



The Friends of the National Railway Museum

Briefing 7

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

December 1996

THE DUCHESS

This Autumn, the Museum's flagship, 46229 "Duchess of Hamilton" has been making its final appearance on the national rail network before the expiry of its main-line certificate. The FNRM have, as usual accompanied her on her travels, providing sales support including the Duchess books, badges, Christmas cards, postcards and bookmarks. For the tours in late October and November the South of England Group provided cover.

At 05.50 on 26th October, the "Past Time Rail" trip set off to Bristol from Watford, via Birmingham and Shrewsbury. Onboard was the South of England Group sales team. It was at Shrewsbury that the Duchess came on, taking the tour forward to Hereford for a water stop, then down to Abergavenny to join the main line at Maindee Junction. We had been delayed at several points so, as expected, we had to wait for a path along the main line and through the Severn Tunnel. We arrived at Bristol 25 mins late. The return started on time at 16.25 but we were badly delayed when a freight preceded us up the valley to Abergavenny; speed dropped to walking pace. Once over the top, the Duchess got into her stride before the water stop at Hereford. Handover at Shrewsbury was nearly on-time and arrival back at Watford only a few minutes late after a journey lasting 18 hours. The tour had been delayed for 2 weeks to allow emergency repairs to the Duchess's boiler tubes, paid for by the Friends. Despite this the tour was some ¾ full and the sales stand took £420.

It was again barely light as the sales crew assembled at Watford Junction a week later, for a "Days Out" tour which was to take us via Crewe to meet the Duchess again at Shrewsbury, and then return with her to Reading. With 2 excursions due to leave at about the same time, there was some confusion, but eventually our train arrived and we took our allocated seats with our sales area opposite. After reversal at Crewe, we arrived at Shrewsbury, passing the Duchess as we rolled to a halt. The RES Class 47 moved forward, ready to follow us, and the Duchess took over. Then we were off to the first water stop at Hereford. Unfortunately, the Regional Railways service bringing our relief Inspector and Fireman was running 25 minutes late. Eventually, everything was in place and we set off over an hour down for Pontypool. Spirited running made up 20 minutes - we even passed cars on the parallel A40. Being the closest Saturday to bonfire night, there was some concern that the Pontypool Fire Brigade might have other things to do than provide us with water, but we needn't have worried. The brigade quenched the engine's thirst and we were off again. Some spirited running, and no delays joining the mainline at Newport, saw arrival at Bristol Parkway only 5 minutes down. By now our stock was also down following good sales. With further trade during the water stop at Wootton Bassett and a steady stream of passengers coming along to visit us, there was not much left when the time came to pack everything into the support coach. At Reading, the Duchess came off to run down to the Mid-Hants, whilst we returned by car to Watford. Overall, the sales amounted to £305

46229 was unexpectedly pressed into service the following day for the Mid Hants' members' day, due to the failure of newly restored "U" class 31625. Her next outing was for the Days Out "Royal Devonian" on 16th November. A 05.00 start from Ropley was frustrated when the points at Alton failed, losing time which was never made up during the day.

Leaving Guildford around 45 min down, we were held in Platform 9 at Reading whilst a "47" was tagged on the rear for heating purposes. We were over an hour late leaving Reading. Down the Berks and Hants to Newbury she got into her stride. The water stop at Newbury Racecourse saw some athletic mountaineering by the support crew, getting up the cutting side, over the fence onto the bridge, finding the hydrant...what hydrant? ...oops, wrong bridge!! Railtrack zone rules change at Westbury: the class 47 moved from the rear to behind 46229; support coach to the rear. Then we were treated to an amazing ascent of Whiteball, which we topped at 61mph - 7 mph slower than the "Duke" earlier in the summer, but with 100+ tons of 47 hung on behind. The descent on the other side was no less exhilarating.

At Exeter a surprise awaited us. Mel Chamberlain had arranged for the real Duchess of Hamilton to welcome the train and ride back with us. We were even more delighted when she joined us and helped the sales by signing books. Unfortunately, the run back to Guildford was dogged by troubles; we were held at Pinhoe but had a good run up Honiton bank. Then the rather mediocre coal started to block the grate, resulting in poor steaming. That was eventually cleared and we made good progress back to Basingstoke then via Reading to Guildford. 46229 and support coach reached Mid-Hants metals again at about 23.10. And after all that we had taken £577 on the stand and, thanks to Mel Chamberlain's generosity, raised £217 on a raffle in aid of 46229.

The very final outing, 650 miles from Euston to York via Glasgow, was on 30th November - 1st December. The performance was outstanding with a powerful exhibition over Shap. Shortly after this, while watering in a loop at Beattock, the crew were surprised to find, in addition to the expected bowser, two fire engines arriving with all lights flashing. Apparently, some passing motorist, unused to fire breathing monsters on the main-line, thought there had been a major catastrophe and used his mobile to call up help. At Glasgow, the passengers went off for their overnight rest, while the support crew accompanied the engine to Motherwell for stabling. Unfortunately, the support coach was derailed in the sidings and demanded work throughout the night to get it back on the road. Because of this we left Glasgow 15 mins late but recovered half of this by Edinburgh where low water pressure caused us to lose 41 mins. We then ran well until we slowed to cross over to the bi-directional Down line, allowing a service express to pass us. At Berwick, poor watering meant we left 85 mins late then a mixture of track circuit and signal failures caused more problems. With engineers possession of the King Edward Bridge, the coaling manoeuvres took longer than planned and we left Newcastle 187 mins down, finally to arrive at York. Despite this, everyone said they had a good trip. The real Duchess of Hamilton again helped us on the sales stand, this time selling signed copies of her own book "Scottish Plants for Scottish Gardens". Over the two days we had takings of £1300.

Throughout all the tours, we had a steady stream of questions about the future operations of the Duchess when its main-line certificate runs out. The answer is that she will be touring the preserved lines, including the Great Central over the Christmas and New Year period. You can find out more and see video highlights of the recent tours at the AGM.

THE AGM AND NEW YEAR SOCIAL

As usual, we combine the Annual General Meeting with a social event; the date is Monday 6th January. The official proceedings will start at 7pm, but this "interferes" with the festivities which commence at 6.30pm.

This year two committee members, Phil Brown and Richard Causebrook stand down. Richard will not seek re-election, so we are looking for nominations from willing volunteers - names to the Chairman please. In addition to the election of the new committee, the AGM will also include the Chairman's report on our activities and the amounts of money raised - rumours are rife that it was a record breaking year.

The main reason for attending (sorry George!) is to partake of the food wine and good company. We will also have other diversions including video and photographic reports of the recent Duchess trips (see above). Our Group Vice Chairman may also plan to embarrass us all again by showing how little we know about railways when we answer his quiz.

Entry to the Social is by ticket, which can be obtained by sending a stamped self-addressed envelope with a cheque for £5 (made out to "FNRM South of England Group") to George Rutter, see address on rear. Tickets should arrive with you by 3 January.