

Railway Ramblings

Issue 181

August 2025

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



37264 Backing onto the Pullman stock at Grosmont, North York Moors Railway
17 July 2025

(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.

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 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.

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

During September 2025

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

9th September **The Midland Main Line – Bedford to St Pancras**
From the Peter Bland Collection

Bryan Cross

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

30th September **The Doncaster Rover**

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.

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, Peterborough, South Essex, and Watford) The details are available in the *Railway Observer* and on the RCTS website.



Chairman's Platform

After weeks of rather hot weather we seem to have returned to more normal summer weather – just in time for the school holidays! I trust you are all coping and keeping well.

On 26 July we had a stand at the Letchworth Model Railway Society exhibition (this was at the Priory School in Hitchin). This was a well-attended event and we made a good number of book sales. I much appreciate the assistance of the volunteers manning our stand at this exhibition.

As I am sure you all know, we have no normal branch meetings in August. For those who have booked places we are visiting the Mid Suffolk Light Railway and the Big Bus Show on 10 August. Any enquiries about the details should be made to Dave Elsdon or John Dossett. Normal indoor monthly meetings resume in September.

On behalf of our Editor, I previously asked for contributions to this newsletter and I am pleased to see that, in this issue of *Railway Ramblings*, we have the first of what I understand is a three-part article by Hugh Driscoll. We also have new observation reports from Tom Gladwin. As you, dear readers, have a eclectic range of interests, I am sure these, and any other rail-related articles, will be well received by many. I must remind you that we do need a regular flow of contributions to sustain our newsletter. Please talk with John Dossett who will, if requested, help put your words and pictures together.

Finally, please consider the 2025 RCTS Members Weekend at Darlington 24-26 October. This is being organised by RCTS North East Branch and full details about this were distributed with the July *Railway Observer*. The closing date for bookings is 1 September and new attendees are particularly welcomed.

Steve Lacey

Lanyard Badges – The Usual Reminder

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

West Country Wanderings - Devon and Cornwall, September 2024 (Part 1) – Hugh Driscoll

Last September, I was lucky to have the opportunity to spend three full days in Devon and Cornwall, indulging in three of my favourite pastimes: walking, sea-swimming and railways.

I arrived at Dawlish Warren station, in the rain, on the evening of Sunday 8 September, having travelled down from Paddington on a GWR Class 800. I then walked up to the holiday park where I had hired a “lodge”. I usually camp, but the weather forecast was not favourable, and the lodge hire at that time of year was cheaper than the cost of a tent pitch! It turned out to be a good decision.



Golden Sands Holiday Park, luxury (compared to a tent!) Lodge 11. My home for four nights.



Real luxury: ex Mk1 camping coaches at Brunel Holiday Park, in the old Dawlish Warren Goods Yard.

Day 1: My itinerary for Monday was to take the train from Dawlish Warren to Paignton. I then had enough time to buy a ticket and catch the first Dartmouth Steam Railway train of the day to Kingswear. This was hauled by BR Standard 4 no. 75014. This loco was withdrawn in 1966 and rescued from Woodhams yard in Barry in 1981. It was then restored at the North Yorkshire Moors railway and had run the Jacobite train in Scotland for several seasons, hence its name *Braveheart*.



75014 prior to departure from the Dartmouth Steam Railway platform at Paignton.

The DSR has a shed just to the south of their Paignton station platform, where Class 37 D6975 was undergoing servicing. This locomotive entered traffic in 1965 and spent most of its career on the Western Region until the late 1980s, when it was reallocated to Immingham and then Scotland. It was stored in 1999 and was sold into preservation in 2004.



In the Dartmouth Steam Railway shed, just south of Paignton station platform: Mk1 coach and English Electric Class 37 D6975 (37275).



After arrival at Kingswear, 75014 has just uncoupled from its train and crossed over to the run-round road. It is seen running forwards over the crossover points, towards the stops by the signal box to allow the loco crew to take on supplies.

On arrival at Kingswear, I took the ferry across the River Dart estuary to Dartmouth. Here, famously, was the Great Western ferry terminal, a “station” without rails. The building still exists in good condition, now serving as the Embankment Bistro. Also visible on the river crossing was the paddle steamer, *Kingswear Castle*. This vessel was constructed in 1924, and is the last coal fired paddle steamer in Britain. It still carries passengers for pleasure cruises on the River Dart.



Kingswear Castle at Dartmouth Quay.

Disembarking at Dartmouth, I headed south along the coast path to Sugary Cove for a quick swim. This cove lies just south of Dartmouth Castle. Then it was back to Kingswear station via the ferry, for another ride behind 75014, back to Paignton.

I then caught a train from Paignton to Torre. The GWR Type 7 signal box at Torre is still standing. Opened in 1921, it was closed in 1986 when control of the Paignton branch was transferred to Exeter Panel. Apparently, it retains its lever frame and fittings.



*Torre signal box.
As with many ex-GWR lines, the wider
than usual "6 foot" between the running
lines is a legacy of broad gauge days.*

My reason for alighting at Torre was to visit Babbacombe model village, which I had never visited before. There is quite a lot of humour (and a few dreadful puns) built into the models, which are of a high quality and the construction techniques have advanced over the years. There is also a good representation of a GWR Class 800 on the continuous run railway.



*City street scene,
Babbacombe model village.*



*Building site scene,
Babbacombe model
village.*

I then headed down the cliffs to Oddicombe Beach, where there is a funicular railway. I had a quick dip in Babbacombe Bay, but I was not quick enough to catch the last uphill run of the day, which was signalled by the ringing of a hand bell 15 minutes before departure. The railway was opened in 1926. It is cable hauled and powered by electric motor at the upper station.



*One of the pair of Oddicombe Beach Cliff Railway cars ascending the cliff,
having crossed the unusual bridge over the beach access road.*

Having walked along the undercliff path from Oddicombe to Withy point, I climbed up the steep road to Babbacombe, along the back of Torquay town to the station, whence I returned to Dawlish Warren for a rest!



On the road from Withy Point.

Hugh Driscoll

Observations at Hemel Hempstead – Tom Gladwin



On Friday 4 July my son Julian and I spent four hours at Hemel Hempstead, mainly to view the new units. The pictures, taken on the day, are of soon to be replaced 350248 + 409 in original livery, and new 730234 + 205 on an up service to Euston.

Due to platform length restrictions, some Class 350's are to be retained for the Birmingham – Northampton services. The rest are being returned to Porterbrook. Their future is undecided.



London Northwestern Railway's (LNWR) 5-car Class 730/2 Aventras started entering service on 9 June. Designed for long-distance services they will gradually replace the Class 350's on the West Coast Main Line (WCML).

There are 112 more seats in a two five-car set of 730/2s than in a three 4-car set of Class 350's. The maximum speed of 110 mph is the same.

LNWR is one of the two parts of the West Midland Trains single franchise. The other being West Midlands Railway (WMR). Each part has a distinct livery.

Several pairs of Class 90's appeared on freight. Although one to two years older than the Class 91's on our East Coast Main Line services, we were told that with the switch of some shipping from Felixstowe to the London Gateway the use of the Class 90's has significantly increased.

As I have found on a previous occasion, it seems that Real Time Trains (RTT) don't always show light locomotive movements along the WCML routes in Hertfordshire. Standing on the platform at Hemel Hempstead, we suddenly heard a soft rhythm behind us. I turned, pleasantly surprised to see, but too late to photograph, Black Five 45212, with its support coach, returning northwards to the Keighley & Worth Valley Railway. A little earlier Direct Rail Services' 37407 *Blackpool Tower*, in immaculate external condition, had similarly appeared unexpectedly, passing northwards. Two tamper unit movements were, however, shown on RTT.

Note: Parking for those with a Disabled Blue Badge is free at most stations used by LNWR trains. Apply at the machine and in minutes you receive confirmation that you have been permitted free parking for a year.

Tom Gladwin.



A Bank Holiday Weekend on the Continent

23, 24 & 25 August



Step aboard for a European-inspired railway adventure this August Bank Holiday!

Locomotives and Carriages:

Danish Steam Locomotive No 656 – Journey through the Nene Valley in vintage elegance.

Swedish Railcar – Enjoy a unique ride on our Continental Commuter service, including trips along the Fletton Branch.

Belgian First-Class Carriages – As seen in Poirot: Murder on the Orient Express – travel in cinematic luxury!

Orient Express Restaurant Car (1927) – A beautifully restored original carriage built in Italy for the legendary train.

Tickets: £18 adult pre-booked, £19 adult on-the-day. Children £1.

For more details (timetables & bookings) visit the NVR website:

[A Bank Holiday Weekend on the Continent | Nene Valley Railway Ltd](https://www.nenevalleyrailway.co.uk/)

NOTE: Maximum of 2 children at £1 each per paying adult. Additional children will be charged at the standard fare.

(Reproduced courtesy of the NVR)



Photographic Opportunities and USATC S160



For those interested in a photography day-out the Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway offer the following advice about their charming line.

When you are out and about in the landscape to photograph the railway, please do follow the Countryside Code. May we also request your respect for private property. The railway and its supporters hope to be good neighbours to all those whose property backs on to the line.

(Photo: John Dossett – taken at Princes Risborough during our branch visit in August 2024)

Several vantage points, not on the railway, which may be of interest for photographers:

Footbridge adjoining the road bridge at Chinnor

This position affords a safe view of the trains leaving and returning to Chinnor. You look down into a cutting with the track on a falling gradient toward you. Access is via the car park, cross over the main road and turn left to the footbridge.

Keens Lane (Donkey Lane) and Chinnor Bank

Trains to your right will be completing their climb out of the cutting and will approach on a gentle curve. Trains on your left will be ascending Chinnor Bank on their return journey. Access on foot takes about 12-15 minutes - as above but walk over the footbridge and take the first right turning (no access to cars), follow the lane and turn right into Church Road. After passing the church and shops, turn right into Keens Lane. Keeping to the left hand side the road becomes a trackway and leads you to the railway crossing.

So as not to alarm the Driver please stand clear of the crossing and behind the gates. It really is common sense as getting too close to any moving train is dangerous, even on a heritage line. For those with telephoto capabilities and anyone looking to video the train in the landscape, then go over the crossing (keeping a sharp lookout for trains) and after a short distance, turn left into the open fields and follow the path to Wainhill or Bledlow.

Wainhill Crossing

We strongly recommend walking from Keens Lane (see above) as there are no parking or turning facilities available at the level crossing, which serves the very small hamlet of Wainhill. When the trains are running any visitors arriving on foot are invariably made welcome by our Gateman. When the gates are open to road traffic views of the rising gradient to Chinnor can be obtained and in the opposite direction the line drops away from the crossing towards Bledlow.

Bledlow Village

This location offers the photographer an excellent view of the railway and across the Vale taking in Bledlow Village Cricket Club grounds. If you are arriving by car then turn off the B4009 into West Lane (signposted Bledlow) and continue under the railway bridge and then park in the vicinity of the Lions of Bledlow public house. Footpaths in front of the pub will lead you to the view described above.

Horsenden Lane Crossing

This location offers splendid views of the railway and surrounding fields. If you are arriving by car then turn off the B4009 very close to the former railway bridge just outside Princes Risborough. This bridge once carried the branch to Oxford via Thame, but is now part of the Sustrans Phoenix Trail. After turning off the main road follow the track up a slight hill to the small parking area between the old bridge and Horsenden Crossing. Please do remember to keep the crossing clear.

USATC S160 (6046)



C&PRR steam locomotive for the 2025 season is the USA Class S160, numbered 6046.

6046 is the most powerful steam locomotive to have ever worked on the Chinnor branch. Although of American build, the Class S160 locomotives have a fascinating British history, including on the GWR.

Shipped in the early to mid-1940's to South Wales and dispatched from the Great Western Railway locomotive depot at Ebbw Junction, Newport, the first 43 locomotives were transferred to the London & North Eastern Railway's Doncaster Works for completion, and later running in over the East Coast Main Line.

Builder - Baldwin Locomotive Works, Philadelphia, USA

Class/type - S160

Built year - 1945

Engine output - Boiler pressure 225 lbf/sq in

Max speed - 25mph on the C&PRR heritage railway!

Tractive effort - 31,490lb

Weight - Loco 73ton 0cwt

Tender 52ton 2cwt

Wheel arrangement - 2-8-0

Each of the four British railway companies eventually deployed a total of 400 S160's under the guise of "running in," but in fact replacing damaged stock and increasing the capacity of the British railway system to allow for shipping of military pre-invasion equipment and troops. The deployment of S160's to the Great Western Railway alone was 174 locomotives, followed closely by the London & North Eastern Railway with 168. So the S160 class is no stranger to British shores!

[historical details with credit to Wikipedia]

(Reproduced courtesy of C&PRR)

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 August Puzzle – Martin Elms

This month it's a sunny Southern flavour.

The first letter of each answer should spell a Southern station.

1. Name of locomotive 34057
2. Station east of Hastings
3. LSWR locomotive superintendent 1912-1922
4. Depot with code 74B
5. Name of locomotive 30850 Lord ?
6. South Sussex coast terminus
7. ? East, West and Barracks
8. Devon station
9. ? Wishing Well Halt
10. Name of locomotive 30905
11 .Depot with code 75D

12. North Kent coast station ? on Sea
13. LSWR locomotive works
14. Junction south of Winchester
15. West Devon station

Best of luck.

My answer to each of the questions and solution to the puzzle are on page 21.

Martin Elms

Vintage Transport and Traction Engine Weekend 16 & 17 August

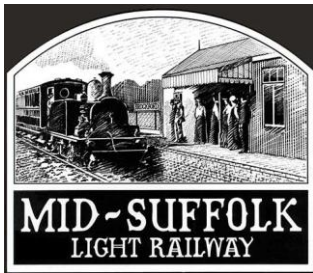


The EOR will have a wonderful collection of steam traction engines big and small on display and moving around North Weald station - an excellent mid-Summer day out. The heritage steam and diesel trains will be gracing the rails and the vintage London bus service will also be operating. Other vintage vehicles are also expected to be on display.

For details of timetables and fares click the link to visit the EOR website

[Vintage Traction Engine Weekend | Epping Ongar Railway](#)

(Reproduced courtesy of the EOR).



At last the opening of the Extension! Public Opening 2 & 3 August



Learning the Route
(Photo credit: James Kindred)

The extension gives visitors a return ride of almost two kilometres in the Middy's Victorian 4-wheeled steam hauled trains, along the original track alignment through countryside served by the MSLR between 1908 and 1952. This is more than double the length of the previous Middy ride and will give passengers a real feel of train travel during the early part of the 20th century, especially as the terrain is, in railway terms, either side of a marked dip, so in both directions, there is plenty for a steam engine to do.

This is a great leap forward for the Middy and a general atmosphere of celebration is expected this weekend. There will be performances by Castleton Brass on Sunday the 3rd August.

Manning Wardle *Sir Berkeley* (featured in the July RR) will be the duty locomotive for both days.

(Reproduced courtesy of the MSLR)

Our RCTS branch visit to the Middy takes place on 10 August, and also includes the Big Bus Show at nearby Stonham Barns.

Observed at Welwyn North – Tom Gladwin



93001, the first of the 30 110mph bi-mode locomotives on order for Rail Operations Group, passing Welwyn North on 27 June 2025. It was returning to Worksop from Canonbury. Based on the Class 88 platform these can also run in battery mode alone.



387109 + 387124 on the 1246 to Kings Cross at Welwyn North on 23 June, 2025. Built in Derby in 2014-5, these 110mph dual voltage Electrostars are being transferred to Southern. They are being replaced by the older, slower, Class 379 100mph 25 kV AC Electrostars, built in Derby in 2010-11. The 379's have been in store, mostly at Worksop, since 2022.

Tom Gladwin

Workshop Wanderings – Steve Lacey

You may be relieved to read that this will be a short offering as things have been hectic this month. As I rapidly write this I am due to leave for Hampshire to help a friend operate his layout (Ventnor) at a 2-day model railway exhibition in New Milton. It looks to be an interesting show and a real change for me as no books to transport and sell!

At the Nene Valley workshop several members of the *92 Squadron* group spent Thursday 10 July helping to clear out the Southern Railway TPO to enable the restoration to start. It will be restored as an exhibit not a running coach, as the money will not stretch to that, unless you have a stash down the side of the sofa! I was however able to get a few more shots of the interior, including one of the supervisors "office / cubby hole" at the end of the coach.



On the 13 July I was back up at the railway with Carol and a couple of her relatives. We had eventually come up with a mutually convenient date for a "cream tea train" and for Andy to give a guided tour of the workshop. For perfectly understandable reasons, the NVR cancelled the cream teas due to expected high temperatures. Who needs rancid cream on a scone!

We were offered alternative dates but none of these suited, so we opted for the full refund and instead took our own (much cheaper) non-perishable picnic on the service train. We had a great day and greatly enjoyed the display of steam traction engines, a steam roller (which spent the weekend rolling the filled potholes in the car park) and vintage vehicles in the car

park at Wansford. At Peterborough (NVR) we were able to see the now complete exterior of the former LNWR station building (formerly Wansford Road) moved from the closed Wansford to Stamford branch, as it was now in the path of the proposed improvements to the A47. It will now form the combined ticket office for the NVR and Railworld.



As a bonus, *Tornado* was also on site, having been taken off a charter due to a steam ban imposed by Network Rail. I think the NVR is now her second home!



Over the last few days I have been preparing for the RCTS stall at The Greatest Gathering (TGG) at Derby on the 1-3 August. As a trial-run, I set up our proposed stall in our conservatory, all I have to do now is get it to TGG!



I have boxes of new publications to pick up from BookLaw, our stockists in Nottingham, as well as my current stock. If you are going to TGG please visit the stall - and buy some new books so that I can get it all back in my car at the end!

Steve Lacey

Exhibitions in August

Not a railway exhibition but one you might be interested in – and a fund-raiser for the local air ambulance service :

Friday 8 August

Offley Classic Car and Motorcycle Show

At Offley Recreation Ground, Offley (near Hitchin), SG5 3DX

OPENING TIMES: 15:00- 20:00

ADMISSION: £10 per car (or £5 per m/cycle)

An event organised by the Rotary Club with ALL proceeds going to Hitchin Priory Rotary Charities, which includes the Essex & Herts Air Ambulance.

For further details: Roger Watkins – rogerwatkins@yahoo.co.uk and 07887 503704

Solution to the August Puzzle (page14)

1. **B**iggin Hill. 2. **O**re. 3. **U**rie. 4. **R**amsgate. 5. **N**elson. 6. **E**astbourne. 7. **M**aidstone.
8. **O**kehampton. 9. **U**pwey. 10. **T**onbridge. 11. **H**orsham. 12. **W**estgate. 13. **E**astleigh.
14. **S**hawford. 15. **T**avistock.

Answer BOURNEMOUTH WEST

Martin Elms

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.