



The Friends of the National Railway Museum

Briefing 77

South of England Group

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

WINSTON CHURCHILL - PROJECT (NEARLY) COMPLETED

On 30th January, a party from the South of England Group were invited to the opening of the NRM exhibition “*Churchill's Final Journey*” which commemorates the funeral of the statesman. This also represented the objective of our funding campaign – to get the locomotive to the condition where it merits being centre-stage for such a national event. At 8am the doors to the Great Hall opened and the locomotive headed a re-creation of part of the funeral train across the turntable to take up its position on the main road – the one which normally is the home of *Mallard*.

The head of the Museum, Paul Kirkman, and Chairman of the Friends, Philip Benham, gave the opening speeches. It was gratifying to hear the acknowledgement of our efforts to raise the money to fund the exhibition, with our Group chairman, Ian Harrison, being invited to share the stage. Both Paul and Philip also acknowledged the superb work of the teams at the Mid-Hants Railway in restoring the locomotive, and at Shildon in restoring the baggage car. All present were then encouraged to inspect the work

and the Pullman car *Lydia*, which has been loaned for the duration of the exhibition.

Local press and TV were present throughout the event, taking interviews from the restoration teams and Jim Lester, the fireman from the funeral train. Unfortunately, the national press concentrated on the London-based commemorations, so the publicity only went out in the Yorkshire area.

The exhibition will run until 3rd May, after which the Pullman car is due to be returned to its owner. We understand that the Swanage Railway, which owns the baggage car, is willing to donate the vehicle to the NRM, so we may still see a partial recreation of the funeral train for a little longer.

Meanwhile, the restoration fund currently stands at £38167, so £5833 still to go to our target. The restoration fund will remain open until the show closes so there is a home for additional donations and from the sale of the limited edition print “*The ACE at Battledown*” (of which about 300 still remain – so it’s still not too late to buy yours).

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BRIDGING THE GAP AND LEICESTER NORTH MUSEUM - GCR

On 9th February we welcomed Tom Inggall from the Great Central Railway to update us, particularly, on the Leicester City Council/GCR/NRM plans for Leicester North Museum.

Great Central History

Tom started his talk by giving a summary of the history of the original Great Central Railway and the London Extension, the last main-line railway to reach the capital. Its construction was extensively documented by Sidney Newton, an “unofficial” photographer. Being the last of the mainline railways, it benefited from the lessons learnt in building the earlier lines, in particular easy gradients and gentle curves. The management was also progressive in its promotion of the railway, putting on special excursions and employing the marketing strap-line “*rapid travel in luxury*”. Robinson, the chief engineer, was no slouch either, introducing a new fleet of advanced locomotives, including the well respected O4, adopted by the War Department ROD as its standard design. Things probably started to go down-hill from the 1923 when the GCR was merged into the LNER – a glance at the map shows that much of its lines encroached on the territory of the LMS so it was something of a frontier line. The crunch came with the Beeching report, which earmarked it for closure, overlooking its strategic potential as a high speed connection between the Midlands and London. The line closed completely in 1969.

Preservation

In that year and the following year, a group of enthusiasts explored what could be done to retain some of the line, focussing on the part between Nottingham and Leicester. Preservation got going in 1973 with footplate rides

offered (for 6d) at Loughborough. At that time double track still existed between Birstall and Rothley, but BR lifted this shortly after. Belgrave and Birstall station was badly vandalised and had to be demolished. It took until 1991 to extend south from Loughborough, before returning to this site, now re-named Leicester North. The project to reinstate double track and the Swithland loops, was a 22 year project, just completed, which puts the line in the unique position of being able to have trains passing each other at speed.

The railway now attracts some 125,000 visitors a year, runs two major galas, is home to four locomotives from the National Collection (O4, Class 33, *Sir Lamiel*, and *Oliver Cromwell*), and has the largest collection of mineral wagons in the country. It provides both film sets (featuring in the famous “Casualty” accident), and test facilities for the rail industry – one of the most recently publicised being the load testing at speed of 60103 *Tornado* in 2008.

Current projects include the re-opening of the Mount Sorrell branch (as a local community project), restoration of the Loughborough station canopy, and a turntable (from the NRM!) at Quorn & Woodhouse.

New Museum

That brought Tom to discuss the most recent collaboration involving the NRM, the proposal to have an NRM out-station museum at Leicester North. It is a £15M collaboration between the GCR, the NRM and Leicester City Council. As far as the NRM is concerned, it has the potential to provide valuable under-cover display storage for important parts of the collection; the APT-E was mentioned along with steam locos associated with the area, such as *Butler Henderson* and

Green Arrow (the V2s being regular performers on the line). It will put part of the National Collection within easy reach of many millions of people living in the West and East Midlands – not to mention cutting the travelling distance for those of us living further south. Easy access to the GCR running lines gives opportunities to rotate the displays, especially once the bridge (see below) is complete. The museum will be built where the current temporary station is, with the running lines slewed to the east, and platforms built by the side of the new building. The building will be similar in design to the one at Locomotion, Shildon. As far as the GCR is concerned, the museum will provide a new visitor attraction, increasing visitor number by 230,000 p.a. Leicester Council see it as part of the group of local attractions, including the National Space Centre, and Richard III Centre. It is expected to generate some £43M to the local economy and 983 jobs in the area over the first 5 years.

Tom showed the video they prepared for the revised bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund – the results of their deliberations are expected after the May elections. Let's keep our fingers crossed for an NRM out-station in the (near) south!

Bridging the Gap

The preserved GCR and GCR(N) are currently unconnected and operate separately. Reinstating the missing 550 yards of track will produce a 18 mile railway connecting the new Leicester North museum to the Ruddington transport centre. Key to the project is replacement of the 160ft bridge over the Midland main line. This was removed by BR in the 1980s. A feasibility study was commissioned from W S Atkins in 2009 and concluded that the reconnection was technically possible. It will involve not just the replacement of the bridge over the Midland line, but addressing several

other challenges. The first is the bridge over Railway Terrace. When the railway was originally built this was just a bridge over an occupation road to some fields. Since closure a recycling and waste site has been built on the fields. This means that a new bridge will need to have 5.3 m (17ft) clearance to allow refuse lorries to pass. This point will become the crest of the new alignment. An embankment then needs to be built south of this point, close to a new business park, and up to the Grand Union Canal bridge, which will also need some attention. To the north, the A60 bridge on the GCR(N), will need strengthening. Key, however, is the Midland main line whose imminent electrification could have killed all these plans. Network Rail have been very supportive and are willing to factor in the new bridge as part of the electrification preparation work, provided GCR pay. This is the reason for the current aim to raise the estimated £1M to cover the bridge costs. The original idea was to use two bridge spans recovered as part of the Reading redevelopment. However, installing a modern single span steel bridge turns out to be not much more expensive, and removes the risk of needing to build a central pier in the middle of the main line; there is a worry that, despite, the ground surveys, there could be some remains of the original bridge piers at this point. The two Reading spans will not go to waste and it is likely they will be used elsewhere on the project or at other locations on the GCR. Once the new bridge is installed, attention will then turn to raising the money for the remainder of the project, the total cost of which is estimated at £3M. With £730k already secured, it looks like they have a good foundation from which to bridge the gap and, with Leicester North built, we may see a fleet of NRM locos in action across it.



Artist's impression of Leicester North Museum, for the Heritage Lottery Fund bid

Opening of "Churchill's Final Journey" exhibition



Left & below – the train enters the Great Hall



Left – the opening speeches from Paul Kirkman (director NRM) and Philip Benham (chairman FNRM) with Ian Harrison (chairman SoEG)



Left – the locomotive and train in position after the speeches

Right – Mid-Hants Railway restoration team (left) and Shildon restoration team (right), pose with the locomotive



Left – the South of England Group fund raising team.

JAMES CHOLMELEY RUSSELL

by Nick Booker

Railways, as we know, did not just appear in the landscape but were built by armies of navvies; overseen by specialists such as engineers, architects and surveyors, all under the control of “The Engineer” – people such as Locke, Brunel or Stephenson. But behind all these people stood the Directors and investors: people who had put their own money on the table in the hope of a good return. One such was James Cholmeley Russell (JCR).

Born into a well-to-do legal family in Bloomsbury in 1841, James’ career was cut out for him by family background and tradition. After Harrow School he graduated from Magdalen College, Oxford in 1864 - with a third in Law and Modern History - but went on to follow the legal route and was called to the Chancery Bar in 1867. The life of chancery lawyers is well documented in Mr Dickens’ *Bleak House* – not too much work and plenty of fees!

Presumably through a chum, he became interested in the prospects for a network of narrow gauge railways in North Wales. Quite why is not known; there must have been safer punts, even in the age of Railway Mania. A prospectus was drawn up but after Parliamentary authorisation in 1872 the original scheme was abandoned in 1876 and went into receivership in 1878; however fragments were developed and some of those have survived to become what is now the Welsh Highland Railway. By this time JCR had invested £19,000 – about £2M in modern money – but he did so quite shrewdly by buying the locos and stock for what was then the Moel Tryfan Railway with the railway leasing them back – effectively the first Rosco!

Amazingly enough, there was a scheme to electrify these narrow gauge lines and

some designs for locos were worked up – but there was never enough money, so it was dropped.....Wales is not Switzerland!

In 1906 the Bedgellert railway ordered a 2-6-2T loco from Hunslet which was named *Russell*, after JCR. The loco still survives on the Welsh Highland Railway. JCR had various other railway interests, including the Manchester and Milford [Haven] Railway (MMR) – a grandiose scheme to link Manchester with a deep water port through the mountains of Central Wales. Originally backed by the LNWR, the scheme progressed in fits and starts and JCR became manager of the stretch from Pencader to Aberystwyth in 1867. But it took at least 8 changes to travel from Manchester to Milford Haven!

One of the branches of the Manchester and Milford Railway was to have been the Vale of Rheidol Railway, of which JCR was a Director until his resignation in 1899. The concept of the MMR was finally abandoned as a workable entity in 1906 with the GWR taking control of the various sections that had been built.

In 1892, JCR was involved with another scheme that did not take off: this time in central London. The plan was to build surface railways from Waterloo and London Bridge to take passengers directly into the City, rather than stopping on the south bank of the Thames. Known as the Royal Exchange and Waterloo Railway, it would have been a competitor to the Waterloo & City Line and would have required considerable land acquisitions in Southwark and the City. Needless to say, it did not get very far!

One of JCR’s associates – on the MMR proposals, Vale of Rheidol and the Royal Exchange railway - was [Sir] James Szlumper, who was a noted railway civil

engineer and whose nephew, Gilbert Szlumper, was destined to be the penultimate General Manager of the Southern Railway (1937 – 39).

JCR married late in life – when he was 52 – and he and his wife Eleanor had one daughter, Margaret. Having lived most of his life in London, JCR moved to Haslemere and also had a house (now a hotel) near Fort William. He was keen on steam boats and had three steam yachts at various times. He had various other strings to his bow, such as property development - which was no doubt reasonably lucrative - and authorship: he wrote a book entitled “*The rights and liabilities of husband and wife*”. Once a lawyer always a lawyer! After a long illness he died in August 1912 and is buried – next to his wife (and Mother in Law!) – at Merrow near Guildford.

JCR left estate worth £166,000 – about £45million in today’s money – but when

Eleanor died her estate was “only” worth about £7,000. Perhaps she managed to avoid death duties rather more successfully than he did!

Nick made the point that JCR seems to have been an inveterate “networker” in today’s parlance. He had lots of acquaintances who pointed him towards opportunities for investment – presumably nothing has changed for those with cash to spare. So JCR seems to have been an interesting character who got more deeply involved in various enterprises than was perhaps wise. But he doesn’t seem to have suffered too much financial hardship while doing so – which is more than can be said for many investors in Victorian railways!

Nick Booker is a Trustee of the Welsh Highland Railway Heritage Group. More information about JCR is available on the web: just put James Cholmeley Russell into Google.

AGM

The Group’s AGM was held at Marylebone on 12th January with 18 members present. During the formal business, Roger Smith, Martin Sixsmith and Mel Draper were re-elected to the committee, and chairman Ian Harrison, and treasurer Roger Smith, gave a review

of the general and financial activities of the Group, respectively. Throughout the event, we had the opportunity to partake of the buffet refreshments, and watch video and photographs of the key events during the previous year.

MEMBERS’ EVENING

The topics for our next meeting on Monday 13th April is up to you. As a Members Evening, this is your opportunity to bring along some photographs or video which others may find interesting. Short of ideas? How about these:

- With the NRM *Churchill’s Final Journey*, do you have any photos of the real event 50 years ago (covering the train or the rest of the funeral)
- This year is the 40th anniversary of the opening of the NRM, and the Stockton and Darlington celebrations

– do you have any photos of either?

- It’s also the 70th anniversary of the end of WWII – how about your shots of the WDs?
- A bit more recent, 1995 was the year of BR privatisation – what an excuse to show those pictures of “raspberry ripple” carriages.

If you can, bring along your photos or video on a USB stick. If they are still in their original form (slides, prints or tape) get in touch with me (Mel Draper) and I’ll get them converted.

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>