



# The Friends of the National Railway Museum

**Briefing 57**

**South of England Group**

**March 2010**

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

## **AGM AND MEMBERS EVENING**

You should have heard that we had to cancel the January meeting due to the extreme weather. If you remember, on the day (11<sup>th</sup> January) we were in the midst of heavy snowfall and sub-zero temperatures, transport systems were breaking down and the official advice was to stay at home unless your journey was really necessary. To cap it all, most mainline railway stations had warned that last services were scheduled for around 9 pm. It was unavoidable, therefore, that we had to cancel the meeting and postpone the AGM. As a consequence, the AGM will now be held together with the scheduled “members' evening” on 12<sup>th</sup> April. Since we are well into the New Year, it seemed inappropriate to have the seasonal refreshments (unless they were to be Easter eggs!) so those of you who had sent in advanced payment should, by now, have received a refund from our Treasurer, Roger Smith. If you have not, please contact Roger or another member of the committee.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> April we will hold the AGM first with the usual agenda and the election of committee members. Remember that two committee members are due to stand for re-election. This year it is Roy Bell and George Rutter. However, if you would like to join the committee we would be pleased to hear from you – please contact Ian Harrison. If you have any other items for discussion at the AGM also contact Ian or George.

Les Butler will provide details of this year's summer outing which will be a day visit to the Nene Valley Railway to see Brian White's Travelling Post Office team in action on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> May 2010. (See report of his evening talk on page 6) If you cannot attend the AGM but would like to come on the summer outing, please contact Les Butler. We will aim to assemble at Peterborough Nene Valley at 11.00 am or at Wansford (if you come by car) at the same time.

The rest of the meeting will be devoted to your slides, photographs, or videos. Note that we will be relying on the computers and electronic projector, so if you have some material which is not in digital form (VHS tapes, photographic prints, etc.) please get in touch with Mel Draper or Ian Harrison, and we will arrange for it to be converted. To give us time to do so, please make contact at least a week before the event, i.e. by 5 April. Otherwise, bring along any material you would like others to enjoy.

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## CHINA STEAM'S LAST FLING

*(Note the spelling of locations is phonetic and is probably not the official one!)*

Klaus Marks paid the group a return visit on 8<sup>th</sup> February - he had previously appeared in front of the group over 10 years ago when he gave a presentation about the Bluebell Railway. This time his talk was of a more international flavour, as he presented a record of his 2003 trip to see Chinese steam in action. This had been well organised by the *Railway Magazine*, the only disappointment being the absence of snow. But for Klaus it certainly lived up to its promise of offering a reminder of 1968 as steam was on the way out in the UK.

The party flew into Beijing and, after an overnight stay to recover from the 10 hour flight, moved on to Dahuichang, just outside Beijing, to see the 760mm narrow gauge line. This line brings limestone from a quarry to a marshalling yard. The rolling stock consisted of small 4-wheel tubs, and only two working locomotives.

At Zhengzhou, the main railway station still had plenty of communist iconography. As a demonstration that it is not only in western hotels that managers seek to exceed their customer expectations, their hotel manager specifically put them in rooms with grand views of the railway (normal tourists seem to prefer the other side). Here they could admire the Sy class 2-8-2 engines hauling long freight trains with Js class bankers. The Sy class are a relatively new design, having been built right up until 1999. The following day, they proceeded to follow the line from the track side, which winds its path through the city, often being used as a pedestrian footpath. The first photographic point was the point where the line crossed the river. From here, the prevailing gradient up to the summit is 1 in 33, typically requiring double bankers. The noise and

sight was spectacular. Because of the constant pounding, the track is under continual maintenance, official track gangs (with their family in tow) tightening the fixing bolts. But there are also unofficial track gangs - people gathering dislodged coal from the lineside for use in their domestic fires and recycling as home-make briquettes for resale. Finally, the line reaches the summit where there are two short tunnels providing a good vantage point to look down on the hard working locos.

A loco stabling point and freight yard at Shunantazarmy, half-way to the steel works, provided an opportunity to take a closer look at the locos and rolling stock. One exception to the extensive freight stock was a rail-car used to take staff along the line. The "economic police" were resident in a cabin at the yard who, while keeping a low profile on the first day, took exception to the party's activities on the second day and kept them well away from the track. Another marshalling yard and engine shed awaited them at the steel works which also had a substantial stock of spare wagon wheels - clearly the route up the hills didn't only take its toll on the track!

They returned to the Chinese "Orient Express" for a run to Chabunga, where a Qj replaced their electric loco to take them on the Ji-Tong line. At Lingdong, they were allowed out of the train on to the line only to be ushered back on board almost immediately - but with just time to photograph a passing goods train. A return the following day allowed them to get to the pagoda overlooking the line and station and providing an excellent panoramic view of the railway environs.

At Daban, they gained access to the loco depot which was full of Qj's lined up, some of which had been withdrawn for

overhaul. A Baldwin loco of World War II vintage was also displayed for visitors. Following an overnight journey they arrived at the Jing-Peng Pass on route to Sandejang. Here it was possible to see the same train pass the observation point on three occasions, as it zig-zags up the valley. A little up the valley at Erdee, trains were still climbing towards the summit, the sound of their approach being audible for about 10 minutes prior to their arrival.

At Jing Peng station, John Cameron, owner of A4 *Bitton/Union of South Africa*, was the lucky winner of an organised cab ride on the Orient Express engine. However, by offering some dollar notes, it was possible for Klaus and a travelling companion to arrange their own, slightly illicit, cab-ride on a goods train going over the summit. Unfortunately, this meant that they lost communication with their party once they had been dropped in the middle of nowhere – some further money crossed hands and they were reunited at Sanjiazi,

where the group was transferred onto buses so they could photograph the Orient Express as it travelled along the line to Penhong. Here they watched freight trains being shunted and the crossing of the two daily passenger trains – one steam hauled and one diesel. Travelling back to Beijing, they stopped off for a guided tour of the Great Wall. However, the real surprise awaited them as they explored what appeared to be an abandoned loco shed, finding hidden in its dark interior the main elements of the Chinese national collection of preserved locomotives. These locomotives have since been transferred to a purpose built museum at Beijing.

Klaus finished his talk by showing some clips from the official tour video, so that the audience could experience not only the sight, but the sound of modern Chinese steam locomotives tackling the gradients with their loaded trains. It was, as Klaus pointed out, a real reminder of the closing days of British steam, albeit with much better maintained engines.

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## OUTREACH REPORT

It has been relatively quiet over the winter, with just one event. This was the East Bedfordshire Model Railway Exhibition at Biggleswade. As seemed to be normal this year, the outside temperature was sub-zero, with a good wind and snow flurries. The organisers took pity on the hardy early risers and opened the doors half an hour prior to the official time. Luckily we were prepared. We were joined on our stand by Bishop Richard Inwood who was present to sign copies of his new book “Moved by Steam”, which was the subject of our November lecture. Not to be out-done, the local Methodists were represented by Martin Dawes who, you may remember, talked to the group back in May 2000 on the Great Northern Funeral Railway – we still sell copies of his book on the stand.

Whether it was because of their collective blessings or not, we did have our most successful visit to this exhibition as measured by the value of sales. Clearly the local population are not put off by the bad weather.

Our next outing will be on 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> March to the London Festival of Railway Modelling at Alexandra Palace, just about the time when this edition of the *Briefing* will land on your door-mat. This is the major show in the London area. We will be in our usual spot near the entry to the second hall and looking forward to a busy weekend.

Then to the South West Hertfordshire Model Railway Exhibition at Bushey on 8<sup>th</sup> May and “Trains at Trinity” back in Biggleswade on 12<sup>th</sup> June.

## WOOLMER COMES TO BASINGSTOKE

If you are a museum aficionado you will know that Basingstoke is the home of Milestones – a museum of modern industrial history with particular emphasis on the products of long gone Hampshire vehicle manufacturers such as Tasker’s, Thornycroft, and Wallis and Steevens all set in a “townscape” of nearly full size streets and buildings.



*Woolmer at Locomotion*

Although Milestones is less than half a stone’s throw from the LSWR mainline, there has been precious little railway interest – until now. One of our own, Stephen Hoadley, who was at the NRM until a few years ago, has become “Keeper of Domestic Technology” – which means more than vacuum cleaners! Stephen wants to present the railways in context and so has borrowed 0-6-0ST *Woolmer* from *Locomotion* for three years in the first instance.

The carefully planned move to Basingstoke took place on 17<sup>th</sup> January and was technically challenging, with the 27 ton locomotive being transported approximately 90 metres from the back doors of the museum. This was achieved by carefully inching it around the “streets” on skates and steel plates to get her into the “coal yard” which stands alongside a replica of Winchester Chesil station. Several members of the Group

were present to watch Andrew Goodman’s team of ‘Moveright International’ doing the business – and they made it look ever so easy! Watching the exercise, you can understand why this is the NRM’s preferred company for such complex transportation and transfer processes. (NB we have got Andrew, lined up as a speaker for our 2010/11 session).



*Moving into the museum hall*

*Woolmer* was given a cosmetic restoration at *Locomotion* a couple of years ago (I think they learned on her before tackling 1247!) so she looks very smart standing alongside a coal wagon and horse and cart in a scene from the 1920’s. She was built by Avonside Engine Co in 1910 (No 1572) for the then “Woolmer Instructional Military Railway” (which became the Longmoor Military Railway in 1935) and appears in their dark blue livery with red lining. Strangely enough I have not found reference to *Woolmer* in web articles about the LMR, although there are photos of her “plinthed” there in 1964.

She was later removed to the Museum of Army Transport at Beverley until that closed and she was taken into the National Collection to beef up our fairly thin collection of industrial loco’s.



*“Woolmer” next to Hunslet 0-6-0ST  
“Waggoner” at the Museum of Army  
Transport 30<sup>th</sup> July 1989*

So if you find yourself in deepest Hampshire, do call in at Milestones. There is a shuttle bus from Basingstoke Station and as Milestones is on the same site as the leisure park you can go swimming, ice skating, tenpin bowling, eat out and visit the flicks while you're here. The final attractant is that

admission to Milestones is free on production of your FNRM membership card – an offer you really can't refuse!



*Inching into its final resting place in the  
“coal yard” of the replica Winchester  
Chesil station*

*Ian Harrison*

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## **RAILWAY CHILDREN ARRIVE AT WATERLOO**

We have it on good authority (well, it was reported in the Evening Standard on 19<sup>th</sup> March!) that the stage play of the Railway Children will next appear at Waterloo station. Those of you who have been following the reports of this presentation will realise that it has been attracting good reviews over the last two years when it has been showing at the NRM during the summer season. The troop of players will now head south to the currently-empty ex-international platforms at Waterloo station.

Accompanying them will be the NRM's Stirling Single N° 1, which will provide the necessary atmospherics and drama. The show will run from 4<sup>th</sup> July to 4<sup>th</sup> September and each showing can accommodate up to 900 in the audience. This seems to be a great opportunity for those of us in the South of England to experience the show. A perfect way to keep the children (or grandchildren) amused during the summer school holidays. For more details watch the press.

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## **FNRM AGM**

The FNRM AGM will be held on 19<sup>th</sup> June. The Group will not be organising an outing to the event this year (remember we do this only every alternate year). If you want to take part

you will therefore have to make your own way or use the proxy voting form which will be distributed with the next *Review*. There will be the usual election of candidates onto FNRM Council.

# THE HISTORY OF THE TRAVELLING POST OFFICE

It was standing room only at Marylebone on 8<sup>th</sup> March to hear Brian White, a “Travelling Post-man” of 30 years service tell us about the history – and his life and times – of this departed institution. Brian is one of the volunteers at the Nene Valley Railway who has been instrumental in resurrecting the coaches and equipment to carry out live TPO drops and pick-ups.

We tend to associate the TPO with rail transport but, as Brian pointed out, mail had “travelled” long before railways and the maxim “the mail must get through” brought many a hardship on a cold and freezing night when mail coaches had broken down. There were even proposals to sort mail “on the move” in a horse-drawn vehicle – but sense was seen!

Mail was sorted on trains from around 1838, but the introduction of the Penny Post in 1840 brought a quantum leap in the volume of mail in the UK, from around 83 million letters to about 170 million within a year. This required some new thinking.

Nathaniel Worsdell on the Liverpool and Manchester Railway is credited with building the first recognisable rail-borne mail vehicle in 1840, and pretty basic it was too: more or less the standard four-wheeler with stagecoach body and some appropriate fittings inside. No heat; no loo; no corridor connection. They were tough in those days!

Progress in carriage improvement was slow – as indeed it was generally on the railways until rudimentary 8-wheelers came along around 1870 and then bogied vehicles a little later. Coke stoves were fitted to melt sealing wax, but were often the source of illness or even death from carbon monoxide poisoning – not to mention the risk of fire in an accident. Corridor connections were introduced –

with offset gangways: not, as some suppose, to create space for the sorters, but to ensure that mail vehicles could not be coupled to passenger vehicles – in other words, to keep the public out.

This, of course, meant that it was necessary to turn vehicles from time to time to ensure the gangways connected.

Brian took us through the saga of the moving pick-up of mail and the various mechanisms that were used – from pouches hung on the end of a pole on a station platform for the guard to collect “on the move” to mechanised equipment.

When the GPO declined to buy the original patent from Worsdell (for £3000 – a tidy sum in 1840) they set about designing their own version that did not work well. Later a Mails Supervisor, John Dicker, devised the version we see still in use on preserved lines and in the films. The pick-up pouches are made from buffalo hide and can weigh up to 60lb – not much fun to handle on a cold, wet night.

A single pick-up could involve hanging up to 16 pouches being put out by the train crew and deposited in the lineside net – or hopefully deposited there. Very often the pouches would “miss” and, moving at 55-60mph, could travel quite some distance alongside or away from the line depending on what they might hit on their travels. Postmen had to ensure that all the pouches were accounted for – each one was numbered in chalk and the final number was followed by “F” (final). So if the full set was not in the net, it was out with the lantern and set off on a rabbit hunt.

Brian mentioned some of the accidents and events that have befallen the TPO, from the postman burned to death in the Grantham accident of 1906 to the Great Train Robbery of 1963. The security – or lack of – connected with “high value movements” – generally returning used

bank notes to the Bank of England (before the robbery) was testament to the law-abiding nature of this country at the time.

And to bring us up to date Brian commented favourably on the “BRUTES” – the high sided mesh four wheeled trolleys we used to see on stations and which could be piled high with mail bags – as opposed to the Royal Mail’s bright idea of using nylon mail bags which slid off their flat bed trolleys if piled more than one layer high: that’s progress!

Brian and his NVR colleagues operate a rake of Mk1 TPOs that came out of

service in 2004. Before this they had formed a group around the former NRM-owned vehicle M30272M which was donated by the Museum in 1995 and which is the only surviving vehicle from the 1963 Great Train Robbery (the NVR already had a Southern TPO vehicle 4920 on loan from the NRM as a static museum). The Group has recently been given an historic GNR TPO vehicle body (1885) that had been in use by the Balby & District Horticultural Society as a shop and meeting room near Doncaster.

For more details see the Nene Valley Group’s website [www.tpo.org.uk](http://www.tpo.org.uk)

## MAINLINE STEAM TRIPS

This is the latest list of day trips which are hauled by NRM locos. The Group aims to be represented with the sales team on all of these. Those marked with ¶ are fully staffed with two members, those with # are still light by one or two people. If you want to join in the fun of the sale on one of the latter, please contact Ian Harrison.

Date	Loco Staffing	Route	
23 April	30777	Waterloo - Stratford on Avon ret	¶
29 April	30777	Victoria – Canterbury return	#
1 May	30777	Poole – Cardiff ret	#
16 May	70013	Victoria – Faversham return	#
22 May	30777	Waterloo – Weymouth ret	#
22 May	70013	Bristol – Fishguard ret	#
29 May	70013	Tyseley – Didcot ret (inc Lickey)	#
31 May	30777	Swanage – Waterloo ret	#
19 June	70013	Didcot – Swansea ret	#
3 July	30777	Waterloo - Swanage	#
4 July	70013	B’ham – Stratford ret (twice)	#
9 July	30777 + 34067	Waterloo - Swanage	#
11 July	70013	B’ham – Stratford ret (twice)	#
18 July	30777 + 34067	Waterloo – Weymouth ret	#
22 July	70013	Victoria – Canterbury ret	¶
5 August	70013	London – Bristol ret	¶
12 August	70013	London – Gloucester ret	¶
18 August	70013	London - Weymouth ret	¶
29 August	70013	London – Norwich ret	¶

If you need a reminder of what is involved in selling on board the trains, then you can do no better than read Ian Harrison's article on page 15 of the winter edition (No 130) of the *NRM Review*.

**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>**