

The 20th Sacrewell Steam rally – 16th/17th July

Sacrewell is a farm park on the north-west extremity of Peterborough, close to the Great North road, which was set up in the last quarter of the twentieth century for recreational purposes and to educate and instruct young visitors in the ways of animals and farming methods. It is surrounded by farm land and, as one would expect in that part of the world, fairly level and generally open countryside.

This is the twentieth year in which the steam rally has been held; it started as a joint operation between the Farm Centre and **Peterborough Society of Model Engineers**, who are responsible for all the operation. Two of the original leading organisers were Doug Crampton and Roy Mosley; sadly Roy died a little while ago, but Doug was there this year, administering the details from his pitch on the edge of the field.

The Peterborough Society are currently without a track, at present being in the advanced stages of negotiation for a new site within the bounds of the City. It was obvious that the Society put a lot of effort into the Sacrewell weekend; not only did they attract the many participants and looked after their needs, but they manned a stall selling many engineering bargains from a tent on the field at incredibly good prices, as well as a static display of models in one of the farm barns, alongside a complementary display of the work of the **Peterborough Area Model Boat Club**. It was ascertained that the Battle of Britain Flight was making a visit to a show elsewhere in the country during Saturday afternoon and they agreed to pass over Sacrewell at the appointed time on their way to their main display. Not only did a Spitfire fly over the ground, but it performed a couple of circuits, flying low in a tight circle, so that it could be seen in many aspects against an almost cloudless sky. That brought back memories, not only of the magic roar of the Merlin engine, but also having witnessed those planes in action during the Second World War, while living in Surrey.

At the entrance to the Farm Centre is a large fairly level field with its grass well cut and with water and electricity laid on. It is sometimes used for parking caravans and is ideally suited to the task of catering for a weekend of steam, for which many people bring their own caravans or camper vans. Fortunately the weather had held fair at least for the few days leading up to the rally, so the unusual traffic in the field did not cause any unwanted ruts.

The Sacrewell site is neatly laid out, with a closed loop of concrete road surface in good condition, which is normally used only by farm traffic, thus making the site a safe area for small children to wander without fear of interaction with traffic. During the afternoons that roadway was used for a 'road run', so typical of many miniature traction engine meetings. As if designed to make things more interesting, there is a number of hazards to challenge the engines: it is not by any means a level surface, with one good 'pull-up' from the area of a watermill to the perimeter of the site, and a number of rather challenging speed bumps which must be respected if the drivers' fillings are not to be shaken out of their teeth!

Mention of a water mill as a diversion for those attending the rally needs some clarification: the original farm on the site had a working water mill which, like others all over the country, was used to mill the grain for the whole local community. Miraculously the mill has survived the ravages of time, although it had fallen into bad repair in recent decades. It has been recently restored to working order with the aid of a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund and is used to demonstrate the principles of water power to the hordes of young visitors who use the place for educational purposes. The mill building also contains visual aids to demonstrate the principles of water power and other aspects of the processes used in agriculture. Visitors

are also apprised of the old way of life and the sharp practices of the milling fraternity in the days before weights and measures legislation.

Now it so happened that the 'road run' was timed for 2.30 pm and that coincided with another attraction on the site: the 'Lamb National' race for the non-coal-burning live exhibits with wooly lagging. That naturally drew the crowds who, after the race, found themselves in the 'flight path' of a load of miniature traction engines. So the models had, by a good chance, a large captive audience. The families out for a day's enjoyment at the Sacrewell centre found themselves in the middle of an unexpected spectacle and the timing could not have been better. The area around the mill and the other main farm buildings was thronged with spectators who were, perhaps for the first time, witnessing road transport as it used to be in the time of their great grand-parents, albeit mainly at one third full size. Eventually the crowd positioned themselves sensibly lining the route of the road run, a man with a red flag giving the warning to keep the middle of the road clear and leading the first of the engines past the mill at the bottom of the most challenging gradient along the route.

So, to those taking part in the rally: people had brought their engines from a radius of as far as eighty miles, although it was noticeable that the majority joining the core of Peterborough members were from the neighbouring counties of Rutland, Leicestershire and Northamptonshire, with a few from Lincolnshire as well. One thing which was remarkable was the predominance of the designs of Foster engines, slightly ahead of the Burrell numbers and mainly at 4 in. scale to boot. Perhaps that says something about the designs of Bill Newcombe and Roy Mosley. Another notable thing was that most of the engines had actually been made by those taking part in the rally; from this sample the hobby is in good shape, with owner-builders being the order of the day.

On the second day, before everybody dispersed, as a result of a ballot of all the participants, two awards were made, sponsored by the late Roy Mosley. They were presented by his son Chris. They were:

Best engine in action in the show: Chris Gunn for his 6 in. scale Garrett 2 cylinder compound.

Best exhibit, not in steam: David Dean for his 5" gauge 'Speedy' tank engine.

The number of participants this year was slightly ahead of the original line up of nineteen years ago and they included all those running on the site over the weekend, as well as some models on display in their unfinished states. I shall concentrate on many of the thirty which were in steam, in particular those taking part in the run.

Starting with the Foster collection, Tony Baldwin's 4 in. scale Double crank compound *Shirley B* was a good example of Roy Mosley's design. It certainly pulled well and was, like so many others, finished in red livery.

As a contrast Eddie Lancaster from Northamptonshire had built his 4 in. scale agricultural tractor as a simple, to Bill Newcombe's design with components from LSM (Live Steam Models). Eddie reminded me that the name *The old Gel* is Northamptonshire dialect for the lady of the house, although I have no doubt that others from the surrounding counties would claim the phrase as their own.

Crossing the border into Leicestershire, another single crank Foster 4 in. scale agricultural tractor had been built in 2000/2 by David Holland of Kettering, again from LSM materials.

Named *JoJo*, it has been worked quite hard and has just returned from a significant overhaul in the shops. - Perhaps one of you traction engine aficionados will inform me what is the road equivalent of the railway terms 'general repairs' and 'intermediate overhaul'.

Yet another 4 in. scale Foster single cylinder agricultural tractor had been finished only last year by Pat Franks and named *Puffer*. Thus in its first full season of operation, Pat had it well under control. Most people were running on Welsh Steam Coal which they had brought with them and there was little evidence of engines having serious problems in this sort of service. Discussing the issue of fuel with several of the participants I sensed that there was consensus that the supply of this material gave most the confidence required. The high volatiles content, low ash level and high ash fusion temperature makes for reliable steaming, with little tendency to clinker during a day's running.

As a contrast Peter Spikings from Northampton ran his 3 in. scale Foster compound showman's engine, which he had scaled down from Roy Mosley's design. Ingeniously he was able in a few minutes to remove completely the canopy, along with dynamo and all other distinguishing components to transform the engine into agricultural format.

Back to the 4 in. scale Fosters, when Doug Crampton could get time off from his administrative duties, he was able to enjoy his single crank simple, finished in green livery as an agricultural tractor. He sublet the running of the engine to younger, more agile hands and sat back and enjoyed it, ably driven by Luke Geeves.

All the way from Chalfont St Peter in Buckinghamshire, Malcolm Saytch brought his newly finished Foster GP tractor, again a single cylinder Bill Newcombe model. Malcolm has been a regular attender at most of the Sacrewell rallies in the past.

From much nearer to hand, father and son team Kevin and Michael Moss had brought their 4 in. Foster single cylinder agricultural tractor from Bourne and Spalding in Lincolnshire. This engine had been completed in 1997 and is still in fine working condition.

John Clawson from Flatley in Leicestershire completed the Foster roster, yet another example of the agricultural single cylinder model. This green example had been built between 1991 and 1995.

We now move on to the clutch of Burrells, surely the most common maker of the traction engine world. Paul Salmon had taken six years to build his double crank compound road locomotive *Princess Polly* which performed well around the circuit. This is a 4 in. scale model.

Another 4" scale compound named *Albert* was brought by Phil Weston of Market Harborough. Phil has been a regular attender at almost all the Sacrewell rallies.

Again, a 4" scale two cylinder compound had been finished in 2013 by Mark Harris of Chatteris.

As a contrast, a pair of single crank compound Burrells had been brought by two friends Arthur Sosby from Market Harborough and Tom Pywell from Leicester. In matching red livery they were named *Gemini 2* and *Gemini 1*. Normally they could be found not far from each other.

Probably the oldest engine on the field was a 3” scale Burrell to Plastow design built with a copper boiler in 1980 by Peter Nixon from Newton in Derbyshire.

The Burrell contingent was completed by Colin Alexander from Middlesex with his 4” scale single cylinder agricultural tractor called *Warrior Queen*, which he had finished in 2007.

No traction engine gathering would be complete without at least one Fowler and Peterborough SME’s chairman Richard Cannell did not disappoint, with his 3” scale A3 single cylinder agricultural tractor. Richard did admit that he was feeling short of water on the long road run and had to take a short cut home! (I have heard an old proverb that *A good engine driver never passes water.....!*)

Representing a fairly uncommon prototype was Ross Gibbons’ 4” scale Ruston Proctor single cylinder g.p. locomotive, built jointly with Malcolm Gibbons, both of Bedford and finished in 2011, painted in green livery.

Familiar to ME readers will be Chris Gunn’s 6” scale Garrett 4CD tractor named *Edward*, which he finished in 2015 after five years’ building; for this, its first public outing it had to come the short distance from Kettering.

And so to the other road-going locomotives, very much to the Editor’s Taste(!) was Roger Kightly’s 6 in. scale Foden C type lorry. When Roger is driving this, a casual spectator might be forgiven for thinking that he had been shrunken to fit inside the cab! Ingenious positioning of the driving seat enables him to look through the windscreen.

Graham Sadler, resplendent in a bowler hat, dwarfed his 3” scale Atkinson uniflow tractor. Finished in Worksop in 2014, it runs smoothly and quietly and is currently being described in *Engineering in Miniature*.

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