

## SEVERN STEAM FAIR TEWKSBURY August Bank Holiday Weekend. 1974

At the request of Mr Joe Weston-Webb, John Mayes took his two Engines Excalibur and Excelsior to Tewksbury. Here follows his account of the weekend's proceedings.

It was too far to consider driving the engines from home, so we low-loaded them on consecutive days about a fortnight beforehand, having made arrangements with Ron Smith, a fellow member of the Ross on Wye Steam Engine Society, to stable the engines at his yard at Defford, just off the A38 about 7 miles north of Tewksbury.

The entrance to Ron's yard is somewhat dicey, being on a bend on a busy main road, however there was a good wide lay-by some 200yards off and it was here that we unloaded. Also, once through Ron's gate we would have to do a sharp left hand turn to avoid the end of a building, and I therefore decided to bring Excelsior first as I'm more used to her.

About a fortnight later, old Tom Stanley and I steamed Excelsior, drove her from Cash Lane to the loading point about half a mile distant, loaded and were on our way by nine a.m. Three hours later we arrived at "our lay-by" made up the fire, as pressure had dropped considerably during the journey, and regaled ourselves at the local hostelry whilst waiting for steam. There were just the three of us, the low-loader driver, old Tom and me.

We unloaded in our usual brisk style and drove up to the gate. With Tom and the low-loader driver doing traffic duty, I took Excelsior onto the wrong side of the road, backed smartly into a side-turning almost opposite Ron Smith's gate, waited for the traffic to clear, then across the road, through the gate, a smart left turn, a couple of short shunts and we were there with ample room for Excalibur to park alongside the next day, a manoeuvre we completed with equal aplomb!

On the Thursday before the Fair was due to open, Peter Noble, with Tom Stanley steering, and I with Peter Collins steering, set out for Tewksbury, driving at an interval of about 100yards, we kept the traffic clear along the A.38. We picked up water from a previously reconnoitred hydrant and proceeded to a Transport Cafe for lunch. It was a beautiful day, sweat poured off us and we were pleasantly surprised when the Cafe Proprietor produced some bottles of Cider.

We oiled up, checked round and set off again. The A.38 travelling south to Tewksbury descends a long, fairly steep hill with a nice easy, left hand bend half-way down, Our landmark for stopping to insert the off-side driving pin was the Waterworks Tower. Keeping our distance of about 100yds. behind Excalibur, we saw Peter Noble stop and (we hoped) insert his pin. Seeing him move off again we then continued to the Tower, learned that he had inserted his pin, after a bit of ringing around we got our pin in and cotters home and hung around-to give Excalibur time to get down the hill. We made friends with the householders opposite who had not seen a Ploughing Engine for years!

About a quarter of an hour later we decided that Excalibur must be down by now. Having warned Peter Collins to keep out a bit from the kerb, I set off in top gear, braking intermittently to check Excelsior from getting into a headlong gallop. All was going well as we rounded the bend, water bobbing just above the bottom nut as I checked her on the brake, it had been out of sight on the top nut before setting off - when, horror of horrors, there was Excalibur proceeding at about a foot a fortnight! I don't know who was the most scared, Peter Noble glancing back and seeing a ploughing engine rapidly overtaking him, or Peter Collins trying to make up his mind whether I could stop or if he had better start pulling out to overtake,

Brake wound hard on at a high rate of knots and a bit of delicate reverse lever work ('cos if 'er strikes, you've 'ad it ) and we came from about 5mph to a stop in about 30ft. It was then I realized that not only had Peter Noble got both pins in but he was also in bottom gear!, far better to be safe than sorry. Anyway, we both got done the hill safely.

The entrance to the site was pretty grim, a sharp turn of the A38 right by a bridge over the Severn, and a steep drop about 1 in 4 onto the meadow where, needless to say, the Fair people had built up very close to the gate, necessitating a very sharp turn whilst still on the steep slope and not clear of the gateway. Due to the steep descent we had previously decided that the only safe way in was to reverse into the field in order to keep the water over the crown. So, having parked Excelsior well into the side, with Peter Collins to look after her and keep the traffic flowing, I got onto Excalibur to help Peter Noble with the reverse and the brake whilst he watched his offside front for Tom who had to concentrate on keeping as close as possible to the nearside gatepost and turn in sufficient time to clear the Fairpeople's tranklements, and to clear the offside gatepost with the front wheel.

Slowly I inched her down on the brake and reverse taps open, regulator shut. Listening to Peter instructing Tom, waiting for a shout to stop and watching the Fair equipment getting ever closer, was quite a laugh. Both pins in, bottom gear, it seemed, ages before we were properly in and clear.

The Water Tap of course was situated just inside the gateway a really handy position. With Excalibur parked by the tap, there was just enough room to get Excelsior off the main road, which we did without mishap, but of course the gateway was now completely blocked.

Old Tom, when being given any slightly lengthy or mildly complicated instruction, or when being told off, has a disconcerting habit of standing with his feet together, his hands clasped tightly in front of him as if in prayer and simply saying yes to everything and anything. An Inspector of Police and his Sergeant seemed to be having a somewhat lengthy talk to old Tom and noticing his stance I knew what was about to happen. It did, the Police walked off with faces like thunder. Tom came and told me that they wanted to get their car out. Presently they buttonholed me, to my complete surprise asked if that chap was dotty. Being caught somewhat off guard, I hadn't time to put my feet together but with tightly clasped hands replied yes '.The Inspector went purple and stalked off followed by his Sergeant.

With Excalibur filled, Peter Noble and Tom drove off to our pitch, I backed down to the tap, filled up and peter Collins and I proceeded after Excalibur.

Mr J.Rome of Gloucester attended the Fair with his ex Bomford & Carr Ploughing Engine, on which, a remarkable job of restoration had been carried out since I last saw it in 1969 at Binton.

During the Fair Excalibur and Excelsior winched an old landing craft hulk from the far bank of the Severn and then winched out various dismantled parts for salvage.

We were aided in this by a team of frog-men & women fastening chains, winch-ropes, etc., which was all part of the entertainment laid on by Joe Weston-Webb.

The weather was ghastly on the Sunday and Monday, torrential rain and a high wind, and bitterly cold with it. Notwithstanding such adverse conditions the show went on, including the daily attempt by Mary Connors to be fired across the Severn from her cannon, each attempt ending in her getting a drenching in midstream! Tuesday, however, was a beautiful day and the engines were moving around without difficulty.

John Mayes