



# INSIDE MOTION

News and Views from the  
TYNESIDE SOCIETY of MODEL and EXPERIMENTAL ENGINEERS  
No. 10 Special Edition mid-November 2020

## Jim Stephenson



It is with great sadness that we record the passing of Jim Stephenson, who died on the 5<sup>th</sup> November. Jim was a stalwart member of the Society for over fifty years and its Chairman for over ten, a prolific and skilled model engineer and a friend and mentor to many. He will be sorely missed, but not forgotten. This IM Special Edition is TSMEE's tribute and thankyou to him, and a celebration of a life well-spent.

### From Steve Lowe

I knew Jimmy for over 50 years.

When I joined TSMEE as a junior member, Jimmy was our section leader and a frequent runner on the track with his Jubilee tank loco. Always friendly and approachable he was immediately someone I looked up to, and of course he worked on the footplate at Gateshead Shed, so in my eyes he was very much one of the elite !!

It wasn't long before I was spending many happy hours driving that engine and his newly finished 9F, and as time went on, the social side of TSMEE developed, with Jimmy being the accepted "leader" of the band of younger members. I well remember being led astray by Jim and introduced to drinking in Newcastle, and along with the likes of Stuart Laidler, Dave Bradwell, Bob and Pete Johnson and more, the friendships and the social bonds developed.

Jimmy left the railway in the early '70s and after a while moved to Willington where he took his first steps into the model engineering business, and again the frequent trips we all made down to his place to help him get established also included the mandatory visit to the pub to put the world to rights.

I myself made a career move in 1975 and started on the footplate at Gateshead Shed. Jimmy was always referred to as "Rocket" (obviously) and he was remembered with much affection by Drivers and Secondmen alike and had been a "good mate" to work with. I never ever heard a bad word said about him ! I would often mention Driver's names to Jimmy and the tales were legendary and typical of that unique occupation.

Life took its twists and turns and Jimmy continued with his modelling, both professionally and for himself, completing a vast number of models, both large and small, culminating in the two 5" gauge 9Fs which were a magnificent epitaph to his model engineering skills.

Jimmy had a vast knowledge and experience which he gladly shared with other members, and it was all achieved with quite modest equipment such was his ability to get on with the build, making tools was not one of Jimmy's priorities.

Jimmy always had the Society at heart and worked tirelessly over the years to enhance and improve our facilities at the Park, ultimately serving as Chairman through the building programmes for the new Clubhouse and the extended railway infrastructure we all now enjoy.

Jimmy was a great friend and a stalwart member of the club. We will all miss him - driving the grass cutter, serving the tea, standing in the Signalbox, the jokes and the banter, but most of all because Jimmy simply was TSMEE !!!

### **From Philip Work**

I had known Jim for many years before joining TSMEE. He, like myself, had been a former British Rail employee. We met pursuing our hobby on a visit to TSMEE in the 1960's, and also at the home of the late Bill Longstaffe in Sherburn, Durham.

Jim was always a jovial character, a prolific builder of locomotives (some 70 ) and always available to give advice to a novice newcomer to our hobby. He spent many hours of his free time to both Committee and background work at the track. During the building of the ground-level track he would be in charge of the cement mixer, and with myself cutting sleepers to size. He loved driving the grass-cutter, and I hope in his resting place there will be plenty of grass and places of peace where he can tell his tales of the life below, and, most importantly, the kettle will always be full and on the boil. A sad loss to myself and all at TSMEE.

### **From Lindsay Oliver**

One of my earliest recollections of Jim Stephenson was when visiting Blackgates Track, West Riding Small Locomotive Society, being the official name, back in the mid 1960's when we used to visit for their open weekend held in early June each year. Most people arrived on the Friday evening and camped there until the Sunday, everyone either slept in the big marquee or in their cars.

It was one big adventure for a small boy like me and of course great fun being able to drive engines in the dark. Jim being a fashionable Teddy Boy at this time would arrive from Newcastle with his brother in his dark green mini-van, which they usually slept in. Being early June it was often quite cold at night, I remember Jim telling me it was so cold one night that they steamed their engine up, dropped the fire and loaded the engine into their van to keep themselves warm.

True to form they had spent most of the evening in the local pub !

Jim was quite a character in his day and will be greatly missed

## **From Richard Sharp**

As many probably know, Jim did a magnificent job on my 120-year old 5" gauge NER 4-4-0, restoring it to full running order following decades of neglect by the previous owner. The work was carried out gradually, between 2000 and 2017, and we enjoyed many conversations, both in person at his workshop and on the telephone.

In the face of health problems which would have daunted many other men, Jim steadily insisted that he wanted to complete the job on my engine. His cheerfulness and courage were inspirational, matched only by his ability as an engineer.

The glorious result which Jim eventually accomplished bears witness to his great skill, and my locomotive (which must return to Exhibition Park just as soon as we are clear of this pandemic) carries a second works-plate to ensure that Jim's achievement in restoring it to life is never forgotten.

## **From Norman Blackburn**

What can you say about Jimmy ? - "I've na Idea" ...

He was also a prolific builder of O gauge models for Rolling Stock in North Shields as well as all the live steam that he built for various customers. He once told me that it does not take much longer to build two models at the same time as one. Hence my building of two Highland Railway "Lochs".

He not only built for customers in this country. A 7¼" "Bridget", track and carriages were produced for export to Japan. He was also a boiler maker for Don Young.

I remember assisting him with checking two Jubilees prior to their steam test at the Track. On opening the regulator nothing happened except for a slight hissing sound, the wheels did not move. After about half an hour of investigating, time to put the kettle on ! Fire dropped and left to cool down. Got the second loco in steam. It was then that as we moved it into forward gear we realised that was what was wrong with the first loco. - nothing happens in mid gear ! Put the kettle on !

It is surprising that along with building 5" gauge he also had an interest in N gauge. After selling his workshop he dismantled his N gauge layout from the attic and rebuilt it in the workshop. In less than a year he had a new fully built N gauge layout filling the space of his old workshop with 4 main line tracks to play trains on.

## **From Peter Newby**

When I first joined TSMEE and started coming to the track, Jim was the first to make me very welcome. This was just after the previous administration took the Club to near extinction. He had taken over as Chairman and, with Ian and Linda, brought the Club back to life.

Jim was always most generous with both his help and advice - when he knew I was building Martin Evans' 2-6-4 tank engine, he gave me many laser cut parts thus saving me many hours of tedious work.

All the time I have known Jim he was never in good health and not able to do the more heavy manual work, but I do vividly remember Jim and his cement mixer guiding everyone in mixing cement for the ground-level track.

When we were building the new Clubhouse, Jim was there giving both practical advice – from his building experience gained from work before joining the railway - as well as encouragement. I am so glad he was able to see the Club come from a very low place when he first became Chairman up to the standard we now enjoy.

I think we all will miss Jim standing in the Club kitchen making tea, riding around on the lawn mower cutting the grass, or standing in his Signal Box. Rest in peace Jim – you will be sorely missed.

### **From Stu Davidson**

When I joined TSMEE in 1972 {I can't believe it is forty two years ago} I was introduced to many of the members and one of the first was Jim Stephenson. It was obvious from the outset that he had a great deal of knowledge about steam locomotives, especially when he told me he had been a fireman on the full size ones. He recalled some of his experiences on the footplate but unfortunately the passage of time has erased them from my memory. As I recall Jim left the railway about 1973 having decided to set up a model-making business.

As time passed I recall seeing Jim driving his 3½" gauge Juliet together with a 3½" gauge "Evening Star". If I remember correctly he also had a 3½" gauge Jubilee tank locomotive and all of these engines had been built by him. I soon discovered that Jim and I had a common interest in copper boiler construction and in the mid 1970's I used to go to his workshop and help him with some of the construction and silver soldering operations. This was all part of his commercial model-making activities.

During this time I came to know Don Young who, as many of you will know, used to design model steam locomotives, and many of his design drawings were published in Model Engineer. On one of my visits to Don's home on the Isle of Wight he said he was wanting someone to make boilers and I mentioned Jim's name. Things moved on from there for Jim with his commercial boiler making activities and, as they say, "the rest is history". I also recall driving down to the West Country to meet Keith Downer who was the owner of a firm called Loco Parts. I had done some work for Keith but as I had a full time job and wasn't able to devote as much time to making boilers for him as he needed, so enter Jim ! We stayed at Keith's home for a night or two, consumed one or two pints at the local hostelry and then drove home. During the following months Jim made his own way with Don and Keith on the boiler front, and other activities (marriage) in the late 70's took me in a different direction for a while. Latterly Jim built two 5" gauge 9F's.

As many of you will know, Jim was our Chairman for many years and we shall all miss seeing him in the signal cabin at the track, or making tea at the kitchen counter. I have just given brief details of some of my memories of early times with Jim and I am sure others will have their own stories. Rest in peace old friend.

### **From Jim Scott**

Sad news indeed. I respected his advice which resulted from a lifetime of experience. When we get back to 'normal' his presence at the top table will be greatly missed by that little group in particular. His involvement with TSMEE is considerable and will be long remembered.

### **From Don Fosket**

Very sad news. Jim was a very knowledgeable person and a first class engineer.

### **From Eddie Yarwood**

Very sad news. I had a lot of time and respect for him. He will be sadly missed.

### **From Linda Nicholls**

A quiet, quite private person, my memories of Jimmy are like photographs – sitting in the Clubhouse with a group of members around him, serving tea and coffee in the kitchen, sitting on the ride-on mower cutting the grass with our dog Millie chasing him around, directing public running, initially from the Station platform and latterly from “Jim’s Signal box”. When we return to the Club, these will be enormous holes where Jim should be.

In his time as Chairman of TSMEE, Jim oversaw massive changes - from the installation of the ground-level track and public running to the building of a new Clubhouse and Workshop.

He had a total dislike of public speaking at any social event, and had to be coerced into standing at the front. But, in his own way, Jimmy encouraged and supported others to fulfil their potential for the benefit of the Club.

Jim’s leadership made TSMEE the successful Club it is today. He will be a massive miss to us all.

### **From Brian Nicholls**

I’ve known Jimmy for a number of years, can’t remember how many, but a lot. He was a font of knowledge to me.

I will always be extremely grateful for a very important event he was instrumental in - namely resurrecting the Club from almost certain demise due to the actions of two individuals. His intervention and determination had them removed and since then, under his leadership, the Club has flourished until it is now a great place for the enjoyment of like-minded members. I will miss his presence greatly.

### **From Ian Spencer**

I still remember the first time I met Jim. It was 1961, and I came to the track wanting to join TSMEE. Jim was there in his B.R. steam fireman’s bib and brace, driving a 5” gauge “Netta” belonging to Jack Hall. He gave me a ride around the track, and we had the first of many chats about model engineering and working on the big railway. After a few visits, the conversation came round to what would be a good first loco to build. Jim invited me round to his workshop to see his near complete “Juliet”, and it was as a result of these discussions I began construction of a “Netta”. Jim and one or two others gave much assistance on a steep learning curve, and the result was a rough but serviceable locomotive which gave me many hours of pleasure.

Those early years at TSMEE were great fun. Jim quickly became a good friend. Engines seem to be running every time, there were portable track outings where Jim always took a lead, and the banter amongst the younger members (yes, there were quite a few of us under 21 at that time), was always good-natured and amusing. I could never have imagined that over 50 years later, he and I would still be meeting regularly at the Park.

Jim’s passing leaves a void in the life of the Society and in my group of friends. Thank you Jim, for everything we have done together.

## From your Editor

There can be no doubt at all that TSMEE in 2020 is, in large part, a result of Jim's leadership during his tenure as Chairman. When I joined four years or so ago, much of the infrastructure we all enjoy was already in place, and the further improvements programme has continued since. For me, the icing was the Garden Railway track which re-kindled an interest that had lain dormant for over two decades. Knowing something of Jim's model engineering background, it was never clear to me exactly what he thought about the little engines, but he always seemed to display a kindly tolerance toward these activities. That he occasionally referred to it as "Toy Town" never upset me in the slightest, as it was always said with a twinkle in his eyes.

Along with the multitude of memories recorded here (and many more elsewhere I'll warrant), there couldn't be a finer tribute or legacy than "the Club". Thank you Jim.



Enjoying some sunshine and socially-distanced company in July this year

[picture credits – front-piece Jim Scott, end-piece Mike Maguire]

## Contact information

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**Headquarters and Multi-gauge Track – Exhibition Park, Newcastle upon Tyne NE2 4PZ**

## Picture Gallery



At the Park, ca 1963



The Likely Lads

Left – with Arthur Jay, Geoff Rogers and Brian Cook

Right – with Geoff Rogers

[credit – Linda Nicholls, possibly taken by George Jennings]



On the footplate of ex-LNER Q7 No.63460 at Lanchester, September 1963,  
heading a RCTS-SLS rail-tour

[credit - Norman Blackburn]



In the workshop with nearly-completed 9F “Evening Star”

[credit – Norman Blackburn]



Richard Sharp's NER 4-4-0 which Jim fully restored – an enduring testimony to his skill

[credits – Richard Sharp, Norman Blackburn]



Some more examples of Jim's handiwork

Left - 3½" gauge Jubilee and 2½" gauge S160 US Austerity

Right - 3½" gauge Clarkson Princess

[credit – Norman Blackburn]

Happiness was ... Team-work ...

A couple of Working Parties take a break



[credit - Linda Nicholls]

... or Mowing Grass, or Mixing Concrete ...



[credit – Linda Nicholls]

... or Signalling Trains, or Showing How ...



[credit – Linda Nicholls]

... or driving his 9Fs ...



[credits – Stu Davidson, Norman Blackburn]



... or simply being Jim



[credits – Norman Blackburn, John Rowley]