

THE MARLOW DONKEY



Edition

159

December 2017



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Howay The Lads (Part 4)

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The Night Postal

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

All photos Old Oak Common 111 2nd September 2017. Mike Walker.

See article page 5 for full image details.

TIMETABLE

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

All meetings are held in the Bourne End Community Centre, Wakeman Rd, Bourne End at 7.45 for 8.00pm

- Thursday 21 December **CHRISTMAS SOCIAL**
Planning for this popular annual event is well-advanced and full details will be announced shortly.
- Thursday 18 January **1967 - THAT WAS THE YEAR THAT WAS** Geoff Plumb
Always a popular speaker, Geoff returns with another selection of his outstanding photography this time from the year 1967 - the last full year of "real" BR steam.
- Thursday 15 February **WHAT THE MODERN RAILWAY CAN DO FOR MARLOW & DISTRICT AND THE UNITED KINGDOM** Sir Peter Henty CBE
Following our usual brief AGM, we welcome Sir Peter who is the Chairman of Network Rail and will make a presentation on the future of the nation's rail network.
- Thursday 15 March **ENGINES OF THE NBL COMPANY, GLASGOW** Ken Livermore
The North British Locomotive Company was the nation's largest locomotive manufacturer, supplying many home railways and those across the British Empire and beyond. Ken is secretary of the NBL Preservation Group.
- Thursday 19 April **ON AND OFF THE FOOTPLATE Part 3** Bill Davies
Bill returns to recall another portion of his long railway career.

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

I'm sure I've written before about how difficult I sometimes find putting these few words together every three months and I can assure you it's not just those producing novels who get "writers' block". My interpretation of this section of the *Donkey* is that I should write something interesting (if possible), personal (to me – the Chairman), relevant (to railways, transport in general or the society) and timely, so being asked to create my notes for Christmas during October, due to production difficulties, has brought some consternation and I apologise if this edition's offering fails to meet those parameters listed above.

I think those of us who attended the visit to Statfold Barn in September enjoyed themselves but I have a sense that every time I go, there are yet more people in attendance and it was striking this time how much less accessible parts of the site had become and that restriction was being enforced quite officiously. I know it's a private site and I am very aware what a fantastic job they are doing restoring all the exhibits but it just wasn't as much fun as it used to be. Good to find a few more toilets though! My biggest disappointment was not getting to see Tim and Veronica Edmonds. I bumped into most of the members who were there and a lot of other people I knew, but not them. We got close but not close enough. From there, my pal Martin and I went to Rotherham, to attend a bus event but unfor-

unately it was more of a non-event. You win some and lose some.

Poor GWR don't seem to be winning much at the moment. As I write this, the first IET trains have just gone into service, not particularly successfully, and I hope by the time you are reading these words things will have improved considerably. At least that celebration of all things GWR (old, new and in-between) at Old Oak Common seemed to go extremely well, though personally I stayed away, not being a great fan of big crowds (of people or Class 50's – sorry Mark).

As we approach another new year, it is good to report that our membership seems to be holding up numerically and I think we can be proud of the quality of most of the speakers we have had in 2017. It helps to plan ahead and I can tell you that the 2018 programme is already fully booked with a great selection of speakers, some old, some new. Well done Vincent for organising this so early.

All that remains is for me to wish all of you and your families a very happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year. I hope to see you at our January meeting.

All my very best wishes

Tim Speechley

SOCIETY AND LOCAL NEWS

PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Our new season opened in September with a visit from John Jolly how explained how he made the transition from Essex farmer to become the proprietor of the Mangapps Railway which seems to have taken over most of the farm. Speaking without illustrations, it was nevertheless a most enjoyable and informative evening.

For October we welcomed David Maidment who recalled his earliest railway interests growing up in suburban Surrey and then to boarding school and university before joining BR for a career that took him to the top of the organisation. That will form his next visit to us which is something to look forward to.

Peter Robins was our presenter at the November meeting with British Rail not quite Modern Image which took a look at first generation diesels and electrics working around all regions of British Rail mainly in the 1970's and 1980's and showing how much of the steam-age infrastructure was still in place. There was also a quick look at the few remaining first generation locos still operating today.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subscriptions become due for renewal in January. The good news is that Peter Robins has decided to keep the rate unchanged for the coming year, that is £16.00. The reduced rate for those of you who live some distance away and therefore attend meetings only on rare occasions remains at £8.00 with a meeting attendance fee of £2.00.

Remember, the Society now has a bank account with Lloyds which has a number of advantages over the previous account for both members and the treasurer. If you have on-line banking, you may make bank transfers to the Society.

The sort code is 30-95-36

The account no. is 62236160

If you wish to pay your subs by this method, please put "SUBS" and your name (including initial) - e.g. "SUBS-J.BLOGGS" - in the reference, and MDRS in the "Pay" box if required.. You could also set up a Standing Order to pay MDRS every 1st January which would be most convenient for both parties.

If you wish to pay for anything else by this method, please reference accordingly - e.g. "XMAS-J.BLOGGS" (Xmas) or "DON-J.BLOGGS" (Donation) or as advised. If you have any issues with the reference, please drop an e-mail to pd.robins@btopenworld.com advising of the payment.

Of course you may still pay by cash or cheque. Please note that ONLY cheques made out to "MDRS" or "Marlow & District Railway Society" will be accepted by the bank.

Visitors to the Society's meetings will be asked to pay a £3.00 admission fee although that will be reduced to £2 for our friends from the Maidenhead RCTS branch in a reciprocal arrangement.

Please use the form supplied with the AGM pack so we can ensure our records are kept fully up to date. We look forward to your continued support.

If you are renewing by post please send to Peter at:
1 Chalklands, Bourne End, Bucks., SL8 5TQ.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

As in previous years, a pack containing all the reports and other documentation will be distributed to members in advance of February's AGM to enable us to keep the business part of the meeting to a minimum.

LOOKING AHEAD

A quick look at the forthcoming programme outlined on page 2 will show that we have some interesting and high quality speakers lined up for the coming year starting with another visit from a firm favourite, Geoff Plumb. who this time will be turning his attention to 1967.

Following our usual swift AGM, we are privileged to welcome the chairman of Network Rail, Sir Peter Henty CBE. This is a major coup for a society of our size and is made possible due to the generous help given by our Vice President to whom we are grateful

In the months that follow we have other leading names including Adrian Shooter, the former chairman of Chiltern Railways, Brian Arman with part 3 of the story of Swindon works, Brian Ringer concluding the story of rail freight and prominent photographers such as Bob Sweet, Brian Stephenson and Peter Groom.

Certainly an interesting programme awaits and proves that the society continues to "punch above its weight" in such matters. We look forward to your continuing support.

DONKEY CONTRIBUTIONS NEEDED

This issue has left my "pending" folder completely empty so once again the editor is appealing for material for forthcoming issues.

Whilst I get regular contributions for the weekly e-newsletter, sourcing enough material for this quarterly magazine is always a struggle so please help!

RCTS MEETINGS

Our friends in the RCTS have the following meetings planned for the coming months.

Monday 18th December Branch AGM

Monday 22nd January

Travels in South Africa Adrian Palmer

Monday 26 February

Railways of Northern Ireland Tim Morton

Monday 26 March

London to Velké Kapušany David Jackman

Monday 23 April

The Patriot Project John Hastings Thomson

Meetings are held at the Cox Green Community Centre, Highfield Lane, Cox Green, SL6 3AX starting at 19:30. MDRS members always welcome.

IET - A MIXED START

Great Western introduced the first of the new Class 800 Intercity Express Trains on Monday 16th October with an initial two diagrams covering the Paddington to Bristol and South Wales routes.

Initially things didn't go to plan with one of the trains suffering major technical issues and was withdrawn on arrival at Paddington. Thereafter things improved although Tuesday saw some disruption due to infrastructure issues. Both were out of use on the Thursday to allow a software update to be made but from then on they have settled into service.

Further diagrams were introduced on Monday 13th November and there is due to be a major increase in their use from 3rd January which will also see the start of the full electric service between Paddington and Didcot with the Class 387s replacing the Turbos.

The IETs will gradually take over from the HSTs during 2018 with the final HST departure from Paddington scheduled for February 2019.



History in the making. IET 800008 waits at Paddington to form 1C03, the 07:00 to Bristol Temple Meads on Monday 16th October, the first revenue-earning departure of the type from the station.

Photo: Richard Porter

Photo: Mike Walker



FIRST & LAST ON THE BI-OX

Over the weekend of 16/17th September Reading was closed for electrification works with GWR services diverted over the recently upgraded Bicester to Oxford line.

On the Sunday, Chiltern 168107 forming 1H45, the 15:12 Snow Hill to Marylebone waited at Bicester South Junction for GWR 43079 and 43020 to pass with 1L60, the diverted 12:24 Swansea to Paddington.

Unfortunately, the work was not completed resulting in a further blockade the following month but due to the short notice services were not diverted on that occasion. The electrification between Maidenhead and Tilehurst was switched on from 15th October.

WESTERN DUCHESS

46233 *Duchess of Sutherland* has made a number of trips along the Great Western Main Line this autumn. On 10th October it was caught leaving Swindon with 1Z73, Steam Dreams' 09:06 Southend East to Gloucester *Cathedrals Express* which it took over at Hanwell.

Photo: Peter Robins

LOCAL STATIONS TO TfL

Burnham and Taplow stations came under Transport for London management from 10th December in preparation for Crossrail. Slough, Maidenhead and Twyford along with the branch stations remain with GWR.



OLD OAK COMMON 111 LEGENDS OF THE GREAT WESTERN



Great Western Railway hosted a most successful open day at Old Oak Common depot on 2nd September which was attended by more than 7,000 visitors including a large number of Society members.

The event marked 111 years since the opening of the original steam shed, now the site of the Crossrail depot, and the impending closure of the depot progressively between Christmas and next summer.

A wide collection of, mostly, GWR and BR WR equipment was gathered for display under sunny skies representing both steam, diesel and future traction. The centrepiece was a line-up of “legends” comprising railmotor 93, 6023 *King Edward II*, 7903 *Foremarke Hall*, D821 *Greyhound*, D1015 *Western Champion*, 50035 *Ark Royal*, 43002 *Sir Kenneth Grange*, 180103 and IET 800003.



The event featured the naming of 43093 *Old Oak Common HST Depot 1976-2018* and unveiling in a special “Legends” livery, 180104 was also part wrapped, whilst GWR MD Mark Hopwood’s personal interests were catered for with a line-up of 50007, 50017, 50026, 50044, 50049 and 50050. Mark also opened the proceedings.

Four photos: Mike Walker



In addition to 6023 and 7903 in the main line up and the railmotor, which was working shuttles, steam was also represented by 60163 *Tornado*, Panniers 1501 and 6430 and 70013 *Britannia*.

Providing a reminder of the Diesel-Hydraulic era was the superbly presented Hymek D7017 along with "Teddy Bear" 14901.

Equally polished was GWR's 57604 *Pendennis Castle* which had just had its heritage livery refreshed for the event. In fact, all four of the GWR's Class 57 fleet were to be found on display at the open day, the previous night's sleeper having been worked by DRS 57310.



Five photos: Mike Walker

Photo: Tony Allerton



Other exhibits included Chiltern's "Bubble Car" W55034 which made its way from Aylesbury under its own power, and prototype HST power car 41001 inside the heavy lift shop alongside 57603 *Tintagel Castle* up on jacks.

GB Railfreight sent its celebrity "last Shed" 66779 *Evening Star*, the 9F of the same name having originally been an OOC locomotive.

The event was superbly organised which was a major feat as the depot remained operational throughout.



RETURN TO STATFOLD BARN



The Society made its fourth visit to the Statfold Barn Railway for its annual autumn open day on 9th September. Unfortunately numbers were down this year possibly due to members believing they'd been there already which is a pity because, as always, much had changed since our last visit in 2015. This year, the biggest innovation is the construction of a tramway whilst, as usual, several "new" locomotives were making the debut such is the phenomenal rate of restoration taking place in the railway's works.

The calm before the storm; Trangkil No.4 (Hunslet 3902/1971), Alpha (Bagnall 2472/1932) and Lautoka 19 (Hudswell Clarke 1056/1908) on shed before the general public were admitted.

Photo: Tim Edmonds

Liassic (Peckett 1623/1932) and Marchlyn (Avonside 2067/1933) depart from the much altered station as Statfold and Jack Lane (Hunslet 3903 and 3904 of 2005) wait for their turn.

Photo: Mike Walker



The sun breaks through the morning mist as Avonmouth Smelting Kerr Stuart Wren class Roger (3128/1918) waits ready for duty on garden railway.

Photo: Tim Edmonds



Beautifully restored Burton & Ashby Light Railway car 14 gathers passengers outside its barn on the newly laid 3' 6" gauge tramway.

It was built in 1906 by Brush at Loughborough and spent some years in Detroit before being repatriated to Statfold. It operates on battery power recharged by a regenerative braking system.

Photo: Mike Walker

A busy scene at Oak Tree Halt seen from the top deck of the tram. Jatibarang No.9, a Jung 0-4-0+0-4-0T Mallet (4878/1930) is passed by Sybil Mary (Hunslet 921/1906) and Minas de Aller 2 (Corpet 439/1884) whilst 'The Goose' heads away from the camera.

Photo: Tim Edmonds



HOWAY THE LADS

Tim Speechley concludes his visit to the North East
Part 4 Tanfield, North Tynside and the Stephenson Museum



Armstrong Whitworth 0-4-0 diesel D22 of 1933 and 0-6-0T Twizell built by Robert Stephenson and Co in 1891 at St Andrews House station on the Tanfield Railway.

Sunday dawned bright and after a somewhat lighter breakfast than normal, in deference to the previous evening's excesses, we headed for the Tanfield Railway, though encountering more queues trying to get into Beamish, I found a different route using the back roads. For the Tanfield it was a fairly normal Sunday operation and on arrival we bought our tickets and decided to travel on the first train of the day but were surprised to find it had a rather odd double-headed combination of locomotives, in the form of "Twizell", the 1891 Robert Stephenson 0-6-0T and an 0-4-0 diesel, Armstrong Whitworth works number D22 of 1933, which must be one of the oldest standard gauge diesels still working in the UK. Its presence didn't seem to slow the progress of the train and I suspect it probably travelled at speeds for which it was never designed, being pushed along by the steam loco. I think this was its only line work of the day and for the rest of the time it was at St Andrew's House station giving cab rides.

By speaking to the right volunteers, Chris and I were able to wangle a DIY tour of the big shed containing locomotives under restoration, something I'm sure wouldn't be possible at bigger, less friendly railways. The big "Five Road" shed contained a large number of steam, diesel and electric locos in varying stages of restoration, whilst outside the yard contained many more items.

From here we had a reasonably long journey eastwards and then north through the Tyne Tunnel in order to find the North Tyneside Railway and Stephenson Museum at Percy Main, which seemed to be in the middle of a huge retail park. My main aim of going here was to see Consett Iron Company No.5, an 0-6-0 pannier tank built by Kitson in 1883, which often works the trains down to the Tyne from the museum. It is a "Long Tom" type of loco, where the firebox is behind the rear set of wheels and I had seen this particular one in the scrap line at Derwenthaugh back in 1968. Unfortunately it and all the other steam locos were dead in the museum and the train was being operated today by an 08 shunter (08915), albeit the most splendidly restored example I had ever seen. The train trip is only about a mile or so, along a section of line that used to link some inland collieries to the riverside staithes and runs through some pretty depressing post-industrial landscape as far as a run-round loop just after it has come under the Tyne and Wear Metro line. Not the most exciting of journeys.

Back at the museum we looked at the small but interesting collection of industrial steam, diesel and electric locos, plus a 1904 ex-NER electric luggage van that used to work on the North-Tyne third rail electric system. The most unexpected exhibit, though, was *Billy*, an authentic



Armstrong Whitworth diesel D22 from 1933 and Twizell (Robert Stephenson 1891) run round at East Tanfield.

The North Tyneside's immaculate 08915 runs round at the southern limit of their line, beneath the Tyne and Wear Metro.





Consett Iron Co 0-6-0 PT No.5, Kitson 1883, in the Stephenson Museum at Percy Main.

Stephenson 0-4-0 dating back to 1826 that had worked on the Bowes railway system for about 50 years and later had been on display at Newcastle Central Station and then the City Museum. I was very surprised I had been completely unaware of such an important machine's existence for so long and pleased to have seen it at last.

The museum closed quite early and with some time to kill I drove north to see if I could find any remains of the old Backworth Colliery railway but had no success at all. Then we headed further to try to see some coal staithes at Blyth that have been listed. Despite driving round for ages and using Google we failed completely and it was only later I realised that it's only their wooden foundations, not the whole towering edifice that still exists.

By now it was time to find somewhere to eat and again we were presented with gut-busting helping sizes. Then I dropped Chris at Newcastle Central, to catch a train back home around 8 pm and I returned to the good old Travelodge. I aimed for home on the Monday, taking a circuitous route via Driffield, where I visited a good friend I hadn't seen for a while, and then via Lincoln to Leicester for a quick pit-stop at my son's flat before the last hundred mile dash back to Wycombe. It had been a most enjoyable visit, into which we had crammed quite a lot of activity but if I do return to Beamish again I'll make sure I get out before closing time – that wasn't the sort of "lock-in" I'm used to.

A little-known survivor - (Killingworth) Billy, built by Stephenson's in 1826.



The Marlow Donkey

AUSTRALIA REVISITED Part 2

Tim Edmonds



Museums large and small

A problem with visiting many of the railway museums in Australia is that most depend heavily or entirely on volunteers and thus have restricted opening times. An exception is the National Railway Museum at Port Adelaide, which is open every day, but Newport (Victoria) is open only on Saturday afternoons and Bassendean (Western Australia) on Sunday and Wednesday afternoons. All three are large sites with many locomotives and interesting items of rolling stock on display. Most in the NRM are completely under cover in modern buildings and thus protected from the elements, but at Newport almost all are in the open and the condition of some is clearly deteriorating. At Bassendean the majority of stock is under cover but there is not space for all and the weather can be extreme – after hot sunshine we had to delay our departure while a heavy downpour passed. There is no such problem at the well-appointed Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, which has some excellent railway displays.

Outside the cities there are many small community museums and some have significant railway content. Two we visited were closed stations in South Australia. At Tailem Bend, on the main Adelaide – Melbourne line, there is also a plinthed Rx class 4-6-0 in an adjacent park. The former branch terminus at Port Milang has expanded its scope in recent year with a static broad gauge diesel and the newly-opened Light Railway Centre, which has a fascinating display on South Australian narrow gauge industrial railways.

The afternoon sun highlights oil-burning U class 4-6-2 655 (NB 24863/1942) at Bassendean Railway Museum. This wartime loco was intended for use in North Africa, but remained in the UK until sold to Western Australian Government Railways in 1946. 23rd April 2017.

Pride of place in the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney is this fine display of the first steam locomotive to work in NSW, the Sydney & Parramatta Railway 0-4-2 1 (RS 958/1854) matched with a set of authentic restored carriages. 18th April 2017.





The A2 class 4-6-0 was the first express passenger locomotive to be entirely designed by Victorian Railways and remained in front-line service for 40 years. Unfortunately the effects of outdoor storage at Newport Railway Museum are all too apparent on 884 (Newport 1913). 8th April 2017.

Cosmetically restored South Australian Railways 350 class Bo-Bo DE 351 (Islington 1949) displayed at the Port Milang Historic Railway Museum. Two were built with English Electric 6RKT 250hp engines and EE electrical equipment. 25th March 2017.

Coal and gold in Victoria

During our stay in Victoria we spent a week exploring Gippsland, the region SE of Melbourne, and this included visits to two contrasting narrow gauge railways. The Walhalla Goldfields Railway started life as a 2ft 6in gauge line from Moe, on the Melbourne to Traralgon main line, to the gold mining town of Walhalla in the hills to the north. This closed in the 1950s and the track was lifted, but part has been reopened from the terminus, worked by diesels. It is an extraordinary line. Almost the whole route from Walhalla to Thomson runs along the Stringers gorge, including several spindly bridges, before crossing the Thomson River on a high girder bridge. Three months later I was manning the Minehead booking office on the West Somerset Railway when a face appeared at the window with the greeting "Hi, I'm from the Puffing Billy Railway...". Fortunately it was not at a busy time and I was able to chat to Greg Goold about my visit to his line in 2007 and the WGR this year. He told me that in 2010 NA class 2-6-2T number 7A from the PBR had visited the WGR for a weekend celebrating the line's centenary. On the Saturday the loco was running as classmate 9A, which had worked the first train on the line in May 1910. When he returned home, Greg kindly sent me some photos of the event.

The town of Korumburra was once an important coal-mining centre and railway junction. Its fine station survives intact and was part of a diesel-worked heritage line, the South Gippsland Railway, which ceased operation in 2015 due to shortage of volunteers. South of the town is Coal Creek, an open-air museum with reconstructed buildings – think Beamish. It includes a broad gauge station with a static K class 2-8-0 and rolling stock, and the Bush Tramway, an operational 2ft gauge railway round the site representing the industrial lines of the area. This is worked by a Hudson-Hunslet 4wDM (a Ruston & Hornsby was out of use) and, on special occasions, by an ex Bingera Sugar Mill (Queensland) 0-6-2T – one of

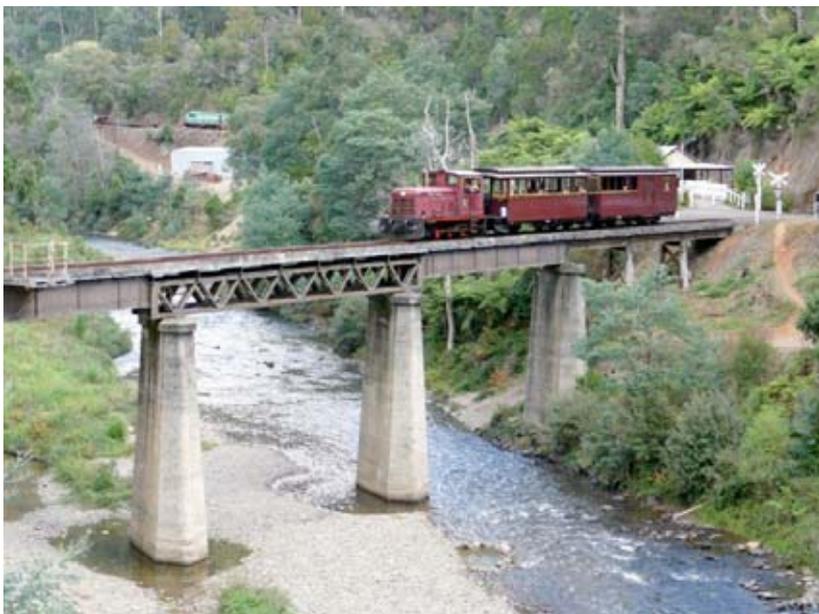
eight built in Australia in 1953 under licence from Fowler after they stopped building steam. Our friendly driver Owen opened up the loco shed so we could take a look.



Ex Bingera Sugar Mill 0-6-2T 2 Count Strzelecki (Bundaberg Fowler 7/1953) slumbers in the shed on the Coal Creek Bush Tramway. (31st March 2017)



On the Coal Creek Bush Tramway, 4wDM 3 (Hudson-Hunslet 1955) waits for passengers. 25th March 2017.



Seen from the road bridge, former State Electricity Commission of Victoria 0-6-0DH 14 (Fowler 1954) heads the 15:40 Thomson – Walhalla train on the Walhalla Goldfields Railway.

This was the view from the 13:40 Thomson – Walhalla train crossing one of the bridges in Stringers gorge on the Walhalla Goldfields Railway. 3rd April 2017.



Visiting from the Puffing Billy Railway, Victoria Railways class NA 2-6-2T 7A, running as 9A, crosses bridge 6 on the Walhalla Goldfields Railway during the line's centenary weekend on 29th May 2010.

Although built by the Victoria Railways in its Newport works the similarity with the Lynton & Barnstaple's Lyn is obvious. This is because the original two members of the NA class were supplied by Baldwin in 1898 to what was basically an enlarged version of the L&B design.

Photo: Greg Goold,



Big diesels on three gauges

Melbourne Southern Cross still sees N class Clyde-GM Co-Co diesels working some of the peak regional outer suburban trains on the broad gauge, and I found two of the class there on 30th March. However there was also a surprise in store. When I saw Clyde-GM Co-Co A 70 working Geelong trains from Melbourne in 2007 I thought it would be my first and last encounter with this venerable class – rebuilds of Victoria’s first main line diesels, the B class from the early 1950s. So I was amazed to find A 66 working the 16:04 Bacchus Marsh service at Southern Cross nearly ten years later. Stored and reinstated, this is the last of the class in service. Having noticed a good viewpoint at North Melbourne station, where the regional line goes over the metro lines, I headed there for a shot of the train leaving with the city skyline behind. Alas I hadn’t allowed for an empty DMU coming the other way!

From Cairns we made a trip that included the Skyrail cable car over the rain forest to Kuranda, returning on the 3ft 6in gauge Kuranda Scenic Railway. This is a tourist operation through the Barron River gorge and there are two trains up in the morning, returning in the afternoon. Having booked on the second return train, a walk along the riverside produced a spot with just enough space in the tropical forest to photograph the first departure. Although narrow gauge these are big trains, hauled by pairs of class 1720D Co-Co diesel-electrics built by Clyde between 1966 and 1977 modified with an air-conditioning unit in front of the cab. The journey includes a stop at the Barron Falls viewpoint before a descent of the gorge that includes numerous tunnels and some spectacular bridges and curves.

As for big diesels on the standard gauge – well that was part of the *Indian Pacific* experience.

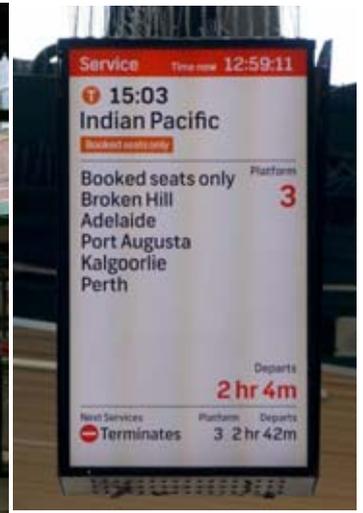


The first return train to Cairns heads away from Kuranda behind 1720D Co-Cos 1774 (in Kuranda Scenic Railway ‘aboriginal’ livery) and 1764 (in QR livery). Note the air-conditioning unit in front of the cab. 12th April 2017.



At Melbourne Southern Cross [Above] Clyde-GM A 66, the last survivor of its class, waits to depart with the 16:04 service to Bacchus Marsh whilst Clyde-GM N class 462 City of Shepparton [Left] is the appropriate power for the 16:31 service to Shepparton, while classmate 469 City of Morwell waits for duty nearby. 30th March 2017.

Those of a certain age will recall the A class as the loose prototype for one of the Triang Transcontinental range.



Check-in at Sydney Central for the Indian Pacific, which fully occupies both platforms 2 and 3. After joining both sections, G 530 will be one of the locos at the front of the train at platform 3, as per the departure board. 19th April 2017.

Transcontinental

Operated by Great Southern Rail, the *Indian Pacific* is not a cheap form of amusement, particularly since we had booked 'Gold Superior' in order to get a large bed in a decent-sized cabin. This was well worth the extra, since in addition to an ensuite shower room we had plenty of space including table, armchairs, ample storage, fridge and kettle. The journey takes three days. The westbound train departs from Sydney Central on Wednesday afternoons with the eastbound service returning from East Perth on Sunday mornings. The train journey is in two parts: 1683km from Sydney to Adelaide, where reversal takes place and there is a change of on-board crew, then 2669km from Adelaide to East Perth, including the famous 'long straight' across the Nullabor Plain.

The train is huge. From Sydney to Adelaide it is limited to 28 vehicles (including six restaurant cars!) while another passenger carriage and a car carrier were added at Adelaide for the motor-rail service. The train is so long that it is split between terminal platforms 2 and 3 at Sydney, with the section at platform 2 being moved to the front shortly before departure. The first part of the journey requires double-heading since it crosses the Blue Mountains, and our power comprised two big Co-Cos – NR 25

(Goninan) and G 530 (Clyde). From Adelaide our 30 cars were hauled by NR 25 unaided – a length which the platforms at Adelaide Parklands and East Perth have been built to accommodate. However, getting photographs of the locos on the train was almost impossible. The only opportunity for the double-header was during a brief stop at a damp, grey and platform-less Two Wells, where we disembarked for a wine-tasting excursion to the Barossa Valley. However, the train was already on its way before I could reach the front. The service stop at remote Cook station, at the eastern end of the Nullabor Plain, was the best place for a shot – once I'd waited for those taking pictures of each other in front of NR 25 to disperse. We really enjoyed the *Indian Pacific* experience, although the first night was somewhat uncomfortable due to some pretty rough track through New South Wales between Parkes and Broken Hill. It provides a fantastic way to appreciate the size and landscape variety of Australia in a luxurious and relaxing way. The food was excellent, there were unlimited drinks in the bar and restaurant, and the company (most of it Australian) was congenial.

Recommended!

The Barossa Valley excursionists have left the Indian Pacific at Two Wells, so NR 25 and G 530 have the green light to depart for Adelaide. 20th April 2017.

Next day, NR 25 has just been serviced at Cook and awaits its new crew.



THE NIGHT POSTAL

David Gardner



Both Sam Longman and Jack Cooper were senior postmen having worked for the GPO for a number of years before they upgraded to the Travelling Post Office as letter sorters. Only established postmen were considered for this position and the very nature of the job meant they had to be quick and accurate in sorting mail into the correct pigeon holes. Of course there were disadvantages. It was permanent night work and staff were away from home for days at a time but as neither Sam nor Jack were married it was not much of a worry to either man.

Once their night's work was over they got a few hours' sleep in the dormitory provided by the GPO then the rest of the day was theirs to do as they wished. This usually meant going to see a film at a cinema perhaps two days in the week but they would always meet up for a pint or two. Never more as they didn't want to impede their concentration of letter sorting.

Both were railway enthusiasts and would find a suitable vantage spot to watch and photograph interesting railway activities. On reporting for duty their first job was to empty out mail sacks which had previously been loaded onto the train by regular station staff and postmen, then once the locomotive had coupled up, Sam and Jack would wander up front to see what their motive power was that night. Usually it would be one of the Coronation or Princess Royal class 4-6-2s but 71000 *Duke of Gloucester* had taken a turn as well as some of the Britannia class. On this particular night there were a pair of Jubilee 4-6-0s on.

"Super power tonight Jack" said Sam. "That's right" replied Jack "And their bark will disturb more than a few in their beds I wouldn't wonder." Although, the Anglo-Scottish Postal was capable of quite high speeds it did stop at principal stations to pick-up mail.

However, the most interesting and exciting parts of the journey were the high speed automatic pick-up and drop off points which were often though not always in rural areas. Night Postal staff could be trained to operate the drop-off and pick-up apparatus. This was a skilled job not only in operating the grab net etc. but the operator had to be totally familiar as to the exact location of the pick-up points.

Difficult enough in daylight but even more so in pitch dark with, if he were lucky, only the light of an oil lamp to guide him. The rule book stated that there had to be a post office employee on the ground close by whose job it was to attach the mail pouches or bags to pick-up hooks then collect the mail that had been dropped off. These pouches were securely strapped to prevent them splitting open which rarely happened but if the train was travelling too fast then they could split as they entered the coach or even thrown clear. Another reason for a postman to be close by on the ground. Standing on or alongside the pick-up apparatus was however strictly forbidden. Most ground staff stayed in or alongside the GPO van on the roadway or track nearby. Only returning to pick-up the mail bags dropped by the train from the safety net after the train had passed.

Mike Jones had been the netman all week but on Friday morning managed to have an accident on his bike and whilst not seriously hurt was in no fit state to report for work.

Jack Cooper had knowledge of the route and had operated the dispatch gear and pick-up nets so was asked to take over the task for the night. Things went well enough with no mishaps and the sound of the pair of Jubilees up front was music to Jack's ears and with the prospect of a week-end off, life, he thought couldn't get much better.

Well into Scotland by this time Jack fixed in the mail bags for the next drop off and collection point. Having pushed the dispatch gear outward Jack left the side door half open so that he could watch proceedings and still operate the pick-up net lever. The spotlights on the side of the TPO certainly helped once the coach was alongside the pick-up apparatus.

It was a moonlit night so that looking forward Jack could see clearly ahead and what he saw concerned him. There on the pick-up platform was a figure of a man who seemed to be attaching the mail bags to the hooks. For some reason he must have been delayed or the bags were particularly heavy but having hooked them on the man did not make any attempt to get down from the platform; in fact he was

leaning dangerously outward. Even stranger were the clothes he was wearing. A long frock coat and top hat not unlike a picture Jack had seen of a Victorian postman. Perhaps the man was in fancy dress or re-enacting some occasion of hundred years previously. Seconds later but before the actual pick-up the man fell towards the rail line. Jack's immediate thought was to get the train to stop even though a postman was walking up the path to the dispatch/collection point. He would still need help to assist the injured or dead man.

Getting the train to stop was one thing but the loco crew and guard had to protect their train against a rear collision. Whilst the guard went off to set down detonators, one of the firemen phoned a signal box so that the signals could be placed at danger. Whilst this was going on, Jack, Sam and a couple of other postal staff ran back to where the man had fallen. When they arrived they found the postman Jack had seen taking the mail bags to his van at the end of the path. He had seen the TPO begin to slow down but by the time it stopped it was out of his sight.

Jack called out to him anxiously about the strangely dressed man he had seen fall from the pick-up platform, but the local postman didn't know what Jack was talking about. "Naw there wiz only me here til ye come scaring the life out o me, Aw ye ravin mad mahn" said the postman, "I saw nothin o ony mahn fa'in."

Jack and his colleagues searched everywhere along the line but found no trace of the fallen man. "You're for the high jump now Jack" uttered Sam. "Delaying the night postal is a serious offence, how on earth are you going to talk your way out of this." Jack was silent for an age almost as if he couldn't believe his friends disbelief. "I saw a man fall from that pick-up platform" he shouted "and nothing will make me think any different." After the postal workers returned to the train, the guard had to collect the detonators and the fireman rang the signalman to get a clear line. Soon the TPO train was on its way again some 40 minutes late.

Jack was told to stand down for the rest of the journey and another postal worker given the job of net and dispatch man. Not unexpectedly Jack was suspended and an internal

inquiry setup. Convinced of what he saw Jack used his now free days to try and make sense of the mysterious happening. He travelled to the town nearest to the pick-up point, booked into a B&B and visited the site during day light hours looking for clues. He found none but knowing there would be a pick-up that night caught the late bus to the nearest stop which happened to be a pub called 'The Hapless Postman'. It had a sign showing a Victorian postal worker falling from a post collection platform.

Jack entered the public house and over a pint discussed the name of the inn and his own terrifying experience a few nights previously with the landlord.

Luckily for Jack the man had run the pub for many years and was also a bit of a historian. He informed his listener of the unfortunate postman who one night in 1895, after hooking the mailbags to the collection apparatus, fell from the platform and was killed when he hit the passing TPO "What's more" he told Jack "there had been some sightings of the ghost over the years and always on the anniversary of his death".

Apparently it had to be a moonlit night and the exact day and time so any occurrence was rare. "You check the papers in the local library, it's all there". The Landlord even managed to get Jack a lift back to town with one of his regular customers. Jack visited the library the next day and gleaned all the information he required. When he appeared before the GPO inquiry he quoted the incident of the 19th century postman, the newspaper reports about the accident and four incidents where TPO operators had witnessed a ghostly postman fall before the train. He also told them about the Inn which took its name from the accident. Jack had to wait another week while the details of his story were checked before receiving a letter to say he was given the all clear to resume work the following Monday. In the meantime he kept Sam informed who said that he and the rest of the TPO Team had reported what an industrious person Jack was. When he returned to work on the Monday evening he was greeted as a hero. Jack lived on that ghostly sighting for many a year and even kept a photograph of the Inn sign just to prove his point.

Opposite: *Jubilee 5653 Barham and an unidentified sister head a down express at Whitmore on 17th July 1937.*

Photo: E R Morten

Right: *The interior of BR Mk1 Sorting Van 80300 built in 1959 and now preserved on the Severn Valley Railway.*

Photo: Nicholas Smith



THEN AND NOW - CHINNOR



Photo: Colour-Rail 390528

6145 draws a train out of the cement works at Chinnor on 27th November 1965, some eight years after passenger services were withdrawn but with the station still intact. The same view today is barely recognisable, the cement

works have been replaced by housing and the station, demolished by BR, has been painstakingly rebuilt albeit with a longer platform. 45041 idles on 11th May 2017.

Photo: Mike Walker

