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MOB bow-window saloon As 102 between duties at Montreux *Photo P.J.Bowen*

Nostalgia on the MOB

Some personal reminiscences by C.J.Freezer

The MOB's two special salons, the bay-window car As 102 and the *Belle Epoque* bar car, Ars 101 should be well known to many members, for it is difficult to take a trip over the MOB without encountering at least one of these popular vehicles in service. They have an interesting history, for although they formed part of the short lived *Golden Mountain Pullman Express* of 1931, they were built before the advent of this train. They were originally built for the MOB in 1914 as A4 85 (101) and AB4 75 (102) and were modernised and renumbered in 1930. In their new guise they were sufficiently well received to justify the ordering of four new cars 103-106 (See *Swiss Express* 3/1 & 3/2 for further details).

My initial contact with one of these cars was in May 1979, during my first visit to Switzerland. Our party had left Lausanne that morning, headed for Brig and the Lotschberg. We

changed trains at Spiez, with just enough time for a quick visit to the old buffet before joining the local service to Zweisimmen. Here we alighted and crossed the road to the MOB station - at that time the Standard gauge didn't go all the way. Also, at that time, the TAKT schedules were still a gleam in the traffic department's eye, so we had a little time to wait.

My attention was immediately caught by the sight of As 102, resplendent in blue, white and gold, sitting serenely under the overall roof. At the time, my knowledge of Swiss railways was a trifle sketchy but this I knew and greeted with delight. Rico Signore was conducting our tour, quite a privilege and no longer, alas, available. He smiled in his usual fashion and motioned to a MOB employee, who unlocked the coach, which was to be ours for the trip to Montreux.

It had been a very warm day and in all probability the coach had been standing outside

for some hours. It was stifling inside, I'd not experienced such temperatures since my days as an apprentice, in fact, half the party held back, with good reason. However, experience inside recently blown down boilers told me that the temperature was OK providing you didn't breathe in too much hot air. Drawing a deep breath, I boldly went in and lowered a couple of windows, drew in cool air and continued to work my way through both saloons. In no time, the temperature was bearable.

The journey was delightful for many reasons. For a start, it was a beautiful day, bright sunshine, blue skies with just a scattering of fluffy cumulus, the right conditions to see the Golden Valley. It was the culmination of several metre gauge journeys during an all too short visit and, as is often the case, we were in the last coach. This not only provided plenty of glimpses of the train as it rounded the many corners of the route, it also gave a lovely view out along the track. I have much sympathy with the fabulous gerfouzelem bird which, as you probably know, always flies backward because, whilst it doesn't particularly care where it's going, it likes to know where it's been. (I should point out that it is the fouzelem bird that comes to a very unfortunate end and should never be emulated.)

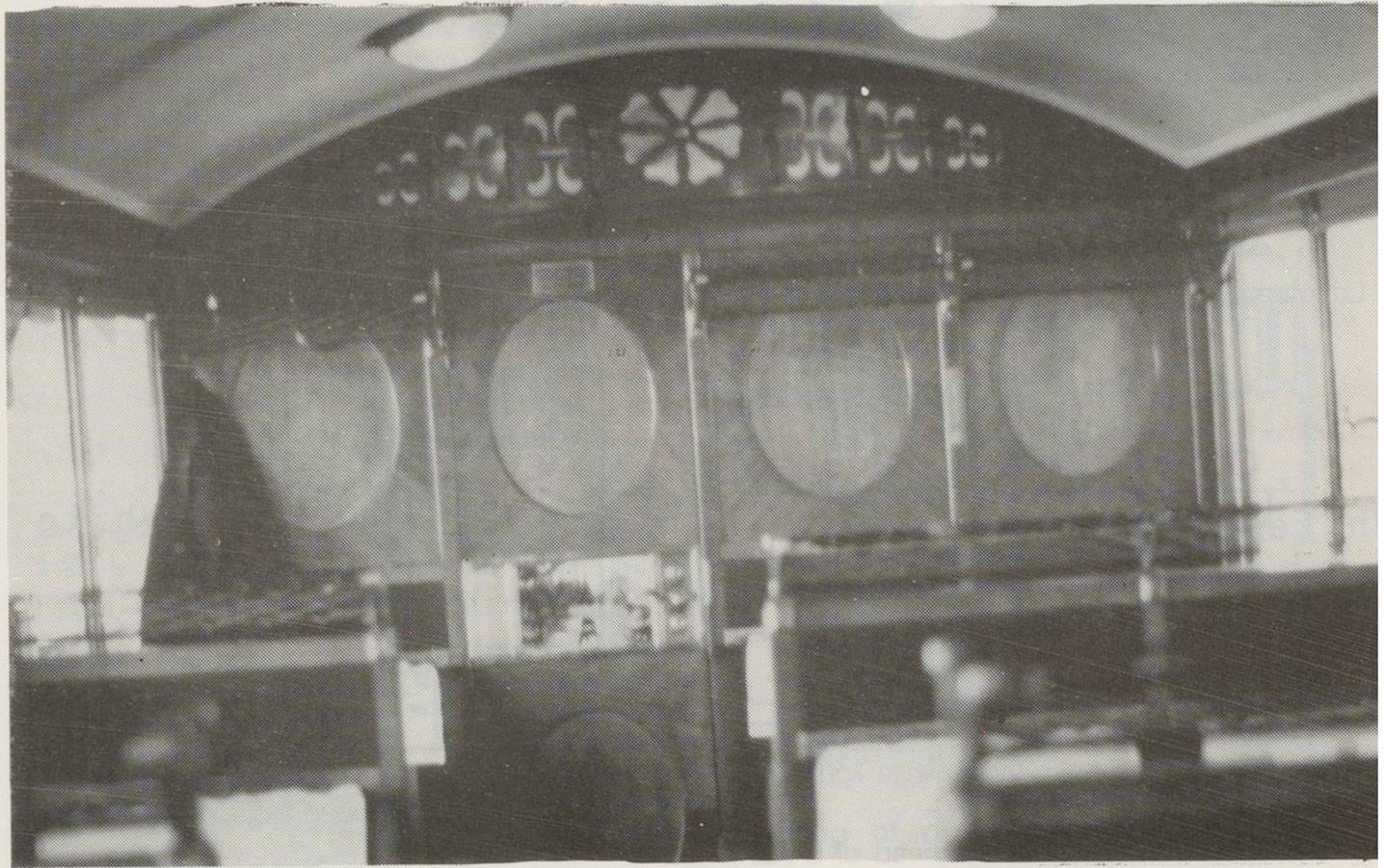
Needless to say, I took care to see that our next party trip over the MOB in 1981 would be taken in 102. This time the journey was from Montreux to Zweisimmen and I was interested to see that in the interim 102 had had a refurbishment, during which the original Pullman type doors had been replaced by the standard twin swing doors, not, I felt, an improvement. However, the new upholstery did brighten up the car no end. The rebuild had been in connection with Queen Elizabeth's state visit and some of the Staff referred to it as the "Royal Saloon", though to the best of my knowledge the Queen used the Panoramic car As 111, which bears the Royal Coat of Arms, 102 being used by the equerrys and other officials accompanying the Queen. For once, I fancy, they got the best deal since the many

virtues of the modern coaches cannot, in my opinion, compare with the feeling of sheer luxury provided by the fine panelling of the older coach, or the delights of the bay-windows which can be lowered to allow one to savour the scent of the Swiss meadows en route - and shut quickly when entering a tunnel.

My final experience of these coaches took place in 1982. We had arranged to end our trip by leaving Luzern on the 09:00 Brunig express to Brienz, then take the lake boat to Interlaken Ost before taking the BLS to Zweisimmen and our MOB run to Montreux where we would take another lake boat to Geneva - a trip I can thoroughly recommend, providing you don't want to go back to Luzern, as it takes most of a day to carry out. However the MOB asked us to take an earlier train at Zweisimmen, cutting out the Lake Brienz trip. Reluctantly, we agreed.

It had been an unfortunate week, raining every day. It is a tribute to the delights of Switzerland that my wife, on her first visit, took this in her stride. Our last day seemed to be no exception, we made our way to Luzern Station through a steady drizzle and waited for the train. It duly backed in, I looked out for our reserved coach but the only full first was reserved for a party of Japanese tourists. "Don't worry," said the station foreman. "We're putting your coach on later."

Sure enough, before the train engine backed on the resident Te pushed A]101, the SBB's prototype lightweight centre gangway saloon of 1937 onto the head of the train. It was my first encounter with a pleasing Swiss custom; where a small party of British railfans outranks a large party of Japanese. The Brunig observation saloon was still in its original condition, with loose seats, which allowed the entire party to move over to the right hand side, the one with the views. Not that the initial part was that spectacular, by the time we'd left Giswil visibility was down to about 10m and closing in. At the summit, the weather changed abruptly, the skies cleared, the sun shone and the only blemishes were that we were flying back early the following day and we weren't enjoying the



Interior of As 102 taken in May 1979 Photo C.J.Freezer

glorious weather from the upper deck of a Lake Brienz boat. But at Zweisimmen the rest of the party had a pleasant surprise for instead of one Pullman, we had two - this for a thirty strong group. The MOB's generosity was due to the fact that, by changing our itinerary, we had allowed them to return the set from an earlier trip in time for a further working that evening - these coaches are very much in demand.

With not only a cheerful hostess to serve drinks, but a knowledgeable guide as well (also making a return journey), we had a marvellous time. It was quickly agreed that the photographers would use 102, with all windows lowered, whilst the rest of the party enjoyed the comforts of the *Belle Epoque* car. As the *chef*, I commandeered a seat in each car on the specious excuse that I needed to supervise both sections of the party. Speaking for myself, I don't think there is anything to choose as regards intrinsic comfort between the two cars, but I imagine that the *Belle Epoque* might get a little noisy if the group were less than well behaved.

It is worth adding that after an ignominious period of service as a kiddies coach, A 101 is now beautifully refurbished, provided with fixed, swivelling bucket seats and labelled for the *Golden Pass* service. First class travellers are advised to join the train as early as possible in order to get the best seats, remembering that, thanks to the reversal at Meiringen, at Luzern or Interlaken, the right hand side of the train has the best views.

Luxury Trains of the MOB

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What a journey to look forward to. In the meantime, I shall be returning to sample the delights of the MOB in the snow and to see what further adventures await me aboard the *Panoramic Express*, doubtless hauled by the faithful 6004 *Interlaken* (A model of which has now supplanted RhB stock on my model railway - but don't tell Dave Howsam & Co.!).