

## "After the Last Train has Gone"

On 16th March 1998, Greg Beecroft of the BR Property Board gave a fully illustrated talk on the structures left after the railway has been closed. He pointed out that many railway Acts of Parliament include provisions which state that the bridges and structures have to be maintained for ever - hence the need for his work. Of course, it is possible to sell them, and then the liability for maintenance passes to the new owner. A sale to local councils or other railway companies is ideal, but preservation companies are also welcomed. There are some unusual demands placed on the Board because of the historic Parliamentary Acts. These include the maintenance of 17 miles of river-bank and the provision of a free water supply to certain private houses.

Brick and masonry buildings are generally well made, the ones which were jerry-built have all fallen down long ago. The problems come with iron or steel-work and there is now a big challenge to make them able to take modern 44 tons lorries - on bridges which were built mainly to accommodate horse-drawn vehicles. Many of the structures are of architectural interest. Of 5000 structures owned by the Board, 50 are listed as worthy of preservation, and Greg gave us a slide tour of most of these, giving some interesting snippets of information on each one. These included the oldest surviving box girder bridge in the world, over the River Trent; Millers Dale viaduct in the Peak District National Park; the GER viaduct in Limehouse, London; Vauxhall Swing Bridge at Yarmouth over the River Bure (which suffers from an unusual form of "bridge bashing" from boats). Some of the property even has literary connections; the viaduct on the Scarborough line at Whitby, for example, is mentioned in Dracula. It may become a cycleway following restoration. There are some strange structures as well. Pensford on the GWR Bristol to Radstock is curious because the piers and arches are of different sizes. The builders of Cannington, an early concrete structure on the Lyme Regis branch, didn't get the foundations right so a reinforcing brick infill was needed for one arch. There have recently been suggestions to use it as a bungee jumping site!

Restoration of the important structures is often helped by grants from national and local government as well as the European Union and special Trusts. The big scheme for 1998 is Bilston Glen Viaduct on the old railway south of Edinburgh which used to lead to some coal mines. It is arguably the biggest truss viaduct in the country. It will be renovated and transferred to the Edinburgh Trust. Greg gave us a step by step guide by photographs of the restoration of Meldon viaduct near Okehampton. It is owned by Devon County Council and will be open to the public this summer.

An extended synopsis of the talk is on the Web site - see next column

## Outreach Programme

This being the winter season, there has been less activity. Indeed, the stand only visited one event, the East Beds Model Railway Exhibition at Biggleswade - conveniently located near your editor! The show was well attended and we had a good position in the linking corridor between the entry room, main hall and refreshments. A smaller version of the main stand was used which proved a little cramped, but, nevertheless, we had a healthy trade. Visitors were not restricted to those from Bedfordshire - indeed one prospective new member had come down from Stockton on Tees. There was considerable interest in the activities of the FNRM and several enquiries about access to the reading room and collection. One visitor towards the end of the show asked about 1247 and was surprised to find that we could provide not only details of its current location but the definitive reference book, signed by the author (our Vice-President). As a special show, since it was nearby, your editor provided a computer and monitor, showing a mixture of photographs of the museum and its collection. This worked well until lunchtime when we discovered we were on the same electricity supply as the kitchen - the beefburgers took priority!



The South Eastern Career Development Centre is located off Meymott Street. Approximately 5 mins walk from Waterloo or Blackfriars

## Forthcoming Events

### 18 May 1998 "London's Victorian Railways"

Mr R Brasier, London Transport Museum will give an overview of the great railway building age in the capital

### 21 September 1998 To be announced

A speaker will shortly be identified, please mark the date in your diary.

### 16 November 1998 "A Railwayman Remembers"

Mr R.H.N. (Dick) Hardy

The meetings will be held at the South Eastern Career Development Centre, off Meymott Street, London SE1 (near Waterloo Station), starting at 7pm, doors open at 6.30 pm.

## Steam on the Met'

It's back this year after an absence in 1997. The event runs on 16th and 17th May, and the Bank Holiday Weekend 23rd to 25th May. The first weekend coincides with the canal festival at Rickmansworth, and the South of England stand will be at this station. For the Bank Holiday, we expect to move to Amersham. The events are usually very popular and, compared to main-line steam excursions, very modestly priced. There are many other stands, in addition to our own, distributed at the stations along the line. So why not come along? Please let George Rutter know if you can spare some time to help with the stand on any of these days.

## SoE Group on the Web

No, we haven't been caught by an overgrown spider. As editor of the Briefing, I've finally got round to using some of my free Internet storage space to mount a Web page for the South of England Group of the FNRM. This contains a brief overview of our activities. Of more interest to existing Friends will be the News pages which contain information which is waiting inclusion in the Briefing and extended synopses of the indoor talks. There are also electronic facsimiles of recent copies of the Briefing, just in case you mislay them.

For those of you with access to the Internet, the pages can be found at

<http://www.argonet.co.uk/users/mel.draper/index.html>

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