



Combe Rail members' magazine - issue #10 Summer 2018

(Combe Rail CIO – Registered charity 1164083)

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IN THIS ISSUE....

Retired Barnstaple railwayman Frank Kidwell celebrated his 90th birthday earlier this year. We met up with him in May to hear about his long railway career – starting as a teenage porter at Barnstaple Junction, and finishing as one of the last signalmen at Ilfracombe.



COMBE RAIL NEWS

We were guests at the Lynton and Barnstaple Railway Spring Gala in May, where we shared our heritage and TawLink plans with many visitors. As part of Ilfracombe's Victorian Week in June, John Burch gave a well-received talk at Ilfracombe Museum: "The Ilfracombe Line, past, present and future." We are in ongoing discussion with Braunton Parish

Council to begin restoration of the semaphore signal in Station Road.

2018 AGM and Railway Exhibition

This year's AGM will take place on Saturday 8th September 2018 in The Landmark Pavilion, Ilfracombe (formal notice appears on page 2.) The Pavilion will be open to the public from 10am-4pm for a Railway Exhibition, and as last year, we have invited a variety of local railway groups including Ilfracombe Model Railway Society, Lynton and Barnstaple Railway, West Somerset Railway, Tarka Valley Railway, Bideford Railway Heritage Centre, Instow Signal Box Tarka Rail Association and Ilfracombe and Braunton Museums. Combe Rail trustees will be on hand to meet CR members and to talk to the public about our plans. The AGM itself will start at 4pm, and members who wish to attend are requested to bring ID (e.g. driving licence) in order to be admitted and to receive a ballot paper.





NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN

that the 2018 Annual General Meeting of Combe Rail CIO
will be held at 4pm on Saturday 8th September 2018
at The Landmark Pavilion, Wilder Road, Ilfracombe, Devon

AGENDA

1. Introduction and apologies for absence
2. To receive and adopt the Report of the Trustees, and the Accounts for the year ended 31st July 2018
3. To elect two Trustees
Under UK charity law, two of our five Trustees must stand down at each AGM. This year, John Burch (Vice Chair) and Yvonne Hin (Secretary) are standing for re-election.
4. To approve the appointment of Andrew Hedges as independent auditor

PROXY

A member is entitled to appoint another person as their proxy, to speak and vote on their behalf at the meeting. Proxy Forms and a list of Trustee candidates will be emailed to the membership on 24th August 2018.

NOMINATIONS

Any member may stand for election as a Trustee, provided they are not barred from doing so under Charity Commission regulations. They must be proposed by another member, and must supply their full name, date of birth, nationality, profession and address. They should also supply a short personal statement for distribution to the membership. Nominations must be posted to: Combe Rail, Flat 5 Holly House, Avenue Road, Ilfracombe EX34 9AT, to arrive by 2pm on Wednesday 8th August 2018.

By Order of the Board
(signed) Yvonne Hin
CIO Secretary
3rd July 2018



TAW LINK NEWS

Following an encouraging meeting in June, North Devon Council have kindly offered to provide local transport and demographic data in support of a pre-feasibility study.

FRANK KIDWELL'S RAILWAY MEMORIES – PART 1



(Frank in May 2018, holding the layout diagram from Ilfracombe signal box. COMBE RAIL)

BARNSTAPLE 1942-49

I was born in 1928, and I joined the railway on 20th August 1942, at 8.30am at Barnstaple Junction. I started as number-taker, just recording every vehicle that came in, goods vehicles, this is, origin, contents, consignee and the number. That [information] was used then by the goods office, so that if it stayed over 48 hours, it incurred demurrage; that was the purpose of it. The goods office would inform the consignee that there was goods waiting for them to offload, because that vehicle had to be emptied and put back into service again,



(E1R class shunting in Barnstaple goods yard in 1947)

but particularly with covered wagons some would want to use the wagons as storage space. That was preventing the wagons being used profitably, so somebody had to make good the lost money. Of course August '42 that was just when the Americans arrived. Just where the stationmaster's house is now, there was a half-round Nissan hut and a Corporal in there, Corporal James G. Owen from Allentown Pennsylvania, his job was to record all the American

traffic coming in. There were times when he wanted to go to the local hop, either Landkey or Umberleigh or round the town here, he loved dancing, so of an evening if I was late turn, I'd duplicate my work and stick it in on his office table ready for tomorrow morning when he could enter it in. On occasions the Major might come in, the boss, but instead of chastising me, it'd be "Here's a cigar for your father" or a chewing gum. It was a good relationship.

It was a good life. As I got a bit older, I suppose I was fairly useful. I could shunt, and I could shunt coaching stock as well. One memorable November 1st, the 8.10 Ilfracombe's coming up (I suppose it's the 8.10 Torrington) with a 2-set and a 3rd from Torrington. The engine would run around, go up back out over by West 'box then come in and tow the Torrington coaches back out over on the Torrington line, allow the 8.10 up, and then it was my job to jump in, take off the tail lamp, take off the screen from the corridor, then jump down, lift up the lump (the coupling, this is) then set that up, bring up the Torrington [train] then and they would be coupled up, everything would be set.



Then I'd go back, jump down between the 3rd and the 2-set, uncouple the vacuum then couple up the vac for the 3rd so the Torrington engine could pull away. I'd done this job dozens of times, but it was November 1st and I didn't know about steam [heating] being introduced [for the winter months], and I hadn't coupled up the bloody steam pipe! Of course as soon as they gave the Exeter and Waterloo train the signal to go, he pulled away and pssssss... and the carriage and wagon were cold and the foreman gave me

(M7 30254 attaching the Torrington portion to the up ACE)

a right telling off. There used to be the dreaded form that if you'd made a mistake of any sort, it was a "Please Explain". I had to take this form out and go into the staffroom and I was shaking like a leaf - I'd never had a Please Explain given to me, it was deadly, that. The next thing, in comes the Foreman "Boy, chuck that away. You're only 16. You're not supposed to be shunting till you're 18!" Course I'd been shunting there for months, but in wartime you made do with what [staff] you'd got. For example over on the coal stage (it was a sleeper platform) I haven't heard anything about it in the records - there were three ladies over there who had wicker baskets, and they'd fill them up with steam coal, and the engine would come up with the tender, and they'd fill it up.

Then there was the little lady over at Town station, Rosie - I forget what her surname was - she was ticket collector. And Jimmy Decker. He was 80, he'd come back, he was ticket collector at Town. There were two of them, Rosie and Jimmy. They were good at their jobs. I was number-taker at Junction, but Saturday afternoon there was no goods traffic, so I'd be sent over to Town to let the old timers off and collect tickets. The Parliamentary Express was always known as "The Parley" - Lord Fortescue allowed it to come down through Portsmouth Arms providing every train stopped at his station. You had two trains in the afternoon, 3.13 and 3.54. The 3.13 was the 9.00 Waterloo down and the 3.54 was the 11.00 Atlantic Coast Express coming downwards. The 3.13 would come in at a load of matelots would come off. Usually leading them was no other than Percy Brend (later of the Brend Hotel Group): "Just paid off a ship at Chapelton - 5d please." The blighters, they were coming up from Plymouth. I knew that and they knew that, but as a boy I'm not going arguing with a gang of matelots. "Just paid off a ship at Chapelton" you can just imagine a destroyer up there!



(N Class 857 leaving Barnstaple Town on a down service)

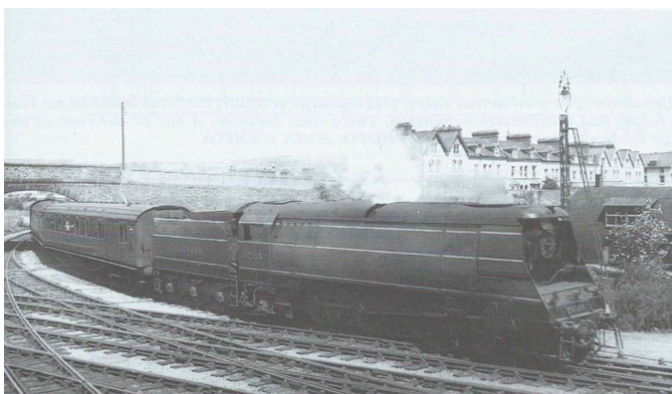
There was "The Boozer" the 10.30pm to Wrafton and Braunton. The big camps were out on the Saunton Road. Both stations were open stations. There was no hope in hell of collecting a ticket there, they were jumping off and just running. That's why I had to collect the tickets at Town station. As you come up the steps of Town station, the booking office was on your right, and then you had to go through another pair of sliding doors to get onto the platform, and the 10.30 would be waiting out there.

I would be sent out to collect tickets on "The Boozer". They would come up the steps, but a ticket - fivepence it was - and then before they could get on the platform they had to give up the ticket. Of course that goes against the grain. "I've only just bought the bloody thing, and now you're taking it from me." I would have my cap off to put the tickets in. If anyone objected, there would be two "snowdrops" - the American Military Police with white helmets - two Military Police "redcaps" and two RAF police. There used to be six of them back there.



("Snowdrops" in wartime Bristol. PAUL TOWNSEND CC)

Anybody who misbehaved - depending on what [service] they were - a hand would come over my shoulder and they'd grab them "Right! Last compartment!" There was a porter there, I won't mention his name... I'd get my hat nearly full of tickets, I'd give him the tickets to take up to the signalman, who would count the tickets tomorrow morning to know how many passengers were on there. But he would save half a dozen, go round the back of the queue "Come on mate, you don't want to hang around here. Fivepence each" But they were checking on him and it didn't balance, and one night he's out there at the tail end of the queue selling fivepenny tickets to the 'back-enders'... and a hand goes on his shoulder. Railway Police. That was the end of his railway career. I've seen them [on 'the boozer'] between the coaches hanging on, mad they were. When the train went, there were no lights then because of air raids - or the possibility of an air raid, we never had one - the ladies of the night would come out of all the alcoves, sheepishly down the steps and go away. But they'd had a good night. If you can imagine going up the steps and going through the booking hall, you turn right and there was the porter's office there, and there was a trapdoor to get up into the roof area. There was more bloody GI equipment up in that roof - torches, macs, cigarettes, all up in the roof. Freddie Frampton and Jack Thoms were the two foreman/porters - they did a roaring trade in contraband. You could get anything there.



(21C105 arriving at Barnstaple Junction in 1947 RS CARPENTER)

I always wanted to go to sea. I tried to go in the merchant navy when I was 16. I didn't want to go in the navy because most of my mates were going down to Plymouth or Portsmouth, and being in barracks for months. I wanted blue water. So I tried to get in the Merchant Service, and eventually I got in at 17. The Stationmaster [at Barnstaple Junction] played up hell with me.

Railways were a reserved occupation, and at that time [1945] I didn't have to go. But I wanted to see things. And fortunately by the time I was 19, I'd been out through Suez and come home via Panama, so I'd done the circle. I realised that it wasn't for me, and enquired what would happen if I packed it in and came back to the railway - "There's a job waiting for

you now. You can start tomorrow if you want.” I suppose my past history [on the railway] had stood me in good stead. They must have forgotten about that steam pipe!

I'd get sent over for swing bridge duties, to open up down at Pottington 'box to let the vessels through. There was a restriction there that the bridge had to be closed twenty minutes before high water. The river traffic had priority up to twenty minutes before high water, then irrespective, you had to close the bridge. The crossing keeper from Shapland and Petters used to come over, and - I must have been shunting Rolle Quay then - I was portering on Town station and also shunter for Rolle Quay. Rolle Quay could hold 98



wagons, a brake and an N class engine. It used to come over at 4 o'clock and we'd start shunting. Sometimes you'd be lucky and you'd only have 20 wagons to mess around with - take out your empties, put back your full. Of course they had to be in the order of the contractors starting from Squires up by the rugby ground, going through Devon County Council yard, Carters, Stanbury's, Osbourne's, Trump's, Cowper's Dallyn's, RGB and Gould's, all down through there. As well as the odd farmer's, you know you'd have

(Rolle Quay 1950s MAVIS EASTAUGH COLL)

a wagonload of manure which they would come with a horse and cart and offload. By Squires there was only a narrow width between the wagon and the platform, because they could drop an open wagon trapdoor from the wagon into their store. They could run trolleys across. The brake was on the wagon, and the driver pushing was having trouble moving it. Your brake lever's up there, and you've gone down and put a pin in. Normally you'd get in there and push the lever down to take the pin out and let the brake off. But I couldn't get in that way, so I turned around this way, pushed it down, took the pin out - you can see what's coming. The bloody wagon went, the shunting-pole went back to a right-angle. It couldn't go any further, the hook was on the end, and it's running along the wall and all the bloody drainpipes. Stripped the lot. But my relationship with the foreman Freddie Jordan - that name's come back - he saw what was happening "Don't worry, boy, we'll fix that up"

Charlie Cooper was wounded early in the war, and he was given the job of crossing keeper at Shapland and Petter's. I'd be there [at the swingbridge] and Charlie, and there was a great big fat - signalman at Pottington 'box, Charlie Trigger. We'd take off the fishplates, disconnect the rods, get the capstan head - there was a square 3-4" head came up through the bridge decking and we'd put a capstan head on so you could put 4 bars in, and then get hold and start pushing. Charlie Cooper was a fairly active chap, and so was I; we could make the bridge really swing. But Charlie Trigger the signalman being so fat he couldn't keep up with us pushing, and instead of pushing the bar in front of him, he let go and the bar behind him got him up the backside.



(Opening Pottington swing bridge in NORTH DEVON JORNAL HERALD 1963)

He got wedged between the railings, and he'd have gone out in the river if he hadn't hung on to the railings. We had some fun on that bridge. Once a week I'd have to go down with a bucket of grease because the bridge was exposed to the salt water. Every cog was thick with grease. That was one of my other jobs. I came back from the Merchant Service in '47, so this would have been about '48. I went on through '49 and new year's eve 1949 I started as leading porter-signalman at Umberleigh.

UMBERLEIGH 1949-53



People would look down their nose really at a place like Umberleigh. But if you wanted a basis of a good railwayman, stick him there because he's got to clean the urinals, he's got to order up his wagons because outside there's the auction field where the farmers would bring their cattle, sheep and pigs to be auctioned off. If they wanted to send them off - particularly the pigs up to Trowbridge - you'd have to drive the cattle in yourself, put them in pens, load them, label up the

(34064 'Fighter Command' arrives on a down service on 18th April 1960 ROGER JOANES)

wagons, charge them - and then get inside and wash your hands to sell tickets to the passengers, and also deal with parcel traffic so you had to weigh that and charge it at the correct rate. And at the end of the month, you had to do your monthly accounts, and there was no surplus or loss column, it had to be down to the ha'penny. You covered the whole spectrum of railways. There was a stationmaster, he covered Portsmouth Arms and Chapelton, and there was a signalman. I was leading porter/signalman so I covered the interval between the early man and the late. I used to go over I think for 11.45 until about 2.15, just to cover. That was my introduction to a Class 5 'box. In those days you had not only the Atlantic Coast Express but also the Devon Belle. I was 3 years at Umberleigh. It was right beside Murch Brothers timber yard. I bought a ton of offcuts when I got there, and for three years I was burning timber. The stack was just beside the back door.

We got married in September 1949. I got the Umberleigh job on new year's eve 1949. If you cross Umberleigh bridge, Murch Brothers is on your left, and there are two railway cottages. The railway housing people enquired of me "In the event of a house becoming vacant, would you consider taking tenancy?" So of course I grabbed at the chance and said yes please. Very soon after that, [I had] "Please attend Barnstaple Court:



(An up service arrives in 1961 CLIFF GREGORY)

British Rail v. Mrs Snow - repossession." Oh my God, my name was mud. They'd come up to the booking office window and I'd be serving tickets, and they'd be "He's the one that's getting me out of my house" God, I took some stick there. But eventually she bought three

houses in Pilton Street.

My wife was from Cardiff, and to come to a place where she'd be cooking on Primus (except at weekends when you might get the fire going) and we'd got a Tilly lamp which she was scared to death of, because if you turned it on too early it flared right up. You'd got to go up the garden to use the bucket toilet - keep your foot against the door and sing loud. Out the back there's an elm trough between the two houses and a pump to pump water. When a niece asked me about the bathroom I said you undress on Friday night in here and you go outside and get in that trough and I use the pump, and she said "I'm not having a bath in that!" It was a lovely living though because you'd be out in the garden, and Lionel the farmer over at Nethercleave would say "Alright, pack it in, we've got a whist drive!" and you'd go to the village hall, which was in the quarry on the main road, and we'd settle down and have a hand of cards, then "Come on let's go for a pint" down to the Rising Sun. It was a real good laugh all the way along the line. We thoroughly enjoyed it.



In 1953 Frank became signalman at Morteohoe station. His railway memories will continue in the next issue of Devon Belle.
