

Railway Ramblings

Issue 155

June 2023

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



The 06:23 Lumo service from Edinburgh to King's Cross passing through Hitchin on 11th May 2023.

Photo credit: Tony Turner

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

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 June 2023

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

13 th June	A 10th Colour Rail Journey	<i>Paul Chancellor</i>
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At Digswell, Welwyn (14:00-16:30, doors open from 13:30)

27 th June	All About Mangapps Farm Railway	<i>John Jolly</i>
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During July 2023

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

11 th July	Re-creating the Past	<i>Des Shepherd</i>
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At Digswell, Welwyn (14:00-16:30, doors open from 13:30)

25 th July	The GER – rarely other than idiosyncratic	<i>Ray Schofield</i>
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Donations are requested for attendance at 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 have been reviewed and, with effect from the May meetings, are now £3 for members and £5 for non-members.

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

Digswell, Welwyn meetings are held at Digswell Village Church Hall, Warren Way, Digswell, Welwyn AL6 0DH

Please note the change of southern venue and the new donation rates.

“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

Last month, saw us move meetings from Welwyn Garden City to the Village Church Hall in Digswell. A great start at the new venue – 31 attendees. For the benefit of those who did not manage to get to our first meeting there, the location details are shown on the next page. Perhaps we will see you there for the June meeting?

Our May meeting at Hitchin took place on a day many of us still recall. This is a picture of the road through Oaklands (between Welwyn and Woolmer Green) and it shows the difficulty in travelling that day:



B197 at Oaklands on 9 May 2023

WHTimes photo.

Understandably attendance that evening was affected! (My own excuse for not being there was that I was in the north of England). Miraculously the roof of the hall at Hitchin was not leaking this time. Hopefully we will fare better on 13th June.

Steve Lacey

The August Outing 2023

A reminder that by tradition, our August fixture is an outing, to which family and friends are also invited. For this year the proposal is a visit to either the Epping Ongar Railway, or the Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway and/or the Buckinghamshire Railway Centre. The Branch Secretary is investigating these options. Provisionally, the trip will take place on 6th August.

At this point it would be helpful to know if you would like to participate and how many there would be in your party. There is no commitment at this stage. Likewise, if you have strong views about the options then it could also be helpful to know about them. At present, very few responses have been received.

Please help by letting Dave Elsdon (dandjelsdon@gmail.com) know by 17th June.

New Meeting Venue

A reminder that, starting with the meeting on 30th May 2023, meetings in the south of our area have moved from Welwyn Garden City to Digswell Village Church Hall, Digswell, Welwyn AL6 0DH



Digswell Village Church is located in Warren Way, Digswell. In this photograph the hall and adjacent car park are to the right of the picture. Apart from the car park there is on-street parking available in Warren Way and other nearby roads. The parking restriction only applies 09:00 to 11:00 (to discourage commuters using Welwyn North station).



Welwyn North Station is a short five-minute walk away.

The small red arrow indicates the location of the hall.

Note
This is “Digswell Village CHURCH Hall”
- NOT “Digswell Village Hall”.

The RCTS Website

A reminder that the RCTS website <https://rcts.org.uk/> contains past copies of *Railway Ramblings* as well as branch details for all of the RCTS branches. Much of the site is also accessible to non-members.

No Longer 92 Squadron

34081 92 Squadron becomes 34111 Royal Auxiliary Air Force !

Last year the BBLS (Battle of Britain Locomotive Society) received an enquiry about a change of identity. It came from an RAF association which caters for members of the RAF Auxiliary Air force a branch of the service which I confess I had never even heard about. It is part of the RAF reserve and was formed in 1924, hence it is entering its 100th year. As you know the West Country/Battle of Britain Class of the Southern Railway started off being named after places in the West Country served by the Southern. When the publicity department ran out of suitable names, they changed to things to do with the then-recent Battle of Britain, hence people such as Winston Churchill, Sir Keith Park, bases such as Tangmere, Biggin Hill and Squadrons such as 92 and 247 Squadrons. They also named locomotives *Royal Observer Corps* and *Anti-Aircraft Command*, but never *Royal Auxiliary Air Force*. We have always considered 92 Squadron a memorial to all those who served in the Squadron and felt it would now be appropriate to rebadge our locomotive as a tribute to the RAuxAF.

One of their association members agreed to fund the change of identity with vinyl numbers for the cabside and front (produced by Clive at Vintage Aircraft Fabrics - a long standing supporter of ours), two new cast plates (produced by Procast) and badges. The number 34111 would have been the next in the Battle of Britain Class, hence the number. They decided to start their commemoration year on Saturday 27th May with an unveiling at the Nene Valley Railway, as one of their Squadrons is based at nearby RAF Wittering. Sadly, as many of you know 92 Squadron is currently out of action under repair, but those involved have been very understanding and have stuck with the planned unveiling.

With time very short, our loco was given a quick wash and brush up, sadly not through a carriage washing plant and the vinyl's fixed in place on the 24th of May.



Then the inevitable curved-ball....nobody said there was a headboard!



Ok no problem.

The nameplates finally arrived at the end of Wednesday 24th May and on Thursday they were drilled, using our old nameplates as a template for the fixing holes. One of our skinnier members then wriggled up behind the cladding to hold the fixing bolts as they were tightened, ditto the badge. Job done, with a whole 2 days to spare!

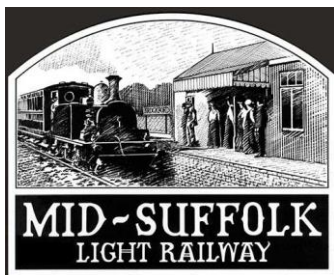


Notice that despite both being the same RAF blue they are different shades.

I think that is what is known as just in time logistics!

Thanks to Kevin Wilkins and Kingsley Harris for the pictures.

Steve Lacey



Mid-Suffolk Light Railway

Steam Railway Days in June

4 Jun 2023

Steam train rides in genuine Victorian 4-wheel coaches, but the Mid-Suffolk Light Railway's summer programme has an added attraction on many of the Sundays – and this Sunday is one of them, when the MSLR will be visited at lunchtime by the Colne Valley Classic & Vintage Club, who will be bringing 25/30 vehicles to brighten up the Brockford Station Car Park.



Members and their vehicles will be arriving from about 12.30 and having their lunch-break at the MSLR before moving on to the East Anglian Railway Museum at Chappell. Bar Open.

11 Jun 2023



A standard Middy Day with all the museum and railway attractions open.

Ride the train as often as you like and get the real feel of early 20th century rural travel.

Tickets through the web site or on the day at the ticket office.

Bar Open

Reproduced courtesy of the MSLR

The June Puzzle – Martin Elms

This month, the first letter of the answer to the following questions will spell the name of a Southern Pullman train

1. Mail interchange station southeast of Lichfield.	
2. Class of Great Western locomotive commencing with number 4900 "Saint Martin".	
3. Station between Honeybourne and Worcester.	
4. Name of the locomotive in the film "Oh, Mr Porter".	
5. Viaduct south of Balcombe.	
6. Locomotive depot with location code 64H.	
7. ? Jones locomotive superintendent of the Highland Railway 1869 – 1896.	
8. Station between Bungay and Beccles.	
9. Freshwater, Yarmouth, and ? Railway.	
10. Station at end of the branch line from Saxmundham.	
11. Name of locomotive 47565.	
12. Locomotive depot with code 75B.	
13. Station between Cambridge and St. Ives.	
14. H.S. ? Locomotive Superintendent of the London and Chatham Railway 1899 – 1913.	

As usual, best of luck – my solutions are on page 17. No cheating!

Martin Elms



Nene Valley Railway

Pacer Driving Experience Course



Take to the controls and drive Pacer No143602 along the Nene Valley Railway from Wansford to Peterborough.

Your experience starts with a visit to the signal box at Wansford, before meeting your driving instructor who will cover some driving theory before you take to the controls on a 5-mile trip to Peterborough or return to Wansford, driving the Pacer at NVR line speed of 25 mph. With all station stops this will give you a great experience of driving this modern but now heritage unit.

Family or friends can join you and ride on the Pacer for a small additional ticket purchase.

Pacer was the operational name of the BR Classes 140,141,142,143 and 144 diesel multiple unit railbuses, built between 1980 and 1987. They were inexpensively developed using a passenger body based on the Leyland National bus on top of a chassis based on the HSFV1 research vehicle. The railbuses were intended as a short-term solution to a shortage of rolling stock, with a lifespan of no more than 20 years. As modernised replacements were lacking, the Pacer fleet remained in service on some lines until 2021, some 37 years after their introduction in 1984.

Former Arriva Trains Wales 143602 arrived at the NVR in 2022, becoming the sixth of the Class to be preserved.

The Pacer courses will operate on 9th June, 23rd June, 7th July and 22nd Sept.

Price Per Person £180 (Wansford to Peterborough OR Peterborough to Wansford)

A double-booking slot for a full round-trip so that you, a friend or family member can share the driving from Wansford to Peterborough and back to Wansford is £320 for two people - this opportunity will be available only by telephone booking and will be the 14:30 session on each of the dates on sale.

Each Pacer Driver Experience Participant will also receive a Pacer Driver Mug to keep their experience as a keepsake.

One guest per participant can travel on the Pacer free of charge, any other guests can buy a £5 travel ticket, per person, on the day.

All Pacer Experience participants must be 18 years or over

Details courtesy the Nene Valley Railway

Calling Hornby Dublo 3-Rail Collectors



One of our readers, who is a collector of Hornby Dublo 3-rail is interested in making contact with any other readers who share his interest.

If you are interested then please contact the editor in the first instance - hitchinnewsletter@rcts.org.uk – and he will put you in direct contact.

Newsletter Distribution

This e-newsletter, *Railway Ramblings*, 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



Epping Ongar Railway

Steam Gala featuring 4079 Pendennis Castle,
23rd, 24th and 25th June



4079 *Pendennis Castle* departing Bewdley on the Severn Valley Railway

The home fleet of steam locomotives, along with star visiting locomotive 4079 *Pendennis Castle* and British Railways pannier locomotive, 9466, come out to be put through their paces over some of the most challenging gradients in preservation.

The gala will feature:

GWR Castle class locomotive 4079 *Pendennis Castle*, courtesy of the Great Western Society
BR Hawksworth pannier tank locomotive, 9466, courtesy of the West Somerset Railway
GWR Hall class locomotive 4953 *Pitchford Hall*
GWR prairie locomotive, L150 (5521) in London Transport maroon livery
Hawthorn Leslie 0-6-0 saddle tank, number 3437 *Isabel*

An intensive service will operate, during which the engines will need to work hard on our challenging gradients. Services will additionally run until late evening on Saturday.

All trains will be running in conjunction with the EOR fleet of heritage London buses, which will provide connections with Epping Underground and Shenfield National Rail stations.

As well as an intensive passenger service between Ongar, North Weald and Epping Forest, goods trains, some double-headed services and additional shuttle services from North Weald to Epping Forest are also planned.

On Friday 23 June: Expect up to five locomotives to be working services, including 4079 *Pendennis Castle*, 9466 and 4953 *Pitchford Hall*, with an intensive service from 10am to 6pm with a traditional non-stop express service finale.

On Saturday 24 June: All five locomotives will be working trains throughout the day. An evening real ale train service will operate – see the EOR website for details. Overall, services expected to operate between 10am and 10pm.

On Sunday 25 June: 4079 *Pendennis Castle*, 9466 and 4953 *Pitchford Hall* will operate an intensive passenger service between 10am and 5pm.

Notes on the visiting locomotives:

GWR 4079 *Pendennis Castle*

This locomotive was completed at Swindon works in February 1924 and began working-life at Old Oak Common depot where it was employed on routes to South Wales and the West Country.

Pendennis Castle's claim to fame dates from 1925 when the GWR lent the locomotive to the LNER for trials against Gresley's mighty new pacifics. Working 16-coach trains on the East Coast main line from Kings Cross, the stalwart Castle covered itself in soot and glory, thoroughly out-performing its larger competitors. Its exploits were the talk of every schoolboy in Britain and the GWR rather cheekily sent *Pendennis Castle* to stand alongside *Flying Scotsman* at the 1925 British Empire Exhibition at Wembley with a notice proclaiming it to be the most powerful passenger express locomotive in Britain.

After being preserved in 1964, *Pendennis Castle* was shipped to Australia for use on excursion trains on the Hammersley iron ore carrying network, with the final steaming there taking place in 1994. With an uncertain future, the locomotive was offered to the Didcot Railway Centre and after a 10-week voyage *Pendennis Castle* returned home in July 2000. Having laid idle since 1994, the locomotive returned to steam again in April 2022.

BR Hawksworth pannier tank locomotive 9466

9466 was built by Robert Stephenson and Hawthorn Ltd and was towed from Darlington to Swindon in 1952. It was initially allocated to Gloucester depot in February 1952 but in March of that year it moved to Worcester where it was used on pilot work as well as shunting and on local passenger and freight duties. It stayed at Worcester for nine years after which it was overhauled and then transferred to Bristol (St Phillips Marsh) in 1961.

Towards the end of its working life, 9466 also saw service at Tondur depot from June 1962 and Radyr shed a year later. Duties at these sheds were similar and comprised trip work and yard shunting. 9466 was withdrawn for scrap in June 1964 after a working life of less than 12 years and sold to Woodham Brothers. It spent 11 years at Woodham Brothers before moving to Quainton in September 1975.

In preservation 9466 has visited many heritage railways and worked trains on the London Underground network, so it is a very fitting that it is making its first visit to the EOR for the steam gala.

Details reproduced courtesy Epping Ongar Railway



Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway

Fare Specials on Fathers' Day (18th June)

All-Day Rover Adult tickets are issued at just £7.00 for all Dads on Sunday 18 June. The regular range of discounts and concessions are also available. When you buy tickets online the full range of fares is shown together with these Fare Specials - at the checkout simply select the tickets that are appropriate for you - please buy your travel tickets in advance.

In addition - for adults travelling together there are also combined All-Day Rover tickets and Boxed Cream Teas which will be served at reserved seats in the Train Restaurant - they are available in limited numbers to pre-order for travel on steam departures from Chinnor at 10.45, 13.10 and 15.45 when you buy your tickets online. The Boxed Cream Teas are £7.50 each.



C&PRR are delighted that GWR Steam Locomotive No.4144 is on hire from Didcot Railway Centre and will be hauling the 1950s period carriages on Standard Days during the 2023 season. Vintage Diesels will also operate alternate services for added variety and interest.

On 28, 29 May; 04, 11, 18, 25 June; 02, 09, 16, 23, 27, 30 July; 03, 06, 10, 13, 17, 20, 24, 27, 28, 31 August; 10, 17, 24 September; 01, 08, 15, 22, 26, 29 October 2023 you can join the heritage trains at either Chinnor or Princes Risborough stations. Then relax and enjoy the panorama of the Chiltern foothills - as the scenery gently unfolds past your window you may spot some of the local wildlife. For more information, please see the "Journey Guide".

Information reproduced courtesy of the C&PRR

Beccles Parcel Office 1962 – a short story by Martin Elms

I studied the parcel that I had taken from the batch just unloaded from the 10:50 DMU from Ipswich to Lowestoft.

I am the senior porter/parcels clerk based at Beccles station, my principal duties are collating parcels outward and inward traffic by trains stopping here. I record details in a huge leather-bound ledger, sorting them for forward delivery by road vehicle. I am assisted by Reg Jones, who appears to know everyone and every location, Brian Wight, Sid Walters and, hindered by the lanky spotted faced long haired youth, Eric Jarvis. Road deliveries being tasked to Henry Wilson for the area north of Beccles and Richie Smith for the southern area.

“Just look at this” I said to Reg, drawing his attention to a very heavy package, in the shape of a box. about twelve inches long four wide and three deep. It was covered by very worn and torn brown paper. Affixed to it was an incredibly old destination parcel label, upon which, just legible, was printed “To Beccles LNE East.” The condition was obviously many years old. The appearance was it had been lost somewhere in between then and now! It was addressed to “Farmer Stan Stroud, Whitehall Farm, Beccles” There was no information about the sender or the contents.

“Well, we can’t deliver that” said Reg sidling up to the counter.

“Why?” I asked.

Brian, who was now handling the parcel, said, “He died in 1946!” He took time to examining the parcel turning it round and studying it for any clues.

In this run up to Christmas 1962 the office was quite busy. We were however not as busy as my last two years here. Our volume of business was being affected by Royal Mail and embryo parcel delivery companies springing up across Norfolk and Suffolk. I did not really have time to deal with mysteries of unknown parcels, having enough to attend to with straightforward ones. I took the parcel from Brian and placed it on a high shelf for future attention.

Reg lent back on the counter and attended to the important task, to him, of lighting his pipe. This brought back happy childhood memories for me, watching my Grandad filling and then lighting his pipe followed by the pleasant aroma of tobacco. I watched him with interest.

He then told us he would tell us the story about farmer Stroud. I knew from experience of Reg and his past revelations that this would certainly be interesting and a welcome break from completing the parcels ledger.

Eric, always looking for an excuse to stop work, wandered over, chewing gum noisily. He added a spearmint aroma to the area!

“Wish you wouldn’t chew in here” I complained.

“Trying to stop smoking, ain’t I “, he said sulkily. “Saving up with my girl to get engaged, aren’t we?” he continued.

Ignoring Eric’s social news, Reg studied his audience, and now joined by Sid, drew himself up, standing upright and creating a forceful presence, related the following story - “After the war in June 1946, Stan Stroud was in severe financial trouble. His wife had died and also his only son from an illness. The farm was failing. Stan was in the depths of depression.”

Reg continued "One night he was found shot dead in a hut on the farm. The door was locked from the inside, the only key was found in his pocket. The windows were all shut and bolted and there was no sign of anyone else having been in the premises. So, suicide was suspected. However," – Reg paused to relight his pipe. To add an element of drama to the story he went on to say "no weapon was found either in close proximity to Stan or inside the hut. The position his body was found in, and the gunshot wound had all the makings of suicide. But as I said, no weapon was found and no sign of a break in.

At the Inquest, the facts and circumstances were deliberated in great depth. Subsequently the only verdict made by the coroner was one of an Open Verdict. Stan did not have any known enemies. There was no evidence of intruders on the farm, or at the hut. It was established that the wound was from a bullet discharged from a wartime-issue military revolver. Stan was not known to have possessed a weapon of this type.

"So, after many theories and investigations the mystery remains to this day. The farm was sold, and the occurrence almost forgotten." Reg finished his tale by tapping his pipe in an ashtray on the counter.

During the next few days, I was extremely busy. This included having many acrimonious arguments with some of the public over lost, missing, or damaged parcels. To add to the problems a rather fractious interview with the local British Transport Police, in the form of Sergeant Willies, regarding a supposedly lost, or allegedly stolen, case of whisky was something I did not relish.

Eric, who was lurking in the vicinity, said to the sergeant "Now we know what Martin has given his friends for Christmas! "

The Sergeant, who in my presence didn't have any sense of humour, took this badly and set about chastising Eric. I am sure the whole episode didn't do my innocent-standing with the police any favours. Fortunately for me the case of whisky was discovered intact at Yarmouth South Town Station the next day. It had been overcarried.

Due to all these distractions, I had forgotten the battered parcel with its old label that I had placed on the lofty shelf.

On a Tuesday towards the end of January, during a slack period, Eric and I were having a tidy up. Eric was perched precariously on a ladder. He felt along the shelf and produced the parcel.

"Look what I've found" he said "But it's all damp now. The window alongside it must have leaked and let the rain in", he said - this brightly with a humorous touch.

What happened next was rather unfortunate. Eric was holding one side of the ladder with one hand, the parcel he held with the other. Without having another hand to hold the other side of the ladder he was taking a considerable risk. Suddenly, the ladder wobbled and not unexpectedly Eric yelled and dropped the parcel. It hit the floor with a squelch and burst open.

From it and sliding across the floor, with its barrel pointing ominously at me, was a wartime military revolver.

I reported this to the police. Hoping that I would have been able to avoid seeing Sergeant Willies for a considerable time after his previous visit, I was therefore greatly pleased to have instead a Suffolk County police inspector from Lowestoft attending.

To ensure that there no repeats of Eric's behaviour, and unhelpful remarks which I am sure would have been enough to put me in the dock on a murder charge or of illegal possession of a weapon, I sent him out of the way on parcel deliveries with Henry.

I was later informed that subsequent forensic tests, established that the weapon had been fired only once and that the bullet that caused the death was established, without doubt, having been fired from that weapon. The only fingerprints on it, which included the trigger, were of Stan Stroud.

Martin Elms

The June Presentations (1)

A 10th Colour Rail Journey

- Paul Chancellor

13th June at Hitchin



This presentation "A 10th Colour-Rail Journey" portrays the work of ten photographers, each of which had a different approach to railway photography. Pictures featured will cover the country and they date from the 1950s to the present day. There should be something for everyone. This is the 'lead image' to the presentation.

Paul is the proprietor a Colour-Rail and author of rail related books and articles. As an RCTS member he manages the Liveries Library, is a member of both the Administration Group and the Strategy Group.

The June Presentations (2)

All About Mangapps Farm Railway - John Jolly

27th June at Digswell, Welwyn



Stories from the owner. Mangapps Railway Museum is a heritage railway centre located near Burnham-on-Crouch in Essex. The 0.75 miles (1.21 km) of standard gauge running line and associated museum are owned and operated by the Jolly family assisted by volunteers.

The Museum has one of the largest and most comprehensive collections of railway items in Britain. Where possible items from the collection are displayed in the appropriate setting, for example in the restored Station Master's office at Mangapps station and the Lamp Hut. However, the vast majority of the collection may be seen in the Museum building.

We enjoyed a branch visit to Mangapps in August 2018.

Puzzle Solutions

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

1. **Tamworth.** 2. **Hall.** 3. **Evesham.** 4. **Gladstone.** 5. **Ouse.** 6. **Leith Central.** 7. **David.**
8. **Ellingham.** 9. **Newport.** 10. **Aldeburgh.** 11. **Responsive.** 12. **Redhill.** 13. **Oakington.**
14. **Wainwright.**

Solution: THE GOLDEN ARROW

Martin Elms

Finally, from the Archive

Photos from the branch visit to Mangapps Farm Railway (Aug 2018)



Photos: John Dossett

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) and Alan Cheetham. The Railway Correspondence & Travel Society is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation Registered with the Charities Commission.