



Photography: John Reynolds

My weekend

Stuart Searle, 63, station enthusiast

At the weekend, this retired signalman from Hastings is to be found searching out railway paraphernalia at auctions around the country

As a child I'd always been interested in railways, and at school one day the headmaster said I could have a sign that was being used to hold coal, and that was just the start. Since then, I've gone on to collect around 1,500 other signs.

'I go to fairs and auctions all around the country at weekends, and I've even been to Hadrian's Wall and back in a day to collect an enamel sign I bought on eBay. You used to see the same faces everywhere who were interested in railway paraphernalia, but now there are lots of younger people too – they see it as a form of art. That's good, but it does mean prices are higher.

'Getting the things I've found home has been a challenge – like a heavy wooden 'LNW Junction' sign with 18-inch letters. I joke that I only married my wife because she had a car so I knew she could

help me bring back all my railways finds!

'It's the architecture and accessories that interest me, rather than the rolling stock, and I only buy things I have some association with. For example, last year, I found a presentation purse given to the retiring station master at St Leonard's in 1877, near Hastings.

'My collection got so large that I've now built a mock station in the garden with waiting room, signal box and platform'

'My collection got so large that I needed a separate building for it, so I've built a mock station in the garden... there's a waiting room, a ticket office, a signal box, a telegraph office and a platform, and all are in just the right setting. There's always something else I would still like to add. Some people call me obsessed and I've

even been invited to appear in the Dull Men Of Great Britain book. But I prefer to say it's a passion!

Dull Men Of Great Britain: Celebrating The Ordinary by Leland Carson (Ebury, £4.49)

WATCH IT NOW

Paul Kirkley



A round-up of the week's TV

Dame Vera Lynn: Happy 100th Birthday

Saturday, BBC Two

Sometimes, things become so familiar we stop even thinking about them. Dame Vera Lynn being a case in point: she's such a part of our island story, it's easy to take her for granted – perhaps even dismiss her as a bit twee; the human equivalent of a Union Jack tea towel.

This tribute to mark the Forces' Sweetheart's centenary was a reminder of why Lynn became, to quote an unusually sincere Barry Humphries, 'as much the voice of the Second World War as Winston Churchill'.

Take We'll Meet Again – its impact may have been blunted through overexposure, but when it was released, at a time when the Allies were losing the war, its message of 'optimism, hope, redemption and reunion' (Humphries again) must have felt like a shining light in the darkness.

Easy to forget, too, that Lynn (right) came under fire at the time for being 'too sentimental'; it was bad for morale, she was told, to make our brave boys feel so homesick, and the BBC cancelled her radio show.

Undaunted, she simply went out and sang to them in person, bringing a piece of England to the corner of foreign fields. 'I had a wife and daughter waiting at home,' said one veteran. 'She brought them closer.' Another, who recalled trekking through the Burmese jungle to see her perform in a paddy field, still couldn't talk about it without crying, even today.

Recalling her early days in London's East End, Lynn – still sharp as a tack – admitted she'd only really sung to please her parents. She also revealed she'd had one singing lesson in her life, after which her tutor had declared: 'I can't train that voice. It's not a natural voice.'

'I wonder if she ever heard me on the radio after that...?' she mused, with a twinkle.

In 1952, Lynn became the first British artist to score a US No 1, pre-empting 'the British invasion' by a decade. The fact the song, Auf Wiederseh'n Sweetheart, was German says a lot, Dame Vera: she's no Little Englander, simply a Great Briton.



Vera

Sunday, ITV

Another Vera who's on the way to becoming a national treasure, Brenda Blethyn's detective returned for her seventh series, tramping round Northumberland in that floppy hat investigating the murder of a wildlife ranger. 'Eee, I am so sorry, love,' she told the victim's sister, sounding more like an agony aunt than a DCI. But she gets the job done, our Vera. Plus, on what other cop show would freshwater pond algae provide a vital clue to catching the killer?



Carnage

iPlayer

Mixing shot footage and archive material, Simon Amstell's 'first full-length feature film' sees Britain facing 'the shame and silence of its animal-eating past', from a utopian future where Captain Bird's Eye is reviled as one of history's greatest monsters. As a slice of vegan polemic, it's hardly subtle, but it's funny and, this carnivore has to admit, occasionally horrific. Think Chris Morris's Brass Eye but a bit less... well, meaty.