to each carriage, one at each end, in a recess. There is a special carriage reserved for the Governor. It is very similar to the first-class carriages, but better furnished, and is provided with electric light obtained from accumulators, supplied from a dynamo worked by a belt from one of the axles.

Various projects have been put forward for branch lines, but nothing has come of them, owing to the poor chances of getting an adequate return for the money laid out. There has also been talk of a scheme for electrifying the line, but nothing has yet been done in this matter. My thanks are due to Mr. Buhagiar, the Manager and Engineer, who very kindly showed me the workshop, supplied details of the history, and working of the line, and also gave me facilities for taking the photographs which appear with this article.