

Railway Ramblings

Issue 190

May 2026

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



An Up Thameslink Class 700 service from Bedford taken from a point north of Harpenden on the Midland Main line, on 30th March 2026.

Photo: Alan Elsdon

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 May 2026

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

12th May **Oliver Bulleid and 35028 Clan Line**

Simon Martin

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

26th May **The Railways of Austria**

Richard Morris

During June 2026

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

9th June **The Railways of South Wales in Transition**

Jeremy Segrott

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

30th June **An A-Z of Swiss Railways (Part 3)**

Steve Ollive

Please Note - Programme Change

The previously advertised 9 June 2026 meeting topic at Hitchin “London Underground Trains of the Past – Brian Hardy” is cancelled. Brian is no longer able to travel to give presentations.

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 RCTS 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

Thanks to all of you who attended our Branch AGM. As I mentioned previously, the AGM is an important part of keeping the branch running. As part of the meeting Officers and committee for the next 12 months were elected, with Dave Cornelius joining the committee. A full committee chart will be in next month's issue of *Railway Ramblings*.

One of the first tasks for the new committee is to consider the various suggestions received for the annual August Outing and to agree where we will go. The **provisional** date for the visit is **Sunday 16th August** – so put it in your diary. Family and friends can be invited to take part and we will, as in recent years, be subsidising the event from branch funds. We expect to be able give you details in next month's *Railway Ramblings*.

A reminder to those of you coming to meetings at Digswell that building works on the church hall are now well underway. This work will continue through to November 2026. In each issue of *Railway Ramblings* we will try to keep you up-to-date with progress (see p 9 in this issue). If you have any concerns about coming please contact our Branch Secretary (Dave Elsdon) on 01438 714277.

Used book sales recently have been encouraging – helping to boost our branch finances and, importantly to my family, reducing the amount stored in my home. Remember that at the end of this month (May), we will start to dispose of books we have held for a long time – trying to rehome them. From the start of June you can still expect to find some used books for sale at meetings but once they have been on offer for two months they will go – new stock will continue to be available from time-to-time but it too will normally only be on sale for two months. So, please check the book stall at our May meetings and if there are books you would like to have in your collection you need to act before it is too late!

And finally, a few of you have already taken the opportunity to invite a friend or two to join you at meetings – we just ask for a nominal £1 each for anyone accompanying a member. (Just sign them in and add your membership number beside their name.) This offer includes our May meetings.

Steve Lacey

New Members

This month there are four new members to welcome to the RCTS and to the Hitchin & Welwyn Garden City branch. They are David Southan of Enfield, Ian Thomas of Stevenage, Reg Hounsell of Royston, and Iain St. Leger of Buntingford.

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



A Busy Month on the Middy

Bank Holiday Steam Railway Days - 3 & 4 May

The Bank Holiday offers two Spring days to just enjoy the Middy in its new longer form up the gradient from Dovebrook to the new destination station Aspall Halt.



Trains of veteran Great Eastern Railway coaches will be hauled by guest locomotive 'May', a Peckett 0-4-0ST from the Buckinghamshire Railway Centre – to give passengers a real feel of what train travel was like in earlier times.

And, of course, all the Middy facilities will be available including the Tea Room, Bar, Museum and Restoration Shed visits. Plus the USAAF 34th Bomb Group Museum will also be open.

Middy in the 1940s - 24 & 25 May

"Middy in the 1940's" will be back again for another two-day extravaganza celebrating the Middy's role at the end of WWII. Quality re-enactors and 'personalities', together with a range of military and civilian vehicles of the period and stalls selling everything from clothing, collectables, toys, military memorabilia, wartime paperwork and magazines will help create a great 1940's atmosphere

And on both days there will be 1940s style music featuring the excellent Sarah Mai.



The MSLR also hope the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight will be able to provide a flypast (weather and mechanicals permitting).

The USAAF 34th Bomb Group Museum, now resident with the MSLR and very much part of the Middy's wartime history, will be showing their range of artefacts and memorabilia from their days at RAF Mendlesham.

If you feel like donning some 40's attire then this is the occasion to do so!

Middy Model Railway Show – 31 May



Exclusively railways and of all gauges and sizes. 2025 was a great success and the MSLR hope for even better things this year, especially now they have the track extension open for visitors to enjoy along with the model show.

As ever it is one entry price to visit the show and ride the full-size trains as often as you like. Plus all the usual Middy facilities will be open, tea room, museum, Restoration Shed and real ale bar.

For more details about these, and other forthcoming events on the Middy, visit their website at: [Visit Us & What's on - Mid-Suffolk Light Railway Museum](#)

(Information and photographs reproduced courtesy of the MSLR)

Book Sales at Branch Meetings

New RCTS Books

These will continue to be available at branch meetings, by ordering from the Branch Chairman. This saves you the cost of postage. Discounts are usually available to RCTS members.

Pre-Owned Books

Substantial stocks have accumulated over recent years. This stock will be available for purchase until the end of May 2026. After that, much of that remaining will be given to worthy causes or destroyed.

New additions (often from the estate of former members) can still be received and will be on offer for no less than four branch meetings after receipt, after which any remaining books will be given to worthy causes or destroyed.

These changes will be reviewed in 2027.

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

The May Puzzle – Martin Elms

This month it is a Great Western flavour

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

1. Tunnel East of Truro	
2. Station south of Moretonhampstead	
3. Station north of Aberystwyth	
4. Name of locomotive 7001 Sir James ?	
5. Locomotive depot with code 84B	
6. Station east of Tiverton Junction	
7. Cornish border river	
8. Name of locomotive 7929 Wolf ?	

9. ? and Brecon Railway	
10. Name of locomotive ? Grange	
11. Locomotive depot with code 81D	
12. .? Platform near Helston	
13. Name of tunnel north of Cheltenham	

14. ? and Swansea Bay Railway	
15. Head Quarters of Cambrian Railway	
16. Name of locomotive 4901 ? Hall	
17. GWR locomotive superintendent 1877 – 1902	

Best of luck.

My answer to each of the questions and solution to the puzzle are on page 17.

Martin Elms

Part 1 How It All Began - Derek Boothby

What might imaginatively be described as my formative years were mis-spent in a small town or large village – there was no agreement as to what it was - close to the Derbyshire – Cheshire border in the High Peak and on the edge of the National Park. Seven miles to the south is Buxton, and 17 miles to the north is Manchester and through the village ran the LNWR line between the two, which branched off the main line at Stockport, 10 miles away. Whaley Bridge is known to transport enthusiasts as the southern terminus of the Peak Forest Canal and the original northern end of the Cromford and High Peak Railway.

I had an aunt who lived near the centre of the village and my earliest memory is of sitting in my pushchair in her garden watching trains steaming along the nearby embankment, and I was hooked.



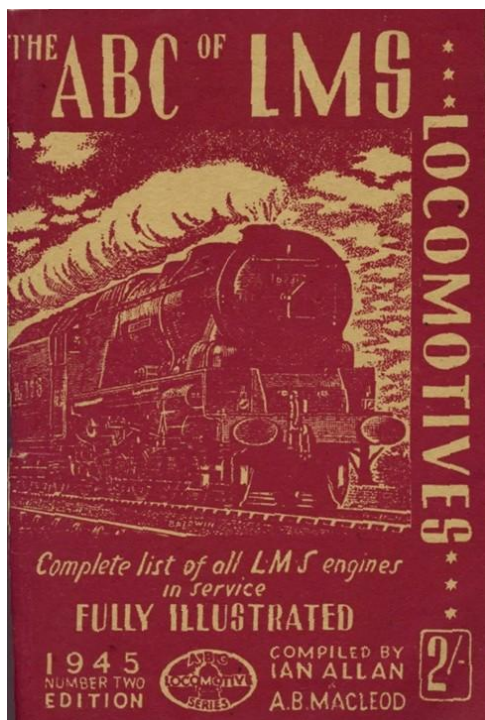
My next memory is of one summer's day in my pre-school years, when we had one of those occasional outbreaks of sun, running around the garden towing along a wooden toy train.

Later, I drove my Hornby 0-Gauge clockwork tender engine (LMS of course) with its train around the living room floor, before gaining “promotion” to the top link of a 00-Gauge *Duchess of Athol*.



The village school had been built beside the main road, opposite the aforementioned railway embankment, and offering wonderful views of passing railway traffic. During school times this was mainly freight, most frequently hauled by WD or Stanier 2-8-0s and occasionally by ex-LNWR 0-8-0s. At that time I did not know what they were, but quite soon I found I could differentiate them by sound. The WDs clanked noisily as if parts of ironmongery were about to fall off, the Staniers ran rather more smoothly, and the 0-8-0s had a characteristic beat of two strong and two soft beats per revolution. The last could sound quite impressive, especially

when banking a heavy freight, charging up the grade and sounding as if going flat out to keep up. Passenger traffic was mostly in the hands of Buxton's Fowler 2-6-4 tanks and their only crab, 42942. Occasionally strange things appeared from Longsight on the 11 o'clock Buxton train, conveniently timed for the start of our playtime.



My brother gave me his 1945 ABC of LMS locomotives, which I still possess, and I studied as intently as a 6 or 7 year old could, learning the names of different locomotive Classes and their characteristic features. Books about trains became natural presents and thereby my knowledge and interest was stimulated. When I was able to use the grownup's library I found several shelves of books on railways and I read the lot, thus acquiring a lifelong interest in their history and that of steam engines in general, and locomotives in particular.

I persuaded my brother to lend me his camera to try my hand at taking photographs of trains. It was made by Kodak and took 120-film, only 8 exposures each if I remember correctly, so it made quite a hole in my pocket money. It took a little time to master the viewfinder, as a consequence of which I have several photographs of tender-less Jubilees or locomotives represented only by the smokebox, chimney and buffer beam. I did eventually get the hang of it. Recently I discovered the prints of these photographs - still in their original wallets.

My first railway photos - Rhyl 1956



My first railway photos - Holyhead 1956



Next month, in Part 2, I will start with more photos from those early days and then go on to describe how my railway interest developed during holidays and school excursions.

Derek Boothby

Meetings at Digswell - Update

Those who attended recent meetings at Digswell already know that work on rebuilding the Digswell Village Church Hall has now started. This work will continue throughout 2026.

A new temporary mains power supply has now been installed, so we shouldn't have the power interruptions we experienced in March. The excessive noise we also experienced for part of that same meeting should also not be repeated!

Temporary facilities (a toilet & small kitchen) have been provided and proper access paths installed. A completely new doorway has been added to give access to the church and the original main access closed. Our access is now past the temporary facility block and around to the other side of the main church building.

We have lost the car park, as it is required by the builders. However street parking is not a problem for the hours of the day that we meet. This is not an area where you will struggle to find somewhere to park.

As the months pass, no doubt things will be different (possibly each time we meet) but the church officers and the builders will ensure that conditions are "safe".

For anyone interested in the detail of what is being built the most authoritative source should be the WHBC website. On their "Planning Applications" section look for application 6/2025/0777/FULL and chose "documents".

John Dossett



Young Engineers Day

4 May 2026



Designed especially for children aged 5–15, this interactive event gives young railway fans the chance to get hands-on with real railway equipment and learn how steam locomotives and railway infrastructure work.

Take part in a unique morning or afternoon session designed for children with a keen interest in steam locomotives and railway engineering.

- Morning Session: 09:45 – 11:45
- Afternoon Session: 12:15 – 14:15

What's Included

- Interactive Steam Engine Session – Learn how a steam locomotive works and get up close to see its parts
- Shed Tour – Discover the inner workings of the NVR engineering shed
- Signal Box Tour – Learn how the heritage signal box operates
- Turntable Demonstration – See how the historic turntable works
- Miniature Railway Ride – Enjoy a steam-hauled miniature railway ride
- Peter's Railway Book – Each child receives a book from the Peter's Railway collection
- Book Signing – Meet author Chris Vine and have your book signed
- Travel on the Day's Service Train – Included with your ticket

All children must be accompanied by an adult and pre-booking is essential as places are limited.

For full details, including bookings: [Young Engineers Day | Nene Valley Railway Ltd](#)

(Reproduced courtesy of the NVR)



Various dates in May

If you're looking for somewhere unusual to have a delicious supper of Fish and Chips, or a lunchtime outing accompanied by Fish and Chips, then the Epping Ongar Railway's Epping Fryer dining train is the perfect place for you.



EOR can cater for singles, couples, families and even larger groups who want to celebrate a special anniversary, birthday or just a great time with friends.

With evening and daytime dining options, enjoy a scrumptious meal of Fish and Chips on board one of the EOR heritage trains as you journey through the Essex countryside.

For daytime trains the fare of just £37.50 includes an all-day rover ticket, so you can enjoy a great day out on the steam and diesel train services, and vintage London buses, together with a fish and chip lunch, and an ice-cream dessert which is suitable for vegetarians.

Your rover travel ticket offers unlimited travel all day long on the heritage trains and vintage buses on the day of your visit. The fish and chip lunch will be served at Ongar on arrival of the 13.00 steam hauled service from North Weald.

There is no daytime parking available at North Weald station; EOR recommend joining their vintage London bus service on route 339 from Epping Underground or Shenfield stations. The bus service is included in your fare.

For full details and to make bookings visit:

[The Epping Fryer - Fish and Chip trains at the Epping Ongar Railway](#)

(Reproduced courtesy of the EOR).

More from Lancaster – Alan Elsdon

These photos were taken at the recently refurbished Lancaster station on 24 February 2026



390114 heading south from Glasgow



A northbound Trans Pennine service with an unidentified class 397



158815 on a local train



390117 Glasgow to London Euston

*Photos: Alan Elsdon
Captions: Dave Elsdon*



Diesel-Only Days in May

May 2 & 23 + dates later in 2026



A total of 512 Class 47's were built between 1962 and 1968 which made them the most numerous class of British mainline diesel locomotive. Currently only 76 Class 47 remain with 32 in preservation including this fine example, 47715.

Owned by Railway Engineering Solutions (RES), 47715 has been based at CPRR since her first successful passenger working in nearly a decade at the CPRR Diesel Gala in April 2025. Resplendent in her RES Red livery, she is a perfect companion for the C&PRR Class 08825, also in Network South East livery.

47715 is a very appropriate loco for the Chinnor branch line as the Class headed the last ever freight train to run on the line before closure.

Builder: Brush Traction

Class/type: Brush Type 4

Built year: 1964

Engine output: 2580 bhp

Engine type: Diesel-electric

Fuel tank capacity: 850 gallons

Livery: RES Red

Max speed: 25mph on the heritage railway

Tractive effort: 55,000 lbf

Wheel arrangement: Co-Co

On diesel-only days day-rover tickets are valid on every train and all day long. No seat reservations are required so you can sit in any non-dining areas.

For further details, timetables and fares visit:

[Day Rover tickets for diesel only days: « Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway](#)

Diesel Cab Observer Experiences



Also, on Diesel-Only days you can book Diesel cab observer experiences. These are quite limited in number but provide the perfect taster experience for 'big diesel enthusiasts' and it could make a lovely gift for a birthday or to celebrate a memorable occasion!

You join the diesel crew from an observer perspective for an approximately 1-hour long round trip. The journey includes some arduous work by the vintage diesel locomotive including the 1 in 68 banks, and you will see everything from the driving-end and experience the sights and 'growl' of a vintage diesel!

The expert and highly experienced driver and second-man will be pleased to answer your questions and show you various points of interest during the journey.

(Please note that you will NOT be invited to touch any of the controls and you will NOT be driving the locomotive - this experience is to purely observe the diesel locomotive and crew in action whilst travelling with them in the cab.)

£59.00 which includes your day rover travel ticket.

For further details, including requirements for participation, and timetables visit:

[Diesel cab observer experience on diesel days: « Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway](#)

(Information and photographs reproduced courtesy of the C&PRR)

The May Presentations (1)

Oliver Bulleid and 35028 Clan Line

- Simon Martin



12th May

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

Simon A.C. Martin is back to report on his research and writing. The next engineer to discuss is O.V.S. Bulleid, a Great Northern and then LNER stalwart who eventually made the jump to C.M.E. of the Southern Railway whilst working for Gresley.

Simon looks at his personal life and career before focusing more closely on a number of his locomotive designs in the first half of the talk, before moving onto discussing no.35028 *Clan Line*, the Bulleid locomotive he is involved with and supports as treasurer.

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.

The May Presentations (2)

The Railways of Austria - Richard Morris



26th May

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

Austria is a country where most of the passenger rail services are still provided by the main national operator Österreich Bundesbahn (or ÖBB for short!). Freight workings within or through the country are hauled by a selection of locomotives from a range of other operators.

Rich has visited the country a few times over the years so we will have a look at what he found.

Solution to the May Puzzle (page 6)

1. Polperro. 2. Lustleigh. 3. Ynyslas. 4. Milne. 5. Oxley. 6. Uffculme. 7. Tamar. 8. Hall. 9. Neath. 10. Oakley. 11. Reading. 12. Truthall. 13. Hunting Butts. 14. Rhondda. 15. Oswestry. 16. Adderley. 17. Dean.

Answer PLYMOUTH NORTH ROAD

Martin Elms

Workshop Wanderings – Steve Lacey

This month, with my *92 Squadron* hat back on, I will describe my Workshop Wanderings, to the East Lancs Railway (ELR) workshop at Baron Street, Bury! I was there for the excellent ELR “Legends of Steam Gala”, which took place from Friday 10th to Sunday 12th April. We try to have regular stands at the ELR galas, as well as stands at our more local exhibitions so that the ELR does not think we have abandoned *92 Squadron*. We have to continually raise money to keep the old girl steaming.

One of our regular volunteers (Les Dessent, from Biggleswade) agreed to help me with the stand, so after loading tables and stock on the Tuesday, Les and I set off on the 190-mile journey north. We travelled up via the A1 and M62, though the way back was via M6 and M1 due to a Black Cat weekend closure.....just what you need after 3 days stood on a station platform! About half-way across the M62 at 3pm on the way up, we passed 34070 *Manston* owned by Southern Locomotives Limited. This surprised us as she was due in steam the following day at the ELR. We never did catch up with her tender, which had preceded her! Although within the range of my electric car, we had stopped at Blyth services on the way up for a coffee and coke and used the time to top up the car battery while we were there. I did not wish to arrive with only 40 miles range left....just in case!

On arrival at our Premier Inn at Prestwich (cheaper and with free parking) than the one at Bury, I need not have worried, as next door was a BP garage with 6 fast chargers!



As our loco is now resident at the ELR, we are given a free stand on the Island platform, under the canopy at Bury (Bolon Street). This is a great help as no gazebo to wrestle with, but it does mean we have to clear the stand at the end of each day into the cafe and re-erect it each morning as there is no overnight security and things have been known to disappear! On the Thursday afternoon we moved all our stuff across the barrow crossing onto the platform and stored it overnight in the cafe. Bright and early the next day we arrived at Bury

to set up the stand....a task to be repeated each day of the gala. On all 3 days Les and I were helped by Steve Banfield, a 92 Squadron member, who lives on the outskirts of Bury.

In addition to their resident L&Y saddle tank, Class 09 diesel and *City of Wells* ("spam can") they also had hired in the aforementioned *Manston* AND *Tornado*!



City of Wells 34092 stands in Platform 3, as 34070 *Manston* arrives in Platform 4 having passed under the magnificent signal gantry at the south end of the island platform.



A better view of the signals as *City of Wells* draws into platform2.

One of the unsung hero's of the ELR are the diesel shunters which came to the rescue when a set of electrically operated points failed, requiring a train to be moved out of Platform 4 backwards. We all know the Class 08 shunters , but lesser known are the Class 09's. These

were the same horse power (350) as the 08's, but higher geared to run at a maximum speed of 27.5 mph for transfer goods, as opposed to the pure 08 shunter that had a top speed of only 15mph.



09 024 shunts M32978M 6-wheel Stove R magnificently restored in BR maroon.

Although not easily seen in my pictures, *City of Wells* is kept immaculate, whereas *Manston* is kept dirty to represent the Class in later years. On several occasions during the Gala we were treated to double-heading either with 2 spam cans or a spam can plus *Tornado*. All in all, it was a splendid Gala with good attendance and we took over a thousand pounds on our stand and kept the *92 Squadron* flag flying. The weather was variable with bright sunshine, driving rain and at one point a heavy hailstorm, all accompanied by a chill wind blowing along the platform! Fund raising is not for wimps....on the other hand it did sell several fleeces!

I mentioned that Steve Banfield helped us on the stand. He is also a volunteer in the engineering department and arranged for us to visit the ELR workshop on the Saturday night. What a treasure trove of Classes I never expected to see! The works is on the site of the original shed built when the line was created in 1848. Later extended northwards it still retains the original shed at its southern end. Google maps gives a good view of the site if you type in "Baron Street Bury". Also on the same site is a carriage shed/workshop. Having gained permission to visit we took the car to nearby Baron Street, at the end of a day on the platform, none of us could face the short walk!

Inside the original shed were wagon turntables, still in working condition, but a bit too short for even a tender! (Ed: picture on next page)

The highlight of our visit was a reunion with *92 Squadron*. At present, she is being stripped ready for the boiler to go off to Riley's in Bury for a quick overhaul, including a retube. An appeal to fund this was launched at my last visit to Bury in October and has already raised two-thirds of the £18,720 needed....you can still contribute via the *92 Squadron* website!



Since this picture was taken the cab has also been removed. There are some thoughts that our tender may be loaned to another spam can, while we are out of action.



Next month, in Workshop Wanderings, I will continue the workshop tour.

Steve Lacey

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.