

## Book Review

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Martyn Pring, *Luxury Railway Travel: A Social and Business History* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2019); 366 pp., ISBN: 978-1526713247.

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In recent decades historians of Britain's railways have become increasingly interested in the passenger experience of riding the rails. They have asked more detailed questions about what persuaded people to become passengers, and what kinds of leisure the railways helped to promote as more were encouraged to travel further and more often. Things like speed, luxury, and design more generally have been acknowledged as important, as well as how these were integrated into bold and persuasive advertising. Whilst progress has been made in relation to these areas, and many more connected ones besides, most historians acknowledge that there is still much more to be done. Therefore, new volumes on such topics are most welcome, and many will likely be interested in the new title from Pen and Sword, Martyn Pring's *Luxury Railway Travel: A Social and Business History*.

This book is not intended to be a “precis of the activities of well-known luxury trains”, but rather seeks to examine the “dimensions and influences that brought these activities into existence”. The six core chapters define and take the reader through different ‘ages’ of luxury railway travel: 1. Victorian Expansion (1860–1900); 2. Edwardian Elegance (1901–1920); 3. A Golden Age of Luxury Travel and Austerity (1921–1945); 4. A Second Golden Age and New World Change (1946–1975); 5. Preservation and Restoration Projects (1976–2000); and 6. The Era of the New Luxury Dining Train (2001– present). In terms of geographical coverage, the book is primarily through a British lens, but there are forays into Europe and Japan in the later chapters. In addition to these core chapters there is then a substantial appendix of four additional sections, roughly a further 120 pages, comprising travel in and to particular regions. Taken together, there is a considerable amount of content within *Luxury Railway Travel*. The book is also richly illustrated with equally wide-ranging visual material, 87 colour and 49 black and white illustrations in total. The book is certainly eclectic: although luxury and

business are the key themes the author brings many related topics into play in swift order to explore a range of social dimensions associated with luxury travel.

On the one hand this eclecticism is inviting and engaging. However, on the other it represents one of the *Luxury Railway Travel*'s critical shortcomings. In the bold attempt to cover such an extensive time period, and many different avenues within this, important or interesting topics are frequently skirted over all too fleetingly. Information is delivered at a breathless pace. Readers seeking an overview, or interesting and quirky information, will be pleased. However, those wanting a more sustained and critical engagement with this topic would want to see a more paced approach. This point can be extended to the treatment of the visual material within the book. Many wonderful illustrations are contained within, yet it would have been good to see the author get to grips with these more analytically, tying them in with the points raised in the main text. At present the illustrations suffer from a brief treatment all too common to railway posters and their ilk; letting the advertising itself 'do the talking'.

The book's jacket also promises new, unpublished research material. As mentioned earlier, given the relative paucity of works around this area, this is quite an exciting announcement. Yet, ultimately, I missed detailed and sustained engagement with this new material. A further, rather frustrating aspect of the book is that there are altogether too few footnotes. Frequently an interesting quote appears, and is attributed in the text to, for instance, a contemporary newspaper, magazine, or journal. But the lack of additional accompanying information makes it difficult to follow up. Following on from this, throughout the book there is much more material, which is quoted, but which lacks a citation.

At 366 pages, this well-presented book represents good value for money. It also offers something quite rare – a business history covering all Big Four companies, and pre and post grouping companies as well. Altogether, *Luxury Railway Travel* will prove to be a useful book for those interested in this area, and especially for those wishing to get a quick overview or hear stories from various "Golden Ages". Indeed, the book is an ideal primer for anyone wanting to get to grips with or get an overview of various railways' innovations with regards to luxury. Ultimately the book does demonstrate that British luxury rail travel was "not just the domain of the Pullman Company", but those seeking a more diligent engagement with this area will find little that is new here.

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