

Stationmaster's Farewell 1924



Semley Station June 1963

Mr R J Risdon who has recently retired from the position of stationmaster at Semley, was the recipient of gifts from the staff and public at a gathering held in the waiting-room at the Station on Monday evening. At the same time there were also presentations to Mrs Risdon and Miss Risdon. Mr Risdon, who formerly held similar positions at Sampford Courtney, Bodmin, and Yeoford Junction, had been stationmaster at Semley for about eight years and is shortly leaving with his wife and daughter for New Zealand.

The presentation fund, organised by Mr W G Stoneman, was liberally subscribed to. There was a representative gathering on the occasion when the gifts were formally handed over and tributes of appreciation of Mr Risdon's services were made.

Mr E G Coward presided and the presentation was made by Colonel the Hon George Herbert who was accompanied by the Dowager Countess of Pembroke.

Among those who had subscribed, but regretted inability to be present were Mr Hugh Morrison, late MP for the Salisbury Division, Lord Stalbridge, Lady Winford, Mr James Ismay, the Rev R M Rees (Vicar of Semley), Rev W Neville (East Knoyle), Mr John Jeffery, Major F B Nixon, Rev G Heavens (Baptist, Semley), Captain Balmain (Shaftesbury), Mr John Hastings, Mr R W Borley, Mrs Mark Beaufoy, Dr Blackburn, Mr Green (East Knoyle), Major A H Watt MFH, Mr C Prideaux, Mr J P Milton of Salisbury (District Goods Supt.) and Mr D S McBright, District Supt. Exeter.

Mr Coward, opening the proceedings, said that Mr Risdon came to Semley during the period when the war made railway work extremely difficult. A stationmaster, he continued, was the buffer between the regulations of the Company and the travelling public, and a man who held that position required the patience of Job and the wisdom of Solomon (laughter). Mr Coward quoted the earnings of Semley Station (£50,000 a year) as showing the importance of the station, and said they were there that evening to express in a practical way their appreciation of Mr Risdon's services to the Company and the public. On behalf of them all he wished Mr and Mrs Risdon every happiness in their future life and also Miss Risdon, whom, it was an open secret, was going to New Zealand to be married (applause).

Mr Stoneman read the messages of cordial good wishes sent by subscribers unable to be present.

Col the Hon George Herbert first asked Mr Risdon's acceptance on behalf of the general public, of a handsome silver watch, inscribed "Presented to R J Risdon, Stationmaster, Southern Railway, Semley, as a token of appreciation on his retirement, May 12th 1924, from those he so faithfully served."

Colonel Herbert spoke of Mr Risdon's geniality and courtesy, particularly during the trying period of the war and said he had become almost an institution at Semley. They had hoped to have had him many years there, but he had completed 42 years' service, and richly deserved rest and happiness which they all hoped he would enjoy. He was going to rather a far country, but he (Col Herbert) was told that the climate there was better than in England, and if he was keen about fishing, there were the biggest trout in the world to be caught there (laughter). Colonel Herbert asked Mr Risdon to accept the watch, and also a cheque for £27 as a small token of appreciation of his services. No-one could have done work better than he did, or given more satisfaction to everybody concerned, and they wished him and his family the greatest of happiness in their new life (applause).

Mr Risdon feelingly returned thanks for the gifts, and spoke of the difficulties of the war period when, he said, if they got a couple of trucks they felt like hugging them (laughter). During the eight years he had been stationmaster there they had never found him very far from Semley. He had only been to Gillingham once and that was when he drove through in a car, and if he went to Salisbury it was only to get his hair cut, and he came back by the next train (laughter).

Whatever he had been able to do for the public had been a pleasure. No-one could have a more loyal and efficient staff than he had. In fact, the stationmaster really got the credit of the work of the staff. Sometimes, of course, he got the blame (laughter). He had never regarded himself as a success. He sometimes thought he had only been tolerated, but he was glad to feel, from the gifts they had presented him with, that he had given some satisfaction to the public. There were, of course, some members of the public who, if the stationmaster came down from above, would never be satisfied, and who wanted thirteen pence for every shilling (laughter). Mr Risdon acknowledged the ready assistance given at all times by Mr Coward and Mr Stoneman, and appealed to the staff to give the same loyalty to the new stationmaster as they had done to him.

Colonel Herbert then handed to Mrs Risdon a handsome umbrella and Miss Risdon a morocco hand-bag, with the best wishes of the subscribers for their future happiness. Both briefly acknowledged the gifts.

The parting gift from the staff, a gold watch chain, to Mr Risdon was presented on their behalf by Mr J Gray, the oldest member, who has been at Semley Station for 38 years. Mr Gray thanked Mr Risdon for all that he had done for the staff during the eight years he had been at Semley and expressed their cordial good wishes that the future of him and his family might be happy and prosperous.

Mr Risdon, in reply, said that whatever it had been in his power to do for the staff he had endeavoured to do. They had, of course, had their little differences as in every other place. The thanks of the staff were especially due to Inspector J Edwards, to whom they had cause to be very grateful for his kindness and sympathy (applause). Mr Risdon referred to the absence of a first aid outfit at the station and he asked Mr Coward to accept, on behalf of the station, a first aid cabinet, which he hoped would be useful to them (applause).

Mr Stoneman, in a few remarks, spoke of the personal qualities and actions of Mr Risdon which had, he said, been an example to them all. He had done his duty truly and well and his great endeavour had been to do his duty to his employers. He (Mr Stoneman) could bear testimony to the appreciation of his services by the general public and to his desire to help the staff at all times.

Mr P C Hayman, of Exeter, Relief Stationmaster, Mr Mark Churchill and the Rev Beaumont Johnson (Sedghill) added their tributes and good wishes.

Mr Churchill, on behalf of the gathering warmly thanked Col the Hon George Herbert, whose family name, he said, had been long honoured in that district and in counsels of this nation, for his kindly services that evening. The Rev R Johnson, in the name of the subscribers, and all interested, thanked Mr Stoneman for his splendid work in organising the presentation and also his son, who had designed the address and list of subscribers and staff presented to Mr Risdon.

Mr Coward expressed to Mr Risdon the gratitude of the staff for his gift of a first aid cabinet which would be of great benefit to them, though he hoped the occasion would not arise when it was required (applause).

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