

Alan Pegler Reminisces

Fifteen Friends were present on 23 September for an engrossing account by one of our "regulars" of his early experiences in the railway preservation movement.

Alan blamed an encounter with Lord Northesk on a special train journey in 1950 for his passion. He told of the plan to re-open the Festiniog and encouraged Alan to organise his own special trains. Alan's own dining special to Blackpool in 1952, with 480 passengers, required every knife and fork in the Eastern Region! This drew attention from the powers-that-be, and in 1954 he joined the Regional Board as a part-time non-executive. Another of his specials was from Leeds to London. On board were the royal train attendant and H. A. Ivatt's two daughters. "Henry Oakley" and No 251 from the "old" York museum hauled the train with two drivers, the famous Hoole and Hailstone. The run was spectacular - 80 mph down Stoke Bank. Alan stuck up a close friendship with Bill Hoole, Bill joining Alan on the Festiniog. In 1959, Bill Hoole took "Sir Nigel Gresley" on a SLS special from London to York. Demand for footplate passes was high. To solve the impasse, Alan, as a Board member, was asked to occupy the fourth position in the cab. How could he refuse? Alan remembers the exciting run; the train exceeded 100 mph north of Hitchin on the down, and set a post-war speed record of 112 mph on the return.

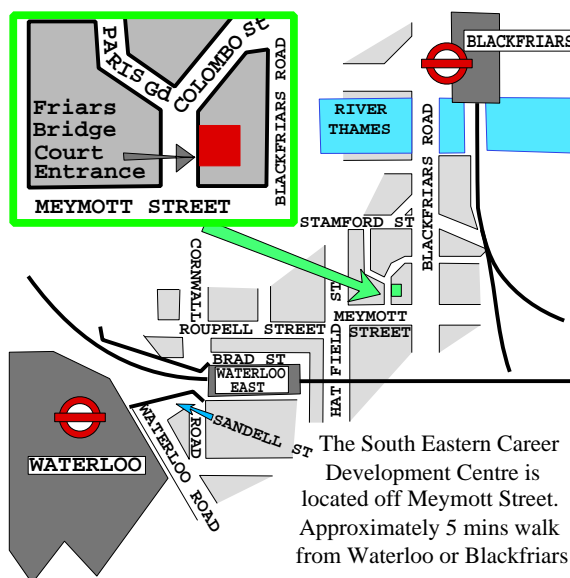
With a little help from Alan and the BR solicitor, problems with the Festiniog legal situation were overcome, but money was needed. An initial offer from his bank was upstaged by a loan of £3000 from his father. Control of the Festiniog passed to the preservation team in June 1954, with Alan as its first Chairman. In June 1955, and £40,000 later, the first train ran across The Cob at Porthmadog.

Alan turned to his memories with "Flying Scotsman". Shortly after buying the engine, Alan realised that lack of water columns would cause problems. With an eye to running trips on the Settle & Carlisle, he built a second water-carrying tender; it cost more than the purchase price of the locomotive! The idea then came for the non-stop London to Edinburgh run. Alan described this great event, with 4 helicopters following the train and even a live on-board radio broadcast. As a direct result of this, Alan appeared on "Desert Island Discs".

Alan explained the background to the North America tour. Regulations forbade carrying fare-paying passengers; foreign stock being restricted to "circus or exhibition" trains. Not wishing to take over a zoo, Alan decided on the latter option, and so was born the travelling British Exhibition train. Knowing that costs could be high, he lined up a sponsor, Nelson Blandt - a bible reading millionaire. He was also a private pilot and the inevitable happened, he was killed while on a flight. With him went the sponsorship deal. Nevertheless, the tour went ahead. He recalled an early trip from Boston to Houston. The local fire-brigades provided water at all spots except one - they had dozed off in the fire station! He even drove the engine, having passed a "Department of Transportation" test. After wintering in Texas in 1969, they headed up Central USA, to Chicago and Milwaukee, finishing at the National Railroad Museum at Green Bay. Trips to Niagara Falls and Canada followed, before finishing at San Francisco. Despite higher income than anywhere else, it was here that the tour ended in financial failure. Even so, Alan wouldn't have missed the experience.

Alan recalled his friendship with the late Terence Cuneo. After Alan bought the engine in 1963, he asked Cuneo to paint it on the Forth Bridge. The engine would occupy the bridge for 3 days, but Alan organised it over dinner with the manager of the Scottish Region! Each day, the train left Edinburgh for the bridge, with Cuneo at the controls. Alan sold the painting to a fellow member of the Gainsborough Model Railway Club, and later it was bought by Sir William McAlpine. Alan was there when the painting recently went to auction; it sold for £26,000 - three times the top price paid for any other Cuneo painting.

Finally, Alan gave us a preview of 2 new videos of his experiences with "Flying Scotsman", including an interview with the new owner, Dr Tony Marchington. The videos are published by Bygone Films - look out for them.



Forthcoming Events

6 Jan 97 AGM and Social,

plus some railway related entertainment - see article on front page

17 Mar 97 "Return of the Tramway?"

The original railways were developments from the 18th century tramways. Much later the electric urban tram spurred on the development of electric railways. More recently, "Metro" systems have taken over inner suburban lines. Fred Davis is a regular attendee at our meetings and has extensive knowledge of UK and European tram and light railways. He will review the rise and demise of the tramway in UK and cover recent developments.

All the meetings are held at the South Eastern Career Development Centre - see map. Talks start at 7pm, with refreshments from 6.30pm.

"Degrees of Indifference"

Why Historians Should Care About Railways

Our meeting rooms were nearly full on 18 November to hear Prof Colin Divall give his views of the historian's role in interpreting the railways' impact on our social and economic development. He started by quoting from some reference books by well respected historians. The inaccuracies were obvious to anyone with a knowledge of railways. Yet these works have a significant influence on current policies, for example being used to provide lessons for the current round of railway privatisations. It is therefore essential that historians take great care to research and interpret the historical records.

Colin pointed to the significance of the pre-nationised railways. They were the largest companies of their time, not just as service and transport providers, but as manufacturers. They were ground-breakers in management practices, their representatives toured the world to ensure that they used the best possible techniques. However, they were not omnipotent and were as prone to make mistakes as we are today. Researching board and committee records provides insights into the decision making process. Colin finished by describing some of the recent "finds" in the Public Records Office, including reports on the possibility of introducing diesel multiple units during the 1930's.

During questioning, Colin said the Institute of Railway Studies aims to develop a large cadre of people who can do this research. He is developing courses leading up to formal certificates, and is currently working on a distance learning version which will be supplemented by summer schools - watch this space for details.

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