

Railway Ramblings

Issue 124

November 2020

The monthly newsletter of the Hitchin Branch of the RCTS

Meetings Update

Whilst we continue to be unable to have traditional branch meetings we are now starting to offer you virtual meetings. It is the intention to run a regular programme on this basis for the foreseeable future.

Register now for 10th November... ..For details see “Forthcoming Events”

From the Photo Album



66789 in BR Blue Large Logo livery on 4M46 London Gateway to Hams Hall on Monday 7 September 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). They should be photographs you own!

Chairman's Platform

As we cannot offer you the traditional branch meeting presentations we have decided to venture into the world of "virtual" meetings. Our experience of these is, to say the least, minimal but I have every expectation that they will prove an acceptable substitute in the circumstances. Please bear with us as we gain experience and, hopefully, expertise!

Let's look upon the positives. Firstly, there are no geographical constraints – the presentations are available wherever you can access the internet. No more needing to turn out in rotten weather or find somewhere to park the car. Absolutely Covid-19 secure. Of course, you can also "go to" presentations arranged by other branches without any need to travel – now that's a real benefit.

There are a few downsides. You do not physically meet others and the informal chit-chat of meetings is lost. You do need access to the internet, although you don't necessarily need a camera or microphone. You can even access the presentations from a smartphone. You have the room as warm or as cool as you want and you control the sound volume. You don't get to have tea and biscuits, unless you do it yourself and unfortunately you don't get the opportunity to purchase books from our bookstall!

There will no doubt be other pro's and con's but let us all be positive about this development.

On other issues, you should have had a letter from the society membership team with renewal details. Please respond as soon as possible, so that they can deal with everyone in time for the January Railway Observer distribution. And for those of you receiving this newsletter and who aren't already members, there is a bargain rate special offer if you join now, until the end of 2021 - see <https://rcts.org.uk/join/>.

Finally, in a recent issue Martin Elmes set readers a puzzle and, although he was not overwhelmed with answers, is venturing to set new puzzles, probably monthly, starting in this issue. I trust you will put the grey-matter to work and give these new puzzles a go.

Steve Lacey

Local Observations

All reports as seen at Welwyn North

After a very quiet period following my last report, I can now report that Azuma 801228 arrived at Bounds Green overnight on **Sunday 20 September** and was immediately in service the following day going to Edinburgh.

Wednesday 23 September saw another class 73 (73128) travel up from Tonbridge West Yard to Peterborough in the early morning with empty wagons, returning to Tonbridge via Hertford North at 11:10.

At Hertford North on **Friday 25 September** 37716 + DR77907 (A ballast & finishing machine) passed at 13:35 heading north

Monday 28 September a charter train came through with 90001 hauling six red & cream livered coaches running from York to Crewe via Euston, where it picked up a Class 40 diesel on the rear. Also, during the night a FLIRT unit arrived at Hornsey, via Liverpool Street and Cambridge, from Norwich. This unit 745006 returned on Wednesday evening **30 September** passing here at 19:30.

Thursday 1 October saw the start of the winter RHTT leaf clearing programme with 66099 & 106 passing at 11:31 southbound.

The last Class 800 Azuma to enter service finally ran between Doncaster (06:10) to Edinburgh on **Friday 2 October**, to form the 10:00 Edinburgh to Kings Cross, this completes the Class in operation.

Tuesday 6 October 56103 was an early runner via Hertford North (07:37) with a rake of empty rusty wagons running between Willesden and Chaddesden Sidings. Also, very early this morning saw another Class 745 FLIRT unit run from Norwich to Hornsey for wheel turning. This unit 745008 returned past here at 19:53.



90001 with a charter train (1Z46) passing through Welwyn North on 28 September 2020

Photo: Mikky Hart

Running via Hertford North at 09:53 on **Friday 9 October** was one of the strangest train configurations we have seen, comprising two HST power cars, two Class 91 loco's and several MK 3 coaches (43054 / 91122 - coaches – 91128 / 43066), these were operating as a test train between Rectory Junc. & Bounds Green.

A failed freight train carrying concrete tunnel segments was collected on **Saturday 10 October** from Welwyn GC and taken to Peterborough, the failed loco was 66147, the rescue loco 66005 passing Welwyn North at 10:15.

Tuesday 13 October was a bad day on ECML which suffered almost a four-hour stoppage due to a fatality between Welwyn Garden City & Hitchin and, much further north near Berwick-upon-Tweed, the overhead power line came down. Many services were cancelled or badly delayed.

Freight via Hertford North (13:34) on **Wednesday 14 October** hauled by 66738 from Eastleigh to Peterborough.

A busier day on **Friday 16 October** when 66701 ran from Doncaster to Ilford (10:27) returning via Hertford North (16:04) to Ely hauling 317657 / 672 for storage. Also that day, 755413 returned to Norwich from Bounds Green following wheel turning (18:29) having travelled to Bounds Green during the previous night

No trains in or out of Kings Cross on **Sunday 18 October** due to engineering work near Gasworks tunnel.

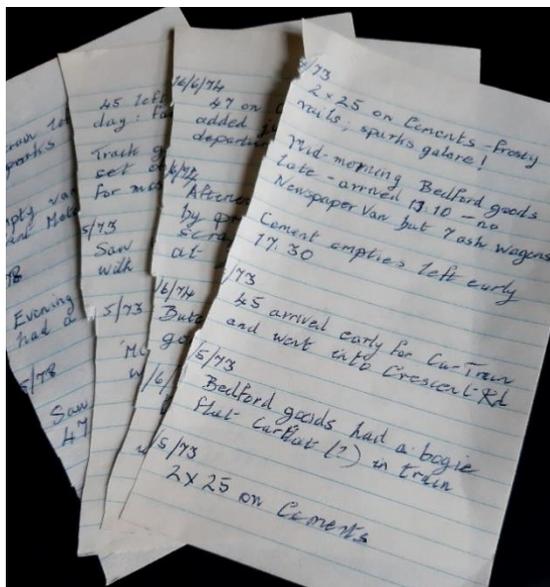
(Observations courtesy of our Branch Secretary, Dave Elsdon)

Luton Freight in the 1970's and 1980's (Part 1)

- John Rainbow

The excellent article "Working the Dunstable Branch" by Bill Davies, in the September edition of "Railway Ramblings", brought back many memories of freight workings at Luton in the '70s and '80s. Suitably inspired, I embarked on a rummage through my study for my old note books of the period which, once found, were sadly not as comprehensive as I had at first remembered them to be. However, here are a few notes you might find of interest.

In September 1972 I began training as an Environmental Health Officer with the then County Borough of Luton. It was a "Sandwich Course" which involved travelling to London for the theoretical training. To arrive in time for the 09:00 start I had to catching the 07:14 DMU service from Luton to St. Pancras. Timings were such that I would frequently be crossing the old Bute Street station footbridge over the Dunstable Line as the Northfleet APCM to Dunstable/Houghton Regis train that Bill spoke of was setting off.



My notes were made on spare pages taken from notebooks - student finances didn't stretch to push note books!



In the early '70s I, like many, thought it was excessive to have more than two haircuts a year.

It was always entertaining to watch the loco struggle up the gradient from the "head shunt". However, the real spectacle was to be seen on frosty mornings when adhesion was low and a pair of Class 25's had been substituted for the more usual Class 45 or Class 47. Goodness, what a sound and light show that was!

During the six month of each work placement – fortunately in the summer months - I took every opportunity to, as the Chief used to say, "Get abroad in the Borough". When out of the office I always tried to "adjust my routes" so as to pass the Luton Midland station/Crescent Road Goods Yard as often as possible and see what was going on.

At that time the Midland Main Line was, as it had been since it's early days, a major artery for the transport of coal to the south of the country. The up slow line saw a procession throughout the 24-hrs of heavy coal trains hauled mostly by Class 45's or Class 47's, with the odd pair of Class 25's thrown in for good measure. Whilst the majority of coal was carried in Merry-Go-Round (MGR) block trains there were still a fair number of loose-coupled trains of loose-coupled wagons sandwiched between two brake vans. Rather ironically, one of the coal flows (in MGR wagons as I recall) was from Welbeck Colliery to Northfleet Cement works where the wagons Bill Davies took to Dunstable originated.

Ninety-nine percent of the flow of coal was from North to South but there was one which went the other way. This involved a working taking coking coal from Betteshanger Colliery in Kent to a coking plant in the East Midlands.

Each week saw the Friday "Rainbow Train" of Vauxhall cars and vans from Crescent Road Yard to Scotland. For many years this train, was formed of Carflats – redundant carriage frames boarded over and with flaps at each end to provide a continuous surface. Cars and vans were brought into the yard on road transporters either direct from the factory or, more usually, from storage at Slip

End/Caddington, unloaded and then driven up the ramp and onto the train of Carflats. This was always accomplished at great speed but I'm only aware of one occasion when a vehicle "fell off". Latterly, the Carflats were used for larger vans, with cars loaded onto Cartics sets, the upper deck via a ramp-wagon.

Once the first part of the train was fully loaded the yard shunter (a Class 08, of course) would drag it back into the head shunt and then propel it into the "back road" behind the then Platform 4. Handbrakes applied on the Carflats, the Shunter would trundle back to the yard and position the other half of the train for loading. Once loaded, the second half would be shunted to join its fellow. All of this being done without having to enter the main running lines. On occasion, the full train was longer than could be accommodated on the "back road". So, to deal with this, just before the train was ready to depart (at about 16:30), the shunter would fuss around adding a final couple of loaded Carflats at the last minute.

The train, hauled by a Class 45/47, was routed via the Settle & Carlisle Line. On one stormy night the train was crossing Ribbleshead Viaduct when a sudden gust blew a couple of cars off the train and onto the ground far below – or so the story goes!

Before the removal of Chiltern Green signal box and replacement with an Intermediate Block Signal, the train was assembled in the yard of the old Chiltern Green station between Luton and Harpenden.

John Rainbow

(Part 2 of John's recollections will be published in the December issue of Railway Ramblings.)

Dave Elsdon – My Time in the RCTS



I joined RCTS in the late 1980's having spent considerable time with two local members here in Digswell.

I became Chairman of the newly formed Hertfordshire Branch (now Watford Branch) when it was set up in October 1994. I was later asked to be one of their representatives on the Northern Home Counties Regional Committee. There I undertook the role of Meetings Secretary, which I still do.

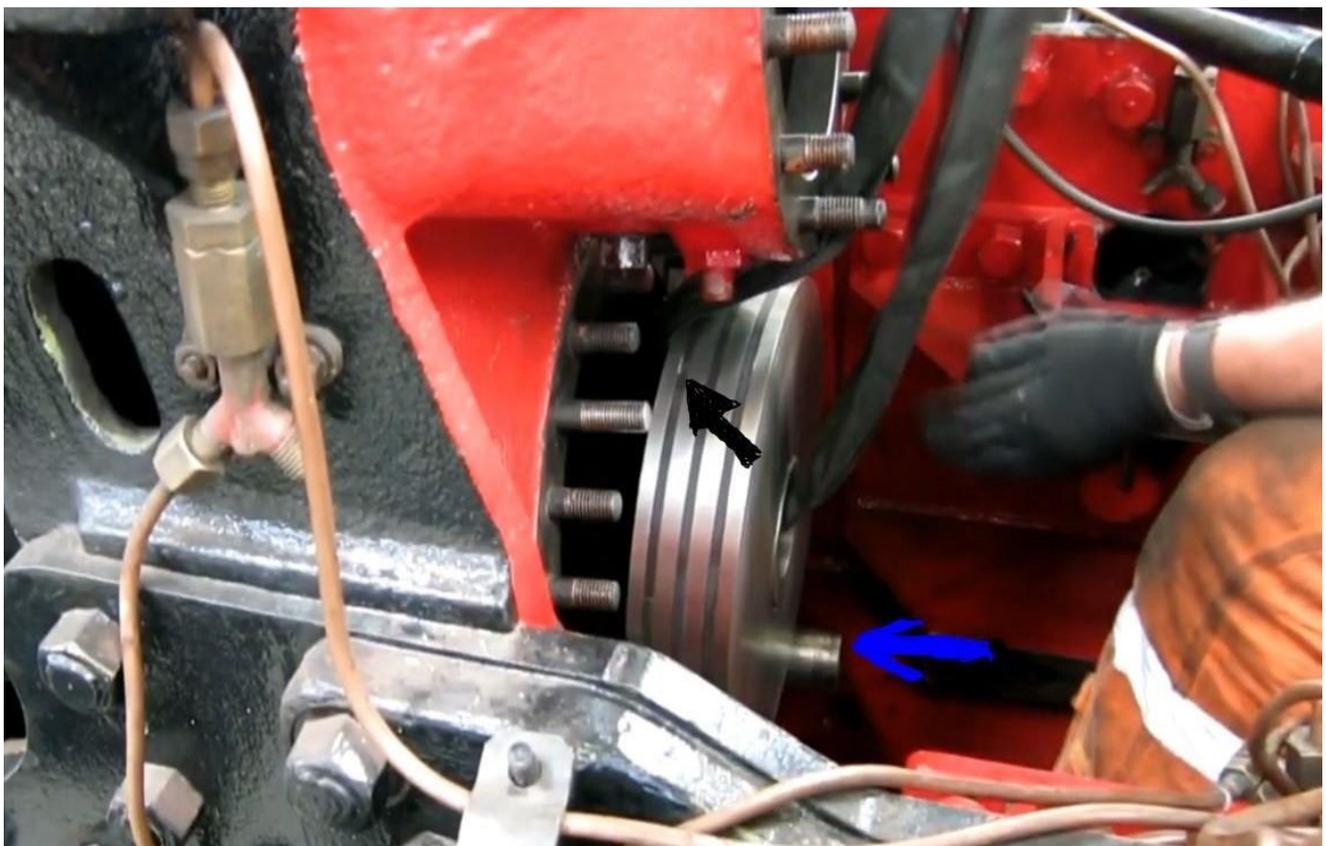
Following the re-formation of Hitchin Branch, I became the Branch Secretary in 2012, a position I still hold. Alongside this I have also acted as the Exhibitions Officer, which followed from my experience of exhibitions in my day job. This also led to me taking on the role of Society Exhibitions Officer from 2011 until 2019, during which time I arranged numerous national exhibitions at a variety of locations.

All of this has been recently recognised by the Society Trustees and Management who have thanked me by making me an Honorary Life Member of the Society which came as a total shock and great surprise, as I treat what I do as one of my hobbies!

A Love Affair (Part 6) – Steve Lacey

Last time, in Part 5, we saw the boiler return and I, in my innocence, thought completion was a few months away. After all, we had refurbished all the components as we took them off, so surely it was a simple Meccano job. By now it was March 2013, 92 Squadron having arrived back at Wansford in May 2010 and work on the overhaul having started straight away. The older hands sounded a note of caution, Meccano it may be, but with rather a lot of nuts and bolts! It was to be another 4 years before we re-entered traffic! Having said that, it took the original team 22 years to get her going from scrapyard condition, but to be fair, she was a wreck, they didn't have all the parts, money was short, they were out in the open at Wansford with little equipment.....but they were 34 years younger!

First job this time was machining and refitting the middle piston head and new rings. This was needed as the middle piston head had to be replaced due to wear. This meant the new piston head blank had to be machined down and fitted with new rings (new rings were also fitted to the outer cylinder piston heads). On a motorbike or car this is simple: Hold the rings in compression with paper wedges (black arrow), while you fit the piston heads. In service, the paper wedges disintegrate and the rings spring out giving a steam tight fit. Unfortunatley, piston heads on a Battle of Britain weigh more than one person can lift....but the principle is the same. As you will see, Tony, one of our engineers, turned up 2 cylinders on the lathe (blue arrow). These fitted over the piston cover retaining studs and supported the weight of the piston head, it having been lifted into position by the overhead crane. Simple, but neat.



As I said in Part 1, the smokebox was deemed scrap, but retained as a pattern for a new one. This was produced by several of our volunteers at a farm in Liddlington (known as Top Shed by the group) owned by a great benefactor and volunteer of the NVR and 92, Dave O'Connell. By August 2014 this had arrived back and was ready to lift into place on the frames and smokebox saddle. At this stage it

was an inverted U-shape with little intrinsic strength, hence the chalked sign on the side of this hefty bit of kit.....Fragile!



The smokebox base was fabricated out of a single sheet of steel and drilled with 46 holes to fit over the studs on the frame. This is not easy, as the steel flexes, until you weld the U-shape to it, changing the distance between the holes. You can't weld the U-shape to the smokebox floor until you mount the boiler or the two might not meet, which is also the reason the rear of the smokebox was left slightly long and only trimmed at the last minute! In the end as you will see only one hole was slightly out, the one with a big yellow ring round it in the picture!



There was a huge sigh of relief when it all matched up and was successfully welded in place. As an aside, the overhead crane was sponsored by Dave O'Connell who had it named "Diane" after his lovely slim wife, in an attempt to curry favour. Unfortunately, cranes have to have their lifting capacity clearly displayed, so 10 tons appears next to the word Diane, not quite the result Dave was looking for!

The next month saw the boiler successfully hydraulically tested. A-level physics explains why you hydraulically test before steam testing. If you fill the boiler with water completely you see if it is leaking and then pressurise it with a pump, to well above its design working pressure. If, God forbid, it fails there is a slight bang and a gush of water. If you steam test first, the boiler fails by exploding, killing all around! The reason is that a fluid cannot be compressed, whereas a gas can, storing up a vast amount of energy in the process. The difference is like opening a can of coke, before you shake it, or after, when you have liberated some of the gas!

By October 2014 the frames were ready to be re-wheeled. So it was, that on 8th of October the frames were lifted up on the Matterson jacks. This involved placing large beams at either end of the frames and attaching to the jacks which can raise the frames to give a 6-foot clearance under the lifting beam. Unfortunately, our driving wheels are 6' 2" meaning we had to pack the jack bases up, before the lift started. Things are never as simple as you hope.



As you lower the loco, you have to locate the pivot pin of the front bogie in its bearing, six driving wheel axle boxes (3 on each side) into their horn guides on the frame (each with just a few thousandths of an inch clearance) and be sure nothing catches on the way down. Oh, and by the way all the crankpins on the 6 wheels have to be in the right place to receive the coupling rods! Luckily the trailing pony or delta truck can be wheeled in later. If you have ever tried to re-rail your Hornby Flying Scotsman you will have some idea of what we were up against.



To make the job slightly easier, once you have the bogie and wheels in position you lower the front end slightly more than the rear end (not too much or the frames slide off the lifting beams!) which means that you can locate one pair of driving wheels at a time. It is also made easier, as the jacks are screw jacks which make it all very controllable. Like an Archimedes Screw.... physics again!

Despite all the care, one bit of steel sheet got a bit bent, so the frames went up again, a repair made with a heat torch and a big hammer, before lowering again! In all, the rewheeling was a 7-hour day.

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Oh dear, Rambling Syd Rumpo has wittered on for so long that the boiler and tender will have to wait for the next installment! Sound of groans in the readership.

As before, you may view some of the action more enjoyably by using the link:

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

Steve Lacey

New Member

We welcome Anthony Loin, of Biggleswade, as a new member of the Hitchin Branch.

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

More from the Photo Album



34053 *Sir Keith Park* assisted by 33063 - Spa Valley Railway 17 October 2020

Photo : Mike Bunn

The Puzzle Page – Martin Elms

(Answers next month)

Take the first letter of the following railway locations to spell a topical day in the month of November:

Sussex seaside town
Cambrian Railway Headquarters
County town of the Isle of Wight
North Scottish fishing port
Between Stratford and Romford
Somerset coal area
Small city in Cambridgeshire
Town with Abbey and Trent Valley stations
Between Fordham and Mildenhall
Preserved station in North Yorkshire
Prickle at 6J
Cornish border river

Answer:

Now one for the loco enthusiasts,
Take the first letter of the following locomotive names to spell another:

45648
D9009
70032
6813
46111
34046
D857
4087
62431

Loco name:

Loco number:

Forthcoming Branch Events

We had hoped to restart conventional branch meetings but the current measures to combat the spread of Covid-19 make this impossible. Along with some other branches, we are now going offer “Zoom” presentations/virtual meetings. These will be accessible from almost any PC/iPad/Smartphone. To participate you will need to register, in advance, and the link for that presentation will then be sent to you. Presentations are open to members and guests.

Our Chairman, Steve Lacey, will introduce the presenter and aim to start promptly at the time indicated. During the presentation there will be a 10-minute interval about half-way through. For those with a camera/microphone there will be the opportunity to ask questions.

We look forward to seeing you.

During November 2020

Tuesday 10th November at 19:30

Railways before the War - that's the Great War (Part 1)

Jeremy Harrison

This will be a Zoom presentation.
Register in advance for this meeting:

<https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tJlpf-2qqj0pG91WRJi49uknjaTRlxsLAs9s>

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email (from Jeremy Harrison) containing information about joining this meeting.

Notes about this presentation:

Railways before the War - that's the Great War (Part 1)

Jeremy Harrison

This presentation comprises Black and White images (scanned from glass plates) from the LCGB Ken Nunn Collection (now in the custody of the NRM, but with ‘showing rights’ retained).

It somehow seems fitting that we move into the new era of “Zoom” meetings by looking back at our railways well over 100 years ago; from the end of the 19th century, into the early years of the 20th (when Great Northern Railway class A1 were Stirling Singles, not Gresley pacifics).

We are expecting to be able to see Part 2 on 12th January 2021.

During December 2020

Tuesday 8th December at 19:30

That Was The Year That Was – 1962

Geoff Plumb

This will be a Zoom presentation.
Registration details will be in the next issue of Railway Ramblings

Zoom – Simple Meeting Instructions

A comprehensive guide (“Simple Meeting Instructions”) to using Zoom has kindly been provided by Jeremy Harrison. This is provided to you along with this issue of Railway Ramblings.

Don't be over-awed by it! Although you can take part without reading any of this excellent guide, it provides many explanations and tips which you will probably find useful in due course.

Other Branch Virtual Presentations

Members of Hitchin Branch will be very welcome at other branches' Zoom meetings:

During November 2020

Tuesday 3rd November at 19:30 – Watford Branch

A Miscellany of GB Rail tours – 1970s onwards

Rob Freeman

You will need to register in advance for this meeting, the registration link is available from Rob Davidson (watford@rcts.org.uk)

Monday 16th November at 19:30 – South Essex Branch

The Rail Freight Group

The history and the aims of this important part of the rail industry

Maggie Simpson – Director General RFG

You will need to register in advance for this meeting. The registration link can be obtained from the branch secretary, David Couzens-Howard (southessex@rcts.org.uk)

Monday 23rd November at 19:30 – Windsor & Maidenhead Branch

That Was the Year That Was – 1966

Geoff Plumb

Please request registration details from Sally Goddard (maidenhead@rcts.org.uk)

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

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