

Recollections of a Railway Enthusiast

Thomas L. Vardy

What is it that makes an enthusiast? My introduction into the world of steam began at an early age. In 1916 I was three years old and now I remember my father often sitting me on a wall overlooking fussy 0-4-0 locomotives of the Stocksbridge Railway Co manipulating wagons disposing semi-molten furnace refuse of the Samuel Fox Steelworks (*near Sheffield*). It was the highlight of my day; that is until he was mobilised. World War I needed him.

Early after the war I recall frequent railway journeys. My father was a schoolmaster, and an avid fisherman, allowing the family to take advantage of the holiday breaks. As the train was the only major means of transport I was delighted. At this time most of our Easters were spent at Brighton, summers at Aberdovey and autumns at Abermule. The attraction being sea bass fishing in the Dovey Estuary and salmon fishing in the River Severn. To Brighton the London journey was either Great Central Railway (GCR) or Midland (MR). My young age preferred the former, mainly because there were usually many more named engines to be seen though on reaching Marylebone a 4-4-2 was the norm. I can recall *Lady Farrington*, *Rt. Hon. Viscount Cross* and *Sir William Pollitt*. If it ever happened what a sight it would have been to see *Lady Farrington* coupled with *Lord Farrington*, a Valour class 4-6-0 at the head of a train! Another surprise was encountering electric trains with overhead catenary at Victoria station. The first I had seen.

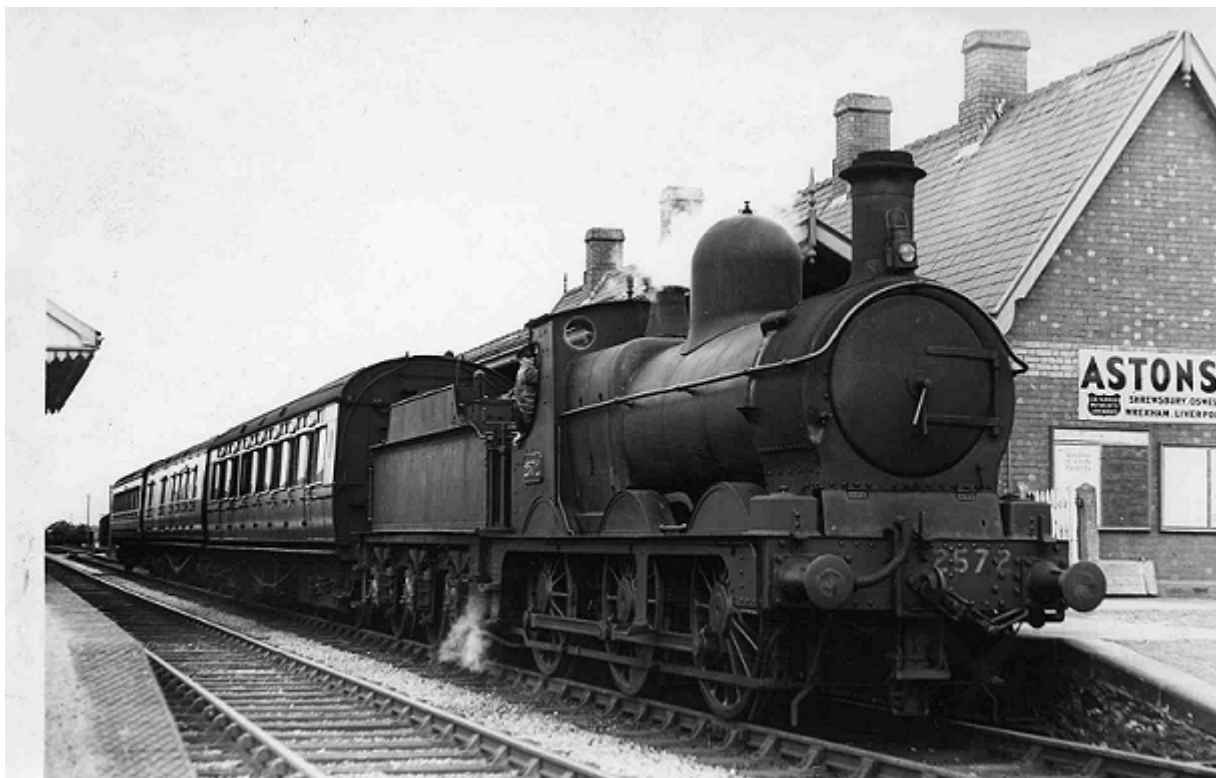


Former Great Central Railway 4-6-0 *Valour* in LNER livery at Nottingham Victoria station.

T.G. Hepburn/SLS Collection

To a youngster the more exciting journeys were to Aberdovey. We always travelled by night, Penistone to Manchester London Road. With a wait here of two hours the London & North Western Railway (LNWR) provided a plethora of named locomotives. Unusual names too. On to Whitchurch where our Cambrian train awaited us. A further change at Dovey Junction and a sleepy boy having stayed awake all night found Aberdovey a welcome sight.

During the month's holiday there was lots of railway interest; the 'main' line was quite busy



Dean Goods 0-6-0 2572 on a local passenger working, possibly at Aberdovey.

Ian Allan Library

and the siding down through the sandhills produced a daily pickup goods to marshal in the yard adjacent to the jetty. Here the rails were still in place but no longer used, merchant ships came no more. A Dean goods was allotted to this task. A favourite expedition was Mother (Father preferred fishing) taking me by train to Towyn, then the Talyllyn Railway to Abergynolwyn, walk the four miles to Corris to catch the Corris Railway to Machynlleth. Back by train to Aberdovey. What a splendid way to spend a day. Another regular outing was to Aberystwyth to take the Vale of Rheidol train to Devil's Bridge and back. Sometimes we crossed the estuary by boat catching the Aberystwyth train at Borth.



Talyllyn Railway *Dolgoch* at Abergynolwyn with a train for Tywyn on a pre World War II August day

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At Abermule there was little to watch other than the numerous 'Dukedogs', of which *Chough* and *Tre Pol & Pen* were the most consistent. The major attraction was the three mile branch line to Kerry. It was nearly always possible to beg a ride in the guards van and walk back. Again, Dean Goods locomotives predominated. Writing this causes me to wonder whether I have seen a GWR tank engine along the whole Cambrian line in Wales. I cannot recall one, Vale of Rheidol and Welshpool &

Llanfair Railways excepted.

Vale of Rheidol 2-6-2T No.7 *Owain Glyndŵr* pausing at Aberffwd to take on water for the rest of the climb to Devil's Bridge, 20 July 1967.

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In 1923 I won a scholarship to attend a school in Sheffield which meant daily travel: again the train being chosen. Still the GCR. It meant catching the 8.10am at Deepcar station, necessitating a walk of three miles each morning or use the alternative.. Many of the Fox Works employees travelled by train to Deepcar and the Stocksbridge Railway provided a train to meet them. It left before 7am, I was privileged to use this but it meant a long wait at Deepcar. I believe the name of the usual locomotive was *Jennifer* and was the one purchased for heritage preservation. Whether it was ever restored I do not know.



The restored Hudswell Clarke 0-6-0T *Jennifer* at Garth y Dwr on the Llangollen Railway, 25 November 2008. Built in 1942 and becoming No.20 of S. Fox & Co Ltd of Stocksbridge, near Sheffield. Came to Llangollen Railway in 2002 for restoration. Plates on tank side refer to S. Fox & Co Ltd with nameplates still to be attached to cabsides. Loco has been on loan to Colne Valley and Gwili Railways in recent years.

S.G. Jones

I have a memory lapse. In the mid 1920s my school sponsored a trip to Paris. I have no recollection of the travel arrangements involved, except when staying overnight in London I introduced a chum to the delights of the Underground. A penny ticket each enabled us to explore its many routes for the entire evening. One memory I hope I shall never forget is in the summer

of 1922 standing on a platform at Newark GNR station awaiting expectantly the arrival of our train. My father's school team had been playing a match. To my surprise the engine was the largest I had ever seen. It was resplendent in all its GNR glory, *Sir Frederick Banbury*. I now realise it would have been recently out-shopped and on running in turns. It took us to Retford where we changed for the Sheffield train.



A3 Pacific 60102 *Sir Frederick Banbury* at Grantham shed, May 1961.

Ian Allan Library

1924 was the year of the Wembley Exhibition. My parents realised that it was essential to take me to view the engines. Of course *Flying Scotsman*, the subsequent locomotive to *Sir Frederick*, together with *Caerphilly Castle* won the day. Although there were other ones they could not have been impressive. I do recall the Metropolitan electric and at that time it raised little interest.



4472 *Flying Scotsman*.

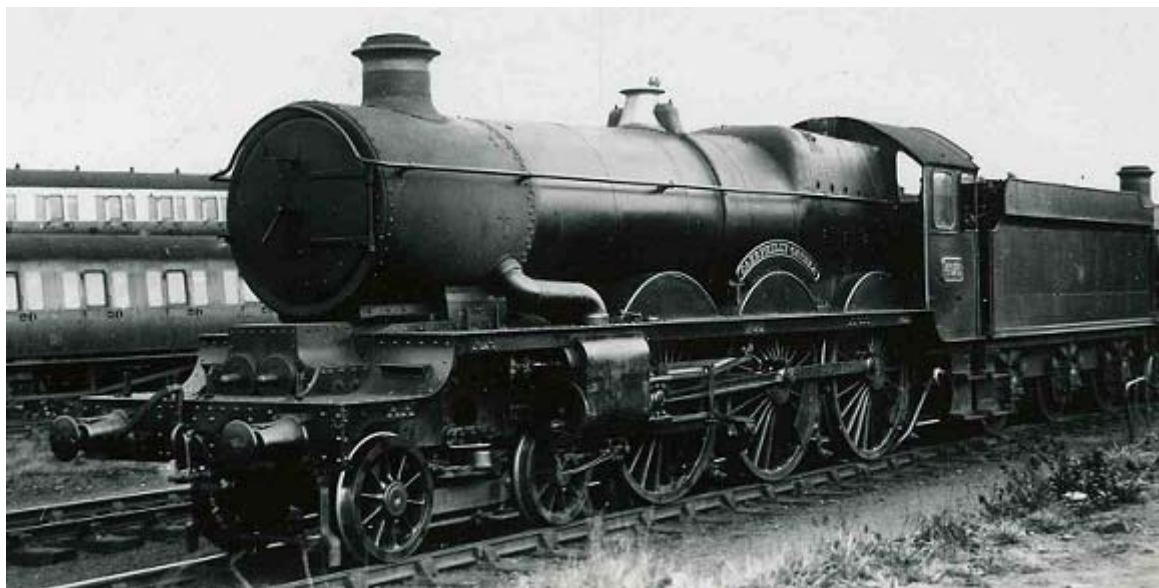
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In the latter 1920s my father drove on occasional weekends to fish at Tydd on the Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire border. It was here that I was introduced to the Midland & Great Northern Railway. It was stimulating to ride on as it differed

from other major lines. The engines appeared to be of Midland origin whilst the little six wheeled coaching stock suggested GNR. Surely it should have been the other way round.

The 1930s were still train productive. The family had moved to Rotherham and I was

studying at Sheffield University. Naturally the train was the opted form of transport though the tramcar offered better service. The daily commute continued for a year or so until the family moved to the Huddersfield area and it continued from there. A previous article was published in the 'Journal' concerning this so I will not repeat.



The first Castle class locomotive, 4073 *Caerphilly Castle* at Tyseley, 18 April 1936.

SLS Collection

The Huddersfield journeying continued until 1936, the year I gained employment in London, and the opportunity to join the SLS. I was 'spotting' on a platform on Willesden station when a gentleman, I forget his name, told me of the Society and asked if I would like to become a member. I gave him my particulars and was told I would be contacted in due course. Later, I was interviewed at my digs by C. Herbert and was accepted. I now could attend the monthly meetings though no longer at Kings Cross station but at various locations until finalising at Addison Road. It was the start of a happy association. The Society was active most weekends. Lots of shed visits and, weather permitting, frequent line side observations. Swindon Works was not forgotten. There were also four day summer tours until the commencement of war stopped them. In 1937 Scotland was visited, a circular tour; Perth, Inverness, Kyle of Localsh etc. On one of the trains C. Hamilton Ellis was noted but he requested the privacy of his compartment. In 1938 it was Ireland. Pleasant trips indeed.

Former Metropolitan Railway electric locomotive No.3 *Sir Ralph Verney* on an empty stock working at Neasden, 9 June 1951.

SLS Library

Mention of Scotland reminds me of being fortunate enough to experience the 'Thames Clyde Express' to Glasgow and back. I was a delegate at the University celebrations. The same year I was also a member of a party



of civil engineering students touring Scotland on a study session. One of the projects was walking across the Forth Bridge. I will not forget this because on the way I noticed a series of

open metal trap doors. On inspection they led down to a double plank maintenance walkway suspended from above and protected by side ropes. Being a smart Aleck I visualised this as a means to get ahead of the party and greet it catching up. All went well for about 300 yards when suddenly the sidewall supports disappeared leaving only bare planks ahead. The water looked a long way below and it was a scared fellow that scuttled back to the nearest exit.



Peppercorn A2 Pacific 60527 *Sun Chariot* crossing the Forth Bridge with an express.

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World War II curbed Society activities and they ceased for me on enlisting in the Royal Air Force. Thinking back what a privilege and pleasure it had been being in the company, although junior in capacity, of many of our prominent members. Names come to mind such as J.N.Maskelyne, R.A.H. Weight, W. Beckerlegge, P.M. Kalla Bishop, H.C. Casserley, W.A. Camwell and many more worthy of mention.

Late in 1946 I was finally demobilised having served at the end of the war in Europe, the Middle East, Africa and as far as India flying support. I returned to London though not too actively in the Society. In 1947 marriage intervened. The society had to rejuvenate too. The railways were struggling to return to normality having been completely run down by the war. Shed visits seemed to be no longer welcomed as they were before. Rationing was much in evidence and this contributed to our emigrating from Britain to Canada. The reason being my long association with the country. Having failed my flying tests I was told that I would make a better navigator than a pilot. I was sent to Canada to train for six months in Manitoba under the Commonwealth scheme. After which I spent eight months navigating bombers across the Atlantic to England; living in Montreal between trips. It was then time to return to prepare for paratroop dropping and glider towing for D-Day and the European theatre. It was a surprise to

learn that our plane was needed to provide support to Canadian troops exercising under severe weather conditions in the far North. I remember our leaving, it was New Year's Day 1945. We were stationed at Prince Albert for three months and then invited to visit several military establishments in the USA to demonstrate English techniques. It is obvious why we chose Canada, it was like a second home to me.

We said goodbye to England in 1949, arriving in Vancouver after sailing through the Panama Canal. In Canada railways were of interest but not to the same extent as before. Steam had already disappeared with the exception of Canadian Pacific Railway's Hudson 4-6-4 2860 sitting rusting and unattended at the bottom of a yard. Lest I forget, my English railway association I kept in touch via the 'Journal' and many other media publications. Also British Railways had an office in Vancouver, a friendly one too.



Royal Hudson 4-6-4 2857 on Milton Hill near Campbellville, 3 September 1954. In the rake of coaches are two Budd dayliner rail cars being used as coaches.

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All was not lost. I was fortunate to become a major contributor to the resurrection of *Dunrobin*, the Duke of Sutherland's 0-4-4T locomotive which had been purchased, together with its small saloon, and been brought to Canada by a Victoria businessman in 1965. The locomotive was exhibited in a shop window in a major city street and after a few months the ownership went broke, necessitating its sale by auction. Fortunately the Provincial Government purchased it for \$15,000 hoping it could be turned into a tourist attraction. It was handed to Bob Swanson, the government chief engineer, to make it fully steamworthy again. My share was to provide the funding. The repair was carried out in New Westminster. The small saloon was considered

unsuitable for tourism and a larger coach was needed. I negotiated with British Rail in 1966 to purchase a more suitable vehicle. The only one offered was Ocean Saloon No.9111 built by the GWR for first class traffic. Having only 29 seats the price had been reduced to £1,000 which would allow the removal of chairs for better accommodation substitution. Freight charges were £2,000 making an expensive and unattractive proposition. The deal was off.

Eventually *Dunrobin* was in steam again and running took place on British Columbia Electric Railway lines. Later it toured British Columbia and finally ended, in 1968, at Fort Steele where it operated around a circular type track. Here, a suitable coach, British Rail E3733, purchased in 1968 for approximately £2,500, joined it. The seating capacity was 48. Because of retirement I lost touch with the locomotive though I remember reading of its excursion from Fort Steele to San Francisco to a Railway Exposition where it was a great success with the US public; it was considered cute.



Dunrobin at Fort Steele, Canada. This 0-4-4T locomotive was built by Sharp Stewart in 1895 for the Duke of Sutherland to haul his private train at Dunrobin Castle, Scotland and did so until c1920. After a period on display the locomotive and carriage were exported to Canada in 1965 where it remained in operation until 2005. After negotiations the locomotive and its private saloon was bought by Beamish Museum, Co. Durham in December 2010 and returned to England in May 2011.

R. Whetham

I had never lost my desire to ride English trains again. This I could do when attending funerals of my mother and father in 1966 and 1968. Because of their nature visits had to be short ones but there was an opportunity to travel to Golspie and experience the local feeling for *Dunrobin* and its history. Also I was able to travel on 'The Master Cutler' and pleased to find that the locomotive was *Falcon*. These visits were the first chance to see and ride behind diesels in England. I am not a convert, I still prefer steam.

In 1971 I attended the National Model Railway Convention held in London. This was my

introduction to the newly instituted British Rail pass. The cost was approximately £25 for a month's unrestricted train travel and had to be acquired abroad. This allowed bed and breakfast in Brighton instead of an expensive London hotel together with the added pleasure of daily train rides. The convention lasted a week and with my desire to visit as many heritage steam railways as possible I only managed 6,482 miles of travel. 1975 was a better year. It was the 150th anniversary of the opening of the Stockton & Darlington Railway, long to be remembered. A total of 9,696 miles was managed.

From 1975 onwards I took a month's holiday in the UK each year until 1998., with the exception of 1982. For simplification the mileages travelled during this period ranged from a low of 8,308 miles to a high of 14,410 miles. For five of those years a week of Irish railways was included and those in the Isle of Man were not overlooked. In 1986 I also added 14,669 kilometres in New Zealand.

Mainline steam excursions were managed; a notable one being the 'Centenary Express' in 1979, *King George V* heading it from Hereford to Shrewsbury. In the earlier years, because of mail distribution, night trains were prevalent and I made good use of these. On one occasion travelling to Stockport to catch the York to Aberystwyth service, my train was delayed and I had to watch my connection draw out of the opposite platform. I waved, the guard would not stop the train and I was stranded. A young porter arranged, by telephone, for the next parcels train to stop and pick me up. I rode in the cab of a Class 86 electric locomotive to Crewe. The swaying and bumping was unbelievable, almost as bad as the time I rode on the footplate of a River class 2-6-0 from Belfast to Portrush in 1937.



The pioneer King class locomotive, 6000 *King George V*, outside Shrewsbury station on Saturday 15 September 1979 after hauling the 'Centenary Express' organized by Travellers Fair from Hereford to Shrewsbury where it terminated. The train, consisting of historic catering vehicles, originated from Marylebone. The fare included full meals and passenger return to London by any suitable train. The locomotive was snapped from a passing train as it was being watered and serviced.

Thomas L. Vardy

Its time for closure. I do so with no apology for the many possible errors the purist may find. As headed, they are recollections, unedited and un-researched with the exception of the copied mileages and the *Dunrobin* coaches information. Long live the Society!