

# Railway Ramblings

Issue 120

July 2020

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The monthly newsletter of the Hitchin Branch of the RCTS

## Meetings This Month

*As a consequence of the Covid-19 crisis, branch meetings continue to be cancelled. However, if the regulations permit, we are currently considering how we might restart the programme from September.*

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

## From the Photo Album



66779 *Evening Star* - with 4M46 London Gateway to Hams Hall passing Headstone Lane (WCML) on Monday 1<sup>st</sup> June 2020

*Photo: Bernie Holland*

*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](mailto:John.Dossett@btinternet.com)). They should be your own photographs!*

# Chairman's Platform

As I mentioned last month, we have started to consider how, and when, we might be able to 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. By August we will hopefully know if that is realistic and the conditions under which we would be able to meet to be strictly compliant with the government regulations.

As you can see, we are carrying 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.

A few of you may have wondered how the Hitchin Branch started and why we have meetings in both Hitchin and Welwyn Garden City. One man who knows all the answers to these questions is Dave Elsdon and, in this issue, our editor has persuaded him to tell the story. There is also another contribution from Paul Holloway – thanks Paul. The question he asks is one which others may also wish to try answering; How far back in your life can you recall being interested in railways?

On a personal note – Whatever you do, keep safe and follow the government guidelines.

*Steve Lacey*

## Local Observations

### All reports as seen at Welwyn North

**Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> May** - Again we saw diverted freightliners (via Hertford North) from Daventry to Mossend, this week 88010 was doubled up with 68016, with the southbound service using 88006 & 68017, this was running approximately 2hrs late. It was thought the additional diesel power was to assist north of Newcastle where the power capabilities of the OHL are not as robust as the rest of the ECML.

**Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> May** - We had another Daventry / Mossend service using 88010 & 68016 northbound and 88005 with 68015 on the south bound working, (both via Hertford North). Also, running again this weekend were the diverted Caledonian Sleepers with 92033 on the northbound service (22:02d) and 92028 (06:57u) on the Inverness to Euston southbound service.

**Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> May** - Passing here at 08:55, was 47815 with another 6 x Mk 3 coaches going for scrap from Ely to Newport. I understand there are still approximately 50 Great Western coaches & 50 LNER coaches at Ely plus a few others.

**Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> May** - Again we saw Daventry / Mossend workings (via Hertford North) this week using 88002 northbound & 88010 on the southbound freightliner working. Also, the Caledonian Sleeper diverts continue in both direction from Euston to Inverness today using 92028 (21:48d) and 92038 on the up working passing at 07:01 on Monday morning.

**Friday 5<sup>th</sup> June** - Another six Mk3 coaches from Ely to Eastleigh for upgrade & re-use. Also, today there was the yellow test train formed of 37099 topped and tailed with 37254 running between Doncaster & Kings Cross passing here at 12:25 up returning at 14:10 down.

**Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> June** - Through Stevenage via Hertford North we again had the Daventry to Mossend diverted container service hauled by 88002 (16:46) northbound & 88007 (23:15) on the southbound working.

**Monday 8<sup>th</sup> June** - The southbound only Caledonian sleeper was again diverted via the ECML hauled by 92043 passing here at 06:57, then at 08:41 the Ely to Newport scrap train with six Mk3 and 47815 passed at 08:41. Today also saw the commencement of the Dollands Moor to Scunthorpe steel service with 66148 passing at 11:40.

**Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> June** - Something a little different today, the latest and last new Hull trains unit 802305 came through completely unbranded running between Merchants Park and Kings Cross passing here at 12:49u and 14:10d.

**Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> June** - Another Ely to Newport train with six scrap Mk3 coaches hauled by 47815 came passed at 09:04.

**Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> June** - Saw the test train from Derby to Bounds Green pass 14:11 hauled by 37175. Then at 21:58 the diverted Caledonian sleeper service from Euston to Inverness came this way again with 92018.

**Monday 15<sup>th</sup> June** - The southbound sleeper from Inverness passed with 92028 at 06:59. This was followed at 08:54 by 47815 hauling another train of scrap Mk3 coaches between Ely and Newport. Passing Hertford North 60046 was at the head of the next unusual working at 10:21 down running between Willesden and Foxton sidings. To complete a busy morning a Peterborough to Eastleigh works engineers train with 66769 & 66790 in charge also ran via the Hertford loop.

(Observations courtesy of our Branch Secretary, Dave Elsdon)

## Where It All Began – Paul Holloway

Sitting in my railway room the other day watching LMS 4F no. 4454 and two clerestory coaches heading from Orfell End to Dougdale and on to Dougdale viaduct I had a thought as to where did my fascination with railways begin, be they full-size or model.

Having read Steve's article in the June RR about his visit to a maiden aunt in Worthing I thought it was high time I put my recollections on paper even if only for the grandchildren to read. Some of you may say unfortunately but John Dossett, RR editor, thought these memories should be shared with the members during our period of no meetings. So here goes.

I was born in Watford in 1948 so the mainline out of Euston was the obvious destination as a lad. My first railway journey however was the overnight sleeper to Par in Cornwall for a family holiday. How we got to Paddington or all the way home I've no recollection as I was only 3 at the time!

Back to Watford – many a day was spent at the Junction station trainspotting. Occasionally we went on the little service to St Albans Abbey – I'm amazed that this is still running today. If you stood on the St Albans line platform at Watford you had a great view of the engine shed.

My maternal grandparents lived in Abbots Langley and you could hear the trains from their garden. During school holidays I'd stay with them and go down the road to Kings Langley station. It was great fun sitting on the fence near the signal box watching the trains roar by, unless of course it was a goods train. Many a time I was late home for lunch or tea.

Another favourite trainspotting venue was Gypsy Lane bridge – the first bridge north of Watford tunnel. You had to go with a friend so that one of you got the engine numbers. The clouds of smoke as the engines left the tunnel made number getting difficult.

I can recall my father taking my brother and I to Apsley station one evening to watch the original Deltic come through – progress they called it. He also used to take us to Radlett or Barnet on cup final day to watch the specials come through. You got to see locos from up North! Great to mark these off in the latest Ian Allan book.

Trips to London in the school holidays were always popular although I never understood why I wore a white shirt. With the window down it was covered in sooty smuts by the time we reached Euston.

As I grew up railways took less of my attention although visits to London and the South East kept the interest up. One time I travelled up to Perth on my own to see family – I was told I'd got a window seat so got ready for a bit of spotting only to discover the window seat was on the corridor side.



Dougdale Viaduct (the line across this shot is the top of a Perspex screen to keep little fingers off!)

As to model railways, there was always one around as my brother and I grew up – my father loved his layouts and we exhibited a couple of these around Essex, Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire during the 1980s and early '90s. He was a GWR man through and through but did give occasional running rights to my LMS stock – he also permitted Thomas on the line a few times. When my father died in early 2016 I inherited his model railway although by then it was mainly rolling stock. I have one scenic section and that's the site of Dougdale viaduct.

In April that year I headed to the De Havilland exhibition in WGC and discovered the RCTS. Thank goodness for that my wife says.

Finally, back to Gypsy Lane bridge near Watford. It was early in our teens that my brother and I were told that it was on that bridge my father proposed to my mother, so I suppose really that's where it all began.

*Paul Holloway*

## 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](mailto:John.Dossett@btinternet.com)

# Branch History – Dave Elsdon

The RCTS Hitchin Branch was formed in 2002 after David Cole had carried out extensive research through the Society membership lists looking at the postcodes for the number of members in the areas surrounding Hitchin. He found that there were more than enough members living in Hitchin, Stevenage, Bedford and Hertford as our new area would reach the boundaries with four other existing branches, Cambridge, Peterborough, Milton Keynes and Watford. Having contacted all members within the proposed new catchment area, David and the Society agreed to start up a Branch in Hitchin.

The first meeting was held in January 2002 with 35 members attending, including the then Society President John Day and the Branches Liaison Officer Eric Palmer who had assisted David Cole throughout the start-up process. Our speaker on this occasion was Bob Ballard, a Society Officer and Milton Keynes Branch member. His talk was "Reflections of the 1960's".

Initially David Cole formed a committee with himself as Chairman, Stuart Little, Secretary and Stuart Saunders, Treasurer along with Adrian Scrutton and Dave Elsdon, who are still on the Branch Committee today. The meetings were held in the Hitchin Christian Centre until 2013 when the building was sold and everyone had to leave. A new venue was found in The Walsworth Road Methodist Church. This was a very convenient location as it was half way between the town centre and the railway station but, unfortunately, we had to move on again after a couple of years, as their long-standing meeting groups needed more space and we were the last ones in. This was in 2015 when we moved to our present venue in The Tilehouse Street Baptist Church Hall, Upper Tilehouse Street, Hitchin. David Cole who instigated the Branch in 2002, did all the hard work in ensuring everything was operating smoothly then stood down as Chairman after six months, handing over to Cyril Crawley. David remained on the Branch committee for many years. The Branch continued on with a long period of stability. Our finances improved when we began to get involved in attending local model railway exhibitions, primarily in St. Albans, Letchworth and Royston selling books, slides and photographs. We were approached by the Society HQ asking if we could exhibit on their behalf at exhibitions at Alexandra Palace and at The East of England Showground in Peterborough. We also represented the Society for five years at The Warley Model Railway event at the NEC in Birmingham, until the major exhibitions became too expensive to finance for the return achieved.

Over the years there have been very few changes within the positions of the Branch Officers. Sadly, Branch Secretary Stuart Little died unexpectedly in 2011 his post being taken on by Norman Hill until Dave Elsdon took on this roll in 2013. In 2009 long standing committee member Adrian Scrutton started producing "The Hitchin Flyer", a monthly newsletter about the activities of the Branch which proved very popular with members. Chairman Cyril Crawley was extremely enthusiastic about the Branch and Society, and in 2014 he did all the preparation work for the Branch to start holding afternoon meetings in Ludwick Way Methodist Church in Welwyn Garden City. These proved to be well attended as public transport was much more readily available than for the evening meetings. Adrian started an additional newsletter entitled "Garden City Express" to compliment "The Hitchin Flyer" for the new venue. It was at the 2014 AGM Cyril decided to stand down as Chairman due to his poor health, and our present Chairman Steve Lacey took office.

During 2015 our Branch suffered a double loss when Treasurer Stuart Saunders passed away on 9<sup>th</sup> September and almost immediately afterwards, following a long illness, former Chairman Cyril Crawley also died on 30<sup>th</sup> October. After a long search Roger Moulden volunteered to become Branch Treasurer. Our latest Branch Officer change was in 2017 when current Treasurer Paul Holloway took control of the finances. After many years of producing the newsletters Adrian Scrutton handed on this task to John Dossett in April 2019. The two previous newsletters were subsequently combined into "Railway Ramblings", which you are reading now.

*Continued ...*

And currently, between both venues, RCTS Hitchin Branch hold twenty-two meetings a year, excepting August when we have a Branch outing to somewhere of railway interest, and during the year attend five local exhibitions.

I must take this opportunity to thank everyone who has served on the committee during the past eighteen years for helping the Branch to continue and succeed as in the past, present and hopefully for many years into the future.

*Dave Elsdon*

## A Love Affair (Part 2) – Steve Lacey

Always ominous when you see the phrase “Part 2”, you wonder how long this might go on, I’ll let you into a secret, I’ve no idea either!

Taking up where I left off, my first day at the Nene Valley Railway (NVR) seemed to go without disaster, so I was allowed to continue volunteering. To be fair I have had it easy, as the locomotive I was working on (*92 Squadron*.....Just in case you had forgotten) had been restored from Barry condition over the previous 34 years (see photo). When I say Barry condition, I mean as languishing in Dai Woodham’s scrap yard at Barry Docks, not Barrie Woods, who had tempted me into the project 34 years later!

The original group, based around Gloucester, had bought the old girl for £3,500 in September 1973, but just as they came up with the money, the Chancellor “invented” VAT, then at 10%, adding a further £350 to the deal. Not only that, but there was also the cost of transport to the NVR, which had agreed to give the group a home. It took a further 3 years to raise the £2,500 needed for transport, arriving at the NVR in November 1976. Strangely enough, this is still about the cost of a low loader, though the original price was for 2 journeys, one for the loco and one for the tender.



*92 Squadron* in Dai Woodham’s Barry docks scrap yard, pictured in 1975.

Photo: BBLs

It was not our tender either, it belonged to Eddystone, ours had disappeared into industry before our purchase. Tenders made cheap water carriers, though ours was probably used with the tank cut off, for internal carriage of steel billets around the South Wales steelworks, we have never found out. When they started to restore Eddystone we generously offered to swap our tender for their new build, but strangely enough they declined!

At that time the NVR had no restoration shed, so all the work took place outside, with only basic hand tools (some pneumatic), quite literally in snow, rain and shine. No wonder the first restoration target date of 1983 was missed by 15 years; it took a total of 21 years of hard slog, by a dedicated team, to get her back as a "runner".

She worked at NVR for 5 years, before moving to the North Norfolk Railway (NNR), where she ran until April 2008, when she failed with a number of broken stays. For those who do not know, these are not items of a Victorian lady's attire, but the vital spacers between the inner and outer firebox. This forms the water space. They are vital as the inner firebox contains the fire, which burns at a higher temperature than the melting point of the metal from which it is made! The reason it doesn't melt, is that the water jacket takes the heat away, as it forms steam (remember the latent heat of vaporisation from physics), hence the panic to "drop the fire" if a locomotive ever runs short of water. Never let a kettle run dry!

That, to cut a long story short, as my Granddad would say (this filled us with horror as children, as you knew you were in for the long haul) is where I came in, back on my first day at work at Wansford in May 2010.

Looks like another part to me.....to be continued. (*Editor: Part 3, will be published next month*).

*Steve Lacey*

## On Hands and Knees – Martin Elms

Always be wary of railway men relating their work achievements. In my 42 years on the railway in my career I heard the same stories (that some of our speakers relate now) – they did this, they did that, they stopped this, and other tales. They are often the same stories but with different heroes!

I have noticed that many career railway speakers' jobs were always "Assistants to ...", never really putting anything together that either hadn't been done before or mainly the same with a different title. I'm sure some were given imaginary jobs and projects to keep them out of the way and from doing any real harm at the coal-face. This enabled them to boast and tell many after dinner talks to the uninitiated!

My own career was mainly on surveys and inspections of complicated track/points/structures – all essential to keep 125 mph/25-ton axle trains safe. These inspections were undertaken often in difficult circumstances - such as in the dark by artificial light on hands and knees on track where (until recently) toilets were flushed!

As the inspections were safety critical and to a certain degree for railway-eyes only and all done with an amount of pressure, especially after the incidents at Hatfield and Potters Bar. I should also add that the hand and knees inspections in later days in and around Finsbury Park had the additional track hazard of discarded hypodermic syringes to catch you out. Mandatory regular inspections also took longer due to more trains around and it could be difficult to get time to complete an inspection in daylight, hence the move to night work or an attempt to get a line blockage also difficult anywhere near London between 7 a.m. and 8 p.m. But we managed to achieve them and kept the infrastructure working and safe.

In the next issue of Railway Ramblings I will relate a true story to you which is tea related!

*Martin Elms*

## More from the Photo Album



Friday (22 May) afternoon at Welwyn North and, because of the coronavirus, the usual stream of commuters returning from London is eerily missing. The northbound departing unit is 700007.

*Photo: John Dossett*

## Newsletter Distribution

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