



Midland Railway Survivors

Kettering to Cambridge: A branch where Midland Railway survivors worked

by Robin Cullup

Over the years, snippets appeared in the railway press about the workings of Kettering loco shed and the Kettering to Cambridge line – a branch where Midland Railway survivors worked.

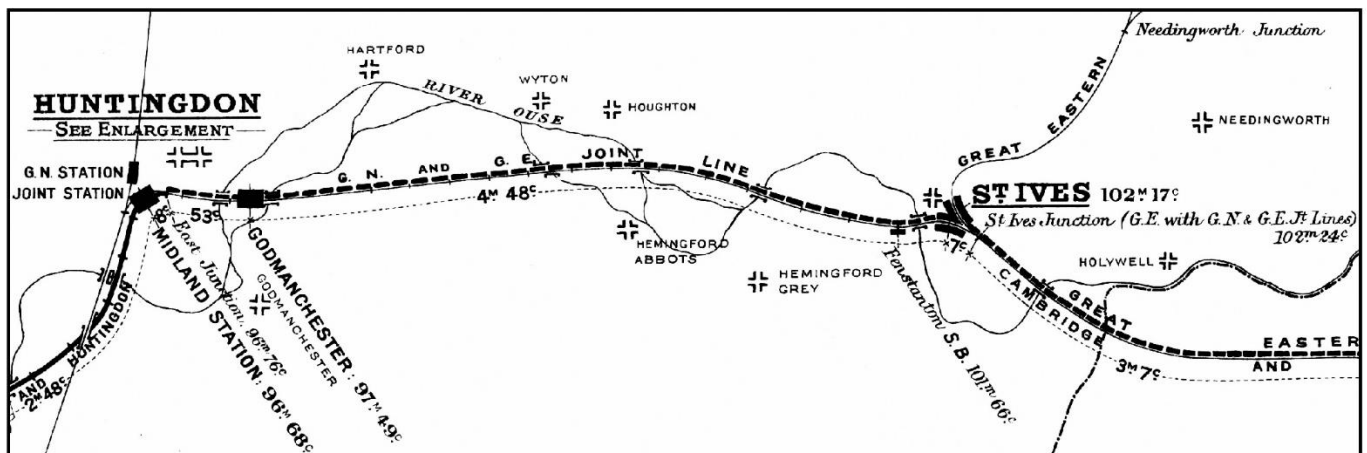
This branch line attracted interest in the 1930/40s because of the antiquarian motive power which the LMS retained for use on the route. The reason for this was the continuing existence of the wooden bridges over the river Great Ouse around Huntingdon and

the wooden trestles over the flood plain near St. Ives. These wooden structures had a severe speed limit on them (strictly observed in the writer's experience), and a weight limit – hence the use of small locomotives.

These structures were on a short stretch of line between Huntingdon and St Ives, which belonged to the GN-GE Joint Railway. Originally, this length was double track but had been singled as a maintenance precaution and economy measure.



As can be seen from the extract of the Midland Distance Diagrams, the railway between St. Ives and Huntingdon crossed the river Great Ouse no less than six times. Above is the bridge at Godmanchester, taken on 26th December 1953. The bridge is for single track, but the original was double track, shown by the second iron bridge on the further bank. [Transport Treasury]





The Midland enjoyed running powers over this stretch and then further east along the St Ives to Cambridge line, which was Great Eastern territory. Both the GN-GE Joint and the Great Eastern became part of the LNER from 1923.

As stated above the operating authorities retained small locomotives with low axle weights for the Kettering – Cambridge services and by the 1930s this meant that 2-4-0s and class 2F 0-6-0s of Midland Railway vintage were in use on both passenger and freight services. So Kettering became the depot that many of the remaining 2-4-0s gravitated to as they became redundant elsewhere on the system.

It should be noted that larger locomotives were allowed as far as Kimbolton according to the Working Time Table Appendix, and so in later years Class 8F 2-8-0s and the BR Standard 9F 2-10-0s could be used on the branch – and these locomotives were required to move the daily heavy trainloads of ironstone from quarries situated alongside the line. In the 1930s, there were a small number of the Fowler 7F 0-8-0s at Kettering and these worked ironstone out from the quarries and coal into Islip Furnaces. These locos moved away in the 1940s, to be replaced by Stanier 8F 2-8-0s.

Returning to the presence of the older, smaller locomotives, this attracted photographers to the line in order to capture a bit of the past. Other observers recorded the scene in print and snippets of information appeared in railway publications of the day.

Let us go back in time and imagine the scenes described below with thanks to the correspondents to “The Railway Observer”, “Railways” and “Railway Locomotives” from years gone by.

Reports from “The Railway Observer”^[1]

1929:

March: 2-4-0 No 108 is the Midland Section locomotive stationed at Cambridge.

1931:

15th March. At Kettering: 2-4-0s 123, 182, 137, 207 & 226, as well as around two dozen 1F and 2F 0-6-0s. (Also some 4-4-0s and 0-6-0Ts not used on the branch)

July: Kettering – Cambridge service:

For passenger traffic:

2-4-0s, especially the following: 123, 137, 182 (Bepaire firebox), 207 (ditto), 226 and 240. 107 and 255 have not appeared recently and have probably left Kettering.

For Goods traffic:

1F 0-6-0s 2780 & 2785 (not beyond Huntingdon); through to Cambridge:

2F 0-6-0s 2930 & 2986 (both Belpaire), 3040, 3042, 3080, 3119 & 3139 (both Belpaire), 3262, 3481, 3545 (Belpaire), and 3547 have all appeared recently.

No 4-4-0s work through.

Stored at Kettering:

2782, 2783, 2784, & 2785 (1F 0-6-0s)

1932

November: Locos noted at Kettering (M12) 2-4-0s 123, 137, 182, 193, 207, 229, & 240 as well as some two dozen 1F and 2F 0-6-0s. (Also some 4-4-0s and 0-6-0Ts not used on the branch).

1933

June shed 12:^[2]

2-4-0s 12, 137, 193, 207, 221, 228, 240, 253 & 266 as well as the usual two dozen 2F 0-6-0s. Also present were four 2P 4-4-0s, two 3F 0-6-0Ts and, worthy of note, Sentinel 7191 (on secondment from the S & D).

1936

February: Nos 20012 and 266 are stored at Kettering.

1942

February: No. 3195 (15B) continued to work the Kettering – Cambridge trains until 6/11/41 when “double-framed” 2-4-0 20012 took over. This was replaced by 20216 (15D) on 11/11/41. This loco differs from 20012 in having inside frames and no Salter valves on the dome.

On 29/12/41, 20012 was working the Cambridge line, and 20216 was on Kettering shed. In connection with the working of this line, it is rather interesting that the 2.15pm is a through train from Leicester, stopping at all stations and changing engines, of course, at Kettering.

August: Midland engines are represented at Cambridge by 2F 0-6-0s and 1P 2-4-0s, the veteran 20012 still running well.

November: 3195 and 22930 continued to work the Kettering line, and a Leicester 2F No. 3648 has also been noted.

1943

May: On 27/3/43 a most interesting working was observed, LNER E4 7478 (CAM) appearing on the afternoon Cambridge to Kettering local. The LMS loco 2F 3525 had failed at the last minute, and 7478 was the only suitable loco available at Cambridge. It was worked by an LNER driver and fireman, with the LMS crew as pilotmen. They remarked that 7478 was a better engine on this job than 3525. The load was four LMS coaches.

July: The two trains daily in each direction on the Kettering – Cambridge branch were until recently worked by the same engine for all four journeys.

1 By courtesy of, and with thank to, the RCTS, who have produced *The Railway Observer* monthly since 1928.

2 This was the Midland Railway code, superseded in Sep. 1935 by 15B, and in Sep. 1963, 15C.



Johnson 2-4-0 20012 taking water at Cambridge on 3rd February 1935 after arriving from Kettering. The locomotive has already been turned and the crew are preparing for the return to Kettering. Hopefully they will have time for some refreshment before departure time at Cambridge
 [John E. Simpson]



Six coaches and double-headed so it must be a Saturday, and indeed it is. 2F 0-6-0 3195 and Johnson 2-4-0 20092 near Huntingdon on Saturday, 3rd July 1937 with the 2.45 pm ex-Cambridge, about to pass under the Great Northern mainline, just to the south of Huntingdon, and crossing one of the minor branches of the Great Ouse.

[E.S. Murrell - Stephenson Locomotive Society collection]



Apparently this has proved too much for the engine concerned (either a Midland 2-4-0 or a 2F 0-6-0), possibly due to inferior coal, and as a result different engines work the morning and afternoon trains.

September: The present allocation at Kettering is as follows: 8076, 8125/36, WD623.^[3]

Other locos: 2P 4-4-0s 454, 537/50, 7F 0-8-0s 9501/54/72/80/83/89, 2F 0-6-0s 3042/95, 3195, 3416, 3525/61/66, 3601, 22930, 3F 0-6-0 3782, 4F 0-6-0 4602, 1F 0-6-0T 1889, 3F 0-6-0T 7437, and 2-4-0s 20012 and 20216, also 3164 on loan from Bedford.

20012 mostly shunts in the yard all day, but sometimes works the afternoon Kettering to Corby local passenger train. 20216 is also used for shunting mainly, but sometimes works on the passenger to Cambridge in turn with the small 0-6-0s, and occasionally to Corby. The 2-8-0s and 0-8-0s and 4602 work the "long" jobs such as Toton, Mexborough and York. The 4-4-0s work local passengers to Bedford, Leicester, Nottingham and elsewhere.

October: Additional engines to those listed last month at 15B are 4F 0-6-0s 3887, 4230/32, 8125/36 have gone to 20B (Stourton).

1945:

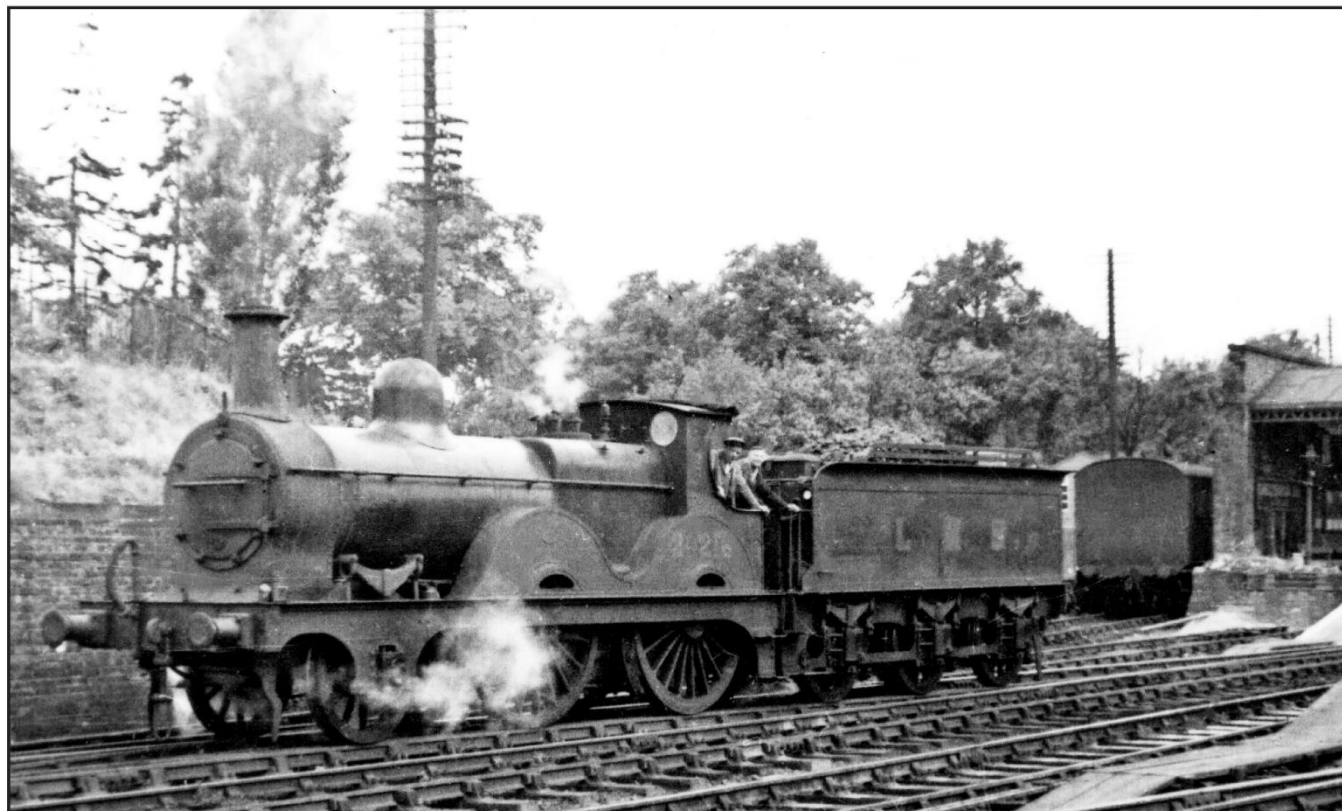
Kettering's last 2-4-0, 20216 continues to appear regularly, usually on the morning working, and

2F 3551 is a very consistent performer on the afternoon job. On Saturdays when the trains are increased from the usual three and four coaches to six, 20216 does not appear, 2Fs 3195 and occasionally 3525 deputising. Evidently six coaches are considered too much for the 2-4-0 with her 6ft 9in coupled wheels over the gradients of the branch, but her large wheels come in very useful over the 14³/₄ miles St Ives – Cambridge portion of her run, which the LMS trains run non-stop in the Down direction. Late starts from Kettering are frequent and as a late arrival at Cambridge means less time for the crew to turn and attend to their engine, drivers make full use of the good road from St Ives to pick up a few minutes.

To stand on one of the platforms on one of the four stations between St Ives and Cambridge and to see passengers, waiting for the following LNER train, stand back as, with a hovering "Middy" whistle, 20216 or one of the 2Fs comes spinning through, is a sight for sore eyes. (At this point your writer wishes that he had witnessed this).

Of course, one can understand 20216 covering the ground well as she is an express engine, but the speed which the 2Fs work up is surprising. The Kettering men look enviously at the 2-6-4Ts that the Bletchley men usually have, but realise that they cannot have

³ This is an 8F 2-8-0 that was due to go to the Middle East, but somehow "missed the draft". Later it was renumbered 8285 – w/e 08/05/1948 - and became the longest serving 8F at Kettering, not being allocated elsewhere until January 1964.



After moving from Kettering, Johnson 2-4-0 20216 spent its last days as station pilot at Cheltenham. It was built in 1879 and withdrawn in November 1949 and so had seventy years service. It was allocated number 58022 by British Railways, but this was not carried by the locomotive. This picture was taken on 30th July 1949. [Author's Collection]



anything heavier than that they are using now over the line and make the best of a bad job.^[4]

1949:

Several ex-LNER engines have been working on the Midland Division south of Leicester recently. On 4/3/49 J15 5474 (CAM) was on Kettering shed having worked a passenger train from Cambridge due to the failure of a CI 2 2-6-0 at Cambridge. The following day J15 65461 was on Kettering shed also having worked a passenger train from Cambridge. On 23/3/49 Y3 8172 (NEA) was noted in Gray's Sidings at Burton Latimer (between Kettering and Wellingborough). This is apparently on loan in place of their own Sentinel.

Recently an E4 2-4-0 was tried out over the Cambridge – Kettering route on passenger workings, coming into Kettering on the 7.30am from Cambridge, and returning on the 5.20pm to Cambridge, 8.05pm on Saturday, for one week.^[5]

1951

January: Eastern Region J15s are now regular visitors to Kettering, working over from Cambridge on passenger turns, 65457 and 65475 (both 31A) having been noted in the last week or so.

February: 2F 0-6-0 58214 was on loan to Cambridge from LMR 26/11/50 to 3/12/50. 58194 and 43002 (used on the Bedford line) were returned to LMR on 26/11/50 and 3/12/50 respectively.

1956

February: E4 2-4-0 62786 (31A) made a somewhat eventful appearance on the Midland Division main line on December 19th and 20th (1955). Having worked the 4.55pm from Cambridge to Kettering in place of a failed Kettering 2-6-0 it continued on the 8.15pm Kettering – Leicester and after a late start of about twenty minutes owing to the late running of the 6.40pm St Pancras – Manchester took twenty five minutes from Kettering to Desborough (6 miles) with a load of 160 tons eventually arriving at Leicester at 9.55pm – forty four minutes late.

Next morning it set out from Leicester to work the 7.00am Melton Mowbray – Kettering arriving at Kettering at 8.50am instead of 8.10am. Kettering was left at 9.00am on the 8.33am to Cambridge and Thrapston was eventually reached and 62786 handed back to a crew from its own shed. These, however soon tired of it as they gave up at Kimbolton which was reached over forty minutes late and the unfortunate passengers had to contemplate the wintry scene until a relief engine was found. It is

believed that Cambridge was reached approximately two hours late.

1959

August: Last day scenes on the Kettering-Cambridge line on Saturday 13th June followed the all too familiar pattern. Chalked inscriptions on the smokebox door and "Brian's Folly" in huge letters on the cab of 46496 which hauled the 2.10pm from Kettering. The four rather decrepit coaches were well filled all day, and 46444 arrived quite late on the 11.25am ex-Cambridge, delayed by the activities of camera-laden enthusiasts making their last journeys. The section between Godmanchester and Kimbolton was closed completely; track lifting from Kimbolton towards Huntingdon started soon after the service was withdrawn.

After this day the passenger service was withdrawn, although a number of specials used this route – probably no further than Thrapston, and from 1964 Twywell was the end of the line.

1965:

August: The former single line from Kettering to Cambridge is still quite busy with ironstone traffic and is open to a point about half a mile east of Twywell Station. Wagons are loaded from lorries in the station yard whilst a bigger concentration can be found at Cranford sidings (Cranford East) where there is contact with the private rail system.

The Cambridge end of the line.

1947:

May: An item on Cambridge notes the recent changes to motive power and continues:

On the Midland branch from Kettering there has been least change of all. The 2-4-0s no longer come into the station in bright red and polished brasswork, with the driver's name in a small plate on the cab. The service of trains is much reduced, but the non-stop from St Ives to Cambridge still exists, and three of the four daily LMS trains from Kettering run from St Ives to Cambridge without an intermediate stop in 25 minutes. The 2-4-0s still appear frequently on the four trains a day, sharing the duty with small-boilered Midland 0-6-0s. The famous 20012 has been observed quite recently at Cambridge and it is hoped that a few of these 2-4-0s will work this branch for many years to come.^[6]

September: R. P. Brooks writes, "In connection with Mr D A Beacock's articles in the March, April and May issues it may interest readers to know that the

4 The Ivatt 2MT 2-6-0s arrived at Kettering in 1947 to be greeted with great enthusiasm

5 E4 2-4-0s arrived at Kettering very occasionally through the 1950s, and so the last 2-4-0s to work on the branch were not the Midland engines, but the ex-GE LNER E4 class.

6 There were a couple of replies to the May 1947 item which give the impression that some of the above description relates to several years earlier.



Ivatt 2-6-0 46404 approaches Godmanchester Crossing on 17th July 1953. [Transport Treasury]

new LMS 2F 2-6-0 locomotives are replacing the old Midland 2-4-0s on the Kettering-Cambridge passenger trains. I observed 6401 on 17th June on the 9.52am from St Ives.”

N. P. Robinson writes, “The Kettering line has changed considerably since about 1941, when 20012 was transferred to Nottingham. Since then few 2-4-0s have worked into Cambridge, and the only engine of that wheel arrangement at Kettering is now 20216, which appears to be employed only on shunting near Kettering station. The line was run wholly by MR 2F 0-6-0s (mainly of the small-wheeled variety), until the introduction of the new 2-6-0 No. 6404 which has been employed wholly on the line. Recently it has developed steaming trouble and No. 6400 was on loan from Derby shed, and has been working into Cambridge for some time.”

D H Palmer writes, “It is now over twelve months, I think, since the Kettering 2-4-0 20216 has worked the Kettering-Cambridge branch.^[7] Since the appearance of 6404 early in the year, light 2-6-0s Nos. 6400-4 have all taken their turn on the branch. They work nearly all the passenger trains while 2F 0-6-0s still handle the light goods trains there.

For the greater part of the time No. 20216 lies dead. For the remainder it is employed on shunting duties, also occasionally working a local passenger train to Gretton (on the Kettering – Nottingham line).

I should be interested to hear how the other two 2-4-0s are faring.”

December: J. C. H. Waine writes, “With reference to the letter by Mr R P Brooks in the September issue, I would mention that I have observed LMS 2F 2-6-0s 6400/1/2/3/4 all working the Kettering-Cambridge passenger trains over the Huntingdon East-St Ives branch. Also a point of interest is that the 7.40pm fruit train which starts at Godmanchester, Hunts to Kettering via Huntingdon East in the fruit season is usually double-headed. In the 1946 season MR 2F 0-6-0s were used but this season have observed LMS 2-6-0s 6400 and 6404 for a week at a time heading this train. Prior to the coming of the 2-6-0s I have never seen anything bigger than 0-6-0s working the branch.”

The fruit train mentioned above ran for several weeks during the summer and started at Histon – departure around 5.30pm after the last passenger train to Kettering had gone. It picked up vans containing the fruit from each of the stations along the line to Huntingdon and then ran to Kettering. The fruit being of a perishable nature had to be transported to market as soon as possible. The destination was usually Ancoats, Manchester and the train left Kettering later in the evening. Kettering Loco received a couple of locomotives to work this train – in the early 1950s a couple of Compounds were allocated, and then in the last few years it was a couple of Fowler / Hughes “Crab” 2-6-0s that came.

⁷ 20216 was resurrected after spending time at the back of Kettering shed – partially dismantled, and sent to Gloucester where it was used as station pilot at Cheltenham Lansdown Road until withdrawal. See also the item regarding Kettering shed in “Railway Locomotives”.



If readers are interested in this – and other seasonal traffic – obtaining a copy of BR LM Region (Midland Division) Fruit and Vegetable Notice (Passenger and Freight rated) makes fascinating reading.^[8] Not only is fruit traffic covered, but transport of green peas and lettuces is included. There is also provision for a van to be attached when required to the early afternoon passenger service as far as Kimbolton for blackberries (passenger rated) – with the loaded van returning on the final Cambridge- Kettering train of the day (6.07pm from Kimbolton) The British Locomotive Society^[9] published a magazine entitled “**Railway Locomotives**” on a two-monthly basis. This was in the same format as the “Railway Observer” and even used the same printer.^[10] This makes interesting reading and complements the contemporary RO reports.

The January/February 1949 edition includes an extended piece entitled “Kettering and District”, noting that the Kettering shed building and yard are easily accessible from the northern end of the up slow platform and are fully visible from all trains. Fourteen locos can be housed in the four-road shed.

On 21/11/48 the allocation was:

454, 40537, 550, 1010, 41047, 1071, 1889, 2988,

2999, 3038/9/42/90, 3889, M4278, 4465, four out of 6400-04 (one is normally at 17A), 7437, 8069, 8124/41/43, 48285, 8355/56/80/81, 8645, 8704/59, 20216, 23011, 58164 (ex 2990); Total 36.

During the fruit season, 4F 0-6-0s 44043, 4066/99, 44226/65 were on loan. They took over from the 2F 0-6-0s which had brought the trains from Histon, and had destinations as far away as Colne, Manchester and Chesterfield. The ubiquitous 8F 2-8-0s are however the main freight standby at 15B, and when not required for coal or iron ore trains, may be seen on the steel tube traffic from Corby; they are frequently noted on the Western division main line, working coal trains through Northampton to the south.^[11]

The 64XX 2-6-0s have given a very good account of themselves, especially on the Cambridge branch, and have displaced from those duties the 2F 0-6-0s. They are quite equal to the 2P 4-4-0s on short-distance passenger turns, and none of the 6400-04 batch have visited works since they were built two years ago.

One 0-6-0, almost invariably 23011 with its light tender, is retained to handle the iron ore traffic on the heavily graded New Cransley furnaces and Loddington pits mineral line.

8 The Study Centre has the notices for the 1954 and 1955 seasons [MRSC RFB32422 and 32423].

9 The British Locomotive Society was formed in April 1945 by the amalgamation of the Birmingham Railway Club, the West Riding Railway Society of Huddersfield and the Three Spires Locomotive Club of Coventry.

10 A Tomes Ltd Printers, Leamington Spa.

11 There was a daily Lloyds - Poplar docks working of steel tubes which took a Kettering 8F onto the LNW main line.



Johnson 0-6-0 58162 (2988 in Midland and LMS days) waits in the north bay at Cambridge station with the 14:20 SO on 30th June 1951. The train consists of, appropriately enough, of one Midland clerestory carriage. [Author's Collection]



Out of commission for many months, 2-4-0 20216, at the age of nearly seventy, is in very poor condition at the rear of the shed and sports the warning "Not To Be Moved". It will doubtless soon be broken up.

Compound 1047 also lay idle for a year or so, rusting and often liberally splashed with lime sludge; it recently returned from Derby Works in the new black passenger livery. 40537 has been repainted in the same way.

Amongst the exchange locos noted at Kettering was WD 2-10-0 73784, on shed 7-9/7/48 with valve gear out of order and supported on chocks of wood. It was noted in the same condition at Feltham shed, Southern Region on 24/8/48.

1949:

July / August : E4s and J15s have on several occasions been at work on the Kettering branch.

1951:

March/April: Midland Railway 2-4-0s. This edition includes an article on the above types with brief details of the various classes. It concludes with withdrawal dates of the later survivors, some working from Kettering lasting until:

1938: 20092, 20238/67	
1939: 20157/83/94, 20225/54, also 20155 (reinstated)	
1940: 20251/66	1941: 20204
1943: 20008, 20219	1945: 20012
1947: 20002	1948 20185 (58021)
1949: 20216 (58022)	1950: 20155 (58020)

Also noted – A 31A J15 now works the 7.30am to Kettering every day. As a result, there is never an LMR engine lying dead on Sundays as formerly at Cambridge shed.

Inspection of the Programme of Special Trains notice for the week commencing Saturday, 13th April 1946 makes interesting reading. Under the Strengthening of Passenger Trains section there are instructions regarding the branch to Cambridge. These concern the 8.45am service from Kettering and the return 11.30am from Cambridge which has an additional 1st class coach added on 18th, 20th and 22nd April. The 2.10pm departure from Kettering and the 5.10pm return from Cambridge is to be formed of six non-corridor coaches on 18th and 22nd dates. Obviously extra patronage is expected, not surprising as the 18th is Maundy Thursday, the 20th is Easter Saturday and 22nd is Easter Monday, forming the first holiday period of the year. Also it could be that military personnel are having some leave over this period, and there are a number of RAF airfields in the vicinity.

Easter Monday is also a day of horse racing at Huntingdon – although the course is a tidy walk from Huntingdon East station.

No doubt that six non-corridor coaches would require extra motive power, so perhaps a couple of Kettering's allocation of 2F 0-6-0s would be put to the task.

Holiday trains

The RCTS also published "A Midland Traffic Survey" in 1956 (MRSC library ref 425), when members took up observation positions at various points on the Midland system and recorded the performance of the services on 7th August 1956. For readers who are interested in what happened on a Summer Saturday this is a publication well worth reading.

This records the progress of the Summer Saturday Leicester – Clacton working, which started from Leicester 2 minutes late. The train engine was Ivatt 2MT 2-6-0 78028 from Leicester with 8 coaches.

There is a paragraph in the survey describing the situation of this service:

"Back in Leicestershire a serious hold-up may well have occurred at a vital time when 78028, new from Darlington Works, began to prime badly whilst on the climb to Wigston North hauling the 8.18am Leicester – Clacton, which had left Leicester 2 minutes late due to last minute strengthening of the train. Fortunately, 8F 2-8-0 48619 was running light in the opposite direction at that time and was speedily attached as pilot running tender first. This combination brought the eight coaches into Kettering only 15 minutes late, where a further 6 minutes were lost in attaching an additional coach, treating 78028 with anti-priming powder, and replacing 48619 with local 2MT 2-6-0 46444."

The return, again hauled by 78028, this time with 9 coaches, was 6 minutes late at Kettering at 3.04pm, arriving at Leicester 7 minutes down at 3.57pm. Nine coaches is quite a load for a 2MT class locomotive and usually this train was double-headed by a couple of 2-6-0s between Leicester and Huntingdon East.

The Special Traffic Notice (STN) which covers the week commencing 2nd August 1958 shows a relief working to Clacton-on-Sea starting from Hinkley at 7.00am, taking the curves at Wigston, thus missing Leicester, arriving at Kettering at 8.00am. In this STN the return relief from Clacton (dep 9.20am), arrives at Kettering at 2.05pm and travels via Melton Mowbray to Leicester. A second extra on this day started at Yarmouth at 12.13pm and runs via Norwich and Cambridge, arriving at Kettering at 4.05pm. This was the return of an additional through train which worked through to Yarmouth the previous Saturday, calling at Kettering at 6.05am, Cambridge at 7.37am and arriving at Yarmouth Vauxhall at 9.48am – just in time for a Full English breakfast.

Many of our readers will have read and studied the various timing logs published in railway publications



over the years. In your writer's experience these almost always covered express workings over the main routes, sometimes with top-link crews. To find such information of freight workings or passenger trains on branch lines is very rare.

However, through the good offices of the Railway Performance Society we have some logs of passenger workings over the Kettering - Cambridge branch.

Date: 20.7.1941 Recorder G Aston
Train: 1.05pm Leicester London Rd – Cambridge
(Kettering - Huntingdon East section only)
Motive Power MR 2-4-0 20204 Load 3 for 89/92

Miles/ Chains	Location	Time	Speed	Schedule
0.00	Kettering	0.00		
1.21	Kettering Jcn	3.17	sigs	
3.30	Butlin's Sdgs	7.56		
4.49	Cranford	10.06		10 mins
2.26	Twywell	3.56	49 max	4 mins
3.39	Thrapston Midland Rd.	4.16		5 mins
3.07	Raunds	7.08		8 mins
5.07	Kimbolton	10.15	PW slack	9 mins
1.33	Long Stow Goods	2.54	48	
2.73	Magpie Crossing	4.41	54/57	
4.53	Grafham	6.53		7 mins
2.50	Buckden	4.52	46/52	5 mins
2.49	Huntingdon East	4.49		4 mins

Date: 21.2.1945 Recorder G Aston
Train 8.45am Kettering – Cambridge
(Kettering – Huntingdon East section only)
Motive power MR 2F 0-6-0 3195
Load 3 + 1 for 89/93 (gross/tare)

0.00	Kettering	0.00		
1.21	Kettering Jcn		22/39	3 mins
3.30	Butlin's Sdgs			7 mins
4.49	Cranford	11.11		10 mins
2.26	Twywell	4.14	50 max	5 mins
3.39	Thrapston Midland Rd.	4.30	47 max	5 mins
3.07	Raunds	7.43	24/41	9 mins
5.07	Kimbolton	8.07	45/36/52	11 mins
1.33	Long Stow Goods	3.04	41	
2.73	Magpie Crossing	5.02	50/52	
4.53	Grafham	7.33		9 mins
2.50	Buckden	5.06	50 max	5 mins
2.49	Huntingdon East	5.30		4 mins

Our recorder ceased timings at Huntingdon East, although both trains continued to Cambridge. Kettering to Huntingdon was scheduled to take 60 minutes for the 27 miles – a leisurely pace that changed little over the years.

Date: 10.5.1952 Recorder M N Bland
Train 8.12pm Kettering – Cambridge
Motive power J15 0-6-0 65467
Load 3 for 90/91

Miles/ Chains	Location	Time	Speed	Schedule
60.22	Histon	0.00		
58.38	Milton	3.12	35	
57.54	Chesterton Jcn	5.28	41	
57.19	Barnwell Jcn	6.23		
56.27	Coldham Jcn	8.08	sig stop	
55.52	Cambridge	10.22		10 mins

This train was the Saturday evening service as the departure time from Kettering is 8.12pm. On other weekdays the leaving time was 5.25pm. From the early 1950s (see notes from The Railway Observer) the first train from Cambridge was worked by a Cambridge engine which took the evening train back. The motive power was usually a J15 0-6-0, but in later years one of the Cambridge Ivatt 2MT 2-6-0s would be used; and very occasionally an E4 2-4-0 may appear (again see The Railway Observer notes).

Date: 7.2.1959 Recorder G Aston
Train: 5.00pm Cambridge – Kettering
Motive Power: BR 2-6-0 2MT 78028
Load 4 for 126/130
(Cambridge – Histon section only)

55.52	Cambridge	0.00		
57.54	Chesterton Jcn	4.52	31/45	
60.22	Histon	8.55		10 mins

This was the final train of the day back to Kettering. This was also during the final months of the service, and by this time the motive power had moved on to the 2MT 2-6-0s – either the Ivatt or Riddles versions. It is assumed that the recorder left the train at Histon.

Some general points to make about these logs.

The speed limits over this route:

Kettering to Huntingdon restricted to 45mph reducing to 40mph around Cranford.

St Ives to Cambridge restricted to 60mph.

The two war-time logs recording the journey over to Huntingdon showed some lively running over parts of the route. It is interesting that we have details of a working by both a Midland 2-4-0 as well as a Midland 2F 0-6-0. Both locos exceeded the line speed limit and it was undoubtedly a lively experience on either footplate as speeds reached 50mph.



Over the years the journey time did not change much, so it still took well over an hour and a half to traverse the 47 miles from Kettering to Cambridge.

The Royal Train

Finally, the red-letter day took place late in the life of the branch when in July 1965 the Royal Train spent the night stabled at Butlin's Sidings with the Queen and Prince Philip sleeping on the train. Two Black 5s came from Leicester to provide steam heat for the night, with the train being moved to Kettering in the morning to enable the Royal party to make a number of local engagements.

The Railway Observer notes that on 4th July 1965 two Black 5s, 44851 and 45262 were on Derby shed cleaned ready for use on the Royal Train in the Leicester and Kettering area.

Bernard Smith writes:

“My tale is from July 8th and 9th 1965. Although passenger trains had ceased the branch was still used to bring ironstone from Twywell. On this particular night I acted as fireman on the Royal Train. The Queen and Prince Philip had been visiting nearby and the Royal Train was to spend the night at Butlin's Sidings, a small loop line about two miles from Kettering. Our engine was to stay coupled to the train for heating for the night, and the train was to return to London in the morning.

“We met the train at 10pm at Kettering Station, with just a minimum of security present. The engine was a nicely cleaned Class Black 5. Although it was night time, we had to dress with a collar and tie.

“We took the train to Butlin's Sidings and remained there until relieved at 6am, coupled to the train for heating purposes. So my claim to fame is that I kept the Queen warm.

“A few days later I received a letter thanking me for working on the Royal Train and awarding me an extra 7/6d”.

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With thanks to all the correspondents whose observations are collected above.



Johnson 2F 0-6-0 3545 arrives at Kettering with a Cambridge train on a wet Saturday, 27th March 1937. 3545 was built by Sharp, Stewart & Co. in 1897 and was not withdrawn until October 1960. Its British Railways number was 58287 but its nationalised time was spent mainly around Barrow-in-Furness. [Author's Collection]