

# LIVING THE STEAM DREAM ON THE TORBAY EXPRESS

IT IS the nearest thing to time travel. The coaches are painted in classic Great Western chocolate and cream livery and at their head a legendary King class locomotive.

A long whistle pierces the air. Moments later the six feet six inch diameter driving wheels begin to turn and 6024 King Edward I draws out from beneath Temple Meads majestic station roof.

The sound from her pistons echo back through the train. The unmistakable aroma of locomotive steam drifts gently in through the open windows. It could easily be a Sunday departure in the 1930s.

But this is July 2010 and this is the Torbay Express recreating a summer excursion to Devon. On board are 350 people. Some celebrating birthdays, some simply enjoying a day out. But all of them lured by a love of steam.

The time travel illusion continues as an upright man in steel framed glasses and an immaculate white station master's uniform makes his way through the carriages. He is 63-year-old Michael Wyatt who runs the family carpet business, Leonard Wyatt and Sons in Brislington. His uniform was worn by the station master at Temple Meads.

His love affair with railways began when he was three and was given a clockwork train. "I can't remember a time when railways were not part of my life," he said.

"And look at this," he says proudly. "The last time I saw a Great Western engine power at the head of a train on a Great Western route" It is now just after 9.15. But for the team of volunteers who help maintain, clean and prepare King Edward I the day began more than four hours earlier on a siding at the Barton Hill depot in Days Road.

King Edward I, one of only three out of the original 52 King class locomotives left and the only one currently running on the mainline, is being prepared for her day's outing.

Imported Russian coal towers above her and a giant orange hose snakes its way along the trackside gushing water into her tender.

Nearly on a support coach Shirley Parry is making tea. She admits she is besotted. "I fell in love with her the first time I saw her," she said.

She had gone to video King Edward I. Not long after she became a volunteer helping to clean the mighty engine.

Today she is a regular member of the support crew who travel everywhere with the loco.

Her husband, Nicholas, even proposed to her on the footplate.

"All steam engines are she," says the 54-year-old consumer services officer from Yeovil. "They are living beings when they are in steam, they have their own personalities, their own characters, their

The Torbay Express is a re-creation of a train which ran between Bristol and Devon in the days of steam. ROB STOKES and photographer STEVE ROBERTS stepped aboard for a memorable trip



First class! Anne and Kevin Hogarty, of Clevedon, with Dave Jackson, right, of Brent Knoll, share the champagne during the trip to Torbay



Steam team: Fireman Vince Henderson, front, and driver Fred Lewis, to his right, with support crew, from left, Marilyn Bane, Cynthia Brown, Dave Fuszard, Shirley Parry, Keith Lines, Richard Corser, Tim Watson, Richard Loydall and Martin Ryan



All aboard: King Edward I brings the Torbay Express into Temple Meads before



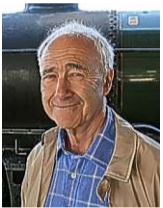
Pride and joy: Michael Wyatt in an original Temple Meads station master's uniform



'Besotted': Shirley Parry, of Yeovil, a member of the King Edward I support team



Finishing touch: The Torbay Express headboard is fitted



Nostalgia: Barry Cordell, Torbay Express director

own ways of behaving."

This particular "she" was 80 years old last Monday.

Yet but for the vision and dedication of volunteers King Edward I could have been a victim of the cutter's torch and lost forever.

When British Rail withdrew her in 1962 she ended up at the infamous Barry scrapyard.

But in 1973 a group of enthusiasts bought her for £4,000 and set about restoring her. It was a project described as mission impossible.

Like everyone involved steam it is in his blood.

As we head towards Devon in glorious morning sunshine literally hundreds of people turn out to watch.

One of them is retired architect and editor of the 6024 Society's magazine Tim Watson.

"I'm not an engineer but there is always something I can do," he says.

"There's not a person on the planet who could not do something to help."

As if to prove it during a stop for water 65-year-old Tim is on top of King Edward's tender moving coal to make it easier for the fireman.

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A mum lifts her giggling baby up at a bedroom window; children still in their pyjamas clamber onto window sills to peer out from their bedrooms, stick in salute, people in their back gardens lift mugs of tea. They all wave and smile. And people on board wave back.

Among them are pensioners Hugh and Ruby Thomas.

We do this three times a year," explains 84 year old Ruby.

The couple who have two sons and a daughter are always joined by a member of the family.

Hugh, 88, says: "I have always been interested in

steam because as a child we used to go on steam trains up and down to Devon."

"They just bring back so many happy memories," says Ruby, who like her husband spent a working lifetime with the Royal Mail.

It is music to the ears of Torbay Express director Barry Cordell.

He has introduced dining coaches to the train for the first time this year.

"We are offering people nostalgia. We just want them to have a really good day out," he says.

But it is not without its headaches. Six days before last Sunday's run the locomotive

that had been due to haul the train, the A1 newly built Tornado, developed a fault and had to be withdrawn.

Barry then had a frantic two days trying to get a replacement. On Wednesday he managed to secure King Edward I.

Throughout the train people are dining or tucking into snacks from the buffet car or eating home-made sandwiches.

But on the footplate it's a different world.

The heat from the firebox is intense, the exhaust sounds like thunder. The cab is rocking, the countryside is flashing by at 75 mph. It is so noisy you have to shout to

her round trip to Kingswear in Devon

make yourself heard. If this was a fairground ride it would be the most exhilarating ever created.

On the outside King Edward I is shining green paint and polished brass fittings, on the inside a charging, vibrant beast straining to get free.

Fifty-year-old fireman Vince Henderson constantly shovels coal into the open mouth of her firebox. Such is the heat that it crackles instantly it lands.

"It's a case of you and the driver against the engine. If you let her get ahead of you then you're beaten. So we work as a team," he says grinning widely, his features covered in a layer of coal dust. He looks like a miner coming off shift.

In the space of a few hours he shifts tonnes of coal in a

space where he is barely able to swing round. But he loves it. A railwayman for 18 years he is based at Barton Hill driving diesel freight trains in the week. But after volunteering for a course seven years ago he is now a regular fireman aboard steam specials.

"I couldn't do it without him. He's the important one," shouts 54-year-old driver Fred Lewis his hands never far from the giant bright orange lever at the heart of the cab. It is the regulator controlling our speed.

Watching over all of this with a gentle Welsh benevolence is a railwayman of 57 years. He is Gareth Jones the inspector and the man in overall charge. At 71 he is officially retired but he is still in demand for steam specials.

"There's never been a day when I haven't enjoyed coming to work and I see more of the rail network now than when I was working," he says.

We are now pulling into Paignton where Fred and Vince will finish their shift. Fred brings the mighty King to a gentle halt, there is a hiss of steam and the brakes are lock on.

He then turns with a smile to fireman Vince and offers a coal blackened hand. "Thanks mate," he says.

## Travel details

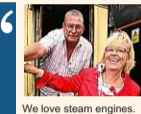
Torbay Express Leaves Bristol Temple Meads for Kingswear on the following Sundays, July 18 and 25, August 1, 8, 15 and 22, September 5, 19 and 26. Tickets cost: Premier dining £175 First class £109 Standard class £75 For more details go to [torbayexpress.co.uk](http://torbayexpress.co.uk).



We're here out of nostalgia for steam, excellent dining and relaxation. We try to do this every year. We thoroughly enjoy it. It's a great experience. Michael Hopkins, 55, sales manager, Weston. Jill Hopkins, 54.



It's absolutely fantastic. We love it. We will look to book up for next year when we get home. Lynda Thomas, 53, and Brian Knight, 63, Coalpit Heath.



We love steam engines. They come from a more genial era. This trip is like going back in time. Gary Mayo, 57, runs a tyre business, Cheddar. Sue Mayo, 55.



This is a Father's Day treat for my dad. It is just marvellous. Trains like this are kept running. It is great for us and must be very rewarding for all those that are involved. Gary Lane, 50, Weston.



It's lovely, it's really nostalgic. I wasn't aware of steam trains when they were first around but it's great to be able to experience trips like this. Linda Rogers, 52, Weston.



Travelling in style: King Edward I and the Torbay Express at Kingswear, Devon

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