



The Friends of the National Railway Museum

Briefing 52

South of England Group

December 2008

Vice Presidents - Alan Pegler OBE, FRSA; Sir William McAlpine Bt, FRSE, FCIT, FRSA

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The AGM takes place on Monday 12th January at our usual venue, the Station Conference Room in Marylebone Station (see rear page for location map). As is normal, we will be combining the AGM with our New Year social gathering, providing an opportunity to relax, talk to other members, enjoy some railway related entertainment and partake of the seasonal refreshments. There will be a charge to cover the cost of refreshments. This year it's £8 per head, a slight increase on last year's cost but, bearing in mind the inflation costs associated with food prices, that is only to be expected.

Business for the AGM will be a review of the Group's activities and finances over the last year, together with the election of three committee members, as required by our constitution. The committee members whose posts are up for election are Roger Smith (Treasurer), Phil Brown (events organiser) and Mel Draper (Editor) - Roger and Mel are willing to stand again, but Phil is no longer able to continue in the post due to other commitments. We are therefore looking for another member to join the committee - not necessarily as events organiser.

Attendance at the AGM is open to any member of the FNRM, whether or not they reside in the South East of England.

An attendance form is enclosed, please return this with your cheque for the appropriate amount. If you have anything for formal discussion, enclose a note with your form or contact our Secretary, George Rutter - address on rear page.

There are already a couple of topics for discussion. The first is any offers of material for the February members' evening. If you have anything, please let Phil Brown know. In addition, Les Butler, our outdoor events co-ordinator, has been making provisional plans for a weekend visit for 20-21 June, to take in the FNRM AGM at York and a guided visit round the East Lancashire Railway. Les will provide more details but he would find it helpful if you come prepared to say whether you are interested in taking part and, if so, whether you prefer to travel to/from York or to York and return from Manchester. So check your diaries (assuming you've got one for 2009 - if not, we can always sell you a calendar!)

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RE-BIRTH OF A RURAL RAILWAY THE STORY OF THE WENSLEYDALE LINE

We were pleased to welcome David Gibson, Vice Chairman of WRA Ltd, on 13th October who, despite his title, did not have too far to travel as he lives in Essex.

David used an extensive selection of photographs to illustrate his talk covering progress on reopening the line and its future plans; but he started with a brief history. 1848 saw a start made from Northallerton to Leeming Bar, a length of 5m 70c. It took another 7 years to get to Bedale. A very sharp curve was installed to allow an extension to Leyburn in 1857. Finally, in 1878 the Midland made a junction to Hawes to join with the NER line which had extended from Leyburn. Although after 30 years there was now a “through route” it still operated as two branches to Hawes. The line continued in that form until the passenger service was withdrawn in 1954 and freight withdrawn west of Redmire in 1964.

David then took us on a virtual tour of the line giving a few snippets about each main location. At **Northallerton** the Hawes train left from a bay at the north end sandwiched between the down fast and slow lines of the ECML. The Hawes formation is now buried under the car park. Northallerton has always been a bottleneck. In World War II a loop was built from the ECML to give some redundancy in case of bombing. With only 3ft vertical separation from the Hawes branch, it used a moveable and fully interlocked bridging piece (it never seems to have been used!)

Leeming Bar station is placed where the old Great North Road used to cross the line – it is now effectively in the middle of nowhere following the building of the A1 bypass. **Aiskew Crossing** over the A684 is ungated but protected by flashing

lights, and it is indeed “a skew” crossing! **Bedale** station was rebuilt as an industrial unit - the railway rent a couple of rooms.

Spennithorne village is 2-3 miles away from the railway; the old station building is a private house and unlikely to reopen. **Leyburn**, at which one of the platforms has been rebuilt, was once a major loading point for race horses. Its claim to fame was in 1927 when a total eclipse brought crowds to the area. The village of **Wensley**, which gives the dale its name, was effectively wiped out by the black death and has never really recovered. **Redmire** station building is now owned by the Scout Association. Limestone traffic continued to this point until 1992, only finishing because the overhead loading cable-way was life-expired. The quarries didn't have much stone reserves anyway. BR put the line up for sale at £1.5M but there were no buyers. However the Army proposed to use it for transferring tanks to/from Catterick Camp and paid BR £750k to bring it up to standard. The company is still under contract to move army trains. These are difficult to operate – they arrive very early in the morning and only pay by the mileage run, so are not very profitable.

Aysgarth was a passing loop mainly serving farms but it was a major station with 8-9 staff. **Askrigg** was reopened to passengers during the 1962/3 winter as the only means of communication during the heavy snows. **Hawes** station is now owned by the National Park. The only tunnel is at **Mossdale Head** (240yds) thence to **Garsdale**. at which the last train from the branch arrived in April 1954.

William Hague is the local MP for Richmond and helped Ruth Annison, set up the Wensleydale Railway Association

by enabling discussions with Railtrack. This resulted in the transfer of the railway to a separate company. By having a 99 year lease and remaining part of the national network, it was eligible for all five licenses from the Rail Regulator to operate both track and trains. On transfer, the line was effectively a 22 mile siding with no buildings or signals – other than a single fixed distant. The lease was finally handed across in March 2003 and the line opened on 4th July 2003. William Hague flagged off the first train, and the Duke of York visited the line in March 2004.

Grant-Rail installed the loop at Constable Burton as a training exercise. The railway has a good working relationship with the company, which uses it to test new track maintenance equipment.

Although they have a rake of 5 Mark 1s, these have not seen much use. The mainstay is a class 101 DMU. Class 66s bring in the army trains and steam excursions occasionally come in off the main line. For two years running they have operated a “whiff of steam” during August and September. However, it has no infrastructure to support steam – the locos even have to be topped up with water from a childrens' swimming pool!

Although set up as a community railway, it hasn't been able to offer such a service due to the lack of connection at Northallerton. Despite this it has helped regenerate the local economy by attracting tourists, and more steam may attract even more. However, diesel galas make more money for the railway, not because they carry more people but because running costs are much lower. One lesson learnt from the special train visits is to plan a break of journey at Leyburn to give visitors the opportunity to be parted from their cash in the local shops.

Future plans include ideas for a station at Northallerton and the relaying of the

south curve connecting the Wensleydale branch to the ECML, by reinstalling the old line to the main station and a tighter curve into a new platform on the low-level loop. This would also benefit Arriva Northern services to Sunderland, but will also involve relocating signalling and overhead masts. Costs are around £3M and progress will depend on grants from the regional development agency.

Phase two will be a one mile extension to Castle Bolton which is a popular tourist destination. The main problem is a 50-60ft gap where the Apedale Beck bridge used to be. The rest of the formation is in good condition with little tree growth thanks to grazing sheep.

The third stage is a two mile extension to Aysgarth giving access to the National Park centre and Aysgarth Falls. This will be the natural terminus for the foreseeable future, but it will cost several million pounds to complete. You can hire Aysgarth station, which is situated in several acres of grounds, for week stays.

Phase four is a six mile link from Hawes to Garsdale on the S&C. There is good local political support and the track formation is in excellent condition. The final step would be the 9 mile link between Aysgarth and Hawes.

The last two years has been a period of consolidation with financial hard reality setting in, requiring some cost cutting. There are now only 2 full time and 3 part time staff, down from the original ten. Running is at weekends only in winter with special events to attract customers. £3M capital has been spent so far with no government money or grants, all the money coming from small investors, but the line is now very close to break-even. More details on the Wensleydale Line is on the website at -

<http://www.wensleydalerailway.com>

OUTING TO STATFOLD BARN RAILWAY

Our second outing of the year took place on 20th September to this private railway near Tamworth, the home of the "new" Hunslet Engine Works. This was their annual "open day" but tickets were

restricted so we were fortunate in using the Chairman's contacts to procure some for a few of our members. As Martin Sixsmith's photographs show, there was plenty on display. We hope to organise a repeat visit in the future.



OUTREACH REPORT

The sales stand visited TADrail in Beaconsfield on 11th October and the NEC for the Warley (National) Model Railway Exhibition on 22nd & 23rd November. It was noticeable that the latter was significantly quieter than last year, probably due to the combined effects of

National Rail, who used that weekend to dig up the line, the weather, which being cold, wet and windy, and the recession beginning to bite. A special activity on our stand involved taking bids for the last of the NRM production-run OO-gauge Deltic models. The lucky winner came from Cornwall!



Sir Lamiel at Gloucester 11th October 2008



Photo: Ian Harrison

RAILWAYS AT WAR

Sixteen members were present on 10th November as Alan Gosling introduced Shaun Houldridge from the NRM, our speaker for the evening. We were also pleased to welcome into the audience Kitty Chisholm, from the Board of Trustees of the NMSI.

Shaun's talk concentrated on the first years of World War II, but he started much earlier, noting that although the Duke of Wellington is credited with recognising that railways had a role in transferring troops in times of war, it was actually General Napier who identified this possibility in 1839. The Crimea War used railways to a limited extent, but it was the Boer War that really used it for strategic purposes, even using armoured cars.

By the late 1930s, there was no doubt about their strategic importance. The armed forces were operating their own rail services at docks, army camps and even airforce stations. The Emergency Defence Act of 1939 brought all civil railways under government control.

Operation "Pied Piper" followed quickly, evacuating children, women and older people from London, Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool. All children were tagged with railway luggage tags and had a small case containing half a loaf, some dried milk and sweets. The plan was to evacuate 4 million people, but it only achieved around 1.5 million. A second evacuation came in May 1940.

During the Dunkirk campaign, the railways moved troops away from the ports. Eight days of special train movements were needed without any prior knowledge. This involved 620 extra trains for 300,000 troops, using carriages from all over the system.

In summer 1942, US troops were carried

from arrival ports at a rate of 5000 trains a month.

The war didn't just affect the national system. The RHDR introduced an armoured train, manned by volunteers from their own works. In 1942 the whole area, including the RHDR, was taken over as part of the PLUTO programme.

Meanwhile UK factories were busy with war products. These required not just goods trains but also workmans' trains, with special tickets. In 1942, 400 million passenger journeys were made using these tickets. Passenger restrictions were in force, cheap tickets were withdrawn and leisure travel was discouraged. Even so 10,000 million more passenger-mile journeys were made than pre-war!

At the start of 1943 there were only 20,000 women working on the railways, by the end of the war this had risen to 105,000 out of a total workforce of nearly 1 million.

In the locomotive works, austerity was the name of the game, resulting in designs such as the Q1, and the expansion of mixed traffic designs such as the LMS Black 5 and LNER V2. These locos achieved some amazing feats - a V2 pulled a 850 ton, 26 coach, troop train from Peterborough to London. However, the Black 5 was by far the most numerous of the mixed-traffic type. Meanwhile the shortage of manpower led to the simplification of maintenance and was the justification for the removal of the streamlining from the Princess Coronation class and the wheel covers from the A4s.

The war produced many heroes. In 1943 railway workers received 1 George Cross, 28 George Medals, 72 British Empire Medals, and 124 commendations. It just shows the contribution the railway, and its workers, made during the war.

SALES ON THE MOVE

Ever since the launch of the South of England Group in 1992, we have taken every opportunity to raise funds for the Museum by operating a sales stand. Initially, we had the luxury of depot open days with a free pitch and large crowds of enthusiastic punters. Open days are now history, so we have to make do with a stand at some of the larger – or just convenient – model railway exhibitions, for which we often have to pay a sizeable fee for the pitch.

Recent tours in the south behind NRM locos have enabled us to broaden the reach. Last year we had 850 *Lord Nelson* and 777 *Sir Lamiel*, this year the newly rebuilt 70013 *Oliver Cromwell* and *Sir Lamiel* again (see photo on page 5). Although selling on trains is nothing new for us – we did it several years ago behind 46229 *Duchess of Hamilton* and 4771 *Green Arrow* – we have been able to greatly increase our impact by use of a mobile stand on the trains.

Traditionally, we have simply set up shop on a table in the buffet car. Whilst this is fine for those in Standard and First Class who might slip out for a tin or two, it doesn't reach everyone on the train. Thanks to an agreement with Steam Dreams – by virtue of convincing them that our mini-trolley would not be a serious obstacle – we are now able to reach parts of the train that were previously out of bounds, notably the Premier Dining customers. Folks in latter are wined and dined all day so the idea of staggering down to the buffet car on the off chance of finding something of interest was a non-starter for most.

By carefully arranging our stock we can

present a surprisingly large range of goods from the trolley. Postcards, greetings cards, calendars, coasters, DVDs, book-marks, badges, tea-towels, wall-plaques and the range of locomotive books are all there. We try and offer “specials” where we can – so on *Oliver Cromwell's* trip to Norwich from Liverpool Street, we offered the Mike Turner print of 70000 *Britannia* at Liverpool Street together with a certificate signed by the group Chairman validating the fact that this print had been bought on “The Norfolkman” train. We could easily have sold twice as many as we had!

The net result has been a startling jump in the Group's turnover with nearly £3,000 coming from six on-train sales. That's not all profit, but it helps to build a presence and get us accepted as a serious player by the train operators. We are typically taking £450 - £500 per train, but the stars of the show are Pat Moody and Charles Firminger who grossed £684 on one train.

A real benefit for the passengers is our “souvenir price list”, handed out on the train. This not only has the list of goodies we have on board, but gives details about the locomotive, including an outline drawing with major dimensions. It also has some background on our Group, the Museum and gives directions to the website. We are currently waiting to see details of next year's outings, but if you fancy a day out behind steam, let me know.

Ian Harrison

(Thanks are due to the railtour operators for their willing co-operation in allowing us to work on their trains)

FOR CURRENT LIST OF FORTHCOMING LECTURES

See the Diary section of the web page at:

<http://www.nrmfriends-south.org.uk/Diary.html>

FOR CONTACTS IN FNRM SOUTH OF ENGLAND

GROUP:

See Contacts at main index:

<http://www.nrmfriends-south.org.uk/index.html>