

# Railway Ramblings

Issue 162

January 2024

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



On the Bure Valley Railway, 11<sup>th</sup> August 2023,  
No 7 *Spitfire* leaves the turntable at Wroxham to run round the train for Aylsham.

*Photo: John Dossett*

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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

**Note:** In the event of any late change to the programme, everyone on the distribution list for this newsletter will receive an email advising the details of the change.

## During January 2024

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

9<sup>th</sup> January **Hitchin, 2013 to the Present Day** *Richard Allen*

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

30<sup>th</sup> January **Steam in the Kings Cross Area in the 50's & 60's** *David Percival*

## During February 2024

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

13<sup>th</sup> February **Edward Thompson, Wartime CME** *Simon Martin*

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

27<sup>th</sup> February **East Anglia in the 2020's** *Iain Scotchman*

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 are £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

## “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.

# Presentations Offered by Neighbouring Branches

Make the most of your RCTS membership. The following details have been provided by those RCTS branches which are geographically closest to us.

## CAMBRIDGE

The Swifts, Haggis Gap, Fulbourn, Cambridge CB21 5HD  
- Meetings start at 19:30

9<sup>th</sup> January                      “March” with Richard Munns

## SOUTH ESSEX

Shenfield Parish Hall, 60, Hutton Road, Shenfield CM15 8LB  
- Meetings start at 19:30

15<sup>th</sup> January                      “The Greater Anglia Fleet Replacement” by Jonathan Denby,  
Greater Anglia  
(A virtual presentation)

## MILTON KEYNES

Network Rail, The Quadrant, Milton Keynes, MK9 1EN  
- Meetings start at 19:30

4<sup>th</sup> January                      Members’ Presentations

## WATFORD

Beechen Grove Baptist Church, Clarendon Road, Watford WD17 1JJ  
- Meetings start at 19:00

2<sup>nd</sup> January                      “Northampton Gateway Strategic Railfreight Interchange”  
by George Collinson  
(A virtual presentation)

6<sup>th</sup> February                      “Railways in & Around the Second World War”  
by Robin Mathams  
(A virtual presentation)



## Chairman's Platform

Best Wishes for 2024. Another year! By the time you read this the Christmas festivities will be behind us and the New Year will either be imminent (or past). I hope that you have been making the most of the opportunities to enjoy yourselves with family and friends. The downsides of this time of year are the short daylight hours and the cold weather – I urge you to keep safe, and keep warm & well. New Year Resolutions? – even if you have no others, I should urge you to attend our branch meetings whenever you can!

Thanks to the work of Dave Elsdon, our Branch Secretary, we have a full and exciting programme for 2024. You will find details for the whole of 2024 in last month's issue of *Railway Ramblings* (which can be viewed on the RCTS website – access available to members and non-members). Printed programmes are also now available for you to pick-up at Branch meetings.

Since October, we have provided our more frequent attendees to branch meetings with a lanyard-type name badge. The aim of the badges is to “put names to faces” and, also, make it easier for the “regulars” to help newcomers and those who attend infrequently (those without badges) feel more welcome. Personally, I feel that the early experience with badges is helping to improve our meetings.

Our Branch Secretary is now keeping an eye on the list of attendees at each meeting and additional badges will be prepared for those who become more frequent attendees. If you don't yet have a lanyard badge (and feel you have been overlooked) then let me (or Dave Elsdon, Paul Holloway or John Dossett) know and we will get one ready for your next attendance. It could be that there is already one waiting for you – there should be a list at the registration desk so that you can check. If you already have a lanyard-type badge we would now like you to retain it – and try to remember to wear it when attending meetings.

Finally, during January we would like to encourage you to “bring a friend” to our meetings by offering them admission at the member donation rate. All you need to do is to register their name as your guest when you sign-in.

*Steve Lacey*

## Weather Warning

Over the next couple of months we are more than likely going to see a return to really cold weather – during which we will, as usual, try to run our scheduled programme BUT please keep an eye on your emails if you are intending to attend the meetings as messages will be sent to everyone on the email distribution list if weather conditions are such that it seems imprudent to meet.

*Steve*

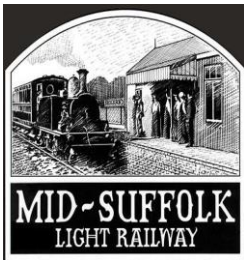
## New Members

We welcome Andrew Grayson, of Biggleswade, and Ray Shakespeare-Smith, of Hitchin, as new members of the RCTS and to the Hitchin & Welwyn Garden City branch.



# “Cathedrals of Steam”

This talk, by Christian Woolmar, (to be held at Holy Saviour Church, Radcliffe Road, Hitchin, on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2024) was notified in the previous issue of *Railway Ramblings*. At the time of writing further details have not been received. Hopefully they will soon appear on the church website.



## Mid-Suffolk Light Railway

### 2024 Events



After the New Year Day's "Steam & Light Festival" the next event will be the "Easter Stem Up" - at the end of March.

More details will be published in the March issue of *Railway Ramblings*.

*Reproduced courtesy of the MSLR*



## Epping Ongar Railway

### 2024 Events

After another packed festive season programme, the next events will be "Kids for a Quid" during the February school half-term and then, especially for bus enthusiasts, the "Winter Country Bus Event" on 25<sup>th</sup> February.

More details in the February issue of *Railway Ramblings*.

*Reproduced courtesy of the EOR*

# The January Puzzle – Martin Elms

This month, the first letter of the answer to the following questions will spell a seasonal message.

This time you can probably quickly guess the solution and used that to help answer the individual questions!

1. ? Paragon Railway Station	
2. Name of locomotive 45562	
3. ? Stirling G.N. locomotive superintendent from 1866 to 1895	
4. Locomotive depot with code 9H	
5. Freshwater, Newport and ? Railway	

6. Station between Dingwall and Tain	
7. Name of Locomotive D1036 “Western ?”	
8. Signal and brake engineers located in Chippenham	

9. Junction station for Princetown	
10. Name of locomotive 60111	
11. Depot with code 10E	
12. Junction station for Swaffham	

As usual, best of luck – my solutions are on page 13.

*Martin Elm*

# Manchester Piccadilly to Welwyn North

## - Exhibition Travel Woes

I had an arrangement to meet up with my son, who lives in Benthams, North Yorks, to visit the Manchester Model Railway event on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2023. I travelled to Leeds, leaving Stevenage at 06:55, arriving in Leeds in good time to board the 09:15 Trans Pennine service from Newcastle to Manchester Piccadilly. I arrived in Manchester, on time, at 10:25.



*Kirkdale Junction*

We had a great time at the exhibition, one of the best we had been to this year. I was amused by one particular layout - a small industrial layout entitled W.C.Boggs & Sons, Sanitary Ware Manufacturers! Our visit to the exhibition was followed by a good pub lunch and a couple of beers before we went our separate ways. That was when the "fun" started!

My train back to Leeds was due at 16:30 already re-scheduled to leave at 16:45 but in fact, due to an even later arrival, it did not eventually depart for Leeds until 17:02. A stop at Stalybridge was omitted in an attempt to gain time, but we still did not arrive at Leeds until 18:08, which gave me just 7 minutes to cross platforms to get my Azuma back to Stevenage. This train arrived from the depot a couple of minutes late and we therefore departed Leeds at 18:18. The train was full, with quite a few rowdy football supporters on-board, was very noisy, fortunately some left the train at Wakefield and the rest at Doncaster. At Doncaster the train was held while police came through the train checking for any remaining noisy passengers. We eventually left Doncaster 16 minutes late. Our next stop was Grantham, to which we kept good time, although still running late, until about 3 miles north of the station where we stopped - for 1 hour 30 minutes! - having been told that a north-bound service had damaged the overhead wires and there was no power.

Snacks and water were given to passengers, if required, and we gradually moved off, creeping into Grantham station on the Azuma's diesel power at 21:03, where we were informed that we would be reversing back to Newark to allow us to take the avoiding line via Lincoln! We left Grantham, again, at 21:08 arriving at Newark 21:23 and straight onto the avoiding line, passing Lincoln at 21:44 eventually pulling into Peterborough at 22:55 after a second delivery of snacks and drinks en-route.



Fortunately, the driver and train supervisor were Leeds-based and had the avoiding line route knowledge. This was a considerable time-saver, as this would not have been the case had they been a Kings Cross crew.

Once at Peterborough, at 22:55 the information was that another train would arrive in approximately 15 minutes time to take any remaining passengers on to Stevenage and Kings Cross. Following on from this, some 10 minutes later, a further announcement that this train had also be terminated, somewhere, but certainly not Peterborough! Taxis would now be summoned to take us forward. I eventually got into a taxi just a little after midnight, with three ladies, arriving at Stevenage 00:46. After collecting my car and driving home to Digswell I finally unlocked the door at 13:00 exactly. Not bad - an eight-hour plus journey to get home! I did feel sorry for the ladies, as once they were dropped at Kings Cross they had to make their own way - two had to get to Tunbridge Wells and the other to Reading.



*On a lighter note – the layout made entirely from Lego*

Exhibitions must have an effect on my travel, as I went to the one at Milton Keynes at the end of September, and on this occasion there was a points/signal failure at Euston with train delays of at least 90 minutes. On that day I was pointed in the direction of a bus going to Luton, which I boarded, and eventually arrived at Luton station, with several miles spent travelling down the M1 on a scheduled double-decker bus. From Luton my tickets were then valid via St. Pancras and Kings Cross to Welwyn North and home.

Which exhibition should I go to next time? Perhaps the DeHavilland Model Railway Society in Welwyn Garden City?

*Dave Elsdon*





# Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway

Round-up of Project Prima (Princes Risborough Infrastructure Materials Acquisition)



The arrival of the first tranche of redundant materials from the HS2 works on Network Rail's Princes Risborough to Aylesbury branch (PRA) has been successfully completed. (A second similar tranche is theoretically to be available soon, but practicalities at the HS2 site mean that this is uncertain.)

The PRA branch is being realigned just South of Aylesbury to run over a new bridge over the HS2 track (and another over a putative new by-pass road), with new track on new embankment. Some of the old track materials, not re-usable on the national network due to age and wear, are being donated to the Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway Association (a registered charity and heritage railway entirely run by volunteers) by Network Rail.

The materials are principally concrete sleepers, which for speed of removal from the trackbed (over the weekend of 19 August) and relative ease of transport are still formed as short lengths of track with rails cut to 6m long. These rails won't be re-useable. Each of these short track panels has 8 sleepers and weighs about 3 tonnes, and there have been 72 of them so far. In practice some sleepers were wooden replacements, and two panels were entirely wood, so we effectively have about 67 concrete 6m panels and 5 wooden ones. The wooden sleepers are of course still useful to us.

The panels had to be collected from the huge HS2 site which stretches between Stone and Stoke Mandeville. HS2 has requirements to use accredited hauliers and lorries with the latest



environmental and safety gizmos, so we eventually wound up using a firm from Hampshire. We also had challenges at the Chinnor Railway end, as we have no space to store these materials other than trackside where they are to be laid, and no road access possible to that area. At present we do not have any loading area where we can get large lorries alongside a train, nor a working large rail crane, and added to that we have a weak bridge which limits the loads we can put on wagons travelling the length of the line! So a method had to be found....



Of course we would have liked to see the materials shipped by rail, but this was ruled out as impractical at the HS2/NR end due to the project programme. (It's always difficult moving the materials of a single line out over the line you have just lifted. Rather like taking the wheels off your car, loading them in the boot, then driving to the garage...)

For speed, two types of articulated lorries were used to collect from the HS2 site. One had its own 'Hi-ab' crane on board, mounted behind the cab. The weight of the crane together with all the stabiliser jacks and hydraulic equipment means however that the payload of such lorries is limited (5 of these track panels), so a second 'plain' vehicle was used in addition, which could carry more (8 or 9 panels). The crane on the first was used to load both itself and the second lorry.

Without a loading wharf or crane available at Chinnor, deliveries were made via the rural level crossing on Horsenden Lane. It was only just practical to get the size of lorry up the lane, but there was no way we could get two at once within crane's reach of the crossing! So each run of the hi-ab lorry brought 5 track panels to Horsenden crossing, and lifted them onto waiting rail wagons. Then that lorry rejoined its mate which had gone to our Chinnor station car park and unloaded it there before both ran empty back to HS2 for the next load. Two cycles per day of this were possible, shifting up to 28 panels out of HS2. Of course, the stacks of materials built up in Chinnor car park, and at one stage there were 33 panels there; so on other days the focus was simply shuttling from Chinnor to Horsenden with a single lorry.



Once the lorries left the level crossing, our short train of loaded wagons was shunted from Horsenden level crossing to Thame Junction, ¼ mile away. There, our TRM (Track Relaying Machine, also known as a twin jib crane) was waiting in the Loop line alongside. It picked up one track panel at a time on each of its jibs, and then carried these alongside for up to half a mile to where they could be stacked trackside ready for use. Then back for the next load. This 40+ year old TRM hasn't worked so hard in many years! Inevitably it threw up a few issues – minor hydraulic and air leaks, a sensor playing up, a switch that fell apart - but it has come through for us.



The result of this exercise, completed in a fortnight, is that we have about half the sleepers needed to complete the missing section of the Chinnor Independent Line out of Princes Risborough. If we get the second tranche from the HS2/PRA project then we will have about enough. We already have some recovered rail to fit these sleepers, but only about half the amount we will need. Stops were pulled out, and something like 70 volunteer shifts were worked over the two weeks to bring these materials in. Impressive!

*Information reproduced courtesy of the C&PRR*

## Thames Crossing – a Short Story by Martin Elms

“O Blast” I exclaimed as I watched the stern of the last ferry of the day churn away from Gravesend Pier.

This makes a bad end to an already troublesome afternoon and evening.

In the afternoon I had decided to visit friends in Crayford, the other side of the river Thames from my home in Tilbury, and chose to use the cross-river ferry and the connecting train service as I had often done since moving here in 1970.

In my haste to get ready I broke the strap on my wristwatch, given to me by my parents for my twenty first birthday which was suitably engraved celebrating the event. I had to put it loose in my jeans pocket and then almost ran to catch the ferry .

After a convivial afternoon and staying later than intended, I waited impatiently on the East bound platform at Crayford.



To my annoyance the train I intended to catch was cancelled and the following one, having made extra stops, was now twenty minutes late making my ferry connection now uncomfortably tight. But I hoped the ferry would be held, after all it should run for the convenience of train passengers whether late or not!!

Eventually with much noise of air-brakes the train arrived and, opening the nearest door, I entered the stuffy empty compartment.

After what seemed an eternity of a journey the train arrived at Gravesend and I hastened to catch the ferry.

Of course, it wasn't held and complaining to the railman in his cabin produced no helpful response, just the usual shrug of his shoulders as he locked up his cabin and rapidly disappeared into an office and locked the door behind him, before after getting my breath back I was able to "let rip" at him and The Southern Region in general!

Walking along the now deserted pier I appeared to be the only stranded passenger. I noticed a smell, it reminded me of traction engine rallies that I had attended when a boy in my home in East Anglia or perhaps steam locomotives also seen on visits with my parents to the miniature railway at Audley End. Curious, I followed my nose and turned a right-angle corner to a part of the docks unfamiliar to me.

There to my surprise was a ferry moored to the dockside producing substantial amounts of smoke from its twin funnels. But more important to me was a sign on the gangway attached to it proclaiming the boat to be destined for Tilbury. This was an unknown service to me; perhaps a rival or a private charter. Anyway, not wishing to question my good luck, I trotted up the gangway and, relieved at not being apprehended by officialdom, onto the deserted deck. Finding no one to check my return ticket, I ventured to the bows of the boat, passing the passenger saloon on my left. It appeared quite full of passengers all dressed in Edwardian clothes. I was now convinced I had entered a private fancy dress function and decided to keep quiet and out of the way, even though I had the required ticket I didn't want to be ejected.

Luckily, before I was noticed the ferry was released from its moorings by unseen staff and, as we set sail, I felt in my back jeans pocket and realised that my wallet was missing. I must have dropped it in my haste to reach the ferry and now I had no way or time to investigate its disappearance.

"Isn't that just great. This should be Friday 13<sup>th</sup> 1973 not Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> " I said out-loud in my frustration and anger.

I retraced my steps on the ferry to hunt for my wallet but to no avail, I must have dropped it on the pier at Gravesend. I knew I had it when I left the train as I placed my return ferry ticket in it for safe keeping. On route back to the bows I passed a large structure to my right and from it came a noise of water churning and the sight of spray flying around – and despite my limited knowledge of ships this told me that I was on a paddle-driven vessel which I thought a type now obsolete - perhaps this was a preserved one?

We swung out into the Thames and to my surprise I noticed how few lights there were on the shoreline and that I could see a clear starlite sky with no sign of aircraft lights, also unusual for London there also appeared to be a large number of moored craft with their riding lights dimly glowing in the dark. I thought that the Thames in recent years had lost most of its shipping but the river here was certainly busier here than I had been led to believe. The ferry continued chugging along and fascinated I watched the procession of sparks from its funnels.

Being curious as to the name of the ferry I located one of its life-rings.

"P.S. Thames Star, L.T & S Rly Southend" I read.

Now P.S. must stand for paddle steamer but what on earth did L.T.&S.Rly mean? I mused.

My knowledge of shipping ownership and railways was virtually nothing. I thought that all Thames ferries belonged to British Railways, leaning over the rail I continued starrng at the almost dark riverside which I knew must be the approaching Tilbury but why so dark with few lights?

"I know - a power cut ", I concluded.

Suddenly the ferry gave a violent lurch and I all but fell into the river. Clinging on desperately it soon quietened down, and we continued our journey.

Now I thought, if I had fallen in all I have on me is my engraved watch, some loose change, and the return half of the ferry ticket, so nobody for some time would know who I was. I shuddered at the thought and resolved that once back on dry land I needed to quickly pursue my investigations to retrieve my wallet at the earliest opportunity.

The ferry arrived at the dark gloomy Tilbury, and I joined the departing passengers, though most seemed to be staying in the saloon, and I was now convinced that this was a private charter.

Nobody appeared to collect my ticket so hastening down the gangway I gladly hurried away down a narrow ill-lit passageway - the other departing passengers vanishing to my left and right.

The passageway opened out into the familiar well-lit street of Tilbury.

The power cut must be over I thought, and hurried to set about the task of trying to retrieve my wallet, and hopefully most or all of its contents.

A few days later at home, bored with watching TV, I tuned into my radio, catching a programme in mid-stream, so to speak, as it was about the ferries that had served on the Thames. Being of local interest to me, I listened intently. After a few minutes, the programme related a story that on February 7<sup>th</sup>, 1911, the ferry P.S. Thames Star, owned by The London Tilbury and Southend Railway, whilst crossing on the last service of the day from Gravesend to Tilbury hit an obstruction. This hadn't caused much damage to the ferry however one passenger was thrown overboard in the violent collision. His body was found washed up some four days later.

He couldn't be identified, as all he had about his person was an engraved pocket watch, some loose change, and the return half of a ferry ticket from Gravesend to Tilbury.

*Martin Elms*

## Puzzle Solution

Solution to the puzzle in this issue (page 6):

1. Hull. 2. Alberta. 3. Patrick. 4. Patricroft. 5. Yarmouth. 6. Nigg. 7. Emperor.
8. Westinghouse. 9. Yelverton. 10. Enterprise. 11. Accrington. 12. Roudham.

Solution: HAPPY NEW YEAR

*Martin Elms*

# The January Presentations (1)

Hitchin, 2013 to the Present Day

- Richard Allen



9<sup>th</sup> January at Hitchin

Richard plans to take the local railway scene from 2013 to the present day, with a variety of bits and pieces, for want of a better phrase!

## An Appeal for Information

Do any of our readers know anything about the private industrial railway that used to be within the old Shredded Wheat factory site in Welwyn Garden City? Perhaps you, or someone you know, even worked there? Perhaps you have a photo of the railway when it was in operation?

The small diesel that used to operate there is alive and well on the Mid-Suffolk Light Railway and is now known as *Shreddie*, but I have only scraps of information about the system where it originally worked.

If you have any information that might help then please let me know.

*John Dossett (Editor)*

Email: [Hitchinnewsletter@rcts.org.uk](mailto:Hitchinnewsletter@rcts.org.uk)



# The January Presentations (2)

Steam in the Kings Cross Area in the 50's & 60's

- David Percival



30<sup>th</sup> January at Digswell, Welwyn

It was in 1953 that the Percival family moved from South London to North Hertfordshire. For the next ten years, until the end of regular steam in the area, David spotted at the ECML lineside, travelled by train to school and latterly commuted to Kings Cross.

This presentation chronicles the variety of steam classes and workings he observed “on the GN” during that decade, illustrated with photographs from ColourRail and others as well as some of his own pictures taken in the closing years.

This photo shows 64206 shunting the morning Hitchin-Hertford ‘pick up’ at Langley Junction on 17 January 1959 (photo by Basil Coles). This image is in the presentation.

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

## Another from the Bure Valley Railway



11<sup>th</sup> August 2023, No 6 *Blickling Hall* at Aylsham

Photo: 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) and John Dossett (Newsletter Editor). The Railway Correspondence & Travel Society is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation Registered with the Charities Commission.*