

THE MARLOW DONKEY



Edition

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A Donkey Centenary

Return to the Somme

The Marlow Donkey

The Magazine of the Marlow & District Railway Society

COMMITTEE

President:	Sir William McAlpine Bt	Vice-President:	Mark Hopwood
Chairman:	Tim Speechley. 5 Sunningdale Close, Booker, High Wycombe HP12 4EN Tel.: 01494 638090 email: tim.speechley@ntlworld.com		
Vice-Chairman	Mike Hyde. 11 Forty Green Drive, Marlow, Bucks., SL7 2JX. Tel.: 01628 485474 email: michaelahyde@uwclub.net		
Treasurer:	Peter Robins. 95 Broome Hill, Cookham, Berks., SL6 9LJ. Tel.: 01628 527870 email: pd.robins@btopenworld.com		
Secretary:	Malcolm Margetts. 4 Lodge Close, Marlow, Bucks., SL7 1RB. Tel.: 01628 486433 email: mandw.margetts@btinternet.com		
Assistant Secretary:	Vincent Caldwell. Moses Plat Farm, Speen, Princes Risborough, HP27 0SD Tel.: 01494 488283 email: GandV.Caldwell@virgin.net		
Webmaster:	Tim Edmonds. 90 Green Hill, High Wycombe, Bucks., HP13 5QE. Tel.: 01494 526346 email: tfedmonds@btopenworld.com		
Deputy Webmaster:	Dave Woodhead. 7 Larkspur Close, Wokingham, Berks., RG41 3NA Tel.: 0118 979 1621 email: dave@woodhead.tv		
Outings Organiser:	Julian Heard. 58 Chalklands, Bourne End, Bucks., SL8 5TJ. Tel.: 01628 527005 email: julian@jeh.org.uk		
Donkey Editor:	Mike Walker, Solgarth, Marlow Road, Little Marlow, Marlow, Bucks., SL7 3RS. Tel.: 01628 483899 email: mikewalker@solgarth.eclipse.co.uk		
Press & Publicity:	David Collins, 26 The Lagger, Chalfont St Giles, HP8 4DG email: davidcollinsgwr@ntlworld.com		

Website: www.mdrs.org.uk

The contents of the *Marlow Donkey* represent the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Society

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FRONT COVER PHOTOGRAPHS

Celebrating the Centenary of the opening of the Great Marlow Railway. Top: Between Bourne End and Maidenhead a second train was top-and-tailed with 6998 Burton Agnes Hall emerging from the mist at the top of the climb across Cock Marsh. Sunday 15th July 1973. Photo: Gordon Rippington. (Article page 13).

Bottom: The Dart Valley's 1450, ran between Bourne End and Marlow with Didcot's Autotrailers. Here it crosses Marlow Viaduct. Sunday 15th July 1973. Photo: Tony Caton. (Article page 13).

TIMETABLE

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

All meetings are held in the Bourne End Community Centre, Wakeman Rd, Bourne End at 7.45 for 8.00pm.
(Except June starts 7.30pm)

- Thursday 20 June **C B COLLETT AND SWINDON WORKS.1922-1941** Rev. Brian Arman
In a change of programme, the Rev. Brian Arman returns to present Part 2 of his talk on the history of Swindon Works. Please note this is a joint meeting with the RCTS and **starts at 7.30pm.**
- Thursday 18 July **INDIA BY RAIL IN THE 1980'S** Tim Edmondss
The presentation is based on tours of India in 1981 and 1985-6, this will intersperse pictures of steam on four gauges with other railway scenes and aspects of Indian life and culture, and including some other forms of transport.
- Thursday 19 September **GOING ON HOLIDAY TO IRELAND 1940-1960** Mike Page
Postponed from last year, Mike recalls his travels on family holidays to visit relatives in the west of Ireland during two decades of change on Ireland's railways.
- Thursday 17 October **A JOURNEY TO REMEMBER** Bob Sweet
The most recent 20 years of Railway Photography, showing the Rail Industry from a very rare and unusual perspective.

FORTHCOMING VISITS

- July or August **GLOUCESTERSHIRE AND WARWICKSHIRE RAILWAY** By car
Three dates have been proposed, Sat. 14 July when there is a bus rally, Sat 10 or Sun 11 August when there is a Carriage & Wagon Works open weekend. See page 3 for more details.
- Saturday 7 September **GREAT COCKROW RAILWAY** By car
We have been invited to a special running day at the Great Cockrow Miniature Railway at Chertsey Note Numbers are limited to a Maximum of 10, and there will be a draw if oversubscribed

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

This time I have some good news and some bad news regarding the running of the Society. The good news is that after one false start we do now seem to have a willing volunteer to shadow Malcolm's role as Secretary, a crucial one in keeping us operating properly. I'm pleased to say that Vincent Caldwell has offered his services and has already attended a couple of committee meetings. Over the next few months he will gradually take over from Malcolm, who has been keen to relinquish the task for quite a long time. That said, we owe him an enormous vote of thanks, for nobody has devoted so much time and effort to MDRS than him and he'll be a hard act to follow, though I am confident Vincent will do an excellent job. For the time being we have co-opted him onto the committee and will propose him for full membership at the next AGM.

The bad news is that Tim and Veronica Edmonds will shortly be leaving the area for the delights of Somerset. Our web site, which has given the Society such a good image, has been Tim's baby from its inception and the loss of his management of it will be extremely difficult to replace. We do have one or two proposals in discussion but if any of the membership has any web management experience then please come forward and let the committee know, as we need your expertise. I wish Tim and Veronica all my very best for their new life in the Minehead area and I'm sure they will have many visits from Society members, especially around West Somerset Railway gala dates. I cannot overstate how important the web site has been for us and I thank Tim wholeheartedly for his work on it.

I enjoyed participating in a small group visit to the Baie de
www.mdrs.org.uk

Somme Railway's "Fête de la Vapeur" at the end of April. Four of us took a car over using Le Shuttle and thanks to John Tuck's forward planning we had managed to book accommodation in nearby Abbeville. During the course of the weekend we saw several members of the society and other known suspects. It's sometimes felt that foreigners don't have much of a sense of humour but I was greatly amused by the extensive guide to the operations of the weekend, essentially a working timetable, dubbed officially as the "Guide du Spotter". This was a pretty complicated document and by the latter stages of the third day I had just about got to grips with it. A full report of the gala appears later in this edition of the *Donkey*.

Unfortunately I was involved in other activities on the morning when the *Cheltenham Flyer* special ran up to London but I was keen to see it on its return in the afternoon. I thought I was in plenty of time as I drove to Ruscombe but as I approached the bridge over the line and looked for a parking spot I was horrified to hear that familiar whistle and see the smoke rising. It was such a disappointment to have missed it that I had to pay a visit to the Rebellion Brewery shop later on to console myself with some free beer.

We have seen some glimpses of good weather in the recent past and I do so hope we will have a better summer than for the last couple of years. Our preserved lines need this to recoup recent losses. Don't forget to do your bit by getting out and enjoying yourselves.

All my best wishes.

Tim Speechley
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SOCIETY AND LOCAL NEWS

PROGRAMME CHANGES

There are several changes to the previously announced programme over the next few meetings. Ill-health means that Les Nixon cannot attend the June meeting as planned and in his place the Rev. Brian Arman will return to present part 2 of the story of Swindon Works which he started last June. Les hopes to visit us next June. Please remember the June meeting starts at **7.30pm**.

Also we have swapped speakers for the July and September meetings. Tim Edmonds will now present a programme on India in July and Mike Page's Irish programme is booted for September.

As is usual, there is no August meeting.

MEMBERS NEWS

For the first time in many years we have a lady member as Tim Edmonds' wife Veronica has joined our number. Tim and Veronica are moving to Somerset later this year but we do hope they will join our growing band of "distant" members.

Members of many years standing will be saddened to hear that one of our early members, Ted Gregory, passed away at the beginning of May. An ex-seaman (with pet parrot) Ted had moved away to the West Country many years ago.

PREVIOUS MEETINGS

In March Tony Bowles took us on a tour of the railways of Portugal in the days of steam.

Steam featured again April but closer to home when David Mitchell took us to Wales in the 1960's providing a fascinating look back to the past.

Bill Davies returned in May with another evening of anecdotes from his career on and off the footplate. He

A view of the control room deep inside the new Reading station during the Society's visit on the evening of the 25th April. The gentleman seated closest to the camera is the announcer and the lady to his left the duty controller.

The monitors at the top relay images from the station's 200 high definition CCTV cameras and below them is a graphic representation of the station and its approaches showing the location of all trains in the area, basically replicating the view of the signallers at the TVSC at Didcot.

Photo: Mike Walker

could probably be carried on until dawn but we shall have to get him back again.

AND VISITS

Nine members got to see behind the scenes at Reading's new station on 25th April courtesy of our friends at First Great Western. Having toured the public parts of the station we ended up at the heart of the operation, the control room.

Although there was no formal organised party visit to the Baie de Somme this year at least eleven members visited for various periods over the weekend and a full report appears elsewhere in this issue.

FORTHCOMING VISITS

Three dates have been put forward for a visit to the Gloucestershire & Warwickshire Railway. Saturday 14th July when there is a bus rally at the railway or Saturday 10th or Sunday 11th August when the railway has an open weekend at its carriage and wagon works at Winchcombe. If you are interested in joining a group please contact Julian Heard at julian@jeh.org.uk or 01628 527005.

Our visit to the Great Cockrow Railway on Saturday 7th September is limited to 10 places so we will hold a ballot if that number is exceeded. If you wish to be included please contact Julian as above.

Two further visits are being explored, a tour of London stations guided by a member from the LT Museum and a visit to the Swindon & Cricklade Railway possibly in conjunction with a visit to either Steam at Swindon or the GWS at Didcot.

Further details will be given in the e-newsletter as available.



THE CHELTENHAM FLYER

There was a brief but glorious break of the excursion ban through Reading on 11th May when 5043 *Earl of Mount Edgcumbe* ran non-stop from Gloucester to Paddington and back at the head of the *Cheltenham Flyer*. The train had been leisurely timed in both directions but with the superb co-operation of Network Rail, First Great Western, Vintage Trains and West Coast Railways it was allowed to race up and down the Great Western Main Line running main line most of the way rather than relief as booked. The result was the up train arrived at Paddington 39 minutes early and the return, seen in Sonning Cutting [Right], got to Gloucester 51 minutes early.

It was probably the last steam working along the GWML before the wires go up and therefore marked the end of an era in some style.



photo: Mike Walker

STEAM ON THE MET 150

As part of the special events to mark the 150th anniversary of the London Underground steam returned to the Metropolitan Line between Harrow-on-the-Hill and Amersham on 25th to 27th May.

Three steam locomotives were used, Metropolitan No.1, Dennis Howell's 9466 and Bill Parker's Small Prairie 5521 which had been bizarrely painted in fake London Transport maroon livery as L150. These were supported by veteran Metropolitan electric loco 12 *Sarah Siddons* and Class 20 20227 also in "LT" livery. Unlike the Circle line event in January, the train was formed of LU's ex-BR 4TC set together with the LT Museums 4-wheel first class carriage 353.

Things didn't go quite to plan. Over-running engineering work on the Central Line on Saturday morning trapped the locomotives and stock inside Ruislip Depot which meant that services started running nearly an hour late although this was gradually recouped during the day. Then at the end of Saturday No.1 was discovered to have a seriously overheated bearing with melted white metal and it was therefore unable to take part in Sunday or Monday's proceedings.

CROSSRAIL WORKS AT MAIDENHEAD

Work has started at Maidenhead in preparation for its forthcoming role as western terminal of Crossrail. The goods shed was demolished some months ago. Now the old goods yard is being cleared and the remaining two sidings shortened. The site will become a construction depot initially before becoming a stabling point for Crossrail trains.

two photos: Chris Waite

photo: Peter Robins



CLASS 56 ON THE JOINT LINE

A flow of spoil from the Crossrail tunnelling has brought a Class 56 onto the Joint Line for the first time in many years. Running as 6Z80 the down, loaded, train runs from Willesden Euroterminal to Calvert and is booked through High Wycombe at 10:59 whilst the return empties, 6Z81, pass through at 19:29 Mondays to Fridays. The train is being operated by a locomotive supplied by Devon & Cornwall Railways and 56312 is seen just east of High Wycombe with the empties on 23 April. At present there is no indication as to how long the operation will continue.

At the time of writing the other local Class 56 turn, the Didcot to Calvert fly-ash trains, 6Z91/6Z92, are still running but probably not for long as with the power station closed the supply of ash is vanishing fast.





photo: Mike Walker

FAWLEY OPEN WEEKEND

To mark the centenary of Sir Robert McAlpine 31 Sir William and Lady McAlpine opened Fawley Hill to the general public for the first time over the weekend of 18/19 April. The event was a huge success attended by thousands on both days. The star of the show, fresh from overhaul, performed superbly putting on a great show climbing the 1in14 bank.

Also in attendance was David Buck's Aveling Porter *Sir Vincent* which made at least one trip down the hill on Sunday evening.

In the field beyond the park was a great gathering of steam traction engines, rollers, commercial and military vehicles, buses and classic cars along with an old time fair and other attractions.

photo: Mike Walker



photo: Brian Daniels

photo: Mike Walker





photo: Mike Walker

Among the old buses present perhaps the most interesting was this 1927 Guy FBB with a 32-seater body by Vickers which is the last known survivor of the large fleet of 'Roadmotors' operated by the Great Western Railway up to 1929. Registered YF714 and carrying the GWR number 1268 it was allocated to Penzance and survived thanks to being converted into a caravan. Now owned by Colin Billington of Fifield it has been superbly restored to its original condition and is cared for by the Thames Valley & Great Western Omnibus Trust at its Fifield base.



photo: Mike Walker



photo: Mike Walker

A unique exhibit, literally, was this racing car transporter built for the Scottish Ecurie Ecosse racing team by Alexanders on a Commer coach chassis in 1960. A one-of-a-kind vehicle, it could carry three cars, two on top and one inside, and had a self-contained workshop in addition to crew accommodation. It was exhibited at Fawley complete with two beautifully restored Jaguar D Type Le Mans sports cars from the original Ecurie Ecosse team.

How many remember the Corgi model of this vehicle which was sold in the 1960's? Those of us who had one are kicking ourselves as they are now valuable.



photo: Mike Walker

In addition to No.31 and *Sir Vincent* a third steam locomotive was present at Fawley albeit not in operation. This was *Lilla* from the Ffestiniog Railway which is one of the well known Hunslet Penryn quarry engines, this being no.554 of 1891.

Just visible behind is a Foden steam bus which was giving rides around the fair.

More mundane exhibits among the buses were these two former Thames Valley vehicles. On the right is 446, DBL154, a 1946 Bristol K6A and alongside is 748, JRX823, a 1955 Bristol KSW6B. Both have 55-seater ECW 'lowbridge' bodies with the long bench seats and sunken gangway upstairs, 748 having the staggered style. Your editor can remember travelling on vehicles like these to school on route 28. After the crawl up Burroughs Grove hill it was not unusual to make an extended stop at the Blacksmith's Arms to allow the engine to cool and top up the radiator. The landlord kept a filled watering can ready for use. Happy days!

Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantysiliogogoch

50 and 20 years ago

Tim Edmonds

In August 1963 the Edmonds family set forth for its summer holiday – a visit to relatives in Liverpool for a few days, followed by a two-week stay at a self-catering cottage in Anglesey. A couple of months earlier my father had encouraged me to take an interest in photography by giving me a Zeiss Super Ikonta 531 folding camera – at least third hand, but with a rangefinder, a good number of aperture settings, shutter speeds of up to a 500th/second and taking 16 exposures on a roll of 120 film. It was an excellent piece of kit and the holiday gave me a chance to put it through its paces, including taking some railway pictures.

My first efforts at Chester General station were not a success, but as the holiday continued I managed to get some more presentable railway photographs, including the Great Orme Tramway and the Snowdon Mountain Railway. In the late afternoon on a gloomy 19 August we were returning from a trip to the mainland and took the opportunity of stopping at Llanfair station to see the famously lengthy nameboards and to purchase 6-inch long souvenir platform tickets. The well-timed arrival of

a stopping passenger train enabled me to capture Ivatt 2MT 2-6-2T 41226 pausing alongside the station name.

Moving on 30 years and the summer of 1993 saw another generation of the Edmonds family taking a holiday cottage in Anglesey for a couple of weeks. In the interim Llanfair station had closed, on 14 February 1966, but following the fire damage to the Britannia Bridge the station was reopened as Llanfair PG from 29 May 1970 to 31 January 1972, when it served as a temporary terminus. Then on 7 May 1973 it was reopened to regular services and it remains in use. When we visited on 11 July 1993 new station name-boards were in place, complete with a pronunciation guide for visitors, but the building was empty and unstaffed. If you wanted to buy a souvenir platform ticket then you had to do so at the James Pringle shop next door – a lost opportunity for the railway to cash in on the tourists more directly, I think. The next day we visited the National Trust Industrial Railway Museum at Penrhyn Castle, where we saw one of the BR enamel station nameboards on display.



Ivatt 2MT 2-6-2T 41226 stops at Llanfair station with a Bangor-bound local service on a gloomy 19 August 1963.

All photos: Tim Edmonds



To amuse the tourists – the version of the Llanfair station nameboard that was on show at the unstaffed halt on 9 July 1993.



With the James Pringle store and a tourist bus in the background, 158817 passes Llanfair station with the 16:00 Holyhead-Cardiff service on 11 July 1993.



One of the old BR enamel station boards from Llanfair preserved at Penrhyn Castle, 12 July 1993.

A Trip to New Zealand

Part 1 The North Island

John Fowler

In February 2012 I flew to New Zealand for a visit. This is a rough diary of events focusing on rail and other transport where appropriate, to give you an idea of what you might see if you were to visit New Zealand. I have included hyperlinks so that if you are interested in learning more you can follow up the link.

Thursday 16th February

I flew on an Air Malaysia 747 non-stop to Kuala Lumpur arriving 07:00 local time on Friday 17th. The onward flight was on a 777 non-stop Auckland, Australia is big when you fly over it. I finally arrived around 24:00 on 17th. and spent the night in Jet Park Motel, which is to be recommended.

Saturday 18th February

Flew on to New Plymouth in an Air New Zealand Bombardier Q300 with those whirly things for propulsion. <http://www.airnewzealand.co.uk/seat-map-bombardier-q300>

Sunday 19th February

A trip to Waitara 15kms northeast of New Plymouth where unknown to most residents of city there is a railway preservation society which operates the Waitara Railway. <http://waitararailwaypres.tripod.com/>
More information can be found on Wikipedia at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waitara_Railway_Preservation_Society

My first sightings were not too promising being three heavily encrusted loco chassis. **(Below)** Apparently NZ

rail had the habit of strengthening embankments, especially where they were by rivers or the sea, with old steam loco chassis.

The location of the railway can be found from <http://waitararailwaypres.tripod.com/id16.html>
For reference the locos are parked by the line just below the Queen Street level crossing.

Basically, it is a single track line terminating near the river bank, there is no station building, but there is a run round but it is not in use. Apparently there were extensive sidings serving several factories when the line was in use, it closed to freight as late as 1999.

There were no signs or activity to suggest there might be trains running that day. However, just before 11:00, the time of the first departure according to the website, a loud hoot came from up the line and a yellow front appeared making its way slowly down the hill. **(Opposite top)** I should say that the line climbs quite steeply at 1:40 out of Waitara.

This proved to be the train. The loco propelling a box van converted to a booking office complete with a disabled ramp for access and pulling a semi open 4 wheeled wagon, also with ramp, and an old NZ coach. The ramps are the things that look like large Venetian blinds on the side of the van and semi open wagon. Loco is ex NZ rail DSC class 2584.

Once the covered wagon was detached and set up people started appearing wanting to buy tickets.



To quote from their web site:

Travel on the Waitara Branch Line which was opened in 1875. Part of the first Railway in Taranaki between Waitara and New Plymouth. The train Travels under the road bridge top of Big Jim's Hill, on Highway 3, which we say is our "tunnel". At Brixton we travel through our yards where the "The Former Tahora Station" is now sited. On the way to Lepperton one will see an old house, just over Kairau Road, on the right, which was once used as a maternity home about the 1890s.

Train on the return stops at Brixton at the "The Former Tahora Station" for hot or cold drinks.

Our Fares;- Adults \$12.00 Child 14 years and under \$6.00 Family \$30.00.Groups of 30 Persons, \$180.00, Extra person/s @ 6.00 per head extra. Up to a maximum of 60 persons.

If you ever get there you should note they only run basically one Sunday a month (two in Jan) in Summer.

Unfortunately the train doesn't now get to the junction at Lepperton as there is a river bridge over the Waiongana Stream, which will have to be strengthened, and the Society doesn't have the capital for the repair.

However, the drinks stop at Brixton was very pleasant with not only tea and coffee but home made cakes as well. The volunteers were all very friendly and on learning I was from the UK I was invited onto the footplate for the return journey to Waitara. I have a video from the cab, which I will be showing to SWRS in January. The DSC class are a 2 engined centre cab locos the first 18 were built by BTH in the UK and the remaining 52 in NZ. most are still in service on Kiwirail as shunters although they are only 422 Hp. I saw a couple in use on South Island but that's for later.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NZR_DSC_class

They are apparently similar to the ill fated Claytons used mostly in Scotland. They have been re-engined several times.

Afternoon trip round New Plymouth included first site of a Kiwirail line from New Plymouth docks to Marton on the Main North Trunk. 3' 6" gauge, which is the New Zealand standard. It's now freight only. The stick in the



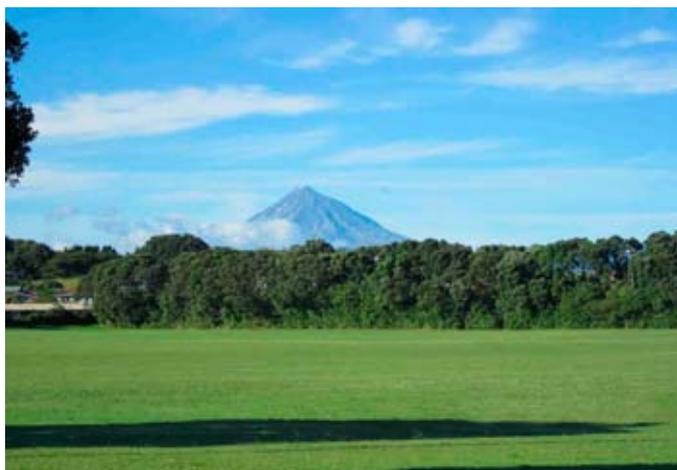
picture is the Wind Wand, which sways in the wind. (Bottom)

<http://www.windwand.co.nz/ourwindwand.htm>

In the docks there was a set of container wagons but no loco, I'm not sure if it was loading or unloading.

Monday 20th February

Tour round Taranaki which is not only the dominant mountain (Mount Egremont in English) but it also give its name to the local province. It's "an active but quiescent stratovolcano" according to Wikipedia. So you never know! The photo below shows it from Bellblock in New Plymouth.





Now I wasn't expecting any rail interest, but surprisingly there turned out to be quite a lot. Firstly at Inglewood which is southwest of New Plymouth. The railway line from New Plymouth basically starts northwest of Taranaki proceeds East and then turns South so it almost circumnavigates the mountain. By road from New Plymouth you hit the mainline from New Plymouth to Marton on the Main Trunk Line (Auckland-Wellington) at Inglewood. The old station (**Above**) is right by the main crossroads. Note there is only one platform the cleared area would have been loops for passing freight trains and the goods yard.

There was a road rail lorry just leaving the yard. By a bit of judicious chasing in the car, the line runs parallel to the road to Stratford, I was able to get some photos (**Right**).

On arrival at Stratford the station was found to be a cycle shop, but on getting on the platform I was just in time to see DC class 4283 arriving with a short freight train of tank containers. (**Below**). It has just detached from its train and is running round.



The GM-built DC class is the most common type of diesel locomotive operating in New Zealand.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Zealand_DC_class_locomotive



Note Stratford station is also only a single platform with lots of very long loops. This seems to be characteristic of most stations in NZ as you will see as the tour progresses.

Stratford is also the junction with the New Plymouth - Marton on the Main Trunk line and the Stratford Okahukura also on the Main Trunk line, the latter is currently out of use but there are plans to restore it to provide more paths for freight from New Plymouth.

After the station, back into the town centre for the 15:00 performance at the clock tower (**Right**) which to quote Wikipedia: *“Is today New Zealand's only glockenspiel clock tower plays the balcony scene from Romeo and Juliet three times a day. The spoken words are provided via external loudspeakers - there is no carillon (multiple bells) as would be more typical for glockenspiels in towers.”*

On the way back to New Plymouth a triple headed container train passed heading towards Stratford, didn't get the numbers. I presume it would have picked up the containers left in the yard at Stratford.

Wednesday 22nd February

No real railway interest today. I drove to Roturua via Taupo. Saw part of electrified Main Trunk line near Bennydale, but no trains! However in Taupo I found a McDonalds with a rather unusual occupant of the car park. “Would you like a DC3 with your burger!” (**Below**) Apologies for the dullness of the picture, but it was raining and when it rains in NZ it rains!

Friday 24th February

Saw many of the hot mud, geysers and thermal vents etc in Roturua. Plus a traditional Maori Hacker and food cooked in a thermal vent. Do you know there is hot water coming out of springs into the gutter in parts of Roturua. They also use steam from underground for heating and hot water. There was some rail interest but that's for later. Drove to Tauranga.

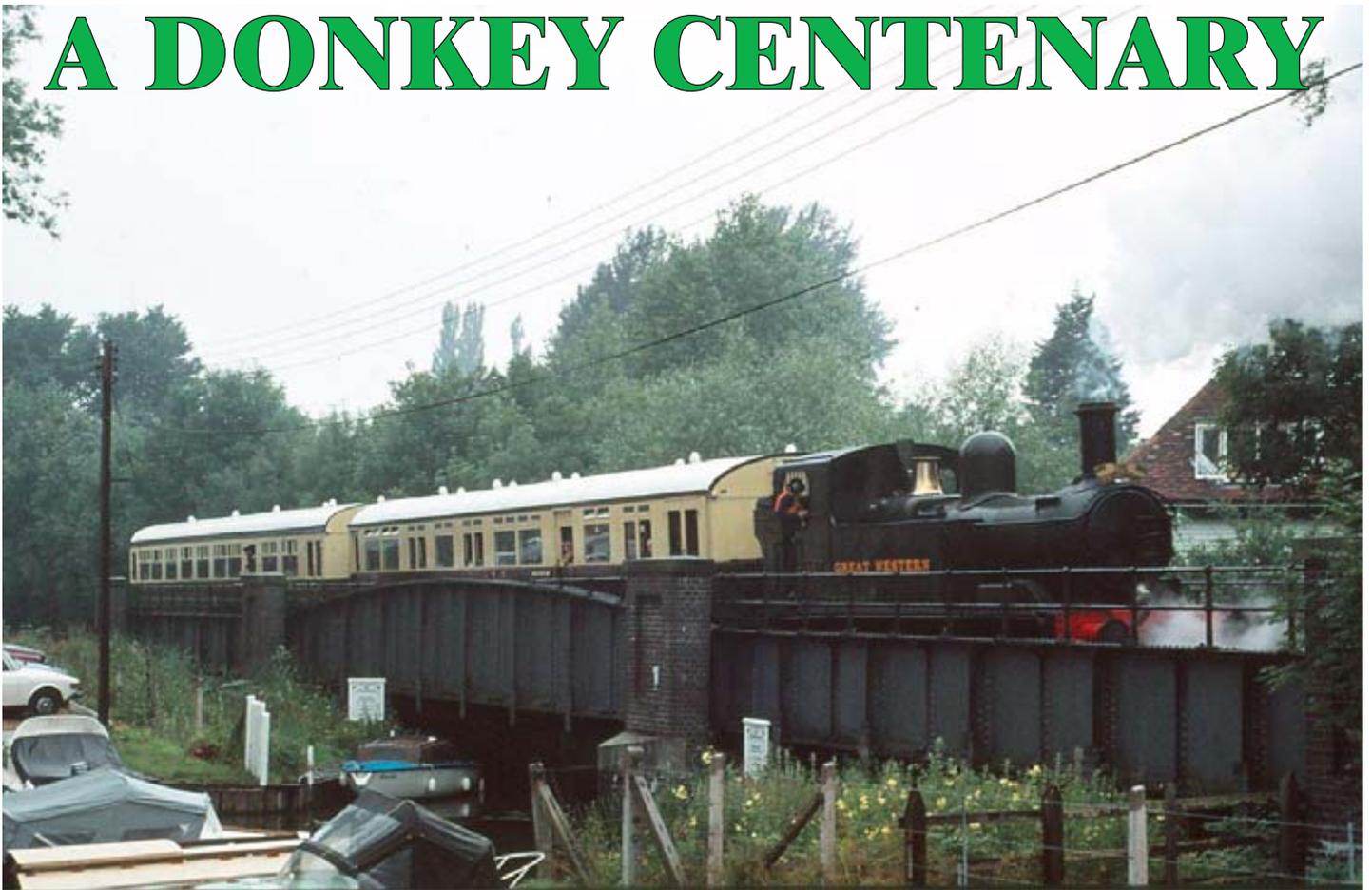
Saturday 25th February

Saw the cruise ships *Sea Princess* and *Pacific Sun* in Tauranga harbour. Cruise ships have started using Tauranga instead of Auckland as it is nearer to Rotorua for day trips. Videoed a log train crossing in front of the car also saw a new Chinese built DL loco. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Zealand_DL_class_locomotive Finally swam in the Pacific!

To be continued. Glenbrook, Auckland, The Overlander, Wellington and Cook Strait Ferry then South Island



A DONKEY CENTENARY



Forty years ago on Sunday 15th July 1973 British Rail, the Marlow-Maidenhead Passengers' Association and Great Western Society got together to celebrate the centenary of the opening of the Great Marlow Railway on 27th June 1873. Despite poor weather all day the event was a great success and is recalled here in members' photographs of the day.

The Dart Valley's 1450, ran between Bourne End and Marlow with Didcot's Autotrailers. Here it crosses Marlow Viaduct.

photo: Tony Caton

Between Bourne End and Maidenhead a second train was top-and-tailed with 6998 *Burton Agnes Hall* emerging from the mist at the top of the climb across Cock Marsh.

photo: Gordon Rippington





1450 ambles along in the rain at Spade Oak Crossing. The locomotive was a late replacement for 1466 and was appropriate as it had been a 'Donkey loco' in the 1950's. It ran all the way to and from Devon under its own steam and on the return linked up with *Flying Scotsman* west of Bristol!

photo: Tony Caton



6998 *Burton Agnes Hall* drifts downhill towards Cookham.

photo: Tony Caton



6106 has just crested the summit of the climb out of Cookham and is about to pass under the Rowbarrow bridge before dropping down into Bourne End.

photo: Gordon Rippington

6106 was on the other end of the Bourne End - Maidenhead shuttle and is seen about to descend the bank across Cock Marsh towards Bourne End.

photo: Gordon Rippington



Almost lost in the mist and rain, 6998 *Burton Agnes Hall* crosses Bourne End Viaduct at the start of another trip to Maidenhead.

photo: Tony Caton



RETURN TO THE SOMME

The Society has had an association with the Baie de Somme in northern France since our first visit in 1978. This spring at least ten members attended the Fete de la Vapeur, the biggest steam event of the year in France as MIKE WALKER reports.

This year's Fete de la Vapeur was the first gala to be held on the Chemin de Fer de Baie de Somme (CFBS) since 2009 and the railway really pushed the boat out with two days of intensive operations with twelve steam locomotives and a couple of railcars in support. Although we didn't have a formal group visit this year, roughly a fifth of the membership attended at various parts of the weekend along with hundreds of other Brits. Indeed, at times we almost seemed to outnumber the locals. Our little party consisted of Tim Speechley, who did the driving, Gordon Rippington, John Tuck and myself. We headed for France on the Friday and arrived in the area mid-afternoon. When we originally planned the trip we were unaware that an extensive pre-gala programme had been arranged so we missed much of that unfortunately.

Before we look at the weekend's activities in detail a little historical background to the CFBS might be of interest. The first part of the system dates from 1858 when the Chemin de Fer du Nord opened a standard gauge branch from Noyelles on its main line to Boulogne to the medieval town of St. Valery a distance of around 3½ miles.

In the 1880s, there were various schemes to build narrow gauge lines of either 750 mm or metre gauge in the Somme département. Eventually, a metre gauge line nearly 4.7 miles long was built by the Société Générale de Fer Economiques (SE) from Noyelles to Le Crotoy on the north side of the bay, opening on 1 July 1887. A second metre gauge line opened on 6 September 1887 from Noyelles to Cayeux, 11 miles from Noyelles, with stations at St. Valery Ville and Lanchères-Pendé. The line between Noyelles and St. Valery being laid between the rails of the standard gauge branch, which was also extended into St. Valery Ville.

The line earned a modest living hauling sugar beet, chicory, shellfish and galets (pebbles used in building) in addition to general merchandise and passengers. As might be expected from its location it was heavily involved in both World Wars.

The initial post-war years were positive with some modernisation and investment including the replacement of steam with diesel locos and railcars but during the 1960's the decline set in. Although SNCF continued using the standard gauge into St. Valery until 1989, the branch to Le Crotoy closed in 1969 and the line to Cayeux in 1972.

A preservation group started running trains in 1971 but initially struggled. At the time of our first visits the line appeared very rundown (see page 19) but today it is totally transformed and can equal the best of UK preservation with an impressive collection of well maintained locomotives, steam and diesel, and stock.



By the time we reached Noyelles, Friday's events were winding up. Resident 2-6-0T 15 (Haine St. Pierre 1316/1920) arrived on its way light engine back to St. Valery and paused to be turned and watered.

All photos: Mike Walker



CFBS galas usually feature arriving main line steam specials but not this year. Instead SNCF 150P13, a 1941 built 2-10-0 from the Mulhouse museum was on display in Noyelles yard.



Former Côtés du Nord Autorail 11 arrives at Noyelles. It was built by DeDion Bouton in 1932 as one of their model JM4 and was visiting from the Musée des Transports à Vapeur et des chemins de fer Secondaires Français. It reminded one of the Model T creations of Colonel Stephens. Unfortunately it derailed arriving at St. Valery.



Friday finished up with a visit to the depot at St. Valery Canal where the locomotives gathered for servicing in glorious evening sunshine. Left to right: visiting 0-4+4-0T Mallet 101, and residents 2-6-0T 1, 0-4-0T 25 and 4-6-0T E332.



Resident 0-6-2T 3714 (Buffaud Robatel 1909) and visiting TIV 0-6-0T 75 (Corpet Louvet 1234/1909) arriving at St. Valery Canal with a mixed train.



SNCF Autorail X2403 at St. Valery Canal. Visiting from Chemins de Fer de Haute Auvergne. It was built by Decauville in 1951, is 27.23m long and has two Renault 300hp engines. During the gala it was used on the dual-gauge section between Noyelles and St. Valery Quai..

From here we made our way to nearby Abbeville where John had booked us a very acceptable hotel in the town centre and Tim had discovered the second best restaurant in town was only 300m up the street. This therefore became our base for the next two evenings.



Saturday dawned promisingly with clear skies so we made our way to the only overbridge on the whole system to see E332 gets to grips with the steep climb out of St. Valery as it takes the first train of the day to Cayeux. This 4-6-0T was built by Fives-Lille (3587/1909) for the ETAT Réseau Breton system and now resident at the CFBS. The line from St. Valery is usually diesel worked and only operated in the peak summer months so the galas provide a rare chance to steam tackling the only real gradients on the otherwise fairly level system. The bridge shot is therefore popular and it's best to bag your position early!

A pair of Corpet Louvet 0-4-0Ts both originally owned by Paul Frot, a French civil engineering contractor, CFBS resident 25 (1672/1927) and visiting sister 11 (1589/1921) from the Blanc Argent Museum climb towards the Ferme de Rossigny crossing above St. Valery with the mixed train bound for Cayeux. The location is the plateau at the top of the climb from St. Valery. The aforementioned bridge is visible in the background.

Unfortunately on the return working of this train the brake van seen here behind the locos but at that time on the rear, derailed just east of Lanchères-Pendé. After a remarkably short delay it was detached and the train ran the rest of the weekend minus a brake van.

Resident 2-6-0T 1 *Ainse* arriving at the intermediate station of Lanchères-Pendé with a train from Cayeux. The loco was built by Corpet Louvet (1097/1906) ex-Régie Département des Transports de l'Aisne whilst the typically French country station is normally out of use even when trains are running to Cayeux. However, during galas it really comes alive and acts as a passing place midway between St. Valery and Cayeux. The locals had set up stalls to sell local produce and wares.

Having passed an eastbound at Lanchères-Pendé, the 0-4+4-0T Mallet 101 sets out for Cayeux. This magnificent locomotive was built by Blanc-Misseron (337/1906) and was visiting from the Voies Ferrées du Velay in the Haute-Loire having originally worked on the PO Corrèze.

By midday the weather had turned to the forecast showers so we adjourned to Noyelles to look at the indoor displays. But recently overhauled CFBS based 101 a 0-6-0T built by Pinguely (165/1904) for the ex Chemins de Fer du Morbihan was sitting in the rain awaiting its next job. Compare the superb condition of this loco today with that of it in 1979 on page 19.



By early evening the sun returned so we were able to catch visiting KESR 12 *Marcia* and *Bebert* from Belgium bracket the SECR coach as they skirt the Baie de Somme between Noyelles and St. Valery. *Marcia* later failed!





Sunday was a beautiful spring day with warm sunshine all day. We started with a visit to another classic Baie de Somme location, the lake just outside St. Valery where we caught the recently overhauled 101 heading for Noyelles with the mixed train, as mentioned now minus a brake van. The two carriages were also visitors for the gala from the Association des Amis du Petit-Anjou and were superbly restored whilst the tractor on the rear wagon was a vintage Deutz not a John Deere as its colour might suggest.



A feature of each morning were teams of locomotives running light in convoy from St. Valery Canal to Noyelles to position them for the day's work. Here engines 11, 25, TIV 75, 1 and POC 101 are caught passing the pond.

CFBS publicity shots here often show swans on this pond but although there was one on this occasion it stubbornly stayed out of shot whenever the train passed. Someone from the CFBS once said theirs were plastic!



An unexpected sight in Cayeux was a lengthy section of temporary 60cm gauge track laid down the middle of the Avenue Paul Doumer to allow CFCD 5, a 0-6-0T built by Decaville (165/1904) visiting from the Froissy Dompierre Light Railway to operate. There was a precedent for this it seems as this used to be done to transport the galets gathered from the beach to the main station, but can you imagine it being done here?

Another surprise was to find a 1928 Paris Metro train running between St. Valery and Noyelles. This was possible because a diesel-generator had been installed in one car. Again, imagine doing that to LT's heritage tube train! Here it leaves the recently rebuilt swingbridge over the canal leaving St. Valery.

So our weekend came to a close. The word is that the CFBS plans to hold its next gala in April 2015 so pencil it in your diary now. These events should not be missed.



Another locomotive failure on Sunday afternoon threw services somewhat out of plan but once things started running again no.1 *Ainse* stormed up the bank out of St. Valery without disturbing the cows.



FROM THE ARCHIVES



Our recent visit to the Baie de Somme prompted **Roger Woodham** to dig out some of his slides taken on the Society's second visit to the railway in June 1979.

Things were very different back then with the railway struggling to survive. In the shot above 101, the Pinguely-built 0-6-0T which returned to service for this year's fete after overhaul (see page 17) stands at St. Valery Ville. The coaches back then were in a poor condition and it was something of a novelty to be able to view the weeds passing below through the large holes in the floor.

The generally rundown condition of the stock can be seen in the shot below of diesel 352 shunting some stock at St. Valery Canal. Note one windscreen is held together with tape whilst the other is missing altogether.

Derailments, which still happen today, were routine back then and it was not unknown for the train to make an extended stop seemingly in the middle of nowhere whilst the crew adjourned to a nearby bar for some alcoholic refreshment, closely followed by any passengers.

How times have changed!

