

# THE MARLOW DONKEY



Edition

# 112

March 2006



Contents:

100 Years of the Joint Line

Four go Manx

25 and 15 Years Ago

# The Marlow Donkey

## The Magazine of the Marlow & District Railway Society

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#### FRONT COVER PHOTOGRAPHS

*Top: One of the regular SLOA operations was the 'Welsh Marches Express' from Crewe to Newport, which involved a loco change at Hereford. 14 March 1981 - Tim Edmonds. (details page 13)*

*Bottom: GWR 0-6-0PT 1638 on the South Devon Railway. 29 March 1991 - Tim Edmonds (details page 14)*

# TIMETABLE

## FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

All meetings are held in the Garden Room, Liston Hall, Liston Road, Marlow, at 7.45 for 8.00pm.

- Thursday 20 April                    **RAILWAY ODDITIES - YOU CANNOT BE SERIOUS!**                    Tim Edmonds  
Tim delves deep into his photographic collection to bring a selection of pictures showing the stranger side of railways and railway operations including unusual lines, strange formations, special locos and rolling stock - expect the unexpected.
- Thursday 18 May                    **YET MORE FROM COLOUR RAIL**                    Ron White  
Stand by for more pithy tongue-in-cheek observations from one of our most popular presenters making a welcome return after too long an absence. "Remember, it's all in my catalogue dear boy!"
- Thursday 15 June                    **GAS TURBINES AND DIESELS OF THE UNION PACIFIC**                    Tom Watson  
Tom follows up his coverage of the world's largest seam locos with a look at the world's largest diesels and the amazing Big Blow gas-turbines.
- Thursday 20 July                    **THE WELSH HIGHLAND RAILWAY**                    Ivan Ball  
If you've been to North Wales recently or been following progress in the magazines you will know that rapid strides are being made to return the WHR to Porthmadog. Tonight Ivan Ball brings up to date with this remarkable project.
- Thursday 21 September                    **THE WEST SOMERSET RAILWAY**                    Keith Smith  
A look at the current operations of one of the nation's premier heritage railways.
- Thursday 19 October                    **BRITISH TRANSPORT POLICE**                    Chief Inspector Willie Baker  
The work of the Transport Police explained. To many of us their role seems to be to prevent us taking photographs and creating inordinate delays to the clearing up operations after an accident but there's much more to it than that as we shall hear, and you have the chance to ask those probing questions!
- Thursday 16 November                    **THE LANCASHIRE & YORKSHIRE RAILWAY**                    Noel Coates
- TUESDAY 12 December**                    **CHRISTMAS SOCIAL**  
Please note the non-standard day and date. The party will be held in the main hall at Liston Hall to overcome last year's overcrowding.

## FORTHCOMING VISITS

- Friday 21 - Sunday 23 April                    **BAIE DE SOMME**                    By ferry  
Once again a small group are making the pilgrimage to St Valery for the bi-annual Fete. If you'd like to join them please contact Tim Speechley for details.
- Thursday 4 - Sunday 7 May                    **IRISH WEEKEND**                    By air  
Your last chance to book. Contact Mike Walker for details.
- Sunday 9 July                    **DAY TRIP TO THE BLUEBELL RAILWAY**                    By coach  
We are now taking bookings for our annual coach trip which this year visits the ever-popular Bluebell. Please do try and support the trip. Details and bookings from Mike Hyde.

*Please note: The above programme is correct at press time but subject to change due to unforeseen circumstances. Please check the Society's website [www.mdrs.org.uk](http://www.mdrs.org.uk) for the latest details.*

## CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

The Christmas social was again well attended, be it a little cramped though, so a decision to use the large hall has been implemented in plenty of time for Christmas 2006, the date being TUESDAY December 12th. Yes I know it is a week earlier, but in order to have the use of the hall this was the only date available, so please make a note in your diaries gentlemen.

Several society trips have been planned for this year. These are:- April to Baie de Somme; May to The Emerald Isle led by Michael O'Walker, begorra! and July

9th July to the Bluebell Railway. The latter being much closer to home will I trust be well supported.

As for myself, I shall be relinquishing the chairmanship to move to pastures new, somewhere in the region of 71B. I shall miss the society evenings and events which have been most enjoyable since I became a member some eighteen years ago. I thank my fellow committee and members for their loyal support and I also wish my successor all the best for future years.

*Gordon Rippington*

# SOCIETY AND LOCAL NEWS

## GORDON IS LEAVING US

As he reveals in his Chairman's Notes, Gordon Rippington is standing down as Chairman after five years in preparation for a family move to Dorset. We are sure all members will want to thank Gordon for all he's done for the club and we wish him all the best for the future.

## COMMITTEE CHANGES

Gordon Rippington's imminent move south means that he has stepped down as Chairman and is replaced by Tim Speechley. Julian Heard takes over from Tim as Vice-Chairman. As John Tuck retired from the committee at the AGM we are already a committee member short, and with Gordon's departure we will lose another, so the committee is urgently looking for a volunteers to be co-opted during the year. Please contact any committee member if you want to find out more.

## PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The annual Christmas social was held December and can best be described as "cosy", despite booking the bigger hall it was a tight fit! Catering was once again courtesy of the Marlow Bottom chippy whilst Mike Hyde set another of fiendishly difficult quizzes which was won by Roger Bowen.

The New Year got off to a cracking start when Malcolm Ranieri was our guest at the January meeting. As one would expect from one of our hobby's leading photographers, the images were truly stunning especially as all were shot using medium format cameras. Malcolm took us on a tour of main line and heritage steam around the country and finally a brief trip around the world.

The formal business of the AGM in February was followed by a selection of slides from Mike Walker, Tim Edmonds, Alan Morris and Ron North, the last showed a nostalgic selection of the High Wycombe area in the sixties.

## SUBSCRIPTIONS REMINDER

Thanks to all of you who have renewed your subscriptions promptly, and a gentle reminder to those of you who yet to do so.

## LOOKING AHEAD TO OUR 30th ANNIVERSARY

2007 will see the society's 30th anniversary and we are considering how to celebrate - current ideas include an exhibition of photographs, documents and railwayana, and a publication on local railways. Mike Hyde is leading a sub-committee to get things moving - talk to him if you would like to help in any way.

## NORMAN ASTON-SMITH TROPHY

This year's winner of the miniature signal arm was Mike Walker for his articles on Ireland.

## BRUNEL EXHIBITION IN MAIDENHEAD

The Maidenhead Heritage Centre will be putting on an exhibition from 11 - 19 April 2006: "When Brunel's Railway Came to Maidenhead." This will include a model of the brick "Sounding Arch Bridge" that carries the railway across the river Thames and various items of memorabilia.

## CHILTERN STEAMS FOR CENTENARY

Chiltern Railways are marking the Centenary of the opening of the Great Western & Great Central Joint Railway by operating a series of steam shuttles between Marylebone and High Wycombe on Saturday 1st and Sunday 2nd April 2006. The trains will operate "top and tailed" by GWR 4953 *Pitchford Hall* and 4965 *Rood Ashton Hall* (The use of LNE B1 61264 in place of one of these would have been an appropriate Joint Line pairing). Full details of times will be on the Society's website as soon as they are available.

## HIGH WYCOMBE FIRE

The cause of the serious fire at High Wycombe station on 27th November is understood to have been an electrical fault. It seems the wiring had not been improved to handle all the additional demands of a modern station and adding the deep fryer was the proverbial last straw! There is a serious lesson for us all here especially those with older properties. Contractors have now moved in to restore the building to its former glory as it is Grade 2 listed. Meanwhile the business of the station is being conducted from a village of temporary buildings in the forecourt. Train services returned to normal a few days after the fire once the damaged platform canopy had been made safe.



Two views of High Wycombe on 29th November, two days after the fire. **Top:** 165038 passes non-stop, the damage to the station roof can be clearly seen. **Bottom:** The temporary buildings are lowered into place in the forecourt.

photos: Tim Edmonds

## MARYLEBONE DEVELOPMENTS

The extension of Marylebone station is proceeding at a rapid pace. As soon as the new Wembley Depot had been commissioned last summer, the contractors moved in and quickly removed the Down Sidings behind platform 4 and reinstated the long disused Up or Tunnel Siding. By the beginning of this year, the new platforms were in position and the framework for the canopies in place. The latter are designed to replicate those beyond the overall roof on the existing platforms. About now platform 4, which is currently the longest in the station with a capacity of ten 23m cars, will be shortened to a mere 5 car capacity to allow pedestrian access to the new platforms. Disruptive processions are due to begin this month to allow the trackwork into the new platforms to be laid and ballasted along with the required signalling changes. It is hoped the new layout will be in use by the early autumn. A feature of the site is the restricted access. All materials and equipment have to be lowered by crane from the Rossmore Road Bridge, the southernmost lane of which has been closed during the construction work.

## SIGNALLING THE FUTURE

The observant among you will have noticed that the signal engineers have been busy in the area since the end of last year installing the additional and modified signals for the Evergreen 2 project. The first phase, the commissioning of an extra five signals on the Down line and four on the Up line between High Wycombe and Princes Risborough plus conversion of the existing signals on this section to 3 aspect was due to take place in early March. The remainder of the work including extra signalling between Princes Risborough and Bicester and at Little Kimble plus changes between Wembley and Marylebone will be completed during the summer.

## GERRARDS CROSS

The saga of Gerrards Cross Tunnel rumbles on. All work has stopped on the site and no one is allowed to be admitted without the approval of and accompanied by the H&SE. Whilst some at Chiltern are hoping it will "just go away", Tesco are still hoping to complete the project. Negotiations continue between Tesco, their contractors, Network Rail, Chiltern and the H&SE (and no doubt an army of lawyers) but to date no agreement has been reached.

It has emerged that Tesco and Railtrack had identified around 140 sites across the network where developments like this could take place. Gerrards Cross was the first and it is thought that Great Missenden may have been next. Railtrack saw it as a great way to raise money but Network Rail have called a halt to any further schemes of this type, at least for the time being.

## FIRST GREAT WESTERN

Much to the surprise of some, First have retained the Greater Western franchise (the former FGW/FGWL plus Wessex) which begins from 1st April and runs for 10 years. First's performance particularly in the past couple of years has been lack-lustre to say the least. Whilst it is true that several factors beyond their direct control have conspired against them, too many delays are caused by themselves through train defects or a simple lack of

attention to detail. The company has focused on gimmicks on the express fleet and failed to attend to the details. Perhaps now the franchising distractions are over, management will concentrate on the service although in celebrating its success First's website claimed it would be 2011 before it could run up to 90% of its services on time!

Other pledges for the new franchise include re-powering the HST power cars with MTU engines as successfully trialled last year, and refurbishing all the trailers after the pattern of the two prototypes done last year. First says will co-operate with the DfT over the development of HST2. There is no word about refurbishing the FGWL 165/166 fleets (apart from fitting air-conditioning in the cabs) which are looking increasingly tired and dirty compared to their Chiltern cousins. Fortunately the new franchise will not be implementing the awful timetable which the SRA specification called for which would have given Twyford, Maidenhead and Slough a much worse and slower service. Instead extra peak hour services will be provided from these stations to ease overcrowding. Additionally, there will be additional peak hour Slough - Paddington stopping services and the Reading - Gatwick service will be doubled to half-hourly. Quite how this will be achieved given the already stretched Turbo fleet remains to be seen.

Most worrying are the financial arrangements for the franchise. First will be getting a subsidy for operating Greater Western in only three of the ten years, for the other seven they will be paying a premium to the Treasury totalling £1.131 Billion - allegedly more than First's rivals, National Express and Stagecoach bid combined! Quick maths suggests that's £2.175 million a week, but in reality the bulk of the premium payments do not kick-in until 2012 when the sums become astronomical. The specific amounts each year are:

2006/07	£97.387m subsidy
2007/08	£46.674m subsidy
2008/09	£14.538m subsidy
2009/10	£20.163m premium
2010/11	£111.016m premium
2011/12	£168.296m subsidy
2012/13	£233.277m premium
2013/14	£302.151m premium
2014/15	£363.856m premium
2015/16	£427.725m premium

Whichever way you calculate it; this is in effect a "Stealth Tax" levied on every passenger who uses Greater Western. There are those both in the industry and the City who question First's ability to pay, it has even been suggested that First hopes it won't have to pay as it will wait until the premiums start to fall due and then claim the business hasn't developed as it expected and hope the Government will cancel the payments rather than take control of the franchise directly as it did with South Eastern costing the taxpayer dearly. The alternative, to re-allocate the franchise would probably take 2 years and therefore take most of the remainder of the franchise period. It has been calculated that to meet these payments alone, fares will need to rise by 6% above inflation each year, a sum that makes this January's controversial rises look mild!



# 100 YEARS OF THE JOINT LINE

## Part 1 DREAMS & CONSTRUCTION

Mike Walker



It seems hard to believe but at the dawn of the twentieth century today's burgeoning and booming commuter towns of Denham, Gerrards Cross and Beaconsfield were but small villages clustered around the undeveloped and dusty London to Oxford road. All that was about to change with the opening on 2nd April 1906 of the Great Western & Great Central Joint Railway, the first stage in the construction of the last main line railway to be built in this country for the next ninety years. Created by the competition between the pre-grouping railway companies, it would wither and nearly die under state control before becoming resurgent once more as one of the few real success stories of the privatised railway.

Paradoxically, although Buckinghamshire is one of the country's smaller counties, despite its position so close to London it remained a rural backwater largely dependent on agriculture until comparatively recently. Although two of the country's earliest trunk railways, the London & Birmingham and the Great Western, both opened in 1838, entered the extreme north east and south east corners of the county respectively, the great boom in railway construction largely passed the county by, the only other early construction was the Aylesbury Railway's branch from Cheddington (1839) and the Buckinghamshire Railway from Bletchley to Banbury and Oxford in 1850/51. The Wycombe Railway had received the Royal assent to its proposal for a line from the GW at Maidenhead to High Wycombe in 1846 but because of a series of financial and legal problems these powers lapsed and had to be renewed before the line opened on 1st August 1854. Any member interested in reading how High Wycombe did (or nearly did not) get its railway is recommended to read the first two chapters of Chris Potts's excellent *Oxford to Princes Risborough, A GWR Secondary Route*, Oakwood Press 2004.

During the second half of the 19th century only a few lines were added. On 1st August 1862 the WRC opened its extension to Princes Risborough and Thame and in October 1863 opened a branch from Princes Risborough to Aylesbury. Finally it completed the line from Thame to Kennington Junction south of Oxford a year later and its quasi-independent existence came to an end on 1st February 1867 when it was absorbed by the Great Western. Next was the Aylesbury & Buckingham connecting the county seat with the LNWR's Buckinghamshire Railway at Verney Junction. Originally backed by the LNWR, the A&B fell out with its bigger neighbour and turned to the GWR to operate the line from its opening in September 1868. As the A&B was built to standard gauge the GW's Aylesbury branch was converted in October 1868 to permit through running, the first part of the broad gauge to be narrowed. The GW continued to work the A&B as a single service from Princes Risborough to Verney Junction until the A&B was purchased by the Metropolitan Railway in 1891. The Metropolitan itself reached Aylesbury on 1st September 1892.

Nevertheless, many schemes were proposed which if carried through would have put the county on main lines. The Oxford Worcester & Wolverhampton made an attempt to promote a line from Oxford by way of Thame, Princes Risborough, High Wycombe and Uxbridge to a connection with the LSWR at Brentford under the name Oxford & Brentford in 1852 but the Bill was opposed by the GWR and rejected by Parliament. A second similar proposal the following year called the London & Mid-Western Railway got the same treatment. A third attempt in 1861 by the OW&W's successor, the West Midland, and called the London Buckinghamshire & West Midland Junction was modified to avoid High Wycombe but instead to go from Princes Risborough to Beaconsfield via Amersham (did anyone actually survey such a route?!) thence via Uxbridge to a new terminal near Sloane Square rather than joining the LSWR. This also met opposition from the GW which dealt with the matter once and for all by taking over the West Midland.

Next was the London Buckinghamshire & East Gloucestershire proposal of 1864 which was backed by the Midland from whose main line it would have branched off at Hendon and then run via Amersham, Princes Risborough and Thame before taking over the existing railway from Yarnton Junction to Witney and extending it to Cheltenham. This again received fierce opposition from the GW and was rejected by Parliament. The Midland was also involved along with the LNWR and Manchester Sheffield & Lincolnshire in an ambitious project of 1895 titled the London & South Wales. This would have had two lines through south Bucks, one via High Wycombe the other via Amersham, which would have combined at Bledlow then continued west to Oxford, Cheltenham and South Wales. This really set the alarm bells going at Paddington as the GW could see a real threat to its lucrative coal traffic to the capital as well as passenger services. The GW fought hard to oppose the



*The Joint Line was built sufficiently late to take advantage of mechanised construction techniques. Here a steam shovel works in the cutting on the Saunderton cutoff.*

*photos: Leicester Museums Newton Collection*

Bill and in a classic "divide and rule" move it "bought off" the MS&L by offering a connection from the latter's then under construction London Extension to Banbury.

Nearer to home, 1875 and 1881 both saw independent companies promote Bills for direct lines from London to High Wycombe via Uxbridge. Both were defeated, the latter being opposed by a rival scheme put for by the GW but later dropped due to the severe winter of that year which had affected the company's finances. A similar Bill was promoted by the Metropolitan District Railway in 1897 which again provoked a rival Bill promoted by the GW for a line from Acton to High Wycombe. In the ensuing Parliamentary process, the GW scheme was approved and the MDR approved only as far as Uxbridge - but never built in that form. The scene was now set for the building of what would become the Joint Line; just one more component was required.

The Manchester Sheffield & Lincolnshire had embarked on its ambitious and, to many, foolhardy London Extension in 1893, changing its name to the Great Central in 1895. The GCR and the Metropolitan shared the same Chairman, Sir Edward Watkin, and he arranged that the GCR would operate over the Met's main line between Quanton Road and Canfield Place just outside the tunnels leading to the GCR's London terminal at Marylebone. To formalise this agreement the Metropolitan & Great Central Railways Joint Committee was set up. However, by the time the GCR was ready to open Sir Edward had retired and the Met board were having second thoughts about sharing their line. Because the M&GC had been authorised by Act of Parliament it could not prevent the GCR from running over the line but it did everything it could to frustrate the newcomer.

As a result the GCR decided that it would be wise to have an alternative route into London. There was the option of the new link to the GW at Banbury but the consequent route via Oxford and Reading would be circuitous and unwelcome. For its part the GW was just awakening from its dark days at the end of the broad gauge and was anxious to create shorter routes for some of its main lines - not for nothing was it known as the "Great Way Round". This led to the creation of the cut-offs to the West and South Wales followed by a desire to compete more equally with the LNWR for the London to Birmingham trade. Here the latter had a distinct advantage with trains covering the 113 miles in 2 hours whilst the GW took 20-30 minutes more to cover their 129¼ mile route. A short cut to Birmingham was needed and it wasn't long before the GC and GW started to jointly look at how they could co-operate to each others advantage. The outcome was the agreement that the GWR would build a new, shorter route to Birmingham to which the GC would have links to provide a parallel alternative to the Met.

Consequently the GW started to build its new Acton (Old Oak Common) to High Wycombe direct line authorised in 1897 whilst powers were sought by the GC for a 6¼ mile connection from Neasden, on its line into Marylebone, to Northolt on the GW's new line which was granted in



*High Wycombe during 1904. The new retaining walls have been completed and demolition is about to begin of the second Wycombe Railway station, just visible through the Amersham Hill bridge, itself due to be replaced as part of the works.*

1898. The following year saw the passing of a further act authorising the Great Western & Great Central Joint Railway. This was given powers to take over the GW powers for the new line from Northolt to High Wycombe and complete construction, then take over and reconstruct the old Wycombe Railway from High Wycombe to Princes Risborough and finally build approximately 16½ miles of new line from the last point to a junction with the GC's London Extension at Grendon Underwood. It would also acquire the Princes Risborough to Aylesbury branch from the GW, thus creating a unique situation at the latter whereby it would be jointly managed by two Joint Committees. At this time the GW intended to upgrade the Princes Risborough to Kennington Junction line but later decided in stead to build a direct line from a point in the parish of Ashendon, 9½ miles north of Princes Risborough, by way of Bicester to join the old GW main line at Aynho. This was authorised by Parliament in 1903, the same act transferring ownership of the Ashendon to Grendon Underwood portion of the GW&GC solely to the GC.

Construction work on the new lines began in 1901 under the direction of Mr R C Sikes from the GW and with the major contract for the 16½ mile Northolt to High Wycombe section being let to Messrs R W Pauling & Co. of Westminster for £580,000. Work was advanced enough to allow the GW to run services as far as Park Royal from 15th June 1903 to serve the Royal Agricultural Show there. These trains ran out via the new line from Old Oak then returned to Paddington via the Greenford Loop to West Ealing which opened at the same time. The GC was less fortunate and was experiencing much difficulty with its Neasden - Northolt connection. In addition to the 203 yard tunnel at South Harrow, the line required a considerable amount of cuttings which unexpectedly needed lining with retaining walls after the ground was found to be unstable. Some of these near Wembley started to buckle and had to be rebuilt. As a result this relatively short section cost around £300,000 to build, almost twice the original estimate.

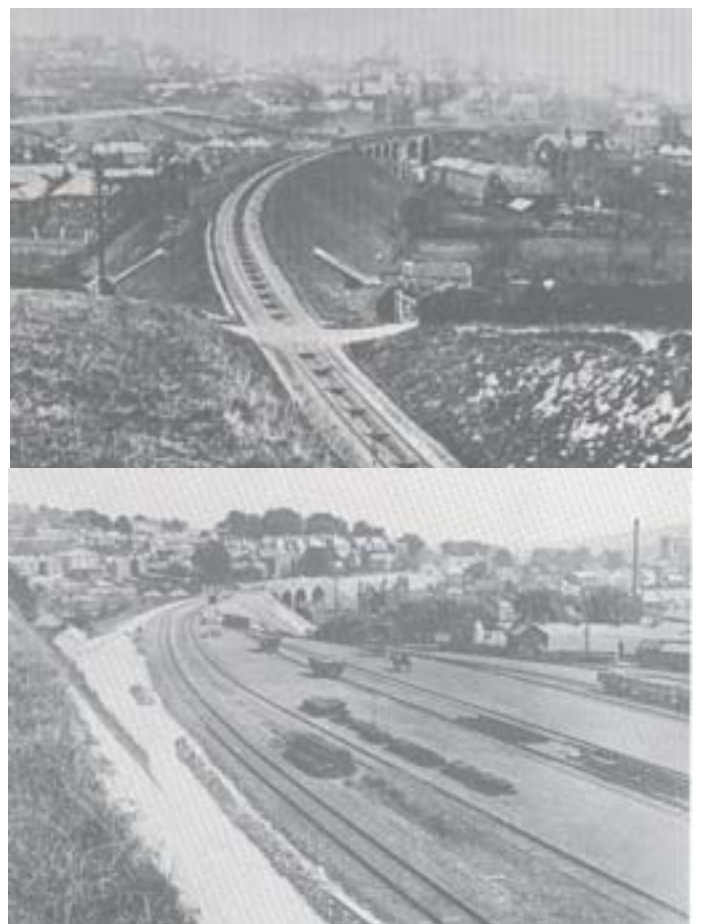
The Northolt to High Wycombe section was a magnificent piece of work built on the grand scale in a manner befitting its intended role as a major trunk route. Passing through an area of rolling hills and valleys it was alternately carried on high embankments and deep cuttings. Gradients were kept as gentle as possible, the steepest being 1 in 175 between Denham and Gerrards Cross, whilst curves were sweeping so as to not require speed restrictions. Even today in its rationalised state it is, when viewed from the cab as your author is frequently privileged to do, a magnificently aligned line. The massive earthworks were made easier by the employment of no less than sixteen steam excavators and a light railway system operated by 34 locomotives (including five ex-LBSC Terrier tanks) and nearly 900 items of stock. Additionally the section included six viaducts; Grand Union Canal (198 yds, 9 arches) and River Colne (121 yds, 4 arches) near Denham, Misbourne No.1 (114 yds, 5 arches) and Misbourne No.2 (165 yds, 5 arches) near Gerrards Cross and Sir Philip Rose's (66 yds, 3 arches) and Gordon Road (47 yds, 3 arches) approaching High Wycombe. There was also one tunnel, White House (362 yds) near Beaconsfield. A collapse during its construction claimed the lives of six labourers who are buried in High Wycombe churchyard.

Stations were initially provided at Ruislip & Ickenham (which became West Ruislip in 1947), Denham, Gerrards Cross and Beaconsfield. All were equally grand with platform loops off both Up and Down lines but had relatively small good facilities. All were to the GW "house style" of the period in smooth red brick with dark blue corner bricks, door and window edges etc. All had hipped slate roofs and canopies cantilevered out from the front of the building. Gerrards Cross was unusual as the depth of the cutting there meant the main building entrance and booking office were at first floor level giving direct access to the footbridge and stairs down to the Up platform. At all the stations the main buildings were located on the Up side with only waiting rooms and toilets being provided on the Down. Signal boxes were also of the standard GW pattern of the era in red and blue brick with hipped roofs and the five-pane style of main windows. Initially all the stations had two 'boxes each, one to control each end of the layout, plus intermediate 'boxes at Wilton Park and Tylers Green. The signals controlled were of the standard GW pattern but, reflecting a new trend, made use of ground discs rather than shunt arms.

High Wycombe itself was a major challenge. The original Wycombe Railway station had been a terminal on approximately the south side of the present forecourt - the section of the tyre dealers nearest Amersham Hill is the original WRC loco shed. When the extension opened trains initially continued to use this terminus, backing in or out as appropriate. In 1864 a new through station was opened consisting of two platforms opposite each other and linked by a footbridge. The Down platform was broadly on the same site as the present one. Because of its location on the side of the hill the site needed considerable excavation and a low retaining wall along the rear of the Up platform. But this was nothing to what the Joint Line would require. As it was required to have through lines and platform loops the restricted site meant

that the platforms had to be staggered. Construction involved cutting back behind the 1864 Up platform and building the present massive retaining walls (which are reputed to contain more than 1¼ million bricks) and a new bridge to carry Amersham Hill. Once the new Up platform and loop line had been laid the old Up platform could be removed and the through lines laid. The Down platform was reconstructed and lengthened to around 700 feet and a bay provided on the south side for trains from Maidenhead. The two main platforms were connected by a subway and the buildings were in a similar style to those to the east up to roof level. At High Wycombe (and at the remaining stations beyond) a different roof style was used whereby a single, gabled structure combined the function of both roof and canopy. Also, High Wycombe differed from the others in that the main building was on the Down side nearest the centre of town although the Up building was more extensive than the Down buildings elsewhere as it also included a ticket office. As High Wycombe is the largest town on the route an extensive goods yard was laid out. Once again two signal boxes (of the standard design) controlled the layout, High Wycombe South, the largest, located at the junction with the Maidenhead line and High Wycombe Middle next to the Priory Avenue footbridge.

North of High Wycombe the existing Wycombe Railway was to be totally rebuilt and the contract for this section went to Mackay & Davies of Cardiff. The WRC had been built cheaply and followed the contours of the land but this was deemed unsuitable for the new main line so curves and gradients were eased. Leaving town the



*These two shots show "before and after" at High Wycombe North, that's the Hughenden Road viaducts in the distance. Focus-Do It All now occupy the yard site.*



WRC's sharply curved viaduct over the Hughenden Road north of Frogmoor was replaced by a new one of 77 yards and 4 arches on the south side. Whilst this eased the curvature slightly the section through the town is still restricted to 50 mph (30 for freight). The old WRC viaduct remained in position, disused, until it was demolished to make way for the new road layout about 15 years ago.

Next came a second major goods yard for the town. Located on the Down side this was known as North Yard and required considerable filling to create the space. Additionally, some stabling sidings, known as the Chalk Sidings, were provided on the Up side. This layout was controlled by High Wycombe North Signal Box which was on the Up side next to the Bellfield Road under bridge.

At West Wycombe the WRC station, which had resembled those at Loudwater and Wooburn Green, was replaced by the standard GW design. The platforms were positioned so as to allow for the usual layout of through lines and loops but the through lines were never laid and as a result the station always looked much as Denham or Beaconsfield does today.

Along the valley through Bradenham much realignment was undertaken and evidence of this can still be seen today, particularly where the line crosses the A4010 at the Skew Bridge, the abutments of the original WRC bridge are still visible on the south or Down side. The WRC did not have a station at Saunderton. It was opened by the GWR on 1st July 1901 and therefore slightly pre-dates the Joint Line although it was part of the complete scheme. It had two platforms, linked by a footbridge, without loops and a simple goods siding. The buildings were of the standard design.

Between Saunderton and Princes Risborough the line crosses a gap in the Chilterns and descends the steep north facing escarpment. Although changes were done to the WRC alignment this still gave a final climb of 1 in 164 to the summit followed by a descent at 1 in 100, then to 1 in 88. This was deemed to be too steep for Up trains so a completely different alignment was built for the Up line for nearly 2¼ miles, mostly in a deep cutting and including an 83 yard tunnel. This kept the climb to 1 in 167 with the southbound summit being at the south end of the deviation.

Princes Risborough was the second most important station on the line, not because of the size of the community it served but because it was a major junction for the lines to Chinnor and Watlington; Oxford via Thame and to Aylesbury. The original WRC station which had become hopelessly inadequate was replaced by a commodious new one immediately to the south. This followed standard practice with two main platforms on loops off the through lines and had bays at the north end on both sides for the branch trains. The main station buildings (in the "High Wycombe" style) were on the Up side and a footbridge connected the platforms. A small goods yard was provided at the south end. Two signal boxes controlled the layout, the South 'Box was a modest affair but the North 'Box controlling the complex junction layout was one of the largest on the GW, as long as a cricket pitch and containing almost 100 levers.

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The section from a point 3½ miles north of Princes Risborough was built by a third contractor, a Mr L P Nott who had the easiest section. After a gentle curve north of the junction the line struck out north westwards in a straight line across the Vale of Aylesbury, continuing to drop for the first few miles then levelling out. This was, and still is an under developed part of the county - Chiltern crews still refer to it as the "Great Green Desert" - and there was no settlement until the village of Haddenham was reached. The station here was again lavish with platform loops and a three siding goods yard. The buildings were all of the usual style. A final viaduct of 80 yard and 5 arches at Cheersley carried the line over the River Thames about a mile north of the station.

The line continued across the open Vale in a mixture of shallow cuttings and low embankments until it reached Ashendon. Here the initial line swung to the right and continued almost due north for 5¾ miles to Grendon Underwood Junction. The two stations on this section, Wootton and Akeman Street were built by the GCR following the decision to terminate the Joint Line at Ashendon. However, they too had platforms on loops but the buildings were of timber construction. They presented quite a contrast with the "standard" GC island platform stations of the London Extension such as that at Quorn.

The first goods trains and some through GCR passenger services started operating over the new line in November 1905 but as the stations were still incomplete local services would be a little longer. The GW had started running to Greenford on 1st October 1904 and on 1st March 1906 the GCR introduced a service on the Neasden to Northolt line using a steam railmotor. Finally came the official opening. On 2nd April 1906 special trains carrying officials and invited guests ran from both Marylebone and Paddington to High Wycombe where a civic reception was held. The two trains were then coupled together and continued as one over the rest of the line as far as Calvert where it reversed before returning to High Wycombe where it was divided and the two portions returned to their respective terminals. Public services began on the same day.

The construction of the final section - the Great Western's 18¼ mile cut-off from Ashendon Junction to Aynho Junction was authorised by a 1905 Act and work began soon afterwards. Again it was built to the highest standards with flying junction at both ends. Five stations were provided; Brill & Ludgershall, Blackthorn, Bicester, Ardley and Aynho Park Platform. With the exception of Blackthorn and Aynho Park Platform all were again lavishly provided with platform loops and goods yards. The line also included two tunnels, Brill (191 yds) and Ardley (1147 yds). There were also two major viaducts at Souldern approaching Aynho Junction.

The whole line was opened on 1st July 1910 completing the last main line to be built until the Channel Tunnel Rail Link and finally giving the GW its coveted direct route to Birmingham ad 2 hour schedules. Indeed the new route is actually the shortest route between London and Birmingham, being 2½ miles shorter than the LNWR route.

*In part 2 we will examine the story of the line up to the BR era.*

# FOUR GO MANX

TIM SPEECHLEY recalls last year's Isle of Man adventure

For some time the Committee had been thinking about a trip to the Isle of Man and the July 2005 Gala there seemed an ideal opportunity to put a plan into place. Initially we felt it was a shame that only four people decided to participate but once there we found that four was an ideal number. So on the afternoon of Friday July 22 yours truly picked up Malcolm Margetts from Marlow, Gordon Rippington from



*Tim Speechley, Terry Dearing and Malcolm Margetts pose with IoMR 11 Maitland in front of Port Erin shed - the fourth member of the team, Gordon Rippington was behind the camera.*

Hazlemere and Terry Dearing from Thame and we drove to Birmingham Airport to catch the 16.05 Flybe flight. Arriving with time to spare we indulged in a coffee and whilst doing so were surprised to bump into Tony Caton and Phil Searle with their wives, who had decided to make an independent visit and were booked on the same flight as us. Somehow we seemed to run out of time and passport/baggage control took longer than expected particularly as they decided to inspect my camcorder bag and all its myriad contents with considerable zeal. Having failed to find anything too incriminating, we could board the aircraft for our flight. It was the smallest, well the shortest, aeroplane I had been on for many years, if ever, and also the first turboprop since a very bumpy trip to Dublin in a Viscount in the late 70's. I think it was a DeHavilland Canada Q200, but aircraft aren't my forte. Nevertheless it gave us a comfortable journey to Ronaldsway, where we arrived around 5 pm in glorious sunshine.

Ronaldsway is, as you can imagine, a pretty provincial airport and quite a contrast to Birmingham, though seemingly very busy on this Friday afternoon, with a collection of small commercial aircraft, mostly with propellers, arriving from and departing for a variety of national destinations. Once the baggage had arrived (eventually) it was outside to await our transport to Douglas. We had contemplated a taxi, but on discovering that a service bus was due soon, we opted for that, getting our first views of Mona's Isle from the top deck. Unfortunately, the bus station in Douglas was an awful long way from our hotel but I am sure all participants benefited from the exercise as we lugged our cases the mile, or more likely mile and a half, to the Silvercraigs Hotel, located on Queens Promenade, and overlooking the sea.

The hotel was not exactly palatial and had obviously seen better days. Although I had booked singles, several of us had rooms with multiple beds. I was on the third floor and I think the only one to have a room with a view (a

perk of having made the bookings I suspect) but subsequently I was asked if I would move into a smaller room as a favour to the owner and this I did, ending up with a somewhat poorer view and yet more steps to climb. Breakfasts were a bit of a challenge as they seemed to serve them "at 8.30" so the whole complement of guests would be milling around just before then (awaiting the starter's pistol) jostling for a good position in the

fruit juice and cereal queue. Then, rather than table service, you had to go up and queue up to get your cooked breakfast, served by a woman who appeared as though her face would crack apart if she dared smile or even say good morning! But despite this we were all reasonably comfortable and the food was quite acceptable.

Having settled in our first task was to sample some of the local brew, Okell's, a very palatable real ale. There was a pub just up the road and it was pleasant to sit outside and watch the world and the horse trams pass by. Then off to a nearby chippy for dinner, where we encountered the Caton/Searle party again, the only time we saw them during the course of our visit. Afterwards we walked miles trying to find a nice hostelry but Douglas seemed to lack them. There were pubs but they had either the wrong beer, wrong clientele or were too loud. We compromised!

Saturday dawned rather dull. After our first experience of the "breakfast steeplechase" we caught the 9.30 bus down to Lord Street terminal and walked the short way to the railway terminus, where we had to wait for the booking clerk to open up so we could buy our 3 day runabout tickets, which cost a very reasonable £20, and give unlimited travel on all the state owned transport - Steam Railway, Manx Electric, Snaefell Mountain Railway, Douglas Horse Trams and island-wide bus services.

Amongst our party, Malcolm had never been to the island, Gordon had been on a very hurried day trip not long before this, Terry had been on the last Society visit many years ago and I had made my only visit back in 1971, so there had been some pretty big changes. I was particularly upset at the reduction in scale of Douglas station, where part of the station itself and much of the yard and carriage sheds that had existed in '71 have been swept away to form a huge bus depot. In addition, the platform canopies have disappeared. However, steam trains still run of course and we boarded a pretty crowded 10.15 (first) departure, strengthened to six coaches by the

The Marlow Donkey

addition of two extras reserved for a Hertfordshire Rail Tours party. This proved to be quite a load for No.11 *Maitland* especially for the stiff climb for the first few miles out of Douglas, during which we enjoyed the bark from the chimney. I took some video from the window but somehow the driver's hi-vis vest and Nike headgear did not quite fit in with this "Victorian" steam railway's image.

We crossed the first train in the opposite (up?) direction with No. 12 *Hutchinson* at Ballasalla. Very noticeable was how smooth riding the train was, even at quite elevated speeds, especially on the western half of the line. This is a legacy of having a new main sewer laid beneath the track and the complete renewal of the permanent way. We shared our carriage with other enthusiasts who turned out to be a party from the Shropshire Railway Society, of whom we would see more at other locations, not least our hotel, where they were also staying (I thought they looked familiar - I had probably elbowed my way past some of them to get to the Corn Flakes earlier that morning!)

On arrival at Port Erin we had time to watch the loco come off the train, take a stroll down to the cliff top to look at the sea and have a coffee on the platform before catching the same train back. There is a small railway museum here, but having caught a glimpse of its contents through a window, we opted not to visit it. In my own case attending to my ever-present caffeine and nicotine dependency took precedence.

So it was back to Douglas on the 12.15, crossing No.12 again at Ballasalla and arriving at 13.12. Time for some more Okells. What a shame the pub wasn't doing any food. Caught a bus along the promenade intending to alight at the Manx Electric's terminus at Derby Castle, but, oh dear, it didn't stop and we were taken quite a long way up the hill towards Onchan Head before we could get off. I think if we had been quick enough we might have got the MER train we had just passed to stop, but we weren't and it didn't. Never mind - instead we grabbed some much needed sandwiches and rolls to keep us going in the minimarket there and sat on a bench looking out to sea, catching sight of the preserved vessel, *M V Karina*, on a cruise, though at the time we did not realise which boat it was.

According to the timetable, we had plenty of time to walk down the hill to Derby Castle for the next train. So why did it pass us when we were only half way there? It transpired they had laid on an unadvertised extra, so in fact we did get our intended 15.10, travelling behind motor car No.20 in a very crowded open trailer car, No.48, with a group of blokes, apparently on a "stag" weekend.

*MER No.1, the world's oldest operational electrically powered vehicle built in 1893, stands at Groudle Glen.*

*photo: Malcolm Margetts*

The MER is so unique nothing can spoil its delights. It is very like an American interurban system, generally following the road on its own reserved track but frequently crossing from one side to the other, necessitating level crossings, most of which are light controlled but un-gated. The Douglas to Laxey section opened in 1893 and motor cars Nos. 1 and 2 date from then, but all of the stock is from 1906 or earlier, though I'm sure there is an element of "Grandfather's Axe" about it (four new heads and six new handles).

Unlike the Steam Railway it has not had any "sewer benefit" and its trackwork is pretty deplorable, so that combined with crude suspension and in our case the slatted wooden bench seats of the trailer, the ride takes its toll on certain parts of the anatomy. Given this fact it is rather surprising that we opted to go the whole length of the line to Ramsey, a journey lasting an hour and a quarter, rather than getting out at Laxey (of which more anon) after just half an hour. Still, the weather had brightened up and the "stags" had disembarked, so onward we went, to enjoy what is the most scenic part of the line with lovely views of the countryside, hills, cliffs and sea beyond. And so to Ramsey, where we watched the trailer fly-shunted to the other end of the motor car, and then had a bit of a rush to find the bus station where we had a quick connection onto the 16.40 No.5 bus that would take us to Peel. After two visits I've no idea what Ramsey town looks like!

We were lucky to secure the two front seats on the top deck of the bus and from this splendid vantage point we could trace the course of the long closed St. Johns - Ramsey section of the IoM Railway, assisted by modern and vintage O.S. maps provided by Malcolm. We all agreed it must have been quite a line and what a shame it didn't last that bit longer and into "preservation".

On entering Peel I was pleased to see one of the "Peel" three wheeler cars that still exist. These were the only cars ever built on the island (during the 50's and 60's) and about five or six are preserved. There would be a rally next day but I felt lucky to have caught a glimpse of one, albeit from the bus. Alighting, we strolled down to the waterfront. Peel is a nice fishing village with a castle on a headland, but it is spoilt by the presence of a huge



power station just inland that dominates one's impression of the place. We enjoyed a locally made ice cream, served to us by a man in a clown's costume. There had obviously been some sort of charity race earlier in the day but we never worked out if it was on land or water. The streets were thronged with people and a group played live "music" at high volume, it was time to leave.

The No.5 took us all the way to Douglas. By now we had full sun and I must admit I missed some of the scenery whilst resting my eyes. We arrived in time to catch the last horse tram at 7 pm. They are not the fastest form of transport but sure beat walking.

Tonight we planned to eat at a rather nice Italian pizzeria we had spotted earlier, but having walked the length of the prom to get to it, found it was full up! Fortunately we located an even better establishment and had an excellent meal washed down with some very nice vino rosso. The day concluded with another pint of Okell's at our "local".

Sunday was sunny (hooray) and our original plan had been to try to lineside the first steam train out of Douglas. However, we hadn't bargained for the appalling Sunday service on the buses, which effectively put paid to this. I think at this juncture it needs to be pointed out that for some inexplicable reason (I suspect simply because the timetable had been in my camera bag) I had been appointed "Tour Leader" and anything that went wrong now seemed to be my fault! Instead we walked to Derby Castle and caught the first (09.40) Manx Electric train as far as Laxey. We weren't the only people to have this idea, but learning from our experience yesterday, we travelled in the motor car on its beautifully upholstered seats.

At Laxey we transferred to the Snaefell Mountain Railway that (not surprisingly) goes virtually to the top of Snaefell Mountain at an altitude of 2036 feet. Apparently the SMR was built in just seven months and opened in August 1895. We departed from a calm sunny Laxey and half an hour later arrived at Summit, more or less at the

cloud base and with a freezing, gale force wind. We felt duty bound to walk up to the true summit and take pictures at the trig point, though instinct suggested the cafe or the train would be a more sensible place to stay out of the wind. We didn't hang about, though some fellow travellers on the uphill journey set off to walk down all or part way (to Bungalow, where the rails cross the famous TT track and I had witnessed motor cycles racing back in 1971, a sight that had prompted me to become a "biker" soon after). The SMR is steeply graded and has a "Fell" type braking rail in the middle of the track. This probably explains why it is a wider gauge than the MER (3'6" against 3'), though I'm sure an Irishman must have had a hand in it somewhere. Views are spectacular and as you approach Laxey again you can see the huge overshot waterwheel, "Lady Isabella" turning in the distance.

We returned to Laxey and back out of the wind there was time for a coffee before taking a look at the relatively new Laxey Mines Railway that has two newly built recreations of the original diminutive Lewin 0-4-0T locos, *Ant* and *Bee*. We did not travel on the line, which is quite short, but watched a couple of trains in operation. The loco works in push-pull mode with one enclosed "mine" car, passing through quite a long and very restricted tunnel at the Laxey terminus end that forces the poor driver to crouch down. Then I took the opportunity to video some of the activities on the MER around Laxey station, which is separated from the road traffic and very picturesque amidst trees. Whilst doing this I mislaid the rest of the party, only to find them enjoying a beer in the pub garden, and was gratified to see a full glass being waved in my direction.



*Ant of the Laxey Mines Railway. Note the primitive driving position. The "dome" is actually the water tank!*

*photo: Malcolm Margetts*

We caught the 12.55 MER train back towards Douglas, with car 22 and trailer 44, alighting at Groudle, where access to the 2' gauge Groudle Glen Railway's terminus, Lhen Coan (Lonely Valley), is via a steep footpath along the river gorge. At the station we witnessed a train arriving behind a small 4 wheeled diesel, *Dolphin* and then departing behind their very odd looking battery-electric loco *Polar Bear*. Then another train arrived behind not just one, but both of the tiny original Bagnall The Marlow Donkey



*Snaefell Mountain cars pass under the watchful eye of a local sheep. The horizontal rail gripped by the Fell emergency brakes can be seen between the running lines.*

*photo: Malcolm Margetts*



*The Grouldle Glen's original two locos, Sea Lion and Polar Bear double head along the cliffs.*

*photo: Malcolm Margetts*

2-4-0T steam locos. Although *Sea Lion*, built in 1896, is based here, the original *Polar Bear*, celebrating its centenary in 2005, is preserved at the Amberley Chalk Pits Museum and had been brought to the island just for this gala weekend, in exchange for *Sea Lion's* visit there earlier in the month. We rode down to the coast behind this pairing; passing the battery loco's train not far out of the far terminus. We stayed at *Sea Lion Rocks* for a while, photographing the coming and going of other trains, before returning to *Lhen Coan* behind the other resident steamer, *Annie* a 1998 built replica of a Bagnall 0-4-2ST.

As this line had not been rebuilt and reopened until 1986, I had not seen it before and it proved to far exceed all my expectations. Although very short, it has real character and the coastal section is very scenic. However, it is quite a climb back up to the road and MER. Here we saw the arrival of a special excursion with the Hertfordshire Rail Tours party, using motor car No.1 and open trailer No.48 which were stabled whilst, I presume, the participants visited the railway. Then a southbound service train arrived. We could have taken that, but I had noticed earlier that an alternative existed and soon it arrived, in the form of preserved ex-Douglas Corporation Transport AEC Regent double decker No.64. This splendid vehicle had still been in service with its sisters when I was last here and is retained by Isle of Man Transport, with at least one other historic bus, for just this sort of special working. We grabbed seats on the top deck for the run back to Douglas and went all the way to the bus depot/Steam railway terminus. There was some time before the last arrival of the day was due, so Terry and I went for a long walk to see if any linesiding possibilities existed on the steep Nunnery bank out of Douglas. In the late afternoon's heat we walked miles but found nowhere suitable, so returned to the terminus, only just in time to see No.11 arrive at about 5.15.

We caught a horse tram all the way to Derby Castle and had a well earned pint at the pub there. Having had nothing much to eat since breakfast we had thought we would be able to get a meal there but they didn't do food after 2.30 on Sundays so we were disappointed. Instead we horse-trammed back to the hotel, had a very quick clean up and just caught the last one down the promenade eating in the same place as the previous evening.

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On Monday they were operating double headers on the Steam Railway and we were keen to try to get some lineside shots. Having ascertained yesterday that the Douglas end of the line was unsuitable, we opted to take service buses out to Santon. Here the very promising looking field we had spotted from the train on Saturday proved to be full of quite tall vegetation, so Malcolm and Terry decided to stay at the station whilst Gordon and I fought our way through it to find an adequate, though far from spectacular vantage point. The double header duly arrived with Nos. 11 and 10 *G H Wood* and coasted downhill past us. Not long after No.12 arrived from the other direction but it too was not working hard. What a lot of effort for a couple of none too spectacular shots! (Does this sound familiar?)



*Double heading at Castletown, IoMR 10 G H Wood and 11 Maitland..*

*photo: Malcolm Margetts*

From Santon we caught another bus, after a long wait, to Ballasalla, but there wasn't much there so we got the next bus to Castletown, where we repaired to the pub for an infusion of alcohol or caffeine according to preference. Here we were able to photograph the double header arriving from Port Erin and we caught it back to Douglas where a couple of other engines were in steam including No.15 "*Caledonia*", the only 0-6-0T on the island. Off to a pub for some lunch that took such an age to arrive we had to scoff it down and rush back to the station to get the 14.15 train. This was the double header again, up the bank, but with two locos it was not such a noisy spectacle as we had had on the Saturday.

By now we had to watch our time, so we alighted at Port Soderick, where we had the whole place to ourselves for half an hour, until the up train arrived with No.12 to take us back to Douglas. We found a taxi and it took us back to the hotel to retrieve our bags and then on to Ronaldsway for our 17.25 flight. All sorts of other flights were called and departed, but not ours. In the end we were 40 minutes late. During the wait we were asked if we would respond to an Isle of Man Tourist Board questionnaire. Overall our experience of the island had been a mixed one. The vintage transport we had come to see had been excellent, but the bus service, especially on a Sunday, was too infrequent. There does not seem to be much effort into welcoming tourists and Douglas in particular is not well equipped with restaurants or decent pubs. Nevertheless we had all enjoyed our visit. The interviewer said our opinions were not untypical and they knew they had to improve tourist facilities.

Once our flight was finally called everything was fine and we arrived at a soggy Birmingham feeling lucky that we had not seen any rain throughout our stay. Will we go again? Definitely, and I certainly won't leave it as long as I did this time - otherwise I'll be 86 when I make the next trip!!

My thanks go to my three companions, all of whom were excellent company. We all got on very well together and I don't recall any disagreements regarding any aspect of the four day trip. Having taken only video material myself, I am indebted to Malcolm Margetts who supplied the still photographs illustrating this article.

## 25 AND 15 YEARS AGO

Tim Edmonds

### 25 YEARS AGO.

To mark the 150th anniversary of the birth of George Mortimer Pullman on 3 March 1831, every passenger taking dinner on the up and down evening *Manchester Pullman* trains on 3 March was presented with a miniature bottle of Malmaison house sherry by Travellers-Fare.

Demolition of the original station at Newmarket, disused since closure in 1967, was due to begin in March. The ornate building was the 1848 terminus of the Newmarket & Chesterford Railway and became a goods depot in 1902 when a new through passenger station was opened nearby. Attributed to Philip Hardwick, its listed status failed to save it, although it had been hoped to dismantle it for re-erection elsewhere.

Having been replaced by the first batch of 25 new D78 units, the last of the pre-war red trains on the LT District Line made its final journey in normal passenger service on 31 March. Farewell tours were run for enthusiasts on 12 and 19 April. Latterly known as CO and CP stock, these units were introduced between 1936 and 1940 when they were designated O and P stock, the main difference between the two sub-classes being the position of the guard's controls. Their main features were the 'Metadyne' control equipment and the modern body design with flush exterior panels and a flared skirt.

The subject of the talk at the Marlow & District Railway Society's meeting on 16 April was 'Pre-nationalisation steam' and the speaker was Ron White. On 21 May Colin Garratt spoke on 'Expedition India'. The venue was 'The Marlow Donkey' in Station Road.

Formal reopening of Honeybourne station, near Evesham, took place on 22 May when the 11.40 Worcester-Paddington and the 10.50 Paddington-Worcester stopped there specially. Regular services from the unstaffed station were to start with the new BR timetable on 1 June.



*One of the regular SLOA operations in 1981 was the Welsh Marches Express from Crewe to Newport, which involved a loco change at Hereford. Here 4930 Hagley Hall takes over a southbound train from 6000 King George V in early spring sunshine on 14 March 1981.*

*photos: Tim Edmonds unless noted*



*Seen here on 3 February 1977 during its period of disuse is the ornate building of the Newmarket & Chesterford Railway terminus at Newmarket, which was demolished in 1981.*

## 15 YEARS AGO.

During the weekend of 2/3 March the Princes Risborough area was converted to multiple aspect signalling operation, controlled by the Marylebone (ME) Integrated Electronic Control Centre. This had been the last outpost of semaphore signalling on the Chiltern lines out of Marylebone and resulted in the closure of the last signal box on the line at Princes Risborough North. The new layout and signalling includes a route onto the line to Thame, from which the last booked train ran on 21 March!

The former Dart Valley Railway, between Buckfastleigh and Totnes, began the new season with a new name and a new operator - the South Devon Railway. The Dart Valley Light Railway plc leased the line to the SDR in order to concentrate on its more profitable Paignton - Kingswear line. The SDR volunteers were able to increase in the number of timetabled trains in the 1991 timetable and the first services were worked under the new regime on Good Friday, 29 March.

From 31 March Sealink closed the container handling facilities at Holyhead and Dublin a decision greeted with disappointment by Railfreight Distribution. The RfD container service between Ellesmere Port and Belfast was unaffected.

Royal assent was granted on 9 May for the Heathrow Express rail link to go ahead. The Parliamentary legislation took BR and the British Airports Authority by surprise - both had expected authorisation to be delayed until later in the year.

During the night of 25/26 May, BR and Foster Yeoman operated the longest and heaviest train ever to have run in Europe, with a total length of 1 mile 44 yards and a weight of 12,108 tonnes. This 'megatrain' was to provide test data for the operation of stone trains made up of several portions, particularly in terms of braking and coupling behaviour. Two locos were used, working from Merehead in two portions and then combining at East Somerset Junction with 59005 at the front and 59001 in the centre.

### CONTRIBUTING TO THE DONKEY

The *Marlow Donkey* is your Society's magazine and needs your contributions. The Editor welcomes articles of all sorts so if you have a pet subject or have been on a trip recently share it with your fellow members. Articles typed and submitted on disk or by email are preferred but hand written contributions can be accepted (They may take a little longer to appear!) Pictures can be prints, slides or digital images.

Please contact the Editor, address on page 1, for further advice.

**Deadline for next issue: 30th April 2006**



*On 29 March 1991, the first day of operation of the Buckfastleigh - Totnes line as the South Devon Railway, GWR 0-6-0PT 1638 approaches Staverton with the 2.32 p.m. from Littlehempston Riverside to Buckfastleigh.*



*On the former LNWR route to Oxford, 56041 approaches the level crossing at Bicester Town with a train of 'binliner' empties from Calvert on 17 May 1991. The train was held at this signal whilst a Bicester Town to Oxford DMU cleared the block to Oxford North Jct.*



*First contact. In early 1981 Foster Yeoman took delivery of the first GM built loco to operate on the British mainland, An almost standard model SW1001 "switcher", no.44 Western Yeoman II is seen at Merehead during its first year of service.*

*photo: Mike Walker*

# A BUCKS QUIZ - THE ANSWERS

So how well do you think you did in our Christmas Quiz? Here are the answers. In the event of a dispute, to quote Mike Hyde, the Editor's decision is final!

**1** Which was the first railway to be opened in the county?

London to Birmingham between Tring and Denbigh Hall (north of Bletchley) on 4th April 1838

**2** Which was the first railway to be closed in the county?

Brill Tramroad on 30th November 1935 was the earliest railway to close, however, the Stony Stratford Tramway closed on 14th May 1926.

**3** Which was the most recently closed passenger service in the county?

Bourne End to High Wycombe on 4th May 1970. The latest line to close completely was Princes Risborough to Thame in October 1991 although the last train ran on 21 March 1991.

**4** In 1900 how many different railway companies offered passenger services in the county and which were they?

Seven: LSWR, GWR, GCR, Metropolitan, Oxford & Aylesbury Tramroad, LNWR and Midland.

**5** How many passenger Train Operating Companies currently operate services passing through the county and which are they?

Seven: FGW, FGWL, Chiltern, Silverlink, Virgin West Coast, Virgin Cross Country and First ScotRail. In addition of course to London Underground which is not a TOC.

**6** What was the maximum number of public passenger stations in the county, excluding those that have been relocated to an adjacent site such as Marlow or High Wycombe?

78 (counting Haddenham and Haddenham & Thame Parkway as two - they were some distance apart.

**7** How many stations are open to the public today?

29

**8** Excluding Gerrards Cross! What was the maximum number of tunnels built in the county?

Six, White House, Saunderton, Brill and the three separate bores at Linslade

**9** How many tunnels remain in the county today and what happened to the others?

Three, the county boundary moved taking with it the three bores at Linslade north of Leighton Buzzard.

**10** The viaduct over Rayners Avenue opposite Kings Mead between High Wycombe and Loudwater is named in honour of Sir Phillip Rose, but who was he?

A prominent local solicitor who acted in that capacity for the Wycombe Railway Company. He also owned the land on which the Joint Line was built in this area and insisted the viaduct be faced with red brick rather than the engineering bricks used elsewhere on the line.

**11** What was the connection between the Great Marlow Railway and a well known Marlow brewer?

Col Higginson O P Wethered was the GMR chairman..

**12** What did Taplow and the old Marlow stations have in common?

Both were designed by the same architect.

**13** What was significant about January 1914 on the Marlow branch?

It was the first line in the country to be protected by Electric Key Token working.

**14** In GW days what was the Route Availability rating of the Marlow branch?

Red (dotted) - maximum 20 mph for Red group locos.

**15** Which preserved 14xx tank was a regular performer on the 'Donkey in the 1950's'?

Mike Little's 1450 - it also took part in the Centenary specials.

**16** Marlow once had a working 2 foot gauge railway. Where was it and who owned it?

At Westhorpe pit of the Marlow Sand & Gravel Co. It ceased operating around the late 1960's.

**17** When did the old Marlow station close?

9th July 1967

**18** Why are Chiltern Railways Clubman units known as class 168 and not part of the similar Turbostar class 170 series?

Because their couplers are only compatible with class 165 and 166 units.

**19** FGWL class 165/1 units are prohibited from working between Amersham and Harrow-on-the-Hill or Princes Risborough and Aylesbury. Why?

Between Amersham and Harrow because they do not have LUL trip cocks and between Princes Risborough and Aylesbury because they have dampers on the bogies which Chiltern's 165/0's lack and which might foul lineside objects. The fact that the 168's have the same dampers and are permitted is ignored by Network Rail's "just say no" mindset!

**20** Chiltern Railways services between Amersham and Harrow-on-the-Hill are unique. Why?

They are the only National Rail services that operate over infrastructure not owned by Network Rail .

**21** What is notorious about Underbridge 128 on the WCML at the north end of the infamous Ledburn Junction - apart from it being called Sears Crossing?

The Great Train Robbery took place here in 1963. Alternatively, cynics claim it's the place where huge sums of money disappear!

**22** What "White Elephant" was built between Winslow and Bletchley during the 1950's?

Swanbourne Marshalling Yard - it was never finished.

**23** Where is either 25m 40c from Euston or 28m 50c from Paddington?

Bourne End. To be pedantic Bourne End Junction, the station is officially 28m 55c.

**24** What was unique about Aylesbury Town station before 1948?

It was jointly operated by two Joint Committees, the Met & GC and GW & GC.

**25** What of significance occurred between Princes Risborough and Aylesbury in 1868?

It was the first section of Brunel's Broad Gauge to be converted to standard by the GWR.