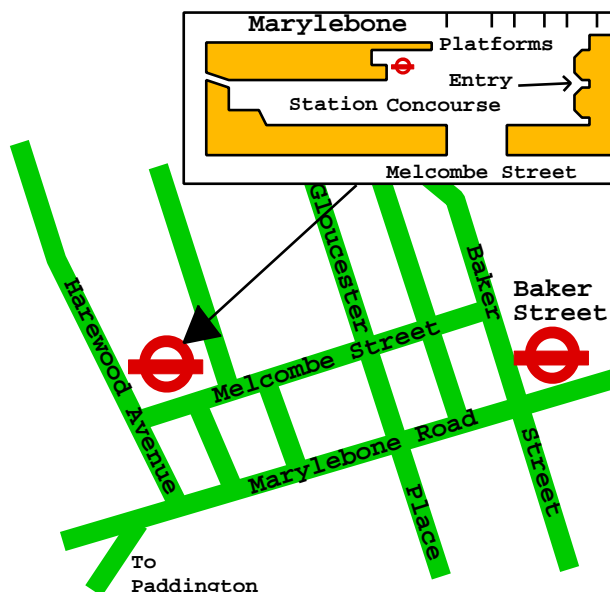


Forthcoming Events

- 15 Jan 2001 AGM and Social, plus some railway related entertainment. (see overleaf)
- 12 Mar 2001 " Rocket - The Archaeological Research Project", Dr Michael Bailey & John Glithero.
- 14 May 2001 "Diaries of a Train Spotter - 1955 to 1968", Michael G Harvey.

The meetings will be held in the Meeting Room at Marylebone Station. Please enter from the door between Upper Crust and W.H. Smith's Bookstall at the east side of the station concourse. The talks commence at 19.00 and there will be a person on the door to let you in from 18.30. If you arrive after 19.00 and find the door locked, please telephone 0771 554 9907 There will be a voluntary collection to help cover the cost - a donation of around £1 to £2 per head, tea or coffee included (except AGM & Social - see overleaf). Guests are welcome.



INDOOR EVENT REPORTS

(for full reports see the Group's Web page - address below)

Virtual Reality at the NRM

Robin Gray, the NRM's information technology specialist gave the Group a view of the future at our 13th November meeting. The power of virtual reality was demonstrated with a "live" reconstruction of Locomotion hauling a train of chaldron wagons, with additional human freight, on the Stockton to Darlington railway. The "moving eye" enabled us to see the whole ensemble, from the footplate sweeping up to a bird's eye view of the train and a sideways "helicopter" view of the train in full forward motion. We were slightly concerned that there was no crew on the footplate - but this is only a prototype. Robin also has ideas of 4468 doing 125+ down Stoke Bank on 3 July 1938. That will be a bit more of a challenge!

More virtual reality came with material developed by Corus Consultants (British Steel to you and me). To start with, a relatively simple level crossing scene, with a Class 159 in fictitious plain grey livery - well, it saves having to wash them. Then we saw the pièce de résistance - the audience were the first to see the new Leeds City station track layouts in virtual reality, as viewed from the driving cab, complete with sound. A choice of nearly 20 routes in and out of the station is available, and all on a single CD-ROM. This will enable drivers to familiarise themselves as the new station is developed, in effect to learn new routes before they exist. It can be watched at any convenient location, even at home on a PC. The displays faithfully reproduce the lineside features, signals and AWS, right down to tracks in course of construction and the catenary complete with shadows. But no other trains in sight - more cancellations? For those of us living in exile, it was fascinating to see well known Leeds landmarks reproduced in this way. Shame we ran out of track before getting to Elland Road!

Robin gave us an update on rebuilding the NRM website. A focus on ease of use and accuracy was welcome (we note that the current site STILL has no reference to the SoE Group website..hint, hint). And a list of material for sale from the shop would be useful.

And finally.....a 4 minute whizz through 175 years of history and a view of the future - the special video prepared for the 25th Anniversary Dinner showing the Museum as it may be in 10 years' time. A really exciting prospect; and we love the tower - a real tourist attraction in its own right that will bring people flocking to the Museum - and they might just learn a thing or two while they're there.

Leighton Buzzard Light Railway & the Protected Simplex locomotive

Tony Tomkins opened our 11th September talk with a history of the Leighton Buzzard Light Railway. This owes its existence to sand quarrying and opened at the end of the First World War. Ignoring convention, the owners contacted the County Council for permission to cross the 13 roads between the quarries and the exchange sidings. As a consequence, operations were (and still are) not controlled by an Act of Parliament, but merely by some, not very onerous, regulations framed by the council. The railway purchased war-surplus Simplex petrol locomotives and except for the first two years, was exclusively internal combustion powered; this continued until the line closed for commercial operation in 1982.

Chris Grimes took up the story of the Protected Simplex and the restoration of the NRM's example. The origin goes back to Eric Geddes of the NER, who set up a 2ft gauge system to supply the World War I trenches. In the rear, steam locomotives moved supplies by night, but the glare from their fireboxes proved dangerous near the front; here, petrol locomotives were used. Over 1,000 Simplex locomotives were built for this purpose, but the last examples were sent to industrial sites, not to the army. Works number 1377 went to the Nostrop sewage works in Nottingham and was withdrawn in 1980. By the time it came into the National Collection the engine was seized due to frost damage. Exterior paintwork was good but the engine internals were in a large crate! It was loaned to Leighton Buzzard in 1991. Restoration was targeted for the 80th anniversary of the railway's opening, it being similar to those used at the opening. The seized engine was freed, but it produced no more than a few coughs. Although the magneto provided plenty of sparks (as one volunteer found out!) it was not of the original type. The engine had been set up based upon the direction of motion shown on this magneto, which was the wrong way - hence the coughs as it tried to run backwards! This was corrected and the locomotive ran smoothly. Work continues to reduce the fuel consumption and improve the exhaust system.

Tony closed by pointing out that industrial railways, especially narrow gauge, are poorly represented in the National Collection and hoped the NRM could set up a centre where the public could see these work-horses operating in a representative situation.

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