



The Friends of the National Railway Museum

Briefing 76

South of England Group

December 2014

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 12th January 2015 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. There will be a vote, if necessary, for the rotating membership of the Group's committee. This time, the three-year terms of Roger Smith, Martin Sixsmith and Mel Draper are due to end. They can, of course, agree to continue for another term, but we are always happy to have nominations from any member who would like to join the committee and help run the Group's activities.

Before and after the AGM there will be

an 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 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 5th January. This will allow us to order sufficient the food and drink for the evening and make sure there is enough for everyone.

Meanwhile, I hope you enjoy reading this bumper edition and I wish you a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

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NORTH YORKSHIRE MOORS RAILWAY - TO GROSOMT AND BEYOND

On 13th October Philip Benham, Managing Director of the NYMR, and Chairman of the FNRM, addressed the group. He gave a brief history of the NYMR, before considering its current operations and plans for the future.

The railway goes back over 175 years, being only the sixth in the country to operate a passenger service. It was built under George Stephenson's supervision, and was difficult to construct with severe inclines and passage over boggy ground. It was initially operated using horse haulage, the first train from Whitby to Pickering running in 1836. At that time Grosmont as a village, didn't exist and it was only the railway which stimulated the establishment of this settlement, initially called "Tunnel". Some of the early infrastructure of the Whitby & Pickering line still exists, such as the public weighbridge on the approach to Whitby. The railway didn't generate much income and sold out to George Hudson's York & North Midland empire in the 1840s. They converted it to double track and steam power, although the incline from Grosmont to Goathland was still rope hauled. Ultimately it was decided to build a diversion suitable for steam locomotives, but not before the deaths of some passengers on the rope-worked incline while the diversion was under construction. The old incline continued in use to test "Fell" locomotives. Much of the current infrastructure dates from this period and still suffers problems because of track curvatures.

In 1850 the line merged into the NER and continued quietly serving its rural communities. The tourist potential was recognised – the NER even running a tourist push-pull train to Beck Hole (the remaining spur to the old incline) between 1908 and 1914. During the First

World War the line between New Bridge and Levisham was singled to recover the steel for war use, and remains so. Following the war, the LNER reintroduced tourist services, including circular tours from Whitby to Scarborough, camping coaches (which are still available at Goathland), and a steam rail-motor for local traffic.

In the early 1960s, the threats to the line were growing. Closure came on 6th March 1965, with the Stephenson Locomotive Society running a farewell steam tour. However, a clause in the closure order required that the infrastructure remain in place for a further 2 years, mainly to help with the severe winters in the area until alternative arrangements were in place. In June 1965, the Duke of Edinburgh travelled by Royal Train on the line to open the new Fylingdales early-warning station. This stay of execution, allowed the fledgling preservation society to be formed. They were allowed access to the line in 1968, preserved locomotives arrived and by 1971, "day members" tickets were on offer for journeys between Grosmont and Goathland. The official re-opening by the Duke of Kent took place on 1st May 1973.

The Railway Today

The railway is now owned by the North Yorkshire Railway Trust, the successor to the early preservation society. It is the most visited heritage railway in the country and has over 10,000 members. It runs services on 260 days of the year, only closing during the winter to allow for engineering possessions. There are 400 active volunteers and 145 paid staff, 6 stations, 5 catering outlets, and 4 shops. At peak season, there are six trains in operation and 135 dining trains run each year. Last year (2013) there were 327,000 passengers, producing a turnover of

£5,294k, but running costs were £5,390k, resulting in a deficit of £96k. This is more than covered by membership income of £150k. All of this activity yields around £30M to the local economy each year.

Keeping the trains running requires constant upgrading of the infrastructure. Recent projects have included the rebuilding bridge 30 on the incline from Grosmont to Goathland. This was built in 1860, reconstructed in the early 1900s, and badly in need of replacement; a speed restriction being applied in recent years. The cost of £800,000 was raised through an appeal and a special grant from the county council. The work started in January 2010, with the old girders removed and replaced, and was completed in time for the opening of the Spring season on 27th March.

Another major project was the “Train of Thought” - aimed at reinstating the overall roof at Pickering. The original, which had been designed by George Townsend Andrews (the designer of the Euston Arch), had been removed by BR in 1952. Most of the funds came from the Heritage Lottery Fund, and work started in early 2011. While this was a high visibility project, it would have been pointless without a less visible project – to replace Bridge 7 situated at the end of Pickering station. This involved spending around £350k on a new pre-cast concrete bridge. It uses a novel rail fixing – the track is glued in place.

Whitby

The biggest changes have taken place at the other end of the line at Whitby. A few excursions had run to the town in recent years, including one on 20th October 2007, when No 61944 and *The Great Marquess* repeated the 1965 closure special. But was it possible for the NYMR to run a regular train service? To satisfy the authorities they needed to prepare a Rail Safety Case, negotiate a

track access agreement with Network Rail, and secure their own Train Operating Company (TOC) agreement. This means their operations, like other TOCs are fully regulated by the Office of Rail Regulation. During the trial excursions in 2008, A4 *Sir Nigel Gresley* had reached Whitby but the trailing axle didn't like it, and consequently smaller locos are now used. In the 4 years that trains have been regularly running to Whitby, ticket sales to Whitby have reached over £1M.

The NYMR arrival at Whitby has required some changes to the station. The original layout only allowed three trains a day in each direction. A business case was developed to build a second platform and run-round at the station. Network Rail agreed to put up £500k of the original estimated £1.5M cost. However, this cost increased to £2.3M following further investigation and changes. As a result Network Rail increased their contribution to £850k, with the remainder coming from a regional development grant of £1.1M and a £500k business loan by the NYMR. The project was agreed in 2012, started on 24th February 2014 and the first train ran into the new platform on 16th August. The service now sees two steam engines simultaneously at Whitby for the first time since 1965.

The new platform at Whitby involved additional changes at Grosmont, requiring the recommissioning of a second platform and the installation of new signalling. The signal gantry was recovered by volunteers but cost £150k to install at Grosmont – it was commissioned the month before the second platform at Whitby opened.

The Future

Many of the steel bridges along the line are in need of repair or replacement. Each will be expensive, for example that at the south end of Goathland station is likely to cost a third of a million. Add to this the

need for rail replacement, bridge inspection, clearing and repairing drainage and cutting back vegetation, it is easy to see where the operational costs go. Ideally Philip would like an annual budget of around £500k for such work, but that is not affordable at present. Keeping the locomotive fleet in good condition is also expensive, costing some £750k to £1M per loco. And that doesn't cover the maintenance of the carriages, much of which is irreplaceable NER and LNER heritage stock. The next engine scheduled for overhaul over this winter is BR 2-6-4T No 80135.

Priorities for the future are to make the most of the Whitby extension, income from which is already 3 years ahead of its projected levels. Increasing the capacity of the railway will involve doubling the track south of Goathland. The increasing costs will need to be supported by diversification, such as developing the heritage potential of Grosmont, e.g. by running horse-drawn trains, and broadening the market appeal, particularly by attracting younger people, e.g. through the Mulberries Café at

Pickering. But new developments all need to be respectful of the Railway's heritage – which it is not just LNER but includes LMS, SR and GWR “foreigners”. This aims to secure the position of NYMR as the “World's Most Popular Heritage Railway”.

Questions

Opening south of Pickering? – A local group is campaigning to reopen this, but it will involve knocking down a supermarket, crossing a main road via a level crossing, and laying track alongside a main road. Also NYMR will be against the idea of running high speed train along its existing tracks. Philip believes a better option to gain improved connections to the national rail network would be to open the old connection to the East Coast Main Line via Battersby.

Challengers for the most popular heritage railway? – Severn Valley Railway has a larger annual turnover but this comes from running two pubs! It has fewer annual passengers than the NYMR. The Harz Mountains system in Germany probably has more passengers, but this is still partly state run.

ACTON DEPOT VISIT

The Friends of the London Transport Museum invited members of the South of England Group to join them on Wednesday 8th October for an afternoon considering railway signalling. Two talks were given, one by Bill Collins, and one by Russell Hollowood. Unfortunately, Russell, and a team of half a dozen volunteers from York, were badly delayed by a broken rail on the East Coast service. So Bill was first on to describe the LTM Friends' work in restoring the Marble Arch and Elephant & Castle frames. The volunteer team, which includes Mike Hanscomb (who couldn't be with us) and Mike Crosbie, has spent many hours restoring the two frames to working order. The Elephant & Castle frame is the

latest, and uses computer-generated train sequences to feed the train describers and demands from the operator of the frame. Its restoration involved full dismantlement and rebuild of the frame and the replacement of some original parts with more modern equivalents, e.g. the electrical relays. A full rewiring, using many reels of wire, was also necessary. By the time Bill had finished, Russell had managed to make it to Acton, and after a brief drink of coffee, stepped up to the rostrum. He gave a fascinating, and amusing talk on the history of the NRM signalling collection with a special focus on Borough Market Junction Signal Box. On the latter, he used some early photographs to show it in situ and its

railway surroundings, including one showing overhead catenary on the approach to London Bridge before conversion to third rail (I wonder how long before it reverts again? {editor}). Its unfortunate previous neglect at the NRM was covered, together with the more positive recent steps for its restoration. It was pleasing to hear that when the box was opened to the public recently, there were many positive comments about it. Russell is confident that it now has a key role in helping to tell the story of the “dark arts” of railway signalling.

Following the talks, there was an

opportunity to see the two restored LTM frames in operation. Because of the numbers attending (well over 50), we had to spit into two groups. This gave a little more opportunity to get close to the installations and see them working and operating nearby coloured signals, as well as the track diagrams.

This was something of an experiment by the LTM Friends, being the first mid-week session held at Acton. Judging by its popularity, I expect others. We also hope to organise other joint activities with them in the future – not just on signalling, fascinating though it is!

WINSTON CHURCHILL EXHIBITION

Southern Railway's parcel van S2464S carried the great statesman's coffin as part of the funeral train and is on loan from the Swanage Railway Trust. Last week, staff, volunteers and trainees at Locomotion finished the structural work required to bring it back to its former glory. All that remains is the painting to umber and cream, the “Pullman-style” livery it had for the funeral journey.

Meanwhile restoration work on the locomotive, No 34051, continues at Ropley on the Mid Hants Railway. It is currently in undercoat apart from the front and top which are glossed. Once complete, it will return to the NRM at York for the anniversary display. There is some doubt on whether one of the Pullman cars from the original funeral train will be there, but investigations are still continuing. The exhibition, “Churchill's Final Journey” is scheduled to run from 30th January – 3rd May 2015. The display will include archive footage of the state funeral, on 30th January 1965, which was televised to millions worldwide.

James Lester, the fireman on 34051 during the solemn final journey, will be helping the Museum to commemorate the 50th anniversary by reliving his memories

of that historic day in 1965 when people stood at station platforms and clustered around their TV sets to give their final farewell. As part of its preparation for the exhibition, Jamie Taylor, Interpretation Developer at the National Railway Museum, is also appealing for other first-hand memories of the funeral train. He is seeking personal recollections and photographs to share with visitors, and would like to hear from anyone who saw the train on its journey from Waterloo to its final stop at Handborough, and from anyone who may have worked on the funeral train. Any stories should be emailed to jamie.taylor@nrm.org.uk.

Meanwhile the new FNRM book “Winston Churchill and the Bulleid Pacifics”, by Rob Adamson and Chris Nettleton, has just been published. This is the latest in the FNRM's “famous locomotive” monographs. At 136 pages plus covers, it is the largest so far and is extensively illustrated. Like the recent ones, covering *Duchess of Hamilton* and *Mallard*, it covers the design and history of the NRM Collection locomotive and its class members. It is priced at £9.95, with a 10% discount for FNRM members (at £8.95). Copies should be available at the AGM.

PHOTOS FROM THE GILLIAM COLLECTION

Some years ago, our late member Brian Gilliam left his slide collection to the FNRM in his will. There are some 5000 slides and it has taken some time to catalogue these – currently I'm just passing the 4000 mark. However, with our two recent evening lectures, by Philip Benham (see page 2) and Chris Taft (see page 8), I thought you might like to see some relevant examples from Brian's collection. {editor}



First a selection of Brian's shots of the SLS Whitby Moors Railtour featuring LNER K4 2-6-0 No 3442 *The Great Marquess* and K1 2-6-0 No 62005 on 6 March 1965. This was run to mark the closure of the line to Pickering.



Whitby was clearly very busy that day, above, but I'd be grateful for thoughts on the other locations shown here and at the top of the next page.





The collection also includes a few photographs of the Post Office Railway at Mount Pleasant in 1996, while it was still operating.

Below left is a train arriving at the station, and right, and second row left, one of the battery-powered locos. Second row right is the VIP car, still with GR logos.



Left is a general view of the workshop, showing the inspection pits and overhead power rail with its sliding sockets. Right, is one of the 1927 4-wheel cars.

LONDON POST OFFICE RAILWAY

Chris Taft, Head of Collections at the British Postal Museum and Archive, came to the Group on 10th November, to describe the work of his organisation and particularly the history and plans for the London site. The original Post Office museum (always a temporary measure) closed in 1998. The archive, however, is an officially designated government archive with statutory responsibility for the protection of, and public access to, the historic documentary records of the organisation. They are now at the point where they are ready to embark on the creation of a new, world-class facility at Mount Pleasant which will provide a safe store for the archives and a museum which, for the first time, will give general public access to the railway.

History

The Archive goes back to the time of King Charles II, but has a rich collection covering the relationship with the railways over the past 200 years. While the “MailRail” brand only dates back to 1997, the development of the Post Office (London) Railway – to give it its proper title – goes back over 100 years. The aim was to connect the East and West London Sorting Office with the main-line railway stations at Liverpool Street and Paddington. London was always the hub of the national postal system and was always a bottleneck. Even during the days of horse-drawn mail coaches, mail from one part of the country to another often needed to be transported across London before it could board another coach to its final destination. The London Postal Districts date back to 1855, each originally having its own district sorting office, but their location did not reflect those of the established railway termini. The original suggestion to improve interconnection was via a “tubular conveyance”. In the 1860s there were

experiments of a pneumatic system at Battersea, with the Post Office expressing interest. A full-scale trial system was installed between Eversholt Street and Euston, which was subsequently extended to Holborn and St Martin's le Grand. In this system cast-iron cars held mailbags which were then pushed through the tunnel by air pressure. Despite its technical success, the Post Office decided to withdraw from the project in 1874, at which point the system was abandoned and the Pneumatic Mail Co went out of business. The infrastructure was, and to some extent still is, in existence and in 1929 a build up of town gas in the tunnels led to an explosion. Investigations of the system revealed two original railcars still in the tunnels and these were removed and are now in the reserve collection.

In the meantime, the cross-London mail continued to fight its way through the growing traffic, but by the early 20th century it was clear that something must be done if the mail was not to suffer unacceptable delay. The inevitable government committee was established which published its report in February 1911. This includes an interesting historical précis of the technical alternatives which were then available, and concluded that an electrically-driven, driver-less, underground railway was the answer. The Post Office, being a government department, needed Parliamentary approval, and this was granted in 1913. Two trials were set up, one at Chelmsford and the other at Woolwich Arsenal. Miniature cars were used, each holding one mail bag, just to prove the principle. Meanwhile the plans for the real railway were developed, involving a line from the Eastern District Office to Paddington via Liverpool Street and Mount Pleasant. There have been various suggestions over the years for

extensions to Euston, Waterloo, and Victoria railway stations, and to the Northern, South-Eastern and South-Western District Offices, but nothing came of any of these, other than the incorporation of short stub connections on the main Eastern District Office to Paddington spine.

The Chief Engineer of the the Post Office was in charge of the electrical design work, but the civil engineering was undertaken by London Underground. The basic design was two 2ft gauge tracks in a single bore tunnel, the tracks diverging into two separate tunnels at stations. The main running tunnels were 7 to 9 ft, opening to 27 to 30 ft at stations.

The Stations

Using reproductions from the archive of the original station plans, Chris then took us on a tour of the system. At the Eastern District Office at Whitechapel, the station had a siding and loop section to allow turn-back of the trains, the tracks at the western end leaving, as they do at all stations, into a single bore tunnel. Liverpool Street was unusual as it didn't serve a District Office, mail sacks just going straight up to Platform 10 where the TPOs arrived and departed. The next station served the King Edward Building which was the Post Office headquarters for handling foreign mail. Then came Mount Pleasant which then, and now, is the centre of both the railway and for UK mail sorting. Mount Pleasant station is the largest on the network, with maintenance facilities, as well as loops at each end of the station to allow turn-back of trains. Western Central District Office, situated in New Oxford Street near the British Museum came next and also had turn-back loops. Western District and Western Parcel Office, were next, both of which were relatively small. Neither of the ground based facilities of these offices were able to handle road-based

collections and deliveries. Consequently, both were closed and replaced by a new office on Rathbone Place. At the western end of the line, Paddington combined a major railway interchange and a District Postal sorting office, so was quite substantial with turn-back loops, sidings and an impressive mail transport system to ground level.

Construction

Construction of the tunnels, using the tried and trusted Greathead shield, started in 1913 with completion anticipated in 15 months. Inevitably the start of the war delayed work, but construction continued at a slower rate and was only fully suspended in 1917 by which time, most of the tunnels were complete. As the tunnels were without any track they were ideal for providing safe storage of national treasures from, amongst others, the National Portrait Gallery, to protect them from the bombs falling from Zeppelins and Gotha bombers above. After the war, work didn't recommence immediately as it was unclear whether the changing circumstances (the expansion of the city, and introduction of reliable motor lorries) justified continuing with the system. However, as so much of the civil engineering was ready, it was decided to finish the job and rails and electrical supplies were installed between 1924 and 1927. Operations finally started between Mount Pleasant and Eastern District in time to handle the Christmas mail in 1927, with the rest of the system opening early the following year.

However, it soon became apparent there was a problem. The original trials had resulted in a design for a small 4-wheel car with a central storage compartment for the mail. The Post Office Chief Engineer had expressed concern that a two axle arrangement, combined with the system's sharp curves, would result in excessive wheel wear. He proposed an

alternative bogie design for the cars but was over-ruled on cost ground. His predictions proved true and, in 1930, a batch of bogie cars was ordered to his design. Additional batches of bogie cars followed during in the next few years, resulting in all the 4-wheel stock being withdrawn. The 1930 bogie stock proved reliable and, although trials of new designs were held in the 1960s, it carried on until the 1980s. Replacement stock was finally procured from Greenwood and Batley (GreenBat), a subsidiary of Hunslet Engine Co. So good was the 1930s design that the replacement stock didn't differ significantly and could run side by side with the older design. In the 1990s, for the system's Diamond Jubilee, the line was re-branded "MailRail" and the stock was smarted up cosmetically. This included fitting a headlight; no one knows why since there was no driver on board to see anything ahead – perhaps it was to frighten the rats!

Operation

The operation of the system was relatively straight-forward. Mail bags came down a shoot from the ground level facilities, via something like a helter-skelter, and were immediately loaded into trolleys, each designated for an appropriate destination station on the system. The trolleys were then loaded directly onto the trains. At the destination station, the trolleys were removed from the train and the contents (mail bags) tipped onto a conveyor which took them up to ground level. The length of their journey to, or from, ground level varied from station to station – Paddington being the deepest, requiring a 390 ft long conveyor belt. The routing of the trains was set up by an operator at a switch frame at each station. This had a miniature lever frame which controlled the block sections. As a train travelled along the system the block in rear had

power switch off, meaning that collisions were (theoretically) impossible. Between stations, the train was under full automatic control, block sections switching in and out of power as the train moved forward. To start a train at the station, the platform staff simply pulled a cord, stretching along the roof of the station tunnel, which switched on the track power. Each station had its own 11kV power supply which was transformed down to 440V DC to supply the main tunnel tracks, and 150V DC for station tracks – the latter ensuring that trains travelled slowly where Post Office staff were working.

The system's engineering – automatic, electrically-powered, driver-less trains - was very advanced for its time. Even the maintenance, which was concentrated at Mount Pleasant, was well thought out. It was here that all rolling stock was serviced and any large pieces of plant and equipment could be brought in, or out, of the underground system. The servicing depot was at basement level of the Mount Pleasant sorting office, about 30ft below ground level and roughly the same height above the running tunnels. The two were joined by an incline at the top of which the electrified third rail of the main system ended. Power to operate the trains was then from overhead electrical wire and sockets, thus providing a (relatively) safe working environment.

At the peak, the system employed 270 staff, operating 6 days a week, 22 hours a day, maintenance taking place between 8am and 10am daily, i.e. after the morning deliveries. Trains ran at roughly six minute intervals and could, if needed, travel express through stations, but rarely did. Line speed in the tunnels was around 30 mph, slowing through a combination of reduced traction voltage and rising gradients on the approach to each station. Conversely at the exit of stations, a

falling gradient and the re-establishment of full voltage, resulted in rapid acceleration. During maintenance periods and in the case of train failures, when the system power was switched off, a number of battery-electric vehicles were available. These were built in 1926 and two still exist. They were designed to haul 6 tons, roughly two train-sets, but trials showed they could cope with 52 tons. Each had 350 lead-acid batteries and was operated by an on-board driver. There was also a “VIP” passenger car which the battery locos could haul round the system, but it was rarely used.

The System Today.

The Eastern District Office stopped sorting mail as mechanisation was introduced at Mount Pleasant. King Edward Building had closed and was being sold. The TPOs had ceased to run to either Paddington or Liverpool Street in 1995. By 1997 less than half the system was in use – only the Mount Pleasant to Paddington District Office was operated, with Rathbone Place as an intermediate station. In 2003 the District Offices at both Paddington and Rathbone Place were closed and the decision was

taken to mothball the system. The power was turned off and the trains left were they stood at the end of the early morning shift on 31st May 2003.

Since 2008, when the decision was finally taken to abandon the system, the Postal Museum and Archives has acquired a 1980s set, a 1930s set and one of the original 1927 4-wheel cars. Each of these was conserved and is now housed in the reserve collection at Loughton.

The Future

The aim is for these conserved vehicles to form part of the display in a new museum which will incorporate the car maintenance depot and station at Mount Pleasant. Visitors will have the opportunity to experience the working environment and take a short ride on the *MailRail* from the maintenance depot, through the station and round the turn-back loop. There will be displays in the maintenance depot and on the station platforms to show how the railway was worked.

We wish Chris and his team success with this major project and look forward to a group visit when it is opened.

OUTREACH

The South of England stand visited Wing (for the Tring and District Model Railway exhibition) on 11th October. As usual, we were made very welcome at this local show, which is one of the better ones in the region, and did reasonable business. However, without doubt, the major annual event is the Warley Model Railway Exhibition, at the Birmingham NEC. This took place on 22nd to 23rd November. It was, as always, extremely busy, and, while we had a stand well away from the entrance, we had a good corner plot and, consequently, had plenty of customers. Locomotion Models had a stand across the aisle from us and seemed

to have a good trading weekend. The next stand to us was the Great Central Railway (a seemingly regular occurrence at the major shows this and last year), so there was plenty of interest in the bid for Leicester North museum. Lets hope for success to the proposal for an NRM outstation there. The results of the bid should be made public in the middle of next year.

Our next outreach event will be to the East Bedfordshire Model Railway Exhibition on 14th February 2015 at Stratton Upper School, Eagle Farm Road, Biggleswade, SG18 8JB.

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>