

LIVE MUSEUM OF STEAM RAILWAYS

By ARTHUR GAUNT



THE STRANGE SIGHT of a steam locomotive being trundled slowly along a Norfolk road on a giant transporter aroused much public interest in August, 1968. Eight steering axles enabled the carrier to be manoeuvred from Diss station to Bressingham.

The "cargo" was the 143-ton *Oliver Cromwell*, a 4-6-2 Britannia Class Pacific engine bearing the number 70013. It was to have its useful life extended by being added to the Museum of Steam founded in 1961 by Mr. Alan Bloom, of Bressingham Hall.

The *Oliver Cromwell* had already been accorded a distinction, having been chosen to head the last steam-hauled B.R. train to run on the Liverpool-Carlisle line on August 11 in the same year.

It had then travelled light to Norwich—and that trip was a further historical event, for this locomotive had started its regular career there when it arrived brand new in 1951. From Norwich it was towed to Diss station for completion of its journey to Bressingham by road.

Thundersley, a fine example of a 4-4-2 express tank engine built by a firm with an honoured name in rail

transport development (Robert Stephenson & Co. Ltd., of Darlington) was also moved to Bressingham.

This engine was chosen to be specially restored and decorated for the Coronation of King George V in 1911. It received VIP treatment again in the centenary celebrations of the London, Tilbury & Southend Railway, having served that line for 47 years.

After taking part in these commemorations this doyen of the L.T. & S.R. was stored by British Rail, but its care and subsequent renovation were undertaken by the Norfolk Railway Society. In this way members of that organisation obtained helpful insight into looking after steam-driven railway engines.

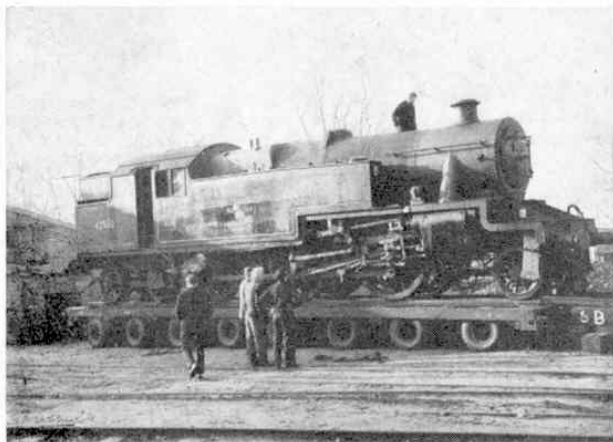
Now on permanent loan to the Bressingham railway museum, *Thundersley* was re-tubed by volunteers in 1969 and is in first-rate mechanical and steaming condition today.

An example of the type which preceded it, an 85-ton three-cylinder 2-6-4 tank locomotive built in 1934, and numbered 2500 for service with the L.T. & S.R. section of the L.M.S., has also been given.

There are now thirteen railway locos cared for on this Norfolk property. Road traction engines in working order are also to be seen there, and although there are other preservation societies concerned with souvenirs of steam transport, the Bressingham collection is the only one in Britain where exhibits of both rail and road engines are maintained as "live" ones.

The thirteen locomotives comprise seven standard gauge ones, a one-metre gauge engine, four 2 ft. gauge examples, and a 9½ in. gauge engine.

This singular but attractive and instructive enterprise arose in a fortuitous way. Needing a hobby in direct contrast to his horticultural activities at Bressingham, Mr. Bloom turned to steam transport, chiefly because a favourite Burrell traction engine named *Bella* came to an untimely end in 1950.



Heading picture shows *Oliver Cromwell* on Bressingham track in late 1968. Left: No. 2500 on arrival, on loan from B.R.



This useful engine was sold for scrap during his absence, and for more than ten years it was not replaced. In 1961, however, another Burrell, named *Bertha*, was bought for use on the estate.

Many of the visitors who came to enjoy the Bressingham gardens at that time expressed pleasure on seeing *Bertha*, and it soon became clear that most people have nostalgic memories of steam travel. From this circumstance emerged the idea of forming a collection not only on show but also in operation, and including railway engines as well as traction engines.

By the end of 1961 eight railway locomotives were brought to Bressingham, though they were mostly in a sorry state. Restoring them promised to be formidable, but volunteers with engineering knowledge and experience helped railway "fans" to take on the job.

More progress in establishing the working museum occurred when a small 9½ in. gauge locomotive called *Princess* joined the collection. A 750-yard track was laid alongside the gardens, and the mini line proved so popular that other developments were encouraged.

Most visitors wanted to see the widely spread nursery gardens, yet sightseers could not be allowed to wander there at will, lest the plants be damaged.

To overcome the problem a 2 ft. gauge railway has

been constructed. Skirting the two-acre lake, and going alongside the beds where some 600,000 plants are grown, this facility has enabled visitors to obtain enthralling views of the gardens which they could not enjoy previously.

The original half-mile track has since been extended, and today it has a length of nearly three miles. It has historical links with other narrow-gauge railways, too, for the rails were brought from a quarry line in Wales and from a cement works track.

The rolling stock includes a number of "toast rack" coaches formerly used by miners at Penrhyn slate quarries. Three locomotives (named *George Sholto*, *Gwynedd*, and *Bronwlyd*) were purchased as well. They were augmented by the *Doll*, an 0-6-0 tank engine used previously by Stewarts and Lloyds, Bilston.

Efforts to run the *Doll* as a passenger train engine at Bressingham proved mysteriously unsuccessful. Though the locomotive itself kept on the track, the coaches it was hauling became derailed on curves.

A closer inspection of the *Doll* revealed that its gauge was slightly wider than it was thought to be. Consequently the engine was pressing the track outwards on curves, and the coaches behind were unable to stay on the lines.

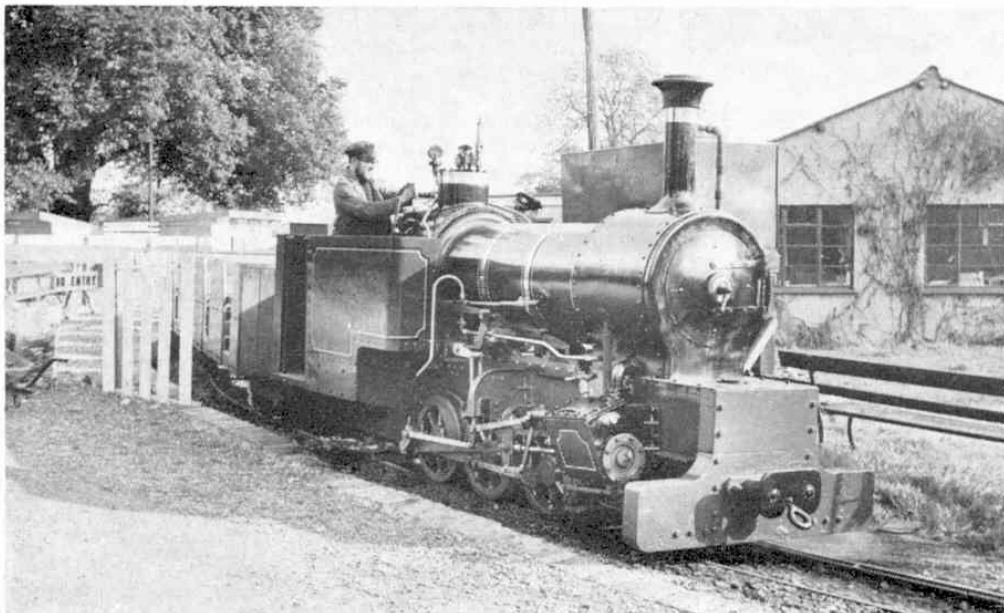
The loco concerned was therefore put up for sale and was bought by the Iron Horse Railway, Leighton Buzzard, Beds.

The metre gauge engine *Banshee* has been given a place in the museum, but it is now a static exhibit. It is one of three which ran on a mineral line near Wellingborough, Northamptonshire.

Outside bodies have helped to form the Bressingham collection. A 25-ton saddle tank standard gauge locomotive, *Beckton 25*, now on permanent loan there, served as an industrial engine and spent some years with the famous Bluebell Railway in Sussex, before being presented to the Industrial Locomotive Society for preservation.

The I.L.S. has also lent a chain-driven *Sentinel* to the Bressingham collection. This standard gauge engine was first used by the South Eastern Gas Board, but was eventually given to the I.L.S. That organisation in turn had it moved to Bressingham.

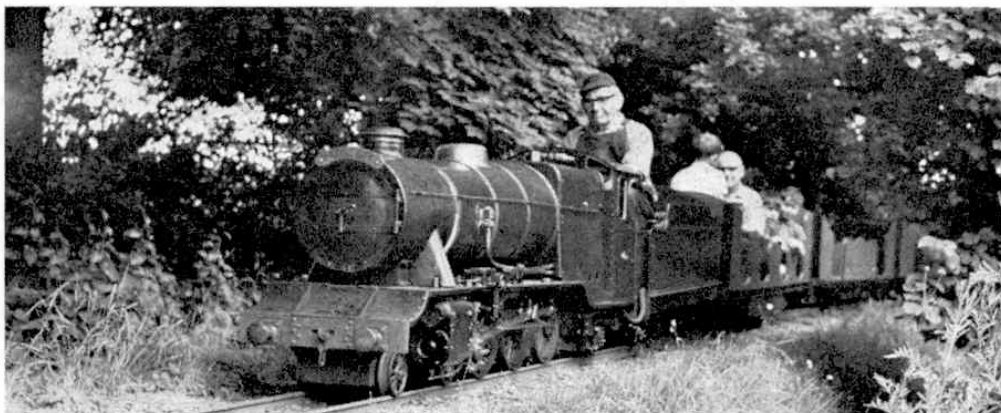
The exhibits there include Britain's sole surviving standard gauge Garratt type locomotive, *William*



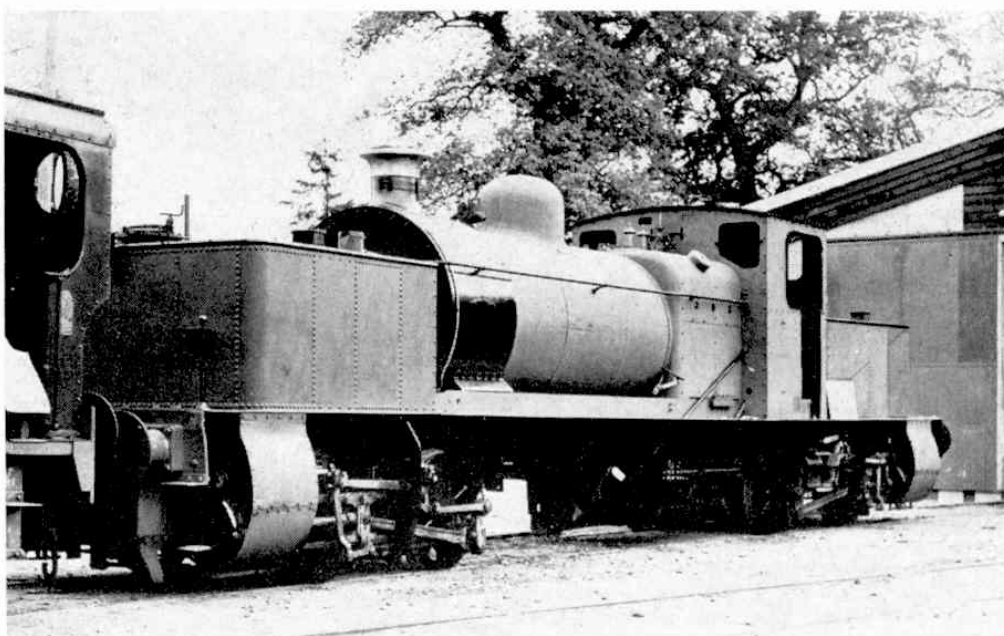
Above: *Thunderstey* on the road from Diss to Bressingham.

Left: *Bronwlyd*, a Hudswell Clarke chassis rebuilt by the museum in 1969, using the boiler from K.S. Stanhope.

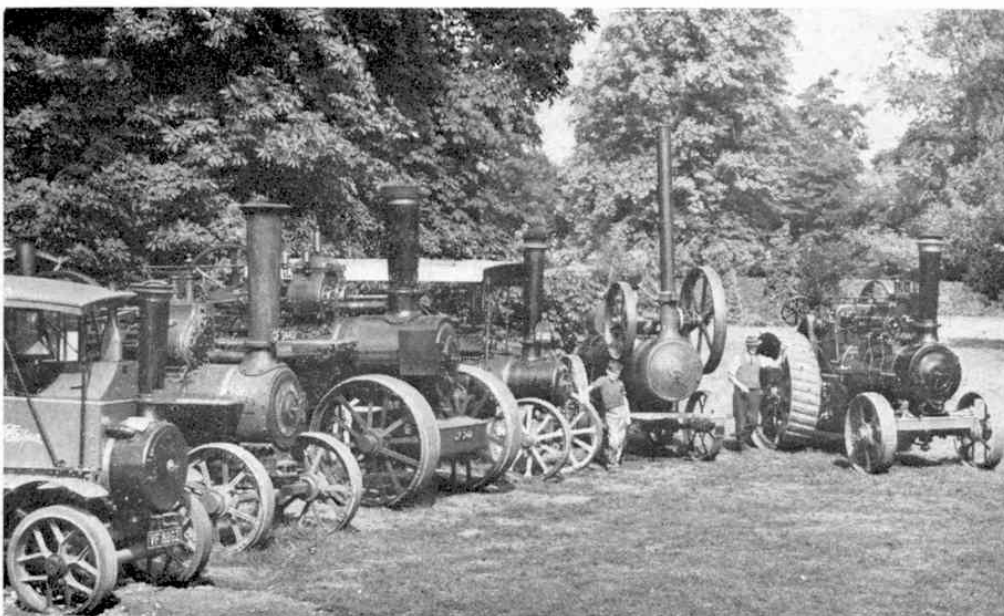
The first locomotive at Bressingham was this 9½ in. gauge *Princess Pacific*.



The Beyer-Peacock Garratt, the only such standard gauge engine in England, with its restoration nearly complete. This locomotive was owned by the Coal Board.



Not only locomotives are preserved by the museum, as this fine group of traction engines and road vehicles indicates.



Black Prince, a one-time showman's engine, as it arrived at Bressingham for restoration.

Francis. Built on an articulated chassis, it was designed for heavy loads up steep gradients and round difficult curves. It was named after the mine owner William Francis Dugdale.

When *Bronwlyd* first reached Bressingham from Penrhyn, it was a scrap chassis with no boiler. To put this relic into operational order a boiler from another scrap locomotive was installed. A Hudswell Clarke loco built in 1930, the Welsh-named engine was stripped and rebuilt with this second-hand boiler.

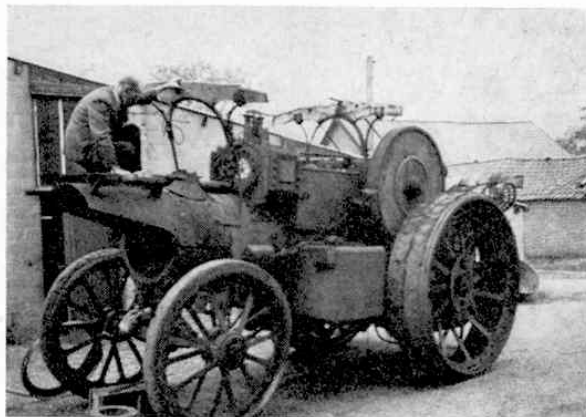
The Hunslet *George Sholto*, built more than sixty years ago, was the first locomotive to be used for regular passenger services on the nursery railway at Bressingham.

In May 1969 a new railway route was opened on the estate. Known as the Woodland Line, it gives visitors an opportunity to travel through a somewhat inaccessible area. The first steam-hauled trip along this mile-long line was made on a special "open" day by 500 passengers brought from London to Diss by the *Flying Scotsman*.

Plans for the near future include laying a new track half-a-mile long and with a 10½ in. gauge. It will give visitors an opportunity to make a new scenic ride round the lake.

Probably the most unexpected feature of this pleasant haven for steam locomotives is that diesel transport has intruded there! A diesel shunter has been introduced, but it is used solely for the nursery business, track repairs, and suchlike jobs.

Steam railway enthusiasts need not fear that the Bressingham collection of steam locomotives will be



diluted with more diesels.

A touch of gaiety is added to the scene by Mrs. Bloom's steam roundabout with an organ. This fair-ground souvenir is 90 years old, and after many years of travelling and giving joy to children and teenagers up and down the country, it has found a permanent site at Bressingham.

OPENING TIMES

First Sunday in May to First Sunday in October, inclusive: 1.30 p.m. to 6.30 p.m.

Bank Holidays in that period.

Third Thursday in May to third Thursday in September: 1.30 p.m. to 5.30 p.m. (Restricted steam activity on Thursdays).

Not open at other times except first Sunday afternoons in each month, November to April inclusive.

DINKY TOY NEWS (Continued from page 227)

plants—a 4-cylinder, 1.7 litre capacity unit developing 80 Horse Power, or a 6-cylinder 2 litre capacity unit which develops 110 Horse Power. The former gives the car a top speed approaching 110 m.p.h., while the 6-cylinder unit results in a maximum speed of almost 125 m.p.h.—figures which undoubtedly prove the "Sports Car" designation in the car's title, whichever engine is fitted.

The Dinky VolksPorsche, Sales No. 208, does not of course offer these speeds, but it certainly qualifies as "fast", thanks to the low-friction Speedwheels which are fitted. It reproduces all the "sporty" lines of the original and has its own model features, including opening doors and an opening bonnet, or, in this case, front luggage compartment lid. So snugly fitting is this lid, in fact, that a special "bonnet lifter" has been incorporated in the shape of a small button projecting through the baseplate. When pressed, this button raises the bonnet slightly to bring the edge free so that a finger can then be used to open the bonnet fully.

All the standard Dinky Toy features are present including windscreen, moulded seats, steering wheel and interior door panels, and German-style number plates. The final touch is supplied by an immaculate colour-scheme of yellow body, contrasting well with bright-plated bumper inserts, black baseplate and black interior fittings. The overall effect is striking, making the model a "must for serious collector and youngster alike".

The new VW-Porsche 914 Sports Car from Dinky, based on a fast 2-seater manufactured by Volkswagen-Porsche of Stuttgart, Germany. On the real car, the open cockpit would be enclosed by a removable hardtop which could be stowed in the boot during open motoring.

