

Railway Ramblings

Issue 119

June 2020

The monthly newsletter of the Hitchin Branch of the RCTS

Meetings This Month

As a consequence of the Covid-19 crisis all previously planned meetings are cancelled. However, we are currently looking at a possible programme starting from September.

Look after yourselves and your loved ones. Follow all government guidance.

From the Photo Album



One of three GTR units nationally that have been rebranded to recognise the work of the NHS during the current Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

Photo: Rail Insider

If you have photos (old or new) that you are willing to share with other members please supply them, with a suitable caption, to the Editor (John.Dossett@btinternet.com). They should be your own photographs!

Chairman's Platform

It still seems really strange not to have our regular branch meetings. However, we must all carry on the best we can in the current circumstances and get to the "new normal" soon. With the government starting to give guidance on how the country will loosen the "lockdown", we have started to consider how we might restart our branch meetings. We have concluded that the earliest we can aim to restart is September and Dave Elsdon is contacting speakers on that basis.

As I said last month, we have decided to carry on publishing Railway Ramblings. If any of you have railway related topics, with or without photos, which you could share with other members then please send them to the editor. With your help we can keep our monthly newsletter going and, in exchange, provide you with something extra to get involved in.

At branch meetings most of you are used to me talking about *92 Squadron*, a Battle of Britain class locomotive which spends most of her time running at the Nene Valley railway. In 2019 I gave a presentation to the branch on the very topic. Now, after a bit of brow-beating by the editor, I have been persuaded by him to give you all the benefit (?) of the background to my involvement with this superb machine.

On a personal note - Follow the government guidelines and keep well and safe.

Local Observations

All reports as seen at Welwyn North

Sunday 26th April 73961 / 962 passed with an odd assortment of coaches running from Tonbridge Yard to Derby.

Also the tonight's Caledonian Sleeper services were again diverted to the ECML with 92020 working the Euston to Inverness & 92038 on the up working.

Monday 27th April Ely to Newport, this train consisted of 6 Mk3 ex-GWR coaches & 2 barrier coaches being taken from store for scrapping, by locos 20311 / 314

Wednesday 29th April a repeat of Monday's working this time with locos 20118 / 134

Also today saw 66719 hauling 91102 & a rake of Mk4 coaches from Bounds Green to Doncaster via Hertford North, it is thought these were going to be refurbished for further use elsewhere.

Thursday 30th April saw 66710 hauling ex-Gatwick Express set 442407 from Ely to Eastleigh for refurbishment.

Weekend of 1st May all of this weekend's Caledonian sleepers were diverted to ECML using locos 92014 / 28

Monday 4th May & Wednesday 6th May again saw locos 20311 / 314 hauling old Mk3 coaches from Ely to Newport for scrapping. The locos & barrier coaches returned to Ely the same evening passing here at 20:05 & 20:13 hrs. respectively.

Friday 8th May at 11:49 down 802218 Trans Pennine Express unit passed on its way from Eastleigh to Doncaster. This is thought to be the last of these units to be fitted out at Eastleigh

Sunday / Monday 10th & 11th May again saw Caledonian Sleeper services diverted along the ECML, the locos in charge were 92028 / 014

Monday 11th May again, more coaches taken for scrap from Ely to Newport, motive power today was locos 20118 / 132 passing here at 08:53

Friday 15th May today we had two more unusual movements the first was 66739 dragging six more Mk3 coaches from Ely to Eastleigh. This was followed at lunchtime by a brightly painted yellow Colas Class 37254 hauling a yellow test train from York Thrall to Dollands Moor.

Sunday / Monday 17th & 18th May Another busy couple of days, the Caledonian Sleepers were again diverted to the ECML using locos 92014 / 038.

On Sunday a very rare loco to visit these parts was 88010 routed via Hertford North running between Daventry & Mossend passing Watton-at-Stone at 16:44 hrs.

There was also a southbound container service taking the same route in the reverse direction using 88005, but this was halted at Doncaster for quite some time as a train ahead hit a person between Doncaster & Retford. Eventually passing GN land in the early hours of Monday.

Again, on Monday another six coaches for scrap from Ely to Newport passed here at 09:06 hrs. This was followed at lunchtime by the test train hauled by Colas locos 67023 & 027 between Heaton and Cambridge via Kings Cross.

(Observations courtesy of our Branch Secretary, Dave Elsdon)

A Love Affair (Part 1) – Steve Lacey

Yes, you guessed it, another excuse for me to prattle on about *92 Squadron*. This time blame the editor of Railway Ramblings, as it was he who suggested I put pen to paper.

I was born in Gravesend Kent in 1951 on (not literally!) the electrified North Kent Line, with the only steam being the West St line daily pickup goods and the fireless locomotives in the local paper mills. So how did my attraction to steam and “92” start?

When I was about 8yrs old, we were invited to holiday in West Worthing with our retired maiden Aunt Alice. She lived a short walk from the Brighton Portsmouth line and in those free and easy days, I was allowed to walk to the park with my younger sister to watch the trains after tea. Being the Southern (Region) it was of course mainly electrics, but there were a few steam-hauled goods and the odd steam express to Portsmouth, hauled by Battle of Britain / West Country locomotives. In the words of Michael Palin, I was hooked!

The story now moves forward to 1985 when my wife bought me a steam crane (a Grafton -built in Bedford) driving course at Chatham Dockyard. That went down so well, that she then bought me a Footplate Days and Ways driving course at the Bluebell. The die was cast. Subsequent years found me on 2 further courses with Clive Groome’s Footplate Days and Ways, once driving *Joem* and then *257 Squadron*, at last a Battle of Britain!

On then to 2010 and I was about to retire. I had always thought I would like to volunteer on a preserved standard gauge railway and the obvious choice was the Nene Valley Railway (NVR). Having said that, although I had for years visited the NVR with the children, for Santa trains etc., I had always thought of it as a *foreign* railway.

Just at that point, I heard through Barrie Woods (at the Stevenage Locomotive Society), that they were bringing *92 Squadron* back from the North Norfolk Railway, to be re-restored at the NVR. Someone up there was giving me a big hint!

So it was, that I reported to Alan Whenman 92's CME in Wansford yard. At last a chance to work on "92"...but no! At that time, Alan was also CME of the NVR and *Thomas* had just failed and was due to be the train engine in an hour. A rapid welding job was needed on the blower ring, so my Health and Safety briefing consisted of "hold that there, don't look at the bright light, and don't hold the hot bit when I stop welding"!

But still to get my hands on "92"...

(Part 2, will be published next month)



Steve falling in love on his first day working on *92 Squadron*

Photo: Kingsley Harris

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More from the Photo Album



West Somerset Railway – 4-6-0 7822 *Foxcote Manor* at Crowcombe Heathfield with *The Quantock Belle* heading for Minehead, 7th October 2018.

Photo: John Dossett

Contributions to Railway Ramblings

If you would like to make contributions – photos and/or text – to this newsletter then please contact the editor: John.Dossett@btinternet.com

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