

THE MARLOW DONKEY



Edition

168

June 2020



Contents:
Bourne End to High Wycombe
A stranger in Bucks
Double Whammy
Then & Now

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: 6141 leaves Wooburn Green with the 07:43 Aylesbury to Maidenhead 24 March 1962.

Photo: Gerald T Robinson. Article Page 3.

Bottom: 6128 heads out of Bourne End July 1961.

Photo: ©Colour Rail. Article Page 3.

TIMETABLE

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

Due to the current situation, all meetings are cancelled until further notice.

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Hopefully we have all made it so far. But what a start to the year. It has certainly caused your committee to rethink. Fortunately some of our regular features continue, such as this magazine 'The Marlow Donkey' and Mike Walker's regular Newsletters. We have had to postpone a number of talks but in the New Year we managed to get in Frank Banfield's 'Steam in the 40s' and Bob Sweet's appropriately named 'How Time Flies' after the AGM. You will be pleased to know your committee were re-elected en-bloc.

Just when we had arranged 'An Evening with our President' the shutters of (un?)social distancing came down. However by the marvel of modern IT science we were able to set up a first for the society. A Zoom call in which some 26 members took part. Our President gave us an interesting and honest appraisal of GWR and SWR including a little humour as you might expect from Mark, and opportunities to comment or ask questions through the 'chat' button. It proved a new method for the society to invite willing speakers to give their talk to members until such time as we can meet up again. Of course, the latter is the desired method as soon as we are able but rather than cancel all communication between us the use of Zoom or other similar systems enables most members to continue

to engage with their railway interest. So this is what we will try to do again and will advise members of forthcoming Zoom talks and how to join in. We are also in discussion with our friends at the RCTS Maidenhead. Meantime your committee use the method to hold committee meetings as required.

Being locked up, sorry locked down, for some time I have nothing in the way of stories or photographs to offer but younger more able members and colleagues keep us apprised of the situation out there. The railway press continues and there seems to be an abundance of railway features on TV albeit journeys taken a while ago. I try to watch as many as possible to see how places have changed, or not, since I was there on a railway tour. Those days are now over and the big question for me now is whether the holidays I have booked for this Summer will take place – doubtful. If you have a rail story to tell, recent or otherwise, steam or diesel/electric, home or abroad, Mike Walker would like to hear from you and we would love to read it. Stay Alert.....for railway activity.....and stay safe.

Mike Hyde

SOCIETY AND LOCAL NEWS

SLIMLINE 'DONKEY'

This issue of the *Marlow Donkey* is slightly slimmer than usual due mainly to there being no forthcoming or previous meetings to record and the lockdown has reduced the amount of news generated.

However, thanks to the efforts of several members I now have a good stock of material particularly archive pictures for the weekly e-newsletters but, as usual, the "pending" file for the 'Donkey' is still somewhat short so if you can come up with a short article it would be most welcome.

GW ELECTRIFICATION COMPLETE

The overhead through the Severn Tunnel was finally energised on 31st May bringing to a close the project first announced nearly 11 years ago although since then the scheme was descope to remove Didcot to Oxford, Chippenham to Bristol and the Thames Valley branches from the originally announced plans due to escalating costs. Cardiff to Swansea was later added, then removed.

The wires don't even reach Chippenham, finishing at Christian Malford due to a listed footbridge at Chippenham. In addition, the alternative route into Bristol, from Stoke Gifford, has also been deleted from the originally announced plan.

www.mdrs.org.uk

BOURNE END PROJECT DELAYED

During our Zoom meeting in May, Mark Hopwood advised us that the project to remodel the layout at Bourne End has been delayed. This has since been supported by a statement from Matt Golton who is standing in for Mark as Interim MD of GWR:

GWR's project to run two trains per hour on the branch has received another blow as it has missed the deadline for LEP funding. The project was supported by both Buckinghamshire Thames Valley and Berkshire Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership. The LEPs now need the funds for other projects.

This doesn't mean that the project is dead. The LEP Boards still want to support the project but GWR will have to submit a new bid when Approval in Principle has been obtained for its approach. We are astonished to learn that GWR is still waiting for survey work to be completed.

One of the main stumbling blocks has been the signalling solution. Ideally the whole branch should be properly signalled throughout and put on the appropriate workstation at the Thames Valley Signalling Centre (TVSC) at Didcot, but this would need more funding. Failing this Network Rail and GWR need to come up with an acceptable and affordable local solution at Bourne End.

BOURNE END TO HIGH WYCOMBE



Just over 50 years ago, on 2nd May 1970, the last trains ran between Bourne End and High Wycombe. To mark the occasion, MIKE WALKER looks back at the history of the line and takes a sentimental journey.

By the early nineteenth century High Wycombe had become well established as the principal town in south Buckinghamshire and a centre for paper-making and furniture manufacture yet the early railways passed it by - the London & Birmingham away to the north east and the Great Western to the south. The town had to rely on the poor provision of the London to Oxford road to connect it with the outside world. It was therefore inevitable that there would be pressure from within the town and district for it to be connected to the brave new world offered by the railway age.

This led to the creation of the Wycombe Railway Company to build a railway initially to link the town with the GWR at Maidenhead but with ambitions to also connect it with Aylesbury and Oxford. After some opposition in parliament, Royal Assent for the first section from Maidenhead to High Wycombe was granted on 27th July 1846 but it would be more than eight years before the line would carry its first passengers.

The promoters had reached an agreement with the GWR the previous October for that company to lease and operate the line for an annual payment of 4% of the initial capital (£150,000) and half the profits.

There then followed a series of disputes including a failed attempt to sell the company to the GWR which delayed the start of construction until 1852. Even then things didn't go smoothly with the bankruptcy of the contractor thanks in no small part to the unorthodox method of payment the WRC followed leading to the GWR itself stepping in to complete the line. The full story is recorded by C R Potts in his book *Oxford to Princes Risborough A GWR Secondary Route*, Oakwood Library of Railway History 131, ISBN 0 85361 629 9. Highly recommended for anyone interested in the history of our local lines.

1421 with a typically ratty-looking autotrailer in tow leaves Bourne End and approaches Cores End level crossing on its way to High Wycombe on 7th July 1962, the last weekend of steam passenger operations.

Colour-Rail BRW362

The line finally opened between Maidenhead and High Wycombe on 1st August 1854, initially for passenger traffic only and worked by the GWR under the a modified version of the original lease agreement.

The line was single throughout although provision was made in the earthworks and bridges for doubling if required which never happened. It was laid to broad gauge using Barlow rail which was in the form of a 12" wide inverted "vee" embedded into the ballast with the wheels running along the top. This did away for the need for sleepers but, unsurprisingly, proved somewhat unstable. Nevertheless, it remained in use until conversion to standard gauge which took place over nine days in August 1870, reopening on 1st September.

Initially there were stations at Maidenhead Boyn Hill (off the Castle Hill, A4, bridge), Cookham, Marlow Road (which became Bourne End in 1874), Wooburn Green, Loudwater and High Wycombe. Further extensions saw the Wycombe Railway reach Thames on 1st August 1862 and Kennington Junction where it joined the GWR line into Oxford on 24th October 1864. A branch from Princes Risborough to Aylesbury was opened on 1st October 1863. The branch from Bourne End to Marlow, opened on 28th June 1873, was built by another company, the Great Marlow Railway again leased to and worked by the GWR. The Wycombe Railway Company was finally absorbed by the GWR on 1st January 1868.

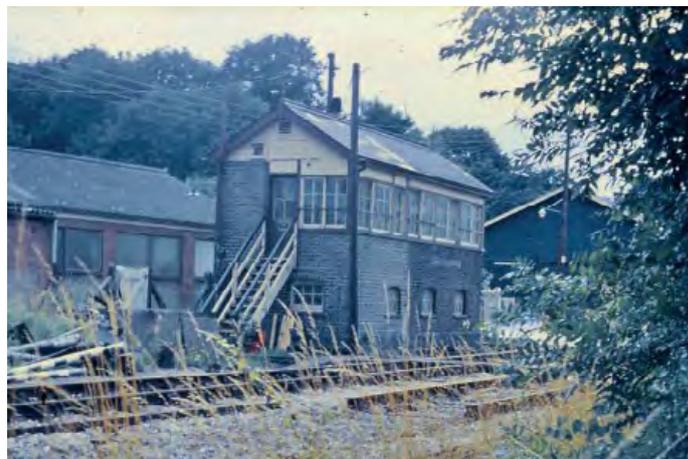
As the 20th century dawned, the Wycombe line lost its middle section between High Wycombe and Princes Risborough to the GW&GC Joint Line which opened fully in 1900. After that the section south of High Wycombe became a relatively quiet branch line, useful as a diversionary route, until as a result of dwindling passenger numbers the section north of Bourne End closed in 1970.



Colour-Rail BRW371

6128 heads out of Bourne End over the Station Road level crossing with a respectable load for the branch freight. The connection in the foreground leads to two sidings laid during WWII primarily to serve Jackson's fibreboard mill, Gunpowder Mill, but also useful for carriage storage. July 1961.

Bourne End Signal Box was originally Bourne End North SB until it was extended - none too subtly - in 1955 to take over control of the Marlow branch junction from the South 'Box which closed in January 1956. Like all the signal boxes on the branch it dated from the early 1890s when the branch's signalling was upgraded and originally had 15 levers plus a wheel to operate the gates. After extension it had 44 levers. Following closure of the Bourne End - High Wycombe section it remained operational to control the junction until 13th June 1971 when it was closed and replaced by a traincrew worked ground frame. It is seen here shortly after closure awaiting demolition which came soon after.



Ron North

The station passing loop ended before the line reached Cores End level crossing located at 28m 70c where Cores End Road crossed the line. Following closure, the track between the crossings was retained with a buffer stop just short of Cores End crossing. This was to provide a run-round facility for the timber trains to Marlow which were to have been diverted via Maidenhead, It is doubtful these ever ran and the the station crossing was taken out of use and the track partly lifted early in 1971.

Dating from the opening of the line, Cores End had a cottage for the crossing keeper in typical WRC brick and flint style (which survives albeit much extended) and at a later date this small hut covering a small ground frame which locked the gates and was interlocked with the signalling controlled by the signal box. Originally equipped with hand-worked gates, it was modernised with lifting barriers still controlled locally around 1965. A prominent hump in the road today marks the crossing's location.

The line now ran dead straight for more than half a mile in a ENE direction through open fields on a rising gradient of between 1:114 and 1:87. This section is now an overgrown path. www.mdrs.org.uk



Author's collection



SWOP MHW29056

Forty-two chains beyond Cores End crossing, a ground frame, Thomas's Siding (released by the token), gave access to a pair of loop sidings serving Soho Mill which was operated by Thomas & Green Ltd.

Soho Mill dated back to 1705 and was one of a chain of paper mills along the River Wye between High Wycombe and Bourne End but was the only one directly served by rail although the others created considerable traffic for the branch.

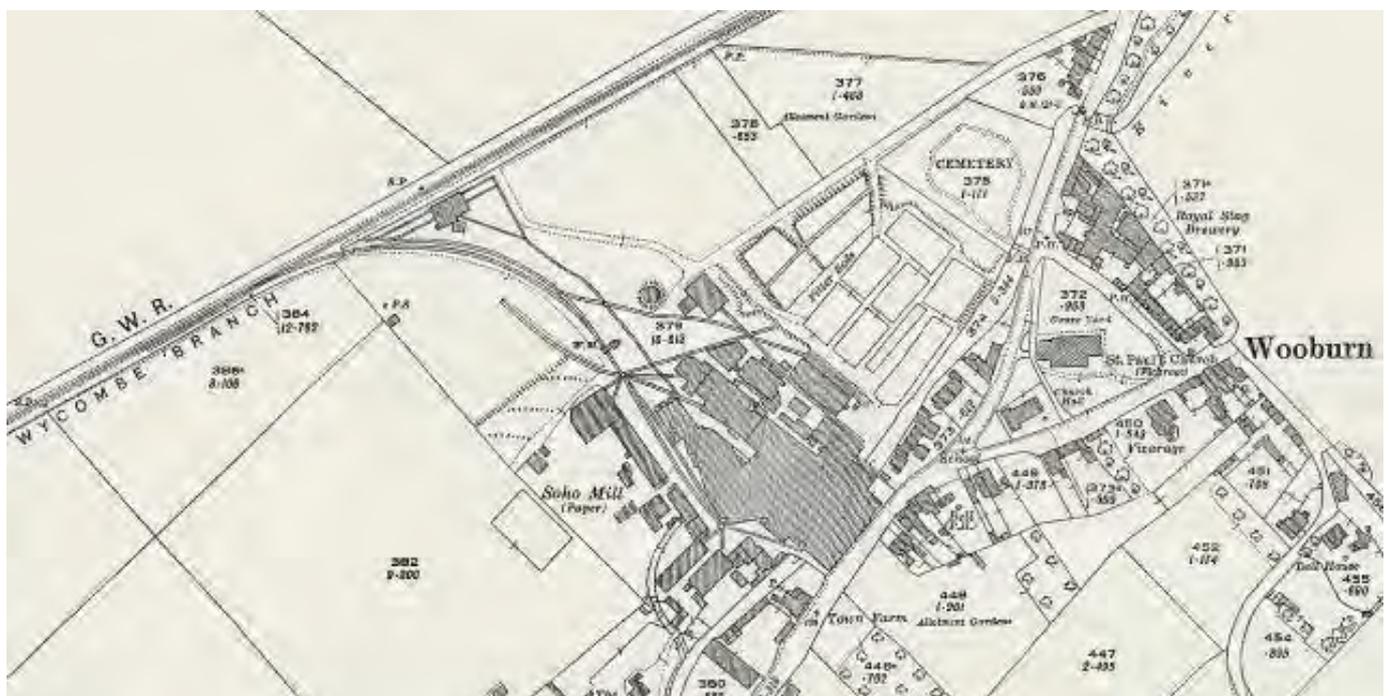
As can be seen from the extract from the 1925 25" OS map, there was an extensive network of tracks within the mill but locomotives were not permitted beyond the boundary, a horse or later a tractor being used for internal shunting.

There is no recorded date of when the private sidings were installed (they are shown on the 1899 OS map) but they remained in use 31st August 1967. The mill continued in operation until 1984. The site is now an industrial estate.



Thomas & Green owned a small number of wagons to bring coal direct from mines to feed the mill's boilers. Outbound traffic of paper would be loaded into railway company-owned vehicles both opens and vans with containers being used in later days.

Beyond Soho Mill, the branch entered a sweeping left hand curve as the Wye Valley narrowed to bring it to Wooburn Green station.



Wooburn Green located at 30m 2c and known as Woburn Green from opening until October 1872, was the smallest and most basic of the stations on the branch.

The layout was simple, a single platform with a short loop on the up side at the up end which could not be used for passing trains but fed two sidings.

The station buildings were to the standard Wycombe Railway design constructed of brick and flint with a slate roof comprising a single storey building with a two storey house attached at the "country" end. Like Bourne End this had been extended at some stage with a second gable, the extension being in plain brick. However, the rest of the building was the most unaltered of the lot to the extent that the original open-fronted waiting area was retained to the end but with a wooden frontage.

The signal box was located on the platform at platform level and contained 18 levers. Despite there being no facility to pass trains, it was a token exchange block post and remained open until the last day.

The goods yard appears to have had a shed similar to that which survives at Bourne End but this seems to have been removed between the wars (it appears on the 1920 GWR plan below) and a shed was provided on the platform between the station and signal box as a replacement. Despite being busy with local traffic and serving Glory Mill, the largest of the mills, it closed to goods traffic 11th September 1967. The station itself became an unstaffed halt from 1st January 1966.

Whitepit Lane crossed the line by a level crossing at the Wycombe end of the platform equipped with manual gates. Another, private crossing crossed both the line and goods yard at the other end of the station.

Following closure the station was demolished and the site is now a small housing development called Old Station Way.



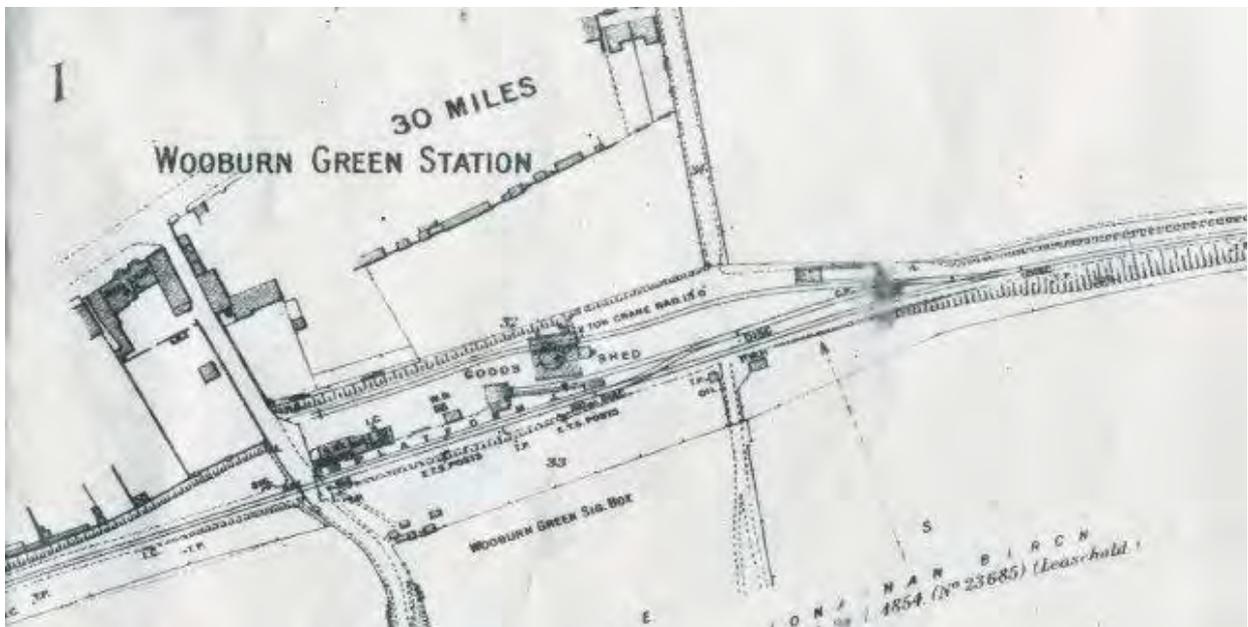
6141 leaves Wooburn Green with the 07:43 Aylesbury to Maidenhead on the delightful spring morning of 24th March 1962.

Gerald T Robinson



An unidentified Pressed Steel unit arrives at Wooburn Green on a High Wycombe to Bourne End working.

Author's collection





Gerald T Robinson

‘Tanner-oners’ were the staple power for most of the branch passenger trains for many years. Here, 6167 sets out from Wooburn Green bound for High Wycombe in 1961 with at least six non-corridor coaches of BR and GW origin probably having worked through from Paddington.

The line now entered the narrowest part of the Wye valley running along the back gardens of the houses on Wycombe Lane in a broad left hand curve bringing it onto a north-westerly heading.

At the point where Wycombe Lane changes to Boundary Road, a minor road, Juniper Lane, turns off leading up to Flackwell Heath. This crossed the railway at another level crossing known as Spicer’s Crossing at 30m 48c and the end of the curve. A tiny hut was provided to house the 3-lever frame which worked the gate lock (the gates were hand-worked) and the protecting distant signals which were mounted below the stop arms of the Wooburn Green down starter and Loudwater up advanced starter. Unlike the other stand-alone crossings, North Town (Furze Platt) and Cores End, Spicer’s Crossing does not appear



Author’s collection

to have been provided with a crossing keeper’s cottage.

Today, a small housing development, Tudor Close, occupies the trackbed on the Wycombe side whilst the nameplate lives on at the Didcot Railway Centre - if you know where to look!



Originally there were no bridges on the section between Bourne End and Loudwater. That changed with a vengeance with the construction of the M40 motorway in 1968-69.

A massive viaduct was built across the Wye Valley which was provided with box like tunnel nearly 100 yards long through the western approach abutment to the viaduct.

Of course, within a year of completion and the opening of the motorway the railway closed leaving a huge white elephant.

Author’s collection



Loudwater, 31m 29c, was in many ways the busiest on this part of the Wycombe Branch. The photograph above shows it around 1905 following the provision of the passing siding in 1904 but before the extension of the station house. This gives us an opportunity to see what the standard Wycombe Railway station buildings looked like in their original condition. The loop was only used for passing goods trains as there was no platform. The signal box had 25 levers and a gate wheel for the crossing.

The station house was extended around 1910 but in a different way to those at the other stations as can be seen in the photograph below taken in the 1950s. The passing loop was provided with a platform with a typical GWR 'Pagoda' shelter and upgraded to passenger standards from May 1942.

The chimney visible above the trees in the upper photograph belonged to Snakely Mill which was famous for manufacturing Ford's blotting paper.

Both collection of David Gardner





Collection of David Gardner



Ron North

Turning to face High Wycombe in the 1950s we can see the 'Pagoda' whilst the station appears to be enjoying a thriving parcels traffic. Contrast this with a view taken after the loop line was removed in 1966 as a Pressed Steel 'Bubblecar' and matching driving trailer depart for High Wycombe. A general air of neglect and decay has set in not helped by a damp winter day.

A more cheerful image is provided by 1421 about to leave for High Wycombe in the final days of steam operation in 1962. Whilst most services on the branch ran through between Maidenhead and High Wycombe (often starting or terminating elsewhere), there was a single round trip each day from Marlow to High Wycombe and return.

The subsidiary arm below the main arm was a Shunt Ahead signal whilst the Limit of Shunt applied to the up line.



Author's collection



Both author's collection

The yard handled the usual types of traffic found on country branch lines with a large amount of coal traffic not just for domestic consumption within Loudwater and Flackwell Heath but also for the local mills. All had to be delivered by road using vehicles such as this splendid Thames Trader of local merchant, Clarks.

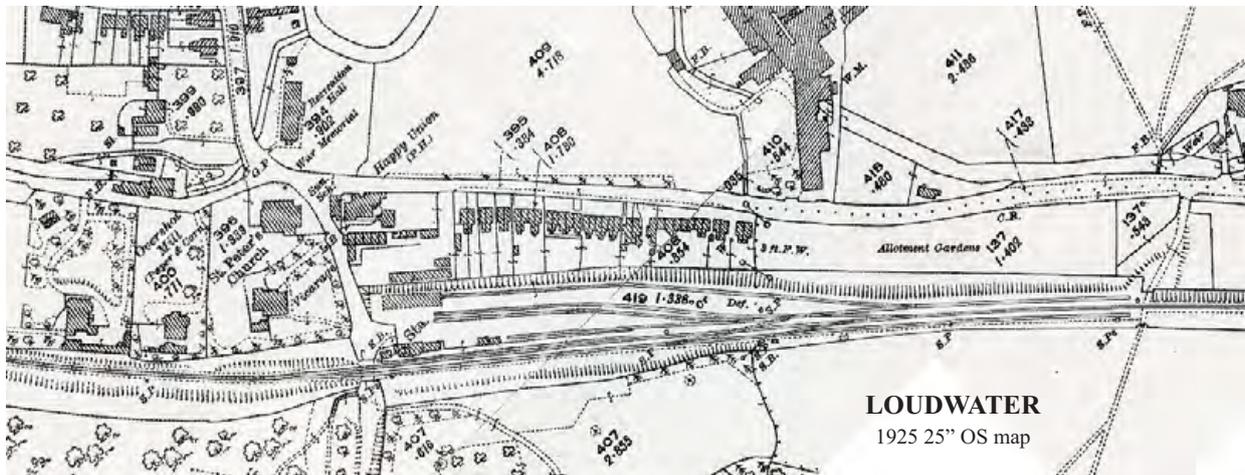
By the BR period much of the mill output was shipped in BD type containers which were loaded using this specialist fork lift called a Freightlifter- and built by Shelvoke & Drewry.

Despite its busy appearance, the yard closed on 18th July 1966.



The goods yard was a busy place feeding the two nearby mills, Snakely and Hedge Mills. Originally the layout resembled that at Wooburn Green but without a goods shed. It was extended in 1904 with two additional sidings, a lengthy headshunt towards Wooburn Green and a trailing crossover from the loop to the yard removing the need for one facing point - a common GWR practice.

A goods shed of sorts, it was actually more like an agricultural Dutch barn, was provided on the rearmost siding opposite the station house.



Following closure, Loudwater was used briefly as a base for training operators of tamping machines which were then in their infancy which must have resulted in this part of the branch having the best maintained track in the country! Unfortunately, the station buildings were neglected and soon became vandalised and derelict. They were demolished and the site redeveloped as a small industrial estate called the Treadway Technical Centre.

As previously mentioned, the section from Bourne End had been notably devoid of structures apart from the stations and the line closely following the contours of the valley on a steadily rising gradient. From Loudwater, however, things changed with nine bridges and some major earthworks onwards to High Wycombe.

As the line left Loudwater it entered a short, deep cutting before emerging to parallel Kingsmead Road. First there was an accommodation underbridge located off what is today Bridge Bank Close. Next came another underbridge over Spring Lane which lasted long enough after closure to be fitted with a modern height restriction sign but has since been demolished.



This was followed by an overbridge carrying Abbey Barn Lane which survives but apart from the parapets is hard to see as it as the trackbed has become completely overgrown with now mature trees.

From here the line turned to the right and struck out across the valley on an embankment with four underbidges. The first crossed Battersbury Lane which has not only been demolished but part of the embankment has been removed for housing development. Further bridges crossed a footpath off Bowden Lane, the River Wye and finally the A40 London Road. This last was a substantial steel girder bridge although it might not have been the original which might have been similar to Spring Lane but was replaced when the road was upgraded. It survived closure for a few years but was demolished due to corrosion.



Author's collection
On the last day of service, 2nd May 1970, Pressed Steel set 409 crosses the A40 London Road bridge.



Author's collection
The line now started its final approach to High Wycombe. In this view taken from the overbridge carrying the road into Gomm's furniture factory we can see the last underbridge over Gordon Road and on the right the viaduct carrying the GW & GC Joint Line over the same road. Today this area is occupied by the major housing development off Princes Gate.



Mike Walker
Following the construction of the Joint Line, the branch entered High Wycombe in front of the South Signal Box which had a 93-lever frame. The present Engineer's siding is the last remnant of the branch.



Colour-Rail

Journey's end. 1421 sits in the bay platform at High Wycombe on 7th July 1962. Unless they were continuing to Aylesbury or Oxford, all the branch services terminated in the bay - today's platform 1 used by trains from Marylebone terminating at High Wycombe.

Nearly eight years later, set 409 waits in the same position as Brush Type 4 1709 arrives with a Birmingham to Paddington service.

Back when the line opened in 1854 the station in High Wycombe was a terminal with a Brunelian overall roof. It was replaced by a new through station in 1864 (itself replaced when the Joint Line was built) but remained as part of a goods shed. Neglected for many years, local artist Dan Wilson painted this mural to brighten it up. Planning permission has recently been granted to restore and redevelop the building as commercial offices and a cafe.

WILL IT RETURN?

There are many who wish and believe that the railway will be reopened between Bourne End and High Wycombe while others argue it should never have closed.

Certainly, closure wasn't avoided by the way BR appeared to deliberately run down the service in its final years by splitting the service in two at Bourne End with one train running between Maidenhead and Marlow as now and the other between Bourne End and High Wycombe. Poor connections did little to encourage use. But it must be remembered that travel patterns were very different fifty years ago.

Much of the trackbed, as we've seen, has been lost and built over in the ensuing half century which means any attempt at reopening would require much property demolition making it prohibitively expensive. Some have suggested that rather than heavy rail, the line could be rebuilt as a light rail line, diverging from the old alignment where not available but again not really practical.



Mike Walker



Mike Walker

A STRANGER IN BUCKS



Derek Jones/Railway Herald

Were you to be motoring along the A41 north of Waddesdon in the early 1970s you might well have been surprised to come across this short train sitting at Westcott near the site of Akeman Street station on the former Great Central connecting line between Grendon Underwood and Ashendon Junctions.

It comprised electric locomotive E2001 and a pair of somewhat delapidated coaches. The locomotive had its pantograph raised but, of course, there was no wire. Intrigued, a letter was fired off to BR which resulted in the response shown. However, quite what they hoping to discover or prove when there was only one part of the electrification kit remains a mystery.

The locomotive was, of course, rebuilt from 18100, the WR's second gas-turbine built by Metro-Vickers in 1951 and captured by the late MDRS member Alan Morris at Paddington on 3rd May 1952.

In 1958 it was converted to a 25kV electric locomotive for early training and testing ahead of the arrival of the first AL series locos. It moved to Akeman Street late in 1969 and was finally sold to Cashmores at Great Bridge in 1972 who cut it up.



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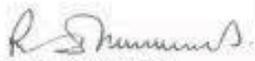
5th April, 1971.

Dear Sir,

Thank you for your letter of 28th March. The locomotive and coaches you refer to are sited, for testing, on an embankment in the direction of prevailing winds. The purpose of the tests is to measure wind velocities and turbulence on the overhead current collection system.

The train was towed to the unelectrified site at Westcott by a diesel locomotive.

Yours faithfully,


for R.W. Crawshaw.

MDRS 2001/13

DOUBLE WHAMMY, and more!

NIGEL HUNT's adventures in rail replacement

Having opportunity to cover a few rail replacement coordination shifts may involve gallivanting off to some exotic destination. Sunday February 9th was no exception.

Whilst having breakfast I checked my phone. There was one message asking me to sign in to work, which was strange as I was not aware of having agreed to doing any jobs on that weekend. Something was amiss! A call to 'the Ivory Tower' (tIT) elicited the fact that I should already be at Romsey! This visit was intended to be in conjunction with planned bridge replacement project.

Not wishing to let the side down, a quick change of clothes was followed by a rapid walk to Furze Platt station arriving as the 09:14 was approaching. Whilst awaiting connection at Maidenhead a phone call from 'tIT' advised that roads to Romsey were blocked by fallen trees. A quick rethink of my plans ended with redirection to Southampton Central.

On arrival at Reading (10:04) I checked departure-boards – next train to Basingstoke would be at 11:31. Hmm! Further investigation revealed that the 09:31 train was still in platform 3, lines being blocked by a dodgy tree at Bramley. Conversation with train-crew indicated that there was also disruption south of Basingstoke. Colleagues at 'tIT' advised it would be sensible to go home! Time now 10:25.

All the while, Storm Ciara was sending streams of rainwater around and through the station, driven by gale force winds. People were starting to mill around, with a few of them beginning to get very agitated. Several trains were advertised as either delayed or cancelled. Whilst problems were being reviewed, messages came through of reopening Waterloo, Gatwick and eventually Basingstoke lines but closure of all lines betwixt Reading and Paddington - trees on the lines and possible OHLE damage. Apologies for disruption, etc. All the while ancillary staff were scuttling around the overbridge with safety mats, mops and vacuum trying to contain, Canute-like, the flow of water being blown through the orifices above staircases and escalators.

Several cups of coffee (+ a pasty) later, a glimmer of hope. The first east-bound train. Late-running 13:35 from Didcot departed at 14:28, but only authorised to run as far as Slough. At last respite from watching rain fall, at times in monsoon proportions, and the constant drumming of the rain on the roof. Arrival at Maidenhead meant either waiting for branch train or heading into town for another cup of coffee and bus home - just as well I chose the latter option as there was another torrential downpour when I would have been walking home from the train. Eventual-home at 16:05!



GWR 43158 Kingswear Castle on a 'short' HST set at Penzance ready to form the 12:50 to Exeter St. Davids on 3rd March.

All photos by Nigel Hunt

WEEKEND TWO: STORM DENNIS

The following weekend I was collared to cover an early shift at Penzance (closure of line from Truro for programme of booked engineering work). Journey down on the 14th was fine, although the weather deteriorated from bright sunshine, through mist to persistent rain. Extensive flooding noticeable in the Hele / Cowley Bridge area. Some bouncy waves along the Dawlish coastline. One dare-devil was even swimming close to the shoreline, but I guess he knew what he was doing as high tide was imminent.

This trip coincided with Storm Dennis!! Silly hours start on Saturday morning, 15th February, to the accompaniment of gusty wind and associated rain. Winds forecast between force 6 and 8 on the Beaufort Scale (25-50 mph) became more boisterous and driving persistent rain throughout the morning. The shift idled away with varying numbers of embattled passengers, railway staff believing many potential travellers were being driven to Truro, trains restarting from there. All rail replacement vehicles, a mix of buses and coaches, ran to timetable despite worsening conditions. Bus shelter beside Penzance station is hardly a 1st-class lounge but it seems as strong as the proverbial outside privy and does at least give basic protection from the worst of the elements.

Transfer to Truro on the replacement stopping service at end of shift went to plan. This was a chance to glimpse the newly completed park-and-ride facilities at St Erth (replacing Lelant on the St Ives branch) and to meet colleagues at various stations who were getting their share of a soaking! On arrival at Truro we were advised that stock for the next Paddington service was delayed by c.30 minutes due to combination of network 50mph speed-limit and various operational challenges. Shelter under the platform canopy gave some respite from gales driving incessant flows of rain, at times almost horizontal, across the city.

The 5-car IET departed 30 mins late - speed restrictions and signalling problems ensured we lost a bit more time to Plymouth, where we coupled up to another 5-car unit. All the way along, station stops were achieved as quickly and safely as

One of the "features" of the new Reading station is the number of openings around the escalators and the transfer deck which during winter storms allows the wind and rain to enter the area making for unpleasant conditions and wet floors which can be a hazard for passengers and staff alike.



possible with travellers heaving their worldly chattels aboard. Unfortunately, speed restrictions and signal delays hindered improved timekeeping. Approaching Reading via the Berks and Hants line our delay was compounded by a very slow approach to the station – arrival over 100-minutes late. At least I had a chance of getting home, via connections, just after 2200. Almost a 9-hour journey, but I am sure that was better than for many travellers as some IET services were either cancelled or terminated at Reading – running so late they were turned around providing opportunity to passengers wishing to travel to westerly destinations.



Penzance bus station is conveniently located outside the rail station. First Kernow 33453, WK66CCF, an ADL Enviro MMC waits to work to Truro. St. Michael's Mount is visible beyond.



GWR 802013 departs from the down platform at St. Erth forming a Paddington to Penzance service on 3rd March.

GWR 150246 arriving at St. Erth from St. Ives. The bay platform here was realigned last year to make it slightly longer allowing it to accommodate trains formed of three 23m vehicles. Despite this, the well maintained station still has many traditional GWR features and semaphore signalling.

The alterations at St. Erth were in connection with a major new Park and Ride project for St. Ives replacing the former one at Lelant Saltings which had become inadequate.

The new facility has 518 parking spaces split between two locations on either side of the station - this is the one on the south side - and a bus interchange.

The old facility at Lelant Saltings is now closed although the station, which opened in 1978, remains open with a limited service for local residents.





GWR Turbo 16621 prepares to leave Cardiff Central with the 12:30 service to Salisbury on 25th February. Normally this would continue through to Southampton and Portsmouth Harbour but was prevented from doing so by the landslip near Milford just beyond Salisbury.

LANDSLIP AT SALISBURY

Along with many people, I awaited return of more peaceful weather, coupled with opportunity to go out to take some photos. Yeah, well pigs might fly! Nature conspired to cause a variety of inconveniences around the country, including to transport, during the latter part of February. If flooding and lines blocked by landslides wasn't bad enough a section of the railway between Salisbury and Romsey subsided to such an extent that rail services had to be suspended. (This disruption has lasted for several weeks).

Replacement road transport was hastily provided, using Southampton Central and Salisbury as main bases, with Romsey as an intermediate focus for stopping services. I was 'invited' to cover 3 shifts, 26th-28th February, at Southampton Central. I decided to travel down on 25th February using the Cardiff – Portsmouth service, a chance to familiarise myself with aspects of the customer experience.

People not familiar with Cardiff (Central) station do not realise platforms are divided into 'A' and 'B' sections. Trains departing from platforms 1 and 2 tend to be 2 or 3- car trains and leave from the Bristol end of the platform ('A' end). Apart from the variety of trains, amusement for old fogeys is to watch passengers congregating at the 'A' end until they see stock for the next train appear at the 'B' end of the platform, where it stops for crew-change, catering, etc and for the call-on signal to the 'A' end. On reaching said train they are sent scuttling back along the platform to await boarding announcements. My own trip went smoothly with all connections as advertised, which was good as provision of transport was still in the planning stage for the longer-term prospect of disruption.



The delights of rail replacement service; it always seems to rain. Which is precisely why the service was running as it was heavy winter rain that caused the landslip. Passengers struggle with their luggage to board outside Southampton Central station on 25th February.

With the railways now having to provide PRM compliant rolling stock the issue of accessible road vehicles is now to the fore. Whilst buses are already compliant, high-floor luxury coaches such as these are not.

Services from Southampton Central proved to run smoothly for the first 2 days, some rush-hour delays to be expected. For once weather was a mix of sunshine, chilly winds and a few sharp showers. Services consisted of 2 vehicles direct on an hourly basis Southampton Central to Salisbury, and a half-hourly stopping service to Salisbury via Romsey, which also served the diddy stations along the line. On Wednesday there was an additional requirement for my double-decker stand-by bus to cover an early Romsey to Southampton run, and mid-afternoon return, for 60+ school-kids on a day out to Southampton. Also on Wednesday, we were advised of a need to introduce additional services consisting of a half-hourly road service to Romsey via Eastleigh and Chandlers Ford. Draft timetables eventually became available, as did vehicles to provide the service. Thursday was thus a bit more hectic than originally expected.

On day 3, Friday, we had arrival of Storm Jorge, which heralded plenty of wind and vast quantities of continuous rain. Needless to say, this was the busiest of my 3 days, with vast numbers of people trying to use the pre-weekend Portsmouth – Cardiff route of which our road transport services formed the middle section. We did our best, numerous uses of back-up vehicles, but delays were inevitable with horrendous volumes of road traffic and roadworks causing varying degrees of delays. Problems for late shift colleagues were compounded by routine closure of the A36 each night 2000 – 0600 for major road works, with the diversionary route via Ringwood.

Most of our passengers accepted the problems resolutely, but I can't say that for everyone. We also managed to cope without too much angst from taxi and local bus-drivers. Very cramped area at Southampton Central we had to work around the frequent service of local town buses and squadrons of taxis. Yet another soaking for the coordination team, but hey-ho the customers come first. (Subsequently schedules have been reviewed; there is a local train-service to Romsey, I am not sure what the final road transport solution has been – may even change on a weekly basis!).

Once things had quietened down, I spent a couple of days retracing my steps thereby having a few moments to take photos to record sites and scenes. No camera during shifts, but at least I could now see things from the comfort of leisure time. Also, time to see some of the fine countryside, Saltash Bridge, the holiday railway carriage at St Germans, coastal scenes, floods on the Somerset Levels, etc, and some welcome sunshine to accompany the winding country-lanes on the rural ride from Romsey to Salisbury!

I had just finished these notes when the coronavirus plague hit us – back to normal one day!

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Southampton Central is noteworthy for having a superb example of Southern Railway Art deco architecture dating from the mid-1930s when the station was rebuilt and extended as part of a wider land reclamation project to enlarge the docks.

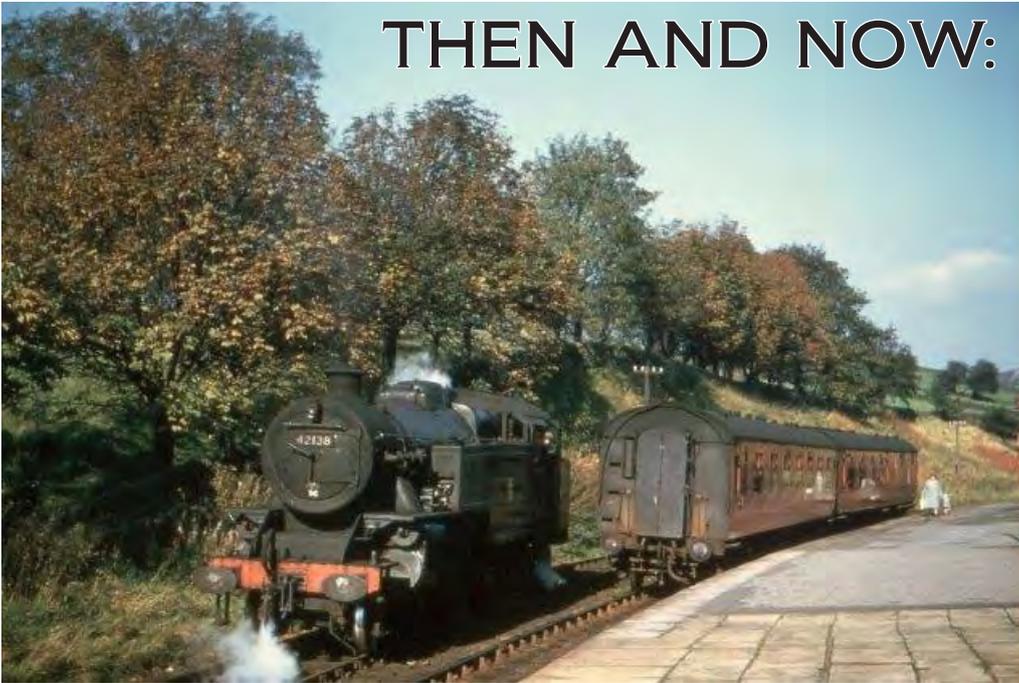
Conditions were much improved on 13th March when X22ACL, a Jonckheere-bodied Volvo operated by AC Travel of Gosport was on rail replacement duties, sharing the forecourt with another Enviro MMC this time operated by Go South Coast, and a taxi.



To meet the PRM requirements it is often necessary to provide regular service buses for rail replacement service so that wheelchairs can be accommodated. Unfortunately, these are much less suited to the longer-distance journeys that are often required.

On 13th March one such vehicle, YY69TNJ, a brand-new ADL Enviro 20D operated by Bee Line Travel of Hatch End approaches Romsey station.

THEN AND NOW: OXENHOPE



Three views this time depicting, for once, a scene very little changed with the passage of time, Oxenhope.

This was how this quiet former Midland Railway terminus looked in October 1956. Fairburn 4MT 2-6-4 tank 42138 runs round its train amid the autumnal tints and long before the K&WVR was thought of.

Colour-Rail BRM307

Following closure at the end of 1961 the branch was rescued by the newly-formed Keighley & Worth Valley railway although operations didn't begin until 29th June 1968.

Almost four years later, Ivatt 2MT 2-6-2T 41241 dressed in K&WVR maroon livery stands at Oxenhope on 5th June 1972.

Nothing much has changed apart from a far healthier passenger count.

Mike Walker



Moving on to 4th May 2009 still there is little of note in the way of change apart from some gardening taking place opposite the run round.

A "soft" Yorkshire day has obviously reduced the number of visitors to witness BR Standard 2-6-4T 80002's arrival from Keighley.

Mike Walker