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WELLS RAILWAY FRATERNITY

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Your contributions for future newsletters are welcome.
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Our visit to the Gloucestershire Warwickshire Railway on Sunday 14 June

Obituary - Reverend Prebendary Denys Goodman

As members who attended the September meeting will be aware, Denys died on the 24th July 2009 at the age of 85 years. He was an enthusiastic Fraternity member who served us well as 'Refreshment Attendant' for several years and was a keen supporter of our fund-raising for the Railway Children Charity.

Denys was born in Moseley, Birmingham, and from 1943 - 47 served as Adjutant in the 1st Battalion, The Worcestershire Regiment, seeing action in Northern France and then being posted to various other places throughout Europe. On leaving the army, he studied at Selwyn College, Cambridge, and Lincoln Theological College, and was ordained priest in 1952. He then worked in the Diocese of Manchester and became the Vicar of Hollinwood, Oldham, in 1957 (hence the name of his house in Wells). Whilst in Oldham he met and married Anne in 1963. In 1970 Denys moved south, becoming the Rector of St Mary's, Bathwick and he was to remain there for 21 years. He moved to Wells in 1991 and served as Sub-Dean and then Priest Vicar at the Cathedral until he retired ten years later.

The Fraternity was well represented at Denys' funeral, which took the form of a Requiem Mass in Wells Cathedral on the 4th August. Our condolences were expressed to his widow, Anne, and, in a letter from her, she referred to the joy which Denys had experienced through his membership of the Fraternity. He is much missed and we shall remember him for many years to come

Fraternity Visit to the Gloucestershire Warwickshire Railway (Sunday 14 June)

On Sunday, 14th June, 30 Fraternity members, family and friends met at 8.30 a.m. at Princes Road coach station for a day excursion to the Gloucestershire Warwickshire Railway. For our travel, Fraternity member Dr Michael Walker very generously provided a classic 'Bristol Greyhound' coach, a MW6G type No.2150 (FHW 156D) of 1966 vintage, one of a number of buses and coaches which he has acquired and saved for preservation. In this splendid vehicle we made sedate progress up to Pen Hill and continued to the M5 via Keynsham and the Bristol Ring Road. Once on the motorway our historic vehicle was able to reach its maximum speed of 50mph.

A brief stop was made at Michaelwood Services, where, as a surprise, Mike had arranged for another 'Bristol Greyhound' coach from his collection to await us. This was another MW6G, No.2138 (BHU 92C) dating from 1965. This latter vehicle was one of seven diverted to Bristol Omnibus from an Eastern National order and is of interest in that it was equipped as a 39-seat coach but with a bus-shell body. It is conjectured that these vehicles were acquired in connection with a possible replacement Bath - Bournemouth service on the closure of the Somerset & Dorset line. [For further details, see page 95 of 'Bristol Omnibus Services - The Green Years', by Martin Curtis and Mike (published in 2007)].

Visit to the Gloucestershire Warwickshire Railway - continued

Our party divided themselves between the two coaches and we made our way to Toddington (near Tewkesbury), the present northern terminus of the Gloucestershire Warwickshire Railway, arriving in good time just after 11.30 a.m. The Railway was holding a Transport Nostalgia Day and our two Bristol Greyhounds joined the many classic cars and other vehicles on display in the station yard.

The G-WR, as it is known, runs for about 9 miles south-westwards to a station at Cheltenham Race Course. It was part of the Great Western Railway's Honeybourne - Cheltenham line, which was opened in 1905-06 and the present G-WR is endeavouring to reopen a further four and a half miles northwards to Laverton and Broadway.

Having made a leisurely exploration of the Toddington Station area and lunched, we then travelled over the line on the first train of the afternoon and we were delighted to find that it was hauled by David Shepherd's '9F' 2-10-0 *Black Prince*, for many years a favourite at the East Somerset Railway at Cranmore. The other locomotive in use during the day was a beautifully turned-out GWR 'Small Prairie' tank engine, No.5542.

The line first of all runs to Winchcombe, where there is now a splendid station; this originally stood at Monmouth (Troy) but was purchased, removed stone by stone and faithfully rebuilt on its new site. Then follows Greet Tunnel, 693 yards long and the second longest tunnel on any British heritage railway. Leaving the tunnel there are magnificent views of the Malvern Hills and the Black Mountains beyond. After passing through the growing villages of Woodmancote and Bishop's Cleeve, the train arrives at Cheltenham Race Course station, from where a weekday park-and-ride bus service runs into Cheltenham. During race meetings, much use is now made of the train service to the great benefit of the G-WR..

Returning to Toddington, we all assembled around the front buffer beam of *Black Prince* for the obligatory group photograph before rejoining our coaches. Next we set off for Bourton-on-the-Water, the severe hills of the Cotswold scarpland providing a severe test for our ageing vehicles. All went well, however, and we enjoyed a stroll through the pretty little town before a traditional cream tea at the 'Mad Hatter' restaurant, situated alongside The Water.

Our return was via Cirencester and Tetbury and we arrived back in Wells, spot on time, at 8.30 p.m. after a delightful day with superb weather and enjoyable company.

Quiz and Members Slides (Tuesday 8 September)

The new season of meetings at Wells Town Hall got under way on the 8th September. The evening commenced with the Chairman, David Stephens, paying tribute to our member, the Reverend Prebendary Denys Goodman, who had died on the 24th July. Denys had been a long-standing member of the Fraternity and, for many years, had headed the small team responsible for serving refreshments at meetings. He had also been an enthusiastic supporter of the Railway Children charity and never missed an opportunity of championing the Fraternity's support for that charity.

After receiving a brief report by Chris Challis on the success of this year's 'Railwells' exhibition, members then got to grips with the Annual Quiz and the winner of the coveted trophy this year was a comparatively new member, Simon Kennedy.

The second half of the evening was taken up with the showing of some films taken by members. The first was a record by Patrick Hopton of the Fraternity's visit to the Gloucestershire Warwickshire Railway at Toddington in June, and this was followed by another short film featuring the visit made to Midsomer Norton station and a local quarry in April. Finally, despite having to struggle with an ancient and at times most temperamental projector, Chris Challis took us on a most nostalgic trip back into the mid-1980s. His fascinating cine-film included a trip made by the Fraternity to the Severn Valley Railway in 1984 and scenes on the Keighley & Worth Valley Railway (where the locomotive *City of Wells* was in use), and, still in Yorkshire, the Embsay & Bolton Abbey preserved line, together with a trip over the highly scenic Settle & Carlisle line. We all left remarking on just how much had changed in the past quarter of a century.

Colonel Stephens and his Railway Empire – by Tony Ward (Tuesday 13 October)

On the 13th October, we again met at the Town Hall for an illustrated lecture on 'Colonel Stephens and his Railway Empire'. Our speaker was Mr Tony Ward, Chairman of the Gloucestershire branch of the Festiniog Railway Society, who had travelled from Cheltenham to be with us.

Holman Fred Stephens was born in 1868, the son of an art critic and member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Despite this artistic parental background, he trained as an engineer and, at the age of 22, commenced his railway career as Resident Engineer of the Cranbrook & Paddock Wood Railway. From then on, he went on to become involved with no fewer than 16 other railways, either as Engineer or Manager. Most of these were minor concerns, several built under the provisions of the Light Railways Act 1896. With the advent of serious road competition after the First World War, Stephens became a pioneer in introducing methods of running these lines on a shoe-string budget and he was amongst the first to introduce, as an economy, petrol-engined 'railmotors' - some of these being essentially a lorry chassis with a passenger-carrying body, adapted to run on rails.

Colonel Stephens and his Railway Empire – continued

Stephens was also involved for many years in the Territorial Army and achieved the rank of lieutenant-colonel in the Royal Engineers in 1916. Thereafter he was always known to everyone simply as 'The Colonel'. He died in 1931 but several of his companies survived for many years thanks to the efforts of his assistant William Austen. In fact, about half-a-dozen lasted long enough to be nationalised in 1948.

Mr Ward then gave us a power-point presentation which provided us with a thumbnail sketch of each of the 17 Colonel Stephens lines. Many of these operated with antiquated rolling stock and consequently acquired great charm and character. One line of local interest was the Weston, Clevedon & Portishead Railway whilst, further west, part of the Bere Alston & Calstock Railway is still open to passenger traffic to this day. Elsewhere, the Kent & East Sussex, the Festiniog and Welsh Highland Railways have become highly successful 'heritage' railways, making major contributions to their local tourist industries.

A vote of thanks was given by Colin Price.

Rails Around the World (Part One) – by Mike Beale (Tuesday 10 November)

At the Fraternity's meeting at Wells Town Hall on 10th November, we welcomed Mr Mike Beale who gave us the first part of his well-illustrated presentation on 'Rails around the World'. He began by explaining that for the first 20 years of his career as a civil engineer, he had worked for British Rail and in the 'run-up' to privatisation, in 1993, BR had set up a new company, Transmark, to provide consultancy services both at home and abroad. He had been successful in obtaining a post with this new organisation which, soon afterwards, was purchased by Sir William Halcrow & Co, trading as Halcrow. After working for a short while on the Manchester Metro project, he was sent for two months to Thailand in connection with a container terminal scheme for Bangkok. Here, he was able to explore a little and showed us several pictures of the city and also, one of its engine sheds, where four steam locomotives were maintained and kept in readiness for working the Thai Royal Train. We were most interested to learn that whenever the King travels by rail, his train is always steam-hauled! Mike was also able to make a brief excursion to see the infamous 'Death Railway' into Burma and the bridge over the River Kwai.

Mike's next assignment took him to Egypt as a consultant on part of the Cairo Metro scheme. Three lines were planned and two are now in use - one running on the surface and incorporating much of a former suburban railway line and the other more akin to a true Metro line, involving much tunnelling through waterlogged sand - we learned that the tunnel engineer's greatest dread in Cairo, however, was that of uncovering previously unknown archaeological remains, which could result in lengthy delays with the work. We were shown photographs of present-day Egyptian trains, both long-distance and local, some of which were of very modern appearance, and a selection of the trams which run through the streets of Cairo and Alexandria. The latter city has some modern double-deck trams as well as some single-deck cars bought second-hand from Copenhagen.

Rails Around the World – continued

Then in 1997, Mike was sent to Hong Kong, where he was to remain for some five years working on various schemes including the Westrail project of the city's Mass Transit Railway which linked to the new international airport. This was an extremely difficult railway to build, running for 45% of its length in tunnel and 45% on viaducts. Its construction costs per kilometre were double those of Britain's Channel Tunnel Rail Link and in the centre of the city, much of the line had to snake its way through the numerous very high apartment blocks. Hong Kong has perhaps the most stringent environmental requirements in the world and Mike told us of the ingenious methods used to contain and minimise the noise generated by the new railway. We then saw scenes of railway interest in Hong Kong and the New Territories, starting with the famous Peak Tram, dating from 1884, a funicular which climbs at gradients of up to 1 in 2 to the heights above the city, and the tramway system with its very-British vintage double-deck tramcars. After a brief visit to the Hong Kong Railway Museum, we saw trains on the Kowloon-Canton Railway, Hong Kong's link with mainland China, dating from 1910, its services including daily express trains on the long journeys to Shanghai and Beijing.

We also saw a photograph of the 'Pig Train' which used regularly to bring thousands of pigs into the centre of Hong Kong to satiate the city's enormous appetite for pork. This train could be detected from a great distance on account of the pungent smell it generated! It now terminates, however, near the mainland border where a new abattoir has been built. In addition to the railway projects, an extensive light rail system has also been provided to serve the various 'new towns' established in the New Territories.

During his time in Hong Kong, Mike was able to make holiday visits to mainland China, Vietnam, Malaysia and India and we were shown a variety of scenes in those countries before a most enjoyable evening came to an end. A vote of thanks was given by Andrew Tucker and we look forward to Part 2 of Mike's presentation to be given next year. This will relate to the years Mike subsequently spent working in Australia and New Zealand.

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.

New Members

Please welcome the following who have recently joined:

John Crane, Chris Homeyard (Chewton Mendip), Chris Hughes (Street), Ray Kethro (Weston-super-Mare), Dean Knights (Martock), Andrew Sindrey (Draycott) and Ray Smart (Wells).

From member Derek Lampard – A Visit to Langport in 1886

Recently I found myself thinking about a local lad, one Walter Bagehot (1826 -1877). For those who haven't heard of him I can explain that he was a Langport man, related to the Stuckey family, owners of the Bristol and Somersetshire Bank popularly and famously known as Stuckey's Bank. At one time he worked in that bank but he made his name as a versatile essayist and economist; indeed in 1861 he became editor of the 'Economist'. He also wrote a book on the nature of the British constitution, as it was in his day, and this added to his fame.

Now at this point you will say, very politely, “excuse us but this is the newsletter of a railway club so what are you going on about?” I can only say to that “bear with me and read on”.

It will be obvious that my thoughts turned to Bagehot because of the great turmoil that the world's financial systems are in, but I'm not going to dwell on that. However in thinking of Bagehot I put my hand on a little book I have about him and reminded myself that it starts off by saying that in 1886 Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924), who became President of the United States in 1913, while staying in Wells had noticed a branch of the Bristol and Somersetshire Bank. Wilson had much admired Bagehot's writings and so on impulse he made a pilgrimage to Langport to visit the the great man's grave.

Now at this point in the story I began to think of how would Wilson have made the journey ? By railway was my obvious first thought because as we know at that time Wells was well provided with railways and stations. In those pre-grouping days the options were many and mostly complex. A traveller could plan to use the GWR or the S & D, but the problem would have been which was the most practical route. The Castle Cary to Langport line was still in the future but even so from a look at a pre-grouping atlas there appear to be several possible routes but none of them are an obvious first choice. If one had a timetable (when did Bradshaw start ?) I guess that it would be easy to spend a lot of time on establishing the quickest way and what it might cost.

The options are in two groups, either going westward or eastward from Wells. The traveller could have gone westward to the Bristol -Taunton line via the GWR to Yatton or on the S&D via Glastonbury and Highbridge, or Bridgwater, then down to Taunton and finally catching a Yeovil train which would have stopped at the then Langport station, later Langport West. The options starting in the eastward direction included going by GWR to Witham and changing (was that possible at Witham?) to go down to Penmill. From there the Taunton train, through Yeovil Town, would stop at Langport. Similarly a passenger could have considered going eastward from Glastonbury to Evercreech and thence to Templecombe to catch a LSWR train to Yeovil Junction. From the Junction the local train or shuttle would take the passenger to Yeovil Town where he could catch the Taunton train as above. No doubt deciding factors would be the time taken by a given journey and the number of changes needed.

A Visit to Langport in 1886 - continued

This aspect of railway study, that is sorting out a good route in the 19th century, is not really my scene so I wouldn't presume to pursue these thoughts any further. No doubt someone in the Fraternity would have some better and more accurate views on this.

At this point someone will suggest that a person of Woodrow Wilson's standing, an academic American of substance, would have hired someone with a horse and trap to take him the 20 or so miles to Langport. Well no. At this point, and with the benefit of the little book, I will stop tantalising you and reveal that in 1896 Woodrow Wilson got himself from Wells to Langport by riding a bicycle. From our present day viewpoint this seems surprising but we forget before the days of the motor car, certainly before the days of the inexpensive motor car, the bicycle was used by a wide range of people, both the well-to-do and the poor. The roads would not have been as good as we expect today, probably firm but very dusty if dry: rolled tarmac didn't come in until after 1901

I could go on about the practical value and the social acceptability of the bicycle at length but, you will be relieved to hear, I won't because after all this is the newsletter of a railway club. Nevertheless as a final thought I will ask you a question. How did Henry Fowler, later Sir Henry, when Works Manager of the Midland Railway's works at Derby, get round the works? If you can't guess then look up J B Radford's excellent book 'Derby Works and Midland Locomotives' (Chapter 12).

Derek Lampard, Jan. 2009

2010 Programme

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

12 January	Go Great Western	Mike Wyatt
9 February	Tornado – Completed and Working	Bob Alderman
9 March	Southern Branchlines	David Milton
13 April	Railway Roundabout	Brian Arman
11 May	The Blue Pullman Story	Mick Hayes

And finally, a piece of trivia:

Did you know that of all the stations on the London Underground system, St Johns Wood is the only one which does not contain any letters from the word mackerel.
Sounds rather fishy to me.....

I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!