

RCTS Bristol Branch Observation Day at Stafford, 11th June 2026

Although I have been a member of the Bristol Branch of the RCTS for many years, I haven't for various reasons had the opportunity to join in with the Observation Days organised by Paul Udey, the Branch Secretary. That changed this year when I was able in June to travel to one of my regular railway haunts when I used to live in Shropshire, Stafford. Stafford is quite a mecca for railway enthusiasts and the station is one that welcomes careful and considerate spotters and has done for many years. It houses a waiting room that has many pictures taken by enthusiasts and daily sees many of them at the Crewe end of the station, normally based on platform 4 where freight trains pass through at regular intervals. Over the years, the pattern and intensity of those freights has changed and like many such stations there are lots of reserved Q paths where trains are rarely activated.

Taking advantage of split ticketing site once Paul had indicated the intended date, I was able to get a return ticket for just over £30 from my home station of Bradford-on-Avon and left on the 07.48 to Bristol Temple Meads ready to join other Bristol RCTS colleagues for the 09.00 to Manchester Piccadilly. Unbeknown to me they had sought advance First-Class tickets which can sometimes be a blessing on short formed Cross-Country units where you are usually guaranteed a seat! Paul was joined on this stretch of the journey by Tony Horstmann.

The ubiquitous Cross-Country Voyager 221134 was our steed to Stafford although I have to say that, in comparison with the wonderful HSTs that plied this route in the past, one might compare them to an old nag. Any organisation that gets rid of one of the finest high-speed trains in the country and substitutes the pretty dire Voyagers deserves brickbats. At Bristol at 8 am in the morning, the commuter trains to London are in evidence as are the local Metro trains to Severn Beach, Parkway, and Weston-super-Mare, whilst those to the more distant towns and cities of Bath, Weymouth, Westbury, Portsmouth, Salisbury, Southampton, Taunton and beyond are filling up the platforms in quick succession. 800027, 802018, 802021, 802111, 165103, 166201 and 166206 were noted. Tantalisingly as we passed Barton Hill depot, there was an 08 (number unknown) sticking its nose out of one of the distant sheds, presumably in for wheel turning but the first diesel locomotive we passed where we could note the number was 66562 at Parkway in the sidings adjacent to the station. When we reached Cheltenham, unusually 153910 and 153323 formed a Transport for Wales service to Cardiff whilst 800032 awaited in sidings for its platform for the next IET service to Paddington. At Bromsgrove, we flashed past 730024 and 730022 awaiting their path to Lichfield Trent Valley a class of EMU that nowadays tackles the ascent of the Lickey as if it doesn't exist. At Kings Norton, 20007 and 20205 were silent in the sidings and from that station we took the Camp Hill line passing through the three new stations recently opened to traffic and noting 170117 and 390049 as we entered Birmingham New Street, passing by the impressive Curzon Street bridge that had only a week or so before been moved into position.

New Street was its usual busy self with 730048, 730045, 158835, 158821 and 196114 disgorging commuters whilst at our penultimate stop, Wolverhampton 730038 on a Walsall service, 196101 en route to Shrewsbury and 390129 waiting to start its Euston train were in evidence. As we neared Stafford only the second diesel locomotive we had seen, 70812 was seen. Arrival at Stafford saw us meet up with Brian Arman, Stewart Jolly, Red Wood, and Dale Robetson who had travelled from Bristol Parkway to join us, making a total of seven participants. The main problem was the weather as the forecast rain came down with a vengeance for most of the day but it didn't dampen our enthusiasm nor the conversations.



Stafford has a great variety of motive power going in a number of directions. There are the ubiquitous Pendolinos en route to Euston, Manchester and Scotland, bi-mode Hitachis going to and from Holyhead, local trip workings to Manchester, Liverpool and London run by LNWR using the older Class 350s and the newer Class 730s, Cross Country workings from Plymouth and Bristol to Edinburgh, whilst there are numerous freight workings throughout the day with 66s and 90s and an occasional engineering train as evidence by DR73909 opposite.

Brian had mentioned to us that he had never seen a Class 93 actually working. We had thought that a shuttle shown running from Crewe to Stafford and back might see one being used for crew training but it wasn't to be. The use of the excellent Realtime Trains app can give advance notice of some of the freight train's locomotives but if you are not careful a working can take you unawares. One of the services that day was a light loco ending up at Crew Basford Hall but we didn't notice that it was running an hour ahead of schedule and were sorting out or respective lunch packs at the time. Most of us were thus in the far waiting room when 93001 went swiftly past. At least Brian wasn't otherwise engaged and thus saw his first working 93!

It would be too onerous to note the individual reporting numbers and the passing times of all the locomotives we saw; some we would see more than once as they made their return journeys, but by these were the noted motive power by individual classes:

66017, 66096, 66152, 66425, 66430, 66433,
66543, 66723, 66771, 66778, 66787, 66788
70812
90004, 90007, 90011, 90039
93001

220020, 220022, 220033
222107, 222111, 222115, 221122, 221128,
221131, 221139
222601 (Lumo service from Stirling)

350105, 350112, 350115 (seen opposite),
350121, 350127
350234
350368, 350373, 350375, 350377



390008, 390010, 390043, 390044, 390047, 390049, 390114, 390118, 390121, 390122,
390123, 390128, 390131, 390135, 390136, 390137, 390138, 390141, 390152, 390153,
390156

730207, 730212, 730214, 730216, 730217, 730220, 730230, 730232, 730234, 730235,
730236

805001, 805002, 805003, 805006, 805007, 805008, 805009, 805013

807001, 807004, 807007, 807010



The highlight of the day was a working that had started at Eastleigh Works and was headed for Locomotive Services Limited's depot at Crewe. This mid-afternoon service was headed by a black Class 37, 37667. It was hauling Brush Type 4 D1645 and, between two barrier coaches, was a resplendent coach that forms part of LSL's HST Blue Pullman set and this coach had clearly been the subject of the overhaul at Eastleigh. The noise of the accelerating Class 37 as the group left Stafford was, as ever superb.

On one of the morning Cross Country trains, there was a delay at Stafford whilst the onboard crew attempted to shut one of the sliding doors that steadfastly refused to shut tight. It eventually took some 20 minutes to overcome the juddering mechanism and lock it shut. I then noticed that this was the return

service I was booked on back to Bristol and was relieved when I saw that it had left Manchester only 10 minutes late rather than the service being cancelled. However, it got steadily later and then, from announcements of cancelled LNWR services to London and a succession of diverted Pendolinos via Birmingham, Coventry and Rugby the news had come through of a collapsed railway bridge where the Driver had apparently driven off without reporting the extensive damage. Thankfully he was later arrested but whether Network Rail will charge him with the massive costs associated with both the necessary repairs and the disruption across the network through delay repay is yet to be ascertained. When I got on my train, opposite me was a lady who had expected to travel to St Austell and was hoping to do the train swop at New Street on one of the Edinburgh to Plymouth Cross Country routes, Because our train was running so late it would have left before we arrived. The problem we then had was the awful internet connectivity on Cross County, the lack of any announcements that could have assisted the lady and an inability to access Realtime Trains website presumably because so many of us were trying to, to see what time our trains might arrive. My train was a Bournemouth-bound one and I was to change to one at New Street terminating at Bristol. When we alighted, an announcement was made that the train to Plymouth was running very late and was at Platform 11 and I just hope that the lady heard this and was able to get her allocated seat. If she did not, the only potential services she could use were by GWR to Taunton from Bristol and then a Penzance service, but those would have got her to St Austell three hours later than planned. I hope she made it.

For those who had enjoyed a good day at Stafford, we were booked back on three different trains. Bristol bound Cross County service got me there on time thankfully unaffected by the chaos caused by the errant lorry driver and I alighted at Bradford-on-Avon tired but having

enjoyed my first Bristol organised spotting day. My thanks are due to Paul for the day's organisation – whether I take the First-Class option at £70 extra next time remains to be seen!

John Baxter