

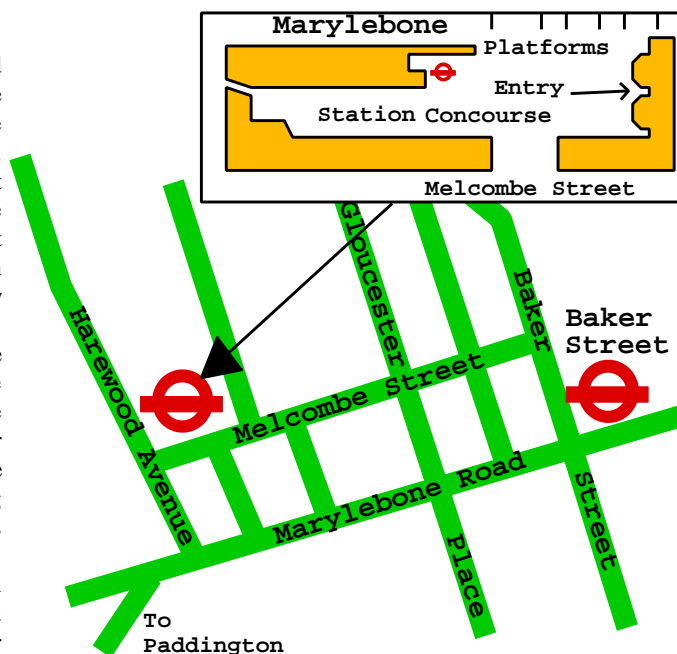
OUT OF THE BLACK HOLE

For the opening lecture this year we were treated to a talk by Mr David Wright, Curator - collections at the NRM. The locomotive collection may be the most impressive, the pictures the most colourful, but the "Collection" is the most extensive, ranging from tickets to uniforms, office chairs to rail chairs, clocks to horse drawn wagons. The sheer scale of the collection meant that those on display were traditionally only the tip of the iceberg - most of the items remaining unseen in storage. The various museum galleries each set out to reflect a particular aspect of railways, but could show little more than representative examples. When he had moved to York David set about a policy of making as much as possible of the collection visible to the general public. When the museum opened at York many larger items ended up outside in the south yard. By dint of hard work, the area was tidied up and the task of storage in the Foundry Lane building and cataloguing began. Some of the items were catalogued, but many were not. In particular, the silver was catalogued, but for security reasons was not on display. As an aside, David warned us about the consequences of wrapping silver in cling-film - the result is a black tarnishing to the silver, which is very difficult to remove. Conversely, some of the models were catalogued, but the identification marking on the model has been lost. Gradually, some order was given to the smaller items. Notably, the collection of several thousand tickets were placed into binders which in turn were stored on racks. It was now possible to find specific tickets quickly. Slightly larger items were stored in drawer cabinets of the type purchased with funds provided by the South of England Group. These were very successful, but the effort involved in preparing the drawers to take the items was immense. Each item had to have an individually shaped cut-out made to the foam which filled the drawer.

The collection of uniforms was another example of something which was difficult to display. To prevent fading each item had to be stored in its bag and hung within a temperature and humidity controlled environment. This precluded the uniforms going on general display, but they could always be seen by appointment.

The opening of the warehouse had been a wonderful opportunity. Originally, this was to have been a vehicle store but the terms of the Heritage Lottery Fund meant that more of the collection had to be visible. The simple exercise had been to use the walls to mount the collection of station name boards and wagon makers name plates. Simple, as long as one remembered the weight of the items and the height of the walls. The J P Richards collection of O gauge LNWR models merited special treatment and a large purpose built display had been purchased. However, funds would not allow for further display cabinets and some ingenuity was required to enable more of the other items to be put on show. The solution devised was to use stacking crates of the type used in industrial warehouses. These could be used in a variety of ways. On their own they provided a structure upon which larger items could be hung. With the addition of Perspex sides, many more smaller items could be made visible to visitors. One interesting side effect of the greater visibility of items was the increase in the number of donations made to the collection. No longer were donors put off by the thought that their prized possession was merely going into a "Black Hole".

The work continued to provide even greater visibility of the NRM collection. However, this requires investment and the collections division had to compete with the rest of the museum for funding. These days museums are expected to be more than mere stores of memorabilia and the emphasis is on educating the casual visitor through interpretation of the subject matter, with only a few representative items incorporated into the display. This requires money and so there was little left to display many examples of a particular item so that the wide range of solutions produced by the different companies could be appreciated.



Forthcoming Events

- 12 Nov 2001 "The work of the GWR Preservation Group", R A Gorringe, Chairman, GWR Preservation Group Ltd.
- 14 Jan 2002 AGM and Social, plus some railway related entertainment.

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.

AGM and Social

As you'll note from the above, plans are in hand for the AGM and social - our tenth. All Friends, and guests are welcome. As usual, we intend there to be seasonal refreshments and a small charge will be made to cover these - there is no charge if you only wish to attend the AGM. This year, Ian Harrison and Alan Gosling will be standing for re-election to the committee, but if anyone else wishes to put their name forward for the committee, please get in touch with George Rutter. Final details will be in the next Briefing.

Christmas is Coming

It may have escaped your attention, but the nights are drawing in and Christmas will soon be with us. If you're looking for gift ideas, why not consider purchasing some of the items we carry on the outreach stand. Because of our intensive model railway exhibition programme, we have reasonable stocks of most items, including the NRM calendar, Christmas cards, playing cards, - or why not one of the illustrated books on railway company posters, or a presentation print by Michael Turner, or a carriage print? I could go on! Any of these, together with the range of hand-painted railway company crests, and more beside, can be obtained at any of the events we attend, for Friends we can even offer a discount!

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