



# The Friends of the National Railway Museum

**Briefing 68**

**South of England Group**

**December 2012**

**Vice Presidents – Sir William McAlpine Bt., FRSE, FCIT, FRSA; Richard Hardy**

## **AGM AND NEW YEAR SOCIAL**

The annual general meeting of the South of England Group takes place on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2013 and will, as usual, be held at Marylebone Station in conjunction with our New Year Social gathering. Activities will commence around 19:00, with doors opening from 18:00.

Any member of the FNRM, whether living in the South of England or not, can attend and vote at the AGM. The meeting will take a report of last year's activities from our Chairman, Ian Harrison, and from our Treasurer, Roger Smith, who will describe the (very healthy) state of our finances. There will be a vote, if necessary, for the rotating membership of the Group's committee. This time, the three-year terms of George Rutter, Jeremy Moore, and Roger Emerson are due to end; they can, of course, agree to continue for another term. We are always happy to have nominations from those who would like to join the committee and help run the Group's activities.

Les Butler will take views on the

proposals for the Group's summer outing – see separate item on page 3 for the current suggestion. Before and after the AGM there is the opportunity to chat with others over a drink, and enjoy the food from the buffet. You will also be able to watch some of the photographs and videos of the Group's activities.

Attendance at the AGM is free, but to cover the festive buffet refreshment for the New Year Social, there will be a charge of £8 per person (the same as last year). Those of you who came last year will remember that we enjoyed a good spread, courtesy of M&S, and we anticipate the same this year. A form is included with this Briefing to allow you to indicate whether you require refreshment. We would be grateful if you would return this, with a cheque, to Roger Smith (address on the form) by Monday 7<sup>th</sup> January. This will allow us to order sufficient the food and drink for the evening and make sure there is enough for everyone

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## EVENING LECTURE BY GORDON REED

Gordon joined us on 8<sup>th</sup> October and is reputed to be the oldest working boilermaster. He is currently a consultant for the NRM.

He is really a North British man at heart, and started his slide show in the Border regions, tracing his “home” line, the “Wannie”, from Hexham to Riccarton Junction through stations bearing names such as Humshaugh, Chollerton, and Plashetts. The bridge at Hexham, ultimately caused the closure of this line, but the major junction was at Reedsmouth. The sheds there were used to store *Columbine* and two other preserved locos to keep them out of way of bombs. These sheds still exist. At the time, he lived at nearby Bellingham on the upper Tyne; the station sign is now preserved at the NRM. During the war, the longest train between Edinburgh and Newcastle came via this Borders railway – it was known as the beer train, for obvious reasons!

A photo taken at Plashetts, further along the line to Riccarton Junction shows a group of platelayers, one of which was Gordon's father. That station now lies under Keilder lake. Keilder viaduct was designed to suit the architectural views of the local Lord, resulting in its castellated walls. When Jim was growing up he was impressed by the North British Scotts (D29) passing along the line, with their evocative names such as *Ellangowan*, and the *the Fair Maid*. The line was tough though, with many a train stuck in snowdrifts. The line closed to passengers on 13<sup>th</sup> October 1952, the final train being hauled by 63022 to Riccarton Junction.

With his father already working for the railway, and his own interests in trains, it was natural for Gordon's career to go in that direction. He started work around this time, having an interview at the Regional CME HQ offices at Darlington – now the

location of BR pensions HQ. He was taken on and started at North Road works as a fitter. He quickly learnt that there were better offerings as a boilermaster? Boilermasters were colloquially known as fitters with their brains knocked out – but they were the best paid. As it was a closed shop, he had to join the Boilermasters Union – it was more like a Masonic lodge in those days. Such practices did a lot of damage to BR in the early days. Darlington always painted the cylinders green rather than black, and when he started, they were still outshopping new Shires and Hunt classes.

In 1954 Gordon finished his apprenticeship, got his redundancy notice and was called up for military service. He was sent to Marchwood military railway with the Royal Engineers. Marchwood was the biggest military port in Britain, famous for providing the Mulberry harbour in WWII and the supplies for the Falklands campaign. He worked on the internal railway with its J94s 0-6-0ST which had a busy workload to keep the ships moving, especially during the 1956/7 Suez crisis. They were even too busy to keep engines clean and normal army attention to spit and polish was forgotten. Today it is still a busy port but with 0-4-0 diesel shunters operated by civilians.

After his military service he took a job as a boilermaster at West Auckland shed, which had 18 roads in a roundhouse format. Locomotives from there operated services to Stainmore and Kirkby Stephen, so it was no easy posting for a fireman. With the fearsome gradients you could always tell a West Auckland loco from the burnt paint on the smokebox - and the handle circle which was painted white - usually by Gordon. Snowploughs were often needed to cope with the winter weather. They were always hauled by an

0-6-0 to avoid worrying about derailing a leading bogie. The shed foreman was Alderman J.R.S. Middlewood, who was also chairman of the local football club. Gordon remembers him being on the breakdown train in 1957, when they were sent to the aid of a J71 which had derailed. They had to use traversing jacks because they didn't have a crane. The foreman told Gordon to take his time as "I don't want any candidates for the Luton girls' choir". The big problem for the shed came when Ernest Marples closed the line to Tebay, and they were left with only local work. Some of these went to some quite interesting locations. For example, Middleton in Teesdale had its station in Yorkshire but the town was in Durham. He got his second redundancy notice in 1965 as the shed closed. The last engine off the shed was D5174, with 76050 being the last steam locomotive to leave.

Although he was a fully qualified boilermaker, there was now no need for those skills on BR as steam was phased out. He therefore moved onto permanent way maintenance for the rest of his time with the business.

Gordon still volunteers at the NRM and does a lot of boiler inspections at KWVR using traditional techniques, such as using paraffin flares for internal examinations. To illustrate the importance of such inspections, he showed a photograph of an ex-NCB loco boiler which had the roof stays almost wasted through.

Throughout his talk, Gordon illustrated other aspects of his life as a boilermaker in the North East, and gave many anecdotes, both of his own personal experiences and of the misfortunes of others who had ignored the need to treat boilers with the care due to them.

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## PLANS FOR 2013 SUMMER OUTING

Each alternate year we organise an extended weekend to attend the FNRM AGM in York and use the opportunity to visit some attractions in the region. This year the AGM takes place on Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> June, so plans are being made to assemble a visit programme around that date.

This year, the proposal is that we base our weekend at York. There will be a meal in a local restaurant on the Saturday evening and a trip to the Middleton Railway on Sunday to see its collection of industrial steam and diesel locomotives. There are plenty of attractions of a non-railway kind in the area, should you, or accompanying spouse, wish to broaden the visit, e.g. the Royal Armouries, Brewery Museum, Kirkstall Abbey Museum, the Art Gallery and, of course, extensive shopping areas in the city centre and out-of-town centres. As usual, we will aim to secure some good hotel accommodation at reasonable prices, but to do so we need to know the rough number of people making up the

party. No commitment is necessary at this stage, but if you are interested please let Les Butler know, either by e-mail or phone (after 6pm) as soon as possible - contact details on back of this Briefing. You can also make your interest known at our AGM and New Year Social, when we will be canvassing views on the actual make up of the visit. The more people are involved, the greater the discounts for the hotel. Les aims to start organising the hotel booking at the end of January, so please make sure you let him know by then.

There should be the possibility to extend your stay either side of the weekend, for example to take in the Wensleydale Railway on the Friday and Locomotion at Shildon on Monday. Both are accessible by public transport from York. These can be organised nearer the date. The next edition of the Briefing, scheduled for March, will confirm the arrangements for the trip.

## THE ACE AT BATTLEDOWN - A PROGRESS UPDATE

As you know, we have commissioned a painting from Philip D Hawkins of 34051 *Winston Churchill* at Battledown near Basingstoke.

Philip had originally thought that it would be ready about now, but as with most things, there has been a certain amount of slippage in the timetable and he is now anticipating that it will be complete around the end of February.

This means that after all the work has been done on producing the prints and getting them signed (by Philip, Dick Hardy and Jim Lester) it is likely to be April/May before they go on sale. That is probably no bad thing as people get a bit sated with “must have’s” around Christmas.

The picture will feature 34051 on the Atlantic Coast Express (it’s a summer

Saturday extra portion not hauled by a MN!) with two other NRM locos in the frame – 35029 *Ellerman Lines* crossing the flyover with an up express and 30777 *Sir Lamiel* in the distance on the down Bournemouth line.

Originally I had suggested the Q1 on the down Bournemouth but Philip reckons that they did not normally work west of Basingstoke so we plumped for 30777 instead.

You will be getting an order form in the Spring edition of the *NRM Review* but you can register interest with the office in York now if you wish to reserve a copy (particularly the Artists Proofs which are sought after). Prices will be £95 for an Artist’s Proof and £80 for a numbered print (500 copies).

*Ian Harrison*

## UPDATE ON WINSTON CHURCHILL APPEAL

The locomotive has been on tour to the South of England and is currently located at the Mid-Hants Railway. A team from the museum is to visit to make a full assessment of the works necessary for a cosmetic external restoration, full internal clean (boiler, tubes, smokebox) and treatment with a archival-standard preservative oil. Meanwhile, during the clearing of some old stores at York, a box of raw casting has been recovered. These appear to be the missing ones from *Ellerman Lines*. This supports the view that the equivalent fittings from *Winston Churchill* were used on *Ellerman Lines* because of the urgency in getting the latter ready for display for the opening of the Museum. NRM propose to machine these castings and fit onto *Ellerman Lines*, with the *Winston Churchill* ones being returned to their correct home.

Fund-raising has continued and more that £20,000 is now in the fund to support the restoration. The limited-edition prints of

the specially-commissioned painting is expected to bring in substantially more funds, see above.

Depending on the estimated cost for the cosmetic restoration we may need to initiate further fund-raising work. You may have seen in *Railway Magazine* that the MHR is keen to undertake the restoration work itself. The NRM staff recognise the benefit to our fund-raising campaign that comes from having the locomotive in the South, and it would obviously help if the restoration was also done here. However, they still need to justify this in terms of ensuring that using an external restoration centre will not adversely impact on their own in-house team. That needs to take account of other restoration work earmarked for the NRM workshop, not the least of which is *Flying Scotsman*. We can expect to hear more about this shortly.

Further updates will be provided in future editions of the Briefing.

## OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

The late Spring and Autumn has been a busy period for our outreach work. We had the locomotive *Winston Churchill* visiting our patch, attending both the Great Dorset Steam Fair and the Mid-Hants Steam Gala. The Mid-Hants Railway also ran a special dining train and a real-ale train, on which we had some sales presence. Both trains were full.

More generally, we have attended model railway exhibitions at Banbury, Tring (actually Wing), Peterborough and finishing with the Warley event at the NEC Birmingham. At the first three of these, there was much interest in the new NRM-exclusive model of Great Central locomotive "*Butler Henderson*". Sure enough, when the Warley show came round, and the supplies of models were available, we were besieged by customers, our stocks running out mid afternoon of the second day.

We have also been on-board two steam specials hauled by *Oliver Cromwell* – to Worcester on 6<sup>th</sup> and Swanage on 11<sup>th</sup> October.

These events are not just about selling but provide an opportunity to meet the public and discuss various aspects of the NRM. We receive a lot of comments about the on-going restoration of *Flying Scotsman*, some doubting whether it will ever be completed and worried about the cost but, in the main, looking forward to its appearance in running condition. We get comments about the Museum, mostly all complimentary with the occasional bricbat, and this year, in particular, there was a lot of praise of Railfest. We distribute a good amount of promotional literature for the Museum and, more recently, have supplemented this with our own more general guide to the attractions in York. This is aimed at encouraging families in the South of England to consider the city as a base for more general visits or holidays.

Our next outing with the stand will be to the East Bedfordshire Model Railway Exhibition on 23<sup>rd</sup> February and the London Festival of Alexandra Palace on 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> March.

## BOROUGH MARKET JUNCTION SIGNAL BOX

Many members in the South will be familiar with this signal box which originally controlled the lines between London Bridge, Cannon Street and Charring Cross/Blackfriars. It was, at the time, the most intensively worked box in the UK and featured in several British Transport Films. When the junction was remodelled in the 1976, the box was removed and sent to the, then new, NRM at York. It has been there ever since, currently located behind the Station Hall in the South Yard. The elements have not been kind to it and, despite some emergency repairs to the woodwork and roof some years ago, a proper restoration job is now required.

The museum is keen to embark on this work. It is also developing a strategy for the longer term, taking account both the future of this box and the expected release of a considerable amount of other artefacts as Network Rail progress plans for modernising the entire national signalling system. We are working with the Museum to identify how this work should be supported, especially the early conservation of Borough Market Junction signal box. There are likely to be opportunities to help the work with donations, especially bearing in mind the tight public-sector financial position. Further details will be provided as they become available.

## MEMBERS' EVENING

We had a US flavour to our November Members' evening. Jim Baldwin started with his research to trace the carriages which accompanied *Flying Scotsman* on its tour of the USA. The main part of the train consisted of 5 exhibition cars, which housed 22 different stands. Alan Pegler paid for the support coach and an observation coach. The latter was from the Kyle of Lochalsh line, and was built in 1914 for ambulance train service during the First World War, being rebuilt in the 1920s. For the trip to the USA it was painted in Pullman livery and was refitted by Watneys with a bar. The support coach was originally from the Western Region, being a BR Mk 1 built in 1958. The first part of the public exhibition train was a reception car - a Thompson 1948 York-built coach. The next three exhibition cars housed 6 or 8 stands each, and were a mixture of Gresley and Thompson designs dating from the 1940s. Car D, at the end of the exhibition, was a Gresley 1940 coach which was only open to trade visitors and housed stands from engineering companies. For the first part of the tour, the train also included two Pullman cars which were being delivered to the Wisconsin Railroad Museum at Green Bay. The first was *Isle of Thanet*, which had been used in Churchill's funeral train. The second, *Lydia*, was normally permanently coupled to the observation car, as it had no hand-brake.

The train left Boston for New York and Washington before going into store over the winter. The following spring, it went to Montreal and Niagara Falls, before another winter stop-over at Green Bay, where Pullman car *Isle of Thanet* left the formation. The observation car and *Lydia* over-wintered at a Montreal tank store. The following spring the train went forward to San Francisco, but needed to

drop off an exhibition car on the way as the ferry boat across San Francisco Bay had limited capacity. The train took tourists on rides along the San Francisco harbour front, much to the annoyance of the locals - blocking 70 car parking spaces, and breaching local "no-smoke" regulations. It was reputed to be taking around \$1000 a day. Despite this Alan was declared bankrupt, and the US Revenue Service impounded the train. It was shipped to secure store at Sharp Army Base. *Flying Scotsman* was rescued by Bill McAlpine and returned home. *Lydia* was moved back to Green Bay.

The rest of the train was ultimately bought by the Victoria Restaurant Company who used the coaches as part of a restaurant at Universal Studios. The surrounding building, known as Victoria Station, was fitted out with railwayana from UK. The observation car was moved to a position outside the company's HQ in downtown San Francisco, serving as a boardroom. Ultimately it was sold on to UK railway preservationists and moved to Swanage. The coaches incorporated into Victoria Station had been radically modified, with windows removed and doorways cut into the sides. Then, in 1997 the entire place, coaches, memorabilia and all, was trashed as part of a rebuilding programme. Two of the coaches ended up at a scrap metal merchant but no buyers were found for them and the superstructures were burnt, the underframes being used as farm bridges. Inspection of these shows them to be of 1939 and 1944 Metro-Cammel construction, used by LNER York carriage works as standard frames on which the Gresley/Thompson bodies were built. Of the rest, nothing is known.

Gordon Roberts continued the US theme, with a description of the US passenger timetables which were in operation during

the 1960s. During this period, Gordon was based at Houston but, like many US citizens, never used the trains. This was because there was only 6 long-distance trains calling at the city, with no local commuter service. This city was not unusual, with the whole passenger rail system being in terminal decline due to competition from road and air. The ability of the railroad companies to compete was limited by archaic (to our eyes) regulations; Commerce Department refused to sanction any mergers, safety regulations limited speeds to 70 mph, and on top of that, the labour unions were totally inflexible on changes to working conditions. The result was inevitable, and only with the government finally waking up and forming Amtrak did things change. There has been some limited recovery with, in 2012, some 31 million journeys being made using the services of this company. Gordon used some 20 original US timetable leaflets to support his talk, many showing route maps of long gone services from the passenger network of the USA.

To finish our US evening, Phil Brown, described his trip on the Amtrak service from Seattle to San Diego along the West Coast. Over the years, Phil managed to cover the complete route, but never in one go. The distance is 470 miles, not much more than London to Edinburgh, but only the daily Coast Starlight is a through train. Along the way there is a wide variety of station styles - some old traditional styles, some small and others new in very modern style.

The train takes to the coast of Puget Sound, passing under the infamous Tacoma Narrows bridge. It is confusing enough with Washington State and DC, but just before crossing the Columbia River into Oregon the train calls into Vancouver (Washington State, not the

Canadian one).

Coming west through the Glacier national Park, is Portland - a town proud of its floral displays. A refurbished Santa Fe parlour car, with a dining area on the upper deck and a small cinema below, provided a splendid venue for afternoon wine tasting and dinner. as the train wound its way through the Cascade Mountains. On an earlier trip he had disembarked in Klamath Falls and hired a car to see Crater Lake - which even surpassed the publicity hype.

Just after leaving Sacramento station the train passes the California Railroad Museum, which challenges the NRM for the claim of "Best in the World". Moving south, there are great views of the San Francisco Bay. The next main stop is in Oakland, where those travelling to San Francisco leave to take a bus across the Bay. In Oakland the train runs through the streets in traditional US style, much to the annoyance of the motorist. Continuing south, the train passes Gilroy and the San Francisco commuter train depot, then through the greater San Francisco area before going up the Salinas Valley. North of San Luis Obispo the train descends through the Cuesta Pass in a series of tight curves. From here, the train follows the coast almost into the Los Angeles area. The views are striking but photography is banned as the train goes through the US Vandenberg Air Base! The Coast Starlight ends at Los Angeles Union Station. This was built in the 1930's at the hey-day of the US passenger rail services when it was the place to see Hollywood stars as they arrived back from Broadway.

At the time of his first trip to San Diego there were only the 3 local shuttles per day out of LA with the train being turned at each end. Nowadays, there are frequent push-pull 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 FNRN SOUTH OF ENGLAND**

**GROUP:**

**See *Contacts* at main index:**

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