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# The Marlow Donkey

The Magazine of the Marlow & District Railway Society

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### FRONT COVER PHOTOGRAPHS

*Top: 37685 at Bourne End Saturday 16 July 2011.*

*Photo: Peter Robins. (Article page 3).*

*Bottom: EWS 66169 at High Wycombe with ballast train on 25 August 2011.*

*Photo: Geoff Plumb. (Article page 4).*



# SOCIETY AND LOCAL NEWS

## PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Our first joint meeting with the Windsor & Maidenhead branch of the RCTS in June was a great success when George Reeve, due to technical problems, digressed slightly from the advertised programme on the Southern route between Exeter and Plymouth to take us on a tour of North Cornwall line from Okehampton to Padstow. George is the proprietor of the Irwell Press which has published the definitive history of this remote line from which he was able to draw a wide range of photographs along with some views of what's there now.

Our Chairman, Tim Speechley was the speaker in July when he blew the dust off his slide collection to take us back to the nineteen seventies. The variety of Tim's collection and the quality of photography was remarkable as we were taken on a tour of the country and a few forays into Europe. It wasn't all trains, being Tim a few vintage motor vehicles and ships got in on the act too. We are promised part two next summer which is something to look forward to.

## SUMMER VISITS

There have been several visits during the summer months two of which are featured elsewhere in this issue. First was a visit by a dozen members to Hollycombe at the beginning of June followed by two sessions on First Great Western's Class 165 simulator at Reading which was well supported by members keen to show off how much they knew about driving trains. If FGW hoped to get some recruits from the exercise they were out of luck as we all failed miserably but it was great fun all the same. A full report also appears in this issue.

*37685 at Bourne End on Saturday 16th July.*

*Photo: Peter Robins*

The visit to the Bredgar & Wormshill and Sittingbourne & Kemsley railways in Kent on 7th August generated little interest from members and as Tim remarks in his Chairman's Notes only four took part and they were somewhat disappointed by what they found, particularly the shortness of the former.

## SOCIETY DIGITAL PROJECTOR

The launch of this proved problematic. Twice it failed to operate at Society meetings despite having worked perfectly at Julian's home and we were fortunate to be able to fall back on Julian's old one as a substitute. After the second failure, it also failed at Julian's and was promptly returned to the supplier for a replacement.

This was trialled at the July meeting (although Tim's presentation was on slides) and appears to be working properly and giving an impressive picture quality. Hopefully the problems are now resolved.

## LOCO-HAULED AT BOURNE END

Normally the preserve of FGW Turbos, the first loco-hauled passenger train to visit Bourne End for more than forty years did so early on 16th July when the branch was included in the itinerary of Spitfire Railtours' 'Root 'n' Branch' tour. It was topped-and-tailed by 37685 and 37516.

In addition there have been two loco-hauled Network Rail test trains over the branch in recent months. On 31st May 37059 and 37604 topped-and-tailed a late running train whilst 31106 running push-pull ran early on 11th August.



## LAST BIG PUSH FINISHES CHILTERN MAINLINE

After several delays caused by a number of factors not least the failure of contractor Jarvis, Chiltern's troubled Evergreen 3 project was completed at the end of August with a two week blockade of the main lines.

During the first week, Marylebone was closed completely to allow the remodelling of Neasden South Junction to permit high speed running towards High Wycombe. During this period a twice-hourly shuttle service operated between Bicester North and Paddington using trains of up to 7 cars whilst an hourly service from Birmingham was diverted south of Banbury to run to Didcot Parkway.

The second week saw Marylebone reopened but only for services to Amersham and Aylesbury. Crews were busy at several locations along the Joint Line carrying out a major remodelling of Northolt Junction, where the line speed for through trains is now 100mph and the physical junction removed for non-stop trains, and completing the new through line at Princes Risborough.

At High Wycombe the Up line has been relaid and realigned to permit higher speeds and the crossover west of the station relaid. In its new form the speed through it is reduced from 45 to 25mph but this is not a problem as it is only used occasionally and mostly by trains calling at the station. The photos right show work underway on 25th August with 66169 waiting with a ballast train. Note that signal ME150 had just been renewed with a LED searchlight head.

*Photo: Geoff Plumb*



*Two photos: Tim Edmonds*



The speeded-up Chiltern Mainline service was able to be launched from Monday 5th September, nearly a year later than planned, and with it comes a new livery for the loco-hauled trains based on the former Wrexham & Shropshire colours but with additional two-tone blue striping and branding.

Four loco-hauled sets were in operation from the start of the new timetable and more will be added as Wabtec at Doncaster release further refurbished coaches which will feature power-operated plug doors. Once those are delivered the existing vehicles will go to Wabtec for similar modification.

The displaced class 168s will be used on the new service to Oxford now expected to begin in 2015.

# HOLLYCOMBE GALA VISIT

David Collins



Photos: Tim Speechley unless noted.



On 4th June twelve members attended Hollycombe Steam Museum on the occasion of their Railway Gala. The Museum is situated on the Hampshire/Sussex border and boasts many steam orientated attractions including a 2ft gauge railway of about a mile, a short standard gauge line and a 7¼ inch gauge line. In addition to a fairground, steam worked farm, an engine from a paddle steamer, plus over 30 traction engines and steam rollers in various conditions of restoration. Including the oldest showman's engine in the world, built by Burrell in 1895 and named *Emprorer*.

Tim Speechley picked me up from the British Legion Club Car Park in Marlow and once we had collected Mike Hyde we headed for Hampshire, but not as I expected via the M40, M25 and A3, but westwards on the M4 to Reading then due south cross country eventually reaching Alton, where we passed under the Mid Hants, thence on through Bordon (a one time terminus of the Longmoor Military Railway) and Liss. Passing thorough the latter we passed the Royal Anchor pub which has a railway connection because a 15 inch gauge diesel locomotive of the same name was built there (the loco ran briefly at Romney, before being used on the Ravenglass & Eskdale for some years in the 1960s. It is now based in the USA). Reaching Hollycombe we were greeted by along queue of cars - it transpired that the admissions were being taken as cars were driving in and the attendant was a bit slow. When we eventually parked we set out to explore the delights of the museum.

Most attention for the day was on the 2ft gauge which consists of a circuit with a spur to the station adjacent to the main entrance. Working the passenger trains on the day

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of our visit was Polish 0-6-0T *Tourska* [**Opposite bottom**] which was seen at Statfold Barn last year, with visitors 0-4-0T Wren Class *Jennie* [**Opposite top**] built in 2005 and de Winton style 0-4-0 Vertical Boiler loco *Paddy* [**Right top**] built in 2007 which worked short worked short passenger and freight workings from a recently constructed halt.

Another visitor in the form of a German loco [**Right centre**] which made several light engine runs along the station spur, nobody has been able to identify it (if anyone can help let us know). The museum's resident 2 foot gauge Hunslet 0-4-0T *Jerry M* is currently undergoing overhaul, while the other 2 foot gauge loco was nowhere to be seen. Nevertheless there was plenty of action to photograph (or in Julian Heard's case, to video) and things went without a hitch, apart from one of the former Southern Railway signals failing to raise and a member of staff pulling the signal wire to get it up, and becoming very red faced!!

Working the standard gauge line (known as "The Tramway") was a 0-4-0VB loco named *Yvonne* [**Bottom right**] built in 1920 in Belgium. This line runs from the far end of the funfair, past the 2ft gauge terminus to a point near the farm. The other standard gauge loco is a Hawthorn Leslie 0-4-0ST named "Commander B" built in 1899 which is currently out of traffic.

Several members enjoyed a ride on the a 7¼ inch gauge railway [**Bottom left**], operated by the Liphook Model Engineering Society, with trains being worked by a 0-4-2T Tinkerbell type loco named *Bob*. This line is laid out as a dumbbell loop which encircles a shorter 7¼ and 5 inch dual gauge circuit, on which a model of a Class 47 was being run.

As well as the action on the railways, members also viewed the many traction engines and took a ride through woodland on a trailer towed by Burrell Tractor No. 2 *Sunset* dating from 1951. The fairground was in action with many steam powered rides (Mike Hyde, Tim Speechley and yours truly had a ride on the big wheel) worked by two portable



Photo: Mike Hyde

engines. The Bioscope was also in action powered by a Showman's Engine *Leiston Town* built by Richard Garrett & Sons in 1918. Also there were various model railway layouts on display.

On the whole it was an enjoyable day, although it would have been nice to have seen different locomotives on the passenger train and perhaps a demonstration of steam ploughing. Never mind perhaps next time I visit ...



# LEARNING TO DRIVE A TURBO

Mike Walker



*Photo: Mike Walker*

Back in the 1950s and 60s it was not unknown for British Railways to allow members of groups such as ours to take driving lessons on a branch line, usually on a Sunday when the line did not have a scheduled service. The university railway societies at Cambridge and Oxford often took advantage of this.

Today most heritage railways offer "driving experience" courses on both steam and diesel traction but whilst these give a feel for running a train one does not get the opportunity to get to drive a modern train on the main line.

Naturally, it is impossible to even consider allowing "amateurs" to take the control of a real train on the main line but thanks to our friends at First Great Western several members got the chance to have a go at the next best thing: the Class 165 'Turbo' simulators at Reading.

*Mike Hyde makes good progress [Above] on the open road whilst Peter Greatorox is a study in concentration [Below] as he guides "165114" into platform 11 at Paddington.*

*Photo: Tim Edmonds*



Two visits were arranged each comprising four one-hour sessions with three members at a time. The start of the first session was considerably delayed when the simulator refused to boot-up correctly but all went well on the second visit and we had both simulators in action allowing us to get more experience.

Whilst many of us have one of the proprietary train simulators on our home PCs, these simulators replicate the actual cab controls along with all the sounds heard on the real train.

Normally they are seldom used for the training of new drivers which is undertaken on actual trains under supervision, naturally.



*Two photos: Tim Edmonds*

The simulators' role is to aid the assessment of drivers and to train them on how to handle unusual incidents such as line obstructions, adverse weather or faults on the train all of which can not be easily arranged on the main line.

The driver follows a CGI impression of the route (loosely based on Paddington to Pangbourne) onto which the instructor in the adjacent room can create incidents. Here, FGW's Simulator Manager Brian Clarke [Left] has set a fallen tree in the path of Julian Heard [Above] one of numerous hazards thrown at us during the first visit.



Everyone who took part found the experience most enjoyable but it soon became obvious that driving a modern train is not as easy as it looks!

Once again we must thank FGW and in particular Mark Hopwood and Brian Clarke for allowing us this rare privilege.

Brian noted that new, more advanced simulators are on order and hinted that we might be able to try them sometime next year.

*The real thing. The cab of a Class 165 showing the similarity with that of the simulator.*

*Photo: Mike Walker*



# TUSCANY - A BRIEF VISIT BY TRAIN

STORY AND PICTURES BY MIKE HYDE



*Trenitalia 741.120 a Crosti-boilered 2-8-0 built by Breda in 1920 stands at the head of a train of suitably vintage stock at Rimini on 11th April 2011.*

I opted to take this eight day tour in April 2011 rather than join the RTC's Great Britain 4 having taken all the other GBs previously. A difficult choice but I think I was right..

After flying into Bologna and taking a short rest at the bar we took a scheduled FS service to Rimini where we were to spend our first night. A long straight track with low rise buildings and fruit farms most of the way. Rimini is an interesting holiday resort where I spent my first visit to Italy over 30 years ago. Plenty of Roman remains and structures though I spent time with old friends.

Next morning we joined our charter train from Rimini to Florence. It was drawn by a Class 741.120 a Crosti boiler engine, one of two still around (we saw the other in La Spezia later). Lots of smoke and noise from the boiler-side exhaust. A break at Faenza for a stroll and lunch then on though wonderful country to the renaissance city of Florence.

We were due a guide tour of the city that morning so I took the opportunity of getting the group on to the new street tram system for a short ride. After the tour and lunch we had time to wander at will. Some went to the station others took in the whole tram system.

Next day we had 2-6-0 No.625.142 with our vintage carriages to take us to Siena. As the line was reasonably busy we could only take photos in station stops but at Poggibonsi we were held longer than anticipated. Apparently we had set off a line side fire. Actually it was

which only needed a spark from the firebox was hardly surprising given the long dry grass everywhere. According to local TV News it took 5 fire crews 3 hours to bring it under control ! I saw the smoke in the far distance and jokingly said to another passenger we were being followed by another steamer. Nevertheless, after a lot of mobile negotiations by staff we were eventually allowed to proceed with caution to Siena half an hour away. Lunch was in my favourite town of San Gimignano.

*Tram No.1011 street running on route T1 in Florence (Firenze).*



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Not surprisingly our steam excursion the next day was cancelled. However we were supplied with an older type diesel loco D343-2026 in red-green-brown heritage colours for our day round trip to Monte Amiata. A lot of photo stops though it was not always easy as everything at the lineside was overgrown or thorny. But a good day was had and we all recognised that had we had steam on this track we would certainly started many fires due to the undergrowth.

*Italian steam was certainly distinctive as demonstrated by 2-6-2 685.089 entering Piazza al Serchio station for a lunch stop after a very hard climb from Pisa and 2-6-0 625.142 backing on to its train in Florence which has inside cylinders but outside valves and valve gear*

Another guided tour followed in Siena. Here lunch was in a restaurant by the Campo, site of the famous 'Palio' horse race around the piazza. Somehow we 'lost' 2 people here but they caught us up later. We were heading by coach to Pisa for an overnight stay but not without an arranged stop at Pistoia. Here were lined up many dead steam and diesel locos and railcars. Snap-happy!

Next day was perhaps the highlighted of the tour. FS No.685.089 2-6-2 took us on a round trip via a challenging country branch line to Piazza al Serchio. Magnificent scenery, long pulls and a great lunch stop. That afternoon we went on to La Spezia where I had arranged to visit the Railway Museum. We actually went straight in with our train which was another bonus. It was here we saw the other Crosti engine 743.301 looking more like a naval MTB with 2 'torpedo tubes', one on each side of the main boiler. Photos were difficult here but the site was well worth the visit and we were made very welcome. The run back to Pisa was down the coastal main line when 685.089 showed its paces. A very charming, graceful but effective engine.

*The medieval town of San Gimignano from the top of the main tower, one of 14 remaining.*

Our last day started with a guided tour of Pisa and lunch (of course) and then the flight home. In all a very good tour with sightseeing of the principal cities, plenty of steam traction., railway visits and good hotels. I lost count of the variety of pasta we encountered but still managed to consume helped by occasional litres of red wine. I am happy to pass on any details or to tell you how to book for next year.

*FS 2-8-2 tank no. 940.008 in Pistoia Depot*





## A Day by the Seaside

As another summer draws to a close where better to spend a day than along the seawall section between Dawlish Warren and Teignmouth especially when such stirring sights as 6024 *King Edward I* passing Dawlish with the *Torbay Express* on 13th June 2010 can still be enjoyed. In this timeless spot it's only the cars that show it was not half a century earlier.



A FGW Class 153 and 142 pass Sprey Point just east of Teignmouth with a local from Paignton to Exmouth.

The 08.57 Paddington to Penzance is caught about to enter Parsons Tunnel, the fifth, longest and last of the group between Dawlish and Teignmouth,



Photos: Mike Walker



Sprinter 150278, one of a small number of Arriva Trains Wales units which have been operating for FGW, emerges from Clerk's Tunnel with Dawlish in the background whilst working an Exmouth to Paignton local.



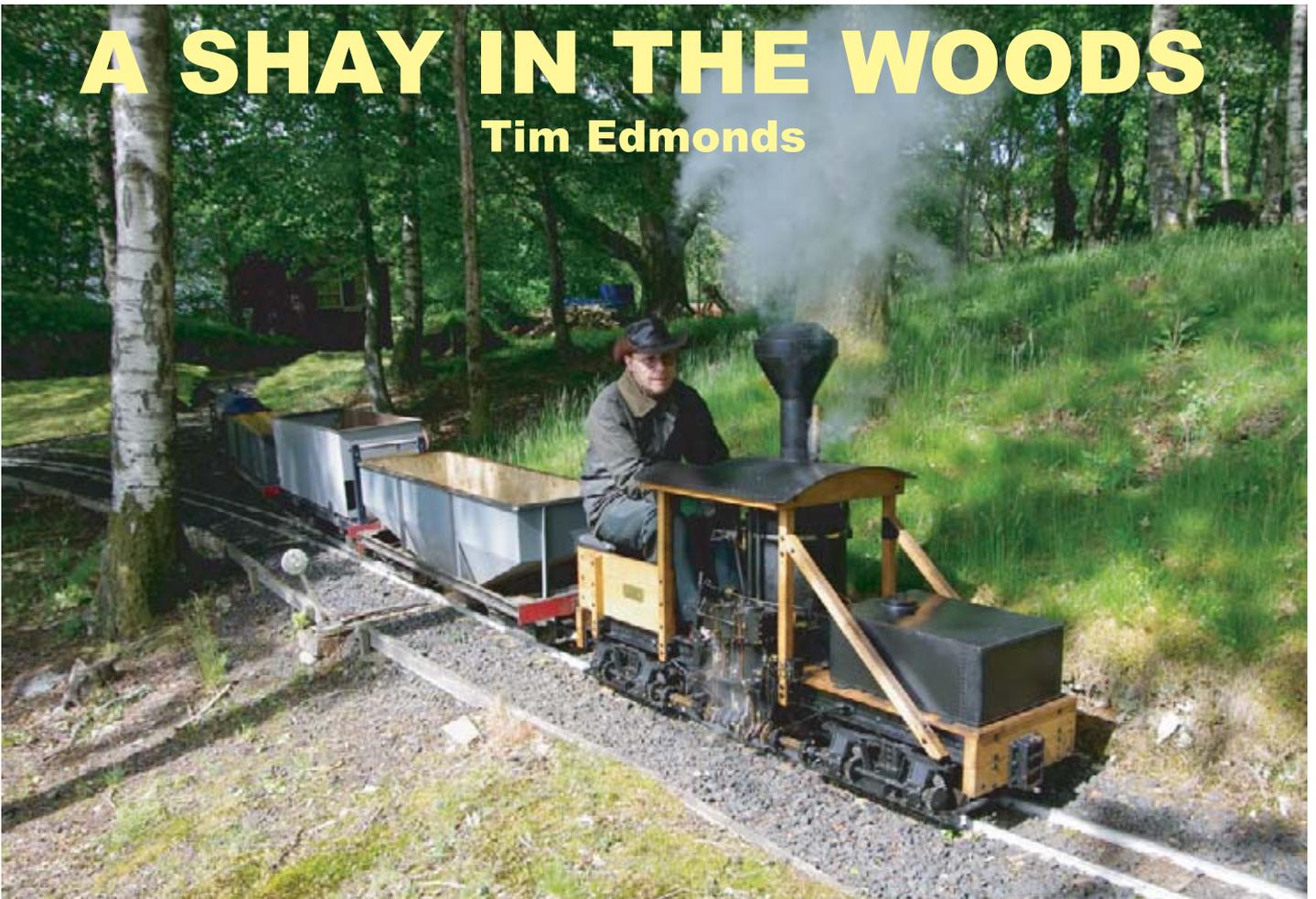
Cross Country Super Voyager 221119 pulls out of Teignmouth with the 12.25 Plymouth to Glasgow Central.

Seen from a precarious perch atop of the Langstone Rock 43185 leans into the curve at Dawlish Warren as it leads the 14.57 Paddington to Penzance onto the seawall section.



# A SHAY IN THE WOODS

Tim Edmonds



During holiday in Scotland at half-term Veronica and I took the opportunity to visit some relatives that we had not seen for many years. On Sunday 29th May we called on my mother's cousin Lucy in the small town of Comrie, on the edge of the Highlands. During conversation Lucy mentioned that a local man in one of the large houses in the area called The Ross, on the outskirts of the town, had built a miniature railway which he apparently opened to the public several times a year, and that this was a popular local attraction. When we left in mid-afternoon we decided to go past the road leading to the house, just in case, and we found a sign up to say that the Comrie Railroad was running. So we headed up a side road and

*Dave Burleigh takes his Shay round the loop of the Ross & Comrie Creek Lumber Co line.*

*All photos: Tim Edmonds*

then a driveway and parked in the designated field just before a level crossing. To the left was Comrie station and to the right was an impressive girder bridge over a low-lying grassy area.

A train was approaching so I hastened to get a shot of it crossing the bridge, pulled by Denver & Rio Grande 2-8-2 483 (the prototype is on the Durango & Silverton). We bought our tickets (£1.50 each) at Comrie station and while waiting for the train to depart I got chatting to one

of the volunteer staff. He told me that the railway was owned by Bob Smith, who retired from Cable & Wireless at the age of 50 and then built the railway on the land round his house (shades of Ted Martin!). The loco was built by David Curwen, who had died the previous week - Bob was to attend his funeral on 1st June. 0-4-2T "Mary" was also working passenger trains, while 2-4-0T "Auld Reekie" was in steam and running round the line light engine between trains.

The line is 7¼" gauge, but this is not a garden railway like the Ted Martin's at Thame - a better comparison would be

*Dave Burleigh proudly brings his Shay up the 1 in 21 grade on the main line after the passenger services had ended for the day.*



the now dismantled line at Dobwalls in Cornwall. On leaving the station there is a loop, then the line traverses woodland on fairly level track to pass Earthquake Halt (Comrie is on a fault line and is apparently the earthquake centre of Scotland). The line then curves right to cross marshy ground around the end of a small lake via an impressive trestle viaduct before climbing through a short cutting and crossing two smaller trestles. The next section is a climb of 1 in 21 up to a level crossing over the driveway then a curve downhill through woodland to pass Easter House Junction station non-stop. This has a loop and is the junction for lines leading into the adjacent loco shed, two turntables, a workshop, and an inner loop line around the woods. Posed on the latter was a loco that immediately caught our attention - a vertical-boilered 2-truck Shay. This warranted further investigation!

The return to Comrie station is downhill, curving round the landscaped gardens in front of the house through a short artificial 'tunnel' and a cutting, then over the girder bridge (known as the "4th Bridge" - count them...) and level crossing. A thank-you to the staff, then an enquiry about access to the shed area, brought the response to walk up there and ask someone to show us round, so off we went. In the well-appointed loco shed I counted three steam and two diesel locos, and when I asked one of the volunteers "was that a Shay I saw in the woods?" the result was an introduction to its owner, Dave Burleigh.

Dave was pleased at our interest and walked us up to the inner loop, which is the line of the "Ross & Comrie Creek Lumber Co". He told us that the loco was built by Paul Frank in 1998 and previously ran in the Lake District, but that when he bought it he decided to run it at Comrie even though he lives in North London (he works for the London Underground). Dave did a run round the track with four wagons so that I could get some photos, then offered us a ride on the last wagon, a tanker, which was the only one capable of carrying passengers. He told us that he usually operated on the main loop at the end of the day, when he wouldn't hold up the passenger trains, and sure enough his train appeared at Comrie station just before we left. At Dave's suggestion I went to the second level crossing for a photo where the gradient was at its steepest.

So ended an unexpected and exciting railway visit - I had not heard of this line before and was not aware that there was a working Shay in the UK. The people were really friendly and obliging, so if you are ever in Perthshire on a bank holiday weekend in the spring or summer do check it out. It's a fantastic line and thoroughly recommended.



*Mikado 483 brings a passenger train across the 4th Bridge.*



*0-4-2T 'Mary' brings a train down the grade from Easter House Junction towards the 4th Bridge.*



*The view out from the loco shed past diesel Rio Grande 1982 to one of the two turntables.*

# The Railways of Buckinghamshire

## COMETH THE GREAT WESTERN

Mike Walker

By the beginning of the 19th century Bristol had developed into one of the country's principal ports especially for Trans-Atlantic traffic. The small ships of the period could still make it up the twisting River Avon to the city and in 1809 the Floating Harbour had been opened which was the world's first non-tidal harbour. It was therefore only natural that the city should desire to improve its connections with the capital as early as possible. The first proposal was as early as 1824 when the road engineer John Macadam surveyed a route for the London & Bristol Rail Road Company but this came to nothing. However things took a more positive turn on 21st January 1833 when four prominent Bristol businessmen met and resolved to form the Great Western Railway Company with a capital of £3 million to be offered in £100 shares requiring a deposit of £5. They selected a young engineer, Isambard Kingdom Brunel, to survey and build their line.

Although only 27 Brunel had already made his mark in the city of Bristol, in 1830 he had won the competition to design and build the bridge over the Avon and Clifton Gorge, construction of which began in 1831 but was not completed until 1864 work having been suspended in 1843 following political interference and financial difficulties. He had also assisted his father Marc Isambard Brunel with the construction of the tunnel under the Thames between Wapping and Rotherhithe today used by the East London Line but the Great Western was his first was his first experience of railways. As a result Brunel had no pre-conceived ideas to bring to the GWR as the Stephensons had on their pioneer railways. It was therefore fortunate that the first Bill placed before Parliament for the Great Western Railway in 1834 failed as it contained a clause specifying the gauge to be 4' 8½".

As with the London & Birmingham, several routes were considered for the Great Western several of the options encountering severe opposition. None more so than at Windsor and Eton, the former town seemed to be divided as to whether or not it wanted to be on the railway but the headmaster and trustees of Eton College were emphatically opposed to the whole idea. It was felt that the presence of the railway would prove a distraction to the students who would be able to travel easily to the "attractions" of London when they should be studying. This standoff would continue for several years.

The second Bill was placed before Parliament in 1835 and proved successful although not without opposition. Although the chosen route went north of Windsor and Eton through Slough, the company had included the provision of a branch to Windsor in its Bill but this met once more with the fierce opposition of Eton College and had to be dropped. Additionally, the college insisted that the railway was not to have a station at Slough and that the whole line from Langley to Burnham was to be bounded by a closed fence or wall not less than 10 feet in height and patrolled by policemen supplied by the company in sufficient numbers as to prevent college students from boarding the trains. Within Parliament, opposition to the Bill was led by Serjeant Merewether who at one point spent eleven days cross-examining Brunel and then wound up his case with a speech lasting another four days! It was to no avail however for the Act received the royal assent on 31st August 1835.

A crucial omission from the second Bill had been the stipulation of the track gauge and as a result within a matter of weeks of the passing of the 1835 Act Brunel showed his independence of thinking by persuading the directors that they should adopt a track gauge of 7' 0" to ensure more roomy accommodation and greater stability and speed than offered by the Stephensons' "narrow gauge". In practice this would be widened by a further ¼" when it was found that extra clearance between the flanges and rails would be desirable. Another major change was the decision to establish their own London terminal at Paddington rather than share the L&B's Euston station as had originally been proposed. The first surveys had proposed a station in the Vauxhall area.

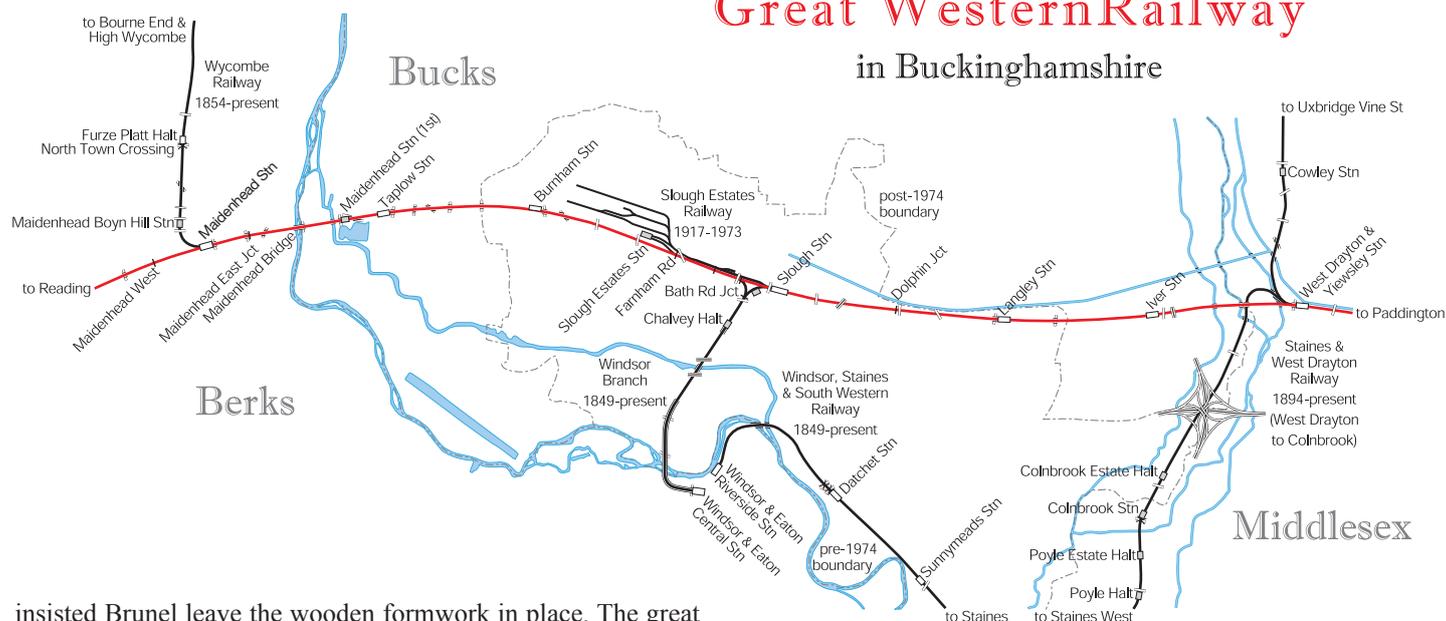
Construction began in 1836 from both the London and Bristol ends. The double track line was superbly laid out with gentle curves and an almost negligible rising gradient of around 1 in 1320 for the London end. Major engineering works included the eight-arch 900 ft long Wharncliffe Viaduct near Hanwell and the bridge over the Thames at Maidenhead at the London end and of course Box Tunnel at the Bristol end. The London end was completed first in May 1838 and trains started running from the old station at Paddington (on the west side of Bishop's Road) to a temporary terminal named Maidenhead but actually in Taplow on 8th June 1838. Upon opening only one intermediate station was provided at West Drayton although by the year's end additional stations would be opened at Ealing and Hanwell.

Although the "high security" fencing in the Slough area never materialised, the ban on the GWR providing a station there remained but the company soon found away round it. Trains simply stopped at a point adjacent to the Stoke Road where a gap was conveniently left in the fencing. An enterprising soul opened a public house nearby to provide shelter for intending passengers and sell tickets. This was too much for Eton College which resorted to legal action against the railway and promptly lost. The courts ruled that whilst they had the power to prevent the construction of a station they could not dictate where the railway could or could not stop its trains or prevent members of the public boarding or alighting during such stops! Two years after the opening of the line, Eton College bowed to the inevitable and having found the railway of use for its masters and trustees withdrew its opposition. Slough got its station in 1840 but opposition to a branch to Windsor would continue for several more years.

The reason for the temporary terminal at Maidenhead was because the bridge over the River Thames was not complete. This was one of Brunel's greatest achievements. At this time the Thames was still carrying commercial traffic and the Thames Commissioners insisted that the river was not to be blocked by intermediate piers (conveniently ignoring the existing multi-arch road bridge). For his part Brunel did not want to create a "hump" bridge which would spoil his gradient profile and was reluctant to use wrought iron girders. Instead he took advantage of an island and designed a spectacular two arch brick bridge. Each arch has a span of 128 feet and a rise of only 24 feet making them the longest and flattest brick arches in the world - a distinction that remains to this day. The directors were not convinced the bridge would stand up and

# Great Western Railway

## in Buckinghamshire



insisted Brunel leave the wooden formwork in place. The great man did not agree and whilst they were left, he had them eased slightly so they were no longer in contact with the brickwork. Later a severe storm and floods washed the formwork away leaving the bridge standing and Brunel vindicated.

The bridge was completed late in 1838 but the line was not opened to Twyford until 1st July 1839 and completed through to Bristol on 31st May 1841 with the opening of the final section from Hay Lane (west of Swindon) to Chippenham. The temporary terminal at Maidenhead took on a semi-permanent role and remained in use even though the line passed close to the centre of Maidenhead and after the opening of the Wycombe Railway in 1854. It was not finally replaced until November 1871.

Whilst Brunel had confidently predicted that eventually the other railways would convert to his Broad Gauge it was the decision of the Gauge Commissioners in 1845 to make "Standard" Gauge mandatory north of Birmingham that meant that it was inevitable that it would be the GWR that would have to change. A third rail was added from Oxford to Reading in 1856 and from there to London in 1861 to enable standard gauge trains from the GWR's Northern Division, the Oxford Worcester & Wolverhampton, to reach the capital. The line was quadrupled from Paddington (where the present station had opened in 1854) to Taplow in the 1880s and from there westwards in 1892 following the widening of Maidenhead Bridge to Burnel's original design. In May of that year the last broad gauge train left Paddington for the West of England and the line became entirely standard gauge.

The railway enters Bucks just west of West Drayton, the actual boundary crossing the tracks at 13m 66c - just beyond the crossing of the branch to Colnbrook. The original station at West Drayton was on the west side of Station Road and replaced by the present structure in 1884. It had become a junction with the opening first of the branch to Uxbridge (Vine Street) in 1856 to which was added a branch to Staines in 1894. This, now truncated to Colnbrook, curved off the Uxbridge branch and dropped steeply turning south to pass under the main line. Unlike the Uxbridge branch the Staines branch passed through Bucks and will therefore be examined in more detail later in this series.

Once in Bucks the main line is carried on a low embankment across two water courses, the River Colne at 13m 72c and Coln Brook at 14m 8c before entering a shallow cutting which is crossed by a modern concrete bridge carrying the M25 orbital [www.mdrs.org.uk](http://www.mdrs.org.uk)

motorway at 14m 41c followed by an older bridge carrying Thorney Lane nine chains further on. Iver station is the first in the county and opened on 1st December 1921 to cater for new development in the area. It is a modest facility with the main entrance on the down side and simple brick-built shelters on the platforms which are linked by a recently replaced footbridge. The ticket office is only open until mid-morning on weekdays and there is no car parking provision.

The area immediately west of Iver station was formerly the site of several sidings including two which curved north to serve gravel pits. These are long gone with industrial buildings now occupying the site and the sidings closed on 6th January 1964. Just beyond was the quaintly named Dog Kennel Bridge which connected farmland on both sides of the line. Built as part of the original line it retained its original elliptical arch and was given Grade II listing but this did not ensure its survival as it was demolished over Christmas 2010 in preparation for the Crossrail works which will see the existing Up Goods line between 15m 12c west of Iver and West Drayton extended westwards to connect with the Up Goods Loop at Langley. This will also require the next under bridge over Market Lane, known as Chequer Bridge, to be widened. Ten chains east of Chequer Bridge the line has, since 1974, left Bucks and entered Berkshire although since 1998 the county has been broken up into unitary authorities, in this case the Borough of Slough.

Langley station opened in 1845, the present imposing two-storey building on the Up side dating from 1878. Until 1849 it was known as Langley Marsh and from 1920 to May 1975 as Langley (Bucks) to distinguish it from another Langley in Northumberland or Langley Green & Rood End on the Birmingham to Stourbridge line. In addition to platforms on all four running lines linked by a footbridge it had a small goods yard with shed north of the main building. Behind this was a private siding into a flour mill. Goods facilities were withdrawn on 2nd January 1964 and the sidings replaced by a car park. In addition to the goods depot, an oil terminal was established on the north side of the line just east of the station served by three sidings. This was latterly operated by Total and was the scene of a serious fire on 5th October 1973 when a locomotive was moved whilst still coupled to its train which was in turn connected to the discharge hoses. These ruptured and a spark ignited the leaking fuel. Fire-fighters from both Bucks and Berks fought throughout the night to successfully bring the blaze, which could be seen for miles around including



*A westbound local passenger train leaves Slough during the mid 1950s behind 6127.  
Photo: David Gardner collection*

Marlow and Bracknell, under control and prevent it spreading to the storage tanks. The depot closed in the late 1990s and whilst sidings remain in a derelict condition, the terminal facilities have been removed although the site has to be decontaminated before it can be redeveloped.

Immediately west of Langley station the line crosses Station Road on a pair of steel girder bridges. With a clearance of just 12' 9" above the road these are regularly the scene of "Bridge Bashes" and are on the register of high risk locations. After passing under a further two road bridges the line reaches Dolphin Junction, a series of crossovers allowing trains to cross from the Main to Relief lines and vice versa in either direction. These spread over a distance of half a mile and are spliced by the Middle Green road bridge. The crossovers were the scene of a serious head-on collision at 02.55 on 2nd July 1941 when the previous night's 18.20 Plymouth to Paddington train hauled by 4091 Dudley Castle which was crossing from the Up Main to the Up Relief was struck by the 01.55 Old Oak to Severn Tunnel Junction freight formed of LMS 8F 8593 and 59 wagons plus a Toad. This was travelling on the Down Relief and passed the home signal at danger although due to an error on the part of the Dolphin Junction signalman, this had been cleared and restored to danger as the freight approached. Five passengers, three of them naval ratings, were killed and a further 24 injured five seriously. Because the locomotive was on loan from the LMS it was not fitted with the GW's ATC equipment which could have prevented the crash which took place with an estimated impact speed of 30-35 mph.

Continuing westwards under the Uxbridge and Wexham Road bridges, the line reaches Slough, the most important intermediate station between Paddington and Reading. As mentioned above Slough finally got its station in 1840. This was one of Brunel's curious "single-sided" stations comprising separate stations for Up and Down traffic on the same side of the line, in this case the Down side. This arrangement required crossovers between the two stations and consequent conflicting movements but the number of trains in those early days was low and the convenience for passengers was thought to outweigh any resulting operational difficulties.

Slough was completely rebuilt on conventional lines during the quadrupling in 1886. The main buildings remained on the Down side and were designed by J E Danks in the French

colonial style with a domed roof. Although modernised and reconfigured internally, they remain in use today. The station had platforms for all four main running lines and two bays at the down end, one for the Windsor branch cut into the Down Main platform and one in the island platform. Additionally there used to be a through siding between the Down and Up Relief lines but after this was removed the Up Relief was slewed and its platform widened. Around the same time an additional bay was provided at the London end alongside the Up Relief. The East Signal Box was unusual as it was located at the London end of the island platform with the lever frame at right angles to the tracks and facing London. There were two sidings between the Up Main and Down Relief, two more alongside the Down Main and private sidings serving the former Windsor engineering works on the up side. The original goods depot had been located opposite the passenger station on the up side but with the rebuilding it was moved to a more commodious location west of the Stoke Road bridge which crosses the line at the west end of the station.

The Windsor branch, opened in 1849, curves away to the south straight after the bridge, the junction formerly being controlled by Slough Middle 'Box. Originally there was a triangular junction here but the West Curve was taken out of use in 1964 and lifted in 1970. This was also known locally as the Queen's Curve as for many years it was used only by the Royal Train and excursion traffic although there had briefly been a service between Windsor and Basingstoke that used it. Slough locomotive shed stood alongside the east curve. Dating from 1868 it was closed on 1st June 1964 and demolished in 1970. The site is now the station's west car park. The area inside the triangle contained a carriage shed and a permanent way depot. Today the site is occupied by housing.

The mechanical signalling along the whole of the main line through Bucks was replaced in 1962-63 by multiple-aspect colourlights controlled from a "Panel Box" at Slough. This is located on the Up side opposite the Windsor branch junction. Next door is an anonymous red brick building which houses the Slough New Integrated Electronic Control Centre opened in October 1992 controlling the lines from Paddington as far out as Dawley and including Heathrow. It also houses the Electrical Control Room for the electrification out to Heathrow. Eventually both will be replaced by the Thames Valley Signalling Centre at Didcot but no date has yet been set.



*FGW's 166204 calls at the well-maintained Taplow station on 17th February 2010. The similarity in detailing to the old Marlow station is clearly visible.*

*The superb classic GWR footbridge, built in 1884, visible in the background might not survive the forthcoming electrification.*

*Photo: Mike Walker*

Beyond these modern signal boxes is the former Slough yard. Although closed in the mid-1970s the massive goods shed remains albeit further extended, remodelled and no longer in railway service. Behind it is the distinctive Horlicks malted milk plant which used to provide a large amount of traffic for the railway with its own private sidings but the building now stands abandoned and seeking a new owner or tenant. At the west end the narrow Stoke Poges Lane crosses the railway. Slough West 'Box' was located on the down side right next to the bridge and controlled the west junction of the Windsor triangle. West of the bridge there used to be further extensive sidings on the up side forming mileage and coal yards but almost all have been lifted, the remaining couple used only by the engineers. Today, a further set of crossovers known as Slough West Junction allowing trains to move between the Main and Relief lines in any direction are located west of this bridge.

At the far end of Slough yard were the exchange sidings for the Slough Estates Railway whose tracks diverged through a separate arch under the Farnham Road. Established in 1918, Slough Trading Estate quickly grew to cover more than half a square mile north of the main line. It had its own railway with tracks down the three principal Avenues and its own locomotives. As recorded by Peter Robins in the December 2010 *Marlow Donkey* operations ceased in April 1973.

Beyond the Farnham Road bridge the line enters a shallow cutting once more. Farnham Road 'Box' stood on the down side just beyond the bridge controlling the entrance to the Slough Estate passenger station opened in 1920 and closed as recently as 1956. The line skirts the southern boundary of the estate on a gentle left hand curve remaining in a shallow cutting and crossed by two bridges carrying Leigh and Dover Roads. Emerging onto an embankment once more it reaches Burnham station at 20m 77c.

Burnham opened in July 1899 and was always a passenger-only station comprising of a single island platform between the Relief lines. It has a red brick building with hipped slate roof and surrounding canopies typical of GWR practice of the period. Access to the platform is by way of a subway from the forecourt on the north side. It was known as Burnham Beeches from opening until 1st September 1930 when it became Burnham (Bucks) again to distinguish it from Burnham in Somerset. The suffix was dropped in May 1975.

Continuing on the low embankment, curving to the south west and crossing several local roads, the first of which, Huntercombe Lane, marks the modern boundary back into Bucks, the line reaches Taplow at 22m 39c. The present station opened on 1st September 1872 finally replacing the original temporary terminal station further west. The station retains its buildings on the up side and on the island platform only those on the down side have been demolished. They are in the same architectural style as the old Marlow station in orange brick

with stone detailing and round-topped windows. The platforms are linked by a superb covered GWR footbridge dating from 1884 which has recently been refurbished. Although reduced today to a simple passenger station it was once a busy goods station as well. The yard was on the down side and included a timber goods shed. This yard, after it closed in the mid-sixties, became a temporary home of the Great Western Society who held at least two open days there in 1966 and 1967. Contemporary photographs show enthusiasts milling around only feet from the Down Main with only a rope to keep them away from speeding expresses - those were the days! And did anyone come to harm? There were also extensive sidings on the north side including a couple of private ones latterly used by Geest for a distribution centre. Up to twenty banana vans would arrive from Newport Docks at a time. Not all would get sold and at regular intervals a 21 ton open wagon would be summoned to remove the rotting fruit to a landfill. There was also a dock at the west end of the Up Relief platform.

Leaving Taplow the embankment becomes higher as the land drops away towards the Thames. At 22m 63c the line crosses the A4 Bath Road on an impressive skew bridge known as Dumb Bell Bridge and just west of this was the original 1838 "temporary" terminal. It was an all-timber structure and consisted of two platforms with shelters separated by a middle siding all which were originally linked by an overall roof but this was removed to Twyford after the line was extended in 1839. The booking office was at ground level on the north side facing the Bath Road. Initially called simply Maidenhead, it became Maidenhead & Taplow following the opening of the Wycombe Railway on 1st August 1854 and simply Taplow on 1st May 1869. It was also known locally as Maidenhead Riverside but this was never an official name.

The line continues on the high embankment to reach the bridge over the Thames at 23m 21c. From track level there is no indication of the magnificence of the structure with just the parapet walls being visible. The county boundary runs along the river and passes under the eastern arch which is locally known as the Sounding Arch owing to its incredible echoes.

Halfway between the original terminal and the bridge was the site of the short-lived Maidenhead Bridge Signal Box. This was built in 1884 to control the junction where the quadruple track from Paddington ended. It briefly survived after the quadruple track was extended over the bridge and beyond in 1892 but was abolished around the turn of the century. It is believed it was on the up side.

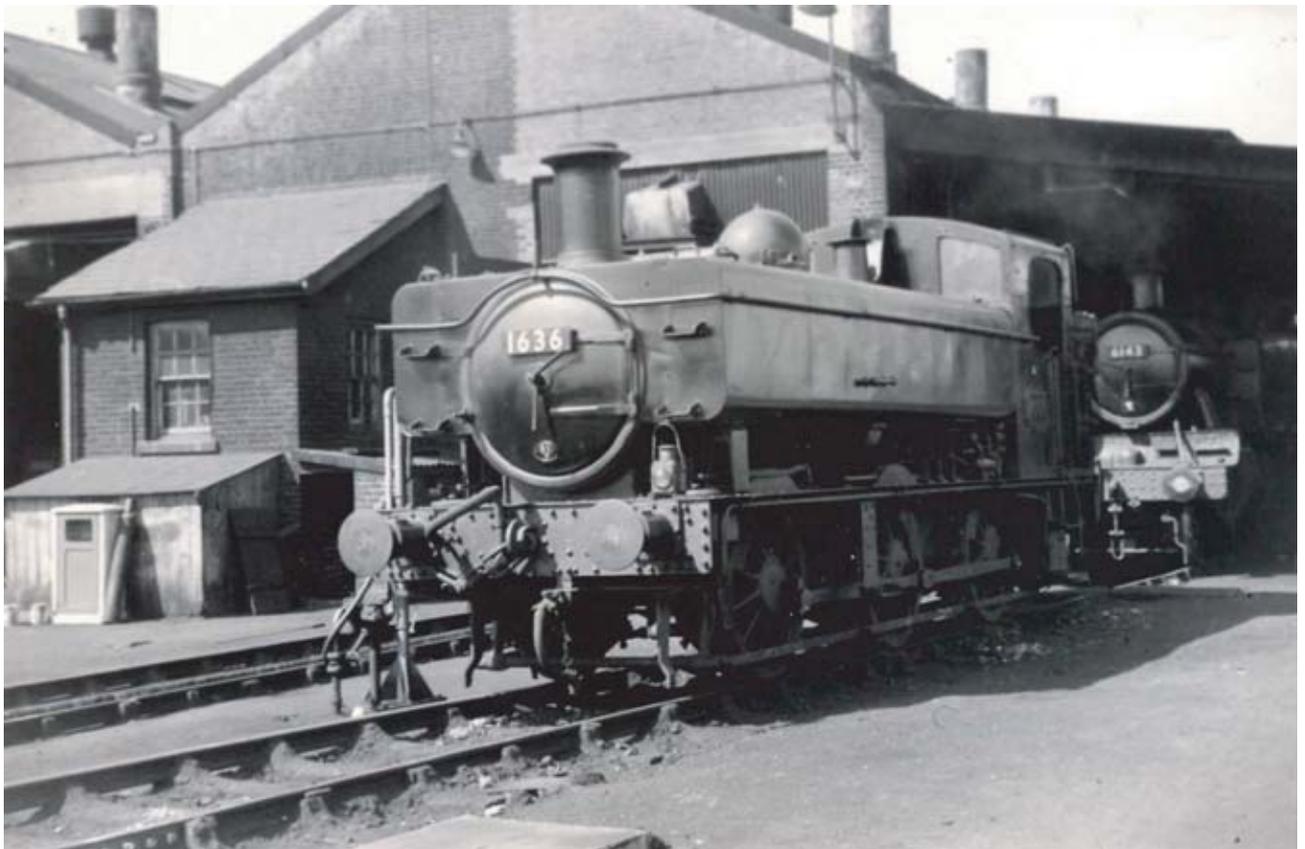
West of the bridge and now in Berkshire, there are a set of crossovers known as Maidenhead East Junction before the line comes to the present Maidenhead station which opened on 1st November 1871 and was located conveniently for the town and adjacent to the junction with the Wycombe branch. The development of this station will be covered in the instalment dealing with the first part of the Wycombe Railway.

# FROM THE ARCHIVES

with David Gardner



David Gardner provides us with a couple of shots from Slough shed in the sixties. Post-war RSH-built heavy Pannier tank 9421 sits on shed at 10.45 on a gloomy 17th December 1961. Slough shed was located on the south side of the curve leading to the Windsor branch the site today being occupied by the station's west car park.



A more unusual occupant was BR-built light Pannier 1636 which was basking in the sun outside the shed on 24th June 1962 having been transferred to Slough to handle shunting and goods services on the local branches. Prairie 6143 is visible behind standing under the lean-to attached to the north side of the shed which closed two years later.