

## IN MEMORY OF IAN MATTHEWS

On 28 December 1999 the Wychwood area lost one of its most admired residents. Ian Matthews was born in Shipton in 1930 and lived all his life in the same house in which he died. He was a strong supporter of many local activities including cricket and tennis. He contributed to church activities and the building of The New Beaconsfield Hall. He was a trustee for the Friends of MacIntyre Tall Trees. He played golf at Burford and was interested in his family genealogy in Fifield. He was a highly respected businessman and the Director of F.W.P. Matthews flour mill. His passion for coal fired trains took him all over the world in pursuit of them. He was a devoted family man, and his wife Anne joined him on his world travels.

We in the Wychwoods will all miss Ian Matthews, and especially his invaluable contribution to our community. We thought our readers would enjoy the talk he gave to the Evergreens a little while ago, included below.



### SHIPTON STATION AND OTHER RAILWAYS

From a talk given by Ian Matthews to the Evergreens.

**G**OOD AFTERNOON, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN. I thought that I would talk to you about memories of happy times in the past, and immediately one thinks of holidays, and why certain events stand out in one's mind.

Let's go back to the summer of 1940. May. France had just fallen to the Germans. There was grave danger of invasion. Dunkirk was now taking place, and the Battle of Britain was to follow over the next four months.

I was just over 10 years old, and at a boarding school in Swanage (Dorset). I had been there for two years, and at the start and end of term I travelled by train. My father would take me to Basingstoke or Oxford to catch a through train to Bournemouth, where I would be met by a school master and other boys to be taken on to Swanage (via Wareham). I was considered too young to travel on my own, so had a label tied round my neck, and was placed in the custody of the guard, and travelled with him in his Guard's Compartment! I enjoyed this, as I could get out when he did at each station platform, and would help him with his parcels! When we pulled out of Southampton, I would look out on the Port Dock side, and was often immensely impressed to see the vast hulk of the "Queen Mary", though sad when she was not in dock!

Anyway back to late May, early June 1940. I was having breakfast at school when Mrs Lloyd (the Headmaster's wife) asked me to stay behind. More trouble!? She gave me a big surprise by saying "Pack your trunk immediately, your father will be here in two hours time".

So that was the sudden end to my school days at Swanage and bliss to look forward to three and a half months of holiday! My father quite rightly thought there was grave danger that the South Coast would be invaded.

So I unexpectedly had free time at home. My brother (Gordon) had volunteered for the R.A.F. (a little under age), so I was like an only child. Fortunately my mother was very understanding, and allowed her small son to wander down to Shipton station, where I was soon enthralled by the comings and goings of the Down Pick Up Goods train, that would shunt for 1½ – 2 hours every day. Shipton was a busy station for freight. It had room for 58 trucks, it was often full and was sometimes over full, when the excess would have to be dropped off at Ascott or Kingham!

I gradually began to know all the staff, and was welcomed by Harry Newman, the Station Foreman. He would allow me to go into the Porter's Room to his desk, where he would book in and out all the trucks each day, organise the deliveries for the lorries, and write the labels for the trucks being dispatched.

On red-letter days, I was invited up on to the footplate of the shunting engine – either a brisk Pannier Tank or a plodding G.W.R. Dean Tender Engine.

One day the driver got down to read his newspaper on the Up Platform seat and I was allowed to operate the regulator, brake and the large reverser lever, so carried on doing the shunting. The friendly fireman kept his eye on me and ensured the steam pressure was

maintained, coal put on the fire and water supplied to the boiler! Happy carefree days except for the world situation! We had wonderful sunny weather that summer.

Harry Newman (the foreman) was very friendly to a small boy visiting his station. I think I was very lucky. He allowed me to run around with sack carts, when feeding stuffs were unloaded into Silcocks shed (an extension beyond the Black Goods shed) and if lorries were in for loading. He would tell me what trains to expect, and advised me to record their names "Pershore Plum, Red Gauntlett" etc. He called me "Bim" for some strange reason. I have never been called that before or since!

Harry had under his control two porters and three lorry drivers. The porters were Bill Hedges and Len Shepherd. They collected passengers' tickets, saw to the luggage, booked in and out parcels, sheeted and roped wagons, helped load and unload trucks, and operated the small Pooley weigh-bridge. Carts and coal lorries were always blowing their horns waiting to be weighed. How a horse and cart blew a horn I am not sure!

The three drivers operated three lorries that were stationed at Shipton. They were :-

1) Ernie Clemson from Milton. He drove the large lorry of about seven tons carrying capacity, and was

chiefly employed carting grain (wheat, oats and barley), fertilisers and timber for Groves. Groves sent away many trucks of pit-props and trays upon trays of boxes probably for the fish trade? I remember watching Sonny Baldwin's father (Jack Baldwin) making them at Groves - he banged in nails so quick, the handle of his hammer would wear out from the imprint of his thumb. Never had I seen a hammer shaft like it!

2) Dai Lewis. He drove an open lorry with about four ton carrying capacity. He mainly delivered feeding stuffs to local farms, (Silcocks, Bibby's and Sharps) and Bran from F.W.P.M. Ltd. Sometimes if he was only going out for an hour or two, he would invite me to go with him, so I began to learn many of the local roads and farms. I particularly enjoyed a wheat to mill job, as I then had a chance to see a threshing drum hard at work driven by a tractor or one of Joe Griffin's steam engines.

3) Harry Samson from Ascott. He drove a small covered lorry and went out every day on "Roadside Goods". These were provisions and parcels for the local shops - typically Hambidges, then to the hotels and pubs delivering spirits, cigarettes and barrels of beer!

The signalman was George Stayt. He opened the signal box "as required". For example whenever traffic was particularly busy, or when the Down or Up "pick-up"

(goods train) was due. The "Down" would arrive about 11 a.m. and the "Up" at about 3 to 4 p.m. He would allow me into his box – it was always in immaculate condition – most impressive – so I had to take my shoes off and borrow his towel when he let me pull off a signal!

If hospital trains were about, it was the place to be, as they had absolute priority whether loaded or empty. All trains had to get out of their way – even passenger trains. I watched the 12.22 Up passenger shunted across to the Down line, and in no time we had standing trains at Ascott, Charlbury, Handborough and Yarnton – in other words all the way back to Oxford.

Most days he had to visit his nine signals, trim their wicks and refill the lamps with methylated spirit, sounds easy, but a lot of ladder work and a long trudge in poor weather, as his Down Distant was at Beck's Crossing – half way to Ascott and his Up Distant by the bathing spot in the river Evenlode, best part of the way to Bruern!

The Station Master was Mr Law – rather a quiet austere man. I would make every effort to keep out of his way, as I am sure that he did not approve of me trespassing on his patch of railway. One or sometimes two girls worked in the office with him, issuing tickets, doing returns and answering the telephone. Miss Shepherd, daughter of Len Shepherd

(porter) worked at the station for several years. In later years Mr. Rose was Station Master – a friendly man who played bowls for Shipton.

Obviously this early experience of trains gave me an interest, that I still have. I always got a thrill from listening to the bark of a G.W. Castle leaving Shipton on the Up Line. The 7.50 a.m. Up would wake me and I would always hare down to the bottom of the garden to see the 1.27 p.m. depart with its nine coaches and restaurant car. The smartest and largest train of the day stopping at Shipton.

At that time I so enjoyed trains that I cajoled Phyllis Baldwin (you will know her as Mrs. Smith – one of Sonny Baldwin's sisters) to take me one day to Chipping Norton just for fun. We Caught the 2.10 p.m. diesel car that ran direct to Chipping Norton via Kingham. We had a short stay at Chipping Norton and were back in Shipton by 4p.m.

On another occasion we were at Kingham and I was invited onto the footplate of "Princess Margaret". I should have cadged a lift to Shipton.

From 1940-43, I was at Prep. School in Oxford, again boarding. At the end of term, I had to stay behind as I was not allowed to catch the 7.42 a.m. ex Oxford, so would catch the 11.28 fast to Kingham, and return to Shipton on an Up stopper at 12.22. Once I decided to travel via Banbury,

then to Kingham and Shipton. It was the one and only time I saw the full Banbury/Kingham line and I remember I was impressed by the height of the two viaducts at Hook Norton and Chipping Norton tunnel.

Through the late 40s and 50s, I lost interest in trains, however when Dr. Beeching came on the scene (1962/1963/1964) to modernise British Rail, I began to take an interest again, realising many rail routes might disappear, though the purge wasn't as bad as I feared.

On holidays in the early 1970s, whether in Scotland, Cornwall, Wales or the Eastern Counties, I would buy tourist rover tickets, and so covered a lot of B.R. accompanied by my wife or son (Graham).

We had some happy experiences. One day at Ely, on the last leg of a Circular Tour of East Anglia, (starting at Kings Lynn, then Ely, Thetford, Norwich, Yarmouth, Ipswich, Felixstowe, Newmarket, Ely, Kings Lynn) – cost £5. Graham and I were waiting on Ely platform for the evening 'Fenman'.

The signalman invited us up into his box, and we spent a pleasant twenty minutes studying the complicated rail lay-out there. He told us when the 'Fenman' came in to step out of his box and down the steps as if we owned the place, and to ask the driver for a cab ride and so we both had a cab ride back to Kings Lynn!

Some of you may know Johnny Langham – a retired B.R. driver living at Churchill. I used to regularly travel to London, Mark Lane for the Grain Market on a Monday and he kindly used to let me ride home in his cab, usually a Hymek or a Class 31, though I had to be out of sight when the train stood at Oxford as that was his home base!

He told me that one day he was bringing a long goods train out of Acton Yard (not far from Paddington) and when going over the points ladder to reach the Down main line, a truck containing Australian malting barley consigned to A.B.M. at Wallingford derailed and tipped over, spilling the grain. In due course the grain germinated, and so the patch of green was known as 'Langhams Lawn'!

One of our amusing incidents, was when my wife and I planned to catch a mixed freight train running from Breyton to Lothair in S. Africa. On attempting to buy tickets (they were very cheap) we were told we could not travel because two trucks of gunpowder were in the consist! "Please come back tomorrow"! We had to tell them, that the train was in the time-table and no way would we be at Breyton tomorrow. In the end the station master relented, and sent a porter off with a bucket and mop to clean and wash down the 'Whites compartment' that was part of the guards van.



He thoroughly washed the seats, so we were unable to sit down for twenty minutes until the seats had dried! We trundled off behind steam, loitering at each station to do the shunting. It took four hours to cover 60 kms (say 38 miles) – not even averaging 10 m.p.h., but I loved the experience.

I expected her to follow the train, unaware that I had the car keys in my pocket! It was about 4 hours before I got back to the car and Anne had spent all that time waiting with only a guide book to South Africa to read! She had been warned by the tour leader not to leave the car!

On another occasion in South Africa, I was given the opportunity to travel on a footplate behind a steam engine. My wife Anne was sitting in our hired car when I waved “good bye” to her.

On that trip Anne went with 13 male train enthusiasts as the only lady! She always tells me that she saw more of South Africa chasing and riding on trains than on the normal tourist routes!

\*\*\*\*\*

## WYCHWOOD BOWLS CLUB

The Wychwood Bowls Club starts the new season with an opening evening on Wednesday 19th April at 7-00 p.m. – a time for members to pay subscriptions and enter the club competitions. Anyone interested in joining our club will be more than welcome to come along on the same night to meet the members. We do need new people to join as the club is now down to 26 members and to keep it in operation we need some young blood. There will be an open day for all to try their hand at bowling on Sunday 14th May, so put that date in your diary. For all those who are new to the villages, the green is situated behind the Shaven Crown.

Although the club is in Shipton it is called the “Wychwood” club and open to all of the villages including Ascot, Milton and the surrounding areas as far as Kingham, from where we have a member. So with all the new housing in and around Shipton and especially Milton, we should be able to get some interest. If not, the old village activities will disappear and we will then have to travel to other clubs on already busy roads. So if you are interested young or old, male or female, join us on nice summer days for a few hours of fun. We are not the fuddy duddies that bowls perhaps used to portray, and we have a lot of laughs on the green and at the end of the match at the bar when all members have a good chat with the opponents. And for those who like competitive play we always go out to win the match.

There are also club and county competitions to enter, so if you are interested please ring me, Sheila Cambray on S-U-W 830174 or our captain Colin Pearce on S-U-W 830405

S.Cambray (sec.)