

Wemyss Bay station by Ray Pearce.

Last year I was given a book called Britain's 100 best railway stations by Simon Jenkins, on the cover was a photo of Wemyss Bay railway station and there and then I resolved to visit this station if the opportunity arose. It is some



26 miles from Glasgow and is a terminus for ferries going to Rothesay on the Isle of Bute. Thought no more about it until my old school pal Keith received an invitation to a dinner in Renfrew with a request to bring your old friend Ray. Keith and I readers may recall met in 1946 when we both started at Waterloo Grammar School

near Liverpool, then in the Borough of Crosby. Since becoming widowers 13 years ago we have visited Scotland several times.

The dinner party was to take place at 5.30 pm on a recent Wednesday in Renfrew so we agreed to go. I would go from New St station to Glasgow Central station and Keith, who lives in Formby, would go from Preston and we would meet on the station early afternoon.

Whenever we stay overnight in Glasgow we stop at the Central Glasgow Travelodge and from there we went to Renfrew for the dinner party. The following morning after breakfast off to Glasgow Central station, not for our trains back home but for the 50 minutes trip to Wemyss Bay station (pronounced Weems Bay) passing through Paisley and Port Glasgow.

I was not disappointed when arriving at our destination. It was the most beautiful station imaginable, curved glass roofs, flowers everywhere. A covered walkway to the ferry terminal. On the concourse is a library, an art gallery and a tea room. The station is a Grade A listed building in Scotland. It was designed in 1903 by James Miller for the Caledonian railway. It was fully refurbished in 2016 and is part of Scot Rail. At one time it was owned by the LMS who also ran the ferries to Rothesay and other nearby islands. Not long enough time there as we had to get the next train back to Glasgow Central. I mentioned that the



train stopped at Port Glasgow. In earlier times this was as far as large vessels could go on the Clyde so imports had to be off loaded here and sent by road into Glasgow. This made Port Glasgow very prosperous dealing with imports of tobacco, sugar, rum and cotton from our colonies. The

port also dealt with timber, iron and hemp from the Baltic. The Clyde was widened in 1832 when Port Glasgow took on ship building.

Back to Glasgow Central station to find Keith's train to Preston had been cancelled. Avanti West Coast run very few, if any, trains direct to Birmingham so I had the choice of changing at either Carlisle or Preston. As Keith was going to Preston I changed there and waited for the Birmingham train, this was going on to Euston via New St. and Birmingham International. As the standard class was fairly full I sat in the Standard Premium class paying a supplement when the ticket collector appeared. The carriages are first class but no food is served. The collector, Hannah, the train manager duly appeared and I paid the £15 upgrade. I then pushed my luck and as, oh so politely, could you smuggle for me a cup of tea as I had been travelling a long time and was rather tired and thirsty (true). She kindly suggested that I move forward into the First Class section and say Hannah sent me. Here Alison brought me a cup of tea, some biscuits and a cake. She then offered to make a sandwich for me but, as a kind neighbour was going to bring round a dinner of lamb chops, mashed potatoes, peas and gravy I declined the sandwich offer. Alison then asked where I was getting off, Birmingham International, says I. I will help you off the train. The staff were so kind and helpful. As it happened there were long delays at New St. Due a fatality on the line so I alighted at New St. and got a taxi home. Very tired but I has seen Wemyss Bay station which lived up to its reputation as the finest station on the British Rail network. Holidays next year? Already the Isle of Bute is on my wish list. Ray Pearce 23.8.2022.