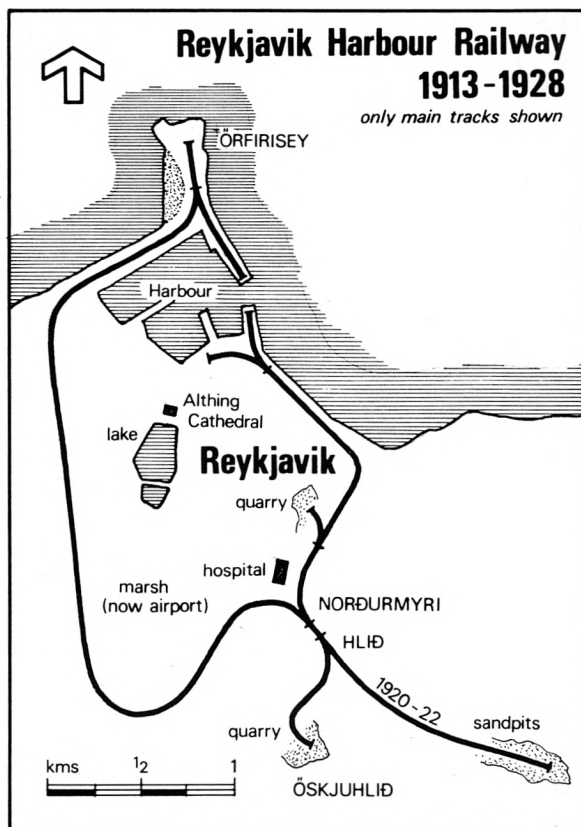


# THE REYKJAVIK HARBOUR RAILWAY



**D.G. TUCKER**

The note by Dierk Lawrenz and the editorial comment on it in RECORD 74 (page 145), together with an earlier note by W.H.G. Boot in RECORD 46 (page 369), concerning the locomotives referred to in my article 'Railways in Iceland' (RECORD 42, pages 216-219) prompt me to offer a fuller account of the Reykjavik Harbour Railway than was possible six years ago. Since then a most important and useful paper, *Járnbrautin í Reykjavík 1913-1928* by Thorleifur Thorleifsson, has been published (in Icelandic) in the journal *Saga*, Volume 11, 1973, pages 116-161. This article gives an immense amount of detail, although it does not fill the gap in the history of the two locomotives between 1892 when they were built and their shipping to Iceland in 1913; nor does it give a map of the railway. However, it provides a very full verbal description of the line, and from this, my own knowledge of Reykjavik, and the help of an Icelandic friend, Mr B. S. Benedikz, who first drew my attention to the article, I have with some confidence been able to reconstruct a map of the system. Another recent source of information about the construction of Reykjavik Harbour, with numerous photographs, is an article *Eimvagninn Pioner kominn í öruggt skjól* in the newspaper *Timinn* for 22nd August 1976. The history of Reykjavik harbour from early times is given (again in Icelandic) in *Úr Bae í Borg* by Knud Zimsen (Reykjavik, 1952).

Construction of the new harbour at Reykjavik by the Danish contracting firm of Momborg began in 1913. A 90cm gauge railway, which eventually attained a length of 12km, was built primarily to convey stone from quarries for building the breakwaters. The first locomotive was MINØR, purchased secondhand in Denmark in February 1913 and brought to Reykjavik along with rolling stock and equipment in the ship EDVARD GRIEG which arrived on 8th March 1913. The second (and only other) locomotive, PIONER, was also bought secondhand in Denmark and arrived in Reykjavik some months later. Leading dimensions were — length 4.9m;



*Locomotive MINØR at Reykjavik about 1913-1914. A "gaffer's" head obscures an important feature and prevents positive confirmation of the spelling of the name, although apparently there is a plain "O" on the nameplate. The origin of this photograph is not known, but it has been published at least twice in Iceland and a rather indistinct version of it appeared in the Locomotive Magazine in 1915.*

height to roof of cab 3.0m; weight empty, 13 tonnes; weight in working order (carrying 1.5 tonnes of water and 0.5 tonne of coal), 15 tonnes; steam pressure 180 lb per sq/in; two outside cylinders (dimensions not given by Thorleifsson, but given as 10½in by 15½in on page 244 of the November 1915 *Locomotive Magazine*) with Walschaert's valve gear; wheels 78cm diameter.

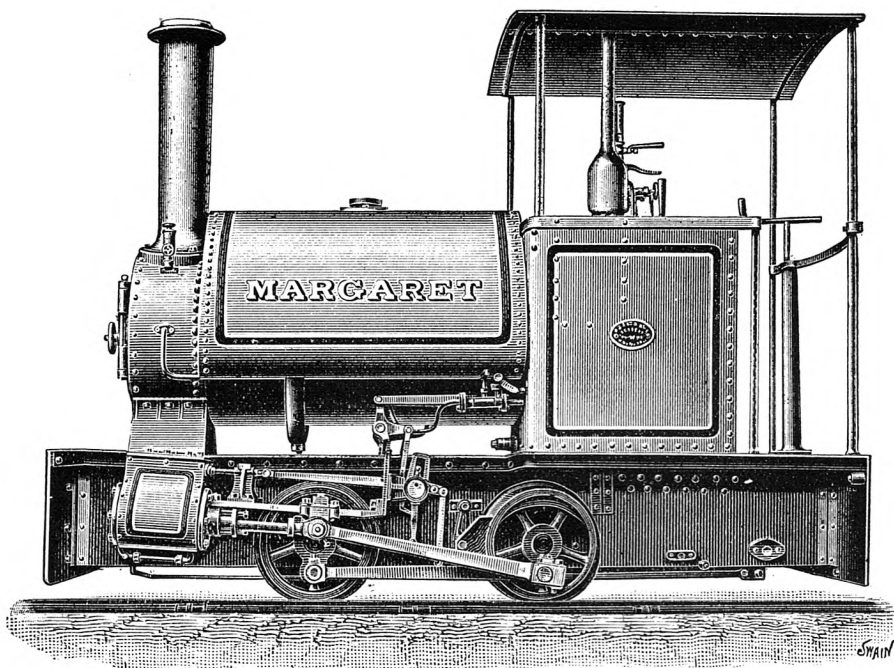
The locomotives were identical, having been built by Jung, PIONÉR certainly, and MINØR presumably also, in 1892. Messrs Boot and Lawrenz, in their notes referred to above, are no doubt correct in stating that Jung supplied them to Dolberg of Rostock, but there seems little doubt from Thorleifsson's account that they did not go to Iceland until 21 years later. PIONÉR had a new boiler in 1910 and the original number on the worksplate was removed and '1591' lightly engraved in its place with the new date 1910. It seems probable that MINØR was **not** reboilered, and Thorleifsson suggests that it was for this reason that PIONÉR was regarded as the better and more powerful of the two locomotives.

In my previous article I included a photograph of PIONÉR, preserved at the Folk Museum at Arbaer on the outskirts of Reykjavik; it is still there but now under cover. At that time it was generally believed that MINØR had either been scrapped or had left Iceland. However, it is now known that MINØR was stored in a shed at Örfirisey and apparently forgotten until 1973; so it is still in Iceland.

The wagons used on the line comprised trolleys for carrying large stones, and box wagons for gravel and sand. The maximum load was 27 loaded trolley wagons, perhaps rather fewer box wagons, with the eastern line normally restricted to trains of 17 wagons because of the steeper gradients on it. These were in favour of the load and the locomotives could not hold back a greater number of unbraked wagons, especially in view of the sharp bend where the line approached the shore. There was a mobile wagon turntable but no facilities for turning locomotives.

During the construction of the harbour the railway was owned by the contractors. The City authorities took over the harbour in November 1917 and then purchased the railway, although it was not used from 1918 until 1920 when a new coal jetty was commenced. In order to obtain hardcore and gravel the line was extended south-eastwards to some sandpits, and PIONÉR was used to haul trains until 1922 when the railway again fell idle. In 1925 the new ocean quay was started and also the National Hospital, and these projects kept the railway busy, with both locomotives in use. However, in 1928 the working life of the railway ended. The wagons were sold to Poland, and the track was eventually taken up.

The Reykjavik Harbour Railway was the only substantial railway ever built in Iceland. However, in my previous article I discussed some of the proposals for long-distance lines in the early decades of this century. In this connection I would like to acknowledge a useful letter I received in 1973 from Mr M. Coates-Smith, who pointed out that a very full discussion of these proposals was given in the book *Island og dets Tekniske Udvikling Gennem Tiderne* by Th. Krabbe (Copenhagen, 1946). It appears that the most serious proposal was for an electric railway in 1927, using power from the new hydro-electric generating stations then being constructed. However, by 1931 it was considered better to develop the road system, and no further railway proposal is thought to have been put forward. ■



The above engraving depicts MARGARET, a 1ft 8in gauge locomotive built by W.G. Bagnall Ltd (1429 of 1894) and supplied in October 1894 to the Essington Farm Colliery Company of Bloxwich, near Walsall. Outside valve gear actuated the 6in by 9in cylinders, and the loco was carried on 1ft 6in diameter wheels. MARGARET weighed about 5½ tons in working order, and her duties consisted principally of hauling rakes of coal tubs (of 20-25 tons overall weight) about 1 mile between two pits on a gradient of 1 in 90. According to Society records the colliery was closed and the plant subsequently auctioned on 18th May 1904, but the actual fate of MARGARET is not recorded.