

Motivations for volunteering on heritage railways

John Canning

2008

This paper was written between about 1999 and 2003. It was based on my master's dissertation: *Motivations for the preservation of steam railways: Volunteer perspectives*. (Unpublished MSc dissertation, 1998), University of Bristol. It was submitted for publication in a journal, but was never published. However, feeling that it deserved an audience, I self-published it on my website at www.johncanning.net in 2008. The referenced websites date from the period the article was first written and are unlikely to still exist.

Suggested citation: Canning, John (2008) *Motivations for volunteering on heritage railways*. Available at www.johncanning.net. Accessed [date]

1 Heritage –the new religion?

Heritage- the new religion? Yes, if the discourses produced since the 1980's are to be believed. [1] The past is not only conserved and admired, but its relics have become the basis of everyday life practices; it is worshipped, and glorified. But what is the doctrine of this new faith? If the public come to worship the past, who are the clergy of the new religion? Who mediates between the material relics of the past and their consumption by the public?

This paper concerns an activity which represents only a small fraction of the 'heritage industry'—the heritage railway movement. Many historians are sceptical of 'heritage', but this is often the means through which the public has access to the past.. Heritage railways represent the public face of transport history and understanding them is a way to understand how history is communicated to the general public. It is important to understand the motivations, processes and negotiations involved in the production of the heritage railway. This paper seeks to explore further the volunteer perspectives touched upon in Sykes et al's 1997 paper in *Journal of Transport History*. [2]

The contribution of volunteer labour to the production of heritage is a neglected aspect of its study; which tends to be relegated to the margins of analyses based mostly upon outcomes and ideology rather than material processes. [3] This article considers the role of volunteers an area of research which requires further attention, [4] examines three main issues: the role of volunteers in railway heritage, the ways in which they disrupt heritage and the ways in which volunteers resist heritage, for example in their affection for Thomas the Tank Engine.

Railway heritage volunteering is among the most popular form of heritage volunteering and the preservation of steam railways has a long-standing history, the first major preservation being that of the Talylyn in 1951. [5] Sykes et al maintain that an early motivation for preservation was concerned mostly with keeping lines open.[6] One respondent cited the Ealing film comedy *The Titfield Thunderbolt* as a possible inspiration for much railway preservation. In recent years, however, there has been a movement away from the idea of 'preserved railway' and towards 'heritage railway'; thus the 'Heritage Railways Association', was until relatively recently called 'Association of Independent Railways and Preservation Societies'. [7]

2 Defining heritage —Two views

There has been a notable rise in the word 'heritage', perhaps the most recent example being the National Lottery heritage funds. Before considering the role of volunteers it is worth considering how some criticism of heritage treats it as commodification of the past and how these critiques effect on heritage railways. , There are positive and negative definitions of heritage. [8] Firstly, there is the negative view espoused by Lowenthal, Hewison and Wright, then there is the positive view popularised by Raphael Samuel., Both views see heritage as relating to the way in the past is viewed in the present, but they differ in their perspectives on how this is achieved and presented in practice.

According to the negative view, heritage represents a selective part of history, not only an extraction from history but it is also a history upon which a gloss has been painted. [9] History is presented in a static state and not as a process. Relics are timeless; the entire past is presented in a single frame,[10] not processes, but residuals of processes. [11] The site does not make technological progress. It is a 'snapshot' of railway history —'Artefacts thus become static and removed from history, avoiding any suggestion that history is a dynamic process involving conflict and change.'[12] This is 'mimesis', an ideal of 'staged authenticity'. [13] The legitimacy of heritage lies not in history, but in industry. Heritage finds its legitimacy, not as a means of understanding the past, but as a means of generating profit. The past is viewed as a marketable product.

The past has no intrinsic value of its own. [14] The archaeologist Fowler expressed dismay at the British Tourist Authority's view that, a relic such as Leeds castle could be conserved at '... little expense to the tax-payer' rather than focusing on its educational value and aesthetic qualities. [15] Hewison sees the manufacturing of heritage was a replacement for the manufacturing of goods. Although indefinable everybody seems keen to sell heritage.[16] 'Like medieval relics, heritage is sanctioned not by proof of origins but by present exploits'. [17] Thus instead of providing a window to the past, heritage is legitimised by the social, economic and ideological needs of the present. The Swanage railway won the prize for the best heritage railway on the grounds of its successful park and ride service; [18] its success has been judged on how it serves a present need and not how it can elucidate understandings of railway history.

Heritage has been viewed as a 'new right' ideology. Not only is the past being exploited for the economic requirements of the present, it also presents an ideology of past greatness. Patrick Wright views this as part of the decline of the left, which viewed history more as progress to a 'bourgeois view about an unproblematic past'. [19] The growth of the heritage industry is a reflection of the view the past was better. The values of the past are to be exalted and admired. Hewison interprets this tendency as a sign that Britain has become so obsessed with the past it is unable to face its future. [20] Traditional museums have an association with power and authority and appear to serve an elite. [21] When heritage comes together as ideology, profit and bad history, nothing remains except for a heritage whose legitimacy lies solely in the pleasures of the 'gaze' or in aesthetics. The outcome, as noted by David Harvey, is that

aesthetics rather than ethics becomes the basis of academic enquiry. [22]

Attention is drawn towards objects by virtue their aesthetics, not of the explanations and narratives which accompany them. Objects are fragmented and deconceptualised from their historical context and presented as autonomous. Material objects inherited from the past do not require explanation and narrative in their historical context. Rather than an object's meaning being embodied in its past uses and meanings, it is an empty vessel waiting to be filled with new meanings; some of these meanings have links, however contentious, to the past.

In sum, the result of this is that history is presented, whether through a museum, re-enactment or film as 'heritage'. For example, Fox's film *Anastasia* presents the Russian Revolution as a love story- the harsher realities of history can be written out. John Tosh cautions strongly against using the resources of the past in order to construct contemporary myths, even if the ends appear to be desirable. 'Myth-making about the past, however desirable the end it may serve, is incompatible with learning from the past'. [23]

Eventually, the boundaries between knowing the realities of the past and the myths become blurred. Most importantly authenticity becomes of only minor, if any importance. [24] This cynical view of heritage is not uncontested. Raphael Samuel draws attention to some of the lessons that can be learnt from visits to museums and from re-enacting history. He suggests that historians have given an over-privileged place to the written word. [25] Heritage does not need to be bad history- neither must pleasure be mindless. [26] Visiting museums can be an inspiration, especially to children to get excited about the past.[27] Stratton agrees: 'Children have found them [open air museums] highly rewarding in developing project work in a way inconceivable before the 1970s, while volunteers of all ages have gained new skills and found fulfilment.' [28] Sharon MacDonald emphasises the word can in assessing the usefulness of heritage centres for telling a story. [29] Similarly heritage railways can inspire people, especially young people, to take an interest in the past. There are, however, major shortcomings in both the cynical and the more 'approving' analyses of heritage. There is an overemphasis on the 'non-physical' production of heritage and the implications this has for the consumption of heritage. As the heritage debate has become focused upon the contemporary ideological and financial production and reproduction of the heritage resource, the perspectives and motivations of people who donate their labour to the conservation, preservation and presentation of a heritage resource have largely been ignored. This also ignores the diversity that exists in the heritage industry, failing to differentiate the profit-making motivations of some sites from those which are produced out of passionate non-economically motivated desires to share their enthusiasm with the public and to educate them.

3 Motivations for volunteering

Most volunteering research discussed in sociology and economics is largely based upon social volunteering -those pursuits whereby, directly or indirectly, the lives

of socially disadvantaged people are enriched (or made more bearable) by the labours of those prepared to work without financial reward. It is problematic to classical economic theories because people work without the motivation of money.[30] A majority of these volunteers do so through the pressures of others and 31 per cent have a family member or a friend who benefits directly from the work. [31] Millar, however suggests that the motivations for heritage volunteering are different from other forms of volunteering. [32] Volunteering in heritage is primarily motivated by enjoyment of the resource itself, the social relations and the satisfaction of learning new skills, rather than for altruistic reasons or to relieve feelings of obligations; heritage volunteering is not filling a social 'need' per se that the political and economic mode of regulation fails to fill.

The findings presented in this article are based upon interview and participant observation data gathered during the summer of 1998. Most of the data comes from participant observation and discussion held at the Avon Valley Railway (AVR). The AVR is centred round the village station at Bitton, between Bristol and Bath on a section of the former Midland Railway.. The railway co-exists with the Bristol-Bath cycle path and Bitton station forms an important focal point about halfway between the two cities and the railway has provided car parking facilities and cycle racks. Cyclists spend money in the station buffet and provide a useful source of income to the railway.

The social structure and business organisation of heritage railways in general has yet to be explored in detail. [33] The AVR has around 450 members, but only a small proportion serve as volunteers. [34] The volunteers observed were all white and almost exclusively male. [35] One respondent's, (Henry) wife was involved in helping him to restore a carriage, but at the time of the research women were only found working in the buffet. The male dominance of the heritage railway is perhaps an ironic manifestation of mimesis which sits uncomfortably alongside contemporary commitments to gender equality. [36]

It is difficult to describe where the AVR sits amongst the extreme diversity of heritage railways. Dewell records 108 operating railways and 60 steam centres in the UK. Whilst the North Yorkshire Moors Railway and the Severn Valley had a wage bill of around 1,000,000 in 1998, [37] the AVR employed only two or three staff to work in the buffet part time. The AVR is also a short line, around two and a half miles (currently being extended by 400 metres); this is short in comparison to larger operations like the 12-mile long Severn Valley. Whereas these bigger railways operate seven days per week the AVR operates almost entirely on Sundays and on public holidays. One way in which the AVR could be considered to be typical is that despite its location between Bristol and Bath, it is a rural line. Heritage lines in urban or industrial areas are unusual and heritage railways have appealed strongly to the notion of the rural idyll. [38] This is further reiterated in that the tourist city of Bath is the ultimate desired destination, rather than Bristol, its larger neighbour and that the revenues that could be gained through becoming a city of Bath tourist attraction are likely to be considerable.

The legal status of the AVR is complex; it is a charity which trades through

a limited company. Formally, the railway was a company limited by guarantee with no share capital —the Bitton Railway Company Limited. In September 2001, the AVR became a registered charity known as the Avon Valley Heritage Trust. The charity has six trustees of whom two are also directors of the Avon Valley Railway Company Limited. The limited company is the trading arm of the AVR, but is owned by the trust. [39] Under English law [40] an organisation may be eligible to register as a charity if it can be demonstrated to be providing benefits to the community. The benefits of charitable status include paying business rates at only 20 per cent of normal rates and they are normally exempt from income and corporation taxes. [41] In order to benefit through permanent trade (by selling tickets for train rides etc.) charities are permitted to set up limited companies.. The profits of trading can then be passed onto the charity in a tax efficient way (such as through the Gift Aid scheme), which enables charities to claim back the tax paid on income from companies and individuals. [42]

The business side of the AVR is largely left to business-minded members in consultation with department heads, directors and trustees. Proposals are put to the directors and trustees by means of a vote. [43] Although this may not appear to be fully democratic, two respondents noted that a majority of volunteers had little interest in the business goals of the railway, especially when these goals did not impact directly on their own activities. Members are updated at member’s meetings and the minutes are published in *Semaphore*, the magazine of the AVR. Regular volunteers will also contribute to and be informed about plans through more informal channels of communication when they meet their friends and co-volunteers on the railway and in other social settings.

Decisions about the choice of rolling stock are made in accordance with policy, operational and marketing requirements. Rolling stock from the 1950s and 1960s is preferred for authenticity and to create a unique identity for the AVR amongst the huge diversity of heritage railways in the UK.

4 Methodology employed

Two principle methodologies were used in carrying out the research. The first of these was in-depth interviewing and the second was participant observation. The in-depth interviews allowed scope for respondents to open up new avenues. To protect the identity of the respondents their names have been changed. Most empirical studies of heritage issues have tended to favour the use of quantitative survey data. [44] Merriman’s decision to use a postal survey was taken with a view to collecting as many responses as possible in a way that was cost-effective. [45] Moreover, he sought to obtain a sample that would be ‘representative’ of the population as a whole. In contrast, this study does not seek to be ‘representative’ of volunteers of the AVR in any statistical sense. Instead the motivations of a handful of volunteers are explored in a high amount of detail through the use of in-depth interviews which permit the respondent (the volunteer) to raise the

important issues instead of the interviewer. Merriman is right to draw attention to the advantages of not having an interviewer- for example the assurance of anonymity and the absence of a desire to please the interviewer. [46] However, he acknowledges that the presence of an interviewer allows for the clarification of any misunderstandings concerning the question being asked as well as enabling the interviewer to 'probe' the respondent. [47]

With in-depth qualitative research there is the issue of the 'representativeness' of the interviews with regard to volunteers on heritage railways as a whole. [48] Moreover, the nature of the presentation of the interview data is itself very selective, so the quotes and analysis which appear in this paper represent only a small proportion of the actual data collected- for example, one interview generated over 8000 words over a period of one-and-a-half hours. On reflection the in-depth, 'unstructured' interview was the most appropriate method for carrying out this study.[49].

Before each interview a brief list of questions was made, but these were not strictly adhered to. These questions were used as prompts to change the direction of enquiry when one topic of discussion was exhausted. This is said to provide it with an ability to challenge the preconceptions of the researcher, as well as enable the interviewee to answer questions within their own frame of reference. Some might regard this a licence for the interviewee to simply talk about an issues in any way they chose. Nevertheless, this apparent disadvantage is turned into an advantage. [50]

It was very important that respondents were able to address the issues raised within their own framework of reference, rather than within a frame of reference determined with reference to 'expert' discourses published in books and academic journals. In contrast, in quantitative surveys and more structured forms of interviewing, respondents must express their opinions in accordance with ...boxes or categories which the researcher has predetermined.' [51] This unstructured 'open' approach led to some exciting anecdotes which may not have been obtained if a more structured had been employed. The interviews gave scope for some respondents to talk about their life experiences and their families as they themselves deemed appropriate. These provided the most exciting insights into the nature of railway volunteering. The flexibility of the interview approach allows analysis to start during the interview rather than afterwards; [52] future questions can be asked with reference to the particular discussion taking place.

The participant observation enabled the author to gain an understanding of the volunteering process, as the author had not previously been a railway volunteer. Participant observation does not need to begin with assumptions about what it important [53] so the opportunity existed to learn what was important, partly through immersion in the volunteer situation. The technique is useful for studying small population groups of which heritage railways are one [54] and for understanding situations, which are commonly hidden from public view.[55] A more detailed analysis of the application of these methods to heritage railways has been undertaken elsewhere. [56]

The in-depth interview method and participant observation could be usefully

supplemented by larger scale quantitative surveys like those used by Tillman. [57] Unfortunately his analysis has not been published, but such approaches are imperative if further insight into volunteering on heritage railways is to be gained in the future.

Three main facets of the heritage railway have been identified:-, the volunteer as a mediator between the artefacts and the public; the management of the railway and , the railway's relationship with the public.

1. Volunteers as mediators between the artefacts and the public.

There are many ways in which volunteers stand as mediators between the historical railway artefacts and their public consumption. The multiple aims, identities and motivations converge in the mediation between the physical railway artefacts and the presentation of these to the public as 'heritage railways'.

2. Managing the heritage railway.

The management of heritage railways provides an important point of mediation between volunteers and the public. From the interviews and participant observation three main issues emerged:- the relationship between the railway and the public, the railway as a site for tourism and the railway as a regulator of what aspects of the past are presented to the public.

3. The railway's relationship with the public.

The railway has a relationship with the public, not only as tourists but also as a neighbour and as a local organisation. Alan, a member of the board of directors of the railway, yet also an enthusiastic volunteer was always talking about the railway's relationship with the public, be they the railway's visitors, the railway's neighbours or the people using the Avon-Cycleway which runs alongside the railway. In observing Alan it was evident that relating to the public was very important to him. Alan said to Henry that a couple of people who were 'good with the public' would be needed in order to ensure that the crane work involved in track laying was done safely and with minimum disruption to the cyclists and walkers passing by.

The significance of these three facets can be identified as being implicated throughout the many roles, purposes and identities that the railway has vis--vis those who work on the railway site. The desire to maintain good public service has extended to the AVR's Internet site. [58] Anyone who contacts the railway by e-mail receives an automated response outlining the railway's commitment to response to all enquiries within 48 hours.

5 Railway as Tourist attraction

A phrase commonly heard on the AVR was, 'We are not a railway- we are a tourist attraction that happens to be a railway' indicating that members

are urged to see the AVR, firstly as a tourist attraction and only secondly as a railway. Alan has been in discussion with two local councils, Bath and North East Somerset and South Gloucestershire. In one discussion the council official did not seem particularly interested until Alan told him that the railway had 75,000 visitors per year. Again, Alan's passion for public relations was demonstrated here. He passionately desired for the public to share in something of what the railway was doing. There are also financial motivations to attracting tourists and James suggested that often the financial revenues were the main motivation for seeking to attract tourist rather than an altruistic desire to 'share' the railway with the public. Tim, a committee member as well as a volunteer stated that as far as the PLC board of the Gloucestershire-Warwickshire Railway were concerned the aim of the railway amounted to be able to sell enough shares in order to reach the railway's southern terminus at Cheltenham Racecourse. [59] However, he asserted that financial goals are of very little interest to most volunteers. People volunteered because they found it enjoyable. Volunteers obsessed with deadlines and tangible 'progress' generally gave up volunteering quite quickly. In James' view tourist and financial oriented goals mean very little to the average volunteer, who is happy to leave such concerns to others. In discussions with non-committee volunteers, the financial issues in running the railway were notable mostly for their absences. This emphasis on the railway as tourism is perhaps most notable for the absence of references to 'heritage'.

6 Railway as regulator

As outlined in the first part of this paper, the connections and linkages between heritage and history can be problematic.. The production and presentation of heritage has severe limitations in the extent to which it can teach about history. Those involved in the management of the railway play an important role in making decisions, not simply about which artefacts are on display, but also how these are presented to the public. This mediation may involve promoting the railway as an experience of the past, as nostalgia', as an educational exercise or as an enjoyable activity for its own sake.

When asked about the 'period' the railway sought to portray Alan said that the railway was broadly based on the 1950s Midland line. However the AVR was running a 1930 Great-Western locomotive. Alan did not claim that the AVR was a 'heritage' experience or that the railway sought to educate the public about the past. Alan's emphasis and passion was very much on providing an experience that the public would enjoy on its own terms.

Other volunteers felt that their railways should or could do more to educate people about the past rather than being simply 'gimmicks —at that quite boring ones' as James suggested. David felt that there should be greater availability of information on the different bits and pieces of railway equipment, even if this was only in the form of leaflets in the carriages for the benefit of the more enthusiastic visitor. He acknowledged that the whole set-up appears to be feasible, even if it is something that never existed in the past, for example mixing up artefacts from

different time periods or railway companies. Few visitors will be able to see that this is the case, thus the appearance of being 'historical' is more important than the set-up being an actual representation of a past time- heritage experiences can 'look real'. [60] To James the real education has come when somebody has strayed onto the railway site when the railway is technically closed to the public and he has offered them a tour of the site. This is a far more useful process as far as education is concerned than running trains at weekends. James claimed that the experience of riding on a heritage railway in comparison with the locomotive's capability was like riding in a trailer being towed by a Ferrari around a car park at 10 miles per hour.

Mark too viewed education as 'nice if you can', but ultimately the task of the railway is to give visitors a good day out. He considered having something distinctive heritage wise as very important, but ultimately people visit the railway for a day out and there is a need to compete for entertainment value with the 'next tourist attraction up the road'. All the volunteers found railway history interesting, but none appeared to possess a great belief that their role as a railway or as an individual was to educate the public. This was partly a realisation that it is difficult to achieve true historical accuracy in the presentation of the railway, but mostly it is a realisation that most visitors are not interested in railway history anyway.

If anybody tells you that they are preserving the past for future generations then they're lying, because the vast majority of people who come to the railway don't give a damn what they are travelling behind (James).

Thus there is a clear perception that most visitors to 'heritage' attractions are not really interested in history and simply want to have a good time. [61] It is not that volunteers or heritage managers are ignorant or indifferent to the history of the artefacts they work with, but a realisation of the need to bring in the public as paying customers, it is necessary to put entertainment over education. Some railways have strong public education programmes, [62] targeting the schools trips market, but most are largely indifferent to presenting the railway directly as a resource to educating people about railway history.

Tillman along with Divall and Scott outline some useful suggestions for enhancing the educational value of heritage railways, for example by offering work experience to young people [63] and opening up locomotives and signal boxes in a controlled way. [64] There was no evidence that the word 'heritage' is branded about by volunteers as a either a reason or a legitimisation of their hobby, although James said that some people did use claims of 'heritage' and preserving the past as an attempt to legitimise an 'otherwise ridiculous hobby'. In contrast the enthusiast magazine *Steam Railway* presents quite a different picture with many complaints about inappropriate rolling stock on certain heritage railways. There is also evidence that railways are benefiting strongly from the recent emergence of the national lottery heritage fund. [65] It is possible to detect a much stronger emphasis on heritage from enthusiasts, but these enthusiasts were not necessarily themselves volunteers and it is likely to be those with the strongest opinions are most likely to write in.

7 Railway as engagement with artefacts

Therefore it is clear from the interviews that the principle reason for volunteering was to enjoy the material artefacts themselves. Many volunteers used the phrase 'playing trains'. Enjoyment is had in restoring, conserving and preserving the artefacts. Desires about preserving the past per se, although existent, played a very secondary role in volunteers understanding of what they did. This is not to suggest that volunteers were unconcerned about whether the restored railways portrayed an 'accurate' representation of the past, but that they did not pretend to be doing anything other than something which they enjoyed. Narabbo called for the need to preserve railways on the basis of preserving the past, but if the prime motivation for individuals doing this was 'playing trains' then this did not really matter at all. [66] In the 1990s, a senior manager of the Strasburg Rail Road in Pennsylvania, suggested that 'playing trains' was the motivation of the railway's founders. [67] The author's personal experience is that volunteering is more of an education in engineering than in history. It is this engineering perspective that Tillman recommends that heritage railways use to attract young people to work experience schemes. [68] However, it is also evident that for certain people steam trains have a certain appeal in themselves. The material artefacts themselves embody enjoyment for certain people. 'It's earth, fire, air and water' David suggested. Mark considered that somehow the steam train was a living object that needs to be coaxed and encouraged. James found the steam engine to be a pleasing shape and hinted that part of the enjoyment is found in the possibility of being able to see the steam engine at work. Railways are preserved because of people's desire to do so — As Wilson states, '...after all, there are few if any works entitled How I became a Capstan Lathe operator or an Ace Dustbinman'. [69] The aesthetics of the technology have an important role in deciding what is presented as 'heritage' and what is not. However the heritage cynics fail to see that even the presentation of 'history proper' (as Lowenthal calls it) must also be in part related to enjoyment. This enjoyment is not only in the engagement with the artefacts but also in engagement with other volunteers. Therefore although volunteers primarily enjoyed the processes of volunteering it is not the case that this enjoyment represents an 'opposition' to the preservation of the past. A US survey found that respondents ranked museums as a reliable source about the past higher than the discourses of their families and high school history teachers. [70] The presence of artefacts confirmed a strong desire for an unmediated experience of the past which was seen as being unavailable through oral and written courses.

Being authentic objects from the past enabled the artefacts to give the respondents a stronger connection with the past, even if the period of this past is unspecified. Railway as social relations. James and Mark both spoke strongly about the 'family atmosphere' on the railways they are involved with, suggesting that much of the enjoyment was embodied in the social relations they enjoyed with other people on the railway. Sykes et al suggest that this may be part of yearning to escape from the rationalised bureaucracies and service administration that constituted modern middle class employment. [71]

Moreover the railway has a clearly defined hierarchy of skills. Once qualified, a volunteer is not only capable of doing a job —he or she will have the opportunity to perform the task. This is in strong contrast to the modern workplace. James noted that there are 'no shades of grey on the railway'- something is either right or wrong, unlike the ambiguity of most tasks in modern middle class employment where the differences between doing a task correctly and incorrectly are severely blurred. The notion of the 'family atmosphere' suggests that there is no real competition and that everybody helps each other and everybody shares the same interests. So although the hierarchy of job tasks is clearly defined, it is clear that conventional hierarchies (external of the railway site) are broken down. As James expressed, the Harley Street surgeon and the person who has never been able to hold down a job become equals on the railway. As a volunteer an individual is under no obligation to continue to work should the work become unsatisfactory. He or she can leave the railway without any adverse effects on her or his career, social status or income. [72] Nobody can be placed under any obligation to undertake any task which they do not wish to do. Paid staff, according to Neil, usually get left to do the tasks such as cleaning toilets which volunteers do not wish to do. [73] At the AVR the only paid workers work in the buffet. As Tillman observes 'Volunteers do the things that interest them and cannot be easily moved to undertake other tasks'. [74]

Thus a construction of the railway as a 'utopian space' emerges. The volunteer works (or does not work) as he or she pleases. Unlike in the workplace, social relationships can transcend conventional social mores about which occupations are able to associate with which. Unlike the workplace the volunteer is limited only by his or her ability and the amount of time he or she is prepared to invest in undertaking the tasks. However, heritage railway sites are not uncontested and free of power politics and conflict between volunteers. James and Mark both expressed annoyance at those who try to act as if they were in charge. Conflict is brought into being by when individuals attempt to destabilise the railway as an egalitarian society. There is not a rejection of 'authority' per se, but a strong resistance to those who either seek to challenge hierarchies and power networks or to make them visible. Mark did not enjoy:

The railway politics, those who perceive themselves as those who are in charge and important on the railway can sometimes be annoying- most are nice enough people on their own, but together they can be bit unbearable.

Similarly James stated:

Some of the people can be very tedious; the worst factor about anything to do with heritage railway operation or heritage locomotive restoring is the internal politics, the partisanship. I think it is somewhat pathetic the number of people who take opportunities to be desperately self-important around steam engines, whether they are volunteers or whether they are visitors.

This is not a rejection of the need to assign certain tasks to certain people and for certain people to take supervisory roles or committee positions. It is more a reaction against those who seek to give the impression that they are in control. So far this paper has considered heritage discourses and their relationships with railway history. The next section of this article demonstrates with the use of the example of Thomas the Tank Engine, how all these concerns about heritage, history and volunteer motivations converge upon and are crystallised in this single physical entity.

8 Railway as Spectacle: Thomas the Tank Engine

Rather than being a side issue to the heritage railway scene Thomas the Tank Engine is a crystallisation of the tensions between the railways as historical representation, the railway as an educational tool and the railway as a theme park of present day meaning and enjoyment. Financially, it represents a tension between the need to raise revenue, the enjoyment of the volunteers' hobby and sometimes the desire to run a credible heritage railway. Tillman found that the Middleton Railway accounted for only 27 per cent of passenger numbers and 15 per cent of passenger revenues through non-special events such as Thomas days. [75] The popularity of Thomas amongst children is enormous and despite being very quintessentially English his popularity has extended to the USA and Japan. His existence has impacted hugely on the heritage railway scene. On one hand Thomas destabilises the claims of railways to be 'heritage' (in a positive reading of the term) yet at the same time he offers opportunity to raise of revenue to preserve heritage. Thomas days at the AVR are well publicised locally. Prices can be raised and vintage buses are put on to bring people to the site. All volunteers are expected to lend a hand as these days are very busy. On the first Thomas day Alan was concerned about the huge numbers of people who visited and that they were so keen to go on the trains that they would rather stand up than wait a few minutes for seat on the next train. David believed that Thomas is what children especially think of as being a train; modern trains do not represent children's perception of trains at all. Here the distinction between the past and the present is blurred, as Thomas is contemporary literary character who happens to be a train. It suggests that Thomas has led children to perceive something which belongs to the past as part of the present.

Although the Thomas days represent revenue-raising opportunities for the railway, there is strong evidence that he is widely resisted. When the Thomas days first began there were letters in *Steam Railway* magazine calling for a boycott of these days, regarding this as sacrilege, reducing railway heritage to theme-park tourism. Dai said that volunteers at the Talylyn were not keen on their engine Peter Sam. [76] Although the faces on the front of the locomotives may be attractive to children they represent a corruption of the real thing'. James suggested that there is strong extent to which Thomas gives the game

away. Thomas days eliminate any claim that railways may have to being 'heritage' (again using the word as a positive). There is a realisation that volunteers volunteer in order to enjoy the material artefacts, but that they are prepared to use this means to raise the revenue for this to continue to happen.

In James's view, if they truly desired to recreate the past, then Thomas days would not and could not be part of this. Thomas both epitomises and destabilises the 'heritage industry'. He [77] epitomises the dilemmas of heritage because he has an aura of 'pastness' —he is a steam locomotive —yet he is very much contemporary- he is a personality. His presence on the heritage railway scene is to serve present day needs, the need to raise revenue for the furthering of the enjoyment that volunteers have of preserving, restoring and conserving steam railway artefacts. In order to save the past it is necessary to exploit the needs and opportunities the present presents. The heritage railway scene is able to appeal to children to come and 'meet' Thomas and his friends, to ride on their carriages, just as a child may wish to go to Disneyland to 'meet' and experience Mickey Mouse in 'real life'. It is perhaps a coincidence that Thomas is a steam train let alone being based on the London Brighton and South Coast Railway 0-6-0 Class E2. [78]

Although Thomas provides a good illustration of exploiting the needs of the present that rather than preserving the past, he also destabilises volunteer discourses about what railway preservation is concerned with. Although perspectives on the extent to which historical accuracy is desirable or necessary vary, it is also clear that Thomas is not what volunteers would believe the railway scene to be about. Volunteers also vary in their tolerance of Thomas, but are not generally favourable (tolerance being the operative word). It is what many commentators call a spectacle (in the most negative sense of the word)

David Ley uses the words 'dramatic and sensuous' implying a lack of any substance in these usually temporary attractions. [79]

9 Conclusions

Volunteers on heritage railways are important mediators of railway history between the artefacts and the presentation of these artefacts to the public. Firstly the material production and reproduction of heritage is bought about by volunteer's enjoyment of the material artefacts and the social relations with others. For most volunteers an interest in railway history exists but it plays a secondary role, yet not insignificant role. Secondly, these motivations mean that there is a disruption between the reasons for heritage production and the end product which is an historical railway experience. Whilst volunteers are motivated mostly by enjoyment of the artefacts and the social relations enjoyed on site the product which is sold to the public is a heritage experience.

Thirdly, volunteers resist both heritage discourses and 'unheritage conscious' commodification of the hobby. On one hand the 'obsession' with preserving the past is rejected both as a historical project and as a 'need' to preserve the past in itself. On the other hand activities such as Thomas the Tank Engine days are

resisted both on the grounds of 'heritage' (as in authenticity) and (perhaps more importantly) on the grounds of the work involved which distracts volunteers from the mainstay of their hobby (e.g. rebuilding locomotives).

Finally, motivations for preservation amongst volunteers are rooted in an enjoyment of the physical and social processes of preserving, conserving and consuming. Volunteers are not in ignorance about the popularity of the idea and rhetoric of preserving the past for future generations. However for the most part they are not concerned with actually selling the railway to the public and only a handful of volunteers appear to be highly conscious of the financial facet of the railway. If there is a new faith' in heritage, then it is evident that volunteers may be contributors to the production of the faith, but there are few indications that they themselves are believers in it. Perhaps this contradicts

MacDonald's comment that 'not only is it the tourists [who] are duped but those who perform for them'. [80] A long-standing love of railways has enabled other agencies including some of those who are on committees of heritage railways to appropriate the outcomes of these processes. It will be interesting to see over the next few years, how Lottery heritage funding impacts upon railways, as these have proven a very useful source of income for many railway projects. The heritage railway scene is one that severely destabilises the relationship between heritage and history.

It is hoped that this article will enable those who study railway history to think about the relationships between seeking to explore the history of transport and how concerns such as heritage railways fit into this. An understanding of how historical discourses of all kinds are viewed outside of academia is extremely important to the future funding of the subject. Therefore it is imperative that the ways in which sites like heritage railways are produced and interpreted are understood.

10 Appendix: Profiles of respondents cited in this article

- David, late 30s. Volunteer and self-employed railway model maker.
- James, 25. Volunteer and committee member.
- Henry, 60s. Retired. Began volunteering about 2 years ago.
- Mark, 24. Postgraduate Student. Especially interested in signalling equipment.
- Alan, late 30s. Committee member and volunteer.
- Neil, 40s. Volunteer.
- Dai, 20s. Volunteer on Talylyn Railway.
- Tim, 20s. Volunteer and committee member on Gloucestershire-Warwickshire Railway.

11 References

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