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CYRIL FREEZER – A LIFE WITH TRAINS

*Nick Freezer
remembers his
father*

PHOTO: Courtesy of
Peco Publications



Cyril Freezer, who died on the 19th May, was described by John Emerson in the June 2009 issue of *British Railway Modelling* as being “[probably] almost single-handedly responsible for the development of the [model railway] hobby during the later part of the twentieth century”. What more recent Swiss Railways Society members may not be aware of is that he had contributed significantly to the Society itself, having edited *Swiss Express* in the early 1990s.

Cyril was born in Poplar, East London, and attributed his railway interest to the scene outside his bedroom window, which backed on to the sidings at Poplar station. A move in 1932 to Becontree was to a house which backed onto the London Tilbury and Southend and the District Railway lines! At this period, he was interested in articles on foreign railways, the Bernese Oberland having been cited, but was told by his mother that ‘people like us don’t go abroad!’

As Editor of the *Railway Modeller* from August 1950 to March 1978, he encouraged the modelling of railways outside the British Isles by publishing appropriate articles as and when they were available. His move to edit *Model Railways* from August 1978 saw things change when he was asked to go on a group tour to Switzerland in June 1979. This discovery of the Swiss Transport System firstly saw the railways actively publicised in *Model Railways*, and secondly saw my father and our family become actively involved in running an annual tour to Switzerland for the next 12-years. The earlier tours were written up in *Model Railways*, and were also used as the source for prototype articles; while researching his work I found articles on Rorschach Hafen and Stans in early 1983 issues.

Direct publicity for Switzerland stopped after he was made redundant from *Model Railways* in a May 1983 cost-cutting exercise. The last tours ran

in 1991, although we took yearly family holidays in Switzerland until 2007. On one of these holidays, he took detailed photographs of the track which was then sent to Beer to help in the design of the Peco H0m track system.

It was not until the end of 1988 that we were persuaded by John Jesson to join the SRS, when we became active members of the London Branch. Dad took on the Editorship of *Swiss Express* from June 1990 until March 1995, after the previous editor had to retire at very short notice. He was amused to hear the Rhätische Bahn described as “the Great Western Railway of Switzerland”, particularly as he had collected a quantity of these models with a view to building a model himself, which, sadly, his general health delayed and ultimately stopped its construction.

I have just returned from a holiday in Luzern and there were three particularly poignant moments during 27th June on what would have been his 85th birthday. The first was going round the Transport Museum on its 50th birthday bash, walking round the deck of the *d.s. Rigi*, now in flush deck style, and thinking that Dad would have liked to see this. The second was coming in from Zürich Flughafen by tram in the afternoon, stopping on the descent to Central at Haldenegg in torrential rain, reminding me of my first visit in 1980, when we called at that same stop in the same weather - the only difference being that year we were on a charter tram which made a special stop!. The third was watching the evening firework display over the Vierwaldstättersee and thinking back to our first solo trip 20-years earlier, when on the same Saturday evening a firework display was staged, then for the Pilatusbahn centenary while this year it was for the Luzern Festival.

Dad is survived by my mother Doris and his children Alison, Andrew and myself.