

The Role of Umbrella Organizations in the Development of Heritage Railways

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Introduction—Why have Umbrella Organizations?

It is important to recognize that there is little or no competition between heritage railways. Apart from one or two instances where there are heritage railways within some 20 km of each other, the only rivalry lies in competing for volunteers and bidding for stock and equipment. The fact is that heritage railways share common interests and face many of the same problems. It is hardly surprising then that the first Railway Preservation Association was established in the UK soon after the founding of the first preserved railways. It very quickly became the Association of Railway Preservation Societies (ARPS) and is now known as the Heritage Railway Association (HRA).

Heritage Railway Association—Britain and Ireland

It could be said that the HRA's current role is market led; as the sector grew, we developed our activities in response to the perceived needs of our members. It is worth remembering that last year we carried over 9 million passengers, generated a combined turnover exceeding £50 million and ran more than 100,000 steam operations on about 200 days. I believe that these figures far exceed those of any other country, including the United States. The point is that many of our members now run sophisticated businesses, having grown up from the 'shoestring' organizations of the early days.

As Chairman of the North Norfolk Railway, I can remember the excitement in the 1960s when we put an engine in steam once a year for the Shareholders' Special. Our annual turnover was less than £1,000. Now we operate trains on 210 days each year carrying over 100,000 passengers and our turnover will probably exceed several million pounds. We also

increased our share capital by £120,000 and received a grant from the Heritage Lottery of £190,000.

The HRA has grown and changed in the same way. In the early days, its principal activity was the provision of free advice and guidance. We could not afford to pay but our members usually included someone with the necessary expertise, whether in the form of professional advice or information on technical matters. We still provide this service but the larger railways tend to have their own teams of advisors and, of course, can afford to pay. This has led to our advisory service being more focused and more specialist.

I can best explain the role of umbrella organizations in the development of heritage railways by outlining what the HRA does now. I use the plural because I shall also discuss the role of the European Federation of Museum & Tourist Railways (FEDECRAIL) and a proposed worldwide international association later.

HRA's Current Role

The HRA represents railway organizations in both Britain and Ireland, reflecting the membership of the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland which also operates main-line steam tours on both sides of the border in Ireland. There is an Irish branch of HRA and a Scottish branch (from 2001) that has occasional meetings and is financed out of central funds.

We also represented the Isle of Man Steam Railways (IOMSR) until they withdrew in April 2001, because they are not subject to UK legislation. While true for both the IOM and Ireland and partially true for Northern Ireland and Scotland, it has been suggested that there is another reason for the withdrawal. Parts of the IOMSR are about to be closed for 2 years to allow construction of a natural-gas pipeline under the track bed—a strange bedfellow you might think for a business that relies

on coal to fire its locomotives—because it will cause less disruption than other alternatives. The Chief Minister Donald Gelling of the Isle of Man government has indicated that 'The Railway would be reinstated to a higher specification than at present. This would then allow for the possible introduction in the future of modern commuter trains, to operate alongside the existing steam train service, with a view to reducing road traffic.' Some island objectors to the plan believe that this is the thin end of the wedge, probably leading to the abandonment of steam services altogether. I have to admit that the timing of the IOMSR's withdrawal from the HRA supports that viewpoint.

This incident raises two common topics that we have to address. First, the HRA seeks to keep its members advised of changes to the law, especially those relating to safety, many of which are railway specific. Second, more disputes are being referred to us, not only by our members, but also by the public and even a government. I think it is fair to say that most HRA members see our activities on the legislation front as being of prime importance. For that reason, the HRA is now on the list of consultees of the Health and Safety Commission and the Department for Transport and is frequently consulted by other government departments, such as the Home Office. Lobbying is therefore a major part of our rationale.

Formation of FEDECRAIL

Due to this concern with legislation, we realized that there was a need to form a European Federation to monitor developments in the European Union. We found that our concern was shared by Dutch and German heritage railway operators when we held the first ARPS meeting in Utrecht in 1989 to celebrate 150 years of Dutch railways. This was

followed some 2 years later by a conference in Hamelin where the Morgan Commission working party was set up to consider establishment of a European umbrella organization, resulting in the formation of FEDECRAIL in Brussels in 1994. Since then, FEDECRAIL has managed to influence changes to at least five EU Directives plus the withdrawal of the infamous 'Hot Surfaces Directive.' An annual conference and general meeting is held in a European city with speakers from national organizations and European and other agencies.

Proposed Formation of International Steam & Tourist Train Association

Following our conference in Barcelona, which was addressed by Livio Dante Porta and the Chief Engineer of Cuban Railways (UFC), I was invited to present a paper at Ecovapor Cuba in 1999 where I met several speakers from South America who urged us to join the formation of an international steam and tourist train association. At first, I was sceptical about the need for such an association but after visits to Russia and Argentina, I was persuaded that there was a need for a truly worldwide organization in the light of the increasing globalization of enterprises and legislation. Environmental concerns tend to be coordinated on an international level and it was felt that there was some need to formulate a response when the activities of our members could be threatened.

As a European, it is easy to believe that we can teach the rest of the world something about heritage railways, but I quickly learned otherwise. Dante Porta—one of the best living steam engineers—served his apprenticeship under André Chapelon of France and spoke to me about a water treatment that was pioneered by the Americans during WWII. Unfortunately, they never released the

recipe but it was rediscovered by a team of scientists commissioned by Chapelon and Dante Porta. According to Dante Porta, the further-developed recipe reduces boiler maintenance costs by anything between 92.5% to 98.5%.

To launch the international association, a world congress was planned in Ushuaia in Argentina, where there is very rich railway history. The Argentine government has pledged support for a congress and over 300 people registered interest on the website. However, the organizers in Argentina were discouraged from holding the congress due to declining support from north America and Japan. I addressed this matter again at the Joint Convention of the Tourist Railroads of America Inc (TRAIN) and the Association of Railway Museums in the USA in November 2001.

What Creative Role Can Umbrella Organizations Develop?

Clearly umbrella organizations must address the issues facing member railways and promoters of tourist lines and trains round the world. To do this, we first need to identify the threats to our continued success, if not survival. I think that the issues are largely finance, environment, shortage of train staff, loss of skills and heritage equipment, plus other issues of a more local nature.

In the UK, the HRA has held sessions on how we should adapt to the changing world. We need to address the training of staff and the transfer of skills. We need to consider the changing role of volunteers, particularly with reference to recruitment, training and available skills. In the early days, most volunteers were or had been railway men, while today's volunteers come from a very diverse spread of professions and are often very highly qualified in their areas of expertise. We must continually review changing

legislation and regulations, particularly pertaining to safety and the environment. Where possible, we lobby government agencies and parliaments (both national and international) and advise our members how to adapt to new rules by modification or education. In Britain, we are lucky that we have cross-party support in both Houses of Parliament.

We seek to address the question of expanding our market and assist our members in achieving this through special events, such as running wine and dine trains, Santa Specials, and Thomas the Tank Engine, developing footplate experience courses as well as through normal marketing channels such as guides, websites and tourist associations. We encourage our members to conserve equipment and infrastructure, the costs of which are balanced by increased income. For example, an expensively restored Directors' Saloon Car can recover its costs by letting for use in period films and TV dramas.

We promote modern information technology, such as computer hardware and software to speed and facilitate rolling stock construction and repair.

Funding is a problem we all face. Umbrella organizations can help by giving advice on sources of public funding, by pressuring governments and by encouraging commercial organizations and other grant sources to sponsor heritage railway projects.

Museums like the National Railway Museum at York could play a valuable role in promoting the operators of steam trains—a role that I think is still underplayed.

Any umbrella organization worth its salt will wish to raise the profile of its members' activities and to achieve greater public recognition of the cultural value played by members' operations. A good example is the listing of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

A map of Great Britain showing the locations of 92 numbered points, representing constituencies for the 1992 election. The map includes labels for major cities: Edinburgh, Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol, Southampton, London, and York. The points are distributed across the country, with a higher density in the south and east. The numbering starts in the north (1-10) and proceeds generally southwards and eastwards, ending with 92 in the southwest.

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|----|---|----|---|-----|--|
| 1 | Mull Rail | 39 | Telford Steam Railway | 75 | Amberley Museum |
| 2 | Strathspey Steam Railway | 40 | Severn Valley Railway | 76 | Hollycombe Steam Collection |
| 3 | Keith & Duftown Railway | | Kidderminster Railway Museum | 77 | Mid-Hants' Watercress' Railway |
| 4 | Caledonian Railway | | | 78 | Isle of Wight Steam Railway |
| 5 | Bo'ness & Kinneil Railway | 41 | Chasewater Railway | 79 | Swanage Railway The Purbeck Line' |
| 6 | Scottish Industrial Railway Centre | 42 | Birmingham Railway Museum | 80 | Avon Valley Railway |
| 7 | The Leadhills & Wanlockhead Railway | 43 | Coventry Railway Centre | 81 | East Somerset Railway |
| 8 | Isle of Man—Transport Heritage | 44 | The Battlefield Line Railway | 82 | Seaton Tramway |
| 9 | Ravenglass & Eskdale Railway | 45 | Great Central Railway | 83 | West Somerset Railway |
| 10 | South Tyneside Railway | 46 | Rutland Railway Museum | | Somerset & Dorset Railway Trust |
| 11 | Beamish, The North of England Open Air Museum | 47 | Nene Valley Railway | 84 | Devon Railway Centre |
| | Tanfield Railway | 48 | Northampton & Lampport Railway | 85 | Lynnton & Barnstaple Railway |
| 12 | Bowes Railway | 49 | Northamptonshire Ironstone Railway Trust | 86 | Bideford Railway Museum |
| 13 | Eden Valley Railway | 50 | Rushden Historical Transport Society | 87 | Dartmoor Railway |
| 14 | Weardale Railway | 51 | North Norfolk Railway | 88 | South Devon Railway |
| 15 | Lakeside & Haverthwaite Railway | 52 | Bure Valley Railway | 89 | Paignton & Dartmouth Steam Railway |
| 16 | Wensleydale Railway Association | 53 | Mid-Norfolk Railway | 90 | Launceston Steam Railway |
| 17 | Darlington Railway Centre & Museum | 54 | Bressingham Steam Museum | 91 | Bodmin & Wenford Railway |
| 18 | North Yorkshire Moors Railway | 55 | Mid-Suffolk Light Railway | 92 | Lappa Valley Steam Railway |
| 19 | | 56 | East Anglian Railway Museum | 93 | Llanberis Lake Railway |
| 20 | Embsay & Bolton Abbey Steam Railway | 57 | Colne Valley Railway | 94 | Snowdon Mountain Railway |
| 21 | National Railway Museum, York | 58 | Leighton Buzzard Railway | 95 | Welsh Highland Railway |
| 22 | Derwent Valley Light Railway | 59 | Luckinghamshire Railway Centre | 96 | Ffestiniog Railway |
| 23 | West Lancashire Light Railway | 60 | Gloucestershire Warwickshire Railways | 97 | Bala Lake Railway |
| 24 | Keighley and Worth Valley Railway | 61 | Dean Forest Railway | 98 | Llangollen Railway |
| | Bahamas Locomotive Society Vintage Carriages Trust | 62 | Swindon & Cricklade Railway | 99 | Cambridian Railways Society |
| 25 | Middleton Railway | 63 | Didoct Railway Centre | 100 | Welshpool & Lanfair Railway |
| 26 | East Lancashire Railway | | | 101 | Corris Railway |
| 27 | Astley Green Colliery Museum | | | 102 | Fairbourne & Barmouth Steam Railway |
| 28 | Moseley Railway Trust | | | 103 | Talylyn Railway |
| 29 | The Heaton Park Tramway | | | | The Narrow Gauge Railway Museum |
| 30 | Appleby Frodingham Railway Preservation Society | | | 104 | Vale of Rheidol Railway |
| 31 | Lincolnshire Wolds Railway | | | 105 | Teifi Valley Railway |
| 32 | The Barrow Hill Railway Centre | | | 106 | Gwili Railway |
| 33 | Peak Rail | | | 107 | Swansea Vale Railway |
| 34 | National Tramway Museum, Crich | | | 108 | Brecon Mountain Railway |
| 35 | Midland Railway Centre | | | 109 | Pontypool and Blaenavon Railway |
| 36 | Golden Valley Railway | | | | |
| 37 | Churnet Valley Railway | | | | |
| 38 | Foxfield Light Railway | | | | |
| | North Ings Farm Museum | | | | |
| | Market Drayton Railway Preservation Society | | | | |

Conclusion

To sum up, I believe that umbrella organizations are essential to heritage railways because of the very real assistance they give to members. ■

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