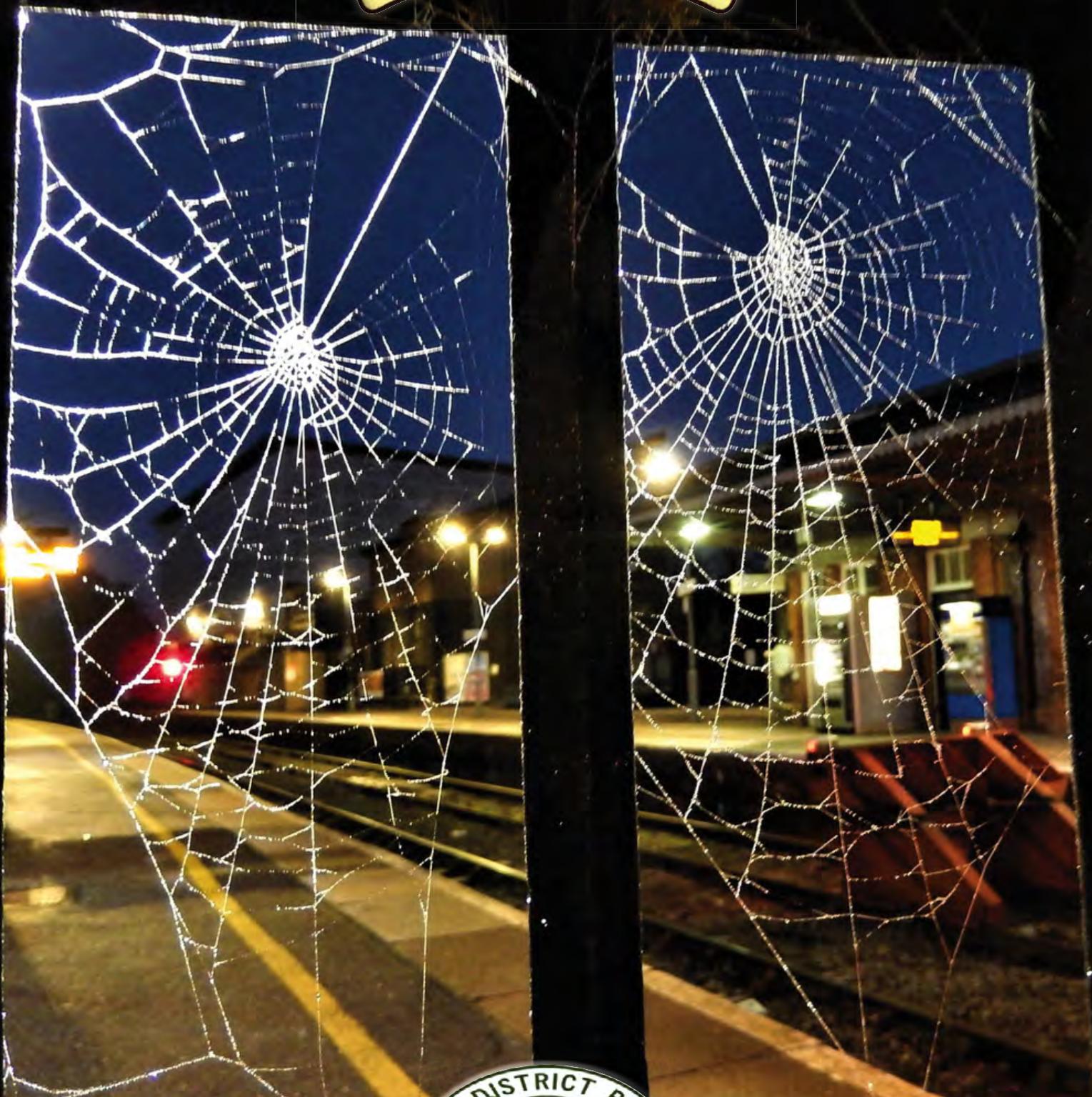


# THE MARLOW DONKEY



Edition

# 170

December 2020



**Contents:**  
Relaying the Branch  
A Taste of France  
Plywood Wonders  
Days of '65 *Part 1*

# The Marlow Donkey

The Magazine of the Marlow & District Railway Society

## COMMITTEE

President:	Mark Hopwood
Chairman:	Mike Hyde. 11 Forty Green Drive, Marlow, Bucks., SL7 2JX Tel.: 01628 485474 email: michaelahyde@uwclub.net
Treasurer:	Peter Robins. 1 Chalklands, Bourne End, Bucks., SL8 5TQ. Tel.: 01628 527870 email: pd.robins@btopenworld.com
Secretary:	Vincent Caldwell. email: vincent@mosesplat.uk.
Webmaster:	Dave Woodhead. email: dave.woodhead@uwclub.net
Outings Organiser:	Brian Hopkinson. email: hopkinson005@gmail.com
Publicity:	Keith Gower email: gowerstowers@btinternet.com
Donkey Editor:	Mike Walker, Solgarth, Marlow Road, Little Marlow, Marlow, Bucks., SL7 3RS. Tel.: 07791 544426 email: mikewalker@solgarth.eclipse.co.uk

**Website:** [www.mdrs.org.uk](http://www.mdrs.org.uk)

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 Photograph

*Bourne End Station at 07:00. 27 November 2020.*

*Photo: Nigel Hunt.*

# TIMETABLE

## FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

For the present, all meetings are being conducted on Zoom starting at 7.30pm.

- Thursday 17 December **A TOUCH OF WINTER** Peter Robins  
In place of our traditional pre-Christmas social gathering, Peter brings us a selection of seasonal pictures from Britain, Germany and China to get you in the mood.
- Thursday 21 January **THE GWR IN SOUTH WALES** Terry McCarthy  
Terry's presentation examines the role of the GWR in the development of the railway network in South Wales both broad and narrow gauge followed by the grouping which gave the company control of all the region's railways. He concludes with a look at what might have happened if nationalisation hadn't happened.
- Thursday 18 February **THE TRANS-SIBERIAN & TRANS-MONGOLIAN TRAVELOGUE** Colin Miell  
Colin takes us on a marathon journey from Moscow to Vladivostok with a stopover at Irkutsk and across Mongolia turning right at Ulan Ude. Following a second stopover at Ulaan Bataar we enter China and travel all the way down to Shanghai via Beijing.
- Thursday 18 March **OPERATOR TURNED TIMETABLE PLANNER** David Langton  
David reflects on his railway career starting as a graduate trainee at Derby in the 1970s then through spells as Traffic Manager at Workington. Postings at Carlisle and Plymouth followed before moving to the north west in the privatisation era for roles with FNW and Trans-Pennine.
- Thursday 15 April **WEST COUNTRY BRANCH LINES** Mike Walker  
Another trawl through the archives to visit the branch lines of Devon and Cornwall in the days when the area was a mecca for summer holidays where the sun always shone on pristine beaches reached by trains hauled by Small Prairies, O2s or the occasional (real) Diesel.
- Please note that you have to register for each meeting as a separate meeting ID and passcode is generated by Zoom. We send out an invitation to register a few days ahead of each meeting by e-mail. When you receive this please follow the link contained which will generate a further message containing the relevant meeting ID and passcode. Don't think that because you have registered for a previous meeting you don't have to register again and can reuse the same details.

## CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Christmas Greetings to all members and their families. Let's hope it will be a good one even given the pandemic that has been thrust upon us. I guess many of us are self-isolating or briefly dashing out for a quick bout of necessary shopping. Lucky ones go further afield and take photographs of the iron road which they kindly share with us through the medium of the Marlow Donkey and/or Mike Walker's welcome Newsletters.

Recognising that we cannot meet regularly as a group your committee introduced monthly talks via 'Zoom' hosted by our own Dave Woodhead and Peter Robins. Vincent Caldwell initiates the engagement of speakers and yours truly simply opens and closes the gathering. We very much hope members, families and friends enjoy them now we have completed six Zoom meetings to date. At times it is not easy to hear the speaker as I know, mainly because they do not sit close enough to their microphone or they speak quietly. I asked my IT supplier if I should give up but he said it was a common failing because the speaker usually sat too far from the mike which was small and situated on the frame of the screen. He suggested that as my PC does not have a camera or a mic, I should purchase a set and

plug it in. He then told me that they are like gold dust and if you can find a set it probably has gone up in price. My usual solution is to use my wife's laptop but that has a limited sound volume even when on full blast. You may notice my head about 3 inches from the screen.

Depending how you or I resolve the matter I hope it we will be in time to see and hear Peter Robins's 'A Touch of Winter' on 17 December. If we miss it I hope Freeview or You-tube will pick it up!! The latter website includes many railway videos from far and wide. There certainly seems to be an abundance of TV channels employing a multitude of so-called celebs charging around the world on railways. Apart from Portillo who always gets the best hotels my current favourite is Chris Tarrant so much so I now watch his replays of 'Millionaire'. Sad really.

However you divide your time over the coming weeks, spare a thought for those out there in the cold or rain keeping our rail services going and those providing public transport even if we do not use it. Stay safe and don't forget to stuff the turkey.

*Mike Hyde*

# SOCIETY AND LOCAL NEWS

## NEW MEMBERS

Once again we welcome three new members, Phil Darlaston from Wantage, Richard Styles from Bridgham, Norfolk and Brian Madge from Maidenhead who have all joined in the last quarter.

## PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Our meetings this autumn have continued to be conducted on Zoom and after some early teething troubles we seem to be getting the hang of it which is just as well as it would appear this will have to continue well into next year.

In September Keith Gower looked back over half a century of rail photography whilst in October Simon Colbeck shared some superb images taken by the late Roy Miller featuring a wide variety of subjects.

Geoff Plumb entertained us in November with another of his excellent That Was The Year That Was presentations this time focusing on 1969.

## SUBSCRIPTIONS

Subscriptions normally become due for renewal in January but this year things are a little different. Thanks to the Covid-19 pandemic we have been unable to function in our normal way with the effect that our full members are enjoying no more benefits than our associate members.

Therefore, the committee has decided the **Full** members' (those that paid £16.00 in January) subscriptions will be extended through to **31st December 2021** which equates to £8.00 per year, the same as Associate Members who already pay £8.00. However, existing **Associate** members will need to renew as usual in January.

**Note**, those new members who have joined us since the 1st September 2020 are paid up through to 31st December 2021 in accordance with the club rules.

We therefore invite our Associate members to renew in January as usual. The Society's bank details are:

**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 have any issues with the reference, please drop an e-mail to [pd.robins@btopenworld.com](mailto: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.

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

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The AGM will be conducted by Zoom as part of our February meeting - there is a function which allows you to vote. Details will be sent with the pack containing all the reports and other documentation will be distributed, as in previous years, to members in advance of the AGM to enable us to keep the business part of the meeting to a minimum.

## LOOKING AHEAD

As can be seen from the forthcoming programme outlined on page 2 will plan to continue with meetings on Zoom at least until the spring. Given the outlook and the profile of our members it is possible that normal "live" meetings will not resume until the new season starts in September.

Whilst attendance at our Zoom sessions has typically been around two dozen it is well below that which we expect at live meetings and many familiar faces appear to be missing which is a great disappointment.

We therefore ask those of you who have not yet taken part to do so. It's easy to join in, all you need is a suitable PC, laptop, tablet or even a Smartphone.

Peter sends out the invitation to register a few days in advance of each meeting, all you need do is respond.

## DONKEY CONTRIBUTIONS NEEDED

Thanks to all of you who have contributed to the Donkey and newsletters this year but once again my "pending" folder is somewhat depleted so here's the regular appeal for material for forthcoming issues.

## RCTS MEETINGS

Our friends in the RCTS are also conducting their meetings on Zoom and have the following meetings planned for the remainder of their 2020-21 season.

Monday 21st December

Branch AGM followed by the final part of Steve Ollive's A-Z of Swiss railways.

Monday 25th January

The Restoration of 34081 92 Squadron Dr Steve Lacey

Monday 22nd February

Creating a railway timetable Gawain Nicholson GWR

Monday 22nd March

Western Enterprise Colin Brading

Monday 26th April

What the Future Holds for Britain's Railways Gareth Dennis

Monday 24th May

Volunteering on the GWSR Richard Morris

MDRS members are welcome to take part in these sessions and if wish to do so please register in advance of each meeting you wish to attend by going to <https://rcts.org.uk/windsor-maidenhead/events/> and follow the instructions..

# RELAYING THE BRANCH

The railway between Bourne End and Marlow was closed for two weeks from Saturday 14th to Sunday 29th November inclusive to allow engineers to completely relay virtually the whole 2¾ miles. In addition, the various foot crossings were renewed and equipped with red/green lights activated by the approaching trains to warn pedestrians whether or not it is safe to cross.

Due to the layout at Bourne End it was difficult to bring in materials by rail so much had to be delivered and removed by road. However, Freightliner 66507 brought a Kirow KR250 crane to Bourne End on the first Saturday evening and then, along with 66520, spent the second weekend available to support the works. This included topping-and-tailing some ballast hoppers which reached the line only by means of some complex shunting at Bourne End.

The line has been relaid with welded flat bottom rail. Most is on steel sleepers but concrete sleepers are used on the sharp curves out of Bourne End, presumably to ensure the alignment is maintained, and into Marlow station. Additional, there is a single length of bullhead in brand new chairs at the very end of the branch. The initial curve out of Bourne End has not been relaid at this time as the proposed remodelling of the junction at Bourne End would require this section to be replaced. Unfortunately, this project seems to have stalled.

Whilst the line was closed rail replacement buses were provided between Marlow and Bourne End with additional weekday peak hour services linking Marlow and Maidenhead. Each weekend these were provided by Reading Buses using some of their newest high-specification single deckers. On weekdays Walters of Wheatley operated the Marlow-Bourne End service with aging former London double deckers.

This was the first major upgrade for the branch since the 1950s and it is now virtually a new railway. The Bourne End to Maidenhead section has been similarly upgraded over the past few years.



*The Kirow crane working between Spade Oak and Vineyard Crossings on Sunday 15th November. Both Mike Walker*



*Reading Enviro MMC 680 on replacement duties at Bourne End with 165122 providing service to Maidenhead on the 21st.*

[www.mdrs.org.uk](http://www.mdrs.org.uk)



*A week's progress at Marlow, above on the first Saturday, below a week later. Both Phil Searle*



*Activity at Marina Crossing in Bourne End on Thursday 19th November. David Stoolman*



*66507 with ballast hoppers outside the Crown Plaza hotel in Marlow on Sunday 22nd November. Phil Searle*

# THE MILEAGE MUNCHERS

RON NORTH recalls the heady days of railtours with friends

## FORWARD

It may seem strange to some rail enthusiasts that I would always seek the company of others to enjoy my railway interest. The time honoured fashion of standing alone with notebook/camera lineside for hours on end has never appealed to me and neither has the common practice of always striving to obtain that 'perfect' photo shot. Yes, I often carried a camera but it was always in the context of 'train spotting with a camera' rather than pure rail photography.

Therefore I feel very fortunate to have enjoyed the companionship of Robert, the madcap enthusiast with no transport, which I provided in the form of a Vespa 150cc motor scooter.

Then in later years by Alan, Wilf and David, without whom I would never have even considered clocking up mileage on charter trains. Photo opportunities on these were sparse so I often didn't take a camera with me. All my colour slide pictures were taken alongside Robert with Box Brownie in hand. My best footage of Alan and Wilf were taken with a camcorder which needs transferring from VCR to DVD format, but I imagine the picture quality would be poor by today's standards.

## INTRODUCTION

From about 1970 until 2007 Wilf Long, Alan Morris and myself formed a sort of inseparable league of friends devoted to observing the current railway scene. We were work colleagues at a light engineering company called Airflow. As the years rolled by, we would often liken ourselves to the characters in the TV comedy 'Last of the Summer Wine'. Wilf being the oldest would be Compo, Alan, Clegg the leader, and myself Foggy, often confused.

Years previously in 1963 I had teamed up with another work colleague. Robert Mendy (ex-Parker Knoll & Molins) with whom I would travel widely on a motor scooter to Slough, Reading, Hook, Worting Junction, Basingstoke and Southampton. By train our destination would be Waterloo, Basingstoke and Southampton where we would spend the whole day observing and photographing an almost fully operational steam railway from 1963 to 1965.

We made a decision during 1966 to stop going, as by then almost all the steam engines were in a deplorable state, name and number plates missing, even the cab side numbers barely legible.

At the end of steam in 1968 many of my railway minded friends abandoned interest in the railway network and barely looked over the railway fence again. But apart from the loss of steam traction the railway pretty much carried on as before. All the steam age infrastructure remained unchanged, principal express services were all loco hauled, a huge amount of parcel and postal traffic were being handled, lots of freight trains, yards still in place with Class 08 shunters and wagons to shunt.

This then was the scene that Alan Morris persuaded Wilf Long and myself to venture out and witness first hand, usually at a very busy Reading Station. Even though Alan had grown up in



Alan Morris

Southall and had spent hundreds of hours train spotting the steam age BR Western Region trains heading in and out of the Capital it was always the 'working railway' regardless of traction that most appealed to him.

I will always be grateful to Alan for persuading us to look again at the working railway and appreciate that although different, was still well worth observing.

It wasn't long before he started organising his London area tours, whole day trips out by train, he was a good organiser, he poured over timetables to provide a seamless journey on as many

trains and routes as possible. Sometimes this required us to walk from one terminus to another to pick up another route, there were a rich variety of destinations, outer London lines, DLR, a maze of southern third rail routes including the Addiscombe branch, all the London Termini large or small, Broad Street, Cannon Street and North Woolwich.

Other trips would take us out on various suburban lines to the likes of Kent, Sussex, Surrey or Hertfordshire. Much of the time Wilf and I hadn't a clue where we were, not to worry Alan had everything worked out.

## THE MAD DASH

By the mid-1970s Alan had a mind to travel further afield so he put his name on the mailing list of a company called the LNER Society, later the company changed its name to become Hertfordshire Railtours and after that UK Rail Tours. I think John Farrow was one of the principal names behind these tours.

I was always in two minds about this phase of our railway adventures, the days were long and not without a level of stress. I always thought these charter trains were more suited for travellers joining at one of the London Termini, but this would have been impractical for us.

We had to rise at typically 5.00am, leave home no later than 6.00am and make a mad dash by car to join the train at either Slough, Watford, Hemel Hempstead, St Albans or Potters Bar. We would be lucky if we arrived home before midnight, and if the tour was on Sunday be up early next day, still dog tired for work.

In the early days we took our own cars to join the train, often with wives, sons and daughters. The tour itinerary requested passengers to be on the platform 15 mins before the charter train arrived. But when things went wrong there seemed no limit to stress endured, three examples still etched on my mind are related below.

One morning, Alan and myself were sharing a car, Wilf with his wife and daughter were travelling in his Daf Variomatic (belt drive) car to Hemel Hempstead. Just beyond Chesham the belt snapped, we offered to cram the three of them into our car, but Wilf was quite rightly worried about abandoning the car, so we had no choice but to leave them to it and crack on to join our train, needless to say we almost missed it. We felt sorry and bad for the rest of the day about abandoning Wilf and family roadside.

On another occasion all three of us were on our way to St Albans in my car, our route that day seemed to attract numerous slow moving vehicles for a good part of the journey. We only had a few minutes to spare as we approached the station, a car in front was dawdling along at 20mph. What do you do about this? You cut him up of course! We did that, screeched onto the station forecourt and into an empty car park space, the guy followed us in, intent on giving me a good rollicking. "Sorry" we said "got a train to catch". We leapt out, dived into the station and onto the train which was on the point of departure, I didn't even have time to lock the car, so spent the rest of the day wondering if we would have a car to travel home in.



On another tour there was an option to go either to Newcastle, with time to travel on the Metro system or alight at Durham, and board a coach to visit the Beamish Museum. Alan and his cousin went on to Newcastle while Wilf and I visited the Museum. We got so absorbed that we didn't allow enough time to get back to the coach. It was a nail biting ride on the tram back to the entrance, all we could hope for would be for the coach to be delayed. It wasn't, poor old Wilf ran puffing along behind me as we leapt out on to the empty road outside.

First thought was to get a taxi so I knocked on the door of one of the nearby cottages to ask if we could use the phone. Luckily the chap that answered the door was very helpful and phoned for us. Only snag was the taxi would have to come out from Durham. We would miss our train, our new friend very kindly drove us back to Durham Station in his car. If he hadn't done so we would have been well and truly up the creek, we barely had enough money for the taxi let alone a pair of train tickets back to Potters Bar.

Hardly anyone carried a mobile phone in those days, Alan held all our tickets. I had learned the hard way never to become complacent. Stressful indeed, I would think to myself, never again, this is unacceptable, but when the prospect of another outing cropped up I would try to forget past disaster scenarios and hope for an un-dramatic day.

## THE TOURS

The rail tour company offered a wide range of days out, the ones I preferred were the out and back in a day to such destinations as York/Scarborough, Exeter/Paignton. If running to time they would offer about 5 hours to explore and enjoy the destination, these held more appeal to wives and other family groups. The alternative tours were more in the nature of a day out for train buffs, a sort of 'land cruise' format.

At the time it was said that rail enthusiasts fell into three categories - Puffer Nutters, Number Crunchers or Mileage Munchers. Alan definitely fell into the last category, his aim was to travel on as much of the British railway network as he possibly could, and for company he invited three others myself, Wilf and in early days his cousin, and in latter days his friend David.

These tours were many and varied, classic routes i.e. S&C, rare trackage which in some cases might only be a little used curve on a three way junction, freight only lines which included collieries, china clay works or quarries. However these trains stopped numerous times either at a signal box whilst waiting clearance to traverse a diverging route or pick up a second loco for reverse and/or top and tail operation. At least an hour's dwell time was booked at usually a terminus station during the day for change of train crew and servicing of the train.

www.mdrs.org.uk

*As Ron mentions, Alan Morris grew up in Southall and started photography at an early age. One of his earliest shots was 1925 seen at Southall around 1949. It was the last surviving example to retain its saddle tank.*

## WAITING FOR THE TRAIN

Having arrived at our point of departure station hopefully with a good ten minutes to spare before our train's arrival, we could start to relax and enjoy the day. The train would normally be running bang on time, and if we were under the wire typical motive power would be a Class 86, 87 or just as likely a Class 47 hauling an eleven or twelve coach train of well-appointed BR Mk 1s.

With an on-time start the schedule could be maintained, a return to the capital could be within a ten minute either way arrival. But a loss of half an hour wouldn't bode well as 30mins down could quickly build up during the day to become a couple of hours which could mess up the whole day's itinerary.

The organisers would maybe cut out some advertised routes and stop overs as necessary to regain time. It must have really tested the organisers having to make these adjustments with the railway authorities throughout the day at short notice. A delayed departure wouldn't be so bad in summer time, but on one January day I can remember a large crowd of us standing on Potters Bar platform with a freezing cold biting wind gusting under the canopy.

## THE JOURNEY

Once we had found our seats we could settle down, relax and read the day's itinerary booklets placed on our table. I think that almost all the coaches were opens with four seats facing a table in each seating bay. Alan would waste no time in getting his Ian Allan Rail Atlas book out of his bag so he could follow the route. Each map page had a sheet of tracing paper over it so he could lightly pencil the actual route taken.

These maps were colour coded to identify main and secondary lines, depots, freight only lines and yards were all included, even disused and abandoned lines were marked. Alan was not alone in following these maps, I guess about two thirds on board had a map of some kind to follow. Throughout the journey Alan would act as tour guide, pointing out long lost junctions and industrial spurs well in advance so we could have something to look out for.

These trips were very well organised, most points of general interest would be broadcast over the trains tannoy system and of course not long after boarding details of a raffle would be announced, the money would be to support a charity. On most trips we would soon get talking to the occupants of the seating



*A scene familiar to us all taken by Wilf Long aboard a Mk1 SO on a railtour. Ron North is facing us with Alan Morris occupying the window seat and David next to him. Out of sight, the table is covered with maps.*

bay across the aisle from us, all in an air of cheerful expectation, sharing of magazines etc. and tales of previous experiences would ensue.

### **A TYPICAL DAY OUT**

With the 'destination only' trips it gave us a chance to visit seaside towns never visited before and in all likelihood never visit again, I lost count of the many Northern towns and cities we either briefly halted at or slowly glided through. Thinking at the time, 'must properly visit this place sometime', but really knowing full well I never would.

On the 'land cruise' trips I would always look forward to the hour or so we had off the train to stretch our legs, especially if it was a nice day. I found it surprising that some passengers really hated having to leave the train, even though sometimes it could be a lot less than an hour if we were running late.

For example an on-time arrival at Plymouth would give us the chance to get down to Plymouth Hoe for a quick walk round and enjoy the sea views. On occasion when we only had half an hour dwell time we would briskly walk ten minutes away from the station, turn round and walk back, and that was it! Alan and I being younger and fitter than Wilf would have him well and truly puffed out by the time we got back to the station, but he always willingly tagged along with good nature and humour.

### **THE BEST OF COMPANY**

As the years went by Alan's cousin accompanied us less frequently and we often just occupied three seats of the four in our bay, we had to become acquainted with a single stranger but this was never a problem.

However we were soon joined on a regular basis by Alan's friend David. He worked in education and his principal job was leading

school parties on historical guided walking tours in High Wycombe and surrounding area. As Wilf had lived in High Wycombe all his life, David found him to be a mine of recollection and information, and they would talk for hours. Nothing wrong with Wilf's memory, it stretched back to his early school days.

David and I were young enough to have escaped National Service but Wilf had served in the Army Engineers, spending much of his time posted to India and the far East. Alan was in the RAF and served at many Northern air bases which provided lots of opportunity to go train spotting, he spent a good deal of time posted to Cyprus.

Of the hundreds of tales about service life I can still recall Alan's experience of his demob day. He was travelling back home from the North by train, it was a hot day so he took off his airman's cap. He was spotted by an RAF Officer who immediately gave him a severe reprimand for the sloppy wearing of the Queens uniform. He came very close that day to having to return to base and spend two weeks in confinement!

At lunch time we would tuck into homemade sandwiches, Alan and Wilf being more old fashioned would bring along thermos flasks, David and I would buy tea and coffee from the Buffet car.

### **OFF THE BEATEN TRACK**

Our train would traverse these various industrial spurs at a very slow speed, brushing past foliage and tree branches as we went, so the rule was window open and head in. We would wave and be waved back by folk in their back gardens, some would have been aware of our coming, and some surprised by the presence of a twelve coach passenger train on their freight only line.

Once at our destination be it quarry or mine we were lucky if our section of the train had entered inside the gate, not much use going forward to the front coaches because everyone had the same idea. We waited for the train crew to get to the other end, and we would trundle back from whence we came, all time consuming, Alan could mark it off in his Rail Atlas.



## BOOK REVIEW

### EARLY INDEPENDENTS OF THE HENLEY & MARLOW AREA

Written and published by Paul Lacey

As many of our members have interests in the wider transport field this volume covering the early bus operations in our home town and neighbouring Henley may be of interest.

Author and publisher Paul Lacey has spent over fifty years researching bus operators in the area and has published a string of books including a definitive 4-volume history of the Thames Valley Traction Company.

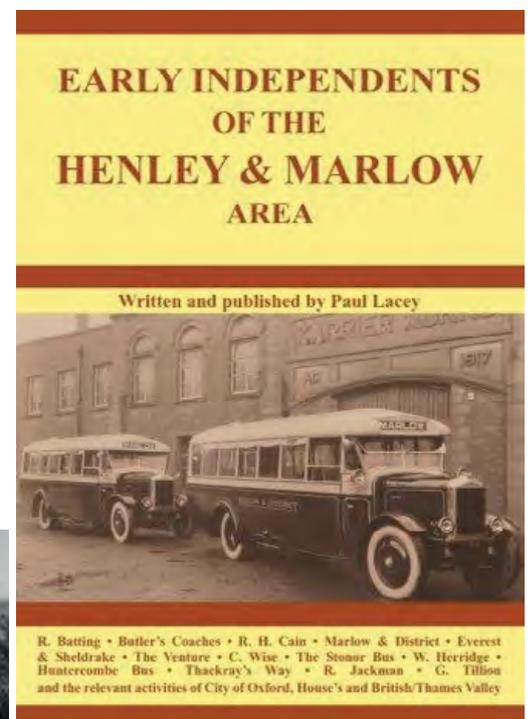
This latest work is this 96-page softback covering a wide variety of operators, often one-man bands. Among them is Battings of Marlow which long-time residents of the town will remember as a hardware shop in West Street but in the early 'twenties they also operated a charabanc business. However, roughly half the book is devoted to the story of Marlow & District Motor Services which pioneered bus services from the town between 1925 and 1933 when it was absorbed by Thames Valley. It is covered in great detail which also includes much background information on the town and its social life of the period.

Production standards are superb, it is printed on heavy coated paper and profusely illustrated.

Copies can be obtained from Paul Lacey at 17 Sparrow Close, Woosehill, Wokingham, RG41 3HT for £15.00 post paid. E-mail: paul.lacey17@btinternet.com MW



*During one of the trips he organised himself, Alan Morris watches 43080 depart from Peterborough.*



*One of the illustrations from the book. Marlow & District KX3638, a 1929 Karrier CL4 26 seater crossing Marlow Bridge. The destination display reads 'Marlow' although it is clearly heading out of town. However, looking at the original, which accompanied an article in Commercial Motor, it looks a little hand-written so it might have been altered.*

# A taste of France

CHRIS WAITE continues his visit to France last year

In the March issue of the Donkey Chris looked at the scene in Paris. He now heads into the country

From Paris I took the TGV to Chambéry, which is on the edge of the Alps not far from Grenoble. It is on the line to Modane and through to Italy and thus sees a fair amount of freight. Oddly, though, I only ever saw westbound freights during the day.

Alstom Prima EL 4200 2U 4,200kW dual-voltage (1.5kW dc and 25kV ac) Bo-Bo No.27056. Probably the 'standard' electric freight loco in France - 180 examples built 2001-05, 27056 being delivered in January 2003.



Alstom 'Astride' 6,000kW Tri-voltage Bo-Bos Nos.36339/50. 60 'Astrides' were built between 1996 and 2001. All are capable of operating on both French voltages, the first 30 also in Belgium, the last 30, including the examples seen here, in Italy. These were delivered in December 2000 and March 2001 respectively.

Alstom/Siemens 2,400kW Bo-Bo diesel-electric No.75410. 200 BB 75000 diesels were built between 2006 and 2012. The first 132 were 2,200kW, the last 68, including 75410 (new September 2010), with a more powerful but less polluting engine.





1,040kW Bo-Bo diesel-electric No.69461 (new circa 1970, rebuilt circa 2006). Originally over 300 were built around 1970 by a variety of manufacturers. In 2006, 75 locos including 69461 were refurbished and given new MTU engines.

Y8250 - one of 375 'Y 8000' class built between 1977 and 1989 and seen here shunting Corail passenger stock. It was built by Fauvet Girel in the mid-80s and has a 224kW Poyaud engine.

On the depot, in yellow Infra (structure) livery, flanked by 2 BB 75000 diesels Y9029. The Y9000 class of diesel-hydraulic shunters consists of 110 former Y7400 locos from the 1960s rebuilt between 2010 and 2015 with new 'floating' cabs and an upgraded 265kW MAN engine. Socofer of Tours was responsible for the first 22, while the rest, including 9029, were done at SNCF's Sotteville (Rouen) works. There is, however, very little work for them -Y9029 (and for that matter the 2 BB75000) didn't turn a wheel during the 5 days I was there and several Y9000s went straight into store after refurbishment.



The latest TGVs are not normally used on the Chambéry route. Normally domestic TGV services are formed of the first batch of double-deck 'Duplex' TGVs from the late '90s or the 600 series 'hybrids' from 2006. I was therefore rather surprised one day to find a domestic Anancy to Paris service formed of one of the 2014-built 9,280kW tri-voltage 'Euroduplex' sets, which normally work the Paris to Switzerland 'Lyria' or Paris to Germany services. Some of these domestic services are coupled to the Paris - Milan sets between Chambéry and Paris and No.4723 seen here is waiting for a train from Milan to couple up.



The Paris to Milan service is operated by six dedicated 'Réseau' sets built in the mid-1990s, such as 4504.

Local and Regional passenger services in the area are operated by a whole host of emus, bi-modes and loco-hauled Corail sets. Although semi-fast services tended to be formed of the Corail sets, they were also used turn and turn about with the various units on stopping services. Examples include this TER2N NG (Z24500) 2,550kW dual voltage 3-car double-deck EMU No.371, forming TER 17554, 07.32 Grenoble to Anancy at Chambéry on 1 June 2019. 145 of these units were built by Alstom and Bombardier between 2004 and 2011. Set 371 dates from 2007.

BGC bi-mode/bi-current 1,900kW /1,324kW 3-car E/DMU No.82580/79, forming train TER 84205, 10.32 Anancy to Annemasse and 1,300kW 4-car emu No.27751/2 forming train 84158, 12.08 to Anancy, at La Roche sur Foron on 31 May 2019. These Bombardier units date from around 2008/9. 146 bi-modes and 225 EMUs (plus 168 diesel-only) were built between 2005 and 2011.



B-B No.22392 with Corail stock at Annecy on 1 June 2019. 205 of these 4,360kW locos were built by Alstom (as it then was) between 1976 and 1986, 22392 dates from December 1985.



Regio 2N/Z55500 2,400kW 6-car EMU No.048C (Z55595/6) built by Bombardier in July 2015) seen here at La Tour du Pin forming train 887315, 10.00 Lyon Jean-Mace to Saint André Le Gaz on 3 June 2019.

AGC bi-mode but mono-current (1,500V dc) 1,900kW/1,324kW 3-car E/DMU No.81710/09 (Bombardier/08), forming train TER 883816, 09.22 to Annecy, leaving Chambéry on 4 June 2019. Although the entire journey is under the wires, this bi-mode was operating on diesel power - sound familiar? There are, however, two possible explanations, one is that the unit had a fault, the other is that while Chambéry is energised at 1,500V dc, the line between Aix-les-Bains (the next stop for this service) and Annecy is 25 kV ac, so this particular unit would need to use diesel power on that section in any event. 185 of these units were built between 2005 and 2010.





While staying in Chambéry, on 31 May 2019, we took a day trip to St Gervais-Le Fayet, from where 2 metre gauge lines operate in high summer and during the ski season - the SNCF 'Ligne de Savoie' to Vallorcine and the Tramway du Mont Blanc. Neither line was operating at the time of our visit, but I was able to photograph 'Ligne de Savoie' 802kW electric railcars Nos.601/5 (Decauville 1958) and an unidentified Z850 696kW 3-car emu (Stadler circa 2007). As far as I know, the elderly Decauville units are no longer in service.

On the Tramway du Mont Blanc, three even older 475kW SLM/Decauville railcars, dating from 1956, are, however, still used. The three, named *Anne*, *Marie* and *Jeanne* are in the shed at St. Gervais-les-Bains.



While plinthed outside the station was 0323 formerly Tramway du Mont Blanc 0-4-ORT No.3 (SLM 1990/09).

# PLYWOOD WONDERS

MIKE WALKER looks back at Reading's last fling

Plywood Wonders was the affectionate name given to the final design of manual signal boxes produced by Reading Signal Works for the WR in the late fifties and early sixties.

Reading Signal Works was established by the GWR as early as 1859 and within a decade or so it was producing both complete all-timer 'boxes or components for brick or stone built examples to a series of standard designs which evolved over the years and with which we are all familiar.

The final design, which became known as the Plywood Wonders, were less familiar as there were fewer of them and they represented a complete break with anything which had emerged from the works previously. Not only did they look radically different and "modern" for their day but they introduced new standards for the signalmen and were much sought after postings as a result.

Despite the sobriquet, they were not made of plywood! The external cladding, which was vertical boards of varnished cedar wood, was applied to a frame constructed in hardwood. The design was modular and could be prefabricated in the works to suit the size required for the location in question.

Apart from a glazed door, there were no windows in the ground floor whilst the upper, operating, floor featured large single pane windows on three and a half sides, several of which were arranged to open by sliding. Most had an external staircase but a few, including Evesham, had internal stairs. The door into the operating room on the external stairs examples had a full height window adjacent to it. There was a reason for this. Both door and window could be easily removed as a unit to allow the lever frame (or in a few cases a WR-style NX panel - Twyford for example) to be moved in easily on site during erection.

Internally there was a further break with WR tradition in that the lever frame was positioned at back of the 'box rather than at the front overlooking the action. This may have been a reflection of a wider BR policy at the time as the other Regions seemed to adopt a similar approach which appears to have originated on the LMS. Also, the lever frame was positioned towards one end of the building rather than centrally with the rest of the rear wall being occupied by "amenities" such as a sink and cooker - unheard of luxuries hitherto. There was also an inside loo on the ground floor - luxury indeed! The construction of the boxes also included effective insulation and, as built, prominent sun shades were provided above the main windows. As a result they were warm in winter and cool in summer - it is easy to see why they



*Exeter City Basin presents a fine example of the Plywood Wonder design in its original form including the prominent sun shields above the main windows which were later removed from most of the breed.*

were so highly thought of by the Bobbies lucky enough to work them.

There were around thirty of them scattered around the Region including a handful, Llantrisant West LC, Stocks Lane LC and Reading High Level, that were ground level. A remarkable number were in the London area being commissioned as part of the early MAS schemes which retained local control at some locations. Hence they could be found at Maidenhead and Twyford as well as Shiplake and Windsor & Eton Central.

Because of their modular and prefabricated construction it was possible to relocate them when they became redundant at their original location. Examples of this included the one from Ashendon Junction which moved to Eggesford on the Barnstaple line where the original LSWR 'box was slipping into the river, and Cymmer Afan which took a shorter journey to Bargoed. After the original GWR 'box at Hungerford was partly demolished by a derailed freight in 1971 it too was replaced by the second-hand Plywood Wonder previously at Bristol East Depot. Most bizarrely, Dainton ended its days as a clubhouse near a lake at Westbury!

The others gradually disappeared with the onward march of modernisation or line closures. Today, only one survives on the network at Evesham, albeit somewhat modified.

Understandably, some of the modular components found use elsewhere. The upper floor operating rooms of several WR Panel Boxes including Slough, Reading and Swindon were made up of similar materials and components to the Plywood Wonders including the double doors at one end to get the panel itself inside.

The WR also built some reasonably large brick signal boxes in the same period such as that at Fenny Compton and Waterloo Junction (Newport) which also incorporated standard components shared with the Plywood Wonders including windows and doors.

So ended the story of the last in a long line of GWR and WR standard signal boxes.

*Eggesford Signal Box seen in its final days in April 1988 by when the sun shields had been removed but the brackets remained. The lever frame was located along the back wall below the windows with the "amenities" behind the solid portion of the wall. As mentioned in the text, it was relocated from Ashendon Junction.*

*Photo: Tim Edmonds*



### Day one, Thursday, 26th of August: the Central Wales line

They were, looking back from today, just as much “Days of old, days of gold” as were the Days of '49. August, 1965 was when I travelled the Western Region using my first Rail-rover, and my very first trip was on the 8.05 from Bourne End to Wycombe, to catch the 8.50, the original *Inter City* from there through to Shrewsbury, due 11.24. National Rail Enquiries tells me that today's equivalent is 8.11 off Wycombe, a walk between Moor and New Street stations in Brum, and an arrival in Shrewsbury at 11.23. But back in 1965 The *Inter City* was the first of only seven through trains from Wycombe to Birmingham. It called at Bicester North and Banbury, missed by two minutes being a two-hour service from London to Birmingham, and was due into its “final destination” of Chester General at 12.48.

It's hard to conceive how different things were on the Railway 55 years ago. Steam locos were still common-place, even on the Western. During the course of the day I noted 21 steam locos, including five 9Fs, a Standard 4MT 2-6-4T, three Black Fives, a Standard Class 5 4-6-0, two “Tanner-oners” – 6106 and 6141 – and a Grange. I say “noted”, but my note-taking was poor, with no locations listed and numbers crammed into ill-defined columns. However, one of the 61XX pair was at Wycombe (almost certainly 6106 - Ed), and 6933, the one-time *Birtles Hall*, was in the north-facing bay at Banbury. *Birtles Hall* was one of the slightly off-piste places for the GWR to have selected, as it is a few miles to the west-north-west of Macclesfield. The grand total of numbers taken during the day was 108: 21 steam, 54 diesels and 33 DMU cars. 18 of the diesel locos were WR hydraulics – five Westerns, six Hymeks, and seven of the 95XX class. They had Paxman engines, Venturas rather than Valentas. Five 47s and seven 37s plus a 33 made up the rest of the main-line diesels. The biggest change from today's fleet was the number of 08s; 22 of them were spotted during the day. My 1969 “Combine” lists 1,078 of Classes 08, 09 and 10. The DMUs were mostly Derby three-car suburban units and Cross Country units of both Swindon and Gloucester R.C.&W. builds. One two-car unit was noted, a Birmingham R.C.&W. product, probably at Shrewsbury. Other sightings there likely included the Black Fives, the Standard 4MT tank and 75012, the tender version. A reminder of times gone by, even in 1965, was 7802 *Bradley Manor*, now on the Severn Valley Railway, and a genuine Western place, being on the western outskirts of Newton Abbot.

Notes about the journeys are also poor; no proper details of passenger numbers on the Central Wales train, the 11.50, which was a Cross-Country DMU, all three cars of it, but no open buffet. I can remember that the front saloon was full by the time I got on at Shrewsbury, so no seated view out of the front, although the first “vestibule” offered a standing view out front, and a useful base for photographing. I didn't record the time-keeping either, though it does seem we were eight late into Swansea, making it a one-minute connection into the 16.20 through train to Slough. The process of rationalising the Central Wales line was in full swing, with goods yards rusty or lifted, and a Class 37 on scrapping duties stabled at Builth Road in the sidings alongside the connection down to the G.W.R. The oil lamps at Llanbister Road were noted, and photographed, as was the goods yard at Penybont and the lifted loop at Llandrindod Wells. Llanbister Road is famous for being a “long way” from Llanbister, which is a hamlet some 4¼ miles away as the crow flies, and 5½ miles by road. It's only about 30 feet lower than its station, whereas Dent is closer to its station horizontally – only c. 4.38 miles by road – but further vertically, being about 700 feet lower. Double track was still in operation on the stretches



*Leaving Craven Arms aboard the 11.50 Shrewsbury to Swansea High Street, a three-car Cross Country unit, on Thursday 26th August 1965. All photos by the author unless stated.*

between Craven Arms and Knighton (town in Wales, station in England) and between Llanbister Road and just north of Llandrindod Wells. Presumably the northbound platform there was taken out of use to save passengers the need to cross the line, but it made operating unnecessarily awkward. Yet another of those weird rationalisations that were, well, irrational, and have had to be reversed.

The Central Wales line is a stunning confection, cooked up by five separate companies. From Central Wales Junction at Craven Arms & Stokesay to Knighton was the Knighton Railway, which opened in 1860/1. That was a relatively easy stretch; thence to Llandrindod Wells the Central Wales Railway, opened in stages 1862-65, had a much harder task, as did the locos, especially southbound, with four miles of 1 in 60 up and out of the Teme valley to the summit at Llangunllo. My train wasn't booked to call at Knucklas, saving it an awkward re-start about half way up that 1 in 60. It also missed Hopton Heath, but its only conditional call was at Cilmery Halt, the first stop south of what was still called Builth Road High Level, three years after Low Level had closed. The stop at Cilmery was to set down only if the guard had been asked at Builth Road. Why not let passengers also join the train; just what was the reason not to? All Cilmery's stops were conditional in one way or another. Its only other southbound stop was at least open, but only on request to the guard at Builth Road, or by hand signal if joining. Northbound three trains might call, but passengers couldn't signal to the driver in this direction. The first did so to pick up only, but on request to the station at Llanwrtyd Wells, three stations to the south. The second call was set-down only, and the guard had to be told at Llandovery, four stations to the south. The final possible call was at 20.39, again pick up only and by request to Llanwrtyd Wells. That train might, on Wednesdays and Saturdays only, also call at Garth, if the guard was asked to do so at Llandovery. In 1958 Garth had a conditional call at 9.40 by the 7.45 from Swansea – those wishing to board, but only if travelling to Shrewsbury at least, had to inform the station the previous day. Just what market research had been done to create such an esoteric collection of conditions?

Since Llandrindod we'd been on the third railway, the Central Wales Extension, opened 1866-8. It ran as far as Llandovery, where the Vale of Towy had opened in 1858, connecting the town with Llandeilo, which had been reached by railway number five, the Llanelly Railway & Dock, in 1857. That railway later built the line from Pontardulais to Swansea, opened in 1865. The Central Wales line had been proposed for closure throughout in June 1962 by the Western Region, to save the £202,000 annual loss. The local Transport Users Consultative Committee actually listened to people, as in November that year they decided that hardship would be caused to passengers on the route between Llandeilo and Craven Arms. Over to you, Minister. Seventeen months later the decision that the line would stay open was finally made. The route between Pontardulais and Swansea Victoria, used as late as 1939 by through carriages from Euston, was closed – hardly a surprise, as Victoria had an average weekday use of 120 passengers. An interesting “might have been” was the 1960 proposal to convert the line to CTC, controlled from Llandrindod Wells. It would have been singled, with loops added as necessary. The cost was given as £676,000. The reason for the proposal was to provide a route for additional freight traffic that it was thought was coming. One wonders at the amount of research behind it though – miles of 1 in 60 gradients, two major summits – Llangunllo (980 feet) and Sugar Loaf (820 feet), and plenty of banking engines required.

Lines that are difficult to operate are normally scenic wonders, and the Central Wales line is no exception. Like other very rural railways, say the still-lamented Port Road through Galloway, its alignment far outclasses that of the roads that parallel its route. Back in 1965 its trains had recently been re-routed via a reversal at Llanelly to Swansea High Street. The timetable of the day didn't acknowledge that fact, with Llanelly shown as the origin and destination of all four daily trains, and no notes to show that they did manage to reach Swansea High Street. There I boarded the crowded 16.20 through train to Slough, which was non-stop from Newport to Reading, and also the penultimate train of the day, apart from the sleeper, to Paddington. At Slough I followed the announcer's exhortation to find platform 1 – “Slough, Slough, change for Windsor, platform 1 for Windsor” and made my first trip to Windsor & Eton Central.



*Builth Road No. 1 High Level: the driver of the 11.50 from Shrewsbury exchanging the tokens. The signal box is a classic LNWR design but the signals have apparently been replaced by GWR style ones.*



*An unidentified Class 37 at Builth Road: stabled in the sidings along the connection to the ex-GW line low-level line.*

### **Day two, Friday, 27th. of August: Somerset and Wiltshire**

After a first day that had travel over two closed stretches of line, this day featured three now closed lines, two branches and part of a through route. The day began with a fifty-minute run on the 7.37 through train from Bourne End to Paddington, which after Maidenhead called only at West Drayton & Yiewsley. The current equivalent isn't, of course, a through train, but the 7.46 from Bourne End, with a cross-platform change at its main-line junction onto a non-stop train booked into Paddington in 18 minutes, gets passengers to that terminus at 8.20. Off-peak things aren't so flash: in 1965 the connections from Maidenhead called only at Slough and Ealing Broadway. Now the typical off-peak journey takes 59 minutes, four more than 1965, and has five stops on the main line.

My train from Paddington was the 8.45 *The Bristolian*, Bath Spa then Temple Meads at 10.35. Today's IET equivalent is faster – 8.32 due 10.07 – but has five stops, a total of ten minutes. The 8.32's overall average speed is a tad short of 75 mph, which is, even now, only five mph faster than the average speed Gerard Fiennes held was the competitive minimum for inter-city rail. I made some rudimentary efforts at calculating the train's speed: 82 mph was recorded through Hayes, across Maidenhead Bridge and after Cholsey. Gravity helped us up to 90 going down Dauntsey Bank. Once at Temple Meads it was off to Yatton for a quick jaunt to Clevedon and back. Clevedon was an early arrival, opened by the Bristol & Exeter in 1847, only six years after they had opened their line from Bristol to Bridgwater. Rationalisation had stripped the branch of all track except a single line from Yatton and the typically glorious goods shed, with its two-storey office extension. What was that garret room – a records store? Goods traffic had ended back in June, 1963, and the passenger service was withdrawn in October, 1966. Back in the winter 1957/8 timetable there had been 30 trains a day, in 1965 it was still at 25. Rationalisation extended to the station's name – it was now “Clevedon Halt”. Shunting the goods sidings, which were in two groups of two either side of the platform, would have been quite a smooth business. Goods trains arrived in the platform road, ran-round and were then pulled back through a single slip onto the headshunt on the down side of the line. From there access was possible directly to both pairs of sidings. Back to Temple Meads for the train to Chippenham, and a trip to Calne.

Calne was a later arrival, open in 1863, but an earlier departure, closing in September, 1965, less than a month after I travelled there. Like the Marlow branch ten years later, it was built by its eponymous railway company, but was taken over by the GW in

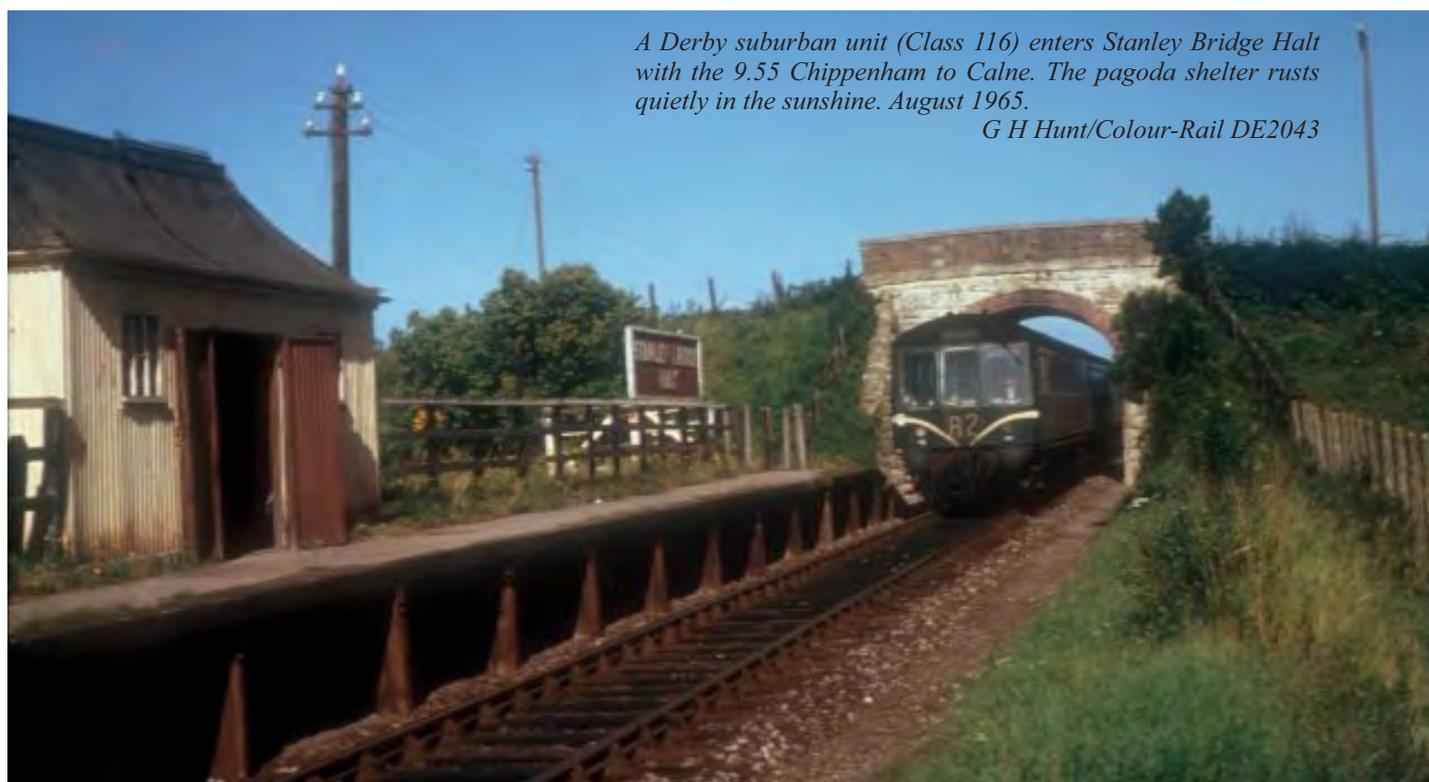


*Clevedon goods shed: what was behind that garret window?  
Friday 27th August 1965.*

1892, five years before the Great Marlow Railway was. R.H. Clark, in volume 3 of his GW station layouts series, notes that in 1959 200,000 passengers used the station. Parcels traffic was considerable, an average of 564 every day, nearly five times as many outbound as inbound. No doubt many of them would have contained the products of Harris's bacon factory. In 1957/8 it had 14 trains a day, which it still had in 1965, although it had lost its Sunday service. Given that each end of the 5¼ mile line served towns of reasonable size, one wonders if a little more care and attention might have kept the line going. The timetable had two-hour gaps in the late morning/early afternoon, with the train crew twice twiddling their personal needs for an hour at Calne. As the end-to-end running time was only fifteen minutes, gap-fillers would have been perfectly possible, making the timetable more attractive. The service used a bay platform at Chippenham, carved out of the island platform that on its northern face was the Up Main. However, it was not a true island, as

the south face was a dead-end west-facing bay. Now it's all change, as for the arrival of the HSTs the layout was revised, to increase the line speed, with the Down Main platform created out of the south side of the island. There were two intermediate stopping places; first out of Calne came the piratical Black Dog Halt, only advertised to the public from 1953, and Stanley Bridge Halt, a typical GW halt with timber platform and corrugated-iron pagoda waiting shelter. It had opened in 1905, served by the steam railcars introduced then; they lasted until the mid-30s. Black Dog had been built for Lord Lansdowne, of a wealthy family who had an estate of 121,000 acres in Wiltshire, and numerous titles and political posts, including five years in the 1880s as Governor of Canada. Although passengers could use the station, the GW couldn't put up a name board, and had to book pax at Calne fares. Although its entire service was on request, it was staffed until 1960. The agreement about the station between the Lord and the GW specified that the staffing costs were to be shared.

Next it was back to Bristol for a spin out to Severn Beach and back. In the Days of '65 the timetable was less hectic than today's, helped not just by fewer trains, but also double track to Avonmouth. Now it's single, with loops at Clifton Down and Avonmouth. Sectional running times are tight, as are turn-rounds, making it subject to "perturbation". Back in Bristol TM it was across to the 17.00 to Salisbury. It was booked to call at Keynsham & Somerdale, Oldfield Park, Bath Spa, then non-stop to Trowbridge, from where it was all stations to Salisbury. No hourly through Cardiff to Portsmouth trains in those days, and a very infrequent service. After the 5.45 from Bristol, change at Westbury with a 31-minute wait, Salisbury at 8.00, it was the 8.20, Salisbury at 10.13. I made a quick change at Trowbridge into the last train of the day to Devizes, the 17.54. Many years later, waiting for a train at Trowbridge with a vegetarian colleague, a fellow member of the Paddington APTIS team, she asked me "What's that factory over there?" I replied "You don't want to know." More bacon products. The line through Trowbridge was opened in 1848 by the Wilts., Somerset & Weymouth. The lines from Bath and to Devizes had opened in 1857. Devizes became a through station in 1862 when the Berks & Hants Extension opened from Hungerford. The 17.54 from Trowbridge terminated at Devizes, and according to the timetable returned as the 18.30 to Westbury. Oh, no, it didn't. An



*A Derby suburban unit (Class 116) enters Stanley Bridge Halt with the 9.55 Chippenham to Calne. The pagoda shelter rusts quietly in the sunshine. August 1965.*

*G H Hunt/Colour-Rail DE2043*

amendment was missing from my timetable. The train in fact continued empty to Patney, and then hurried through Lavington to Westbury. The next train back west was at 18.45 (!), the 18.31 from Patney & Chirton. Was it really formed by the 16.19 arrival there, and if it was manned by that train's crew, what was there to do for over two hours at Patney? Although only delayed by 15 minutes, my arrival at Westbury would have been five minutes after the last London of the day had left. So, change at Trowbridge for Bath and an eventual arrival in Maidenhead at 22.27, 16 minutes after the last branch had left.....

It had been another day with a wide range of loco types. A total of 90 numbers was recorded: only eight steam, but six types – two 61XX, two 8Fs, and one each of the two types of Hall, a Grange and a 9F; 66 diesels of 11 types, again 08s were the most numerous, 23, then ten 47s, nine each of Westerns and Hymeks, four 63XX, three each of the Peaks and 95XX, two each of the 03s and Warships, and a single 33 and D8013. What was it doing? Why didn't I make the effort to record the numbers against locations?! The 16 DMU cars recorded included one of the Western's Inter-City sets, perhaps the Class 175 of their day, though not in terms of performance. My first trip on one had been from Plymouth to Brent, en route to the Kingsbridge branch in 1963. We crested Hemerdon at a lowly rate, probably little more than 20 mph. Another unit was Gloucester "bubble car" W55013, later one of the herd sent to Scotland. Also seen that day was D1013 *Western Ranger*, later to star as one of the locos on the *Western Tribute* tour of 1977, and on many excursions once preserved. The Warships were D812 *Royal Naval Reserve 1859 – 1959* and D869 *Zest*. What gorgeous locos they were, with their cast nameplates helpfully explaining that its loco was one of the "Warship Class".

### Day three, Sunday, 29th August: Somerset, Devon and Cornwall

Saturday's itinerary had been a visit to the South Wales Valleys, but the trip was cancelled, for a reason lost in time. Sunday started with a return from Bourne End to Marlow and back, before continuing to Reading for the 10.15, originally to Exeter, but, after single-line working for track relaying, revised to Taunton, to bash the Minehead line. Thanks to that engineering work I never travelled on the lines from Exmouth to Tipton St. John's, part of which had opened as late as 1903, and Sidmouth/Sidmouth Junction. I see that my train from Exmouth would have been through to Sidmouth – there were a couple a day. Instead of a South Devon resort I added a trip to a North Cornwall one, Bude, which would otherwise have remained "unbashed". Once back at Taunton I caught a train to Exeter St. David's, and then a through train to Bude, whence I returned to Halwill Junction. Exeter to Bude was a concretion of companies and openings. Exeter to Crediton was the Exeter & Crediton, open in 1851, on to Coleford Junction was the North Devon & Dock of 1854. Okehampton had been reached in 1871, after a two-year pause at North Tawton, and a four-year wait at Sampford Courtenay, by the Devon & Cornwall. That company continued westwards, opening the line through what became Meldon Junction in 1874. Five years later the L&SWR itself opened a line to Holsworthy, which remained the terminus for 19 years until Bude was finally reached in 1898.



*Bude on Sunday 29th August 1965 looking up the line, goods shed to left, signal box and loco shed to right.*

The line from Meldon Junction passed through some of England's most sparsely populated country – high, open and no doubt visited by vile weather in the winter. From Meldon Junction to Ashbury the line was more than 800 feet above sea level; by Halwill Junction it was down to about 600 feet. And empty – there was a halt at Maddaford Moor which the 1960 published one-inch sheet shows had a few buildings nearby, and a station at Ashbury, about two miles from that settlement, which is shown as a church and a couple of grey shapes. Google Earth today shows it to be what looks like five houses – Street View doesn't actually get all the way there – and what look like holiday lets, probably built on the site of a manor house demolished in 1965, and St. Mary's church, "redundant since 1997, but preserved by residents". On from Ashbury it was Halwill Junction, with its lines to Padstow, Bude and the wondrous line to Torrington, not opened until 1925, by the North Devon & Cornwall Junction Light Railway. That line had closed earlier in 1965, removing its two and a half (a short working from Torrington to Dunsbear Halt, returning from Petrockstow after, presumably, an empty stock working) trains from the timetable. I was lucky enough to travel over it from Torrington to Meeth on the *Atlantic Coast Express*, an excursion on 12/4/80, hauled by two 31s to Exeter, then by two 25s to Meeth and Meldon Quarry. The winter Sunday service to Bude was a bus, which left Bude at 15.00 and ran to Okehampton and back. It provided a 27 minute wait into an up train, but down pax had an hour's wait. By "summer", that is mid-June, trains ran on Sundays. In fact, the winter "New Issue" timetable, which ran from 4/1/65 to 13/6/65, shows that for the last three Sundays of the service there were through carriages from Paddington to Ilfracombe, detached from the 11.30 Paddington to Kingswear.

Back from Bude as far as Halwill Junction, where I caught one of the two trains a day to Launceston, which was as far as anything went on the North Cornwall line, even on summer Sundays. The return train, 19.15 from Launceston, was a Cross-Country unit, shown as a through train to Exeter, but before arrival at Halwill Junction the guard told me it was change at Halwill, where the train combined with a train from Bude, another Cross-Country, becoming its rear three cars. Needless to say, the front three weren't full and standing; I recall being one of two passengers to get off the train from Launceston. Off we went, clambering back up to Meldon Junction and down to St. David's. I was off to stay with a nursing friend of my Mum's who lived in Exeter. I would be back on the line the very next morning.

Number-taking was almost non-existent; I've no idea why, but all that I noted were three 08s and a couple of DMU cars!

*To be continued.*

*Approaching Westbury on the 9.30 SuO from Paddington on Sunday 29th August 1965.*



# THEN AND NOW: HANDSWORTH JUNCTION

These two photos supplied by Tim Edmonds show two sides of the same bridge about 88 years apart.

His father's shot was taken when he was still at school c1927. He had befriended one of the signalmen at Handsworth Junction signal box, which started his interest in railway signalling. It is looking in the Birmingham direction with a down auto train approaching on the Wolverhampton main line and the Stourbridge Junction line diverging on the right. Note that this was taken before the station for The Hawthorns football ground was opened in 1931 on the Wolverhampton side of the junction. This was closed in 1968



The 2015 shot taken by Tim is from The Hawthorns, the 1995 Midland Metro station, which is located on the other side of the bridge. The view is looking towards the site of Handsworth Junction signal box, with the platforms on the Stourbridge Junction line off picture to the left.

It's an interesting contrast in suburban railway travel and the tram itself is already history!