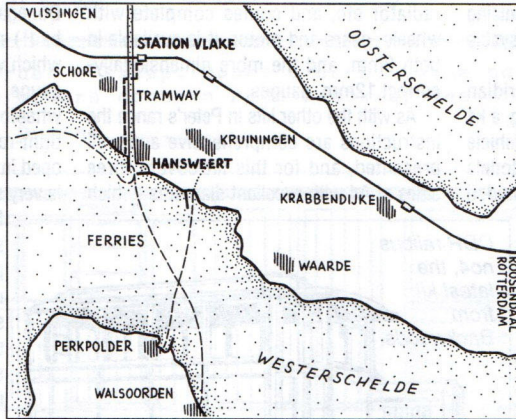


Narrow gauge in The Netherlands

Reinier Hendriksen describes the Hansweert-Vlake Tramway

The county of Zeeland in The Netherlands is complicated to travel across because of its expanses of water, many islands and peninsulas. Crossing it 60 years ago you often had to use ferry boats. At that time there were no Delta Works or large bridges. Trains, buses and, in this case, a narrow-gauge tramway took care of public transport to bring people to ferry harbours.

The subject of this story is a simple line with an unsensational history. For 20 years it was the most important connection between the standard-gauge (Dutch Railways) station at Vlakte, on the line from Rotterdam-Roosendaal and Vlissingen, and the ferry harbour at Hansweert. Its length was just three kilometers (1.8 miles) and used a gauge of 750mm (2ft 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ in). Its closure in 1933 resulted from two reasons: Vlakte station was closed and the canal had to be



enlarged.

Rolling stock consisted of two small engines, HV 1-2, two passenger coaches carrying 20 each and a post-luggage van ordered from Decauville at Petit-Bourg in France in 1912. Trackwork came from the same source. In 1915, Allen & Co in Rotterdam built luggage vans nos 4 and 5,

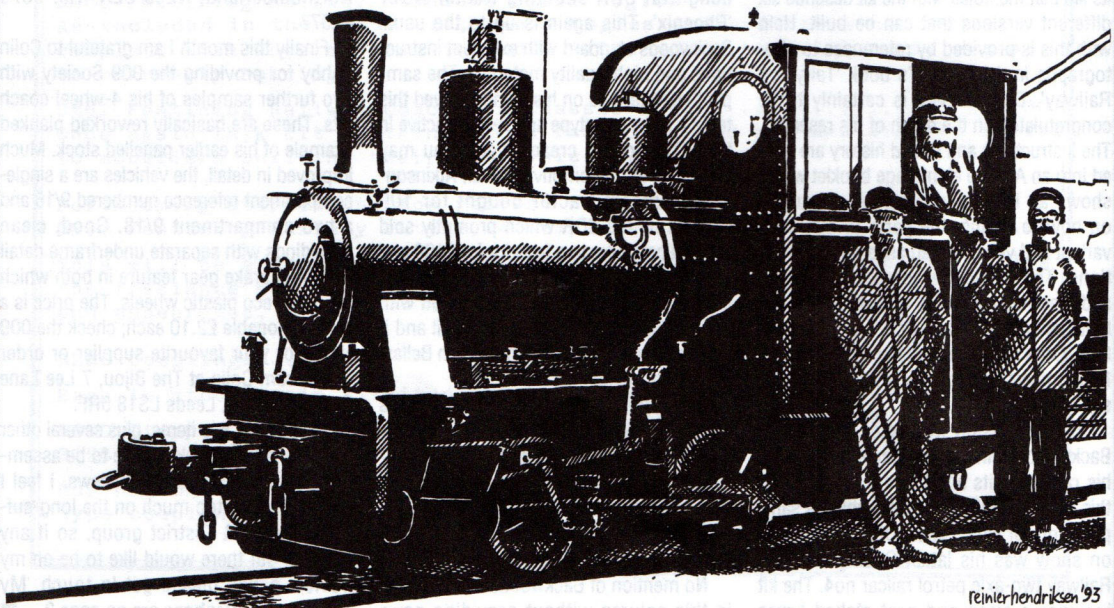
followed by passenger cars nos 6 and 7 in 1920. To help the loco crews be protected from the cold in the exposed flat and windy surroundings, the engines were fitted with sliding windows.

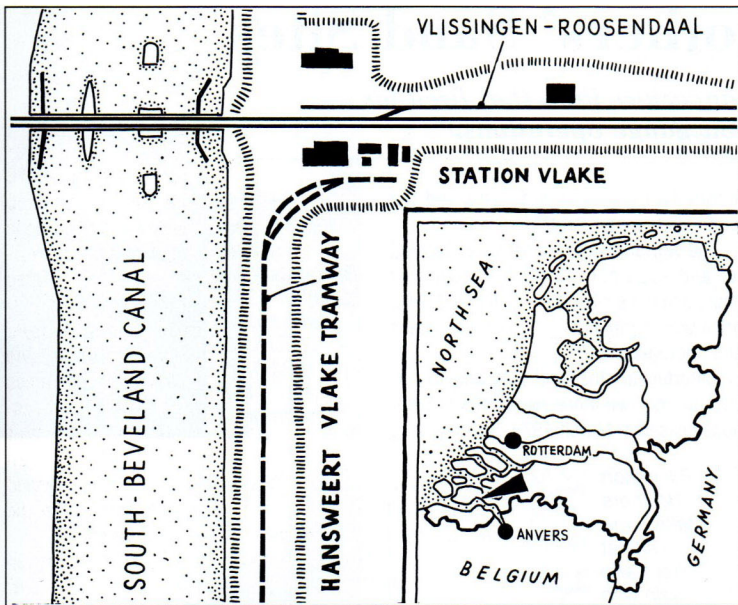
The tramway was opened almost 80 years ago on 2 June 1913 and in that year the five trains a day carried a total of 17,374 passengers. During the Great War between 1914-18 more than 100,000 passengers were carried and by the summer of 1926 the millionth was celebrated.

Staffing for the line's operation originally consisted of just four: two engine drivers, conductor and a track man. The staff were very proud of their line and not one serious accident was reported in all the years of its operation.

But its fate took the form of progress. The South Beveland Canal was a significant route and the busiest waterway in Europe, connecting Gand and Anvers in

HANSWEERT-VLAKE TRAMWAY





Belgium to Rotterdam in The Netherlands. Work was started in 1932 to enlarge the canal, and Vlakte station had to be destroyed in the works. No station, hence no passenger traffic, and the line had to close.

On October 7th 1933 at about 8 pm in the evening the last train arrived in Hansweert decorated with garlands and ribbons with text such as 'Faithful service or 20 years' and 'Rust in Peace'. The local band played the Marche Funebre as the train rolled the last few metres in to the ferry harbour station. The tramway was a part of history.

Dutch and UK fans are in luck in modelling the Hansweert-Vlakte Tramway because the French firm Duton now produces a similar 0-4-0 Decauville loco. My own example arrived recently and it looks very nice. Looking through a number of British catalogues I also think a number of cars and vans can be based on their products. ■