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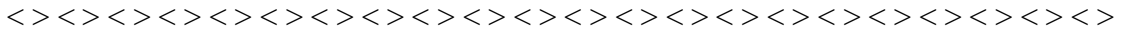
# WELLS RAILWAY FRATERNITY

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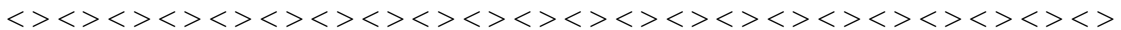
Newsletter No.173

December 2010

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



Our visit to Fawley Hill on Sunday 1 August



## **MRS PHYLLIS HAYES**

Members will be saddened to learn of the death, on 19th November, of Mrs Phyllis Hayes, the widow of the last stationmaster of Wells. She was a remarkable 103 years of age and a good friend of the Fraternity for many years. In March 2002 she assisted the late Roger Bennett, of Radio Bristol, with the unveiling of the pillars recording the sites of the three stations in Wells. Her husband, Richard, began his railway career as a booking clerk at Exeter St David's and later became a stationmaster - at first at Bishop's Lydeard, then at Holsworthy on the SR's 'Withered Arm' and finally, in the early 1950s, at Wells - where he remained until the closure of the Cheddar Valley and East Somerset lines in 1963/64.

## **VISIT TO PENDON MUSEUM**

**Wednesday 9 June**

A small group of members enjoyed a group visit to Pendon Museum organised by Chris Challis. This was a special opportunity to have a close look at the exhibits on a day when the building was not open to the public. After lunch at the local pub we were met by the chairman, Robin Harding, who is also a member of the Fraternity. Robin showed us round the museum and explained the history and recent progress of the project.

The historic Madder Valley Railway by John Ahern is only operated on a few specific days each year to avoid wear and tear to its elderly handmade rolling stock and infrastructure. However, it is always worth looking at this pioneering model that was one of the first to set a model railway into a realistic landscape. We moved on to the Dartmoor scene created by Roye England and Guy Williams in the 1950s. Robin brought a succession of beautifully modelled trains across the dramatic wooden viaduct typical of the structures designed by Brunel in the far west of England. Most of the passenger services call at the lonely junction station of Pen Tor Road but the highlight is always the long loose coupled

coal train that seems to be endless as it emerges from the tunnel and makes its way over the viaduct.

Continuing to the Vale scene, this is very impressive at first sight and even more so when you start to appreciate the very high level of detail. This was Roye England's major project, to recreate in model form the countryside and buildings of the Vale of the White Horse as they were in the 1930s. The railways are of course a significant feature but they appear to be built through the rolling countryside rather than having scenery as an afterthought. In addition to its station the fictitious village of Pendon Parva has a wide range of buildings closely based on prototypes from around the vale.

We ended our tour at the shop and cafeteria where refreshments were served and questions answered by Robin and other museum volunteers.

Pendon is located in the village of Long Wittenham in Oxfordshire. It is only about 3 miles from Didcot and some of the members on this trip also took the opportunity to call in to the Great Western Society at Didcot. On a fine Wednesday morning in June there was plenty to see and not many other visitors.

## **VISIT TO FAWLEY HILL**

**Sunday 1 August**

On the 1st August, a party of 30 members and friends visited the Fawley Hill Railway and Museum in the grounds of the home of Sir William McAlpine near Henley-on-Thames. Our member, Dr Mike Walker, again kindly provided transport for us with the same two Bristol Greyhound coaches of 1960s vintage that had taken us on our visit to the Gloucestershire-Warwickshire Railway last year. This year we joined the coaches at Keynsham as both vehicles are normally garaged in that area.

Fawley Hill started as a 'garden' railway in 1964 and, thanks to his contacts, 'Bill' McAlpine has been able to build up a wonderful collection of railway

## 2010/11 PROGRAMME

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

14 December	Annual General Meeting, followed by Members' Short Talks	
11 January	Building the Bath & West Railway	Roger Davis
8 February	The Titfield Thunderbolt & The Camerton Branch	Simon Castens
8 March	American Narrow Gauge Locos	Richard Pelham
12 April	25 Years of Electric Trains to Ipswich	John Day
10 May	Railway Roundabout	Brian Arman

artefacts, some of which are very large indeed - and these are preserved at the purpose-built museum or within the parkland adjoining the house. The site is private and not generally open to the public, access being limited to occasional special days - the 1st August being Collectors' Day. The Fraternity was therefore very fortunate in being able to obtain a number of tickets to allow us to enjoy a real treat.

The highlight is the standard gauge railway, which runs from the museum area through part of the estate. This is about a mile long in total and laid out in a Y-shaped configuration, the three arms meeting at the delightfully named Bourne Again Junction. The section from the junction back up to the museum has a gradient of 1 in 13 ! There are several locomotives and other items of rolling stock on site and rides were on offer in an open wagon and brake van, hauled by a Hudswell Clarke 0-6-0ST (built for McAlpine's as a contractor's engine in 1913). The sound of the train climbing that formidable incline was a joy to the enthusiast's ear. There was so much on site - buildings, vehicles, model railways and, on the day, a showman's engine and a steam bus - that we were all very reluctant to leave. The railway and museum are now in the care of a Fawley Hill Museum Society and we were delighted to hear Sir William say that rumours that the day's event might be the last to be held were without foundation.

On our homeward journey we stopped at Marlborough for a pleasant evening meal at 'The Castle & Ball' and arrived back at Keynsham after a most enjoyable and interesting day. Our particular thanks are due to Andrew Tucker for organising the visit and to Mike Walker for his help with providing such delightful transport.

### RAILWELLS WEBSITE

[www.railwells.com](http://www.railwells.com)

If you have any historical information that you would like to share or have any interesting railway related stories and or photos please send them to [platform1@railwells.com](mailto:platform1@railwells.com)

### QUIZ AND MEMBERS SLIDES

**Tuesday 14 September**

The new 'season' got under way at the Town Hall on the 14th September and for the first half of the evening members grappled with the now traditional annual quiz, this year devised by Simon Kennedy with the assistance of Andrew Tucker. The winner of the coveted Quiz Trophy this year was the Honorary Secretary, John Uncles.

After a break for refreshments, we were entertained with two short presentations by members. Firstly,



Roy Kethro took as his subject 'Re-railing Reminiscences' and, with the help of most interesting slides, spoke of his railway career to date, at first with British Railways and latterly with First Great Western. In particular he told us of the period in the 1980s when he had been involved with the work of the Bristol Division breakdown train and its crew, based at the Bath Road depot. He explained the techniques involved in re-railing locomotives and rolling stock which had come to grief and illustrated this work with a series of photographs of the recovery of a two-coach diesel multiple unit which had left the rails at Worcester.

There followed a short presentation by Andrew Tucker recording a journey which he and his wife had made in 2009 on 'The Canadian'. This train covers the 2,775 mile journey from Vancouver to Toronto in four days and Andrew's photographs of the Rocky Mountains contrasted with those of the vast plains of the central provinces.

#### **WELCOME NEW MEMBERS**

Please welcome the following, who have recently joined:

**John Drew** (Compton Martin) and  
**Aubrey Prutton** (Wells)

#### **GO GREAT WESTERN - by Mike Wyatt Tuesday 12 October**

Our first speaker of the season was Mike Wyatt who gave an illustrated talk entitled 'Go Great Western' - very appropriate as this year is the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the GWR.

Mike set out to show that the company was much more than the locomotives and carriages that we see in photographs and on preserved railways. It had equipment and procedures for every situation and it all had to be recorded using the appropriate paperwork.

This was illustrated using many different special tickets and forms from Mike's Uplands Railway Museum collection. The format of the talk was a journey down the line from Paddington to Penzance incorporating brief diversions north to Worcester and Shrewsbury, south to Weymouth and to branches such as Tetbury and Kingswear. Colour slides of these various locations mainly taken in the 1950s and 60s took us back to the early days of British Railways when the influence of the old company was still very strong. A case in point was the very last batch of pannier tanks built in 1956 which were all fitted with the GWR trademark copper capped chimney.

In pre-war days cabbies at Paddington needed to buy a ticket for 1d to admit them and their vehicle to the station concourse. Elsewhere a motor car could be parked at a station for 1/- per day or 2/6d for a week. When on the train a four course meal in the restaurant car could be purchased for 2/9d. We were shown examples of tickets for all these situations and many more with information about the printers, the number of copies that were run off and typographical errors that were sometimes made.

As we made our journey west particular attention was paid to Swindon Works. The coming of the railway made this previously rural location into a busy factory town with housing, education and hospital care for the workers and their families. Of course all this needed paperwork and the GWR had forms for everything. Mike showed us quite a few and pointed out that these are very collectable and can still be found at reasonable prices. As with

tickets there are some rarities that attract higher prices.

The company had agencies in many unlikely locations in this country and abroad. One poignant example was a child ticket issued in Berlin on 7 August 1939 just before the outbreak of the second world war. Nearing the end of our virtual journey Mike showed us a ticket that he had purchased quite recently for rather more than he would usually pay. It was for Ocean Liner Passengers landing at Plymouth to make the journey onwards to London. They were printed specifically for travellers that fate decided would never arrive. They would have been off the first eastbound crossing of the Titanic.

The presentation was much enjoyed by a large gathering of members. A vote of thanks was proposed by Roy Kethro (who is a manager for the present day First Great Western).

## **RAILS AROUND THE WORLD – PART II – by Mike Beale**

### **Tuesday 9 November**

Exactly a year after giving us the first part of his presentation 'Rails around the World', Mike Beale returned to Wells Town Hall on 9th November to conclude his account of his travels as a railway consulting engineer. After 20 years with British Rail, on privatisation Mike moved to the Halcrow company and he had previously told us about his work in Thailand, Egypt and Hong Kong.

Mike began the second part by saying that in 2002 his work took him to Australia where Halcrow were involved in several railway projects and initially he spent some time in Sydney where he was able to explore the various main and electrified suburban lines serving that city. We saw a variety of slides illustrating these services including some of double-deck suburban trains. The main line trains linking

Sydney with Melbourne and Brisbane looked rather familiar as the XPT diesel units were closely based on the highly successful British High Speed Train although some included sleeping cars. Mike explained that for various historical reasons railway development in Australia had been somewhat hampered with each state choosing its own gauge without any regard for its neighbours. Thus, today there are therefore 17,600 km of lines built to the standard gauge (as in Britain), 17,000 km to the narrower 3 ft 6 ins gauge and some 8,000 km to the broader 5 ft 3 ins gauge. In order to improve matters sections of the latter gauge lines have over the years been converted to standard gauge to provide a basic network linking Perth with Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane whilst a north-south link had been added recently with the long-awaited completion of the line from Alice Springs to Darwin. As in the USA, having regard to the great distances between the principal cities, most Australians preferred to fly and the very limited service of long distance trains was nowadays patronised mainly by tourists.

Mike's work was soon to take him to Perth where a new 70 km long commuter line was to be built mainly on the broad central reservation of a freeway as part of a scheme to revitalise and develop public transport in the sprawling city. Western Australia is the largest state in the country and occupies about one third of its area but with a population of only 1.8 million; and of these some 1.4 million lived in Perth, the state capital. Understandably, railway development in Western Australia was very sparse, the original lines being built to transport grain and timber to ports whilst some appeared during the Australian Gold Rush period. The state was noted for the jarrah hardwood tree, which was felled in huge quantities for export worldwide until the advent of conservation concerns particularly for use as railway sleepers. Long distance trains are few but the famous 'Indian Pacific' runs across the whole continent linking Perth and Sydney.

There are a handful of preservation sites in Western Australia and after seeing some scenes on these, we

moved on to some similar sites in South Australia. Victoria came next and its capital Melbourne has an electrified suburban system dating from the last years of the 19th century and two large termini, Flinders Street and Spencer Street (now renamed Southern Cross). The city also boasts a thriving street tramway system which is still being extended, its routes now totalling 340 km! We saw something of nearby preservation sites and a ride on the famous 'Puffing Billy' narrow gauge line up into the hills. Our 'visit' to Australia concluded with a brief glimpse of a museum line in Queensland.

The final project upon which Mike worked took him to New Zealand where he was seconded to the Auckland Regional Council for 11 months in connection with improvements to the suburban lines in that city. Mike took the opportunity to see as much of New Zealand as time permitted and took the train over the 800 km main line to Wellington, the central section of which was electrified at 25kV some 20 years ago. We then crossed the Cook Strait onto South Island and here we saw scenes featuring the famous steam-hauled 'Kingston Flyer' which runs over the mountains from Christchurch to Greymouth, reaching an altitude at Arthur's Pass of 737 metres above sea level. The line also features the famous unventilated and single bore Otira Tunnel, through which the steam locomotives had to be 'shut down' and towed by diesels.

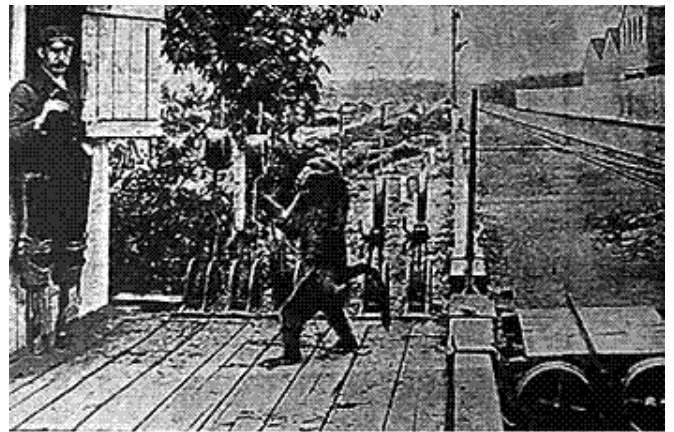
For our final view in New Zealand, we returned to the North Island for a brief look at the eccentric Driving Creek Railway on the Coromandel Peninsula. This narrow gauge line was originally built by a local potter for the transport of clay to his workshop but was later developed as a tourist attraction, offering breathtaking views as the little train runs up into the hills.

A vote of thanks was given by Simon Kennedy.

## **AND FINALLY; a piece of trivia:**

### **Jack the Signalman**

In the 1880's, at a station called Uitenhage on the Cape Government Railway's line from Port Elizabeth to Cape Town, the signalman, James Wide, found it difficult to pull the levers to operate the signals, as he had lost both his legs in an accident. So he trained a baboon, called Jack, to work the levers in response to whistle codes.



Much to the amazement of locals and passengers who stood in awe marvelling the spectacle of a boon working at a station. The inevitable happened one day when a prominent lady on route to Port Elizabeth were horrified when she saw that the signals at the station were changed by a baboon. Fearing for her safety and fellow passengers the incident was reported to the authorities in Cape Town who at first could not believe her story. The system manager and a delegation that consisted of an inspectorate visited the station and Jumper Wide and Jack were dismissed from duty. Again Wide pleaded and fortunately or maybe a case of curiosity forced the system manager to test the ability of Jack. A locomotive driver was given secret instructions and all present waited to see if Jack will past this strenuous test. Each time the driver blasted a different signal Jack would change the correct signal and points without fail.