



The Friends of the National Railway Museum

Briefing 26

South of England Group

June 2002

Vice Presidents - Captain Bill Smith VRD, RNR; Alan Pegler

OUTREACH REPORT

We have had a busy Spring this year. It started on 23rd and 24th March at the Alexandra Palace Model Railway Exhibition. We had a major display in the annex - yes the exhibition has got so big it needs two rooms. We did good trade throughout the two days - even selling one of the railway crests to a visitor from the USA. Then followed our first outside visit of the year, Easter at the Buckinghamshire Railway Centre at Quainton Road for the visit of *Rocket*. We had a second visit there on the following Bank Holiday, 5th and 6th May, for the visit of *Green Arrow*. We were made very welcome by the Centre which was very busy throughout this period, the crowds being drawn not only by "our" engines, but by the opening of the newly restored "Oxford - Rewley Road" station building. If you haven't visited it, you really ought to go and see what a marvellous job they have done. In between these two visits, we provided the sales team on the 18th April excursion of *Green Arrow*. Finally, on 11th May, we rounded off with attendance at the Lodden Model Railway Exhibition (near Reading).

We have a rest in June before starting the Summer session at Sandy Model Railway Exhibition on 6th and 7th July, followed by our first visit to the flying display at the Shuttleworth Collection, Old Warden on 7th August. Why not come along?

25TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER OF THE FNR M

On 25th May, a party from the South of England Group sat down at the anniversary dinner at York. We had a table to ourselves, with both Vice Presidents in attendance. No doubt there will be a full report in the *Review* but suffice to say that it was a very enjoyable event. Andrew Scott paid tribute to the work of the Friends and was especially grateful for our support in helping the NRM gain the European Museum of the Year award last year. The after-dinner speaker, Chris Green, both looked back on his experiences in the old BR, and looked forward to the new generation of private railways, but recognised that not everything with the present structures is right. He has a strong attachment to the NRM and is expecting to see some of his current stock taking its place amongst the exhibits soon.

The photo shows the South of England table with (from the left and clockwise), Ian Harrison, George Rutter, Alan Pegler, Rubina Curtis, George Haslar, Mel Draper, Dorothy Brown, and Charmaine Harrison; photograph - Philip Brown



Green Arrow and the Stand at Quainton Road

Photo: Mel Draper



GOLD AND SILVER AT SWINDON by Ian Harrison

Purists will tell you that a 75th Anniversary is "platinum" - but gold and silver (50+25) is much more romantic; and the romance of "KGV" - Great Western loco No 6000, *King George V*, is exceptional.

Completed in June 1927, after C B Collett was given instructions just 10 months earlier by Sir Felix Pole to build the most powerful locomotive in Britain, she hauled a 10 coach Cornish Riviera Express unaided over the Devon banks within a month of leaving the works. I wonder what Railtrack would make of that?

Invited to send a British loco to the centenary of the Baltimore & Ohio Railway, Sir Felix didn't need to think twice. So KGV was immediately packed off to the USA - the precursor of those visits by 6100 and 6220 from another railway (both, of course, substituted - the latter by a lady of our acquaintance), not to mention 4472 in more recent times. The bell on KGV's buffer beam is a reminder of that 1927 visit.

On her return to the UK, KGV ran in the pool of King class locomotives until the last of the class were withdrawn in December 1962. Although claimed for the national collection, she languished at Swindon until 1968 when the H P Bulmer cider company paid for her to be taken to Newport for overhaul to main line standard and later to Hereford as her operational base. She was the first locomotive other than 4472 to run on BR main lines after the steam ban. Scenes of those October days in 1971 - and the mass trespass at various points - make one wonder that BR had the bottle to rescind the ban at all. She hauled numerous steam tours before her mainline ticket finally expired just after the 1985 GWR 150 celebrations, but by then 6023 and 6024 were close to completion and the NRM decided to leave her in cold storage.

So now she is back at her birthplace in the new "Steam" museum on the site of Swindon works. Not, perhaps the centre of attention - that is undoubtedly *Caerphilly Castle*, which looks absolutely magnificent in the large gallery, with a full length walk-through pit under the loco. KGV is in a terminal platform on a "country branch line" station, bedecked with union flags and surrounded by with the traditional appurtenances. Her cab is open and spruced, her bell gleams and she carries "The

Bristolian" headboard with a GW 70ft buffet car behind. Superb.

On 14th June, numerous friends of KGV assembled to wish her happy birthday. The Mayor of Swindon led the tributes and Tim Bryan, the curator of the Museum talked about KGV's exploits. A photographic exhibition showed some of the triumphs and tribulations of her years, including the wet August day in 1968 when she had to be hauled out of the storage shed at Swindon by hand because BR had lifted the track and would not allow a loco to run over the temporary panels.

Sad to say, this was the first time that your scribe had visited "Steam". With about half the indoor accommodation of the NRM, and with a more limited canvas to cover, it does what it does remarkably well, having perhaps more of a sense of "place" than our own museum, which is now almost unrecognisable as a real working building. There is a carefully thought-through introduction to the main activities of Swindon works; an introduction to Mr Brunel and the building of the GWR; the broad gauge "North Star" and a glimpse of the railway signalling, passenger and goods infrastructure. There is the poignant "wall of names" - over 1500 GWR Swindon staff who have been commemorated by donations to the museum. A galleried workshop like York and, most exciting of all, a simulated "footplate ride" with movement, sounds and cab-window views ahead on a locomotive descending the bank from Crowcombe to Williton on the West Somerset Railway. If you were ever in doubt, this experience will convince you of the worry that all steam drivers must face on curving track such as this when the boiler obscures the view ahead. A salutary experience for all who are tempted to nip across foot crossings!

Lots of ex-GW nameplates, including the delightful oval plate from 1843 "TERRIBLE 4136 Great Western Railway". Need one say more?

There is the GW royal coach in course of restoration - not quite like those at York as until recently it was gracing somebody's back garden. And finally a glimpse of the GWR we all remember - chocolate and cream at Teignmouth and Penzance. Now those really were the days!

OXFORD TO CAMBRIDGE : THEN & NOW

Our speaker on 13th May, Richard Crane, grew up near Bedford St Johns station and was never far away from the railway throughout his school education. Even in the late '50s and early '60s the line was under threat. A friend in the church choir persuade Richard to help in a petition to keep the line open - an early portent for his future. After Sunday evening service, they both used to go for a footplate ride on the line, including one memorable time when they had forgotten to take off their surplices. The last day of 1967 saw the final trains from Bedford to Cambridge, and Bletchley to Oxford. In 1980 the Railway Development Society called a meeting to support the remaining part of the line - Bedford to Bletchley. The result was the formation of a Rail Users Group, and Richard got fingered as organiser. Twenty years on they have 550 members, the line has attracted major investment, and Richard is still there!

He then took us through the illustrated tour of the line, stopping off at the stations and interesting spots. We commenced at Oxford Rewley Road, which although closed to passengers in 1951, remained open for goods until 1990; it has been rebuilt at the Buckinghamshire Railway Centre. The first stop at Islip had an original stone platform until a few years ago but is now a typical NSE station. Bicester Town, originally called London Road, follows with its military railway. A mile east is the crossing of the GW line, followed by Launton Station and the boundary between W and LM regions, just before Marsh Gibbon and Poundon, which was in neither village and had a waiting room on stilts over a significant drop. The signal box at Claydon Junction is now at the Swindon and Cricklade railway, but the connection to Quainton Road is still there. Next is Verney Junction, opened in 1868 for services to Banbury, Buckingham and Baker Street, but in the '60s, so few trains stopped, Richard had a 6 hour wait. The Bedford Rail Users Group once organised a special train from Winslow, the next station - it got a repaint and full illumination - all for one train. Swanbourne station is well worth a visit to see a LNWR 0-8-0 depicted in topiary.

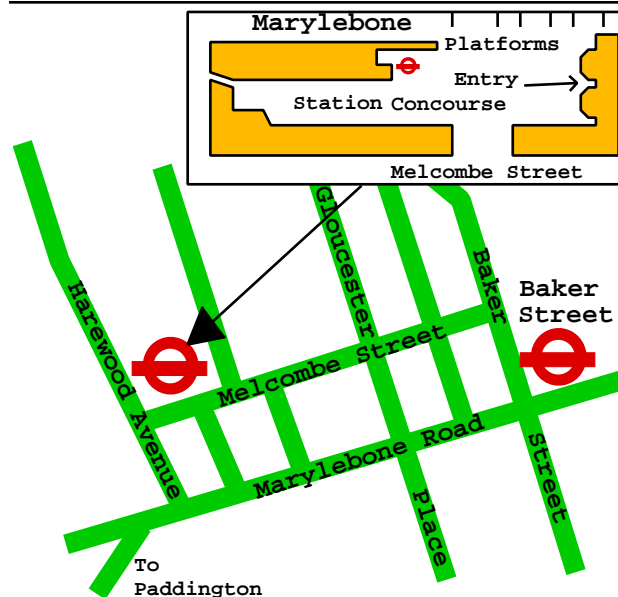
At Bletchley we saw an early colour photo of the 3-coach LMS railcar, and *Flying Scotsman* on the flyover in 1974, arriving for the Borough Council celebrations. From here we moved onto the original, and still opened, section. There are 10 major road crossing over the line to Bedford, all busy and expensive to operate, but which are now being modernised. Fenny Stratford, the first stop, was originally a staggered platform, then made parallel, and now singled. A 150th celebration was staged here when a brand-new class 150 unit was provided by NSE. The line has had other novel power - in 1998 Class 31 engines and air conditioned stock, which were well received by passengers but badly damaged the track. We learnt that the village of Woburn Sands was originally called Hog Sty End. Its new name has its problems though, people have been known to get off asking for Woburn Abbey (5 miles away) or the beach! Aspley Guise, only 1 mile by rail, is some 4 mile by car. We then cross under the M1, and enter Ridgmont station which still has its half timbered buildings - as specified by the Duke of Bedford - and signal equipment inside the station building with the levers in the open. This is due to change when the new signal box is built to control the whole line. We climb over Brogborough Hill and to Lidlington station, in 1961 the site of one of the first automatic-crossing barriers; the instructions were in English and Italian - for the local brick workers. The station was bought by members of the Rail Users Group and is now a centre for events, the next being a ramble starting at 1.40 on 10th August, and a vintage transport day on 31st August. The next stop, Millbrook recently benefitted from £500,000 to bring it up to modern standards. Stewartby, once the biggest UK brickworks, is now smaller with no rail freight traffic. The old clay pits are now used to dispose of ballast and household waste. Kempston Hardwick station buildings were partially remodelled by a brick lorry and have now been demolished. Kempston and Elstow halt closed in the war and never reopened.

This brought us into Bedford St Johns positioned after the flat crossing of the Bedford -Hitchin line. It has been made redundant by diverting services through the old freight yard to a new St Johns station, services terminating in Bedford (Midland Road). The old St Johns is still there under the weeds. Freight traffic continued to Goldington Power Station for a little while; the shunting engine from here, coincidentally, also finding its way to the Swindon and Cricklade Railway. Willington only opened in 1902, and only the goods loading dock is now left. Blunham had a thriving banana goods service - of all things - but if the line is reopened, as is hoped, a diversion will be needed round the new houses here. Girtford Halt, between here and Sandy, must be one of the shortest lived stations in the country, opening in 1938 and closing in 1941. Crossing the East Coast Main Line, we enter Sandy; the East Coast line was only double-track here, until the Cambridge line closed, when it was widened to 4 track.

The next part was the original Sandy to Potton Tramway - the original loco *Shannon* is now at Didcot. Potton had two signal boxes right to the end and the station, now in private ownership, is the best survivor on the line. After Gamlingay there was a 6 miles climb to Old North Road station, the signal box and goods shed still exist but

the platforms have been filled in. Lord's Bridge, originally a cluster of houses, is now the site of Cambridge University's Radio Telescopes. We then joined the Eastern Counties line and finished our journey at Cambridge.

Philip Brown proposed the vote of thanks. A VHS video, and video CD recording of the talk are available for loan. Please contact Mel Draper (see below for address)



FORTHCOMING EVENTS

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| 9 September 2002 | "The Pendon Museum"
Ken Surman |
| 11 November 2002 | "Operating or Wrecking the National Collection"
Richard Gibbon, NRM |

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, behind Ben & Jerry's ice-cream outlet, 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.

FRIENDS BENEFITS

In order to offset the apparent loss of advantage since free Museum admission was extended to all, efforts are being made to obtain additional benefits for members. So far the following have been negotiated for **MEMBERS ONLY** on production of a current membership card. Families need a Family membership.

- Milburns' Brief Encounter restaurant and their other outlets in the Museum - 36.25% discount.
- Museum shop - 10% discount on most goods.
- Car parking - purchase a £2 token from the Car Park Entrance desk - the usual fee is £4

Other benefits are in course of negotiation, watch future issues of the *Review* and this Briefing for up dates. You can, of course, also get your 10% discount on goods from the South of England Group stand at our outreach events - another hint to come along!

Contact Addresses for South of England Group

GROUP WEB PAGE - <http://Homepage.ntlworld.com/ms.draper/index.html>

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