

RCTS CHICHESTER-BRANCH NEWSLETTER-MARCH 2026

Our Next meeting open to all. No advance booking or membership required

Wednesday 25 March at 19:15

The Bassil Shippam Centre

Tozer Way, St Pancras, Chichester, P019 7LG

CHASING STEAM IN WESTERN EUROPE 1970-1974



John Barrowdale our speaker writes:

The illustrated talk covers visits to western Europe for photographing remaining steam services organised by myself and friends and 5 short weekend visits organised by the LCGB between 1970 and 1974. During that time, we went on three fortnight visits to Europe in 1971, 1972 & 1973 visiting West Germany mainly, limited bits of France and Austria and included northern Italy on the 1972 and 1973 trips.

We did the 2nd, 3rd and 4th West Germany tours of four trips organised with the LCGB between 1970 and 1972 using the SS Avalon as overnight accommodation as follows:-

Rhein – Mosel 3rd Oct October 1970

Wesffalen & Weser 1st May 1971

Ems & Wupper 29th – 30 April 1972

We also did the 2nd & 3rd trips of four organised by the LCGB between 1972 and 1975 to Portugal flying out from Luton to Porto for two nights in a hotel as follows:-

Minho and Vouga 23-25th March 1973

Corgo and Tamega 22-24th March 1974

Suggested donation on the door £3 Members £4 Guests



<p>The Monthly Newsletter of RCTS Chichester Branch</p> <p>Editor: Graham Benzeval</p> <p>Distributor: Roger Sandford</p> <p>Additional Proof Readers: Geoff Adams, Geoff May, Hefin Jones, Ian McKey, John Robbins & John Barrowdale</p>	<p>Front Cover by Roger Sandford ©</p> <p>Contributors: Alan Wallbank, Joe Whicher, John Barrowdale, Roger Sandford, Geoff May, Clive Sayer, Bob Foster, Geoff Adams</p>
---	--

*******LAST MINUTE INFORMATION*******

Visiting *Inspiration* at

Bognor Regis station, Station Road, Bognor Regis, West Sussex, PO21 1BA

Dates 2 March 2026 to 3 March 2026

Opening information

Opening times 10am - 5pm. Last entry will be at 4pm

Join us in celebrating 200 years of the modern railway by visiting ***Inspiration: The Railway 200 Exhibition Train*** at Bognor Regis station.

You'll be joined by a fantastic team dedicated to making your experience memorable. The train is accessible and to ensure a quality experience and time to enjoy the displays, visits are structured in 15-minute intervals. Please arrive at the station no earlier than 10 minutes before the time indicated on your ticket. Have your ticket in hand for check-in.

Go to the website -

<https://railway200.digitickets.co.uk/tickets>

What's on for the Railway Enthusiast in March

Railway Name	Website	Contact Email	Contact Phone
Bluebell Railway	Bluebell Railway Web Site	Bluebell Email contact	01825 720800
Isle of Wight Railway	IOW-SR Website	IOW Steam Railway Email	01983 882204

Kent & East Sussex Railway (K&ESR)	K&ESR Website	K&ESR Email	01580 765155
Watercress Line	Watercress Line Website	Watercress line Email	01962 733810
Amberley Museum	Amberley Museum Website	Amberley Museum Email	01798 831370
Hayling Light Railway	Hayling Island Railway Website	Hayling Island Railway Email	07902 446340
Littlehampton Miniature Railway (LMR)	LMR Website	LMR Email	01903 719876
South Downs Light Railway	South Downs Light Railway Website	South Downs Railway Light Email	07518 753784
Stansted Park Light Railway	Stansted Park Light Railway Website	Stansted Park Light Railway Email	02392 413 324

Railway	Start Date	End Date	Event
Bluebell Railway	20/03/2026	22/03/2026	Spring Gala , normal running for other weekends, also special trains for Fish and Chips, Afternoon Tea on Mothering Sunday and cheese and wine, see website for details.
IOW-SW	03/03/2026	24/03/2026	Trains running on Tuesdays and Sundays. Sunday 29th special Easter event.
K&ESR	14/03/2026	15/03/2026	Mothers weekend specials
K&ESR	22/03/2026	31/03/2026	Trains running on 22, 29 and 31st
Watercress Line	10/03/2026	21/03/2026	Special events with Flying Scotsman , Wednesday to Sunday outside these dates normal two train operation.
Amberley Museum	15/03/2026	15/03/2026	Mothering Sunday event ,
Amberley Museum	19/03/2026	19/03/2026	Discovery Day event , outside of these dates normal opening Wednesday to Sunday.
Hayling Light Railway	01/03/2026	29/03/2026	Running weekends.
Littlehampton Light Railway	28/03/2026	31/03/2026	Running starts on 28 th , 29 th and 31 st .
South Downs Railway	14/03/2026	15/03/2026	Narrow Gauge Gala , normal running on other weekend dates
Stansted Light Railway	04/03/2026	29/03/2026	Running on Wednesdays and Sundays

Southern Engineering Works - March 2026



**Some Engineering works likely to affect
journeys in our area.**

Start Date	End Date	
01 Mar	01 Mar	Buses replace trains between Three Bridges and Horsham
02 Mar	05 Mar	Amended late night service between London Victoria and Three Bridges
08 Mar	08 Mar	Buses replace trains between Guildford and Gatwick Airport, Arundel/Angmering and Littlehampton/Barnham
09 Mar	11 Mar	Amended late night service from London Victoria
15 Mar	15 Mar	Buses replace trains between Brighton and Worthing/Littlehampton; early morning between Three Bridges and Brighton
16 Mar	20 Mar	Amended late running from London Bridge
21 Mar	22 Mar	Buses replace trains between Three Bridges and Brighton/Lewis Amended early morning on 22 nd London Bridge to Victoria
23 Mar	26 Mar	Buses replace late night/early morning trains between three Bridges and Brighton; and late night between Horsham and Barnham
28 Mar	02 Apr	Track renewal, buses replace trains to/from Portsmouth Harbour
30-Mar	02/Apr	Buses replace late night/early morning trains between Three Bridges and Brighton

South Western Railway Engineering Works - March 2026



Some Engineering works likely to affect
journeys in our area.

Start Date	End Date	
07 Mar	08 Mar	Buses replace trains between Basingstoke and Southampton Central
08 Mar	08 Mar	Amended service to/from London Waterloo
14 Mar	15 Mar	Buses replace trains between Waterloo and Woking
16 Mar	18 Mar	Buses replace late trains between Basingstoke and Southampton Central
21 Mar	22 Mar	No trains via Wimbledon
23 Mar	26 Mar	Amended late trains between Portsmouth Harbour and Waterloo
28 Mar	02 Apr	Track replacement, no trains to/from Portsmouth Harbour, will affect Cardiff, Bristol, Southampton and London trains
28 Mar	29 Mar	No trains via Wimbledon

Here is another Railway interest group with monthly meetings



Watercress Line Heritage Railway Trust, Portsmouth Regional Group

Where

Cosham Community Centre, Wootton Street, Cosham, Portsmouth, PO6 3AP

When

On the third Tuesday of each month at 7:30pm (Apart from July and August). Admission is by a donation of £4.00. Group funds are used to support the Watercress Line.

Programme 2026

17 March: Isle of Man Transport with Niel Kearns

21 April: Railways of Finland with David Rendell

19 May: The History of Railways within 20 miles of Ropley with Peter Cutler

16 June: AGM/East Southsea Railway and other images of local interest such as trams and the Southsea Miniature Railway with Steve Hayward

Further Information

Meetings start at 7:30pm. They will be held in the small function room which has a separate entrance on the south side of the building. There is a car park at the centre and on street parking as well.

A great day out by Alan Wallbank

Having worked on the railway, I have a pass that gives me free travel on a number of occasions each year, so every now and again I ride around mainly over lines that I have not travelled on before as I did on Saturday the 8th November. On this day I caught the bus from Bedhampton at 09.50 to Havant and from there the train to Littlehampton as I wanted to see if semaphore starting signals were still in place at this location. The journey was quite short as I managed to get a semi-fast service sitting in a facing offside seat which I prefer. As most of you probably know, the semaphores are still there and are operated from the signal box that looks as if it's out of use due to its boarded up appearance. From here, I had planned to go to Horsham, but there were no trains probably due to the line to Brighton being closed for engineering work, so it was back to Barnham and then on to Horsham stopping all stations. As we left Pulborough, I was surprised to see flower baskets outside the signal box windows and wondered what the box was used for now as I'm pretty sure the signals on the mid-Sussex line are now operated from Three Bridges? *(Ed note from Geoff May – Three Bridges ROC took over control of the mid Sussex back in 2014, thus rendering Pulborough Box operationally redundant)*



Above – Littlehampton station showing the semaphore starting signals still in place – image Alan Wallbank

From the outset, I was planning my journey using the ‘National Rail Timetable Map’ 2002-2003 so from Horsham I caught the London Victoria service via Dorking and Sutton, although going through to London didn’t give much option as to further travel bearing in mind the Brighton line closure, so I got off at Mitcham Junction and caught the Croydon tram to Wimbledon. I then decided to go to Guildford via Leatherhead as this was another route that I had not travelled on before, but on checking my phone for times, found the line from Guildford to Havant also closed due to engineering Works. Not wanting to sit on a bus, I found the fastest way home was to catch the fast Southampton train from Waterloo, but how to get there from Wimbledon?

I couldn’t get to Waterloo in time, so I caught a train to Clapham Junction, where on arrival it was straight over to platform 9 to join the Alton service which would arrive at Woking just before the fast to Southampton. In fact, both trains entered Woking at the same time, so it was a rapid sprint over the footbridge to catch the other train for my onward journey which only stopped at Winchester, Southampton Parkway and Southampton Central. What annoyed me on this journey and it happens quite often, is that the automated station announcements weren’t working and the conductor failed to do this manually. I did challenge him at Southampton, but he didn’t seem too bothered! I had this on a Southern service coming back from London Victoria after the train had divided at Horsham. We either got no announcements at all or when we did it was as the train was almost coming to a stand! Back to my journey, on arrival at Southampton I had a twenty-minute wait for the train from Cardiff, which was on time and alighted at Cosham where I caught the bus home to Bedhampton and arrived at 17.05. I took my own lunch so the total cost for the day was just two cups of tea and if you are wondering about the tram, I get free travel on them as well!

30 Years of working as part of the Watercress Belle Team Part 1

By John Barrowdale

Now for something completely different from my main volunteering as part of the locomotive department on the Mid Hants Railway. I first volunteered on the Watercress Belle in Oct 1989 following an appeal for new volunteers by former general manager Ian Dean who came to the railway from his previous management job at the Amberley Chalk Pit Museum. This train always looked appealing from the lineside when it was passing by or when I was on the footplate hauling it, so I thought I would spread my wings and help somewhere else completely different from my usual volunteer roles on the railway.

To avoid too many journeys, I had from the outset decided to do this role on Saturdays when I was working in Ropley locomotive yard doing ash pit clearance, breaking pallets, engine cleaning etc, making sure that I did not become too dirty as my role on the Belle would be public facing. I usually ventured down to Alresford about 17.00 after packing up from Ropley at 16.30, having a good wash, removing any dirty smudges on my face and dirt from under my finger nails as that is not the impression you want to give when serving wine and food. Volunteers who had been working elsewhere on the railway were given a staff meal on arrival, but I hasten to add this was not the sort of meals our customers would be expecting during the evening.

I was told to find the Belle train manager when I got there who at that time was Dave Bates, who was a very pleasant and confident guy who sadly died in 2024. He introduced me to several of the other volunteers who were working that evening, a few I already knew from other parts of the railway, but the bulk were new to me, albeit a few I was aware of by sight. One volunteer was the second relief train manager who was the delightful and much missed Marie Knight who was the very first Watercress Belle train manager. Her two daughters were also volunteers one being a trainee chef and the other a waitress. In addition, her husband the late Dave Knight was a driver on the railway. Dave Bates said we needed another person on the bar that night, so my first role was barman. All staff were told in advance to wear black trousers or skirts with black footwear and white tunics were provided by the MHR to wear over our own top clothes. The tunics were yours to keep and wash between duties or if you gave up volunteering to return to the company.

The train always consisted of four Mark 1 BR coaches painted in pullman colours and would be formed in a set of a FO, Full kitchen car, FO, BC, the latter holding a generator in the luggage space to create electricity for cooking and lights as much of the journey was

often in the dark especially at the start and end of the running season. The coach batteries would not charge up enough for such short use over a day to provide the power we needed. There was also a spare FO and all the first open coaches had names in Pullman tradition being Sage, Fern & Sylvia. Each coach sat 36 passengers in 2 seat and 4 seat across combinations with the central doors separating the saloons into 12 and 24 seats. There were storage cupboards with flat surfaces on top by the central doors where we prepared crockery and dishes after collecting them from the kitchen. Opposite this serving area was a spare two seats which were not bookable, but handy when the reservation office got the numbers wrong which occasionally happened. It was rather annoying having people there as the table was used usually by the wine waiters to open bottles and put drinks on trays before delivery to the customer tables, plus you did not want customers to hear you swear and curse during the evening.



However, I was on bar duties that first evening. The train was open to the public at 18.45 with a 19.30 departure from Alresford. (yes, we got some silly buggers turning up to start at Alton because they had not read the tickets correctly, but that only happened about twice a year). The bar opened at 18.45 and shut at 19.25 after which all further drinks had to be ordered at your table from the wine waiters. On opening the bar custom was slow

for the first 10 minutes but got hectic from 19.00 onwards and needed two volunteers serving. I had until that evening never served in a bar before which proved to be my undoing as people asked for drinks I never heard of before, then I caused more washing up by not matching drinks with the correct size of glass. Mental arithmetic was also not my forte so calculating the costs of each round was not particularly easy either. The main barman being a regular told me just to add up the first two drinks accurately then add on a further 5 quid for every additional drink the customer was buying. Seemed weird but nobody queried it. Wiping up spillages was constant, but apart from all that I was having a great evening! When the bar closed, I thought great I can take a break now, but oh no as the wine waiters started to arrive with drink orders for each table on docketts which had the table number on which the barmen prepared on trays. Wine bottles were taken from shelves behind us for red wine and just along from the bar was a large fronted glass fridge where white wine was cooled. The initial rush was usually over by 20.00, then you just dealt with the odd wine waiter coming along for further orders. In between you were watching the food waiters collecting courses from the kitchen and the TTTs (tea towel technicians) wiping up the crockery, glasses, and cutlery the latter being collected from the pantry which was between the bar and the kitchen. When the two pantry volunteers had emptied the dish washer, they shouted up the coach 'glasses' then a TTT would rush by and collect plastic trays of all the stuff that needed drying. There was another short rush to coincide with the cheese course when there would be orders for liqueurs from the wine waiters. About 21.00 the barmen would start adding up the bills from the docketts (attached to a large spike) for each table for the wine waiters to take back to the customers to pay for their drink orders, hence where the table numbers and list of drinks on the docketts came in. The waiters would return with the payments, usually cash back then, a few cheques and later the use of credit cards was catered for but the latter was a rare form of payment back in 1989. Often the cash was more than asked for, but it was returned for people to leave as tips as we did not take the extra for granted. The tips did not go directly to the staff as it was used as an amenity fund to buy and replace equipment, replacement glasses, crockery etc for the train. However, each member of staff was entitled to a drink out of the tips after all the clearing up had finished or could take a bottle home with them if they had a long drive back. Many stayed and enjoyed the social side of the evening and often I did not get home until about 12.45 in the morning. David Bates asked me how I had enjoyed the evening and I replied it was interesting, very busy and I learnt a lot but could I have a different job next time as barman was not really my calling. Part 2 to follow next month. (this series will not be as long as my footplate

series of articles, some may be relieved to know!) and talking of my footplate article, see below -



This is a belated picture of myself which I found recently and had forgotten I had of the amusing incident from my series of articles in the RCTS Chichester Branch newsletter on my 41 years of Mid Hants Railway Footplate Crew. This featured in Part 10 and was the occasion when a children's author Moira Blackwell approached me with Binky the bear, who was an Alresford based teddy bear who has lots of adventures around the town & rural Hampshire. She asked me whether she could take pictures of Binky and me in the 9F cab to which I agreed to. After many pictures were taken, she asked if I would pretend to be talking to him by moving my mouth. So just in case our readers thought I made the story up, albeit nobody suggested that, here

is the proof.

Picture taken by Moira Blackwell

May's Miscellany: by Geoff May ©



Most pick ups at water troughs resulted in a tender overflow and woe betide those passengers in the front coach who didn't heed warnings to close any open windows! Stanier Class 5MT 4-6-0 44802 passes over Hest Bank troughs north of Lancaster with an up WCML service on 22/7/67. From Dillicar in the Lune Gorge to Bushey on the outskirts of London, there were at least eight sets of troughs on the 300 mile journey from Carlisle to Euston.

National Transport Trust Red Plaque (22) - by Joe Whicher

1847 BURNTISLAND – GRANTON ROLL-ON/ROLL-OFF TRAIN FERRY

This is an important station, built in 1847 as the Fife terminus of the world's first train ferry, which was invented by Sir Thomas Bouch to convey vehicles across the Firth of Forth from Granton near Edinburgh. It is a two-storey classical building, with a seven-column portico terminating in pedimented pavilions on square columns. Behind there was a train shed, now demolished, and single storey station offices listed Grade B.

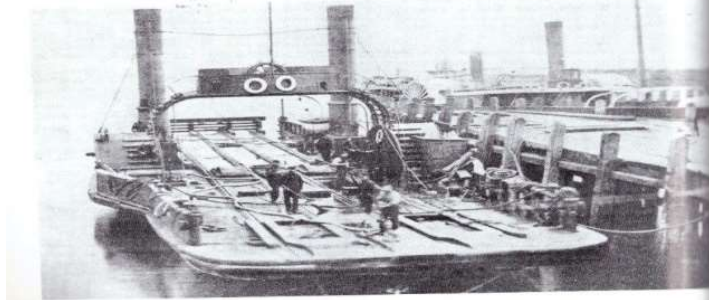


When the Forth Bridge was opened in 1890 the station became redundant and was replaced by a station built on the new through line. The old station building has been refurbished as offices.

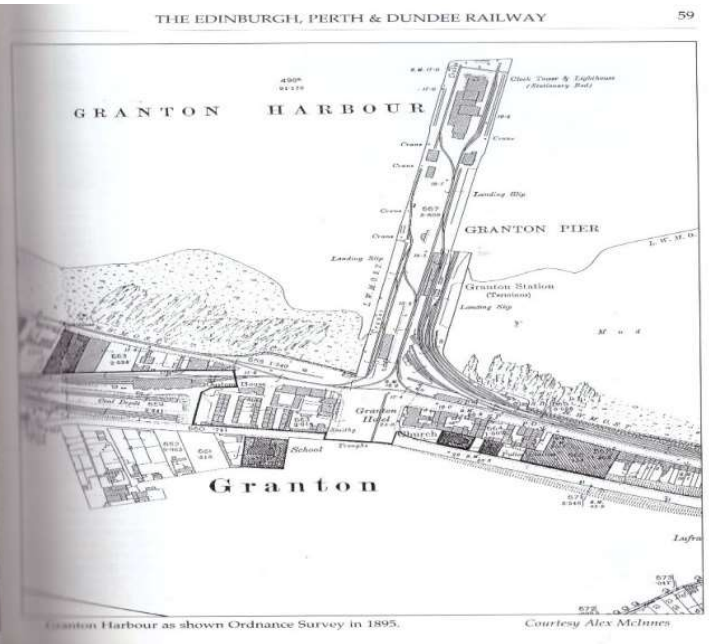
Here in 1850 Bouch devised the Floating Railway, which comprises three main elements. There is an inclined pier at the dockside, a flying bridge to the vessel's flat deck with rails on board the boat. A moveable framework rolls up and down the pier on 24 wheels to suit the state of the tide, the hinged linkspan was operated by a steam winch. This became the outline for most subsequent train and car ferries for the next 150 years.



Goods boat PS *Ballermic* at Granton showing the rails over the Floating Bridge.
Kirkcaldy Museum/3324A



PS *Carrier*, showing the separate engines for each paddle and the spartan facilities on board.
Douglas Yull Collection



Granton Harbour as shown Ordnance Survey in 1895.

Courtesy Alex McInnes

Despite accidents, his novel approach to ferry loading is a triumph, reducing the Edinburgh-Dundee travelling time from three days to around three-and-a-half hours. Bouch is able to report to the Edinburgh, Perth and Dundee Railway Board in March 1851 that the Floating Railway is a complete success, having been in operation every single day since it began. In the first six months alone, over twenty-nine thousand wagons have been transported.



John Barrowdale

The attached picture was taken by me at the Pacific coast city of Wonsan in North Korea on the 24/09/90 and shows a 2-8-2 locomotive based on a Japanese JF-6 design for Chinese Railways built in Korea in 1924. This was an organised trip by TEFS with its leader the late Bill Alborough being our guide. Despite the efforts of our local guide Mr Kim to get us permission to visit the local depot we were told that we were not allowed by the Local People's Committee as it was a dirty, muddy, smelly steam depot, which is what we all wanted to see of course. However, they allowed a light engine down to the railway station for us to see and photograph for half an hour. Apart from perhaps regular visitor Mike Hudson to our RCTS branch who seems to have been everywhere in the world in search of steam, I doubt whether any other Chichester member/visitor has visited this very unusual country (in more ways than one).

Southern Railway calling at Barnham Station



Thought our readers of the newsletter would like to see that Christmas seems to have come early this year.....

Gatwick Express 387216 working 1Y39 15:14 Fareham to Brighton service still in 'Santa Train' livery calls at Barnham on 6th February running 15 minutes late. Photo by Bob Foster

Sussex passenger newsletter

- information from Geoff Adams

Peckham Rye Station



Passengers travelling through Peckham Rye can look forward to a brighter, more accessible station as a £5 million improvement programme gets underway, supporting the wider regeneration of the area.

The Department for Transport has committed £3.9 million to the scheme, with a further £1 million contributed by Southwark Council and The Railway Heritage Trust.

Over the next 18 months, investment will deliver a series of enhancements designed to make the station easier to navigate, reduce congestion at busy times, and restore its much-loved historic features. The work will also create a more welcoming gateway to the new Peckham Rye Station Square; a civic space being delivered by Southwark Council.

These improvements will provide immediate benefits for passengers while safeguarding existing planning permissions for future upgrades to the station.

Keep up to date with the latest developments via our [webpage here](#).

Ockley Landslip



Our engineers are undertaking emergency engineering works near Ockley after a landslip was detected.

Trains between Dorking and Horsham are suspended until at least Monday 16 February while engineers stabilise the embankment. Buses are replacing trains between Dorking, Warnham, Holmwood and Horsham.

Safety for passengers and railway staff always comes first, and we needed to act quickly to make sure that the condition of the embankment didn't deteriorate further.

Brighton Main Line upgrade work

A recent series of upgrades have been completed along the Brighton Main Line to improve performance and resilience as we carried out essential improvements between Brighton, Gatwick Airport and East Croydon over three weekends in January.

Our engineers laid new rail between Purley and Horley and between Merstham and Coulsdon South. We also upgraded the conductor rail between Redhill and Reigate.



A cutting north of Merstham was also strengthened to protect against landslips and drainage repaired along three miles of track at Caterham. Bridge timber replacements were carried out at Godstone and Coulsdon South.

We also completed the refurbishment of the busy Stoats Nest Junction between Purley and Coulsdon South.

The busy Brighton Main Line is among the most complex and congested routes in the country, with the infrastructure being some of the oldest and most intensively used. Because of this, we need to carry out this work to try to prevent delays to passenger journeys.

As it is a key route for the leisure and tourism industry on the south coast, we use typically quieter times on the railway to carry out these vital works, to avoid having to close the railway during busier times of the year.

Major Christmas upgrades completed

We completed a major package of festive engineering works across Sussex and south London over the Christmas period.

Over the 12 days, our teams renewed track, refurbished heavily used points at locations including Gatwick, Three Bridges and Wadhurst, and replaced sleepers



and realigned track between Cannon Street and London Bridge to keep this busy stretch reliable.

Power supply upgrades also took place at London Bridge, Cannon Street and Loughborough Junction to support today's longer and heavier trains and reduce the risk of power drops.

South Bermondsey station now has fully rebuilt platforms with new steel frames, improved lighting and better drainage.

Thank you for your patience whilst we carried out the works over the holiday period.

Clive Sayer tells us that he took the photo on the next page showing the extensive list of routes for the Travelling PO that was on display at the Gwili Railway in Carmarthen. I thought I would give some background information to the Travelling P.O.

The Travelling Post Office (TPO)

From the British Postal Museum information sheet

As early as 1826 Rowland Hill had written about the possibility of sorting letters along the road in specially fitted mail coaches. Despite the fact that mail was first carried by train on 11th November 1830, it took a further seven years before George Karstadt, a Post Office Surveyor, first suggested the idea of using special railway carriages for the sorting of mail whilst en route.

This led to an experimental Travelling Post Office (TPO) on the Grand Junction Railway between Birmingham and Warrington. The first TPO was a converted horse box and was planned by Edward Ellis and Henry Mellersh together with George Karstadt's son, Frederick. The first journey undertaken by the TPO took place on 20 January 1838. This trial was so successful that, within a couple of months, a Bill was passed which obliged Railway Companies to provide a separate carriage for sorting letters en route. The first train carrying a purpose-built sorting carriage ran from Euston to Denbigh Hall, where the mail was transferred to mail coaches to continue the journey by road. The London to Birmingham line was opened throughout its entire length in September, and by the end of 1838 the TPO service had extended to Preston. Extending the Service The establishment of new rail routes, together with the heavy increase of mail following the postal reforms of 1840, ensured the rapid growth of the TPO service. By 1852 there were 39 railway clerks employed and the service stretched as far as Perth, Newcastle, and Exeter. In 1859 agreement was reached for the Night Mail trains to and from the north to have strictly limited passenger accommodation and increased postal facilities, and in 1885 Special Mails, trains devoted solely for Post Office purposes, were introduced. 1885 also saw the first parcels sorted en route. In the years leading up to the First World War, there were over 130 TPOs making up an intricate web of interconnecting routes reaching every corner of the land. However, the War saw many TPOs suspended due to war-time economics and staffing difficulties. Recovery after the War was slow and a number of trains were never reinstated. It was not until the 1930s that substantial investment was made in TPO rolling stock again. Later Developments In 1936, the GPO Film Unit made the classic Night Mail documentary showing the Postal Special's nightly run from London to Scotland. Featuring a verse by W H Auden and music by Benjamin Britten, the original production budget was set at £2000 but upon completion it had cost an estimated £3546. However, even from its first public showing at the Arts Theatre, Cambridge, it was apparent that it would be a great success. The centenary of the TPO service in 1938 was marked with an exhibition at Euston station. A selection of Rolling Stock was on display, including a replica of an 1838 sorting carriage. There was also a working model representing the 'Down and Up Special', a term assigned by the Post Office in 1923 to the Euston-Aberdeen TPO. The TPO service was again suspended during the Second World War, from 1940 until 1945. During this period a few key services still ran as 'bag tenders', trains which only carried closed bags of mail. Services were quickly restored after the War, but the reduction in the number of deliveries saw only 43 of the pre-war 77 services reinstated.

LIST OF TRAVELLING POST OFFICES

<u>NAME</u>	<u>ROUTE</u>
Cardiff-Glasgow TPO	Cardiff-Birmingham-Crewe-Carlisle-Glasgow
Bristol-Penzance TPO	Bristol-Taunton-Plymouth-Penzance
East Anglian TPO Down	Willesden RM-Ipswich-Norwich
East Anglian TPO Up	Norwich-Willesden RM
Glasgow-Cardiff TPO	Glasgow-Carlisle-Crewe-Birmingham-Cardiff
Great Western TPO Down	Willesden RM-Reading-Taunton-Plymouth
Great Western TPO Up	Plymouth-Taunton-Reading-Willesden RM
Midland TPO Going North	Bristol-Cheltenham-Birmingham-Derby-York-Newcastle
Midland TPO Going South	Newcastle-York-Derby-Birmingham-Cheltenham-Bristol
North Eastern TPO Down	Willesden RM-Peterborough-York-Newcastle
North Eastern TPO Up	Newcastle-York-Peterborough-Willesden RM
North West TPO Down	Willesden RM-Rugby-Crewe-Carlisle-Glasgow
North West TPO Up	Carlisle-Crewe-Rugby-Willesden RM
Penzance-Bristol TPO	Penzance-Plymouth-Taunton-Bristol
South East TPO Down	Willesden RM-Ashford-Dover
South East TPO Up	Dover-Ashford-Willesden RM
South Wales TPO Down	Willesden RM-Reading-Bristol-Cardiff-Swansea
South Wales TPO Up	Swansea-Cardiff-Bristol-Reading-Willesden RM

The nationalisation of the railways, following the Transport Act in 1947, led to a process of standardisation of TPO vehicles, although the first BR-designed TPO stock was not used until 1959. With the introduction of a two-tier postal system in 1968, it was decided to sort only first-class mail on the TPOs. This led to the withdrawal of a few marginal TPOs on economic grounds. During the mid-1980s, large scale revisions and alterations to the TPOs were undertaken to align them with the Royal Mail Distribution network, reducing the number of TPOs to 35 in 1988. The network in 1994 consisted of only 24 TPOs operated by approximately 550 staff. In September 1996 there was a major development in the working of TPOs. As part of Royal Mail's Railnet project, trains for almost the whole of the South-East of the country now depart from the 16-acre London Distribution Centre in Willesden, and smaller developments will cover the rest of the country. This will eventually eliminate the need for TPOs to leave from main line railway stations. Many routes will be renamed, and some will be discontinued.



TPO at the [Colne Valley Railway](#).

Visible to the right of the Royal Mail logo is the letter box, for first class post only.

Exchange Apparatus

The Post Office had been experimenting with a mechanical apparatus to pick up and put down mail from a moving train since 1837. This wasn't ready by the time TPOs were introduced and mail was exchanged manually. Trains merely slowed down and mail bags were thrown out; to collect mail the guard was expected to seize bags from the end of a pole that was thrust towards him. A new system was developed by a senior Post Office clerk, John Ramsay. This consisted of an iron frame covered with a piece of net, and was attached to the near side of the TPO. This net opened out to receive mail bags suspended from the arm of an upright post erected by the side of the railway line (known as a gibbet). As one bag was collected into the net, another was released from the train and dropped on the ground. Successful trials were held in May 1838 and the first gibbets were erected at Berkhamsted and Leighton Buzzard in June.

Ten years later, John Dicker, an inspector of mail coaches, submitted an improved design, with nets fixed at the side of the railway track to catch the bags dropped by the train. His system remained in use, largely unchanged, from its introduction in 1852 until the demise of the apparatus system in 1971. The use of high-speed trains means that it is no longer necessary to transfer mail whilst moving, and TPOs now stop at stations instead.

© Postal Heritage Trust 2005. Information Sheet last updated January 2005

Chichester Branch – 19th February Meeting Report

Lance King in Ulster 1957-1970, The Northern Counties Committee – Leslie McAllister

A significant number enjoyed a presentation by Leslie McAllister, the railways of Northern Ireland during the last years of steam and transition to DMU operation. The source material came from the extensive set of colour slides taken by the late Lance King on his trips to that part of the UK, interspersed with black and white images attributed to H. Casserly depicting the same scenes from decades previously.

Initially images of the terminal stations around Belfast were shown, and associated railway architecture, followed by lineside shots of both passenger and goods services on the routes to Derry, Portrush and Larne Harbour. Stations along each route were included, as were harbour facilities at Larne including images of the ferries sailing to various ports in the UK. Interesting was the method adopted for quickly loading luggage from the trains safely to the ships.

Finally, the presentation focussed on the so-called spoil trains operated by WT Class 2-6-4 tank engines mainly in top and tail configuration which for 5 years moved around 4.5million tons of over-burden from Magheramorne Quarry to Belfast which was used to reclaim land in the construction of the M2 motor-way. These operations significant in that they represented the last scheduled steam operations in the UK finishing in May 1970.

RCTS Chichester Branch Meetings

2025/6 Season

RCTS Chichester
2025-2026
Monthly Meetings

Bassil Shippam Centre
Tozer Way Chichester, PO19 7LG



Illustrated talks on a range of railway related subjects
Everybody Welcome

Dates and Times Overleaf

- Wednesday 24th September 19:15**
1125 & DEMU's over the Alps (Watercross Line)
Richard Bentley
- Wednesday 22nd October 19:15**
The Didcot, Newbury & Southampton Railway
Richard Coghlan
- Wednesday 26th November 19:15**
Rail Freight Trains around the UK - Steve Bigley
- Wednesday 17th December 19:15**
AGM plus Local Heroes - Members Photos
- Thursday 15th January 1400**
A Dawlish Adventure, Afternoon Meeting
By Phil Haines
- Wednesday 28th January 19:15**
Railways Remembered: Lake District and North Lancashire - Charles Roberts
ZOOM MEETING ONLY - See Below
- Thursday 19th February 14:00**
Lance King in Ulster 1957-1970, The Northern Counties Committee - Leslie McAllister
Afternoon Meeting
- Wednesday 25th February 19:15**
Stratford Upon Avon to Cheltenham 1904-1979
Tony Bowles
ZOOM MEETING ONLY - See below
- Wednesday 25th March 19:15**
Chasing Steam in Western Europe 1970-1974
John Barrowdale
- Wednesday 22nd April 19:15**
Lines to Midhurst, via Petworth, Petersfield and Chichester - Bill Gage
- Wednesday 27th May 19:15**
Signalling Topics - Peter Gibbons

Zoom meeting tickets at £2 must be purchased in advance at www.rcts.org.uk/branches/branch-chr-chichester

No advance booking required at Bassil Shippam Centre Meetings
Suggested small donation on the door - Guests £4, Members £3
Interval Refreshments - Meeting duration 2.5 hours approx.

www.facebook.com/chichesterrailrcts
E-mail chichester@rcts.org.uk

We Look Forward to seeing you



RCTS Chichester Branch Newsletter March 2026