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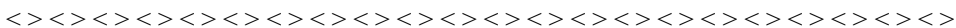
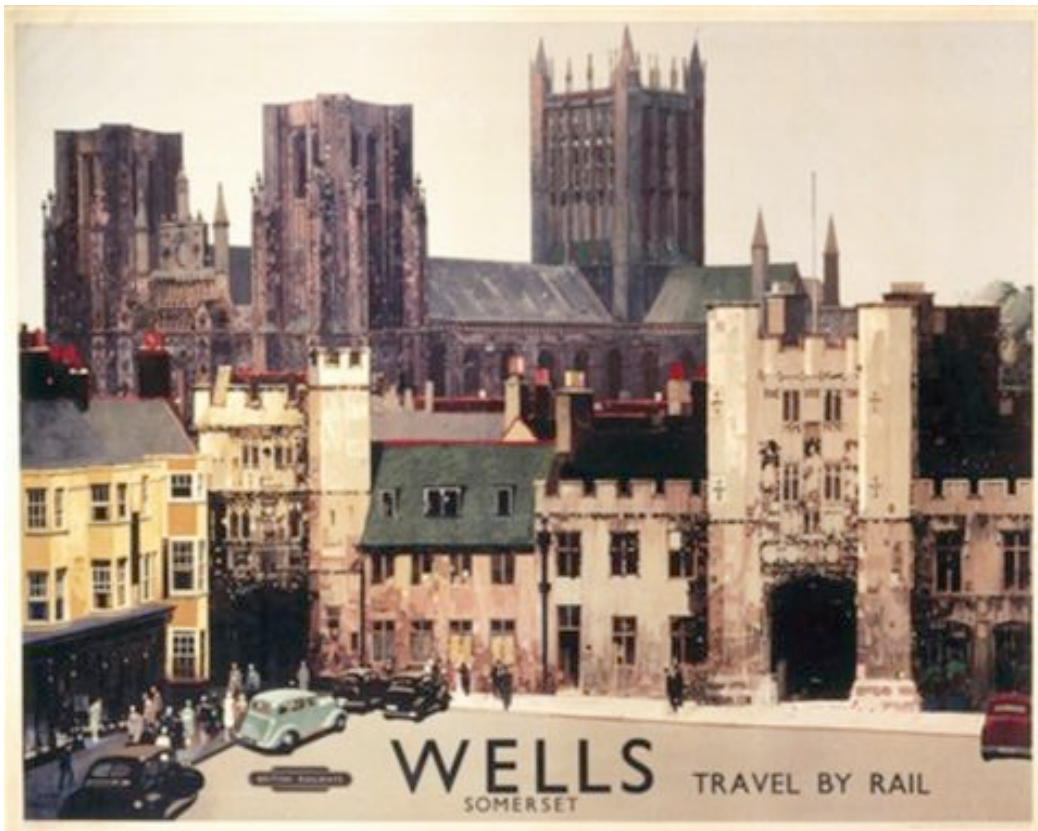
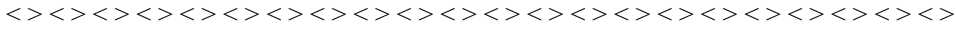
RAILWAY

FRATERNITY

Newsletter No.180 - April 2014

www.railwells.com

Thank you to those who have contributed to this newsletter.
Your contributions for future editions are welcome.
Please contact the editor, Steve Page
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BILL SWEET

Just as this newsletter was about to go to press, we learned of the sad news that Bill Sweet had passed away. Bill was a member of the Fraternity for many years and he will be greatly missed. A full obituary will be in the next newsletter.

THE PADDINGTON SLEEPER ACCIDENT – by ROY KETHRO and RESTORING A CLYDE PUFFER – by JIM HAY (14 January)

At our meeting on the 14th January, held as usual at Wells Town Hall, two of our members entertained us with short illustrated talks.

Roy Kethro, who had served as an engineer with British Railways (and latterly First Great Western) for 42 years, told us about his involvement following the serious derailment of a sleeping car train entering Paddington Station in the early and foggy morning of 23rd November 1983. Being on duty at the station that night, Roy was the first engineer on the site after the accident in which the locomotive and twelve coaches left the track and ended up on their sides. Fortunately there were no serious injuries to passengers or traincrew but the recovery of the rolling stock seriously affected operation of the station for some time. Roy then told us about the subsequent internal and public inquiries at which he was required to give evidence. The driver alleged that his brakes had failed but the Investigating officer concluded that the driver had lost concentration and entered a crossover from one track to another at an excessive speed. Various recommendations were made and implemented, including the fitting of a form of Black Box recorder in all locomotives. Roy concluded his talk by telling us some anecdotes about one of his colleagues whom he had got to know at the time of the derailment.

For the second half of the evening, we unusually had a non-railway subject when Jim Hay talked about his involvement as a director of a trust responsible for the preservation and restoration of 'Vic 32', a Clyde 'Puffer'. These small steam-powered craft were once a familiar sight along the West Coast of Scotland, serving the many Western Isles. The design, incorporating a vertical steam boiler, originated in the late 1850s and, to many of us, was immortalised in the TV adventures of Para Handy and his Puffer, the 'Vital Spark'. Surprisingly, in 1943, the Admiralty ordered 102 of these Victualling Inshore Craft, as they were officially known, virtually to the original design, and many of these wartime craft, which were able to carry a cargo of 100 - 120 tons, found their way all over the world. Today, twelve Puffers survive in preservation and Jim told us how, in 1975, an Uxbridge businessman, Nick Walker, had bought 'Vic 32' and started its restoration before eventually donating it to the Trust. Thanks to a generous grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, some £140,000 had so far been spent on restoration and the vessel and its crew now offered a novel opportunity for a small number of paying passengers to cruise along the Scottish coast.

A vote of thanks to Roy and Jim for two very different presentations was given by the Chairman, Colin Price.

THE BRIGHTON BELLE – by ANTONY FORD (11 February)

On the 11th February, Antony Ford from Swindon visited us to tell us the story of the Brighton Belle, at one time one of the country's most famous trains. He explained that for many years he had been fascinated by Pullman trains and had amassed a substantial collection of fittings, fixtures and other memorabilia from many Pullman cars. The Pullman Car Company originated in the United States and the import into Britain of Pullman cars - they were never referred to as coaches - began in the 1870s. The American built vehicles offered high standards of comfort, luxury and service and became very popular with the first all-Pullman express trains being introduced between London and Brighton in 1881. Although generally Pullmans catered for both first and third (later second) class passengers, a new all first-class train, the 'Southern Belle' entered service on the same line, using new Pullman cars built in Britain. A British Pullman Car Company had been established in 1882 and during its 80 years of independent existence, operated well over 200 cars with many railways.

In 1932 the Southern Railway, in association with the company, ordered new all-steel cars for use on its several Pullman expresses (such as the Golden Arrow and the Bournemouth Belle). Included in the order were three five-car electric trains for use on the newly electrified line to Brighton. These, known officially as 5-BEL sets, were the first electric Pullman trains in the world and took over the Southern Belle service, which in 1934 was rechristened as the Brighton Belle. Apart from the war years, this service ran continuously until the end of April 1972. Six of the new cars were first class only and, following Pullman tradition, were given names, on this occasion feminine ones - Audrey, Doris, Gwen, Hazel, Mona and Vera. The decor of all 15 cars was in art deco style with no two the same. Much use was made of marquetry, using woods from all over the British Empire and the standard of craftsmanship was exceptionally high. Originally finished in the Pullman Company's umber and cream livery, the trains were later repainted into British Railways blue and white, which did not really suit them.

For many years the Brighton Belle was regarded as a daily commuter club for actors and other showbiz personalities and Antony showed us a brief newsclip of the very last service with celebrities such as Flora Robson and Jimmy Edwards very much in evidence. By that time, however, the train had become expensive to operate and regarded by many as decidedly old-fashioned.

Upon withdrawal, all the cars were sold and all except one are still in existence, one even finding a new use as a pub. Eventually a new charitable organisation, the 5-BEL Trust, was set up to restore a Brighton Belle unit in all its glory. The Trust has been successful in acquiring six cars and it is hoped to complete restoration by 2016. There remained, however, many technical and other problems to be overcome to ensure that the train complied with the many present-day safety requirements. On completion it is hoped to operate the train on prestigious charter journeys, using a specially modified diesel locomotive to allow it to run on lines not electrified with a third rail.

During the evening we had seen many photographs of the trains and of their exquisite fittings such as panelling, lights and door handles as well as some extracts from news film.

A vote of thanks from Chris Avery concluded a most interesting evening.

RAILS TO AVONMOUTH – by GERRY NICHOLS (11 March)

The speaker at our meeting in Wells Town Hall on the 11th March was Gerry Nichols from Bristol. His subject was 'Rails to Avonmouth' and we were entertained to an excellent illustrated presentation covering the history of this nearby port and the railway lines serving it.

Gerry began by reminding us that, at the beginning of the Victorian era, the area around the mouth of the River Avon was mainly marshland and mudflats. This land then formed part of the extensive Kingsweston estate, then owned by the Miles family who were prominent Bristol bankers. In 1852, they had backed a scheme to dam the Avon at its mouth and thereby transform the five miles or so to the centre of Bristol into a vast dock system. This scheme did not materialise of course but, a decade later, plans for building a dock at Avonmouth were approved and this was to be connected to the city by a railway. The Bristol Port Railway and Pier, to give the line its legal name, was financed and built by the well-known railway contractor, Charles Waring, and was opened in 1865. This line was totally isolated from the national railway system, having its Bristol terminus at Hotwells, almost immediately below the Clifton Suspension Bridge. In addition to the new dock, steps were taken with a view to developing a resort at Avonmouth, its attractions including pleasure grounds and a large rifle shooting range. The Port Railway was always impecunious and finally the Great Western and Midland Railways, wishing to gain access to the new dock, promoted a joint railway through the northern central suburbs of Bristol to connect with the Hotwells to Avonmouth line near Sea Mills. This line, which involved driving a mile-long tunnel under the Clifton and Durdham Downs, was brought into use in 1877. Great Western passenger trains from Temple Meads and Midland ones from Bath via Mangotsfield initially terminated at Clifton Down and not until 1885 were such trains permitted to run though the tunnel to serve Avonmouth. The original service from Hotwells survived for a while longer until part of its route disappeared under the building of the Portway arterial road through the Avon Gorge in the 1920s. The next major development affecting Avonmouth was the opening of the Severn Tunnel in 1886 and eventually a connecting line to the South Wales route at Pilning was built in 1900 and it was on this line that a station was to be built at Severn Beach some twenty years later. By the turn of the century the original Avonmouth Dock had proved inadequate and the City Council began the building of the vast Royal Edward Dock, which was opened by King Edward VII in 1908. The final substantial railway development followed in 1910 with a new line from Filton and Stoke Gifford via Henbury. This line gave direct access to the main lines serving South Wales, London, the Midlands and the North and is now heavily used.

Over the years, a considerable internal railway network came into being to serve the docks, associated industries - such as the Imperial Smelting Company - and warehousing. In the last years of the Edwardian period, attempts were made to attract transatlantic liners to use Avonmouth and during the First World War a large quantity of armaments and other supplies, together with horses and mules, were shipped to the Continent from Avonmouth to relieve the pressure on the Channel ports which were more concerned with troop transport. Subsequently, a passenger service of sorts did develop to and from the West Indies when a limited amount of passenger accommodation was provided on the ships used in the banana traffic and right up until 1964 occasional special boat trains were run into the docks for these passengers. In recent years cruise liners have increasingly used Avonmouth but as virtually all the internal railway network has disappeared there is now no possibility of providing any sort of rail connection.

RAILS TO AVONMOUTH – continued

Avonmouth, however, still generates a great deal of rail freight traffic especially with regard to imported coal and cars. Also, for many years, the railway lines serving Avonmouth saw many passenger excursion trains, mainly from South Wales, and unofficially and irreverently known as 'Monkey Specials'. These unloaded thousands of passengers each year at Clifton Down station for the short walk to Bristol Zoo.

During the evening we saw a magnificent selection of photographs illustrating the development of the docks at Avonmouth, the four railway lines serving them and the locomotives which were operated by the Port of Bristol Authority and the various industrial companies. After Gerry had received a warm vote of thanks, we all agreed that we had learned much about this important port not so far from Wells.

RAILS TO AVONMOUTH – A Postscript by Roy Kethro

As soon as I saw 'Rails to Avonmouth' on the meetings programme I knew it was one I didn't want to miss and I wasn't disappointed on the night. I have had many dealings with this line ever since I was a youngster and Gerry's account brought back many memories. Tempted as I was to intervene with numerous relevant anecdotes during his talk, I think there is every chance we would still have been there at midnight.

It all started in the mid 1950's when we lived in St Pauls. Dad would take me up to Montpelier station to watch trains in the evenings and we would sometimes walk across to Narrowways Junction where movements were much more frequent on the main lines. As the evenings drew in and winter approached, we turned into a right couple of villains. I would keep watch while he reached through a hole in the fence at Montpelier coal yard to fill a carrier bag with some suitable sized lumps for the fire at home. Times were hard back then. I was probably the youngest ever lookout on the railway.

In the early 1960's we moved close to Stapleton Road. One day we went to Severn Beach for the afternoon on one of the new multiple units. On the way back we managed to grab the seats directly behind the driver's cab affording us a panoramic view of the line ahead. Imagine my delight when the driver opened the sliding door into the saloon and asked me if I wanted to drive. I sat on his lap while his hands guided me through the various throttling, gear changes and braking. Just as well because I didn't have the strength to keep the dead man's handle depressed by myself. Coming through Clifton Down Tunnel seeing the pinpoint of light ahead gradually getting bigger was quite an experience which came in useful many years later as I will explain further on. My trip on car number W51070 was certainly a memorable one but can you imagine that happening today?

Regular train spotting trips to Temple Meads with my school mates during that decade involved travelling on the various services off the branch, including a time when trains were formed with four coaches hauled by a class 22 North British type 2. On starting my apprenticeship at Bath Road depot, I used the Avonmouth/Severn Beach trains to get to and from work. By now they were down to a single car unit, affectionately referred to as the 'Bubble Car'. There were several incidents with these units hitting the buffers at Severn Beach, on one occasion demolishing the awning of the station building. I never understood the intricacies of the vacuum brake but, if I recall correctly what was being said at the time, it was down to driving technique causing a loss of top side vacuum.

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## **RAILS TO AVONMOUTH – A Postscript by Roy Kethro - continued**

As part of my training I had to attend Filton Technical College. It was a tortuous journey from home by bus but then I discovered the BAC workers train to North Filton Platform which Gerry mentioned. I reckon my residential free pass to that station must have been unique. I took my life in my hands a few times dashing across the main Gloucester Road as departure time was literally a few minutes after the last class ended. Alternatively, if we were a few minutes late finishing I would run all the way along to Filton Junction hoping that the train would be held at the signal waiting to come off the chord onto the main line. Rarely made it. It was usually formed by a 3-car suburban unit and well patronised by Rolls Royce and BAC workers, including my uncle Frank who was an airframe fitter.

Moving on to the early 1980's, Bath Road played host to the BRE-Leyland R3 Railbus which Gerry showed in use on the branch. As the depot technical officer I was responsible for making sure the support team from Derby had access to any facilities they required as well as arranging with the movements and maintenance departments to make sure the vehicle was serviced and available for traffic. The four wheeled chassis with soft suspension soon earned it the

nickname 'Nodding Donkey' especially on the short track sections along St Andrews Road. It was totally reliable and generally well received by regular passengers, although the guards were never happy with the fact that the 'guards van' was just a locker behind the cab. The body was actually two front halves of a Leyland National bus mounted back to back. As such, it only had access doors at diagonally opposite corners. Certainly a challenge joining on one side and alighting on the other if you had a pushchair or bicycle which had to be manoeuvred the length of the saloon. One perceived problem with this vehicle was its tendency to drop off the track circuit going round Horseshoe Curve. Suspicion fell on the fact that with such a low axle weight, centrifugal force on the sharp curve was causing the inner wheels to offload, breaking the circuit intermittently. The boffins came up with a little black box to remedy the problem which they called a Track Circuit Actuator. It was hidden somewhere on board and I was sworn to secrecy about it as it was untested technology. I think I can talk about it now under the "30 year disclosure rule" and in fact all DMUs now have something similar and it must be functioning for the unit to stay in traffic. Alas, it turned out to be of no avail on the R3. But then a chance conversation with a signalman elicited the response: "I wouldn't worry about it. Most trains drop out going round there. I expect the rats have been eating the cables again!" It eventually went to Northern Ireland for use on the line to Coleraine. The colour scheme of green, orange and white must have raised an eyebrow or two amongst the Loyalist population in the province.

At Bristol, we were largely unaware of the volume of freight leaving Avonmouth as it generally went out via Filton. However, while out one day with a class 50 on a trial run following repairs, the driver was asked if we were available to assist a failed freight which had stalled on Hallen Bank. I readily agreed as it would be a good test for a low power fault. The failure was a class 37 hauling a train load of heavy copper ingots. Having gingerly buffered up on the down gradient, we hauled the lot through to Severn Tunnel Junction with no problem. A successful trial run duly signed off.

Over the past decade, growth in passenger traffic on the Avonmouth branch has been phenomenal with two car units barely adequate at certain times of day. There are generally two trains running on the branch at any time, with timings designed to cross over at Clifton Down. In my last role as Area Operations Manager, when delays or failures occurred for whatever reason, it was my job to manage the service back to some sort of normality, especially for the evening peak commuter traffic.

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RAILS TO AVONMOUTH – A Postscript by Roy Kethro - continued

The various stakeholders in the local rail partnership certainly took a dim view if the situation was allowed to continue and my Performance Director was quickly on my back to know what I was doing to remedy the problem. I had a number of tricks up my sleeve including knocking out station stops to gain time, turning services back short at Avonmouth or Clifton or injecting a spare unit and crew into the workings. However, the Achilles Heel was always the fact that the branch had been reduced to single track during the MAS resignalling scheme of the early 1970's.

Going back to my driving experience in Clifton Down Tunnel when I was a lad, a bizarre incident occurred just before I retired. I waited on the platform at Temple Meads to meet one of my recently qualified drivers on arrival to find out why he had lost a lot of time between Avonmouth and Clifton. He said that as he came through the tunnel, he couldn't see daylight at the far end as he would have expected. He proceeded at a very reduced speed, fully expecting to encounter a roof fall or some other obstruction. But as he approached the far end of the tunnel, a dull greyness gradually appeared ahead of him. It was apparently due to the fact that it was a very dark, gloomy day and raining very heavily. When I had a chance to speak to him later I did put him on the spot with the question 'so what steps would you have taken if you had come across a big pile of rocks?' 'Large ones back the way I came' was the inevitable reply.

Gerry's final photo was from the Narrowways area around 1920/30 and was concerned with a newspaper report into the death of several platelayers at that location. As a youngster we used to visit my mother's Auntie Rose who lived alone very close to Stapleton Road station. Her husband was one of the track workers who were killed in that incident, reportedly due to a train coming up the wrong line.

This was an excellent talk to which I could relate right up to the last minute.

FRATERNITY OUTINGS

Arrangements are in hand for two outings this summer with the possibility of a third:

Mid-Hants Railway and the Alton Bus Rally – Sunday 20 July

For this outing we are again fortunate to have the use of one (or possibly two) of Dr Mike Walker's preserved Bristol

Greyhound coaches. The Alton Bus Rally is one of the largest in the country and includes free bus trips to the Mid-Hants and other local destinations. There will also be a full summer service of trains on the railway. Departure from Wells at 8.45. Full details at the April meeting. Any queries to Andrew Tucker.

West Somerset Railway – date in September to be confirmed

This outing will largely be funded by the sale of model railway items left to the Fraternity by David Stephens. It was David's wish that members would enjoy a special day and to that end the outward journey will include lunch on the train with a cream tea on the return. Any queries to John Uncles.

FRATERNITY OUTINGS - continued

Keighley and Worth Valley Railway for naming of City of Wells – date to be confirmed

After a very long time out of service (it was withdrawn from working on the KWVR in 1990) it now seems almost certain that the locomotive will return to traffic this year. The Fraternity have kept in touch with the project to return 'our loco' to steam and it has always been the intention that members would have the opportunity to attend the renaming. With no actual date firm plans cannot be made but enquiries are in hand regarding transport to Yorkshire and overnight accommodation.

OTHER EVENTS

Evercreech New Open Weekend – Saturday and Sunday 26/27 April

Julian Birley is holding these open days in aid of his local Parish Church and Village Hall. This is likely to be the last occasion to see his excellent 0-gauge model of Evercreech New station. Julian is custodian of Ivo Peter's Bentley (a car much associated with the S&D line) and there will be other vintage vehicles on display. Andrew Tucker is also taking along his Castle Cary layout. David Shepherd will be there as a special guest. Enjoy refreshments in the garden. Richmond House, North Barrow. Open 10.30am – 4pm both days.

The Strawberry Line, Talk to Priddy History Group – Thursday 8 May

This talk will be given by Richard Harman, the author of The East Somerset and Cheddar Valley Railways. Visitors are welcome. 8pm at Priddy Village Hall.

Garden Railway Open Days – Sundays 18 May and 13 July and Saturday 13 September

Terry Dumbrell has once again extended an invitation to Fraternity Members to attend one of his garden railway open days at Holcombe. You would be more than welcome to take along your 0-gauge locos to run. For more information contact Andrew Tucker 01749 830695 or andrewtucker@btinternet.com

NEW MEMBERS

Please welcome the following, who have recently joined:

| | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| Eddie Armand (South Horrington) | Ted Carver (Wells) | Tony Jepson (Wells) |
| Stephen Ledbetter (Draycott) | Derek Sprague (Wells) | Roger Waddington (Banwell) |
| | Martin Zouch (Easton) | |

2014 PROGRAMME

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

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|--------|---------------------------|-------------|
| 13 May | Somerset & Dorset Journey | Brian Arman |
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AND FINALLY

The shortest distance between stations on the London Underground is from Covent Garden to Leicester Square on the Piccadilly Line – 0.26km. The irony is that it is the most common journey undertaken by foreign tourists. It would be quicker to walk!