

fast rewind

BUILDING A LOST STEAM ENGINE; WOMEN OF THE 1960s



Breathing life back into the age of steam

A life-size steam locomotive is being built from scratch, and u3a member **John Peat** is appealing for help

Do you love steam trains? Perhaps you remember them puffing across the countryside? Maybe you worked or travelled in them. Now's your chance to get involved with a project to build a brand-new, life-size steam locomotive through either sharing your memories, giving financial support or donating your time.

John Peat, of Wymondham u3a in Norfolk, is among enthusiasts building

the 61673 "Spirit of Sandringham" B17 steam locomotive, which it is hoped will carry passengers on heritage and mainline railway lines from 2029.

The B17 Steam Locomotive Trust, whose patron is rail enthusiast rock star Sir Rod Stewart, is looking for people to share their memories of this special locomotive, the brainchild of Sir Nigel Gresley who also designed the Flying Scotsman. John, who has an engineering background, is a director of the Trust which has around 200 members.

The B17 was an express passenger locomotive that operated on the London North Eastern Railway (LNER) until

1960. A total of 73 engines were built but, sadly, not one survived the scrapyard and there are very few photos or memories of this engine.

John says: "We would love to hear experiences of former LNER railwaymen who were involved with these locomotives and anyone who may have photographs of them. It is important to glean as much information as possible before the knowledge disappears. We are also looking for people who would like to help us recreate this LNER railway icon. This can be achieved by financial support through membership of the Trust, or sponsorship, or by offering your skills."

Spirit of Sandringham is being built at Sheffield-based engineering company CTL Seal Limited, using traditional methods where possible, and will cost upwards of £3million.

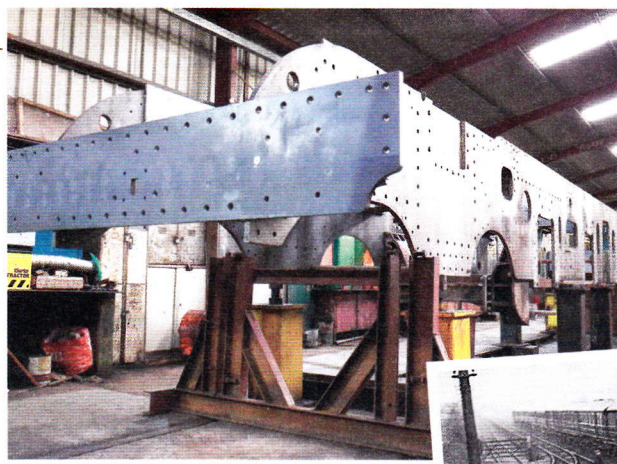
As a charitable trust, the B17 SLT must deliver public benefit and has chosen the fields of education and training. The Trust is using traditional engineering skills and UK firms to build the engine. It is also providing educational material for GCSE and A-Level students in schools and offers opportunities for university students and apprenticeships associated with STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) subjects.

John says: "The B17 class of locomotive is the missing preservation link in the evolution of the Great Eastern Railway (GER) and London North Eastern Railway (LNER) design of 4-6-0 locomotives. The B12, built in 1911, is in use on the North Norfolk Railway, while the B1, built in 1942, is in mainline use."

The locomotive is being built by qualified labour to meet rail regulations to be able to haul charter trains on the mainline. Volunteer roles are available in areas such as web design, publicity, finance and admin, and you do not need to be a member of the Trust to volunteer.

The first B17, Number 2800, was named Sandringham after the Royal Family's country home in Norfolk, by permission of King George V, and after that they were all known as "Sandringhams", reaching speeds of up to 90mph.

They operated on the old LNER network within East Anglia and the cross-country boat trains from Parkeston Quay (Harwich) to Manchester and Liverpool. They were also allocated to Royal Train duties when the Royal Family travelled to Sandringham House in Norfolk and as Royal funeral trains. One was used to haul the funeral train of King George V when he died at Sandringham on 20 January, 1936, and the LNER was called upon at short notice to provide a funeral train on January 23



Left: Static chassis approved for use on the mainline.

Below: "Helmingham Hall" hauling the King George V funeral train



from Wolverton to King's Cross.

The last 25 locomotives, built in the mid-1930s, were named after football clubs and were fitted with larger tenders to operate on the longer distances of the old Great Central Railway (GCR) route. This was from London (Marylebone) to Sheffield, via the Chilterns, Rugby, Leicester and

“There are very few photos or memories of this engine”

Nottingham. It was on this route that some of the best performances were recorded.

In 1937, the London and North Eastern Railway introduced a new express from London Liverpool Street to Norwich. Known as the East Anglian, it was hauled by streamlined locomotives. This weekday service was to provide a new standard of luxury, with full dining facilities en route for passengers from Norwich to London Liverpool Street and return, with sufficient time to spend an afternoon in the capital.

Locomotive 2859 "Norwich City" was one of two class B17 4-6-0 express passenger engines that were fitted with a modified streamlined casing for this service and re-named "East Anglian" on September 21, 1937.

Oswald Nock, in his book *LNER Steam* (1969), describes an early-morning trip on the B17 "Gayton Hall" from London Marylebone to Leicester to deliver newspapers as his 'most exciting' trip, with driver Simpson and the fireman listed as a man called Wood from Neasden shed, from which comes the following extract: "Setting off at 2.32am and in the best Gresley tradition, the engine smartly lifted its train on full regulator in the initial ascent from Marylebone to Brondesbury, then passing Neasden (5.1 miles) at over 70mph and uphill again to Harrow from where the climb continued through the Chilterns. Some 40 minutes into the journey speed touched 84mph at Wendover on the descent into the Vale of Aylesbury. Then Brackley (59.3 miles) was reached in 64¾ minutes from starting at the London terminus – some 2¼ minutes early."

He describes the "magnificent finale" on a seven-mile descent into Leicester, when the locomotive reached 90mph.

● For more details, visit the website b17steamloco.com or email b17enquiries@gmail.com, telephone 01462 811256.

JOHN HAS BEGUN A RAILWAY GROUP AT WYMONDHAM u3a AND IS KEEN TO HEAR ABOUT ANY OTHER u3a RAIL-BASED INTEREST GROUPS. CONTACT HIM AT JOHNPEAT439@BTINTERNET.COM