O
cne it became evident that tramway operation in Brabant on the remarkable Société Nationale des Chemins de fer Vicinaux (SNCV) was likely to cease – and operation of historic Vicinal exhibits from Schepdaal would be impossible long-term – two spin-offs were spawned. In 1966 came the Tramway Touristique de l’Aisne (TTA), whilst 1972 saw the foundation of ASVi – the association pour la Sauvegarde du Vicinal – created to perpetuate the memory of a national institution. ASVi’s story is unique in that from the same location it operates electric, diesel and steam trams. Its activities are generally volunteer-funded, although construction of the museum itself was largely financed by a European (FEDER) grant, and financial reliefs are afforded through the structure of its (emphyteutic) lease on museum land. Most of the rolling stock is still owned by regional operator TEC (Transport En Commun) with relevant sections of track by TEC, the town of Thuin or the Wallonia Commun) with relevant sections of track by regional operator TEC (Transport En Commun) with relevant sections of track by TEC, the town of Thuin or the Wallonia Commun) with relevant sections of track by TEC, the town of Thuin or the Wallonia

**MARKING A HALF CENTURY OF ASVI**

The year just gone was a significant one for Belgium’s tramway heritage movement. This month, Mike Russell reviews the celebratory events held to mark the 50th anniversary of ASVi, founded in 1972.

The morning started with a four-minute service between Thuin Ouest and Lobbes, culminating in an impressive line-up on the NS9 roadside reserved track between Entreville and Quatre-Bras.

Motor car A.9073 started at 10.00, leaving Thuin Ouest for Quatre-Bras and arriving at 10.17. In order of departure it was followed by A.9288, A.9965+A.8821-A8861, A.9515, TCL 34, 9888, 9924, 10284, 10308+19405, 9954+10409 and Sunday 2 October break, the convoys returned in reverse order, trains having meanwhile been coupled to the motor car following them on the outward journey. Type N 10480 left at 11.15 towards the museum, with other vehicles following at four-minute intervals.

Operation of the full route to Lobbes is seldom achieved, the section north of Entreville having been bedevilled by obstructions in recent years. Quatre Bras to Lobbes Ecodes has not been worked for many years and there are no plans to reopen the extension to Bonnier, although the right-of-way is legally protected.

On Friday afternoon, steam and diesel-hauled convoys saw various trains run between Thuin museum and Biesme-sous-Thuin station. The Haut Matceau passing loop and Biesme-sous-Thuin terminus were used to capacity when a freight train of ten wagons and hauled by two steam locomotives made the last round trip: Corpet (Aisne 1)+HL.303 in double traction +A.8168 +A.8158+A.3504 +A.7089+A.7801+A.8328 +A.17691+A.17850 (numbered 4268) +A.14849+A.4833.

A few ASVi vehicles did not participate in the 30 September event. These included trailers A.1484, A.1590, A.1936, A.2026, A.11501, 19220, wagons 5071, 6755, 51567 (ladder car) and 8409 (railway/railway interchange wagon). Also excluded were the wagon built on a Type N bogie, the Type S set 9148+9309 parked at Anderlues, and vehicles in the Thuin workshop (motor 9733, van 9963, trailers A.2121 and A.11634).

Saturday 1 and Sunday 2 October were public days, when lines operated 10.00-19.00. Diesel and steam-hauled services worked between Thuin museum and Biesme-sous-Thuin; electric services between Thuin (museum) and Lobbes Entreville; and on Sunday only an electric service between Thuin museum and Ville Basse.

ASVi has come a long way since those aspirations of 1972 dreamed of saving a section of the Belgian Vicinal for posterity. Long may it continue to give evocative pleasure to thousands of visitors each year as it enters its second half century.
1. The impressive line-up of rolling stock alongside the N59 road at Lobbes. SE motor car 9974 and trailer 19405 are nearest the camera.  
Luc Koenot

2. One of two visiting electric tramcars to the ASVi 50th anniversary celebrations was Luxembourg car number 34 of 1931, seen here passing Thuin Cimetière on its return from the opening cavalcade.  
Luc Koenot

3. The other electric car visiting the ASVi line for the anniversary weekend was motor baggage car A.9965 of the Coastal tramway, preserved by the TTO at its De Panne depot. It is seen about to pass under the main line railway bridge on its way to join the opening parade at Lobbes.  
Philip Harwood

4. Three cars of the inter-war era posed on the roadside reserved track between Entreville and Lobbes. Quatre Bras. Nearest the camera is 9924, built by La Dyle in 1931; behind is 9888, a Franco-Belge product of 1930 and ASVi's most recent restoration, whilst in rear is Ville de Luxembourg 34 of 1931, built by Uerdingen.  
Luc Koenot

5. Wooden-bodied Standard bogie car number 10284 of 1936, 'type Eugies', was built at Braine le Comte and was a workhorse of SNCV lines for three decades.  
Philip Harwood

6. The steeply-graded and twisty section of the ASVi line between Lobbes, Pont du Nord and Thuin Ouest, is well-illustrated in this image of Metal Standard car 10308, built in 1942 by Baume et Marpent.  
Luc Koenot

7. On the afternoon of Friday 30 September it was time to operate on the former railway formation to Biesme-sous-Thuin. This image shows one of the short trains of assorted wagons being hauled by the ASVi's steam locomotive HL303 of 1888.  
Luc Koenot

8. Double-headed steam on the ASVi: a train of wagons sets off from Biesme-sous-Thuin to return to the museum. It is drawn by the combination of ASVi's locomotive HL303 and Baie de la Somme number 1.  
Luc Koenot