

# THE MARLOW DONKEY



Edition

# 191

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Three Score Years and Ten  
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Tickets Please - Part 16

# 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: HST 14.29 Plymouth to Paddington passing Powderham. 28th October 1999.*

*Photo David Mitchell. Article page 17.*

*Middle left: Eclectic collection of rolling stock on the Bishop's Castle. 1928. Photo BCRS Collection. Article page 5.*

*Middle right: Loco 'Carlisle' under repair at Bishop's Castle. Photo BCRS Collection. Article page 5.*

*Bottom left: 'Carlisle' taking water from the River Onny. 1936. Photo BCRS Collection. Article page 5.*

*Bottom right: GWR rapid-charge battery electric unit 230001 Viva Ventura. 31 January 2026.*

*Photo Chris George. Article page 4.*

# 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 19 March **THE CENTRAL WALES LINE** Christopher Jones

### Part 1 SHREWSBURY to LLANDOVEY

Although today reduced to a secondary route through the beautiful scenery of mid-Wales, the Central Wales line has a long and fascinating history as a once busy part of the LNWR giving it access to the South Wales heartland of the GWR. In this, the first of a two-part presentation, Christopher Jones follows the northern half of the line. Part 2 is scheduled for July 2026.

Thursday 16 April **RAILWAYS BEFORE THE WAR - THAT'S THE GREAT WAR** Jeremy Harrison

A further selection of black and white images, drawn from the Ken Nunn collection and scanned from glass plates, illustrating railways in Britain before the Great War. Tonight's is the second of three parts, starting with a few images from before the Great Boer War (as it was known at the time), and then featuring Eastern England, Scotland and Ireland. The Ken Nunn collection was acquired by the LCGB after Ken's death, and although it has now been transferred to the NRM, 'showing rights' to the scanned images were retained, and Jeremy Harrison is making this presentation wearing his LCGB hat.

Thursday 21 May **THE KENT & EAST SUSSEX RAILWAY PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE** Tom Burnham

The K&ESR was one of the first railways to be worked under the Light Railways Act of 1896. It closed to passengers in 1954 and to goods in 1961, but a small band of enthusiasts succeeded in reopening it from Tenderden to Bodiam between 1974 and 2000. Work is actively in progress on the "missing link" to the national network at Robertsbridge.

Thursday 18 June **IRISH NARROW GAUGE** David Pinnige

David follows up his excellent presentation last year on the Great Northern Railway of Ireland with a look at some of the wonderful narrow gauge lines that were once a feature of the railway network in the Emerald Isle.

## CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

The year seems to have got off to a good start for the Society with the first two meetings being well attended, importantly so with regard to the live audience Community Centre although it is still disappointing that several members who live close to the venue - some within a few minutes walk - prefer to watch on Zoom rather than in person. As I've said many times before, presenters like a live audience, it provides an instant feedback and sense of engagement which Zoom simply cannot provide. Many of our speakers make lengthy journeys to come to us and it is very dispiriting for them to be greeted with not much more than a handful in the room - it's pretty disheartening for the committee too. So, please do make the effort to attend in person if you possibly can especially as we move towards the summer months.

Talking of the committee it was extremely disappointing that nobody was prepared to stand for election prior to the AGM. It seems that there is a fear amongst the members - watching from the top table it was noticeable how when the subject came up you all started staring at the floor or ceiling, desperately hoping for the meeting to move on to the next item.

Your Society does not run itself. Someone has to handle external correspondence, seek and book speakers, look after the finances, place announcements of future meetings in the railway press, look after Zoom and many other aspects of IT - an essential part of things these days - and many other administrative roles. It is this that the committee takes care of to ensure you

can enjoy our monthly meetings. Yet there seems to be a reluctance to get involved. Sadly, this is not unique to the MDRS, the same reaction comes up at the Maidenhead RCTS branch AGM, at my local cricket club and many other similar clubs. Nobody seems to want to contribute these days, just take; which is sad.

However, I'm pleased to say we appear to have a recruit. After some gentle arm-twisting by Martin Stoolman, Nick Snell has expressed an interest in serving on the committee. He's just retired from Network Rail and is starting to adjust to his new way of life before finally committing himself although he did take part in our first post-AGM committee meeting as an observer. So hopefully Nick will find it possible to take part even if after a few weeks of retirement, he's wondering how he ever found the time to get to work!

I can't let the retirement from the committee of Vincent Caldwell go unnoticed. Vincent was on the committee for many years and for the last decade acted as our very efficient Secretary which for around half that time included arranging speakers until John Tuck took on that important role. Thank you, Vincent, for all your hard work, it's very much appreciated by the rest of the committee and, I'm sure the rest of the membership even if they are unaware of what you've done.

Finally, I hope you all manage to get out and about in the coming months of hopefully good weather. Don't forget to submit photos and reports!

*Mike Walker*

# SOCIETY AND LOCAL NEWS

## NEW MEMBER

We are pleased to welcome Graeme Vickery who joined us in January.

Graeme is currently building a finescale 4mm model of the old Marlow station.

## COMMITTEE CHANGES

With the retirement of Vincent Caldwell, we were left with a vacancy on the committee which no one seemed eager to fill with no nominations received before or at the AGM. However, since then Nick Snell has indicated he may be prepared to serve, he just needs to sort things out in his life as he gets used to retirement.

As a short term stop-gap, Martin Stoolman has agreed to take on the role of Secretary on a temporary basis in addition to his existing duties as Press & Publicity officer.

## PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Peter Robins wrapped up 2025 with his presentation to the December meeting concluding his colourful travels around India and Pakistan.

In January we welcomed Jack Boskett who gave us an excellent presentation titled 'Railways & Royalty'. Jack is a professional photographer regularly commissioned by the railway industry which led to him getting involved with royalty too. Many members commented that if they'd known how much the royalty content would be they'd have brought their partners along. Watch this space!

Following the AGM in February we had a presentation titled 'White Gold' by our Chairman, Mike Walker, looking at the Cornish china clay industry and the role of the railways. Mike explained the origins of china clay, its uses and the production process in addition to looking at the involvement of the railways.

## SUBSCRIPTIONS

A polite reminder to the small number of you that have not, as yet, renewed your membership for 2026. 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.

If you wish to pay for anything else by this method, please reference accordingly - e.g. "XMAS-J.BLOGGS" (Xmas) or "DON-J.BLOGGS" (Donation) or as advised. If you have any issues with the reference, please drop an e-mail to [pd.robins@bopenworld.com](mailto:pd.robins@bopenworld.com) advising of the payment.

Of course, you may still pay by cash or cheque. Please note that ONLY cheques made out to "MDRS" or "Marlow & District Railway Society" will be accepted by the bank.

## OUR GOLDEN JUBILEE

Next year marks the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Marlow & District Railway Society, a notable achievement that deserves to be marked and celebrated in some way as we have done for previous significant milestones.

In 1987 we marked our first 10 years with a model railway exhibition at Court Garden in Marlow (The profit from which still allows us to have a healthy cash reserve and keep subscriptions stable). For our 20th we held a public meeting at the same venue with the late David Shepherd, the acclaimed railway and wild life artist - again making a healthy contribution to our reserves - plus a family gathering at Fawley. The last anniversary celebrated was our Silver Jubilee in 2002 with a special lunch aboard the Severn Valley Railway.

So how should we mark our Golden Jubilee?

The committee has been giving this some thought recently and several ideas are starting to take root.

Following the success of Jack Boskett's presentation in January we are looking at having him back in 2027 but, mirroring the David Shepherd meeting in 1997, making this a meeting open to the wider public and orientated slightly more towards the royalty side. Thoughts are to using the big hall at the community centre and doing it in conjunction with the Bourne End Community Association (the custodians of the community centre). Jack regularly updates his presentation so it wouldn't be an exact repeat of the January talk.

Another idea is to hold a celebratory lunch at the Marlow Donkey (Venue for the early MDRS meetings) or an afternoon tea taken on the Chinnor & Princes Risborough Railway. Another idea is to have a summer visit to Fawley.

Whatever we decide relies upon your support, therefore as plans develop, we will be asking your views to establish what to organise and, importantly, will get your support.

## MATERIAL WANTED

My file of articles awaiting publication in the *Donkey* is now just about exhausted so I'm appealing once more for contributions. Please help!

## RCTS MEETINGS

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

Monday 23rd March

The Deltics - Worth Successors to the A4s - Michael Smyth

Monday 27th April

The Monochrome Model Railway - Nigel Bowdidge

Monday 18th May

The Seaton Tramway - Clement Fallows

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.

# NEARLY NEW ARRIVALS

Chiltern Railways placed their Mk5A sets into passenger service from Monday 26th January, initially using one set on a diagram of two round trips Mondays to Fridays. As additional sets enter traffic, it is planned that all the Mk3 'silver sets' will have been retired by the end of March. The remaining Mk5A sets will enter traffic during the year allowing a major upgrade to the timetable from December and operate under the *Explorer* name.

Whilst Class 68s leased from DRS are used with both fleets, different equipment is required for each type of stock so the actual locomotives allocated to Chiltern have changed.

On Friday 30th January, 68022 leads set CH02 through South Ruislip forming 1R25, the 11:02 London Marylebone to Birmingham Snow Hill.



The Mk5A sets were built by CAF in 2018-19 for Transpennine Express but saw little use between 2019 and 2023 due to claimed reliability and training issues. After a period in store, they have been refurbished for Chiltern.

Each set is formed of five vehicles, a Driving Open Brake Standard, three Open Standards and an Open First (which is disabled accessible) next to the locomotive. There is also an additional Driving car to act as a spare.

The trains reintroduce First class to Chiltern and being only five cars not the six of the Mk3 sets they represent a reduction in capacity per train. As a result when fully deployed some of the peak hour trains will be formed of six-car Class 168 formations. The DfT refused Chiltern spending to convert the Firsts to standard class.

Great Western Railway used their experimental rapid-charge battery electric unit 230001 Viva Venturer in passenger service for the first time on Saturday 31st January when it worked the Greenford branch faultlessly all day.

The occasion attracted much interest among locals and enthusiasts plus coverage from TV and radio. GWR were genuinely shocked at the interest – even the first train 2G02, the 05:30 from West Ealing was well loaded.

Future dates for those wondering when it'll be running next (Saturdays only): 14th and 28th March; 4th, 11th, 18th and 25th April; 2nd May.

Later in the year it is hoped to operate it six days a week on the Greenford branch, which doesn't have a Sunday service.



Three photos: Chris George

# THREE-SCORE YEARS AND TEN

JOHN SEARS concludes his look at the fabled Bishop's Castle Railway



In 1889 the Regulation of Railways Act required the BoT to act, to ensure the Act's provisions for continuous brakes, the block system and interlocking were being implemented. The BCR demurred, why should its railway, with three trains a day each way, typically two compos, a brake third and four or five waggons, all never travelling at more than 20 mph, need such features? The BoT continued to press for block signalling, and in 1892 the BCR asked for more time, pointing out that the line's income went to the Receiver, who didn't have enough income to pay the rent due to the landowners. Furthermore, working the line "one engine in steam" meant that trains could not collide. Nevertheless, the BCR did manage to do some of the work required, and in May, 1895, Colonel Yorke arrived to check. Loops were given protection by catch points interlocked with the points off the through line, worked by levers unlocked by an Annett key attached by a chain to the train staff. The level crossings were protected by having signals interlocked with the gates so as to show danger if the gates were open to road traffic. The Annett key unlocked the lever controlling the crossing signal and gates. However, the gates were left open for road traffic (and clearly didn't close the railway) and drivers were permitted to pass the signals at danger....

No, said the BoT again, fit facing point locks, attach the keys rigidly to the staff and work the level crossings and signals correctly. Colonel Yorke went on to remark that the permanent way was once more unsafe for traffic, with decayed sleepers, worn rails. He didn't mince words: "I have never seen in England or elsewhere a railway in such a bad condition". The BCR set to work and three months later announced that the Colonel's requirements had been met. After what must have been a very cursory re-inspection, in July 1896 Colonel Yorke reported

*Carlisle taking water from the River Onny, between Plowden and Horderley, during demolition in 1936. Much of the rail went to Cammel Laird in Birkenhead for use in building the Battleship Prince of Wales.*

*BCRS Collection*

again; presumably the line was in a state that was acceptable enough for it to continue operating.

In 1901 the line faced more trouble. A case requested by the Receiver and manager of the BCR was heard in April that year. The judge, Mr. Justice Kakewich, opined "We do not expect everything to be straight forward. I never heard a Bishop's Castle case that was." A London accountant had finally got round to demanding, on behalf of debenture holders, "almost all the annual surplus". Hang on, said a Mr. Plowden, a local landowner, who was owed money due for rent, "It is entirely due to me that the line is not only working, but.... resulting in my obtaining the appointment of Mr. Cartwright as Receiver and Manager...it is in a state of efficiency never before known". He threatened a three-month closure of the line, trying by that threat to force his case (and the BCR's), not that of the accountant, who was claiming something like 93% of the profits. Litigation of some sort or another repeatedly endangered the BCR's future. Various suggestions and schemes had also appeared over the years, including more plans to complete the line, the Minsterley branch, and approaches to the GWR for it to take over the BCR. None came about. The final suggestion of a GW take-over came in 1930 when the Minister of Transport was asked by the MP for Ludlow if he was going to take any action over the resolution of the Bishop's Castle Borough Council that the Great Western should take over the line. Even the Grouping had ignored the railway, possibly because its finances were tangled into knots that King Gordian would have admired.

*Carlisle under repair at Bishop's Castle: one wonders how they lifted it from its wheels. Note the carriage "shed" beyond, the rear end of a "road motor" on the platform, and the timber traffic. The BCR at one time did build some wagons.*

*BCRS Collection*



The Bishop's Castle Railway continued on its way, slowly, but, despite all the worries of the Board of Trade, safely. Four return trips per day were made at first, by 1898 only Bishop's Castle Fair Days had four, by 1928 frequency was down to only two trains each way, except Mondays and Fridays, when Bradshaw showed a third service operated by a "road motor". It left Bishop's Castle at 17.30 and returned from Craven Arms at 19.05. All calls in that timetable except Lydham Heath and Plowden were by request. The BCR registered a subsidiary company in January, 1928 – the Bishop's Castle Transport Company (BCT). It was equipped with a fourteen seat Chevrolet bus and two lorries. From February the bus operated a timetable that was very similar to the railway's. The bus service appears to have been a move to forestall road competition.

Over the decades penury was the BCR's constant companion. A Defence Trust was set up in July, 1904, various locals contributed more than £9,000 – a certificate issued in 1906 to record the £100 donated by a Bishop's Castle ironmonger noted that it was part of the "Nine Thousand Four Hundred Pounds forming the Bishops (sic) Castle Railway Defence Trust Fund". Its purpose was to support the line and ensure its continued operation. The First World War demand for timber had created plenty of traffic for the BCR, and a one and only dividend for the shareholders. (Even during the War the BCR had remained outside Government control.) Other attempts at improving the line's prospects include the "Bishop's Castle Railway User Committee" which emerged in 1931 as a pressure group with the aim of being an "informed friend" of the railway. Among its suggestions were: using the BCT bus to boost the timetable, rather than simply shadow the train times, re-locating the Manager from Wrexham to Bishop's Castle, and some aimed at improving running times. Mr. Roberts was the manager, and the line's Receiver, and knew the facts – traffic was only half what was needed – the previous

year [8] income had been £4,000, so about £77 per week, and out-go had been £4,500. Wages were £42 per week – guards had a 12/- per week cut to their pay, and platelayers an 8/- cut.

Despite the basketry containing the BCR's finances, schemes continued to be floated for railways in the district. One of the most surprising was the "Bishop's Castle & Montgomery Railway" Act authorising the building of a railway from Montgomery to Lydham Heath which was passed in August, 1884. Plans were already in existence, having been prepared for the BCR over twenty years earlier; the aim could have been to construct the "missing link", take the BCR off the Receiver's hands, and sell on the unified railway to the GWR. Nothing came of it; despite its Act, no shares were sold and its powers lapsed, with the backers' deposit of £5,911 6s. and 7d. forfeited – that's about £886,000 at today's prices. One particularly intriguing scheme was concocted in 1901. It would build the line to Montgomery, extend from Bishop's Castle to Hopton Heath on what is now the Central Wales line, and link with the Minsterley branch. Moreover all these lines could be powered, not by snake oil, but by electricity!

That even Colonel Stephens was persuaded that the line was too far gone was one more clue that the line was close to shuffling its last. The good colonel sent his business partner, W.H. Austen, to have a look. Aided by an all-line first class annual pass, Mr. Austen saw nothing worthwhile, and duly reported back that barge-poles were too short. The end was protracted. In May, 1933, news came that a court order would have the line closed in January, 1934. The Town Council had a special meeting in May and resolved to protest [9], which was conveyed to the Court of Chancery. However, financial and moral support were finally exhausted, and the relevant powers decreed that the Bishop's Castle Railway should close on 24th of April, 1935 – which was a Wednesday. Why chose a Wednesday?!

Although closed, the BCR continued to operate trains to convey goods consigned before the date of the closure and to clear the line of “foreign” stock. The demolition was done by a firm from Chester, to which the BCR apparently owed a “big bill” for coal. The BCR’s 0-6-0 powered all the demolition trains; one run in September, 1936, took about twenty waggons that carried scrap, or had been sold, for interchange at Craven Arms. The final trip off the line was on Sunday, 21st of February, 1937, when *Carlisle* tied up for the final time in the yard at Craven Arms: she was cut up about a week later.

The BCR’s eccentricities permeated all aspects of its being; sleepers in need of replacement? Cut down a nearby tree, or cut off a suitable branch, split, trim and lay: no surprise that some sprouted. The fourteen inches of gravel ballast noted in 1865 and noted as “cleaned” by the Board of Trade’s inspector in 1879, gradually became as nothing, covered by a blanket of grass, apparently angled whichever way the last train had passed. Even just the weight of a person walking on the sleepers would press them into the track bed.

Locomotives were more eclectic than eccentric, the BCR used a total of seven by the time it closed, a mix of 0-6-0s, 2-4-0Ts and 2-4-0s. It took until the fifth, a George England 2-4-0, which arrived in 1877, to bestow a local name – no less than *Bishop’s Castle* itself. [10] The penultimate loco arrived in “about” 1895. It was *Carlisle*, an 0-6-0 sans balance weights built by Kitson in 1868 for Thomas Nelson, a contractor in, of course, Carlisle. It had been used to build the Selby to Doncaster railway, on the widening of the L&NWR in the Aston area and, probably, on the Olney to Towcester line. The final loco to arrive was given the number 1, clearly maintaining the BCR’s unique approach to life! Number 1 was a product of the GWR’s Wolverhampton Works, an 0-4-2T built in 1869, number 567. Churchward himself advised the locomotive committee in August, 1905, that 567 was “practically obsolete”, and had been inspected by the BCR, who had offered £700 for it. So off it went, but only after the cheque had cleared. The GWR performed various works on the BCR’s last two locos., including providing *Carlisle* with a

six-wheel tender to replace its original four-wheeler, and giving both locos a bigger cab. No. 1 originally having no back to its cab. The locos were in green – a “GWR form of livery”, unsurprising considering their main works.

The BCR’s final four passenger coaches [10] came second-hand from three railway companies: one was ex-LSWR via the Brecon & Merthyr, a six-wheeler tri-composite brake bought in 1924, one was a four-wheeled ex-LNWR coach that had been fitted with that company’s chain brake mechanism, which system the BCR had continued to use until 1924, and two four-wheeled coaches bought in 1926 from the GWR. One of those was originally used on the Hull & Barnsley, then by the Neath & Brecon. The BCR used the LSWR coach as a one compartment first, one compartment second, two compartment third. There were times when the BCR needed more passenger stock and some came from the Wrexham area – through local contacts of the manager’s, no doubt. Sometimes it seems a “deal” was done locally with the big railways at Craven Arms. The BCR operated the occasional excursion, one went to Shrewsbury, and others were for local football derbies, with one such at Easter, 1934, taking 180 passengers.

The BCR’s waggons were few: four vans, ex Bristol Port Authority (GW iron mink lookalikes); probably five cattle waggons; five flat trucks of seven ton capacity; two brake vans, ex-GWR bought in 1913 and 1923, both versions of the Toad style of van.

The BCR’s fame justly attracted many railfans, including well-known types such as Henry Casserley and W.A. Camwell. As well as photographs, visitors left descriptions of the unique railway. A chap called S.A. Pearce Higgins visited in April, 1931, and wrote a comprehensive report of his trip. He followed the line to Bishop’s Castle by road, and visited again in March,

*Bishop’s Castle: No. 1 post-rebuild with a back to its cab, it had smokebox wing plates and retained inside bearings on the rear axle, number plate (now at the NRM) on the rear of the bunker; Carlisle with a six-wheel tender, received in 1924 at the GWR’s Wolverhampton Works, where it was fitted with vacuum brakes when the BCR finally got round to abandoning using the chain brake. Its name was engraved in the beading on the centre splashers.*

*BCRS Collection*





*Bishop's Castle, 1928: the two coaches, both bought from the GWR, are, left, L&SWR built c.1885, (via the Brecon & Merthyr) tri-compo brake six-wheel coach, right an ex-Brecon & Merthyr four-wheel coach; and ex-GWR brake van no. 1, built post 1882. Note the variegated platform canopy, the town of Bishop's Castle beyond, and the evidence of DIY in the foreground.*

*BCRS Collection*

1932, when he reports paying 2/1 for a Parliamentary ticket and a bike ticket. There were other passengers on the train, though he doesn't provide a count, and enough parcels to fill the van. His bike joined him in his first class compartment – thought he bought a “Parly? He also estimates the train's speed, never more than 12 mph. As well as the railfans were some others. The *Wolverhampton Express & Star* was one newspaper that sent out a journalist in the line's last days. He paid 1/11 for his ticket and was invited by the guard, Tom Cadwallader, a long-serving employee, to join him and travel in the guard's van. Naturally he did, and was entertained by tales of the BCR and a few vague facts: “We don't have many passengers... Some days we have two or three and sometimes none at all.” Indeed the reporter wrote that his fare was the only one collected for the train.

Just under 13 months before services were withdrawn with a finality that even the BCR had to accept, another visitor arrived to explore the line in April, 1934, a sixteen year-old from Birmingham. He was David Morgan, later to complete an engineering apprenticeship with the LMS at Crewe. He travelled on a Friday, market day in Bishop's Castle, and wrote a detailed description of his day on the railway. Reaching Craven Arms in time for the 13.30 to Bishop's Castle, he gave a little more detail regarding passenger numbers: three on in Craven Arms, one off, two on, at Horderley; no passengers at Plowden; but no further mention of numbers, apart from mentioning that the guard collected the tickets at Lydham Heath. He also provides infor-

mation regarding how the train rode. Despite writing of “fast undulations combined with a roll of about the same speed” he also commented “...although the track was in such a terrible state, the coach rode extremely well with the result that I could write comfortably throughout the journey.” Hmm. His return journey had to be on the bus replacement service: the 17.20 was marked in the timetable as a “Road Motor”, although Master Morgan was told it was a train if any cattle had to be transported. He also noted the bus carried the mails, so perhaps the BCR had simply decided to send them by bus, rather than lose the traffic.

David died in 2003; wonderfully his family not only kept his description but, in 2011, donated it to the Bishop's Castle Railway Society. They published it in 2014 as “Bishop's Castle Railway Journey”, edited by Peter Broxholme, who also edits the society's quarterly journal. Recorded below are the references I have relied upon in composing this meander through some of the life and times of the BCR, my attempt to excite or rekindle others' interest in this utterly fascinating and charming railway line.

### Acknowledgements

I must offer my grateful thanks to directors of the society, and Peter Broxholme, the editor of the Society's *Journal*, for their help.

### Footnotes

[8] Presumed to be 1930/31.

[9] One reason against closure from the council's list was “would bring about further rural depopulation”.

[10] Those in use or noted in July 1934.

*Bishop's Castle station “circa 1932” in 4mm to the foot built by the BCRS' “Modellers Group”. Note the stop signal at the far end of the platform.*



# Bishop's Castle Railway postscript

**TIM EDMONDS looks at the station remains in 2012**

On 4th May 2012 I was one of a group from the Railway & Canal Historical Society that explored remains of some of the stations on the Bishop's Castle Railway. The organisers had arranged access to property in private ownership, which enabled

a closer look than is normally possible. As a postscript to John Sears's fascinating article about the history of the line, with its archive photos, this is a description and photos of what we found at four of the stations.

## Horderley

The small red brick Station Master's cottage has been extended in several ways but retains its character. Only the central part is original (compare the photo in Donkey 190) and the gable woodwork and finials are replicas in the style of the original.

The road-facing side of the station building and extensions at both ends – the garage has the lower roof-line on the left.



The railway-facing side of the building. Note the replica totem sign 'Onny Gara' (Onny Station?) on the side of the garage.

The wide trackbed and yard were mostly levelled and grassed, but a section of raised platform survived, a part of the brick facing had been restored, and a decrepit BR-era box van body was displayed.



## Plowden

The substantial station house and contiguous station building are constructed of brick similar to that used at Horderley and appeared to be in good condition. The barge boards and finials are not original.

The large size of the tall station house is apparent in this view from the road. The attached station building is on the left.



On the platform-facing wall of the station a Victorian letter box was still in use. It had six collections a week, although one wonders how much was posted there. I doubt that it survives now.

## Eaton

The trackbed at the former level crossing was still accessible and walkable, if rather muddy. In the yard behind the small restored and extended station house were two decrepit box van bodies used for storage, on one of which was a remarkable survival.

The station building from the trackbed – the level crossing was to the right.



One of the two box van bodies, on which was clearly visible the remains of painted letters B. C. RY. This body is believed to be there still, but its condition has deteriorated further so that it is not salvageable.



Close-up of the lettering on the van body.



## Bishop's Castle

My only previous visit to Bishop's Castle station had been in August 1966, when the goods shed was used by a timber company. In 2012 the goods shed had gone but the timber company was still active and surrounded by various tatty light industrial units, among which one railway building survived - the brick one-storey weighbridge house. This was disused and in an extremely poor state but, remarkably, has now been restored and refurbished as a museum.

The appalling state of the weighbridge building is apparent, as is the untidiness of the station site.





The goods shed as it was on 4th August 1966.



In contrast to the derelict condition shown on the previous page, the weighbridge building at Bishop's Castle has been fully restored and is now the Bishop's Castle Railway Museum.

# DEFIANT PANNIERS & FRIENDS

Mike Walker

Late last year a question was posted on RMweb asking how many Pannier tanks survived into the 1960s still wearing GWR livery. This motivated me to check through my own photographic collection and I found no less than seven. I can't claim this is a definitive list although, despite considerable debate on the forum, no additional examples have been added.

The G W R lettering was applied during and after the war but for most of the wartime period the locomotives were painted overall black with the traditional green not being restored until early 1946. Swindon had a reputation for being a little parsimonious with its use of paint so some of the locomotives feature here may have received BR livery but that has worn off revealing the old.

7428 at Aberystwyth in August 1962 with the letters G W R still just visible under a thick layer of grime. An earlier photograph taken in 1959 shows the lettering to be much more visible but it is still too grimy to tell whether the base colour is green or black although the difference between the tank front and sides would suggest the former especially as she visited Swindon early in 1947.



*Photographer: B. J. Harding / Colour-Rail BRW925*



7788 seen at Ashchurch with a branch train for Tewkesbury and Great Malvern in March 1961 inspired the original question.

Again it is difficult to be certain of the base livery but it looks most likely to be wartime black.

*Photographer: R. Denison*



8751 seen at Old Oak Common in March 1960 not only has the lettering more clearly visible but the locomotive is definitely wartime black.

*Photographer: Frank Hornby /  
Colour-Rail BRW109*

8783 seen at Bridgwater on the down pick up in July 1962 during a brief spell allocated to Taunton looks likely to be in green livery. As it was withdrawn 11 months later it definitely never got BR livery.



*Photographer: B. J. Harding /  
Colour-Rail BRW920*



It's hard to tell what base livery 9621 sitting on Wellington (Salop) shed in 1960 was carrying but as it was new in October 1945 it was almost certainly black.

*Photographer unknown.*

The small sub-class of eleven condensing Panniers were particularly adept at avoiding BR's paintbrush with three recorded in GWR livery in the 1960s including 9703 at Old Oak Common in April 1962.

It has been suggested that this was down to their limited sphere of activity leading them only to need light 'soled-and-heeled' overhauls but in addition to their trips over the Metropolitan to Smithfield they were used on ECS work into Paddington and work further afield having been photographed on round-London goods and as far out as Taplow and West Wycombe.

*Photographer: B. J. Swain /  
Colour-Rail BRW1198*



Here's 9706 bringing empty stock out of Paddington back to Old Oak Common in October 1963. Like 9703, it's impossible to tell whether it's green or black given the amount of dirt.

*Photographer: R. C. Riley.*

The most remarkable survivor was 9710 which as late as August 1961 still carried the GWR 'Shirt button' monogram (applied 1934-1942) when seen at Old Oak Common.

Sadly it was sent to Caerphilly Works three months after this photograph was made for a major overhaul, emerging in BR black with the 'ferret and dartboard' crests only to be scrapped three years later.

*Photographer: Trevor B. Owen /  
Colour-Rail BRW491*



It wasn't confined to Panniers. 5801 was well-known and retained GWR livery until withdrawal in 1958. However, like most of the class it had spent much of its life in storage through lack of suitable work.

It was on pilot duty at Barmouth in April 1957.



*Photographer: Keith Pirt.*



7816 *Frilsham Manor* famously gained a GWR lettered tender late in life whilst allocated to Reading.

This followed its BR liveried one being condemned and replaced by one used at Reading MPD as a 'sludge carrier'. Although the tank was, hopefully, thoroughly cleaned the external paintwork was in very poor shape, cracked and flaking but still bore the hallowed initials.

Here it is leaving Betchworth with a Reading to Tonbridge train in 1961.

*Photographer unknown /  
Colour-Rail BRS1100*

The last Dean Goods in traffic, 2516, received GWR lettering late in its career for use on specials like the SLS 'West Midlands Rail Tour' on 21st May 1955 alongside Cleobury Mortimer Signal Box.

Several others were similarly treated of which 4555 is probably the best known but in this case GWR livery was restored by Tyseley after sale to Pat Whitehouse for preservation who allowed BR to use in local work around Birmingham in exchange for free board and lodging at Tyseley before it headed off to the embryonic Dart Valley Railway.



*Photographer: E. S. Russell /  
Colour-Rail BRW245*

# TICKETS PLEASE!

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

Martin Stoolman



I spent the last article looking at various incidents connected with the Sleeper train that involved me during the Spring and Summer of 2001. Whilst appreciating that this is the sixteenth article in this series and I have only reached the second summer of my career, let's quickly examine a few other entries from my logbooks for that year before moving on. After all, those early years when the railway was still trying to settle down after the shock of privatisation were arguably more interesting than the later ones.

Eventually First Great Western was to acquire a fleet of 'Ade-lante' (class 180) trains, but until that happened the company had to make do with class 47s hauling a motley assortment of Mark II coaches to supplement the High Speed Trains. The condition of some of these coaches was definitely questionable. The latter part of my shift on Friday 1st June 2001 involved just such a set of coaches; however the day had begun with an HST on a slow run up to Paddington as 1A25, the 06.42 Exeter St David's to Paddington via Bristol. This was very much a commuter train, stopping at all principal stations between Taunton and Bristol, thus giving Bristol-bound workers from places like Bridgwater, Weston and Yatton a decent length train and a Bristol arrival time of 08.12. It also provided an opportunity for business travellers from these places to travel through to Paddington without changing, with FGW naturally charging full open fares for the privilege. But the fare was no guarantee that FGW were going to get you to Paddington at the scheduled time of 09.53 of course! On this occasion departure from Bristol was on time at 08.15, but then three vital minutes were lost at Chippenham while station staff searched for a party of Bath-bound foreign tourists who had been seen boarding, and who were of course meant to be joining a train going in the opposite direction. Good customer service for the tourists, but not for the London bound business fraternity as we seemingly lost our path at Didcot, being held there for a train off the Oxford line to run on ahead. That train then encountered problems at Reading blocking up platform 5, meaning we had to arrive and depart

*The problems with the aging Class 47s were, at least for a few years, alleviated by the rebuilding of several as Class 57s. The prototype, 57601, was painted in a striking purple livery and is seen here on its first day of operation, at Silverton, a few miles east of Exeter. The date is Monday 11th June 2001, ten days after the problems Martin had at Reading. The rake of coaches here is more typical, with just one brake coach at the rear.*

*Photo: Charles Woodland*

from platform 9, thus making us 15 minutes late. A further 2 minutes were dropped into Paddington leaving our commuters having to rush for any 11.00 meetings!

I did at least have a decent break at Paddington before my back working, 1C33, the 12.33 Paddington to Exeter St David's, with 47815 pulling 7 Mark II coaches. I spotted a long list of defects already in the repair book as I made the train ready. Unusually the rake had two brake vans in it, one at the front (9480) and one at the back (9492), and I therefore carried out the dispatch from the rear one. After receiving the first "tip" from the head dispatcher I operated the Central Door Locking (CDL) which locked the doors. Once I had observed that those orange CDL lights that I could see had extinguished, and I had received the second tip from the head dispatcher, I waved my green flag, boarded, and we began to move off. However very quickly the brakes came on and we shuddered to a halt. Now an underlying cause of the incident that happened next was that our departure was from platform 10 which is one of the most awkward platforms at Paddington as it has a sharp left hand curve at the country end, meaning the Guard cannot see the full length of the train from the rear. So the front dispatcher was out of my sight, as were the leading two or three coaches, but it should not have mattered as that person was (supposedly) keeping an eye on that part of the train, while the head dispatcher, positioned in the centre of the platform, was relaying his tips to me. It was clear that something had occurred at the front of the train out of my

sight because the head dispatcher disappeared around the corner leaving me scratching my head. Eventually I began to wander up the platform myself to see what might have happened, safe in the knowledge that the train was not allowed to move forward again without my green flag. But it did. And with the train departing without me I was left with little choice but to run towards the open door of my brake van and haul myself in, with the train doing a good 5mph. I had just about recovered myself as I passed the head dispatcher, and was able to hear him shouting to me something like "There was a problem with the door locking at the front of the train but it's okay now." However common sense told me that it probably wasn't okay, and I walked through the train to the front. Although at this stage I could see nothing wrong, I rang Maintenance Control in case there happened to be a fitter around to examine the train when we got to Reading.

At Reading I decided to unlock the train doors from the front brake van to see what happened when I did that, but all seemed well until I got out onto the platform and observed that only the front two coaches (9480 and 6226) were unlocked and their CDL lights illuminated, while the rear five coaches remained locked with passengers pushing at the doors trying to get out. I therefore hopped back into one of the two unlocked coaches, walked down into the section of the train that was still locked, keyed in to the first CDL panel that I came across, pushed the buttons and, lo and behold, the rear five coaches unlocked. I wonder how many of you astute enthusiasts have worked out what was going on. Well basically the door locking (CDL), instead of working throughout the train, was working in two parts independently (the front two coaches and the rear five coaches). I knew immediately what had happened at Paddington, but more on that later. At that moment I had a situation on my hands which had to be sorted, especially as we were of course blocking what at the time was the key platform for Down Main line trains at Reading, platform 4. I made a cursory examination from the platform of the CDL connections between the two coaches where the break was, but it all looked okay and, in the absence of a fitter (sometimes you were lucky at Reading and sometimes you weren't), mitigation measures were necessary as Control would not countenance the train going forward in that condition. I had no choice but to evacuate the two front coaches and lock them out of use. Of course this just had to be a Summer Friday afternoon, so persuading people to move from their seats and try to find alternatives on an already busy train,

and for no apparent reason, was not easy. Suffice it to say I was not Mr Popular! Eventual departure from Reading was at 13.30, 28 minutes late, although we did make up 7 minutes of that to Exeter.

Before going home, a report had to be submitted which makes interesting reading now as, even though I was still relatively new, I wasn't about to cover for my colleagues at Paddington. It was clear to me what had happened. The front dispatcher had failed to notice that the leading two coaches had not locked when the tip was given and I waved my green flag, but then it was noticed and he had the train stopped. Two further mistakes were then made which I think, given the passage of time, I can safely relate. Firstly one of the dispatchers, without involving me or giving any thought to the consequences, simply jumped onto one of these two unlocked coaches and used a CDL panel to lock them with his key. Then he must have instructed the driver directly, probably using the 'RA' (Right Away) button, when he should have re-started the full dispatch process, as it is only the Guard that is permitted to give final authority for the train to move out of a platform. The result was I nearly got left behind! Anyway, I made it clear in my report that I was not happy, but I really don't know whether a manager actually did anything about it; after all these were the days of "if no harm has been done, why bother to stir it?" And anyway the CDL fault was entered by me in the repair book and would have been sorted out before the train re-entered service, so no big deal there. Certainly I heard nothing more from anyone. Different times.

A rather more harmless incident took place on Sunday 30th September 2001 when I was working the down Sleeper out of Paddington, although it wasn't nice if you were one of the passengers involved. My inbound trip on 1A92, the 17.30 Penzance to Paddington, wasn't so great either for the passengers! Sunday evening trains going up to London are generally extremely busy with people returning to "the smoke" after spending the weekend in Devon and Cornwall, and this one was no exception. We left Exeter St David's on time so all seemed well, but then horrors! As we drew into Taunton I could see the platform lined wall to wall with expectant punters. The 16.30 from Penzance, the previous train, had broken down with power car problems, and we had to somehow cram in everybody from that train. For the remainder of the journey I wouldn't have been able to even get out of my van, let alone go through providing customer service and checking tickets. However my biggest



*57601 is seen again in the summer of 2001, this time east of Taunton at Creech St Michael on 7th August, while hauling a Down service from Paddington to Plymouth.*

*Photo: Charles Woodland*

*A photo taken in the same month that Martin started working as a Guard on First Great Western. On 28th October 1999, 43031 (still wearing the "Merlin" livery from before First took over the franchise) is leading the 14.29 Plymouth to Paddington past Powderham. 43138 is on the rear.*

*Photo: David Mitchell*



problem was arguably that I couldn't get through to the buffet to grab myself a cup of tea! But at least arrival in London was only a couple of minutes down.

Following my break at Paddington I would have followed the Driver out to prepare the Sleeper train on platform 1, with 47811 coupled up and ready to go. One thing I used to do (time permitting) was check all the tickets of everyone in the seats prior to departure. There weren't usually too many of these, those with allocated sleeping berths having already had theirs checked by the stewards as they boarded. It was always better to do it before leaving, as any problems encountered such as persons without tickets or not fit to travel could be sorted out there and then. That night however I quickly gathered that there was a different sort of problem - there were about a dozen passengers for Bristol on board. Now in those early days the train was booked to call at Bristol Temple Meads, but to pick up passengers only, so these punters should not have been on there. On challenging them however, I quickly realised that something had gone badly wrong when they showed me seat reservations for the train, official travel itineraries and, worse than that, they were telling me that the Customer Information Screens on the station were all displaying the Bristol stop. So I stepped out to have a look and, guess what, they were right! Somehow or other the gremlins had got into "Genius", the system that the railway used for such things, and a Bristol set down time had been mistakenly added. Now you might think that this would not be such a big deal; after all it was a one off and everyone had a seat, so for this one occasion they should just be allowed to get off during our "pick up only" stop at Bristol. But, oh dear, there was a bigger problem. The driver and I had already been told that we were going nowhere near Bristol that night - we were routed via Castle Cary, Yeovil and Honiton! I consulted with Swindon Control but of course at that stage there was nothing they could do as the Railtrack engineers had a line possession. And of course no managers were around at Paddington that late

on a Sunday night. All I could do was try to persuade these dozen or so passengers to disembark whilst being unable to reassure them that they were going to get any other trains to Bristol before the service start up on Monday morning. In fact they wouldn't have. I merely told them that the consequence of not getting off would be them ending up down in Exeter! Our eventual departure from Paddington was at 00.03, only 13 minutes late, not too bad given the circumstances. I think personally if I was a passenger I might have made more of a fuss about it however than those poor folk clearly did!

At other times, preparing the Down Sleeper on platform 1 at Paddington could be quite a social affair if no unexpected problems such as the above were encountered. The stewards would be there by the doors, checking in the passengers with booked sleeping berths, and one or two other members of staff might be around also. I remember only too well one night standing around chatting and sharing a joke. Our Driver was also there, and somebody said something that made him laugh so much that his false teeth shot out of his mouth and went straight through the gap between the edge of platform 1 and the train, landing on the track. After we had all recovered ourselves, the question of course was who was the smallest and nimblest, and most able to squeeze down between the platform and the train in order to retrieve said teeth. And, yes, it was me. So having donned my orange vest and gloves, and pulled one of the "pass comms" (communication chords) to prevent any unexpected movement of the train, down between the platform edge and the coaches I slithered. Of course you don't need me to remind you that in those days few if any trains using platform 1 at Paddington had toilet retention tanks so my task was not a pleasant one. However the teeth were recovered, and I like to think that the Driver gave them a very thorough wash before putting them back in. Needless to say no formal report was made to Swindon Control about this particular incident!