

SHORT HISTORY OF THE
SOUTHAMPTON (FORMERLY BISHOPSTOKE
AND AT ONE TIME EASTLEIGH)

PERMANENT WAY INSTITUTION

SECTION

1888 - 1988

by D. J. WROE

SOUTHAMPTON SECTION P.W.I. CENTENARY 1888-1988.

After formation in Nottingham in 1884, our name was firstly the Institution of Permanent Way Inspectors, which explains why Supervisors today are the "Members". Mr Meredith, the founder, came to Bishopstoke on 3rd November 1888 and outlined to the local London & South Western Inspectors the objects of the Institution and impressed them with the need to further its welfare. He also spoke practically on (1) the care and maintenance of slopes of cuttings and embankments, (2) breaking of rails under varying degrees of temperatures. The latter subject is still familiar, even if Mr Meredith might be saddened had he been able to see our slopes today. However, Inspectors cared then, as Supervisors do today, and the Section was formed. In 1894 they were drawn from Alton, Eastleigh, Ringwood, Petersfield, Christchurch, Newport, Winchester, Basingstoke, Broadstone, Salisbury, Fareham, Wimborne and Brockenhurst. Today they are from Weymouth, Brockenhurst, Southampton, Eastleigh, Winchester, Salisbury, Andover and Ryde as valued Members, together with the Training School, Redbridge Works, and the Works Maintenance Supervisors.

The L.S.W.R. Engineering Department was a strong element under J.W. Jacomb Hood in the 1890s. It is noteworthy that the Centenary of the Bournemouth Direct Line (Brockenhurst to Christchurch) occurred on 5th March 1988. Hood's predecessor, William Jacomb, died in office possibly as a result of the strain of its construction, a story of slipping cuttings and embankments. The Holes Bay curve at Poole and the Branksome 'North Curve' opened in 1893, thus completing the present day Southampton to Weymouth route. Bishopstoke P.W.I. Section obviously had status when the Summer Venue of 1895 was held at Southampton. There were 13 speeches, 5 songs and one recitation at the dinner at the Hartley Institute, and Southampton Docks (newly acquired by the L.S.W.R. in 1892) was inspected on foot and in the launch 'Albert Edward'.

Hesitation appeared in 1902 when there was a discussion of a motion to continue the Section, but the 1903 Minute Book - the earliest held by the Section - reveals a dozen members regularly meeting at the Railway Institute at Eastleigh. What did they discuss? Accident Reports and papers read at other Sections (e.g. the lengths of leads, and obtaining same, as reported in the Journal "these lengths being much longer than those now in use on the L.&S.W.Rly.")

Strangely, though perhaps understandable, was a proposal by the London Section for a joint meeting in 1906. Bishopstoke turned this down as "distasteful". The subject? "The System of Permanent Way Inspection in Vogue on the L.&S.W.R." In those days reports from Council Meetings and the Annual Summer Meetings (now Conventions) etc. were read out in full by the Corresponding Secretary. After discussion of same, no doubt they repaired to wet their throats. Significantly the name of the Section was altered from Bishopstoke to Eastleigh on 20th September 1907.

The 1911 Convention was hosted by Eastleigh; visits made to the Loco. and Carriage Works, the S.S. 'Olympic', Winchester, etc. For organising this the Secretary, Mr Baines, was presented with a Gladstone Bag. Running the Institution was earnestly discussed at meetings, even to the subscription rates. These had to be collected, not an easy task! A favourite debating subject was 'Rail Creep' in the period before 1914, and there seemed to be dissatisfaction with the fishplate pattern.

Unfortunately the Section appeared to lapse in 1913, the members attending down to five. World War I obviously intervened, and the Section was not struck off, but it was March 1922 before the President, A.W. Szlumper, also Chief Engineer of the L.S.W.R., probably goaded Eastleigh into life again. The Minute Book records a resumption from 10th November 1922, and there were 2 meetings in 1923 the year that the London & South Western Railway was amalgamated into the new Southern Railway. There is no record of the activities from 1924 to 1926, but the Section was surviving. Arthur Maber, starting in the Eastleigh Office in 1924 as a Student member, later served as Secretary into the late 1970s. Our oldest member, W.J. Witt now aged 95 and living in retirement in Southsea, has been in the Section since 1914. Starting as a tool boy at Fareham in 1909, he became a clerk at Eastleigh in 1912 and draughtsman in 1919. He retired as Chief Draughtsman in 1952 and made a Hon. Life Member.

1927 saw the Section title become Southampton, and an invigoration which has hardly faltered since. 17 members, including the Inspectors at Winchester (Harry Merritt) Poole, Wimborne and Eastleigh and two Associate Members from Redbridge Works, were listed. Meetings over the next few years were held in the Mess Room at Redbridge Works and occasionally at Bournemouth, Salisbury and Ryde. Great friends were the Brighton Section in the 1930s; several joint meetings (e.g. at Fratton) and visits - a favourite was the reclamation works and construction of the new Southampton West Docks.

The Section must have had good standing in July 1928 because it was entrusted with holding the National Convention in the City. The Chief Engineer of the S.R., George Ellson, as P.W.I. President, Local Secretary, E.R.Dashper, and a committee of four organised it. As well as Stonehenge and the Island, parties went to the Supermarine Co. (Woolston) then making flying boats (but Spitfires a decade later), to see the new concrete bridges at Redbridge (and to the Works of course), and to the Co-Op's Model Dairy at Shirley. At tea time at Alum Bay on the last day Mr Dashper was presented with a "beautiful walking stick".

Lantern slides were the method of illustrating papers in those days, but occasionally a cinematograph arrived to show films, and the lecture room was packed for that! But it was not all 'viewing'. Mr Lodge used a black-board to explain crossing angles on a wide sixfoot. "This caused endless questions" said the Minutes, which kindly quoted his formula as well! Exmouth Junction Concrete Works was turning out all manner of products in the 1930s - one can still see many examples today such as fences. Southampton and Exeter Sections went over the Works in June 1931, afterwards sitting down to a 'sumptuous Devon Tea'. Brighton Section again at Ryde in May 1932 when an audience of 40 had a feast of short papers on drainage, rail adjusting and steel bridges. Southampton meetings were at the old Terminus station, held on Saturday afternoons, and up to 30 members would be present. The Institution Jubilee in May 1934 was celebrated by a high tea at the Roles Hotel and a musical evening. (Miss M. Dean of the Divisional Engineer's Office "delighted the party with songs"). Mr K. Brinsmead spoke on 'American Railways through the Eyes of an Englishman' to 30 members on 14 March 1936 - he is another of our long-standing members, and one-time Editor of the Journal - now in retirement at Salisbury.

For years permanent way men picked up knowledge as they went along, still true today of course, but no formal education or classes then existed. Nevertheless the Institution was founded on this very thing. Not until the 1930s, however, was anything done in an organised manner. Post World War II members

in the 1940s and 1950s will recall the Institution's 'A' (General) and 'B' (Advanced) examinations. They originated in 1935, were suspended in the War, and revived in 1945. Since B.R. now undertakes staff education these examinations (with Diplomas for successful candidates) have ceased.

Worting Junction received two-level chairs in 1937 and the L.M.S. Railway started using flat bottom rails. Both were subjects of papers to Southampton Section, and members went to Cricklewood in 1938 to inspect the latter, not only the "new" type of track, but to watch a demonstration of measured shovel packing. A rather poignant visit to Southampton Airport on the last Saturday of Peace in August 1939 was to be the last of its kind until 1944.

The 1944 visit was to a P.W.I. Diamond Jubilee exhibition of p.w. equipment at Salisbury on the 17th August. A Special Meeting was held at the Unity Club, Eastleigh, in September to which the Mayor of Eastleigh was invited, and three "cinematograph films" were shown to 52 members and 12 visitors. The Wartime meetings were held in the Unity Club, on Saturday afternoons, and attracted between 30 and 40 members. Lectures and discussions on purely p.w. matters, but they did venture out in May 1945 to inspect Ellson joints at Winchester.

Secretary Edwin Dashper and Arthur Maber (Council Member since 1933), together with Chief Inspector Townsend, kept the Section going during the War. Another stalwart was Mr. E. Fenner, Inspector at Brockenhurst, who has left his name on the railway map. The rise and fall over Bridge No. 2 on the Lymington Branch is still known as "Fenner's Hump". Arthur Maber assumed the Secretaryship in 1952 and continued in this until 1979.

It is nearly half a Century since the end of World War II and this Section has kept going, members giving up their Saturday afternoons until about 1952, after which Wednesday evenings became the norm. (The influence of the five-day week?). On 1st January 1948 the Southern Railway Co. became the Southern Region of British Railways. Interestingly the G.W.R. Inspectors at Weymouth were members from time to time, though some of their permanent way was rather "foreign" to S.R. men! In 1950

Weymouth, Newbury to Winchester, Westbury to Salisbury and Reading to Basingstoke lines were transferred to the Southern Region. Balancing this internally, the Exeter Central District Engineer extended eastwards even as far as Hamworthy Junction. From the mid-1950s Flat Bottom track was adopted as standard, firstly at 98/109 lb, then 110A, and finally the present 113A with CWR installation. Bull Head techniques survive on B.R. of course, but the P.W.I. has assumed a consulting role to the preserved railways and members of the Swanage and Isle of Wight Companies are active in the Southampton Section. Significantly a visit was paid to Eastleigh on 26th April 1947 to see pre-assembled track relaying (it rained hard all afternoon...) and recovering materials. Inspector Ireson, in charge of the Depot, was warmly thanked for explaining the details.

As the 1950s progressed it was apparent the old order was changing. Not only pre-assembled relaying, but the infancy of continuous welding of rails, the introduction of work study and the bonus system. All changes were ardently discussed, at length, with meetings extending on to 9 p.m. The Institution was, and is, a good place to air ones views. At the meeting on 9th April 1959 for instance, 26 members (including Messrs Restall, Peart, Stewart, Noyce, Yarlett, Stovin, Sherriff and Tregay) hammered out the subject of "Payments by Results". P.B.R. and its bonus scheme lasted for a decade, but its planning and work study content has re-emerged as CAMPS in the 1980s. Measured Shovel Packing packing was widely adopted but has lapsed somewhat with the advent of mechanical tamping. Tamping and Ballast Cleaning, stressed concrete sleepers, ultrasonic rail testing, FB fastenings, etc. were the subject of papers, films and discussions in the 1960s - indicative of the profound changes taking place at this time.

The Institution's membership is widely based and the election of local officers, Chairmen, Council Members and Secretary is irrelevant to their positions on the railway. As stated before, Inspectors (now Supervisors) are its foundation. However one finds that the Secretary often will be a technical officer, or clerk, as B.R. allows some use of office facilities and internal mailing to help run a Section. Nevertheless much of the running of a Section is done in members' free time as is nearly all visits, and certainly evening meetings. It is interesting to note, even so, that B.R. does not attempt to influence the P.W.I. Text Books, for example, are entirely the Institution's work and has no subsidy. The P.W.I. tries to encourage by awarding prizes for papers read at Section meetings. Trackmen are not always

well versed in public speaking. One of our Associate Members, R. Heyd-Smith received an Award this year for his subject paper 'Patrolling The Track'. In recent years almost half the papers given at Southampton have been by local members about permanent way, and some works, subjects. Some lively debates have arisen from them too. Southampton and Guildford hold an annual exchange on contentious motions, diffused by a solemn award to the 'winners' of a wooden spoon. In these days of audiences captivated by T.V. 'soaps', evening sporting fixtures, husbands much more domesticated, it is heartening to see such good support for meetings and visits, also a steady influx of younger persons joining our Section. From the few stalwarts of the early years, the number now tops 130. Many we do not see from year to year, nonetheless their silent support is appreciated. Even after retirement a majority faithfully pay up to receive their Journals, quite a few go to meetings; some go on visits, arduous as these can be at times!

Yet more change in the mid-1960s, The third-rail electrification system was extended from Farnborough to Bournemouth (Branksome) in 1967. Southampton Central station buildings were replaced and the Section was tipped out of its room there into a hut on the up side. Working amid live conductor rails was accepted, but at the meeting on 14th December 1967 the future of the Section had to be discussed. The long-established District Engineer's Office at Eastleigh was about to be abolished! The direction of the p.w. and works was transferred to a new Divisional Office at Wimbledon, in London. Many members were transferred there and this involved a lot of travelling. Chairman in 1967 was Fred. Gay, and John Hatherell in 1968, he was the new Area Civil Engineer at Bournemouth, with contemporary Engineers at Eastleigh and Fratton, all with very reduced staffs. Secretary Maber (from Bournemouth) kept the Section going through all this, with his Chairman Norman Kitchen, and the average attendance remained at a steady twenty nonetheless.

Taking stock of the situation on BR's tracks in the 1970s called for a full-scale debate on 13th April 1972 brought on by a motion by Tony Allen "That the standard of track maintenance has improved since the introduction of mechanised maintenance". One should remember that in 1972 most people had experienced the old system of small gangs and hand labour. Consequently many viewed "mechanisation" with distrust, if not hostility. In 1988 most of our p.w. men accept tampers and machinery and have known no other than large mobile gangs. The 1972 motion was carried by a majority of one (!) but "a number of those present abstained from voting" said the minute book.

Visiting factories, railway work sites, panel boxes, local members are always willing to improve their knowledge. Whether at the top of 'Big Ben' or at the bottom of a coal mine, a free lunch or to fork out for a night's lodging, the Secretary can usually rely on his supporters! In recent years he even undertakes family outings and social evenings, which is one way of letting wives understand what moves us to be in the P.W.I. Like most British Institutions the P.W.I. had always been 'male-only'. Ladies were admitted from the 1950s; Southampton's first was Mrs Barnes from Fratton A.C.E.O. But still only two in 1988 - Maureen Collins (Eastleigh) and Maria Seaton (Redbridge).

After 27 years as our faithful Secretary, A.C.Maber relinquished his post in 1979, but was Chairman in 1984. Never swerving in his devotion to the Institution, he will be remembered by the 2nd Award of the Institution by its new name 'The Arthur Maber'. This has been possible by his generous bequest of £3000 to us when he died in January 1986.

The nature of B.R. has changed again in the 1980s. Many staff have been made redundant, or retired early, through successive reorganisations. It is a wonder that the Institution survives, but it is interesting to note that quite a few younger men who left railway service have retained membership. Of the 136 in the Section in 1988, 20 are retired and 19 are "outsiders" (e.g. employed in firms supplying p.w. equipment, the preserved railways and the Royal Corps of Transport). The proportions of the remainder are 11 in the Works (Bridges, Building, Workshops) and 86 permanent way - including Redbridge Works and the Training School. Meetings still attract a 'hard core' of 25-30, visits about 20. The bearded and bowler-hatted Inspectors of 1888 would be pleased to observe such enthusiasm if they were alive today. Their world was, of course, very restricted and the L.S.W.R Company dominated their lives to an extent we would not countenance. We should therefore salute their courage in coming together on that November afternoon one hundred years ago.