



The
David Shepherd
Wildlife Foundation

Our Ref:DS/ja1222

9th July 2003

Colin Burges
Christow Station
Doddiscombsleigh
Exeter
EX6 7YT



Dear *Colin*,

It was a few weeks ago now that I was in Romsey in Hampshire, raising money for the David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation and, following this event, I have just received a letter from Gordon Wood whom I gather, with his wife Cathie, recently stayed with you at your enterprise at Christow Station.

Gordon has written to me telling me about your open day and has sent me a leaflet about the railway which absolutely fascinated me; he suggested I might wish you luck but unfortunately I was in America on 5th July when you had your open day which I trust and hope was a great success.

I read the leaflet with tremendous interest as I have to admit that I was unaware of your activities. However, as a fellow railway enthusiast and one who owns a piece of hardware, *Black Prince*, somewhat larger than your own artefacts, we obviously have a great deal in common. It is marvellous to know that there are people like yourself who have managed to save and develop just a small relic of what was obviously a fascinating railway enterprise about which I knew little but you have achieved something "different"! For my part, I just wish there were more days in the diary that were free when I could come and visit places such as yours but life goes at such a pace now and I am even unable to enjoy the pleasure of being with *Black Prince*, my 140 ton locomotive, as much as I would wish. Indeed, she now is in small pieces costing a monumental amount of money in a ten year overhaul and it is this sort of thing that makes one realise that 'little boys' should not be playing with such toys! Anyway, she will hopefully be back in service on the Gloucester and Warwickshire Railway in the middle of next year but I am now coming to realise that times have changed since I bought her for £3,000 in full running order in 1967. Perhaps I should have purchased a 'Toad'. Anyway, I wish you great success in what is clearly a unique enterprise and maybe one day, I might find myself in your direction.

With warm regards.

Yours

David Shepherd

'Saving tigers, elephants, rhinos and other critically endangered mammals in the wild'

The David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation, 61 Smithbrook Kilns, Cranleigh, Surrey, GU6 8JJ, UK.

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8th September, 2003

The David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation,
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COPY

Dear David,

What a delightful surprise it was to receive your letter of 9th July. Thank you so much for taking the trouble to lend moral support to a little fellow doing his best to reach prominence.

Gordon Wood - who was kind enough to write to you on my behalf - and his wife Cathie were generous and supportive, and must rank among the most pleasant guests to have stayed in TOAD; although generally I am fortunate in somehow attracting nicer people to my humble camping accommodation.

It was flattering of you to say that we obviously have a great deal in common. I am tempted to use this in publicity - "lots in common with David Shepherd" - but would not dare. World renowned artist and naturalist, successful businessman, O.B.E. - and I bet you have lots of friends and got the best woman. But perhaps a shared love of railways transcends all else.

A month or so before receiving your letter, a friend who runs a gift shop in Teignmouth had asked the significance of a signed print of *Black Prince*. "David Shepherd is the famous railway and wildlife artist," I replied. "And that's his engine." Disgracefully, I could not have enlarged much upon this and have not added a great deal since. Perhaps I can claim in defence that I don't get out much.

One of those John Peel-narrated T.V. programmes which I have on tape shows *Black Prince* on what I had taken to be the Great Central, but actually must be the G. & W. And I have just received some back copies of *Steam Railway*, one of which has an article on the East Somerset. So I am a little wiser. I will find out more so that I can tell people that the man who has done all this can still find time to pen a letter to a struggling compatriot.

You know, I would be a fraud if I tried to claim that I am unmoved by the sights and sounds of the old railway, principally of course the steam loco. But, in a way, I wish the whole lot had been scrapped.

A pal of mine, graduate of the Camborne School of Mines, although now employed in tourism, says that he half wishes

that industrial places and equipment were destroyed or allowed to decay with dignity when they fail, and were not tarted up, analysed and interpreted for hordes of modern people to gawp at, traipse over and use for play without ever grasping any real understanding of what it was once all about. A view perhaps jaded by too much contact with tourists, but one I am beginning to share.

It wouldn't be so bad, or not even be bad at all, if, alongside those things which have been pickled or stuffed, there were the modern equivalents enjoying rude health. But, increasingly, we are just preserving the remains of a Britain which once used to make things and do things.

The valley here is now dead. The mines and quarries have gone. The bus service, sparse as it was, has been cut back. The shops and post offices are closing. An enterprising local chap tops the grass for those wealthy incomers who have bought up the farms but have no inclination or reason to work them. In the midst of this, do I want to build yet another steam or "heritage" railway?

No, I want to build a functional railway. A railway which can help to regenerate this countryside and community in the future. Yes, a railway bringing trippers and sightseers, but one doing an all-year-round job of work. I want a purposeful railway, but one full of interest and character and diversity.

It saddens me that the railway industry could have the benefit of the huge camp of devotees and champions which is presently bogged down in endlessly recreating scenes from the past, unwittingly reinforcing in the public collective mind exactly why the general-purpose railway was replaced by modern road transport. This sadness turns to annoyance when I think that the charitable status of the private railways is based partly on their being an educational resource, when the reality for the most part is that they are large train sets for overgrown boys to play with. The educational angle becomes absurd when one considers the diesel brigade who, it seems to me, to all intents and purposes, are mostly car lovers with big cars.

In a world that is crying out for our system of transport, in its modernized and fully developed form, there are those many who feel content to let it exist within its boundary fences, having as little contact with the outside world as possible, unsullied by any rôle which might compromise its "authentic" appearance.

And they infiltrate the big railway, too. Another pal, a regular camper here, has just passed out as a driver with Chiltern. He supports my stand and is depressed that talk in the cabins is of the usual cars and footie. If anyone has a railway interest, it is not in the firm that feeds them, but in the preserved diesel they will play with in their time off. And this tallies with my experience of the last days of B.R.

Andrew Dow is almost alone in expressing his disgust at how the railway has been treated and the way its present-day potential is disregarded. I can forgive his desire to see the Lynton & Barnstaple restored just the way it was (perhaps one case where perfect authenticity could be justified) because he

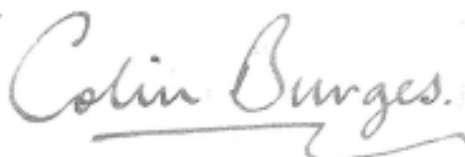
writes with passion and is not afraid to have a go at the road camp. On the big railway, where are the Ed Burkhardts?

It is tempting, even to a fire-brand like me, to wallow in some imagined golden era, to immerse oneself in a stage-set from the past where to escape the grim reality of present conditions, but this achieves nothing. What we should all be doing is thrusting the railway - the bold idea of the sophisticated, expansive backbone of public transport it could be - into the public gaze and consciousness in an effort to break the predominance of roads and rubber which has so diminished our society and its environment.

But please do not think that I am being critical of you. Having read only of your achievement on the E.S.R., I can hold nothing but the greatest respect for you, and I am sure Cranmore is only a fraction of your life's work. If you had championed endangered industry instead of mammals, you would no doubt have accomplished more than I will ever do.

Thank you again for your kindness and thought.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Colin Burges". The signature is written in dark ink and has a fluid, connected style. The name "Colin" is written above "Burges", and there is a long, sweeping underline that extends under both names.

Colin Burges
Owner and Operator

Encl.



David Shepherd
O.B.E., F.R.S.A., F.R.G.S.

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17th September 2003

Colin Burges
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Dear *Colin*

Thanks so much for your letter which I read with great interest – you certainly have strong views as I do and I heartily agree with all yours!

I will keep in touch in case I am in your area, which I think is unlikely at the moment, but all best wishes for your efforts at the E & TVR. Also, many thanks for the book which I have already started reading.

With warmest regards.

Yours