

*British Railway Museums:
From preservation movements to
heritage tourism*

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150th anniversary celebrations at Wharf station in July 2015 on the Talylyn Railway. (Source: Author's collection)

The latter of these is the cradle of a significant and interesting part of the universe of the world-famous Thomas the Tank Engine stories. My love of the railways began when, as a young child, I started watching the television series

Thomas the Tank Engine and Friends, which was based on the book series *The Railway Series* written by Wilbert Awdry from 1945, and continued by his son, Christopher Awdry. My fondness for the railway later turned into a real passion, which I cultivate to this day, by for example maintaining my collection of model locomotives and rolling stock, and my model railway layout.

I would also like to thank all the volunteers who, thanks to the dedication of their time and effort, make the existence and operation of heritage railways possible, and are the driving force behind the realisation of railway galas. I have personally had the pleasure of attending multiple of these, and one at Barrow Hill Roundhouse left the biggest impression on me because the event's premise was to create as convincing of a representation of how the engine shed would appear and operate on normal days back in the 1960s, with the added knowledge that such sights would originally normally be off-limits to non-professional railway enthusiasts. For this reason, gratitude should be expressed towards the railway heritage sector for making such experiences accessible to the general public in the modern era, decades after pragmatic modernisation would have deemed this a redundant relic of the past.

I hope that my work will be interesting for its readers, and that the topic itself will be as fascinating to them as it is for me.



Attending the gala at Barrow Hill Roundhouse in September 2015, and experiencing the authentic steam era atmosphere. (Source: Author's collection)

Abstract

The original public attitudes towards railways were of apprehension and fear, and trust in this technology developed gradually over the decades. However, the former half of the 20th century saw substantial shifts on a large scale in the way railways were perceived. The popularisation of railway enthusiasm through such phenomena as trainspotting and commemorations of the centenaries of pioneering railway companies spread a perception of

railways as something more than a functional method of transport, but also something with innate sentimental value which pleasure and hobbies could be derived from. Modernisation of the railways, which grew to increasingly rapid levels in the post-war years, brought an additional nostalgic value to the railways for those reminiscing about the way they used to be. The combination of these perceptions spurred on the development of what is now the enormous government-sponsored National Railway Museum, and directly motivated the rise of the volunteer-run, not-for-profit heritage railway movement. These institutions are part of the railway preservation movement, and through the use of the artefacts in their care they aim to educate and offer approximate experiences of railways as they existed in the past. To be able to sustain themselves, they have opted to function as part of the tourism industry and to appeal to the general public, seeing this as the most viable demographic to source revenue from to fund maintenance of their operations. They call on the concept of heritage as a formulation of the appeal of the railways as something beyond the purely functional, and as a tool to convey and advertise the value upheld and offered for consumption. Appealing to tourists, and by extent, wider audiences to fund the maintenance of their operations has been a feature of the institutions from their early days, but also one that has faced the consternation and discussion of historical authenticity-focused railway enthusiasts. The wearing down of and modifications made to railway artefacts to keep them operational is another point of discussion without a conclusive answer. Numerous railway preservation institutions believe, and follow the principle, that to be sustainable, a balance must be maintained between conservation of the types of artefacts originally deemed to be heritage, and functioning as tourist attractions that are appealing to wider audiences. Leaning too far towards the conservation side can lead to losing track of the financial needs of the institutions and alienating the general public, while leaning too far towards the commercial tourism side can lead to losing sight of the movement's original principles and to seriously compromising both the physical condition of the artefacts in their care compared to the state in which they entered preservation, and the way they are conveyed to visitors.

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Introduction

This master's thesis is entitled *British Railway Museums: From preservation movements to heritage tourism*.

I have a particular interest in British railway history. This is due to its rich and characterful past, its equipment's appeal in both visual design and technological ingenuity, and the persisting welcoming and educational culture surrounding its enjoyment and preservation right up to the present day. An important part of British railway history is the role of museums and working exhibits in conveying this field's heritage to new generations of people, and potentially even in introducing new enthusiasts to the subject who might wish to partake in its continued survival. Railway preservation in the United Kingdom particularly came into prominence in the mid-20th century with the emergence of pioneering preservation movements wishing to conserve this history for posterity. They laid the groundwork for that which has since then become significant tourist attractions as well as conveyors of a piece of British historical heritage.

a) Research questions

My aim is to delve deeper into these railway preservation institutions themselves and explore the history of their central undertakings, which consist of the transformation of railway locations and their accoutrements from purely functional industries to not-for-profit organisations dedicated to the preservation of heritage experiences, this then being the central overarching object of study. For what reason did they become part of the 'heritage' movement and tourism industry and in which way did this occur? In which way have they conveyed and interpreted the historical artefacts they are in possession of? If these have changed through the decades, why? And what challenges have they faced?

In addition to exploring railway-focused preservation literature, I will also utilise theory which includes Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's concepts of how 'heritage' has more recently been used as a way of marketing locations and items as destinations, attractions and experiences. I wish to discover how this relates to railway preservationists' efforts, but also their motivations and their ambitions. An important focus of the text is how and why the industrial railway facilities, in their transformation into railway preservation organisations, became a part of the heritage movement and tourism sector as tourist attractions and heritage experiences.

I wish to explore why, to arrive at this point, railways and associated infrastructure and rolling stock in the first place came to be seen as something worth preserving during the great expansion of the railway preservation movement around the mid-20th century, and why, in the effort to label and market their operations, the movement was over time increasingly shaped to correspond with the concept of 'heritage' and integrated into the tourism sector. They were now marketed not as merely functional industries, but as tourist attractions, tributes to and remnants of the past, and ways for future generations to be able to experience parts of the world as it once was.

When it comes to discussing what role railway preservation institutions serve today, I aim to examine how they have adapted to change over the decades. I want to explore what compromises have been needed to keep the organisations afloat economically through the years. How have they strived to remain sustainable through increasing their appeal to the public, and what part has marketing and commercialisation played?

Functional heritage railways face another conflict between the wish to conserve historical artefacts and need to keep an operation running. Within this dilemma, one potential compromise has begun taking shape in recent years when it comes to the locomotives that are employed. Newly built steam locomotives are emerging, which have the ability to take the strain of being in regular action off older, historic locomotives, while at the same time representing particular locomotive classes previously lost to time due to scrapping after withdrawal from original service. These are in a sense functioning historical replicas which

also have a practical function in physically maintaining the operation of the institutions which created them.

b) Research literature and research status

In my research, I have discovered that the majority of the existing railway literature I have studied is primarily concerned with the original, revenue-earning railways themselves, rather than what came afterwards for many of these following their closure and subsequent re-opening as heritage institutions. Additionally, certain preserved railways have received disproportionate amounts of attention in literature compared to others within the same sector. In the book *The Railway Preservation Revolution*, written by Jonathan Brown and published in 2017, Brown writes the following: “These railways are about preserving our history. Yet, characteristically, their own history has had little attention. The exception is the Welsh narrow-gauge railways - the pioneers on the Talyllyn and the Ffestiniog, for example. The revival of the Welsh Highland Railway was such an epic struggle that already half a dozen books have been written about it. Elsewhere though, coverage is patchy.”¹ This passage illustrates my point. However, rather than basing my text on dealing with one particular preservation institution, I shall instead be striving to study the railway preservation movement as a whole: I will be analysing why it has come to be, and for what reasons certain practices have been employed as well as potentially why these have changed over the years, something I believe to be currently insufficiently covered in this field today, which could be interpreted to be to a large degree preoccupied with recounting past events without covering more recent developments or asking why these have taken place.

Despite it being, as previously mentioned, a well-covered part of the railway preservation sector, the Talyllyn Railway is in my opinion nevertheless certainly worth studying in this context, as it was the first railway to be preserved as a heritage railway by volunteers, hence playing a hugely significant part in setting this sector into motion. To help me research how

¹ Jonathan Brown. *The Railway Preservation Revolution*. Barnsley, South Yorkshire, Great Britain: Pen & Sword Transport, 2017, p. 10. (E-book edition)

and why this all began, I will be drawing on the book *Railway Adventure* written by L. T. C. Rolt and originally published in 1953. Rolt discusses the struggles and challenges of the early preservation movement as well as the underlying motivations for carrying out this work. These were not of an economic character, but rather one of wanting to save a remnant of a disappearing past, that he claims was falling victim to the railway modernisation in Britain at the time.

The previously mentioned *The Railway Preservation Revolution* will be valuable to me in that it also discusses the heritage railway movement in Britain, but it contains a broadened scope in that it discusses the sector as a whole over the decades since the 1950s. The book provides a solid overview over the most significant aspects and developments in the heritage railway sector throughout its history, but as Brown expresses, it is not a thoroughly comprehensive coverage of British railway preservation as a whole, in that it has excluded railway museums and the full range of social and economic aspects. Nevertheless, compared to the way that Rolt's *Railway Adventure* provides an understanding of the personal experiences of one of the earliest pioneers of the movement, this book provides an understanding of the movement's further history.

Another book I will be using in my project is *British railway enthusiasm*, written by Ian Carter, who at the time of its publication was Professor of Sociology at the University of Auckland in New Zealand. The book was published in 2008 by Manchester University Press as part of its "Studies in Popular Culture" series aiming to explore the social and cultural issues, institutions and attitudes of popular culture. Carter's *British railway enthusiasm*, a book born of the author's own enthusiasm for the railways, studies railway enthusiasts in the United Kingdom, as it is claimed by Carter that this was an interest which was widespread in the UK, most particularly in youths in the post-war years. It describes the ways this has manifested itself, with heritage railways indeed being a prominent example. Editor Jeffrey Richards writes in the foreword that "to date there has been no scholarly study of what Ian Carter calls 'the fancy' - the multi-faceted world of the railways as a hobby,"² which further emphasises how railway literature about topics outside of

² Ian Carter, *British Railway Enthusiasm*, Manchester University Press, 2008, "General editor's foreword".

technical histories of rolling stock and historical railway companies is sparse, a characteristic gap in the literature which I aim to explore in this text. While books in my bibliography like Brown's *The Railway Preservation Revolution* do discuss, like mentioned, technical histories of companies, *British railway enthusiasm* directs its focus to a greater degree on the human, social and cultural dimensions of railway enthusiasm and the attitudes that informed action, especially in the case of railway preservation. In my work I intend to combine discussion of both of these crucial sides of the topic.

I have previously discussed literature by Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. Another text which will be useful to my work is the book *Perspectives on Railway History and Interpretation: Essays to Celebrate the Work of Dr. John Coiley at the National Railway Museum, York* which was written by Neil Cossons et al. and published in 1992. This book was made in tribute to the former head of the National Railway Museum in York, John Coiley, who at the time of publication had retired from his position after 17 years. A number of his colleagues and friends subsequently came together to write essays as compiled in this book on the topic of the collections of the National Railway Museum as well as the issues surrounding the conservation and interpretation of both exhibits and railway history as a whole, among other topics. The book is decidedly of use as it explores themes close to those I am working with in this project.

c) Sources

Sources and literature may be difficult to differentiate in the realm of railway preservation, as specific individuals affiliated with said preservation can be found to be involved in both the active operation and development of the railway heritage sites I am dealing with as well as creating the literature surrounding it. As Ian Carter claims in *British railway enthusiasm*, the 1970s marked the beginning of the withering of the distinctions between “austere scholarly publishing and amateur railway publishing [...] as enthusiasts poached ever more insistently in academic pastures.”³ He claims that from that time onwards, railway heritage

³ Ian Carter, *British Railway Enthusiasm*, Manchester University Press, 2008, p. 12.

literature to a substantial degree tends to be written for and by enthusiasts.⁴ Nevertheless, I will be utilising a fruitful source of up-to-date commentary, discussion and news of recent developments from both industry insiders and outside commentators, this being *Steam Railway*, a well-known monthly rail transport periodical which was founded in 1979.⁵ The limitations of the material I am utilising must also be acknowledged. Certain aspects of the railway preservation realm are unknowable, difficult to obtain information about, or absent from official publications, such as internal member discussions and daily practices at the preservation institutions. Opinions about the views visitors have on the institutions are expressed in the publications I have sourced, though this is different from having direct access to said visitors' views. Additionally, the sources have the potential to have biases which result in facets like internal conflicts not being highlighted.

d) Structure

This text is divided into several main sections:

In “Part 1: Underlying theory” my aim is to present theoretical underpinnings for my further thesis moving forward. I wish to present that preservation of railway heritage is set within the larger context of, and is a part of, the concept of industrial heritage and its preservation. This section will show how industrial heritage in itself came to be, how this term is defined, and what historical remnants it specifically consists of. It shall further present the concept of industrial heritage tourism, the particular variety of tourism that seeks to utilise the cultural value of industrial remnants for interpretative purposes and make available the experiencing of it to interested audiences.

“Part 2: Introductory overview” is a section which will attempt to specify on a general level the scale of the railway preservation movement in Great Britain as it stands today. It will present the sizeable amount of railway enthusiasm that this nation possesses, as well as the practitioners of this hobby, this being railway enthusiasts. These enthusiasts, and their

⁴ Carter. 2008. p. 12.

⁵ Brown. 2017. p. 101. (E-book edition)

enthusiasm, is something which lies at the core of the origins of the railway preservation movement. Further, this section will show how these aspects might compare to other territories.

The section “Part 3: From conservation to heritage” is divided into three undersections. In “Part 3.1.: The transforming attitudes” I aim to explore the British attitudes towards the nation’s railway systems. From the original attitudes of intimidation with this new and unprecedented technology in the industry’s earlier days to the emerging signs of a desire to appreciate it on a deeper level and preserve it for its own sake, and also this attitude’s clash with pragmatism and the wish to move forward with progress and new technology. The concept of heritage was formulated as a means of appreciating and showcasing the value of past ways of living and operating societal systems, providing a look into the past, and a look into the roots of the industrial society of today.

In “Part 3.2.: Arrival of the heritage railway movement” I explore the formation of the physical manifestations of the wish to preserve railway history, with this undersection’s focus most importantly being on the heritage railway sector. I aim to explore how this happened and what it entailed, and how this tied into the attitudes towards the railways as seen in the previous section.

In the undersection “Part 3.3.: Emergence of the railway museum” attention is directed towards the other significant portion of the railway preservation industry, this being railway museums, with the focus being on the National Railway Museum in York. This is due to said museum being the largest of its kind in the world, being commonly viewed as an important centrepiece of British railway preservation, as well as possessing a history tracing back farther than any other sizeable railway museum. Here, similar questions are dealt with as in the previous undersection, although here aimed towards the museum field of the preservation movement.

In “Part 4: Battlegrounds” I aim to explore what struggles the railway heritage movement has faced, is facing currently and seems to be required to face in the future. In what way and why is the railway heritage preservation put into practice, and what happens at these

sites? In what way is the concern of sustainability for the future balanced with faithfulness to the past? Additionally, I aim to explore how this is balanced with the wider concept of heritage and the preservation of it.

This section is divided into two undersections. “Part 4.1.: Preservation and Tourism - financing heritage” will more specifically deal with the heritage sites' balancing of the need to advertise and gain streams of revenue to maintain themselves, and the core desire to conserve the historic atmosphere and physical state of the items in their care. Additionally, the undersection will be examining in what way exactly said desire was specified by certain pioneering preservation avenues, and to what degree such tenets persisted within the industry.

“Part 4.2.: Conserving and operating heritage” will deal with the need to balance the physical usage of artefacts and the retention of their historical value, the conflicts between the desire to establish protected sites of railway heritage with the surrounding drive of modernisation in the world, and the need to provide facilities expected in the modernising world while not erasing what the movement set out to uphold.

In “Part 5: Sustainable heritage” I will explore what part the previously discussed aspects have to play in ensuring the future of railway preservation.

Part 1: Underlying theory

Before I begin my discussion in earnest, I wish to lay down some theoretical groundwork for it to better frame and contextualise the area of study I am entering. To do this, I will be making use of the Polish scientific article “Turystyka kulturowa w obiektach poprzemysłowych – zagadnienia ogólne,” written by Tadeusz Jędrzyśiak. This work was published in June 2011 in the scholarly journal *Turystyka Kulturowa*, which has functioned as a quarterly publication since 2008 with the aim of exploring and discussing the cultural dimension of tourism from the perspective of scientists from diverse academic backgrounds. My chosen article by Jędrzyśiak deals with, discusses and defines concepts

and issues that are central to the study of cultural tourism in the realm of post-industrial objects and sites, as well as defining industrial heritage and the ways in which the items belonging to this can be preserved. This is relevant to my work in that my area of discussion falls directly into the realm in Jędrzyak's article, with the preserved railways of current-day Britain having once been industrial concerns that have, through and by the social movement of railway enthusiasm, been transformed into branches of the tourism sector, and with the associated railway exhibits shifting from their original function as instruments of industry to artefacts to be viewed or experienced by members of the public.

Tadeusz Jędrzyak recounts that by the end of the 19th century, technological relics were in Europe seen as remnants of the past which should be collected and stored within private museums. This stands in contrast to the current-day understanding that industrial objects might possess important value in the tourism sector, mainly through the potential of being experienced, and being within the sphere of interest of tourists.⁶ As defined by Jędrzyak, industrial heritage is a part of the aspect of culture termed cultural heritage, and it records the events of human civilisation through the lens of technological processes, while simultaneously being inseparable from the human inhabitants of the planet themselves and their customs. Hence, Jędrzyak claims, history of industry can be effectively illustrated by historic physical structures and machines. He argues that awareness of the value of industrial heritage can lead future and current generations of people to inventive and productive contact with modern engineering and technology. Industrial heritage, according to Jędrzyak, in the first instance consists of manufacturing plants and their products, the structures, tools, machines, abilities and technologies made use of during the process of production, and the lifestyles, traditions and events shaped by the manufacturing industry.⁷

Jędrzyak's definition of industrial heritage is widened as he additionally takes into consideration the aspects encompassed by the term according to other institutions and actors. He claims that the Polish Tourist Organization (POT) attributes to the term objects

⁶ Tadeusz Jędrzyak, "Turystyka Kulturowa w Obiektach Poprzemysłowych – Zagadnienia Ogólne," *Turystyka Kulturowa*, no. 6/2011 (June 2011): pp. 17-35. p. 17.

⁷ Jędrzyak. 2011. p. 17.

connected to manufacturing activity, such as mines, ironworks and factories, and to the processing industry, such as mills and forges, as well as other industries like those concerning paper, ceramics and textiles. As is most pertinent to my paper, this definition also includes objects related to railway transport, as well as river and maritime transport. Lastly, he claims the institution lists in its definition feats of engineering like viaducts and dams.⁸

With industrial heritage defined, it is important to next understand the form of tourism that draws value from it, this being industrial heritage tourism. Production and its processes, devices and surroundings are at the core of the aspects of society that are of interest to industrial heritage tourism, and it is the remnants of these that form the basis of developing this tourist product. This branch of tourism involves visiting and experiencing sites where industrial heritage serves as the main focus of attention, the central attraction and where, thus, encountering and learning more about it is the main motive for visiting. Core aspects of visiting such a site, which can indeed be observed at preserved railway heritage sites, consists of visiting objects or locations where technological processes of the past can be traced, observing historic machines and vehicles, and experiencing the atmosphere of an industrial facility of the past. Jędrzyśiak claims that, generally speaking, industrial heritage sites and the tourism that takes place in them deals with objects which have had their original industrial function replaced with a cultural function.⁹

Jędrzyśiak argues that the growing importance of industrial heritage tourism has the potential to positively affect regional development and contribute to national economic growth, specifically by increasing the attractiveness of selected areas as tourist destinations, which then strengthens the economic potential of the regions in which they are located. This is something he claims at his time of writing in 2011 to not have been fully realised or acted upon yet in Poland, where he claims it is a relatively new phenomenon,¹⁰ but which has undoubtedly been implemented in Britain with its railway heritage sector contributing

⁸ Jędrzyśiak. 2011. p. 17-18.

⁹ Jędrzyśiak. 2011. p. 18.

¹⁰ Jędrzyśiak. 2011. p. 19.

revenue to the British visitor economy on a scale of hundreds of millions of pounds, and contributing to the growth of local communities, aspects which will be revisited in detail later in my paper.

Jędrysiak claims that the legacy of the past can not only be recognised in the elegant and refined form of works of art and architecture, but also in the more down-to-earth and practical form of technological appliances such as other building structures, tools and machines, with these being records of engineering initiative in humanity's struggle to achieve mastery over the environment it inhabits. They are able to showcase the relations between humans, their technology, and their environment, as well as the ways these have changed and developed in the span of human civilisation. It is these technical monuments and artefacts that embody the physical manifestations of industrial heritage, and Jędrysiak claims they can exist as areas of civilisation as well as individual objects.¹¹ The railway preservation sector reflects this with the items in its care ranging from station sites, depots, engine sheds and stretches of railway to individual locomotives, carriages, wagons, pieces of railway uniforms, cranes, platform equipment and furnishings, and the like.

These technical monuments of industrial heritage are understood by Jędrysiak to be dividable into two fundamental categories, these being immovable and movable cultural goods.¹² The immovable cultural goods consist of locations and architecture tied to the extraction, production, processing and transportation industries. The latter, in terms of the railway, in turn consists of the infrastructure itself, such as the aforementioned railway lines and stations. On the other hand, the movable cultural goods consist in large part of equipment and vehicles, which specifically for the railway would denote such things as previously mentioned locomotives and rolling stock, as well as tools and appliances in workshops, semaphore signals, points and refuelling equipment.¹³

Jędrysiak claims that protection, conservation and understanding of the history of industrial development through technological artefacts stands at the core of the interest of

¹¹ Jędrysiak. 2011. p. 19.

¹² Jędrysiak. 2011. p. 19.

¹³ Jędrysiak. 2011. p. 19-20.

archaeologists of industry, with their goal being to make possible an authentic look at the history of work and management as well as the remains of industrial and technological history. This is additionally important because such specialists will regard the industrial remnants with a focus on their role in the history of the evolution of technological industry, taking into consideration the importance they have had in the development of settlements and the ways in which they represent social historical value. Nevertheless, this concept of the utilisation of industrial items and sites for recreational and tourism purposes is claimed by Jędrysiak to be a recent phenomenon, considering that it first developed to its full extent in Western Europe in the 1970s along with the contemporary deindustrialisation of the period. As facilities like ironworks and coal mines in countries such as the United Kingdom and France were being closed, the question arose of what should become of the disused industrial remnants and the inhabitants of the locations in question, which had grown and benefitted from industry, as these large reductions in available places of work were taking place.¹⁴

The United Kingdom finds itself as the main focus of my text due in large part not only to it being the birthplace of the modern railway and the steam locomotive, but the industrial revolution as a whole. It further distinguishes itself from the rest of the world by, according to Tadeusz Jędrysiak, being a pioneer in regards to grappling with the relics of the industrial revolution. This process is mentioned by Jędrysiak to have risen into prominence particularly in the 1950s and '60s as a result of the decline of heavy industry,¹⁵ which is true of the railway preservation scene specifically, as well, with the world's first heritage railway emerging in 1951 as a result of the volunteer takeover of the Talyllyn Railway in Wales. This decline, driven by economic transformations in British industry resulted in depopulation of former industrial zones or even cities, fuelling questions about the management of abandoned post-industrial facilities. In turn, great social debate affected the 1970s, in the aftermath of which could be seen some of the first successful adaptations of historic industrial remnants, with state policy often financially supporting continued

¹⁴ Jędrysiak. 2011. p. 24.

¹⁵ Jędrysiak. 2011. p. 24.

revitalisation of more such complexes. Subsequently, much emphasis was placed on the promotion and propagation of what had been achieved up to that point in regards to repurposing industrial heritage, and Jędrysiak goes so far as to claim that this preservation and adaptation of industrial remnants is one of Great Britain's main exports.¹⁶

Thus, the 1950s and '60s saw the beginning of investments being made in the protection and revitalisation of abandoned industrial areas and plants. This aforementioned field of study, which more specifically is concerned with the issues of the history of industry and economy, science and technology, and the conservation of material and facilities related to these, is termed industrial archaeology. This quickly spread to other parts of the world, with early examples being the United States and Germany. Ever since the emergence of these pioneering movements, the number of schemes aiming to utilise industrial heritage for tourism purposes has continued to rise, along with tendencies for heritage institutions to form groups linking various such resulting attractions together as tourist trails, and for investors to make use of such sites for the localisation of shopping and conference centres as well as hotels and restaurants. Since the idea of industrial heritage preservation was born, an international wish to cooperate in the accomplishment of these goals has also been displayed, with this being embodied in the creation of The International Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage, also known as the TICCIH, in the UK in 1973. This society, dedicated to studying industrial archaeology and protecting industrial heritage, aims to exchange experiences and share good practice on an international level.¹⁷

Jędrysiak notes that the amount of tourists interested in industrial remnants is on the rise on an international scale, with the people this group consists of including Western European students of art, history or technical subjects, scientists and business-oriented tourists interested in investment opportunities. They are to a large degree motivated to pursue artefacts of industrial heritage by factors such as wanting to better get to know history,

¹⁶ Jędrysiak. 2011. p. 25.

¹⁷ Jędrysiak. 2011. p. 24-25, 27.

discover new experiences, find points of contact with the past, or document relics by way of photographs or film.¹⁸

Part 2: Introductory overview

To begin with, I wish to make a clarification of one of the terms I will be using in the text. While the text will be using the term “the United Kingdom,” this will mostly be in reference to the countries that make up the island of Great Britain, these being England, Scotland and Wales. I have deemed Northern Ireland to be beyond the scope of this text because of how intrinsically linked and to a large degree shared its railway history is with that of the Republic of Ireland compared to the countries of Great Britain. This is because of the Northern Irish and Irish railways’ shared origins in the period between the opening of Ireland’s first railway, the Dublin and Kingstown Railway between Dublin and Dun Laoghaire, in 1834¹⁹ and the Partition of Ireland and subsequent formation of Northern Ireland as a part of the United Kingdom in 1921.²⁰

Conventional revenue-earning railways and not-for-profit heritage railways can be found in most corners of the world to a greater or lesser degree, all with their own cultural, technological and environmental distinctions that may function as points of interest to the beholder. Even so, Great Britain was the original birthplace of the railway industry, something reflected in the railways’ well-known prominence in the nation's culture and landscape. The activity of trainspotting in particular is heavily associated with Britain, with many station platforms playing host to railway enthusiasts observing the trains as they go by. Railway enthusiasm can also be seen in more dynamic action at the British heritage railways where volunteers operate and maintain equipment and infrastructure for no personal financial gain, but instead for the love of the work itself, the communities that

¹⁸ Jędrysiak. 2011. p. 33.

¹⁹ Railway Preservation Society of Ireland. “Irish Railway History.” n.d. Accessed November 9, 2021, <https://www.steamtrainsireland.com/museum-tickets/learning/irish-railway-history>.

²⁰ history.co.uk. “History of the Northern Ireland Conflict.” n.d. Accessed November 9, 2021, <https://www.history.co.uk/history-of-the-northern-ireland-conflict>.

form around these institutions, railways as a whole, or all of these factors combined. The island of Great Britain is highly saturated with heritage railways and railway museums located throughout the majority of its landmass, with the notable exception of the north-western tip of Scotland. According to the UK-wide trade association and support body called the Heritage Railway Association, the United Kingdom possesses “over 150 operational heritage railways, running trains over nearly 600 miles of track between some 460 stations.”²¹ According to Jonathan Brown, this track mileage is even greater than that of the London Underground’s vast system.²²

Another prominent European country with a highly developed railway system these numbers can be compared to is Germany. Although Germany has both a larger population and a larger geographical territory, these being 83,200,000 people and 357,582 km² respectively,²³ compared to the United Kingdom’s population of 67,406,000 and territory of 242,500 km²,²⁴ Germany possesses fewer heritage railways and railway museums, with a number of approximately 119.²⁵ In other words, the railway heritage sector stands particularly strongly and prominently in the United Kingdom compared to nearby territories.

²¹ Heritage Railway Association. “The HRA - Who we are and what we do.” n.d. Accessed January 30, 2022. <https://www.hra.uk.com/the-hra-who-we-are-and-what-we-do>.

²² Jonathan Brown. *The Railway Preservation Revolution*. Barnsley, South Yorkshire, Great Britain: Pen & Sword Transport, 2017, p. 12. (E-book edition)

²³ Britannica, T. Information Architects of Encyclopaedia. "Germany." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. n.d. Accessed January 30, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/facts/Germany>.

²⁴ Britannica, T. Information Architects of Encyclopaedia. "United Kingdom." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. n.d. Accessed January 30, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/facts/United-Kingdom>.

²⁵ Wikipedia. “Liste Von Museumsbahnen.” January 19, 2022. Accessed January 30, 2022. https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liste_von_Museumsbahnen.



Figure I. This is a map made by “UK & Ireland Heritage Railways,” an internet guide website concerned with cataloguing and describing the entire railway preservation scene of both the United Kingdom and Ireland. The map shows the geographical location of every heritage railway and railway museum the British Isles have to offer. It is evident that Great Britain’s large assortment of these is spread widely across

most of the island. (Key: Green icons denote railways, yellow denotes demonstration lines, purple denotes museums, and brown denotes tramways.)²⁶

In Ian Carter's book *British railway enthusiasm*, Carter argues that railway enthusiasm plays a big enough role in British culture, or at least did so in the 20th century, that understanding this fascination and hobby is necessary to understand British experience as a whole during the last century. He claims that railway enthusiasm was on the scale of a massive craze in the post-war years, one that affected a large portion of the younger generations, and which drove the further development of the hobby into various subsets of activities which includes railway preservation. Carter further emphasises railway enthusiasm's important position in Britain's history with the claim that the subset of railway modelling alone was in the late 1970s deemed to be the leading indoor leisure activity of male Brits, as well as how about two decades later, in the mid-1990s, an informed observer estimated that between three and five million British citizens entertained a significant interest in trains and railways,²⁷ numbers inferior only to the leisure activities of fishing and gardening.²⁸

These observations support the notion that Great Britain possesses the claims to fame in the railway world of being the originator of the modern steam railway, that it today boasts a particularly sizeable and developed railway preservation sector, and that railway enthusiasm is prominent in the nation's culture. It is worth noting, however, that the latter element of railway enthusiasm in itself being necessarily entirely unique in its character to Britain compared to the rest of the world is not a given. Carter poses the question of whether claims such as "the railway train has assumed a place in British society without parallel in the rest of the world"²⁹ are supported in reality, and though he does not answer this question explicitly, he provides mention of how railway enthusiasm can also be

²⁶ UK & Ireland Heritage Railways, "Map of All Steam Railways, Museums and Tramways in UK & Ireland", updated January 22, 2022, accessed January 30, 2022. <http://www.heritage-railways.com/map.php>.

²⁷ Ian Carter, *British railway enthusiasm*, Manchester University Press, 2008, p. 1.

²⁸ Carter. 2008. p. 12.

²⁹ K. Taylorson, *The Fun We Had: an Inside Look at the Railway Enthusiast Hobby*, London, Phoenix, 1976, p. 6, as cited in Ian Carter, *British Railway Enthusiasm*, Manchester University Press, 2008, p. 6.

evidenced in areas like North America, Japan and France, to name a few, on a not-insignificant scale.³⁰

Even so, Carter estimates the number of railway enthusiasts in Britain to somewhere in the realm of an impressive ten percent of the entire population, and again poses the question of whether this surpasses the number of enthusiasts in other nations, while seemingly cautiously implying that this is the case.³¹ The noncommittal nature of this claim might stem from a lack of available concrete figures for other countries.

Michael Williams, a railway author, journalist, academic and a travel writer, has also commented on this topic on his personal website. On this website Williams writes articles about various railway-related topics. Williams claims the British people can be described as being obsessed with nostalgia about railways, claiming such a mood is observable everywhere. He mentions that Britain possesses several prominent celebrities whom are known for promoting railway enthusiasm to wide audiences, such as television presenter Michael Portillo and his travel documentary programme *Great British Railway Journeys* (2010 - present), Pete Waterman, who, in addition to his musical career, is known for his involvement in numerous railway initiatives like locomotive ownership, rail vehicle restoration and tourist charter businesses, as well as popular historian and television presenter Dan Snow. This underlines that railway enthusiasm, or at least the awareness of it, appears to continue to reach the popular consciousness in the country in the present day.³²

Part 3: From conservation to heritage

³⁰ Carter. 2008. p. 5.

³¹ Carter. 2008. p. 12.

³² Michael Williams. "Why we British love the railways – and how railway enthusiasm became respectable again." Michael Williams Website, June 2, 2015. Accessed January 30, 2022. <https://www.michaelwennwilliams.co.uk/why-we-british-love-the-railways-and-how-railway-enthusiasm-became-respectable-again/>.

Part 3.1.: The transforming attitudes

While many of the displays of railway enthusiasm mentioned previously, most particularly and iconically trainspotting and railway preservation, go back decades in British history, the earliest attitudes of the public towards the railway as it first emerged were originally of a different character. I will use these early reactions as a starting point for how people in Britain perceived their railways. This will better give context to and illustrate which initial tendencies and points of view the later attitudes, which gave rise to the railway preservation movement, evolved from. It will also show why the developing sense of sentimentality for, and interest in, the railway in many individuals including those from the general public, was noteworthy and interesting to behold, especially given it was this which allowed the preservation of railway heritage to occur, and subsequently later enter the domain of tourism.

The first public, steam-powered railways in both Britain and the world as a whole were constructed and opened in the first half of the 19th century, not long after the invention of the steam locomotive, with pioneering examples being the Stockton and Darlington Railway and Liverpool and Manchester Railway, opened in 1825 and 1830 respectively. Though a revolutionary new phenomenon, the railway as a concept was initially met with a public sentiment significantly characterised by deep uncertainty and fear. The educational railway website Worldwide Rails, operated by the railway enthusiast “Josef” gives a thorough account of this period and its attitudes.

The dawn of the railway saw an unprecedented increase in the efficiency and speed at which the transportation of goods and people took place, changing the way of life of the population. Nevertheless, the revolutionarily high average speed of the recently developed trains of about 25 mph was a cause for concern at the time about the viability and safety of this method of travel. Landowners were also provoked and frustrated about the notion of having to fend off the construction of railway tracks which they saw as interfering with their properties. According to Josef, the hostility of these landowners was so severe that it forced the pioneering civil engineer George Stephenson and his railway surveyor teams to

work at night to avoid their wrath. As the general populace had grown accustomed to the lower pace of travel by horse and carriage, many were deeply apprehensive of the perceived potentially disastrous results of a malfunction or accident at the new, higher speed established by the railway, and distrusted the private railway companies with their safety. Various other aspects were seen as hazardous, like the lack of shelter from the weather elements in the originally entirely open railway carriages.³³ As claimed by the railway museum Didcot Railway Centre in a social media post, this apprehension towards the new and revolutionary features of the railways extended to the British monarchy, with Queen Victoria being alarmed at the notion of having travelled by train at 60 mph to such a degree that she had it conveyed to the locomotive driver that the royal train should not exceed certain speeds, and that the Queen should be able to operate a disc signal to indicate to the driver whenever she deemed the train was going too fast for her comfort.³⁴

The public's misgivings about the railway extended to the beliefs that merely being conveyed aboard a train on its own caused physical harm, with the swaying of the trains' motion damaging nerves, a belief supported by contemporary medical professionals, and supposed to even be causing mental health issues in passengers. A particularly interesting example of this was the concern and anxiety over the "railway madmen" phenomenon, consisting of reports beginning in the 1860s of seemingly sedate passengers engaging in violent outbursts and aggression towards other passengers only in the duration of the trains being in motion. While the contemporary media of the time relished in the opportunity to share stories about these extraordinary events with the public, the subsequent decades saw the reports of, and thus the fear of, the "railway madmen" inexplicably rapidly decline into nonexistence. In more recent years the reported unusual behaviours of passengers have

³³ Josef. "Why Were Railways Unpopular in Victorian Times?" Worldwide Rails. October 28, 2019. Accessed January 30, 2022. <https://worldwiderails.com/why-were-railways-unpopular-in-victorian-times/>.

³⁴ Didcot Railway Centre. "On this day in history – 26 August 1852, a royal instruction letter carrying this date was sent by Queen Victoria's equerry to Mr Charles A Saunders, Secretary of the Great Western Railway." August 26, 2021. Accessed January 20, 2022. <https://www.facebook.com/DidcotRailwayCentre/posts/5002954293064752>

been theorised by historians like Amy-Milne Smith to have likely been something akin to post-traumatic stress disorder.³⁵

Additionally, distaste was sowed in the general public by the Victorian era's railway infrastructure's lack of regulation, ease of use and standardisation, in such cases as how there was originally no formal requirement that the new railways were inspected prior to initiating operation, and how the Great Western Railway used broader gauge railway tracks compared to much of the rest of the British rail network, which caused significant inconveniences for the passengers who as a result needed to switch trains to get to their final destinations. Widespread knowledge of safe and appropriate locomotive construction and operation during this period was also lacking, and the contemporary scramble by investors to capitalise on the construction of new railways often led to hastily conceived and questionable standards of structural integrity of infrastructure. Also of concern to the early railway travellers was the infrequent implementation of warning systems like semaphore signalling. Only the gradual spread in the subsequent decades of technical expertise, inspections, safety equipment, legislation and regulation, as well as the invention of more effective technology like block signalling and air brakes established the prevalent trust in the railway in the general public, and the perception of its attractiveness and promise for the future of transportation and everyday life.³⁶

Even though the Victorian era, and particularly the period surrounding the dawn of the railway, was distinguished by the commonplace view of the general public of the railway as unappealing, uncomfortable and dangerous in a variety of ways, this was not completely universal. On the other hand, the first indications of enthusiasm for the railway could also be detected during this turbulent but vibrant era, according to numerous sources. According to Josef, many people experienced excitement at the unknown implications of travel by rail and held optimistic sentiments towards future prospects of a world utilising railway

³⁵ Joseph Hayes. "The Victorian Belief That a Train Ride Could Cause Instant Insanity." Atlas Obscura, March 13, 2020. Accessed January 30, 2022. <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/railway-madness-victorian-trains>.

³⁶ Josef. "Why Were Railways Unpopular in Victorian Times?" Worldwide Rails. October 28, 2019. Accessed January 30, 2022. <https://worldwiderails.com/why-were-railways-unpopular-in-victorian-times/>.

technology.³⁷ Michael Williams is of the opinion that railway enthusiasm can be traced back to the time directly leading up to the opening of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway in 1830 where what he claims could be the first railway enthusiast, the 21-year-old theatre actress Fanny Kemble convinced civil engineer George Stephenson to let her have a ride with him on a locomotive, which she described as “a magical machine, with its flying white breath and rhythmical, unvarying pace.”³⁸ Although the recreational activity of trainspotting first became popular on a national scale during a later period which will be discussed more in depth later, its origins have also been found to date back as far as the Victorian age. A BBC News report by Colin Paterson from 2014 claims that staff at the National Railway Museum in York (NRM), during research for a new trainspotting exhibition, had unearthed the earliest ever mention of the hobby from 80 years before its popularly accepted origin point. According to NRM Associate Curator Bob Gwynne, a reference was found in a journal of 14-year-old girl Fanny Johnson to her trainspotting back in 1861, recording the names and numbers of locomotives heading in and out of the terminus station London Paddington.³⁹

Another, though somewhat more comparatively recent, manifestation of such early railway enthusiasm which appears particularly interesting in its relation to a notable figure who returns at a later point in this text is the Ampfield Model Railway. In Brian Sibley’s official biography of children’s author Reverend Wilbert Vere Awdry, it is mentioned that Awdry’s father, Vere Awdry, had a big passion for the railway which he acted on in creative endeavours. While serving as vicar of the village and parish of Ampfield in Hampshire in England, Vere Awdry built a handmade 40-yard, 2.5-inch gauge model railway in the vicarage garden in 1909 which he entertained his sons with. Evidently, such a railway-related leisure installation was popular in the village, as Sibley claims the model railway

³⁷ Josef. “Why Were Railways Unpopular in Victorian Times?” Worldwide Rails. October 28, 2019. Accessed January 30, 2022. <https://worldwiderails.com/why-were-railways-unpopular-in-victorian-times/>.

³⁸ Michael Williams. “Why we British love the railways – and how railway enthusiasm became respectable again.” Michael Williams Website, June 2, 2015. Accessed January 30, 2022. <https://www.michaelwennwilliams.co.uk/why-we-british-love-the-railways-and-how-railway-enthusiasm-became-respectable-again/>.

³⁹ BBC News. “Trainspotting hobby 80 years older than thought.” August 26, 2014. Accessed January 30, 2022. <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/uk-28934268>.

was often visited by both children and railway workers, and received even greater fame when Vere Awdry obtained an enlargement of a photograph he had taken of a derailment that had occurred on it. The photographic firm in Romsey which Awdry went to first displayed the photo in the window of its premises, causing large amounts of people to hurry around the town of Romsey seeking answers to what was depicted in the photo, only to be either amused or underwhelmed when invited to the scene of the accident and realising it was a small model railway rather than a regular railway. Wilbert Awdry, who would later go on to be an early volunteer member of a pioneering heritage railway and a promoter of railway preservation in a series of extremely popular railway books, cited observing and playing on his father's Ampfield Model Railway as the foundation of his lifelong and widely known railway enthusiasm.⁴⁰

While the Talylyn Railway Preservation Society expanded railway enthusiasm into the realm of railway preservation - here in the sense of the preservation of railway lines as opposed to other equipment - for the first time, by the time this occurred in 1950 with the creation of this preservation society, there already existed numerous railway societies with different forms and aims. These are organisations with the aim of uniting railway enthusiasts through their hobby, as well as studying the railways and exchanging information. Some significant, well-known, and early examples of these are the Stephenson Locomotive Society, founded in 1909, and the Railway Correspondence and Travel Society, founded in 1928. Along with arranging hundreds of special railway trips outside of the regularly scheduled timetables, known as railtours, for their members, such societies also went on to support the railway preservation societies as they emerged, such as in the case of the two aforementioned societies running railtours to, and promoting, the Talylyn Railway during its first running season in 1951.⁴¹

These railway societies are also historically important as a group of organisations for the reason that one of them, the Stephenson Locomotive Society (SLS), was a pioneer in

⁴⁰ Brian Sibley, *The Thomas the Tank Engine Man: The Story of the Reverend W. Awdry and His Really Useful Engines*, London, England: William Heinemann Ltd., 1995, p. 26, 36, 38.

⁴¹ Carter. 2008. p. 57.

railway enthusiast-driven locomotive preservation. Railway enthusiasm was evidently significant and well-established enough in the interwar period that the first ever instance of preservation of a locomotive by a private body, this being the SLS, was successfully achieved in 1927. The 1882-built London, Brighton and South Coast Railway Stroudley B1 Class express passenger steam locomotive numbered 214 and named *Gladstone*, the first of its class, was withdrawn from service in December 1926 by the Southern Railway. Bruce Nathan, formerly of the SLS, claims that the SLS had many members interested in LB&SCR locomotives who felt that something from this railway should be preserved. The society hence successfully negotiated the purchase of the locomotive *Gladstone* with the Southern Railway, with the reasons for this undertaking given by J. N. Maskelyne, the society's president at the time, being that the engine should be preserved because "she represents the unique achievement of an unique Locomotive Engineer [William Stroudley] whose influence upon Locomotive Engineering generally can still be noted at the present time."⁴² A trend of locomotive preservation by private bodies has continued on from this achievement ever since, with a large amount of the rolling stock used on heritage railways up to the present day being owned by societies supporting and cooperating with the heritage railway companies.⁴³

A cultural phenomenon that greatly strengthened the railway societies and railway enthusiasm as a whole was the so-called 'trainspotter craze' in the post-war period. Ian Carter notes that societies such as the Railway Correspondence and Travel Society (RCTS) only saw modest prosperity prior to World War II, with an eruption of popularity occurring around 1945, coinciding with the great popularisation of trainspotting.⁴⁴ This craze was a particularly notable shift in public attitudes on a sizeable scale towards the railway as more than simply a method of transport, but also something one could craft hobbies out of and derive more sentimental value and pleasure from, and it would inform the larger railway preservation movement to come. Carter provides the Oxford English Dictionary definition

⁴² Bruce Nathan, "70 Years of Preservation (The SLS and Gladstone)," The Stephenson Locomotive Society, n.d. Accessed January 20, 2022, <https://www.stephensonloco.org.uk/SLSgladstone.htm>.

⁴³ Carter. 2008. p. 57.

⁴⁴ Carter. 2008. p. 60.

of the trainspotting hobby as one consisting of observing trains and recording locomotive numbers, with the practitioner simply enjoying the sight of the trains running and noting down the number of the locomotives pulling them to check whether or not they are specific examples the trainspotter has seen before, eventually attempting to collect as large of a list of observed locomotives through their numbers as possible.⁴⁵ It can here also be mentioned that the trainspotting hobby bred and cultivated a particular culture among railway enthusiasts, which Carter claims to have been extrapolated from that of railway workers. This is one that has been built upon to the present day, and includes specialised jargon indicating the interest and endearment Carter claims to have been shared by both amateur railway enthusiasts and many professional railwaymen alike for the railway and its features.⁴⁶

That many classes of steam locomotive and other equipment are widely known in the railway world to have affectionate nicknames dating back to these days of original service, spanning from some of the older classes like the Midland Railway's 4-2-2s gaining the nickname "Spinners," to the modern types from the very end of the age of steam in Britain, like British Railways Standard Class 9Fs being nicknamed "Spaceships," implies that a fondness for these working machines has existed for a long time, one, as mentioned, shared by both railway workers and enthusiastic lineside observers.

The nicknames given to steam engines are characterised by their large variety. They range from more surface-level nicknames inspired by the official naming schemes the railway companies that owned and operated them designated them under, such as the GWR Castle and King, SR Lord Nelson and Schools, and LMS Duchess classes, to nicknames inspired by physical characteristics, such as the LMS Class 5 being nicknamed "Black Five," Furness Railway No. 3 nicknamed "Coppernob," LMS Huges 2-6-0 nicknamed "Crab," LMS Ivatt Class 4 nicknamed "Mucky Duck," and SR Bulleid Pacific nicknamed "Spamcan," to ones denoting perceived unique and endearing behaviours during operation, such as the sounds they produced during operation, with examples being the LB&SCR A1

⁴⁵ Carter. 2008. p. 88, 90.

⁴⁶ Carter. 2008. p. 91.

being nicknamed “Terrier,” and LNER J11 Class nicknamed “Pom Pom”. Finally, I will mention the more enigmatic nicknames with more obscure meanings, likely originating in inside jokes concocted in the jovial company of railwaymen, like “Charlie” denoting the SR Q1 Class, “Mickey Mouse” denoting LMS Ivatt Class 2, “Jinty” for LMS Class 3F, and “Duck 6” for LMS Class 4F, hinting at the deeper and more complex mythology and lore crafted around these vehicles through the many decades of their service.^{47 48}

The long-standing and widespread norm of railwaymen and railway enthusiasts referring to steam locomotives by personified pronouns, especially ‘she’, often in place of the more impersonal ‘it’, also implies a level of perceived inherent value in the locomotives beyond being purely functional metal objects. Heritage railway pioneer L. T. C. Rolt says in his 1953 book *Railway Adventure* that he believed it was only natural to refer to even steam locomotives bearing masculine names as ‘she’, as he thought anyone who had worked with steam engines would agree that for machines so individual in character, temperamental, fascinating and responsive, attaching the masculine gender to them would be inappropriate.⁴⁹ What appears most interesting here is less the specific choice of the feminine pronoun, and more the trend of anthropomorphising these machines in general. These perceptions of individual character were something the author Reverend Wilbert Awdry would draw upon to its fullest extent in his railway stories, which he started writing amidst what happened to be the expansion of the trainspotting phenomenon, by turning the machines into characters with the ability to express themselves. This was symbolic of the belief that had evidently formed by this time, one marked by remarkable ease of accepting as a concept for those less intricately familiar with railways, that specific locomotives had unique characteristics and “behaviours” in the way they operated.⁵⁰ Indeed, Awdry himself was quoted by Brian Sibley to have stated that “Most steam engine drivers have the feeling

⁴⁷ George Dow, *British Steam Horses*, London: Phoenix House, 1950.

⁴⁸ Numerous cases of uncatalogued and informal correspondence with and among railway enthusiasts.

⁴⁹ L. T. C. Rolt, *Railway Adventure*, Stroud: The History Press, 2010, “Author’s Note and Acknowledgements”, p. ix-x.

⁵⁰ Brian Sibley, *The Thomas the Tank Engine Man: The Story of the Reverend W. Awdry and His Really Useful Engines*, London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1995, p. 50.

that a steam locomotive has a personality and can express it.”⁵¹ The topic of Reverend Awdry is an interesting one that will be revisited later with his promotion of the heritage railway scene.

Returning to the development of trainspotting, recording locomotive numbers was just one dimension of the hobby, as Ian Carter claims it developed to include the activities of attempting to visit the largest amount of different railway lines possible and to attempt to travel as far as possible by rail in a given amount of time.⁵² Carter highlights the popular understanding that the transport publisher Ian Allan had the leading role in the dramatic expansion and popularisation of this hobby in the post-war years. This widespread belief is based on Ian Allan’s largely unprecedented and remarkably successful realisation and utilisation of the true market of pocket-sized guide books of locomotive numbers. Allan, during World War II, held a position in the Southern Railway’s Public Relations Office at London Waterloo, where he was tasked with responding to “floods of letters from people interested” in the Southern Railway’s brand new and unorthodox Bulleid Pacific steam engines. According to Carter, Allan’s compilation of locomotive names and numbers for this correspondence is what made him realise such information could be published as separate books, which Allan received permission from the railway to do as the foundation of his new publishing house. The resulting book, published in 1942, was enormously successful, leading Allan to publishing similar works concerning other railways under a brand he named *ABCs*, publishing updated editions when necessary as well as combined editions.⁵³

Ian Carter argues that these guide books met such great success, to the point of popularising trainspotting and railway enthusiasm, due to how the grim wartime and austere post-war years provided little in the way of cheap, simple and engrossing pastimes for children, leaving an unfilled niche into which Ian Allan’s *ABC* books and the subsequent trainspotting craze slotted perfectly.⁵⁴ Thus, it seems that pre-existing railway enthusiasm

⁵¹ Sibley. 1995. p. 149.

⁵² Carter. 2008. p. 92.

⁵³ Carter. 2008. p. 98.

⁵⁴ Carter. 2008. p. 98.

in the form of letters from intrigued railway observers motivated the publication of books which significantly enlarged the railway enthusiasm hobby to all-new levels at a time in British history when appealing and cheap pastimes were a rare commodity. Carter also argues that the post-war years were plagued by fuel rationing for private motorcars and saw the wartime travel restrictions and overcrowding dissolving, which, along with the fading general wartime fears, allowed trains to be a spectacle to be enjoyed freely and throughout the year.⁵⁵

Having published the *ABC* trainspotter's book series and witnessed its remarkable popularity and the bold and precarious vantage points trainspotters would find for their train viewing pleasures, Allan founded the Ian Allan Locospotters' Club around 1945 to indoctrinate a code of good behaviour among trainspotters, claiming the body would further an already existing widespread interest in locomotives and unite enthusiasts.⁵⁶ According to Carter, the discourse around and eventual implementation of railway nationalisation during this period additionally had the effect of shaping railway enthusiasm into a patriotic rather than entirely private endeavour, with the railway now being understood to belong to the people rather than to corporations. Carter also claims that instead of fizzling out as quickly as it had emerged, the trainspotting and, subsequently, railway enthusiasm culture spread to other social classes, as he claims it originated with the working class and entered the middle class in the 1950s.⁵⁷ Indeed, as shall be seen in the discussion of the formation of the pioneering railway preservation societies, interest and support appeared from a large variety of different walks of life. Though the vast popularity of trainspotting and its institutions and publications had waned substantially by the 1980s and '90s, according to Carter, being negatively affected first by the end of steam traction, and in more recent years the increasing cessation of locomotive-hauled trains in favour of multiple units,⁵⁸ railway enthusiasm had already manifested itself in railway preservation by this point, with the railway heritage scene having become a well-established and growing sector.

⁵⁵ Carter. 2008. p. 98.

⁵⁶ Carter. 2008. p. 60.

⁵⁷ Carter. 2008. p. 99, 100.

⁵⁸ Carter. 2008. p. 101, 102.

Part 3.2.: Arrival of the heritage railway movement

Although this age of renewed railway enthusiasm primed the way for the establishment of the foundations of what would be the railway preservation industry, there is one particular element that stands as an outlier to this course of events that would not see success or have the same impact as the later movements of its kind. Though the volunteer takeover of the Talylyn Railway was the first time a heritage railway had been successfully formed, this enterprise was not the first time in history that the preservation of a railway was mooted. The first known case of such a proposal being made, according to Jonathan Brown,⁵⁹ took place after the closure of the narrow-gauge Southwold Railway in the English county of Suffolk on April 11 1929. Information on the website of the current-day scheme to restore parts of this line, the Southwold Railway Trust, suggests that the closure of the railway was so abrupt that a backlog of goods to be transported had to be sorted out before complete shutdown, and that two separate plans for the retention of the railway were formed. However, support was divided between these plans, and as a result, they both came to nothing.⁶⁰ It would take until the early 1950s for a case of a successful transfer of a railway's operations to enthusiasts to occur.

It is claimed by Ian Carter that alongside the popularisation of trainspotting and, as a result, railway enthusiasm as a whole, general impressions of the railway for enthusiasts were changing along with the railway itself. Successive sweeping transformations of the railway system, such as the re-gauging of the Great Western Railway in 1892, grouping and nationalisation of most of the major railway companies in 1923 and 1948 respectively, also brought with them a sense of loss for the generations which were familiar with, and

⁵⁹ Jonathan Brown, *The Railway Preservation Revolution*. Barnsley, South Yorkshire, Great Britain: Pen & Sword Transport, 2017, p. 22. (E-book edition)

⁶⁰ Southwold Railway Trust. "History of the Southwold Railway." n.d. Accessed January 20, 2022. <https://www.southwoldrailway.co.uk/history/>

preferred, the railways as they were before the changes. This developed a nostalgic dimension to the railways for their observers and enthusiasts. Adding to this, the steadily growing competition in the form of the automobile and aircraft sectors in the former half of the 20th century began dethroning the railway as the primary obvious mode of transportation for the general public. Amid the excitement of railway innovation fading, nostalgia building for the supposedly more interesting railways of the past, and railway enthusiasm growing, especially through trainspotting, Carter claims that the sphere of interest of enthusiasts transformed to encompass the more obscure, quaint, and old-fashioned backwaters of the British railway world.⁶¹

This, then, was the state of the railway enthusiasm scene directly leading up to the dawn of the heritage railway segment of railway preservation. This dawn would arise at the Talylyn Railway in Mid Wales. This railway, which had been opened in 1865, was approaching a century of continuous operation by the time railway enthusiast and biographer L. T. C. Rolt had been visiting it in the 1940s and '50s, concerned for its future. The railway company's owner since 1911, Sir Henry Haydn Jones, also the principal landowner in the area and Member of Parliament for Merionethshire, amidst declining fortunes for the line since the closure of its quarries in the 1940s, had pledged to keep the railway open and running for as long as he was able to for the benefit of the handful of local passengers and summer holidaymakers, regardless of the financial cost this would bring upon him.⁶² Sir Haydn's death in 1950 left the future of the railway an open question, as no apparent heir could be discerned and no company expressed desire to purchase it, as no potential for profit was perceived with the railway having operated at a loss. These circumstances motivated L. T. C. Rolt and his friends to act, a group which had been observing the situation on the Talylyn Railway and spreading the word of the railway's unfortunate increasing disrepair and economic decline while suggesting the Government could not be counted on to step in, and proposing that perhaps instead the common people could take the matter into their own hands. These sentiments were publicly expressed by Rolt in a letter to the *Birmingham Post*

⁶¹ Carter. 2008. p. 110-111.

⁶² Ian Drummond, *Rails Along the Fathew*, Leeds: Holne Publishing, 2015, p. 37-43.

newspaper in 1949, and correspondence followed between large amounts of people from diverse occupational backgrounds who all wished to participate in saving the railway from closure, including the enthusiast Owen Prosser who would have particularly noteworthy contributions to the cause, as well as other enthusiasts and preservationists who would go on to form several other heritage railways in the decades to come.⁶³

Upon the aforementioned death of Sir Haydn, these interested actors were prepared to come together to negotiate for the volunteer takeover of operations and to form a preservation society under which they would conduct their organisation. Rolt contacted Sir Haydn's estate, proposing his group's volunteer-run solution to the Talylyn Railway dilemma and asking for the liquidation of the line to be paused while a meeting was held in Birmingham in October of 1950. Much publicised due to the unheard-of nature of a potential volunteer-operated railway and well-attended, this meeting was historically crucial for railway preservation in that it saw the passionate and enthusiastic formation of the Talylyn Railway Preservation Society (TRPS) which would safeguard the railway's future as well as mark the foundation of the broader heritage railway movement.⁶⁴

As part of the development of the organisational structure of the TRPS, a non-profit-making holding company was created to manage the shares of the original railway company in a way that allowed the ownership of the company to simply be ceded to the volunteers, avoiding having to form new configurations of ownership and operation of the line. This arrangement both enabled the original Talylyn Railway Company of 1865 to continue operating uninterrupted, as well as gave the volunteers of the TRPS complete authority over the management of the railway and company policy. This legislative achievement is notable because not all subsequent railway preservation societies were able to achieve such a comprehensive arrangement of ownership and control, instead having to function as supporters' organisations to railways under someone else's ownership. Another factor which made possible this remarkable level of continuity between the railway's original stint as a conventional revenue-earning railway and a preservation society- and

⁶³ Brown. 2017. p. 22-23. (E-book edition)

⁶⁴ Brown. 2017. p. 22-23. (E-book edition)

volunteer-operated heritage railway was Rolt's group gaining the support of Sir Haydn Jones' manager of the railway, Edward Thomas, who would remain with the railway after the volunteer takeover as representative of the Haydn Jones family. It was through the support and connection of Thomas that agreement was reached between the preservationists and the Haydn Jones family, which thus enabled the smooth transition of ownership.⁶⁵

Jonathan Brown claims that the introduction by the Talyllyn Railway Preservation Society of volunteer operation to a railway was a bold move and that this introduced a new approach to preservation in general, as movements to establish industrial museums and preserved waterways had appeared by the time of the TRPS's volunteer takeover of the Talyllyn but these "did not involve public service in the same way that preserving a railway could."⁶⁶

The first train operated by the preservation society ran on May 14, 1951 on a section of the line, before services over the full length of it commenced some weeks later. The new heritage railway operation of the TRPS seems to have been extremely popular with the public from its earliest days, as during its first season as a preserved railway, the line carried 15,000 passengers, something Brown claims to have been a record for the railway. This number was then exceeded by several thousand the following year, all of this tremendous success occurring within a short summer running season of a few months and during a time when the mechanical condition of the railway was still poor and the company underequipped in terms of locomotives and volunteers.⁶⁷ Despite the early difficulties, traffic on the railway had, according to Brown, almost doubled by 1954 with the trains being frequently full, followed by further dramatic growth through 1956's 37,000 passenger bookings to 1957 seeing a nearly doubled number.⁶⁸

With the historical course of events leading up to and surrounding the formation of the TRPS and their creation of the world's first heritage railway through volunteer takeover

⁶⁵ Brown. 2017. p. 22-23. (E-book edition)

⁶⁶ Brown. 2017. p. 12. (E-book edition)

⁶⁷ Brown. 2017. p. 24-25. (E-book edition)

⁶⁸ Brown. 2017. p. 25-26. (E-book edition)

now having been outlined, the question still remains of why this endeavour was embarked on and what the underlying motivations were for those involved in what was at the time seen as a novel experiment. The fact that the Talyllyn Railway had been operating at a loss for years prior to the preservationist acquisition, and the fact that no business saw the company as a financially desirable or valuable asset both imply that the volunteers of the preservation society primarily wanted to rescue the railway for the values and qualities it possessed outside of its capability for making a profit.

As has been seen previously, railway enthusiasm had developed over the course of the former half of the 20th century to encompass the more quaint and remote corners of the railway world, a description that can undoubtedly be applied to Wales' Talyllyn Railway running through the relatively sparsely populated Fathew Valley. In the 1930s and '40s, the Talyllyn was outcompeted by bus services as the fastest mode of transport through the valley it served, meaning the nevertheless persisting perceived value of the railway for the people travelling on it started shifting from the most efficient way of travel in the area into that of the character of the railway in itself. L. T. C. Rolt makes the claim in *Railway Adventure* that the attractiveness of the railway, especially to those people familiar and enamoured with what they perceived to be the more peaceful bygone way of life of earlier decades, consisted of it having acquired "a nostalgic appeal, reminding them, in a distracted world obsessed with the quantitative and dubious values of speed and size, of the smaller but more stable and assured world which they had known and loved when they were young."⁶⁹ The remoteness of the railway and the small communities it served, combined with the efforts of the railway's preservation society, assured that some degree of these qualities survived, something which would prove to be central for this and other relatively secluded later preserved railways' perceived appeal in the years to come.

L. T. C. "Tom" Rolt reveals what motivated him personally in leading the movement to preserve the Talyllyn Railway and what values he sought to protect and uphold in *Railway Adventure*. Rolt was of the opinion that the modernisation and standardisation policies implemented for Britain's nationalised transport system in the 1950s were austere and

⁶⁹ L.T.C. Rolt, *Railway Adventure*, Stroud, Great Britain: The History Press, 2010, p. 26.

stripped the system's outlets of their appeal, charm, character and unique localised qualities, wherein, in particular, the previously privately owned railways all had their own identities. He saw the small, unstandardised railways far from the bigger cities, like the Talylyn, as some of the last remaining 'un-straightened roads', by which he meant locations unaltered by the post-war modernisation processes and instead faithfully existing in much the same state of being as they had since their creation. Rolt deemed it a natural reaction to attempt to conserve such environments, and in doing so, avoid losing characterful monuments of the past and of contributions to local areas to what he perceived as the onslaught of state-imposed dreary uniformity and world-levelling order.⁷⁰

The railway industry of the 19th century was to Rolt something which was not only a collection of architectural and engineering achievements, but additionally an institution possessing its own particular traditions and cultures. He claimed standardisation was in the post-war years eroding away regional differences, in other words points of interest, in the way railway companies looked and operated and were embedded in the communities they served and existed within, as well as this embeddedness in itself being replaced by centralised control. Rolt also placed importance on the appeal of what he saw as railwaymen clearly having a pride in their work in the past, another aspect he believed was disappearing. The TRPS, while it aimed only to preserve one particular railway, was then to Rolt a symbolic move in opposition to the liquidation of the special character of the railways, a term, as just seen, encompassing a broad variety of qualities. Of course, the preservation movement would be a tangible undertaking as well, one which Rolt believed would help remind people of the values he perceived the railways of the past to possess. Keeping the Talylyn Railway (TR) operational would uphold a fragment of the once richer railway culture in a rapidly changing world, seemingly for the worse according to Rolt in terms of the transport industry.⁷¹ Author and clergyman Wilbert Awdry, a passionate supporter of the Talylyn, expressed similar sentiments in favour of safeguarding railway technology, in particular such as that at the TR, which was to increasing degrees being

⁷⁰ Rolt. 2010. p. 147.

⁷¹ Rolt. 2010. p. 149.

labelled as outdated and worthless by the ruling powers in a talk given in 1963. He argued that sentiments like those are held by people almost excessively focused on efficiency and modernity above all else, who hence demean any old technology and sweep it all away. His belief was that efficiency should also be measured in terms of long life and reliability, qualities undoubtedly embodied by the TR and its equipment, having provided good regular service for nearly a century at the time of his talk, consisting of all of its original locomotive and passenger stock preserved and in working order.⁷²

The utilisation of people with a genuine enthusiasm for railways as a volunteer workforce was, additionally, an element Tom Rolt discovered to be pleasingly evocative of the railwaymen of the past's pride in their work. Similarly, the volunteers' use and maintenance of the railway's existing equipment ensured the survival and continued cultivation of assorted traditional skillsets, especially in the world of mechanical labour. This too was important to Rolt in that he perceived a larger trend in the world of people becoming inflexible and receiving extreme specialisation in particular tasks rather than having a more well-rounded set of skills.⁷³ The opportunity for a volunteer to gain practical experience with such mechanical skills would arise as a marketable quality for heritage railways.

Joseph Boughey in the text "From Transport's Golden Ages to an Age of Tourism: L. T. C. Rolt, Waterway Revival and Railway Preservation in Britain, 1944–54." from 2013 provides a look at Rolt's engagement in preservation activities from another point of view. He claims that the motivations for founding the TRPS to save the railway did indeed stem from the admired particular characteristics and distinctions the railway possessed. What Boughey adds to this, however, is that Tom Rolt specifically saw in the TR an authentic embodiment of a concept he viewed as the 'Golden Age'. Boughey describes this notion as something applied to a perceived idealised image of the past, standing in contrast with a

⁷² Brian Sibley, *The Thomas the Tank Engine Man: The Story of the Reverend W. Awdry and His Really Useful Engines*, London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1995, p. 191, 192.

⁷³ Rolt. 2010. p. 98, 118.

present day seen as inferior.⁷⁴ Taking into account the previously mentioned opinions which Rolt held that the 1950s heralded an age of far-reaching standardisation and thus a destruction of the peculiarities and ways of life in the world that Rolt cherished, Boughey's claims seem accurate.

The Polish article "Współczesne wykorzystanie trakcji parowej do obsługi transportu kolejowego w Polsce" written by Filip Bebenow in 2017 deals with the sentiments underlying the desires to preserve railways from a wider perspective. According to Bebenow, railway modernisation under British Railways intensified during the 1950s, and what this movement carried out specifically was that it withdrew both steam locomotives and the infrastructure specially designed and constructed to accommodate them and replaced them with more modern alternatives, and rationalised the railway system as a whole by, to an escalating degree, closing down many railway lines deemed to be unprofitable or duplicates of other routes, forcing local inhabitants living along these lines to purchase private cars or transition to taking buses. A claim made by Bebenow is that what is deemed by the actor implementing it as progress is intrinsically connected to subsequent yearning certain people feel for the things that fade away as a result of the progress. This yearning, or nostalgia for the past, is according to Bebenow the motivating force for those wishing to conserve elements of the past, as in the case of both the preservationists on the Talylyn as well as those who followed on other railways. Thus, the railway preservation seen in the heritage railway sector is derived from the appreciation of the achievements of technology as well as from a desire to recapture and reminisce about lost elements of the past. Bebenow claims that, on a larger scale than just the railway industry, Britain's intensive deindustrialisation in the decades following the Second World War led to a widespread sense of loss for both the discarded technologies and the communities that grew around them.⁷⁵⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Joseph Boughey, "From Transports Golden Ages to an Age of Tourism: L. T. C. Rolt, Waterway Revival and Railway Preservation in Britain, 1944–54." 2013. p. 29-30.

⁷⁵ Filip Bebenow. "Współczesne wykorzystanie trakcji parowej do obsługi transportu kolejowego w Polsce." 2017. p. 64.

⁷⁶ Patrik Sebastian Brekkås, "HIS3090 Fordypningsoppgave i historie", 2020, p. 9-10.

Something Tom Rolt did not realise when assembling the people that made up what would become the TRPS, and then writing about his experiences in *Railway Adventure* a few years later, was the vast extent to which the preservation of the TR would resonate with other groups around the United Kingdom, and subsequently the world. The volunteer takeover, and hence rescue from the brink of closure, of the Talyllyn was seen as proof that success was possible in attempting such an undertaking, and the TRPS became an inspiration for other groups of volunteers to take over narrow-gauge railways in the following years, eventually leading to the spread of volunteer takeovers to closed standard-gauge lines marked for closure by the nationalised British Railways (BR).^{77 78}

Ian Carter expresses similar sentiments as Bebenow in claiming BR's modernisation plans alarmed enthusiasts who were fond of the way the railway system existed up to that point, and specifies the 1955 Modernisation Plan outlining the withdrawal of steam locomotives and the large-scale railway closures making up the Beeching cuts, stemming from proposals submitted by Richard Beeching to the British Railways Board in 1963, as the main redevelopments of Britain's rail system that drove enthusiasts to follow the TRPS's example of moving from trainspotting to railway preservation.⁷⁹

Before the brunt of the impact of these plans for the nation's standard-gauge network were felt however, another Welsh narrow-gauge heritage railway had already sprung up in 1954 with the preservation of the Ffestiniog Railway. This was a revival scheme for an already closed railway, led by enthusiasts interested in the idea developed by the Talyllyn group, but deeming the abandoned Ffestiniog to also be worthy of such a movement based on how it was in a better condition as a result of the way it had been built and how it was of even greater historical significance, having been the world's first public, passenger-carrying narrow-gauge railway and the first to employ steam traction. Thus, while the TRPS was motivated by the appealing quaintness which was perceived as a distinguishing feature of the TR, the people who diverted to the FR were driven by the appeal of a railway

⁷⁷ Brown. 2017. p. 12. (E-book edition)

⁷⁸ Brekkås, 2020, p. 11.

⁷⁹ Carter. 2008. p. 113.

constructed to a higher standard of quality and with an even more illustrious history.⁸⁰

What can be observed from this is that the various railways viewed as suitable and desirable for preservation each possessed unique traits and identities which inspired railway enthusiasts to not just settle for the conservation of one threatened line, but to spread their ambitions wider to multiple of them to ensure the survival of the variegated qualities they recognised in the cherished railway world of the past.

As with the TR, the reformation of the FR as a heritage railway began in correspondence between likeminded enthusiasts through channels such as the press, leading to a pivotal meeting, albeit almost a year later than that of the TR, at which a preservation society was formed. Subsequent negotiations with the existing owners were less smooth than those between the TRPS and the Haydn Jones estate due to the more complicated ownership status of the FR through numerous shareholders and the scepticism of the previous general manager that volunteers would have the needed capacity to restore a railway. However, the businessman Alan Pegler and some of his associates stepped in, in support of the preservationists, to buy the majority shareholding in the Ffestiniog company, vest his shares in a newly made trust, create “a triangular structure of company, trust and society,” and finally, on June 24, 1954, obtain control over the company for the volunteers, with Pegler himself being elected chairman.⁸¹

From this point in time, namely the foundation of the FR as a heritage railway, the next few heritage railways would be created within short time of each other, with railway enthusiasts basing themselves on the idea that what worked in the initial two cases of the Talyllyn and Ffestiniog becoming heritage railways should certainly be able to be applied to other lines, along with the notion that there should not need to be any greater obstacles in the way of preserving and operating a standard-gauge railway compared to a narrow-gauge one. With the spread and popularisation of these beliefs, and despite the challenge those engaged in standard-gauge preservation faced of having to create new operating organisations independent of the nationalised railway networks (whereas the companies like the TR and

⁸⁰ Brown. 2017. p. 28. (E-book edition)

⁸¹ Brown. 2017. p. 29-30. (E-book edition)

FR had been distinct entities throughout their existence), the development of the railway preservation movement thus began accelerating and gaining steam.⁸²

1960 saw the arrival to the railway preservation scene of the two first standard-gauge heritage railways, which would prove to be crucial pioneers within their fields. The Middleton Railway in Leeds was the first of these to be established, the opening train being ran on June 20, and this venture illustrated the achievability of a heritage railway operation emerging from an industrial railway background. The opening train was hauled by a diesel locomotive and was part of a fundraising event for charity arranged by Leeds University. Despite its general obscurity to the public as a result of its industrial freight-carrying history, this was nevertheless a worthy contender for preservation considering how it had originally been founded in 1758, subsequently becoming Britain's oldest railway in continuous operation by the time of its launch as a heritage railway. Despite this outstanding historical significance, the National Coal Board, which had upon nationalisation in 1948 taken over the Middleton's operations, marked the line for closure in 1958. The responsibility for its survival fell upon the Leeds University Railway Society as it declared its plans to intervene and formed a preservation society at the start of 1960. Interestingly, the only interest and support expressed towards their scheme came from some of the businesses located along the railway, which helped purchase the line for the society. By the end of the 1960s the freight traffic had dried up, and the railway found it necessary to open its doors to passengers to keep running. The Middleton Railway in turn inspired further industrial railway preservation schemes, acquiring a Talylyn-like position in its own subgroup of the larger heritage railway sector.⁸³

What caught a much larger amount of public attention the same year, due to how, unlike the Middleton, it had been a passenger-carrying line in its previous life, was the opening of the Bluebell Railway in East and West Sussex a few weeks later as the first formerly British Railways-owned standard-gauge heritage railway, as well as the first standard-gauge heritage line to operate a public steam service. The closure of this line had originally been

⁸² Brown. 2017. p. 33. (E-book edition)

⁸³ Brown. 2017. p. 36-38. (E-book edition)

announced by BR in 1954, and this eventually took place in 1955 despite protests. The locals were so opposed to the closure that they continued campaigning under the leadership of Miss Madge Bessemer who had in the Act of Parliament which authorised the original building of the line found a clause stating a train service was required to be provided until withdrawal was confirmed through parliamentary sanction. This legal challenge gained great public attention, and forced BR to reintroduce services until a new Act was obtained which allowed them to close the railway in 1958.⁸⁴

The desire to reopen the Bluebell line permanently was so great in a small group of student railway enthusiasts that they formed a preservation society, inspired by the narrow-gauge examples set by the Talylyn and the later Ffestiniog. After some revising of their scheme, the society began negotiations with British Railways, resulting in the line being leased to the preservationists with a prospect of later purchasing it fully after raising funds.

According to Brown, the Bluebell's first operating season in 1960 using the acquired locomotives *Stepney* and *Bluebell* was a success, with far more passengers carried than expected. The popularity of the railway continued to grow, however the funds the society had been raising were not growing at the same rate, and BR demanded either an outright purchase or the closure of the line in 1965, of which the latter Brown claims the Bluebell Railway Preservation Society was able to successfully argue would reflect badly on BR. A deal was reached for the remainder of the purchase cost to be paid in quarterly instalments.⁸⁵ The Bluebell Railway set the first example of a reopening of a line closed by British Railways, and, similarly to how it had itself been inspired by the Talylyn, the Bluebell's success had now become an inspiration for the countless proposed and realised preservation projects for former BR lines as the nationalised railway system's extensive closures intensified. While the heritage railway sector by the end of the 1960s had not reached a total amount of operational preservation schemes in double figures, in the subsequent decade this total was more than doubled.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Brown. 2017. p. 33. (E-book edition)

⁸⁵ Brown. 2017. p. 34-35. (E-book edition)

⁸⁶ Brown. 2017. p. 40-41. (E-book edition)

Part 3.3.: Emergence of the railway museum

On the other side of the railway preservation table from the not-for-profit or, in select cases like the Snowdon Mountain Railway in Wales and the Dartmouth Steam Railway in South West England, commercial heritage railways can be found the public museums like the National Railway Museum (NRM) and its outstations. Unlike the heritage railway scene, the coming into being of the primarily physically static museum scene was motivated less by amateur railway enthusiasm, and more by government-driven mandates, which can still be seen most specifically when it comes to the largest and most prominent example which is the current-day NRM, and its origins and original motivations are therefore inclined to be distinct. The literature concerning these origins and underlying motivations during various periods of time, as well as their relations or connections to other movements, has during the research for this thesis also appeared to be somewhat more oblique and difficult to find than that concerning heritage railways, which might potentially in some way stem from its governmental character, with its operation thus being more distanced from the common observer or enthusiast than that of the heritage railways.

According to Carter, railway preservation in the early days of the railways was largely not seen by the Victorians as something that was necessary, as, naturally enough, the focus at the time was fixed on invention and innovation of new technology. Preservationist Handel Kardas adds that as railways and their technology were becoming increasingly ubiquitous and commonplace, the general mood of the time was not one that was expecting hardware from this industry would be found in museum conditions.⁸⁷ Carter also notes that, indeed, due to the minimal presence of railway preservation at the time, a large portion of what would now be considered important railway remnants from the period prior to 1850 has vanished to the passage of time. Despite this general lack of interest in preservation in the 19th century, the earliest traces of government-sponsored railway museum activity can be

⁸⁷ Handel Kardas, "Museums, visitors - and what they expect" in Cossons, Patmore and Shorland-Ball, 1992, p. 138.

detected several decades into the railway age, as the South Kensington Science Museum in London received a donation in 1862 of the 1829-built locomotive *Rocket*, the revolutionary Stephenson engine originally picked to operate the Liverpool and Manchester Railway's trains, by its later industrial mineral railway owner, the Brampton Railway. Other contemporary private railway companies of the time also saw fit to retain a select few artefacts in the form of locomotives, this being the Great Western Railway wanting to commemorate the end of its broad gauge rail system by placing two veteran broad gauge machines in its own Swindon workshops, and the North Eastern Railway promoting its newest locomotives by having two of its oldest, inherited ones plinthed alongside them at Darlington North Road Station for a convenient display of the progression of the engineering technology for the benefit of the public, thus exploiting these artefacts' publicity value, unlike the Great Western Railway's initial private storage of its preserved items.⁸⁸

Underlining the fragility of railway preservation at the turn of the century, perhaps even indicative of the wider lack of appreciation for the value of such movements at the time, and certainly signalling the still dominant pragmatic approach to the railway was the Great Western Railway's subsequent scrapping in 1906 of the two locomotives previously reserved for conservation, as the company's technologically innovative yet evidently exclusively forward-focused locomotive superintendent at the time, George Jackson Churchward, claimed they wasted space in the workshops. More appreciative attitudes towards the value of preservation in the following decades saw remaining components from the originals utilised in replicas of representatives of the same locomotive classes, a kind of implement in the preservation sector that would, as will be discussed later, see great popularisation in the opening decades of the 21st century.⁸⁹

Former NRM Curator Dieter W. Hopkin contextualises this lacklustre and disjointed approach to railway preservation prior to the government-mandated railway grouping of 1923 in the article "Railway preservation in the 1920s and 1930s" in *Perspectives on*

⁸⁸ Carter. 2008. p. 109-110, 136.

⁸⁹ Carter. 2008. p. 110.

Railway History and Interpretation. Hopkin claims that regardless of, and in addition to, the predominantly indifferent public and professional attitudes towards the retention of railway history at the time, the structure of the railway industry, being made up of hundreds of separate competing companies, was not suited for a coordinated or comprehensive exercise of creating a collection of railway artefacts. Cooperation between rivals in the commercial atmosphere at the time to preserve objects is by Hopkin claimed to have been an unlikely phenomenon to expect, and he also points out the lack of a central agency to coordinate such efforts. Subsequently, however, the grouping of 1923 generated a rationalisation of the organisation of the railway network and a need was brought forth in the new Big Four railway companies (the LMS, LNER, GWR and SR), wherein they felt it necessary to establish acclaimed and storied identities for themselves, a goal in which the acknowledgement of the long railway history they had inherited from their predecessor companies was seen a very useful tool. These factors, along with the approach of centenary dates of the formation of pioneering railway companies thought of as worthy of celebrating, came together during the 1920s and '30s to create an environment more receptive to the idea of railway preservation. Hopkin claims that cataloguing railway history had now become an easier task, as the way it could be achieved had been simplified by being able to be divided into the events and circumstances which led to the formation of each of the grouped Big Four railway companies. He also claims that the centralisation the British government had achieved by enacting the grouping of the railways into four regional entities allowed for preservation policies to be devised by each of the companies that would apply to and draw in artefacts from greater geographical areas of operation.⁹⁰

In terms of the railway centenaries which would contribute to the changing sentiments in this period, that of the Stockton and Darlington Railway in 1925 was the first, and one to have a significant impact. The celebration of this occasion had the important effect of stirring the British public's awareness of its nation's railway history, being exposed to media coverage and the exhibition of early relics. This included the largest collection at

⁹⁰ Dieter W. Hopkin, "Railway preservation in the 1920 and 1930s" in Neil Cossons, Allan Patmore and Rob Shorland-Ball. *Perspectives on Railway History and Interpretation: Essays to Celebrate the Work of Dr. John Coiley at the National Railway Museum, York*. York, Great Britain: National Railway Museum, 1992, p. 88.

Darlington of historic rolling stock that had ever been seen, which included a cavalcade of stock spanning the century as well as the regions. The Big Four companies each contributed displays of contemporary technology alongside early relics, even going to the extent of erecting replicas of the latter if no suitable material had survived, some examples of which having been previously mentioned. While the focus here had been on British locomotives, Hopkin claims significant displays of wagons, carriages, small relics and documents had also been gathered, as well as exhibits from other countries in Europe, which “demonstrate an appreciation of the impact of the locomotive overseas.”⁹¹ While the entirety of the assembled collection did not remain intact, some items were retained under the London and North Eastern Railway’s (LNER) protection as part of their future plans. Also fruitful for the railway preservation sector was the Liverpool and Manchester Railway centenary celebration in 1930, for which several replicas were prepared along with the restored 1838 locomotive *Lion*, significant for having been preserved as a result of a manifestation of the public’s growing railway enthusiasm in the former half of the 20th century. More specifically, a public pressure group had campaigned for the locomotive’s preservation and restoration by the London, Midland and Scottish Railway, an event that did occur in time for the 1930 celebrations, with both the locomotive and the new replicas later passing into public Science Museum Group ownership.⁹²

Also coinciding with this particular period of history are Ian Carter’s somewhat broader beliefs about the origins of Britain’s railway museums. Carter claims that, similar to the previously discussed earliest displayed ambitions to preserve railway lines, the preservation of railway artefacts in museums, most particularly steam locomotives, only began on a larger scale during what he describes as the period in the early 20th century when the railway ceased to be at the very forefront of modernity. This development would then offer the chance to step back to a larger degree and reflect on the railway’s greater historical role and its other values. The LNER, as one of the recently grouped railway companies, acted on this by establishing a small railway museum in York in 1928, containing artefacts the

⁹¹ Dieter W. Hopkin, “Railway preservation in the 1920 and 1930s” in Cossons, Patmore and Shorland-Ball, 1992, p. 89.

⁹² Hopkin in Cossons, Patmore and Shorland-Ball, 1992, p. 89.

company had amassed and inherited up to that point, and also laying the groundwork for what was to later become the government-sponsored National Railway Museum, the largest railway museum in the world.⁹³

Neil Cossons, former director of the Science Museum in London as well as the Science Museum Group, a government-backed group with origins dating back to the Great Exhibition of 1851, currently consisting of five museums of which the NRM is one, elaborates on the particular origins of this prominent museum in *Perspectives on Railway History and Interpretation*. Here, he claims the National Railway Museum's roots extend back in time to the importance the North Eastern Railway (NER) placed on tradition and history, as evidenced earlier in this company's preservation and exhibition of two of its oldest locomotives, an action that with Cossons' context seems to have been motivated not only by the perceived potential to promote the railway's newest machines, but also a by genuine reverence for these items' historical importance. This appreciation seems logical for the railway company of the NER to have arrived at when taking into account how it had been the inheritor of the deeply historic and pioneering Stockton and Darlington Railway (S&DR). Cossons further claims that the NER saw the grouping of Britain's railway companies in 1923 as a threat to the history and tradition it valued, in response establishing a Railway Museum Committee prior to the Grouping to ensure the memory of its once independent existence, identity and history lived on. The efforts of this movement resulted in a private collection of artefacts stored in an office building. The 1928 opening of a public museum in an old locomotive erecting and repair shop was, Cottons claims, a result of pressure for such a museum to exist after the centenary celebrations of the S&DR three years earlier.⁹⁴

On the other hand, however, Hopkin claims that no clear support for a national railway museum nor a comprehensive catalogue of artefacts existed at the time of the York museum's opening, but public enthusiasm for railway history had been stirred by the circumstances of the period, making the general atmosphere welcoming of the concept. The

⁹³ Carter. 2008. p. 110.

⁹⁴ Neil Cossons, "Introduction" in Cossons, Patmore and Shorland-Ball, 1992.

newly accommodated existing collection of the NER of items from its history was quickly supplemented by objects from throughout the much wider network of the LNER, supported by the company's Chief Mechanical Engineer H. N. Gresley - according to Hopkin unique among his contemporaries in having an interest in preserving old locomotives as opposed to disposing of them at the end of their economic usefulness. It was also supplemented by objects from even farther afield like the aforementioned first privately preserved locomotive *Gladstone*, which had been handed over to the museum.⁹⁵ The increasingly universal nature of the LNER-owned and -operated museum in wishing to exhibit artefacts from throughout the United Kingdom could be interpreted as the company seeing itself as responsible for maintaining a repository of the nation's railway heritage when no one else stepped up to the task. This was notably on display in cases such as its acquisition, and hence rescue, of the historic 1903 locomotive *City of Truro* in 1931 from its rival company, the Great Western Railway, which had wished to discard it upon withdrawal from service.⁹⁶ While still being privately owned, the success and size of this museum and its collection by the mid-1930s led to it, according to Hopkin, being seen as Britain's definitive railway museum, especially in the absence at the time of any other examples of a comparable profile.⁹⁷

It is interesting, then, to note the irony of how the pre-grouping state of the railway scene in Britain made coordinated preservation extremely challenging, while it was at the same time fear of the grouping's perceived imposed identity loss which motivated the NER to begin amassing a collection of artefacts from its history, this being the same collection which would develop into that possessed by the world's biggest railway museum, as well as one which is universal, encompassing all of Britain's railway industry. A further irony is how the grouping, feared and expected by the NER to erase previous identities, strived to do the opposite in the 1920s with the new railway companies embracing and celebrating their history to the profound extent of one of them, as seen previously, being responsible for

⁹⁵ Hopkin in Cossons, Patmore and Shorland-Ball, 1992. p. 94-95.

⁹⁶ Didcot Railway Centre. "90 years ago today, on 20 March 1931, No 3717 'City of Truro' left Swindon following withdrawal to become a static exhibit at the York Railway Museum." March 20, 2021. Accessed January 20, 2022. <https://www.facebook.com/DidcotRailwayCentre/posts/4520595101300676>

⁹⁷ Hopkin in Cossons, Patmore and Shorland-Ball, 1992. p. 96.

establishing the institution and site which would later be a significant part of what would become the National Railway Museum.

Neil Cossons argues that the processes that furthered the development of what had been started by the York Railway Museum in the following decades most notably included the formation of British Railways upon nationalisation in 1948 and the following events which resulted from this, with the state-owned railway company having inherited the collection from York, among others. In 1951, the same year amateur railway enthusiasts had first put into successful action a desire to conserve a railway line as a heritage railway at the Talylyn, the British Transport Commission – overseer of BR – made clear its own intention to pursue the preservation of railway relics. The commission declared that this intention was to be achieved through having the relics' custody be conducted with appreciation of the wider cultural and social heritage of transport development, and that it was one to be continually worked on through the bringing up to date of the collection. Cossons claims that the maintenance of a representative collection relating to railway history was entrusted to specified consultative panels and curators, and that the commission enacted a parting out of the full collection across several museum sites throughout Britain, with this seeming to presumably be in an effort to make elements of the collection accessible to as large of a proportion of the population as possible. Cossons claims that the ideals of BR had shifted by the late 1960s into ones more so concerned with earning a profit, with this period simultaneously corresponding to the greatly accelerated rate of establishment of heritage railways as enthusiasts acted on their dismay with the ever-so-rapidly changing railway scene. Hence, BR diverted the responsibility for the historical railway artefacts under its care to the Department of Education and Science, and more specifically to the oversight of the South Kensington Science Museum, in the 1968 Transport Act. This latter museum and the Board of British Railways were then assigned to, in cooperation, locating a site and building to house the collection. Response to this relinquishing of responsibility was not unanimously supportive. According to Cossons, it was expressed on behalf of the Government in a House of Lords debate the same year that

the proposals of the Act had been met with concern that the outlined arrangements could lead to needless dispersal and destruction of parts of the collection.⁹⁸

Nevertheless, a combined collection from several outlets formerly under British Railways' care, including to a large degree the former museum in York, was transferred to new premises in York that in large part utilised the old York North Motive Power Depot in addition to several new buildings. The resulting National Railway Museum opened on September 27 1975, the 150th anniversary of the Stockton and Darlington Railway, and Cossons claims it saw great immediate success with the public, with one million visitors attending in its first year, and believes it serves as an incomparable resource both for studying the railway and conveying its great impact on shaping the lives of the people on the planet to the public. The museum's collection continued to grow throughout the 1970s and 80s, according to Cossons, necessitating the acquisition of further buildings to convert into sections of the museum, with the early 1990s being a period of renewal and expansion in which the stature and authority of the Museum in the field of railway history and preservation matured.⁹⁹

Further expansion to accommodate the NRM's growing collection would be seen in 2004 with the opening of a new outstation of the museum. Located in Shildon, County Durham, a complex named "Locomotion" including a new building and demonstration line was constructed on the site of the workshops of early steam engineer Timothy Hackworth, who designed and developed some of the first successful steam locomotives and was involved in the establishment of the S&DR, a location to which part of the museum's large collection was transferred.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Neil Cossons, "The National Railway Museum, York" in Cossons, Patmore and Shorland-Ball, 1992, p. 130-131.

⁹⁹ Neil Cossons, "Introduction" in Cossons, Patmore and Shorland-Ball, 1992.

¹⁰⁰ Josef. "National Railway Museum" Worldwide Rails. February 20, 2019. Accessed January 30, 2022. <https://worldwiderails.com/national-railway-museum/>.

Part 4: Battlegrounds

Part 4.1.: Preservation and Tourism - financing heritage

Already at the very start of the process of the volunteer takeover of the Talyllyn Railway in the months leading up to 1951, questions were raised among the actors involved about the movement's future. The issues that were raised included what decisions would have to be made in the regards to the form the railway would need to take in order for it to be sustainable for the future, and hence, how to balance the preservation of the line with the need to acquire the patronage of tourists to financially support the upkeep of it. These questions were over time found to be a core issue at the centre of the railway preservation movement as a whole that would continue to be relevant to the present day, a perpetual balancing act in which the scales have periodically been tipped in either direction depending on the particular period and location in question. In terms of the reliance on tourism which the early TR preservationists perceived as a necessary element for success in their operation, this was something which had already to a degree been established beforehand in the case of this pioneering railway. As its goods and local passenger traffic had begun to decline in the 1930s and '40s, the railway saw it as necessary to refocus on tourist traffic which, in the summer months particularly, had begun to be supplied to the area in ever-increasing numbers by newly introduced bus services in this period.¹⁰¹ According to Brian Sibley, holidaymakers wished to travel on what was nicknamed the 'Toy Railway' to see the scenic Dolgoch waterfalls along the line as well as walk from the railway's station at Abergynolwyn to the nearby Talyllyn Lake and the mountain Cader Idris.¹⁰² Eventually, according to L. T. C. Rolt, upon the closure of the railway's quarries, this reliance on tourists increased to an extent at which it was the railway's only hope of

¹⁰¹ L.T.C. Rolt, *Railway Adventure*, Stroud, Great Britain: The History Press, 2010, p. 26.

¹⁰² Brian Sibley, *The Thomas the Tank Engine Man: The Story of the Reverend W. Awdry and His Really Useful Engines*, London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1995, p. 172.

survival.¹⁰³ Continuing the strive to attract tourists as a revenue source appeared to be the self-evident strategy for the preservationists in their reshaping of the line into a heritage railway, with little overt discussion to be found in the selected literature about this particular choice.

In stark contrast to the values the TR as a heritage railway would find itself standing for and inspiring others to adopt, the leader of the TR preservationists Tom Rolt, when planning the volunteer takeover, initially assessed the alarming state of physical dilapidation in which the railway and its equipment had found themselves in at the time of the enthusiasts' planning for their takeover, and on the basis of this made a pragmatic and business-like proposal. Having considered that the track of the railway was in such a poor state that it was in need of relaying throughout the length of the line, but that on the other hand the price of steel and timber to accomplish this task was prohibitively expensive, Rolt conceived of the idea of replicating an arrangement performed on the Ravenglass and Eskdale Railway in Cumbria in previous decades. This consisted of replacing the existing trackwork with a more affordable one of a much narrower miniature gauge. Rolt viewed this as a way to keep a train service running while comprehensively modernising it with brand-new locomotives and rolling stock on a brand-new rail system which could accommodate a faster schedule with greater economy. As this would replace the original historic locomotives, Rolt proposed for these to be retained as static museum exhibits.¹⁰⁴ This proposal would in Rolt's view turn a profit for the railway company, which to him was of great importance, as what he had in mind was a "purely commercial venture which would stand and fall on its financial viability."¹⁰⁵ Enacting such a plan would have completely transformed the character and mode of operation of the railway, and it could be interpreted as surprising that Rolt would be willing to carry out such a profound alteration in the name of profitability considering it was the existing state of the railway as a quaint relic of the past that appealed to him and other enthusiasts in their drive to preserve it for

¹⁰³ Rolt. 2010. p. 26.

¹⁰⁴ Rolt. 2010. p. 41-42.

¹⁰⁵ Alan Holmes, *Talyllyn Revived: the Story of the World's First Railway Preservation Society*, Tywyn: Talyllyn Railway, 2009, p. 17.

the future, and also considering, as claimed by Alan Holmes in *Talyllyn Revived*, that Rolt had previously been deeply involved in promoting the preservation of the traditional ways of life on Britain's canals.¹⁰⁶

Crucially, it was the enthusiast Owen Prosser who formulated the first signs that indicated the form the TR would ultimately take, namely that of a heritage railway, in suggestions made in opposition to Rolt's proposal. Prosser's belief was that reconstructing the TR into what was perceived to more so resemble a funfair layout than anything else would disregard the railway's heritage and historical value as what Rolt later admitted was the "sole survivor of a railway era which was otherwise extinct."¹⁰⁷ Indeed, the quarries the railway had been built to serve had proved to be less successful than expected, creating no incentive throughout its history to substantially modernise or improve it, leaving it with a significant amount of original equipment intact.¹⁰⁸ Prosser argued that destroying or extensively altering this would push away those people who would wish to support the venture through an appreciation for the TR's historical value and inherent appeal. He also thought that the kind of people the preservation scheme should look to for support would be not those pursuing return on capital, but rather those prepared to donate to the cause of preserving the railway as it was.¹⁰⁹ In *Railway Adventure*, Rolt claims that he agreed with these notions, expressing that his proposed conversion would differ little from toy railways at seaside resorts and thus not inspire the sympathy of the public which he believed any scheme depends on for support. It was therefore agreed that the only alternative was the unprecedented, and at the time seen as risky, idea of retaining and restoring the existing railway, operated by volunteers not seeking financial gain from the endeavour.¹¹⁰¹¹¹ Embracing these elements instead of neglecting them would go on to become the ideological foundation for both the preservation of this specific railway, and, subsequently, the majority of the railway preservation movement.

¹⁰⁶ Holmes. 2009. p. 17.

¹⁰⁷ Rolt. 2010. p. 42.

¹⁰⁸ Sibley. 1995. p. 173.

¹⁰⁹ Holmes. 2009. p. 17.

¹¹⁰ Rolt. 2010. p. 42.

¹¹¹ Holmes. 2009. p. 20.

Also important in the shaping of the railway preservation movement and its values were the principles laid down by the Bluebell Railway as the first steam-operated, former British Railways-owned standard-gauge heritage railway, although similar contemplation of alternatives took place. Even though it was inspired by the enthusiast-reopened railway line aspect of the pioneering Welsh heritage railways of which the Talylyn was the first example, the group of railway enthusiasts behind the Bluebell Railway preservation scheme of 1959 did not immediately implement the heritage dimension into its planning. Quite similarly to L. T. C. Rolt's initial proposal for the TR before Owen Prosser's countersuggestions, the Bluebell was originally devised as a commercial operation which would be using diesel railcar traction on its trains as simply an attempt to retain a railway service for the local inhabitants.¹¹²

However, the commotion around the line's closure by BR had already faded quickly and the locals had moved on from their reliance on the railway line by the time of the development of the preservation plans by finding alternate means of transportation like buses and cars. This, according to Jonathan Brown, is in contrast to many later proposed preserved railway schemes which did have a large degree of local support from the outset in addition to the interest of railway enthusiasts. This would then lead to a notable portion of the traffic carried in the lines' heritage railway forms consisting of locals and commuters in addition to tourists arriving from further afield. With local traffic seeming to be something they could not rely on in their planned commercial venture, the Bluebell preservationists were compelled to amend their scheme. Meanwhile, the failure to raise enough funds for the purchase of the full line contributed another limitation to the scheme's operation, as it could not feasibly claim to provide a service between multiple significant destinations. Facing these restraints for their intended business, the Bluebell preservationists decided their acquired partial line would better function as a steam museum railway which would align itself more closely with the premise conducted by the TR.¹¹³ As neither end of the line served significant communities, a trip on the Bluebell would not

¹¹² Brown. 2017. p. 33. (E-book edition)

¹¹³ Brown. 2017. p. 33. (E-book edition)

necessarily aim to transport the passenger from a meaningful Point A to a meaningful Point B, but rather invite the visitor to ride on a train for this activity's perceived inherent recreational and educational value. This would be a feature a large amount of the subsequent heritage railways would also arrive at aiming to provide, both during their gradual processes of reopening and reconnecting the full lengths of the long-closed railways they were setting out to preserve, as well as something they would continue to aim to provide in the case of those of them that did achieve their full expansionist goals.

The Bluebell Railway Preservation Society found success in following their updated scheme in the vein of the TR with the railway growing rapidly, going from 91,000 passenger journeys in 1961 to 200,000 in 1965.¹¹⁴ While most heritage railways can be understood to exist as museums as a large part of their operation in that they offer access to the experiencing of historical artefacts - this being the stretches of railway that they have preserved, the valuable ambiances that are maintained resembling bygone eras, as well as the objects that are part of them or operating on them - the Bluebell in particular took embodying this museum role to an exceptional degree. The society created a preservation committee in 1961 specifically to strategize the preservation of locomotives and rolling stock so as to have a consistent and relevant collection of material located and operating at the railway, rather than ending up with a random selection, emphasising the importance the railway placed on acting like a museum railway. Although the strategy was not adhered to completely, the railway does, as a result of it, currently possess what Brown considers to be one of the best collections of locomotives and stock connected to the railways of southern England, and as a whole the second largest collection of steam locomotives in general in the UK, second only to the National Railway Museum.¹¹⁵

To coincide with the railway's particularly strong dedication to presenting and operating the line as it had appeared in its earlier years, the Bluebell had a founding principle of operating steam locomotives only. This is in contrast to a large proportion of heritage railways at which steam and diesel traction had coexisted from either their outset or since

¹¹⁴ Brown. 2017. p. 34-35. (E-book edition)

¹¹⁵ Brown. 2017. p. 35-36, 36-37. (E-book edition)

their early days of operation, due to the flexibility of such an arrangement. This Bluebell policy is one which has been relaxed only relatively recently, from 2007 onwards, as construction work involved in the line's northern extension project necessitated the hiring of diesel locomotives. This was a change in policy which allowed the opportunity to acquire a broader range of locomotives, many of which possessing historical interest in their own right.¹¹⁶

Having uncovered the principles that would serve to guide the majority of Britain's not-for-profit heritage railways from their earliest pioneering days to the present day, it appears useful to seek to find what these consist of for the other significant section of the railway preservation industry that is the focus of this text. The values acting as the underpinnings of the more conventionally operating museums that are the NRM in York and its outstations were described by Neil Cossons, then director of the Science Museum Group, in the early 1990s in *Perspectives on Railway History and Interpretation*. Cossons observes that an important principle for the museum's operation upon its opening had been an approach he also claims to have been one first employed by the NRM amongst the institutions of its kind. He claims that the museum was the first to consciously attempt to place the mode of transport that is the railway in its historical context, to interpret its significance, to explain the technology associated with it, as well as to illustrate the social and economic impact it has had.¹¹⁷

Another aspect he found to be crucial about the NRM's methods was its value of being an avenue that presents the artefacts in its collection for the non-enthusiast, making its exhibits accessible and understandable to the wider audience that is the population as a whole, something Cossons claims sets York's museum apart from many railway museums around the world which he sees as more generally inaccessible, having been designed by railwaymen for an audience of railwaymen.¹¹⁸ According to preservationist Handel Kardas, museums are supposed to present their collections to as large of a part of the population as

¹¹⁶ Brown. 2017. p. 35-36, 36-37. (E-book edition)

¹¹⁷ Cossons in Cossons, Patmore and Shorland-Ball, 1992. p. 129.

¹¹⁸ Cossons in Cossons, Patmore and Shorland-Ball, 1992. p. 135.

possible, and indeed, he claims the NRM correspondingly prioritises accessibility for first-time visitors who step into the building with no prior interest in railways.¹¹⁹ Additionally, the museum's collection is one that has according to Cossons been growing on all fronts, with the museum's archives thriving under the guidance of expert and enthusiastic staff, and its preserved locomotive and rolling stock assortment having been established through close cooperation with British Railways - prior to railway privatisation in the mid-late 1990s - wherein the museum could ask for items to be set aside for preservation upon withdrawal from service.¹²⁰

The way these methods are employed and the value of them in the context of what the institutions have been and are trying to achieve in regards to the preservation and conveying of heritage are things that are, of course, open for debate and not exempt from issues, as will be explored further.

It has been mentioned previously that the British railway preservation movement aims to conserve and convey the heritage of the railways of the UK, as in, the inherent value perceived in their existence beyond their mere function, something that is clearly implied in the name itself of one of its main branches – the heritage railways. In further exploring what meaning lies behind the term 'heritage', how the aspect of heritage preservation interfaces with tourism, and how this compares with railway preservation, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* of 1998 will be used.

Firstly, what the heritage railways and museums in question aim to do with the items in their possession and care is display them to an audience, which could be placed in contrast to a hypothetical scenario of the museum items being placed in private storage and the heritage railways having no public access and being operated only for the benefit of those responsible for their operation. For the government-sponsored National Railway Museum, entry is free and the bulk of the income supplied by an actor external to the museum itself,

¹¹⁹ Handel Kardas, "Museums, visitors - and what they expect" in Cossons, Patmore and Shorland-Ball, 1992, p. 136.

¹²⁰ Neil Cossons, "Introduction" in Cossons, Patmore and Shorland-Ball, 1992.

but heritage railways, being owned and operated by independent preservation societies, are responsible for sourcing and raising their own income to pay for the upkeep of their equipment and facilities, and are thus contingent on priced travel tickets. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett posits that the practice of display is characterised by two hallmarks, these being the foreignness of objects to their contexts of presentation and the location of meaning at their destination. Both of these elements appear relevant to the featured branches of railway preservation as they both present objects which society has deemed as archaic and moved on from and which instead represent parts of past periods of history, however the location of meaning at a destination seems especially apt when considering heritage railways. These are dependent on selling – in the literal sense of the word – a combined package of particular items as well as the location they are placed at in itself being worth experiencing for the meaning and value this possesses. This meaning and value going beyond mere function, which is attached to what are hence attractions, is here described as heritage, and this concept will be returned to.¹²¹

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett also defines two distinct forms of display which differ in how they approach the role the exhibits play and what the nature is of the environment they are presented in. One of these forms is the in-context display, which is concerned with the qualities of the artefacts themselves, where thus the artefacts are the actors and narratives are conveyed through the use of them. This appears to be the primary form of display performed at the NRM and its related museums, as the railway artefacts in their possession are presented on the basis of their own merits within the context of themes like technological advancement in the railway industry and the role railways have played in the industrial development of society. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's other described form of display is the in-situ display which is environmental in nature, focuses on offering an experience within a recreated world into which the visitor enters. This aligns neatly with the display employed by heritage railways. While the artefacts, such as buildings and locomotives, residing at the heritage railways can be appreciated separately for their historic value, what

¹²¹ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998, p. 1.

is mainly presented is a kind of recreated world of past eras of railway history which have since been superseded, this being achieved through the combined effect of the presence of these artefacts and their being in operation, granting a comprehensive level of immersion. While it is true for both of the featured branches of the railway preservation movement that they to varying degrees through the use of historic artefacts offer to the visitor the experience of sites that are otherwise removed in time or space from them, the bridging of space is especially accurate for the NRM in its bringing together of exhibits from all across Britain, while bridging time seems particularly accurate for the heritage railways due to the aforementioned comprehensiveness of the immersion they can provide.¹²²

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett goes on to define numerous traits that characterise the variety of museums existing in the present-day society, and indeed, several of these traits can be identified in the cases of the NRM and the heritage railway industry, such as functioning as schools educating their visitors, laboratories for creating new knowledge, advocates for conservation, artefacts that are to be displayed in their own right – which is at the core of heritage railways especially – and attractions in a tourist economy which provide facilities for their visitors. Dependence on tourism is, as previously mentioned, a factor prevalent in the railway preservation movement, and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett claims this is generally the case for museums as a whole due to it being the number of visitors, not visits, that determines the “total disposable income brought through a museum’s doors, with tourists generating more revenue than a small core of repeat visitors.”¹²³

The term ‘heritage’ in the context of museums and preservation describes, according to Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, the reappraisal of that which is obsolete and defunct, and it is created by way of a process of exhibition in which the defunct and obsolete is given a second life. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues that heritage is a new mode of cultural production in that artefacts from the past are re-evaluated in the present and, through the actions of heritage movements and organisations, become exhibits of themselves. She claims that said existing artefacts are hence protected, preserved and exhibited on the basis that heritage

¹²² Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. 1998. p. 3-4.

¹²³ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. 1998. p. 137, 138, 139.

movements have identified and hence applied value to them beyond the original period in which they were viable and modern. She claims that heritage movements ensure these obsolete remnants do not disappear by adding to them values like pastness and indigeneity.¹²⁴ Heritage activities as defined here do correspond with the deeds of railway enthusiasts in formulating and expressing what they perceived as the appeal of railway technology facing imminent obsolescence - hence performing what Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes as adding value - and subsequently striving to ensure the survival of this technology. In this way existing historical objects and structures become historic, and thus deemed to be worthy of preservation, because of the railway preservation societies and museums, which can accordingly also be described as heritage organisations.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett further defines the relationship between heritage and tourism, as collaborative industries. She claims that heritage refashions artefacts deemed to possess value into destinations while tourism turns these into economically viable exhibits able to sustain themselves by importing visitors to consume the products situated at the destinations.¹²⁵ It therefore stands to reason that heritage railways especially, practically universally, initially settled on a reliance on tourism as a model of operation in the case of the pioneering examples, and consequently perpetuated this reliance ever since on a comprehensive scale. As locations become destinations through heritage, they subsequently compete with each other for tourists. To do this, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett claims that the production of difference is required, wherein each destination strives to distinguish itself from its competitors.¹²⁶ This method is employed in the railway preservation realm, as shown by Ian Carter. In a tourism industry filled with other attractions, like theme parks, as well as other heritage railways and railway museums, each preservation institution utilises branding to emphasise how they differ from the rest. Examples include the NRM marketing itself as “the largest railway museum in the world,” the Chinnor and Princes Risborough

¹²⁴ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. 1998. p. 149, 150.

¹²⁵ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. 1998. p. 151, 153.

¹²⁶ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. 1998. p. 152.

Railway as “the quintessential country branch line,” and the Great Central Railway as “Britain’s only main line steam railway.”¹²⁷

As additionally mentioned by Carter, the heritage railways as a whole are also distinguished by the manner in which they are differentiated from regular for-profit railways. Whereas regular modern railways are concerned with annihilating time and space by carrying goods and people quickly between locations, heritage railways are selling a different product, which results from the establishment of the heritage railway principles established in the movement’s earliest days. This product is also analogous with what Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes as the added value that heritage movements – here, more specifically, railway preservation societies – imbue a site with when incorporating it into the realm of heritage. Carter claims that the heritage value these railways sell is a representation of what steam-powered and, to a lesser degree of focus, early diesel-powered travel once felt like.¹²⁸ Brian Sibley in his biography of Reverend Wilbert Awdry highlights attributes that equally describe the value Awdry’s railway stories and heritage railways strive to convey, this being a supposed “atmosphere of yearning romance, a wistful glimpse back in time to a less complicated age”¹²⁹ as well as the keeping alive in the present day of the excitement of steam train journeys and a supposed nostalgic serenity of past eras.¹³⁰

It was previously mentioned that Reverend Wilbert Awdry and his railway stories was an example illustrating the transformed attitudes towards the railways - perceiving them as something with inherent value beyond merely its function - as well as a manifestation of these beliefs. The author and his stories are additionally relevant when it comes to supporting the preservation movement that arose as a result of those shifted perspectives on the railway. Reverend Awdry’s *The Railway Series* became an enterprise the railway preservation industry has benefitted greatly from ever since a greater sense of connection with the real-life railway world was introduced following the first few books in the series. The book series had developed from simple bedtime stories told to his son into a more

¹²⁷ Ian Carter, *British Railway Enthusiasm*, Manchester University Press, 2008, p. 117-121.

¹²⁸ Sibley. 1995. p. 13, 14, 15.

¹²⁹ Sibley. 1995. p. 14.

¹³⁰ Sibley. 1995. p. 15.

elaborate franchise - beginning with its first publication in 1945 - and a fictional-yet-authentic world, all of which provided Awdry with a means of expressing his profound love of railways, as well as a means of keeping alive the memory of happy and nostalgic childhood experiences.

Professor Jeffrey Richards of Lancaster University claims that as trains, for children especially, tended to be associated with trips, holidays, and other pleasurable experiences, Wilbert Awdry already had a head start for making them feel relatable to wider audiences. This he further achieved by having the locomotives be given approachable human scale and be anthropomorphised through possessing faces and the ability to speak, so as to better be able to express themselves.¹³¹ Even having devised this element of fiction, Awdry still made sure to create and follow specific principles for accuracy and consistency in the development of his *Railway Series* books. Besides needing to be written with fluency and careful word choices, he also, being a passionate railway enthusiast, thought it important for the stories to be drawn from life, meaning they had to utilise real types of locomotives engaging in real railway events while displaying authentic locomotive behaviour.¹³² Hence, along with teaching morality in that they concerned themselves with the themes of reward for moral behaviour, punishment for immoral behaviour and forgiveness for those who repent,¹³³ the books were also educational in technological matters in that they shed light on and interpreted real railway practices and spoke of actual events, machines and locations for a target demographic of all readers regardless of pre-existing knowledge, yet without talking down to them.¹³⁴

Brian Sibley claims that Reverend Wilbert Awdry had a very positive and supportive reaction towards the idea of the preservation of a railway like the Talylyn when he heard of its then-recent volunteer takeover in 1951 through a letter containing a newspaper article. According to Sibley, Awdry was disenchanted with BR's nationalisation of the railways and thus believed that "anything which could be done to preserve an independent railway

¹³¹ Sibley. 1995. p. 98.

¹³² Sibley. 1995. p. 113.

¹³³ Sibley. 1995. p. 165, 166.

¹³⁴ Sibley. 1995. p. 113.

was worthy of support.”¹³⁵ He believed that if the TR was as eccentric and individualistic as he had heard in stories from distant members of his family, it might be worthwhile to experience it for himself, and might even provide unusual stories suitable for adaptation. He inquired the preservation society for more information, made a donation, being among the first one hundred people to do so, and became a member, going on to visit the railway during a summer holiday where he would act as a volunteer booking clerk and guard on the TR’s trains. According to Sibley, the TR was a new avenue for him to express his enthusiasm, as was, and continues to be, the case for a large part of the volunteers working at heritage railways. During Reverend Awdry’s involvement in the volunteer operations on the TR he had received much praise from fellow volunteers for his stories, which had been of great entertainment to both children, their parents, and other adults. One of the aims of his visit was to collect potential story material, but he was also approached directly by chairman Tom Rolt who suggested that the railway be incorporated into the books, recognising the attention the railway could attain by being featured in such a popular series.¹³⁶

After a few years of contemplation around the form it would take, Awdry arrived at the solution of implementing a fictional counterpart of the TR into the world of his books named the Skarloey Railway, near-identical in many respects to the real railway, adapting numerous actual vehicles, places, people and occurrences into entertaining moral stories of assorted misbehaviour contrasted with courageousness and courtesy, all the while explicitly crediting and encouraging his readers to visit the heritage railway he gained inspiration from.¹³⁷ Wilbert Awdry would repeat such arrangements numerous times in his works in the following decades, advertising and adapting events and features from heritage railways like the Bluebell Railway, Snowdon Mountain Railway, Ravenglass and Eskdale Railway and South Devon Railway. When the writing of the books was taken over by Wilbert’s son, Christopher Awdry, in 1983, the trend was continued, with the additional locations of the Dean Forest Railway and the National Railway Museum in York being featured. In this

¹³⁵ Sibley. 1995. p. 174.

¹³⁶ Sibley. 1995. p. 174, 178.

¹³⁷ Sibley. 1995. p. 192.

way, Wilbert, and later Christopher, Awdry gained inspiration for interesting stories with a clear historical and educational dimension, while the heritage railways, which in some cases, such as that of the Snowdon Mountain Railway, made the suggestion to be included in the books themselves,¹³⁸ gained a valuable promotional device which brought them more attention and reached the awareness of audiences within and beyond the scope of the pre-existing sphere of railway enthusiasm.

The close link and enormous number of intentional similarities between many of the railways in the fictional universe of *The Railway Series* and real-life heritage railways, in addition to the explicit mention of the latter within many of the stories, provided impetus for countless readers to make visits to the real counterparts of the locations they had read about, as traveling on them would to a large degree be comparable to experiencing the railway world depicted by Awdry in his books.¹³⁹ Unfortunately, yet understandably, quantifying the precise success Awdry's work has over the years contributed to the preservation movement is a very difficult task. However, the continuous utilisation and popularity of special events held at railway heritage sites since the 1980s across not just the United Kingdom but numerous countries around the world, named "Days Out with Thomas" - or "Duncan Days" at the Talylyn Railway - after popular characters from the series, continue to attract large numbers of young attendees to the railway preservation sector, offering both a stream of revenue for the upkeep of the heritage sites as well as a source of inspiration and avenue of entry for potential future volunteers and railway enthusiasts.¹⁴⁰

The attention gained and wider audiences reached through the help of Awdry's stories in both book and later television form have been and continue to be of substantial benefit to the heritage railways, as also stated by Brian Sibley in that this has "undoubtedly given a tremendous boost to their work."¹⁴¹ Additionally, the National Railway Library at the NRM added Awdry's entire book series to its collection in 1990, claiming they have had an

¹³⁸ Sibley. 1995. p. 237.

¹³⁹ Sibley. 1995. p. 269.

¹⁴⁰ Sibley. 1995. p. 313.

¹⁴¹ Sibley. 1995. p. 218.

enormous role in sparking children's interest in railways.¹⁴² However, the application of elements from *The Railway Series* and the television series *Thomas the Tank Engine and Friends* - which was inspired by the books - to locomotives and rolling stock at heritage railways during "Days Out with Thomas" (DOWT) events has not met universal approval. The alterations made to the preserved artefacts for the events most often consist of the temporary attachment of face plates to the front of vehicles and, less frequently, repaints to make said vehicles appear more like the anthropomorphised Awdry characters. According to Sibley, some members of railway preservation societies have criticised such practices, claiming they demean the railway's professional image or disfigure fine pieces of railway engineering, despite the alterations being in the majority of cases minor, temporary and easily reversible. However, Sibley goes on to state that these opponents nevertheless had to admit that the DOWT activities were successful in raising "large sums of much-needed money that could not have been earned without the Tank Engine's help."¹⁴³

Quite recently, as of the time of writing, a particular occurrence has taken place which could act as an indicator of the success of Reverend Wilbert Awdry's *Railway Series*, as well as that of the subsequent media inspired by the books, in reaching and touching the lives of many people, conveying the appeal of railways generally, as well as that of the specific heritage railways featured in the stories. An event was held by the Talyllyn Railway on the weekend of August 14-15, 2021 named "The Awdry Extravaganza," which aimed to celebrate the work of Reverend Awdry by decorating the railway's engines so as to depict the characters in the books, holding readings of stories and other documents related to the books, displaying original illustrations from the books alongside prop models from the television show inspired by them, as well as Awdry's own model railways, based on locations in his stories. Despite restrictions for the visitors necessitated by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, this special event weekend's great success can be measured by how

¹⁴² Sibley. 1995. p. 307.

¹⁴³ Sibley. 1995. p. 313.

it was the busiest event at the Talylyn Railway in five years as well as how it ensured the holding of a repeat event the following year.¹⁴⁴

Next to “Days Out with Thomas,” another attraction employed by heritage railways to perform what Ian Carter claims to be a crucial role in earning revenue to maintain solvency is the Santa Special during winter. At these events Santa Claus appears aboard trains and at stations to deliver presents. Events like these have, according to Carter, become increasingly necessary since the dawn of the heritage railways due to shifting British holiday patterns. He claims that in the 1950s, holidays in a given year would most commonly take the form of two-week trips to a British location, whereas in the decades since then, holidays have become shorter breaks spread more widely in time and in space. The heritage railways have thus had to shift from adequately profitable short summer seasons to being in operation throughout the year. While this adaptation, coupled to Thomas and seasonal Santa events, has addressed said societal change, it does, according to Carter, bring its own challenges, as additional pressure is placed on equipment and personnel from the longer sustained period of operation.¹⁴⁵ Certain heritage railways, meanwhile, have even stronger ties to tourism, with their reliance on this industry extending beyond the mere need to cover expenses, with the companies definitively seeking to turn a profit. Carter mentions such lines as the Ffestiniog Railway and Snowdon Mountain Railway (SMR) being “resolutely commercial,” highlighting how the SMR in particular takes the form of a commercial investment, not having been acquired by a preservation society of railway enthusiasts and currently being enfolded in the “financial empire” of Heritage Great Britain.¹⁴⁶

York's National Railway Museum, though in contrast, as mentioned previously, to heritage railways in that it is granted government funding, has also faced challenges when it comes to economy. In June 2013, public fear was reported in media outlets for the museum's

¹⁴⁴ Mike Sheridan. “Mid Wales Tourist Railway Enjoys ‘Busiest Weekend for Five Years.’” *County Times*, August 19, 2021. Accessed February 14, 2022. <https://www.countytimes.co.uk/news/19524739.mid-wales-tourist-railway-enjoys-busiest-weekend-five-years/>

¹⁴⁵ Carter. 2008. p. 117.

¹⁴⁶ Carter. 2008. p. 122, 127.

future following Science Museum Group director Ian Blatchford's announcement that an upcoming potential big funding cut of 10% as an addition to existing cuts would necessitate the closure of one of the museum group's attractions in the north of England, with the NRM being a potential victim.¹⁴⁷ The newspaper *The Press in York* reported on what it claimed to be one of the biggest and most astonishing campaigns it had seen of more than 13,500 local residents in support of preventing the closure of the NRM with the campaign later being presented to the Government.¹⁴⁸ Following this and other popular campaigns more broadly directed at the Science Museum Group as a whole, Chancellor George Osborne announced that the projected funding cuts would be reduced to 5% and Ian Blatchford confirmed that all of the threatened museums were safe and would not be closed.¹⁴⁹ While this event displayed the NRM being at the mercy of governmental budgeting whims, it also showed that the museum possesses great support in a British public which is strongly devoted to keeping it open.

Part 4.2.: Conserving and operating heritage

As discussed by authors like Ian Carter and Richard Gibbon, the functional operation of historic railway artefacts like locomotives and rolling stock at museums and heritage railways is a matter of discussion in itself.¹⁵⁰ According to Carter, the exact comprisal of those cherished parts of the world the railway preservation movement originally set out to preserve and applied the concept of heritage to, to better define them has the capacity to

¹⁴⁷ Mike Laycock and Gavin Atchison. "Campaign launched to save York's National Railway Museum from closure" *The Press*, June 6, 2013. Accessed March 4, 2022. <https://www.yorkpress.co.uk/news/10467289.campaign-launched-to-save-yorks-national-railway-museum-from-closure/>.

¹⁴⁸ Mike Laycock. "MPs receive petition signed by 13,500 to save National Railway Museum." *The Press*, June 22, 2013. Accessed March 4, 2022. <https://www.yorkpress.co.uk/news/10502459.mps-receive-petition-signed-by-13500-to-save-national-railway-museum/>

¹⁴⁹ Dolores Cowburn. "Bradford's National Media Museum saved – that's official." *Telegraph & Argus*, July 3, 2013. Accessed March 4, 2022. <https://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/news/10521833.bradfords-national-media-museum-saved-thats-official/>.

¹⁵⁰ Richard Gibbon. "The Curator's dilemma in operating railway artefacts" in Cossons, Patmore and Shorland-Ball, 1992. p. 120.

and does shift to varying degrees in the process of the move from initial unadulterated enthusiasm to the practical concerns of existing as tourist attractions so as to be able to sustain their survival. Carter claims that as railway enthusiasts only comprise around 5-10% of the total visitor numbers for heritage railways, the railways cannot dedicate themselves to serving solely this group, but instead have had to instate the general public as their most valuable demographic.¹⁵¹

Ian Carter notes that as a result of this, railway enthusiast visitors with a more-than-casual level of knowledge about and familiarity with railways, though a minority of total visitors, have and continue to express dismay at perceived inauthenticities, inaccuracies, or inadequacies in the way the supposed railway heritage is presented at the heritage railways. Carter samples opinions he has observed being expressed in the enthusiast community, such as that some liveries carried by locomotives are inauthentic because they were never used prior to preservation, that names given to locomotives do not match those given by their original owners, or that they never had ones to begin with and that attaching them would be historically inaccurate, that heritage railways that are more commercial in nature, like the Ffestiniog Railway, have lost sight of what preservation should look like by installing modern signalling equipment for smoother, more efficient operation, converting steam engines to run on oil fuel to limit lineside fires caused by sparks produced during the burning of coal and the fines having to be paid as a result, and constructing new carriages in modern styles. While discourse emerges within enthusiast communities over whether such criticism of supposed flaws is excessive and pedantic or reasonable, another broad field of discussion also appears, namely that of what the heritage railways in question actually claim to be doing and whether such response from enthusiasts is in fact relevant and useful to their operation, as well as what exactly operating railway heritage should look like.¹⁵²

As mentioned, it is tourists in the form of the general public rather than devoted railway enthusiasts that heritage railways have, on a general level, found to be the most viable source of income for sustaining their operations, due to the former significantly

¹⁵¹ Carter. 2008. p. 120.

¹⁵² Carter. 2008. p. 120.

outnumbering the latter. Using the example of Ffestiniog Railway marketing material, Carter points out how this realisation has shifted the railway's description of what the purported heritage it aims to convey consists of. There is a definite difference in complexity between a visitor map from the FR's early days in 1957 describing the railway's historical development and how it interfaces with what can be described as the heritage of Welsh slate industry, compared to a visitor leaflet from 1995 advertising "special trains."¹⁵³ Although this is one particularly dramatic example, it illustrates the potential dilemma surrounding how simplification, and other alterations, of the heritage the railways aim to present for the benefit of wider audiences can strikingly reshape the context provided for visitors of the relationship between the present-day institutions and the qualities relating to past eras of history they were originally formed to attempt to conserve. Ian Carter claims that it is indeed the railway preservation movement's existential dilemma to determine whether the focus should lie in the faithful conservation of the type of railway site the preservation societies initially set out to ensure the survival of, or in existing as tourist railways where the ties to the past are not emphasised. As has been suggested, the scales have been tipped to varying degrees towards either of these two different fundamental schools of thought depending on the specific railway and time period in question. Carter claims that this dilemma's continued persistence in itself suggests that shifts from enthusiastic preservation movements to more commercial business ventures neither go uncontested nor solve all financial problems.¹⁵⁴

Another example of the weighing up of railway enthusiast concerns against attracting general public interest is mentioned by Jonathan Brown to involve the Bluebell Railway's first few locomotives as used during its earliest running seasons in the early 1960s. Two were given the names *Bluebell* and *Primrose*, having previously been unnamed, and another was wearing its name, *Stepney*, while in a black livery, a combination not seen before. Brown claims that railway enthusiasts complained about the inauthentic names and livery combinations that were given to the locomotives, but that they were on the other

¹⁵³ Carter. 2008. p. 120.

¹⁵⁴ Carter. 2008. p. 121.

hand popular with the general public, and the attention gained and money earned was vital to the society. It should at the same time be noted that enthusiast aversion to historically inauthentic alterations is never universal, with some embracing such changes on the grounds that they provide variety in the cases when multiple otherwise essentially identical locomotives are in existence. However, appeasement of visitors belonging to the general public at the cost of authenticity and the dismay of some railway enthusiasts is hence evidently a concept dating back at least to the earliest days of standard-gauge heritage railways.¹⁵⁵

According to Handel Kardas, situations like this are present at the National Railway Museum as well. The NRM, having opened up an additional exhibition space during the renovation of its main premises in 1990, found that the utilisation of newer, more interactive methods of conveying its exhibits to visitors in its secondary building generated varied response. “Classroom” modules were instated in which interactive props and models could be used more easily to teach children about railways, and platforms and footsteps were placed around locomotives and rolling stock to allow convenient entry for visitors into carriages, wagons and the cabs of locomotives with labels placed to describe the functions of components. Kardas claims the impressions of enthusiasts were mixed, as the new interpretive and accessibility features would to varying degrees separate from each other or obscure and block from view specific parts of the exhibits, but with typical visitors enjoying the new features as they provided a clearer understanding for the uninitiated of what the artefacts were all about, and were perceived by them as successful measures to avoid the site seeming like a “dry, dusty museum.” According to Kardas, while the NRM places the utmost importance on its displays being understandable to first-time visitors, existing enthusiasts are also seen as important in that they in various ways encourage the museum to expand its activities, and have the knowledge to be able to suggest what aspects of railway history could benefit from greater elaboration. Kardas claims that the NRM has always had and used “the ability to discern between different types of enthusiast, to work

¹⁵⁵ Brown. 2017. p. 34-35. (E-book edition)

with the visionaries and placate or override the harpers,” and in this way strives to balance the input of enthusiasts with the perceived needs of the general public.¹⁵⁶

In terms of the fundamental discourse within the railway preservation movement of what the relationship between the heritage it claims to be in possession of and the preservation of said heritage should look like, Carter discusses the very concept of preservation in itself. He labels British railway preservation as a conservational enterprise in the sense that it seeks to save railway implements from obliteration for the sake of future generations’ benefit, but claims complexities arise from the fact that functional machinery is involved, which was originally designed to transport people and goods between destinations. Although, he claims, preservation is at its most effective when the artefacts in question are kept resting in place in a desired state of being, in perpetuity, heritage railways and, to a lesser degree, the NRM have deemed that keeping their artefacts in operation creates a better and more potent, as well as more attractive, representation of how the railways and their equipment functioned and appeared in their original periods of service. The operational status of the artefacts and the subsequent continuous maintenance performed on them to restore parts worn down by friction and erosion to keep them operational causes the thought puzzle of the Ship of Theseus to come into play. In this thought puzzle the question is posed of whether an original item can still be deemed to be the same item if most or all of its constituent components have been replaced. After completions of major overhauls of locomotives and stock, observations are sometimes made of what percentage of original material had had to be replaced by new parts to keep the machines running, though universal consensus of what the implications of this are is not reached.¹⁵⁷ The results are instead perpetual debate, and polarisation of professional views.¹⁵⁸

Former National Railway Museum Curator of Engineering Richard Gibbon discusses principles, from a curatorial viewpoint, for managing and keeping track of the changes

¹⁵⁶ Handel Kardas, "Museums, visitors - and what they expect" in Cossons, Patmore and Shorland-Ball, 1992, p. 142-145.

¹⁵⁷ Carter. 2008. p. 123.

¹⁵⁸ Richard Gibbon. "The Curator's dilemma in operating railway artefacts" in Cossons, Patmore and Shorland-Ball, 1992. p. 121.

brought upon the components of railway artefacts in his essay “The Curator’s dilemma in operating railway artefacts” in Cossons et al. He distinguishes between changes that are reversible, like temporary additions to artefacts for the purposes of particular special events, and those that are irreversible, like worn-out parts being permanently replaced by new ones, and he claims it is the latter which carry greater implications for the future of the objects, which must be considered thoroughly before being enacted and not be taken lightly. Gibbon notes that railway artefacts normally already inevitably exist as quite different collections of parts when they enter preservation compared to when they were originally built, due to numerous minor and major repairs and overhauls done throughout their years in service. Because of this, the only thing the preservation institution can say with certainty at that moment about the acquired object is that it represents the condition in which it entered preservation, and Gibbon argues that it is from this point onwards that any further alterations or deterioration should be controlled sensitively. Gibbon claims that some alterations appear significant, as in the case of the draughting system of the locomotive *Duke of Gloucester*, a case in which faults in the original design were rectified and the full potential power output of the locomotive was finally achieved, a project which he claims adds to the artefact’s historical aspects. Other changes can be more subtle, such as adaptations to more effectively utilise modern and improved resources like lubricants.¹⁵⁹

Richard Gibbon believes that significant alterations to artefacts for the purposes of being more effective teaching aids or more visually exciting, with an example he gives being the NRM’s sectioning of the locomotive *Ellerman Lines*, can be justified when the interpretive and entertainment value is undeniable and there is at least one other identical unaltered object in existence that can convey the authentic essence of the specific type of object in question. He also believes that significant, though reversible, cosmetic changes to such aspects as names and liveries are acceptable as long as visitors are informed of the change and hence not misled and made to believe the alteration reflects the authentic historical state of the artefact. Finally, he notes that the life of particular components of locomotives and stock in operation can be extended almost indefinitely if the proper discipline and care

¹⁵⁹ Gibbon in Cossons, Patmore and Shorland-Ball. 1992. p. 120, 123-124.

is employed during preparation, running, and the disposal after running and before preparation begins anew. Gibbon states that this can mean deterioration will be minimal and perhaps in certain cases be even less rapid than if the artefact was on static display, as he claims numerous specific components last longer in intermittent use than out of use.¹⁶⁰

The very same previously mentioned newly constructed railway carriages which faced criticism from some enthusiasts for lacking historical value do in themselves represent one path to resisting the deterioration occurring to the older artefacts perceived to be the ones possessing historic and heritage value. Jonathan Brown mentions that the Ffestiniog Railway and the Talylyn Railway have both had extensive programmes for constructing new and larger carriages since the 1960s which are better able to carry “the increasing numbers of passengers in greater comfort and help preserve their original stock by using it less often.”¹⁶¹ This is one of several situations, in addition to the one discussed below, which illustrate that new constructions can be of benefit to the sympathetic conservation of older and more historic artefacts.

Although replicas of lost locomotive types and some narrow-gauge locomotives emerged sporadically through the decades since the dawn of railway preservation, no widespread and rapidly growing movement involving the construction of brand-new steam locomotives existed in Britain after the end of steam on British Railways, especially in standard-gauge circles, until a notable phenomenon was kicked off in the 21st century. This was spawned by the successful completion of an 18-year project by a group of enthusiasts to construct a new, and in various ways modernised, standard-gauge steam locomotive, named *Tornado*, belonging to the previously extinct Peppercorn A1 Class in 2008 for use on railtours on the main line railways, but the concept was subsequently adopted by new-build locomotive groups based at heritage railways with more primary considerations of operating the locomotives they construct at their local railways, with some having secondary aspirations of operating them on the main line. More specifically, new-build locomotives are, as described by author Robin Jones in *Steam's New Dawn: Britain's Third Century of Steam*

¹⁶⁰ Gibbon in Cossons, Patmore and Shorland-Ball, 1992. p. 126-127.

¹⁶¹ Brown. 2017. p. 46-47. (E-book edition)

Locomotives, “steam locomotives built for historical, educational, tourist or leisure purposes as opposed to traditional commercial uses, such as service on the national network or on industrial lines.”¹⁶²

Jones claims that the primary motivations for constructing such a locomotive are often a desire to fill a gap in current day locomotive fleets and bring back much-loved but extinct locomotive types. Factors that have to be considered for new-build projects are that the locomotive type is sufficiently appealing to sponsors and the press that the support of covenantors is assured, and that it is attractive to operators, meaning it needs to have a practical purpose like operating heritage services or railtours, and a place to run. According to Jones, although these projects may be faced with the criticism that there already exist many historic locomotives waiting for restoration or overhaul and that time and money spent on new-builds could instead be used for these, new-builds, when completed and in addition to filling gaps, require less maintenance and volunteer input than older examples.¹⁶³

One new-build project in particular stands out to Jones as especially useful and indicative of potential future roads to take for the heritage railway movement, namely the Severn Valley Railway-based project to construct a new member, no. 82045, of the previously extinct medium-sized British Railways Standard 3MT tank engine. Publicity officer of the project Chris Proudfoot discusses in an article in issue no. 471 of the magazine *Steam Railway* how the group believes the 3MT is exactly the type of simple, modern tank engine heritage railways need to ensure the continuation of the wider movement far into the future. He says that even the newest batches of historic preserved steam locomotives are now over 60 years old and cannot be expected to continue in intensive regular service indefinitely. Seeing as the 3MT is just the right type of design to operate the normally about 10-mile-long heritage railways as well as historically appropriate for operation in many parts of Britain, Proudfoot hopes that the project will be one for other groups to take inspiration

¹⁶² Robin Jones. *Steam's New Dawn: Britain's Third Century of Steam Locomotives*. Wellington, Great Britain: Halsgrove, 2011. p. 18.

¹⁶³ Jones. 2011. p. 14.

from in the endeavour of both securing the future of heritage steam and upholding the traditional engineering skills involved in constructing steam locomotives. Proudfoot notes that surviving historic steam locomotives are a cherished link to the past, and as such should not be replaced entirely by new-builds, but that new-builds can rather help prolong older locomotives' working lives by sharing the burden of regular operation and thus lessen the rate at which the historic artefacts are worn down and have components replaced.¹⁶⁴

Part 5: Sustainable heritage

In an article in *Steam Railway* no. 461, General Manager Chris Price of the North Yorkshire Moors Railway (NYMR) in Pickering in England expresses sentiments which are true for many of the railway preservation institutions in Great Britain. While the institutions were originally developed by enthusiasts, they have since then developed into destinations for tourism which to varying degrees present heritage towards the masses. Price succinctly seeks to explain and justify this development. His claim posits that in the case of the NYMR, and by extent, the majority of railway preservation undertakings, the more commercial aspects of their operations are for the support of preservation, not the other way around. The application of the concept of heritage to railway artefacts and the advertising of this, the arranging of special events and emphasising links to popular media, appealing to the general public and operating historic material are activities performed for the sake of attaining income which can directly be fed back into the upkeep and conservation of the artefacts which inspired the creation of these institutions. As Price claims, the preservation institutions operate as a tourist attractions, but this is done to invest in and facilitate the objective of also educating their visitors about the history of Britain's railways.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Chris Proudfoot. "First or Last?" *Steam Railway* no. 471, September 8, 2017. p. 82-83.

¹⁶⁵ Tom Bright. "From Famine to Feast" *Steam Railway* no. 461, December 2, 2016. p. 42.

General Manager of the grouping of the major heritage railways the Ffestiniog & Welsh Highland Railways, Paul Lewin, discussed in *Steam Railway* in 2017 what the continued survival of the railway preservation movement, according to him, needs to look like, and what role business-like operation of heritage railways has to play in the future he envisions. He says the present day marks the golden era of railway preservation, with the institutions having grown from the humbler era of the pioneers into substantial establishments which he claims contribute significantly to the nation's heritage, to local communities, and to the economy.¹⁶⁶ The Heritage Railway Association attests to this especially in the case of heritage railways, claiming that they together attract 13 million visitors per year and contribute around £400 million in economic impact, as well as contributing to social cohesion and wellbeing of both their volunteers and visitors.¹⁶⁷ Of course, they also offer the experiencing of hundreds of miles of railway and countless railway artefacts which would otherwise be lost, and their benefit to the communities in which they are located can be observed in the numerous towns prospering remarkably as 'heritage railway towns'¹⁶⁸ and, for instance, in the example of the Talylyn Railway, which is estimated to provide around £2 million annually to its local communities in addition to attracting more than 40,000 passengers a year.¹⁶⁹

Lewin claims that when these aspects are taken into consideration, it becomes all the clearer how important it is that these institutions are sustainable and are able to persist far into the future. He argues that in order to secure sustainability, the institutions need to face up to and keep track of such concerns as, for example, which components of rolling stock and sections of rail are nearing the end of their operational lives and to plan ahead of time how to deal with this. The institutions need to make sure effort can be concentrated where it is needed to ensure the premises are looked after and have strong commercial business

¹⁶⁶ Paul Lewin. "Preserving Our Future." *Steam Railway* no. 474, December 1, 2017. p. 98-99.

¹⁶⁷ Heritage Railway Association. "The HRA - Who we are and what we do." n.d. Accessed January 30, 2022. <https://www.hra.uk.com/the-hra-who-we-are-and-what-we-do>.

¹⁶⁸ Brown. 2017. p. 10. (E-book edition)

¹⁶⁹ Eryl Crump. "Look: Talylyn Railway in 1968 and the Present Day." North Wales Live, February 10, 2014. Accessed January 30, 2022. <https://www.dailypost.co.uk/news/north-wales-news/look-talylyn-railway-1968-present-6689642>.

plans that ensure solid streams of income that can serve to maintain a sound state of the infrastructure. A balance must be maintained between faithfulness to the roots and original principles of the preservation movement and a commercial drive that ensures the institutions' appeal to wider audiences. Thus, it should be considered what will entice the most visitors, and Lewin observes that out of the various events and galas held at heritage railways, those that attract the greatest number of visitors are 1940s events and beer festivals, in other words, those that have a wider appeal beyond just railway enthusiasts.¹⁷⁰

General Manager of the prominent Severn Valley Railway (SVR) Nick Ralls reports in *Steam Railway* no. 455 of 2016 that his railway and, he suspects, many others are pursuing a balance similar to what Paul Lewin envisions. Ralls claims that the SVR has its own conservation and heritage committee which is given the task of establishing the specific importance, and of increasing understanding, of the artefacts in the railway's possession, resulting in tangible conservation plans that record in detail and historical accuracy the characteristics of objects ranging from stations and other buildings to rolling stock. On the other hand, he claims that said artefacts are greatly advanced in age and it is crucial that these are maintained appropriately, and to fund such maintenance, the railway employs secondary areas of visitor spending like visitor centres, being a certified wedding venue, and family-focused events using characters from children's media, a type of event which has been previously mentioned. Nick Ralls makes sure to point out that enthusiasts are not forgotten, with enthusiast galas also being held featuring desirable rosters of locomotives.¹⁷¹

In the case of the National Railway Museum, specifically, similar considerations as those outlined by Paul Lewin should be taken into account, according to Dr Ian Harrison in *Steam Railway* no. 433 of 2014. While the museum is granted funding from the Government, this resource can be unstable and unpredictable, as was seen in the previously mentioned funding crisis of 2013. The NRM is beholden to the same need to attract visitors, and thus

¹⁷⁰ Lewin. 2017. p. 98-99.

¹⁷¹ Nick Ralls. "Keeping everyone happy in the Severn Valley House." *Steam Railway* no. 455, June 7, 2016. p. 74-76.

place significant focus on appealing to the general public, as heritage railways. This is for the reason that, according to Dr Harrison, the Government budgeting process consists of a pecking order in which ministers have to compete for their part of the budget, and in which the Department for Culture, Media and Sport which the NRM is part of is not significantly prioritised by default. That the members of the Science Museum Group compete amongst themselves for a part of the budget is an additional level of impetus for the NRM to need to demonstrate its value in terms of visitor numbers. As mentioned previously, members of the general public without a particular interest in railways outnumber enthusiasts, which is why the NRM feels this group is its most important demographic.¹⁷²

Conclusion

Although the original response to the arrival of the railways in Great Britain was apprehensive, this attitude morphed through the decades into an increasingly trusting and appreciative one. The period between the 1920s and the 1950s in particular saw enthusiasm for the railways reach unprecedented levels. Gradually declining excitement surrounding railways as a new form of technology, unenthusiastic responses to ever-increasing schemes for the modernisation of the railways, commemorations of centenaries of pioneering railways, and the massive popularisation of trainspotting caused public focus in regards to the railways to turn towards the celebration of their past and the still-existing reminders of this history, and the pleasurable characteristics of what had once been regarded as purely functional technology. Public sentiment supported the development of railway museums such as that which is now the National Railway Museum, and the strengthened railway enthusiasm manifested itself in the creation of the volunteer-run, not-for-profit heritage railways. The railway lines which became heritage railways were saved by enthusiasts not for their potential to be profitable and make fortunes, but simply to make sure they continue to exist for the benefit of future generations, to educate them about the railways of the past

¹⁷² Dr Ian Harrison. "NRM: Moan all you like, but it's a numbers game." *Steam Railway* no. 433, October 10, 2014. p. 86.

and let them experience for themselves approximations of what this would have looked like. Railway-related objects and railways in themselves were by the railway preservation movement transformed from their original function as instruments of industry into historic artefacts to be viewed or experienced by members of the public. The preservation institutions called on the concept of heritage to define their operations.

Heritage in the context of the railway preservation institutions is a formulation of the appeal of the railways as something beyond the purely functional and industrial, and a tool to convey and advertise the value upheld and offered for consumption by the institutions in their present-day form as tourist attractions. Appealing to tourists, and by extent, wider audiences to fund the maintenance of their operations has been a feature of the institutions from their early days, but also one that has faced the consternation and discussion of historical authenticity-focused railway enthusiasts. The wearing down of and modifications made to railway artefacts to keep them operational is another point of discussion without a conclusive answer, but with potential options available for further exploration. Numerous railway preservation institutions believe, and follow the principle, that to be sustainable, a balance must be maintained between conservation of the types of artefacts originally deemed to be heritage and functioning as tourist attractions that are appealing to wider audiences. Leaning too far towards the conservation side can lead to losing track of the financial needs of the institutions and alienating the general public, while leaning too far towards the commercial tourism side can lead to losing sight of the movement's original intentions and to seriously compromising both the physical condition of the artefacts in their care, compared to the state in which they entered preservation, and the way they are conveyed to visitors. That, as mentioned, numerous of the institutions have claimed to be aware of the need for such a balance and that they are taking steps to ensure it is kept is encouraging.

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