

Diary of at Train-spotter

Michael G Harvey 14 May 2001

Fifteen members enjoyed Michael's slide presentation of the 1950s railway scene. This mainly centred on Michael's home area around the Solent and lines radiating from Portsmouth. Fratton shed was his local, and he included a fascinating pictorial record of the gradual demise of the building's fabric, from its pristine operating condition in the early '50s to its derelict condition in the late '60s when it was used to store locos awaiting scrapping.

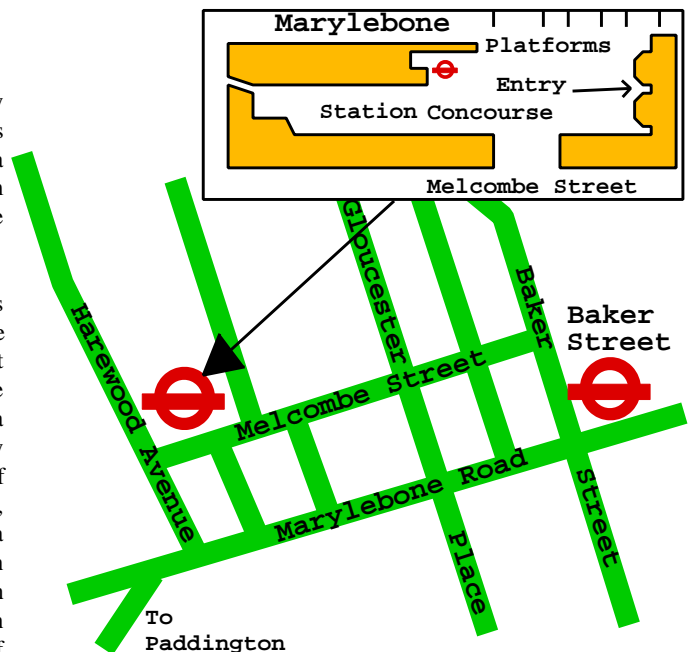
On of his early railway experiences was an open day in 1956 at Eastleigh sheds which included, amongst other interesting specimens, an Adams engine. The Hayling Island branch was both close by and close to his heart. before it finally closed in November 1963, Michael had extensively photographed the line and the diminutive engines with their 2 carriage trains. He implied a degree of poetic justice that the Hayling Island viaduct took 4 attempts by explosives to demolish it - and then only partially. An aerial view of Portsmouth, dockyard in the 50's showed the Royal Navy's 5 aircraft carriers, and 21 miles of track - those were the days! During the summer, there was a regular stream of excursion trains from the Midlands, often hauled by alien engines. Paddle-steamer took the visitors across to the Isle of Wight with coach trip round the Island or trips on the rail network. It's easy to guess which Michael took when he went over - and we saw the resulting views of the Isle of Wight engines. Snow in Portsmouth is very rare but Michael showed us some interesting scenes he took on Boxing day 1962, with the railway services struggling to continue. It was so cold that the water under Hayling Island viaduct froze.

However, Michael roamed widely and we saw photographs from his 1956 visit to Swindon works, a 1957 excursion to Nottingham and excerpts from his records of a 17 hour visit round 11 London sheds. In 1958 he went on a trip to Doncaster and an excursion to South Wales, in 1959 paid a visit to Stratford shed, and in 1960 roamed widely, taking in Sheffield, Swansea and Blackpool. The train ticket for the latter trip from Portsmouth Harbour cost the princely sum of 43/-, and his visit then included a 40 mile tour round engine sheds in the North West by taxi for £1 10s 0d! His 1961 tour of the Western Region using a Rail Rover costing £9 10s sounded almost pedestrian by comparison.

In 1963 with rail fares increasing, a Lambretta scooter was obtained, with Michael riding as a pinion passenger. Later an old Austin 7 provided arguable more weatherproof transport - if you didn't look through the gap in the floorboards!. This transport, and a tent allowed tours of Wales and the North West. These trips included, in 1965, a farewell to standard gauge in Wales, and a visit to Llanfair P.G. including the purchase of the obligatory platform ticket. His final major railway expedition was in 1968 to Manchester and Carnforth for the steam farewell. He took a combined coach and train trip with about 30 spotters from Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight. The tour included visits to Patricroft, Carnforth, Stockport, and finishing at Newton Heath. He showed a poignant picture of two 9Fs face to face at Carnforth standing on the scrap line -each only about nine years old.

We also saw some of his survival equipment - Tuf sandals, haversack, Pack-a-Mac and Hales apricot pies! Applying for shed permits required a reasonable number of visitors, but if they were short they would roundup a number of local spotters - if they were lucky the permits could always be modified for reuse! His other hobby was football, stimulated by the club organising train excursions. He and his old dinner gong, painted in Pompey colours, became well known on his many combined football and shed bashing trips.

Michael generated 850 foolscap pages of notes during his trainspotting days from 1955 to 1968. These have been condensed into the two volumes of his "Diaries of a Trainspotter" which is currently in print.



Forthcoming Events

10 Sep 2001 "Out of the Black Hole"

David Wright, Curator of Collections, NRM.
An opportunity to hear first hand what the Museum is doing to make its collection more accessible.

12 Nov 2001 "The work of the Sir Nigel Gresley Locomotive Preservation Trust"

Keith Jackson

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. Guests are welcome.

Lord Nelson Appeal

The Eastleigh Railway Preservation Society have established a Draw which will provide funds towards the restoration of the National Collection's *Lord Nelson*. There are some substantial prizes, for example

- Two tickets on the *Orient Express*,
- Three tickets on the *Cathedrals Express* for 26th September
- Dinner for two on the Mid Hants dining train.

The tickets are priced at £1 each and, in anticipation of you wishing to take part in the draw, and so help with the restoration (as well as stand a chance of winning a prize) we have included a book on 10 tickets with this copy of the *Briefing*. Please post any counterfoils and payment for the tickets you buy to the address on the tickets.

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