Railway Ramblings

Issue 193 August 2026

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



71000 *Duke of Gloucester* passing Welwyn North hauling the Steam Dreams excursion from Haywards Heath to Ely on Saturday 13 June 2026.

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 August 2026

There are no normal branch meetings during August.

The next meeting at Hitchin will be on 8 September and the next at Digswell on 29 September.

However, for those who have booked places please don't forget that on Sunday August 16th we have our branch visit to Mangapps Railway & Museum.

Details for this visit are on page 4.

During September 2026

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

8th September **A Wee Look Around Scotland**

Robin Mathams

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

29th September **My Railway Meanderings**

Stephen Gay

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

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 trust you are all keeping well and have been coping with the relatively extreme weather we have been enjoying (enduring?).

In the branch there are no indoor meetings in August but please make a note in your diaries of the September meetings. In the meantime, on 16 August, we do have the visit to Mangapps. Recalling our previous visit, in 2018, there is just so much there and I am really looking forward to returning.

Then we have two anniversaries are coming up, one imminently and the other only just over a year away. Firstly, in November 2026, there is the 25th Anniversary of the opening of our branch at Hitchin (we were a spin-off from Watford branch). To mark this milestone we have arranged a commemorative lunch on 3 November in Hitchin, at "The Orange Tree". Details about this are on p 14 Please note this will have limited numbers - and places must be booked in advance. There are already quite a number of bookings, so, if you are interested you will need to book your place soon. Then, secondly, in 2028, the RCTS will be marking 100 years existence and apart from any national events we will be looking to have our own branch event(s) – if you have any suggestions on what we could do, this is the time to let me know. Your committee will soon need to make decisions!

On a more general note, we still welcome feedback, especially about our meetings. Our Secretary, Dave Elsdon, has started to put the 2027 programme together and it would be good to know what you like (or dislike). We all know that overall we have a very broad range of railway interests and we try to reflect that in what we do. Especially from those who never, or rarely, come to meetings, it would be good to hear what if anything you would like to see included in our future programmes.

Finally, a note to those of you coming to meetings at Digswell. The building works on the church hall are now well underway and we can look forward to using the new rebuilt hall before next winter. We all know that the interim arrangements have not been ideal, and I thank those who have persevered in attending our meetings there, but "brighter times" are ahead and I look forward to the return of those who felt they could not cope with the temporary arrangements. Personally, I am already looking forward to the Christmas meeting!

Steve Lacey

Lanyard Badges

The general consensus is that since their introduction our branch lanyard name-badges have been a great help in generating a positive atmosphere at meetings.

If you already have a badge please remember to bring it with you and wear it at meetings. A few new ones have been issued recently but I am sure that there are now quite a few fairly regular attenders who do not have badges. If this applies to you please ask John Dossett (or any of the other committee members) and we will willingly produce one for you to collect on your next visit.

A reminder that these badges are available to members and non-members.

The August Outing – 16 August 2026

Mangapps Railway and Museum – Notes for Participants



2018 Visit

These details are for those already booked to participate in the August outing this year.

Your visit is being subsidised from branch funds and your ticket will have been paid for by our Treasurer. (Your payment should have been made to our Treasurer (Paul Holloway) no later than 28 July.)

The visit, on 16 August, will start at 11:30 (when Mangapps opens). There is adequate on-site parking. We should try to meet, as a group, in the car park.

Our visit will include a tour of the yard and other facilities not usually open to the general public. (Note: Children are not permitted in areas not open to the general public).

For a preview of what is there to be seen go to the Mangapps website (at Mangapps Railway Museum Home Page).

Only hot drinks and snacks are available to purchase on the site but you can take your own, or take a short trip into the town of Burnham-on-Crouch.

If, on the day, you find you can longer participate, or are delayed in your travel, then please contact me, John Dossett, – on 07311 628900.

John Dossett

Society Centenary – 2028

2028 will mark the 100th Anniversary of the RCTS.

A Brief History (from the RCTS website)

The Society was founded in Cheltenham in 1928 at a time when there was little official information published about locomotive stock, their allocations or regular duties. The Society set about rectifying this by members writing to each other, the publishing of a magazine and some meetings organised around the country. The growth of the Society was such that it ran the first enthusiasts railtour in the 1930s but the war years effective stifled both the flow of information and the growth of the Society.

Ian Allan inspired a generation of post war youngsters to take up train spotting and many of those, that stuck with it through maturity, joined a railway society to gain first-hand information on what was going on and to visit sheds in organised groups. The RCTS prospered running frequent shed visits, publishing its magazine *The Railway Observer* each month, running railtours and substantially expanding its branch network. Membership reached a peak long after the end of BR steam.

Additional historical Information

On Wikipedia there is a more detailed history, drawn from a number of RCTS sources, published over the years :-

Apparently, Les Lapper and Aubrey Broad had originally formed the Cheltenham Spa Railway Society in 1927 but realised that this name lacked national appeal and between them persuaded their fellow members to change it to the Railway Correspondence & Travel Society (RCTS) with effect from January 1928.

The monthly magazine for members was originally entitled *The Railway News* but, following complaints from a publishing company the RCTS changed it to *The Railway Observer* (RO) in 1929 and has retained that name ever since. The Society has never failed to publish twelve editions of the RO every year since.

It is also recorded that, in 1938, the world's first chartered special train exclusively for rail enthusiasts was operated by the RCTS, using the ex-GNR Stirling 'Single' No.1 on a round trip from London Kings Cross to Peterborough North. Then, on 30 September 1950, a tour of the newly formed Southern Region of British Railways ran from Holborn Viaduct to London Victoria using three different steam locomotives, including the Society's 'trademark' Schools class No. 30925 *Cheltenham*. Over 300 railtours ran from 1954 until 1993 when the privatisation of British Rail and a reduction in spare rolling stock made this type of operation untenable for the society.

Celebrating 2028

Plans are being formulated to celebrate the Centenary. At the branch meeting on 30 June (at Digswell) our national Chairman, James Milne, took the opportunity to tell us some of the things that are happening, and some that are not.

There had been suggestions to recreate the original RCTS special from Kings Cross to Peterborough but, starting with the fact that the Stirling 'Single' is now little more than a museum exhibit and that track access would be somewhat challenging (impossible?), that idea is a non-starter. Other specials have been mooted but the most likely outcome seems to be on the Gloucester and Warwick Steam Railway (and possibly the Great Central Railway).

A 100th Anniversary Book is being produced and, with funding from benefactors (such as the late John Worby who used to be a regular at our branch meetings) it is likely that there will be a free copy for members (with a P&P contribution). This book will primarily be about the RCTS, but referencing UK railways over the period, and not primarily about the UK railways with references to the RCTS (as some had suggested)

"100 events to mark 100 years", I understand suggested by our own Steve Lacey, will be a challenge to all branches for them to contribute to running 100 events over the course of 2028. This will be more challenging to some branches than to others. As we develop our 2028 Hitchin & Welwyn Garden City branch programme for 2028 we need creative ideas now (we are over half-way through 2026 already). All suggestions welcome.

Beyond 2028

Reaching the 100-year mark will be an achievement in its own right but what follows is now becoming urgent. "Past success is no guarantee of future success". Indeed so much has changed over the 100 years – rail specials have become highly commercialised, commercial railway magazines do much of the reporting that originally justified the RO, print and postage costs are making the printed RO difficult to sustain, the arrival of the internet and social media platforms provide almost instantaneous reporting of railway matters, and the UK rail network has become extremely difficult to access. You might wish for them but the "good old days" will not return and our society will need to adapt or else it will slowly but surely fade away.

Not all gloom and doom – there are still many rail enthusiasts across the country and there is at least one thing that has no replacement – the branch meeting: It should be a sociable activity, meeting in a pleasant venue, with a focus for each meeting while providing the opportunity to meet others of a like mind, over tea & biscuits. That's what we are trying to achieve with our branch meetings so please take the opportunity, especially at the interval, to socialise and make the most of being there.

Most importantly, if you have ideas to make meetings better then talk to committee members about them.

John Dossett

Introducing
“Restaurant on Rails”

EOR are introducing the "Restaurant on Rails" - a selection of lunchtime and evening dining experiences on board heritage trains. The aim is to serve-up simple, tasty food on a classic train journey.





Tuck in to simple, tasty food on a classic train journey through wonderful Essex countryside. The Restaurant on Rails isn't just a meal; it's a memorable adventure! Whether you crave the perfect Fish and Chips, hearty Bangers and Mash, a comforting Lasagne, or even a warming Curry, the growing menu caters to every appetite for lunch or dinner. From romantic dates and family outings to celebrating a milestone anniversary, birthday, or just sharing a great time with friends, EOR welcome singles, couples, families, and large groups.

The charm and unique appeal of the Restaurant on Rails make it incredibly popular. Secure your seat at our sought-after Restaurant on Rail and book early to avoid disappointment!

For details and to make bookings go to

Epping Ongar Railway | Restaurant on Rails

Daytime tickets include an All Day Rover ticket which offers unlimited travel on EOR heritage train serviices and also on the vintage London bus on route 339, so you can make the most of your day out. There is no parking for daytime departures, and passengers are advised to use the 339 bus service. You can find times of trains and buses by selecting your date of travel here.

For evening services, guests should arrive at North Weald station (CM16 6BT) for 18:45, where the train will depart at 19:00, making two return journeys along the line. The evening will include onboard entertainment from our resident magician, and last approximately 2 and a half hours.

(Details reproduced courtesy of the EOR)

A Busy August



"May" the 1915 Peckett 0-4-0 saddle tank, which is the guest engine for the 2026 season.

2 Aug 2026 - Steam Railway & Land Rover Owners Day

A combined display of military and private vehicles to give visitors a better impression of the number of variations which have been made to this iconic British design over the years. The Land Rover Series 1 entered production in 1948 and, although the inspiration was from WW11 jeeps, it was the first ever 4-wheel drive civilian vehicle. The Middy was still in operation for another 4 years when the first Land Rovers were making their presence felt in agricultural and light industrial use.

The Middy volunteers will be in action to provide the vintage train rides in genuine Victorian coaches and all the normal facilities will be available including the Museum, Restoration Shed visits, Tea Room and the Middy Real Ale Bar.

9 Aug 2026 - Steam Railway & Stonham Barns Big Bus Day



Today the Middy will be joining with their friends at The Eastern Counties Bus Preservation Group who organise the Stonham Barns Big Bus Day. Visitors to the railway will also be able to visit the Big Bus Day at Stonham Barns where there will be a magnificent display of around 100 vintage busses some of which will be running a shuttle service to Brockford Station and return.

Passengers will be able to buy tickets either at Stonham Barns or Brockford Station or, of course, the Middy web site.

All the Middy attractions will be open including rides to the full length of the Middy railway, now a nearly 2 kim round trip.

Also in August:

16th August – Steam Railway Day, Vintage Commercial Vehicles & Royal Enfield Owners visit

23rd August – Steam Railway Day & Model Mania

30th & 31st August – Steam Railway Gala Days

Details of these events will appear soon on the Middy website:

Visit Us & What's on - Mid-Suffolk Light Railway Museum

The Middy is open every Sunday and bank holiday until 31st August. First trains normally depart at 11.00 and the last train departs at 15.30 unless the Middy is very busy. You can ride the trains as often as you like during your visit. Note: You can only join the train at Brockford Station.

(Information and photographs reproduced courtesy of the MSLR)

The August Puzzle – Martin Elms

This month it is an LMS flavour

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

1. Station and depot north of St Pancras	
2 Station at end of branch from Cheddington	
3. Locomotive depot with code 24B	
4. ? Castle and Green Ayre	
5. Station south of Wellingborough	
6. Summit also south of Wellingborough	
7. Station east of Dumfries	
8. Name of locomotive 45572	

9. Locomotive depot with code 15D	
10. West Birmingham station	
11. Name of locomotive 45657	
12. Station and tunnel south of Cotehill	
13. Station west of Weedon	
14 Station south of Ravenglass	
15. North Wales coastal resort	

Best of luck.

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

Martin Elms

Meetings at Digswell - Update

The work to rebuild the Digswell Village Church Hall continues and is expected to last throughout most of the rest of 2026. Those who have already attended our meetings there know that the situation is not ideal and we have encountered a few “issues”. However, the church authorities have been largely successful in providing us with temporary accommodation in what is the main body of the church and we are grateful to them for that.

The demolition stage has been completed and the reconstruction is well underway. The new main entrance is taking shape and the remodelling of the old hall is progressing.

If you have any concerns about coming please contact our Branch Secretary (Dave Elsdon) on 01438 714277.

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

John Dossett

How It All Began, Part 4 - Derek Boothby

A New Camera and an Outing to Derby Works.

Last month, in “How It All Began Part 3”, I described some of my visits to Chinley and Marsh Lane – all made possible by the gift of a bicycle for Christmas. This part continues when I purchased a new camera, with money given to me for my 21st birthday and it’s off to Derby Works.



I collected the takings from my 21st birthday and set off to Manchester to buy myself a camera. I returned with a German camera called a Balda which took 35mm film and had a coupled rangefinder which allowed focussing down to about three feet.. It was probably in the *Railway Magazine* a month or two later I noticed there was to be an open day at Derby works on Saturday 26 August 1961 and as I was at home at the time I decided to go to the event and take some photographs with my recently acquired prize.

I caught a train to Buxton about mid-day and walked across from the LNWR station to the adjacent Midland station for the branch train to Miller's Dale. I read recently that Buxton is the only location where the LNWR and MR were required to build identical stations. If you are the Duke of Devonshire and own the land you can do that sort of thing! Back in 1961 many people worked on Saturday mornings so that the evening rush hour occurred at mid-day and therefore a reasonable service ran to Buxton. The 12:24 would have got me to Buxton at

12:43, in good time for the 13:05 to Miller's Dale, due to arrive at 13:14. After a short wait here, there was a train for Derby at 13:26 which was due to arrive at Derby at 14:17.

The trek from the station to the works must have been straightforward because I have not any recollection of getting lost.



I started by looking round the outdoor displays. Unfortunately the juxtaposition of some of the exhibits rendered the taking of photographs difficult.

The exhibits that impressed me most were the preserved Midland compound and 2-4-0. My prized subjects.





I found In the queue of condemned locos,58850, a NLR 0-6-0T. This loco, one of a Class built between 1887 and 1905 had remained in service until 1950.



Having had a good look around the showground I had a look in the works which was pretty well deserted of visitors. It was too dark to take photographs without flash, a luxury I did not have, and as I expected my attempt to photograph a loco under repair was unsuccessful.

From my early teens I was allowed to go on my own to the Manchester Model Railway Society's Christmas exhibition. One year there was a stand displaying model locomotives from the Midland Railway layout at the Derby Museum. These were professionally made models to a very high standard and I gazed at them in wonder. I decided that my visit to Derby would be an opportunity to see the layout and so having had my fill of the works I set out for the museum. To my disappointment the model was not running, but it was available to view.

So back to the station for the return voyage. The 14:35 from St Pancras to Manchester was scheduled to leave Derby at 17:20 and I noted it was hauled by 70048. It was due in Miller's Dale at 18:10 and connected with the 18:33 to Buxton where I had a wait of 47 minutes for the next Manchester train which would have got me home, including the short walk from the station, by 19:45. A grand day out indeed.

The next stage of my story will start with a move south to St Albans.

Derek Boothby

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**

Driver Experience on 'Joyce'

- on selected dates



The perfect taster experience which would make a lovely gift for a birthday or to celebrate a memorable occasion! Be one of the lucky people to join the C&PRR steam crew for a special trip on this Sentinel loco.

Locomotive 7109, nicknamed *Joyce is* a unique, preserved Sentinel industrial steam locomotive from 1927, famous for its distinctive vertical boiler and chain drive.

After extensive restoration and back to full working order, she's now a resident at the C&PRR.

Under the friendly guidance of experienced driving instructors, you will have a great time! Your session will begin with a safety briefing, followed by a familiarisation session to show how *Joyce* works and the operation of the controls. Each trip will give around 20 minutes of driving time at the controls around Princes Risborough station area.

With a day rover ticket you can start your adventure from either Chinnor or Princes Risborough station.

If you would like to find out more please email Chris, Experiences Coordinator, at **driverexperience@chinnorrailway.co.uk**

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

Resilience Fund

"Our Future - With Your Help"

~~A~~n Appeal from the NVR



Support the Nene Valley Railway – Help Secure Our Future

For over 50 years, the Nene Valley Railway has been more than just a heritage attraction; it has been a living, breathing part of our community. Powered by passionate volunteers, dedicated staff, and the unwavering support of people like you, we have preserved an important piece of Britain's railway history for future generations to experience and enjoy.

Today, however, we face a serious challenge. We have a credible plan to overcome it, but we need your support to make it happen.

Rising operational costs, ongoing infrastructure maintenance, and the need to invest in our facilities mean that we must act now to ensure the long-term sustainability of the railway. From maintaining our historic locomotives and rolling stock, to caring for miles of track, stations, and bridges, the reality is simple:

Without support, heritage cannot survive.

For more information about the NVR Resilience Fund, and how you can give your support, visit:

Resilience Fund | Nene Valley Railway Ltd

(Reproduced courtesy of the NVR)

Commemorative Lunch – Book Now - Reminder

Hitchin, 3 November 2026

Our branch marks 25 years of meetings at Hitchin (Welwyn was later) in November this year. Your committee have arranged a commemorative lunch to mark this milestone - and that this will be a members-only lunch at Hitchin.

As Hitchin meetings are usually on a Tuesday afternoon we have organised this lunch for Tuesday 3 November, starting at 12:30.

"The Orange Tree", 100 Stevenage Rd, Hitchin SG4 9DR has been booked. There will be just a nominal charge of £10 (excluding drinks) for a main course plus dessert and tea/coffee. A wide choice from the lunchtime menu will be available (choices will need to be made nearer the time - please note that their menu is changing at the end of July). Numbers will be limited so you will need to book your place and make your £10 payment in advance.

Names, with membership number, to our Treasurer, Paul Holloway, please. Places are being allocated on a "first come, first served" basis with a limit on numbers of 50. Payment should be made in cash at our July or September meetings, by cheque at the meetings payable to RCTS Hitchin Branch, or bank transfer to sort code 40-24-20 account no. 81518003 account name RCTS Branch. Once the 50 limit has been reached bookings will close.

(Note: If choosing to travel by public transport, the 101 Stevenage-Luton Airport bus stops about 200m (3 mins) away from The Orange Tree.)

Solution to the August Puzzle (page 10)

1. **C**ricklewood. 2. **A**ylesbury. 3. **R**ose Grove. 4. **L**ancaster. 5. **I**rchester.
6. **S**harnbrook. 7. **L**ockerbie. 8. **E**ire. 9. **C**oalville. 10. **I**cknield Port Road.
11. **T**yrwhitt. 12. **A**rmathwaite. 13. **D**aventry. 14. **E**skmeals. 15. **L**landudno.

Answer – CARLISLE CITADEL

Martin Elms

Newsletter Distribution

This e-newsletter, *Railway Ramblings*, is now distributed by the Editor (John Dossett). 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. John's email address is **John.Dossett@btinternet.com**

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

New additions 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.

Workshop Wanderings – Steve Lacey

Not much to report this time …sighs of relief all round! Having said that, I have been trying to finalise the paperwork, following the “Rail 200” events at Dereham, Wymondham Abbey and the “Celebration of Doncaster Works” event.

I hope you have booked your places on the August Outing to Mangapps Farm Railway Museum and, of course, our Hitchin 25th Anniversary meal in November. Paul Holloway will be happy to take your money!

Although I will be away for the Letchworth Model Railway exhibition (held confusingly at Hitchin!) we have a stand there, as usual. I have printed out new membership forms, have arranged for the books and RCTS branded tablecloths to be held and transported to the venue by several of the committee members. I have also made up a selection of new RCTS books for purchase, with the incentive of members prices, if they sign up as new members! Helping at exhibitions can be fun as you meet lots of people, not to mention getting in for free. Having said that, our Editor reminded me of one encounter that ended in me being asked for medical advice!

Remaining books of old stock for the book-table at our meetings will now be disposed of, as I have 12 boxes of new stock arriving in August.

I do have an update on *92 Squadron*. We were due in Riley's works by now, but *Wadebridge* another Battle of Britain/West Country Class loco, has taken a bit longer than expected to complete. In the meantime, all 92's cladding and the cab have been removed, with the cladding re-erected outside, like an outsized Anderson Shelter, under which the nearly new superheater tubes will be stored, until ready for reinstallation. *92 Squadron* is now expected to enter Riley's works in September. The expectation is that she will still be out again, with a new boiler ticket, in time to run in parallel with *City of Wells*, until that loco's boiler ticket expires in 2030. The last I heard from 92's treasurer was that the appeal for funds to cover the cost of the replacement large and small tubes needed for the overhaul (estimated cost £18,720) stood at £18,168 so nearly there! Just need to pay for them to be fitted now, Ian & John declined!



Ian and John pushing a small superheater tube into place 27th January 2016!

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), Dave Cornelius, Hugh Driscoll, Tony Stratford and John Dossett (Newsletter Editor). The Railway Correspondence & Travel Society is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation Registered with the Charities Commission.