

THE MARLOW DONKEY



Edition

145

June 2014



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The Railways of Buckinghamshire
A Yankee in King Arthur's Court

The Marlow Donkey

The Magazine of the Marlow & District Railway Society

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The contents of the *Marlow Donkey* represent the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Society

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FRONT COVER PHOTOGRAPHS

Top: 5332 at Kyle of Lochalsh on the late afternoon of 13th August 1972

Photo: Don Woodworth. (Article page 16).

Middle: Talyllyn Railway, No 5 Midlander and no 4 Edward Thomas on shed at Pendre on 7th August 1966.

Bottom left: No 4 Edward Thomas arrives at Nant Gwernol on 18th August 2010.

Bottom right: No 6 Douglas at Brynglas on 8th June 1977. Photos: Tim Edmonds. (Article page 5).

TIMETABLE

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

All meetings are held in the Bourne End Community Centre, Wakeman Rd, Bourne End at 7.45 for 8.00pm.
(Except June starts 7.30pm)

- Thursday 19 June **THE RAILWAYS OF SCOTLAND** Les Nixon
Postponed from 2013, Les Nixon is an excellent and well-known railway photographer, active for at least 50 years, and his pictures have appeared in numerous books and magazines. **Please note that is a joint meeting with the RCTS and starts at 19.30.**
- Thursday 17 July **CROSSRAIL** Richard Storer
Richard is the Area Community Relations Manager for Crossrail, and he will show the latest progress being made with this major engineering project.
- Thursday 18 September **ON PARALLEL LINES** Ken Horan
Yorkshireman Ken's show will contrast black and white pictures from the end of steam, when he was a fireman on BR, with colour shots taken more recently, many on charters.

FORTHCOMING VISITS

- Saturday 28 June **THAMES VALLEY & GREAT WESTERN OMNIBUS TRUST**
The visit includes a talk about the vehicles which includes a 1927 GWR Guy and a guided tour of the storage shed before stepping aboard one of the buses for ride around the Windsor area. £15 per head including a buffet lunch and the tour.
- Thursday 7 August **SLOUGH POWER SIGNAL BOX**
Although this is fully booked, we hope to arrange a second date if there is sufficient demand - see page 3.
- Saturday 16 August **THE WOTTEN LIGHT RAILWAY**
An afternoon visit to the 15" gauge Wotten Light Railway in North Bucks. Further details to follow.

Bookings for any of the above should be made with Julian Heard on 01628 527005 or julian@jeh.org.uk

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

At the request of the Editor, I'm writing these notes at the end of April, so if I don't mention any important railway event that occurs between now and the production of the Donkey then you'll know the reason why.

In the last edition I pondered whether the Network Rail civil engineers' prediction, that they would have the GW main line open again at Dawlish before Easter, would actually happen. Miraculously they met their aim and early at that, with service trains beginning to run on 4 April. I really feel this was a tremendous achievement and all those involved deserve great credit. I realise there is still a lot more to be done to finish the job but in these days when any sort of repair work (road works, gas mains, potholes) seems to take forever, they have done so well. However, having reopened this line, I wonder how much effort will now be put into the study of an alternative route inland.

Thanks to a friend organising it, I found myself at the Statfold Barn Railway at the end of March for the first of this year's open days. Each time I visit here I'm astounded at how much progress has been made since I last went. On this occasion another newly restored locomotive was in use, Hudswell Clark 2'0" gauge 0-6-0 tender loco *Lautoka No 11*, which came to Statfold only in late 2012. The restoration is all the more remarkable because in its latter days in Fiji it had been converted to diesel power with parts of the firebox and boiler

cut away. Also during the last nine months the second "main line", running out into the fields, has now been extended all the way to the balloon loop. As usual there was non-stop action all day, culminating in a cavalcade of the 15 working steam locomotives. I'm sure we will be organising another Society trip here in the not too distant future.

It's not an admission of which I'm very proud but I don't travel by train very often, though I recently received an offer I couldn't refuse. Dave Woodhead sent me details of a deal from Chiltern Railways, I think linked to the London Evening Standard newspaper, whereby you could travel from London to Birmingham and back for 50p. By the time I had the information I was sure I would be too late but going on-line I was able to get two returns for a Monday, the only free day we had. The site only allowed bookings from and to Marylebone but I chose trains that stopped at High Wycombe and we had no difficulty boarding there, though had we had we would simply have gone home and forfeited the £1 I had spent. Taking the 09.10 down train I had my first experience of one of Chiltern's loco-hauled services and what a comfortable trip it provided, so much more refined than the usual diesel units. If a few more offers of this type emerge in the future I may well be doing a lot more train travel.

I do hope you all have an enjoyable summer and look forward to seeing you at our meetings.

Tim Speechley

SOCIETY AND LOCAL NEWS

PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Mike Bunn returned in March to tell the history and development of the French TGV which started the world-wide high speed rail revolution. It is sobering to reflect that the earliest production TGV sets have already gone to the scrapyards whilst our, slightly older, HSTs continue in service.

In April Colin Boocock presented an interesting programme on the design, development, operation and rebuilding of the Bulleid Pacifics. Many interesting and little known facts came to light. For example, how many of us knew that the second batch of Merchant Navy locos were built with hardboard air-smoothed casings due to a shortage of steel and continued with them well into the BR era.

Richard Crane was our guest in May and took us on a nationwide tour of the railways and stations which Dr Beeching recommended for closure and yet managed to survive. The recurring theme of the evening was how many of those lines are now thriving and carrying huge numbers of passengers often being transformed from being rundown "basic railways" to modern electrified lines. One was left wondering what might have happened to many of the marginal lines that were not so lucky.

FORTHCOMING VISITS

We have a number of outdoor activities scheduled for the coming months.

Thanks to Network Rail we have a visit arranged to Slough Panel Signal Box on the evening of Thursday 7th August. This was announced at the April meeting and all places were quickly snapped up - we are limited to a party of twelve. Already we have two members who would also like to go and if we get sufficient support we

might be able to arrange a second visit. To do this we would need to have a party of around six to eight to make it viable. So, if you would like to see this historic facility before it closes next Easter please let us know as soon as possible.

For those of you who are going on 7th August, please meet at the gate marked "Network Rail Operations Office" in Bristol Way off Stoke Gardens which is the first left north of the William Street railway bridge at 19:30 latest. There is on street parking in the area.

We shall be paying a visit to the Thames Valley & Great Western Omnibus Trust on Saturday 28th June. Whilst some may raise an eyebrow, there are many members who are interested in old buses and this collection includes the only surviving GWR Roadmotor, a 1927 Guy which is fully restored. Restoration proceeds on a Western National Leyland Lion of similar vintage and many newer but classic vehicles. Our visit will include lunch and a ride around the district in one of the Trust's vehicles although probably not the GWR Guy.

On Saturday 16th August we have a visit to the private 15" gauge Wotton Light Railway near Bill.

CONTRIBUTIONS FOR THE DONKEY

Following my appeal for contributions last time several members have responded and I now have several in stock which will appear in the next few issues. Many thanks to all of you. But it would be nice to receive more.

Phil Searle and Tony Caton have both prepared articles reflecting on what first attracted them to the hobby and the resultant journey. Both are very different and it would be nice to have more in a similar vein.

Steam made a rare but welcome appearance on the Joint Line on Sunday 13th April when 34046 Braunton worked a Steam Dreams Cathedrals Express from Paddington to Stratford-upon-Avon and back.

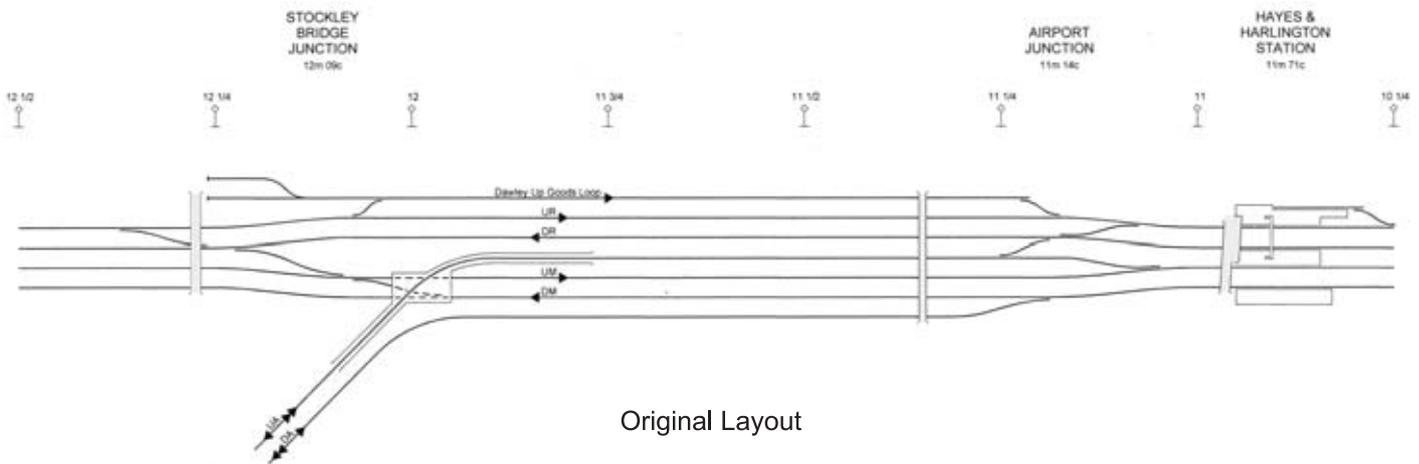
Here it approaches Princes Risborough on the outward working.

Photo: Mike Walker



UNPLUGGING AIRPORT JUNCTION

Mike Walker



Original Layout

Anyone who has travelled on the Great Western Main Line through Hayes & Harlington in the past year or so cannot fail to notice that some heavy construction work is going on at Airport Junction.

When the junction and branch to Heathrow was built in the late 1990s it was envisaged that the only trains that would be using the new line was the non-stop Heathrow Express which would normally be routed to and from Paddington along the Main (Fast) Lines.

The junction was therefore laid out accordingly with high-speed turnouts in the Down and Up Mains and with the Up Airport line being carried over the Main Lines on a flyover. To allow services to continue when the Mains were blocked, connections were provided between the Up Airport line and both the Down and Up Reliefs. Reaching the latter required trains to cross the former on the level but as this was only an emergency provision this was not seen as a problem.

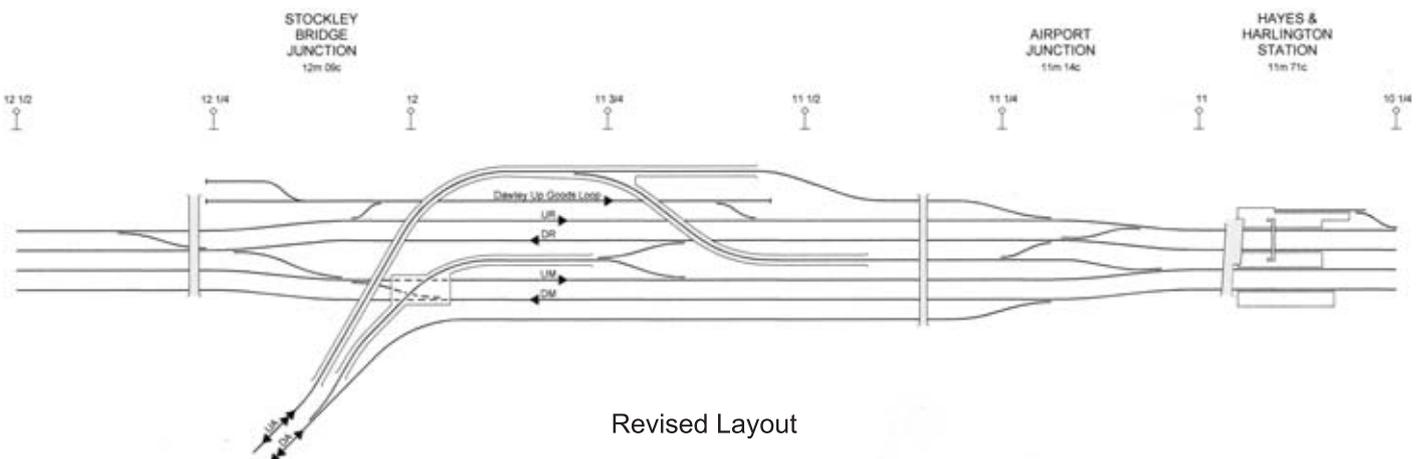
In addition the Down Main was signalled bi-directionally between Airport Junction and Southall East Junction to allow London-bound trains to run via the Down Main if required although no reciprocal facility was provided on the Up Main. To feed this both the Up and Down Airport lines are bi-directionally signalled throughout with a scissors crossover just outside the tunnel.

Things were fine until the stopping Heathrow Connect trains started running twice-hourly in 2005. These use the Relief Lines and therefore have to cross on the level at Airport Junction, causing numerous delays to other services. This will become worse when Connect is replaced by more frequent Crossrail services to Heathrow.

As a result the junction is currently undergoing a major upgrade which includes an additional new flyover west of the existing which will take the Up Airport line over all four GWML lines. It will then split into two with one line descending to join the Up Relief and the other crossing both the Up and Down Reliefs before descending to join the Up Main via the original connection. New connections from both the Up Main and Down Relief to the original flyover will be provided to ensure trains can come and go from either Airport line with minimum disruption to main line traffic.

Additionally a new trailing crossover has been provided between the Up and Down Mains just east of Hayes to allow a train off the branch to regain its correct line quicker therefore reducing line occupation and delays to Down services. This will be particularly useful during the later stages of the remodelling work.

The work is due for completion in 2016 and should eliminate all conflicts at this increasingly busy junction.



Revised Layout

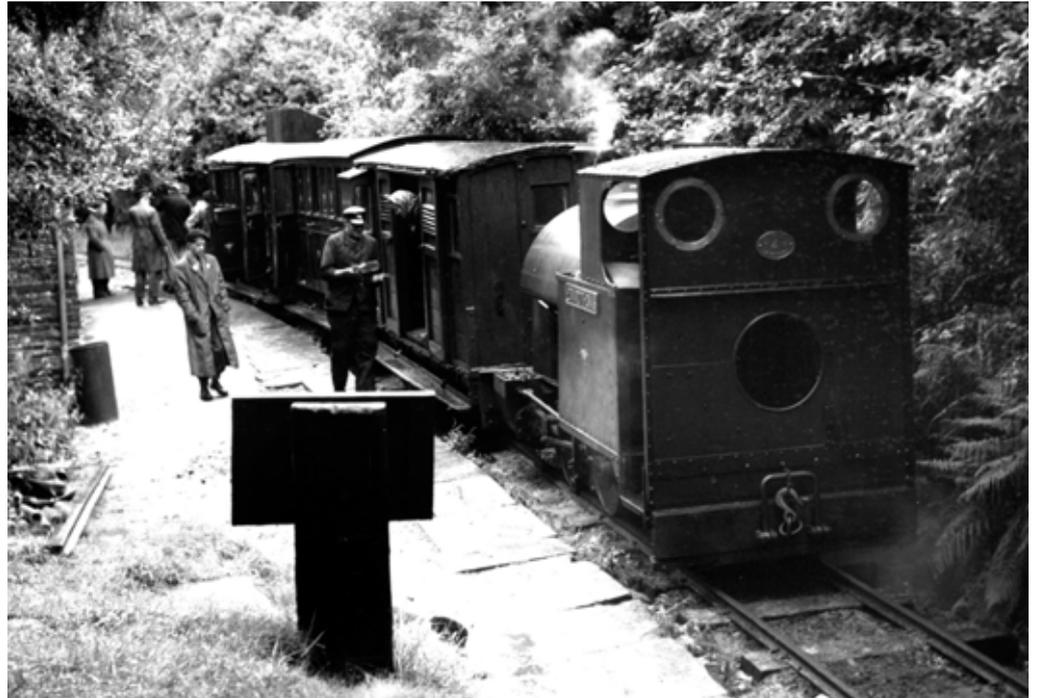
THE PIONEERING PRESERVED RAILWAY

By David Collins

Tywyn¹ is a small coastal town in the county of Gwynedd on the shores of Cardigan Bay, which first came onto the railway map in 1863 with the opening of the Aberystwyth & Welsh Coast Railway, which was incorporated into the Cambrian Railways four years later, which in turn became part of the Great Western at the 1923 grouping. Apart from agriculture there was little industry in the area. However 7 miles in the foothills of the mountain Cader Idris slate had been quarried since the 1830s with the biggest quarry being at Bryn Eglwys just south of the village of Abergynolwyn. Packhorses were used to transport the finished slates as far as Aberdovey. This was a slow and expensive operation, and after the quarry was taken over by the Aberdovey Slate Company, investment was made to build a narrow gauge railway down from the quarry to Tywyn (it being the nearest standard gauge railhead). This step was directly following the example of the Festiniog Railway 40 miles to the north which had been operating for the last 30 years although it was decided to use the slightly wider gauge of 2ft 3in, as did the nearby Corris Railway. Unlike that railway and the FR, which were both horse drawn at this time, the new line was designed to be worked by steam locomotion from the outset. The construction of the line was overseen by James Swinton Spooner (whose younger brother, Charles Easton Spooner was the engineer and manager of the FR) and involved one major engineering structure, a viaduct across the Dolgoch Falls.

An Act of Parliament was passed in 1865 which permitted the carrying of passengers, although a condition was the carriage doors being on one side only due to the restricted loading gauge. 1865 also saw the delivery of the line's first locomotive from Fletcher Jennings of Whitehaven, a 0-4-0ST which was named *Talyllyn* after a local lake which also gave its name to the

¹ Up until the 1970s the town's name was spelt Towyn. For consistency I have used the current spelling.



In the summer of 1954 no 4 Edward Thomas calls at Dolgoch with a train from Abergynolwyn. This clearly shows the original coupling and the circular hole in the rear of the cab.

Photo: B B Edmonds, Tim Edmonds collection.

railway (but how this is so is something of a mystery). When she arrived operation was a problem as no one in Tywyn had any knowledge of working locomotives, so she was put aside until a consultant was brought in from the manufacturers to train staff. A second locomotive arrived in time for the opening also from Fletcher Jennings, although this time it was a 0-4-0WT named *Dolgoch* after the waterfall that the railway passed. Both locomotives were delivered without cabs and were initially unsatisfactory. In particular *Talyllyn* rode very badly and was

As it used to be – no 1 Talyllyn heads up the valley above Dolgoch [Below left] with a train comprising two passenger coaches, brake van and a slate wagon, circa 1931.

Another shot from circa 1931 at the upper end of the line, [Bottom right] this time with no 2 Dolgoch heading four passenger coaches and the brake van up to Abergynolwyn.

Both photo: B B Edmonds, Tim Edmonds collection.





No 5 Midlander and no 4 Edward Thomas on shed at Pendre on 7th August 1966, showing no 4 sporting the Giesl ejector and with buffer beam and lamp bracket added to the cab.

Photo: Tim Edmonds

way up the valley on overgrown track with sleepers rotted away and ballast non-existent. By the time of Sir Haydn's death in 1950 it would have seemed the railway would have passed into the pages of the history books.

However in 1949 a railway enthusiast called Tom Rolt visited the Talyllyn. On learning of its impending fate he set about seeing about saving the line. His initial thoughts were regauging it to a 10¼-inch gauge miniature railway (in a

soon returned to Whitehaven for an extra pair of wheels to be added (unusually for a 0-4-2 the new trailing wheels were fixed to the frame). Both locomotives subsequently received cabs. The rolling stock comprised four passenger coaches, a brake van and about a hundred slate wagons for the line's core business.

The first public trains ran in December 1866. Right from the start, the railway was worked by the "one engine in steam" principle with passenger services operating from Tywyn Wharf station to Abergynolwyn with slate trains continuing to another mile to the bottom of an incline to the quarry at Nant Gwernol – the final section being officially a non-passenger mineral line, but the odd quarryman sneaked onto the footplate for a lift. Another incline was built to serve the village of Abergynolwyn – goods being brought in included casks of beer for the village pub appropriately named "The Railway" and amongst those being brought out were the contents of the village's cess pits which were apparently taken down the line and dumped on certain fields.

Apart from the provision of a works at Tywyn Pendre in 1867, and the opening of intermediate stations at Rhydyronen, Brynglas and Dolgoch in 1873 there was little change on the railway along with virtually no investment for the next 85 years. Although it was initially a success, by the early 1900s the quarry saw its production decrease dramatically and in 1910 when the Aberdovey Slate Company's lease expired, it seemed as if closure would be imminent. However, seeing that the closure would bring high unemployment to the area a local landowner and MP Sir Henry Haydn Jones purchased the quarry and railway and committed himself to keep them both going during his lifetime. However he did not put in any capital so for the next three decades the railway continued in deteriorating state of repair. An interesting point is that at the time of Sir Haydn's take over loco No. 2 was carrying the name *Pretoria*, having been renamed in 1900 but reverting back to *Dolgoch* in 1914.

Although the slate traffic enjoyed a brief revival in the period following the First World War, it soon declined again and continued at a low level until the workings at Bryn Eglwys were deemed unsafe and closed in 1947. Staying true to his word, Sir Haydn kept the railway going. From the 1920s an additional form of revenue came from tourism but this was not very profitable and by the late 1940s a passenger service was operated on two days a week with *Dolgoch* as the only operable locomotive (*Talyllyn* having been unserviceable since 1945) although temperamental and in a bad state of repair, and meandered her

similar vein to the Ravensglass & Eskdale) with a short section of dual gauge track between Wharf and Pendre, but this was quickly dropped in favour of the then unheard idea of forming a society of amateurs to take over the railway as it stood. This led to a meeting on 11th October 1950 in Birmingham for interested individuals and thus the embryo Talyllyn Railway Preservation Society was born.

Negotiations soon began with Sir Haydn's Executors to transfer the railway company's shares to a new company – Talyllyn Holdings Limited. Duly done the society was able to take responsibility and ran its first trains on 14th May 1951 from Tywyn Wharf to Rhydyronen with services being extended to Abergynolwyn on 4th June.

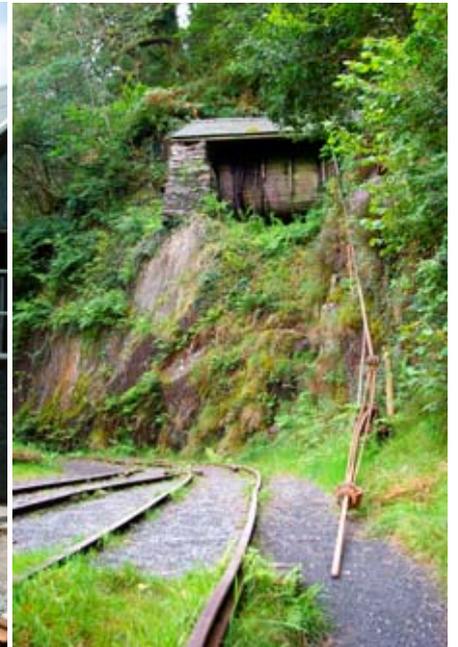
For the first season *Dolgoch* remained the only working locomotive, although it was realised a major overhaul would be needed. At the time it was considered that *Talyllyn* was beyond economic repair, so the society searched for alternative motive power. As described earlier the Corris Railway was also 2ft 3in gauge but had closed in 1948. So the society was able to purchase two locomotives that were stored at Machynlleth from British Railways at the cost of £25 each. The two locomotives in question were a 0-4-2ST built by the Falcon Locomotive Works of Loughborough in 1878 and a 0-4-2ST built by Kerr Stuart in 1924. They were numbered Corris Nos. 3 and 4 respectfully and these numbers were retained by the TR, the locomotives having kept these numbers through four changes of ownership – the Corris being one of three Welsh narrow gauge lines being absorbed into the GWR at the 1923 grouping and subsequently BR in 1948. However they were given names by the new concern, No. 3 becoming *Sir Haydn* and No. 4 *Edward Thomas* (named after the railway's manager prior to preservation). Unlike the TR locomotives they had hook couplings, rather than buffers and screw couplings, and man-holes in the rear of the cabs. Both these features were later removed.

When *Sir Haydn* undertook trials in June 1951, making her the first new locomotive on the line for 85 years, it was found that she frequently derailed as in places the poorly maintained track had spread – this had not been a problem with *Talyllyn* and *Dolgoch* as they had wider wheel treads, so she was quickly withdrawn. *Edward Thomas* was not in a usable condition, however the Hunslet Locomotive Company, whose chairman was a member of the preservation society, offered to overhaul her for free. She returned to Tywyn for the 1952 season allowing *Dolgoch* to be put to one side.



With a down train waiting in the loop, no 6 Douglas brings an assortment of coaches past the 1968 signal box at Brynglas on 8th June 1977.

Photo: Tim Edmonds



Between Nant Gwernol and Bryn Eglwys a walk follows the Alltwllt incline, at the top of which the drum house still remains, seen here on 18th August 2010.

Photo: Tim Edmonds

By the following year the society had, with the assistance of the Territorial Army, got the track to a good enough standard to enable *Sir Haydn* to operate safely so the railway had once again two locomotives available. This was boosted to three in 1954 with the arrival of a 0-4-0WT built by Andrew Barclay in 1918 for the RAF who used her at their Calshot base near Southampton until 1949 when she was sold to an engineering firm who subsequently donated her to the TR. She was named *Douglas* after the donor Douglas Abelson.

As well as new locomotives new rolling stock was needed to supplement the four original passenger coaches. Three came from the Penrhyn Railway – having been regauged from 2ft. Two of these ran as fully open coaches for many years before being fitted with roofs. Two further coaches formerly of the Glyn Valley Tramway (which closed in 1935) were acquired from a vicarage and a farm and restored as first class vehicles. Along with loco Nos. 3 and 4 an ex-Corris brake van dating from 1885 was acquired from BR which was used as a luggage van for a while before being relegated to engineering trains. For

these the society acquired wagons from the same source some still with GW initials. Later an ex-Corris coach was rescued and restored at Pendre, along with new stock designed and built by society members.

Although steam locomotives were preferred for passenger trains, it was soon realised that for engineering trains internal combustion was needed. The first such locomotive was a small petrol powered contraption powered by a Ford engine followed by a 2-4-0 converted tractor fitted with a turntable. Numbered 5 and 7 respectfully neither lasted long and the first successful I/C was a Ruston & Hornsby diesel mechanical locomotive dating from 1941 which arrived in 1957 from a quarry near Nuneaton. It was given the fleet number 5 and named *Midlander*.

Now without a Giesl ejector, No 4 Edward Thomas arrives at Nant Gwernol on 18th August 2010.

Photo: Tim Edmonds

No 6 Douglas arriving at the extended Abergynolwyn platform on 8th June 1977. The signal box had been installed the previous year.

Photo: Tim Edmonds



By the late 1950s the society had turned the fortunes of the Talyllyn around. Besides new locomotives and rolling stock, the permanent way was being much improved by new rail being laid with ex BR sleepers sawn in half and properly ballasted. The workshop at Pendre was properly equipped with machinery and tools while proper water towers were provided at Dolgoch and Abergynolwyn and a passing loop installed at Brynglas.

The public warmed to the idea of a railway being run by enthusiasts and this led to the saving of the Festiniog, Welshpool & Llanfair and Ravenglass & Eskdale by similar societies and by the 1960s the concept was extended to standard gauge with the Bluebell, Middleton and Keighley & Worth Valley Railways.

The TR also enjoyed the attention of the media with the BBC filming an outside broadcast at the railway in 1956 and featuring in their Railway Roundabout programmes with the producer Patrick Whitehouse being an early member. Another member and volunteer guard was the Rev. Wilbert Awdry who wrote aspects of the TR into his stories as the Skarloey Railway with the locos being given alter egos of *Skarloey*, *Rheneas*, *Sir Handel*, *Peter Sam*, *Rusty* and *Duncan*. In addition, it is said that the film *The Titfield Thunderbolt* was inspired by the saving of the Talyllyn.

In the mid 1950s thoughts turned to getting *Talyllyn* and *Dolgoch* operational – *Talyllyn* having stood idle for over 10 years. *Dolgoch* was the first to be sent to an outside firm in the Midlands in 1954 with *Talyllyn* following in 1957. *Talyllyn* was returned in 1958 and was thus available for traffic for the first time in 13 years, though her reliability still left something to be desired until she was rebuilt again in the 1970s. *Dolgoch*, on the other hand, took considerably longer and did not return until 1963, when she did return to Tywyn she was met by much celebration with all the other locomotives lined up at Wharf.

Another notable feature was the fitting of a Giesl Ejector funnel to *Edward Thomas* in 1958 by the German inventor who was trying to interest BR in it. The thinking behind it was the smaller tubes in the funnel would decrease fuel consumption. Unfortunately no major savings were noted and a conventional funnel was fitted in 1969, while BR only fitted the device to one Bulleid Battle of Britain and a 9F, as by then no major improvements were carried out on main line locomotives.

The track layout at Wharf was renewed in 1964 with more sidings added for stock storage along with a new station building incorporating a shop and the Narrow Gauge Railway Museum, replacing a smaller and somewhat inadequate museum in an old gunpowder store which had been opened since 1954. This housed many artefacts including many locomotives from all over Britain, and was opened in time for the railway's centenary in 1965.

The facilities at the other stations were still basic at this time with the original shelters still in situ. Refreshments were available at Abergynolwyn by means of a mobile refreshment van being brought up with the first train each day and returned to Tywyn each evening. This practice, which was copied from the nearby Fairbourne Railway, continued until 1969 when a new station building was built.

As a brief digression, a feature of the early years of the preservation society and that of the Festiniog Railway Society was of running of main line specials from London. This started in 1953 with 2 GWR diesel railcars (a 600 mile round trip with no onboard toilet!) but quickly changed to a train hauled by a classic GWR steam locomotive, such as a Castle, Saint, or in 1957 the famous 3440 *City of Truro*, from Paddington to Shrewsbury via High Wycombe, Birmingham and Wolverhampton. Because of the weight restriction on the Cambrian Lines a lighter locomotive was used to the last leg to Tywyn, usually a Manor or Dukedog double headed. From 1966 steam was banned from the Western Region so diesel haulage was used and

in 1968 the route was changed to starting from Euston with electric haulage to Wolverhampton, this format continued until the specials were discontinued after 1972.

Back on the TR, by 1970 thoughts had turned to reopening the mineral extension beyond Abergynolwyn to passenger traffic. This was no mean feat as the line had been disused for over twenty years, though not on the same scale as the FR's building of a new route to Blaenau Ffestiniog at the same time. In order to bring it up to passenger standards some of the curves were eased and the trackbed widened which necessitated rock blasting and the demolishing of the Abergynolwyn incline winding house. A new station was built at Nant Gwernol and opened in May 1976.

Other improvements round this time including a new passing loop at Quarry Siding in 1969 and a signal box at Abergynolwyn opening at the same time as the extension. Although the railway has no fixed signals all points are interlocked and block sections with electric tokens are used to control multiple train movements.

New passenger coaches continued to be built at Pendre and on the locomotive front two new diesels arrived in 1969-70. These were another Ruston & Hornsby 4w built in 1964 and named *Merseysider* and numbered 8, and an ex National Coal Board Hunslet 0-4-0 built in 1950 which became No. 9 *Alf*. In addition, a 3ft gauge steam locomotive was acquired from Ireland at the same time with the intention of using parts to build a new locomotive at Pendre.

Although work on the new locomotive started, the project was shelved in 1975 as the railway was in financial difficulties due to falling passenger numbers, a situation that continued until the 1990s. The only major changes in this period were the enhancement of passenger facilities at either end of the line and at Dolgoch.

Another change around this time was the appearance of locomotives in different liveries. Up until the 1980s all locomotives were painted in the standard bronze-green lined with gold. The first exception to this rule was when *Sir Haydn* appeared in her original Corris Railway livery of red which enabled her to masquerade as the Rev Awdry's *Sir Handel* on occasions. Subsequently *Edward Thomas* and *Douglas* have run as their Skarloey counterparts. More serious liveries have included *Dolgoch* in maroon, Talyllyn in LNWR Black and *Edward Thomas* in BR Black.

Work on No. 7 restarted in the late 1980s and she was completed in 1991. Built as a 0-4-2T and named *Tom Rolt* by his widow Sonia. The 1990s also saw TR trains fitted with continuous braking for the first time. Up until then the railway had been exempted from having its stock so fitted due to the slow speed of trains, but now the Railway Inspectorate withdrew the dispensation and by 2000 all the steam locomotives had been fitted with Westinghouse air pumps.

In 2001 the 50th anniversary of preservation was marked with the launch of a redevelopment of Wharf station. This included a new shop, restaurant and booking office plus a revamped museum. This was officially opened on 13 July 2005 by Prince Charles on his second visit to the railway.

Today the Talyllyn is a much different railway than it was in 1950. It carries over 50,000 passengers a year and is one of the major tourist attractions of North Wales. It is unique that all of its original rolling stock from 1865 is still in regular service as the 150th anniversary of the line approaches. With the preservation society still giving valuable support, the Talyllyn is on track to celebrate its centenary of preservation in 2051.

I would like to acknowledge Tim Edmonds' assistance in proof reading this article and for providing photographs from his and his father's collection.

The Railways of Buckinghamshire

TWO NORTH WESTERN BRANCHES

Mike Walker



On a bitterly cold 12th December 1991, 56036 pauses during shunting operations at Forders Sidings.

Photo by Dave Theobald.

In addition to the Aylesbury branch, the London & North Western Railway had two other branches of relatively early construction which connected with the main line in Buckinghamshire although both soon left the county's boundaries. However to complete the story of the county's railways both are covered in this instalment.

BLETCHLEY TO BEDFORD

In the 1840's Bedford was being ignored by the proposed main lines north from London so it was left to local interests to promote a connection. A public meeting held in Bedford on 23rd April 1844 led to the incorporation of the Bedford & London & Birmingham Railway Company to build the 16½ mile line with George and Robert Stephenson named as the engineers. The Act was passed in 1845 and the Duchess of Bedford cut the first sod on 13th December 1845 signalling the start of construction.

The contractors, Grissel Peto & Jackson, were confident that the line would be ready for opening by July 1846 but heavy rains that summer caused several landslips in the Bogborough Hill area which delayed the opening until 17th November 1846. The proceedings were slightly spoilt when the first train, consisting of no less than 33 carriages hauled by a pair of Bury 2-2-0 locomotives and carrying 600 passengers, derailed on the 20 chain radius curve leaving Bletchley.

The line was built with double track throughout but only the first 4½ miles from Bletchley were within Bucks. There were initially stations at Fenny Stratford, Woburn (renamed Woburn Sands in 1851), Ridgmont, Lidlington and Manston (later renamed Millbrook). All were provided with distinctive station houses in a mock-Tudor design and all except Millbrook survive in private hands.

In Bedford the line terminated in the St. Johns district on the south side of the town.

From the opening the line was worked by the LNWR (which had been formed in 1846 by the merger of the London & Birmingham and Grand Junction Railways) which later absorbed the Bedford Railway Company.

In 1847 the Midland Railway submitted plans to build south from Leicester through Bedford to join the Great Northern at Hitchin. There were various delays and the line did not receive approval until 1853 but with further delays during construction it did not open until May 1857.

A feature of the original Bedford Railway stations were the ornate station houses with mock-Tudor framing. Several survive today including Fenny Stratford.

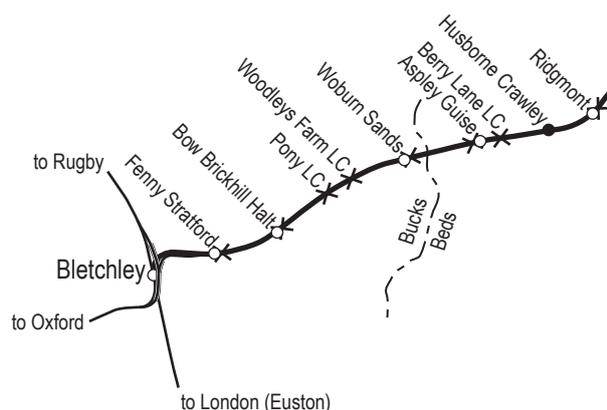
Photo by Mike Walker





An unidentified Class 25 ambles past Bow Brickhill Halt on 16th April 1977.

Photo by Dave Theobald.



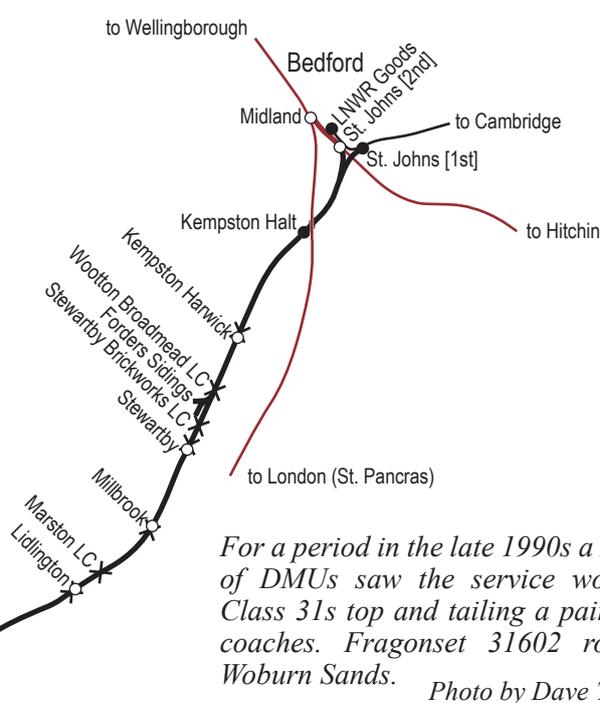
The Midland built its own station on the west side of Bedford which was around a mile from the LNWR although the Midland line crossed the LNWR on the level just west of the station. Both were known simply as Bedford until 1924 when the LNWR station had St. Johns appended and the Midland, logically, Midland.

Following the opening of the Midland's London extension from Bedford to St. Pancras in 1867 the Hitchin line became a branch and closed to passengers at the end of 1961 and goods in 1964.

In 1862 the LNWR extended the line eastwards from Bedford to Cambridge incorporating the Sandy & Potton Railway for some of its length. Combined with the Buckinghamshire Railway from Bletchley to Oxford (opened in 1850 and to be covered in a later part) this gave the LNWR a strategic cross-country route.

Starting on 1st December 1905 the LNWR started to use steam railmotors on the line and from the same date opened 7 simply constructed low platform Halts at Bow Brickhill, Apsley Guise, Husborne Crawley, Wootton Pillinge, Wootton Broadmead, Kempston Hardwick and Kempston & Elstow. Only the first of these was in Bucks whilst Husborne Crawley, Wootton Broadmead and Kempston & Elstow closed in 1941.

In addition to passengers, the line carried a considerable goods traffic from the outset with coal prices in Bedford dropping by almost half and dealing a severe, if not fatal blow to stage carriers and the Ouse Navigation Canal. In addition to the usual variety of goods conveyed on such a railway, a lucrative traffic was generated by the brick trade.



For a period in the late 1990s a shortage of DMUs saw the service worked by Class 31s top and tailing a pair of Mk2 coaches. Fragonset 31602 rolls into Woburn Sands. Photo by Dave Theobald.



A brickworks was opened alongside the line at Wootton Pillinge by B J Forder & Sons in 1897 and it grew rapidly to be one of the largest brick manufacturing plants in the world. Eventually there would be no fewer than 167 brick chimneys throughout Marston Vale. The company was renamed the London Brick Company & Forders Ltd in 1926 and shortened to London Brick Company in 1937. Wootton Pillinge, a model village built for the workers on the lines of Saltaire, was renamed Stewartby in 1935 in honour of Sir Malcolm Stewart who had bought the company in 1920. The station name changed too at the same time.

At its peak the works were producing 18 million bricks a year or 20% of British brick production. Whilst most of the required clay was dug locally with the Vale, large amounts of coal were brought in by rail, much of it hopper wagons, whilst finished brick were shipped out in open wagons by the hundreds. Later this traffic was carried in Palbrick wagons which used open containers or pallets carried on standard 4-wheel chassis. Finally it was conveyed in open ISO containers on Freightliner flats until the railways gave up the business early in 1985. The brickworks continued in production using road transport but despite around £1million being invested in 2005-7 in an attempt to reduce sulphur dioxide emissions, the plant was closed by its last owners, Hanson, in 2008.



A Cravens unit at Bedford St. Johns on 5th February 1972. The Midland line to Hitchin crossed near the signal box.

Photo by Don Woodworth

The extensive yards which served the brickworks, known appropriately as Forders Sidings, survived the closure and have in recent times been used by Network Rail as a “virtual quarry” storing ballast for the WCML upgrade.

The Modernisation Plan of 1955 recognised the importance of the Oxford to Cambridge line as a strategic cross-country line giving access to the East Coast ports. To reduce delays in crossing the main line at Bletchley a fly-over was constructed at considerable expense and work started on a new marshalling yard west of Bletchley.

However plans soon changed and in 1964 closure was proposed of the Bletchley to Bedford line as it had earned only £102,000 in 1963 against costs of £199,700. The two county councils aided by C J Allen managed to fight off the proposal but three years later it was back, this time the whole Oxford to Cambridge line. Oxford to Bletchley and Bedford to Cambridge did indeed close to passengers on 30th December 1967 but the Bletchley to Bedford section was retained due to the difficulty in arranging a suitable replacement bus service.

Economies were made and from 15th July 1968 “Pay Trains” were introduced and all stations became unstaffed halts. Goods traffic, with the exception of that in connection with the brickworks, was also withdrawn exactly a year previously from the intermediate stations although Bedford St. Johns remained open for goods until 10th August 1970. In 1973 the GLC and BR signed a 20-year deal to bring London waste from Hendon to fill the huge holes left by the clay workings. The block trains, similar to those that run to Calvert, were unloaded at Forders Sidings.

Passenger services were again threatened in 1973 but still United Counties had difficulty in arranging a replacement service so once more it was reprieved. PSO Grants to support loss-making lines were introduced the following year and included the line. In 1980 the Bedford to Bletchley Rail Users Association was formed and has since worked tirelessly to promote the line.

In 1979 the line was singled from 0m 67c outside Bletchley through Fenny Stratford to 1m 42c. This was to reduce the cost of bridging the A5 trunk road which was being diverted around the east side of Bletchley as a by-pass. Remarkably the rest of the line remained double and fully signalled thanks to the numerous manned level crossings.

In 1984 BR finally diverted the Bletchley to Bedford trains into the Midland station which had been rebuilt slightly north of its original location. The branch trains now swung left onto a sharply curved single track line which had originally formed a goods connection between the two companies then followed the route of the Midland line into the main station where a bay platform was provided for their use. To continue to serve the St. Johns district a replacement St. Johns station consisting of a single platform and shelter was provided beneath the Amphill Road bridge. The new arrangements came into effect from 14th May 1984.

During 2004 the line was resignalled with colour-lights controlled by a new VDU-based Marston Vale Signalling Centre housed in a new building behind Ridgemont station. This not only replaced the semaphore signals and boxes at Fenny Stratford, Woburn Sands, Forders Sidings and Bedford St. Johns but also the many manned level crossing Gate Boxes along the line - most of which were no more than open-air ground frames with, if they were lucky, a small shelter. The crossings were converted to barriers either controlled by cctv from Marston Vale or of the AHB variety.

Following privatisation the line became the responsibility of Silverlink and received some notoriety by being one of the last outposts of the Class 121 “Bubblecars”. When these became increasingly difficult to keep in service a temporary solution was found in the form of pairs of Class 31s hired from Fragonset top and tailing pairs of Mk2 coaches. Eventually Class 150 Sprinters took over and they remain the principal type of train used today with occasional Class 153s under the aegis of London Midland which replaced Silverlink in November 2007. A basic service of two trains per hour is operated.

Following the uncertainty of the sixties and seventies the line’s future is now secure and will see electrification as part of the East-West Rail project. There is even the possibility that the line onward from Bedford to Cambridge may be reopened although subsequent development means a new route will have to be found in some places and Bedford St. Johns may yet return to its original site.

Silverlink 150128 loads passengers including MDRS members at Bletchley bound for Bedford on 12th May 2007.

Photo by Mike Walker



LEIGHTON BUZZARD TO DUNSTABLE

This branch barely troubles us as barely its first half mile was in Buckinghamshire. The Dunstable & London & Birmingham Railway Act was passed in 1845 authorising the construction of 7 miles of double track railway with a capital of £50,000. The L&B was empowered to purchase the land, arrange construction and acquire the company upon completion. The contractor was Thomas Jackson and the route featured no major engineering features or, initially, intermediate stations. It opened for goods traffic on 29th May 1848 and for passengers on 1st June.

Initially the branch started from the original L&B Leighton station but this was replaced by one on the present site, 176 yards to the south, on 14th February 1859 shortening the branch accordingly. An intermediate station was opened at Stanbridgeford in 1860 although trains had been stopping at the level crossing there since 1849.

A second railway was built to extend the line from Dunstable to Luton and Welwyn. To facilitate a level crossing over Watling Street (A5) the Luton terminal was replaced by a new one slightly to the north with the original becoming the goods yard. The line opened as far as Luton on 3rd May 1858 but the nominally independent company, which had built its own Dunstable station on Church Street, hit financial problems and was unable to complete the line. The LNWR provided the trains to Luton. The LD&WJ later amalgamated with the Hertford & Welwyn to form the Hertford Luton & Dunstable and the line finally opened from Luton to Welwyn on 1st September 1860 with trains continuing through to Hatfield. The Great Northern Railway took over the operation to Dunstable from this time.

Passenger traffic between Leighton Buzzard and Dunstable was always rather light with only around nine or ten trains in each direction daily in 1960. In later years this reduced to as few as four which were push-pull operated by LNWR 2-4-2T or later Ivatt Class 2 2-6-2T locomotives and locally the service was known as the "Dunstable Dasher". It tended to get busier on Saturdays when Luton were playing at home and extra trains were run.



A busy scene at Leighton Buzzard on 10th May 1962 as 41289 propels the Dunstable branch train away past the shed whilst 48657 waits for the road north with a sand train

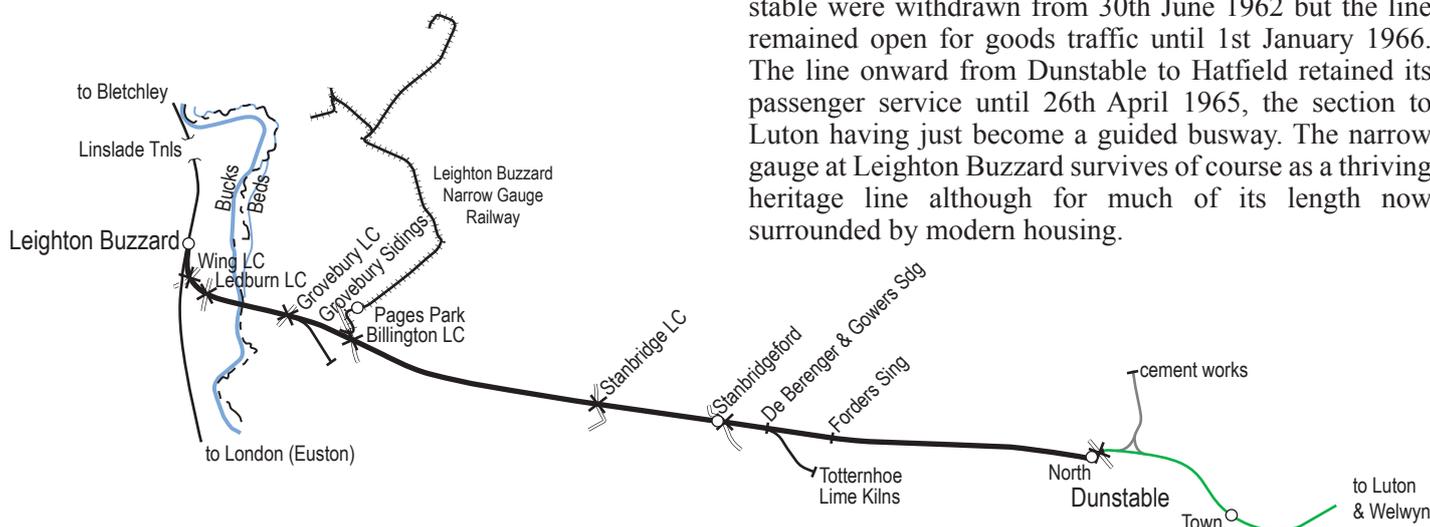
Photo: Colour-Rail

General goods traffic was similarly light although there was coal to the gas works in Dunstable and cattle traffic at Stanbridgeford which was also used by a market gardener in Eaton Bray to send strawberries in season.

It was however limestone and sand that generated the largest amount of goods traffic. At Totternhoe, a half mile east of Stanbridgeford, a short branch led to a 1 in 10 rope worked incline up to extensive limestone quarries, a mixture of surface and underground workings. Much limestone was dispatched from the site, some going to the Dunstable Cement Works in Dunstable, until the railway priced itself out of the business in April 1965.

Around Leighton Buzzard there were, and still are, sizeable deposits of high quality sand. In 1919 a 2' gauge railway was opened to bring the sand from the pits north east of the town to interchange sidings on the Dunstable branch at Grovebury. A glass works was also established at this point. Over the years thousands of tons of sand were despatched by rail until closure of the sidings and line from Leighton Buzzard on 5th December 1969.

Passenger services between Leighton Buzzard and Dunstable were withdrawn from 30th June 1962 but the line remained open for goods traffic until 1st January 1966. The line onward from Dunstable to Hatfield retained its passenger service until 26th April 1965, the section to Luton having just become a guided busway. The narrow gauge at Leighton Buzzard survives of course as a thriving heritage line although for much of its length now surrounded by modern housing.



A CONNECTICUT YANKEE IN KING ARTHUR'S COURT

Part 4 North to Scotland Col. Don Woodworth

Don Woodworth, a friend of the late Dave Theobald, spent 8 years living in the UK in the seventies and eighties whilst serving with the US Air Force. A lifelong rail enthusiast, Don continues his look back at his experiences during that period which led him to explore almost every mile of the network and provides an interesting perspective on our railways at that time from the viewpoint of an outsider.



The scenery at Sandy, Beds. has no doubt changed substantially since the cross-country Cambridge-Oxford route crossing the East Coast Main Line at this point was lifted and since the electrification of the ECML. Post-Beeching axe and pre-electrification, BR 258 (40058) is booming south at 18:41 on 12th May 1973. In the background, one can see the grade with remnants of the abandoned Sandy-Cambridge segment of the former Cambridge-Oxford route.

Over the years, we had several wonderful outings to Scotland. The best was probably in the early 70s when one of my sisters and one of my wife's cousins and husband came to the UK on holiday. Rather than drive all the way north, we took an HST to Edinburgh and used a hire car to get about before returning south and home, again on an HST. It was the first time anyone in our party had ridden on an HST, so it was great fun as boomed along at 125 mph. I had become quite used to higher speed trains by then, but 125 mph was a real treat! For those from the States who were used to 79 mph on Amtrak (on its good days), 125 mph was like a miracle!

A subsequent trip to Scotland was a solo event in the mid-80s with the intent of covering all the trackage there that had not been previously ridden. I managed to cover every single line except for the short Balloch Pier line leading to a steamer connection on Loch Lomond. This was a particularly frustrating experience as I had planned to do it twice and was frustrated each time – once on 5th June 1980 when service on the line was cancelled due to an accident earlier in the day and again on 8th June when the connecting train for the *Maid of the Loch* was cancelled as the vessel was fully booked by

a charter group. I recall correctly because the connecting steamer was out of service. In contemporary terms, bummer!

Scotland did not offer the wealth of steam variety as did Wales, but the Kyle of Lochalsh Line out to the town of the same name opposite the Isle of Skye was certainly a lovely ride. My ride predated the time when a Black 5 would haul excursion trains on this line. Little did I realize at the time though that I had scooped Harry Potter by 25 years in my ride across Glenfinnan Viaduct. It was also fun to ride to George-mas Junction, the most northerly railway junction in Britain, and then onward to the tip of the island.

Getting to Scotland was half the fun. Three highlights of the trip north that I've always enjoyed were the great King Edward VII bridge over the River Tyne at Newcastle, York, floating over Durham, the border bridge at Berwick, and (of course) Edinburgh itself. Still on my list of things to photograph are the bridges at Newcastle and Berwick,



One of my favorite places to go picture taking with Dave Theobald was on the ECML at Huntingdon, Hunts. (before Huntingdonshire got gobbled up into Cambridgeshire). I very much liked the great sweeping curve there and the lovely brick arched bridge in the background that was always a perfect photo prop. In this view, Deltic 55007 Pinza races south for London at 14:38 on the afternoon of 12th October 1974.

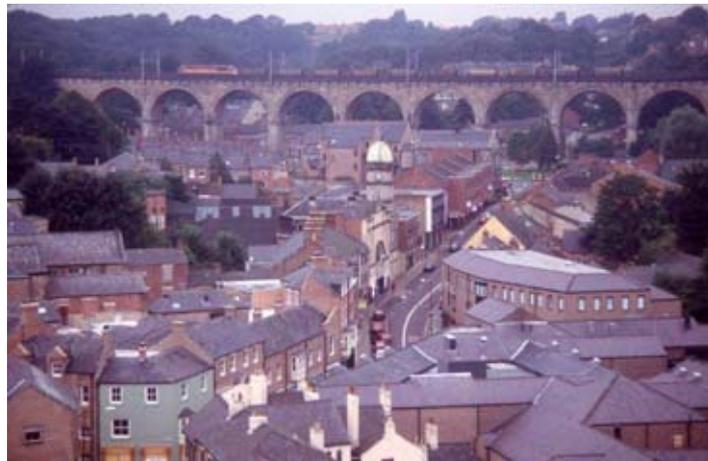


I loved the view looking south from the station platform at Grantham. The 100 mph speed limit sign was something just not seen in the United States. I could not help but find it intriguing that a limit of 100 mph meant that HSTs had to reduce speed from 125 mph! In this view, northbound 1507 (47408) was hurrying its train north on the afternoon of 20 Sep 1972. Here was evidence that we were moving north at considerable speed.

but I did reasonably well at the other sites. Proceeding from sunny south to frigid north, it was fun to rush past places where I sometimes went gricing with Dave Theobald, with the scenery becoming progressively less familiar as we journeyed north.

Many of the accompanying photographs were taken during our motoring holiday in Scotland in August of 1973. I later had occasion to ride all of the lines discussed in June of 1980. On 6 June 1980, I was aboard the 17.45 departure from Inverness to Wick behind 26040. We were away 35 minutes late because the train was held for a connection from the south. Given the relatively few trains run on this line, it was totally understandable why this was done because a missed connection would have resulted in an inordinately long wait for any passengers unfortunate enough to have missed the connection. As we traveled north, I struck up a conversation with a nice Scottish lady who was traveling to Wick. She kindly arranged for her son to take me to my originally booked hotel, which turned out to be pretty awful, and I thus

And if it's Edinburgh, it must be Scotland! In a semi-unusual view of Edinburgh Waverley Station, Type 4 363 (40163) waits to take a train south, a Class 08 station pilot prepares to shunt cars a few tracks over. The Sir Walter Scott Monument, located near the station, provided a wonderful vantage point to observe railway operations.



Durham has always held special fascination for me. I loved train journeys through the town where the train seemed to float above the scenery, with the great cathedral looming above the loop of the River Wear to the east of the ECML. I'd had a visit to Durham in August of 1997 with my friend Dave Theobald. We were cursed with marginal to miserable weather for the duration of the visit and trains simply refused to appear during the miniscule breaks we had in the clouds, totally frustrating my desire to get the "master shot" I've seen of trains passing through Durham in many British railway magazines. This view of an EWS Class 56 hurrying a goods train south at 09:00 on 24th Aug 1997 was taken during brief period of brightening weather that we had – not the shot I so much wanted with Durham cathedral in the background but suitable to give a nice sense of how the ECML sort of floats above the town.

found myself doubly in debt to this nice lady when her son then took me to a much nicer place.

As it turned out, I didn't get to overly enjoy the amenities of the hotel as I had a 05.30 departure the next morning for Inverness and then on two additional trains that would take me onward to Edinburgh. I have always been allergic to morning, so an 05.30 departure meant an even earlier wakeup and sprint to the railway station. There was no thought of breakfast – it would either be some snacks I'd packed with me or something aboard the train if there were a buffet car.



In stark contrast to dieselized Edinburgh Waverley, Glasgow Central was the northern terminus of the electrified West Coast Main Line and center for all of the electrified suburban lines serving Glasgow and vicinity. Here, 86214 Sans Pareil in striking livery awaits its train on 4th June 1980. Interestingly, I had seen a replica of the original Sans Pareil under steam at the Rainhill re-enactment farther south in Lancashire only a week earlier on 26th May 1980.

Things went badly wrong at the hotel and I did not receive the wake-up call that I'd anticipated. Disaster was looming because the next southbound departure would not have been for about another 4 or 5 hours, totally messing up the closely planned schedule I had to cover additional new mileage while I was in the north. Fortunately, it becomes light very early in this part of Scotland in June – a major help when trying to navigate the labyrinthine passages of an older hotel

In suitably murky conditions, BRCW Type 2 26035 (D5335) arriving in Inverness from Wick at 16:17 hours on 6th June 1980.



when making a very hurried exit with one's camera equipment and luggage. Even with the advantage of daylight and no panicked people competing for space in the narrow corridors of the hotel, it became quickly obvious how easy it was to become disoriented in an unfamiliar space as it took me several goes to find my way out. This experience made a real believer out of me in later years when staying at a hotel or motel – I always check for the most direct egress route in case of an emergency.

Long story short – I made the train with literally seconds to spare and no time for my originally anticipated photography. Ordinarily, I'd have been really upset about this but, thanks to the forbearance of my wife and family members in 1979, I had photos from our motoring holiday from August 1979. Thus, one very sleepy passenger began his trip back to the southern climes of Edinburgh.

I had planned a direct route back south. The 05.30 departure from Thurso was spot on time, with an equally on time arrival at Inverness at 10.22. With time to buy a cup of tea and a small apple pie for breakfast for the princely sum of 47 pence, I was off behind 47458 on the 10.35 departure for Perth, departing 5 minutes late but arriving on time at 13.22. A final ride behind 47546 had me away from Perth at 15.33 (a 16 minute late departure) and finally into Edinburgh on time at 16.54. It's a long way from Thurso to Edinburgh!

I shall spare readers a photo of the great Firth of Forth Bridge and share instead a view of the Tay Bridge at Dundee – a lovely view except that someone forgot the sun. Here, two sets of Scottish Region dmu's move north toward Dundee station on the miserable afternoon of 7th June 1980. I had anticipated having a scout around the Granite City but gray granite on a miserable gray day is not conducive to photography so I abandoned the attempt. The symmetry of the mixed liveries of the two sets is noteworthy.



Having made the trek to Thurso, I figured it was only appropriate to find my way to the far opposite corner of the kingdom and by 18th June I was in Penzance.

To be continued...

There is a Tyndrum Upper Station for the line to Mallaig and a Tyndrum Lower Station for the line to Oban. I am fairly certain that this photo of a Class 26 was taken at the former location at it climbs into the highlands with a unit train of oil tanks. The line of the railway itself seems to form a boundary between the more moderate climate below the tracks and the barren summit of the hills in the background.



Dingwall is the junction for the mainline running north to Wick and Thurso and the West Highland line running to the Kyle of Lochalsh opposite the Isle of Skye. I know that Class 24, 25, and 26 diesels were used in other places throughout the UK but I have always associated them primarily with Scotland. Here, 5332 (26032) accelerates its train away from Dingwall on the afternoon of 13th August 1973, headed for the Kyle of Localsh.

Inverness is well along the east coast of Scotland en route to Georgemas Junction, where the line splits for Thurso at the very north of Britain and Wick slightly farther south and to the east. I was surprised at the size of the railroad station at Inverness, expecting something rather smaller so far out on the far perimeter of the BR system. Here, two "Choppers" 20102 and 20.121 are shown coupled to a van at a quiet corner of the station, while main line action goes on in the background.



The wonderful Kyle of Lochalsh line runs from Dingwall to the town of the same name opposite the Isle of Skye. I think some of the magic of the island has been lost with the construction of a bridge to the mainland, but I suppose it does make life easier for both the former "islanders" and tourists. Still, if I were to live on an island, I could not think of a much more splendid name than the Isle of Skye. Here is another view of 5332 on the late afternoon of 13th August 1972, looking from the railway terminus at the Kyle of Lochalsh toward the Isle of Skye. One would have to work quite hard at it to find a more scenic location for a railway station.

Here we are at the top of the world in Thurso. It's impossible to go farther north by train in the UK. 5333 (26033) is ready for an afternoon departure southward on 10th August 1973. Note the interesting container on a flat wagon in the yard.



FOUR PLUS FIVE EQUALS SIX OR SEVEN

(a visit to County Durham to see some A4's)

Story and pictures by Tim Speechley

When the National Railway Museum had first announced plans to display all six extant A4 Pacifics together again, obviously necessitating getting the two preserved in North America transported across the Atlantic, I thought it was a pretty crazy idea, likely to waste an awful lot of money. However, as you all know the plan took shape, the locos duly arrived, were restored and in July 2013, just right for the 75th anniversary of Mallard's record-breaking run, all six were presented to the public at York in "The Great Gathering". It proved to be a monumental success, attracting huge numbers of people to the museum.

So where was I? - on holiday in Jersey. I had just retired from work and some months before had booked this trip as a little celebration, being either oblivious to, or forgetting that the event would be taking place just then. At the time I didn't mind too much but as 2013 came to an end and the return of *Dwight D Eisenhower* and *Dominion of Canada* to their respective museums started to approach, I thought I really ought to take the opportunity to see them. Fortunately there would be another get together of the six locos in February 2014 at Shildon and I started thinking in terms of seeing them there, though County Durham is an awfully long way away.

Initially I had thought of a day trip. East Coast Trains have offered some very cheap advanced fares in recent times and I looked at that possibility but unfortunately there just weren't the deals around, as it would be the half-term holiday week. At this point I had a lucky break. Three guys with whom I have become friends at the Stevenage Locomotive Society also fancied a trip north, so we decided to go together by car and make it a two or three day affair. I looked at accommodation and found some very reasonably at the Travelodge at Sedgfield, only a few miles from Shildon. The plan was to take John Stiles's Toyota, so I would have a restful time "on the cushions".

However, at this point fate took a hand. I had started to sell some surplus stuff on e-bay - my first use of the site - and although I had advertised them as "collection only" had sold a set of alloy wheels to somebody who was restoring an old Fiat who turned out to live in Toronto - no that's Toronto, County Durham (I didn't know it existed either). It's a suburb of Bishop Auckland and only a few miles from Shildon. I told him I might be able to get the wheels to him in mid-February provided we

could accommodate them, us and our luggage. It meant we had to use my car but explains why on Sunday 16th February four men and five wheels were heading north in a very well filled Fiat Qubo. I would point out that having left our last collection point at Barton-le-Clay, north of Luton, around mid-day, we made a non-stop run all the way to Shildon, thereby achieving a world record for Speechley's bladder no less significant than *Mallard's* speed exploits. The reason for this was simply that the sun was out and John was desperate to get some shots before the museum closed.

Arrival at Shildon was around four o'clock and it was absolutely heaving with people. We were very lucky to be arriving so near to the museum's closing time because we were able to get a parking spot very close to the entrance. Later in the week Shildon would become grid-locked as expectant visitors looked for parking places that had just been used up. First job - you know what. You can tell how busy an event is when the queue for the gents is out the door - it was!

Unfortunately the locomotives had been lined up outside the museum in a way specifically designed to make getting a decent shot of all six nigh on impossible. There was also a rather incongruous food outlet trailer placed between the first and second locos on the left hand side. I have to admit I wasn't actually expecting to get any photographic master shots and that was just as well. On the Sunday *Bittern* was working brake van trips up and down the yard but during the week, although in light steam, there were no movements. We stayed after the nominal closing time of 5 pm and as the crowds subsided, so did the light. Having spoken to Anthony Coulls, the NRM's Senior Curator of Rail Vehicles (who had given a talk to the Stevenage society in 2013), we eventually gave up and headed off to our hotel and some much needed dinner. This was taken at the Dun Cow Inn in Sedgfield, reputedly where Tony Blair, then MP for the area, took George W Bush for a pint during the then President's visit to the UK. Whether that was the case or not, we enjoyed our food and some very nice real ale from the Northumberland Brewery, oddly called "Passion Fruit".

Monday was dull and misty, so John's insistence we get there on the Sunday, come what may, was understandable and obviously a good move. I dropped John and Chris Allen, who was working



The two repatriated locos had been pushed well back, making photography very difficult



The only way you could photograph all six together during public opening times (this was early Tuesday)

on the A4 Society stand that day, at the museum and then Ken Bayley and I went to Toronto to deliver the five alloy wheels. This included a section of road over a viaduct that had once been part of an old railway line.

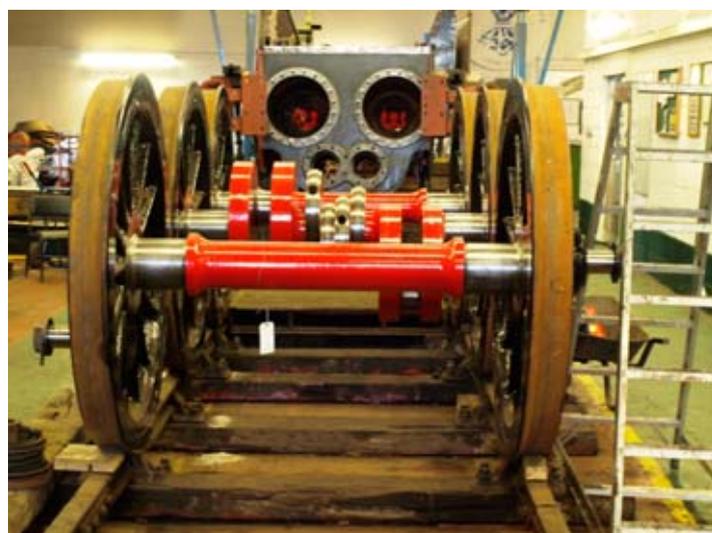
Back at Shildon, there was a lot of traffic and for one awful moment we thought the road to the museum was closed but fortunately not and we were lucky again to get a parking spot close to the entrance. On the way in, a coffee and bacon roll were the first order of the day and whilst at the milk and sugar stand I spotted another customer I recognised – Andrew Scott – formerly head of the NRM. We had a chat and I suggested it was a case of “coals to Newcastle” for him. He was very pleased at the success of the event, with 17,000 visitors on the Sunday. It also transpired he once lived in High Wycombe.

Photography was not very easy what with the weather and the unexpectedly large number of visitors (again). Locomotion is not really that large a place, so once I had done a tour, or two, of the exhibits I wasn't sure what to do, so I went for a walk to try to find where the old wagon works had been. This was the location for the celebrations for the Stockton and Darlington 150th anniversary back in 1975, at which I had spent a week as part of *Flying Scotsman's* support crew. I didn't have much success.

Back at the museum we had tickets for a talk due to be given by Andrew Goodman, owner of Moveright International, regarding his company's movement of the two American A4's. We had been looking forward to this but unfortunately he was unable to attend as a serious problem had arisen with one of his transporters. Instead Anthony Coulls did a short impromptu talk about the A4's in general. He's an excellent speaker and I wish I could bottle some of his enthusiasm.

We stayed late again and saw the locos being re-arranged by one of the museum's diesel shunters. Unfortunately it had started to rain quite heavily, to the dismay of the increasing numbers of photographers who were gathering for their expensive night shoot. At this you could get a decent shot of the line-up (albeit in the rain) and you will no doubt have seen the resultant pictures in magazines and national press and nice as they are, the asking price, £90, was too steep, even for my colleagues who attend charters very regularly. We spoke briefly to Neil Cave, who was arranging the night shoot and well known to my friends, and then headed off to the hotel and dinner again at the Dun Cow.

Our initial plan had been to head home on the Tuesday morning but it started sunny again, so at John's insistence we headed once



Joem under steam test and the J27 being overhauled with its (second set) of new cylinders.



Group shot in front of the seventh A4 (photo courtesy of John Stiles)

more to Shildon, where we were just too late to get some shots of the locos unencumbered by large numbers of the public. We stayed for an hour or so, then headed off towards Darlington. By now Shildon was full of cars and there were queues for some long way out of the centre. We suspected some people would have a very long walk to the museum, if indeed they could ever actually find somewhere to park.

In Darlington we were heading for the Head of Steam Museum (formerly Bank Top) but I managed to take a wrong turn into an industrial estate, though it had the beneficial effect of finding a very nice little café where we were able to get a much deserved full English breakfast. Refreshed, we found the museum but that it did not open on Tuesdays. However, as luck would have it, the NELPG has a workshop next door and J72 *Joem* (69023) was in steam having a boiler examination. Even more luckily, Chris spotted somebody who had been on A4 Society stand duty with him the day before, caught his attention, and we were allowed inside. Within the workshop were the parts of J27 65894, which is under overhaul and is having a new set of cylinders fitted. The newly cast ones were in the shed but another set were outside. Apparently the first ones had a fault in them and a second set had to be produced.

Following this brief supplementary visit I headed eastwards for what I had planned as a surprise extra attraction, though the others had already worked out where we were going. Having travelled all this way to see six A4's, why leave without seeing the seventh? In a rather unexpected location, close to a large Morrisons supermarket and adjacent to the A66 ring road, there is another A4, made of bricks but nonetheless well worth the trouble to go and see. This artwork was constructed in 1997 and was a project headed by sculptor David Mach. It was constructed by 21 bricklayers, labourers and apprentices using 185,000 bricks and 170 cubic metres of concrete, weighing 15,000 tonnes and reputedly cost £760,000. We all agreed the detour was well worth it and group shots were taken before we embarked on a slightly less demanding return to the south.

As a postscript, the exhibition of the six locomotives at the Locomotion museum in Shildon exceeded all expectations in terms of visitor numbers, just under 120,000 people being counted past the entrances. This is a staggering figure given the "back of beyond" location and whilst entry to the museum is free, the income generated from donations has greatly exceeded any expenditure the repatriation project has incurred, thereby proving my initial thoughts completely and utterly incorrect.

GET 'EM WHILE YOU CAN...

The recent announcement that Chiltern Railways will be switching to new Class 68s sub-leased from Direct Rail Services in December means that the sight of Class 67 "Skips" on the Chiltern line which we have taken for granted for the last five years will soon be but a memory. So get your photos this summer.

On 12th April 2014 67010, the only un-named member of the Chiltern fleet, departs from Banbury at the head of 1R37, the 13:06 London Marylebone to Birmingham Moor Street service, seen from the unusual vantage point of Banbury North Signal Box during a visit by the Swindon Panel Preservation Society.

Photo: Mike Walker

