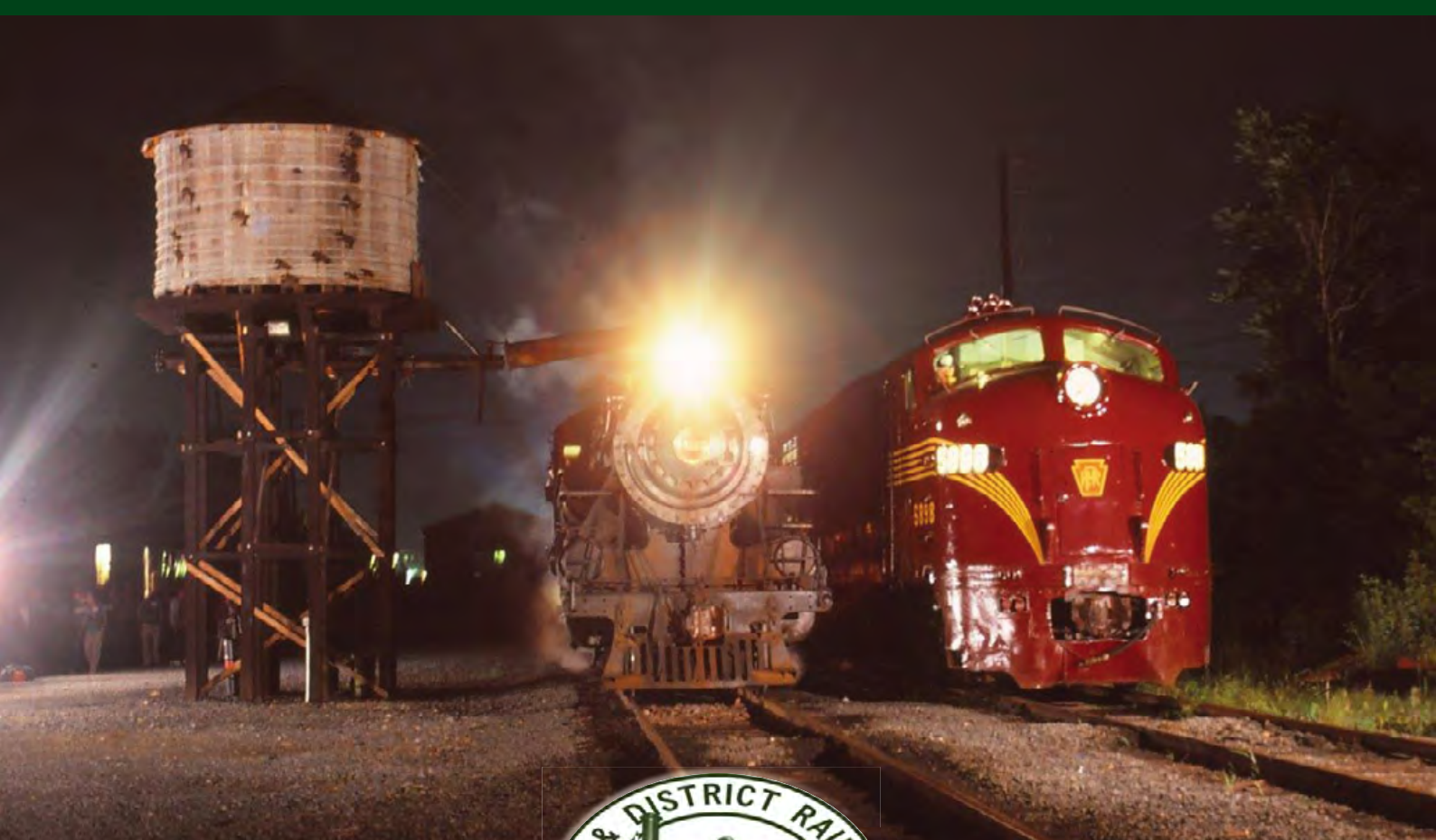
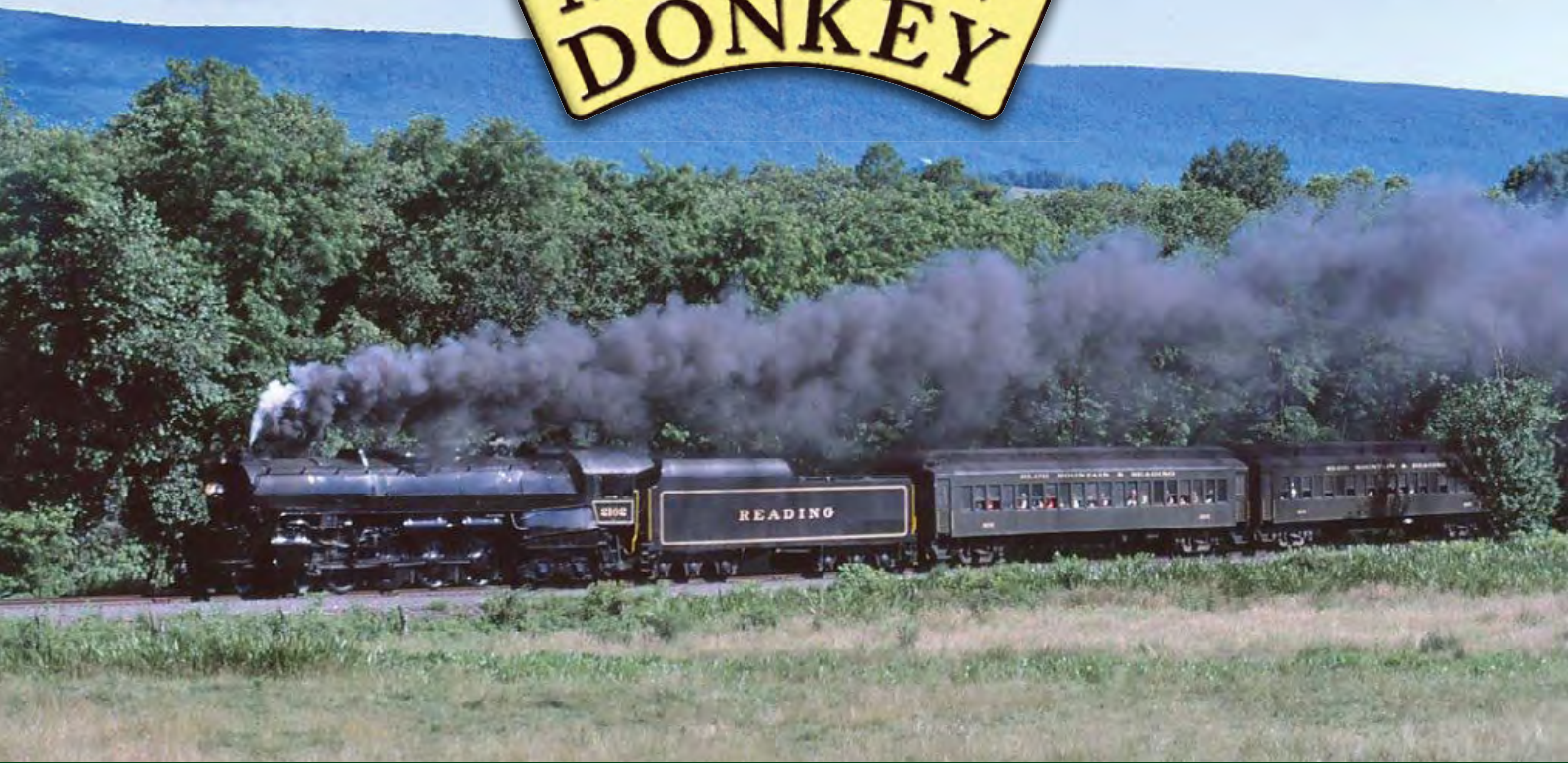


THE MARLOW DONKEY



Edition

187

March 2025

Contents:
Tickets Please - Part 13
The Long Island Chronicle
A Country Wide Ramble
Then & Now Spade Oak

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: 4-8-4 2102 passing Five Locks Farm near South Hamburg PA, USA. 28 June 1987.

Photo: Mike Walker. Article page 7.

Bottom: Former Gulf Mobile & Northern 4-6-2 425 poses alongside Pennsylvania Railroad EMD E8A 589.

26 June 1987. Photo: Mike Walker. Article page 7.

TIMETABLE

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

Meetings are held in the Bourne End Community Centre, Wakeman Rd, Bourne End at 7.15 for 7.30pm or can be attended on-line on Zoom.

Thursday 20 March **50 YEARS OF PHOTOGRAPHING RAILWAYS** Charles Roberts

Charles Roberts has been taking photographs of railways since 1973. In this presentation he looks back on the last half century of camera work, from an inauspicious start, through his early trainspotting days and subsequent travels throughout Britain and beyond. The talk features some of his favourite railway images and recurring theme, as well as examples of simply being in the right place at the right time. Stories of running the gauntlet of shed masters, guard dogs, armed security staff and border officials to get elusive pictures also feature.

Thursday 17 April **P2 PRINCE OF WALES** Chris Ardy

Chris's Presentation will cover the reasons why the A1 Steam Locomotive Trust, has decided to build a P2, including a brief history of the class of locomotive.

All fund raising initiatives being used for the P2 will be described.

Their locomotive works in Darlington where the P2 is being assembled will also be shown.

Thursday 15 May **AMERICA'S COLOURFUL RAILROADS OF THE 60s & 70s** Don Woodworth

Col. Don Woodworth, United States Air Force (Retired), long-time friend of Mike Walker, will give a presentation on the United States railroad scene in the 1960s and 1970s. He will cover highlights of each major region of the US with emphasis, where possible, on locations to which British gricers might relate - starting with Don's home region of New England.

Thursday 19 June **CRICH NATIONAL TRAMWAY MUSEUM** Frank Bagshaw

Frank describes the National Tramway Museum founded in 1959 and located at Crich, in the Peak District. The museum contains over 80 trams built between 1873 and 1982 and is set within a recreated period village containing a working pub, café, old-style sweetshop and tram depots.

A VISIT TO PENDON MUSEUM

We are looking to arrange a visit to Pendon Museum to view the remarkable modelling there. The most suitable date would be in April and Saturday 26th looks to be the most appropriate. We invite you to join us there. The museum is located in the village of Long Wittenham between Wallingford and Didcot, postcode OX14 4QD for sat-navs. There is no public transport but a lift can be arranged if required. The museum is open between 11:00 and 16:00, admission £7.00.

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

2025 is to be a significant year for the railways as we celebrate Railway 200 and the bicentenary of the opening of the Stockton & Darlington Railway. As noted on page 3, Buckinghamshire Council are planning to mark the occasion with some events staged around the Marlow branch. Whilst we know that this is the most important part of the GWR network, why, you might be asking, do they want to concentrate on the branch when the classic GWR served much of the southern half of the county. Well it's because they are hoping to obtain funding from GWR's Customer Community Improvement Fund and therefore are concentrating on that part of the network. Plans include a possible exhibition and creating a heritage train along the line including on-train guides on certain dates. The Society has been asked for its assistance.

The other big event this year looks like being the passage through Parliament that will pave the way for Great British Railways bringing all the passenger operations and infrastructure back together under one organisation which, we are promised, will be largely free from the day-to-day micro-

management by civil servants at the DfT. Freight will remain in private operation as will the existing open access passenger operators although the prospects for future expansion of the latter look bleak.

Will it work? Well time will tell. The privatisation era largely failed because the industry was never actually 'privatised'. Always subject to dictates from the DfT it was never really able to deliver what it was expected to.

Another piece of news you'll see on page 3 is that we are replacing the brass plate on the Bourne End to Marlow train staff which went missing several years ago – before 2008 when the old ground frame was replaced. It is also hoped to restore its original red paintwork during the nine-day possession on the branch next month but this is subject to Network Rail agreeing to release it to us...

Mike Walker

SOCIETY NEWS

FAREWELLS

Sadly, we must record that Alan Machon passed away suddenly last month. He was also a member of the RCTS and an early recruit to the Great Western Society, organising the early open days at Taplow and then going on to undertake various roles for the GWS.

In addition, Tony Allerton and Keith Gower have both decided, reluctantly, not to renew their membership due to their declining health.

PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Peter Robins wrapped up 2024 with his presentation to the December meeting taking us for a trip around Northern China. which covered from Nancha in the North East to Lanzhou in the North West, the show includes loco construction at Datong and Tangshan as well as the older JF/RM/SL classes at work. Later visits made between 1992 and 2004 include various industrial locations on both standard and narrow gauge including Anshan steelworks, Chengde and Hunjiang as well as mainline action at Zhongwei on the edge of the Gobi Desert, Yebaishou and the spectacular JingPeng Pass

In January we welcomed Alan Price from the Great Western Society who gave us an excellent presentation covering the whole story of how the GWS has developed from the initial idea on the Southall footbridge to the Didcot Railway Centre of today.

Following the AGM in February, Peter Robins entertained us once more, this time with a visit to India which was always a wonderful but slightly frustrating country that was full of surprises - some good some not so. From five visits made between 1981 and 1996, both presentations include a variety of steam classes at work on broad and metre gauge and on a number of the charming narrow gauge lines at various locations. Industrial lines also feature as does steam over the border in Pakistan.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

A polite reminder to the small number of you that have not, as yet, renewed your membership for 2025. The rate is unchanged for the coming year, that is £16.00. The reduced rate for those of you who live some distance away and therefore attend meetings only on rare occasions remains at £8.00 with a meeting attendance fee of £2.00.

Remember, the Society now has a bank account with Lloyds which has a number of advantages over the previous account for both members and the treasurer. If you have on-line banking, you may make bank transfers to the Society. The sort code is 30-95-36. The account no. is 62236160

If you wish to pay your subs by this method, please put "SUBS" and your name (including initial) - e.g. "SUBS-J.BLOGGS" - in the reference, and MDRS in the "Pay" box if required.. You could also set up a Standing Order to pay MDRS every 1st January which would be most convenient for both parties.

Of course you may still pay by cash or cheque. However, banks now levy a charge for paying-in cheques so if you can avoid paying that way it would be appreciated. Please note that ONLY

cheques made out to "MDRS" or "Marlow & District Railway Society" will be accepted by the bank.

RCTS MEETINGS

Our friends in the RCTS have the following meetings planned for the coming months.

Monday 24th March

Gems of the HC Casserley Archive – Robert Freeman.

Monday 28th April

Eastleigh: From Railway Junction to Railway Centre – Gordon Adams.

Monday 19th May

Edward Thompson, Wartime CME – Simon Martin.

Meetings are held at the Cox Green Community Centre, Highfield Lane, Cox Green, SL6 3AX starting at 19:30 and like ours by Zoom. MDRS members always welcome. To register to attend by Zoom visit:

<https://rcts.org.uk/windsormaidenhead> and follow the link there.

REFURBISHING THE TRAIN STAFF

We are currently in the process of making a replacement nameplate for the Bourne End to Marlow train staff, the original was stolen one night many years ago when it 'lived' in the open air ground frame. We thought this would be a nice gesture in recognition of all that GWR and our President have done for the Society over the years.

To complete the work, we are hoping to be able to restore its original signal red paintwork which has rubbed off over many years use. Of course, this requires the staff to be available for several days to enable a proper job to be made. Fortunately, there is a 9-day blockade of the branch scheduled for 12th - 20th April and, if Network Rail are in agreement to it being removed, it will be done then.

RAIL 200

In case you've not noticed, this year marks the 200th anniversary of the opening of the Stockton & Darlington and a number of events are planned to celebrate.

Locally, the Culture Team at Buckinghamshire Council are hoping to mark the occasion along the Marlow branch and have applied for funding from GWR's Community Fund. At the time of writing a decision but ideas include:

- To establish a public heritage trail which would encourage use of The Donkey in one direction and walking along the Thames Path in the other
- To include the station in the Marlow Tour currently being developed by the Marlow Society.
- To hold an exhibition at the Marlow Museum, the museum is keen on this.
- To add a photo display at Bourne End station similar to the one already one at Marlow, albeit not at the present station but at the site of the original.

We have been asked to take part but until final decisions are made it's open to debate.

TICKETS PLEASE!

Recollections of a Great Western Train Guard 1999 to 2018 (Part Thirteen)

Martin Stoolman



In the last article I began to talk about the most public-facing aspect of the job, and that is of course checking tickets - or “revenue protection” to quote the official title. As I said before, it is the only side of the Guard’s job that the customers regularly see, with the result that many think it is all we do. Quite often though there is so much else happening on a busy train that there is simply not enough time to complete a full ticket check, or check any tickets at all if safety or other priorities come along. And by “other priorities” I don’t just mean grabbing a cup of tea from the buffet!

On the sleeper train there is not really any excuse for failing to check tickets. Customers joining the sleeping cars have them checked on entry by the sleeper stewards. That only leaves a coach and a half of seated accommodation (not including the Buffet coach, or Lounge Car to give it its correct description) for the Guard to check. And you can never make assumptions either about who will probably not have a ticket, as my log for Friday 20th October 2000 recalls. Earlier problems with a loss of power on the loco, 47811, meant we ran into Taunton on the up sleeper 50 minutes behind time. There an unfortunate family (two adults and two infants) were huddled on the platform waiting for us as we ran in. I never gave it a thought that they might be candidates for the “no tickets and no money to pay” scenario, so I got the train away before approaching them. Their excuse was that they had mislaid their money and were on their way to Reading to retrieve it! Hmm... As we were non-stop to Reading and there were no ticket barriers back then as I am sure they knew, I issued them with an Unpaid Fares Notice. The nice side of me reasoned that if they were telling the truth, they might be able to plead their case when their fine appeared a few days later in the post. They might even have already bought their tickets in retrospect once they “found” their money, but I rather doubt it!

The lack of ticket barriers did nothing to assist us Guards back in those early days. Mind you, at the same time, we didn’t have any guidelines telling us not to chuck youngsters with no tickets off our trains. Not much sympathy shown for child welfare

First Great Western 47811 is recorded by Martin as having had power problems whilst pulling the Up Sleepers in October 2000. Just over one year earlier here is the same loco seemingly going well as it heads away from Newton Abbot and approaches the former Aller Junction with the 14.32 Paddington to Penzance on 18th August 1999.

Photo: David Mitchell

back then! On Tuesday 2nd July 2002, while working 1C38, the 13.33 Paddington to Penzance, I turfed two teenagers for Plymouth off at Taunton who were travelling with One Day London Travelcards issued at Luton, along with a gent trying to get to Exeter with the incorrect portion of a ticket not even for the correct date. My log for the journey shows that we left Reading 3 minutes late, and surprisingly lost no further time at Taunton while I persuaded these miscreants to disembark - the log saying we also left Taunton 3 minutes late. That is not bad going, as people are not always that keen on getting thrown off their train when push comes to shove (pun intended!).

A couple of months later, Tuesday 3rd September 2002, I was booked for a “route refresh” day. All Guards got these periodically, and I think they still do. The idea of these was to enable us to travel with our maps on a route that we “sign” but might not have been on for a while. For us Exeter Guards this would typically be a diversionary route, perhaps Exeter to Castle Cary via Yeovil. If this was the chosen route it would take up the full day. Getting a South West Trains service from St David’s to Yeovil Junction was the easy bit and, if you struck lucky with the timing, hopping on a Weymouth to Bristol between Yeovil Pen Mill and Castle Cary would work out okay. It was getting from Yeovil Junction to Yeovil Pen Mill without any regular train service that was the interesting bit. Donning our high-vis vests we would walk to Yeovil Junction signal box and inform the signaller there of our intentions. Then, with his permission, we would set off on foot along the track to Pen Mill where we would knock on the door of that signal box and inform the signaller that we had “cleared the section”. There were three

FIRST GREAT WESTERN TRAINS CO. LTD.									
05.45 HRS. TRAIN FROM.....BRISTOL.....M									
Name of Driver					Stationed at				
					BRISTOL				
Mile No.	Stations, Junctions, or Division Boundaries	Timekeeping		Minutes lost					
		Booked	Actual	Min. Late Dep.	A. Sta. tops	By Eng. ne	By Sign. ne	By P.W. checks	By other causes
	BRISTOL M.	05.45	05.45						
	BATH SPA	05.57	05.57						
	CHIPPENHAM	06.10	06.10						
	SWINDON	06.26	06.33	7					7
	DIDCOT PAW	06.42	06.47	5					
	READING	06.57	07.01						
		06.58	07.04	6	1				
	PADDINGTON	07.29	07.36	7					

TO PADDINGTON.....TUES. DAY THE 03 OF SEP. 2002									
Engine		Fuel		To					
H.S.T. (14025)									
Minutes gained	At Sta. stop	By Eng. ne	Load		General remarks as to cause of delay and location. Formulated notes, including information to suit during journey.				
			Vehicles	Tons	NO DRIVER/GUARD COMM.				
					CHECKING TICKETS AFTER BATH - BLOKE IN E, NO TICKET NO MONEY. ASKED HIM TO LEAVE AT CHIPPENHAM (HE REFUSED - WANTED TO GO TO PADDING). ARRANGED A RECEPTION PARTY FOR HIM AT READING BUT THERE HE COULD NOT (OR WOULD NOT) WAKE UP. LET HIM CONTINUE TO PADD WHERE I USHERED HIM TO WAITING POLICE. ARRESTED FOR JUMPING BAIL.				
					DELAYED INTO SWINDON (UP S. WALES SERVICE?).				
					20 M.P.H. FROS AT SOUTHALL.				
Accommodation and cleanliness of stock						Weather			
BOOKED ON 03.45 A.M. TAXI TO BRISTOL IN LIEU OF 07.00 ROUTE REFRESH						DAMP AT FIRST - DRIER LATER.			

bonuses we could hope for on such a day, the first being that it wasn't chucking it down with rain. The second was being invited in for a "brew" by one or both of the signalmen (I never encountered any women) or, failing that, enjoying the offerings of one or both of the cafes on the respective stations. And the third bonus emanates from the fact that a golf course straddles that section of line, giving the opportunity to harvest stray golf balls. This was a particularly rewarding activity on a Monday (after the weekend) as I once discovered, when I accumulated eight of them. I have no great interest in golf personally, but they were gratefully received by my brother.

Anyway I digress; back to 3rd September 2002 and, as very often happened on such "route refresh" days, I was denied the opportunity of any sort of jolly due to a shortage of Guards, this time at Bristol. Somehow they persuaded me (by crossing my palm with silver no doubt) to book on at the distinctly uncivilised time of 03.45, putting me in a taxi to Bristol (no train to get me there at that hour of the morning!) in order to cover the 05.45 Bristol Temple Meads to Paddington, stopping at Bath Spa, Chippenham, Swindon, Didcot and Reading. I cannot now remember whether barriers had been introduced at Bristol by then (it was one of the first stations to get them) but in any event they would have been unmanned at that time in the morning. There was therefore nothing to stop a particularly obnoxious gent boarding my train without a ticket, and settling himself down for the journey. It was only after Bath that I entered coach E and encountered him. He had no ticket, and had no intention of buying one either, claiming he had no money. My attempt at persuading him to leave at Chippenham was unsuccessful - the only staff available to help would have been a dispatcher or two, so delay there would have been inevitable. You have to always weigh up the pros and cons of any action you take with fare dodgers, and consider the interests of the other 300 plus people on the train. At that time on a weekday morning they would have been the holders of either season tickets or full fare "Anytime" tickets, all of them anxious to get to work or meetings. He had told me he wanted to go to Reading, so I reasoned that my best bet was to take him there, but arrange for a revenue protec-

Extract from one of Martin's log books, showing the entry for 3rd September 2002 when he worked the 05.45 Bristol to Paddington service as described in the article.

tion team to be on the platform to meet him. Sure enough there they were, but by then he had fallen fast asleep or was feigning sleep. Either way he wasn't to be roused so, in the interests of getting my fare paying passengers to London (we were already six minutes late), I told the revenue protection guys to just leave him and I would contact the British Transport Police at Paddington instead. This I did, and thankfully I spotted two of them waiting on the platform as we pulled in at 07.36. I made sure I unlocked the train doors from coach E so that I could keep an eye on him, and point him out to the BTP guys. It all went like a dream and to his great surprise he was apprehended. Fortunately I had just under an hour until my return working so I was able to stick around at a discreet distance should the BTP want a statement from me. However it was not discreet enough to prevent him spotting me, prompting him to yell "You b***ard" in my direction! Once they had established his identity, it turned out he was in the process of jumping bail so was a wanted man. "Well I'm afraid you're not going to get your fare money," said one of the policemen to me, "but we do appreciate what you have done." And with that I left them to it and wandered off to the mess room for a quick break prior to working the 08.33 Paddington to Plymouth back to Exeter. All very satisfying!

As an aside, you will see from the log of that journey (reproduced here) the comment "No Driver/Guard Comm". All my logs, especially the earlier ones, are littered with references to this particular problem relating to the failure of the stop/go buzzer, along with the crew communication phone. I will be reviewing the many such foibles of HSTs in the next article.

It has to be said we are not always backed up by the BTP but, to be fair to them, they have limited resources and cannot be in two places at once. In my time there was quite often just one staff member on duty to cover the whole of Devon and Cornwall! They did however tend to get more prevalent the closer you got to London. One train that operated for a number of years latterly was the 11.06 weekday Paignton to Paddington which we

worked throughout. Its route was via the Berks & Hants and it stopped at almost every station imaginable, so much so that any more stops wouldn't have fitted in my log book! Bedwyn, Hungerford, Thatcham and Theale all featured. Of course stopping at these stations (all unstaffed) with an 8 coach HST rendered any meaningful attempt at revenue protection pretty futile, and some regulars knew that, so tried to take advantage. I worked this train on two days in succession, Wednesday 11th and Thursday 12th January 2012. On the first day I did manage to catch two guys who got on at Hungerford with no tickets and who refused to pay for any. Time did not permit me to do anything other than report it. Nothing would normally happen in these circumstances but, to my amazement, the following day there were the two miscreants on the platform again and there also on the platform were two BT policemen. They were responding to my report but of course didn't know who they were looking for. Luckily the train stopped with me close to these two guys which meant I could challenge them for their tickets as they boarded. I got the same retort from them as I had the previous day, and so I beckoned the BT police over, explained the situation to them, and they were immediately taken into custody. So it was well worth two minutes station delay to get that result!

As you can see, catching the fare dodgers is very much about teamwork. On Wednesday 6th March 2015 after booking on, I happened to see Perry, the leader of the local revenue protection team in Exeter at that time. He asked me what trains I would be working, and when I mentioned the 16.57 Plymouth to Paddington, he told me to watch out for a young lady with long dark hair and a pink handbag, who would get on at Ivybridge and try to travel to Newton Abbot, pretending that she couldn't find her ticket. Sure enough as the train pulled in I spotted her. Unfortunately I wasn't able to prevent her boarding, but did challenge her for her ticket after we had departed. Sure enough, she went through her usual act. After making it very clear that I knew this wasn't the first time she had tried it on, I ejected her at Totnes.

She would probably have simply got on the next train from there and completed her journey, but at least she had been inconvenienced. Anyway, the main thing was that the revenue team did eventually have her arrested, and my back up testimony helped to ensure a successful prosecution.

I will end with my experience aboard the 13.05 Paddington to Plymouth on Monday 25th January 2016. While checking tickets I came across a young couple dressed in hippy style clothes straight from the 1960s. They had no tickets, saying that they never buy tickets because Mother Earth provides us with all her natural resources for free, and railways and trains were just that. When I pointed out that the railway was not a natural resource, they counter claimed by stating that the ballast was just stones from the Earth, and that the rails were made from iron ore mined from the ground. I did try to play them at their own game for a little while, reminding them about labour costs etc., but they were so unbelievably brazen I ran out of patience. I rang the aforementioned Perry, and he organised a revenue protection party to meet us at Exeter. They got absolutely nowhere with them either however, unable to even get their names and addresses. British Transport Police were their only recourse but sadly there was nobody available and they had no choice but to let them go. Very irritating. However as luck would have it the very next day the duo boarded a stopping service at Dawlish and were spotted by one of the revenue protection team from the previous afternoon, and he again apprehended them at Exeter. This time a member of BTP was around and they were escorted off to the police interview room on platform one. I would have loved to have been a fly on the wall to witness the outcome. Anyway it was certainly one of the more bizarre incidents of my railway career. No wonder I decided it was time to think about retirement!

Martin talks about an experience he had while working the 13.33 Paddington to Penzance in July 2002. Here we see the same service passing Dawlish the previous year, 27th July 2001.

Photo: David Mitchell



THE LONG ISLAND CHRONICLES

Mike Walker



Concluding the story, the first part of which was in the September 2024 issue.

Reggie says he's got an ALCo

Not all my time was spent on Long Island, I often escaped. On one occasion I'd not long returned to East Moriches when the phone rang. Vera picked up, it was Reggie. No time to pass the phone to me but the message was: "I've a pair of ALCos on a rail train and will be coming by in about 15 minutes." Vera asked if that meant anything to me. Of course it did! I grabbed my camera bag and was out of the door and back in my rental car in a flash heading up to the site of the old East Moriches station.

I didn't have to wait long before a headlight appeared in the distance and behind it the imposing form of an ALCo C420 running long hood forward and emitting its signature plume of black exhaust each time the throttle was adjusted. As it passed Reggie shouted down "Meet me at Southampton". After the two ALCos and their trailing train of loaded rail carrying cars borrowed from Amtrak had passed I jumped back in the car and headed for Southampton as instructed.

I managed to arrive just before Reggie. The train was parked up in the siding opposite the station. The lead locomotive was then cut off and run round to be attached to the rear ready for the following day when the train would be dropping new rail at various points along the line.

It would be the only time I encountered Reggie working the ALCos or, indeed, a non-passenger train. Next day we were back on passenger work with 266 again and had to take refuge in the siding at Westhampton to allow 229 and the rail train to pass westbound.

Maintenance?

There was nothing "cutting edge" about LIRR trains in those days. Out on the east end the stock comprised elderly cars

Long Island ALCo C420s 229 and 225 with a continuous welded rail train borrowed from Amtrak passing the former East Moriches station heading east with Reggie at the throttle on 24th June 1987.

All photographs by the author.

that had been converted from former EMU cars originally built by Pullman Standard. There were two series, the 2800s and 2900s. The latter could be distinguished easily by their lower roofs and the heart sank whenever they were spotted in the train. Early in my "career" Reggie had advised me that 2900s "didn't have brakes". You will imagine I found this revelation somewhat concerning. Reggie explained that in their original form they had EP rather than straight air brakes and when it came to converting them it was thought to be too much hassle so they just left them unbraked! What view the FRA took of this I don't know or if they even knew! Needless to say, when running a train including 2900 cars you took a lot longer and more care when stopping.

One balmy summer day we were bowling along the outer reaches of the Montauk line with not a care in the world. Our GP38-2 (not 266 this time) was happily cruising along at about 40mph in notch 4. I glanced at the ammeter and spotted it was showing us pulling maximum amps. That can't be right I thought so I gave it a tap but nothing moved. I throttled back then up again but again no response. I then looked closer and called Reggie over and pointed to the ammeter. Reggie looked closely, shrugged his shoulders and returned to his seat observing "now you know why it's the Long Island Rail Road and Storm Door Company" – a reference to one of the wonderful monologues by the late Bob Newhart: The Grace L. Ferguson Airline (And Storm Door Co.). It seems they'd lost the ammeter needle so someone at Morris Park had taken out the glass, carefully painted a needle on the reverse and refitted it!

263 plus a sister and MP15AC 168 lead train #4021 *The Cannonball* racing through Center Moriches NY on 21st June 1987 and about to get a surprise for all aboard.

The Cannonball is the only named train on the LIRR and still runs eastbound on Friday evenings and returning on Sundays for those city dwellers who weekend in the Hamptons. Sadly, today's bi-level stock does not include 1st class parlour cars, those with red stripes seen here.



Not to be forgotten

On another occasion but on an autumn day we were on another Montauk service again ambling along at sedate forty or so when all hell broke loose in the cab. The over-speed had tripped something that shouldn't happen unless you pass 89mph. Reggie burst out laughing and called across "tap the independent (brake) and give her a shot of sand". I did as instructed and normality was quickly restored. Reggie explained I'd hit some leaves on the line and the wheels were slipping badly as a result. Given his seniority he regularly trained new recruits and said he liked to let them discover this the hard way rather than simply instructing as once encountered the lesson would never be forgotten – how right he was!

A motorist also learnt a lesson one time at Bridgehampton. We'd just restarted from our station stop when a car loaded with youths weaved around the lowered barriers in front of us. Genteel Bridgehampton is one of those towns that have noise abatement orders that forbid the use of train horns except in an emergency. I decided this was an emergency and gave him a full single blast on those melodious five-chime horns whilst skinning back the throttle to Run 8 which would result in a plume of black exhaust (normally EMDs wouldn't do so but we are talking LIRR maintenance standards – see above). Unless he'd stalled his car there was no danger of a collision (if he had I could have dumped the air and stopped short as our speed was so low) but hopefully the driver was left shaken sufficiently to refrain from repeating such behaviour. Reggie approved!

Wanna watch a train wreck?

One Sunday in 1987 we were working shuttles between Speonk and Babylon. On the "city" end we had one of the LIRR's fleet of EMD MP15ACs which were basically switch engines but which had been modified so they could either work as originally intended or by throwing a switch the power was diverted from traction to the train supply. Reggie and I, along with all other crews, hated them as they rode dreadfully.

On our first run west we rounded a curve near Center Moriches and the unit lurched violently from side to side as did the train behind us. Charlie was soon on the radio wanting to know what the hell was going on. Reggie replied he thought there was a track defect and promptly radioed the dispatcher to report it, giving the exact location of the incident.

On our return Reggie slowed to walking pace and we observed a clearly misaligned piece of rail. We also encountered a track inspector looking for the defect but about ½ a mile from the location. Reggie again contacted the dispatcher to update him

on the nature of the problem and asked him to advise the inspector he was in the wrong place. Given the radio works on an open channel we hoped the inspector would hear us and relocate accordingly. Upon arrival at Speonk, Reggie called a special phone line to LIRR headquarters to again report the matter. Like the radio messages, it would be recorded and Reggie wanted to be sure his butt would be clean if something ended up in the dirt.

We did a further round trip again passing over the defect at walking pace but the inspector was nowhere to be seen! Later in the day Reggie suggested we drive out there to watch *The Cannonball*, the LIRR's premier train, pass the scene. Ron Chapman joined us. Sure enough along came 263 with a sister and a MP15AC doing about fifty when they hit the defect. The result was frightening enough for us lineside, what the crew and passengers thought can only be imagined. Fortunately everything stayed on the rails which is just as well. On reflection if it had derailed it would have taken the three of us out!

That boy will go far

On one occasion Mark Hopwood, who at the time was still a BR management trainee, let slip that he would be visiting New York for a few days. Naturally, I made arrangements for him to meet up with Reggie and be shown the wonders of the LIRR. As a result Mark had an intense half-day visit which took in a number of aspects of the operation including meeting LIRR managers. As we might expect, Mark took the opportunity to ask many probing questions which made the LIRR managers think. Reggie told me later how impressed both he and the management had been and concluded "that boy will go far". How right they were. Reggie has taken a keen interest in Mark's career progression through to the present day.

Other excursions

From time to time Reggie and I would head off the island to railfan a little further afield. One such trip was visit in late June 1987 to the Blue Mountain & Reading Railroad which was holding a railfan weekend. The BM&R was a former Pennsylvania RR branch running north-west out of Reading, Pennsylvania which had been purchased by a multi-millionaire railfan, Andy Muller, who had made his fortune as a dealer on the New York financial markets (remind you of anyone?).

A pleasant weekend ensued with plenty of action on the BM&R involving both steam and vintage diesels whilst the Reading Company Technical & Historical Society had an open house at the old Reading shops to display its collection of historic Reading

My first Jim Boyd night photoshoot. Former Gulf Mobile & Northern 4-6-2 425 (Baldwin 60339/1928) poses alongside the water tank at South Hamburg on the Blue Mountain & Reading with Pennsylvania Railroad EMD E8A 5898 on 26th June 1987.



diesels. One of the highlights of the weekend was a night photography session on the BM&R hosted by Jim Boyd, editor of *Railfan & Railroad* magazine and probably the finest practitioner of railroad night photography since the legendary O. Winston Link. Reggie already knew Jim so introduced me, another friendship instantly established.

A year later, we returned to Reading to chase the BM&R's ex-Reading 4-8-4 2102 on a main line trip over Conrail tracks to Jim Thorpe. However, this didn't go quite to plan. Eager to get a shot, yours truly went base over apex resulting in a rather badly gashed arm. We had to break off the chase to seek the Golden Arches where I could be cleaned up before a visit to the nearest emergency room for further repairs – not the first time I needed medical attention whilst in the US and not the last!

Another trip was to travel by train to Altoona PA, by LIRR into the city and then by Amtrak's *Pennsylvanian*. Reggie used his influence to ensure no money exchanged hands for either segment! From Altoona we would rent a car and explore the famous Horseshoe Curve.

Whilst we were at Harrisburg PA, a Conrail freight came past heading for the ramp up from the PRR to the old Reading Company lines. Suddenly it came to a halt, an emergency brake application. Some time passed and it became clear that this typical monster freight was blocking our exit. Our conductor was in our car and we heard on his radio the freight's conductor report a broken coupler knuckle in the train. "That's one engineer who owes his conductor dinner tonight, broken knuckle indeed" said Reggie, our conductor smiled in obvious agreement. The Conrail dispatcher responded by demanding the engineer's full details including hiring date and seniority – he didn't believe it either. The engineer had been guilty of poor train handling which caused a snatch and the coupler to fail. It took some time to drag the front part of the train far enough to produce a gap we could pass through.



The Reading lives! Above 4-8-4 2102 was passing Five Locks Farm near South Hamburg PA on 28th June 1987.

Below, ALCo C630 5308 and EMD GP30 RDG 5513 were outside the former Reading Company Shops in Reading PA the previous day.





Steam in the snow

Our friendship continued after Reggie was forced to retire. He failed his annual inspection one year and was directed into “works” for a triple heart by-pass. After that his driving career was over and rather than take the desk job which he was offered he chose to take the generous Railroad Retirement Board pension.

One evening in late 1995 Reggie called me at home with the news that Steamtown in Scranton was planning a “steam in the snow” extravaganza starring Milwaukee Road 4-8-4 261 the following February. Was I interested in joining him? You bet! The invitation was also extended to my mother.

The evening before our departure, Reggie called to say heavy snow was forecast around the time of our arrival. Sure enough our United flight touched down at JFK in a blizzard of white-out proportions and we later found out ours was the last flight in or out of any of the greater NY region airports for many hours. Despite more than a foot of lying snow, one of New York’s

trademark yellow cabs got us safely over snow-packed roads to Jamaica station where we boarded a train for the east. Everything appeared to be running on time – it takes far worse conditions to disable the LIRR!

A couple of days later, Reggie and I hit the road to Scranton. Fortunately the snow had stopped and all but the most minor side roads had been fully cleared but, thankfully, the snow wasn’t melting. We spent two days at Scranton chasing the 261 and Steamtown-based Canadian Pacific 2317 on multiple runs over the old Lackawanna line from Scranton up to Moscow and Tobyhanna.

All the regular gang of north eastern railfans and staffs of *Railfan* and *Railpace* magazines, by then well-known to me, were in attendance and we all had a terrific time resulting in many spectacular images. Jim Boyd decided my grey anorak was a perfect match for setting the white balance on cameras with my back being in considerable demand as a result!

Scenes from the “Steam in the Snow extravaganza” staged by the National Park Service at Steamtown Museum in Scranton, Pennsylvania in February 1996 which featured Milwaukee Railroad 261, a Class S3 4-8-4 built by ALCo in 1944 and normally a resident of Minneapolis.

Over the weekend it made multiple trips over the old Delaware Lackawanna & Western line from Scranton to Pocono Summit, was arriving at Tobyhanna with a passenger excursion on Sunday 18th February.

Next day the staffs of *Railfan* & *Railroad* and *Railpace* magazines used the locomotive on private charter hauling a freight. Here it climbs through a cutting lined with solid ice at East Wilton. Yes, it was freezing!



The amazing sight of the mighty Hudson River almost completely frozen over can be seen here as a northbound Conrail freight crosses the Doodletown Bite trestle just below the Bear Mountain Bridge behind a pair of EMD SD50s, one Conrail the other Norfolk Southern on 23rd February 1996.



I Know a great place for lunch

On the same trip Reggie suggested a day visit to the Hudson Valley so Mum could “enjoy” this scenic area in mid-winter whilst Reggie and I could indulge in a little train watching. ‘Twas a novelty for me too, I’d made many visits to the area in summer but never in winter. It was therefore quite a shock to see the mighty Hudson River almost completely frozen over.

Reggie announced he knew a great place for lunch and pointed the car westwards over the Bear Mountain Bridge then hung a right towards the village of West Point. He drove straight down main street and through the gates of West Point Military Academy (The American equivalent of Sandhurst) under the seemingly unconcerned gaze of the sentries. He then turned up onto a bluff and drew up outside a very upmarket looking hotel where a liveried valet opened the car doors and offered to park the car. At this point I should mention that Reggie at the time was running a 15 year old Toyota Celica with bodywork which showed evidence of every one of the 200k+ miles on its clock although it was maintained to the highest standards mechanically. What this flunky thought can only be imagined.

We entered the main hall – all wood panelling, crystal chandeliers and thick carpets – and were shown to the dining room overlooking the river by the Maître D. I’d rashly said I’d pay for lunch and was beginning to worry. “My credit card only has a £5k limit” I mentioned sheepishly to Reggie. “That should just about cover it” was the reply. As we sat down in the deep leather chairs around the table with its thick white cloth and heavy gilt cutlery I opened the leather-bound menu, complete with golden tassel, with some trepidation. To my surprise and great relief,

the prices were no more than you’d expect to pay in a regular family diner. It seems the hotel was mainly provided for the families of students and came to life at each passing-out parade. At other times it was open to anyone but a bit of a well kept secret, heavily subsidised by the US Government.

Having finished a superb and leisurely lunch, the car was retrieved and Reggie drove us further into the base and down the hill to the site of the old West Shore RR West Point station (now an officers’ mess) and the dock where Coastguard ice breakers were preparing to go out and do battle. At the north end of the station the line passes under the military academy in a tunnel. No sooner than we had arrived than there was a subterranean rumbling and a southbound Conrail freight burst out. Pure luck as you could easily wait hours to see one!

The West Point visit was the highlight of the day and one I’m sure was not repeatable after 9/11 which turned the whole of the US paranoid.

This would turn out to be my last visit to Reggie and Vera in New York. Within months they packed up and moved westwards to enjoy retirement in the forests of central Oregon where I’ve visited them several times since. At the time of their move Reggie observed it would be a relief not to have to worry about hurricanes – a semi-regular occurrence along the east coast. What he didn’t expect was the raging wildfires of the west. A classic case of out of the frying pan and into the fire!

Thankfully, despite being evacuated for several days in 2020, their beautiful home was spared.



With perfect timing, a southbound Conrail freight bursts out the tunnel and passes the old West Shore RR West Point passenger station led by 6461, an EMD SD40-2, 6790, a SD50 and a Norfolk Southern unit on 23rd February 1996.

A COUNTRY-WIDE RAMBLE

John Sears

Way back in time and place, in the Summer of 1961; your scribe was on holiday in Trebarwith Strand, on Cornwall's bewitching North Coast. Family trips out during the holiday took us past a couple of the stations on the North Cornwall line: Camelford and Port Isaac Road. No trips by rail though, but the route was clearly a must-travel one, and four years later on August Bank Holiday Monday I travelled along it all the way from Halwill Junction, through Tower Hill – one of those station names duplicating another many miles away, like Charing Cross – down to cross the Tamar near Launceston, then on along its entire sinuous course up the grades, mostly 1 in 70 something, through Egloskerry, on up to Otterham and then down from over 800 feet above sea level past Delabole to Wadebridge. A quick visit to Padstow and then back for the branch to Cornwall's one-time county town, Bodmin. Someone, somewhere, presumably in a Western Region head office, had come up with the idea of using the railbuses recently made redundant after the Tetbury and Cirencester branches had closed, and building an exchange station at Boscarne Junction, to run a shuttle from there to Bodmin North.



Bodmin North: AC Cars railbus W79978, waiting its booked departure back down the bank to Boscarne Exchange Platform. Hogging the shot is a Southern Railways cast sign on an Exmouth Junction concrete post behind a concrete fence.



Pickering in the early days of the NYMR: here's W79978, in an unpleasant livery, apparently replicating the LNER's "tourist green and cream" scheme.

All photographs by the author unless stated.

It's now "sometime" in the 1970s – my notes have significant gaps! - the railbus has migrated to the North Yorkshire Moors and their eponymous railway. After my first trip along the line from Grosmont. It's now at the Swindon & Cricklade Railway after many miles of transfer between many different organisations. In 1965 it was based at St. Blazey, from there it was: April, 1966, to Laira, January, 1967 to Hamilton before a move to Grangemouth a month later. There it was to be used on the Larbert to Alloa and Falkirk Grahamston to Grangemouth

branches. It was last used on the 29th January 1968 on the Grangemouth line, the last ever revenue run by a BR railbus. The NYMR bought it on withdrawal, sold it to the Kent & East Sussex in 1979, next it was to the Colne Valley Railway in 1984. It stayed there, apart from a brief trial on the Severn Valley in 2004, where the state of its brakes made it unusable, for thirty-five years. The final sale in November 2019, took it back to Wiltshire. Currently it is "under restoration", although it saw some passengers again in September 2023.



The area south-west of Glasgow had enough traffic sources to create intense competition between the Caledonian and Glasgow & South Western Railways. The latter built a line over the hills to Greenock Princes Pier, which opened in 1869. It closed for passengers between Kilmacolm and Princes Pier in 1959, and for freight in 1966. It re-opened for freight in 1971, but only until 1983, serving a container terminal. 1983 was also the end for the passenger service between Glasgow and Kilmacolm. Part of the line had opened in 1864, when the Bridge of Weir Railway linked Johnstone High on the line to Ayr with Bridge of Weir, the stop before Kilmacolm. The Sou' Western took over in 1865. Part of the 1869 extension works was a direct curve linking the line to Elderslie, which allowed direct running to/from Glasgow. The opening that allowed the line's penultimate timetable was in 1885, when the "Canal" line between Elderslie and G&P Junction (Glasgow and Paisley – the joint railway operated by the Caledonian and the G&SW). The ultimate timetable came when the service was diverted into Glasgow Central in 1966 and St. Enoch closed. A "win" for the Calvey?

The Canal line got its name from the fact that it took over the course of the Glasgow, Paisley and Ardrrossan Canal. It had opened between Johnstone and Glasgow in 1811, it was a busy passenger carrier, with up to twelve sailings a day, but railway competition after 1840 finished the passenger boats. It continued in use for freight after its purchase in 1869 by the G&SW, who closed it in 1881 to convert its course into a railway. The canal's winding course gave the line sinuous, tight, curves which had maximum cant to allow non-stop trains to make the best speed, but created a rather odd sensation in a stopping train.

The warden of Ross Hall Residence, nearest station Crookston, was Doctor Jago, an English lecturer, who came from Wycombe, and was involved with the Canal Line's user group. I joined one meeting they held at Ross Hall where we discussed the options for maintaining the service. The branch from Elderslie to Kilmacolm was the least-used part and seemed "expendable", whereas the Canal line itself was used as a relief for the main line through Paisley Gilmour Street – indeed some of the trains between Glasgow and Ayrshire called at stations along it,

Kilmacolm; the main subject of the shot is the station building, with its mostly enclosed veranda, a design repeated at other stations, such as Crookston. The Derby unit is laying-over before returning to Glasgow Central.

particularly in the peaks to increase the frequency. As its use as a relief seemed likely to continue, I suggested that the group should press the Scottish Region to divert a regular service from a Gilmour Street routing to one via Paisley Canal. Nothing happened, although the service was not finally withdrawn until 1983. But in 1990 it was partly restored, with the line from Shields re-opened to a terminus at a new Paisley Canal station – a new basic railway, single beyond the depot at Corkerhill.

The line was picked for electrification, not too difficult, and done truly on the cheap; work was completed in 2012. Clearances on the line mean that only EMUs can operate on it when the wires are energised, any other stock and the wire has to be dead. Apparently clearances are such that a Class 66 (W7 gauge) would have only 44 millimetres "mechanical clearance".

Paisley Canal (new): 156514 in Strathclyde PTE's orange livery – diesel, not clockwork.



In the late 70s the Western Region was mopping up the bits of line remaining on death row. One due to close, and like the Paisley Canal line, later to partly re-open, was that from Bridgend through Tondy, Maesteg, Cymmer Afan and then through the Rhondda Tunnel, to Treherbert.

By 1970, the tunnel was closed because of safety concerns, and passengers were bussed over the top. A better deal, for once; the views are spectacular as the road climbs to over 1,700 feet asl. Note the line climbing up from the lower left. It was the Rhondda & Swansea Bay from Aberavon; partly obscured by the wind-screen wiper is a “plywood wonder” signal box, then come the platforms for the line from Bridgend, then next are the platforms for the branch to Abergwynfi, closed to passenger trains in 1960. From 1924 to 1950 the GW added the suffix General to these for some reason. In 1926 the R&SB platforms had been given the name “Cymmer Afan” and in 1950 the Abergwynfi platforms were finally given the same name. They’d been built by the Llynvi & Ogmore Railway, which was taken over by the GW in 1883. The Rhondda and Swansea Bay was added to the GW in the amalgamations of 1922.

The line between Bridgend and Cymmer finally closed in 1977. Bridgend to Maesteg (new) re-opened in 1992. Before the Rhondda Tunnel was closed, the much shorter Gelli Tunnel between it and Cymmer Afan was closed, and a new junction,



Cymmer Afan: The view from the front of the Bubble Car arriving from Bridgend.

also called Gelli, put in, which together with another new link at Cymmer, allowed R&SB trains to detour round the tunnel. The Rhondda Tunnel must have been unpleasant to work. It was single track and almost two miles long. The Rhondda Tunnel Society is campaigning to have the tunnel restored for cycling and walking. You can become a member for £10!



4121 shunting stock provides a wonderful panorama of the complex of lines around Cymmer Afan.

Gerald T Robinson

Kyle of Lochalsh: across the Kyle the outliers of the mountains of Skye hint at what's waiting on the Winged Isle, and on the railway pier a lonely crane also waits to serve.



In a move to a place even further north than W79978's Alloa, we're now off to Kyle of Lochalsh, the terminus of the extension of the Dingwall & Skye Railway's line from Strome Ferry. The line had reached there in 1870, but then work stopped. It had been the earliest railway to build anywhere near the west coast of the Highlands, but Strome Ferry was not a port, or even much of a place. The Callander and Oban reached its terminus in 1880, the West Highland reached Fort William in 1894, but the final ten miles on to Kyle was not opened until 1897.

A crane sits on the end of the railway pier at Kyle of Lochalsh one sunny day. Not a trace of railway in sight, which might have been the case regardless of where a camera was pointed. On the 23rd June 1973, the Scottish Railway Preservation Society ran the *Lochalsh Express* day rail tour from Glasgow Queen Street to Kyle of Lochalsh – fare £3.50. The preamble to the flier for the trip said "...the scenic line to Kyle of Lochalsh due for closure at the end of this year." Finals had ended on the 1st June (General Paper II – a three-hour essay) but I had to return to Glasgow for my viva on the 21st June – now, John, this question: "Wales, a valueless core surrounded by alien lowlands" how could you have answered it differently? I'd travelled north the previous day on the 10:05 from Euston, the *Royal Scot*, with E3127 to Crewe and then only 448 vice the booked pair of 50s. Seventeen late into Central after various delays for the electrification work, including single-line working at Shap, with an up Motorail and the 11:40 from Glasgow waiting for us to clear the up line there.

Glasgow Queen Street, Saturday morning: we had a mix of Classes 26 and 27, with 5331 and 5357 heading eight TSOs separated into two groups of four by a BCK, an FO and an RB.

We're off at 07:23, with calls at Larbert, Stirling and Perth. Inverness at 11:35, eleven minutes early, for the reversal. 5113 and 5227 take over, reaching Kyle nine early at 14:31. Only 74 minutes to sample the flesh-pots before the return trip. We have the same pair back to Inverness, but from there 5323 joined 5357, replacing 5331. Queen Street at 23:18, two minutes late, an omen for my journey back south the next day. Those were the days of Class 27s book-ending the Edinburgh and Glasgow trains via Falkirk, and there were still trains that made only one stop between Queen Street and Waverley.

I caught the 12:20 from Glasgow Central, again only one 50, number 443, with 12 Mk2s and a BG. Blissfully unaware of the coming impact of Sunday engineering works, I was quickly disabused when we headed off through Mount Florida on the Cathcart Circle, and had signal stops at Newton, south of Carlisle, north of Lockerbie, followed by a trip over the flyover at Rockcliffe. That wasn't so bad! We re-joined the main line, but then headed off up the goods avoiding line before reversing back into Citadel, reached 48 late at 14:52. No sign of further movement, but at 15:20 "The loco has failed". The 50 was removed at 15:32 and ten minutes later we learnt that a new engine would arrive "as quickly as possible". A further ten minutes brought a Class 47 and we set off along the S & C. More engineering work awaited us: at Howe & Co.'s Siding single-line working, two signal stops near Kirkby Stephen, another two near Ais Gill, and a slow at Dent for a pilot man to jump off. A long, fifteen minute stop east of Bamber Bridge and another before Farington Junction, finally at 18:58 we were back on the WCML, over four hours since we'd arrived at Carlisle. Euston at 21:55, a cool 102 minutes late.....

Right Bideford: the old down platform building, in its days as a Midland bank.



Below Meeth: the Atlantic Coast Express has arrived, and its passengers are enjoying the chance to ramble. 25080 here, 25225 on the rear.

In the late 1970s the Western Region ran several “poshexes” to Bideford, conveying guests to visit the specialist boatyard at Appledore to view their new vessel. One such was operated for Ellerman Lines Limited on the 16th October 1978, 1Z15, the 10:00 from Paddington, due Bideford at 14.30. It arrived behind 31217 with a BFK, two FOs, two RUs, and two more FOs – all from the LMR, apparently. It returned the next day at 11:10; to judge by the number of empty bottles visible through the windows, the passengers probably needed an overnight stay to recover! My request to join the train for its trip to Torrington to run-round was turned down by the train crew. I would have another two years to wait until I finally “did” the line, all the way to Meeth, on the Lea Valley Railway Club’s *Atlantic Coast Express*.

And here’s the *ACE* at Meeth on the 12th April 1980; it was book-ended by Type 2s. 31304 and 31163 handled the train east of Exeter, and 25080 and 25225 took over west of Exeter. The 25s were separated at Torrington, topping-and-tailing to Meeth. I still have the ticket – amazingly it was for first class. I travelled with Howard Birchmore, a fellow inhabitant of Reading, who was one of Slough’s booking clerks. I was then the chief booking clerk. Sometime in the near future, I was enjoying a post-trip pint with another colleague in the Rising Sun at Reading when Howard appeared through the door. He was on late turn that day, window close 22:00, and was already in Reading before that time. Howard blustered “Have you seen my wife?” and then vanished - oops!



Here's another Type 2, back in the days of loco-hauled Summer extras on the line to Skegness, bringing its westbound train across the level crossing into Sleaford. Look at that pair of bracket signals in the distance between the train and the signal box, and the box's barge boards. Someone's followed instructions and placed the headcode display to 0000, although the font used didn't allow 0 to actually be displayed... Trains between Peterborough and Lincoln have to make a detour off the Joint Line which adds a bit over two miles to the journey compared to the direct route. It also means trains pass signal boxes named after all four cardinal points of the compass – down trains pass Sleaford South Signal Box, then Sleaford East (the one in the photo), Sleaford West and Sleaford North Junction when they re-join the Joint Line.



Back west to Devon, for a look at a couple of stations on a one-time broad gauge line, the North Devon Dock & Railway, opened in 1854. Standard gauge was added in 1863 and the L&SWR took over in 1865. The broad gauge was finally removed in 1877. This is King's Nympton, with the markers brought up by a good old tail lamp – where did the marker lights go? Until 1951 the station was called South Molton Road, a bit of a cheek as it's 9.3 miles by the quickest route from South Molton, which had a station on the old Devon & Somerset between Taunton and Barnstaple. It's "only" 2.6 miles to King's Nympton. Six calls, seven FO, all by request.

Note the old down platform on the extreme left of the shot. The down platform, on a loop, was taken out of use on the 26th July 1970, with the box closing. The remaining track was slewed to allow for a less curved route through the up platform. No doubt today's driving negates any gain for arriving trains...

At the next station down the line: another loco-hauled regional service, but this time a Type 3, at Portsmouth Arms, on the lovely wriggling stretch of line where it follows the River Taw's meanders, with a Class 33 arriving from Exeter. Here also there was a platformed loop; as the station's signal box closed in 1966, presumably the loop was also removed then. The station is named after the nearby pub, which is still open and is named after the 4th. Earl of Portsmouth, who paid for the turnpike road next to which the station is sited. Three request stops in 1993, only two today Monday to Saturday, but four on Sundays. Despite the paucity of calls, usage of the station was, in 2022/23, 58.96% more than in 2019/20. Business along the Barnstaple line is much better than it was before the timetable change to an hourly interval. Barnstaple itself had 536,940 journeys in 2022/23, up 26.39% on 2019/20, and only 64,000 fewer than Marlow, Bourne End and Cookham combined. All the stations on the line except King's Nympton (down 36%) recorded higher use in 2022/23 than in 2019/20. Portsmouth Arms led them all, but its 58.96% increase means only from about 500 to 798.





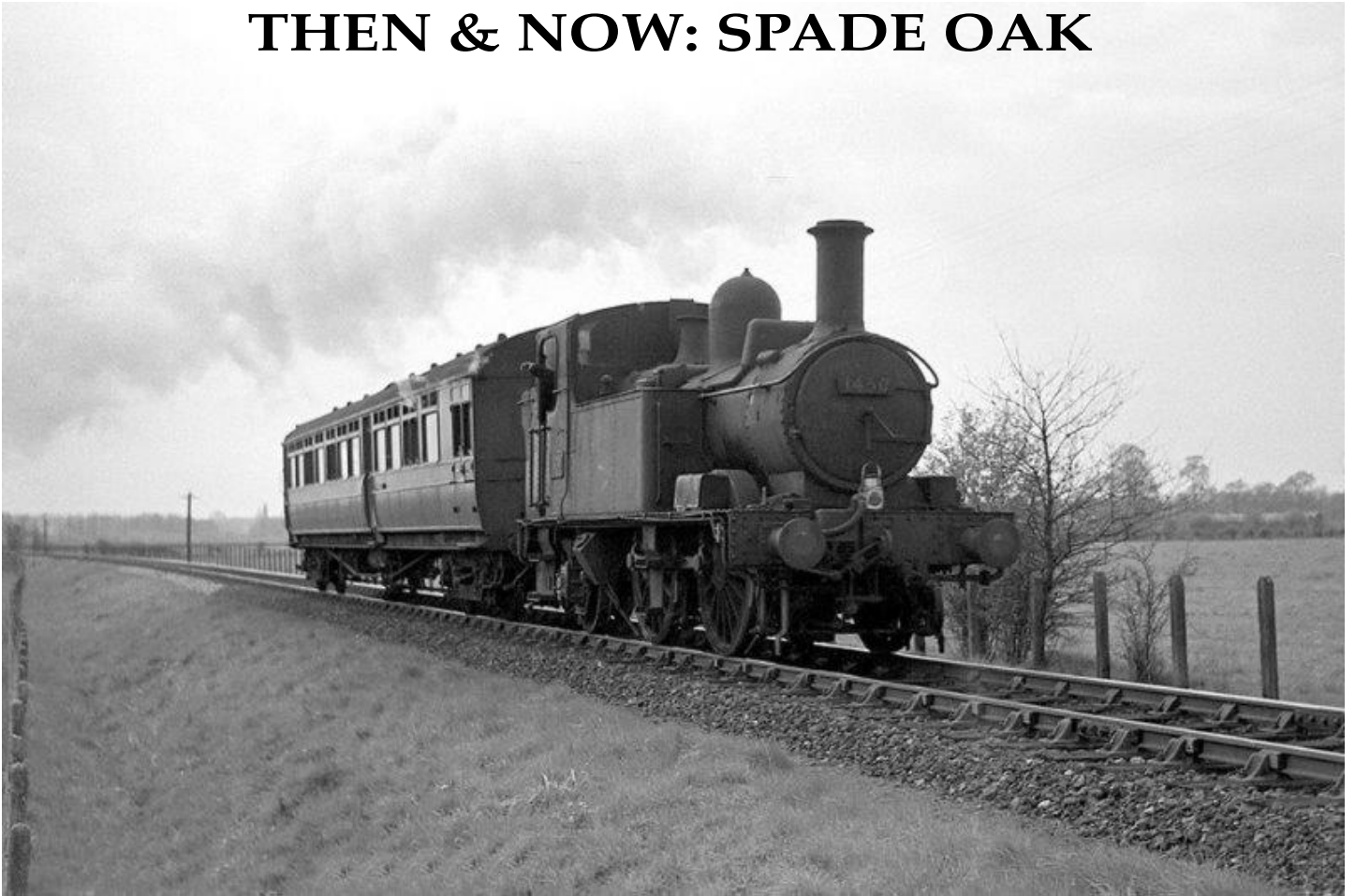
Returning from the Slough Area clerks' last day trip on the Bridport branch, here's another Class 33 propelling a 4TC in Dorchester South's "new" up platform. The previous one, which required an Inverness-style propelling move, is visible in the distance, either side of the new waiting shed. No tail lamps here. Just off shot to the left was Eldridge Pope's brewery, alas no more, but never dismay – Dorset County Council proudly

tells us that "the former brewery site is a hustling (do they mean that?!) and vibrant commercial quarter, Brewery Square"

Finally, a third Class 33, this time again off-piste, at Burnham, heading some genuine Pullman cars west on the Down Relief. Over on the Up Relief is a 47 on a very short train from the vehicle depot at Maidenhead, and on the Up Main an HST is just in shot on a up Inter-City working.



THEN & NOW: SPADE OAK



The area around Spade Oak level crossing on the Marlow Branch has changed greatly over the years. Back on 23rd April 1955 when 1450 was caught heading for Bourne End it was still open country. The land to the right of the train subsequently became a gravel pit, now worked out.

Photo: John C. Berry

Today, like so many places, the tracks are lined with mature growth which means that the passengers aboard 165123 heading for Marlow on 30th November 2020 can barely see the views of the River Thames.

Photo: Mike Walker.

