

Established 1968

WELLS RAILWAY FRATERNITY

www.railwells.com

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Your contributions for future newsletters are welcome.

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It is with regret that we record the death of our former long-term Chairman, David Stephens, on 28th August, at the comparatively young age of 67. He will be greatly missed by all who were privileged to have known him.

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DAVID STEPHENS (1945 - 2012)

David William Stephens was born in Paignton, Devon, on 22nd May 1945 and received his secondary education at Totnes Grammar School. David was a chorister and had an early claim to fame when his church choir was invited to sing in St Paul's Cathedral. On leaving school, he became an articled clerk with a local firm of chartered accountants and, having qualified, he began to specialize in taxation matters, in due course being elected as a Fellow of the Institute of Taxation. At work, he met his future wife, Myrtle, and in March 1968 they married at Christ Church, Paignton.

Wishing to gain wider experience, in 1971 David obtained a position with the large Bristol accountancy firm of Cooper Brothers and worked for three years at their Clevedon branch. David and Myrtle set up home at nearby Yatton but in 1974 David decided to branch out and this was to bring him to Wells. He and a friend were successful in acquiring the Trowbridge firm of H Ledbury & Sons and David thereafter ran a branch of the company at Glastonbury. The venture proved successful with David specializing in work concerned with regard to the newly-introduced Value Added Tax.

David, however, was to suffer with restricted sight problems which led to his taking an early retirement but he then devoted some of his time in working for the Institute of Financial Planning, including invigilating at examinations, and he was able to continue with this work until shortly before his death. In 2003 David was diagnosed with a serious congenital kidney disease but, fortunately, he was to undergo a successful kidney transplant two years later. David became very interested in the work of the Bristol Area Kidney Patients Association and became its Secretary.

David was a lifelong railway enthusiast, his interest starting in boyhood with trainspotting trips from Paignton to Newton Abbot. Two decades later, living in Wells he was to join the Fraternity and served as Honorary Treasurer for several years before taking over the Chairmanship from Derek Lampard in February 1999. He continued as Chairman until he decided to step down for health reasons in December 2011. David served the Fraternity well for the best part of a quarter of a century and he was fond of saying that he regarded the post of Chairman as being the easiest Committee office as, most of the time, all he had to do was what his fellow officers told him to do! This was completely untrue of course and we should be very grateful for the gentle way in which he presided at Committee meetings, and for the wise counsel, which he imparted from time to time. It was David that persuaded the Fraternity to support the Railway Children Charity but only after, with an accountant's eye, he had carefully and meticulously studied the work of that organisation and had satisfied himself as to its aims.

DAVID STEPHENS (continued)

With regard to his railway interest David had a deep interest in the railways of Switzerland and for over 30 years he was an active member of the Swiss Railway Society. Apart from his regular visits to Switzerland, he and Myrtle also enjoyed railway holidays, including visits to Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the USA. David celebrated his 65th birthday with a round-the-world trip, a highlight for him being the train journey from Vancouver over the Rockies to Banff.

In addition to his work for the kidney charity, David gave of his considerable talent to other organisations in Wells - he was Stewardship Secretary for St Cuthbert's Church and involved in the re-organisation of the finances of almshouses in the City. For some time he was Treasurer of Bubwith's Almshouse.

David was a quiet, unassuming person who disliked crowds. He was always punctual - a desirable trait for a railway enthusiast - and was a good friend to those who came to know him well.

Despite David's transplanted kidney performing most satisfactorily, he was to succumb to cancer and died peacefully at home a short time after his final spell in hospital. Following a private cremation in Bristol, to which the three senior officers of the Fraternity were invited to join with the family and close friends, a service of celebration of David's life was held at St Cuthbert's Church in Wells on the 11th September. The church was full and a goodly number of Fraternity members joined the many others who were present to say farewell to and remember a good friend.

David will be greatly missed by all who were privileged to have known him.

S & D ANNIVERSARIES TOUR

(Saturday 8 September)

Thirty members and guests set off from Wells bus station at 8.45am in Mike Walker's 1965 Bristol Greyhound coach. With the early morning mist clearing we headed for Midsomer Norton South station. We were met there by John Baxter, the vice-chairman of the Somerset and Dorset Railway Heritage Trust, who told us about the history of the project and recent developments as we toured the station area. At the end of our brief visit John invited the Fraternity to return soon to spend more time looking at the restoration of this part of the S&D and to take a trip on the line. Steve Page, a Fraternity member and S&DRHT volunteer then pulled off a signal to start our trip down the line. Mike Beale from the Somerset and Dorset Railway Trust joined us at Midsomer Norton and then gave a running commentary.

Our next stop was at Binegar station where another WRF member, David Stone has his home. He has converted the former goods shed into two dwellings; one for himself and his wife and the other for their daughter and her family. David had a display of photographs showing the station in years gone by. He also told us about the Oakhill brewery narrow gauge railway that transported coal and other necessities to the brewery and brought the finished product back to the station for transfer at the goods shed into standard gauge wagons for onward movement. The two homes are named 'Mendip' and 'Oakhill' after the locomotives used on the brewery railway.

Following the line as closely as our means of transport would allow, we continued along the A37 and then turned off into Shepton Mallet to pass under the Bath Road viaduct and on through the town to loop around the industrial estate to the east where Shepton Mallet Charlton Road station used to be. Having reached Cannards Grave we then descended to Evercreech Junction for morning coffee at what used to be the Station Hotel (now The Natterjack). The landlord and his wife, Adrian and Kate, looked after us very well with homemade cakes and biscuits to go with our cuppas. We did not have time to look at what remains of the station and the former branch to Glastonbury and Highbridge but it was noted that the old booking office, now a dwelling, is currently up for sale.

Getting back on the coach we then ventured down the lanes through Bruton to Cole where the station is now a private dwelling. The owners, John Knight and his wife, had kindly agreed that we could visit even though they were away. The original building has been carefully restored and extended and the trackbed and platforms are now an extensive garden with views over the adjoining countryside that are not much changed since the railway closed. It all looked idyllic in the bright sunshine and we even saw a few trains passing nearby on the line from Westbury to Castle Cary.

S & D ANNIVERSARIES TOUR (continued)

Making our way on we skirted around Wincanton and headed for Templecombe and briefly halted in the village. Mike explained the complicated shunting moves that were necessary at the junction for the S&D trains that called at the upper station. After a period of closure the station on the Salisbury – Exeter line is busy again although there is only a single platform and no facilities for freight.

Lunch was ready to be served when we arrived at the Gartell Railway just south of Templecombe. During our meal John Penny, a volunteer on the railway, told us a little about how the railway has developed from a hobby to become an attraction with regular running weekends during the summer and a number of special events. After eating we boarded the train that was waiting outside and set off for a trip along the line. The locomotive was the diesel No. 1 ‘Amanda’ that is loosely based on a class 33. The train was complete with Pines Express headboard and carriage roof boards. Once we were up onto the former S&D trackbed we ran back along the full length of the line including the new level crossing over Common Lane and the extension towards Templecombe.

Moving on from Somerset into Dorset and passed through Henstridge and Stalbridge where pretty much all trace of their stations has gone. We had not planned to go into Sturminster Newton to see the site of the former station there which was just as well as the town was hosting a cheese festival and there was heavy traffic. Things were rather quieter at Shillingstone when we arrived. A Pines Express anniversary event was due to take place at the restored station but due to some disagreements amongst the committee some of the planned attractions were not there. However, the sun continued to shine and a pleasant hour was spent looking around and having a cup of tea.

Our tour down the line ended at Shillingstone but on our way back to Wells via Sherborne and Yeovil we called in at the farm of Fraternity member David Sedgman. His O-gauge layout ‘Nethercreech Junction’ is based on Evercreech and the operating team were able to run some typical trains from the 1950s and 60s to remind us how it would have been before run down and closure. David also kindly supplied tea/coffee and biscuits which was very welcome.

We arrived back in Wells just before 8pm. Everyone agreed that it had been a very enjoyable tour and a fitting way of marking the S&D Anniversaries. Mike Beale was thanked for his interesting commentary and Roger Granger was applauded for successfully piloting us along the highways and byways of Somerset and Dorset in a fine old vehicle that needed some hard work to drive.

A JOURNEY DOWN THE SOMERSET & DORSET - by Mick Hayes (11 September)

At the first meeting of our new season at Wells Town Hall only three days later, the Somerset & Dorset was still on our minds when we welcomed back our friend from South Yorkshire, Mick Hayes, who took us on a photographic journey over that railway.

Mick has amassed a large collection of photographs of the line, some dating from late Victorian times and the early 20th century, and others down to the last days prior to closure in the 1960s. His slide show began at Bath Green Park station and we called at virtually every station all the way to Bournemouth West and then along the branch line from Burnham-on-Sea to Evercreech Junction.

A vote of thanks for a fascinating evening was given by David Fisher.

DOUBLING THE COTSWOLD LINE - by Tim Maddocks (9 October)

At the meeting on the 9th February, we were pleased to welcome back after several years, Tim Maddocks, one of Network Rail's Customer Services Managers. His subject for the evening was entitled 'The Cotswold Redoubling Project' and related to the section of the old GWR line between Oxford and Worcester, a distance of some 51 miles.

This was originally built by the Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton Railway in the early 1850s (always known by railwaymen as the Old Worse and Worse) and served Charlbury, Ascott-under-Wychwood, Moreton-in-Marsh, Honeybourne and Evesham. Over the years this developed into a busy secondary main line but following the Beeching Report, in 1966 it was selected for severe rationalisation. Some stations were closed and demolished and the signalling system was simplified. In 1971 more economies were made by singling the double track except for a central 11-mile stretch. Previous express trains were withdrawn and a poor service using diesel railcars was substituted. The line continued to be used by freight trains but the singling often led to unacceptable delays when a train was running late and this could have far-reaching consequences in the Midlands and on the Great Western main line. A further proposal to close the central section completely and work the remains of the line as two branches was fortunately not proceeded with.

In 1982 the Cotswold Line Promotion Group was formed to bring pressure on BR to improve services and in this regard it was successful. Honeybourne station was re-opened in that year but despite a rapid rise in the number of passengers using the line, the level of performance reached an all-time low.

DOUBLING THE COTSWOLD LINE (continued)

With the advent of privatisation and the introduction of a consequential system of financial penalties relating to train delays, it became obvious that, despite the introduction of better trains, the track capacity had to be increased and a plan for reinstating the double track between Evesham and Moreton-in-Marsh and between Ashcott-under Wychwood to Charlbury was adopted.

Work commenced in 2009 with a six-week closure of the line to enable essential preliminary tasks to be undertaken. Repair work was undertaken on the half-mile Campden Tunnel, the only one on the line. Tim reminded us that this tunnel, near the village of Mickleton, had been the site of the so-called Battle of Mickleton in 1851 when a dispute between the contractor and the company had led to a stand-off, with some fisticuffs, between two large gangs of navvies - the victorious party being led by the Company's engineer - none other than Isambard Kingdom Brunel !

Remedial work continued throughout 2010 with a major project being the replacement of a bridge at Honeybourne in October. A new single track steel bridge had been provided in 1971 and it was decided to replace this with a new double-track reinforced concrete structure. Tim showed us a video of the bridge replacement in quick-time so that the many hours involved were compressed into just a few minutes - a surreal experience. The bridge spans the course of the former GWR Cheltenham - Stratford-on-Avon line and a diverted major farm track. We were reminded that the Gloucestershire - Warwickshire Railway were currently pressing on with the restoration of this line northwards to Broadway and had a long-term ambition to continue to Honeybourne which would involve passing under the new bridge. The heritage railway had therefore installed a short length of rail there as a statement of intent! A new home had been found for the 1971 bridge on the Telford Steam Railway at Horsehay.

The following year had been one of major track laying and the redoubled section of the Cotswold Line was officially re-opened on the 22nd August 2011. Tim was pleased to have been able to arrange for the first steam-hauled charter train to travel over the line shortly afterwards. The new track arrangements had also been designed to improve access to the highly successful Long Marston Freight Terminal (formerly a Ministry of Defence depot and served by a 3-mile branch line from Honeybourne). A new junction had been formed there and Tim had been delighted when he had been allowed to choose a name for it - Honeybourne Stratford Line Junction.

Tim's presentation was supplemented with a series of his slides recording the works in detail. Stations had been refurbished and signalling brought up to date so that the whole line is now controlled by four signal boxes. It was pleasant to note that Moreton-in Marsh retains its traditional GWR semaphore signals. Tim concluded by commenting that the revival of the Cotswold Line served as an excellent example of what could be achieved by pressure and supporter groups acting these days under the aegis of Community Rail.

A vote of thanks for a most informative presentation was given by Roy Kethro.

BUILDING A RAILWAY - by John Blatchford

(13 November)

On the 13th November, John Blatchford concluded his account of his 'life with railways', the first part of which we heard following last year's AGM. For this evening's presentation, entitled 'Building A Railway', John began by briefly reminding us of his time with the family's structural steel business at Midsomer Norton. This business diversified into the manufacture of reinforced concrete engineering products, initially at Tor Hill Quarry, Wells, and latterly at Emborough Quarry, near Chilcompton, in the 1980s. To allow us to orientate ourselves John began by showing an aerial photograph of the latter quarry, taken towards the end of the Second World War, showing its large area bisected by the lofty railway viaduct carrying the Somerset & Dorset Joint line.

As an engineer, John had noted that concrete works in Belgium and elsewhere on the Continent usually made use of internal narrow gauge railways laid with light track of about 35 lbs per yard, and he incorporated a similar facility at Emborough. In 1982 he acquired his first locomotive, a small Ruston & Hornsby diesel, from Corsham depot, being surplus to the requirements of the Royal Navy. This locomotive acquired the name *Tinkerbelle* and had been built to the slightly unusual gauge, favoured by the Admiralty for their armament depots, of 760mm. Hence, the track at Emborough was built to this gauge.

In 1996 the concrete manufacturing ceased and John found himself with a large derelict quarry with a short length of railway. He decided therefore, in his retirement, to extend the railway into a circuit around the quarry and he set about acquiring more locomotives, rolling stock and track, much of which came from naval depots. We were intrigued to learn that some track John bought later had, however, come from depots of the former Soviet Navy ! The line currently extends for about 1.25 miles and, having passed through the idyllically named Dingley Dell, runs in the western half of the quarry alongside the extensive lake which had formed there.

John gave us a full description, with excellent illustrations, of the locomotives and the many and varied items of other rolling stock which he had acquired over the years and entertained us with anecdotes about the steep learning curve involved in matters such as rail bending, bridge construction and modifying the mainly 5- and 10-ton wagons for various purposes, including a recently-built passenger coach. He also provided some interesting figures of the costs involved in building a railway such as that at Emborough - a task not to be entertained lightly even on a 'Do It Yourself' basis. For instance he had estimated that a mile of such a railway required about 56 tons of second-hand 35 lb rail, some 2,000 sleepers, 36,000 track clips and fishplates and many tons of ballast.

A vote of thanks was given by Derek Lampard who reminded us that the Fraternity had been privileged to visit the Emborough railway in 2009. He congratulated John on his inventiveness and ingenuity in undertaking such a bold venture and expressed the meeting's gratitude to him for giving us such an interesting, entertaining and enthusiastic account of it.

“YOU HAVE SEEN THE FILM – NOW READ THE BOOK”

Our speaker at the October meeting, Tim Maddocks, is the joint author of a new book ‘The Cotswold Line, Past and Present’. The re-doubling of a substantial part of this line was the subject of his presentation to the Fraternity. The book is published by Silver Link in their ‘Past and Present’ series and includes 250 photographs. It is priced at £19.99.

RAILWELLS WEBSITE: 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

NEW MEMBERS

Please welcome the following who have recently joined:

Peter Baxter (West Horrington), Richard Lander (Oakhill), Roger Oliver (Paulton)

2012-13 PROGRAMME

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

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| 11 December 2012 | Annual General Meeting <i>followed by</i> Quiz (set by Clifford Ison) |
| 8 January 2013 | 150 Years of London Underground – David Mead |
| 12 February 2013 | The Railways of Queensland, N.S.W. and Victoria – Ian Hunter |
| 12 March 2013 | Local Railways of the 60s on Film– <i>goes digital</i> – Andrew Linham
<i>Also</i> Jeffery Grayer <i>signing his latest books on local railways</i> |
| 9 April 2013 | The Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Railways – David Witcombe
and Douglas Lindsay |
| 14 May 2013 | Back to the Broad Gauge - Brian Arman |

A reminder of our S & D Anniversaries Tour



Thank you to all those who have contributed to this newsletter, especially John Uncles and Andrew Tucker.

AND FINALLY

Did you know that when Blackpool Central station closed in November 1964, it set an unenviable record as being the station with the highest number of platforms (14) to close. Dr Beeching did not want to close Blackpool Central. His report proposed the closure Blackpool North, but Blackpool Corporation successfully campaigned for Central to be closed instead, so that it could buy the land for lucrative redevelopment.