

# Railway Ramblings

Issue 122

September 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 for this month remain cancelled.*

*However, we are ready to restart once we are advised that our venues are safe to do so. The latest information is that we are hopeful of restarting (at Hitchin) on October 13<sup>th</sup>.*

## From the Photo Album



870021 and 67026 *Diamond Jubilee* at Carpenders Park on 10 August 2010 with the "Three Peaks Challenge by Rail" special.

*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 photographs you own!*

# Chairman's Platform

First, an update about our branch meetings. Although we have a presentation programme ready to restart, we have had difficulties with our venues and the measures we would need to take in order to provide you, our members, with a safe low-risk environment. Coming to branch meetings might be nice-to-do but is almost certainly not something to do unless there is virtually no risk. Many of us are of an age where catching Covid-19 is likely to carry serious consequences. The good news is that although we have to continue without meetings this month, the restart of meetings is provisionally being planned for 13th October (in Hitchin). This is not yet definite and will be confirmed (or otherwise) in the October issue.

Our editor has included programme details in this newsletter, but I stress that they will only be taking place if I have advised you to that effect.

This is another bumper issue of Railway Ramblings and our editor is grateful to those providing the content which we hope will interest and/or amuse you. Something new in this issue is a puzzle "The Passing Loop Test" sent in by Martin Elmes. Do give it a try!

If you have railway related topics, with or without photos, which you could share with other members then please send them to the editor. The greater the variety the wider the appeal to our readers.

Finally, it is with great sadness that I have to inform you that Chris Alton passed away on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> August. For a number of years Chris served on the branch committee and those attending the WGC meetings will recall him "manning" the reception desk. More recently with the deterioration in his mobility and failing health he had not been able to attend. We all will miss him.

*Steve Lacey*

## Local Observations

### All reports as seen at Welwyn North

After a quiet week here, but a very busy **Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> July** via the Hertford loop with 6 freight trains. **Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> July** saw an engineer's train returning to Peterborough with 66714 & 66777 following an evening's work near Belle Isle tunnel.

66023 hauled the Belmont Yard to Angerstein Wharf freight on **Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> July**.

**Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> July** saw 2 more Class 322 units numbers 322483 / 485 pass on their way from Doncaster to Clacton.

3 more Class 91's (91115 / 125 / 132) went from Bounds Green to Doncaster for scrap / refurbishment via Hertford North on **Friday 31<sup>st</sup> July**.

Grand Central started operating a limited service into London Kings Cross on most days this week.

On **Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> August** the new platform 5 at Stevenage opened for business allowing the Class 717 units to operate a direct to & from Moorgate for the first time in many months.

After a quiet few days we then saw 91105 hauling 91110 "*Battle of Britain Memorial Flight*" to Doncaster from Bounds Green on **Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> August** for maintenance & exam, passing Stevenage at 10:40.

**Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> August** 60028 (in pale livery) passed Hertford North at 16:35, running light engine from Willesden to Toton. Also, today saw Azuma 801212 pass for the first time running on test from York to Bounds Green at 18:59.

(Observations courtesy of our Branch Secretary, Dave Elsdon)

# -The Three Peaks Challenge by Rail

(see photo on first page)

Launched in 2004 and with the rail industry's continued support, Railway Children remains the only charity in the world to complete the *Three Peaks Challenge by Rail*. The famous endurance challenge involves groups scaling Ben Nevis (1134m), Snowdon (1085m) and Scafell Pike (978m), estimated to be the equivalent of walking one-third of the way up Mount Everest. Since its launch, the annual event has now raised over £3 million, helping the charity reach 5,000 new children in need every year across the world, providing shelter, food, clothing, medical supplies, education and counselling.

Unfortunately, this year (2020) has been different with the event postponed due to the COVID-19 outbreak. However, a virtual *Three Peaks* has been run instead with participants completing the same amount of walking or steps as the actual *Three Peaks* event, from the comfort of their own homes or on their daily walk! Not quite the same as being there and doing it. The next real event is now scheduled for May 2021.

Normally the special (as pictured on the first page) starts from Euston (one year it was Crewe) and takes around 200 participants to North Wales where Snowdon is climbed overnight. They then head for Ravenglass to climb Scafell Pike, before a night, sitting up, on the train up to Fort William to climb the UK's highest mountain, Ben Nevis. Little prospect of sleep during the event, the equivalent of three half marathons and on quite difficult terrain, which lasts around 36 hours.

Quite a personal challenge for the teams of four from across the rail industry who are expected to raise a minimum of £3,500 per team for the charity. In 2018 a team from the Department for Transport won the Stadler Three Peaks trophy for raising the most for a single team, contributing £6,700 to the overall total.

## Membership

This month we welcome Christopher Allison as a new member of our branch of the RCTS.

## 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)

## A Love Affair (Part 4) – Steve Lacey

As promised (or threatened!) here is part 4 of my adventures with 34081, *92 Squadron*. Having joined the restoration group and passed my first test, I was given the task of cleaning, needle gunning back to bare metal and repainting the oil bath. This sits between the frames of the engine and as the name suggests, contains oil.....all 40 gallons of it!

Having said that, when the locomotive arrived back from the North Norfolk Railway (NNR), as a precursor to removing the oil bath, the loco was carefully positioned over a 40-gallon oil drum in the ash pit. Our CME, Alan Whenman carefully unscrewed the drain plug at arm's length, taking care not to drop the plug. When it finally came loose, about half a gill of oil slowly oozed out! This was followed by immediate anxiety about the lack of lubrication on the chain driven valve gear and a few choice words about the NNR failing to top up the oil bath.

Continues ...



Oil bath, in ex-loco condition, laying on its side, with capped filler to the right.

As I started to clean the oil bath, it soon became clear that the rust was purely superficial and the lack of oil in the bath was due to cracks in the welded construction of the bath, not lack of maintenance at the NNR!

Having cleaned out the oil sludge, I set to work on the metal construction with a needle gun. Once back to bare metal, the welding team set to work on the seams to make them oil proof.



*(A very happy Steve ! – Ed)*

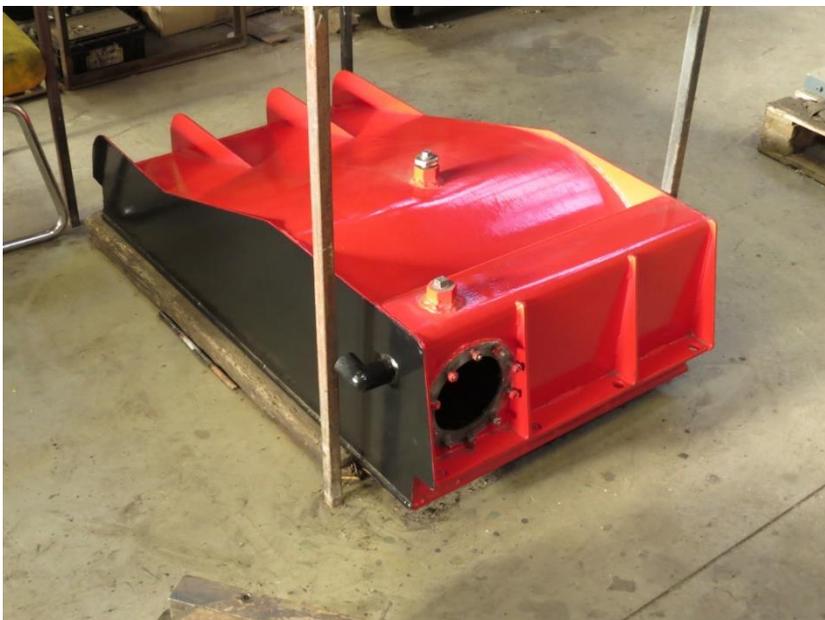
Oil bath lying upside down, after needle gunning. Drain plug visible.

Continues ...

Next, a thin coat of phosphoric acid to inhibit any rust formation, followed by a coat of metal primer. Once dry, two coats of pink undercoat, rubbing down between coats, with ribald comments about how "nice" it looked. Finally, two coats of pillar-box red top coat. What a lovely job, I said to myself, as I stepped back to admire six weeks of noisy, dusty, hard graft. Unfortunately, the big wigs decided that instead of red all over, the sides would be seen from the platform, so should be black! Once again a trial of patience!

At this point, I decided that red was a perfect undercoat for black and covered the sides with 2 coats of black top coat. However, not quite the end of the story.

I left the oil bath on a couple of builder's trestles to dry fully and be out of harm's way. A couple of weeks later, as we were having a tea break in the mess hut, there was an almighty crash from the workshop. We all rushed in, expecting to see some poor soul severely injured, only to find a very embarrassed volunteer, with my prized oil bath lying on the floor. It transpired that one of the lads had been overhauling a Westinghouse vacuum pump, when he attempted to lift it, with the overhead crane not quite directly positioned above. As it left the ground, it swung violently away, playing conkers with my oil bath! Close examination showed no damage to either. Now that's what I call a protective paint job!



Completed oil bath on floor, after incident, now guarded by a "protective cage".



View of chain driven valve gear. The oil bath sits below the triangular frame spacer brackets.

Next month, in Part 5, my best engineering solution ever!

*Text and pictures: Steve Lacey*

# The Passing-Loop Test – Martin Elms



On a single-track railway a train consisting of a loco and twelve coaches is proceeding along the line from east to west.

Another train also consisting of a loco and twelve coaches is proceeding from west to east towards the first train.

In between the two trains is a station with a passing loop – but it only accommodates a loco and six coaches!

How can the trains pass one another?

You can split/divide the trains as often as you like. The locos can haul/propel any number of coaches in any formation in either direction.

(Hint: It may pay to draw the layout and use tokens etc to re-enact the scene.)

This was set to me in my early railway career and took me so long to work out that I think the passengers would have walked !!

Solutions to: [Martin.Elms@internetbuilders.co.uk](mailto:Martin.Elms@internetbuilders.co.uk) by 15 September. Names of those who have solved this, together with the solution, will appear in the October issue of Railway Ramblings.

## Newsletter Distribution

This e-newsletter is distributed by the Branch Chairman (Steve Lacey). If you do not currently receive a copy directly but would like to do so, provide him with your email address and you will be added to the list. Conversely, if you currently receive a copy but wish to be taken off the distribution list then please advise him accordingly. Steve's email address is [gricersteve@hotmail.com](mailto:gricersteve@hotmail.com)

## Working the Dunstable Branch – Bill Davies

When I moved my Drivers Position from Charing Cross to Bedford, in 1978, the Dunstable Branch was one of the routes I had to learn. By this time the work had dwindled to 3 jobs per day. In the early morning we booked on at 04.10 to travel passenger to Luton to take to the Class 45/6/7 left for us in the Down Fast North Bay having brought the news vans from London. We then ran light engine through Luton Station wrong road onto the connecting curve onto the Dunstable Branch. Advancing onto the site of Bute Street we awaited the arrival of Hither Green men with 2 x Class 33 locos from Northfleet with 16 bogie cement tanks. Because of the gradients plus a very short shunt neck at Dunstable we took them up 4 at a time, backing them round the apex of the triangular layout at the Houghton Regis cement plant for their loco to deal with them.

Returning light engine to Luton we would repeat the process until all the train was at its destination. Occasionally we would go into the oil terminal to take the empty oil tanks to Cricklewood. Otherwise we would leave the loco at Bute Street screwed down or take it light engine to Cricklewood. The next movement on the branch was the Bedford to Cricklewood pick-up which dealt with any scrap wagons from the Vauxhall works plus any other traffic from Houghton Regis. Finally, the afternoon pick-up came to take the, by now empty, cement tanks down to Bute Street where Hither Green Class 33's loco and men awaited to return them to Northfleet for loading.

Continues ...



This is my loco, 45075, waiting to back onto the tanks arriving from Northfleet, which can be seen in the background having set back through the 1965 spur.



Taken from Luton South Box a down vacuum fitted stopping express passes the chord line meandering off to the right of the loco. When Bedford men had to learn the route initially just prior to the closure of the line south of C block of Vauxhalls Hatfield men had the remaining work after passenger services finished. Normally a single class 20 sufficed so two Bedford Drivers climbed aboard to be greeted by a Driver who called everyone 'Cocker'. Whilst explaining the various sidings which required shunting 'Cocker' came into use to an annoying degree. On alighting at Bute Street our intrepid route learners decided to tell 'Cocker' that one of the Bedford Drivers learning the route was profoundly deaf. Next day 'Cocker' was joined by 2 more Bedford Drivers so acting on advice received he proceeded to up the volume to such an extent that the Bedford men had to shout back at him that neither of them were deaf and which bugger had told him so.

Continues...



My loco, 45075, in the headshunt at Dunstable having completed our cement duties and then dropping back to pick up the empty oil tanks.



Awaiting our Guard to go round the wagons before performing a brake test then we ran empties to Cricklewood recess from where the tanks went forward to Thames Haven.



Finally, a picture of the afternoon pick-up collecting the empty cement 'Camel Tanks' for return to Northfleet.

# Forthcoming Branch Events

## IMPORTANT, PLEASE NOTE

As there is the possibility of being able to restart branch meetings the programme is shown here. However, at the time of writing, these cannot be confirmed. In the event that they can go ahead you will receive an email advising you of that, together with details of the safety measures which will apply.

## During October 2020

At Hitchin (19:30-22:00, doors open 19:00)

13 October: **The Peter Bland Collection (the diary of a train-spotter)** "Railways as we remember them" Bryan Cross

At Welwyn Garden City (14:00-16:30, doors open 13:30)

27 October: **Through Kirton Tunnel (Part 2). Kirton in Lindsey to Cleethorpes** "Another exceptional afternoon" Stephen Gay

A reminder that the suggested donation rates for our branch meetings are £2 for members and £3.50 for non-members. All attendees are entered into a free book draw and admission also includes refreshments at the mid-meeting interval.

All members are welcome at all meetings, at any branch of the society.

*Railway Ramblings is published by the committee of the Hitchin Branch of The Railway Correspondence & Travel Society. Such committee does not endorse any personal opinions expressed in this publication. The committee comprises Steve Lacey (Chairman), David Elsdon (Secretary), Paul Holloway (Treasurer), John Dossett (Newsletter Editor), Martin Elms, Roger Moulden and Adrian Scrutton. The Railway Correspondence & Travel Society is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation Registered with the Charities Commission*