

# ON SHED

## The Journal of the 8D Association

Volume 8 Number 1 – March 2018



### Runcorn Station in the 1970s

A train of chemical tanks hauled by a class 40 locomotive is seen passing through Runcorn in the late 1970s. **Photo by Roy Gough**

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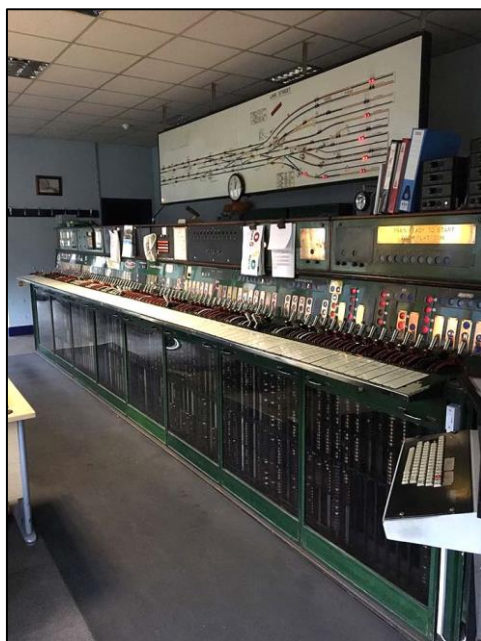
## Volume 8 Number 1

March 2018

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### Editor



*Left: The control panel at Liverpool Lime Street signal box seen in 2017. This panel which dates from 25 January 1948 (when the box opened) will become redundant. Photo by John Wilson*

The year 2018 marks the eighth year of the On Shed Journal which is amazing as it really doesn't feel like I have been editing it for that long. When I look back at some of the early journals, it reminds me of just how far we have come. The very first journal had only 7 pages of content, and this edition will be the first to have 32.

I was always concerned that there would not be enough to fill four editions per year but that has proved not to be the case. I am very pleased to say that all of the main features in this journal are by members other

than myself. That is really good as I have always wanted the journal to be something that is accessible to all of the membership. So keep those articles coming.

The summer season will soon be here, and we will be back out and about on our usual walks and visits, which as usual appear on the back page.

Paul Wright

## Society News

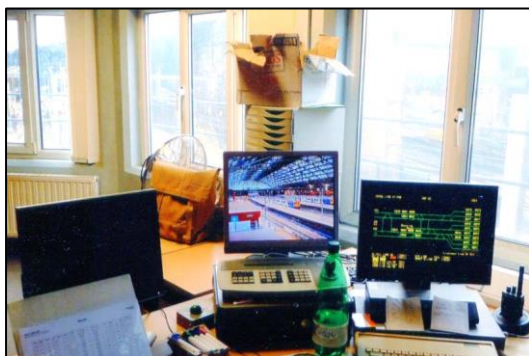
### 8D Members visit Liverpool Lime Street Signal Box



***Members of the 8D Association during their visit to the Liverpool Lime Street signal box on 14 February 2018.***

On Wednesday 14 February 2018, some members of the 8D Association were fortunate enough to be invited to visit the Liverpool Lime Street signal box, which is due to close in July 2018.

Seven members arrived at Lime Street and were met by signalling manager Gary, who conducted them through the construction area to the signal box, where signalmen Chris and Ben were on duty.



***Left: Computer screens inside the Liverpool Lime Street signal box, which were viewed by members during the visit on 14 February 2018***

The three then proceeded to take the group through the workings of the box, explaining the different practices carried out by the box. Photographs were allowed of the main control

display above the lever frame, and also the computer screens displaying the

movement of trains in and out of the station, members were also given the opportunity to operate the levers (under supervision) changing points and signals. Due to the working environment of the busy station, only about an hour was taken, but it was an enjoyable and instructive hour, which was thoroughly enjoyed by all.

**Richard Mercer**

**Please note this was not an 8D Association event. They are always advertised to all members.**

### **The 8D Association AGM 2018**

The 2018 AGM took place at the Select Security Stadium on Saturday 27 January 2018 at 10.00. Around 25 members attended the AGM, which was followed by a railway quiz, and a buffet lunch.

A proposal was put forward at the AGM that there should be an amendment to the constitution. The amendment concerns the post of Chair. It was proposed that going forward the Chair post would be limited to a 3 year term of tenure. The proposal was seconded and agreed by the membership. A new version of the constitution will be presented to the membership at the next AGM.

The Committee was re-elected in its current form as shown below.

<b>Chairman –</b>	Joe Cowley
<b>Secretary –</b>	Doug Birmingham
<b>Treasurer –</b>	Lee Woods
<b>Minute Secretary –</b>	Les Fifoot
<b>Journal Editor –</b>	Paul Wright

<b>Committee Members –</b>	Roy Dixon
	Tony Foster
	Chris Hollins
	John Wilson
	Neil Wilson

### **Sad Loss of 8D Association Member Dave Smallshaw (1946 – 2017)**



It is with great sadness that I have to report the sudden death in December 2017 of 8D Association member David Smallshaw at the age of 71.

As well railways, Dave was also passionate about canals. He had been Chairman of the Sankey Canal Restoration Society (SCARS) for the past six years, during which time the society had made great progress in its bid to bring together the three boroughs, and Canal & River Trust, to work towards restoration of the Sankey Canal, and to regenerate the whole of the Sankey Valley Corridor. The Sankey Canal was of course owned by

railway companies between 1845 and 1948.





**Dave Smallshaw (second from the left) during the 8D Association visit to the original stations of St Helens on 3 May 2014. Behind Dave is his beloved Sankey Canal. Photo by Tony Foster**

In September 2017 the formation of the Sankey Canal Partnership was finally announced, and Dave was eagerly looking forward to moving the project forward. Sadly for him this was not to be, but the fight will go on.

At 12.00 noon on Wednesday 3 January 2018 over two hundred family and friends packed into Thornton Crematorium to bid farewell to Dave, many of them standing out in the cold wind and rain listening to the eulogy of his life and times, which was relayed via speakers situated in the entrance.

He was an avid sports man playing rugby union for Waterloo in his younger days and also a cricket fan, being a member of Northern Cricket Club. He was also a great fan of his home town rugby league team Wigan RLFC, and a keen Everton FC supporter. Along with these activities he liked walking, belonging to many rambling groups. Gardening was another of his passions, and he spent many hours pottering around his garden.

I first met Dave in 1995 at the IWA National Waterway Festival in Chester, where he was helping on the Towpath Action Group Stand. He joined SCARS in 1999 and from then on became a regular member of our monthly work parties, and also on our sales and exhibition stand at IWA National Festivals, and local shows we attended throughout the years from then on. During that time he came to SCARS Committee meetings as an observer for the IWA Merseyside and North West Branch. In 2005 he was elected to SCARS Executive Committee and became Communications Officer in 2008. In 2011 he took on the task of chairman, a role in which he soon showed great leadership skills.

As a keen member of IWA he served on the committee of the Merseyside and North West Branch which later became IWA Chester & Merseyside Branch and was also a member of IWA North West Region Branch Committee.

In 2016 he accepted a position on the CRT North West Partnership committee, a role to which he was well suited with his wonderful knowledge of things that were happening in the North West area.

A great enthusiast for all things to do with waterways, railways and industrial heritage, he belonged to many such associations, groups and societies.

Dave leaves behind a loving wife, three daughters, and grandchildren. He will be sadly missed by all who knew him.

**Colin Greenall**

### **8D to Visit the Churnet Valley Railway**

Well summer is around the corner (hopefully), and there's money in the bank, so the committee have decided, following the trip to the Llangollen Railway in 2015, to run a trip to the Churnet Valley Railway, using a preserved heritage bus. This will take place on 9 June 2018. Full details of the trip are given on the back page.

The Churnet Valley Railway is a preserved standard gauge railway based at Cheddleton, in Staffordshire, and in Heritage Railway terms it is a relative newcomer, being established in 1997. The railway runs through the Staffordshire moorland east of the Potteries, from Oakamoor to Leekbrook Junction, and on to Ipstones (opened in 2014), just short of Caulden Low, where there was a connection at Waterhouses to the Leek & Manifold Light Railway, a distance of 11 miles.

**Neil Wilson**

### **WARRINGTON RAILWAY PENSIONERS**

8D association Members are once again welcome to sign up for trips that are organised by the Warrington Railway Pensioners Group. The trips are by coach and run from Warrington and if you are interested in going on any of the ones listed below simply contact Roy Dixon on 01925 638299. All of the trips are on Wednesdays and they all start from Warrington Central station.

**Wednesday 11 April 2018 – Holmfirth, Last of the Summer Wine Village**

**Wednesday 16 May 2018 – Whitby**

**Wednesday 13 June 2018 – Severn Valley Railway**

**Wednesday 11 July 2018 – Beamish**

**Wednesday 15 August – Knaresborough**

**Wednesday 5 September - Llandudno**

### Continuing Works at Lime Street



*Left: The new platforms at Liverpool Lime Street seen on 16 February 2018. Photo by John Wilson*

Further engineering work took place over the Christmas period at Liverpool Lime Street station. Upon resumption of the train service, one of the two new platforms was brought into use, but Platform 1 was

closed permanently for the track to be removed. This has resulted in the present Platforms 2-7 being renumbered 1-6, with the two new Platforms becoming 7 and 8, while the old Platforms 8 and 9 are now renumbered 9 and 10. At present the new Platform 7 and Platform 10 are out of use for further remedial work to take place.

London North Western services to Birmingham appear to be the sole user of the new Platform 8 at present, having used the old Platforms 5 and 6 while the building work had been taking place. A new Virgin Trains first class lounge is due to be constructed shortly, to replace the temporary facility on the concourse, which in turn replaced the original building which was demolished to make way for the new platforms 7 and 8.

### More routes for 323 EMUs

Northern Rail has applied to Network Rail to extend the routes that the fleet of 17 Class 323 EMU's operated by them can run over.

At present they operate the local services from Manchester Piccadilly to Crewe, Hadfield and Stoke-on-Trent. Due to further Class 319 EMU's being delayed in transfer to Northern, and the new CAF units, under construction in Spain, not arriving until next year, Northern is looking to use the Class 323 units on the line to Blackpool when it is electrified, and is asking Network Rail to approve their use over the lines from Manchester Victoria and Manchester Piccadilly to Blackpool North via both Bolton and Wigan, Preston to Lancaster, and Parkside East Junction to Edge Hill.

If they are put to use on the Manchester Victoria to Liverpool Lime Street service, it will not be the first time that this class of unit has been seen in Liverpool, as Central Trains used them on services between Birmingham New Street and Liverpool Lime Street for a number of years.

## **Revenue Earning Freight on the Low Level**

For four days only commencing 3 January 2018, revenue earning freight returned briefly to the section of the Low-Level line between Ditton Junction and Fiddlers Ferry, when for operational reasons the loaded Southbound Ditton Foundry Lane to Neuss Aluminium train was routed this way to Arpley Yard, where it recessed for up to 8 hours before continuing south. It was retimed to depart from Foundry Lane in the morning at 11.07 instead of its normal evening departure. The Northbound loaded working continued to operate on its normal route from Weaver Junction through Runcorn to Ditton Junction.

## **Another Lime Street Closure**

Train Services were suspended into Liverpool Lime Street on Sunday 6 January, due to the overhead wires being damaged as a result of a corroded Gantry. Virgin Trains diverted the majority of their services to Warrington Bank Quay for onward coach connections to Liverpool, while London North Western, Trans-Pennine and Northern services terminated at Liverpool South Parkway with the intention that passengers could transfer to the Merseyrail electric line for the onward journey to Liverpool Central. However, due to engineering works between Hunts Cross and Sandhills on the electric line through South Parkway, a replacement bus service was in operation, which resulted in passengers having to wait for rail replacement buses to be provided. Repair work was carried out overnight by Network Rail engineers, and normal services were resumed from Monday morning, except for Northern who were experiencing one of their strike days.

## **Bridge Strike at Widnes**

At 09.30 on Wednesday the 24 January 2018, a mechanical excavator belonging to Merseylink struck the Low Level line Railway Bridge at Victoria Road in Widnes. The bridge suffered some damage and shifted on its supports, resulting in Network Rail having to appoint a contractor to repair the Bridge. A small portion of metal was dislodged which was then removed and a new piece welded into place, while new supports for the bridge were installed on one side of the road. The repairs took four days to complete, resulting in road diversions although trains continued to use the line as Network Rail had deemed that there was no physical damage to the line itself.

One of the trains that crossed the bridge while repairs took place was the Ditton Foundry Lane to Neuss Aluminium train. The Southbound train appears to have a regular Monday to Saturday path along the Low Level line and has run this way nearly every day for the past four weeks. On Mondays, the Northbound working from Germany also traverses the route, which on Monday 4 February 2018, was composed of 26 Container wagons hauled by DB Cargo 66118 in DB Cargo red livery. This is possibly the first time that the train has been formed of container wagons, as normally it includes up to 10 Bogie Ferry wagons. On Monday mornings when the Northbound working runs over the low level line, a separate train departs from Daventry International Freight terminal via Runcorn at 02.50, to Foundry Lane arriving at 05.00. On Tuesday's to Saturday's, the northbound working continues to run via Runcorn, similarly the Sunday Evening departure from Foundry Lane runs via Runcorn, as the Low Level Line is closed on Sundays.

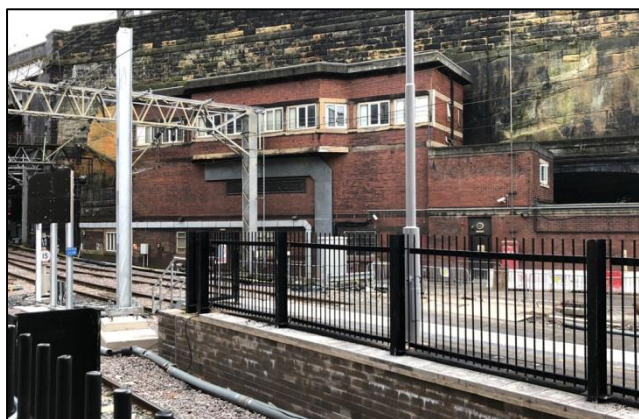


## **New Units for Allerton**

Allerton Depot received the first of its Class 769 Bi-Modal 4 Car units on Wednesday the 7th of February. The units were brought from the Brush works in Loughborough by DRS Class 57 57301 which arrived at 16.05 having taken the units down to Edge Hill Wapping sidings to run round. The Class 769 units are Class 319 EMU's fitted with small diesel engines under the Driving Trailer Carriages, and are intended to be used on services from Manchester Airport to Barrow-in-Furness and Windermere. The units will be able to run electrically on these services to Carnforth and Oxenholme before switching to diesel power to complete their journeys. When not needed to use their diesel engines, they can be used as straight Electric Multiple Units and if required can still be coupled in multiple with other members of the Class 319 fleet.

The first of the new Class 331 EMU's for Northern Rail has been completed at the CAF factory in Spain. Northern has confirmed that all of units in this class will be allocated to Allerton Depot, although some will be out stationed at Neville Hill depot in Leeds for use on the Aire Valley suburban services to Bradford, Ilkley and Skipton.

## **Signal Box Closures**



***Left: Liverpool Lime Street Signal Box on 16 February 2018. Photo by John Wilson***

Network Rail has confirmed that the Signal Boxes at Halton Junction and Runcorn will be closing in May 2018. Liverpool Lime Street Box will close in July 2018, however due to problems signalling both areas, Edge Hill Power Box

and Ditton Box will remain open for the time being. The closures are part of upgrade works along the Weaver Junction – Liverpool line.

## **Frodsham Junction Prepared for Halton Curve Upgrade**

During the weekend of 16 and 17 February 2018 the signal box at Frodsham Junction was converted from a mechanical to an electronic box. The LNWR frame and levers were disconnected and removed and a new electronic panel was installed. The new panel allows trains to go onto and come off the Halton curve (a crossover having been installed at Frodsham Junction last November). However no trains will be coming from the Liverpool – Weaver Junction line just yet as the crossover is yet to be installed at Halton Junction. That will happen later in the year. An all year round passenger service (Liverpool – Chester) will be introduced from December 2018.

## Tanhouse Lane – The Later Years - by Terry Callaghan



***The new sidings at Tanhouse Lane being laid out in February 1982. The old sidings can be seen in the distance with cement wagons standing on them. The Tanhouse Lane goods shed had been located here just to the left of the new points. Photo by Graham Earle***

Following on from the article in December's Journal, I started to write about the history of the yard from 1982 to the present day, only to realise there wasn't an awful lot left to write about. Instead, I began to look back as to why cement ended up being the last product to use the yard at Tanhouse Lane and how it came to be.

In the early 1950's demand for sulphuric acid was high in the Widnes & Runcorn area, and transportation costs for the finished product were excessive. Led by the local chemical giant, ICI, a consortium of local chemical companies with a thirst for sulphuric acid, set up the United Sulfuric Acid Corporation (USAC) in 1951, and began to construct a plant on Tanhouse Lane. Two kilns, A1 and A2, were constructed on the site by Edgar Allen of Sheffield; with A1 being operational on 21 April 1955 and A2 coming on stream during July of the same year. Raw materials being supplied from Long Meg in block trains, with the finished product being stored on site and distributed by road and rail. Six 750 ton tanks stored the 98% sulphuric acid whilst three 500 ton tanks stored oleum which was mainly used in the manufacture of explosives. A bi product of the process was cement clinker which, along with some 'conventional process clinker' which was brought in by rail to sweeten the USAC clinker, was stored and distributed from the site by road and rail. Two 1800 ton silos provided ample storage for the cement distributed by rail and four 1000 ton packing silos were sufficient for the road haulage side. Associated Portland Cement Manufacturers Ltd (APCM) undertook the processing and distribution of the cement side of the operation.

Both kilns were originally coal fired, but were converted to oil in the 1960's, probably



***In this view from April 1997 cement wagons have been positioned onto the sidings by the Blue Circle company's own locomotive. This locomotive moved the wagons between the Blue Circle depot and the sidings where main line locomotives would take over. Photo by Terry Callaghan***

as a result of the price per barrel steadily falling; by 1970 it stood at \$1.21. At the start of the 1970's the cost of oil started a relentless rise (by 1974 it would be \$11 per barrel), and the cost of elemental sulphur (mined) was falling dramatically, thus the 140,000 ton capacity plant was becoming increasingly unprofitable. Closure came on 14 January 1973, shortly before the oil price went through the roof, and the manufacturing process ceased. It was not the end for the site though; APCM started to 'import' cement by rail from Earles Cement Works in the Hope Valley for onward distribution by road, as distribution facilities were well established. APCM would become Blue Circle in 1978.

Block trains ran from Earles Sidings at Hope from 1973 until the depot closed in 2000; this was the only traffic to use the yard at Tanhouse Lane. As described in the previous article, the trains were tripped from Widnes West Deviation yard, (latterly Ditton yard), to Tanhouse yard, originally accessing the yard from the former St Helens & Runcorn Gap Railway. However, from April 1982 a new yard which was connected to the deviation line was opened.

The layout was a simple affair, with a trailing crossover between the up and down deviation lines just west, (but out of sight of), Carterhouse Junction box; a CCTV link was provided to aid the signalman. A facing set of points ran from the up goods which divided into three sidings and then merged into a single line towards Tanhouse Lane level crossing. A short remnant of the head shunt from the Widnes Loop days was retained as a cripple siding. A short distance from the main line was the boundary for Railtrack (now Network Rail) marked by a simple notice bolted to one of the sleepers. Blue Circle was responsible for all maintenance within the yard.





***In April 1997 sees industrial locomotive HQ02 drawing 8 PCA wagons over the level crossing on Tanhouse Lane. Within three years the traffic would have ceased with the closure of the cement terminal. Photo by Terry Callaghan***

The trip workings from Ditton lasted until around 1990 when the ground staff at Ditton and the Class 08 shunter were dispensed with. For the final decade, the train engine worked the tanks both in and out of the sidings, with the resident Blue Circle Sentinal shunter (HQ02) working the full and empty tanks both to and from the yard. One quirk of this working was the passage across Tanhouse Lane via the level crossing with its huge gates. A view of the train crossing Tanhouse Lane could be afforded from the footbridge over the railway, although with many of the tread boards missing you had to be very careful where you stepped and more mindful of it if you were taking pictures.

A look at the freight timetable for 1997 showed the train was booked to run daily, although I can't confirm whether it did or not. 6F59 19:30 Earles Sidings to Widnes ran via Warrington booked southbound at 21:05; it is unclear as to whether the train ran via Arpley Yard and the Low Level line (as it did in the early 80's) or via Crewe and Runcorn. 6H33 was the return working which was booked to depart Tanhouse at 14:00, but if my memory serves me correctly it could be much earlier; it was allowed 55 minutes to reach Crewe despite having to run round in Ditton Yard. Various types of motive power have made an appearance from the 1980's until closure in 2000 with Classes 31, 37, 47 and 56 all being present at some point.

When the traffic came to an end in 2000 the sidings were abandoned, with the connection and trailing crossovers on the main line, slowly being replaced with plain line.

All associated signals controlled by Carterhouse Junction box were removed on 3 December 2006, although the box was closed and derelict by July 2004.



*Left: The maintenance notice indicating the boundary for Network Rail staff at Tanhouse Lane as seen on 19 February 2006. Photo by Terry Callaghan*

In 2007 the yard was sold to Halton Borough Council who wished to lay out a linear park. Officers of the council were most surprised when at the handover meeting they realised that they were to inherit the track which

was still in place. Having only been laid in 1982 the track was good quality flat bottomed rail and it was offered to the Llangollen railway free of charge so long as they removed it from site. The Llangollen Railway sent up one of their permanent way staff who couldn't believe his luck.

The track was removed in the early months of 2008 and work began on the linear park later in the year. A short section of the head shunt, (which dated from the Widnes Loop GC/MR Joint days and latterly used as a cripple siding), was retained within the park as a feature, and nicely links back to the former railway use of the land. The linear park was given the title Moss Bank Park and was completed by March 2009. **Terry Callaghan**



*Class 37 locomotive number 37 509 departs Tanhouse Yard with 6H33 14.00 Widnes to Earles Sidings empty cement tanks on 16 January 1997. Photo by Terry Callaghan*



## MEMORIES OF BIRKENHEAD MOLLINGTON STREET MOTIVE POWER DEPOT, THE MEN AND THE AREA - PART 5 - by Dennis Flood



*Class 40 locomotives at Birkenhead Mollington Street depot in the 1980s. This type of locomotive was a common sight at the depot in the diesel era. Photo by Kevin Graham.*

I mentioned guard Les Thompson at the end of Part 4 of these articles, and how I worked a train of Class 502 EMU empty coaching stock (ECS) from Birkenhead North Traction Maintenance Depot, using a Type 2 diesel locomotive (Class 25), to Hall Road Carriage Shed, just north of Liverpool on the Liverpool to Southport line, in 1974, with Les as my guard.

This particular journey ended at Hall Road Carriage Sidings, with Les banging his head against the stove pipe in his brake van, resulting in him sustaining a cut head – and breaking the stove pipe in half!

When the train arrived at Hall Road and was shunted clear of the down Southport line, the first move was to shunt both brake vans clear so that the Class 502 ECS EMUs could be berthed inside Hall Road Carriage Shed.

This train always conveyed two brake vans because of the 'run-round' move which was needed upon arrival at Edge Hill Waterloo Sidings (opposite platform 1 and the up slow line at Edge Hill station).

This movement could also be carried out at the foot of the grid iron at Edge Hill, but would still require the train to be propelled towards Waterloo sidings to allow it to

then move forward and depart via Tuebrook Sidings, Edge Lane Junction and then the Bootle Branch.

Inevitably, the shunters at the foot of the grid would want this type of train out of the way quite quickly, so the signalman at Picton Road Junction Signal Box was asked by them to signal the train towards Waterloo Sidings as it travelled down from Exhibition Junction, via the foot of the grid.

The locomotive was detached upon arrival at Waterloo Sidings, and was then `run-round` via Waterloo Tunnel Mouth, and then back `light engine` towards Picton Road Junction Signal Box and back again, once more, to re-attach to the train. When this was completed, departure was then via Tuebrook Sidings, Edge Lane Junction and the Bootle Branch.

The maximum speed of this train was 25 mph so it is no wonder that it took almost 8 hours to travel from Birkenhead North to Hall Road Carriage Shed, via Heswall Hills, Dee Marsh, Mickle Trafford, Helsby, Frodsham Junction, Runcorn, Wavertree Junction, Edge Hill Circular Goods Line, Exhibition Junction, Foot of the Grid, Waterloo Sidings, Tuebrook Sidings, Edge Lane Junction and then the Bootle Branch to Bootle Junction...and then Hall Road – with numerous signal checks on the way.

Contrast this today with an ECS movement from Birkenhead North to Kirkdale via the `link` line just beyond James Street (Wirral Line) to Liverpool Central (Northern Line) and then to Kirkdale...this movement can now be carried out in about an hour – but it most certainly won't be as interesting as it was in those days.

However, back to Hall Road and the shunting moves which were needed upon arrival from Birkenhead North with Class 502 EMU ECS...

As the train was propelled towards Hall Road CS, the leading brake van (the one leading the shunting movement) was berthed at the side of the shed and, when this was done, the train would draw forward clear of it and then propel once more to berth the Class 502 EMU ECS inside Hall Road shed, on whatever road it was required by Hall Road carriage shed staff.

When this was done, the brake van next to the locomotive was then attached to the berthed brake van at the side of the shed and they were then usually secured and stabled at Hall Road for use in a return ECS movement to Birkenhead North, at a later date.

This was usually within a week or so or, if they were needed, they were returned to Edge Hill by the same Birkenhead men who had brought them in earlier.

How did Les Thompson come to knock his head against the stove pipe and injure himself...and completely wreck the stove pipe?

I had completed the shunting movement involving the first berthed brake van at Hall Road and had completed berthing the Class 502 EMU ECS within the carriage shed. All that then needed to be done was to attach the brake van still attached to the locomotive to the brake van which had been stabled earlier... *what could go possibly wrong with such a simple shunting movement?*

As both of the brake vans were going to be left at Hall Road for future use, the shunter asked me to 'hit-up' the brake van in the sidings to allow it to travel under its own momentum towards the stabled brake van – whereupon Les Thompson would control it using the handbrake to gently roll against it.

That was the plan – however the shunter didn't tell Les about this 'master plan' of his beforehand and he only realised this when the brake van set off, after being detached from the locomotive by use of his brake stick, at a reasonable rate of knots towards the stabled brake van...Les happened to be asleep in this van as it approached the berthed brake van – the shunter shouting to Les to 'get the brake on.!', or similar words of encouragement.

Les woke up and realised where his brake van was heading and started to wind the hand brake on somewhat frantically, to say the least, but there was not enough time to stop it colliding with the berthed brake van and, as it struck the buffers of this brake van and then 'bounced' away, Les was flung forward from his brake van handbrake wheel and promptly 'head butted' the stove pipe – and split it in two as he fell to the floor...it was just as well the fire in the brake van wasn't lit!

I don't think he was at all impressed with this turn of events!

I got off the locomotive and was able to reach Les in the brake van before the controlling shunter...I picked him up off the floor and sat him down in the guard's seat of his brake van. He had a large soot mark directly across his forehead – and a slight cut above his right eyebrow – he looked like a chimney sweep after being attacked by a feral cat.

I obtained the first aid box from the office and cleaned his cut forehead – and gave him the inevitable cup of tea. This was the miracle cure and he was soon back on his feet.

*I am unable to repeat, for inclusion in this article to readers of the 'On Shed' Journal, what he actually called the controlling shunter but it can be safely said that it wasn't very complimentary!!*

He entered the details of his injury in the Hall Road Carriage Shed accident book and then travelled back with me on the locomotive to Edge Hill, where I stabled the locomotive on the depot.

I put my own report in when I myself arrived back at Birkenhead Mollington Street. *Les was on sick leave for four weeks – and he 'milked' this event for all it was worth!*

He claimed compensation for his injury and was ultimately awarded £50. He bought me a Milky Bar for treating his cut head as he probably thought I was tough and strong..... His wages at the time, as a guard, were about £40 per week.

I recall the day he came into the office at Mollington Street, when I was the duty deputy Train Crew Supervisor at the time, with his final sick note prior to resuming duty...and it was a sight I have never forgotten.

Les came into the office wearing a cream three-piece suit, with a straw boater on his head, and he was wearing George Raft style black and white 'spats' type shoes



**Left: a class 47 locomotive being refuelled at Birkenhead Mollington Street in 1985.  
Photo by Kevin Graham**

– and carrying a cane!

*'Welcome back, Les', I said. 'It's been very quiet without you in recent weeks.'*

*'How do I look, man?', said Les, twirling himself around for all to see. 'Like Frankie Vaughan on a bad day', I said.*

There was never a dull moment for any Birkenhead Mollington Street driver when Les Thompson was your guard, that was for certain.

When the Liverpool 'Loop' line was being built in the mid-1970s, we had a job at Mollington Street known as the 'Mersey Ballast'. Booking on time for this job was 22:00, and it was primarily to be available with whatever train and materials contractors required, to assist them in their work building the 'Loop' line, and for any other 'ad hoc' work which was required.

I always found this job quite fascinating as you could see, first hand, what work was being done at Hamilton Square, James Street and at other locations as the building work progressed.

After booking on duty, both myself and the booked driver, in this particular instance driver John Welsh (who was a 'gentle giant'), travelled 'as passenger' from Mollington Street to Birkenhead Park Station. Upon arrival at Park Station we then walked to Birkenhead Duke Street to take charge of the locomotive.

John Welsh was not only a 'gentle giant' of a man but he had a very dry sense of

humour. It was always fun to work with him.

Our locomotive at Duke Street was the stabled `Target 26` 350hp shunting locomotive (it was always known as `26 Shunt`).

`26 Shunt` was the locomotive used on the day and afternoon shunting turn at Duke Street, Cavendish Sidings, Morpeth Dock, New Sidings and the Cheshire Lines Yard, near Canning Street North Signal Box, and anywhere else it was needed to shunt at Birkenhead Docks.

It did not work at Bidston Dock North Side, as all the shunting of the iron ore traffic for John Summers steelworks was carried out by the locomotives that actually worked the trains forward.

The locomotive diagrammed to the `Mersey Ballast` turn was always a 350hp shunting locomotive (now known as Class 08) and it was used as the `Mersey Ballast` locomotive because there was no night shunting turn at Duke Street, although shunting staff were available there to deal with incoming and outgoing freight trains.

The locomotive was stabled there and it was ideal for this type of `as required` ballast work as it could be returned back to Duke Street before commencement of the day shunting turn at 06:00.

The 350hp shunting locomotive was eventually replaced by a 2-Car `Battery Unit`, which was a former BR 3-Car Class 501 EMU used on the Euston- Watford services.

After preparation at Duke Street we would take the 350hp shunting locomotive `light engine` to Bidston Yard, where the `Mersey Ballast` traffic was normally stabled.

The trains used were composed of no more than about four wagons because of the gradient of 1-27F between Hamilton Square and Liverpool James Street. This included the brake van.

They only usually consisted of wagons which were required by the contractors such as an open wagon carrying, or for the removal of, building materials or a `Weltrol` wagon for the carriage of a cement mixer or an item which would normally have been `out of gauge` on a conventional wagon.

Upon arrival at Bidston yard we would shunt and attach the train and when the last Mersey-Wirral EMU was safely stabled at Birkenhead North, and an electrical isolation was confirmed in the area where we were to work, (usually Birkenhead Park, Hamilton Square or James Street) we would draw out of Bidston Yard onto the `down` Wrexham line and then propel the train through Bidston Station on the `up` Liverpool line, towards our eventual destination.

We were advised about this upon arrival at Birkenhead Park by the signalman there. The `Clerk of the Works` would then join us on the locomotive to the site of the work. He was in overall charge.

At the time of the building of the Liverpool `Loop` (Merseyrail now call it the `Wirral loop` which it most certainly is not – it is a `Loop` line beneath Liverpool City Centre,





**An 08 locomotive of the type used on the 'Mersey Ballast' seen at Birkenhead Mollington Street depot in the early 1980s. Photo by Kevin Graham**

not the Wirral, and named as this by BR who built it) most of the work involving the 'Mersey Ballast' was at either Hamilton Square or James Street.

There was a period of only about *five hours* between service shutdown and recommencement. That was between 00:15 and 05:15, so any work had to be ready to start and be completed by that time. We had to be out of the tunnel sections with the 'Mersey Ballast' no later than 05:00. We always managed it – but there were a few close calls!

When we arrived at either Hamilton Square or James Street, the train was stabled and secured and the engine of the shunting locomotive shut down, for the obvious reason of being within a confined space and, more importantly, because of men working.

Both myself and the driver usually watched the work that was going on or, which I was to do subsequently many times, walk through the tunnel to James Street, if we were at Hamilton Square, or Hamilton Square if we were at James Street.

I came across a few things in the tunnel that I never knew existed when I did this – and always looked forward to the next occasion...

I have been in the long closed signal cabin (called a *cabin* rather than a signal box by the Mersey Railway Company) situated on the upside of the line on the 'river bed' of the tunnel between Hamilton Square and James Street.

How on earth a signalman worked in there during steam days, prior to electrification

of the Mersey Railway in 1903, is quite beyond me...even with steam locomotives fitted with condensing apparatus working through the tunnel.!

This individual would have to walk to the `river bed` signal cabin from either Hamilton Square or James Street – and then walk back again at the completion of his shift...I wonder if he was a non-smoker when he was working in the signal cabin.?!

It was quite possible when a large oil tanker was being berthed at the Tranmere Oil Terminal to stand at the `river bed` near the signal cabin and hear the propellers of both the tanker and the Mersey river tugs rumbling in the water as the big ship was being berthed. It was always a very sobering thought that the bed of the River Mersey was always just 30 feet above the tunnel roof...

John Welsh, the driver, said to me when we were stood there once that *`if an anchor comes through the tunnel roof it's time to get out of here and make the tea..!`*.

Mann Island Junction, where Merseyrail trains now diverge towards James Street was not a new junction when the Liverpool `Loop` line was being built. Work had commenced there many years previously and the makings of a tunnel could be clearly seen in the exact spot that Mann Island Junction now is by a person walking through the tunnel. I myself had actually been fortunate enough to see this.

This original `cut` was a likely extension by the Mersey Railway Company in the mid-1870s to reach Liverpool Exchange and the Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway...and then to continue on the surface towards Sandhills.

Given the short distance the current Moorfields (Wirral Line) station is from Mann Island Junction, via James Street, the idea of the Mersey Railway Company building a line to Exchange Station and beyond has some plausibility to it.

I was told, however, by the `Clerk of the Works` of an interesting financial saving as a result of this initial work by the Mersey Railway Company.

The work by the Mersey Railway Company commencing the boring of a tunnel at what was to become Mann Island Junction saved some £600,000 in the mid-1970s from the final bill for the new `Liverpool Loop`.

This amount was considerable sum of money in those days.!

Another interesting item in the tunnel between James Street and Hamilton Square is the existence of another tunnel heading having been bored. This one is on the down side about fifty yards into the existing tunnel from the down platform at James Street.

The remarkable thing about this one is that it is a full sized tunnel entrance at the start which then tapers off to almost nothing within about 50 yards of entering it.

The thought behind this `cut` is that the Mersey Railway Company apparently had plans to ultimately reach Herculaneum Dock and the Liverpool Overhead Railway.

Another interesting item which can be seen on the upside at James Street Station is a small inscribed stone tablet, situated just at the top of the platform ramp at the Hamilton Square end of the up platform.

This commemorated the conversion of the Mersey Railway from steam to electric operation in 1903. The stone tablet is still there but the inscription on it has long decayed away.

I did take a pencil etching of it using grease proof paper on one occasion but, unfortunately, this has now been lost.

One of the funniest things I got involved in at James Street, on the `Mersey Ballast`, was with driver Bob Warburton.

This was during the time that the platforms at the Liverpool Central end of James Street Station were being extended and brickwork from the arch of the tunnel was being removed to allow room for steelwork for the new James Street power signal box, for future control of both the Liverpool `Loop and Link` lines.

We had stabled the locomotive and train at James Street, the contractor`s had assembled a scaffolding tower on the `Weltrol` wagon, and were working under the mouth of the tunnel removing brickwork. This work would occupy all of the time we were there.

A wooden hut had been provided for staff and contractors near to what was then the existing James Street Signal Cabin, and myself and Bob were sat in this hut having a cup of tea and listening to Peter Hansford`s excellent ARGO TRANSACORD recordings of steam locomotive sounds.

The one we were listening to at the time was called `Britannias and the Clans` and one such recording on the record was of a Britannia picking up speed on the falling gradient towards Scout Green and Tebay, and giving out the unmistakeable sound of its `chime` whistle as it stormed down the bank towards Tebay Station.

This gave us an idea...

The tape recorder I had in those days used a cassette so it was portable and quite easy to carry. We went into the Station Supervisors office on the downside at James Street, as this office was left open during the night to allow use of the telephone by the contractor`s staff, when needed.

We found what we were looking for – it was a megaphone!

I picked it up and both myself and Bob then went onto the station footbridge, which was an open footbridge in those days, and the track below could be easily viewed below head height.

I balanced the megaphone on the top of the footbridge and, as we both crouched down, Bob held the tape recorder and turned the sound up on our chosen recording...as the contractor`s staff were busy working away below, about twenty yards away from us.

The scene was now set for some fun!

The recording of the `Britannia` started off quite leisurely to begin with, and all that

could be heard was the sound of a bird twittering away in the summer sunshine – then the beat of the locomotive could be heard in the distance...

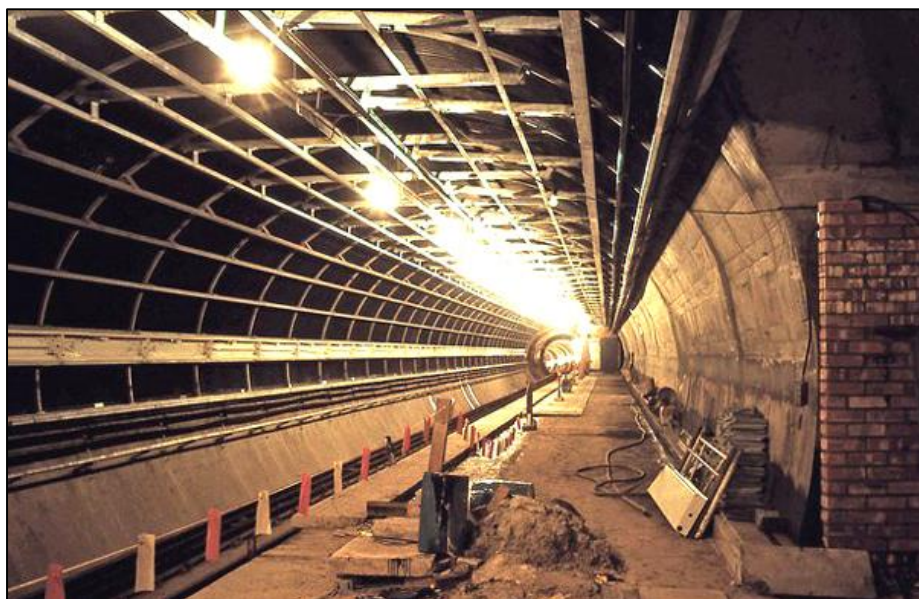
This sound was, of course, amplified in the confined spaces of a deserted James Street Station at about 2am in the morning...

It was at this point that one or two of the contractors started looking nervously towards Hamilton Square. I saw a few of them clearly do this as I peered over the top of the footbridge.

As the sound got increasingly louder I could see one or two of them start to climb down from the scaffolding tower as others stopped work and wondered what was going on. Bob and myself were laughing so much at this time it is remarkable that we did not drop either the tape recorder or the megaphone!

As the beat of the locomotive got even louder one or two actually got off the scaffolding tower and pointed towards Hamilton Square...just then came the unmistakeable sound of the magnificent Britannia 'chime' whistle and the thunderous roar of the Britannia was heard all over Liverpool James Street – and eight contractor's staff disappeared off the scaffolding tower in several different directions – at the same time.!

When the noise tapered away silence reigned at James Street once more – and some very choice language was heard coming forth...myself and Bob rapidly disappeared up towards the long James Street Station exit towards Water Street.



***Construction of one the Liverpool Loop platforms in 1975/6.***

We sensibly stayed up there until the language had subsided... there were some rather big physical contractor's working at James Street in those days and we thought it best not to antagonise them any further.!

We eventually returned to the wooden hut – and kept a low profile but having a very good laugh, it must be said.

Afterwards a few of the contractor`s came into the hut for their break –they took it all in good grace and, amazingly ,they really did actually believe that a train was coming through the tunnel from Hamilton Square...good fun was to be had on the `Mersey Ballast` that night.!

I refer to driver John Welsh once again and another hilarious moment in the saga of the `Mersey Ballast` .

There was one occasion when we had completed the work at Hamilton Square, stabled the wagons at Bidston Yard, and then returned the locomotive to Duke Street – and set off on the long walk to Mollington Street to book off duty.



***The Junction at Mann Island seen in 1983. Photo by Paul Boyd***

We were walking along Park Road North when we heard a woman`s voice shouting `Help.!,Help.!!`. She was standing outside one of the large Victorian houses on this road and, after spotting us both, motioned with her arms for us to come over to her quickly.

We did this and John asked her what the problem was. `My mother has fallen out of





**Duke Street Birkenhead seen on 10 November 1983. At that time, it was common to see an 03 locomotive stabled here. It was from this point that the 08 locomotive was picked up to work Mersey Ballast. Photo by Kevin Smith**

the bed!', was the reply. 'Can you help get her back into it for me, please?' 'No problem at all, love', replied John.

We took our boots off and went upstairs to find the unfortunate lady wedged between the bed and the adjacent wall...John said *'What a funny place to read a Mills and Boon book that is, love'..!*

We all started laughing...I climbed over the bed and got behind the lady, with my back against the wall, and John stood at her feet. The plan was to lift her and, literally, swing her back onto the bed...

I put my arms under the shoulders of the unfortunate lady, who was rather large to say the least, and John took hold of her legs at the calves...*'right, after three..!'*, said John.

*'One, two, three'...*we lifted her and, literally, flung her onto the bed as laughter went on all round the room.!

The lady was very grateful and insisted we have a cup of tea before we went – railwaymen never refuse tea...and we didn't.!

We finally got back to Mollington Street at 06:50, when we should have booked off at 06:00. John tore up the 'driver's ticket' he had made out earlier at James Street, as he had booked just the eight hour duty diagram length, and then proceeded to make out another one.

The information on a 'driver's ticket' indicated what duty diagram had been carried out and what overtime had been worked, if any. There was also a 'remarks' column on it which was used to indicate any operational occurrences which may have taken place during the actual diagrammed turn.

He booked an hour's overtime for both himself and me and made an entry in the 'remarks' column, for the information of the wages clerk, which read as follows :-  
*'One hour's overtime booked on this Mersey Ballast diagrammed turn due to late shunting at Duke Street'. 22:00-07:00.*

We were gainfully employed in 'shunting' alright, but not at Duke Street – it was in a house on Park Road North...of sorts.!

*'That's worth a bag of chips and a couple of pints.!',* said John.

It most certainly was...



***A West Kirby to Liverpool Central service is seen arriving at Bidston station in the late 1960s. The sidings that were used to stable the 'Mersey Ballast' wagons during the construction of the Liverpool Loop line in the mid-1970s can be seen to the far left. They had originally been part of the GCR line to the Birkenhead Docks. They also served the GCR locomotive shed at Bidston. Photo from the John Mann collection***

**To be continued... Dennis Flood**

#### **2018 Membership**

**Don't forget if you haven't paid your membership fee for 2018 yet please do so as this will be the last reminder. Membership fees can be sent to Lee Woods at  
125 Pit Lane, Widnes, WA8 9HR. Membership is £12.00**

## A Visit to Station House, Crank by Tony Foster

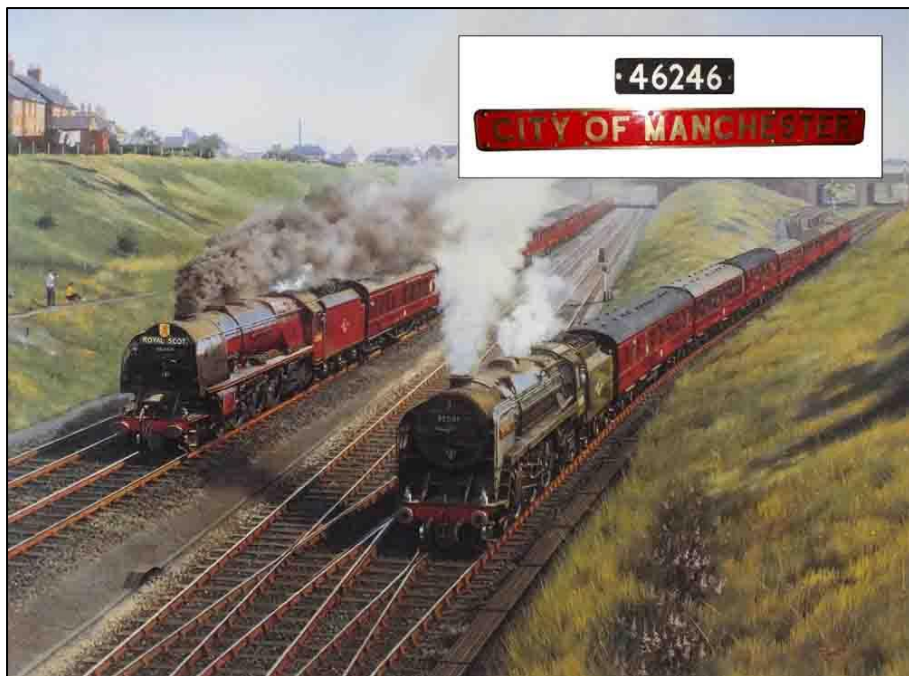


***This beautiful painting in acrylics by rail artist John Chapman was commissioned by Brian Edmondson, and is now displayed along with other paintings by the same artist in the Railway Room at Station House, Crank. After crossing Crank Road, the train in this late 1940s wintry scene at Crank Station is headed for Rainford Junction.***

As a fellow resident of Crank, I was recently invited to view Brian Edmondson's collection of railwayana at Station House - once the station master's house at Crank on the St Helens to Rainford Junction line. With Brian's co-operation, and with reference to various items of interest at his home, I have prepared this short summary of my visit.

Now settled at the recently refurbished Station House at Crank, Brian has had a lifelong interest in railways. In particular he enjoys monitoring the whereabouts of railwayana (totems, name plates, lamps etc) and, on occasions, participating in the bidding when items come up for sale at auction. He stresses that his purchases are always for the sheer pleasure derived from owning what are usually unique items of railway history, and are certainly not viewed as investments.

In common with most boys of his era, Brian spent many hours at the side of a railway with his copy of the Ian Allan loco-spotters book to hand. A favourite location for him was the Farrington junction, a couple of miles to the south of Preston. An image that remains firmly in his mind is the magnificent sight of the down Royal Scot being hauled by 46246 'City of Manchester', running alongside 72001 'Clan Cameron' as the latter joined the 4 track system as it headed a train from Liverpool to Glasgow. A more tangible record of that event is now to be found in the Railway Room at Station House. Pride of place goes to the 'City of Manchester' nameplate, purchased by Brian for a 4-figure sum in 1981, and now probably worth 10 times that amount. As an industrial chemist, he was working in the Middle East when the smokebox number



***A train spotter's paradise? This late 1950s scene at Farrington serves to record memories of summer holidays and lineside 'spotting'. The oil painting 'The Duchess and The Clan' is by rail artist Malcolm Root'. Inset - 'City of Manchester' nameplate and smokebox number.***

for the same locomotive (46246) came up for sale by auction in 1990, and was obliged to submit his successful bid by way of an overseas telephone call. In the unlikely event that the memory should ever fade, a beautiful painting of that Farrington scene, by railway artist Malcolm Root, also hangs in the Railway Room. Other commissioned works include 2 superb paintings showing (i) the station house, crossing gates, train and signal box, and (ii) a platform scene showing an approaching train headed for St Helens - both by railway artist John Chapman.



Crates of documents and photographs occupy corners of the Railway Room, whilst a truly stunning model 3½" gauge Class 9F No.92220 'Evening Star' - an unexpected gain from a casual visit to an auction - is displayed in a large glass cabinet. Currently without a boiler certificate, but apparently capable of some serious hauling, it

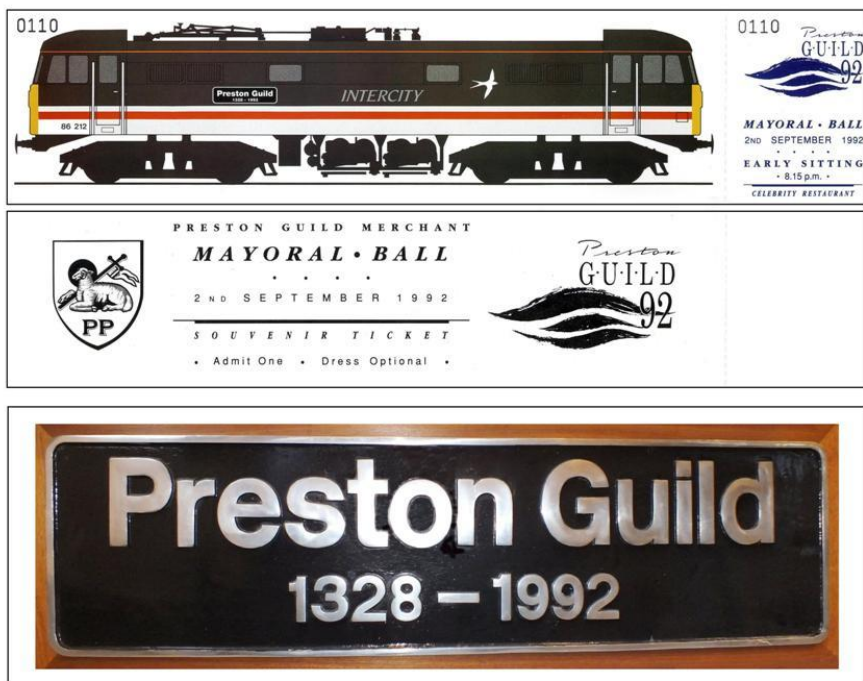


remains to be seen if the locomotive will take up hauling duties in the future.

Based on the account of 8D member, Rod Dixon, I was able to confirm that 9Fs were no strangers to the branch! During an earlier conversation with Rod, I recall him telling me that, as a Sutton Oak fireman, he and a driver were despatched (by bus !) to Rainford Junction where they were to take over a 'Special' headed for Chester and North Wales. I can do no better than quote Rod as recorded on his CD 'A Railwayman's Tale' -

*"On one occasion we went up there (Rainford Junction) and this huge loco came in. It was a Class 9 on a passenger train and my heart sank when I saw this. I thought, here we go, I'm in for some hard work here. That Class 9 was like riding in a limousine. It was a big loco on a comparatively small train. It floated along, it drifted along ..... etc".*

In 1992, the opportunity to acquire another nameplate, also very close to his heart, proved irresistible. To mark the occasion of the 1992 Preston Guild, BR decided to name Class 86 locomotive 86212 'Preston Guild 1328 - 1992'. In addition to the 2 plates for the locomotive, a third plate was struck and generously donated to be auctioned to raise funds for charity. Brian's bid was successful and, as part of the 'lot', an impressive drawing of the locomotive, together with the (still attached) ticket stub, invited him to the Mayoral Ball held on 2 September 1992.



Inevitably, not all bidding is successful. During our conversation, Brian recalled the disappointment he felt in 1988 when the nameplate for Jubilee Class 45595





**Left : North-west station totems bought at auction. Top right : Ground frame sign. Above centre : A 'through' ticket (3rd Class) from Ormskirk to Crank. Bottom right : Sign from Crank signal box.**

'Southern Rhodesia' escaped his grasp. Given the breaking up and renaming of Rhodesia to Zimbabwe, interest in the plate (and subsequent bidding) was very high!

Having acquired the old Station Master's house in 2011, Brian and his wife Gillian embarked on a rebuild project that took almost 5 years to complete. Along the way, progress was delayed by negotiations for the purchase of the adjoining parcel of land that included the old track bed and platforms, together with an equally frustrating 18-month period during which the welfare of resident bats (common pipistrelle) took precedence over advancing the building works.

After lying idle for more than half a century, the track bed had become home to well-established trees that needed the attention of professional gardeners. Landscaping was kept to a minimum, and care was taken to avoid damaging what remained of the platform on the south side of the tracks. One by one the cast iron letters of the station sign were recovered from undergrowth and have now been incorporated into a refurbished station sign, facing the house from a position on the embankment at the north side of the track bed.

In addition to items reclaimed 'on site' during the 5 year purchase / refurbishment project, Brian has tracked down and bought several other artefacts, including the 'CRANK' signs from the signal box (once situated on the west side of Crank Road, and from where the level crossing gates were operated), together with a similar sign, once attached to the ground frame servicing a freight landing and shunt at the east end of the station.

Given that scheduled passenger services on the line ended in 1951, I had not



anticipated that I would ever see a ticket with Crank as the destination. In fact, on my visit to Station House, I saw many such tickets - all neatly framed and, for convenience, accompanied by enlarged copies allowing the viewer to read the small print.

The station totems securely attached to the walls of his

Railway Room, indicate Brian's affection for his home town (now city) of Preston and, of course, his favourite 'spotting' location at Farrington. Proudly displayed are the totems from Blackburn, Bamber Bridge, Lostock Hall and Preston.

For my own part, it was a pleasure to see at least a hint of the station that closed long before my wife and I moved into the village in 1970. Who knows - perhaps that 3½" gauge Class 9F will one day be put back to work on new track in the grounds of Station House ! If such a project is ever contemplated, I have no doubt that there are model engineers within the 8D membership who would be only too happy to offer guidance and advice if assistance was requested.

## Tony Foster



*Crank station looking south-east in 1949. Departing from the station in 1949 is a St Helens to Rainford Junction service.*



*A local trip working approached Halewood North Junction in 1959. Photo by Jim Peden*



*The west curve of the Halewood Triangle seen in 1959. Photo by Jim Peden*

## Events Programme

**19.00 – Thursday 1 March 2018 – The early Days of BR Steam Days** – An illustrated talk by Derek Phillips. **Select Security Stadium, Lowerhouse Lane, Widnes.**

**19.00 – Thursday 29 March 2017 – The Railways of East Africa** – Another talk by the much travelled 8D member Chris Lewis. This time Chris will be taking us on a tour of the railways of East Africa. **Select Security Stadium, Lowerhouse Lane, Widnes.**

**19.00 – Thursday 5 April 2018 – Liverpool's Goods Stations** – An illustrated talk by Paul Wright. **Select Security Stadium, Lowerhouse Lane, Widnes.**

**10.00 – Saturday 21 April 2018 – The Halewood Triangle** – A guided walk led by me Paul Wright looking at the former CLC junction that is now a country park. This walk has been done before in the past but there will be many newer members who have not visited this site. **Meet at Halewood Park car park on Okell Drive, Halewood.** [Easy/Medium distance](#)

**10.00 – Saturday 19 May 2018 – The CLC North Liverpool Extension Line, West Derby to Clubmoor.** A guided walk led by Paul Wright looking at a section of the CLC north Liverpool line not yet visited by 8D. **Meet at West Derby station on Mill Lane, West Derby.** [Easy/Medium distance](#)

**10.00 – Saturday 26 May 2018 – The LJR Liverpool – Ormskirk Line.** A guided tour of the line by train. By purchasing a £5 Merseytravel Saverway ticket members will be able to take a ride between Liverpool Central and Ormskirk. Stops will be made at various stations along the way so that points of interest can be observed. Lunch will be in Ormskirk. Paul Wright will lead the tour. **Meet by the ticket barriers at Liverpool Central.**

**Time TBC Saturday 9 June 2018 – 8D association visit to Churnet Valley Railway.** This trip will be by heritage bus. With pick up points in Warrington and Widnes. The bus trip will be part subsidised by the association but there will be £5.00 charge per member payable at the time of booking. Please contact **Neil Wilson** on either [neilwilson1560@gmail.com](mailto:neilwilson1560@gmail.com) or 07714 789803 to make a booking. Places are limited so it is first come first served, Book early.....

## Where is This Competition



**'Where is this' competition?** (Answers to [pwright964@btinternet.com](mailto:pwright964@btinternet.com))  
**Photo by K Rose. The December competition was correctly guessed by Rod Dixon. The location was Sutton Oak St Helens.**

**NEXT  
JOURNAL PUBLISHED  
1 June 2018**