

JOURNAL

- of the -

RAILWAY AND CANAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Vol. 1. No. 2.

April, 1955.

NEWS FROM THE SOCIETYThe Journal

The first issue of the Journal was well received and a number of favourable comments was expressed. Number two has been increased in size and several articles have been included. Short original articles by members, on any topic falling within the scope of the Society's objects, will be welcomed, and for the time being contributions should be sent to the Hon. Secretary, pending the appointment of an Hon. Editor.

Hon. Secretary's Notes

Membership figures continue to increase steadily, and the Society now has 87 paid up members, a most encouraging sign.

The Hon. Secretary has recently moved to Bradford in connection with his business, and will be taking up permanent residence there soon. Meanwhile, he will continue to deal with Society matters at weekends from his present home address, and trusts that members will bear with any temporary delay in dealing with correspondence, which may arise as a result. Members will be advised of a change of address when it occurs.

Local Groups

The time has not yet come to consider the formation of branches of the Society. The Council proposes, however, to divide the country into a number of areas, small enough to make it possible for members living in them to meet together from time to time. It is thought that such meetings, held informally, perhaps every three months, over lunch or tea, will be of use and interest, especially to those members who are beginning historical research and will be in need of advice and help. Whenever the Society has more than six or seven members in any area, therefore, the Council will suggest to one of them that he act as a convenor of quarterly meetings of members in his area, to be conducted in whichever way suits them best. Convenors will be asked to send a short note to the Hon. Secretary periodically, reporting on the meetings held.

The suggested areas and centres have not finally been arranged, but they will be published in the July Journal.

Gifts to the Society

Since publication of the last Journal, the following have been gratefully received and acknowledged.

"List of Railway Plans in Cheshire Records Office", from the Cheshire County Archivist; "The Bexley Heath Railway", by E. A. Course,

from the author; "Chronology of the Railways of Lancashire, 1828 to 1939", by M. D. Greville, from the author; "Notes on the Annual Report and Accounts of the British Transport Commission, 1953" and "Modernisation and Re-equipment of British Railways", both from the Public Relations Officer, British Transport Commission.

Membership List

The following amendments are made to the January, 1955, List of Members.

Correction: Brown, J. L., address should read - Churchward, Bromsgrove Road, Romsley, Birmingham.

Changes of Address: Edwards, J.P., National Provincial Bank, Ltd., 51 Church Street, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffs.

New Members

The following new members have been elected, up to 31st March, 1955.

Bray, J., 38 Whernside Road, Woodthorpe, Nottingham.

Cockman, F. G., 8 Balmoral Avenue, Bedford.

Dunkley, H. R., 94 Belgrave Road, Wyken, Coventry.

Hales, L., M.Y. "Aloha", Mill Lane, Thurmaston, Leicester.

Hanson, J., 116 Greatfield Road, Kidderminster, Worcs.

Hartigan, J. M., Lavendon Grange, Olney, Bucks.

Pollins, H., 552 High Road, Leytonstone, London, E.11.

Reading, M.P.N., 40 Reddings Road, Mosley, Birmingham, 13.

Stearn, W.A., 11 Luccombe Place, Shirley, Southampton.

Watson, F.G.M., 12A Wilson House, Albion Avenue, London, S.W.8.

Webb, G.N., 93 Kenwyn Drive, Cricklewood, London, N.W. 2.

Wheler, G.H.H. Otterden Place, Faversham, Kent.

Forthcoming Events

Annual General Meeting. All members will have received notices of the Annual General Meeting and gathering to be held at Leicester during the weekend April 30th and May 1st. It is hoped that as many members as possible will be able to attend and with this in mind a full programme has been arranged. Members are reminded that in order to secure places on the outings and for Saturday tea, booking forms should be in the Hon. Secretary's hands not later than April 16th, accompanied by remittances.

North Western Meeting. It has been suggested that a meeting for north western members be held in June. Final details have not yet been settled, and members will be advised by circular.

Liverpool Manchester Ry. and Sankey Brook Navigation Anniversaries. The arrangements mentioned in the January Journal are not yet complete, but it is hoped that it will be possible to hold these trips on the Saturday and Sunday of a weekend in September. Full details will be published in the July Journal.

Report on Visit to the Grand Junction Canal

On Saturday, 26th March, the Society organised its first outing, to Wolverton and Blisworth to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the opening of the Blisworth tunnel and of the whole line of the Grand Junction Canal on 25th March, 1805.

The event was run in conjunction with many of the people of Blisworth, who themselves wished to celebrate the anniversary.

The party of 34 people met at Northampton. The first stop was at Cosgrove, where the junction of the Buckingham arm with the main line of the canal and the site of the Ouse locks were seen. Then we walked over the Wolverton embankment to inspect the iron trough aqueduct built by William Reynolds at Ketley, installed 1811, and still in good order. We went on to Newport Pagnell for a quick look at the old canal basin there, and for lunch to the Bull Hotel at Stony Stratford, where the opening of the tunnel was originally celebrated.

In the afternoon we drove to Stoke Bruerne and then followed the track of the tramroad that preceded the tunnel. At Blisworth the local people had organised a most interesting display of local photographs, plans and material about the canal, and gave us tea as well. At this point it began to rain, but with historical enthusiasm undiminished we went on to look at Blisworth wharf, and the site of the Northampton tramroad which connected that town to the canal until the canal branch was built. Finally, we climbed into a boat kindly provided by British Transport Waterways, and went through the Blisworth tunnel to Stoke Bruerne. This tunnel is 3080 yards long, the longest canal tunnel still in active use. It must have provided quite a thrill for those in the party who were going through for the first time, and it was added to by the pair of narrow boats which we met in the middle. From Stoke Bruerne we returned to Northampton.

The party was led by Mr. C. N. Hadlow of the engineering staff of British Transport Waterways, who also took part with Mr. George Freeston, of Blisworth, in the organisation of the exhibition. The Society is most grateful to these two gentlemen, to Mr. C. Saywood, Divisional Waterways Officer, South Eastern Division, who granted facilities, and to all those who organised the trip

E.C.R.H.

BOOK REVIEW

"The Bexley Heath Railway, 1883 - 1900", by E. A. Course.
(Woolwich & District Antiquarian Society, 6 Foxcroft Road, Woolwich,
London, S.E.18. Price, 2/6d.)

This is an offprint from vol. XXX of the Woolwich and District Antiquarian Society Proceedings, nicely produced with 2 illustrations; it is not dear at the price. The story of this suburban branch railway, promoted by local notables as an independent entity, and its inevitable progress into the somewhat coldly welcoming arms of the main-line company which many years later reaped the benefit of large traffics, is not unfamiliar near London, and there are examples elsewhere in the country. This example has been carefully studied and recorded, with a number of foot-notes indicating in a general way the sources of the information; and some pleasant recollections are recorded.

Unfortunately, a quick first reading, even by one who has no local knowledge, discloses a certain unevenness in the handling of the material.

The name of the place in the company's title is variously spelt in one and two words; the Acts conferring powers on the railway are not clearly set out (one is mentioned only in a footnote and some not at all); the Earl of St. Germans' title is consistently misspelt "St. Germaines"; Eltham Park station is shown on the sketch map as "Shooters Hill and Eltham Park (1908)", but appears in the text only as "Eltham Park"; there is no mention of the north curve at Crayford Creek, also shown on the map. There is much in the 12½ pages of text that is interesting, but one's confidence has been shaken.

R.M.R.

THIRD CLASS TRAVEL IN EARLY DAYS

1. The London and Birmingham Railway

By C. R. Clinker

Although the official announcement of the opening of the initial section of the London and Birmingham from Euston to Boxmoor on Thursday, July 20th, 1837, referred to first, second and third class accommodation on the trains, there seems to be no evidence that the humbler passengers were, in fact, provided for. Certainly subsequent advertisements of the extension to Tring, and later Denbigh Hall, do not refer to third class accommodation.

Conveyance of third class passengers on this line appears to have started on Monday, October 5th, 1840 - almost exactly two years after the throughout opening of the railway. The "Railway Times" of September 26th (at page 823) carried a London and Birmingham advertisement announcing new trains "for the conveyance of third class passengers (in open carriages), private carriages and horses "leaving London at 7.0 a.m. and Birmingham at 2.0 p.m. The down journey occupied 8½ hours and the up 8 hours, calling at all intermediate stations

The interesting point about the new trains is contained in a footnote "Ample time will be allowed to passengers for refreshment at the Roadstation, distant 60 miles from London". The stops were about 1½ hours, ample indeed! Wolverton had been the "refreshment station" for all trains since the throughout opening on September 17th, 1838. Can it be that the "matron or generalissima and seven very young ladies" at Wolverton were considered to be above serving third class passengers and, if so, is there another known instance of such class distinction? The segregation did not last long: the timetable dated June 1st, 1841, announced "refreshments at Wolverton", and the lengthy stops of the third class trains at Road had disappeared.

The possibility of error in the announcement seems to be precluded by mention of the distance from London and the fact that the advertised times clearly make no allowance for an extended stop at Wolverton. The London and Birmingham distance tables show that the old station at Road was 59m. 71ch. and the Wolverton station then in use 52m. 37ch. from Euston.

DICKENS AND COKEBy H. Chase

In the issue of Charles Dickens' magazine "Household Words" for December 1857 there appears an article entitled "Riding the Whirlwind" which describes a journey on the 8.30 p.m. mail train from London Bridge to Dover by a writer travelling on the engine footplate.

Among the more interesting points in this essay are:-

- (1) A description of the first-class carriages of that period "-----six chocolate-coloured cloth compartments, with white and blue binding, and wicker hat rail".
- (2) The "white telegraphic posts": this probably being an optical illusion due to the glare from the firebox.
- (3) The "partly opened doors of two glowing, ever-craving ovens ----- whose fiery hunger the stoker is constantly trying to satisfy with coke". This would seem to be an error, as Cudworth's twin firebox was designed specifically for burning coal, when coke was being abandoned as fuel for locomotives.
- (4) A reference to "the coke-ovens of Folkestone which remind one more of South Staffordshire than Kent". It would be interesting to know whether any record remains as to where exactly these coke-ovens were.

Regarding the essay itself, a popular writer of railway history has more than once referred to it in his works and has ascribed the journey to Dickens personally

This statement should be accepted with very great reserve, as it is highly improbable that he ever undertook the trip. Dickens was in the habit of commissioning the staff of his magazine to write articles of this nature, which were afterwards subjected to considerable blue-pencilling and revision; in fact alterations to the text were often made in Dickens' own words, which may have deluded the author ~~referred~~ to into the belief that the typical "Boz" touches were conclusive that the whole of the work was Dickens'.

The "Non-Such" edition of the "Letters" reveals absolutely no reference to any such journey, whereas had Dickens made it himself he would inevitably have dramatized it in his own characteristic manner, and Forster at least would have had a weightily disapproving comment, but as it is, there is no record of the matter anywhere.

WHY THE CAMBRIAN RAILWAYS DIRECTORS WERE ONCE ADMONISHEDBY THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONSPART 2By E. A. Wilson, M.A.

The first intimation of this completely new accusation came to Mr. Hood when he read the report of the proceedings in the local press. He naturally wished to have an opportunity of clearing himself of so serious a charge. As the Directors promised the Committee that they would grant ample facilities

for any of their servants to give evidence, he applied to the General Manager for permission to appear before the Committee and give his version of the events. No reply was received to this letter, so he sent a registered letter which received the same treatment. He wrote yet another registered letter asking that at least he should be allowed to defend himself in the local press. A short memorandum came back stating:

"I am in receipt of your letter of the 27th inst. There is nothing to correct, and I cannot consent to your communicating with the papers.

(Signed) J. Conacher"

Mr. Hood then approached two local members of Parliament, the Hon. George Kenyon and Mr. Stanley Leighton. As a result, Mr. Hood received a summons to appear before the Committee, where he stated his case.

On his return to Montgomery he received the following letter:

"I am directed by the Directors to inform you that this company have no further use for your services, and on handing over the keys and all other property of the Company, the bearer, Mr. Robert Jones, will pay you a month's wages in lieu of the usual notice, and will take charge of your station from today. The house must be vacated on the 10th proximo.

(Signed) J. Conacher,"

Throughout the whole of these happenings the high esteem in which Mr. Hood was held by those who knew him was shown in no uncertain manner. When he was transferred from Ellesmere to Montgomery, a petition was signed by the inhabitants of Ellesmere in an effort to retain him. On his dismissal from Montgomery the inhabitants of that town also rallied round this redoubtable protagonist of the rights of the individual in like manner. More remarkable was his immediate appointment to a position of trust in the Royal Welsh Warehouse at Newtown by Sir Pryce Pryce-Jones, the High Sheriff of Montgomeryshire.

In spite of the publicity and public support, Mr. Hood felt that his name had not been cleared of the original charge, and he asked the Directors to give him a hearing at Crewe. After keeping him waiting for six weeks they sent for him, admitting subsequently to the Select Committee that they had no intention of reinstating him, but wished to get all the information possible from him.

What had been a smouldering fire now blazed up into a conflagration. A once local incident now figured in the national press. Meetings were held in many towns; the Trade Unions and the Labour Party were loud in their condemnation of the "Cambrian tyranny".

Then Parliament stepped in. They considered there had been a "Breach of Privilege" committed by interference with a witness before their Select Committee. They ordered Mr. Conacher and three of the Cambrian Railways' Directors to appear before the Bar of the House of Commons. Here they were found guilty of a Breach

of Privilege and were sentenced to "admonition". After apologising for the wrongful dismissal of Mr. Hood, the Chambrian Directors were firmly "admonished" by the Speaker. So ended the case of one man against many.

Mr. Hood later came to live in Ellesmere where he served the community well, taking an active part in local administration. He died in 1920, but the name he vindicated is ably carried on by his son, Mr. "Tom" Hood, who also has a long career of public service to his credit. To him I express my thanks for information and also to Mr. C. P. Gasquione's book "The Story of the Cambrian".

(Concluded)

CROMFORD AND HIGH PEAK RAILWAY

There has long been some doubt as to the actual date on which working by locomotives was introduced on this railway.

A lengthy report on the subject (part of which is reproduced in the "Railway Times" of 6th February, 1841) appears in the "Derby Mercury" of Wednesday, 3rd February, 1841. From this, it is clear that locomotive working dates from about 20th January, 1841; the correspondent travelled with a steam-worked train on 27th January and he adds that the engine was at work throughout the week 25th to 30th January.

It may be of interest to record that an unusually detailed account of a journey from Whaley Bridge to Cromford on Saturday, 10th July, 1880 appears under the title "Over the High Peak Railway" in "In the Derbyshire Highlands" by Edward Bradbury, published by J. C. Bates of Buxton in 1881. This describes the incline working and other operating features at considerable length.

G. O. HOLT and C. R. CLINKER.