

27 MAR 1997

COMMENTARY

GLENFINNAN
VIADUCT
'SPECIM' TRAIN
See 'Highland
awayday'

Letters to the editor

Letters to the editor at 151 Rosebery Avenue, London EC1R 4QX
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and reserves the right to condense.

Highland awayday

This year's annual joint Scottish Local Associations summer visit organised by PHEW incorporates a celebration of the start of work one hundred years ago by "Concrete Bob" McAlpine on the spectacular Glenfinnan Viaduct. To mark the occasion the Hon Sir William McAlpine Bt has very kindly agreed to unveil a commemorative plaque at the viaduct sponsored by the Institution, Sir Robert McAlpine Ltd and the Railway Heritage Trust.

An opportunity has now arisen to charter a steam train to travel along the West Highland Railway from Fort William to Mallaig and back. It is hoped to leave Fort William at 1300 hrs, to stop at Glenfinnan for the ceremony and to see the exhibition at the station, and then proceed on to Mallaig. After a stop of about an hour at Mallaig, the train will return, reaching Fort William by about 1850 hrs. It is intended to provide expert commentary at the various engineering structures on the route, with occasional stops. New light may be shed on the mystery of the horse and cart supposed to have been incorporated into a pier at Loch nan Uamh viaduct!

For the steam train to be chartered at a reasonable cost per head it will be necessary to have advance bookings for at least 200 tickets in the next fortnight. The anticipated cost per head will not exceed the normal return fare of about £20.00 per adult (half for children under 12) and will be less if the take-up is greater or sponsorship can be obtained. If any reader would like to come please telephone Heriot-Watt University on 0131 449 5111 ext. 3151 or fax me on 0131 451 5078 giving your name, address, telephone number and number of tickets required. If sufficient support is forthcoming you will be contacted. This is an opportunity not to be missed! Professor Roland Paxton (F), Department of Civil and Offshore Engineering, Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh EH14 4AS, Scotland

Inspection retort

In response to Graham Watt's item on the regulatory requirements placed on the building industry, (NCE 6 March) 1, and many others including the government's deregulation desk force, would like to see all the regulations brought together using the functional approach of the present Approved Documents to the Building Regulations and administered by Building Control practitioners. This would reduce duplication and the scope for conflicting advice in both plan assessment and inspection of works on site as well as accelerating the construction process.

I do not agree with Mr Watt's comments on what he perceived to be the burden of inspection. Inspection of works on site is a necessary part of maintaining health and safety standards. After all, plans don't fall down or burn down, it's the built product which needs to be assessed. If a reduced level of inspection service is to be provided by Approved Inspectors, then I hope insurance premiums are up to date.

I believe that it is in the client's and end user's best interest to have a properly designed inspection service geared to ensuring the health and safety of the finished building. In the light of Mr. Watt's comment, this will be best achieved by continuing to use Local Authority Building Control.

John Wood, 96 Bluebell Avenue, Penistone, Sheffield S30 6LQ

Single issue

The association noted with interest the comment of Graham Watts on regulation requirements placed on the building industry. While agreeing with some of the points, in particular the "Greasy Pig", the Association finds itself at odds with Graham Watts' conclusions.

On almost all recent consultative documents regarding construction-related topics the Association of Building Engineers has urged

government to simplify the regulatory process by combining all the multi-faceted controls under single Building Regulatory control regime. Graham Watts is right to identify "vested interest" of civil servants in protecting their own "patch" but is this fair - are they only the outward symptoms of a Ministerial affliction? At times all they seem to achieve in their actions is to create apparent conflict with sister departments, and seldom to sing off the same hymn sheet. The costs are borne by both industry and local authorities alike. Both have to unravel unnecessary bureaucracy and poorly co-ordinated legislation. This is particularly true of matters relative to fire in which the Home Office appears determined to overturn the recommendations of Bickerdike Allen and is at odds with the government's own theme of providing a "one-stop shop". The recent report by Her Majesty's Chief Fire Inspector on consultation procedures, while having many laudable recommendations, was flawed in its conclusions by recommending a return of fire related controls to fire authorities. The earlier Fire Precautions in the Workplace document was similarly flawed as to the location of control.

The answer to the problem lies not with either more or less regulation, nor between public versus privatisation, but firmly with the government putting its own house in order by consolidating all construction related controls within one government department, namely the Department of Environment. Thereafter, regulatory controls would fall under the umbrella of Building Regulations inclusive of Fire Safety and Services.

Once established, the system of regulation and control could be meaningfully addressed with those controls considered outmoded or redundant removed. The present system of Building Regulations supported by Approved Documents was a giant step forward and works well whether it is undertaken by local authority or approved inspectors. It should signal the

way for other controls to be simplified and follow.

A classic case of "Physician heal thyself". Brian Hughes, Chief executive, Association of Building Engineers, Jubilee House, Billing Brook Road, Weston Favell, Northampton, NN3 8NW

Fond memories

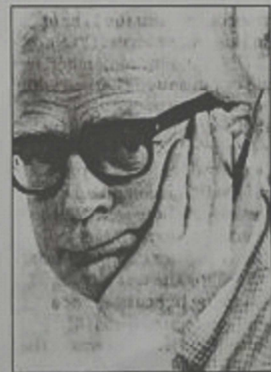
Your affectionate tribute to cartoonist John Field came as a pleasant reminder of the years I spent alongside the old scallywag during my time on the staff of NCE.

During one frenetic Monday news meeting, when reporters like me were being dispatched far and wide, I had no idea that I was actually being drawn by John. Within little more than a dozen lines he had me to a tee... the brogues, the braces, the shorthand notebook, the whole bit. That drawing is now a treasured possession.

But it was more than his extraordinary economy of style that mystified me. His unique sense of dry fun was infectious. His warmth left you glowing. His mischievous grin left you grinning mischievously.

In later years for the BBC I rang him to ask if I could reproduce a couple of his old drawings from the seventies. "Of course old boy" came the reply. But he seemed confused when I quizzed him for the size of his fee.

He was genuinely amazed that his work should still have a value. It was a rare modesty which I found tough to handle in



John Field