

Halling View Summer 2014  
You Can see the Works

What's so fascinating about steam engines? Electric and diesel trains are cleaner, faster and safer, but we all love steam. In fact thousands of volunteers put millions of hours of work into maintaining and running preserved steam railways. Hundreds of thousands of visitors enjoy riding on them. They barely make ends meet, and yet enthusiasts keep them running and we'd all be very disappointed if they didn't. They are even building new steam railway locomotives just for what you might call the hobby market.

There seems to be a special connection with vicars. You're always running into them hanging about locomotive sheds. One of my most special birthday presents was a driving lesson on a steam engine on the Kent and East Sussex Railway. The Titfield Thunderbolt is one of my favourite films. [When a branch line is scheduled for closure following a dubious deal between officialdom and the proprietor of a bus company, a group of perfectly decent ordinary English people decide to run the trains themselves. The vicar gets to drive the locomotive.] Also the first time I ever went to the cinema on my own was to see the Great St Trinian's Train Robbery [ticket 1/=, the Plaza, Gillingham] – one of the funniest films ever made.

I think that there are two reasons why steam is so fascinating. One is that the development of the steam engine made possible the Industrial Revolution and therefore the modern world and that Britain was first! The other, more visceral, reason for the appeal of steam is that you can see the works. You can feel the fire. You can hear the hiss of the steam. You can see the pistons and valve gear. You can feel the power.

I am the proud possessor of a Mamod stationary steam engine. I've used it sometimes in church to demonstrate Whitsun (this year 8<sup>th</sup> June) to the children. You fill the boiler with water. Then you light a methylated spirit lamp and put it under the boiler. After a while, it all begins to sizzle and hiss and, via a piston and simple valve gear, the resultant steam turns a flywheel. As a child I used to connect Meccano machines to the flywheel, which it would then power. I even managed to rig it up so that it could move itself. I turned my stationary engine into a locomotive by way of Meccano.

What has all this to do with Whitsun? You can't see the energy in the methylated spirit, but it is there. Lighting the spirit lamp releases the energy in the chemical bonds which link the carbon and hydrogen atoms in the alcohol. This energy is emitted as heat, which excites the water molecules in the boiler. When the water molecules are so excited that they turn into a gas (steam) they dramatically expand and create a pressure which moves the piston, which moves the wheel, which moves anything connected to the wheel. An engine is an energy converter. In the same way you cannot see the Holy Spirit. You cannot see the power of God or the grace of God. Nevertheless God's power is working within us. In fact the New Testament uses the Greek word *energeia* [ἐνεργεῖα], which gives us our word energy, for the power of God working within Christian believers. You cannot see the Spirit, but you can see the effects of the Holy Spirit. The power of the Holy Spirit working within us enables us to work the works of God. You can see the works!

The Centenary of the Outbreak of the Great War

We shall mark this at St John's at 11.00 on 27<sup>th</sup> July, when the Rt Rev'd Dr Brian Castle, Bishop of Tonbridge, will preside at our service of Holy Communion. Civic dignitaries and representatives of the community are also being invited. Everybody in the village is of course very welcome to attend. The service will be followed by a buffet lunch and an exhibition of artefacts, documents and photographs in the south aisle. If you have anything that you would be prepared to lend for the exhibition, please contact me. If you have any information about the people named on the WWI war memorial which I could publish in the parish magazine, please send it to me.

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