



The Friends of the National Railway Museum

Briefing 56

South of England Group

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

THE GREAT HALL RE-DISPLAY

Dr Belinda Morris, Display Content Manager, NRM

Over the past few years we have become accustomed to hearing of the Museum's plans for re-development – the Flying Scotsman exhibition, "York Central", the streamliners etc. Now we move a step closer.

Dr Belinda Morris, who has developed exhibition content at the NRM for 11 years, gave us some insights into the plans for the re-display of the Great Hall. This is a subject that moves some grown men to near apoplexy, but Belinda made a cogent case. As she points out, the current layout is fundamentally the same as when the Museum opened in 1975 – it lacks focus and punch and does not tell a story. It is simply a collection of objects whose relationship one to another is not obvious to the average visitor.

In a bid to understand more about the profile of its visitors, the Museum has done some work to segment its audience. The rough breakdown is 49% families; 46% independent adults and 5% pre-booked schools. The majority of visitors are on holiday in the area, are local, or are travelling from their home on the day of visit. However some will travel any distance as "Pilgrims" and another group are "Progress Checkers", like us, who visit, often from further afield, when something

has changed.

The Museum's aim is to boost the interest level, engagement and "dwell time" for the visitors, giving them more of an active rather than passive experience and a better feel for the impact of railways in the UK and elsewhere.

The problem is how to get a better experience into the same space – there is no increase in the size of the current buildings planned.

The solution is to insert a high level walkway, or Backbone, into the Great Hall that will offer new space for introducing the story of railways and offer views down onto themed displays which tie in with the outline

story. The introductory experience will explore what makes up a railway and will focus on the opening of the Liverpool & Manchester Railway as the first passenger

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railway. Story threads from this point will introduce people, technology and timeframes for what happened before and after this important event.

So having traversed the walkway, people will be better informed to explore the main exhibits, which will be more variable than at present in content and with better explanations. Other ideas include relocating the Museum shop in order to create a better entrance with more explanation about what is where and improving the goods in the shop to link to the items on display. The "City" entrance will become the single point of entry for general visitors and the Car Park entrance will be used solely for school parties and conferences.

The turntable will stay put, but vehicles may be placed on lengths of track other than the fixed layout to improve space flexibility. That said, there are likely to be

fewer vehicles on display and the list of those that will be included is being worked on at the moment. That means that homes will need to be found for some items and, given the more descriptive nature of the display, it will not be possible to move the majority of vehicles

around in the same way as at present.

One of our number made a brilliant suggestion for creating a new exhibition of the surplus items – use the ex-Eurostar platforms at Waterloo!! Plenty of space, undercover and a railway environment. What more could one ask?

If the Heritage Lottery Fund and others accept the Museum's proposals for the Great Hall and release the requested funding (the cost is £20million in total) we might have it open in time for late 2012. But it will take a lot of work and goodwill all-round for that to happen. We await developments!

GN SUBURBAN ELECTRIFICATION AND SIGNALLING

13 members and guests were present on 12th October when Paul Hepworth visited us to present his personal recollections of the electrification and associated resignalling of the Great Northern suburban lines out of Kings Cross during the late 1970s. Paul started his career in BR before moving on, during the privatisation years, to various signalling companies, including Westinghouse, before retiring in 2007.

Paul started his presentation with a short powerpoint display comparing the original GN route diagram and the post electrification route highlighting the restructuring of the Highbury and Islington to Moorgate route. Overall, the GN suburban routes from London to Royston and Huntingdon included some 50 mechanical signal boxes and three power boxes. The 2nd oldest power box was at

Potters Bar, installed during in the 1950's rebuild. At the same time, New Barnet and Hertford North had been resignalled with non-standard (non-AC immune) signals, which required more work later on.

For the 1970's electrification, local electronic interlocking centres were installed at the major junctions. After a period of testing, these were installed in the relevant mechanical box. This process started at Hertford North, initiating the resignalling the entire branch as a diversionary route. Each weekend, control was transferred to Kings Cross from one of the temporary local interlocking centres and then the redundant local interlocking equipment was moved to the local relay room, for emergency use only.

Meanwhile a temporary control centre was set up at Kings Cross in a new signalling

centre. Initially, this just communicated with the local mechanical boxes, but ultimately became the new power centre for the whole GN line.

Paul then presented his slides, showing in many cases, the before and after arrangements and recounting some of the interesting sights and moments he encountered during the upgrade work.

We started at Farringdon with a class 33 on a train of slam-door, short length carriages. This was the limit to get round Hotel Curve into platform 14 at Kings Cross, which could only just accommodate a 6 coach train. At the other side of the station was York Road with its connection to the Widened Lines to Farringdon. Surprisingly, there was a west-bound link, although in the absence of one on the other side of the station, trains could only be sent to Paddington - with no way back!

During the upgrade, some of the platforms at Kings Cross were rebuilt and extended. This produced some interesting temporary measures, such as temporarily supporting signal cabinets in mid-air.

There were some interesting old boxes at Finsbury Park. Ashburton Grove box had its original GNR track diagram until it finally closed. No3 had gas lighting burners up to the end, and No 4 was in the way of the new dive-under onto the Moorgate line, so was an early casualty.

Harringay station box was unusual in controlling both up and down lines, but it was the west Up box which was chosen to temporarily control the passenger lines during the upgrade. It was around this time that the ground heaved in the cutting supporting the over-looking tower blocks. This needed steel piling - which is still visible from a passing train.

At Wood Green a scissors crossing on the down side was removed meaning that

trains could no longer switch between the main and Hertford Loop. Needless to say, on the first day two trains arrived at Wood Green on the wrong platforms! Wood Green No 4, right next to the main line, was the temporary interlocking centre during the upgrade. It shook so violently when trains passed that it had a ship's clock installed for time keeping.

A new control panel at Gordon Hill was designed to oversee some ground frames to store spare stock - these have since been removed to dubious operating advantage. At the time Hertford North controlled the rest of the loop all the way to Langley Junction.

At Woolmer Green box there was no mains water, supplies coming in cans which were delivered once a day. Following an exchange of some choice words, Paul learnt never to ask the signalman for a cup of tea!

During discussion it was noted that throughout the rebuild, train services were never fully stopped and there was no "bus replacement" service. Also, the local interlocking, installed during the upgrade, remains - and is essential when there is a signal-communications problem. Indeed, mostly the signalling is unchanged from the upgrade. Finsbury Park alone has been replaced by a local digital system because of wire degradation - but the new system operates slower than the original!

Paul finished with two signalling stories. One was about the "bush telegraph" which kept track of the chief signalling inspector as he travelled from Kings Cross to inspect the line. The other was the "overtime special" which carried Bank of England notes and bullion from Stratford to Leeds. There was a crew change at Finsbury Park, but with armed police on-board, there were never any delays!

WHERE IS THE EUSTON ARCH?

On 16th September, Phil Brown and George Rutter attended the launch of "Raising the Arch", a proposal for rebuilding the Euston Arch, which included an informal talk by Dan Cruickshank and Gavin Stamp.

There has been much speculation over the years about the ultimate fate of the Euston Arch. It has been widely rumoured that it still existed, but in the fire surrounds of many a stylish front room. However, another answer has been found - one based upon actual evidence.

In making improvements to the Prescott Channel in East London as part of the Olympic preparations, British Waterways dredged up stones which had been carved. The carving identified the stones as coming from the Euston Arch. It is now believed that a deal was struck between two contractors, the one demolishing the Euston Arch and the other doing repairs to the Prescott Channel.

This saw the stone from the Arch used to repair damage to the bed of the channel. In 1938 there had been a proposal to refurbish Euston Station, as part of which the Euston Arch would have been moved closer to the Euston Road. World War II put paid to that scheme to rationalise Euston Station and it was in a very different climate that British Rail redeveloped the station in the 1960s. All traces of the old, steam, order were to be swept away with the introduction of the West Coast electrification. The experiment has not been a great success and 50 years on there is talk of replacing the hideous "box" with a new Euston Station. With the discovery of a significant amount of the stones from the Briefing No 56 Euston Arch, the Euston Arch Trust has been set

up to counteract the 1962 demolition of the Arch and restore it as part of the redevelopment, placing it back between the 2 lodge houses (which were spared in 1962).

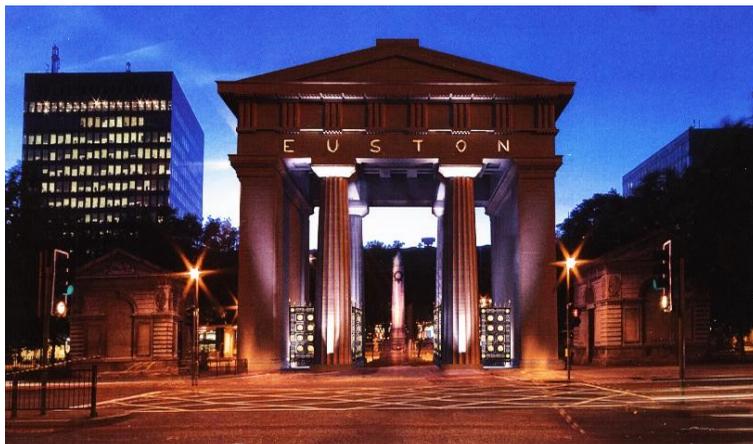
To the the casual observer, the Euston Arch was a massive monument, but actually the stone merely faced a brick and iron structure. The massive columns were actually hollow and the writer knows 2 members of railway staff who worked in the attic when it contained all the LMS deeds. A number of the stones have been recovered and are mainly undamaged (except that some of the grime of 1950s London had been washed off in the enforced bath). From pictures taken at the time, it would appear that the contractors took down the north side first, rather than working "top-down". This is supported by some of the stones raised to date which clearly came from towards the top of the arch. It is hoped, therefore, that excavation of the Prescott Channel would provide much of the south elevation of the arch, enabling the arch to be rebuilt. The Trust's plans foresee the cost of the rebuilding being recovered by income from the basement and attic rooms.

The project has the support of the local MP, Frank Dobson, and our own vice president, Sir William MacAlpine. Incidentally, his company bid for the contract to demolish the Arch. What might have happened if they had won the contract - a very impressive entrance to Sir William's private railway station at Fawley, perhaps?

More details at

<http://www.eustonarch.org>

Phil Brown



How the Euston Arch could look. Computer composite provided by Euston Arch Trust



The stand at the NEC, with the well-stocked display

OUTREACH REPORT

On 10th October the stand attended the Tring & District Model Railway show at Berkhamstead. We understand from the organisers that attendance was up on last year. Despite not having a full range of stock – in particular we did not have any stocks of the NRM calendars, we had a slightly larger sale than last year. This was certainly boosted by the sale of locomotive postcards donated by Roy Bell. There was a lot of interest in these, so if any reader has similar stock languishing in a shoebox, how about donating them and help the good cause.

Our main event, without question, is the Warley Model Railway Exhibition at the National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham. This year it was held on 20th and 21st November. The show was busy, filling Hall 5 with a wide range of layouts and sales stands. We did a brisk trade on both days. Our next stand visit will be to the East Beds Model Railway Exhibition at Biggleswade on 13th February, followed by the London Festival of Railway Modelling at Alexandra Palace on 27th & 28th March. If you are attending any of these, please drop by the stand for a chat.

MOVED BY STEAM

Richard Inwood and Mike Smith based their illustrated talk on their book of the same title, recently published by Silverlink. Mike is a music teacher and Richard is currently the Bishop of Bedford. In his early ecclesiastical career he spent some time as Archdeacon of Halifax, but regrets that his photos don't achieve the heights of an earlier incumbent there, Eric Treacy. But, as we saw, this is a little self-demeaning!

Richard and Mike met at Burton on Trent grammar school in the 1950's. They first found out that they had a similar passion when, on 18th August 1959, they were both travelling to Leeds and Sheffield for trainspotting purposes.

The book took 7 years in preparation, involving reviewing over 4,500 photos, each being critiqued so that poorly focussed or framed photos were cast aside. Only 217 were chosen for publication. Thanks to Mike's notebooks, it has been possible to confirm the details of most of the photographs.

Mike founded a locospotters club at the school, later taking over another club to organise coach trips - surprisingly most were to locosheds. Although the primary purpose was to collect numbers, they did possess a Brownie 127 camera, but it was useless for taking moving images. It was Christmas 1962 before they got their hands on a 35mm camera.

Starting at Burton on Trent we learnt that Jubilees were the "poshist" locos, 9Fs and 8Fs being far more common. Not surprisingly, it is the former which feature most in their photographs. Moor Street just south of Burton station, close to the signal box and little-used level crossing, was a favourite site. The local breweries provided workings to and from their independent rail networks, with a mixture of old main-

line locos and private engines. There were many level crossing, so plenty of spots to observe movements.

Clay Mills, north of Burton, was also a favourite spot. Here they could admire the passing "specials", such as troop-trains from Catterick Camp, double-headed 4Fs on route to Blackpool or Skegness, and Jubilee-hauled day trips to Alton Towers. Another favourite spot was the ex GN line from Burton to Nottingham. Unlike the earlier Midland line, the GN route had to take the more difficult path over the hills. As a result many of the photos on this line show engines working hard.

The Cromford & High Peak wasn't too far away. In June 1964, a RCTS special travelled along the line from Parsley Hay, with 5 brake vans plus about 10 open wagons packed with standing RCTS members. Richard showed a "before and after" shot, highlighting how 40 years of tree growth, and conversion to a linear path, has impacted on the views. Only four photos in the book have been "tweaked", one being to remove the image of their car wing mirror when they took a photo of the RCTS train. Not surprisingly, the RCTS members had to detrain and walk down the Middleton Incline!

The previous Summer they had trips to Easleigh via Salisbury and the Exeter line to Yeovil Town, and an over-night trip to Scotland via the Settle & Carlisle. In Scotland they struggled round six sheds, inspecting many of the old locos then dumped out of use on the scrap lines. Coming back via Edinburgh they were welcomed by A1s and A3s. Interestingly one of the photographs taken from the carriage window of the train engine, shows the carriage in front of them was one of the then-new Mark 1s with special window frames, capable of being opened

to take stretchers if the carriage was formed into an ambulance train. In early 1964, the pair took a bike trip to see the Somerset & Dorset line. They stopped at Stroud, seeing some unusual wrong-line working due to engineering works. But shortly after they had to abandon the trip because of appalling weather. Despite this disappointment, they persevered with longer-distance trips, taking in Warwickshire, Gloucester and Hereford, and Rutland. Later in the year, a family holiday to Devon, provided the opportunity to visit local lines including, finally, the Somerset & Dorset.

The following year, the family holiday took them to Ilfracombe, involving an interesting trip via Birmingham New Street, Snow Hill, Bristol and Barnstaple. Unfortunately, they never got as far as Padstow and Tavistock, but did cover some of the little used lines in the area.

Chapter 8 of the book is called "Uses of Education", and reflects the activities Mike got up to when he obtained a grant to allow him to take weekly music lessons in

Birmingham. The travel money had no restriction on how he got from Burton to Birmingham.

By using a "Midland Red Rover" he took in Gloucester, Litchfield, Wolverhampton and all points between! By Summer 1965, Richard was at Oxford University making trips around the area, and using his first colour film. He tried to get a shot of Winston Churchill's funeral train at Yarnton but at the critical time a gust of wind hid the engine with steam.

At that time, you could get a 37 shilling all-Scotland rover ticket. This was too good to miss, and the pair took off via the West Coast line to Carlisle, returning via the Settle & Carlisle.

The final swansong came in July 1967, when the pair toured the North West, the final home of operating steam, taking in classic locations at Standedge tunnel, Shap and Ribbleshead Viaduct. The final shot was of Jubilee 45720 on the scrap line at Lugton with its nameplate "Indomitable".

Copies of the book can be obtained from our stand at any of the Outreach events.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The AGM will be held on Monday 11th January at our usual location, Marylebone Station Meeting room. This year the two committee members who are due to stand for re-election are George Rutter and Roy Bell, although if you would like to join the committee, do let the Secretary know. Les Butler will also discuss the options for the coming year's Summer Outing. As you know, we alternate between weekend breaks and days out - this time it will be one of the latter. Les has some ideas for destinations, but other thoughts will be welcome. There will also be the formal reports of last year's activities and our financial position.

As usual, we will have a mixed evening of railway-related entertainment, with seasonal refreshments. To partake in the latter, there will be a charge of £8 for members and guests (there is no charge to members, only, who just wish to attend the formal AGM). In order to make sure that we cater for the correct number, please complete the enclosed form and forward with your cheque for the appropriate amount to Roger Smith, our Treasurer by 4th January. Alternatively, if you have left it too late, please telephone the Secretary, George Rutter (contact details at rear of the Briefing), and be prepared to pay on the door.

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>