
Local Artist Inspired to Create Painting of Unique Standard Gauge Engine



You may know Abingdon artist Bruce Bignold for his quirky, illustrative pen and watercolour renditions of Oxfordshire buildings both of his hometown and those around Oxford City. He has however been inspired to create a collection of paintings of locomotives housed as part of the country's National Collection at Didcot Railway Centre. One of the engines, No 5 'Shannon' given the unofficial name 'Jane' back in 1878, was once used by the Wantage Tramway Company and Bruce's mother Betty Hurle used to travel in the train it pulled.

Born in Wantage in 1923, Betty's father Isaac 'Burt' Hurle was a local newspaper seller and ran the Wagon and Horses public house in Wallingford Street opposite where Motorlux is now located; her mother Elizabeth worked at Arbury's, the haberdasher in Wantage's Market Place. Her parents had married in 1914 before her father, who was in the London Rifles went to serve in World War 1. Betty used the train regularly to get to London from Wantage Road Station when going to visit her Uncle Harry who lived near Holborn. She would also use the train to connect with the service taking her down to Cranmore in Somerset to visit her other relations.

“Mum used to tell us tales of her travels on the Wantage Tramway,” says Bruce. “She always said the regular train driver was a bit of a character. It has been enjoyable bringing a painting of the engine to life, knowing that my mother was a regular user of the Wantage Tramway Company service.”

The engine which is the focus of Bruce’s painting was built in 1857 by George England and Co of New Cross, London, for a Capt. William Peel the owner of the Sandy and Potton Railway; it cost £800. Given that £100 in 1857 is now equivalent to around £14,171.36 today that would have been quite an investment. The ‘Shannon’ is only one of five remaining George England engines remaining and she is the only standard gauge one; the other four are all narrow gauge and were built for, and are still with, the Ffestiniog Railway in North Wales, where three are still operational.

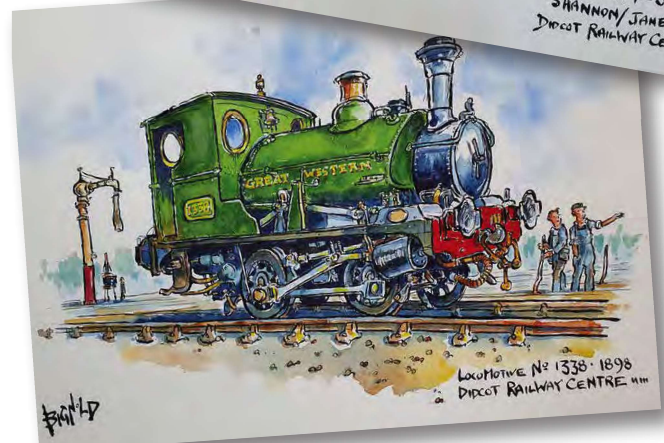
By 1862, ‘Shannon’ had been sold to the London and Northwest Railway, numbered 1104. Sadly, the engine was only used for a two-week trial on the Cromford and High Peak Railway in Derbyshire before she left to become a Crewe Works shunter. By 1872 the engine had been renumbered and given the name ‘Shannon’. By 1878, ‘Shannon’ was sold to the Wantage Tramway Company for £365 8s 1d, having moved under her own power all the way from Crewe to Oxford then on the GWR lines to Wantage Road Station. Once in Wantage, renumbered to No 5, the engine was given the unofficial name ‘Jane’. Whilst in service on the Tramway, although given new cylinders in 1882, she did not require any further heavy repairs until she was taken into the Swindon Railway Works in 1896 and again in 1921. Further works were undertaken over the years in both Bristol and Swindon when in 1941 ‘Jane’ was given a works plate carrying the words ‘Registered by GWR No. 209’.

The Wantage Tramway was a two-mile tramway carrying passengers and freight between Wantage and Wantage Road Station in Grove. The line was cheaply built in 1873 and was located parallel to the Besselsleigh Turnpike, now the A338. The tramway closed to passengers in 1925 and goods traffic in 1945 when the track was severely damaged beyond affordable repair by heavy lorries during the Second World War.

When the Wantage Tramway closed, ‘Shannon’ went into storage on the premises of the Atomic Energy Authority in Grove. When members of the Didcot Railway Society who worked for AEA saw the engine they were keen to get her taken to Didcot. Following discussions with Wantage Town Council, by January 1969 the engine had been relocated. Having been written off some 26 years before, after a considerable amount of restoration work, she was finally steamed up and operational again by the October of the same year. In 1975 ‘Shannon’ was the star of the 150th anniversary of Stockton and Darlington Railway celebrations following



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which extensive cracks were discovered in the firebox requiring major work if she were to ever steam again. However, 2017 saw this remarkable engine given a cosmetic restoration and repaint in her original Wantage Tramway Company red livery and No 5 ‘Shannon’ joined the static display of engines at the Didcot Railway Centre.

“I took great delight in paintings the fabulous locomotives at Didcot after visiting there last year for the first time,” says Bruce. “A wonderful collection almost all run and cared for by volunteers.”

If you would like to see Bruce’s latest collection of delightful illustrative paintings, he is taking part in Oxford Artweeks with a display at the Appleton Village Hall along with nine other local artists. The exhibition will be held on Saturday 18-19 May with a private viewing on the 17 May.

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