

Class 45/1 Preservation Society – 30 Years On - 2016

The Class 45/1 Preservation Society was formed way back in 1986. Whilst some early members will remember how it all came about, our 30th year seems to be an apt time to look back and recall how it all started.

During 1985-86, when the Class 45/1s were in the twilight of their careers, Brian Ashby and his wife Maureen travelled regularly on Peak hauled Trans-Pennine trains, particularly between Leeds, York and Scarborough. Brian got into conversation on these journeys with like-minded Peak enthusiasts and raised the idea of saving a Class 45/1 loco for preservation. Brian felt that his experience in locomotive preservation (he is one of two present custodians of ex-Midland Railway 0-6-0 tank No.1708, which was put on loan to the 1708 Locomotive Preservation Trust Ltd from 1973-2006) and his valuable contacts within British Rail would be useful and that he was willing to help.

Back in his home town of Luton in March 1986, Brian discussed the idea with his friend, the late Brian Lockey, and Peter Dennis, who he knew through Peter's father and the South Bedfordshire Locomotive Club. It was decided that they would form the 'Class 45/1 Preservation Society', with the aim of raising enough funds to purchase and restore at least one Class 45/1 locomotive. The first committee was formed, consisting of Brian Ashby as Chairman, Brian Lockey as Secretary and Peter Dennis as Membership Secretary. Brian was also to edit a quarterly newsletter, to be called 'Peak Power', with the help of Peter (gathering news of loco movements) and Maureen (typing and photocopying).

The committee immediately began to promote the Society and its aims through adverts in the railway press and Peter Dennis spread the word and distributed leaflets to other Peak fans travelling on the trains. Full Member shares were available for £300 each, paid outright or by Standing Order and Supporting Member shares sold in multiples of £10, with an annual subscription of £5. The first member (other than the committee) joined on 4th April 1986 and support grew steadily throughout the summer of that year.

The first edition of 'Peak Power' was produced in autumn 1986 and reported that £3315 had been received or promised. An appeal was also included for members to continue to promote the Society and also for volunteers to form a 'Sales Team' to raise awareness and funds at BR Open Days. John Lavender and David Tibbett joined the committee shortly afterwards as Sales Officers and Alan Rawlinson and Amanda Lamb as Events Managers. The Treasurer position was taken up by Rob Anderson and Chris Edwards became Publicity Officer.

In these early days the preference was for the Society to save a named Class 45/1, as this would make the loco better known in preservation and add some 'prestige'. A particular favourite of Brian Ashby's was 45137 'The Bedfordshire & Hertfordshire Regiment T.A.'. However, Brian and the rest of the committee were also realistic in that the Society should preserve the loco in best overall condition, to ensure a long operational life on a preserved railway. Indeed, Brian was already using his contacts within BR to ascertain the withdrawal plans of the fleet and which locos were in good condition.

In January 1987, there were 41 Class 45/1s still in service. However, the Trans-Pennine passenger diagrams were to transfer to Class 150 'Sprinter' operation or Class 47 haulage with the start of the Summer timetable. This would result in a surplus of locos and Brian was advised by staff at Tinsley that 18 locos:

(45111,112,119,120,121,124,125,127,130,132,133,135,136,137,140,143,145,148) were to be withdrawn in April 1987 and that the remaining 23 locos:

(45103,104,105,106,107,108,110,113,114,115,118,122,126,128,129,134,139,141,142,144,146,149,150) were to remain in service until the end of March 1988. As it turned out, 105,114,118,122,126,139 and 146 fell by the wayside due to failures, which gave a reprieve for 121,124,137,140 and 145.

Many of the locos withdrawn in April/May 1987 were towed to March Depot for storage pending disposal. A visit was arranged for three committee members and three experienced BR Engineers from Derby and Toton to inspect the locos there on 22nd August 1987. During the inspection, some locos were even started up to assess their condition. Two locos stood out as the best. 45133 had been withdrawn with only defective batteries and was largely complete. Although in tatty condition externally, major components such as bogies, engine and generator were in excellent condition, having been exchanged at Derby Works only 12 months earlier. 45108 had only just arrived, having been withdrawn on 3rd August with very minor derailment damage sustained at Willesden on 30th July. The loco was otherwise in excellent condition and was even driven up and down the sidings to prove that everything was in order! The staff at March Depot were extremely helpful and sympathetic with the aims of the Society. They agreed that 45108 and 133 would be moved out of the yard and placed alongside the depot buildings, where they would be more protected from the elements and the risk of vandalism. From then on, members of the Society were permitted to make regular trips to the depot to work on the locos and keep them in good order whilst negotiations took place for BR to offer them for sale.

Urgent fundraising and recruitment of new members continued, so that the Society were in the best possible position to bid for a loco as soon as they were made available for sale. At the end of 1987 amalgamation was agreed between the Society and the Class 45 Locomotive Group (45LG). The 45LG had been formed in 1980 with the aim of preserving a loco. Whilst they had a reasonable number of members and a good stock of sales items, funds were limited and it was felt that joining forces would boost the chances of securing a loco.

Negotiations to get locos on the tender list were protracted, as BR kept coming up with reasons not to sell. These included possible asbestos content, possible reinstatement to traffic, a requirement to recover engine blocks and other components for re-use and then a plan to sell six Class 45s to the new owners of the Settle & Carlisle railway!

On March 29th 1988, the BR Director of Supply at Derby wrote to the Society to advise that authority had been given for 45108, 133 and 135 to be offered for sale by competitive tender. However, documentation would not be issued until the locos had been inspected for possible asbestos content.

In August 1988, all the remaining Class 45s were withdrawn from normal BR service and stored at Tinsley Depot.

Only 45135 was offered for sale in Summer 1988 and members of the committee inspected the loco at Derby Etches Park, just before the Society AGM on 13th August. It was decided at the meeting that a low bid would be submitted for 135. This would demonstrate to BR that the Society were serious about purchasing when one of the preferred locos (45108/133) were offered for sale. If the bid was successful, then 135 would be bought for a bargain price! In the event, the Pioneer Diesel Loco Group were the successful bidders.

At the AGM, there were also some changes to the committee. Peter Dennis became Chairman, Andrew Greenshields became Secretary, Phil Crumpton and Nadine Rack became Publicity Officers and Dave Jackson became Newsletter Editor.

In early 1989, efforts to publicise the Society even stretched to appearing on television! On 17th January, filming took place at March for a short piece on Anglia TV 'About Anglia'. This was following an interview Peter Dennis gave for a local newspaper in Luton. A whole two minutes was shown of working members cleaning 45108 and 133!

An Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) was held at Derby on 18th March 1989, where a Constitution for the Society was agreed and a decision made to register for VAT exemption. Also at this meeting, Rob Anderson stepped down as Treasurer, his duties taken up by Andrew Greenshields and Ashley Lovell co-opted onto the committee as Secretary. Ashley's role was confirmed at the AGM on 12th August 1989. Other appointments were Mike Spencer as Treasurer and David Salisbury as Technical Officer.

The choice of possible preservation candidates was also discussed at the 1989 AGM. The following locos were selected in order of choice:

- 45133 – Good overall condition and no derailment damage.
- 45108 – Excellent condition but some minor derailment damage.
- 45113 – Good mechanical condition – failed vacuum exhauster, damage to one axle box and radiators stolen whilst stored at Tinsley.
- 45104 - Good mechanical condition – minor bodyside collision damage, some component recovery had taken place.

It was agreed that further discussions would take place once all four locos had been inspected thoroughly.

A breakthrough finally came in December 1989, when BR issued a tender list including 45108 and 45133, with a return deadline of 11th January 1990. An EGM was hurriedly arranged at March for Sunday 7th January, where members could inspect both locos at the depot, followed by a meeting in the nearby 'Great Northern' pub. Over 30 members attended and it was decided that bids would be submitted for 45108 as first choice and 45133 as second choice, although both locos were in comparable condition.

By the end of that week, the exciting news came through that the £16102.30 (inc.VAT) bid for 45133 had been accepted. The Class 45/1 Preservation Society became the new owner on 21st January 1990 – the culmination of nearly four years hard work by the founding members and the committee – only made possible of course by the support of the loyal membership.

The original home intended for 45133, Peak Rail at Matlock, were unable to offer space for the loco until the autumn of 1990. Following approaches to other preserved railways, an offer of temporary accommodation at the Midland Railway Centre, Butterley was gratefully accepted. The loco departed March in the consist of 6X16 Whitemoor – Tees Yard as far as Doncaster and continued the following day in the consist of 6X88 01:58 Doncaster – Spondon, as far as Toton, when it was tripped the short distance to Codnor Park and Butterley. The loco worked its first passenger train two days later. The rest, as they say, is another story!