

April 2001

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Thoughts of Chairman Dell

With the risk of boring you, I must remind you all that the AGM is coming up fast and that we do have several vacancies and need nominations for the following: Vice Chairman, Treasurer and Council members. We have a candidate for Chairman and Ron Thorogood is prepared to stand as membership Secretary so whoever stands as treasurer will have some help if needed.

The weather has been simply awful but at least the rain has eased off and we all look forward to spring. The work parties at Colney Heath continue to make steady progress in spite of the bad conditions.

I went to the Brighton Show and had a good run down: 1 ½ hrs door to door. The return

journey was somewhat different. We left Brighton at 3.30pm to avoid the rush. All went well until we approached the Dartford Tunnel turn-off. The signs were for the central lane and then changed quickly to the nearside lane. Consequently we sailed right by the tunnel turn-off. There was nothing we could do but carry on and hope for the best. We went through Purley, Croydon, Streatham, Elephant and Castle and then across London Bridge. All this at the height of the rush hour. We never got above 10mph and after dropping off Sam Skuse I eventually arrived home at 8.30pm – a journey of five hours. When travelling with John Squire I sometimes take the mickey at the route that he takes but after the Brighton escapade I am now back as champion of how to loose your way!

We could do with more members to attend the Marine meetings. Bernard Lambert is doing a good job and the meetings are friendly affairs and full of interest. We are thinking of combining the Marine and Garden Railway into one meeting for both Sections. Perhaps we could call them Marine and Small Steam meetings. What do you think?

My rescue dog, Basher, had a stroke and I took him to the Vet expecting him to be put down. The Vet said that sometimes even with very old dogs they can recover. After two injections and a course of tablets he did recover. He lay flat out for four days and on the fifth day he sat up. On the next day he attempted to make his way to the garden and after falling over several times he made it and since then he has made splendid progress and is now back to normal thank goodness. A tough old boy. So we hope to get a few more miles out of him and to bring him over to Colney Heath which he loves.

Don't forget, put your name forward for nomination. You will probably enjoy yourself. Your Club needs you!

Several of our members are taking a trip to Exeter by steam train organised by Mike Foreman. Enjoy yourselves and have a nice trip.

Frank Dell

Marine Mutterings

Due to sickness we were unable to enjoy Ron Evans talk on submarines at our March meeting. At short notice Mike Collingwood continued to recount his experiences on the canals and John Caldwell gave an excellent talk on early voyages of exploration. A very pleasant evening and we may still get Ron Evans next season.

We now have two dates agreed for our Summer events – Sunday 22nd July and Sunday 16th September. It is intended that we invite some other Societies and run a steering regatta with the emphasis on enjoyment rather than fierce competition. Any ideas for other Summer events would still be very welcome. In the meantime don't forget to keep an eye on Dates for your Diary each month.

At Colney Heath the weather is still slowing things down but we have now finished the three proposed paved areas. We have also finished the paving round the launching pit and hope to have replaced the fencing and gate by the time you read this. Shelter building and lighting installation will have to encroach on the boating season.

Do not forget April Meeting at Colney Heath. Happy Boating

From Bernard Lambert

Loco Section News & Track Report

The Track Committee has recently concentrated its efforts on the new rule book for Colney Heath. This will incorporate the locomotive track running rules, procedure at the boating lake, rules for operating on the garden railway and will include sections covering special events and open days. As the document is in its final stages of preparation I hope to be able to release an early draft for discussion at the next Loco Meeting.

Roger Bell who's Loco Section reports are eagerly awaited in the News-Sheet was unable to attend last months meeting (Work in Progress) due to family illness. We wish the family well and hope a speedy recovery is on its way. A report on this meeting will be published next month.

Work is progressing well at Colney Heath despite the adverse and some times impossible weather conditions. The Ground Level and Garden Railway look set to be operational at the start of the running season if not completely finished. The boating lake is already looking smart with new pathed areas ready for their shelters. The raised track

repairs and maintenance is all but complete and will be in operable prior to the Easter opening. A lot of work has gone into preparing the coach for painting when the weather improves, large metal panels have been put at the rear of the coach sealing the damaged rear doors and refurbishing the front doors and panels has been completed successfully.

The old carriage shed is being modified to take the new carriages. This may not be complete by Easter but we hope to complete the work soon after.

Birthday party bookings are to be arranged this year by Frank Hills with a very busy programme already booked.

A special working party is to be arranged on the Saturday the weekend before Easter. We will have a skip to remove rubbish accumulated during the past season and winter working parties.

Finally, the Track Stewards list for the season will be published next month.

Don't forget there is no Loco Section Meeting in April since it would have fallen on Good Friday!

From Jim Macdonald

Slot Car News

Apart from club racing slot racers in the 60s and 70s were able to indulge their passion by racing on very large public tracks popularly known as raceways. These were in various locations around London and had a shop attached where pocket money could be exchanged for dreams of getting your cars to go faster. The most popular of these raceways (for those who lived in North London) was at Tottenham Model Raceways located at the bottom end of Tottenham High Road. Unfortunately, this and I suppose many others, ended up being demolished and turned into office blocks. With this in mind John Secchi has got all nostalgic and proposed a class of racing based on cars that ran at Tottenham up until the end of 1972.

With a set of regulations put together by himself and Ian Fisher we all set about to build cars for the inaugural race. Thirteen racers turned up for the event on March 7th. The cars fell into two camps; scratch-built anglewinder chassis and modern production chassis. There was a separate final for both classes. Winner of the Production Class was Paul Harwood from John Newton (who unfortunately slowed down because he thought he was leading) Mark Harwood and Dan Condon. In the Scratch-Built Class John Secchi won from myself, Ian and Tony Condon. This event proved to be immensely popular and the next event should be sometime in April.

Finally, welcome back to the Society to John Newton and I shall leave you with the calendar for April.

5th F1
12th Sports
19th 1/24th GP12
26th 1/24th Production

From Steve Francis

Richard Hooke

As many members will now know, sadly, one of the Club's long serving members, Dick Hooke died in February 2001. He was unwell for the last few years of his life but still enjoyed a good chat about one of his main interests, railways and in particular model engineering. Dick was also very much involved with other model engineering clubs around where he lived and for some time he played an active role with the Southern Federation of Model Engineering Societies: The result of this being that he was well known to many connected with societies spread over the country. I first got to know him many years ago when my mother worked with Connie, Dick's wife. I was invited to visit him as we shared a common interest in railways. Little did I realise at the time that this meeting would sow the seeds of what was to become some years later the same abiding interest in large-scale locomotive building. My interest in railways was at that time quite different and involved endless hours scanning over the Hornby or Peco Catalogues dreaming of model railway systems which I could never have afforded and even if I had been able to do so my bedroom would never have accommodated.

But back to that first meeting. I could have only been about 11 or so years old and I was greeted by a quietly spoken man who seemed and was very tall from where I was standing. After a brief chat I was asked if I would like to go up to the workshop? Looking skyward I nodded and so started my introduction into this world of engineering.

Dick's workshop was like many others FULL but on the bench covered with a sheet which he carefully removed was the project he was working on at that time, a 3 1/2 " gauge B17 locomotive. I was immediately enthralled by the complexity of the machine. Dick started to explain how the various parts had been constructed and I particularly remember him explaining how he had machined the coupling rods for the loco. As happened on many further occasions a couple of hours soon passed and we returned to the house for a cup of tea and a chat with Connie sitting in their front room. However, conversation never strayed very far away from some aspect of railways. Several more visits ensued and an invitation to an open day at his club track was accepted and my father duly obliged by providing the transport to get me there.

We arrived at Colney Heath. Dick met us at the gate and gave us the tour. I think this was probably what clinched it. I was still young and whilst very interested in what Dick was working on each time I visited as a youngster I could not even begin to contemplate the timescale for building something he worked to. I was more interested in instant modelling via the Hornby catalogue. But this was different. These locomotives were actually running on what was a very large railway. I had a great day with Dick and my father.

Then came the visit to his workshop when he announced that the locomotive, which seemed almost finished to me, his B17, was to be put aside for a while so that he could build what he referred to as a quickie. He went on to explain how he had watched for many years the N7 0-6-2 tanks pass to and fro on the railway in the valley below where he had lived for so many years. This was the branch line from Luton to Hatfield. No drawings were available for this new project in 5" gauge but it shouldn't take too long to build he said. Well as those who knew Dick will know I don't think he was capable of building a quickie. He certainly didn't appreciate his one big problem - an eye for the

smallest of details. This was to be the cause of what was to become not just an engineering project but one requiring a great deal of research involving a number of day trips with Connie to a surviving example being restored on a preserved railway with extensive use being made of both tape measure and camera. I sometimes wonder how he got away with it. I can just hear my wife's response to an offer of a similar day out.

I watched this locomotive grow over many years and marvelled at the intricacies and lengths he would go to achieve what he considered to be a satisfactory result. I can still remember him showing me as the locomotive neared completion a vertical revolving hand pump, which fitted in one of the side tanks. It must have taken a great many hours to not only design but build. It worked perfectly but wasn't used because of some minor detail and thus consigned to a box somewhere. Many in the club have been lucky enough to see the final result, which was first exhibited at the Model Engineer exhibition and was awarded a bronze medal.

Dick continued to build loco's until his health prevented it. As I started to build my first locomotive Dick was always willing to give advice and encouragement. He was not the sort of man to seek praise for his work but delighted in passing on the tricks of his trade. He did a great deal of good for the hobby behind the scenes and he will be greatly missed by all those who knew him well.

I am sure that his many friends both in the club and elsewhere will join with me in expressing our sympathy to his family.

Keith Hughes

Spotlight on George Case Part 2.....

As the war went on, George was promoted to relief telegraph boy; he also started doing night duties. Despite the difficult hours and long journeys, the job of relief telegraph boy was considered prestigious:

'In 1943, when I was seventeen, two of us were selected to train as signalmen. I knew a lot already from my days as a telegraph lad, but to be a full signalman you had to know a hell of a lot more, as I quickly discovered when I was sent to the signals training school at Hatfield.' This school was established in a former royal waiting room on one of the platforms, and the story of how it came to be there provides an interesting glimpse of the relationship between railways and royalty in former times.

Queen Victoria had often visited Hatfield, because it is the nearest station to Hatfield House, home of the Cecils. In order to accommodate the Queen, the platforms at Hatfield were built staggered – in other words, they are built in such a way that they do not face each other across the tracks in the normal way. This meant that when the royal train stopped at the station, there was no chance that another train could stop opposite the royal train, and so there was no risk of the Queen being ogled by her subjects. The Hatfield royal waiting room was kept in perfect order, but in fact it was never used – until 1943 when the national emergency persuaded officials that they'd better make some use of it. And so it became a signals school for young men like George.

'When my mate and I turned up at Hatfield we found we were joined by two trainee telegraph girls and three women training as guards; they were the first women ever to be trained in those jobs. Our training lasted three weeks; we were given a test to see if we

knew the rules and regulations, and then we were off to our own signalboxes. I was sent to Crews Hill on the Hertford Loop. Every frame – that’s the bit in the box that the levers are in – is different, so you had to be trained for the specific box you were going to work in. At Crews Hill it was what was called a porter signalman’s job: in other words it was a tiny station where you did a bit of everything, signals, booking clerk, station master, porter. In fact there wasn’t much signal work to be done, and you only really opened up the cabin to shorten the block or to perform shunting duties. The more block sections you had, the more trains there were, because there was only one train to a block. The idea was that so long as you knew there could only ever be one train in a block section, you knew the trains were being kept safely apart. But you always had to keep your eyes and ears open for things that weren’t quite right – as a train went by you’d always look at the back of it, for example, to make sure its tail lamp was there: if it wasn’t, it meant that half the train had got lost somewhere! That really did happen in the old days when wagons were loose coupled.

‘I had a bit of help at Crews Hill in the shape of a lad porter who had better remain nameless. But for the sake of the story let’s call him Monty. All I can say is, he was a real no-gooder; he was always late and he was always up to something. He was supposed to light the station’s oil lamps as well as the oil lamps in the signalbox when he arrived, so if he was late it was a real nuisance. One day I was up in the box when a young lad walked up to me and said “I’ve come for the oil. Is Monty about?”

“No,” I replied in complete bafflement.

“I’ve got the can,” he said and proceeded to wave it under my nose.

“What?” I said.

“Don’t you know the dodge here?” came the reply.

‘Well it turned out that this chap had been buying our lamp oil from Monty at 6d a go. I put a stop to it immediately.’

Crews Hill was situated in the middle of a large area of nurseries so much of the freight traffic was associated with this industry, and one of George’s most delightful stories arose as a result of this connection:

‘One morning the stationmaster, who looked after three stations including Crews Hill, turned up early. He asked me to stay behind and told me that the best kept station competition was to be judged in the area that day and he wanted to win the prize. There was £2 in it for the station master, 10s for me and my mate Joe Ward, five bob for the lad porter and a little something for the booking clerks; the total prize was a fiver.

‘Crews Hill had plenty of flowerbeds so we set about re-whitening the edges of these, and then the stationmaster sent us down to the nearest nursery, which backed on to the station, to get some plants that were in flower and would therefore look really good. We raced off with several big barrows, came back with the plants and buried them in the soil complete with their pots! Within a couple of hours the whole station was transformed – it looked absolutely beautiful. A little later the special train arrived with the district superintendent aboard. Our stationmaster began sucking up to him like mad – “Would you care for a piece of this cake? My wife made it this morning,” and suchlike. Anyway, the superintendent was impressed and said so. He got back on the train, having said we were in the running for the prize, and off he went. As soon as he was out of sight, the stationmaster shouted to us to get the barrows, dig up the plants, still in their pots, and take them straight back to the nursery! Disgraceful really, but we won first prize.

‘This particular stationmaster used to take vegetables and fruit from the owner of one

nursery if he failed to take delivery of his coal within a specified time; he should have been fined, really, but the stationmaster was happy to take the grub in lieu! When the circus trains used to stop at High Barnet this same stationmaster – then a lad, but his dad was stationmaster – used to charge the local kids a penny to watch the elephants being exercised; that’s how he got his nickname, Jumbo!’

Like most railwaymen, George continued to move around a great deal as he changed jobs. After two years at Crews Hill he went to Cuffley Station, then on to Palmers Green, then Enfield, all posts in the North London/Hertfordshire area. He got his first job on the main line in Hornsey Number One signalbox:

‘Hornsey was a bit scary at first because you were dealing with expresses. I’ll never forget the first day I spent in the box on my own – it was a hell of a responsibility because you didn’t get any second chances; what you did had to be spot on, or there could be a disaster. I spent three weeks in that box being trained; it was a bit like the system with drivers where they had to know the road, in other words the route, before they were allowed to drive the engine over it. With signals you had to know your box before they left you to get on with it. On the day you were finally to be tested the district inspector would come along, then the regular signalman would step back and say to you, “All right lad, get on with it!” The two of them then watched to see if you made any mistakes.

‘Each track had a bell telling you a train was coming and a bell telling you the train was going away, and there were eight bells at Hornsey, covering four sets of tracks. The bells were on a shelf above you and each one had a different tone, so you had to know which tone was which in order to answer. If you got the wrong bell, the man who’d sent you the signal would signal back with a sarcastic ring. I know it’s hard to imagine, but you really could ring the bell sarcastically; if I made a mistake and replied to the wrong signalbox when a bell rang, the returning signal would instantly make me aware that the other man was saying, “Come on you nit-wit get it right!” You didn’t want to let yourself down in front of people, so you very quickly got to know the sound of each bell!’

At peak periods George found that he was dashing around pulling levers for all he was worth, but there were slacker periods when he could heat up something to eat on the range at the back of the box. All signalmen cooked, and many would take the ingredients for a complete roast dinner if they were working on a Sunday. ‘I remember one old boy used to nip out of the box, run across to a nearby allotment and help himself to some onions which he then added to his meal,’ says George with a grin.

After Hornsey, George moved to Wood Green, to a box that overlooked the racecourse at Alexandra Palace: ‘That was great, because from my box I had a better view of the horses than anyone anywhere on the track itself. I’d often look out the window, too, and see my father, who was a guard, waving to me as his train went past, and all the drivers waved so you never felt too lonely. You could also telephone your mates in signalboxes up and down the line.’

A signalman who worked on what was known as a continuous cabin had to work for twenty days before he was allowed a day off, and this would include two twelve-hour Sunday shifts. Shifts were either 6pm-6am or 6am-6pm, so the hours were long. When the union negotiated a reduction in the hours from forty-eight to forty-six, more staff were needed to cover the rest-day relief.

The contingency that all railwaymen dreaded in the pre-electronic age was bad weather,

particularly fog, but for the signalman there were also the practical difficulties associated with relatively primitive equipment. 'If a signal lamp went out you could be in trouble,' remembers George. 'When they were trimmed and lit – they were all oil – they were supposed to last eight days, but through human error, badly trimmed wick or whatever, perhaps high winds, they might go out. This was particularly dangerous if a light went out on the gantry above the lines and the signalman might have to re-light it. Those rickety old gantries high above the rails were bloody awful places to be, I can tell you, and in bad weather (when you were most likely to have to go up there) they could be terrifying. I remember going up to light a lamp when there was a terrible gale blowing and it was pitch black. I didn't think I'd ever get down, and when I did, I hardly knew where I was. It was pitch black that night.'

'Fog was the biggest killer of all because fogs then, the old pea-soupers, would reduce visibility to a few feet. Everything slowed down and we'd bring the fog signalmen on.'

George continued as a signalman until 1955 but his obvious abilities, combined with the shortage of men in the years following the end of hostilities, meant he was promoted to assistant controller.

This was at Knebworth and I was eventually responsible for everything from King's Cross to Barkston in Lincolnshire. I had to know every inch of those 108 miles as well as the sections of loop line. A class five assistant controller, which was where I started, was at the bottom of the pile; you had to do all the record keeping, check that all the trains were running on time, stoke the fire in the office and make the tea for all the controllers.' By starting at the bottom as an assistant controller George lost £3 a week in wages, but the prospects were good. After four months he went back into the signal grade (his assistant controller job was., as a summer relief only). Soon after that he was sent to Peterborough which, in the 1950's was incredibly busy.

'The first thing I remember about that job was that I was put in charge of giving the drivers salt tablets! They were regulation issue because driving was such warm work, and losing too much salt through sweating is very bad for you. I also had to go to the drivers' barracks in the town and wake them up in the morning. I'd walk along in the dark with a list of names in my hand tapping on various windows with a long pole.'

By 1955 George was working as a full-time assistant controller, and by the 1960s he'd taken over as assistant stationmaster at King's Cross. 'I'd known I wanted that job years earlier when the assistant stationmaster at King's Cross had said to me, "Where's your hat?" I told him I didn't have one – I was a signalman at the time, and signalmen never did, but he obviously had no idea. Anyway he sent me home, so off I went. But halfway along the platform he called me back and told me to go to the stores and get something for my head. I went, picked up and scrubbed out the words "Ticket Collector" which were printed on the front of it. That assistant stationmaster then asked me what my ambition was, so I said I wanted to be an assistant stationmaster like him so I could boss people about the way he did. "Get out, you cheeky devil!" he replied. I did nearly twenty years as an assistant stationmaster, and for much of that time I was acting stationmaster. It was a great job.'

Signalboxes all disappeared in the late 1970's and early 1980's and these days trains are all monitored and controlled electronically; but George wouldn't have missed a minute of his early years: 'I'm glad I had my time working the old levers. The men I worked with both then and later on were a great bunch, and there were some very funny moments. I remember particularly Chitty Mason who kept the platforms tidy at Kings Cross. One day Princess Margaret had just arrived and was about to get off her train

when Chitty spotted a poodle using the red carpet in an unmentionable fashion outside her carriage. Quick as a flash he leapt over, picked up the poodle dropping and put it in his pocket. He walked calmly over to me and simply said “That was a near miss, gov!”

‘Perhaps the funniest thing in all my forty-three years’ service was my meeting with Anthony Barber when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer. He borrowed two bob from me, and would you believe it – some flippin’ chancellor – he never paid it back!’

The End

The opinions and views expressed in this News Sheet are not necessarily those of the Society or editor.

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