

Broadlands Avenue,  
North Petherton  
Somerset

I am writing in support of the Downs Light Railway's Centenary Development Programme.

The reasons for my expressing support are rather different to that of most of the letters which in the main are from directors of our various heritage railways. Growing up in Malvern in Worcestershire as we did, I and my siblings had a father who was passionate about railways, both model and full size. So it was perhaps inevitable that we would learn about the Downs Light Railway. As a result, courtesy of the Downs School and organised in conjunction with the Malvern Model Railway Club, our whole family first visited the Downs Light Railway on Thursday 14th July 1960. Thus I have been aware of its existence for many years.

I actually write as a volunteer on one of our major heritage railways and as part owner of several mainline full-sized steam locomotives. I have been saddened by the fact that people under the age of 16 are severely limited in what they themselves can do to volunteer, and therefore are in danger of losing interest as they grow into their older teens. I see the activities engaged in by the Downs Light Railway Trust children as being a very important part of counteracting that situation.

Going through the collection of photographs of my late father I came across the photos that he took of that July 1960 visit and that was what triggered my thoughts of perhaps getting in touch with the Downs Light Railway once more. As a result, I revisited the railway and met up with Nick Dodson in June 2016.

Having grown up as the oldest of six children and then having worked with children all my life it was only natural that I should find myself very much at home with the children of the Downs Light Railway hobby. It cannot be stressed enough that this is very much an educational facility rather than a plaything although obviously much enjoyment can be got out of working on such a wonderful and almost unique project for children. As a Chartered Surveyor myself, I thought that they might find it interesting if we were to survey the line and produce a gradient profile and this was indeed done by the children with me guiding them, on a very cold Saturday 21st of January 2017.

I am also co-owner of the almost unique vintage O gauge exhibition railway "Templeford", (built in Malvern by my father in 1960) and we brought it up to the Downs School for the 90th birthday celebrations, and all five of the co-owning siblings of the layout were present for what was only its third outing since being restored after 53 years of storage. Several of the children from the Railway Hobby helped operate the layout with us on what had effectively been our own childhood model railway.

I would imagine that my support will be mainly one of helping financially, and I know from first-hand experience that railway engineering in all its guises needs a great deal of funding. I can also be available from time to time to introduce the children to the surveying aspects of railways, such as are described above.

Claire Sheppy