

Railway Ramblings

Issue 182

September 2025

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



*70000 Britannia passing through Welwyn North
en-route to York on 23 July 2025*

(Photo: Tom Gladwin)

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 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

During October 2025

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

14th October **The Last Four Years of Steam**

George Howe

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

30th September **Memories of a Gorleston Spotter (Part 2)**

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 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

The Great Gathering, at the start of August, was very memorable. The event was a sell-out on all days and the collection of locomotives on display was awesome. I organised and, with the assistance of a small band of volunteers, manned the RCTS stand. A fair number of RCTS publications were sold and a good number of new members recruited but perhaps more importantly it brought the RCTS to the notice of thousands of railway enthusiasts. Personally, I found *The Great Gathering* hard work but a great experience that I will long remember.

Also in August, a number of us enjoyed a great day out at the Mid Suffolk Light Railway and the Big Bus Show. It was hot, very busy (thanks largely to an enormous car boot sale taking place at Stonham Barns) and quite exhausting, but thoroughly enjoyable. My thanks to those that made the arrangements. What should we do next year?

In September it is, of course, back to normal for our branch, with scheduled meetings at Hitchin and Digswell. Details of these are in this issue of *Railway Ramblings* and I trust many of you will be there. This will also provide the opportunity to buy some previously owned books – and as some of you already know, we have recently had quite a lot of rare new additions kindly donated to us.

Finally, a reminder about 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*. If you haven't yet booked and are interested you will need to act quickly as the closing date for bookings is 1 September. Carol and I are going, perhaps we will see you there?

Steve Lacey

New Member

We welcome Kevin Sylvester, of Hoddesdon, to the RCTS and to the Hitchin and Welwyn Garden City Branch.

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

Limestone to Aylesbury and the Quainton Railhead – Tom Gladwin

Since the HS2 project gained momentum, between 15% and 25% of annual rail freight has been the conveyance of materials for the construction.

These movements currently include up to three daily 2,400-tonne trains of limestone from Tytherington Quarry in South Gloucestershire to the Quainton Railhead in Buckinghamshire. The trains are routed to Princes Risborough where they take the seven-mile single line branch to Aylesbury. Thus, with the return empties, there can be six heavy-freight movements along the branch each day.

On Thursday 31 July Julian, my son, and I boarded the 11:56 from Aylesbury and made the 17-minute journey to Princes Risborough on York built two-car Network Turbo Unit 165004. It is reported that plans to replace these comfortable smooth-riding 34-year-old units, have been put on hold.

Along the branch, built to 7ft gauge in 1863, we couldn't miss noticing the dreadful scar, due to the huge HS2 land-take, that now extends across a once quiet and beautiful part of Central England.

During our visit we observed two of the limestone movements.



This picture shows 60055 *Thomas Barnado* descending down from Saunderton into the up platform at Princes Risborough before turning onto the branch to Aylesbury.

The second movement we observed was top-and-tailed by 66774 and 66717. Such loads are double the capability of the Class 66 300's, and some 4,000 tonnes less than that of the Class 66 600/700's. Hence the need to top and tail them when a Class 60 is not available.

To cope with the heavier loads more Class 66's are being re-gearred, and their maximum speed accordingly reduced to from 75 to 65 mph. The 28 so selected from numbers 66752 to 795 are being renumbered 66662-89. 66779 *Evening Star*, the last built has already become 66689.

There is no run-round facility at Quainton Railhead. As a result, a locomotive, stabled at Aylesbury, follows trains hauled by a single Class 60 and draws the empty stock back to Aylesbury North Loop where any run-rounds can be made.

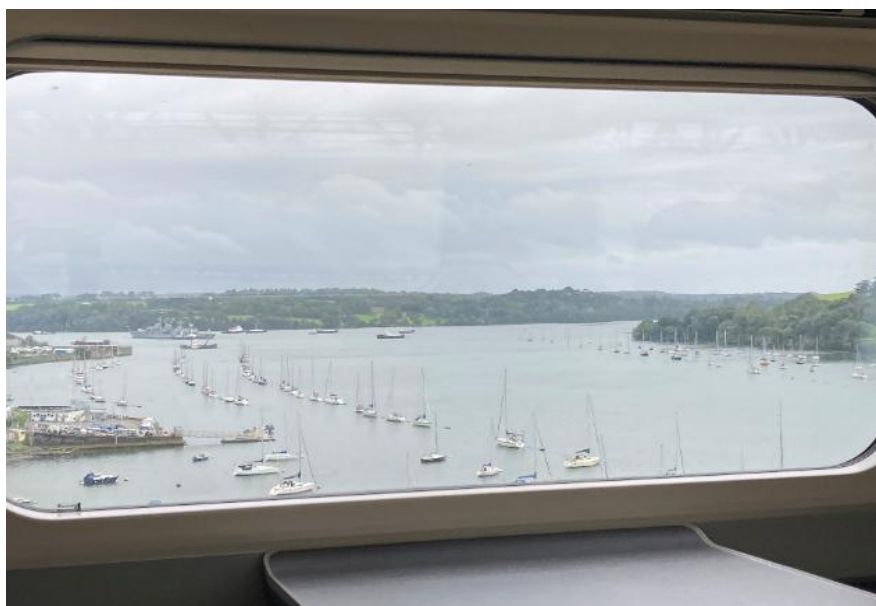
Tom Gladwin

West Country Wanderings - Devon and Cornwall, September 2024 (Part 2) – Hugh Driscoll

Last month, in Part 1, Hugh related how he spent the first day of three he spent in Devon and Cornwall last September, indulging in three of his favourite pastimes: walking, sea-swimming and railways.

Day 2:

My target for Tuesday 10 September was the Bodmin Railway. After an early start from Dawlish Warren and a change of train at Newton Abbot, I arrived at Bodmin Parkway with plenty of time to buy a return ticket for the heritage railway from the former signal box. As well as being associated with the heritage railway, it is now a café so I took the opportunity to sample their breakfast.



*Crossing the Tamar,
from a GWR Class 800.*

I was fortunate enough to see a Castle set arriving on the down platform at Parkway, with power car 43042 (*Tregenna Castle*) leading. This power car is still listed as serviceable in July 2025. These units were becoming harder to find in 2024, so unfortunately, I did not get to travel in the comfort of a Mk3 coach this time round.



*Castle set arriving at
Bodmin Parkway...*



*...and departing
through the weeds a
few minutes later.*

Bodmin Railway is a comparative newcomer to the heritage railway scene. It was closed by BR to regular passenger traffic in 1967 (along with the line to Wadebridge and Padstow) and to freight in 1983, when china clay trains from Wenfordbridge ceased.

It re-opened as a heritage line in 1990 and is unusual as it has a junction just south of Bodmin General station. Passenger trains are authorised to use both routes, from Bodmin General to Bodmin Parkway and also to Boscarne Junction halt, re-opened in 1996.

The line formerly continued onwards from Boscarne Junction in a westerly direction to Wadebridge, which closed to freight in 1978, and to Padstow, which closed completely in 1967. Boscarne was also the junction for the lines to Wenfordbridge clay dries and Bodmin North station, both branching off in a north-easterly direction.

My train to Bodmin General was hauled by ex-GWR Class 4575 Small Prairie tank no. 5553, painted in BR black livery. This loco was built in Swindon in 1928, withdrawn at the end of 1961 and then dumped at Woodham's yard. It was the final loco rescued, from Barry, in 1990. It had spent 28 years there, the longest duration for any loco.



Small Prairie 5553 at Bodmin General, a remarkable survivor.



5553 taking water at Bodmin General.

In common with other preserved railways, the locomotives, rolling stock, buildings and crews are immaculately turned out. Even the fireman was wearing a tie!

A full return trip from Bodmin Parkway to Boscarne Junction and back involves plenty of running round and opportunities to investigate the surroundings. Bodmin General station has a very good café, shop and second-hand book stall.



5553 running round at Boscarne Junction

At Boscarne Junction, the trackbed continues beyond the current limit of the Bodmin Railway, towards Wadebridge and Padstow as the Camel Trail, now a popular walking and cycle path.



View from the stops towards Boscarne Junction Halt. The trackbed to Wadebridge and Padstow is behind the camera. The cyclists were from Holland!



5553 arrives at Bodmin Parkway after the descent from Bodmin General. Like the loco, the rake of Mk1 coaches is immaculate condition.

After leaving the steam train at Bodmin Parkway, my next port of call was Par. I wanted to investigate the surviving railway infrastructure around Par Docks and St Blazey depot, then walk along the coast path via Carlyon Bay, have a swim, then visit Charlestown Harbour and St Austell.

Unfortunately, the weather was becoming increasingly “Cornish”.

I alighted from a Class 800 unit at Par station and was greeted by a foreboding sky. I left the station and headed up towards the Newquay branch, along a footpath which was part of the old Treffry Tramway from Pontois Mill china clay works and beyond, to Par Harbour.

This part of the tramway ran on the eastern bank of the former Par Canal, whereas the “modern” St Blazey/Par Docks railway lies on the western bank, connected to the main line by the Newquay branch. Stone “sleeper” blocks are still extant on the path, evidence of its original purpose.

The path crosses the Newquay branch on the level, then continues past Middleway road level crossing. I headed back towards Par from Middleway crossing, heading past St Blazey depot which was virtually invisible through the overgrown hedge along its boundary with the road. The rain didn’t help my photographic efforts either!



GWR pattern lower quadrant signal SB40, in the OFF position, permitting the Newquay branch train (a class 150) to proceed from Par to Newquay. Note the footpath crossing.



Towards Newquay from Middleway LC, showing the GWR pattern lower quadrant bracket signal. The main signal is for the line to Par station, the junction signal is for the goods line to St Blazey yard, depot and Par Docks. Note the check rail on the curve and the rail lubricator.

Turning to the east after passing St Blazey depot, I headed past the level crossing at where the Par Docks branch crosses the A3082. I then headed out towards the coast.



*Par Docks branch from the
A3082 level crossing,
showing signs of recent use.*



*Looking through the fence
towards the remaining
dockside tracks and
facilities inside Par Docks.*

I headed onto the coast path, past the former dockside clay dries on the western side of the docks. The whole area has an air of dereliction about it.

This section of coast path has an incredible number and assortment of health and safety warning signs. Some reflect the industrial background of the area, others are faintly ridiculous!



My montage of H&S warning notices on the path between Par and Carlyon Bay. This must be the most dangerous path in Great Britain!

At Carlyon Bay, I took a quick swim in the swell near the site of the erstwhile Cornwall Coliseum. This venue saw performances by some of the biggest rock bands of the 1960s, 70s and 80s. It finally closed in 2003, and was demolished some years later.



A murky Carlyon Bay. The white sand is due to deposition of china clay waste, the result of years of industrial kaolin extraction, processing and pollution (!) in the area.

The rain intensified as I swam back to the shore, and I'm sure to this day that I got wetter changing back into my clothes than I did in the sea! I rapidly regained the coast path to Charlestown Harbour - in search of a tearoom!

Charlestown Harbour is a fascinating place. Specifically designed for china clay export, it was equipped with underground cellars for keeping china clay dry before loading onto ships via chutes fed by underground tramways and small wagons. The civil and mechanical

engineering is on an impressive scale. It is a UNESCO World Heritage site. Construction began in 1790 and was completed in 1804.



*A very wet
Charlestown Harbour,
near St Austell.*



*Charlestown Harbour
Tramway wagon bogie.
It appears that the
wagon body would
have been capable of
rotation and tipping.*

I left the coast path at Charlestown and headed inland for a couple of miles to St Austell station. It was very wet! I caught a Class 800 back to Newton Abbot, then changed for Dawlish Warren, and headed back to my shack. I was very glad to have its wooden roof over my head as torrential rain fell.

Hugh Driscoll

Next month, in Part 3, Hugh concludes by relating his experiences on the third and final day of his trip.



Railway 200 Weekend 13 & 14 September



Join the NVR in a celebration of Steam and Diesel Traction at our Railway 200 Weekend.

LNWR Coal Tank No 1054 will be the star of this NVR Railway 200 event. Built in 1888 and reprieved from the scrap man by WW2 in 1939, 1054 eventually served the national network for 70 years before passing into preservation after being sent for scrap for the second time.

Also featuring:

- GWR No 4144
- Hudswell Clarke No 1800 (Thomas)
- Danish No 656
- Class 45 45041
- Class 14
- HST
- Pacer or Railcar



For further details and to make bookings, visit

[Railway 200: Weekend | Nene Valley Railway Ltd](https://www.nenevalleyrailway.co.uk/railway-200-weekend)

(Reproduced courtesy of the NVR)



Chinnor Independent Line Officially Opened

On Saturday 5 July 2025, the Chinnor and Princes Risborough Railway officially opened their volunteer-built independent line between Thame Junction and Princes Risborough Platform 4. Prior to this moment, the railway was operating over the Thame Branch Siding, with access provided by Network Rail each weekend. This new line enables the C&PRR to have independent access to Princes Risborough station.

A VIP Day was held on Friday 27 June, attended by local councillors and guests including representatives from Network Rail, Chiltern Railways, Colas and other organisations that have helped throughout the project. Another special guest was Lady Judy McAlpine, wife of the late Sir Robert McAlpine, who were both long-standing supporters of the railway. Lady Judy has agreed to take on the position of President of the Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway.



*USA Class 160 (6046) breaks the tape
Photo Credit: Richard McVeigh*

The day included a ceremonial tape breaking by the first train (consisting of passenger stock) ever to traverse the independent line, followed by a return run to Chinnor.

With the opening of the line over the weekend of 5 July and 6 July, all Chinnor Railway services will now run via the Independent Line.

(Reproduced courtesy of C&PRR)

Class 387 Liveries – Tom Gladwin

The Class 387 Electrostars, now being transferred within Govia Thameslink from Great Northern services to Southern, have appeared at Welwyn North in a variety of liveries.

My picture of 387109+387124, *Railway Ramblings* Issue 181 (August 2025), showed a pair of Class 387 units in white with green doors. Others, such as 387303, being one of three formerly with c2c, have blue doors. In contrast the three units, 387172-4, transferred from Great Western have retained their green livery.



These pictures of 387303 and 387172, were taken at Welwyn North on 2 August, 2025.



For some months red-liveried units from the Gatwick Express services, such as 387208 pictured here at Welwyn North on 8 September 2021, also appeared on Great Northern services.

Tom Gladwin.

The September Presentations (1)

The Midland Main Line – Bedford to St Pancras

- Bryan Cross

9 September



45614 at Flitwick
1 October 1959
© Bryan Cross

45650 at West Hampstead
16 October 1959
© Bryan Cross



At Hitchin (14:00 – 16:30)

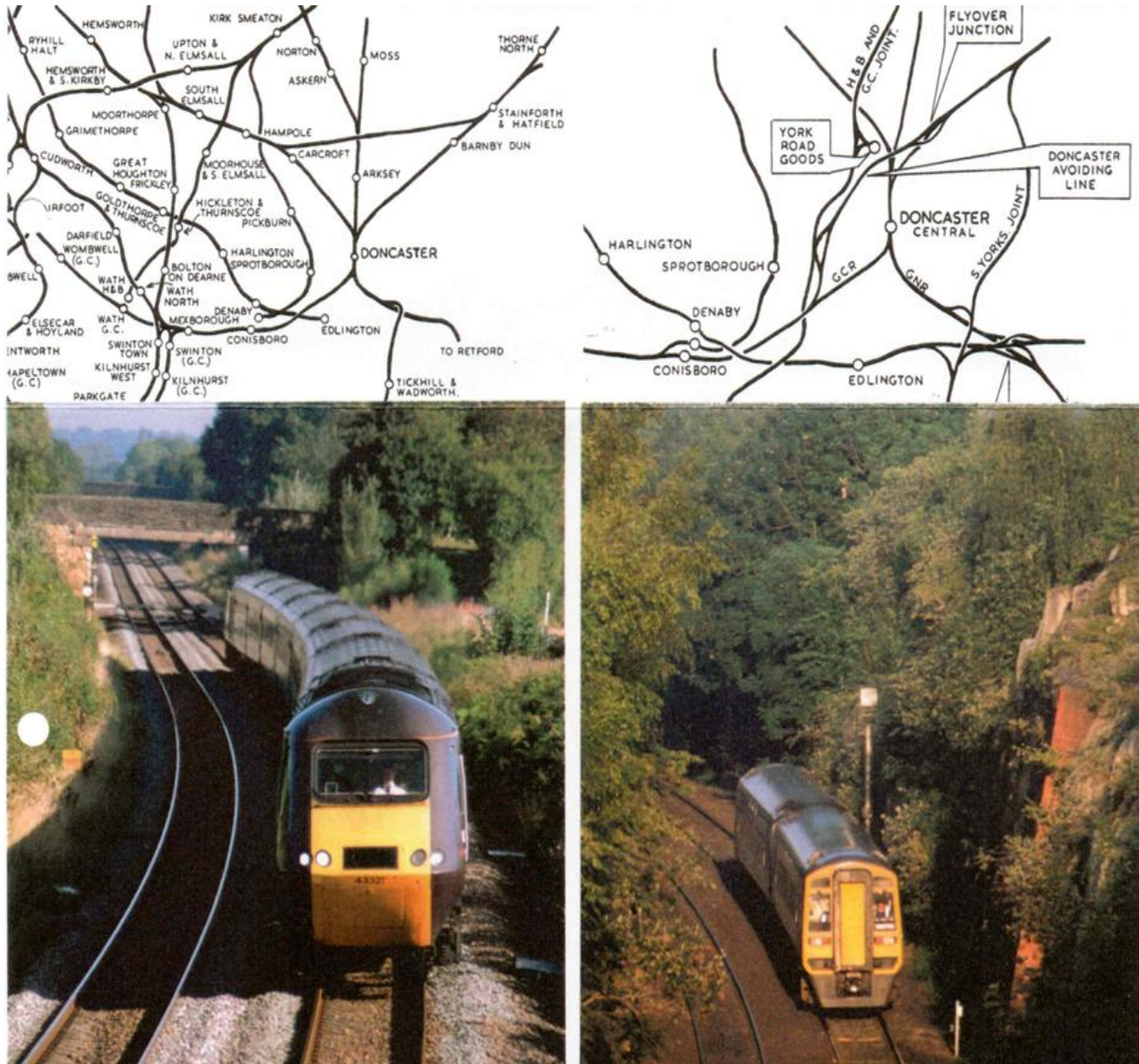
A digital presentation of images mostly scanned directly from the negatives of Peter Bland & Harold Clements.

We will travel along the ex-Midland Main Line, Bedford to St Pancras & Moorgate. Looking at the early history, aided by maps & diagrams but mostly photographs covering the period mid 1950's to 1961 and the end steam hauled suburban services.

The September Presentations (2)

The Doncaster Rover – Stephen Gay

30 September



At Digswell, Welwyn (14:00 - 16:30)

Travelling from Frickley to Finningly, Mexborough to Moorends and Bentley, Bessacarr to Bawtry. This is a railway journey which criss-crosses the Doncaster borough. Using Stephen's slides taken over the last 40 years, the presentation will also look at waterways and historic buildings. We will also take a bus journey, helping to locate lost lines and stations!

(Information provided by Stephen Gay)

The September Puzzle – Martin Elms

Following last month in the south, this month it's a northern flavour.

The first letter of each answer should spell a North Eastern station or feature.

1. Station northwest of Barnard Castle
2. Station south of Northallerton
3. Locomotive depot with code 52C
4. Middleton ? Teesdale
5. Name of locomotive D9020

6. Depot with code 52B
7. York's river
8. ? and Ilkley joint railway
9. Station near to Scotswood
10. Locomotive with number 60014

11. East Yorkshire coastal town
12. Junction station for Easingwold
13. Station south of Eaglescliffe

Best of luck.

My answer to each of the questions and solution to the puzzle are on page 24

Martin Elms



Southern Giants - Steam Gala 19, 20 and 21 September



Photo credits: 34072 - Matt Bentley 926 - K Felstead

The EOR annual steam gala will feature locomotives from the home fleet, alongside some interesting giants of the Southern region!

There will be three days of intensive steam action with the locomotives being put through their paces over some of the most challenging gradients in preservation. Two Southern Region "giants of steam" will be visiting, and operating alongside the home fleet:

- Bullied pacific locomotive, 34072 "257 Squadron" courtesy of Southern Locomotives Limited
- Maunsell Schools Class locomotive, 926 "Repton" courtesy of the North Yorkshire Moors Railway
- Hunslet locomotive, 3781 courtesy of the Watercress Line
- Great Western Hall class locomotive, 4953 "Pitchford Hall"

The Penny Salon Gallery at Ongar station will be hosting a photographic exhibition entitled "Our Steam and Pleasant Land" with photos from the lens of renowned photographer Geoff Silcock. Admission is free so why not take a look during your visit?

This will also show a series of images of the Schools Class No.30926 Repton on the LCGB "Kentish Venturer" railtour, which is now believed to be have been the last known train that Repton hauled in BR service. The day itself started with bright sunshine, and then turned into a blizzard in Kent on the branch through to New Romney, with Schools Class No.30926 Repton taking over from Appledore via Ashford back to Charing Cross. With Repton facing imminent withdrawal, as were the rest of class then, along with all the remaining King Arthur 4-6-0s also, it became a thrilling finale to the day, as it topped 85 mph. on the trip.

For details and bookings, click [Southern Giants Steam Gala | Epping Ongar Railway](#)

(Reproduced courtesy of the EOR).

Some Observations from Bletchley – Tom Gladwin

On Friday 18 July my son Julian and I enjoyed travelling from Harpenden to Bedford, thence to Bletchley and Milton Keynes and return.

At Bletchley we noted three Class 196/0 units. Presently being used for driver training, five of these CAF Civity DMU's are to be sub-leased to East West Rail for two years. Services to Oxford are expected to commence later this year (2025).

We found much else of interest as evidenced by the following pictures:



33207 hauling Black Five 45212 from Carnforth to Southall.



69009 *Western Consort* running round 360109 which it was hauling from Kettering to Northampton.



The Golden Whistle emblems for 2023, 2024 and 2025 on Rail Operations Groups Class 37 37611. These are “productivity awards” made annually to the operator with the best record of on-time arrivals. 37611 arrived at Bletchley delivering 730204 new from Derby.

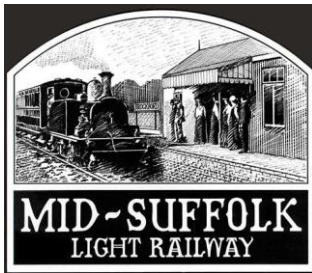


The elevated extension, Platforms 6 and 7, to Bletchley station for the East West Rail services.



A magpie's nest in the catenary at Platform 4 at Bletchley.

Tom Gladwin.



Extension Opened!

- Public Opening 2 & 3 August



The Formal Opening

The Middy extension is now open and trains are running the full length of the line

At the formal opening on Friday 1st August, a large group of invited guests celebrated the cutting of the ribbon by Mark Pendlington, Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Suffolk. Amongst the guests were Lord and Lady Deben, Adrian Ramsay, MP for Waveney Valley, the Mayor of Stowmarket, David Child, many local Suffolk Councillors, supporters, volunteers and members.

On Saturday 2nd August and Sunday 3rd the railway was open to the public and, according to an ad hoc survey, visitors were universally in favour of the new development. And, to the delight of the Middy team, there were lots of them on both days. Manning Wardle *Sir Berkeley* (featured in the July RR and pictured above) was the duty locomotive for both days.

On Sunday 10th August the RCTS Hitchin & Welwyn Garden City branch visited the Middy for their August outing. *Sir Berkeley* was again the duty locomotive. The weather was sunny & hot and, apparently, there were even more visitors on that day than there had been on the public opening day – probably because of the Big Bus Show at nearby Stonham Barns, with a reasonable number (including the RCTS contingent) attending both events



The infrastructure team are now well on with creating the last part of this incredible project - the construction of the destination station, Aspell Halt. The station construction is being modelled on the old station at Wilby, which had the minimal building and facilities so typical of the original cash-strapped Middy.



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 gives 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.

The opening of the line extension is a great leap forward for the Middy

(Reproduced courtesy of the MSLR)

Exhibitions in September

Brambleton Model Railway Club - Outdoor Model Railway Open Day

Saturday 6 September 2025

Highfield Oval, Ambrose Lane, Harpenden, Hertfordshire AL5 4BX

OPENING TIMES: 2:00 – 17:30

ADMISSION: Adults £4.00 Children £2.00 Family £10.00

Brambleton have one of the largest outdoor model railways in the country. Set in woodland, they have an extensive double-track O gauge mainline layout with 9 stations, along with a lengthy and complex SM32/16mm garden line. They will be running an intensive service on the O gauge with a wide variety of modern and steam outline rolling stock. On the SM32/16mm line, an interesting selection of live steam locomotives and stock will be in operation. Refreshments and free parking available.

Tring and District Model Railway Club - Tad-Rail 2025

Saturday 6 September 2025

The Cottesloe School, Aylesbury Road, Wing, Nr Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire LU7 0NY

OPENING TIMES: 10:15 – 16:30

ADMISSION: Adults £6.00 Concessions £6.00 Children £3.00 Family £14.00

This is their second year back at this larger accessible venue between Aylesbury and Leighton Buzzard. There will be 14 layouts in a variety of scales, traders with a wide variety of model railway items and demonstrations of MERG electronics, a train simulator and the N gauge Society. Light refreshments will be available in the spacious canteen. All rooms are on the ground floor.

Solution to the September Puzzle (page18)

1. **R**omaldkirk 2. **O**tterington 3. **B**laydon 4. **I**n 5. **N**imbus 6. **H**eaton 7. **O**use
8. **O**tley 9. **D**unston 10. **S**ilver Link 11. **B**ridlington 12. **A**lne 13. **Y**arm

Answer – ROBIN HOODS BAY

Martin Elms

Workshop Wanderings – Steve Lacey

Steve's regular reports will be back next month.

Back Issues

If you want to view back issues of Railway Ramblings you can find those from recent months on the RCTS website www.RCTS.org.uk These are available to members and non-members alike. Earlier issues are available (as jpg files) by contacting the Editor.

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.