

**Established 1968**

# WELLS RAILWAY FRATERNITY

Newsletter No.170

July 2009

Your contributions for future newsletters are welcome.  
Items can be posted to me,  
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Tel 01761 433418, or email to [page.steve@virgin.net](mailto:page.steve@virgin.net).



Our visit to Emborough Quarry which took place on Saturday 18 April – see report on page 6.

## **Railwells – Saturday 8 and Sunday 9 August**

Our annual model railway exhibition takes place on Saturday 8 and Sunday 9 August in Wells Town Hall. Scalefour Southwest is an annual part of the exhibition, and is complemented this year with a special Scale 7 section. There will be some 52 exhibits at this years show with 14 layouts, 20 traders, how-to demonstrations, museum and other displays making up the show.

Anyone who would like to help out over the weekend, and who has not already received stewarding instructions from Chris, should contact him on 01749 345612.

## **New Members**

Please welcome the following who have recently joined: Paul Burdett (Oakhill), Terry Fowler (Wells), Richard Groves (East Harptree), Simon Kennedy (Banbury), Sean Page (Shepton Mallet), David Stone (Binegar), Ian Young (Wells).

## **Fraternity Website**

The website address is [www.railwells.com](http://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](mailto:art@peterbowen.net). He will be pleased to hear from you.

## **A.G.M. and Members 10 Minute Talks (Tuesday 9 December)**

The Fraternity's Annual General Meeting was held at Wells Town Hall on the 9th December. After the formal business and a break for coffee and mince pies, there followed a series of short presentations by members. First of all, Peter Bowen gave an update on developments relating to the Fraternity's newly-established website, after which Gordon Selby spoke briefly about his small collection of railway telegraph insulators. Derek Lampard followed with a few words on his favourite railway books and then Councillor Colin Price gave an illustrated short talk on the life of Alfred Williams who was a blacksmith at Swindon Works from 1871 -1914 and who gained a reputation as a local poet. We then saw a selection of slides taken by Ken Smith and entitled 'A Day at Cajon Summit' - a busy location in California on the main line of the former Santa Fe system from Los Angeles to Chicago. The sight of present day American freight trains never fails to amaze us –particularly on account of their immense length and also height, having regard to the increasing use of containers stacked two-high. Finally Andrew Tucker showed us a mystery object - a metal piece about six inches long in the form of a railway signal and post. This was inscribed "Cast in Chippenham Streets" and dated 1907; it also bore the name of the Chippenham signalling company Saxby & Farmer Ltd (later to become part of Westinghouse S & T Ltd). The purpose for which this tiny object was made remains a mystery - was it a children's toy or some form of advertising gimmick?

## **Local Railways in the 1960's on Film – by Andrew Linham (Tuesday 13 January)**

On the 13th January, we were delighted to welcome Andrew Linham, a former secretary of the Fraternity, back once more to show us some more of his fascinating amateur 16mm cine-films which he took in the 1960s and early 1970s. For our delectation Andrew had put together two composite films, each lasting some 50 minutes, and we were whisked around the country at great speed from the North of Scotland via Wales to Penzance. The show started with *Clun Castle* leaving Bristol Temple Meads on the last scheduled steam train on the Western Region after which we saw many scenes taken in our local area, including several on the Cheddar Valley line, a train leaving Tucker Street station in Wells and then crossing Priory Road, trains on the S&D branch from Highbridge to Evercreech Junction, as well as at Shepton Mallet and Cranmore. Also, at Glastonbury we were treated to the sight of model trams operating on the famous garden tramway of the late Mr Eric Jackson-Stevens whilst Andrew also recorded some scenes at the first traction engine rally held at Stourpaine Bushes (which eventually developed into today's Great Dorset Steam Fair).

In addition to the wonderful cornucopia of railway scenes, the incidental glimpses of life 40 years ago - such things as the cars, the buses, the street furniture and fashions in dress - brought back memories to many of us and served to show just how much things have changed in four decades. A vote of thanks to Andrew for giving us such an entertaining and nostalgic evening was proposed by David Milton.

## **More Railways in the Snow – by Philip Fowler (Tuesday 10 February)**

Unfortunately the speaker booked for the Fraternity's meeting at Wells Town Hall on the 10th February, Mr Philip Fowler, was indisposed and therefore not able to be with us. He was, however, able to ensure that the films which he planned to show us were available and so we were still able to see and appreciate these examples of his expertise. The first was entitled '53809 in Close-Up' and recorded the display of that preserved and celebrated Somerset & Dorset Joint Railway 2-8-0 locomotive in the former Green Park Station at Bath (now Sainsbury's Supermarket) in October 2007 and its subsequent short stay working trains on the nearby Avon Valley Railway between Bitton and Kelston prior to moving on to the West Somerset Railway at Minehead. A colleague of Mr Fowler's, Mr Brian Smith of the Somerset & Dorset Railway Trust (Bath Branch) was present to answer questions on the work being undertaken by No.53809.

After the interval, we were treated to another of Mr Fowler's splendid films, appropriately entitled 'More Railways in the Snow', featuring a winter journey on the 'Arosa Express' on the metre-gauge railway from Chur to Arosa in Switzerland. Finally, a most enjoyable evening was brought to a conclusion with glimpses of scenes at Dai Woodham's scrapyard at Barry and of the Gartell Railway, built on the formation of the old S&DJR south of Templecombe.

## **Railway Safety and Level Crossings – by Colin Stanaway (Tuesday 10 March)**

A month later, on the 10th March, our speaker was Mr Colin Stanaway, whose subject was 'Railway Safety and Level Crossings'. Mr Stanaway, a railwayman with 34 years' experience, mostly in the field of signalling, is currently an Operational Risk Advisor for Network Rail with particular responsibility for level crossings over a large area between Paddington and Chippenham (on the Bristol main line), Hullavington (on the South Wales line) and Langport (on the main line to the West Country). He started by describing the various types of railway crossing, from the simplest relating to a footpath and protected only by stiles or kissing gates, to farmers' 'accommodation crossings' to enable livestock to cross the railway, and to the large gated road crossings usually operated from an adjacent signal box. Mr Stanaway reminded us that, unlike most other countries, it had been a legal requirement since 1840 for all railways in Britain to be continuously fenced, although this requirement had been slightly relaxed by light railway legislation in the 1890s. Thus, prior to the Second World War, all main crossings were protected by substantial gates, most of which had to be operated manually. After the War, European practices were studied with a view to introducing more modern forms of level crossing but, although legislation in 1957 authorised the use of Automatic Half-Barrier crossings, it was not until 1961 that the first example in Britain appeared - at Spath in Staffordshire. Many more followed but development was suspended for a while following the Hixon accident in January 1968 when a large transformer, being moved by road, obstructed the AHB-controlled crossing there and was struck by a Manchester - Euston express train, resulting in 11 deaths and 45 injuries. As a result of this tragic accident, various new safety measures were introduced.

Mr Stanaway then showed a selection of photographs, illustrating the various types of crossing in use throughout the country, and some video clips which had the audience gasping with amazement and horror. One showed a scene in India with a family crossing a railway line only seconds before an express train thundered past at high speed. Several of the hair-raising incidents of motorists and pedestrians trying to 'beat the barrier' and captured by CCTV cameras in our own country, are being used in Network Rail's current 'Don't Run the Risk' campaign on television. So far, this campaign has been aimed at families, children and young people and young car drivers - and it was probable that the next phase would target older people.

Mr Stanaway described how the risk at each crossing was assessed and how improvements were achieved - with his team working with local authorities and other groups such as Community Safety Partnerships. Although Network Rail would like to eliminate all level crossings as far as possible, this was clearly out of the question and schemes replacing crossings with bridges (such as that completed recently at Silk Mill, Taunton), were often extremely expensive. Looking to the future, much work was being undertaken to develop new and safer forms of automatic crossings.

The Fraternity's Chairman, David Stephens proposed a vote of thanks to Mr Stanaway for providing such a fascinating insight into an aspect of railways which does not always receive the attention it deserves.

## **Railway Ancestors – by David Hawkings (Tuesday 14 April)**

At the Fraternity's meeting held at Wells Town Hall on 14th April, our speaker was genealogist Mr David Hawkings and his subject was 'Railway Ancestors'. David began by telling us how he had become interested in the surviving records of railway companies completely by accident. He had been looking for information regarding a great great uncle who lived in Bedminster in Bristol and whose occupation was given in a Victorian national census as 'St. Porter'. This he took to indicate a station porter and he wondered if he could glean anything from the records of the former Bristol & Exeter Railway (which was absorbed by the Great Western Railway in 1876). In this he was unsuccessful but he did find a reference to his grandfather who, completely unknown to the family, had been employed as an engine cleaner for a short while by the GWR at Bristol. His investigations soon led him to realise just how many railway records still existed and their potential value in assisting genealogists in their researches. This eventually inspired him to write a book entitled 'Railway Ancestors' which is now regarded as the definitive guide to the subject. Prior to nationalisation in 1948, there had existed at one time or another no fewer than 998 different railway companies in England and Wales and David attempted to summarise which records for these still existed and where they could be located. He astounded us by telling us that in the Public Record Office at Kew (now known as the National Archives), railway records occupied no less than a mile and three quarters of shelving. Incidentally, several years after his first enquiry, he discovered that his great great uncle had in fact been a street porter, having no railway connection at all !

David explained how anyone pursuing family history could access this great wealth of information. He had found that the staff records of the GWR were far more complete and detailed than possibly any other company in the country. Unusually, it had been the practice on the Bristol & Exeter Railway for every uniformed member of staff to be interviewed and appointed by the Board of Directors and accordingly many names appeared in the company minutes.

In addition to staff records, there also existed a great amount of other records, relating to such matters as accidents, wage payments, receipts and fines; the latter as it was customary over a long period for fines to be levied on employees responsible for various minor misdemeanours. Other documents often revealed fascinating stories and David mentioned one that related to three friends who, in late Victorian days, had travelled to London for a day-out. Sadly one of them was taken ill and died during the visit. His friends decided to bring his body back home by sitting him between them on the train, reasoning that he still had his return ticket - and the involvement of an undertaker would have involved great expense! Unfortunately the records did not mention the advice given to the perplexed station master who discovered the matter.

A vote of thanks to David for giving us such a fascinating talk on a most unusual facet of our hobby was proposed by Mr Chris Challis.

## **Fraternity Visit to Midsomer Norton and Emborough (Saturday 18 April)**

Four days later, on the morning of the 18th April, a party of 25 members and friends visited Midsomer Norton Station, which since 1996 has been leased from the local Council by the Somerset & Dorset Railway Heritage Trust. We were welcomed by Councillor Shirley Steel who outlined the history of the station since the closure of the S&D line in 1966 and referred to the considerable amount of work which had been undertaken by the Trust's volunteer members in recent years on restoring the buildings and infrastructure in the station area. We were particularly impressed with a completely new facsimile signal box which has been built on the foundations of the original structure and older members remembered how in years gone by, the station was noted for its wonderful floral displays, tended in particular by the signalmen. The new signal box has been provided with an appropriate lever frame and interlocking equipment.

Railway track has been relaid in the station area and for a short distance beyond whilst we learned that planning permission had recently been granted for the relaying of another third of a mile of track towards Chilcompton. There was a variety of rolling stock on site, including a small diesel shunter, whilst a 'Sentinel' vertical-boilered steam locomotive, similar to those used for shunting at Radstock half a century ago, was being restored to working order. Other steam locomotives are hired in from time to time for special events.

An excellent lunch was provided for us by the volunteers in the buffet car and a vote of thanks was given to them and other members of the Trust who helped to make our visit so very pleasant. Purchases were made from the well-stocked bookshop before we moved on to the next venue.

From Midsomer Norton we moved on to Emborough Quarry to meet Fraternity member John Blatchford and his small group of helpers. John explained that his original intention had been to use the quarry for the production of precast concrete units. He had acquired some 2'-6" gauge industrial railway equipment to assist with the manufacturing processes.

Although this proposal did not materialise, John went on to acquire more track and rolling stock and decided to continue with the building of a narrow gauge railway around the quarry. From the workshop building in No.1 quarry the line runs out in a loop before coming back past the workshop and its extensive sidings to then pass under the Nettlebridge viaduct into No.2 quarry. The Somerset & Dorset railway line passed over this viaduct and there were exchange sidings for quarry traffic. On the narrow gauge line the track now forms a large circuit around the lake in this part of the quarry before returning to the starting point. Until recently there was a 300yard gap on the west side and great efforts had been made to complete this for our visit. Jim Hay who is also a Fraternity member regularly helps John and staffed the train for our trip.

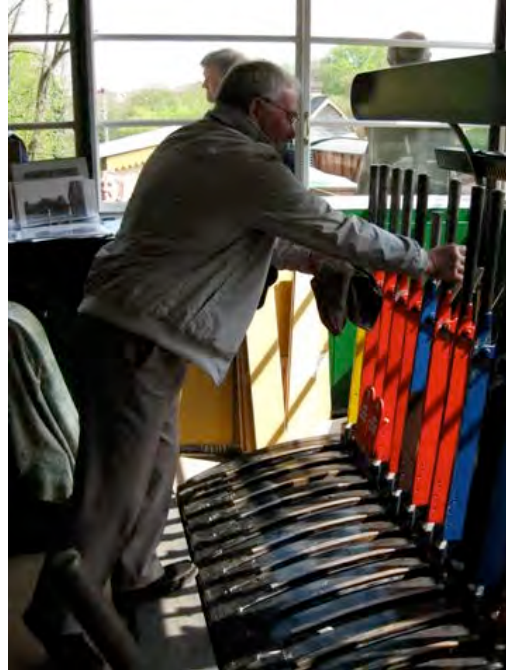
We were also shown around the workshop and stores. Much of the equipment is government surplus with rolling stock from Royal Navy ordnance depots being particularly sought after because of its high standard. John's wife and family were on site for this special occasion and they very kindly provided a splendid buffet. There was a vote of thanks for John and everyone who helped make this a very enjoyable afternoon.

## **Railways of Bristol in the 1960's, 70's and 80's – by Brian Arman (Tuesday 12 May)**

The final meeting of the current session of evening meetings took place at Wells Town Hall on 12th May when, once more we were delighted to welcome Canon Bryan Arman from Bristol. In his introduction, our Chairman, David Stephens, commented that this was, in fact, the 11th consecutive year that we had been privileged to have Brian as one of our speakers. Brian's speciality subjects are the history of Swindon Works and the locomotives of the Great Western Railway but, although both featured in his presentation, the emphasis this evening was slightly different. He began by explaining that he had recently been generously presented by Mr Russell Leitch, a noted historian and railway photographer of Keynsham, with that gentleman's extensive collection of railway photographs. From these, Brian had selected a selection of slides to illustrate the railway scene primarily of the main line from Swindon to Bristol during the 1950s to the 1980s, although some photographs were of earlier date and included some of Russell's earliest railway photographs dating from the late 1930s. His early work was, of course, in 'black-and white' but he had made the transition to colour photography in 1955.

For those of us familiar with the area in those now far off days, the evening proved to be a wonderful excursion down Memory Lane. We started with a look at the Swindon area and then made our way to Bristol via Bath. Russell was a prodigious photographer who tried to record the rapidly-changing railway scene of the period and he did not restrict himself to recording just steam locomotives and steam-hauled trains. So, whilst we did see the last regular steam express train, hauled by *Clun Castle* leaving Bristol Temple Meads in November 1965, this was followed by photographs of its successors, using at first diesel-hydraulic locomotives of the 'Warship' and 'Western' Classes, then by the Class 47 and Class 50 diesel-electrics, together with views of the Bristol 'Blue Pullman' and the prototype High Speed Train. He also recorded the various experimental and prototype locomotives (including the gas turbine locomotive No.18000 and the white-liveried *Lion* express diesel-electric built by Birmingham Carriage & Wagon Co.Ltd) which worked in the Bristol area as well as some of the early Modernisation types which were destined to have very short lives in British Railways' service - and which were much neglected by the average enthusiast. We were reminded of the various locomotive depots in Bristol – at Bath Road, St Philip's Marsh and Barrow Road - the last-named always seeming to be overshadowed by a great pall of smoke - very atmospheric to the steam locomotive lover but scarcely environmentally acceptable today. We saw several photographs taken in the nearby but seldom-visited St Philip's station in central Bristol before returning to Swindon via the former LMS line from Bristol to the Midlands (as far as Yate) and the GWR South Wales main line. It was yet another memorable evening which concluded with a vote of thanks proposed by John Uncles.

## Midsomer Norton South Signal Box



Some more reminders of our day out on Saturday 18 April – this time inside and outside the signal box at Midsomer Norton South Station.

### 2009 Programme

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

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| <b>8 Sept</b> | Quiz and Members Slides Evening. Please bring along some of your favourite slides or prints (especially of recent Fraternity Visits). |
| <b>13 Oct</b> | Colonel Stephens and His Railway Empire – Tony Ward.  |
| <b>10 Nov</b> | Rails Around The World (Part 1) – Mike Beale.   |
| <b>8 Dec</b>  | AGM followed by Railway Heraldry – John Uncles.   |

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

Did you know that in September 1963, when the Witham – Yatton branch closed to passengers, Wells became the first English city to lose its passenger train service. Almost 46 years on, Wells is *still* the only English city with no trains.