

HAMPTON AND KEMPTON WATERWORKS RAILWAY

"I want to drive a steam train " was the comment made to me by Brother Phil Pond a few months ago. Most brothers in our Circle will know I am 'vaguely interested' in railways, especially as I volunteer at one in West London. Anyhow, I was able to arrange a day's 'driving' course at my railway, which is the Hampton and Kempton Waterworks Railway, Snakey Lane, Hanworth, Middlesex, TW13 6XH, which is near Kempton Park racecourse .



So the big day arrived the 11th May 2024 when Phil, wife Mary and myself arrived on site at about 8.00 am. Phil was introduced to his mentors for the day, drivers Dave Wheeler and Gerry Scofield and fireman Steve Hayto on our 1903 Glasgow built locomotive (named Darent after a south east London river). I had stressed to Phil that the full experience was not simply arriving, getting on the loco and driving. It would be starting from scratch. For example: lighting up, cleaning, oiling, polishing and learning the route. So, to give him his due, Phil was immediately in at the deep end on one of our diesels, collecting coaches, driving our circular line and learning the variations in gradient, where to whistle and where to toot.

Then it was to the steam shed and to actually light up, using the same techniques we would use for a home fire - kindling, small logs then adding a few lumps of coal to finally build up a full bed of hot coal. The grate on this engine is about 3ft square and bigger than a fireplace! The boiler already full of water, with about 50 gallons had to be gently warmed, then heated and finally brought to an intense heat (when working hard the temperature in a 'firebox' can reach up to 1000 degrees Fahrenheit!)

So whilst waiting to raise steam it was round the loco filling all the assorted pots and bearings that required lubrication, cleaning and polishing etc ... no grubby engines here thank you!!



At about 10.30 am, Phil, under the careful guidance of our crew, was able to couple up to the coaches and move them to our station to pick up Mary his passenger. He actually proceeded to fire and drive the train.

This experience was a FULL one when you learn all the techniques and crafts needed to be able to pull a passenger train safely....I am proud to say that Phil excelled at all he was taught. He learnt quickly and within only a few circuits was proving a capable and safe train driver and actually enjoying it! Aside from Mary, one of his daughters and two grandchildren were able to join him for the day and were all transported safely around our line with Phil in charge of the loco.

It should be noted that ALL passenger trains must have a guard who is in charge of the whole train. I was the only person available to learn this task this day. So, two trainees on one train! (I do not drive or fire my trains. My specialisation is working on the rails for the trains to run on).

All too soon, on this warm sunny day, lunchtime arrived and Phil was able to join his family in our picnic area whilst the regular crew stayed and kept an eye on the loco and train. We have to ensure the fire is kept going, there is sufficient water in the boiler and the brakes are still on!

After a few more circuits it was time to put all 'toys' away, the carriages back in their shed, drop the fire, clean out the ashpan, empty the boiler of steam, and push the loco back into its shed to simmer and cool down ready for its next outing ... in this case the next day when the new crew would find the loco still warm from its outing the day before and therefore quicker to light up and raise steam.

Phil made it clear, the family had thoroughly enjoyed the day out, his expectations had been exceeded and his ambition fulfilled. My thanks to my fellow volunteers at the railway and to Phil for trusting us to provide the day's entertainment .

This experience is available to anyone over the age of 16 and will usually be on Saturdays as we run public services on Sundays. If any Brother has a yearning to realise a boyhood ambition to be an engine driver or wish to volunteer at Hampton and Kempton Waterworks Railway, speak to me or send an email to selsdonsteamrail@gmail.com .



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