

Railway Ramblings

Issue 138

January 2022

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



Steam & Light Festival on the Mid-Suffolk Light Railway
Image credit: John Reeve, MSLR

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.

Branch Programme

Although the current Covid-19 situation is making our future programme look very uncertain, details are published here with optimism! Please check your email for last-minute changes.

We remain very concerned that our meetings are conducted in a safe way. Therefore, we developed a meeting “Protocol” to minimise risks. The “Protocol” is published on page 15.

It is most important that you familiarise yourself with this if you are planning to attend.

We trust that you will feel that attendance will be as safe as possible and we look forward to seeing you.

During January 2022

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

11th January **The Work of the Railway Heritage Trust** Andy Savage

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

25th January **North from Euston, from the RCTS Photographic Archive** David Jackman

During February 2022

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

8th February **The “Prince of Wales” a Brand-New Steam Locomotive for the 21st Century**
Rob Morland

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

22nd February **The Varying Fortunes of the Hatfield to St Albans Railway** Alistair Cameron

Donations will be requested for attendance branch meetings – these, together with book sales, go towards the costs of hiring the venues, speakers expenses/fees and the provision of tea/coffee & biscuits during the meeting. These are currently £2 for members and £3.50 for non-members.

Hitchin meetings are held at Tilehouse Street Baptist Church Hall, Upper Tilehouse Street, Hitchin SG5 2EE

Welwyn Garden City meetings are held at the Methodist Church, Ludwick Way/Cole Green Lane junction, Welwyn Garden City, Herts AL7 3PN

“Zoom” Virtual Presentations

Some RCTS branches are still offering Zoom virtual presentations. There are also some “national” Zoom presentations (on the fourth Thursday of each month). Details of these can be found on the RCTS website (and in the *Railway Observer*).



Chairman's Platform

Happy New Year! Traditionally it is time to make those New Year's resolutions. The best ones are those which involve doing things you want to do! Avoid those that you know you can't, or won't, keep!

I truly hope that 2022 will be better than 2021, but I have to say it is not starting off too well. With an excellent calendar of presentations to look forward to this year, we have to keep our fingers crossed and hope that, as a country, despite the appearance of the new omicron variant of Covid-19, we can get on top of the pandemic and actually be able to run the full programme. Having just cancelled the second of the December 2021 meetings (I understand that this would have been Mike Bunn's 500th presentation!) the outlook does not look very promising - but we should remain optimistic that things will soon improve. Fortunately, for the moment we have the RCTS "national" Zoom presentations. Details of these can be found in the Railway Observer and on the RCTS website.

With a busy Christmas now over (my beard and build give me an obvious role over the Christmas period at the NVR), I thought the editor would allow me to rest – but no chance. I have been pressed in writing about the Santa Specials and, next month (February), more about the other locos and stock currently in the care of the Nene Valley. I expect I will also take the opportunity to update you on any developments with *92 Squadron*!

Steve Lacey

Local Observations



All reports as seen at Welwyn North and the local area

Two more Class 321 were sent for storage at Gascoigne Wood from Clacton on **Friday 19 November** the train through here at 14:00 consisting of 37800/321410 & 321417. A similar move occurred on **Saturday 20 November** when 66732 hauling unit 465028 from Slade Green to Doncaster ran at 14:16. Unusual traction these days occurred on **Monday 22 November** when Colas loco 70813 passed light-engine from Doncaster to Hoo Junction. Also today, 66089 on the Dollands Moor to Scunthorpe worked by running an hour late at 12:42. Problems with 91127 occurred on **Thursday 25 November** - firstly this loco failed at Skipton on an early morning train, this problem was resolved, and the train re-entered service only to fail again in Gasworks Tunnel later in the afternoon, as there is no thunderbird now at this end of the ECML, one was sent from Doncaster to carry out the rescue. Two more Class 321's moved from Clacton to Worksop on **Friday 26 November** for storage - the units 321440/321441 passed here at 14:00. Following the strong winds on **Saturday 27 November** chaos prevailed at Kings Cross - LNER services were running no further north than Newcastle with some cancellations, then late in the afternoon Great Northern had problems when a tree fell onto the track near Royston. It took us over two hours to get home from London, using a Class 717 train to Welwyn Garden City, then fortunately a train calling at Welwyn North came 10 minutes after our arrival. No one knew which trains were running and which were being cancelled - a complete lack of communication by GN to their passengers.

The new Werrington dive-under was in use as from **Monday 29 November**, albeit for a few limited services at present but at least it will help limit some delays on the ECML. At 14:12 on **Wednesday 1 December** 57312 worked from Southall to Norwich with the West Coast charter stock, surprisingly in the consist was 46233 *Duchess of Sutherland* in full steam. 57312 hauling 317509/317892 came past at 11:02 on **Thursday 2 December** running from Ely to Eastleigh. The HST test train that was stabled

in Welwyn Garden City all day eventually worked back to Derby at 23:33. Early on **Friday 3 December** another unit, for scrap this time, running Doncaster to Sims scrapyards in Newport passed here at 07:59 with 37800 hauling 365538. Black 5 44871 with 47802 on the rear ran a charter train from Kings Cross to Lincoln passing here at 09:44 on **Saturday 4 December** returning at 20:04. On **Sunday 5 December** 66743 was noted on a track maintenance train at 09:09 going from Connington South to Whitemoor via Welwyn Garden City where it turned. It then continued to Whitemoor at 09:58. Later 61306 *Mayflower* worked the second charter service to Lincoln this weekend starting from Ealing Broadway, she passed here running really well at 11:06, returning at 20:25.

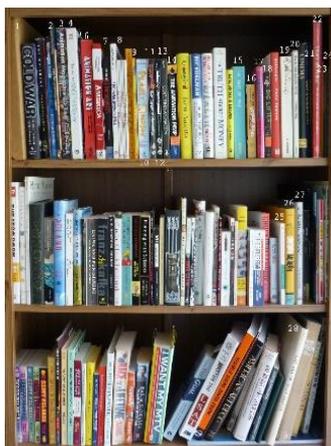
On **Monday 6 December** 66721 hauled unit 465934 from Tonbridge to Doncaster, through here at 08:36, running 85 minutes late. 66144 passed at 10:26, also late by 256 minutes working from Hither Green to Tallington. Two drags occurred on **Tuesday 7 December** - the first 57312 hauling 365532 from Doncaster to Newport for scrapping passed at 08:00, followed later that day when 57306 towing 387201/387204/387205 came by at 14:35 from Reading to Peterborough. 60046 worked an empty freight train from Wembley to Burton on Trent on **Friday 10 December**.

We saw no Christmas Market charter services over the weekend, then on **Monday 13 December** the Dollands Moor to Scunthorpe steel empties including three Class 66's returning from duty in Europe in the consist, comprising of 66051/66179/66224/66244 here at 11:52. Quite a busy day on **Tuesday 14 December** at Welwyn North - we saw 755325 at 07:27 running from Norwich to Hornsey for maintenance, the unit returned via the North London Line. Then at 14:10 two Class 73's numbers 73951/73952, that were stabled in the yard at Welwyn Garden City, worked back to Derby. Whilst at Hertford North, there were three freights in half an hour starting with 66720, with a mixed rake of wagons including a railvac at 13:07 from Hoo Junction to Whitemoor, then 60046 followed at 13:18, with an empty freight from Chaddesden to Wembley, and finally 66543 with 36 containers from London Gateway to Leeds at 13:36. On **Wednesday 15 December** here at Welwyn, another storage working from Clacton to Worksop ran with 37884 hauling 321426/321433 at 12:39. On **Thursday 16 December** 46233 *Duchess of Sutherland* worked Southall to Cambridge with empty stock at 05:53 for a charter to York later in the day from Cambridge. Also today, 37884 took 365508 from Doncaster to Newport at 08:05 for scrapping. 57601 & 57314 hauled Pullman stock from York to Southall, passing here at 22:34. 46233 *Duchess of Sutherland* ran again on **Saturday 18 December** with a charter service from Kings Cross to York, here at 08:02, 8 minutes early probably due to the stopping service that would have been in front of it being cancelled. The train returned at 20:57 minus the Duchess. A second charter ran today, this time from Kings Cross to Beverley with 90034 and 67005 passing at 08:43 returning at 21:32.

(Observations courtesy of our Branch Secretary, Dave Elsdon)

New Members

We welcome Richard Oliver, of Welwyn Garden City, and Dominic Estall, of Hitchin, as new members of the RCTS and the Hitchin & Welwyn Garden City branch.



The Book-Table

A familiar feature to those who attend branch meetings, the book-table has returned. Currently with hundreds of books, ranging from “coffee table” volumes to rare-to-find treasures, this is an opportunity to purchase a pre-owned book (or two) and thus contribute financially towards the branch running costs. All books are most modestly priced.

We are always looking for “new” stock, so you can also contribute books which you no longer want – which will free-up space on your book shelves for new volumes!

A Mystery Story – by Martin Elms

“I’m sorry sir, but your car will have to stay here for a few days as we need to order the special parts.”

That’s a blow I thought. I was going to visit my friends Richard and Marian in Aylebridge for a pre-Christmas drink and a stay over.

I had moved to St Johns about two months ago and this was my first visit to this part of town.

I walked away from the garage crossing roads heading back to my more familiar area.

I wonder how I can still visit Richard and Marian. I could use the bus or hire a car tomorrow, I pondered, and continued to walk. I then noticed a side road on my left “Railway Street “ written on a metal sign halfway up a wall.

I didn’t know St Johns had a railway I thought. It’s only just after five so I can explore this street and see if the station exists, I know Aylebridge is about thirty miles away and I wonder if there is a train service to it.

Being a car user, my knowledge of trains is almost zero, so I walked along the street to find out. The mist turned into a thick cold fog, and I could hear my footsteps echoing as I walked further along, the fog made the streetlights dim and the cold made for an unpleasant time.

I turned a corner and through the fog I made out the shape of St Johns station ... so there is a railway station and the lights inside indicated it was open. Well, I learn something every day about St Johns.

I walked through the entrance – all quiet. A chalked sign was placed against the closed booking office window “Due to staff shortage this office is closed – please pay on the train or at your destination.”

Oh well I continued onto the foggy platform.

More signs - Trains to Aylebridge leave from this platform at 40 mins past the hour.

So, no staff, just notices. I moved along the platform where the waiting room was surprisingly open.

A fire burnt in the grate, so somebody must have been about. I took my mobile phone out. I’ll tell Richard to expect me by train that will surprise him knowing how I never go anywhere except by car.

Oh, blow the phone wasn’t working.

I snuggled down on the hard bench not too long to wait.

Suddenly there was a loud roar outside as a train entered the station, swirling the fog about.



I re-entered the platform as the train squealed to halt and I boarded. What an ancient relic this is. I thought trains were all glass and aluminium and all high tech – not this one!

The train lurched away, and I almost fell into a dirty looking seat at a table, there was nobody else in the coach.

The journey progressed. Looking through the dirty windows and fog I recognised some of the station names having seen them on road signs on my journeys along the new dual carriageway between St Johns and Aylebridge.

At last, the train stopped at the fog-shrouded Aylebridge terminus. I left the train. Ghostly figures were in front of me as I looked for the exit ahead of me. Another chalk sign was on my left – does the railway consist of handwritten information signs? I wonder how foreign tourists get about. The sign informed me to use this side entrance as the station was under redevelopment. As I approached the side entrance I saw a member of staff, at last someone to pay my fare to, however he went into an office as I approached and ignored my calls to him and closed the door. Oh well I tried to pay, I'll take the free ride as an early Christmas present! I walked alone down this side street at the end of which I could see brighter lights and I left the fog behind.

I entered a busy area of shops people and traffic the “ping” from my pocket told me that my phone was back in action. I recognised the area as Aylebridge shopping centre and Richard’s house was only a few hundred yards away.

I crossed a busy street and noticed a pub “The Silent Whistle.” After a train journey why not finish in a railway themed pub.

The pub was warm and inviting with a customer at the bar looking into his half-empty glass.

“How can I help you?” asked the bartender.

I ordered a pint.

“I’m glad the fog has cleared,” I said conversationally.

“There has been no fog here Sir.”

“But ... on the train from St Johns just now, it was thick.”

“Train, Sir?”

The other customer turned to stare at me.

“Yes, I’ve just come here by train from St Johns.”

More strange looks.

“But Sir, that railway closed in 1964, the terminus over there was demolished and redeveloped – look”, the bartender pointed out of the pub window to over the road.

I turned and gasped.

Over the road was ...

A B&Q Superstore.

Martin Elms



The Real Train in the Fog

The station I used to illustrate Martin’s fictional story is Lionheart Station on the Aln Valley Railway and the locomotive is No.9 *Richboro*.

I took these photos mid-morning on 7 April 2019. The fog eventually cleared and there was no B&Q Superstore!

John Dossett

A Love Affair (part 16) – Steve Lacey

The Santa Specials



In Part 15, I described the last set of repairs, completed just in time to run this year's "Santa Specials". Santa's are a vital part of the Nene Valley Railway's finances, keeping the railway solvent in the lean months and financing vital out-of-season maintenance. Last year was severely compromised by closure on the 19th December 2020, as Peterborough had been placed in Tier 4 of the Covid-19 restrictions. Remember when a tier was a layer of a wedding cake?

NVR Santa Specials run "top and tailed" between Wansford and Peterborough. They are "heavy" trains in NVR terms, with 7 coaches and a Class 14 diesel to tow. The coaching stock used is the continental rake, as this has a higher capacity than the ex-BR stock. This is air braked, whereas our loco has a steam brake for the loco with a vacuum brake for the train. In order to run safely we have a specially designed brake which, when supplied with air from the Class 14, via a through pipe, can brake the train. A special valve proportions the braking between the loco steam brake and the air brakes on the train. This year a new coach was added, which being longer than most coaches, meant that the end of the train was off the end of the platform at Wansford. Due to this, the rest of the train has to load through the last 2 coaches. Some thought they were walking to Peterborough!



Due to Covid, trains run out of Platform 2 but, on return from Peterborough, run into Platform 3, where the old station building is situated. Passengers disembark here, walking directly out from the platform onto the north side of the level crossing, thus ensuring no mixing of passengers from trains and keeping the numbers on site as low as possible. The train then works “empty stock” to just short of the tunnel, returning via the crossover, into Platform 2. During this manoeuvre the train is cleaned and tables re-laid ready for the next group of passengers. Most of the servicing of the train is done by the youth group based at Ferry Meadows (now called “Overton for Ferry Meadows”). They have also been responsible for restoring the new coach, a *Wagon Lits* Restaurant car. This is beautiful and will in future be used as part of a dining train, a useful source of income.



The shine on the magnificent marquetry ruins pictures!

But what of the main man I hear you ask? Passengers are greeted at a reception desk, where badges giving age and gender is given to the parents, for the children. This needs tact, as many a boy has been labelled a girl by mistake! The name Sky or August gives little clue! Passengers then queue through the platform marquee, past our excellent professional magician/juggler, to meet Santa and be given their present.



Note Santa (guess who) is wearing an NVR branded mask and has his vaccination card pinned to the front of the stage. A sign of the times!

This is true for most of our customers, but for those booking the St Nicholas lounge (the ex-Belgium Railways bar car) Santa visits them and gives out named presents. The lounge accommodates up to 16 people, so is often booked by families or parties (err...no, gatherings!). Normally Santa travels on the train, but this year, to be Covid safe; he has returned to the platform before the train leaves.



My family and their friends in the St Nicholas lounge

As I write this on Christmas Eve, we have completed our Santa duties both, *92 Squadron* and me. Only one hiccup this year, *92 Squadron* was failed with leaking stays one day, by an over enthusiastic inspector, only to be passed fit the following day by our engineer, without further attention!



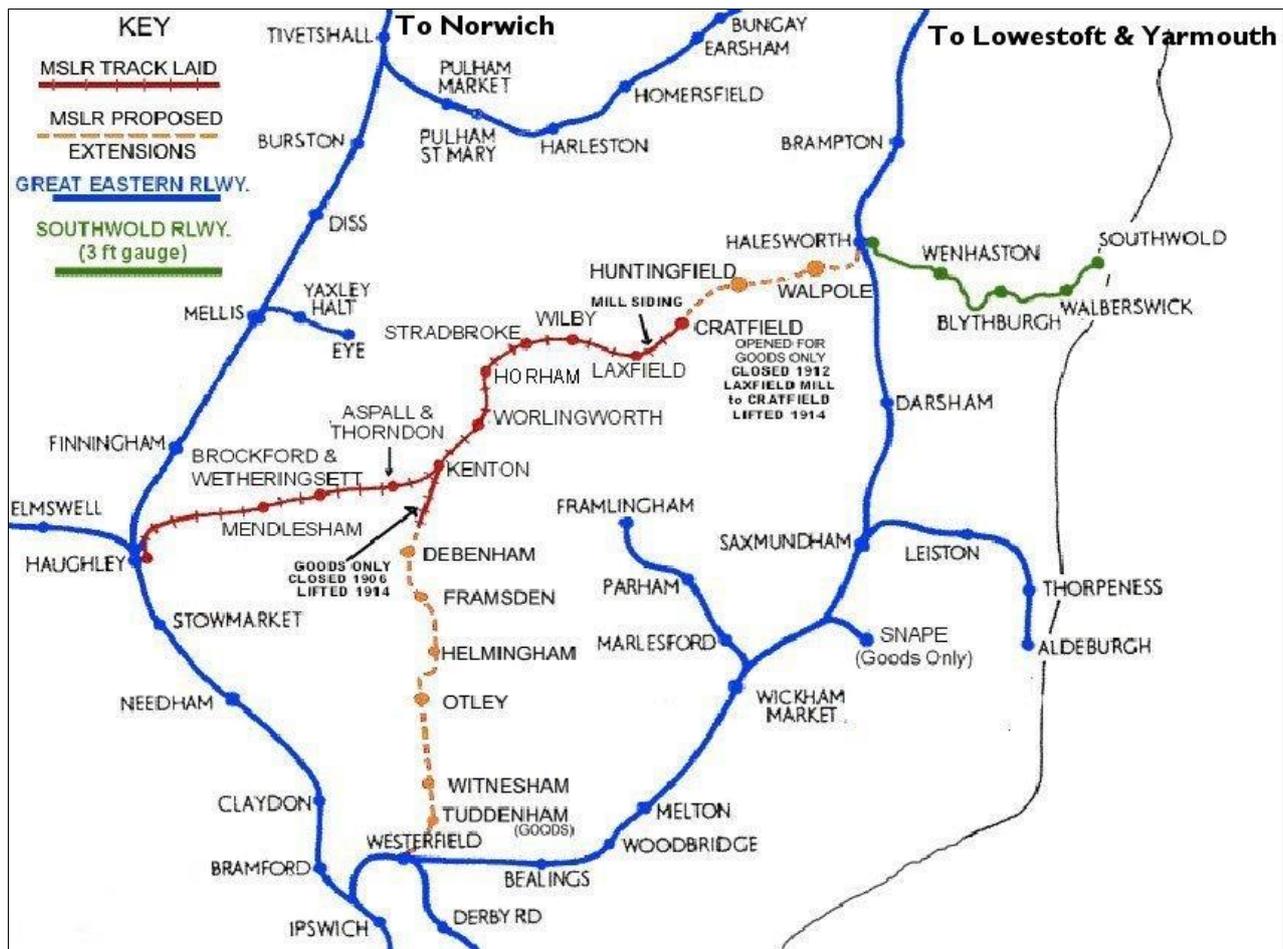
I hope you had a merry and safe Christmas, as we look forward to a happier New Year.

Steve Lacey

Light Railways in Mid-Suffolk

During 2021 we featured the Mid-Suffolk Light Railway (MSLR) on a number of occasions. As a lesser-known heritage line you might have wondered where it is and how it fits into the larger railway picture. The following material is reproduced by kind permission of the MSLR.

In the late Victorian period (like now!), mid-Suffolk was poorly connected to the national railway network. The main lines from Ipswich to Norwich and Ipswich to Lowestoft & Yarmouth passed to the west and east of the area respectively, but only short branch lines to Eye and Framlingham penetrated its rural depths.



Railway lines in mid-Suffolk, including the proposed and actual routes of the MSLR.

Communities across mid-Suffolk were calling for railways to be built to boost agriculture and relieve poverty. However, the Great Eastern Railway, which dominated East Anglia, was not the most prosperous organisation and could not justify the expenditure. So, following the passing of the Light Railways Act, local community leaders began to develop their own railway scheme. The plan for the Mid-Suffolk Light Railway was to provide a link between the two Great Eastern main lines, from Haughley to Halesworth, with an additional line running south from Kinton to Westerfield.

The MSLR Company was formed to promote, build and operate the line, with local men prominent on the Board of Directors including at various times:

F.S. Stevenson, Woodbridge (MP for Eye), The Earl of Stradbroke, Henham Hall, J.B. Chevallier, Aspall Hall, F. Remnant, Halesworth, and J.D. Cobbold, Ipswich.

In April 1900 the Company was granted its Light Railway Order, authorising them to raise money and begin construction. The MSLR held a grand ceremony for cutting the first sod at Westerfield on May 3rd 1902. Ironically the MSLR was never to reach as far as Westerfield.

The January Presentations

The Work of the Railway Heritage Trust - Andy Savage MBE

11th January, at Hitchin



Andy Savage is the Executive Director of the Trust, which he joined at the start of 2010. Prior to that he was Deputy Chief Inspector of the Rail Accident Investigation Branch of the Department for Transport, following a long career in railway civil engineering and, more recently, contractor safety. Andy has a long involvement in railway heritage, and in the building aspects of it, with a particular involvement in the Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Railways. Andy is a Fellow of the Institution of Civil Engineers, the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport, the Institution of Railway Operators and the Permanent Way Institution (of which he was President from 2006 to 2008). He is also a Chartered Member of the Institute of Occupational Safety and Health. Andy was awarded an MBE in 2021 New Year's Honours list for services to the rail industry and heritage.

Britain's railway heritage is the world's richest. It includes a wide range of types of buildings and structures, many of which were first devised in this country to meet the needs of the new railways. Every style and material is represented in its architecture and engineering. This heritage is still growing: railway buildings completed as recently as 1966 have now been listed. The 681 railway buildings and structures listed in 1985 in England, Scotland and Wales had increased to some 1,650 by 2009; Ancient Monuments increased from 45 to over 100 in the same period, while numerous parts of the railway estate fall within Conservation Areas. Along with churches and government departments, the railway industry is one of the most significant owners of historic premises and structures. Of particular interest is the extent to which the industry's infrastructure is still in use for its original purpose.

North from Euston, from the RCTS Photographic Archive - David Jackman

25th January, at Welwyn Garden City



Class 7P No. 46133 'The Green Howards' on a Euston to Glasgow service near Penrith 16/6/1962

Image credit: Edwin Cowper.

Apparently, the presentation isn't exclusively steam, some shiny new (and not so shiny) diesels and electrics will be included.

The January Puzzle – Martin Elms

This month, the first letter of the answer to the following questions will spell a seasonal greeting:

1. What was the name of loco D227?		
2. St Ives branch line junction in Cornwall is St?		
3. What was the surname of George, GWR loco superintendent from 1864 – 1896?		
4. What was the name of the summit on the Highland Railway near Forsinard?		
5. What was the name of loco 34001?		
6. Where was the Butlins holiday camp station near Scarborough?		
7. Where was the location of the loco depot with the code 5F?		
8. What was the class name of O.V. Bulleid' s revolutionary and unsuccessful steam loco?		
9. What is the name of the station between Stowmarket and Ipswich?		
10. What was the name of the Class EM2 electric loco number 27000?		
11. What was the old name for the county where Stranraer is located?		
12. What is the name of the town which had the following stations – Pen Mill, Town, and Junction?		
13. What was the name of loco number 45572?		
14. What is the name of the loco works in Kent?		
15. What is the name of the railway bridge that the GWR crosses to reach Cornwall?		
16. Henley-on?		
17. What was the name of the water troughs and junction for the S on A&M junction railway north of Bedford?		
18. In what city were the works located where most of the LNER coaching stock was built?		
19. What is the name of the river crossed by the ex LBSC line north of Haywards Heath?		
20. What was the name of loco number 5093?		

Best of luck – the solution is on the next page. No cheating!

Martin Elms

Hugh Gould

Hugh Gould, former President of the RCTS, moved into a care home in Bridge of Weir, Renfrewshire, earlier in 2021 to be near his family as he was no longer well enough to manage independently.

Sadly, news has been received that he died peacefully on 20th December 2021. RIP.

Contributions to Railway Ramblings

You will have seen that during 2021 we had a number of new contributors to this newsletter but now 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

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!

Back Copies of Railway Ramblings

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

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

Hertford Happenings - Paddy Carey

Paddy has promised further articles in the New Year.

Puzzle Solutions

Solution to the puzzle in this issue (page 13):

1. Parthia. 2. St Erth. 3. Armstrong. 4. County March Summit. 5. Exeter. 6. Filey. 7. Uttoxeter.
8. Leaders. 9. Needham Market. 10. Electra. 11. Wigtownshire. 12. Yeovil. 13. Eire. 14. Ashford.
15. Royal Albert Bridge. 16. Thames. 17. Oakley. 18. York. 19. Ouse. 20. Upton Castle.

Message: Peaceful New Year To You

Martin Elms

Protocol for Keeping Safe at Branch Meetings

At 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 virtually no 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.

- 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-sanitisers as you enter, and after touching any surfaces.
- Move seats to feel “comfortable” and please use the same seat throughout the meeting.
- Maintain social distancing as much as possible.
- 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.

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.

This Protocol was reviewed after the August 2021 meetings and will be further reviewed after any revised Government rules or regulations about meetings.

Steve Lacey (Branch Chairman)

Looking Forward to the Summer



North Weald Station, on the Epping Ongar Railway

As the main operating hub of the Epping Ongar Railway, North Weald is where the workshops and motive power depot are based. Once in a state of disrepair, EOR volunteers have worked hard to restore the station to 1940s London North Eastern Railway condition, complete with period lamps, footbridge and signage. The original 1888 signal box and lever frame, located on Platform 1, has also been attended to and restored.

At North Weald you can enjoy a light bite in the “Anglia Buffet” coach, or browse the well-stocked gift shop and find that perfect souvenir of your visit.

Image and information courtesy of the Epping Ongar Railway

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), Roger Moulden and Adrian Scrutton. The Railway Correspondence & Travel Society is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation Registered with the Charities Commission