

Railway Ramblings

Issue 180

July 2025

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



On 31st May 2025 RTC tour from Kings Cross to Great Yarmouth passes Letchworth on route to Yarmouth with Black 5, 45212

(Photo: Keith Cox)

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 July 2025

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

8th July **On Great Eastern Lines Since 1991**

Geoff Brockett

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

29th July **UK Railways in the 21st Century**

John Day

During August 2025

There are no indoor branch meetings this month.

However, there is a visit to the Mid Suffolk Light Railway and the Big Bus Show on 10 August.

[Updated details for this visit are on page 4](#)

Note that places on this visit **must** be booked in advance.

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 Hitchin meetings are held at St Mark's Church Hall, St Marks Close, Lancaster Avenue (off Bedford Road) SG5 1UR Note: these are 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

I hope you have all been enjoying the recent fine weather and that it has not been too hot for you. It really is important that you drink plenty of fluids and don't overdo exposure to the sun.

As I am sure you all know, we have normal branch meetings in July and details of these appear in this issue of *Railway Ramblings*. I also want to remind you that, on 10 August, we will be visiting the Mid Suffolk Light Railway and the Big Bus Show. Although the date might still seem far off, we need to finalise arrangements with both organisations and to do this we need to close our bookings list (for subsidised rates) by 9 July. As these events are both open to the general public you obviously can decide later but you will then need to pay non-subsidised admission rates.

Our outing to the Mid Suffolk Light Railway – a real heritage line seeking to portray the railway much as it existed in the distant past - has been arranged on the day of the Big Bus Show 2025 as we know many of you are also bus fans and will no doubt want to spend a chunk of the day there. Judging from the BBS website it looks very appealing – and we already know what a little gem the Middy is. So, if you want to go, make your booking with Dave Elsdon as soon as possible and certainly no later than 9 July. You will see that our subsidised prices for this outing have been reviewed and revised – downwards!

Also, in July, we will have a stand at the Letchworth Model Railway Society exhibition. This will be at the Priory School in Hitchin on Saturday 26 July 2025. If you would like the opportunity to help with our stand (and get free admission) then please talk with Dave Elsdon or Paul Holloway.

Finally, please consider contributing your photos and/or articles for publication in future editions of this newsletter. They should be railway related but, because our readership has a very wide range of interests, they could be on almost anything. Speaking from experience I know that our editor, John, will do his best to make any contributions “shine”!

Steve Lacey

Lanyard Badges

If you are a fairly regular attendee (including non-members) you probably have a lanyard name badge – and it is good to see you remembering to wear it at meetings.

If you have not got a badge and feel “forgotten” then please let me (or Dave Elsdon, Paul Holloway or John Dossett) know and John will endeavour to get one prepared for your next visit. It could even be that there is already one waiting for you – there should be a list at the registration desk so that you can check.

For those who struggle to remember to bring their badges you have the option of leaving your badge in the box between meetings!

Steve Lacey

Branch Outing – Sunday 10 August 2025

A Visit to the Mid-Suffolk Light Railway AND The Big Bus Show

The Big Bus Show is at Stonham Barns, Pettaugh Road, Stonham Aspal, Suffolk, IP14 6AT and commences at 10:00. It is expected to feature over 100 vehicles. Latest details are available on their website: [Big Bus Show 2025](#)

At the MSLR it will be a normal Steaming Day and the new track extension will be in service (it opens the previous weekend). Our visit will include access to the restoration shed and the workshop.

The MSLR is at Brockford Station, Wetheringsett, Stowmarket, Suffolk, IP14 5PW. The MSLR opens at 10:30.

The MSLR website is: [Mid-Suffolk Light Railway - Suffolk's only standard gauge heritage railway](#)

These locations are approx 6 miles apart and a free bus service will operate between them.

There are buses from Stonham to Wetheringsett scheduled for 10:40, 11:10, 11:40, 12:40 etc.

It is intended that our group parks at Stonham Barns, and uses the included bus service to go to (and from) the Mid-Suffolk Light Railway. Although we will start with a visit to the Mid-Suffolk, with a number of buses going back to Stonham Barns throughout the day, individuals can then decide how they want to split their time between the two venues.

Branch funds will be used to subsidise this outing for places booked by 9 July. The subsidised rate will be **£8** per head for our branch members and plus ones. **£12** for non-members, and RCTS members from elsewhere. Late bookings will be “at cost”, which should still be below published rates.

Bookings should be made now – contact Dave Elsdon.

NOTES:

Arrangements detailed are provisional.

Journey time from our area to Stonham Barns is likely to be just over 1½hrs (obviously depending on your starting location).

There are lunch facilities at both locations.

There is also a free bus service from & to Stowmarket Station for anyone travelling by Network Rail to Stonham Barns.



Opening of the Chinnor Independent Line - 5 and 6 July



On 5 & 6 July, the Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway are celebrating something they have been working towards for many years, the public opening of the Chinnor Independent Line.

Opened in 1872, the line between Chinnor and Princes Risborough was finally closed under British Rail in 1989 and became derelict. Part was re-opened by volunteers from the Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway Association from the 1990s, but for the final kilometre into Princes Risborough its trains have diverted, since 2018, via an adjacent siding owned by Network Rail.

Volunteers from the heritage railway have worked to completely relay the derelict track. Known as the 'Chinnor Independent Line' this major operation has been funded through donations, grants and sponsorship. This event marks the completion of the reopening of the line, an objective of the Association since it was formed 36 years ago.

On the Chinnor Independent Line itself this is also the resumption of passenger trains after a short service disruption since 1957!

So, to mark and support the opening of this new section of track - and much more - visitors will be invited to ride the steam and vintage diesel trains running over the new stretch of line on the weekend of 5 & 6 July and afterwards. Diesel service on 5 July and steam & diesel service on 6 July.

For full timetable details and fares visit the C&PRR website:

[Opening of the Chinnor Independent Line - 05 and 06 July « Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway](#)

(Reproduced courtesy of C&PRR)



Mail by Rail

5 & 6 July

Experience Britain's Postal Railways in Action!



Morning & Afternoon Sessions Available – 10:50 (£15) & 13:10.(£10)

For over 100 years, Britain's postal trains worked through the night, collecting and delivering mail across the country at high speed. Now, at Nene Valley Railway, you can step into history and experience it for yourself!

Join the NVR for “Mail by Rail”, where you’ll ride aboard the historic Travelling Post Office (TPO) train, witness mailbag exchanges from trackside, and try your hand at sorting letters on the move—just as real postal workers once did!

Your Mail by Rail Experience Includes:

- Ride on the Travelling Post Office Train – Step aboard and travel in authentic TPO coaches, just like the postal workers who once sorted Britain’s mail overnight.
- Live Mailbag Exchange Demonstrations – Watch as the NVR recreate the dramatic way mail was collected and dropped off from a moving train!
 - Three mailbag exchanges per session
 - Customers will alight before the demonstration to watch from the lineside
- Hands-On Sorting Activities – Test your speed and accuracy as you sort letters while the train is in motion—a fun challenge for all ages!
- Steam & Diesel-Hauled Trains – Travel behind two historic locomotives:
 - Morning Exchanges (Steam) – Hauled by GWR Large Prairie No. 4144
 - Afternoon Exchanges (Diesel) – Hauled by BR Class 45 'Royal Tank Regiment' (45041)



Note: “Mail by Rail” tickets do not include access to standard service trains, for which you will need a ticket for Standard Travel.

Want to extend your railway postal adventure? Enjoy a classic dining experience aboard our Pie & Postal Evening Excursion.

For full details visit: [Mail by Rail | Nene Valley Railway Ltd](https://www.nenevalleyrailway.co.uk/mail-by-rail)

(Reproduced courtesy of the NVR)

The July Puzzle – Martin Elms

A similar format to last month. For each block of five questions (below), the first digit of the number (pre-TOPS) of the five locomotives will give you a new 5-digit number. That number should give you the identity of another locomotive!

1. Scots Guardsman		
2. Lawton Hall		
3. Bittern		
4. Sir Lamiel		
5. Blue Funnel		

6. The Lady of the Lake		
7. Carmania (diesel)		
8. Comet		
9. Pinza (diesel)		
10. Dudley Castle		

11. City of Lancaster		
12. Westmorland		
13. County of Leicester		
14. Bath Abbey		
15. Southport		

Best of luck.

My answer to each of the questions and solutions to the puzzle are on page 20.

Martin Elms



Real Ale and Cider Festival

25 to 27 July

Tickets and train fares

All day fares offer unlimited travel on all of the EOR heritage train and vintage London bus services on the date of your visit. Tickets purchased in advance must be printed, or the barcode must be able to be scanned from your mobile device.

CAMRA members may purchase concession tickets. A valid CAMRA membership card must be shown at the ticket office or to the bus conductor.

All Day Tickets

Adult: £19.50, Child: £10, Concession: £18.50

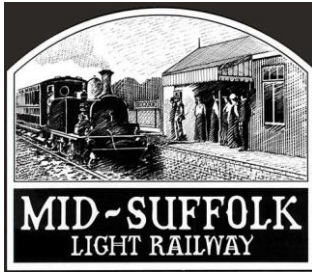
Special evening fare

Valid on train and bus services after 17.00 on Friday and Saturday only. Adult: £12

There are also “Package Offers”, which include a glass and beer tokens.

For more details, go to : [Real Ale and Cider Festival | Epping Ongar Railway](https://www.eorailway.co.uk/real-ale-and-cider-festival)

(Reproduced courtesy of the EOR).



'Sir Berkeley' returning to the Middy in July



The very popular centenarian locomotive 'Sir Berkeley' will be back at the Middy in time for the Steam Railway Day on 20th July. The Vintage Carriages Trust owned 0-6-0, built in 1890 by Manning Wardle of Leeds, performed very successfully during the Easter Steam Gala this year and will be a welcome visitor for the rest of the summer, including the Extension opening weekend in August.

For those not planning to join the Hitchin & Welwyn Garden City branch outing in August there is a tempting and busy programme for July:

- 6th July – Land Rovers Day (military and civilian).
- 13th July – Railway 200 Celebrations
- 20th July – Middy Railway Day & Suffolk Craft Fair
- 27th July – Norwich Vintage Motor Cycle Club visit.

For more details: [Visit Us & What's on - Mid-Suffolk Light Railway Museum](#)

(Reproduced courtesy of the MSLR)

Exhibitions

Sat 12th July 2025

Enfield Whitewebbs Railway Modellers

At Whitewebbs Museum of Transport, Whitewebbs Road, Enfield, Middlesex EN2 9HW

OPENING TIMES: 10am-4pm

ADMISSION: Adults £6.00

19 layouts expected.

Model railway exhibition only, the Museum of Transport will NOT be open.

Sat 19th July 2025

Northampton & District Model Railway Club

At Roade Village Hall, Bailey Brooks Lane, Roade, Northamptonshire NN7 2LS

OPENING TIMES: 10am - 4pm

ADMISSION: Adults £6.00 Family £12.00

N&D MRS are again holding their show at this great venue in Roade which is famous for its railway cutting. The hall is easy to find, has good free parking and easy access for all. They hope you will come along and enjoy the day and possibly find that elusive model railway bargain that you have been searching for. You will definitely be assured of a warm welcome from all club members.

14 layouts are expected.

Sat 26th July 2025

Letchworth Model Railway Society

At The Priory School, Bedford Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire SG5 2UR

OPENING TIMES: 10am-4.30pm

ADMISSION: Adults £5.00

After the success of our 2024 exhibition please visit again, at the Priory School, Hitchin. There will be a wide range of layouts in many scales and gauges, plus trade stands and societies. Food and refreshments will be available. Free parking, children under the age of sixteen are admitted free of charge if accompanied by a paying adult. Credit cards accepted.

16 layouts are expected.

There will be an RCTS Hitchin & Welwyn Garden City branch stand!

The July Presentations (1)

On Great Eastern Lines Since 1991

- Geoff Brockett



68002/5 at Thorpe on the 12:05 Norwich-Lowestoft on 11 November 2016.



70001 at Brantham on the 14:16 Felixstowe – Lawley Street Freightliner on 28 May 2010.

8th July, at Hitchin

In Geoff's own words – "The show is based on a presentation I did for the Great Eastern Railway Society and depicts trains on lines originally wholly or jointly owned by the Great Eastern Railway. The photos were taken between 1990 and 2023 - and there is an emphasis on loco-hauled trains".

The July Presentations (2)

UK Railways in the 21st Century

- John Day



165006 at Birmingham Moor Street 16 January 2015

29th July, at Digswell
(An afternoon presentation starting at 14:00)

A presentation taken year on year for the first 25 years of the 21st Century looking at everyday service trains, passenger, freight, locomotive units, both diesel and electric multiple units that run regularly in public and freight timetabled service.

Livery and franchise changes will feature without delving into statistical analysis. Special liveries will feature where appropriate and space within each year allow. The images featured will be from personal travels around the UK, especially as the network moved from loco hauled passenger trains to set formations built around the InterCity 125 staple. It is hoped you will enjoy the variety presented and my apologies if I might have missed, or not photographed one of your favourites. So much has changed this century, with much more to come as the Department for Transport take the franchised railway back into public ownership.

John Day

Travel Log of a Day Out – Dave Elsdon

On the 11 June I had to attend an RCTS meeting at Tyseley Railway Museum and Works in Birmingham. This is an account of my travel throughout the day.

Leaving home to catch the 06:02 Welwyn North to Stevenage (700055), I connected with the 06:16 Azuma service to Peterborough (801109 / 110). I was meeting colleague David Goddard who was on the 07:50 Stansted Airport to Birmingham New Street train. He had booked the return tickets for both of us. This gave me an hour or so spotting at Peterborough before David arrived. David had joined the Stansted train at Ely, this arrived two minutes late into Peterborough (170103), one of the un-refurbished sets. After a quite speedy run across country, stopping at Stamford, Oakham, Melton Mowbray, Leicester and Nuneaton we arrived into Birmingham New Street on time at 09:38, having passed some huge construction work for HS2 in and near Birmingham city centre.

After a quick coffee and a bite to eat in the Bull Ring Centre, we made our way between New Street station and Birmingham Moor Street, where we boarded our 10:25 train (172006 / 007) for the five-minute journey to Tyseley.

Following the meeting we were given a tour of the Museum and part of the works. Loco's 7029 Clun Castle, 5043, 4965, 4588, 47773 (D1755), 08590, 08417, 37240, ex-Cadbury loco No.1, & parts of loco's 80104, 34052, 5164, 4709, 5952, 46521 were noted.

For our return journey we planned to catch the 16:21. from Tyseley back to New Street, which we were in good time for, but all platforms here were full. The train we boarded was, in fact, the 15:05 (172338). This was caused by an unfortunate passenger on the train in front of this one suffering a heart attack and was being treated by medics. Fortunately, we eventually moved at 16:48, arriving in New Street in plenty of time for our service back to Peterborough at 17:20 (170638).

Arriving in to Peterborough at 19:13, I had a seventeen-minute wait for my Azuma (801229) back to Stevenage. This turned out to be a good smooth high-speed run with no signalling or other restrictions, getting to Stevenage in twenty-seven minutes. A ten-minute wait here for my train (700032) back to Welwyn North at 20:16.

A long day, quite tiring but very enjoyable.

Dave Elsdon.

Workshop Wanderings – Steve Lacey

As reported last month, there is a new charity shop building at the Nene Valley Railway, courtesy of a generous donation from R G Carter Construction. It was officially opened on May 28th as seen below.



Last month I also promised pictures of the CCT (confirmed as 94796) now in the main workshop, for restoration and conversion to a generator car. Although coaches have dynamos beneath them, belt driven from the coach axle, this only really works above about 30mph, so not great on a heritage railway limited to 25mph! For many years the NVR has fitted generator sets beneath the coaches to supply power for catering etc, combined with batteries. Sadly, this environment is not great, resulting in frequent expensive replacement and difficult refuelling, not to mention noise and fuel smells of a non-steam nature! Happily the large corporation Amey were looking for a project to celebrate Rail 200, so the project is fully funded! The body has been lifted on the Matterson jacks to remove the running gear, so that it can be refurbished/replaced, while work continues on the body. The CCT last ran in 2008 and having been stored for 17 years in the Oundle siding, it is cosmetically rough, though thought to be structurally sound.



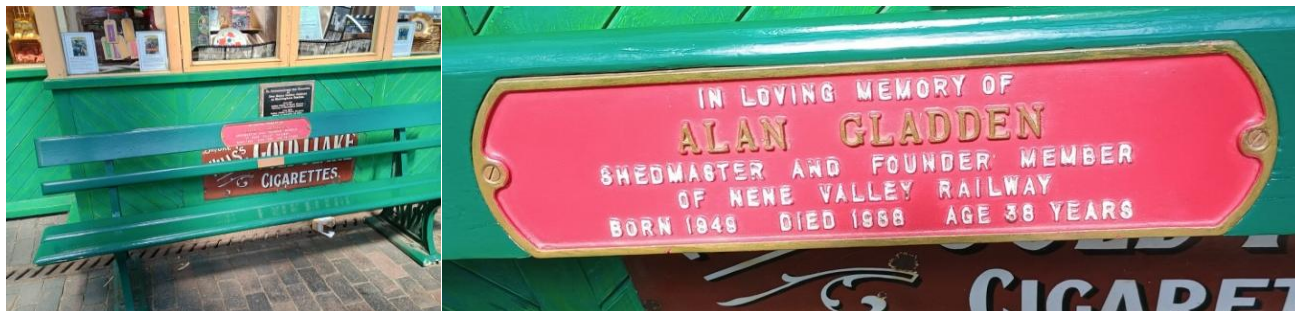
In the couple of weeks since its arrival in the shed, work has commenced with gusto, illustrating the fact that things always get worse before they get better!



Meanwhile *Derek Crouch's* frames have seen the smokebox and cab refitted, The HST set power cars have started a repaint into blue, from Midland Mainline livery. Note the new hoses.



My wanderings took me a bit further last week, as my wife and I, had a couple of nights away in Blakeney. Carol wanted a shopping trip to Holt, but in addition I did suggest a short ride on the North Norfolk Railway from Holt to Sheringham and back, with a walk to the sea. Much to my surprise Carol spotted a link to the NVR at Sheringham Station in the form of a dedication on a platform bench to Alan Gladden, a founder member of the NVR!



As an added bonus, the locomotive on our train was 800080 built in Brighton in March 1954 and based at Tilbury shed (May 1954 - 62) where Carol and I would have seen it on our trips with grandparents to Southend as children!



800080 moves forward to run round her train at Sheringham.

92 Squadron's presence at the NVR finally ended on Monday 16th June, when our container was finally lifted clear of its surrounding by Deeping Direct hauliers.



She flies through the air with the greatest of ease.....When you get the right kit!



Having said that the '92 squad then went off to help Sarah, from the Charity Shop, with her latest project.....the restoration of a rare Southern Railway TPO No 4920. Built in 1939 at Eastleigh to Diagram 3192. It was initially used on the night postal service, Waterloo to Weymouth and Exeter, subsequently being transferred to the Dover night postal service. Withdrawn in 1977 and initially claimed by the National Railway Museum for the national collection, she was subsequently purchased by the NVR. This vehicle has been under a tarpaulin in the bay, platform 4, on the north side of the station for many years. As a first step

it had to be uncovered to assess its condition. The good news was that inspection by Karl, the NVR carriage man, revealed it to be in a reasonable state, with no nasty surprises (as yet!).



Tarpaulin pulled back to reveal the off centre corridor connection, which allowed transfer between GPO vehicles with similar ends, but no access from the rest of a mixed train.



The inside has all the original sorting racks, sack hooks and even mail sacks and bundles of twine used to close the sacks! Remember when you could post urgent mail in the side of a TPO for an extra half-penny stamp?

Sarah already has a pot of money sufficient to restore this rare vehicle, now all she needs is a group of willing volunteers.....interested?

Steve Lacey

Solution to the July Puzzle (page 8)

1. Scots Guardsman - 46115. 2. Lawton Hall - 5906. 3. Bittern - 60019.
4. Sir Laniel - 30777. 5. Blue Funnel - 35013.

Answer – **45633 Aden**

6. The Lady of the Lake - 62690. 7. Carmania – (D) 218. 8. Comet – 42735.
9. Pinza – (D) 9007. 10. Dudley Castle – 4091.

Answer – **62494 Glen Gour**

11. City of Lancasterr - 46243. 12. Westmorland – 62735. 13. County of Leicester – 1018.
14. Bath Abbey - 5084. 15. Southport - 45527.

Answer – **46154 The Hussar**

Martin Elms

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

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), Hugh Driscoll, Tony Stratford and John Dossett (Newsletter Editor). The Railway Correspondence & Travel Society is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation Registered with the Charities Commission.