

Railway Ramblings

Issue 142

May 2022

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



*“Over Half a Century has Passed” – the May Presentation at Welwyn Garden City
Image credit: Geoff May*

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 the event of any late change to the programme, everyone on the distribution list for this newsletter will receive an emails advising the details of the change.

During May 2022

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

10th May **The Bridge is Down – The Tay Bridge Disaster** *Dr Rudi Newman*

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

31st May **Over Half a Century has Passed** *Geoff May*

During June 2022

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

14th June **Passenger Services Across the UK During the Past Decades**
Paul Chancellor

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

28th June **Construction of HS1 – The Channel Tunnel Rail Link**
David Kelso

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

Although Covid-19 certainly hasn't gone away (as I can personally verify!), this year seems so much different to the last two. Thankfully, it seems that the likelihood of serious illness is much reduced and this is allowing most people to carry on "normally". Unfortunately for a few, especially those most medically vulnerable, the situation still requires caution. With that in mind, we will continue with our meeting "protocol" (published at the end of this newsletter) which is intended to help minimise infection risks and enable you to attend meetings with some confidence.

As many of you are aware, the RCTS centenary will be in 2028, and the Strategy Group (of which I am a member) is still keen to hear of ideas for marking the occasion. It might seem a long way off but "time flies" and whatever we do will no doubt take a fair bit of planning and organising. Perhaps we could also do something at Branch level? Talk to me!

The avid reader of *The Railway Observer* will also have noted that there are three main structural elements to the current RCTS Strategy. These are *attracting new membership, improving membership retention, and enhancing the Society's "product"*. The Strategy Group report to the AGM gave some detail about current progress and, if you have any suggestions then please let me know and they can be included in our deliberations.

It's your Society and you can help shape its future direction.

Steve Lacey

New Members

We warmly welcome Bryan Cross of Ampthill, Alistair Cameron of Biggleswade, and Shaun Saltmarsh of Hatfield as new members of the RCTS and of the Hitchin & Welwyn Garden City Branch.



Days Out – Dave Elsdon

A trip to Bethnal Green

On Monday 28th March, following a spell of good warm weather, with today possibly the last warm day according to the weather forecasters, I decided it was time to get out and watch some trains. Having read that many new Class 720's were now in service, Bethnal Green became my obvious choice, because it is through here that these units operate from Southend, Colchester and Ipswich with some on the branches such as Hertford East and Cheshunt. I set off on the 0945 hrs service from Welwyn North & (700044) arriving on time at Kings Cross platform 8. An east-bound Circle Line train was in the platform when I arrived underground to take me on to Liverpool Street, where on platform 4 I boarded the TfL service for Bethnal Green departing at 1048 hrs. (345027) arriving at Bethnal Green 1054 hrs, where I stayed until 1315 hrs. when some of the first units I had seen on the longer distance services were making their return. I then took the next stopping service back to Liverpool Street (345031) and retraced my route back to Kings Cross, just missing the 1338 hrs train back to Welwyn North. I used the half-hour wait to purchase a snack for lunch before catching (700044 again) at 1358 hrs back home arriving at 1430 hrs.

Seen at Bethnal Green: 2 x Class 313, 8 x Class 317, 8 x Class 321, 2 x Class 322
14 x Class 345, 14 x Class 710, 30 x Class 720, 11 x Class 745

There was nothing else to report other than the usual units (Classes 387 / 700 / 717) seen between Welwyn North and London Kings Cross. Also nothing noteworthy on the return journey.

WCML to Wolverhampton

Saturday, 9th April: I had arranged this trip to represent the Branch at the Society's AGM. I had pre-booked my tickets & seats to & from Euston three weeks earlier. I left home on a beautiful clear frosty morning to catch the 0717 hrs train from Welwyn North to Kings Cross, this train was 3 min late from the time it left Cambridge. I boarded (700010) at 0721 hrs. arriving at 0751 hrs. in platform 10 at Kings Cross, no locos were noted anywhere on route, only GN units. I had a gentle walk from Kings Cross to Euston where I boarded the 0843 hrs Pandalino service for Preston via Wolverhampton (390010) on platform 5 for an on-time departure. I passed 92020 at Kensal Green (0848hrs) and 710268 at Willesden (0850 hrs), in Stonebridge Park were 66594 / 66061 / 90016 / 90048 (0851 hrs). Other than southbound running Avanti services and Class 350's on local services there was very little to note, until passing 67005 & 67014 at Cheddington (0910hrs) on a Pullman Charter going to Liverpool for the Grand National, before stopping at Milton Keynes (0915 hrs). On departure from here it was a clear run to Birmingham New Street arriving at (1010 hrs) with scheduled on time stops at Coventry (0941 hrs) and Birmingham International (0953 hrs) and on to a slow approach into Birmingham New Street at 1010 hrs. I departed New Street at 1017 hrs, two minutes down, followed by a slow run to Sandwell & Dudley, our next stop at 1025 hrs, arriving at Wolverhampton one min late at 1038 hrs.

It was a short walk now to the AGM venue in the old Wolverhampton Low Level station, which has been beautifully restored into a meeting venue. There was also a wedding reception taking place in another part of the building. As you may have seen in the RO, the meeting started with a digital presentation by Chris Youett, followed by a buffet lunch, before getting started with the main business of the day. All went well, finishing earlier than expected. Then followed a second presentation, this time by David Jackman, of photographs from the RCTS collection.

I left the meeting in time to catch the 1545 hrs. Avanti service back to Euston, operating with 390040. This train arrived in Wolverhampton 10 minutes early and was held for a right time departure. It was a fairly uneventful return journey, running on time all the way back to Euston, passing / departure times: Sandwell & Dudley 1555 hrs; Passing Soho Junction there were a couple 323 units and 350250 standing outside the depot here. Progressing to Birmingham New Street we departed here at 1606 hrs, after a four-minute stop, Birmingham International 1619 hrs; Coventry 1631hrs, Rugby 1652 hrs, where 57307 & 309 were stabled in the bay platform, Milton Keynes 1703 hrs, arriving at London Euston at 1736 hrs. Everything stabled in Stonebridge Park and Willesden was blocked from view by passing services.

Having arrived back at Kings Cross problems were very evident, as there were no services showing for Welwyn North at all on the departure boards, several trains had been cancelled, which left me no choice but to catch the 1806 hrs service to Welwyn Garden City (717004) on platform 7: this train was packed with passengers, I eventually arrived in platform 1 in WGC at 1852 hrs. where Jill came to pick me up to get me back home. I had been indoors over an hour before a northbound service from Kings Cross stopped at Welwyn North

Dave Elsdon

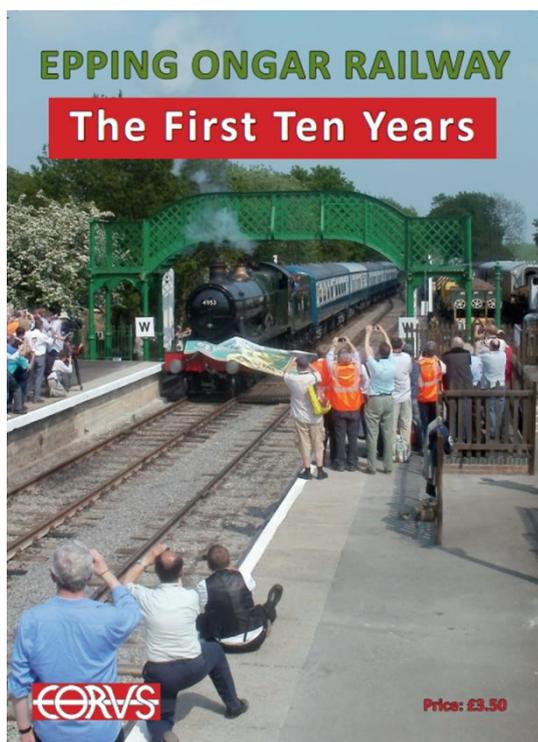


SUMMER EVENTS AT THE EPPING ONGAR RAILWAY

Received from Robert Good of the Epping Ongar Railway Volunteer Society

The **10th Anniversary Event and Steam Gala** will take place on 2, 3, 4 & 5 June.

To commemorate the occasion the Epping Ongar Railway Volunteer Society has produced a 44-page booklet, priced at just £3.50, to chart progress since reopening in 2012.



The booklet includes:

An Early History of the Line

The Last Day of Operation by London Underground

A New Beginning 2008 – 2012

The Opening 24 May 2012

Our Various Projects

Locomotives and other Rolling Stock

Character and Themed Events

Our Volunteers

Thoughts About the Future

We hope you will find this to be a fascinating insight to our work. Copies will be on sale at our shops in North Weald and Ongar.

19 June our **Father's Day Classic Car Show** will take place at North Weald. The Father's Day car show is being staged and organised by the MG Car Club Anglia Region, with members cars on show from Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Essex and Hertfordshire. The Anglia Region is one of the largest of the 12 regions that make up the MG Car Club.

We expect a good selection of cars on show at North Weald, covering the MG story from sports to saloons; spot the car you always wanted, the bedroom poster cars of years gone by and the car your dad had back in the day. All the owners are approachable and don't be afraid to ask them questions!

26 June come and meet the roaring, walking **Dinosaur** - he's normally very friendly, except when hungry! Plus meet the baby dinosaurs on board the train!

Don't forget the **Penny Salon Micro-Gallery** at Ongar Station, they will be showing 'River Thames: Docks and Shipping' up to 22 May.

An interesting and entertaining programme of presentations is planned for the future:

10 years of the Epping Ongar Railway, 50+ Years Behind the Lens - A Transport History in Photographs and Esoteric Steam 2 - This Steam and Pleasant Land.

Please visit our website at: www.eorailway.co.uk for full details.

Why not come along and volunteer on the Railway to help us operate these events? We have opportunities available in all departments, including catering, track maintenance, buildings and infrastructure maintenance, steam and diesel locomotive operation and maintenance, carriage & wagon restoration, together with numerous customer-facing roles on operating days.

You can obtain further information by emailing: volunteering@eorailway.co.uk or if you are ready to join go to: www.eorailway.co.uk/membership/ where you will find the membership application form at the top of the page under 'Join the Epping Ongar Railway Volunteer Society'.

Robert Good

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

Matters Arising

Our Secretary recently received the following communication (slightly abridged) which you may find of interest – and, to which, you may be able to respond: Dave Elsdon has a phone number for Chris.

I was a regular visitor to Hitchin aged 9 – 15 (1959 – 1965). I had an aunt and uncle who had moved to Hitchin, in 1959, from my hometown of Great Yarmouth. Every summer (and later, other school holidays too) I stayed with them for most of the holiday. They lived on Ninesprings Way, close to the junction with Wymondley Road: I could actually spot from my bedroom window!

I spent most days on Benslow bridge, and became part of the local spotting fraternity ... this strange person who migrated from a seaside resort 112 miles inland at the height of summer! I undertook many trips with local spotters, including several London shed bashes, trips to Derby and Swindon works ('64) and Crewe and Eastleigh ('65) – plus bus trips to Luton, bus and train trips to Bedford and then by train to Bletchley; and train trips to Cambridge, March and Peterborough.

I struggle to remember the names of my vacation spotting friends, but there was a 'Smithy', a 'Murphy' and a Martin, and Alan Sexton, known as 'Big Al' in his later years, who died tragically in 2010.



These (rather poor) photos were taken from/near Benslow, with my aunt and uncle's Box Brownie, in 63/64. Taken in summer 64, the Baby Deltic is in Hitchin Shed, with three of my local spotter mates in the cab. 'Scotsman' was on a summer special summer 64. The 9F was January 64 and had come off a freight north of Benslow. As I recall, after the official ban on steam south of Peterborough at the start of the summer timetable 1963, there were three daily freight workings steam-hauled as far as Hitchin, where diesels took over. I also recall an August bank holiday weekend, probably a Saturday, where over the day, we saw eight steam workings from Benslow Bridge, including an A1 and A3 on express passenger working to Kings Cross. My recollection was that it was 1964, but in a conversation with David Percival (who I first met when I joined the Stevenage Locomotive Society in the early 60s) a few years ago, he thought it must have been '63. Can any of your members shed light on this?

If anyone dimly remembers me from sixty years ago, I would love to hear from them. And if anyone has records of steam at Hitchin post-June 1963, and is willing to share them, that would be great. I'm hoping to have an attempt at listing steam workings from post '63, drawing on records kept by local enthusiasts and contemporary journals (I have all the 'Modern Railways' and 'Railway Magazines' for the period).

Chris Wright

The May Puzzle – Martin Elms

Similar to the puzzles in the previous two issues, but this time the first letter of the answer to the following questions will spell the name of a Diesel Locomotive

1. Loco depot with code 85A
2. Name of water troughs south of Exeter
3. William ? LMS loco superintendent
4. Name of diesel loco D9015
5. Station at end of branch from Burnmouth
6. Station on Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire border
7. Tunnel near Ramsbottom

8. Name of loco 60011
9. Station between Inverness and Forres
10. Name of diesel shunter manufactured by Yorkshire Engine, used on trial in 1964
11. What does the letter E signify in electric units braking system EPB
12. Station at end of branch from Winchelsea
13. Water troughs near Rhyl
14. London and North-western Railway Loco Superintendent
15. Name of loco 60063
16. London Tilbury and ? Railway
17. ? Road station between Thetford and Attleborough

Best of luck. My solutions are on page 14.

Martin Elms



The Queens Jubilee “Jolly Fisherman” – 4th June

No young children on this one! Check-in opens at 6pm. At 7pm the whistle sounds and the train departs for Peterborough, pausing to pick up passengers joining at Overton. Then relax in your seat and enjoy drinks from the bar as the onboard team serve a traditional fish and chip supper at your seat. There is plenty of time to enjoy the scenery as you travel along the Nene Valley during two round trips of the line. Finally, the service returns to Wansford at around 9.30 pm.

Enjoy a drink from the onboard bar and have a good look at the train locomotive in steam.

Traditional fish & chip supper as the train makes two return trips from Wansford to Peterborough. (The meal is served during the first round-trip.

Just £30 per person. You are encouraged to enter into the spirit of 'Best of British' by dressing in Red, White & Blue.



Seating at tables of four. (Any children must be over 12 years of age).

Menu options: Traditional fish & chips, battered sausage and chips, veggie burger and chips, chicken & chips. (For other dietary requirements, contact the NVR office to discuss).

Note: There is a family fish & chip train running on Friday 3rd June if some of your party are under 12.

On **Sunday 5th June**, 45596 “Bahamas” will be hauling all of the passenger services. Take a trip with a Jubilee to celebrate the Queen’s Jubilee!

Adults/seniors £20, Child £12, Carer £5, Family (2+3) £60.

For bookings and further details: <https://nvr.org.uk>

Details reproduced courtesy of the NVR.

The May Presentations

The Bridge is Down, The Tay Bridge Disaster - Dr Rudi Newman

10th May at Hitchin



Transport historian and author, Rudi Newman, presents new Investigations into the Tay Bridge Disaster.

When the Tay Bridge collapsed in 1879, commemorated by poet William McGonagall, the confidence of the Victorian Age was shattered. Seen as a triumph of engineering, its destruction with the loss of a train and all souls aboard revealed fatal deficiencies in design and construction and would lead to a change in how all future bridges

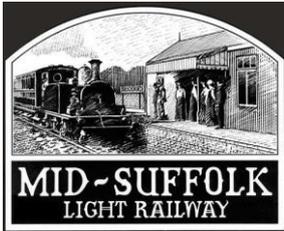
would be built. But many facts are unclear, while the final trigger for the Disaster is still greatly debated. Presenting a history of the bridge from construction to destruction, a brand-new theory for the cause of the tragedy is unveiled that changes its very history.

Over Half a Century has Passed - Geoff May

31st May at Welwyn Garden City



Just in time, Geoff May was fortunate enough to capture on camera the final years of the steam age on the Southern and London Midland Regions of BR. The selection of photos in both monochrome and colour conveys his memories and impressions of a bygone age from a personal perspective.



The Middy in the 1940's

28th and 29th May 2022

So as not to clash with the celebrations of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee Bank Holiday, this year's *Middy in the 1940s* event will take place over the Saturday and Sunday before.

There will be a grand array of displays and exhibits and, of course, many of our favourite re-enactors and 'personalities', including the friends from the German Alpine Corps, who joined for the first time last summer.



This year will also feature some of the contributions made by women at the time with displays from and about the WVS, Women's Land Army and American Women in East Anglia. There will be a range of military and civilian vehicles of the period and stalls selling everything from clothing, collectables, toys, military memorabilia, wartime paperwork and magazines. And a flypast from the Hawker Hurricane of the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight is scheduled for Saturday 28th May, as ever, subject to weather conditions,

Both days will feature 1940s style music, from Kitty Collins on Saturday 28th May and the Laxfield Community Choir on Sunday 29th May.

Tickets will be available in advance from mid-April through the website, and at the Ticket Office on the day. Website: <https://www.mslr.org.uk>

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In Case You Missed Them

Recently BBC4 TV broadcast two "old" programmes that you may have missed:

"The Rainhill Story" and "Rocket 150 at Rainhill"

You can still view them by using BBC IPlayer.



Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway

Princes Risborough North Signalbox Update

Princes Risborough North 'box once controlled railways radiating to every point of the compass and, today, it is the largest former Great Western Railway signal box still standing. It was out of use and had deteriorated dramatically over the last 25 years. But the previous neglect is now being rectified by C&PRR volunteers, including the renewal of 200 panes of smashed glass, the building of a replica staircase and, fittingly, the casting of replica nameplates which are now proudly on display. This is a progress update.

Lever Frame

Without doubt the main thrust of the recent work inside the box has been the ongoing construction of the interlocking level of the "Middle" lever frame at the south end of the box which is to go into operational use. The mechanical configuration of the frame and locking trays is pretty much complete, and the electric locks, plungers and indicators have been added where needed. The task of installing all the electrical wiring to bring it alive is also almost complete. Internally we have laid almost half a kilometre of single wire cabling plus some multicore cables, whilst outside it runs to just over a kilometre of multicores so far. So why does a mechanical lever frame need all this wiring? When first constructed, the original 1904 frame would have had very little. In fact, mains electricity had not reached the railway at that time and batteries would have been used to power the limited electrical devices then in use. It was mainly for the bell telegraphy equipment that the signalman would have used to communicate with the adjacent boxes along the line, and to confirm the correct aspect was being displayed on signals which were out of view from the signal box windows. Modern safety requirements mean we need to put a lot more electrical controls in place 120 years later. As well as the equipment on the lever frame, this involves much work in the relay room downstairs, and in lineside cabinets. When we come to fit out the North end of the box, which will become the demonstration area, this will focus on the post-1958 re-signalling scheme, when the original frame was replaced with the one still in situ today. By then advances were made with the use of relays and electric locks etc. so this will also require electrical technology.



Above left - One of the many relays to be used with the new lever frame. It's about 5 inches long and fairly heavy duty as with all railway components. Above right - Rear of the relay rack with recently installed wiring.

Test Tools

Once all the wiring emanating from all corners of our site at Princes Risborough and those inside the signal box is installed then our next task will be to test all the circuitry. To that end we are constructing some test tools to help with that process.

This photo shows old telephone switchboards, known as key and lamp units, from the 1970s or 80s. We are just using them as a convenient set of multi-contact switches to temporarily simulate the outside world when testing electrical signalling functions within the box.



Making Way for the Signal Cable and Point Rodding



Peter Scouse and Roger Rowe are shown here wire brushing the metal supports which hold up the signalbox wall above what is called the 'letterbox'. This is the nickname given to the ground-level opening where the point rodding and signal wires leave the signal box and run alongside the tracks to their respective points and signals. The supports will need to be treated with rust inhibitor to make sure they do not rust away and cause the bricks above to collapse. The letterbox is currently blocked with plywood. The metal supports are GWR castings made for the

purpose. On top of those supports are 3 horizontal lintels which are actually made from reclaimed bridge rail (originally used for the GW's broad-gauge track in the 1800s). This bridge rail is also used to support the concrete floor and ceiling of the battery room.

Open Day

The next PRNB public open day will be Saturday 7th May 2022 from 10:00 to 16:00. This is for those who would like to see inside the signal box and the progress made to date with its restoration and eventual control of all the signalling at Prince Risborough. There will be talks and demonstrations as well as tea, coffee and biscuits available and some memorabilia items to purchase as a souvenir of your visit.

Admission is free but donations of any amount are always exceedingly welcome.

Access is via the restored Platform 4 at Princes Risborough railway station. On arrival at the station main entrance cross over the footbridge to Platform 3 then follow the signs onto

Platform 4. (Children must always be accompanied by an adult). There is a rough footpath to the signal box from Platform 4 and a steep staircase - so robust footwear is strongly advised. Numbers may have to be limited at times for safety reasons. Please keep away from the edge of all Chiltern Railways platforms at Princes Risborough, as high-speed trains pass through some of them!

Please note: there are no Chinnor and Princes Risborough Railway trains operating on Saturday 7th May, as this then allows visitors safe access to the signalbox!

This information is provided courtesy of the Risborough Box Group, a team within the Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway Association. Any comments/feedback can be made directly to them at news@risboroughbox.org.uk (Alan Jeffries).

Exhibitions

Saturday 7th May – South West Herts Model Railway Society

40th Annual Model Railway Exhibition

Queens School, Aldenham Road, Bushey, Watford, WD23 2TY

10am – 4.30pm

Adults £7, Children £3, Family £14

Postponed from May 2020. A host of excellent model railway layouts have been invited in a variety of scales and gauges ranging from N gauge to O gauge, with narrow gauge also represented. Trade support will be provided to help you find those essential items for your own collection. Refreshments will be available. Please note that the venue now levies a small charge for parking.

21 layouts expected plus a variety of traders and demonstrators.

Information: 07783 823457

Puzzle Solutions

Solution to the puzzle in this issue (page 8):

1. Worcester. 2. Exminster. 3. Stanier. 4. Tulyar. 5. Eyemouth. 6. Royston. 7. Nuttall.
8. Empire of India. 9. Nairn. 10. Taurus. 11. Electric-Pneumatic. 12. Rye Harbour.
13. Prestatyn. 14. Ramsbottom. 15. Isinglass. 16. Southend. 17. Eccles.

Solution: WESTERN ENTERPRISE (D1000)

Martin Elms

A Great Day Out with a Duchess - Paddy Carey

On 23 July 2005 I went on a steam trip to Darlington Locomotive Works hauled from Kings Cross by 6233 *Duchess of Sutherland*. This was an odd location for me to see this locomotive again. I would previously have seen it as 46233 in Liverpool Lime Street possibly on 'The Red Rose', after school, as I returned home from Liverpool to the Wirral via the Mersey Railway from Liverpool Central Low Level. Or it may have been on 'The Merseyside Express' coming into Lime Street. This would have been in about 1961 when she was shedded at 8A Edge Hill and would have been in maroon livery (I think I read somewhere that some Coronation Pacifics were painted green because they mainly worked night duties. Carlisle based? True?). The incoming train stock would have been detached from the Coronation or Princess class and shunted off by a 'Jinty' 0-6-0 while the locomotive was turned on the turntable.



Seeing 6233 at Kings Cross early in the morning was an odd experience. Wrong station, pre grouping number and not another steam locomotive to be seen, but the smell and the sound soon took me back 45 years or so. From what I remember of the trip the ride was excellent and the timekeeping good.

The A1 Steam Locomotive Trust ran this train, 'The Talisman', to Darlington so that the enthusiasts could see progress on 60103 *Tornado* then under construction. It was also an opportunity to see some of the other exhibits there. Seeing *Tornado* under construction was quite an experience. I am not old enough to remember new steam locomotives under construction but I did see 'Peak' diesel 1 Co-Co 1 class D50 - D56 and D129 - D137 under construction on a visit to Crewe works. So, seeing a steam locomotive being built was

enlightening but I would guess as a one off the 'production' line would be small and focussed and also at a pace that funding allowed.



69023 J72 was there, a N.E. Class E1 side-tank by Worsdell. We also saw: N.E.R number 910, a Fletcher locomotive which had been withdrawn in 1925 after taking part in the Centenary celebrations at Darlington. No 25 *Derwent* was designed by Timothy Hackworth for use on the Stockton and Darlington Railway and put on display in the museum after many years on display at Bank Top station. *Locomotion* No. 1 built by George Stephenson hauled the first passenger train on the S&DR on 27 September 1825 (The exhibit is a replica). 1463 was a N.E. Tennant Class withdrawn in 1927 and placed in York Museum. Also on view, was A2 4-6-2 60532 *Blue Peter* with 'Talisman' headboard. Quite a nice touch. I never saw it at Welwyn Garden City but a 'near miss' was 60533 *Happy Knight*.

As there was a generous stop in Darlington, my friend and I also managed a meal in a Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet. I remember this as a family treat when I lived in Knebworth but the version we had was not as I remembered it. Little taste and gristle. A swift pint soon afterwards removed the nasty taste! The return trip stopped at York where we met up with my brother in law who had travelled from Harrogate especially to see 'The Talisman'.

The trip back to London was a good run which I believe recorded some fine speed on the final leg into Kings Cross from Finsbury Park. In writing this a few questions occur to me: How did 6233 turn at Doncaster? On the triangle? What happened after the return to Kings Cross? Did it reverse out of the station? Where to? All corrections to this hazy account most welcome.

Paddy Carey

(Editor: If you have answers to any of Paddy's questions then please get in touch with me.)

Workshop Wanderings – Steve Lacey

As time has gone by the contents of the workshop have changed (last week a coach appeared...shock horror), but I will stick to the original locomotives so as not to miss any out.

On the maintenance track nearest the Station building (east) end of the shed, has been our most famous engine - Thomas.



Built by Hudswell Clarke in 1947 to a design of 1914 for the Port of London Authority (PLA), he is the same age as *92 Squadron*. Delivered new, to the British Sugar Corporation, he spent his working life shunting sugar beet wagons and bagged sugar vans in their sidings at Fletton, just south of Peterborough. No 1800, as he was originally known carried the familiar blue with red lining livery from new and was soon nicknamed *Thomas*, due to his likeness to the tank engine in the Rev Awdry's books. In 1971 the Rev Awdry made the nickname official by naming *Thomas* himself. Very fortunate for the Nene Valley Railway, as we can run *Thomas* events whenever we like, without paying a licensing fee to the copyright owners! As I have said before, the NVR started life as the Peterborough Railway Society and "played trains" in the sugar beet sidings at weekends. In the late 1960's a diesel replaced *Thomas* for everyday use, but *Thomas* was retained for use in the peak sugar beet season. In 1973 *Thomas* suffered firebox damage and was sold to the Peterborough Railway Society for £100. Another great move! Several years later the NVR bought a good boiler from a sister loco (1844) owned by the National Coal Board. By 1979 *Thomas* was back in action at the newly formed NVR.

In a twist of fate, the British Sugar Corporation diesel failed in 1986 and they borrowed *Thomas* back for one day to keep up the flow of beet to the factory! In the early 1990's the boiler certificate expired and an overhaul was undertaken at Wansford, with the boiler and

other major jobs being farmed out to contractors. As a shunting engine, *Thomas* was not originally fitted with a vacuum brake, but one was added during the overhaul. In 2002 the boiler certificate had again expired, so *Thomas* was dispatched off-site for professional overhaul, at the cost of nearly £100,000, returning back into service in 2004. Time marches on and a further overhaul was needed in mid-2014, this time at Wansford, being outshopped at about the same time as *92 Squadron* in 2016.

At Christmas last year, he was found to have a leaking boiler tube. Normally, if just one tube is defective, it is sealed at both ends to enable the loco to continue in traffic. However, sods law immediately took effect, in that the leaking tube was really difficult to get to and would need considerable dismantling work to gain access to blank off. As all the tubes were of similar age, the decision was made to remove all the tubes and retube entirely, hoping for a longer uninterrupted period of service. A busy Christmas meant a slow start to the work, but the removed tubes all showed signs of wear and would certainly have been a cause of further failure, if they had not been replaced. As always, partial disassembly brought other matters into view, but nothing major.....thankfully.



A rather unusual shot of *Thomas* without his face, paired with *92 Squadron*. I usually tell the children that his face has gone to the dentist for his dental check-up, as the whole loco is too big for the dentist's chair!

At the present time, re-tubing is being completed with an imminent return to service anticipated in time for his annual Birthday celebrations in June.

More 'Workshop Wanderings' next month.

Steve Lacey

Protocol for Keeping Safe at Branch Meetings

Now we are again holding real 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 minimal 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 relatively 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 while in close proximity to others.
- 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)

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