

A Railwayman Remembers

On 16 November 1998, that well known author and railwayman, Richard (Dick) Hardy, gave our group a fascinating insight into his early career on the railways. This started in January 1941, following his successful interview by Edward Thompson for a premium apprenticeship on the LNER. He nearly went to the LMS, but for the intervention of his career master at Marlborough College, who felt there were "gentlemen at the top of the LNER"!

He started as an apprentice in the machine shop and quickly learnt the first lesson - beware of the foremen. The months went by, and he found himself in erecting shop helping to give general overhauls on the 4 coupled locos as quick as possible - this was war-time after all. He was only supposed to have 6 months in there but found it so good he stayed for 11 months.

At the start of 1944 he went to the running sheds and quickly came to terms with the rough and tumble of dealing with running repairs on engines in steam. He was posted, as something of a mascot, on the emergency breakdown crew, and discovered that there were a lot more derailments than most people realised. One he remembers well was at Keighley when a wagon ran away through the goods shed to land in the middle of the street. One of the more unusual trips was to Gainsborough, under great secrecy, to load a midge submarine onto a rail wagon. In February 1944 he had a period of 63 continuous hours of duty on the breakdown train - as a result he saw his first £5 note. Problem was a young man in overalls couldn't get it changed in the shops - either they thought you a thief or a fifth columnist!

While on his apprenticeship, he was only allowed 3 weeks of official footplate time; this wasn't really on, so he found other ways to extend this. He was, in fact, so successful that he managed to clock up 60,000 miles on the footplate while he was based at Doncaster. Richard explained some of the warm-hearted characters who helped him and, along the way, taught him a great deal about the unofficial, but albeit practical, ways of the railway which were invaluable to him in later life. He had a real affection for the men based at Bradford and Copley Hill, the exploits of one of whom, in starting a 16 coach train on a 1:100 gradient with a poorly steaming engine, show just how skilled they were.

Richard ended his talk with a small number of slides, showing the men and machines he had captivated us with during his one and a half hour talk.

A report on the talk given by Mr R Brasier on 21 September, was included in the Group's news in FNRM Review No 85, page 5, so is not repeated here. Extended reports on both talk, and earlier ones, are on the Group Web site - see below for the address.



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

Forthcoming Events

11 January 1999 AGM and Social
Come along for a chat and some railway related entertainment

15 March 1999 "An evening with Ron White of Colour-rail"

17 May 1999 "The Railways of Sri Lanka",
by our Chairman, George Rutter

20 September 1999 "The NRM Poster Collection"

Evening talks are held in the South Eastern Career Development Centre, Colombo St, off Meymott Street, London (near Waterloo Station). Doors open at 18.30, with the talk commencing at 19.00 and the sessions usually finish around 21.00. Please sign the attendance book.

Outreach Programme - Colchester Model Railway Exhibition

We attended this exhibition, held on 30 October and 1 November, as a bit of an experiment - as it turned out a very successful one. The exhibition is held in the Colchester Institute on the outskirts of the city and took up seven halls with 30 layouts and 32 stands, of which we were one. Despite of, or perhaps because of, the inclement weather (it was raining again!) attendance was good with a steady stream of people past our stand. We were positioned at the entrance to the gymnasium which, coincidentally held the prize-winning layout in the show, Runswick Bay from Keighley 7mm scale group - yes they brought it down from Yorkshire. The Colchester Model Railway Society made us very welcome, even including an invitation to their annual club and exhibition dinner on the Saturday evening.

As for our stand, business was very brisk. Calendars and Christmas cards were in great demand. Indeed, one of our first sales, a calendar, was to the Lady Mayoress of Colchester. There was considerable interest in the new Railway Company Crests. Although we had these on display we were referring prospective purchasers to the mail order contact. If you haven't seen these I

can assure your they are superb, and remember you can get one for £30, i.e. a £9.95 discount, as a member of the Friends - see the November FNRM Review. There was also considerable interest in railway advertising posters, not just the mini ones we carry, but the full scale ones, and we referred these people, as well as those with more general railway interests, to the NRM at York. I suspect there will be a good few visitors to York from Essex in the next few months. Overall then a very successful visit and we will be making tracks again next year to this Great Eastern stronghold.

Our next outing will be to the East Bedfordshire Model Railway Exhibition at Biggleswade on 13th February. If you are interested in helping please let me know. With our success at this show last year, and our recent experience at Colchester, we intend to attend more model railway shows in the future. If you know of any which you think are worth attending, please drop me a line - it would help if you can give a contact name for the organisers.

Contact Addresses for South of England Group

GROUP WEB PAGE - <http://www.argonet.co.uk/users/mel.draper/index.html>

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