

The Chairman's Notes

A couple of weeks ago I spent the weekend in Wales on the occasion of the Centenary of the Welshpool & Llanfair Light Railway. Am I the only member who exchanges words with his spouse over navigation? After 35 years of marriage the lady wife and I still interpret maps in a totally different manner and on occasion this can lead to friction. However once communication was re-established we had an absolutely splendid weekend. I think that the ride on this super railway is the best in Wales. The countryside is not dramatic but quite beautiful. You can ride on the open balcony of the first coach just behind a loco climbing a 1 in 30 gradient over a mile, and on the way back a shorter gradient of 1 in 25. This is particularly good for white summer dresses - the smuts make a lovely pattern. But the sound of the engine working so hard makes it worth while.

As I type these brief notes with fingers sore from G1 track laying I am pleased to say that the redesigned garden railway layout is steadily nearing completion, although we still await some new track for the extra sidings. We have eased the curves on the new layout and are putting in two passing loops on the G1 outer line. There are also plans to construct a special circuit within the existing system dedicated to juniors with Mamod engines. This will be at the top end loop accessible over the wooden bridge. It will be more suitable for smaller drivers, the track in this part of the circuit being lower and uncluttered with any G1 rail. So to any dads/grandads out there: if you are willing to put in a couple of days work, we have the track and materials and we should be able to get this up and running soon. Just give me a call.

The raised track at Colney Heath is all up and running after our winter maintenance and in use on Easter Saturday a day earlier than usual for Master Jack Shawe's fourth birthday. It all ran very well and is a credit to all the hard work members have put in this winter.

Work continues on the ground level loop around the pond but it will be in use later this year.

I was en route to Wales during the general meeting this month but I have it on good authority that those who attended thoroughly enjoyed their evening with American railways. The diversity of our club is its strength.

John Squire

Treasurer Twittering (and Subs).

Your Treasurer is still busy finalising the books ready for the Auditors. I think that I will be able to report on a healthy year at the A.G.M.

Subs are also still rolling in nicely – thank you!

For those who have not yet paid I can accept payment at Finchley, Colney Heath and by post. If you post your subscription please send a stamped and self-addressed envelope if you want your membership card and/or receipt returned by post.

Bernard Lambert

I say, I say, I say

A set of jump-leads walks into a bar.
The barman says "I'll serve you, but don't start anything."

A sandwich walks into a bar.
The barman says "Sorry we don't serve food in here."

A dyslexic man walks into a bar.

A man walks into a bar with a roll of tarmac under his arm and says:
"Pint please, and one for the road."

Two aerials meet on a roof, fall in love, get married.
The ceremony was rubbish but the reception was brilliant.

Two cannibals are eating a clown.
One says to the other: "Does this taste funny to you?"

Supplied by Jim Robson

From the Membership Secretary

This month we have three new Members to welcome.

Victor Burgess, Eric Pell, and son Anthony as a junior, Derek Smith.

Bernard Lambert

Marine Section - 2003 Open Day.

The 2002 July Open Day was by far the most popular of the two we ran, so there is no hesitation in announcing the date for this year, Sunday 27th July 10:00 to 17:00. Please make a note and turn out boat in hand to welcome our visitors.

As usual there will be an organised event or two on the water, but the emphasis will definitely be on "fun" with time between taking you round the course for free sailing.

Do not have a boat? SORRY, no excuse as the very manoeuvrable Club Boat will be available to use free of any charge. No previous experience is necessary as there will be ample time to practice between now and July - just turn up at the lake any Sunday.

For those who may be visiting other clubs with a boating section during the season, please ask John or Bernard for an invitation to give to your hosts.

John Morgan

Marine Mutterings From Bernard Lambert

The only outstanding work is a bit of general tidying up and perhaps planting a few shrubs. We may have to re-sow the grass seed if our earlier efforts prove to have been premature.

Once again a big thank you to all who contributed to the winter work.

And finally don't forget the following dates:

Friday 16th. May 7 pm. Marine meeting at Colney Heath – members will be able to sail on the Lake and have tea and a chat by the Lakeside.

Sunday 25th. May 10am We host a 'Toy Boat Regatta' organized by the Vintage Model Yacht Group. This event should produce a fine display of vintage toy boats of all types.

Enjoy the boating.

Slot Car News **By Steve Francis**

Apologies for the non appearance of this article last month but what with pressure of work, art exhibitions and working on the improvements to the track and clubroom something had to take a back seat. Which did not give me the chance to congratulate Mark Harwood and family on the birth of a daughter last month. Also last month our very own Warmington-on-Sea team entered the 12hour race at Pavilly near Rouen, France. Four local teams, one team from Belgium and us consisting of John Secchi Bob Hallums and myself entered. We made our usual early start but this time without Mark as he was otherwise engaged (see above) and arrived about midday in Pavilly, a very nice small town just outside Rouen. To make us feel at home the French very kindly laid on some rain for us, which lasted all day.

We had only been there 15 minutes then there was a power failure in the building and Bob went off to find a Tabac. After an hour of changing the plugs on our controllers in the gloom we decided it was time for lunch and left the organisers to find a few

Euros for their electricity meter. Three hours later the power was restored and we could now see the clubroom had a 6 lane track, a 4 lane scalextric track, a separate room for race control, kitchen and plenty of room for slot boxes.

There was plenty of time for practise, as the race did not start until 11 pm. We qualified third with the two top French teams Hexagone and Grand Mare first and second. Bob started the race for us and was soon a few laps up. Hexagone started getting into their stride and overtook us but Grand Mare were having some early troubles and we were comfortably holding second after the first hour. After two hours we were back in front, Hexagones early charge having now faded and Grand Mare 40 laps behind us. The end of the third hour saw G.M. in front 17 laps ahead. By about 4am we had dropped 90 laps behind G.M. as a result of too large a diameter of tyre at the tyre stop, which was upsetting the handling of our car.

G.M. were now starting to have gear problems that was to affect them for the rest of the race. We were now only 20 laps behind with 3 hours to go and now using smaller tyres were catching fast. At 9 am we were 19 in front and with one hour to go they pulled back 3 laps. Then their gear let go again. Going into the last hour we were now 25 laps up and the G.M. car was still eating gears. When they run out of spares we gave them one of ours but their car chewed that as well. So, with a very trouble free race we ended up winning what amounted to a 12 hour sprint race by 29 laps or about 2 minutes on the road.

Back home the improvements are well under way. The track alterations are finished and the routing for the pick up braids has been completed. The track and barriers have been painted, light grey track surface and dark blue barriers. And very smart it looks too. We are running behind schedule but I think the end result will be worth it. Work on the new pit complex is also well under way. The buildings are having a new coat of paint and new adverts and there is enough room for a large static display of cars and the usual paraphernalia associated with a busy pits and paddock complex. The next major job will be laying the braid and wiring the track, which should take place over the next two weeks. With a bit of luck we should be up and running in May.

Tyttenhanger Gazette **by Roger Bell**

The April meeting was an invitation to our members to give a talk on a subject of their choosing. George Case spoke of his life on the railway, which would be too long to tell from start to finish as his career started as a porter signalman and progressed to top box, control office, Deputy Chief Controller Eastern Region and to the number two position at Kings Cross Station.

George spoke of his early life as a boy; he was born in Islington Road, Finsbury Park, then in 1930 moved to Chadwell Heath in Essex. He recalled his father pointing out

the R101 airship to him one day as it flew on its fated voyage to India. It crashed near Bauvais in France shortly after. In 1934 he moved to Potters Bar. The house cost £435 as an end of terrace. The ones in the middle were £10 cheaper. At the end of his garden were some allotments then the path that ran alongside the East coast main line. His grandfather was a platelayer, who lost his life in an accident in the fog at New Barnet Station. His father was a guard. He would be told of inaugural runs of locomotives and in 1936 watched the Royal Train as it passed from Sandringham to Kings Cross bearing the coffin of King George the fifth, the locomotive was 2847 Helmingham Hall. It passed by at 15 m.p.h. the coffin was draped in purple with his crown on top.

George had developed a fascination for signalling and learned how to use the telegraph with two instruments borrowed from the railway. He then managed to learn to be a train register boy in one of the boxes whilst still at school, he borrowed a peaked cap and used to bypass the barrier. Eventually his father had a visit from the school truant officer, which put a stop to that.

On 20th December 1940 he started work officially as a messenger boy. Often during the fog he would have to run across six lines whilst listening for trains. The chaps would take advantage of his naivety. One called 'Soapy' asked him to get a privilege ticket for him so that he could visit his sick aunt in Delhi. The white tickets were for travel on the railways own lines, so George wrote a pink one for travel to London Airport. When the boss Mr Keyes found the ticket on his desk he was not impressed and asked George to fetch Soapy immediately. Inside the office the table was banged and the air was blue. He was not teased so much after that.

After four months he worked as a signaller at Holloway Southbound on a three shift system, either with Charlie Day, Arthur Goddard or Bill Roberts. They were all in their 60s and looked after him as a son. If the bombing from the German aircraft got heavy usually about 7pm one of the chaps allowed him to take refuge at Caledonian Road underground station. There was a small air raid shelter in the box, so small he had to sit on the signaller's knee. As the bell went George would run out, answer the bell and handle the levers and rush back in the shelter.

The toilets in the boxes all had an Elsan right up to the 1970s. It was the boy's job to empty it and replenish the fluid. As there were seven sets of lines to cross with it, another character Chitty Mason would do it. Once he got his foot caught in a signal wire and the contents of the bucket went everywhere. His colleagues would shout out, 'Mason, I think you have still got one in your turn up'.

A bomb dropped with a broken fin and landed at an angle on the fast line and did not explode. This was on the 2pm to 10pm shift. The Royal Engineers said it was safe and began winding it out, meanwhile the signaller had sounded six bells, meaning line obstructed to the oncoming 3.05 Leeds express with fourteen coaches. It approached slowly labouring up the incline. All the top brass were there including Mr. Keyes, but someone had forgot to remove the detonators and they went off. The shock was amazing. Mr Keyes nearly died.

We thanked George for his talk, which included many other amusing yarns: unfortunately not enough room to mention them here.

Mike Ruffell joined what is now Tubelines in 1990. Tubelines is responsible for the maintenance of London Underground stock at Cockfosters. He is Engineering Support Manager and sorts out day-to-day engineering problems within the depot including design changes and the purchase of parts and machinery; he also arranges the service of equipment and the infrastructure.

The workshop was built at the Northern end of the Piccadilly line in 1933 for the stabling and maintenance of tube stock. Heavy overhauls are carried out every nine years and body lift offs every four and a half years. They undertake repairs to trains that have failed in service at the Northern end of the line. Many improvements have been made to the workshop; in 1989 a radio-controlled crane was installed which is capable of tandem lifts. All the work was done with spanners but air tools and cordless wrenches have sped things up. Pulse wrenches are now being used to reduce the possibility of operators 'white finger'.

We watched a video of the workshop and trains being worked on. The trains did not used to be painted and every few weeks the outsides were scrubbed with a detergent containing phosphoric acid then hosed down with cold water. During the period between acid washing they were washed with plain water. In 1997 the stock was painted and an automatic train wash installed (there are no power rails in the train wash). They are now washed in a biodegradable detergent and rinsed with softened water.

Work is carried out on trains outside and the lines are always electrified at 630 volts DC, there are safe areas to cross the rails but many choose to step over the rails elsewhere. Sometimes a rubber mat would be laid across the rail, one specially made for the job and the work done on that. We were shown men trying to separate a train in two and the coupling could not be released. This rarely happens and much work with crowbars would not free the mechanism. A train was needed for service so the three coaches at each end were removed and joined together. We watched the driver drive from the middle coach. As he could not see where he was going another man was on the telephone at the end of the train. It is procedure during movement that they keep talking to ensure the telephone is still working. The train is controlled with a dead mans handle, it is held down against a strong spring, movement towards the driver increases speed in increments, in the other direction applies the brake in two increments followed by a full application. Release of the lever applies the brake. The driver sometimes uses two hands to hold the lever down if his muscles get tired.

Views in the workshop showed bogies being worked on, and the body being lowered onto a central pin on each bogie. A side control unit stabilises the bogie and a shock absorber is fitted. A burnt out motor on a train back in the workshop at 8-30am can be replaced and back in service by midday. The motors on these trains, unlike those mentioned recently in the press, are designed so that they cannot fall off.

There are eighty seven and a half trains on the Piccadilly line. One train equals two units.

Mike was very knowledgeable and could have spoken for hours. We thanked him for an interesting insight into the work behind a service, that we take for granted, which

runs long hours every day, often heavily laden, running to the tightest schedule and without seconds to spare. Next time you travel on the Piccadilly line spare a thought for Mike and his team who help to make your journey possible.

Locomotive Section Meeting Friday 9th May 2003.

This will be your last chance this year to attend the Locomotive Section at Headquarters because the next few meetings will be held in the Barbeque Format at Colney Heath.

This meeting starting at 8.00pm will be mainly **Work in Progress** so please don't be shy. Bring something along and be prepared to talk about it for just a few minutes. Remember you will be in an encouraging and benign forum.

Teas by Frank. Gazette by Roger. Raffle by Ian and anyone else who would like to contribute.

Ian Johnston

A Birthday Mystery By Geoff Wren

Birthdays are often associated with pleasurable surprises, but on my 80th birthday last January something happened that more than surprised me; it completely mystified me because it seemed truly inexplicable. But it did start me thinking back to the 1950s.....

I was very fortunate in my younger days in experiencing footplate runs but really my only knack in getting these rides was that I simply asked the footplate crews if I could accompany them. This was the case I remember one year in the 1950s when my late wife, Jean, and I and my friend Charles and his wife, Rose, were staying on a farm at Mortehoe in Devon for a holiday.

Now, Mortehoe is a small settlement served by the old London and South Western branch from Barnstable to Ilfracombe, a line that became part of what later was known as *The Withered Arm*. I think this particular branch was the sleepest line on the Southern Region.

On one day, I remember, the girls wanted to sunbathe on the beach so Charles and I said we'd drop them there and we'd go on the train up Mortehoe bank. There's a station at the top – Mortehoe itself. We took the Barnstable train from there. We hadn't decided how far to go and we hadn't got any tickets. 'When we see a pub near a station, that's where we'll jump off!' I said. We were not disappointed and as we alighted a porter was on the platform so we enquired when the next train back to Mortehoe was due.

'Half past two,' he replied. 'The Atlantic Coast Express.'

‘That’ll do,’ I said.

After a very pleasant lunch we went back to the station to catch the 2.30. I said to Charles that I’d love to go up the bank and when we stopped at Croyde Bay I went up to the driver and asked him if there was any chance of going up the bank with him. ‘No, there’s too many people about.’ But after a short conversation about ‘steamers’ he relented, ‘Go on – hop on.’

The locomotive was Battle of Britain class number 34066 *Spitfire* with an air-smoothed casing. We had a good run and eventually stopped at Morteheo. ‘Are you getting off here?’ asked the driver. I said I was and he added, ‘I’m on this turn all week, so if you want to come again just come along.’

A few days later we were all having breakfast and deciding what to do that day. I asked the ladies if they would like to go into Barnstable to do some shopping! They thought this an excellent idea and we packed some food for a lunch afterwards on the beach. At about one o’clock, Charles looked at his watch, ‘I think it’s about time for your train, Geoff.’

‘Train – what train?’ enquired Jean.

‘Well – I’m going on the engine up the bank again.’

I stood on the station waiting and hoping it was the same driver as before. It was, and as the train slowed to a halt the cab door was opened and I hopped on. ‘Want to take her up the bank?’ the driver asked.

‘OK but can I whistle first because my friends are on that bridge?’

‘Go on.’ And so away we went for another interesting run although I can’t claim to have done much more than handle the regulator. The driver asked me if I knew what engine this was. I wasn’t quite sure what he meant because obviously it was *Spitfire* again. ‘It was driver True’s, the one that was in the Lewisham smash in 1957.’ He continued, ‘It was rebuilt in its original form and brought down to Exmouth shed and it’s now one of our best engines.’

At one point on Morteheo bank I asked the driver if he could make the reading on the steam chest pressure gauge equal the boiler pressure gauge reading. Without hesitation he shoved the regulator wide open and shoved her into full gear and there was just 10lb difference between the gauges! ‘There we are,’ he said. ‘Bulleid was no fool was he?’ At the top of the bank he said, ‘I’ll take over now because it drops down to Ilfracombe and the station is on a 200ft cliff!’

When we got down to Ilfracombe, Jean and the others soon arrived and we all ended up on the footplate in the station. As you can imagine, the driver was a smashing chap – a real West Country man, only too pleased to do all he could for us. ‘It’s nice to see people who are interested in our work,’ he said. What happy memories.

I met another smashing couple of fellows in 1959 when Jean and I were on the ten-thirty from Waterloo to Bournemouth. We were going to visit my sister in

Bournemouth. The train was headed by West Country Pacific number 34018 *Axminster*. We stopped at Southampton for water so I took the opportunity to have a few words with the driver. When I told him I was a member of the North London Society of Model Engineers and I was building a GN Atlantic, 'Hop on,' he said. As I climbed onto the engine the fireman came on the other side.

'Hello,' he said in a welcoming, cheerful voice. 'Are you coming with us?'

'Well the driver said I can.'

'Oh, you'll enjoy it. It's my last run as a fireman. I'm a passed driver now.'

As we bowled along making good progress with very smart running to Bournemouth, I learnt from the friendly fireman that his name was Clive and he too was interested in model engineering and was a member of SMEE. The driver's name was Gordon. The fireman had to unhook the train at Bournemouth and somehow I didn't get to thank him properly for the run although I had thanked the driver. I said to Jean afterwards that I'd like to drop him a line to thank him properly.

Next day I 'phoned Bill Carter who was the chairman of SMEE at the time. 'Oh,' he said. 'That's Clive Groome – he's a nutter! He lives and breathes locomotives. On his days off he goes with his mates on goods trains. He can't get enough of engines – he's got to be the most enthusiastic loco driver of all time.' Well I wrote to Clive and he replied with a very nice letter, which unfortunately I didn't keep.

Well, anyone today who is interested in steam railways does not need reminding who Clive Groome is. His name is now a household term for dedication to steam and he's famous for introducing the first driver and fireman training courses in the preservation period. He still runs these very popular courses called 'Footplate Days and Ways' at the Bluebell and I think other railways.

In recalling the footplate stories in Devon and Hampshire it's brought back so many happy memories that I've got carried away and almost forgotten to tell you about my mysterious birthday surprise, which was the reason I put pen to paper in the first place.

As I was saying at the beginning, on 18th January last I spent a very enjoyable evening entertaining family and friends to celebrate my 80th. During the evening I received many presents. I remember amongst all the good wishes and presents, at one point an envelope was pushed into my pocket. At the time I wasn't too sure who it came from and I didn't open it until next day.

Imagine my surprise when I did open it and saw the card inside. It was from Clive Groome! Inside, the message was:

Dear Geoffrey,

It is 44 years since you rode with 'Happy' Gordon and I on *Axminster* at the head of the 10.30 to Bournemouth (May 30th 1959) and it is my pleasure to wish you good health and happy memories on this your birthday.

Unfortunately I haven't a drawing of 34018 but this impression of a Merchant Navy on the embankment at Esher will please you I hope!

Best Wishes,
Clive Groome

Well - what a delightful surprise. But how did Clive know my address? It was 1959 when I last had contact with him. How did he know it was my birthday? How did he know what day it was that I'd had that footplate ride with him and 'Happy' Gordon? I spent a long time trying to unravel this mystery. Eventually I was able to contain my excitement enough to think more clearly and I worked out that it was one of two people who had put the card in my pocket the previous night. I rang my young friend, Colin Bainbridge, and he immediately came clean, admitting he was the mystery postman.

'But how?' I asked.

'Well you remember how you've told me in the past so many stories of the old days including the Clive Groome one. In the office where I work there's a lady colleague who I discovered is the partner of Clive. I told her your story and she of course told Clive.'

'But how did he know it was me on that actual date and exact train?'

'Well Clive being Clive kept a daily diary of his working life. In it he was able to find an entry for May 30th 1959 which read: Accompanied on the footplate by a man from the NLSME who is building an Atlantic!'

It's a small world isn't it? And what a great pleasure to receive such a special tribute from Clive. And what a special person he is too.

COLLETT'S FOLLY

By Peter Kearon

Part Three

And Afterwards

The years rolled on; by the middle of the 1960's the 56/6600 classes had largely been cut up with only a handful preserved. And how rarely do we hear of any example being steamed? Perhaps just as well for when I recall the 1000-odd journeys I made behind engines of this unsuitable class, they were suffering chronic backward and forward surging, while the front carriage was hunted from side to side by an unrestricted engine. Small wonder that local main line journeys between Cardiff and Newport were entrusted to 3700-class panniers which gave a smooth ride even when steamed at up to 60 miles per hour.

With the demise of these ill-fated radial tank engines there was surely no way that I could ever hear anything more about those problems of 40 years earlier. In fact it took a further 20 years before the fullest details of those events of 1924 were revealed; an unbelievable 63 years to be precise. In 1987, Eric Mountford, that most precise and thorough of all railway historians, author of that classic "Caerphilly Works 1901-1964" published his latest book "The Cardiff Railway". On April 26th of that year, by chance my birthday, Mr Mountford invited me to his home in Caerphilly and presented me with a copy, personally endorsed. It is before me now as I write these notes.

It was a wonderful opportunity to talk about all things Great Western and especially things, which had taken place in South Wales over the years. A golden opportunity to ask him if he knew anything about the disastrous introduction of the first 5600-class engines and I was fortunate to find in Mr Mountford probably the only person alive who could help me understand the background to those unhappy events of 1924.

It was immediately clear that those far-off happenings were well remembered and understood and without reference he told me what had happened. When the damaged 5600-class engine was hauled into Caerphilly Works, instructions were received from Swindon in the terse few words, "look into it". While the wheels were being removed and all the Barry instrumentation taken down and disposed of, Caerphilly drawing office set about its own investigation. "You must remember", Mr Mountford, told me, "The Rhymney was an unfashionable railway with need for few passenger engines but on the other hand it had vast experience in providing good reliable locomotives which could be worked over tight bends and steep gradients on often roughly laid track".

To decide whether a locomotive meets a set of parameters, calculations have been devised using a drawing of the wheel layout and superimposing it on a rail curvature plan. Bearing side clearances can then be increased until the wheel flanges remain within the gauging limit. When the 5600 layout was checked in this way it became clear to see that these engines were incapable of operating on the track curvatures commonly encountered on South Wales mineral lines.

The Rhymney in its own old-fashioned way had long learned the value, the necessity, of sufficient side clearance, more particularly you may think, when such long and unwieldy wheel centre dimensions were chosen so that wheels could be free to follow the track curvature. Primarily this boils down to machining axlebox flange thickness to allow the required wheel side movement. In turn the Rhymney considered that side rods must be flexible and specified that both vertical and horizontal hinged bearings should be provided. The horizontal hinge demanded an ungainly bossing to house the vertical pin; the vertical hinge was of a forked end connection used everywhere.

I well remember setting up these side rods which had split brass bearings secured by a block and wedge and trying to adjust bearing centres to tramells. The rods were laid out on a bench but the overall flexibility made it difficult to be sure of the rods straightness as it could, and did, move in all directions. The real proof came when the rods were offered up to the wheel crankpins using a gang of so-called helpers who were less than enthusiastic. The first side was fixed and would tolerate no misalignment. Our unwilling helpers were ready to denounce anything not making an

immediate fit, which could so easily be spoilt by the same helpers not keeping the rod quite straight. To be sure there was always a repair manager hovering and an immediate fit was often greeted with such praise as “You were lucky”, followed by clearances being checked by a feeler gauge just to see

There was thus no alternative but to reduce hugely axlebox flange thicknesses which on curved track was a necessity but on straight track produced a sloppy uncontrolled engine. The result was reminiscent of Doncaster practice where, it was said, bearing clearances of an A3 leaving the Crimpsall after a general repair were greater than the bearing clearances of a Castle entering Swindon for similar work. Those of us lucky to remember A3s running into Kings Cross out of Gasworks tunnel being pushed by 15 or so coaches will have heard bearing knocks more appropriately associated with a blacksmith’s anvil.

It seemed to me strange that the lowly Rhymney Railway could find the necessary modifications so promptly and suggested to Mr Mountford that surely Swindon had a similar system for checking an engine’s ability to run on tight curves. Almost certainly, but possibly, Swindon drawings were not quite extensive enough to show track curvatures of the severity, which they were now encountering for the first time. I asked about lines in Cornwall where some of the branches had similar minimum radius layouts. Quite likely, my mentor told me, but look at the locomotives designed by Churchward from 1906 onwards to operate these lines – the 4500-class prairie tanks with coupled wheels spaced at 5’-6” + 6’-0” and with both a pony and radial truck to guide the engine smoothly around those tight curves.

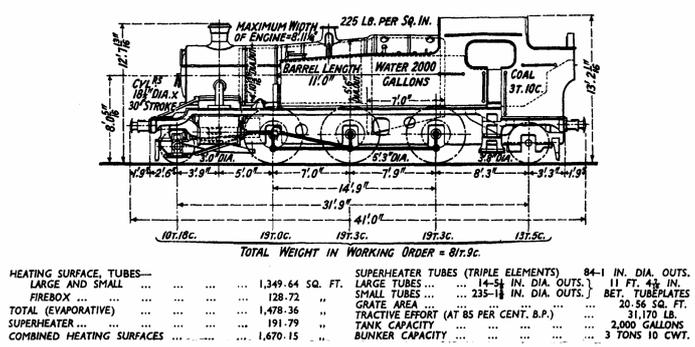
Whereas the 4500-class were ladylike little engines they were considerably less powerful than the new design and not really suitable for the rough and tumble of South Wales usage. Although two of the earlier 4400-class were used exclusively on the Bridgened-Porthcawl passenger service no 4500-class engine worked out of East South Wales sheds until late in life a few were equipped for Auto train working. On the other hand the large prairies of the modified (by Collett) 3100-class were in turn more powerful than the 5600-class while having a shorter wheelbase 7’-0” + 7’-9” which, with a pony and bogie truck, gave considerably greater flexibility. More and more I feel that it was folly for Collett to produce a radial tank when Churchward had shown the proper way forward. Perhaps the Barry shed foreman, who 60 years earlier had asked for a fleet of 3100-class prairie tanks, had been wise beyond his own understanding.

There remained just one more question to ask. Did someone at Caerphilly send a strong letter to Collett criticising Swindon design understanding? With a smile Mr Mountford rummaged through a file of correspondence and pulled out a yellowed sheet. This is the carbon copy of that letter he said, but before you read it, let me explain some background. The Rhymney and Barry Railways had been deadly enemies locked in a massive struggle to take away coal with scant regard from whose territory it came. Great animosity existed between these companies with the Taff Vale detested by both. Bitter disputes with no side giving way were sometimes taken to Parliament for a final decision. In age the Rhymney of 1854 was well senior to those parasitic newcomers from Barry (1889) and the very incompetence of the work done at Barry in wrongly setting up temperature readings gave a wonderful opening for the Rhymney to exploit. Barry had certainly laid themselves wide open to all

kinds of criticism; in reality the hatred held at Caerphilly for all things Swindon eclipsed their dislike for their former rivals. No mention was made of the Barry failings. Instead Swindon were held to blame.

Although penned in the historic style of letter writing used in the railways at that time and indeed even in post-war days the message was quite clear and to the point. I can recall something to the effect that Caerphilly was impressed with the new 5600-class, the first example of Swindon workmanship to reach these works and it is clear that these standards have made Great Western engines so outstanding on Great Western permanent way. Our South Wales track, apart from a few short sections of passenger line, is largely for mineral traffic and cannot accommodate engines with the tight clearances we see on this new class. It is surprising that Swindon has not appreciated the degree of side play, which must be provided to ensure that wheels can follow the track. Excessive side loading, of even the best bearing surface, will cause overheating and quickly. Included was a list of suggested axlebox dimensions and tolerances which must have made Swindon draughtsmen cringe. The letter was signed by a brave repair manager under that Dickensian ending “Your Humble and Obedient Servant”. Mr Mountford told me that no immediate reply was received but revised machine drawings were later sent to all company factories. Had I not seen this letter I would have held my cynical view that such acts of bravery are generally make-believe; its presentation totally exposed my lack of faith.

Eric Mountford’s death robbed us of his wonderful knowledge and experience. How grateful I am to have been given a chance to gain something special from him. Charles Collett, too, has passed away. He will be remembered with distinction for his work on Castles, Kings and Halls; it would be true to say that the 200 engines of his only design performed a lifetime of hard work, particularly during the war when their power and availability were taken to the limit. Purely in this writer’s opinion, Collett deserved every praise for his talented adaption of Churchward designs. But as a designer in his own right his single attempt at something new showed that he lacked the depth of understanding, which characterises truly great engineers.



The class that could have been, should have been. Based on Churchward’s 3100 series of 1906, engines which worked long lives as Severn Tunnel bankers, Collett increased the boiler pressure from 200 to 225 lb/in² while reducing the coupled wheel diameter from 5’-8” to 5’-3” which increased the nominal tractive effort to 31,170 lb; almost as much as the figure attributed to the Castle Class.

The End

Since publication of this serial, new and interesting information has come into Peter's hands concerning the 5600 class locomotives. Peter will present this in next month's News Sheet as a postscript. (Ed)

The views expressed in this News Sheet are not necessarily
those of the Chairman or Council of the NLSME