

THE 8D ASSOCIATION

ON SHED

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Sutton Oak Shed (8G)

BR Standard Class 4 2-6-0 mixed traffic locomotive number 76083 at Sutton Oak shed in the 1960s. The portable coal loading machine can be seen to the left and the shed turntable is in the foreground.

Photo by Les Fifoot.

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Editor



On a winter day in 1973 a diverted Liverpool to Newcastle service passes through the site of Clock Face station.

Photo by Bevan Price.

The wettest year on record has not dampened the enthusiasm of members for our site visit programme. All of the events to date have been well attended and the one thing that strikes me is just how much everybody seems to enjoy themselves when we get together. I have made some fantastic new friends through the 8D Association and been able to learn so much more about our local railways and their history. I have also seen old friends and colleagues be brought back together for the first time in decades. This aspect of the 8D Association is just one of the positive spin offs that we have seen.

We also have two more former railwaymen who have recently joined us. Rod Dixon formerly of Sutton Oak (8G) and Barry Nolan formerly of Widnes (8D) sheds. Barry adds an international dimension to our group as he resides in New Zealand. Welcome to you both and long may our group continue to grow.

On a more sombre note it is the centenary of the Ditton Junction crash on 17th September 2012 and contained in this edition is an article by Richard Mercer about the accident. **Paul Wright**

A Shift at Tanhouse Lane.



Barry Nolan observes the scene at Waterloo Crossing from the cab of ex LMS 'Jinty' number 47659 in the early 1960s. Barry was firing the locomotive and was caught on camera as he passed over the crossing.

I became an Engine Cleaner at 8D at the age of 15 in 1955 and eventually progressed to the elevated rank of Fireman. A lot of my time was spent on main line work, but in the early days, I did quite a lot of work on shunt engines. It was common to be rostered with a given driver for a period of a year (or sometimes longer) and because of the BR hierarchical system, drivers were assigned to a 'Link' or type of work, depending on their seniority. Because of this, I found myself with a wonderful driver name Billy Melvin who was permanently assigned to the shunt engine based at Tanhouse Lane. I can't remember the exact year of my stint at Tanhouse, but think it was between 1959 and 1961.

I used to work 2 shifts. The day shift started at 8.00am through to 5.00pm. At the end of the day, the fireman was responsible for 'dropping the fire' and coaling the engine. The latter was achieved by throwing coal over the top of a wagon coupled to the engine, into the bunker. This was very hard work until the bottom of the wagon was uncovered which made shovelling a little easier. The night shift started at midnight and ran until 8.00am. However, only the fireman started at this early hour because he was responsible for lighting the fire in the loco and raising steam in time for the start of operations. I used to hate the long, dark walk from the Motive Power Depot along the Dead Wall to Tanhouse. The only light on the journey was a glimmer from a single electric bulb in Denis's Copper Factory which did nothing to dispel my insecurity. The cabin (mess room) at Tanhouse was in a block of single storey offices which housed the traffic Superintendent, the Wagon Checker and the shunting staff.

Alas, this was only illuminated by a gas light which did little to allay my fear of the unseen.

The loco, which *I think* was a 3F Fowler 0-6-0 Tank, was parked alongside the ex Station Master's house at night. The house was situated just inside the railway crossing gates on the town side of the crossing. It was rented by Ma Casey, who, legend said, had a number of pretty daughters, who, much to my disappointment, I never met. I used to feel sorry for them as I'd be banging about on the footplate in the middle of the night whilst they were trying to sleep, but they never complained.

Tanhouse was an isolated outpost with its own dedicated staff. There was Sailor Bill, the Signaller responsible for the area between Moor Lane and the signal box to the east of Tanhouse (Can't remember the name) as well as operating the level crossing gates. This used to bring him into conflict with ICI workers at their start and finish times as they expected him to halt the trains so they could cross at their leisure. Billy Melvin, my driver and Bill Houghton, the other driver who used to bike to Tanhouse from his home in Runcorn. Jack Hope, the shunter, a diminutive, clever man and his opposite number Derek (forgotten his surname) who loved nothing better than a good chin wag. The guard was a Cockney, named Fred, who liked nothing better than betting on horses and drinking whiskey. There was a wagon repair man named Cadman who travelled daily from Liverpool to his job and a jolly, effeminate, man named Ron who used to check the



The west end of Tanhouse Yard seen from a passing train in the summer of 1964. The train had just passed over the St Helens line at Ann Street and its next stop would be Tanhouse Lane station.
Photo by Neville Conroy



Looking west at Tanhouse Yard from Tan House Lane in 1987. A shadow of its former self the yard was at this date being used by trains serving the Blue Circle Cement works. Since April 1982 it had been connected to the Deviation line. The section of track to the left is still in situ as part of the Moss Bank Park.
Photo by John Wilson

details shown on the labels attached to wagons, though I never understood the reason for this! Finally, there was Sid, the depot Superintendent who hailed from Liverpool and also travelled to and from the city every day. Sid took his job very seriously but since there was little for him to do, he spent most of his time staring gloomily from his office window. We were a disparate group, but I really enjoyed the friendship and family feeling I got from my time there. It never really felt like a job – more like a hobby!

We weren't exactly rushed off our feet at Tanhouse apart from an occasional visit to Bowman's Chemical Works, Bush Boake Roberts and ICI Pilkington Sullivan factories. The day's highlight was a run to Moor Lane, then along the Desoto Road track, across Ditton Road to the Hutchinson Estate territory with traffic destined for the multiple works in their area. By this time in my career, my drivers felt they could trust me to share the driving responsibilities so Bill would drive to Moor Lane very sedately and I would drive back as fast as the little loco could travel. I'm sure this alarmed Bill, Fred and Derek, but nobody ever complained. Perhaps they were glad that I'd enabled them to get home earlier than before!

Barry Nolan

Closure of Crossfields and Littons Mill Crossing signal boxes.



Crossfields signal box on 21st April 2012. Photo by Paul Wright

Crossfields and Littons Mill signal boxes have now closed. The boxes were due to close at 06.45 on Monday 7th of July 2012 but the closure was actually delayed by a week. The crossing at Crossfields is now controlled by Monks Siding box. A number of semaphore signals have been taken out and replaced with colour light signalling.

Crossfields Crossing box had opened in 1907 having replaced an earlier structure dating from 1872. It was an LNWR type 4 box with wooden top on a brick base. Provided with an LNWR tumbler 18 lever frame the box controlled the crossing at Crossfields and the line between Warrington Bank Quay Low Level and westwards towards Littons Mill. It also controlled access into the Lever Brothers works. By 2002 it had only four of its original levers still working. Cosmetically it had been modernised having had double glazed windows fitted. For the time being the box will remain standing as a relay room.

Littons Mill Crossing box opened in 1890 having replaced a box that had opened in 1875. It was also an LNWR type 4 but it had an LNWR tumbler 16 lever frame. Its frame was replaced in 1922 by an LNWR tappet frame of 18 levers. Littons Mill controlled the crossing after which it was named and a short section of line. There is only half a mile between Monks Siding, Littons mill and Crossfields boxes. Between Crossfields and Littons Mill the distance can be measured in metres. Littons Mill will remain in situ as a gate box. At least for now these LNWR survivors will not be demolished. Interestingly their replacement, Monks Siding box, is much older dating from 1875. **Paul Wright**

'I am alright for Liverpool' *The Ditton junction Railway Accident of 17th September 1912 – Part 1*



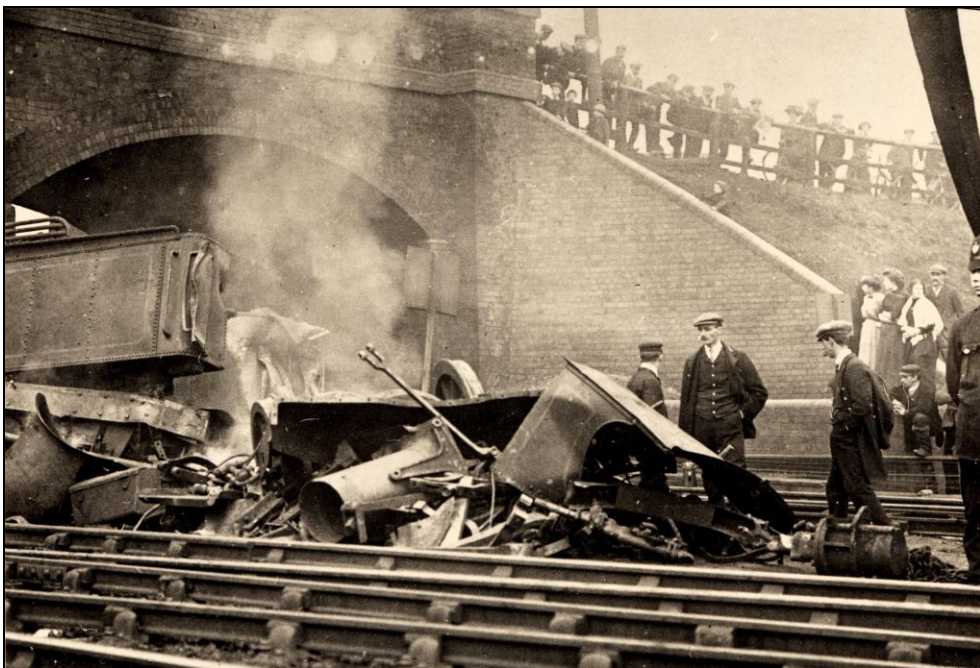
Ditton Junction looking east in 1912. The postcard view shows the point, marked by x's where the 15.30pm Chester to Liverpool Lime Street train left the rails at 6.05pm on 17th September 1912 with tragic consequences.

The following article is based upon a much larger piece of work by Richard Mercer that the 8D Association is hoping to have printed as a book to mark the centenary of the Ditton Junction Railway Accident.

'I am alright for Liverpool' were the fateful words spoken by Robert Hughes at Llandudno Junction shed on 17th September 1912. The chain of events that was to follow resulted in the death of fifteen people and injury to forty-two others at Ditton Junction.

Tuesday 17th September 1912 was a busy day for the London & North Western Railway (LNWR) and especially so at Llandudno Junction as there were numerous extra services running that day to cope with passenger numbers. Organising rosters that day was Owen Owens a driver who had been given the task. He was trying to find a crew for a train that was to work from Bangor to Chester where it was scheduled to depart for Liverpool at 5.30pm. The train only ran in the summer months between July and September.

The crew were required to work through to Liverpool and it was Robert Hughes a 41 year old 'Extra Driver' (passed fireman) who volunteered. He had experience of the route and had signed for it on 10th July 1912. Although he had worked to Liverpool on one hundred and forty four occasions on only ten had he been the driver and they had been spread over four years. Also crucially he had never worked along the slow lines from Ditton towards Liverpool. Robert Hughes was paired with Abraham Lunn a 21 year old



Wreckage from the locomotive 'Cook' at Ditton Junction the day after the crash.

passed cleaner. Lunn had only fired over the route to Liverpool on one previous occasion.

It is not recorded how Hughes and Lunn travelled to Bangor but is possible that they went there as passengers (on the cushions). In any event they worked the train which departed Bangor at 3.55pm with George Henry Boardman of Edge Hill as the guard. According to Boardman the train was heavily loaded for the journey to Chester. At Llandudno Junction the train was split into a Manchester and a Liverpool portion. At Chester two horse boxes were added for the journey to Liverpool Lime Street. The train was hauled by a 2-4-0 'Precedent' class locomotive number 1529 'Cook' (which had been with it from Bangor) followed by the two horse boxes (which were GWR), an LNWR six wheel third class brake no. 4493A lighted by gas, an LNWR six wheeled composite third class coach no.1997 lighted by gas, an LNWR six wheeled composite no. 445 lighted by gas, an LNWR eight wheeled (bogie) third class brake no. 7236 lighted by electricity, two LNWR eight wheeled (bogie) composites nos. 3281 and 3371 lighted by gas and an eight wheeled (bogie) third class brake lighted by electricity.

The train departed from Chester at 5.32pm two minutes late. The train was booked to stop at Helsby, Frodsham and Runcorn.

Ditton Junction was a complex place in 1912. To the west of the junction there was a road over bridge which carried Hale Road across seven lines of railway track. To the west of the bridge was Ditton Junction station with its five platform faces, to the stations south there were sidings and to its north a railway creosote works. To the west of the station the main line continued as a quadruple route to Liverpool.

At the junction two lines of the Warrington line came in on the north side of the Weaver junction line and joined it. These lines followed the original route of the SHC&RC line to Warrington. Two lines from Warrington also came into Ditton Junction from the south side of the Weaver Junction line. They had opened in 1885 and were classed as slow lines being used mainly by freight trains.

Controlling the junction in 1912 was an LNWR type 4 signal box with a 75 lever frame called The box had opened in October 1884 replacing an earlier box dating to 1868. It was located on the north side of the junction had a brick base with a timber upper cabin. The box was called Ditton Junction No. 1. To its east on the Weaver Junction line was Ditton Bank box and to its west was Ditton No. 2 box. The next box on the Warrington line was West Deviation Junction. Traffic was heavy in 1912 with a steady stream of goods services running along all of the lines and with express and local passenger services.

In Ditton Junction Number 1 box was signalman William Hignett. He set the route to Liverpool via the slow lines. The speed restriction on the points leading from the main line to the slow lines was 15mph. At 6.06pm the Chester train passed Ditton Junction No 1 box at about 60mph. It hit the speed restricted crossover at four times the speed that it should have. The locomotive left the rails and careered on its side across the tracks and smashed into the piers of Hale Road Bridge with such force that the boiler was ripped from the firebox. The smoke box was split and scattered and the cab and side sheets ripped apart like paper.

Directly behind the locomotive were the horse boxes, the first of which was thrown past the wrecked loco and landed across the up and the down slow lines. Amazingly the horse in this box emerged from the wreck shaken but unhurt but the fate of its groom is not known. The second horsebox was split asunder, half either side of the road bridge. The horse was killed but the groom survived.

The first three passenger carriages crashed in a zig-zag between two of the bridge openings and against the wall of station booking office. These three coaches, lit by gas were at the heart of the fire which broke out moments later. The fourth carriage wedged itself between the half horsebox and the tender, the three rear carriages, although damaged and derailed, remained upright.

The locomotive driver, Robert Hughes and his fireman Abraham Lunn were still alive after the crash but mortally wounded. They were trapped in the wreckage and could not be freed until the brakedown train arrived at 10:30pm. When they were cut free driver Hughes was found to be dead. Lunn died later in hospital. Thirteen passengers also lost their lives.

The crash produced many tales of heroism performed by the railway staff and the people of Halebank and Ditton which were reported by the Widnes Weekly News. First on the scene was the Ditton Junction Stationmaster James Derby who with ganger William Sefton had witnessed the crash. Derby quickly assessed the situation and smelt escaping gas from the gas lit carriages. A fire had already started and Derby organized the station staff to break out the fire fighting equipment and search the carriages for survivors. The nearby LNWR creosote and sleeper works had its own team of fire-fighters amongst the workforce who had been specially trained. They came over to the wreck and assisted the

station staff. The station porter on duty was Peter Kavanagh and he ran back and forth through the smoke and the heat to bring stretchers for the injured.

People from the district began to arrive, one was Kathleen Murtha who, with other women of Halebank ripped up bed sheets for bandages, provided blankets for the injured, made tea and gave comfort to those in shock. This was a poor working class community, they didn't have much but what they had was given freely and generously.

Alexander Davies of Halebank, heard the crash at home, dashed across the fields and with great risk to his her own life rescued a woman from a carriage in which a fire started. After he had freed and carried her to safety he then went back to help assist others who were suffering in the smoke and heat.

Joseph Dolan, of Ditton was a driver in the 14th Royal Field Artillery and with other members of his unit were walking along Ditton Road to their battery in Hale when they saw the accident, they raced to the scene and joined in the rescue, he later said he will never forget that horrifying night carrying dead and mutilated bodies from the burnt out wreck. Other members of his unit had joined in with throwing buckets of water to douse the flames with little success until an act of quick thinking by George Taylor of Ditton who picked up lumps of coal from the wrecked tender and proceeded to smash the carriage windows thereby allowing the water to quench the flames. Other military personnel arrived from Widnes at 7.00pm including Sergeant Instructor J Dwyer of the South Lancashire Regiment and Staff Sergeant J Watson R.A.M.C who were both later commended for their efforts at the crash scene.

The Widnes Fire Brigade did not arrive on scene until 7.30pm by which time the fire had been brought under control by the station staff and creosote works fire fighters. It was practically extinguished by 8.00pm. The carriages under the bridge were gutted.

The first of the rescued were taken to the Widnes Accident Hospital in West Bank where William Manning and his young son spent the night winding the lift up and down as stretcher after stretcher arrived with the injured, the waiting rooms on platforms 3 and 4 at Ditton Junction station were used to treat some of the injured and also as a temporary mortuary.

When news reached Lime Street station a special train was organised consisting of an engine and two coaches. Doctors from the Liverpool Royal Infirmary were taken on board and the train left Lime Street at 7.05pm. It arrived at Ditton at 7.33pm and it was used to take many of the injured to the Liverpool Royal Infirmary. The dead were also taken to Liverpool by train.

It must have been a long night for those involved in the rescue and treatment of the injured as well as for those involved in dousing fires. The following morning, crowds gathered at every vantage point to watch the work of clearing away the wreckage, cranes from Edge Hill depot and Crewe works lifted the twisted remains of the locomotive and its tender onto wagons to be taken back to the works for cutting up. The remains of the carriages burnt out in the fire would also have been scrapped others may have been repaired; there are no references in reports of the accident as to their fate. After the clear up, permanent way gangs from all over the district descended on the junction to begin the work of repairing the torn and twisted track and trackbed and



A burnt out coach from the ill-fated 5.30pm Chester to Liverpool service. The coach is seen standing at Ditton Junctions goods platform. The present day signalbox which opened in 2000 now stands at this location.

by Friday 20th September 1912 normal services resumed.

The official enquiry blamed the accident on the driver Robert Hughes but one hundred years later we should not regard him as the villain in this piece, there are probably circumstances we are unaware of. Railway pay at that time was poor. With a family to support any extra would be welcome and a trip as a driver would generate much needed extra income. Also at this time railwaymen tended to be very loyal to their companies and no doubt Hughes would have thought he was being helpful, in his mind he'd done the trip before without any problems and could see no reason for anything to be different. He was more than confident in his own ability to do the job. If he is guilty of anything it is overconfidence and we have all been guilty of that sometime in our lives. The system was really the guilty party in this tragedy, the haphazard way in which men were allocated certain jobs, the complete lack of any competent examination of drivers knowledge of the road, a lack of any competent leadership, the ambiguity of a contradictory rule book, put any one of those components right and Robert Hughes would not have been driving the 5.30pm Chester to Liverpool express.. And the tragic truth of this whole affair is this ----- it takes a tragedy to change the system. **Richard Mercer**

In Memory – Robert Hughes (Driver- Llandudno Junc), Abraham Lunn (Fireman- Llandudno Junc), Mr F W Carter (St Helens), W M Cordelle (Tue Brook), Mr W S Garner (St Helens), Mrs Margaret Eleanor Lloyd (Toxteth), Mrs Mary Caroline Marshall (Mossley Hill), Mrs Freda McArdle (Wavertree), A M Poole (St Helens), Mrs Myrddin Rees (Abergele), Mr Albert Roby and Mrs Agnes Roby (Rainhill), Mr Sherwin (Chester), Mrs Marjorie Thomas (Kensington), Miss Nesta Walmsley (Sefton Park).

Clock Face Colliery Branch Site Visit



In the winter months of 1976 a class 108 Derby Built DMU heads north towards Clock Face on a diverted Liverpool Lime Street to Preston service. A yellow mile mark can be seen in the distance. Just beyond it, to the left, there was a triangular junction formed from the lines going to Sutton Manor Colliery. Until the mid 1960s there had also been a triangle of lines opposite formed from the Clock face Colliery branch.

Photo by Bevan Price

On the 19th of May 2012 the 8D Association visited the Clock Face colliery branch and the route of the St Helens and Runcorn Gap Railway between Clock Face and the M62 motorway. The visit was made all the more memorable because Rod Dixon, a former BR driver but in his earlier career a passed cleaner at Sutton Oak, joined the tour and provided the group with the benefit of his local knowledge.

The sinking of a Coal Mine at Clock face by Bold Hall Estates Ltd started in June 1896 and under an agreement of 22nd of September 1896 with the LNWR a railway was constructed from the mine to the St Helens and Widnes line (former St Helens and Runcorn Gap railway) where it made a connection just to the south of Clock Face station. After sinking 500 feet problems with water forced the work on the mine to be abandoned. The men were paid off on 17th of March 1900 and the unfinished mine became derelict.

The Clock Face mine was taken over by the Wigan Coal and Iron Company towards the end of 1902. The new owners using new technology were able to overcome the water problems and production started in 1908. A revised agreement for a connection with the LNWR was signed on the 19th of May 1905. The Clock Face Colliery branch was $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile long. It connected with the LNWR with a triangle which allowed trains to run either north to St Helens or south to Widnes.

Clustered around the triangle there were sidings that were used for the exchange of traffic between the colliery and the main line. To the east of the triangle the line crossed the Clock Face Road on an over bridge before running in a north-easterly direction to the colliery. Between the east side of the road and the colliery there were numerous sidings.

To work the branch the Wigan Coal and Iron Company acquired, along with the pit, a four-coupled saddle tank locomotive called 'Crosfield'. The locomotive had been built by the Vulcan Foundry at Newton-le-Willows for the Bold Hall Estates Ltd in 1897. Within a few years 'Crosfield' was joined by six-coupled saddle tanks.

Passenger trains operated on the Clock face Colliery branch in the 1920s in the form of workmen's trains. The trains started after the Great War and operated from St Helens and calling at Peasley Cross and Sutton Oak. A train for day shift workers left St Helens at 5.50am Mondays to Fridays and at 5.00am on Saturdays. The night shift train departed St Helens at 10.00pm. The day shift men arrived back in St Helens at 3.15pm Mondays to Thursdays, 3.35pm on Fridays and at 12.47pm on Saturdays. The night shift trains arrived back at St Helens at 7.10am Mondays to Fridays and at 6.15am on Saturdays. The trains consisted of two portions, one for Clock face Colliery and one for Sutton Manor. Upon arrival at Clock Face the train hauled by an LNWR locomotive stopped on the down line clear of the points leading to the colliery. A Clock



Ex driver Ron Dixon a native of Clock Face describes the layout of the lines between the former St Helens and Runcorn Gap Railway and Sutton Manor Colliery to Lee woods during the 8D Association site visit to Clock Face.



Looking towards the west along the route of the Clock Face Colliery branch on 19th of May 2012.
Photo by Paul Wright

Face Colliery engine then attached itself to the rear portion of the train and hauled it to the pit head. A Sutton Manor locomotive then backed onto the remaining portion and hauled it to Sutton Manor. In the reverse direction the Clock Face engine hauled the train to a point just outside the LNWR boundary, detached and went into a siding. The LNWR engine then backed onto the train drew it forward onto the main line and then propelled over a crossover to pick up the Sutton Manor portion.

The Clock Face Colliery was taken over by the Wigan Coal Corporation Ltd on its formation on 1st August 1930 and it became part of the Number 3 (St Helens) Area of the National Coal Board on 1st of January 1947.

As early as October 1947 proposals were being made to close Clock Face Colliery and to work the coal face from Sutton Manor as the washery at Clock Face was in a bad state of repair. It was closed and coal was taken to Sutton Manor for preparation. It was hauled by NCB locomotives that crossed what had become the British Railways line. Latterly the NCB locomotives were only based at Sutton Manor. The Clock Face Colliery branch closed early in 1957 and the agreements in respect of the connections with the main line were terminated on 31st of August 1957. It is likely that the connections were taken out shortly after. Clock Face Colliery ceased production of coal in March 1966.

The last train from Sutton Manor ran on 15th of August 1987 but that is another story.

Paul Wright

Widnes No. 2 Signal Box Diagram

The Widnes No. 2 signal box diagram is now in the ownership of an 8D Association member. The diagram recently came up for auction and I was successful with my bid. The box in which the diagram once hung opened in May 1895 and stood on the south side of Ann street crossing on the up side (St Helens direction) of the line. The box closed on Sunday 30th December 1973 the control of Ann Street Crossing passing to Widnes No 1.

When I learned that the box diagram was in an auction I was keen to obtain it as the Widnes No. 2 holds a special place in my memory having spent many hours talking to the signalmen there when I was a child. Along with my friend we used to go to the shop for one of the signalmen and as a reward we got a few pennies which were converted into flying saucers and white mice. They were usually carried down to Dock Junction (then derelict) where a set of buffer stops made an excellent seat.

The diagram now hangs proudly on my study wall at home and any 8d member who would like to view it would be most welcome. **Paul Wright**

Warrington Arpley 'Not' in the 1960s



There are a few clues that show that this is not a scene from the 1960s such as the modern headlights and the yellow (rather than red) overhead warning signs on the locomotives but otherwise the view could have been from a different era. It was in fact taken on Thursday 26th July 2012 at Warrington Arpley. The Deltic D9009, to the left, had travelled from Edinburgh to where it had worked a rail-tour from London Kings Cross and was on its way back to its home at the East Lancashire Railway.

Photo by John Wilson

Events Programme

15:00 - Saturday 25th August 2012 – Rail Journey Helsby to Ellesmere Port & Return – A journey on what could be described as a ghost train as it runs so infrequently. Meet at Helsby Station Car Park.

10.00 - Saturday 22nd September 2012 – Sutton Oak Junction. Including junction, Robins Lane Halt and the intersection bridge - Meet at St Annes Club car park, Monastery Road, Sutton, St Helens.

10.00 – Saturday 27th October 2012 – LMS Sheds *Film and Pictures* – Given by Les Fifoot - **Widnes Library, Kingsway, Widnes.**

10.00 – Saturday 24th November 2012 – The Great Central and Midland Railway Widnes Joint Line (The Widnes loop) – Given by Paul Wright – **Widnes Library, Kingsway, Widnes.**



'Where is this' competition? (Answers to pwright964@btinternet.com) - Picture by Les Fifoot

- The June competition winner was R Dixon and the location was Folly Lane Runcorn.
- The March location was west of Waterloo Crossing