

SUMMER
1965

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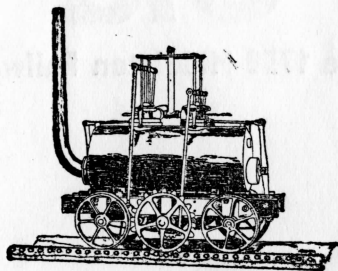
The Old Run

Journal of the 1758 Middleton Railway Trust, Leeds



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Journal of the Middleton
Railway Trust, Leeds

The Old Run

EDITOR: B. W. ASHURST, 18 INGLEWOOD DRIVE, OTLEY, YORKSHIRE

VOLUME 5 NUMBER 49 SUMMER 1965

COMMENT

The third edition of the official history of the Middleton Colliery Railway has just been published. Although it is largely a reprint of the last edition, the new history adds up to date information on the recent history of the line, and the story and activities of the Middleton Railway Trust.

The reasonable price of the history - only 1s 0d. (by post 1s. 6d.) --- should enable even the most impoverished member of the Trust to really know the history of his railway!

A large number of the histories have been produced and it is hoped to offer them on sale at exhibitions. Members

could greatly assist the MRT's cause by ordering a dozen or more copies for sale to their friends. Some local bookshops may also be willing to give space to the publication, which has a striking blue cover.

Also available is the reprinted popular MRT prospectus. These are free and any member who feels he can use some should not hesitate to ask for them. Non-members may also obtain a free prospectus by sending a stamped addressed envelope to the address below.

One final plea; can you sell any Old Runs? You will find that they sell exceptionally well on railtours and in your local enthusiasts' club. Please help to reduce the financial burden on your own magazine by doing your best to secure some regular orders, and by asking John Bushell for a supply whenever you are going on a rail excursion. We depend on your support.

All the above publications and details of membership of the Trust may be had from J. Bushell, 12 Trelawn Crescent Leeds 6 (Tel. 54282).

Scarboro and Malton routes go

Whitby loses Yorkshire's two most beautiful lines

BY JOHN BUSHELL

A paper dart floated down on to the railway track in the twilight of a chill March evening. The seagulls climbed, dived and glided over the silvery slime of the mud flats of the River Esk, calling one to another.

Had Whitby Town Station ever experienced so many visitors at such an uninviting time of the year? Why, why such a crowd? If you had descended from platform to track to examine that dart of despondent disappointment, you would have been reminded of Mr. Harold Wilson's pledge to the Scarborough and Whitby Labour Party.

VOLE LABOUR AND SAVE OUR RAILWAY was the promise, a promise that had floated in the form of a fragile paper dart from a wall above the station. All Whitby, it seemed, had turned out to see their trust betrayed. The services to Robin Hoods Bay and Scarborough, and Malton and York, were to be discontinued on and from Monday, March 5.

The last special

To provide enthusiasts with the opportunity to "See Yorkshire by Train" a last special had been organised by the Stephenson Locomotive Society from Manchester to Whitby, headed for part of the way by The Great Marquess. The bell on the front of the locomotive tolled in mourning at the planned destruction of our national railway heritage, a poop in reply from spare engine 62005 and, with just a trace of slip, the two locomotives made a spirited attempt at the climb to beyond Goathland.

The last train of trippers made its way beneath the great Esk Valley viaduct, which makes its giant stride high above the delightful oil lamps with "Goathland" on a little glass at the top. On past lonely signal box and tiny cottage, each of which told a sad tale of redundancy, coming road hazards and winter isolation.

On again at an increasing pace past Fylingdales Early Warning Station, whose great white marbles are fitting symbols of the politicians' international knock-out competition. An age which will spend many millions upon preserving an ability to retaliate against the aggressor says no to a few thousands to subsidise a vital means of communication for our country dwellers and a lung for the West Riding.

On to Pickering, Marishes Road, and Malton; on through the darkness to York with its splendid station, such a grand monument to the skill and sense of proportion of the Victorian engineer-architect; on to the collieries and chimneys of Castleford, Normanton and Wakefield, where the Marquess was replaced by Jubilee

The Old Run, Summer 1965

45698 for the journey across the Pennines.

Much could be written about a most exciting day. Oh, yes, we were very late - at times it seemed that getting The Great Marquess past a water pump was worse than taking an alcoholic past a pub with free beer. We had our own personal memories, of a small boy watching the A8s on the Scarborough-Whitby run; of a honeymoon journey to Robin Hoods Bay (those non-corridor carriages had advantages over railcars).

We could have spoken of too tight a schedule in places - 1 1/3 miles from Filey Camp to Filey was allowed ONE minute - average speed 80mph! We could also have mentioned the enthusiastic photographer who travelled over our train in a helicopter, chased us in a Jaguar, and photographed us from every conceivable angle.

What stands out in my memory is that we may no longer enjoy those delightful scenes from the comfort of a train on the disciplined iron road, a swift, safe, satisfying mode of travel.

An Industrial Anthology

"Steam on the Narrow Gauge" - a collection by the Industrial Locomotive Society. David & Charles, 7s. 6d.

In present-day railway bibliography the fields of industrial railways and the locomotives that worked them has remained sadly neglected. The Industrial Locomotive Society has gone some way to remedy this with their collection of 46 photographs of steam locomotives that worked on no less than 33 different gauges.

Of course, a book of this size can only hope to serve as an introduction to a surprisingly vast and complex subject and this it does admirably, whetting the reader's appetite for more.

At first glance some of the photographs seem to have suffered badly in reproduction, but it must be remembered that many of the locomotives depicted had their demise a considerable time ago and the photos were produced on equipment of a very primitive nature compared with that available today.

The book suffers in that too many of the illustrations are of stationary locomotives taken from the conventional front three-quarter viewpoint, and one misses a few more modern pictures of surviving lines showing working engines and their surroundings. Here again, perhaps the fact that many of the locomotives no longer exist makes up for this small deficiency.

Of particular interest to Middleton Members will be a general arrangement drawing of a 4ft 1 1/2in gauge dummy crankshaft 0-4-OST built in 1860 by Nasmyth Wilson of Manchester for use by the Wigan Coal & Iron Co. This locomotive and three others built at the same time are presumed to have been for use on the Orrell Colliery line at Wigan, a Blenkinsop-type rack line on which steam traction was introduced in 1813, although by the time the Nasmyth engines appeared it had converted to adhesion working.

Copies of the book and details of the Industrial Locomotive Society may be obtained from Mr. J. B. Latham, FRICS, "Channings", Kettlewell Hill, Woking, Surrey.

THREE HOLES IN ONE HILL

Three tunnels were built under Morley in the last century to take the railways between Leeds and Huddersfield. One of these, Soot-hill Wood Tunnel, has been closed for a number of years, and the rails lifted. It was constructed in 1858 and is about half a mile long. Now it is little more than a rubbish dump by day, and I'd better not say what it is at night.

Morley Tunnel, nearly two miles long, is the oldest of the trio and it is the only one whose future is assured. Perfectly straight throughout, it was completed in 1848 after two years work. During the construction of this tunnel there were at one time 11 powerful steam engines, 15 double horse gins, 330 horses, and 2,000 workmen working at 48 different places in the tunnel. 23 temporary and four permanent shafts were sunk. The tunnel measures 3,370 yards long by 26 feet high and 26 feet wide.

The third tunnel is, unfortunately, going to share the same fate as Soot-hill Wood Tunnel, for the Spen Valley line has been proposed for closure and it seems certain that the Minister will approve. Gildersome Tunnel was opened in October 1900. It is 1-mile 571 yards long and has four ventilator shafts, although one has been domed off. Twelve million bricks were used in its construction, and it is as sound now as when it was built.

Both Morley and Gildersome Tunnels were built by the London & North Western Railway, but the Soot-hill Wood Tunnel was on the Great Northern line.

I have walked through two of these tunnels myself, one of them many times. It is a few years since I first peered nervously into Soot-hill Wood Tunnel, wondering whether or not it was wise to proceed. Since that day I have been through many times without fear - indeed I have yet to use a torch in there!

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Recently, however, when I heard that the Spen Valley line was doomed, I decided to walk Gildersome. So when most people were having tea or travelling home from the shops one Saturday evening, a friend and I were walking through the derelict ruins of Horse Riggs Colliery on our way to the tunnel. To reach the southern portal involves a half mile walk across waterlogged fields and a small wood.

On the cutting side my old fears returned, but once we reached the metals and saw the massive symmetrical arch above us, all my fears vanished. We lit our lamps and entered another world; a strangely beautiful world nearly 200 feet below a trunk road, a railway line, a foundry and two woods.

The eerie silence was broken only by the muffled thumping of our feet on the sleepers; except when we were nearing a ventilator shaft. For before we could see the shaft of light cross the metals ahead of us, we could hear the sound of running water. Each ventilator was doing a p a s s a b l e impersonation of a tropical monsoon, even though there was not a cloud in the sky! Underneath the foundry the water was stained a reddish-brown and there was enough of it to produce a small stream beside the lines. In several places we were bombarded by heavy drops of water from the roof.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Tunnel-walking is highly dangerous and also illegal. Readers are not recommended to follow this example



Canada's railways meet 1965 with optimism

The latest railway to open in Canada was the 432 mile line from Peace River, Alberta, to Great Slave Lake, NWT. It was completed in October 1964 to enable the Pine Point lead-zinc deposits to be mined, and was completed a year ahead of schedule at \$86 million.

This is one example of the go-ahead spirit which permeates Canadian railways today. In 1964, major developments included speeding up of freight handling with introduction of computer-controlled marshalling yards; the commencement of a programme to up-grade diesel fleets to units of 2,500hp instead of 1,700hp; major re-equipment of freight rolling stock, much more of which will now be of specialized kinds; and preparation of plans for moving freight yards to suburban locations to exploit the value of city sites.

The re-equipment programmes alone will cost over \$1,000M over 10 years.

Opposing views

On passenger traffic, however, there is the interesting situation of the two major concerns taking directly opposite views. The Canadian Pacific Railway aim to run down all its passenger trains until only a few main line trains are left, while the

national-owned Canadian National is energetically and successfully aiming for more and more passenger traffic.

Which is right? CPR officials believe there is no profit in passengers, while CNR claims that rail travel can be made so attractive that it will eventually pay rich dividends.

How does CNR aim to achieve this? It has introduced many new travel concessions, provides free meals for long-distance travellers, and also provides new amenities in greatly improved rolling stock. Does it work? In 1964, passenger revenue leapt by 20 per cent over the previous year!

Two new trains, the trans-continental Panorama and the Super Continental, were introduced last year and gave the Montreal-Toronto-Vancouver route more passengers than at any time since the second world war. This year, 700 new passenger coaches are going into service.

Another innovation is the remarkable value Canrailpass, which for \$99 (£33) provides 30 days of unlimited travel for residents of Britain and Europe.

A Bill is at present being debated in the Canadian House of Commons which would free the railways of much of the regulation of freight rates which they believe hinder their efforts to compete for a bigger share of traffic and would permit them to abandon unprofitable lines or, alternatively, subsidize them for a limited period to continue unprofitable lines which it is considered to be required in the public interest.

A total of 3,797 miles of line (6 per cent of the total) would be proposed for abandonment. Of these, 3,518 miles are in the three Prairie provinces.

CPR said that profit from rail operations (there are many other divisions of the company) would be the highest in its history in 1964, but that earnings were still not commensurate with the capital employed on the railway.

Other Canadian lines

Apart from railways owned or operated within the CPR and CNR systems, there are 32 railways in Canada. Track mileage at the end of 1963 was 58,782, of which 43,689 was main line. The 32 other railways were mostly small, ranging upwards from 0.4 miles of track.

Larger railways other than CPR and CNR are: Northern Alberta (jointly owned by CPR and CNR), 928 miles; Pacific Great Eastern (owned by the government of British Columbia), 789 miles; Ontario Northland (owned by the government of Ontario), 566 miles; Quebec North Shore & Labrador (privately owned), 358 miles; and Algoma Central & Hudson Bay (investor owned), 322 miles.

In Montreal, a \$200 million subway is scheduled for completion in 1967. It will be 15½ miles long with 26 stations and capacity will be 60,000 passengers an hour.

HOW THE RAILWAY CAME TO BRISTOL

Part 2

by
Philip Worsfold

In this section we shall deal with the Bristol & Exeter Railway in as much as it affects Bristol as a railway centre.

As mentioned in Part One, the railway opened in June 1841. The first train ran on June 1, although it was a fortnight before it was open for public traffic operated by the GWR as an extension of its own line as far as Bridgewater, with a branch to Weston-super-Mare using horses as the motive power.

The prospectus had been issued in October 1835 by Bristol businessmen, and Brunel was appointed engineer. Compared with the early history of the building of the Great Western, that of the B. & E. was comparatively placid. Shares were issued, but remained at a heavy discount and 4,000 were forfeited due to their not having been paid for before work commenced.

The B. & E. started at the junction with the GWR on Avon Bridge and curved sharply left and over the "New Cut" - the site of the major part of Temple Meads station as we know it today. The line turned through a right angle. It had no station at this time, and trains used the GWR station, backing in.

In addition a line at the other end of the curve, at right angles to the GWR, led on to wagon turntables outside the GWR station. These were provided by the GWR.

The express platform, built in 1845, was to allow through running of trains from and to London. It was on the north side of the curve and used by both Up and Down trains.

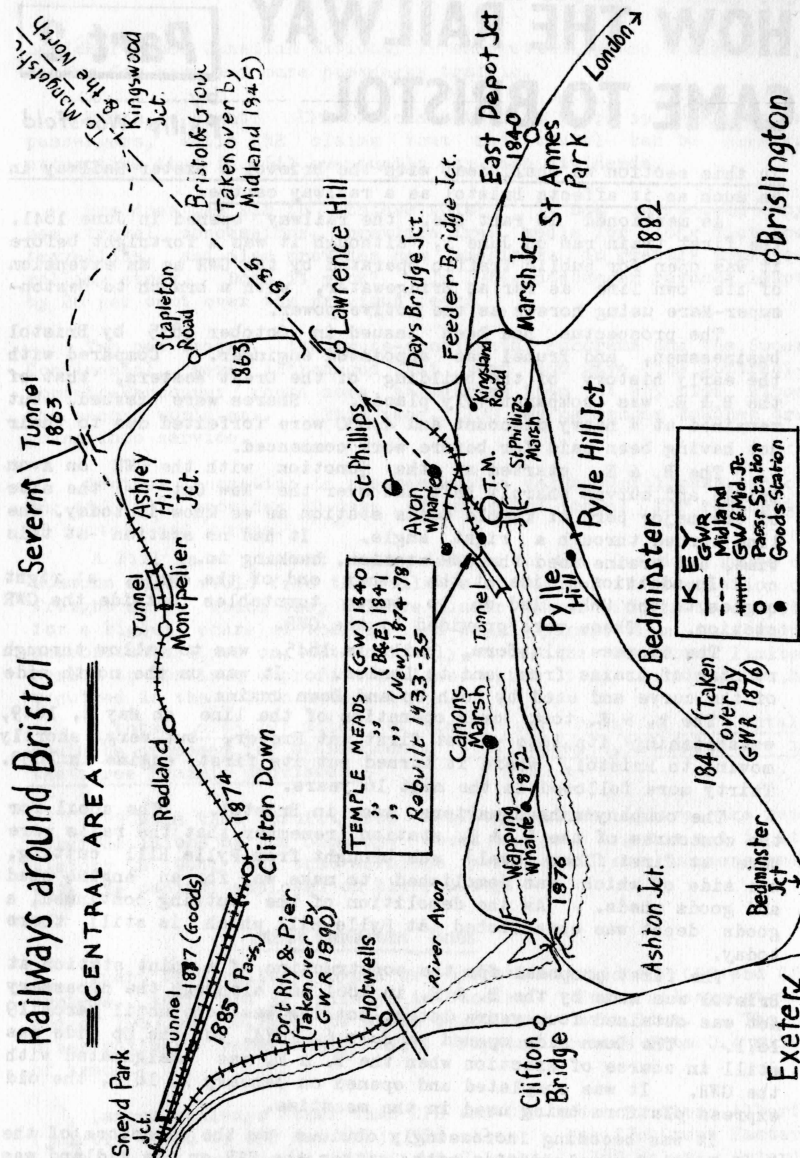
The B. & E. took over operation of the line on May 1, 1849, establishing its loco depot first at Exeter, but very shortly moving to Bristol, where it turned out its first engine in 1859. Thirty more followed in the next 16 years.

The company's headquarters was in Bristol. The spoil for the concourse of the B. & E. station (remember that the rails were here at first floor level) was brought from Pylle Hill cutting, one side of which was demolished to make way for an engine shed and goods sheds. As the demolition of the cutting continued, a goods depot was established at Pylle Hill which is still there today.

The first proposal for the construction of a joint station at Bristol was made by the B. & E. in 1861 and although the necessary Act was obtained four years later, nothing was done until March 19 1871. The Down side opened on July 6, 1874, but the Up side was still in course of erection when the B. & E. was amalgamated with the GWR. It was completed and opened on January 1, 1878, the old express platform being used in the meantime.

It was becoming increasingly obvious to the directors of the B. & E. that amalgamation with either the GWR or the Midland was inevitable, and as the majority favoured the GWR, that proposal was put forward. Accordingly the GWR took over the running of the line as from January 1, 1876, and it was amalgamated with the GWR as from August 1, 1876.

Before leaving the Bristol & Exeter completely, it is worthwhile recording that it operated the line of the Bristol and Portishead Pier and Railway Co., opened April 18, 1867, and converted



Continued from page 7

to standard gauge by the GWR towards the end of January 1880. A new station was built at Portishead in 1952 when a new power station was built.

We must now turn back in time and look again at the east end of Temple Meads, where the line of the Bristol & South Wales Union Railway, incorporated in 1857 under Brunel's auspices, was opened

September 8, 1863. There had been a previous attempt to get the capital together to build such a line in 1846, but this came to nought.

The works were commenced in October, 1858, and included a heavy cutting at Ashley Hill (Narrowways Hill), and a big tunnel at Patchway. The line was $11\frac{1}{2}$ miles long from its junction with the GWR half a mile outside Temple Meads, to New Passage Pier, with a gradient of 1 in 75 up to Filton and 1 in 68 down to Pilning.

By ferry to Cardiff

Stations were at Lawrence Hill, Stapleton Road, Filton, Patchway, Pilning, and New Passage. Ashley Hill was added in 1864. Connection by ferry to Portskewett Pier on the other side of the Severn gave access to the main line from Gloucester to Newport and Cardiff.

The line was converted to standard gauge in 1873 when the line was doubled as far as the junction with the new CER at Narrowways Hill.

In 1886 on completion of the Severn Tunnel, (the Severn Tunnel Railway connected with the B&SWUR at Pilning) New Passage Pier was closed. Before this the line from Narrowways Hill to Pilning had been doubled. A separate Up line of uniform gradient of 1 in 100 was provided - the Down line being 1 in 68 for $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles.

A separate tunnel at Patchway was provided. This was longer than the first, measuring an exact mile.

A short loop was also provided from Days Bridge Junction to North Somerset Junction to allow through running of standard gauge trains from London to South Wales - 15 miles less than via Gloucester. A through train was established the following year (1887), though the loop carried freight traffic from May 9, 1886.

At the east end of the loop was built a large marshalling yard on both sides of the main line - Bristol East Depot. The provision of shunting necks on the Up side involved the demolition of No. 1 tunnel, and widening of the resulting cutting. This was carried out in 1887-89 without interrupting traffic.

Meanwhile it had been found necessary to quadruple the B&SWUR from the north end of the loop to the junction with the CER just beyond Stapleton Road station.

The same year as the gauge conversion of the B&SWUR, the Bristol & North Somerset line opened standard gauge to Radstock, thence broad gauge to Frome, until conversion of the Frome - Radstock section the following year. At the time of construction of the East Depot, the Bristol relief line was provided from Pylle Hill Junction to the North Somerset line, crossing it and connecting with it, and thence by St. Phillips Marsh to Pylle Hill opposite the goods depot built there originally by the Bristol & Exeter. It was opened for traffic on April 10, 1892.

Look out for the concluding article in our next issue!

Confessions of a compulsive Marquess chaser

By
MALCOLM HINDES

The people following last October's Great Marquess/Flying Scotsman railtour to Darlington by road found it more of a race against time, traffic and trains than anything else, particularly if their vehicle was the writer's somewhat underpowered motorbike.

The first stage was an easy ride to Arthington, where there were already signs of something in the air, as half a dozen camera carrying folk were wandering around the station. Around midday tension was high, and by the time The Great Marquess appeared the station was ready to receive nobility. Both main line platforms were arrayed with cameras, and one agile gentleman even perched on the booking office roof!

The passing of 3442 caused a split in the ranks. Some remained, while others rushed for transport to be ready elsewhere for the Flying Scotsman. A farm crossing at North Rigton provided an access point for several, as did the nearby bridge, and 4472 proved a stunning sight storming round the curve from N. Rigton level crossing.

From this point, my account must take a more personal note, as I had decided to go straight to Darlington, with stops only at Ripon and Sinnington station on the Al. The journey to Ripon was rather hurried, due to a traffic jam in Harrogate, and I expected to have to stop at Wormald Green if I wanted a photo. However, Ripon was reached with no sign of the train, and a 20-minute wait ensued before the double-header pounded across the viaduct over the Ure and into Ripon station.

I catch up again

Hereafter, the bike "flew" as never before to see a northward vanishing plume of steam at Sinnington. So to Darlington, where Bank Top station provided a worrying moment before I emerged to find 3442 and train, with banker, about to leave for North Road. Several photos later, I wandered through back streets to North Road, where the early Stockton & Darlington building was a pleasant surprise.

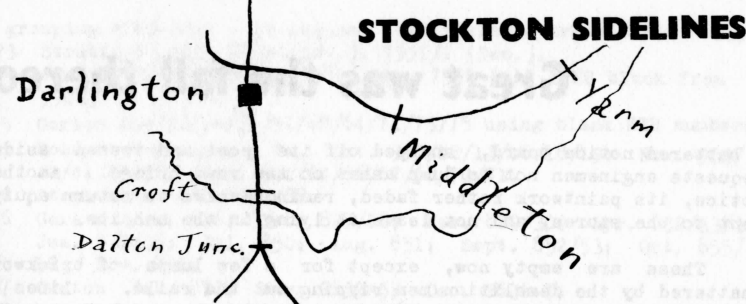
Following the ceremonies (see Old Run No. 47), the visit to Darlington works provided great interest, but I never did find out how they moved whole locos along the shop with that crane of 10 tons maximum load!

For me, the return journey was disappointing. After a tea break just outside Darlington, I found an excellent viewpoint adjoining the former Leeds Northern bridge near Thirsk, whence I sped on to York. A petrol stop delayed me, and so I entered York

station as 3442 steamed out, stopped on Dringhouses bridge as it passed underneath, and arrived at Barkston Ash bridge as the train disappeared towards Sherburn and Leeds.

The Old Run, Summer 1965

11



This illustration is from a railway map of 1851. Note the station "Middleton" on the Stockton & Darlington Railway! This was near Middleton St. George and Middleton Row. "Fighting Cocks" was actually nearer the station, and Low Dinsdale (from which the present name comes) was further away on the River Tees.

Middleton station was in fact near where the original S&DR route joins the present route, which turns east at the south end of Darnton Station on the York, Newcastle & Berwick Railway.

Yarm was not the later Yarm station, on the Leeds Northern line from Northallerton, but was at Urray Nook, which name was used later.

Eaglescliffe Junction, where the two routes met, was near the village of Egglescliffe. (Alternative spellings are an interesting feature of early railway history.)

SUMMER SALE

Your editor again asks for the copy for our Old Run advertisement. What shall we advertise? Recording tapes and accessories? Flexes and cables? Bulbs? Valves? What about our competitive TV and Radio Repair Service, or our by return post Mail Order Service? What about the free advice we are always willing to give our regular customers?

The staff suggest we do a strip cartoon - but I can't draw. The editor will be here any moment so we must conclude with a suggestion you call, write or phone (Leeds 55126) the next time you think that we may be able to help you. Our list of customers (or friends) gets bigger daily. Join them. You'll be glad you did.

• DAVID BUSHELL •

TELESERVICENTER, ASH TERRACE, LEEDS, 6

Great was the fall thereof

A battered notice board, snapped off its post and tossed aside, requests enginemmen not to dump ashes on the road bridge. Another notice, its paintwork rather faded, reminds crews to return equipment to the stores, and not leave it lying in the ashpits.

These are empty now, except for a few lumps of brickwork shattered by the demolition men ripping out the rails. Lines of narrow furrows in the black ballast indicate where sleepers once lay. Here and there are piles of wood-ash, where timbers unfit for re-use had been disposed of; round the corner are some broken concrete sleepers, unusable but also unburnable, left there to defy the elements as best they can.

Not an inch of rail remains, save the few yards embedded in concrete at the shed entrance. In the shed itself the metals have been gouged out of the brickwork in an orgy of scrap-salvage, leaving the old inspection-pits ankle-deep in their own rubble. Though otherwise intact, this building which once housed the cream of the line's motive power seems strangely dead, naked. From outside comes the majestic twin-engined boom which announces the passing of a Deltic on its climb out towards London.

No more spotters

There is hardly a pane of glass intact in the offices. The foreman's window, where spotters of the past timorously asked permission to "have a look round", has been completely smashed in. and every fitting removed from the office beyond. It is the same story in the rest of the rooms, with everything removable removed, and everything destructible destroyed. The only survivor is a rather lopsided gas cooker in one of the mess rooms, and even this has been torn away from its pipes.

That's all there is to see here, and so it's back to the cavernous stairway down to the road. The lamps on these steps are still switched on, although it's broad daylight. (I wonder how much that costs BR a year.) Next time I come I expect to see everything razed to the ground, lamps and all.

So goodbye, Copley Hill! It was nice knowing you.

THE 132 N7s

Following the story of the Great Eastern Railway N7s (Old Run No. 48), "7777" has supplied the details of all the engines built of this class, and these are given below:

GER O-6-2T. 132 engines in all

7990-7999 and 8000-8011 were GER built.

At grouping 8000-8011 - 12 engines (Westinghouse brake fitted only).
 1923 Stratford built 7990 (Nov.), 7991/2 (Dec.).
 1924 Jan. 7993-6; Feb. 7997-8; Mar. 7999 (all LNER black from 990E).
 1925 Gorton 409/21/26/56/57/60/64/71/73/75 using blank NER numbers.
 1925 Robert Stephenson & Co. Oct. 907/12/13/16/18/19; Nov. 935/40/41/47/50; Dec. 952/64/66/67/68/70/71.
 1926 Stephenson Jan. 987/88.
 1926 Gorton Jan. 826; Feb. 827/28; Mar. 829/30; Apr. 832/33/34; Jun. 837/38; Jul. 850; Aug. 851; Sept. 852/53; Oct. 855/56; Nov. 867.
 1927 Gorton Feb. 873; Nov. 2632-5; Dec. 2636-7.
 1927 Wm. Beardmore & Co. Jun. 2642/3; Jul. 2644-9; Aug. 2650-5; Sept. 2656-61.
 1927 Doncaster LNER N7/3 Nov. 2600-4; Dec. 2605-10.
 1928 Gorton Jan. 2638; Feb. 2639; May 2640/41.
 1928 Doncaster Feb. 2611; Mar. 2612-6; Apr. 2617; May 2618; Jul. 2619; Aug. 2620/21; Sept. 2622/3; Nov. 2624/5/6/7; Dec. 2628-31.
 2642-2661 vacuum brake only. 2653/57/59/60/61 were dual fitted on transfer to GE section 1933-34.

POINTS FROM READERS' LETTERS

Yes, there was a station at Stourton

From: Sheila Young, 90 Longroyd View, Leeds 11.

With reference to a query about "Nicholson's Siding" in the July/August Old Run (page 13), the siding mentioned is in fact the Laporte siding. The acid works was only acquired recently by Laportes, and was formerly Nicholson's - known locally as "Nicky's".

My father's cousin remembers engines running across Nicholson's yard about the time of the First World War, so it seems certain that Laporte's and Nicholson's siding are one and the same.

In the "Rationalisation - 1847 style" article in the September issue, the author mentions the possibility of there being a station at the Haig, possibly at the Stourton Yard. My father, who is in charge of rail traffic leaving Yorkshire Imperial Metals, tells me that he used to know an old man who had been the last station-master at what was probably the station mentioned.

Unfortunately, the gentleman died some years ago: he worked for the YIM for many years after leaving the railways when the station was closed.

WHAT TO SEE IN FRANCE – AND HOW TO LOOK AT IT!

By
MERVYN LEAH

"Le train pour Rouen, monsieur?" The man in the blue overalls (railwayman or seaman?) pointed to some rather steep concrete steps which led up to the Customs shed, situated, here at Dieppe Maritime, on a concrete raft above the tracks.

This position is obviously intended as an official discouragement to passenger traffic through the port, as you have to heave your luggage up one set of stairs, trundle it through a long and practically deserted Customs hall, then go down some more steep stairs which come out where you started.

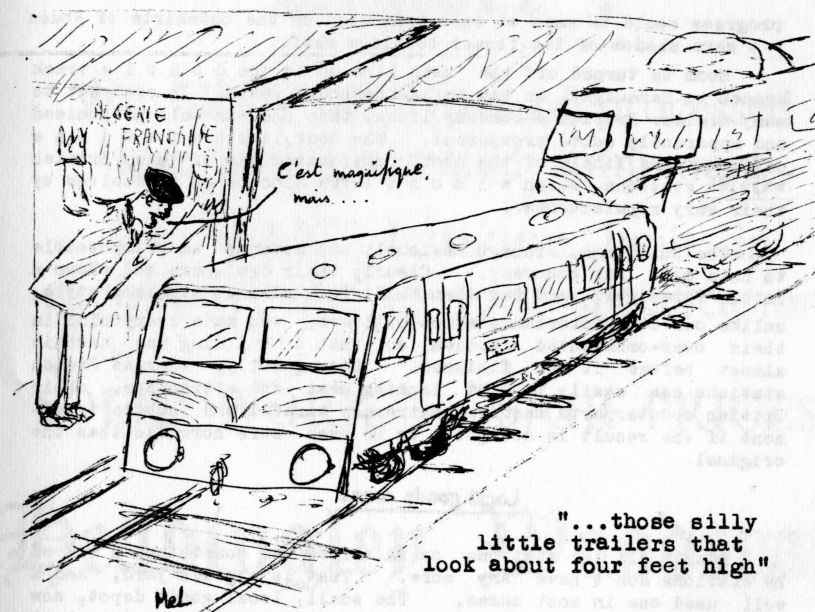
"Rien a declarer, monsieur?"...."Rien"...."Anglais?"...."Oui" "Bon". That was Customs over! My train was waiting at where the platform would be in England, so I got on board and waited. The other two trains in the station departed, but mine seemed to be forgotten. When, at last, a locomotive did couple up at the front end (and what a bump that was!), it wasn't dark green and hissing as I'd expected, but blue and white and growling with a Sulzer accent.

It was then that I recalled that Normandy was the site for one of the first total dieselisation schemes in France, using the new 67000 class. It seemed I had come just in time to photograph the dying days of steam on the SNCF Western Region.

With a louder growl from the engines, we moved off – only to stop again after a few yards. Signals? Vandals? Locomotive failure? The real reason became apparent when we moved off again – relaying. But no ordinary relaying – from the port to the main station the line runs alongside a road and, although fenced off from the carriageway, it is still embedded in a cobble surface. So the track they were laying was grooved tram-track, still to be seen in many European cities. I never expected to see track of this type being laid in the 60's, even for railway purposes!

At the main station – a terminus except for one through platform for trains for the harbour – the almost empty train was rapidly filled, and off we set again with a high-pitched hoot from our engine. (The French manage to make their diesels sound effeminate too!)

Just outside the town, we turned off the main Paris line and plunged into a tunnel. It was when we emerged from the darkness that I realised we were on single track; the second line had been there once, certainly, but, judging from the state of the ballast, had been lifted for several years. Some stations still had crossing loops, but it was rather odd to see the isolated and disused platforms of those which had not – at least in France, where the local train is still an important part of the transport scene.



"...those silly
little trailers that
look about four feet high"

The track may have been singled, but what was left was maintained to full main line standards, and we were soon hitting the sixties and seventies in perfect safety and comfort. It seems that if, for example, the Newcastle-Edinburgh line and the WR Bicester route to Birmingham are treated in a similar fashion, they will lose very little – in terms of speed, anyway.

The main station at Rouen, my first changing point, is situated in a deep cutting between two tunnels, and there was consequently very little in the way of scenery to occupy me during my 1½ hours wait. So I bought a newspaper and sat down to watch the trains go by. The little railway activity there was was the trains go by. The little railway activity there was, was mainly in the form of light engine movements – smart looking 4-6-0 and 2-8-2 types, and the ubiquitous 63000 diesels, the equivalent of our Type 1.

My train, a red and cream Renault railcar with three of those silly trailers that look about four feet high, arrived as a local from Le Havre, then shunted into about three different platforms, finally ending up in the one where it had started.

The well-filled train – a contrast with the half-empty Birmingham area locals I had been travelling on a week before – departed right on time and plunged straight into the tunnel. On the other side the track ran between lines of steel poles – the first visible signs of the Le Havre electrification, which will almost certainly be one of the last major conversions in France. Elsewhere, steam will be replaced by the high-powered diesels only now coming into SNCF service in large numbers. Evidence of their

progress could be seen at the steam shed on the outskirts of Rouen - a mere shadow of its former bustling self.

Soon we turned off the main line on to the double track branch to Serquigny, on the Paris-Cherbourg route. In contrast to many similar British secondary lines, this one was well patronised and apparently quite prosperous. The neat little stations certainly had little of the drab, antiquated air of many British wayside stations, which almost force closure on themselves by their very repulsiveness.

The buildings, though obviously not modern, were impossible to date with any accuracy. Clearly their designers had shown a little foresight, and had them built in a simple, timeless style, unlike our own Victorian station-builders, who made everything in their over-ornamented fashion so that a building was archaic almost before it was finished. Consequently, whereas French stations can easily be kept looking neat and attractive, their British counterparts require extremely careful and subtle treatment if the result is not going to be even more horrific than the original.

Local goods count

Nearly all the stations on this line had something a lot of BR stations don't have any more. That is a goods yard, and a well used one in most cases. The small, local goods depot, now almost non-existent in Britain, still seems to play an important part in French rural life. So the local pick-up goods is still around in France, and as yet does not appear threatened by the Beeching-type noises now coming from Germany as well as our own country.

The junction with the main line at Serquigny is a triangular one, with the station on two of the arms, rather like a truncated Ambergate. In the summer of 1944 it suffered no fewer than 49 aerial bombardments.

From here we had a quick trip along the main line as far as Lisieux, where the railcar was to wait half an hour before trundling down to Le Mans. I changed platforms (so ridiculous having to use a subway when you are at rail level to start with!) and waited for my Cherbourg express, once again hauled by a big blue diesel.

The evening was drawing on now, and it became increasingly difficult to pick out items of interest from the general gloom outside. Outstanding, though, was the fleeting glimpse I had of the shed at Mezdun, where steam power, both stored and active, was in great abundance.

The same was true of the floodlit shed area at Caen, but in both places the diesel had begun to make its mark. Caen was, in fact, my destination for that day - and my home for a couple of months. Plenty to investigate there during that time, but for the moment a large meal and a comfortable bed were my only requirements. As ever, first things first!

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