

ON SHED

The Journal of the 8D Association

Volume 10, Number 2 : June 2020



'On Shed' : Journal of the 8D Association

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From the Editor : Tony Foster

It seems a great deal longer than 3 months since the March edition of 'On Shed' was produced ! In the absence of any news to the contrary, I can only hope that members and their families and friends have survived this dreadful Covid-19 pandemic, and remain in good health.

In common with other organisations, the 8D Association has had to cancel or postpone planned events since mid-March. At the time of writing, we await further government instructions regarding social distancing and permitted meetings. On that basis, you'll see that the usual 'Future Events' section (normally found on the back cover of 'On Shed') is not there. When details relating to a resumption of meetings / walks etc become available, they will be circulated via email by the Secretary. At the same time, every effort will be made to contact those without email by telephone or personal contact.

Fortunately, production of 'On Shed' is a task

that requires little or no 'social contact' with others and, in my own case, has been undertaken over recent weeks in splendid (self) isolation ! However, our usual printer is temporarily unable to deal with the journal and I have made alternative arrangements with an online printing company.

This edition includes some first class yarns and some superb photographs. I welcome particularly those new contributors, and of course I am grateful to all who have provided material. I continue to hope that other members may also feel able to submit tales of yesteryear or items of historical interest. Perhaps writing is not your forte, but you have some wonderful photographs that you would be prepared to share with colleagues - I'd love to hear from you !

Stay safe.

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Cover photograph : An evocative shot that brings back great memories ! An assortment of Black 5s and 8Fs at rest in Speke Junction shed in August 1967.

Photograph : Lorne Anton

News Round Up

Chris Hollins

Given that 'On Shed' is published quarterly, many of the items referred to in this 'News Round Up' can only be of historical interest. Nevertheless, every effort has been made to record also those changes, developments and items of interest that have occurred within the 8D area since the date that the last publication was prepared for the printer.

Chris Hollins

CLC Anglo Scottish Service

On Tuesday the 3rd of March for four days an Anglo Scottish service traversed the CLC route non stop from Liverpool Lime Street to Manchester Piccadilly.

Trans-Pennine Express retimed service 9S08 the 05.24 from Liverpool Lime Street to Edinburgh Waverley, to depart at 05.05 and diverted it from its normal route via Earlestown and Manchester Victoria, to run via Widnes, Warrington Central, Manchester Piccadilly and Guide Bridge regaining its normal route at Stalybridge. The train formed of Class 802/2 IET reverted back to its normal route the following week, before being suspended indefinitely due to the reduction in service caused by the coronavirus.

Road Vehicle Trains on Low Level Line

For several weeks in February and March, DB Cargo moved a five days a week loaded train of road vehicles from Warrington Arpley Yard to the Garston Car Terminal. Routed along the Low Level line to Ditton Jct, the services ran as 6L84 departing Arpley Sidings at 09.28, with the return train running as 6L55 departing from Garston at 12.09. Its believed that the wagons were attached and detached at Arpley Yard from the weekdays only service from Dagenham to Mossend Yard, and replaced the once a week direct service that DB Cargo once previously operated from Dagenham to Garston Car Terminal.

More MK4 Coaches at Alstom Widnes

On Tuesday 24th March, GBRF Class 66 66722

'Sir Edward Watkin' was used on train 5Z84 09.31 Wembley Reception Sidings to Widnes Alstom Transportation Centre, delivering a further rake of ex LNER Mark 4 carriages for refurbishment. These are another set to be used on the new Grand Central service from Blackpool North to London Euston, which was due to commence in May but has now been suspended until further notice.

Coronavirus Service Changes

The impact of the Coronavirus on train services in the area has been immense. Faced with a 70% reduction in the number of passengers travelling, major changes have been made to the timetables which has included the suspension of a number of services until such time that they can be reintroduced.

While not covering every service that has been affected, as of today the 6th of April, I include details of the major changes that have taken place on the routes in the 8D Association area.

Merseyrail after continuing to operate a normal service, cut the frequency from every 15 minutes to 30 minutes on all routes. A week later it was announced that services would finish at 19.00 in the evening on all lines. After representations to Merseyrail from people wanting to use the service after 19.00, a limited hourly service is provided after this time between Liverpool Central and Southport, West Kirby and Chester until 23.00.

Northern Trains Limited, have suspended services between Liverpool Lime Street and

Blackpool North, Manchester Airport via Widnes and Warrington Bank Quay via Earlestown. Most trains between Liverpool Lime Street and Crewe via Manchester Piccadilly now terminate at Manchester Airport. Also suspended are the Chester to Leeds service along with the few trains that operate between Helsby and Ellesmere Port.

East Midlands Railway have cancelled all services between Liverpool and Norwich. These now run every two hours between Sheffield and Norwich only.

Trans-Pennine Express have reduced the Liverpool to York services to hourly. The Scarborough service runs every two hours utilising Class 185 DMUs, with the Newcastle service also running two hourly using the Class 802/2 IET sets. All of the recently introduced extension of the service to Edinburgh have been suspended apart from the 10.54 from Liverpool Lime Street, which due to the cancellation of all of the weekday Manchester to Scotland services makes this train the only direct weekday service from the Liverpool and Manchester area to Scotland. Additional calls have been applied to all services, the Edinburgh train now making 20 stops before reaching the Scottish Capital. The three Monday to Saturday Liverpool Lime Street to Glasgow Central services have also been suspended, however a single service is operating on a Sunday between the cities.

At the end of March, Transport for Wales suspended the Liverpool Lime Street to Chester via Runcorn service. Also the Manchester to North Wales service via Warrington Bank Quay was reduced to apart from two trains, a

Manchester Piccadilly to Chester service. Avanti also reduced the London Euston to North Wales service to only one train a day to and from Holyhead, but with an additional four weekday trains from Chester to Birmingham New Street via Crewe.

Avanti West Coast are now operating a Saturday service on weekdays with the addition of the last trains that normally operate on a weekday between Liverpool Lime Street and London Euston.

London North Western Railway have suspended all through trains between Liverpool Lime Street and Crewe to London Euston. After initially reducing the Liverpool to London service from half hourly to hourly, and then terminating the service at Northampton rather than London Euston, they bowed to the inevitable and suspended the service south of Birmingham New Street.

It now operates hourly separate trains between Liverpool Lime Street and Birmingham New Street, Crewe to Birmingham New Street via Stoke-on-Trent, Crewe to Rugby via the Trent Valley, Birmingham New Street to Northampton and Northampton to London Euston.

Freight has also been affected. The car trains that operate between Halewood and Southampton and Garston and Dagenham have been suspended, and while no Freightliner trains from our area have been suspended, loadings have been reduced. The 14.03 from Ditton to Felixstowe (normally a fully loaded train) was observed on 30th March with just 10 containers as its payload.

8D Events Programme

At the time of going to press, plans for future 8D events remain uncertain. Further details will be emailed to members by the Association's Secretary as soon as they become available.

Bad Day at The Office !

John Wilson

The date was Tuesday 24th February 1987, and my turn of duty that day was an 06.50 'Book On' for Driver's Assistant Turn 422 - a local tripper T71 or Target 71 as known within the railway community.

the guard was Martin Lloyd - both sadly no longer with us. Billy was an ex Sutton Oak driver who moved to Warrington when 8G closed. He was a conscientious type of character, but he would let us second men drive

FEBRUARY		1987
24 Tuesday	07.10 - T69 06.50 - 15.40 T71	
20073 } 20210 } T71		O/T = 1.17
DALLAM LEATHERS x PRESCOT x (8.50)	* "REPORT WNW RUN - AWAY"	*
25 Wednesday		

Above : For ease of reading, John Wilson's longhand diary entry for Tuesday 24th February 1987 has been here reproduced in type. The term 'O/T = 1.17' refers to overtime (1 hour 17 minutes) and 'WNW' of course refers to Wigan North Western.

At this time the booking on point was a dilapidated building opposite Arpley Junction signal box. This particular local tripper normally involved dropping off or picking up traffic from Prescott BICC, Leathers (Baxter Lane, St Helens), Dallam Lovely Lane, Fiddlers Ferry and sometimes Burtonwood Airbase on the CLC.

Looking back, this incident could have ended up very seriously, with potential for loss of life. A series of events occurred that got us into the predicament and, as the saying goes "all the holes in the cheese lined up". If we took any individual component away, we would have been none the wiser and it would have been just another uneventful day on Target 71.

My driver on the day was Billy Topping and

for him when he knew we could perform well. Martin was a local Warrington lad who shall we say liked a drink and a smoke !

The traction could be anything from a Class 47 to a Class 25. On that day we had a couple of Class 20's 'in multiple', numbers 20073 and 20210. The general way of working was that you were given your locos by the Train Crew Supervisor and either the second man, driver, or both, went down to the holding sidings at Arpley and prepared the locos. We then turned off towards Arpley yard and were given the days orders by the 'B' Supervisor at '2 End Cabin'.

It was at that point that the day's plan regarding order of drops was sorted out by the driver and guard, although if the second man had anything to add, it would be considered

as well. Normally if there was any traffic to be taken in or out of Dallam, that was boxed off first. A course of action was then planned to deal with traffic in or out of other locations. Luckily, back then, most locations had signal boxes, cross-over junctions, refuge sidings, run-round facilities etc etc, and in those days signalmen weren't too fussed if you left traffic with them while you popped to other locations and coupled up to go forward at a later time.



Above : *Class 20 locomotive with VTG Ferrywagons in the Prescott sidings of BICC.*

Photograph by John Wilson

Our plan for the day was that we would first go to Dallam with traffic, then light engine to Walton Old Junction yard where we were to collect traffic for St Helens and Prescott. We would then head out to St Helens Baxter Lane via Earlestown and St Helens Junction. We would leave the Prescott traffic outside at the Junction while we shunted the tanks into Leathers via a ground frame released from Sutton Oak box. There was nothing to fetch out of Leathers so we just simply re-coupled the Prescott traffic and set off for St Helens Shaw Street station.

It was from Leathers that Billy let me take the reins, but whether in the grand scheme of things this was a good idea we'll never know ! At St Helens Shaw Street we shunted over into the sidings and ran round before heading off to Edge Hill Gullet sidings where we per-

formed the same manoeuvre before setting off to Prescott BICC via Huyton. On arrival at Prescott the ground frame was released from Prescott signal box and we shunted our VTG Ferrywagons into the 2 or 3 sidings within the small sidings complex. All was going well up to this point, but things were about to take a turn for the worse.

At Prescott BICC, I seem to recall they had their own works shunt loco that would take traffic into the main works and fetch traffic out and place it on the sidings near the mainline. Their method of working was to attach the shunt loco, isolate the brakes on the wagons and place them within the works, stabling them as required with just the hand brake applied. When they brought traffic out they would stable them and de-isolate the wagon brakes.

Our forward traffic this day was stabled on the works line. At this point perhaps we should have smelled a rat, but it wasn't uncommon for their traffic to be on the works line. I buffered the class 20's up to the 3 VTG Ferrywagons and our guard Martin walked round the train. We performed a brake continuity test which basically ascertains that we have a through brake pipe. Martin should have checked that the brake blocks had applied to the wagons and released when I blew the brakes back up. Whether he did or not we'll never know. Unbeknown to us we set sail for Arpley with 3 'swingers' on, so if the draw bar between loco and train was to come adrift the wagons would simply run away. I was still driving at this point and noticed nothing untoward on the journey towards Warrington. In my defence, with 2 locos and just 3 empty wagons, I wouldn't have felt much difference.

As we approached Ince Moss Junction, we should have been routed towards Bamfurlong Junction and main line back to Warrington. At this point, the last '*hole in the cheese*' lined up ! Due to a points failure, the signaller in

Warrington Power Box asked us if we could proceed to Wigan North Western station and run round there to go back to Arpley, as we were blocking the line for Wigan bound passenger trains. Where we stood we had no choice but to follow his request.



Above : *A pair of Class 20s working 'in multiple' - as on the day of the Wigan North Western runaway.*
Photograph by John Wilson

On reaching Wigan NW station we were routed onto platform 1 - the 'up' passenger loop. The platform had a slight incline, dropping from the Preston direction to Wigan South Junction. This meant that when we arrived and Martin tried to uncouple, the coupling was obviously taut as the wagons were being pulled by gravity towards the South Junction. None of us knew that the train was totally unbraked and Martin asked me to 'buffer up' - a procedure to squeeze the locos up to the train so that the coupling would slacken and the guard could uncouple the locos from the train. Once uncoupled, the 'run round' could be performed. However, each time I buffered up, the wagons just rolled off again. After a couple of attempts, Martin decided to apply a hand brake on the wagons. With hindsight, he should have done this first, but again we'll never know why he didn't. My driver, Billy, was stood at the driver's side door seeing what was taking so long. Martin was now standing at track

level between platform and train and gave me the signal to ease up again while he darted in and finally threw the coupling off.

This is when disaster struck ! Billy and I just watched as our train gently gained momentum and started to pick up speed as it ran away towards Wigan South Junction. To his credit, Martin was running alongside the wagons, desperately trying to spin the hand brakes on - all to no avail. In the distance, and to our horror, we saw a class 142 DMU approaching the bay platform 2, with our wagons now heading towards it for a head-on collision. By some miracle, the 142

driver had seen what was happening and very quickly assessed the situation. Instead of stopping (and thereby sealing his fate) he gave the little 142 a burst of power and just cleared the Junction. As he reached the safety of the bay platform, our runaway train flew past him at a rate of knots. Disaster had been averted and our train came to a stand half way down the Wigan East goods lines towards Springs Branch having split the points at the South Junction on its way !

We were eventually reunited with our train, brakes de-isolated and with Billy driving. When we arrived on Arpley Yard there were reports to be completed by each of us. Unfortunately, Martin got the brunt of the blame, and I had to deny all knowledge of any driving !!

The event taught me a valuable lesson in my railway career. Never take short cuts, and always do the job correctly. Failure to do so can lead to fatal consequences.

A Royal Visit

Rod Dixon

Starting at the bottom

I left school at Easter in 1954 with no qualifications. I heard that the railway were recruiting cleaners at Sutton Oak loco sheds which was just down the road from where I lived. I applied and I recall having an in-depth interview with the grandly named 'Shedmaster', Mr Hargreaves. It was obviously a successful interview because I was sent for a medical at a department in the old Liverpool Central Station. Of the four applicants there for a medical, three of us had been at school together !

I passed all the exams and I started work at Sutton Oak as a junior cleaner on Monday 16th August 1954. The starting date was important because it was used for seniority and redundancy purposes. I joined three other junior cleaners. Because we were under sixteen years of age, we were not allowed to work shifts and so our main duties involved cleaning locomotives 8.00am - 4.30pm each day.

Dirty, tiring work

All the work attached to steam locos was dirty and tiring - particular cleaning. In addition to general cleaning for appearance, it was necessary to clean various parts for inspection by maintenance staff. Every 2 - 3 weeks, 2 locomotives would be taken out of service. The fire would be drawn out over the main ash pit and the loco would be shunted into the shed where the steam would be released from the boiler. The boiler would then be cooled by running cold water through it. When everything had cooled, the firebox was cleaned by a junior cleaner. At the same time, the fine ash was removed from the smoke box, and the small smoke tubes would be cleaned by a junior cleaner

pushing a long rod with a small brush attached through the tubes.

There were 24 older cleaners who had passed Medical and Rules exams so they could be utilised as Firemen in the case of sickness, holidays, or if special trains were ordered. These 'Passed Cleaners' worked a multiple shift system 6.00am - 2.00pm, 10.00am - 6.00pm, 2.00pm - 10.00pm, 4.00pm - 12.00pm, 10.00pm-6.00am and 12.00am-8.00am. The senior passed cleaners main duties were cleaning, but if they were not needed as firemen they were often used for other jobs about the shed, cleaning fires on the ash pit or loading coal if the shed men were off sick or if there was no cover for holidays.

As the passed cleaners worked the day turns in rotation, I got to know them. If I qualified when I reached sixteen I would be on the same shifts with them.

"I hear the Queen's coming to St Helens"

I had been working for about six weeks when news went round about a visit to St Helens by the Queen. It was rumoured that the Queen's party would be arriving by Royal Train at the old St Helens Shaw Street Station which at the time was looking very run down.

A day out to Springs Branch

The rumour turned out to be correct. The Royal Train would arrive at Shaw Street Station on the morning of Thursday 21st October. On Monday 18th the junior cleaners and all the available passed cleaners were told to book on at 8.00am on the following day (Tuesday 19th) and be prepared to go to Springs Branch Loco Depot at Wigan to help with the cleaning and preparation of two

Class 5 locos - we called them Black Fives. The locos were to be used to haul the Royal Train.

On the Tuesday morning I think there were 8 or 9 of us gathered outside the foreman's office, waiting to receive our instructions and tickets for the train from St Helens to Wigan. One of the older senior passed cleaners was placed in charge and we made our way on foot to Shaw Street. I remember that we were allowed 30 minutes for that part of the journey, and then a further 20 minutes on the train to Wigan. We were allowed another 30 minutes for the walk from Wigan North Western station to Springs Branch Depot. It was about ten o'clock by the time we arrived and the foreman at Springs Branch was fuming ! He had expected us at 8.00am but he soon calmed down when it was explained we had only booked on at that time.

St Helens - v - Wigan

All the Sutton Oak cleaners were put to work on one of the Black Fives and a big group of Wigan cleaners were already working on the other. As always there was great rivalry between the two groups as to which loco was the cleanest and which one would be used on the Royal Train. In the event, both locos were used. One for the journey into St Helens and then on to Wigan where the Queen would rejoin the train, and the other loco would be attached at the rear of the train to take it on from Wigan (to Bolton or Manchester I think).

After we had finished our cleaning and the foreman was satisfied with our work, we made

our way back to Sutton Oak the same way we went out and we got back at about 6.00pm. That meant that we had worked 2 hours overtime which I do not think they were very keen on paying us for !

On Thursday 21st October 1954, the day of the Queen's visit, the 4 junior cleaners were told that we could go to Shaw Street station to see the Royal Train arrive. We made our way in to St Helens and met up with other



Above : 21st October 1954, the Queen and Prince Philip are seen leaving the Town Hall during their visit to St Helens. **Photographer unknown**

railwaymen. Whilst they were allowed into an enclosed area, us scruffy cleaners were kept well back ! We did see the train arrive being hauled by the loco we had helped to clean. I think also that I glimpsed the heads of the Royal Party.

As everybody was moving away, one of the supervisors called us over and asked us to help roll up the red carpets and then load them onto a waiting lorry. The carpets and colourful plantpots used to brighten the station were then taken to Wigan to be put out for when the Royal Party rejoined the train.

..... Happy days !

West Allerton Station

(The Case of the Mysterious ‘Star’)

Phil Graham

Dennis Flood’s article in the previous ‘On Shed’ brought back many memories! It has also involved me in doing a bit of research.

Betty was the daughter of LNER Walton Driver Charles Grayson. Originally, she had been taken on as a Shunter at Walton CLC.



West Allerton Station circa 1959 with the ‘Star Turns’ plaque. (Note the totems and running in board in BR LMR maroon).

Unless otherwise stated, all photographs are from the Bill Martin Collection

I first saw the ‘Star Turns’ sign in about 1964. My elder brother (Barry) pointed it out to me when we were off trainspotting to Crewe or Chester. Over the years the weeds grew around it and it gradually disappeared from view.

Gardening at West Allerton

It was after my ‘A’ levels in May 1973, and before I joined the railway as an employee in July of that year at Hough Green, that I and two mates did some (unofficial) gardening and tidying at West Allerton. We were well known to the regular staff, Betty Maker (nee Grayson), Arthur Dyer and Dick Kelbrick.

Arthur was an ex-Brunswick Guard who had come out of the brake van following a heart attack. Dick had been a Signaller at Knotty Ash and long-time Porter at Mersey Road. He was very much my mentor and the reason I joined the railway. We also knew the Assistant Area Manager, Derek Halstead. He had been the last Station Master at Widnes North, and latterly had responsibility for the Widnes Loop until its demise.

Looking for the ‘Star’

Weeding on the embankment, I knew what I was looking for, and we soon uncovered the *Star*. It was me who then whitewashed the

concrete surround with Snowcem intended for the platform edge whitening. We then cleaned the steel sheet sign and reinserted it in the whitewashed surround.

We didn't attempt any restoration work on the sign itself - none of us was artistic. The sign was still quite legible and we thought that we may spoil it if we tried to repaint it.

Sadly, I did not know that there had been more to the garden, or I am sure we would have been able to uncover the stones which read *'British Railways - West Allerton'*. I did learn that the artwork had been done by a former Porter, Len Lees. Len had left the railway, but I was lucky enough to meet him later on several occasions.

Up to about 1979, I used the West Allerton Station quite regularly and watched as the sign suffered flaking and corrosion. The whitewash faded and the weeds took over again. It's possible, of course, that somebody else weeded it out again, but I strongly suspect that the sign that Dennis photographed was as I left it in July 1973.

Passing through the station in September 2013, I took a photo of all that remained of the *'Star'* - ie. the concrete surround, now looking very sorry for itself. I also took a photo of the station community notice board at that time - also a rather sad affair. It did, however, explain a little of the *'Star'* story.

And that was where matters would have rested, but then Dennis' article brought it all back to me ! I decided to see what I could discover.

Len Lees and Bill Martin

I knew that Len Lees had been a close friend of Bill Martin, a former colleague who I am still in contact with. In the early 1970s Bill worked in Rail House, Liverpool. He also often worked his Rest Day on the rather

unpopular 'late turn Saturday' at West Allerton (something that I also did a few times in the 1973 - 75 period). When Bill was on duty, the now long-retired Len would often visit him. It was on some of these occasions that I met Len.

I recently telephoned Bill (now 83) at his home in Liverpool and he immediately told me the full story. Two days later he e-mailed me with black and white photos that accompany this article, as well as some press cuttings about the events. So the rest of the story is thanks to Bill.

Len Lees - the artist

Bill had started on the railway as a 16 year old Porter at Mossley Hill Station in 1953. Len Lees, then 47, was already working there, having moved to the station in January of that year, after a 15 month spell as a Porter at Allerton. Len had studied in his own time at the Liverpool College of Art and had become very skilled and innovative.



Len Lees in his Coronation Garden at Mossley Hill Station in 1953.

1953 was Coronation year, and Len set about building a commemorative garden behind the cess facing the Up Fast platform. The work, mostly in whitewashed stones, received local acclaim and it gained Mossley Hill a prize in the annual Station Gardens competition. Len also designed a railway poster for Coronation year.



Len Lees and his Scots' Collie 'Shep' in front of the 'Star Turns' plaque, with Allerton Station Master Fred Lloyd who was also responsible for West Allerton Station - circa 1959 : Inset : The 'Closer Capital' plaque on the footbridge, ready to be placed in the garden - 1955.

In 1954 Len moved to West Allerton, where he was given permission to design his 'Closer Capital' garden which was awarded a First Class Prize in the 1955 Station Gardens competition. His last, and most impressive, work was completed in 1959, when he adapted and greatly enhanced the 'Closer Capital' garden into the 'Star Turns' display. This project went on to win West Allerton the Liverpool Station Gardens competition again in 1960.



Len Lees with part of his artwork – circa 1959.



Above : *Len's garden awaits formal inspection – 1960. The sign at left bears the Liverpool coat of arms and the legend 'Liverpool 4½ miles'. The sign at (extreme) right bears the London coat of arms and the legend 'London 189 miles'.*

Below : *Station Master Fred Lloyd accepts the certificate for the First Prize in the Station Gardens competition from Lime Street District Operating Superintendent Mr Douglas Cochran, while Porter Len Lees and Mr Theo Byron (District Passenger Manager at Lime Street) look on – 17th November 1960.*



Len left the railway sometime in the mid-1960s. He bought a bed and breakfast guest house near to Llangollen. He and his wife ran the guest house for a year or two, before his wife's ill health forced them to sell up. They then moved to Rock Ferry, from where he would often visit his old friend and colleague, Bill Martin, on those late turn Saturdays at the West Allerton Station.

So the mystery is solved! I feel sure that Len would be proud to think that his work is still remembered, more than 60 years on thanks to Dennis and Bill.

Below : *Photograph taken in 2013 showing the few visible remains of the 'Star Turns' plaque.*

Photo by Phil Graham



'On Shed' journal material

Your 8D related articles and photographs invited

News items, comments, photographs and tales of yesteryear are always most welcome.

Please don't hesitate to get in touch.

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Above : 9F (possibly 92091) trundles tender first past Speke Junction Shed on the Allerton Junction to Garston Dock East Junction line in August 1967.

From an 8D Member's Collection

Photographs taken in August 1967 by Lorne Anton



Above : Under the wires, an unidentified Black 5 heads for Garston Dock in August 1967. The photograph was taken from Garston Road bridge, near to the MPD.



Above : No side rods, no steam, nowhere to go, and now awaiting the cutter's torch, 5F No.45188 and an unidentified 9F are seen in the stabling sidings alongside the main line near to Speke Junction shed.



Above : How the mighty have fallen ! With only months to go before withdrawal in December 1967, BR Standard 7P6F No. 70024 'Vulcan' (nameplate missing) trudges through Preston with a mixed freight.

From Wirral to Metroland

Mike Venn

In 1951 at the age of 8, I started trainspotting with one of my school friends. When the opportunity arose to visit relatives in Aylesbury, it was too good to be true as I would have the opportunity to spot Eastern Region locomotives, as well as Southern based London Midland Region and Western Region engines.

It was decided that the best way from Wallasey to Aylesbury would be via Liverpool and Rugby. Although an alternative route existed via Birkenhead Woodside and Birmingham Snow Hill, very few Birkenhead to London Paddington trains called at Princes Risborough, the Junction for the branch shuttle to Aylesbury.

Having decided the route, we took the electric train from Wallasey Grove Road to Liverpool Central Low Level. Formed of a 6 car American style multiple unit which still provided weekday service on the New Brighton line, and would continue to do so until 1956, when they were replaced by newly built units.

From Liverpool Central, we walked to Lime Street for our train to Rugby which would be departing from Platform 7. The 2.05pm service to London Euston calling only at Rugby Midland was named 'The Manxman' as it carried Passengers who had arrived at Liverpool landing stage just after midday, on the Isle of Man Steam Packet Company ship from Douglas. The train had up to 15 coaches and was usually entrusted to a Stanier Coronation or Princess Royal Class Pacific locomotive. If one was not available, then a Royal Scot 4-6-0 would be provided sometimes double heading with a Stanier Black 5 on the heavy train.

In the late 1950's, this service became a regular diagrammed job for the prototype Deltic

diesel which would work the Liverpool portion of the 7.45am 'Lancastrian' from Euston into Lime Street. During 1961 and 1962, another diesel prototype DP2 was used on the same trains.

Upon departure from Lime Street, the heavy train was assisted out of the platform by a Jinty 0-6-0T at the rear, having earlier brought in the empty stock from Edge Hill Downhill Sidings. Up the cutting and through Edge Hill to Wavertree, where the Pacific would get into its stride through Mossley Hill (at that time a stop for certain London trains), and on through Runcorn which was a less important station than it is today. Passing through Crewe observing the 25mph speed restriction for non-stop services, we headed to Stafford and then down the Trent Valley through Lichfield and Nuneaton to arrive in Rugby Midland at 4.15pm a journey time of 2 hours and 10 minutes.

After leaving the train and seeing it depart for Euston where it would arrive at 5.45pm, it was time for us to set off on the half mile walk down Hillmorton Road where the Eastern Region's Central Station was located on the Great Central main line. From here to Aylesbury a different region with different locomotives.

The train we boarded at Rugby Central was the 2.10pm Manchester London Road to London Marylebone service - a 57 minute journey to Aylesbury Town. Formed of an 8 coach rake of Gresley built, teak bodied stock including a buffet car, with haulage behind one of Leicester Central Shed (code 38C) or a Neasden Shed, (code 34E) Gresley Class A3 Pacific. At the time Leicester had 60048 *Doncaster*, 60049 *Galtee More*, 60052 *Prince Palatine*, 60054 *Prince of Wales*, 60102 *Sir*

Frederick Banbury, 60103 *Flying Scotsman*, 60104 *Solario* and 60107 *Royal Lancer* allocated to it, while Neasden had 60050 *Persimmon*, 60051 *Blink Bonny* and 60111 *Enterprise* on its books.

Departing Rugby, the train headed for Dunsmore cutting where on 4th September 1966, buffer stops would be placed on both tracks ending the Great Central main line as a through route. Onwards, passing the Ministry of Defence Sidings at Barlby where 4 years later on Sunday 7th August 1955, Kings Cross shed allocated Gresley V2 60828 hauling the 10.35 Manchester London Road to London Marylebone service, would be derailed at excessive speed on a set of points. The driver and pilot-man mixed up wrong line working instructions as to where the train was due to cross over as a result of single line working because of engineering works. Sadly there was a fatality, while the V2 rolled 25 Feet down an embankment and several coaches including some new Mark 1 vehicles were badly damaged. The V2 was recovered and repaired at Doncaster Works eventually being withdrawn in 1964.

From here the train proceeded through Catesby Tunnel and Charwelton, before passing through Woodford Halse, where two large marshalling yards handled several thousand wagons per day, and was also the destination of the 'runner' or 'windcutter' coal trains from Annesley in Nottinghamshire. A large locomotive shed was also here (code 38E) at the time. It serviced engines from the Eastern, London Midland and Western Regions. It was still possible to get a passenger train from Woodford to Stratford Upon Avon via the former South Midland Junction Railway, although this ended the following year in 1952, allowing the route to be upgraded for heavy freights going to South Wales from the Scunthorpe steelworks.

Onwards from Woodford, the Pacific hauled train headed south past Culworth Junction,

where an important link diverged to Banbury. Heavily used by freight trains to the Western Region, the York to Bournemouth passenger service used the route along with a multitude of additional summer Saturday holiday trains from the South Coast to the Midlands, Yorkshire and the North East. From Culworth, the train passed through Helmdon before arriving at Brackley Central, the only large town between Rugby and Aylesbury.

Departure from Brackley, through Finmere, brings us to Calvert North Jct where a connection from Claydon Jct on the Bletchley to Oxford line trailed in, which in September 1966 became the northern limit of operations for freight trains on the southern end of the GC main line. A few miles further south, the train passed over Grendon Underwood Jct, where the Great Central link line to Ashendon Jct on the Paddington to Birmingham line diverged. The northbound 'Master Cutler' and a return service to Manchester used the route until January 1960. Further south, Quainton Road present base of the Buckinghamshire Railway Centre where the London Transport lines to Brill and Verney Junction had closed, losing there passenger services in 1935 and 1936 respectively, is passed before running down the Vale of Aylesbury to arrive at Aylesbury Town.

At the time, Aylesbury services to London via Amersham were provided by London Transport to Baker Street. An alternative service was provided with a few trains to London Marylebone via Princes Risborough, utilising Stanier or ex LNER L1 2-6-4T tank engines and rakes of non-corridor carriages.

While staying at my relatives, I took several trips to London with my parents. London Transport provided the carriages for the Baker Street service which were non-corridor compartment vehicles hauled by a Neasden based tank engine. The route followed was over Dutchlands Summit, then through Amersham and Chalfont and Latimer, where steam

was still at work on the Chesham branch, arriving at Rickmansworth where 3 minutes was allowed to change to electric traction for the onward run to London.

From here, the train was in the hands of an ex Metropolitan Railway Bo-Bo Electric Locomotive. London Transport had a fleet of them, all named after London personalities including *John Lyon*, *Oliver Cromwell*, *Sir Ralph Verney*, *Lord Byron*, *Sherlock Holmes*, *John Hampden* and *Sarah Siddons*. Two of the locos are still with us - *John Hampden* preserved at the LT Museum in Covent Garden, and *Sarah Siddons* is preserved in working order by Transport for London's Underground Division and occasionally works special trains. Locomotive *Oliver Cromwell* was renamed *Thomas Lord* in 1953 after the construction of the Britannia Pacific with the same name.

Departing Rickmansworth, the train proceeded along the double track main line calling at all stations to Harrow-on-the-Hill. From there a fast ride ensued through Neasden and Dollis Hill before arriving at Finchley Road, the final stop before Baker Street. During the peak hours, several trains were extended to terminate at both Liverpool Street and Aldgate. From electrification to the 1920's, these peak hour services carried a Pullman Car serving meals to the businessmen who used them.

In the mid 1950's, my relatives moved from Aylesbury to Moor Park. Consequently, journeys from Wallasey were via London Euston and then on the Metropolitan line from Euston Square. Travel would be on London Transport's venerable compartment T stock which were used on Aldgate to Watford and Rickmansworth services. At Moor Park, I would watch the southbound 'Master Cutler' and the 'South Yorkshireman' in both directions pass through the station, still hauled by Gresley A3 Pacifics in their last years of working on the route.

These were great times to be a train spotter

but what of the journey today. Well in 1958, the rundown of the Great Central route started when ownership of it from Pilsley to London Marylebone was transferred from the Eastern to the London Midland Region. It came as no surprise that on 2nd January 1960, through services ran for the last time from London to north of Nottingham. Standard Class 5 73066 arrived at London Marylebone with the last southbound 'South Yorkshireman' from Bradford Exchange. The replacement semi-fast service lasted until September 4th 1966 when Sulzer Type 2 D5085 departed Marylebone on the 00.40 to Nottingham Victoria, immediately returning to Neasden with the empty stock. This was the end of the line as a through route. The only portion that retained a passenger service was from Rugby Central to Nottingham Victoria, which closed a year later. This resulted in Nottingham Arkwright Street (closed in 1963) being reopened to become the terminus until 5th May 1969 when the passenger service ceased.

A number of improvements were made on the Underground, as London Transport carried out quadrupling of the Metropolitan line between Harrow and Watford South Jct. Improvements included new stations at North Harrow, Pinner, Northwood Hills, Northwood and Moor Park. Electrification was also carried out between Rickmansworth and Amersham, including the Chesham branch. This brought an end to Baker Street to Aylesbury services, which British Railways took over and diverted into Marylebone using the newly delivered 4 car Class 115 DMU's. These units operated the service for over 30 years until replaced in the Network South East era by new Class 165 Turbo units which continue to operate the service today provided by Chiltern Railways. Part of the Great Central main line was reopened to Passenger Trains on 14th December 2008 when services were extended from Aylesbury to Aylesbury Vale Parkway.

Further development in the coming years will see the line north of Aylesbury Vale Parkway (which still has freight trains operating on it), being reopened to passenger trains as part of the East West Railway project. Similarly, the GC main line formation from Calvert to Brackley is scheduled to become part of the HS2 route from London to Birmingham.

If I was to make the Journey to Moor Park

today. It would take just over 3 hours riding a 507/508 unit from Wallasey, a Pendolino from Liverpool Lime Street, and a TFL S stock set from Euston Square. Progress - but not as interesting a journey as the one that took me to Metroland in 1951.

Note : The author wishes to acknowledge the valuable contribution made by Chris Hollins, who assisted with historical notes.

The Cumbrian Coast Line

Chris Lewis

A landslip on the Cumbrian Coast line on March 13th, between Workington and Whitehaven, reminded me of the four attempts I have made to cover this line - with only one succeeding.

In 1959 by father and I had a North-West Railrover. On its last day we were planning to go around the Cumbrian Coast. We caught the train from Chester (we stayed with my brother there) to Rock Ferry then on a train to Liverpool Central Low Level. The train in front broke down so we stopped in Birkenhead Central for nearly an hour ! We missed the intended train from Exchange to Lancaster. Since the service around the coast was sparse we could not do it and return to Chester at a reasonable time. So we caught an electric train to Southport then a steam train from there to Preston on part of the West Lancs Railway. In retrospect this was possibly good, as it enabled us to ride that line - closed now for well over 50 years. We then went from Lancaster to Morecambe and then back to Chester.

My next attempt was in 1968. Three of us

bought LMR 'Runabout' tickets so that we could travel extensively and also see steam still operating. We had overlooked the fact that train drivers were working to rule. On the Friday we had planned to go to Barrow and then the last train to Carlisle. The train to



Virgin staff at Preston couldn't resist the opportunity to see what a real train looks like ! 71000 'Duke of Gloucester' waits for the 'Right away'.
Photo by Chris Lewis

Barrow was late and the connection was not held. So we spent the night on Barrow station. Next day we headed south because there was going to be fewer trains running before a strike on Sunday.

The next attempt was in May 1974, a week after the inauguration of electric trains to Glasgow. I caught an electric train to Carlisle, then a train around the coast. At Whitehaven we were put onto a bus to Sellafield engineering works !

I gave up then until 2006. Jennifer and I were stewarding for Nigel Dobbing of the Railway Touring Company on many of his trains in the UK. We were scheduled to travel with *'Duke of Gloucester'*, mainly using West Coast Railway Pullmans (as they have no opening windows in the passenger compartments and the line has restricted clearances). Much to my surprise there were no problems and I completed the whole route, after nearly 50 years of trying.

There was a RTC steam train booked to go around the Coast line as I write this, March 14th, I had thought of going on it so maybe I'm a jinx - the line has been closed for repair ! Network Rail appears to have done a



Above : *North of Workington on the Cumbrian Coast line, RTC steam special is hauled by 71000 'Duke of Gloucester'.* **Photo Chris Lewis**

marvellous job re-scheduling at short notice, to pick up the steam locomotive at Carnforth rather than Carlisle and returning over the Settle and Carlisle. Despite it changing locomotive at Carnforth, and then steam not electric, it was only about 30 mins late into Carlisle. It left Carlisle on its rescheduled time with a Jubilee, a credit to both Network Rail and the operators, Rail Touring Company and West Coast Railways.

The Harwich Boat Trains

Chris Hollins

I have been fascinated by Boat Trains ever since Uncle Gary and Auntie Florence with their family, left Tilbury in 1965 on the Peninsular and Oriental Steamship Company liner RMS Orcades for a new life in New Zealand. They journeyed from Widnes to Tilbury on the overnight sleeper from Liverpool Lime Street to London Euston, before departing from St Pancras on the P&O Boat Train (at that time hauled by a Cricklewood based

Class 27 diesel) to Tilbury Riverside.

In 1972 when I was a pupil at Fairfield school in Widnes, one of the maths teachers (the late Alan Robinson) who became a very good friend, told me that he was going to West Germany to photograph steam locomotives, which were still active at various places on the Deutsche Bundesbahn network. He said he would be taking the Harwich to Hoek Van

Holland ferry, and then travelling from there to Mainz on the 'Loreley Express' where a friend who lived in Frankfurt would meet him. To get to Harwich he travelled on a Class 115 four car DMU from Warrington Central to Manchester Piccadilly, from where he boarded the 14.40 boat train to Harwich Parkeston Quay hauled by a Stratford allocated Class 37 hauling 11 coaches including Gresley buffet car E9195E in the formation. My appetite was whetted for trips abroad, but it was to be another 3 years before my first journey which began 20 years of travelling on the Harwich Boat Trains from the North West.

Before I come to my journey details, some history of the so called 'North Country Continental' is required. The service was introduced by the Great Eastern Railway in 1891 between Harwich and York. The route used was via Ipswich, Ely, March and then over the Great Northern and Great Eastern Joint Railway through Spalding, Sleaford, Lincoln and Gainsborough to Doncaster and then up the Great Northern Railway's East Coast main line via Selby to York. This brought a Great Eastern locomotive and carriages to York on weekdays.

In 1906, the Great Eastern Railway constructed a new 6 carriage train set for the service. Through carriages to other destinations were added, with two being detached at March for Birmingham New Street. One was worked by the Midland Railway via Peterborough East, Melton Mowbray and Leicester, while the other travelled over the London and North Western Railway from Peterborough East via Wansford, Market Harborough and Rugby Midland. Two other carriages were detached at Lincoln Central, and worked to Manchester Central and Liverpool Central over the Great Central Railway route via Torksey Worksop, Sheffield and the Woodhead route to Manchester Central, handing over to the Cheshire Lines Committee for the non-stop run to Liverpool.

Liverpool was also served by another carriage detached at Doncaster, and worked by the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway via Knottingley, Wakefield Kirkgate and the Calder Valley route, eventually terminating at Liverpool Exchange. One quirk of the service was that the westbound train started at Harwich Parkeston Quay but eastbound it terminated at Harwich Town, this practice only ceasing in 1962 when the eastbound service also terminated at Parkeston Quay.

After the first world war, some changes were made to the service. The main train including a restaurant car now operated from Harwich to Liverpool Central. Through carriages to Birmingham New Street via the Midland Railway, and to Liverpool Exchange were withdrawn.

At the grouping in 1923, the London and North Eastern Railway now operated the service. The remaining through carriage to Birmingham New Street via the LNWR route was taken off, while the main train was re-routed from Lincoln to Worksop via Gainsborough instead of the more direct Torksey route. The service now settled down to 30 years of operating on weekdays between the Essex Port and Merseyside.

In 1954, a major change took place with the Woodhead route electrification. Previously the steam engine (either a Class B1, B2 or B17) would work the train from Harwich to Manchester Central, returning the following day. At electrification, steam would be replaced by a Class EM1 or EM2 - later Class 76 & 77 - electric locomotive for the journey from Sheffield Victoria to Guide Bridge with a Trafford Park 2-6-4T taking the train to Manchester Central for the final leg to Liverpool. One other thing was that the restaurant car was detached at Sheffield Victoria enabling it to return on the same day's eastbound service. In the late 1950's, the ex LNER 4-6-0's were replaced on the Sheffield to Harwich portion by Norwich allocated Britannia Pacifics until 1961 when Class 37 diesels from

Stratford Depot started to appear on the service.

With diesels now introduced on the service, the Eastern Region decided that economies could be made as two sets of carriages were required to operate the service. It was decided that from 18th June 1962, the train would be diverted to terminate at Manchester Piccadilly. The restaurant car would once again operate all the way to Manchester and so crucially would the diesel locomotive. It was the only regular diesel hauled service through the Woodhead Tunnel, with March crews working through to Manchester, which they had done prior to the electrification in 1954.

The last Liverpool Central to Harwich services operated on Saturday 16th June 1962. The following Monday, a DMU operated connecting service started running non-stop from Liverpool Central to Manchester Piccadilly. The train used a track connection through Cornbrook carriage sidings to access the former Manchester South Junction and Altrincham Railway line from Altrincham to Manchester Piccadilly. Motive power was either Class 108 or 115 sets. Two years later the service was withdrawn due to lack of patronage.

During the next 8 years only minimal changes were made to the service. Class 47 diesels started operating the service. Occasionally a Class 31 made its way to Manchester, which wasn't a problem as March crews were trained on them. The restaurant car was removed in the mid 60's and replaced by an eclectic mix of ex LNER Gresley and Thompson buffet cars. Notable ones were Thompson 1948 Doncaster built E1705E & E1706E which were constructed as buffet lounge cars for the 1948 Flying Scotsman train sets. Both had been rebuilt as conventional buffet cars in 1959. After a period of operating on the boat trains, they were removed and sent to London to become the buffet cars on British

Rail's low cost 'Highwayman' service from Finsbury Park to Newcastle. Their replacements were Gresley teak bodied vehicles dating from the 1930's but rebuilt in the 1950's.

In 1970, the first major route change since LNER days took place when in January the Woodhead route closed to passenger traffic. The boat train was diverted to operate over the Hope Valley route with Sheffield Midland replacing Victoria as the stop in the steel city. From there, the train regained its normal route by taking the upgraded Nunnery curve. It was this route that Alan Robinson used on his 1972 West German trip. In 1973, Britain Rail proposed a radical re-route as part of the downgrading of the GN&GE joint line to a secondary route. Thus on 5th May 1973, the last Manchester to Harwich service departed Sheffield via Retford, Lincoln and Spalding to March. From the following Monday, the new route from Sheffield would be via Chesterfield, Nottingham, Grantham and Peterborough. The new route brought an end to the through working of locomotives as the train reversed at Sheffield. Tinsley depot was tasked with providing a locomotive to operate the Sheffield to Manchester leg of the train. By now Class 47's were the regular power on the service, so it was a welcome change that saw them provide Classes 37 & 45 locomotives to operate the Pennine section of the route.

It was via this route that I made my first ever journey to the continent on the service with Alan Robinson and Andrew Helsby in 1975. A Class 45 took us from Manchester to Sheffield where after reversal, a Class 47 hauled the train through to Harwich.

After this, although I used the Port of Harwich on several occasions, my journeys were via London using the Hook Continental service from Liverpool Street. In May 1983, Inter City decided to move the Nottingham to Glasgow service away from its traditional route via

Leeds and the Settle and Carlisle line, and divert them through Manchester, Preston and the West Coast main line. Included in the proposal was the extension of the Harwich service to Glasgow Central and Edinburgh, with the Manchester calling point now being Victoria instead of Piccadilly. This was achieved by the train using the Ashburys West Jct to Phillips Park Jct line. Later on when the Hazel Grove chord was opened, the train ran via Stockport and reached Victoria using the Denton Jct to Ashton Moss Jct line. The train had also acquired a name 'The European'. It was on this service that I travelled from Harwich to Edinburgh on 4th August 1986 behind 47547 to Sheffield. Providing the power from there to Preston was 47490, which was then replaced by 87004 'Britannia' to Carstairs. 47677 then worked the Edinburgh portion to Waverley.

The May 1987 timetable brought more changes with 'The European' being routed away from the Manchester and the East Midlands to run via Birmingham New Street and the newly overhead electrified North London line, enabling the Class 86 electric locomotive to operate all the way from Glasgow to Harwich. However, Manchester was not to be left without a service to the Essex Port. Enter the Standard class only 'Rhineland' formed of 7 early Mark 2 vehicles but no buffet car, although a refreshment trolley service was provided. A Stratford based Class 47 worked the train throughout, running round at Sheffield. On 29th June, I and my brother travelled on the service behind 47534 which departed Piccadilly at 15.27. Unfortunately we never got to Harwich as due to a lightning strike at Grantham knocking out all of the signals, we arrived at Ipswich an hour after the ship had sailed from Harwich. The Railway paid for a one night stay in a hotel, and we travelled to Germany the following day. On our return on 4th July, we took 'The European' from Harwich to Crewe behind 86239 L S Lowry. As it was a Saturday and engineer-

ing work was taking place, Class 47 No.47647 'Thor' was attached at Carpenters Road North Jct, to take us via Temple Mills, Tottenham South Jct and the then non-electrified Tottenham and Hampstead line to Gospel Oak and Kensal Green Jct. At this point, the diesel was removed for the onward journey via Rugby, Birmingham New Street and Stafford.

The 'Rhineland' lasted a year and, along with 'The European', was gone in the Summer 1988 timetable changes. Sprinterisation was taking place and 'The Rhineland' became 'The Loreley' departing Blackpool North at 14.14, utilising Class 156 units and traversing the Windsor link to call at both Manchester Oxford Road and Piccadilly. At Peterborough, a portion from Birmingham New Street was attached. In the first week of the new timetable on 21st May, I travelled on 156 403 from Blackpool to Harwich with 156 417 forming the Birmingham portion.

In the May 1989 timetable, a second train started running from Manchester Piccadilly to Harwich connecting with the day boat. It was named 'Britannia' and lasted for 2 years. In the summer of 1991, Blackpool lost most of its East Anglia services as they were diverted to Liverpool, and so from July of that year 'The Loreley' restored the link from Liverpool to Harwich for the first time in twenty nine years.

On 20th September 1991, along with my brother and late mother, I travelled on 'The Loreley' from Lime Street to Harwich. The route had also changed with an additional reversal at Nottingham, and reached Peterborough via Loughborough and Melton Mowbray. Formed of unit 156.402, the Birmingham portion now only operated in the west-bound direction, so for the return on 23rd September, 156.411 & 156.404 provided the traction with the latter unit detached at Peterborough to go on to Birmingham.

On 4th October, due to an incident in the

London area, I and a few friends intending to get to Harwich en route to Holland for the Werkgroep 1501 DC Tracker railtour (using NS 1501 former BR electric 27003 *'Diana'*), were stuck at Manningtree with no trains to Harwich. However the Station Manager arranged for *'The Loreley'* from Liverpool to be diverted into the station to pick us up. 158.768 was the unit on the train, calling at Mistley and Wrabness before terminating in Harwich. I'm pleased to say that we made the ship and the Railtour.

In 1992 *'The Loreley'* name was changed, thus the 13.56 to Harwich became *'The Vincent Van Goch'*. I went to travel on the service on the 28th of May. Unit 158.778 was scheduled to operate it but it was declared a failure at Lime Street and the service was cancelled. I eventually reached Harwich via London Euston and Liverpool Street.

On 17th October, I travelled from Harwich to Liverpool on *'The Vincent Van Goch'* formed of 158.848 & 158.852, the rear unit detached at Peterborough for Birmingham. At that time, I didn't realise that this was to be the last time I was able to travel from Liverpool to Harwich without changing trains. Privatisation took place in 1994 and the Harwich service was diverted to Norwich. From now onwards passengers would be required to change at Peterborough as a service to Harwich would start from there. On the 12th of August 1995, I utilised the service when 150.227 provided the motive power, and again on the 11th of September returning

from the Maasvlakte Marauder railtour with NS 1501, 150.213 *'Lord Nelson'* took me from Harwich to Peterborough. A year later on Sunday 11th of September 1996, 153.322 *'Benjamin Britten'* and 153.311 *'John Constable'* were the traction on the Peterborough service that I used from Ipswich to Harwich.

In 1997 the boat trains with any connections to the north ceased as Stena Line replaced the *'Koningen Beatrix'* and *'Stena Europe'* ships, with a high speed ship named *'Stena Discovery'* which operated two day sailings from Harwich to Hoek Van Holland. This lasted for ten years when conventional ships replaced the HSS, the *'Stena Hollandica'* and *'Stena Brittanica'* again operating day and night sailings to the Hook. A connecting train service was provided but now from Cambridge departing at 19.43 rather than Peterborough. I have used the service on several occasions. On 26th September 2008, 153.314, the 8th October 2010, 153.322 and 15th July 2017, 170.272 were the units travelled on. Since the beginning of 2020, a new Class 755 Stadler Flirt bi-modal unit has been provided, and despite the massive reduction in passenger trains due to the coronavirus, this service has continued to run daily.

It's unlikely that there will ever be a through service again from Liverpool to Harwich, as travel patterns have changed considerably over the years. It was fun while it lasted and always provided an interesting beginning and end to my European rail adventures.

Chris Hollins

'On Shed' journal material

The task of gathering in material for the journal is never ending. On that basis, you will not be surprised to learn that before this edition is published, material for the next edition - due in just 3 months time - is already being sought. Any news items,

comments, photographs or tales of yesteryear are always most welcome ! I would be very grateful for your assistance if you feel able to contribute material for publication. Many thanks.

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Memories of Mollington Street MPD (Part 9)

Dennis Flood

During my time as a driver at Mollington Street I had the good fortune to work with all sorts of interesting individuals some of whom were great 'characters', to say the least !

There were several signalmen who worked in the area between Birkenhead Docks and Helsby West Cheshire Junction who were also 'characters' who I got to know very well and a few of them became lifelong friends.

One of these great 'characters' passed away earlier this year and deserves a special mention – **Fred Simpson**.

I first met Fred when he worked at Heswall Hills signal box. It was on a Sunday in October 1974 when I was working an iron ore train from Bidston Dock to Shotwick Sidings. Single line working was in force between Heswall Hills and Shotwick Sidings over the 'up' line which meant that as my train was travelling in the right direction towards Shotwick Sidings on the 'down' line I had to stop at Heswall Hills and, when permitted, cross over to the 'up' line and then travel in the 'wrong direction' under the authority of a Pilotman to Shotwick sidings.

Single line working (SLW) is introduced when one line of two lines of railway is out of use for planned engineering work or emergencies and only one remaining line is in use for train movements. An individual called a Pilotman is appointed and he, in conjunction with the signalman, oversees safe working of trains over the remaining line open to traffic. In this instance I had to draw the train forward beyond the signal box at Heswall Hills and stand beyond it until the train travelling on the 'up' line, which was travelling in the right direction towards Bidston, had cleared Bidston Dee Junction at Bidston station.

As I had about 15 - 20 minutes before the 'up' train would arrive at Bidston station this gave me the opportunity to visit the signal box to make a 'brew'. Fred had the kettle on and welcomed me into his signal box. We introduced ourselves and little did I realise then that our friendship would last over 45 years until Fred's very untimely death earlier this year.

As I was making myself a 'brew', I noticed Fred had a chamois leather tied around his right shoe and he was dragging it along as he moved across the floor of the signal box in a perfectly normal, but not in a deliberate manner. *'What's with the chamois leather wrapped around your right foot, Fred'*, I asked. *'It saves me bending down to clean the floor at the end of my shift'*, replied Fred !

In subsequent years when I visited Heswall Hills signal box and later when Fred worked at Canning Street North signal box between Birkenhead Duke Street and Green lane Junction he always wore a chamois leather around his right foot to clean the floor as he worked. Most signal boxes in those days had oilcloth floor covering and it was quite easy to keep the floor clean with water and a mop. Fred chose to use his trademark chamois leather instead !

When it came to crossing over a 1000 ton loose-coupled train of iron ore at Heswall Hills, through the crossover between the down and up lines, driving 'dead slow' was the order of the day. We had to make sure that the driving cab of the leading locomotive didn't go more than a few feet past the mechanical ground disc signal, which controlled movements travelling 'down' over the 'up' line towards Shotwick Sidings. This was because the rear of the train was just about to

enter the falling gradient towards Bidston. It was, therefore, very important not to go too far past the mechanical ground disc signal.

Even with the assistance of the guard applying his handbrake on the brake van at the rear (the regular Bidston Dock guards were always first class to work with), a train of that weight wouldn't take much to start rolling backwards on the falling gradient if a driver went too far beyond the mechanical ground disc signal. It always occupied my mind when carrying out this movement !



Above : Heswall Hills Box - where Fred Simpson combined roles of signalman and floor polisher !

Fred always said the same thing to me each time I carried out such a move... *'Don't go too far Dennis, you don't want to be going backwards through Upton station at 60 miles an hour – you'll upset the locals if you hit a 'sparky' from West Kirby at Bidston !'* (Upton station was situated between Heswall Hills and Bidston). Thanks Fred.

When Fred was working at Canning Street North signal box, he would always invite any railway enthusiasts who turned up into the box for a cup of tea and to ask him what was *'on the dock'*. I can only imagine what they must have thought when they saw a chamois leather tied around his right foot !

He had a *'rockery'* directly opposite the signal box but this was no garden *'rockery'*. When

he was going home at about 4pm each day he would always re-arrange the twenty or so bricks which formed his *'rockery'* into the numbers of locomotives which had worked out of Birkenhead Duke Street sidings during his shift. *'So the spotters who turn up when I've gone home for the day know what's been at Duke Street !'*

In retirement Fred would ring me up for a chat and when I answered the phone he would say to me *'ring me back, Dennis !'* and then immediately put the phone down. When I did and asked him why, he said *'You became a railway manager in your career, I was just a poor signalman – your pension is better than mine !'*

It was a pleasure to have worked with Fred and to have known him for over 45 years. There was only one Fred Simpson.

I was once sat in the messroom in Chester in the mid-1970s when a Chester driver I knew well, **Don Morrison**, came in and suddenly told me *'Your mate has fell out of the signal box at Port Sunlight !'* There was laughter all round but Don said *'I'm not kidding !'* Don was working an afternoon train from Rock Ferry to Chester when he was stopped at the box by the signalman at Port Sunlight to be told that the *'up'* section signal wire had snapped and he was authorised to *'pass the section signal at danger and to observe and obey all others'*. The signalman then withdrew his red flag from the view of the driver and gave him a green flag exhibited outside the signal box to proceed. It would be a yellow hand signal these days but it was a green hand signal at that time.

Don crossed the cab floor of the DMU, sat down, and then pulled away quietly in first gear. He had not travelled more than a few yards when a passenger banged on the cab door shouting *'Stop, stop, stop, stop !'* He immediately put the brake on, stopped and opened the cab door *'What's up ?'*, he said to



Top left : Joe Helms who retired in his early 80s after serving for 65 years ! **Centre :** Ellesmere Port No.2 Box.
Right : Ellesmere Port No.5 Box,, scene of the Bardic lamp checks by 'Inspector Mossrapper' (alias Derek Collins).

the passenger. *'The signalman has just fallen out of the signal box !'*

Don crossed the cab floor and opened the cab door window to have a look. He then saw the signalman lying on the ground. *'Christ, he has fell out !'* He jumped out of the cab and ran over, calling to the guard for help. They found the signalman unconscious on the ground and, very fortunately, there was a nurse on the train who came over to help.

The signalman was turning blue and the nurse quickly realised that his tongue had blocked his airway. She cleared the airway and then put him in the recovery position. This action saved his life. He was taken to Arrowe Park hospital where, thankfully and remarkably, it was found that he had not suffered life threatening injuries. As he is still working, I shall not mention his name but I gave him the nickname of the 'Kamikaze' and that is what I still call him to this day !

Don Morrison embellished this story as the years passed by telling all and sundry that he actually saw the signalman fall out of the box and if he was a judge at the Olympic games he would have given him 5.4 for *presentation*, 5.8 for *downward movement*, but only 0.5 for the *crash landing*! There was never any sympathy from footplate men in those days ! He is another signalman who became a good

friend of mine and who I have known for over 45 years. He certainly made his mark (on the ground !) when he was at Port Sunlight.

The 'branch', as we called the line between Hooton and Helsby, was always very busy with trains to and from Stanlow oil refinery, the local passenger services from Rock Ferry to Helsby and return, plus the local freight trips between Birkenhead Docks, Port Sunlight sidings and Ellesmere Port. There were six signal boxes at one time between Hooton and Ellesmere Port. They were at Little Sutton, Ellesmere Port No.1, Ellesmere Port No.2, Ellesmere Port No.3, Ellesmere Port No.4 and Ellesmere Port No.5.

Joe Helms was a signalman at Ellesmere Port No.2. He worked on the railway for over 65 years and received **two** long service awards in that time ! He was an amazing individual.

British Railways had a problem in the Ellesmere Port area in the early to mid-1970s with retaining signalmen. There were always vacancies for signalmen in the area in those days and numerous individuals who had just been employed as signalmen did not stay long.

Some would start training at Ellesmere Port (usually at Ellesmere Port No.5 signal box, the smallest and easiest to train in) and would then leave for a variety of reasons.

It was at that time that Joe Helms was approaching retirement age (65). He was not looking forward to it. Joe enjoyed his job !

The local Area Signalling Inspector (ASI) had problems every week in covering and rostering signalmen to cover all the shifts in the six signal boxes in the Ellesmere Port area. He was aware that Joe wanted to continue working beyond retirement age. A remarkable arrangement was then agreed involving the Area Signalling Inspector, the Area Manager, Joe himself and the local National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) trade union representative.

The NUR representative was a very sensible individual who was well aware of the difficulties in covering signalman posts in the Ellesmere Port area and he agreed that Joe could continue working providing he retired when *'sufficient staff become available and are retained'* and, furthermore, be subject to a medical examination at six-monthly intervals to ensure that Joe was still fit to continue his job. This magnanimous, and at the time, unprecedented gesture by the NUR was welcomed by the local management – not to mention by Joe Helms himself. The arrangement lasted for very many years, and Joe finally retired in his early 80s !

The NUR representative was happy with this arrangement as Joe was receiving regular medical examinations and the original agreement that *'sufficient staff become available and are retained'* was not being met. No agreements were being broken and all parties were acting in good faith with each other.

What was ironic about Joe was that his eventual retirement came about not because of a health issue but that he was finding it difficult to pull the signal levers over in Ellesmere Port No.2 signal box ! Joe's son had long retired before Joe finally retired from railway service.

When I needed to visit Ellesmere Port No.2 signal box during shunting movements in

Ellesmere Port west end yard, usually to make the inevitable 'brew', I always asked Joe *'What was it like to work with George Stephenson ?'* His reply was always the same *'He wasn't much of a signalman' !*

Ellesmere Port No.5 signal box (and indeed the West Cheshire area) had the first Chinese signalman. **Wai Kee Leoung** became a bit of a character as time went on. The nickname he was given entered local railway folklore whilst he was at Ellesmere Port, but before I reveal it a further explanation is required so it can be fully appreciated. Most signal boxes, but not all, are capable of being *'switched out'* by means of a **Block Switch**. This allows signal boxes situated on either side of the *'switched out'* signal box to maintain block and bell communication with each other.

Imagine signal box 'A', signal box 'B' and signal box 'C'. Signal box 'B' can be *'switched out'* with through communication between signal boxes 'A' and 'C' by means of a **Block Switch**.

On a Saturday afternoon at Ellesmere Port, when there was only the local passenger service running back and forth between Rock Ferry and Helsby, and freight traffic movements had ceased for most of the weekend, it was normal for all signal boxes except Ellesmere Port No.4 to be *'switched out'*.

If Stanlow & Thornton and Helsby West Cheshire Junction signal boxes were also *'switched out'* the **Block Section** was then between Ellesmere Port No.4 (**3m.70ch**) and Helsby Junction (**8m.61ch**) a *'long block'* of nearly 5 miles.

Ellesmere Port No.4 signal box is still in situ today. It deals with Merseyrail electric services from Liverpool Central and the very irregular passenger services from Ellesmere Port to Helsby and beyond - a far cry from what it once dealt with. The signal box is now simply referred to as Ellesmere Port following

the closure of all other signal boxes in the area due to rationalisation and the change in traffic volume.

Now, having explained the principle of a *'long block'* in signalling terms, that takes me back to Wai Kee Leoung and his nickname **'Won Long Block'**. He was universally known by that name for the rest of his working career in the Ellesmere Port area. He took it in good faith, which was to his great credit.

Derek Collins was a signalman at Helsby Junction - yet another *'character'*. Each signal box on British Railways was provided with what is now universally known as a Bardic hand lamp, made by the Bardic Company of Southampton. The lamp was the finest lamp ever to be used on British Railways. Made from light steel alloy the lamp is very robust and can display a red, green or normal white light. To change to any of these colours was a simple operation by the action of turning a rotary switch on the top of the Bardic lamp until the appropriate colour of plastic sleeve covered the bulb. Some Bardic lamps could display a yellow light, as well.

Derek was a great practical joker and when **Wai Kee Leoung** took over as a newly qualified signalman at Ellesmere Port No.5 (ie. before he was known as Won Long Block !) he decided it was time to have some fun with Wai Kee.

Railway Inspectors in those days were universally recognized by the wearing of a collar, tie and trilby hat but what made them really stand out was the wearing of the regulation black *'gaberdine'* mackintosh. They could be identified instantly and anywhere when wearing this attire - every railwayman could instantly recognize an Inspector from a few hundred yards away !

Derek somehow obtained one of these black *'gaberdine'* mackintoshes and, on his way home to Ellesmere Port one night after completing his 1400 - 2200 shift at Helsby Junction,

he turned up at Ellesmere Port No.5 signal box on a Honda 50 motorcycle ! No self-respecting Inspector would ever be seen on a bicycle never mind a Honda 50 motorcycle - it was all about image and authority in those days ! However, Derek did not drive a car at that time and his trusty Honda 50 was all he had to get to and from work - apart from the train, of course.

Now for some fun with Wai Kee

He parked his Honda 50 outside the signal box and got out the *'gaberdine'* mackintosh from the carrier on the back and put it on. He didn't have a trilby hat but that didn't really matter - it was the black *'gaberdine'* mackintosh that was all important. He entered the signal box and, as Wai Kee did not know him, he almost stood to attention as Derek came in. *'I'm Inspector Mossrapper, Bardic handlamp Inspector, get your Bardic lamp out for inspection lad'*, said Derek. *'Very good, Sir'*, said Wai Kee as he jumped towards the block shelf. *'Right lad, go to the end of the signal box and I'll tell you what I want you to do'*, said Derek. Wai Kee jumped to it and obeyed immediately. *'Right, show me the white light, now the red light, now the green light'*. Wai Kee's fingers were spinning around like a demented piano player. *'Right lad, swing it up and down and from side to side*'. Wai Kee complied and was swinging his arms around like a windmill. *'Calm down, lad'* said Derek, *'the lamp inspection is over'*. *'Thank you very much'*, said Wai Kee. *'Only one thing to tell you, lad, you need a replacement lamp battery. Other than that, it can still be used'*, said Derek. *'Thank you sir'*, said Wai Kee. Derek signed the signal box Train Register and off he went home.

A few days later the Area Signalling Inspector arrived at Ellesmere Port No.5 signal box for a visit. He noticed that an *'Inspector Mossrapper Bardic hand lamp Inspector'* had also signed the train register. *'Who is this bloke Inspector Mossrapper ?'*, asked the ASI. *'He's a very nice man.'*, said Wai Kee. *'I'll very nice*

man him when I catch up with him', said the Area Signalling Inspector ! The Area Signalling Inspector knew his men and he knew this was the work of a certain signalman who liked a practical joke - and one who worked at Helsby Junction signal box. 'I'll be having a word with Inspector Mossrapper Collins when I next see him!'

Last but not least was **Harry Reid**, who was a signalman at Hooton South signal box during my time as a driver at Birkenhead Mollington Street. Harry was, by far, the most unhinged of all of the signalmen I have mentioned in this article.

I was working a Chester to Rock Ferry afternoon DMU service in August 1977 and it was a very warm day. There was a 'fixed' (unworked) distant signal for Hooton South located just beyond the old Ledsham Junction station, where the up and down slow lines once were for Birkenhead Woodside.

I slowed down and I was looking out for the down home signal and, when I sighted it, it was 'on' (ie. at danger). This was unusual but not unexpected as I thought there might be a train or a light locomotive coming off the 'branch' from the Ellesmere Port direction.

I stopped at the down home signal, waited for a few minutes and sounded the DMU horn to alert the Hooton South signalman. There was no signal post telephone provided at this signal so I was unable to speak to the signalman directly. There was no response. After about ten minutes of waiting I told the guard that I was going to walk to Hooton South signal box, about a quarter of a mile away, to see what was going on. I secured the train and off I went. When I reached Hooton South signal box I went in to find that there was no signalman there but the radio was on. It was like a scene from the 'Mary Celeste'! I checked the toilet. The signalman wasn't there. His coat was hanging up and his bag was on the table but there was no sign of

him. Where is he ?

There was a signal box at Hooton North and signalman **Raymond Dickie** was on duty. I had seen Ray in the signal box earlier in the day so I rang him on the phone. 'Hello, Hooton North', said Ray. 'Hello Ray, this is Dennis here, the driver of the DMU sat at Hooton South's down home signal - where is the signalman ? He's not in the box', I said. 'Harry Reid's on duty, Dennis', said Ray. 'That bloody lunatic, where is the twit ?', I replied. 'He's probably collecting plums from the plum tree on the old West Kirby branch a few hundred yards from the box, give him a shout on the megaphone, that'll bring him back - he always collects his plums on a Tuesday' said Ray. 'A Tuesday ? What kind of a railway is this ?. Alright, I'll give it a go', I said.

I picked up the signal box megaphone and shouted in the direction of the old West Kirby



Above : Signalman Harry Reid at work in Hooton South Box. **Photo by Mark Davies**

line 'Harry, where are you' ? You're delaying the Chester DMU. Can you hear me, Harry ?'. I shouted again but much louder this time 'Harry, come back to the box, for Christ's sake !'. Just then a figure came out of the bushes carrying two bags - full of plums. I put the megaphone back on the shelf in the signal box and waited for Harry. He came up the stairs slightly breathless with his two bags of plums in tow. 'You've delayed the Chester DMU for 20 minutes, what are you playing at Harry ?'. 'It's Tuesday, it's plum day', said

Harry. *'Here, have a plum, they're nice and ripe – I'll make some good plum jam out of this lot'.* I cannot possibly say in this article what I told Harry to do with his plums !

'Get that bloody home signal off and let me get out of here'. When I got back to my train, I was about to tell my guard what had happened and to guess who the signaller on duty was, but before I could say anything to him he said *'Let me guess – it's Harry Reid and today is Tuesday – it's plum day'.* I asked him *'Are you that lunatics brother then ?'.* *'No',* said my guard – *'but around here BR doesn't stand for British Railways –*

it stands for Birkenhead Railways because its full of lunatics like Harry Reid. Where's my plum then, Dennis ?'.

I heard nothing more about that delay, and what Harry Reid and Raymond Dickie had done to explain away the delay I have no idea to this very day. Maybe Harry gave the Area Manager a few of his ripe plums to keep him sweet – in more ways than one. I submitted a report when I booked off duty stating that I was delayed for 15 minutes at Hooton South but I heard no more about it.

Birkenhead Railways indeed !

(To be continued ...)

Editor's note : Members' photographs for publication

I am grateful to those members who have contributed photographs for publication. I know that the images are appreciated by fellow rail enthusiasts. Thank you for your support.

Below : Rock Ferry : *Before the third-rail was extended through the Wirral to Hooton and beyond, a Liverpool bound service leaves from platform 3. Power car M28683M clearly shows the modifications required to allow the Class 503 sets to work through the new Liverpool Loop. Needless to say, the signal box and semaphores were swept away during Stage 1 of the Merseyrail Wirral Line resignalling in September 1994.*

Photograph by David Allen





Above : Seacombe Junction : Two 3-car Class 503 sets form an evening new Brighton to Liverpool Central L.L (old station) service in September 1972. Note, the unit has yet to be modified to allow it to work through the planned single bore tunnels. The train has passed the photographer and will take the left fork towards Birkenhead North. Two Class 24s are waiting on the long closed spur from Bidson with iron ore empties from Shotwick Sidings bound for Bidston Dock. After a prolonged period of being 'switched out', Seacombe Junction SB was destroyed in an arson attack in May 1989.

Photograph by David Allen

Below : Birkenhead Mollington Street : On 8th April, 1979, Class 47/3 No 47334 positions redundant Class 502 emu sets at depot. From left to right, the Class 47 is flanked by Class 502 sets lead by M28341M and M28322M power cars.

Photograph by David Allen

