

Railway Ramblings

Issue 132

July 2021

The monthly newsletter of the RCTS Hitchin & Welwyn Garden City Branch

Forthcoming Meetings

Although we had been planning to restart conventional meetings in July, the government announcement on 14th June (which delays the next step out of “lockdown” until at least mid-July) means that we are “Zooming” again this month. We now hope to restart normal meetings in August!

The Zoom meeting will be on 13th July – for details see “Forthcoming Events”.

From the Photo Album



Flying Scotsman at Wansford Station on the Nene Valley Railway 28 September 2019

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, at hitchinnewsletter@rcts.org.uk. They should be your photographs!

Chairman's Platform



Let's start with the negative news – we will NOT be restarting our traditional branch meetings this month. Although a fair number of you were ready to do so, the PM's announcement that the relaxation of Covid-19 restrictions will be delayed by a further four weeks means that we cannot.

The good news is that all is not lost, as we can continue with a Zoom presentation, made possible through the endeavours of our Branch Secretary, Dave Elsdon, who has been busy making all of the necessary arrangements: Many thanks Dave. We also hope that nothing further will occur to prevent us picking up our revised programme in August.

We have republished our Protocol for when we restart traditional meetings. This is at the end of this newsletter (page 18). Please note that, in the light of whatever the government announce about the relaxation of restrictions, this may need modification.

On more mundane matters - full marks to anyone who noticed the subtle changes last month – we have now become the Hitchin & Welwyn Garden City Branch. Nothing significant changes, but the branch committee felt that the change better reflected the catchment area of the branch and our meeting places. This change has been approved by the RCTS Trustees.

Another development to note is that the current issue (and two-years-worth of back copies) of *Railway Ramblings* are now available on the society website (www.rcts.org.uk/hitchin). This will make it easier to access those splendid multi-part features - such as the excellent ones about the restoration of my beloved 34081 92 Squadron !!

And finally – I trust you are enjoying the enhanced newsletter, which has been developing over the past year. This has only been made possible because, apart from the “standard items”, a number of you have been prepared to produce articles for inclusion. If you want to see it continue in this way then we need a steady flow of new contributions, so please see what you can do.

Steve Lacey

Local Observations



All reports as seen at Welwyn North and the local area

This week started with a busy **Monday 17 May**, both Euston-bound Caledonian Sleepers ran via the ECML, 92043 at 05:23 from Glasgow, & 92023 at 06:57 from Inverness. Further engineer's trains also ran from Doncaster to Belle Isle at 09:25 hauled by 66751/66754, Test coach *Caroline* also passed, pushed by 37421 at 12:33 and again at 17:30, having run from Derby to Welwyn Garden City via Temple Mills. Also, on test over the same route were HST power cars 43229/43290 through here at 15:33. 66711/66783 returned from Belle Isle to Whitemoor at 16:25. Then, from Norwich to Hornsey, two 755 units 755412/755723 ran-by at 19:54 going for maintenance. 66791, on the new Biffa service, started **Tuesday 18 May**, passing at 06:12 working from Renwick Road to Scunthorpe. At 08:42 66751/66754 worked through from Belle Isle back to Doncaster. At lunch time, 12:11, 57312 hauling an unidentified Class 321 ran past from Clacton to Gascoigne Wood. The test train with 37421 & coach *Caroline* came by on its roundabout tour from Welwyn Garden City to Welwyn Garden City, via Temple Mills, at 12:21 and again at 18:09. **Wednesday 19 May** saw the same movement as yesterday with the same test train passing at 12:12 & 18:09. 66971 with the Biffa waste train started the day on **Thursday 20 May** at 06:13, running from Renwick Road to Scunthorpe. A second drag this week was 57305 hauling 321408/321444 from Clacton to Gascoigne Wood at 12:12 for further storage. Just one movement on **Friday 21 May** that was via Hertford North when 66733 worked light engine from Tonbridge Yard to Doncaster with barrier vehicles, passing at 13:58, also via Hertford North was again 66733 hauling units 466030/466037 from Slade Green to Doncaster at 14:11 on **Saturday 22 May**.

On **Monday 24 May** the Caledonian Sleeper came our way again, with 92043 in charge from Inverness to Euston, at 06:57. A train-load of stone was next, hauled by 66177 at 12:12, from Willesden to Peterborough, followed by 66780 at 13:07 from Eastleigh to Peterborough. Over the past few days three of the old Class 91's have been put back in service to help out, these are 91106/91110/91111. Just one movement on **Tuesday 25 May** which was unit 755328 working from Norwich to Hornsey passing here at 17:58. This unit ran back to Norwich the following day **Wednesday 26 May** at 19:09, also today saw 57305 hauling a pair of Class 321 units numbers 431 & 445 through here 13:05, from Clacton to Gascoigne Wood for storage. 66952 came through at 08:37 on **Sunday 30 May** after working in the Hitchin area, to reverse at Welwyn Garden City before returning to Whitemoor Yard at 09:39.

The Euston Sleepers were again diverted via the ECML on **Monday 31 May** with the Glasgow to Euston here at 05:22, hauled by 92010, followed by the Inverness to Euston hauled by 92020 at 06:58. Also today saw a Doncaster to Belle Isle engineers train with 66706/66770 here at 09:34 and 66715 working a Ferme Park to Peterborough at 16:35. More diverted sleepers on **Tuesday 1 June** when the Glasgow to Euston ran past at 05:22 with 92038 in charge, followed at 07:05 with 92043 on the Inverness to Euston. **Wednesday 2 June** saw the first test working of 803002, one of five new express units for LNER, passing at 12:58 from Darlington to Kings Cross. Later, at 19:10 working back from Belle Isle to Whitemoor Yard, was 66706/66770 a similar test working on **Thursday 3 June** again with 803002 ran at 12:55 again from Darlington to Kings Cross returning at 14:05. Also today, two more units for maintenance at Hornsey coming from Norwich ran at 20:07 these were 755331/755414. Two further unidentified Class 321 units from Clacton came through on their way to Gascoigne Wood, 37611 hauled a test train from Welwyn Garden City to Ealing at 14:30 after stabling in Welwyn Garden City overnight. **Sunday 6 June** the last day of the Kings Cross transformation saw 66742/ 66782 working an empty ballast train from Kings Cross back to Whitemoor Yard at 07:45.

The Euston sleeper trains again came this way on **Monday 7 June** with 92010 working from Glasgow to Euston passing at 06:24 hrs and, approximately 1 hour late, the Inverness sleeper hauled by 92020 at 06:58 - unfortunately both were further delayed as the wires were brought down between Finsbury Park & Kings Cross by a faulty pantograph on unit 700151 around 06:00 - not a good start for the remodelled Kings Cross. The only other thing to note was Hull Trains unit 802304 worked as a test train from Kings Cross to Edinburgh passing here at 13:05. 803002 made another test run from Newcastle to Kings Cross on **Wednesday 9 June** passing Welwyn North at 13:55, returning to Darlington at 15:02. On the following day, **Thursday 10 June**, 37800 ran north hauling 321428/321432 at 12:10, taking the units from Clacton to Worksop for storage. 803002 ran again on test at similar timings to yesterday.

The Euston-bound sleeper trains again were diverted via the ECML on **Monday 14 June** with 92020 working from Glasgow through here at 05:30 and 92010 at 06:58 with the train from Inverness. 37421 worked a test train from Derby via Hertford North visiting Cambridge, Ely, Peterborough on a circular trip. Disruption occurred when Azuma 800202 failed in Stevenage station when working the Kings Cross to Edinburgh service - all northbound trains passed through Stevenage using the slow down line. It seemed to take a long time to clear the unit from the station, it was eventually ran back to Hitchin yard where it remained for at least two days. An afternoon signal failure between Stevenage and Cambridge caused major disruption to many local services to and from Kings Cross & St. Pancras on **Tuesday 15 June**. During the afternoon of **Wednesday 16 June** failed Class 91 (91130) was dragged from Bounds Green to Doncaster by 67012 via the Hertford loop passing Stevenage at 16:46. Further proving trips were made using 803002 from Newcastle through here at 13:55, returning north at 15:03. The *Tour of The Fens* on **Thursday 17 June** with 60103 *Flying Scotsman* was cancelled, causing disappoint to many as this would have been the first steam Charter since lockdown started eighteen months ago. Instead, we saw 66703 with two barrier vehicles run from Eastleigh to Old Dalby through Watton-at-Stone at 13:20, whilst here at Welwyn North 57312 hauling units 465236/465246, from Gillingham to Worksop for storage, ran through at 13:37.

(Observations courtesy of our Branch Secretary, Dave Elsdon)

Random Reminiscences (Part 3) - Bill Wilson

This month we publish the final part of Bill's reminiscences:

I went to the Rainhill cavalcade held over the May Bank Holiday in 1980 to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Liverpool & Manchester Railway. Also in the 1980s, I attended Crewe Works and Old Oak Common MPD open days. During the same period, I also went to the Woodham Bros. scrap yard, Barry Island and joined, with several acquaintances, a number of Steam Locomotive Owners Association rail tours. This included, in February 1983, a ride behind 4472 *Flying Scotsman* on the ECML, the train being part of the programme intended to celebrate the 60th Anniversary of the building of the locomotive. Whilst in May 1987 I went to the Bounds Green TMD open day.

Wood Green station was renamed Alexandra Palace on 17 May 1982. The nearby former Palace Gates Branch (Severn Sisters to Palace Gates, Wood Green) had closed on Saturday 5 January 1963.

Some years ago, a friend presented me with a brilliant line drawing depicting two N2s at Belle Isle in about 1953, 69548 on a down local train and 69523 drifting down to King's Cross with empty coaching stock. He was mortified that 69523 had been drawn chimney first, but for me it did not detract one little bit. I had hoped to find these to present with this article but, alas, they are hidden away somewhere

For many years I used the Northern City Line (NCL) as part of my commute to work. This was cut back to Highbury and Islington from 1 September 1968, as the Victoria Line opened on that date and used the former NCL platforms at Finsbury Park. London Transport involvement with the NCL ended on 4 October 1975 when the line closed and was transferred to British Railways for conversion to form part of the Great Northern Electric services.

There were various yards in the Finsbury Park and Hornsey areas which either closed or changed function between 1960 and 1973. Hornsey shed closed to steam in July 1961 but continued in use for diesel locos until May 1971. The shed's duties were passed to Finsbury Park Traction Maintenance Depot. Responsibility for Bounds Green Train Maintenance Depot and Ferme Park servicing sidings was transferred later from the train operating company to Hitachi Rail Europe in November 2018, as part of their contract to supply and maintain the Class 800/801 Azuma trains.



Class 91 91011 (now 91111 *For the Fallen*) ready to depart from a very quiet Kings Cross on Monday 25 May 1990, well before the new western concourse (opened 2012). This locomotive was to become part of the national collection, but this was reversed. 91111 is one of the class to be retained by LNER until the end of 2023, and is currently in warm store. The sets may return to traffic once the King's Cross engineering work is completed

Photo: Bill Wilson

The end of the 'vertically integrated' railway came under the provisions of The Railways Act, 1993. These were implemented between 1994 and March 1997 and culminated in separate management of operations and infrastructure, together with the resulting fragmentation of the industry. The franchising process introduced at the time formed part of a disjointed railway industry structure and organization.

We all know that 2020 was a traumatic year for the railways, with the coronavirus emergency resulting in a dramatic fall in passenger demand. The Department for Transport (DfT) announced in September 2020 franchising had officially ended. There will be a change to concession agreements under which train operators will deliver services.

With future rail demand uncertain following the shift to home working as a result of the pandemic, some new build projects, not yet approved, are in danger of being postponed or abandoned. Quite a large infrastructure upgrades programme to accommodate increased passenger flows had been taking place, but in some cases has proved a considerable challenge for Network Rail (a government body since 1 September 2014) to implement. Network Rail's present devolution policy, however, offers the opportunity to reverse a history of over-budget and over-time projects. On GN, investment included: the redevelopment of King's Cross station, Finsbury Park to Alexandra Palace improvement project to increase capacity (completed in time for the December 2013 timetable), rebuilding and expanding the Hornsey Traincare Depot (completed July 2016) where trains operated by Govia Thameslink Railway are maintained, improvements to Hatfield station, new flyover at Hitchin (opened June 2013) and new platforms, station facilities and signalling at Peterborough.

The new concourse at King's Cross opened in March 2012, followed by the Square in September 2013. I found it fascinating to compare the present King's Cross area with scenes from "*The Ladykillers*", a British black comedy film made by Ealing Studios in 1955.



Kings Cross on 6 March 2021

Photo: Bill Bass

At present Network Rail is undertaking a major track remodeling and asset renewal project on the approaches to King's Cross station, including reinstating the disused third bore of gasworks tunnel. The work is expected to be completed during 2021. Most of the current layout was installed by British Railways in 1972. The work is part of the £1.2 billion East Coast Upgrade funded by the DfT (designed to increase the number of high-speed long-distance paths between London and Doncaster from six to eight), which also includes the Werrington grade separation (due to open in 2021) and route-wide power supply upgrades. It was fascinating to see, during a nine-day partial closure of the East Coast Main Line in January 2021, the 11,000 tonne, 155-metre curved concrete box tunnel at Werrington being pushed into place.

Life-expired signalling will be replaced with European Train Control System (ETCS) equipment on the Moorgate branch, Hertford Loop and between King's Cross, Royston and Stoke Tunnel, just south of Grantham. The expectation is the programme will be complete by the end of 2029. The scheme, known at the East Coast Digital Programme, includes ETCS in-cab signalling technology and removing lineside signals. In-cab signalling will be introduced first with a pilot scheme on the Moorgate branch from December 2021. At some stage control will be transferred from the Power Signal Boxes at King's Cross, Doncaster and Peterborough to York Rail Operating centre (ROC).

So much has changed, and continues to change, since the 1950's when I started train spotting!

Bill Wilson

How & Where Did It All Begin? (Part 4) - Paddy Carey

In Part 1 we heard how Paddy started off "trainspotting" (and we also found, in Parts 2 & 3, that the more he wrote the more his memory was jogged!). This month picks up the story as he moved to Hertfordshire:

Previously I mentioned my move to I.C.I plastics in Bessemer Road and things noticed at Welwyn Garden City station, after I moved there from Liverpool. Also, I told of getting married and having a flat in Hatfield, about a minute walk from the Hatfield to St. Albans branch near Ellenbrook (Nast Hyde Halt). My then father-in-law told me about services being delayed (before World War 2) on this branch one evening due to thick fog. He met up with the Editor of a popular children's magazine and they had a few ales while waiting. And a few more, because the editor liked a drink. Eventually they decided to walk back feeling their way along the tracks to Nast Hyde in the fog, so the story went.

We moved next to Knebworth in the early 70s, with a young family, to a small semi backing onto the main line. After our first night there I thought we would never settle: The evening Deltic would roar past just after 10 o'clock which we could hear approaching from Woolmer Green. After a week we didn't notice it! I then changed jobs and moved to Warren Spring Laboratories, Stevenage also near the main line. There I met Chris Duffell, who told me one day that 60103 *Flying Scotsman* would be going past that day. This would probably be its first outing on the main line after restoration, but unfortunately I cannot pinpoint the date. At this time I was going to North London Polytechnic for one evening a week and I had a lift to Stevenage station, which was then further north than the current one. The coaching stock was pretty much unchanged from steam days, as I recall, and was quite stuffy in summer. Alas by then I did not note what I saw on these trips.

It was always good to get back to Knebworth and the short walk home. At weekends I used to take my children out to watch the trains go past at Knebworth station because we could see up and down in advance, rather than the elevated line at the bottom of our garden. The ticket collector at the station lived in a cottage further north near the overbridge and when we went past there were always exotic cooking smells.

Preparations were in-hand for electrification and I remember seeing the gantries being installed from our garden. I also remember seeing an unusual train - it was either the gas turbine prototype or similar HST. It was white, I think, and was a complete mystery to me at the time. The rest of my time in Knebworth was watching trains go by from the garden but family was more important so I probably missed much interesting traffic. In these times cameras used film, which was a luxury then, so what photographs I took were limited to family and I have no record of those railway days. In 1972 I changed jobs and was employed as a lab assistant in Ware, working in what was then Allen and Hanburys (now GSK). There was just the one research building there, opposite the manufacturing site and this was a "new" development - the clubhouse and canteen definitely felt as if they were run by

manufacturing. As I progressed up the ladder I was sent on various meetings, some overseas, to extend my knowledge of chromatography.



BB 67344 at Evreux

We had a group within the company that hosted meetings to discuss chromatography across our sites. I went up to Montrose, with my assistant, on the Night Sleeper from Kings Cross and I did manage to see what was hauling us. It was a Deltic *The Black Watch*. It is the only time I have been on a sleeper and I found it so enjoyable. We had breakfast in Montrose prior to going to the factory and, if I remember correctly, I had my first Arbroath Smokie. On another occasion, we were going to visit a contract laboratory in South Wales, and at Paddington I saw a Western hydraulic locomotive: It may have been in blue livery by then. I thought the few early liveries such as “desert sand” were so imaginative, as was the concept of diesel hydraulic traction.

We also had a site in France that was part of the expanding business. I went once, was delighted at their canteen and friendliness, and took a few pictures of some local locomotives after I left the site early. These were on “old” film, before digital, and with a very modest camera so please excuse the quality.

When we moved house to Hertford, one evening coming back from Tesco I heard a diesel. This I knew, even then, was unusual so I dashed home for the camera and caught a few pictures of what I assume was an inspection train in Hertford East station.



Nameplate of 31601 seen on a test train at Hertford East station.

I am afraid my non-digital photos may jump out of chronological sequence as I progress with this “saga” and I dig out my old photos. There will be more, possibly liveries of long-gone operators who ran the services to Hertford East. And even more maintenance trains and RHTTs (but this will be in the digital era).

Paddy Carey

Look forward to more of Paddy’s personal recollections in the next issue of *Railway Ramblings*.

A Love Affair (Part 11) (or Lovers Tiff?) – Steve Lacey

When Steve wrote his articles about the restoration of 34081 “92 Squadron” he promised to write about the in-service issues.

As I started writing this, we were awaiting the next stage of release from lockdown, but no luck for those wanting release, or for my readers! As promised (threatened?) by our editor, here is another in the series about 34081 *92 Squadron*. This time, the story of the locomotive’s time following release to traffic on the NVR, her travels to other railways and, at times, more grounds for divorce than a Love Affair!

Initially, as a new engine on the circuit, we were in high demand, especially as the only Battle of Britain locomotive in malachite green with sunshine lettering and yellow stripes along the casing. The reason she was so popular, was the potential to gain added income from photographic charters, not to mention the novelty of a “new” locomotive. Photographic charters are where a group hire the locomotive and stage run-pasts and set up shots for the photographers. But why is malachite green so important for this? The answer is simple; British Railways green does not show up well against foliage, which is the normal background, unless you are by the sea! It is also easier to get a decent picture, if the sun is not shining. Of course, a newly out-shopped locomotive is also beautiful, especially ours!



I rest my case; the trees in the right-hand picture are not even in leaf!

(Picture on left, at Swanage, courtesy of Kevin Wilkins)

After considerable negotiation with the Nene Valley Railway, who naturally wanted her at home as much as possible and with a few side deals (“I’ll let you play with mine, if you let me play with yours”.... locomotives of course!) an agreement was reached. Therefore, in March 2017 she was loaded onto 2 low-loaders (one for the loco and one for the tender) for the journey to the Severn Valley Railway. As is normal, the requesting railway pays the transport cost and an agreed steaming fee for use on their railway. She had a great time at the SVR, a particular highlight being when she lifted an eight-coach train unaided, whereas *Flying Scotsman* had to be banked! To watch a video of her time there, use the link to footage by chairman of the Battle of Britain Locomotive Society, Ian Bowskill: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MyCkQSRCKoQ>

Our next outing was part of this two-way deal. From the SVR it was back onto 2 low-loaders and off to Swanage for their "Strictly Bulleid Gala" 31st March – 2nd April 2017. They had gathered together 5 working Bulleid's, namely 34046 *Braunton* (running as 34052 *Lord Dowding*a scrapped member of the class), 34053 *Sir Keith Park*, 34070 *Manston*, 34081 *92 Squadron* and 34092 *City of Wells*. Strictly speaking there were 7 Bulleid's on display, as 34072 *257 Squadron* was nearing the end of her overhaul in Herston Works and 34010's remains were on display at Corfe Station, unrestored! In total 4 un-rebuilt and 3 rebuilt light pacifics! We had a wonderful reception there, as the only Malachite Green liveried engine and freshly out shopped to boot.



92 Squadron on a short freight, south of Corfe Castle - Photo courtesy of Kevin Wilkins

We then went home to the NVR, before getting back on a low loader to visit the Mid-Hants in July for "The 50th Anniversary of the End of Southern Steam". Next came the Great Central Railway in October 2017, for their Autumn Gala, followed by a week of service trains on the GCR. All the preserved railways visited to this point had the usual speed limit of 25mph.....but the GCR is allowed 45 mph for public trains. Hence, we found ourselves stretching our legs on a mail-drop train!



Exchanging the token at Quorn & Woodhouse Station, while hauling balcony coach *Quorn*.

Having run reliably since the return to service on the NVR in Feb 2017, we were invited to attend the North York Moors Railway for their RAF 100 Autumn Gala, celebrating a hundred years since the RAF was formed in 1918. This was scheduled for October 2018 and took place during the filming of the 2nd TV documentary about the line. A film crew came to Wansford to interview our Chief Engineer, Alan Whenman, showing the preparations for the move north, with shots of me and a mate in the background polishing our rods.....no sniggering in the ranks please! Then, with a couple of weeks to go - potential disaster! Cracks were noticed around the stays below the fire-hole door resulting in the failure of *92 Squadron* at the NVR

If you watched the TV series, you will have seen the drama surrounding this shocking discovery. I will tell you the true story, but in the best traditions of a cliff hanger, that will have to wait until next time!

Steve Lacey

Contributions to Railway Ramblings

You will have seen that we have recently had a number of new contributors to this newsletter but we still need more of you to “put pen to paper” and write articles. Use your knowledge and/or experience to help provide a rich variety of material for the benefit of all - photos and/or text – please contact the editor, John Dossett, at hitchinnewsletter@rcts.org.uk

Flying Through Welwyn North



Taken at 08:16 on 19 June 2021 - The details are in the photo!

Photo: Mikky Hart

The Nene Valley Railway



Continuing the introduction to local heritage lines we now turn to the Nene Valley Railway. As many readers will already know this is the home of 34081 "92 Squadron", the love of our Chairman's life. Rather unusually this railway does not seem to publish a potted history so, we have constructed one from information in various sources.

The London & Birmingham Railway (L&BR) built the line, reaching Peterborough in 1845. Wansford Tunnel (617 yds) was one of the biggest undertakings – made easier (and cheaper) by the area being a major brick producer. In 1846 the L&BR was acquired by the London & North Western Railway (L&NWR) with Wansford station becoming a junction in 1867 when a line was constructed to Stamford.

Later, in 1923, the grouping saw the LMS take control until nationalisation in 1948. Post-war saw traffic rapidly decline and Wansford station closed to passenger services in 1957, with through passenger services ceasing in 1966. Then, in 1972 the line was closed completely.

The Peterborough Locomotive Society (PLS) was formed in 1970 to restore a scrapped Class 5 steam locomotive 73050 (which had already been purchased by clergyman Richard Patten and found to be in working order!). Also, around then the local councils had been hoping to have the National Railway Museum located in the city, but lost out to York, and there were then proposals to redevelop the line along the Nene valley back into a working line as a tourist attraction. The PLS, now transformed into the Peterborough Railway Society, and after the Peterborough Development Corporation purchased the line from British Railways, the PRS took on the lease of the line.

Wansford became the centre of operations and a shuttle service through the tunnel started in 1975. Restoration of the line to Orton Mere Station and additional locomotives and carriages (including some from Denmark and France) enabled a Nene Valley Railway public service to start on 4 June 1977. In the early years the NVR suffered lack of visitor facilities and a lack of public visibility, but things gradually improved, when the line was extended to Yarwell in 1983.

Following an appeal, launched in 1984, the line was restored into Peterborough with the first NVR passenger service into the city in 1986. The line was now 7½ miles and much more accessible to visitors.



Map reproduced by kind permission of the NVR

Wansford signal box (1907) is one of the largest preserved boxes still in its original location. The adjacent crossing gates are controlled by a (visible) big wheel inside The box still controls most of its signals and points by the traditional method of large cable-connected mechanical levers.

The station building at Wansford is, perhaps surprisingly, a new-build facility designed around the needs of the modern-day tourist/visitor and opened in 1995.

Like many heritage lines there is often the question about possible expansion. In the case of the NVR this would be the line towards Oundle, a lovely historic town that hasn't had regular timetabled trains since 1964. However, the number of missing bridges, including a substantial viaduct, makes the project most unlikely.

The NVR in Operation

Today, the NVR aims to provide services throughout the year, except for a break January to March during which essential maintenance is performed. Officially categorised as a light railway and with a maximum speed limit of 25mph the railway plays host to a good variety of locomotives (including 34081) and has the capability to provide a wide range of services.

Claiming uniqueness in the range of stock it can operate (from 10 countries) has enabled it to offer itself to film makers who can use it to represent all sorts of locations here and abroad.

Wansford is the site of two restoration sheds – the loco shed, with public viewing gallery (when Covid ends!), and the carriage and wagon shed, to which there is no public access. There is no public access to the yard, but there are good views from the footpath (leading to the maintenance sheds), the platform and the footbridge.

There are around 200 volunteers who give their time and effort for free, in addition to 10 paid employees. The duties covered include steam and diesel locomotive driving, catering on and off trains, manning the station shop, museum and secondhand bookshop, signalling, rolling stock maintenance and restoration, civil engineering, ticket sales and general duties. On a typical day, 25 to 30 volunteers are required to operate the system; this rises to 40 during the peak summer months. The busiest time of all is throughout December, when the Santa Specials run. It takes 80 people to run these trains; distributing mince pies and drinks to adults, sweets to the children and, of course, somebody has to be Father Christmas as our RCTS Branch Chairman knows so well! However, around 17,000 to 18,000 passengers travel on these services, a significant proportion of the 65,000 people who normally visit the Nene Valley Railway each year.

To make an enquiry about volunteering on the NVR email volunteers@nvr.org.uk or ring them on 01780 784444.



NVR Driver Experience Package

This includes theory and practical driving of a steam locomotive. The course will be on a large locomotive without rolling stock and consists of 1 hour tuition and 1 hour on the footplate. During the hour on the footplate, two participants will take it in turns to drive and fire the locomotive for a total distance of approximately 15 miles.

from £325 per person
(Check availability on the NVR website.)

Following closure due to the Covid-19 pandemic regulations the NVR is now resuming services and intending visitors should consult their website for the most up-to-date details.

THE NENE VALLEY RAILWAY

Wansford Station, Stibbington, Peterborough, Cambridgeshire, PE8 6LR

Telephone: 01780 784444 (enquiries), 01780 784404 (talking timetable)

Website: www.nvr.org.uk

BATTLE OF BRITAIN LOCOMOTIVE SOCIETY

Website: www.92squadron.co.uk

Details reproduced with kind permission of the NVR

Middy and “Shreddie” Scoop an HRA Award



The Heritage Railway Association Morgan Preservation Award was won by the Mid-Suffolk Light Railway, and the “Shredded Wheat” locomotive at a virtual event on 28th April 2021

The 1934 diesel mechanical 0-4-0 locomotive was built for the Shredded Wheat Company’s Welwyn Garden City factory by Fowler of Leeds. After falling out of use, it was eventually bought in a very decrepit state by Mr. Tony Goff, who took it to brothers Neal and Nigel Davis, for restoration at their works near Attleborough in Norfolk.



Neal and Nigel, who are both members and volunteers at the Mid-Suffolk Light Railway and, by general consent, in charge of the Middy’s diesel fleet, due to their enthusiasm and expertise for all things internal combustion, set-to to return the rusting hulk into a working locomotive again.

After only 6-months work and the support of owner Tony, ‘Shreddie’ was delivered in full working order to the Brockford headquarters of the Middy, where it has remained ever since as a valued member of the railway’s motive power complement. It is now usually to be found heading the works train whenever help

is needed on track or trackside maintenance and, more recently, engaged on the MSLR extension project. It has also now been fitted with vacuum brakes and can be used on passenger trains, although as Neal said, ‘It is so low geared it might be quicker to walk!’

Owner Tony is absolutely delighted that his engine has become an award winner, but quick to give credit to the Middy team for their skill and the opportunity for proper work the railway now provides for his ‘Shreddie’.

(Reproduced with kind permission of the MSLR)

The July Puzzle – Martin Elms

This month I have another 21 miscellaneous questions for you, to test your railway knowledge:

1. What was unique about the western end of the Tweedmouth to Kelso branch line?
2. Why can't you post a letter to No's 23 and 24 Leinster Gardens, London?
3. What was the shortest standard-gauge passenger railway in the British Isles?
4. Which 3 steam locos were presented with North American bells?
5. At the time of the collapse of the Tay Bridge it's designer Sir Thomas Bouch was working on plans for an even larger structure - to cross what?
6. What is the name of the concrete viaduct on the LNWR Lyme Regis branch?
7. Which railway, when first built in 1836, ran entirely on a viaduct?
8. What was destined to be the most southerly station on the Didcot, Newbury and Southampton Railway?
9. In 1946 the SR added a former LSWR locomotive to its stock: what was it and which railway did it come from?
10. Which was the first railway to carry fare-paying passengers hauled by a steam locomotive?
11. Which Light Railway was transferred from the British Transport Commission to the Admiralty in 1956?
12. What was the unique rolling stock vehicle used on the North Tyneside Electric system?
13. Which two BR regions used Bulleid "Tavern Cars"?
14. In distance terms what was the furthestmost station from Waterloo on the LSWR?
15. What was the original name of A4 <i>Sir Ralph Wedgwood</i> destroyed in an air raid at York in 1942?
16. Of the 184 LNER class V2, how many carried names?
17. Which two classes of diesel locos were given the TOPS class code 43?
18. Who was the design consultant largely responsible for the appearance of the Class 52 Western diesel locos?
19. Which electric loco was the only member of TOPS class 80?
20. Who produced a report on the proposed electrification of the GWR lines west of Taunton and when was it published?
21. Where was the only level crossing on the electrified Underground system?

Best of luck – solutions are on the next page. No cheating!

Martin Elms

Puzzle Solutions

Solutions to the puzzles in this issue (page 14):

1. It was the only line in Scotland that was wholly owned and operated by a pre-grouping English company – in this case the North Eastern Railway. **2.** They have a false frontage – When the houses were demolished to make way for the Inner Circle underground line the residents of Leinster Gardens insisted on the provision of the façade to maintain the continuity of the terrace. **3.** The 2m 37ch Easingwold Railway from Alne (ECML) to Easingwold. **4.** 60010 *Dominion of Canada*, 6000 *King George V* and 46100 *Royal Scot*. **5.** The Firth of Forth. **6.** Cannington Viaduct. **7.** The London and Greenwich Railway, with a 4-mile stretch over 878 brick arches. **8.** Winchester – Chesil/Cheesehill. **9.** Adams Radial; Kent and East Sussex Railway (to be used on the Axminster branch). **10.** The Canterbury and Whitstable Railway, in May 1830. **11.** The Cleobury Mortimer & Ditton Priors Light Railway. **12.** The perambulator vehicle - which was attached to six-car electric trains at the height of the summer services. **13.** The Southern and Eastern regions. **14.** Padstow. **15.** *Gadwell*. **16.** Seven. **17.** HST power cars and the North British Warship class. **18.** Misha Black. **19.** The former WR gas turbine loco 18100, converted to driver training loco E1000 then renumbered to E2001. **20.** C Messrs Mere and McLellan in 1939. **21.** North Weald.

More from the Photo Album



Hitchen on a typical afternoon in 1983 (Class 37 on freight plus a 312 EMU)

Photo: Tony Turner

Meetings - Looking Further Ahead

At Hitchin

Subject to the Covid-19 regulations

Held at Tilehouse Street Baptist Church Hall, Upper Tilehouse Street, Hitchin SG5 2EE on the Tuesday evening from 7:30 to 10:00 (doors open from 7:00)

14 th Sept	45596 Bahamas Locomotive Society – “A Preservation Pioneer”	<i>John Hillier</i>
12 th Oct	That Was the Year That Was 1969	<i>Geoff Plumb</i>
9 th Nov	European Railways	<i>Rob Freeman</i>
14 th Dec	History of Leatherhead Station – Home to the RCTS Library & Archive Centre	<i>Andy Davies</i>

At Welwyn Garden City

Subject to the Covid-19 regulations

Held at the Methodist Church, Ludwick Way/Cole Green Lane junction, Welwyn Garden City, Herts AL7 3PN on the Tuesday afternoon from 2:00 to 4:30 (doors open from 1:30)

28 th Sept	Edge Hill Marshalling Yard & Its Complex of Railways	<i>George Howe</i>
26 th Oct	The East Coast Main Line, Kings Cross to York	<i>Stephen Gay</i>
30 th Nov	A Northern View	<i>Stephen Batty</i>
21 st Dec	A Lifetime of Railway Discoveries	<i>Mike Bunn</i>

As soon as we can, we will be re-instating the refreshment break (tea/coffee & biscuits) during the meetings. We will also reintroduce the bookstall, where you can browse a substantial collection of pre-owned books (and hopefully make some purchases, which will contribute towards the running costs of the 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 gricersteve@hotmail.com

Back Copies of Railway Ramblings

Back copies of Railway Ramblings are now available on the RCTS website: <https://rcts.org.uk/hitchin>

Protocol for Keeping Safe at Branch Meetings

As we restart our meetings the safety of all of our members is paramount.

Coming to branch meetings might be nice-to-do but is almost certainly not something to do unless there is a very minimal risk. Many of us are of an age where catching Covid-19 is likely to carry serious consequences. The following measures will apply at our meetings in order to provide you, our members, with a safe low-risk environment.

- You need to advise the Branch Secretary if you wish to attend a meeting: hitchin@rcts.co.uk (preferably) or 01438 714277. Do not attend unless the Branch Secretary has been advised.
- Do not come to meetings if you are feeling unwell.
- Put on a face mask as you enter and wear it throughout the meeting.
- Avoid touching door handles as you enter (committee members will act as “doormen”).
- Use the hand-sanitiser as you enter.
- Maintain social distancing as much as possible.
- Do not move seats around, and please use the same seat throughout the meeting.
- If you use the wc, wash your hands thoroughly and reapply hand sanitiser after leaving the wc.
- At the end of the meeting apply hand-sanitiser as you leave.
- Should you test positive for Covid-19 or have symptoms within fourteen days of attending a meeting please let the Branch Secretary know.

Unfortunately, there will not be refreshments provided during the meeting and no book-sales table.

As usual there will be a register of those attending and this will be used to assist in contact tracing should the need arise.

If we all follow the rules our meetings should be a safe environment.

Steve Lacey (Branch Chairman)

Railway Ramblings is published by the committee of the Hitchin & Welwyn Garden City 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