

Railway Ramblings

Issue 126

January 2021

The monthly newsletter of the Hitchin Branch of the RCTS

Branch Meetings

We are still unable to offer you traditional branch meetings, so we are continuing to arrange Zoom virtual meetings. It is the intention to run a one-meeting-per-month programme on this basis until circumstances change.

*We still have a 2021 conventional programme ready to start, **if and when** the Covid-19 regulations permit.*

*Our next virtual meeting is **12th January**: for details see “Forthcoming Events”*

From the Photo Album



A1 Class 60128 *Bongrace* between the Welwyn North tunnels on 9 June 1963

Photo: Doug White Collection

(Use this link to read the story of this loco: [No. 60128 Bongrace - The A1 Steam Locomotive Trust](#) - Editor)

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

A Happy New Year to you all!

By the time you read this I expect you will be ready to make your New Year resolutions! Here is an easy one to get you started - In these continuing uncertain times, it's worth resolving to take that little bit of extra effort to keep your hobbies and pastimes going, including your interest in railways, as it can help provide that mental stimulus important to us all. That should be easy to keep.

With Covid-19 restrictions continuing we are continuing with our virtual meetings, with which I am sure many of you are now familiar. I am pleased to report that at our December presentation we had over 40 participants. But if you are one of those yet to "dabble" then I recommend you give this month's presentation a try: For details turn to *Forthcoming Branch Events*. These presentations are available wherever you can access the internet and you can use a PC, Tablet, or Smartphone. Although we would prefer to see you, you can even watch the presentations "incognito" – perhaps advisable if you are in your pyjamas!

With the new vaccines becoming available in the battle against Covid-19, we look forward to a time, now hopefully not too far into the future, when we can restart "normal" meetings. As you will know from last month's issue of *Railway Ramblings*, our Secretary, Dave Elsdon, has done a brilliant job in lining up an amazing programme of speakers for 2021 – we are just waiting for the opportunity to get going with it. (But please, do remember that these meetings will not be taking place unless I have emailed you to that effect.)

Looking forward to seeing you all again sometime soon,

Steve Lacey

Local Observations

Reports as seen at Welwyn North & the local area

Saturday 21 November an engineer's train passed on route from Whitemoor Yard to Alexandra Palace with 66723 & 738. This was part of this weekend's work in the areas of Kings Cross, Finsbury Park & Alexandra Palace. In all, there were 10 loco's involved on **Sunday 22 November**, they were 66702 / 703 / 706 / 716 / 723 / 725 / 738 / 746 / 780 / 785.

Royal loco 67001 *Royal Messenger* travelled from Bounds Green to Doncaster via Hertford North light engine, reason unknown, on **Monday 23 November**.

Tuesday 24 November a test train comprising of the yellow HST set 43013 / 43014 passed (12:10) on route from Doncaster to Kings Cross, returning to Doncaster at 13:05 through here. The same set appeared here again on **Wednesday 25 November** from Doncaster to Kings Cross passing at 13:26, but this time returning to Derby at 14:19 the same day. Also, that day, the pantograph coach from *Heathrow Express* unit 332014 was seen going north on the A1M to Sims for scrapping. It is thought there was severe corrosion on these units which would prevent them being transferred to somewhere else. This movement is expected to be a regular event in the near future with the rest of the class.

Thursday 3 December 67024 (*British Belmond Pullman*), hauling a dead Class 325 postal unit, passed at 23:20 heading for Low Fell Royal Mail Terminal from Willesden. Within a couple of hours, at 01:38, 66054 also hauling a dead Class 325 passed in the opposite direction heading for Willesden from Low Fell RMT.

Then on **Friday 4 December** we had slow running southbound through Welwyn North for a couple of hours mid-morning due to trespassers on the track at Welwyn Garden City.

On **Saturday 5 December** DCR loco 56103 ran light engine from Wembley to Leicester through here at 11:11.

Sunday 6 December saw 73961 / 962 pass with a yellow test train working from Tonbridge Yard to Derby RTC at 12:51.

Monday 7 December, trains stopped for over two hours due to a fatality at Stevenage at approximately 09:15.

Wednesday 9 December saw a Class 70 through Hertford North with a Southampton to Leeds Freightliner, at 22:47, running 40 mins late, with 70020 + an unidentified Class 66. This is the second time this week we have seen a Class 70, increasingly rare here these days.

On **Sunday 13 December** we had a couple of freight movements. The first, 66753 (at 08:33) working from Hitchin to Belmont Yard with a reverse in Welwyn Garden City. The train returned past here at 09:22. This was followed by 66768, running light engine, from Peterborough to Willesden. This again returned later in the day (14:07) returning from Willesden to Doncaster works, hauling unit number 465930.

Monday 14 December past here at 12:16 was 66718, 66740, 66741 hauling the RTT tanks from Tonbridge Yard back to Doncaster now the leaf problems are over for another year. At 19:12 the Network Rail test train passed hauled by 67023 & 67027 running from Heaton to Derby via some very long way round including running into and out of Kings Cross; it returned later that evening. Then at 23:25 working from Doncaster to Belle Isle were two more Class 70s - 70809 / 812.

On **Tuesday 15 October** four loco's coupled together light engine working from Doncaster to Tonbridge Yard came through at 11:22; these were 66792, 782, 741, 718

(Observations courtesy of our Branch Secretary, Dave Elsdon)

Luton Freight in the 1970's and 1980's (Part 3)

- John Rainbow

(This is the third and final part of John's personal recollections. Part 1 was published in the November issue and Part 2 in the December issue.)

Fridays in the mid to late '70s were always "Special" days as that was when the stone train from Merehead Quarry brought loaded wagons to Leagrave. It travelled via the Oxford to Bletchley route, over Bletchley flyover to Bedford and thence to Leagrave. Having left the full wagons there, the loco – a Class 52 Western and hence my "excitement" – and brake van ran to Luton where it picked up the empties brought in by the mid-morning trip working before making its way back to London and the Western Region. Such were the usual workings from/to and through Luton at the time.

Having qualified and got married I managed to persuade my new wife that a flat in a new development overlooking Crescent Road Yard was not only within our price range but suitably located for work, shopping etc. I'm sure she saw straight through my ploy! Thus, suitably located, I was able to observe a number of interesting one-off workings.

Normally, apart from the odd track train, work in the yard ended at lunchtime on Saturday. One Saturday afternoon, however, I became aware of activity in the yard. To my surprise a train of tracked military vehicles in "snow camouflage" was drawing to a stand from the Bedford direction. The train was then split and the two halves shunted into the vehicle loading ramp road. The vehicles were then started up, driven off the train and, when the wagons were empty, driven back on. After the usual niceties of re-coupling, brake tests etc. the train set off south. Clearly the vehicles were the "wrong way round" to be driven off the train at their destination.

Although we had moved from our flat by 1980, I continued to work for Luton B.C. (as it had by then become) and took every opportunity I could to observe workings through the station.

When the A41 Kings Langley – Hemel Hempstead by-pass was constructed in the late 1980s, Crescent Road Yard was chosen as the most convenient point to stockpile the required aggregate. Stone trains from Merehead quarry - frequently hauled by the then new GM Class 59's - were unloaded and the material taken to site by a procession of lorries.

Sometime in the 1980's there was a strike at the Buncefield oil depot which prevented tankers delivering kerosine from there to the fuel farm at Luton Airport. To circumvent this, trains of kerosine were brought into the yard where tankers were loaded and operated a shuttle service to take it to the airport.

By the 1990's I had become much more desk-bound, my opportunities to observe workings became few and far between and, sadly, I put my notebooks away.

John Rainbow

A Love Affair (Part 8) – Steve Lacey

The next major task was now to join the new ashpan to the boiler and replace the boiler in the frames. The 7th October dawned, yes you guessed it, wind and rain, ideal for lifting a heavy wind-catching boiler. First task, was to attach the new ashpan to the boiler! This is done using slotted pegs secured by folded steel wedges. You may ask, why not simply bolt them together? You would know the answer to this, if you have ever wanted to undo a nut and bolt from anywhere in the vicinity of the ashpan. They rust, distort with heat and weld themselves together!



The combination was then lifted into the frames and, with fingers crossed, it was found to fit. One detail that is not obvious, is that the boiler is only bolted rigidly, via the smokebox saddle, to the frames at the front end. At the rear end 2 smooth plates, either side of the firebox, sit on 2 matching plates attached to the frame. These were mated with each other, having slavered both with copious amounts of grease. They are held down with S-shaped brackets, allowing the plates to slide back and forth, but not side to side. But why? We are back to physics again! As the boiler and firebox heat up, the metal expands getting physically longer. If held rigid at both ends, the loco would bow upward and become suitable for specialist use in hump shunting yards!



Having wheeled *92 Squadron* back into the workshop, we realised that another huge milestone had been achieved. As we stood back admiring our handiwork, we realised there was a bit missing...the tender!

Work on the tender had been going on in parallel with the loco. First it was lifted from its wheels, which were cleaned degreased and repainted. The brake gear was removed for overhaul and the inside of the tank examined. Sadly, the only access is via the tender filler, whose diameter is rather smaller than me! One of our slimmer chaps was "volunteered" to work inside the tank. Dave Branch, or "Twiggy" as he is known, made an inspection. He reporting back that the bituminous coating had stood the test of time, with little serious corrosion and only a couple of broken welds. As you will see from the picture, moving around inside the tank is not easy due to the baffle plates. These strengthen the fairly thin outer shell of the tender and also prevent surges of water during acceleration and braking. Twiggy had the unenviable task of recoating the tank with Apexior bituminous paint.



Next time, in Part 9, *92 Squadron* gets a tender behind; we may have received our vaccine and the sunny uplands hove into sight.....hang on I'm turning into a Boris; time to stop! Don't panic the end is in sight!

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

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

Steve Lacey

New Members

We welcome Greg Harrison and Barry Titmus, both from Luton, as new members of the Hitchin branch.

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 glicersteve@hotmail.com

From The Photo Album



Woolmer Green Box, January 1963

Photo: Doug White

Route Knowledge: A Driver's Perspective

By Bill Davies

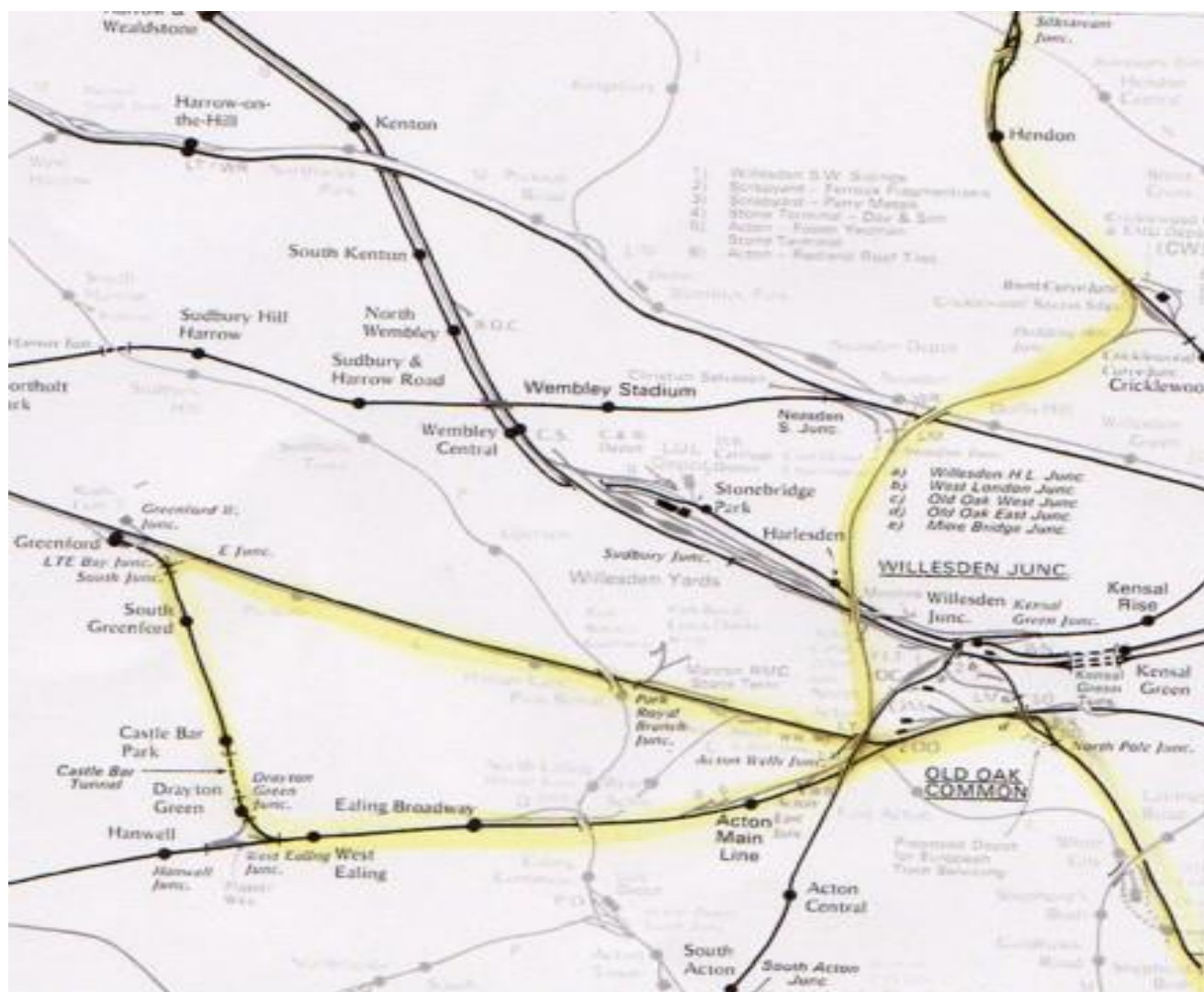
Part 2

On my move to Bedford the route knowledge required was well down on what I was used to. St Pancras, Hemel, Dunstable, Goldington, Kettering, Leicester and Bletchley in addition five Depots at Cambridge Street, Cricklewood, Wellingborough, Leicester and Bletchley. I was offered the chance to review Nottingham, Toton, Derby and Nuneaton - lines I had worked over in a previous life whilst based at Nottingham. This was a total of 208 miles.

In 1983 on commencement of the Midland Electrics I gained a further 6 miles on my route card down to Moorgate. When the 317's failed with faulty welds on their transformers I had to learn Wolverton, my first and only incursion onto the mighty North West, to transfer ailing 317s for repair and modification.

In 1984 when Wellingborough depot closed further routes came our way one of which was Coalville, 16 miles, then to my surprise Northfleet which entailed a circuitous route around West London to regain routes I had worked over at Charing Cross. On leaving the MR at Cricklewood Curve Junction we passed by Neasden Junction through Acton to Kew Junction then over Barnes Bridge along the South Western to Clapham before going down underneath to gain London, Chatham and Dover Lines to Brixton, Nunhead, Lewisham, Hither Green, Sidcup, Dartford thence Northfleet. Hoo Junction came later when we were allocated a freight job removing contaminated spoil to Stewartby in Bedfordshire.

On the 15 June 1986 a fire occurred in Clapham Junction A box which meant we had to be diverted onto a different route approaching Clapham Junction from Kensington Olympia. At Acton Wells Junction we descended onto the hallowed Great Western to Ealing Broadway where we branched off to Greenford then making our way to Old Oak Common, crossing the GW main line to gain access to North Pole Junction, proceeding to Kensington Olympia, under the South Western at Clapham Junction to Wandsworth Road regaining our normal route. This added a further 20 miles of new routes on my card a new total of 240 miles not including Northfleet 24 miles plus 5 miles to Hoo Junction – in all 269 more miles.



This was my first time of signing a series of routes where signals went up-and-down on the Great Western at Greenford. To complete my Great Western route knowledge, I had to learn all lines to Slough from Ealing Broadway and onto Old Oak Common Depot. This was in connection with the Langley oil tank trains with aviation fuel for Heathrow, now delivered by pipeline. This added 15 more miles of main line so now 284 miles in total.

Bill Davies

In the third and concluding part, next month, Bill learns the Thameslink routes.

Contributions to Railway Ramblings

If you would like to make a contribution by sharing your photos, experiences or stories with readers of this newsletter then please contact the editor: John.Dossett@btinternet.com

Forthcoming Branch Events

The current measures to combat the spread of Covid-19 continue to make it impossible to restart conventional branch meetings. So, along with a number of other branches, we are offering "Zoom" presentations/virtual meetings. These are accessible from almost any PC/ablet/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 – Unfortunately Adrian and Martin will not be able to provide you with tea, coffee or biscuits!

For those with a camera/microphone there will be the opportunity to ask questions. We look forward to seeing you.

During January 2021

Tuesday 12th January at 19:30

Railways before the War - that's the Great War (Part 2)

Jeremy Harrison

This will be a Zoom presentation comprising 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). Part 1 was presented in November 2020.

To register in advance for this presentation:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZ0qduuhrzMtG9zidVuGA23nbesUWsQdvUL5>

There is no charge, but donations towards the running of the branch are welcome. Please go to:

<https://rcts.org.uk/branches/product/donation-hitchin/>

During February 2021

Tuesday 9th February at 19:30

The Honeybourne Line

Bernie Holland

This will be a Zoom presentation, featuring a line we have not visited before.

To register in advance for this presentation:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZ0kcuCgrzwvG9L0KXafGUAEZIMDTvdcP-aR>

There is no charge, but donations towards the running of the branch are welcome. Please go to:

<https://rcts.org.uk/branches/product/donation-hitchin/>

Other Branch Virtual Presentations

Many other RCTS branches are also offering Zoom virtual presentations. Details of these can be found on the RCTS website (and in the Railway Observer). You will find these virtual meetings listed under the "Branches" drop-down menu.

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

More from the Photo Album



November 2008 - 60019 *Bittern* has just passed through Ashwell & Morden, heading east on a Cathedrals Express. Santa's elves have kindly removed the unsightly masts and overhead wires!

Photo: Tony Turner

Zoom – Simple Meeting Instructions

A comprehensive guide (“Simple Meeting Instructions”) to using Zoom, kindly provided by Jeremy Harrison, was distributed with the November 2020 issue. If you have mislaid your copy please contact Steve Lacey gricersteve@hotmail.com and he will happily send it to you again.

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