

WELLS RAILWAY FRATERNITY

The final evening meeting of the season took place at Wells Town Hall on the 11th May. First of all, we congratulated our member, David Humphreys, on his successfully taking part in the recent London Marathon, as a result of which he had raised a significant sum in aid of the Parkinson's Disease Society.

Our speaker for the evening was Mr Nick Hayes from South Yorkshire and his subject was 'The Blue Pullman Story'. Nick, however, began by telling us a little about his 44-year career on British Railways from which he retired as a 'top link' driver in 1996.

Turning to the 'Blue Pullmans', we learned that, in connection with the Railway Modernisation Plan of 1955, British Railways decided to develop a small fleet of luxury diesel-electric multiple unit trains aimed primarily at the 'Premium Business' sector. The trains were intended to offer the highest standards of comfort and on-board catering, coupled with a maximum speed of 90 mph, considered high in the 1950s. Eventually authority was given for the building of five trains, two of them in a 6-car formation and three of 8 cars, a total of 36 vehicles (of no fewer than six different types). They were built by Metropolitan-Cammell Ltd at their Saltley Works near Birmingham and the final cost amounted to £1.6 million - a considerable sum at the time. Various routes were considered for the operation of these trains and finally those chosen were the former Midland Railway route from London St Pancras to Manchester (via Leicester and Nottingham) and the Great Western routes from Paddington to Bristol and South Wales and to Birmingham and Wolverhampton. To emphasize the high standards on offer it was decided to brand the services as 'Pullman' (the British Transport Commission having acquired a controlling interest in the UK operations of the Pullman Car Company in 1954).

The 6-car trains were exclusively First Class, seating 132 passengers, whilst the 8-car trains offered accommodation for 108 First Class and 120 Second Class passengers. A full range of meals was offered to be served 'at seat' and each train contained a state-of-the-art kitchen car. The trains were innovative in many ways; they were the first in Britain to feature a 'power car' (locomotive) at each end. These were each fitted with a 1,000 hp diesel engine (of German design) which provided electric current to motors mounted on its rear bogie and also to motors on the leading bogie under the adjacent carriage. The power cars were also unusual for the time that they contained seating for a small number of passengers, their accommodation being well insulated against noise and vibration from the nearby diesel engine. In view of the high maximum speed of the trains it was decided to use bogies of a Swiss design. Despite such bogies being entirely satisfactory in trains on the Continent, they gave the 'Blue Pullmans' a rough ride at speed; this problem was never fully resolved and almost certainly contributed to the trains having a comparatively short working life. In appearance the trains were of a pleasing design, considered very modern at the time, and they were painted in a rich 'Nanking Blue' and white colour scheme. With the addition of the Pullman 'coat of arms' on their front end, they made a most striking impression.

Branded as 'Midland Pullman', the 6-car trains went into service on the Manchester service in July 1960 whilst the 8-car trains were introduced on the Bristol / Wolverhampton routes two months later. Finally, the latter services were supplemented with a 'South Wales Pullman' in September 1961. To emphasize the new image, train staff were provided with new uniforms and the drivers of the Western Region trains were adorned in long white coats and peaked caps - which earned them the nickname of 'ice cream sellers'.

The trains continued in service for 12 years and despite efforts latterly to find new uses for them as charter trains, they were finally taken out of use in 1973. In their final years the striking blue livery gave way to a version of the new BR 'corporate' livery of mainly white with blue trim and a yellow front end - a scheme which did not suit them at all well. Efforts to secure the preservation of some of the 'Blue Pullman' vehicles sadly failed and all 36 vehicles were scrapped in 1974.

To supplement his account, Mr Hayes showed us two films, one made on behalf of Metropolitan-Cammell, the builders, and the other by British Transport Films. Following these, we were entertained by a film, made from a 'Blue Pullman' cab, of a journey from Paddington to Birmingham - taking all

of 5 minutes! Finally, Mr Hayes illustrated various details of the trains and showed scenes of them in service by means of a series of slides. A most interesting evening concluded with a vote of thanks given by Andrew Tucker.

The Fraternity will resume its evening meetings in September but meanwhile we shall be busy preparing for the annual Railwells model railway exhibition to be held at Wells Town Hall in August. Further details of the Fraternity and its activities can be obtained from either Paul Fry (673187) or John Uncles (870158).

John Uncles