

8E Railway Association - December meeting in Northwich

The December meeting of the 8E Railway Association was the AGM, followed by a slide show. The meeting was relatively calm, with the committee being re-elected.

Jon Penn has amassed a large archive of images around Chester, principally from Brian Hickey and Edgar Richards and dating from the 1950s and 60s. Many aspects of railway operation were illustrated, ranging from immaculately maintained track, without a weed in sight, to distinctly grubby and unkempt locomotives.

Since the environs of Chester were quite complicated and controlled mechanically there was a need for vast arrays of signals, controlled by six signal boxes. Jon had never seen a picture of No. 1 box, but all the others were well illustrated. There were even LNWR signal arms still in use.

Freight operations were important, with cattle trains from Holyhead, coal for local power stations, early containers, meat trains and oil tanks from Stanlow, one of which ran away and demolished part of the station! There were even comfortable wagons for prize winning cattle!

There were scenes inside and outside the shed, of the station pilot at work, of the transition to diesel power, of the pump house supplying water to the station and the water columns and of changing fashions worn by the passengers. Fascinating detail!

8E Railway Association - November meeting in Northwich

Trevor Booth's talk about the Cheshire Lines Committee (CLC) at the 8E Railway Association meeting revealed a wealth of detail largely unknown to the audience. This was enhanced by anecdotes from former employees of the CLC, which he had recorded in the 1980s.

The constituent companies were the Great Northern Railway, the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire railway and the Midland Railway. The CLC absorbed various companies and routes in Cheshire, including that through Northwich, but its first main line was from Liverpool, through Warrington, to Manchester Central. Despite its roots it established its headquarters at Liverpool Central station. The system expanded to serve Southport, Birkenhead and Stockport through to Woodhead and the East through acquisitions and construction, the CLC remaining independent until Nationalisation in 1948.

The dock systems in Liverpool were huge and there were also extensive branches around Northwich for salt and chemicals traffic. These were well illustrated. For example, the Barons Quay branch ran down Leicester Street to a salt works on the current Marks and Spencer site and the Adelaide branch was subject to continual subsidence. The company works was established in Warrington and produced virtually everything required for the railway apart from the rolling stock. This gave the system a unique appearance.

8E Railway Association - October meeting in Northwich

"Diesels and preserved steam on the Welsh railways in the 1980s." Perhaps not the most apparently appealing of subjects, but a large audience came to hear Geoff Morris at the 8E Railway Association meeting and were treated to a fascinating, authoritative talk. Geoff was born in Llanelli and his talk commenced in the south west corner, at Fishguard Harbour and worked eastwards through Milford Haven, Pembroke Dock and Carmarthen towards Swansea and Cardiff.

Inland from Cardiff are the Valley lines, a very complicated network which served numerous collieries. The changes to the industrial landscape since the 1980s were described with great clarity.

From Newport the route to Shrewsbury was covered, as were the Cambrian Coast and Central Wales lines. The plethora of stations in Wrexham, the expanse of Llandudno station, the changes at Holyhead and the rain in Blaenau (no change there!) were well illustrated, as were most of the narrow gauge railways.

The period covered included the GW150 celebrations in 1985, the Crewe-Chester-Shrewsbury circulars and the North Wales Coast Expresses at the end of the decade. These featured steam locomotives from the GWR, the SR and the LMSR.

It is always a pleasure to listen to a speaker who knows his subject and delivers it coherently, assisted by excellent photographs. Well done Geoff!

8E Railway Association - April meeting in Northwich

Due to the unavailability of the advertised speaker, Phil Braithwaite was called upon once again to provide a slide show for the 8E Railway Association. He has a massive collection of slides and is in the process of digitising them. The selection he showed this time dates from the 1950s and 60s. In black and white and colour most were excellent, but a few of the latter were in an intermediate state, requiring more work and reflecting the quality of the film available then.

As might be expected many of the locations have been explored previously. Dallam shed in Warrington must have been one of the smokiest places on earth, for example. As ever the pictures were full of atmosphere. A prime example was at Leeds Holbeck shed, with shafts of light striking locomotives stabled around the turntable. A classic photograph.

There were extensive sequences at Shrewsbury and at Preston, which seemed to have legions of signals and signal boxes and station pilots.

Some gems included the private station at Waverton, built for the Duke of Westminster, the engine wrecked in an accident at Broadheath and the preserved Highland Railway Jones Goods engine, resplendent in its yellow livery. How did they keep it clean? Well done Phil for producing another fascinating selection of slides at short notice.

8E Railway Association - March meeting in Northwich

In a change from its traditional January slot the 8E Railway Association gave a showing of the PSOV review of steam on the main line in 2016 at this meeting. However, without the live commentary from Dave Richards and Karl Jauncey it felt a bit flat. As ever, of course, the quality of filming was excellent throughout.

The only run in January was by two Black 5s over the Settle and Carlisle line and Shap. There was a remarkable absence of snow on the hills.

There were fine views of "Royal Scot" passing through Conway, dominated by the castle, en route to Holyhead and superb tracking sequences on the return.. February also saw the return of "Flying Scotsman" and the inaugural trip from Kings Cross to York was covered extensively. The Great Britain tour featured a number of ex-LMS locomotives, including both "Leander" and "Galatea".

A route seldom covered is that from Carlisle to Newcastle, one of several appearances in the film by "Tornado". We saw both "Duchess of Sutherland" and "Princess Elizabeth" being well exercised by the steep gradients in Devon and Cornwall and several outings by "Earl of Mount Edgecombe" around the Midlands and the Welsh Marches.

A brief night sequence showed ex-GW pannier tank 9466 tackling the Lickey Incline with gusto, cascades of sparks lighting its progress. Magic!

8E Railway Association - February meeting in Northwich

Geoff Cook's presentation on the "Ffestiniog Railway" to the 8E Railway Association meeting proved to be absorbing and informative.

The talk was in two parts: steam locomotives; and the line. The first seven locomotives were constructed by George England and Co. between 1863 and 1869. Of these, four were 0-4-0TT (side tanks plus a tender), followed by two larger ones (0-4-0STT, with saddle tanks). The last was Little Wonder, an 0-4-4-0T and the first of the Fairlie design locomotives, which allowed much longer trains to be hauled along tightly curved track. Prince, Princess, Palmerston and Welsh Pony still exist, in rebuilt form, some being in operation. Four more Fairlies were built up to 1886, mainly at Boston Lodge. The revived railway constructed a further two and acquired a number of other locomotives from different sources.

The trip up the line started from Pen-y-Mount, adjacent to the Welsh Highland Heritage Railway and showed the complexities of crossing the main line and running through the streets of Porthmadog to the station. Views of the station, the Cob and Boston Lodge works now form an historical record due to the changes taking place. Perhaps the most interesting views were around Tanygrisiau and Blaenau, with a fantastic network of narrow gauge lines and rope-worked inclines.

8E Railway Association - January meeting in Northwich

The first talk of the year was a fine presentation on "Railways North of Crewe", by Bill Chapman. The audience for the 8E Railway Association meeting were entranced, particularly since many of the locations are well-known. The period covered was 1966 to 1973, which was very much one of transition.

The first picture was of a Crosti-boilered 9F on a passenger train at Crewe, a sight which no-one else could remember seeing. We then moved to Manchester Oxford Road, with both the LMS electrics from the 1930s and their BR replacements. From Central, with its impressive arched roof, we proceeded to Buxton (a four wheeled railbus) and onto the Midland route through Darley Dale and Chinley. Victoria always seemed grimy.

The coverage of the line south from Carlisle included the construction of the A66 at Penrith, the Lune Gorge, Carnforth, Morecambe and Heysham (the Duke of Lancaster was in the background) and Preston.

The Settle and Carlisle gave us views of Dent, Blea Moor, Ribbleshead, Skipton and Leeds (both City and Central). After a brief look at Deltics at York we moved to the collieries around Newcastle and finished on the Alston branch.

The railways of that time are barely recognisable today, not always for the better. This was a good history lesson!