



THE NORTH STAR CHRONICLES – a newsletter primarily for the model railway fraternity

Volume 6 no 11 November 2018

Editor: David Cairns

e-mail: northstarrailway@gmail.com

Website for back copies: www.northstarrailway@gmail.com

Phone: +27 82 653 5642

Editorial

I am always on the lookout for copy for the North Star Chronicles. A recent visit to the UK provided an opportunity to obtain such copy and at the same time tick off another item on my so called 'bucket list.' The subject on this occasion is the GWR Museum at Swindon. Now at the outset I have to admit the decision to visit the Museum was taken at the last moment as a result of another plan falling through so I had not done my homework e.g. looked up the Museum on its website so my comments have to be viewed in that light.

STEAM – the Museum of the Great Western Railway

Imagine you are a tourist in the Swindon area in the UK and you have heard about the GWR Museum and wish to visit it. So you set your off looking for Fire Fly Avenue in Swindon in the belief that it will be well sign posted. Dream on. There are signs (not very many) for STEAM with a steam loco icon but what is that a preserved railway line of which there is a large number in the UK? Well yes of course one should put two and two together and know that they actually mean the GWR Museum but why not say so?

Eventually with the assistance of a GPS and postal code you find a building that looks promising and you look around for parking. There are signs all over the place (see below) saying where you can't park but

none saying where you can. But wait a minute there is a boom (the original design was probably better) with cars parked behind it so that must be the place. Drive to boom expecting parking ticket but none appears so press button for assistance, no response. Ok reverse, park (illegally) and try to find entrance to Museum (no signs directing you there of course). Find entrance, told to go back the way we came and park outside across the road in the Designer Outlet car park. Do so but by this time not in the best of humour.

Signs and parking control post the magical mystery tour. You do not gain access unless you have a blue ticket. Nice of somebody to explain that or answer the intercom



The point I am trying to make with respect to this Swindon Council run operation is that the entire process of visiting the Museum should be more 'user friendly' which in my view with respect to signposting/directions/ parking, the GWR Museum is not. Ok having got that off my chest what about the inside of the Museum? This is housed in a restored Grade 11 listed building and in my view it is beautifully done, world class. It is informative with many videos of the Swindon works in its heyday and what a heyday that was! Opened in 1843, at its peak the workshops covered 326 acres and employed some 12000 people. Space does not permit going into detail on the history of the workshops. Refer <https://www.steam-museum.org.uk/> or https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Museum_of_the_Great_Western_Railway So why is the Museum so good? It is smaller than The National Railway Museum at York and indeed the Outeniqua Transport Museum, being located in the old GWR Machinery shop. If I try to encapsulate its attraction in one sentence it is the way the exhibits are presented, merchandised if you like.

The Museum features not only locomotives and some rolling stock but also a huge quantity of artefacts including signs, a library, furniture, clocks, workshop tools, publicity posters, photographs (including a photo library) and mannequins which bring the whole thing to life. The posters in particular promoting rail travel and holiday venues in Devon and Cornwall show how integral part of society steam railways were before the age of the internal combustion engine. The contribution railways made to the Allies winning the Second World War is also highlighted. One of the most interesting aspects of the GWR (God's Wonderful Railway to many) is that it was originally built as a 7¼ foot (2140mm) broad gauge line. In this regard mention must be made of the legendary mechanical and civil engineer Isambard Kingdom Brunel "one of the most ingenious and prolific figures in engineering history" (Design Museum quote). Refer Wikipedia again:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isambard_Kingdom_Brunel There are many reasons to study Brunel's work, the bridges and (iron) ships he built for example but for those passionate about railways it is Brunel's adoption of the 7 foot broad gauge system which he chose for the GWR that is of particular interest. Again space does not permit the detailed reporting of this subject. However I will just quote one statistic. Following a parliamentary inquiry, the passing of an Act of Parliament in 1846 restricting the broad gauge to the South West of England and Wales (the death sentence of the system albeit it was a lingering death – 46 years later) the entire 171 miles of the GWR system was converted from broad gauge to standard gauge by 3500 workers in one weekend!

How carriages and wagons were built



Examples of belt driven machinery



A portrayal of a female boilersmith inside the smokebox of a class 4200 loco in 1943



GWR Class 4073 'Caerphilly Castle' which pulled the 'Cheltenham Flyer' billed as the fastest train in the world.



Replica broad gauge loco 'North Star' (no relation!)



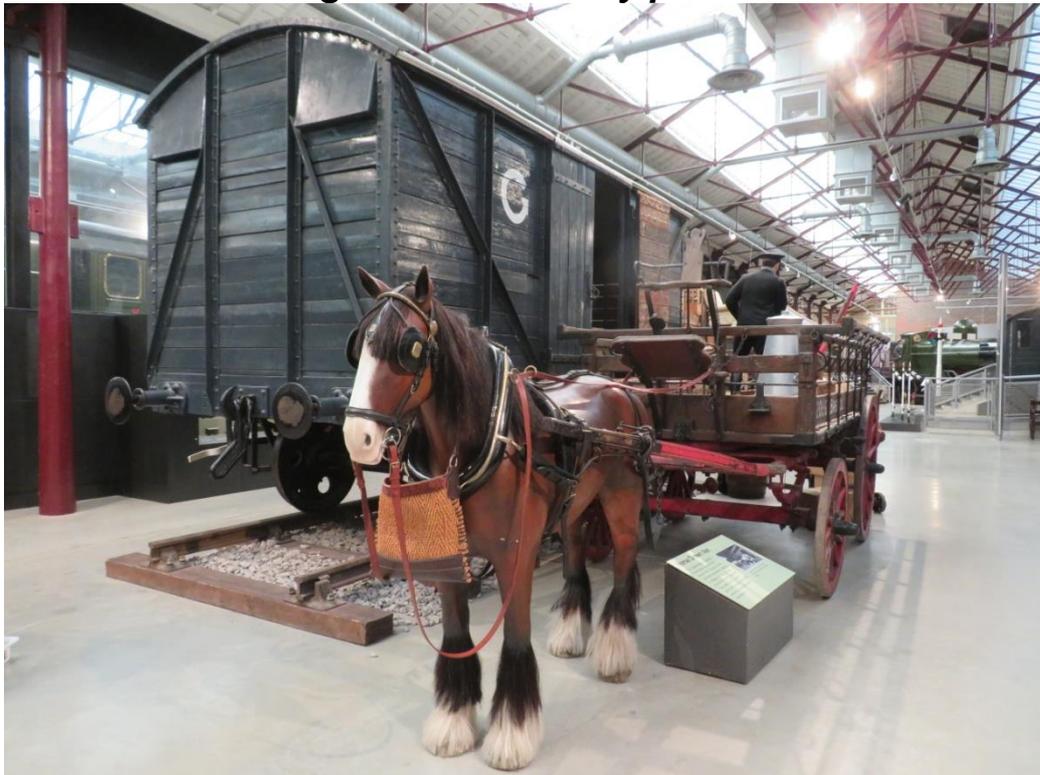
Scammell tractor and trailer



GWR Class 9400 'Hawthorn' pannier tank



One of the few wagons – beautifully presented



The main display 'hall'. Right front GWR Class 6000 'King George'. This loco acquired the bell during a visit to the USA for the Baltimore and Ohio's Centenary celebrations in 1927



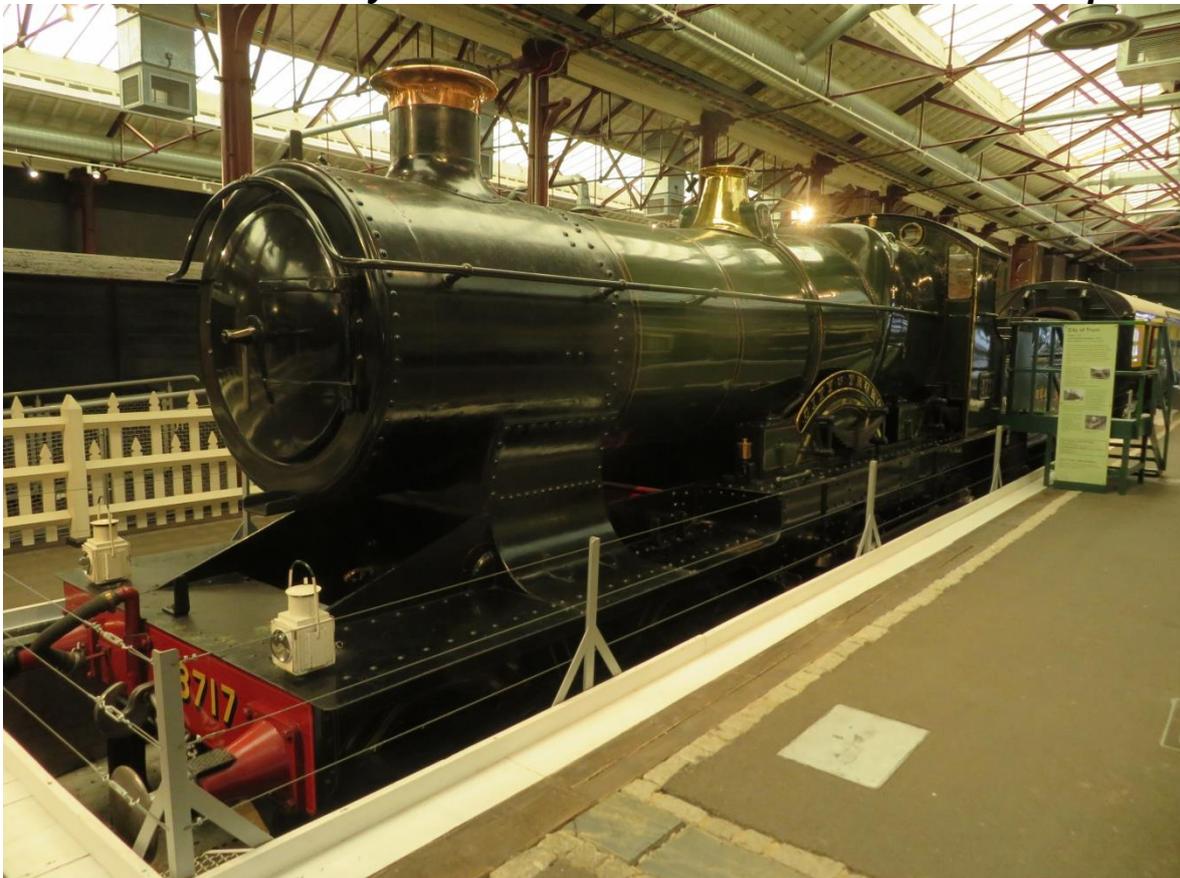
Is this a real lady or a model?



Some of the many clock exhibits



GWR Class 3700 'City of Truro' the first loco to exceed 100 mph?



Queen Victoria's carriage



To revert to the location, no report on the Museum would be complete without a comment on the adjacent Designer Outlet. This is a large shopping centre owned by the McArthur Glen property group. As the name suggests the primary tenants are designer outlets (all the big luxury brands) but the centre retains the railway theme as can be seen below. Apologies for the poor photo quality.



I will have one of those below left! But to be serious if we want to promote our hobby we need to get it out there.



Now that is special! A closer view of GWR Class 7800 'Ditcheat Manor'. I think there are a lot of men who would be prepared to let their wives loose in the centre if they were permitted to sit and admire this loco! BTW they had to remove the front of the building to enable the loco to be moved into its position



And finally the man himself: Isambard Kingdom Brunel with 'North Star' in the background.



Conclusion

As with the National Rail Museum at York and the Didcot Museum the GWR Museum at Swindon should be on the list of places to visit if you are interested in standard gauge steam locomotives.