

ON SHED

The Journal of the 8D Association

Volume 4 Number 2 – June 2014



St Helens 1960s

BR Standard 2-6-0 locomotive number 76083 is seen heading south on a freight working towards Ravenhead Junction in the 1960s. The locomotive had just passed over the Sankey Canal and would have passed through St Helens Shaw Street station only a minute before this view was taken. **Photo by Gordon Howarth**

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Editor

The year 2014 is a significant one for anniversaries. One hundred years ago on 4 August 1914 the First World War (originally referred to as the 'Great War') began. The conflict left a scar on the collective memory of this nation, and many others, attested to by the long list of names on the memorials that were erected throughout the land. The First World War would never have been fought in the way it was had it not been for the invention of the railway. Railways were used for moving men and materials and there were even narrow gauge railways laid between the main lines of Northern France and the trenches at the front. Some of the largest guns capable of throwing shells great distances were rail mounted. The local stations of the 8D area would have all witnessed scenes of farewell and departure and many men would never return. Later in the year the North Cheshire Rail Users Group will be marking these events with an exhibition. They have already sowed an area of poppies at Runcorn East station.

The railways of Great Britain went on to perform an equally important role in the Second World War especially in the build up to D-Day which was seventy years ago on 6 June 1944. However, fifty years ago, in 1964 the railways were most definitely out of favour and the Beeching Report of the previous year began to be implemented. The year 1964 saw the greatest number of station and line closures compared to any year before or after. Within the 8D area we lost Widnes Locomotive Shed on 16 May 1964. On 6 July 1964 the St Helens – Rainford Junction line closed as a through route. Widnes Central and Tanhouse Lane stations closed on 5 October 1964 and the entire former GC & MR Widnes Branch (except for a short section at Tanhouse Lane) closed on 6 December 1964. On 2 November 1964 the Glazebrook – Wigan Central line lost its passenger service and a few weeks later on 30 November 1964 the Liverpool Central – Stockport Tiviot Dale service was withdrawn.

In the years following 1964 the local network continued to shrink but there were some improvements. Forty years ago at the introduction of the May 1974 timetable

the electrification of the West Coast Main Line between Weaver Junction and Glasgow was complete and electric services between London and Glasgow were introduced.

In more recent years there has been a renaissance and railways are expanding and receiving significant investment.

The most significant investment currently underway locally is the electrification of the Liverpool – Manchester (Chat Moss route) and the Huyton – Wigan lines. The electrification will be complete in December 2014 and from May 2015 there should be (subject to there being enough EMUs) a full electric service on the lines. As part of the electrification project the lines between Roby and Huyton are being quadrupled (in two phases).

Work is also underway on the construction of a new freight facility at Halebank. The Stobart Port continues to thrive as does the Garston car loading terminal. The Folly Lane branch now has daily services and it is not uncommon to see more than one train there.

That which has been lost will continue to be celebrated by the 8D Association and through the pages of the Journal and our website we will record the history of our railway heritage. Our mobile display is currently hosting a display about Widnes Locomotive Shed which not only closed fifty years ago but opened one hundred and forty years ago.

The current developments which will also become an important part of the history of our railways will also be reported on and long may they continue. Hopefully the dark days of 1964 are now just a piece of history. **Paul Wright**



In 1964 Ivatt Mogul 2-6-0 locomotive number 43033 heads north along the former GCR/MR Widnes Branch towards Widnes East junction with a Liverpool Central – Manchester Central stopping service. The view was taken looking south from the Dans Road bridge. To the left can be seen works in connection with the construction of Fiddlers Ferry Power Station. Photo by Gordon Howarth

Steam along the Birkenhead Joint Railway



On 28 April 2014 Stanier 4-6-0 5MT (Black 5) locomotive number 44932 is seen emerging from the Sutton tunnel and passing through Runcorn East station. Photo by Kerry Ramsbottom

On 28 April 2014 a steam hauled special ran along the former Birkenhead Joint Railway between Chester and Warrington. The special was the 'Great Britain VII' rail tour, a nine day tour that started at London Victoria. The run along the Birkenhead Joint line was on day three of the tour and it provided the spectacle of a steam hauled train emerging from the Sutton tunnel.

Nievenheim – Ditton Foundry Lane Service

A freight service is currently running between Nievenheim in Germany and Ditton Foundry Lane. The service is a 3 year contract run by DB Schenker on behalf of Novelis for the transport of imported 10 tonne Aluminium coils to a factory in Widnes, returning with exported recycled 27 tonne aluminium from the Novelis plant in Latchford.

The train departs Ditton Foundry lane at 19.00 on Sunday and 20.37 on Tuesday and Thursday arriving at Nievenheim in Germany at 23.00 the following day. Departure from Nievenheim is at 06.30 on Wednesday, Friday and Sunday, arriving at Ditton Foundry Lane at 08.20 on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. It appears the Sunday working spends a day in the yard at Aachen before proceeding to Calais the following day.

As the train is formed of 22 bogie ferry wagons and takes the length of Ditton Yard's longest siding, it requires a diesel locomotive to come from Arpley along the Low Level line each time the train is either arriving or departing from Ditton to assist the train engine in shunting the wagons into the former AHC sidings at Foundry Lane. The only difference to this is on a Sunday afternoon when the diesel gets to Ditton Yard from Arpley, by reversing at Hartford Junction.

Generally, motive power for the train is a DB Schenker class 92 electric locomotive which takes the train from Ditton to Frethun Yard in Calais, after picking up another class 92 at Dollands Moor to assist it through the Channel Tunnel. From Calais, the SNCB (Belgian National Railways) handle the train to its destination. They use a Class 29 electric locomotive to Muizen Yard where a dual voltage class 28 electric takes over the train from there to its final destination.

Generally a class 66 diesel is the usual engine provided for the Ditton shunting move. However, on two Sundays earlier this month, the shunt engine became the train engine. This was due to engineering works in the London area which resulted in the train being re-routed off the West London line between Willesden West London Junction and Factory Junction. It was diverted via Acton Canal Wharf Junction, Acton Wells Junction, Bollo Lane Junction, Kew East Junction and New Kew Junction joining the Hounslow Loop line before passing through Clapham Junction to regain the West London line at Factory Junction. As the sections of line between Acton Canal Wharf Junction and Acton Wells Junction along with Bollo Lane Junction to New Kew Junction are not electrified, this precluded the use of a class 92, resulting in the class 66 working right through from Ditton to Dollands Moor.

The trains run as 6M14 between Dollands Moor and Ditton Foundry Lane and as 6O16 between Ditton Foundry Lane and Dollands Moor. **Chris Hollins**

Work begins on St Helens & Runcorn Gap Railway path



Work has begun on the footpath/Cycleway which will link Clock Face with North Widnes. The path runs along the course of the St Helens & Runcorn Gap railway between Clock Face and Mill Lane and will provide a pleasant walking and cycling route between the two locations. It will also help to preserve a section of the line and prevent it from being developed. There will be interpretive boards that celebrate the history of this early railway.

Left – Looking south towards Widnes from the Bold bridge on 23 May 2014. The construction work was at an advanced stage. Photo by John Wilson

Widnes Locomotive Shed 1874 to 1964



Widnes Locomotive Shed on 3 July 1948. The shed had become part of British Railways London Midland Region on 1 January 1948 but in this view the letters LMS are still proudly displayed on a locomotive tender. Photo by M J Mason

This year is the 140th Anniversary of Widnes Locomotive Depot which opened on an unknown date in 1874. It is also the 50th Anniversary of the sheds closure on 16 May 1964.

In the early years of the St Helens & Runcorn Gap Railway it is likely that the locomotives that serviced the southern end of the line were stabled at Sutton. However with the expansion of industry at Widnes from the 1840s onwards there must have been a need to stable engines locally. It is known that local factories had engines of their own for use on their systems and that these were stabled in simple wooden sheds. By the time that the London & North Western Railway (LNWR) took over, what had become the St Helens Canal & Railway company, on 31 July 1864 Widnes had become a major industrial centre.

The LNWR set about improving the railway at Widnes. One of the major issues was a flat crossing and junctions between the St Helens line and the line between Garston and Warrington which was called 'Widnes Dock Junction'. To improve the congestion caused by the flat crossing the LNWR built a new line, the Widnes Deviation, which branched off the Garston and Warrington line to the west (at West Deviation Junction) of the St Helens line passed over it and then re-joined the Garston and Warrington to the east (at Carterhouse Junction). A spur was put in between the deviation. it branched off from the deviation to the east of the new

Widnes passenger station. The spur dropped down to the level of the St Helens line and formed a junction with it at the point where it passed under the deviation. The spur allowed St Helens line trains to use the new station. The deviation and spur opened in November 1869 to goods services with passenger trains starting to use it from 1 March 1870 when the new Widnes station opened.

In the space between the spur and the deviation the LNWR built the Widnes Locomotive Shed to which it allocated the code 35W. The shed had three roads and in 1873 it was approved to accommodate six locomotives. At first the shed had no turntable and only basic facilities. By 1879 there were 26 locomotives allocated to Widnes so some additional external storage lines must have been added. Certainly by 1890 the shed had developed into a six road shed that had a turntable and a coaling facility. Also to the south of the St Helens line spur additional sidings had been laid that were used for locomotive stabling. It was in this form that the shed would remain up until closure.



Widnes Locomotive shed on 20 September 1963. Ex LMS 2-8-0 8F locomotive number 48045 with a Fowler tender awaits its next duty. Photo by Brian Swinn

The main shed building fronted onto Alford Street a narrow north/south thoroughfare which passed under both the 'Deviation' line and the St Helens spur. Facing onto the street was staff accommodation and offices. Behind them was the engine shed. Its south wall was very close to the St Helens line spur. The six roads led out of the shed and merged into a single line that joined the St Helens line spur just before its junction with the line down to Widnes Dock. A signal box, Widnes No. 3 controlled the junction between the shed and the spur line.

Leading off from the northern most shed road was a line that ran to the north of the shed right up to Alforde Street where it ended adjacent to a brick wall at a higher elevation than the street and parallel to the Widnes Deviation line (which was in turn at a higher elevation). Leading off this line were two sidings that ran into the coaling and watering area and a line that ran to a turntable at the eastern end of the shed site. To the south of the turntable there was a further siding for stabling locomotives.

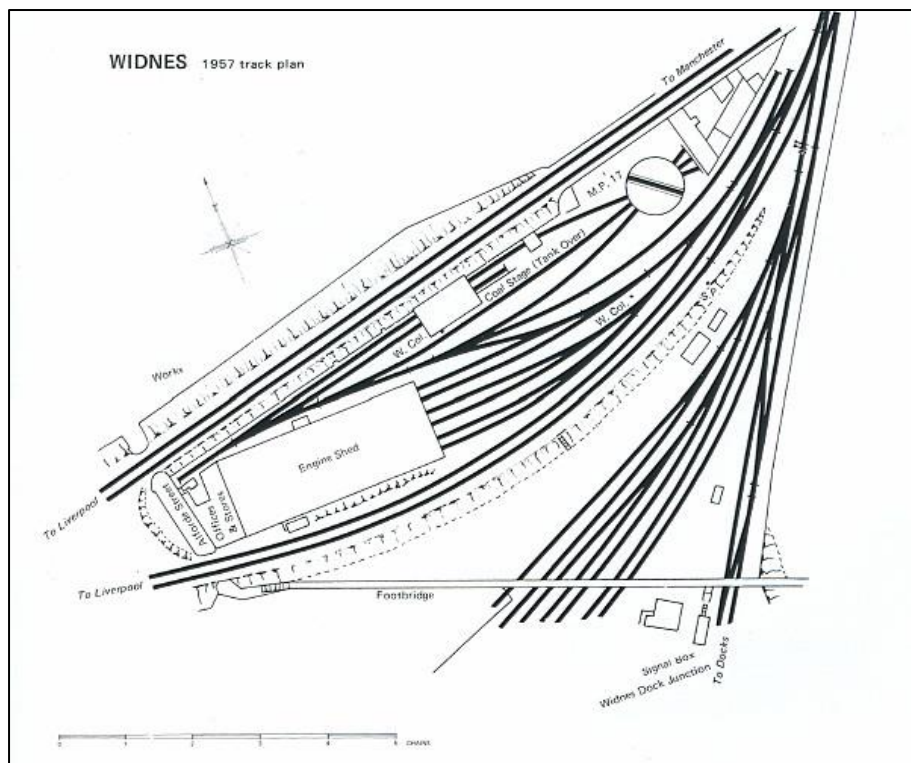
The duties performed by the Widnes based locomotives in the later part of the 19th Century would have been in the main goods turns but there were also passenger turns.

On 1 January 1923 the Widnes Motive Power Depot was taken over by the London, Midland and Scottish Railway (LMS). They allocated it the code 8D being a sub shed of Liverpool Edge Hill which was 8A.. By the time the LMS took over, the shed had an allocation of thirty-five locomotives. Tank engines had been the usual type at Widnes since it had opened but that changed in the 1920s and by 1929 nearly half of the locomotives were tender types. During that year Widnes had four 2-4-2Ts, four 0-6-0Ts, eight 0-6-0STs, and a single 0-4-0T. It also had a dozen ex LNWR 0-6-0 'Cauliflowers' and seven ex LNWR 0-8-0s. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s the shed employed over 100 men.

In 1937 the LMS enlarged the office accommodation at the western end of the shed building. As in the later part of the 19th Century the turns during the LMS era were mostly goods. The few passenger turns that there were included runs to Liverpool, Acton Bridge and to Manchester London Road.



The coaling facility at Widnes Shed seen on 7 August 1964 after the shed had closed. Due to its cramped location every inch of space had to be put to productive use. Photo by Alan Robinson



During the Second World War the shed was extremely busy and the loco crews found themselves traveling further afield than they previously had done. In 1946 the LMS renewed the shed roof in the 'louvre' style.

On the 1 January 1948 the shed became part of the nationalised British Railways (London Midland Region). British Railways kept the LMS shed codes and so Widnes remained as 8D. Widnes gained a sub shed at this time the former Great Central/Midland Railway Joint Shed at Tanhouse Lane which was situated half a mile to the east on a line that had no physical connection with the former LNWR network (other than via private factory sidings). Little changed in terms of the duties that Widnes based locomotives performed but the number of allocated locomotives had dropped to twenty-five by 1948. They included eleven ex LNWR types mainly 0-6-0s and 0-8-0s. LMS 2MT Mogals had begun to arrive by then and became a feature of the shed. Eight ex LMS 8Fs had also been allocated to Widnes along with an Ivatt 2-6-2T.

In the 1950s there was a great deal of local trip working and runs to Gorton, Wigan Springs Branch and Liverpool. On 16 April 1954 the shed at Tanhouse Lane was closed and in 1956 it was demolished. Railway staff continued to have a base at Tanhouse Lane but locomotive crews had to walk there from the main shed a distance of about half a mile. On 16 March 1961 a spur was put in between the

Widnes and St Helens line and Tanhouse Yard with allowed the easy transfer of locomotives between the two systems. By the late 1950s Widnes had two 350hp diesel shunters numbers D3793 and D3794. No fuelling point was installed for them and they had to travel to Garston for refuelling.

In 1961 Widnes shed still had passenger work to Liverpool Lime Street, to Ditton Junction and to Manchester Oxford Road. The shed also had a working from Ditton Junction to Helsby which departed from Ditton at 6.05am.

In 1961 Widnes Locomotive Shed was providing locomotives and crews at weekends for works associated with the electrification of the West Coast Main Line which was then in progress. Gradually though the numbers of Locomotives declined and the shed closed on 16 May 1964. Locomotive crews were offered transfers to other sheds in the area such as Speke and Warrington.

The shed stood in a derelict condition until 1974 (although the track had been removed by 1970) when it was sold to a scrap merchant who demolished all but the outer walls. The St Helens line from Widnes No. 2 to Widnes Dock closed on 4 November 1968 and from Widnes No. 7 to Widnes No. 1 on 18 April 1982 (the through route to St Helens having closed between Widnes No. 1 and Sutton Manor on 1 November 1981).

In the mid-1990s a new road was built adjacent to the south wall of the shed which was still standing in 2014. **Paul Wright**



Widnes Shed seen after closure but before the track was lifted. Photo by Les Fifoot.

Night Turns at Widnes Shed



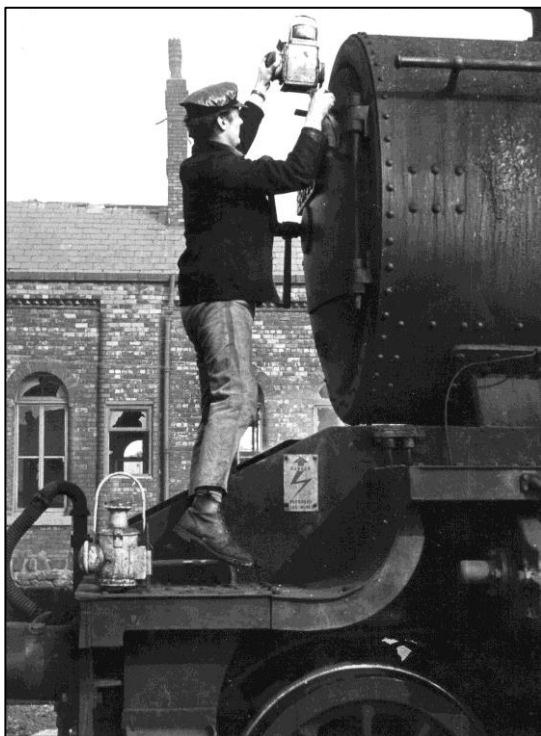
The crew of ex LMS 2-8-0 8F locomotive number 48750 (Driver Harry Ashbourne and fireman Gordon Mills) pose with their locomotive in the 1960s . Photo by Eddie Bellas

Working on the footplate during the hours of darkness brought its own special challenges for both Driver and Fireman. Most sidings had absolutely no means of illumination so the darkness was absolute. We often had to pop our heads outside the confines of the cab to look for signals from Shunters or Guards. This had to be done with care as it was common for wagons on adjacent lines to be parked dangerously close to the point where two tracks converged. I remember one 'close call' when we were leaving the siding and I was looking back to check that the Guards Van was following. I'd just popped my head out when it brushed against a wagon parked on the adjacent track and knocked my cap off! Just a whisker away from decapitation!

Shunters carried a paraffin lamp which had a white, green and red lens. The more conscientious used to clean the glass before each shift which made it easy to see them, whilst others neglected this task, resulting in a lot of guesswork on our part. This was exacerbated by the lack of night vision caused by 'Fire Blindness' from looking into the firebox. Although this wasn't too serious when working in a siding, it badly affected main line operations. Drivers used to rely on the fireman to relay the position of signals which they couldn't see (when travelling round a curve, etc). This was particularly important when travelling at speed when they needed early warning about the position of a 'Distant' signal. However, the vast majority of signals were

also illuminated by paraffin lamps. As with the Shunters, some Lamp Men (responsible for maintaining the signals in an area) omitted to clean the signal lens or trim the lamps adequately which reduced the lamp clarity considerably. I used to hate being responsible for giving the driver accurate signal information whilst vainly trying to make out a signal with a great blob of Fire Blindness in my eyes!

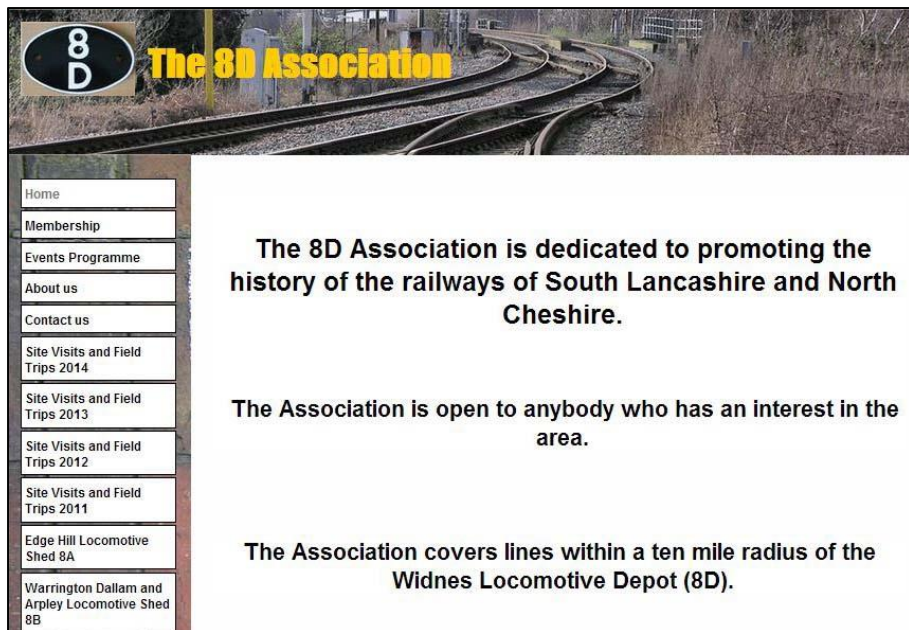
In a previous article, I described the problems we encountered with the Gauge Lamp which illuminated the glass tube that showed the water level in the boiler. This was a critical piece of equipment, but a bad design as the paraffin fuel used to vaporise in the heat from the boiler causing the lamp to go up in flames. We had to hose it down to extinguish the fire which usually prevented us from using it again. Of course, this meant that we were then unable to check the boiler water level. People got around this in various ways. Some smokers would use a cigarette case to reflect the light from the fire onto the gauge whilst others achieved the same result by holding the tea can (these were always white enamelled) in a strategic position.



Perhaps the most difficult aspect of night running involved topping up the water level in the boiler. This involved opening the water supply on the tender and a steam valve on the 'Front' (control panel) This allowed the water to run out of an overflow pipe situated beneath the Fireman's window, onto the track. A third lever was then adjusted until the balance of steam and water was equalised which allowed the water to be forced into the boiler. It was incredibly difficult to see when this had been achieved at night because of the combination of darkness and fire blindness and common to discover that water from the tender was simply running out onto the track!

The heat from the fire, added to the fatigue caused by insufficient sleep during the day made me weary but since I needed to stay alert to maintain steam pressure, I never actually drifted off during a night shift. However, some drivers would regularly nod off. We firemen knew who the sleepers were and would give them a nudge when they started to slump. **Barry Nolan**

8D Association Website



The new home page of the 8D Association web site.

The 8D Association website homepage has been updated with a fresh new look and can still be found at the usual address www.8dassociation.btck.co.uk

I have been editing the site for just over two years and it has grown steadily during that time. By the end of last year the initial goal of covering certain lines of special interest had been achieved, with all the originally intended lines having a history, station and signal box page. Along with delivering enjoyment for the 8D members it also provides a useful research tool for modellers and promotes the 8D Association to new members.

More recently the Lancashire Union Railway and LNWR line from Garswood to Huyton has been covered with a general history and signal box page. I have not been able to complete the station page as there is a shortage of historic pictures for the stations along this route. Any pictures or contacts where pictures of the stations may be obtained would be gratefully received.

Our 8D Association Flickr Group has now grown to 40 members and has 1,225 photographs; many of which do not appear on the website. The web address is www.flickr.com/groups/the-8d-association This has been another useful tool to promote the Association and has brought us several new members. If anyone has any contributions, comments or questions regarding the website or the Flickr Group you can contact me via the8dassociation@sky.com. Many thanks to the members who have already contributed photographs and articles and hopefully there will be many more to come. **Terry Callaghan**

Widnes Central and Tanhouse Lane station closures



An evocative scene from Widnes Central station in 1964. Ann Olohan worked at the station at that time and she is seen in this view with a parcel. In contrast to earlier years there was only one person employed at the station at this time and they were responsible for all duties. Photo by Gordon Howarth

Interestingly both Widnes Central and Tanhouse Lane stations were not listed in the Beeching report for closure but that was an oversight that was quickly picked up on and British Railways went through the closure process for both in 1964. Widnes Central and Tanhouse Lane were located on the former GC& MR Joint Widnes Branch Railway (see *On Shed – Volume 2 Number 4* for a detailed history of the line) the former having opened on 1 August 1879 and the latter on 1 September 1890.

The passenger timetable for the summer of 1962 listed only four up and five down trains Monday-to-Friday. There was one extra down service on Saturdays and one

less up service. One of the up services, the 6.57am departure from Widnes Central, terminated at Tanhouse Lane.

With such a poor service it was not surprising that there was not much opposition to its withdrawal. The service was of little use to most people. In the up direction for example after the departure of the 8.33am Warrington Central service from Widnes Central there was nothing in the up direction until 6.18pm. The 6.18pm train also ran to Warrington Central but it did not run on Saturdays.



Widnes Central seen from a Warrington bound train in September 1964. The station had a deserted air seeing very little traffic. Photo by Neville Conroy

In their latter years both stations had become very run down and would have been unwelcoming to any potential passengers. This was typical of the times and helped to drive custom away from the railways.

Although Widnes Central had been deserted by passengers in the early 1960s it still had a healthy trade in parcels and packages. On Monday 13 February 1961 Colin Turton fired Widnes shed allocated Ivatt 2-6-2T MT locomotive number 41244 on a trip from Tanhouse Lane yard to Widnes Central station with one van attached. The van was filled with packages which were unloaded at the station over the period of an hour or so. The empty van was then returned to Tanhouse yard. Colin had no idea what was in the packages. The move was possible because of the sparse passenger service. Colin recalls that the departure from Tanhouse Lane was just after the 8.16am Liverpool Central service had set off from Widnes Central. During the early 1960s most parcels and packages would have arrived on the passenger workings being carried in the guard's compartment.

Although DMUs had been introduced onto the services that ran between Liverpool Central and Manchester Central (and points in-between) in the late 1950s steam hauled trains served both Widnes Central and Tanhouse Lane until the very end. The last down departure from Widnes Central on 3 October 1964 was a DMU and the last up was steam hauled.



Widnes Weekly News reporter Ray Miller talks to the station porter at Tanhouse Lane station in September 1964. Ray Miller visited both Tanhouse Lane and Widnes Central to prepare an article for the Weekly News about the station closures. Photo by Gordon Howarth

The former GC & MR Joint Widnes Branch did not last long after the withdrawal of passenger services closing completely on 6 December 1964. No time was wasted and the demolition gangs moved in very quickly. The stations were demolished and ironwork from bridges was removed for scrap. The site of Tanhouse Lane station was taken over and converted to a weighbridge station. The platforms at Widnes Central could still be seen in part until 1982 after which the embankment on which it stood was demolished to make way for Ashley Way. A stained glass window from Widnes Central survives in the National Railway Museum and a bench from Tanhouse Lane is in the care of Halton Borough Council. **Paul Wright**

8D Visit to St Helens



Members of the 8D Association at the site of the swing bridge that had carried the railway into the 2nd St Helens station on 3 May 2014. Photos above and below by Tony Foster

On 3 May 2014 the 8D Association visited the sites of the first, second and third St Helens stations. The first had opened by September 1833 and closed on 18 December 1849. The second lasted from 18 December 1849 to 1 February 1858 and the third from 1 February 1858 to 17 July 1871.



A highlight of the visit was a walk along the northern end of the Widnes – St Helens line.



On 19 August 1961 ex LNER 4-6-0 B1 locomotive number 61002 'IMPALA' heads a coal train along the Warrington avoiding line. The line was used by express passenger services that did not call at Warrington and by through freight workings. It closed on 22 July 1968 although regular traffic had ceased on 20 May 1968 . Photo by Harry Arnold



A view from inside the Hays works on 20 February 1986. A class 25 locomotive is seen shunting bogie tanks. Photo by John Wilson

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Events Programme

19.00 – Thursday 5th June 2014 – Tanhouse Yard – Back by popular request. On this walk the long forgotten former GCR/MR Widnes Branch is explored. **Meet by the Tan House Lane entrance to Moss Bank Park (the site of the former Level Crossing at Tanhouse Lane station), Widnes.**

11.30 – Saturday 21st June 2014 – Rail Ale Trip Birkenhead and Liverpool – Joe Cowley leads another of his popular rail ale trips. This time pubs are visited in Birkenhead and Liverpool. There will be much to see of railway interest too. **Meet outside W H Smiths in Liverpool Lime Street station.**

19.00 – Thursday 10th July 2014 – Site visit to Widnes Locomotive Shed – A visit to the site of Widnes Locomotive Shed. **Meet in Croft Street, Widnes - just off Ashley Way.**

12.30 – Sunday 10th August 2014 – Visit to the Wirral Tramway. Travel by vintage tram from Birkenhead Woodside to the tramway museum. See trams from the local area including one from the Warrington system. **Meet at Liverpool Lime Street station outside W H Smiths.**

10.00 – Saturday 16th August 2014 – The St Helens & Runcorn Gap Railway footpath. A walk along the new footpath that connects Clock Face to north Widnes. **Meet at Mill Lane, Widnes (by the Rivendell Garden Centre).**

13.00 – Saturday 25th September 2014 – Fiddlers Ferry Visit – Another chance to visit Fiddlers Ferry Power Station. This time we will be going out to the lagoons from where the Garston and Warrington line (the Low Level) can be observed. Numbers are limited to 25. If you would like to take part in the visit contact Richard Mercer on 0151 378 9908.



'Where is this' competition? An industrial location. But where? (Answers to pwright964@btinternet.com) **Photo by Gordon Howarth**

The March competition winner was Rod Dixon. The location was Peasley Cross St Helens looking north.

NEXT JOURNAL PUBLISHED 1 SEPTEMBER 2014