

Railway Ramblings

Issue 187

February 2026

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



At Carlisle

158796 to Leeds, 158870 to Whitehaven, plus unidentified TransPennine 397 unit
14 January 2026

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 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

During March 2026

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

10th March **Timetable Planning – A Dark Art, Plus More**

Dave Hepper

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

31st March **The Harwich Branch**

Dave Goodyear

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

As a branch we really finished 2025 on a high - Our final meeting of the year was at Digsowell and it was wonderful to see so many of you there. Our largest attendance for years enjoying a great presentation and a superb festive spread. This was the first year your committee put a meeting between Christmas and the New Year and we had wondered if anyone would attend! We will be doing the same again this year. Hopefully the building work at the hall will be completed by then and we will be able to squeeze a few more in. Never too early to put a note on your calendar.

The January meetings were also very well received, bringing new presenters with modern themes to our programme. Our thanks to Dave Elsdon for his work in creating an exciting programme for the year. If you haven't already collected yours, you can now pick up the 2026 printed programme at our branch meetings.

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 February or March. Just sign them in and add your membership number beside their name.

Although the hours of daylight are thankfully starting to extend again, winter is still with us and we can expect spells of bad 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.

You will also see in this issue that two of our "local" heritage lines (Epping Ongar and Nene Valley) have events in February. If you have family looking for activity over the half-term then these may provide a suitable and interesting day out.

Steve Lacey

New Member

We welcome Geoffrey Kingham, of Luton, as a new member of the RCTS and to the Hitchin & 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 griersteve@hotmail.com

The Newcomen Memorial Engine at Dartmouth – 'The engine that changed the world'

- Derek Boothby

I enjoyed reading Hugh Driscoll's entertaining account of his adventures exploring Devon and Cornwall. I noticed that in his visit to Dartmouth, in common with accounts of many other visitors there, he did not include an important industrial archaeological survivor that is preserved there. This is the oldest surviving Newcomen beam engine.

Thomas Newcomen (1664-1729) was born in Dartmouth. After an apprenticeship in Exeter he set up in business as an ironmonger in Dartmouth, where he developed in his workshop his invention for pumping water out of mines. His inspiration possibly came from Thomas Savery's 'Miner's Friend', 'an invention for raising water by fire'. Savery (ca. 1650-1715) was also a Devonian who was a military engineer whose work with the Royal Navy took him to Dartmouth where he might have met Thomas Newcomen. Both systems used atmospheric pressure as the driving force, and are therefore correctly described as atmospheric engines. The harnessing of steam power came later, after the development of suitable machining technology.

The first Newcomen engine is believed to be that which was installed in 1712 at a colliery on the estate of the Earl of Dudley near Dudley Castle in Staffs. By the end of the century around 1400 had been installed throughout the country. James Watt (1736-1819) developed a number of modifications which improved their efficiency and adaptability. Improvements in production machinery enabled atmospheric pressure to be replaced by steam pressure as the driving force. In 1986 a working replica of the original engine was constructed at the Black Country Living Museum in Dudley. The engine preserved at Dartmouth was originally installed by 1725 at Griff colliery in Staffs. After working in at least one other colliery, it was 'modernised' and re-erected in 1825 by the Coventry Canal company at Hawkesbury Junction where the canal and the Oxford Canal meet. It was taken out of use in 1913 and remained in its engine house until in 1963 it was donated by the British Transport Commission to the Newcomen Society who arranged its move and re-erection in Dartmouth to commemorate the 300th anniversary of Newcomen's birth. It no longer works, but by inserting a coin in a slot it goes through the motions. A third Newcomen engine exists at Elsecar near Barnsley. This was installed in 1795 in a colliery owned by Earl of Fitzwilliam on the Wentworth Woodhouse estate and it worked until 1923. It has been restored to working condition and is the only engine still in its original location.

The engine at Dartmouth now resides in a specially built house adjoining the tourist information centre in Royal Avenue Gardens, only a few minutes walk from the ferry terminal. If you plan a visit to Dartmouth include it in your agenda. And if you need a justification for doing so, think of it as an early predecessor of the steam locomotive. Later developments led to Trevithick, Stephenson (and others) fitting some wheels and producing steam locomotives. So without Savery and Newcomen where would we be? (My guess is someone would have come up with something.)

Derek Boothby

The Working Replica of the Original Newcomen Engine - Constructed at the Black Country Living Museum in Dudley



Photo: John Scorer

The photograph is of the replica Newcomen engine house at the Black Country Living Museum in Dudley. (photograph taken and loaned by John Scorer.)

The photograph shows the engine house and half of the horizontal beam protruding through the left hand wall. This end of the beam is attached by means of a chain to the vertical pump rod which is attached at its lower end to the pump located down the shaft.

Inside the house is the 'haystack' boiler with the vertical cylinder located immediately above, and the piston rod is attached to the end of the beam by a chain in the same manner as the pump rod. The weight of the pump rod draws down the end of the beam as it descends the shaft thereby raising the piston to the top of the cylinder. Steam is allowed to fill the lower part of the cylinder, after which the valve is closed and the cylinder sprayed with water. The steam condenses creating a vacuum and atmospheric pressure forces down the piston at the same time driving the pumping stroke of the pump.

Derek Boothby

Settle to Carlisle, January 2026 – Dave Elsdon

Starting on 31st December 2025 the new Avanti West Coast units Class 805 'Evero' bi-mode trains began running along the Settle & Carlisle (S&C) line for the first time. Using diesel power, the trains worked from Carlisle to Wigan North Western initially, then Preston from 5th January. The diversionary route was necessary as Network Rail were demolishing the existing concrete bridge that carries the WCML over the M6 motorway near Penrith and replacing it with a modern steel structure. Both the railway and motorway would be closed until 15th January. The diverted trains ran almost non-stop through many intermediate stations along the route leaving the S&C at Hellifield continuing back to the WCML. This is the first time in over 10 years that the S&C has been used as a diversionary route for main line services

The pictures show single unit Class 805001 and a coupled pair 805004 / 013 at Garsdale, along with a normal Class 158 (158753) Leeds to Carlisle via Skipton, Settle and Appleby stopping service, on Thursday 1st January 2026



805001



805004 / 013



158753

On 1st January 2026 the Evero line up through Appleby was;

1Z33	10:01	805001
1Z34	10:55	805004 / 013
1Z35	11:48	805005 / 007
1Z36	12:56	805001
1Z37	13:49	805002 / 012
1Z38	14:55	805005 / 007
1Z39	15:49	805004 / 013
1Z40	16:39	805002 / 012
1Z41	17:48	805001
1Z42	18:39	805004 / 013
1Z43	19:49	805005 / 007
1Z44	20:37	805001
1Z46	22:22	805005

(Details thanks to the Class 800 group)

Dave Elsdon
with photographs by Alan Elsdon



Photo: John Dossett

The February Puzzle – Martin Elms

This month it is a Southern flavour

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

1. The nickname of the Class A1 0-6-0 locomotives	
2 Station south of Buxted	
3. Name of locomotive 35014	
4. Locomotive depot with code 73B	
5. Station with branch line to Camber Sands	
6. Name of locomotive 30799 Sir ?	
7. Locomotive superintendent of LSWR 1895 –1912	
8. Station west of Semley	
9 Name of locomotive 30900	

10. 1815	
11. Station west of Launceston	
12 .? And Barnstaple Railway	
13. Name of locomotive 34099	
14. Name of locomotive W20	

Best of luck.

My answer to each of the questions and solution to the puzzle are on page 15.

Martin Elms

Causey Arch – Derek Boothby



I was interested to note that in John Dossett's account of his visit to Beamish and the Tanfield railway he mentioned the Causey Arch. I know that without clambering down it is difficult to photograph the arch – here are two from my photo collection.

We had a holiday in Durham in July 2003 and called in on the arch on the way back from from a day in Beamish. I thought it had a special, almost magical feel about it.

In the landscape photo the Causey Burn is visible at the bottom of the picture, and in the portrait one the pathway down to the burn is in the middle foreground.

Derek Boothby





Freedom Travel – Your Day Out, Your Way

Starting in February

Experience the Nene Valley Railway with complete flexibility. A Freedom Travel Day Pass gives you unlimited travel on NVR heritage services for the date of your visit — allowing you to hop on and off, explore the stations, and enjoy everything the Nene Valley has to offer at your own pace.



Advance booking is recommended, but walk-in Day Passes are available from station booking offices or Travelling Ticket Inspectors (TTI).

Wheelchair users can board via the Guard's Van or the Accessibility Coach.

For more details and to make bookings:

[Freedom Travel | Nene Valley Railway Ltd](#)

(Reproduced courtesy of the NVR)



Half-Term Family Adventures

14, 15, 18 February



A great family day out, with a journey into history featuring THREE heritage transport experiences for ONE great value ticket!

Tickets offer unlimited travel on EOR heritage steam and diesel trains and vintage London bus services on the date of your visit.

Hop on and off all 3 great transport experiences as you please.



Explore the stations, the historic town of Ongar and journey into the ancient Epping Forest.

Adult: £19.50; Child: £1.

For further details and to make bookings:

[Family Adventures | Epping Ongar Railway](#)

(Reproduced courtesy of the EOR).

The February Presentations (1)

The Last Years of Steam Part 1 1966-1967

- Michael Smyth



44694 climbing out of Bradford Exchange with the 0918 to Blackpool, 19/8/67

10th February

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

This presentation features the final two years of BR steam mainly on the former North Eastern Region, and in particular around the Leeds-Bradford-Wakefield area and the North East. It was noted for the last working examples of several classes such as the Stanier and Fairborn 2-6-4Ts, WD 2-8-0s, J27s, Q6s, B1s and perhaps most famously the Jubilees at Holbeck.

The pictures in the presentation capture a lost world not just of steam engines but also of their working environment.

(Michael was the presenter at the December 2025 Digswell meeting with his outstanding photographs on the Settle & Carlisle line.)

The February Presentations (2)

Appalachian Wanderings

- Tony Field



A montage of Appalachian Mountains views featuring: Helmstetter's Curve, MD on the 16-mile Western Maryland Scenic Railroad with 1916-built Baldwin 2-8-0 No. 734 (top left); Elkhorn, WV on Norfolk Southern (top right); Fairhope, PA on CSX (bottom right); Cassandra, PA on the Norfolk Southern (bottom left) and close to Sand Patch Summit on CSX (centre). Photos: Tony Field.

24th February

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

The passage through the Appalachian Mountains, on the eastern side of the USA, still provides a stern test even for modern traction. This video presentation shows a variety of such workings, covering several mainline routes and a heritage line, all set in spectacular scenery.

Tony Field

More From Carlisle – Dave & Alan Elsdon



Avanti West Coast 805002 / 010 Carlisle to Preston via S & C



Pendolino 390117 arrived for Glasgow



Triple headed ballast working New Biggin to Tees Dock with 66422 leading



Colas 43272 on the Network Rail test train, 321426 stabled



47246 / 57314 stabled.



Avanti West Coast 805016 arrived from Preston via the S & C

All photos: Alan Elsdon on 14 Jan 2026

Descriptions: Dave Elsdon

Solution to the February Puzzle (page 8)

1. Terriers.
2. Uckfield.
3. Nederland Line.
4. Bricklayers Arms.
5. Rye.
6. Ironside.
7. Drummond.
8. Gillingham.
9. Eton.
10. Waterloo.
11. Egloskerry.
12. Lynton.
13. Lynmouth.
14. Shanklin.

Answer: TUNBRIDGE WELLS

Martin Elms

Workshop Wanderings – Steve Lacey

Last month I gave you a brief guide to the Bury Transport Museum. From Bury, Carol and I drove across country to attend the RCTS Member's Weekend, this year based in Darlington. If you have not been before, I can thoroughly recommend the event, as you meet fellow members from across the nation and get to visit interesting Transport-related places, often with some behind the scenes access.

The weekend started with a short coach trip across town for a visit to the Hopetown museum. *Tornado* was built in their original works on this site, but they are now based in a new building (on the same site) where they are building a new P2!



Exterior of entrance to Hopetown Locomotive Museum, originally the wagon works.

We were treated to a visit to the inside of the new works where the P2 is being built By the A1 Steam Locomotive Trust. Normally visitors to the museum only get to view through a glass windowed gallery at one end of the works.



View from the visitors' gallery

We were given a guided tour with a description of the works to dateand an opportunity to make a donation of course!



P2 taking shape in the workshop. On the right was an object covered in a blue tarpaulin which was kept secret from us!

(Note: Our October 2026 Branch Meeting, at Hitchin, will be a presentation by Liz Gibson of the A1 Locomotive Trust, giving us a comprehensive update on this P2 build project.)



The cylinder block casting for the P2.

Also in the shed were two shunting locomotives. The small black 0-4-0 saddle tank was Great Eastern Railway 'Coffee Pot' No 229 (LNER Y5 7230). Built in 1876 by Neilson & Co of Glasgow it had a top speed of 20-mph with its 3ft 7in driving wheels.



After visiting the works we then had time in the Hopetown Museum itself, housed in the original Darlington station of the Stockton and Darlington Railway. This is the original Darlington railway museum which I am sure many of you will have visited in the past.



Inside are a range of exhibits charting the history of early railways of this country. There are examples showing the evolution of the stage-coach into the early railway carriages, the development of the locomotives and goods vehicles. Some are original and some are replicas.



As you can see, photography is not easy as there are an awful lot of exhibits in a small space! Also on the same site and housed in the old Carriage Works, is a huge store of railway artefacts held in metal cage stillages, like the Works at the NRM.

On Saturday we were taken by coach to Beamish Open Air Museum and on Sunday, after the Officers Conference, we again boarded the coach for a visit to Locomotion at Shildon ... but that will have to wait until next time.

Steve Lacey

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

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.