

*Marlow & District
Railway Society*

Please reply to:

THE MARLOW DONKEY NO 8

SEPTEMBER 1978

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

I have just been happily rereading the six newsletters produced by our Society since January 1977. The present year has been even busier than the last. My sole regret is that I was unable to be present on all our journeys. Probably the most novel venture was the visit to "La Baie de la Somme" in the north of France. BR's French opposite numbers may be planning even faster trains and their passengers enjoying heavily subsidised fares, but their standard of steam preservation seems pitiful. I have just read that the BR boiler inspector has rejected "Britannia" because of a fault in her welding. She will not now be running in 1978. The recent accident to a Didcot preserved steam locomotive was a most unusual occurrence. The standard of British preservation is high.

Other journeys of note include the visit to the National Railway Museum at York, the mecca of all lovers of steam locomotion in this country. Two of our members reached the Isle of Wight steam centre at Haven Street. The trip to the Bluebell Line was a day to be remembered. We were able to travel nostalgically behind a Bulleid West Country Pacific and return by a Southern Mogul in authentic SR coaches. The visits to Amersham LT signal box and to Willesden Traction Maintenance Depot brought us to the reality of the post-steam age, ten years after the last BR steam trains ran. Speaking of BR steam trains our congratulations to all concerned for bringing back Flying Scotsman and Sir Nigel Gresley running out of Preston twice weekly. Several of our members spoke enthusiastically of their recent journey on this train. Thanks also to Ted Gregory for providing a most enjoyable evening cruise on the Thames, running alongside the "Donkey" track.

The monthly talks have been of a good standard also. The signalling talk by Mike Hanscomb was most novel. I personally was at times "blinded by science" but learned a great deal. The excellent films made by the Bourne End Cine Club were a notable attempt to put back the clock to Prairie Tanks travelling through from Maidenhead to High Wycombe and O.4.2.'s travelling to and fro between Bourne End and Marlow. It was unfortunate that the visit to Leighton Buzzard following an excellent talk by their ex-Chairman had to be postponed. Mike Walker's enthusiastic talk on Canadian railways, in particular his first-hand experience of Western Canada, was well worth hearing - and seeing too. I note that Ted Gregory and Ernie Dove have been putting in some hard slogging at Cookham and Furze Platt stations, a practical contribution to BR's continued willingness

to keep open the Bourne End Marlow rail links. The provision of a railway seat at Bourne End Station, bearing a plaque in memory of our late member, Norman Aston-Smith, was a welcome gesture by BR.

What of the future? Our Committee members are once again full of plans for future talks and visits. We look forward to the autumn monthly meetings and more journeys. The number of topics and places worth visiting seems unending.

THURSDAY NIGHT PROGRAMME FOR 1978/1979 AT 20.00 HRS

- 21 Sep 1978 Narrow Gauge Films. These will be Land of the Little Trains - Festiniog Summer - Along these Lines - Steam - Craftsmen of Dinorwic
- 19 Oct 1978 Irish Steam in the Preservation Era. An illustrated talk by Leslie McAllister of the Railway Preservation Society of Ireland
- 16 Nov 1978 Members Evening. A series of short talks by our own Members.
- Great Britain - Brunel's surviving steamship - Ted Gregory
 A GWR MPD in 1946 - Stan Verrinder
 Early Railway Telegraphing - Ron Brooks
- 14 Dec 1978 Christmas Film Show. The main film is "The Gargantuan Triumph of Science" the story of the Tay railway bridge disaster of 1879. Supporting this are 5 short films on French Railways - Turbo Synthesis - The Paris-South East File - Speed - From Chartres to Canterbury - The Loire Valley
- 25 Jan 1979 Annual General Meeting which will be followed by members' slides
- 15 Feb 1979 Ken Riley Divisional Passenger Manager BR (WR)
- 15 Mar 1979 Signalling Part Two - Mike Hanscomb
- 26 Apr 1979 Adventures in Latin America. An illustrated talk by the well known author Colin Garratt sponsored by Praticka Cameras.

PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Railways of Western Canada were featured by Mike Walker when he entertained us on 15th June 1978. We all envied him his good fortune especially when he showed the slides of his trip through the Rockies. He is currently planning another visit to Canada but not confined to just the western part.

Those members who were not at the meeting on 20th July 1978, missed an extremely enjoyable evening when Robert Barker spoke on "Searching for Steam around Europe". His practical experience of European steam was very obviously extensive and varied and not without their touch of danger as he was detained by police in Yugoslavia.

PAST VISITS

The Bluebell Railway and Brockham Railway Museum were visited by 44 members and their friends on 16th July 1978.

The French weekend successfully organised by Roger Bowen took place 16th/18th June 1978.

Another foreign visit occurred on 11th June 1978, this time to the Isle of Wight.

The trip to the Leighton Buzzard Narrow Gauge Railway seems to be fated not to take place. The cancellation of the visit on 3rd August 1978 was due to the fact that track relaying operations were brought forward.

COMING EVENTS

The Stacey Hill Collection of Industry and Rural Life are holding special open days on Saturday and Sunday 16th/17th September 1978, from 12.00-17.30 hrs on the Saturday and 10.30-17.30 hrs on the Sunday. The collection includes demonstrations of crafts, working engines and farm machinery, vintage commercial vehicles and displays of various kinds. The location is Stacey Hill Farm, Southern Way, Wolverton, Milton Keynes, Bucks. Admission is 25p for Adults and 10p for children and OAPs with the car park free. Your secretary has visited a previous open day and can recommend it as a good day out.

The MMPA excursion to Chester and North Wales is on Sunday 10th September 1978. Commencing at Marlow and picking up from all stations to Maidenhead. Adults £3.85, Children £1.90.

AMERSHAM SIGNAL BOX VISIT

Apologies to Roger Woodhams for errors in transcription of his enjoyable article. The BR(LMR) boundary is of course north of Amersham and Chorleywood is south.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Sir,

Whilst I would like to congratulate you on the latest "fun packed" edition of the "Marlow Donkey" I hope you may spare some space for a few comments in the next issue.

The description of the Amersham Signal Box visit by Roger Woodhams was excellent and served to remind me of the latest arrangements to enable Great Missenden to close. Even I haven't seen the signal box since that modification.

In the article "A visit to York" I am credited with the demonstration of mechanical and electrical control of points and signals. 'Tis true I had a bash at demonstrating exhibit (normally locked out of use) but this was, of course, arranged through the kind co-operation of the Curator Dr. John Coiley, his signalling adviser John Howard-Turner and Mr. Affleck one of the museum staff, who supervised the demonstration. It was perhaps unfortunate that I had not given myself time to run through the exhibit beforehand. Just one example will serve to illustrate why!

Members who were there may recall my leaning over the barrier to place a tenpenny piece in the points to stop it moving its full distance. Mr. Affleck then pulled the (Black) lever to change the points and grip the coin. I then described how the facing point lock was set and adjusted finely enough to prevent the lock plunger going fully home and therefore preventing the signal lever becoming free. He glanced in my direction in surprise - I don't think he had tried this test before - and pulled the FPL (Blue) lever over very slowly. The lever stopped about halfway and would not go any further. The signal lever (Red) was therefore locked and a train - if there had been one - would have been stopped before reaching the facing point. "Test satisfactory".

And finally I must put the record straight concerning the article "Willesden Motive Power Traction Depot", by Roger Bowen. Contrary to his belief and that of others apparently I have been seen behind bars before, particularly the ones at the Marlow Donkey.

Sincerely,

Mike Hanscomb
Amersham, Bucks.

(ed - I have a feeling that Mike will be writing a further letter as he has another mention in an article in this issue)

25 YEARS AGO - Contributed by Roger Bowen

Most magazines have a 25 years ago section and it was thought appropriate that the "Marlow Donkey" should have one too. As the first issue only appeared in April 1977 we can't have extracts from the "Marlow Donkey" of 25 years ago so as second best this first offering is from the September 1953 edition of "Railway Magazine". Knowing the majority of members have GW leanings I have selected the Western Region entry of Locomotive Notes. This certainly reads like history now. If you think this is of interest it can be made a regular feature.

"Western Region Locomotives withdrawn from service recently were Saint class 4-6-0s Nos 2937 Clevedon Court and 2945 Hillingdon Court. Mr. R.C. Riley writes that the works of the former Rhymney Railway at Caerphilly deal with a much larger variety of locomotive types than those mentioned in the Western Region notes in the July issue. In addition to 0-6-2 and 0-6-0 tank engines the 7200 class 2-8-2 tanks are regular visitors together with 4200 class 2-8-0 tanks, all types of 2-6-2 tanks (including occasional engines of the 6100 class from London), 0-4-2 tanks and engines belonging to all the former railways in South Wales. On July 26th, Mr. I.M. Philpott travelled from Dawlish to Exeter behind King Class No 6000 King George V and noted that the famous bell was not on the front of the engine. On arrival at Exeter he found the bell lying in the cab, and was informed by the driver that it had broken loose from its fastenings, and had fallen on to the track, before the train started from Newton Abbot. It is to be hoped that this momento of the engine's visit to America will soon be restored".

THE FLOWERS THAT BLOOM IN THE SPRING (BLUEBELLS) - Contributed by Alan Wheeler

The morning was dull and cool, time 08.45 hrs and a Sunday, but even so people could be seen heading for the Marlow Donkey. Soon 44 souls had gathered, and then a Red Rover coach arrived, not a restored LT double decker which some expected to see. Everyone on board? No, a telephone call from Amersham, could we pick up a stranded signalman. A rapid detour, and back again heading for Guildford and refreshments. Once refreshed, the more serious subject of finding railways. Roger Bowen had heard of one near Dorking - the Brockham Museum Trust, an industrial narrow gauge collection. Roger spotted a cart track and directed the coach up it. We came to a level crossing - no go, a DMU was expected any hour, or so it seemed. On getting the right of way a set of track indicators was noted on the level crossing keepers house. Mr. Hanscomb informed, as if he needed to be! The cart track now became more a path, but still we proceeded until - small wagons, locos and track appeared ahead. It was at this point a young voice was heard to say "it's a junk yard why's everybody laughing Mummy?"

We were shown many exhibits, including a Guinness loco and gauge convertor - somehow 5'3" gauge doesn't have much of a following in the UK. Many wagons were of early date and it was pleasant to see that the GWR were present in the form of a couple of wagon axle boxes. Overall, however, the general feeling was that much effort was required in the future to break even on the venture, let alone succeed. Our Amersham friend couldn't depart without examining those track indicators, so armed with camera he walked down to the crossing whilst we took the narrow, bumpy ride down.

We then sped forth along Sussex roads to Sheffield Park - home of the Bluebell Railway. Arriving a little after 14.00 hrs we soon stood on Platform 1 awaiting the departure of the 14.28 to Horsted Keynes. But we needed an engine - soon Blackmore Vale, a Bulleid West Country Class spam can, appeared in fully restored condition. The loco backed onto the train as members filled the compartments of the 3rd Class SR stock immediately behind it - who said BR DMU's were hard riding, those seats were hard enough to be a Parliamentary Train. With a blast from Blackmore Vale's whistle we moved off - pleasant surprise, the coach rode the track beautifully. Good track maintenance crews, if not the seats. With frequent blasts from the Vale we built up a good speed and some 15 mins. later we arrived at Horsted Keynes. Here much activity took place, running the engine around the stock whilst the next train arrived shortly afterwards. Mr. Hanscomb was seen heading for the signal box. It was later learnt that he hadn't pulled any levers there as a signalman was under training instructions. However, a lever attracted our signalman's eye, working a shunters gong, very rare, even more so by the fact that it was operated by a yellow lever and not a green one. Moreover, the distant signals were green levers not yellow. A practice dating back from well over a 100 years. (Is this why Southern Region in general is so much behind the rest of BR?).

The majority of the party boarded the 15.16 hauled by a Mogul Southern tender loco 1618. The run was brisk, but a stop at Freshfield Halt has been requested and 1618 made a good start up the slight incline from the Halt, a good beat note being recorded. Back at Sheffield Park, members wandered around the sheds or refreshed themselves. On shed were a variety of locos in various stages of restoration. A couple of Brighton Terriers under general repairs, a Q1 class, an American Austerity loco, massive against our own British locos, and a line of locos stored for future work, including a Dukedog, sadly not in steam this year. Our signalling friend reappeared - he had been let loose in Sheffield Park Signal Box where he had operated several levers. No locos appeared to be in need of re-railing so no damage could have resulted.

17.30, and time for our return. We were soon on our way heading for Guildford where refreshments were taken, from tea to something a little stronger. A run to Marlow with dropping off points at Cookham and Little Marlow brought us back to the Donkey at 20.30. Some headed for home after a good day out, a group however was to be seen heading for the Donkey's bar.....

ISLE OF WIGHT - Contributed by Roger Bowen

Eight (plus baby) members and family ventured overseas (well - the Isle of Wight to be exact) on Sunday 11th June, 1978.

08.20 hrs on that day saw our keen explorers waiting expectantly on High Wycombe Station for their "Merrymaker" excursion to Portsmouth Harbour. One, however, was rather agitated as he had left his cigarettes at home and was shuddering at the thought of a "weed free" journey. Prompt on 7 minutes late (this is the London Midland Region) our train 1277 arrived from Bicester with 47.233 of Cardiff Canton shed at its head. At Beaconsfield we picked up our Chairman and his wife. Bas was able to calm our nicotine addict with a packet of his own so bringing relief to all concerned. Not for long, however, as Norris junior, whilst being held up to the window by dad, decided that the communication cord was just there to be pulled. This danger averted all listened to the Secretary expound on the route to be taken. This was dangerous statement as inevitably it was completely wrong!!

For the record the actual route taken was via Greenford Loop, GW mainline to Reading, then Reading West, Basingstoke, Eastleigh, Botley, Fareham, Cosham and Fratton. Crew changes took place at West Ruislip and Basingstoke. Arrival at Portsmouth Harbour was 12 minutes late, due to the Fratton signalman putting an empty stock working in front of us and some unexplained delays near the Harbour. As a result Sealink despatched our ferry before we arrived and thus we were later still arriving on the Island. We caught the MV "Brading", built in 1948 by Wm. Denny of Dumbarton of 837 tons gross. This was a "stopping" ferry as it called at Southsea Clarence Pier.

At Ryde our travellers dispersed. Your Secretary and Mike Walker caught a Southern Vectis Leyland National to the Isle of Wight Railway Centre at Haven Street. This is just under two miles of the former Ryde to Newport line closed by British Railways in 1966. The highlight of the day was the journey on this line in vintage ex LBSCR stock hauled by "O2" Class O-4-4T No. 24 "Calbourne". This loco was built at Nine Elms in 1891 as LSWR No. 209. In 1925 it was shipped by the recently formed Southern Railway to the Isle of Wight. Allocated to Ryde shed it was the last of the island steam loco's with British Railways, lasting to assist with the electrification programme in 1967.

Our travellers returned to Ryde and then caught "modern" railway power to Shanklin, the only non preserved railway on the island. The island has always had second (or third or fourth) hand stock. Today's is 1930's vintage ex London Transport tube stock which looks incredible in rail blue and grey lurching through the Isle of Wight countryside.

Only too soon was the time to come home. Vast crowds at Ryde Pier meant that many were delayed to the next boat (none of our party) and as a consequence our train was delayed 17 minutes at Portsmouth Harbour. Here the station announcer delighted in

in announcing our train as the "1902 to Bi-Chester"!! Our return was via the outward route with the same loco. Due largely to the apparently statutory stop outside Reading for some minutes our train returned to High Wycombe 25 minutes late.

Our travellers arrived home weary but happy after a glorious day in the sun and for some the joy of a journey behind steam.

TO FRANCE FOR STEAM (AMONG OTHER THINGS) - Contributed by Mike Walker

Since its formation, the members of the MDRS have taken part in many outings, which have had various degrees of success, but all have proved thoroughly enjoyable. This tradition was maintained on the much publicised French trip on the weekend of 16th/18th June 1978.

We left Marlow at 16.00 hrs in a blue Ford Transit minibus with Roger Bowen at the wheel. Arriving in Folkstone at 19.30 hrs a good but cheap hotel was quickly found and the party adjourned to an excellent restaurant in the town centre and indulged in a feast. This took place in an excellent atmosphere, the merriment increasing as the evening drew on, no doubt encouraged by the amount of wine being consumed. The treasurer did express his concern that although there was a choice of Irish, Scotch and French coffee there was no Welsh!

On the Saturday morning whilst awaiting loading on the 0810 sailing to Calais we inspected the deserted Folkstone Harbour station with the famous 1 in 30 incline and swing bridge. We came to the conclusion that the latter was no longer required to open, as although the running rails were divided the conductor rails were devoid of joints.

The fine weather of the previous day had given way to drizzle, sea mist and a heavy swell so it was with the possibility of a rough crossing that we boarded the BR Sealink ferry "Earl Leofric". This 3500 ton vessel was originally built as a stern loader by Hawthorn Leslie on the Tyne for use on the Irish services as "Holyhead Ferry One". Sometime after being transferred to the Channel she was renamed and given bow doors for roll-on and off operation.

The crossing in the event was fairly calm and we arrived at Calais pretty punctually. In contrast to the British side the dockside station was well stocked with trains in a variety of liveries. Not just those of the SNCF but also those of several other European railways.

We now made our way along the N1 to Boulogne where at a Hyper-market just outside the town we carried out one of our priority tasks the purchase of a large quantity of wine. With this precious cargo aboard Roger's driving became even more careful.

The railway we had come to see was the CFBS "Chemin De Fer De La Baie De Somme", a metre gauge line which runs from Le Crotoy to St. Valery S/Some and Cayeux-Sur-Mer, a total distance of 11½ miles. Built in the period 1887-1892 and closed in two sections in 1969 and 1973, passing almost immediately to a preservation society.

We first met the CFBS at Noyelles where the line shares the station with the SNCF, however we went on to St. Valery to the Town Station where we were a little surprised to find a general air of dereliction, with the track lost under weeds and the sleepers rotting away.

The weather had turned to heavy rain so as we had an hour before the 15.00 departure we drove into the main town for lunch and to search for a hotel. We returned to the station just as No. 25 a 0-4-0 side tank was arriving. At this point I must introduce "The man in the little green Renault". He was sitting outside the station summoning passengers over a public address system on his car. Roger and Roy introduced themselves to which he replied in an endless stream of French, with a cigar in the corner of his mouth, which no-one could understand. Only 2 or 3 members of the Preservation Society appeared to be present and apart from our party only about 6 ordinary passengers arrived to catch the train.

The train set off with two coaches which had open balconies at each end so we had the pleasant new experience of obtaining an extremely close view of the locomotive. Less pleasant was being able to observe the track through the holes between the floorboards!

Soon after leaving St. Valery Ville the line crosses a bridge and comes to the small station of St. Valery Canal. The line's main workshops are situated here. The 3¼ miles to Noyelles is maintained by the SNCF and is mixed gauge track to allow standard gauge to reach St. Valery.

Arriving at Noyelle our locomotive was changed to a 6 wheel diesel No. 352 which had hauled a train from Le Crotoy. As we left for Le Crotoy the locos leading wheels became derailed. This was caused by the track being overgauge. Quick running repairs were carried out which were not made easy by the rotten sleepers.

Clear of Noyelles and on purely CFBS track things got worse. The track was appalling and the train had to force its way through the trees which overhang the track. Despite the late running we stopped at a level crossing identified as the "station" of Morlay. Here the train crew took off for a nearby bar and some members followed. On returning to the train those members who had been left thought the crew had got off to deal with another derailment.

Ultimately Le Crotoy was reached but not without incident when just outside the terminus where the line crosses a busy main road with an open crossing an approaching car stopped but the one behind did not.

The return journey to St. Valery was marred by the fact that we had to ride behind the diesel all the way. There was only one incident on the return journey when there were problems with the ground frame at Noyelles.

On our return to St. Valery Roger presented a plaque to an English speaking member of the Preservation Society. The plaque was painted by Ted Gregory in GW green and bearing the GW crest surrounded by our title.

In the evening we had a meal which will be remembered for its excellent quality and because it took 3½ hours to eat with no waiting between courses. As St. Valery is well known as a fishing port and the starting point of the Norman invasion the meal was taken at the William of Normandy Hotel and consisted mainly of sea food dishes including lobster.

The Sunday morning saw an inspection of St. Valery with its town walls dating back to the Norman Conquest followed by a drive to Cayeux at the other end of the line. This part of the line is not open to passengers except in July and August. The station is similar to others on the line in style and condition and there were two very interesting freight vehicles. These were a bogie bolster and a self supporting tank car of similar size to our own standard gauge 100 tonnes. The tank car showed a building date of 1978 and its a mystery as to what they were doing there and how they managed to get round the tight clearances near St. Valery.

We then returned to St. Valery Canal and inspected the works where we were encouraged to find several items of stock undergoing repair including a O-6-2T being repainted light green and looking very smart.

Then onto Le Crotoy where we were rewarded by finding the O-4-OT in steam and shunting carriages. "The man in the little green Renault" was there still with a cigar in his mouth and still carrying on in an unintelligible stream of French. Ted's plaque had obviously made an impression on the CFBS because we were presented with some photographs and drawings of their locos.

On the road to Etaples where we had lunch we came across an old London Transport RT No. 2549 being used as a mobile showroom, much to the joy of two members and the derision of the rest.

Our arrival at Calais was in good time but there was some confusion at the car ferry terminal and to our surprise a Dover sticker was slapped on our windscreen. We then received a tap on the window and some chap asked us to move up so he could get his car into the next lane. When his car was discovered to be a Rolls there were some predictable comments. However, once on the ferry the Rolls driver discovered he was on the wrong ferry and since he was 5 miles out he was a little peeved.

The reason for there being no Folkstone was discovered to be that on the previous afternoon the MV Horsa had demolished the end of the ferry dock so all services to and from Folkstone were transferred to Dover. In contrast to our first crossing this time it was warm and sunny so several of us travelled on deck. Despite the find weather the 5500 ton Hengist still rolled in the heavy swell.

Leaving Dover we arrived home at about 21.00 hrs on Sunday with a stop at a fish and chip shop for supper in London on the way. I must express the thanks of all those in the party to Roger for his superb driving effort, to Ted for the plaque and both English and French signboards on the minibus and to Roy Mee for communicating so ably with the natives, even if "The man in the little green Renault" did manage to completely confuse him.

The only question remaining is; when are we going back? After all CFBS is a poor railway and needs all the support it can get.

THE WYCOMBE RAILWAY AND THE "MARLOW DONKEY" - Contributed by
Mike Walker

Introduction

This is the first part of a series which will trace the development of our two local branch lines, the Wycombe Railway from Maidenhead to Oxford and the Great Marlow Railway.

To clarify matters, diagrams will be introduced from time to time but it is regretted that the method of printing precludes the reproduction of photographs. However, if there is sufficient interest it may be possible to include a picture evening as a club night at the end of the series.

Possibly because of the lines' proximity to London and its commuter traffic, they have tended to be neglected by OPC, Ian Allan, D&C and Bradford Barton, etc. This is a pity, for as anyone who has used the remaining sections of the line will know, they pass through scenery as attractive in its own way as the much publicised lines in the far west, and as I will show, an interesting past as well.

Part I - Early Days at Maidenhead

In 1830 Maidenhead was already becoming a popular riverside town. It had the good fortune to stand on the Bath road at a bridging point across the River Thames. The Maidenhead Corporation imposed heavy tolls on traffic using its magnificent bridge. For example a stage coach was charged £18 to cross in 1830. This sum was a small fortune and with up to 70 coaches and other horse drawn vehicles crossing a day, Maidenhead became a very wealthy town attracting wealthy residents.

In 1833 Brunel drew up a route for his main line from London to Bristol, the Great Western Railway which passed through Maidenhead. The story of the construction has been told before * but this article will concentrate on the GWR as far as Maidenhead is concerned.

The Corporation, understandably, was somewhat alarmed at the prospect of a railway which would have a considerable effect on their tolls revenue. The GWR answered by conducting a survey of road traffic through the town over a fortnight in March 1834. **

The Bill authorising the Great Western Railway was placed before Parliament and passed in the 1835 session. The anxieties of the Maidenhead Corporation were recognised by a clause which required the GWR to compensate the Corporation for all revenue lost in the first six years of operation west of the Thames.

Work started in 1836 on the section from Paddington to the east bank of the river at Maidenhead. It should be remembered that the original Paddington station was on the west side of Bishops Road, more or less the site of the present NCL depot.

In January 1838 the first locomotive arrived at Maidenhead, by river. This was the famous "North Star" which was delivered by barge. After some difficulty in hauling the locomotive up the steep bank from the river, she was steamed and sent off to the engine shed at West Drayton.

Brunel had hoped to get the 22 $\frac{3}{4}$ mile line finished by October 1837. However, there were several difficulties, both financial and with the workforce, and Maidenhead station was not built until 1838. The line was opened on 31st May 1838, with public services commencing on 4th June when 1,479 people were conveyed, paying a total of £226 in fares.

As there is now no trace, or almost, of the original terminus at Maidenhead, a detailed description may be of interest. Intended as a temporary structure it was constructed of timber and situated on a high embankment just west of the brick skew bridge by which the railway crossed the Bath Road. The passenger station had two roads, broad gauge of course, and was originally intended to have an overall roof, but, for unknown reasons, this did not materialise.

There were two raised platforms to allow easy access to trains without having to climb up from the ground, as at Paddington, with the hope that this would encourage people to use the train rather than the coach. At this time only Euston and Birmingham stations had raised platforms. On each platform there was a long, low building with a wide awning. These were topped by clock towers on both platforms. The reason for this was that Maidenhead Local Time was three minutes behind GMT because local clocks were set by the sun. GWR trains ran, of course, to GMT.

There were three entrances to the station. The first led from a triangular piece of land between road and railway, west of the skew bridge. This was a coach park for coaches to the West Country awaiting the arrival of trains from London. The site is now occupied by the "Old Station Inn". On the down side there was an entrance from a lane at the river end, and another from an entrance in the abutment of the skew bridge. This entrance can still be seen and the staircase is in use as the exit from Paddington station onto the Bishops Bridge.

As well as a passenger station there was a goods depot, with a staff of six, an engine shed and a turntable. Early engraving show the station also boasted a full set of Brunels early fan tail and disc crossbar signals.

As noted above this was intended to be a temporary structure pending the extension of the line westwards, in fact the GWR Board voted on 3rd August 1839 to move the station one mile west. However, temporary things have a habit of becoming permanent, so the buildings were to see 23 years service, during which they were known successively as Maidenhead, Maidenhead Dumb Bell Bridge, Maidenhead Riverside, Maidenhead and Taplow, and simply Taplow, surely a record!

Extension westwards had problems. Much of the land was owned by the Grenfell's, a famous Maidenhead family but the biggest obstacle was the river itself. The Thames Commissioners stipulated that a brick bridge was required and there was to be no piers or other obstructions in the river or on the tow-paths. Fortunately for Brunel there was shoal in the centre of the river to bear a centre pier. Nevertheless this was no ordinary bridge, 788' total length with two arches of 128' span and a maximum rise of 24'3". They are reputed to be the longest brick arches in Europe and probably the world.

At the time of its construction much criticism was made of the design which many labelled as unsafe. However, despite slight problems in construction detailed elsewhere, the bridge has given nearly 140 years service, been widened and now carries loads far in excess of those envisaged by Brunel and at speeds undreamed of even by that great engineer.

The first trains crossed the bridge on 1st July 1839 when the line was opened to Twyford. Subsequently, further sections were opened until the whole line was in operation from London to Bristol from 30th June 1841.

- * History of Great Western Railway by Mac Dermot
- ** First Stop Maidenhead by Matthew Wells

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Stop Press

It is your committee's intention to hold an informal dinner or dinner dance this Christmas. Your suggestions as to venue, type and interest would be appreciated during the September meeting.