



Railway Memories

Working On The Railway
50 YEARS OF MEMORIES
By John Taylor

If Watson Crowther had worked another three months on the railways they would have given him a gold watch-but he only worked forty four years nine months. I've heard it mentioned somebody was just one day short so he missed being presented with his gold watch. I bet he was annoyed," said Watson". He brought back sweeter memories from his life on the railways at his home in Riley Street Broadclough. "Even though im now 81, my mind is pretty clear about things of the past. An old railway man, especially a driver, somehow has steam or oil or smoke in his lungs and never loses that excitement which has now become a part of such places as Haworth and Carnforth. That visit to the British Rail film shown at Whitworth during the festival really brought back some memories for me. " Well to start near the beginning, you won't remember the Barley Mow above the Flowers will you ? he asked, not really expecting an answer. " Well my mother converted that pub into a house. It's still there on the right up Tod Road ".



"When I was 12 years old, my first job was part timing at Parrock Mill for half a crown a week. I later went to Holmes Mill and trained as a Weaver. Both these mills have recently become but a memory. "In 1912 after a period of farm labouring on on Holmes Barn, I joined the railways. I got 14s10d a week for cleaning and firing engines at the old loco sheds up New Line. It was a big engine shed was number21,with room for up to 52 engines. The worst job I remember was going round knocking up the drivers-it meant getting up in the middle of the night". After a move to Newton Heath for about six years, Watson came back to Bacup as a fireman-cum-spare driver. The natural progression from cleaner to fireman to driver was a slow one and there was a strict order of service for promotion. "When a man died or left everyone seemed to move a rung up the success ladder", he said and added", today things are a little different.



After qualifying for what every schoolboy of yesteryear wanted to be when he grew up, Watson M. Crowther the engine driver, drove steam engines for over twenty years up and down the valley, over Britannia to Rochdale and often further a field. He mentioned other local drivers such as Dicky Hanson, Billy Russell, Albert Smith, Harry Taylor-two, Sammy Hirst, B Butterworth, and that fund of railway reminiscence Jimmy Manion all joined the railway in the nineteen tens and all were still living in the Borough. He thought he was the oldest. When the Bacup shed eventually closed on August 1954, Watson was moved down to Bury for a short while with the era of steam trains coming to a abrupt halt when the valley line was dieselled in 1956. Watson reluctantly left the footplate life-with 44 years nine months service on the railways-and worked at Irwell Springs Mill up Weir. After a spell as watchman at Meadows Mill he decided that at the age of 78-after 66 years working he deserved a rest. In his retirement he hasn't been sitting around with his feet up. He enthuses that his travels in the last three years have taken him on a variety of types of transport to various parts of the world. Portugal, the Canary Isles and Jerusalem have all been visited by Watson and plans are in hand for Maybe Mexico or Malta next year. But all this is another story and somewhat removed from the days of Steam Engines at Bacup Station.