



Railway Ramblings



Issue 173

December 2024

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



*"92 Squadron" 34081 takes a break between Santa Special services
On the Nene Valley Railway
(From a previous year!)
(Photo: Steve Lacey)*

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 December 2024

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

10th December **Five go to Swansea (Part 2)**

Chris Jones

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

17th December **Hitchin & Potton Snippets**

George Howe

During January 2025

At Hitchin (14:00 – 16:30, doors open from 13:30)

14th January **North from Kings Cross – Photographs from the RCTS Archive**

David Jackman

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

28th January **Memories of a Gorleston Spotter (Part 1)**

Chris Wright

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.

The December Hitchin meeting will be held at Tilehouse Street Baptist Church Hall, Upper Tilehouse Street, Hitchin SG5 2EE. Starting in January the Hitchin meetings will be held at St Mark's Church Hall, St Marks Close, Lancaster Avenue (off Bedford Road) SG5 1RU and will become afternoon meetings starting at 14:00.

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

With the Christmas & New Year break rapidly approaching, may I wish you all a "Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year".

With Christmas now just a few weeks away, the restored/heritage lines are busy with their variants of the "Santa Specials". The festive season provides these railways with a sizeable portion of their annual income and if you are still looking for a seasonal outing for children, grandchildren, or just for yourself, why not have a railway treat? Although many services will be fully booked by now, there are no doubt opportunities still left.

For our December meetings I hope you can join us – apart from the presentations we will be enjoying "festive nibbles" (over an extended break) and it would be good to see you there.

Those of you who have been attending at Hitchin will be very familiar with the issues at Tilehurst Street - and we really had to move. I am pleased to tell you that we have now secured a more suitable venue at St Mark's Church Hall, in Hitchin, and you will find details elsewhere in this issue of *Railway Ramblings*. This will be our new regular venue starting in January 2025. We did however have a dilemma – we couldn't get Tuesday evenings – and we had to choose between moving to another evening or changing to afternoon meetings. To help our decision I sought views and the outcome was that we will stay with Tuesdays but move to afternoon meetings. I do realise that there are a few of you that will not find this satisfactory but a choice had to be made.

For the January 2025 meeting at Hitchin we will not be requesting donations from attendees AND all of the pre-loved books on the book stall will be at half the marked price. But do remember it will be an afternoon meeting!

Since October, our catering volunteers have offered tea/coffee to those arriving soon after "doors open" for meetings. This seems to be well received and we will continue trialling this. There are just two conditions – you need to return cups to the catering point before the presentation starts, and please leave the biscuits to the mid-session break!

The 2025 programme of presentation appeared in last month's 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.

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

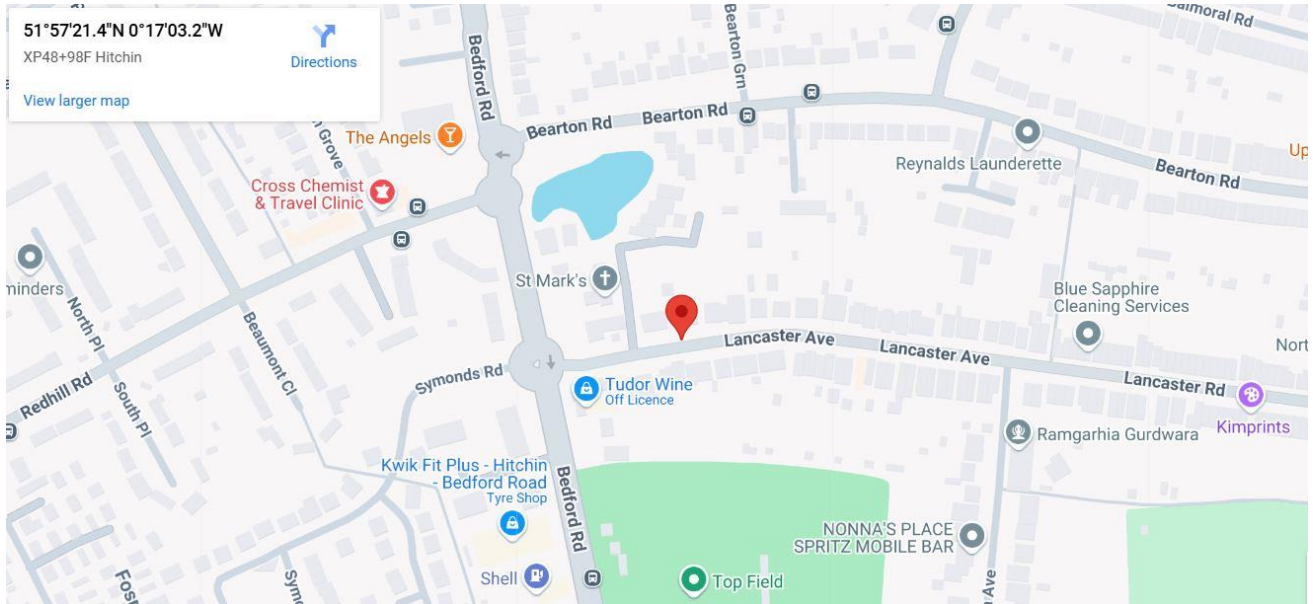
New Members

We welcome Daren Lucas, of Baldock, and Richard Varley, of Hitchin, to the RCTS and to the Hitchin & Welwyn Garden City branch

Hitchin Meetings

– Important Changes Starting in January 2025

Starting with the meeting on 14 January 2025 the RCTS Hitchin & Welwyn Garden City branch meetings scheduled to be held in Hitchin will be at St Mark's Church Hall, St Marks Close, Lancaster Avenue (off Bedford Road) SG5 1RU and will become afternoon meetings starting at 14:00.



There is a car park which should suffice on most occasions, with additional parking available in Lancaster Avenue and other nearby roads. ("The Angels", in the adjacent Bedford Road also allows the church the use of their overflow car park).

Numerous bus routes run along Bedford Road, with stops close to St Mark's church.

Hitchin Station is one mile away.



The church hall is fully accessible, without internal changes of level, and the hall itself is modern with an adjacent well-equipped kitchen.



Please remember that these will be AFTERNOON meetings.



Winter Warmer Train Services

Saturday and Sunday 28 & 29 December and again on New Year's Day 1 January 2025

Looking for an outing between Christmas and the New Year? And it's Kids-for-a-Quid £1.

GWR Steam Locomotive No 1369 from the South Devon Railway will be hauling steam trains on Saturday and Sunday 28 & 29 December and again on New Year's Day 01 January 2025. You can join the trains at either Chinnor or Princes Risborough stations. Then choose your seats, sit back, relax and enjoy the winter panorama alongside the Chiltern Hills.



Standard Day tickets are issued as go-as-you-please Day Rovers and are valid on every train. Stay for a couple of trips - or come for just one return journey if you only prefer a taster - it's the same price and you can also break your journey at Chinnor or Princes Risborough for a stroll into the village or town.

On the trains - a trolley service of teas, coffees and light refreshments will be provided by C&PRR volunteers. There's also one cup of complimentary tea or coffee for every adult ticket holder from the trolley (other drinks and snacks are available at the usual tariff).

For more information, please call on 07979 055366 (10.00 - 16.00 hours) or visit the C&PRR website:

[Winter Warmer Train Services: « Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway](#)

(Reproduced courtesy of the C&PRR)



Christmas at the Railway

Get in the festive spirit at Nene Valley Railway with their brand new, never-before-seen Christmas Special...



A fully immersive festive experience with 14 professional actors playing Christmas characters

Journey through the autumn forest, snow-frosted portal and Santa's workshop

Help the elves make toys in Santa's workshop (Children only)

Meet Santa and Mrs Claus

Receive a Christmas gift from Santa in his lodge (Children only)

Round trip from Wansford Station, this will usually be a steam train, but could on occasion be a diesel.

On train entertainment and festive fun sheet

The whole event will last approximately one and a half to two hours

Select from 3 check-in times.

For further information and to book tickets go to:

[Christmas at the Railway | Nene Valley Railway Ltd](https://www.nenevalleyrailway.co.uk/Christmas-at-the-Railway)

(Reproduced courtesy NVR)

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

The December Puzzle – Martin Elms

An East Anglian theme this month. The first letter of the answer to the following questions will spell the name of a locomotive in the same theme:

1. St ? swing bridge
2. Station between Saxmundham and Aldeburgh
3. Summit near Shenfield
4. Yarmouth ? station
5. North ? station north of Dereham
6. Station at end of the branch from Somersham

7. ? and Wakes Colne
8. Station south of Wickford
9. Closed station south of Derby Road
10. Locomotive depot with code 31B
11. Station north of Cambridge
12. ? Rudham near Fakenham
13. Most easterly station on mainland Britain
14. Station between Cambridge and St Ives

Best of luck.

My answer to each of the questions and solution to the puzzle are on page 10.

Wishing you all A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Martin Elms



Santa Specials

1, 7, 8, 14, 15, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24 December

Four Trains Per Day



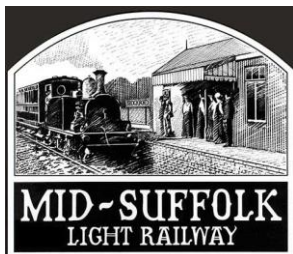
The experience starts as you join the EOR vintage London bus service at either Epping Underground station or in Ongar. When you arrive at North Weald Station you will get the chance to get in the spirit with something from the festive foodstall whilst you listen to the live brass band! As you wait for the train perhaps you will meet the festive characters who will be walking around the crowds looking for the nice children to make sure that Santa will find them later. Naughty children will not be allowed to board the train!

Not long after arriving the excitement mounts as you cross the footbridge to join Santa's fantastically festive Special Train, which will take you on a return journey via the ancient Epping Forest to Ongar. Whilst the nice children wait for Santa to find them on the train and give them a present, entertainers will be around to keep you busy.

Trains are planned to be hauled by a steam locomotive. Every effort will be made to operate services as advertised but the Epping Ongar Railway reserves the right to substitute a diesel locomotive for steam in unavoidable circumstances. (No refunds will be offered in the event that a diesel locomotive is substituted.)

For further information, including an easy-to-use availability chart, visit the EOR website: [Santa's Special Trains | Epping Ongar Railway](#)

(Reproduced courtesy of the EOR)



Mid Suffolk Light Railway

Looking forward to Christmas



The 2024 open days have now finished. The remaining events for 2024 are the Santa Specials (in December), followed by the New Year's Day Steam Up and Historic Lighting Exhibition.

The duty loco for the Christmas period will be the Andrew Barclay 0-6-0T 'Swordfish' built in 1941 for Stanton Ironworks, later Stewart & Lloyds. "Swordfish" is the first of its type to run on the Middy and is coming to the MSLR from the Colne Valley Railway.

For further details and to book tickets, go to the Middy website:

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

(Material courtesy of the MSLR)

Solution to the December Puzzle (page 8)

1. Olaves. 2. Leiston. 3. Ingrave. 4. Vauxhall. 5. Elmham. 6. Ramsey. 7. Chappel.
8. Rayleigh. 9. Orwell. 10. March. 11. Waterbeach. 12. East. 13. Lowestoft.
14. Long Stanton

Solution: OLIVER CROMWELL (70013)

Martin Elms

The December Presentations (1)

Five Go To Swansea (Part 2)

- Chris Jones



Mumbles train 1923



LLansamlet West 1949 - closed in 1875 to passengers

10th December, at Hitchin

Researching for a part two on Swansea stations has proved an interesting challenge. However the material has been coming in and the coverage will be extensive after all there were over 30 stations listed at one time and some like Grovesend are a rare sight. The Swansea 00 gauge modellers group often bring insights to long lost collieries.

Chris Jones

The December Presentations (2)

Hitchin and Potton Snippets

- George Howe



Hitchin

17th December, at Digswell

I moved to Potton in August 1952, aged 10, into a railway cottage next to the Bedford to Cambridge branch, very near to Potton Station. I met some new friends and cycled to Sandy with them, and soon found there was such a hobby as train spotting.

By Spring 1953 I brought my first ABC books - for the Eastern and Midland regions. Seventy one years later I have still not been cured.

After leaving school at 15, with a story attached which will come to light in my talk, I became Telegraph Lad at HF. Hitchin South signal box.

Throughout my railway career, I later relieved, worked, was involved with engineering work, and various emergencies at Hitchin on many occasions.

These experiences have made many "snippets".

George Howe.

Exhibition Volunteers

We are still looking for members who would be prepared to occasionally assist in manning our RCTS stand at exhibitions. This is not particular arduous and, of course, gives you free 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 Steve Lacey, at one of our meetings.

Dave Elsdon

Workshop Wanderings – Steve Lacey

Since my last offering, quite a bit has happened to *92 Squadron*. The long-awaited replacement grate castings and superheater elements have arrived. Within two weeks of their arrival a team effort saw them all installed, but not without incident! When was anything involving a steam locomotive as simple as it should be?

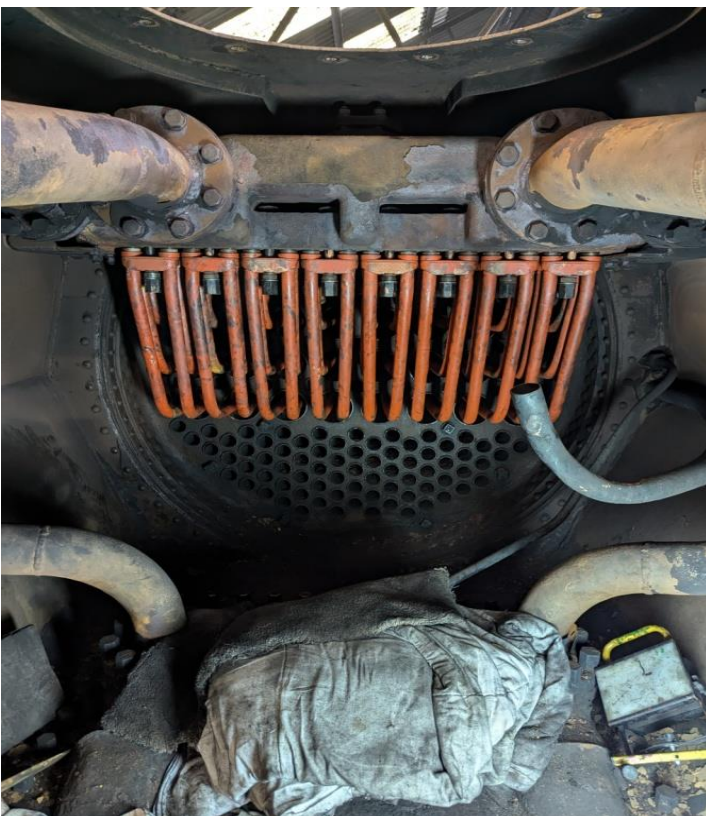
Before reassembling the grate the 32 superheater tube elements had to be fitted into the four rows of flu tubes, arrowed in white in the picture below. This took longer than planned as one of the first to be fitted was awkward and in feeding it in past the steam pipe, it became wedged solid, short of its intended position. Unbeknown to the lads, one of the spacers which keep the tubes held in place to aid sliding down the flue tube, had itself slid down the super heater element, when a spot weld failed. It then took about two hours, several cups of tea and a winch to disengage it for a new attempt!



The superheater tubes are held in place against the superheater header sockets, by T-bolts, which are tightened to produce a steam-tight fit. No sealant is used, as in such an environment a sealant would soon fail.



This picture shows the T-bolts in position ready to accept the other three rows of superheater tubes.



This picture shows the completed job, with a large patch of daylight showing where the chimney fits. As you can see, this has to be removed to give access for fitting the superheater elements. This is quite a task in itself, as it is held in place by over 20 bolts and has to be lifted in place by the telehandler, JCB to you and me!

The grate castings were sourced by the Mid Hants for us, as they had patterns for Battle of Britain locomotive grates. Having spotted them in the Mid Hants yard, while on the RCTS member's weekend, they duly arrived at Wansford some weeks later.

When they arrived it was noticed that there were some parts which were different to our old castings (see left hand picture below) and which did not even fit together with the new castings! We can only assume that the extra lugs (circled in the left-hand picture) were to make them universal for other grates! Before assembly could start our CME Alan Whenman removed them with an angle grinder.



The elements were then test assembled on the shed floor, before manoeuvring them up into the cab, through the fire-hole door and into position in the firebox. The individual fire bars were slotted onto their supports. This is back-breaking work in a confined space.....luckily for me; the fire-hole door is sufficiently small for me not to be able to gain access with my commodious girth!

With the repairs complete and the society over £46,000 poorer, *92 Squadron* now awaits a decision by the Nene Valley Railway and steam-test before return to service. Watch this space!

Steve Lacey

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.