



The Friends of the National Railway Museum

Newsletter 1

South of England Group
Vice President - Captain Bill Smith VIRD, RNR

January 1995

Evening Meetings in 1994

The AGM/social evening on 10 January succeeded in attracting a full house of 40. We were pleased Lord Downe, President of the Friends, and Lady Downe were able to spend some time with us, and in so doing, recognising the efforts of the Group. The entertainment consisted of a selection of 8mm sound films, two of which, had particular interest to Friends: the Port Sunlight event in 1988, which includes footage of the Merseyside Electric Unit and "York to Carlisle" with the Duchess, a film which took about ten years to make, consequently the only consistent element in it is Her Ladyship, the seasons, weather and rolling stock are, to say the least of it, changeable.

We held our last indoor meeting before the summer break at Waterloo International Station. We had an excellent turnout of some 40 members to enjoy a privileged tour round the new International terminal prior to its opening. The guides provided by Eurostar explained the full system, from buying a ticket at the departure end, to exiting through the large arrivals hall (originally designed for Customs checks). Despite all the guides being multi-lingual, we stuck to the English version.

The move of location to the South Eastern's Career Development Centre at Friars Bridge Court for our evening meetings in the Autumn proved a success in that several new faces were present on 19 September and enjoyed a highly entertaining talk by Steve McColl, Director of the Special Trains.

During the evening, we learned many secrets of Railway family life in the Liverpool area. One of the stranger pastimes was the sale to the School of Tropical Medicine of Caribbean spiders imported with bananas. Steve also provided a glossary of nicknames describing the attributes of various characters in the railway community. During the course of the evening, we received an insight into Steve's aspirations for future in Special Trains Unit operations. A most enjoyable evening.

On 14 November, Peter Townend, the last shedmaster at "Top Shed" Kings Cross, gave an illustrated talk on "LNER Pacifics". Peter explained the operational difficulties and joys of these engines, including the modifications which he, and his team, implemented, sometimes incurring the wrath of the men at the Plant, but always to the benefit of the travelling public.

A Duchess in the South

This year we have had the opportunity to experience the "Flagship" of the NRM, the Stanier Pacific No 46229, Duchess of Hamilton, in action on railtours in the south of England. Through special arrangements with the operators, we were able to man a sales stand for the Friends on four of the trips.

On 5th November, the fireworks started early as the Duchess hauled the "William Shakespeare" out of Paddington via Reading, Didcot and Banbury, to Stratford on Avon. The sales stand did good business both from passengers on the train, and from bystanders during the stopovers at Banbury and Stratford. The recent building of a supermarket adjoining the station at Stratford not only altered the scenery around the Bard's town, but it also provided us with an audience - several people went home with a souvenir of the Duchess as well as the weekend shopping. Overall the day's takings reached close to £300.

The following day, using different stock, the Duchess was on more foreign territory, leaving Paddington on a tour to Bristol, travelling via the Hants & Berks line to Westbury and Bath. The Duchess sounded magnificent as she stormed up to Bathampton with just an occasional short slip. This was even more impressive considering that there was a class 47 at the back of the rake to provide heating and brakes. The down trip went well, and sales were brisk despite the counter attractions of lunch. Unfortunately, GWR sidings don't seem to match LMS tender wheels, and the lady found herself with two axles off the rails. Despite this setback, we still managed to raise £230.

On 13 November, the Duchess was back in form, none the worse for the incident at Bristol. She became the first Princess Coronation to use Waterloo station since the 1948 locomotive exchanges. But first she had to get from Old Oak Common to Clapham Yard. Because of worries over a tight clearance under the wires near Primrose Hill the route was via Reading and Basingstoke. She then ran down the LSWR mainline to Salisbury and then returned in the dark via Southampton and Winchester. Unfortunately, the weather during her stay in the south was dark and murky, with poor rail conditions; not ideal for allowing her to show her best form.

Sales stands were also mounted on the two positioning runs which brought 46229 to the south and returned her to York on 17 November.

Our thanks go to the operating crews on all trains and to the FSS support team who made our stand welcome alongside their own.

Fund Raising

As described in the summer and Duchess sections, the Group has been active in raising funds for the NRM. The stock of Friends and NRM lines, including the guidebooks and souvenirs of the collection's locos, tends to sell well. Indeed at some events we have been "cleaned out" of certain items before the end of the day. All the profits from these activities go to support the NRM in its projects

At present the Group has over £1700 in hand from these fund raising activities, and the time has now come to decide how our surplus should be used. We could, of course, hand it over to the FNRM at York as a contribution to the main projects. However, we have the opportunity to suggest a project which the South of England Group can be associated with.

So this is your chance. Do you want to suggest a pet project which the South of England Group could take under its wing, perhaps connected with a loco, stock or artifact associated with the South of England. Suggestions to members of the committee please, and we'll let members have a short list of our collected ideas from which to choose.