

# Railway Ramblings

Issue 171

October 2024

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



*60532 Blue Peter passing Watton-at-Stone  
13 July 2024*

(Photo: Tom Gladwin)

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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 October 2024

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

8<sup>th</sup> October **Mandarin Madness – Solo Travels in China**

*David Longman*

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

29<sup>th</sup> October **Travels Around the Ukraine by Steam**

*Michael Smyth*

## During November 2024

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

12<sup>th</sup> November **The 11<sup>th</sup> Colour Rail Journey**

*Paul Chancellor*

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

26<sup>th</sup> November **Colchester in the Age of Steam**

*Dave Goodyear*

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

Firstly, my thanks to those brave souls, including our speaker, who made it to the Hitchin meeting on 10 September – the weather was absolutely appalling, with many roads almost impassable. The presentation itself was quite “different” in that it mainly featured specialist equipment used to install and maintain the rail network. It was a real insight, from a man who had worked there.

Looking forward, remember that for the October meetings, if you want to sign in a friend as a guest, at the members' donation rate, they will be very welcome. At reception simply sign-in your guest with your own registration. (The normal rate will apply to other non-members).

Also starting in October, if you want to arrive soon after “doors open” for the meeting, our catering volunteers can offer you a tea or coffee to enjoy while you chat before the presentation starts. I have also taken advice from colleagues and have now started to bring only a limited number of boxes of pre-owned books to each meeting – and aim to bring different sets of boxes to subsequent meetings.

The 2025 programme of presentations is being finalised and will appear in the next issue of *Railway Ramblings*. The usual printed versions will also be available (shortly) at Branch meetings and at forthcoming exhibitions where the Branch has a stand. Our thanks to Dave Elsdon for the vast amount of work he has done in putting this programme together.

Having mentioned exhibitions, we are looking for members who would be prepared to occasionally assist in manning our stand alongside a committee member. This is not particularly arduous and, of course, gives you admission to the relevant exhibition. We are not expecting anyone to commit to doing this on a regular basis. If you are interested then talk to me, or Dave Elsdon, at one of our meetings.

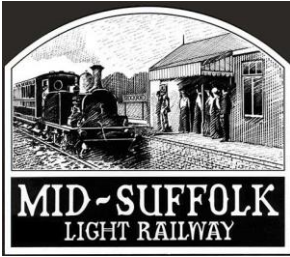
Again, a reminder about badges at our meetings - If you already have a lanyard-type badge please try to remember to wear it when attending meetings! If you don't yet have a lanyard badge (and feel you have been overlooked) then let me (or Dave Elsdon, Paul Holloway or John Dossett) know and we will get one ready for your next visit. These are available to our non-members as well as members. 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.

*Steve Lacey*

## New Members

We welcome Andrew Hills, from Stevenage, Robert Taunton, from Welwyn, and Richard Windsor, from Upper Caldecote, as new members of the RCTS and the Hitchin & Welwyn Garden City branch. All three joined while attending the Nene Valley Diesel Gala.

We had a stand at the gala and there is a report, from Dave Elsdon, on page 14.



# Mid Suffolk Light Railway

Looking forward to Christmas

... and Track Extension Progress

The 2024 open days have now finished and the next events are the “Santa Specials” which will be running on 1st, 7th, 8th, 14th, 15th and 21st December 2024.

*Note the Vintage & Bygones Fair & Exhibition previously advertised for 27th October will not now take place.*



The new track extension has planning permission granted by Mid-Suffolk District Council for the re-laying of approximately 936m of track on the former track bed of the railway, including where it crosses an existing public footpath (FP46), and the construction of a new halt. The track has now been completed and construction of the halt is underway. Progress continued to bring the new track extension into service when the Mid Suffolk Light Railway Company, on 1st August 2024, applied to the Secretary of State for Transport for a Transport and Works Act Order. The Order would provide statutory authority for the Company to maintain and operate the railway authorised by planning permission, including a level crossing over the public footpath, and would also require the Company to provide, maintain and operate at the level crossing such protective equipment as the Office of Rail and Road requires.

For further details of this, go to the Middy website:

[TWAO Documents - Mid-Suffolk Light Railway Museum \(mslr.org.uk\)](https://www.mslr.org.uk)

*(Material courtesy of the MSLR)*



## Seniors Day (60+ Years Young) £7

6 October



Small Prairie 4555 heads towards Keens Lane Crossing.

*Photo: James Davies.*

If you missed the Branch outing to the Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway, here is another chance and at a bargain rate. If you're 60+ years young, you can explore for just £7 - and bring up to two of your grandchildren for only £1 each!

All-Day Rover Tickets are available for just £7 for everyone aged 60+ on Sunday, 06 October. When you buy tickets online, you'll see the full range of fares, including these amazing specials. Simply select the tickets that suit you best at checkout.

The Green Timetable operates on 6 October 2024:

Chinnor depart: 10.45 steam, 12.15 steam, 14.00 steam, 15.30 steam

Princes Risborough depart: 11.20 steam, 12.50 steam, 14.35 steam, 16.05 steam (no return from Chinnor)

If you can't get there on 6 October then consider 13, 20, 27 or 31 October 2024 The Green Timetable also operates on these dates. Standard fares apply.

For more information, please call on 07979 055366 (10.00 - 16.00 hours) or contact by email at [bookings@chinnorrailway.co.uk](mailto:bookings@chinnorrailway.co.uk).

*(Reproduced courtesy of the C&PRR)*

# Along the Abbey Line And a Morning's Observations at Watford Junction

- Tom Gladwin

Thursday 29 August 2024, found Julian, my son, and I boarding the 10:08 West Midlands Train to enjoy the 17-minute journey from St. Albans Abbey to Watford Junction. The hourly services along the branch that day were worked by EMU 350253.

At St Albans Abbey station there were plenty of vacant parking spaces for which the daily charge was £4.80p. The return fare to and from Watford was £7.20p.

For most of its length the branch runs along the delightfully green valley of the River Ver which has its confluence with the River Colne at Bricket Wood.

At Watford we were disappointed to find that the refreshment outlets on Platforms 7/8 and 9/10 have closed and replaced by vending machines. There is still on outlet selling sandwiches, etc., on Platform 6.

As expected, Avanti West Coast Class 390 Pendolinos still dominate the West Coast Mainline express services. Strangely the Realtime Trains web-site still shows the operator to be Virgin Trains. Avanti West Coast took over the franchise from Virgin Trains on 8 December 2019!



We saw three of the new Class 805 Evro BMMUs. 805009+013 were on the Holyhead, and 805004 on Chester (see picture), services respectively. These, and the Class 807's which are due to enter service, will eventually allow Avanti to end its use of Voyager Class 221's. Voyagers 221103+109 did appear on a Birmingham New Street to Euston service.

Four of West Midland Trains Class 730/0 units, 730001+044 and 730002+043, in a pleasing orange livery, were operating on Milton Keynes services. Some of the Class 350's now have the inscription "Twin Sister Train - *I also work in the West Midlands*" on some of their carriages.

The London Overground services between Euston and Watford were mostly worked by 5-car Class 710/2's. This line is now known as the "Lioness Line."

We had hoped to see a Direct Rail Services Class 88 Electro-diesel on the Tesco 12:31 departure from Tilbury to Daventry. In the event it was hauled by 66091. An observer on the platform said he understood the 88's, with their high energy demand were proving expensive to run, and Class 66's are being substituted for them on some of their diagrams.



The 12:26 mail departure from Willesden PRDC to Sheildmuir was worked by Postal Units 325003+005 (see picture). These are soon to be withdrawn from service, as Royal Mail has decided to transfer its services from rail to road.

We spent over three hours enjoying the railway scene at Watford before returning on the 13:45 to St. Albans Abbey. There was much of interest.

Tom Gladwin



## What's On, and When? And – that *Tornado* Visit

For the remainder of the 2024 season, the Nene Valley Railway 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 your visit, as they may have to make changes at short notice for operational reasons.



# 60163 TORNADO

## New Steam for the Main Line

The A1 Steam Locomotive Trust had to postpone the visit of *Tornado* but this is the result of external factors over which they have no control. NVR are sorry for the inconvenience that this will cause to their booked customers.

They have now announced that *Tornado* will be running a timetable on the NVR on 19, 20, 26 and 27 October. Previously booked customers are being contacted with ticket options.

*(Reproduced courtesy NVR)*

## Workshop Wanderings

*Steve Lacey reports from behind the scenes at the Nene Valley Railway (NVR) - and his other recent activities.*

This month I went to the Gauge O Guild annual bash at Stafford, leaving the ever-reliable David Elsdon to man a recruitment stand at the NVR/GBRf diesel event by himself all weekend, but I believe he is writing about this. A big thank you to him for that!

What a small world the railway enthusiast world turns out to be. While working a shift at the 92 Squadron shop at the NVR a few weeks ago, a young chap (most appear young to me now days!) came in and asked if I had a book on the cement railways of Kent. I fished out the

Oakham press book, which he bought. In chatting, I explained that I had been born in Gravesend. Between school and starting at medical school I had a job in the construction offices of the then new cement works at Northfleet. At the time this was the biggest in Europe, though it was demolished a few years ago.... I am that old! He explained that he wanted the book for his father. A couple of weeks later, Alan Whenman, the Chief Mechanical Engineer (CME) of *92 Squadron* asked which primary school had I attended? He explained that the chap to whom I sold the book, had given it to his father relating the tale I had given. His father, Peter Foster, was a bell ringer in the same village church tower as Alan. Peter asked who would have been in the shop that weekend and was told Steve Lacey. Peter then told Alan that he thought he recognised the name and asked Alan to find out when I was born and which primary school I attended. I replied "Dover Road", at which point Alan smiled and said he knew one of my old classmates! It turned out Peter used to sit in front of me, we had mutual friends and, also, were in the same class in the first year at the Grammar School! Half way though senior school he had moved to Twyford where he travelled to school behind Hymeys! Peter now lives in Luton, near Spalding and on 24th August we met at the NVR for the first time in 60 years! He even brought with him the class photograph.....spot your Chairman, the arrow is the giveaway!



Back in the shed, *92 Squadron* is still awaiting 32 replacement superheater tubes and new grate castings, now scheduled for delivery late September.

The NVR has announced it is bringing in "*Bahamas*" to cover the Santa's and "*Tornado*" is now scheduled to be hauling trains from 19th - 27th October. Let us hope "*Tornado*" doesn't blow "*Bahamas*" away! At the end of August, John Dossett and I attended the RCTS Strategy Group meeting at Waterloo, where ideas for helping the RCTS to a bright future are formulated! As you will see from our National Chairman's piece in the Railway Observer, moves to join forces with the Stevenson Locomotive Society continue to slowly move forward.

In the Branch, our Autumn season kicked off with a really different presentation from Andy Grimmett entitled "A drivers eye view - 48 years on the railway". This showed many of those unseen essential things that happen on the railway, to keep the trains running....and a real treat for lovers of 37's and 31's on civil's trains. While on the subject, I really enjoyed Stephen Gay's annual visit (on the 24th of September). Also, at the end of September, my wife and I are going to Portsmouth for the RCTS Members Weekend. More about that next time.

From the above "wanderings", you will have deduced that "the shed" has been quiet over the last month, with much effort going into preparation for the NVR/GBRF event, which I believe David Elsdon is reporting elsewhere in this newsletter.

Steve Lacey



## Fright Week Halloween Services

26, 27, 29, 30, 31 October



Your experience starts on the inclusive Park-and-Ride vintage London bus service from Epping Underground station. This will take you to North Weald (North Weald) where you can join the EOR full-size ghost train!

Buses depart from the front of Epping Underground station at the following times: 10.20, 12.20, 14.20, and 16.20 (26, 27 and 31 October only).

The EOR bus will return you to Epping Underground station after the ghost train returns to North Weald. You should allow approximately two and a half hours for the experience.

Fares: Adults from £18, Child from £10, Children under 3 are free - no ticket needed!

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

*(Reproduced courtesy of the EOR)*

# The October Presentations (1)

## Mandarin Madness – Solo Travels in China

- David Longman



Fuxin 19 - SY1319 shunting in main yard



Handan 09 - SY0800 and SY1393 in yard

8<sup>th</sup> October, at Hitchin

What do you do if you want to photograph steam in China but don't speak the language, can't afford a guide or an interpreter and dislike big groups? In a moment of 'Mandarin Madness' you decide to go it alone of course! Dave Longman recalls the pitfalls and the pleasures of solo travel in a country in the throws of radical change.

## The October Presentations (2)

### Travels Around the Ukraine by Steam

- Michael Smyth



29<sup>th</sup> October, at Digswell.

Pictures from three trips to the Ukraine in 1993, 1999 and 2002. These illustrate Russian designed steam locomotives at work and explains the American influence of the 1930s.

More importantly it aims to give an insight into the history, geography and normal life, in this now sadly war-torn country.

The picture above is a P36 class 4-8-4 on a run-past - Russia's final post-WWII design of an express passenger engine, of which 250 were built up to 1959.

## Class 221 Voyagers on the Southern Section of the East Coast Mainline (ECML)



I was not aware of any Voyager movements on the southern parts of the ECML, and certainly not on regular scheduled services, until Grand Central hired two ex-Avanti West Coast units 221142 and 221143 for use on the West Riding Route.

My attempts to photograph one, or both, of these units, which came into service in November/December, 2023, were repeatedly frustrated by the simultaneous passing of trains on the “other” line. Eventually I secured this picture of 221142 on an up Bradford on Friday 30 August at Welwyn North.

*Tom Gladwin*

## 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)

# Nene Valley Diesel Gala - Report

This event took place on Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> & Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> September, I arrived in site at 07:45 on Saturday to prepare our stand, Steve Lacey had already erected the gazabo, sorted a couple of tables and put up appropriate RCTS banners which left me to arrange the books and dress the stand ready to open at 08:30. GBRf, the company organising the event and supplying the locos, already had several locos in position and ready to work their trains throughout the day. Our stand, like the few other stall holders was situated between the platforms and the main car park, not the best place for a high volume of passing customers, this was because GBRf would not have stalls on the platforms as in previous years. (Health & Safety concerns yet again rearing their head).

Business was extremely slow with probably less than twenty visitors during the morning, someone mentioned to me that at these diesel events visitors just wanted to make use of all available travel by simply rushing from one train to another. This is exactly what happened, all people were interested in was travelling behind as many different locomotives as possible, each train was packed with standing room only on some trains. Business picked up slightly during the afternoon when I managed a couple of sales, not much for the time and effort involved.

Sunday started even worse, with only a dozen or so visitors during the morning, this was not helped after 11:30 when the weather decided to take a turn for the worse and a couple of heavy showers caused a re-arrangement of the stock as the gazabo was not entirely waterproof! With these showers looking as if they would persist and people were looking for cover, Steve arrived from his weekend break. Disappointed with one book sale and two new members signed up, Steve took over and kept the stand going until 17:00, the weather then improved and more visitors came our way towards the end of the day. We finished the weekend with two book sales and eight new members, three of whom were for our Hitchin & Welwyn Garden City Branch. So not too bad a result in the end.

Guest Locomotives on site during the weekend were;

08632, 45041, 47727, 57303, 57310, 66312, 66799, 69003, 69009

*Dave Elsdon*  
Branch Secretary

## The RCTS Website

On the RCTS website ([The Railway Correspondence & Travel Society – Britain's Leading Railway Society \(rcts.org.uk\)](http://www.rcts.org.uk)) you can find details of presentations and activities being arranged nationally and by all branches across the UK and, of course, past issues of our own branch newsletter *Railway Ramblings*. Most of the site can also be accessed by non-members.

## Spotted at Welwyn North



The six-car "Rail Adventure" HST set, including power cars 43468 and 43480, that was stabled in Welwyn Garden City Sidings from Friday 23 August departed for Kidderminster (Severn Valley Railway) on Tuesday 27 August. Here seen passing Welwyn North.

*Tom Gladwin*

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