

Railway Ramblings

Issue 186

January 2026

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



At Carlisle, 156504 ready to depart for Dumfries.
28 November 2025

Photo: Alan Elsdon

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 January 2026

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

13th January **Eurostar - 30 Years & Counting**

Chris McCandless

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

27th January **6 Months at Stratford Depot – My Recollections from 1988**

Hugh Driscoll

During February 2026

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

10th February **The Last Years of Steam 1966-1967**

Michael Smyth

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

24th February **Appalachian Wanderings**

Tony Field

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

Digsowell, Welwyn meetings are held at Digsowell Village Church Hall, Warren Way, Digsowell, 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

I hope that you have enjoyed Christmas – it's now time to sort out those New Year Resolutions! Amongst the many that you might make – and then generally fail to keep – there is one you can make AND keep without too much effort. As you can probably guess, that is to put our Branch Meeting dates in your diary and then simply come along to the meetings.

If you haven't already collected yours, you can now pick up the 2026 printed programme at our branch meetings. Our 2026 programme contains a number of familiar presenters and also some new ones. It would also be nice to see some new faces join us – so please take the opportunity to invite a friend or two to join you at meetings. To make it easy we will just ask for a nominal £1 each for anyone accompanying a member to meetings in either January or February. Just sign them in and add your membership number beside their name.

As we head into the winter months I would urge all of you who are eligible to have free flu and Covid vaccinations. It provides a large degree of protection, reduces the illness if you still get it and reduces your infectivity to others.

We can also expect spells of winter weather. If we need to cancel or change a meeting then we will put that on the branch pages of the RCTS website and we will also email all those on the distribution list for this newsletter. In bad weather please check your emails and/or the website before setting off to a meeting.

Looking well ahead, you will see that the programme includes provision for an August "outing". In recent years we have made visits to Bressingham Steam Museum, Mangapps Railway Museum, Nene Valley Railway, Epping & Ongar Railway, Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway, and Mid-Suffolk Light Railway. These have generally been viewed as enjoyable and successful, recognising that some have involved quite a bit of travelling time. In the next couple of months we need to decide what to do this year. Should we revisit somewhere we have been or should we try something new? Your views would be appreciated. If we follow the formula from recent years we want places with a railway theme, not too far away, and where we can expect, as a group, to get admissions that may not be available to you if you just visit as a member of the general public. Quite a challenge! Talk to me, or any of the committee, or send me an email.

Wishing you all a Happy and Healthy New Year.

Steve Lacey

New Branch Member

We welcome Richard Dockree, of Bedford, as a new member of our Branch. Richard has been a member of the RCTS for some time but has only recently moved into our area.

Digswell Village Church Hall

Rebuilding work should start soon but we have been assured that our meetings can take place as planned.

A Few Days Away – Dave Elsdon

Recently, I was fortunate enough to get some time with my family in North Yorkshire. My son, Alan, had to come to Harpenden - and offered me a ride back home with him to Bentham. I would have to travel home by train.

Our north-bound journey on the 26th November took us straight up the A1 and A1(M) to junction 47 where we joined the A59 through Harrogate to Skipton where we picked up the A65 almost to Alan's home. On Friday 28th November I was told we were going out for the day to Carlisle on the Settle & Carlisle Railway!

It was an appalling morning, heavy rain and very strong winds blowing. I must admit it was very bleak as we waited on Ribblehead station for our train, the 10:11 from Leeds. The train (158759) was running 12 minutes late but, fortunately, the couple staffing the tea room invited us into the café to keep warm whilst we waited. However, the further north we progressed the better the weather became and we arrived at Carlisle just after midday to a drying, almost bright, afternoon.



Our purpose was to spend the next two and half hours or so spotting. Our first sighting of note was Black liveried Class 90 (90026), as shown by Rob Freeman at our RCTS Welwyn meeting the previous Tuesday. During our time on the station other interesting traction appeared including 56090 / 094 on a RHTT train running to Carlisle north yard. Almost immediately as this was departing, the Tesco freightliner running south from Coatbridge to Daventry with 88005 / 68006 passed. The Class 68 was in a new environmental green livery as this loco operates on hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO) fuel producing 75% less pollution, it also produced a very different sound, much noisier than a diesel. There were quite a few

Trans-Pennine movements using both Classes 397 and 802/2 units. These were working to and from Edinburgh and Glasgow to Manchester Airport; also some Class 156 workings in Scot Rail livery to and from Dumfries, and Class 156's working to and from Whitehaven.



Class 70's also appeared, one (70009), on a log train running from Carlisle NY to Chirk, the other two (70806 /811) on a another much longer RHTT arrived from Carnforth this train stopped for a crew change before returning south to cover track to Workington. Carnforth, Settle Junction, where it reversed before running back to Carlisle via Appleby.



During our stay a couple of coffees were needed in the station café, just to get a little warmer and out of the cold, although we did see the sun for a good spell before returning to Ribblehead on the 14:50 service, (158849) arriving back 16:13. then back home for some warmth and dinner.

Seen at Carlisle; Diesel loco (inc. HVO) 8, Electric loco 2, Dmu 15, Emu 18.

Outward	Ribblehead	10.50	Return	16.13
	Dent	10.58		16.05
	Garsdale	11.04		16.00
	Appleby	11.28		15.34
	Armathwaite	11.58		15.06
	Carlisle	12.09		14.50

The following day, Saturday 29th November, I returned home by train via Leeds leaving Bentham at 10:11 on 158817 arriving at Leeds at 11:36 having travelled via Settle Junction, Hellifield, Skipton and Bingley. I had left myself considerable time at Leeds for some more spotting. Other than a few more Trans-Pennine Class 802/2s and almost now completing my Neville Hill allocated Class 195 & 331 units, the only more unusual train to pass through the station heading south was 70801 with a long rake of loaded tank wagons. I cannot think of any other station than Leeds to see so many Class 150 units.

My Azuma home arrived into Leeds around 15 minutes late, leaving little time for the turn-around, however it was achieved and we left on time at 14:15 on 800205. It was a fast uneventful journey, calling at Wakefield, Doncaster, Grantham and Stevenage. I saw very little at Doncaster (most was blocked by Freightliners) and passed 5 Class 66's and a 69 at Peterborough. I should have had 3 or 4 minutes to cross the platform to catch the stopping service to Welwyn North, we passed my train in Hitchin, thank goodness I thought for good time keeping- until we were held outside Stevenage station for 6 minutes during which my 379 unit passed and was well gone by the time we arrived in the platform. The next local service was shown as 17:09 with the 16:39 stopping service not indicated at all. A word with the Stevenage staff confirmed it had been cancelled, so a coffee was in order as I now had to wait for almost an hour. Sitting chatting to other unfortunate passengers who had much further to go than me, a unit pulled in to the platform, its indicator panel showing it was going to Knebworth and Welwyn North on route to Kings Cross, coffee abandoned and a quick dash to board to the train I arrived home at 16:50. This train was never shown on the indicator boards and the GN staff thought it was cancelled. One has to wonder why the left-hand does not know what the right-hand is doing.

Seen at Leeds; Diesel loco 1, Dmu 30, Emu 20 (not everything was recorded)

Timings for this journey home were;

Depart	Leeds	14.16
	Wakefield	14.22
	Doncaster	14.48
	Grantham	15.18
	Stevenage	16.16

*Dave Elsdon
(All photographs by Alan Elsdon)*

Looking for Snow? – John Tigg

A couple of photos taken (on 8 December) at Leighton Buzzard, of snowploughs heading for Norwich as 7Q56. The locos were due to return the following morning (9 December) and collect another two as 7Z58 Wolverton Centre Sidings to Fairwater Yard.



The consist was - plough ZZA / ADB965208 followed by 56302, then 56113 with plough ZZA ADB965209 bringing up the rear. Don't know what speed they were doing but a lot slower

(obviously) than usual services - but they opened up just beyond the station as they started to climb to Tring.

Also observed 5Q57 37884 Cepheus taking Class 455s 5702 & 5708 to Derby LL from Wimbledon Park Sidings for scrapping.



*John Tigg
(Photos & notes)*

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! Maybe another of your New Year's resolutions?

(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.

Steve Lacey

The January Puzzle – Martin Elms

All over the place this month.

The first letter of each answer should spell a Great railway company !!

1. Station at end of branch from Aberdeen	
2 Locomotive depot with code 74B	
3. Name of locomotive 60063	
4. Locomotive superintendent of LNER 1941 - 1946	
5. Station between Perth and Dundee	
6. Name of locomotive D9	
7. Summit between Sidmouth Junction and Seaton	

8. Name of locomotive 70027	
9. Station between County School and Wroxham	
10. Name of locomotive 47380	
11. .? St Marks	
12 Locomotive depot with code 60D	
13. Tunnel south of Retford	
14. . ? South Town	
15. Name of locomotive 5040	

Best of luck.

My answer to each of the questions and solution to the puzzle are on page 16.

Martin Elms

The January Presentations (1)

Eurostar – 30 Years & Counting

- Chris McCandless-Stone



13th January

At Hitchin

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

Tickets and passports at the ready! Join Chris McCandless-Stone, Eurostar's Fleet Performance Manager on a high speed journey across Europe as we look back at the 30 years of Eurostar connecting the fine people of Great Britain with mainland Europe via the engineering marvel that is la Tunnel sous la Manche. From the days of bumbling through Kent on the 750vDC to whizzing along the French Ligne à Grande Vitesse at 300km/h, there may be bumps along the way and a few unexpected surprises but we are still connecting people, and what to the future, well a new fleet, more destinations and the looming inevitability of competition. Sit back, avec un café and enjoy the views- no EES required!!

Chris McCandless-Stone

The January Presentations (2)

6 Months at Stratford Depot – My Recollections from 1988

- Hugh Driscoll



27th January

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



6 Months at Stratford Recollections from 1988



This presentation gives a brief history of Stratford depot, then describes my experiences as an engineering trainee there in the late 1980s. The various functions of the depot are detailed, together with the areas it served at the time.

It closes with the decline and eventual closure of the depot.

Hugh Driscoll

Further Wanderings in Bury – Steve Lacey

As promised last month, I will give you a brief introduction to the Bury Transport Museum.

Situated just across the road from the Bury Bolton Street station of the East Lancs Railway (ELR), it has a wide ranging mix of transport exhibits, well worth a couple of hours of your time. It is housed in the restored Castlecroft Goods Warehouse, from 1848.



Entry to the museum is free if you have an ELR Day Rover Ticket, or £5 for adults otherwise. As you can see from the general view below this is good value!



On entering, to the left there is *Wren* from the Horwich works of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway. Built in 1887 by Beyer Peacock at their Gorton Works, now a Manchester Corporation Depot, housing all the local election booths, their Transport servicing facility and much more, it was used to ferry raw materials and parts around the works. *Wren* cost £268 to build and lasted at work until 1957, not a bad investment!



Also in the same view is a replica of Trevithick's 1808 *Catch me who can* built in 2008 to celebrate its bicentennial.

There is a good selection of buses and lorries including this Leyland Titan bus and ERF 6 wheeler.



For those who do not know the story, Foden was founded in 1887 by Edwin Foden (1841 - 1911) and initially produced traction engines and some very successful (and nippy) steam lorries. In 1933 his son Edwin Richard Foden (1870-1950) decided that diesel was the way forward, but the board of Foden disagreed, leading to the son splitting from Foden to start a new company, known by the sons initials ERF. Hence two great lines of British trucks Foden

and ERF! Ironically this ERF was owned by Gardner (manufacturer of diesel engines) and was used to deliver Gardner engines to Foden!

Anyway, back to Bury Museum.

Further down the line of vehicles are two versions of the Scammel Mechanical horse. Designed to work in railway yards, initially laid out for horses, their 3-wheel arrangement gave a tight turning circle allowing them to be used in yards without the expense of relaying.



As you can see from the above photos the walls are covered with many totems and railway signs of all description. Carrying on round the end of the museum, there is a wonderful Dennis pump escape (my daughter's partner is a fire-fighter, so I am not allowed to call it a fire engine!).



Built by Dennis in 1952 for Cheshire Fire Brigade, it remained in service, mainly at Northwich, until 1974. Powered by a Rolls Royce 5.6 Litre engine it has a 100 gallon water capacity.

Further on, there is a steam road roller, but not a Foden, this one is by Thomas Green & Sons of Leeds and London.



As you will see, there are a number of steam engines also on display, difficult to photograph, but none-the-less impressive!

This article gives just a taster of the items on show. Outside, the pug was shunting, the yard providing a good vantage point for photographing trains entering and exiting the station at Bury Bolton Street station.



If you wish to visit the museum, it is open whenever the ELR is operating, so a good time might be at their Spring Gala "Legends of Steam III" on the 10-12 April 2026. In the meantime a Happy Christmas and New Year to you all.

Steve Lacey

Solution to the January Puzzle (page 9)

1. Ballater.
2. Ramsgate.
3. Isinglass.
4. Thompson.
5. Inchture.
6. Snowdon.
7. Honiton.
8. Rising Star.
9. Aylsham.
10. Immingham.
11. Lincoln.
12. Wick.
13. Askham.
14. Yarmouth.
15. Stokesay Castle.

Answer – BRITISH RAILWAYS – with or without the GREAT !!

Martin Elms

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

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 griersteve@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.