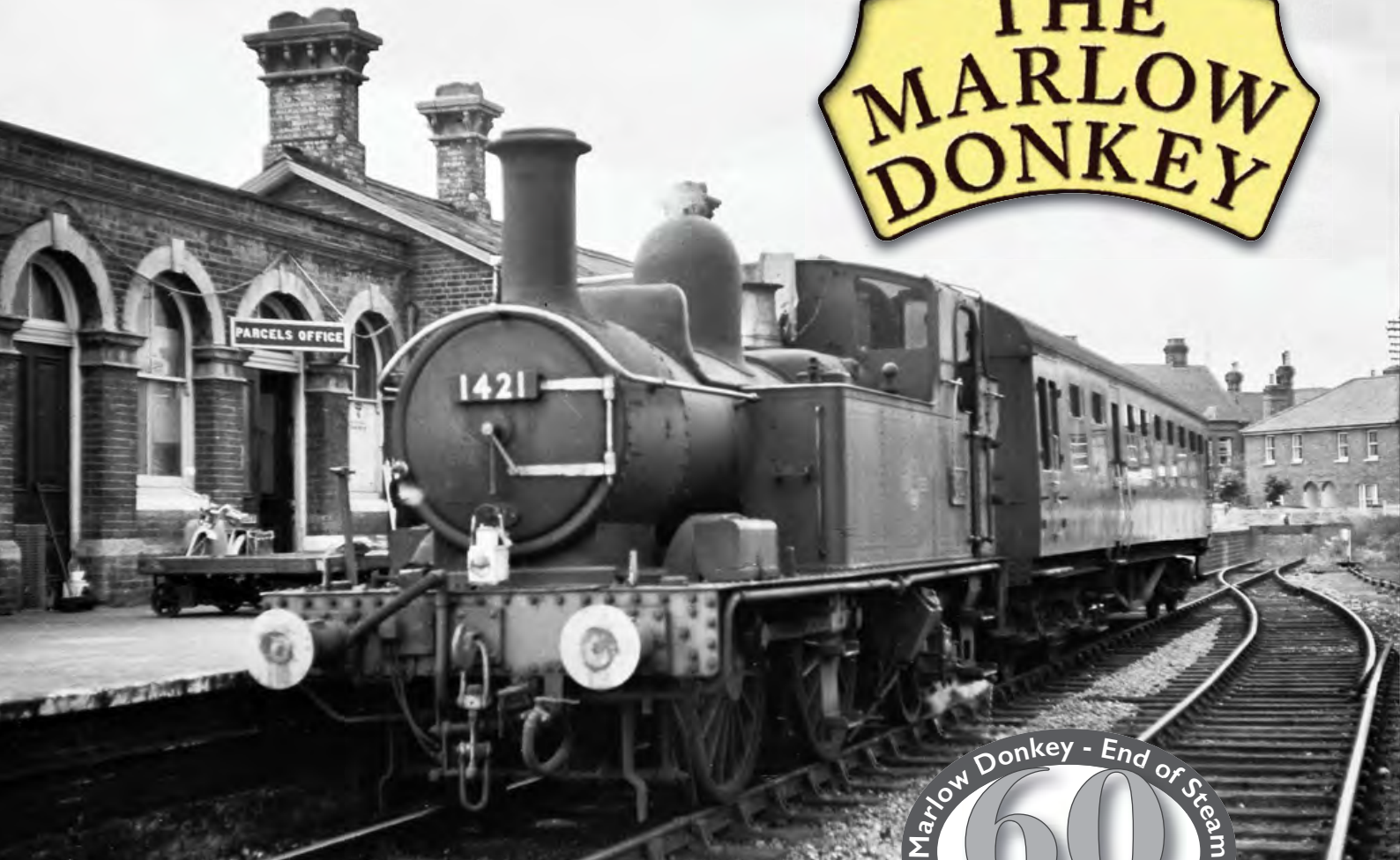
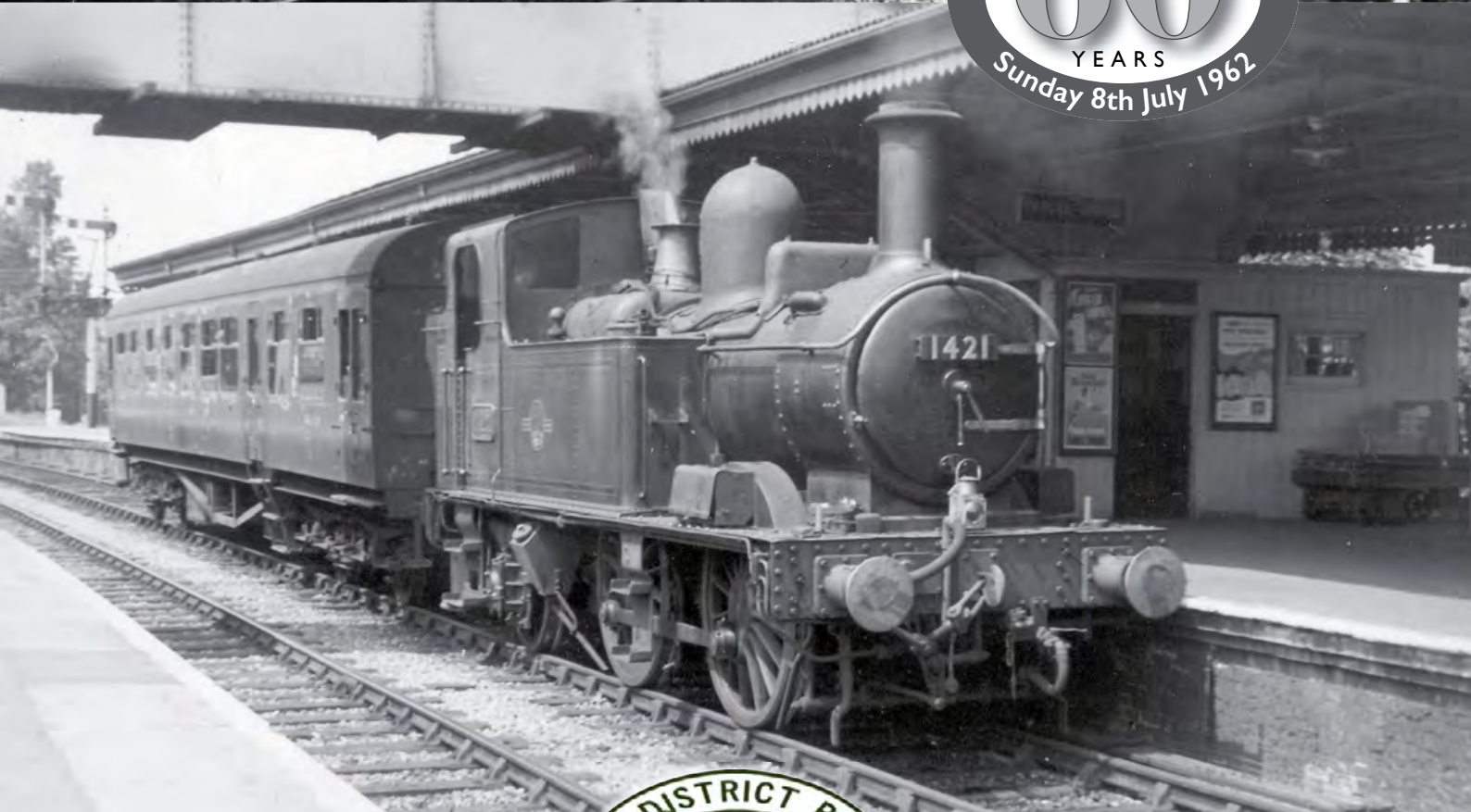


THE MARLOW DONKEY



Marlow Donkey - End of Steam
60
YEARS
Sunday 8th July 1962



Edition

176

June 2022



Contents:
Marlow Donkey Steam Finale
Tickets Please - Part 3
Vintage Railfan Recollections - Part 4
Then & Now - Dawlish

The Marlow Donkey

The Magazine of the Marlow & District Railway Society

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

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Front Cover Photographs

*Top: 1421 on the Marlow Donkey at Marlow on the final weekend of steam. 7 or 8 July 1962.
Mike Peart (Article page: 5)*

*Bottom: 1421 on the Marlow Donkey at Bourne End. 8 July 1962.
David Gardner (Article page: 5)*

TIMETABLE

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

Meetings are held in the Bourne End Community Centre, Wakeman Rd, Bourne End at 7.15 for 7.30pm or can be attended on-line on Zoom (see page 3).

Thursday 16 June **SIR NIGEL GRESLEY AND THE A4s** David McIntosh

This is the story of the man, the locomotive and the Class of A4s with special reference to the 100th Gresley Pacific No 4498/7/60007. David is currently the Education Officer for the Sir Nigel Gresley Locomotive Trust and will therefore be able to update the meeting on the return to Main Line service of the only currently operational A4. In addition, he is the Locomotive Manager for the Gresley Society Trust, owner of the oldest preserved Gresley Locomotive N2 0-6-2T No 1744 and so will be able to update the meeting on the current status of the Overhaul and future plans for the N2.

Thursday 21 July **OXFORD TO CAMBRIDGE - THEN & NOW** Richard Crane

Richard's presentation covers the closure of the through rail route between Oxford and Cambridge on the last day of 1967 which was arguably one of the greatest mistakes of the 1960's closures. Richard takes us on a pictorial journey along the 77 mile route as it was and as it is in 2022 along with a look at the progress of restoring the rail link now progressing as the East-West Rail Project.

Thursday 18 August **TRACKS IN THE MIST - PART 2** Colin Brading

Continuing the theme begun in October 2021, Colin's presentation explores two more pioneering railways lost in the mists of time. Starting in Wales with the Swansea and Mumbles Tramway, we then journey a little closer to home for a detailed look at the short, but fascinating, Wantage Tramway.

Thursday 15 September **THE RAILWAYS OF SRI LANKA** Simon Colbeck

Thursday 20 October **BROAD GAUGE JOURNEY 2 –SWINDON TO SOUTH WALES** Brian Arman

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

By Avoiding the few showers which can break the blue cloudless skies it seems now is a good time to be out photographing railway scenes and action. Hopefully members will take the opportunity to get some fresh air, enjoy their hobby and share it with other members via these pages. We have had some fascinating stories and pictures of late so send yours in to the Editor.

Sofar the committee have been able to serve the monthly meeting of members with a hybrid service of actual meetings at BECC and providing 'Zoom' productions for those at home. The latter often outnumbering the former which negates much of the potential socialising but you have the choice. True we had had a few hiccups, usually at the start of Zooming, but your technical hosts of David, Richard and Peter, have been able to resolve the issues and get us back on track. The variety of talks is a feature we try to encourage with over a year of talks plus quality pictures. Two months ago Colin Miell took us to the Isle of Man which it seems many members have not been to in person. If you get the chance do go and enjoy the mixture of road and rail across the island. Those that have been once often go again and again by air or by ferry. English is widely spoken!

We were delighted in April to have the return, at least on scene, of our member Tim Edmunds who escorted us over the West Somerset Railway 'in Challenging Times' (his words). When living there until recently Tim volunteered on the railway so has quite an intimate knowledge of the line to Minehead.

We followed in May with 'A Nineth Colour Rail Journey' (yes, nine visits to MDRS) although Paul Chancellor did admit to a certain someone of renown doing the early ones. 'Named Trains' was the principal subject scanning across the regions. A novel quiz in the middle of the presentation was a challenge to most of us. The selection of photographs, many quite rare, was both interesting and enlightening. We look forward to a return visit from Paul perhaps next year. For details of near future talks read this magazine and Mike Walker's regular Newsletters. Book your place on Zoom when invited or put a towel on your seat if coming to BECC. Do not miss out on the MDRS.

Mike Hyde

SOCIETY AND LOCAL NEWS

NEW MEMBERS

We are delighted to welcome a further three members to the Society, Steve Frattaroli who lives locally in Bourne End, Keith Mapley from Hythe in Kent and Richard Dyett of Pinner. We hope you enjoy the Society's activities and look forward to seeing Steve, at least, in person at our meetings.

PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Our spring season opened with Colin Miell who took us to the Isle of Man in March. Colin is a regular visitor to the island and his presentation was a collection of images taken on those trips giving us an excellent idea of how the railways on the island have changed in the last thirty or more years.

In May member Tim Edmonds took us behind the scenes at the West Somerset Railway to enlighten us on some of the major challenges the line has faced in the recent past, financial, maintenance backlogs and of course, Covid and the related effect on operations. Perhaps, wisely, he steered clear of the personality issues. Tim and Veronica have now moved from Somerset so their involvement in the affairs of the WSR will be much reduced future.

Paul Chancellor returned in May with a Ninth Colour-Rail Journey this time concentrating mainly on passenger services including titled trains. He covered the entire country over a wide time range although it was disappointing not to see the *Marlow Donkey* featured.

VISITS

Sadly there was no interest in the proposed visit to Quainton Road on May 1st. In view of this the Committee has decided that we will not organise any more trips in the immediate future which is disappointing but understandable. It seems times and tastes change and the days when we could fill a 50-seater coach for our annual summer visit to a heritage railway are long gone. But back then we had Stan Verrinder who would accept nothing less than a death certificate, in triplicate, as an excuse for not signing up!



Whilst the Society didn't visit Quainton, Vincent Caldwell was there assisting with the miniature railway and took time out to get this shot of the star visitor, Furness Railway 20 in action with a suitable train of vintage stock.

VINEYARD CROSSING UPGRADE

Network Rail have recently been upgrading the Vineyard footpath crossing at Little Marlow which will now have miniature red and green lights to warn users if it is safe to cross. These are activated by the approaching trains.

This is the final crossing on the Marlow branch to be so upgraded, several others were done last year including Caldicot Lane (the next one towards Marlow) despite it having been sealed on the north side by palisade fencing erected by the land owner!

Vineyard crossing has been the scene several instances of abuse in recent times, some of which have made it into the national press. However, it isn't clear whether the upgrade will actually deter such mindless behaviour, which, it must be stressed, is not being done by locals.



The new light units in position at Vineyard Crossing awaiting commissioning. At the time of writing, no date has been given for that.

Photo: Mike Walker

SAFETY FENCES AT SLOUGH

An application has been made to (and so far as we can tell approved by) Slough council to erect fences with gates along platforms 1/2 and 3/4 at Slough. It seems that the gates will be controlled by staff and presumably only opened shortly before a train is due to stop at one of the main line platforms.

Similar fences with gates are, of course, already installed at various stations on the GWML, but those are all stations where the main line platforms are rarely used.

The gateline, currently on platform 2, is also to be moved and alterations are to be made to the older footbridge on 3/4 so that at its base it is parallel to the trains rather than being at 90°. It looks like access to the lift on platform 2 will be from what is now the East car park, rather than from platform 2 itself.

ERRATA

A small error crept into the article on Private Sidings in the March issue. The loco shed at Broom & Wade was at the end of the siding marked 2 in the photograph not 1 as stated in the text.

Steam Dreams' *Royal Windsor Steam Express* has started its 2022 season running twice on most Tuesdays through to the end of August.

On 10th May John Tuck caught David Buck's B1 61306 *Mayflower*, which is the booked regular locomotive, arriving at Windsor & Eton Riverside.



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Mike,

Your piece on the Three Private Sidings (*March Marlow Donkey*) was very interesting. I knew all three of course though I never got to venture over Thomas & Green's but saw it plenty of times from the train though.

I seem to think Gomme's Siding couldn't be seen from the branch but when I was at secondary school a pal of mine's Dad was a crane driver at Gomme's so with his help I saw the sidings at close hand. During the 1960s while I was working for Sid Cabbage, a heating and ventilating firm, we had to do some work at E. Gomme so I had another look at the site.

Broom & Wade's was the most interesting as I visited the siding, probably no.5 on your map, on three occasions in October/November of 1963 to photograph Shell Mex & BP fuel oil tank wagons. There were always quite a few of the 1940s and later build and were usually accompanied by a low-sided open.

Again while I was working for Cabbage, we had to do some ducting work at Broom & Wade. We had to drop off some stuff alongside siding no.2 which had some low-sided wagons on it. Our pick-up lorry was backing up and I had to inform the driver when to stop but he didn't hear me shout so hit one of the wagons, or rather the buffers, which made a lot of noise but not much damage.

For two years during the 1970s I worked at Broom & Wade and it was a dreadful place. I was on the inspection side and to get from one side of the factory to the other it was quicker to walk through the foundry but you had to dodge the molten metal flying about. Clothes and hankies became begrimed with dirt and rust spots which would not wash out. Some people worked there all their working lives, I was just glad to get away.

Best wishes

David Gardner



Two of the Shell Mex & BP tankers photographed by David at Broome & Wade on 27th October 1963 6340, was a 20 ton

anchor mounted Class B tank wagon built in September 1948 whilst 5402 was a similar vehicle built in September 1953.

MARLOW DONKEY STEAM FINALE



David Gardner

Leslie Sander

Sixty years ago next month, on Sunday 8th July 1962, the *Marlow Donkey* was worked by steam for the last time, just over 89 years since the branch opened. To mark this event we present a selection of photographs taken on the final weekend and the days leading up to it.

Since the 1930s the '*Donkey*' had been regularly worked by 14xx class tanks and autotrailers. These were supplied by Slough shed which usually had two of the class on its allocation, one of which would spend a week at Marlow housed in the single-locomotive shed opposite the station with the locomotive being exchanged by returning to Slough at the close of service on Sunday and replaced by a fresh one on Monday ready for the week ahead.

At the end of steam, Slough (81B) had 1421 and 1445 on its books with the former working the final services suitably bulled-up for the occasion.

Here it is seen at Bourne End (above) and at Brooksby Crossing (right) seen from the top of the branch up home signal, both taken on the 8th.



The 'Donkey' standing at the old Marlow station on Friday 6th July. On this day, 1445 was in use as it had been all week but was swapped overnight for 1421. The autotrailer, W229W, was in particularly ratty condition!

Note the 16 ton mineral wagon in "Klondike siding" used for loco coal, the shed is just visible beyond.



Ron White / Colour-Rail



1445 leaving Marlow on the same day, the autotrailer looking slightly more presentable from this angle.

Again, the engine shed is in the background along with the Greenwich sawmill which was established on the site during World War Two. It was the expansion of these premises which led to the demolition of the old station and relocation to the former coal siding in 1967.

Ron White / Colour-Rail

1421 resting at Marlow station on either the final Saturday or Sunday. As already noted, Slough had specially prepared the locomotive with a good clean, although to be fair both it and 1445 were kept in fine condition by the cleaners at 81B, and the picking out of the buffers, smokebox hinges and handrails with aluminium paint. Being the last steam-worked autotrains in the London Division the occasion warranted such attention and attracted many enthusiasts so it is well documented.



Mike Peart



In addition to shuttling to and fro between Marlow and Bourne End all day, there were several through journeys to Maidenhead or High Wycombe each day. Here, 1421 calls at Cookham on its way back from a trip to Maidenhead on 7th July.

Ron White / Colour-Rail

Breaking free once again, 1421 scurries up the short climb towards Cores End crossing bound for High Wycombe, again on the Saturday.

The two sidings in the foreground latterly served Jacksons Mill which was behind the photographer. The further one was laid in 1936 as a carriage siding whilst the nearer one was added in 1942, paid for by the Ministry of Supply for the delivery of foodstuffs.



Ron White / Colour-Rail



Having made it to High Wycombe, 1421 blows off enthusiastically anxious to return to Marlow.

Ron White / Colour-Rail

On 14th April 1962 1421 leaves Marlow for Bourne End approaching Fieldhouse Lane crossing. On this occasion compartment type autotrailer W250W was being used in place of the regular open type.



Nick Lera



On the same day, 1421 rumbles across Marlow Viaduct. Despite its name, this was in Bourne End and spanned the Abbotsbrook waterway just before it flows into the Thames. The name was probably chosen to avoid confusion with Bourne End Viaduct which is the bigger structure over the Thames.

Nick Lera

On the last day once again, 1421 is seen between the Upper Thames Sailing Club and Wharf Lane crossings approaching Bourne End from Marlow.



John Cramp

The only sources of water available to the 'Donkey were at Maidenhead, High Wycombe and Marlow.

1421 makes a visit to the shed at Marlow on the final weekend which, because of the lack of space in the headshunt beyond the loop, required a fairly complex shunt from the platform.



Mike Peart



1421 sitting on shed which was provided from the opening of the railway in 1873 and closed with the end of steam.

It was normal for the locomotive to lead to Bourne End as this meant it was easier to handle on the shed without detaching the trailer although there were occasional exceptions.

After the 'Donkey and a short period in store, 1421 moved to Exeter where it spent another year working the Exe Valley and Hemyock lines before being withdrawn in 1963. 1445 went to Gloucester and was withdrawn in 1964.

Mike Peart



Although the scruffy W229W was used for the weekend there were two other trailers in the Down sidings at Bourne End, sister W221W which was named *Wren*, one of two of the type named after British birds - W220W *Thrush* was the other.



Also at Bourne End for the weekend was W250W. This was one of a batch of twelve built as brake 3rds and converted in 1953 to diagram A44.

both: Mike Peart

TICKETS PLEASE!

Recollections of a Great Western Train Guard 1999 to 2018 (Part Three)

Martin Stoolman



Wearing the original Great Western Trains "Merlin" livery, 43004 Swan Hunter passes Ruscombe on 31st October 1997.

All photos: Mike Walker

They can teach you all you like in the classroom but learning "on the job" is what really counts. My train ploughing into a herd of cows less than three months into my career (as recounted in part 2) was in many ways a horrible blessing in disguise. I learned a lot from it, although no two incidents are ever exactly the same. It never happened to me again thank goodness, although I do recall being at Exeter St David's when a Virgin Voyager unit came in with most of a cow stuck to the front coupling bar. All highly unpleasant – actually not so much the sight as the smell! But moving on quickly....

Pulled passenger communication cords are something that all Guards have to deal with; when they happen though you would far rather it was in a station than on the move. But on Saturday 3rd June 2000, having booked on just 25 minutes earlier and taken over the 09:38 Paignton to Paddington at St David's, we had travelled about 100 metres when the train ground to a halt. I immediately communicated with the driver who suspected a pulled "passcom", so I began walking through the train from the rear. Sure enough, after a few coaches, I came across a lady in a panic. She was of course completely oblivious to the overall situation. When quizzed she said she thought she had pulled on "a handle", but showing me which one was not on her list of priorities - she just wanted to get off! Fortunately I managed to persuade her to accompany me back up the train and we found it. But having re-set it I then had a decision to make. Do I communicate with the driver and simply tell him to continue forward or, with the rear two coaches still in the platform, do I walk back with the passenger and unlock one door and allow her to disembark? I chose the latter course, and delivered her into the hands of a member of platform staff.

www.mdrs.org.uk

Whether the lady was ever made to pay the statutory fine I don't know, but probably not – passengers had become customers by then! Certainly she had no appreciation of the problem she had caused, and would undoubtedly have given me a lot of grief had she not been allowed to disembark. If we had travelled just a few metres further, this would have been out of the question anyway, and I would have had the problem of getting the train re-started while trying to avoid a full blown discussion on why it was not possible for the train to reverse! In the end we departed 9 minutes late – not too bad, although anybody reading this with a geographical knowledge of Exeter St David's station will know that those 9 minutes were spent parked blocking the very busy Red Cow Level Crossing at the station's east end! So not only had this individual's actions caused disruption to the railway, they had also caused delay to Exeter's traffic system. And who was going to pay for all this? Well not the lady and not Railtrack; this was a customer incident so the entire cost would have to fall on the Train Operating Company. And unsurprisingly a train stopped at this location is particularly expensive! So you can be assured that First Great Western would have had to shell out many times the cost of that lady's rail ticket....

Curiously just four days earlier in that very same week I had suffered another incident while trying to leave Exeter St David's on the midweek equivalent of the same Paignton to Paddington service, although this was rather different in nature. It was also one that tested me, as a newbie, on my knowledge of the Rulebook. All seemed normal as

I received the first “tip” from the platform staff which instructs the Guard to lock the doors. This I did and all the indicator lights went out, showing that the doors were now locked. I was about to receive the second “tip” instructing me to go when a passenger came running down the footbridge steps, and started running towards me shouting to be let on. Now these are always testing times for both the dispatch staff and the Guard as a Mark 3 coach slam door can easily be pulled onto the safety catch from the outside. And sure enough this gent tried to open one of the doors; imagine my shock though when the door actually opened and he scrambled aboard! The departure was aborted, with the dispatch staff immediately getting on the phone to Exeter Panel advising them to “put the road back”, particularly important at this location because of the presence of Red Cow Level Crossing just beyond the end of the platform. Nobody would want the traffic held up unnecessarily (we were going to do a good job of doing that four days later), and FGW would not be wanting to pay for another shedload of delay minutes!

Now came the process of diagnosing the exact fault. Was it some kind of electrical fault affecting the CDL (Central Door Locking) on the whole or part of the HST set? Or was it simply that the bolt had failed on this particular door? Just like with your car, the only way to find out was by a process of testing and eliminating, and this was at least made easier by the presence of platform staff. In the end it proved to be the bolt on that one particular door, and so I locked and labelled it out of use, also applying the requisite yellow hazard tape on the handles. This was the first of many I was to deal with during my career, often caused by damp entering these gradually ageing coaches, and not helped by the fact that door locking was a feature that had had to be retro-fitted.

So was that the end of the incident? Unfortunately not! The rules surrounding locking coach doors out of use are many and varied, and I would risk boring even the most ardent of railway enthusiasts by trying to recite them all. Suffice it to say that, for obvious reasons, you are not allowed to lock up both doors on one coach or both doors

in separate coaches that are next to each other. There has to be a means of escape. Things get even more complicated when the doors are in the vehicles at the extreme ends of the train. My guard's van door was at the very rear of the end coach, but unfortunately the faulty door was also in that coach, being the rearmost passenger door. The question then arose whether that end coach would have to be evacuated as a result. I at first thought that I would have to do that, but then a quick phone conversation with Swindon Control confirmed that this was not necessary. So finally after 15 minutes everybody was happy, but then another 9 minutes were lost because we had lost our path, and of course the level crossing barriers had to be lowered for us once more. But we were finally on our way....

We were approaching Taunton when, having completed a bit of paperwork and still feeling a little uneasy, I rang Swindon, and once more talked to this lovely guy called Patrick, who remained at the Control Centre pretty much throughout my career. I just wanted reassurance that I had done all the right things. This he gave me, but he did suggest that maybe taking a quick refresher course on locking doors out of use wouldn't be a bad thing – that dented my pride just a little!

That particular service, the 1A45 10:00 Paignton to Paddington, travelled the “long way round” via Bristol, and in the Highbridge area my phone went off; it was my Guards' Manager at Exeter (the person who had recruited me) along with the Driver Duty Manager, both of whom advised me that I should, after all, have evacuated the rear carriage, Coach A. Now my confidence was well and truly shot! I had between then and Bristol (about 20 minutes) to accomplish this unenviable task. But by the time we drew into Temple Meads where lots more punters were waiting to board, I had managed to remove the 30 or so disgruntled coach A passengers into coach B and had shut and locked the internal vestibule doors leading into it.

Arrival at Paddington was 24 minutes late, and I quickly discovered that my back working, the 1C43 14:15 Paddington to Bristol TM, was to be formed of the same



43139 Driver Stan Martin 25 June 1950-6 November 2004 heads west past Ruescombe Church on 12th June 2006. The unit was named for the driver killed in the Ufton Nervet accident.



First Great Western 47846 Thor passing Ruscombe with a rake of Mk2s forming the 14:03 Paddington to Plymouth train mentioned by Martin. 22nd November 2001.

HST set. In those days there were such things as rolling stock technicians, and at least one could always be found at Paddington dealing with running repairs. Luckily on the way to the mess room I met one, who immediately expressed surprise that nobody had told him about it. A quick look on “genius” (the rolling stock fault reporting system) showed that it hadn’t even been entered on the system! However these lovely guys were always keen to help and over he came. Although he couldn’t fix the fault he expressed surprise that I had felt the need to lock coach A out of use. I decided to ring my manager and pass on to her what had happened, but she confirmed that I would have to keep coach A locked out for the journey to Bristol. However 15 minutes later she rang me back; they had reconsidered and I could, after all, bring coach A back into use! (Basically there is a sliding door with an emergency handle at the back of the coach, which allows emergency passenger egress through the Guard’s compartment at the very back of the train). Well really; what a way to run a railway, I thought to myself.

But it was a result! I had a nice quiet journey to Bristol on the 14:15, travelling back to Exeter “on the cushions”, with no hassles caused by locked out coaches. I had plenty of time to reflect on the day’s events. To be fair, in 2000, the Central Door Locking System on HSTs was relatively new and everyone was still getting used to it. Also I wasn’t the only new kid on the block, and even my manager and the driver manager at Exeter had not been in their posts all that long, following a recruitment drive by First after taking over the franchise. However my personal pride and confidence had been restored; at least it wasn’t me, I concluded, who needed to consider going on a refresher course on locking doors out of use!

Finally it would be wrong of me not to point out how things have improved considerably on First Great Western (now Great Western Railway of course) since those early days. It is also easy to forget how much services have improved for the passengers in the West Country, and particularly on all the branch lines. Incredibly in the timetable for Summer 2000, the last train on a weekday that

you could get to Newquay from Paddington was the 14:03. And even then you had to change at Plymouth! The 14:03 itself wasn’t even an HST either; it was a loco pulling a rather down at heel set of just 7 mark 2 coaches. On Thursday 22nd June I worked this train to Plymouth, discovering en route that I had 24 hardy souls for Newquay on board. The problem was we were 31 minutes late from Exeter with only 21 minutes allowed at Plymouth for the connection. (47832 had sat down at Twyford, although the driver had managed to get it going again). Now in those early days of rail franchising common sense most certainly did not prevail, and Wessex Trains would not even consider holding their 18:00 ex Plymouth for 10 minutes no matter how many connecting passengers there were needing to get the last train of the day to Newquay. So it was down to me to organise for them to get the 18:30 instead, changing at Par for a fleet of taxis organised by Control. And the following day, guess what, same train same result! This time it was a bridge strike at Langley that was the cause of the 27 minute delay to the 14:03; 28 passengers this time for whom taxis had to be sourced. Sheer madness.

But some problems were at least easily solved. Tuesday 23rd May 2000 had seen me working the 20:33 Paddington to Plymouth. All was well until platform staff at Reading gave me the tip to go after I had locked the doors. I dutifully gave 2 on the buzzer... nothing. I tried again... again nothing. Just as I was about to begin the fault finding process the platform staff pointed out somebody waving at me out of the window of the front coach. It was the driver; seemingly he had been taken short and had nipped into the front coach to use the loo. But he hadn’t been quick enough and was now locked on the train! So doors had to be released to let him out and the dispatch process restarted. Too much tea in the Paddington mess room methinks!

Vintage Railfan Recollections

Colonel Don Woodworth, USAF (Retired)



Having completed a posting in California, Don was looking forward to a possible posting to the UK. Instead, he found himself sent to southern Illinois first.

At the time, Scott AFB was fairly isolated and was literally surrounded by corn fields but it was considered the Center of the Universe as far as US military airlift was concerned - akin to RAF Brize Norton in Britain. I soon discovered the railway wonders of nearby St. Louis, MO and surrounds. Sadly, I was still in my early railfan mode of “bunk the engine terminals” and not paying as much heed to moving trains as I should have. This played out to the full in April of 1971 with the advent of Amtrak and the overnight shrinkage of the American national railway passenger system from 366 trains a day to a measly 184 under the new system. Had Dr. Beeching been hiding somewhere in America?? (-: I wish now that I had spent much more time riding and photographing the trains that were about to disappear but, sadly, that didn't happen.

I courted a young woman from St. Louis who subsequently became my wife Donna on 8th January 1971. So much for my now abandoned thought of meeting attractive young British girls! And of course, the USAF had my best interests at heart because just one short month after getting married, I had new orders - to RAF Mildenhall in Suffolk! My wife was unable to join me until April as the rule was that I had to find living quarters for us before she'd be allowed to travel to the UK. I did that with reasonable dispatch - and used the interval while I was on my own to begin exploring the wonderful British railway system. I was like a kid in a toy store - so many different lines to ride and so much new equipment with which to become familiar. I'll not delve into my 8 years in Britain as this was previously covered in the September 2013 issue of the *Marlow Donkey*. Suffice it to say that I had the most wonderful time and met a lot of friends, some of which time has since taken from me and some of which, most happily, are still with me today - to include your esteemed editor Mr. Walker!

There was an interval from 1974-1978 between my first and second tours of duty in the UK. These years were spent at HQ .

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St. Louis Union Station was a natural magnet for gricers. It was opened on 1st September 1894 by the Terminal Railroad Association of St. Louis and, at its peak, was served by 22 different railroads. There were 32 tracks under its great 600 ft. wide train shed, making it the largest terminal in the United States. During the years of WW II, it handled 100,000 passengers a day but, sadly, by the late 1960s as train travel waned significantly in the States, it had become a white elephant and Amtrak operated its last train from there on 31st October 1978 - thereafter moving to a small utilitarian prefab facility (derisively called the “Am-shack” by gricers) just east of the great station.

Toward the end of service from Union Station, the Gulf, Mobile & Ohio RR (GM&O) operated the lion's share of daily trains with four round trips spaced out over the day between St. Louis, MO and Chicago, IL - a distance of 283.9 miles. GM&O E7A #101 and F3A #880A providing a total of 3,500 horsepower are shown on the point of Train #18, the Ann Rutledge (a name perpetuated under Amtrak), awaiting a 16:30 departure for Chicago on the afternoon of 21st September 1969. Seven stops later, the train will have reached Chicago at an average speed of 55 mph, roaring across the flat lands of central Illinois at high speed to make up for perforce slow departure from St. Louis and slow arrival in Chicago and what amounted to street-running in the Illinois capital of Springfield.

All photographs by the author

Air Force Logistics Command at Wright-Patterson AFB just outside of Dayton, Ohio (OH), the birthplace of American aviation. Ohio was at the time a busy industrial state as well as heavily agricultural so there was a plethora of railway activity to be observed. Rail activity in Dayton has significantly declined since those days but it was certainly busy back then, with all kinds of interesting tidbits such as position light signals on the former Pennsylvania RR lines; color position light signals on the former Baltimore & Ohio; semaphore signals on the former Erie RR; and interesting sights such as locations where the trackless

The Marlow Donkey



In St. Louis, Amtrak operated from the world's oldest "temporary" passenger station, a pitiful little prefab building, from late 1978 until December 2004 when they moved into a more substantial concrete block building slightly east of the interim station. This somewhat more substantial building, bordering on the respectable, was used until 20th November 2008 when Amtrak again moved slightly farther to the east to the new Gateway Transportation Center on 21st November – a purpose-built structure with all the charm of a crematorium built to serve Amtrak, Greyhound inter-city buses, MetroLink rapid transit, and local city buses.

Here, two Amtrak 4,250 hp P42DC locomotives wait on the point of terminating Train #301, Lincoln Service, from Chicago. The train will depart for Chicago at 15:00 as Train #304, with scheduled arrival for 20:40 with 9 en route stops and an overall average speed is 50 mph - 5 mph less than offered by predecessor GM&O. At this time, the city of St. Louis, MO was served by 5 daily round trips to Chicago, one set of which continued on to Texas in the form of the *Texas Eagle* and two round-trip extensions of the Chicago trains 248 miles west to Kansas City, MO on the far western edge of the state.

The 230 ft. high tower of Union Station can be seen peeking up at the upper right of the photo. By this time, the original "Amshack" had mercifully been torn down but its low-profile successor, now used by Amtrak crews, can be seen in the background.

trolley system lines in Dayton crossed active railway lines. It was also at Wright-Patterson that my darling daughter Allison was born. The base hospital was within walking distance of our quarters so it was a very short trip to the delivery room when the stork arrived.

My duties were ready made for gricing. At the time, AFLC operated a system called LOGAIR (military-ese for Logistics Airlift) that provided daily airlift service to 51 bases within the continental United States for the movement of critical military
www.mdrs.org.uk

supplies. One of my duties was to supervise the operation of this system to ensure that the contractors who flew the airlift missions complied with contractual requirements and that the government also honored its end of the bargain. To this end, I periodically traveled each of the different circuits flown by the contract airlines to visit each AFB receiving airlift support. This would often have me on the road for a week to 10 days at a time, and I was permitted to take down-time at weekends, which I happily did. Oh dear, did there happen to be an interesting railway operation near the bases I visited?!? What a hardship to spend the weekend there gricing before resuming my duties. In the process of doing so, I was afforded the opportunity to get some wonderful aerial views of things on the ground as I flew in the cockpits of the airlift aircraft with their crews.

All USAF officers were required to complete a continuing series of professional education requirements in order to advance in rank. So it was that I spent a year completing the requirements of the Air Command & Staff course by correspondence. Shortly after I'd finished the course and just after the birth of my daughter, I received orders to Maxwell AFB outside of Montgomery, Alabama (AL) to attend this course in person, the only officer in my career field that year to have been selected. My first reaction was "Yuk, I just finished this stupid course and I don't want to attend" but the colonel who was my boss counseled "Donald, don't be stupid – Go – It would be career suicide to turn down the assignment." I hated to admit that he was right but I smiled, said "Yes sir!" and packed my bags. Off we went, young wife, little girl Allison, and baby "in the hanger," to the sunny south!!

My son Donald III was born while we were in Alabama. Between my studies and a new infant plus a toddler, my gricing time was strictly limited though I usually managed to do a bit between the air base and my home at the end of some duty days. Toward the end of my 10-month period of schooling, I did manage the occasional Saturday off for a trip to Birmingham or Mobile, so I managed to reasonably cover central Alabama. On occasion, I would take my daughter along to give my wife a



break from riding shot-gun on two little ones. As my tour of duty at the school was ending, I was informed that I would be receiving a joint-service assignment to Stuttgart, Germany. That was OK but I wasn't really thrilled about it.

At that point, fate intervened in the form of a communication from a friend at my old squadron at RAF Mildenhall informing me that he was fed up with the commander and was leaving his posting early to get away from him. Would I like his job? Yup!!!!!! Little did I realize what I was getting into when I arrived back in the UK. It was like old home week catching up with all my friends at the Cambridge Railway Circle and getting re-acquainted with people in my squadron. Within just a few months of my return, my squadron commander (the same person my friend disliked) was relieved of duty for incompetence and I suddenly became the squadron commander in addition to the duties of my original posting. This really put the brakes on my gricing as the stress of doing both jobs simultaneously was an absolute killer. After about 11 months of this, I was absolutely delighted to see a new lieutenant colonel posted to the squadron and revert to just my normal job. Things gricing picked up again and the rest of my posting was considerably more enjoyable – especially because I received a promotion to lieutenant colonel myself shortly before leaving the UK.

Following completion of my second tour of duty in the UK in 1982, and against the advice of my friends, I opted for an assignment to the Sacramento Air Logistics Center at McClellan AFB, CA – my second posting to the Air Force Logistics Command, formerly officially known as Air Materiel Command (colloquially and sometimes derogatorily known as “A Million Civilians,” which had a huge civilian and miniscule military component. My logic was two-fold. As I was looking at the possibility of retirement from the Air Force within perhaps four years if I failed selection to colonel (Group Commander in the RAF), I thought it would be nice to have an assignment on the West Coast for gricing and sight-seeing purposes as my plan, upon retirement was to retire to my native New England. My more

This photo of CSX #5910 in predecessor Seaboard Coast Line livery and CSX #6113 southbound on former Baltimore & Ohio RR trackage in Dayton, OH on 28th July 1988 nicely illustrates some of the interesting tidbits to be found in the birthplace of American aviation. The B&O color position light signal to the right of the locomotives is obvious. What is more subtle, but really cool, is the double overhead trolley wire for the trackless trams that continue to operate in Dayton – the smallest city in the United States to retain this type of conveyance. The only thing that could have improved upon this photo would have been a trolley-bus waiting at the barriers for the train to clear! General Electric built 222 B-B 3,600 hp B36-7 locomotives for domestic use between 1980-1985. Of this number, the lion's share (120) went to the SCL.

practical reason was to significantly broaden my career experience so I'd have something significant to put at the top of my resume' when I transitioned to a civilian career. Most of my previous military experience had been with airlift and air terminals, so becoming Chief of Transportation in charge of about 700 staff at a major military depot was a new and challenging experience. Highly unusually for the Air Force, I had a water terminal in addition to an air terminal, and packaging development and packing & crating section; a rating & routing section; reclamation section, a container stuffing operation, and, most fun of all, a small intra-plant railroad of about 7 miles – not exactly the Great Western Railway, but the gauge was the same!

My large staff made it impossible to get to know everyone but I did get to know all of the supervisors down to the working level; the best of my workers; and (sadly) the few bad apples. In the course of my periodic rounds to talk with folks and keep my finger on the pulse of operations, I chanced upon a photo of a fellow I recognized but who was wearing a military uniform. “What's this?” I asked the young woman upon whose desk the photo reposed. The answer was “That's my boyfriend Pat and

he serves as a Seabee in the US Navy Reserves. Wheels immediately started to turn. I had an uncle who was a Seabee in WW II and a cousin on active duty as a Seabee so I knew well what these mobile construction battalions could do.

I was faced at the time with the prospect of the key part of my railroad being severed due to construction of some new buildings – a very unhappy thought as we terminated about 7 car loads of freight every week. An estimate for relocating the 800 ft. section of track came in at about \$200,000 dollars. Ouch! Resorting to shameless guile, I sought out Mr. cum Petty Officer Pat and chatted him up about the capabilities of his battalion, observing that according to my late uncle that the “Seabees could build anything.” When Pat was sufficiently chuffed, I asked if “anything” might include building a railroad. Pregnant pause! Well, we’ve never done that but I think we could. A lot of paperwork and a year of weekends later, the Seabees made good and we had a Golden Spike ceremony on 22nd October 1983 to recognize their outstanding accomplishment. Using re-claimed material and a minimum of new material, the

Seabee’s training project resulted in a new section of line needed for my railroad operations at a cost of only about \$30,000.00 – a \$170,000.00 saving to the government and a nice feather in the sailor’s caps.

As I already knew, the state of California could comfortably be its own country given its widely diverse scenery – mountains, sea shore, deserts, and lush agricultural country. I chose Roseville, CA as a place to live – comfortably situated within easy commuting distance of the air base and about equidistant between the mountains and the seacoast. Roseville also just happened to be the location of the largest marshalling yard in the West on the great Southern Pacific RR (now, sadly, a component of the even larger Union Pacific RR system), which lay at the foot of the great Sierra Mountain range and the infamous Donner Pass. Needless to say that between my duties, sight-seeing with the family, and gricing at every opportunity, four years at McClellan passed extremely quickly!

A great obstacle lies between the metropolitan areas of San Francisco and Oakland, CA and the upland interior to the east – the great range of the Sierra Mountains. The roughly 100 miles between Oakland, CA and the great SP marshalling yards in Roseville is relatively level. The climb east from Roseville is a different story where the railroad must gain roughly 6,800 ft. of altitude in about 76 miles for an average gradient of 1.1% (and in places steeper) causing a never ending need for immense power to lift trains over the Sierras. Sparks, Nevada (NV), just east of the gambling mecca of Reno on the east side of the mountains, was where helpers were added to westbound trains and subtracted from eastbound trains. Roseville, CA on the west side of the mountains, added power to eastbound trains and subtracted it from westbounds.

California has a Mediterranean climate with most of its rain falling in the winter. The Sierras act as a natural barrier to storms so much of the rain they receive falls as snow making the Donner Pass route of the SP one of the snowiest places in the

The Bingham Canyon Mine (aka the Kennecott Copper Mine) has been in production since 1906 and has produced over 19 million tons of copper. It is the largest and deepest man-made open pit mine in the world. It even has its own weather system – note the clouds! The large steam shovel and diesel locomotive and train are dwarfed by the immense size of the pit. If one looks carefully, many vertical support columns for the overhead wire that originally supported operations for electric locomotives can be seen. When electric operations ended, unique EMD GP39-2 diesel locomotives were brought in with high-clearance cabs intended to obviate problems often caused by rocks and other debris. Sadly, rail operations in the pit have now been replaced by a conveyor system and 17 mile slurry pipeline to the smelter in Garfield, UT, where some rail operations still continue.





The sailors of Detachment 4, Naval Construction Battalion 2 stand on parade in front of USAF locomotives #1605 (GE 80-tonner) and #1240 (GE 44-tonner) at McClellan AFB, CA on 22nd October 1983. Following a Golden Spike ceremony where senior Navy and USAF officers drove a “golden spike” into a pre-drilled hole (we didn’t want to risk giving the brass hats a hernia!), we operated train rides for the Seabees and their families in appreciation of the great amount of effort they had devoted to this project. Later on, we had a separate ceremony where I was able to award USAF decorations to the Navy personnel who had worked on this project – which greatly pleased them as inter-Service decorations are rather uncommon.

It was not uncommon to see locomotive consists of 15,000-20,000 hp heading up trains, usually with the majority of power on the head end and helpers (banking engines) cut in toward the middle of the train, and sometimes pushers at the rear. In this photo, SP #7480, 9235, 8553, and 8511 with helpers SP #7309 and 9312 mid-train are exiting now abandoned (1993) Summit Tunnel near the top of Donner Pass. A combination of SD45R, SD45T2, SD40T2, SD40T2 with SD40E and SD45T2 are putting some 16,200 hp to work to move this westbound train over the Sierras. In the background is Donner Lake, named after the ill-fated Donner Party who tried to cross the mountains too late in the year in Nov. 1846 but became snowbound on the eastern side and lost 45 of their 81 members, some resorting to cannibalism to survive.



United States, receiving an average of 411 inches of the white stuff every winter and on occasion 775-800 inches. Combine this with wind gusts that sometimes hit 100 mph and you have a witch's brew of operating conditions in winter with flangers often called out and, on rare occasions, the powerful rotary plows stationed at Roseville and Sparks. Operating conditions are tough in summer as well due to the many snow sheds and tunnels on the route which often cause locomotives to overheat.

Winter comes early and summer comes late in the Sierras and because of the weather most of my gricing in the mountains was performed in the summer. Trains were not terribly frequent but, once one learned the lay of the land and the good photo locations, a train could be picked up in Roseville and followed all the way to Reno using parallel Interstate Highway 80 (equivalent to a British motorway) to leapfrog ahead of the train to pre-determined scenic locations.

As it turned out, I also managed to do something that none of my predecessors had ever done at McClellan AFB and got promoted to colonel (equivalent to an RAF Group Captain), which meant that retirement from the Air Force would be postponed for at least another four years and that a new posting was in the offing. This meant one of two things – an assignment to the Pentagon in Washington, DC (a fate worse than death as far as I was concerned; I'm allergic to big cities!) or to a major command headquarters. The Military Airlift Command (MAC) at Scott AFB, IL (where I'd met my wife some 15 years before) was the obvious choice as it had the highest number of positions for colonels in my career field in the USAF. So it was back to the corn fields of mid-America for a second time. My wife, being a St. Louis, MO girl, was elated. I was generally satisfied but not thrilled. That said, St. Louis was still pretty good gricing territory – though slowly becoming a shadow of its former self – due to the seemingly unending series of railroad mergers that had been continuously taking place throughout the United States.

When I'd first taken up gricing as a hobby, there were 113 Class 1 carriers (those having annual gross revenue of \$3,000,000/-year) and at least 630 short lines and terminal and switching lines. There was almost endless variety available, complete with still extant passenger and freight stations, interlocking towers, and many of the vestiges of the recently passed age of steam (roundhouses, coaling towers and stand pipes). Railroad employees were generally friendly and could be approached for information about train movements. Railroads were still private property but they weren't overly paranoid about entry on the property for purposes of picture taking as long as one didn't act foolishly.

By the time of my reassignment to Scott AFB in mid-1986, the number of Class 1 railroads (now with a revenue threshold of \$504.8 million instead of a measly \$3 million) had shrunk to a mere 7. The same ugly scenario repeated itself with all of the once individual short lines across the country as they increasingly came under the control of about four or 5 umbrella companies that homogenized and standardized them. I'm sure this all made great economic sense but it sure made it boring as hell for gricers.

By this time too, the great majority of diesels from the once four major and one minor builders had vanished from the scene and one had a choice of generally boring wide-cab machines built by either Progress Rail (Electro-Motive Diesel, formerly the Electro-Motive Division of General Motors (generally called EMD by gricers) and Wabtec (formerly General Electric Transportation Systems or just "GE"). The erstwhile short lines adopted standardized paint schemes with only the initials varying to identify them. Freight and passenger stations, interlocking towers, roundhouses, and coaling facilities fell as fast as they could be razed and removed from the tax rolls in the interest of corporate tax avoidance.

It thus became an increasingly greater challenge to find interesting venues for photographs. With completion of the installation of Positive Train Control (PTC) on 29 Dec 2020 on the 57,536 miles of track (of 125,828 miles nationally) required by the US Congress, even signals became homogenized. As in the UK when one could identify a railway by the type of signals employed, the same applied to the States with time-worn but highly distinctive position light signals on the former Pennsylvania RR, color position light signals on the Baltimore & Ohio, and individual target type signals on the likes of the Wabash and New York Central all disappearing in a tidal wave of what I came to call Darth Vader signals used by the Union Pacific RR as another wave of standardization swept over the railroads. Bloody BORING! Worse was yet to come.

St. Louis, MO is the third largest railway center in the United States and railway lines radiate from the city in all directions. Happily, one of my favorite lines (until it was embargoed on 7 Aug 2015) was the former Baltimore & Ohio which ran some 355 miles from East St. Louis, IL (just across the great Mississippi River from St. Louis) eastward across the states of Illinois and Indiana to the city of Cincinnati, Ohio. The railway yards in East St. Louis were located in the flood plain of the Mississippi River, so railways headed east had a steep climb of about 400 feet in a distance of about 8 miles to reach the flatlands of central Illinois. Until CSX "Darth Vader-ized" the traditional B&O color position light (CPL) signals with standardized hooded Union Pacific style signals, these distinctive CPLs dotted the railroad landscape at intervals of about one mile along the entire route and made wonderful props for photographs.

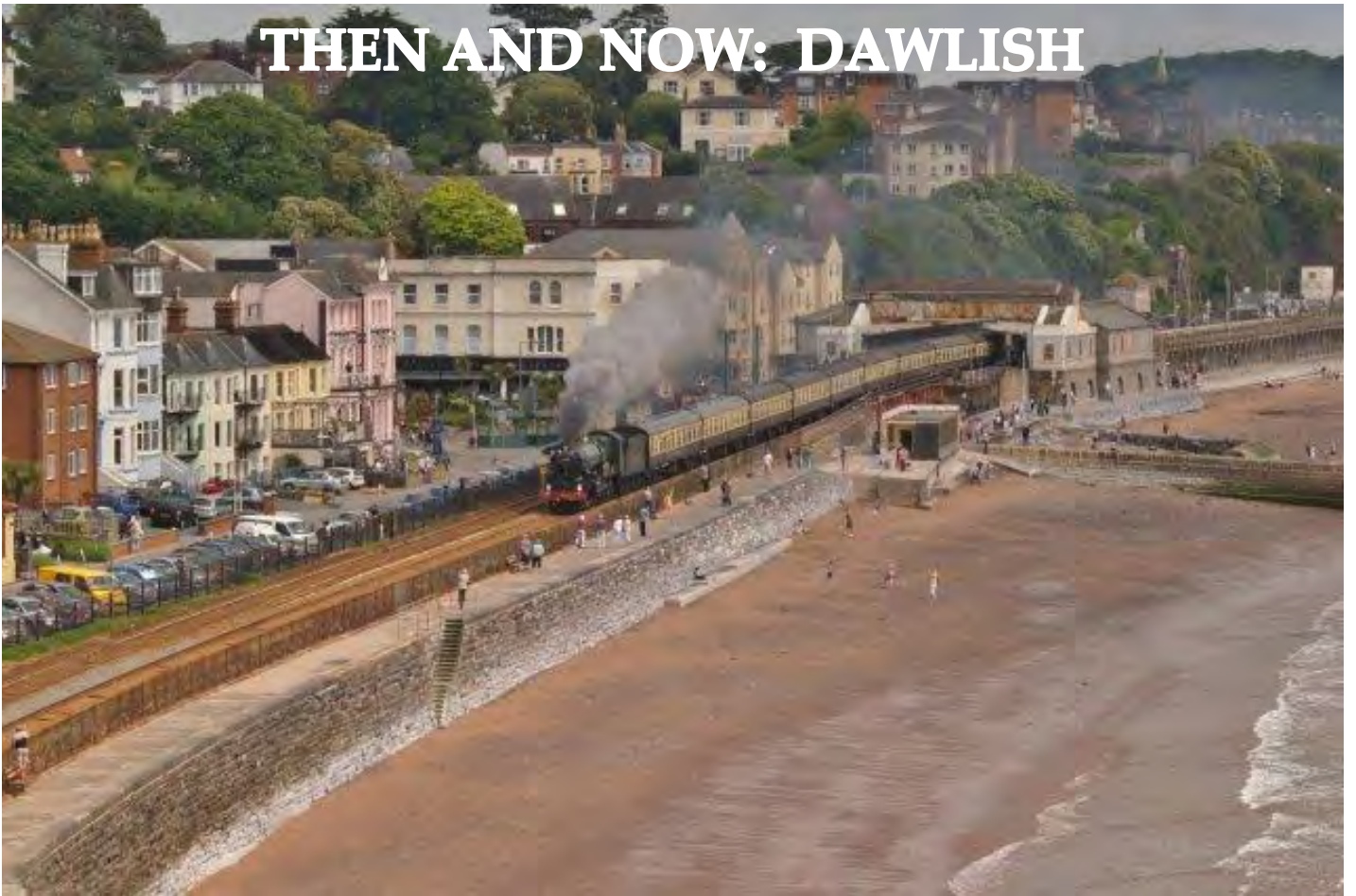
Despite rumors of abandonment that persisted for years, CSX upgraded the signal system along this line to meet the new Positive Train Control (PTC) standards imposed by the Congress of the United States in response to a terrible train accident in California in 2008. Knowing that embargo cum abandonment was imminent (but not knowing when) and that the CPLs were on borrowed time, I made a concerted effort to cover this line as thoroughly as I could.

Next time, Don retires to civilian life and concludes his memoirs in a much changed (railroad) world.



One of my many pet names for my daughter Allison is "Wren." This particular name stems from her time at Playgroup in the village of Isleham, Cambs where she learned to sing a little song called "Jenny Wren." As serendipity would have it, I took her on a short gricing trip on the afternoon of 2nd Apr 1978 to watch the arrival of Amtrak Train #57, *The Floridian*, at Union Station in Montgomery, AL. Tucked into the train was sleeping car 2537 *Wren* and, through the kindness of the porter shown in this photo, I was able to pose my daughter on the steps of the car for this photo.

THEN AND NOW: DAWLISH



The works at Dawlish following the breach of the seawall in 2014 have dramatically altered the appearance of this famous section of railway. On 13th June 2010 6024 *King Edward I* presents a timeless seen as it passes with an excursion.

Photo: Mike Walker

The rebuilt and reinforced seawall is clearly visible in this view as 802102 passes forming 1C77, the 10:35 Paddington to Paignton on 30th April. Work continues near the station.

Photo: Peter Robins

