

A Castle of Steam in the Cotswolds

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An 'A-list' steam locomotive is to take top billing at the [Gloucestershire Warwickshire Steam Railway's \(GWSR\)](#) Cotswold Festival of Steam in May.

The locomotive in question is Great Western Railway 'Castle' class no. 4079, named Pendennis Castle and is appearing by courtesy of the Great Western Society at Didcot Railway Centre. This on one of its first visits to a heritage railway, since returning to steam following its stay in Australia from 1977 and repatriated in 2000.

The event, organised by the railway's volunteers from 12 to 14 May, is being run in conjunction with Trackside magazine, launched just two years ago as the journal of railway preservation.

The Festival's theme is 'Cheltenham and Gloucester Steam Days'. In the halcyon days of steam, the Castle class locomotives were in charge of the most important express services from and through Cheltenham and Gloucester, including the 'Cheltenham Spa Express' to London Paddington. This train, known popularly as the Cheltenham Flyer, was deservedly advertised by the Great Western Railway as the 'fastest train in the world' smashing records with a time from Swindon to Paddington of 56 mins 47 seconds at an average speed of 81.6 miles per hour, hauled by Tregenna Castle.

The only named express to run over what is today the GWSR, 'The Cornishman' between Wolverhampton and Penzance, was also usually hauled by a Castle class engine. Castles were also in charge of the heavy race specials from Paddington to Cheltenham Racecourse for the Cheltenham Festival.

Ian Crowder, the railway's spokesman, said: "The Castles were synonymous with Great Western express train services in the area.

"They were introduced 100 years ago this year, no. 4079 being built in 1924. In 1925, Pendennis Castle was sent to the London & North Eastern Railway for trials against their new A1 pacific Flying Scotsman and, to the embarrassment of the LNER's directors, Pendennis Castle not only significantly outperformed Flying Scotsman but did so using less fuel and water. That year, Pendennis Castle – with a notice proclaiming it to be the 'most powerful express passenger locomotive in Britain' – appeared at the British Empire Exhibition in Wembley, alongside Flying Scotsman."

In May 1964, when steam was coming to an end, Pendennis Castle took part in a high-performance farewell trip from Paddington to Taunton with the aim of achieving 100mph. Unfortunately, the fire was burning so hot that it melted the grate when running at about 95mph, bringing the train to an ignominious halt: but it proved that steam was still capable of outstanding performances and guaranteed the engine's preservation.

Earlier that year on 14 March, a sister locomotive, Clun Castle, had worked the last steam-hauled Cheltenham Festival special from Paddington to Cheltenham Racecourse.

"We are thrilled to have Pendennis Castle visit our railway for the first time," added Ian. "It surely should be as famous as Flying Scotsman – after all, it has, like that engine, visited Australia and has circumnavigated the world.

"The Cotswold Festival of Steam is a unique opportunity to experience this outstanding engine first-hand on a railway where it once thundered through with express trains taking Midlands holidaymakers to the West Country resorts."

Tickets for the Festival are available from 6 February online at www.gwsr.com. With up to eight steam locomotives running it will offer an action-packed timetable of trains, including goods trains and shunting demonstrations. The locomotive and carriage & wagon workshops will throw open their doors for rare behind-the-scenes visits and there will be plenty of other activity at the railway's stations.

One other visiting locomotive has been confirmed for the event: Standard class 4 4-6-0 no. 75014 Braveheart, appearing by courtesy of the Dartmouth Steam Railway and which will be on the GWSR for three months from March.

Photo credit: Mike Morant Collection