

(Starts)

Can I just say to anyone who has got urgent business like a loco blowing off or having to keep the pressure up, feel free just to dash out without saying anything! (Pause . . .) That is good because I was expecting all of you to immediately dash to the door, but I am very relieved you haven't!

You heard the nice lies that Wilf told about me just then saying that I was knowledgeable and various other things that were completely untrue, but I have been in this business for some time, 1964 to be precise, which I think was when I first joined the Midland and Great Northern Joint Railway Preservation Society Ltd, merely because it had the longest name of any society that I had ever heard of. Anyway, I ended up being a Chairman of the Railway in 1973, seven days after I got married. My wife still isn't sure which I think is the most important event in my life. I have assured her it was the wedding day but I have been Chairman on and off pretty well ever since.

What I am going to try and explain to you is the reason why we came together and formed what is now known as the Heritage Railway Association, and on the European front why we formed Fedecrail and why later this year in October we are launching something called TINHATT which is the International Association of Heritage and Tourist Trains and Trams, and the thinking behind that.

Wilf was certainly right in one thing: that we do have a lot of political clout. The reason we have a lot of political clout is that we are very lucky in the UK to have huge support right across the spectrum of all social income groups and therefore we have the full support of all politicians, all political parties and, rather like motherhood and custard pie, we are regarded as a good thing – I should have said apple pie actually but . . . I think that people are pretty supportive of us and they see us as being quite a good thing.

Why is that? I think they enjoy the fact that we do maintain some important parts of what we think of as our industrial heritage. Secondly, it is certainly volunteer led. We do all employ a small core of paid employees because, when we are running as we do on the North Norfolk or the Great Central Railways 245 days a year, you need that continuity in the form, not so much of the operating staff but people doing the engineering works and doing the jobs that people do not want to do like cleaning out the lavatories.

By and large we have been fairly successful. Last year over 13 million passengers travelled on steam trains in the UK, which is actually three times as many as in the United States. I did go recently to Ogden where the Americans have an organisation called TRAIN, which is the Tourist Railway Association of America Inc. and they were very hospitable but at the end I said, "Well, we have got this conference coming up in Argentina" and I was with my two Argentine friends - Quique Diaz, who you know, Wilf, and his partner Sergio Zubieta - and a row of hands went up all wanting to ask the same question as it turned out: Which part of Mexico is Argentina in?

Now this is not a very popular topic for my Argentine friends because now whenever they ring me up I always say "Well, tell me, Quique, which part of Mexico are you calling from, because we can save money here?" Anyway that is just a quick surmise.

So why did we start anything like the HRA? I know you have HRASA but that is probably a younger organisation than the HRA. The very first railway that was run by volunteers was the Talylyn Railway when the first train pulled out of Tywyn Station in 1951; and that was the first preserved railway as we used to call it, certainly in Britain and also in the world. The second was the Puffing Billy Railway down in Australia near Melbourne, and I am pleased to say that although they have had terrible fires down there, when I rang last week to make sure that everything was all right, they assured me that luckily the fire had halted within about 200 metres of the railway there. They were saved because the wind changed and the fire went away but otherwise they were very nearly wiped out and that would have been a tragedy. That was at Belgrave which is a halfway station there. I don't know if anyone here has been there; anyone who goes to Australia really ought to pay it a visit.

Of course it was narrow gauge at the Talylyn Railway and the first standard gauge railway was what we call the Bluebell Railway in Sussex, which was taken over in 1960. That was led by a man called Captain Peter Manisty. He was a retired naval captain, a great enthusiast, and he realised that we were going to have problems, first of all negotiating with British Railways which owned all the standard gauge railway stuff at that time. He persuaded seven railways to form an association (the Association of Railway Preservation Societies – ARPS) to resolve disputes and lobby for our interests.

For example, in Norfolk we had about three groups all battling it out over the same non-existent railway line that they wanted to save and we had great problems and some people would not speak to others. The only time they would speak was once a year when we used to get together and actually run a train, and this was an occasion when I persuaded Peter Manisty to come up, bang heads together, and get an arbitration. I pretended I had not met him before so when one of the other group said, "Oh we hear this chap Peter Manisty is coming - we are going to talk to him", I said, "Oh, I don't know anything about that" and pretended that I had never met the guy before in my life and reluctantly agreed to the arbitration, which of course had been my idea in the first place. That worked a treat, so that I suppose you could say my legal background was coming into full play; but he knocked heads together and in 1969 we formed the company that is now the North Norfolk Railway which developed and has been a great success, at least I like to think so.

Subsequently I got called in to join the ARPS as it was then called. We were having a meeting on a paddle steamer out on Lake Windermere and I always remember Peter getting up and saying, "We are very short of legal advice" so they had to make do with me. In fact I had my hand put up for me because I just assumed this paddle steamer was actually choc-a-bloc with lawyers longing to join this association. I became involved and as a result I became Peter's deputy and eventually successor when he died, and we had a very close relationship. It is quite unusual when you become buddies with a bloke of a totally different generation but that is what we were.

We had a lot of fun together, but we also did a lot of hard work and we managed to get support politically and this was very important to us because not only did we get political support, we got support from our own Royal family because we would get them to come and open our railway lines or extensions. I always remember standing at a station one day when Prince Charles was cutting the tape and the editor of a magazine saying, "Well, David, you have now really arrived because you have got the Royals on board" and that was very true. Because the Royal family were there the Town Councillors wanted to be there.

In fact the last time I had the Royal family on my railway in Norfolk, which is not 1,000 miles from Sandringham, the Town Council appeared completely uninvited and earlier they had been bloody awkward because they had objected to our moving of a toilet block, and I was asked quietly by Prince Edward who was there with his newly married wife to try to find out what was going on because he had no idea who these people were. I said these are the people who are in love with lavatories and they have this odd perception that a new lavatory block will be far more attractive in drawing tourists than a steam railway. I am glad to say we have proved them wrong although I will admit I have not sat outside a toilet block selling tickets to see whether in fact they attract more people; but that gives the sort of mentality that we have to live with.

Anyway, so what do we do? I swan around claiming all the credit for what the people do, whether they are volunteers on my railway or volunteers in the association, but I am very lucky because the HRA now has 75 advisers and officers who do all the bloody work while I swan around doing nothing except having a nice job like talking to you guys. I think it is quite important that you have this team. It is a thing that distinguishes us from perhaps other forms of preservation.

For many years I was Chairman of something called The Transport Trust and we had aircraft groups, bus groups, car owners and also boat owners but to run a railway you actually need to be a team. It is impossible to run a railway single handed. The person who gets nearest to it is sitting here on my right hand side and his name is Wilf Mole, but most other people have to have help – and I know he cheats, of course, because he gets you guys to come and help – but I think Wilf will be the first to agree that actually it is very labour intensive and you need a lot of people putting their hands to the pump so to speak, and I think that is why railways in fact organise themselves rather better.

I think it has been very interesting for me that this year I have been approached by the Motoring Federation, a French organisation for vintage cars, saying "We would like your help in forming our organisation because we recognise that you are the most effective lobby" in this particular case in Europe but I think it is true also within the English Parliament.

The English Parliament has two chambers. We have a lower chamber which is called the House of Commons and the upper chamber which is the House of Lords. We find it easier raising matters in the House of Lords because they don't have quite the sort of pressures on timetable.

I may be wrong but I suspect it is more difficult for you here because I think your ruling party is a largely African party and I think that some of them, if not many of them, see railway heritage as maybe a white man's heritage rather than theirs. So you have an additional mountain to climb I think because you have got to get them to understand that this is part of their heritage as well. I do not think that will be particularly easy but when we started we were regarded as completely irresponsible youths trying to preserve scrap metal and they could not see what the value was.

Going back to my North Norfolk Railway, some gypsies acquired the freehold of the station site in Sheringham which is our base, and they would not sell it to me because I had busted them in some court case and therefore they were going to sell it to anyone except to myself.

Well, luckily I got a supermarket chain whose chief executive had been in the army with me so he said, "Look I want to buy this land, David, would you be interested in coming in with me?"

I told him the background so they got the option for this land and then gave me an option for the bit we wanted. We then had to raise money in a very short period of time and people knew that the occupants had served notice on us to quit, and suddenly the whole town thought, of course, 'My God we are going to lose 140,000 visitors a year that come here' and the whole town came through and supported our campaign to raise money.

We in fact got money from the Heritage Lottery Fund and it is probably the best thing that happened to us because ever since then the public authorities have not been able to stop throwing money at us. This actually causes its own problems and I will not go into that, but the important thing is that we were recognised and we were recognised as having clout. When I go in to meetings with Ministers I am able to say I represent 154 railways. We have a huge number of members. Each railway probably has on average about 2,500 members. We have thousands of members altogether and when I give the figure "Well, last year we carried 13 million" that is a huge figure which impresses on them the importance of this in the Tourism industry.

I was discussing this with Wilf last night – there is a difference perhaps in some of our attitudes. We are interested very largely in the heritage here and that is what I think motivates many of us as volunteers. May I explain right away I am a volunteer – I do not get paid a penny, in fact it costs me a lot of money, and the same goes for Mike Schumann at the back here. We are involved as volunteers in our railways. Now I think that we have the motivation of wanting to preserve and restore steam and run steam. We find that the public interest is more interested in steam as well, but of course what counts for the politicians is the fact that it generates money. It generates tourism and tourism brings in money.

We had a couple of surveys done on the West Somerset Railway that showed that for every £1 spent on the West Somerset Railway £10 is spent in the immediate surrounding region. I could not of course prove that – I could not say that every individual walks in and then goes and spends £10 down the road, but what did prove it was that two years ago the Severn Valley Railway, which is a fairly major railway line in the West Midlands which attracts about 240,000 visitors every year, was breached in 49 places by the floods and it closed for eight months. During that period of closure 12 businesses went belly up, 12 businesses went into liquidation because of the drop in Tourism and I think that really confirmed everything. I went to see the Vice President of the European Commission – that is the sort of Government of the European Union, a German, and I said to him "We have had this disastrous impact with floods and I want to know whether you can do anything for us." He said, "You need speak no more Mr. Morgan. You shall have three quarters of a million Euros." I have not worked out what that is in Rands but a Euro is now almost the same as the Pound so if anyone knows that – R10 million. So you have R10 million which was not enough to pay the whole thing but it was a hell of a boost and the local authority put money in – I think public authorities put in £3 million and then voluntary donors gave the rest which is about £4 million.

There has been a huge boom and it was for me a great plus because I was able to prove that there was an impact and a relationship between the benefit of tourism in the area and the railway that served it. That is also proved in eastern Germany – if any of you get the chance

you should go to the Harzquerbahn in the Hartz mountains where there is a metre gauge network (and it really is a network) run entirely by steam. The Brocken Mountain Line attracts over a million visitors every year. Now the German Government puts in about EUR 4 million into this organisation every year but the value is evident if you go down alongside the line you see the very prosperous houses, people doing well, very successful and then if you go only 10 kms away from that then you see a lot of poverty. I think it is pretty obvious, and that is the message you have to get over to your politicians and other people: that this will generate jobs, because if you generate income . . . I think we worked out in the UK that every £68,000 earned by a railway will create another job. I think it is a lesson you need to get over.

Some people thought in the early days – I remember being told "there are already too many railways in Britain, you will not survive, and in about 10 years time only 10% of you will be here." I have to say it has been completely the reverse. I do fear the day when the bubble bursts but it doesn't seem to show any sign of it here.

What I am really trying to get over to you is the value of working together. We thought that there may be too many railways in a close area, particularly in places like Wales, but actually it has proved to be the reverse because people will come a long distance to rather a remote area like Wales and, because there are several railways, it is worth their while to go because they can do not only the Talylyn, they can visit the Ffestiniog, the Welsh Highland, Llanberis, Snowdon Mountain – a lot of railways all within a very small area. Of course they are very scenic because they are going up in the mountains and for many people it is the scenery that attracts them.

The European Federation Fedecrail is actually called the European Federation of Museum and Tourist Railways; it is difficult to say when a railway ceases to be a heritage museum railway and becomes a tourist railway because they overlap. For me that is unimportant. We have just had an application to join from 12 funicular railways in Britain – they are mostly cliff railways and some of them are Victorian, they are quite old. They are at the moment regulated by the Mines and Quarries Inspectorate, which is totally inappropriate for these organisations except that they use cables, and they have joined us because they want to be able to take advantage of being regulated by the Railway Inspectorate. They have seen the value that because we are well organised that we have much more political clout. While their organisation would only have 12 members in it by joining us they join a body which will now have about 166 members and in fact has a well organised and well funded organisation.

We have benefited from the fact that some people who died have left bequests in their wills; this has given us a very solid financial base, and when occasionally we need to pay for costs of doing things then we actually are able to do that.

That is really how the Heritage Railway Association came into being. I will just briefly go on to Fedecrail and TINHATT. Fedecrail resulted from the Dutch Railways 150: they had a great parade and cavalcade in Utrecht where their railway museum is. While we were there we met a lot of Dutch colleagues and quite a lot of Germans. The result of this was that then we then had a meeting in Hamelin where we discussed the need to set up a European Federation because the European Union is constantly passing new laws and we needed to do something about it.

That resulted in the formation of Fedecrail. We have I think so far lobbied on 12 different directives and I like to think that we have been successful with every single one, even to the extent of knocking one out completely. They wanted us to paint all hot surfaces yellow – I am sure you remember, Ralph, the yellow surfaces directive. They wanted doors on the cabs, and any pipes had to be lagged. We went to Luxembourg – I went with my French Vice President at the time to persuade him it wasn't just a Brit thing - and I said to this Commissioner, "I suppose, if you had your way, every mountain would have a hand rail leading from the bottom to the top?" "Why should we do that?" he said. I said "Well, then you could pass a law requiring every climber to have a clasp attached to the hand rail before he would be allowed to climb it." "No I would not want to do that", he said. I said "Well it is a very dangerous exercise climbing isn't it?" "Yes, but one does it voluntarily"; so I said "So why should my engine drivers be forced to have lagged pipes, yellow surfaces and doors on the cabs?" He said, "Well to get their payment, they are forced to go and do this dangerous work." I said "All my drivers are volunteers, so tell me the difference between that and a mountain climber?" and I have to say he accepted the argument; and that was the end of that.

I also would say that I was able to point out that in some cases you need to be able to feel the pipe, albeit through a cloth, to test whether the water or steam is going through or whether there is an air block so that it actually would have been dangerous to have lagged some of the pipes and the same with the doors. If you have doors on the cab side, that may restrict escape in the event of some burst gauge or something else, so in fact I was able to persuade him that it was dangerous.

What was interesting was the motor manufacturers association of the whole of Europe had been lobbying against this for ages because of the exhaust stacks going up behind the cabs of trucks, and they totally failed. I got a very nice donation from them as a thank you for having knocked out a directive they found impossible. So a slightly quirky hobby, if you might call it that, actually can do other people a lot of good.

We are not competitors with each other.

My competition is the zoo or the theatre or the football match or the shopping mall. They are the competition that we suffer in the UK and I suspect that is true for you because you are not so close to each other that you are going to compete with each other. Possibly in the purchase of locomotives or some particular piece of equipment that could be the case but we have found that co-operating with our colleagues on other railways has proved extremely beneficial. We have locomotive exchanges and, of course, as we get to know them we trust them more and we have regular meetings with the HRA three to four times a year and with just Fedecrail once a year, but I would urge you that you should follow suit because I think every country which I have persuaded to do this has found it has worked.

Wilf, thank you very much indeed. I am very happy to answer questions but I fully understand that with the sun shining there are probably better places to be.

Thank you very much.