

Winslow Oral History Project

Interview Summary

Interviewee	John Elvin		Date of interview	1 March 2012
Maiden name				
DOB		Place of birth	Ealing, London	
Father's occupation				
Mother's occupation				
Interviewer	Sue Stainthorpe			
No. of files (tracks)	1	Copyright status	Cleared	
Abstract	John describes his involvement in the Oxon and Bucks Rail Action Committee (OBRAC) and their campaign to re-open the railway line through Winslow. He mentions the Special Trains run from the old Winslow Station, and plans for re-opening the line.			
Keywords	Winslow Station, , Special Trains, Quainton Rd Station, Calvert, Aylesbury, Milton Keynes, Oxford, Bletchley, The Open University, East-West Rail Project, Bicester, Bedford			
Key people	Peter Clark			
File				
001	John moved to Winslow in 1986 and became involved in running the Special Trains from the old Winslow Station from then until 1993.			
	He was born in Ealing in West London and first became interested in railways in the early 1950s when his aunt used to take him to Ealing Broadway station to watch the express trains to and from Paddington going through to the West Country. His family then moved to Sudbury (Wembley) to a house which backed onto the Marylebone to High Wycombe railway line.			
0.52	He moved to Winslow in May 1986, though he had first seen the town from a train on an excursion from Wembley to Rugby through Metroland in 1984. Although in those days the station was closed, he could see where houses were being built on the new Magpie Farm Estate. On moving to Winslow, he discovered the disused station at the bottom of Station Road, still with an old poster displaying parking charges of 6d per day, although the station had closed to regular passenger trains at the end of December 1967.			
1.37	He noticed an advertisement in Bucks Herald or Advertiser for Christmas Shopper Special Trains from Aylesbury to Milton Keynes via Winslow, so he went down to the station and recorded the event with his camcorder. He met some people there who were trying to get regular services from Winslow station again.			
2.03	The following year, 1987, there were again some Christmas Shopper Special Trains from Aylesbury Quainton Road through Winslow to Milton Keynes on the three Saturdays before Christmas. John went down again with his cameras and he met Peter Clark, a railwayman from Aylesbury whom he knew. Peter was selling tickets, and John also volunteered to sell tickets for the remaining two Special trains. John put up posters in shop windows in Winslow, notices beside the road, and also articles in the local press. He also took flasks of hot coffee for the passengers who were waiting for the train.			
2.55	Later on one of these days there was a meeting in Milton Keynes in a			

	community hall (Centrecom) where the Oxon and Bucks Rail Action Committee was formed. This was an alliance of people mainly from rail user groups and pro-rail campaigners, who were committed to re-opening of the line from Oxford to Bletchley to passengers. At that time the line was only used for a few stone trains and once a week a train carrying fertiliser down to Calvert.
3.43	Once the group was set up John became Treasurer and Assistant Secretary of OBRAC. At one time there were over 100 members of the group, not only from Winslow and surrounding areas, but also from as far away as Wales and Bournemouth.
4.17	Around 1990-1991, the group decided to run their own Special Trains. In 1991 they ran a special to Bedford from Oxford, Islip, Bicester and Winslow. In the following year they ran one to Spalding, again starting from Oxford, and also in the autumn of 1992 another special from Aylesbury and Winslow to the Goose Fair in Nottingham. These were all very well supported.
4.55	At this time Winslow Station had been closed for over 20 years and the platform was covered in weeds with broken paving stones so John had to clear these, make sure the platform was level and paint white lines on it. He also got some replica 1960s signs and some running-in boards.
5.40	The Special Trains ran up to 1993, when the last one left Winslow Station for the Spalding Flower Festival and on to Lincoln. This was extremely successful and John still has some posters and handbills.
6.03	Other than running the Special Trains, the group campaigned for the opening of the Oxford to Bletchley line, with a link down to Aylesbury. Over the years they have lobbied MPs, Councillors, and Rail Companies, published their own history of Winslow Station and the railway line, organised public meetings, made slide shows, one member made a model of a new Winslow Station when it re-opens, and also a model of the whole line between Winslow and Oxford, which the group took to an exhibition in Bicester and ran it all day.
6.51	In 1991 the Open University came to make a documentary on Winslow and spent 2-3 days interviewing local people. John was interviewed on Winslow Station. During this interview a stone train came through and this is on the recording, which John still has on DVD. He says that it is interesting to see the town as it was then and the reasons for re-opening the line are still as valid now as they were 20 years ago.
7.37	In March 2012 the group celebrate their 25 th anniversary and will hold their AGM at Centrecom, the same place where they first began.
8.00	John mentions the last train from Winslow on 1 st May 1993, but in fact there was one more train which called at Winslow but didn't pick up any passengers. It was a Hertfordshire Rail Tours Special and stopped at Winslow because this was the last weekend that the line was open. It was called the "Mothball Special" and John has recorded this on film.
8.30	As from the 1 st June 1993 the line was closed (officially "mothballed") which meant that trains couldn't run, but in theory the line should be preserved and the bridges looked after so that it shouldn't be too difficult when the line was re-opened in the future.
8.53	When OBRAC first became involved, the line was only used for freight trains, there was a speed limit of 30-40 mph and when the stone trains went through, usually early in the morning, the nearby houses could feel the vibration. In those days special permission was required from the Department of Transport to run any train carrying passengers over a freight line
9.32	We now have the news that, subject to local funding being identified by July

	<p>2012, the line should be re-opened by 2017, with contractors starting in 2015. Up until then the group will have to make sure that the East-West Rail Project meets the Government's conditions for funding. They are working closely with the East-West Rail Consortium and local councils to make sure this is achieved, but it is looking positive. Running up to 2017, they will be liaising with local train operators to make sure that the train service meets local expectations and there are enough trains calling at Winslow to make local people want to use the service. After that, the group will probably transform itself from a campaigning group to a user group to ensure that the service meets local needs and performs well. John will take an active interest in the new station and will make sure it is being well maintained. The new station is planned to be built just off the Buckingham Road in the deep cutting next to the railway bridge. There will be plenty of parking spaces and also shops and light industry there.</p>
11.21	<p>John feels that travel opportunities will be improved by the re-opening of the line for those who don't want to use cars with the increasing cost of fuel. There is also a proposed bus interchange at the station which will serve passengers coming by bus from Buckingham.</p>
11.51	<p>As of March 2012, there are no plans to use the line for freight. However, if in the future the authorities wish to run freight trains, with the modern track John says they will be nothing like as noisy as the old stone trains were in the past. John stressed that the line is being re-opened primarily for passengers. John quotes the latest cost-benefit study of a 6 to 1 ratio, meaning that for every pound investing in rebuilding the line will generate 6 pounds in local benefits.</p>
12.54	<p>Looking forward to later this year, he is hopeful the Government will give the final go-ahead and construction can start in 2015.</p>
13.14	<p>There will be two services coming through Winslow; one train per hour from London via Aylesbury, Winslow and on to Milton Keynes, and two trains per hour from Oxford, Bicester, Winslow, Bletchley and Bedford. 3 trains per hour will be stopping at Winslow. The platform at Milton Keynes has already been built for the East-West trains from Winslow.</p>