

## TONY JAMES

The Sittingbourne & Kemsley Light Railway is coming to terms with the sad death, on July 4<sup>th</sup>, of one of its most enthusiastic and active members.

Tony James joined the Railway early in 1998 and rapidly became a leading light in the management of the line. Tony had a background in working for British Rail, for a local radio station, and as a public relations consultant before failing health forced him to cease paid employment. For some years he was also a Canterbury City Councillor.

Shortly after becoming a volunteer member of the SKLR he was appointed acting Marketing Manager and, over the next three years, held the posts of Press Officer, Marketing & Retail Manager, Deputy Commercial Director and Commercial Director. At the end of 2001 even Tony realised that he was doing too much due to his health and formally gave up his Commercial responsibilities. At this time he was made an Honorary Member of the Railway.

Far from opting for a quiet life however, Tony effectively became the unofficial site manager at Kemsley Down and busied himself with creating the gardens, which won a number of awards, and generally tidying the site. He took on the responsibilities of ordering supplies for various departments and for arranging the deliveries. This activity seemed to give him new impetus and, over the last five years, he gradually allowed himself to take on the official posts of Security Officer and Museum Curator. He also delighted in the role of liaison with the Local Press and his imaginative and informative items appeared almost weekly. One other liaison role that he took on selflessly was that of caring for the mill cats that live at the railway and therefore he became known as "Feline Liaison Officer".

He also took a leading role in the running of the Railway's train services and was always ready to sort out local staffing problems. He became the "voice of Kemsley Down" to the thousands of visitors who arrived on our trains and prepared numerous displays, treasure hunts etc for our special events and Christmas trains. One of his great delights was in tapping the beer barrels before "Steam & Beer" and then complaining that he smelt like a brewery.

Tony saw the threat to the future of the SKLR almost as a personal affront and he became a leading figure in the Save our Steam Railway Campaign. His vocal participation in many meetings earned him many admirers (as well as a few less enthusiastic comments from people stung by his remarks). As negotiations continued Tony recognised the need for a less hands on approach to the issues and stepped back but he continued to encourage the other officers in their task.

Tony's contribution to the development of the Light Railway cannot be overstated and the few feathers that he ruffled along the way only added to that development. The other members of the Railway will not know how much he contributed until they find things that no longer happen automatically and unnoticed. He will be greatly missed.

Bob Newcombe  
Chairman of the Trustees  
Sittingbourne & Kemsley Light Railway

6 July 2009