

# THE MARLOW DONKEY



Edition

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The Last Day

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# The Marlow Donkey

The Magazine of the Marlow & District Railway Society

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The contents of the *Marlow Donkey* represent the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Society

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### Front Cover Photographs

*Top: 6018 King Henry VI at Birmingham Snow Hill 28 April 1963. Photo: Mike Page. Article Page 15.*

*Bottom: 6000 King George V at High Wycombe 4 October 1971. Photo: Dave Theobald. Article Page 7.*



# TIMETABLE

## FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

All meetings are held in the Bourne End Community Centre, Wakeman Rd, Bourne End at 7.15 for 7.30pm

- |  |  |                  |
|--|--|------------------|
| Thursday 20 September  | <b>ANCIENT AND MODERN</b>                | Bob Sweet        |
| Bob's presentation will deliver another excursion into his extensive archive of railway photographs, from "golden oldies", through to the present day, and includes unusual scenes from both UK and further afield.                                |  |                  |
| Thursday 18 October  | <b>EUROPEAN RAILWAYS BEFORE 1947</b>     | Brian Stephenson |
| Brian's presentation will feature images from the Rail Archive Stephenson and is described briefly as "lots of vintage views of Dutch, Belgian and French steam; pre war Swiss steam and Electric with a few Wartime views in France and Germany". |  |                  |
| Thursday 15 November   | <b>TO SCOTLAND FOR STEAM AROUND 1960</b> | Peter Groom      |
| Peter's presentation starts at Carlisle; and then deals with the former LMS classes starting with the Tank Engines. After the break he progresses with the ex LNER classes; Tank Engines first, and finishes with the Standard classes.            |  |                  |
| Thursday 20 December   | <b>CHRISTMAS SOCIAL</b>                  |                  |
| Full details of our annual festive social evening will be announced shortly.   |  |                  |

## FORTHCOMING VISIT

- |   |                                 |        |
|---|---------------------------------|--------|
| Saturday 13 October   | <b>HORSHAM TRACTION COMPANY</b> | by car |
| This will be a joint visit with a group from Fawley, and transport will be by car. There is expected to be Traction Engines, a Steam Bus, and other attractions at this private Museum belonging to Les and Dee Searle. |                                 |        |

## CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

As a true dyed in the wool steam man, I can hardly write this column without mentioning the 50th anniversary of the end of scheduled steam on British Railways, because for many of us it was a pivotal moment in our lives. Now unlike many of you, I'm not old enough to have seen much proper main line steam, like the Kings on expresses through Wycombe, Princess Coronations out of Euston, all those East Coast Pacifics etc but I did see Castles on the Herefords and panniers and prairies on empty stock at Paddington, the last few years of the Southern and quite a lot of the grimy last years "up North" and it was all very influential on a callow youth like me. I really cannot believe it was fifty years ago, because that means I'm old and I don't feel old, even though I have recently become a grandad for the first time. However, I have to admit I had planned to do an article for this edition of the Donkey about the LCGB last day (4 August 1968) special I was lucky enough to be on, only to realise I had already written it for September 2008's edition for the 40th anniversary (No. 122, still available on the web site) so I had to apologise to our editor for being so forgetful and have supplied the odd photo from that day for inclusion here.

I suspect the staggeringly hot weather we have been experiencing until recently has had a varying effect on different people. It seems from Mike's newsletters that it has encouraged Peter Robins to rush hither and thither taking advantage of the sunny conditions, with some excellent photographic results. Con-

versely, it has sapped away any enthusiasm I may have had to go out and do things, preferring to remain in the relative cool of the curtained house. The lack of rain for an almost unprecedented period in many places has played havoc with the steam railways' ability to run services with their normal motive power and diesels have become the order of the day. The society's planned visit to the Great Central's "End of Steam" gala was a casualty of the weather, the majority of the few participants agreeing to cancel the trip because the event's activities had been diluted (perhaps that's the wrong word) so much from the original plan that it just wasn't worth it. We will probably organise another visit later in the year when full steam running has resumed, though if very poor response rates from members continue then I believe future society organised trips could be jeopardised.

I know Mike has already said this in one of his electronic newsletters but I would just like to reiterate our very best wishes to our President and Tanya, Mr and Mrs Hopwood, on their (fairly) recent marriage which, unsurprisingly but very secretly, featured some Class 50 locomotives. Mark, what a very thoughtful wife you have. We wish you both a very long and happy life together.

*Tim Speechley*

# SOCIETY NEWS

## NEW MEETING START TIME

With the new season please remember that our monthly meetings now begin at 7.30pm.

## PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The June meeting was once again our annual joint one with the Windsor & Maidenhead branch of the RCTS and saw the return of the Rev. Canon Brian Arman with the final part of his trilogy on the story of Swindon Works taking it through to closure in 1985.

Brian Ringer returned in July with the concluding part of 'Strictly Freight Only' looking at the development of British rail freight industry in the latter years of BR and into privatisation. This included an in-depth look at the development of international traffic both by train ferries and the Channel Tunnel - a really interesting evening.

Regrettably, our planned visit to the Great Central Railway on 4th August was cancelled due to the railway being forced to significantly scale back steam operations because of the fire risk thanks to the heat wave and drought. In addition, the numbers who indicated they wanted to go were very disappointing.

## HORSHAM VISIT

As noted on the previous page, we have arranged to the Horsham Traction Company in conjunction with the Fawley Museum Society on Saturday 13th October.

This is a non-railway but steam related event. The Horsham Traction Company operates a number of restored steam traction engines collected by the Searles family which also run a specialist earth-works business in Horsham for more than a century.

In addition to the engines, several of which will be in steam, their Foden steam bus will also be in operation with, hopefully, the opportunity to take a ride.

When this visit was proposed at the AGM there were quite a number of expressions of interest so, please, turn these into actual participation. There is nothing more dispiriting for the committee than to arrange such a visit and then find there are no takers despite initial interest.

The trip will be by shared car and can be booked by contacting Brian Hopkinson on 01628 298520 or at hopkinson005@gmail.com. Please let him know if you are prepared to drive or require transport.

## CHRISTMAS SOCIAL

Sorry to mention it so early although one major London store apparently opened its Christmas department in July! Our annual Christmas party will be on Thursday 20th December. Format much as usual - full details including menus and booking arrangements will be announced shortly.

## NEW TELEPHONE NUMBER

Your editor has decided to ditch his land line number due to the high number of "nuisance" calls. In future I can be contacted only on 07791 544426.

## INTRODUCING MARTIN STOOLMAN

The author of the feature recalling commuting on the *Marlow Donkey*, Martin Stoolman, is a recent recruit to the Society joining in May.

Although he now lives in Exeter, Martin is a native of Bourne End having grown up on the Abbotsbrook Estate and as well as attending Borlase school in Marlow, he and his brother David played cricket for Little Marlow (and remain vice-presidents). Martin attended university in Exeter and more recently has been a train manager on high-speed services for Great Western Railway based out of Exeter and was also Employee Director for the company representing the staff on the board. He retired in May and hopes to be a regular attendee at meetings, combining them with visits to his mother.

During his schooldays he kept a detailed diary of his daily commute which form the basis of his fascinating look at our local branch line nearly half a century ago and how different it was then. The story will continue in the December issue.

Thanks to Martin for this contribution. Perhaps we can look forward to a future contribution looking behind the scenes of his railway career.

## MAIN LINE STEAM

The following trips are booked for the coming months:

22 Sept Three Bridges - Oxford 60009  
4 Oct Theale - Plymouth 60103  
27 Oct Sheffield Park - Worcester 61306  
20 Nov West Brompton - Gloucester TBA  
22 Nov Paddington - Cardiff 60009  
24 Nov Paddington - Oxford 35028  
24 Nov Paddington - Bath 60009

These are provisional, full details and times will be published in the weekly newsletters closer to the dates.

## RCTS MEETINGS

The autumn/winter programme of meetings of the Windsor & Maidenhead branch of the RCTS is as follows:

Mon 24 Sept London Bridge Redevelopment  
Mon 22 Oct India Tony Skinner  
Mon 26 Nov Colonel Stephens' Railways  
Mon 17 Dec Branch AGM and members' presentations.

All meetings are held at the Cox Green Community Centre, Highfield Lane, Cox Green, Maidenhead SL6 3AX, commencing at 7.30pm and MDRS members are always welcome to attend.

## EXHIBITIONS

The High Wycombe & District Model Railway Society will be hosting is excellent annual exhibition, Wycrail, on Saturday 3rd November at the Cressex Community School, Cressex Road, High Wycombe between 10.00 and 5.00.

The next Marlow Maidenhead & District MRC exhibition will be on Saturday 5th January at Cox Green.



# C&PRR REACHES PRINCES RISBOROUGH

The Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway achieved its long-term goal of reaching Princes Risborough and establishing a main line connection in mid-August, a major achievement for the relatively small all-volunteer run railway.

Whilst the official opening by Sir Peter Hendy, Chairman of Network Rail took place on Wednesday 15th, a special train ran on the preceding Sunday for C&PRR members and supporters.

This was worked top-and-tailed by Class 20 D8059 and small prairie 5526 which is spending the summer at the C&PRR on hire from the South Devon.

Public services began on 19th August.



For the present, trains have to top-and-tailed as work continues to complete the run-round loop at Princes Risborough which was host to a works train during the opening week.

Among the passengers on the members' special were MDRS members Phil Searle with his wife and Tony Caton.

Whilst the C&PRR claims to be the closet heritage railway to London with a main line connection it isn't. Princes Risborough is 36 miles from Marylebone whereas East Grinstead on the Bluebell is only 30½ miles from Victoria.

*Photos: Phil Searle*





# THE LAST DAY



Sunday 4th August 1968 was officially the last day of steam operation on BR and saw a number of Farewell Special trains. **TIM SPEECHLEY** rode the LCGB's train which ran from St. Pancras to Carnforth via Manchester.

Black Fives 45390 and 45025 wait to depart from Carnforth for Lostock Hall and pause for a photo stop at (the other) Clapham Junction. 70013 *Oliver Cromwell*, 44781 and 48773 were also used on this tour.







The rival SLS ran two specials from Birmingham on the same day. Black Fives 44874 and 45017 wait at Blackburn with the second of these which they worked from Manchester Victoria to Stockport via Copy Pit and Wigan Wallgate. With no fewer than

six farewell specials passing through Manchester Victoria on the day, immaculate 45110 was on standby in case of a failure but not needed. It carries a 24C (Lostock Hall) shedplate even though it had been 10D since about 1963.







## A Future for Main Line Steam?

**As fifty years have passed since the end of BR steam, MIKE WALKER poses what might be a provocative question.**

To those gathered alongside the Settle & Carlisle line and others in the north west on that fateful Sunday in August 1968 to witness the passing of the *Fifteen Guinea Special* the future for steam must have seemed very bleak indeed. British Rail had already announced that, with the exception of Alan Pegler's *Flying Scotsman* with which there was a unique operating contract, there would be no more steam operations permitted on the main line citing the such spurious reasons as a lack of facilities to support steam along with the there being no qualified crews. Was the infrastructure ripped out and the steam men

retired overnight? Of course not - the truth was that BR management of the day didn't want "dirty" steam trains spoiling the new, progressive railway they were trying to promote to the public.

Things were made bleaker for the steam enthusiast when it is remembered that in 1968 the heritage railway movement was very much in its infancy with only the Bluebell, Middleton, Keighley & Worth Valley and Dart Valley Railways plus the pioneer Welsh narrow gauge lines actually in operation.

Following the appointment of Richard Marsh as chairman of the BRB in 1971, things began to change. He was approached by Peter Prior, managing director of Bulmers Cider, with a business plan. Bulmers' sidings at its Hereford base were then home to



*BR dipped a toe into the waters of main line steam in 1971 when 6000 King George V made a tour of the Western Region with the Bulmers Cider train which brought it to High Wycombe [Left] on 4th October. The crowd on the bridge belies BR's contention that there would be little or no public interest!*

*Photo: Dave Theobald*

*Even then, who could have imagined what sights would come to pass in the future such as Castle 5043 Earl of Mount Edgum powering past Southcote Junction [Above] with Vintage Trains' Moonraker from Solihull to Salisbury on 8th April 2017.*

*Photo: Mike Walker*





*On 3rd May 1980, when railtours really were railtours, SLOA operated The Mancunian from Crewe to Crewe via Manchester, Leeds and Carnforth using 40020, 76011, 76021, Midland Compound 1000, 4771 Green Arrow, and 4498 Sir Nigel Gresley. Here are 1000 and 4771 near Long Preston on the Leeds to Carnforth leg.*

*Photo: Peter Robins*

the 6000 Locomotive Association, custodians of the iconic GWR locomotive of that number which was already part of the National Collection along with Bulmers' own exhibition train formed of former Pullman cars. Both being fully operational, Prior's plan was to run them on a multi-day tour of the Western Region to assess what problems the operation of steam on the "modern" railway would present and what the public reaction would be whilst getting some extremely valuable exposure for Bulmers Cider along the way.

Although there was still considerable reluctance and scepticism among BR management, Marsh went along with the idea and as a result *KGW* made a magnificent and almost faultless tour of the Western Region over four days from the 2nd to the 9th October, passing through the Severn Tunnel twice! Seats were sold on each leg at just £5 each. The tour attracted overwhelming public interest and many stations and other lineside locations were swamped with trespassers - at High Wycombe I remember them climbing signals for a better vantage point. Fortunately attitudes were more relaxed back then, if such practices occurred today main line steam would be banned instantly.

Whilst it was deemed a success, another nine months were to pass before BR allowed limited main line steam to operate. Initially, it was restricted to a small number of carefully chosen secondary main lines such as the Welsh Marches between Chester and Newport via Shrewsbury and Hereford; Birmingham to Didcot; York to Scarborough and, later, the Settle & Carlisle. Similarly, there would be a small fleet of 'passed' locomotives. Exceptions crept in however - most famously the celebration of the *Marlow Donkey* centenary in July 1973. For enthusiasts, however this seemed like utopia compared with the bleak years of 1968 to 1971.

Gradually the sphere of main line steam operations widened to take in almost every part of the national network. The final bastions to fall were the Southern Region where, understandably, there had been considerable concern for public safety if trespassers in search of the ultimate shot came into contact with the third rail and running into or out of London termini. The first operation on the SR was on 27th April 1974 but on that occasion steam was confined to the largely non-electrified section between Basingstoke and Westbury whilst by the late 1980s Marylebone would host regular steam arrivals and departures whilst on one memorable day commuters into Waterloo found their EMU replaced by 35028 *Clan Line* and a set of Mk1s.

The locomotives used became more varied, in addition to the predictable big express locomotives from the Big Four, as the 1970s wore on a remarkable collection of "old timers", mostly from York museum were to be found on the main line. In a way it was reminiscent of the late 1950s when the "Scottish Quartet" and a couple of English 4-4-0s were let out to play- something that would be impossible today.

With the privatisation of BR looming in the mid-nineties there were fears for the future. Would the new order permit steam operation and who would operate it? Under BR's sectorisation reorganisation of the mid-eighties steam operation had largely come under the wing of BR's Parcels, later Rail Express Systems, sector but would that continue?

One unexpected result of the privatisation legislation was that steam had to be allowed equal access to the network as any other form of traction subject to it meeting required standards and route availability. With the sale of RES to US-based Wisconsin Central in 1995, responsibility for steam operations went with it. The new company, English Welsh & Scottish (formed after WC also acquired the BR Trainload freight companies) was initially the only one to hold a safety case and licence for steam operation as required in the brave new world the railway was entering. EWS therefore had the monopoly of steam operation.

This was soon challenged by a new entrant, West Coast Railways which emerged from the former Steamtown operation at Carnforth which had been purchased from Sir William McAlpine by David Smith in 1990. WCR was granted a nationwide train operating licence in June 1998, becoming the first privately owned company to do so and its related safety case permitted it access to the entire network using both modern and steam traction. This built on the company's experience gained in operating the regularly scheduled *Jacobite* steam services between Fort William and Mallaig for which it had held an operating licence since 1995 - the *Jacobite* had been running under various operators since 1984.

West Coast has grown to be the preeminent player in main line steam operation providing crews and rolling stock for a number of railtour promoters with the locomotives being provided by individuals or owning groups. David Smith owns several locomotives himself but none is owned by WCR in its name. The company does, however, own a large fleet of main line Diesel locomotives of Classes 33, 37, 47 and 57 which it uses to support the steam operations and operate its own tours. The



company has also occupied Southall depot for many years and has established a depot at Fort William to support the *Jacobite*.

West Coast has not always enjoyed an unblemished reputation, not least the now infamous SPAD at Wootton Bassett in 2015 which led to the company's train operating licence being suspended for two months only to be followed by a second suspension in February 2016 following a number of incidents.

Whilst DB Schenker (the successor to EWS) stepped in to cover some of the booked charters WCR were unable to operate, it became obvious that the new owners were not so enthusiastic about main line steam. Old hands were retiring and DB were not actively training replacements.

This led to the tour promoters to consider the future and whether alternative arrangements could be made. The major obstacle is that applying for a train operating licence from the ORR is no simple task, it takes months of planning, creating systems, proving competence and, crucially, costs huge sums of money.

Two new entrants have appeared. Firstly, multi-millionaire investor Jeremy Hosking, owner of a number of main line steam locomotives, decided to set up a main line steam operation of his own under the banner of Locomotive Services Limited based at Crewe. Hosking has poured millions into this venture converting the former Crewe Diesel depot into a fully equipped steam works, refurbishing his own rolling stock to a very high standard and setting up the operating company which was granted its own operating licence early in 2018. Locomotive Services does not, currently operate charters on behalf of other promoters but rather concentrates on running its own tours under the title of Saphos Trains concentrating on a number of specified routes.

Around the same time Tyseley-based Vintage Trains decided it too would take the plunge and apply for a train operating licence. It might be coincidence, but West Coast promptly informed VT that it would be unable to supply steam crews for its 2018 season trains leading to the cancellation of that promoter's entire programme. Not put off, Vintage Trains have forged ahead with its application which was granted in late summer. Like LSL, VT initially intends to concentrate on running its own trains, most famously the *Shakespeare Express* between Birmingham and Stratford-upon-Avon, rather than provide facilities for other promoters although it has plans to provide Diesel locomotives and crews on a spot-hire basis to the industry (as does West Coast) and even plans to establish a driver training academy.

*Without doubt the most successful main line steam operation has been The Jacobite running each summer between Fort William and Mallaig. On 19th August 2001 B1 61264 leads the return working across the Glenfinnan Viaduct.*

*This service, which appears in the national timetable and has thrived under West Coast Railways operation, can be expected to continue for many years to come.*

*Photo: Dave Theobald*



Despite the arrival of these new entrants, the operation of main line steam is coming to a crossroads as it faces a number of challenges which will increasingly make it a challenge to carry on.

First, there is the question of maintaining the locomotives both to the high standard required for safe, reliable operation on the main line and the ever increasing demands to install new equipment that ensures they are compatible with operations particularly as the industry inches towards the "digital railway".

With the exception of the handful of new builds we can expect, the main line fleet is aging rapidly and each overhaul cycle produces new challenges as parts wear and need replacing at often enormous costs particularly when it comes to cylinders, boilers, wheels and even on occasions, frames - or part thereof. The standards that apply on the main line are far more stringent than those acceptable on heritage lines. Then comes the requirement for new equipment. First, came the requirement for the fitting of TPWS (when main line steam first started some locomotives didn't even have AWS) followed by OTMR (On-Train Monitoring Recorder) then air brakes and most recently the now universal GSM-R radio system. Whilst it is understandable, and desirable, that these important safety features are fitted to steam locomotives venturing onto the main line, they are expensive to install and usually involve major modifications to the locomotives whose original designers could never have dreamed of such systems. Understandably, locomotive owners are starting to question if such expense can be justified; will the locomotive earn enough on the main line to pay back the investment or is it more sensible to maintain it to the lower standard required for heritage line operation?

Waiting in the wings is the European Train Control System (ETCS) and European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS) which will bring a whole new way of controlling movements on the railway including, eventually, replacing lineside signals with in-cab displays. Leaving aside the cost of such systems there is still no clear indication of how, or indeed if, it can be installed on steam locomotives. The industry is currently developing installations for locomotives and multiple units of various classes but cannot be expected to extend this to steam locomotives.

A further challenge for locomotive owners is one of clearances and gauge compatibility. In the half century since the end of the "real" steam era the network has changed almost out of recognition. Tracks now sit on higher beds of ballast reducing the





*The increasingly stringent requirements for main line operation are leading locomotive owners to think again whether the returns justify the investment.*

*An early casualty is John Cameron's A4 60009 Union of South Africa which will be permanently retired when its current period of operation ends.*

*Here it passes Potbridge near Hook with 1Z84, Steam Dreams' 12:52 Salisbury to London Victoria 'Cathedrals Express' on 18th July 2017, a glorious summer day.*

*Photo: Mike Walker*

overhead clearances (on non-electrified lines) whilst at many stations tracks have been slewed to reduce the train-platform interface which makes boarding easier but presents clearance issues for steam - especially 2-cylinder GWR designs! As a result, locomotive owners are faced with having to make major changes to their locomotives to ensure maximum route availability. The two Kings being a prime example. Permissible axle loadings have risen meaning they can go where they never ventured in the old days but the boiler fittings and width over cylinders have had to be reduced to keep them within modern clearances - more expense!

Next there is the question of capacity. Our national network is getting ever more congested as each year passes and train speeds are increasing. Finding paths to run steam specials at 60 or 75 mph becomes more difficult. Take for example, the Great Western Main Line between Paddington and Didcot. It is probably fair to say we will not see steam again on this section after late 2019 when Crossrail starts - there simply won't be room to squeeze in steam specials between scheduled services both passenger and freight. As an example, it is rumoured that after 2019 the empty stock of *Night Riviera* sleeper will, in the down direction at least, run via the Chiltern Line and Oxford as even it can't be accommodated on the main line.

Understandably, Network Rail is anxious to encourage more locomotives to be passed to run at 90mph on the basis that it is easier to path a service at that speed rather than 75 or, worse, 60 mph. But achieving this requires even higher standards and

many of the steam locomotives running today were never designed to run at such speeds especially for sustained periods. The Black 5s for example are restricted to 60mph. Even the new-builds which can be built with 90mph operation in mind are not immune to failure as *Tornado* proved earlier this year.

Finally there is the question of crewing. Virtually none of those crewing main line steam today have experience dating back to BR days, a handful of old hands are continuing way beyond normal retirement age but they will be gone in a few years. Others have learnt their skills on heritage lines but again they need to meet the increasingly strict regulations on competency.

So, where does this leave the future of main line steam in the UK? In many ways we can expect to see a revision to a situation similar to that which prevailed in the early-seventies. That is confined to secondary routes where traffic levels and linespeeds are lower and will be among the last to be folded into the "digital railway". Likewise, the locomotive pool will be considerably reduced with just a selected few being kept in line with modern requirements.

It seems certain that we have lived through the golden era of main line steam and face a much more restrictive future. Some may mourn its passing but others less so as it has become almost impossible to get decent pictures on certain "modernised" lines. The consolation is that the heritage lines have progressed to levels unimaginable a half century ago and provide a perfect canvas to display steam in action.

*As steam is driven off the core main line network by a lack of available paths, increasing speeds and new signalling technology it will be forced to retreat to the quieter secondary lines such as the Settle & Carlisle where modernisation is probably decades away.*

*As a result we shall be able to savour sights such as Black Fives 45231 Sherwood Forester and 44932 blasting uphill at Birkett Common with 1T57, the 45th anniversary re-enactment of the 'Fifteen Guinea Special', BR's last steam-hauled train on 11th August 2013 for many years to come.*

*Photo: Mike Walker*

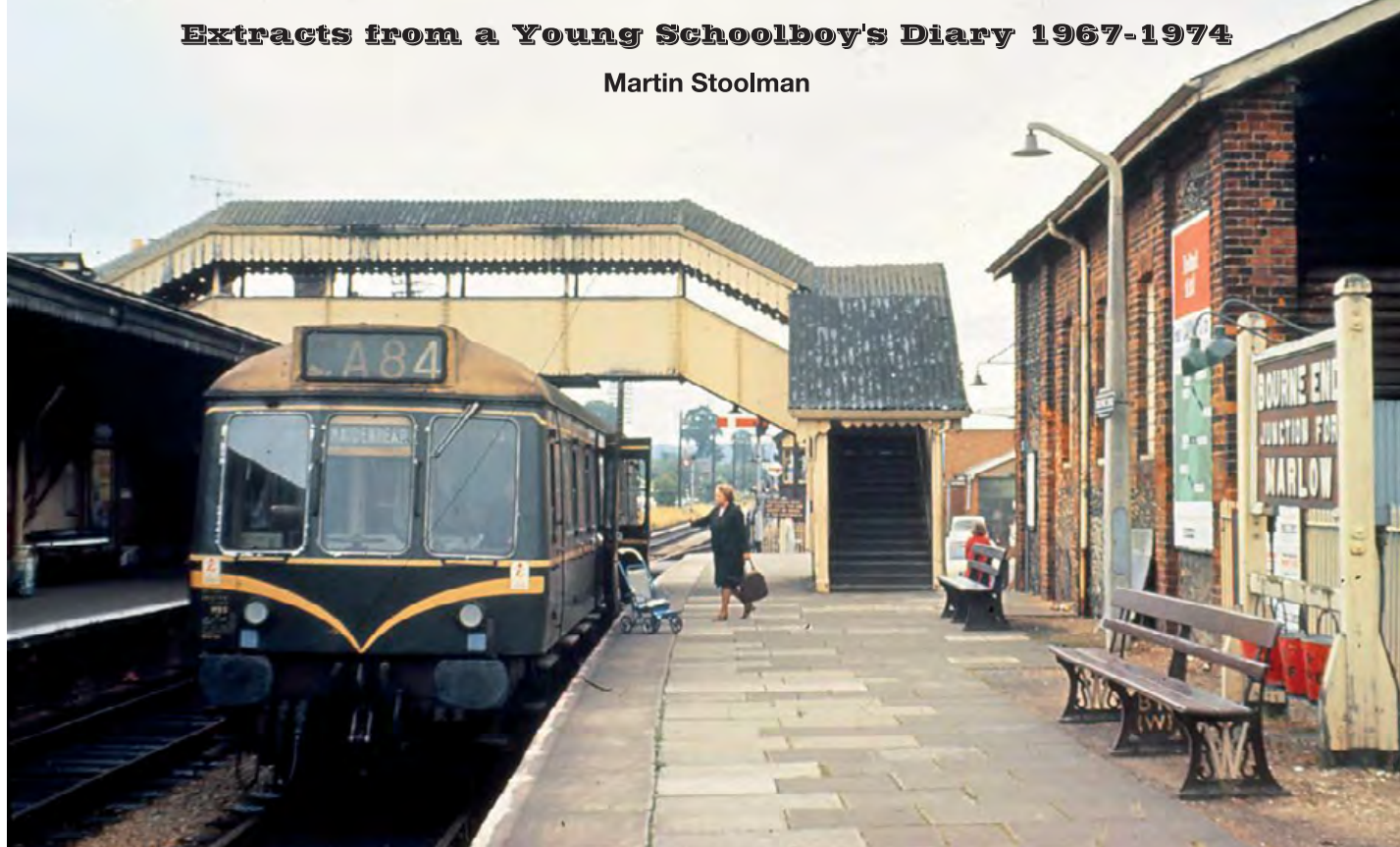




# COMMUTING TO SCHOOL ON THE DONKEY

Extracts from a Young Schoolboy's Diary 1967-1974

Martin Stoolman



Thursday 31st August 1967 was a momentous day – at least it was for me! Having passed the dreaded 11-Plus a few months earlier, it was the day I started school at Sir William Borlase in Marlow. Living in Bourne End this meant travelling to Marlow by train each day, something that was a pain for some but to a railway enthusiast like me was more like a bonus!

Steam had gone by then of course, but at least the section to High Wycombe was still in operation - for my first three years at any rate. This meant that in 1967 Bourne End was quite a busy station in the morning peak, with up and down trains passing in the main platforms, and my service to Marlow (always a class 121 Pressed Steel single car in those earlier years) shuttling to and fro from the bay platform.

Borlase boys like me had a choice. The keener ones (or the ones who wanted to play a spot of football in the playground before lessons) could catch the 08:09, while the 08:39 (with an arrival time at Marlow of 08:45), would still get you to school in time for Assembly which was at 09:10 sharp. And this was despite the walk from one side of Marlow to the other! In general, apart from the strikes (of which there were plenty later on), you really could rely on the trains getting you to school on time.

On arrival at Bourne End the earlier of the two trains mentioned above formed connections into and out of the 07:50 Maidenhead to High Wycombe (formed of another class 121 single car but with a Driving Trailer Second in the W56280 to W56289 series attached). More importantly however it connected into the 07:50 from High Wycombe which was the second service of the morning through to London Paddington (departing Bourne End at 08:04).

The 08:04 was a fascinating train to this 11-year old schoolboy in many ways. First there were the passengers. These largely consisted of extremely well dressed city gents in pin striped suits and bowler hats, whose highly polished shoes would click loudly as they walked along the up platform to await the train. Much of the remaining clientele was made up of young ladies whose skirts got shorter and shorter as the Sixties became the Seventies and who, likely as not as I imagined, were the secretaries

*An unidentified Class 121 single unit calls at Bourne End on the 11.24 High Wycombe to Maidenhead. August 1966.*

*Colour-Rail DE1100*

of the above mentioned gentlemen! Today's society is rather more enlightened.....

Then there was the formation of this train. Like the other through services on the branch including the 07:36 just under half an hour earlier and the 17:50 departure from Paddington in the evening, it was a DMU formed rather awkwardly of seven cars. Quite why “higher authority” had decreed it should be so formed is a bit of a mystery, considering that the Pressed Steel class 117s (along with the less common but virtually identical Birmingham RCW class 118s) were 3-car units. The planners however, one way or another, seemed to make it their daily duty to provide the seven carriages for these services. At first this was achieved by inserting a Driver Trailer vehicle from the W56280 series somewhere in the train; this could be at the front, in the centre, or at the very rear depending no doubt on operational convenience at Southall depot.

But then in 1966 three Metro Cammell Trailer Composite Lavatory vehicles (designated class 168) appeared at Southall from the Scottish and North Eastern regions, numbers W59528, W59538 and W59543. There is a school of thought that they were originally transferred south to act as centre cars for GRCW built Cross Country units, but it seems to me that this never actually happened. Rather they were put to work strengthening class 117s and 118s on the through services to/from High Wycombe, as when I started at Borlase nine times out of ten it was one of these vehicles that was acting as the seventh vehicle. With their sliding ventilation louvres above the windows, along with their three doors only on each side and their low density seating, they certainly looked out of place amongst the out and out suburban coaches!

So was it to be the earlier train or the later train for me? I very quickly settled into the habit of catching the later train; nothing to do with the fact that I wasn't keen to get to school (although I wasn't!); rather it was to do with my discovery that a down

The Marlow Donkey



parcels was booked to pass the 08:22 High Wycombe to Maidenhead, which was the service into which the 08:34 arrival from Marlow connected. So each morning I had the pleasure of arriving at the station to the sound of an NBL diesel hydraulic throbbing away in front of the level crossing gates.

Well, that's when it appeared! As is well documented these "Baby Warships" (as they became known) were not the most reliable of locos, and one wonders how many of the non-appearances were due to locomotive failure. To be fair though, from Tuesday 5th September 1967 when I started to record their numbers (D6352 on that occasion) through to Friday 1st December 1967 (when D6342 did the honours) I only recorded three occasions when it didn't turn up. After that it did not appear on 4th/5th/6th December, however that was undoubtedly due to a "British Rail labour dispute" as my schoolboy diary delightfully put it! It is worth noting however that, whatever this dispute was about, the Marlow shuttle was unaffected and I had no problems getting to school. D6328 (resplendent in newly painted blue livery) dutifully appeared on Thursday 7th December, but then there was no sign of the train until the following Wednesday, with another no-show on Monday of the following week. D6335 (also in blue) was on duty as the Autumn Term ended on Wednesday 20th December.

And so for me I had completed my first term at grammar school – and it was now Christmas. Alleluia! Don't worry, I will spare you all the details of the parcels Father Christmas gave me in my stocking, although this too is all recorded in my diary!

School re-started on Monday 8th January 1968 but alas, my diary for this day reports "I went to school with Daddy because I discovered that the trains were running very late". How I discovered this without the aid of a mobile phone or local radio is not recorded! Anyway this might have been something to do with the weather as my entry for the following day records "worst snowfall so far this Winter", but nonetheless the "train services were alright", so gold star for British Rail! Not so good on Wednesday however with the train 15 minutes late and the snow "nowhere near cleared yet". This probably meant I was late for school, so, taking no chances, on Thursday and Friday I again "went to school with Daddy", with the snow "still piled up". The really great news was that Games had to be cancelled on Friday as a result and we got to go home early!

Normal service was resumed on Monday of the following week. Not so for the parcels train though, of which there was no sign for virtually the whole of January. Disappointed, I had begun to assume that it was no longer running but then, out of the blue on Wednesday 31st January, I arrived at the station to the sight and sound of D6341. Nothing again the following day but then on Friday there was D6341 again. Regularity improved somewhat after that but still with ten more "no shows" between then and the beginning of May 1968. It was rare for the same loco to appear more than two days in a row but D6355 well and truly broke that trend by performing the duty for the entire week, w/c 1st April. Things started to get really exciting when a Hymek, D7076, appeared on the duty for the first time on Thursday 2nd May, but the old order was restored the following day with D6346. Then that was it. Bourne End's early mornings no longer reverberated to the sound of hydraulic music. A new timetable had come in on Monday 6th May and I was never to see the parcels train on the way to school again. But that was not quite the end of the story of which more anon.....

Just for the number crunchers among you, the NBL Type 2s recorded I believe covered Old Oak Common's entire allocation of the time, D6326/7/8/32/5/40/1/2/3/4/5/6/7/8/9/50/1/2/3/4/5/6 and 7. However, whilst D6332, D6343 and D6349 each appeared only once, D6352 was the top performer with a total of ten appearances.

So, parcels aside, what else was happening on the railway that I felt worth recording in my diary at the time? On Tuesday 28th

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November 1967 I wrote: "Saw continental poles working for the first time". Yes, the traditional white gates had gone at the station level crossing, and had been replaced by flashing lights and barriers; little did we know that even these would be gone in less than four years. Then on Tuesday 19th March we read about "men taking up track in sidings by bridge over river" and then (three weeks after the parcels train had ceased coming) on Friday 24th May: "In the one remaining siding at Bourne End station was D6328 (blue livery) hauling a weed killing train".

But what about the performance of my train taking me to school? Well, you might think that a shortage of train sets was a relatively modern phenomenon, and that there was rolling stock aplenty in the days of BR. Wrong! Clearly there could be shortages of class 121 single car units in the late 1960s too.... On Monday 22nd January 1968 I record that "my train to school was a 3-car railcar today". (Actually that must have looked quite impressive in the bay platform at Bourne End). But clearly that couldn't go on as the following day I wrote the following: "They didn't have a train to take us to school. Coach laid on but Mum took me". Similar I'm afraid on the following Tuesday: "Our train was cancelled. Mum took me". It has to be said though that cancellations put down to that cause were very rare in my experience. What's more, delays and cancellations caused by the signalling or token system on the branch were then completely unknown!.....

Sadly it was labour disputes rather than token failures that were the Achilles heel of the local train services in those days. Later in 1968 my diary entry for Wednesday 26th June recalls how the "union go-slow, which started on Monday, continues". And then, as if to be a portent for the future the entry continued: "All services to High Wycombe cancelled for the day". Next day's entry states: "Train 10 minutes late because of go-slow" (but not a disaster). However the following Monday 1st July reveals: "No trains running at all to Marlow in morning". (Presumably Daddy/Mummy transported me!). But to be fair that was the only day us schoolboys were seriously affected, even though the dispute was not called off until the evening of Friday 5th July, almost two weeks after it had started, trains otherwise running normally. Thankfully that was the last reference in my diary to labour disputes on the railways until 1971, a three year respite before things, as we know, really did start "kicking off"!.....

You may have spotted that I talk only about the trains that took me to school in the morning. But what about the trains on the way back I hear you cry? Well, rather oddly, we were expected to take the train to school and then a bus back in the evening. This was because the Thames Valley bus company ran two "school special" (double decker) buses from Quoitng Square in Marlow, one to Maidenhead and one to Slough, both of which were scheduled to depart at 16:20 if memory serves me right. In the mornings the company could only muster one bus from Maidenhead, meaning that the Slough boys had to use that one, leaving no room for us Bourne End lads – hence we were given the train option. I do wish I had kept one of the season tickets they gave us as they were joint rail/bus ones, and possibly unique, with the restrictions detailing all of this.

Some readers might be interested in the buses. They were a right mixture; basically anything that the bus company could dig up! All half cab double deckers, with plenty of Bristol Lodekkas, both the LD (rear manual door) type and the FLF (front door) version. More often than not though one of the older Bristol Type K buses appeared, with their tall front radiators. These included quite a few of the "low bridge" variety which on the upper deck had long bench seats seating four abreast, with a sunken side walkway leading to the stairs. Wow betide any Bourne End boy who chose to sit on the far side by the window, as the three Maidenhead lads sitting next to you would quite likely not let you get out at your chosen stop! I was careful to avoid this.



Every bus had a conductor on too, presumably there just to attempt to keep order! I do not recall them ever checking our tickets; this was only done occasionally when an inspector was also on board. As to reliability, well they were not a patch on the trains. My diary is full of "bus was late" type entries, as well as at least two reading "bus did not turn up so caught train instead". I had been at Borlase school for less than two weeks when, on Tuesday 5th September 1967 "the bus ran out of fuel on the way home"(!). My entry for Friday 15th March the following year recalls how "a single decker bus was sent to take us home so not enough room". On Friday 4th October 1968 we have: "Maidenhead bus not running so crammed into the Slough one" and less than two weeks later on Tuesday 15th October we read: "Slough bus broke down in West Street so our bus had to take both loads". There were cases of overheating radiators too, with us disembarking at Bourne End in a cloud of steam and the conductor running over to the local garage to get some water!

Our season tickets, whilst being specific about not being allowed to use the bus in the Marlow direction, were not quite so clear about their use on the train back to Bourne End. Whilst there were a handful of number 18 buses that might get you back at other times, often the only available choice was the train. So I did occasionally do this, especially if I had after school tuition, extra games practise or (dare I say it) detention! The Guard never challenged our tickets anyway so I never had any qualms about it if it was convenient.

One such day was Friday 13th June 1969. I had a dental appointment after school so, as the surgery was quite close to Bourne End station, I decided to catch the train home. But o dear, no railcar, and of course no information let alone staff on Marlow platform (not much different to now I hear one or two of you squeal!). However my ears pretty quickly picked up the reason for the delay; over on the other side of the hedge in front of me where the old station used to be was the unmistakable growl of an English Electric Type 3 diesel (later class 37 of course) shunting timber wagons. For anyone not familiar with the latter day history of the Marlow station site, the old station was demolished in July 1967, with today's barely adequate platform being built as its replacement where the former coal yard had been. Meanwhile the track layout of the old station was retained and the site became quite a large timber yard. This was serviced by a bulk timber train for some two years, about which very little seems to be documented.

All I can say is that I first saw it by chance on Friday 4th August 1967 during the school holidays when, not knowing what it was all about, I referred to it as "the Marlow midday goods". I did however record the loco's number which was Brush Type 2 (later class 31) D5572. Unfortunately because it was scheduled to run at lunchtime on weekdays I was generally either at school or elsewhere enjoying the holidays. There was also no app or internet to advise when it was running, so sightings were very much hit and miss. One of the staff at Bourne End once informed me that it was supposed to run twice a week on Tuesdays and Fridays but that in practise it could turn up any day, and my own observations such as they were seemed to suggest that. Indeed it was for a Wednesday, 25th September 1968 to be precise, that I made a very amusing diary entry (not that I intended it that way I'm sure!). It read: "Absent from school today because of terrible cold. Saw timber train at station, worked by an English Electric Type 3". Well, clearly the cold wasn't that terrible!

There was a path for it, identifiable in the passenger timetables of the period which show the pattern of hourly departures from Marlow interrupted by the lack of one at 13:xx. The train itself, formed of a string of long wheelbase single axle wagons that squealed round the branch's curves, clearly originated from somewhere in East London as motive power was almost always a class 31 or class 37 based at Stratford. Further information on a postcard please!

Anyway, back to Friday 13th June 1969, and my own frustrations at Marlow were compounded by the fact that through the hedge I could not even make out the number of this Eastern Region interloper – even though the hedge was of course a good deal lower and thinner than it is in 2018! Clearly the train was running hours late today and, even though after a quarter of an hour or so the class 37 growled its way out towards Bourne End with the empty wagons, I worked out that it would be at least another 20 minutes before my train would appear, and so it proved. All hope of making my dental appointment evaporated and all I could think about was the potential wrath of my mother! The arrival of my train at Bourne End was however interesting. For the only time I can ever remember we were held at the home signal approaching the station because, as can be imagined, the late running timber train had thrown the evening rush hour timetable into complete chaos. There were trains everywhere! There was even a unit stabled in the one remaining siding at the south end to get it out of the way. I had already worked out that Friday the 13th had well and truly lived up to its reputation for me; I wonder whether the signalman on duty at Bourne End had! (And incidentally, just in case you are interested, my diary also recalls that Friday 13th June 1969 witnessed "the last Basil Brush Show and the last episode of Casey Jones in the current series", which, due to the delays, I missed!).

A little more on the timber train anon; however in the meantime back to the substance of this article which concerns my morning journey to school. These became somewhat uneventful as the '60s wore on. With the demise of the parcels train I turned my attention to recording the numbers of our Pressed Steel single car unit, starting from Thursday 20th June 1968 and ending with the timetable change on Monday 5th May 1969. I won't bore you with the gory details; suffice it to say that all the usual London area suspects were involved, these being W55020/1/2/3/4/7/8/30/1. The last one to run still painted in green livery was W55024 on Wednesday 6th November 1968, with its first appearance in corporate blue not coming until Thursday 13th March the following year.

Performance during this period was ok, certainly better than on the buses! A diary entry for Monday 21st October 1968 reads: "Trains disrupted in morning, our train" (presumably the 08:39) "eventually turned up at 09:16". A quick glance at that year's timetable reveals that 09:16 was actually the time of the next train (the 09:01 through service from Maidenhead). Similarly a couple of weeks later the diary records: "Trains running sideways again (just a schoolboy expression hopefully!). Railcar W55023 with W56281 finally turned up at 09:15". As this 2-car formation was the rostered one for the Maidenhead through service it seems likely that my own train was actually cancelled on both occasions, possibly due to previous late running. On Tuesday 17th December 1968 the entry simply says: "Train 15 minutes late", while the one for Thursday 6th March 1969 suggests another rare bus replacement: "Our train wasn't running so we took a coach instead". On Friday 14th March 1969 it was again minor: "Train 10 minutes late this morning".

The point of including this is not to show up the train service in a bad light; rather, if a 12 year old schoolboy felt that it was worth recording seemingly minor delays it goes to show just how good it all was the rest of the time. Indeed, the next reference to late running is not until Friday 9th October 1970, a full eighteen months later, when the entry merely says: "Train was about a quarter of an hour late in morning". And as if to emphasise the point the diary entry for Thursday 2nd February 1969 is worthy of inclusion: "Worst snow we've had this Winter overnight and in morning. 16 absent in our class at beginning of day". I then dutifully record that the unit number that morning was W55027 and refer to no problems with timekeeping on our train. One could seemingly just assume that the trains would be running in those days no matter what the conditions. Another gold star to British Rail I feel!



# MAIDENHEAD AND HIGH WYCOMBE BOURNE END AND MARLOW

SINGLE LINE. Worked by Electric Token, Crossing station, Bourne End.

MONDAYS TO FRIDAYS

SINGLE LINE. Worked by Train Staff, No Block Telegraph  
Form of Staff: Square. Colour: Oak. Fitted with Annett's Key lettered 'Bourne End South to Marlow.'  
'Red' Group Locomotives must not exceed 20 m.p.h.

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## DOWN

Mileage from Maidenhead	Mile Post	Mileage
M C	M C	
1 22	24 19	
2 74	25 41	
4 33	27 13	
	28 52	
7 14	2 61	
5 63	30 7	
7 20	31 39	
9 48	34 7	

|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|



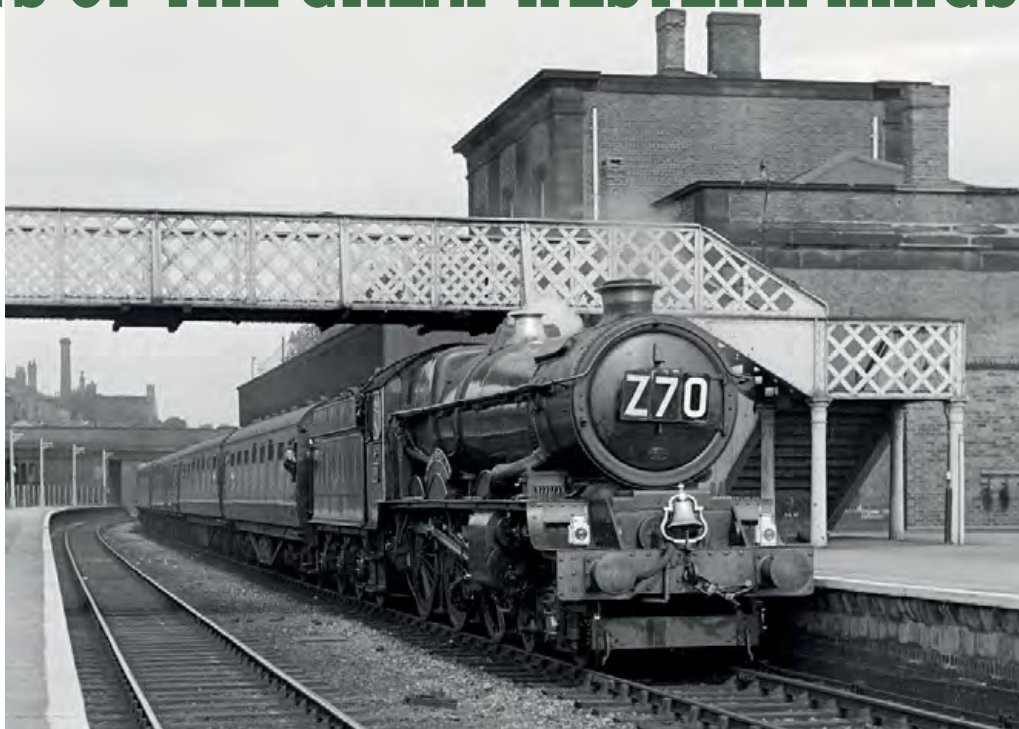
# THE LAST DAYS OF THE GREAT WESTERN KINGS

9th September 1962 was supposed to have been the last day to see ex-Great Western 'Kings' at work, but a few lasted a little while longer recalls Mike Page.

Walking down 'our road', Wilkinsons Road in Moxley near Darlaston, on a cold dark October 'Black Country' evening in 1962 I heard the distinctive exhaust of a hard-working 'King' climbing up the grade between Wednesbury and Bilston. "Ah! The 'Nine O' Clock King'," I thought to myself. "Hold on! A King?" There came a brief interruption in the exhaust sound as the train passed under Bradely Lane bridge, then the engine shut off steam and whistled for Bilston Central. "A King???"

On 9th September 1962, nearly all the Birkenhead/Shrewsbury to Paddington expresses were worked for the last time behind 'Kings' with one or two 'Castles'. On 10th September, these trains had gone over to 100% 'Western' diesel-hydraulic C-Cs (Tops Class 52) – at least, that was British Railways (Western Region)'s idea. About eight 'Kings' now lay cold in 84A Stafford Road shed yards. But it's October, all the 'Kings' are supposed to be 'dead'! Was I hearing a ghost train?

In spite of the slaughter, four 'Kings' had survived in stock at 81A Old Oak Common and were still working the occasional 'special' or covering for those 'Westerns' that couldn't manage to do the job. But let's go back to December 1961 when D1000 *Western Enterprise* emerged from Swindon in 'desert sand' livery. Production of the 'Westerns' began in earnest at Swindon and Crewe Works in Spring 1962 when Swindon and the North British Locomotive Company were also filling Western Region tracks with the 'Warship' and 'Hymek' diesels. Train spotters in the 'Black Country' who had not seen all the 83D Plymouth (Laira) 'Kings' (like 6026 *King John*) suddenly were underlin-



*On Sunday 9th September 1962, 6000 King George V calls at Bilston Central with a British Railways organised 'Farewell to Kings on the Birmingham Line' special working from Wolverhampton (Low Level) to Swindon via Birmingham (Snow Hill), Oxford and Didcot and return.*

*All photos: Mike Page*

ing them all as the diesels kicked those copper and brass behemoths off the Paddington-Plymouth/Bristol and Cardiff routes.

The electrification of the southern parts of the West Coast main Line (WCML) and the rebuilding of Birmingham's New Street Station resulted in BR increasing the frequency of Wolverhampton/Birmingham to Paddington trains leaving only a sparse service on the WCML route. Laira's 'Kings' were transferred to 81A and 84A. But as the 'Westerns' rolled in, the slaughter began with 6006 *King George I* in February 1962. Then 6003/4/8/10/13/23/4 followed in June 1962 and July saw 6017/20/29 taken out of service, leaving 19 survivors working mostly the Paddington-Birkenhead route to Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury.



*Kings were out in force on their last Saturday of working on Saturday 8th September 1962. 6007 King William III is in charge of the 11:35 Wolverhampton to Paddington and is taking the Birmingham (Snow Hill) route at Priestfield Junction. The Birmingham line curves sharply to the right through the station behind the photographer and the former Oxford, Worcester & Wolverhampton line to Dudley and Worcester carries straight on. Today's Midland Metro tracks leave the track bed by the last coach of the train to ascend onto the Wolverhampton Road. The roof of Priestfield Junction signal box is below on the left.*





British Railways organised a special on Sunday 9th September: 'Farewell to the Kings on the Birmingham Line' running from Wolverhampton (Low Level) going via Birmingham, Didcot to Swindon and back. Well, we thought, that was it! Or not quite, apparently, as 6000/11/18/25 were still 'on the books' at 81A. Well, 6000 *King George V* had worked some legs of a *Talylyn Special* and had brought the train back from Ruabon to Wolverhampton on 29th September 1962. 6000 was sitting in steam in 84A's yard, waiting to run light back to 81A, when D1008 *Western Harrier*, working the 18:40 Shrewsbury to Paddington packed up near 84A. 6000 replaced her for the run to Paddington. Apparently *King George V* held the diesel timings but wasn't able to make up any lost time.

In 1962, Britain's iron and steel production was back in private hands and Richard Thomas & Baldwin (RTB) had opened its new Spencer Works at Llanwern in South Wales (the plant exists today, but is rolling and finishing only). On 26th October, two special trains were run from Paddington for RTB's guests to witness the official Spencer Works opening. The locos used were 6000 and 6018 *King Henry VI*. On 30th October, 6011 *King James I* worked the 10:00 Birmingham (Snow Hill) to Paddington 'two-hour' service. Then 3rd November found 6000 on the Up *Inter-City* from Wolverhampton to Paddington.

6018 was out again on 7th November working the Locomotive Club of Great Britain's *King Commemorative* special from Paddington to Wolverhampton (Low Level) – but more about that later. Afterwards, 6011 and 6018 spent a few days weight-testing the Wye Bridge near Chepstow after the bridge had been modified.

Christmas was now approaching and very unexpectedly 6025 *King Henry III* worked the Up *Royal Duchy* on 17th December. What might have been a 'last fling' occurred on 21st and 22nd December: when 6011 worked the 10:50 Paddington to Shrewsbury. Also on 21st December, 6018 probably made the very last visit in BR service of a 'King' to the West Country heading the 13:25 Paddington to Penzance relief, probably as far as Plymouth – anyone know if it got to Plymouth? These observations were made in the Railway Travel & Correspondence Society's *Railway Observer* November 1962 - March 1963.

1963 dawned and February saw 6000/5/11/18/25/8 withdrawn en bloc. I found no reference to any workings by 6005/28 after 9th September 1962. Not all was dead yet though, 6018 was to return to the tracks one more time in 1963.

Before looking at 6018's 1963 trip let's go back to the LCGB's *King Commemorative* tour on 17th November 1962. It was a

**TOP** Drizzle and murk greeted 6018 *King Henry VI* at Hockley, Birmingham on 17th November 1962. The LCGB rail tour was on its way to Wolverhampton (Low Level).

**RIGHT** The LCGB King Commemorative special has arrived at Wolverhampton (Low Level) where one of Oxley shed's 56XX 0-6-2Ts, 6631, waits to take the train onwards along a freight-only line via Oxley and Wombourne to Stourbridge Junction. And the weather got murkier!





*On 28th April 1963 the SLS ran the Last King tour with 6018 King Henry VI which is seen running round the ECS to couple on and bring the stock into the Up Platform 5 at Birmingham (Snow Hill).*

cold dark morning at Paddington Station and we set off with eight coaches, I think, to romp up to Bicester, gallop up Hatton Bank (between Leamington Spa and Birmingham) and on through the 'Black Country' to arrive in Wolverhampton (Low Level). The weather was about as truly cold, wet and miserable it could be. 6018 left us to be replaced by 56XX 0-6-2T No. 6631. The tank took us at a sedate pace along that freight-only line from Oxley, past Baggeridge Colliery and Wombourne to arrive at Stourbridge Junction. After watering, 6631 ran around our train and proceeded to take us through Dudley onto the Dudley-Walsall/Birmingham (Snow Hill) line then leaving it to climb up a sharp rising curve to pass Dudley Port Station.

We carried on along the 'Stour Valley' line (which is nowhere near the River Stour!) to the wonderfully named Soho Soap Works Junction. Maybe it was a 'first' for any kind of ex-GWR loco to traverse these lines (except maybe in wartime) and we carried on down through the long closed Soho Road Station to pass along the south side of a triangular junction with the old Grand Junction Railway Route. 6631 cantered on through Perry Barr, Aston and then turned left onto a line, which crossed over the Derby-Birmingham line to join the old London & Birmingham Railway route at Stechford.

The 6631 must have had a lot of coal in her bunker as she was game to take us on towards Coventry turning west there onto the line through Kenilworth to reach Leamington Spa (Avenue). We halted on the spur line linking Leamington Spa Avenue's yards with the ex-GWR Birmingham (Snow Hill) – London main line at the side of the General station. There, 6631 gave way to 84D Leamington shed's Collett 0-6-0 2210.

The 0-6-0 cantered along to Fenny Compton where she reversed us onto the Stratford-on-Avon & Midland Junction's Cheltenham to Blisworth line in the gloomy, and still wet evening to go as far as Blisworth. Originally a Fowler 2P 4-4-0 was supposed to have replaced 2210 at Blisworth to take us onwards onto the Great Central to finish at Marylebone. A Fowler 4F was produced instead (number mislaid) and we arrived a good three hours late in London!

At least it wasn't raining on 28th April 1963 when 'King' 6018 was steamed again to pull a Stephenson Locomotive Society's *Last King* tour from Birmingham (Snow Hill) to Swindon and back. During the last week of April 1963, British Railways' Western Region temporarily restored 6018 back in traffic, but based in what was now a London Midland Region shed at Tyseley (formerly 84E and now 2A). The loco 'ran in' working local trains between Birmingham and Leamington ready for the Stephenson Locomotive Society (SLS) special on 28th April.

We all waited in anticipation on Birmingham Snow Hill's Platform 5 (Up); then in the south tunnel we heard a double chimney 'King' working up the stiff grade with 12 coaches of



empty stock. Once 6018 had run round the train and shunted it into position, we all piled aboard.

In spite of some checks, and having to reverse for a short stretch of 'wrong line' running, things began to 'hot up' south of Banbury. With 440 tons (gross) behind the tender 6018 made 88mph down Bicester Bank and 91mph down Denham Bank. We traversed the Greenford Loop to draw into Southall Station on the Down Slow for water and an unofficial 'photo stop'. Many of us walked on the tracks (watched over by the local Bobbies!) to get our pictures.

All too soon we arrived at Swindon Station to trek around the works. It was my first visit to the famous 'A' Shop where, bearing in mind that the Western Region was trying to oust steam as quickly as possible, there were 22 steam locos under repair including ten pannier tanks, two 'Manors' (7809/15) and five 'Halls' (4951/6924/33/79/7912). 'Warships' under repair included D604/805/47/9/52/66/70. Under repair too were diesel shunters 15100/1/5.

Outside among the withdrawn were 6011/25/6. It was time to return to Birmingham, which we did running via Didcot and Oxford. We were all hoping 6018 would take a good run at Hatton Bank (three miles at 1 in 106/110) between Warwick and Hatton. Signals at Warwick prevented a 'run' at the bank but even so, with 440 tons on her tail 6018 was holding 42MPH at the summit. One of my colleagues reckoned that 6018 was outputting some 1800 Brake Horse Power (BHP) to do that.

So, until Bulmers Cider supported the restoration of 6000 and she ran on the main line at the end of the 'steam ban' in 1973, no 'King' turned a wheel in anger after 6018 had returned light engine to 81A. 6018 was still there in September 1963 and was scheduled to take theatre goers in a special train from Paddington to Stratford-upon-Avon on 21st September, but the train was postponed (if not cancelled).

At Swindon, there was some discussion about switching 6000's name and number plates to 6018, which was reckoned to be in much better condition. No, 6018 was cut up at Swindon on September 30, 1963. Happily we still have 6000/23/4 and 6024 will hopefully be returning to specials service again in 2018 – 'gauging issues' notwithstanding.





**TOP** Track occupation at Southall under the watchful eyes of the local 'bobbies' as SLS Special riders get their pictures of 6018.

**RIGHT** Swindon Works; 'A' shop where locos under repair included 'Hall' and 'Manor' 4-6-0s.



**BOTTOM** 6018 shares Swindon running shed with a 28XX 2-8-0 (left) and 'Hymek' diesel-hydraulic B-Bs. She was in far too good mechanical condition to go for scrap, but there you go!





# THEN AND NOW: BANBURY



The view above looks north from Bridge 80 at Grimsbury Green towards the what was called Banbury Junction where the GCR line joined - the formation can just be spotted diverging beyond this up train headed by 47369 on 24th July 1976. The large open area on the right was formerly a yard called Grange Sidings.

Almost exactly 42 years later on 18th July this year an unidentified Cross Country Voyager passes with the 13:27 Manchester Piccadilly to Banbury. The pointwork it has just crossed is known as Reservoir Junction, 5 chains closer to Banbury than its predecessor.

*Both photos: Tim Edmonds*

