

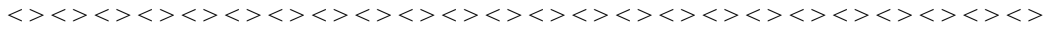
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# **WELLS RAILWAY FRATERNITY**

Newsletter No.184 - November 2015

[www.railwells.com](http://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  
tel: 01761 433418, or email [page564@btinternet.com](mailto:page564@btinternet.com)



Fraternity members enjoying refreshments at Sandford Station.

Photo by Andrew Tucker

## **CHEDDAR VALLEY AND EAST SOMERSET RAILWAYS TOUR    16 May**

### **Report by Andrew Tucker**

As our trip to the Keighley and Worth Valley Railway has been further delayed awaiting a date for the rededication of 34092 CITY OF WELLS this additional outing was arranged at quite short notice. This may have been one reason why only thirteen members booked places with seven guests making a total of twenty passengers on the coach. We travelled from Wells to Sandford via Green Ore and Burrington Combe and so avoided duplicating the route eastwards along the Cheddar Valley later in the Tour.

Sandford Station Railway Heritage Centre is within the site of a retirement village recently developed by the St Monica Trust. The former Sandford and Banwell station building is listed grade II and the structure has been restored by the developers. Inside what was an empty shell has been beautifully refitted by a group of local volunteers. On a short length of track at the platform are two open wagons and a carriage\*. Coffee, tea and biscuits were served before we moved on.

The Strawberry Line Heritage Trail passes the Sandford station site but we travelled in the coach through Winscombe to the recreation ground before setting off on foot. It was a fine if slightly breezy day for the walk of about 1¼ miles along the old trackbed and through Shute Shelve tunnel. We reboarded the coach at the A38 and then went on through Axbridge, passing the station there which also survives, to Cheddar. This station is now part of the Wells Cathedral Stonemasons premises. The main building remains but sadly the overall roof was removed soon after closure. The modern steel framed canopy over the stoneyard does in part echo the form of the old roof. It was also an interesting opportunity to see the work of the stonemasons.

A hearty roast lunch followed at the Strawberry Special in Draycott (the former Station Hotel). Arrangements had been made for us to visit the house opposite that had been the station building here. Of a different 'chalet' style the building has been altered and extended but it still retains several original features including the large carved stone 'Draycott Station' sign.

Going on to Wells we again set off on foot to follow the route of the railway from Tucker Street to Priory Road and then the short-lived East Somerset station. The sites of all three stations are marked with stone pillars carrying engraved maps showing the layout of the railways in Wells. Colin Price led the walk and he also gave an informative commentary on the coach throughout the tour.

Our next stop was at Cranmore on the preserved section of the East Somerset Railway. The train standing in the station was headed by the resident GWR 56XX tank. Taking our reserved seats we were served an excellent cream tea while making the short trip up the line to Mendip Vale. On our way back we alighted at Cranmore West to look around the engine shed and workshops. The recently restored Ivatt 2-6-0 no. 46447 made quite an impressive sight outside.

Walking back to the main station at Cranmore we reboarded the coach for the return to Wells. There was one more stop on the way at the former Shepton Mallet High Street station site. Although the station building itself was demolished about ten years ago, the yard office and part of the goods shed remain in the premises of Ellis and Co.

Our thanks to everyone who made this trip possible.

\*The carriage at Sandford is a BR mk.1 finished in chocolate and cream Western Region livery. However, while we were there Roy Kethro pointed out that several features indicate that it came from a Southern Region electric multiple unit. Subsequent research confirms it is TBSK (trailer brake second corridor) no. 70826 from unit 415. This was one of six unpowered 4TC sets sold by BR to LT for use with their heritage electric and steam locos. It subsequently became surplus when they reduced their fleet.

## **TO THE EDGE OF THE WORLD – The Story Of The Trans-Siberian Railway** **by Christian Wolmer** **8 September**

At the first meeting of the season, on 8th September, we were delighted to welcome Mr Christian Wolmar as our speaker. Mr Wolmar is a freelance journalist, well-known nationally for his writing mainly on the social and political aspects of the current railway scene, as well as being the author of a number of books on railway topics and social history. His illustrated presentation to us was entitled 'The Edge of the World' in which he related the story of the Trans-Siberian Railway which he felt could justifiably claim to be the greatest railway in the world. He had recently written a book on the railway and explained that his interest in the subject had been partly stimulated by his family's Russian ancestry.

Mr Wolmar began by outlining the historical background to the building of this remarkable railway which links Moscow with Vladivostok, a distance of some 5,750 miles. In Victorian days, the majority of the Russian population lived in the westernmost part of the country and the proposal to build a railway across the vast empire was made primarily for political and military - and not economic - reasons. After some 30 years of debate, the decision to proceed was finally taken by the Tsar Alexander III and the first sod was cut by the Crown Prince (later Tsar Nicholas II) at Vladivostok. Construction proceeded very rapidly with some 4,300 miles being built in the years 1891-1901. At that time Russia was still very much a feudal state and Siberia was home to only a few tribes. The route of the Trans-Siberian Railway only traversed a few mountainous areas and few tunnels were required, but there were major rivers to cross and the engineering challenges these presented led to the building of some very impressive bridges. The wide and deep Lake Baikal, however, necessitated a break in the route and the use of train ferries for many years. During the severe winters, trains were actually run over the thick ice - although the first locomotive used broke the ice and sank. Thereafter railway vehicles were hauled across the frozen lake by horses.

Although American technology was drawn upon, very little mechanical plant was available to assist with construction and it was impossible to make much progress during the winter. In fact, nearly all the line was built by manual effort, great use being made of convict labour, prisoners being offered reduced sentences as an incentive. The work force seems to have been well-treated and fed and the death rate was quite low, at less than 1%, although accidents were frequent once the railway opened to traffic. The real total cost of building the Trans-Siberian line is unsurprisingly unknown. The only British contribution to this vast undertaking was the supply of an ice-breaker on Lake Baikal.

Initially, the eastern section of the railway beyond Lake Baikal, opened in 1905, ran partly through Chinese territory and a lengthy alternative line was built by 1916 to ensure that the whole railway was within Russia. The line was principally used for the conveyance of freight and military traffic but there was also a limited passenger service. Following the great interest in the 1907 Paris to Peking Motor Car Race, the Russian government, with the assistance of the Wagon Lits company, encouraged luxury tourist travel over the Trans-Siberian route; originally the journey took some 25 days but today's *Trans-Siberian Express* takes about a quarter of that time.

The operation of the line was affected by several major historical events such as the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) and the Civil War following the 1917 Revolution. With the rise of Stalin, a policy of industrialisation in Siberia was introduced and new towns were founded along the route of the railway, most notably Novosibirsk, which now has a population of over 1.5 million. Stations were built to five standard designs - appropriate to the status of the settlement served. During the 1920s and 1930s the whole line was electrified and by the 1970s had been double-tracked throughout. During the Second World War several vital industries were relocated to the east and, again under Stalin, Siberia saw the establishment of many of the infamous gulags. To avoid the crossing of Lake Baikal the building of a new line from Irkutsk to Ulan Ude was started but was abandoned during the 1930s due to the extremely difficult terrain and permafrost. Work was resumed towards the end of the Second World War and continued until the 1960s when the line was finally completed and opened by President Gorbachov. Mr Wolmar considered that the Trans-Siberian Railway was not blessed with stretches of exceptional scenic attractiveness but he felt that the most attractive sections had been those along the shores of Lake Baikal. With the opening of the new line, these had been abandoned and unfortunately were no more.

Mr Wolmar's talk was well-illustrated with many photographs, some of a historical nature, and a vote of thanks for a most informative and interesting presentation was given by Roy Kethro.

## **SWANAGE RAILWAY – PROJECT WAREHAM** **by Frank Roberts and Mike Walshaw**

**13 October**

On the 13th October we welcomed back after several years, Mike Walshaw of the Swanage Railway who came to give us an up-date regarding 'Project Wareham', the scheme to reconnect the heritage railway with the national rail network. Mike had hoped to have been accompanied by his colleague, Frank Roberts, the Swanage Railway's senior project manager, but unfortunately this did not prove possible.

Mike began his illustrated presentation by briefly reviewing the successful revival of the railway to the extent that some 216,000 passengers were carried in 2014. He reminded us that the line currently operated over 6 miles between the now rather restricted terminus at Swanage and Norden, just north of Corfe Castle, where there was a large Park-and-Ride site. Beyond the line continued to join the main line from Poole to Dorchester at Worgret Junction, a mile or so west of Wareham. Although it had always been the ambition of the Swanage Railway to run a regular train service to Wareham this had not been possible as the northernmost section was in use for traffic to and from the oil wells at Wytch Farm; although the occasional visiting special had been allowed to run over this section, this necessitated the use of single line tokens and pilotmen.

In 1997 the Purbeck Community Rail Project had been launched whereby the Swanage Railway worked with the local authorities, etc to maximise the contribution of the railway to the local tourist industry. In 2008, the decision of Network Rail to modernise the signalling on the main line from Poole to Wool was regarded by the Swanage Railway as a 'chance in a lifetime' to realise the objective of restoring regular rail services over the branch. Although the cost of linking the branch with the national signalling system was considerable, Dorset County Council and Purbeck District Council agreed to contribute £3.2 million, whilst BP had donated some £500,000 for community projects on vacating the oil farm; this left the Swanage Railway to find £347,000. It was decided that the line between Corfe Signal Box and Worgret Junction would be controlled by an electric token block system and in due course, the project got under way, Mike being appointed as the Swanage Railway engineer responsible for signalling matters. It would be necessary to dig a conduit to house cables alongside the four miles of line and this was not quite so straightforward as it seemed as nearly all the line runs through a Site of Special Scientific Interest and negotiations with English Nature resulted in restricted work periods to allow, for instance, for the hibernation of wild creatures.

At Norden, a level crossing and loop necessitated the installation of a ground frame and this was housed in a new building in L&SWR style built by the Herefordshire company, Buildings Bespoke. Token instruments from Lyme Regis, manufactured by Tyers in 1898, were also installed here. Nearby, however, a new and large steel control cabinet was provided but this was very successfully disguised in true 'South Western' style by a volunteer and painted green and cream to match the ground frame building. On a nostalgic note, Mike showed us several photographs of signal boxes on the main line between Poole and Wool - where only that at Wool Station, dating from 1878, still survives for preservation.

The signalling on the branch would in future be controlled from Corfe Signal Box interacting with the upgraded signalling control centre at Basingstoke, where the new Dorset Coast Panel became operational in May 2014. In September of that year the Swanage Railway was granted a 99-year lease of all the 10-mile branch line from Worgret Junction to Swanage, with the County Council agreeing to take over responsibility for the road bridges. The signalling work was duly completed in time for the first train to run from Wareham to Corfe under the new system on 5th February 2015. This was a South West DMU conveying the Rail Minister, Claire Perry MP, who was visiting the line to mark the commissioning of the new electric token block system. Other work, such as bridge repairs, sleeper replacement and fence renewal, continued and the Swanage Railway planned to operate an experimental pilot community rail service from Swanage to Wareham on 50 days during 2016 and on 90 days in 2017 to gauge the level of demand towards the introduction of a future regular service.

A vote of thanks was proposed by Chris Challis, who congratulated Mike on an excellent presentation which he felt sure would encourage members to make an extra visit to Swanage to sample the new service.

Our speaker at a very well-attended meeting at Wells Town Hall on the 10th November was Mr Mike Foster and his subject was 'The Royal Train'. Mike's working life began when he trained as a locomotive fireman with British Railways at Eastleigh and later Guildford, where a workmate of his was Joe Brown, later of 'The Bruvvers' fame. With the demise of steam, he made a career change and joined the British Transport Police. As a constable he served at first in the London area and spent eight years on the Underground. Having been promoted to detective sergeant, he went on eventually to reach the rank of chief inspector with a responsibility for dealing with recruitment. Always a keen photographer, he managed to obtain special permission to travel with the Royal Train during the Queen's Golden Jubilee tour in 2002 and to provide a photographic record of that tour.

The Royal Train had its origins in the special vehicles built by various railway companies for the use of the Sovereign from the 1840s. In the 1970s and 1980s several modern vehicles were provided for the train, converted from redundant main line coaches, including two saloons for the use of the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh. It was at the Duke's suggestion in 1954 that all the Royal Train vehicles are painted in the same maroon livery as other Royal vehicles. For many years the Royal Train has been based at Wolverton on the main Euston - Birmingham main line and a new secure depot was built in 1990 to house the coaches. With railway privatisation, however, this depot and the responsibility for maintaining the Royal Train passed first to the French Alstom company, then to the American EWS company and finally to Deutsche Bahn (the German State Railway). Economies have been imposed in recent years and the number of coaches in the Royal Train has been reduced from 12 to six with consequent staff savings. In 1995 two diesel locomotives, Nos. 47798 *Prince William* and 47799 *Prince Henry*, painted in the Royal maroon livery, were allocated to haul the Royal Train when required. These were later replaced by two more modern locomotives and the Queen performed the naming ceremony of one, No. 67005 *Queen's Messenger* at Euston in 2000.

To return to 2002, as part of the Golden Jubilee celebrations, HM The Queen, accompanied by the Duke of Edinburgh, made a series of seven trips, using the Royal Train, visiting all parts of England, Scotland and Wales, between April and August. Mike travelled on all of these and was able to record them and give us a wonderful impression of life on the train. From the many excellent photographs which we saw on the screen, Mike was able to present the Queen with an album of 100 of them and was also allowed to publish a souvenir book. The only areas which were out of bounds for photography were the royal couple's sleeping compartments.

The complement of staff on board totalled 16, including security officers and catering staff, under the supervision of the long-serving Royal Train Officer, Mr Norman Pattenden (who was to retire at the end of 2004). The tour involved several thousand miles of rail travel with the Royal party mainly living on board between engagements. Mick recalled that there had only been one incident when an errant golf ball smashed a window of a support coach as the train was passing a golf course near Birmingham.

The Queen's first use of the Royal train after her succession had been on Coronation Day in 1953 when it had been hauled by a 'Schools' Class 4-4-0 No. 30915 *Brighton*. Exceptionally the train had been used in 1997 to convey some of the principal mourners at the funeral of Princess Diana, and again to transport wives of the heads of state attending the G7 conference in May 1998 - albeit without the Queen's and Duke of Edinburgh's saloons on that occasion.

On the fourth trip of the Golden Jubilee tour, to Wales, the train was hauled for part of the journey by a steam locomotive, the LMS Pacific No. 6233 *Duchess of Sutherland* - the first time that the Queen had travelled behind a main line steam engine since 1962. Also, before the train left Euston on this tour, the 160th anniversary of Queen Victoria's first rail journey was commemorated. Today, the Royal train is used about a dozen times a year - mainly by Prince Charles.

Accompanied by a series of fascinating and sometimes amusing anecdotes, Mike gave us a presentation to remember and an appropriate vote of grateful thanks was given by Simon Kennedy.

## THE TRANS-SIBERIAN RAILWAY – Postscript

by Roy Kethro

For our first talk of the season by Christian Wolmar my old boss Andy Cope, who was a speaker back in 2014, came along as my guest. While working with the government run East Coast Main Line franchise, Andy had reason to visit the Hitachi factory in Japan to cast his eye over the new Inter City Express (IEP) passenger trains. Most people travelling to Japan would opt to fly but Andy and his wife decided it was an opportunity to travel by train from Yatton to Vladivostok experiencing first-hand the Trans-Siberian Express or *Rossiya* as it is known locally. He wrote a blog of their experience which can be Googled as <http://ruralridetoiiida.blogspot.co.uk/> should anyone be interested in reading more about this iconic journey.

Andy also pointed me in the direction of a related fly on the wall documentary series. Putting *Trans-Siberian Odyssey* in the search box of youtube.com brings up nine very entertaining half hour episodes showing life working on the *Rossiya* through the eyes of the train conductors.

## DEREK LAMPARD

We were saddened to learn that WRF member and former chairman Derek Lampard had passed away on Sunday 15 November. A full obituary will be included in the next newsletter.

## NEW MEMBERS

Please welcome the following who have recently joined:

|                               |                              |                            |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| John Barlow (Glastonbury)     | Tony Jepson (Wells)          | Mike Millward (Wells)      |
| Bruce Parkin (Emersons Green) | John Relton (Wells)          | Christopher Ridler (Wells) |
| Arthur Spain (Wells)          | Susan Stoodley (Glastonbury) | Terry Whitman (Wells)      |

## 2015–2016 PROGRAMME

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

|            |  |                           |
|------------|--|---------------------------|
| 8 December | AGM followed by Quiz, set by last year's winner,                         | Brian Neill               |
| 12 January | Members Memories of the Somerset & Dorset<br>followed by: In Control, by | Roy Kethro                |
| 9 February | The Regional Railways Story *  | Alex Green                |
| 8 March    | S&D – The End of the Line  | Mike Beale and Bob Bunyar |
| 12 April   | Rail Resurgence in the West Country                                      | Nigel Bray                |
| 10 May     | Swindon Works: Part II   | Brian Arman               |

\* Note change.

## AND FINALLY

Did you know that numerically the largest class of steam locomotive in Britain was the London & North Western Railway's DX class 0-6-0, of which 943 were constructed, including 86 for the Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway. Worldwide, the record is held by the Russian E class 0-10-0 with around 11,000 manufactured both in Russia and other countries such as Czechoslovakia, Germany, Sweden, Hungary and Poland.