

I cannot tell you how touched I was to receive Judy's invitation to say a few words to you today, not least because this is such an extraordinarily special memorial servicefor such an extraordinary man.

We are hearing today about so many aspects of Bill's life and his towering achievements, that it is hard for any of us to speak about any one aspect which others are not covering. But let me share with you my first memory of meeting Bill and spending some time with him.

I am not able, I am afraid, to give you the exact date, but it would, I think, have been around 1980. I was working at the British Railways Board as an adviser to the chairman, Sir Peter Parker, who was in my view and many others at the time probably the greatest chairman that the nationalised railway ever had.

My first encounter with Bill was on his Great Eastern Railway saloon which he had persuaded BR should run as a private charter train on a circular tour around London on secondary routes like the West London and Northern lines. Numerous big cheeses from the railway were on board and Parker had asked me – as a pretty small cheese - to join them.

Looking back, it's now clear to me that Bill had invited us all along for a reason. He had two big ticket items on his agenda: one was to persuade BR to allow steam trains to run again on the main line – we shall be hearing a lot about that this afternoon – and the second was to do something about our railway heritage.

Bill and Peter Parker were great friends and unsurprisingly admired each other's gifts and achievements. Parker had become more and more frustrated by the way the press accused British Rail of mistreating its heritage – not unfairly I have to say: remember what they did to the

Euston Arch - and he responded to this by taking the inspired decision to support the setting-up of a separate company, independent of the board, with £2 million of working capital from BR. This was of course the Railway Heritage Trust, and Bill became its first chairman.

We shall hear more about the Trust from other speakers this afternoon, but I'm fairly confident that one of the first crucial discussions took place on that Great Eastern Railway saloon.

It's interesting that Bill features in Dow's Dictionary of Railway Quotations. He is quoted as saying to saying to Andrew Dow in 1993:

"A trip in a saloon is a most wonderful opportunity for persuasion".

But there was another gathering in Bill's saloon, even more momentous than the round-London tour in which I took part. For an account of this I am indebted to Sir Peter Parker's autobiography "For Starters". Peter describes how in 1984, a year after he stood down from the chairmanship, Bill and his father invited all past BR chairmen and the present one to lunch in one of his old saloons.

"We assembled, Lord Beeching, Sir Stanley Raymond, Sir Henry Johnson, Lord Marsh and myself, Sir Robert Reid and, as an honorary member of the party Sir John Elliot, who had been a wise and witty chairman of London Transport. I have no idea what the collective noun is for ex-chairmen of BR – a siding?"

He describes Bill as "The Enthusiast of all rail enthusiasts", and says in his book that he could not vouch for any conclusion they came to. "The day was a merry one, imperfect only in its brevity, a memory-tour with one stop only, at a platform out of sight of most of the rest of Clapham Junction, and there we lunched only too well.

“The wine I do remember; with that McAlpine touch of style and accuracy it was a 1963 vintage, from the first year of Dick Beeching’s chairmanship. The Reverend Sidney Smith described his idea of heaven as eating pate de foie gras to the sound of trumpets. For me that merry lunch up the Junction, drinking Cheval Blanc ’63, comes pretty close.”

Bill was simply the most wonderful host – kind, generous and extraordinarily good company. I had the good fortune in seeing quite a lot of him in recent years. He was a member of the Great Western Railway Advisory Board, which I have the honour to chair. We came across each other at railway heritage events where Bill was usually performing an opening or making a presentation, and I was there as President of the Heritage Railway Association.

And he and I were fellow members of the Grand Junction Club, who dine convivially together three times a year and exchange railway anecdotes and shared experiences. He was kind enough to invite the Club here to Fawley on one of your wonderful open days, where you, Judy look after your guests with such style and grace.

I am going to conclude, ladies and gentlemen, by making an announcement on behalf of the National Railway Museum, with which I am associated as deputy chairman of the Science Museum Group. In the autumn the NRM are organising with Judy a very special Flying Scotsman memorial run to commemorate Bill's life and in recognition for his support for heritage railways. It's our way of saying thank you for saving Scotsman and getting her back to the UK and successfully operating her for 23 years.

I think you will agree with me that there can be no better way of honouring Bill's memory and giving thanks for his legacy for which the railway heritage world will enjoy for ever.

Thank you Judy for giving us all today the opportunity to pay tribute and express our thanks for Bill's wonderful life. And thank you too for announcing today that you will be keeping Bill's railway museum here at Fawley Hill.