



M&GN Joint Railway Society

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R.H.N. Hardy 1923 – 2018 : passing of a giant

It is with much sadness that we learnt of the passing of M&GN Society president and well known railwayman, writer and preservationist, “Dick” Hardy earlier this week.

I am sure that many obituaries will appear over the next few days, as is fitting for someone of such stature in the railway world. This one attempts to consider Dick through an M&GN Society perspective, recording our gratitude for what he gave us.

R.H.N. (“Dick”) Hardy 1923 - 2018

A tribute by Phil Starks, Tony Dewey and Peter Mayne

It felt like the end of an era when we learned the sad news that our Society President Richard (‘Dick’) Hardy had passed away on February 18 at the age of 94.

Few people with an interest in railway history or involvement in the world of heritage rail will not know the name R.H.N. Hardy as a highly experienced professional railwayman, author and major player in railway preservation. Those privileged enough to have met him speak of him universally with the greatest respect and affection, as this story from Society Vice President, Phil Starks, illustrates.

“When we commissioned the J15 (the first time!), I had been driving for Bill Harvey on some of his test runs. Dick Hardy was invited to come and drive the first "official" public train and I was to act as his pilotman. He came up to the engine early, introduced himself, although I

already knew who he was, and asked permission to come on the footplate to "have a look round" before he drove the train later in the day. When I offered him the regulator he was very reluctant to take my turn, as he put it. This was a lifelong professional railwayman talking to an amateur driver! Then he offered me one of his Gauloises and was amazed when he found out I had read "Steam in the Blood". We got on like a house on fire after that and that's the kind of man he was - a true gentleman with an astronomical memory who treated everyone with utmost courtesy. He was a wonderful man. "

This story dates from 1977 and was Dick's first 'official visit' to the NNR. He had probably been invited at Bill Harvey's instigation. Phil continues "Dick was a very busy man, getting involved in all sorts of activities in the railway preservation world - he joined the board of the Ffestiniog for example that same year - so after that we did not see him very often until the Steam Dream event in August 2002 where he performed the inaugural trip by dashing a bottle of appropriately named beer over the J15's front buffer beam, cutting his hand in the process!

It was not long after that when we invited, or should I say persuaded, him to become our President and from then onwards he was a regular visitor who made a big contribution to the Society in many ways." This is demonstrated not least by his significant contributions in the Society publications "B12s Remembered" and "J15s Remembered", two classes of locos he was very familiar with in his railway career.

He was a guest at Members' Day in October 2003 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the "Wandering 1500 Rail Tour", accompanied by former colleague David Butcher, fireman and minder of the B12 on that memorable tour.

The next official visit was in February 2009 for the Railway's "That's Yer Lot" gala, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the M&GN's closure which reunited him with former colleagues at South Lynn and members of the M&GN Circle. The ex-South Lynn men joined him again when he came to the NNR gala weekend in September 2011 to be reunited with Ivatt Class 4 43106, a South Lynn loco, which was a visiting locomotive.

After those two momentous occasions, Dick would make weekend visits to Norfolk, staying with a friend from his Doncaster apprentice days, so as to attend galas in an informal capacity but always welcomed by the many on the railway who knew him.

Visitors to the railway would go up to him for a chat and he would always engage with them, even if he didn't know them, such was his popularity in the railway fraternity. To quote Phil Starks again, "He treated everyone he met with the same degree of courtesy and remembered every detail of the people and locomotives he had dealt with at all levels throughout his life". He made what was to be his final visit to the railway in 2015.

The Society is indeed privileged to have had Richard Hardy as its president: the most notable of railwaymen, respected by all who worked with him throughout a long career that stretched from 1941 to 1982 followed by a spell on the British Railways Board, and someone who brought his unrivalled experience of "the Big Railway" to the world of heritage and preserved railways.

Born in 1923, he went to school at Marlborough College and in 1941 gained a Premium Apprenticeship at Doncaster Works. Although he had shown a passionate interest in railways from a very early age, this was a great opportunity to learn about the engineering of steam locomotives and the running of them, with stints at the nearby Doncaster motive power depot.

In 1945 he moved further south to take up a post at Stratford in the Liverpool Street District where he met his mentor Mr L P Parker. It was not long before he was assigned to King's Lynn in 1946 as Foreman for a short spell, then moving to South Lynn (ex M&GN) for fourteen months as Acting Shedmaster until 1948.

He moved back to Liverpool Street Motive Power HQ, followed by spells as Shedmaster at Woodford Halse and Ipswich and then at Stewart's Lane, in 1952. In 1955 he became Assistant District Motive Power Superintendent at Liverpool Street, subsequently to become the 'DMPS'. On the move again in 1968 he was appointed Divisional Manager, Liverpool where he stayed until 'retirement' in 1973. But even then he was appointed Executive Member, Central Engineering Training Group of BR and took up a place on the British Railways Board at Marylebone.

Emboldened by knowledge of steam engines gained during his apprenticeship and encouraged by his mentor Mr Parker, he rode out on the main line with his footplate crews to gain experience of what it was like at the 'sharp end'. He would never ask but would always be invited to take the regulator ('take hold') or the shovel and he was respected as a manager by his men because they knew he knew their jobs. He retired with more than 60,000 miles of footplate experience on all classes of LNER, GC and GN engines. Likewise,

on the depots he would know every man by name and he had such a remarkable memory that he could recall them and stories about them well into his retirement.

He was well known during his working career for his 'exchange visits' with French SNCF footplate crews and colleagues between 1958 and 1971.

Dick was Chairman of Steam Locomotive Operators' Association (SLOA) for many years giving that organisation a knowledgeable, well-connected and steady hand at the helm on main line running. He also played a big part in the operation of 'Steam on The Met' and was there when the M&GN Society's B12 was a participant.

He was the author of a number of books and numerous articles: the autobiographical "Steam in the Blood" (1971) and "Railways in the Blood" (1985) as well as "Beeching: Champion of the Railway?" (1989), "The Flying Scotsman Pocket-Book" and "The Railwayman's Pocketbook" in addition to his Society publications on the J15s and B12s. He continued writing well into retirement with his final publication appearing in 2012.

Well-known as a speaker, he travelled to many parts of the country to give talks to clubs and societies until just a few years ago. His photographs - many taken with his Brownie 620 box camera - are a valuable resource for the study of railways in the war years and after. The negatives are now part of the Transport Treasury collection.

As M&GN Society Chairman Neil Sharpe says "The Society owes an inordinate debt to Dick Hardy and we are hugely proud to have had such a giant of the railway world as our president. This was a man who will be missed by so many."

God bless you, Richard, may you rest in peace.