

THE MARLOW DONKEY



Edition

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Contents:

Tickets Please - Part 14

Ffestiniog Railway Platinum Jubilee

Troubles of a GWR Country Station Master

Then & Now: Marylebone

The Marlow Donkey

The Magazine of the Marlow & District Railway Society

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CONTENTS

TIMETABLE - Forthcoming meetings	Page 2
CHAIRMAN'S NOTES Mike Walker	2
SOCIETY & LOCAL NEWS	3
TICKETS PLEASE - Part 14 Martin Stoolman	4
FFESTINIOG RAILWAY PLATINUM JUBILEE John Tigg	7
TROUBLES OF A GWR COUNTRY STATION MASTER Tim Edmonds	15
THEN & NOW: MARYLEBONE	19

Front Cover Photographs

Ffestiniog Platinum Jubilee Weekend: 19 - 22nd June 2025

Top: Merddin Emrys leading the 'slates' away from Porthmadoc. 200 Wheels on the Cob.

Middle left: Palmerston with vans at Dduallt. Middle right: Leading the cavalcade was Prince flying the Union and Welsh flags. Bottom left: Russell 2-6-2T of the Welsh Highland Railway. Bottom right: The newest loco to enter service South African NG15 134 a 2-8-2 built Société Anglo-Franco-Belge in 1952.

Article page 7. All photos: John Tigg

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 18 September **MOVING FORWARD** Mark Hopwood
With the ongoing re-nationalisation of the country's train operating companies, it is pertinent that we have the Managing Director of Great Western Railway with us to give us his take on what is currently happening in the railway industry and how the future might look, given that private "open access" operators will still be allowed on the network. Mark is of course the Society's honorary President.
- Thursday 16 October **WITH LANCE KING IN ULSTER, Part 1. THE GREAT NORTHERN 1957-1965** Leslie McCallister
The background to Leslie's talk is the Northern Ireland Government's statement in 1958 that it wished to close many of its railways, something that it achieved in 1965 with the closure of lines such as Lisburn-Antrim and Portadown-Derry, both of which are likely to feature this evening - and with steam operation!
- Thursday 20 November **THE KEN NUNN COLLECTION: AFTER THE GROUPING 1923-29** Jeremy Harrison
Jeremy returns with a further selection from the remarkable collection of photographs taken by the late Ken Nunn which are now in the care of the Locomotive Club of Great Britain. This time the early post-grouping years come under the spotlight.
- Thursday 18 December **INDIA Part 2** Peter Robins
India was always a wonderful but slightly frustrating country that was full of surprises - some good some not so. From 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.
Part 2 covers 1991, 1994 & 1996 which includes the Punjab and concentrates on the narrow gauge including Darjeeling, Assam and some sugar mills with a return to Pakistan

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

I trust you have all been out and about taking advantage of what has been so far (I write these notes in mid-August) a superb summer with just a few rainy interruptions.

Highlight of the summer must have been The Greatest Gathering at Derby with several members apparently among the 40,000 visitors who attended. I gave it a miss myself as, to be honest, such displays don't really 'float my boat'. However the organisers seem to have managed to bring together a remarkable collection of exhibits although the steam display was a little 'top heavy' with LMS, LNER and BR Standard examples with only two each from the GWR and Southern. But at least the former were different types, the Southern was represented by two identical Merchant Navies! Among the modern image exhibits it was curious that only Alstom/Bombardier products were on show. Okay, so I appreciate it was held on Alstom's premises but it was supposed to be a representative gathering of railway equipment through the ages so why not include the products of Hitachi, Siemens and Stadler - the latter was represented by its locomotives.

Hopefully there'll be a selection of members photos of the event in the next issue, space constraints prevented them being included this time. So, if you were there but haven't submitted any pictures so far, please do so.

Of course The Greatest Gathering wasn't the only event to mark the bi-centenary of the opening of the Stockton & Darlington Railway. Many heritage lines have also taken the opportunity to merge Railway 200 with celebrations of significant milestones of their own such as the Ffestiniog Railway's 70th anniversary covered in this issue by John Tigg. Remarkably, 2025 coincides with the 50th anniversary of several others.

Whilst the AGM in February seems a long way off, it's worth reminding you all that Vincent Caldwell is retiring from the committee at that time after many years of valuable service. This means we need to replace him to maintain a viable committee and ensure the future of the Society. So please, do give it some thought. Could you offer your services? It's not onerous and meetings (held on line) only take up about an hour, five or six times a year.

As we move towards autumn I trust you'll support our monthly meetings, preferably in person where possible. Attendances have been on the low side recently.

Looking even further ahead, 2027 will mark the Society's 50th anniversary which is something special to be celebrated. We are therefore looking for ideas on how we can mark the occasion. Any suggestions...?

Mike Walker

SOCIETY AND LOCAL NEWS

PREVIOUS MEETINGS

In June we welcomed Frank Bagshaw who gave us an excellent presentation on the National Tramway Museum at Crich in Derbyshire. As a long-time volunteer, Frank explained how they'd rescued the trams and turned a disused quarry into a world-class museum and visitor attraction.

Ian Capewell, a Principal Inspector at the Rail Accident Investigation Branch gave us a fascinating insight to their work in July. How they go about their often gruesome task and why it appears to take so long to restore services after an incident. I think it's fair to say we all learned a lot that evening.

In August Gerald Daniels, a life-long railwayman, took us through his career on Southern Region up to his famous spell as Area Manager at Salisbury during which he managed to reopen Templecombe station, hold various special events and ran many special trains which included returning steam to Southern metals and raising huge sums for BR. It's a pity such entrepreneurial enterprise is discouraged on today's railways micro-managed by clueless civil servants.

ZOOM ISSUES

Those who have attended our meetings recently, either in person or remotely will be only too aware that in recent months we have had issues with Zoom in particular and IT in general every time.

This is of great concern to the committee and our tech experts Peter and Richard in particular as it detracts from your enjoyment and makes us look unprofessional.

What is particularly frustrating is that each month, Peter and Richard have a rehearsal a few days before the meeting when all goes perfectly only for the gremlins to strike on the night.

The most recent meeting was typical. After previous issues, the lavalier microphone (worn by the presenter) was tested again the week before via zoom and it worked perfectly. Of course last night it was completely dead. It was not a battery issue this time. Our presenter had said he wanted a chair to sit down to present so we explained the problems with the lavalier and he said he could present sitting down - and close to the laptop microphone. Of course he then stood up to present and wandered away from the laptop which is why you had sound issues.

In addition during our test, after an "upgrade", Powerpoint decided it didn't want to work on the Society's laptop and wanted us to pay £104 for Microsoft 365. However Richard got it to work at home. Come the meeting and we had the same problem so we swapped host/presenter laptops which worked. However unbeknown to Peter the other laptop had Powerpoint slideshow set on automatic timing which meant that images were advanced before they should have been - hence the backwards and forwards with some images. It would have caused further delay to put right in part one but we did manage to put it right for part two.

We are striving to overcome these issues so please bear with us and thanks for your understanding.

CHOPPERS ON CHILTERN

GB Railfreight have the contract to operate the Rail Head Treatment Trains on the Chiltern lines this autumn. However, because none of their locomotive fleet have the trip-cocks

required to operate over the Metropolitan Line between Harrow-on-the Hill and Amersham. It is understood they will be hiring in Class 20 locomotives to top-and-tail the trains, a type which despite having been around since the late fifties has not been regularly seen on these lines.

FOLLOW THE DONKEY

As part of Railway 200, Buckinghamshire Council has sponsored a scheme to raise awareness on our local branch line backed with funding from GWR's Community Fund. This includes establishing a walking route between Bourne End and Marlow which follows both the railway and river and is publicised by special boards at the stations.



Sadly, the launch on 12th August didn't go quite to plan when the unit working the service, 165128, as declared a failure in the middle of the proceedings!

CHINNOR STEAM GALA

The Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway is holding its 3-day steam gala from Friday 31st October to Sunday 2nd November

Four locomotives will be in action: 4079 *Pendennis Castle* from Didcot, 6695 from the Swindon & Cricklade plus USA S160 2-8-0 6046 and Sentinel 7109 *Joyce*, both of which have been residents at the railway this season. An enhanced timetable will apply on each day which can be found on the railway's website.

RCTS MEETINGS

The Maidenhead & Windsor RCTS branch resumes its meetings in September following its summer break. The programme for the coming months is as follows:

Monday 22nd September

Irish Railways - Dick Fearn

Monday 27th October

North From Kings Cross (RCTS Archive) - David Jackman

Monday 24th November

Trams at Home and Abroad - Graham Bilbe

Monday 22nd December

Branch AGM and Rail 200: The British Railway Revolution - Richard Marks

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/windsor-maidenhead> and follow the link there

TICKETS PLEASE!

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

Martin Stoolman



As we all know, British Rail's High Speed Trains were an enormous success. When they were introduced in 1976, it is fair to say they were a "game changer". However by the time I started my career in 1999 some were already 23 years old and, not unreasonably, they were beginning to show their age. Having said that, I would much rather have had an HST on my diagram than a set of loco and coaches hauled by a class 47, which of course were over 10 years older. They were also hampered by the fact that they had a single point of failure, whereas an HST had two engines.

That said, after looking through my logs, I can only find one instance of a breakdown involving a daytime loco and coaches set that I was guarding, and that didn't even involve one of our own GW locos. Occasionally to cover a shortage, the company would hire in a loco as cover, and, for a few weeks in August/September 2001, Fragonset owned 47712 *Artemis* was knocking around. I had a successful run with it on Saturday 1st September, but by the time I had it again on Friday 14th it was getting rather sickly. I booked on for duty at Exeter at 16:55 and shortly afterwards headed out in search of my train. And, oh dear, there was 47712 on platform 6 at the head of the 17:30 Exeter to Paddington looking and sounding extremely dead. However my hopes did rise when I saw that one of our travelling fitters, Jim, was about. Jim had a reputation for being a genius when it came to mending all things diesel, and did not earn his nickname "Jim'll Fix It" for no reason. I fondly remember at about 05.00 one morning, Jim striding over the tracks to Riverside Yard where a westbound Cross Country HST had been abandoned the previous evening. According to the Night Duty Manager it was "well and truly knackered" and bets were taken among the early turn staff in the mess room as to whether or not Jim could fix it. And sure enough, after a mere twenty minutes or so, the unmistakable sound of Paxman Valenta engines roaring into life could be heard across that part of Exeter. Shortly afterwards into the mess room strode a beaming Jim, and money duly changed hands!

During August and September 2001, Fragonset hired loco no. 47712 Artemis to FGW to cover shortages of its own 47s. It was deemed unreliable, and failed when Martin had it on 14th September. However here it is three weeks earlier, seemingly going well on a Plymouth to Paddington service passing Cockwood Harbour.

Photo: Charles Woodland

But back to 14th September 2001 and sadly even Jim had to accept defeat on 47712. It had certainly earned itself a poor reputation, and it was said that for much of its loan spell on FGW, it had a fitter from its owning company riding around on it. In fact one story went that the said fitter did at least one return trip to Paddington standing in the engine room with his finger continuously pressed on a button which, if released, would have brought the loco to a grinding halt!

As for my train, all that could be done was to cancel it and put the unfortunate Friday evening passengers onto a following HST, and, as I was booked to work the 21:45 Paddington to Exeter back home, I had to travel up to London with them all. However it should be said that having your train cancelled at its point of origin is better than it breaking down somewhere en route. And as it happened that fate had already confronted me exactly three weeks earlier, on Friday 24th August 2001 while working that same shift, when I suffered a complete failure with my returning HST. Earlier that evening FGW's very own 47813 had comfortably got me to London with the aforementioned 17:30 Exeter to Paddington just 5 minutes in arrears. While I was in the Paddington mess room having my break, I learned from the Area Operations Manager (AOM) that the HST set for my 21:45 back to Exeter was in a poor state. Not only did it have three coaches without air conditioning, it was running on only one engine and was very late on its inbound working. To make matters worse, as was common back then, in order to turn the train round as quickly as possible no cleaning was undertaken and the seat reservation labels were not put out. The Friday

night punters on this busy late evening service would not have been pleased! They were to be even less pleased shortly afterwards. Departure was at 22:02, 32 minutes late, and we only got just over 5 minutes into the journey before the brakes came hard on. I'm not sure whether it was through driver skill or pure luck, but we managed to stop with at least some of the coaches in the Down Main platform at Ealing Broadway. Once I had got out, it did not take very long to spot what the problem was - in fact I didn't need to see it, I could hear it! There was a very large air leak between two of the coaches. Now one of the beauties of HSTs is that two sets of air pipes pass through the whole train in a continual circuit, so a fault such as this can be isolated by simply closing the two cocks either side of the leak, something easily done by the Guard, and the train is good to go again. Unfortunately that doesn't work if you only have one power car in action, as was the case with my train that night. So sadly it was game over for us and our hapless passengers. The good news for them though (not that they would have appreciated it while being told to disembark) was that we were at a busy station and not in the middle of the Somerset countryside. The 22.12 Paddington to Swansea was duly stopped on the Down Relief platform and everybody (including me and the buffet host) transferred onto it. It must have been like sardines however! Then at Reading all those going further west (including me) joined the 23:00 Paddington to Bristol, and at Bristol, according to my log book, road coaches and taxis were the order of the day for those travelling to Weston, Taunton and Exeter, not to mention all the intermediate stations (that train stopped everywhere). My buffet host Michelle (a good friend who later became a Train Manager) and I were put in a taxi non-stop to Exeter, but even so we did not get back to St David's until after 03:00!

As I said earlier, complete failures with HSTs were pretty rare even back then, but nonetheless they did present us Guards with a plethora of other niggles. My previous article included one of my logs (for 3rd September 2002) which made mention of 'No Driver/Guard Comm', and I promised to explain in this article what this was all about. In common with diesel multiple units, HSTs were fitted with a buzzer along with a crew communication phone. Everyone reading this article will be familiar with the fact that two on the buzzer from Guard to Driver means Go whilst one long buzz means Stop. The use of this could most commonly be witnessed in a station when, with head out of the droplight window, the Guard would send 'two' to the Driver,

and said Guard would then remain in that position until the train had fully cleared the platform, keeping a good look out all the time, with finger hovering over the button. If a problem was spotted, an immediate 'one' on the buzzer would be enough for the driver to bring the train to a halt. However there were many other codes, including for example three pause three (3-3), which was an alert meaning Guard wishes to speak to Driver or vice versa. This was where the crew communications phone came in, making life so much easier than on a traditional loco and coaches formation where the only way to communicate was (and as far as I know still is) by climbing down and going to speak to the driver face to face - and it goes without saying that that cannot be done while the train is on the move!

Failure of the communications system almost always meant both the buzzer and the phone being out of action, and in this situation an alternative 'degraded' method of working had to be adhered to, which essentially meant going back to loco and coach principles using a green flag. But doing this with an HST had its complications. On a loco hauled set the Driver is supposed to look back from his cab window while the train clears the platform, but with an HST there is no cab window that he can open in order to lean out. So, while the train is standing in the platform, the Driver had to be by the open crew door, looking back for the green flag. Once this had been waved by the Guard, he then had to shut the door, walk back to the driving seat and start the train - not an instant process. With the Driver unable to look back and the Guard unable to use the buzzer in order to stop the train should a problem be spotted in the interim, said Guard would have had to previously ensure that he was dispatching from a door where there was immediate access to a "passcom" (passenger communication chord), the pulling of which would be the only way he could stop the train if a problem came to light during departure. Failure of the 'Driver/Guard Comm' was frequent particularly in my early years; indeed my first experience of it was just one week into the job on 28th February 2000 with the 12:32 Plymouth to Paddington. However I am pleased to report that, despite the problem, a one minute late departure from Exeter was turned into a one minute early arrival at Paddington!

My diagram on Sunday 2nd September 2001 illuminated (pun intended) how prone HSTs were to lighting problems within the passenger coaches. My log book shows that on the up journey to London (08:50 Plymouth to Paddington) there was just such



47813 SS Great Britain is piloting Fragonset's 47709 Dionysis on a West of England service passing Rewe (east of Exeter) circa 2001. Given the perceived unreliability of Fragonset's locos, it is entirely possible that 47709 has failed and has had to be assisted by FGW's own 47813

Photo: Charles Woodland



a problem with First Class coach G. Now some readers may be aware that the lighting controls consisted of two on and off buttons at the ends of the coaches, completely exposed to misuse by the general public. Therefore the first thing to check was that they hadn't been deliberately switched off by a trouble-maker (surprisingly rare), or that someone hadn't leaned accidentally on the 'Off' button. Simply pressing the 'On' button would establish that one way or the other. If the lights remained on then all was well, but if they went straight back off again you had a problem. One trick I learned (although officially frowned upon) was that if tape was applied to the 'On' button then the lights would stay on at least for a while, long enough hopefully to get you out of trouble until you could pass the train over to another Guard, at which point it became his problem! So by doing that we got through to London okay, but Sod's Law being what it is, my return working on that particular day, the 13.03 Paddington to Penzance, happened to be with the same HST set! And sure enough the lights went out shortly after departure. This was not good news as the rulebook back then stated that, at whatever time of day, the coach had to be evacuated. (Common sense later prevailed and this rule got changed to hours of darkness only). On this busy Summer Sunday afternoon it was a major problem. Lots of people had taken advantage of a cheap weekend upgrade meaning First Class seating was at a premium and this, coupled with the fact that the air conditioning was not working in one of the Standard class coaches, meant no shortage of disgruntled passengers having to be placated by yours truly!

Another problem with HSTs in those early years, before the power cars were refurbished and fitted with MTU engines, was that their red tail lights were not all that powerful, and my log books are littered with references to this. And it was no coincidence that on each and every occasion that the problem surfaced it was on an eastbound service on a sunny afternoon! During my training this particular issue was never highlighted, so when it first arose it came as something of a surprise. That day was Friday 9th June 2000 when I was at the rear preparing for departure from Plymouth with my 16:30 to Paddington. A member

Still wearing the original First Great Western livery, an HST set led by power car 43139 is seen emerging from Parson's Tunnel in the summer of 2005. The light cluster incorporating the "dodgy" tail lights, as well as the headlights, can be seen below the driver's window.

Photo: Charles Woodland

of the platform staff walked up and informed me that the Plymouth signaller (who could obviously see my train from the Plymouth panel box) was concerned that the tail lights might not be working. Much peering and head scratching ensued from both of us as we tried to work out whether they had failed or whether it was simply the bright low sun that was playing tricks. Eventually we concluded that it was the latter, and the signaller was clearly content with that as we departed on time. However I have a feeling that a travelling fitter (Jim?) joined us at Exeter to double check, as my log book states that we made a special stop at Taunton (we were booked non-stop) "to allow a riding inspector to de-train". And it was of course no coincidence when exactly the same thing happened again at Plymouth on a hot and sunny Tuesday 7th September 2004, with what was then the 16:40 departure for Paddington; this time it did lead to a 3 minute late departure while everyone convinced themselves that the tail lights were really on!

There were also two occasions when signallers actually delayed my train en route because of this particular issue. One of these was on Saturday 9th April 2005 with the 16:00 Penzance to Paddington, diverted via the Southern due to planned engineering works on the route via Taunton. We were delayed at Honiton because the signaller at the previous signalbox (Feniton) had reported that our tail lights were out. In this case the Honiton signaller insisted on coming over and checking for himself; satisfied that they were in fact working we were allowed to continue. With the train being on unfamiliar territory, the signallers involved can perhaps be forgiven for being unaware of this particular foible on HSTs. But in conclusion maybe, all in all, those good old fashioned portable tail lamps hanging on the back of a set of coaches weren't so outdated after all!

Ffestiniog Railway – Platinum Jubilee Weekend

19th – 22nd June 2025

Story and photography by John Tigg



Line up of 'stalwarts' - Mary Anne, Merddin Emrys and Prince at Porthmadog Harbour on Friday 20th June 2025.

The highly anticipated 'Railway 200 – FR Platinum Jubilee Weekend' marked the 70th Anniversary of passenger trains running in the 'preservation' era and a chance to reflect back on some of the earliest trains run as the railway reopened and began the arduous task of getting back to Blaenau Ffestiniog. The weekend was a celebration of the whole 70 years of operation since 1955, highlighting many of the fantastic achievements during that time.

The event also linked with the national 200th anniversary of the modern railway with two events featuring '200 Wheels on the Cob' – a Cavalcade on the Sunday afternoon of all available locomotives parading across the Cob in the order in which they entered service on the railway. There was also a special gravity train of slate wagons on the Saturday morning.

With 67 passenger or freight departures scheduled from Harbour Station over the four days it was a challenging timetable. Before the event got under way on the Thursday a wildfire near Tanygrisiau, with fire services laying hoses across the line, wreaked havoc with no trains able to run in either direction between Porthmadog and Blaenau Ffestiniog meaning that stock was in the wrong position just before the start of the event. With the preceding days having been exceptionally dry the railway had been running only diesel hauled services due to the tinder dry conditions but the organisers stationed three 'fire trains' during the event at locations to respond to any incidents, enabling them to run a near full steam service.

Adding to their woes *Welsh Pony* had been declared a failure with a 'hot box'.

Each day was themed and to celebrate the first trains on the Thursday evening Simplex *Mary Anne* with carriage 23 and van 12 ran twice across the Cob from Harbour Station to Pen Cob where a partial re-enactment of the 'chain shunt' took place.

An early start from home on the Friday got me past Birmingham before the M6 morning rush and past Shrewsbury by 7:30 arriving at Porthmadog by 10:00. The weather was exceptionally hot and dry and the morning was spent at Harbour Station where, to commemorate the 'stalwarts' of the early services *Mary Anne*, *Prince* and *Merddin Emrys* (playing the role of *Taliesin* now *Livingston Thompson*) lined up for a photo call at Harbour Station with both *Prince* and *Merddin Emrys* sporting their new Garraway era green liveries. There followed the departure of two appropriate vintage trains to represent this era – the first being the 'Garraway' set with Vans 11 & 12 and the other carriages in 'Woolworths' livery of green and cream hauled by *Merddin Emrys*. This was followed by the 'Flying Flea' set hauled by *Prince*. Later in the day 'The Ladies – *Linda* and *Blanche* had set off to Caernarfon so the afternoon was spent at Beddgelert and in the Aberglaslyn Pass awaiting their

return. First train down the pass was K1 leading Garratt NG130 double-headed due to the fire risk as the K1 has no spark arrester. Back at Beddgelert station the Welsh Highland service was in the down platform hauled by the recently rebuilt NG15 'Kalahari' No.134. A light shower of rain (I was in Wales) just before departure resulted in the 2-8-2 slipping spectacularly in its attempts to start its train up the gradients into the forest on its way to Rhyd Ddu where it would cross with The Ladies. Then back to the pass to see *Linda* leading *Blanche* on their way back Porthmadog. The final act of the day was a planned 'non-stop' run by *Prince* and *Merddin Emrys* from Porthmadog to Blaenau Ffestiniog. Unfortunately, due to *Prince's* water capacity there was a 'splash & dash' stop at Tan-y-Bwlch for a top up. Arrival back at Porthmadog should have been 20:20 but in keeping with events the train arrived back at Porthmadog at 21:35.



Linda leading Blanche through Aberglaslyn Pass on return from Caernarfon to Porthmadog.



Prince and Merddin Emrys at Blaenau Ffestiniog following 'non-stop' run on Friday 20th June 2025.

On Saturday 21st June Merddin Emrys leading the 'slates' away from Porthmadog - Brake Van, 3 wagons, 1 Bolster and 45 slate wagons - '200 Wheels on the Cob'



Saturday morning the weather was fortunately a little cooler and started at Harbour station at 07:00 with *Linda* hauling the 'early-bird' service to Blaenau Ffestiniog. This was followed at 07:25 with *Merddin Emrys* hauling the 'slates' – Brake Van, 3 wagons, 1 Bolster and 45 slate wagons – a '200 wheels on the Cob' special. Joining the 09:10 service, which crossed the descending 'gravity slates' at Tan-y Bwlch, I alighted at Tanygrisiau to join eight other participants for a rare experience – The Deviation Walking Tour. Leaving Tanygrisiau, led by infrastructure staff, we walked the 2½ miles along the ballast back to Dduallt. Between Tanygrisiau and the 'new' Moelwyn Tunnel, just as we were passed by the returning service train, it started to rain which lasted until we were through the tunnel. The rest of the day was spent at Dduallt where, between rain showers, in the afternoon there were 'over & under' run pasts of trains heading over the Rhoslyn Bridge towards Blaenau Ffestiniog whilst services heading for Porthmadog departed underneath. Everything was by now running late but nobody seemed to worry. On return to Porthmadog I watched *Linda* and *Blanche* leave for the evening's 'non-stop' run to Blaenau Ffestiniog.



The Deviation Walking Tour led by infrastructure staff.



Looking across unusually full Tanygrisiau Reservoir towards entrance to old Moelwyn Tunnel.

The north portal of the new Moelwyn Tunnel which is 275 yards long.



Old trackbed approach to the old Moelwyn Tunnel south portal as viewed from the new line.



Over and Under at Dduallt - Prince on a freight heading for Blaenau Ffestiniog passing over Linda and Blanche heading under to Porthmadog.



Palmerston with vans awaiting departure from Dduallt.

Blanche and Linda leaving Porthmadog 'non-stop' to Blaenau Ffestiniog.



Sunday was the Grand Cavalcade across the Cob. A complete change in the weather with a gale blowing off the sea. Locomotives largely in order of their beginning service on the Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Railway processed across the Cob from Boston Lodge to Harbour Station from where they then returned past the gathered masses, in the same order to assemble at the Boston Lodge end of the Cob for a photocall – ‘200 Wheels on the Cob’. (Actually 234 wheels). The procession order was:

Prince
 Merddin Emrys
 Linda
 Blanche
 Britomart / Mountaineer* /Chaloner
 Earl of Merioneth* / David Lloyd George
 Palmerston
 Velinheli
 Lilla
 Garratt NG/G16 No 143
 Taliesin / Russell*
 K1
 Garratt NG/G16 No 87
 Lyd
 Hugh Napier / Princess*
 Welsh Pony
 Garratt NG/G16 No 130
 James Spooner
 NG15 No 134 / C2

* These locos were either being propelled, dragged or on flat wagons.

With the Cavalcade over the weather took a turn and the afternoon ended with a torrential rainstorm.

Unfortunately, I was unable to visit Boston Lodge during the weekend.

With such a comprehensive timetable of events the organisers, staff and volunteers who made this ‘once in a lifetime’ event possible should be complimented. As with most galas, on the day, the timetables slipped but those like me who had purchased tickets in advance were e-mailed by the organisers with revised loco schedules for the Saturday and Sunday whilst at the event.



Leading the cavalcade was Prince flying both the Union and Welsh flags.



Linda was followed by Blanche, the Penrhyn twins.



Britomart hauling the dismantled Mountaineer, which is being overhauled, and Chaloner bringing up the rear.



A contrast in Fairlies: ‘traditional’ David Lloyd George’ dragging the ‘modernistic’ Earl of Merioneth.



Velinheli an ex-Dinorwic Quarry Hunslet 0-4-0ST; the first of the Hunslet "Alice" class of locos she was built in 1886 (Works No. 409).

Lilla was built by the Hunslet Engine Company in 1891 (number 554). She was built for the Cilgwyn Slate Co. Quarry at Nantlle and was reputedly named after the quarry manager's wife, though this is unconfirmed.



At the other end of the size scale is former South African Railways NNG16 Beyer-Garratt no.143 which normally works on the Welsh Highland. Sister Garratts 87 and 130 were also in the cavalcade.

Single Fairlie Taliesin which was built at Boston Lodge in 1999 replicating the original 1876 locomotive which was withdrawn in 1932 and eventually scrapped.



Russell is the last surviving locomotive from the original Welsh Highland Railway or North Wales Narrow Gauge Railway as it was known and is a 2-6-2T built by Hunslet in 1906 (Works No. 901).



K1, the pioneer Beyer-Garratt built in 1909 for the North East Dundas Tramway in Tasmania. After withdrawal in Tasmania it was purchased by Beyer Peacock for their museum collection. It later came to the Ffestiniog Railway, from where it was loaned for display in the National Railway Museum.

Lyd is a replica of the Lynton & Barnstaple Railway Manning Wardle 2-6-2Ts built at Boston Lodge and completed in 2010. A resident on the FR, she has visited the revived L&B on numerous occasions.



Hugh Napier is another of the Hunslet quarry engines (No.855 of 1904) which worked in the Penrhyn quarries. It was hauling Princess, another of the original FR George England locomotives.



Welsh Pony is another of the Ffestiniog's George England locomotives and was part of the second batch built in 1867. It now carries lined black livery.



Also in black is Double Fairlie James Spooner. The original was built by Avonside in 1872 and was finally dismantled in 1933. The present incarnation, which is faithful replica, was completed at Boston Lodge in 2023.



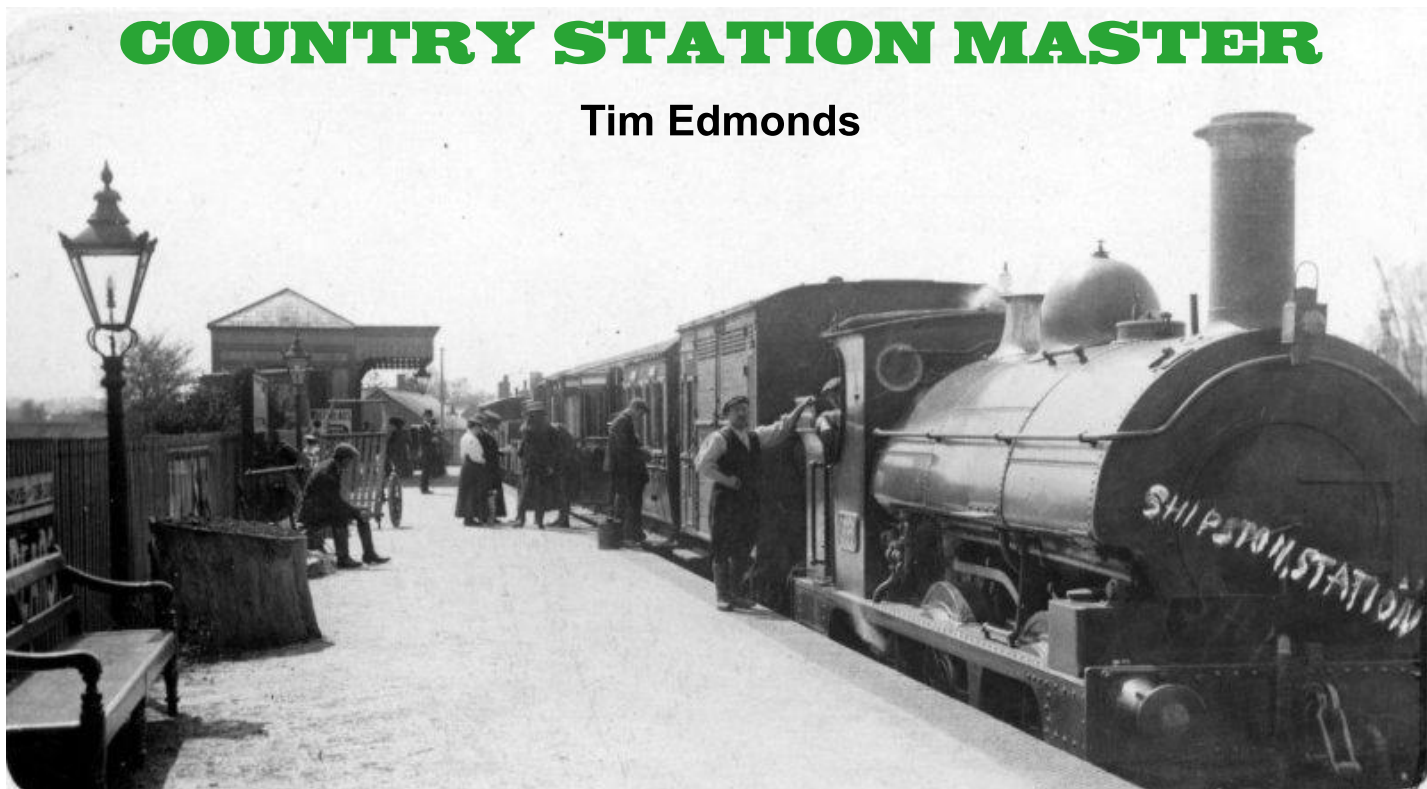
The newest locomotive to enter service is the Welsh Highland's former South African NG15 134, a 2-8-2 built by Société Anglo-Franco-Belge in 1952. Restored at the WHR's Dinas Works, it entered service in 2024.



Bringing up the end of the cavalcade hauled by 134 was Harbin C2 class 0-8-0, Dahulichang no.4 which is currently being rebuilt for future service, probably on the WHR.

TROUBLES OF A GWR COUNTRY STATION MASTER

Tim Edmonds



Shipston-on-Stour, now in Warwickshire but before 1931 in a detached part of Worcestershire, was poorly served by railways. The town has a varied transport history. Before the railway age it was an important staging post on the main road from Oxford to Stratford-upon-Avon, with coaches running between London and Holyhead, London and Shrewsbury, and Oxford and Birmingham. In 1826 the horse-powered Stratford & Moreton Railway was opened, a 16 mile line passing a couple of miles to the west. The main traffic was goods. A short branch from Darlingscott Junction, opened in 1836, gave Shipston its first railway, but the town was shunned by the main lines. The Oxford, Worcester & Wolverhampton Railway, opened through Moreton in 1853, took a lease on the S&MR and briefly operated a horse-worked passenger service between Moreton and Stratford via Shipston, reached by reversal at Darlingscott. This ceased when the OW&WR opened its Stratford branch from Honeybourne in 1859 leaving the S&MR as an outmoded relic, although still carrying local goods traffic.

In 1863 the OW&WR line became part of the GWR, which inherited the lease on the S&MR. The anomaly of a lengthy horse-worked branch was tackled by rebuilding the southern section from Moreton to Shipston as a lightly-laid conventional railway capable of taking steam locomotives. A south-to-east curve was laid at Darlingscott to enable Shipston to be reached without reversal, and the section of the old S&MR from a new junction at Longdon Road to Stratford was retained for residual horse-worked goods traffic. The GWR Shipston-on-Stour branch opened in 1889 and was always worked as a light railway, with a 20mph speed limit and most trains being mixed, but it failed to satisfy the main demand for travel from Shipston, which was to Stratford. The alternative was a roundabout route with changes of train at Moreton and Honeybourne. Although the GWR considered converting the northern end of the S&MR to a light railway on more than one occasion, this was not done because it would have needed expensive realignments on roadside sections where the line passed close to houses. Branch passenger traffic was always sparse and lasted only until 1929, but there was sufficient traffic in coal and agricultural produce, supplemented by a healthy parcels business, to support a goods

This photograph of Shipston station was taken by Frank Packer, a photographer based in Chipping Norton who sold postcard prints in several formats. This one was a Christmas card, from which the seasonally decorated edging has been cropped here. The exact date is unknown but Packer started his business in 1907 and it is certainly from the pre-1914 era and represents how it would have appeared in Smith's time. Armstrong 1901 class 0-6-0ST 1338, built in 1886, is awaiting departure with a mixed train and the basic nature of the passenger station is clear. The goods yard was to the right and had more extensive buildings, including a brick-built loco shed.

(John Alsop Collection)

service until the branch closed completely in 1960. The station remained open for another three years staffed by a porter to handle parcels and sundries carried by road.

Since moving to North Oxfordshire in 2022 I have been researching a short lived steam bus company that provided a service between Shipston and Stratford from 1903 to 1905 to try and meet the demand that the railway ignored. The Shipston-on-Stour & District Local History Society, which runs the local Museum, introduced me to their transport specialist, Dick Burge, who was very helpful but unfortunately died in 2024. Dick mentioned to me that the Museum had in storage various documents retrieved from Shipston station shortly before its demolition, and that these included correspondence relating to the steam bus company. Early in 2025 some of this material was moved from storage into the Museum, where I could examine it. Included was a file of items dating from 1897 to 1904, when the Station Master was Arthur H Smith, and the reason he put them aside was because they concerned issues on which GWR management had been alerted. They give an interesting glimpse into the world of the Station Master at a rural branch terminus in Edwardian days.

Smith arrived at Shipston from Bewdley, where he was Goods Clerk, and the earliest document is a personal one informing him of his wage increase from £80 to £90, effective from the previous 15th December. It is a completed GWR 'Increases of



This is an extract from the Railway Clearing House map of 1897 centred on Shipston. Note that several parts of the GWR network have yet to be built: Honeybourne to Cheltenham, the North Warwickshire line from Bearley to Tyseley and the Princes Risborough to Aynho Junction direct line. It clearly shows the roundabout nature of the route from Shipston to Stratford. The little-used former S&MR line between Longdon Road and Stratford is not marked, probably because its traffic was largely local by this date. (Timetable World)

Salaries and Wages' form dated 15th March 1897, rubber-stamped Worcester, signed by Divisional Superintendent D H Roberts and countersigned by Superintendent of the Line, T I Allen. There is a similar form dated 28th March 1899 for his next increase, from £90 to £100 effective 16th January 1899, when Allen's is the only signature, but none after that. Another personal document is a memo to Smith from D H Cooke at Worcester about his annual leave in 1903, when he was required to take his two weeks holiday earlier than usual. However, most of the documents relate to various customer and staff problems and involve answering awkward questions from GWR management at Worcester.

Some relate to operational matters. In 1897 there was a query related to proposed timetable changes and their impact on enginemens' hours and the mail traffic. Later topics included defective labelling of wagons, fog signalling instructions, and the circumstances of an injury inflicted by a horse in the goods yard – possibly when it was frightened by shunting activity.

Another group relate to money matters. There are questions about three claims for damage and one about the resolution of

an accounting difficulty when a customer's parcel account was wrongly paid to the goods account. The GWR had a parcels agent in the George Hotel and when there was a change of management there in 1902 there was a series of memos about the new incumbents taking over the agency. Smith had to make sure all the paperwork was completed correctly and sent to Worcester, including a banker's reference. Two groups of documents are particularly interesting and provide a bit more detail – a complaint about a non-delivery and the one which led me to these documents, the steam buses.

On 11th November 1903, Smith sent a memo to the Goods Agent at Brill, terminus of the Metropolitan Railway branch from Quainton Road (the former Oxford & Aylesbury Tram-road) saying that there was "Strong Complaint of non delivery" and asking him to wire proof of delivery. The complaint itself has not survived, but the goods invoice, dated 2nd November, shows that the sender of a case of wine was identified only by the initial 'S'. I knew that the Chairman of the steam bus company was Edward Sheldon, who was a successful Wine Merchant in Shipston, so surmised that he was the consignor. The consignee was someone named Collis at Brill, and online research identified this as the Rev William Frederick Collis, who had recently been appointed Curate at Brill and was living at the Manor House there. The present business occupying Sheldon's impressive premises in Shipston has an interest in its history and trades as Sheldon's Wine Cellars. It retains some of Sheldon's Ledgers, to which I have been allowed research access. These confirm an order for a case of whisky, not wine, on 2nd November 1903 under Collis's name.

There is no copy of a reply to Smith's memo from Brill station, but the answer seems to have been that Brill station had not received the consignment and Smith was trying to find out why. The invoice specified the route to Brill Station, Met Rly, as via Aylesbury, but perhaps parcels for Brill via the GWR could also be routed via Thame for delivery by road, because there is a letter sent with a copy of the invoice to the Goods Clerk at Thame on 14th November asking if he had received and delivered the case of wine. Thame returned the invoice and letter endorsed "No trace of receipt". In view of the nature of the consignment, this incident looks suspiciously like theft, and there would have plenty of opportunity for pilfering on a roundabout route via Moreton, Oxford and Princes Risborough. There are no more documents on this complaint, which probably was passed up the management chain for resolution.

The documents relating to the steam bus company are different because they concern GWR policy at a high level. The wonderfully named Brailes, Shipston-on-Stour & Stratford-upon-Avon Steam Omnibus Company Limited grew from local frustration in Shipston with the lack of a railway to Stratford. Most of the finance came from a prominent local landowner, the 3rd Earl of Camperdown of Weston Park, and the Board was dominated by Shipston business interests. In 1902 Camperdown had campaigned for refurbishment of the S&MR line into Stratford and the Banbury Guardian reported that if this was unsuccessful the alternative was "to organise a motor service". This is exactly what happened the following year, with the company being incorporated on 8th July and services beginning on 16th September, to great local delight. Six documents show the reaction from GWR management at Worcester to this news.

At 11:30am on 1st October an incensed Cooke wrote a three-page letter to Smith headed "Important" and demanding a full reply on the same day. He had heard of the successful start by the steam bus company but clearly felt that Smith should have told him of it earlier. He demanded details of the company,

when it started running, full particulars of the service, whether it called at Shipston station and what intermediate places it served. Smith's prompt reply supplied the information but showed he did not consider that the bus service would affect the GWR, only two local road carriers who also took passengers. He also forecast (correctly) that the buses would struggle in winter conditions. Cooke's reply the next day did not consider Smith's response to be satisfactory and "Mr Allen would no doubt think so too". He reprimanded him for not being aware of GWR circulars "that have been sent you from time to time" on the importance of advising him of any matters relating to "Light Railways, or Special Road services etc.". This letter was followed the same day by an Urgent Train Message (i.e. sent by train, not post) asking further questions, including the number of passengers booked from Shipston to Stratford and beyond because "our London people will require to know exactly the extent we are likely to be affected".

On 6th October Cooke forwarded an annotated GWR Worcester circular dated 3rd October which was being sent at the request of the General Manager to selected stations in the division. This was accompanied by a form (of which there is no copy) asking for information requested by the General Manager "with a view to seeing to what extent the Company could with advantage provide Road Motor Car services". It is significant that this is happening soon after the GWR had introduced its first motor bus service, from Helston to The Lizard. The last of these documents is a letter from Smith to Cooke dated 21st October which

This is the second of two steam buses owned by the Shipston company and built at Bristol by the Straker Steam Vehicle Company in 1904, works number 92. It is outside Stratford GWR station, still with its overall roof before the alterations of 1908 to accommodate traffic on the new North Warwickshire line. Perhaps the top-hatted figure on the right is the Station Master.
(Shipston Museum)



belatedly supplied the traffic statistics requested. These show that during July, August and September 1903 a total of just four passengers booked from Shipston to Stratford, two to Leamington and two to Warwick, but longer distance passengers were more tolerant of the roundabout route via Honeybourne and there were 43 passengers booked to Birmingham. It is remarkable that none of these documents mention the fact that the steam bus service terminated at Stratford GWR station and that the timetable was designed to connect with trains.

Arthur Smith left Shipston in the summer of 1904 when the

steam buses were still running, but alas, the bus company fell foul of the Heavy Motor Car Order of 1904, effective the following March, which imposed a speed restriction of 5mph on vehicles with an unladen weight of over three tons. This made the timetable unworkable and the company went into liquidation in September. Surprisingly, there seems to be no evidence that the GWR ever considered running its own bus services on the Shipston – Stratford route. Were they, perhaps, deluded into thinking that there was no demand by the low passenger bookings supplied by Smith for the longer and slower railway route?



The passenger and goods station buildings and the loco shed at Shipston were cleared by 2001 with one exception, the weighbridge office remains amid the residential development on the site. 25th May 2025.

The impressive Victorian building constructed for Edward Sheldon's wine business survives in Shipston and is now occupied by Sheldon's Wine Cellars. 28th July 2024.

(Both photos: Tim Edmonds)



THEN AND (NEARLY) NOW: MARYLEBONE



Marylebone approaches seen from the Rossmore Road bridge in the 1960s with a Black 5 drawing stock out of the sidings. The old station signal box, dating from the opening, was replaced in 1967 with one relocated from Market Harborough.

The view was very different by 2004 when we see 165011 arriving. The DMU servicing depot seen above had been replaced by flats and the whole approach rationalised with the route modernisation. And this was before the extra platforms.

Photo: Mike Walker

