

# Railway Ramblings

Issue 140

March 2022

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



*"Duchess of Sutherland" heading a Kings Cross to York charter special, passing through Welwyn North on 12<sup>th</sup> February 2022*

*Image credit: Mikki Hart*

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*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

**Special Note:** In light of the current situation with Covid-19, the branch committee decided to recommence live meetings starting in March. (Everyone on the distribution list for this newsletter will receive emails advising any last-minute changes.)

## During March 2022

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

8<sup>th</sup> March      **Branch AGM and Members' Evening**

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

29<sup>th</sup> March      **The Narrow Gauge Steam Railways of Nepal and Pakistan**      Geoff Warren

## During April 2022

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

12<sup>th</sup> April      **On Shed**      *Robert Warburton*

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

26<sup>th</sup> April      **A Modern Image – Not Quite**      Peter Robins

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 offering Zoom virtual presentations. In addition, there are “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*). Members can register and then take part in any of these events.



## Chairman's Platform

First, a BIG reminder that our branch AGM is on 8<sup>th</sup> March. Please make an effort to attend – I would anticipate that the formal business will not take very long but it is important to the running of the branch. The AGM will be followed by members' presentations.

As you know, during February we had virtual (Zoom) meetings and we are grateful to the presenters, who agreed to do the originally planned presentations but in the Zoom format. Deciding how to proceed has been difficult but we have decided to return to proper meetings starting this month (March). The risk from Covid-19 has not disappeared - currently we are seeing Covid-19 case numbers gradually fall and we are all hoping there is not another twist in events – but we need to get back to some sort of normality at some point in time.

With our relatively straightforward set of rules (our "Protocol", which is republished as the final page of this newsletter), you should be able to attend meetings with confidence. However, I accept that nothing can make our meetings absolutely safe and I respect the view of those who will still feel that to be a step too far too soon. For those members, and those who are unable to make the journey to meetings, there will be the "national" Zoom presentations. Details of these can be found in the *Railway Observer*.

In the possible scenario that the Covid-19 situation takes a turn for the worse, we will endeavour to convert more of our planned programme into Zoom presentations.

Please look out for any emails from me giving you last-minute updates.

*Steve Lacey*

## Branch AGM Reminder

A reminder that the Branch AGM will be held at Hitchin on 8<sup>th</sup> March. The agenda, the minutes of the 2021 AGM, together with the usual Officers' reports for last year (2021-22) were published as a supplement to the February issue of *Railway Ramblings*.

I hope you have given these a read and will be attending: I would really like as many as possible to be there. If you have any questions, advance notice will help the Officers to give a considered reply. The formal meeting is usually fairly short in duration and will be followed by members' presentations.

You are invited to take this opportunity of making a short presentation (no more than 10-15 minutes) based on electronic means (USB stick) or slides. Please make sure the material is yours, or that you have the owner's permission to use it. Please, share your interests with others.

If you are able to get your material to me by 7<sup>th</sup> March that would help me ensure everything works! My fall-back position is that, if there are insufficient members' presentations, you will hear more about *92 Squadron!*

*Steve Lacey*

## New Members

We welcome Michael Carne, of Luton, and Paul Pink, of Stevenage, as new members of the RCTS and of the Hitchin & Welwyn Garden City branch.

# Local Observations



## All reports as seen at Welwyn North and the local area

Over the weekend of **22/23 January** the blockade in the Huntingdon area continues this time the loco's involved were 66712/66716/66721/66765/66769 again the LNER services were diverted via Ely and Cambridge. **Monday 24 January** saw a late running Plasmor block train unusually work via the main line with 66092 passing here at 09:24 on its way to Bow depot, also this morning 66017 ran light engine from Peterborough to Harringay at 08:27, returning to Peterborough at 10:10. Another early start on **Tuesday 25 January** with 37800 hauling 365512 from Doncaster to Newport for scrapping at 08:00. 67007 was seen hauling 91130 from Ferme Park to Neville Hill (presumably the Class 91 had failed) at 09:44. Then in the evening, 755413 ran through from Norwich to Hornsey at 19:59 on the maintenance run. This unit returned to Norwich the following morning **Wednesday 26 January** at 06:39. A further scrap move, with 37800 hauling 365524 from Doncaster to Newport, took place on **Thursday 27 January** at 08:00. On **Saturday 29 January** 66782 passed at 14:34 hauling 465912 from Slade Green to Doncaster. A light engine move happened on **Sunday 30 January** when filthy yellow 73951 ran from Welwyn Garden City to Derby passing here at 12:44.

Then the following day **Monday 31 January** 755415 worked from Norwich to Hornsey for maintenance at 19:59, returning the following morning **Tuesday 1 February** at 06:39. Nothing other than scheduled services occurred until **Monday 7 February** when 66790 came by at 13:27 hauling 313121 from Eastleigh to Old Dalby. That evening a further Class 755, number 418, worked to Hornsey from Norwich at 19:54, this unit returned to Norwich at 06:33 on the morning of **Tuesday 8 February**.



On **Saturday 12 February** 6233 *Duchess of Sutherland* worked from Kings Cross to York with another "White Rose" charter train passing here at 08:12, this had diesel 47804 on the rear. Later that day 66789 with unit 465904 passed at 14:32 running from Slade Green to Doncaster. 37708 ran light engine at 18:07 from Southall to Peterborough to connect with the returning Charter train from York, as *Duchess of Sutherland* was being taken off the train at Peterborough, to spend the Sunday on the Nene Valley Railway. 37708 & 47804 the brought the York train back to Kings Cross through Welwyn North at 21:47.

57312 plus 365504 & 365516 worked from Doncaster to Newport on **Tuesday 15 February** at 08:01 taking the Class 365's for scrapping at Sim's scrapyards. A points failure on the up lines at Welwyn Garden City caused disruption and delays around lunchtime on **Wednesday 16 February**. The second scrap move this week occurred on **Thursday 17 February** when 37800 with 365530 in tow from Doncaster to Newport passing at 08:00. Overnight on Thursday and throughout the day on **Friday 18 February** there were many cancellations and a 50 mph speed limit introduced due to Storm Edwin producing such high winds.

Just one movement of note on **Saturday 19 February** and that was 66748/66767 at 15:55 hauling an engineers' train from Whitemoor Yard to Ferme Park. The return working due that evening was cancelled. On **Sunday 20 February** no trains at all as engineers took possession of the track from Welwyn North and across the viaduct, the engineers' trains involved on the down line were 66051/66053 taking all the scrap metal and old ballast away, they were in the area from midnight Saturday and most of the day on Sunday

Note: Until I can get back into the railway group of which I was a member, I shall be suspending any further reports as I can no longer feel I can give a good area overview.

*Observations - Dave Elsdon*

*"Duchess of Sutherland" Image Credit – Mikki Hart*

## The Cat and Its Signal Box – A Short Story by Martin Elms

"I left the pub and walked along the back-lane to my brother and sister-in-law's house where, after being recently widowed, I was staying for the weekend – more out of duty than respect. I walked through the clear chilly air with a touch of frost, alongside a high wall on my left, with the help of a stone jutting out of the wall just above the ground. I peered over the wall. The ground slopped down towards a railway line, whose rails shone in the moon light. There were some trees, and, in the distance, I could see and hear a stream tumbling over rocks. To the right, down a flight of steps, I saw the lights of a signal box. Moving further along the street I came to a gate in the wall. On it was a metal sign:

"Private No Entry" it warned, in faded letters.

Just to be curious I couldn't resist having a peep. Unfortunately, the gate squeaked as it opened, and I saw, at the bottom of the flight of steps, the signalman who looked up at me.

"Come on down for a chat" he unexpectedly said in a cheerful voice.

"I can see that you're no troublesome youth, and no railway inspector will come here this time of night to bother us".

So, I descended the steps to a landing. One flight of steps went up to the box and the other down towards the railway track.

He shook my hand upon my introduction, and I told him I had recently retired from the railway after some 40 years.

"I'm Henry" he said, and together we entered the warm cosy lit box.

On a cushion placed on a table was the biggest black cat, with white paws, I had ever seen.

"This is Jess" Henry said "she is the box cat and all us signalmen are wary of her; we are sure the box is hers and she lets us in to work. The strange thing is that she always seems to have been here and manages to be away when an inspector or somebody important visits! So, she is only seen by

us, as I say I'm sure she owns this box and will be here until it shuts, and I bet then she will keep guard over the site and keep people away from her box."

Jess looked at me with an almost superior sneer and continued to groom herself.

Henry busied himself with the block bells and signal levers.

A train passed in a blaze of lights and rattled the box fittings.

We drank tea and reminisced on our different railway careers while Jess continued to clean herself, oblivious of us.

Henry left the box to go down the lower steps for coal. Jess stopped washing, sat up and stared at me, almost defying me to touch anything or even move. I felt increasingly uncomfortable as if being under a watchful oppressive boss.

Thankfully, Henry soon returned and dealt with the stove. Jess returned to her washing.

Some more trains passed, and I bid Henry good-bye and, keeping as far away as I could, passed Jess and went out into the night.

"Come again" said Henry, "I'm sure Jess won't mind."

I wasn't so sure.

I was surprised that it was only eleven o'clock, I thought we had been talking for a long time. I returned to my in-laws.

As expected, they weren't the slightest bit interested in where I had been, they just wanted to talk, as usual at length, about themselves, their children, and grandchildren. After a decent period, I escaped to bed.

The following morning, I decided on a walk with my camera to see the signal box, and the area around, in daylight. I told my intentions to my brother-in-law.

"Well, we only moved here last year to be near our son and daughters as you know so I don't know the area well."

I guessed that they spent most, if not all, available time visiting them and the rest of their family

"I'll be back for lunch, then I will be away at three" I got in quick, fearing that a family tea was in prospect.

Walking along the path, kicking the leaves, I found that I had missed the gate and was at the handy stone. I balanced on it and, with camera ready, looked over the wall. There was just dense vegetation, bushes, and a tangle of trees – no railway, the ground sloped down to the rushing stream, as last night, but nothing else. I hardly dare look to my right as I knew the signal box was also missing.

I retraced my steps alongside the wall, I then saw an area of lighter coloured stoned badly laid covering where I suspected the gate was.

There was a scratching sound above me, I looked up.

It was Jess

She arched her back and glared at me, and I found myself unwillingly walking away. After a few yards I dared to turn and looked back.

Jess had vanished!



*Martin Elms*

# Recollections of Visiting the Severn Valley Railway in 2005 - Paddy Carey

In September 2005, a friend suggested we spend a weekend at the Severn Valley Railway. He knew of a good B&B in Chelmarsh, so I decided to have my first break after retirement earlier that year, on the Severn Valley Railway. I had recently bought a Personal Digital Assistant and an IT colleague from work downloaded TomTom navigator on it. Unfortunately, it was not up-to date, so when we got to Hampton Loade we were surprised to find no ferry – A really good start!

The B&B was fine and was a short walk for us (in those days) to the SVR line. In the evening, my recollection is that we went to a pub in Chelmarsh. My friend informs me that it was the *Bulls Head Inn*. What I remember most is the walk back to the B&B - in the dark.

The next morning, we walked in fine weather, past the sailing lake near Hampton Loade, to enjoy the early morning mist and catch the train to Arley. This was followed by a walk to Bridgnorth. The exact routes for our two days are a bit hazy, but I will do my best to try and make it logical! The shots I took walking alongside the line show what made this walk so pleasurable.



This picture of 1450 pulling an immaculate auto-trailer really captured my attention. Although I did not see 1450 in my spotting days, I did see a few others of the type which were shedded at 83C Exeter. This would have been when we stayed with an aunt who lived in Exton and I would be dropped off for the day to Exeter St. David's. This was also where I would see West Country, Battle of Britain and diesel hydraulic Warship Classes. The return to Exton took me near 'The Puffing Billy' pub, also through Lymstone Commando station.

For this visit, over 23 to 25 September, Bridgnorth offered a busy scene.



During our stay *Union of South Africa* was at Bridgnorth.

One observation - that may open up various opinions - is the colour of the backing to nameplates and GWR cab cast number plates:

Here, 1501 has a red background to its plate.

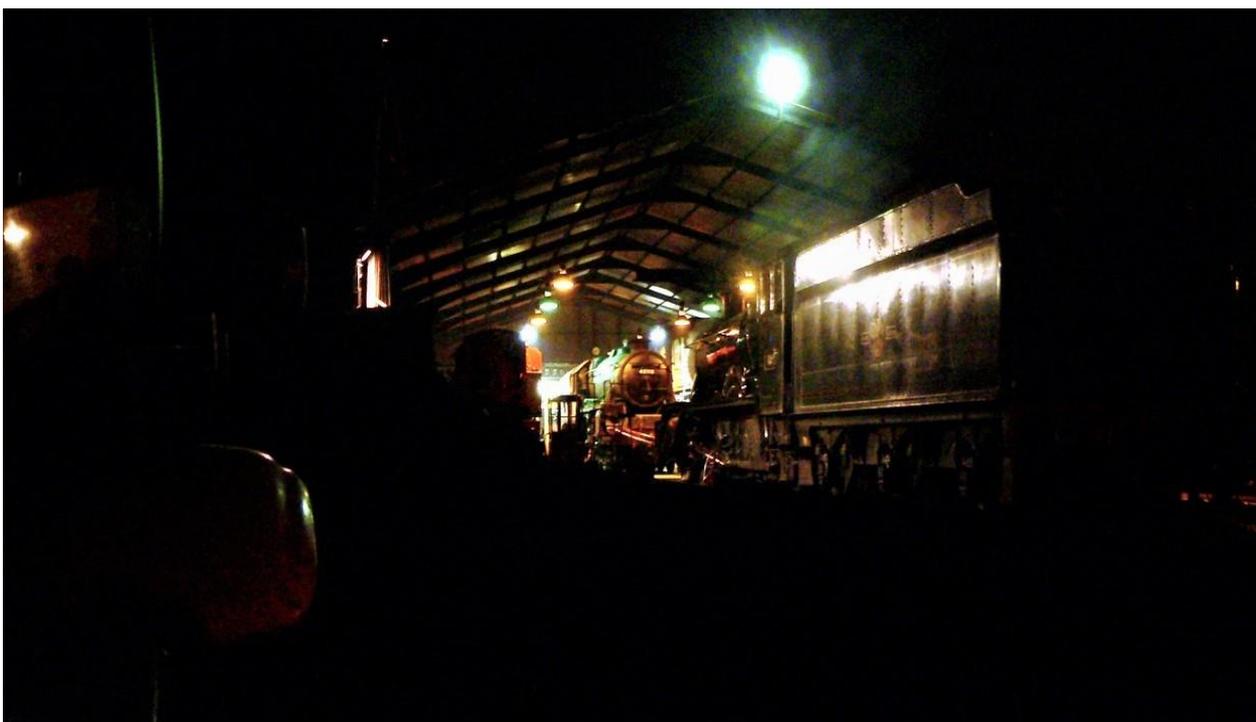
I had previously seen a few 1500 Class pannier tanks but these would have been at Paddington, where I would be dropped off for a few hours when we stayed with an aunt in Hampstead.



One West Country Class I did photo at Bridgnorth was 34036 *Westward Ho* which I now notice also has a red background to the nameplate -



I took a lot of shots at Bridgnorth in the evening:



We also had a curry in High Town which I remember as being very good!

This was my first trip to a heritage railway and it brought back memories of Classes of locomotives seen on holidays in my spotting days - when we went from Liverpool to London and Exton to stay with my mum's sisters. Exeter St. David's was possibly my favourite holiday stay probably because I spent more time there than with adults talking over old times.

I think my parents never grasped why anyone would want to spend hours on a railway station rather than going to the beach but I am grateful they recognised how happy I would be coming home with a few more locos underlined in the *Ian Allan abc*.



I also managed a shot of Western Class D1013 *Western Ranger* and what is now Class 73, an electro-diesel then numbered E6005.

I recall seeing D1004 and D1006, Western Class, in my spotting days. I had managed to get a fair number of Warship class which were mostly shedded at 83D Plymouth Laura so I wonder if I saw these two over a week at Exeter rather than at Paddington. I wonder what livery they were in before the blue era?

*Paddy Carey*

## Exhibitions

A number of model railway exhibitions have, at long last, returned. Two local ones coming up soon are:

19-20 March

### London Festival of British Railway Modelling

At Alexandra Palace. There will be an RCTS "recruitment" stand (no book sales).

23 April

### The De Havilland Model Railway Society

At the Methodist Church, Ludwick Way, Welwyn Garden City. This is the same venue that we use for RCTS meetings. There will be an RCTS stand.

## 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](mailto:gricersteve@hotmail.com)

# The March Puzzle – Martin Elms

Similar to the puzzles in the previous two issues, this time the first letter of the correct answers to the following questions will spell a railway establishment.

1. Name of locomotive no. 60860		
2. Station at the end of line from Connel Ferry		
3. Name of tunnel near Berkhamsted		
4. Charles B. ?, GWR Locomotive Superintendent		
5. Name of locomotive D9009		
6. Light railway, goes from Halesworth to ?		
7. Name of River crossed by the Royal Albert Bridge		
8. Locomotive depot coded 71A		
9. Summit located on the line from Dingwall to Kyle of Lochalsh		

10. Station at end of a branch line from Hull		
11. Name of locomotive no. 46127		
12. Name of viaduct over the River Tweed at Berwick		
13. Goods station in the south of Lowestoft		
14. What does the letter S denote in the coach description TSO?		

As usual, best of luck – my solutions are on page 14. No cheating!

*Martin Elms*



## Our Branch Committee

Please consider joining your branch committee. The AGM is not until 8<sup>th</sup> March there's still time to put yourself forward.

Anyone prepared to take on the committee role is invited to discuss this with Steve Lacey or Dave Elsdon in the first instance.

# Workshop Wanderings – Steve Lacey

As I said last month, at present the Nene Valley Railway main restoration workshop contains four locomotives being overhauled.

At the A1 end of the workshop is 73050 class 5MT 4-6-0 *City of Peterborough*. This is held on a 99-year lease by the NVR from the City of Peterborough and is under major overhaul. It was built in Derby by BR in 1954, one of a class of 172 locomotives, at a cost of £19,655, very much less than the current overhaul! She was designed by R A Riddles (Chief Mechanical Engineer to BR) as one of the “new” standard locomotives of the nationalised railway. In reality, it was a development of the Stanier “Black Five”, with 6ft 2in driving wheels, 2 cylinders (19”x28”) and a weight of 126 tons. As most of you will know by the designation MT, she was a mixed traffic locomotive intended to be equally at home hauling passenger or goods trains, with a maximum speed just short of 100mph. She was originally allocated to Bath Green Park and used on trains to Bournemouth over the famous Somerset and Dorset. In 1964 she was reallocated to Shrewsbury, then in 1966 to Manchester Agecroft and finally Patricroft. Withdrawn in July 1968, it was purchased for £3,000 by the Rev Richard Paten of Peterborough, initially with the idea of having it “plinthed” in Peterborough as a reminder of the town’s railway heritage. However, having travelled under its own steam from Manchester to Peterborough, arriving on 11 September 1968 it was clearly too good to plinth. Many of you may be surprised by the above date, as the “official end of steam” on BR was Sunday 4 August 1968! After a while on Baker Perkins private siding alongside the East Coast mainline, the siding closed in 1971 and she moved to the British Sugar Corporation site just south of Peterborough, under the care of the Peterborough Locomotive Society, forerunner of the NVR.

On 28 August 1972 she was named *City of Peterborough* by the then mayor and in 1973 the Rev Paton donated the loco to Peterborough City Council, on the understanding she be leased to the NVR for 99 years, to be used on the new NVR. Here she remains.

In 1988 she was withdrawn for overhaul, returning to NVR service in 2005. But what of now?

*City of Peterborough’s* boiler certificate expired in 2015 and therefore was withdrawn from service. When *92 Squadron* returned to steam in February 2017 *City of Peterborough* entered the workshop, to begin a heavy overhaul. Many of us from *92 Squadron* then joined those working on both COP and the Danish F class 656.



Fairly rapidly the loco was stripped down and boiler and wheels removed. The later were known to need turning, so were dispatched to the South Devon Railway where they were reprofiled and returned to the NVR. They have been wrapped in Clingfilm to prevent deterioration. All the bearing surfaces are wrapped in grease impregnated tape to keep them in good condition.

The frames were placed on sleepers and needle gunned to within an inch of their lives! They have since been primed, undercoated and top coated (twice) with horn guides refurbished. The drag box metal (the bit that attaches the loco to the tender and hence the rest of the train) was found to be wasted and remedial welding completed.



The drag box securing rivets are being replaced as corrosion was also found here.



The biggest problem has been the boiler. Once removed, the boiler was needle gunned to remove surface rust and the tubes extracted to allow proper examination. Initial investigations suggested that there were areas of thinning which would need replacement. Further ultrasound testing suggested

some areas of delamination. A sample was removed and sent off for metallurgical investigation, in order to determine whether successful welded repairs could be made (something where the 92 Squadron team have experience!). It appears that this can be achieved and tenders are currently being sought. This will cost large amounts of money, but still less than a new boiler!



Sorry, I went all “arty farty” with this shot of the boiler through *Derek Crouch*’s cab rear spectacle plate! The area of the lower firebox removed for testing can be seen behind the access tower.

Next time in *Railway Ramblings*, a biography of the Danish F Class, which should return to service this summer!

*Steve Lacey*

## Puzzle Solutions

Solution to the puzzle in this issue (page 11):

1. Durham School. 2. Oban. 3. Northchurch. 4. Collett. 5. Alycidon. 6. Southwold. 7. Tamar.  
8. Eastleigh. 9. Ravens Rock. 10. Withernsea. 11. Old Contemptibles. 12. Royal Border Bridge.  
13. Kirkley. 14. Second or Standard.

Solution: DONCASTER WORKS

*Martin Elms*

# The March Presentation

## The Narrow Gauge Steam Railways of Nepal and Pakistan - Geoff Warren

29<sup>th</sup> March at Welwyn Garden City.



Janakpur Railway "Chandra", built by Hunslet in 1962, photographed at Khajuri, in February 1980  
Image credit: Geoff Warren

Over 6000 km of railway of gauges at, or less than, 2ft 6in were built in the Indian subcontinent. Compared to those in post-independence India, the lines in Nepal and Pakistan were less easy to reach and received fewer railway enthusiast visitors. But in the early 1980s, almost all traffic was still steam hauled.

The Janakpur Railway was an international route across the border from Nepal into India. It was steam worked until 1993 and closed in 2013. It was known for its usually very overcrowded trains and two Garratt locomotives. It was remote from main centres of population and access slow and often uncomfortable, but a visit was very rewarding for all who went there.

The narrow gauge railways in Pakistan were mostly constructed for strategic purposes, to provide access to the politically unstable regions bordering Afghanistan. In 1984, the lines from Kohat to Thal, and Mari Indus to Bannu and Tank, were still in operation. The railway at Changa Manga, near Lahore, was built in 1866 to access an irrigated forest plantation. By 1984 it had started a tourist operation in parallel with the logging and it survives today.

*Geoff Warren*

# Protocol for Keeping Safe at Branch Meetings

Now we are again holding real meetings the safety of all of our members will be 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 could 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.
- In consideration of others, put on a face mask as you enter and wear it throughout the meeting.
- 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.

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