

Presidential Address

James Hervey-Bathurst

Many thanks for asking me to be your President. After over 40 years membership of the Society, it is an honour, and I look forward to deeper involvement in your activities over the next 12 months.

My interest in steam started with the railways. At about the same time as the end of steam on BR, my father bought an Aveling roller, an AF, 14 tons, slide-valve compound, formerly owned by Coventry Corporation as No 1. Stan Simmonds, who lived near Malvern, was the seller, and he drove it over.



Fig 1 Aveling & Porter No. 14077 at Eastnor.

At the time, we had a quarry on the estate at Hollybush so there was a ready supply of good roadstone, The idea was that we would repair own estate roads, also using a levelling blade on the back of a Ferguson tractor to spread the stone. I was very lucky to be able to learn to operate the roller, often on challenging hills, and to understand the demands and delights of daily working to repair water-bound roads.



Fig. 2 Aveling & Porter No.14077 on more challenging work.

Richard Willcox showed me how to drive at a commercial rate, setting the regulator just right and then not touching it while rolling back and forth on level ground. Later, on another visit, Esmond Kimbell told me to stand facing the direction of travel when reversing.

The roller needed a retube after 4 years, which my mate, Gervase Channer and I undertook after removing the fork and front roll with help from the estate JCB. We then attended the Much Marcle rally, but did not win any prizes, with the roller being in working condition i.e. not especially clean.

We then took it, thanks to Aveling Barford, with living van and watercart (acquired from Ben Taylor of Wimbish) to the 1975 NTEC 25th anniversary rally and road run at Nettlebed. After a great party, including Dr Romanes, in the confined space of the van at Appleford, we set off to go home, staying the two nights en route with friends. Near Fairford, we were overtaken by Concorde on a test flight. Gervase Channer and I were joined on the second day for the thirty miles from Cirencester to Eastnor by Frank Holl and Richard Vane. All the hydrants we had surveyed in advance worked, but Frank hid in the van when we were filling up as he knew we did not have permission. The injector failed 12 miles from home, but we had a spare which unfortunately did not work at high pressure, so we had to use the pump.

My first road engine run was with Lionel Williams who drove an Aveling tractor for Derek Hackett of Bridstow, near Ross. He was heading for Bishop's Castle, and we travelled to Dick Woolley's yard at Bucknell in the day, drawing water from roadside ponds which Lionel knew well. It went smoothly, but I was criticised for looking at the fire too often. Soon after, I was able to buy a roadman's living van from Dick. I was told it had become a "liability" with local men coming to the yard to ask if they could live in it after falling out with their wives. Luckily it was delivered without a sitting tenant.

I was keen then to have an agricultural engine for the estate and saw various engines that were not for sale or were too expensive. My father called a tractor dealer he knew in Dublin, Maxy

Henderson, who told him there as was engine in Cartons' Yard that had driven the mill there and might be available. I went to Dublin, met the owners and a price was agreed. It was a Ransomes, 1915 agricultural engine, a single on strakes and with a winch, pump but no injector, mechanical lubricator or cab, and no springs except on the stem of the seat. It had been painted over in blue, covering the Ransomes transfer, but was in full working order. I shared the purchase with a contractor and friend, Bill Jones, who went to collect it with his low loader and Gervase Channer, a lawyer who proved useful when discussing VAT at the UK border.



Fig.3 Bill Jones, Gervase Channer and myself with the Ransomes No.26839 on the A449 near Ledbury c1976.

We have not used the Ransomes as much as I expected to, but we have done some sawing and threshing, where the Gardner governor has performed well. We have recently revived the Ransomes, repairing the water tank and getting a new boiler ticket for operation at 100psi. I intend to keep it in as-found condition as it gives much pleasure as such to discerning viewers.

I briefly owned another Aveling, bought at auction and formerly owned by Mountain Ash Council, South Wales. The idea was to keep it in the collection and sell it on when another engine became available. It was duly sold, at a small profit, after a few years.



Fig.4 Aveling & Porter No.9347 on arrival.

The Wallis Advance roller came next. The Aveling was a bit too heavy for estate roads and so when Henry Netherway offered the Wallis to us, we accepted and, like the Aveling, it was driven over and delivered from Henry's yard. It was ex-Worcester Corporation, originally restored by Bishop's of Birley, and a good engine. In due course, we had stopped road rolling after the quarry had to close, and the roller only left the yard once a year to attend the Marcle rally, so it too was sold. But it will return now after it has been acquired by Martyn Lane, one of the regular yard visitors.



Fig.5 Wallis & Steevens Advance No. 8082 with James and Frank Holl.

I show a photo of it with Frank Holl and me by the front roll. Frank had driven it in preservation of road repair work and liked to come over when we were steaming it. Frank had started his career driving traction engines and trailers before World War I, working for Everton's in Droitwich. He later invested in buying his own Sentinel with a partner and founded Holl & Morgan, haulage contractors based in Worcester. In preservation days, he used to drive "WINSTON CHURCHILL" out of Eric Middleton's Yard in Hartlebury. He was delightful company, with a good sense of humour and a source of sound advice and loved visiting the yard whenever there was any steam activity. I never forget his adage: "Better to buy oil than parts." He later sold me the ex-army Merryweather fire pump we have used for many years for boiler washouts.

On a speculative trip to Staffordshire to look out for another engine, Bill Jones, my partner in the Ransomes, and I spotted a large rusting Fowler near the Foxfield Railway site. We later traced the owner, Mr Trubshaw, and were told it was "ATLAS". I was very impressed with the size of the engine, with three steps up onto the man stand, and admit that I soon dreamt of owning it.

But soon afterwards, Denis Brandt gave me a ride on his 6-ton Foden wagon when driving it from West London to Suffolk, so, recognising that owning "ATLAS" was a very long shot, I determined to look for a Foden instead. Soon afterwards, Fred Tilbury, who drove Denis's low loader, reported that there were two Fodens dumped in Geoff Maxen's yard at Cheshunt, Hertfordshire, so we arranged a visit. Mr Maxen did not seem very interested in a sale, but told me he was interested in guns. On my next visit, my father gave me a pair of obsolete pin-fired Needham shotguns to see if they could be used in part-exchange, and Geoff Maxen agreed they could and offered me the cut-down Beck & Pollitzer "C" type, which was more or less complete apart from injector and water gauge fittings.



Fig.6 Foden tractor No 12770 as found.

Mick Walters, Denis, Bill Close, Fred Tilbury and Richard Vane collected it with me on 15th March 1975. Geoff Maxen had thoughtfully partially inflated the tyres using oxygen from a cylinder. My parents concealed their concerns when we arrived at Eastnor.



Fig. 7 The Foden being loaded.

Restoration took 5 years and was greatly accelerated by the help of many good engineers and other specialists, including George Andrews, a former RAF engineer who had worked on Merlin engines, and Albert Born from the Foden heritage museum, The gift of a White's injector from Eric Middleton was a great boost. Paul Harrison helped every day when I had a week's holiday to reassemble the newly painted parts.

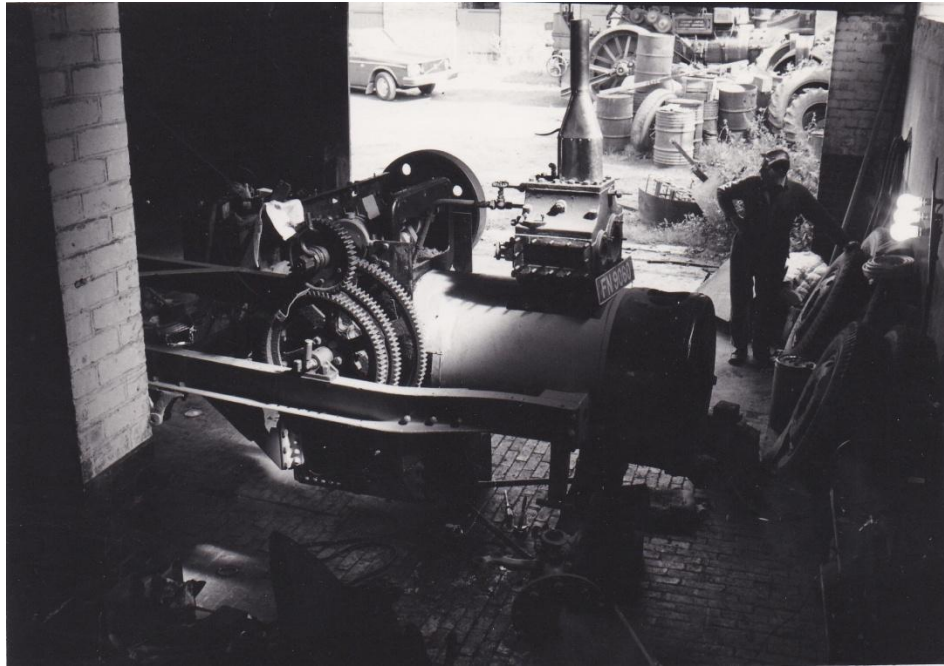


Fig.8 Restoration under way.

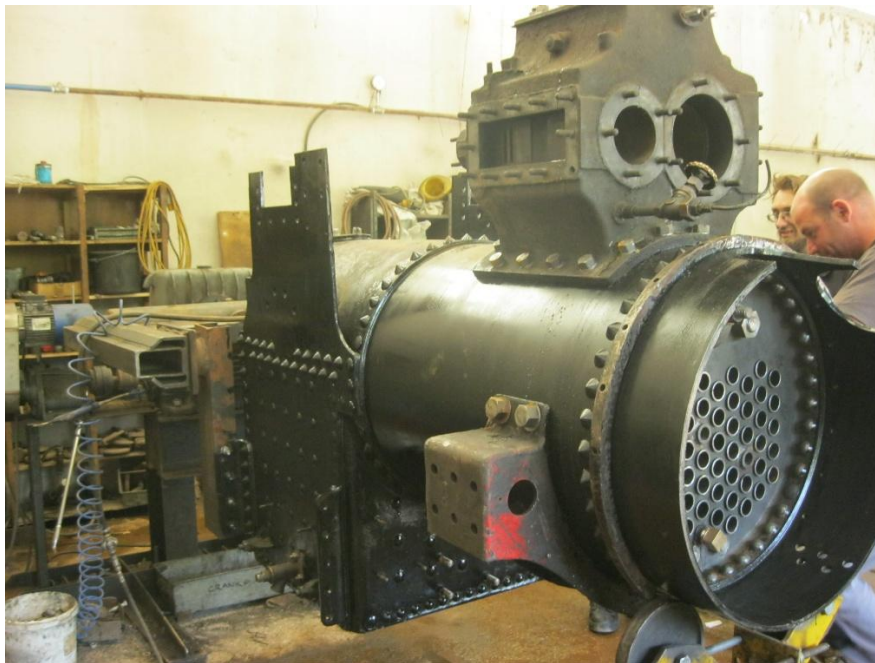


Fig.9 The repaired Foden boiler.

We entered the Foden into the HCVC Brighton run in 1980 and won the Steam Tractor class (only one other entrant) and came Third overall. Jack Hampshire met us en route as he had also advised on the project and provided drawings for a modified blast pipe for the exhaust steam heater. Beck & Pollitzer took the Foden back to Herefordshire. Over the last 45 years, we have had some good runs with the Foden, the best of which was to the GDSF and back towing the 4-ton showman's living van, a ten-hour run for which Tom Attwood did most of the preparation.

I briefly owned a Clayton portable, makers number unfortunately not known, bought to work a rack saw bench that we had bought in 1990. After we found that we could not really accommodate the bench, it went to a museum in Sussex, and I sold the Clayton.



Fig.10. The Clayton portable.

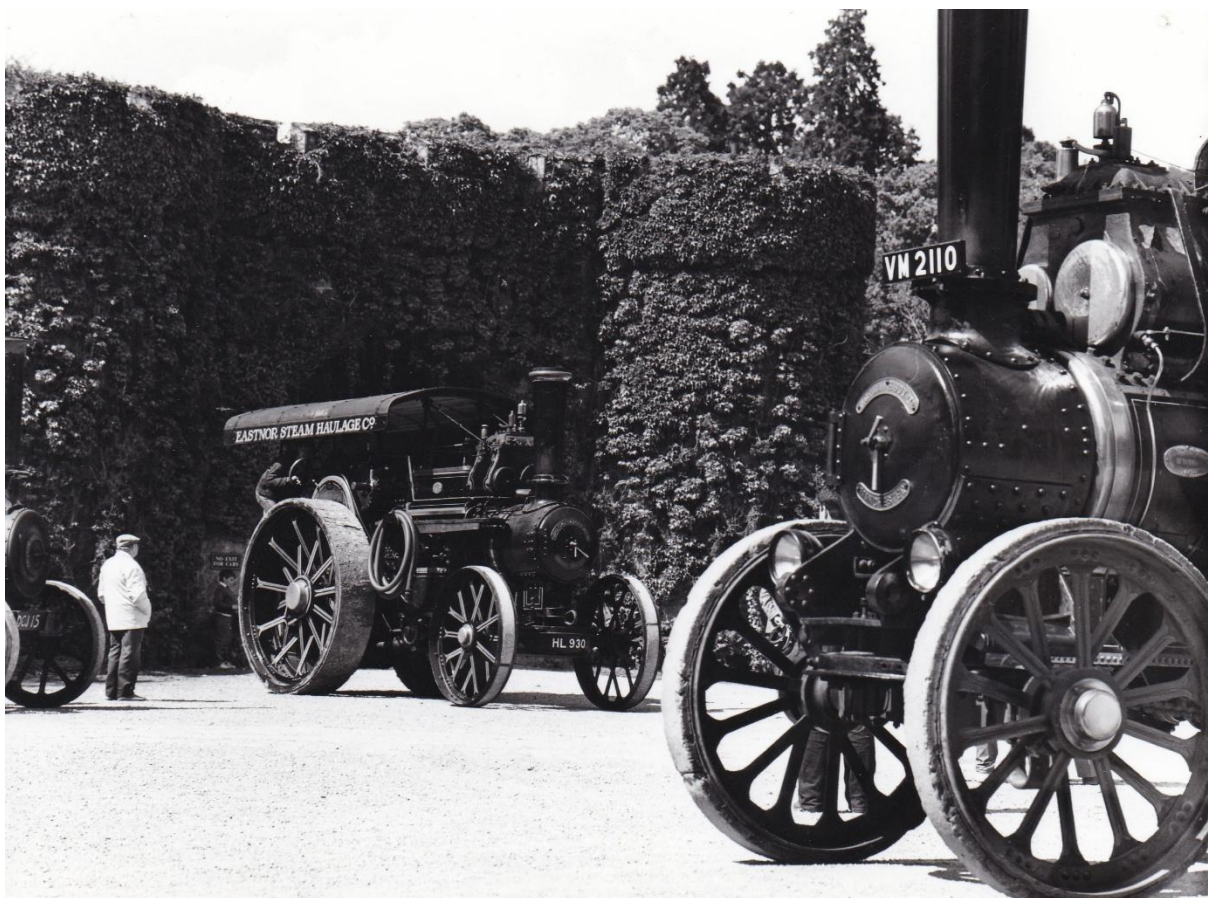


Fig.11 Fowler No.12226 "TITAN" with Fowler No.17105 "ATLAS".

Still keen to have a road locomotive to drive, Denis and I bought “TITAN”, the former Spurr Inman, Wakefield Fowler at a sale. It was distinctive as it had wooden-shod rear wheels, designed to have a better grip on the paved roads in the Yorkshire industrial towns. It ran well, but the wood started to peel off the wheels after a few miles on the road as it was supposed to have been kept wet, an easier job in the north than the south. When I saw “ATLAS” and “DUKE OF YORK” advertised by Mr Coombes in the World’s Fair, Denis agreed to buy my share of “TITAN” so I could bid for “ATLAS”, which I was able to do.



Fig.12 “ATLAS“ with trailer and concrete filled transformer.

After a visit to Jack Johnson of Banks for some modifications, “ATLAS” came to Eastnor in 1987 and was the star of the shed for the following twenty years. It featured with Fred Dibnah on one of his TV programmes and was widely travelled in our area expertly driven by Bob Hayter, our estate joiner. Some further work was needed, however, as we detected the need for a new HP valve, the phosphor bronze original having worn badly. When he cast the new one, David Ragsdale said it was normal for Fowler drivers to have a worn HP valve under their workbenches, so we keep ours there too.



Fig.13 The worn HP slide valve kept under the workbench.



Fig.14 "ATLAS" on the move with trailer.

Following the arrival of "ATLAS", Jack Johnson offered Denis and me two ex-Walter Denton of Hyde heavy trailers, ideal for Fowler Road Locomotives. The smaller one was restored, and we were able to get an obsolete transformer, filled with concrete, as a load for "ATLAS". We

had a wonderful day bringing the load back from Gloucester with Fred Dibnah, Richard Willcox and Bill Walker as recorded on the DVD by Jim Stephenson “The Big Road Atlas”.



Fig.15 “ATLAS” with wagon and van.

We loved “ATLAS”, but when it needed a new firebox and boiler barrel, it had to go. Mike Dreelan has done a wonderful job with the restoration and design of new valves to allow a freer exhaust, so “ATLAS” is performing better than ever and looks immaculate. Mike very generously sent “ATLAS” back for a return visit to Eastnor for a weekend this summer, and we all enjoyed a couple of good runs, but with only a Foden trailer full of men as a load.

I have enjoyed my steam career very much. I have come into contact with a wide variety of enthusiasts in the UK and overseas and it is wonderful to have a yard and shed full of engines to escape to when I want some shed time.

Our heritage is important, and our steam heritage is uniquely rich. I look forward to my year as President to continue the good work of the Society and previous Presidents.