

Railway Ramblings

Issue 123

October 2020

The monthly newsletter of the Hitchin Branch of the RCTS

All Change / No Change

We were expecting to restart meetings this month. However, the government announcements on 9th & 22nd September introduced new restrictions ! Consequently there are no actual meetings this month and it is anybody's guess when conditions will enable us to do so.

From the Photo Album



At one time I had this labelled as a most unusual sight. Now it seems to represent the times we are living through. It was taken mid-afternoon on Friday 22 May at Welwyn North and, because of the coronavirus measures, the usually packed car park was (almost) empty. Apparently, the solitary car is owned by a train driver!

Photo: John Dossett

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 photographs you own!

Chairman's Platform

I am so disappointed. I had been expecting to write about restarting our branch meetings during October, even although we would need to do so with a lot of Covid-19 safety measures in place. It just seemed like a really positive step forward. Instead I have to tell you that, following the government announcements on 9 September and then 22 September, we have to continue without.

As it now seems probable that meeting and/or movement restrictions will be in place for some considerable time, we are now looking at how we might offer you "virtual" presentations (including the opportunity to raise questions with the presenter). Watch this space!

Our editor continues to include programme details in this newsletter, but I must again stress that presentations will only be taking place if I have advised you to that effect.

On a lighter note, in last month's issue we offered you a puzzle "The Passing Loop Test" set by Martin Elmes. Although only a few of you sent Martin your solution, I hope that many of you at least gave it a try! The solution is published this month. "Simples" as someone in public life said not so long ago.

Steve Lacey

Local Observations

All reports as seen at Welwyn North

Thursday 13 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.

Sunday 16 August 37025 / 254 passed with a test train of yellow coaches at 13:07 running between Tonbridge Yard & Derby.

On **Tuesday 18 August** a very unusual visitor passed here at 19:57 hrs, this was Greater Anglia unit 745007 running between Norwich and Hornsey via Liverpool Street & Cambridge for wheel turning at Hornsey. It ran this long way round to avoid being dragged. The unit returned to Norwich the next day passing WN at 20:10 via the same route.

Monday 24 August saw two special workings the first was 37800 hauling two Class 322 units from Doncaster to Clacton these were 322481 & 482 passing here at 13:57. Then, in the evening, Colas liveried 67023 & 027 hauled a test / maintenance train from Heaton to Bounds Green passing at 19:00.

Tuesday 25 August saw another Greater Anglia unit come Hornsey for wheel turning this time it was 754004 passing here at 23:23. The unit returned to Norwich the following evening at 20:46. We then a very quiet time with very little out of the ordinary until **Friday 4 September** when 755010 another Greater Anglia exited Hornsey for Norwich at 14:41. I have no idea or seen any reports when this unit arrived at Hornsey.

Several engineer trains were in the Kings Cross area on **Sunday 6 September** three of those were 66733 / 747 / 753 all returning after their nights work through here before 09:30.

Saturday 11 September running as 5X89 from Slade Green to Doncaster were units 466009 / 014 passing Stevenage at 12:15. Unfortunately I do not what loco was hauling these.

As far as I know there are only three Class 800 Azuma's to enter service, they are unit No's 801212 / 218 / 228 all but 228 have been past here on test but 228 remains in Tyne Yard.

(Observations courtesy of our Branch Secretary, Dave Elsdon)

The Passing-Loop Test – Martin Elms



The solution to the test set in last month's RR:
For simplicity label the trains as A and B.

Train A leaves 6 coaches on the single line and enters the loop.

The entire train B passes through the station and joins the 6 coaches left by train A.

Train A leaves the loop and goes out onto the single track ready to leave.

Train B reverses back through the station (with the 6 coaches of train A) and leaves the 6 coaches in the loop as it passes.

Back on the single track, train B now goes back through the loop and departs.

Train A now reverses back to the station and collects its 6 coaches and is now ready to leave.

Correct solutions were received from...

Brian Place, Derek Boothby and Nick Burton, our Chairman, (and the Editor): Well done.

Surely others must have been able to solve the test but were presumably too shy to submit their solutions.

The Start Of It All - Dave Elsdon

The beginning of my spotting days was in 1949/50 when my cousin, who was 7 years older than me, moved to St Albans, and was already into trains and buses. At this time I was living in Adelaide Street, St Albans, which is close to the roundabout at the top of main shopping area in the town. Colin, my cousin, would come & pick me up and off we would go walking to St Albans City station, where access to the platform was easy and free. We would sit on a 4-wheeled porters' trolley armed with notebooks, sandwiches, drinks, etc at the ready. In those days the majority of the express workings were Jubilees or Black 5's; local services were hauled by Fowler or Stanier tank engines with the occasional Ivatt. I do remember a great deal of freight was hauled by 8F's, then everyone would get excited if a Garrett appeared. One of the things about St Albans is that being situated on a curve you didn't know what was coming until it rounded the bend.

We would occasionally take the train from the Abbey station to Watford, where again no one bothered you, there I noted what I thought were really big engines, Duchess and Princess classes, hauling long-distance expresses. Also, Watford was always busier than St Albans. As I grew up my cousin had started work, so I was left to my own devices. I was now old enough to travel on my own and trips primarily to London termini were made, usually on Saturdays. Paddington & Waterloo were among my favourites, also trips to sheds were now within my range. Locally I cycled quite often to the area around Napsbury station, adjacent to Handley Page airfield, or to London Bank, just south of Hatfield station on the East Coast Main Line. I did not travel long distances in those days. I persisted with trains locally and around the London area until I started work in 1958, when time became much more limited. I was still playing football & cricket for teams in St Albans & met my future wife, we married in 1964, then in 1970, with two small children we went on holiday to Barry Island. With Woodham's scrap yard close by, a few evening visits through the rows of abandoned locos kicked off the spotting bug once again, although, maybe not as intensively as in the earlier years.

In 1981 I met Jill, we married in 1984 and moved to Digswell just as the bungalow opposite Welwyn North came up for sale. Now, with the railway close by and diesels ruling the rails, the spotting hobby picked up again, slightly more seriously as the ECML is visible from our window. Here I struck up a friendship with Tom Gladwin and couple of others, including Doug White (RCTS no. 023), in the village with similar interests. With Tom we had many fascinating railway trips out, to mainline stations, branch

lines, preserved lines, here there and everywhere. They were great days. One of the other villagers was a renowned traveller (strangely enough another Colin) and it was with him that I got around the railway system even more, albeit mostly by car, and finally managed to “clear” all the diesel locos on British Rail. One notable day out was a trip to Blythe in Northumberland which was home to my very last diesel “cop” - a Class 56 on Blythe shed. In those days most freight engines, particularly those working coal trains, returned to their home shed at weekends. So on a Sunday in May we set off early for a long drive, arriving at Blythe shed around 11 am. As these things turn out the required loco was inside undergoing maintenance and a visit to the reception office was needed. There we were met by a grumpy Geordie who, after telling him about our quest and having travelled approximately 300 miles to get there, finally relented and let us in. Now, the atmosphere completely changed to become very welcoming and friendly. We were allowed in the cab, through the engine compartment and given a guided tour of the whole shed and yard. With the prospect of another long drive home in the early afternoon, we travelled at a more leisurely pace, popping in at Tinsley and Toton on route. With traffic as it is now, I’m not sure we could manage something similar in the time.



I also did another marathon drive with Colin, not long after the trip to Blythe, when in aid of the local Isobel Hospice we drove from Digswell to John-o-Groats in the Renault estate car on a single tank of fuel, which we managed with still around 30 miles worth of fuel in the tank. Again, we drove home via various interesting depots, as they are now called, not worrying too much about the fuel usage in this direction!

My work, in the years between 1989–2005 also took me to many parts of the UK, as I was the company service engineer and also their exhibition manager. These trips out also permitted visits to either depots and stations while on route to or from my destination.

These days with modern traction becoming more and more “units”, rather than loco hauled operation, much of the fun is unfortunately going out of the hobby, but the recording of numbers still goes on. With new stock appearing everywhere it almost feels as if we have to start over again. Nowadays with the assistance of “Realtime Trains”, live mapping and mobile phone information, targeting the train you need has become easier. It is still good to stand on a station watching and waiting, though travel by train still has its excitement, the acceleration and speed of travel is astonishing compared to our first experiences behind a steam engine.

The notebook and recording still goes on between my duties to the Hitchin Branch of RCTS and jobs at home.

Dave Elsdon

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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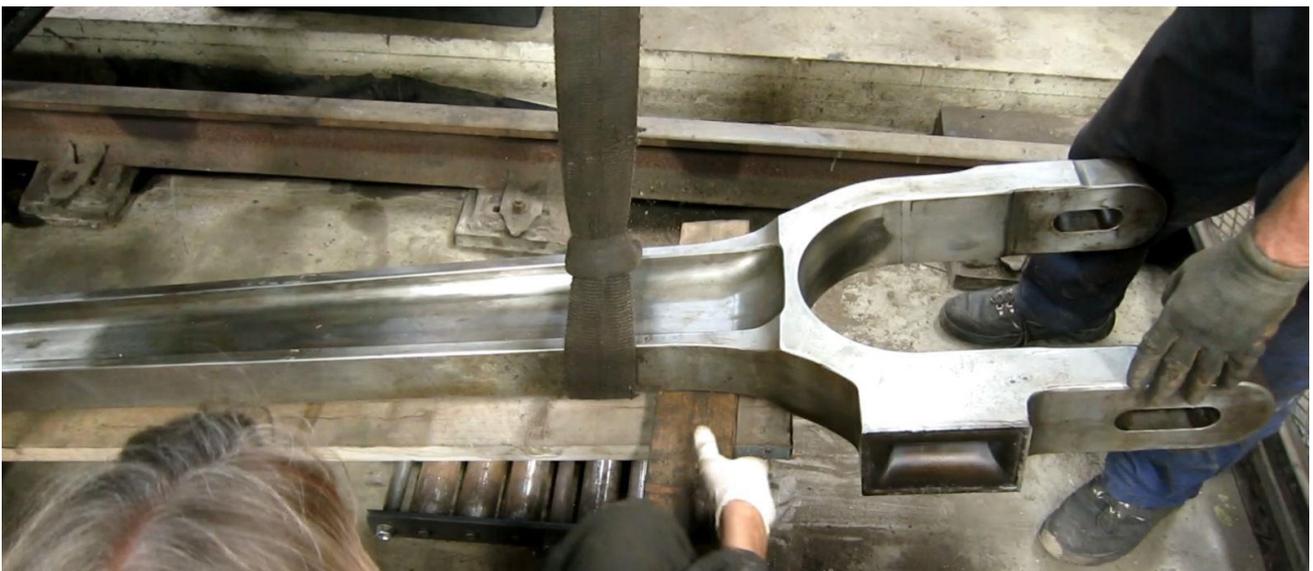
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A Love Affair (Part 5) – Steve Lacey

It must be truly dreadful, not only the persisting Coronavirus, but another episode of my adventures in NVR land! (Nene Valley Railway)

Last time I told the tale of the oil bath and gave you a rare view inside.....what a thrill! Today I will move on to reuniting *92 Squadron* with her boiler, tender and constituent parts. As we removed parts from the loco, they were labelled with a numbered metal tag and details entered onto a spreadsheet, with their description and where they were stored. The idea was that as parts progressed through refurbishment, painting etc, this would be updated. Well, in the main it worked, with only the whistle valve going missing. Naturally, it reappeared just after we had bought a replacement! However not all was lost, as we managed to sell it on at a profit!

And so to my engineering triumph. The middle connecting rod lies between the locomotive frames entering the oil bath. It cannot be lowered into position from above, due to the frame spacers and other obstructions. The obvious solution is to lay the rod on the ground and push the loco into position over it, before jacking/hoisting the rod up into position. Unfortunatley, our loco was positioned between two other locos, neither of which were easy to move. The proper engineers were trying to think of ways to manhandle this huge lump of solid steel into a place with limited head room and space. I then had my Eureka moment. We had a scaffold board and two sets of rollers, manufactured for another task. I explained my idea to a rather sceptical audience, who gradually realised it might have merit. Place the scaffold board on the rollers, lower the rod onto it and push it into position.



I confess I had my doubts, as the scaffold board bent while the Connecting rod was lowered onto it, but it held. Then the moment of truth, as two chaps started to push the rod into position.

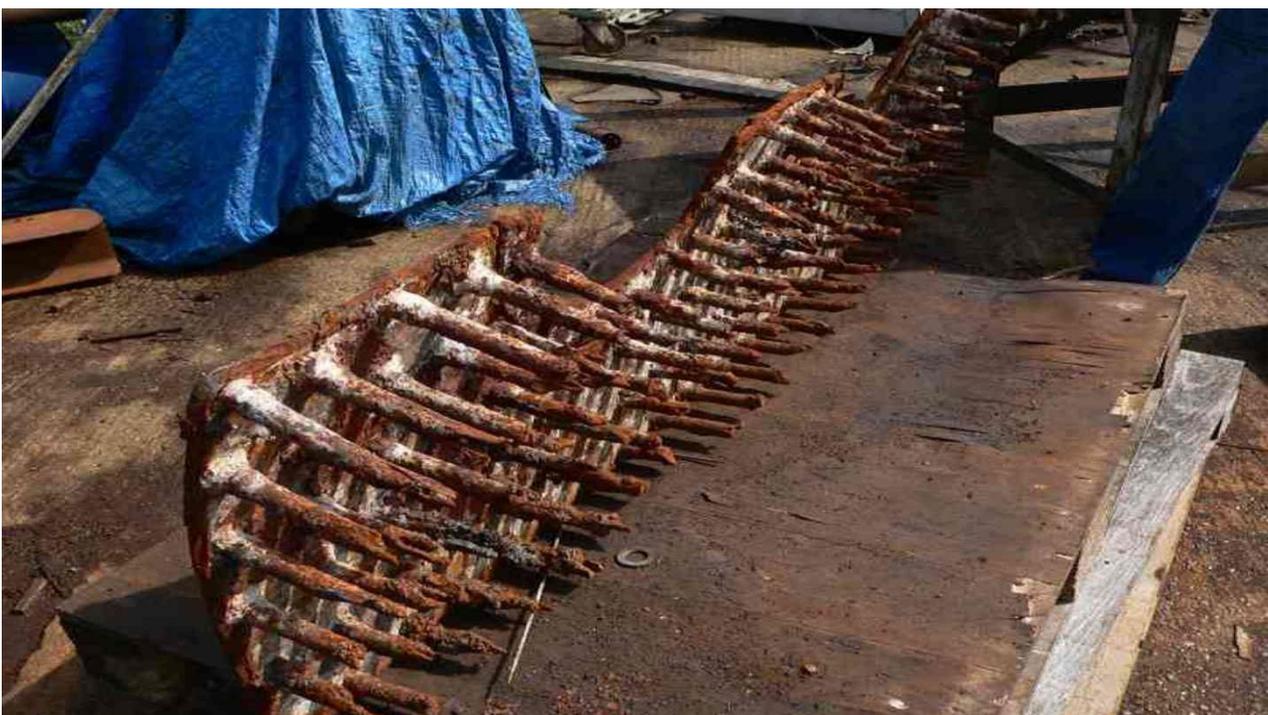


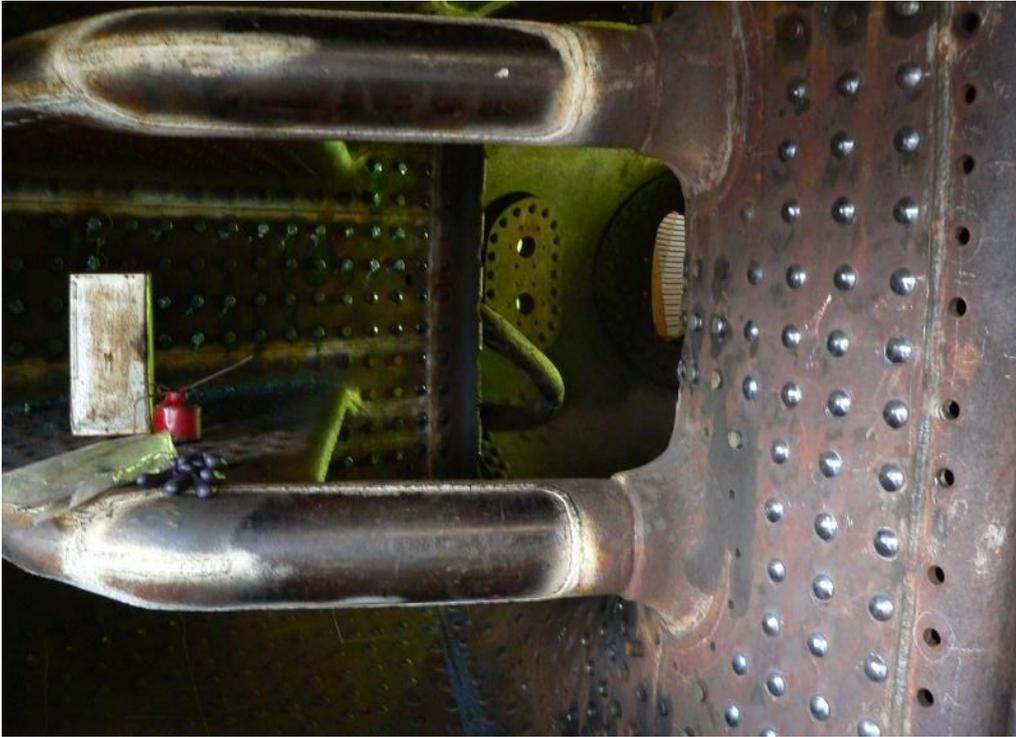
It was easier than I had expected. In the end, it was pushed into position by one chap, lying on the ground, pushing with one hand! Who needs years of engineering experience, when you've done O level physics!

Next was the return of the boiler from Chatham Steam Services, originally at Chatham Dockyard (hence the name), then Detling airfield, but now at Weybourne on the North Norfolk Railway. Those of you who are still awake, will notice that the loco was brought back to Wansford (on the Nene Valley Railway) from Weybourne, only for the boiler to go back there for overhaul, then back to Wansford after overhaul!

While there, despite being in "good nick", it had wasted areas cut out and replaced for a bargain £260,000! Loco owning is not cheap.

Area of firebox from below the thermic syphons, cut out due to plate and stay wasting (the stays are the pointy rods).





A patch in place, with new stays and patches, on the thermic syphons. The firebox is on its left-hand side. A thermic syphon was a way of using the heat in the firebox to warm the boiler water before it entered the boiler tubes, making more efficient use of the heat from the fire.

For some time, the Colas Rail Kirow crane had come to Wansford for servicing, saving them a journey to their base at Rugby, where being so long, it blocked the yard throat! By “happy coincidence” they “happened” to be on site on 26th November 2013 when the boiler arrived back. We asked if they felt they needed a test lift after servicing and they were happy to oblige



As you can see the crane took our 18-ton boiler for a “walk” across the yard, after which it was placed on a Weltrol for ease of transport around Wansford. Appropriately, the Weltrol was lettered Brighton, the works where 92 Squadron was built. It’s not what you know, but who you know!



Some of the images used in this Part 5 are screen-grabs from John Wood's excellent video's of the restoration. Many, including these images, can be viewed on You Tube by using the link below:

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=92+squadron+34081+john+wood

Next time - in Part 6 - the tender is re-wheeled and 92 Squadron gets a tender behind!

Steve Lacey

A Very Positive Outcome

In Dave Eldon's contribution you will have read about his road trip from Digswell to John O'Groats (and back) and how he fitted his loco spotting interest into that journey. Here is a photo showing the generous outcome of their trip:



Pictured L to R:

Colin Pottruff (driver)

Henry McIntosh (Chair of Isobel Hospice fundraising)

and

Dave Eldon

John Worby

It is with regret that I have been informed through the Society of the death of Hitchin member John Worby. I know John had not been well for at least eighteen months, if not longer.

He was a regular at both Hitchin, WGC & Croydon meetings for as long as I can remember. Many will recall how, when the book draw numbers were drawn at meetings, John would instantly recall the details of the London Transport bus route with the same number!

I last saw John in November 2019 when he came to see Stephen Gay's presentation. He had been hospitalised at least twice during this time.

Dave Elsdon

Forthcoming Branch Events

IMPORTANT, PLEASE NOTE

As there is now the probability of being able to restart (some) branch meetings as "Zoom" virtual meetings the original presentation programme is shown below. Once these are organised we will advise you the details of how you can access the presentations.

During October 2020

13 October (Evening)

Roaming Around London with my Camera Geoff Brockett
(This is a change from the previously published programme, due to a temporary medical issue for Bryan Cross; we wish him well.)

27 October (Afternoon)

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

During November 2020

10 November (Evening)

Newcastle and the North East in the 90's "An ever popular area" Richard Allen

24 November (Afternoon)

A Lifetime of Railway Discoveries "Where will we go this time?" Michael Bunn

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