

## NEWSLETTER 24 – CHAIRMENS' REPORT – SVR June 2015

I'll try to get through this report without mentioning football to keep all members (well Martin really) happy. The two chairmen (SCARCE and the Latics Supporters Club, Canada) set off early on Thursday 4th June, myself having wished my wife a happy wedding anniversary first, on our way to the Severn Valley Railway (SVR) to fire and drive a steam train. We had to decide which classic car to take and eventually settled on my Chevrolet Aveo as it was probably my turn to drive anyway. The journey commenced and the M56 was followed by a trip south down the M6 towards Birmingham. As time was not of essence, we opted to exit the motorway at Junction 13 and follow the A449 to Kidderminster. It was a direct route which bisected Wolverhampton City centre, nudging Molineaux football stadium, without hold-ups with a bonus that we avoided the inevitable stop-start motorway traffic of Birmingham. The picturesque route took us through some salubrious countryside which skirted several counties including the impressive 'creative' county of Staffordshire. We arrived in Kidderminster around 12:30pm and made a snap decision to check out the hotel location, even though check-in was not until 2:00pm.



We decided to find a country pub to partake of some refreshment and to seek out Highley station which had a transport museum. Kidderminster was skirted and we chose to follow a route to the first small village, any village, which was indicated on any road sign. The first road from the roundabout brought a tranquil looking Marston's House into view so we checked it out. Named 'The Windmill' it showed promise but when I drove into the car park and noticed the 'special' on the board that offered two drinks and two pies for a mere £12, it gave me the perfect opportunity to practice my 180 degree skids and make a hasty retreat. Undeterred, we continued blindly until we witnessed a sign for Bewdley, a station on the SVR line, so we headed in that direction. Bewdley is a very attractive town on the Severn River which is reminiscent of Henley-on-Thames, therefore we opted to park and find a suitable watering hole. Success was swift - we walked the embankment and dived into the Mug House to order a couple of ploughman's lunches. Sitting peacefully on the river, Tony sampled a pint of Wild Goose while I opted for a refreshing cider. We devoured the food and then washed it down with a cheeky little Cabernet Sauvignon digestif.

Moving on, we chose to drive to Highley using the old method of map skills and instinct. Instinct took us the first 5 miles and, not finding a suitable sign, after checking the map we came to the conclusion that we were travelling completely the wrong way. We re-traced through Bewdley and headed on our true destination route. It was worth the trouble as Highley turned out to be a very attractive step back in time.





After an hour or so in the museum, which displayed a good example of a Morris Minor (it's a car), we selected to check in at the hotel as it was around 5:00pm. Preserved diesel-hydraulic D1062 Western Courier had also pulled a passenger service through the station during our viewing of the exhibits. After sprucing up, we headed for Kidderminster again to locate the station, thus hopefully saving valuable time the following morning. I observed the floodlights of Aggborough Stadium, the home of Kidderminster Town FC, and knew from memory that the station is close by. Next stop was to find a pub for an apéritif. We parked in the centre of town and began the foot slog to the first decent looking establishment on our mini pub-crawl. This journey is second nature to a hardened football fan and is usually accomplished within the first five minutes — not so in Kidderminster — but after traipsing through the run-down shopping centre and five consecutive 'to let' shops among the plethora of charity shops, I realised that pub searching with a classic car fan is much more difficult than with a football fan! We eventually stumbled onto the Red Man (not a real man but a pub), the only watering hole in the one-saloon town, and it remarkably turned out to be a decent place. When questioned, the barmaid admitted that there were only three pubs within walking distance — a terrible admission by any stretch to a seasoned connoisseur. After a swift couple, it was back to the hotel to partake of an evening meal (and some wine for the driver) before turning in for the night.

Tony was knocking on the door of my room at 7:20am in an attempt to rouse me in time to leave at 7:45am, an inconsiderate action as I had requested my early morning call at 7:30! However, we checked-out and left on time and arrived at the station early as traffic had not been as heavy as we expected. We ate a leisurely breakfast and watched a safety video which stressed the importance of not walking in front of moving trains, not slipping on oily floors and not doing other potential hazards which had been laid down by the MSBO (ministry of stating the bleeding obvious) or, as it is commonly called in England, Health and Safety! We were told that we would be firing and driving a Southern Region giant, the Battle of Britain Class 34053, *Sir Keith Park*. When we ventured onto the platform I was surprised to find that, contrary to previous information, we were greeted with a GWR Manor class, 7812 *Erlestoke Manor*. Tony was vindicated as he had informed me that he already knew which engine we would be using as he had gleaned the information the previous day from the signaller at Highley signal box. My first viewing of this engine dates back to the mid-1970s when I visited Dai Woodham's scrap yard at Barry Island. She was in a sorry, dilapidated and rusted state and destined to be reduced to tin cans after the cutters' torch had done its damage. Thankfully, many preservation societies were simultaneously formed which prevented the carnage and put smiles back on the smoke-boxes as opposed to the chalked on tearful eyes – a significant result, without which there would be few of these wonderful, breathing, living examples of exceptional and pioneering British technology still running today.



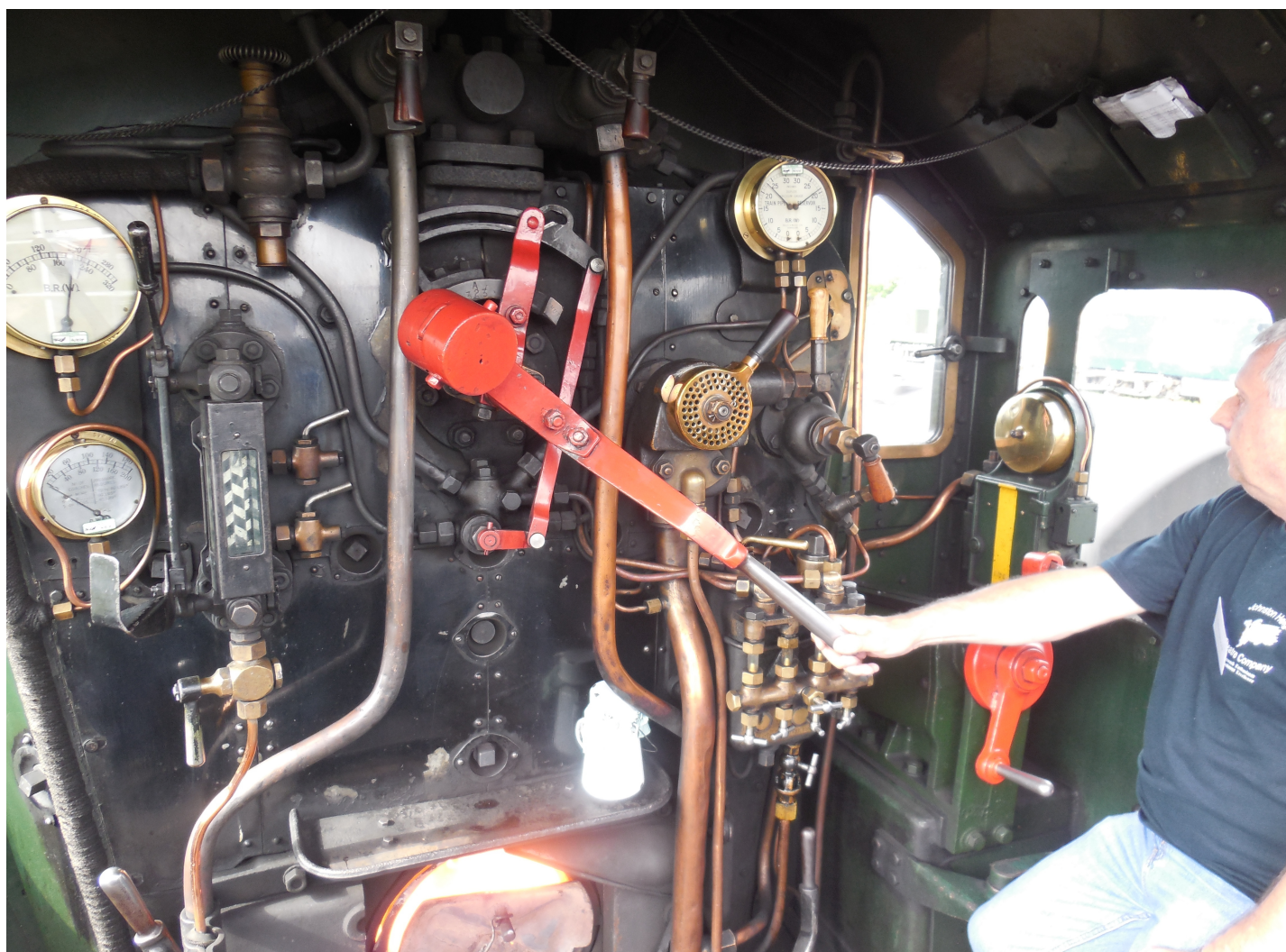
**GWR 4-6-0 "Manor Class" 7812 ERLESTOKE MANOR (named after an historically interesting Manor near Devizes in Wiltshire) – the 89A shed plate was from Oswestry**



Our experience began with Tony stoking the firebox and me pulling the six-coach hauled train out of Kidderminster Station on time. When I eventually pulled the train into Arley Station we reversed roles. We completed two return journeys from Kidderminster to Bridgnorth which began with the 9:15am outbound and we arrived back at 5:05pm



**Come on Fireman – swing that shovel**



**This is the life – but we need more steam – where's that skiving fireman hiding?**



We managed to partake of a sandwich and cup of tea for lunch before we began the afternoon run. This gave us an opportunity to take in Kidderminster Railway Museum which houses literally hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of railway memorabilia; nameplates etc. Our afternoon turn-round time in Bridgnorth was delayed due to excessive traffic and our train had to be diverted into a siding to await the clear road. This gave us the opportunity to bunk the engine shed and works at Bridgnorth as well as listen to an educational lecture by the signal box man who explained in detail how the signals and points work in such a fail-safe way.

Our footplate experience entailed learning how to correctly fire and drive a standard gauge ex-BR engine: understand signalling; taking and receiving single line tokens; when to sound the whistle (very important); working through tunnels; communicating with signal boxes; safety; types of coal; keeping a sufficient level of water in the boiler; and how to operate an extensive number of levers, knobs, gauges, switches etc. At the culmination of the day we both received a certificate and a commemorative mug and key ring which were made especially for participants of the footplate experience. Over the two days we even spotted a couple of fancy cars; an Alvis Silver Eagle and an e-type Jaguar. See – not one mention of football!



**The nameplate of our engine**

Regards,

**Dave Moore (International Member)**