

The Great Railway Conspiracy

One of Britain's greatest-ever achievements — the creation of a national rail network — has been systematically undermined over the last 40 years.

The railways can no longer offer the comprehensive, efficient service for either passengers or freight that they once did.

How has this great national asset been squandered? Is it simply stupidity and ignorance on the part of politicians and bureaucrats. There has certainly been plenty of that — and there still is.

Or is there something more sinister at work? Has the "death by a thousand cuts" been orchestrated?

The closure of the Waverley main line from Carlisle to Edinburgh is just one of the many dubious decisions which have aroused suspicion.

Painstaking research by RDS member David Henshaw reveals that yes, the railways were "stitched up" by powerful political interests and the road lobby.

The web of intrigue and deception is revealed in his book *The Great Railway Conspiracy*. He has also discovered that some of the relevant documents which should have been preserved in Britain's national archives have mysteriously disappeared.

According to publishers Leading Edge, this new book — published last month — will be a must for railway enthusiasts and those interested in the politics of transport. The conspiracy was remarkably successful. Even honest experts seemed to accept the argument that roads were self-financing. It is only now that Britain is waking up to the



The author: RDS man David Henshaw

enormous cost of road building in cash, human and social terms.

Now we are beginning to quantify the real cost of pollution, accident damage, policing, injuries and congestion. The Government, isolated from reality in ivory towers and limousines, is still slow to catch up with the national mood. Even in the 1960s, the railways were popular. The then government used the Beeching "evidence" as a smoke screen to justify taking away vital local and

national links that should have been carefully nurtured. It had decided that money had to be saved. What a familiar refrain.

A committee to investigate the railways was set up by motorway builder — and Transport Minister — Ernest Marples. It contained no-one with railway experience and had "no time" to talk to the unions or the rail lobby but it did make sure it met the Road Haulage Association.

In typical British government fashion, the "awkward" people who talked sense were silenced or ousted and Beeching allowed to do his dirty work.

Our secondary and branch lines did not fall victim under the onslaught of road competition. They were pushed. The book has many photographs of the locomotives and trains which disappeared in and after the Beeching years. But the cuts Beeching started are still continuing today.

The book's message is even more relevant now when railways are being seen as a way of relieving traffic congestion. Railways are also essential for our national economic wellbeing and our individual enjoyment. And that's why our work in the Railway Development Society is so important.

The publishers have agreed to donate 50p to the RDS for every hard-back copy sold. David Henshaw has been a member of RDS for 10 years and lives at Castle Cary, Somerset.

The book is available for £7.95 (paperback) or £14.95 (hardback) post free from Sales Officer, 139 Harrowdene Gardens, Teddington, Middx TW11 0DN

What Wight might have been

By STEPHEN BACKWELL and BRIAN DRUCE

Hopes of bringing trains back to Newport, the county town of the Isle of Wight, were dashed in October when planners agreed to allow flats to be built on what would have become the town station.

The beauty of the Fairlee/Victoria Road site which was ironically former railway land, was that it was within easy walking distance of the town centre.

A major opportunity to bring back the trains has thus been lost — and all for the sake of just 10 flats which could surely have been built elsewhere.

All is by no means lost, however. The railway is now considering a terminus further along Fairlee Road — and further away from the town centre.

Councillors have also expressed their support in principle for a Newport extension.

This will be of particular interest to RDS vice president Lord Ross of Newport who campaigned fiercely to save the Cowes and Ventnor lines until unfortunately the track was torn up in 1971.

Interest in railways as leisure aids has been stimulated on the island since the opening in July of the steam railway extension which now links with the "main line" from Ryde to Shanklin at Smallbrook Junction.

Network SouthEast director Chris Green opened the junction station which was completed by volunteers but with grant aid from NSE as well as the English Tourist Board and the Rural Development Commission.

NSE uses ex-London Transport Tube trains dating from 1938 on its line but they are inadequate to carry the holiday crowds. On occasions there are so many people crammed into the two-car trains that the guard cannot check tickets.

The stock could be supplemented. There is still a two-car set at London's Strawberry Hill depot and

the Alderney Railway Society were recently offering a similar two-car set for sale. Maybe even the Waterloo and City stock could be cascaded to the island when it is modernised soon. And London Transport is set to offer 1956 stock for sale soon.

Help RDS to stay in focus

Many RDS members are interested in photography and some, such as myself, combine the hobby with an appreciation of railways, writes Nick Lewis.

As RDS photographic co-ordinator, I have the names and addresses of around 30 members who are willing to supply photographs for use in books, leaflets and exhibitions. Some of these people have been very helpful and I am very grateful.

However, I am sure that there must be many other members who could assist RDS in this way. I would particularly like to hear from more Scottish and Welsh members and from members living in areas where developments are either taking place or are in the pipeline.

But no matter where you live, and whether you are a beginner or a professional photographer, if you are willing to supply photographs for RDS publications, then I want to hear from you.

While RDS normally uses black and white prints for publicity material, colour slides are sometimes needed, for example, to illustrate the covers of railguides. Colour prints are also useful for exhibitions.

As for subject matter, this need not depict trains and there is plenty of scope for imaginative and original work. Anything relating to railway development, current RDS campaigns or to general transport and environmental issues can be useful.

If you are interested in assisting RDS in this way, write to me at 36 Common Road, Stotfold, Hitchin, Herts SG5 4DB. Give me details of the type of photographs in your collection, for example, black and white, colour slides or colour prints, the

subject matter and locations covered by your work.

You could also mention any special skills you have, such as night photography, darkroom experience or action photography.

Reopenings conference

RDS is to hold a one-day conference on Rail Reopenings on Saturday 21 March 1992 in Nottingham. It is planned to have speakers and workshops on reopening freight lines to passengers and line rebuilding or new railways. More information will appear in the next *Railwatch* - but if you would like full details as soon as available, please send SAE to Colin Franklin, 109 Curlew Crescent, Brickhill, Bedford, MK41 7HY

Christmas offers

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This offer closes on 31 January. Send orders for books or an sae for a sales list to RDS sales officer, 139 Harrowdene Gardens, Teddington, Middx TW11 0DN