

## **Oliver V.S. Bulleid CBE**

**(1882-1970)**

By Geoff Ledden

*One of the best-known engineers in the era of steam railways, Oliver was famous for his 'Pacific' Class locomotives and rolling stock. He had no engineering background and was of a family that had farmed in mid-Devon, England, for centuries.*

### **Family Background**

William Bulleid came from a long line of Devon farmers. In 1851, when he was five years old his grandfather, George (1781-1869), occupied two farms in North Tawton: Staddon and Hayne. George was an Overseer of the Poor and took on apprentices from poor families for both farms. At that time, William's father, Samuel (about 1813-1886), was living in The Square, North Tawton, and farming 28 acres with the help of three employees. Samuel was also a brewer and maltster and he and his wife Elizabeth were still living in The Square in 1862 when she died. William had already left home and, in 1861, was living with his uncle, Elizabeth's brother, Samuel Lee and his family in East Teignmouth. This Samuel was a linen draper and William was one of his assistants.

What happened over the next 14 years is a blank. All I know is that George died in 1869 and my guess is that he was not the owner of Staddon and Hayne and therefore unable to pass them on to his son Samuel. Presumably, the family's fortunes declined during this period.

William was the eldest of three sons and next appears in 1875 when he left North Tawton for New Zealand. His younger brother John and wife Fanny also emigrated to New Zealand. In his book "Bulleid of the Southern", H A V (Anthony) Bulleid claims that the brothers were orphans and had been taken in by their uncle, Samuel Snell Lee. This does not seem entirely accurate: William was already living with his uncle the year before his mother died, but their father did not die until eleven years after the brothers had emigrated. Their parents' grave is in North Tawton churchyard with a gravestone inscribed with the dates. In 1881, Samuel was a widower boarding at 16 Finewell Street, Plymouth St Andrew, described as a maltster. I have not been able to discover where John was in 1861 or 1871, but his wife (if they were married, for I have not found that record either) Fanny was his first cousin, daughter of Samuel Snell Lee, so he probably did live with that family together with his elder brother during the 1870s.

William returned on business in 1878 and met a twenty six year-old Welsh woman, Marianne Vaughan Pugh, whom he married at Llanfyllin on 31 July of the same year. William returned to New Zealand with his bride and their first child, Oliver Vaughan Snell Bulleid, was born in Invercargill on 19 September 1882. Two more children were born in 1884 and 1886. Tragedy struck on 19 August 1889, when William died in Invercargill. Marianne took her young family to Oamaru, a coastal town on the South Island, 200 miles north of Invercargill, to stay with John and Fanny. John was the owner of a large department store and importing business in

Oamaru where, in 1889, he built a large single-storey house. The house was reputedly the largest on the South Island and named 'Pen-y-bryn' ('Top-of-the-Hill' in Welsh), perhaps with Marianne's input.

### **Oliver V S Bulleid**

Marianne took her three children to live in Llanfyllin two years later, where Oliver went to a local school. In 1893, at the age of eleven, he was sent to Spa College at the Bridge of Allan, Stirlingshire, in Scotland. This only lasted a couple of years and in January 1896 he switched to Accrington Technical College in Lancashire, England. This must have suited him because in 1901 he joined the Great Northern Railway at Doncaster in Yorkshire as a four-year Premium Apprentice under Henry Alfred Ivatt. In September of the same year, Oliver became a Graduate Member of the Institute of Mechanical Engineers. Seven years later, he married Ivatt's youngest daughter, Marjorie, in Doncaster. The honeymoon was short and sweet at Folkestone, en-route to Paris where Oliver was working.

He joined the Board of Trade for a couple of years in 1910, working first in Brussels, where his daughter was born, and then in Turin. He returned in 1912 as Assistant to the famed Sir Nigel Gresley, Chief Mechanical Engineer of the Great Northern. Gresley was 36, just six years older than Oliver. At this time the family were living in Haywards Heath, Sussex, but the job was fixed for Doncaster. They could not afford a car, so Ivatt – who had retired to Haywards Heath – gave Oliver his Cadillac and they drove north, arriving in Doncaster just after midnight, after a sixteen-hour drive in a car with no windscreen.

When war broke out in 1914, Oliver volunteered for service and rose to the rank of Major, as Deputy Assistant Director of Railway Traffic. In 1919, he returned to the Great Northern as Manager, Carriage and Wagon Works. The railway company became part of the London North Eastern Railway in 1923 and Oliver moved to London as assistant to Nigel Gresley.

In 1937, Sir Herbert Walker, General Manager of the Southern Railway Company, invited him to apply for the post of Chief Mechanical Engineer, which he got that same year. In 1941 he introduced his Merchant Navy Class of Pacific locomotives. Pacifics have a wheel arrangement of 4-6-2, where 4 is the number of wheels on the front bogie, 6 the number of driving wheels and 2 the trailing wheels. The Merchant Navies were heavy, express passenger locomotives and were followed in 1945/6 by the lighter West Country and Battle of Britain Class Pacifics, which were able to operate over 90% of Southern Railway. The Bulleid Pacifics were highly regarded for their innovative engineering, including their "Air Smoothed" side casings.

I shall not attempt to list here all of Oliver's other achievements: details are available on the website of the Bulleid Society (see below). Suffice it to say that in 1950 he was awarded the CBE – Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire. The following year he joined Irish Railways as Chief Mechanical Engineer. He did not retire until 1958, when he was 75, and went to live in Belstone, Devon, not far from his father's birthplace at North Tawton. He wished to be near his daughter, who had a farm nearby and later helped her move to a larger farmhouse near

Hatherleigh. Oliver didn't like the house in Belstone and moved to Exmouth where the climate was kinder. He and his wife subsequently decided to move either to Gibraltar, or Malta. Given the political problems between Gibraltar and Spain, they settled on Malta moving there in 1967. Oliver died in Malta in 1970. His widow returned to Devon and her funeral took place at the Roman Catholic Church, Okehampton, on 15 January 1985.

Although he spent very little of his life in Devon, his paternal family's roots were strongly commemorated through his West Country Pacifics, which bore names such as '*Exeter*', '*Barnstaple*', '*Plymouth*', '*Tavistock*' and '*Bideford*'.

All of the Merchant Navy locomotives were rebuilt and converted to a more conventional shape by removal of the "Air Smoothed" casings in 1959, whilst 60 of the lighter Pacifics were rebuilt and converted from 1957 to 1961, leaving 50 in their original condition.

Until July 1967, virtually all passenger trains from Waterloo to Southampton, Bournemouth and Weymouth were steam-hauled, primarily by Bulleid's Pacifics. The last steam train into Waterloo was the up Weymouth boat express on 9 July 1967 hauled by West Country Class No. 35030 "Elder Dempster Lines."

### **The Bulleid Society**

With the impending end of steam on British Railways in July 1967, a group of drivers and their colleagues from Nine Elms, the motive power depot near Waterloo, formed the Bulleid Preservation Society in 1966 to purchase a Bulleid Pacific. Initially the two Battle of Britain class Pacifics, No. 34066 '*Spitfire*' and No. 34086 '*219 Squadron*' were considered suitable locomotives. However with the end of steam in July 1967, West Country Class Pacifics Nos. 34023 '*Blackmoor Vale*' and 34102 '*Lapford*' were the only unrebuilt Bulleid Pacifics remaining in traffic. '*Blackmoor Vale*' was the locomotive purchased as it was considered to be the more mechanically sound.

The engine and tender were purchased for £1,900 and the locomotive transferred to Longmoor, the site of the Longmoor Military Railway. BR stated on the bill of sale that 'No Guarantee can be given as to the condition and suitability for future use'.

With the closure of Longmoor in 1970, the Society, now called the Bulleid Society Ltd. found a new home at Liss on the short-lived Longmoor Steam Railway. Another move occurred in September 1971 with the closure of the Longmoor Steam railway. No. 34023 was moved by rail to Haywards Heath, Sussex, and then by low loader to the Bluebell Railway, which has been her home ever since. Five years later, in May 1976, No. 21C123 '*Blackmoor Vale*' returned to traffic on the Bluebell, resplendent in Malachite green. She was repainted in Brunswick green in 1984, her final BR livery, with additional cosmetic work being undertaken to give the locomotive her 1967 appearance.

In 2003, to commemorate Oliver's birthday, '*Blackmoor Vale*' was temporarily renamed '*O V S Bulleid*' and uses that name from 19 September to the end of October each year. '*Blackmoor Vale*' was

overhauled and a new tender body built in the Bluebell's Workshop, returning to traffic in August 2000. The Bluebell also has the Battle of Britain Class locomotive No. 34059 'Sir Archibald Sinclair' which is in course of restoration.

A great deal of information and many photographs are available on the Bulleid Society's website [http://locos-in-profile.co.uk/Bulleid\\_Society](http://locos-in-profile.co.uk/Bulleid_Society) . Oliver's son, H A V ('Anthony') Bulleid is President and the Society would welcome new members from the family.



*"Blackmoor Vale" on the Bluebell Line*

### **The Bluebell Line**

The Bluebell Railway was the first preserved standard gauge passenger line in the world. It runs from Sheffield Park in Sussex via Horsted Keynes to Kingscote and is currently being extended to East Grinstead, where it will connect with the main line to London. It has a regular timetable, special events for families and children, and is a great day out, especially if combined with a visit to the beautiful Sheffield Park Gardens, which are within walking distance. Members of the Bulleid family are assured of a warm welcome at the Bluebell. Visit [www.bluebell-railway.co.uk](http://www.bluebell-railway.co.uk) for full details of the railway.

## Coat of Arms

Oliver Bulleid obtained a Coat of Arms in 1934. Arms are personal and may be used by male descendants, but not by the family in general.



Description: Sable, two Bendlets engrailed between three Plovers in bend sinister Or. The Crest: A Plover supporting with the beak a key Or. The motto's dog-latin means 'Here and Now', Bulleid never liked waiting!

The plover is known as a bullhead in the West Country, the source of the Bulleid name.