



British Section

Newsletter

Vol.27 No.2

December 2022

† Janis Petersons

European Association of Railway Personnel

Association Européenne des Cheminots (AISBL)

International Association (A.R. 4.2.1985)

**International Non-governmental Organisation with advisory status to the
Council of Europe (6.4.1977)**

**International Non-governmental Organisation with consultative status to the UN
(decision E/ 2002/ of 22.07.2002) and member of the
United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)**

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**AEC EUROPEAN BUREAU – elected at the General Assembly at Sofia (BL),
May 2022.**

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Asst, Secretary: Xosé Carlos Fernández Diaz (ES)

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AEC BRITISH SECTION COMMITTEE

The Annual General Meeting for 2022 took place in Bournemouth on 7th April. The existing officers and committee were re-elected, excepting the position of Vice President. As a measure of our respect, our beloved Patrick Rigby was named Vice-president of Honour in perpetuity. We also noted with great sadness, the passing of our past President, Theo Steel.

Honorary President:

Colin Charman,
formerly Operations Manager
Eurostar Engineering Centre.

President:

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Checker of Accounts:

Colin Charman,

The British Section Newsletter is produced by a small team headed by Philip Worsfold, who fulfils the non-committee role of Editor and Translator

**A.E.C. BRITISH SECTION NEWSLETTER, Vol. 27 No. 2
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**A membership Application Form / GDPR Declaration is attached to the e-mail edition of
this Newsletter.**

The European web page is at: <http://www.A-E-C.net> (hosted by the German section)

AEC Latvia is at www.ldzb.lv/aec/lv/

The aecitalia website is not recognised as representing the official Italian section of AEC. Vito
Visconti is no longer a member of AEC.

The **French section website** has been **re-established** at:

<http://aec-france.pagesperso-orange.fr/>

The **British Section Website** is available at <http://www.aec-europe.co.uk>

The British Section Facebook page is closed.

The British Section Newsletter is also available on line at the European website and on the
British section website.

WE TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO WISH ALL OUR READERS FAR AND WIDE A HAPPY AND PEACEFUL CHRISTMASTIDE.

EDITORIAL

This edition is a little bit late so that we could include a report on the visit to Brussels.

We live in the strangest of times. The United Kingdom has experienced the actions of two monarchs and three Prime Ministers since our last edition. For many the death of Queen Elizabeth II and the accession of King Charles III will have presented a curious change for there are not that many of us left now who can remember when our country last had a King. Our late Queen has been a symbol of stability in a changing world, having reigned longer than any other monarch before her. She has guided our monarchy through choppy waters. Let us hope her son can do the same and wish him well.

More recently our government seems to have created choppy waters for itself by reason of its ineptitude in dealing with crises and the internal squabbling and jockeying for power within the Conservative party whose members of Parliament seem more intent in preserving their own positions than looking after the wellbeing of our country. It has again become the sick man of Europe, albeit and to a large extent because of now being outside the European Union. A revolving door would have been useful to accommodate the coming and going of Prime Ministers. A recent visit to France, which proved easier than expected, highlighted how much better things are looked after in France than they are in austerity Britain. But of course they pay more tax and the tax burden is more fairly applied, administered and distributed. It is a disgrace that our health service is falling apart due to lack of funds and resources and that food banks are increasing in number and being overwhelmed by demand in a country that claims the fifth richest economy in the World. All the worst predictions of the effects of Brexit, ridiculed at the time as scaremongering by the 'remainers' are coming home to roost.

It is with great sadness that we report the death also of the founder in 1998 of the Latvian section of AEC, Janis Petersons, who worked tirelessly in increasingly difficult circumstances to maintain a section in his homeland.

It is also a sad fact that many of our own members are now reaching the point where travel becomes difficult and as a result attendance at our Reunions has declined. Recent rail strikes – an indication of the parlous economic state of our country – have also caused cancellation of these events. It is interesting to note that by far the majority of the traveling public have expressed sympathy towards the railway people's case. Our long week-end trip to Brussels, will give us the opportunity to discuss the way forward. We had deliberately refrained from organizing a Reunion in December because so many people seem to be intent on Christmas lunches; **So for now we are suspending Reunions in January and February 2023 and hope to present something new for the Spring.** Look out for details in the March 2023 Newsletter – or possibly an earlier newsflash if we get something organized close to publication date. I just hope that we can get something going that is meaningful and positive.

Reminders.

Again a reminder that the British section website is up and running at www.aec-europe.co.uk It will be a source of up to date information, so please use it regularly. Jenny Worsfold is the webmaster and material for insertion should be sent to her as an e-mail attachment.

Recruitment

Nigel Hyde has been re-elected as Treasurer and Membership Secretary as well as Recruitment Officer. Any ideas you have should be channelled through him. All enquiries about membership should be addressed to **Nigel Hyde. Please note telephone number and e-mail addresses on page 2.**

THE PRESIDENTS SLOT.

Bob Clark

What goes around comes around (or so they say); maybe it does but who knows?

History repeating itself can probably stand up to the evidence if we look at things that seem to occur Over and over, time after time events happen and the world is faced with chaos and disaster caused by conquest, war, famine and death, usually referred to as the four horsemen of the apocalypse. Often the first two cause the second two[but sometimes nature reminds us that the world belongs to every species and famine and death follow. Humanity has a lot to answer for too, as the lust for territory and resources causes war, which causes death followed by famine and pestilence. Accidents happen and life is lost but somehow, we survive to live and thrive. As we make great technological and scientific advances that vastly improve living standards for some; but not all of humanity has had the same advances leading to “the developed” and “third” world labels when people talk about the world today. With massive advances in communications these days, it is hard to believe that up to only 200 years ago travelling any distance was only for the wealthy and everyone else walked or stayed within village limits. By the beginning of the 19th century the world was becoming a different place and the advances made led to our advanced way of life today. War and “tribal rivalry” carved up the world between the strongest of national tribes. In the 1800s railways started to develop and grow to revolutionise travel for everyone; and villages grew into towns which grew into cities. Our European homeland was a hotchpotch of little dukedoms and kingdoms ‘Great Britain & Ireland’ was only 21 years old in 1822 and ruled by George IV who was also king of Hannover, His father George III lost the 13 colonies in North America. There was no Germany, Italy or other European countries as we know them today; and France was a republic/empire then a kingdom once more after years of being a republic (one of many to come). Revolution was never far from the regal thought and the rapid progress made in industrialisation could not have been possible if the governments and other bodies had not built the railways. In 1837 one of the longest reigning Monarchs came to rule over an expanding (British) empire competing with other empires whilst at the same time propagating many royal households in Europe. This did not stop rivalry in Europe as each empire raced to outdo the others’ expansion. Diseases were causing loss of life as were wars, some of which changed the map with the historical great empires entering their dying days as the new world order began to rise. The 20th century arrived bringing more progress. As the old Queen Victoria’s reign came to an end exceptional advances made by scientists and engineers accelerated the expansion of the railways and heralded the beginnings of the motor vehicle. War and disease still took lives of young people as the battle raged in Europe. 1916 saw Ireland in a battle for independence; 1917 brought revolution in Russia. 1918 saw the end of the 1st World War and the end of Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires. Spanish flu raged throughout Europe and claimed many lives in a truly terrible pandemic which faded out in 1922-24. Inflation caused hardship for many and a financial crash in the USA reverberated round the world resulting in famine, starvation and destitution for millions. Monarchs came and went; fascist forces rose and took over in some countries leading to the Second World War and maps changed once more. The middle of the 20th century arrived bringing more horrors than anyone would have imagined. The 1940s whilst being the worst of times also heralded better things to come, nationalisation (Great Britain and Northern Ireland later than other systems) of the railways, a national health service free at point of use ((UK). Great advances were made in the 1950s, when technological and scientific research improvements meant that health issues are being made curable or eradicated. This decade sees another young princess becoming Queen reigning throughout the remaining years of the 20th century. Europe also changed and is still changing. The fall of communism brought more freedom of movement to the Eastern European nations with the end of the Cold War improving living standards for most. Traditional attitudes seemed to be changing and everything moving forward in cooperation. Even British politics modernised with devolved governments in Scotland and Wales. Then Brexit hit the country, bringing more horrors than anyone would imagine and another pandemic which almost mirrored the one a hundred years previously. COVID-19 almost brought the whole world to its knees. Flattening growth, falling currency and a phenomenon for the UK, political incompetence and institutional decrepitude, bring us to the present state of affairs in 21st century, with more uncertain futures and more poverty-

stricken people depending on foodbanks, etc. Democracy is dying and with three Prime Ministers so far in 2022; one that lasted a few weeks; met and shook the hand of the Queen who passed away 2 days later! So the longest reigning Monarch in her 70th year on the throne ended her days in Balmoral; Balmoral her favourite place, bought by Prince Albert for his Queen Victoria who loved its location and made regular visits using the Royal train - a tradition continuing to this day.

Railways brought families together and our family of railway people is still together even if they are dwindling in numbers. So as the world goes round and history repeats.....the invasion & occupation of Ukraine by a Russian army of terrorists is an abomination in our modern world. The passing of a Monarch does not end monarchy that goes on continuously; but late Queen will have a place in our association history as it was in Sorrento, I presented the mayor with a set of stamps commemorating her diamond jubilee. He insisted that I ask her to visit Sorrento as his guest! I think that would have been impossible to do and now with her laid to rest, we as an association also need to look at our ageing membership and dwindling numbers and ask how much longer can we go on? Mobility issues and illness are making travelling any distance impossible. It is not just the British section of the Association thinking this way; but all sections need to plan for the end. Life has a beginning but an end that is the only certainty.

PEOPLE.

† Janis Petersons



It is with deep regret that we heard of the passing of Janis Petersons, the President of the Latvian section of AEC, which he founded in 1998. He was the Rolling stock Director of Latvian Railways until his retirement and guided the system through difficult times, particularly after Latvia's accession to the European Union when the funding of the rail system was greatly reduced, making the system predominantly a freight network. He was also involved in railway

preservation, facilitating the restoration of an Estonian steam locomotive for use on a Latvian narrow gauge line. Latterly he was involved in the planning of the proposed Rail Baltica project.

I first met him when he and colleague Valeris Turko came to the European days in Canterbury in 1998, so soon after the foundation of the Latvian section. Soon after Jenny and I met his wife Agnija and we seem to have established a special bond with them. I have always regarded him as a true friend and was fortunate enough to attend both European Days which he organised in Riga – a most interesting city. The news of his death came as a great shock to us, and we hope that by now Agnia will be able to come to terms with her loss; and that the Latvian section of AEC will survive this terrible blow

The picture of Janis was taken at European Days in Linz in September 2019, the last time we saw him. I thank Spanish section members Paco Gonzalez for taking it, and iego Guerero for obtaining it from him.

TRANSPORT AND TRAVEL NEWS

Rail Baltica.

A grant agreement which will see the EU's Connecting Europe Facility provide €353.9m for the Rail Baltica project has been signed by the European Climate, Infrastructure & Environment Executive Agency, ministries from the three countries and tri-national implementation agency RB Rail.

This will fund the completion of main line design work between the Polish border, Kaunas and

Vilnius, as well as compensation for land expropriation; the start of construction on the priority section in Latvia near the Lithuania border and development of detailed technical design for the construction base in Skulte; construction in Estonia, including capercaillie mitigation measures; and activities to ensure technical interoperability.

It is the eighth CEF Action supporting implementation of Rail Baltica, and the first in the 2021-27 financing period.

'We live in times of increased economic uncertainty resulting from geopolitical crisis, continuous price fluctuations and volatile construction material availability, and it is more important than ever to ensure tight cross-border cooperation between the partners in the three Baltic countries to deliver the Rail Baltica and maintain its position amongst the top priority high-speed infrastructure projects in the European Union', said RB Rail CEO Agnis Driksna on 21st October 2022.

The European Commission initiates feasibility study to better connect Ukrainian and Moldovan railway networks with EU

The European Commission together with the European Investment Bank (EIB) is launching a pre-feasibility study to assess how to better connect the Ukrainian and Moldovan railway networks with the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T). The rail gauge used in most of the EU is different to the one in Eastern Europe, which makes it difficult to ship goods in both directions. This could be solved by extending the EU railway gauge across the borders from Poland and Romania into Ukraine and Moldova. Today's study is a key step in preparing for better EU-Ukraine and Moldova connectivity after the war.

Commissioner for Transport Adina Vălean said: *"The study is one of the medium- to long-term measures set out in the Solidarity Lanes action plan and is also closely linked to the Commission's July 2022 proposal on the extension of the TEN-T to Ukraine and Moldova. This way we are setting the scene for longer-term solutions, supporting Ukraine in its post-war trade and the reconstruction of the country, aiming, in particular, to remove the interoperability gap at borders"*.

EIB Vice-President Teresa Czerwińska, who is responsible for operations in Ukraine and Moldova, said: *"The EIB study on integration of Ukrainian and Moldovan railway networks with the EU is the first step towards a modern transport link between the EU, Moldova and Ukraine. It is a strategic investment for sustainable, green economic growth, which also improves global food security. Integration of railroad networks will allow for easier and safer movement of people, goods and services between the three markets, and faster integration of the two countries with the EU. Finally, with the Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the blockade of Ukrainian ports, which induced a global food crisis of unprecedented scale, these new transport links will create a reliable alternative for food supply which will benefit the whole world. All this makes the EIB study on integration of EU, Moldovan and Ukraine railroad networks the right step in the right time. I am very proud of the fact that the EIB and Team Europe continue to contribute to solutions which make the world a better and safer place."*

The EIB technical advisory service JASPERS is in charge of completing the study by May 2023, in close cooperation with all countries concerned.

Standard gauge to Ukraine and Moldova could benefit the whole world, says EIB

2 November 2022

Improved connections with the TEN-T network would build on recent initiatives to reinstate rail links between Ukraine and Moldova. The European Investment Bank's technical advisory service JASPERS has begun a pre-feasibility study looking at the development of 1 435 mm gauge cross-border links to connect the Ukrainian and Moldovan rail networks with the Trans-European Transport Network in the light of the Russian attack on Ukraine.

The European Commission said the break-of-gauge between the 1 435 mm used on the EU sides of the borders and the 1 520 mm broad gauge in Ukraine and Moldova makes freight shipment difficult, but this could be solved by extending standard gauge tracks from Poland and Romania.

The study, which is to be completed by May 2023, is one of the medium to long-term measures set out in European Commission's Solidarity Lanes action plan, and closely linked to its July 2022 proposal to extend the TEN-T network to Ukraine and Moldova.

'We are setting the scene for longer-term solutions, supporting Ukraine in its post-war trade and the reconstruction of the country, aiming, in particular, to remove the interoperability gap at borders', said Transport Commissioner Adina Vălean on October 21.

EIB Vice-President Teresa Czerwińska said modern cross-border links would be 'a strategic investment for sustainable, green economic growth', and would 'benefit the whole world' by improving global food security through the creation of alternatives to the Black Sea shipping routes blockaded by Russia

Ukraine – Romania Cross border link reopened

EUROPE: The 19.3 km cross-border rail link between Rakhiv in Ukraine and Valea Vișeului in Romania has been reopened for regular traffic.

The 1 520 mm gauge line through the Carpathian mountains had been out of use since 2007, but has now been reactivated as part of the strategy to improve connections between Ukraine and the European Union. UZ completed the refurbishment of the majority of the line on Ukrainian territory in August, and CFR has now restored the short section in Romania.

UZ initially expects to operate two passenger trains each way per day from December. Interchange will be provided in Valea-Viseului with services on CFR's 1 435 mm gauge network offering connections to Sighetu Marmăției, Cluj-Napoca and București.

Services are expected to be operated by UZ's Class DPKr3 DMUs, which were manufactured by Kryukovsky Railway Car Building Works in 2021. One of these was used for the inaugural run on November 9. Journey time from Rakhiv to Valea-Viseului will be around 40 min, excluding the border control procedures which will be undertaken before boarding.

Romania rehabilitates rail links to Ukraine

ROMANIA: Additional tracks have been rehabilitated and brought back into use at Vișani on the border with Ukraine, providing a total of seven 1 520 mm gauge and six 1 435 mm gauge tracks to increase capacity and reduce transshipment times.

The Ministry of Transport has also called tenders for the rehabilitation of the short dual-gauge line between the River Danube port of Galati and Giurgiulești in Moldova. This would allow the transport of goods between Galati and Ukraine via Moldova. The deadline for bids was May 19, and the work involving 3.6 km of 1 520 mm gauge and 1.2 km of 1 435 mm gauge track was to be completed in 60 days.

Ukraine – Moldova rail link reinstated ahead of schedule

EUROPE: The reinstated 23 km railway linking Berezyne in Ukraine to Basarabasca in Moldova was reopened on August 22. The line provides a rail connection from the Bilhorod-Dnistrovskiy – Izmail line in the southern part of Odesa oblast to the River Danube port of Reni, transiting Moldova and facilitating onward links to Romania. Approximately 22 km of the route is in Ukraine and 1.2 km in Moldova. Moldova's national railway CFM said the reopening would make Basarabasca into an international logistics hub for ports in Ukraine, Moldova and Romania.

BRÉTIGNY RAIL CRASH TRIAL

FRANCE: A court in Evry has found national operator SNCF guilty of homicide and involuntary injury following the derailment on July 12 2013 of a Paris Austerlitz – Limoges locomotive-hauled Intercités service at Brétigny-sur-Orge in the southern Paris suburbs.

The train was passing through Brétigny station when the rear four of seven Corail coaches derailed at 137 km/h, killing seven people and injuring or traumatising 428 others, some of whom were waiting on the station's platforms.

In its ruling on October 26, the court issued SNCF with a €300 000 penalty but acquitted local maintenance inspector Laurent Waton, who had made the last inspection of the trackwork eight days before the accident. Infrastructure company SNCF Réseau, which in 2013 was functioning as Réseau Ferré de France, was also acquitted.

At the end of a trial that lasted from April 25 to June 17 this year, the public prosecutor had stated that SNCF had 'created the context at the origin of the accident' by 'a failure in the maintenance chain'. The prosecutor had asked for a maximum penalty of €450 000, saying that the 'whole concept of public service has collapsed' and accusing SNCF of being 'a company in denial'.

The derailment was caused by a loose fishplate obstructing the flangeway of an oblique crossing forming part of a double slip about 200 m north of the station. The fishplate had pivoted as a result of a crack spreading in the crossing which had first been detected in 2008. The crack should have been monitored annually by SNCF, and 'this negligence in monitoring the crossing is definitely linked to the derailment', the judge said in the October 26 ruling. If SNCF had correctly checked the crossing it would have noted its damaged condition and proceeded to replace it, the judge concluded.

The court also found that SNCF had inadequate documentary checks in place to monitor the work carried out by its maintenance staff. In its defence, SNCF said that the accident was attributable to an undetectable defect in the steel used in the crossing, but the judge dismissed this argument.

EUROPEAN DAYS AND OTHER EVENTS

What appears below as proposed is all dependent on the progress made on defeating the Covid-19 virus and re-opening Europe to its citizens and visitors.

Dates of European Events.

AEC European Days in Porto, Portugal 2023 has been organised by the Spanish section, To avoid a massive price increase the dates have been changed – brought forward into April 2023. This has shortened the time available to make reservations to a date that will have passed by the time you read this, but your editor has alerted those people who he thought most likely to be able to attend. Apologies to any he missed. Nevertheless, the full programme is given below.

The AEC European Days for 2024 should be in Lublin, Poland. This postponed event had to be re-scheduled. The programme will appear in a subsequent edition of the Newsletter

Whilst there have been changes to the proposed programme, not least the dates, for European Days in Portugal; and that the date for payment of deposit has already passed, nevertheless, in case late bookings prove possible, I give below the final programme.

PROGRAMME FOR AEC EUROPEAN DAYS.

This is the definitive programme with revised dates

Porto- (Portugal) 16 to 22 April 2023

Organised by the Spanish Section of AEC and Portuguese partners

Sunday: April 16. Reception of the first participants

08:00-23:00 Arrival of the participants of the European Bureau and delegates of the AEC member countries and other participants to the Administrative Council.

Transfer from Sá Carneiro airport and Porto Campanha station to the OCA-ORIENTAL hotel.

4 ****. Rúa Padre Antonio Vieira 83; near the station.

19:30 to 22:00- Dinner at the hotel restaurant.

Monday: April 17 Meeting of the AEC administrative council and arrival of the rest of the participants.

07:00 -08:45 Breakfast.

09:00-13:00 Meeting of the AEC Board of Directors in the conference room of the OCA-ORIENTAL hotel.

13:00-15:00 Lunch at the hotel restaurant.

15:30 –18:00 Continue the meeting of the AEC board of directors, if necessary.

19:00 – 22:00 Official opening of the AEC European Days and welcome dinner to be determined.

Tuesday: April 18 BRAGA –GUIMARAIS

07:00-08:30 Breakfast.

08:45 departure by bus to Braga.

09:30-13:00 Guided visit to Braga, water funicular, Bom Jesús Sanctuaries, and Sanctuary of Sameiro

13:30 –14:30 Lunch at the Albino Ponte de Caldas das Taipas Restaurant, followed by a guided tour of the city and the Guimarães Castle fortress

18:00- Return to Porto.

20:00- Dinner at the hotel restaurant

Wednesday: April 19. BOAT TRIP ON THE DOURO FROM PORTO TO REGUA

07:00-08:00 Hotel breakfast.

08:30 Transfer buses pier.

09:00 Departure, boat trip on the Douro River, lift to Régua, food on board

16:30 Return by bus to Porto and dinner at the hotel

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Thursday: April 20: NATIONAL RAILWAY MUSEUM OF ENTRONCAMENTO.

07:00-08:00 Breakfast.

08:30 Departure by train from Porto Campanha station.

11:00 Arrival in Entroncamento and visit of the National Railway Museum.

14:00 Lunch inside the National Railway Museum.

16:30 Departure from Entroncamento, 18:52 Arrival in Porto.

20:30 Dinner at the hotel.

Friday, April 21 PORTO and VILA NOVA DE GAIA

07:00-08:30 Hotel breakfast.

08:45- 13:30 Guided tour to see the historical points of tourist interest by panoramic bus in Porto.

13:30-15:30 . Lunch at the hotel.

15:30-18:00 Free time for shopping and relaxation.

19:00 Departure by bus to the typical winery for the closing dinner. 20:00-23:30 Official closing dinner of the AEC event, with music and a folk group at the **HERANÇA MAGNA** Winery in Vila Nova de Gaia.

Saturday 22- DEPARTURE

08:00-10:00 Hotel breakfast.

Departure of the participants. Transfer to the train station or the airport.

PRICES:

Cost per person: double / Single

BASIC (Dinner Monday 17 to breakfast Saturday 22) €695 €815

EXTENDED (Dinner Sunday to breakfast Saturday 22) €842 €962

TIP (Dinner Sunday 16 to lunch Monday 17) €147 €171

Note: Cost in a triple room per person (a double bed and an extra bed) €595 from April 17 to 22 and €717 from April 16 to 22).

PAYMENT to ACCOUNT:

European Association of Railwaymen-Spain Section

ENTITY: ABANCA:

IBAN: **ES29 2080 0375 1530 4004 6103**

BIC: **CAGLESMMXXX**

The programme includes:

-Hotel accommodation at (OCA-ORIENTAL) 4 *****) built one year ago - Full board for lunch and dinner with drinks.

- Transport by bus, metro, boat and train with a companion.

- Entry to museums and monuments.

-Transfer to and from the railway station or the airport

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(Note: All attendees arriving and departing from Porto airport (the “ANDANTE” metro card will be provided).

From the Porto Campanha station, you can walk; the hotel is located 300 m from the station.

-.Pass for the European Days

.

Completed registration forms should be sent as soon as possible.

Deposit: required of 250euro/person. before 25 November 2022 (extended deadline)

Balance before February 6, 2023

Any extension of reservation before April 16 or after April 22 must be managed directly with the hotel. We will give you a code to have a special price in all the hotels of the OCA chain in Spain and Portugal. AEC Spain cannot carry out any management, each participant will be done directly with the hotel.

The organizing committee reserves the right to modify the programme if necessary

ADVENTURES.

Part One: THE TRIP TO NICE.

In late September the French section of AEC organised a joint event with their FEANDC equivalent the Amicale des Agents Mouvement et Commerciaux des Gares (AMCG). This was a venture postponed several times due to the Covid19 outbreak and followed the success of a similar one organised by AMCG in Brest in 2018. This time it was a week long and much resembled our European Days. Indeed, the opportunity was used to hold the second bi-annual meeting of the AEC Administrative Council during the proceedings. Besides the French members of their respective organisations, AEC members from Germany, Belgium and Poland also attended besides Jenny and I, who decided to go to meet up with old friends and to represent the British section at the council meeting.

Since long distance rail travel with luggage has become rather a problem for me, we decided to travel by car, in much the same way as we had in the past travelled to both Austria and Spain. In effect we sauntered through France, avoiding Autoroutes as much as possible, taking six days to get to Nice, starting on Monday 12th September with an overnight ferry trip from Portsmouth to Ouistréham, which proved rather less arduous than expected. Although our departure was delayed due to the late arrival of the preceding service from France, the bonus was a later arrival the following morning. From the French port we negotiated successfully the Caen ring road; .and made our way to Le Mans, where, having negotiated the western side of that city's ring road, we spotted our hotel just in time to turn off down a side road. It was a bit of a surprise to find the access road to the hotel closed to traffic; but the small print assured us that access to the hotel was maintained. It turned out to be one of the best IBIS hotels we'd found in our numerous stays abroad. Our journey had been much quicker than anticipated and we were there in time for lunch in the attached Courtepaille restaurant. We stayed put during the rest of our stay there since returning to the ring road was a bit daunting.

Wednesday's destination was Bourges. To get on the right road meant retracing our steps on the ring road for a few junctions. Unfortunately our route was not signed in that direction, since through traffic from the north would have used the Eastern side route, so we missed our turning and had to proceed a fair way before we could retrace our steps, with the junctions now suitable indicated and we were soon on our way to Tours. Many of you will know of my interest in French railways and I have a model layout depicting an imaginary location somewhere on the line between Tours and Le Mans. In fact our route took us within a couple of kilometres from where I imagined my model to be located. It was all rather strange because, although I had never before actually visited the precise location, I felt I knew it. By sheer chance I seemed to have got the architecture and landscape just right. I felt rather pleased with myself, although the discovery that I had lost my little magnifying glass – useful for reading small print on maps, detracted from my overall sense of pleasure.

Our hotel – IBIS Budget this time - again proved relatively easy to find. Although more basic than that of the previous night, it did have a Novotel next door, where we could dine at a discounted price. So the following morning we set forth for our next stopover in Roanne. We

chose this spot not because of any tourist value the town might have – it hadn't – but was usefully located on our way to the Rhone valley. The best lunch we could find was a pizza in a small café inhabited mostly by students from the nearby university; while the entertainment consisted of highlights from the recent European cup matches on an Arabic TV network. The pizzas were so big that we saved half each for a picnic lunch the following day. The IBIS hotel was on a rather uninspiring industrial estate but it did have a decent restaurant where our table No 34 brought back memories of a holiday during our daughters' childhood and their making up a little ditty about 'Your Table in the Dining Room is Number Thirty-four!'

On Friday morning we set forth to reach the Rhône Valley. We skirted St Etienne, one end of France's first railway line; a big town, still industrial but no longer the coal-mining centre it had been that brought the arrival of the railway. From there we took a lovely if sinuous road across the remote Parc Naturel Régional du Pilat. Driving would have been easier without the horde of cyclists pitting their strength against the climb. We stopped for a while at the roadside Auberge de La République, which seemed to serve only passing trade and the local road repairers, whose company we shared over a lovely cup of coffee.

We caught up with the cyclists at the Col de La République, where, like them we stopped to admire the view across the mountains. Then we set off downwards, now ahead of the cyclists to reach the Rhône. We had a choice of routes here – left bank or right bank. We chose the lesser used and more scenic right bank. We found an ideal spot, surrounded by vineyards, to eat the rest of our pizzas and watch the trains go by. As with the road, so with the railway – there are lines both sides of the river, although where we were it was an exclusively freight route. Further south, near Avignon, a passenger service to Nîmes has recently been re-introduced. After our lunch we continued south, passing through Tournon-sur-Rhône and reviving memories of days spent visiting the Vivarais railway, although we did not stop since there were no trains that day. So by early afternoon, we made it to Valence, our next port of call. New road construction had modified the approach to the town but it assisted our approach to the hotel since that was from the south and thus avoided having to turn across a busy road. By now I was missing my little magnifying glass and wondered if I might find something among the stationery department of the hypermarket just over the road and near enough even for me to walk.. Fortunately there was a pedestrian crossing. I had no luck in the hypermarket, but the optician there came up with a wonderful credit card sized magnifier with built in LED light. It has turned out to be very useful indeed.

In the morning (Saturday) we started towards Aix-en-Provence. This time we followed the left bank of the river as far as Orange before cutting across the Luberon country through Carpentras to get to our destination. We found a nice bakery in a Centre Commerciale on the northern outskirts where we had an enjoyable snack lunch.

We were anticipating difficulties negotiating the road network around the town, despite our arriving and leaving on the RN7, which was for part of the way subsumed in a motorway type road. But we survived and found ourselves pointing in the right direction on the right road. Then our troubles began.

First we turned off too soon and found ourselves in the middle of nowhere. Turning round – itself a bit of a nightmare since the road was so narrow and twisty - we made it back to the main road. But we couldn't find the hotel. We did find a small supermarket and asked there. We were pointed to the hotel next door. We were assured it was the right place but the name had been changed. It wasn't and the name hadn't changed. The place seemed deserted and access was apparently by paying by machine and obtaining a code to open the door.

Fortunately someone inside saw me and opened the door. They were able to tell me where our hotel really was – we had passed the entrance hidden by roadworks. Retracing our steps, we found it second time round. Like the other one, access was by machine. But we couldn't make the code work. We had to phone the emergency number and the caretaker came to let us in. The trick was that you had to tap in your code very quickly or it didn't work. After a few practice tries we finally got the hang of it. Although the hotel was basic even by the standards of IBIS Budget, the little restaurant just a couple of hundred metres away was divine.

Fortunately we found it during the afternoon and were able to reserve a table for dinner that evening. I'll gloss over taking the wrong exit at the roundabout and finding ourselves confronted by the motorway toll booths. Getting back out again was a bit tricky to say the least!

By Sunday morning we knew where we were going. It was RN7 all the way to Nice – all along the Mediterranean coast. Couldn't be easier – or so we thought! We took a wrong turning approaching Cannes and found ourselves in a dead end in an industrial estate. It took us ages to find our way out of the labyrinth. But back on the RN7 we found our way past Antibes without seeing any of the spots we had visited during our honeymoon. And so on towards Nice, now actually signposted – but we were heading towards Terminal 2 before it dawned on us that Nice Côte d'Azur was actually the airport.. Fortunately the exit was also signposted and soon we were on a parallel road out again leading us back towards the 'Promenade des Anglais' – couldn't be easier could it?. Except that ahead of us, the main road was closed off and we found ourselves going into an underground car park instead. Again we managed to manoeuvre out again and found the ill signed 'Déviation'. We got to the old port without any difficulty but then found that the one-way system had been changed and we spent nearly an hour touring the adjacent streets to get to our hotel – which we had seen a couple of times the wrong way down a one-way street before we found the other end of it.

Fortunately there was a space just outside the entrance to the hotel's car park, which we blocked until we could get the car inside. Many modern French buildings are all columns and breeze-block walls in their underparts and this was no exception. I have been in French underground car parks before but this one really was a tight squeeze, with a U-turn necessary between columns to get inside. In trying to ensure the rear of the car was clear of one column, I scraped my wing mirror on another. But we had arrived.

Jenny and Philip Worsfold

RECENT EVENTS...

Découverte de Nice 18th – 24th September.

Jenny and I spent a splendid week with European friends at the jointly organised event of the French sections of AEC and FEANDC. We arrived on the Sunday afternoon after an action packed journey by road (see earlier) so were glad to relax a bit before the event took off. But on the Sunday evening we dined delightfully at the Comptoir Centrale Électrique restaurant in rue Bonaparte, just a few metres from the Hotel du Pin, where we stayed during the event. Dining outdoors – as you can in these parts – the atmosphere was indeed electric as this road seems to be a centre for nightlife for the young and young at heart. It was a lovely surprise to be greeted by friends from Poland, Germany and Spain as we dined and they made their way from the tram stop to the hotel.

On Monday, Jenny and I explored the area around the hotel to the Place Garibaldi and down to the Old Port. Rue Bonaparte was a bit quieter and we enjoyed a gentle stroll with stop for coffee and lunch before returning to the hotel for a rest, to meet the new arrivals and get to the restaurant 'Le Garibaldi' for the welcome drink and dinner.

Tuesday morning dawned bright and clear and perfect for the conducted walking tour of the town. This proved too much for Philip but Jenny told him that he had already seen the best bits so hadn't missed a great deal. However he had not been informed that lunch had been brought forward, so by the time he rejoined the party, it was well under way. In the afternoon we took a bus tour – again slightly disrupted because there was insufficient room on the first bus and those who did not had to walk to the bus terminus and then take a slightly truncated journey ending at the Old Port, where we visited the sweet, chocolate and preserve factory of Florian. We were all ready to eat when we returned to 'Le Garibaldi' for dinner.

French AEC then held their AGM.

On Wednesday we departed the hotel for the nearest tram stop to get us to the Nice terminus of the Chemin de fer de Provence, a metre gauge line which serves both as a suburban artery and a link up into the mountainous country behind the city. The 'Train des Pignes' left punctually at 09h25 we travelled as far as Entrevaux for a guided visit of the medieval town before lunch. In times past, the town was effectively on the border between what became France and what became Italy so was walled and fortified and on the hill above stood the Citadel. Overlooking the joining of two valleys and controlling what went on below. The streets were narrow with fascinating old buildings and an excellent restaurant for lunch. After lunch we were free to explore further and climb the hill to the Citadel – a feat sadly beyond Philip's abilities. We returned to Nice on the train, arriving just before six in the height of the rush hour. It was a squeeze on the tram back to Place Garibaldi, but most people were taking sensible Covid precautions and I've not heard of anyone catching it. We returned to Le Garibaldi for dinner, after which it was the turn of French FEANDC to hold their AGM.

Thursday was the day for the boat trip to Monaco. We got down to the Old Port in good time to sally forth into a fairly rough sea. The trip took about three quarters of an hour. From the port we admired or were appalled by the luxury yachts tied up there before climbing up through the rocky enclave – using escalators or lifts whenever possible. Some of us got a bit lost but we all got up to the palace of Monte Carlo on the top of the bluff in good time to see the changing of the guard at noon. Lunch followed at a charming restaurant before a conducted visit of the Prince's palace. Return to the port was thankfully all downhill and the sea had calmed for the return trip to Nice. Philip found the walk back to the hotel a bit of a struggle but eventually made it in time for dinner at Le Garibaldi. Then it was the turn of the AEC Administrative Council to hold its meeting – the second of the year, to conform with the Statutes, although it was, in fact, inquorate.

On Friday morning we departed by coach eastwards along the coast to the village of Eze to visit the perfumery and laboratory of Fragonard, a well known parfumerie. We stopped for photos at points of view along the way, since the road follows the coastline some height above sea level. There was time to shop before lunch at the Pinocchio restaurant. Some intrepid souls climbed up the hill to the old village at the top. Some of us decided a cool beer was a better idea! We left Eze fairly early so we could get ourselves ready for the Gala dinner that evening at Le Garibaldi. During the dinner, Philip received his citation as a European President of Honour of AEC.

The following morning it was over and we all set forth homewards Jenny and Philip in their car heading back towards Aix-en Provence and a further adventure. But that's another story.

Weekend visit to Brussels.

Six of us from the British Section travelled by Eurostar for a long weekend in Brussels from Friday 25th November to Monday 28th November. There we met up with two friends from the French Section, Pierrette and Gilles Michel; along with Belgian section members Johny van der Bracht and Angela Lewus, who live locally and had been a great help in getting the show off the ground. By sheer chance, the European General Secretary of AEC, Malgorzata Boczek from Poland happened to be in Belgium at the same time and, for one day, we were able to meet up with her. With one from the Polish Section who, by sheer good luck, happened to be staying in Belgium at that time,

This made for a great mix of personalities, nationalities and language – an experience that we in AEC are privileged to enjoy. It even attracted the attention of a fellow diner in a restaurant where we were taking one of our evening meals; he stopped to ask us what sort of group we were and was amazed when we explained what AEC was!

The Christmas market was open in Brussels – visited by most of us – some adventurers trying out the big wheel, and the Christmas lights in the Grand Place were quite amazing.

We also had a day in Bruges (where there were two Christmas markets) and, being in the Flemish part of Belgium, having quite different architecture and a generally different 'feel'. It's a town where we could have spent much more time.

On Sunday we travelled to Schaerbeek (having by now just about mastered the art of getting the cheapest tickets from the machines at the station) to visit the railway museum, "Train World". And a very good museum it is too, having things of interest both to the train buffs and to some of us more interested in the social history. (My own attempt on the train simulator was great fun but indicated that I would never have made a train driver.)

Returning on Monday morning on a Eurostar from Amsterdam and running a bit late, we were really sorry to say goodbye to the others in the group, until next time – but at least the sun was shining when we got back into England

Jenny Worsfold

...AND THINGS TO COME

Monthly Reunions...

Our efforts to hold Reunions in Birmingham have fallen on stony ground. The October Reunion had to be cancelled because of the rail strike, and there was insufficient support forthcoming for the one person who aimed to attend to risk spending three and a half hours travelling time to lunch alone in a pub he would have been visiting for the first time. A return to Reading has been suggested but we intend to discuss the whole subject of Reunions when

we have our weekend together in Brussels – an event which will have just taken place when you receive this. We had not planned a Reunion in December and it seems likely that we shall suspend them at least until after the publication of the next edition of the newsletter. In the meantime, any change will be advised by e-mail only. If we do not have your e-mail address, and you wish to receive notices between newsletters, please inform the Editor.

Visits.

Nigel is also working on a visit to a Beer Festival on the North Norfolk Railway. Bob's investigation into the possibility of a longer visit to the Great Little Trains of Wales and Port Meirion to which we thought we might invite overseas members for the meeting of the European Administrative Council, proved to be massively too expensive for our consideration – or that of our European colleagues. It is sobering to note that a 3-star hotel in central Brussels is now significantly cheaper than the most basic hotel near Kings Cross station in London..

ASSOCIATION TIES AND BADGES.

In common with other sections, the British section of the Association has a necktie and a badge. Our particular items are common to both the British and Belgian sections. We have produced the ties and the Belgian section, the badges. We are looking into the possibility of having a unisex T-shirt or sweatshirt. What do you think?

Ties (at £4.50 plus postage), and badges (last one at £1.50, including UK inland postage) are available from **Philip Worsfold**. Please contact him first by e-mail or phone to check availability (details at the top of page 2).

CHARTERED INSTITUTE OF LOGISTICS AND TRANSPORT (CILT)

Railway Study Forum: The former Railway Study Association has merged with the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (CILT) as the Railway Study Forum. Subscription rates have changed and no longer include a subscription to 'Modern Railways'. Each annual session of lectures, is now on line and together with other details and activities can be found on the CILT website. <https://ciltuk.org.uk>

YOUNG BUFFERS ASSOCIATION.

There is no subscription provided that you have an e-mail address; and no obligation to attend their events. If you would like further details, the Secretary is Larry Fullwood, tel. 01485 541599, e-mail larry.fullwood@virgin.net.

REPTA.

The long standing Railway Employees' and Public Transport Association offers bargain price insurance through offers including competitive insurances through their brokers the Alan Boswell Group; and concessions and discounts at stores and attractions throughout the country. The 'Yearbook' gives full details, including the invaluable guide to staff travel facilities throughout the world. For details contact our Asst Secretary, Peter Davies (see page 2), who is also General Secretary of REPTA; or visit: www.repta.co.uk

FEANDC.

FEANDC has similar social aims to AEC; and like AEC has sections in a number of European countries, including some which do not have AEC sections. More details and all other information about FEANDC are available from Peter Davies (address etc on Page 2).

AND FOR THE FUTURE???

We shall endeavour to continue the production of these newsletters. I use a variety of sources for news of international interest and thank those members who send me information – but I continue with my plea for more from you. I hope I shall be able to keep my promise of more articles. So please, put pen to paper yourselves so that I can build up a library of articles. Please keep in touch and let us have your information, your views and your ideas.

The next issue will be published for 1st March 2023

The copy deadline is **1st February 2022.**

SUMMARY OF EVENTS

Because of the recent poor attendances at recent Reunions and the need to cancel some due to transport strikes, we have decided to consider if they are the right way forward. We are therefore not holding any social events in January or February 2023. Please let us have your ideas for consideration.