

Railways with lots of puff

Railfuture has been concerned not to be seen as "puffer train enthusiasts". We believe rail should be at the centre of Britain's modern national public transport system. But now John Ginns, Railfuture's liaison officer for heritage railways, is confident we can gain by involvement with the preservation movement.

The heritage rail movement has been seen by some in Railfuture as steam nostalgia merchants playing at trains in the middle of nowhere – and depending on the tourist industry to make financial ends meet.

In the railway preservation movement, the outside world of modern railways is seen as something to get away from, apart from using it as a means of travel if you can't get there by car.

Even if there was no steam on heritage railways, there would still be large numbers of volunteers who want to get involved in running a railway.

And if you look, ask and listen you will find Railfuture members not only visiting heritage railways, but some actually working on them.

Railfuture, even with its many years of lobbying experience, its many real achievements and its enviable portfolio of rail-industry contacts at all political levels, didn't win all its battles in the past.

Some of the routes for which the predecessors of Railfuture fought and lost are now preserved lines, operated by some of the same people who stood side-by-side with the Society for the Reinvigoration of Unremunerative Branch Lines, the Railway Invigoration Society, the Railway Development Association and Railway Development Society.

We had something in common then. What's happened in the meantime?

The heritage rail movement has been accused of generating car traffic, just for the fun of playing trains. But so too does the everyday railway. You only have to look at Britain's commuter station car parks, packed to overflowing through the day-time hours. They contribute to traffic congestion in the morning and evening.

And don't forget the heritage railway movement is not an economic midget.

There are over 100 operating railways with well over 400 route miles of track and 570 stations. Last year 7,800,000 visi-



TWO WORLDS MEET: Appleby station on the Settle-Carlisle line has a down-to-earth role as a public transport gateway, but also sees thousands of tourists who want to enjoy the glories of the former Midland Railway line. Appleby also plays host to steam and diesel trains on enthusiast specials. The fight to save the line in the 1980s united preservationists and public transport campaigners. This year the station won the Small Station of the Year award and saw the reintroduction of loco-hauled trains.

Picture: Arriva Trains Northern

tors contributed to a turnover of £42,960,000.

The movement employs more than 1,000 people and uses 23,000 volunteers, some of them of course acting or retired network railway people working voluntarily in their spare time.

I suggest that Railfuture and the heritage rail movement have significant things in common. The first is recognition of the sanity of rail travel and it is this that draws many visitors, including whole families, to heritage rail lines, regardless of what type of locomotive is pulling the trains.

Like Railfuture, the heritage rail movement is largely voluntary. The two areas of involvement may seem poles apart – but are they?

Railfuture and its predecessors have long grappled, successfully, with the "political" end of the spectrum, while from that day over 50 years ago, when the Talylyn Railway was launched, railway preservationists have successfully tackled the seemingly impossible practicalities of running a railway.

The essential feature in both cases is real people voluntarily undertaking what they see as a "good and proper" thing.

This is a commodity in short supply in the modern world.

Some heritage lines already carry "real" passengers, those going to work or to school on a regular basis.

Through train working on an ad hoc basis from the national rail network on to a number of preserved lines has long been

established, for instance on the Nene Valley and the Severn Valley lines. Attempts at through running are often blighted by challenging requirements from health and safety and Railway Inspectorate officials.

"But we can cope. We take it in our stride," said one heritage stalwart.

We read of substantial progress towards establishing permanent working rail connections between a number of other preserved lines and the national network – the Swanage Railway for example – and that ambitious scheme to link up the diesel-only Mid-Norfolk and the North Norfolk lines.

The Norfolk Orbital Line could link Wymondham (served by Central Trains) via Dereham, Fakenham, to Sheringham (Anglia Railways).

The Keighley and Worth Valley line is looking seriously into providing daily services for commuters to the Leeds and Bradford areas.

And the hazy demarcation line is being breached on the Wensleydale Line ("not a heritage railway") and the Cast-Iron group's scheme to reopen the Cambridge-St Ives line.

There is talk of mini-franchises within the national network, and Arriva Trains North has an "adopt a station scheme" with registered volunteers monitoring stations and rail services.

For years Railfuture members have been effectively marketing their local lines in many different ways. The power of volunteers is so often underesti-

mated; 32 million unpaid volunteers (including many Railfuture members) daily operate the national private car-driving industry. No one questions that.

Only long-standing custom and practice decrees that volunteers should not play a more active role in running the nation's railways. Once that legacy of the past is set aside, the status of the "up front" heritage lines is changed significantly.

Some heritage railways, running from "A Place to Park Your Car" to "Nowhere in Particular" and back again, will forever remain shrouded in steam, tourist attractions only. Why shouldn't they?

Other preserved railways, in the right geographic locations, could perhaps do with some encouragement and help from a fresh direction, to recognise their "real railway" potential.

For all of us it is time for "Up periscope!" It's time to get to know each other. We have a lot to learn from each other.

We need a clear but flexible Railfuture heritage railways policy. We need to form a strong working relationship with the Heritage Railways Association.

Railfuture members can still believe in the importance of high-speed railways while looking approvingly at a cloud of steam or a volunteer sweeping the station platform.

Do you have strong feelings either way on the subject, or great ideas? Why not write to me, John Ginns, Rose Cottage, Caythorpe, Grantham, Lincs NG32 3DY, or email me jwginns@whsurf.net