

# Railway Ramblings

Issue 169

August 2024

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



*Ecclesbourne Valley Railway 27 May 2024*

*D1842 departing Warksworth for Duffield*

*(Terminating at Shottle due to landslip near Duffield)*

*(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 August 2024

11th August                    **Visit to the Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway**

There are no indoor branch meetings during August. Instead, there is the now customary Branch Outing – this year to the Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway.

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## During September 2024

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

10<sup>th</sup> September            **A Driver's Eye View – 48 Years on the Railway**

*Andy Grimmett*

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

24<sup>th</sup> September            **Through Kirton Tunnel, Kirton Lindsey to Cleethorpes**

*Stephen Gay*

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

## Presentations Offered by Neighbouring Branches

Make the most of your RCTS membership. Why not attend a presentation offered by a neighbouring RCTS branch (Cambridge, Milton Keynes, South Essex, and Watford) The details are available in the *Railway Observer* and on the RCTS website.



## Chairman's Platform

Thanks to the efforts of the people at the Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway our plans for the August branch outing have been finalised and there has been a good uptake of places for the day. We are now hoping for good weather on the day! All participants should, by now, have received "reporting instructions" and guidance notes. If not then please get in touch with our Branch Secretary, Dave Elsdon, on 01438 714277 or email at [hitchin@rcts.org.uk](mailto:hitchin@rcts.org.uk) Just a reminder to our participants – please be mindful that the C&PRR is a small heritage line, run by volunteers, and especially the amount of "behind the scenes" access will be dependent on the availability of staff on the day of our visit.

This month we publish the third (and final) part of a series "Stratford Reminiscences 1988" by Hugh Driscoll. I trust you find his reminiscences interesting and I hope that this will encourage more of you to step forward and be contributors! Don't be shy – our Editor needs to hear from you.

We know that many of you have enjoyed the Short Stories that Martin Elms has been writing regularly for us over the years since Covid-19 struck. On behalf of all readers, I thank Martin for the time and effort he put into producing these. There are a couple of stories still in reserve and one of these appears on page 14 of this issue of *Railway Ramblings*. Martin's regular Monthly Puzzle continues and you will find that on page 7.

On 26<sup>th</sup> July we had an RCTS stand at the Letchworth Model Railway Society exhibition. The weather was rather good and this was a well-attended event, with many family groups. It was good to see a number of you there and I can report that we sold a fair number of our wonderful pre-owned books, making a net profit of £221 for our branch funds. We also recruited one new member to the Society. My thanks to John, Dave and Paul who helped me man the stand.

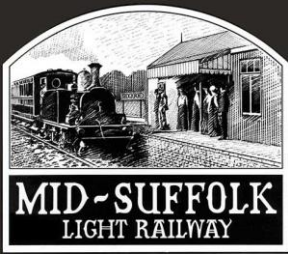
I finish with my now standard reminder about badges at our meetings - If you don't yet have a lanyard badge (and feel you have been overlooked) then let me (or Dave Elsdon, Paul Holloway or John Dossett) know and we will get one ready for your next visit. It could be that there is already one waiting 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 prefer you to retain it – AND try to remember to wear it when attending meetings!

Steve Lacey

## 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)



# Mid Suffolk Light Railway

## Four Events in August

The Mid-Suffolk Light Railway is Suffolk's only standard-gauge heritage railway, offering steam open days and events to the general public. Services are normally steam operated on both standard open days and special event days.



There are four events in August 2024 –

4th August – Steam Railway & Mogfriends (Morgan) Car Club Day

11th August – Steam Railway & Big Bus Day \*

Eastern Counties Bus Preservation Group shuttle services from Stowmarket Station to and from the MSLR Station at Brockford.

18th August – Steam Railway & BMW & Royal Enfield Motor-cycles Day

25th/26th August – Model Mania & Hornby Collectors Club Days

A Bank Holiday weekend with a wide range of models on display. The famous Hornby Collectors day has now grown into a major celebration of models of all sorts over two days.

Model boats, planes and vehicles as well as trains will be on show. Details of exhibitors will be posted on the MSLR website soon.

All “Middy” attractions will be open and running, including the shunting demonstration at Dovebrook.

Details of these (and all other events) will appear in due course on the Middy website:

**[Visit Us & What's on - Mid-Suffolk Light Railway Museum \(mslr.org.uk\)](http://mslr.org.uk)**



*(Material courtesy of the MSLR)*



# GWR Small Prairie 4555

The 2024 Season Steamer



The steam locomotive for the 2024 season is GWR Small Prairie 4555. She's on hire from the Dartmouth Steam Railway for the main summer season and pulled her first service train on the Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway on Sunday 17th March. She was specially repainted from her Great Western livery to the British Railways lined green livery in time for her arrival at the C&PRR. And she's going to celebrate her 100th birthday this year!!

**Builder** GWR Swindon

**Class/type** GWR Small Prairie

**Built year** 1924

**Engine output** Boiler pressure 200 lbs/sq in

**Engine type** Cylinder size 17 in x 24 in

**Fuel tank capacity** Water 1000 imperial gallons, coal 3t 14cwt

**Livery** British Railways lined green

**Max speed** 25mph on our line!

**Status** Operational

**Tractive effort** 21,250 lbf

**Weight** 57 tons

**Wheel arrangement** 2-6-2

**Wheel diameter** 4 ft 7+1/2 in

*(Reproduced courtesy of the C&PRR)*

# The August Puzzle – Martin Elms

This month, the first letter of the answer to the following questions will spell out the name of a preserved locomotive:

1. Name of locomotive E26057
2. Hook ? station between Kingham and Kings Sutton
3. Tunnel near Dalguise
4. Name of locomotive 45730
5. Locomotive depot with code 2E


6. Station between Cromer and Mundesley
7. Midland locomotive superintendent 1909 – 1922,, then LMS 1925 – 1931


8. Name of locomotive D1056 Western ?
9. Locomotive depot with code 63C
10. Wisbech and ? Tramway
11. Name of locomotive D1671 which was in service for only 11 months - being written off at Bridgend
12. Manufacturer of diesel shunters including D2500 – D2519


13. Joseph ? GWR locomotive superintendent 1834 - 1877
14. Locomotive depot with code 34G
15. Town with railway stations Pier Head, Esplanade and St Johns Road
16. Name of locomotive 60534
17. Water troughs between Oxford and Kingham
18. Welsh west coast terminus


My answers, together with the solution, are on page 16.

*Martin Elms*



# What's On, and When?

## And – *Tornado* Visit

For the main 2024 season, the NVR will generally be running Steam services every First and Third Weekend of the Month, and Heritage Diesel services every Second and Fourth weekend of the month. Please check with them which service is operating before you visit, as they may have to make changes at short notice for operational reasons.

NVR are proud to have been awarded the Tripadvisor Travellers' Choice Award, which shows that the Nene Valley Railway is in the top 10% worldwide of places to visit!

24<sup>th</sup>. 25<sup>th</sup> & 26<sup>th</sup> August – Tornado Returns



# 60163 TORNADO

## New Steam for the Main Line

60163 *TORNADO* returns to the NVR on 24th, 25th & 26th August 2024.  
Ride behind Tornado as the locomotive returns to the NVR between Main Line duties.

Tornado is a 21st century steam locomotive. The first main line steam locomotive built in the UK since 1960, Tornado made headlines as it steamed for the first time in 2008. In just over 10 years, the engine has continued to impress, hauling Royal Trains and appearing on the big screen in Paddington 2, as well as on numerous television programmes including Top Gear. Tornado is also the fastest steam engine to run since the 1960s.

ROVER TICKETS: travel on all trains and all day.

Adults

£25.00

Children (over 3 years of age) £15.00

Visit the NVR website to make bookings.

[60163 TORNADO | Nene Valley Railway Ltd \(nvr.org.uk\)](https://www.nvr.org.uk)

And, if you are looking forward to Christmas, you can now make *Santa North Pole Adventure* bookings!!

(Reproduced courtesy NVR)

# Stratford Reminiscences 1988 – Part 3

Hugh Driscoll

*This is the concluding Part of Hugh's Reminiscences. Part 1 appeared in the June 2024 issue and Part 2 in the July 2024 issues of Railway Ramblings.*



Class 87 in the TRS/Major Depot north bay, looking west (pan up!). This was probably nearing the end of a CEM overhaul. 40-ton crane in the background.

*Photo from Stratfordman72 Flickr page with permission.*

I had the pleasure of working with many of the Stratford depot apprentices in the TRS, many of whom have cropped up later in my career. The railway world is a small one.

One apprentice was a keen climber and a bit of a daredevil. He was determined to “tight-rope” walk along the length of the top edge of a Class 47 bodyshell while it had its roof removed. The body was on stands so fortunately it wasn’t as high as when on its bogies. He fell off. But he survived.

I worked with the same apprentice on a few jobs, including a memorable one on a Class 47 undergoing Component Exchange Maintenance (CEM). Unfortunately, during the power unit overhaul at Crewe, a spacer had been omitted between the underside of the engine sump and the sump drain cock assembly. The power unit had been fitted to the Class 47 and fully connected, but the sump drain cock on the power unit was now too high for the loco-mounted sump drain handwheel shafts to engage with it. The sump drain cock had to be removed,

the spacer inserted, and the sump drain cock refitted afterwards. A spacer had been recovered from a used power unit before it went back to Crewe, and we were allocated the job to fit it. We had been promised that the engine oil had been fully drained on the previous shift. The loco had been shunted outside the shed and left in the spring sunlight. So, on the flat, we crawled into the oily four-foot under the loco and, lying on our backs, managed to free up the sump drain assembly with an open-ended spanner, a bar and a hammer. It was an awkward, knuckle grazing job. Thanks to the missing spacer, the nuts had been run high up on their studs, beyond the reach of sockets, and were recessed up and into the sump drain hole in the underside of the loco. As we both worked the sump drain nuts loose, there was an ominous sucking noise. We couldn't move quick enough, being on our backs in the four-foot. Inevitably, we were both soaked in the remnants of the sump contents!

The Traction Repair Shop (TRS) also carried out maintenance on freightliner flat wagons. The Supervisor in charge was like something out of a Western, bounding along the wagons in all weathers with little regard for his own safety. I was involved with coupling a set at the intermediate coupler, standing in the four-foot, holding the bar coupler under one arm, bolts at the ready in the other hand, to match it up with its opposite as a Class 08 approached with the rest of the set. All under control, but all a bit daunting.



East end of TRS/Major Depot in 1987.

DMU lurking under the covered freightliner maintenance road, unusually.

*Photo from Stratfordman72 Flickr page with permission.*

I also spent time with the Stratford Plant and Machinery team, who were based out of the former, three-road, Diesel Railcar shed, "A" shed. The stops end of this shed had been turned over to P&M, and the rest of it was used for underframe washing. The team had a varied workload. I remember working on the mechanism of the ancient "dumb waiter" in the Jazz Bar at Liverpool Street, and lift machinery in the Great Eastern Hotel, to points heaters at Shenfield, carriage wash plant at Chingford and emergency signalling supplies at Chadwell Heath and Chelmsford. We serviced fork lifts in the warehouses at London International Freight Terminal (LIFT). Leyton Civils yard also featured, working on the Civil Engineers rail cranes.



The "Railcar" shed, A shed, in final DMU days.

The Cravens Class 105 unit had been painted green for the last DMU runs on the Romford to Upminster and Wickford to Southminster branches in 1986, when these two lines were electrified at 25kV AC.

*Photo from Stratfordman72 Flickr page with permission.*

There was also work with the Carriage and Wagon department at Barking wagon shop (where I learnt to play poker when not working on Cartic 4s and VDA vans with damaged doors), Bow Midland and Temple Mills yards, and Tilbury FLT. I also travelled the roads of Essex and Hertfordshire with the mobile wagon inspector and his Ford Fiesta to Broxbourne yard, Austin's siding near St. Margarets, Costains at Rye House, Harlow Mill yard and the "nuclear" siding at Southminster. More miles were covered with the Romford overhead line gang.

My next training placement was in Derby with Intercity. But the die had been cast. It was traction maintenance for me. I had become, and remained, a creature of the depot. From Stratford, after I finished my training and college, I progressed to Bounds Green, North Pole and finally and ironically, Temple Mills International. Full circle.

*Hugh Driscoll*

*On the following two pages are additional photographs provided by Hugh*



Class 31 in A shed having undergone a bogie wash, after the withdrawal of DMUs from GE lines.

*Photo from Stratfordman72 Flickr page with permission.*



Some of the transit warehouses at Stratford LIFT, looking south west. Depot to the left of this photo.

*With permission from Gregory's Transport Photos.*



Overall view of the depot from the west end, looking east in 1995, after closure of the TRS. Cargowagon ferry wagons on the left, next to LIFT unloading apron. TRS building left of centre, with modern mess block in front. C shed right of centre. Wash plant on right.

*With permission from Gregory's Transport Photos.*



View from east end near fuel point, showing B shed in centre, A shed on right. Fuel point canopy and peak of TRS roof on extreme right.

*Photo from Stratfordman72 Flickr page with permission.*

*Hugh Driscoll*

# Grantham 1976 - almost a repeat of 1906!

– a short story by Martin Elms

September 19<sup>th</sup>, 1976, and I am the rostered driver of 1M78 the 19:50 parcels and mail train from Peterborough to Crewe. I am working this to Nottingham. The train locomotive is 31407, one of the few in use that electrically supplies the train heating from the locomotive. In an effort to save money, this is booked to be driver-only operated with a second-man not required. It complies with the requirements for driver-only in that there is no train heating boiler to supervise, there are numerous station stops, is not rostered for more than 150 miles or exceeding four hours driving. Currently a guard is on board. British Railways has not yet taken the next step to driver-only trains

This evening the guard, Gordon, told me the train weight was two hundred tons, air-braked and electric heated. It was all coupled up and fit to go. I checked the hose and electric connections for myself and then went to the front of the locomotive to give the windscreens a wipe-over as the washers on Class 31's are not very effective.

I paused from rubbing the windscreen and looked back along the exterior of the locomotive. A driver approached me. I particularly noticed how he was dressed in steam driver overalls, which in this day of corporate uniforms is quite a novelty. Perhaps he had special dispensation or refused to comply. I mulled this over, pondered and wondered about what I was seeing. His mate was following some distance behind and then stopped to have a good long look at the connections between locomotive and train.

“Good evening driver” said the man in his driver uniform of pre-BR styling “I wonder or hope you could help us?” He pointed at his mate. I could see he was also in steam age garb, and he now joined us after his close observations of the couplings.

“I am driver Fred Fleetwood, and this is my fireman Ralph Talbot. We are from Doncaster. Our booked train back has been rescheduled from Grantham due to delays. We were rostered from here at Peterborough. Could you give us a lift to Grantham? We will travel in the train with your guard if you want” I was willing to help-out from the comments I had heard.

“OK” I said “you can travel with me up front and your fireman can travel in the rear cab”

“Thank you, that is kind of you” Fred said.

As instructed Ralph hurried back and climbed into the rear cab.

Fred and I entered the front cab, Fred occupied the seconder's seat.

I tested and retested the various brake functions and ensured the Electric Train Heating was on for the benefit of the mail sorters and of course Gordon.

Having received the right of way from Gordon we set off.

I was surprised but happy to see us routed onto the down fast line instead of the down slow which was our usual passage. Then I remembered that due to an earlier suicide at Stevenage there had been and still were heavy delays to the south of us for northbound trains. We were therefore able to take advantage of a substantial gap in the down trains to go “fast line.” Hopefully, fast line to Grantham.

We trundled along at a sedate 50 to 60 miles an hour, up the bank making plenty of noise and a considerable amount of diesel smoke as these Class 31's are prone to do.

Fred sat quietly in his seat watching our progress intently through the windscreen. I was pleased that my windscreen cleaning was appreciated. Fred also pleased me in that he observed the "seafarers" rule of behaviour of not talking to the "helmsman"!

As I hoped, we kept to the fast line and entered the two-track section and onwards to Stoke tunnel at all of sixty miles an hour! I closed the throttle and was glad of the relative peace and quiet as the train slowly swayed and rocked along. I became aware of a rattle from the engine room door. We left the tunnel in the half-light and slowly gathered speed down the gradient towards Grantham

I saw two yellow lights on the approaching colour-light signal. Reacting to this, I moved the brake handle over to slow our progress ready for our booked stop at Grantham.

But!

There was no slowing down, in fact there appeared to be no application of brakes on the train. Only the locomotive brake was performing.

I kept on trying the brake handle. Still no reaction to the brake.

I was now getting concerned as our speed had hardly reduced. The AWS horn sounded for the signal. I left it sounding, hoping this would make the brakes work!

But no luck, this did not happen.

I noticed Fred was now very worried. He was pale-faced and suddenly leapt to his feet to stand behind the seat he had occupied from Peterborough. I heard him say

"Not again, not again" His voice was louder in the repeating sentence. He froze behind the seat, staring ahead.

I was extremely concerned at this chain of events. However, a stroke of good fortune followed. Gordon was "on the ball", he noticed we had not slowed down. By him applying the brake from his compartment in the train brought great relief to us all. At last, we began to slow down and passed the next colour-light signal. This was showing a single yellow.

However, it was clear to me that we could not stop before the red light shining ominously at the north end of the platform. I could only hope we would not travel too far beyond the danger signal and the potential risk of injury to ourselves or enormous damage to infrastructure.

We sailed by the signal and stopped, with a squeal and shudder, some hundred yards beyond the red aspect signal. The locomotive was on Harlaxton Road bridge, partly on the points which had been set for our booked passage towards Nottingham.

"Phew" I exclaimed

I turned towards Fred,

"Are you OK? That was close. Good for Gordon - well done" I stated in a mixture of speech with shock and relief

But when I looked around there was nobody in the cab with me.

*An explanation for the title for you:*

On Sept 19<sup>th</sup> 1906 the 20:45 Kings Cross to Edinburgh "Scotch Express" mail and passenger train ran through Grantham, its booked stop. It derailed on points still set for a previous freight train from Nottingham and burst through the parapet wall of Harlaxton Road bridge and down the embankment, killing the train driver Fred Fleetwood, his Fireman Ralph Talbot and twelve passengers.

At the time and for many years after, it was considered a mystery. Brake failure was suspected but couldn't be verified or explained. The last sighting of the crew by a signalman was that they were simply standing motionless staring ahead and this led to many theories being given over the subsequent years

However, in October 2006 reinvestigations by *Railway Magazine* almost firmly established the cause

It was practice in 1906 by the GN railway when changing locos at Peterborough to completely release the vacuum brakes by pulling the brake release chord on each coach. The fresh loco being coupled on, the brake pipe connected, and a new vacuum created. By delving into newspaper reports, including from a Reuters reporter incognito who interviewed Peterborough shunters before their superiors "gagged" them, led to suggestions of a collusion, and closing up of ranks. It is now believed that the vacuum pipe was not connected between the loco tender and the train. The train therefore ran "unbraked" and therefore couldn't stop at Grantham causing the derailment. The guard also couldn't stop the train by claiming there was no vacuum showing on his gauge which would indicate that there hadn't been any created after coupling at Peterborough. The practise of pulling the brake chords was stopped after the accident. Furthermore, the relatively new inspecting officer of the enquiry, Lt Col Pelham von Donop, didn't closely question the shunting staff at Peterborough on the brake release and coupling, seemingly being more interested in the health and wellbeing of driver Fleetwood

*Martin Elms*

## Puzzle Solution

Solution to the puzzle in this issue (page 7):

1. Ulysses. 2. Norton. 3. Inver. 4. Ocean. 5. Northampton. 6. Overstrand. 7. Fowler. 8. Sultan. 9. Oban. 10. Upwell. 11. Thor. 12. Hudswell Clarke. 13. Armstrong. 14. Finsbury Park. 15. Ryde. 16. Irish Elegance. 17. Charlbury. 18. Aberystwyth.

Solution: UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA

*Martin Elms*

## Workshop Wanderings

Steve Lacey's report from behind the scenes at the Nene Valley Railway will reappear next month.



# One for Bus (& Train) Enthusiasts

25 August

This is an occasion to commemorate 70 years of Routemaster service (Prototypes, Early Types and Odd Ones).

From the collection of the London Bus Company and friends, this unique event will enable visitors to ride on some of the earliest surviving Routemaster buses including the prototypes as well as some of the provincial RMs seen across the length and breadth of the country.



*Vintage London Bus at an Epping Ongar Railway event*

EOR steam and diesel train services will also be in operation, together with their route 339 bus service providing connections to Epping Underground station (Central Line, zone 6).

The Penny Salon gallery at Ongar will be showing a topical photographic exhibition. Admission to this is free.

## Timetables and Bus Allocations

Complete timetables, together with bus allocations, will be available in the special programme which can be purchased, on the day, for £2.



*Prototype Routemaster buses*



*Routemaster buses*

You can start your journey at any of the EOR stations, or on the vintage London bus service from Epping Underground station.

It's easy to get to the EOR via the London Underground. EOR inclusive vintage London buses will run from right outside the front of Epping Underground station (Central Line, zone 6), connecting with EOR train services and the other bus routes at North Weald station. A feeder service will also operate from Chingford station direct to North Weald at 09.50.

There is only limited car parking for disabled passengers at EOR stations, which must be booked in advance. There is no public parking at North Weald for this event.

Public car parks are available in Ongar (charges may apply), a short walk from the station (use postcode CM5 9AB). Alternatively, passengers may park at Epping Station (charges apply) and join the EOR vintage London bus service (use postcode CM16 4HW).

The bus services are included in your great value fare All Day Rover fare -

Adult - Bus only: £10

This ticket allows unlimited travel on the bus services only.

Adult - Bus and train all day rover: £18

This ticket allows unlimited travel on all the bus services and our heritage train services.

Child: £1

Children under 3 are free - no ticket needed.

Tickets can be purchased on the day, or in advance, via the link below, and selecting 25 August from the calendar.

For more details, on all events, visit the EOR website: [Upcoming Events \(eorailway.co.uk\)](http://www.eorailway.co.uk)

*(Reproduced courtesy of the EOR)*

*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.*