

JOURNAL

- of the -

RAILWAY AND CANAL HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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From the President

There appears to be little doubt that serious research into railway history has increased steadily during the past ten years. A similar interest in canals was negligible before the late war but has made good progress since. From 1770, when the first "canal railway" was authorised, canal and railway history has been closely linked. Our Society can help to bring these two parallel studies together and provide a means whereby the story of canal and railway appears as one entity in appropriate cases. Individual pairs and small groups of members are already co-operating on these lines.

Our Society provides also a medium for bringing together members who have, unknown to each other, been studying the same subject. One such event took place within a month of the Society's formation.

There is much that individual members can do to help each other. Interchange of information has long been a commonplace in this field of study, always remembering that it should not be used for publication without consent and always with acknowledgement.

I am confident the Society has a useful future. The results of our long term plans for assembling information as to the whereabouts of material of railway and canal historical interest and preparation of a bibliography of printed books will be very valuable when they reach fruition.

This Society exists for the mutual benefit of members interested in railway and canal history. The Council, which is representative of both interests, will do its utmost to further the objects for which the Society was formed. Their task could be lightened by letters containing suggestions - on any subject - which members care to address to the Hon. Secretary.

C.R.C.

THE JOURNAL and MEMBERSHIP

This modest first issue of the Journal is, we hope, the forerunner of many others. At present publication is visualised as quarterly, but as

(2)

membership grows it should be possible to produce larger issues and to include articles and other material of permanent value. Eventually, it is intended to replace typescript by printed reproduction.

All such plans, are, of course, linked with financial considerations and we hope members will take every suitable opportunity of introducing new members. It is only by an increase in membership that we can fully implement the Society's objectives.

BOOK REVIEWS

"British Railway History, 1830 to 1876" by C. Hamilton Ellis. (George Allen and Unwin, Price 30s.)

This is a book which should have a two-fold appeal: to the general reader who admires the author's works, and to the amateur historian who has long awaited a treatise placing railway history in broad outline against a setting of contemporary social and political events.

Written in Mr. Ellis's attractive and entertaining style, his lucid and balanced narrative is excellent. It embraces a host of railway activities; from company politics to mechanical developments, architecture, catering and labour policy. The illustrations are good and, with one exception, well chosen, while the concluding notes might well be copied elsewhere.

Unhappily for the historian, that accuracy which is the least to be expected in any work calling itself a "History" is sadly lacking. Errors are historical, geographical and typographical. Among them one finds numerous mistaken dates and facts, even perpetration of classic fallacies; the author confuses the rivers Anker and Amber; and the location of Norton Bridge eludes him. An illustration described as "Standon Station, Grand Junction Railway" is really Sandon, N.S.R. Added to factual errors are misconstrued events. For instance, after giving an account of the dispute between the L. & Y.R. and E.L.R. at Clifton Junction, in 1849, Mr. Ellis goes on to say that at a subsequent meeting of the parties ".....the friction.....doubtless came to an end". This is not so. Notoriously bad relations continued for nearly ten more years. Such generalisations convey the impression that the author is treading soft ground, and a writer of Mr. Ellis's calibre should know better.

To the hopeful student of history, therefore, this book is disappointing, and, if his pocket be slender, can hardly be commended as value for money.

G.J.B.

"The Leicester and Swannington Railway" by C. R. Clinker (Leics. Archaeological Society, Guildhall, Leicester, price 8s. 6d., post free 8s. 9d.)

It is over fifty years since C. E. Stretton's histories of the Midland and Leicester and Swannington Railways appeared, and conceptions of railway history were at that time rather below to-day's standards. But although we treat these works with reserve, it is to Stretton's credit that he gathered a good deal of valuable information, and he is entitled to a place amongst the few who created an interest in the older railways.

The time has come for the Leicester and Swannington to be viewed in a new light, and Mr. Clinker has industriously turned to the full story revealed by the Company's minute books and other irrefutable sources. This distinguished little railway, the first in the Midlands and earliest constituent of the much-loved Midland Railway, has, as the author admits, a story which is by no means exciting. But no apology is needed. The details are recounted in a style which enables the reader to follow clearly its development into a prosperous concern. Apart from the Company's history, the course of the line with its interesting inclines, is fully described, whilst details of rolling stock, permanent way, traffic and so on help the reader to envisage the working and add colour to the scene.

Perhaps it is because of the very clarity of the pictures that one misses a few of the landmarks in earlier accounts. A dramatic story has been published (at least twice) of John Ellis's effort to enlist George Stephenson's support which culminated in a remarkable change in the attitude of the latter and whole-hearted readiness to help. This is not mentioned, and if Mr. Clinker does not believe it one feels he might have said so. Again, the Company's use of metal tokens as tickets is well known, but no allusion to them is made. John Ellis's subsequent career is, one feels, worthy of remark for he was the Chairman of the Midland from 1849 to 1858 and saw it through difficult days. Doubts are cast upon the oft-told tale of the invention of the "steam trumpet" for which, by the bye, F. S. Williams rather than Stretton may have been responsible.

The book is an excellent example of the way in which an older railway history may be examined anew. Mr. Clinker had done his work conscientiously, and the Leicester Archaeological Society is to be congratulated on making it available to a wider circle of historians.

G.O.H.

GIFTS TO THE SOCIETY

The following have been gratefully received and acknowledged.

"Our Iron Roads" (1889), by F. S. Williams, from H. J. Moore, Esq., Onibury, Craven Arms; List of Plans and Documents deposited with the Clerk of the Peace for the County of Salop (1902), from the County Archivist; "The Leicester and Swannington Railway", by C. R. Clinker (1954), from the author.

"THE RAILWAY MANIA AND ITS AFTERMATH" by H. G. Lewin

This very valuable work, upon which railway historians place great reliance, contains a few slips, mainly in dates. It is thought desirable to record these in the Journal. Mr. M. D. Greville has already collected a number of these corrections, and will be glad to hear from any member who has similar information. The source of the amended information should be quoted in each case.

MEMBERS' QUERIES

An example of the Wooden Railway was laid out and working at Midleton, Co. Cork, in 1845. Was this similar to the line at Wimbledon Common or was it, in fact, the same equipment transferred to Ireland? (Walter McGrath)

Exact date in 1931 (believed to be during November) on which the last passenger train ran on the Campbeltown and Macrihanish Lt. Rly. (M.D. Greville).

Actual date of opening of Carlisle (Citadel) station, with the contemporary source of information. Extensive research shows that the dates usually quoted are incorrect (G. O. Holt).

(Replies to be sent direct to enquirers, please)

FORTHCOMING EVENTSSaturday, 26th March

An excursion has been planned to mark the 150th Anniversary of the opening of the Grand Junction Canal. This will start from Northampton (Castle) station at 10.30 a.m. and finish there about 5.30 p.m. Visits will be paid by coach to Northampton branch locks and site of tramway, Blisworth tramway (including optional trip by boat through the canal tunnel), Wolverton aqueduct and site of Ouse locks. Cost per head about 15/- (maximum), exclusive of meals. The party is being organised and led by Mr. Charles Hadfield with whom bookings must be made not later than 12th March. Notes will be supplied to those taking part.

Saturday and Sunday, 30th April and 1st May

Week-end gathering at Leicester, including the Annual General Meeting, an inspection of the City Museum's extensive transport collection and visits to the Leicester and Swannington Railway and Ashby-de-la-Zouch Canal's Ticknall and Cloud Hill tramroads. The programme will be as set out in the November circular. Full details will be sent later to all members.

Sankey Brook Navigation

A visit to the above is planned for September. Further information will be given as soon as possible.

Liverpool and Manchester Railway, 125th anniversary of opening

Consideration is being given to a suggestion that we should organise a special train and inspect the various items of historical interest en route. There are considerable railway operating difficulties in arranging a train to meet our special requirements and at the time of going to press the proposal is still being examined by the chief officers of the London Midland Region.

LONDON LECTURE MEETING held on 15th January

Twenty-nine members, mostly from the London area, gathered in the London Transport Executive's library to hear Mr. H. A. Vallance, a member of the Council, give a paper entitled "The London and Greenwich Railway, the First Railway in London". As the President said in his opening remarks, the speaker needed little introduction, being well known as a regular contributor to "The Railway Magazine".

Mr. Vallance commenced by speaking of the promotion and original construction of the line, which was laid throughout on a viaduct, and proceeded to trace its subsequent history and working down to the present day. That his subject was of great interest was evident from the numerous questions which followed.

During that period of the evening devoted to social matters, in which those present were introduced to one another, the Hon. Secretary appealed for information of members' particular interests. Stating that the Society had over seventy members, he stressed the importance of free exchange of knowledge between them. This was one of the primary objects of the Society, and it was only by recording details of members' interests that such an end might be attained.

The meeting was distinguished by the presence of Mr. Michael Robbins, Secretary of the London Transport Executive, and Mr. Charles E. Lee, both members of the Society. At the conclusion of the proceedings the President expressed grateful thanks to Mr. Vallance for an admirable paper, and to Mr. Robbins and London Transport for the use of the room.

BRITISH TRANSPORT COMMISSIONHISTORICAL RECORDS SECTION

We are informed by the Archivist, Mr. L. C. Johnson, that the above repository is now open for research purposes on Tuesday evenings until 9.0 p.m. This is very welcome news for students from the provinces and those who are unable to visit the repository during the daytime.

WHY THE CAMBRIAN RAILWAYS DIRECTORS WERE ONCE ADMONISHED BY
THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

PART 1

By E. A. Wilson, M.A.

Conditions of service on the railways were very different in 1887 from those of the present day. The directors of many imposed an often tyrannical discipline on their employees. The result was excessive hours of work, and often instant dismissal on the flimsiest of pretexts. One such incident, however, had a most surprising and unexpected ending.

On the 6th November, 1887, a porter named James Humphreys had been on duty continuously for the extraordinary time of 44 hours, when the down morning mail train reached Ellesmere station. In those days points were often worked by hand (the "interlocking" system of working signals was introduced in 1889) and Humphreys was too late to operate the lever, with the result that the train was derailed. Fortunately, there was little damage and no loss of life. An investigation of the incident took place, and the General Manager of the Cambrian Railways, whose line it was, attributed the accident to the negligence of porter Humphreys, and he was dismissed the Company's service.

A memorial for the reinstatement of Humphreys was prepared and signed by the gentry and principal tradespeople of Ellesmere, and Mr. John Hood, the stationmaster, appended his signature. (It was not at Mr. Hood's orders, but at those of his superiors that Humphreys had been obliged to work such long hours).

No blame was attached to Mr. Hood and he was still at Ellesmere Station in 1889, two years after the accident. Later, in giving evidence before a Select Committee of the House of Commons, he produced testimonials given to him by the manager and other officials of the Cambrian Railways proving the efficient conduct of his duties during twenty years as stationmaster at Criccieth and later at Ellesmere.

After this unaccountable interim period he was moved to the smaller station at Montgomery, and fined £3: 6s; the reason given by the Directors was that they considered his action in signing the memorial for the reinstatement of Humphreys a most undesirable breach of discipline.

We now move on to 1891, when a Select Committee of Parliament was enquiring into the length of time worked by railway employees. During this investigation, Mr. Conacher, the General Manager of the Cambrian Railways, was asked why Mr. Hood had been fined and removed to a smaller station. He said "that his removal to another station was determined with reference to the accident which occurred at Ellesmere when he was Stationmaster there in 1887, and that the Directors blamed the stationmaster for not having made better arrangements with regard to his staff".

(To be continued)