



The Friends of the National Railway Museum

Briefing 75

South of England Group

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

PROGRESS WITH WINSTON CHURCHILL

As you know, the South of England Group is leading the fund-raising effort for the cosmetic restoration of 34051 *Winston Churchill*. I have been making occasional visits to Ropley (Mid Hants Railway) to see work in progress.

At the moment, the tender is mechanically complete – various rotted parts have been repaired. The tank has been shot-cleaned inside and sprayed with a special paint to prevent rust reappearing. The footplate has been undercoated in black and the body rubbed down to base and undercoated. The electric lights have been removed and cleaned inside and out ready for re-fitting. The loco itself is less far-advanced. The front bogie has been removed and thoroughly overhauled and repainted. The frames have been cleaned and the wheels taken back to bare metal. The cladding has been removed where rotted and new sheet welded in – especially along the bottom of the smoke deflectors. The backhead has been cleaned and repainted

and a new driver's side cab-window manufactured.

The chaps are still waiting for various parts to come from York – including an injector and some cab instruments. In the meantime, the cladding is being put back, the rivets flushed off and all being rubbed back and filled to a smooth surface. All the “bits and pieces” – battery box, generator, front lights etc – have been removed and painted.

When all is complete the loco and tender will be painted together – we don't want them in different shades of BR green! They will then be lined out, plates refitted and the end result posted back to York. Easy really!

The plan is for the loco to go back to York in January ready for an unveiling on the 30th (the 50th Anniversary of the Funeral Train). We understand the BBC are going to make a documentary on the funeral, featuring the restored loco. More details in the next edition of *Briefing*.

Ian Harrison

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THE NRM SIGNALLING COLLECTION

Our Autumn season of talks commenced on 8th September, when we welcomed Russell Hollowood, the NRM's Associate Curator of Railways with responsibility for the signalling part of the collection. Russell was a BR signalman before joining the Museum, so is unusual at the NRM in having a professional railway background. This has been put to good use in the development of the signalling collection and in forging links with other relevant organisations.

Until he took this post, signalling at the NRM was always something of a Cinderella. There had been previous enthusiastic collectors at the Museum, one of whom, in the early days, had made it his aim to assemble examples of all manual lever frames in existence! Not surprisingly, this was not achieved, but it resulted in a collection of some 200 different types, many in various states of dis-assembly. The resulting bits were stored on pallets, with little information and virtually no chance of being re-assembled. In addition, signalling kit, from block instruments to full signal posts, was, and still is arriving. Much of the larger items were stored in the old concrete works, or outside in the yard. Clearly something needed to be done to bring order to the collection and make it available to the public. Space is also at a premium at York, and some of the items were taking up rather more than was reasonable.

All items accessioned by the NRM are included in the Museum's acquisition records database, but Russell needed help to decide which items were worth keeping. He assembled a group of experts drawn from other organisations, such as the Institution of Railway Signalling Engineers and Signalling Record Society. This panel was charged with prioritising the items. Rather than just rank them,

Russell and the panel developed a system allowing the individual members to assess the various properties of each item (historical significance, state of preservation etc) using a scoring method which avoided everything being prioritised or middle ranked. The result was a list which allowed decisions to be taken on the items. Some were identified for restoration and display, some for transfer to the reserve Science Museum collection at Wroughton, and some were offered to preserved railways for use on their lines. None of the items were destroyed. This has allowed a significant reduction in the number of items in the stores at York; the number of frames reducing from near 200 to a couple of dozen. While there has not been a similar scale of pruning of other equipment, such as block instruments, it has been possible to refocus attention on the items of real significance.

Getting order into the collection has been one important task, the other is to get the collection in a form for display in a way which will engage the public. One major item, which has been developed for show over the last few years, is the ex-Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway Signalling School. This is a electrically powered model railway, roughly to Gauge 1, which has been used to train signalmen in the principles of block signalling. It was in store since recovery in the late 1990s from its last home at Manchester Victoria Station. A group of volunteers, working with Russell, has now re-assembled the layout on its original mahogany tables in the Warehouse, and restored it to working condition. The volunteers regularly demonstrate it to the public and it has just been recognised by the Guinness Book of Records as the oldest working model railway in the world.

The public can also get an appreciation of the work of a signaller in the workshop gallery area, where there is a simplified block signal and lever frame. Volunteers demonstrate its operation, often to children. Each child gets a chance to try their hand at operating the block instruments and frame, and all get a certificate to prove their competence (whatever the level!). Nearby is the popular relay from the York Signalling Centre. Its future is however, in question as a result of the changes on National Railway Network. These have been well reported in the Railway Press; the August edition of the *Railway Magazine* listing the future of the old manual signal boxes as the new Regional Operating Centres (ROCs) are commissioned. The resulting changes mean that there is a major job to identify what should be preserved, and Russell and his team of experts, have a key roll in that. The system of ranking, described earlier, should provide a good basis to work out what should end up at York and what should go elsewhere. It's not just the physical artefacts which are important. These changes mean that a unique form of working life will disappear. Gone will be the days of the lone signaller, based at some remote location, conscientiously following strict rules to ensure the safety of trains and the public. The Signalling Record Society and the FNRM have now started to capture this form of working using video recording, through the FARSAP (Film Archive of Railway Signalling and People) project. Network Rail has given its support to the project and the first few recordings are now available at <http://www.s-r-s.org.uk/archivevideo.php> (it's well worth viewing - editor). Russell noted that while some of the signallers were initially reluctant to take part, most have been only too pleased to get involved.

That brought us to Borough Market Junction signalbox. Its restoration has been managed by Russell and funded by Mike Hanscomb and South of England Group. As the busiest signalbox in the entire country, its position in the history of railway signalling is unique. Russell recalled that the two signallers who worked the box had to set up routes virtually non-stop, using the miniature lever frame. He showed the current progress and noted that this had allowed the box to be opened to visitors during certain days in the last few weeks. Visitors have been fascinated to see the inside of the box and hear about its history. Russell hopes to develop this, perhaps with audio recordings of signallers working in the background. While it will not be feasible to get the entire frame working (it is far too complex to demonstrate) it should be possible to have some of the levers operate to show what they do. That is part of the next phase of the project, now that the fabric of the box has been made water-tight.

Interestingly, it is not just the public who want to see all this equipment in operation. Network Rail have been sending groups of trainees to the museum to work on the L&YR Signalling School and Russell also aims to give them access to Borough Market Junction 'box. Although the ROCs will ultimately displace all the manual boxes, there will still be many years until this happens, during which the new ROC operators will need to have an appreciation of what is involved in operating a manual box. Russell also thinks that there is scope for the NRM to offer signalling experience days to members of the public, or groups. It looks like things associated with signalling are now on a firm foundation at the NRM.

WINSTON CHURCHILL AT ROPLEY



34051 at Ropley in August: the smokebox front has now been further stripped down and undercoated, together with the buffer beam, tender side sheets and footplate.



FOREST OF DEAN VISIT

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Jeff Phelps demonstrates the wheel lathe at the Flour Mill



Peter Pan at Alan Keef's workshop



The boiler for L&B *Lyn* at Alan Keef's workshop



L&B Lyd at Alan Keef's workshop



Tasmanian Garratt at Perrygrove



St. Egwin at Perrygrove



GWR 2-6-2T No 5541 running into Norchard

TRAINS IN THE FOREST OF DEAN

Between 19th and 22nd September a small but dedicated group of members plus respective partners visited the Forest of Dean and its railways.

Beginning at Bill Parker's Flour Mill works near Bream we were given a guided tour by Jeff Phelps and saw various standard gauge locos at various stages of repair/reconstruction. GWR 5619 had come in for a couple of leaking tubes, but closer inspection had revealed other faults and the boiler was out and being more extensively repaired. A loco that had languished on a plinth at Barry (? 5553) as a "collection of parts" was being properly restored – with some difficulty as many parts were missing and were having to be sourced or manufactured. We were given insights into the very real problems of loco restoration – not least finding drawings and information held by others. Perhaps the NRM ought to be a national repository for new, as well as old, information.

A visit to the annual "Steam Up" at Alan Keef's works near Ross-on-Wye brought us to the other end of the scale with several narrow gauge locos operating or in course of repair. We saw the bar frames and boiler for the replica Lynton and Barnstaple Railway *Lyn* under construction and the other replica – *Lyd* – was in the car park on a low loader.

The Perrygrove Railway is located just south of Coleford and we were fortunate to strike their gala day, with a very intensive service. We had the opportunity to sample some of Alan Keef's coaches as well as be hauled by his 2007-built 2-6-2 *Lydia* and other locomotives such as the Tasmanian Garratt. Other locomotives had been brought in, including the Baldwin No 27 *Soony* and the Evesham Vale Light Railway's 0-4-0 tender tank *St Egwin*. The railway is ideal for children with woodland tree-top walks and

adventure areas as well as the 1.5 mile railway.

In Coleford itself, we visited the Railway Museum, established by Mike Rees and essentially a tribute to his and other local families who had devoted their lives to the railways when the Forest was a hive of industrial activity with coal and ironstone mining, metal smelting and wire-drawing. Photographs from not too long ago are almost unbelievable now that the Forest has essentially returned to nature. As well as the Coleford Junction GWR signal box with a working frame and collection of signalling equipment there is a substantial collection of 5in gauge steam locomotives (some of which operate on a track round the site) and local memorabilia, all contained within the restored Coleford Goods Shed – now rather incongruously located in the centre of a totally changed town centre!

On the remains of the Wye Valley line, Tintern Old Station has transformed itself into a café with a couple of slightly out of place Mk3 coaches (in GWR livery!) serving as a museum/information centre; the signal box is a knitting/sewing shop. But at least it's still there!

And finally...yes, we did visit the Dean Forest Railway where we were hauled by a very trim looking 5541. The line has expanded very considerably from its early beginnings and apparently has further ambitions to install a passing loop and second platform at Whitecroft and possibly extend a little further north.

As well as 5541, Hunslet 0-6-0ST No 3806 *Wilbert* (in memory of Revd W Awdry) was on duty on the Royal Forester dining train....complete with express head code!

All in all this was a superb trip, much enjoyed by all and thanks are due to Les Butler for making the arrangements.

Ian Harrison

OUTREACH

The Group's stand attended the Northampton Model Railway Exhibition on 19th July. Unfortunately, we found ourselves positioned in a narrow corridor somewhat removed from the main exhibition. This meant that we had considerably fewer visitors than previous years.

On 28th September we were at the Model Railway Exhibition at Banbury. This coincided with our "Indian Summer", with temperatures back up into the mid 20s. Again, it affected numbers attending

the show. However, at both events we had quite a few people whom we managed to engage in conversation to persuade them to have a trip to York or Shildon.

Oliver Cromwell has had fewer trips on the mainline over the last few months, partly because of the firemen's' strike and the steam ban issued by Network Rail during the hot, dry weather. However, we were present on the trips to Bristol on 24th July and to Weymouth on 20th August.

Please get in touch if you would like to help on either the stand or the train trips.

ROGER EMERSON

We have been informed that Roger Emerson, a long-stranding member of the FNRM and a member of the committee of the South of England Group, passed away on 27th June. Unfortunately, we were only informed three weeks later, so we were not represented at his funeral.

Roger made provision in his will to leave a substantial legacy (we understand over £100,000) to the NRM. He also left money to a number of other railway-related charities. The NRM are in touch with the executor.

Roger was a frequent attender at the Group's evening lectures and visits, and,

until ill-health caught up with him, the committee. He often came to the Group's stand at model railway events throughout the region.

With his passing, we had a vacancy on the committee, but I am pleased to report that Jim Baldwin has agreed to be co-opted. Jim will be familiar to many as the owner of Eagle Eye Productions and an expert on *Flying Scotsman*. We are, however, always looking for more help with the organisation of the Group's activities, so please consider whether you would like to join the committee and put your name forward at the January AGM.

SIGNALLING AT ACTON DEPOT 8th October

There will be an afternoon of presentations and demonstration at the London Transport Museum Acton Depot on Wednesday 8th October, starting at 14:30. The event is being organised by the Friends of the LTM who have extended the invitation to FNRM members. Russell Hollowood, from the NRM, will make a presentation on Borough Market Signal Box. The LU signalling team will describe the work they have done and future plans, followed by demonstrations of the Marble Arch and Elephant & Castle frames, finishing around 16:30. It is not necessary to pre-

book for the event, but the Museum would like to know approximate numbers. So if you intend to come, please drop me, Mel Draper, a note.

The Acton depot of the LTM is located near Acton Town station on the Piccadilly and District Lines. Exit the station, cross the pedestrian crossing, turn right, then immediately left into the depot entrance. Walk up drive way (about 50 yards) and round the corner of the depot building to get to the entrance. You may need to ring the bell to gain entrance, just say you are with the Friends for the Signalling event. I hope to see you there.

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>