

Railway Ramblings

Issue 184

November 2025

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



60007 *Sir Nigel Gresley* running from Newark to Alton for a planned visit to the Watercress Line
1 October 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 November 2025

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

11th November **From Litchurch Lane to Temple Mills via Paris**
A working life on the rails.

Hugh Driscoll

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

25th November **The Changing Scene on the WCML Southern Section**
1930s to the present day

Rob Freeman

During December 2025

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

9th December **Sugar, Steam and Sunsets**

David Longman

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

30th December **Six Decades of the Settle & Carlisle**

Chris Wright

Special Note for the December meetings:

There will be an extended interval, when “festive food” (but certainly not “turkey”) will be available. It will greatly help to know if you are likely to be able to attend either (or both) meetings as we don’t want to run out of mince pies, sausage rolls, etc. There will be no additional donations requested but please let us know at one of the **November meetings**, or by other means if you prefer.

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

Digswell, Welwyn meetings are held at Digswell Village Church Hall, Warren Way, Digswell, Welwyn AL6 0DH



Chairman's Platform

Quite a lot of very positive branch news this month. Meetings at both Hitchin and Digswell have been very well attended – well up to the best pre-Covid numbers. This does mean that branch finances are now “healthy” and enable us to provide a strong programme next year, which your Branch Secretary, Dave Elsdon, has just finished creating. Details appear in this newsletter and will, in due course, be available later, in the usual printed format.

Our festive season meetings this year will be more-or-less a repeat of last year – which seemed very well received – but it will help us with the catering if you could let us know (at the November meetings or otherwise) whether or not you are likely to be coming. As a reminder, these are on 9 December at Hitchin and on 30 December at Welwyn. The cost of the catering is again being met from branch funds.

Still on catering, in 2026 Janet Wood will be “stepping down” from providing the catering at Hitchin. Janet has been doing “teas & coffees” for us for quite some time and we are extremely grateful for that. Although the December meeting will be her last day behind the counter, I hope she will continue to accompany Vic to future meetings. I can announce that David Holdstock and Ray Shakespeare-Smith have agreed to take on the role.(no pun intended). I really appreciate them taking on this important task. David also continues with the catering at Digswell.

In your committee we have decided to have an Assistant Secretary and Assistant Treasurer. These roles are being taken on by Tony Stratford and Hugh Driscoll respectively. These roles help to spread the workload and also provide us with resilience against absences or illness. I will put these changes, retrospectively, to the 2026 AGM for ratification. (Perhaps I should remind readers that all committee posts are voluntary with no remuneration).

Last month I mentioned that our Editor, John Dossett, is always looking for new contributions for this newsletter and much appreciates those from our “regulars” but it would be good to see photos and/or articles from more of you. This month we have a thought-provoking article from Richard Varley. We also have further contributions from Tom Gladwin – thank you Tom. Does anyone want to respond to Richard’s article? Or could you be another new contributor with another topic? Either talk with John at one of our meetings or contact him at John.Dossett@btinternet.com About the only criteria is that it is railway related.

I also mentioned that I have been writing regular *Workshop Wanderings* articles now for a number of years and have, until recently, focussed primarily on what has been happening at the Nene Valley Railway workshops. With my beloved 92 *Squadron* 34081 now at the East Lancs Railway I am not such a frequent visitor to the NVR and am spending more time elsewhere (mainly on behalf of our Society). My regular reports still need a new title – any (polite) appropriate suggestions?

Steve Lacey

New Member

We welcome John Doyle, of Waltham Abbey, to the RCTS and to the Hitchin and Welwyn Garden City Branch.

Freight Through Watton-at-Stone

The DB Cargo Plasmor Trains – Tom Gladwin

Plasmor are major manufacturers of blocks and paving for the construction industry. DB Cargo are contracted to haul their trains from their production site at Plasmor Power Station, Heck, near Selby.



66182 passing Watton-at-Stone with the down working on Tuesday 23 September 2025

On days when they run, loaded trains are pathed as follows;

Heck	dep.	2147
Biggleswade	arr.	0605
	dep.	0915
Watton-at-Stone	pass	0942
Bow Depot	arr.	1048

Some of the loaded wagons are detached at Biggleswade. The remaining load is detached on arrival at Bow, and the empty wagons from the previous delivery attached.

The return working is pathed as follows;

Bow Depot	dep.	1124
Watton-at-Stone	pass	1239
Biggleswade	arr.	1305
	dep.	1445
Heck	arr.	2042

At Biggleswade empty wagons from the previous delivery are also attached, and the train returns to Heck.

I was curious to know why the empty wagons at Biggleswade were not attached to the up train, thereby saving the stop there by the return working. The gentleman who kindly answered my telephone call advised that the reason is that they cannot handle the full-length train at Bow.

Tom Gladwin.

Back Issues of Railway Ramblings

If you want to view back issues of Railway Ramblings, you can find those from recent months on Hitchin & Welwyn Garden City branch pages of the RCTS website www.RCTS.org.uk. These are available to members and non-members. Earlier issues are available by contacting the Editor John.Dossett@btinternet.com

Wouldn't It Be a Good Idea ? - Richard Varley

If you've tried to drive through Hitchin lately, you'll have met the Cadent roadworks — temporary traffic lights, dug-up pavements, and the sort of delays that make you wonder if the 1950s weren't so bad after all. But beneath the grumbling lies something quietly revolutionary: Cadent is replacing old gas pipes with new ones capable of carrying a hydrogen-natural gas mix. Eventually, these pipes may deliver 100% hydrogen to our homes — clean-burning fuel for boilers, without the carbon.

Now imagine this: what if the hydrogen didn't have to come from distant industrial plants or imported sources? What if it was produced locally — not just for heating, but also for transport?

Enter the Small Modular Reactor, or SMR. Think of it as a mini nuclear power station, safe and compact, designed to sit quietly near towns or transport hubs. These clever machines generate electricity — enough to power railways and heavy industry — but they also produce heat, which can be used to make hydrogen. That's right, one SMR could light the station, run the trains, and warm the homes.

Place them strategically along railway lines — say, at junctions or depots — and you've got the makings of a distributed energy backbone. The railway becomes more than a transport corridor; it becomes an energy spine, delivering power and hydrogen where it's needed most. Even non-electrified lines could benefit, with fuel-cell trains sipping hydrogen instead of diesel.

It's not science fiction. It's a question of joined-up thinking. Wouldn't it be a good idea?

Richard Varley

Editor: Richard tells me that he has no connection with either hydrogen production or the railways other than being a retiree who likes trains and often researches weird and wonderful things on the internet !



Christmas at the Railway SANTA'S REINDEER RESCUE

Various Dates from 29 November



The Magical Train Journey

Step aboard the NVR heritage train from Wansford Station for a return journey to Peterborough, filled with festive cheer. Expect festive songs and laughter from the onboard elves as you roll through the wintry countryside. If you would prefer a quieter time on board, NVR would suggest booking a private compartment or booking onto our quiet train service which will run on Wednesday 17 December.

What's Included

- A fully immersive festive experience at Wansford Station
- Reindeer food making with the elves
- A meet-and-greet with Santa in his grotto or a personal visit in your private compartment
- A gift for every child
- A return journey on a heritage train (steam or diesel)
- On-train entertainment with cheeky Christmas elves
- A festive activity booklet
- Access to the gift shop, café, and onboard bar

For more details and to make bookings visit the NVR website:

[Christmas at the Railway: Santas Reindeer Rescue | Nene Valley Railway Ltd](#)

(Reproduced courtesy of the NVR)



Autumn Steam Gala

31 Oct, 1 Nov and 2 Nov 2025



A steam gala to commemorate 200 Years of passenger carrying railways. At present there are four confirmed locomotives.



GWR Castle Class 4079 *Pendennis Castle*

The *first* ever Castle Class and the most powerful steam locomotive to visit.

She was built at the GWR Swindon Works and completed on 4 March 1924.

Pendennis Castle reigned superior in the LNER and GWR exchange trials, and undertook a famous stint in Australia with the legendary *Flying Scotsman*.

USA Class 160 (6046) (Main picture – top)

Built in Philadelphia, USA in 1945 and 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 locomotive spent the majority of its working life on industrial lines, before being withdrawn. This engine has been the C&PRR resident steamer for the 2025 season.



Sentinel 7109 'Joyce'

Built in 1927 at the Sentinel Waggon Works, Shrewsbury, *Joyce* was ordered by Croydon Gasworks and gained the number 37 in their fleet. It was given the name *Joyce* after the daughter of Mr Sandeman, the chairman of Croydon Gas works where it operated for 32 years until 1960.

The locomotive is unusual in having vertical water-tube boiler supplying transversely mounted cylinders that transmit power to the wheels via gears and chains.



GWR 66XX class 0-6-2 6695

6695 was completed at Armstrong Whitworth's Newcastle works in October 1928 and was given works number 983. During its working life it has been employed on suburban passenger services and used to haul freight and passenger trains

It was withdrawn from service in July 1964, after completing more than 620,000 miles, and sold to Woodham's scrapyard. In May 1979 it was purchased by the 56XX Tank Group (from 1995 called the 6695 Locomotive Group).

Since December 2019, the locomotive has been based on the Swindon & Cricklade Railway and returned to steam in September 2022.

Picture courtesy of Owen Hayward

The Gala is steam haulage at its best and with gradients like the 1-68 Chinnor Bank (and there's others, including quite an incline at the Princes Risborough end of the line), it will be a really very intensive 3-Days of Steam!

There will also be brake van rides at Princes Risborough and these will take place between steam departures and arrivals, using Sentinel 7109 'Joyce' hauling up-and-down one or two brake vans! Brake van rides are included in the ticket price!

There will also be seven assorted road steamers at Chinnor station for the weekend. These include rollers, traction engines, a showman's ploughing engine and a steam lorry! So not only are rail enthusiasts being catered for but also the road steam enthusiasts too.

For further details, timtables and to make bookings visit the C&PRR website:

[Autumn Steam Gala with guest locomotives and more! « Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway](#)

(Reproduced courtesy of C&PRR)

Lanyard Badges – Reminder

A reminder that badges are issued to members and non-members alike.

If you have been a fairly regular attendee you probably have a lanyard name badge – and it is good to see many of you remembering to wear it at meetings. However, there are some who seem to regularly forget to bring theirs with them to meetings. Please do try to always remember to bring yours! (For those who struggle to remember to bring their badges you have the option of leaving your badge in the box between meetings!)

If you have not got a badge and feel “forgotten” then please let Steve Lacey (or Dave Elsdon, Paul Holloway, Tony Stratford, Hugh Driscoll or John Dossett) know and John will endeavour to get one prepared for your next visit.

Seen at Welwyn North – Tom Gladwin



On 1 October 2025, 66116 and 66127 topping and trailing an operational track-head leaf clearing run from Ferme Park to Royston. They had earlier made the up run. With leaf-fall only just starting such an operation might seem a little premature.

On the same day I also photographed 60007 *Sir Nigel Gresley* running from Newark to Alton for a planned visit to the Watercress Line. (*Editor: See cover photo*).

... and More From Watton-at-Stone – Tom Gladwin



67021 hauling the British Pullman through Watton-at-Stone on an ad hoc day trip from London Victoria to Stamford on Friday 3 October 2025. 67021 is one of two DB Cargo locomotives in matching cream and umber livery. The other being 67024.



20205 (leading) and 20007 passing Watton-at-Stone on 8 October 2025. They were running light on a Rail Adventure movement from Burton to Wembley.



The Magical Epping Ongar Lights Express

Various dates Nov 2025 to Jan 2026



The Epping Ongar Lights Express is an incredible light show on and in a steam train, consisting of thousands of coloured LED lights and LED wristbands, creating a kaleidoscope of different colours and flashing patterns. The train looks amazing, inside and out!

Join the festive action on board and get in the party mood with a festive DJ mix of music the whole family will love. Each passenger will receive their own interactive LED wristband which is synchronised to the music, meaning you become part of the show!

Sing, dance and cheer on this magical journey, hosted by the legendary "Voiceover Man" - laugh with him (or at him!) and compete against each other in his on-board game!

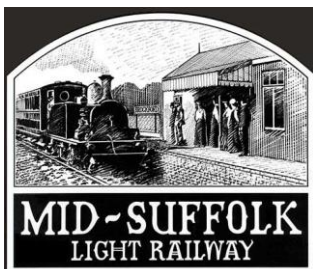
In the lead up to Christmas the train will feature Voiceover Man's festive family friendly mix of music and Christmas hits! (From 27 December, the train switches to Voicover Man's family party mix with a journey through the hits of the decades from the 1990s to the present day!)

Tickets: Adult: £25 Child: £20

For more information and to make bookings visit the EOR website:

[Epping Ongar Lights Express | Epping Ongar Railway](https://www.eppingongar-railway.co.uk/)

(Reproduced courtesy of the EOR).



2025 Santa Specials



There are six days of Santa Specials planned this year – December 7th/13th/14th/20th/21st & 22nd. For a magical Christmas treat for children up to 10 years old, a trip on a Mid-Suffolk Light Railway Santa Special is not to be missed. Steam trains run from Brockford Station to 'North Pole Halt', for an individual visit to Santa at his Christmas Guards Van and each child receives a present. The Stations, Brockford and 'North Pole Halt' will all be decorated in full 'Christmasy' style. On the return from their Santa visit passengers will find Christmas crafts, hot drinks and snacks will be available to buy and for the grown-ups, a complimentary cup of festive mulled wine. The trip to see Santa will last approximately 35 minutes. Visitors, especially children, can enjoy the unique atmosphere created at Suffolk's only standard gauge award winning railway museum. The Santa Special's genuine Great Eastern Railway Victorian four-wheeler coaches are a historical experience for any passengers. You will need to wrap up warm as these coaches are not heated!

Bookings are for individual compartments which can seat up to 8 people and must include at least 1 adult and 1 child over the age of 1. Children aged 1-10 will all receive an age appropriate and gender considered present.

Christmas trips get booked up early – so don't leave it to the last minute. Ticket prices £15.00 per person. Advanced bookings only. [Book Tickets](#)

(Reproduced courtesy of the MSLR)

The 2026 Branch Programme - Hitchin

Afternoon meetings, held at St Mark's Church, Hitchin

13 January

Eurostar, 30 Years & Counting – *Chris McCandless-Stone*

10 February

The Last Years of Steam 1966-1967 – *Michael Smyth*

10 March

Timetable Planning – A Dark Art, Plus More – *Dave Hepper*

14 April

The Vintage Trains Story – To a Train Operating Company – *Mike Corbett*

12 May

Oliver Bullied & 35028 Clan Line – *Simon Martin*

9 June

London Underground Trains of the Past – *Brian Hardy*

14 July

A Plug for Brunel – *Colin Brading*

August

Outdoor Visit or Something Different - The Branch Committee invites suggestions

8 September

A Wee Look Around Scotland – *Robin Mathams*

13 October

A1 Locomotive Trust – The P2 Build Update – *Liz Gibson*

10 November

A Broad Gauge Journey – Paddington to Swindon – *Brian Arman*

8 December

London to Beijing by Train – *Irene Rabbitts* - plus Seasonal Buffet

The 2026 Branch Programme - Welwyn

Afternoon meetings, held at Digswell Village Church Hall, Digswell.

27 January

6 Months at Stratford Depot – My Recollections from 1988 – *Hugh Driscoll*

24 February

Appalachian Wanderings – *Tony Field*

31 March

The Harwich Branch – *Dave Goodyear*

28 April

Branch AGM – and - Travels in 2025, Rail 200 & More – *John Tigg*

26 May

The Railways of Austria – *Richard Morris*

30 June

An A-Z of Swiss Railways (Part 3) – *Steve Ollive*

28 July

A Tale of Three Countries – *Geoff May*

August

Outdoor Visit or Something Different - The Branch Committee invites suggestions

29 September

My Railway Meanderings - *Stephen Gay*

27 October

Timetable Planning Oversimplified – *Matthew Alden-Farrow*

24 November

The Mid-Suffolk Light Railway – *John Reeve*

29 December

Your Pictures & Memories – please share yours - plus Seasonal Buffet

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Just £10 for membership until December 2026*

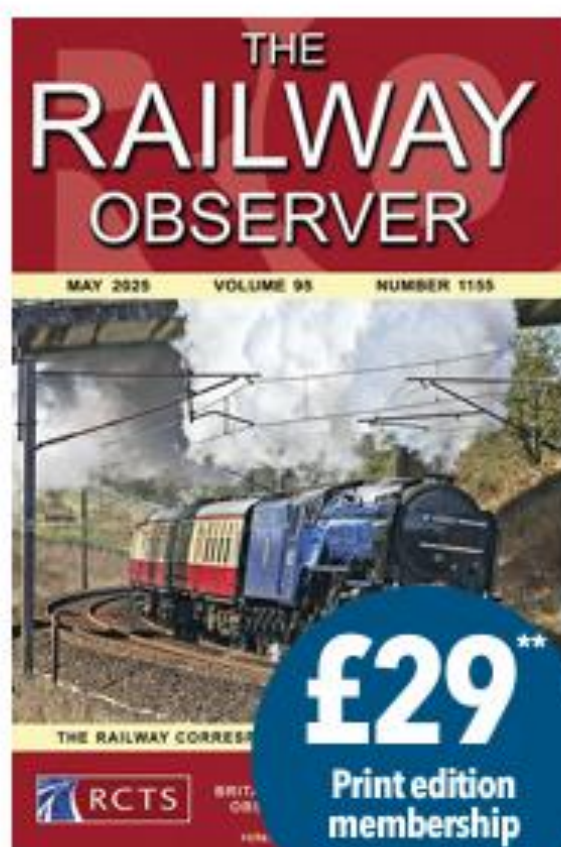
Membership benefits include:

- Discounts on many of the Society's books
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- Talks and illustrated presentations at branches throughout the UK
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www.rcts.org.uk/join



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RCTS

THE RAILWAY CORRESPONDENCE
AND TRAVEL SOCIETY



The November Presentations (1)

From Litchurch Lane to Temple Mills via Paris -
A working life on the rails

- Hugh Driscoll



11th November

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

Hugh will be describing his railway career, from his initial training at Derby Carriage Works through varied BR engineering training scheme placements, then on to working in depots for BR, Intercity and Eurostar in a variety of roles.

Hugh will also describe time he spent working for Network Rail on the Anglia Zone, dealing with infrastructure specialists and train operators.

Note: This is a change from the previously advertised presentation.

The November Presentations (2)

The Changing Scene on the WCML Southern Section - 1930s to the present day

- Rob Freeman

2378 down local
9th June 1945



25th November

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

The first part will cover Euston to Bletchley in the days of steam featuring mainly the photos of H C Casserley.

After the break we will look at some of the hundreds of more interesting workings Rob has photographed since the 1970s - as many as we have time for!

The November Puzzle – Martin Elms

This month it's an LNER flavour.

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

1. ? On Sea - a Norfolk station	
2. Name of locomotive 60141	
3. Depot with code 53E	
4. North British Railway locomotive superintendent	
5. Station on the north east coast	
6. Station west of Corpach	
7. Branch line from Alne to ?	
8. ? and Suffolk Joint Railway	

9. Name of locomotive 62729	
10. St ? – swing bridge near Haddiscoe	
11. Station at end of branch from Hexham	
12. Station north west of Kielder	

Best of luck.

My answer to each of the questions and solution to the puzzle are on page 19.

Martin Elms

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.

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

Exhibitions in November

Information from the organisers:

Sat 1st – Sun 2nd Spalding Model Railway Club – Annual Exhibition

Springfields Event Centre, Camel Gate, Spalding, Lincolnshire PE12 6ET

Opening times: Saturday 10:00 -17:00, Sunday 10:00 -16:30

Admission: On the day - Adults £12.00 Children (5-16) £1.00

Advance bookings – Adults £11 Free parking on site.

Restaurant on Site.

The annual model railway exhibition hosted by Spalding Model Railway Club with 31 layouts of various scales and gauges, 22 trade stands and 8 demonstration and organisation stands. Free colour event guide.

Exhibition clearly sign-posted from A16 Spalding By-pass. Exhibition centre located next door to Springfields Outlet Centre.

There will be an RCTS stand.

Solution to the November Puzzle (page18)

1. **Mundesley** 2. **Abbotsford** 3. **Goole** 4. **Drummond** 5. **Alnmouth**
6. **Locheilside** 7. **Easingwold** 8. **Norfolk** 9. **Rutlandshire** 10. **Olaves**
11. **Allendale** 12. **Deadwater**

Answer: MAGDALEN ROAD

Martin Elms

Workshop Wanderings – Steve Lacey



92 Squadron 34081 at work on the East Lancashire Railway
(Photo: Chris Ainsough)

Steve's reports return next month.

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.