



Established 1968

WELLS RAILWAY FRATERNITY

Newsletter No.169

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Your contributions for future newsletters are welcome.

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John Adams, the Chief Engineer of the 34092 Locomotive Group (on the right) and his colleague Brian Hearn, with David Fisher's painting of "City of Wells", at our October meeting—see page 3.

Members Slides and Annual Quiz (Tuesday 9 September)

The new season of evening meetings got under way at Wells Town Hall on the 9th September when the first half of the evening took the form of the Fraternity's traditional annual quiz. This was set by last year's winner, Brian Neill, and most unusually there were two winners with identical scores. They were Andrew Tucker and Ken Smith who agreed to adorn their mantelpieces with the Fraternity's splendid trophy for six months each!

After the coffee break, members were entertained by the Speakers' Secretary, the aforesaid Andrew Tucker, with a photographic survey of the Fraternity's two outings during this 40th Anniversary year - to the Docklands Light Railway in London in May and to North Devon to visit the revived Lynton & Barnstaple Railway in July. This was followed by a series of photographs which Andrew had taken on a visit to the Isle of Wight in 1964 when steam still reigned over the railways there.

Next we were shown a splendid short cine-film made recently by one of our members, Michael Green, on the rebuilding of the Welsh Highland Railway. This is a massive project which is now approaching completion and which will link Caernarfon with the Festiniog Railway at Porthmadog. This narrow gauge line, abandoned over 70 years ago, runs through some of the finest scenery in Snowdonia, and promises to be a wonderful asset to that National Park.

The evening concluded with another slide show, this time by Brian Neill on a visit he had made to Argentina earlier this year. He reminded us that many of the railways in that country, as elsewhere in South America, had been built and were owned until nationalisation in the 1940s by British companies. Even today, much of the railway infrastructure in Argentina has a pronounced British feel to it and certainly many of the steam locomotives which survive in preservation were unmistakably products of British manufacturers. The railway system in Argentina is still very extensive and nowadays operated with diesel and electric traction; in fact some of the trains we saw portrayed were extremely modern and state-of-the-art. As most railways in South America share with Spain and Portugal the broad gauge of 5'6", recent years have seen the import into Argentina of a number of second-hand locomotives from those two countries. We thank Brian for giving us a most interesting insight into the railway scene in such a distant part of the world.

Bulleid Pacifics – by Colin Boocock (Tuesday 14 October)

There was a very full programme for the Fraternity's meeting at Wells Town Hall on the 14th October. The evening began with the formal acceptance by the Chairman, Mr David Stephens, of the painting of the 'West Country' class locomotive *City of Wells*, commissioned to mark the Fraternity's 40th anniversary this year. The painting by local artist and Fraternity member David Fisher depicts the engine hauling the prestigious 'Golden Arrow' express, whilst vignettes recall the naming of the locomotive at Wells Priory Road station in 1949 and its rescue from a scrapyard in 1971. The painting was shown at the recent Railwells model railway exhibition and it is hoped that it will now go on public display for a while with the sale of prints eventually aiding the Fraternity's 'adopted' charity, the Railway Children.

Our speaker for the evening was Mr Colin Boocock, a retired railway engineer now living in Derby and making his fourth visit to us. Colin's subject was appropriately 'Bulleid's Pacifics' - a collective name for the 140 locomotives of the Southern Railway's 'Merchant Navy', 'West Country' and 'Battle of Britain' classes, built to the designs of Oliver Bulleid, the Chief Mechanical Engineer from 1937-1949. He began by briefly outlining Bulleid's career and reminded the audience that this had included a long period on the London & North Eastern Railway, where he had been very much involved with the building of the famous locomotive *Cock O' the North* - which was clearly to have a great influence on his later work.

Although the Southern Railway had made impressive progress with the electrification of many of its lines in the South East, its steam locomotive stock had been somewhat neglected and the company was in dire need of some more modern engines for services on the main lines through Kent, to Bournemouth and to the West of England. Despite the outbreak of the Second World War and the fact that his designs incorporated many highly innovative features, Bulleid was nevertheless able to produce his first 'Merchant Navy' engines in 1941 and to follow this with a smaller version from 1945 - those intended for use in the West of England being designated the 'West Country' Class and those for the South East as the 'Battle of Britain' Class, although there were hardly any differences between the two groups. In the event, 30 'Merchant Navy' Class engines and 110 of the lighter version were built at Eastleigh and Brighton up until 1951.

Although the boiler design is generally acknowledged as the finest in the history of British locomotive development, several of the innovative features, such as the ingenious chain-driven valve gear (enclosed in an oil-bath) and the distinctive 'air-smoothed' casing were a continual source of problems, leading to excessively high maintenance costs.

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It was therefore decided to rebuild the locomotives so as to eliminate as many of these problems as possible and 90 engines were dealt with between 1956 and 1961. With the decision to eliminate steam from Britain's railways, all the Bulleid Pacifics were taken out of service by 1967 although an amazing total of 30 escaped the scrapman's blowtorch and remain in existence, several being in active use today on heritage lines and hauling main line special trains.

Colin gave us an excellent photographic survey of these most interesting engines, highlighting the many changes made to them over the years. He concluded by commenting that their design had always been controversial - and this point was certainly reflected in the questions at the end of the lecture. A vote of thanks was given by Mr Peter Chandler.

The 'West Country' No.34092 *City of Wells* is currently undergoing a very lengthy heavy overhaul at Haworth on the Keighley & Worth Valley Railway and we were delighted that three members of the group involved in this work had made the long journey from Yorkshire to be with us. One, Mr John Adams, the project's senior engineer, was able to give us a brief report on the progress being made with a view to *City of Wells* returning to a further period of service, most probably in 2010.

Congratulations !

Members present at the October meeting will recall that David Fisher told us briefly about his entry in a competition organised by the Holburne Museum in Bath. David's painting, of local writer Philip Ledbury, was unanimously chosen by the judges as the winner of the 2008 Holburne Museum Portrait Prize from the entries of over 50 artists. This is one of the most prestigious competitions in the country and David's prize is a £5,000 commission to paint someone who 'plays an active role in the cultural life of the South West'. This painting will then be placed on permanent exhibition at the Museum. We extend our heartiest congratulations to David !

New Members

We are pleased to welcome four new members who joined us during this year's 'Railwells' and we hope that they will enjoy their association with the Fraternity. They are -

Chris Avery (Croscombe), Pete Chandler (Shepton Mallet), Brian Trigg (Shipham) and Mike Walker (Dinder).

Fraternity Website

The website address is www.railwells.com and, although it is still early days, it already contains some information about the Fraternity and some photographs.

If there is anything that you think ought to be included, please contact Peter on 01749 671448; e-mail: art@peterbowen.net. He will be pleased to hear from you.

Annual General Meeting

Members are reminded that the AGM takes place on 9 December.
Official notification of this is enclosed separately.

2008 Programme

40th Anniversary Year !

All meetings are on Tuesday evenings, at 7.15 for 7.30, in Wells Town Hall.

2008

11 November Heavy Haulage – by John Wynn
9 December AGM and Members Short Talks

2009

13 January Local Railways in the 1960's on film – by Andrew Linham
10 February More Railways in the Snow + 53809 in Closeup – by Philip Fowler
10 March Railway Safety and Level Crossings – by Colin Stanaway
14 April Railway Ancestors – by David Hawkings
12 May Railways of Bristol in the 1960's, 70's and 80's – by Brian Arman

And finally, a piece of trivia to round off with.

Did you know that it was 40 years ago, in August 1968, that British Rail ran its last standard gauge steam-hauled train. Steam locos were then banned from running on BR. But the ban only lasted for 3 years.....