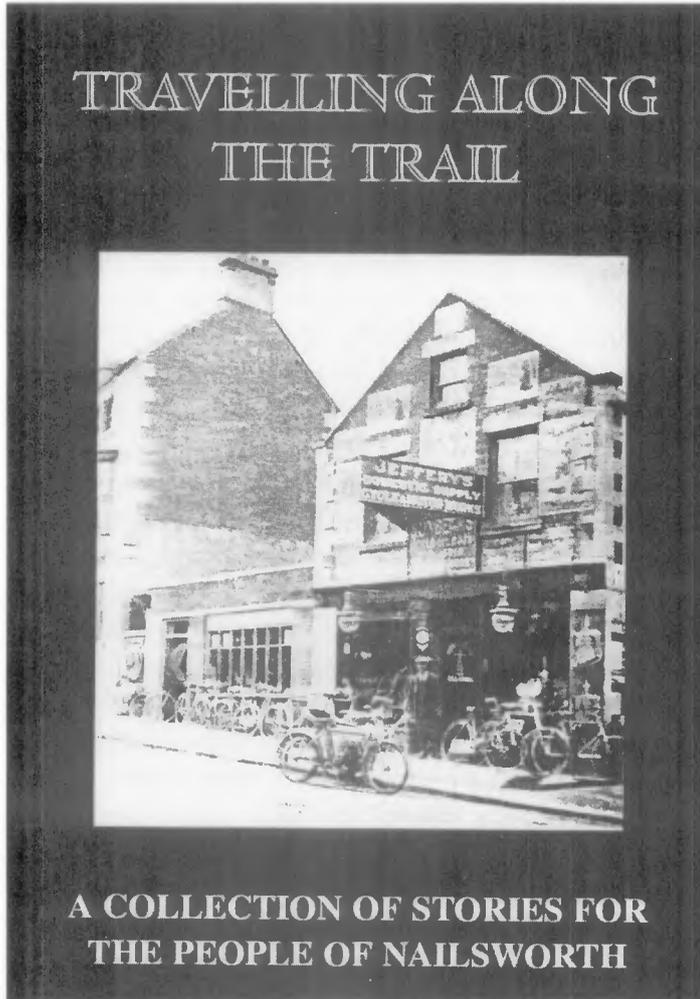


## TRAVELLING ALONG THE TRAIL

by Sue Reed

*The development of a community-based art project in the Stroud Valleys, Nailsworth*

For the last two years the inhabitants of Nailsworth and its immediate environs have been involved in making art



works with local artists and craftspeople as part of the annual Nailsworth Festival. These art works are sited along the Stroud Valleys Pedestrian Cycle Trail, which follows the route of a railway line that operated from 1867 - 1966. The art works therefore all relate in some way to the activities that took place in relation to the railway. These various activities have been illustrated through the reminiscences of some senior local residents, and it is their recollections that have formed the basis for most of the art works. These art works involve subjects such as the transportation of pigs, luggage and people along the railway, a mural which represents the sport, energy and interests of youth, a book called 'Gardens and the Nailsworth railway,' and the reconstruction of the cottage garden of a railway crossing keeper.

Travelling along the trail enabled local people to make art works relating to the past, present and future use of the trail. The projects are diverse. Some are placed along the

trail and have become way markers and places of communication and discussion. The sites for the art works were selected by local people, some are marked clearly and are easily spotted along the trail, others have been hidden so that they can be discovered if people explore beyond the boundary of the track.

Twenty local people aged between sixty to ninety-three years contributed towards a book entitled *Travelling along the trail*. This book explores how people talk about their experiences of the railway and the continuities and changes along Nailsworth Valley from 1903 - 1995; they discuss a wide range of issues with the author and co-ordinator of the project. She describes her function as follows: 'My function has been to find the grants, negotiate with councils and landowners, work with people and enable them to make their art works by finding the appropriate person to work with them. This process has enabled local people to inform the practitioner and focuses on people who have led the development of the project by describing local events and the places where they live.' People talk about their childhood, growing up between the wars, independent travel and the celebration of travel, communication, local industry, shopping, recycling, gardening and family life. Photographs from Nailsworth Archives and the Conway collection, 1904 - 1923 illustrate the text. Major support and funding from local agencies such as Rural Action for the Environment, Gloucestershire Rural Arts Projects, Nailsworth Town Council, Stroud District Council's Arts Investment Fund and a Nailsworth printer and publisher meant that the cost of publishing was met and those people involved were able to have a copy of the book for themselves and their children. The book will not be sold, instead copies will be given to local schools, libraries and the archives, as a contribution to local history. The book was initiated in October 1994 and had taken a year complete.

The railway line was well maintained and local inhabitants say that when it was running a large number of people were employed along it, each person playing a small but valuable contribution to the whole. Bob Hinder, an interviewee, described the number of people working on the railway in the 1930s "There were two porters and a station master in the passenger station, Mr Smith, Bill Purnell and Mr. Bowen. Two porters, one early and one late. Down in the goods yard was the main goods man, foreman, one goods porter, three dray men, sometimes four, one was on the weighbridge. The man who hit the pegs in, he would walk the line every morning. Bill Clift maintained the line." This large number of participants involved in the railway is also evident in the project as a



Pigs in a Sty

whole which enables people to make small but valuable contributions towards the knowledge of the whole community.

### *Ideas Germinate*

The idea for travelling along the trail came from three Nailsworth Festival events. In 1988, to celebrate the completion of the pedestrian cycle trail which was constructed by the Stroud Job Creation Group, 1983 - 1986, Festival committee members organised a fancy dressed bicycle treasure hunt along the trail. This was well supported by local people and initiated the idea of celebrating travel and linked past local events of the carnival floats and dressed cycles documented by Conway with contemporary concerns about transport, travelling and communication. For the 1992 Nailsworth Festival young people painted a mural on the walls of a local bus shelter which has remained graffiti free indicating that people claimed ownership of the site. Two years later children from three local primary schools worked with students from Stroud College and The National Star Centre and built willow sculptures along the trail using the theme 'Dreaming for the railways'. Children built tunnels, people, wagons, animals and a train from found materials and related their ideas to the history of the railway and the environment. The completion of this event was celebrated with a performance of May Day dancing.

The art works placed along the cycle trail reflect the exchange of knowledge from senior residents to younger people. Local knowledge of the railway and travel had been essential to the progress and outcome of each art work. Twenty art works have so far been completed and these will be documented in a book, to be printed in 1998. Included will be details of four art works which are particularly significant because they reflect the history and environment of the railway line and pedestrian cycle trail; they also reflect the continuities and changes in the Nailsworth Valley.

### *Creative History*

Nailsworth Primary School children, parents and teachers worked with Donald Workman, Stephen Rowley and Barry Mason for one week on 'Pigs in a sty.' The three men had combined skills of woodworking, story telling, traditional music, sculpture, contacts with a local pig breeder, a hurdle maker and residents who remember Hillier's pig industry, known locally as The Trade, and the railway. The artists wove a multi-media performance and story around Isaac Hillier and the pig industry which was established in 1830. Pigs were originally delivered to the site by wagon and horse or walked; when the railway was constructed in 1867 pigs came by rail. They arrived at Nailsworth goods yard, Egypt, and were herded to the factory where they were made into meat products. Hillier's was a major employer and pigs were essential to the local economy. There are many local people who worked at the site which finally closed in 1990. During their art week, which was later called 'Pigweek', the children were introduced to some Gloucestershire Old Spots, traditional crafts and music. They worked all week on drawings, making clay and plaster pigs, writing pig jokes, constructing pig sties and puppets, story telling, carving pig heads in blocks of soft rock, and they celebrated the completion of the pig week with a performance which was the re-enactment of the pig run from Egypt to Newmarket on their school field. The final outcome of the week, two large Gloucestershire Old Spots carved out of beech wood, were placed in a sty along the trail. This is the most popular art work and it has become an established walk for local people who go to see the pigs at Egypt. This art work is made from recycled doors and beechwood donated by parents of the school and Westonbirt Arboretum.

'Waiting to be collected' was made by children of St Dominic's Roman Catholic Primary School, Woodchester, who worked with Stephen Rowley. This was carved out of one piece of wood and was the result of a series of workshop activities which included visits to the trail, making clay casts and models of luggage. The carving was influenced by ideas and drawings from the children and it reflects the transport of luggage, people and goods into and out of the locality. Children explored the

development of travelling routes, the transport of goods and the movement of people. The 1891 census was examined and children discovered that people travelled extensively around the country. The railway increased the movement of people and brought goods, services, ideas and trade to Woodchester and Nailsworth. One major



Waiting to be collected

change was in industrial processes; local people recycled and used everything and the railway transformed this activity into a major industry. Paper was brought from Birmingham to be recycled at Chamberlains and rags were made into flock for mattresses. The train was used by travelling salesmen who stayed at the Railway Hotel, Nailsworth and people used the train for short trips, shopping, school trips and to visit friends and relatives. The train also brought incomers; interviewee, Ronald Woodward said "the longest train I can remember coming up here was nine Southern carriages, coming from Eastbourne with evacuees." Some of these incomers settled in Nailsworth and established a support group called The Friendly Circle, which was the first of its kind in Gloucestershire. The exchange of ideas and travelling is continued to this day with the establishment of the pedestrian cycle trail.

The Friendly Circle worked with Christine Digman, garden historian, and Sue Reed, over a period of three months on a book called "Travelling the Track, Gardens

and the Nailsworth Railway,' in which people talked about many issues relating to the railway. It contains the reminiscences of people who remember the gardens of Longfords, the Railway Hotel and one lady described the garden of her father Bill Clift who was the crossing keeper at Bird's Crossing, Woodchester. 'My dad had beautiful garden it ran right from the level crossing nearly to the station, along by the side of the railway. He had every vegetable growing. He had two apple trees and a big yellow plum tree; he had all the fruits on the red wall, and he had red, black and white currants, raspberries, loganberries, gooseberry bushes and every kind of fruit and all the vegetables you'd grow from one year to the next. We never bought anything and you wouldn't see a weed in his garden'. The resulting book is an art work and it is hoped to reconstruct Bill Clift's garden in a simple form near to the original site. It will be cared for by children of St. Dominic's Roman Catholic School, Woodchester who go to school near the site and who will care for the garden which will be built by the Stroud Job Creation Group. The Friendly Circle continued from 1945 - 1995 and the book and garden have become a tribute to their activities; the memory of the Circle will be continued by children.

Finally, children from The Junction Youth Club worked with Sue Reed, parents and youth leaders and created a painting which is located on the inside of a bridge under the A46 at Woodchester and is illustrated below. The young people painted their ideas onto paper and their images reflect the energy and interests of youth; they include symbols of Air Jordan, Chicago Bulls and nicknames of local children. This mural also reflects the local custom of walking. The locality is networked with footpaths, some cut across the valley and walking is sometimes almost quicker than car. Some routes are ancient; they were used by pack horses, to go to work, or for the pleasure of walking. They have names that indicate their use; Whips Lane and Gydynap Lane and Wheelbarrow Way. The most famous local walker was



The mural under the bridge

WH Davis, the super tramp. Local people still use the network of trails. There are several groups which use the trails and others, like the Cotswold Warden service, the local Civic Society and Stroud District Council, which provide walking guides and local maps.

The projects indicate continuity and change in travel self-sufficiency and independence and a continuation of local knowledge through oral communication. Local people have always made their own arrangements to travel independently, particularly when they had to pay tolls and more recently because of the reduction of public transport

and congestion on the roads. Concerns about high local unemployment have resulted in a number of initiatives to support and develop local trade and the community; for instance increased awareness and concerns about unemployment resulted in the pedestrian cycle trail itself which was built by the Stroud Job Creation Group. The local environment has always been a concern; recycling and sustainability are not new but knowledge of this activity has increased awareness of green issues, the development of recycling banks and local expansion of cleaner and safer transport systems.