



WINTER SMOKESTACK

Dec 2021



A picture from the Steam Museum in Strasbourg PA sent to us by new member Michael Luck.

At last a late 2021 issue as we approach another year.

Welcome to another **Smokestack**. First of all my apologies for being something like 4-6 weeks late in publishing – especially as I have had quite a few contributions, for which many thanks to IFRR members.

Two reasons – one is pressure of being my own Rotary Club President this year and with a number of important losses in members I've had to take on several other responsibilities for major Club projects. The other is more important – a heart scare in September that necessitated a full set of medical tests as well as knocking me out of circulation for a while. Recovering under medication now but not in exactly top form. Let us hope the contents of this issue make up for all that. More in spring 2022.

ONE MORE THING – are you thinking of attending the RI Convention in Houston next June? If so see the note at the end of this issue! IFRR could use your help with a possible House of Friendship Booth staffing and decoration. And ideas of rail attractions and rides in the Houston area.

President's Prerogative Article

I am a registered enthusiast for the London and North Western Railway Company and its successors into British Railway days. The LNWR was the operator of the famous West Coast main line from London Euston to Manchester, Liverpool and Scotland but it also had its cross country minor byways in which I am most fascinated. The following article contributed by IFRR member Chris Behan illuminates one of these – once part of what was called the Inter-Varsity Line from Oxford to Cambridge, closed in 1970 and now, at enormous expense, being reopened. Cockley Brake will NOT be part of that.

Victorian entrepreneurs going for broke at Cockley Brake by Chris Behan (Rotary Club of Haddenham and District UK)

Every Monday evening, I travel through Farthinghoe, in Northamptonshire, England, on way to and from my Haddenham and District Rotary meeting. I turn into Cockley Road, situated between the 13th century Church of St Michael and the Village Primary School. The road leaves the village on a 158 metre high ridge, with, to the North, outstanding views of Warwickshire and the South Midlands. This notoriously twisty and bumpy road then drops down through dark and, sometimes, foreboding woods.

The woods are named Cockley Brake. "Brake"? That's an unusual word for woods. So, I sort answers to my question. The Oxford English Dictionary describes "brake" as a dense group of trees or bushes. A thicket, often of ferns. "Brake" being the plural of the Middle English word "Bracken". The search for "Cockley Brake" also highlighted "Cockley Brake Junction". That sounded like a railway connection. "Carry on reading", I said, and another story emerged.

In the woods between the Halse Road and Cockley Road is the site of a long gone railway junction. The result of Victorian Railwaymania coupled with Victorian entrepreneurial opportunism. What was the pot of gold that drove Victorian businessmen to invest and obtain Parliamentary Acts to build a railway line from Blisworth to Cockley Brake across unpopulated green and pleasant Northamptonshire farmland with no prospect of passenger traffic, just cattle, sheep and milk?

The answer lies in the soil. The ironstone discovered around Blisworth in the mid 19th century.

The promoted financial attraction for the investor was the shipment of this newly discovered ironstone from Blisworth to the blast furnaces of the South Wales steel works, via a direct rail route through the Cotswolds, by way of Banbury, Chipping Norton, Moreton in Marsh and Ross on Wye. Can you imagine the response to that kind of proposal today?

In 1847, the Northampton and Banbury Railway Act was passed authorising the building of the line, but nothing happened. It had failed to raise the capital needed.

In 1863 another act was passed, but with a name change, the Northampton and Banbury Junction Railway Act. This one definitely failed to raise enough capital. However, work had now started on the Northampton and Banbury Railway and in 1866 the line between Blisworth and Towcester was opened. It was not a success. Why? It was only four miles long and had no locomotives or rolling stock. Both had to be hired.

The Northampton and Banbury Junction Railway (NBJR), as it finally came to be known, was saved from bankruptcy in 1870 by another Act, which attracted enough funds to complete the line to Cockley Brake. Here it connected to the London and North Western Railway (LNWR) line from Bletchley, Buckingham and

Brackley to Banbury Merton Street station, which, by the way, was in Northamptonshire in those days. From Blisworth the NBJR line ran through Towcester, Wappenham and Helmdon Village to Cockley Brake. Although it passed close to Greatworth, the village never had a station.

For many reasons Cockley Brake turned out to be the end of the line for the NBJR and its investors. Its survival for over thirty years as an independent company was only made possible by hiring locomotives and rolling stock from the LNWR and negotiating running rights over the LNWR line from Cockley Brake to Banbury.

However, in 1910 the NBJR was purchased by the Stratford-upon-Avon and Midland Junction Railway (SMJR). A questionable, but nearly understandable, business decision as both companies had shared, until 1910, a mile long stretch of track from Towcester Station to Greens Norton Junction. Interestingly though, at the time of the purchase on July 1st, 1910, the track layout had been changed. The NBJR now had its own single track from Towcester Station to Greens Norton Junction, whilst the SMJR had its own single track alongside the NBJR track. Not surprisingly, Greens Norton ceased to be a junction.

The NBJR railway line, under various ownerships, somehow survived until 1951 operating three passenger trains a day, four on Thursdays, from Banbury to Blisworth and back. On at least one of these passenger trains, as well as two passenger coaches, there would have been six or seven cattle wagons. From the very beginning passenger revenues were never sufficient to justify the line but the revenues from cattle traffic to and from Banbury Cattle Market made the line viable, if only just.

A walk to the site of Cockley Brake Junction was now a must.

I studied the latest edition of the OS map for South Northamptonshire. It gives sufficient clues, old embankments and cuttings, to locate the site. However, I decided to look at earlier editions published when the railway was operating. The 1900 edition provided the most information. Details of the track layout, signal posts and the signal box. More importantly it showed a footpath, which went across the junction. Armed with my 1900 map I drove to the Halse Road, parked my car next to the left turn to "Greatworth only", as the signpost says, and crossed the road to join the footpath.

The 1900 map showed that there was a railway bridge over the Halse Road, locally known as the "Iron Bridge", and this became very apparent as the footpath climbed onto a wide greensward path. I was walking along the old trackbed of the NBJR. As I walked along the path it swung to the right in a fine geometrical curve, clearly not of Mother Nature's doing, but of a Victorian engineer with precision in mind. After 200 yards the greensward widens into a clearing with another wide and fine geometrical curved path coming in from my left. It was another railway trackbed, which, having not been used for nearly 54 years, was slowly being taken over by Mother Nature. This was the LNWR line from Bletchley to Banbury.



A photo of the junction site as it is now and with the original trackwork superimposed. Always a lonely place.

I was standing on the site of Cockley Brake Junction. It wasn't as significant as reaching the South Pole, but it was poignant. This was the spot, a clearing in a brake, nearly 100 miles from the blast furnaces of the South Wales steel works, where the local Victorian businessmen's ambitions were thwarted, where their plans were found to be wanting and where their investment was clearly not enough.

The pot of gold had turned into a pot of clay, or should I say, a pot of rusty old iron ore.

Authors note:

To my knowledge there are only two photographs of Cockley Brake Junction in existence. Are there anymore? Has anyone got a photograph of the railway bridge over Halse Road at the "Greatworth only" turn, or even the Cockley Road bridge over the railway line just before the entrance to Cockley Hill Farm travelling towards Fathinghoe?

Rail destinations - we hope this will become a regular update

We know how much the pandemic has affected many of our Rotary interests this last 18 months but as well it does so with matters of our Fellowship interests. At present activities are naturally curtailed but there is some gradual reopening of places of interest. Let us know about your trips or plans – or direct from attractions you personally know of.

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Rail User Express (UK)

To be included in the next issue

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Railway Children

David Maidment spoke to my Club on 15 November for an uninterrupted hour, with illustrations, about the plight of lone and abused children on railway stations around the world. As moving as it was informative. David prefers not to talk on Zoom but to be with you in person which restrict his appearance elsewhere

other than the UK. However, it might be worth asking him in case he is vacationing near you. My Club is donating to his Charity, as do I personally. You will love their Charity's Christmas Cards – all steam scenes. You can find them at www.railwaychildren.org.uk .

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Three spectacular steamways. A contribution from Kati Schmidt of the Marketing Department.

There is a good Rotary connection here. The managing director of the company is Roland Richter from Rotary Club Annaberg. He sends best regards from him and all Rotarians of the Club Annaberg. Roland contributes to international causes through Annaberg Rotary Club – <https://annaberg.rotary.de>.

The three lines of the Sächsische Dampfeisenbahngesellschaft (Saxon Steam Railway Company) pass through picturesque landscapes. Trains run along the Fichtelberg Railway in the Erzgebirge, the Löbnitzgrundbahn Railway and the Weißeritz Valley Railway near Dresden every day. Steam locomotives are used daily on all three narrow-gauge railways. At a maximum speed of 15 mph, your journey will be relaxed and will give you plenty of time to admire the passing scenery.

The Fichtelbergbahn runs along the base of the Fichtelberg, Saxony's highest peak at 1214 m above sea level, from Cranzahl to Oberwiesenthal, travelling through one of the largest areas of contiguous woodland in Saxony. In summer, the Erzgebirge forests offer cooling temperatures, whilst in winter, they are transformed into a winter wonderland of deep snow.

The Löbnitzgrundbahn puffs between Radebeul, Moritzburg and Radeburg, close to Dresden. The area around Radebeul is famous for its 800year wine-making history, and importantly also as the home of German classic children's author Karl May, creator of the heroes Winnetou and Old Shatterhand. Moritzburg has lots of baroque Saxon history, with its eponymous castle and Little Pheasant Castle.

The Weißeritz Valley Railway is the oldest narrow gauge railway still in public service in Germany, with the journey in open carriages through the wild and romantic Rabenauer Grund being a particular highlight. The steam locomotive sounds its whistle impressively as it enters the historic station complex. The terminus still includes original features from the 1930s, when the current station building was erected.



All three railways run daily on a set annual timetable. A variety of events and themed journeys add to the excitement and ensure that the railways continue to be attractive to visitors.

Looks as these may be on my list if ever in the area tram hunting (the most likely for your President).

The California Zephyr by Rotarian Mark Burchill

Rather lazily I put this in in full without any real editing. Why not? It tells me something about a railway I'm not familiar with and, more importantly, includes mention of IFRR and Rotary. And I enjoyed reading it – President Bob.

Ever since I received my Lionel train set from "Santa" back in the 1950's I have been fascinated by trains. My bride also enjoys trains.

Over the years, we have taken a variety of train rides: The Coast Starlight from the San Francisco Bay Area to LA, continuing on the Pacific Surfliner to San Diego. The "Reno Fun Train" multiple times, from the Bay Area over the Sierra Nevada and Donner Pass to Nevada. Throughout Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Italy in the 1980's. The Rocky Mountaineer from Vancouver to Jasper, and then continuing on by train to Toronto for the Rotary Convention. Plus many shorter scenic train rides, both in the states, and abroad.

Our "big adventure" on Amtrak was our first real long distance train ride, from the San Francisco Bay Area to Chicago, on the California Zephyr. This was Christmastime in 2015. As an overnigher, we reserved a roomette so we would not have to sleep in our seats. The first segment, from Emeryville to Reno, took the same route as the Reno Fun Train. That section is made even more enjoyable by a docent from the California State Railroad Museum who rides along from Sacramento to Reno. The docent gives passengers many scenic and historical insights on the journey up and over the mountains. The segment from Reno to Salt Lake City was overnight. As the sun arose the next day, we entered the twists and turns of the Rocky Mountains. As we rounded some of the hairpin turns the front of the train would be looking across at the back of the train. A bit past dinnertime, we arrived in Denver, where we took a weekend break before continuing our journey.

Our trip included connections with two Rotary Fellowships. The IFRR, of course, helped spur our enthusiasm for the train journey. And the Rotarian Home Exchange Fellowship helped us organize some home trades: The first home trade of our journey was a luxurious high rise apartment in downtown Denver, which we had received in exchange for our oceanfront home in California. It was just a three block walk from the train station.

After the weekend, we returned to the California Zephyr for the final segment, across the Great Plains of America. A distinct pleasure on a long train ride is getting to know other passengers. One afternoon, a passenger brought out his guitar and entertained those of us in the observation car with folk songs. Another time we talked with a passenger who was afraid of flying and used the train for all his long-distance travel. We met a number of fellow passengers, and heard many fascinating stories, at shared dinner tables.

Somewhere in Iowa, the ride took on a new dimension, as we overheard the conductor talking with another staffer. They were making such good time that they had a chance to break a record for early arrival in Chicago. They made some announcements changing the stations where passengers could get out for a short break and skipping some planned stops where no one had reservations to get on or off. We could hear them excitedly counting down, and the train definitely felt like it was going faster. The excitement built, and we had a chance to make that record, when, near Naperville, the train slowed down to almost a crawl. Apparently, the engineer had been instructed by a dispatcher to delay arrival in downtown Chicago. The staffers were disappointed when we arrived at Union Station 10 minutes later than their target.

We walked a couple of blocks to the Loop, hopped on the "El," and traveled to a lakefront apartment in Chicago's Gold Coast, for another week-long home exchange.

You don't enjoy these kinds of adventures packed into a flying sardine can!

Mark Burchill has been a Rotarian for 35 years. He is Past President of the Rotary Club of Santa Rosa. He is Founder and Chair of the Rotary Means Business Fellowship and on the Board of Directors of the Rotarian Home Exchange Fellowship. Thanks indeed to him for such a descriptive ride and encouragement to join IFRR and publicise Home Exchange at the same time.

Opportunities for railfans in Dade City

Jere Ferguson Rotary Club of Noon Club Dade City, FL lets us into a little secret most of us in the rest of the world will not have heard of. Many thanks!

I figured I would share info ref our little town in Dade City that has a great opportunity for Railfans in that we are one of very few CSX lines that has "lighted tracks" for railfans to observe and photo trains. Our historic Dade City train depot (Atlantic coastline railroad/Seaboard) is a local community supported museum restored to its glory and has maintained its covered observation and passenger terminals.
<http://dadecityheritagemuseum.org/index.html>

In addition to 4 layouts of different scales, it has installed lighting along the length of the depot for photography and night viewing of the regular traffic along its still active lines. It was also an AMTRAK stop but was diverted to AMTRAK bus line regional stops a few years ago. The museum hosts regular "Train days" with 300+ railfans attending from all over the east coast. They are working to recruit volunteers to install a garden railroad around the exterior of the facility as well. Just down the road (still in Dade City) is also our Florida Pioneer Museum and Village which also has a Trilby train depot and static displays of the Lacoochee lumber engine.



An aside into modelling

One from Rotarian David Highfield Rotary Club of Bonds Meadow Westminster, Maryland USA

My model train layout is S gauge, American Flyer. Some trains date back to the 1950s, purchased by my father when I was a kid. Others have been produced more recently. Part of the layout is a winter scene and part is summer.



Always fascinating to us in Britain. S gauge is known of course but very much a minority interest and nearly all has to be scratchbuilt. Sometimes known as Half 1 in my past. Interesting to see the scale available in the USA in the 50s – President Bob.

Another offer we would surely like to take up

from Wade R. George, Rotary Club of Emmaus

On September 10th 2020, I did a presentation for our Emmaus Rotary about the history of railroading in our town. Our meeting was a hybrid of both virtual and also in person. Here is the link to the virtual broadcast

<https://conf.voxtandem.com/playback/presentation/2.0/playback.html?meetingId=71aa177dff08a2d10ffaab185c74d30fe4fbc6de-1599736358367>.

My presentation starts at the 19:50 mark. Let me know what supporting materials you would like for me to send that you could include with the link for the Smokestack. You are welcome to any of the photos I used in my slideshow. I hope that is helpful to you. I would be happy to do an article about some of the steam action that is currently going down near me. Recently, I rode behind the CNJ 113 and also the R&N 425. Upcoming adventures for me include the N&W 611 and (if everything works out as I hope) the Nickel Plate 765.

Wade – I'd like to hold that for the next issue of Smokestack. In the meantime I hope members will avail themselves of the contact above - President Bob.

Trains big and small in the USA

From Penny Hansen Rotary Club of Novato, California USA District 5150

As a new member of the Rotary International Fellowship of Railroads I would like to give a summary of my train fascination that dates to before television in our home in Omaha Nebraska USA. As a family we took the local bus to downtown to see the store window Christmas displays. There "it" was in full steaming, whistling chugging around the tracks. That led to a Lionel model my husband and I assembled under our family Christmas tree every year for our daughters and eventually our 4 grandchildren.

We rode the infamous California "Skunk" steam engine train in the Redwoods with grandchildren in hand. Followed by light rail for children and adults could fit. The train around the San Francisco Zoo, a short but fun trip for youngsters rivaling the Merry-Go-Round. A train in the foothills from the forest to the ocean beach of Santa Cruz, California. The train in Tilden Park in the San Francisco East Bay above the University of California, Berkeley. The train at Sleepy Hollow Zoo in San Jose, CA. The train in the City of Sonoma now referred to as Wine Country.

Later, a day trip, San Francisco East Bay to Reno Nevada on Amtrak. Busy streets closed for the passing of the train with pedestrians waving! The extraordinary all-day trip from Williams, Arizona to the South Rim of the Grand Canyon on a full-size restoration steam engine and the original passenger clanky cars-that included a mock train robbery by fast horseback riding masked bandits that boarded the train asking for our cash. Made that journey twice for the grandchildren. They are college graduated and remember that ride as children with my husband and me.

My last train ride was Vancouver to Banff National Park in Alberta, Canada. Rocky Mountains all day - breathtaking.

My neighbor up the street brought home a trailered authentic caboos. There is a story to be written.

Penny – yes please. Sort of running out of space here at the moment as I want to get this out before Christmas but next issue in the spring? - President Bob.

You Write! A note from a reader.

Many thanks to you who continue to keep those of us more silent ones posted on IFRR activities over the years. I thought it well past time to make some type of written contribution, since I like everyone else who currently cannot walk past the Convention Fellowship Booth and chat. So here is an idea which my wife and I have been doing for years with our grandchildren:

We take our grandkids two-by-two (cousins, not siblings) on Amtrak overnight train trips. We travel out of Chicago, spending one night on board a sleeper in two roomettes, staying three days in and/or around our destination. When appropriate we rent (you Brits would say hire) a car. Then back aboard an Amtrak overnight sleeper in two roomettes. It gives "today's youth" a travel experience that most don't have, and of course it gives Grandma and Grandpa time with the Grandkids.

Dick Galitz
Rotary Club of
Naperville
2005 RI Convention HOC Chair
Past District 6450 Governor
Past President Rotary/One

Dick – do tell us more for another issue. Should interest members. And other IFRR members – I am always willing to accept very short notes and pieces, especially if they have a Rotary connection and this includes short letters – President Bob

A quick update from our regular contributor in the past.

The Toronto Railroad Museum. Lots more from them in the next issue I guess.

Planning a visit? Please note our [holiday hours](#): **December 24:** Open, 12:00-5:00 PM **December 25-28:** Closed **December 29-31:** Open, 12:00-5:00 PM **January 1:** Closed

Convention News

Many people were very complimentary about our virtual booth at the virtual Taiwan Convention. We had lots of passing visitors and resulting enquiries. It was worth all the hard work getting it together.

The Convention in Houston looks as though it will go ahead. We have been asked by RI to indicate our participation and we will hope to have a real booth in the HoF. We will need someone to staff it and stock it with some attractive pictures. I fear it seems very unlikely that I will be well enough to come myself. Long distance travel is not as appealing as it was before my illness. My colleague Director Bruce has already booked to go but he will need some help. We will also need to consider our Annual Meeting to reappoint Officers and do other necessary business.

Part of the note from RI is below:

"Rotary International is now accepting booth applications for the International Convention in Houston, Texas, 4-8 June 2022. If you wish to exhibit in the House of Friendship, we encourage you to coordinate with fellow officers to submit a single booth application for your Fellowship; this person will be RI's contact for exhibitor communications.

Please review the instructions below before beginning the application process.

The deadline to apply for a booth is **Friday, 4 February 2022**. RI staff will review all submissions after the deadline and make booth assignments. Notification emails will be sent by early March".

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That's enough for now though I already have more articles and comments from some new members - but we always need more – the more I have in the bag the more often I can produce issues of our newsletter and keep us all together in Fellowship. And, I hope, helping Rotary projects at the same time – which is what we are really here for. I will always give priority to items that emphasise Rotary relevance!

Once again - let us know your interests and how you might want the IFRR to continue. We would all love to hear from you. In the meantime – a Peaceful Christmas and a safe New Year and Happy Holidays to all. Stay well.

Thanks to fellow Board members for their advice and contribution to the layout of this issue but most of all to all those members who have or are now contributing ideas and articles to **Smokestack**. However, all errors and omissions are entirely down to me!

Yours in Rotary Service,

Bob

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