

STEAM PLOUGH TIMES

September 2002

SEVENTY MILES ON A BB by John Billard

With the Hands On approaching fast and fully booked at that we needed to use at least six engines. Five were available at Avon Dassett but the sixth, BB 13482, lay in Bridgnorth having been roaded there from near Craven Arms last October. The old kettle having gone well on that occasion led Mark Rigg to suggest to me, "We'll drive it there". Consultation with work diaries led to the weekend of 28-30 June being the best with the bonus of some long days. We were to need them.

Mark having worked out the route and reconnoitred water stops the fire was duly lit just after 5 on the Friday morning. (By Mark, it must be recorded). Bill Stacey was with us, soon to be invaluable in supplying coal from his 4WD and using his special way of blocking traffic in our favour when later on it came to roundabouts and other road hazards.

Well, this story could be told quite quickly because on the Sunday night at about 9 pm we pulled into Hill Farm and parked up alongside the other five engines. That was after some 40 miles in 13 hours on that Friday and the remainder on the Sunday. It should be noted that we felt like a day off in between. (Mark and I went to see the Severn Valley Railway by way of a change). Old 13482 didn't miss a beat, steaming well, the rather shallow ashpan having to be kept clear every so often. We had to make a point of oiling the turntable to help the steersman and the lubricator needed flushing through on the second day but that was about it in terms of engine attention. But of course there was just a bit more to the story than that.

By about noon on the first day we were well on our way to Kidderminster and it seemed to be a good idea to stop for a shandy at a pub Mark knew. We swung over to the offside into the car park and I have to say there was a bit of a shunt to get straight as the steering had already started to stiffen up a bit. Mark went off to see if it was open while I oiled up.

Then the landlord appeared producing more steam than we'd seen all day. He was threatening everything including the local constabulary about the state of his car park. We couldn't see what he was on about - just the usual wheel marks that would be gone in a day or two. We never did get that drink after all. Some people have no sense of proportion.

The main problem was of course traffic. Most of the time at the regulator was spent looking backwards waving on vehicles. Everyone seemed pleased to see us or maybe to see us go! If it is obvious that you are aware of holding up traffic that helps a lot - even including a V sign from a van driver that turned into a friendly wave when he could see that we were trying to help things along a bit. There was one moment on the main A44 going into Stratford with the usual double white lines when I looked round and following us was a complete funeral. There was nothing to be done at that moment but to open the regulator a bit more and take off our caps as we did so - and we did have a black engine after all.

Keeping going at steady pace with a reliable engine soon eats up the miles and Astwood Bank was our overnight stop. We were pleased to see a cheery Bob Davis to greet us. Mark had arranged a stock of coal there and there the old kettle stayed until the Sunday morning.

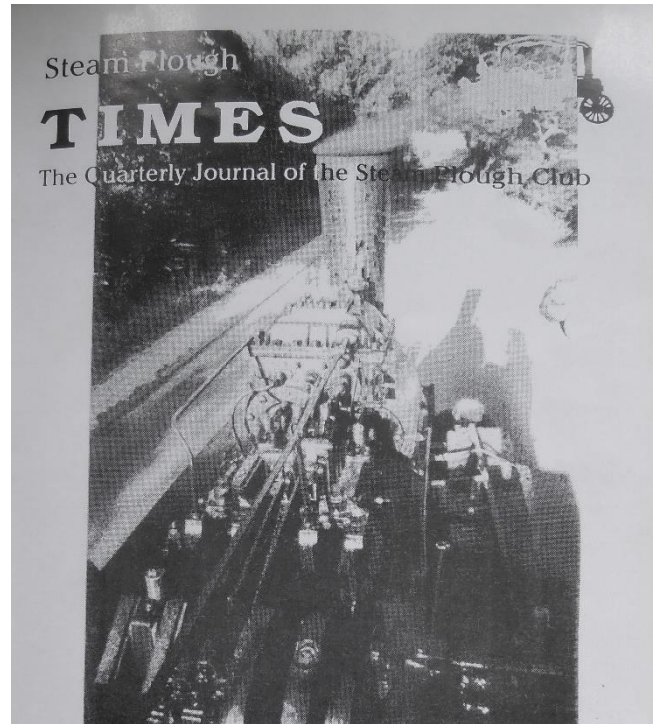
During the usual lighting up chores Mick Troman and I were standing by the front of the engine. There was a vague discussion about whether it was worth looking in the smoke box. There was not much point because we lacked a tube brush. But there seemed nothing better to do and the door was opened - and out flew a very live owl. "There is a God, you know," added Mick. So remember - always have a look.

Some of us were hoping that England would get through to the World Cup final if only to ensure that we had a quiet drive through Stratford on Avon that morning. But even so it was not too bad and we were soon heading for Wellesbourne and closer home. By now Bob Allison had joined us and was a welcome help on the steering box. The weather had held up well up to that point but the trip down the B4100

through Gaydon was in the wet. The final climax was up and over the country park - "Low gear - and don't stop." said Mark, and of course we didn't.

So that was it. Pretty uneventful really. We used about 27 cwt of coal. We had friends in cars to help us and no living van, water cart or plough to tow. But it gave us just a slight idea of the long journeys made with engines of many years past.

Special thanks to our helpers, Bill, Mick, Bob and Malcolm. It was a good effort and we couldn't have managed without them. What next? London to Brighton Historic Commercial run next year maybe!



Johns picture, taken during the adventure, made the front cover of SPT