

DECEMBER 1996

A slide show, which incorporated over 200 photographs of steam in action on the BR main line, was screened by enthusiast and photographer Mr Trevor Owen. Most of these historic shots were captured in either the late 1950s or the period leading up to the final elimination of steam workings on British Rail in the summer of 1968. Mr Owen will be known by many steam-age enthusiasts as he has had many of his excellent photographs reproduced in a number of railway albums over the past two decades.

The show featured ex-LMS locomotive classes including Duchess Pacifics, Princess Royals, Jubilees, Patriots, and Royal Scots, some of which were of the unrebuilt variety, at the head of top-link express services. Special trains featured too, especially when the various cup finals were staged at Wembley Stadium. On these occasions, additional trains were run which produced some unusual sights. Interestingly, a number of these action pictures had been recorded at locations where, unfortunately, it would be impossible to obtain a similar result nowadays, even if there were still steam workings there. The reason for this is because there has been an enormous natural growth of trees and bushes which flank the edges of the railway as well as constructions which have been purposely built.

Although much of the night was associated with trains running on the London Midland Region, there were forays into Scotland and Wales, the latter picturing a great deal of the ex-Cambrian Railway lines. Due to Mr Owen's foresight, future generations will be able to see some of the interesting workings he had captured on film and the way in which the railways played such an important role in the transport of both passengers and freight.

The highlight of the evening was after the interval, when about 20 slides showing the brewery railways of Burton were screened, and it is safe to say that the majority of these had not been seen before. One picture in particular was very interesting indeed, this being the signal box at High Street Crossing, which was situated near to the *'Burton Mail'* office. The photograph actually exposed the box as being unique. In fact, the box had been constructed much narrower at one end than its other end, due to the signal box's location.

John Tuffs

NOVEMBER 1996

Dr Les Nixon, a well-known and respected railway photographer entertained members with an excellent slide presentation entitled "A Railway Enthusiast in the Tropics". This was a superb show with Dr Nixon excelling in his narrating skills to entertain the audience with some very witty remarks to bring about an abundance of regular laughter, even though not a single train was shown during the first twenty or so slides he presented.

With the exception of an intentional interloper, all the photographs were shot on the island of Ceylon, now referred to as Sri Lanka, during Dr Nixon's two-and-a-half year stay there from 1972. One of many interesting comments he made was that even before making his outward journey he had the task of working out how much photographic film would be needed for the duration of his stay. At the end, he had not exhausted his limited supply and therefore had not needed to make arrangements for more to be dispatched.

A number of his photographs were taken at some beautiful locations where the countryside was completely unspoilt at the time. Needless to say, he was very careful not to give too much away and identify these remote spots; otherwise the graceful scene would likely be spoilt by an influx of visitors. It certainly appeared from his selection that the majority of railway operations in Sri Lanka consisted of steam traction, but there were occasional diesels which appeared from time to time on either standard gauge or narrow gauge lines.

As in many countries, the railways in Sri Lanka have been subject to changes since the early 1970s as Dr Nixon was to find out when he revisited the country in 1991 - nearly 20 years since his extended stay. Then he found that a once a tranquil scene of a rural railway station had been transformed into a bustling bus terminus. The tracks had been completely ripped up and some of the associated infrastructure had been dismantled making the site more in keeping with a market place.

This was Dr Nixon's third visit to the Society and even taking into account that there were very few references to the railways of the UK on this occasion, it was still considered by many to be the most fascinating of all.

John Tuffs

OCTOBER 1996

Mr Graham Morgan from Knowle presented a show of colour transparencies entitled "Up the Main, Down The Junction". The audience saw a selection of very good quality slides which included many pre-1968 shots of steam locomotives at work on the British Railways network, prior to their demise in the August of that year. It was interesting to see that some of his work even incorporated photographs of more than 50 years ago, which, bearing in mind the time since they were taken, were very good examples indeed.

During his narrative, Mr Morgan emphasised several times his presentation was in dedication to the many hard-working railway workers, irrespective of whether they were paid employees or just volunteers with the many preservation society's that have developed over the years since steam ended on the British Rail network. Due to the helpfulness of many of these individuals, it is now possible for future generations of railway enthusiasts to enjoy the heritage that has been preserved. Had it not been for these particular workers' loyal dedication in the mammoth tasks that were needed at the time, similar events together with opportunities for travelling on a steam-hauled train would have become a thing of the past, with the ever likelihood of not occurring in the way we have grown to expect.

There was also mention of how preservationists have used their skills to recreate scenes of the past. It should be remembered that the infrastructure plays a vital role in this respect as well as locomotive preservation. This is especially true at centres such as the East Midlands-based Great Central Railway, where reinstatement of a double track will in future enable scenes of moving trains passing one another to be witnessed yet again.

Some of the slides showed that preservation centres are continuing to develop. This was indeed a very encouraging sight to see. Since the final steam working on British Railways in August 1968, centres where locomotives are restored to full working order have accumulated at such a rate there is now an abundance of them spread nation-wide with each one playing a vital

role in the preservation movement. Perhaps it is worth recalling that had it not been for the foresight of establishing such centres, many of the steam-hauled charter trains, which have run on BR metals in the past 25 years, would not have been possible. Some of these specials, together with the locations where centres have been established, were shown during the evening.

John Tuffs

SEPTEMBER

“Burton in the 1960s” was the theme set by Mr Robin Jeffcoat, from Matlock. Memories were rekindled as he showed in the region of 200 slides to the 100-plus people present, ably supported by an excellent commentary.

At the beginning of the show, Mr Jeffcoat requested assistance from the audience, for help in identifying some of the photographs he was about to screen. Many years have passed since he spent his childhood days in Burton, residing in Derby Road, overlooking the Midland Railway line and the massive complex of railway lines in the Hawkins Lane area. However, although a few slides did need members’ help in identification, Mr Jeffcoat recalled the railway systems very well indeed. This was due to his vast knowledge of the area, which helped in giving everyone present a splendid recollection to how important the railways were at one time.

The majority of his collection was ‘shot’ within the confines of the old County Borough boundary of the town. In particular, many illustrated the area around Hawkins Lane, where the ex-LNWR engine shed was situated, although by that time it had closed for the purposes of locomotive servicing. Remarkably, the building still exists today and is used for industrial purposes. This area has changed beyond all recognition now: the railway lines have all gone, along with many of the fine buildings and it has been turned into a number of industrial estates with no rail connection whatsoever. Hawkins Lane bridge has disappeared and the road extended to form a new major roadway which uses part of the old North Staffordshire Railway line out of town. This road now carries an enormous volume of freight traffic, so perhaps with hindsight, the rail system could have helped environmentally, had it been retained for a few years longer!

Most areas of the town were featured in some way. One thing that became clear was the way in which characteristics unique to Burton have been lost forever. This is a pity, some may say, especially as a number of the buildings which have long since been demolished could have been put to other uses if a genuine and constructive approach had been made before their demise.

Perhaps, the old brewery railway system could have been preserved, attracting future generations of enthusiasts and tourists to the town. This would have certainly injected additional income to the town and contributed towards the repayment of any initial costs incurred. Unfortunately, the idea could not have been considered at the relevant time: dismantling took place instead, and the land was used for other purposes, including industrial use, house-building and road-making.

How does the scene look now in comparison? The features which at one time formed part of Burton’s heritage have nearly all disappeared, whilst others have changed beyond recognition. There are certainly people with the opinion that not all has been changed for the best. In fact, some of the heritage could have been saved if "listing" had been forthcoming at the time. One

such building being the maltings, adjacent to Shobnall Road, where the sight of a Jinty 0-6-0 tank engine coupled to two of malt wagons was captured on film. Another interesting fact that was mentioned was the regular transport of water to a brewery in Bolton, Lancashire. The source of this water was an artesian well at Shobnall.

A short distance away, the spectacle of a 15-wagon freight train, about to dive under the main line as it paralleled Shobnall Road that also formed the backdrop, was a fine sight. The scene is all but a memory now, as much is buried beneath the flyover forming the road bridge crossing the Derby to Birmingham railway line.

At Bond End, many will remember the fine timber building of the Midland Joinery Works on Lichfield Street with the crossing gates and signal box adjacent. Sadly, redundancy occurred for many local people who were employed there when the firm ceased trading some years ago. Nevertheless, the photograph was one to be savoured! It was a delightful sight for the many who can remember the scene as it was before being "lost" in the re-development that has taken place over the past decade or so, under the premise of progress.

The views of brewery-owned locomotives, some of which had been built by the Burton-based manufacturer of Baguley and Son, were a spectacle to be seen. Some of them looked somewhat forlorn as they worked in the industrial surroundings of the four major breweries of the town, as a gradual run-down of the infrastructure took place during the years preceding final closure.

A few 'branch' lines lasted beyond the brewery railways closure in 1967, but there was not a great deal of rail traffic left. Just a few isolated workings remained such as the occasional trip along the Dallow Branch to Harold Wesley's factory in Victoria Crescent - the final train ran over this section in January 1970. However, for a number of years afterwards, rail deliveries of malt to the maltings at Shobnall continued.

The presentation was a delight to all present. A further thank you is extended to the Mr Jeffcoat who said he would screen another selection to the Society at a future date should we take up his offer.

John Tuffs

AUGUST 1996

The August club night welcomed Mr Martin Bromley, from Nottingham, who gave a talk and slide presentation about the railways of Wales. The presenter, started by giving a very descriptive talk about Welsh Railways in general, which included the national standard-gauge railway network and also the many narrow-gauge systems that operate in the principality. Later, over one hundred colour transparencies were screened to illustrate the narration.

The journey commenced with a trip along the North Wales Coast as well the picturesque branch line to Blaenau Ffestiniog and the short section of line to the holiday resort of Llandudno. Continuing across the Menai Straits on to the Isle of Anglesey, Holyhead is reached where the line terminates. It is also an important ferry port where a frequent service operates to and from the Emerald Isle.

Backtracking to Blaenau Ffestiniog and joining the narrow-gauge Ffestiniog Railway, a trip was undertaken to allow the BR standard-gauge line operating along the Cambrian Coast to be reached. At either Minffordd or Porthmadog, one can make a change of trains - this useful connection allows the BR Cambrian Coast line to be joined. Nowadays, services along this line are provided by 'Sprinter' type diesel units that call at most stations along its entire route. In days gone by, however, the majesty of steam ruled with some famous classes such as Manors and Duke-dogs being in-charge of the trains, and some of these were seen in the presenter's numerous illustrations.

A brief visit to the Welsh seaside resort of Pwllheli showed the railway station has been rationalised over the past two decades to such an extent that only a single platform now exists. The Cambrian Coast line is single for its entire length from Pwllheli to Aberystwyth, although a number of passing loops where trains can pass - Porthmadog, Harlech, Barmouth and Towyn, to name a few, are provided. Dovey Junction - a very isolated location - forms the junction with the other section of Cambrian line that trails in from Aberystwyth. Railway operations around Aberystwyth, which also included the Vale of Rheidol narrow-gauge railway that commences its 12-mile journey to Devil's Bridge at this coastal terminus, were featured.

The Welsh journey recommenced with photographs admirably illustrating the talk and depicting scenes at such places as Machynlleth, Newton and Welshpool, as steady progress was encountered through mid-Wales. The Welsh Tour finished with railway recollections at the once-important Shropshire town of Shrewsbury, before continuing to Birmingham Snow Hill, where, a splendid and architecturally superb station once stood.

John Tuffs

JULY TO MAY

No reports available.

APRIL 1996

Burton Railway Society's April Club night featured fascinating archive footage presented by Mr Rob Foxton in a programme entitled, "Railways Remembered – Cinema Centenary".

Films included the first railway moving picture, shot on location at a small branch line station in the South of France over a hundred years ago.

Other films included the opening of Immingham Transit Quay, performed by the Duke and Duchess of York (the present Queen Mother) in July, 1925, and action from the early 1900s showing Peckett saddle-tank 'Progress' with mineral wagons at a Northamptonshire quarry.

An eight-minute Edwin S Porter film, "The Great Train Robbery", from 1903, which had a major influence on the development of motion pictures, was also featured. Another film gave a look inside the railway workshops at Swindon with Great Western 4-6-0 Star Class steam locomotive No 4041 'Prince of Wales' being assembled.

A 'static shot' on a movie film showed former broad gauge locomotives in store at Swindon, either for conversion to standard gauge or for eventual scrapping. Mr Foxton said that most would agree it was very unfortunate that the broad gauge did not last a couple of years longer or that early motion pictures had not have come on the scene just a little earlier. In the event, the broad gauge system does not appear in motion on any movie film.

After the break members viewed a 40-minute film, "Railways Recreation", showing how railway lines play an important part in marketing leisure and tourist activities in the United Kingdom. This film is scheduled to be televised on Channel 4 shortly.

MARCH TO JANUARY

No reports available.