



Travelling to School By Gerald Wyeth

I went to Peter Symonds School in Winchester and from the age of 11. I used to get there by going on the train from Medstead and Four Marks station. We used to travel using mainly little M7 tank engines. There were quite a few children that travelled by train to school. I was the only boy that travelled from Four Marks at that time on that train. But when we got down to Ropley a number of lads joined there. Then when we got to Alresford even more got on. There were a number of us travelling to Winchester, even some girls.

We only went to Peter Symonds in the morning because we shared the school with Portsmouth Grammar School. Their school got bombed out and it wasn't very safe for the boys to live in Portsmouth anyway. So, they were allowed to move up into the general area around Winchester. They used the school in the afternoons and we used it in the morning.

During the war, particularly on the M7 type of engines, quite often there were women guards and gentleman drivers. They were quite often fond of each other. Quite often you would find the female guard in the M7 with the driver. If there was an attack or anything like that, they would get to a bridge and would park the engine under the bridge. Us boys were left out; the carriages were exposed to the whole lot and we used to jump off and get underneath. So, they used to put the engine itself under the bridge to protect it. The passengers could do whatever they liked, no one told them to do anything. If you wanted to, you got out.

At Winchester, we loved when the troop trains came through and the Americans were onboard. They used to chuck sweets and candy out to us, and that was good when they came through. Other trains that came through were full of injured military men onboard, you would see them lying on stretchers in the coaches. It made you quite sorrowful and if you were on the platform and you saw them coming up like this.

Prisoners of war travelled on the trains as well. You could lock the doors from the outside, they didn't want us in the carriage with them so they locked the doors. The guard would go along and lock them, so the doors would be locked from the outside and the prisoners couldn't get out.