

Tales from DalesRail

DalesRail Personalities – Howard Hammersley

DalesRailers including Richard Watts

DalesRail may not be operating in 2020 but that doesn't stop us sharing our many interesting experiences about our journeys. We hope you will share your interesting stories, favourite walks, fascinating anecdotes and pictures about DalesRail. Please send them to richard.watts.crl@gmail.com or Simon Clarke at simon.clarke.crl@gmail.com.

Thoughts from Richard Watts

To all DalesRailers Howard needs no introduction. He was DalesRail – well he was for me and I relied very heavily on him for the smooth running of the train, the programme and for record keeping. I did, however, always go to work on Monday with a little tremble in the pit of my stomach. Had there been any problems with DalesRail? With great regularity Howard would ring me on Monday and then I would hear either the good news or the bad. If it was bad news the call usually came quite early!

The one word I didn't want to hear on a Monday morning was 'tanking'. Howard was passionate about many things but timekeeping and tanking were certainly two of them when it came to DalesRail. I am sorry to say the various railway companies let DalesRail down on many occasions with failing to properly 'tank' the 156s. I suspect many reading this will wonder what on earth 'tanking' is about. Well it is making sure the train is turned out properly with its water tanks full to bursting, which with a 156, if it had been fully tanked you could see it sloshing out of the roof when full. That way the train toilets would remain fully functional throughout the day.

Howard was very meticulous, and I still have his records going back over many years. His record keeping was second to none and all beautifully handwritten in his lovely and instantly recognisable style. In detail he set out the times of the train from the working timetable and the actual times the train achieved on the day; the numbers who got on and off at each station along with dogs, bikes, prams and other impairments!! Then, along with his colleagues a full record was kept of what each passenger planned to do during the day. Were they simply sightseeing, joining a guided walk, planning their own walk or using the train to make a longer distance journey? All was faithfully recorded and 'uploaded' on to a handwritten A3 size spread sheet – no computers for Howard.

Howard was a great personality as well and you certainly felt his presence on the train. Good mood or bad, frustrated or elated he shared it with all around!! More than that though Howard had a great intellect and was knowledgeable on many subjects which he generously shared with the DalesRail team and with passengers. I certainly learnt a lot from him ranging from the geography and history of the line to the state of the local reservoirs.



Two great DalesRailers Howard and Craig on a very special train. Note that even when relaxing the maps are out and records are being kept. Pete Shaw from the Friends of the Settle Carlisle is standing behind Craig.

One thing I always admired about Howard was his lack of publicity seeking. When I timidly suggested we name a train Lancashire DalesRail or run familiarisation trips he was always 100% behind it but I was never too sure he really felt it was necessary. Yet when we named 156464 'Lancashire DalesRail' Howard was certainly all smiles just take a look at the next picture. The naming of the unit was a big recognition of the work Howard and the team had put in over the years to make DalesRail a very successful niche service. This was followed by a special 'swoosh' livery for the train which has now sadly been removed as the unit went into works to be refurbished.



The naming of 156464 'Lancashire DalesRail' at Clitheroe. That's me with my back to you along with Matt Beeton from Northern



Howard with Kathryn O'Brien beside 156464 showing the recently installed DalesRail swoosh

Another facet of Howard which many of us will remember is that he made the front of the train his office. Take a look at the picture below. The table has all the paperwork needed for the day and behind, in the luggage rack, and on the seats are the bags of leaflets and other requirements.



Howard's office for the day.

There are many other things I could add but I think the things that really mark Howard out are his great love of the outdoors, his passion for public transport, his captivating personality and the mark he made on DalesRail. Without the contribution Howard and the whole Lancashire Rail Rambler team made DalesRail would have long been history. It was the success the team made of DalesRail and the numbers of passengers being carried that enabled me to convince OPRAF* (remember them?) way back in 1994 that the service should be included in the first Passenger Service Specification for what became North West Trains.

Notes:

* OPRAF – Office of Passenger Rail Franchising

Simon Clarke added:

My main memory of Howard was his encyclopaedic knowledge of local history and geography and this was brought home to me when Howard led a guided walk back in July 2007.

DalesRail, as a service, was lacking new faces and the organisers decided that they should run one of the Sundays as a Familiarisation Trip and invite senior managers of the train operating company and local press representatives to demonstrate what DalesRail was all about and the opportunities for a great day out.

Sunday 15th July 2007 came around and the train was well loaded with the great and the good along with a journalist from a local paper. The weather was good and for the walk to be led by Howard and we alighted at Langwathby and made our way to St. Michael's & All Angels Church at Addingham via the ancient stone circle Long Meg & her Daughters. The walk also included a food break at Little Salkeld Mill and a walk along the River Eden to see Lacy's Caves, a series of five chambers carved out of the sandstone.

Howard was able to recount all the local legend about Long Meg, a local witch, and her daughters and how they were turned to stone for profaning the sabbath, as they danced wildly on the moor. The legend has it that if you count the stones twice and get the same number both times they will magically come back to life!

Howard also knew all about Colonel Lacy from Salkeld Hall and how it was fashionable to have romantic ruins at that time and how he may have used them for a wine store. What is definitely known is he used entertain guests in the caves and had them planted with gardens.

Sadly a lot of this knowledge has now gone as Howard, a founding member of the Lancashire Rail Ramblers and DalesRail, passed away in January 2015.



Howard being interviewed by a local journalist close to Addingham Church (Simon Clarke)

Thoughts from Bob & Pam Jackson

Throughout many years we've been passengers on the Saturday Rail Rambler and Sunday DalesRail services. Howard would be there, for him not to be was an extremely rare occasion. Sometimes members of his family were with him but more often they were occupied at their home in Preston. Howard was one of the founder members of both groups, started as a means of encouraging people to use the train and experience the joys of walking in areas they were unfamiliar with. Other members of both groups, ever faithful to his knowledge, leadership and organisation, willingly gave up their weekends to volunteer as walks leaders. In the case of DalesRail, it was important to Howard to have accurate detailed statistics: how many people were using the service, i.e. adults, children, babies, bicycles and dogs. Where each joined and left the train, how they were going to spend their day, be it joining one of the organised walks or doing their own, spending the day in one of the towns, meeting friends or relatives, station arrival and departure and any delays which occurred en-route. All these details were carefully noted for future analysis.



Howard with a walking group. Photo Bob & Pam Jackson

Clitheroe was the last main pick-up point on the Lancashire section and Howard used this as an opportunity to do yet another passenger count. He would go through the carriages with his trusty counter, clicking all the while, trying to avoid bumping into Steve and his trolley or not be tripped up by dogs lying in the aisles. When making his way back to his seat and table in the 'Leaders Only' section, where all his relevant paperwork and leaflets were kept, he would make time to stop and chat with passengers. Howard's knowledge of the rail system was phenomenal, any question regarding the best route for planning a journey and he would provide an answer.



Howard at work on the train

Howard did lead walks from stations along the Settle-Carlisle Line, but he mainly travelled to Carlisle. Sometimes he would lead one of his popular Town Tours or there might be an additional train or bus journey involved for a walk around Dumfries, Gretna, Brampton and others we can't recall now.

Besides everything about trains, collecting books was another hobby. When he was in Carlisle, some of his day would be spent browsing the shelves of one of the bookshops, hoping to find another map or guidebook on the local history, which he yearned to learn more about. At the end of a long day he would then make his way to the Tullie House Cafe where he would relax with a drink and bite to eat before the return journey home.

He made visits to Hay-on-Wye, when the Book Festivals were being held, no doubt returning home with yet another book to add to his already large collection. His wife Sue would remark, "he has a room full of books" and she would go no further than the door! What might have looked like a chaotic jumble, Howard knew exactly where each book was. We often wonder what became of them all when sadly, he passed away in January 2015.

To us and many, many others who knew him, Howard was, Mr. DalesRail.



Howard and Sue Hammersley (Photo Bob & Pam Jackson)